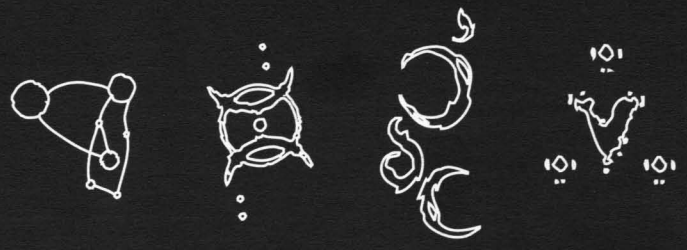
A ROLEPLAYING GAME OF POWER AND CONSEQUENCES

UNKNOWN



ARMIES

BY GREG STOLZE AND JOHN TYNES



A ROLEPLAYING GAME OF POWER AND CONSEQUENCES BY GREG STOLZE AND JOHN TYNES

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About the Book 6
About the Rules 7
Legacy 8

Book One: The Secret Names of Streets

⇨ Chapter 1: Street Overview **20**
There is an Occult Underground 20
Witness: Ruth Pechvogel, Dive Instructor 21
Witness: Agnes Veuve, Retired Farmer 22
Witness: Remy Dole, College Student 23
What You Hear 24
⇨ Chapter 2: Street Campaign **26**
Trigger Events 26
Creating Your Group 27
Circle of Friends 27
Occult Investigators 28
Vigilantes 29
⇨ Chapter 3: Conception **30**
Who Are You? 30
Your Obsession 30
Obsession Examples 30
Adept Obsession Examples 31
Your Passions 31
The Fear Passion 31
Character Sheet 32
The Rage Passion 34
The Noble Passion 34
Your Personality 34
What Can You Do? 35
Your Stats 36
The Body Stat 36
Body and Wound Points 36
The Speed Stat 36
The Mind Stat 36
Mind and Madness Meters 37
The Soul Stat 37
Soul and Adepts & Avatars 38
Your Skills 38
Buying Skills 38
Notes on Skills 38
Free Skills 38
Skill Names 38
Skill Penumbras 39
Obsession Skill 39
The Body Skills 39
The Speed Skills 40
The Mind Skills 41
Paradigm Mind Skills 42
The Soul Skills 43
Unskilled Actions 44
How Do You Change? 45
Instant Improvement 45
Gaining Experience Points 45
Spending Experience Points 45
Something to Think About 45
⇨ Chapter 4: Combat **47**
Six Ways To Stop A Fight 47
Initiative 48
Rolling Initiative 48
Default Initiative 48
Ambush Initiative 48
Improving Initiative 48
Tied Initiative 48
Attacking 49
Drawing a Weapon 49
Attack Shifts 49
Focus Shifts 49
Dodging 50
Damage 51
Firearms Damage 51
Called Shots 51
Multiple Shots 51
Suppressive Fire 51
Firearms Table 52
Hand-to-Hand Weapons Table 52
Firearms Damage by Caliber Table 53
Full-Auto Weapons 53
Special Ammo 54
Bulletproof Vests 54
Hand-to-Hand Damage 54
Disarming Attacks 55
Multiple Attacks 55
Throwing People 55
Throwing Objects 55
Knife Attacks 55
Sucker Attacks 55
Cherry Attacks 55
Sample Cherries 55
Explaining Crit Kills 56
Exotic Damage 56
Pointblanking 56
Drowning 57
Strangling 57
Car Wrecks 57
Falling 57
Non-Combat Actions 57
Wounds and Healing 58
Wound Penalties 58
Healing a Minor Injury 58
Healing a Major Injury 59
Convalescence 59
Permanent Damage 59
Car Chases 59
Something to Think About 60
⇨ Chapter 5: Madness **64**
Stress Checks 64
The Violence Stress 65
The Unnatural Stress 65
The Helplessness Stress 67
The Isolation Stress 67
The Self Stress 68
Getting Callous 68
Getting Crazy 69
Mental Help: Pre-Insanity 69
Permanent Madness 69
Mental Help: Post-Insanity 71
Something to Think About 71
⇨ Chapter 6: Playing the Game **72**
Getting Busy 72
Opening Your Mind 73
Closing Your Mind 74
Meeting and Greeting 74
Go Figure 74
Making Allies 75
Losing Allies 75

Book Two: The World of Our Desires

⇨ Chapter 7: Global Overview **78**
Welcome to the Occult Underground 78
Witness: Amanda Wilkes, Private Detective 79
Witness: Stan Abronski, Day Trader 80
Witness: Lydia Sobretado, Specialty Antiquarian 81
What You Know 82
The Afterlife 82
Magick 83
Adepts 83
Avatars 84
Other Magick 84
Dukes and Cabals 84
The Occult Mainstream 85
The Occult Underground 86
Under-Undergrounds 86
The Adept Underground 86
The Avatar Underground 87
Competing Undergrounds 88
The Claws of the Tiger 88
What You Hear 88
⇨ Chapter 8: Global Campaign **90**
Creating Your Cabal 90
The New Inquisition 90
The Sleepers 91
The Sect of the Naked Goddess 92
Mak Attax 92
Magick Cabal 93
Clued-In Mundanes 93
⇨ Chapter 9: Magick **95**
The Nature of Magick 95
Ritual Magick 96
Minor Rituals 96
Poison Ward 96
Snowblinding 97
Back Monkey 97
Plague of Hiccups 97
Seek the Lost Tome 98
Angel of the Animals 98
Harmonious Alignment 98
Significant Rituals 98
Prowess of Samson 99
Prowess of Bruce Lee 99
Scurvy Livestock 99
Spellbreaker 99
Washing Your Luck 99
Lead Into Gold 100
Summon Unspeakable Servant 100
Create Homunculus 100
Major Rituals 101
Authentic Thaumaturgy 101
Proxy Rituals 101
Minor and Significant Proxies 102
The Rooted Seed 102
Mirror of Lies 102
Minor Effects 103
Consciousness Peeping 103
Long Distance Spell Blocking 103
Remote Charging 104
Taboo Fuzz 104
Significant Effects 104
Charge Theft 104
Consciousness Swapping 104
Death Dumping 104
Taboo Dumping 104
Taboo Static 104
Tilt Rituals 105
Bonds 106
Boons 107
Hexes 107
Wards 107
⇨ Chapter 10: Adepts **110**
Laws of Magick 111
Becoming an Adept 112
Self-Taught Adepts 112
Mentored Adepts 113
Casting Spells 113
Blast Spells 113
Minor Blast 114
Significant Blast 115
Customized Blasts 115
Using Blasts 115
Formula Spells 115
Random Spells 116
Using Random Spells 116
Cherries 116
Sour Cherries 116
Adept Schools 116

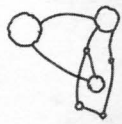
The Bibliomancer ... 117
The Cliomancer ... 121
The Dipsomancer ... 126
The Entropomancer ... 130
The Epideromancer ... 133
The Mechanomancer ... 137
The Narco-Alchemist ... 141
The Personamancer ... 145
The Plutomancer ... 149
The Pornomancer ... 153
The Urbanomancer ... 156
The Videomancer ... 159
Creating New Formula Spells ... 164
Creating New Schools ... 165
Customizing Old Schools ... 167
Something to Think About ... 167
⇨ Chapter 11: Avatars ... 168
Becoming an Avatar ... 169
The Demagogue ... 171
The Executioner ... 172
The Flying Woman ... 173
The Fool ... 175
The Masterless Man ... 177
The Merchant ... 179
The Messenger ... 181
The Mother ... 183
The MVP ... 185
The Mystic Hermaphrodite ... 187
The Pilgrim ... 188
The Savage ... 191
The True King ... 192
The Warrior ... 195

Book Three: The Living Mirror of Heaven

⇨ Chapter 12: Cosmic Overview ... 198
You are the Occult Underground ... 198
Witness: Juan the Infinite, Observer ... 199
Witness: Minnie Palomar, Bank Robber ... 200
Witness: James McGowan IV, Mover & Shaker ... 201
What You Know ... 202
Matter ... 202
Entropy ... 202
Order ... 202
The Conflict ... 202
The Cosmos ... 203
The First and Last Man ... 203
The Struggle ... 203
The Afterlife ... 203
The Controversy ... 204
The Occult Underground ... 204
What You Hear ... 207
⇨ Chapter 13: Cosmic Campaign ... 208
Creating Your Cabal ... 208
Cosmic Cabal Assets ... 208
Ascension Cabal ... 208
Archetype Cabal ... 210
Agents of Renunciation ... 211
The Sleepers (Cosmic Level) ... 212
⇨ Chapter 14: Assumption and Ascension ... 214
Assumption ... 214
Closed Assumption ... 214
Open Assumption ... 215
Life as a Godwalker ... 215
Interacting with Godwalkers ... 216
Ascension ... 216
Unconscious Ascension ... 216
Conscious Ascension ... 217
Godwalker Ascension ... 218
Godwalker Defenses ... 218
Archetype Attacks ... 219
Final Battle ... 219
⇨ Chapter 15: Demons ... 220
Demon Summoning ... 220
Demon Control ... 221
Demon Possession ... 221
Unwitting Possession ... 222
What Demons Can Say ... 222
What Demons Can Do ... 222
⇨ Chapter 16: Artifacts ... 223
Natural Artifacts ... 223
Constructed Artifacts ... 223
Making Artifacts ... 224
Sample Artifacts ... 224
Lucky Charm ... 224
Travel Bond ... 224
Obnoxerox ... 225
Wooden Nickels ... 225

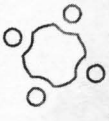
Book Four: For the Gamemaster

⇨ Chapter 17: GM Overview ... 228
Here is the Occult Underground ... 228
The Invisible Clergy ... 228
The Afterlife ... 229
The Comte de Saint-Germain ... 229
The House of Renunciation ... 229
The Otherside Room ... 230
Lili Morgan, Agent of Renunciation ... 232
The Sleepers ... 232
Cletus Crowe, Sleeper and Cop ... 233
Angela Forsythe, Sleeper Agent ... 234
Daoud Mabsut, Sleeper Bodyguard ... 234
The New Inquisition ... 235
Alex Abel, Mastermind ... 237
Eponymous, Bodyguard ... 237
Violet McIntyre, Warbuck ... 238
Cage, TNI's Meat on the Street ... 239
The Sect of the Naked Goddess ... 240
Daphnee Lee, Imperatrix ... 241
Hiram Ganz, Bodyguard ... 242
Lucius Garcia, Agent ... 242
Andrea Deutsch, Priestess ... 243
Chloe Greene, Acolyte ... 244
Mak Attax ... 245
Derek Jackson, Hidden Master ... 246
Harvey Duopoulous, Adept ... 248
Monica Barberry, Manager ... 248
The Global Liberation Society ... 249
Randy Douglas, President for Life ... 250
Darla Cooper, Captain and Master Trainer ... 251
Michael Hauser, Agent ... 252
The Order of St. Cecil ... 253
Father José Carrillo, Thwarting Satan's Wiles ... 254
Satan's Chosen Temple ... 256
Rebecca DeGhoule, Satanic Leader ... 256
Thurston Joseph "T. Joe" Walters ... 257
Josie Reed, Hanger-On ... 257
Street-Level GMCs ... 258
Jim Smith ... 258
Molly Wilson, Decompressionist ... 258
Global-Level Dukes ... 259
Dirk Allen, Boozehound ... 260
Selena Ramírez, Reporter ... 261
Cosmic-Level Lords ... 261
The Freak ... 261
Jeeter, Weird Old Duke ... 262
Tina Lovac, Curious Automaton ... 262
Generic Characters ... 264
⇨ Chapter 18: GM Campaigns ... 265
Campaign Types ... 265
Play Styles ... 266
Narrative Structures ... 267
Themes ... 267
Content ... 269
Plotlines ... 271
Pivotal Events ... 273
Coping with Changes ... 273
Concluding the Campaign ... 274
⇨ Chapter 19: Running the Game ... 275
Basic Narration ... 275
GM Characters ... 277
Managing the Flow ... 279
Skill Checks ... 279
Check Levels ... 280
Using Fuzzy Logic Skill Checks ... 280
Running Combat ... 280
Exceptional Skills ... 280
Wound Points ... 280
Mechanics ... 281
Running Car Chases ... 282
Running Magick ... 283
Spells ... 284
Tilts ... 284
Ritual Ingredients ... 285
Running Madness ... 286
Mechanics ... 286
Using the Sleeping Tiger ... 286
The Tiger Wakes ... 287
Riots ... 287
Impairment ... 290
Alcohol ... 290
Uppers ... 290
Downers ... 291
Psychedelics ... 291
Tips & Tricks ... 291
Motifs ... 291
Sweat the Details ... 292
Daily Life ... 293
The Fantastic/The Mundane ... 293
⇨ Chapter 20: GM Artifacts ... 294
Significant Artifacts ... 294
Hand of Glory ... 294
The Jesus Fishes ... 294
Das Garten ... 295
The Ghost of a Camera ... 296
Skeleton Keys ... 296
Major Artifacts ... 297
The Magic Bullet ... 297
The Warstone ... 297
The Naked Goddess Tape ... 297
⇨ Chapter 21: The Unnatural ... 298
Unnatural Phenomena ... 298
Causes of Unnatural Phenomena ... 298
Minor Unnatural Phenomena ... 299
Significant Unnatural Phenomena ... 299
Major Unnatural Phenomena ... 300
Unnatural Beings ... 300
Astral Parasites ... 300
Demons ... 301
Entropics ... 301
Golems ... 302
Lycanthropes ... 303
Nonentities ... 304
Revenants ... 305
Ghouls ... 305
Snowfallen ... 305
Splits ... 306
Suicide Stalkers ... 306
Tenebrae ... 306
Unspeakable Servants ... 307
⇨ Chapter 22: The Unexplained ... 309
⇨ Scenario: Bill in Three Persons ... 314
⇨ Scenario: Pinfeathers ... 326
⇨ Guide to First Edition Sourcebooks ... 335
⇨ Index ... 336










UNKNOWN ARMIES

About the Book

This book is divided into four sections. Which sections you read depends on what your campaign is going to be like. There are three campaign levels: street level, global level, and cosmic level. The terms "street," "global," and "cosmic" don't refer to settings or locations, but instead describe how much knowledge you begin the campaign with and how powerful you are. If you're the GM, you can of course run any kind of campaign you want. But we've designed the rulebook to support three broad categories of play to make your job easier.

Note that there is a difference between player knowledge and character knowledge. If you're a player who has already read the whole rulebook before you find a campaign to join, review the appropriate sections to understand what your *character* is going to know at the start of the game. Don't use your greater knowledge of the rulebook to give your character information and ideas he or she shouldn't have.

Book One: The Secret Names of Streets

Everyone should read this section. It contains the usual roleplaying-game rules for creating characters, combat, and so forth. It also explains a little bit about the setting of the game, but not very much. If the GM decides to run a street-level campaign, this is the only section that players should read. Much of the game deals with mysteries and secrets, and the less players start off knowing in a street-level campaign, the better the campaign goes.

In a street-level campaign, your group consists of relatively ordinary people who are just beginning to explore a hidden world of magick and intrigue. You are often heroic people trying to right a wrong, and this brings you into collision with strangers who have frightening powers and dangerous agendas.





Book Two: The World of Our Desires

Players should only read this section if the GM is going to run a global-level campaign. It contains much more information about the world of *Unknown Armies,* along with rules for several kinds of magick. At the start of a street-level campaign, the players shouldn't know how magick works or what forms of magick exist, but players in a global-level campaign can.

In a global-level campaign, your group consists of obsessed mystics and visionaries who are pursuing your own agendas. You know who the movers and shakers are, and you're earning a rep as people that novices shouldn't mess with. The stakes are higher, but so are the risks.

Book Three: The Living Mirror of Heaven

Some GMs may decide to run a cosmic-level campaign. If so, players can read this section. It reveals more secrets of the game world, explores some of the consequences of magick, the creation and use of magickal artifacts, and other high-level issues that characters in street and global campaigns should not start off knowing.

In a cosmic-level campaign, your group knows how the cosmos works and how to change it. You know the fate of the world, and you can try to shape that fate. You are operating in the very highest echelons of symbolic magick and transcendent identities, and can even become a god.





Book Four: For the Gamemaster

This section is strictly for the GM, and no players should read it. It contains further secrets of the world, lots of advice for running *Unknown Armies,* the most powerful artifacts, unnatural creatures, stats for all the major gamemaster characters (GMCs), two scenarios, and more.

UNKNOWN ARMIES

artwork by Vance Kelly, Samuel Araya, Matt Harpold, and Drew Tucker

ABOUT THE RULES

Here are the very basics of playing the game.

Rolling Dice: Use two ten-sided dice to play the game. Usually these are read as percentiles from 01–00 (100), with one die as the tens digit and one die as the ones digit. A 0 in the tens digit counts as a leading zero (0 and 8 is 08 = 8). A 0 in the ones digit counts as a trailing zero (8 and 0 = 80). Sometimes they are added together, in which case the 0 counts as ten (8 + 0 = 18). Sometimes a single die is rolled by itself, in which case the 0 also counts as ten (0 = 10).

Character Stats and Skills: Humans have stats (Body, Speed, Mind, Soul) and skills (Horseback Riding, Greek History, Safecracking), all of which can range between 1%–99%. Each skill is tied to a single appropriate stat. To take an action during the game, you use the skill and roll the dice. If you do not have the appropriate skill, the game master may allow you to roll against the relevant stat instead—but you will not be able to succeed nearly as well as you would with the right skill, or it may take you much longer, or the game master may impose some other penalty.

Minor Skill Checks: In relaxed situations where you have plenty of time and are not at risk, you automatically succeed in any skill that you have at 15% or higher. The game master may ask you to roll anyway just to see how long it takes you or how good a job you do, or to see if you get any matches, crits, or fumbles (see below). If you do not have a suitable skill, you may attempt a minor skill check by rolling against the appropriate stat instead, to just barely squeak by the task (a weak success); for this roll, your stat is reduced by 30.

Significant Skill Checks: In situations where there is uncertainty but little actual risk, you succeed strongly if you roll equal to or under your skill level and you succeed weakly if you roll above your skill level but equal to or under your related stat level. If you do not have a suitable skill, you may attempt a significant skill check by rolling against the appropriate stat instead for a weak success; for this roll, your stat is reduced by 30.

Major Skill Checks: In tense situations where time is important and/or you are at risk, such as in combat, you only succeed if you roll equal to or under your skill level. If you do not have a suitable skill, you may attempt a major skill check by rolling against the appropriate stat instead and hoping for a **Hail Mary**: only matched successes and criticals (see below) succeed; your stat is not reduced for a Hail Mary roll.

When to Roll: The GM always decides what rank of skill check to request and how to interpret it. He or she may be aware of factors you do not know about.

What to Roll: Besides rolling equal to or under your skill or stat level to achieve success, the number you roll has other effects. Your goal is to roll as high as you can without going over your skill. The closer your roll is to your skill level, the better you do. If you have a skill at 46%, a roll of 43 is better than a roll of 04.

Minimum Rolls: The game master may require you to roll a certain number or higher, as well as below your skill or stat. To shoot someone in the leg, you might have to roll under your skill level with a minimum roll of 30. If your skill is lower than the difficulty, you cannot perform the action.

Matched Rolls: A match is when both dice come up with the same number, such as 11, 66, or 44. This makes the action you are attempting more dramatic, but whether that added effect is good or bad depends on whether the roll was a success or a failure. A matched successful roll is unusually good, but a matched failed roll is unusually bad. Most of the time, the game master interprets what additional effects this triggers. However, some actions in the game have specific effects keyed to matched rolls—these are called Cherries and are used with obsessed martial arts skills and with the Magick skill.

Fumble Rolls: A fumble is when you roll double zeroes (00) and it means the worst possible outcome occurs—short of death. Even if you somehow have a skill or trait at 100%, rolling a 00 is still a fumble.

Crit Rolls: A crit is when you roll a zero-one (01) and it means the best possible outcome occurs. It does not mean you can succeed at an impossible task, such as picking up a skyscraper and throwing it across town. A crit supercedes even a difficult roll.

Flip-Flop Rolls: In some situations or with some skills, you may be allowed to flip-flop a roll. This means you have the option of switching the dice. If you rolled a 91 and you can flip-flop that roll, you could make it a 19 instead if it's better for you.

Shifted Rolls: A shift is a modifier applied to your skill number before you make the roll. If you had a Greek History skill of 56% and for some reason a –30% shift was applied, your skill would be 26% instead. Shifts are usually temporary, and might be applied because of wounds, difficult environments, or magickal effects.

Hunch Rolls: A hunch is a percentile roll you get to make and then set aside to use for the next time you need a skill check. In other words, you know what your next roll is going to be and can act accordingly, using it up on something unimportant if it's bad or trying to save it for something important if it's good. Hunches are awarded by the game master in some situations for magickal or mundane reasons. Note that you cannot always control when you make a roll, so don't try to hang on to a good hunch too long or you may lose it on a meaningless action.

LEGACY

"What kind of name is 'Renata Dakota'?"

"It's my name, duh."

Renata bit at the inside of her lip, thinking she should have given this guy a fake name. Or simply told him to go to hell. He was a scary-looking dude, no doubt about it. He wasn't scary-big, like her dad. He was thin, needed a shave, *really* needed a shower. He had bad teeth and weird eyes; it was like they didn't blink enough, or they weren't pointing where you thought they were going.

He was scary-crazy, was what he was. His eyes were like that guy from the comet cult on television, or that other guy with the Nazi thing on his forehead.

"I'm Eugene LaRue," he said, and held out a hand with too many veins and scabby, bitten nails. She didn't take it, and didn't say anything. She slipped her hand discreetly into her pocket, where she had a small cannister of pepper spray on a keychain. She wished she was bold enough to look away from him, but she didn't like the idea of turning her back on him.

This is nuts, she thought. *We're on a crowded bus. What's he gonna try? Nothing . . . but on the other hand, I'm stuck with him until we get to Atlanta.*

"So, how come you're going to Atlanta?" he asked.

"None of your goddamn business!"

He leaned back and raised his hands. "Hey, just making small talk, little lady. I see a young girl by herself on a bus, and . . ."

"And what? You figure, 'She'll be easy to pick up, strangle and leave in a ditch'? You probably think I'm a runaway, right? No one to take care of me or pick me up at the bus station? Well I've got news for you, buddy, my dad's a U.S. Marine who eats guys like you for lunch, and if he even sees you talking to me he'll, he'll . . ."

"Eat me? Gee, it isn't even lunch time." He had a mean little smirk on his face, and suddenly he reminded Renata of Dale Carter, the teacher's pet back in Romeoville, near Chicago. Dale had always smirked like that when he'd given the teacher a right answer. This guy had the same look—the same smartass, know-it-all look.

He turned away and stretched his legs into the aisle. She turned away too, looking out the window at the dark highway. The white lines dashed by like a morse code message that didn't say anything. She hoped he wouldn't watch her at the station, hoped he wouldn't see that she *didn't* have anyone waiting, didn't even know for sure what she was going to do next.

Four days ago her parents had vanished. She'd come home from school and they'd gone—taken most of their clothes, closed their bank account, rented a trailer, and driven away without telling her anything, without leaving a note or a forwarding address or even a message on the answering machine.

Between beating her and watching the Home Shopping Network, Renata's dad had made an unimpressive living as a collection agent for a rental company. In his rare good moods (often when he'd gotten to pound on someone at work) he'd explained that the key to getting what you wanted was simple guts.

"You just gotta act like everything's on your side, and you know it. Like this a-hole at work today. Big as Texas, all worked-out, right? And right behind him is the gun case with all kinds of shotguns and stuff in it. So when I ask him to give up the TV he's defaulted on, he says no and expects me to just buzz off. And I don't, so right there he gets antsy, 'cause I'm looking at him like he's nothin'—I got the law on my side, and more than that, I ain't scared of him and his guns. That makes him wonder why I'm so confident. Like, am I some kind of kung-fu badass, or am I just nuts? I tell him I'm taking the TV and I start to unplug it, and he gets in my face and pushes me back, only it's a real weak push—see, 'cause he's uncertain, he just does it halfway. That's it, though. He put his hands on me, that's assault, so I got call to yank out the pepper spray. You keep that in your pocket, the top of your pocket, like I showed you? You better be, the world's full of creeps and a-holes, girl. So I spray this guy, and he falls and starts crying like a little baby, and I figure I better be sure he isn't going to backshoot me while I'm carrying the tube away, so I give him a good kick between the legs. That put him down.

"The thing is though, he really *did* hold all the cards. If he'd really pushed me like he *meant* it, he could have tumbled my ass five ways from Sunday. But because I acted like I was in charge, it happened. So you remember that. You can start out with a bluff and turn it true."

She was thinking about that while she jiggled the air conditioner in Hiram Ossowski's window. It was loose, and like most air conditioners it was off balance. Graham Joad, her kind-of boyfriend in Romeoville, had shown her this easy way to break into houses. They'd done some stealing together, and when she left town, Graham had gotten her a couple hundred bucks for the stuff her parents had left behind—most of it was rented from Dad's work anyhow.

The air conditioner slipped forward. When she and Graham were stealing in the hick sticks way out from Chicago, the two of them could usually lower it to the floor of the house pretty quiet, but this time she was alone. She strained her back trying to make it go down slow, but it made a loud clunk. She froze for the slow count of thirty, watching everything and listening, ready to run. She'd always been a fast runner.

When she felt ready, she went through the window into Hiram Ossowski's house.

First thing, she did a quick, quiet look through the whole place. It didn't take much time, 'cause it wasn't much of a house. Not a lot bigger than a double-wide trailer. She found a checkbook in a drawer in the kitchen—usual place for it. While there, she helped herself to a long, nasty-looking knife in a plastic sheath. A real Norman Bates kind of knife.

Then she went into the bedroom and took out her camera—a cheap, disposable one from a drugstore. When she was done, she schlepped the air conditioner back into its hole, then went out the back door.

She had a long walk back to the highway. She kept her right hand on her pepper spray as she hitchhiked back to the 'burbs of Atlanta. The Norman Bates knife was at the top of her backpack.

Before leaving Illinois, Renata had talked a guy at the truck rental place into telling here where her parents' truck had been returned. It was a kind of seedy neighborhood outside Atlanta proper—an area with a lot of shut-down factories, not far from the highway. All of the buildings and even the people looked like they either hadn't been there long or

No Live Organism Can Continue For Long To Exist Sanely Under Conditions of Absolute Reality

The Bod Couple '89. Sloppy sexpot Olivia and her tidy friend Felice put the 'mate' back in "room mates." Directed by Carl Plogue. [ORT: 93] 'NR' **PLA** Mon. 10:20 p.m. 23489789; Thurs. 1:20 a.m. 09877892 **[PW]**

12/17 – THIS IS THE TV GUIDE ENTRY FOR THE MOVIE WITH HER IN IT. IT DOESN'T LIST HER NAME, BUT SHE PLAYED FELICE. I NEARLY WENT INTO SHOCK WHEN I SAW HER IN IT – I'VE GOT TO TAPE THIS WHEN IT COMES ON AGAIN. TAPE COULD BE THE KEY TO FINDING HER NAME, FINDING OUT WHY SHE'S SO IMPORTANT.

THE MOVIE IS A CHEAP RIP-OFF OF "THE BOD COUPLE" WITH AN EMPHASIS ON 'COUPLE,' HA HA. OLIVIA IS THE SLOPPY SLUTTY SPORTSWRITER AND FELICE IS HER PRISSY ROOMMATE, THE FELIX TYPE, AND THE 'PLOT' REVOLVES AROUND OLIVIA GETTING FELICE TO LOOSEN UP. IT'S ABOUT WHAT YOU'D EXPECT, EXCEPT FOR HER.



The Sexorcist '92. Possessed woman tempts Catholic priest with all the infernal pleasures. Directed by Gunter Lorenz. [ORT: 105] 'NR' **PLA** Wed. Midnight 09878927 **[PW]**

12/19 – R. FROM PISTON VIDEO RECOMMENDED THIS TO ME, AND I RENTED IT BEFORE I SAW IT COMING ON CABLE. SHE'S IN IT, BUT THEY DIDN'T EVEN PUT CREDITS ON THIS MOVIE. I ASKED R. IF HER NAME WAS ON THE BOX, AND HE SAID HE'D THROWN IT AWAY A LONG TIME AGO. THE LITTLE RENTAL PANEL HAD HER NAME ON IT, BUT IT'S SO BENT AND FOLDED THAT THE LAMINATION PULLED THE INK OFF HER NAME. DAMN!

IT'S "THE EXORCIST" PLAYED FOR ERECTIONS, AND THERE ARE A LOT OF SCENES THAT WERE CLEARLY ADDED IN LATER. THE WHOLE THING IS A HACK JOB: HALF THE TIME IT LOOKED FILMED AND WAS CLEARLY DUBBED FROM ANOTHER LANGUAGE! THEN THERE ARE THESE CHEAPO VIDEO SCENES SPLICED IN IN ENGLISH (SHE'S IN BOTH THE FILM AND THE ENGLISH SCENES). WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON WITH THIS? R. DOESN'T KNOW.

12/21 – TAPED "THE BOD COUPLE" OFF CABLE, BUT THERE WAS A POWER SPIKE DURING THE CREDITS. NO NAME!

weren't sticking around. On the bus down, she'd figured her best bet was to go to the unemployment office and see if her mom was still getting her disability checks.

Renata's first day in Atlanta had been a long one. She'd gone into the bathroom at the bus station, then climbed out a window just to make sure that creepy Eugene guy didn't follow her. Then she'd had to find the neighborhood with the truck place on a map, figure out the bus route there—all to find out the rental agent didn't know anything. He'd helped her find the unemployment place and she'd walked there, and after waiting in line for a long time she'd met Hiram Ossowski, who'd leered at her, had tried to look down her t-shirt—which was sweaty and gross from riding around and not showering—and had told her that he wouldn't tell her what Judy and Fred Dakota's new address was.

"That's confidential information," he'd said. "I could lose my job for telling you that. Now, if we were to . . . say . . . know each other a little better . . ."

For a moment she'd tried to not know what he meant, and then she'd felt like throwing up. She'd left, had spent way too much of her money on a room at a Knight's Inn. She'd taken a long shower and cried and cried and cried.

Then she planned. She got a phone book and found where Hiram Ossowski lived. Then she went to a drugstore and bought a disposable camera. The same drugstore would develop your photos in an hour.

When she picked up her photos, she blushed furiously and didn't meet the eyes of the girl (*thank God! a girl!*) behind the counter. She paid and almost ran out the door. Then she took a few deep breaths and went to see Ossowski. The line went much faster this time.

When Hiram saw her come in his tiny office, he smirked and pulled his greasy hair back with his hands.

"Welcome back . . . Betty, right?"

"Beth," she said. She'd told him her name was Beth Wallace, and that she was Judy Dakota's daughter from a previous marriage. Without any identification he hadn't believed her, or had said he didn't.

Before she could chicken out, she showed him one of the photos. She didn't put it down on his desk—she held it in her hand.

He smiled big when he saw her naked skin in the snapshot. Then his smile vanished when he realized . . .

"Hey—that's my bedroom! How'd—"

"You want your wife to see this? Do you?"

"What did you—?"

"You just say the word, a-hole, and these pictures are in the mail."

"But . . . you . . . you broke in . . ."

"Is your fat dumpy wife going to believe that? 'Oh yeah, this crazy chick broke into our house and took naked photos of herself honey, I don't know who she was!' Is she going to believe that?"

Hiram Ossowski started to cry.

"Shit, I didn't . . . come on, I just . . ."

"You just tried to put it to a teenage girl whose parents already did a hell of a job on her. Now where are they?"

He caved completely—gave her the address, gave her his bank card, told her the PIN number. All she had to do was show him the pictures and say, "If this number doesn't work, in the mail they go. And if the cops pick me up, I'll be like, 'He took the pictures, and I'm only fifteen!' You got me?"

There was $520 in his bank account. She left him $100 because she felt sorry for his wife.

The address for her mom's checks was a store front about four miles from her motel. Renata had thought about going straight there, but she was so tired, more tired than she thought she could ever be, and she'd already paid for her hotel room. The next morning she had a stale donut off the platter by the check-in and set off walking.

She was tired and hot again by the time she reached the right street. It didn't look like a residential neighborhood—there weren't houses, just fast-food joints and check-cashing places and second-hand stores.

Just a few blocks farther, she thought, and then she saw Eugene LaRue.

He was in a beat-up old car, not far from the address Hiram had given her. He was slouched back in the driver's seat, eyes closed and mouth open. Her heart started to beat faster as she got closer. His window was rolled down, and her stolen knife was out of her backpack and in her hand before she even knew what she was thinking about.

She had to hold the knife in her left hand to get it in the window and at his throat, and she had to move quickly because he woke up as soon as she got between him and the morning sun.

"Don't you *move*!" she hissed at him. His whole body locked rigid as he looked down at the knife.

"I don't have . . ." he started, then looked up at her, and his eyes got even wider.

"Holy . . ."

"Listen to me, prick. Put your hands on the wheel, where I can see 'em. Real slow, you got it?"

"Yeah, I got it. Shit you're, what was it, the name that sounds like tap-dancing? Renata Dakota?"

"That's right, and if you make one false move I'll slit your throat."

"Uh huh. So what exactly *is* a 'false move'?" Even with the knife at his neck he managed to look kind of smartass-ish.

"Just shut up." Renata unlocked the door behind him and opened it. Then she stood there for a moment.

"Look, you're going to have to take the knife away if you want to get in the car, which is smart 'cause even around here someone's going to notice you pointing that thing at me eventually . . ."

"Shut *up*!" She got the pepper spray out of her pocket and very carefully put it in her left hand as she took the knife with her right hand.

"Know what this is?"

"Capsicum pepper spray, I'm guessing, unless you've got chemical mace instead."

"That's right." She took a half-step back from the car, keeping the cannister pointed at his face. "You move at all, I'll spray you and *then* stab you, got it?" As he said "Yeah," she darted around the door and got behind him.

"Ow, dammit!"

Renata gasped as she saw blood welling from the back of his neck. She'd accidentally poked him when she got in the car.

"Ohmigod, I'm sorry!"

"Jesus, what did I ever do to you?" He'd automatically put his left hand to the back of his neck and turned to face her, and he looked mad as hell.

"Put your hands up," she said, but she knew she said it weak, and she could feel herself shrinking back from him—back from what she'd done to him.

"No, *you* put your hands up," he said, "And if you mace me I'll just open fire. I don't think I'm likely to miss at this range."



69½ Weeks—Over a year's worth of non-stop action on one videotape! This film features adult video legend Wick Diepper's debut in the infamous "Paris Catacombs" orgy scene. A must have for any collector! Directed by Carl Plogue. Re-released on Apex Video, $29.95.

2/16 – FOUND THIS IN AVN TODAY. NO YEAR ON IT, DAMNIT, BUT THIS IS ONE OF HER MOVIES. I'LL SEND AWAY TOMORROW.
REM: CHECK OUT DIEPPER CONNECTION.

3/7 – '69.5' FINALLY ARRIVED. IT WAS FILMED IN 1996, AND APPARENTLY HER CAREER IS ON THE DOWNWARD SLIDE. IT'S HER ALL RIGHT, BUT STILL NO NAME! THERE'S SOME KIND OF 'MAGNETIC ERROR' ON THE TAPE WHERE HER NAME SHOULD BE IN THE CREDITS. YEAH, RIGHT. HER NAME HAS TO BE THE KEY. COULD THOSE N.G. BITCHES HAVE GONE THROUGH AND VANDALISED EVERY TAPE? IMPOSSIBLE... MAYBE THE MASTER TAPE, THOUGH. THAT WOULD BE A LOT EASIER. IT'S CERTAINLY WITHIN D.L.'S POWER TO ARRANGE A 'CONVENIENT ACCIDENT'. HELL, SHE MIGHT HAVE EVEN DONE IT MANUALLY – MUST CHECK ON CONNECTION BETWEEN APEX VIDEO AND D.L. THEY'RE BASED IN MILWAUKIE, THAT'S A SHORT DRIVE FROM HER STOMPING GROUNDS.

3/16 – SAW HER ON MTV TODAY! BLOODY DANNY KRAK OR WHATEVER HIS NAME WAS PUT HER IN A VIDEO! IT'S CALLED "VIDEO VIXEN" OR SOME SUCH TRIPE. HE MUST HAVE MET HER WORKING ON "BRIDAL WHOREHOUSE" BEFORE HE MADE IT BIG. GREAT, NOW I HAVE TO RESEARCH SOME LATTER-DAY JON BON JOVI, TOO. STILL, HER APPEARANCE IN THE VIDEO – AS A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN ON A VIDEO THAT DANNY CAN'T MEET OR TOUCH OR GET TO – THAT'S SIGNIFICANT. EVEN A STOPPED CLOCK IS RIGHT TWICE A DAY. EVEN A PUFFY-HAIRED POP-STAR CAN REVEAL MYSTIC WISDOM...

There was a little black gun in his hand, pointing at her. Her eyes got wide, and she slowly raised her hands.

He said nothing for a moment, then reached back with his bloodstained left hand and carefully took the knife and the pepper spray.

"You try anything and I'll scream," she said.

"Jesus, you're lucky *I* don't scream," he said. "I'm the one stabbed by a runaway in my own damn car."

"I'm not a runaway!" she said. Then, before she realized she'd thought it, she asked him "If you have this car, how come you took the bus from Chicago?"

He drew breath to answer her, and then laughed.

"You don't quit, do you? I suppose I shouldn't be surprised if you're Duane Regis's daughter."

"I'm Fred Dakota's daughter!"

"Is *that* what he's calling himself now?"

Renata and Eugene sat in a diner. After some bickering, they'd both gotten out of the car and walked a few doors down to Ned's Hasty Tasty. At the door, Eugene had told her she could either run away and never find out anything, or she could have breakfast with him and they'd both spill their respective beans. He didn't care, he said, he was going in to put a bandage on his fucking head. When he'd come out of the bathroom, she was sitting in a booth. She'd picked one where she could watch the storefront through the window. Instead of sitting across from her, he'd pulled up a chair and sat at the end so he could watch it too.

"All right, who goes first?" she asked.

"Well, we could do a traditional 'ladies first', but since I got the gun and have been stabbed, I think *I'll* go first. What the hell are you doing here?"

So she told him her story—from coming home to find her parents gone, to tracking them through the truck company and taking the bus to Atlanta. She didn't tell him about breaking in to the Ossowski house; she just said she'd found them through her mom's disability check.

"How come you just didn't go to the cops?"

"I tried," she said, and it seemed like she got smaller right before his eyes. "When I went down to the station, they told me they couldn't find any record of my parents. Like, the social security numbers they'd given our landlord were fake and everything. They didn't have their names on anything—or mine either. Like I'd never been born, you know?"

He nodded, with the know-it-all smirk. "I wouldn't be too surprised at all if Duane Regis has an outstanding warrant or two floating around . . ."

"Who's Duane Regis? And how do you know my parents? And you *were* following me on that bus, weren't you?"

"Hey now, one question at a time."

"*You* asked two in a row."

"I . . . shit, I guess I did." He laughed a little, then sighed. "All right, you've been straight with me I hope. It's just . . . well, weird. Are you superstitious? Black cats, four-leaf clovers?"

"Burying an egg under your doorstep every month and burning pine cones on the first snowfall? Not particularly . . . what?"

"Your parents do that? The eggs and, you know, the pine cones?"

She looked down at her french toast and moodily stirred it around in a pool of thin syrup.

"Yeah, they're into all kinds of dumb little rituals like that. Like they sometimes walk into the house backwards, or hop across the threshold on one leg. It's embarrassing . . . what?"

"Okay, Renata." Eugene took a gulp of slimy egg and grimaced. "What if I told you that superstitions work?"

"Get out of here."

"What if I told you that not only do superstitions work, but that the same thing that makes the pine cones and black cats and that crap work, that same power can do other things, too? Bigger things?"

"What are you talking about? You gonna say, what, my mom rides around on a broomstick while I'm out at school?"

"The witch myth about the broomstick probably came from European witches taking drugs and having out-of-body experiences . . . but basically, yeah, I'm saying there are witches and warlocks and sorcerers running around, though they don't go by those names."

"Bullshit!" Renata was angry; her face was becoming mottled with color and her breathing was harsh. "I want to know about my *father*, not hear some fucking fairy tales about . . ."

"Okay, fine, you don't believe!" Eugene was practically yelling. He looked around and lowered his voice. "Would your parents?"

Renata opened her mouth, then shut it. She bit her lip.

"You've heard about Guyana, right? The Manson family? Those Japanese guys who gassed the subway? You believe in *those*, right? And you said your folks were superstitious."

"Yeah . . ."

"Well, before you were born they were in a cult, headed by a guy named Dermott Kane. And they *did* believe in all this stuff, and more besides. They were trying to . . . well, what they were trying to do was pretty complicated . . ."

"What? What were they trying to do?"

"Okay. Crash course in metaphysics here. There are a number of what we'll call 'gods' for the sake of convenience. They aren't gods, but it's close enough. Now for each god—a better name is 'archetype'—there's a human who, uh, kind of acts out that archetype."

"Huh?"

"Ok, there's an archetype of the Mother, right? Someone in the world is the woman who's the mom closest to the general type. That person has . . . power. She's a reflection of the archetype, called an avatar. She acts out the type and performs it in the world."

"Like a celebrity impersonator or something?"

"Kind of, or kind of like being possessed. Once you become an avatar, or start to become one . . . things just kind of fall into place for you. It becomes easier and easier to be like your archetype." His eyes had gotten far away.

"What does this have to do with my parents and this cult?"

"Back in the seventies and eighties, Dermott Kane—he called himself Dermott 'Arkane' then—was trying to become an archetype."

"One of the high priest things?"

"No, one of the *god* things. He promised his followers that when he did, they'd get their reward, yadda yadda ya. Only it didn't work out so well."

"What happened?"

"A couple rival groups got wind of what he was trying and suddenly a bunch of his followers wound up with bullets in their brains. There was a lively little war for a few years, and Kane wound up making a strategic retreat."

Renata shook her head. "I don't get it."

"Basically, your parents were in a cult that became a threat to a number of other cults, so they ganged up on

3/19—Apparently, 'The Sekorcist' was originally filmed in Germany by Gunter Lorenz, who was some kind of flipped-out "art-house pornographer" (c.f. "Cafe Flesh" and "Dr. Caligari"). American distributors found the original (which was titled something like "The Temptation of Father L." only in German) too weird or creepy, so they hired her to shoot some more scenes and patched it all together. I'm looking for the original German version, but no luck.

This could be important: it might be the first link (however diluted and commercial-ized) to the occult in her work.

Bridal Whorehouse—Winner of the Golden Stallion award for best adult film of 1994! Wick Diepper and Earnest Johnson both appear in this star vehicle for. Directed by German genius Gunter Lorenz, and with music by Danny Krak! Pagan Video, $44.95.



4/1—April Fool's for me, damnit! Where's her name? Did it just get sucked out of the text when she ascended? I tried to order it and they were all out. I've got to be on the right track. I've got to.

4/16—I don't believe it. I called to see if they had anel version ready, and they said, "Oh, the Naked Goddess edition?" I ordered it express mail.

4/19—No name. NO NAME. It says "The Naked Goddess" right on the cover, and the credits were redone to put her title in place of her name. How high does this go? How much power do D.L. and her cultists have to bend reality to their will?

them. Rather than stay in one place to get picked off individually, they scattered across the country and hid. Then the other cults figured they weren't a threat anymore and started fighting each other again."

"So what now?"

"I'm not sure. But one of the guys who really hated Dermott woke up eight days ago with his head cut off—a particularly potent way to kack him, considering that he was the avatar of the Messenger—and Dermott's old cronies all started gathering in Atlanta. I'd had a feeling about your part of Illinois for a while, but I didn't get a fix until your folks had beat feet. What I got a fix on, though, was you."

"What do you mean, a 'fix' on me?"

"I was trying to find Kane with a thaumodolite . . . a kind of magick compass. It led me to you instead. When you ditched me in the bus station—nicely done, too—I took another reading and this time found the real McCoy. He's in that storefront," he said, gesturing.

"Ok, I'm calling your fucking bluff," Renata said irritably. "A 'magic compass'? Maybe my parents are dumb enough to buy that kind of crap, but come *on*! How dumb do you think I am?"

"Fine. You think I'm a bullshitter? I'll prove it to you. Prick your finger and bleed into that little shmutz of uncooked egg there," he said, pointing at his plate.

"What?"

"Do it. Come on. I'll show you magick, real magick, right here in Queasy Greasy or whatever this place is called."

"I don't believe you."

"Then why not prove me wrong? I mean, it's not like I have a lot to gain from you bleeding on my breakfast."

She scratched her ear, then undid one of the safety pins that held her backpack together. She poked her little finger and squeezed it over the egg.

"This is, like, *so* stupid." She felt uneasy at the intent gaze that Eugene LaRue was fixing on the little drop of blood that was welling out of her finger. While they'd been talking, she'd half-forgotten about him having the gun, her pepper spray, and Hiram Ossowski's carving knife. Watching him look at blood made her forcibly recall those things.

"Who is this girl's father?" he intoned. Something about his voice seemed to grate through her body, like the sound of a buzzsaw biting.

His hand darted out and flicked the top of her finger. It hurt, the drop of blood fell, she said "Hey!" and he blew on the drop, hard, in midair, so that it sprayed and spread out and fell on the egg in a smear.

Her eyes opened wide.

Her blood had spelled out the words "Dermott Arkane."

Renata blinked, and stared. The words were still there.

"Oh fuck," Eugene muttered. She glanced up at him and knitted her brows at his look of sadness.

"What?"

"It all makes sense now."

"*What* makes sense?"

He looked up at her and in a quiet, gentle voice said "Renata, what's your middle name?"

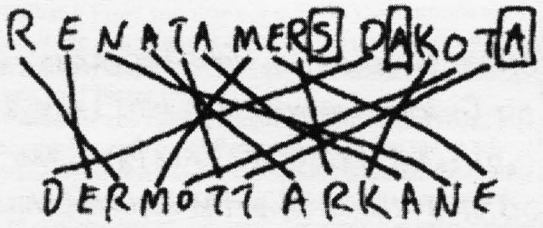
"It's . . . well, it's Mers."

"Mers?"

"Yeah, it was my mom's maiden name . . . what? What's that look?"

"Let me show you something."

He pulled a napkin out of the holder and produced a ballpoint pen from a pocket of his coat. He shook the pen a little and wrote "RENATA MERS DAKOTA" on the napkin. Underneath he wrote "DERMOTT ARKANE." Then he drew lines between the words.



"Looks like ole' Dermott's middle name is Asa, see?"

"I don't see anything but a plate of fucking spaghetti," Renata said. She was almost crying, though she wasn't sure why. She glanced at the egg and saw that the name had faded away.

"You're Dermott's daughter, and your name's nothing but a variation of his—an anagram, see? And you don't have a social security number or anything . . . I bet you always had trouble registering with schools, didn't you?"

"No," Renata said sullenly, but she had.

"No wonder I found you when I was looking for him. That's exactly what you're *for*."

"Shut up! You don't make any sense!"

He opened his mouth but for once didn't say anything. He just stared at her with a pity that made her furious.

"What are you trying to tell me, huh? That I'm some kind of superstition? That I'm a trick so people can't find this, this Arkane guy? That my parents *ditched* me because they only *had* me to protect some cult leader?"

Renata was crying in earnest now. Eugene hesitantly reached his hand towards her shoulder, and she swatted it away.

"Well you're full of *bullshit*, mister! I don't know how you did that trick with the egg, but my mom's maiden name was Mers, and my dad is Fred Dakota, and, and I'm *me*, not just some weird decoy for a guy I never even met!"

She ran out of words and just cried.

Eugene LaRue watched her for a moment, then stood up and took her by the hand.

"Come on," he said, pulling out his wallet.

"Where are we going?" He let go of her to pull out money for the breakfast, but she stood up anyway.

"We're gonna go see your *parents*," he said. He took her hand again and pulled. His other hand was in the pocket of his raincoat—the pocket with the gun.

"Eugene . . ."

"Don't worry, Renata. They won't hurt *you*." He had the keys to his cheap, shitty car in his hands. He squinted up the street, then down. It was mid-morning and still no one seemed to be around.

"Oh here, before I forget." He fished her pepper spray out of his pocket and gave it to her. He'd locked the knife inside the car, under the driver's seat.

"Eugene, before I go with you, tell me what you think is going to happen."

Eugene stopped cursing at the trunk, which didn't seem to want to accept the key. He looked at her for a moment.

"Kane did a terrible thing to you, Renata. From the moment you were born . . . hell, from conception, he used you. He hid behind you. I'm guessing most of his little cultist pals don't know that." He turned the key and opened

MAYBE THERE'S A MORE REASONABLE EXPLANATION. I MEAN, D.L. CERTAINLY KNOWS HER WAY AROUND THE ADULT-VIDEO SCENE. MAYBE SHE JUST CONVINCED THE PEOPLE AT PAGAN VIDEO THAT "NAKED GODDESS" IS HER STAGE NAME, LIKE PRINCE. UNLIKELY—BUT MORE LIKELY THAN THE ALTERNATIVE...

4/22—R. CASUALLY DROPPED A FUCKING MYSTIC BOMB TODAY! I ASKED HIM ABOUT "THE NAKED GODDESS" AND HE SAID, "OH YEAH, WHATSERNAME... YEAH, I GUESS ~~SHE~~ SHE'S CALLING HERSELF THAT NOWADAYS, PROBABLY TRYING TO GET SOME MORE INTEREST BUT HER CAREER IS REALLY TANKED. YOU'RE A BIG FAN, RIGHT? SHE DID A FILM IN '91, RIGHT BEFORE "BRIDAL WHOREHOUSE." NAME'S ON THE TIP OF MY TONGUE..."THE EROTIC JOURNEY OF ROSA CROSS" SOMETHING LIKE THAT. YOU WANT I SHOULD TRY TO FIND IT FOR YOU?" I COULD BARELY GET MY JAW SHUT LONG ENOUGH TO SAY YES.

ROSA CROSS! WAS SHE AN INITIATE? DID SHE PLAN HER ASCENSION STEP BY STEP? OR WAS IT ALL SOME COSMIC JOKE, SOME MYSTIC ACCIDENT? WITHOUT MAGICK POWER, HOW COULD SHE HAVE ARRANGED SYMBOLICALLY AND MYSTICALLY POTENT FILMS LIKE A SKIN FLICK ABOUT THE ROSICRUCIANS? BUT WASN'T THE WHOLE POINT THAT SHE GAINED MYSTIC POWER? I HAVE TO GET THAT FILM! IT'S GOT TO BE THE CORNERSTONE TO THE WHOLE THING!

5/11—GOT 'ROSA CROSS' TODAY. AGAIN A "NAKED GODDESS" RE-RELEASE ON PAGAN. IT'S FINALLY ALL FALLEN INTO PLACE FOR ME. IN "BRIDAL WHOREHOUSE" EVERYONE SLEEPS WITH HER EXCEPT THE GROOM. IN "THE BOD COUPLE" SHE KEEPS SAYING NO TO HER UGLY MILQUETOAST BOYFRIEND UNTIL OLIVIA PUTS HER OVER THE TOP AND SHE PUTS OUT FOR EVERYONE. IN "THE SEKORIST" IT'S THE PRIEST WHO WANTS HER BUT CAN'T HAVE HER EVEN THOUGH EVERYONE ELSE CAN. (I'LL BET EVERYTHING THE THEME IS PLAYED UP MORE IN THE GERMAN VERSION, SINCE IT'S BY THE SAME GUY WHO DID "BRIDAL WHOREHOUSE.") IT'S EVEN IN "VIDEO VIXENS"! SHE'S THE WOMAN THAT EVERYONE CAN GET—EVERYONE BUT YOU!!!

the trunk. Renata gasped.

"At least, I *hope* they don't know," he said as he hunched forward and concealed a pistol-grip shotgun in the folds of his coat.

"Do . . . do you think you're going to need that?"

He looked at her again, and his face was inscrutable. "Nah," he finally said.

He set off across the street, and she followed. He tried the door to the storefront—locked. He took a deep breath.

"Still, you may not want to stand right next to me," he said. Then he glared at the door, and Renata thought she heard clicking.

"Open it," he said.

"But it's locked."

"Not any more." His mouth was grim. "The herald cannot be stayed. Not when the message must be heard."

The knob turned, the door opened, and he strode inside. Renata followed.

It was dark, dusty, empty except for lumpy blanketed forms on the floor and a bare counter in front of a door to the back. As daylight streaked in through the door, the forms stirred.

"Master?" muttered one.

"Not quite," Eugene said. "Shut the door," he told Renata, who obeyed and then started to back away.

He turned on the light with his left hand. With his right, he held the shotgun, straight up and down.

There was a chorus of cries from the wakened sleepers. "Eugene!" "What the fuck?" "Where's the Master?"

"Yes," boomed Eugene's voice, and Renata felt the same grating sensation from the restaurant. "Where is Master Dermott Arkane?"

Then, above the confused mutter of the residents, a shrill voice cried out "*Mother!*" It was Renata's voice. A woman rising slowly to her feet looked back at Renata with a look both suspicious and forlorn.

Eugene turned towards her and suddenly Renata saw her father rise up from behind the counter. There was a gun in his hand.

"Look out!" she screamed, and then Eugene's shotgun came down, pointing at her dad.

"Duane," Eugene said, and his voice was as smartass as Renata had ever heard. "Met your daughter. 'Course she's not really yours, is she?"

"You should have stayed away, Gene," Renata's father replied coldly.

Slowly, the half-dozen people on the floor were edging away from the two men, from the two guns. Eyes wide, they pushed up against the walls and stood up fearfully.

"What are you doing, Eugene?"

"I'm here with an announcement." Again, his voice was filled with that terrible tone. He spoke with a voice blank and pitiless as a peal of thunder or a dying man's cough. "I'm here to tell the truth."

The people against the walls were all starting to speak at once, desperately trying to explain, trying to get Eugene and Renata's father to put down their weapons. "Gene, you don't understand . . ." "No, Gene, Master Arkane is going to become the Herald . . ."

"He called you Duane, dad," Renata said. "Dad, he called you *Duane*." Her voice grew accusatory. "Your name is *Fred,* you bastard, *Fred!*"

"Oh honey, you don't understand," her mother told her from against the wall, a quaver in her voice.

"She doesn't understand, but I do and so will you," Eugene said. "She carries Dermott's blood and bears his name. He *made* her as a decoy." Eugene's glance shot for a split-second to a man standing by the wall. "Does that sound familiar to you, Pete?" A woman next to the man went ashen-faced. "Bridget, you remember someone else who did the same thing, don't you?"

"What are you saying, Gene?"

"No Gene, Master Arkane wouldn't do something like that . . ."

"He did, though, didn't he Duane?" Eugene kept the lion's share of attention on Renata's father—or the man she'd called father, anyhow. "Just like Alton Montgomery in 1971, he had his name on children and hid behind them. You're seventeen, right Renata? So you were conceived about the time the Temple of the Fearless Chalice was putting the pressure on. Just like Alton Montgomery had a son in 1965 when *we* found him the first time. Remember? You remember don't you, Gina? Montgomery had that little boy, and when we thought we'd killed him it was the little boy who died instead. And we were all appalled. You were furious, Duane—when we finally found the real Alton, I remember your righteous grin when you shoved the shotgun in his mouth."

Renata glanced at her dad. His expression was blank. He was standing with his side pointed at Eugene, presenting the least target possible, but his great belly still hung out. The gun was level with his shoulder, pointing right at Eugene.

"Duane, is it true?" One of the sleepers was looking at the two men—Renata thought it might be the man called Pete.

"He's lying," was Duane's answer. "I never seen this girl before in my life."

"*Daddy!*" Renata screamed, and then she sank to her knees.

That was when she saw the pistol.

It was just the handle, sticking out from under a pillow. She saw the gun and blinked, and then she saw a woman by the wall not far from it, and she was looking at the gun, too.

Renata looked at the woman. She looked at Renata, then back at the gun. Then, as one, they both lunged for the pistol.

Eugene's head twitched to the side and his body lurched, and then there was a loud crash and a jet of fire from Duane's gun.

"Get down!"

"No, please *no!*"

People screamed, dove for the floor, and Renata had gotten the pistol first. The woman was right by her and Renata pointed the gun and pulled the trigger but nothing happened. She heard the crash of the shotgun and suddenly daylight poured into the room.

"Jesus, my leg, oh my *god!*"

Renata waved the gun, and every way she pointed it people screamed and dove to the floor. She had both hands on it, and she found a little switch, moved it, and then the gun went off, there was smoke and a flash and it gave her hand a stinging jerk. She could see Eugene low to the ground. He worked the slide of the shotgun and an empty cartridge flew out. Then he pointed and fired and she saw a man stagger back, chest suddenly red. Eugene was running towards the door and somehow Renata pulled the trigger again, to uncertain effect.

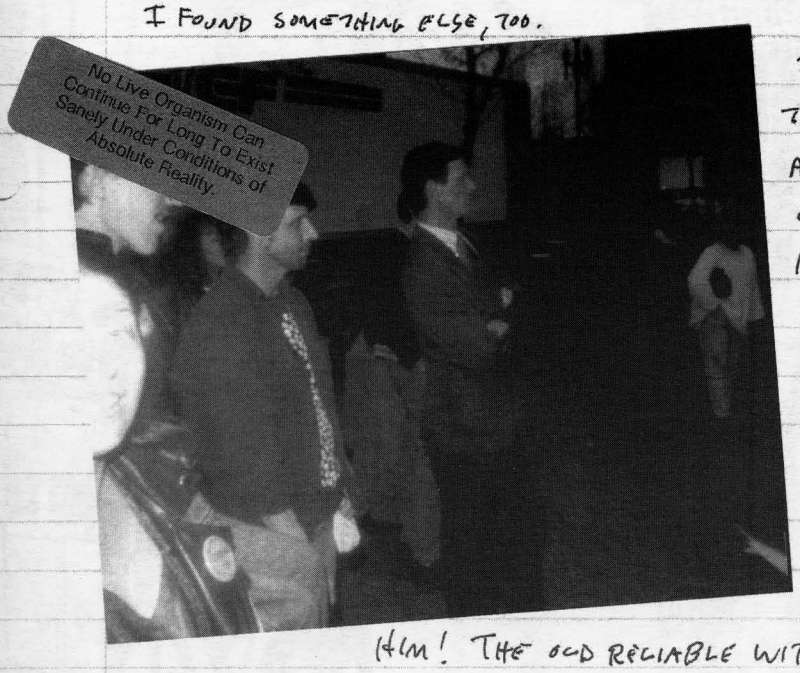
She saw her father aiming at Eugene's back and she pointed the gun at him and it went off. Her father staggered.

Then she was on the street and running and the gun fell from her fingers and the sunlight was broken into a thousand splinters by her tears and she ran and there was a sharp pain in her ribs and she ran as her breath came in short, agonizing gasps and still she ran and ran and ran.

6/12 – It's been one hell of a month. I had no idea how close I was getting to the core of the N.G. archetype. But after that conceptual revelation of last month, things have been way screwy. I've been sick a lot, got some kind of ear infection that hosed my sense of balance for a couple of weeks. Finally figured it out – I was in danger of starting down the path of the Avatar. Kill that noise. Her gravity well is powerful, but I've been treading the path of the Herald too long to switch now.

Still, getting caught in her mystic prop wash for a couple weeks had its benefits. I won a free combo meal from the Golden Arches up the street, and found a twenty in the gutter.

I found something else, too.

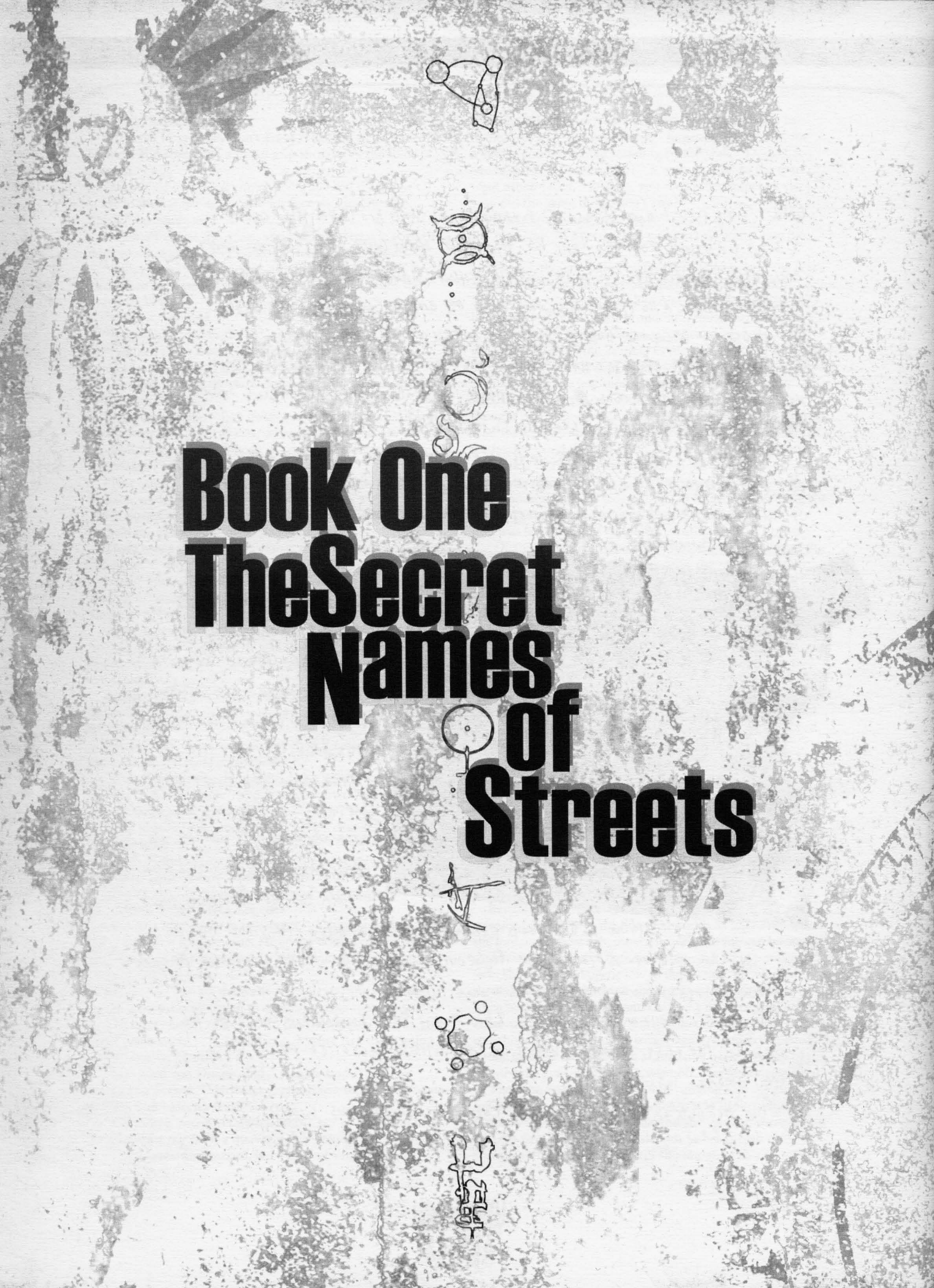


This photograph stuck to my shoe in the street as I was leaving with my combo meal. That's Dermott Arkane there – the snappy dresser. I'd know the bastard anywhere.

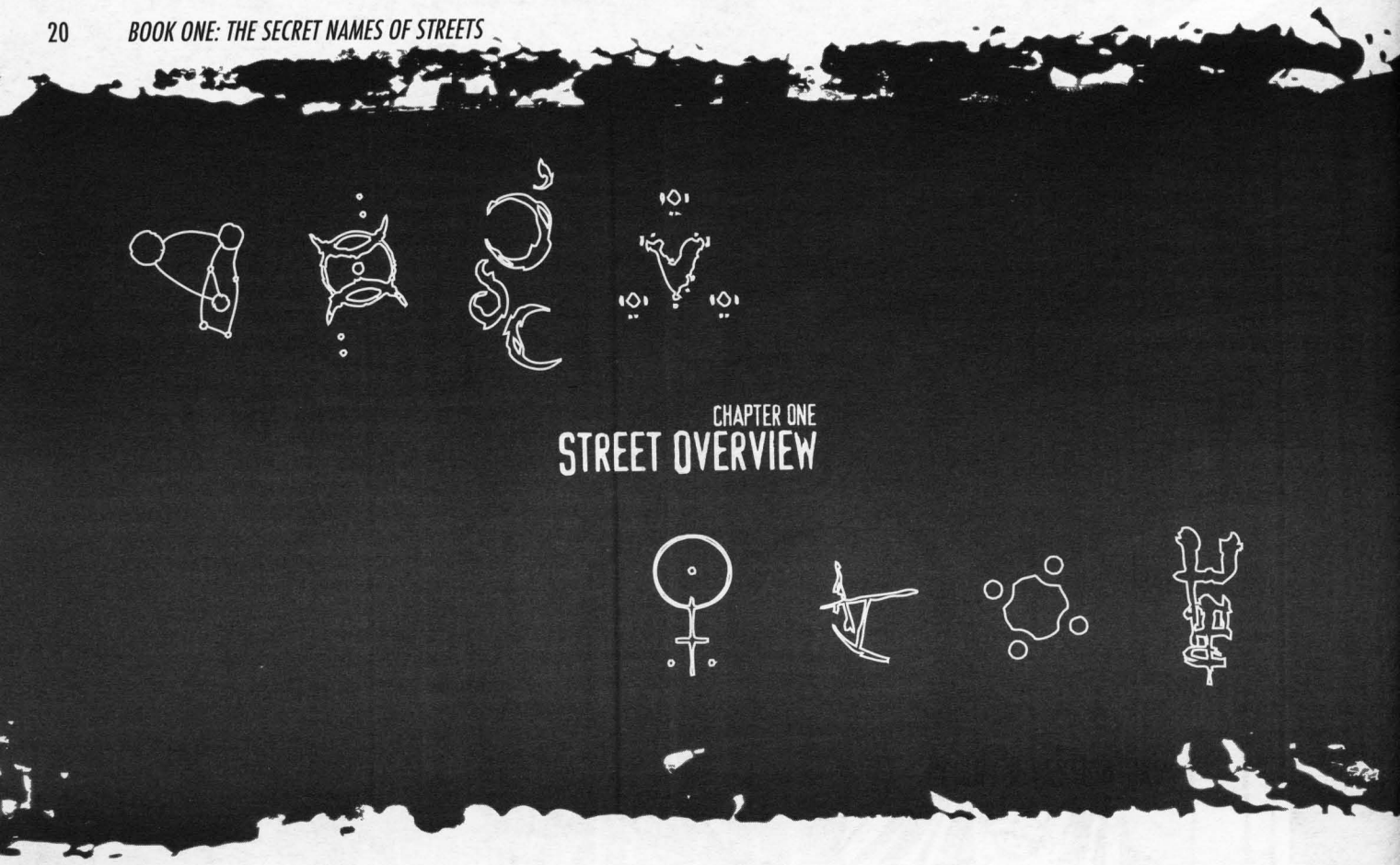
Things like this don't just happen. If Arkane's mucking around again, I've got to nail him, and fast – I'm gonna be the Herald, not him! The OCD reliable witchfinder has me headed for some armpit of a town, Romeoville, Illinois. That's where Arkane is. Goddess knows what he's doing there.

I leave in the morning. First I'll burn this journal – can't be too careful. The last thing I want is for these pages to fall into the wrong hands.

The Herald is coming, Arkane. Fear his righteous word.


Book One
The Secret
Names
of
Streets





CHAPTER ONE

STREET OVERVIEW

THERE IS AN OCCULT UNDERGROUND.

Beneath the living mirror of heaven, beneath the world of our desires, there are streets with secret names. They connect the back alleys of civilization with the urine-stained vacant lots of the cosmos. They take you to the occult underground.

You can't call information for the underground's phone number. It doesn't advertise in *Rolling Stone*. There are no maps that show its borders. Yet you know it exists—or rather, you know it *has to* exist. You know it in your bones.

You know because you've heard the rumors. A song that drives people to suicide. A man whose face melts with each dawn. A videotape that shows the birth of a goddess.

There are lots of rumors. These are different. The people you hear them from are different, like the weird drunk in the bar who lit his cigarettes without matches, or the street performer whose juggling pins pirouetted in unison between his hands. When you asked them how they did it, they smiled and said, "Eh, it's just a magic trick." Then the drunk sloppily pulled a quarter from your ear and the juggler dropped a pin and the moment was gone. But that feeling of truth remained.

Finally you knew what it was: the look in their eyes. Once you noticed it, you couldn't help but see it. Maybe every week or two you'd pass somebody on the street and for a second your eyes would meet and there it would be. You can't describe that look. Sometimes it seems like the hunger of a junkie, and other times it's the smug satisfaction of a fat tycoon. In the mornings when you're half awake, on the weekends in the nightclub bathrooms, you catch yourself staring into the mirror, looking for the look. It's not there yet. But you feel it coming on, the way the tickle in your nose says you're catching cold.

You want it now. You want to know what they know. You want to walk those secret streets and see where they go.

Some seek the occult underground for power: the power to change their bodies, change their lives, change the world. Others seek the occult underground for knowledge: the knowledge of their hearts, of their dreams, of the cosmos itself.

Everyone finds what they desire. But few know what their desire truly is until it is upon them.

You know these things:

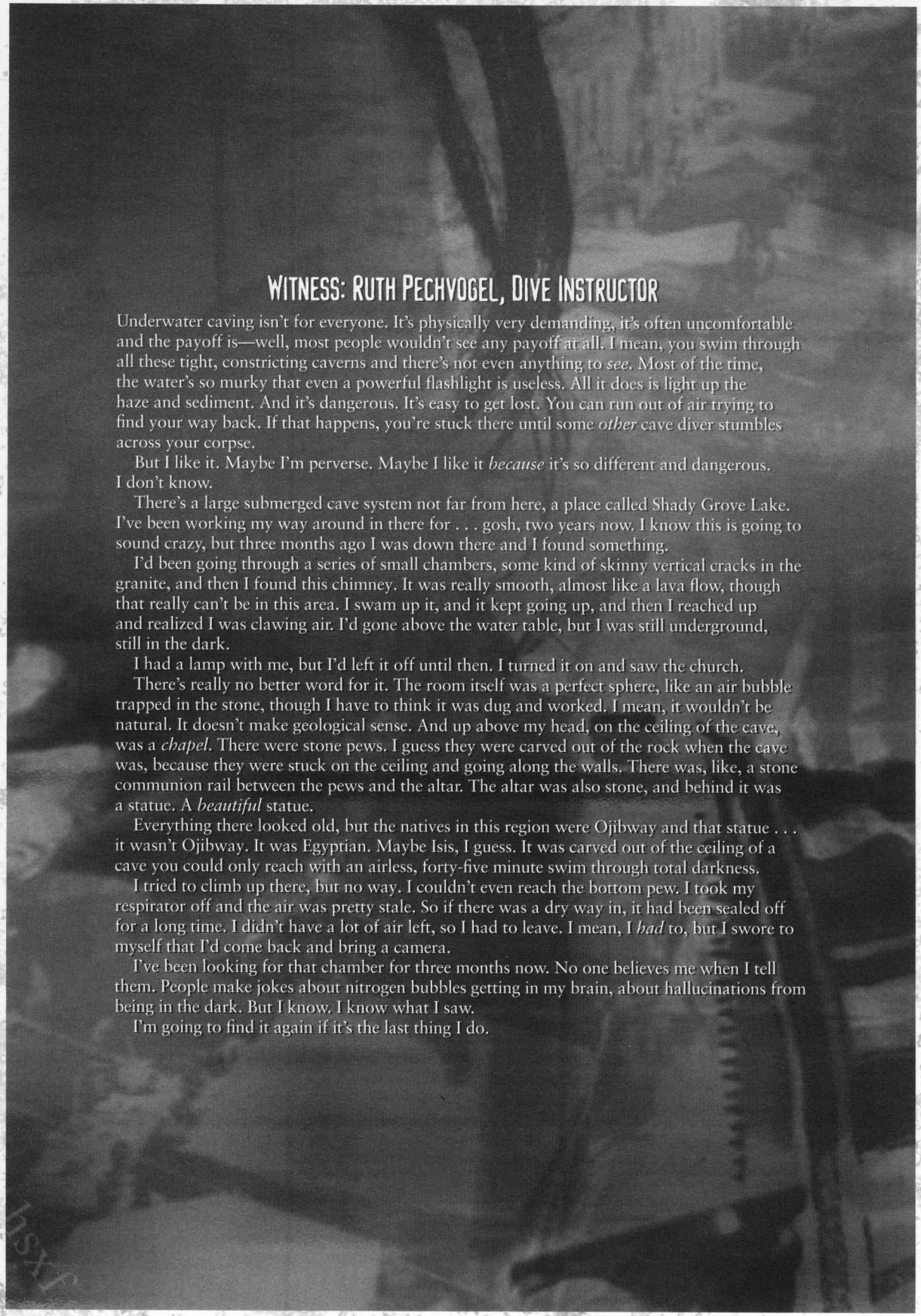
Something big is going down. You don't know what. But you can feel it all around you. It's in the air, in the headlines of newspapers, in the blurry images on television. It is a secret you have yet to grasp, though you could swear there was a dream you had in which you heard it whispered.

You need to know more. The world you know is not enough for you. You want to go deeper. At times you want to let go of reality and let yourself slip into some kind of pure understanding. Anything would be better than daily life. You know there is a place, a place of ideas, and that it contains all of your desires.

But there is danger there. People vanish, die horribly, become madmen, for the sake of whatever the secret is that lies at the heart of the unseen world.

That world is the occult underground. Find it, before it finds you.

artwork on previous page by Vance Kelly
background painting by Matt Harpold
photomontages by Haroudo Xavier



WITNESS: RUTH PECHVOGEL, DIVE INSTRUCTOR

Underwater caving isn't for everyone. It's physically very demanding, it's often uncomfortable and the payoff is—well, most people wouldn't see any payoff at all. I mean, you swim through all these tight, constricting caverns and there's not even anything to *see*. Most of the time, the water's so murky that even a powerful flashlight is useless. All it does is light up the haze and sediment. And it's dangerous. It's easy to get lost. You can run out of air trying to find your way back. If that happens, you're stuck there until some *other* cave diver stumbles across your corpse.

But I like it. Maybe I'm perverse. Maybe I like it *because* it's so different and dangerous. I don't know.

There's a large submerged cave system not far from here, a place called Shady Grove Lake. I've been working my way around in there for . . . gosh, two years now. I know this is going to sound crazy, but three months ago I was down there and I found something.

I'd been going through a series of small chambers, some kind of skinny vertical cracks in the granite, and then I found this chimney. It was really smooth, almost like a lava flow, though that really can't be in this area. I swam up it, and it kept going up, and then I reached up and realized I was clawing air. I'd gone above the water table, but I was still underground, still in the dark.

I had a lamp with me, but I'd left it off until then. I turned it on and saw the church.

There's really no better word for it. The room itself was a perfect sphere, like an air bubble trapped in the stone, though I have to think it was dug and worked. I mean, it wouldn't be natural. It doesn't make geological sense. And up above my head, on the ceiling of the cave, was a *chapel*. There were stone pews. I guess they were carved out of the rock when the cave was, because they were stuck on the ceiling and going along the walls. There was, like, a stone communion rail between the pews and the altar. The altar was also stone, and behind it was a statue. A *beautiful* statue.

Everything there looked old, but the natives in this region were Ojibway and that statue . . . it wasn't Ojibway. It was Egyptian. Maybe Isis, I guess. It was carved out of the ceiling of a cave you could only reach with an airless, forty-five minute swim through total darkness.

I tried to climb up there, but no way. I couldn't even reach the bottom pew. I took my respirator off and the air was pretty stale. So if there was a dry way in, it had been sealed off for a long time. I didn't have a lot of air left, so I had to leave. I mean, I *had* to, but I swore to myself that I'd come back and bring a camera.

I've been looking for that chamber for three months now. No one believes me when I tell them. People make jokes about nitrogen bubbles getting in my brain, about hallucinations from being in the dark. But I know. I know what I saw.

I'm going to find it again if it's the last thing I do.

Witness: Agnes Veuve, Retired Farmer

Well, back then there wasn' no such thing as a battered women shelter. Not out in Caesar county, anyhow. There was just Mama Flo, a big ol' woman with her children runnin' 'round her house like ants on a hill. She didn' have no husband, Widow Flo, but she had some money set by and her oldest three sons looked after her and her oldest three daughters tended to the rest. And if a child run away, most times you could find him at Flo's. And sometimes women ran 'way there too, when their man had gotten mean or drunk or just run off.

'S why I was there, me and Leo, nursing a match' pair of shiners. We'd been there one night, and I figured Cyrus had one more night of mean drinkin' in him 'fore he got sorry, and then Loretta O'Day showed up and I almost went home to take my chances with Cyrus, because Retta's husband Antoine was somethin' else. Most men, you push 'em hard enough, they push back and that's nature's way. Antoine, though, he was just born snake-poison mean, a cruel man, a devil of a man. Even the police chief was afraid of Antoine O'Day, and no one got worse from him than Retta and her two sons. Those boys couldn't have been but nine an' twelve when they drag' her to Mama Flo. Retta couldn' hardly walk, she beat so bad, and no money for the doctor. But Mama Flo, she put Retta down in a bedroom and coo on her and kiss her forehead like Retta jus a sick little girl herself. And I thought it might be okay.

Right 'bout dinnertime, Antoine come to Flo's and he's yellin' for Retta and his two boys to come out. Flo, she tell him they ain't there, but Antoine know she lyin'. He try the door, but she got it locked, but Antoine don't make no mind of it, he just kick that door on in.

He don't take one step, though, 'fore he see Flo there with her husband's old scattergun, pointin' at him like she know how to use it. And he a mean man, but Antoine's no fool. He say some threats and back off, calling Flo an old woman, an old bitch, sayin' she can't keep him from what his. Flo don't say nothin' back to him, just warn all them children to keep themselves back.

After midnight, Antoine come back. Middle of the night, all Flo's kids and Retta's sons and Leo and some others besides, all sleeping around the house like a pile of puppies, when Antoine come through a window and start yellin' for Retta.

Now, Retta was in the bedroom next door to where me an' Leo was, and I told Leo to get in the closet and not make a sound 'til me or Flo come get him. While I gettin' him hid, I hear a powerful row out in the hall, and when I peek through the door I see Flo holding a fry pan in her hand standing toe to toe with Antoine, and Antoine, he got a gun.

"Get out the way," Antoine yell at her.

"Ain' gonna," she say back. "You try 'n hurt them children and I'll kill you dead."

"My children's my business," he say back. He put the gun right 'tween her eyes and he start to count three.

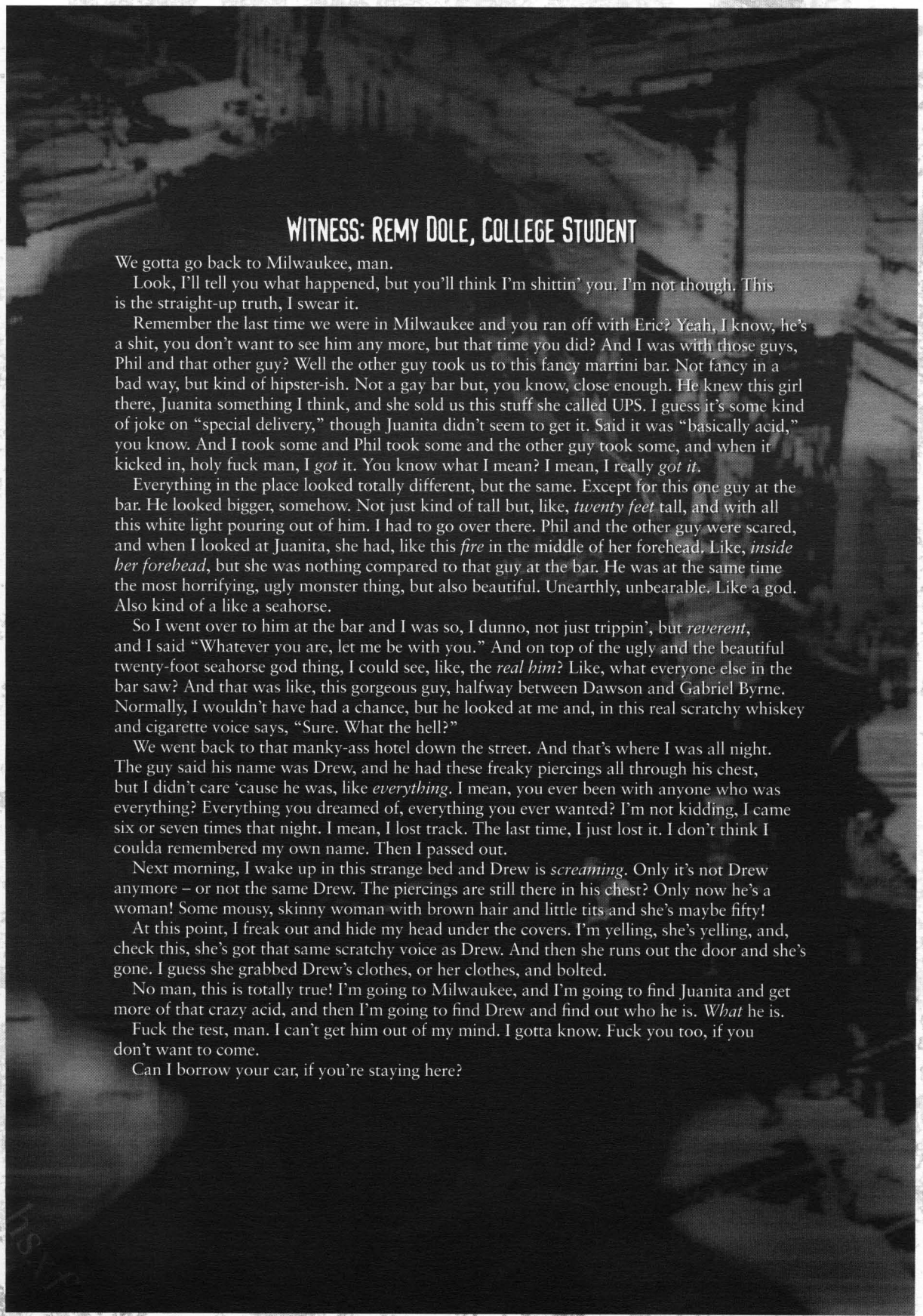
On two, she swing that fry pan. Antoine, he see it comin' and he pull the trigger.

I'll tell you truth, he blowed her brains clean out 'fore that pan hit his head. It knock him back hard and he fall. Mama Flo, though, she don't fall.

I seen her later, and that bullet killed her clean. That hole went through the front an' out the back, and her eyes was burned black with powder. But she stood while he fell, and then she swing that pan again on his head. I couldn't do nothin' but count while she hit – one, two, three, clang went that pan, and he just screamin' for the first hit, and quiet for the next hit, and on the third one his head just open up like an egg and he dead. And as soon as he dead, Mama Flo fall on him, dead too.

I'm the only one who seen it, but it's true. It was just that way. An' if you don't believe me, tell me how he coulda got hit three times 'til his head bust open and *then* shoot her, huh?

'S what I thought.



WITNESS: REMY DOLE, COLLEGE STUDENT

We gotta go back to Milwaukee, man.

Look, I'll tell you what happened, but you'll think I'm shittin' you. I'm not though. This is the straight-up truth, I swear it.

Remember the last time we were in Milwaukee and you ran off with Eric? Yeah, I know, he's a shit, you don't want to see him any more, but that time you did? And I was with those guys, Phil and that other guy? Well the other guy took us to this fancy martini bar. Not fancy in a bad way, but kind of hipster-ish. Not a gay bar but, you know, close enough. He knew this girl there, Juanita something I think, and she sold us this stuff she called UPS. I guess it's some kind of joke on "special delivery," though Juanita didn't seem to get it. Said it was "basically acid," you know. And I took some and Phil took some and the other guy took some, and when it kicked in, holy fuck man, I *got* it. You know what I mean? I mean, I really *got it*.

Everything in the place looked totally different, but the same. Except for this one guy at the bar. He looked bigger, somehow. Not just kind of tall but, like, *twenty feet* tall, and with all this white light pouring out of him. I had to go over there. Phil and the other guy were scared, and when I looked at Juanita, she had, like this *fire* in the middle of her forehead. Like, *inside her forehead*, but she was nothing compared to that guy at the bar. He was at the same time the most horrifying, ugly monster thing, but also beautiful. Unearthly, unbearable. Like a god. Also kind of a like a seahorse.

So I went over to him at the bar and I was so, I dunno, not just trippin', but *reverent*, and I said "Whatever you are, let me be with you." And on top of the ugly and the beautiful twenty-foot seahorse god thing, I could see, like, the *real him*? Like, what everyone else in the bar saw? And that was like, this gorgeous guy, halfway between Dawson and Gabriel Byrne. Normally, I wouldn't have had a chance, but he looked at me and, in this real scratchy whiskey and cigarette voice says, "Sure. What the hell?"

We went back to that manky-ass hotel down the street. And that's where I was all night. The guy said his name was Drew, and he had these freaky piercings all through his chest, but I didn't care 'cause he was, like *everything*. I mean, you ever been with anyone who was everything? Everything you dreamed of, everything you ever wanted? I'm not kidding, I came six or seven times that night. I mean, I lost track. The last time, I just lost it. I don't think I coulda remembered my own name. Then I passed out.

Next morning, I wake up in this strange bed and Drew is *screaming*. Only it's not Drew anymore – or not the same Drew. The piercings are still there in his chest? Only now he's a woman! Some mousy, skinny woman with brown hair and little tits and she's maybe fifty!

At this point, I freak out and hide my head under the covers. I'm yelling, she's yelling, and, check this, she's got that same scratchy voice as Drew. And then she runs out the door and she's gone. I guess she grabbed Drew's clothes, or her clothes, and bolted.

No man, this is totally true! I'm going to Milwaukee, and I'm going to find Juanita and get more of that crazy acid, and then I'm going to find Drew and find out who he is. *What* he is.

Fuck the test, man. I can't get him out of my mind. I gotta know. Fuck you too, if you don't want to come.

Can I borrow your car, if you're staying here?

WHAT YOU HEAR

Everybody hears things on the street. Some of them might even be true. Like these:

There is a man who lives behind a trap door in the sporting goods section of a Wal-Mart in South Dakota. If you ask him for a lemon, he will accurately predict your future for you.

Planes do not actually fly. It is a very elaborate hoax created because the general public does not understand or trust quantum physics.

Stories of elves, fairies and hobgoblins are based on a race of small people who still exist in a labyrinth of caverns underground.

Cats can catch ghosts, and eat them. That is how the old story about their having nine lives got started.

A mysterious man is often seen observing a spot where an exceptionally tragic car accident will happen. He stands on the sidewalk for hours watching the street, smoking a cigarette and checking his antique pocket watch from time to time. Then a moment after he leaves, cars come crashing into each other and people die.

Every single president of the United States has had a glass eye. The same glass eye.

Never use ATMs. They record the serial number on the bills they give you and send it to the government. Then they wait until a store deposits that bill and they know where you shop.

The penis of John Dillinger in the Smithsonian's secret vault is a fake. The genuine article has dark magickal properties and has been grafted onto a chimpanzee which can be controlled via ULF radio waves by the fiendish Brazos brothers, two gifted technological adepts, in the service of darker powers.

Don't eat the food at those greasy burger joints: it'll suck out all your mojo.

The final scores of every year's Superbowl are part of an ever-changing numerology formula that can start and stop wars.

There's a prison in the mid-west where there are no guards yet the prisoners are too afraid to try and escape.

There is a vault inside the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. that contains several tomes of magic rituals. These were collected by Jefferson back in the day to keep them from being destroyed. Supposedly there are hundreds of workable rituals in each book.

Butane lighters with occult symbology contain listening devices in the bases. The company putting them out is trying to spy into the occult underground with these devices.

The interstate highway system was actually laid out as a giant magickal glyph to enable the summoning of a demonic legion in case of a Soviet attack.

All the Russian immigrants in Alaska will take the state back for Russia at a pre-determined date and time.

Germ theory is a lie. Sickness is caused by invisible rays that nobody can explain. They are suspected to be of alien origin.

There's a website that sells magic books—real magic, that really works. The URL changes all the time 'cause they keep getting shut down. Do a search on "Magnum Arcanum" and "John Doe".

Aliens from Proxima Centauri have been living among us now for years, but in the last few months they've all started leaving.

Bigfoot has a Social Security Number.



UNKNOWN ARMIES

artwork by Earl Geier

Aleister Crowley designed the Susan B. Anthony dollar, and elements of that design have been used in the new dollar coin.

If you bury empty coffee canisters end to end around your house, lids on, then you will never see the Northern Lights from your yard, and the IRS will never audit you.

The Hertfordshire Constabulary is the only police force in Britain not headed by a Mason.

The Dodo is still bred in secret by an Amish community. They use its liver to brew an immortality potion.

JFK was in fact the Lindbergh baby, abducted by Joe Kennedy who performed a ritual on the baby. JFK gained a power allowing him to tap into the power generated by the fame of his biologic father to fuel his own popularity. The ritual is still performed in the Kennedy family.

The U.S. Patent Bureau hosts a special section for occult material, rituals, and mystic artifacts.

My ex-wife used to sing at a karaoke club where the spirits of dead musicians were trapped in the karaoke machine. After midnight each Saturday, a few would come out and jam.

In Memphis, there's a phantom Piggly Wiggly. It's where the local ghosts buy their groceries.

The Golden Gate Bridge is laced together with yards of scar tissue. It's the only thing holding California together.

Most people's morals and sense of authority comes from a psychic parasite living in their corpus callosum. You have to worry about the people who don't have the parasite. You can spot them easily: they're the ones with bad dress sense.

There are eight insect legs in every bar of chocolate. And it's some guy's job to put them in.

Certain prolific authors—hacks, in other words—put spells in their books. When you read these books, the books are reading you, and worse. One of these authors wrote over a thousand dime novel stories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Once his stories have been read enough times, the accumulated power (taken from the readers) will activate the spell embedded in his stories and he will be resurrected.

Holiday Inns are sentient beings, tied in a large collective mind, with their own agenda. The people working in Inns are just pawns. People sleeping in Inns are sometimes warped in subtle ways, sometimes untouched, sometimes just disappear. Maybe it depends on the rooms, maybe not.

If you really examine the phone numbers scribbled on the walls of public restrooms, you'll find the secret mathematical construct of the universe.

The Knights Templar did not die out, but are actually still alive via the Masonic fraternity.

The Knights Templar are directly linked to the international banking conspiracy, via the bloodline of the Rothchilds.

The banking conspiracy had JFK eliminated because JFK was going to pull U.S. troops out of Vietnam. That would have bankrupted several military-industrial endeavors, including Bell Helicopter, Sikorsky, and General Dynamics.

The banking conspiracy is linked to the Illuminati.

The Illuminati manifested themselves in other mediums historically, most notably with the founding of The Order of the Golden Dawn, in 1776—the same year as the American Revolution against England on the basis of a revolution against taxes (economics), and the publication of Englishman Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations.*



George Washington was a Mason. His monument was dedicated with full Masonic rites, and this is actually detailed in those words in brass at the foot of the Egyptian-style obelisk.

Pop radio includes secret instructions for the secret armies that fight for control of the world.

Masonic lore figures prominently in all aspects of American heraldry.

The fate of the world rests upon the shoulders of seven honest and devout ordinary men. If there are ever less than seven, God will destroy this earth.

There's this girl who can sing without moving her lips, and everybody hears a different song when she does it.

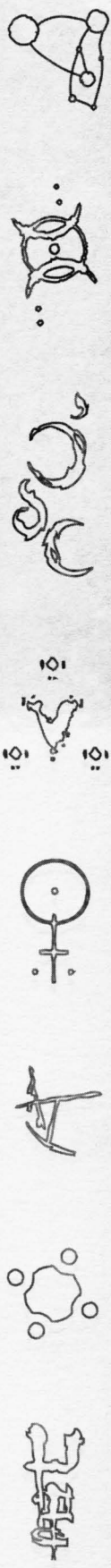
Cats are secretly the bodily manifestation of angels.

The telephone system is alive, and has been ruling us—in a limited fashion—since 1943. The introduction of the Internet has cemented its hold on us.

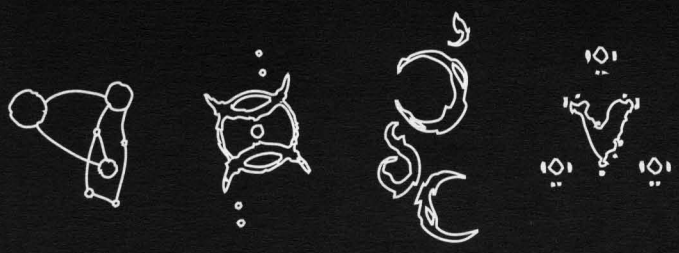
Everyone forgets the *other* five symbols of the Zodiac.

When you're drunk, reality opens up for you and allows you to fly away. Just remember to take your parachute with you.

Seven colors in the rainbow. Seven chakras in the Sanskrit texts. Seven varieties of Barbasol shaving cream, if you count the discontinued Wintergreen gel. Do I have to draw you a picture?

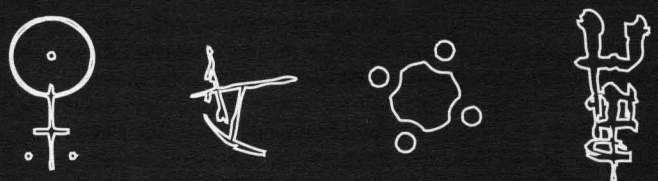


artwork by Felipe Echevarria



CHAPTER TWO

STREET CAMPAIGN



In a street campaign, you are a normal person entering an abnormal world. You understand that there are strange things out there, and great secrets to explore, but you know little more about those hidden lands than any ordinary person on the street. You do have one advantage over another ordinary person: you've experienced a **trigger event**.

Trigger Events

This is something in your life that has opened your eyes to the existence of the occult underground. The three street witnesses in the last chapter are examples of trigger events: Ruth Pechvogel's cave dive into an impossible chapel, Agnes Veuve's encounter with a death that was not death, and Remy Dole's night of unbelievable passion. All three of these people have been touched by the unnatural, just as you have been.

To prepare for a street campaign, come up with your trigger event. You don't have to know anything else about yourself at this point. Just make up a strange experience and go from there. Your GM can help you with this. If you have an idea, she can ask you questions about it to flesh it out. The others in your group can do this as well.

Imagine it's a winter's night. You and the others have each come to a snowbound inn to escape the cold world beyond. A fire crackles. In this quiet space, over steaming mugs of hard cider, the bartender asks a simple question: *What is the strangest thing you've ever experienced?*

Go around the table and tell your trigger events. Ask each other questions, compare experiences, and flesh out your stories.

Examples

Here are some sample trigger events you might think about, or even use if you're stuck for an idea:

You're eight years old, and for the first time you are staying over at a friend's house. You both have crept into the attic with your blankets and pillows, and late into the night you tell each other jokes and read comic books. Finally you fall asleep. But you awaken a few hours later, before dawn when it is still dark. There is an old chest nearby. From the soft glow of the nightlight your friend's mother plugged into the wall socket that afternoon you can see a little girl squatting on the chest, staring at you, and she frowns and says: "Don't look at me. *Don't look at me!*" You shut your eyes tight for almost two minutes before you risk peeking again, and she is gone. But you remember her eyes, sunken from hunger, with a hatred you never even knew could exist focused directly on you.

On your fifteenth birthday, your parents gave you a puppy. You loved that dog. But your grandfather, who lived down the street, hated her. When you walked by with the puppy on a leash, your grandfather would come to the window of his run-down old house and scowl. One evening you came home late and your parents said the dog had run away. They'd looked all around, called her name, and had no luck. You ran out into the night to find her. Your grandfather was sitting on his porch and he called you over, looking grave. "I ate her," he said. "I had to. She had your grandmother's eyes." He would never speak of this again. Your parents didn't believe you. Two years later, he died of a heart attack.

Your karate instructor has an "unofficial" requirement for black belt. You have to go to Jolly Roger's, the local biker bar, and pick a fight. When your pal Ron was up for promotion you went with him, even though you were just a green belt. The guy Ron messed with—skinny guy with all these tattoos—rolled his eyes and sighed, but eventually went outside to fight. Out in the parking lot, he just reached over and *pulled off Ron's nose*. Just pinched it off like a piece of clay and threw it behind the dumpster, where you had to go and find it so the doctors could reattach it. Ron said the guy must have had a wire cutter in his hand or something, but you saw it. You were there and he did it with just his fingertips. Right then you decided that, compared to that guy with the tats, karate was bullshit. The weird thing was, you and Ron later realized you'd been at the *wrong bar* the whole time.

You were in a highway construction site, looking for a place to sleep, when you saw these two old geezers glaring at one another by a half-done overpass. They were talking some language that was mostly phlegm, but one said something about "John Dillinger" and the other said something about "Genghis Khan." They coughed and blathered some more, then shook hands and said "winner take all." They opened these big black suitcases and pulled out robots. *Weird* robots. One was like an ape made out of sawed-apart pistols and shotguns, and the other was this bright silver alligator. When the robots started to fight, you wanted to get closer, and that's when the old guys noticed you. They just *pointed* and the robots took off after you. Lucky they'd already hurt each other, 'cause you barely got over the fence before them. Alligator still took a piece of your heel.

You weren't quite old enough to go to the movies yourself, but you could sense that the local theater—the Platinum—was a magical place. You snuck in to see *Jaws* and *E.T.* and the other, weirder films they showed—*The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* and *The Deadcoat* and *Clash By Night,* but the guy who ran it kept kicking you out. The Platinum eventually closed down when the multiplex moved in, but one night you saw people going there and you snuck in one last time. It was the people who'd worked there—the owner and the ticket girl and the guy from the popcorn counter—but they were all dressed like characters from *Casablanca* or *Key Largo*. A black-and-white movie was playing, one you'd never seen, and one by one they started stepping up and *into* the screen. As they did, they got big and flickery and entered the action, *becoming the movie*. When just the owner was left, you ran up and begged him to take you too, but he just snickered and said something about how, after him, "Cinnamon Nancy" was going to be dead. Then he stepped in and the lights went out. You thought it was all a dream until last week, when you caught the last half of *that movie* on late-night cable. It was titled *Cold House With Mirrored Door.*

You were ten when your parents burned. Your house burned, your two family cats burned, and you should have burned up too, except for the man with the mismatched eyes. He just walked in through the flames, looked at you, and said "Want to live?" You nodded and he pulled you out. Fire was all around, and smoke, and you know now that you should have died from carbon monoxide, smoke inhalation, or even heat prostration, but he took your hand and you *just walked out*. When you got outside he said, "I may have need of you some day. Do not marry or form any permanent attachments. Become a fire fighter. I'll come when you're twenty-six." The guys at the station are planning a big party. You'll be twenty-six next Wednesday.

Creating Your Group

You're not going on this journey alone. There's a group of people you're working with to pursue your goals, people who are after some of the same things you are and who have trigger events of their own. The GM may have a plan for the kind of group you form, or you may decide this for yourself.

You need to know why your group is working together and what your common goals are. By defining your group, you help define the relationships your group has with other people and groups you meet.

Three types of groups are described here, but the nature of your group may change over time. These are just points of departure so everyone in your group knows where to begin.

Circle of Friends

Your group is joined by the bonds of friendship. Before you even get into anything weird, you're already a team who trust and rely on each other. As a group, you explore the unknown and hang together as long as you can.

Goals

You each have your own personal goals, but as a group, you're just concerned with holding on to the ride of life and taking care of the people who mean the most to you. Your circle of friends is the most important thing in your world, and you want to protect each other.

Assets

You're determined to stick together come Hell or high water. You know each other well and trust each other completely.

Liabilities

Sometimes friends piss each other off, or worse. You probably don't have the range of skills and experiences that formalized groups do. No one is going to take a bunch of dilettantes like you seriously. Since you live real lives outside of the occult underground, you're more vulnerable to those who would hurt you.

Examples

Dot Gone. The members of your group were co-workers at a local dot-com that went bust. The big project you all worked on was a data sniffer that could correlate seemingly unrelated events by performing text searches on news sites, looking for patterns in global events that could indicate market trends. You began getting some very strange results, and then your stock tanked, the founder spontaneously combusted, and one of the shadowy venture capitalists behind the project stepped in and took all the code. In the weeks since you lost your jobs, you've begun to suspect you're under surveillance. But from whom, and why?

The Friends of Charlie Verrick. Charlie was everyone's best friend in college. He was always three degrees past what anyone else was willing to do. When you were sweating through finals, Charlie blew his GPA to hunt for lost

cities in Peru. When you went to the kegger, Charlie brought the Hell's Angels. And when 9/11 went down, Charlie was a paramedic killed by debris. After the funeral, you all made a decision: it's time to do things Charlie's way. You're walking away from your comfortable lives to discover the secret world around you, and make it a better and more interesting place. The funny thing is that Charlie is right there with you, talking to you in your dreams about what you could become.

Cabana Boys. In your small resort town, there's a pretty big divide between the Haves and Have Nots. You and your buddies were Nots in terms of money, but you've always been Haves when it comes to looks. Now you're in your prime and while you may put "Tennis Instructor" or "Pool Attendant" or "Chauffer" or "Gardener" on your tax forms, you're really pretty much kept men for widows, spinster daughters, or lonesome wives attached to one of the five local Have families. But you're learning that all is not happiness and light for the rich and beautiful people. They scheme and plot constantly—and viciously. "Accidental" deaths, mysterious reversals of fortune, and murky betrayals are their bread and butter. There's something weirdly rotten about this town. You never meant to get tangled in a web of intrigue, but it's increasingly obvious that if you're not the spider then you're the helpless, struggling fly.

Occult Investigators

You know the world is a dark and scary place. Your group is trying to figure out just what the heck is going on in this so-called "occult underground" and whether it's dangerous to the world at large. You might be a secret government task force, you might be the staff of a paranormal-investigation television show or magazine, or you might just be a bunch of would-be Van Helsings out to stop the Draculas of the modern world.

Goals

Find out as much as you can about the occult underground. When you find something ugly going on, expose it or stop it or both. Don't get killed. Don't turn to the dark side, whatever that is.

Assets

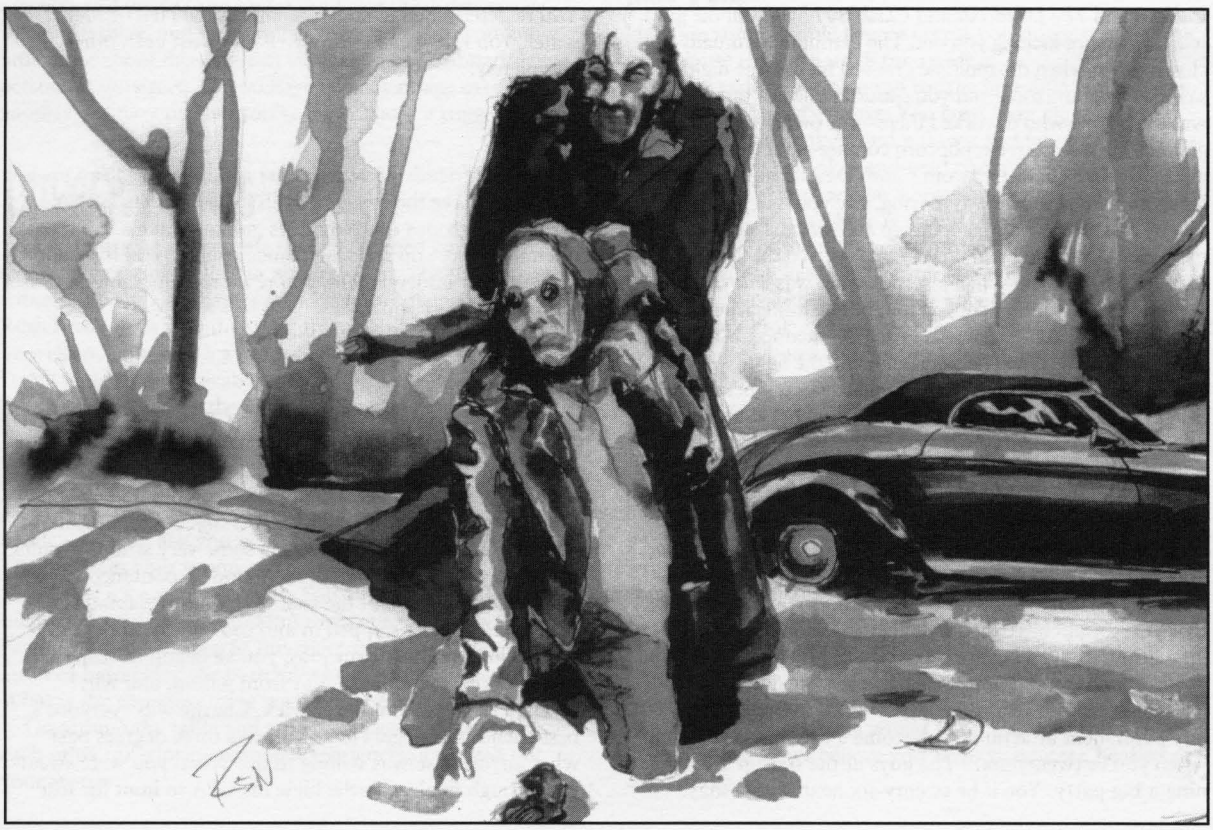
Your curiosity is a good reason to get involved in things. You expect the worst, and are pragmatic about the threats you face so you're well-prepared. You aren't likely to get suckered.

Liabilities

You don't know what's really going on with the occult underground. Your actions might backfire and get you in trouble with the authorities. When you gaze into the abyss, the abyss gazes into you; when you battle monsters, you can become a monster.

Examples

Lab Section Six. Professor Morbius is a weird old guy, but you knew that when you signed up for his Psychology Open Study Course. You'd heard the rumors: alchemy,



UNKNOWN ARMIES

artwork by Rob Nemeth

magic rituals, spirit summoning, all sorts of wack stuff that puts the "para" in front of "psychology." You and your fellow grad students comprise lab section six of the course, and the prof has given you your assignment for the semester. It's a hundred percent of your grade, all wrapped up in a nice little bundle: get off campus, mix it up with the alternative-spirituality community, and see just how deep the subculture goes. Wicca, Santeria, Rastafarianism, sure, but what else is out there? If this town has a cutting edge of the occult, your grade depends on finding it.

Sleepy Holler. Time passes slow out here in the boonies. You work for the county laying asphalt, tinker with that car up on blocks in the back yard, and hunt quail with a shotgun in one hand and a beer in the other. But you and the boys down at the bar have a secret: when you were just kids, Old Momma Voodoo showed you the cave where she said the angel lived, and told you how people from the city would sometimes come out looking to take that poor creature's wings on account of they worshipped the devil. You could even hear it in there, deep under the earth, singing so faintly but so sweetly it near broke your heart just to listen. Now Old Momma is gone, and you and the boys are the guardians of the cave. But you've had enough of these freaks coming out here and making trouble for that poor thing in the earth. You're gonna take the fight to them. Go to the city, find their devil's temple, and put paid to those sunsabitches once and for all. Show them how justice works down in the Holler.

The DEA's Dirty Dawgs. It all started because you figured the Army sounded like more fun than technical school—and sure enough, it was. You all wound up detached to a covert South American command, a joint duty with the Drug Enforcement Agency, and that's where the ethics got confusing. I mean, kill a drug kingpin's bodyguard and you're doing your job. Blow up his house and his smuggling boats and you're a hero. But put one sticky finger on any of his durable consumer goods and suddenly you're a rogue, out of control, dishonorably discharged and shipped back home in disgrace. Lucky thing you didn't squeal about any of the stuff you saw in ol' Pablo's secret sub-basement: stuff like the moving head in the jar with the metal nose, and those weird glass birds that actually *talked*. You'd have got a Section 8 instead. Now you're wondering what else is going on. Fortunately, not *all* your Army pals think you're crooked—and not *all* your DEA friends think you're crazy. Besides, it'd be a shame to let all that expensive demolitions training go to waste, right?

VIGILANTES

Something bad is happening, and the cops aren't doing jack. You've hooked up with a few other like-minded people to take action. You aren't looking for trouble, but you sure aren't going to tolerate it. You believe the trail leads to some high weirdness, and you're determined to follow it right into the heart of darkness if that's what it takes.

GOALS

You've got some sort of a clear agenda, such as "help people in trouble," or "stop psychos from screwing up our kids," or "destroy all monsters." You've got your group view of the way things ought to be and you're dedicated to enforcing it.

ASSETS

Your motivation is clear: beat some sense into the world. You know the occult underground can mean trouble for everyone, and it's also a bit short on heroes. Since you've got a definite agenda, plot hooks are pretty simple.

LIABILITIES

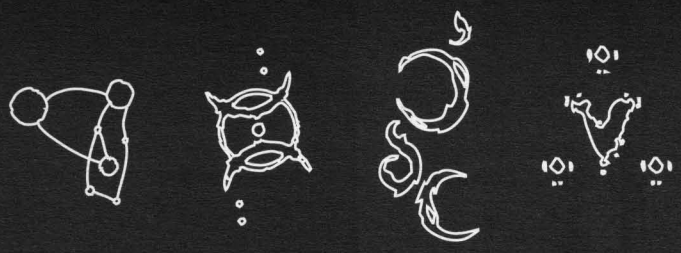
You're a bunch of amateur meddlers without a real power base. You're idealistic and could be manipulated by those more cynical than you. Since you aren't after power (the way many people are), you may not have the resources it takes to survive when you tick off the wrong people.

EXAMPLES

Curb Service. Being a valet is a crap job, no doubt, but it's what you and your buddies do to pay the bills. Now and then you take a little spin in some yupscale bastard's beamer, which you consider a perk. Then two of you were "on break," cruising through downtown in a freaking Hummer, when you saw a couple punks stomping on some homeless guy. Wham! You were on the sidewalk in seconds, kicking the crap out of those jerks, and then you drove the poor old man to the free clinic. As he got out of the truck, he turned and said: "There are a thousand more like me every day." That's when it hit you. You've got an endless supply of cars you never drive twice, you've got a monkey uniform that means nobody looks at you twice, and you're insanely unsupervised. *You can fight crime.* You can change this city one hell-bent joyride at a time.

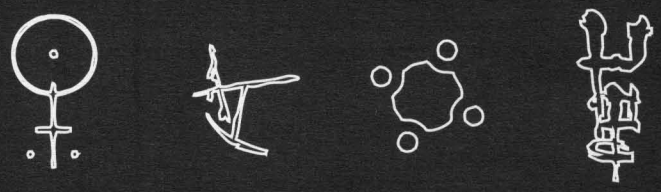
The Star Chamber. You started out as a group of like-minded professionals, getting together to bitch about being women in "masculine" jobs like law enforcement, newspaper reporting, or the D.A.'s office. But it changed with Otis Smallbury. He was guilty. You all knew he was guilty. But you couldn't get the evidence admitted in court, and you couldn't publish without further wrecking his victims' lives, and legally, you couldn't do anything but watch him walk. That was the night you decided that laws are like a pair of tight pantyhose: justice looks better with them on, but sometimes has to lose them for comfort. Now your little secret group has grown. You don't act often, but you do act decisively.

The Lifers. You're an odd bunch. All different ages. All different walks of life. All different political views and backgrounds. And all different fatal diseases. HIV, for a few of you. Or a slowly-growing rhinopharynxial cancer, far too close to the brain to operate. Perhaps the ultra-rare and invariably fatal Berrinton's Syndrome. Not much in common except you've all got five years to live, max, and you're all looking at a slow, nasty, painful decline. But while other "support groups" press for acceptance and resignation, you've made a pact to flirt with disaster in the name of renewal. Some want revenge on a criminal world. Others want to make a statement, or to make the world just a tiny bit better. Some just want to die fast and hard instead of slow and whimpering. But you all agree on one principle: If you gotta go, why not go in a blaze of glory?



CHAPTER THREE

CONCEPTION



As you prepare to explore the occult underground, you need to examine three key questions: Who are you? What can you do? How can you change?

WHO ARE YOU?

You are a person who is turning away from the everyday to scratch deeper. You believe there are secrets that are worth learning. You are determined to discover them.

You are not boring. You are an obsessed, passionate individual with a distinctive personality.

YOUR OBSESSION

You don't enter the occult underground unless you're obsessed with something. This goes beyond a quirky interest or minor hobby. Your **obsession** is what you live for, what defines your existence, what gives your life meaning. Pick carefully. You want something useful, but original. It should also be something simple to express. "Toughness" is a good obsession. "Getting really strong so I can beat people up" is a needless elaboration.

There are rare exceptions. If you want to begin without an obsession and find one later on, talk to the GM about your idea.

If you want to be an adept—someone who follows a **school of magick**—or want to become an adept later, your obsession should be closely tied to your magickal world-view. Only the terminally fascinated ever get good enough at magick to make it work. Check out the *Adepts* chapter beginning on p. 110 and see what brand of obsession turns your crank. (If you're playing a street-level campaign, your GM may want to keep adepts in the shadows for now. Ask her before reading the *Adepts* chapter.)

If you want to be an avatar—someone who follows an **archetype**—you don't have to take a related obsession. Avatars do not necessarily internalize their chosen archetype into their worldview, though some do. But they should not be incompatible, either. Check out the *Avatars* chapter beginning on p. 168 and think about the symbolic path you want to walk on. (Again, street-level campaigns don't usually begin with you playing an avatar. Ask your GM about this before peeking at the *Avatars* chapter.)

Write your obsession on the character sheet, along with a short summary of what it means to you. Examples follow.

OBSESSION EXAMPLES

Breaking & Entering. The violation of a person's home is an expression of power and daring that pumps you up. The secrets you find inside are just the whipped topping on the dessert of intrusion.

Egyptian Antiquities. You not only have a large personal collection and a degree in archaeology, you compulsively track current artistic and design trends looking for ancient Egyptian influences.

Human Motivation. You're fascinated by what makes people stubborn, what makes them give in, what makes them love and hate different things.

Knowing It All. You want to accumulate all knowledge for yourself. You love the exchange of information, because

you always wind up with more than you started with.

Music. To connect with people on a deep level, you use the sister languages of melody, harmony, and tempo. You see music as a bridge between our separate worlds.

Physical Perfection. You diet, stretch out every morning and evening, lift weights three times a week, and try to run ten miles or swim sixty laps at least as often. If you don't get your exercise, you can practically *feel* your body turning to putty.

Pleasure. You tried S&M, B&D, LSD, PCP, and XTC—and then you tried them all again, only this time on a water slide. Too much fun is never enough for you.

Religion. Your dedication to Roman Catholicism (or orthodox Judaism, or Zen Buddhism, or whatever you want) guides your every action and thought. You strive completely to live a Christ-like life (or to adhere to the laws of the Talmud, or to annihilate your ego, or . . .).

Shadows. You dwell in the margins, in both literal and metaphysical shadow. You lurk and you plot and you slip through society like a ghost.

Top Dog. You want to be the quintessential alpha, the leader of the pack. In every situation, you must be dominant.

Toughness. You are compelled to be the baddest mofo on the street. Guns, knives, bare fists—they're all props, all part of the killer mystique you anxiously seek.

Adept Obsession Examples

(**Bibliomancy**) **Self-help books.** They are the alchemical texts of the postmodern era, every sentence a recipe for transformation.

(**Cliomancy**) **Conspiracies.** You must learn the secret history behind history, and revel in the power it grants.

(**Dipsomancy**) **Binging.** Can you drink yourself so far down a hole that you actually emerge on some unglimpsed other side? Through force of will, you can transubstantiate a toxin into pure wisdom.

(**Entropomancy**) **Vansurfing.** There's nothing like riding on top of a big smoking Ford right down the damn interstate. The ocean is just the ocean; the highway is a metaphor.

(**Epideromancy**) **Blood Freedom.** Your blood is your sixth sense. You must release it so it may share in your experiences and take its secret knowledge into your heart.

(**Mechanomancy**) **Eccentric Genius.** You follow in the path of Tesla, a solitary explorer in the unknown future of human achievement. You do not seek to be understood—only respected.

(**Narco-Alchemy**) **Following the Dead.** They stopped touring when Jerry died, but you're beyond that now. You follow the true dead: souls and the wisdom they impart, the expanded reality you find in every blunt.

(**Personamancy**) **Mental Armor.** You have a vulnerable core of being you must protect at all times. You rely on social and magickal masks to hide your injured, mewling soul from a long-buried nightmare.

(**Plutomancy**) **The Price of Freedom.** You suspect that every idealist is a capitalist with good spin. You are a modern Diogenes, walking the world to look for the one who cannot be bought.

(**Pornomancy**) **Desire's Visage.** You believe that in orgasm, we mimic the true face of the Naked Goddess. You must catalog those features, cross-reference points of similarity, and build a composite image of Her.

(**Urbanomancy**) **Urban Renewal.** The dead hulks of abandoned buildings are abused children in your eyes. You believe if you can renew the city, the people renew themselves.

(**Videomancy**) **The Judges.** You know them all. Judge Judy. Judge Brown. Judge Wapner. They dispense wisdom and justice to the masses, Solomons for the media age. You must transcribe their teachings, systematize them, and synthesize the ultimate judgment passed on a passive audience.

Your Passions

You don't go through life like a car on an assembly line. You're volatile, spontaneous, and committed. The events in your life can have a profound effect on you. There's something that really scares you, something that ticks you off, and something that inspires you to action.

These are the **passions** that rule your life. In a very real way, they're the foundation of all the "logical" and "rational" decisions you make as a human being. These are the hot buttons wired deep into your brain.

You have three: a **Fear** stimulus, a **Rage** stimulus, and a **Noble** stimulus.

Your passions cannot contradict your obsession. You are a coherent person.

When you're in a situation that pushes one of your buttons, you go all spooky-intense. You can opt to either flip-flop or reroll a failed roll during that situation. You only get to do this once per session for each passion. If you're going to go buck wild, make sure it's worth it.

The GM can shut you down. If you unleash a passion for bogus reasons and she calls you on it, you don't get to cut loose. Yet.

The Fear Passion

What do you fear the most? Pointy things? Looking weak in front of people you respect? Whatever it is, it's the thing that makes you run like a neck-stumped chicken, the stink of panic erupting from your fevered skin.

If you activate your fear passion, you can use the flip-flop or reroll to get away. Run fast. Bust down the locked door. But you cannot use it to attack—the thing you fear most has the most power over you.

Your fear passion has a connection to your Madness Meters. These are **mental stresses** that record how messed-up you are in the head. There are five such tracks: **Violence**, **Helplessness**, **The Unnatural**, **Isolation**, and **Self**. Pick one that synchs up closest to your fear. Then if your fear rises up and smacks you, you have to make a **stress check** against the linked meter. Madness Meters are covered in the *Madness* chapter beginning on p. 64.

Fear Passion Examples

(**Helplessness**) **Fire.** Fire claimed your house, and with it your wardrobe, your record collection, not to mention all your photos and yearbooks. It's bad stuff, not just dangerous and painful but unpredictable as well.

(**Isolation**) **Foreigners.** When you were overseas, you always knew they were talking about you behind your back, jabbering away in that weird monkey language. Now they're all around you, even in the streets of your home town.

continued on p. 34

PERSONALITY

UNKNOWN ARMIES

YOUR NAME

SUMMARY

YOUR OBSESSION

RAGE STIMULUS

FEAR STIMULUS

NOBLE STIMULUS

BODY ____	SPEED ____	MIND ____	SOUL ____
BODY SKILLS	SPEED SKILLS	MIND SKILLS	SOUL SKILLS

VIOLENCE	THE UNNATURAL	HELPLESSNESS	ISOLATION	SELF
HARDENED ☐☐☐☐☐	HARDENED ☐☐☐☐☐	HARDENED ☐☐☐☐☐	HARDENED ☐☐☐☐☐	HARDENED ☐☐☐☐☐
FAILED ☐☐☐☐☐	FAILED ☐☐☐☐☐	FAILED ☐☐☐☐☐	FAILED ☐☐☐☐☐	FAILED ☐☐☐☐☐

NOTES - ITEMS - MAGICK

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Trigger Event

Unknown Armies

School or Archetype

Cabal Notes

Taboos

Firearms

Name	Caliber	Capacity	Max Damage

Hand-to-Hand Weapons

Name	Damage Bonus

Rituals

Name	Power Level	Charge Cost

Artifacts

Name	Power Level

Notes - Items - Magick

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continued from p. 31

(Self) Temptation. You don't drink anymore. When you get drunk you do terrible things, so you don't drink. Much. No, not at all. In fact, you're careful to stay away from bars, restaurants, and that liquor store on Third and Main.

(The Unnatural) Possession. You don't like to talk about the exorcism. You don't like to say the creature's name. You know it's still out there and calling it could bring it right back.

(Violence) Dogs. You've got marks on you from the red jaws and white teeth. Even those barky little shit dogs make you nervous, and big beasts like a Doberman or Saint Bernard? Forget it.

(Violence) Victimization. You weren't the one who got hurt, you were just the one they made talk. You tried to be tough, and that made it all your fault. Now you can't stand to see people get hurt. To you, watching the victim is worse than being the victim.

The Rage Passion

What makes you lash out in blind fury? Child abusers? People who have undeservedly been rewarded with the things you work so hard for but cannot obtain? Your rage passion is the thing you must destroy, surpass, or overcome, in whatever form or persona it manifests.

If you activate your rage passion, you can use the flip-flop or reroll to lash out. You might fire a gun, swing a fist, or turn over the tables of the money-changers in the courtyard of the temple. You cannot use it to do some sort of skilled, careful work, like picking a lock or hacking a computer belonging to your enemy. You must lash out immediately, in all your volatile, beautiful, uncontrollable rage.

Rage Passion Examples

Backchat. Is it too much to ask that people be polite? You understand someone who throws a punch at you, but a sarcastic loudmouth really gets your goat.

Enemy Drivers. You're an excellent driver. You wish all the bad drivers around you would just realize it, hang up their cell phones, and get the hell out of your way.

Laziness. When someone does a half-assed job, they're not just disrespecting their duties or their boss. They're flipping the bird to everyone who has to put up with their shoddy work. God help one of *your* employees if you catch her slacking.

Sleaze. Booze. Pornography. Foul language. Toilet humor. The country is swimming in filth, and no one's doing anything about it. It's time someone took a stand. Someday a real rain is gonna fall.

Stuck-up Assholes. Just because you didn't go to college and don't drive a Lexus doesn't mean those rich fucks get to look down at you. Goddamn snobs. Someone ought to take them down a notch.

Those Fat Cats in Washington. Democrats and Republicans are just the competing teams in the "Screw the Taxpayer" Super Bowl, brought to you live by the Army, the Post Office, and your local Police Department.

The Noble Passion

What inspires you to be the very best person you can be? Relieving the worldwide burden of poverty? Getting the money for your grandmother's operation? Your noble passion is the thing that takes you higher. To avoid your fear, you might leave your friends in the lurch. To destroy your rage, you might lie, torture, and murder. But to pursue your noble goal, you would make sacrifices, risk your own life, and endure terrible suffering for the common good.

If you activate your noble passion, you can use the flip-flop or reroll to take a selfless action that furthers your noble goal. You need to do it right away—this isn't a resource you can use to write a grant proposal. Bust the lock on the warehouse to feed the starving, drive fast to get the child to the hospital, persuade a soldier to let you into the refugee camp. This is a moment to define your highest self.

Noble Passion Examples

Entertainment. How much better would the world be if people devoted as much effort to making one another happy as they do to getting rich or becoming powerful? You believe laughter is the best medicine—so if you cheer someone up now, the future takes care of itself.

Historical Preservation. If we can't learn from the past, we're doomed to repeat it, and all those who suffered did so in vain. Preserving our links to the past gives us a firm foundation to build a better future.

Landmine Removal. Landmines are deadly, indiscriminate, and a bitch to remove. You've seen their carnage firsthand and you're dedicated to removing them physically (by working as a minesweeper) and politically (through activism to get landmines banned).

One for All. Most people are crap, but you've made a tight bond with your friends. *They're* all right, and your loyalty to them is unshakeable.

Pedagogy. Education is the key to it all. Knowledge rinses away prejudice, eases misery, and exalts all that is good about the human condition. Educating others is your mission in life.

Protect the Elderly. Most old people have already had seven courses of misery and heartache in their lifetimes without an extra helping in the eleventh hour.

Your Personality

Who the hell do you think you are? Are you a lover or a fighter? Capricorn or Leo? Harry Potter or Darth Maul? You need a quick way of summing up how you present yourself, because that's as much attention as most people are going to pay you. You could use a role model, like a Good Cop or a Reluctant Warrior. You could use a Zodiac profile, not because it's really when you were born but because millions of people read the damn things in the newspaper already and know what they mean. Or you could use a pop-culture figure, like Lancelot, Gatsby, or Joey from *Friends*. Pick a role and play it. You've already figured out the real you—this is the you that other people can relate to.

Role Model Personality Examples

The Good Cop: You're tough but fair. You make a point to stay in regular contact with the people in your community, and you work hard to earn their trust. You want to do good, but sometimes the power you wield is frightening.

The Bad Cop: You're the Pit Bull of society. Nobody wants you around their kids until danger strikes, and then they throw you at the problem and hope for the best. That's fine by you. You don't need approval—you just need a target.

The Reluctant Warrior: You've trained yourself to be a top-notch fighter. You're a master of weapons. Your body is a deadly instrument. But you keep it all in reserve until the day you have to take a stand, because the way of the warrior is a private one.

The Weary Observer: You've seen it all before. Nothing surprises you, except maybe genuine, selfless kindness. Nothing disappoints you, unless it's unqualified enthusiasm. Nothing impresses you, except a show of greater cynicism.

The Femme Fatale: You're the trouble that every man's looking for, the sticky sweet they'll pay for later with cavities and heartache, but you just don't care—and they just can't resist. You get what you want, they get used up and trampled underfoot. Secretly, they like it just fine that way.

The Outside Agitator: You've been marginalized, betrayed, and laughed at, but you've never been stopped for good. You know your cause is just. The Powers That Be may oppose you, but they can't afford to ignore you.

Zodiac Personality Examples

Aries: You're courageous, powerful, straightforward, and incredibly egocentric. Everything's always about you, you, you. You'd make a good boxer.

Taurus: You just keep plowing along without letting setbacks get you down. You generally get the job done, but you rarely pause to ask if it's worth doing. You'd make a good receptionist or cop.

Gemini: You see both sides of every question and can quickly reach the facts. Unfortunately, you prefer Truth to facts—so you spend a lot of time debating with yourself. Gemini are often philosophy professors or strung-out druggies.

Cancer: You're intuitive and sensitive, and your loyalty to the group is tremendous. This often sets you up for disappointment, if not outright betrayal. You'd be a swell mom, with a pack of sons who come by every weekend to check up on you.

Leo: Leadership and authority are your strengths. Arrogance and an insatiable hunger for approval are your weaknesses. You need people to do things to. You'd make a good CEO or cult leader.

Virgo: Wise, cautious and pure, you're efficient and hard to fool. Proving you're smarter is one of your favorite things in the whole world. Virgos make good lawyers, drama critics, art critics, book critics . . . you get the picture.

Libra: You believe what goes around, comes around. This makes it easy for you to shrug off failures and overcome setbacks. However, it also means you can be an ungrateful jerk.

Scorpio: You're relentless. Your indomitable will scares people, but also fascinates them. Scorpios are known as great lovers and cruel ex-lovers. Scorpios are the most effective poets, pimps, and telemarketers.

Sagittarius: You're more concerned with results than theories. You don't waste your time trying to control others, and you expect them to extend you the same courtesy. If you're not a drifter, you'll probably wind up as a freelance something or other.

Capricorn: Versatile, patient, and subtle, you prefer to work slowly, adapting to changing circumstances but always building a power structure with yourself at the center. If someone crosses you today, you'll back down now and pay him back in a year. Capricorns make good spymasters and better snitches.

Aquarius: You are reactive, perceptive, and good at keeping your cool. Skilled with deals and compromises, your friends often rely on you to smooth things over—until you decide you can sell them out for an advantage. Being willing to compromise everything often means you really stand for nothing.

Pisces: Crisis brings out the best in you, because you're best at doing two things at once. In less stressful circumstances, this can make you look scatterbrained. You're good at any job that's 99% waiting and 1% sheer terror. Priests and hookers also tend to be Pisces.

Pop Culture Personality Examples

Kane from *Kung Fu*: You are a mystic and a philosopher, a rootless seeker after knowledge. Yet time and again the world pulls you back into itself. Someone needs help, and while you seek to expand their mind you also have to kick some ass.

Joe Pesci in *Goodfellas*: You're the life of the party, everybody's good-time pal. But at the drop of a hat you rock and roll. You can turn your attitude on a dime to address the situation at hand, weaving confidently between friendship and violence like a bipolar skier. People want to be your friend because they're afraid to be your enemy.

Heather Donohue in *The Blair Witch Project*: You may be bossy, but it's because you're the one with the plans and ideas. You never give up, even when you're scared and over your head, because ultimately you feel responsible for your followers.

Louise from *Thelma and Louise*: You've spent a lot of time waiting to bust loose, and now that you have, no one's going to tell you what to do. You may be impulsive and headstrong, but you're willing to pay if that's the price of freedom.

Professor Snape from *Harry Potter*: You have absolutely no problem being a jerk. You're surrounded by fools and inferiors who resent your intelligence. But you have no need to prove them wrong—you just do the hard jobs that have to get done while they quiver and quaver, and the hell with what anyone thinks.

Obi-Wan Kenobi from *Star Wars*: You are the still, calm center around which chaos swirls. You share your wisdom where it's needed, but otherwise you keep your own counsel. You seek out people who need your help—not just to achieve an exterior goal, but an interior one as well.

What Can You Do?

You rate yourself with four **stats**: **Body, Speed, Mind,** and **Soul**. Each stat is a number from 1–100, the higher the better. From 30–70 is the typical range of adult human ability, so if you want a stat higher or lower than that range, you'd better have a good reason to feed the GM.

The number of points you have to divide among your stats depends on the kind of campaign you are creating a character for:

- **Street-level points:** 220
- **Global-level points:** 240
- **Cosmic-level points:** 260

With your stats in place, you pick **skills**: natural, learned, or unnatural abilities like Driving, Shooting Guns, Lying, or Seeing Auras. Each skill is assigned to a single stat. You use your stat levels as points to set your skills, and a given skill can't be higher than the stat that governs it. The more points you put into a stat, the more points you have available for the skills linked to that stat. It's a co-dependent relationship.

YOUR STATS

You can read more about the four stats below. Divvy up your points when you're ready.

But you're more than just numbers. Once you've chosen your stats, add a **descriptor** to each one. This is a word or short phrase that characterizes the nature of your stat. A Soul stat of 65 might be "shoulder to cry on," while a Soul of 35 might be a "cold fish." Mind descriptors could range from "irrational" to "quotes encyclopedias." Speed descriptors might be "catches flies" or "all thumbs." Body descriptors might be "totally ripped abs" or "flabby."

THE BODY STAT

This is a measure of how healthy, strong, and generally fit you are. A fitness buff has a really high Body score. A strung-out alcoholic has a really low score. Body determines how hard it is to kill you.

WHAT BODY MEANS

- **10s** You're on death's door. You can't walk unassisted and require constant medical care.
- **20s** You're very frail. You can manage maybe five shallow steps without taking a rest, but that's it.
- **30s** You're sickly and weak. You breathe heavy after climbing a flight of stairs. Your muscle tone is best described as "suety."
- **40s** You're either generally puny or a lard-ass, but not too bad.
- **50s** You're average: you can wear a swimsuit without too much embarrassment and helping a friend move is no big effort.
- **60s** You qualify as "brawny." You're always among the first picks at the company softball game.
- **70s** As far as you're concerned, every bottle has a twist-off top. You can do one-handed chin-ups.
- **80s** You had the potential to be a professional athlete. You move heavy furniture without effort. "Getting tired" is something that happens to other people.
- **90s** Professional strongman level here: tearing phone books, lifting the front end of cars, bending metal bars, *etc.*

BODY AND WOUND POINTS

Wound points are a measure of how much damage you can take before dying the death of a small brown dog. Your initial store of wound points is equal to your Body score. Every time your Body score goes up through experience (but not through magick), your wound points increase too.

If you hit 0 wound points, you're dead. If you hit 5, you're unconscious or in shock. You can read more about wounds and healing on p. 58.

You do not keep track of your wound points. The GM does that in secret and tells you how you're feeling.

THE SPEED STAT

This stat measures how physically quick and responsive you are. A race car driver probably has a high Speed stat, while a toll-booth attendant could have a low one. Wiggling through a tight space, trying not to slip on ice, or playing a computer game are all governed by your Speed.

WHAT SPEED MEANS

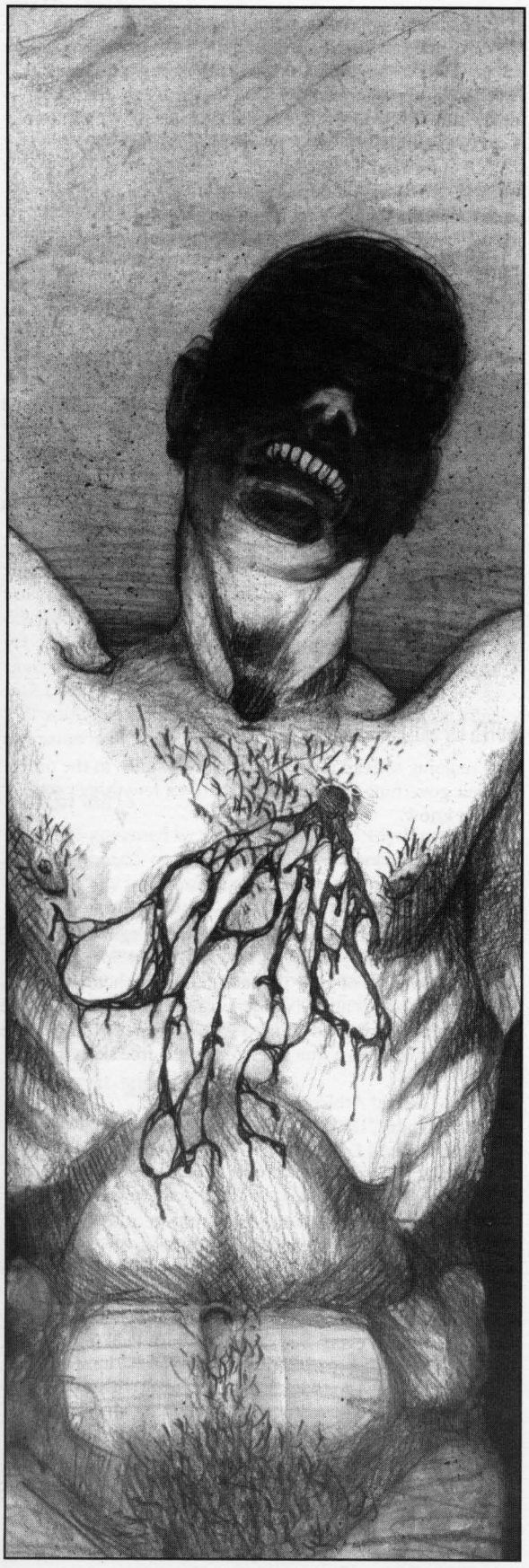
- **10s** You're pretty much immobile, capable of only limited and tentative movements. People in the advanced stages of degenerative nerve disease fit into this category.
- **20s** You can get around on your own, but you're still pathologically clumsy. You probably need canes or a walker.
- **30s** You're a klutz: you routinely spill drinks (even when you're sober), walk into door frames, and trip over your own feet.
- **40s** The low end of average. When you play darts, almost all your shots hit the board. If you drive a stick-shift, it rarely stalls due to incompetence.
- **50s** You're normal. You can hit the bull's-eye at darts (sometimes), you can run a city block in a reasonable amount of time, and you can box-shuffle a deck of cards without playing 52 Pick-Up.
- **60s** As a kid, you were the local champ at "Bloody Knuckles" (or *Pac-Man,* depending on your age and inclination). You can manage an impressive sprint when you want to, and if you're not a good dancer it's because you didn't care to try.
- **70s** Your childhood nickname was "Flash," even if you kept your clothes on all the time. You learned to juggle in about two minutes, just by watching someone do it. You can run a five-minute mile.
- **80s** Your control of your body is nearly complete. You can beat carnival games of skill.
- **90s** Your grace and dexterity is incredible. With training, you could compete at the Olympic level.

THE MIND STAT

Steven Hawking has a really high Mind score. Most people who appear on *Maury Povich* don't. It governs how quickly you think, and how good you are at examining an idea from all sides. It's also how mentally tough you are. When things go south in the occult underground, people lose their marbles. With a high Mind stat, you've got a much bigger sack of marbles you can lose.

WHAT MIND MEANS

- **10s** You are a clinical moron requiring institutional care.
- **20s** You're mentally retarded, but capable of independent living with frequent oversight.
- **30s** You've got an IQ around 60. You can read (slowly) and write (poorly), but long division is pushing it.
- **40s** You're no genius, but you can answer the occasional riddle on *Jeopardy* and remember to phrase it as a question.



artwork by Thomas Manning

50s You're average. You can balance a checkbook and you're fairly well-informed on subjects that interest you or employ you (sports, finance, Greek history, *etc.*).

60s You do crosswords in ink. You sometimes complete other people's sentences for them.

70s If you wanted to, you could get into Mensa. Whenever you took standardized intelligence tests, you scored in the top 5%. Even if you have little formal education, you retain information well and remember easily.

80s You're a genius, with an IQ of 150+. It takes you about ten minutes to do the New York *Times* Sunday crossword—less if you really push yourself.

90s You're capable of lightning-fast inductions and deductions that look like ESP to average minds.

Mind and Madness Meters

When you created your fear passion, you linked it to one of the five madness meters. These measure how close you are to going crazy, freaking out, freezing like a headlighted deer, blowing your brains out, or running into the night howling like a wolf. These things happen when you start talking with demons, melting your face to win friends, and exorcising the supernatural resonance of a sex crime. It's tough stuff, and your Mind stat is all that stands between you and going completely gonzo batshit.

But why go crazy if you already live there? If you've had some heavy trauma in your life, you can go ahead and start using those madness meters right now. You need to read through the *Madness* chapter (p. 64) first, but if it sounds like a good idea then go right ahead, freak boy. You can put up to three "failed" notches onto your madness meters, total. For each one you take, you can also take a "hardened" notch as well. They don't have to be on the same meters—if you're going to be crazy, be your own special kind of crazy. And if you want more than three of each, talk to your GM. Remember to wear clothes.

One more thing. If you're an adept, you have to take one failed and one hardened notch in the Unnatural meter. (This is in addition to any other notches you take.) Play with fire, get burned.

The Soul Stat

Do you care about anything? If so, that's your Soul stat working. Emotions, nonverbal skills, social interaction, and magick are all governed by Soul. If you want to seduce people, sell cars, make a speech, or turn your will into reality, go with the Soul.

What Soul Means

10s You're emotionally stunted and almost incapable of forming emotional attachments.

20s You're congenitally crude, uncultured, and crass. Any time you dress acceptably or do the polite thing, it's completely accidental.

30s You're an uncouth slob with all the sensitivity of a toilet seat.

40s You're at the low end of average in the personality department. Unless you're such a nebbish that no one notices you at all, you make people uncomfortable sometimes with your boorish comments and rude

jokes, but you can get along. At least one person in your life secretly despises you.

50s You're average. You at least know enough to be uncomfortable in a delicate situation.

60s You're unusually sensitive. If you turn this towards supernatural matters, you probably have a general feeling of the unseen powers in the world around you. If you turn it towards human society, you're probably empathetic and likeable.

70s At this level, those who pay attention to the spirit world get indistinct feelings about certain objects, areas, and people. Those who turn their perceptions to their fellow humans always seem to say and do the right thing.

80s Emotional energy and supernatural energy are both quite perceptible to you, and your own emotions are pretty easy to detect if you're not bothering to conceal them. If you turn your mind to politics and manipulation, you could be a state senator within a decade or so.

90s You can learn almost as much from your "extra" senses as you do from the normal five.

Soul and Adepts & Avatars

If you're an adept or an avatar, your Soul stat matters big time. Soul governs the Magick skill of adepts and the Avatar skill of avatars. Don't slack on spending the points here, if you want to do more than pull rabbits from hats.

Your Skills

Skills are narrow applications of stats. You can be a huge, strong guy, but if you've never been in a fight or got trained to throw a punch, a lot of people can clean your clock.

Skills work on a percentile basis—from 1–99. You roll percentile dice and compare the result to your skill. How this works depends on the situation, since you make one of three different kinds of **skill checks**.

For **minor** skill checks, you need a 15% or higher skill rating for an automatic success—no dice needed. These are situations where you have plenty of time and no risk, like taking a photograph of your house or reading up on Greek history.

Higher skill levels are important for **significant** skill checks. These happen when you aren't in an intense situation such as combat, but there's still some pressure on you or what you're doing has a high element of uncertainty. Spending a day hacking an unfamiliar operating system, keeping an eye on your husband in a big crowd, or studying for a weekly test could qualify. For these tasks, you have a strong success if you roll under your skill level. If you fail the roll, you get a weak success if that roll is still under the related stat. You only fail completely if you roll above your stat.

Major skill checks are the big ones, and in the occult underground they happen all the time. All combat rolls are major checks, as are any actions you attempt under stress and risk. If it really matters, it's a major check.

There is a limit to how high your starting skill ratings can be. The limit depends on which kind of campaign you are going to play:

- **Street-level maximum:** 55%
- **Global-level maximum:** 70%
- **Cosmic-level maximum:** 85%

If you have a good reason for a higher starting skill than allowed, you can ask the GM for approval. But starting with a single skill too high cripples your other skills within that stat.

There's no comprehensive skill list. You can pretty much define any skill you want, but the GM has to okay it first. Lots of examples follow.

One rule: Your skill number can never exceed its governing stat. If you have Body 30, no way are you going to be able to handle the training to get Boxing at 45%.

Buying Skills

As with stats, you have a certain amount of points to spend on skills. But unlike stats, there is no fixed list. You can take as many or as few different skills as you like. It's better to take a few skills at higher scores than lots of skills at lower scores.

The amount of points you have to spend on skills is based on the stat that governs those skills, because every skill is tied to a single stat. If you have a Body of 60, that gives you 60 points to spend on Body-based skills.

You also get some bonus points you can distribute among your skills regardless of which stat they are tied to. These bonus points are based on the kind of campaign you are creating a character for:

- **Street-level bonus points:** 15
- **Global-level bonus points:** 70
- **Cosmic-level bonus points:** 125

Notes on Skills

You're going to read more about sample skills, in the order of their governing stats. But first, here's a few things you oughta know.

Free Skills

Before you spend any points on skills, you get some free skills per stat right off the bat. All of these begin at 15% except for Initiative, which starts at half your Speed score. You can use some of your points to improve them, or just let them be and spend the points on something else. The free skills you can take are discussed with each stat section in the following pages. As a quick reference, the free skills are:

Body: General Athletics, Struggle
Speed: Dodge, Driving, Initiative
Mind: General Education, Notice, Conceal
Soul: Charm, Lying

What if you grew up someplace without cars? Replace Driving with Horseback Riding or Sprinting or whatever you did to get around. You can replace any free skill with a similar skill appropriate to your background, but only if your GM gives you the thumbs-up. Don't try using this flexibility to turn every free skill into Pistol Packing Mofo, though. That's a loser maneuver.

Skill Names

You can call your skills whatever you want. Rename the free skills if you like. Instead of Struggle, you could use Take 'Em Down Street-Style, or make boring old Driving into Reckless Driving.

Skill Penumbras

A skill is more than a direct action. It's also the knowledge you have related to that skill. This area of knowledge around a skill is the **penumbra**. Your Firearms skill lets you shoot guns, but it's also the skill you use for knowledge about firearms: what the gun laws are in your area, who sells guns on the black market, how much a gun is worth, and so on. The penumbra is abstract knowledge, it's knowledge of people with similar skills and interests, and so on.

Got a skill in Egyptology? The skill's penumbra means you know about current Egyptian antiquities exhibits touring the country's museums, or who can figure out how old that mummy in your basement is, or where to sell stolen grave goods. It's all right there in that one skill.

The higher your skill, the wider your penumbra. Someone with a Firearms skill of 30 is unlikely to know any arms smugglers. Someone with an Egyptology of 70 is on a first-name basis with nationally recognized experts in the field.

Obsession Skill

Your obsession isn't just what drives you. It also governs what you're good at. Pick one of your skills as your **obsession skill**. It's gotta be related to your obsession. Put a star next to that skill. *Every time* you make a roll on your obsession skill, you can choose to flip-flop the roll. You only get one obsession skill, and never get another, and can't change unless you somehow change your obsession—so pick carefully.

If you're an adept, your school of magick must be your obsession skill.

The Body Skills

The skills governed by your Body stat are anything you do with strength or endurance. It covers practices that are physically taxing or that require training and muscle memory, like the Martial Arts skill. Body can also govern inborn physical traits like "gorgeous" or "freakishly tall."

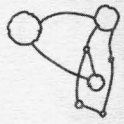
Your free Body skills are General Athletics and Struggle. The first is any basic physical activity—running, jumping, throwing balls or rocks. The second is fighting without guns, using your fists, knives, baseball bats, *etc.*

Free Body Skill: General Athletics

General Athletics 15%. Swimming, catching, hitting—all that stuff you spend some time doing as a kid, including organized sports. This is a poor substitute for specialization, though. If you're playing dollar-a-point volleyball against someone with a Volleyball skill, you have to make a significant skill check. If the winner gets the loser's car, it's a major check.

What General Athletics Means

- **10s** You can hit a fly ball—sometimes. With a lot of huffing and puffing you can scale a ten foot fence.
- **20s** This is about average for someone with an inactive lifestyle. You can hit an overhand pitch—sometimes. Your golf game hovers around the bad side of par.
- **30s** This is about average for someone with an active lifestyle. You can sink free throws predictably. You can run a mile and not be exhausted at the end.
- **40s** This level of skill is appropriate for someone with a very active lifestyle. Teenagers down at the schoolyard try to get you to play basketball on their team. You could outrun attack dogs with a little luck or a head start.
- **50s** If you're on the company softball team, you pitch and bat clean-up. You get a lot of spikes playing volleyball and can sometimes slam-dunk a basketball.
- **60s** You could play AAA baseball, or possibly be a minor pro in a less-lucrative sport like ice skating or horse racing.
- **70s** You could be on a professional baseball, basketball, or football team. You'd spend a lot of time on the bench, but you'd be a pampered, well-paid pro.
- **80s** You could be a top professional athlete—a Brett Favre or Tiger Woods.



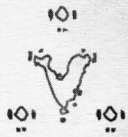




Free Body Skill: Struggle

Struggle 15%. When you have to put the hurt on someone, this is how you do it. Even if you don't know Lotus Form from Lotus Notes, you can try to dodge, throw haymakers, pinch, spit, and bite. Besides, you might get lucky and roll that 01, right? If you want a martial-arts skill such as Tae Kwon Do or Savate, that's what Struggle becomes.

If you make Struggle your obsession skill—calling it Martial Arts or Big Brawl or whatever—then you get Cherries. These are special effects triggered whenever you roll a successful match (such as 11, 33, or 66) on your hand-to-hand attack. For a list of Cherries, see pp. 55–56.



What Struggle Means

- **10s** Your combat skills are pretty much limited to slapping, shin kicks, and hair pulling.
- **20s** This is about right for someone who grew up in a nasty neighborhood but who has outgrown weekly fisticuffs.
- **30s** You're a skilled fighter. Nothing really impressive, but you're the equal of the average unarmed mugger.
- **40s** Which nickname do you prefer, "Crusher" or "Lightning"? If you've studied the martial arts, you may have your black belt.
- **50s** If you don't pound on people for a living, you could. Your punches can break ribs and pop jawbones.
- **60s** You're a match for two average opponents, even if they've got knives.
- **70s** You could go toe-to-toe with most professional boxers.
- **80s** Your body is a finely tuned killing machine.

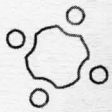




Body Skill Examples

Distracting Physique. There's something about your body that just draws stares. Maybe you're almost inhumanly beautiful. Or maybe you have a gigantic goiter on your neck, a filmed-over eye, or one arm is a foot longer than the other. In any event, whenever someone sees you for the first time, you can make a Distracting Physique roll. If you succeed, the viewer is freaked out and is at -10% to all skills until you leave his presence. Unfortunately, this only works once per target—and it works on your allies as well as your enemies.

Hold Your Breath. You can hold your breath a freakishly long time. Normally a person can hold their breath for a





number of seconds equal to their Body score. Then they have to breathe. Not you; you can hold your breath for an extra second for each point you put in this skill.

Hold Your Liquor. Normally, people take penalties for sucking down booze like a dissipated writer; some people with iron guts can imbibe like William Faulkner and show no appreciable effects. At that point where an unskilled drinker would start taking penalties, the GM rolls this skill for you. If the roll succeeds, you don't take the penalty. If it fails, you still do—but you don't know it until you try to make a roll on your own. You cannot negate the effects of more than four drinks within a six-hour period.

Large And Hard To Move. You've got a low center of gravity, so you're hard to knock off your feet. Any attack or effect that would knock you down only does so if the person who rolled for it rolled *over* your Large And Hard To Move skill. (Note that you can also be Small And Hard To Move; ever try to push over someone who weighs 140 pounds and is only four feet tall?)

Do-It-Yourself Body Skills

Here are some examples of Body skills you might make up for yourself in consultation with the GM: Climbing, Boxing, Weight Lifting, Work Without Rest, Marathon Running, Football, Basketball, Judo, Swimming, Enduring Torture.

The Speed Skills

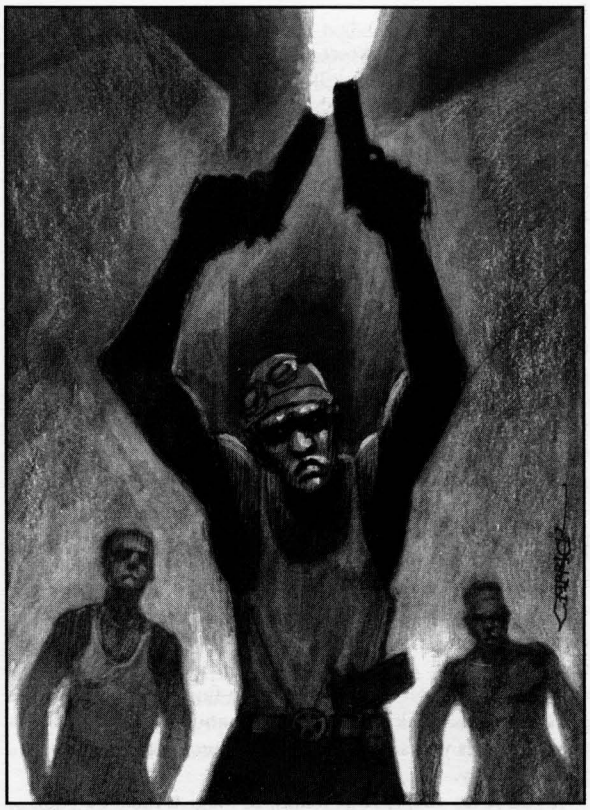
These cover reaction time, aim, and coordination—skills governed by your sense of where your body is. There is some overlap with Body; this is because a lot of sports and other activities have a reflex component and a physical-training aspect. If in doubt, ask your GM for a decision. (If you have Speed 50 and Body 40, you can still probably get away with having a Tennis skill at 45% if you really want it and your GM says okay. If you had Body 30, it might be a different matter.)

Free Speed Skill: Dodge

Dodge 15%. People have natural flinch impulses when lunged at or startled. This dodge score represents that reflex. It's also your ability to avoid getting hurt in combat. If you just use your Dodge skill instead of fighting or doing anything else, it's your chance to hunker down and not get smacked.

What Dodge Means

- 10s You can barely get out of the way of your own feet when you're dancing.
- 20s You can dodge a single falling object.
- 30s You have an okay—not good—chance of avoiding being hit by a speeding car.
- 40s The other kids never liked playing tag with you—you were too good.
- 50s If you work at a high-risk job (firefighting, police work), your co-workers probably call you "Cat" and make jokes about your nine lives.
- 60s You're darn near impossible to hit or kick when you put your mind to it.
- 70s People who try to shoot at you tend to get unnerved by your uncanny ability to not be where the bullets go.
- 80s Two words: Jackie Chan.



artwork by Paul Carrick

Free Speed Skill: Driving

Driving 15%. This is your chance to drive safely in a tense situation—controlling a skid, swerving around a pedestrian, or stopping before you drive off a cliff. You don't have to roll for parallel parking unless someone is shooting at you or you're trying to do it at 70 mph.

What Driving Means

- 10s You're a bad driver. You either go too fast when it isn't safe or you crawl along at ten miles below the speed limit.
- 20s You're an average driver: you still get caught in traffic jams, but you know enough to pump the brakes on ice.
- 30s This is a good level for a professional driver, like a cabbie or a trucker. Not a professional with an outstanding record for safety, but a professional.
- 40s You actually *are* as good behind the wheel as the standard jerk in a Trans Am *thinks* he is.
- 50s Your car could pop up on the two driver's-side wheels and you'd have a good chance of bringing it back down safely.
- 60s This is a good level for a professional stunt driver or an adequate race car driver.
- 70s You're an honorary *Duke of Hazzard.*
- 80s You could be a strong competitor on the stock-car circuit.

Free Speed Skill: Initiative

Initiative. When danger strikes, some people stand around slack jawed, while others instantly leap for safety.

Initiative is a measure of how quickly (if not how well) you respond when someone tries to shoot you, grab you, or cave in your head with a 2x4 plank.

Your Initiative score is equal to half your Speed. In a combat situation, you have a choice. You can *either* roll for initiative and hope to get a result under your Speed stat, *or* you can just go on your Initiative score as it is.

You can improve this skill normally, either by buying it up during character generation, or by improving it later with experience.

WHAT INITIATIVE MEANS

10s Wha?
20s Your first instinct when threatened is to frown angrily.
30s You're fairly alert to troubles around you.
40s Your jittery nerves pay off when the chips are down.
50s This is the level that separates "fast" from "goddamn fast."
60s You've got the combat smarts of Doc Holliday.
70s Miyamoto Musashi reborn.
80s The only rational explanation is a sixth sense for danger.

SPEED SKILL EXAMPLES

Do Two Things At Once. You're adept at splitting your attention without halving it. As a consequence, whenever you're successful at a Speed-based skill, and your roll was lower than your Do Two Things At Once skill, you can do something different at the same time (as long as the two actions aren't mutually exclusive). For instance, you can shoot your gun and kick someone in the same round, if your Firearms roll was low enough. Or you can yank the parachute out of your enemy's hands and pull the cord at the same time. However, the second action fails if the roll is higher than the relevant skill *or* if it's higher than your Do Two Things At Once skill.

Fast Draw. You're real good at getting a weapon ready real fast. Normally it takes an action to draw a weapon; however, if your initiative roll (or skill) is under your Fast Draw skill, you can draw your weapon and attack with it immediately.

Snatch. This is the skill of grabbing things out of people's hands or pockets before they can react. This is not the same as picking a pocket; the victim is immediately going to know what you've done. However, there's not a lot he can do about it. One limit to the Snatch skill is on its use in combat; if you try to snatch a gun or knife out of someone's hand, you have to not only roll under your Snatch skill, but *above* the target's relevant skill (Handguns or Knife Fighting or whatever). This is only for disarming someone with a drawn weapon; it doesn't apply to weapons still in their holsters, which can be yanked with a simple Snatch roll.

Squirrelly Reflexes. You're just an intrinsically jumpy, paranoid person. When a fight starts, your first instinct is to make like a squirrel—grab your nuts and run. Consequently, when you're making an initiative roll, you can flip-flop it if the roll is lower than your Squirrelly Reflexes skill. You can do this even if the result would then be *higher* than your skill level (but still under your Speed). For example, if you have Squirrelly Reflexes 30% and you roll a 24 on initiative, you can make it into a 42.

DO-IT-YOURSELF SPEED SKILLS

Here are some examples of Speed skills you might make up for yourself in consultation with the GM: Billiards, Ping Pong, Firearms, Darts, Sleight of Hand, Picking Pockets, Moving Silently, Sprinting, Tennis, Juggling, Horseback Riding.

THE MIND SKILLS

Your basic book learning, plus logic and reason. If a skill requires alertness, perception, quick wits, and generally being-on-the-ball, it may be a Mind skill.

FREE MIND SKILL: CONCEAL

Conceal 15%. You can hide physical objects, including yourself or another person. This covers hiding a gun inside a chair, not hiding money in an offshore bank account. If you're hiding a person, Conceal only works as long as you're not moving.

WHAT CONCEAL MEANS

10s You never really understood the concept of "Hide and Go Seek."
20s Your hiding options tend towards "under the bed" and "in the underwear drawer."
30s You've purloined your share of letters.
40s You can outwit the standard jealous spouse or suspicious parent.
50s You could be a professional smuggler.
60s You could be a professional smuggler who's never done jail time.
70s Misdirection, disguise, and subtlety are only the most blatant tools in your arsenal of concealment.
80s You are ninja. You own the night.

FREE MIND SKILL: GENERAL EDUCATION

General Education 15%. It is difficult to get through life without learning *something* in school. 15% is the low end of average. 25% would be enough to put you on the honor roll, while 50% probably represents a college degree and some postgraduate work. If you do have a skill indicating a college degree or substantial professional training, you can change General Education to Philosophy, Medicine, Eastern European History, or whatever other academic or professional knowledge you specialize in; its penumbra still serves for general knowledge checks.

WHAT GENERAL EDUCATION MEANS

10s If you graduated high school, you did so with an unimpressive C average.
20s You were a good student and probably finished college.
30s You graduated from college with honors.
40s You probably have a master's degree.
50s You either have a terminal degree (Ph.D., M.D., M.F.A.) or multiple master's degrees.
60s You are an acknowledged expert in your area of study.
70s You are internationally known in your area of specialization. You can demand high fees as a consultant.
80s If lay people are aware of your field, they know your name. You appear in documentaries and *Newsweek*.

Free Mind Skill: Notice

Notice 15%. See that? Probably not. Most people live in a haze of self-absorption, but sometimes we pick up on things that stand out: a cute puppy, a brand new car in a bad neighborhood, the glint of a telescopic sight moments before the sniper plants a bullet in your brain, that sort of thing. Some people notice more than others. Police detectives tend to have a Notice skill of 40% or higher.

What Notice Means

- **10s** You notice the obvious, most of the time, but you're easily distracted.
- **20s** You're about average: if someone drops a shiny dime on the sidewalk, you at least see it.
- **30s** You're pretty sharp: you can spy a toupee or dye job at twenty paces, and your typing is always free of typos.
- **40s** You're remarkably perceptive: this level is typical of police detectives, forensic pathologists, and archaeologists.
- **50s** You notice even tiny details—the one book that's upside-down in a shelf, incongruous scents, a previously locked door that's now open a crack.
- **60s** You can hear a whisper from twenty feet away on a still night, or read a newspaper by starlight.
- **70s** You could trail a cat through a dark alley.
- **80s** Like Sherlock Holmes, no detail escapes you.

Mind Skill Examples

Authority. For whatever reason, you are in a position to tell people to do things and have them get done. This is the requisite skill for people who want to play cops, mob bosses, bishops and other people who have a power structure backing them up. (GM characters in such positions don't need to take this skill; it's just a game balance thing for players in these jobs.) A police officer has an Authority score of about 15%, while a federal agent would have a score more like 30%. You can use this skill to wow the yokels, call for backup, obtain the skills of specialists—it's a very broad-based skill. (If you need to coerce someone into obeying you in a normal situation, like writing a speeding ticket, it happens automatically unless the person is predisposed against compliance.) Just make sure you and your GM agree on what kind of authority you are. You can also lose this skill by failing to uphold the responsibilities and expected duties of your station ("You were out of line, McBlain! Hand in your badge!"), so be warned.

Doublethink. This is a weird skill—the skill of briefly convincing yourself of things you really *know* aren't true. "I don't know what you're talking about! I didn't shoot nobody!" It's a short-term and intense form of method acting that involves suppressing your memories under waves of powerful emotion—usually an intense *wish* that what you're saying was true. When you make a successful Doublethink roll, the next time someone asks you about something, you can give them a brief answer that appears true; you don't have to make a Lie roll because you believe it. The down side of Doublethink is that using it about minor stuff is a rank-2 Self mental-stress challenge, and using it on anything important ("Of *course* I love you!") is a rank-5 Self challenge. (To read about stress checks for madness, see p. 64.)

Hypnotherapist. This isn't any kind of mind-control shtick. It just means you can put a willing subject into a trance state. You can use this to recover lost memories, reinforce suggestions, and get them to quack like a duck or gibber like a mandrill. You're more than just a sideshow entertainer, however; you're also trained in helping people deal with repressed, distorted, or just plain painful memories. (Meaning, you're qualified to put people under and erase those nasty "Failed" dots on their Madness Meters—see p. 69 for info on mental help). Note that it is possible to hypnotize an unsuspecting suspect, but it's hard—you have to roll at least a 40% and still get under your skill. It is impossible to hypnotize an unwilling suspect who knows what you're doing.

Photographic Memory. This is the ability to rapidly memorize everything in your visual field. You have to do it deliberately and it takes one action. Write down what you've mentally "photographed" when you do it; later you can roll to pull discrete details out of your "picture." (This means you can do that trick where you glance at a page in a phone book and can later recite it back.) A variation is eidetic memory or "total recall" where you can roll to recall anything you paid attention to; this does *not* allow you to do the phone book trick (you'd have to thoroughly read the page first instead of just looking at it), but you can (with an okay roll) remember any page of any book you've ever read.

DIY Mind Skills

Here are some examples of Mind skills you might make up for yourself in consultation with the GM: Automotive Repair, Biology, Locksmithing, Medicine, Strategy, Physics, Psychotherapy, Occult.

Paradigm Mind Skills

A Paradigm skill is a deeply held philosophy. It's how you relate to the world. This might be military training, religious faith, or deep skepticism about the unnatural. Taking a paradigm skill helps you with some mental stresses, but leaves you more vulnerable to others. You can only have one paradigm skill, and it must be consistent with your obsession, passions, and personality. (Adepts cannot have a paradigm skill at all, because their philosophy is rooted in their school of magick.)

If you decide to take a paradigm skill—you don't have to—then you link it to two types of mental stresses. One is a stress that your paradigm skill protects you against. The other is a stress to which your paradigm skill is vulnerable. Mental stresses are defined in the *Madness* chapter beginning on p. 64. If it's appropriate, you can use the same stress for both slots.

Once you create the skill, you must take a failed notch on the vulnerable stress you chose. This failed notch is *permanent*—it cannot be erased. It is the weak link in your mental armor. Having it does not affect your madness rolls, but it means you are always that one notch closer to suffering a permanent mental affliction. Mark this notch in with a pen so you don't lose track of it.

Any time you fail a Mind roll on the protected stress, you may choose to immediately roll again. This time you roll against your paradigm skill, not your Mind stat. If you succeed, you avoid the stress reaction because your philosophical paradigm was strong enough to see you through the stress. You do not, however, get a hardened notch for this success.

There are no re-rolls on your vulnerable stress unless it's the same as your protected one. The permanent failed notch is trouble enough.

Here are some sample paradigm skills you can use, each of which lists its protected and vulnerable stresses in that order:

Military (Violence/Isolation). Your service in the armed forces indoctrinated you against the horrors of combat, but you're ill equipped to handle problems when cut off from the chain of command.

Scientific (Unnatural/Unnatural). Your scientific mindset stresses logic, reason, and predictability. While you value an open mind, the contradiction of commonly accepted natural law is very hard for you to assimilate.

Superstitious (Unnatural/Helplessness). You see patterns and symbolic connections where others see only coincidence. This makes you more open to the idea of invisible and *sub rosa* forces, but your faith in the power of symbolic gestures makes it hard to accept powerlessness.

Corporate (Self/Violence). Your hard-bitten, hard-headed business sense values pragmatism and results above all else. Occasional moral weakness is easy to assimilate as "flexibility." But your world of abstract results and maneuvers does little to prepare you for visceral realities.

Christian (Helplessness/Self). Your faith in the benevolence of a higher power makes it easier to accept setbacks with equanimity. But in accepting the strength of Jesus, you are quick to see the weakness in yourself.

Orthodox Buddhist (Isolation/Violence). Your Buddhist doctrines of detachment and non-involvement, coupled with your instruction in meditation, makes loneliness less of a burden—almost a treat. However, pacifism can leave you ill-prepared for the barbarity of modern life.

The Soul Skills

These are skills based on interaction and intuition rather than on mental acuity. Any social skill is a Soul skill, as are most artistic skills.

If you're an adept, your school of magick is a Soul skill. But don't just write down "Magick" by itself—include the school title, like Magick: Entropomancy, Magick: Pornomancy, Magick: Cliomancy, and Magick: Dipsomancy. If you're not sure yet, go ahead and write down "Magick" on the character sheet. Just make sure and change it to the name of your school of magick once you know what it is.

Another rule for adepts: Your school of Magick is your obsession skill. As with martial artists who take Struggle as their obsession skill, you get Cherries. These are special effects triggered whenever you roll a successful match (such as 11, 33, or 66) on your Magick roll. Sample cherries for Magick appear on p. 116, and you can make up your own with the GM's approval.

Free Soul Skill: Charm

Charm 15%. You have to make a good impression sometimes—maybe with Miss Congeniality down at the pub, maybe in a job interview, maybe with the high priestess of the cult you're trying to infiltrate.

What Charm Means

10s Even your friends find you a bit annoying at times.
20s You can get along with people, if you have a lot in common. You can flatter the boss without being too slimy.
30s You can be entertaining and friendly, even with people you don't particularly care for.
40s Whenever an important client comes into town, your boss asks you to take him or her out to dinner.
50s You could make a pretty good living as a confidence trickster, provided that you can lie as well as you schmooze.
60s You have the skills of a great diplomat or a great seducer (or both).
70s Your honeyed tongue is nigh irresistible.
80s Even your enemies feel bad about hating you.

Free Soul Skill: Lying

Lying 15%. Sometimes you gotta lay it on thick for the sake of the greater good—or just to get out of a traffic ticket. Most people can't do it without looking around nervously, blushing, over-elaborating their stories, *etc.*

What Lying Means

10s You can lie convincingly—as long as it's a white lie and you're telling your listener what they want to hear.
20s You can put one over on people now and again, as long as you don't have to sustain it for too long.
30s You can tell a complete whopper with a straight face.
40s You lie with ease and facility. This is a standard level of Lie skill for people who deceive routinely—crooked salespeople, con artists, private investigators, and compulsive philanderers.
50s You lie like it's second nature. This is the minimum level of skill possessed by most undercover cops or deep-cover secret agents.
60s You can instantly create elaborate and intricate lies, and keep track of them.
70s You can present the most illogical untruth and still be persuasive. You can keep track of multiple identities and stories without getting them confused.
80s People basically believe anything you tell them.

Soul Skill Examples

A Friend in the Family. You have a buddy who's a mobster. (Or a forensic pathologist, or an expert in the occult, or whatever.) Your buddy helps you out on minor matters without a roll. ("Hey Rocco, can you spot me a twenty until payday?") Activities involving risk or considerable effort will not only require a roll but an explanation. ("Hey Rocco, can you help me bury the body of this dead senator I got in my trunk?") You lose points off this skill if you only see your pal at *your* convenience; after all, who likes a friend who's only around when he needs something?

Aura Sight. Even though you're not trained in a school of magick, you're aware of auras. If you make a conscious effort, you can roll to pick up information about someone's magickal aptitude, health, physical capabilities, mood, and general state of metaphysical health. Demon possession and astral parasite infestation are easily detectable. Only living things have auras, however, so you can't tell if an item is magickal or if a car was last driven by a werewolf.

Commanding Presence. You come across as someone

who should be obeyed, regardless of whether you actually have any authority or not. You're the kind of guy who can direct people to the lifeboats in a calm and orderly fashion, tell people convincingly that the situation is under control, and get them to answer questions on the flimsiest of pretexts.

Good Old Whatsisname. You seem awfully familiar to people. Maybe you just have an unusually average face. Maybe you subconsciously imitate the word choice and accent of those you hear around you. In any event, people are always mistaking you for distant cousins, old high school acquaintances, long-ago frat buddies, *etc.*

Hunches. If you make a successful roll, you get a hunch, as explained on p. 7. You can try this skill a number of times a day equal to the tens digit of your Hunches skill. You can't do this *in* combat—though an existing hunch is valid when combat starts.

Play Dumb. You're real good at convincing people that you're about as sharp as a sack of wet mice. This means they're likely to underestimate you as a threat and often put the best interpretation on your actions ("Aw, the poor retard just wandered into a restricted area. Show him out and kick his ass a little, but don't bother writing it up.") It can also be used to get people to tell you more than they meant to in the process of explaining what they *do* want you to know.

Vocal Imitation. You have a knack for recreating sounds with your voice. Not only is this a useful skill for doing duck calls and spicing up your Bill Clinton jokes at parties, it can be remarkably useful for fooling people over the telephone.

Sing the Blues. You may not be musically trained (or maybe you were) but you can sing a decent blues riff or karaoke along to "Boom Boom (Out Go the Lights)" without sounding like a jackass.

DIY Soul Skills

Here are some examples of Soul skills you might make up for yourself in consultation with the GM: Persuasion, Acting, Getting Sympathy, Painting, Intimidation, Seduction, Cadging Drinks, Getting Bank Loans, Dancing, Social Worker.

Unskilled Actions

Sometimes you need to do things that you don't know how to do—you don't have the right skill, or even the right skill penumbra. You may be in luck, if the dice are on your side.

For minor and significant skill checks, you can roll against the appropriate stat. But your stat has a –30 shift. If you make it, you succeed but only barely—no finesse, no user-definable results, just a lucky but marginal success. Pat yourself on the back and next time, find somebody who knows what she's doing.

For major checks, you can roll a **Hail Mary** against the appropriate stat. Only matched successes and crits succeed. You don't get to treat the results as a match or a crit, either—they just give you a half-assed, marginal success.

Any unskilled failure is unusually bad. The GM comes up with an appropriate screw job as you bumble your way to disaster.

> **Example:** You don't have a Photography skill, but this doesn't mean you can't point and shoot. If you're taking casual photos at your brother's wedding, you have to roll your Mind stat with a –30 shift. If you succeed,



UNKNOWN ARMIES

artwork by Samuel Araya

you've got something your mom can stick in her photo album.

Now suppose you're staking out an apartment with your detective buddy. He takes off for coffee, leaving behind his complicated surveillance camera with telephoto lens, *etc.* Suddenly a car drives up and honks. The surveillance target leaves the building and hurries to the car. You've got to photograph the car, but you have no idea how to work the camera and only moments to figure it out. You make the roll against your Mind stat of 58. If you get a 01, 11, 22, 33, 44, or 55, you get an acceptable photograph. If you fail, you might damage the camera. You might even drop it out the window, causing the target and his driver to come beat on you.

But some things are just plain impossible. Even if you have all day to sit in the cockpit of an F-15, humming to yourself and pushing buttons in relaxed comfort, you're just not going to get it off the ground.

The GM is the final arbiter of all unskilled action attempts. She may choose to impose stiffer penalties than suggested if it seems appropriate, and may even disallow the attempt outright. In some cases, she may choose to make things easier.

How Do You Change?

Only the dead are static. You are a dynamic, living person who isn't content to sit around doing nothing. You're going to get out into the occult underground and make waves. As you do, you're going to make a rep for yourself. But you're also going to get better at the things you do.

Instant Improvement

If you roll a matched success or failure on a major skill check, the skill you rolled against goes up 1% immediately. A given skill can only be improved this way once per session, but multiple skills can each improve once. Stats do not improve this way, only skills, and this does not apply to minor or significant skill checks.

Gaining Experience Points

When you take action, the GM can grant you experience points (XP). These are points you can spend to improve your stats and skills at the end of the session, or you can hang on to them to spend them later.

Just for playing a session, you get 1 XP. Thanks for showing up.

If you're present at the climax of a plotline, your GM gives you 1–2 XP. Even if you didn't save the day, even if you got your butt kicked, you still get at least 1 XP for having been there in the clinch.

Each time you do something clever, your GM gives you 1 XP. Figured out a clue? Planned a good ambush? Made things exciting, entertaining, and unpredictable? That's good thinking and merits you a reward...

Finally, at the end of the session everybody but the GM votes on who did the best job. (Each person decides what "best job" means.) You can't vote for yourself. The GM breaks ties. Whoever wins the vote gets 1–2 XP, GM's call.

You can look forward to 1–8 XP per session. Don't whine if your GM seems stingy with the points—granting XP is one way a GM can pace the campaign. If the GM wants to play in a high-power style, you may get a lot of experience points so you can turn into hardcore bad-asses really fast. If she wants a gritty-realism tone, she'll probably keep the point load low and make you work for 'em.

Spending Experience Points

Raising a skill by 1 costs 1 XP. Raising a stat by 1 costs 2 XP. However, you can't spend more than 3 XP on a single skill or more than 2 XP on a single stat in a single session. You can improve multiple skills and stats, however.

The only exception to this is new skills. Buying a new skill costs ten experience points. It starts out at 10%. Your GM may decide that you need a teacher or special training to gain a new skill. If you want to fly a helicopter, for example, you need to take lessons.

Something to Think About

Character Creation

First and foremost, *Unknown Armies* is about making a good story. You're not playing it against the GM and you're not playing it against the other players. You're playing it against the fictions your GM is creating to oppose you.

Now this may sound real artsy-fartsy and abstract, but in the end it's simple: the best story is the one that keeps getting told. So all the point-stacking in the world isn't going to save a boring character.

What makes a character boring? Safety is the biggest thing. This game (like most roleplaying games) is all about risk, danger, adventure, and intrigue. Since you signed on to play, you have to accept the fact that bad things are likely to happen to your character, including madness, maiming, and death.

If you try to build a character who is immune to all those things, not only will you fail, but your character will be built around avoiding conflict (or at best, surviving it) instead of resolving it. Sure, you want your character to be competent, and the rules are tools to do that. But he should be just as competent at *starting* things as at finishing them.

If you want your character to survive in UA, it's easy: ratchet up your accounting skill and play a guy who works for a bank. Of course, you won't be doing *anything* while everyone else is doing *everything*—but you'll survive! (Bleah.)

If you want to do more than survive, you'll need an interesting character. Lucky for you, the rules are designed to help you develop one.

Obsessed Skills

Your obsession skill is a really big deal. Besides defining the focus of your character, it jacks up your chances of success in a major way because you can always flip-flop the roll. The

statistics show that when you account for flip-flopping, your effective skill is substantially higher than your actual skill:

Actual Skill	Effective Skill
10	18
20	34
30	50
40	63
50	74
60	83
70	90
80	95
90	98

Of course, adepts get this all the time because Magick is their obsession skill. But if you have a 50% obsession skill in firearms, martial arts, or whatever, it works like a 74% skill in play.

WHY NO SKILL LIST?

Some roleplayers, and even some entire groups, are just not going to be happy without a hard-coded list of skills for the game and a definitive list of which stat governs which skill. And, frankly, they're not out of line. Most games do something like that, and our approach can potentially lead to disagreements and confusion. (There's a list of *sample* skills in this chapter, but we freely admit it's not exhaustive.) Here's why we've done it this way.

First off, it's simple. Having a big list of skills to choose from—and a much larger pool of points to spread among them—really ratchets up the time it takes to make a character and the complexity involved in doing so. When you have a big pool of points to spend and a lot of choices to make, you're going to sweat over every decision and worry about juggling the numbers in umpteen different ways. We think that just having a handful of important skills—and resolving actions without a related skill by common sense, GM fiat, or a roll against an appropriate stat—is a smarter and easier way to play.

Second, it's pure. In games where characters all have big lists of skills, the differences between characters aren't immediately apparent. Keeping the number of skills down makes it obvious what the character's specialties are. It helps to define the character without a lot of rigmarole.

Third, it lets you use your imagination. Instead of going through a shopping list of standard skills, you are asked to think, "What does my character do that is noteworthy?" and then see what pops into your head. Maybe white-water rafting is something that would be a big part of your character's life, but a skill like that isn't going to turn up on many roleplaying game skill lists. You can also modulate a skill to better reflect your character. Where a typical roleplaying game skill might be History, you can take 17th Century French History. Make your skills reflect who your character is, rather than having your character defined by what skills are available.

Finally, it encourages cooperation. Yes, there is a red flag over this approach to skills—you're reading it, in fact. But that flag doesn't mean you're supposed to challenge the GM over the governing stat of every skill or what a skill can do. What you're *supposed* to do is to work with the GM in an open atmosphere of cooperation. If the two of you disagree over the nature of a skill, find some middle ground. But just accept that the GM's word is final. If your disagreement occurs during a game session, feel free to discuss it in depth *after* the game. But don't hold up play with an argument. Accept the GM's ruling and move on.

We really think this is a good, clean system, and one that is very appropriate for the game. Other games have used it to great success. If you disagree, you're welcome to come up with something on your own. Gamers do it all the time—it isn't hard. Just grab the rulebook for a roleplaying game that you think has a good skill set, scribble in the margin which UA character stat governs each skill, and use that as your skill guide. If you think characters should buy more skills than just a handful, multiply the number of points available. As a rule of thumb, assume that the typical UA character has ten to fifteen skills (including the free ones). For every multiple of ten skills that your characters are required to spend points on, double the number of points available.

WHY THE WEAK SKILLS?

A common question people had about first edition UA basically boiled down to, "Why are skills so low?" There are a couple reasons for this: the mechanics and the setting.

A skill in UA is not like skills in other games, in that it measures your ability *under duress*. Most games, particularly horror games, are about perilous, terrifying situations. Yet it's not uncommon for a skill to measure your chance to do something under laboratory conditions. Some games don't even bother to modify this: your chance to fix the Jeep on a lazy Sunday with your tools, your buddies, and a case of beer is the same as your chance to fix the Jeep when it's your only escape and the monsters are going to show up in twenty minutes. Others give you the "lazy Sunday" score and make you add and subtract all kinds of modifiers on the fly.

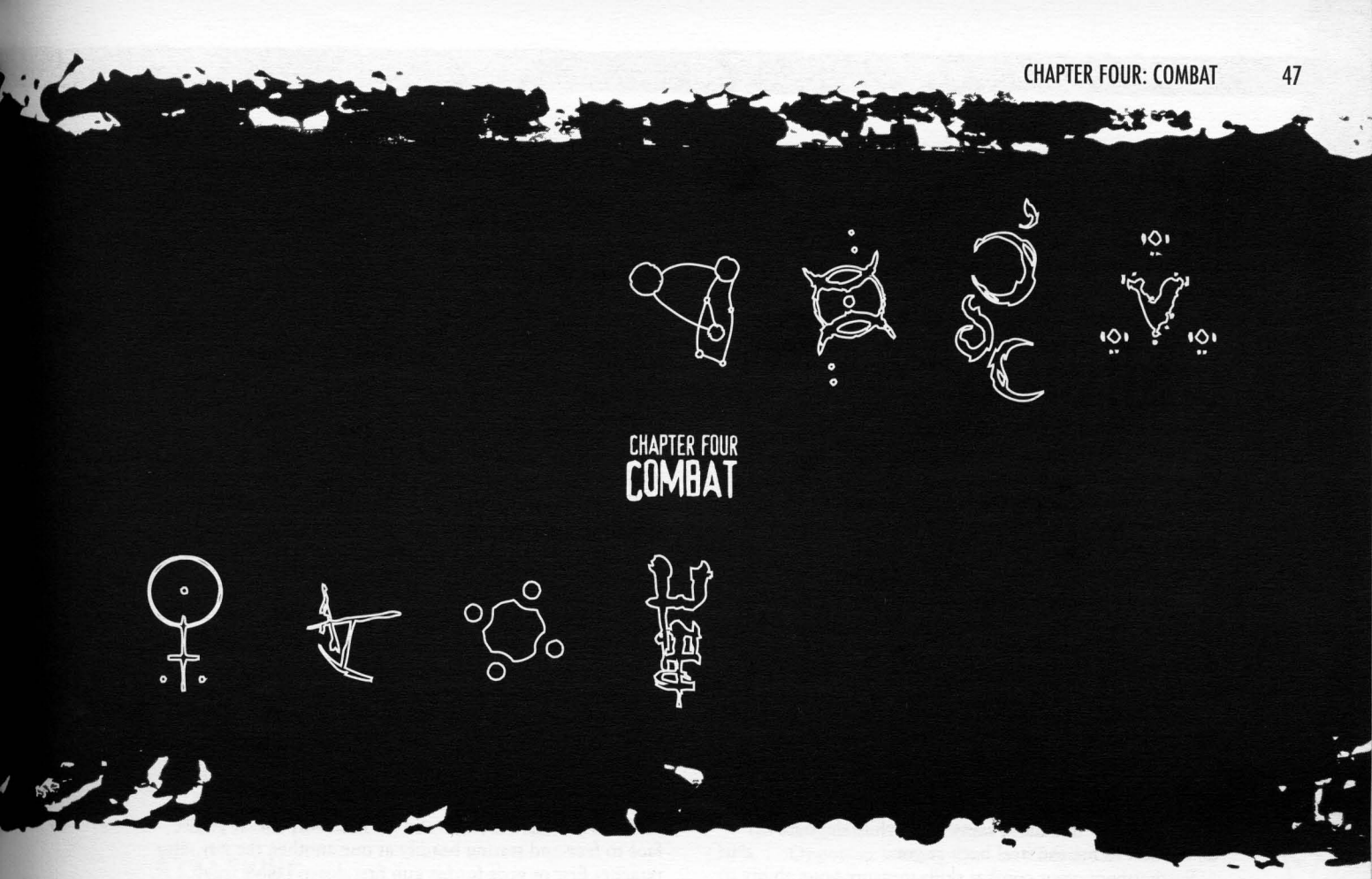
Rather than slow the pace of play with all that math, it seemed smart to have "nail-biting tension" as the benchmark skill level. So if a skill seems low, ask yourself "what would be my chances if it was life or death?"

The setting reason is a little more involved.

UA is a horror game. It's about uncertainty and tough choices. Really high levels of competence reduce the horror. If you can rely on your 75% Firearms skill to see you through, enemies aren't terrifying: They're just paper tigers.

If the skills seem low, don't put trust in your skills. Push things in your favor. Don't like your Initiative? Plan ambushes! Struggle seem too low? Outnumber your opponents! Can't get help with just a low Charm roll? Think of compelling reasons the guy should help you even if he hates your guts!

The two halves of a PC are player and character. In a lot of games, if your character's stats are buff enough, you can be a lazy player. And sure, that's less work, but it's less rewarding too. We want you to get your money's worth out of UA, and if that means more planning, more scheming and more sacrifice—well, so be it. It's tough love, baby.



CHAPTER FOUR
COMBAT

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

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

Six Ways To Stop A Fight

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Oh Well

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

Combat Overview

Combat consists of a few main concepts: who goes first (**initiative**), how do you hurt someone (**attacking**), how do you avoid getting hurt (**dodging**), what happens when you get hurt (**damage**), what else you can do besides fight (**non-combat actions**), and what to do after the fight (**wounds and healing**).

Fighting is unpredictable and often unexpectedly dangerous. You aren't a bulletproof hero who can swagger through gunfire with a wicked grin, bowling over scads of inferior opponents. Even punks can get lucky and even leathery street fighters can take hard falls onto broken bottles.

Your combat skills are calibrated on the assumption that they're being used in chaotic, confusing circumstances. Your skill of Firearms 40% doesn't mean you have a 40% chance to hit a paper target down at the shooting range. It means you have a 40% chance of hitting a moving, screaming, dodging enemy in a dark, rainy alley while she does her damnedest to fire the steel back at you.

Furthermore, your combat skills measure your ability to do something *effective*. A single Struggle attack may be one haymaker, or it could be a series of slaps, gouges, bites and hair grabs. Mechanics-wise, there's no difference between a single elegant kick and the aggregate damage of several hasty rabbit punches, but for storytelling style, it helps to really visualize your personal technique.

Initiative

At the beginning of the combat, the GM determines who goes first, second, third, and so forth. This process is known as **initiative**. When it's your turn to take action, say what you're doing. Going sooner is better than going later, because slower characters have to react to what faster characters are doing.

Combat is divided into **rounds**. In a single round you could use an attack skill, dodge, cast a spell, or start performing some other simple action. Rounds are an abstraction intended for easier gameplay, not a definite measure of time. Assume a round is about three seconds, but don't get hung up on accurate timekeeping.

Rolling Initiative

To determine your place in the initiative for this combat, roll against your Speed stat. You always want to roll high. Treat matches, crits, and fumbles as normal rolls—they don't give you any special bonuses or penalties.

⇨ If you succeed in your Speed check, you act before everyone who failed their roll. You also act before everyone with a successful roll that was lower than yours was.

⇨ If you fail in your Speed check, you act after everyone who succeeded in their roll. You also act before everyone with a failed roll that was lower than yours.

Default Initiative

Instead of rolling, you can decide to use your Initiative skill as your roll result. If you have Initiative 34%, your initiative number is 34. Taking default initiative is considered the same as a successful roll.

⇨ With default initiative, you act before everyone who failed their roll. You also act before everyone with a successful roll that was lower than your Initiative skill.

Ambush Initiative

If you begin a combat by ambushing someone, you get that first attack immediately. For the rest of the combat, you act on your Speed stat number and that is considered the same as a successful roll. If your Speed is 62 and you make a successful ambush, your initiative number is 62.

⇨ With ambush initiative, you get the very first action. For the rest of the combat, you act before everyone who failed their roll. You also act before everyone with a successful roll that was lower than your Speed stat is.

Ambush initiative is only valid for *total* surprise. If you're face to face and staring beadily at one another, the guy who punches first or goes for his gun first doesn't have total surprise. You only get the ambush advantage if the GM agrees you completely bushwhacked your target.

Improving Initiative

Once the initiative ranking is set, it stays the same throughout the entire combat. If you want to improve your ranking during the combat, you can spend one round without taking any action. At the start of the next round, you can either roll against your Speed stat or use your Initiative skill just like at the start of combat.

Tied Initiative

If you are tied for initiative ranking with another character, roll a die to break the tie. The loser's initiative ranking drops by one point so he or she is just below your ranking.

Example: Aron, Brian, Claudia, and Derek are facing three members of a rival cabal—Xander, Yolanda, and Zack. Aron, Brian, and Claudia opt to go on their Initiative scores, but Derek decides that, with his high Speed score, he might as well roll and see what he gets.

Aron	**Speed:** 30	**Initiative skill:** 25
Brian	**Speed:** 40	**Initiative skill:** 20
Claudia	**Speed:** 50	**Initiative skill:** 30
Derek	**Speed:** 60	**Stat Roll:** 54 (succeeds)

The GM decides that Yolanda and Zack go on their skill and Xander rolls. (Xander isn't too bright and is something of a risk-taker.)

Xander	**Speed:** 45	**Stat Roll:** 61 (failed)
Yolanda	**Speed:** 55	**Initiative Skill:** 30
Zack	**Speed:** 65	**Initiative Skill:** 33

The only failure is Xander, so he goes last. Claudia and Yolanda are tied with 30. Claudia rolls a 7 and the GM rolls a 3, so Yolanda's ranking drops to 29. The initiative ranking for this combat is:

Derek	54	**Aron**	25
Zack	33	**Brian**	20
Claudia	30	**Xander**	(Fail)
Yolanda	29		

This continues until the combat ends or until someone attempts to improve their standing. Yolanda could try this, using her Initiative skill of 30 to trigger another tie-breaker roll with Claudia—but that's not worth spending a round as a sitting duck. As it happens, the only person who makes the attempt is Xander. He takes a beating for a round and rolls, getting a 40. Since this is a success, he moves up in the ranking and the new ranking becomes:

Derek	54	**Yolanda**	29
Xander	40	**Aron**	25
Zack	33	**Brian**	20
Claudia	30		

ATTACKING

When it's your turn to take an action during a round of combat, you can choose to attack someone. Just tell the GM what combat skill you're going to use and who you're going to use it on. Then roll percentile dice. You want to roll equal to or less than your combat skill, and given that, you want as high a result as possible. If you succeed, you've just hurt or killed someone. Congratulations.

All skill checks in combat are major skill checks. If you can't stand heat, don't pick fights with burning men.

DRAWING A WEAPON

Note that to use a weapon of any sort, you need to have it in your hand ready to go. If you have to draw your weapon, it takes one round. Without a weapon readied, you cannot use it in the first round of combat.

ATTACK SHIFTS

Attack shifts are shifts—bonuses or penalties—applied to your combat skill because of some situational factor. Note that you add them to your *skill*, not to your die roll. Once your shift is applied, roll against the adjusted skill.

GMs use shifts to model dramatic reality, not physical reality. Shifts should make combat more intense and more deadly, based on the nature of the situation. They usually range from –30 to +30, and are applied in increments of 10. Remember that your combat skills already assume a challenging, fast-paced fight.

Shift	Example Situation
-30%	You're blind
-20%	It's ten degrees below zero and you're just wearing sweatpants
-20%	You've been set on fire
-20%	You're fighting on a thin plank over a forty foot drop
-10%	You're underwater (at least up to the waist)
-10%	You've been drugged and are having a hell of a bad trip
-10%	You're shooting while falling after jumping through a plate glass window
-10%	Your feet are manacled together
-10%	You're in free fall
0%	A typical fast-paced, chaotic, pants-wetting combat environment
+10%	You're shooting someone far away who isn't dodging
+10%	You're using a long hand-to-hand weapon against an unarmed opponent at appropriate distance
+10%	Opponent is barefoot on broken glass
+10%	Opponent is easily scared and just saw you gruesomely kill somebody
+10%	Opponent has on a big, heavy, off-balance frame backpack
+20%	Opponent's feet are tightly chained to the ground
+20%	Opponent just ran a marathon
+20%	Opponent just killed your best friend and is laughing over the corpse
+30%	Opponent is in leg irons and handcuffs

If you're a GM, don't make a habit of applying every shift you can to a situation—these examples are meant to serve as guidelines, not as a shopping list. You don't have to use every shift that applies. Does it seem like the character should have a little tougher time? -10% shift. Does it seem like things are going his way? +10% shift. Use the examples to gauge an aggregate shift, not to add up every little factor. Wing it.

If a factor is going to affect all the combatants equally, it's rarely worth the trouble to penalize all of them. If two characters are fist-fighting in a phone booth, they're both at the same disadvantage. Ditto environmental factors like rain, mud, darkness, and so forth. If they effect everyone, don't apply them.

Shifts should underline dramatics and modulate gameplay. They should not dictate dramatics and encumber gameplay.

FOCUS SHIFTS

If you really want to put the hurt on someone, you can ask for a **focus shift**. You have to declare this at the beginning of the round, not when it's your turn during the round. If the GM doesn't believe you can pull off a focus shift owing to circumstances—perhaps you're badly wounded, or drunk, or affected by magick that makes it hard to concentrate—you don't get to do it.

A focus shift means you concentrate on attacking a single target and pay less attention to the rest of the combat. You can choose a focus shift of +10, +20, or +30, and you apply it to your attack roll when it's your turn during that round—assuming you're still standing when your turn comes around. You can only take a focus shift on a combat skill.

It's clear to everyone else from the start of the round that you're focusing on your target. This is the moment in the movie when the two fighters' eyes meet and the melee around them gets quiet even though the fighting continues unabated. As a result, however, anyone else who attacks you this round, including the target of your focus shift, gets the same shift applied to any attack against you. If you take a +30 focus shift, anyone who attacks you that round does so at +30.

This means if you and your target both declare focus shifts against each other, you each get two shifts: one for your own focus shift, and one as a bonus against your opponent because he or she is taking a focus shift as well. Mutual focus shifts are cumulative to a maximum of +30. Should you declare a +10 shift against your target and your target declares a +10 shift against you, you'd each have +20: +10 from your own focus shift and +10 from your opponent's focus shift. But if you both declared at +20, you'd each have a +30 to hit the other, not +40.

Whether or not another character can take that shifted attack against you is up to the GM. Someone on the other side of the room in a furious hand-to-hand struggle is hardly going to kick you while you're focused on your target. But that guy who's been popping off shots at your partner down the street won't think twice about shooting you while you're preoccupied. You make a tempting target. Still, if you think you've got a decent chance at getting away with a focus shift then take a +10 and up the odds—or go for that fat +30 and call down the thunder.

Example: At the beginning of the third round of combat, Claudia declares a focus shift of +20 against Yolanda. When it's Claudia's turn, she gets a +20 shift to her attack skill if she uses it on Yolanda. But Claudia is fourth in the initiative ranking, which means that Xander and Zack could each take a +20 attack against her before it's her turn. Likewise, Yolanda (fifth in the initiative ranking) could have a +20 attack against Claudia if she survives Claudia's attack. The GM determines if Xander or Zack could and would take that attack, or if they're too busy with the rest of the combat.

Dodging

You can avoid getting hurt. When it's your turn during a round, declare that you're using your Dodge skill as your only action. For the rest of that round, you have some protection versus attacks. (Attacks made against you before it's your turn aren't affected by dodging—they're just plain faster than you.) When someone successfully attacks you while you're dodging, two things happen:

- ⇨ **First,** make a Dodge skill check with a minimum roll equal to your opponent's attack roll. If you succeed, the attack does no damage at all.
- ⇨ **Second,** if you fail but your opponent's attack roll is lower than your Dodge skill rating, the attack does half damage (round up).

If you want to continue dodging next round, you have to declare this at the start of that round. By doing this, your dodge even affects attackers who have a higher initiative rank than you during that round. You can continue this as long as you like. If you stop declaring your dodge at the



UNKNOWN ARMIES

artwork by Drew Tucker

start of the round in order to take a different action, your next dodge starts the process over again.

"Dodging" means you are doing *nothing but* avoiding attacks. It doesn't mean ordinary flinching and blocking, which the rules assume you're doing in combat all the time.

High Dodge

If your Dodge skill is 85% or higher, you can attack or perform another action while dodging, as long as your GM thinks it's plausible under the circumstances.

Dodging Blasts

Your Dodge skill has no effect against most Blast attacks—that is, magickal energy attacks made against you by an adept. Blast attacks succeed or fail on their own unnatural merits, and are not affected in any way by your Dodge skill. Blast attacks are discussed in the *Adepts* chapter. The only exceptions are Blast attacks that result in physical attacks by mundane objects, such as a Blast that makes a knife fly through the air at you.

Damage

When you get hit by an attack during combat, you lose wound points as a result. This happens immediately, before the next combatant's turn, with whatever consequences that brings.

The successful attack roll also determines damage in one of two ways, depending on the type of attack. Firearms damage is equal to your successful attack roll (a 43 attack roll does 43 wound points of damage). Hand-to-hand damage is equal to the *sum* of your successful attack dice (a 43 attack roll does 4 + 3 = 7 wound points of damage). There are modifiers that affect these results, and they are discussed in the following sections. Damage from an adept's use of the Blast magickal attack is covered in the *Adepts* chapter.

Note: Just being shot at triggers a Rank-1 Violence check (see the Madness chapter). Particularly inexperienced enemies may freeze or run away after cracking under the strain.

Firearms Damage

Firearms damage is identical to the successful attack roll—a roll of 45 does 45 wound points of damage. The higher your skill, the more damage you can do because you're shooting more accurately and you're hitting parts of the body that are more vulnerable. But your skill also serves as a limit on how much damage you can do. If you have a Firearms skill of 40, you usually cannot do 70 points of damage in a single gunshot.

There is another limitation on your damage result: different calibers of firearms have different maximum amounts of damage they can dish out. If your successful attack roll is higher than the maximum damage for the firearm you're using, the damage you do drops to the maximum for that firearm. Damage maximums appear on the firearms tables.

Example: Derek has a Firearms skill of 65%. He's using a Colt Viper revolver, a firearm that has a maximum damage of 50 points. If his attack result is a 79, he misses and does no damage. If it's a 23, he hits and does 23 wound points of damage to his target. If it's a 62, however, he only does 50 wound points of damage because he can't do more than the firearm can dish out.

Crits do maximum damage for that firearm—even if the maximum damage is higher than your Firearms skill rating.

Fumbles cause your weapon to jam or misfire. Semi-automatic and full-auto firearms jam (meaning the mechanics of moving a bullet through the weapon have gotten gummed up) and all others misfire (meaning the bullet was just a dud and the mechanics are okay). If it's a jam, you have to spend a round and make a successful firearms skill check to clear the weapon before it works again. If you fail the check then you can keep trying, but each attempt takes one round. If it's a misfire, nothing happens this round but next round you can fire again normally; mark off that bullet as a dud.

Matches have no effect on firearms damage.

Called Shots

To fire at a specific body part or other target of similar size, you need a successful attack with the following restrictions:

- **Leg.** A minimum roll of 30.
- **Arm.** A minimum roll of 40.
- **Hand or Foot.** A minimum roll of 40. Inflicts hand-to-hand damage. If against the hand, target drops any item held in that hand.
- **Head.** A minimum roll of 50, but take a +10% shift to your skill. (Same chance as hitting the arm or hand, but can do more damage.)

Multiple Shots

To fire more than one shot in a round, divvy up your skill rating—which includes any shifts applied—among the number of attacks you want to make. You cannot take more than three attacks per round without using the suppressive fire rules in the next section.

You choose how to divide your skill rating. If you have Firearms 30% and you want to shoot at two targets this round, or fire two shots at the same target, then you could take two 15% shots, or a 20% shot and a 10% shot, or a 29% shot and a 1%. To make three shots, you might take three Firearms 10% shots or two shots at 9% and one at 2%.

You cannot use a focus shift if you are shooting multiple targets, but you may use one with multiple attacks against a single target. If you do this, add the focus shift *before* you divide your skill up, as with any shift. You don't add the bonus to every subdivided shot.

Suppressive Fire

You're not aiming, you're just shooting to make your enemy *stop* shooting while your buddy does something. This requires that you fire at least four shots per round of suppressive fire. More than one person can lay down suppressive fire in the same round; the effects are cumulative.

As with dodging, your first round of suppressive fire kicks in when it's your turn, making it useless against faster opponents. You can continue it by declaring so at the start of each subsequent round, in which case it then affects everyone regardless of initiative ranking.

Firearms Table

Handguns

Name	Caliber	Capacity	Max Damage
Ruger Mark II semi-automatic	.22 long rifle	10	35
Walther PPK semi-automatic	.32 ACP	7	40
Colt Viper revolver	.38 Special	6	50
Glock Model 17 semi-automatic	9mm Parabellum	17	50
Smith & Wesson M586 revolver	.357 magnum	6	60
Ruger Super Redhawk revolver	.44 Magnum	6	80
IMI Desert Eagle semi-automatic	.50 AE	7	95

Rifles

Name	Caliber	Capacity	Max Damage
Iver Johnson Model EW semi-automatic	.22 Long Rifle	15	35
Hechler & Koch G41 semi-automatic	5.56mm NATO	30	60
Remington Sportsman 74 semi-automatic	.30-06	4	80
FN FAL Light semi-automatic	7.62mm NATO	20	80
SIG-Sauer SSG2000 Sniper bolt-action	.300 Weatherby Magnum	4	100
Barrett Light Fifty M82A1 semi-automatic	.50 M2	11	170

Shotguns

Name	Caliber	Capacity	Max Damage (buckshot/slug)
Charles Daly Field Grade break-open	20 gauge	2	60/70
Mossberg 5500 semi-automatic	20 gauge	5	60/70
Mossberg Model 500ATP8 pump-action	20 gauge	8	60/70
Bernardelli Model 115S break-open	12 gauge	2	120/80
Luigi Franchi SPAS 12 semi-automatic	12 gauge	8	120/80
Mossberg Model 500TP8-SP pump-action	12 gauge	8	120/80
Browning BPS pump-action	10 gauge	5	130/85
Harrington & Richardson Model 176 break-open	10 gauge magnum	1	140/115

Submachine Guns

Name	Caliber	Capacity	Max Damage
Heckler & Koch MP5 full-auto	9mm Parabellum	20	50
Ingram M11 full-auto	.380 ACP	32	50
Micro-Uzi full-auto	.45 ACP	16	60
AKSU-74 full-auto	5.45mm M74	30	60

Hand-to-Hand Weapons Table

Weapon	Damage Bonus
Knife (switchblade, cleaver, stiletto)	+3
Blackjack, brass knuckles, roll of quarters	+3
Light club, bo or jo staff, baseball bat, vase	+3
Sai, tonfa, nunchaku	+3
Small or light blunt object (toaster oven, skateboard, plank)	+3
Serious blunt object (chair, fireplace poker, wrench, tire iron)	+6
Huge club or baseball bat with sharpened nails in the business end	+6
Sword or machete (any sturdy blade six inches or longer)	+6
Hatchet or kama	+6
Very large sword or katana	+9
Spear or fire axe	+9
Chainsaw	+9

firearms stats derived with permission from:
Crowe, John H. III. *The Weapons Compendium.*
Columbia, Missouri: Pagan Publishing, 1993

Firearms Damage by Caliber Table

This table gives the maximum damage for a wide variety of firearms calibers so you can stat up weapons that aren't on the main table.

Handgun/Submachine Gun Caliber	Max Damage
.22 long	30
.22 long rifle	35
.22 short	25
.32 ACP	40
.32 Colt New Police	40
.357 Magnum	60
.38 Colt New Police	50
.38 Special	50
.38 Super Auto	50
.380 ACP	50
.40 S&W	50
.41 Magnum	70
.44 Magnum	80
.44 Special	60
.45 ACP	60
.45 Colt Long	60
.50 AE	95
7.62mm Type P	40
7.63mm Mauser	40
7.65mm Luger	40
9mm Largo	50
9mm Makarov	50
9mm Mauser	50
9mm Parabellum	50
9mm Steyr	50
10mm Auto	55

Rifle/Machine Gun Caliber	Max Damage
.22 Hornet	50
.22 long	30
.22 long rifle	35
.22 short	25
.222 Remington	60
.243 Winchester	65
.25-06	65
.270 Winchester	80
.284 Winchester	80
.30 Carbine	60
.300 Weatherby Magnum	100
.300 Winchester Magnum	100
.30-06	80
.30-30	80
.303 British	80
.338 Winchester Magnum	100
.35 Remington	100
.358 Winchester	100
.444 Marlin	100
.50 M2	170
5.45mm M74	60
5.56mm NATO	60
6.5mm Mauser	75
7mm Mauser	80
7mm Remington Magnum	100
7.51mm M31	80
7.62mm M1943	60
7.62mm NATO	80
7.62mm Russian	80
7.92mm Mauser	80
12.7mm Soviet	170
14.5mm Soviet	180

Shotgun Caliber	Max Damage
10-gauge, slug	85
10-gauge, buckshot	130
12-gauge, slug	80
12-gauge, buckshot	120
12-gauge Magnum, slug	110
12-gauge Magnum, buckshot	130
16-gauge, slug	75
16-gauge, buckshot	70
20-gauge, slug	70
20-gauge, buckshot	60
20-gauge Magnum, slug	90
20-gauge Magnum, buckshot	60
28-gauge, slug	65
28-gauge, buckshot	45

(Suppressive Fire continued)

Make a single roll for all the shots you're firing this round. On a 01 or a match, you hit someone by luck. Roll one die to see how much damage you did, while the GM determines randomly who you hit.

The effects of suppressive fire depend on how many shots are in the air that round:

- **4–10 shots** cause a –10% shift to everyone in the same field of fire
- **11–20 shots** cause a –20% shift to everyone in the same field of fire
- **21+ shots** cause a –30% shift to everyone in the same field of fire

Full-Auto Weapons

Firearms are already stupendously dangerous. Full auto makes them worse. Here's how they work:

⇨ You can either fire a three-shot burst or just hold the trigger down. A burst counts as a single shot for rules purposes. Blazing away counts as ten shots for rules purposes—it automatically qualifies as suppressive fire.
⇨ A three-shot burst gives you a Firearms shift of +10%.
⇨ Blazing away gives you a Firearms shift of +40%, but you need a minimum roll of 20.
⇨ Either way, ignore the maximum damage for your ammo type. Your total damage is whatever you roll, period.



Fully automatic firearms are more or less illegal in the United States and many foreign countries. Usage of full-auto weapons in combat is going to attract substantial law-enforcement attention—and of course, they just encourage your enemies to up the ante.

Special Ammo

There are many types of ammunition available for firearms, such as hollow-point, safety slugs, and so on. All have the same effect: the maximum damage of your weapon is increased by 10. One exception is armor-piercing bullets—the so-called cop-killer rounds that penetrate bullet-proof vests. These are described in the next section.

Bulletproof Vests

If you get shot while wearing a bulletproof vest, the gunshot does damage like it was a martial arts attack, but without the weapon damage shift. That's right: that 62-point gunshot just became an 8-point bruise.

If you are shooting at someone with a bulletproof vest, you can opt to aim for the head, legs, hand, or some other unprotected area. This is discussed earlier under "Called Shots."

Armor-piercing bullets punch right through bulletproof vests, but when you figure damage you *round down* to the nearest multiple of 10. If you roll a 45, you do 40 points of damage. If you roll a 08, you do 0 points of damage.

Hand-to-Hand Damage

For hand-to-hand attacks—that is, physical attacks such as punches, kicks, takedowns, baseball bat to the skull, *etc.*—the damage you do is equal to the sum of the two dice you rolled. A successful roll of 47 does 4 + 7 = 11 points of damage. (There are some exceptions to this, described later.)

If you're using a weapon of some sort in your hand-to-hand attack, you do more damage. To decide a weapon's damage shift, ask three simple questions:

- ⇨ **Is the weapon big?** ("Big" means you need both hands to wield it effectively.)
- ⇨ **Is it heavy?** ("Heavy" means it has enough heft to crack bones.)
- ⇨ **Is it penetrating?** ("Penetrating" means it cuts or stabs through the skin.)

For each "yes" you get, the weapon does 3 additional points of damage. A rock is heavy, but not big or penetrating, so it adds 3 points of damage. A steel chair is big and heavy, so it adds 6 points of damage. A knife is penetrating, so it adds 3 points. A machete or sword is heavy and penetrating, so it adds 6 points. A chainsaw is big, heavy, *and* penetrating, so it adds 9 points. A table of sample hand-to-hand weapons and their recommended damage appears in the table nearby.

Crits cause your target to die or drop unconscious immediately. Your choice. If he hasn't acted this round, he doesn't get to. This only happens if the GM says it makes sense. If you were throwing a pillow at the target, he's just not going to die or fall unconscious no matter what you roll.

Fumbles cause you to take the damage you rolled—that is, the weapon bonus plus 20 points (0+0 = 10 + 10 = 20).

artwork by Drew Tucker

You screwed up so badly that either you hurt yourself all on your own or your target deftly countered your attack and hurt you in the process, GM's choice.

Matched successes do firearms damage plus weapon bonus, but only if you're using a weapon with a bonus of +6 or higher. If you're using a weapon with a +3 weapon bonus, or no weapon at all, the match has no special effect.

Note: If your hand-to-hand attack skill is also your obsession skill, matched successes inflict Cherries; these are discussed later in the chapter. If your attack gets the firearm damage effect, that happens in addition to the Cherry unless the Cherry states otherwise.

Matched failures cause you to take your weapon's bonus in damage, if you're using a weapon. A +6 weapon would cause you 6 points damage. If you aren't using a weapon, the match has no special effect.

Disarming Attacks

To take away a target's weapon, make a successful attack with a minimum roll of 30. This does no damage, but the weapon is either in your hand or on the floor, your choice.

Note: If the weapon is a penetrating weapon, you automatically take 3 wound points unless you get a matched success or a crit in the attempt. Taking edged weapons away from people, using anything other than psychology, is a great way to lose some fingers.

Multiple Attacks

To make more than one hand-to-hand attack in a round, divvy up your skill rating—which includes any shifts applied—among the number of attacks you want to make. You cannot take more than three attacks per round.

You choose how to divide your skill rating. If you have Brawling 55% and you want to strike at two targets this round, or make two attacks at the same target, then you could take a 30% attack and a 25% attack, or a 40% attack and a 15% attack, or a 54% attack and a 1%. To make three attacks, you might take them at 20%, 20%, and 15%.

You cannot use a focus shift if you are attacking multiple targets, but you may use one with multiple attacks against a single target. If you do this, you add the focus shift *before* you divide your skill up. You don't add the bonus to every subdivided shot. That is, you can take a +30% focus shift to your 15% Brawling skill and have a 45% attack to divvy up, but you can't divide your 15% into three attacks and then add +30% to each one.

Throwing People

To throw a person you're fighting, make a successful attack with a minimum roll of 30. If you succeed, you do your normal damage and also inflict the Knock Down cherry.

Throwing Objects

To attack a target by throwing an object or weapon at him, use your General Athletics skill instead of your hand-to-hand attack skill. The only exception is when your hand-to-hand attack skill is also your obsession skill, in which case you can use it for the throw. This only applies to direct attacks at a target, not throwing a grenade or tossing a Frisbee around.

For a thrown object to do any damage, it must be big, heavy, or penetrating as described earlier. You do not add the weapon's bonus to the damage inflicted, but the special effects of matched successes still work as normal.

Knife Attacks

Any hand-to-hand attack with a penetrating weapon does a minimum of 1 wound point damage *even if you miss.* This does not apply to thrown weapons, only weapons used directly in close-quarters combat.

> **Example:** You have Brawling 37% and are wielding a knife against an opponent in hand-to-hand combat. You roll a 43, a miss. Your opponent takes 1 wound point damage.

Why is this? Knives cut. Imagine you are wearing a white suit with white gloves, and you are facing an angry child waving a black magic marker. Imagine trying to take the marker away from the child, or grabbing the child, or doing anything to the child except running away from it. You're going to be covered in black marks in a matter of seconds. That's why. *Knives cut.*

Sucker Attacks

To feint and then lunge with a powerful attack, declare a sucker attack and describe the fake move you pull to fool your target: trick him into stepping onto slippery ground, push him back so you can yank him forward when he resists, pretend to hit him high so you can really hit him low, or whatever the GM agrees sounds reasonable. Then make your attack roll this round as normal. If you succeed, you do no damage this round and your attack has no effect except to mislead your enemy. (Dodging does not affect this, since you aren't doing damage this round.) On your next round, if you attack the same target, roll only one die. Treat this roll as a match. If you roll a 1, your result is 11. If you roll a 7, your result is 77.

So if your first attack succeeds, you get an automatic match next round. It might be a matched failure or even a fumble—a 00—so use with caution.

Cherry Attacks

If your hand-to-hand combat skill—whether it's street brawling or judo—is your obsession skill, you get **Cherries.** Cherries are extra-special results that occur on a successful matched roll. (Unless the cherry specifies otherwise, the normal matched-success effect of extra damage still applies.) Having a hand-to-hand combat skill of any sort that is not your obsession skill does not grant you these cherries.

Each time you get a cherry during combat, pick one from the following list. You may also design new cherries, as long as your GM approves them.

Sample Cherries

Big Hurt. If you aren't using a +6 or greater weapon—or even no weapon at all—you still get the matched-success effect of doing firearms damage.

Blind. You cause no wound-point damage, but your target cannot see for the next four rounds (a -30% shift).

Dazed. In addition to taking the normal damage, your target has a -10% shift to all skills for the next four rounds.

Gimme. In addition to taking the normal damage, your target loses whatever weapon he is holding. You choose whether the weapon drops to the floor or ends up in your hands. Either way, this occurs immediately, and you don't take the usual automatic damage from disarming attempts.

Knock Down. In addition to taking damage, your target is immediately knocked off his feet. He automatically goes to the end of the Initiative queue. Furthermore, until he takes an action to stand up he can only attack characters who are standing within a few feet of him.

Kung Fu Grip. Instead of doing damage, you put your target in a restraining grip. Your target cannot attack or dodge on his next action because you've got him held. This continues until your target gets free. **Getting Free:** You can choose to release the grip at the beginning of the round before anyone acts, and then you can both act normally. Your target can get free by rolling against his hand-to-hand combat skill (Struggle, Tae Kwon Do, whatever), but he must make a minimum roll of your hand-to-hand skill score to succeed. **Attacking:** Held targets can be attacked by anyone nearby with a +10% shift for the attacker. While holding him, you get to inflict 5 points of damage each round automatically by wrenching his shoulder socket, kneeing him, *etc.* If you have any sort of hand-to-hand weapon ready, you get to inflict 8 points of damage each round instead. **Disarming:** You can make another hand-to-hand skill roll in any round after the one where you make the hold and, if successful, use the effect of the Gimme cherry. This is instead of doing any damage this round. **Limitations:** You cannot make any attack besides the automatic one on the person held, and you can't dodge, either.

Monkey Dodge. Not only do you damage this target, but you may redirect the next attack declared against you (before it is rolled) to any other combatant who could reasonably be targeted instead (GM's call). You can't use this to make someone attack himself. You can choose to redirect the attack so it hits the floor, wall, furniture, large plate-glass window, *etc.* instead of another combatant.

More Hurt. Roll and add another single die of damage to the current attack.

New Damage. Roll two dice and use that for damage instead of your original roll. If you're using a +6 weapon or greater, you still get to do firearms-style damage even if your new damage roll isn't a match.

Second Helping. In addition to inflicting the normal damage, you can use your attack skill again *immediately* in the same round at no penalty.

Turning Tide. In addition to taking the normal damage, your target can't get any benefits from rolling matches for the rest of the combat.

Explaining Crit Kills

If you roll that fatal 01 and drop some poor bastard in his tracks, it's not terribly dramatic to say "he dies." Here are a number of plausible one-hit kills for smaller weapons.

With a Blunt Object

- A sharp blow to the temple puts a deadly shock through the brain, resulting in instant death.
- A transverse blow across the bridge of the nose sends bone fragments into a sinus cavity, shredding it and causing the victim to drown in his own blood unless someone performs an emergency tracheotomy within about five minutes. For purposes of the 01, assume the blow also knocks him out or immobilizes him with pain while he dies.
- An upward blow at the base of the skull (either attacking from behind or by reaching around) breaks the neck or causes instant unconsciousness.
- A blow to the front of the throat crushes the trachea. Intense pain and panic is immediate. Unconsciousness occurs within 20 seconds, or less if he was already breathing heavy. Asphyxiation happens soon after.
- A hard thrust right to the bottom of the sternum breaks off a bone called the xiphoid process and drives it into the heart.
- A hard blow directly between the shoulder blades instantly stops the heart.

With a Sharp Object

- Even a small knife driven up into the head through the top of the eye socket kills quickly. (Elizabethan playwright Kit Marlowe died this way.)
- An upward blow under the sternum pierces the heart.
- A stab to the temple shanks the brain.
- A shallow slash across the throat causes blood to drain down the windpipe and drown the target.
- A deep slash to the neck causes a rapid bleed-out from either the vein or the artery.
- A long slash along the inside of the bicep from elbow to armpit opens an artery.
- A slash on the inside of the leg from knee to groin also opens an artery.

Exotic Damage

You can die in all kinds of terrible ways. Here are a few examples.

Pointblanking

Pointblanking is trying to kill an immobile, helpless target in close proximity. This doesn't mean an ambush. This means cutting the throat of a guy tightly bound to a chair, or shooting a sleeping person in the face.

So your target is helpless. It's up to you to decide if he or she lives or dies.

This is a dramatic moment, so don't try to gloss it over. The consequences of your decision are likely to be severe, no matter how you decide. The decision to snuff out a human life in a cold and calculated fashion—not in combat, not by "accident," not in a rage of anger or fear—is one of the most important ones you may face. Choose carefully.

If you decide to murder someone, then, here's how you do it. Roll the appropriate skill. If it's martial arts and you fail, you do the damage you rolled, firearms-style. If it's firearms and you fail, your weapon does the maximum damage for its caliber.

If you succeed with either roll, the defenseless victim is dead. Lights out.

That's not it for you, though. Deliberately trying to kill a helpless target is a rank-7 Violence check. Your GM may

assign other checks as well; after all, if you generally think of yourself as a friendly, forgiving guy, or a law-abiding straight arrow, such a deed may well merit a Self check. On the other hand, if you fail to kill your target then you may have to face a Helplessness or Unnatural check (the latter if some sort of magick saved the target).

Drowning

In a crisis, you can hold your breath for a number of seconds equal to your Body score. After that, you have to breathe or pass out. If you breathe in (or pass out) underwater, you're out of the fight and drown unless someone drags you out and performs CPR. (GMs may make characters who've been saved roll their Body or under to have the CPR work.) An average Body 50 victim can stay alive for fifty seconds, so it takes about sixteen rounds to drown. Not drowning means doing your best to stay above water, either with the Swim skill or (if you don't know how to swim) a General Athletics check. Each success gets you a breath of air, and the breath-holding clock is restarted.

Strangling

There are two ways to choke someone: cut off air to the windpipe (the standard, untrained strangle) or cut off blood to the brain. For the windpipe choke, just use the drowning rules. This goes for untrained neck grabbing, smothering with pillows, plastic bags over the head, and other forms of smothering. An average Body 50 victim can stay alive for fifty seconds, so it takes about sixteen rounds to strangle him to death. For the blood choke, make a successful attack with a minimum roll of 20. Maintain this for three more rounds and the target passes out. Two more rounds and the target dies. This qualifies as pointblanking for Madness purposes. A blood choke requires you to put a rope or scarf or other long, thin object around someone's throat, twist it once in the back, and pull real tight. It works very fast.

To break a choke that's on you, you can make one Dodge or Struggle attempt each round, your choice. If you succeed, you break free. Whether you succeed or fail, however, that attempt is the only action you can take that round.

Car Wrecks

The GM rolls one die for each 10mph the car was going, and arbitrarily assembles a number out of any two of the dice rolled based on factors such as seatbelts, air bags, the type of car, and so on. If a car hits something at 50mph, the GM rolls five dice and picks any two to build a two-digit number from. Different occupants in the car can receive different combinations of damage numbers if the GM feels it is appropriate.

Example: A car strikes a brick wall at 40mph. The GM rolls four dice and gets 7, 7, 3, and 2. Possible damage results include 23, 27, 32, 37, 72, 73, and 77. It's a late-model luxury sedan. The driver is wearing his seatbelt and there's an airbag but it's still a bad wreck, so the GM assigns him 27 points of damage. The passenger wasn't wearing a seatbelt and was leaning half-way out the window shooting at someone, so the GM assigns him 77 points of damage.

Note: If two cars hit head-on, you *combine* their speeds. Two cars going at 40 that do a head-on yield eight dice of damage to the occupants.

Is your character wearing her seatbelt? Unless you stated so earlier, you need to make a Mind check: if you succeed, you have your seatbelt on.

Falling

The GM rolls one die per ten feet fallen, adding the dice together. If it's a controlled, deliberate fall, drop the highest die. (So if you carefully jump down 10 feet, you take no damage. If you're shoved out of a first-story window, you take full damage because you aren't in control of the fall.)

Non-Combat Actions

If you're fighting someone, there's an excellent chance it isn't just because you're a psycho. You want something. The two of you are fighting because the Maltese Falcon is on the table or because you're trying to get out the door to your car or whatever. Attempting goals like these in the middle of a fight means you're using non-combat actions. These are any actions you take that are not directly related to injury.

The tactical use of magick qualifies as a combat action, such as using magick to whack somebody, or confuse them, or control them. But if you try to divine what you're having for lunch tomorrow in the middle of a fight, that's a non-combat action.

Short Actions

Any non-combat action takes at least two rounds. The first round, you declare your action but you still get to attack or dodge that round as normal. The second round, you can neither attack nor dodge—you just perform your action. Non-combat actions work this way because it requires presence of mind to do anything in a fight other than fight.

Once you declare your action in the first round, you cannot change it in the second round. You *can* modulate it slightly if the GM allows it. If you declared you were going to get in a car, you could change that to getting *under* the car instead.

Long Actions

The GM may rule that some non-combat actions take longer than two rounds. Remember that a round is roughly three seconds and plan accordingly. These longer actions work the same way as two-round actions: declare the first round, then spend the other rounds taking the action.

You have more freedom to modulate your actions when they're stretched across a longer span of time. If you're running for the door and it takes you four rounds, on round three or four you could decide to change direction and run in a different direction. But if you want to cancel a longer action and go back to fighting, you have to announce this during your turn one round and can then attack or dodge the *next* round.

Drawing Actions

It takes one round to draw a weapon, not two. When you declare you're going to draw, you do it right away instead

of making an attack or dodge. It's ready for use next round. You have to draw a weapon before you can use it, of course—so you cannot shoot your gun on the first round of combat unless you were walking around with it in your hand before the combat began.

Simultaneous Actions

If your attack skill is 85% or higher and the GM approves, you can attack and either dodge or perform another action at the same time. Similarly, if your Dodge skill is 85%+, you can dodge and either attack or perform another action at the same time. If you're such a lightning-quick bad mofo that your attack skill *and* Dodge skill are both 85% or higher, you can attack, dodge, *and* perform a non-combat action in the same round.

Wounds and Healing

You begin the game with a number of wound points equal to your Body stat. When you get hurt, you lose wound points.

The GM is in charge of tracking your wound points. You are not allowed to know how many wound points you have at any point in time. When you get hurt, the GM tells you what happens: what it feels like, whether you have to move slowly, and so forth. There's more information on this in the GM section.

The GM makes a note of how much you lost from each separate injury. That's because healing is on an injury-by-injury basis.

Wound Penalties

When you've lost somewhere between a quarter and a third of your wound points, the GM tells you that you now have a –10% shift to all your stats for stat check purposes. Exactly when this penalty kicks in is up to the GM.

If you get hurt so badly that your wound points are down to somewhere between two-thirds and three-quarters of your total, the GM tells you that you're now at –20% to your stats.

The first penalty is a warning that you need to get off the streets. The second penalty is a warning that you're about to die. But if you're getting so trashed that your stats are at –20%, you're probably dead meat anyway.

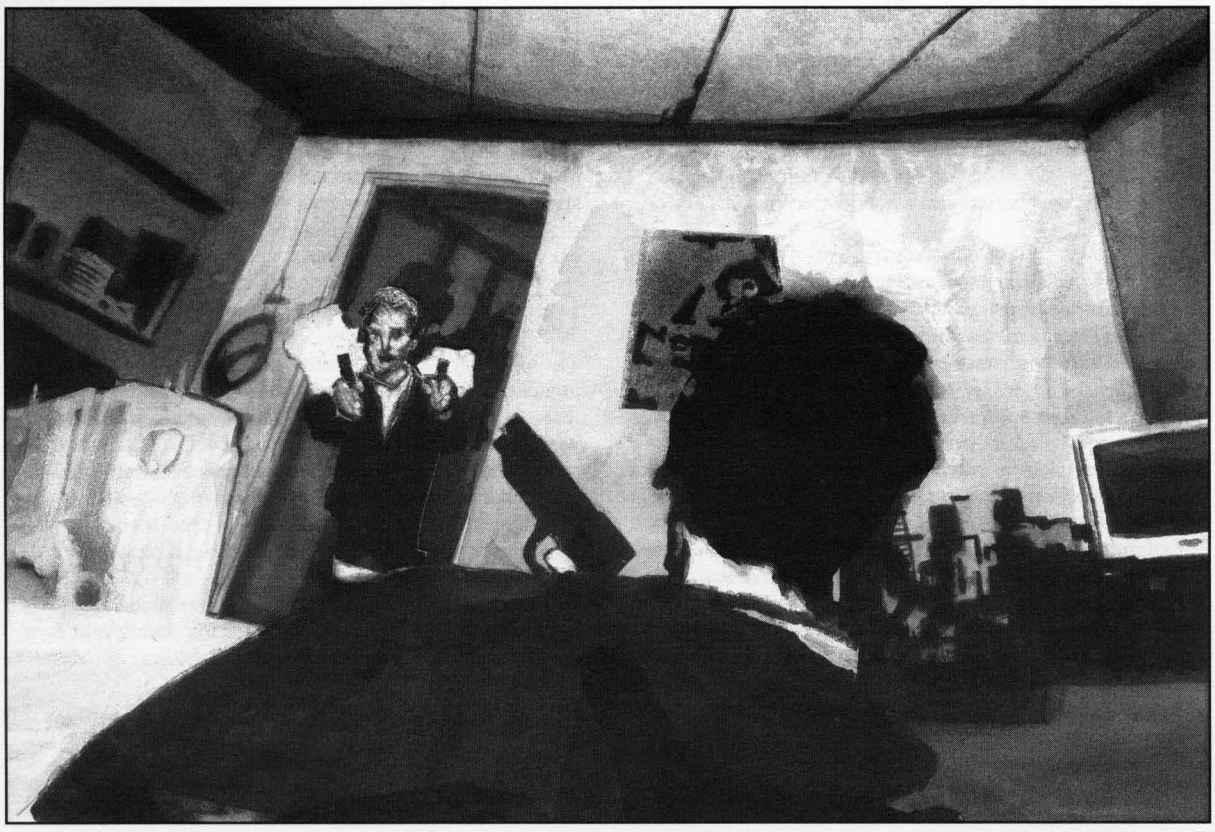
These penalties only apply when you're rolling against your stats. They don't affect your skills.

Healing a Minor Injury

Basic first aid is sufficient for an injury up to about 10% of your Body stat. To perform first aid, you need the right supplies—bandages, makeshift splints, whatever the GM deems sufficient—and you must make the attempt within an hour after the injury occurred. Make an appropriate significant skill check, or a major check if you're under fire.

A successful first-aid attempt heals a number of wound points equal to the dice rolled, added together. A roll of 56 would heal 5 + 6 = 11 wound points. A roll of 10 heals 1 + 10 = 11 wound points. If the result is higher than the number of wound points inflicted by that particular injury, the extra points are ignored.

You may attempt first aid only once for each minor injury. If you fail any of those checks, the victim may get



UNKNOWN ARMIES

artwork by Drew Tucker

another set of attempts from a professional medical facility, or from convalescence.

No matter how well you roll to patch it up, one wound point of damage always remains to be healed by convalescence. No mortal science can heal an injury perfectly and instantly.

Example: Aron gets kicked in the crotch and takes 4 points of damage. Claudia convinces him to let her help and, after icing it to reduce the swelling, she makes an unskilled significant check against her Mind stat because she doesn't have an appropriate skill. She gets a 42, which is more than 30 and lower than her stat, so she could heal a maximum of 6 points of damage—more than enough to take care of the injury. But, because no first aid is perfect, Aron's still down one point.

Healing a Major Injury

A major injury is one that inflicts more than 10% of your Body stat in wound points. This is beyond the scope of first aid. You need professional help, and you need it fast.

Listen up: EMTs and doctors agree that people have a much better chance of surviving major injuries if they get treated within one hour. It's what ambulance response time and ER procedures are designed to accomplish.

If you get to a medical facility within one hour of receiving the injury, the GM rolls the doctor's medical skill. Healing a major injury is always a major skill check. A successful check heals that number of wound points immediately, the same way firearms damage is computed. Each injury requires a separate check. Healed points in excess of the particular injury are ignored. Even rolls that heal more than enough damage still leave one wound point, as with minor injuries, to be healed in convalescence.

Example: Your doctor (Medical 68%) rolls a 43 and it's a success, so you get back 43 points. If the injury was only 24 points, the extra healing points are ignored and you're down 1 wound point instead of 24. If he'd failed with a 94, you'd get back nothing.

If you don't get there within an hour, you're in bad shape. The skill use only heals back the sum of the dice, the same way hand-to-hand damage is computed.

Example: If your doctor got that successful 43, you'd only regain 4 + 3 = 7 points because you lost blood and weakened before you were treated.

Most doctors range in skill from 35% for a newbie to 70% for a veteran. Most can flip-flop their rolls, since it's probably their obsession skill. If the doctor makes a matched miss or a fumble, the GM may rule that additional wound points were lost. If so, those additional points count as a new injury.

All this assumes modern medical facilities and a skilled staff of assistants, of course. If your doctor—or a helpful boy scout with a First Aid merit badge—is trying to put you back together on your kitchen table with that bathroom first-aid kit, you can only get the sum of the dice, no matter how fast you're treated—a gauze pad won't do much to help a broken arm.

Convalescence

To heal damage missed by first aid or emergency medical care, you must either stay in a hospital or at home with regular attention from a doctor or nurse. You heal 2 wound points per day that you rest. If you go out and run around, the GM can rule you heal nothing for that day.

Once you're at 60% of your normal wound point total, you are well enough to get out and about again. You may not be fully healed, but you can get back to work. If you leave convalescence at that point, you can still heal 1 point per day. Remaining in bed continues healing you at 2 points per day. If you push yourself too hard, the GM may give you nothing back for that day.

You can also spend experience points to heal. Each point you spend restores a point of damage. You cannot spend more than three experience points on this per day.

As usual, you won't know precisely how many wound points you have. The GM will describe how you feel, such as "achy," tired," or "like you're going to puke." "Unable to focus your eyes" and "seeping" are signs that you should slow down a bit.

Permanent Damage

If you take 50 wound points or more in damage from a single attack and survive, you're a stud and should feel good about yourself. However, you also survived damage that would kill many people, and you *never* fully recover. A hit that bad marks you for life, and there's no way to avoid it.

The nature of the loss is up to your GM, though your group may make suggestions. It could be a straight, permanent loss of wound points—between 5 and 10 is a good number. You could lose points in a relevant skill, or even a stat—Body and Speed are obvious choices, but Mind is also appropriate for cranial traumas. You may lose limbs.

Car Chases

Movement in car chases is measured in **lengths**. If you are being chased, you want to increase the number of lengths between you and the car pursuing you. If you are chasing another car, you want to decrease the number of lengths between you.

The GM determines how many lengths there are between the vehicles involved in the chase. The lead car might have two or three lengths ahead of the next one if the chase began tight, or up to eight if they had a good head start.

A length is an abstraction for rules purposes. The distance is not important; the number of lengths is. If a car gets ten or more lengths ahead of the next one, that next car is now out of the chase and loses track of what is happening up ahead.

Every round, all the drivers in the chase make a significant Drive skill check. Drivers who beat their Speed but get under their Drive neither gain nor lose a length. Rolling under the Drive skill means that car advances one length, closer to any cars up ahead and farther from any cars behind. Failure means that car drops back one length, farther from any cars up ahead and closer to any cars behind. A match under your Speed or a crit means you advance two lengths. A matched failure or fumble means you drop back two lengths and may suffer additional problems at the GM's discretion.

Hazards

The GM may ask you to make a second Drive roll in a single round to navigate past a **hazard**, such as an obstacle in the road, congested traffic, or a sharp curve. Hazard rolls may be major or significant, depending on the nature of the hazard. If you fail the hazard check, you drop back a car-length and may suffer other consequences. If you succeed, you get past the hazard safely.

Risks

To close on your quarry or escape your pursuer even faster, you can try a **risk**. You must first succeed in any GM-mandated Drive rolls this round. Then you can describe the risk you take to advance in the chase. You must be specific and creative, and you cannot use the same risk twice in the same chase. Some sample risks include:

- "I run a red light."
- "I lunge into the oncoming lane for about ten feet to get past this truck."
- "I jump my motorbike onto the sidewalk."
- "I sideswipe that Escort out of the right lane and shoot up there."
- "I drive my motorcycle *between* those two big semis, right up the lane marker."

If the GM accepts your risk, make a major Drive roll. If you succeed, you gain a car-length. If you fail, you lose a car-length. Matches double the car-length results.

Insane Risks

To make a real run at advancing, you can do something insane. This works the same as a normal risk, but you must come up with a sufficiently dangerous maneuver, such as:

- "I jump my car over the barrier onto the highway, go the wrong way, and then get off ahead of him by driving the wrong way up the on-ramp."
- "I tilt my motorbike onto its side, slide *under* the tanker truck, and catch up lost ground while everyone else is cut off."
- "I take the turn at maximum speed so my car goes up on the two driver's-side wheels, then maneuver it onto the sidewalk and get the passenger wheels on the front of the building, so that I'm driving along the sidewalk at a 45 degree angle."

If the GM accepts your insane risk, make a Drive roll at *half* your skill, rounding down. Add any shifts to your halved skill number. If you succeed, you advance five lengths. If you fail, you wreck the car, you're out of the chase, and you suffer injury as per the car-wreck damage rules on p. 57.

Ramming and Roadblocking

Once two cars in a chase are at zero lengths, they can try to stop each other by **ramming** or **roadblocking**.

To roadblock, you must advance one length ahead of the other car any way you can. If you succeed, you steer right in front of them. They have two choices: run into you or run off the road. If they run into you, both cars stop and car-wreck damage occurs. If they run off the road, they might wreck, plunge off the side of the bridge, or suffer some other result depending on the circumstances.

If you ram, you don't roll—but the guy you hit does. If he succeeds at a major Drive check, your distance remains the same. If he fails, he must drop back one car-length or two if it's a matched failure. You may only ram once per round, and you may ram the same round that you closed the gap to zero.

Passengers

Passengers using magick roll as normal. Passengers using firearms against targets at zero lengths roll as normal. For firearm attacks at distance, the attack is made at a -10% penalty. These are for attacks against human targets.

To fire at a car, make a normal Firearms skill roll:

- **Crit.** You hit the driver.
- **Matched success.** You hit a passenger in the car.
- **20 or lower.** Cosmetic damage only.
- **21 or higher.** No damage, but driver is distracted and must make a hazard roll.

Jumping Between Cars

Unless you have a skill such as Hollywood Stuntman, this is not at all easy. To jump from one moving car to another, make a General Athletics skill check with a -20% penalty. If you fail, you suffer damage as per a car wreck.

Something to Think About

Combat Strategies

Fighting in *Unknown Armies* is different from many games in some very important ways. Psychology, in the form of Violence checks, can matter as much as physiology. Combat is extremely dangerous and unpredictable, even for experienced and skilled fighters. It is not something any reasonable person takes lightly.

To get a better grip on what the system actually does, and on how you can handle it best for a fun and interesting game, here are some strategies and observations to keep in mind.

Weapons Make a Difference. The bigger the weapon, the more difference it makes. Fist fighting, while not "safe," is much less likely to leave you dead or permanently crippled. As soon as a deadly weapon enters the scene—a big knife, a hatchet, or a baseball bat—matched successes become really, *really* painful because they inflict firearms damage. Suddenly, 10% of all the hits are extremely bad news. Once guns come into play, it's even worse. On a rough average, a gunshot does *four to five times* as much damage as an equivalent hand-to-hand roll.

Keeping this in mind, you should realize the following:

⇨ If you're armed and your opponent isn't, you have a big advantage.
⇨ If the situation is reversed, you should run away.
⇨ Once weapons are involved, fights can get fatal much quicker. Three rounds of successful punching means less than one successful gunshot.

Fools Fight to the Death. The difference between unconsciousness and death is pretty thin when weapons are out. That means you want to get out of the fight *before* you're unconscious, because most gunshot damage can skip right past the KO and into the Undiscovered Country. If you're hit with a weapon, you might want to run. If you're unwilling (or unable) to get away, consider dodging or diving for cover.

Fools Also Give No Quarter. Living problems are—in the short term, at least—preferable to dead ones. Sure, the guy you roughed up and let go may come back and jump you later. But if you kill him, even in self defense, you've got major problems with the police, who are almost assuredly more trouble than any individual GMC you can put down. Besides, a living enemy is one you can pump for information, one you can intimidate more easily, and one who's a walking testimony to your bad-assitude. Furthermore, the guy you let go with a beating today may be the guy who returns the favor next month—whereas if you kill him, you may get that deed repaid in kind by his son, his sister, or his vengeful ghost.

The First Round is Different. The first round in a fight sets up a lot of what happens later, and it gives a good sense of what kind of fight you're in for. If all your enemies are sticking their hands in their pockets, odds are good they're drawing weapons. (Remember, it usually takes a round to draw.) If you're unarmed, you may want to spend that first round grabbing their weapons, getting some cover, or running the heck away.

Ambushes Work. Going first in the round can be an important advantage. If you get at the top of the initiative ranking, your attacks are less likely to be dodged. This also means if you *get* ambushed, your best option is to get away—at least long enough to catch your breath and resume the fight on more even terms.

Watch Out for Sucker Attacks. A sucker attack is a powerful move, especially if you're using a +6 or +9 weapon or if you're an obsessed martial artist. However, it is not without risks. If your skill isn't very high, you can easily end up with a matched failure and screw yourself. Of course, sucker attacks work both ways. If you see an opponent ducking and weaving and distracting you, next turn may be a good time to Dodge. If you're fast enough.

The Initiative Skill is a Good Deal. Let's do the math with the Initiative skill. It's half your Speed stat by default, so even if you roll against Speed *successfully*, there's a 50% chance your roll is worse than what your Initiative skill already is. Furthermore, rolling allows for the possibility of failure, while the Initiative skill even at its worst never leaves you with a failure. Most people use the Initiative skill most of the time. Rolling is really only smart if you know your opponent is going to beat your Initiative skill anyhow.

Optional Rule: Negative Focus Shifts

If your group agrees to this *before* a combat starts, you can have negative focus shifts as well as positive ones. Negative shifts mean you're being extra-cautious, so you are not only harder to hit but you have a harder time hitting. Otherwise they work the same as normal focus shifts. We do not recommend you use these, as they slow down combat and encourage constant fiddling with numbers. (The positive focus shifts compensate for this by increasing risk to you and to your target, thereby speeding up combat.) But if your group wants to play that way, give it a shot.

A Brief Primer on Firearms

For the curious and the damned, here's a quick look at some common firearms issues likely to come up in your games. These are necessarily brief; if your real-world knowledge supersedes these generalities, by all means go with what you know. In particular, the section on legalities contains baseline assumptions. Local laws vary, but go with these assumptions if you don't have better information yourself. If you want more details, especially about your local laws, just call a gun store and ask. This information refers to the situation in America; foreign countries have very different laws.

Note that some information in this section falls under the rubric of "how to use firearms illegally and not get caught." This information is provided because it's the sort of thing that firearms-using characters in the game are likely to try, and the GM needs to know how to handle such activity. Nothing is provided in this section that cannot be readily inferred from the mass media. As stated later, however, you should understand that nothing draws the attention of law-enforcement authorities faster than illegal usage of firearms. You may think you're slick and will get away with it, but the fact is there will be anywhere from a couple to a couple *dozen* highly trained professionals doing everything they can to put your slick self behind bars.

Legalities

An adult can walk into a gun store and choose from a wide variety of revolvers, semi-automatic handguns, bolt-action rifles, semi-automatic rifles, break-open shotguns, pump-action shotguns, and semi-automatic shotguns. Long arms—rifles and shotguns—can be purchased and taken from the store immediately, but the buyer must fill out a one-page form with his name and vital statistics, describing the firearm and its serial number, and asserting that he is not a felon, is not abusing drugs or alcohol, does not have mental problems, and so forth. Handguns—both revolvers and semi-automatics—can be purchased, but must be left at the store for several days so local law-enforcement authorities can run a criminal-records check on you; if you're a felon, you can't buy a gun. The only identification required is a driver's license or some other governmental ID. (The waiting period for handgun purchases generally ranges from five to fifteen days, varying by state.)

Many restrictions on the manufacture and importation of specific types of firearms have been passed over the years. They do not restrict the sale or ownership of already-existing firearms of these types, however, and in many cases such a large quantity of these weapons are already

in circulation that the various bans merely raise the price, without greatly affecting availability. If you want it, you can buy it, and you can probably afford it.

Note that the above government forms and waiting period are only a factor if you're buying a weapon from a dealer. Firearm sales between private individuals—buying a weapon from a friend, co-worker, or what have you—are legal and unregulated, with the exception of fully automatic weapons.

Fully automatic weapons—machine guns, submachine guns, military assault rifles, and the like—are not legal to buy, sell, or own without special permits. These permits are expensive, are difficult to get, and essentially require you to surrender several of your civil liberties—if you have such a permit, for example, agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms can search your home without a warrant.

Cost

As a rule of thumb, if you need a good handgun, rifle, or shotgun, $500 does the trick. Depending on your needs and budget, you can go a lot cheaper or a lot more expensive.

You can legally buy a cheap .22-caliber semi-automatic handgun for well under $200, making it very popular among street gangs. Low-end medium-caliber handguns (9mm, .38) can be had for $200 or $300. Good-quality handguns in a variety of calibers range from $400–$600. High-quality or specialty models can go for more than $1000.

Long arms tend to fall into similar price ranges. A cheap .22-caliber hunting rifle or double-barrel break-open 12-gauge shotgun can be had for $200 or less. Most good-quality rifles and shotguns—including semi-automatic rifles and pump-action shotguns, popular with movie criminals and player characters—are priced from $400–$600. Again, high-quality or specialty models—or collector pieces that have been banned from new manufacture or import—can go above $1,000. Even among banned weapons, however, the prices may not be outrageous. A typical civilian version of the AK-47 that once sold for $350 was banned in the spring of 1998; after the ban, the price jumped to $520, still well within the typical range of prices.

These prices are all for new weapons. For used weapons—offered at gun stores, pawn shops, or by private owners—you can typically expect to pay $100–$200 less than the new price, assuming the weapon isn't some sort of collector's piece.

Operation

The mechanics of firearms operation vary widely. Some need to be cocked in some fashion before they work. Others fire from the first squeeze of the trigger. Many have a "safety" of some sort, generally a simple mechanical switch that must be flipped before the weapon functions. Details of which firearms require what sorts of operation are beyond the scope of this game, though again you're welcome to use these details if you're aware of them. Otherwise, assume that a character with some sort of firearms skill can safely and reliably operate any civilian firearm. Characters without a firearms skill use a stat check instead; if they're in combat, it's a major check and they can only succeed with a Hail Mary.

Concealment

It is illegal to carry a concealed handgun on your body without a permit. (Long arms are generally unconcealable.) Permits vary in cost and restrictions, but in general you can assume that a concealed-weapons permit may be issued to any adult who can pass a stringent criminal-records check. Expect to wait up to thirty days to receive the permit. Once you have it, however, you can carry your handgun almost anywhere. It's often illegal to carry even otherwise legally concealed handguns into places like banks, bars, schools, court houses and police stations, though this varies by locale. A given permit is only legal within the state where it was issued. You must keep the permit with you if you're armed and show it to police when requested.

It's generally not illegal to carry unconcealed long arms or handguns. You can walk into a gun store, buy a shotgun, and immediately wander all over town on foot, your shotgun cocked and loaded at your side, as long as you don't brandish it in anything resembling a threatening fashion. However, police usually take a dim view of such activity, and will certainly ask you a few questions, decide if you're drunk or on drugs, check your record, and maybe cite you for something like disturbing the peace or being a nuisance. You'll also probably end up causing a panic and showing up on the local news, given the spate of disgruntled mailmen/employees/schoolchildren shootings in recent years.

Rifles and shotguns must have a barrel length of at least eighteen inches. You can saw the end off your shotgun if you want with no problem, as long as the barrel doesn't go below that limit. This generally makes it impractical to conceal long arms.

Transport

It is illegal to ship firearms through the mail across state lines without dispensation to do so—such as if you're a legitimate gun dealer. You can bring firearms on airplanes, but they must go with your checked baggage, and you cannot bring ammunition with you. You must also inform the airline that you're flying with a firearm.

If you're traveling in a car, any firearm you have with you should be unloaded, in the trunk, and preferably wrapped in a blanket or stored in a firearms case. Carrying a handgun in your glove compartment or under your seat is generally considered the same as illegally carrying a concealed weapon, with big penalties. This varies, however—in some states, you can have the gun lying on the seat next to you as long as it's not loaded.

Repercussions

The presence of a firearm of any sort at the commission of a crime—even if the crime is jaywalking, or being drunk & disorderly—immediately puts up a red flag for law enforcement. Should a police officer realize you have a gun, no matter what the circumstances, he's going to take the situation very seriously and will, first and foremost, attempt to neutralize the threat of the gun. Preferably, he asks you to put it down, and then finds out what the hell you were doing with it. If you refuse to surrender the firearm and cannot be reasoned with, he may shoot you outright, if you pose an immediate threat to him or anyone else.

If you've been charged with a crime of some sort, and you had a gun with you—even if you weren't using it in



artwork by Rob Nemeth

the crime—it's safe to assume the legal consequences are graver than if you hadn't had the gun, owing to the implied threat and level of malicious intent this suggests. In some places, there are additional, mandated penalties for having a firearm during a crime. In many places, *claiming* to have a firearm during a crime is considered the same as *having* a firearm during the crime, even if you were lying.

If you show up at a hospital or doctor's office with a gunshot wound, medical personnel are typically required to notify the police immediately.

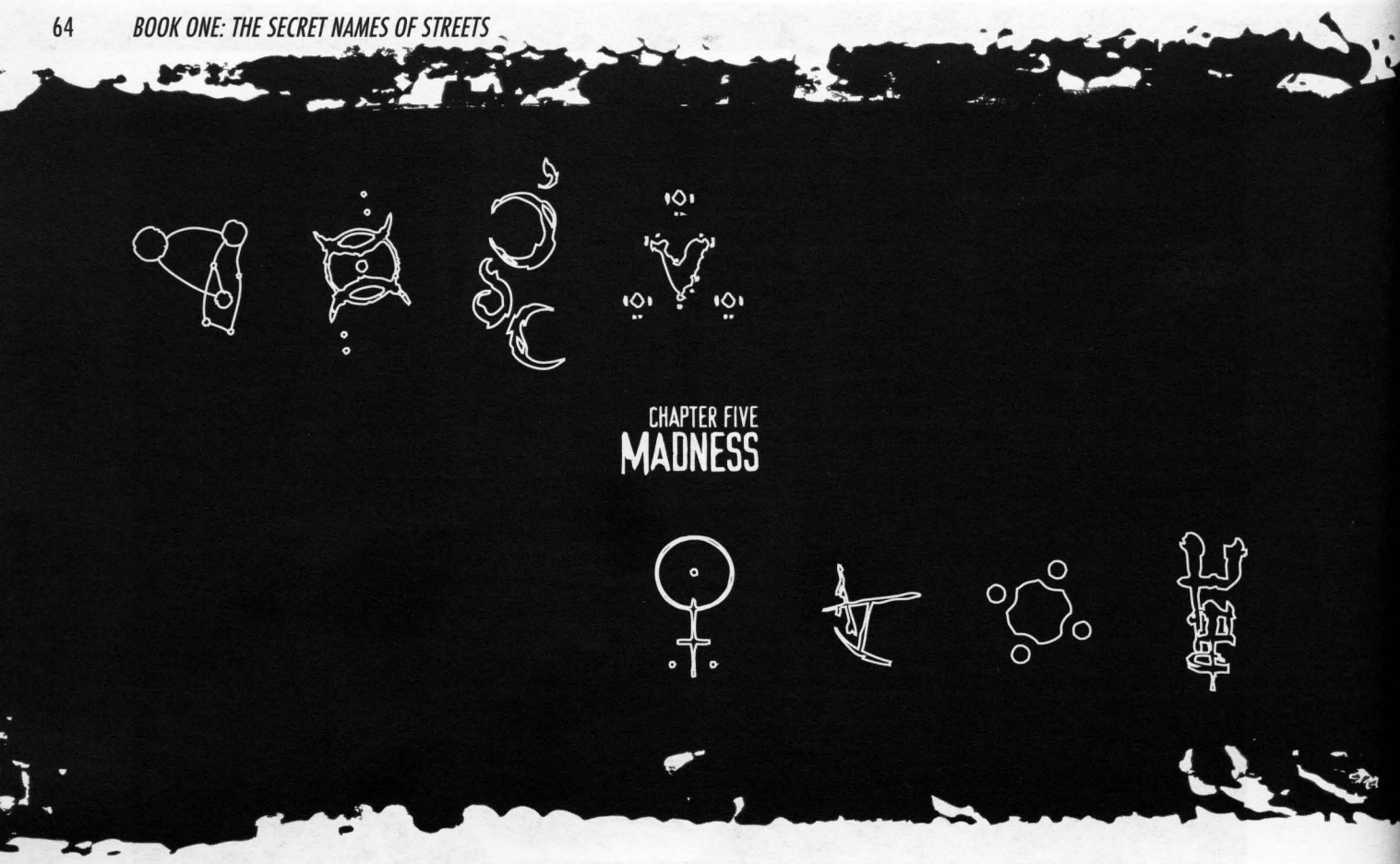
FORENSICS

Every rifle and handgun leaves unique marks on bullets, enabling a gun and a fired bullet to be matched up conclusively. The spent cartridge casing left in the weapon (or ejected to the side) also carries a unique mark from the firing pin that can be matched up as well.

Shotguns are a bit different, however, if you're using pellets (also known as "shot" such as birdshot or buckshot). The pellets cannot be matched with a particular shotgun, but the metal and plastic cartridge casing that contained the pellets can. Semi-automatic and pump-action shotguns kick these used shells out to the side when fired, but break-open shotguns (such as the familiar double-barrel style) keep the shells inside until manually removed. If you want to kill someone and minimize the evidence, use a break-open shotgun and don't remove the spent shells until you're safely away, or use a pump-action or semi-automatic shotgun and pick up the shells before you leave.

When a firearm is used, it gains a distinctive smell and residue that indicates recent use. Cleaning a used firearm thoroughly can make such determinations much harder. However, residue is also left on the shooter. Tiny particles thrown off by the detonation can easily become lodged in your skin, giving away your recent firearms usage. The more time that passes since the firearm was used, the harder it is to obtain useful forensic evidence from the shooter.

Likewise, shooting someone at close range leaves evidence on their body that shows how close you were when the gun went off. The explosion from the end of the barrel actually tattoos the victim's skin permanently with powder burns, if it's within a few feet or so. If this evidence contradicts the story you tell the police, you're in trouble.



CHAPTER FIVE
MADNESS

You're going to face a lot of threats out there, and not all of them are physical. You're going to be exposed to stresses that are beyond the normal, experiences that challenge your mind's ability to fit them into your view of how the world works.

These stresses are measured on the Madness Meters. These are five gauges that measure how resilient or susceptible you are to different mental threats. First, let's explain how challenges to your sanity are handled.

Stress Checks

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

Each stress has two types of notches you can mark off. **Hardened** notches represent stress checks you've beaten, and they are numbered 1–10. **Failed** notches represent stress checks you've blown, and they are numbered 1–5.

Different stresses have different power levels, ranging from 1–10. These are called **ranks**. The higher the rank, the more extreme the stress and the more you're likely to suffer if you fail the check.

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

Example: You face a rank-4 Violence check. You have five hardened notches on your Violence meter. You don't have to roll.

If you don't have a hardened notch at the rank of the stress check, make a Mind roll. If you succeed, mark off the lowest unmarked "hardened" notch on the appropriate madness meter. If you fail, you mark off the lowest unmarked "failed" notch instead and choose one of three reactions: **panic**, **paralysis**, or **frenzy**; these are discussed more under "Getting Crazy" on p. 69. A failure may have other long-term effects as well.

Example: You face a rank-4 Violence check. You have four hardened notches in Helplessness, but that doesn't do you any good. You only have two hardened notches in Violence. You have to roll against your Mind stat of 58. You roll a 47, and so you mark the third hardened notch under Violence. If you had rolled a 64, you would mark the next failed Violence notch and react accordingly.

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

The Violence Stress

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

Sample Violence Checks

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

Failed Violence Notches

1 **At this level, you're superficially fine.** Perhaps you're a little edgy whenever a knife in the room happens to be pointing your direction.
2 **You are very aware of violence,** both as it exists and as it is depicted. It strikes you as somewhat odd that so many people don't realize that movie violence is very different from real violence.
3 **You get alert or uneasy** every time you see blood, even badly faked blood in a horror flick or when someone cuts a rare steak. Sometimes you have nightmares about violence you've witnessed.
4 **You instinctively take a defensive posture** whenever there's a loud noise or raised voice nearby. Your nightmares are frequent, and you have a hard time looking at anyone without imagining (if briefly) what you would do at that moment if they attacked you.

Hardened Violence Notches

1–3 **Superficially,** you're much like everyone else.
4–5 **Your attitude towards violence** shows on your face when the subject comes up in conversation, unless you work to keep it hidden. It might be intensity, or nervousness, or just a grim silence, depending on how you cope.
6–7 **Violence is a common feature** of your mental landscape. Unlike less-hardened people, you show little reaction at all when it is discussed or depicted in fiction.
8–9 **Your callousness shows** in your every word and expression unless you make a continuous effort to suppress it. Again, the exact tone is up to you: it could be bitter and harsh, feverish and vehement, or icy cold.
10 **It's not hard for people to realize** that the deepest horrors of torture and brutality have become commonplace to you, unless you work very, very hard to keep it hidden—which means you come off as tense and guarded all the time. The death of others, or yourself, has no intrinsic significance. You might prefer to stay alive, but it's only a matter of personal taste. Life, in the abstract, doesn't mean anything.

The Unnatural Stress

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

Sample Unnatural Checks

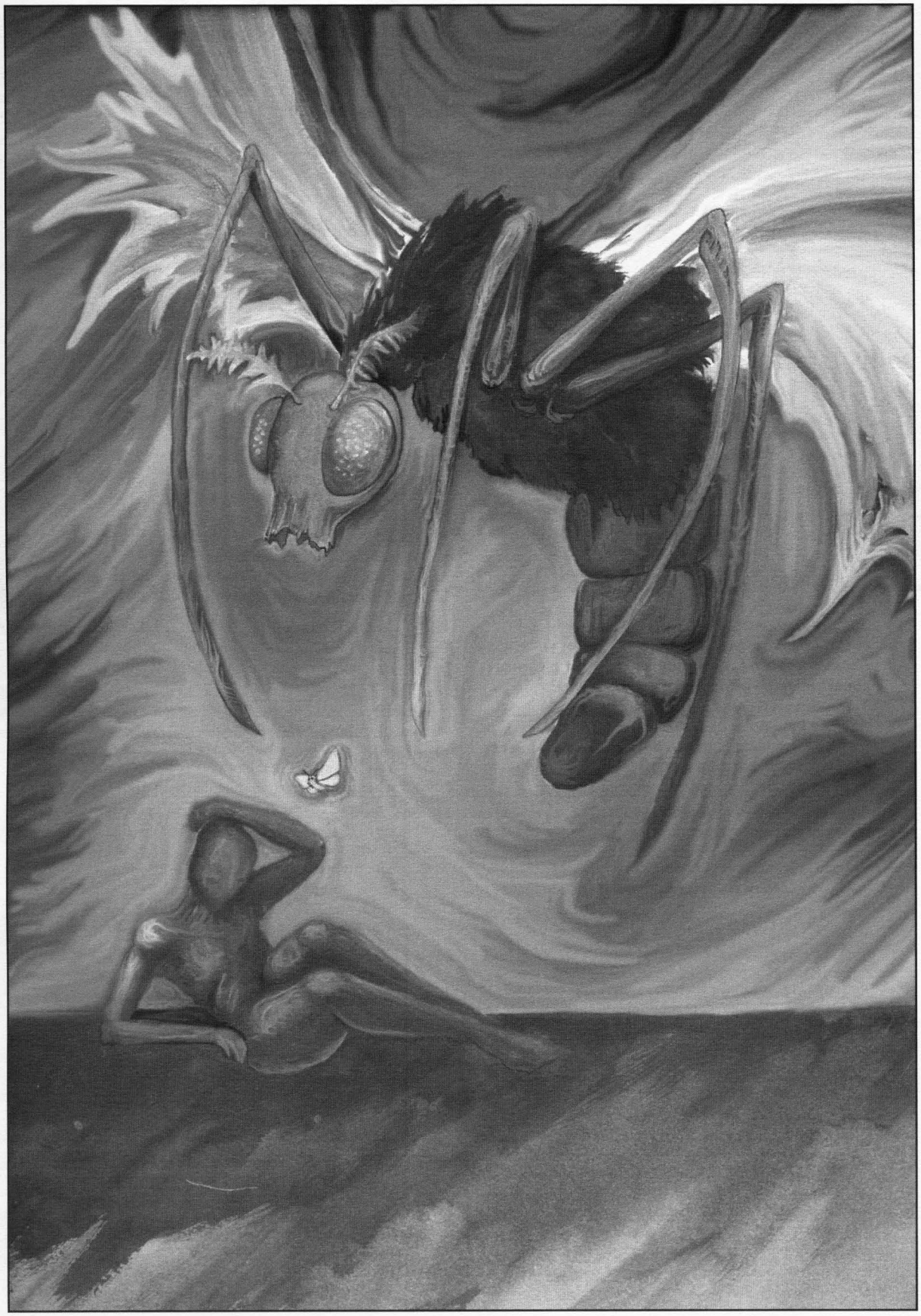
1 Experience a preternaturally strong *deja vu.*
2 See a creature or machine that cannot logically exist.
3 Realize that a vision you had of the future has come true.
4 See convincing proof that 2+2 does not equal 4.
5 Be successfully attacked with magick.
6 See someone you know killed by magick, without any visible or "rational" cause.
7 Have a conversation with a loved one whom you know is dead.
8 See an animal with human features.
9 See the dead rise.
10 Realize that the reason you and your husband of ten years have never had children is that he's not really a human being.

Failed Unnatural Notches

1 **At this level it's pretty hard to tell.** Perhaps you become a little superstitious—reading your horoscope daily, watching for "lucky" numbers, avoiding cracks in the sidewalk, *etc.*
2 **You have a few nightmares,** and you are suspicious of and/or fascinated by occult and religious books, places, paraphernalia, and people.
3 **You frequently feel like you're being watched,** even when there's no one around. Sometimes it seems like you hear voices in "white noise"—sounds like the wind in the trees, the sloshing of a washing machine, or the noises of traffic.
4 **The nightmares are frequent,** and often you don't know you're dreaming until you jerk awake. Sometimes you feel like there's someone—or some*thing*—watching you and you can almost see it out of the corner of your eye. When you whip your head around, there's nothing there.

Hardened Unnatural Notches

1–3 **There's little to distinguish you** from the average person, except perhaps a tendency to snort derisively when someone mentions their "intuitions."
4–5 **You tend to listen very closely and intently** when someone discusses the paranormal or supernatural, trying to figure out if they know something or if they're just talking trash.
6–7 **You now know and accept** that there are vast, incomprehensible forces governing the universe. It strikes you as odd when people act as if they're in control of their lives: you know better.
8–9 **Things that average people** consider "meaningless coincidences" strike you as deeply, intensely funny



UNKNOWN ARMIES

artwork by Ann Koi

because you see the connections that they do not. You may develop a reputation for laughing inappropriately.

10 **You are no longer surprised** by violations of ordinary logic. Everything is "normal" to you—talking foliage, spontaneous combustion, and stigmata are as ordinary and reasonable as cars, dogs, and rain.

The Helplessness Stress

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

Sample Helplessness Checks

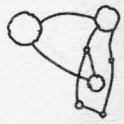
1 Unintentionally humiliate yourself in public.
2 Get fired from a job you love.
3 Fail at something when it's *imperative* that you succeed.
4 Get dumped into a pit of maggots.
5 Spend a month in jail.
6 Watch a videotape of your spouse committing adultery.
7 Be placed in a situation where you have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

Failed Helplessness Notches

1 **At this level you're fairly normal.** Perhaps you're a little finicky or meticulous, trying to eliminate the possibility of something going wrong.
2 **You have a tendency to get unreasonably nervous** and pessimistic when small things go wrong. You may be irritated if a bus is just a few minutes late, or if your computer freezes up.
3 **You have an intense dislike for surprises,** even good ones. They remind you of the essentially unpredictable nature of reality, and that scares and annoys you.
4 **You find it very difficult to trust anything.** Your friends, your own abilities, even your memories could be false, waiting to betray you. You have a tendency towards obsessive-compulsive behaviors such as checking the door to your house two or three (or more) times every time you leave to make absolutely certain it's locked. You attempt to be prepared for every eventuality.

Hardened Helplessness Notches

1–3 **You don't have any major behavior** or attitude shifts yet, just minor things. You tend to be pessimistic and fatalistic, perhaps.
4–6 **Your fatalism has increased.** When things go wrong in a big, bad way, or when trouble comes from a completely unexpected or unlikely source, you handle it with a remarkable lack of affect. (This is not necessarily incongruent with the behaviors of 2+ failed notches: it's perfectly possible to be freakishly calm about big things and freakishly upset about little things.)
7–9 **You have a boundless faith** in the ability of chaos to screw you over. You can easily believe that even the most suspicious of mishaps is simple random chance. ("So my brake cable snapped and my gas pedal got stuck down to the floor. What makes you think someone tinkered with my car? Shit happens.")
10 **The distinction between** "intentional" and "accidental" is pretty much lost on you. Maybe you believe that everything is completely predestined, or maybe you believe that everything in the world happens due to chance. The one thing you find hard to swallow is the idea that we are the captains of our fates.





The Isolation Stress

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



Sample Isolation Checks

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

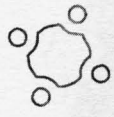




Failed Isolation Notches

1 **You can interact in society** and get through your everyday life with no real problems. You're maybe a little shy with people at first, but you feel a kind of gratitude whenever a new acquaintance doesn't reject you.
2 **You're a bit nervous around new people,** eager to make a good impression. This could be expressed as shyness or through "chatterbox" behaviors.
3 **If you sleep alone,** you sometimes suffer from insomnia. Perhaps you don't like silence when you're by yourself, and always keep a television on or a radio playing. Sometimes, when you're not paying attention, you talk to yourself or think out loud.
4 **Sometimes when you're isolated** (either all by yourself or surrounded by strangers) you have panic attacks—a sense of intangible, impending doom. Your skin flushes, your breath becomes rapid and labored, you sweat. Simply put, you show the signs of being in mortal danger, when there is no danger around.







Hardened Isolation Notches

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

The Self Stress

This is the trickiest one. It's your guilt and self-loathing, but it's more than that. A major stress is when you find out you're not the person you thought you were, by breaking a promise you honestly meant to keep, or by standing idly by when your values (or what you *thought* were your values) are desecrated. It's your sense of alienation from self that provides, perhaps, the deepest terror. Where other meters measure how traumatized you are by things that happen to you, Self measures how traumatized you are by your own reactions to those things. To put it another way, the only thing you can ever really be 100% sure of is "I think, therefore I am." The Self meter measures how uncertain you are about the "I" in that statement.

Sample Self Checks

1 Break a minor promise.
2 Be confronted with proof that your self-image is incorrect. ("I'm very responsible; I'm sure I've called you back every time I said I would." "Actually, you've blown me off so many times I started keeping track in my journal. Lessee, November 19, December 3 . . . again on December 17 . . . January 9 . . ."
3 Secretly gratify an urge that is unacceptable to your upbringing and background. (Spit on a cross if Christian, date a person of another race if raised in a racist home, have a homosexual affair if you come from a homophobic background, *etc.*)
4 Lie to conceal some aspect of your personality from a close friend or loved one who trusts you implicitly.
5 Decide not to act on an impulse from your Noble stimulus (see p. 34) because it's "too dangerous."
6 Deliberately deceive someone you love in a way that is certain to cause them terrible pain if they find out.
7 Discover that you have inadvertently committed an act of cannibalism.
8 Deliberately act completely contrary to your Noble impulse.
9 Kill someone you love.
10 Deliberately destroy everything you've risked your life to support.

Failed Self Notches

1 **You don't have any real kinks yet,** but every now and again you feel a sense of dissociation, an eerie moment when you feel alienated from your own character and motivations. "Sure, I know I'm Greg Stolze," you might think, "but who's Greg Stolze?"
2 **The "who am I?" moments come more frequently.** You tend to become introspective whenever someone mentions "truth" or "lies" or "promises."
3 **Half the time your words and actions** feel oddly forced, fake, or rehearsed to you—as if, rather than yourself, you were an actor playing the role of you.
4 **You frequently feel** like you're watching your every action from the outside. You have little or no sense of will or volition: it's as if you're a passive observer, along for the ride while your body goes through the motions.

Hardened Self Notches

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

Getting Callous

Cops, coroners, and social workers know about getting **callous.** When you've seen enough horror, it loses its power to horrify you. The more hardened notches you have on a single meter, the more it takes for that kind of stress to rip up your head. Once you resist *ten* incidents on a meter—that is, all ten hardened notches on that gauge are filled in—you're so jaded and blasé about it that *nothing* in that category of stress can endanger your mind.

This is not a good thing.

Mental stress makes us vulnerable. But it also makes us human. If you fill in too many hardened marks, you become so completely callous that you are unable to feel fear at all. That's because you are now cut off from a broad range of emotional experiences that everyone else shares. You're "hardened" all right: hardened into an emotional fortresses, completely isolated, unable to make a fundamental connection with other human beings.

You're a **sociopath**:

- ⇨ You become a sociopath when you have all ten hard marks in two or more gauges, or when your total sum of hardened marks exceeds thirty-five.
- ⇨ You can no longer use your passions—the Noble, Rage, and Fear events that represent you at your most intense. You just can't relate to them anymore, and you don't get to flip-flop those passion-related rolls.
- ⇨ If you're an avatar, you cannot use your Avatar skill until you get treatment. Avatars rely on an empathic connection to the global unconsciousness, and sociopaths slam that particular door shut.

GETTING CRAZY

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

If you **panic**, you run away at high speed. You can take no action except to run full out in the direction farthest from what made you panic.

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

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

You act like this until the stress that triggered the behavior is gone. Until then, you must follow your choice. If you frenzy against someone who can beat the holy heck out of you, you *are not able* to run away. You fight until you or your opponent is dead.

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

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

MENTAL HELP: PRE-INSANITY

You can get counseling to help you with your mental problems before you become certifiable—that is, before all the failed notches on one of your meters are filled. To do so, you need a psychotherapist, social worker, philosophical counselor, or another professional you trust. Even if you're a mental-health professional, you cannot perform this on yourself.

The GM decides what your counselor's relevant skill score is. After a few introductory sessions to get trust established, you make a Mind roll and your counselor makes a skill roll on her Psychoanalysis skill for each session.

- ⇨ Any time either you or your counselor get a matched success, you can erase a hardened notch or a failed notch of your choice.
- ⇨ Any time both you and your counselor succeed, you can erase a hardened notch or a failed notch of your choice.
- ⇨ If you succeed and your counselor fails, you can choose to erase any failed notch.
- ⇨ If you fail and your counselor succeeds, you can choose to erase any hardened notch. (Or choose not to erase any notch—and get a lecture on "resisting therapy.")
- ⇨ Any time *both* of you get a matched success, you can erase up to three failed or up to three hardened notches in any one gauge. (You cannot erase some of each; excess erasures are lost.)

Another option is to get **psychological first aid**, though this only works to erase failed notches, not hardened ones. If you've got a friend with psychological training, he can attempt to counsel you right away—as long as you talk to him within an hour of your Mind check failure. Anecdotal evidence indicates that people who get counseling right away tend to do better in the long run. After all, if the counselor can put things in perspective right away, it saves the effort of uprooting an entrenched and sick attitude. If you can get counseling that fast, your counselor makes a roll. If he makes any success, you can erase that failed notch.

PERMANENT MADNESS

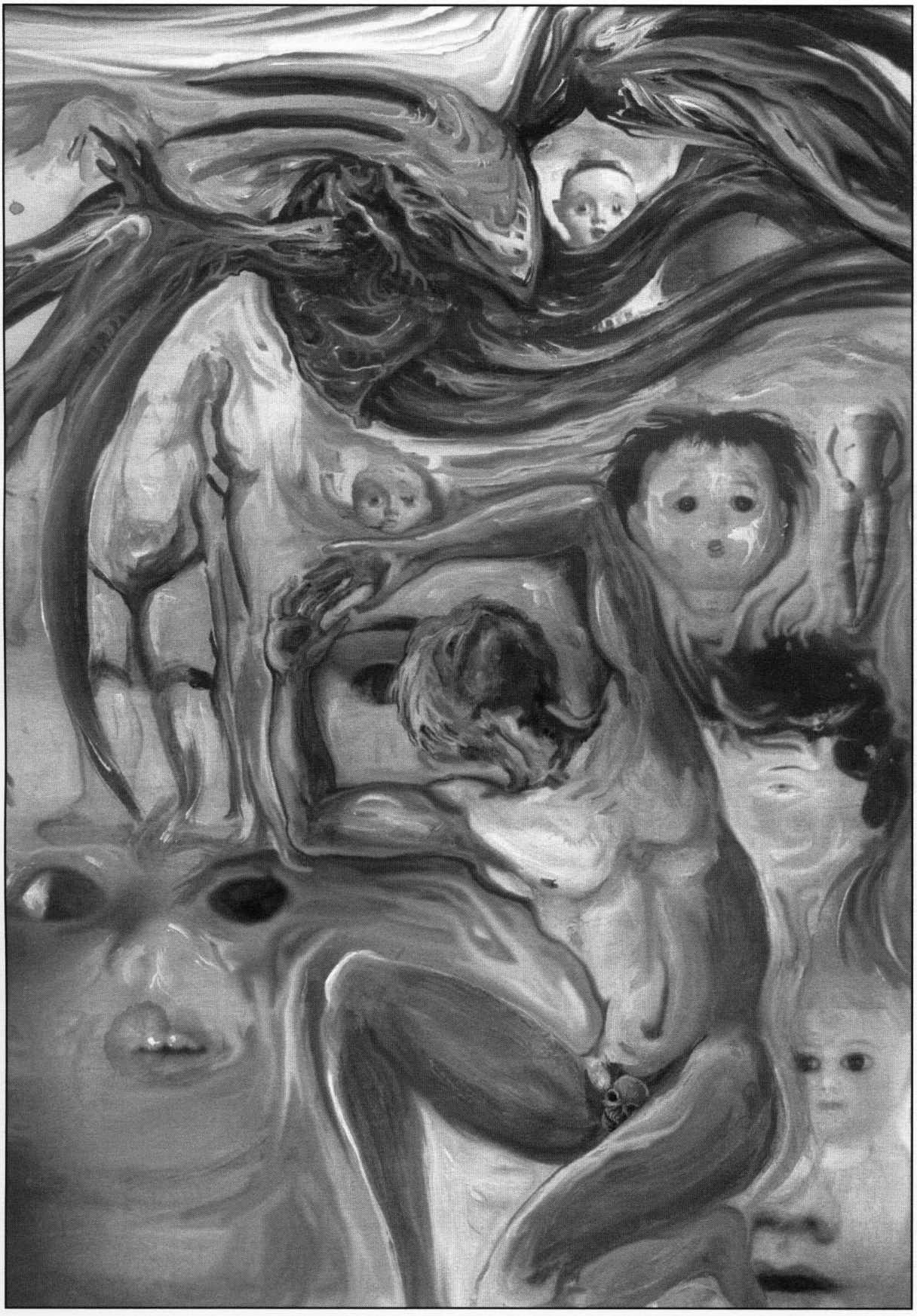
Once you have five failed notches marked in a single meter, you don't have to make stress checks when confronted with that stress any more. You just flee, fight, or freeze as if you'd failed the roll. The only exception is when your hardened notches are enough to void the stress check anyway, in which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

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

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

Some permanent forms of madness include:

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



UNKNOWN ARMIES

artwork by Ann Koi

- **Trauma Bond.** This is like a phobia, but instead of the actual stimulus, you get scared around something incidental to the trauma. If your father molested you in the mornings before work, you might repress your memories of that event but the smell of brewing coffee would set you off.
- **Flashbacks.** This is also known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (or PTSD for short). If you're exposed to any element that was present during the trauma, you're in danger of reliving the event. In the example given above, the smell of coffee might sometimes be a perfectly okay scent for you—but other times, it might make you relive the event. Or sometimes you might flash back from hearing footsteps on stairs, or simply from waking up in a bed that reminds you of the bed where the assault took place. There are many examples of combat veterans who flash back at the sound of fireworks, or when in a setting similar to that where combat occurred.
- **Blackouts.** You can slip into a semi-conscious state and simply wander away in an attempt to flee your past. When you come to, you have no recollection of your flight. These blackouts (or "fugue states") can last for days and cover a lot of territory. You're usually non-violent and seem pretty dazed—you're just wandering away. Threatening stimuli usually snap you out of a fugue. So can the presence of friends or trusted individuals.
- **Addictive Behaviors.** You can smother your memories of the past with any one of the countless chemicals available in this modern world. Alcohol is a perennial favorite—powerful and easily available. Marijuana, heroin, and synthetic depressants might appeal to you because they deaden the pain and make everything seem okay. On the other hand, uppers like 'drines, speed, or coke give you vital illusions of being in control.
- **Philia/Obsession.** You may develop an unhealthy affection for an individual, object, or action that you perceive (for whatever reason) to have "saved" you from the trauma. The target of your affection didn't necessarily have to save you directly—you see some sort of salvation connection that isn't necessarily rational. This philia could result in a desire to constantly be around that person/object/area, or it could result in a compulsive repetition of the saving action. If you said the Lord's Prayer when you were "saved," you might develop an obsession with the Lord's Prayer, say it constantly, carry a rosary at all times, *etc.*
- **Delusions.** You believe something that simply isn't true because it covers up the pain. Delusions in response to trauma can range from flat denial to elaborate confabulations that rationalize or justify the experience.

Mental Help: Post-Insanity

"Permanent madness" is a bit of a misnomer. It's only permanent if you don't get cured. But curing insanity is no walk in the park. By the time you're that badly hung up on an issue, it's sunk deep into your psyche. Seeking professional help at this point is like shutting the gate after the cows have wandered away.

To get rid of a permanent insanity, you need a therapist to rid you of that final, fifth failure notch that drove you over the edge. Your therapist probably suggests residential treatment—often a good idea. You pack up your things, leave your job, and go to live in a residential treatment facility to try and get better. (You can try normal therapy, but as you'll see, it takes a *lot* longer once you've gone mad.)

Every month of residential treatment, or every *six* months of non-residential treatment (normal therapy), you make a Mind check while your therapist makes his skill check. If both of you succeed then you can shake off your insanity and go back to four failed notches in that gauge—you're not stable, but you're okay, and you can leave the residence and go back to normal therapy. If either of you fails, you're still insane. (Matches have no effect on these outcomes.)

Needless to say, it's a good idea to continue normal therapy after this point to work off a few more of those failed notches. Otherwise, all it takes is one failed Mind check on that same old mental stress to knock you back into your insanity again.

Something to Think About

Missing Madness

We have not included schizophrenia and multiple personalities. A great many people have misperceptions about these disorders, and we don't want to reinforce any incorrect information out there.

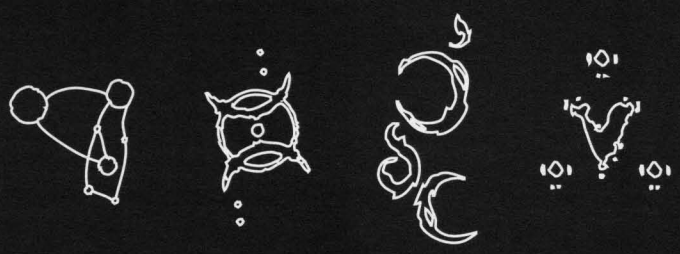
Multiple Personality Disorder (or MPD for short) is believed to be the result of severe and repeated traumatic betrayals in childhood. As one professional put it, "people who go through this sort of treatment end up one of three ways: catatonic, dead, or multiple." But you are an adult, not a child, and for better or worse you face your traumas as a grownup.

We also don't want to split your attention. If you're dealing with two personalities, both may become caricatures. Instead of being one person with two personalities, we'd rather see you be one person with twice the personality.

Now that MPD is taken care of, that leaves schizophrenia. The two disorders are often mixed up, because both are injuries to the sense of self. However, where the self fragments into separate selves in the case of a multiple, in the case of a schizophrenic the self is simply fractured and has a difficult time processing the world or interacting with it appropriately. Furthermore, there's strong evidence for a physical, neurological basis for schizophrenia. (The success of certain psychotropic drugs in alleviating its symptoms also argues for a chemical disorder.) While psychological stresses probably play a part in causing the disease to manifest, it first has to be present (albeit dormant) in the chemistry of the brain.

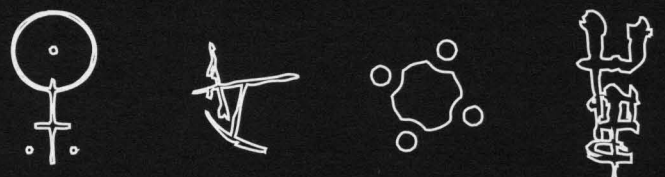
We left schizophrenia out because *we* don't understand it all that well, and because its effects are so varied and intrusive that it would detract from most stories that did not center on it exclusively.

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



CHAPTER SIX

PLAYING THE GAME



You know a few things now. You know who you are, what you can do, and how you can change. You know how to handle yourself in a fight, even if that means slapping a number on your back and making like the marathon. You've even popped your hood and gotten your hands dirty mucking around inside your brains. Now it's time to learn what to do with all this. It's time to play the game.

GETTING BUSY

There are no instructions on how to find the occult underground. You don't get it handed to you on a platter, complete with a copy of *Secret Magick Cults For Dummies*. You have to find it for yourself. The best way to do this isn't spending time in a library or asking your guidance counselor for help. The best way is simple: pick a goal, follow your obsession, trust your passions, and get ready for trouble.

The secret to finding the occult underground is to create it for yourself. You and your group start doing things, learning things, and the fact that you're making things happen attracts attention. Just deciding you're going to be part of the occult underground is like putting out an "Open For Business" sign. You start giving off vibes that tell the right people you're one of them. Next thing you know, there's a knock at the door or a tap on the shoulder and somebody's got a proposition for you.

Get prepped. Start acting like you're a part of the occult underground and it'll become a part of you.

YOUR GOAL

What do you want? Your group wants something, sure. But what do *you* want? It could be something selfish, altruistic, or indifferent. It might coincide with your group's goal, or your group may just be a vehicle for getting what you want. Power? Wealth? Pleasure?

There's something else to consider: what would you risk to get what you want? You might be willing to die for it, or lose a friend, or just lose your job. The more vital your goal, the more it's going to violate the comfort zone of everyday life—and the closer you'll be to finding the occult underground.

Figure out your goal and make a note of it, plus how you're going to achieve it. That tells you some useful things right there. If your goal is to pull a bank heist and retire, the first thing you need to do is hook up with some people who can take down the score.

Here are some sample goals and how you could pursue them:

- **Payback.** Someone whacked your kid brother, and you're out for revenge. You can start by finding the scum that pulled the trigger, but you won't be satisfied until you've gone as far up the food chain as you can. Somewhere, there's a whole system in place that considered your brother's death a necessity. You're going to take down that system one corpse at a time. You need people with street contacts, people with brawn and brains, people who have good reason to help you out. The enemy of your enemy is your friend.

- **Understanding.** You've had an experience you can't explain—your trigger event. You can't just ignore it any more. Go back to where it happened. Relive the experience. Start at ground zero. Find the people who know about this kind of bad craziness. Find someone who has had the same experience. Learn what they know. Make sense of your life.
- **Independence.** You're not living your own life. You need to get out of your parent's house, out of your boring job, out of your loser scene. You have a passion for life and an obsession with something that won't let you sleep. Stick a match in your world and sculpt a new one from the ashes. Quit your job, say goodbye, pack a bag, and hit the streets. Look in the eyes of the people you meet as you walk this strange new road: some of them have the look you see in the mirror, the haunted look of a seeker. Those are your people.
- **Greed.** You want the fly car, the cool clothes, and the mansion guarded by pit bulls in diamond collars. You want the good-looking people lounging 'round *your* pool, drinking *your* champagne, and trying to kiss *your* ass. Forget enlightenment, forget being a better person, forget personal fulfillment and all that Oprah crap. You want *stuff*. More stuff is better, and while people squawk about all that altruistic, social justice, hard workin' American dream bullshit, you've noticed *they* all seem pretty eager for stuff too. There's only so much to go around, so you need an edge: something to get you on the fast track. Unless you'd rather hump the chump change at Arby's and work your way up the corporate ladder. Uh huh. Right.
- **Ambition.** In the final analysis, power is simply the ability to get things done. It is the line that divides those who get what they want from those who take what they're given. In the final analysis, it doesn't *matter* what you want until you have the power to make it happen. A powerless fiend is just as pathetic and insignificant as a powerless saint. It therefore stands to reason that the acquisition of power is an essential step, no matter what *concrete* goal you decide upon.
- **Altruism.** People are hurting and you want to help. The world isn't just or kind, but we can be if we let ourselves. And if you don't, if you choose to be cruel or selfish or to simply look away, then what's the point of being human?

One more thing about your goal: people who get everything they want are dead people. It isn't the destination so much as the journey. It's the friction between what you want to pursue and what you are able to achieve that makes your life interesting. Don't skip to the end of the book just to read the last page. Throw yourself into every single day, make every stage of your goal a lifetime in itself. Think of those Russian dolls, one inside the other. The biggest one is your goal, the thing you're after. It's bright and gaudy and hard to miss. But inside of it are all the experiences you're going to have along the way, and those are treasures and those are surprises and those are the things you want to savor the most.

Your Obsession

Your obsession is critical. When your brain is idle, your obsession is what you turn to. Even when you think of something else, you tie it back to your obsession.

It could be linked to your goal, or to that of your group. But it's not as concrete as a goal. If your goal is to make a million dollars, you could achieve it. If your obsession is wealth, you could *never* have enough.

Your goal is what you plan and do. Your obsession is how you understand the world.

Maybe your obsession is "toughness." This infuses your goal of becoming stronger and more dangerous, but it also colors the way you see every situation. If you witness two people compromising on something, you know neither of them was *tough* enough to make the other cave. If you see a guy you hate drive off with three slugs in his gut, you're furious—but you respect him for being so hard. Even buying a car feeds off your obsession. You want a truck that can take a lot of punishment, but it's also got to *look* tough. It's who you are, and how you want to be seen, because it's the thing that matters most to you.

Somebody obsessed with wealth would see these same things differently. When those two people compromise, he is impressed they're acting like reasonable businessmen and not tough-guy whackjobs. He's angry when the enemy gets away, because the time he's spent taking the guy down is an investment that went bust—and now he has to calculate how much pursuing an angry, wounded foe is really worth. As for a tough truck, forget it. He might pick a cheap car to save his capital for more important things, making it a symbol of his frugality and wisdom. Or he might go for a flashy BMW, a status symbol to display his wealth and an emblem of quality.

Your obsession is the lens you see the world through, the principle you organize your life around, and the key that unlocks all the input you get from your five senses.

Your Passions

Your passions mean a lot to you. They are stronger than reason and intellect. They are stronger than willpower and drugs. They come bubbling up from deep inside you no matter what you do.

When your passions erupt, you lose some control. Those are the times when you are at your most human, the most true to yourself. Your social filters drop away and you are pure existence. They may conflict with your goal, or even your obsession. They may arise at the worst time, and put you in terrible danger. But to deny them is to deny yourself.

Strong people find ways to channel their passions. Maybe you're in a tense negotiation, with everything riding on the line. Something triggers your rage passion and you lose your temper. Use that anger. Instead of just lashing out at the source, reframe why you're angry in the context of the negotiation. Turn your fury to your advantage. If you can.

The GM may set up situations where your passions threaten to defeat you. Don't suppress them. Embrace them, channel them, use them, *be* them.

Opening Your Mind

Going mad is the worst thing that can happen to you short of death. It is a terrible, shattering experience, not a cliché-ridden Oscar-grabbing thrill ride of hammy acting. Don't approach it as an opportunity to get wacky. Respect it for what it is: the ultimate betrayal of your own mind.

Going mad leaves you naked. It robs you of choices. It means your mind has been stressed so hard for so long that in the moment of panic, only primal animal reactions remain. Fight with tooth and nail. Flee headlong, abandoning everything and everybody. Or freeze, shut down, turtle up in hopes the threat somehow overlooks you.

Once the moment passes, the more insidious side of insanity can emerge. A mental illness does not change or replace your essential character. Instead, it often brings that character to the fore in distorted and disproportionate ways. If you were always cautious, you become recklessly violent—but only if the caution was just a mask for a powerfully repressed impetuousness. If you genuinely *were* cautious, permanent madness is more likely to come to you as an *irrational* caution, a disproportionate caution, a caution that makes no logical sense—but which has a meaning to you that transcends logic.

Insanity is the failure of your rational side. It is the death of options. It is when you cannot choose between reasonable paths because you can no longer judge them.

Madness is what you see when you've got nothing left to fall back on.

Closing Your Mind

Getting callous towards threats is a dead-end street. Where's the challenge in being a null? What's the excitement in deadening your head? It also cuts off options. Your emotional inputs are clogged. True, you don't get scared when something nasty happens. But you also couldn't care less when something good happens. You're so emotionally insulated you can't feel a damn thing.

You only have so much "fuel" for your feelings. When you get callous, your emotional gas tank is empty. You're running on fumes. Nothing is worth doing because you know there is no payoff. No pleasure, no sensation of success, no satisfaction in camaraderie. It all loses meaning.

It may be that you dig this for a while. If you approach it as an opportunity to give you and your group interesting problems, maybe there's some value there. But you can't maintain it for long. The bonds that hold you to the group don't last when you're a walking corpse. Make some trouble, explore this terrain, and then fight your way back to life.

When you're ready to fight back through therapy, don't just roll dice. Talk it out. What drove you to this strange place? The rest of your group can help. They might take the roles of other people in therapy with you for a bit, asking questions and probing to the heart of where you went wrong. *Then* roll the dice.

Meeting and Greeting

The occult underground is a conceptual space, not a physical one. But as much as it's a churning fire of ideas, it's also a social network of people. Concepts don't live long outside the brain, and conceptual spaces only exist where people are interacting.

You deal with people based on your personal and group goals, your obsession, your passions, and your mental state. There are times when you really have to strut and challenge. There are other times when you just shut it down and follow the pack. You need to know when one approach is better than the other.

Within your group, you can sometimes justify popping off and letting one of your allies have it. If she's been getting in your face, or disrespecting you, you need to stand up for yourself. But you're a group, not a bunch of punks on the playground. Know when to stand your ground and when to back down. No group goes without arguments, and if you weren't such a passionate person you probably wouldn't be hanging with these people anyway. It's your common drive that brought you together. A big blowup can even strengthen your group, revealing your true selves to each other and finding a way to communicate in the aftermath of fury. The time to do this is not when the chips are down, though. Pick your fight. When you're in the downtime, talking and planning and hashing things out, that's when the time is right to open up and say your piece.

It's different with people who aren't in your group. To the world at large, you can choose the face you show. It's expected. Behave the way you want to be perceived. If that means copping an attitude, or shrugging off the small stuff, don't hesitate. There are still right times and wrong times to tell the world who the hell you are, but treat it as a conscious decision. Don't just fly off the handle.

There's more to dealing with people than conflict. Like the greeting cards say, smell the flowers sometimes. If somebody does well, don't just let it go by. React. Interact. Mix it up. Establish yourself and your relationships with the people you meet. Don't just sit there, watching the world go by, wondering if you'll ever get to roll the dice. You *are* the dice. Roll your own bones.

Go Figure

The occult underground doesn't advertise. If you're going to find it and get into it, you're going to have to ask questions. The more you look, the more mysteries you find. Here's the straight dope on finding stuff out.

Social Engineering

That's what con artists and old-school phone hackers called it when they contacted somebody in authority and talked them into revealing what they shouldn't reveal. The blunt-force approach is lying and intimidation. Tell them you're a cop, or a CIA agent, or a troubleshooter from the home office looking for downsizing opportunities. Or you can be clever. Don't come right out and say you're one thing or another. Just be chatty and confident. "Yeah, hey, I'm supposed to check on that thing that happened last night. Were the passcodes busted or what?"

Sometimes the mystery you have to solve didn't leave any witnesses. Check property records at city hall, blueprints filed with the planning office, newspaper archives, and the ever-popular internet.

Speaking of the internet, you can drop fifty bucks—or a lot more if you hire a real snoop—and get credit records, shopping profiles, even medical records. Most of that stuff isn't legal to access, but legality is the least of your worries right now.

Structure Hacking

The old B&E—breaking & entering—is a time-tested way to get the dope. Hire a pro to lift fingerprints and bribe someone to run them through the big databases. Found a curly hair on the floor? Pay a lab to compare it to samples you've sneakily gathered from likely enemies. Free-enterprise DNA testing is your friend. When billboards advertising "1-800-WHO'S THE DADDY!" offer their services to unwed mothers, you know the days of privacy are gone. Make the most of it.

Getting in can be a pain. Guard dogs, alarm systems, security guards making eight bucks an hour—what's a guy or gal to do? Get a pro on your side and it all turns to butter, or amateur-hour your way through and end up in the paddy wagon with the vomit brothers. Of course, there are rumors of all kinds of freaks in the occult underground who can walk through walls, spy from the astral plane, talk to the dead, or turn dogs into cats. 90% of everything is bullshit but maybe you can find the right duke to lend a hand. She'll want something in return, but them's the breaks.

But why go in when people come out? Park your ass in a rented car all day and play detective. Watch the right people, then B&E their homes—security is low, and chances are good they have papers in their home desk, documents on their laptop, or passcodes that can get you inside the target. Good security requires rigor and discipline, and people are lazy. Exploit their weakness and get what you need to move on. Sharks die if they don't keep swimming.

Data Analysis

Once you get a bunch of scrawled-on napkins, accounting records, and dirty pictures, you have to put it all together into something coherent. You have to solve the mystery. Rolling dice is lame. The GM should be able to tell you enough info about all these clues that you can put the pieces together in your own sweet head. And don't just look at the physical stuff. Think about actions, think about motives. If some people made a move on you, what did they have to gain? Always question intent. And always follow the money.

Making Allies

You can't do this alone. You need allies. Not just the people in your group, but other groups too. There's two ways to make the decision of who to approach: common interest and common sense.

Common-interest allies are like-minded people who fight alongside you because you're all after the same thing. Chances are good you can trust them, as long as you can share whatever it is you're after.

Common-sense allies are those you hook up with to get what you need. President Lyndon Johnson kicked ass when it came to using common-sense allies. Top law dog J. Edgar Hoover had been a major thorn in the sides of JFK and RFK, but Johnson slapped him hard and kept him in line without making him an outright enemy. He even said this of Hoover: "I'd rather have him inside the tent pissing out than outside the tent pissing in." The man knew how to use people. You may end up fighting next to whacked-out psychopaths, but they're pretty good in a fight so what the hell?

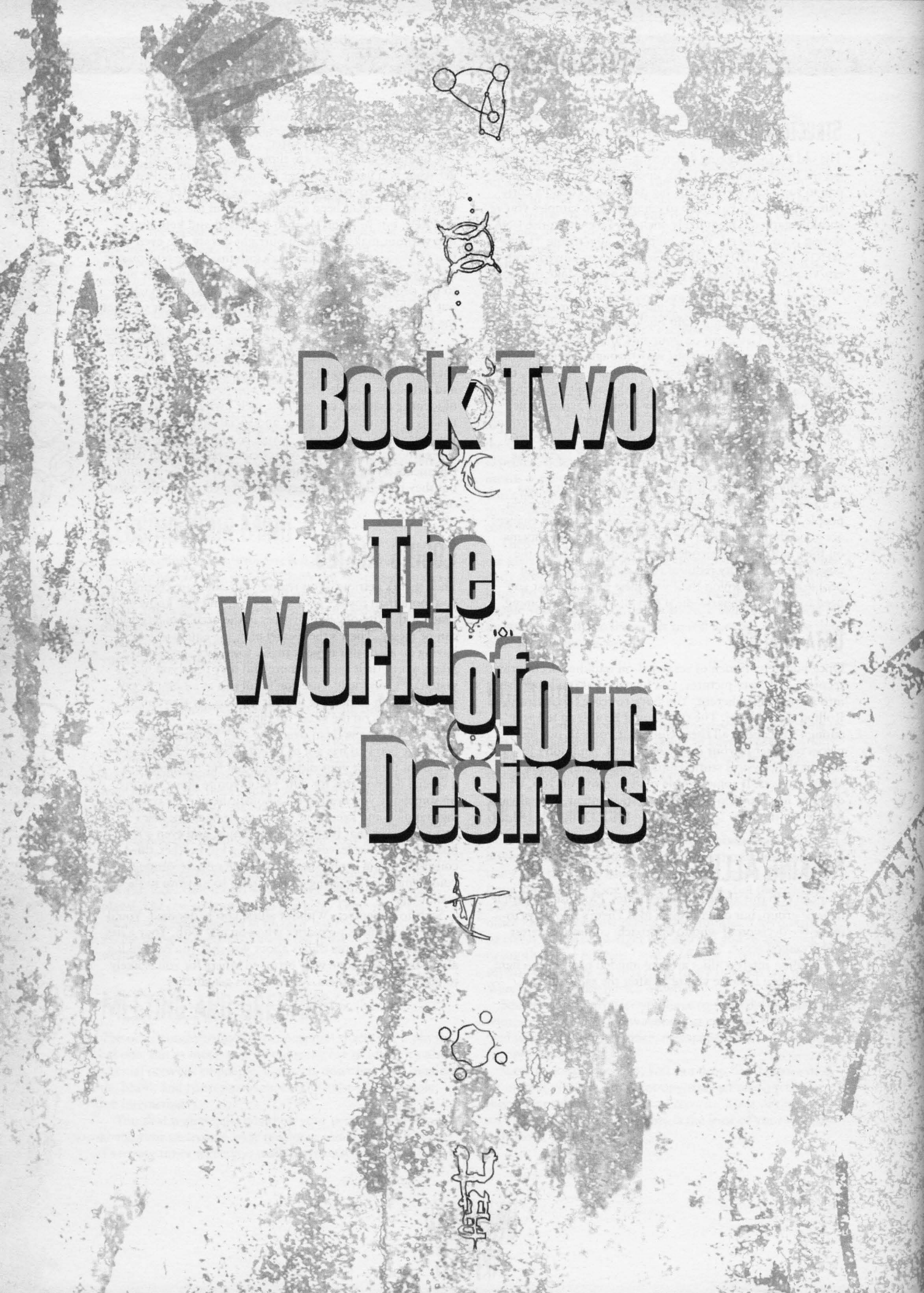
You'll find that a lot of people in the occult underground are stone paranoid freaks. But that doesn't mean they can't cut deals—it just means you have to play to their fears and delusions. People who are so obsessed with the nature of identity that they can reshape their own bodies aren't usually known for their grace and social skills. Back when you were going to keg parties and asking your parents for textbook money, these whackjobs were sitting in dank basements trying to eradicate the id. They may be paranoid, but they probably aren't very sophisticated. Make the most of this.

Losing Allies

Then there's betrayal. You realize your allies are costing you more than they're giving in return, and you know it's time for the kiss-off. But divorces in the occult underground can be messy. There's the weasel play, the equivalent of having an affair just to get caught. Convince them you aren't worth their time anymore and they drop you like yesterday's boyfriend. Just don't pull this at a point where you *are* worth something to their enemies, or they might Judas your ass on the street for dimes.

You could screw them over. The trick to betraying an ally is the betrayal has got to be *complete*. The last thing you want is to see your old penpals out for revenge, with a special delivery just for you. No, if you're going to turn on somebody you need to do a holistic hosing. Leave nothing standing and keep your hands as clean as possible. Just remember that bastards have friends, and even a total hosejob probably leaves some weeping kid brother, third cousin, or secret acolyte standing in the rain, screaming your name, and swearing a blood oath to nail you to the wall. Oops.

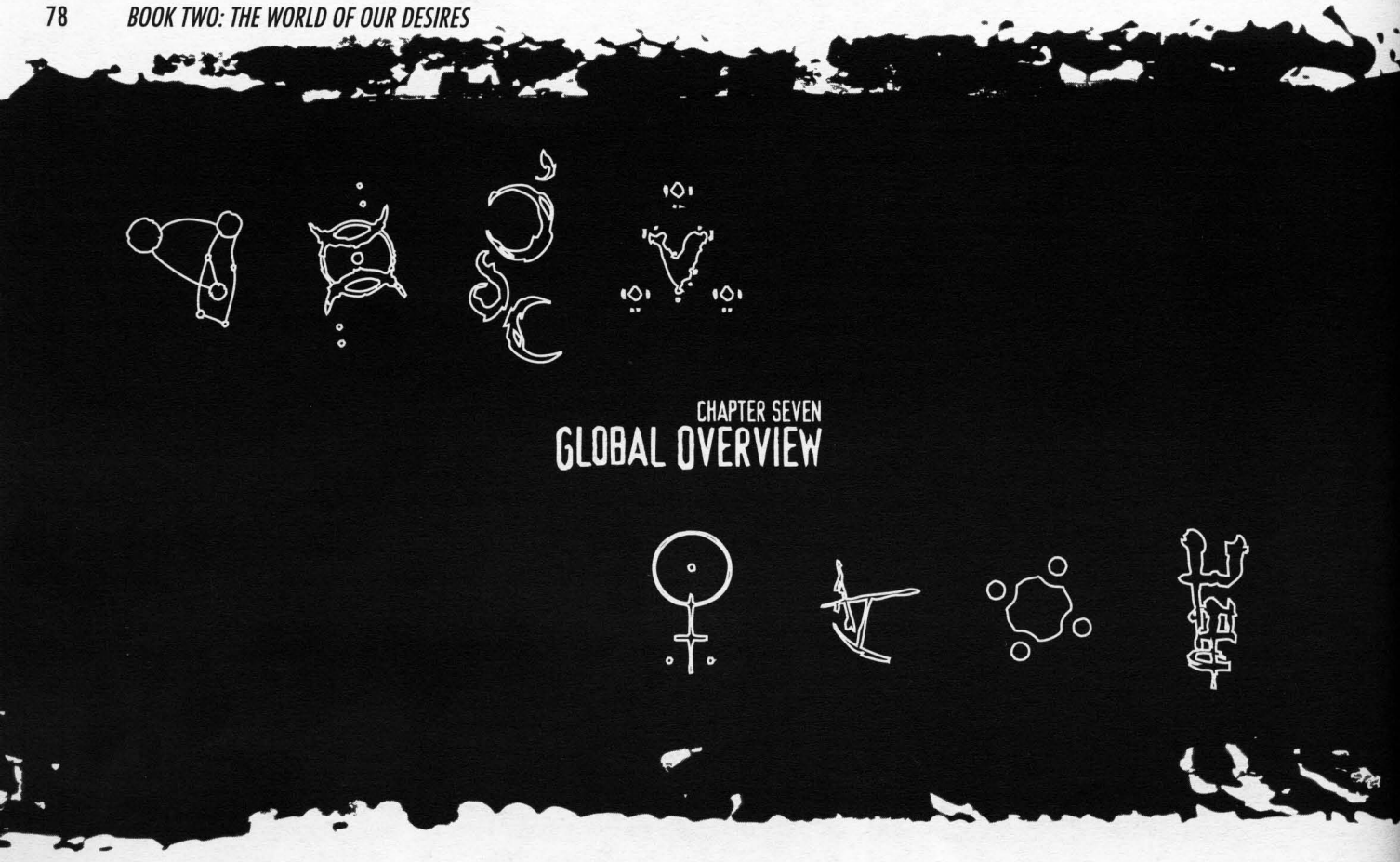
Stuff to remember: Without allies, you're doomed. You'll make new enemies no matter who you ally with. Your allies are thinking the same things about you that you're thinking about them. Someone who betrayed others for you is likely to betray you for others. And snitches get stitches.



Book Two

The World of Our Desires





CHAPTER SEVEN

GLOBAL OVERVIEW

WELCOME TO THE OCCULT UNDERGROUND.

Beneath the living mirror of heaven, above the streets with secret names, there is the world of our desires: the occult underground. You are a part of this world.

The occult underground is not made up of ordinary people. It comprises obsessed visionaries, mystic degenerates, hardcases with doctorates, fallen pagans, renegade scholars, drug-dealing hermaphrodites, actors who refuse to be seen or heard, military vets bent for Masons, children raised as gods, sewer dwellers, kill-crazy psychos inspired by *Logan's Run,* worshippers of cardboard boxes, those who know the language of cats, secret societies of grocery-store clerks, the followers of James Dean, holistic terrorists, stigmatic talk-show hosts, that kid in third grade who ate his thumb, autistic clairvoyants, old souls in new bodies, practitioners of Tantric channel-surfing, JFK-suicide conspiracists, people who believe we *never* landed on the moon, people who believe *they* landed on the moon, and people who believe they *are* the moon.

And these are your people.

And you are one of them.

And every one of you knows a secret no one else understands.

That it's not enough to merely believe in something.

That you have to *become* that belief.

That the world is you and when you change yourself the world changes too.

The mundanes can't figure you out. It doesn't matter if you punch a clock at an auto shop or collect a six-figure salary at a global conglomerate. It's not important if you're the most reliable person at your job or if you get fired every couple months. You just have this vibe that tells the straight world not to look too closely. Normal people who get into your life get out again pretty damn quick. They don't understand that what you do is not who you are.

In the occult underground, your people love you. If they don't love you, at least they understand you. If they don't understand you, at least they tolerate you. If they don't tolerate you, at least they fear you.

Beats the straight world any day of the week.

UNKNOWN ARMIES

artwork on previous page by Samuel Araya
background painting by Matt Harpold
photomontages by Haroudo Xavier

WITNESS: AMANDA WILKES, PRIVATE DETECTIVE

Once you've found The Weird, The Weird finds you. I don't think this is any kind of Zen voodoo karma bullshit. I think people just talk.

When I was a cop, I had the bad luck to get assigned The Case of the Hijacked Bloodmobile. After we solved it, my partner Barney and I got painted with the *X-Files* brush until he requested a transfer to Wire Fraud and started telling everyone that *I* was the oddball. Thanks, Barney. Thanks a lot.

It got ridiculous. Not right away, but it wasn't really all that gradual. It was more like every cop in Baltimore realized that they could shaft me with the freakshow mumbo-jumbo and that I wouldn't Section-8 or drop the ball. If they'd been at all grateful, I'd be there still, but oh no. No, they had to make me a *big joke* for taking the cases that scared them. They cracked wise about the Homeless Shadows, and the Bowlegged Buddha. But after that nutjob with the samurai sword got strangled, they started to twitch whenever they saw a lariat. And don't get me started on the Erotic Fireworks.

I went into private practice, and damned if the crazy crap didn't stick. Not every case—I paid my bills peeping on lonely housewives, or doing routine security checks for small corporations—but every now and again, some other weirdo with a sad story and a copy of *The Golden Bough* would wash up in my office. Most of 'em were a few Wands short of a Tarot deck, too.

I'll never forget the day Coe Williams came in. She looked bad. Not just uncertain and underslept, but *bad*. Like a drying-out junkie with no track marks, or a drunk gone sober without the gin blossom nose. She was withdrawing from something, and it wasn't long before she told me what.

"My baby is gone and no one believes me."

She didn't just up and say it, of course. She introduced herself, and I asked if a Coe wasn't a type of fish, and she said her father had been a fisherman, and I asked if she didn't get a lot of jokes and she said most people didn't know the word and, besides, a lot of pleasant afternoons on the lake with her old man made up for it. Normal banter. I hadn't even got The Weird feeling off her, thought maybe she was another one-man woman with a two-woman man, until I asked what her problem was and she told me.

I blinked.

"The father?"

"Gone. Dead, actually." Didn't sound like she missed him much.

"You've gone to the police?"

"According to the police, I don't have a baby."

"Yeah?"

"Birth records, gone. My obstetrician remembers nothing. The birth certificate is gone from my house. I think they took it when they got him." She was starting to get worked up. "My co-workers don't remember me being pregnant. The insurance records aren't available."

"Ms.?" I asked gently. "How well do *you* remember him?"

She flushed red. "I remember enough," she said, but her tone told me just the opposite. "And if I never had him, where did this come from, huh?" With a sudden jerk, she pulled her shirt up, revealing stretch marks and a transverse caesarian scar. I looked away, but not quick enough: I could still tell it was professional—and fairly recent.

"I know I gave birth! I remember the labor even if I don't remember everything. I'm lactating, dammit! I can't hear another baby cry without leaking, without *feeling him gone*!"

"Memories." My mouth was dry, because this unfortunately *wasn't* as mysterious to me it could have been. "I think I may have some idea what happened here. Your boy wasn't born the same day as Stonewall Jackson or Jefferson Davis, was he? Don't know? Go find out, go to the library. Before you do that though, get a long dress. Not just a skirt, a full dress, and it's got to be blue." I dredged through my mind, trying to remember other symbols, other portents. "Get some moonstones if you can. Spirals are good too."

"What are you talking about?"

"You're his mother, and that's protected you somewhat. I'm trying to give you some more camouflage. There's a jeweler on Baker street, Wim Stevens. He can help you out. Tell him I sent you." I stood up and started to unlock the bottom drawer of my desk.

"Where are you going?" she asked, puzzled and afraid.

I got out my Glock and checked the magazine. When I answered, I hoped my dread wasn't audible.

"I'm going to Gettysburg."

hsxf

WITNESS: STAN ABRONSKI, DAY TRADER

The police don't have a clue.

They think they have plenty. The killer uses acid, they think. They're probably scouring chemical supply records, questioning teachers, searching classrooms. They think the killer does it in the victims' homes, restraining them somehow and then applying the acid in fetishistically precise arcs and patterns. They're looking for fingerprints, footprints, hair. They're looking for connections between a poor black waitress, a real-estate salesman, a local delivery trucker, and a brilliant grad student. Joene Cotes, Charlie DeSoel, Brandon Dell and Myra Rosario. Some person who knows them all, who saw them all. Some connecting factor.

It's right in front of their noses and they haven't got a chance of seeing it.

The pattern is *always* there, and it is almost always invisible.

Almost always.

Joene Coates, phone number 555-4137. Address, 7 West Willow. DeSoel, phone number 555-4264, 11 Cedar Bluff. Dell, 555-5705, 13 Deerfield Road. Rosario, 555-6633 at 17 Mill Place Southwest.

It's all there. All so obvious.

The last four digits of Coates' phone number add up to 15. DeSoel's adds up to 16. Dell adds up to 17 and Rosario to 18. And the addresses: 7, 11, 13, 17. A litany of prime numbers.

The police are helpless. They'll never find Lorch. He didn't have to be inside with them. He could tear them open with his eyes, peeking through a window, watching with a spyglass. He didn't use acid. He used will and logic and a few false primes in the universal digistructure. Molecules are surprisingly delicate. Change a few constants and they just fall apart. I've never killed anyone with it, but the principle is solid.

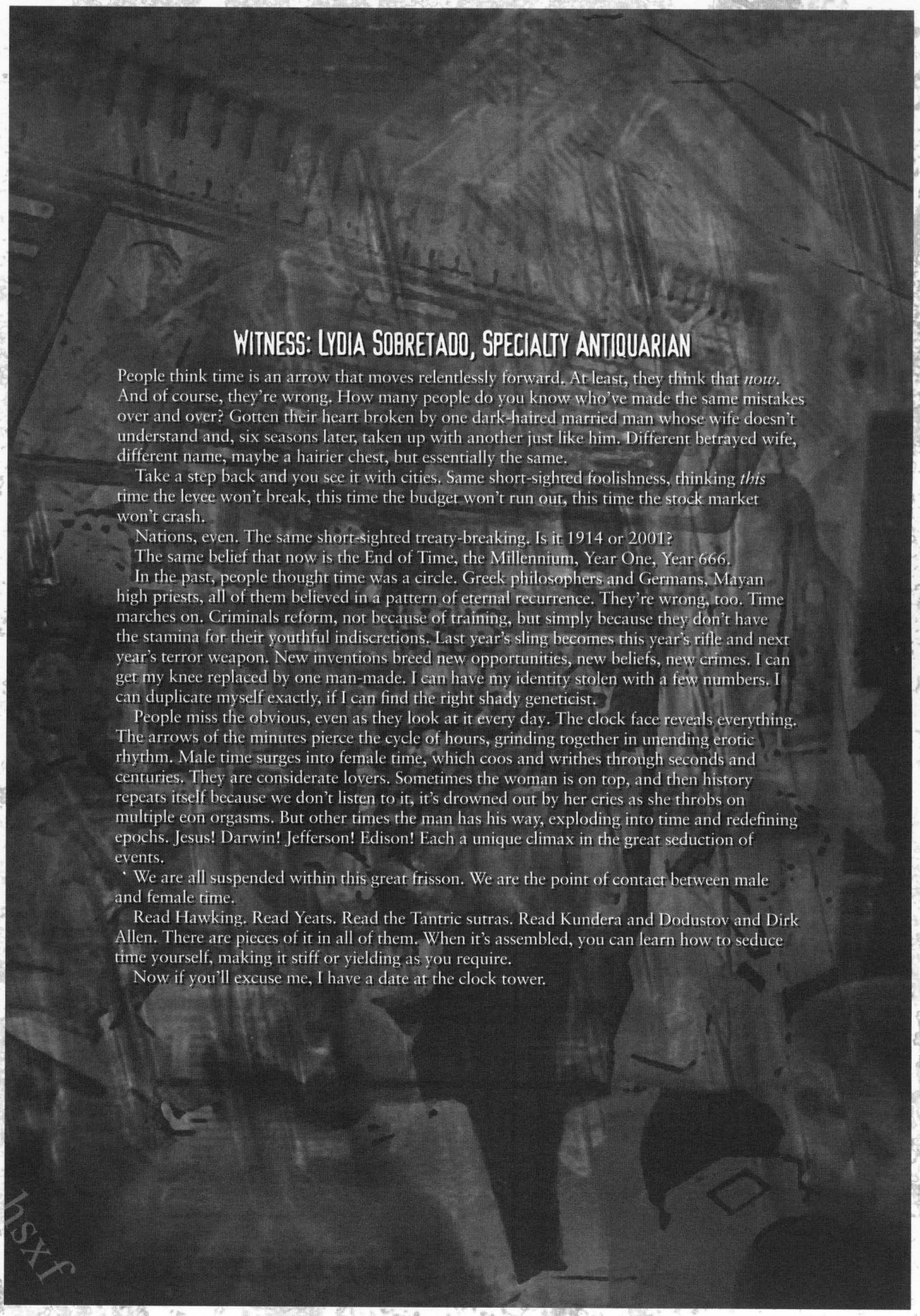
All four of them are just points on the curve. He's building a pattern. There will be two more murders before he makes his move. I'll be number seven. A prime, of course. My last four phone digits add up to 21. I live at 27 Fordham Drive.

I haven't worked in days. Half the time I'm at the phone book, looking for the next two victims. Maybe Ian Murdoch, 555-5185 at 19 Sedge Point? Or will it be Maria Racine at 555-1387 at 19 Campbell Court?

There's got to be a third dimension to his pattern. A third axis focusing in on me. But what is it? Birthrates? Driver's license numbers? Altitude of their homes? I've got to find out what it is so I can start building a pattern of my own.

This has gone on too long, far too long. Lorch needs to be stopped. I've got his schedule, and his presence at each of the crimes compels him to adhere to one element of a pattern. I've got some backup elements, too: the victims' middle names all have five letters so far, much like Mr. Trevor James Lorch. If I can find a third element, something that fits after he does the next two, I can beat him at his own game.

The pattern is a prison for us both. But I'm making a gun out of soap.



WITNESS: LYDIA SOBRETADO, SPECIALTY ANTIQUARIAN

People think time is an arrow that moves relentlessly forward. At least, they think that *now*. And of course, they're wrong. How many people do you know who've made the same mistakes over and over? Gotten their heart broken by one dark-haired married man whose wife doesn't understand and, six seasons later, taken up with another just like him. Different betrayed wife, different name, maybe a hairier chest, but essentially the same.

Take a step back and you see it with cities. Same short-sighted foolishness, thinking *this* time the levee won't break, this time the budget won't run out, this time the stock market won't crash.

Nations, even. The same short-sighted treaty-breaking. Is it 1914 or 2001?

The same belief that now is the End of Time, the Millennium, Year One, Year 666.

In the past, people thought time was a circle. Greek philosophers and Germans, Mayan high priests, all of them believed in a pattern of eternal recurrence. They're wrong, too. Time marches on. Criminals reform, not because of training, but simply because they don't have the stamina for their youthful indiscretions. Last year's sling becomes this year's rifle and next year's terror weapon. New inventions breed new opportunities, new beliefs, new crimes. I can get my knee replaced by one man-made. I can have my identity stolen with a few numbers. I can duplicate myself exactly, if I can find the right shady geneticist.

People miss the obvious, even as they look at it every day. The clock face reveals everything. The arrows of the minutes pierce the cycle of hours, grinding together in unending erotic rhythm. Male time surges into female time, which coos and writhes through seconds and centuries. They are considerate lovers. Sometimes the woman is on top, and then history repeats itself because we don't listen to it, it's drowned out by her cries as she throbs on multiple eon orgasms. But other times the man has his way, exploding into time and redefining epochs. Jesus! Darwin! Jefferson! Edison! Each a unique climax in the great seduction of events.

We are all suspended within this great frisson. We are the point of contact between male and female time.

Read Hawking. Read Yeats. Read the Tantric sutras. Read Kundera and Dodustov and Dirk Allen. There are pieces of it in all of them. When it's assembled, you can learn how to seduce time yourself, making it stiff or yielding as you require.

Now if you'll excuse me, I have a date at the clock tower.

WHAT YOU KNOW

Religion, in all its mainstream and alternative forms, has got it wrong. Sure, ideas like the Golden Rule and Karma are good ones. There's a lot to learn from all religions.

But they aren't *practical*.

You believe God is in His heaven? He's sure not returning phone calls.

You follow Buddha or Allah or Shiva? They don't reward you with jack except maybe inner peace, and you can buy that shit downtown for fifteen bucks a pop.

But humanity itself? Belief in humanity pays you back. Karmically speaking, humanity has the loosest slots in Vegas.

This world was shaped by human hands, guided by human will, riven by human strife. We have no one to blame but ourselves, and no one to thank but each other.

We live in the world we deserve, because it's the world we made. This is the world of our desires.

THE AFTERLIFE

The afterlife is what religion is usually all about, right? So this is the straight dope: the occult underground is just as divided about the afterlife as everyone else. But here's a few things that have come to light.

There are people who can speak with **demons**. That's what they usually call them, anyway, because every single entity anyone has ever successfully contacted in the afterlife has been evil, to use a loaded term. They may not seem so at first, but they are. Evil. Every last one of them. That doesn't mean they're from the Christian vision of Hell, but they're from *someplace* and they're pretty pissed about it, whatever it is, so "demon" is as good a term as any. Demons are best known for telling lies and trying to take over your body to wreak havoc among the living. Steer clear.

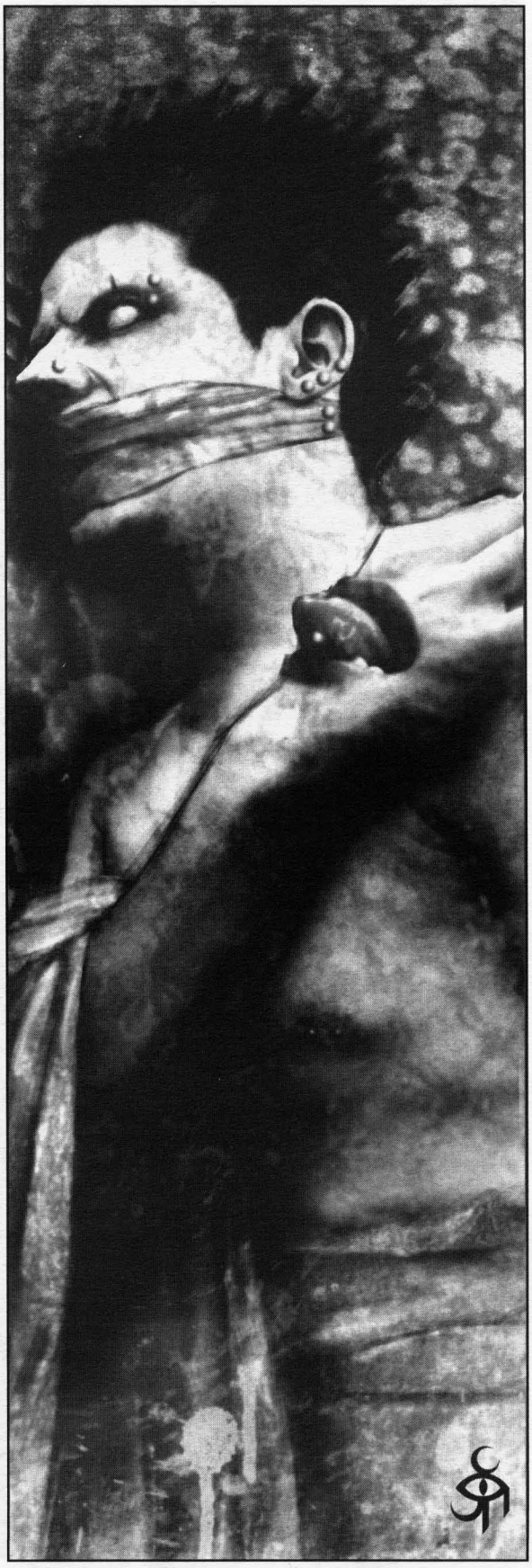
Some think demons are our only contact point with the afterlife because good souls pass on to a better place, and only the bad souls keep in touch. Others think death corrupts the soul as well as the body, that the afterlife is a metaphysical grave in which our identity rots away. Most people in the occult underground just interpret demons according to whatever worldview they've got going on.

Trafficking with demons is not unknown. But they're the supernatural equivalent of ebola virii: you have to know what you're doing to handle them, and even then you can die horribly.

Disturbingly, there are things in the afterlife even demons fear: **the cruel ones**. We only know about the cruel ones because demons have told us about them, and they're rather biased. The cruel ones could actually be angels, or guardian spirits, or who knows what.

Demons also talk about something called **the veil**, but their explanations contradict each other. It might be the wall between the living and the dead, or it might be the space between demons and the rest of the afterlife, or it might be where the cruel ones live.

The problem with the straight dope on the afterlife is it all comes from demons. And demons are evil and they lie all the time. But they've apparently got the monopoly on the truth, so people keep trying to shake it out of them. If you're smart, you'll find better things to do with your time.



artwork by Samuel Araya

MAGICK

Magick changes to suit its times. Every earnest young punk has a theory about how magick works and why it takes the form it has, but there's no professor to grade the papers. No one knows nothing dead sure.

There is a story, though. It's the story of magick. This story is the baseline from which most theories deviate. You gotta know the axis to plot the wave. So the story of magick goes something like this.

Way back in ancient times magick was primal. Most anybody could do it, small time or big time. It was innate, instinctual, like a weird form of breathing.

Then language started getting rigid. Writing made this happen. Magick got less improv and more rehearsed, more codified. Less powerful.

Each society hardened its consensus belief in *how things are*. Creation myths solidified. Who first made fire. The boy who spat out the oceans. That sort of thing. Magick ritualized and narrowed, weighted down with storytelling and oral traditions and customs of clothing and food preparation and all kinds of garbage. When magick filled up with enough garbage it collapsed into the dogmatic dump of religion.

First thing religion likes to do is turn off the magick spigot, restrict it to the priests and the shamans and the other people savvy enough to join the power structure. Magick for everyone else was little more than prayer, meditation, even superstition. If the religions shared magick with the people, it was for rare ritual events like adulthood or childbirth. People lost magick and replaced it with metaphysics, which is like abandoning your lover so you can masturbate more. Where magick once flowed free and in diverse forms, it now trickled out in a scattered but homogenous drizzle.

Macrosociety—civilization—pushed magick to the fringes. But as the centuries sped by, magick found a friend. When religion got too big and ran short of enemies, it responded by kicking science out of the house. Science and magick found each other in the dark ages and started making out. Alchemy was their first love child, and mad scientists like Issac Newton saw no distinction between these two great human arts.

The advance of reason brought magick into modernity. Modernist magick in the Renaissance took ritual and made it formula. Occultists drafted laws of magick the way scientists drafted laws of physics, each inspired by the other, minds embracing and exulting in freedom and discovery. Their goals were the same: reproducible results.

It sort of worked. Magick flowered during the Enlightenment and beyond, making converts wherever it bloomed. And the pinnacle of modernist magick was Clockworking, younger sibling to alchemy and the favored child of the twin arts, the cross-breed between naturalism and supernaturalism. The rationality of cogs and gears married the irrationality of magick, and in a symbolic declaration of independence from the past the Clockworkers sacrificed their own memories to fuel their creations.

But then magick stood still. Formalized and hidebound, it ground to a halt as technology rocketed forward. The notion of symbolic sacrifice grew quaint and eventually foolish, given the power available from gunpowder, or steam, or the atom itself. The Spiritualist movement at least offered an alternative to religion in terms of the afterlife, and its mutant cousins started by Mathers, Blavatsky, and Crowley helped open some minds. But they also ladled worthless ornamentation and cosmological onanism on top of the pure truth of what magick really was. By the late 20th century magick was simply irrelevant, and most of it just didn't work anymore. The spark was lost, and as with the decaying religions only the hollow rituals remained.

The American counterculture changed that. The symbolic inversion of the civil rights movement, where outsiders became insiders, fed the varied freedoms of the hippie years that the Spiritualists and the Beats had set in motion. Researchers into ancient cultures helped bring back or reinvent old mystical traditions, and ditched much of the new dogma slathered on by the Victorian mystics. Formula fell first, and ritual followed. Magick got postmodern. It was once again something anyone could create from moment to moment, with their own idiosyncratic symbologies no one else need understand. Everyone could, as they said, do their own thing.

Postmodern magick blossomed in the 1980s, finally reuniting with its instinctual and diverse origins. New forms of magick cropped up everywhere. Old-school occultists gave them names and tried to codify them, but the truth was quicksilver. Magick worked the way each person believed it should, and to hell with what the books said.

Sometime in the early 1990s, it became fashionable to say there was a new wave going on. There was, but it wasn't pretty. What the gloomy 1970s had been to the counterculture, the 1990s were to the occult underground. Power and money got involved in weird ways, creating schisms and rivalries. Murder and betrayal became more common. There was a millennial tension in the air, and a sense that time was running out. People in the occult underground imagined themselves as players at a cosmic poker game, and the pot was the world itself.

Today it's all over the map. A lot of nasty hardcases got whacked in the late '90s by others who were nastier but smarter. The tide of tension has rolled back into the sea of the unknown, and a fresh rain has fallen on the magickal soil. It's a time for new beginnings, for new ways of working magick, and for getting serious about doing something with your life.

People realize they can make a difference. They can change the world. They know magick is both a precious gift and a terrifying responsibility. It remains, as always, the collision point between the human condition and individual will.

ADEPTS

There are people who understand magick down to the bone. You could be one of them. If you have an obsessive worldview, a way of seeing reality that most people don't understand, you could have the force of will you need to be an **adept**.

Adepts practice an advanced, underground form of what some people call chaos magick. They take their personal obsessions, their secret symbols, their idiosyncratic desires, and they use them to work magickal rituals with real results.

But one adept's pleasure is another's poison. Because this magick is so personal, it relies on a passionate, furious adherence to a particular worldview. There are people who work magick based on the complex patterns of their city. Others

need to get drunk, to chase the enlightenment that beckons from beyond the fuzz of alcohol. Some get off on money, both for its own sake and for the symbolic power that exists in every transaction. For a few, true control comes from cutting themselves with razor blades, and they can invert that control so it affects the world around them as well. No two adepts are exactly alike, and none can really relate to other systems of magick. Each adept exists in a walled-off reality bubble where their obsessive belief skews everything in unpredictable but symbolically coherent ways.

Adepts swim against the flow of reality. They believe bizarre, illogical things and they do so with more passion that most people can muster for believing the obvious. It is this contrary effort that gives them their power. By defying reality with unbounded faith, sundering it with paradox, and battling it with behavior they can win limited fights against it. They can push back the boundaries of *what is* and colonize the territory as *what I will.*

The mundane world does not make sense to adepts, in very personal and profound ways. To those who find power in drunkenness, sobriety is disorienting and threatening. The adepts who work magick with their blood and skin are frightened by the concept that ideas could exist independent of flesh. Being an adept is not a job, like that of a janitor or a forklift operator. It is what you are.

To be an adept, you must filter every observation and every situation through an arcane kaleidoscope. Your obsession is so deep you think in symbolic magickal terms 24-7. It's the only way you know how to live.

Avatars

Not everyone in the occult underground is an adept. Most aren't, in fact. Some take a different course. They are less obsessive, more deliberate. They dip their bowls in the waters of the mass consciousness, panning for archetypal roles that the entire population of the planet has invested with its will. If most people are law-abiding citizens of the cosmos, and adepts are its purse-snatchers and stickup men, then avatars are its welfare cheats and embezzling bureaucrats. They exploit the rules instead of breaking them.

When they succeed, they can walk the path of **archetypes** like the Warrior, the Pilgrim, or the Masterless Man. As long as their behavior aligns with the mass conscious image, they are **avatars**, and they gain magickal powers associated with their archetype.

Every archetype is like a story. People who know the story and who help the plot along can cash in on the predictable ending. They can wear their red cloak into the forest, confident the woodcutter will be along to kill the wolf. Pick your wolf, don your cloak, and start walking the path through the forest of the collective unconscious. The longer you walk the path, the more powerful you become. If you stray, your power ebbs.

Avatars can be hypocrites. They need not be obsessed with this persona, for a persona is all it is. It's a suit of clothes, an attitude, a set of symbolic behaviors that attune them to the power inherent in the world at large. They are going with the flow of reality, not standing against it. At a performance of *Hamlet,* the audience does not care if the actor in the title role is genuinely conflicted. They only care that he *demonstrate* the conflict. So too the cosmos.

Yet avatars need not be hypocrites. There are those who are fully sincere. The red cloak they wear is their own skin, and they know no other path through the woods. They are closer to adepts than the rest of their flock, except they believe their worldview is shared by reality itself. Many of these avatars are devout followers of African-influenced spirit religions (like Voudoun, Candomblé, or Santeria), or saint-worshipping offshoots of Christianity, or some other totem-spirit style of belief. The core archetype they follow is glimpsed through the mask of Erzulie Dantor or Saint Patrick or Coyote, and they believe their powers descend through the elevator of religious faith.

But the majority of avatars have a different approach altogether. They are ignorant avatars, those whose normal actions lead them to follow the path of an archetype and avoid its taboos. They have no idea that they're walking a path, or even that a path exists. They can't see the forest *or* the trees. They occur because the only way an archetype becomes an archetype is if millions of people accept it unconsciously. And when an idea is that widespread, it has a significant chance of being practiced in pure form but at random. But ignorant avatars rarely advance far along the path, for the higher levels of avatar power require more dedicated behavior.

There are rumors of a greater kind of avatar, of a point at which you actually become the archetype incarnate and leave your humanity behind. But there are rumors of lots of things.

Other Magick

Magick doesn't stop there. It's the cheat code of the universe, the shortcut between will and action. You've heard of people who have **artifacts**, physical items that have acquired a distinctive magickal bent their possessor can exploit. Others you've met spend all their time pursuing **rituals**, old-school magick spells from modernist times that litter the footnotes of human history. Most rituals do nothing, relics of a time and a belief that have passed. But some still hold power usable by the credulous, while others are traps for the unwary.

Dukes and Cabals

The occult underground is more than magick. It is also people, the mystic wanderers among hidden landscapes—the people whose ranks you have joined. The common slang for lone operators in the occult underground is **duke**.

Dukes are fervent, fixated, and highly motivated. They quest for secrets and they keep the ones they find, for a secret loses its power when too many know it.

Secrets make them dangerous. It is said that two can keep a secret, if one of them is dead. The history of the occult underground is littered with the battered and the slain, starry-eyed visionaries and steely psychos alike, people who died on the long march towards their desire, victims in the children's crusade of enlightenment.

Even microbes work in teams. Dukes are no different. They hook up with others who have similar goals, or similar beliefs, or similar perversions. These groups are known as **cabals**, and while there are hundreds, maybe even thousands of cabals, there are some that most everyone in the occult underground has heard about.

There's the **Sleepers**. The bogeymen. The self-appointed watchdogs of mystic society. They want magick to stay underground, so they cull punks who can't keep the mojo

in their pants. If you make too much noise, if you try to go public, if you melt a cop's face in broad daylight, you get a visit from these guys. They might let you live, they might kill you fast, or they might make such an example of you that your name becomes slang for misery. They've been around for hundreds of years, longer than any other cabal. No one lasts that long unless they're good at what they do. Don't fuck with them.

The New Inquisition has bought their way to the status the Sleepers earned. Some say they work for the U.S. government, or for the Catholic Church, or even for Bill Gates. Whatever their story, they have money and talent and an agenda nobody understands. They send out teams of adepts, computer hackers, assassins, ex-gangsters, and other specialists. They're not afraid to kill people, steal magick, and generally burn their way through the occult underground to get whatever they want. But they're also professionals, in that old-time Mafia sort of way: you can deal with them if you're smart and play fair. It's the people that cross them who get nailed. These guys turned up in the early 1990s, and their **hit squads** are legendary: stone-cold freaks in raincoats and surgical masks who use silenced weapons to take people out.

The geeks in **Mak Attax** used to be everyone's favorite punch line. They're a bunch of idealists who probably voted for Nader. Their gag is they all work minimum-wage jobs for the world's biggest fast-food franchise, which they swear is somehow tied into ley lines or some other bullshit. Subvert from within, you could say. They're trying to bring about a magickal renaissance or change the world or make everyone vegetarian, depending on which of them you ask. They do this by pumping magick into the food, so that normal people get a little juice. The reason why they aren't a punch line anymore is because they hijacked New Year's Eve Y2K and pulled off the biggest magick act in the history of the world—or so people say. The Maks keep their mouths shut about just what they did, but their cred sure went way up. They're earnest and hopeful and probably deluded. Join them, exploit them, or fight them, but don't ignore them.

The Sect of the Naked Goddess is on its own very weird trip. They're mostly women, but not all. They worship some kind of Goddess, and try to recruit people to join them. They would just be yet another new-age group except that their Goddess really exists, or so the story goes. In the late 1990s this bootleg videotape started floating around that was raw footage from a porn shoot. This woman is getting down with two jocks when suddenly she turns into blinding light and vanishes. It's the freakiest damn thing you've ever seen, so freaky that just watching it weirds you out in a life-changing way. That woman is the Naked Goddess, and the tape shows her ascension into Heaven (or whatever). The Sect is based in Chicago, but they've been expanding across the country. Just what they're really up to and what they truly believe is a mystery to you.

There's lots of cabals and dukes who are more rumored than seen. The free-ranging **Agents of Renunciation** are said to turn your identity inside-out, but nobody knows why—maybe just for shits and giggles. There's **the Church of Death Triumphant** in Los Angeles, who are either a bunch of loser pervs or the bringers of the apocalypse. San Francisco is divvied up between the **Sternos** and the **Fellowship of Bad Traffic**, while the midwest is mostly known for lone dukes like the late **Stealin' Dan McKay** and **Neil Brinker**, the lucky loser. Something called **The Freak** haunts wet dreams and nightmares from Milwaukee down to Gary, Indiana, while in St. Louis you can find **Vis Valetudo**, a group that worships angels, drinks their own pee, and can cure cancer through deep-tissue massage. **The Eye-Biting Man** murders unchecked throughout the northern U.S. and southern Canada, if he's not just an urban legend. Oregon is home to **The Freebusters**, who would be easy to dismiss as a pack of drippy comsymp hippies if they hadn't taken down the **New Salem Coven** with what seems to be a combination of sympathetic magick, rattlesnake venom, and spleen-crushing Kung Fu. No one's quite sure what's going on with Austin's **Ordo Corpulentus**, but they keep getting fatter while their enemies disappear. The cycle gang **Heaven's Devils** get their kicks on the Route 666 spur in New Mexico, claiming they're rumbling demons for Jesus. New Orleans has no-shit **Voudoun** and a hotline to the afterlife known as **The Juice Bar**. Tampa Bay has the ritually priapic **Bone Pirates**. Maine's fishing industry boasts a nail-tough cabal called **The Jinxes**, while out in Jersey there's **Satan's Chosen Temple**. New York City has a couple adepts worth the name—the seer **Rose Cranston Crowne** and **Bony Toni Marconi**, both tough (or stupid) enough to use their real names—but besides them, NYC has been a magick wasteland ever since the Sleepers took the mojo out of it decades ago. Of course, there are a thousand stories about 9/11, none of which anybody believes. There are also plenty of old-school legends that mostly crackpots credit, including alleged undying dukes like **Nicolas Flamel**, the **Grail Knights**, **Cagliostro**, the **Eight Immortal Sages**, or **le Comte de Saint-Germain**. And some joker always brings up the goddamn **Illuminati**.

THE OCCULT MAINSTREAM

The occult mainstream exists anywhere there's a New Age bookstore. People who attend psychic fairs, consult palm readers, remodel their house for good *feng shui*, get treated by psychic surgeons, read books by Carlos Castaneda, Kenneth Hite, Dirk Allen, and Trevor Ravenscroft, or have their auras cleansed by crystal-wavers—they're the occult mainstream. So are those who believe in faeries, angels, vampires, or Ramtha. Satanists, Raelians, and Wiccans are all charter members. If you've accepted the paranormal into your life, you're in the occult mainstream.

What separates it from the occult underground is that in the occult mainstream, nobody knows jack about adepts and avatars and cabals. They don't know any magick that produces practical results. They've got their own thing going, but it ain't the real thing.

There's probably a thousand people who have fooled around with Milton Bradley's *Ouija* for every one person who's successfully cast a ritual or found a school of magick. But the occult underground moves within the occult mainstream all the time, like a small darting fish in a big ocean. You will too. Here's why.

PROTECTIVE COLORATION

Poisonous snakes like tall grass because it keeps them hidden. Those in the underground like moving in the mainstream because they meet people who don't flinch at topics like "Thelemic Rituals" and "Alchemical Fusion." The underground has more misfits and obsessives than any *Star*

Trek convention could ever boast, and some of them use the mainstream to figure out what society expects normal occultists to act like. They imitate the guy with the pendulum and the tie-dye shirt so when the cops want to know who's been digging up the graveyard, they lump the occult hardcore in with the occult mainstream and keep looking.

Canary in the Coal Mine

Underground dukes who are drawing heat should keep ties with the occult mainstream. That way, when the FBI stops by the Sacred Pyramid Bookstore to ask about weird customers, you get the word as fast as the crystal-wavers do. Pretend you're all in it together.

Looking for Luke Skywalker

Aspiring underground Yodas in search of willing Lukes can find them in the occult mainstream. Worshippers, followers, acolytes, apprentices, or household slaves are yours for the asking if you can do a little razzle-dazzle.

Needle in the Haystack

Looking for somebody who knows what's what, or maybe just has a wild talent you need to borrow? You're better off trolling the occult mainstream than you are the public library or the Rotary Club.

Nookie

If you've slept your way through the punks and the rockers and the goths, you can still look for disposable love in the occult mainstream. It's where you find people who get turned on by magickal fervor instead of sitcom punch lines. Linger there a while: it's the last stop before *Man From Atlantis* fans.

The Occult Underground

This is where the real action is. It's the loose network of people who know about rituals, cabals, and genuine power. They've seen magick up close and personal, they know there's more to this world than the cross and the crescent, and they have some ideas about the way things oughta be.

But there's no membership card, no employee manual. Like conspiracy theorists or UFO watchers, hardly anybody agrees on anything. The occult underground is divided along all kinds of lines: different gangs of course, but there's cliques that ignore cabal lines. There are divisions regarding cosmologies, the true nature of magick, and whether or not there's really a Saint-Germain. Any one person in the underground can hang with several divisions at the same time. It's a three-dimensional Venn diagram where everything overlaps but nothing stays static.

It does nobody any good for a group of like-minded weirdoes to just take their toys and go home. Even when they're riven by discord, people in the occult underground stick together. Here's why.

Community Policing

If you think you're going to be up against the wall if the squares ever wake up and smell the freakshow, you've got a vested interest in supplying deodorant to the other freaks. Members of the underground with little in common work together when it means self-preservation. Otherwise the Sleepers might do it for you. You really don't want that.

Facing the Unnatural

People in the underground are most likely to recognize unnatural phenomena for what they really are, and with the psychological benefits of exposure they're the best equipped to deal with them. If Ghostbusters actually existed you could call them, but instead you're stuck doing it yourself.

Barter

A pornomancer can't do jack with JFK's coffee mug, but a boozehound sure can. Info and artifacts circulate within the underground, a shadow economy of symbols and portents.

Good Fences

Knowing that the teenage spastic with the skateboard can turn your insides to jelly is helpful the next time he dents your car. When everyone knows what's what, you're all safer from each other.

Bragging Rights

Your mom probably doesn't give a shit that you just copped a major charge or found The Six Eyes of Samuel Lewis. Maybe your obsession feels a little bit hollow if there isn't somebody around to appreciate what a glorious monster you are. In the underground, you can harvest the admiration or fear of the only peer group you truly respect.

Loneliness

Simply put, it's *hard* to follow an occasionally self-destructive belief system all by yourself. Normal folks just don't understand why you're hammering nails into your sinus cavity, or spending all your money on rare books you can't even read, or why you can't miss that rerun of *Ally McBeal* even though you've seen it five times already. Other people in the underground may seem weird or spooky or just plain wrong, even to you, but at least they pony up for your next rent party.

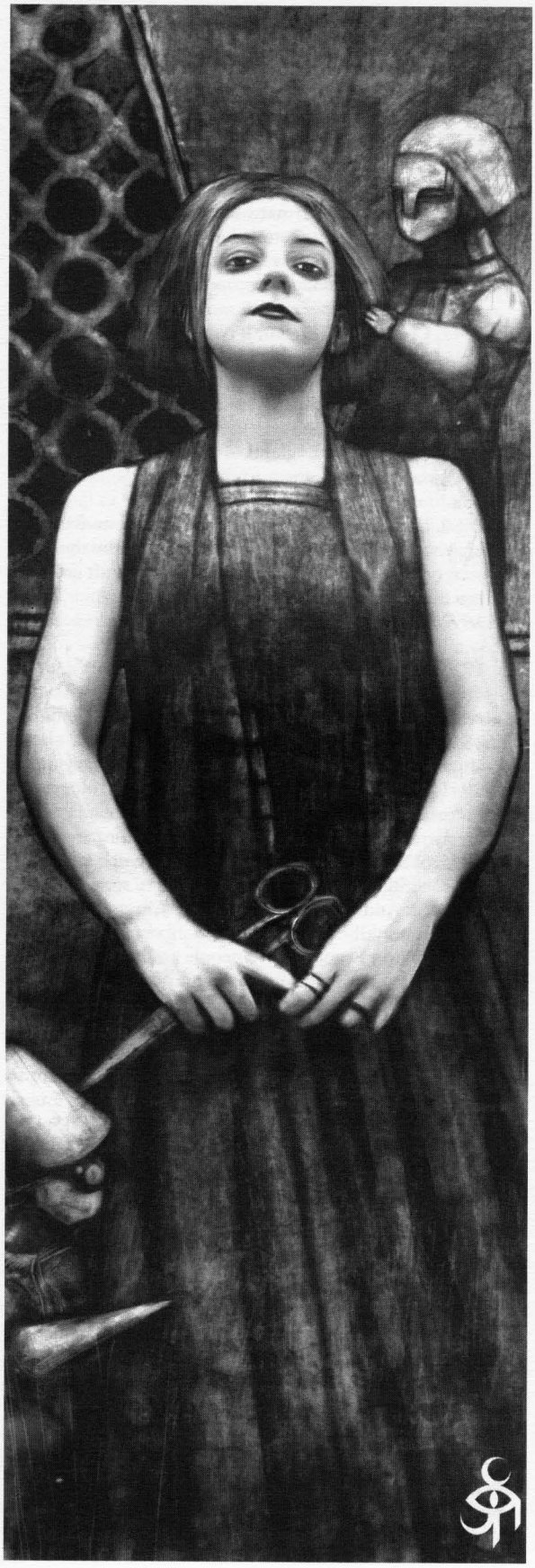
Under-Undergrounds

The two biggest circles in the occult underground are those occupied by adepts and by avatars. Each side has its own view of the way the world works, and of course they're both right in limited ways. Really, each is its own underground.

The Adept Underground

Many adepts are weird, kooky recluse types. They're the crazy old man down the street, or the burnout who lives in a rusting school bus up on the ridge. They have their warped worldview and their freak obsession and they just do their own thing, getting more and more screwy until they run out of heart medicine.

They don't matter. Not unless you hit a baseball through their window, as it were, in which case they get ornery fast.



artwork by Samuel Araya

Don't poke them with a stick and they keep to themselves.

But the rest tend to be more social, especially if they live in cities. Certainly their friends are people whose lifestyles fit their obsessions. Booze mages kick back with other hard drinkers, not adepts bent for history or underwear. Drug alchemists move in the drug scene and chance enchanters haunt floating poker games. Adepts with different obsessions just don't have a lot in common unless an agenda or obligation takes hold. There's some overlap, but it's not like they get together every month and argue over bylaws and who brought donuts last time. Still, urban adepts do seek out others of their kind for the same reasons everyone in the occult underground does. But because of its transgressive, obsessive nature the adept underground is characterized by gossip, suspicion, and posturing.

Occasionally, of course, genuine friendships develop. Even more rarely, a city's adept underground has a majority of members who are secure enough to eschew petty politicking and secretiveness. (San Francisco *used* to be like that.) These lucky cities develop undergrounds that are genuine societies: groups of people who spend time together because they *want* to, because they have similar goals and values, and because they leave meetings feeling better than they entered them. But such cities are few and far between.

The Avatar Underground

Conscious avatars hook up as often as adepts do, and maybe moreso because avatars on the same path are likely to have more in common than adepts in the same school. Adepts tend to develop their obsessions in childhood, and even two adepts who see the world through the same goggles can have radically different attitudes and behaviors. The subtle nature of most avatar powers and the less-extreme behaviors most paths require also make it easier for avatars to blend in with normal society. With less need to hide from the teeming masses—and, by extension, the Vatican's rumored murder patrols—they also feel less need to hide from one another.

Local avatar undergrounds aggregate according to how the avatars perceive the source of their powers. Adherents to Santeria form their own little zone, and so do South American alt-Catholics. They may act out perceived rivalries between their perceived patrons, but are rarely overtly violent and destructive.

In some places, avatars believe their powers come from a specific goddess or god. That makes anyone following "false" gods an enemy to be dealt with in a harsh and possibly permanent fashion.

Still other avatar groups say they're psychics who are attuned to aspects of Jung's collective unconscious. They don't have religious motives for their activities, but they may be just as vindictive as those who believe they've got a divine mission.

One particular social danger for avatars is that, as they rise in power and get closer to the archetype, they come to rely on it more and more as the shape of their own identity. Consequently, when they perceive something as a threat to their archetype they're likely to consider it a direct and personal threat to themselves.

Low-level avatars are more likely to get along than those at the top of their game. For some reason, powerful avatars have a very hard time sharing the path.

Competing Undergrounds

The adept and avatar undergrounds overlap within the larger occult underground, and even within the still-larger occult mainstream. But they rarely recognize each other as disparate traditions, one based on transgression and the other on adaptation. Each is far more likely to see the other as a flawed or retarded version of itself.

Adepts who encounter avatars are likely to consider them fellow adepts. They can transgress reality, right? Or at least manipulate it to their advantage. If an avatar tells an adept her theories about the radio-like attunement of channel powers, the adept is unlikely to take that at face value. He's likely to pityingly regard the avatar as someone who has *kind of* learned some half-baked school of magick with very few effects.

Similarly, an avatar usually sees an adept as someone who's following a really weird archetype and who has delusions about a bunch of extra nonsense being necessary—the equivalent of a Blavatsky or a Crowley. To the avatar, the adept's own ego is standing between her and the cosmic power that the avatar can more readily tap.

All this assumes that a mystic practitioner of either stripe would be forthright and open about his power. That almost never happens. Secrecy is power, and revealing any information that someone might use to deduce your weaknesses or limitations is an act of great trust or great foolishness. It's why Achilles never told anybody about his bum ankle.

Consequently, most people in the underground are very secretive about how their personal magick works. Not only do avatars and adepts rarely understand each other's true nature, very few adepts are able to understand other *adepts* if they're from different schools. Similarly, avatars who encounter other avatars often conclude that the stranger has a distorted or mistaken understanding of the observer's own archetype. They may not even imagine that there are other archetypes just as powerful as theirs.

The Claws of the Tiger

You and three of your worst enemies are in a room together, and your enemies all hate each other, too. You're ready to cut loose and settle scores. But there's a sleeping tiger on the floor between the four of you, and none of you can leave.

That's the situation for the occult underground. There's all kinds of groups out there. The weak ones want what the strong ones have. The strong ones aren't big on sharing. The small ones want to be big, and the big ones want to be secret. Almost every group has a reason to think the other groups are evil, deluded, dangerous, envious, or simply annoying.

Then there's the tiger, snoozing on the floor. Sometimes its nostrils flare, scenting fresh meat. Sometimes it yawns, revealing a set of death-chisel teeth.

The tiger is the clueless general public. Right now, the public hears about magick and thinks of David Copperfield. But if anyone gets too careless, the tiger is going to wake up and all the occult groups put together couldn't stop the public from making them all into tiger snacks.

That's why the Sleepers do what they do. That's why the occult underground is an underground. That's why smart dukes do it in the dark.

Don't believe in the tiger? You don't have to because the tiger believes in itself. Here's what happens when it wakes up.

- **186 B.C. Rome.** Senate reacts to rumors of magick use and cannibalism by Dionysian cults; executes at least seven thousand Bacchantes.
- **1307. Paris, France.** Knights Templar arrested and executed for alleged sorcery and heresy.
- **1513. Geneva, Switzerland.** 500 accused witches burnt.
- **1586. Trier, Germany.** 120 accused witches burnt for prolonging the winter.
- **1621. Heidelberg, Germany and Paris, France.** Suspected "Rosicrucians" stoned by mobs; philosopher René Descartes narrowly escapes mob justice in 1623.
- **1628. London, England.** Accused sorcerer John Lambe stoned to death by a mob.
- **1645. Chelmsford, England.** Nineteen accused witches hanged by self-appointed "Witch-Finder General" Matthew Hopkins.
- **1651. Niesse, Silesia.** Forty-two accused witches burnt alive in an oven.
- **1666 Westminster, England.** Astrologer William Lilly questioned by Parliament for predicting the Fire of London; narrowly escapes execution.
- **1680. Paris, France.** Thirty-seven executed and 146 imprisoned after a three-year investigation by the Paris secret police into Black Masses and witchcraft covens reaching into Versailles itself.
- **1692. Salem Village, Massachusetts.** Nineteen accused witches hung.
- **1727. Serbia.** Accused vampires murdered throughout the country; similar "vampire panics" strike Istria, Slovenia, Hungary, and East Prussia.
- **1844. Carthage, Illinois.** Mormonism founder and angelic contactee Joseph Smith lynched by angry mob.
- **1941. Berlin, Germany.** Hitler orders all astrologers, Freemasons, and other occultists into the camps, fearing astrological influence on Hess' defection.
- **1945. Warwickshire, England.** Alleged witch Charles Walton killed.
- **1948. St. Andre-de-Briouse, France.** Alleged witch Leon Bunot killed by a fearful neighbor.
- **1949. Quito, Ecuador.** Five people are burned alive in a radio station after a *War of the Worlds* hoax is broadcast; eleven others badly injured.
- **1991. Chicago, Illinois.** Romanian secret police murder leading scholar of magick Ioan Culianu.
- **1998. Java, Indonesia.** More than two hundred people lynched as suspected "ninja sorcerers" by angry mobs.

What You Hear

People in the occult underground like to talk. Sometimes they're even telling the truth:

There's a woman in Louisiana who deals in eyes. She can change your sight. You want to see the world like a child again? Or, maybe you'd like to *not have seen* something?

Those games kids play—"step on a crack" and all that—are actually rituals that do stuff, but you've really got to believe in them. Kids believe in them, but don't know what the rituals really do. That's why kids can survive all kinds of troubles that would rack up an adult.

The best seer in America is a woman who lives in the redwoods in California. She's called "the owlwoman" and she can tell what's going to happen to you if you bring her three live mice.

The secret rulers of the world—Count Dracula, Merlin, and the Wandering Jew—meet every year that ends in a zero in a private club in the West End of London named the Mandragora Arms to discuss "business" for the coming decade.

There is a cabal operating in fast food restaurants who want to take over the world by drugging the most popular fast food with powerful magical drugs.

The internet is one big engine. The faster the information flows, the more power it generates. If anyone could find out how to harness this power they could rule the world.

Brendan Behan's pint glass sits behind the bar in a Dublin pub. Any who drink from it have words flow from them, but at what price?

All those cell phone towers aren't really for cell phones. They are built by the government agency known as CTAP, who found a way to harness innate magical energy from unsuspecting people. What they are going to use it for is still unknown.

The president is actually a clockwork under the control of a cabal of seven teenagers.

Nearly every nursery rhyme originated as teaching tools for magicians. You don't even want to know the magickal meaning of "Three Blind Mice."

Dolphins evolved from humans millions of years ago.

Cats are powerful alpha-wave generators and are being used by secret government agencies as a renewable source of energy.

The ice-cream guy at the corner of 9th and Liberty keeps a talking human head at the bottom of his cart, under the dry ice. For a silver dollar, he'll let you ask it one question; it knows the identity of everyone who wants you dead—and why.

"Skull and Bones" is more than just a name. The U.S. government is ruled by the talking skulls of every dead president, animated using ancient Celtic techniques. Kennedy was shot in the head because he was a powerful psychic and would have taken over.

There's a guy in Belgium who handcrafts snowstorms for sale in glass bottles.

Never whistle "Yankee Doodle Dandy" while standing at the Alamo just before the sun comes up.

Cars have grown to hate people.

There's a guy up in Canada, blind from birth, who paints very pretty pictures of swans on old engine blocks. He says they're pictures of God.

Good news: tantric sex magick works!

There's a cult in California who've found a way of crossing voudoun with *The Picture of Dorian Grey*. They stay the most beautiful of the beautiful people while a village in Kansas gets steadily uglier.

There's a tape floating around containing a record of a ritual to produce a soundtrack to the caster's life. The intention was to never again miss anything suspicious or ignore a romantic moment. At the end there is only a long, eerie note—and then static.

There's a sandwich shop in Atlanta where, if you order the special of the day, along with a hot beverage, they include a small slip of paper telling you the date of your death. Most people just throw it away or eat it by accident.

One of the most powerful adepts in the world resides in Alert, in the North-West Territories. It's worth the trip.

There's a kid in Little Rock, Arkansas who gains magical power from boredom.

The Comte runs an email list where you can hear about the plans for the universe and swap cookie recipes and so on.

Cats have their own school of magic, which is a bit like dipsomancy, except with cat toys. How do I know this? My cat told me. Why do you ask?

The new Euro currency can't be used by Plutomancers.

There's a spot in central Delaware where something very famous happened, something central to the history of the United States. Kids read about it in the history books, and tourists go there to visit. But the Cliomancers who live near there, and who harvest the magick from the area, alter the minds of those who visit the area, so that once they've visited the site, they not only forget about the site but are incapable of learning about it ever again.

At great peril to one's life and soul, one can use the Vedic texts to predict mundane events, such as the outcome of football games, and thereby make a great deal of money. The Illuminati have used numerous sacred texts to earn money in this way.

Some—many? all?—pets are telepathic, and keep notes on which humans treated them well and which didn't. One day they will repay us all, for good and bad.

Clove cigarettes with a diamond emblem on them are used to pass charges from one mage onto another. Nobody knows exactly who makes them.

The damnation of the Illuminati is the inability to die of natural causes, coupled with the inability to procreate; and with every passing year, the degree of pleasure they obtain from their senses diminishes.

If you sync the London recording of *Jesus Christ Superstar*—y'know, the one with Murray Head as Judas?—with the DVD of *Casablanca*, just wait til the song "Poor Jerusalem" comes on—everything will become clear when you hear the song explaining the visuals in the movie.

Many high-ranking policemen are initiates in a school of law-based anti-magick. They use the power gained from upholding the law to reinforce morality. They're fighting a war against a group of corrupt cops who use power from oppressing the innocent to further their own goals. Nearly half of police actions are somehow involved in this conflict.

You like the Little Rascals? Smitty, a buddy of mine in 'Nam, had an aunt who collected *Our Gang* stuff. She gave him a lock of Carl "Alfalfa" Switzer's hair as a good luck charm. Switzer would cut off his trademark cowlick every so often when he was a teen and sell it for dope money. And man, Smitty would do some crazy stuff when we were in the shit, and always came up without a scratch.

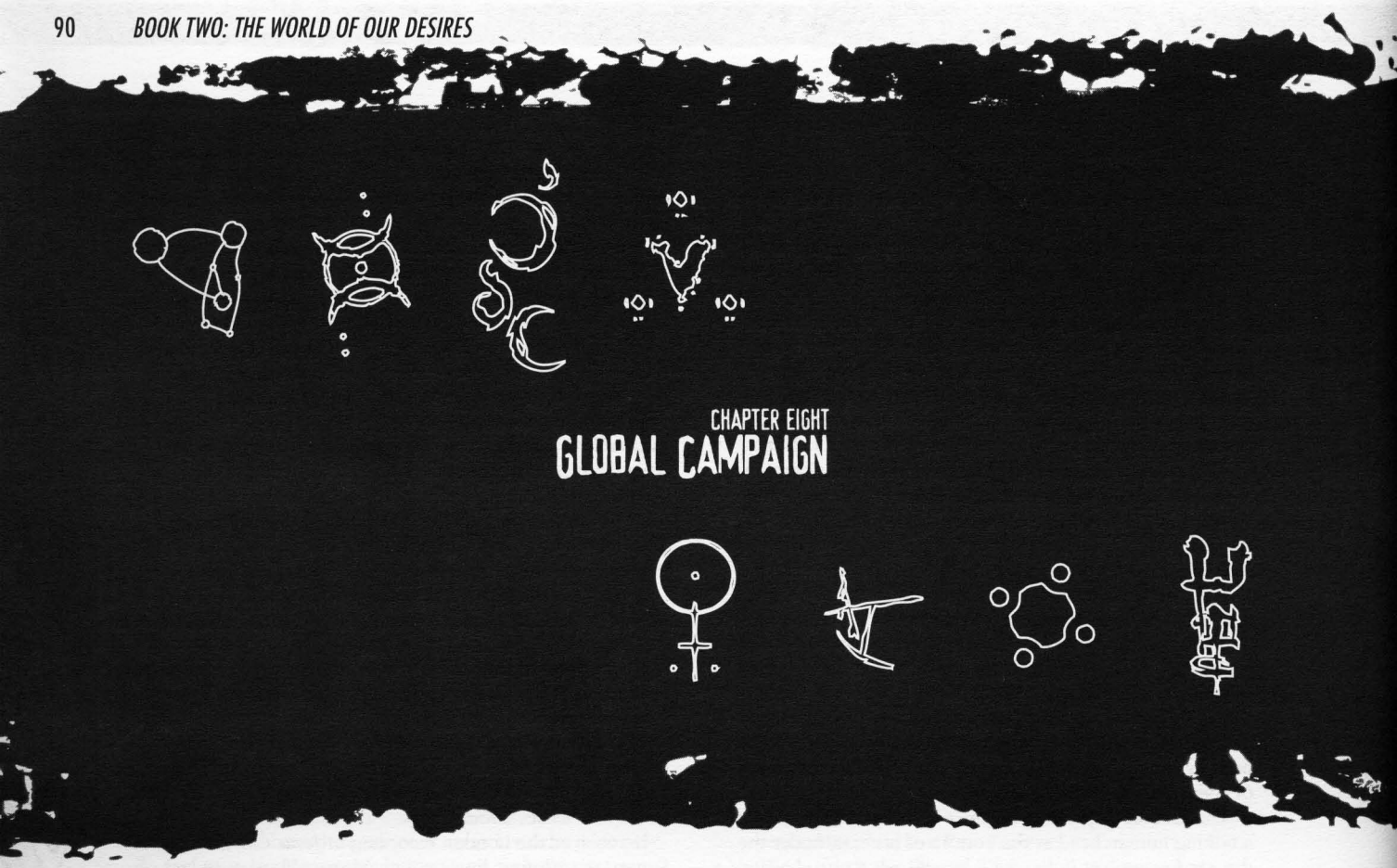
The reason why no Iconomancer has been able to channel Jim Morrison, the Lizard King, is due to the fact that Jim Morrison made history as the first Iconomancer. Jim Lives. And he's channeling himself and living in L.A.

All of the world's remaining Templar Knights report directly to seven Japanese women who share an apartment in Tel Aviv.

Those *Make Money Fast* emails aren't spam! They all carry fragments of the secret number of the Beast in them; if you collect enough of these mails, you can reconstruct the name and talk to the Adversary!

If you climb over the old brick wall in Evergreen Street at the right time, you can get into the land of the dead.

There is a magick word. It powers all magick. Every time it is spoken, magick's flow gets a tiny push. This word starts with 'th' and ends with 'e'. No word is more common. If you never speak it, magick cannot affect you.



CHAPTER EIGHT

GLOBAL CAMPAIGN

In a global campaign, you are an obsessed member of an obsessive subculture: the occult underground. Sure, you've got your **trigger event**—see p. 26 if you don't—but you're in deeper than that. You've popped your magick quarter in the clue dispenser and you know symbolism from shinola. You know at least a little about rituals, adepts, and avatars. Maybe you sling mojo yourself. You also know that while there are lone-wolf operators out there—your crowd calls them **dukes**—the smart play is not to go it alone. Dukes are dukes because they're bent that way, because they're strong enough or weird enough or smelly enough that they don't play well with others. Chances are excellent you aren't a duke, that instead you've hooked up with a few people you can trust—or whom you fear—and so you are part of a **cabal**.

CREATING YOUR CABAL

Cabals come in several flavors. Your group and/or your GM decides what kind of cabal you're in. It could be a big existing cabal you've heard of, like those New Inquisition guys. It could be one that's new to you. It could even be one your group creates, right here right now. Here are a few specific cabals and general types of cabals to get you started.

THE NEW INQUISITION

You work for the new-school strutting turks of the occult underground, a warped version of the French Foreign Legion. Sign the contract and they erase your life, solve your problems, and put your debts in the black. They don't hire just anybody: mobsters, spies, drug dealers, journalists, and of course the occasional adepts and avatars. Be one or be gone. The key to working for TNI is they've got something on you, something that keeps you loyal. It might be blackmail, or it might be lots of cash. Either way you're a disposable asset. But while you work for them, you've got the tools and the talent to carve out a life for yourself. The fact that they only hire badasses means you're a badass, and you're in badass company. That security helps you sleep at night.

GOALS

Follow TNI's orders: investigate, infiltrate, disrupt, steal, even assassinate. Do a good job. Move up through the ranks—you start at level D, you aspire to level A—to gain more power and more responsibility. Use TNI as a cover to pursue your own goals. If you get their back, they'll get yours.

ASSETS

Fat bank. Fast cars. Lots of guns. Muscle galore. Magick aplenty. The will to use these things in the service of a tough goal: make the world a better place by any means necessary.

LIABILITIES

You're a target. There are dukes and cabals out there—lots of them—who hate and fear TNI, and who think they could make a rep for themselves by whacking a TNI agent like you. Your orders often entail inflicting violence and misery, even when it seems wrong. Your bosses only tell you what

you need to know—and most of the time, they don't even know *that*.

Examples

TNI agents work in teams. Some are general-purpose, some are much more specific.

Hit Squad. Assassins and enforcers. You don't need magick to do what you do. You just need someone to hit.

Snoops. Investigate and infiltrate. You get the straight dope nobody wants you to have, and use it in ways nobody expects.

Freak Scene. Mojo all the way. Magick is your drug, and your job is to get high. Find it, make sense of it, and bring it back home to TNI.

General Interest. One of each. You're the first team to react to a situation, because it's your job to figure out what's going on.

The Sleepers

Someone's gotta keep the punks in line. Sure, the Sleepers are the bogeymen of the occult underground, the guys who put paid to dukes and cabals that lose perspective and make too much of a racket. They keep the heat off, they distract reporters, they cover up the truth. Often as not, they kill people. But the good news is when you're a Sleeper, the people you tangle with almost always deserve it. And for the ones who don't deserve it, you have license to find other ways to resolve the situation than just snuffing them out. You're the cops of the occult underground, only it isn't justice you're after. It's quiet, pure and simple.

Goals

Pursue the Sleeper agenda of keeping the tiger of public awareness fast asleep. Watch the occult underground for people who are too sloppy, too obvious, too quick to sling mojo right in front of everybody. Deal out punishments and resolutions as you see fit. Keep the peace. Most importantly, preserve the mystique that makes the Sleepers what they are: rumors are enough to handle the jobs too small for you to bother with.

Assets

Not as well-off as TNI, but they still have far more resources than most of the penny-ante cabals out there. They know more about magick than TNI. They're good at what they do. They don't have any agenda except keeping things cool, so you are a lot freer to pursue your own goals.

Liabilities

Killing, and lots of it, and few are cut-and-dried snuff jobs. When a Sleeper op goes terminal, you're probably facing some of the wickedest adepts and most demented avatars around. It's incredibly dangerous work. When the chips are down the Sleeper attitude tends to be, "Once you eat the corn dog, you throw away the stick." You might be the stick.

Examples

Midnight Court: Your cell operates under deep cover within a particular large city, maybe even regionally. As your cover cabal, you're known and trusted in local adept



artwork by Felipe Echevarria

and avatar circles, and you abuse that trust to keep both groups safely concealed. Like wolves, you improve the herd by thinning its ranks. Unlike wolves, you often have to face the toughest, not the weakest. And you can't afford to let even one survive if there's a chance he'll blow your cover.

Sleepwalkers: You never identify yourselves as Sleepers, and you rarely get your hands wet personally. Instead, you and your pals investigate possible unnatural outbreaks, making sure that swamp gas and mass hysteria are responsible, instead of some powermad cockhead. You deal with a lot of crazies and a lot of hoaxes, but sometimes you find stuff that's just raw wrongness with no adept to warn or blame. Shut it down and cover it up.

The Brute Squad: You are actors in a theater of terror. Your job is to give elaborate, memorable performances. Or, as your audiences would call them, "Warnings from the Sleepers." Rather than just outright kill people, your job is to create the appearance that the Sleepers are like Santa—they see you when you're sleeping, they know if you've been bad or good—only the lumps they give are on your head, not in your stocking.

Wandering Monsters: You get names, information, addresses of individuals. Then you kill them. You travel light and you face the worst and most dangerous weirdos real magick has to offer, all in the name of protecting the mundanes from the hardcases (and vice versa). You bring nothing but violence, and you leave nothing but bloodstains and bad memories.

The Sect of the Naked Goddess

The concept of the Naked Goddess is as old as humanity itself, but finally she has left the realm of mythology and become a living deity—and it happened on videotape. An actress making a porn film ascended as the Goddess, and nothing in the occult underground has been the same since. You are a follower of this new embodiment of the affinity principle, the Naked Goddess, and this connects you to the very fabric of reality. You can *feel* her, moving all over you like a lover, and you have never felt this way before about any person, let alone an idea, and you must share this with the world. But the world is not ready, and the occult underground has definite opinions about your agenda. The Naked Goddess has a temper—fury as well as compassion—and you must wield both with Her savage wisdom.

Goals

Serve the Naked Goddess. Strengthen the Sect. Convert the faithless. Punish the heretics. Bring Her truth to the world. Dwell in the metaphysical temple of Affinity, where desire and synchronicity become one blazing truth. Beware the old Cult of the Goddess, for they would deny Her divinity.

Assets

The fervor of pure faith. A group of committed, intimate believers who trust and defend each other. The power of Her magick. The knowledge that you're right.

Liabilities

Nearly everyone in the occult underground and in the mundane world thinks you're batshit crazy. Your agenda of bringing Her power to the world has gotten you in deadly trouble with the Sleepers before and certainly will again.

Examples

The Emissaries: Your cabal has been dispatched to a new city to set up shop. Find a place to meet and sanctify it. Recruit new followers. Learn about the local underground and how to operate within it. Channel information back to the Sect and carry out assignments. Create glorious moments of affinity in public that don't betray your magickal nature: public art, culture jamming, performance, illegal hijinks. Sniff out the Sleepers in your area and be ready to take them down if you have to.

The Acolytes: You work directly for the Imperatrix of the Sect. Your job is to build the body of knowledge about the Naked Goddess's mortal life, to search for Her hidden lessons, to find those who knew Her and learn from them. Mysterious forces are out to eradicate Her existence from the minds of humanity; uncover and destroy them.

The New Sect: The Sect has gone astray, just as the Cult did. You have seen the true vision of the Goddess, and she's not some trumped-up floozy. Roll your own dogma. Pursue your own agenda. When the time comes, take down the old Sect and the old Cult in the cleansing fire of Her brightness.

Mak Attax

The world's most widespread fast-food restaurant has been infiltrated. A group of adepts, avatars, and other associated underdwellers has glommed onto the idea that a new Golden Age of magick is long overdue—and that it's fated to be born under the sign of the Golden Arches. Connected internationally by the Internet, Mak Attax is a global, largely anonymous society of occult fast-food workers. There's no real command structure. Since everyone's a volunteer, it's not easy to boss people around. There's no central resources, no training regimen, no consensus about what the "magickal renaissance" should be like or even what it is.

Goals

The Maks' goal is so nebulous—"Usher In a New Age of Magickal Acceptance"—that it's nearly meaningless. Some of them want a new caste system with adepts on top and the people who used to bully adepts when said adepts were in grade school sweeping out the gutters. Some want an age of peace and equality and spiritual enlightenment and free sex for all. Some just want to be able to pursue their arcane interests openly. Everyone's working towards a different revolution, but one idea has become the Attaxers' general operating mode: they gain magick charges and then dump them on unsuspecting burger customers.

This does, of course, produce many unpredictable and unintended effects.

Assets

There are over 400 Maks worldwide, making them the largest clued-in mystic cabal in the world. (If you use "clued-in" to mean "a significant number of them know enough to cast spells or use avatar channels.") They've got manpower. They've got a well-developed communication network. And their purpose is nebulous enough to include a wide variety

of people, which means they have a slew of magick schools, avatars, and other skills they can call upon.

Liabilities

They're slightly easier to infiltrate than the Boy Scouts. Their excellent communication infrastructure delivers 10% truth and 90% hogwash. And while everyone agrees on the nebulous big stuff, nobody agrees on anything short term or practical.

Examples

Hamburger Helpers: Sure, a "magickal renaissance" sounds sweet and all, but the franchise where y'all work has more pressing concerns. There are bullet dents in the dumpster. There are prominent "No Loitering" signs to deter the homeless and the drug dealers. As for the clientele, well, if hope was currency they'd have just about enough to supersize their fries. Before you change the world, you want to tidy up the corner where *you* are. The revolution begins with the smelly homeless guy at table three. Make a difference.

Political Animals: You're a small magick cabal (see next section) that also happens to be hooked up with Mak Attax. Maybe you put Attaxer goals ahead of your small group's concerns. Maybe you're a small constituency that's using Mak Attax's numbers for leverage and camouflage. In any event, you're a group within the group. You've got more direction than Mak Attax as a whole, but by the same token you have enemies within it as well as without.

The Wherehouse: You work in a warehouse that stores bales of bags, crates of cups, and pallets of placemats: all the napkins and cup lids and straws that the world's biggest restaurant chain needs to keep serving billions and billions. You're also Attaxers, dropping magickal charges onto french-fry bags and burger wrappers to slide them into the general public. Only something went very weird. Your warehouse has developed extra doors and shadowy staircases that lead to . . . somewhere else. Somewhere wonderful. Somewhere dangerous. Somewhere you have to keep safe—and somewhere you have to keep secret.

Magick Cabal

Create your own cabal from scratch. You could have a group-wide trigger event that spurs you to form a cabal. One person could start it and the rest be the first recruits. What are you unified by: theology or ideology? A belief or an idea? Maybe you're all after general enlightenment, or maybe you worship Elvis. If nothing else, you're united by your acceptance of magick and your use of it to make sense of things.

Goals

Depends on the focus of your cabal, but you want what any small, motivated group wants: improve yourselves, gain power, be true to your ideals, oppose your enemies, and recruit new followers.

Assets

Devotion brings clarity. You know where you stand and who stands with you. You're loyal to each other. You've got clear goals, and they aren't dictated by someone else—you've chosen to be here.

Liabilities

People assume the worst about your group: you brainwash people, you just want free sex, you just want free money, you're all going to commit suicide, or you're all going to commit murder. (Maybe they're right?) You have a hard time being taken seriously by non-occultists. You have a hard time being taken seriously by occultists who really know the score and who assume you're another bunch of crystal-waving tree-huggers. (Maybe *they're* right?) Most cabals think you're wrong and are out to prove it. Also, internal politics and in-fighting could weaken your group.

Examples

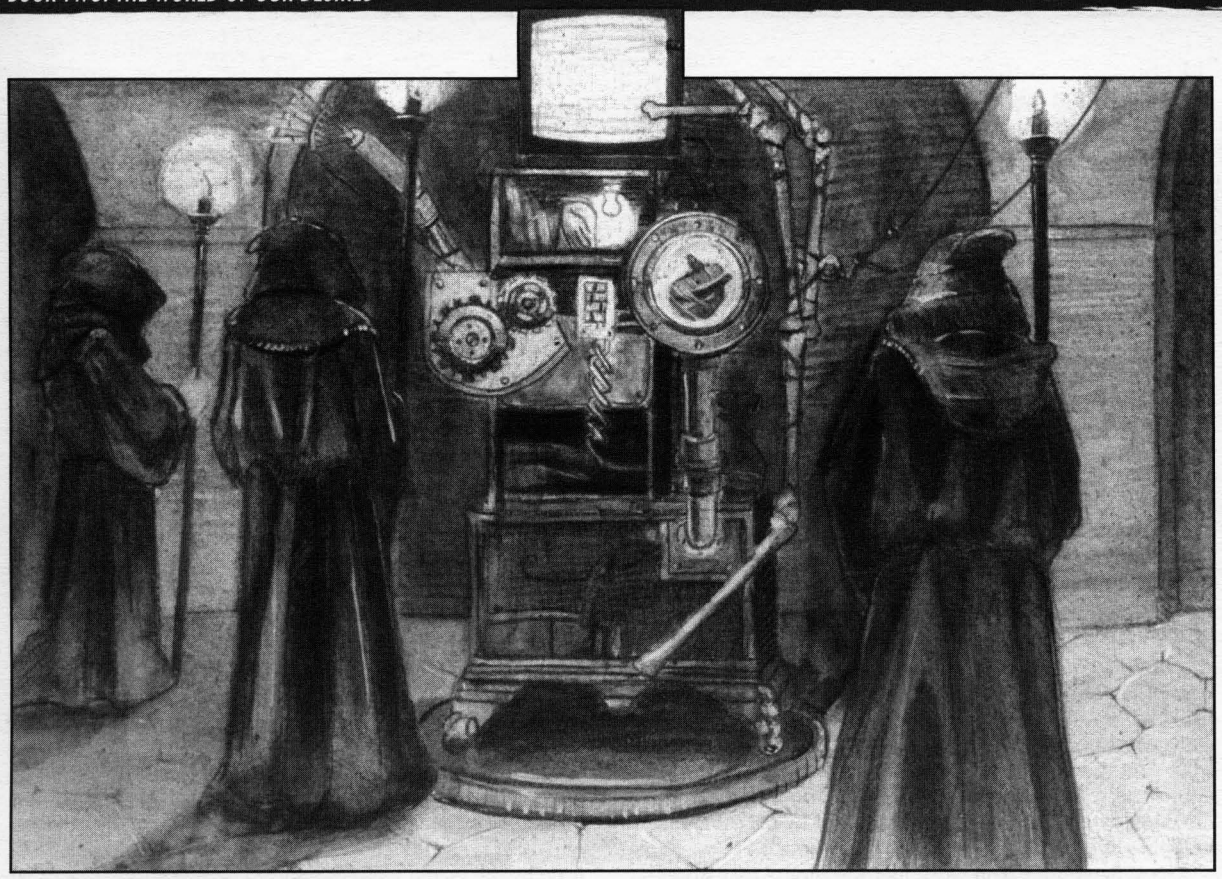
Möbius Dick: Herman Melville's masterwork isn't just *the* seminal literary expression of the American spirit. It's also an occult text that, if read properly, unlocks the secret soul of nature, the sea, and the great American nation. You chosen few have unlocked its magick meaning. Now you must undergo the perils described within to take your destined positions as the captain and crew of the ship of state. But will you steer clear of the pale leviathan? Or will one alone escape to tell the tale?

The Wild Hunt: The selfish "epideromancy" practiced by debased adepts outside of your faith is a perversion of the true spirit of flesh control. It's meant to be a sacrament. Instead of the masturbatory self-mutilation the "postmodern" adepts use to "charge up," you gain power the *real* way: by the sacred wounds inflicted on one another by other members of the Hunt. These wounds give you the power to transform your bodies, letting your true animal features emerge. The Hunt roams the Pine Barrens of New Jersey, wild and free, unfettered by law or technology. Woe to those who intrude on your turf.

The Mutual Aid Society: Short version? You're like the Freemasons, only much smaller, and your ritual mumbo-jumbo actually influences something other than jack and shit. Long version? You're a group of avatars who have, over several years, become close friends and boon companions. You've formally sworn that each of you will do all he or she reasonably can to aid the others in need—or simply help them get ahead in life, love, or business. Over the years, you've given each other loans and hot real estate tips, just like the Masons. Unlike the Masons, you've also buried two dead bodies. No one said avatar politics were a picnic. That's why it's good to have friends.

Clued-In Mundanes

Ignorant people can't do magick, but that doesn't mean every magick virgin is ignorant. Small and dedicated groups of savvy normal folk have proven surprisingly effective at shaking up the occult underground. (At least it's surprising to adepts, who often regard anyone with a money-market account as a pathetic, deluded drone.) Maybe you're interested in manipulating magick without the associated sacrifices. (What better way than by manipulating the magi?) Maybe you're recovering seekers who just couldn't get it or decided you didn't want it. Maybe you've seen the dark side and know enough to hack it off at the knees.



GOALS

Much like a magick cabal, only probably less weird and more practical. You define your own ultimate goals, but defending yourselves, harming enemies, and powering up are almost certain to be ancillary objectives.

ASSETS

No crazed obsessional behaviors. Also, unlike almost every adept, you find it easy to just say "no" to Faustian pacts, turn your back on promises of occult power, and chuck the Big Booke of Uncleane Incantationnes in the nearest incinerator. Because you have consensus views of reality, it's much easier for you to get along with each other, and almost everyone else. In terms of credit rating, criminal record, psychological history, and personal popularity, you're probably light-years ahead of the serious adepts.

LIABILITIES

Not to put a fine point on it, but you have no funky powers. If you're allying with adepts, they may not take you seriously. If you're trying to stop adepts (or play them for your own advantage), well, they hate that shit. And they're not known for timidity when wrecking the lives of ordinary folk.

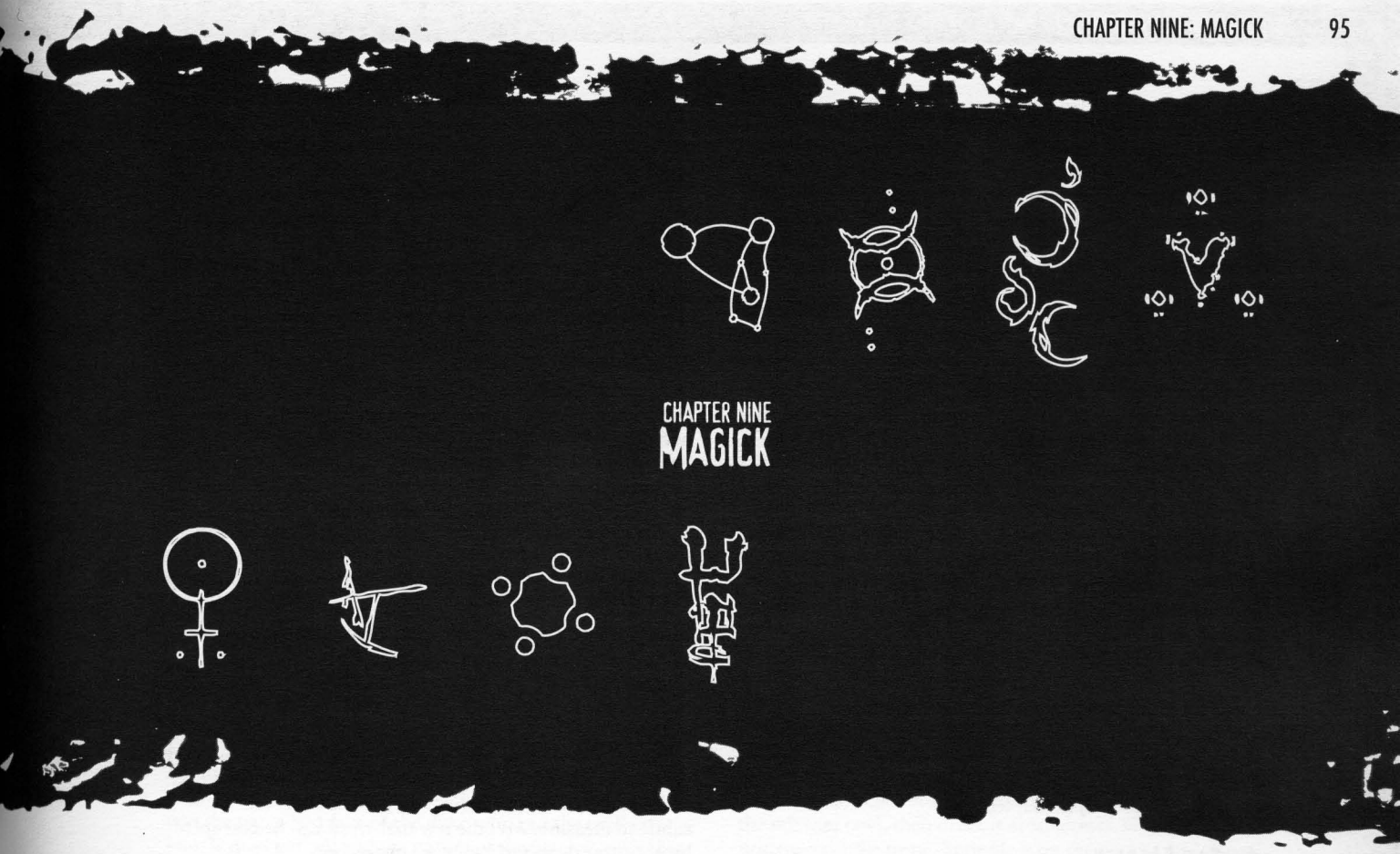
EXAMPLES

Guns Against Magick: You and magick got off on the wrong foot: magick's foot, in your ass. At first, you and your buddies wanted to expose magick to the world. That didn't work out real well: you all lost your jobs, a couple of you spent some time in the big house or the bughouse, and not all of your pals made it out alive. But the survivors now have a simpler goal: kill every adept you meet. You're not sure if the magick makes 'em crazy or if the crazy makes 'em magick, but either way there's only one solution. You know enough to be cautious, which means you know more than enough to be dangerous.

Enterprising Ladies: The Mafia has a problem with women in the business. Your group of gangster molls has joined forces to build a feminine power base inside the criminal underworld, and you're ready to scheme your way to the top. But you need an edge. The Mob has standing orders to whack all adepts, thanks to some decades-old bad blood that spooked the leadership from ever cutting deals with the occult underground. Yet a pocketful of dukes could be just what you need. You aren't the only ones who think magick and the Mafia belong together. As insider-outsiders you can recruit dukes to work for ambitious young gangsters, and *vice versa.* You cut the deals, you bridge the gap, and you skim the profits and power that rise to the top. Just keep it quiet—until the day you make your move to get a seat at the big table.

The Tuxedo Brigade: None of you can do magick. You can make things disappear and you can delude the minds of mortals, you can vanish from plain sight and slip out of straitjackets, you can dazzle and delight, you can bewitch and bewilder and befuddle. You just don't do any of it with magick. You were illusionists and con men and card sharps and escape artists who all went looking for the Real Thing. But when you found it, you discovered the price was too high and the payoff too freaky. By that time, however, you'd convinced all those socially inept weirdoes that you already *had* genuine juice. You're players because no cell can hold you, no one can ever fully disarm you, and no one can figure out your taboos. Abracadabra.

artwork by Thomas Manning



CHAPTER NINE
MAGICK

Magick is what happens when the cosmos is consciously channeled by a human being. It is unconscious power filtered and focused by conscious will.

"Magick" is spelled with a "k" to differentiate it from all the forms of magic practiced by the peoples of Earth that do not have real power in them. In days gone by, many kinds of magic still practiced today had such power. But as the civilizations of Earth have advanced and changed, many older magical traditions lost their potency. Modern practitioners of magick dismiss such traditions as "old-school." They call their own workings "new-wave" or "postmodern." Of course, in centuries to come these forms of magick will wax and wane just as the old-school varieties have.

They say every generation believes it invented sex. The same is certainly true of magick.

The Nature of Magick

All magick is **sympathetic**. It's based on a symbolic relationship between the magickal action and the desired result. Remember voodoo dolls? That's sympathetic magick. You make a symbolic connection between your goal and your will. Magick flows on this path, delivering the result you seek—but only if your will is strong enough to channel the magick where you want it to go, and only if your symbolic connections are significant enough to mark the path the magick must travel.

Most magick can be divided into three levels of power: **minor**, **significant**, and **major**. Major magick is potent, rare, and dangerous. Significant magick is restricted to people willing to pursue the subject seriously. Minor magick is easily accessible—assuming you have the will and the knowledge to make it work. Normal people don't.

There are also three styles of magick: ritual magick, adept magick, and avatar magick. For some reason the cosmos likes things to come in threes.

Ritual Magick

Anybody can use minor ritual magick. It helps to believe in what you're doing, of course, but exerting your magickal will is about as difficult as learning to ride a bike. You fall over a lot until you learn to trust your innate sense of equilibrium. Of course, you need a bike—or a ritual.

Most rituals are leftovers from old-school, modernist magick, or even older traditions that are non-magickal today. Once they were part of a particular faith, such as tribal magick, Christian exorcism, or Kabbalistic divination. They may even retain the symbolic trappings of their origins. Regardless, they are now merely recipes devoid of meaning or context, and they work for anyone with the stones to try. They are the fragile legacies of once-potent beliefs, and with each century fewer and fewer of them retain their power. (There are also a surprising number of rituals with no known connection to any historical or current culture. Some liken them to "cheat codes" in computer games—exploitable variables in the framework of our cosmos.)

The power of ritual magick is limited, and truly powerful rituals are incredibly rare. But some forms of ritual magick have subtle powers imaginative users can unlock to the

detriment of their enemies. Rituals are divided into minor, significant, and major levels of power and importance.

Ritual magick relies heavily on symbolic connections. The kinds of Western Hermetic magick that used eye of newt and toe of frog survive today as specific rituals, and they are chock full of bloody sacrifices, burning incense, full moons, and the other trappings of traditional supernatural folklore. Ritual magick is described in this chapter.

Adept Magick

Adept magick is for those who are obsessed with a particular worldview, such as the transcendental power of sex, the relationship between commerce and cosmos, or the reckless liberation found in a bottle of liquor. By forcing reality to match their particular view of it, adepts can work magick related to their obsession.

Adept magick is much more narrow in scope than ritual magick, because a given adept only accepts his personal worldview and his sphere of magickal influence is limited as a result. But within that narrow worldview, an adept's power can be tremendous.

Adept magick does not require the classical mumbo-jumbo and virgin pig's blood often seen in ritual magick. Instead, the adept engages in circumscribed behavior to generate packets of magickal energy known as **charges**, which he uses to power spells. Charges and spells come in minor, significant, and major forms. Adept magick is described in the *Adepts* chapter.

Avatar Magick

Avatar magick has the limited power of ritual magick and the narrow focus of adept magick. In return, however, it does not require an obsessional worldview or the still-beating heart of a sacrificed puppy.

Instead of creating a path between will and result, the avatar studies the world around her to recognize the well-worn paths that already exist—and then she studiously walks that path every day of her life. Specifically, the avatar adopts behaviors that are symbolically connected to archetypes of humanity. By bringing these behaviors into her daily life, she stays on her archetypal path and gains magickal abilities as a result. She is simply walking the trail that the collective unconscious has blazed, and she can harness that mass will for her own use.

Many avatars have no notion that they are following an archetype. They believe they are worshipping a particular religious or folkloric figure—a figure who is really just another way of perceiving a universal archetype.

You can be an avatar without truly believing in the agenda of the archetype you follow. Merely the outward symbolic behavior is sufficient. Where the adept is an obsessed visionary, you can be an actor portraying a role. Avatar magick is described in the *Avatars* chapter.

Multiple Magicks

The three forms of magick are not exclusionary. You could be an adept, an avatar, and still use ritual magick to boot. Theoretically, you'd be king of the magi.

Realistically, you'd be all but bonkers. Both adept and avatar magicks have taboos, and few are in sufficient alignment to avoid distorting and contradictory behaviors. The chances of maintaining any kind of a normal life, career, and so forth are slim at best. Only the most hardcore and mystical can achieve this, and it's a constant struggle. If you want to pursue this, work with your GM to make it part of the story and not just a power trip; be prepared to accept gracefully if the GM doesn't approve it.

There are stories in the occult underground of somebody known as the Freak, who is said to be both an Epideromancer and an Avatar of the Mystic Hermaphrodite. If the stories are true, the Freak is tremendously powerful, versatile, dangerous, and scary. But to get that way, it has to be dedicated, paranoid, and hate-filled, without one single person in the world it would call a friend. That's the price of having it both ways.

The news isn't all bad. Minor ritual magick is easily used by adepts and avatars alike. It's actually *easier* for them to use ritual magick than it is for other people.

Ritual Magick

Rituals are powerful magick spells because they're independent: most of them, anyone can use. What nobody can do is make new ones. The art of creating rituals is lost, or has been nullified somehow. Worse, most of the old ones are lost to history.

Many of those that remain don't work anymore. But they get passed around anyway by people who *claim* they work, or *heard* they work, or believe they work with results too subtle to measure. And the few that work can be corrupted by poor translation, copying, or instruction.

There's also no reason to trust that any given ritual does what it says. There are lots of trap rituals out there that hurt you when you use them, even opening you up to possession by unknown forces.

Finding a ritual is like finding a slice of pizza in the gutter. Are you hungry enough to eat it? It *might* be okay, after all.

This is why many people in the occult underground don't put much effort into ferreting out rituals. Any given ritual is almost certainly bogus. Those that aren't bogus probably don't do what they claim, and a lot of those are traps. The handful you might find that really work are likely to be mystic cures for warts or something that lets you understand birds.

On the other hand, many dukes are obsessive, pure and simple. They chase after fragments of alleged ancient wisdom like they're buying lottery tickets, certain that *this* time it'll pay off. Sometimes it does.

Then everyone wants to steal it.

Minor Rituals

Minor rituals can be used by anyone. Make a Soul check at a -30 shift and the ritual works.

If you're an adept, you can opt to spend the minor charge(s) for that ritual and make a Magick check. If you're an avatar, you can just make an Avatar check. Neither has a minimum roll. Both can attempt the -30 Soul check instead if they wish.

Poison Ward

Power: minor
Cost: 1 minor charge

Effect: This ritual negates the effects of any poisons in a targeted cup. (This includes alcohol, bacteria, viruses and other toxins.) It won't work on food, only on beverages.
Ritual Action: Before drinking something, rotate the drinking vessel 360° clockwise while saying the word "sushem." Then rotate the vessel 360° counter-clockwise while saying the word "crechab."

Snowblinding

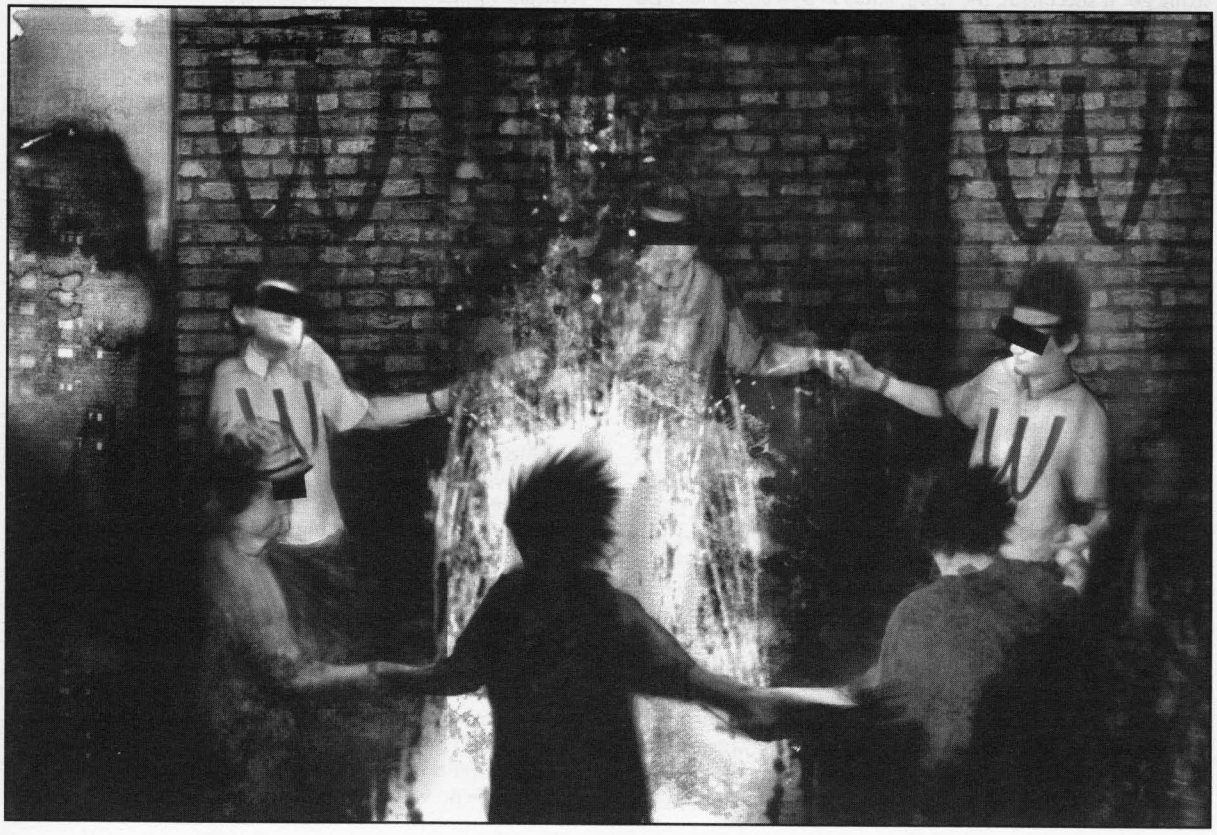
Power: minor
Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: The revenants known as Snowfallen cannot approach within a mile of a residence that has been Snowblinded, until the snow has melted and a new snowfall comes along.
Ritual Action: Take a pine cone and wrap some of your own hair around it, making sure to get it deep into the center of the cone. On the day of the first snowfall, burn the pine cone while walking around your home or dwelling in a counterclockwise direction.

Back Monkey

Power: minor
Cost: 2 minor charges
Effect: If someone has cast a spell or ritual on you with a duration longer than a month—such as a proxy ritual or a tilt (both are described later)—then Back Monkey shows you the name and face of the duke who put the spell on you. It does not tell you the nature of the magick, only the source, and it only reveals the most recent instance of such magick that's still in effect.
Ritual Action: Get a fish tank of any size that has at least one living fish swimming in it. Cut your hand lightly and bleed into the water. If there is a long-duration magick on you, the blood takes the form of the source's name and then shifts to depict the source's face. Within fifteen seconds the blood disperses. If no one has put such magick on you, the blood forms a name in Egyptian hieroglyphs and then shows the face of a woman. No one knows who this is, but the best guess is that a long time ago she cast a spell that affects *everybody*.

Plague of Hiccups

Power: minor
Cost: 2 minor charges
Effect: When the victim of your spell speaks a cursed word or phrase of your choosing, he is immediately struck with hiccups. These convulsions last anywhere from a few minutes to an hour. They eventually fade on their own, but any time the person speaks the phrase or word, the hiccups return.
Ritual Action: Harvest ten ripe olives on a night of moonless dark. Press them for their oil. Harvest ten apples by the light of the noonday sun, press them for their juice, and ferment it into vinegar. Add this to the oil. Suspend the mixture beneath an icicle and build a fire under it. Do not remove the mixture until it has begun to boil and at least one drop has fallen from the icicle into the mixture. Let the mixture cool, then drink it at sundown. When next you urinate, save the urine. Sprinkle it on the doorstep of the house of the spell's target, while whispering the words you



artwork by Samuel Araya

wish to curse. The cursed word or phrase must have at least three syllables, but not more than seven.

> **Example:** You want to make someone stop talking about you. Assuming you prepare the mixture correctly and sprinkle it while muttering your own name, the next time the target tries to say something like "(Your Name) is a fraud of monstrous proportions," he's struck with hiccups midway through his sentence. Forever after, whenever he mentions your name, he's overcome with hiccups.

Seek the Lost Tome

Power: minor
Cost: 2 minor charges
Effect: This ritual points you in the right direction to find a book you once owned but no longer have. If the book has been destroyed, the ritual materials burst into flame. If you fail the ritual attempt, it points you in a random direction.
Ritual Action: Copy a particular mystic sigil onto a piece of animal hide using all-natural vegetable inks. Burn the animal hide (it doesn't matter what type of fire) and mix the ashes thoroughly with a different type of ink, this one blue. Then copy the sigil again onto a piece of paper, with the mixture of ink and ash. (It doesn't matter what type of paper.) Wrap the paper tightly around an eagle feather, and suspend the feather and paper from a braided cord the length of all your fingers added together. The cord must have three strands of different materials; it doesn't matter which materials, as long as they're different. Once the feather, paper, and string are prepared, swing them around your head three times clockwise, repeating the phrase "Ecom Etrubo" once per revolution. Then let the string go. If successful, the string lands in a straight line with the feather pointing in the direction of the book.

Angel of the Animals

Power: minor
Cost: 5 minor charges
Effect: This spell attracts all types of animals to the target for a span of eight hours. The animals are not enamored of the person as a person, but as a location. They want to touch him, not obey him. The target finds all types of animal life swarming towards him at top speed. Birds fly at his window and try to get inside to perch on his shoulders and arms. Cats, dogs, and squirrels surround him and climb on him. Flying insects cling to his face as crawling bugs go up his pants legs.

Most people panic when suddenly coated with wildlife from head to toe. Most animals fight back with a struggling human. They just know they want to touch him; it doesn't matter if he's alive or dead.

Though not directly harmful, this spell is often fatal. Those who struggle are torn apart by a hundred tiny teeth. Those who do not struggle often smother.
Ritual Action: To put this spell on someone, you must have a part of their body in your possession—loose hair and fingernail clippings work fine. Grind the hair or nails up into a fine powder and mix it with two cups of buckwheat flour. Add two tablespoons of butter that were churned under a full moon from the milk of an all-white cow. Add yeast (any kind of yeast is fine) and a teaspoon of salt. Mix all these ingredients, let it rise (covered), and punch it down once. The second time it rises, knead it well and put it in a pan greased with the fat of an animal you hunted yourself. Lance the ring finger of your left hand and write a word on the top of the loaf. (It doesn't matter what word.) Put it in a stove at dawn, over a fire of sandalwood. Remove when it's brown and feed it to the intended target. When you wish the spell to take effect, say the word you wrote in blood.

Harmonious Alignment

Power: minor
Cost: 8 minor charges
Effect: If the ritual is cast successfully, the caster gains one significant charge. If an adept uses this ritual, it is considered a violation of his school's taboo (see p. 112). He does not lose the charge gained by the ritual, but he does lose all other charges. Gaining a significant charge in this way violates the adept's obsession with his particular school of magick, since it undermines his certainty that his way is the true way to power. Very few adepts even believe that this ritual exists—it is used almost exclusively by the insular Authentic Thaumaturges (p. 101).
Ritual Action: The ritual actions required for Harmonious Alignment vary from month to month and depend on the Zodiac sign of the caster. The ritual can be invoked on the date anniversary of the caster's birth. (That is, if you were born on the fourth of July, you can cast it on the fourth of every month. Damn shame if you were born on the thirty-first.)

The equipment and actions needed express the difference and the consonance between "you" (as placed by the time and date of your birth) and "the world" (as placed by the current time and date). The lexicon for expressing these relationships gets more involved the farther you are from your birthdate. On your birthday, you don't need *anything* to cast the ritual—you just need to go out under the open sky at noon and say six words in Latin. Six months from your birthday, it requires particular herbs and crystals, a robe of certain colors in certain patterns, made of certain materials, along with an elaborate three-color chalk pattern that must be drawn and then danced upon while reciting a fifty-one word litany (again, in Latin).
Note: Harmonious Alignment is a charging ritual, one of the gateway spells that lets you cast the more powerful, significant rituals. All rituals are rare, but charging rituals are the rarest of the rare. Every duke who knows Harmonious Alignment would, without exception, kill to protect the secret. You might be able to find it described in the Vatican's collection of forbidden occult texts. You might find it buried in the ex-KGB archives that they took from the ex-Nazi occultists after WWII. You might find a copy in the lethally protected library of a world-class occult conspiracy. But it's not in the Library of Congress, it's not in any university collection, and it's not lurking, waiting to be discovered, at the corner used bookstore—and Harmonious Alignment is one of the *more accessible* charging rituals.

Significant Rituals

These require significant charges to work, meaning they're mostly reserved for adepts. But their greater power makes them very desirable.

The conventional wisdom of the adept underground says there is no way for a non-adept to generate a signifi-

cant charge. They're wrong, but hardly anyone outside the Authentic Thaumaturges knows the truth.

Prowess of Samson

Power: significant
Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: Samson was the Biblical warrior who slew legions in a frenzy, using the jawbone of an ass as a bludgeon. By channeling the warrior prowess that Samson embodies, you can flip-flop all your Struggle rolls for the duration of one combat.

By opening yourself up even further to such energy, you can gain a +10% bonus to this combat's Struggle rolls by accepting one failed notch on the Self madness gauge. You can do this up to four times per use of the ritual, with the bonuses being cumulative. You still cannot have more than five failed notches, and you cannot increase your skill above your Body stat.

The Prowess of Samson ritual is extremely old. There are reputable reports of it being used as early as 29 B.C. in Rome. (That is, if the word "reputable" has any meaning at all in the context of mystic history.)
Ritual Action: Cut up a copy of the Old Testament and stitch the pages into a robe using camel hair for thread and a bone needle. (This also works if you sew together your robe from a properly cut set of Torah scrolls.) Put on the robe, along with goat leather sandals. Wear a beard and earlocks. (Fake hair works fine.) Get the jawbone of an ass and try to beat someone to death with it.

> **Example:** Tina dresses up like Samson, complete with fake beard, and jumps her mean ex-boyfriend when he comes to get his Andrew Dice Clay records back. She doesn't have any failed notches in Self, but decides to push the spell. She accepts three failed notches and gains a +30% bonus to her Struggle skill. (With a 15% base skill and Body 45, she can't improve on nature any more than that.) With Struggle 45% plus flipflops, she kicks the shit out of him. The failed notches remain until she removes them in the usual ways, but the ritual's effects disappear when the combat ends.

Prowess of Bruce Lee

Power: significant
Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: Identical to Prowess of Samson. No one's exactly sure who has the authority (or knowledge) needed to simply update an ancient spell. The most plausible story is that a demon taught this version to a Dipsomancer, after the boozehound had Soul Sipped away all its guile and cunning. It's also possible that the ritual is generically effective, and can be symbolically customized to whatever badass you want—Samson, Bruce Lee, Michelle Yeoh, Neo, whoever. But no one really knows.
Ritual Action: Dress up like Bruce Lee in *Enter the Dragon.* Take a videocassette of *Enter the Dragon* and pull out all the tape. Wind the tape around your torso and limbs. Start hitting someone.

Scurvy Livestock

Power: significant
Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: The livestock owned or tended by the target sicken: cows give sour milk, sheep get patchy, piglets fail to thrive. Some die, possibly many if the spell works well.

(Sure, this doesn't seem particularly impressive today. But in the Middle Ages it was one of the all-time greats.)
Ritual Action: Collect yellow phlegm from a sick woman who has at least one living child. Mix it with honey and wine. Take the resulting mixture into the fields of your enemy on a full moon night and boil it while chanting "sheckaret tyveena, sheckaret tyvanee" over and over, until the mixture completely evaporates.

Spellbreaker

Power: significant
Cost: 2 significant charges
Effect: If successful, this removes the lingering effects of any spell that has been cast on you, within a few limits. It won't get rid of creatures who were summoned by magick: the spell summoned the creature, but ceased when the creature was attached to you. It also won't undo physical damage or death caused by magick. However, it could be used to undo the effects of Psychotrauma (p. 155), Body Melting (p. 136), or that pesky Plague of Hiccups (p. 97). You can only use this spell on yourself.
Ritual Action: Take a live starfish and lace its five legs between the five fingers of your left hand. With your right hand, make the "fig sign"—a clenched fist with your thumb between your first and middle fingers. As you make this sign, clench your left hand and crush the starfish.

Washing Your Luck

Power: significant
Cost: 3 significant charges
Effect: Your next three matched failures become matched successes at the same level they were rolled. A failed roll of 88 is treated as a successful roll of 88.
Ritual Action: You need three items that were present and associated with three separate failures in your life, such as the shirt you were wearing when you got arrested, the deck of cards you used when you lost all that money on three aces, or the ring she gave back when she decided not to marry you. Bitter little mementos like that. (The GM decides what constitute valid mementos for this spell. Any situation that gave you a failed madness notch is a good candidate. You don't know if the items work until you try.)

You also need ten straight pins, a hammer, an anvil, a black Magic Marker (and yes, it has to specifically be a Magic Marker brand pen), and some matches. Finally, the ritual requires a working bathtub or basin of some sort.

To cast the spell, stick a pin through the skin on the very tip of each of your fingers. You don't need to draw blood, just get them through that pad of dead skin at the end. (If your fingernails are in the way, they need to be cut.) The pointy ends should be facing your palm. Take the black Magic Marker and draw a thick cross over your mouth, with your lips as one crossbar. You need to have your lips completely covered. (The fumes will make you dizzy, but the ink wears off in a couple days.) Once prepared, put your mementos on the anvil and smash them up good. Then burn them. (Lighter fluid may be very helpful. Or a blowtorch. They have to stay on the anvil, though.) Throughout the smashing and burning, you must continuously chant "Bad

luck comes in threes." Once the items are reduced to ash and grit, add the ashes to a warm bath and stay in it until your fingers and toes wrinkle up. That's the end. You can't take the pins out until that point, or the ritual is ruined.

Lead Into Gold

Power: significant
Cost: 4 significant charges
Effect: As advertised, this spell turns lead into gold. Not in great quantities, as a rule: a lead coin might just develop a thin coating of gold over its surface. On the other hand, it doesn't take many fishing sinkers to churn up some healthy profits with this spell.
Ritual Action: There are countless medieval alchemical recipes for turning lead (or other base metals) into gold. You can look them up in Agrippa, Lull, and Fludd, among other places. Make sure you find the ones that turn lead into gold rather than the ones that give you progressive brain lesions from inhaling mercury fumes.

Summon Unspeakable Servant

Power: significant
Cost: 5 significant charges
Effect: "Summon" is perhaps inaccurate, since this spell actually creates the unnatural creature known as an "unspeakable servant." (GMs, see p. 307.) The servant obeys its master in all particulars, and can sometimes continue to exist after the master's death.

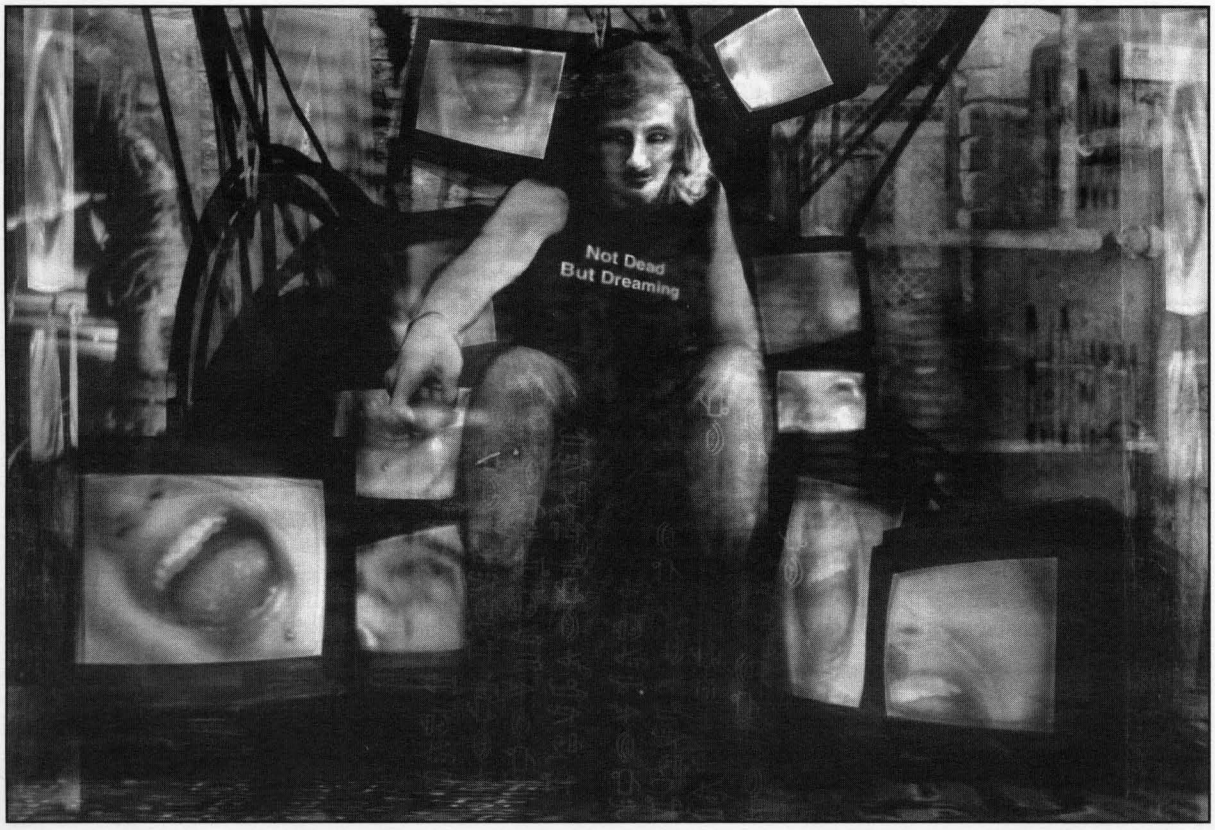
The type of servant you get (Lesser, Greater, or Abominable) depends on the sum of the dice when you rolled to cast the spell. If they add up to four or less, you get a lesser servant. If the sum is between 5 and 10, or if you rolled a low match (11 or 22), you get a greater servant. If the sum is higher than 10, or if you rolled 01, then you get an abominable servant.
Ritual Action: Kill a black bull at midnight when the moon is dark. Empty its body of entrails and keep it at body temperature until the moon is half-full and waxing. Then kill a black sheep when the moon is at its zenith. Empty its body of entrails, put the body inside the bull, and keep them at body temperature until the moon is full. Then kill a black rooster when the moon is at its zenith, gut the body, put the rooster in the sheep and the sheep in the bull, cover and keep warm until the moon is dark again. At midnight during the dark of the moon, pluck out either one of your eyes, place it in the rooster's body, put the rooster in the sheep and the sheep in the bull, and keep them warm for one lunar month. At that time, two months after you started the process, the spell is completed and your unspeakable servant hatches from within the bodies. (This ritual action works only for female dukes. If a man wishes to summon an unspeakable servant, he uses a cow, a ram, and a chicken instead of a bull, a sheep, and a rooster.)

If your ritual failed then it's a darn shame about that eye.

There are rumors that there's a variant on this ritual that lets you use someone else's eye instead of your own, but so far all known experiments in that direction have ended with the servant controlled by the eye donor.

Create Homunculus

Power: significant
Cost: 8 significant charges



artwork by Samuel Araya

Effect: Creates a miniature human being roughly the size of a pint flask, or of a classic twelve-inch *G.I. Joe* doll. This homunculus is a smaller copy of yourself, the only difference being that his Body score is yours divided by five. Any damage the homunculus takes affects you as if it was five times that amount. Homunculi must obey any command their creator gives them, and can learn any skill their creator can teach them. Only very stupid adepts teach their homunculi anything at all about magick, since most homunculi are also born with the instinctive knowledge that they will be free upon their creator's death. That damage-transfer thing is only one way, so it's a good idea to make your first command to the homunculus, "Never harm me." If you really want a miniature version of yourself who knows all your secrets and has a lot to gain from your death, there you go. Enjoy.

Ritual Action: Only males can make homunculi with this ritual. Blow a glass pint flask during the full moon using sand collected from under high tide. Masturbate into it at the dark of the moon, and vacuum-seal the flask using a magnet as the stopper, pointing the positive pole of the magnet into the flask. Bury the flask under a pile of horse manure deposited by a horse with hair the color of your own. After forty days, drill a hole in the stopper and immediately fill the flask with your blood, taken from the femoral artery. You should see a human-shaped blood clot form in the center of the flask, shining with its own light. Once a week, refill the flask with your blood, as above. At the end of forty weeks, dissolve the flask using your own stomach acid. Do not expose the flask to light at any time during this process, and make sure that the flask remains at blood warmth for the entire period.

Major Rituals

If any major rituals survived to the present day, those who have them are keeping quiet. The ritual that appears most frequently in gossip and speculation is called "Resurrection Body" or "The Philosopher's Stone"—a spell that transforms the user's body into an immortal, impervious, flawless vessel. (See *I Corinthians 15*: 40–49.)

A close second is "Summon Archangel." Supposedly this spell allows a sorcerer to both call and command an "archangel"—not a demon, ghost, or spirit of the departed, but the greater immaterial spirits that command and control them beyond the veil. Many speculate that these "archangels" are what demons call "the cruel ones."

Authentic Thaumaturgy

If you meet an old-school occultist who can actually accomplish magickal effects, it's almost certainly because that person practices Authentic Thaumaturgy—even if he or she knows it by a different name, such as Santeria or O.T.O. workings. This is very much like a school of magick, but at the same time it's less restrictive and less versatile.

Thaumaturgy is based entirely on rituals. There is no underlying ethos or contradiction or paradox—and therefore no taboos. On the other hand, there's no random magick, and the spells generally take a long, *long* time to cast.

Authentic Thaumaturgy is a Mind-based skill, and it does not have to be an obsession skill. It is possible for a Thaumaturge to eventually learn an adept school of magick while retaining their Thaumaturgy abilities, but adepts can't learn Authentic Thaumaturgy. A practice can be subsumed into a differing worldview, but a worldview can't accept a differing practice.

Most Authentic Thaumaturges are familiar with Tilt rituals, described later in this chapter. A group of Thaumaturges in Los Angeles discovered and formulized Tilts in the late 1980s while trying to create new rituals, and soon the word got out into the occult underground. Thaumaturges from other traditions may have been using Tilts for centuries.

Stats

Generate a Minor Charge: Thaumaturges do not use minor charges. Instead, they cast minor rituals simply by performing the actions and making an Authentic Thaumaturgy check with no penalty to the roll.

Generate a Significant Charge: Thaumaturges use a secret ritual—such as Harmonious Alignment (see p. 98)—to generate significant charges. Charging rituals are among the most carefully protected secrets in the occult underground. The common wisdom of the adept underground is that such a thing simply could not work, ever. In reality, they do work—but using one breaks an adept's taboo, regardless of his school. Most charging rituals are either difficult, dangerous, or limited, however.

Generate a Major Charge: If there's a ritual for gaining a major charge, it's lost for good. Which is just as well, since no one seems to know of any major rituals, either.

Starting Charges: Beginning Thaumaturges start out with no charges and three minor rituals of the GM's choosing. Other rituals must be acquired during the course of play—and be aware that charging rituals are among the most closely guarded secrets in the occult underground. Starting off in a Thaumaturgy cabal helps.

Memorizing Rituals: Instead of lugging around moldering books and scrolls, you can memorize rituals for ease of use. Memorized rituals still require the same procedures, but you can cast them without having a copy of the ritual at hand. Given that most rituals run for pages and pages of rather hermetic text with a frequent disdain for niceties such as recipes, precise measurements, or step-by-step instructions, the task of committing a ritual to memory in a way that preserves its symbolic penumbra is a daunting one. Mere rote memorization of the text itself would help you to write it down again, but isn't as useful when you're swinging a dead dog around your head and have to recall the names inscribed on the Pillars of Wisdom with meaningful understanding of their historical context and folkloric resonance.

Thaumaturges can memorize a ritual by spending experience points. (Non-Thaumaturges may do so at the GM's discretion.) As a rough guide, each ritual costs 1–5XP to memorize depending on complexity. Rituals that require little time or materials, such as Poison Ward (p. 96), only cost 1 XP. Angel of the Animals (p. 98) would cost 3XP, while Harmonious Alignment (p. 98) would be 5XP, owing to its substantial complexity and variable content.

Proxy Rituals

You can fool the cosmos into believing you are someone else by making that person your symbolic **proxy**. When people target you with magick, they might really target your proxy without knowing it. It's like changing your phone number to that of your worst enemy, so all those angry crank calls you normally get are redirected to your enemy instead.

Although it's possible for two people to work together and become each other's proxy, this is very rare. Usually you make someone your proxy in secret, because you want the bad things that are happening to you to happen to them instead. You can even make multiple proxies of yourself, increasing the chances that someone else takes the hit for you.

Proxy rituals are how you make this happen. There is an entire class of rituals that create the proxy relationship, modify it, and exploit it. They work by building symbolic connections between two identities. The more the identities resemble each other, the stronger the connection.

Proxies work both ways, but only for those who know the proxy ritual is in effect. If someone makes you their proxy, you can only use him as *your* proxy if you are aware of the connection. Otherwise, it's a one-way street.

This makes proxying infants very attractive. The spell activates before they're old enough to understand what's happening, and they grow up ignorant of the mystical bond you've snared them with.

Proxy magick is exploitive. Irresponsible use triggers madness checks. Use with caution.

Minor and Significant Proxies

The proxy bond can operate at one of two levels, minor and significant. A minor proxy can redirect supernatural surveillance and, for adepts and avatars, charges and taboos. But the significant proxy is more intense. It can really harm a proxied duke by stealing his charges, breaking his taboo, or even getting him to die in your place.

(Supposedly there are major proxies, where you actually absorb the target physically, mentally, and mystically but he still functions as a proxy. It'd be like changing your phone number to that of your enemy, then magickally eating both him and his phone so he's locked inside your head forever, taking those angry calls for you and swiftly going mad while you laugh and laugh. But no one's seen a functioning major proxy ritual in centuries.)

Minor proxy bonds are created by a variety of minor rituals. They require 3–6 minor charges and a varying amount of hocus-pocus. The Corsican Experiment, for example, requires only a ten-line Latin spell and one troy ounce of dirt from Italy. Le Chevalier is more complicated, involving ornate mystic patterns, dances, invocations to different Voudoun *loa,* and a baffling array of fiddly little material sacrifices—plus it can only be cast in a barn.

Significant proxy bonds are created the same way, but require significant rituals. They're quite baroque. For example, Geminition can only be cast at night when the constellation of Gemini is visible. It must be performed under the open sky, and you need two agates and fourteen fresh wild gladiolus blossoms. There's also a lengthy chant in Attic Greek. The Soul's Mirror can be cast at any time of the year, but you're going to be drawing symbols in your own blood, burning specially-made beeswax candles at both ends, and spelling things out with the shed skins of snakes. There's also more chanting: antique Mandarin this time. (Most people just sound it out.) In any event, these rituals cost 2–4 significant charges.

GMs should make up their own proxy rituals. The simpler the ritual, the more charges it costs. The more weird behavioral hoops you jump through, the cheaper it should be. Here are two examples.

The Rooted Seed

Power: minor
Cost: 4 minor charges
Effect: You conceive a child who is your minor proxy.
Ritual Action: Construct two full-face masks covered in the shards of a single broken mirror. The mask can have no holes in it, and therefore covers the eyes, nose, and mouth, though not so tightly as to hamper breathing. A man and a woman, either of whom must be the caster, put on the masks and bind their wrists and ankles together into four reversed pairs with twine soaked in menstrual blood from the woman and semen from the man. (The fluids need to be fresh at the time of soaking, but once prepared the twine can be used anytime and repeatedly if needed.) They then have sex while the woman is ovulating in hopes of conception, which is not guaranteed by the ritual. Chance of conception is up to the GM.

Mirror of Lies

Power: significant
Cost: 2 significant charges
Effect: Your target becomes your significant proxy.
Ritual Action: Choose seven people who are close friends or family of your target. Within a one-day period, communicate with all seven in such a way that they believe you are actually the target. You might call them posing as the target, send them an email from the target's own account, or disguise yourself magickally and say hello. As long as you have some sort of communication with them and they accept it believing you are your target, the ritual works.

Creating a Proxy

When you perform a proxy ritual, you gain a Soul-based skill called Proxy of (Other's Name). The skill's rating depends on how many Similarity Factors there are, as listed on the nearby table. These factors are cumulative, so add up the ones that fit and the total is your Proxy skill rating. Regardless, the skill cannot be higher than your Soul stat.

Bonus	Similarity Factor
50%	Proxies are blood relatives at one remove (parent/child, siblings)
40%	Names are identical
40%	Proxies are blood relatives at two removes (aunt/niece, grandparent/grandchild, cousins)
40%	Both proxies donate blood to each other
30%**	Close coincidence (live at the same house, share a birthday, parents' first names were the same, have had a lover in common)
30%	Names are anagrams of one another
20%	Proxies are blood relatives at more than two removes
20%	One proxy donates blood to the other
20%**	Anagram coincidences (Social Security Numbers or phone numbers are same digits in different order, anagram parent names)
15%**	Mild coincidence (same apartment number, share a zodiac sign)
15%*	One participant has a statue, painting or other artistic representation of the other, which was present during the ritual
10%*	One proxy changes appearance to resemble the other

10%*	Proxy is present at the ceremony.
10%	Each significant charge spent during the proxy ritual
5%*	One participant wears the clothes of the other during the ritual

* This bonus is given only to a participant who is actively putting forth the effort: dressing, disguising, participating, or procuring art.

** This bonus is gained only for a participant who is aware of it during the ritual casting.

Strengthening a Proxy

Your Proxy skill is a skill like any other, and can be improved in the normal ways. You can also temporarily improve your Proxy skill for a single check: concentrating on a mirror while rolling gives a temporary +5% skill shift; spending a minor charge gives a +10% shift; sitting in a room completely lined with mirrors gives a +15% shift. These modifications still can't boost a skill higher than your Soul stat, however.

Recognizing a Proxy

If you have secretly been made a Proxy of someone else, there are several ways to find out. The most obvious way is for you to notice all the strange and terrible things that happen to you—if you're a duke, you'll probably realize what's happening. Various forms of divination or mystic seeing, such as the Aura Sight skill, can reveal that you're a proxy. The GM can give you an occasional Soul check to get a freaky feeling that something is magickally screwy with you. Finally, you can find a suitable ritual such as Back Monkey (p. 97).

Realizing you're a proxy is one thing. Figuring out who you're a proxy of is quite another. There are billions of people on this planet, and figuring out just which one is using you as a psychic compost heap can be a substantial chore. Once you do figure out who your other half is, however, you can turn the tables. As soon as you correctly figure out who your tormentor is, the GM gives you the same Proxy skill that the other fellow *initially* had. (If he's smart, he's pumped it up since then, of course.) Your bond to him is the same as his bond to you—that is, if he cast a significant proxy ritual then you can use all the significant tricks and traps on him. If he used a minor ritual, it's just the lesser stuff.

Breaking a Proxy

If you have a Proxy skill, you can try to destroy the magickal connection. Until you actually have the skill, however, you can't do a thing.

To break the connection, you spend experience points. Each point you spend lowers *your* Proxy skill by five points. When your skill reaches zero, the connection is severed and can only be created again from scratch.

This means that while your Proxy skill is dropping, the other person's Proxy skill remains the same. You aren't weakening the connection. You're just weakening *your control* over the connection. The lower your skill goes, the more power the other person has over you. In other words, things are going to get worse before they get better.

Spending the points is just the mechanic. It represents your active, symbolic attempts to break free of the magickal entanglement by distorting the connection between the two identities. You must decide what actions you take, and your GM has to approve them to spend the points. Examples include changing one's name and appearance, acting in a fashion contrary to the co-proxy, or symbolically dedicating oneself to a new identity (getting baptized into a new religion, for example).

Zilching out isn't the only way out of a proxy bond. The simplest way is to kill your partner—but many people lack the guts or wherewithal for such drastic measures. It might be possible to get the proxy broken through other paranormal means; the ritual Spellbreaker could probably do it.

But instead of getting out of it, some proxies get into it. They strengthen the bond until *they're* the dominant partner and can screw up the other with impunity. Even if you don't surpass your fellow proxy, upping the ante makes many of his powers less reliable.

Using a Proxy

Once the proxy bond is established, you can use proxy effects to exploit it. This usually just requires a check against your Proxy skill.

Some effects require you to succeed at a **proxy struggle**. This means you make a Proxy skill check with a minimum roll of your proxy's skill. If Sam has Proxy Fred: 80% and Fred has Proxy Sam: 50%, Sam has to roll between 51–80 to succeed. If your proxy doesn't have a Proxy skill, his effective skill rating is 0%.

No proxy effects require any ritual actions. Will it and it is so. Nonetheless, many people have ritual actions they've been taught to create the effects, and they do them faithfully. It's just bad information that has been passed around.

To use a proxy effect, you must know that you can. Many aspiring proxies are ignorant of the full menu, as it were, because there's no definitive guide to this process. No proxy knowledge is automatic or intrinsic to the experience except for Long Distance Spell Blocking, which works even for proxies who don't know they're proxies.

Minor Effects

These are the proxy effects you can use if you have a minor proxy bond.

Consciousness Peeping

Power: minor
Effect: With a successful Proxy check, you get a vague sense of your proxy's situation. This could be a blurry vision of what he's seeing (or dreaming, if he's asleep), vague sounds, or an emotional impression. If your proxy knows about you, he can automatically take this chance to get a look into *your* life too, but if he's an ignorant proxy he might only get a vaguely uneasy and paranoid sensation.

Long Distance Spell Blocking

Power: minor
Effect: This effect is automatic and unconscious. Whenever

someone tries to use magick on you from a great distance—ritual, channel, spell or whatever—they might target your proxy instead. The chance of them getting a targeting lock on you, and not a proxy, is equal to 100% divided by the number of proxies you're involved with. For the purpose of this calculation, you're considered one proxy. So if you have one proxy (plus yourself), the chance of an accurate reading is 50% (100/2). If you have three proxies (plus yourself), the attempt has only a 25% chance of reading you (100/4). If the roll fails, the attempt works on a random proxy connected to you instead.

This cannot be used against spells cast in your presence. If some gutter-adept is flinging blast spells at you from across the room, your proxy won't protect you. However, if he's using long-distance blasts (see p. 115) then he might hit your proxy by mistake.

This is the one effect that still protects ignorant proxies. Even if I don't know someone's proxied me, there's that chance that a divination or distance blast aimed at me hits my proxy. This is one reason that people who proxy infants tend to target infants who they think won't grow up to be dukes—which, to be fair, is most of them.

Remote Charging

Power: minor
Effect: If you and your proxy are both adepts of the same school, he can perform charging actions for you. This works for schools whose charge concept is externally focused, where you get your "juice" from something other than yourself. Thus, remote charging works for Bibliomancy, Cliomancy, Iconomancy, Plutomancy, and Videomancy. If the charge structure is based on personal experience or sacrifice, proxy charging doesn't work. The personal attunement simply isn't adequate: you can fool a few mundane details of the world, but you can't fool the power of raw magick. It therefore does not work for Dipsomancy, Entropomancy, Epideromancy, Mechanomancy, Narco-Alchemy, Personamancy, Pornomancy, or Urbanomancy. In any event, remote charge can only be done with the voluntary cooperation of your proxy.

Taboo Fuzz

Power: minor
Effect: If you're proxied to an adept or avatar and break his taboo while you're concentrating on the proxy connection, make a roll. This is a proxy struggle, as described earlier. If you win the struggle he gets tabooed—but only a little. An adept loses one significant charge, or a minor one if he has no significant charges. An avatar can't use any channels for the next five minutes or so. In either case, the proxy doesn't know what has happened, but he probably feels something weird. A low-ranked Helplessness check may be in order, depending on the situation.

Significant Effects

Here's the hardcore stuff: the powers you gain from a significant proxy bond. You can use all the minor effects in addition to these.

Charge Theft

Power: significant
Effect: If you're proxied to an adept and you beat him at a proxy struggle, you can steal one minor charge from him. If all he has are significant charges, you break one of them up, taking one minor and leaving him nine minors.

Consciousness Swapping

Power: significant
Effect: A higher form of Consciousness Peeping, this lets you actually take over your proxy's body while he takes over yours. Anyone who wants to do this has to win a proxy struggle. It lasts a number of minutes equal to the successful percentile roll.

Doing this on an unsuspecting person gives him a rank-9 Unnatural check and a rank-4 Helplessness check. (Depending on what circumstances you put him in, more checks could be on the way.) Doing this to someone who expects it, or who has experienced it before, inflicts a rank-4 Unnatural check only.

Death Dumping

Power: significant
Effect: Here's the big one. If you *die*, you can make one last Proxy roll. This is like a proxy struggle, but instead of getting a skill success higher than your proxy's skill, it has to be higher than his Soul stat. If you can beat that, he dies instead. Successfully using this ability is a rank-7 Violence check.

Taboo Dumping

Power: significant
Effect: If you're an adept or avatar who really, really wants to break taboo, you can try to convince the universe that it was really your Proxy who did it. If you get a matched success or a crit, it works perfectly: you break the rules and get away clean. If your Proxy is practicing the same course of magick, he suffers the problems attendant on taboo breaking.

If it's a normal success, you confuse the universe the wrong way. You commit the taboo without penalty, but you cannot use your adept or avatar power for a number of minutes equal to the percentile roll. For that time, you're just an ordinary person.

If you fail, you tabooed and that's it.

Taboo Static

Power: significant
Effect: If you have a significant proxy who's an adept and you break taboo while concentrating on the connection, you can mess him up good. If you win a proxy struggle, he loses *all* charges. If you don't win a proxy struggle but it's good enough to still be a success, it's like winning a proxy struggle for the minor version of Taboo Static.

Against avatars, this is rather less effective. Winning the struggle bars him from using his powers for an hour. A normal success has no effect.

TILT RITUALS

Similar to Proxy rituals, Tilt rituals require you to make a symbolic act tied to a desired outcome. A successful Tilt shifts the odds slightly in your favor within the context of your goal, or cause the odds to shift slightly against your enemy.

Unlike Proxy Rituals, Tilting does not require any charges. On the other hand, it isn't nearly as powerful. You also need a Soul stat of 60 or higher to make use of Tilts.

Tilting is at heart a sort of freestyle version of ritual magick. It's the closest thing to simply creating a ritual that you can do. Unlike rituals, however, a given Tilt isn't easy to repeat.

TILT OVERVIEW

For example, let's say you want to put a whammy on an enemy—you want to hobble him in some fashion. The appropriate Tilt is known as a Hex, and it can force the target to flip-flop an important roll if that result is worse than the unmodified roll.

To pull this off, you ideally want to have your target be a willing participant in the Tilt attempt. Obviously, this works better with allies for whom you want to generate a useful Tilt. Short of that, you do what you can. A Tilt attempt is mostly composed of assembling **symbolic elements** that represent the Tilt at hand. Those appear in more detail later, but for purposes of our example let's say that you want to Hex an Epideromancer so that the next time you attack him, the Hex goes off. You need symbolic elements that represent yourself, your target, the context in which it activates (your planned ambush), and the Hex itself. The more elements you have, the better the chance of your Tilt succeeding, and you can use up to five elements for each of the four categories you're working with. So you use the following:

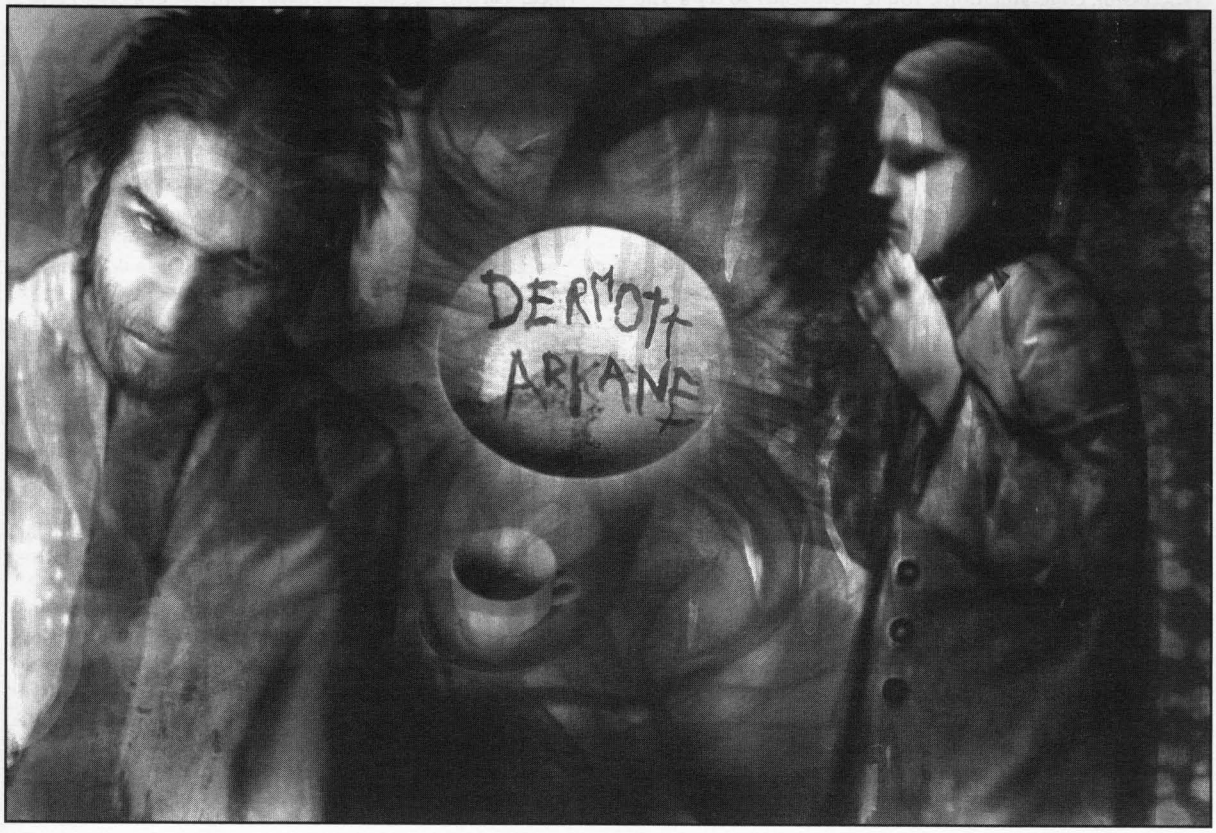
Yourself: Your name, a photograph of you in a pose of strength, a lock of your hair, your credit card, and your favorite shirt.

Your Target: His name, a bit of his skin, a photograph you secretly took of him looking shocked when your accomplice spilled a glass of wine on him in a restaurant, a printout of an email he sent wherein he expresses his anxiety over your recent actions, and the corpse of his dog—whom you killed.

The Context: A videotape of the movie *The Most Dangerous Game,* the bear trap you killed his dog with, a shield made of tissue, an insoluble maze drawn on a napkin he left behind in the restaurant, and a written description of the place where you plan to ambush him, which you read aloud.

The Tilt: A broken mirror, a three-leaf clover, a banana peel, itching powder, and a joy buzzer.

With your symbolic elements assembled, you work up plans for a ritual that uses all of these elements. Typically you set the items up into four distinct groups to strengthen their respective symbologies, then perform actions appropriate to each group. A verbal component in which you intone your names and the description of the ambush site would also be part of this, along with general statements about how powerful you are and how your enemy is as nothing; talking smack WWF-style is entirely appropriate. In the course of the ritual you might want to piss on his dog's



artwork by Samuel Araya

corpse, eat the bit of flesh, read the email aloud in a mocking, derisive tone while your allies laugh heartily, play the hunting-humans sequence of the movie on a handy television set (preferably one with a big screen and a subwoofer), slice the tissue shield up with your credit card and wrap the pieces in your shirt, and so forth. Your every action should serve to reinforce and make explicit the symbolic links between your elements and what you want them to represent.

Needless to say, you better do all this in the privacy of your own home.

If all goes well, you're ready. When you ambush the fleshworker, hopefully his first attempt at getting off a spell is flip-flopped into a disastrous failure and you smear his brains across the pavement. Of course, he still might get away. But you've also done a Tilt that establishes a Bond with your allies, one that places a Boon on all of you, and for good measure you've put a Ward on your apartment so if he survives and comes after you he gets whammied again. (If you really want to jack him up, use a Proxy Ritual to make yourself a proxy of your target so that it's like he actually *is* participating in the Tilt attempt.) In short, you've performed a bunch of ritual, symbolic actions that shift the odds of the conflict in your favor.

Learning Tilts

Simply having a Soul of 60 is not enough to Tilt—you have to learn how to do it. It's not something you can pick up from reading about it, either. In fact, the only way to learn Tilting is to be Tilted by someone else. Specifically, you must be a consenting target for a Tilt, and you must be present for the attempt and participate in it. If the attempt is successful, congratulations: you're now ready to try a Tilt yourself. After you've done it yourself successfully one time, you can Tilt other people and teach them to do it, too. (Although there are different kinds of Tilts, you don't have to learn each one; just getting the basic knack of Tilting is enough to allow you to perform any kind of Tilt, since they all function on the same principle.)

Generally speaking, however, normal people are not going to give much credence to Tilting. It involves a lot of ritual mumbo-jumbo and when you're done, nothing in particular occurs. Even when the Tilt goes off, the only result is a shift of probabilities, not a blast of sourceless light or a sudden, inexplicable injury.

The GM should think carefully before allowing Tilts into a campaign. They are not so powerful as to become unbalancing, but they can be time-consuming to deal with and you may not want to be bothered. On the other hand, they can be a lot of fun, and can introduce interesting subplots into your campaign. Tilts can also have different levels of power (minor, significant, and major), and you should determine which level you're comfortable with allowing. If you wish, you may decide that each level of Tilt power is a separate learning process, so that characters can only use the power level that they've been taught.

If you are just starting your campaign, you should generally not allow any beginning character to know how to Tilt. It's something that should be introduced in play, probably by a GMC patron.

Although some sample Tilts are provided, the GM should consider using them in unpredictable ways. A Tilt is essentially a symbolic connection between a human and the cosmos, but one that the cosmos doesn't necessarily appreciate; establishing such a connection may attract unwanted attention, make the Tilter more vulnerable to magickal detection or attack, or simply make things a little more interesting.

Common Tilts

There are four common types of Tilts. A Tilt can be used at three levels of power as noted above, each of which includes the effects of the lower levels in addition to their own. (So significant Tilt effects include minor ones, and majors include both minor and significant.) The GM determines which levels of Tilts you have access to.

Tilts do not produce Unnatural stress checks unless otherwise noted. They generally just seem like good or bad luck, not the result of magickal will.

Bonds

You may form a Bond between yourself and one or more willing targets, but you may only belong to one Bond at a time; typically, a group of like-minded individuals forms a single Bond that unites them symbolically. You should choose a name for your Bond, though if your group already has a cabal name, that'll do fine. You cannot attempt a Bond for which you are not one of the targets.

To make the Bond, you must perform a Tilt ritual in which every desired Bond member is a target. This means you need a set of symbolic elements for each target, though you only need one set for the context and one set for the nature of the Tilt. Each target is rolled separately, meaning some may be Bonded and some may not be. Because a typical Tilt attempt takes an hour or more, be prepared to spend most of a day making the attempt if you have a lot of people to Bond.

A Bond must be renewed at the start of every quarterly season on an appropriate date chosen by the Tilter; solstices and the like are convenient, as are birthdays of Bond members if they're close enough to the start of the seasons. Once you choose a date, you need to stick to it in future attempts.

A Bond can be **shattered** in a number of ways:

- The Bond is not renewed.
- None of the target attempts succeed.
- Only one target is successfully re-Bonded.
- A Bonded member takes a direct, detrimental action against a fellow Bonded member.

If the Bond is shattered, every member suffers an Unnatural stress check equal in rank to the number of former members in the Bond, and any current Tilts affecting the Bonded group are renounced.

If a Bond is only partially renewed—that is, if at least two current Bonded members are re-Bonded but one or more other current ones are not—then it is not shattered, but excluded members may not be re-Bonded until the next season's attempt unless the Bond is shattered or renounced (see below) in the interim. Groups who really want to get everyone bonded may choose to abandon the Bond and try again from scratch.

A member may **renounce** the Bond at any time with no penalty; renouncing Tilts is described later.

Effects

A Bonded group can be treated as a single target for other Tilts cast by members of the Bond, in which case the Tilt affects all Bonded members identically. For rules purposes, the Tilter simply uses one Bond holder as the target and the results are applied to all Bonded members. No one outside the Bond can exploit the Bond in this way without the use of a proxy ritual, as explained later.

Minor. Once a month, each member of a Bond may take a shift of up to 5% on a beneficial roll they make that is directed at a fellow Bonded member, such as treating injuries or casting helpful magick; the Bond must be activated before making the die roll.

Significant. Once a month, each member of a Bond may treat any single roll as a flip-flop if the roll is made in a combat that includes one or more Bonded allies fighting on your side; the Bond may be activated after you make the die roll.

Major. Once a month, each member of a Bond may **flash** another single member. A flash is a momentary vision in which the target sees through your eyes for about three seconds. The target knows the source and nature of the flash, but has no other knowledge of your situation except whatever he saw through your eyes. This is typically used when a Bonded member is in danger, but a clever usage would be to scrawl a short message on a napkin and then hold it in front of your face before triggering the flash. A flash causes an Unnatural stress check in the target equal in rank to the number of Bonded members.

Boons

You may bestow a Boon on yourself or on a single target. A Boon grants a one-time beneficial modifier to a die roll within the context of a specific situation described in the Tilt attempt. The trigger situation must be tied to the influence or action of another person, not a matter of happenstance; a Boon that helped the target when attacked by a particular person would be acceptable, but a Boon that aided the target the next time she happened to be in a car wreck would not be allowed. Once activated or renounced, the Boon is gone. You may not grant another Boon until the current one is gone, nor may you have more than one Boon affecting you at a time. If your target is Bonded, the Boon affects all Bond members.

Effects

Minor. The target may take a positive or negative shift of up to 5% on any single die roll in the appropriate context. The Boon must be activated before making the die roll, but the target may choose the percentage she shifts (1%–5%) after the roll is made—to get a matched result, for example. The target must shift by at least 1% once the Boon is activated.

Significant. The target may flip-flop a single roll in the appropriate context. The Boon may be activated after the target makes the die roll.

Major. The target may convert any roll made for any PC or GMC, including herself, in the appropriate context into a critical success. The Boon may be activated after the target makes the die roll.

Hexes

You may bestow a Hex on yourself or on a single target. Hexes are otherwise identical to Boons in all respects except their effects.

Effects

Minor. The target's first major skill check in the appropriate context receives a positive or negative shift of up to 5%; the GM chooses the amount of the shift based on what would be the worst result for the target.

Significant. The target's second major skill check in the appropriate context may be flip-flopped by the GM to produce the worst result for the target.

Major. The target's third major skill check in the appropriate context is automatically a critical failure.

Wards

You may create a Ward on the physical location that is most sacred to you; for the vast majority of people this is their living space, but some might venerate a mystical site of some sort. The GM determines whether your desired location qualifies as the place most sacred to you. A Ward is designed to discourage a particular target from entering your sacred space, or at least to weaken them while there. Once activated or renounced, the Ward is gone. You may only have one Ward in place anywhere at any time. A single location may not have more than one Ward. Although you need to symbolically represent the location for the Tilt context, it is the person you are Warding against who is the target of the attempt. If your target is Bonded, the Ward affects all Bond members.

Effects

Minor. While in the Warded space, the target's first major skill check receives a positive or negative shift of up to 5%; the GM chooses the amount of the shift based on what would be the worst result for the target. If the target is a Bonded group, only the first major skill check by any member of the Bond in the Warded space is affected, and then the Ward is gone.

Significant. While in the Warded space, all of the target's major skill checks are flip-flopped by the GM to produce the worst result. The Ward expires once the target (or targets, if Bonded) leaves the location; she may then immediately re-enter the now un-Warded space if she's clever enough. (The minor effect still occurs, but only for the first roll; that roll may also be flip-flopped.)

Major. As soon as the target enters the Warded space, you receive a flash as per the Bond major effect. You see through the target's eyes for three seconds. If the target is a member of a Bond, you do not know which member you're seeing through unless visual cues reveal his identity; if multiple Bonded targets enter the Warded space, you get a separate flash from each of them. You do not suffer an Unnatural check for this flash. The targets are unaware of the flash occurring.

Other Tilts

Players may design other types of Tilts, subject to the approval of the GM. Gameplay effects of a Tilt should

be similar to those given in the examples. Minor effects result in a +/-5% shift, significant ones cause a flip-flop, and major ones either produce an extreme success/failure or may trigger an unusual unnatural phenomenon. Likewise, you should not be able to have more than one of a given type of Tilt active at any time.

Detecting Tilts

Characters with Aura Sight or similar abilities can magickally see Tilts, but only if the Tilt relates to them. Tilts are too subtle to be obvious. Specifically, a character may see a Tilt on himself or on someone he is Bonded to; he may see a Tilt that he has placed on someone else; and he may see a Ward if he is the target or is an inhabitant of the Warded location.

At the GM's discretion, significant or major Tilts may be visible to anyone with the appropriate ability.

Renouncing Tilts

You may renounce a Tilt that is currently on you if you put it there. You may also renounce a Tilt on another target if you put it there, but only if the target is a willing and active participant in the attempt to renounce. Either way, renouncement removes the Tilt and its effects immediately. Renouncement takes only a moment and a simple focus of will.

To renounce a Tilt placed on you or another target against your will, or of which you were simply ignorant, you must counter it with an opposite Tilt. For example, renouncing a Hex on a given target requires you to grant a Boon to that target; instead of actually having the normal effect of a Boon, the Boon simply negates the Hex. Likewise, renouncing a Ward you didn't create requires you to perform another Ward ritual with the intent of removing the current Ward; if successful, the Ward is removed.

Although a successful renouncement attempt usually removes the Tilt with no problems, there may be exceptions. Renouncing your own Bond, for example, is no problem; it's a matter of free will and the rest of the Bonded group may continue on without you. But renouncing the Bond of someone else in your group, which you may do since you all contributed to the Tilt, would qualify as a hostile action and shatter the Bond as described earlier.

Targeting Tilts

Targeting your Tilt is similar to casting a Proxy Ritual, but not identical. To select a target, you assemble a number of Connections; each Connection grants a cumulative percentage chance that the Tilt works on that target. Valid connections and their percentages are:

- Informed consent from the target: 20%
- Physical presence of the target: 5%
- Participation by the target: 5%
- Symbolic elements: 2% each

Informed consent means the target understands that the Tilter is committing a symbolic act to effect a magickal result, and knows what the result is. **Physical presence** means the target is in the same immediate area as the Tilter and witnesses the Tilt attempt. **Participation** means the target joins in the effort. **Symbolic elements** can include items, actions, or verbalizations that symbolically represent four different categories:

- The Tilter.
- The target.
- The context in which the Tilt is to activate.
- The type of Tilt.

No single symbolic element category can contribute more than 10% to the Tilt, and no single symbolic element can contribute to more than one category.

The Tilter assembles the Connections as desired, to a maximum chance of 70%: 20% for informed consent, 5% each for target presence and participation, and 40% for the symbolic elements. The roll may be modified by magick, passions, or other game effects as normal. You must assemble a list of all the Connections and your GM must approve the list.

(There are circumstances in which the attempt can be higher than 70%, described later. No Tilt chance greater than 99% has any additional usefulness, however.)

Once all connections for the target or targets are assembled, you may attempt the Tilt. This requires a number of minutes equal to the chance for the attempt; if there are multiple targets (as with a Bond), you must add all the chances together to determine the duration of the Tilt attempt. At the end of that time, you roll against your chance for each target. If you succeed, the Tilt is made. If you fail, you suffer an Unnatural stress check equal in rank to the tens place of your failed Tilt die roll; your targets are unaffected. If you are using a Tilt on multiple targets, it is possible for you to succeed with some but not others.

Optional: If you wish and the GM agrees, you may resolve a Tilt on multiple targets with a single die roll; use the lowest single-target chance to determine the outcome. Duration of the Tilt attempt is unchanged, however.

Tilts and Proxies

Tilts can be combined with Proxy Rituals to achieve easier results. By making yourself or an accomplice a proxy of your target, you get the benefits of informed consent, physical presence, and participation—that's 30% right there. Become a proxy of your foe, slap a hex on yourself, and then go after him. If he's Bonded, you can Hex yourself and it'll whack him *and* his Bond because it's like he cast it on himself.

To do this, you must make a normal Proxy check in addition to the Tilt check. If you blow the Proxy roll but make the Tilt roll, the Tilt affects you instead.

The symbolic elements you choose must represent you or your accomplice—whoever you initially direct the magick at before the proxy bond redirects it. You're fooling your own magick.

About Symbolic Elements

Symbolic elements are the most important part of a Tilt attempt. Potentially, anything can qualify as a symbolic element if it would naturally make sense to both the Tilter and the target. They cannot, however, simply agree on an inappropriate element for a planned Tilt and thereby invest it with meaning.

The simplest symbolic element is a verbalization, such as speaking the target's name or describing the context of the Tilt. Actions usually include body movements such as walking in circles, shaking hands, or bowing. Items might be photographs of the target or his family, a cup that all targets drink from for a Bond, or blueprints of a location to be Warded.

Besides presenting each element to the GM, the Tilter must also symbolically present each element to the cosmos. This requires acknowledging each element in various ways, perhaps by naming elements aloud, incorporating them into gestures, or burning some in a fire.

All of these elements are combined into what is, in effect, a ritual. The presentation of this ritual should be carefully planned beforehand and then executed without interruption. If the attempt stops before completion, there is no penalty—but if you try again, you must begin from the beginning.

Invested Elements

You may increase the effectiveness of one or more symbolic elements, breaking the 10% barrier and increasing your chances of success. There are two ways to prepare an invested element: spending magick charges or investing elements with ritual acts. In addition, adepts and Avatars are particularly susceptible to invested elements.

Spending magick charges. You may spend a single charge to pump up an element. A minor charge increases the element's effectiveness from 2% to 4%, a significant charge pumps it to 20%, and a major charge pumps it to 100%.

Investing elements with ritual acts. With your GM's approval, you may increase an element's effectiveness through a ritual action. In our initial example, the photograph you staged of an ally spilling wine onto the target in a restaurant would be an invested element, as would killing the target's dog. Generally speaking, you ritually invest an element by doing something meaningful to the element before the Tilt attempt—and to qualify as meaningful, there must be an element of risk involved. Stealing an item from the target's home, clipping a lock of her hair while she sleeps, or getting her fired and snatching her termination letter would all qualify, as would retrieving a bullet that wounded the target—but the bullet casing would only be worth the basic 2%. An invested element can be worth anywhere from 4% to 10%, though anything above 6% should be rare and would require both great risk and most likely some form of physical harm. Killing the target's dog, for example, might provide 6% if it's a cocker spaniel but 10% if it's a vicious guard dog. The more symbolically potent the investiture, the more potent the element. The GM is final arbiter on the strength of invested elements. A truly extreme investiture, such as kidnapping the target's son and sacrificing him during the Tilt attempt, could generate an element as high as 100%—but such mystically powerful actions are generally excessive given the limited benefits of Tilting.

Adepts and Avatars. Any element that has a strong symbolic link to a target adept's school of magick or a target Avatar's archetype is automatically considered charged, and is worth 4%. (For useful examples of the latter, check out the section on Avatar symbologies in the Avatar chapter.)

Combinations. You may use all three of these methods in combination on a given element. If you killed the Epideromancer's vicious guard dog, made ritual cuts into the dog's skin to spell out the target's name, and dropped a Significant charge on the dog, you'd have an invested element worth 34%: 10% for the ritual potency of the dog, 4% for the mutilation of the dog's flesh, and 20% for the significant charge.

As always, the GM is the final arbiter on the value of invested elements.

Limits on Symbolic Elements

A specific symbolic element used in a Tilt attempt cannot be used again by the same Tilter—ever. Each subsequent Tilt attempt must incorporate different elements never before used by the Tilter, even if the previous usage was failed or abandoned partway through. An invalid symbolic element does not sabotage the Tilt attempt in which it is re-used, but it does not contribute anything to it.

Tilts are, in effect, a sort of videogame cheat code for the cosmos—and the reality programmers of the Invisible Clergy are quick to purge such codes from the software of existence. You cannot magickally exploit a given element more than once because ongoing exploitation of a cheat in reality requires the obsessional worldview of the adept; lacking that level of passion and ability, you are limited to minor, restricted effects that get harder and harder to create the more you mess with them.

Target-specific elements are only restricted for use with that target, however. A photograph of a target's childhood home cannot be used again, but a photograph of a different target's childhood home will work for that other target. Note that multiple copies of the same photograph or item do not count as different elements. Similar items, such as different photographs of the same target, can only be used in multiple Tilts if they are both symbolically different and symbolically appropriate. One Boon that used a photograph of the target in his home and a later Boon that used a photograph of the target as a child with his mother would be acceptable, because they are different enough and appropriate enough to the nature of the Tilt that they qualify as distinct elements.

Elements that represent the Tilter, the context, and the nature of the Tilt may not be repeated no matter who the target is. If you use a knife to represent danger, you can never again use that element in any way, unless the new iteration of the element is symbolically distinct enough that the GM allows it. That same knife or any random knife could not be used a second time, but if you used that dagger to wound the target, you could once again use it in a Tilt against the target because now it is invested with new meaning.

This profound limitation requires careful work on the part of the Tilter. You should keep the Connection lists assembled for the GM on file, checking against them for each subsequent Tilt. Needless to say, this very quickly becomes a cumbersome obligation. Pushing the cosmos around isn't easy.



CHAPTER TEN
ADEPTS

There was this guy who was crazy: speaking in other voices crazy, bad trouble crazy. Yet he kept it together enough to have a girlfriend, and one day when his façade of sanity crumbled and she realized what was going on in his mind, she asked him the obvious question: "Have you thought about getting professional help?" He said the first fearful thing that came into his crazymaking head: *"But what if I came out of it a happy, well-rounded person?"*

Welcome to the world of the adept.

Your Vision

You have a vision, a way to see the world, understand it, and even bend it to your will. This isn't a hobby. It's not a pose, or a style, or a trend. Your vision is an all-encompassing, obsessive, and idiosyncratic worldview, and it's something you've been developing—probably without realizing it—since you were a child.

Maybe it's sex, drugs, or rock and roll. Maybe it's money, television, or history. Maybe it's the sounds your city makes at night.

Whatever it is, it's yours. It belongs to you. You are the first human being to ever truly see the world for what it is.

You are more than human. But normal people would say you're less.

Your Power

No one else sees the world quite like you do. You've got cosmic x-ray vision. You know people who think *they* have it all figured out, that *they* know what makes the world go round. *They* are wrong. *You* are right.

You've got just the right tongue to rasp away the candy coating on the all-day sucker of reality. You can explain everything—*everything*—within the framework of your unique perception.

Your reality filter gives you power. You can make things happen. With a thought you can twist the probabilities of chance encounters, or spread rumors even when you're all alone, or make your enemies bleed with both hands tied behind your back.

The ancients gave it a name: **magick**. *You* made it yours.

Your Glory

There's a whole world out there of people who don't know any better. They don't understand you. They don't see your vision. They don't respect your power.

Fuck 'em.

You aren't out to win converts. You're just out to see and do things no one else can. Maybe you'll change the world, or destroy it. Whatever you do, do it *now*. No one's getting any younger and this is one vision that's gonna die with you. If you don't get walking on your path, it's going to walk all over you.

The stakes could be huge. You could make a difference. Coulda shoulda woulda—time to roll.

The whole world is waiting for you and they don't even know it.

YOUR SCHOOL

You're alone and you're not. There are other people who think sort of like you do. If you're bent for booze, if that's how you make the magick happen, you may meet somebody else who uses it too. That don't make you brothers.

Because we've got this creeping monoculture millennial bullshit going on, the same big things keep cropping up in adept magick. Booze, sex, television, identity. Adepts with similar worldviews turn up, and sometimes they teach each other stuff. When more than one adept works magick in a compatible way, it's called a school. That doesn't mean you can read a book about it, or go someplace to learn it. It's just a word that means "a particular way that more than one person does magick."

This might sound good to you. "Hey," you think, "it's *Marvel Team-Up* time! I just found my best buddy!"

Long-term, it don't work out.

You can get along okay with an adept who follows some *other* school. You know he's wrong and you're the one who knows the way the world really works, and he knows the same thing about you, and it's cool. You say potato, he says murgatroid, whatever.

But take a road trip with somebody who walks *your* path and you'll be at each other's throats by the time you hit the city limits. It's like how the Orthodox Church split up: you're so close the divisions are catastrophic.

The thing about you adepts is you can't see each other's point of view. You can't put down your reality filter long enough to understand how somebody else makes the magick happen. Each adept grows up with this way of seeing things nobody else, not even other adepts, can understand. You're shaped by a lifetime of experiences, heartache and pleasure, triumph and destruction, and when you meet an adept in your school your surface similarities camouflage a gaping abyss of difference. You've led different lives, have different stories, loved different people.

You've shaped yourself into the person you are. That guy in your school is somebody else. What he believes about the world and what you believe about the world just don't fit together.

So shake hands and move on. You walk this path alone.

LAWS OF MAGICK

You can slice up magick a hundred ways, but they're all based on three inflexible laws.

- **The Law of Symbolic Tension:** Your magick is based on a paradox.
- **The Law of Transaction:** You get out of it only what you put into it.
- **The Law of Obedience:** Your magick is the only magick for you.

THE LAW OF SYMBOLIC TENSION

Your magick doesn't make sense. Not to normal people. Not even to most other adepts. It gets its power from the friction between ideas, and it's your ability to walk between contradictory ideas that makes you so unusual. Most people's brains just short out when they realize they're in a paradox: "Oh well, it's just a paradox. Move on, nothin' to see here." You're different: "Oh yeah, it's a paradox! Coooool."



You can make sense of the senseless.

Why is this? Everybody's got an opinion and few can shut up about it.

Some say the universe is poorly constructed and falling apart. Paradoxes are the holes in the fabric, holes where you can poke your finger in and pull on the hidden strings. Being a gawker at the car wrecks of standard logic shows you reality's smeared-out brains. This approach appeals to boozehounds, skinners, bodybags and others who generally have a destructive take on things.

Others go the opposite route. They say the sensual world—the common pool of perceptions that "the sky is up there" and "that's a tree, this is a rock"—is all *maya*, illusion. The real truth is incomprehensible to our feeble human minds, but we can get brief, flickering glimpses of it in the areas where the illusion breaks down: through paradox, where the universe contradicts itself. This theory appeals to those who get their charges externally, by shaking down a hidden order, people like Bibliomancers and a few Pornomancers with some banned-book learnin'.

Then there's the consensus-reality theory, that the sky is above and the earth below only because we've all agreed they are and we're too lazy to do it differently. Adepts crack the consensus because they've picked out the contradictions that show its vulnerability to human will. This idea makes the most sense to those who reap mojo based on human attention or belief or desire: Plutomancers, cobweb farmers, and their ilk.

Finally, there's the solipsism approach: the entire cosmos is merely an extension of your mind. No one else in all of existence is real. We're all figments of your imagination.

artwork by Rob Nemeth

You're in a race against yourself, and you're the only challenge there is. Magick works because you've allowed yourself to make it work, to make this illusory game more interesting. There is a distinct possibility that you are insane—but in a solipsistic world, there's no standard to judge insanity by. The solipsistic approach works for schools obsessed with systems and games, like Personamancy, Urbanomancy, or Videomancy. (It's also popular with selfish, shitty, amoral assholes, regardless of their magick practices.)

Whatever the rationale, the power of paradox is real. Take booze: it gives you freedom (from your inhibitions and worries) but it also enslaves you. It makes you more yourself and less yourself. More because all your personality traits get exaggerated (or revealed) when you're drunk. Less because you have less judgment—and because it eventually kills you. Booze binges are full of drunken "moments of truth," revelations that seem life-changing at the time but that fade like smoke during the next day's hangover. Booze is the foundation of the Dipsomancy school of magick—Dipsomancers (also known as boozehounds) can only work magick when they're drunk, and they lose any stored power when they sober up.

Chaos magick—Entropomancy—is a simpler example. In order to get control over the universe, you have to surrender control of yourself. Or there's Pornomancy, practiced by the Sect of the Naked Goddess, where you slavishly worship and imitate a woman who was habitually pushed around and degraded. The skinners—Epideromancers—gain control of the body by destroying it. And so on.

How do *you* believe paradox works?

The Law of Transaction

The second law is simpler: there's no free ride. It's just like Isaac Newton's third law: what you get out of it is equal to what you put into it.

You gotta charge up your magick battery before you can power a spell. There are three types of charges: **minor**, **significant**, and **major**. They're different in ways other than just power. You can build up a billion minor charges and not have enough juice for a single significant charge—though, paradoxically, you can turn one significant charge into ten minor charges, and one major charge into ten significant charges.

Minor charges come from minor acts or behavioral concessions and are used to create minor effects. Significant charges are from more meaningful deeds and power more impressive effects. Major charges are the real deal. They require tremendous effort, danger, and trouble to acquire, and they pay off with similarly impressive effects: a minor charge could light your cigarette; a significant charge could burn down the house; a major charge could scorch a city.

You can't use your magick to generate more charges for yourself. If you're a fleshworker who gets juice by cutting yourself, you can't use your magick to do it. Charges don't make charges.

Just so you know, if you try to use a minor or significant charge and fail your roll, you still keep the charge. If you fail with a major charge you not only lose it, you're probably screwed, too. Have fun.

Charges don't go away on their own. Once you've got a charge, it sticks around until you use it—unless you violate a **taboo**, described later. There's no upward limit on how many charges you can have at one time. Adepts who have worked to build up stupendous numbers of charges—in the hundreds—act crazier than usual, maybe even delusional, but maybe you have to be extra-crazy in the first place to build up so much magickal power without using it along the way.

A final component of this law is that there can be side effects. They're known as **unnatural phenomena**, and they can occur when you work magick. Such phenomena are perversions of the cosmos, symptoms of a sick reality, and the fact that you're responsible for them is a bad sign. You can't control them at all. Watch out.

The Law of Obedience

The third law means nobody can learn two schools of magick. Studying magick isn't like studying dance. You don't just learn a set of skills. You dedicate yourself to a view of the universe and how it works. You can't blast someone just because you believe you have the power to do so; you also have to fundamentally believe the blast *has* to be possible, that the universe makes no sense if the blast *couldn't* occur.

Being an adept doesn't just affect you when you're casting spells. You have to live up to your magickal ideals twenty-four hours a day, or your power abandons you. That's why certain behaviors—known as **taboos**—can instantly drain you of your current store of charges. It's also why you can't follow two different schools at once: it's as mutually contradictory as being a Moslem atheist. (If you ever do manage to learn a different school, you go permanently insane in all five madness gauges.)

Becoming an Adept

Adepts might as well be born rather than made. Magick is something they've been looking for their whole life, one way or another—it's not like deciding to learn Microsoft Word because all your co-workers are using it. If you're a non-adept and want to become an adept, the GM needs to agree that it's appropriate for you.

You can simply begin the campaign as an adept. But if you want to become an adept during the campaign, or if you just want to know how you became an adept in the first place, here's how it's done.

You can do it yourself or you can find someone to mentor you. The difference between self-taught and mentored lies in what your Obsession is. If it fits the worldview of an existing school—or a new school you create with your GM's approval—then you can be self-taught. If your Obsession doesn't fit anything and you don't want to create a new school, you can seek a mentor instead.

Even if your Obsession fits a magick school, you can still seek out a mentor if you wish. It makes some things easier, but it also puts you at the mercy of someone who is already as crazy as you're about to become.

Self-Taught Adepts

There's two things you need to become a self-taught adept: an Obsession that fits the worldview of a particular magick school and five failed notches on the Self stress gauge. Your concept of self has to become so vulnerable that it collapses and rebuilds itself on the basis of your obsession. When you get that fifth failed notch, you can opt to become an adept if your GM agrees it's appropriate.

When the fifth nailed notch kicks in, you gain a 1% skill in your magick school and you can rewrite your Obsession

to emphasize your blossoming worldview. Your obsession skill also changes to Magick. You do not gain a mental disorder, which is what usually happens when you hit five failed notches on one gauge. Your ability to work magick *is* your mental disorder, but unlike a fear of falling or a nervous habit it doesn't go away when the failed notches do. The failed notches on your Self gauge don't go away either, until you've devoted enough energy to your new-found magickal powers; they cannot be removed through therapy of any kind. There's no turning back.

You start with no formula spells except Blast. You can, however, work random magick.

To improve your Magick skill, gain formula spells, and remove those failed Self notches, you must spend experience points. For each point you add 2 points to the skill, remove one failed notch from your Self gauge, and gain one minor formula spell that you know by a unique title you create. You can only spend 1 experience point on your Magick skill every two weeks during this period. You can also only use minor-level magick, not significant or major.

(This process of failed-notch removal doesn't mean you're getting more sane. You're just reconstructing your definition of Self to match your new power.)

Once you've spent 5 experience points, your Magick skill is at 11%, five failed Self notches are gone, and you know six minor formula spells. If you've gained new failed Self notches, they aren't relevant to this process and operate as normal failed notches treatable with therapy.

At this point you can improve your Magick skill like any other skill, at the usual rate: 1 experience point per skill point, and no more than 3 points spent on a single skill per game session. You can also use all levels of magick. But to gain any more formula spells of any power level, you either have to develop them yourself using the rules at the end of this chapter, or you can learn them from another adept of the same school at no cost—except whatever she charges you.

Mentored Adepts

If your Obsession makes you unsuitable for magick, you can find a mentor: an adept who can teach you his school of magick and change your Obsession in the process. A mentor must have a Soul stat of 65 or higher, and must know the school you want to learn.

Becoming an adept is not like becoming a black belt or a getting certified for CPR. It's not a skill set. It's a life perspective. Mentored adepts have a lot in common with people who've been brainwashed. Your mentor breaks down your worldview in a fundamental way, then rebuilds it in a mutated form.

The way this works is your mentor shows you stuff and does stuff to you. The exact nature of the "stuff" varies by school, but it's never pleasant. The goal is to prove to you that everything you understand and rely on about the world is nonsense, and to show you the true way: the way of your mentor.

He makes this happen by forcing stress checks on you until you've got five failed notches in a single gauge. (Your mentor can choose *any* gauge to work on, or hammer you on multiple gauges until one finally breaks.) If you succeed at one of these stress checks then you get a hardened notch as normal—meaning your mentor must be extra-harsh on you to break you down.

Once you max out one meter's failed notches and go insane, your personality has broken down enough for magick to become plausible. Now it's time to build you back up until you can function. At this point, you are in a very vulnerable state: you've got the power flowing through you, but your control is imperfect. Some real bastard adepts get their apprentices to this point and figure "my work here is done," but the better ones stick with you and help you reinterpret the world.

You get a 1% skill in your magick school, and both your Obsession and your obsession skill shift accordingly. Further improvements are as per the rules in the Self-Taught section except if your mentor sticks around, you can spend 1 experience point on your Magick skill each week instead of evvery two weeks—assuming you have the points to spend.

You gain no formula spells automatically or as the result of spending experience points. Either your mentor teaches them to you or you develop them yourself as per the rules. But your mentor can teach you *all* the ones he knows at the rate of one per day.

Casting Spells

Here's how you cast a spell:

- ⇨ You tell the GM what you want it to do. Unless it specifically says otherwise in the spell's description, *any* spell takes a single round in combat.
- ⇨ You roll the dice, flip-flopping as necessary or desired (since magick is *always* an obsession skill).
- ⇨ If you roll a success, the spell happens and you lose the appropriate charge or charges. If you roll a failure, it doesn't work and you keep the charge. (Unless you were using a major charge. If you screw up with that kind of Big Whammy, you lose the charge and *something* happens. Usually something really painful and unpleasant.)
- ⇨ Spells can affect either you or someone else you designate, unless the spell's description says otherwise.

There are three types of adept spells: **blasts**, **formula spells**, and **random spells**.

Blasts are how adepts hurt people with magick. They're direct-attack spells.

Formula spells are reliable old favorites that have been practiced and are well-known. It's assumed that proficient adepts know all the formula spells for their schools. GMC adepts may have imperfect knowledge, or may have different formulas.

Random spells are those you improvise in an emergency to do something very specific. A chaos mage might whip up a spell to blow out someone's tires, or a Pornomancer might divine someone's deepest fear. There aren't formulas for these, but you can still exert magick influence over certain effects specific to your school. Random spells are more expensive and less powerful than formula spells. But the best hammer in the world isn't going to do you much good if you really need a saw.

Blast Spells

Adepts use blasts to injure other people. Adepts call their blasts by some other name, such as "my mojo," "the big hurt," "the evil eye," and other slangy phrases; stuffed-shirt adepts might call their blasts "the Route of Pain" or "the



Way of All Chaos," while street adepts might call their blasts "Big Johnson" or "I'm Gonna Git You Sucka." (What does your adept call her blast?) Not all schools of magick offer blasts; Mechanomancers, for one, don't have this option.

Most blasts only work against complex living organisms: people, dogs, birds, elephants, whatever. They usually have no direct effect on objects such as doors, cars, concrete, or the common cold. There are exceptions, but they affect objects indirectly rather than dealing direct damage.

Every school's blast has the same general effects, as described in the next two sections. But each manifests in a different way. Most such differences are purely cosmetic; it doesn't matter if they hurt you by shriveling your organs or by rending your flesh with invisible claws. The various styles of blast are described in each school's description.

The Dodge skill has no effect against most blasts. Regardless of the Dodge check outcome, the blast still works normally. The only exception to this among the schools of magick presented in this book is the Epideromancy school, since it works by touch.

You cannot make multiple attacks with a single Blast spell casting. It can only be one full-power Blast against one target.

An adept with a 85% or higher magick skill can create his own personal style of blast at no cost, at any time. (You can only create a new blast once, however. You can't make up a new one every day.) Adepts do this for intimidation value: a weird new style of blast makes it clear to those in the know that the adept in question is good at what he does. They can choose to use their school's standard blast or their personal style of blast every time they cast one, since they might not want to advertise their prowess to their opponents.

There are two types of blast—minor and significant—which do different amounts of damage and have different requirements.

Minor Blast

Minor blasts usually fall under the category of minor magicks, meaning you only need to expend minor charges to power the attack. Roll your magick check as normal to execute a minor blast. If you succeed, you do damage equal to the total of the two dice you just rolled, added together. (It's like a martial arts attack in this respect, but there's no bonus damage for matches.) If you're willing to take a -10% shift to your check before rolling, you can add a third die and take the two you want as your roll. You can do this multiple times for one check, if you desire.

If you fail the attack check, you don't lose the minor charge. Nothing happens.

> **Example:** Don has a Dipsomancy skill at 40%. Normally, he'd roll two dice (with the option to flip-flop, since Dipsomancy has to be his obsession skill) and try to get a 40 or less. However, if he's willing to drop his skill to 30%, he can roll three dice and assemble any two-digit number he wants from them to succeed. If he's willing to drop his skill to 20%, he can roll four dice, and if he's willing to go down to 10%, he can roll five dice—hoping one of them's a 0. In this instance, Don drops to 20% and rolls four dice. He gets 5, 5, 2, and 1—so he can assemble a 15 (a success) and do six points of damage.

If you go for a shift but can't assemble a successful number out of your dice, however, your GM gets to decide

artwork by Samuel Araya

which numbers came up. So, if Don had gotten a 2 instead of that 1, the GM could have hit him with a 55—and therefore a sour-cherry effect (as explained on p. 116). Or the GM could have given him a 52, for no ill effect but no instant experience bonus either.

Significant Blast

Significant blasts fall under the category of significant magicks, meaning you need to expend significant charges to power the attack. Roll your magick check as normal to execute a significant blast. If you succeed, the percentile number you rolled is the damage you inflict. If you take an extra turn before using your blast and do nothing but concentrate, you can roll a third die and keep the two you want. If you take two extra turns, you can roll four dice and keep two. You can't take more than two extra turns. These extra turns don't cost you any more charges (though some schools can spend extra charges to get extra dice without waiting). Again, if you roll extra dice (for whatever reason) and fail, the GM decides which dice to keep. If you take damage or fail a mental stress check during any round that you're spending in preparation for a significant blast, you have to start over again.

If you fail the attack check, you don't lose the significant charge. Nothing happens.

> **Example:** Don casts a significant blast and takes an extra turn to prepare it. This lets him roll three dice, hoping to assemble something under a 40%. He rolls 4, 7, 6 and fails—but he doesn't lose his charge and doesn't get any bad results, it's just a simple fail. (If he'd rolled a 4, 4, 7, and 6, the GM could have the option of choosing the 44 and making it a matched failure, with a sour cherry as a result.) He tries again and takes three turns total to cast it. He rolls four dice this time—6, 5, 3, and 1. He sets his roll at 36, succeeds, and does 36 points of damage to his target.

Customized Blasts

In some ways, blasts are inferior to hand-to-hand fighting (since you can't do multiple attacks) and firearms (since you usually have to get a significant charge to do damage comparable to even a small handgun). However, blasts are a more versatile weapon than either. By spending a little extra mojo juice, you use blasts in situations you couldn't get near with a gun or a knife. Although these customized blasts may require significant charges, they are still considered minor blasts for damage purposes.

Long Distance

If you spend a significant charge on your minor blast (in addition to its usual cost), you can target someone you can't even see. It doesn't matter if he's in Asia Minor and you're in the Yukon, you can whip the vengeful fire of your mighty mojo on him. You have to know your target well: know him by his birth name, be very familiar with his face, spent time in his acknowledged presence, have a good photograph or a piece of his clothes, *etc.* It doesn't matter how much you've studied Neal Diamond's personal life and how many pictures of him you have: unless you've *met* him in the flesh and spoken with him for at least a few minutes, you can't nail him from across the continent. (Epideromancers can't use this ability.)

Special Delivery

You can booby-trap an item, person, or even a specific situation with a minor blast spell. This costs an additional minor charge, but the event that triggers the spell has to be appropriate to your school of magick: a boozehound could booby-trap a bottle of scotch, or have someone get blasted the next time they take a drink; a Pornomancer could blast the next person to make love on a certain bed or stretch of beach; an Entropomancer could whammy the next person to draw three aces from a particular deck of cards; a fleshworker could blast the next person to touch (or hit) him or her. There's no limit on how long the spell waits before it goes off. The caster does have to handle the object or be in the place in question to set the trap, however. Furthermore, an area larger than a house can't be trapped in this fashion (at least, not without more than a minor charge).

This Time It's Personal

If you spend an extra minor charge, you can direct your minor blast against a specific body part. While this can't be used to increase the damage (so it does no good to target the brain or the heart) it can be used to keep your opponent from shooting his gun or running away.

Using Blasts

A blast spell is not as simple and deadly as a firearm is. But it has some big advantages:

- You can use it in an airport, or a jail cell, or anywhere else you aren't allowed to bring a gun.
- You can't drop it, or lose it, and if you run out of ammo you can make your own.
- Most blasts can't be dodged.
- Blasts do not leave incriminating forensic evidence. Anyone who claims you killed someone with "magick" is going to get laughed out of court.
- Blasts can be customized, unlike gunshots.
- Every time you successfully use a blast on someone—even a minor blast—it's a rank-5 stress check against The Unnatural for the victim. Compare with a gun or knife, which is rank-1 Violence.
- Finally—and perhaps most important—sorcerers can learn to use guns; gunmen can't learn to use blasts. Maybe relying on blast is a lousy substitute for packing heat, but be careful not to compare apples and oranges. Guns can do things blasts can't; blasts can do things guns can't. It's always good to keep your options open.

Formula Spells

These are simple, and are probably the spells you'll use the most. They all take one action to use, their charge costs rarely vary (unless your GM decides to make them more or less expensive, for whatever reason), and their effects are predictable. These spells are listed by school later in this chapter.

Random Spells

Every school of magick has an idea at its core. The core of chaos magic is entropy and randomness. The core of Pornomancy is desire—both frustrated and fulfilled. People who use a given school can effect things related to that school's core idea (which is called a school's **domain**). Rather than provide an intricate structure of rules and counter-rules governing what can and can't be done by each school, this is largely in the hands of the GM. Each school has some explanation about how random spells from it can and should work, but a few guidelines hold true for all.

⇨ **Random magick is harder.** Magicians should expect to pay more, both in the number and power of charges, to generate a random effect. That's the difference between working off a recipe and winging it.
⇨ **Random magick is narrower.** If Pornomancy didn't have a formula blast spell, you probably couldn't make a random Pornomancy blast spell. Formula spells lend confidence, and therefore make it easier to stretch the boundaries of power. Random spells are unknown; therefore, they need to be closer to the heart of the magickal school's teaching. (However, this rule tends to break down with major charges. When you've got that kind of juice, almost anyone can do almost anything . . .)
⇨ **Random magick is less predictable.** A GM is more likely to have weird unnatural phenomena spontaneously happen around random magick than around boring old formula spells. This randomness is more likely regardless of whether the spell fails or succeeds.

In short, random magick is included to grease the skids and provide a rationale for adepts tweaking the flow of events and making things go their way. They're not a grab bag of unpredictable power and they don't allow a school to do things it normally couldn't.

Using Random Spells

Nothing is pure. Even the personal chaos of random magick has rules, as follows:

⇨ **The spell costs what the GM says it costs.** Even if a similar effect cost a lot less. Even if you've done it *before* and it cost less. Even if you couldn't do it before and now you suddenly can.
⇨ **The GM decides if you can do it, and the GM's word is final.** Even if you could do it before and can't now. Even if you *really* think you should be able to do it. Even if the GM previously said you could.
⇨ **You can't do anything outside the abilities of your school.** It should come as no surprise that the GM decides what the abilities of your school are, and that these limits can change at the GM's whim.
⇨ **Remember:** if it was an exact science, they wouldn't call it magick.

Cherries

Like obsessed martial artists, people who specialize in magick can sometimes produce unusual effects. You may choose from any of these cherries when you roll a matched success on your Magick skill. You can also create your own cherries, subject to the GM's approval.

- **Brainstorm:** The GM tells you something totally unrelated to the situation at hand, but potentially useful in the near future.
- **Gotcha:** Get a +10% shift on your next roll.
- **Hard:** Get a free hardened notch against one mental stress of your choice.
- **Hunch:** Get a free hunch (*i.e.*, roll two dice now and use them for your next roll).
- **Mojo:** Get a free +10% shift on your next magick roll.
- **Potent:** Get a free minor charge.
- **Solid:** Gain a free experience point.
- **Strong:** Your next initiative number is equal to your Speed stat.
- **Tricky:** You may flip-flop your next roll. (If you could anyway, or choose not to, this is wasted.)

Sour Cherries

If you get a matched failure on a Magick check, the GM picks one of the following sour cherries to inflict on you.

- **Backfire:** A spell aimed at someone else affects you, or affects someone else *instead* of you.
- **Mojo Suckage:** Automatic -10% shift on next magick roll.
- **Sourpuss:** Change your next cherry roll into a sour cherry.
- **Suckage:** Automatic -10% shift on next roll.
- **Vamp:** You get no more cherries until sundown or sunrise, whichever is next.
- **Wacked:** An astral parasite latches onto you or someone involved in the magick.
- **Weak:** You lose your charge even though the check failed.

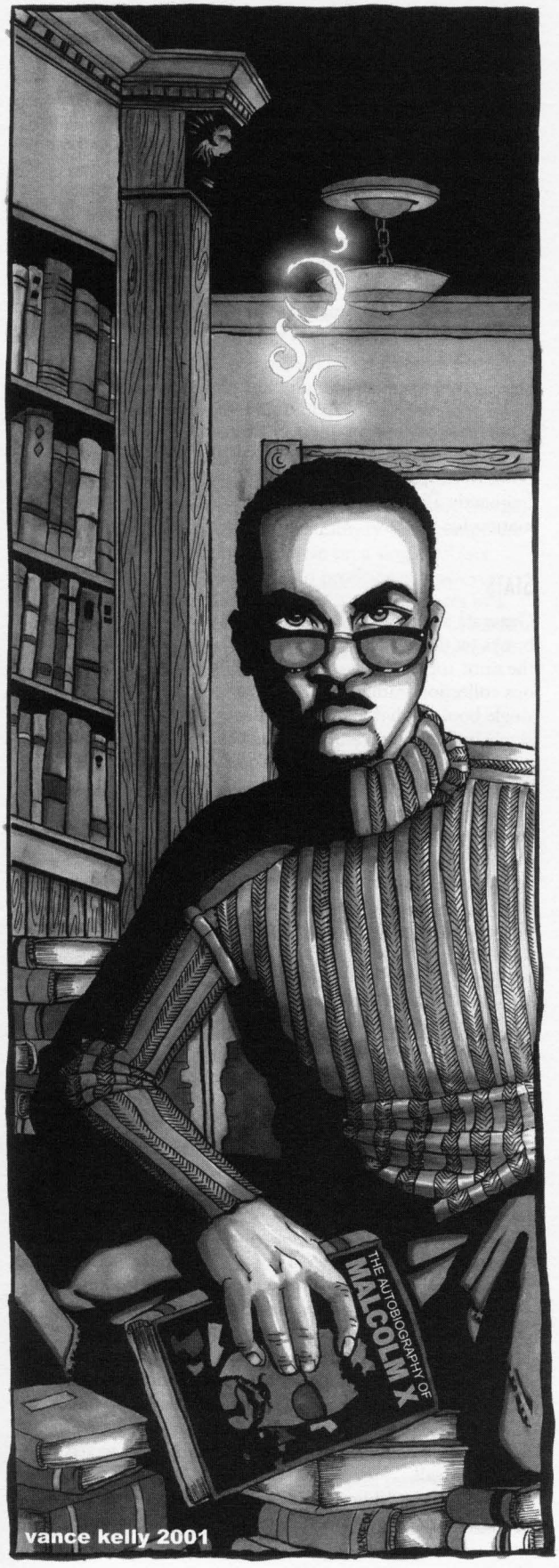
Adept Schools

There are many, many different schools of magick. Any action can be magickal if undertaken in a magickal manner. In other words, if you approach an action with ritual intent and really believe in its power, you can make something magickal occur.

Schools of magick are not organizations. They are not bureaucracies, allegiances, factions, or anything else of the sort. They are styles, paths, ways of making magick happen. Two people who practice the same school of magick aren't necessarily allies; if anything, owing to the scarcity of materials needed for the more potent forms of magick within many schools, they're probably enemies or at least competitors.

Members of a given school of magick don't even necessarily see the world in the same way. These schools are not holistic systems of belief. Their function is very narrow. Members of a given school often view other schools as variations on a fundamental truth only *they* really understand.

A sampling of schools of magick follow. Any adept can create his own school of magick without any trouble—but of course, he has to set out to do so before learning any other school, lest the Law of Obedience come into play. To design your own school for a new adept, you need to consult with your GM. Guidelines are given at the end of this chapter.



THE BIBLIOMANCER

AKA LIBRARIANS, BOOKWORMS

You are what you read. The pages of the world are secured by the binding of knowledge. The literate shall inherit the earth.

You always loved books. They provided escape from reality, knowledge for your mind, succor for your spirit.

Before long you grew fascinated not with the contents of books but with books themselves. The quality of the paper, the style of the type, the nature of the binding. Then there was the history of books, the various editions, how the first publication came about, even the chain of ownership that brought an old book into your hands and that would one day take it on to someone else.

In the old days, books were power. They meant you were literate, that you had access to the sum of all knowledge. When the ignorant relied on gut instinct, those with books had the experiences of their forebears at their fingertips.

You accumulated books. Any books at first. Then you began paying more for books of better quality. You looked askance at the moldering paperbacks and began replacing them with earlier editions. More and more of your living space filled up with books.

Eventually, you didn't even have to read them anymore. Simply owning a book was enough for you to exploit the knowledge it contained. Before you even realized it, you'd become an adept.

Now your library courses with your power. It is your mind externalized. When you travel you take a choice few volumes along, a withdrawal from your papyrus memory bank, but their power serves you nonetheless.

You hunger only for more books, for better books, for rarer books. The thought of your rivals' libraries fills you with envy. You must have *all* the books, and then you will have *all* the power.

The central paradox of Bibliomancy is that even though one may read a book and transfer its knowledge and power to memory, the physical book itself must still be kept and cherished—because it is the book *itself* that matters, even more than what it contains. Bibliomancers collect huge Libraries around themselves, much like the shell of an oyster. And like an oyster shell, a Bibliomancer's Library is usually immobile, strongly defended, and full of pearls (of wisdom!). Attempting to attack a Bibliomancer in his Library is stupidity of the rankest sort.

BIBLIOMANTIC LIBRARY

A bookworm's Library is the center of his power. He can use it to charge himself up, to store those charges, and to use those charges for spells. The downside is that his Library also limits his power: a bookworm only has access to the symbolic powers contained within the books of his Library, the number of books in his Library limits the number of charges he can hold, and he must remain in proximity to his books to use his magic.

A Bibliomancer always builds up a sizable collection of books before even stepping into the path of the school—it's the love of books that creates the adept, not the other way around. His Library must consist of at least a thousand titles, organized by whatever system appeals to him: alpha-

betically, by topic, by Dewey Decimal, by the Library of Congress method, or even by color. The Library must be clean, well-lit, and attractive in its presentation. This usually entails lots of bookcases, and if at all possible the Library must be a room of its own; if that is not possible, then at least the arrangement of the bookcases and other furniture must serve to delineate the space. The physical space of the Library is as symbolically important as the books themselves.

For the purposes of Bibliomancers, any printed and bound material (including scrolls) is a "book." Thus magazines, photocopies, and even comic books can be considered books; computer disks, "books on tape," and electronic files are not. However, Bibliomancers are not satisfied with books in poor condition. They want only the finest copies, and are always happy to acquire a better copy of a title than they currently have.

Most Bibliomancers know the minor ritual Seek the Lost Tome (see p. 98). The ritual is passed down from teacher to pupil as part of the Bibliomantic school, so only self-taught bookworms lack it. It is rumored that there is a significant ritual known as Seek the Hidden Tome; this ritual is said to allow the caster to locate any book that exists, and previous ownership is not a prerequisite. All bookworms drool for such a ritual, and follow any leads or rumors regarding it relentlessly.

Charge Storage

A bookworm's charges are limited by the number of books he has. Minor charges require 100 books per charge, significant charges require 500 books per charge, and major charges require 2500 books per charge. Thus, for a bookworm to retain 1 major charge, 2 significant charges, and 5 minor charges, his Library would have to contain a minimum of 4,000 books. If his Library is full and he generates a charge without increasing the size of his library, the charge is lost.

Proximity Restrictions

A bookworm must remain near her Library, within a number of feet roughly equivalent to her Soul attribute, or she loses access to her charges. The charges remain with the Library, but the Bibliomancer cannot access them.

However, it is possible for a bookworm to take her charges with her in a Traveling Library. At any time while in her Library, the bookworm may transfer a charge into a single book. A minor charge requires a host book worth at least $100 by bookseller standards, a significant charge a $500 book, and a major charge a $2,500 book. If the book leaves the bookworm's immediate possession the charge is lost; typically the book is carried in a briefcase or backpack. If the bookworm reshelves the book into her Library, the charge transfers back into the general collection. Even while a charge is in the Traveling Library, the master Library must still possess enough books to store the charge. The Traveling Library may contain multiple books, each with its own charge. The only limit is how many books the Bibliomancer can comfortably carry.

Book Theft

If another bookworm steals a book holding a charge from an unwilling Bibliomancer's Traveling Library, the charge is lost. However, if the book is of sufficient value to generate a charge for the thief, the charge earned is *doubled*. The two Bibliomancers cannot be allied and the theft can not be permitted or forgiven by the former owner—it must be a genuine theft. Stealing books from a bookworm's master Library also provides this doubling effect if the books are valuable enough, but such a theft does not reduce the number of charges held by the Library unless the total number of books is reduced below the minimum needed to hold the current charges; if this occurs, charges are lost beginning with the least-powerful ones until the number of books and the charges they hold are once again in balance. Needless to say, Bibliomancers do not trust each other, and eagerly steal each other's books whenever possible.

Bibliomancy Blast Style

Bibliomancers have no blast of their own, but can "borrow" the blast of other schools through the use of the Book Burn spell (see p. 120). Because of this, Bibliomancers frequently ally themselves with other adepts, trading information for blasts.

Stats

Generate a Minor Charge: Acquire at least $100 worth of books by the same author, or in the same genre, or covering the same topic—in short, a minor but meaningfully contiguous collection, rather than just a random stack of books. A single book of that value also suffices. Alternately, obtain a single book of any value that has been signed by the author, or get a living author to sign a book you already have in your Library. If you already own a copy of a book you buy, you only get the charge if the new copy is superior to the one you have; a hardcover can replace a paperback, a book in good condition can replace one in bad shape, a signed copy can replace an unsigned one. You must immediately sell or give away the inferior copy.

Generate a Significant Charge: Acquire a rare book worth at least $500 by bookseller standards. Again, this can only replace a book in your collection if it is a superior copy.

Generate a Major Charge: Acquire a one-of-a-kind book, such as the real *Necronomicon* (if such a thing even exists), the Q Gospel, the Copper Scroll, the *Red Book of Westmarch*, the *Voynich Manuscript*, the gold discs of Mormon, the typed pages of *On The Road*, or the authentic diary of Howard Hughes.

Taboo: You must never damage or destroy a book, even one you do not own, or all the charges in your Library are lost. Also, you must not sell, loan out, or give away any title in your Library, unless you are replacing it with a superior copy—in which case you *have* to sell it or give it away.

Random Magic Domain: Bibliomancy is concerned with the power of knowledge. It is powerful magic for finding things out, for illuminating or obscuring the facts of something, and for influencing events that are knowledge-dependent.

Starting Charges: Newly-created Bibliomancers start with three minor charges and a Library of one thousand books. You should come up with a list of the dozen or so most valuable books in your collection, for purposes of the Traveling Library—and also so GMC Bibliomancers have something to steal!

Charging Tips: Bibliomantic charges mostly depend on money. With a large income and bibliofind.com, minor

charges go for $1200 a dozen. Without such resources, charges must come through book signings and lucky finds at used bookstores. In a large city, or a major college town, a bookworm can expect 2–5 minor charges in a week of signings and hunting. 2 significant-charge books usually turn up at used bookstores each month at 10%–30% of value.

Bibliomancy Minor Formula Spells

Let Me Check My Notes

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: A Bibliomancer has a magickal connection to his Library, and may spend a minor charge to retrieve any information contained within its books. This spell allows total photographic recall of any piece of information, provided there is a book that contains it within his Library. The bookworm must identify the target information he wishes, and the Library work from which he intends to retrieve it. "George Washington, from the W volume of *Encyclopedia Britannica.*"

If the Bibliomancer expends an additional minor charge, he may search all the works of his Library for a composite of all information contained therein on a single subject. Knowledge does not translate into proficiency, however; Notes could help the adept decipher a few sentences in a foreign language or understand the use of a piece of medical equipment, but it would not make her a fluent speaker of the language or turn her into a brain surgeon.

The Sorrows of Young Werther

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: Imposes a particular mood upon an individual, as though they had just read a Library book of your choosing and strongly identified with the main character. This lasts only as long as the target would normally feel that mood; typically the events of daily life free them of the mood in an hour or so, but if they are inclined towards that mood anyway the effect may be more lasting. It confers no specific knowledge or awareness of the book or its content. A second minor charge makes the effect twice as intense, leaving the target incapable of doing anything practical except dwell on the mood, whatever it may be; however, the mood may still be broken as normal.

Speed Reading

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: By spending a minor charge, a bookworm may absorb all of the information contained within a single target book—which need not be part of his Library—into his mind. The Bibliomancer retains total photographic recall of the work for around thirty minutes, which then fades to a normal level of recall, just as if he had read the book in a mundane fashion. It does not impart actual ability, such as speaking a language or fixing a car, except insofar as a single reading of a book on that topic would do so.

Booking Glass

Cost: 2 minor charges
Effect: Take a book you own. Open it and stare hard at the words, concentrating on another copy of the same edition that you know the location of. Wait until they resolve themselves into images—you can now see "through" the other copy of the book, as though it had a set of moveable eyes. The effect lasts for five minutes or until you close the book, and does not confer any sense other than sight.

Book Learning

Cost: 2 minor charges
Effect: This spell allows the use of any mundane skill recorded in the books of the adept's Library. It is similar to the Cliomantic spell Instant Zen Master and the Dipsomantic spell God Looks Out For Drunks, allowing you to use your Bibliomancy skill in place of any other normal skill, including the ability to flip-flop rolls. The skill only works for one check and then fades away.

This means that a Bibliomancer can use Book Learning to "tap" his Library to Fence like D'Artagnan, Notice like Sherlock Holmes, Seduce like James Bond, Speak Basque like a native, and so forth—or at least to get as close to Bond, Holmes, and D'Artagnan as his Bibliomancy skill allows. If the bookworm does not have the target book in his possession, the skill gained is at a -20% shift. A clever bookworm will take several Learning-worthy books along in his Traveling Library.

It's Right There in Black & White

Cost: 2 minor charges
Effect: When a bookworm needs to see what the immediate future of some specific topic holds, he merely picks up a book, burns two charges, and riffles through it. Some of the words on the pages draw his eye until they form a complete sentence in the adept's mind, pointing at what is likely to happen in the next twenty-four hours with regards to the desired topic. Typical topics might include the adept himself, another person he's interested in, an item, or a location. These prophecies tend to be general and vague. The nature of the text influences the quality of the information; a book with a symbolic content or title connection to the topic is much more specific. A bookworm interested in events at the mayor's mansion gets more out of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* than out of *The Jungle.* For their own future, adepts usually pick a single book that has personal meaning and use it for all such attempts; with repeated use, that copy of the book provides better and better information. They may likewise designate certain other books for other common topics. You should keep a record of such preferred books, but keep in mind that only the specific copy provides cumulative improvements in accuracy. The book used need not be in the Library.

Blur the Lines

Cost: 3 minor charges
Effect: There are many facts out there that would be dangerous if they saw the light of day. Blur the Lines allows the bookworm to obscure any one fact from a single target, making it difficult for the target to come across it. This is very similar to the disappearance of all information regarding the true identity of the Naked Goddess. The obfuscation occurs by happenstance or bad luck—the needed page seems to be ripped from the telephone book, ink is spilled over the name on the signed confession, databases lock up and crash the system when it comes across the Blurred address, no one seems to know the identity of that

Cigar-Smoking Man, *etc.* This spell lasts twenty-four hours. If the spell is pumped with a significant charge, the fact can be Blurred from everyone, not just a selected target.

Bibliomancy Significant Formula Spells

Read Between the Lines

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: The short version: by spending a significant charge, you can ascertain whether or not a single stated fact—*not* a question—is true at that moment in time. "Joe is alive," would be valid, but "Is Joe alive?" would not be.

The long version: it's not as simple as that. When you cast Read Between the Lines, you are granted a vision of the abstract reality behind the fact you wish to judge. These visions are believed to be glimpses behind the cosmos, a look at the probabilities behind the machinery of the universe. As such, they are ever-changing, cloudy, and maddeningly vague to our limited human perception. In normal life, when asking about the veracity of a mundane fact the result is either "true" or "false." When magick gets involved, results can vary from "sorta true" to "almost totally but not quite false." Evaluating facts that have to do with Avatars return a solid "maybe." And any fool silly enough to attempt to Read Between the Lines on a fact having to do with an archetype or the Invisible Clergy directly is really asking for it; you're opening up a channel between your mind and the statosphere, so don't get pushy.

You Can't Judge a Book by Its Cover

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: Make an inanimate object look like another inanimate object for fifteen minutes. This isn't invisibility, this is changing the way observers think about the subject. Though they may be looking at a chair, the part of their brain that would normally say "chair" is saying something else, like "motorcycle." The object appears as itself in photographs, reflections, video cameras, and so forth. There is a -50% shift to Notice "something odd" about the affected object, less if the object is in an incongruous area (a motorcycle in the living room).

Book Burn

Cost: 2 significant, plus any other charge requirements
Effect: Cast this on a book in your Library and carry it with you; the book you use has to be worth at least $1000 by bookseller standards. The next magick spell, ritual, or artifact power directed specifically at you is absorbed by the book, preventing the magick from working. (Avatar channels are not blocked, however.) You must have the book in your hand or otherwise touching your bare skin for this to occur. At any time thereafter, you may open the book and release the magick against a target of your choice; target eligibility (line of sight, known by name, whatever) is as with the original magick. You must spend the same number of charges the original caster did to release the power. If you do not have enough charges, the power is lost but you lose no charges. You have no way of knowing how many charges you need except through experience. Effects not powered by adept charges (such as artifact effects) require two significant charges to set free. A single book may only hold one power, but once the power is discharged the book may be re-enchanted with Book Burn. No one may use the power from the book except the bookworm who juiced it up, although anyone else who opens the book erases the power by doing so. As with your Traveling Library, the power is lost if the book leaves your possession—that applies both to an untriggered Book Burn spell and to a spell you capture. The GM may determine what magick can be absorbed and how it works when released.

Cross-Reference

Cost: 2 significant charges
Effect: Gathers and correlates any and all extant and available printed information on a living target into a blank book, much like those sold in most local bookstores or stationery stores; the text appears in your handwriting. The information retrieved must be printed on paper, so electronic files do not generate data for you unless hardcopy also exists. If there is too much information to fit in the book, the type becomes smaller until there is enough room. (Rumor has it that a Bibliomancer once cast this upon a business rival, unaware that the man was secretly the Comte de Saint-Germain. The pages of the book turned black, and he was arrested while trying to steal an electron microscope.) This reference work bears the target's name as its title and the bookworm as its author. The book goes back to being blank after half an hour, but two more significant charges make it permanent.

Aphasia

Cost: 2 significant charges
Effect: Deprives the target, who must have just spoken in the presence of the adept, of the ability to use language. They become unable to speak coherent sentences, read, or understand what people are saying to them. It's worth rank-7 Isolation and rank-5 Helplessness checks. The effect lasts until the target sleeps.

Bibliomancy Major Effects

Discover any desired piece of information, no matter how well-concealed. Obscure any fact such that it not only drops off of the world's radar, but looks as if it never existed. Learn any skill. Translate or decode any representation of knowledge. Trap a person in a book forever, making them a character and retroactively rewriting every copy in the world with the altered text.

What You Hear: The Bibliomancer

A Bibliomancer who volunteers in the Denver public library has formulized a spell that enables her to recommend, for any given patron, the one book that will uplift and illuminate that person's spirit, stirring him and filling him with a sense of rightness and purpose. Her rival—who also volunteers at the same library—hasn't formulized *her* spell, which picks out the book that will most challenge, confuse and inspire uncertainty in the reader. But she's working on it. And their quiet ideological struggle continues.



THE CLIOMANCER

AKA COBWEB FARMERS, HISTORY BUFFS

You know history is written on the wind of whispers and gossip. Between what really happens and what people believe lies the path you walk.

Easter Island. The Eiffel Tower. Tianenmen Square. Bikini Atoll. What do these places have in common? Simple: they're famous all over the world.

The motive force behind magick is meaning, and you hunger for physical locations that are thick with it. Everyone knows what you're talking about when you mention Dealey Plaza, or Gettysburg.

You're several steps beyond making clever associations in casual conversation. You've realized that the force of history is not a metaphor. It's as potent and predictable as electricity or gravity. You've mastered the magick art of harvesting meaning from places of importance. You're a Cliomancer.

Famous locations act like magnets, pulling in the mental attention of countless people every day. Someone in Kansas reads about Marilyn Monroe dying and thinks about her home at 12305 Helena Drive. Someone in Paris makes a joke about the Kennedies having her murdered. Someone in Australia uses her death as a metaphor. All these stray patches of attention and thought form a fog of mystic energy that collects around the site of her death. If you go to 12305 Helena Drive you can collect and use that energy—if no one else has gotten to it first. Cliomancers can't share.

A good Cliomantic site is to be treasured more than diamonds. When you stake your claim, you better be ready to fight for it. Because if you're not, there's another cobweb farmer who is—and who isn't afraid to leave you with a brain full of deadly memories, twitching around like the byproduct of a sick aversion-therapy experiment.

You don't have a lot of flashy effects. But talk to one of those *sturm und drang* hotshots—like bodybags and skinners—after an angry mob is done with them, and then they might appreciate that subtlety is a strength, not a weakness.

You hold the key to all knowledge, all thought, all memory, all belief. You listen to the past, and for you, it unlocks the future.

The central paradox of Cliomancy is that history is a lie. What we know as history is but a tiny quicksilver fraction of aggregate human existence, and it is the vast bulk of people living their daily lives and spreading their varied gossip who truly shape the cosmos. Cliomancers pretend the lie is real while manipulating what is real with lies.

CLIOMANCY BLAST STYLE

Cliomancers have no blast.

STATS

Generate a Minor Charge: You can gather a minor charge once per day at the location of a widely known event, as long as the place itself isn't famous. Marilyn Monroe's death is a well-known event, but her house isn't a giant tourist attraction. Graceland, on the other hand, is a celebrated location in its own right.

The event tied to the location has to be something known to a majority of adequately educated people. Most people

know that Jack the Ripper killed prostitutes, but only people who bother to look it up know exactly where he did it. A site of one of his murders would be worth a minor charge. Similarly, the jail cell where Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf*, the patent office where Einstein came up with the idea of relativity, or the place where Rasputin was born could all be harvested for minor charges.

For the purposes of charging, a "place" can't be much larger than a square acre, though it may be smaller. "Paris" isn't a place to Cliomancers—it's a collection of places.

Generate a Significant Charge: To yield a significant charge, a place has to be famous in itself. The OK Corral, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, Number 10 Downing Street, Kitty Hawk—all these places generate at least one significant charge per day, sometimes more. However, famous sites like this also draw Cliomancers like flies on rotting meat. If you're the fourth Cliomancer in a day to try and harvest the White House, you might only get minor charges, because it's only had time to draw in an hour or two of meaning mojo. (As a rule of thumb, if the location could be used as a punch line to a joke most people would "get" then it's a significant site.) As with minor charges, a site for a significant charge is no bigger than a square acre.

Generate a Major Charge: To get a major charge, you have to be the first person in ten or more years to harvest a famous place. The first Cliomancer who got to Machu Picchu got a major charge, as did the first one to Ayers Rock. Everyone since then has had to be satisfied with significant charges. (The moon has one ready . . .)

Taboo: The taboo for Cliomantic charges is a time limit. You can only hold them so long before they dissipate. If you don't use a minor charge or significant charge within a month, it goes away. (Unlike other schools, you don't lose all your other charges with it, however.) You might be able to hold a major charge longer if (for whatever reason) you wanted to.

Random Magick Domain: Cliomancy focuses on commonality. It is powerful magick for dealing with things that "everybody knows" or for influencing events that "could happen to anybody."

Starting Charges: Newly created Cliomancers have four minor charges. You also need to pick out the spot you're charging from and talk it over with the GM.

Charging Tips: History is everywhere if you know where to look, and Cliomancers know it. In even a reasonably interesting location (Memphis, Minneapolis) any Clio should have 1–2 minor charges she can get every morning as well and maybe a significant site that she is contesting with other Cliomancers. Major locations (Chicago, LA, London) are richer both in charges and competitors.

Notes: Cliomancy is said to be the oldest of all forms of magick, going all the way back to ancient Atlantis. Some Cliomancers even claim to know fragments of the Atlantean language. It is whispered that there are immortal Atlanteans still living in the world, and that they sometimes make themselves known to Cliomancers. These Atlanteans expect to be given "harvesting rights" at crucial sites for a week by any Cliomancer to whom they identify themselves. Cliomancy has its share of phony Atlanteans taking advantage of the gullibility of their fellows, but there are dire rumors about the real Atlanteans surfacing to punish fakes.

Cliomancy Minor Formula Spells

Trivia

Cost: 1 minor charge

Effect: This is a minor information spell. By casting it, you can learn any published fact that isn't actually secret. Want to know the shortest sentence in the bible? One charge. (It's "Jesus wept.") Need someone's phone number? One charge—as long as it isn't unlisted. Basically, anything you could look up in a dictionary, encyclopedia, phone book, anything you could find in a good library or on the internet—any information that there has never been any effort (however slight) to conceal—can instantly be accessed by this spell. On the other hand, there are things that can be found in a library that you *can't* get with this spell. For instance, if someone had their phone number unlisted in 1998, but not changed, you could find that number in a 1997 phone book. You couldn't get it with the spell, though, because it's been removed from the realm of public information.

In some cases, this information may be complex: for instance, calling up a map of downtown Chicago or finding out how to file your income taxes. With dense and complicated information like that, it stays in your brain for about half an hour, but at any point during that time you can refer to it.

Familiar Face

Cost: 1 minor charge

Effect: Effect: When you cast this spell, pick one person you can see. The spell makes that person feel like he's met you somewhere. He's not able to put his finger on it particularly, but it's a powerful feeling of *déjà vu*. This is a good spell for getting people to ignore your presence in an otherwise "restricted" area, and can also be used to reinforce a good line of patter. ("Excuse me miss . . . what high school did you go to? I knew it! I sat next to you in, what was it, physics? English? Yeah, Mr. Gillis. Were you the one who always wanted to see my notes when you'd been sick? Yeah! Your name is on the tip of my tongue . . . can I buy a drink? For old times' sake?")

Common Knowledge

Cost: 2 minor charges

Effect: When you cast this spell, pick one person in your immediate vicinity and one skill that person has. You may now use that skill as if you were that person for the next five minutes (if you're out of combat) or the next five combat actions if you're fighting.

> **Example:** You know your buddy Cage is a good man in a fight, so when you see a pack of creepy bikers pulling out chains and switchblades you cast this spell on his Street Fighting skill. Instead of your own wimpy 15%, you now have a skill of 55%. Furthermore, since Street Fighting is Cage's obsession, *you* can flip-flop rolls while borrowing it.

The only skills you cannot borrow with this spell are mystic skills such as Avatar skills or the knowledge of a school of magick.

You Remember Now

Cost: 3 minor charges
Effect: When you cast this spell on someone, you can plant a false memory in his mind. There are a couple ways you can do this: you can implant a vague and general type of knowledge ("We worked together a couple years ago.") or you can implant one very specific memory of a single event ("You and I had the best one night stand ever."). What you cannot do is create a string of associated memories or a detailed history. You might make someone remember a wedding ceremony, but you couldn't implant a whole courtship and marriage.

In any event, the memory is temporary. It fades within 2–5 hours and certainly vanishes after a night's sleep. It should also be noted that memories that make *no sense* can sometimes be picked out as fake. For instance, suppose you give someone the memory of rear-ending your car a year ago. If that person was in prison a year ago, they're going to be darn sure they weren't out getting into a fender-bender. It's also possible to give people really horrific false memories just to mess with their heads. In either case (horrific memories or obviously false ones) the target has to make a rank-3 Self stress check due to cognitive dissonance.

Past Sight

Cost: 3 minor charges
Effect: This spell allows you to have visions of the past events at your current location. You can pick the event either chronologically ("Show me what happened here yesterday at five in the afternoon.") or circumstantially ("Show me these stones being raised," if you were at Stonehenge or "Show me what happened here when Malcolm X was shot," if you were at the Audubon Ballroom). The caster can watch up to an hour of "detailed history" in which every word spoken and every action taken can be perceived as if he was there, or the history can be "compressed" into a silent overview of events. It's not like seeing a film in fast forward: it's more like having seen the event from a distance, so that your mind can comprehend the entire sequence of events all at once. Compression gives you a greater sense of history, but with less detail.

Gnostic Gossip

Cost: 3 minor charges
Effect: When you cast this spell, pick someone (by name—you can't specify, "Whoever it was that keyed my car.") and select a rumor you wish to attach to that person's name. The rumor must be a single sentence, and you have to be able to say that sentence with one breath. If the spell is successful, everyone who knows that individual personally seems to remember the rumor. They may not believe it, especially if it's weird or out of character, but they've heard it from "a friend of a friend."

Even if the target of this spell has a common name, the rumor only gets attached to the particular Bill Jones or Jenny Smith that you've picked as a victim.

It's also possible to cast this spell on yourself, if you want to spread some disinformation. (This spell is in high demand for people who want to fake their own death.)

Cliomancy Significant Formula Spells

Instant Zen Master

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: Like the Dipsomancy spell God Looks Out For Drunks, this spell allows you to use your Cliomancy skill in the place of any other skill, including the ability to flip-flop rolls. There are some important differences, however. For one thing, Instant Zen Master lasts longer: you have five actions' worth of skill if you use it in combat, and about a half hour of skill if you use it in a relaxed situation. On the other hand, it is narrower: you can only use it to enhance a skill you already have. If you don't have a skill like "Safecracking" or "Cheat at Poker," this spell won't give you one. One advantage, however, is that you can sometimes cast this spell for one *minor* charge—if the charge was gotten in a location germane to the skill you're replacing. For instance, if you gained a minor charge from the street where Ronald Reagan was shot, you could use that minor charge instead of a significant charge if you were trying to shoot someone. If you harvested a minor charge from the bar where the Beatles played their first gig, you'd be able to use that particular charge to boost your Play Guitar skill.

Urban Legend

Cost: 2 significant charges
Effect: This is a bigger, badder version of Gnostic Gossip. Gnostic Gossip only affects people who already knew the target. Urban Legend affects *everyone*. If you cast an Urban Legend that Eugene LaRue likes nothing better than a pipe of crack and a good spanking, people who've never even *met* him are going to have that ugly story lurking in the back of their minds. The first time they meet poor Eugene or even hear about him, they're going to think, "Wait, I heard something about this guy . . . isn't he the rock-smoking flagellant?" Like Gnostic Gossip, this can also be used to create *good* rumors. Cliomancers often cast it on themselves to create reputations for being powerful, knowledgeable, magnificent lovers, *etc.* Also like Gnostic Gossip, it doesn't have a tremendous amount of persuasive force if it doesn't seem to be in character for the person in question.

Again, you must know your target's name to cast this spell, and again the rumor has to be one sentence you can say with a single breath. Similarly, the spell only affects one specific individual, no matter how many people share the name.

Unlike Gnostic Gossip, this spell can be used on named groups. "Yeah, I heard that the Trilateral Commission is actually a front for a cult of cannibal satanists!" "They won't let you into The New Inquisition unless you swing both ways." "Bullseye Technologies is a really sound investment." Of course, the better-known the group is, the less credence people are likely to give to a strange rumor. People hear so many things about "the U.S. Congress" every day that an Urban Legend about them is likely to be soon forgotten.

Everyman

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: This spell effectively casts Familiar Face on everyone you speak with for the next twenty-four hours. As soon

as you draw someone's notice, they think they know you from somewhere. Furthermore, this recognition is slightly positive, instead of the neutral *déjà vu* of Familiar Face. People feel like they not only know you, they always had you pegged as a decent type. This doesn't mean everyone you meet is willing to go out on a limb for you—but they probably give you the benefit of the doubt.

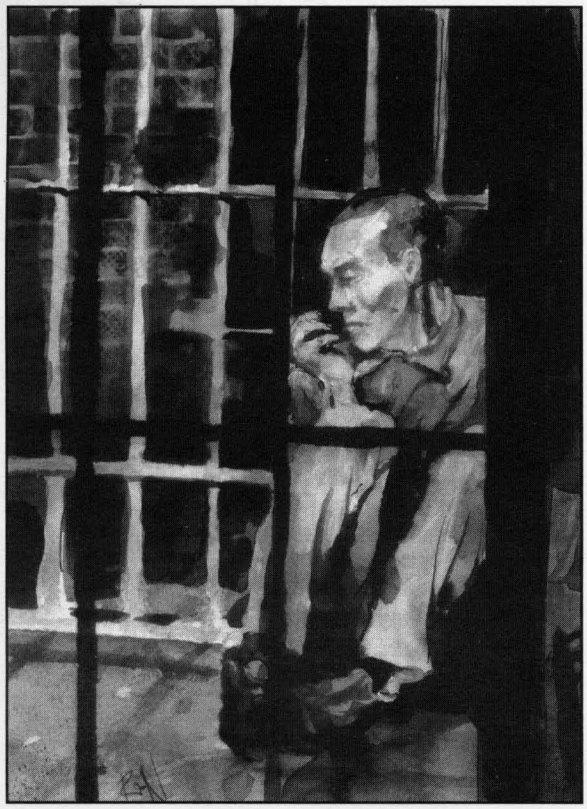
House of Mirrors

Cost: 2 significant charges
Effect: When you're in a fight, you can use this spell to make yourself much more difficult to hit. Basically, your attacker becomes mildly disoriented and perceives everyone else in the fight as being you. His chances of getting the real you decrease, depending on how many people are in the fight.

> **Example:** Pierre the Cliomancer and his two chums get jumped by a group of four thugs from a rival cabal. Pierre casts House of Mirrors on himself. Every thug who tries to shoot him has only a 1 in 6 chance of targeting the real Pierre; he's just as likely to hit one of Pierre's buddies or even one of his fellow thugs. If Pierre had been alone, the chances of hitting him would be 1 in 4—each attacker would actually have a greater chance of hitting one of his own allies.

Everyone who declares an attack on someone protected by this spell rolls randomly to see who he *actually* attacks. The more people are involved in a fight (on both sides), the more protection House of Mirrors offers; it's especially powerful when you're outnumbered. The downside is that it offers no protection in a one-on-one fight, unless there are bystanders nearby.

This spell lasts for five combat rounds. It can be extended by two rounds for every additional significant charge spent on it. These charges can be added in the middle of a fight, but doing so takes a combat action. It is possible to cast this spell on other people.



I Believe The Lies

Cost: 3 significant charges
Effect: Here's a power widely ascribed to extra-terrestrials, social workers, and Satanists: the power to implant false memories. This spell works a great deal like You Remember Now, only it's permanent and much broader in scope. With this ugly baby you *can* make someone remember a fairly lengthy friendship with you, complete with in-jokes and shared secrets. Naturally, it takes some preparation and scripting to make this convincing; but even an unconvincing, illogical, or downright *weird* string of fake memories can be useful. ("You clearly remember being raised on the planet Mars by your true parents, Jim Morrison and Cleopatra . . .") Having a load of obviously false and deeply strange stuff pumped into your brain is disorienting. If someone realizes that false memories have been put in them, it's a rank-8 Helplessness challenge. (After all, if those memories are fake, how can one trust *any* memories? Indeed, powerful Cliomancers are known to double-dip this spell, putting in one layer of bizarre, crude, and obviously false memories to draw attention away from a much more subtle and tricky string of *plausible* fakes . . .) Additionally, if these memories are deeply contrary to the target's self-image (like giving a lifelong pacifist memories of committing atrocities in Tehran at the behest of Saddam Hussein) it can be a Self challenge as high as rank-8.

Forget It

Cost: 4 significant charges
Effect: The "brain rinse" has become a staple of conspiracy theory. Supposedly this is a chemical or treatment that selectively erases memories. While no one can say for sure if the CIA, the Greys or the Freemasons actually have this technology, it is an option available to Cliomancers.

Forget It can be used on short-term or long-term memory. If you cast it on short-term memory, it simply prevents events from going into long-term memory.

> **Example:** Pierre the Cliomancer sprints past the security guard at a very exclusive building. The guard immediately stands and chases him. As Pierre ducks around a corner, he casts Forget It on the guard and empties out his short-term memory. The guard stops, wonders why he's standing up, decides he's yawning and stretching, and goes back to his post.

Forget It can also erase specific short events or small pieces of information from someone's mind. People tend to remember events as "scenes"—the drive to work is one image, your first hangover is one image, the Christmas you got that set of lawn darts you'd always wanted, *etc.* This spell can erase one scene; it can't be used to wipe out a series of connected memories. In concrete terms, you can make someone forget their wedding night, but not

artwork by Rob Nemeth

their 20-year marriage. It can also erase specific pieces of information—nice for making someone forget your name, or the password to her email account, or how to cast one of her spells. Information that is fundamental to someone's sense of self cannot be erased with this spell. You can't make someone forget her husband's name (or her own), or where she lives.

The loss is permanent in the case of images, unless the memories are restored with magick. In the case of information, the knowledge is lost until it's relearned—and generally relearning goes pretty quick. If you make Kim Xiang the black belt forget how to do the Monkey Dodge she practiced in the dojo for ten years, it's not going to take her another ten years to remember it again.

ALL IS KNOWN

Cost: 5 significant charges
Effect: Ever wanted to suck a secret right out of someone's brain? With this handy spell you can—but at a cost. When you cast this spell, the secret is no longer a secret. It's dumped right into the collective unconscious. At the same moment you pry the secret out, everyone else in the world knows it, too. The hidden information is instantly transformed from the private thoughts of the victim into an Urban Legend.

99.999+% of the world's population isn't going to care, or even notice. For instance, if the thought "the combination to Rita Becker's safe is 30 left, 98 right, 51 left," crossed your mind, it would barely register. You don't know Rita Becker, you don't care about her safe, so why should you remember? If (on the other hand) you *do* know Rita Becker—specifically the particular Rita Becker the spell was cast on—you now remember her safe combination. Maybe you think she told you once, or you saw her open the safe or saw it written down. That part's foggy, but you know for sure what the combination is, as does everyone else.

This can be particularly damaging if the secrets are of a more personal nature, of course. No politician wants *everyone in the world* to know he helped finance a soft-core jiggle flick. If you don't believe us, ask Phil Gramm. Perhaps most dangerous of all, you can use this spell to broadcast someone's true agenda to the world. What would happen to the Global Liberation Society if Randy Douglas's true motives and beliefs were to become known?

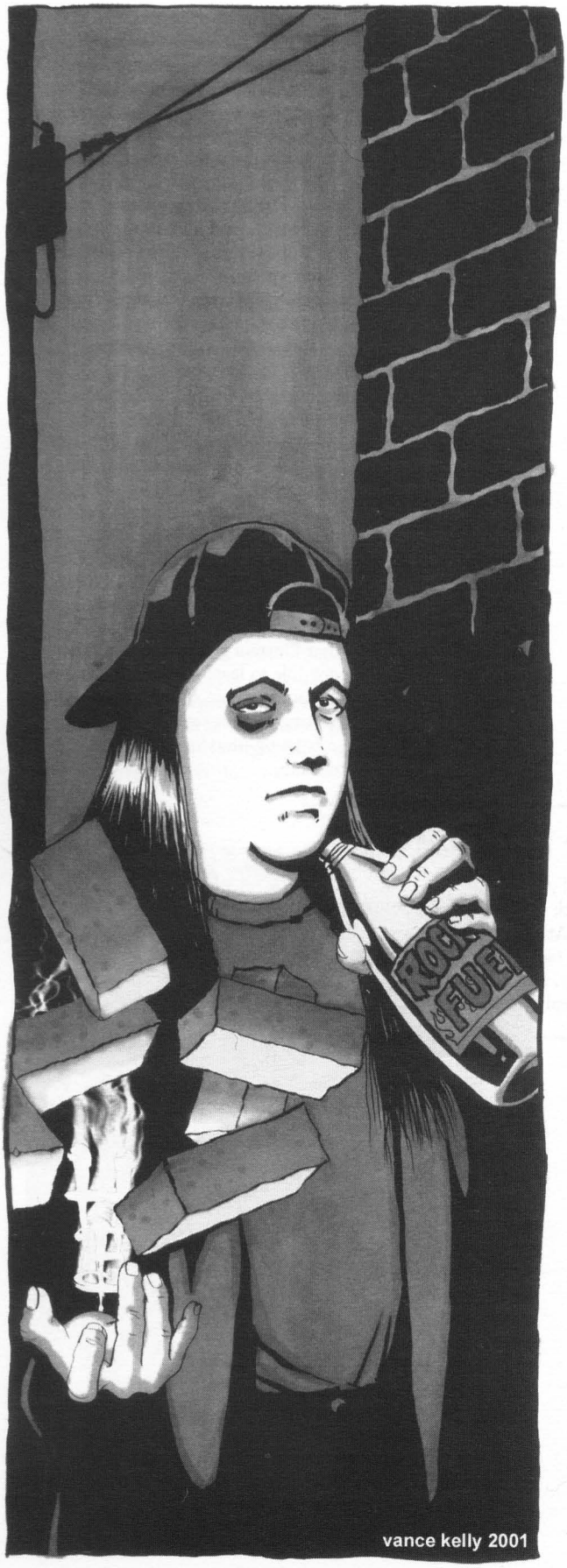
About the only limit on this spell is a targeting restriction: you have to touch your target to make the spell work. Incidentally, the victim of the spell feels nothing. Until someone tells her, she has no way to learn that her secrets have been spilled.

CLIOMANCY MAJOR EFFECTS

With a major charge, you could rewrite history—not what happened, but (more important, perhaps) what everyone *believes* happened. "Hitler won the war" is probably out of reach, but a major charge could make it "common knowledge" that someone named Dirk Penobscott came up with special relativity—that Einstein guy just took all the credit. It would also be possible to learn just about any piece of information. You could also do some fairly decent stretching with time—resetting the last twenty-four hours, making yourself younger, freezing time for everyone but you for an hour—that sort of thing.

WHAT YOU HEAR: THE CLIOMANCER

In his quest for the Merovingian bloodline (which is, as he'll tell you, only another name for the sacred Atlantean priesthood) California Cliomancer Garret LeClerc often uses random magick to spy out the details of individuals' ancestry. He's convinced that only people with the "sang royale" — the sacred blood of Atlantis — can use magick. Granted, many of the San Francisco adepts in his files are now dead, but he continues to harvest the Golden Gate Bridge charges under the noses of the invading L.A. adepts, and has begun seeking out their families magickally. He's not ruthless enough to threaten the invaders' parents and siblings, but there are many in the remnants of the San Fran adept underground who wouldn't be nearly so ethical.



THE DIPSOMANCER

AKA BOOZEHOUNDS

You know there is truth at the bottom of a bottle. You never feel even halfway yourself except when you're drunk. Liquor is your servant, bringing you clarity and power.

Drinking makes you feel good. It gets you high. You laugh more, talk more, cry more. Everything is more itself. Drinking is wonderful. There is nothing better than being drunk.

Parties are better with booze. Meals are better with booze. Making out is better with booze. (Having sex usually isn't, but you never remember that anyway.)

Driving drunk is fun. It's a game. You're breaking the law, thumbing your nose in everyone's face. But it's okay. You're in control. You can handle your liquor. It's evolution in action. You're a faster, smarter mammal and you can careen down the highway tanked because nothing can stop you when you're on your liquor high.

Wine is beautiful. The chemistry of grapes contains more profundity than all of physics. Vineyards are oceans, flavors rolling in and out like the tide, shifting year to year as the product of a thousand thousand interactions.

Beer is happy. Pop a can, open a bottle, sit at the bar and watch the draft pour. Light beer, dark beer, have a beer, take a beer, drink a beer. Go down in the basement and make a beer.

Liquor is wily. It circles you like a hunter, then strips you like a lover. A pint of cheap gin tastes good in the gutter, and single-malt scotch rules the roost when you're in your tux. Cocktails are like spells, every one a formula for interaction.

Drinking turns up the contrast knob on the television of life.

Nothing beats drinking. Nothing.

Boozehounds know all of the above plus more. They know that drinking brings clarity and focus, while filtering out everything that doesn't matter. Dipsomancers ride the easy road of cheap charges and a constant buzz, sliding from bar to bar with a staggering joy and a slippery way that gets them through danger without a scratch. But when they screw up, they screw up hard.

The central paradox of Dipsomancy is that it's a power trip and a death wish all in one. It takes you to incredible heights of insight and potency, then leaves you impotent and blind. It gains you friends and destroys your family. It's like cheating on an IQ test: your slippery success only proves how stupid you really are. But while you're riding that cresting wave of drink, you can do *anything*.

DIPSOMANCY BLAST STYLE

It's a poltergeist effect. Loose objects in the area fly at the target at a high rate of speed. As a general rule, the smaller and lighter the object is, the faster it goes. So a chair moves about as fast as it would if a strong man tossed it; someone's car keys hit like they were shot from a cannon; a handful of dust goes very fast indeed, providing an unpleasant "scouring" sensation.

This is one of the few blast styles that can target inanimate objects, and it doesn't do much good against really strong stuff like metal or heavy-duty plastic. Thin glass might be broken or a wooden door knocked down, but

nothing too spectacular. Just remember that a minor blast is like a really strong kick and a significant blast is like a gunshot.

Because like attracts like, this blast works exceptionally well on people who've been drinking. For every 10% of alcohol-based impairment the victim is suffering from, you can add another die of damage. So if you work this mojo on someone who's at 30% alcohol impairment, you can roll three more dice and add that to the total. (If you roll 3, 2, and 8, you can add 13 points of damage.) This extra damage is added to both minor and significant blasts.

Stats

Generate a Minor Charge: Drink a beer, a glass of wine, or a shot of whiskey. You *must* suffer an impairment penalty (see p. 290) from the drink to get a charge off it; no penalty, no charge.
Generate a Significant Charge: Have a drink of booze out of some kind of historically significant or potent vessel: the coffee cup JFK drank from during the Cuban Missile Crisis, the sacramental chalice of a Borgia pope, whatever. Unfortunately, this has to be *your* item; you can't voluntarily share it with another boozehound. If you *give* your vessel away, you can *never* get a significant charge from it again. If it's taken from you by force (or the threat of force) you *can* use it again if you recover it. You don't start the campaign owning one of these beauties. (As with minor charges, you must take an impairment penalty from a given drink to get a charge off it.)
Generate a Major Charge: Drink a unique liquor: the remnants of the Cask of Amontillado from Poe's story (you think he made that up?), the archaeologically preserved honey mead used for Dionysian ceremonies in ancient Greece, the remnants from Elvis's last bottle. (No impairment penalty is needed to get this charge.)
Taboo: Sober up. Any time your impairment from alcohol hits 0%, you lose any charges you're carrying.
Random Magick Domain: Cheating. Dipsomancy is about cheating the rules, cheating other people, cheating the cosmos itself. It's the short path, the easy way out, the casual betrayal for the sake of a sandwich. Anything that greases the wheels and makes things easier for the Dipsomancer in a short-sighted sort of way is fair game.
Starting Charges: Newly created Dipsomancers have no charges, but they're as close as the nearest bar.
Charging Tips: A Dipsomancer's charges are as close as his hip flask, powerful as his cup, and last as long as an alcoholic buzz. A boozehound can get about 18–25 charges per day, but there's this killer curve of decreasing returns where the more he drinks, and the longer he stays drunk, the more likely he is to pass out and stay down until sober.

Dipsomancy Minor Formula Spells

Moment of Truth

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: Get a hunch (that is, roll two dice and use them for your next roll). This sometimes is an actual vision—a fuzzy, alcohol-glazed image. Other times this is simply an irrational gut feeling.

Hold My Liquor

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: You can perform your next non-magick action without your drunk penalty. Note that if you want to use this in combat for a gunshot or whatever, you have to use one action to cast the spell; you can take your penalty-free action next turn.
Alternate Effect: If you fail an alcohol-related Body test (against passing out, usually) you can attempt this spell. If the spell fails, you have to cope with the results of your failed Body test. If the spell works, you can ignore the Body check failure.

Thimblebelly

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: The target of this spell takes *your* drunk penalty on his next action. So if you're at 60% impairment, you can give the same nausea, poor judgment, and visual distortion to one of your enemies. This does not force your opponent to check against passing out, alcohol poisoning, or any of the rest, however, nor does it take the impairment off of you.

Lil' Whammy

Cost: 2 minor charges
Effect: This is the Dipsomancy Minor Blast. As described, loose objects fly into or slash at the target for one round. For every 10% of alcohol-based impairment the target is suffering, you can roll and add another die of damage.

Party Like Hell

Cost: 3 minor charges
Effect: This summons up a demon, who speaks to you telepathically. Demons and the rules for summoning them are explained in the *Demons* chapter. Keep in mind that this spell does *not* give you any power over the spirit you called, nor any way to get rid of it if things get out of hand. In fact, there are no formula Dipsomancer spells for controlling summoned spirits—though the threat of Soul Sipping and Ghost Vintage (described later) can be used to great coercive effect.

Drunken Stagger

Cost: 3 minor charges
Effect: For the rest of this round, and for all of the next two rounds, anyone who makes a gun or hand-to-hand attack against you takes a -30% shift to her skill. For each additional minor charge you spend on this spell, it gives an additional -10% shift on all affected rounds. (You can use a maximum of five minor charges on this effect.) So if you spend five charges, people take a -50% shift until the end of this round and for the next two rounds. You can still act normally while this spell is in effect—that is, it takes one action to work the spell, but your next two actions are normal while the spell is protecting you.

Dipsomancy Significant Formula Spells

Now I See

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: You have a brief, blurry vision of a person, place,

or thing familiar to you. The vision lasts for about thirty seconds, and you see exactly what is happening to that individual or item, or at that location, at the moment you're having your vision. For an additional significant charge you can hear what's going on, too. Each additional thirty seconds of spying costs a significant charge.

Just a Harmless Drunk

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: You can't be seen for fifteen minutes. This isn't "invisibility" with all its associated hassles. You still appear in photographs, you still have a reflection and you can still look at yourself. (Can you imagine trying to go up a flight of stairs silly drunk *and* unable to see where you're stepping?) It just means that people don't pay attention to you. You become an insignificant feature of the landscape, like a discarded gum wrapper in the vacant lot of their consciousness. This means people are at a -30% shift to hit you in combat with guns and hand-to-hand attacks (-50% if you don't move and remain quiet). If you're just moving around and people aren't in a highly charged, life-or-death conflict, they have to make a Notice skill check to even realize you're there. Furthermore, this Notice roll is made at a -40% shift if you're walking around, or a -60% shift if you're staying still and making some effort at concealing yourself.

Oddly enough, this spell's "don't pay attention to me" effect doesn't cover mirrors or video cameras; people who see your image or reflection respond normally. Beware of savvy marksmen with hand mirrors or camcorders.

God Looks Out For Drunks

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: You can use your Dipsomancy skill instead of any other skill for one action. You can still flip-flop results, and you don't take the drunk penalty. Just to be clear: if you do this in combat you spend one turn making the spell, and can make the switch on your *next* turn.

The Big Whammy

Cost: 2 significant charges
Effect: This is the significant blast. It operates like the Lil' Whammy, only it does significant blast damage. If the check succeeds, you can add another die of damage for every 10% of alcohol impairment on the part of the target. (This is damage only, added once a successful roll has been made; this die cannot be used as part of the success/fail roll and does not count for matches. It's strictly a *bonus* to the total, not an additional die on your attack check.) Furthermore, for each extra significant charge you spend, you can roll another die without spending an action pumping up the volume.

Example: Dirk Allen spends four significant charges to whip The Big Whammy down on an irritating Pornomancer who thought she could take advantage of him while drunk. (Foolish, foolish woman.) He rolls four dice and gets two 5s, a 4 and a 9; he can arrange these into any successful pattern he wants. While tempted to make a 55 and get a cherry, he decides to assemble a 59. But wait! His target has *also* been drinking; she's had four drinks, so she's at -15% impairment. He can roll another die and add that to the damage. He gets a seven, and that added to his successful attack of 59 makes his total damage to the poor woman 66 points. This hurts her bad, but he doesn't get his 66 Cherry because he actually *rolled* a 59.

More Complicated Example: It's just not Dirk Allen's night. While he's staggering out of the bar where he wasted the ill-advised Pornomancer, her besotted boy-toy comes after him with a tire iron. Dirk has four significant charges left, and decides to spend three on a Big Whammy for this punk. However, because he's really angry, he waits one turn to pump the spell up a little more. On his second turn, he lets it rip. He again rolls four dice: two normal, one for waiting, and one for the extra charge. He rolls 2, 3, 6, 7 and is able to put some big hurt on the attacking punk. Had the punk also been a drunk at, say, 10% impairment, Dirk could have added another die to the damage total.

Soul Sipping

Cost: 2 significant charges
Effect: Soul Sipping is a particularly nasty type of magickal vampirism. If you're going to use it on a material being, you have to actually get your mouth on them. (In combat, this is a Martial Arts or Struggle roll that does no damage). If you can get your lips in contact with their body (even if it's through cloth) you can cast the spell; if the being is incorporeal, getting your lips against (or even into) their visual manifestation—or their host body, if they're possessing someone—is sufficient. (In combat, if you roll the successful attack, you can cast the spell the same round as a free bonus action.) Note that while a Blast attack against a possessed human only affects the human host body, Soul Sipping on a possessed human only affects the spirit itself. If the spell succeeds, you consume part of their spirit. What this means depends on who (or what) you're attacking.

If your target is a sorcerer, you can suck off one significant charge (or up to five minor charges, if that's all they've got). They lose it, you've got it, and you didn't even have to increase your drunk penalty. Yum!

If your target is a normal person, you can decrease their Soul stat by 20 points for half an hour. If you reduce their Soul to 0% or below, they pass out and can't be awakened until the half hour is up. You don't gain anything from this form of Soul Sipping. You can use this against sorcerers instead of stealing charges; keep in mind that if their Soul score drops beneath their skill at magick, their magick skill drops as well—after all, you can't have a skill higher than its stat.

Finally, you can use this against immaterial beings like ghosts, demons, and entropics. Every time you do it, you reduce the victim's Soul by the result of your roll. (If you rolled a 25, you reduced its Soul by 25 points.) If you zilch out a spirit's Soul, it's "dead" (or gone, at least) and you've consumed it. You can pick any ability that spirit had and gain a skill in it at 10%. If the skill is supernatural, you have to spend a minor charge every time you want to use it; however, you can still raise it with experience points, like any other skill. Unfortunately you probably won't suck off many skills this way, since most spirits run away the first time someone injures them.

Astral Stumble

Cost: 3 significant charges
Effect: You leave your body and roam the astral plane until you wake up sober—typically about eight hours. You *cannot* leave the astral plane until your body sobers up. While you're astral, you can see the physical world (though living beings appear only as auras), you can move through solid objects or beings, you're invisible to normal people, and you can interact with astral beings you encounter. Unfortunately, you can't hear what's going on in the real world (though you can "hear" astral creatures just fine—it's a form of telepathy) and you see living beings only as their auras—making it pretty difficult to recognize both your friends and your enemies.

The drawbacks to astral travel are considerable: the Dipsomancy blast does not work on astral beings, so if you get in a fight you'd better be soused enough for some soul-drinking (described earlier). Perhaps worst of all, there's no such thing as "astral booze," so there's often a very dangerous lag time between when you're done with your astral business and when your body becomes sober (breaking your taboo and draining all your charges), pulling you out of the astral plane. Naturally, there's no way to prematurely wake up and exit the astral plane.

Ghost Vintage

Cost: 4 significant charges
Effect: This spell allows you to capture immaterial spirits and imprison them in a bottle of liquor. This works on demons, astral parasites, and entropics; you can also use it on a dying person to keep their soul from going to its ultimate reward (or punishment). In order to do this, you have to be on hand and cast the spell the same turn the person takes enough damage to expire. (Naturally this is easier if you're arranging their death . . .)

At any time, you can release the spirit in the bottle by opening it (or breaking it) and pouring the liquor out. The spirit also gets free if anyone else does this.

Unlike most formula spells, this does require you to have a specific item to cast it—you need a bottle of booze, at least half full, to hold the ghost. For most Dipsomancers, this isn't a problem.

For the purposes of Soul Sipping, any spirit trapped by this spell is considered a ghost. However, it can't run away, making this a very handy way to completely hose a spirit through repeated Soul Sipping attacks. Corrupt boozehounds are notorious for murdering someone just to capture their soul in a bottle of booze and then Soul Sipping their skills until the soul is depleted and can be released to the afterlife. (Or, maybe, annihilated. No one knows for sure what happens to a Soul completely Sipped, any more than anyone knows for sure what happens after death.)

Dipsomancy Major Effects

Forcibly exchange bodies with someone else, move a group of twenty people to any location in the world, raise the dead (hideous half-living creatures only) . . .

What You Hear: The Dipsomancer

The annals of drunkenness are full of stories that end "Good thing I was drunk when I went down those stairs! Otherwise the fall woulda killed me!" Dirk Allen, a somewhat notorious Dipsomancer, has used random magick to reduce the damage from falling. In one case, he jumped from a third-floor window and hobbled away with nothing worse than a sprained ankle to show for it.



THE ENTROPOMANCER

AKA BODYBAGS, CHAOS MAGES

You know it's all a roll of the dice. What you risk reveals what you value. Safety is death. Chaos is life. Let go.

You had nothing to lose. Everything had gone to shit. Another night in a dead-end counter jockey job and you were eating sugar every thirty minutes to prevent the shadows from settling down on your head. Dumb punk comes in and shoves a gun in your face and says to give him the cash.

Sign on the door: "No more than $100 in register at any time."

Dumb punk.

Your contempt was absolute and you had nothing to lose. You looked at his pinprick eyes and sweaty skin and you said the first thing that came into your head.

"Eat me."

Click. Click. Click. And then he stopped pulling the trigger on the empty gun because the words "eat me" were bursting out all over his face, trickles of blood running all over like windshield glass from a drunk's highway wipeout.

He started screaming then. He was still screaming when they took him away.

You went out into the night. You played in traffic. You insulted motorcycle gangs. You took a kid's skateboard and sailed off a bridge into the frigid water below with your eyes closed and your hands in your pockets. The power built and built and built and you realized something.

You were alive. For the first time in what felt like ages.

That was when you knew: we risk what we would never give away. It is risk that moves worlds, changes lives. Metaphysics is just a three-dollar word for rolling the dice.

The central paradox of Entropomancy is the pursuit of power through surrender. You aren't even taking calculated risks: you're throwing yourself in the path of the cosmic train because that's how you prove your devotion to chaos. And chaos takes care of its own.

ENTROPOMANCY BLAST STYLE

The surface of the victim's body erupts with a bunch of small injuries, often in the shape of words, symbols, or pictures. If the blast is fatal, they literally explode. (Being caught in such an explosion doesn't cause any damage, but is certainly distasteful and possibly merits a stress check.)

If a chaos mage makes a successful minor blast, he can gamble to increase the damage before it's resolved. To gamble, roll a die. If it's even, you add that much damage to the blast. If it's odd, the blast does no damage, but still costs the charge. Up to five dice can be added in this fashion. You can add them one at a time, too, but if any one of them turns up odd, you have to stop there.

Example: Neal the bodybag whips a blast at Cage. He succeeds with a 21—three lousy points of damage. He decides he's going to try to pump it, so he rolls another die. It's a four; now he's done seven points. Better, but he's feeling lucky and rolls again. This time it's a seven, so Cage takes *no* damage from the blast.

STATS

Generate a Minor Charge: Risk a significant amount of money, a minor injury, or humiliation. It has to be an action that you initiate—as opposed to an ambush, for example—and you cannot use magick to influence the outcome.
Generate a Significant Charge: As with minors, but the risk must be pointless and the stakes must be serious: injury or death. Starting a fight you were planning to get into anyhow doesn't count, but jumping in front of an assailant or offering no resistance during a combat round does. The risk has to be genuine and deliberate. Mixing one poison tablet in a swimming pool full of sugar pills doesn't cut the mustard because the odds are too small to really register. If the chance is less than 10%, it's just not risky enough. Similarly, taking what you *think* is a risk does nothing if there's no real danger. Playing Russian Roulette works. Playing Russian Roulette with a gun you *think* has one bullet—but which is actually unloaded or which has the safety catch on—yields nothing.
Generate a Major Charge: In addition to risking your own life, deliberately put at least ten lives in danger of dying in vain. Incidental innocent bystanders in a high speed chase don't count for this purpose, because that's not a ritualized context. Staking ten people's lives on the flip of a coin, plus your own, is more like it. Another way to get a major charge is to gamble with the life of someone you love, in addition to your own.
Taboo: Get someone else to take a risk you're unwilling to take. If you stick one of your buddies in the front line while you hang out "guarding his rear," you lose any charges you're holding. This also prevents you from callously gambling with other people's lives from a position of safety.
Random Magick Domain: An Entropomancer is the master of coincidence. Need a lighter? Someone just happened to drop one the first place you look. Want to get away fast? Just happens to be a cabbie on crystal meth coming 'round the corner. In a tight spot? Well for *you* there always *is* a cop around when you need one.
Starting Charges: Newly created Entropomancers have four minor charges.
Charging Tips: A bodybag usually has trouble keeping the charges she gets on an everyday basis, since she often has to use them to get out of the jams she risks herself into. Over a week though, she should be able to accumulate between 3–7 minor charges and possibly a significant charge. All her other charges were probably spent recovering from the more painful risks of the week.

ENTROPOMANCY MINOR FORMULA SPELLS

TASTE OF CHAOS

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: The target of this spell has a -10% shift on the next action they roll. For each charge you spend, you can lower their skill by another 10%.

THE EVIL EYE

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: This is the Entropomancer Blast spell. It simply rips up the surface of the target's body, often creating letters or other designs (as described earlier). It's possible to gamble with the Evil Eye for extra damage. After you roll to see if it's successful, you can choose to roll another die. If it's even, that damage gets added. If it's odd, the spell does *no* damage and you lose your charge as well. You can choose to add up to five dice in this fashion, even adding them one at a time once you see the result of the last roll—but any odd roll kills the effect immediately.

PIERCE THE VEIL

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: This summons up a demon, who speaks to you telepathically. Demons and the rules for summoning them are explained in detail in the *Demons* chapter. Keep in mind that this spell does *not* give you any power over the spirit you called, nor any way to get rid of it if things get out of hand. Instead, the significant Entropomancer spell Cage for the Dead is used to control the demon.

FORTUNE'S FOOL

Cost: 2 minor charges
Effect: This spell lets you re-roll a failure you just made—even a matched failure or a fumble. If you do it in combat, it does *not* take an action.

> **Example:** It's Neal the bodybag's turn in combat. He shoots at someone and misses. He can cast this spell and roll for it as part of that same action; if he succeeds at the spell, he can re-roll his gunshot before the next action in the round.

This is a powerful spell, but there are some restrictions on its use. It can't be used to re-roll a failed Fortune's Fool spell. (In the example above, if Neal's spell failed then he couldn't use another spell to react to the failed spell that was itself a reaction to the failed gunshot.) You can't make more than one re-roll; if Neal successfully casts the spell, re-rolls, and fails *again*, he can't try the spell again. Finally, you can only use it on your own screwups; you can't cast this spell on anyone else.

BULLETPROOF CHUTZPAH

Cost: 2 minor charges
Effect: This defensive spell works only on physical attacks; it can't protect you from magick. However, any punch, kick, gunshot, bite, slash or attempt to run you down with a car has a flat 50% chance of failing as long as the spell is in effect. If someone successfully hits you, roll one die; if it comes up even, the damage from that attack is reduced to a big zero. You cannot cast this spell on someone else.

The spell lasts a number of rounds equal to the ones place on your roll; so if you roll a 26, it lasts 6 rounds. If you roll 45, it lasts 5 rounds, *etc.*

While you have this particular mystic shield up, you can't gain any more charges, so handle with care.

DOUBLE OR NOTHING

Cost: 3 minor charges
Effect: You add a bonus to your next roll equal to the roll you made to cast this spell, rounded down to the nearest tens place. If you succeed at this spell by rolling a 19, you get a +10% bonus. If you succeed with a roll of 41, you get a +40%. If you spend an additional 2 charges, you can cast this on someone else in your line of sight.

Entropomancy Significant Formula Spells

Killing Stare

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: This is the Entropomancer significant blast. Unlike the Evil Eye, you can't gamble to add extra damage. On the other hand, since it only costs 1 significant charge you shouldn't really need to . . .

Long Distance Call

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: Think hard about someone. Pick up a phone. Dial 1 and then the first ten numbers that come into your head. The phone closest to the person you were thinking about starts to ring, be it cell phone, phone booth—whatever. If there isn't a phone within earshot, the spell fails, but you won't lose your charge.

Cage for the Dead

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: This spell allows you to control a summoned demon, as explained on p. 221. Keep in mind that demons are contrary little bastards and will do their best to screw you over on general principles—even when they don't have anything to gain by their treachery. In other words, phrase your requests with great care.

Luck of the Damned

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: Reduce all damage just inflicted on you from one source to zero if you can come up with a coincidence that would explain the failure. "The bullet was a dud," works. "The gunman had a cerebral hemorrhage before pulling the trigger," doesn't. The GM can veto outrageous coincidences, of course. This cannot be used to avoid the consequences of charge-building risks.

Edit the World

Cost: 2 significant charges
Effect: History changes slightly. This spell can only effect events since the last sunrise or sunset (whichever was more recent). Some entropy adepts explain this by saying that there are an infinite number of alternate universes, and that they just hopped over to the one where, for example, they remembered to throw their shotgun in the trunk this morning, or where they won a new bike in a lottery. Other adepts say that history is a weak fabric, thanks to entropy, and if you pull the right threads in the here-and-now, you can unravel ones in the recent past. This can't be used to bring back the dead or win millions (or even thousands) of dollars—those are major changes (for you at least), but it can be used to "undo" damage—you can gain back wound points equal to your roll. Your GM decides what incidents you can tweak with this power. As a rule of thumb, changes that would have a cascading effect on the time since the change are less likely to be acceptable than changes whose consequences are still in the future at the time that you work the magick. Retroactively remembering to throw your shotgun in the car this morning would be okay if you wouldn't have used the shotgun from then until now anyway, but not okay if you were in a fight an hour ago and would have had your shotgun present.

I Win

Cost: 2 significant charges
Effect: This spell allows you to retroactively adjust your skill level to whatever you just rolled for the purposes of that action. In other words, you can take a failed roll and make it a success without changing the roll. It can be done as a reaction to a failed roll in combat without changing the order of initiative.

> **Example:** You're in a fight and just tried to karate-chop someone. You rolled a whopping 78—definitely a failure. However, you decide to cast "I Win" on that karate chop. Now that 78 was a success, doing 15 points of damage. Next round, your fighting skill returns to what it was before. (*Love* those 99s!) The one roll that resists this power is the big 00. For some reason, those catastrophic failures just can't be fixed.

On a Roll

Cost: 3 significant charges
Effect: You simply become unbelievably lucky for one day. Every single skill and stat you have has a +10% shift for 24 hours.

Entropomancy Major Effects

With a major charge you can change history in a pretty significant fashion—win the $20 million jackpot, avoid the ambush that killed your friends, prevent that drunk driver from killing your dad so that you mom never married the guy who used to beat the crap out of you . . . the mind boggles. Generally, the farther in the past the change is, the harder it is to pull off, and also the more drastic the repercussions it has on the present. So no one is going to make Hitler win the war. (At least, *you* aren't.) One area that cannot be affected by this power is ascensions that have already occurred at the time that you work the magick: they're permanent. Any attempt you make at changing a historical ascension is warped just enough to still allow the same person to ascend at the same time and with the same archetype as he did originally.

What You Hear: The Entropomancer

A troubled youth Entropomancer named Ollie Fayette uses his powers in Las Vegas to cheat at games of chance and win money. The casinos quickly got his number and, since he's underage, they've got a perfect excuse to keep him out. Once he's old enough to gamble legally, they may be in trouble. Or maybe he won't live that long, if he continues to ply his powers during illegal poker games.



THE EPIDEROMANCER

AKA FLESHWORKERS, SKINNERS

You know truth is in your veins. Let it out. No one sees your true self until you wear the bleeding mask of pain. Open up. Your body is your temple. Plunder it.

It started with cutting. You got dumped or got fat or got jacked, and in the middle of the night you went into the kitchen and got the knife, or to the bathroom for one of dad's razor blades.

You started small. Little cuts on the inside of your thighs. Slices on your upper arm. Cuts on your chest.

Cutting put you in control. You knew you had one true thing: the reality of your body, of your dominion over your own flesh. It wasn't suicide. *It was the opposite.* There isn't a word for what it was.

That smug fuck at the hospital cheerfully said it was a coping mechanism. He wanted to explain it away, put you in a support group, introduce you to some other cutters.

He didn't get it. Neither did they.

Some people grow out of cutting. You grew into it. You did it when you didn't have to. Sometimes the blood ran and then you spoke in a voice that wasn't your own. A voice of power.

You learned to use that voice. You found you could cut your skin without blades. You could open up on command, the will made flesh, the blood running free.

Then you realized you could do it to someone else.

You're beyond cutting now. You're even beyond yourself. You speak in the voice of power all the time and you no longer remember what your old voice was like.

You are strong now. Not vulnerable. Not weak. Not dumped or fat or jacked. You are everyone who you never imagined you could be.

The central paradox of Epideromancy is that it creates from destruction, builds identity from self-mutilation. It cannot heal damage you inflicted on yourself for the sake of building charges. The pinnacle of Epideromancy would be a skinner bleeding himself to death.

EPIDEROMANCY BLAST STYLE

Fleshworkers blast people by warping their body. They can slap you and tear half the skin off your head in the process. They can punch you in the gut and make both your thumbs fall off. They can grab you by the arm and just pull off a fistful of meat. They can . . . well, you get the picture.

The down side of the Epideromancer blast is that you have to touch your victim. You can combine this with a hand-to-hand attack, or you can just try to touch him in combat without really *hitting* him. If you combine it with a hand-to-hand strike, first see if the punch or kick worked; if it did, they take that damage and *then* you can roll to see if your blast went off *too*. If you just try to hit someone without really hurting them, you still roll your hand-to-hand attack, but give yourself a +20% shift to hit, since it's a lot easier to just touch someone than to injure them.

While this makes your blast one of the few magick attacks that Dodge works on, there's an upside: you can pick where the blast damage goes, meaning you can break (or at least injure) a leg, or make someone drop a handgun.

One final note: you can only combine a blast with a concentrated attack. If you split your fighting skill up between several opponents, or attack one person more than once, you cannot add the spell to the attack; your concentration is simply too fragmented.

Stats

Generate a Minor Charge: Give yourself a small injury—3 points minimum. (Just assume that someone who hits himself with a hammer or cuts himself with a knife gets 3 points.)
Generate a Significant Charge: Hurt yourself deliberately—roll two dice and take the total in wound points. (If you roll a 47, you take eleven points.) If you roll a match, add another 3 points of damage.
Generate a Major Charge: Permanent harm, such as the loss of a hand, nose, both ears, an eye, *etc.* This definitely causes some change in your stats or skills. Alternately, you can arrange for some incredible torture that leaves no outward sign but that permanently weakens you, such as drinking acid. In this case, roll and take the damage as it comes up—if you roll a 45, you take 45 points of damage. You can't flip-flop this roll, but the GM can at his discretion. You can't heal these points *per se*, but you can increase your Body stat with experience points to gain wound points again; this represents you improving the remaining parts of your body, not replacing what you cut off. Your wound points cannot naturally go above your Body stat minus the points you lost to get the major charge, however. (Discuss your particular ceremony with the GM; you may be able to negotiate for loss of Mind, Body, Speed, or Soul instead of wound points.)
Taboo: If you ever let anyone else modify your body, you lose all the charges you're holding at that time. This covers everything from seeing a doctor or a dentist, to having your ears pierced, to getting a manicure or a haircut. (Most Epideromancers schedule their beauty salon appointments for when they plan to be "empty." Or they just do it themselves.)
Random Magick Domain: Fleshworkers can alter bodies, and do nothing else. It is, in many ways, the most pragmatic and down-to-earth style. There's no ephemeral philosophy here—just effects on flesh and blood and bone. This school works on animals as well as people.
Starting Charges: Newly created Epideromancers have five minor charges. No, they aren't presently wounded.
Charging Tips: Depending on how quickly you can heal, a flesh mage can generate plenty of charges. On average it takes a week to heal the wounds from 4 minor charges or one significant charge without first aid. If you can patch up the wound yourself, this can go much higher depending on your First Aid skill, and how badly you actually hurt yourself.

Epideromancy Minor Formula Spells

Warping

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: The Epideromancer minor blast is called Warping. You have to touch your target to use this spell. (In case you're wondering, it doesn't have to be skin-to-skin contact; as long as you touch her clothing, that's close enough.) You can combine this with a hand-to-hand attack (as long as you didn't split up your fighting skill, as explained earlier) by making a successful attack roll and then rolling for the Warping right away. Alternately, you can just touch your target; if you try this, give your Struggle (or whatever fighting skill you use) a +20% shift and then roll for Warping, but the only damage from the attack is what you do with the spell.

Any successful Warping spell can be directed at a specific body part, so you can make someone fall over or drop their weapon—no matter what body part you touched or struck. This doesn't mean you can instantly kill someone by targeting their heart or their medulla oblongata. If you do that, they take damage from a weakening heart attack or minor stroke-like episode—but it's not fatal.

Regeneration

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: When you cast this spell, roll a die. The target of the spell gains back wound points equal to the number you rolled. You can use this on someone else to restore any type of damage, no matter the source—magickal or mundane. If you use it on yourself, you can only restore damage that someone *else* did to you; you can't heal self-inflicted damage that was used to build charges.

The Flesh is My Servant

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: You get a Speed or Body shift of +10% until the next time you sleep. If you choose to ramp up your Body, it does *not* give you extra wound points. It does not work retroactively—only rolls you make after successfully casting The Flesh is My Servant are affected.

Relentless Will

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: This spell negates the need for sleep for one night. You feel perky and refreshed for the next 16 hours, and okay for eight after that.

The Mirror Lies

Cost: 2 minor charges
Effect: You can change your appearance until the next time you sleep. This is cosmetic only: skin, hair, and eye color, plus minor changes in height or features. This is not good enough to duplicate someone else, unless you already resemble them. You might generate a superficial resemblance, however, or pass for him from a distance.

Greater Warping

Cost: 3 minor charges
Effect: The normal Warping spell simply does damage, which is eventually healed. Greater Warping doesn't damage a body; instead, it distorts it. For example, Greater Warping could be used to seal someone's mouth and nose shut, or cause their eyelids to grow together, or meld their arm to their side, or stick their feet together. It doesn't do wound point damage; neither do these changes right themselves naturally (though they can usually be corrected with sur-

gery). You can add Greater Warping to a hand-to-hand blow, or simply touch your target and make it happen, just like the regular minor blast. The area of effect is roughly equal to your palm.

If you seal over someone's mouth and nose, they begin to smother until some opening is made through which they can breathe. As mentioned in the rules for strangling (see p. 57), a person can go without oxygen for a number of seconds equal to their Body score. After that, they must either breathe or pass out, with death following soon after.

Epideromancy Significant Formula Spells

Body Like A Still Pond

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: This powerful defensive spell allows your body to flow and re-form in response to damage. Bullets pass right through you with barely a ripple. Knife cuts seal up as quickly and seamlessly as when you drag your finger across the surface of a pond. (Note that just seeing this happen is a rank-3 Unnatural stress challenge.)

In game terms, this means that every physical attack made on you does damage equal to the number on the tens die—from 1 to 10 points. Someone rolled a 54 and shot you? You take 5 points of damage. Someone came at you with a chainsaw, rolled 05 and should have done 24 points of damage (10+5+3 for being big +3 for being heavy +3 for being sharp)? It did 10 points of damage because they rolled a 0 on the tens die.

This spell starts the round it's cast, but does not affect attacks made on you by people who got higher initiative that round. (So if someone shoots you and you cast Body Like a Still Pond later that same round, you still take the damage from the gunshot.) It lasts two rounds past its first round, for a total of three (or more like two and a half if you got bad initiative), but you don't have to concentrate on the spell past the first round—once it's cast, you're done.

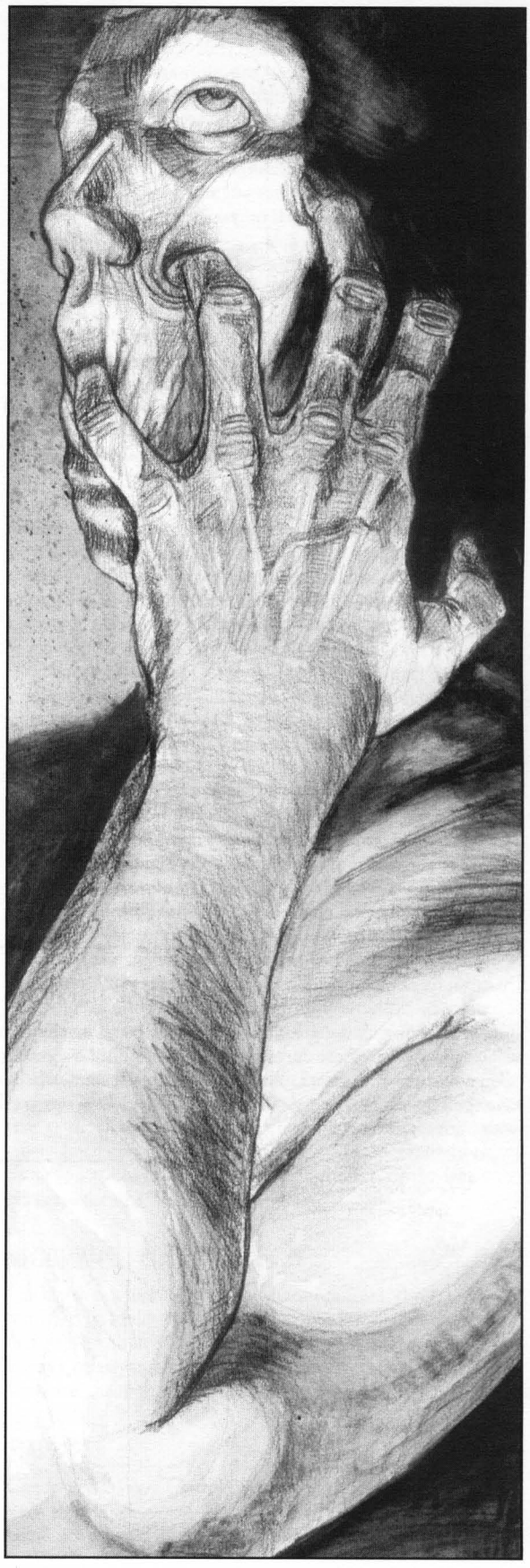
Face Shift

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: With this spell, you can permanently change one aspect of your appearance—gaining or losing up to three inches in height, changing the shape of your mouth or nose or eyes, changing the color of your eyes or skin or hair, and so on. Needless to say, finger or retinal prints are a snap. You can also use this to gain up to thirty pounds (if you're willing to sit down with that much food at a single go) or lose it (if you have somewhere to dump the resultant mass).

If you have a skill like "Adorable" or "Fresh-Faced Good Looks" you can permanently increase or decrease it by 5% every time you use this spell. However, you can never increase a good-looks based skill beyond your Soul stat with this spell—even if the good looks are based on Body. That's because someone with a Soul of 30 just doesn't have the aesthetic sense needed to imagine the beautiful face needed for Drop Dead Gorgeous 45%.

Body Like Iron

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: When you cast this spell, you permanently gain three



artwork by Thomas Manning

more wound points. This does not increase your Body stat. You can use this spell to increase your wound points past your Body score—in fact, you can ultimately have up to 250 wound points, but after that this spell is no longer effective.

If you cast this spell while injured, it does not heal your injury; the injury just matters slightly less because your body is tougher.

You can only use this spell on yourself.

Preternatural Prowess

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: This spell can be used (only on yourself) to permanently increase either your Body or your Speed by 5 points. If you use this to increase Body, there is no resultant wound point gain. Neither Body nor Speed can be increased beyond 85% with this spell.

Body Melting

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: Warping's ugly big brother is Body Melting, the Epideromancer's significant blast. It works just like Warping, only the damage is lots, *lots* worse. Use your imagination, you sick puppy.

Chameleon

Cost: 2 significant charges
Effect: You can turn yourself into a duplicate of someone for twenty-four hours, not including voice, memories, skills, or mannerisms. If you have a part of their body (even just a hair or fingernail sample) this lasts for 168 hours (seven days). You can stop the effect at any time, but if you stop it, you can't activate it again without spending the charges and starting from scratch. It takes about ten minutes to work a complete Chameleon change.

Withering

Cost: 3 significant charges
Effect: Like Warping and Body Melting, you must touch your victim in order to cast this spell on him. If you succeed, you can permanently reduce the target's Body or Speed by an amount equal to the total of your roll. That is, if you succeed with a 45, you reduce the score by 4 + 5 = 9. If you succeed with a 19, you reduce it by 1 + 9 = 10. You can also use this on skills that are based on Body, Speed, or appearance. (For example, if you give someone a hook nose, it decreases their Charm skill, even if it's Soul-based.) It doesn't mean you can decrease both Body *and* one of the target's body-based skills; it's either/or. However, a loss of Body does mean a loss of wound points. Also, remember that no one can have a skill higher than the associated stat. If you use this on someone who has Firearms 55% and you drop his Speed to 52%, his Firearms score drops, too.

Master of the Flesh

Cost: 5 significant charges
Effect: When you cast this spell you permanently increase your Body, Speed, or wound points by X, where X equals the total of the dice you rolled to cast this spell. (If you succeed with a 12, you only get a 3 point increase; if you succeed with a 49, you get a 13 point increase). Increasing Body does not increase wound points; increasing wound points does not increase Body. Using this spell, it *is* possible to raise Body or Speed above 85, but it's still impossible to get more than 250 wound points. You can only use this spell on yourself.

Epideromancy Major Effects

Completely and permanently redesign your own body—or someone else's. (You still cannot repair damage done to generate Epideromancy charges.) Regain lost youth. Gain the ability to switch genders at will without spending a charge.

What You Hear: The Epideromancer

The Freak has raised a great deal of money by using random magick to heal those whose illnesses are incurable to medical science. However, these cures often require multiple significant charges, and each illness is unique enough that no one formula spell could cover them all. You could make a formula spell to cure one strain of the flu, (or one strain of HIV), but not one spell that covers every different type—let alone one spell for every illness. Maybe that was possible back when people were more ignorant about illness, but not today.



THE MECHANOMANCER

AKA CLOCKWORKERS

You know a lifetime is but a tick of the clock. The past is nothing. Only the future matters, oil-soaked and clanking, and you are an architect of that future. Cogs and wheels and levers and gears are the machinery of the cosmos made visible.

You are *so* old school. Nobody picks up clockworking these days unless they got it taught when they were young by a crazy old uncle. It's a holdover, a relic, primed for either extinction or renewal.

But once upon a time it was cool.

Back in the who knows when this was righteous stuff. It was the *first* modern magick, meaning it said "So long!" to all that eye of newt crap. The first clockworkers built their magick on real stuff instead of faeries and hags and talking wolves. They used cogs and gears and oil and steam and levers and pistons and springs.

In its day, it was cutting-edge. Those guys rejected the past completely and embraced an imagined future. They thought there was an aether that worked like the Force in *Star Wars*, a secret power source that could make anything happen if you just made it well enough.

They were so hardcore they sacrificed their own *memories* to make the magick work. They threw away their families, forgot their children, lived lives of pure research, pure creation. They were true modernists, and they cut loose the baggage of the bad old days.

They're gone now. Nobody clockworks anymore except smelly old men in houses full of cats and old newspapers.

You're the exception. What the hell are you thinking?

Maybe you hate the future. You've seen where it's going and you're calling bullshit on the whole thing. If you can't make it in a forge and build it a pasture and repair it in the mud you don't want it.

Maybe you *are* the future. You look at *BattleBots* and nanotech and Segway and you can feel a whole new way to live twitching at the back of your neck. You can jump past all that stuff with the power of your will, and make better machines with century-old tech and aeons-old mojo than any MIT geek ever will.

The central paradox of Mechanomancy today is that it's a vision of the future mired in the past, a modernist ethic that outlived modernism. That tension is giving it enough gas to keep going. But for how long? Magick changes or dies. You could be the agent of that change, or the last practitioner of a noble, beautiful art.

MECHANOMANCY BLAST STYLE

Blasts are not available to Mechanomancers, though it's not hard to build clockworks that can kill people pretty fast. Unfortunately, being attacked by a clockwork does not always create an Unnatural stress check (though a rank-2 Violence check may be in order.)

STATS

Generate a Minor Charge: Spend a day working on the darn thing.

Generate a Significant Charge: Give up a minor memory

from your past—perhaps a pleasant sunny day, or a high school dance if you're building something fun or useful. Maybe the memory of getting beat up in grade school for something monstrous and violent. This can have minor repercussions on Mind, Soul, and sanity, as determined by the GM. (If it's Mind or Soul that's getting risked, roll the appropriate stat; if you fail the roll, you lose 2–3 points, at the GM's discretion. If it's sanity, make a Mind check against whichever madness meter the GM thinks appropriate for losing the memory in question.)

A safer way to generate a significant charge is to get a non-mechanical object that has mystic or historic significance—a bugle from Little Big Horn, a ring that belonged to Rasputin—and work it into the gizmo. Note that the object and the gizmo must be thematically related; Rasputin's ring might be good for surviving damage or mesmerizing people, but it wouldn't be much good for any activity not immediately connected to the Russian monk. Similarly, the cavalry bugle would be good for a musical creation or to help your allies in combat, but it wouldn't help you to fly.

Generate a Major Charge: One way to generate a major charge is to give up a major memory or string of memories. This would be like forgetting a spouse, a sibling, or a parent. This is dangerous; it's our memories that define our personalities, so giving up valuable memories can cost your Mind, your Soul, or your sanity, at the discretion of the GM. (For Mind or Soul, roll against that stat; if you succeed, you only lose the total of the dice from the stat. If you fail, flip-flop the dice and lose the percentile result. So if a 45 is a success, you only lose 9 points. If it's a failure, though, you lose 54 points, which is probably going to leave you totally gone. On the other hand, if you fail with a 71, you only lose 17 points. Fickle, eh?) If it's sanity, you automatically mark off one hardened notch *and* one failed notch on the appropriate Madness meter; if you're already callous or crazy on that gauge, the GM chooses another related madness meter and you mark the notches on that one instead.

A much safer way to get a major charge is to obtain a complete, historically significant, and still-functional piece of machinery (as opposed to a non-mechanical object)—like the original cotton gin, the complete French guillotine that took off its inventor's head, Lee Harvey Oswald's rifle, *etc.* The restrictions described earlier under using significant charges with items apply here, too.

Taboo: Incorporate any functioning piece of machinery in common use after the late 1800s. Any clockwork with a telephone or a laser built in, for example, automatically fails to work unless those components do not function in their intended way and are instead used for some other purpose—perhaps decorative, or structural, or symbolic. This doesn't mean you can't use modern materials or even use the *pieces* of a laser in your creation, but it can't contain a *functioning* laser or telephone.

Random Magick Domain: Clockworkers can only build effects into machines—specifically, their own hand-built machines. A clockworker can't build you a mechanical arm, unless he was working together with a fleshworker.

Starting Charges: Newly created Mechanomancers have previously created clockwork creations worth ten minor charges or one significant charge, assuming they've been practicing Mechanomancy for a year or so. More-experienced Mechanomancers might start the game with considerably more, subject to the GM's discretion.

Charging Tips: Simple. Each day of Mechanomantic work is a minor charge towards the current project.

Notes: Mechanomancers don't really "cast spells" the way other schools do; they build things. So instead of giving you a list of "standard" clockwork machines (as if there was any such thing), what you've got is kind of a shopping list explaining the rules for construction. These are guidelines; if you want to add an effect that isn't listed here (like "shoots fire") talk it over with your GM, and remember the GM's decision is final.

Minor and significant clockworks can be built to perform any function that an animal or a twentieth-century machine can accomplish. Thus you can make clockworks that learn, innovate and create (which are animal functions) at the same time that they can leave the atmosphere, run on gasoline or keep time to the hundredth of a second.

This gives them a broad base of possible abilities, but it does leave out the clearly unworldly. Most clockworks can't turn back time, make you invisible, alter probability or communicate with ghosts. (Of course, if you go for a major charge, the rules start to break down.)

Clockworks cannot use any mechanical innovation that was not common by the late 1800s—transistors, vacuum tubes, and nuclear power, for example, are all out of bounds. But then again, that's what the magick is for. Other than that, personal style seems to vary as much among clockworkers as it does among sculptors. One may make his creations out of rusty iron, bone and barbed wire, while another favors clean, soaring lines of buffed and polished plastic. (You can't use modern machinery, but modern materials are fine.) This one's devices may be brightly painted and fancifully playful, while another's are squat, utilitarian and eclectic. Some use oil. Some are lubricated by vinegar and human blood.

Mechanomancy takes time—experiential time. For minor constructions, it just takes an investment of your current attention. For more important stuff, you have to give up bits of your future or past.

Clockworks are fairly sturdy creatures. Firearms attacks made against clockworks do damage as if they were hand-to-hand attacks. (Hand-to-hand attacks do their normal damage.)

Mechanomancy Minor Effects

⇨ **1 Charge:** Build a small object (the size of your forearm or smaller, weighing 10 pounds at most) capable of obeying one simple command X words long. X equals the total of the two dice you rolled to build the thing; if you rolled a 22, you can have a 4-word command.

The object has 60 points to split up between Body, Speed, and a single skill. The device has Initiative equal to half its Speed. Clockworks of this type are one-trick ponies; they can only do a single function, though often in a fashion that "normal" machines cannot. If it isn't meant to hurt people, it can only possess very basic skills. Usually such devices serve some sort of amusement or vaguely sensible but minor utility function, like a product from the *Sharper Image* catalog. It might sharpen pencils in some over-elaborate but interesting fashion, for example, or wash and put away dishes, or fold laundry and store it in closets and drawers. Minor clockworks are never intelligent. They can understand commands in a language their maker knows, but they cannot act other than to perform their one, narrow function. A butler built to tote and carry is not going to be able to fight, no matter how strong it is physically.

Objects built with minor charges can never exceed a skill of 50%, Speed 100, or Body 80. They cannot have any skill their builder does not have. (For instance, a Mechanomancer who plays the violin can build a minor clockwork that does so too. But if he doesn't know how to sew, he can't build a machine to make his clothes.) Damage from attacking devices are resolved like Martial Arts attacks: roll to hit, and if successful add the two dice together to get damage. Minor clockworks get no bonuses from matched successes, but the GM can choose to rule that a matched failure results in a breakdown or other catastrophic failure. It is also possible to build clockworks of this type that fire guns, but only as long as that is their sole function. A clockwork that shoots cannot reload or travel under its own power, though it could be partnered with other clockworks that perform those functions.

Most minor devices only act when they're activated—an "apprentice broom" only sweeps when told to do so. Attack devices can be made to guard a certain area, but they can't tell one person from another: If built to "shoot anyone who enters" the clockwork can be pointed at a door and shoots whenever someone comes through, regardless of who it is. Some, however, are built to simply do their thing and keep doing it.

⇨ **1 Charge:** For each additional minor charge you spend on the object, you can make it about 3 pounds heavier, proportionately larger, and divide another 10 points among Body, Speed, and its skill.

Mechanomancy Significant Effects

⇨ **1 Charge:** Build an object about the size of a human being. You can divide 120 points between Body, Speed, and its skills. Clockworks of this type are not conscious, though they are capable of limited learning and very minor creativity. They're about at the level of a fairly smart dog, only with less initiative or curiosity. They are completely literal-minded. They can speak, but only to fulfill a skill function or to repeat what they've been told to say. They possess all "natural" senses that they require to complete their functions.

Clockworks like this can be built to have skills their creator does not possess, as long as they are skills appropriate to a machine or a living creature. (One exception to this is that they cannot be built with any paranormal skills: no adepts, no avatars, no aura sight, *etc.*)
If such a machine has an attack skill, it's resolved like a firearms attack with no damage cap. If it does not have a specific attack skill, it can attack as if it had a 15% skill, but only when given very specific orders. "Tobor! Kill them all!" is too vague. "Tobor! Seize him! Now crush him until he's dead!" is much better. In combat, significant clockworks have Initiative equal to their Speed. A clockwork like this can look like a human being or an animal at no extra cost. If the Mechanomancer wants to create a beautiful *faux* person, it's a Soul roll. If successful, the creature gets a skill in "Lovely Visage" (or whatever) at the level of the roll.

If you choose to make your machine as efficiently as possible—that is, it looks like nothing other than a weird, vaguely creepy mechanical monster—you get an extra 20 points to add to its stats and skills.

⇨ **1 Charge:** Reduce the size of your clockwork to one quarter of its normal size without reducing toughness or strength. This can be used a maximum of ten times.

⇨ **1 Charge:** Add 20 points to the skills or stats of a natural-looking machine you're building, or 25 points to an obvious clockwork.

⇨ **1 Charge:** Your machine is conscious, self aware and capable of aesthetics, creativity, independent learning, and morality—if it's taught properly. It has Mind 10 and Soul 10 to start out with, but can improve itself with experience points at the GM's discretion. Its Mind and Soul scores can be pumped up with additional charges.

Mechanomancy Major Effects

For all intents and purposes, you can create life—possibly even a facsimile of a deceased loved one so realistic that no one can tell the difference. Such creatures are created as per the *Conception* chapter, only with 380 points to divide among Mind, Body, Speed, and Soul. Major clockworks can also contain immaterial essences or material paranormal beings—either incorporating them (like the Ghost Soldier of Li Piyian, which was a robot body for demons) or imprisoning them (like the Gullyhooter repression device built in 1955).

Sample Clockworks

The Lonesome Lunchbox

A Mechanomancer named Gus Schivitz built the first Lonesome Lunchbox. They're presumed destroyed, but the terrible thing about them is that if even one escapes, you can potentially have millions of them to worry about. That's because, like a virus, Lonesome Lunchboxes reproduce.

Lonesome Lunchboxes got their name because they look like old-style lunch pails—vaguely barn shaped, about the size of a loaf of bread. Instead of a flat bottom, however, they have a cavity lined with elaborate pincers, snippers and manipulating tools. Looking something like a sick lobster, they can scuttle and crawl and haul themselves painfully along looking for metal. When they find metal, they dig into it and shape it into all the components they need to build... another Lonesome Lunchbox. (As it works on its progeny, the initial "seed" box often appears to be rhythmically mounting it. It would be comic were it not for the geometric progression.) The construction process takes about a half hour.

Slow, weak, and relatively easy to kick to pieces, Lonesome Lunchboxes don't *seem* to be that threatening. But the Sleepers are absolutely bugshit over them because they are a worse threat to the Big Magick Secret than any number of more clever (and subtler) machines.

This is because a Lonesome Lunchbox doesn't quit after it reproduces once. It clones itself, then moves on to clone itself again. Meanwhile, it's clone is cloning itself as well. The rate of increase increases constantly. Even though the Lunchboxes often fail to reproduce, even though they sometimes attack and cannibalize one another, overall their raw, relentless grinding can turn a junkyard into a crawling Mechanomantic minefield overnight.

For example, suppose you toss a Lonesome Lunchbox into a used car lot at midnight (as Gus did in 1964). By

12:30, there's a good chance there are two boxes running around—the original and its creaky, oily love child. Even accounting for some failed attempts, by sunrise there are probably between six and twelve hundred of the little buggers clanking around. If they hadn't been stopped before the dealership opened at 8:00, those unsuspecting Pittsburgh car salesmen would have been greeted by *twenty to forty thousand* clockworks.

They don't do anything but mindlessly reproduce. But as long as there's metal within a half-mile radius, that's *all* they do.

Body 5
Speed 5
Skill: *Find Metal and Reproduce 50%*
Total Cost: 1 minor charge.

THE SUVIRUS

Like a Lonesome Lunchbox, this clockwork can reproduce. But it can do more than that. It can also drive a car—or, more specifically, it can drive a Lexus sport utility vehicle. It can't drive other sport utes, it can't drive Lexus sedans, but the Lexus sport ute is this viral machine's native habitat.

Most of the time, the SUVirus is dormant within its large, expensive host machine. The SUV's owner can drive it around as she likes with no problem—until it gets close to another Lexus SUV. When that happens, the SUVirus senses it and takes control of the vehicle. Turning off the ignition does nothing. The brakes fail. Even taking it out of gear cannot deter the SUVirus.

The SUVirus rams the other Lexus SUV as hard as it possibly can. Since the bulk of the SUVirus lives inside the front bumper and behind the radiator, this is sometimes suicidal: if the impact damages the clockwork enough to destroy it, that's it, it's over and done with. Two vehicles are trashed and the drivers or passengers may be pretty badly hurt, but the clockwork stops.

If it gets damaged but doesn't "die," however, the SUVirus divides into two proto-virii. One stays with the original host, and one works its way into the target SUV. As either vehicle gets repaired, the SUVirus opportunistically steals materials and tools sufficient to repair and re-install itself behind the hood—once the vehicle is completely repaired, of course. Then it's ready to go out and spread the virus further.

Outside of a Lexus SUV, the SUVirus can only remain animate for about an hour. (Unless contained, it crawls along looking for a nearby host vehicle.) It's a small machine—about the size of two spread-out human hands. When it installs itself, thin (but surprisingly strong) metal filaments string themselves through the engine to the accelerator, brakes and steering column, waiting for the right time to take control. These wires are very subtly placed—a mechanic who isn't specifically looking for them needs to make a Mechanics check at a -30% penalty to figure out there's something amiss. A simple Mechanics roll suffices if he specifically looks behind the front bumper.

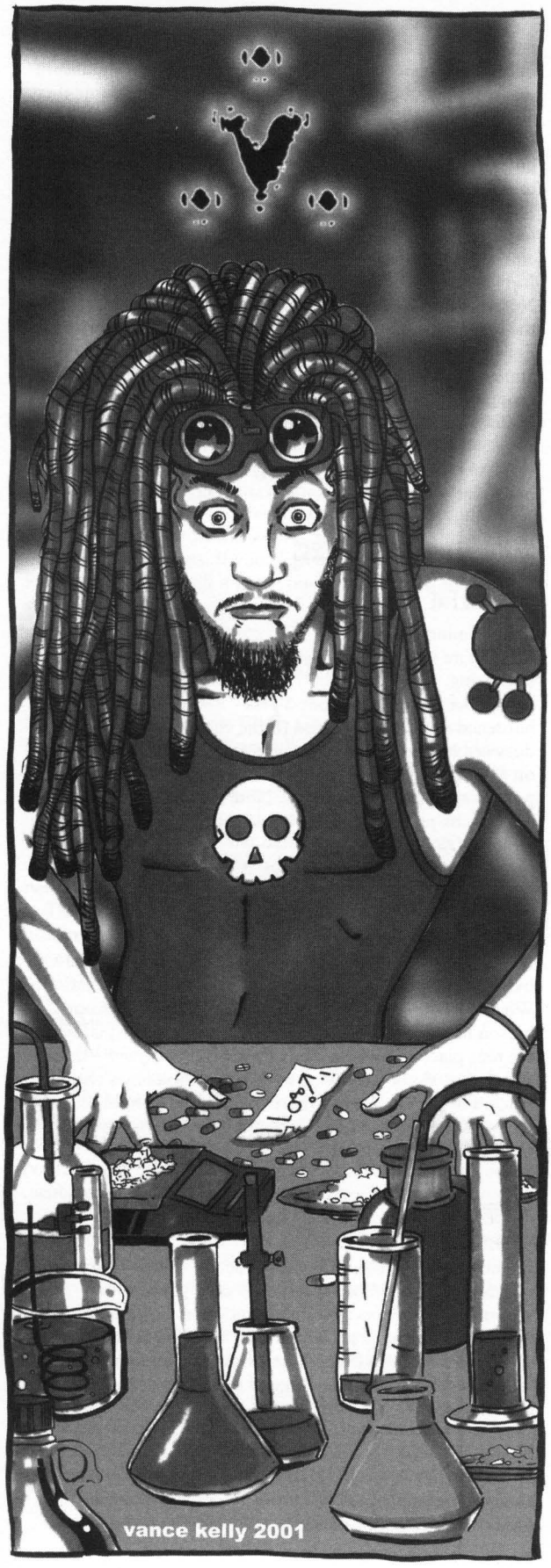
Body 65
Speed 5
Skills: *Drive 30%, Viral Reproduction In Lexus SUVs 65%*
Costs:

- 3x size reduction = 3 significant charges
- 140 starting points (obvious clockwork) = 1 significant charge
- +25 skill points = 1 significant charge

Total Cost: 5 significant charges

WHAT YOU HEAR: THE MECHANOMANCER

There was once a clockworker who made a human machine, indistinguishable from life—on the outside, anyway. He even designed it to reproduce. There are now hundreds, maybe thousands, of these clockwork people living among us. They do not sleep or tire or fret. They always get the promotion, the new car, the phone numbers in the bar. They are the perfect people, and eventually they could replace us all. Beware the beautiful, talented, successful people, for they are not to be trusted.



THE NARCO-ALCHEMIST

AKA DRUGRATS, NARQUIS, PSYCHONAUTS

You know when you're high you can see for miles. The longest journey begins with a single trip. If your mind is your altar then you better alter your mind.

People have been chasing alchemy for most of the last millennium. Some think it's a magickal art that turns lead into gold. Others think it's just a precursor to chemistry. Still others think all the potions and bottles were a side effect to the transformation of self, rising above the base matter of one's body into a more perfect and sublime form.

You know all this.

For much of the last century, a bunch of other people have been chasing psychobiology and psychopharmacology. They think just about every mental illness, disorder, or discomfort known to humanity comes from imbalances in brain chemicals. By tinkering with serotonin uptake, they can purify the emotions of a patient or—potentially—improve memory and cognition.

This, too, you know.

Finally, for all of human history there have been those that pursued the practice more than the theory. They harvested coca leaves or poppies or hemp and used it to get high, talk to spirits, or improve their mind in some fashion. Their modern counterparts can explain how much better the world works for you with a noseful of cocaine. And if you join them for a line, their explanation even makes sense.

You've joined. It makes sense. It's all old hat to you.

Because you're something different.

You stand at the intersection of these three groups. You've given hoary alchemy a nitrous boost from the latest science and hooked it up with the rawboned know-how of street culture and drug ritual.

Now you're a street drug in human form: powerful, innovative, confusing, and dangerous.

You learned to change yourself, to make your body a chemical crucible, altering its ebb and flow with dope and blow. But transforming yourself is only the first step to transforming others, refining them into a higher state or corroding them down into dross.

The central paradox of Narco-Alchemy is that in becoming a superior spirit you're becoming an inferior human. You're a transcendence addict, and your jones for transformation is just as desperate and crippling as any other unstoppable need. You master the drugs that master you, mastering yourself by becoming a slave to powders, drams, and vials. It's a vicious circle, a self-speeding psycho cycle, and you can only hope to become something higher before you're six feet under.

Maybe when you're perfect, you'll become free again.

NARCO-ALCHEMY BLAST STYLE

Narquis don't have a blast spell per se, but they can make stuff that will wreck your whole day if you drink, smoke, or snort it.

STATS

The structure of Narco-Alchemy is different from other postmodern schools, in that there is a definite break

between minor and significant adepts. Minor narquis have mastered the ability to apply their internal energies to the effects of their ingested chemicals: They work their magick inside themselves. Significant narquis are capable of performing transformations externally, making them much more powerful and permanent. Thus, the difference between a minor and significant narqui is the difference between a punk who takes drugs and can do some temporary tweaks on himself, and a fellow with his own lab who's brewing some permanent strong medicine.

Generate a Minor Charge: To perform a minor effect—what narquis call a "lesser transformation"—you take a dose of something seriously psychoactive. The exact pharmaceutical doesn't matter: a hit of dope, a snort of coke, a tab of X, whatever. The effect takes place immediately.

This means all minor Narchemical effects have the same cost (one hit) but if you want to throw down a bunch of effects in succession, you need to get increasingly fucked up.

(A significant narqui can take any one of his own specialized works to produce any minor effect instead of the work's normal significant effect, but doing this is widely regarded as a real waste.)

Generate a Significant Charge: Significant effects—"greater transformations"—create drugs which are collectively known as "works." To create a work, the narqui must spend the listed amount of time in the lab, with sufficient chemicals and resources. (Doing this is illegal in just about any country where the law is regularly enforced. Narquis are risking imprisonment every time they operate, unlike many other adepts.)

The effort always yields *something*—a dose of some drug or other. When the drug is actually taken, the narqui's skill gets rolled. If it fails, he only produced a normal dose of the chemical in question. Drugs being what they are, the receiver may well *think* it worked just fine. If it succeeds, the work is ready.

This means the narqui may put in a lot of work for no payoff. On the other hand, the spells are portable, transferable, stable, and have permanent effects. You give a little, you get a little.

Note that *all works are still powerful psychoactive chemicals* and have the normal results as described in the GM section on Impairment (see p. 290). Many Narco-Alchemists—probably most—are addicted to one or more substances. A narqui cut off from his lab and his stash is in a very bad position—craving the drug as a drug, but also knowing that if he takes someone else's trash chemicals, he's going to lose all the lasting effects of his own pure works.

Generate a Major Charge: No one's quite figured this one out yet. But they're all working on it.

Taboo: Minor narquis lose all the benefits of their spells when the effect of the drug wears off.

The lasting benefits of a significant work is lost if the beneficiary ever takes a psychoactive drug that was not created by a Narco-Alchemist. The spiritual impurities of street drugs—not to mention the catnip, or roach powder, or whatever else it got stepped with—throw the balance they've achieved out of whack.

Random Magick Domain: Narco-Alchemy is good for changing perceptions and innate capabilities—making you a "more perfect man." (Or, if you wish, less perfect.) It can't alter learned abilities like flying a plane, but it can temporarily make you more or less attractive, healthy, or mystically aware.

Starting Charges: Like Mechanomancers, narquis don't start out holding charges. Instead they begin with one significant work of your choice. (If they're minor narquis, assume they got a gift from a mentor. Or they stole it.)

Charging Tips: A minor narqui's ability to cast spells is limited only by his ability to get drugs and his capacity to tolerate them. (Granted, these are often fairly strict limits.) A significant Narco-Alchemist simply has to spend the time required for the work he wants. Thus, five days of work could yield one Solar Gold, or a White Goddess and a Jupiter X, or five doses of Saturn's Horse.

Notes: Narco-Alchemy got its start in South America in the late 1980s, but has rapidly spread through Eastern Europe, south-central Asia, and the southwestern United States. Most grew out of the international drug-trade underground but found it ultimately inhospitable: the various Mafias, Triads, and cartels stamped them out whenever they were foolish enough to reveal themselves. This has made the survivors cautious about entering the occult underground, but so far they've found it more congenial.

Narco-Alchemy Minor Works

Smoke and Fire

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: Fire is the central element of alchemy, unifying and stabilizing. Using the stabilizing power of fire, the narqui can ignore the effects of one Stress Check—he gains no hardened or failed mark and (if the check was failed) he does not have to fight, flee, or freeze. This spell can be used on a check that's just been blown, or it can be used to protect against the next check. Note that if it's used before the fact, its protection dissolves as soon as the drug buzz wears off.

Serpent on the Pole

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: The symbol of a serpent on a pole represents the fixing of the flexible—the loss of adaptability and reaction. When a narqui casts Serpent on the Pole, he can fix one person in place for a number of combat rounds equal to the tens place of his roll. The target isn't paralyzed—he can still dodge, shoot and swing at anyone who comes within reach. He just can't move more than a foot from his current location. The narqui can release the bond prematurely, if he so chooses.

Sulphrous Fixation

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: Sulphur is the alchemical element of unyielding dryness and rigidity. When this spell is cast, probabilities around the caster become much smoother. For a number of minutes equal to the percentile roll, matches, fumbles, and critical hits have no exceptional effect, serving as normal failures or successes. The range of this effect is about a mile in diameter.

Aqua Vitae

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: Twenty points of damage are removed from the

narqui. This effect can only target its caster. However, once the buzz wears off, the damage returns.

Athanor

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: The athanor is the alchemic crucible, where opposites are reconciled and harmony is attained. When a narqui casts this spell, he temporarily achieves perfect balance with the drugs and mystic influences (after all, to a narqui a drug *is* a mystic influence) in his system. Any impairment from drugs or magick is ignored for the next three rounds.

Quicksilver

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: The magus can ignore or bypass one external impediment to his movements. Handcuffs, locked doors, straitjackets, hammerlocks, wrestling pins—the quicksilvered narqui can slip out of any of them. Even magickal effects like Travel Bonds and Serpent on the Pole can be overcome. However, it only works one time, and it does nothing for *internal* impediments. If your legs are cut off, this won't let you walk. Nor will it help you if you're too stoned to stand up.

Narco-Alchemy Significant Works

The improvements that come from significant works—the Speed increases from the White Goddess, the Notice improvements from UPS and all the rest of it—should be tracked separately from your base stats and skills. This is because those improvements are the result of your becoming increasingly harmonized with reality. If you take non-magickal drugs (or, for that matter, magickal drugs that aren't Narco-Alchemical in origin), *all* of those "permanent" improvements disappear instantly.

This happens even if you are forced to take the drug—so holding a narqui down and injecting him with street H can cut even a powerful Narco-Alchemist down to size, and fast.

Saturn's Horse

Cost: 1 day's work.
Effect: When this dose of heroin is injected or snorted, it resets the taker to his metaphysical base level. Lingering supernatural effects are cleared off—hexes, curses, Pornomancer blasts, astral parasites, all that bad stuff just goes poof. (Other blast injuries, like Epideromancer improvements, remain. They're physical changes with metaphysical causes.) Any narqui improvements evaporate as well, as do any magickally gained skills or abilities. (This does not include Avatar skills, Adept skills or anything else that was learned or inborn, just abilities that were magickally obtained.)

Anyone who rides Saturn's Horse needs to make a Body roll. The result of the roll indicates additional effects:

- **Matched fail or fumble:** Instant death.
- **Simple failure:** Coma for a couple days, and lose 1-5 points off the Body stat.
- **Simple or matched success:** No other effect.
- **Critical success:** Ingester instantly dies and remains dead for three minutes and thirty-three seconds. Returns with two failed and two hardened notches in the Violence gauge, but no recollection of how he got them. Furthermore, from that point on, he can clearly see and hear any demons in the area.

Jupiter X

Cost: 1 day's work
Effect: Any individual who ingests this mystically prepared Ecstasy is infused with a feeling of confidence, grandeur, and friendliness to all around him. Furthermore, this feeling is contagious. His Charm skill gets a +30% boost, even if his amped skill exceeds his Soul stat. He can't compel people to do things repulsive to them. But he's everybody's buddy.

If a person under the influence of Jupiter X decides to attack someone—with any effect that might cause physical damage, be it magick or a sharpened toothbrush—he has to face a rank-10 Self check. On the plus side, anyone who wants to attack him has to make the same check. (Struggling to restrain someone does not trigger this check.)

The effects of Jupiter X last a number of minutes equal to the creator's Narco-Alchemy skill.

Mars Dust

Cost: 2 days work
Effect: What happens when you take PCP that's been mystically mixed with iron culled from human blood? You Hulk out in a severe and extreme fashion, that's what happens.

Someone under the influence of Mars Dust has Body 99 and 99 hit points until the drug wears off. Furthermore, his Struggle skill increases 30% and any damage he does with hand-to-hand weapons is increased by 3 points. He gains the skill "Snap Handcuffs and Kick Out Police Car Windows" at 70%, and he doesn't have to make any Violence checks. However, resisting the urge to mop up the place with anyone who pisses him off is a rank-8 Self check. And when a guy on Mars Dust mops up the place with you, he makes sure to get every corner.

A Mars Dust bender typically lasts 10–15 minutes and when it's over the duster's Body drops to half its normal score for about eight hours.

Note that any damage taken while under the influence is still there when the drug wears off. If you normally have Body 50 and you take 60 points of damage while dusted, you die when you come down. But you won't die *until* you come down.

Venus's Roof

Cost: 2 days work
Effect: This is nasty stuff, and some narquis (particularly female ones) are looking for an alternate potion to fit the "Venus" rung of the alchemical ladder. But until they do, all narcotic alchemists learn to make this rohypnol concoction. The less scrupulous ones even sell it.

Normally, rohypnol (also called "roofies") lowers inhibitions, clouds the transition of memory from short term to long term, and eventually makes you pass out. This has led to its use as "the date rape drug"—some dickless wonder puts it in your drink and you wake up the next day with no memory of what he did to you.

Venus's Roof has the normal effects of rohypnol. It additionally functions something like a "love potion" from

folklore: the person who takes it develops an irrational attraction for the next person he or she sees. Furthermore, the ingester becomes more physically attractive: if he or she has a "good looking" skill of some sort (either under Body or Soul) it goes up 5%. (If not, he or she gains it at 5%.)

All the effects last until the ingester sleeps—that's usually not too far off—except for the gain in attractiveness. That effect lasts until the ingester takes another dose of ordinary street drugs.

The Universal Perceptual Solvent

Cost: 3 days work
Effect: This is, of course, based on LSD. Those who know a little (though not quite enough) about alchemy suspect there's actual mercury in there, too—or at least some distillate of the mercury fumes that so infused the hallucinatory works of Charles Dodgson and William Blake.

In any event, it operates pretty much like a shaped charge on the doors of perception. It blows *everything* wide open.

While on the UPS trip (which typically lasts 30–90 minutes), the user can see auras, feel the ripple effects of magick use, understand avatars for what they truly are, notice astral parasites, and recognize entropics. This panorama of magickal perception is easily accessed through a simple Notice roll: to someone whose perceptions are "dissolved" this stuff *is* normal perception.

Of course, it's always possible that he spends the whole time "really looking" at his hand.

Like most higher-level works, this also has a lasting effect. UPS gives its user a permanent +1 to his Notice skill, until the next time he takes a non-alchemical street drug.

(At the GM's discretion, anyone who's taken the Universal Perceptual Solvent may have brief flashbacks in which the effects kick back in when in the presence of powerful magick. This is recommended only as a plot tool, not as something that reliably helps the adept.)

The White Goddess

Cost: 4 days work
Effect: This cocaine-based concoction provides the ingester with a tremendous sense of purity, concentration, and effectiveness. Unlike most coke, in this case it's *actually true*. The White Goddess rush lasts for 15–30 minutes, and during that time the user's Speed and Mind scores both get a +20% bonus. Furthermore, every skill that has its basis in either of those stats is raised by 10%. Any stress checks are confronted as if they were one level lower. (To everyone else it's a rank-5 check, but to the narqui on White Goddess it just looks like a rank-4 check. Because, you know, he can handle anything.)

The White Goddess also grants a lasting one-point increase in Speed. The user can, furthermore, also tinker with her madness meter, to the tune of removing one failed notch *or* adding one hardened notch in the gauge of her choice. (She can also leave well enough alone, if she so desires.) These changes last until the next time a mundane street drug is taken.

Solar Gold

Cost: 5 days work
Effect: The apex of the Narcotic Alchemist's art—until they get the Philosopher's Stone—is Solar Gold, a mixture of real, actual *gold* and THC derived from marijuana. (Some narquis insist that "Acapulco Gold" cannabis works more reliably.) It's an oily liquid with gold flakes suspended in it, and it's typically mixed with tobacco or carefully grown bud and smoked. It provides dizzying insights into the natural world, the spiritual world, and pretty much anything else that interests the narqui.

To anyone but the narqui who made it, this stuff is just normal hash. (Well, not quite: it's incredibly smooth, mellow, and powerful hash.) When the creating narqui takes it, however, he gains a permanent bonus (1–5%) to his Soul stat, and a permanent bonus (again, 1–5%) to his mundane Chemistry skill. (Even if he never had one before, he gets it now.) Furthermore, he gains some form of insight into a problem or question that concerns him. You get to ask the GM a single question and get a meaningful answer. It doesn't have to be terribly specific; concrete locations, numbers and names are less effective than vague hints and abstract clues. But given the power of this stuff, it should be something pretty useful.

Narco-Alchemy Major Works

The ultimate goal of Narco-Alchemy is called "The Philosopher's Stone," the complete, harmonious perfection of body and spirit. Some believe this is the mysterious Resurrection Body, an incorruptible, immortal, and utterly flawless apex human form. Others think it means transcending the flesh without dying, becoming an immortal spirit operating on the material plane without being constrained by its limits.

What You Hear: The Narco-Alchemist

Pietro Cortez, a narqui operating in Cuba, has developed a work that makes its user instantly addicted to a drug of Cortez' choice. (In Cortez' parlance, it creates a specific imbalance in the taker's system.) The drug does not have to be the same as the foundation of the work. Usually he delivers it through ritually polluted marijuana, slipped into his victim's cigar or cigarette.



THE PERSONAMANCER

AKA THESPIANS

You know each person is a mask. Identity is a deck of cards, shuffled for every social situation. We each prepare a face to greet the faces that we meet.

You were a problem child. Your parents said you'd be fine once you "found yourself." You didn't even know who was looking.

So you pretended. You put on the big fake. And soon you fooled everyone. Even yourself.

But you found you couldn't fake it forever. That hurt. Until it snapped into focus: you didn't have to fake it forever. *Just for right now.*

Because the truth is that there is no truth. There's nothing under the mask but another mask. It's turtles all the way down, and you can go from day to day, life to life, mask to mask, forever and ever, always different, always new, always true.

You're a Greek thespian, an African witch doctor, a shaman from Oceana—you're all of them, sacred and inviolate behind your ritual mask. You're the robber with the stocking over your head. You're Jason from *Friday the 13th*. You're Zorro. Darth Vader. The Man in the Iron Mask. You've mastered the art of being nobody enough that you can be *anyone*.

The central paradox of Personamancy is that it manipulates identity, derives power from identity, and does it all in a way that reveals identity to be an illusion. Personamancers are rabid believers in the very thing their art disproves. But by the same token, they deny it and reduce it even as they create and celebrate it.

Their existence proves they don't exist.

PERSONAMANCY BLAST STYLE

Personamancy has no blast.

STATS

Personamancy spells cannot be used to help in getting charges. As normal, no free lunches.

Generate a Minor Charge: Pretend, for an hour, to be something or somebody you are not. You must have an audience that is aware, at some level, that you are acting for this; sitting on your floor and pretending to be a flower doesn't cut it, nor does walking through a crowd disguised as someone else. Clearly, being an actor is a good way to build charges, but a particularly vigorous game of Charades can also be helpful, or playing with children. It is possible to generate charges by acting in front of a mirror, effectively acting as your own audience. However, this tends to worsen the problem of identification discussed earlier. Another way to generate minor charges is to act deliberately contrary to one of your Passions, but this, obviously, racks up the Self checks viciously fast. Yet another way is to wear a mask for an entire day, including at least one lengthy appearance in public—a good way to get arrested (or at least some funny looks), if you're not careful. Costume parties and Mardi Gras are godsends.

Generate a Significant Charge: Pretend to be somebody else for a day, including convincing at least one person familiar with the person you're imitating. This imitation must not cease even out of the eyes of others.

Generate a Major Charge: Fool an audience of at least ten million people into thinking you are a major public figure—for instance, successfully posing as the President for a TV broadcast.
Taboo: If you ever show your truest self in front of another person—in other words, act on one of your Passions when there's a witness—you lose all the charges you're carrying.
Random Magick Domain: Personamancers deal with identity: who we are, who we pretend to be, who we wish we were. A thespian could cure your alcoholism, revert you to childhood, or encourage you to make the same mistake over and over again.
Starting Charges: Newly created Personamancers have four minor charges.
Charging Tips: Personamantic charges are not too difficult to get as an actor or street performer at virtually any time. While still holding a job or doing other research a Personamancer can get 2–6 minor charges per day and 1 or 2 significant charges each week, as long as they're willing to spend the time.
Notes: Some Personamancy spells, rather than having an instantaneous effect, are in fact rituals that create an artifact, keyed to the caster, out of a mask. Upon wearing this mask, the spell effect is automatically activated. These masks last as long as the Personamancer lives, providing a great source of power. Only Personamancers can use them, and only a mask's maker can use it to full effect. Their disadvantage, obviously, is that it is not always convenient to be wearing or carrying a mask, and they take some time and effort to create in the first place, as the mask must be hand-crafted by the adept. Personamancy automatically includes a degree of craft skill, although any adept who develops a separate Mask-Crafting ability may create masks for one charge less; this requires a second successful Magick: Personamancy check per spell.

Personamancy Minor Formula Spells

The Basics

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: The Personamancer takes on the facial appearance of any one individual of their choosing. The adept needs to observe this person for at least five minutes first. Multiple charges or castings affect voice, walk, and other such characteristics. Lasts for an hour.

Here's My I.D.

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: Flash an I.D. card—library, video, police, it doesn't matter—at the target. Unless they make a Mind check at a -10% shift, they are convinced the card is what you say it is. "FBI, ma'am."

I Play One on TV

Cost: 2 minor charges
Effect: Provided that you are acting like a member of a particular profession—doctor, lawyer, whatever—you gain any one appropriate skill at a level equal to your Magick: Personamancy. It wears off as soon as someone challenges your authority—"Are you really a plumber?" for instance, or asks for your credentials—or after a number of hours have passed equal to the sum of your spell roll.

Strip the Mask

Cost: 2 minor charges
Effect: The Personamancer places her hands by someone else's face and lifts an imaginary mask from the target. His true self is immediately revealed for the next minute. The target is inclined to act as he really wishes and is incapable of deception regarding his true self: an uptight businessman suddenly snaps at his colleagues, a closeted gay man openly scopes out another male, a politician reveals that he hates the public. While under the influence of this spell, deceiving anyone about your true feelings requires a Lie roll with a –20% penalty and inflicts a rank 7 Self stress check.

This spell can also be used to reveal demonic possession and the presence of other disguised unnatural beings. It's said that one Personamancer cast this on the CEO of an unknown Fortune 100 company and revealed something ancient and terrible; not a single person in the room left sane.

Visage of Terror

Cost: 2 minor charges
Effect: To the victim of this spell, you appear to lift a mask from your face, revealing a horrifying form beneath—what that form is depends upon the target's fears, although the most commonly reported horror is simply a blank, featureless face. This forces an Unnatural-8 stress check, and possibly triggers the victim's Fear passion.

I Am, Therefore I Think

Cost: 3 minor charges
Effect: You convince yourself, temporarily, that you are in fact the role you're playing, to the extent that attempts to use lie detection upon you, mundane or magickal, automatically fail. The spell must be given a duration of up to a day when first cast, and cannot be cancelled before then. (After all, you don't know you're a Personamancer during that time, do you?) You gain skills based on abstract characteristics that your role would have, such as "Determined" or "Lovable Guy," but not the role's physical or intellectual abilities. You also cannot use any skills you have but which your adopted role lacks.

The Mirror Crack'd

Cost: 4 minor charges
Effect: Two things happen to a person under the influence of this spell. First, she forgets herself. For a number of minutes equal to the caster's roll, she has complete amnesia. She retains all her skills, but often forgets she has them if they're not immediately applicable. This instant amnesia is a rank-8 Self check.

Furthermore, every living creature around her ignores the target of the spell. (Clockworks and demons are exempt from this effect.) She cannot be seen, heard or felt. Any attack she attempts on those who cannot perceive her simply fails: her arm loses strength before she can fire the gun, stick the knife, or pull the grenade pin. She can interact with the inanimate normally, unless someone else is watching. As long as she is beheld, even on a camera, her actions cannot influence her environment; she can't pick anything up or move anything, not even open a door. Becoming aware of this "ghost nature" is a rank-3 Isolation check.

Usually this is used on an attacker. After all, while he's

under the influence of the spell he can't hurt or impede you and doesn't even remember that he's mad at you. A few thespians have cast it on themselves when they want to move through an area unnoticed, but doing so requires some preparation, usually in the form of notes or photographs describing the goal or mission that the caster forgets under the amnesia.

Personamancy Significant Formula Spells

I Am Not Who I Am

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: Changes some significant aspect of your personality, chosen by you, until the next sunrise or sunset. It can make cowardly men brave, shy ones forward, or relieve an alcoholic's yearning for drink. For an extra charge, it can be cast on someone else, who gets to resist with a Soul check unless he's a willing target.

The Tulpa Method

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: For the next half-hour, you appear to be whoever the person viewing you expects you to be. If she's waiting for her lover, you look and speak like him; if she expects her worst enemy—well, you're it. This spell affects everybody who looks at you, even those who know you have the spell up—which can be confusing to your allies if they run into you unexpectedly. This functions in a very similar way to the Plutomancy spell I'm The Man, except that you do not necessarily appear as a figure of authority; you may well seem like an equal or even, in many cases, a servant.

This spell gives you none of the skills or abilities of the expected person, nor does it force you to act in any particular fashion. However, you are instantly aware of the anticipated and "appropriate" actions.

Mask of the Man

Cost: 2 significant charges
Effect: Creates a permanent artifact mask of a human target, chosen by you. While you wear this mask, you appear in all ways—shape, walk, voice, even petty physical mannerisms—to be your target. If you ever encounter your target when wearing this mask, it permanently loses its power.

Shaping a mask from scratch generally requires at least a few hours' effort for a paper mask, and a couple of days for a wooden one, providing you have the necessary crafting skills. A sympathetic item such as a personal possession or a body fragment belonging to the target (locks of hair are common, although blood and semen will do fine) is necessary for the spell's crafting. As with many sympathetic magicks, a body fragment (not a personal possession) of a target's close blood relative of the same sex also works.

Only the Personamancer who creates it can reliably use this artifact. If another Personamancer puts it on, it functions for about ten minutes and then loses all its power.

Identity Crisis

Cost: 3 significant charges
Effect: You must pretend to place an imaginary mask on the victim of this spell for it to work. For the next twenty-four hours, the victim appears, in a subtly irrational fashion, to be an impostor to all who know him. Nothing he can do completely convinces them otherwise; a nagging doubt always remains. The extent to which they believe he is an impostor depends on context. A spouse is likely to merely behave edgily, a security guard deny access, a bodyguard (especially one who knows about magick) arrest or even shoot. Obviously, this spell causes a lot of stress checks.

Mask of the Beast

Cost: 3 significant charges
Effect: Creates a permanent artifact animal mask that grants a single ability of the beast it depicts at a level equal to your Personamancy skill—or raises an appropriate stat by 20%. For every three extra significant charges invested in the artifact's creation, an extra ability can be granted. A spider mask, for instance, might grant the ability to climb walls, provide superhuman agility, generate poison, or the power to spin webs from the adept's behind.

For an extra two charges, abilities attributed to the beast in legend may be granted; a badger mask might grant the power to strike people blind or a panther mask allow the adept to issue forth sweet breath, attracting other animals. Cat masks are quite common, sometimes with the attached ability to suck the breath from a baby, slaying the child and causing the adept to gain a significant charge. Obviously, only the most unscrupulous of adepts use this ability.

As with Mask of the Man, the mask must be hand-crafted and incorporate a body part of the appropriate animal; fur is most common, although tusks and teeth are also popular. (A hinged and toothed mask imbued with a tiger or wolverine's bite can be extremely vicious, delivering the equivalent of firearm damage. Attacks with such masks are made with the wearer's Struggle skill.) It is possible, although extremely difficult, to create masks of entirely mythical animals—this requires some body part which was, at some point, believed to belong to the legendary beast. For example, you could use a narwhal's horn dating from the Middle Ages to create a unicorn mask, or a dinosaur fossil to create a dragon mask.

These masks work for a year and a day after creation. If worn for more than an hour at a time, they lose their power until they're left unused for 12 hours. If worn by a Personamancer other than its maker, the mask loses power after about fifteen minutes.

Mask of the God

Cost: 3 significant charges
Effect: Creates a permanent artifact mask that, when worn, temporarily makes you an avatar of your choice, with a skill equal to your Magick: Personamancy; while you wear it, you cannot use your Personamancy, just the avatar skill. This spell is more likely than any other to cause identity problems, as the power of the archetype is channeled through an unprepared mind. If the caster is in sympathy with that archetype anyway, problems are less likely to occur. Also, if you break the avatar's taboo while wearing the mask, the mask loses all its power, forever.

These masks are extremely beautiful, and require at least a week to craft, along with a successful Mask-Crafting skill check; if you don't have that skill, you can't make this mask. Failure does not waste the charges, but does require another

week's work and fresh materials for another attempt. The sympathetic item required must come from a true avatar of the archetype, and be in some way associated with the archetype itself—such as a Fool's butterfly pendant. If the archetype itself is associated with masks, as in the case of the Executioner, and an avatar's symbolic mask can be obtained, the spell requires only 2 significant charges.

Only the Personamancer who crafted the mask can use it. Any avatar who destroys a mask that steals the power of her archetype gains a permanent +5% bonus to her Avatar skill, unless this would take her to 99% or raise her skill above her Soul stat.

If a Personamancer wears this mask for more than three hours in any given day, he must make a Soul roll. If failed, he enters a fugue state until the next sunrise. During that time he is utterly possessed and controlled by the archetype, who is quite likely to regard him as an expendable, meddling pawn. When he comes out of the fugue, the mask is stripped of all power.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead

Cost: 4 significant charges
Effect: This gruesome ritual turns an imprisoned person into a near-duplicate of the adept. Appearance, memories, and personality all match. The only thing missing is the Personamancy skill.

To perform this spell, the adept must physically restrain an individual and peel the skin of his face completely off. As this is done, the GM rolls two dice and assembles damage like a firearm attack. Meanwhile, the caster makes a rank-7 Violence check. If failed, the spell cannot be cast on this person, regardless of whether the caster attacks, runs away, or just flips out and stares.

The skin is then inverted and put back on as the thespian casts the spell. If the spell fails, the victim is left bleeding and hideously disfigured but the spell can't be re-attempted. If the spell succeeds, the victim may get one more Soul roll, if the GM feels the target is particularly strong-willed. If this Soul roll succeeds, the victim simply dies. Otherwise, he is transformed by the spell into a physical and psychological duplicate of the Personamancer.

This duplicate has all the memories, skills, goals, and traits of the original—right down to DNA, retinal patterns, and fingerprints. There are only two differences: First, the damage taken during the "face skinning" is permanent, though invisible. Second, the duplicate lacks the Personamancy skill.

Example: Jessica the Personamancer has abducted the hated Baron von Wertheim back to a remote farmhouse. She ties him to the kitchen table and skins his face off. The GM rolls two dice for the damage and gets a 2 and a 4. Being cruel, the GM decides the "operation" does 42 points of damage, but that's not enough to kill the Baron. Jessica, meanwhile, rolls against her rank-7 Violence challenge. She aces it with a 22 and continues her gruesome task.

Flipping the bloody visage inside out, she presses it back down on her screaming victim and casts the spell. Rolling a 28, she succeeds.

The GM decides that a tough guy like the Baron deserves a chance to die with dignity and gives him the Soul roll option. But he blows it with a 74. Before Jessica's eyes, he gets shorter, thinner, and more feminine as the face knits itself to his muscles, re-arranging into the face Jessica sees in the mirror every day.

Jessica Number One lets Jessica Number Two off the table. Like Jessica One, Jessica Two has Body 60, but Jessica Two can only take 18 points of damage before she snuffs it. (Body 60-42 points of skinning damage.)

This copy is controlled by the GM and may or may not decide to ally itself with the original. (In fact, the pressure of being an imperfect copy can often cause fairly radical personality changes as the doppelganger strives to distinguish itself.) There are rumors in the adept underground that if a duplicate ever kills its original, it can usurp his position, getting stronger—that is, the better wound point total—and gaining the magick skill. It's up to the GM to decide whether this is true or not.

The original person is still in there, by the way. If the spell is broken somehow, the most common effect is that the enchanted person recovers his memories and personality, forgets everything that happened while he was a copy, and regains the lost wound points. The unenchanted person's appearance depends on the method used to break the spell. Saturn's Horse (see p. 143) typically leaves him with the appearance of the person who tortured and enslaved him. Other methods may restore his original appearance.

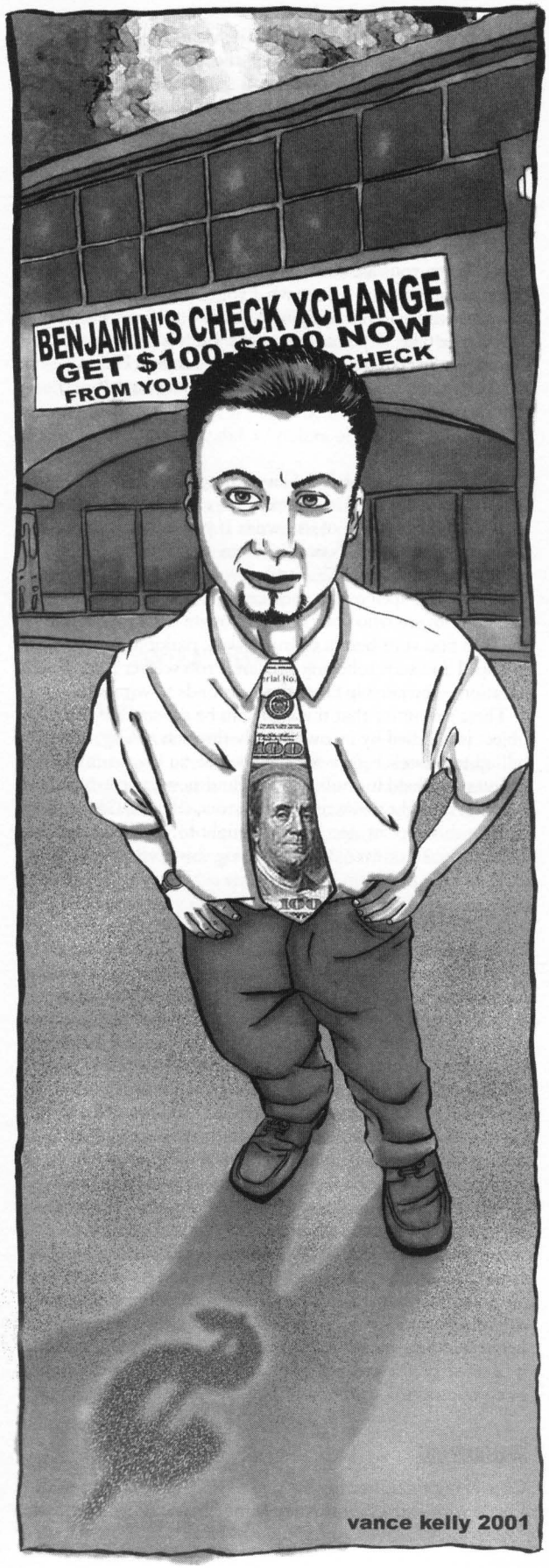
Personamancy Major Effects

Create a mask which convinces a madman he's sane, permanently steal the identity of another, create a mask which your spirit will inhabit after your death, force somebody else to become an avatar.

What You Hear: The Personamancer

A Personamancer who goes by the nickname "Miss Perception" has, on several occasions, confounded a group of would-be do-gooders calling themselves "Team Salvation" through her use of the spell Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead. Once, they thought they'd finally gotten her jailed, but it turned out to be a duplicate. (Or, perhaps the real one's in jail and her duplicate continues her nefarious activities.) A few months later, they accidentally killed one of her duplicates, unaware that an attack as simple as a punch to the stomach could be fatal to the weakened twin. Two members of Team Salvation are currently out on bail, awaiting trial on manslaughter charges.

The same Personamancer has considered formulating a very useful random magick technique she calls "The Mirror's Two Faces." (Yes, she is fond of dramatics.) With this effect, she perceives every person she meets as wearing two masks. Over their face, they wear an indication of the demeanor they wish to present, while the back of their head bears an image of the face they wish to conceal. Thus, a seducer's facemask shows a gentle and lighthearted flirtatiousness, while the back of his head displays callousness and insecurity. Dirk Allen's face is covered with a mask of knowing sarcasm, while the back mask is horror and confusion. This insight is quite valuable to her, though its use does prevent her from seeing a person's real expression.



THE PLUTOMANCER

AKA WARBUCKS, MISERS

You know money is honey. It binds civilization together. The transactions of commerce and the transactions of magick are the same thing. You live in the sweet spot at the epicenter of a handshake, and laugh all the way to the bank. They don't call it the Art of the Deal for nothing.

Most people waggle their tongues for the almighty dollar, but they're too dumb to suck past the sugar coating and get to the strong medicine inside. Not you. You understand.

You know that money isn't about fast cars and big houses. You've watched the dance and ebb of stock exchanges, you've seen the flow and flux of currency and trade, you've seen beyond what money is *for* to what it *means*. You love finance for what it is and not for what it can do for you. Your love is pure because you've seen the beautiful truth: that money is universal transformation. Everything can be bought, and everything can be sold. Everything has its price, and that means the essence of all things is reflected in money.

Your magick is focused on acquisition, but not always physical acquisition. You want money, not as a status symbol, but for its intangible benefits, its invisible leverage. Every dollar you claim exalts you. If only you had enough money, you could acquire the universe.

The central paradox of Plutomancy is that it demands asceticism of its followers. Though they become wealthy, Plutomancy demands they live like paupers, hoarding their money instead of spending it. After all, if you spend it, you no longer have it, and the essence of Plutomancy lies in the having.

PLUTOMANCY BLAST STYLE

A Plutomancer doesn't hurt you, he makes you hurt yourself. This school's blast makes you deliberately injure yourself with whatever is convenient. Under the influence of Plutomantic blasts, people have shot themselves, broken television screens on their heads, jumped in front of cars, and put blowtorches against their own temples.

STATS

Generate a Minor Charge: Get at least $100, but less than $1,000, all at once. Note that being paid $50 by two different people wouldn't work: it does not have the same significance. If seven different people each paid you $200, it would yield seven minor charges. If, on the other hand, those same seven people paid you the same amount, but broke it up in to payments of $100 each (with at least a day between each payment) you'd get fourteen minor charges. Funny stuff, huh?

It's also important to note that *no* charge can be generated from money you summoned with magick. There are no zero-sum spells. Furthermore, you can't get charges from money that you accepted as payment for *doing* magick; that puts the magick in the service of the currency, when it should be the other way around.

Generate a Significant Charge: Get $1,000 or more all at once, as long as it's not enough money to make a major charge. As you might expect, you get two significant charges

if two people each give you $3,000, four significant charges if four people each give you $1,500, and only one charge if one person gives you $70,000. It's not the sum that's important as much as the act of getting. The delay is longer with significant charges, though: if the same person is going to give you two significant charges, they count as a single payment if the money all comes within the same week. If your payer waits seven days between payments, then it's two charges.

Generate a Major Charge: Acquire a hundred million dollars (or more) in one lump sum.

Taboo: Spend. Any time you spend more than $1,000 on a single item, service, or payment of any sort, you lose all the charges you're carrying. (This is why so few Plutomancers own ritzy homes—they want to keep their monthly house payment below $1,000.) A bill for several items that totals more than $1,000 qualifies as a charge-buster, even if the individual items each cost less than $1,000.

Random Magick Domain: Plutomancy is about acquisition. You can use it to call physical objects to you (through happenstance, not telekinesis), or even intangible qualities like luck, strength, or information. It is not good for control or transformation and you can't get rid of things, but if you want to bring something towards you, Plutomancy is a good bet.

Starting Charges: Newly created Plutomancers have four minor charges.

Charging Tips: Plutomantic charges strongly depend on income. If you can arrange to get weekly or daily pay for a lucrative job, many charges flow in. In general, a wealthy Plutomancer can arrange to get 5–10 minor charges a week and 1–2 significant charges per week. Then again, many Plutomancers (like adepts in general) aren't really that wealthy.

Plutomancy Minor Formula Spells

Malfunction

Cost: 1 minor charge

Effect: This spell lets you really screw with any machine that directly handles monetary transactions. You can buy some books through the internet and never get a bill because you've mojoed the computer. If you're low on cash, you can stick your library card or a piece of chewing gum into an ATM and make a withdrawal of up to $1,000 from a random account. (No, you cannot get charges from money you steal with magick.) Careful with that, though: this spell doesn't disable the ATM's camera . . .

If you're a real spendthrift with your power, you can use it to get free cab rides, free phone calls, and free colas from vending machines.

For some reason, a single use of this spell can never provide more than $1,000 worth of value or merchandise.

Economic Forecast

Cost: 1 minor charge

Effect: To perform this spell, you have to look at the money in someone's wallet. By examining the serial numbers that appear on the bills, along with their order and condition (are they rumpled and grungy, or crisp and new?) you can get glimpses into the future of the wallet-holder. These are vague predictions—like a fortune cookie, only you're just as likely to hear "soon blood will spatter your body," as, "June arrives, bringing good fortune." This cannot give names, or specific information—although the numbers can often be startlingly precise. An economic forecast could tell you, "Look out at twelve o'clock," without telling you AM or PM or which day of the week—or even if that meant a direction instead of a time.

Bargain of Pyrrhus

Cost: 1 minor charge

Effect: When you cast this spell, the next attack on you automatically hits, no matter what your opponent rolled. If someone with a 10% Handgun skill rolled a 39 while shooting at you, you take 39 points of damage. But your opponent automatically takes the same amount of damage. Unfortunately, you can't cast this spell on anyone but yourself.

Fiscal History

Cost: 2 minor charges per minute of operation

Effect: While this spell is in effect, you can touch any object and have a brief vision of its owner. If you hold it a little longer, you can see each time it's been exchanged—bought, sold, stolen, or found. Want to know who was shooting at you? Cast this spell over a shell casing. Hold it a little longer, and you can see who your shooter bought his ammo from. Want to find your buddy's car in a dark parking garage? Cast this spell and start touching cars until you see her face. (Each iteration of ownership takes thirty seconds to witness.)

There's a rumor that this spell can be thwarted if the object is handled by its owner only through a crisp, new bill up to a week before the spell is cast: so if your mystery shooter had held his bullets in a brand-new twenty before loading, it might make this spell harder. (If your GM decides to have this superstition work, it might force you to discard rolls under 20 or even 30 while using this spell.)

I Know Your Price

Cost: 3 minor charges

Effect: When you successfully cast this spell on someone, you can ask the GM what would make that individual willing to voluntarily perform a certain action. For instance, you could ask, "What would it take to get The Freak to forgive Dirk Allen?" and get the answer "Immortality." The question "What would it take to make this person kill somebody?" can reveal a lot. "Danger to his friends," indicates one thing about someone's personality. "A hundred bucks and a steak dinner," indicates something completely different.

Note that this spell reveals what makes someone *willing* to perform an action: in an abstract sense, what they want to acquire to buy their willingness. So if you ask "What will make Rebecca DeGoule jump into a sewage treatment tank?" you won't get an answer like "Being set on fire." Sure, setting almost anyone on fire makes them willing to jump in something disgusting. But there's a difference between doing something because you're willing, and doing it because you're compelled to do so. (Being on fire counts as compulsion.)

Mercenary Will

Cost: 4 minor charges

Effect: This is the Plutomancy Minor Blast. When you cast

it on someone, you temporarily override their willpower and make them hurt themselves. In most circumstances, this could mean stomping on their own foot, slamming their hand in a door, or head-butting a wall. If there's something really dangerous nearby, however (like the third rail in a train station) the potential damage is much greater. (For this spell, "really dangerous" means "can injure you just by touching it." A mirror isn't "really dangerous" even though someone could break it and slash their own throat with the shards.)

If your victim is holding a gun, it's possible that you can make him shoot himself.

That's the up side of this spell. If you're in a really dangerous setting (busy street, construction site, burning warehouse) or if your target has a gun in his hand, this spell does damage like a significant blast: the result of the dice instead of the sum. If you rolled a 37 against a gun-toting enemy, you just did 37 points of damage instead of 3 + 7 = 10.

The down side is that people have that pesky free will. Anyone who has this spell cast on him can resist the command. However, fighting the spell is a rank-10 Self challenge, on top of the rank-5 Unnatural check for being attacked by magick, because the target is essentially fighting his own sudden desire for harm.

Plutomancy Significant Formula Spells

Fortune's Wheel

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: This spell allows you to make big, general predictions about groups, trends, nations—even whole economies. Like Economic Forecast, it can be maddeningly vague and uselessly exact at the same time: you might know that Alex Abel's company is going to lose $7,425,871.52 in the next eight months—but you won't know how, or how to stop it. (Also, no prophecy is written in stone: the universe is far too chaotic for that.) You might be able to see that the Global Liberation Society is terribly threatened by someone who wields the powers of fire and rebellion, someone who brings the wrath of countless ages, someone who's five feet eleven inches tall and thirty two years old—but you wouldn't get a name or an image.

Bankrupt Will

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: This is the Plutomancy significant blast, and this is where you get people *really* hurting themselves—sticking their knives into light sockets, jumping out of windows, poking themselves in the eye with car keys, *etc.* If the spell is successful, it does significant-blast damage, the victim loses his next action, and unlike the minor-blast version it cannot be countered by a Soul roll. It doesn't give the extra Self-based stress check of the minor blast, however: it generally happens too fast for the victim to get a real sense of self-betrayal.

I'm The Man

Cost: 2 significant charges
Effect: For the next half hour, everyone who sees you perceives you as his boss. This doesn't mean he sees you as a vague authority figure: if that guard at the military base takes her orders from Colonel BoDean, she thinks you're Colonel BoDean. If a secretary at the law office has his checks signed by Wally Schlegel, he sees you as Wally Schlegel. The only people immune to this spell are the self-employed, the unemployed, the independently wealthy, and avatars of the Masterless Man.

When you speak, those enchanted by this spell hear your words exactly, but in the boss's voice. So if the guard asks for a password, she won't hear what she's expecting. She hears Colonel BoDean saying "I forgot." The other danger is when you're in the presence of two (or more) people with different bosses, since they each react as if you're a different person. Finally, if you're in the presence of the *real* boss, the spell dissolves—so just hope that Colonel BoDean or Wally Schlegel doesn't walk by while you're bamboozling their underlings. On the other hand, if you enter the underling's presence alongside their boss, they perceive you as someone completely different—possibly their boss's boss.

This spell can be extended by fifteen minutes for an additional significant charge. You can add this charge at any point during the spell's duration, and it doesn't require a re-roll.

Devaluation

Cost: 2 significant charges
Effect: This spell causes physical objects to corrode and decay. A wide variety of damage is possible with this spell: you could make a car's wheels blow out, or its windshield explode, or you could just make an axle rust until it snaps. You can use this to rot ropes, blow apart doors, and snap handcuffs. As a rule of thumb, you can wreck any solid, non-living object that weighs fifty pounds or less. If the object has moving parts or electrical components, it's much easier to ruin it. You can ruin anything mechanical or electrical the size of a van or smaller with this spell, so a car would be no problem but a hundred-pound marble statue would be out of your reach.

One effect you can't create with this is making something simply vanish. You can't create or destroy matter with this spell: only perform a limited transformation, making it less valuable.

Washington Speaks

Cost: 2 significant charges
Effect: To cast this spell, you have to write your name somewhere on a piece of legal tender. It has to be a $20 bill or less (in value), but other than that the denomination doesn't really matter. After you sign it, create a mental picture of a person you want to spy on, then spend the money and roll the dice. The bill finds its way to the wallet of the person you envisioned within a number of days equal to your roll (if you succeeded, of course). How long the bill stays with him or her is up to the GM—generally it's a week at the most. (After all, how long does ten bucks last in your wallet?) Once your target has spent the money, the bill returns to you in 2–20 days. When you get the bill back, you can concentrate on the bill and have a vision (complete with sound) of what your target was doing any time that he had the bill with him. So you could spy on his business meeting or hear what he said on his cell phone in a cab—but if he went to the gym and left his wallet in

his locker, you wouldn't be able to spy on him for that span of time.

Many people in the occult underground carefully scrutinize any bill they get for signatures, and then spend the money immediately (or just get change) if they find one. This has led many Plutomancers to simply sign every bill they get their hands on to create decoys. Others have had their name legally changed to something like "Fred Loves Kathy," so their name on the bill doesn't look like a name. Still others write with the aid of a microscope and a surgical laser.

Pluto's Curse

Cost: 3 significant charges
Effect: You can only cast this spell on someone with less money than you. The spell automatically fails against people with more money because their mojo leverage is greater—at least for Plutomancy. You also have to know your target—either know her personally, or be able to see him when you cast the spell.

When successfully cast, this spell makes someone poor. They start losing money in a geometric progression, starting with one penny the first day the spell is cast. The next day, they lose two cents. Four cents the day after that.

Not very threatening, is it? Keep doing the math. One month after you cast the spell, your victim loses $5,368,709.12. That's in addition to an identical sum that he's cumulatively lost over the last thirty days. Since it doubles daily, this spell could bankrupt the entire United States in something like fifty days. (If it worked on countries, that is. Lucky for countries, it doesn't.)

Now, while the losses from the first week can be chalked up to carelessness and sofa cushions, the bigger sums take a little more doing. These losses might be due to robbery, fraud, bad investments, or something similar. This spell always finds an excuse to apply chaos to the victim's finances.

The spell only works on pure money, such as cash and bank accounts. It can't make the victim lose cars, houses, jewelry, shares of stock, and other things that have to be converted into money before they can be spent. Most clueless victims of Pluto's Curse liquidate their resources for cash once their funds run low, so of course that fresh cash gets zapped, too. Those in the know immediately start *buying* things when they realize the nature of their curse. Then when the spell quits, they can sell their new purchases and start over. (The stock market is a very convenient shield against Pluto's Curse.)

Once the victim's cash hits zero, the spell stops working. The only difference between casting this on a pauper and Adnan Kashoggi is how long it's going to take to leech the victim dry.

Devil's Deal

Cost: 5 significant charges
Effect: This powerful spell lets you bargain for someone's obedience—whether they want to give it or not.

Devil's Deal has two parts. When you first cast the spell, you immediately know what your victim wants more than anything in the world. It could be something intangible ("I want a long, safe, healthy life for me and my family"), the completion of an idea ("I want to write the next great American novel," or, "I want to have Jerry Seinfeld's baby") or something concrete ("I want the Hope Diamond").

Knowing someone's innermost desire is powerful enough. If you give it to them, it's even greater. (Granted, some wishes may be beyond even a powerful magician's ability: all the tutors, editors and literary agents in the world aren't going to get the next great American novel out of a hopeless hack.)

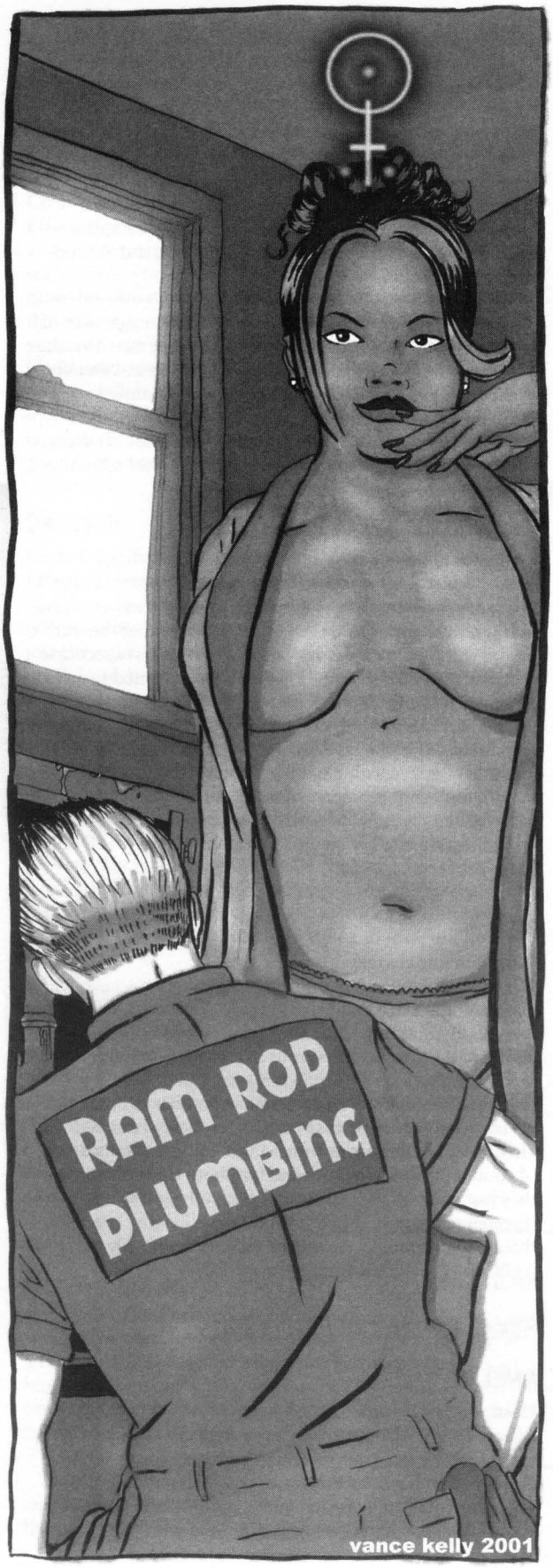
If you arrange, one way or another, for your victim's dream to come true—be it by handing over the Hope Diamond or setting up a night with Jerry—you can compel the victim to complete one task for you. This can be as simple or as complicated as you want it. It could be anything from, "Give me the launch codes," to "Negotiate a lasting peace in the Middle East." Your victim must then work at your task until it is completed. He can take time out to rest, eat, *etc.*, but he now wants that goal with the same intensity that he formerly wanted the goal you fulfilled. Every time he does something directly contrary to the goal, it's a rank-10 Self challenge.

Plutomancy Major Effects

Call any object in the world into your possession. Dictate the world economy for a day. Bring yourself (through "coincidence") into the presence of any person alive.

What You Hear: The Plutomancer

Plutomancer Grover Heerdt has developed a Plutomantic tracking technique. He ritually "marries" two coins of the same denomination and year and plants one on the person he wants to follow. Every time he drops the other coin, it bounces in the direction of its mate. The correspondence doesn't last forever, of course—and if the target ditches the tracking coin, or just spends it, the spell breaks. There's no way for Grover to know this, of course, until his tracking coin consistently bounces in different directions. Still, those familiar with Grover have made it a point to never wear penny loafers.



THE PORNOMANCER

AKA AFFINITES, LOVE PIRATES

You know the Naked Goddess is alive and magick is afoot. She has inverted the masculine order, emerging triumphant from the very core of female subjugation. Follow her path of Affinity.

Watching the videotape from the Sect of the Naked Goddess was like putting your hand in the wound of the risen Christ: proof positive, at least to you. People said it could've been a special effect, some computer graphics thing, but they didn't see the tape. Just touching it started you on the road. Watching it—well, that was what did it. You realized She was real, and you felt Her reaching out to you.

Now you dwell in Affinity. Affinity is the nexus of desire and synchronicity, the covalent bond between emotional attraction and cosmic correlation, the merging of what you want and what you are. Affinity is the kiss that straddles flirtation and affection, the caress that transforms affection into love, the wet spot of love and passion.

The Naked Goddess has revealed Herself for a new age. From the heart of oppressive, exploitive male power She came in majesty and transcendence. She is sex and mystery and identity and anonymity all rolled into one.

As a follower of the Naked Goddess, you are in touch with the cosmos itself. You can surf the breaking waves of coincidence and embrace the beating heart of desire.

Her word is Affinity. Bring it to the world. Ready or not, here she comes.

The central paradox of Pornomancy is that its creative power comes from rote mimicry. You generate charges by meticulously recreating sexual acts in the pornographic oeuvre of the Naked Goddess, and free-will sex saps your power. The most potent, original act humans can perform is forbidden to you except when it duplicates the act of your idol.

PORNOMANCY BLAST STYLE

A Pornomancy blast doesn't really hurt you; you just *feel* intense, agonizing pain ripping through your entire body. Doctors won't be able to find any tissue damage, (meaning damage from a Pornomancy blast cannot be healed by medical science!) but that doesn't reduce the damage. Furthermore, your body continues to believe it's being hurt—so unless you get magickal healing, those wound points *never come back*. If a Pornomancy blast kills you, the coroner probably scratches his head and writes down "heart failure."

Luckily, it's not at all easy for Pornomancers to hurt people; even a minor blast takes a significant charge. However, if you happen to be having sex with the Pornomancer at the time, it can be turned into a *significant* blast. This opens up the irritating possibility of your love-pirate nemesis killing you with a charge that you helped her generate.

STATS

Generate a Minor Charge: Perform a consensual Naked Goddess sex ritual lasting about one hour.
Generate a Significant Charge: Re-enact a scene from a Naked Goddess porn flick with people who look like the other actors from the film, on a set that looks very much like the set from the film in question.

Generate a Major Charge: Re-enact something from the Naked Goddess's life or films that *no one* has ever re-enacted before. (This is why members of the Sect of the Naked Goddess spend so much time hunting down and interviewing her ex-boyfriends, relatives, high school pals, *etc.* The re-enactment has to be *exact,* down to having sex with the same people in the same place.)
Taboo: If you ever have sex outside a ritual context, you lose all the charges you're carrying. Real shame about love, isn't it?
Random Magick Domain: Pornomancy works by creating and enhancing affinities. It's powerful magic for guidance, coincidence, and persuasion. It's considerably weaker when it comes to making physical changes in the world.
Starting Charges: Newly created Pornomancers have four minor charges.
Charging Tips: The availability of willing partners empowers Pornomancy. A cabal of Pornomancers could easily rack up 2–4 significant charges every day. More isolated groups or individuals can arrange 1–2 minor charges per day and 1–2 significant charges each week with unknowing partners—provided said partners are willing to adhere to the strictures of a Pornomantic charge script.
Notes: Pornomancers only exist by means of the Sect of the Naked Goddess (see p. 85). A given Pornomancer must either be a member of the sect, a former member of the sect, or have a mentor who is/was a member of the sect.

Pornomancy Minor Formula Spells

You Know You Want It

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: This spell allows you to mess with the mind of your listener, by making your arguments seem reasonable and desirable. Here's how it works: after you cast the spell, the next social interaction roll you make (meaning skills like Lying, Charm, or Sell Freezers to Eskimos) is at a +20% shift.

The Armor of Desire

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: The next person who tries to attack you has to make a successful Soul check to do so. Even though he rationally knows he ought to shoot you or beat your brains in, he somehow really doesn't want to. If he makes the Soul check and damages you, it's a rank-4 Violence stress check. If he fails the Soul check, he not only loses his action but has to make a rank-4 Helplessness stress check.

Tough Luck

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: You can force anyone to re-roll a successful roll they just made. You can't use it on anyone with higher initiative than you; but once it's your chance to go, you can cast Tough Luck and then hold it in abeyance for the rest of that round until you see a roll you want to mess with. If you don't use it the round you cast it, you can wait and let it go on your next round—but you can't do anything else while you're holding it. If you cast it outside of combat you can walk around, talk to people, and perform simple actions, but if you do anything that requires concentration or attention (meaning, anything you have to roll) then the effect of the spell is lost, along with the charge.

Smooth Move

Cost: 2 minor charges
Effect: You can cast this spell at any time to flip-flop a roll that you just made. This spell can be used as a reaction—that is, if you decide to use it in a fight, it does not cost you an action.

> **Example:** Cindy the Pornomancer has a Struggle skill of 30%. While slugging it out with a teenaged Satanist, she rolls a 71 on her combat action—a clear miss, assuming she can't flip-flop the roll under normal circumstances. However, Cindy casts Smooth Move on her attack to flip-flop it. It is now a success, and the attack goes off successfully without her having to take an additional action.

Mind and Mouth Go North and South

Cost: 3 minor charges
Effect: When you cast this spell on someone, their skill at Lying drops to 0% for the entire duration of their conversation with you. They find themselves either telling the truth or clamming up completely. They can't even have recourse to half-truths (like saying "Joanie said she wanted to *kill* me!" when Joanie had in fact said "I'll kill you for setting up this surprise party"), dilute truths (like saying "Sam's real interested in the investment" when Sam said "The investment is interesting but I can't spare the capital right now"), and truth presented in a manner calculated to deceive (like saying "I honestly believe this legislation will grow the industry," when you privately believe it will only grow your segment of it).

Dazzle

Cost: 3 minor charges
Effect: When you successfully cast this spell on someone, he loses his next action and stands there doing nothing—not even really thinking. He cannot make any skill rolls, including Dodge, though normal rolls still have to be made to hit him in combat.

If you use this spell on someone in combat, it costs him his next action, but he snaps out of it quickly because, after all, it's a dangerous situation. If you use it outside of combat, it distracts someone for about thirty seconds; they just stare off into space and generally ignore any non-threatening stimuli. (Note: a woman walking by is a non-threatening stimulus. A woman walking by openly carrying a gun or a machete is not.)

Pornomancy Significant Formula Spells

Number Nine

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: Your basic love spell—or rather, at least a *lust* spell. If the spell works, your victim immediately wants nothing more than to have sex with you, regardless of their usual sexual orientation, personal tastes, and other feelings about you. If someone hates you or is disgusted with you, this spell

does not replace those emotions; they simply experience a radical conflict of emotions. If you refuse to gratify their urges (or if you say yes, in some circumstances), it may cause stress checks against Self or Helplessness.

The Smouldering Glance

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: If you have a Soul-based skill like Sexually Alluring, you can permanently increase it by 5%. If you don't have such a skill, you can gain it at 5%. However, you can never raise this skill above 72% with this if you're a woman—that's the rating the Naked Goddess had. If you're a man, you can't take it above 66%—the score of the Naked Goddess's most frequent co-star.

This skill doesn't really have much to do with looks; it's more about attitude and flirting and how you carry yourself. It doesn't make you look good. It makes you look good in the sack.

Synchronicity

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: A rather strange effect, Synchronicity puts you where you're "supposed" to be. It could be the time and place where a friend of yours is going to need help. It could be just the right spot to take advantage of a great opportunity (or at least, become aware of it). It could place you in a restaurant just as your two worst enemies meet to plot your downfall.

It is not teleportation. You spend the charge and leave it to the GM to decide where you're supposed to be and to provide a rationale (no matter how flimsy) to get you there. (Your GM may ask for your help or advice on getting you to a certain place.)

Note that just because this puts you where you need to be, it doesn't mean you're equipped to handle what happens. It pays to be prepared at all times, because you never know when the Goddess is going to lead you into trouble . . .

Psychotrauma

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: Psychotrauma is a good name for the pornomancer minor blast, since the damage is all in the victim's mind (as explained earlier). It doesn't make him any less dead if it kills him, though. As explained above, if you're actually having sex with your target, you can make this into a significant-damage blast.

Defeat Yourself

Cost: 2 significant charges
Effect: You can cast this spell at any time to turn any successful roll you witness into a simple failure. The person making the roll has to be in your line of sight. If you do this in combat, it does not count as your action for that round, *and* you can use it even before your initiative turn comes around, or after. (Some Pornomancers refer to this spell as Klutz Hammer, but Daphnee Lee insists that Defeat Yourself is the proper name.) Whatever its name, this spell cannot be used on major-level magicks of any sort.

Paralysis

Cost: 2 significant charges
Effect: It's just what it sounds like. The target of this spell is unable to move, other than involuntary movements like breathing, blinking, and small adjustments of balance. The target can't move until the spell's caster permits it, until he's been frozen for two hours, or until he successfully overcomes the spell. Overcoming the spell requires a Soul roll, made with a -30% penalty. (Sorcerers who attempt this roll can flip-flop their Soul rolls; otherwise, tough luck.)

In combat, breaking the spell can be attempted once per round. (Incidentally, paralyzed people take their actions last in a round.) It is still possible for paralyzed adepts to cast spells (instead of trying to break the paralysis), but any paralyzed person is considered motionless for the purposes of pointblanking rules (see p. 56). It's a bad scene.

Inner Torment

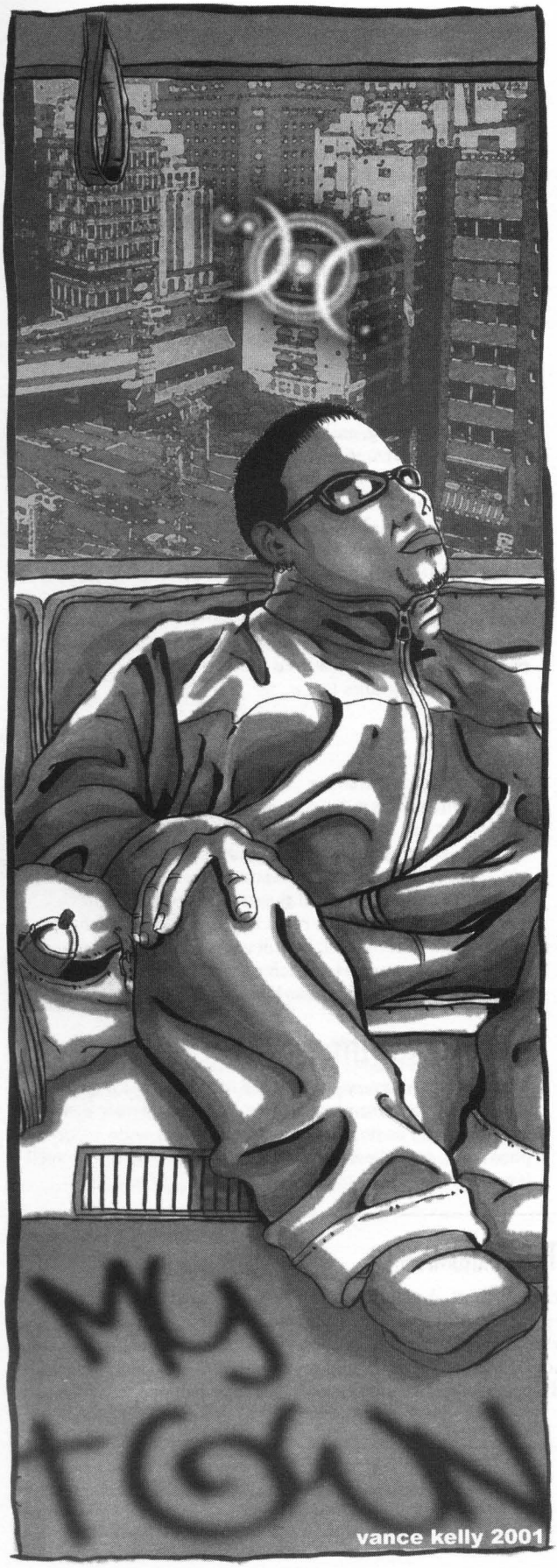
Cost: 3 significant charges
Effect: This spell is a direct attack on the target's soul and sanity. The caster picks one of the five mental stresses when the spell is cast, and (if successful) the target has to make a stress check. The rank of the stress check is equal to the number in the ones place of the roll. (If you roll 23, it's a rank-3 challenge. If you roll 19, it's a rank-9 challenge.) If the victim fails the roll, he still gains a failed mark and freaks out, but a successful defense against Inner Torment does *not* give a hardened mark in that gauge.

Pornomancy Major Effects

Arrange to have every practitioner of a school of magick show up in the same place at the same time "by accident." Make yourself as popular and famous world-wide as Stephen King, regardless of talent. Undo the effects of one spell (even one that killed someone) . . .

What You Hear: The Pornomancer

A rogue British Pornomancer named Bo Jingles—no, it's not her real name—has formulized a defensive spell based on the small advertisement cards that London hookers tack up in city phone booths. Bo carries a bunch of these cards with her at all times. When attacked, she flees. (Not if: when. She's an outcast Pornomancer, which means that for every friend she can buy, her several groups of enemies can buy more.) When pursued, she drops the cards and casts the spell. Then her pursuers can't continue to chase her until they pick up every card she's dropped—like the vampire legends about dropped seeds or coins. That's where she got the idea, after all.



THE URBANOMANCER

AKA RATS

You know the city beats with a human heart. You live for back alleys, yowling cats, shiftless bums, well-toned joggers, harried commuters, and all the other denizens that make your city what it is. That's right: your city. You really know what it means to say you own this town.

Cities are complicated things. Thousands upon thousands of people, acres upon acres of concrete, the sewers beneath, the buildings above, the tangled ecology of rats and pigeons and the bloody feeding chain of the streets. They all form a huge, chaotic, living organism.

Cities are complex and confusing and utterly fascinating. That's why you married one.

Graffiti, traffic, crime, 7-11s, riots, parks. They merge if you look at them closely enough. You see the patterns of the city, probe them, and push them into new shapes. You know the true city is the one you see in your dreams, and if you push hard enough you can make those dreams come true.

You sense the brooding, moron mind of the crowd—it seethes through your lungs with each breath. You sense the thin gaps between districts, the gaps that swallow people whole. You keep albino alligators and mutated rats for pets. You know why time becomes as thick as treacle late at night on the subway. You know what happens if you knock on the small green door at 92nd and 4th. You read the names behind the names. You can send yourself to Rat's Alley, and you really don't want to see what's been made from the dead men's bones—but you could.

The central paradox of Urbanomancy is that the city is everyone and everyone is the city, yet there is no one man the city needs, no woman whose loss measurably diminishes it, no one whose addition really increases it. This is the paradox street on which you build your house of power.

URBANOMANCY BLAST STYLE

The city senses it doesn't like you and lashes out. Bricks dropped by builders, a dog's bite, a sly knife in the crowd, a car accident. It's a useful style for casual attacks, but it only works when the target is in the right place at the wrong time. If you put a blast on a target when you're in the middle of a fight in his house, it's not going to take effect until he drives to work tomorrow. Of course, if your target's chasing you through a crowd it might be a little more immediate.

STATS

Each Urbanomancer may only ever be attuned to one city, which must contain at least one hundred thousand people.
Generate a Minor Charge: Study the city for four hours. This can be anything from walking the back alleys and noting down the patterns of the trash cans, to staring from your window at the faces in the crowd, to going over the crime and fire maps and finding how they spell out a word.
Generate a Significant Charge: Interfere with the city in a significant way—block a major intersection, cause a bomb scare, increase policing in a crime-ridden area, organize a concert that attracts thousands of people. Alternatively, get part of the city named after you—a street, a building. Depending on how important it is, this could bring you in anything from a charge a year to a charge a day, regularly.

Town planner is a *fine* job for an Urbanomancer to have.
Generate a Major Charge: Permanently change a large part of the city. Starting the Great Fire of London would qualify, or being responsible for the addition of a subway system. Alternatively, get the city renamed after you.
Taboo: An Urbanomancer's magick fails completely outside his chosen city, but he still retains his charges for when he returns. Being outside the city is uncomfortable, however—it's like a chain-smoker trying to go without a puff for a while. At first it's just unsettling. Then it gets uncomfortable. Eventually it gets downright unbearable—he needs his city. Force of habit and addictive sensation get the better of the Urbanomancer and he becomes an outright basket case. Skill shifts of -10% or -20% might be appropriate, depending on how long he's been away from his city, and perhaps Helplessness and Isolation checks might eventually be in order.

Also, an Urbanomancer loses all charges if he ever touches the earth on which his city is built. This means parks, for instance, are generally safer places for those hunted by a rat: The sorcerer's shoes protect him, but even so, most are leery of getting that close to unpaved soil. Throwing a handful of local earth at the Urbanomancer can drain all his charges, if it touches his skin.
Random Magick Domain: Anything that draws upon the forces of the city—not specific individuals, but groups, crowds, and so on. Gaining information about the city.
Charging Tips: Urbanomancers must take care where they walk in their wanderings of their chosen city, as many of the most important urban landmarks are located within city parks or other natural spaces. Regardless, your average Urbanomancer can get 1–2 minor charges per day looking out the window or wandering around, and 3–4 significant charges a month without being identified as being responsible for the disruptions.
Notes: The word "Urbanomancer" combines Greek and Latin, which annoys grammarians and old-school occultists. Most rats couldn't care less, and think the correct term—"Polisurgist"—sounds dumb.

Urbanomancy Minor Formula Spells

Day Pass

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: This allows you to use any public transport system completely free of charge and as effectively as possible. Barriers open, conductors fail to notice you, you make all your connections, and so on. It lasts for one journey to a desired destination, chosen at the outset of the spell. A minor variant of the spell lets you avoid heavy traffic while driving to your destination.

Spraypaint

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: You can leave a message concealed in any part of the city, which can only be read by people meeting the qualifications you set when casting the spell (*e.g.* "Brenda Lawson" or "all members of the New Inquisition"). You must be in the area where you intend to leave the message when you cast the spell. For 3 minor charges, you can have the message find your targets, which it does, provided they are in any city.

The message may take many forms—sprayed and seemingly illegible graffiti, chalk marks on the pavement, a song sung by passing children, the scurrying sound of rats that suddenly resolves itself into words. The message can be up to twenty words long. The downside to this spell is that any Urbanomancer passing the area where you left the message knows Spraypaint has been used there, and can spend a minor charge to read the message himself. The message stays present for up to a week.

Receiving such a message is a rank 3 Unnatural stress the first time it happens. The second time it's rank 1.

> **Example:** Leo Theophilus, a noted London Urbanomancer, wishes to contact Dirk Allen. He casts Spraypaint, using 3 charges, and the ragged garbage around the Chicago park bench on which Allen is downing a bottle is blown by the wind for a few seconds, landing in the shape of words.

Streetwise

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: You can divine any fact about either the city itself or the groups within it, but not about individual inhabitants. For instance, you could learn where all the entrances to a building are, what percentage of the population would support Jeffrey Archer for mayor, or which gang controls the area between Fortescue and Montgomery. You couldn't find out whether John Appleby would support Jeffrey Archer for mayor, or where he lived—though if you knew he was a member of, say, the Islington Freemasons, you could find out where they meet, then work from there.

Face in the Crowd

Cost: 2 minor charges
Effect: You disappear into an existing crowd. Your features do not change—you just become incredibly hard to spot, another part of the great teeming mass of humanity. All attempts to follow or detect you are at a -50% shift until you leave the crowd.

Vermin's Eyes

Cost: 2 minor charges
Effect: You must be holding a rat, pigeon, or similar urban animal to cast this spell. You now see through the eyes of that animal, and exert control over its actions, as long as the actions remain natural for that animal—for instance, you could direct a pigeon to a particular area, but not have it attack somebody. This effect lasts until you cancel it, but you can't switch back and forth between your vision and the animal's; as soon as you change back, the spell is over.

Break Your Mother's Back

Cost: 3 minor charges.
Effect: This is the Urbanomancy minor blast. As described earlier, the city, through whatever normal-seeming means, attacks the target, if they're in a situation where harm could occur.

Urbanomancy Significant Formula Spells

Alone in the Crowd

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: The target of this spell becomes a pariah for a week. Nobody attacks her or openly mocks her, but everyone

subtly avoids her. If she's in a crowd, people keep a distance of at least a foot. Conversations are kept as short and sharp as possible. The only exceptions are close friends and family, who treat the victim normally. Isolation and Helplessness checks are probably in order for the target.

My Turf

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: An immensely important spell, this establishes your magical dominance over a particular area—this can be up to a square mile of the city, but it must be defined by clear boundaries, such as "Platt Fields" or "Kingsford." You automatically sense any magick cast within that area, and can specify one other type of event to sense—criminal activity, a member of the Sect of the Naked Goddess entering, and so on; you can add additional types of event-sensing for one minor charge each. This spell has to be renewed once a week and can only be cast on one area at a time. Its desired effects may be revised, increased, or decreased at each renewal.

Use of My Turf on an area including a significant Cliomancy site allows the Urbanomancer to drain one minor charge from that site per day, if he's the first to harvest the site on a given day. However, a Cliomancer who gets there first and drains his significant charge from that site also drains—but doesn't receive—an equivalent charge from the Urbanomancer whose turf it is. Urbanomancers and Cliomancers hate each other, and fight very subtle and very long magickal wars.

Wrong Turn

Cost: 2 significant charges
Effect: This ensures that the target of the spell ends up in a public area where you want them, the next time she travels in the city. This can be just by your house, in the middle of the worst part of town, whatever. As usual, crowds, traffic, and coincidence force this upon them. The only way to avoid it is by casting a different travel spell. Resisting it any other way just makes the effects more obvious and possibly more painful—being hit by a car and taken by ambulance to just outside the adept's house, for instance, where the ambulance then breaks down.

The Madness of Crowds

Cost: 3 significant charges
Effect: This starts a riot. There must be pre-existing tension over some issue—possibly created by Urbanomancy, admittedly—for the riot to explode around. You can specify the area in which the riot starts, and the targets against which the mob directs its wrath, which must be appropriate to the tension you drew upon to cast the spell. Be aware: you must be present at ground zero to cast this spell, and it starts right away. (GMs, this is like getting a 51 on the riot roll, or maybe even higher; see p. 287.)

Napoleon of Notting Hill

Cost: 3 significant charges
Effect: This causes any individual to rise to a position of power and respect within his neighborhood. This happens within three months. The exact position cannot be chosen by the caster, but depends upon the individual—it could be community spokesperson, gang leader, borough representative, head of the Neighborhood Watch, *etc.* You can cast this spell upon yourself. The target can quite happily go further on her own merits once given the initial boost, of course, or just as easily piss it all away once attained.

Ragged Warriors

Cost: 3 significant charges
Effect: Many long-time homeless people begin to lose their identities, merging into the patterns of the city and becoming susceptible to Urbanomantic control. This spell lets the Urbanomancer send his mind out to control one of these poor wrecks. The target must be on the adept's Turf (see My Turf, at left) at the time of casting or be otherwise detectable by magick. The Urbanomancer cannot control his own body at the same time and must cancel the spell to return to himself. On the other hand, for every additional significant charge spent an extra homeless person can be controlled at the same time.

There are two downsides to this spell. First, the people controlled are not going to be fine physical specimens. The caster can use his own physical skills, but they're limited by the Body of the targets, which will likely be 20 + d10 or so. Second, it's an extremely evil and disturbing thing to do. It's a Self-6 check to cast and Self-7 to control more than one individual. Victims suffer a Helplessness 10 check if they resist the control—unless, of course, they're already the victims of permanent insanity. Any homeless person with five failed marks in any gauge cannot resist this spell. After the spell wears off, the victim must make a Self-8 check.

In some big cities, there are homeless who have lost all their individuality to this spell and who just sit there, rocking gently, until one Urbanomancer or another decides to use them as a tool.

> **Example:** Julius, a corrupt councilman and Urbanomancer, is seriously annoyed by some intrepid dukes who are operating in his Turf one night. Spending six significant charges, he leaps into four street people and sends them against the group.

Traffic Accident

Cost: 3 significant charges
Effect: This is the Urbanomancy significant blast.

Urbanomancy Major Effects

Cause somebody to become mayor of a city, start riots in several cities across the world, lower the crime rate across America, form a new building in the middle of a city which nobody notices wasn't there before . . .

What You Hear: The Urbanomancer

The Urbanomancers of Chicago are bad news. They've got their fingers in the sticky pot of political power, and can use cops instead of the homeless for their Ragged Warriors spells. Seattle got uppity and they slapped it down with the WTO riots, but now they're setting their sights on Kuala Lumpur, of all things. Nobody holds a grudge like the Chicago rats.



THE VIDEOMANCER

AKA VIDIOTS

You know the power of the box. TV Guide ***is your TV Guru. Millions of people concentrating intently on the altar of entertainment cannot help but pump it full of juice. You can tap that juice, reach into the screen and wring pure power from the eyeballs of America. Television is everything.***

The most important invention of the twentieth century was TV. How many people do you know who don't have a television? It's more powerful than the atom bomb, more prevalent than the airplane, more versatile than genetic engineering. People talk about TV, they get their news from TV, they learn how to dress and dance from TV. The vast preponderance of the world's entertainment hours are spent with remote in hand, plopped on the couch, suckling at the legendary glass teat. People without TV are not real people.

Television has replaced society, and you're one of the few visionaries who knows it. People used to rely on messy, inefficient, imperfect vectors of human contact. Now millions of people can laugh at the same joke, nod along to the same song, or cry over the same tragedy, all at once.

TV offers a cornucopia of novelty: programming from every country, shows narrowcast to every demographic, proliferating cable channels for niche interests. Yet at the same time it is perfectly safe, predictable, and controllable. You can always mute, change the channel, or even turn it off altogether.

But why would you ever do that?

You like to watch. You like to be outside the action. That's where you can change channels and control the image, even when it's outside the box.

Everyone watches TV, but only you really see it. You get the hidden messages: the things the writers and producers and actors never meant to show, never even realized they were saying. Putting the right commercial in a rerun can reinterpret it completely, the way that adding "un" in front of one word in a sentence can completely change its meaning. That's why you have to keep watching. Because the images keep changing. The world keeps changing. The channels keep changing. And you're changing them even as they change everyone else.

The central paradox of Videomancy is that TV connects and isolates. You can be part of a global experience even when there's no one else in fifty miles of you. TV gives the illusion of connectivity, of community, even while it lets you be as alone as a human being can.

VIDEOMANCY BLAST STYLE

Videomancers have no blast.

STATS

The charge structure for Videomancy is easier and more integrated than many schools, but by the same token it's not as versatile. Charging and the taboo are based on the idea that each Videomancer is keyed to a certain television series. It must be a regularly scheduled broadcast or cable network show (sorry, *Wayne's World* fans: public access

doesn't count) that has or once had new episodes coming out at least weekly. That's all.

Videomancers charge up by watching their fetish show (or shows) and they get tabooed when they miss their show. (Watching a recording of any kind doesn't do anything.) Power outage during the show? Lightning hit the broadcast tower? Tough luck, vidiot. (Special news reports, however, do not violate taboo.)

Vidiots can have more than one fetish show, though this is often a double-edged sword. Not only does it double the chances of taboo, it's not impossible for shows on different networks to get scheduled opposite one another. If this happens, the Videomancer is "in irons"—he cannot charge off either show, because watching one means ignoring the other. ("In irons" is a sailing term. A boat is said to be in irons when there's wind blowing, but the boat still can't go anywhere.) He can only hope one gets cancelled, although this is a terrible situation for a Videomancer; it's similar to hoping for the death of a terminally ill loved one.

A Videomancer can add a show to his collection of mystically meaningful programs by spending a significant charge and making a successful Soul roll. If he's watching the world premier of the program when he decides to add it, no charge is required. Once a Videomancer is committed, however, it's until death or cancellation do they part—and given the proliferation of syndicated reruns on cable, not even cancellation is a guaranteed break. If a show is on the air regularly, it's still got its hooks in you.

Generate a Minor Charge: Watch a rerun of your show one time, beginning to end, missing *nothing*—not even a single commercial.

Generate a Significant Charge: Watch a new episode of your focus program from beginning to end. (Nightly news broadcasts are always "new episodes.")

Generate a Major Charge: Star in an episode of your chosen program. To "star" you must be on-screen at least 50% of the time.

Taboo: Miss any episode of your show when it's broadcast where you are. You also lose all charges if your program gets cancelled. (Though you can still get minor charges off syndication.)

While this taboo and charge structure are pretty bountiful, it does mean you're just absolutely screwed if someone figures out your schedule and attacks while your program is on. You can either defend yourself (and lose all your charges) or try to watch the show (and probably get a savage beat-down).

Random Magick Domain: Videomancy is about understanding people and events through observation. It's versatile for spies or (more commonly) voyeurs. To a lesser extent, it's about adapting oneself to expectations—or, at a more powerful level, adapting reality to the expectations of TV.

Starting Charges: Videomancers start with five minor charges.

Charging Tips: A vidiot's charges all depend on how many programs he locks onto. A vidiot who's just into the local news can get a significant charge every day, or two if he fetishizes both the morning and nightly news. One who's fixed on a show popular enough to have syndicated reruns can get something like 7 to 21 minors a week, along with one sig in the winter. Someone charging from both the news and some syndicated program can get the benefits of both . . . as long as he doesn't wind up in irons.

Videomancy Minor Formula Spells

Dumbin' it Down

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: The recipient of this spell immediately "gets" what someone is trying to tell him. No matter how inarticulate, confusing or esoteric the information, it seems clear, straightforward and easy to remember.

This spell confers no particular persuasive power: If cast on a reasonable person listening to a fanatic, the listener would understand where the fanatic was coming from, but wouldn't necessarily take the theory seriously.

It's also necessary for the instructor to complete the explanation. If someone with a thick accent is giving confusing and discursive instructions on how to get to Howth's End Village, this makes the directions clear and easy to follow—but if the directions get cut off at Castleton, the hearer is only going to know how to get as far as Castleton.

This cannot be cast retroactively, to recall something that you once understood but have forgotten. It cannot be used to completely understand a wide and complicated field, though it's very useful for one facet of that field. (For example, a Videomancer couldn't cast this spell, talk to a physicist for an hour, and understand everything in the world about physics. But he could use it to grasp a single complicated concept that would, otherwise, be beyond him.)

Finally, Dumbin' it Down does not work for physical skills. A single, complex physical action—how to field-strip a rifle or make a Cat's Cradle—can be understood, but this doesn't mean the person who understands it can *do* it all that well.

Film at Eleven

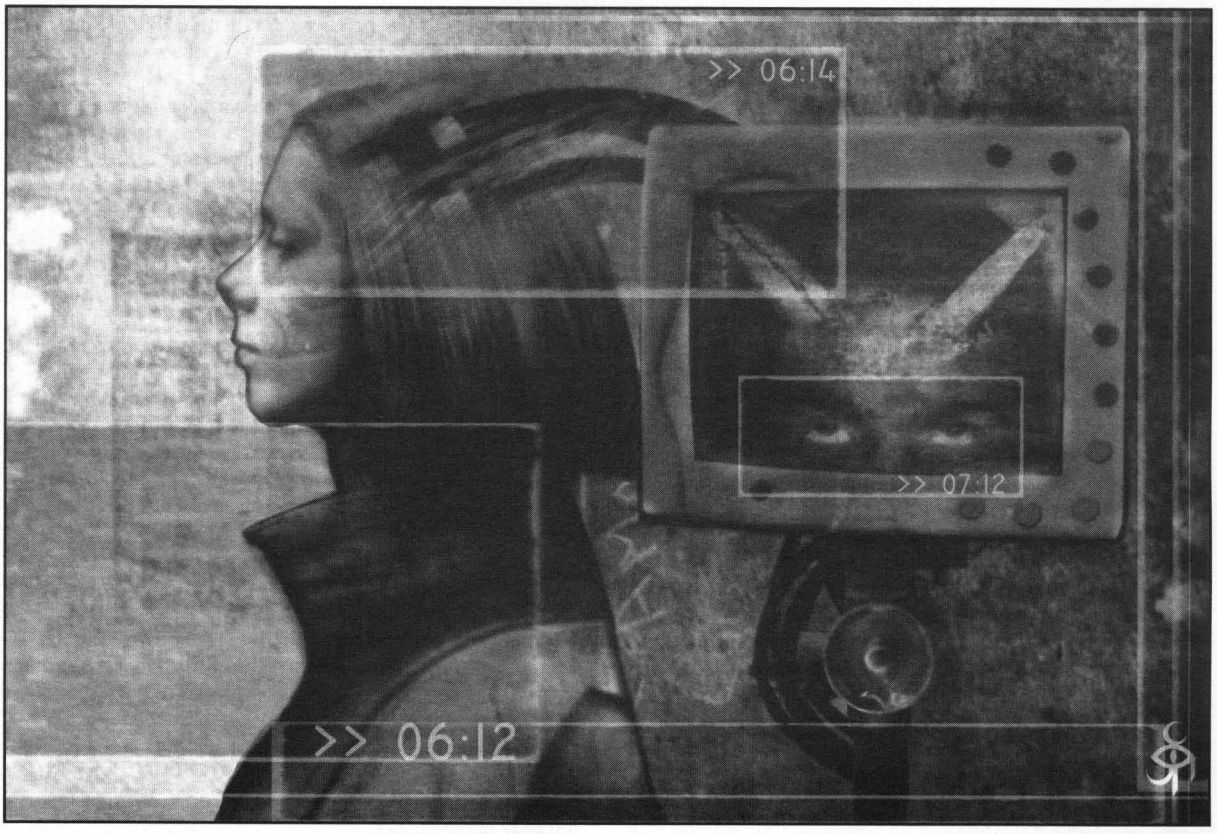
Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: The Videomancer must be carrying a videotape to use this spell. When he starts it, it's as if an invisible, intangible camera starts following him around, filming what he experiences. The "cameraman" controlling this instinctively focuses in on those things that would interest the Videomancer most, *even things of which the adept himself is unaware.* Thus, a Videomancer using Film at Eleven could fruitlessly search an office for clues about a conundrum, only to see the necessary documents pointed out on the tape.

The spell lasts until either (1) the tape runs out or (2) someone puts the tape in a VCR and plays it (or tapes over it).

This spell can only document things that could be seen and heard by a normal video camera. For example, in the case of the Videomancer searching an office, the camera could pan down the first page of a document if it was lying out on a desk, but if it was in a folder, only the folder would be shown. If the folder was in a file cabinet, only the closed drawer would be shown, unless someone had happened to open the drawer while searching.

Rerun

Cost: 2 minor charges
Effect: Whatever the target of this spell is experiencing seems to be old, familiar and even a little trite—nothing to get excited about, nothing really surprising. This is useful under several circumstances.



- ⇨ The Videomancer can cast this as a reaction to a stress check instead of rolling. If she does this, she doesn't have to make the roll, has no reaction, and doesn't get a Hard or Failed notch.
- ⇨ If the Videomancer is startled or ambushed, she can cast this spell as a reaction to that in order to negate the advantage (social or combative) gained by the surprising party.
- ⇨ Casting it on someone else can yield either of the two aforementioned benefits, or it can also add plausibility to a certain narrow range of ruses.

This spell can be cast as a reaction to an ambush or stress check: It does not cost its caster an action in combat.

Narrowcast

Cost: 2 minor charges
Effect: The vidiot can send a message to a single person or group of people through television. The next time the target sees and hears a TV, the face of the Videomancer appears on it and delivers his message. (The length of the message depends on how strong the Videomancer's skill is. Specifically, for each point of skill, he gets one second of time "on the air.") Other people around the target do not see, hear or perceive the message. To them, it's just normal TV, be it on or off.

Edu-tainment

Cost: 2 minor charges.
Effect: The Videomancer may substitute her Videomancy skill for any Mind-based skill—but only for one roll. Need to know a vital historical fact, the uses and side effects of an obscure drug, or how to say "do not trust him" in Hovitos? This spell does it.

Mute

Cost: 2 minor charges
Effect: When cast on an individual, that person cannot speak for five minutes. This duration can be increased by five minutes for every additional minor charge spent.

The other noises of the person—footsteps, cracking joints and the noises of trod-upon twigs—are also softened. Someone who has been muted gets a +20% bonus when trying to move silently.

Videomancy Significant Formula Spells

Dubba-Dubba-Dumbin' it Down

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: The target of this spell loses points off his Mind stat. The reduction is equal to the casting roll, without the ones place die. (That is, if you rolled 43, it would be a 40 point reduction. Trust me, it's easier to lower a Mind score by a round number.) The spell lasts a number of minutes equal to the roll.

Remember: A mind-based skill cannot be higher than an individual's Mind stat. Knock someone down to Mind 10, their highest Mind skill becomes 10%. If someone's Mind drops below 20, their Charm and Lie scores suffer a 20% penalty as well (to a minimum of 1%).

artwork by Samuel Araya

Laff Riot

Cost: 2 significant charge
Effect: This spell replaces reality's normal rules with the conventions of a situation comedy. If cast in combat, it lasts a number of rounds equal to the tens place of the roll. If cast in a calm situation, the duration is in minutes.

In a Laff Riot combat, no one can get seriously hurt. Period. All gunshots miss, automatically, even critical successes. No physical damage can exceed 5 points. Instead of injury, targets are subject to humiliating pratfalls. (Use the Knock Down, Dazed or Blind effects from pages 55-56.) Keep in mind, this effect works on *everyone*. The vidiot and his friends are protected, but so are the guys attacking him.

Outside combat, Laff Riot can still be used to protect against physical harm. It won't save you if you jump in front of a truck, but as long as you're trying not to get hurt, you're far less likely to wind up injured.

This *can* backfire. Trying risky things while 'protected' by Laff Riot can wind up leaving you physically safe but embarrassed and inadvertently hilarious. For example, a vidiot uses Laff Riot when he's trying to jump from one fire escape to the next. He's unlikely to plunge to his doom, but he's far *more* likely to wind up stuck by the seat of his pants, arms flailing wildly, amusingly helpless. At least until the spell wears off.... As a rule of thumb, if a vidiot uses Laff Riot and a rolled failure would normally indicate damage, have it turn into some sort of comic gaffe instead.

Family Drama

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: The target of this spell becomes intensely emotionally interested in the Videomancer (or in a person of the vidiot's choosing). This is not a romantic or sexual interest, but more akin to one's feelings for a parent or close sibling. Whatever the focus person of the spell says to the spell's target is interpreted (where at all possible) as having a tremendous emotional subtext. "I'll have a large coke and fries," for example, might prompt the response "Oh, it's always about *you* and *your* needs, isn't it? Just because I'm working at this burger joint doesn't mean I don't have feelings!" On the other hand, something as simple as "Get the fuck away from me!" might prompt a mournful response like "Hey, don't shut me out. I just want to help you... but you don't make it easy when you say such hurtful things!"

Using Family Drama to distract and harass can provoke a variety of stress checks, on several different gauges. (The GM decides, based on the circumstances.) Realizing that you've been magically manipulated into strong feelings for someone who might be a complete stranger is worth some Unnatural checks. Being rejected by someone you *think* is your boon companion can sting your Helplessness gauge. But if the focus person doesn't know what's happening, the checks are unlikely to be higher than 2 or 3.

On the other hand, if the focus person treats the target well and plays along with the whole "Seventh Heaven" vibe, he can reap the benefits of having a sympathetic new friend—at least for a while. Loans can be tearfully made, favors given and trust abused. ("I know you really shouldn't let me onto the base, sarge... but can't you bend the rules this once? After all we've been through together?") Depending on how reasonable the request is, refusing can provoke Self checks. The spell won't make people act out of character—some people just aren't going to hold up a bank, even if their mom or their brother asks them to. But refusing a more reasonable request (like the loan of a car, or a place to stay for the night) forces a Self check at rank 4 or 5.

If a vidiot casts Family Drama on a friend (or acquaintance), the target reinterprets their past to explain their sudden emotional bond. (Usually, it doesn't feel sudden to the target. The psychological tenor of memories are confabulated so that the bond "was always there.")

Using it on someone who's been misused in the past—or someone who just plain hates the vidiot's guts—gets a different reaction. It's "love scorned." The target won't physically attack unless really pushed—and even then it's probably going to be one blow, followed by a horrified gasp. The vidiot can expect a vigorous bitching out, but that's a lot better than getting shot or stabbed.

The spell is instantly broken if the focus attacks the target physically, or if the target fails a stress check. Otherwise, it lasts for forty-seven minutes (which is about how long an "hour long" TV drama lasts, once you cut out the commercials).

Watching the Detectives

Cost: 3 significant charges
Effect: Ever notice how, on those old-time detective and cop shows, the hero can get a savage whipping in one scene, but be running around just fine in the next scene? Sure, maybe he's got a bandage on his arm, but his activities aren't impaired.

On TV, this is a handy plot cheat. For Videomancers, it's a handy *reality* cheat.

When this spell is cast, the damage from one source is reduced to a single point. If someone's been beaten within an inch of his life, he's still okay—there's just a thin trickle of blood from the corner of his mouth. Similarly, a gunshot can be redefined as "just a graze." (For the purposes of this spell, one gunshot is "damage from one source," but all hand-to-hand damage from a single individual in a single combat is "damage from one source.")

This is a powerful effect, and it's subject to a few limitations. The healing has to be "plausible." First and foremost, that means the spell has to be cast immediately after the damage happened. If you got your leg broken a day ago, it just doesn't make sense for it suddenly to be a little bruise. Secondly, it can't do anything against instant kills—01 rolls, lethal blast damage and the like. (Rule of thumb: A gaping chest wound or decapitation cannot be brushed off with this.)

Finally, this spell can only be cast on an individual once per combat. A Videomancer can protect himself once and each of his friends once, but that second gunshot is going to do the trick.

Confession!

Cost: 2 significant charges
Effect: The target of the spell feels a strong compulsion to reveal the most shocking thing about himself in defiant and semi-articulate terms. In other words, he acts just like he's on the lowest class of daytime talk show. "Yeah, I risk my life fer magick power! Plus, I'm a member of an occult conspiracy run by a power-mad billionaire. You got a f***in' problem wi' dat, bitch?" (Strangely enough, if the target says "fuck," "shit," "asshole" or similar vulgarities

while the spell is in effect, the word gets silenced in the middle. Enough of it gets through that an informed listener can fill in the blanks, of course.)

This compulsion lasts about ten minutes. It can be resisted, but doing so forces a rank 10 Isolation challenge.

For an extra two charges, the vidiot can pick what secret the victim feels compelled to spill. He must know (or have a pretty close suspicion) beforehand. If he guesses wrong, the spell has its normal effect.

> **Example:** Olivia the Videomancer thinks her boyfriend has been stepping out on her. In fact, he's been sneaking around so much because he's planning to surprise her with a getaway to the Poconos. She spends 4 sigs and concentrates on making him confirm his infidelity. Instead he blurts out "Yeah, I torched the McClusky's house as a kid. It was an accident! Besides, it only burned a little bit!"

Days of Our One Life to Live

Cost: 5 significant charges
Effect: Atlanta Videomancers call this spell "The Chinese Curse" because it ensures that the target's life becomes much more interesting and dramatic. This never happens in a pleasant way, either.

While the Videomancer can't control or even predict what will happen to the target, the following effects have occurred.

- The target discovers (or *apparently* discovers) his wife in a compromising position . . . with his *own brother!*
- A sudden blow to the head causes amnesia.
- Kidnapping of the target, of a loved one, for money, for revenge, by an obsessed stalker—whatever.
- A mysterious illness, frequently leading to a coma.
- A bad car wreck (or similar accident), frequently leading to either a coma, or amnesia, or both.
- Just about any form of romantic misfortune imaginable.

In other words, the victim gets hit with all the baggage of being a character in a stereotypical soap opera—without the advantage of being surrounded by good-looking people with few sexual scruples.

Days of Our One Life to Live cannot kill anyone, however. Someone may get kidnapped and threatened with death, but the kidnapper never really carries it out. The lingering illness may be *almost* fatal, but a cure is always miraculously discovered in time. It may seem like the boat wreck certainly killed the victim, but rest assured, he washed up on shore somewhere.

It can't kill. Though sometimes its victims wish it did.

Days of Our One Life to Live lasts a number of days equal to the vidiot's casting roll.

Live on Tape

Cost: 7 significant charges
Effect: To cast this spell, the Videomancer must roll a success higher than the target's Soul score. A low successful roll means that the spell fails, but the vidiot does not lose his charges. The vidiot must also have a television set on his person as he casts it.

If successful, a vital element of the victim's personality is removed from his body and stored in a television. It's not quite the soul (though many vidiots refer to it as such) but it is the element responsible for emotion. Without this vital spark, an individual is reduced to an automaton, going through the motions of his life, doing the things he's always done – pretty much operating on force of habit. Like golems, these deadened physical shells can go undetected for a while if no one was emotionally close. They still have all their skills, but no passions and no obsession. (They show up as "blanks" to aura sight.) Furthermore, they're unmotivated to do anything outside their usual routine. A cop's shell walks its beat, but only chases a purse snatcher for a few steps before losing interest.

The aura stored in the TV is in unspeakable torment. It's not physical pain – there's no body to suffer. Instead, it's a keen sense of loss, horror and personal violation. And spirits without bodies have no way to get used to any unpleasant sensation. They have no brain chemicals putting it in perspective. Every moment of the torture is as keen as the first instant.

It's possible that the stored aura can remember things or use Mind skills, but since all they do is scream, no one's really sure. (Besides, it's not like there's any way to communicate with them. The Videomancer and his friends can see and hear the screaming image of the soul, but there's no way it can see or hear *them,* any more than the characters on *Mall Police* can know of their viewers.)

The Videomancer can release the captured spirit at any time. If he does, it returns to the body immediately, but must make rank 10 stress checks in Self and Isolation immediately. Destroying the TV also frees the individual within. If the TV is turned off, it has no particular effect on the aura: It's still there when the set is turned on again.

Videomancy Major Effects

Bring a TV character to life, permanently. Or cause a TV special effect to manifest in the real world for a time.

What You Hear: The Videomancer

When Videomancer Gina Morris gets thrown in jail (which is often), she finds it invaluable to use random magick to convince her cellmates to watch the evening news (which is her fetish program). She calls this "the water cooler effect" and is considering making it a formula spell.

Paddy Orleans has fetishized a number of shows, and he needs a lot of significant charges to fuel his habit of calling fictional characters to life for half-hour increments. Usually he does this for the purposes of bizarre sexual gratification, but at least one guy who pissed him off is now in an asylum, convinced that Mr. Clean and the Pillsbury Doughboy are going to jump him again the next time he sleeps.

Creating New Formula Spells

Formula spells are great, aren't they? Reliable, predictable, dependable—not adjectives that get much play in the occult underground. Naturally, many adepts who've had successes with spontaneous effects want to make those effects into trusty formulas. Unfortunately, this is hard to do with an established school of magick. In fact, the more established a system is, the harder it becomes to develop new formulas.

When Daphnee Lee had the flash of insight that let her create Pornomancy, it was an ecstasy of mystic creation. It seemed to her that endless effects were possible in that first second, when the reality of the Naked Goddess seemed to make everything in the world make sense. However, as soon as she decided one thing that Pornomancy stood for, as soon as she set any priority at all, it necessarily cut off options. Everything couldn't be the most important thing: once the most important thing (the central paradox) had been realized, many options became contradictory, impossible, or (worst of all) irrelevant. The more detailed the school became, the more it defined what it *couldn't* be. A system of mystic thought has to stand for various things, and since every idea has antithetical ideas (taboos and heresies), definition reduces possibility. For every thing a school can do, it rules out hundreds or thousands of other ideas.

What you run into is a kind of progression where it gets more and more difficult to shoehorn new effects into the old concept. The first several formulas are very easy, but they get harder and harder as time goes on. By the time a dozen rote spells are developed, the idea has become fairly specific and restrictive.

Of course, the same school can mean very different things to different people, so it's easier to make up new formulas if you don't have your beliefs cast into someone else's mold. The more formula spells you learn, the more pegged down your vision of the school becomes. This has two effects. One is that it makes it harder to learn other rote spells. The other is that it becomes harder to cast spontaneous magick. But we'll get to that presently. Right now, you probably want the rules for making formulas of your own.

Mechanics

Once you've decided you want to formulize an effect you can already do as a random spell (see p. 116), spend 1 experience point every time you cast it successfully after that. When you've spent five points that way, you can attempt a ritual to formulize the spell. (If you cast the spell randomly without spending the experience point, that does not count towards the five-cast minimum but neither does it disrupt your plans for the formula.)

After your five successes, you've kind of got the hang of the effect and you can script a ritual to symbolically tie the action to your understanding of the system. This should be pretty elaborate—and after all, it's more fun to come up with a baroque and involved ritual than to just do some point twinking. The symbolism doesn't have to make sense to anyone but you, but you should be able to justify or explain every part of it. Naturally, you have to spend some charges (explained later) and there's no guarantee of success.

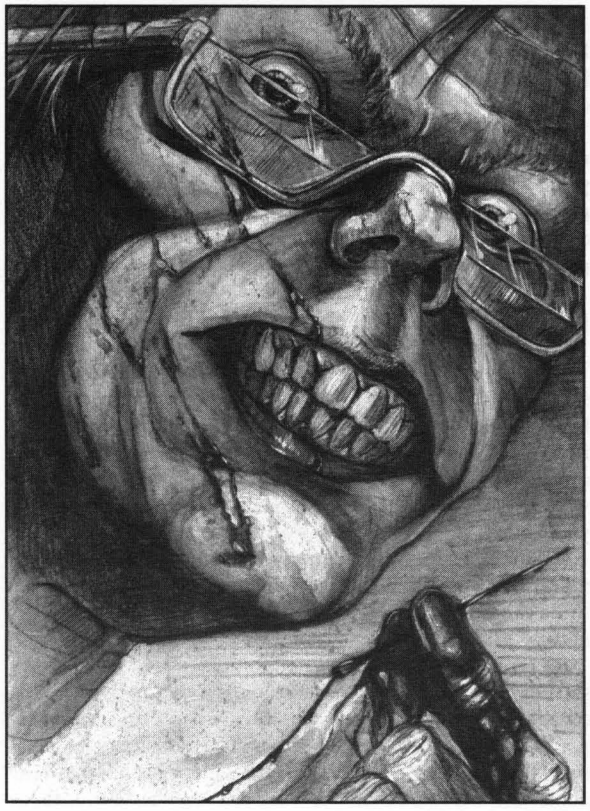
If you've done the spell five times, your GM has to have a pretty good feel for its effects, so she tells you how much it will cost you to cast the spell once it becomes a formula. Usually the charge cost goes down, though it can (rarely) increase if the GM decides she's been letting you off easy. If the spell is going to be a minor-charge spell, you spend its cost plus one significant charge. If you already know fourteen formula spells (either minor or significant) you have to pay more. Specifically, it's another significant charge to get the fifteenth spell, two charges for the sixteenth, and so forth. Spend the charges, make a roll against your skill. If you succeed, the spell becomes a formula. If you fail, you lose the charges and get a significant unnatural effect or two. (Your GM may give you bonuses to your skill percentile if your ritual is particularly elaborate or cool—her choice.)

To make a significant formula spell, you can spend one major charge and roll for your ritual. Or you can spend the spell's cost plus two significant charges, along with *two* additional significant charges for every rote past fourteen—so if it's your fifteenth spell, that's two extra. Your sixteenth is four extra, and so forth. If you botch this roll, you lose *all* the charges you're carrying and you get a loose major unnatural effect (or its equivalent in significant and minor effects) rolling around, too.

Any time you complete one of these rituals, you have to take a stress check against the Unnatural. It's a rank-5 check if you're trying to create a minor-charge formula. If you're going after a significant spell, it's a rank-10 stress. You make this check regardless of whether the ritual succeeds or fails. (Though if it fails, you may have to make some Self or Helplessness rolls as well.)

Mechanics Outline

I. **Cast the spell five times** as a random spell, spending an experience point each time. Your GM decides what the spell should cost as a formula.
II. **Develop a ritual** tying the new effect to the current system.
III. **Perform the ritual.**
  A. **Minor formula spell.**
    1. **Calculate the cost in charges.**
      a. Spend the minor charges the formula version costs.
      b. Spend an additional significant charge.
      c. Spend one more significant charge for every formula spell you know past fourteen (including the new one).
    2. **Roll against your skill.**
      a. If it succeeds, you get a new formula spell.
      b. If it fails, you lose the charges you put up and unnatural phenomena occur.
    3. **Make a rank-5 Unnatural stress check.**
  B. **Significant formula spell.**
    1. **Spend one major charge *or* calculate the cost in charges.**
      a. Spend the significant charges the formula version costs.
      b. Spend two more significant charges.
      c. Spend two more significant charges for every formula spell you know past fourteen (including the new one).
    2. **Roll against your skill.**
      a. If it succeeds, you get a new formula spell.
      b. If it fails, you lose *all* your charges and unnatural phenomena occur.
    3. **Make a rank-10 Unnatural stress check.**



Example: In the course of his jobs (as cop and as Sleeper) Cletus Crowe meets a lot of people. He's got no particular gift for remembering names, so one day he decides to use Cliomancy to remember the name of someone he encounters whom he's met before. It's not a use of the spell Trivia because the fact he's trying to dredge up isn't common knowledge, but (his GM decides) it does fall within the random magick domain of Cliomancy because it deals with history and memory. Cletus casts the spell for four minor charges, and it's useful. He decides to formulize it.

The next five times Cletus uses his spell (which he starts calling "Total Recall") he spends an experience point as well. This represents him thinking about the spell, studying it, and concentrating on how and why it *has* to work. When he's spent the five points, he's ready to try a ritual.

Cletus decides that for his ritual he's going to read every entry in an antique phone book from his city. His GM decides that being able to remember someone's name is a pretty mild trick, so she says the completed formula spell costs but a single minor charge. However, his ritual is going to require a significant charge just to get started. Furthermore, Cletus already knows fifteen formula spells. Total Recall will kick him up to sixteen, so that's two more significant charges (one for his fifteenth spell, one for his sixteenth).

Cletus slogs his way through the phone book, spends three significant charges and one minor one, then rolls against his Cliomancy: 50%. Sadly for him, he rolls a 97 and fails even with a flip-flop. Unless he can re-roll for some reason, he can kiss his experience points and charges goodbye—and probably say "howdy" to some form of significant unnatural effect.

Learning New Formula Spells

Learning a new formula from someone else is a lot easier than building one from scratch. At least, it's easier in terms of the objective effort of gaining the spell. One must, however, consider the bullshit rigmarole that any given teacher is almost certain to inflict on a given student. Mileage varies, of course: one teacher may agree to teach you a new formula for a flat $20,000 in gold bullion. Another may require favors of a more personal nature. A third could set up a simple exchange like "Wanna learn my spell? Okay. But you gotta get all wetworky on this punk who pissed me off. Bring me his heart and I'll teach you the spell. No, the ears ain't good enough."

Once the mentor has been mollified (or compelled, if you're into that sort of thing), it takes about a month of the standard mystic training hooplah—riddles, weird mental exercises, chanting, meditation, *etc.* During this time, the student is expected to be studying about eight hours a day. At the end of that time, spend 5 experience points for a minor spell, or 10 for a significant one, and it's yours.

Drawbacks of Formula Spells

As stated earlier, there's a problem with getting your magick to do something specific and reliable: it becomes harder to do things that are spontaneous and unique. Magick is like a map that creates the land it describes. When a section goes from *terra incognita* to a known quantity, all the other things that *could* have been there are, by definition, no longer present.

Thus, an adept who gets too hung up on certainty has a tendency to calcify. His definition of his particular -mancy becomes stagnant, rigid, and predictable.

In game terms, it becomes harder to cast spontaneous spells. An adept can know fourteen formula spells and still retain enough flexibility to work well on the fly. Once a fifteenth formula is learned, that adept takes a -10% penalty to his skill when casting spontaneous works. Each additional rote spell increases the penalty by 10%, until the adept loses the ability to do any impromptu effects.

There's a way out of this, of course: what an adept loses in flexibility, he can compensate for with raw power. Each 10% of penalty can be bought off with a minor charge—for that one spontaneous spell.

(Note that ignorance doesn't make spontaneous magick any *easier.* If you only know three formula spells, it doesn't give some farcical +100% skill boost with off-the-cuff sorcery. Similarly, paying a minor charge can only *offset the penalty*. It can't make a spell any easier if there's no penalty.)

Creating New Schools

If none of the schools presented in this rulebook float your boat, you can always make up your own school of magick. *Caveat Emptor* though: these rules are really flexible and put a lot of design power in your hands. Use them maturely. You should create your school in concert with the GM, so you build something that fits into the game instead of something that warps the game to fit around it. GMs should design new schools to challenge you, not just to push you around or give you insurmountable obstacles. This should be self-evident, but every time a system provides this kind of creative

input, it's open to abuse from power-mad min-maxers. All we can do is encourage you to exercise caution and discretion. Anyone who fools the GM into letting him make an uber-powerful or ultra-versatile school of magick makes his magick the center of the game—at the expense of the GM's plot and the rest of the group's fun. A GM who uses these rules to make up powerful schools of magick had better expect the group to try the same trick—but an arms race based on dinking the rules isn't really what this should be about.

Enough about the wrong way to use these rules. The *right* way to use them is to create new, innovative, truly unique expressions of your ideas. You shouldn't have to use these because "the schools here aren't damaging enough"—you should use them because you had a great idea ("Magick based on mathematical paradoxes!") that we weren't smart enough to figure out.

Rule #1: GM Veto

This may seem obvious, but we're going to play the GM king card one more time. Your GM knows better than anyone else what is likely to come up in the course of play, which means that she has a better idea of what's going to wreck everyone's fun. An effect that may seem completely innocuous to you may be exactly the right monkey-wrench to ruin the GM's plans.

Furthermore, your mileage may vary from game to game. One GM may like your style of magick just fine; another may insist that you change it radically. Here's the thing: they're *both* right. Campaigns are different, they have different styles and different needs and, consequently, different vulnerabilities.

To sum up: when the GM says no, it means no.

Rule #2: Paradox

As we've said, every school of magick is based on a symbolic tension or a central contradiction: Plutomancy requires you to acquire money, and forbids you to spend it. Pornomancy requires you to have sex, but forbids you to have sex for the normal reasons (love, fun or reproduction).

Your school needs one of these too. Ideally, it should take a warped reflection of everyday concerns (money or booze, for example) and put a mystic and philosophical spin on it. These ideas are very abstract, and they're supposed to be. Magick is all about finding the underlying laws of the world, and using those laws to manipulate the invisible powers of reality.

Rule #3: Taboo

A taboo is something that is anathema to your magick style—something that contradicts or defiles its major precepts. It should come as no surprise that these taboos are often intimately connected to the way "normal" people see or do things. Normal people stay sober, see a doctor when they're sick, and generally try to use the best and most modern technology when they build something. Those are the logical things to do. But logic (at least reasonable, mundane, everyday logic) has little place in magickal thinking. The three things mentioned are taboos to the boozehounds, fleshwarpers, and clockworkers because of their symbolic meaning, not their logical effects.

That's the esoteric, fancy-pants side of picking a taboo. For game balance, your taboo should also be a headache for you to avoid—either from a practical standpoint (most drunks sober up *eventually*) or a behavioral standpoint.

Taboos give magick teeth. They're part of the price of admission. If magick was just a free ride, all gain and no pain, everyone would do it. But when you have to pay a price, and that price is normalcy—well, a lot of people want off that ride fast. Would you be willing to obtain mystical power if it meant you could never bathe again?

Rule #4: Charges

The other price of admission is paid in charges. Some schools have easy ways to get charges, others are more difficult. All of them, however, require behavioral concessions from the sorcerer. You can never get a charge through an accidental action, and you can never use magick to perform whatever it is you do to get charged up. (Some cherries let you get free charges, but that's a special case.)

Minor charges require minor concessions, obviously. Significant charges require a lot more, and major charges—those should always be insanely difficult to generate, and usually risky as well.

As a rule of thumb, a non-textbook magician, when starting out, should be able to generate a minor charge a couple times a day—more often if the school's taboos are particularly harsh, less often if they can hold charges a long time. If a starting magician can get a significant charge *at all*, it should be rare—once a week or even once a month. Major charges? Probably once in a lifetime.

Rule #5: Random Magick

Once you know how you're paying for effects, you can start thinking about the kinds of effects you want to buy. This should be closely tied to your paradox, your taboo, and your charges. It's often a good idea to have a single word that sums up what your magick revolves around: "acquisition" or "affinity" or "the body" are examples from the schools we built.

Keep in mind that what your magick *means* should determine what it can *do*. You can go the other way 'round, of course, but it's much less likely to produce anything really original.

Rule #6: Formula Spells

Now that you know how your magick works and what it does (in general), you can come up with what it does specifically. Write up about five minor and five significant formula spells for your school of magick, making sure your GM agrees about effects, costs, and particulars. (Yes, the rulebook schools get more formula spells; but you have to pay for having your school tailor-made.)

Rule #7: Balance

This is the trickiest, yet most important part. While many of you out there are going to want *your* school of magick to do everything better than all the others, it's just not allowed. Otherwise a game of challenges becomes a boring game of inferior opponents, straw men, and paper tigers. You might as well watch television.

A balanced school may have advantages, but it pays for them with drawbacks. We can't give you rules for balance: it's something you feel more than something you know. All we can do is offer examples and guidelines.

Dipsomancy has some big advantages: it's easy to get charged up, and it's very versatile. These are paid for with big flaws. It's also easy to *lose* charges, and the more charged up you are, the more penalties all your other skills take.

Similarly, fleshwarping has big advantages: you can hurt people real bad, heal people real good, and you can be the prettiest boy on the block when you're not shoving pins under your fingernails. The downside is that you're going to be injured almost constantly, and there's not a lot you can do about it.

Customizing Old Schools

Every adept is different, and every adept's vision of their school is unique, even when they have identical effects. If you wish (and your GM agrees) you can alter one more of the elements of a stock-standard school in order to give your particular take on it.

Use the guidelines given for creating new schools, while changing an element (or elements) of an old school. The most important element is, of course, balance.

Suppose, for example, you're changing Dipsomancy so the taboo is less of a bruiser. You want it fixed so you don't lose your charges when you sober up, you lose charges whenever you refuse a drink that someone offers you. That's a powerful change because (1) it lets you carry charges a lot longer, (2) it lets you cast spells sober and (3) enemies who are trying to taboo you are in for a nasty surprise when they jump you after they think you should be tabooed out. You can make this advantageous change, but you have to pay for it somewhere else, ideally somewhere that fits in with your vision of why your Dipsomancy is different. You might decide that your particular take focuses a little more on alcohol as a social tool. Thus, instead of getting minor charges whenever you take a drink, you get a minor whenever someone gives you a drink. Furthermore, instead of using a power vessel, you get significant charges when a complete stranger spontaneously offers you a drink. Now you've got a very interesting Dipsomancy variant that's balanced. (Or not: individual GMs may decide it's not enough.) You can keep your charges a long time, but you can't get them by yourself. You don't need a significant vessel, but you do need a steady supply of strangers. (When does a stranger stop being a stranger? Probably when he tells you his name. Or when he lies about his name.)

Any element of the school's structure can be customized, if you're willing to work out the details with the GM. You can base Epideromancy on anorexia instead of cutting. Or you could set up Epideromancy so that you only charge up when others harm you—at your masochistic behest. Or change the taboo so you must take fanatical care of your body, tending to every injury as soon as it's received. As long as you're willing to make the other changes your GM wants in order to make the power level balance, go nuts. One easy fix for a too-strong variant: make every formula spell cost one more charge of the appropriate type.

Ideas that look good on paper may have unforeseen consequences in play. It may turn out that your variant school is weaker than you thought. A kindly GM may let you go back and tweak it more to iron out unforeseen difficulties, or she may just say "Tough noogies. You're the one who changed it." On the other hand, if your variant school is stronger and is unbalancing your GM's stories, she has the absolute right to ask you to change stuff. It may seem sad, but it's necessary for the fun of the rest of the group—no one wants to be the Baker Street Irregulars while you hog the spotlight as Sherlock Holmes.

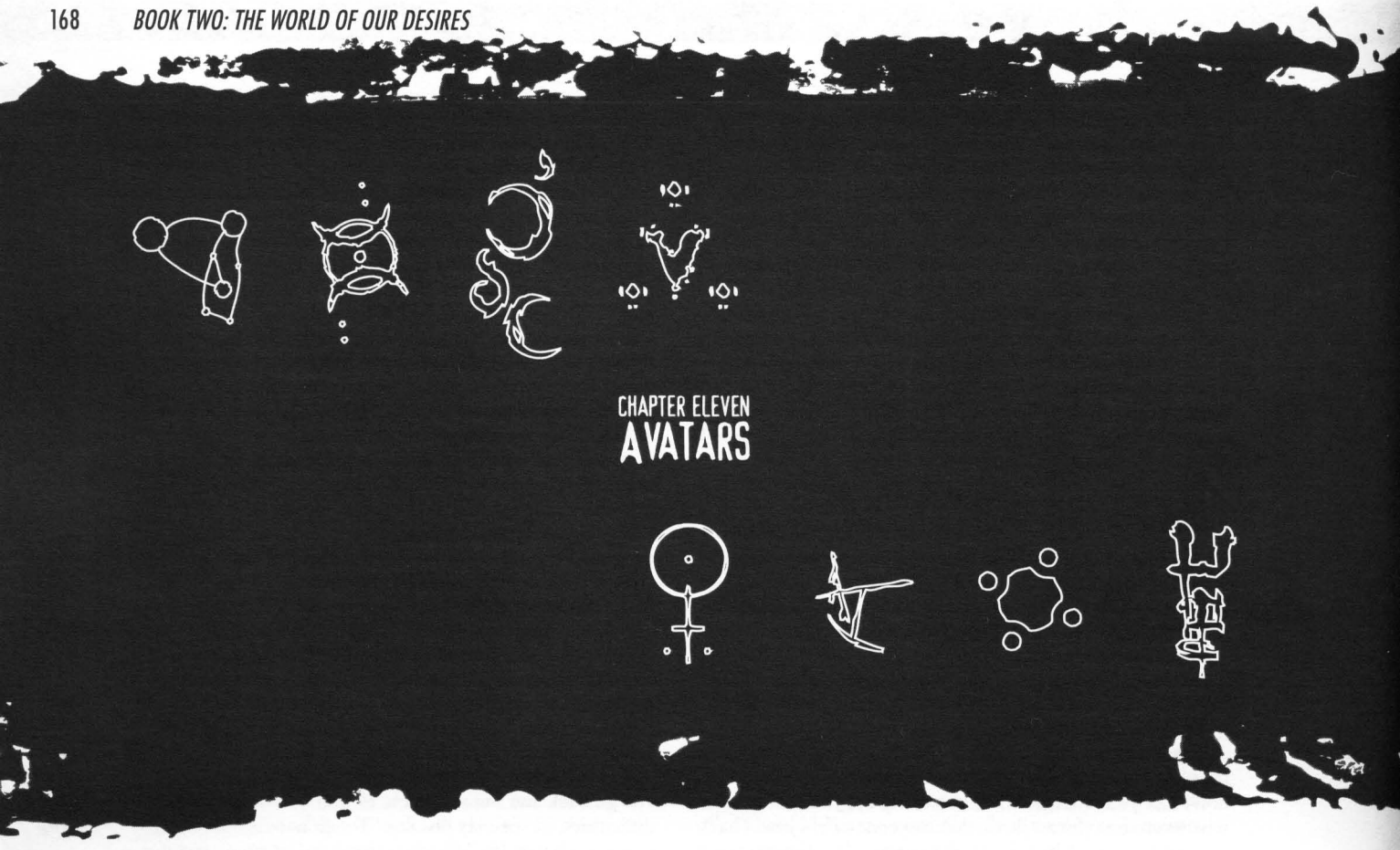
Something to Think About

Mancy, Magy, and Urgy

Technically, the various schools of magick—Dipsomancy, Pornomancy, *etc.*—should actually be written out as Dipso*magy*, Porno*magy*, and so forth. The suffix "-mancy" refers to magickal divination, whereas "-magy" means more general forms of magick. Even more technically, a more etymologically correct suffix would be "-urgy," giving us Dipsourgy, Pornourgy, *etc.* Regardless, "-mancy" is what passed into common currency among the new wave of adepts, and the occult underground is stuck with it—the way normal folks are stuck with people who use "orientated" when they should use "oriented," or who use "literally" when they shouldn't use anything at all. Old-school occultists and scholars tend to make a point of using either "-magy" or "-urgy," which makes novice adepts look at them funny. Life goes on.

Chaos Magick

There's a real-world style of magick-working known as **chaos magick** that has nothing to do with Entropomancy or the chaos mages of the occult underground. Chaos magick is a johnny-come-lately style of Western magick that more or less does what voodoo has been doing for 300-plus years, drawing together a variety of personal and cultural symbols into an anarchic, idiosyncratic non-system. The overlap of slang between "chaos magick" and "chaos mages" annoys some people. In fiction, it's easy to avoid confusing, overlapping slang like this—but in the real world, language is a virus beyond human control and things like this just happen. Much like the -mancy/-magy/-urgy controversy, adepts just deal with the chaos issue in whatever way makes them happy.



CHAPTER ELEVEN
AVATARS

You live in harmony with the cosmos, acting in accordance with what is and what will ever be. Where adepts use the force of their will to bend reality to their obsessed vision, avatars like you move within the will of the cosmos, harnessing its natural power and riding the wave that flows from the heart of the world.

In the short term, adepts are often more powerful. This power is an illusion. Like that of civilization, adept power is temporal.

In the long term, you rule. Your power is true. Like that of faith, avatar power is eternal.

Reality demands far less of you than adepts demand of themselves. They believe there is no joy without suffering, no price without pain. You know the truth: swimming against the river gets you nowhere, but swimming with it puts the entire channel at your service.

Go with the flow.

ARCHETYPES

Six billion people can't be wrong. All of our minds, churning away and interacting with each other, do their best to make sense of the world. Our brains rely on pattern recognition to pull meaning from the vast quantity of data our senses deliver. We know faces better than names, can pick our children out of a crowd, understand what it means when water falls from the sky because it's happened before.

The strongest, truest patterns we recognize are **archetypes**. These are human personalities and roles that are common to every culture, and they are understood so profoundly that they are a universal conceptual language. Anyone can pantomime the shaking fists of the Warrior, cradle the imaginary infant of the Mother, mimic the steady walk and far gaze of the Pilgrim. Every culture has different names for these roles, but their meaning burns clear with symbolic purity.

There are many, many archetypes. They are invested with the power of mass consciousness, the product of billions of people thinking about them every day without even knowing it. We make them more potent with every thought.

They are not gods. They are the creation of humanity, and they retain their vitality only as long as we give it to them. If they are not obedient to us, they are at least true to themselves. They are loyal to what we made them. The force of the Warrior's presence in the minds of humans may shatter peace treaties, blow up school buses, and kill presidents, but it is not because the Warrior hates us: like the faithful dog who drools on your slippers, the Warrior only does what the Warrior knows to do.

For they truly *are* presences. They *do* have power. They *can* walk among us. And the human face they wear is no mask, no mask at all.

AVATARS

The face of the archetype is your face. You are an avatar, one who walks the path of an archetype and behaves in accordance with its role. You mimic it, the way impressionists mimic the voices and mannerisms of celebrities. A talented impressionist gets on national television and builds

a career out of diligent replication. A talented avatar swims with the river of the archetype's power and is pulled by its cresting current into the deeps of magick.

Many avatars walk the archetypal paths and do not know it. Because they are not aware of the path they walk, they often stray. They are unable to access much of the archetype's magick because of this. Straying from the path, behaving in a way that the archetype would not, violates the **taboos** of the archetype. The fewer taboos you break, the truer to the path you are, and the more of the archetype's magick you can access.

Archetype magick takes the form of **channels**. Channels are the magickal powers you wield as an avatar of the archetype you follow. Each archetype has four channels.

Some avatars know they walk a path but they know it in a different context. Rather than following an archetype, they follow one of its **masks**. A mask is a cultural identity that is magickally synonymous with an archetype. In India, a devout follower of Kali actually walks the path of the Executioner. The mask can provide a different set of symbols and even taboos that make sense for the avatar in his cultural context.

Other avatars know exactly what they are doing. They understand the invented pantheon of archetypes, and have carefully chosen the one they follow. They move steadily along the path, unlocking the greater channels.

There are rumors of avatars who have found a fifth channel, and undergone an epiphany that transmutes their lives into conscious, free-will allegories for the archetypes they serve. Some call these avatars **godwalkers**, but you have never met one. If they truly exist, they operate at a level of mystic behavior that you can now barely imagine.

And beyond that? The sky is the limit.

Becoming an Avatar

You can begin the campaign as an avatar. But if instead you wish to become one over time, this is how it happens.

Choose an archetype you want to embody. Fourteen examples are given in this chapter: The Demagogue, The Executioner, The Flying Woman, The Fool, The Masterless Man, The Merchant, The Messenger, The Mother, The MVP, The Mystic Hermaphrodite, The Pilgrim, The Savage, The True King, and The Warrior. You may also design your own with the GM's approval.

Unlike the process of becoming an adept, stepping onto the archetype's path requires no personal upheaval, no usurpation of identity. It is simple and natural, in harmony with the cosmos, and is about as difficult to begin as it is to learn to ride a bike.

You don't have to believe in the archetype's agenda. Where an adept *is* Hamlet, you are an actor *playing* Hamlet. You know there are other characters out there, other archetypes, and the path you walk is but one of many. The archetypes do not demand servitude. They merely reward loyalty.

To start walking the path, you must spend one month not breaking any taboos of the archetype you have chosen. At the end of the month, you gain the appropriate Avatar skill as a Soul-based skill, such as Avatar: The Warrior or Avatar: The Fool. It does not have to be your obsession skill, and it does not have any cherries for rolling matches. You can only have one Avatar skill at a time, but if it reaches 0% then you can start over with a different one if you wish.

You begin the Avatar skill at 1%. For each week that you strictly respect your taboos, you gain another 1 point. If in any week you violate taboo, you lose 2 points from the skill. This continues until your Avatar skill is at 11%, at which point you stop gaining points from time and start gaining them by spending experience points. You have now internalized the behaviors of the archetype sufficiently to integrate them into your daily life.

From then on, your Avatar skill only goes down if the GM believes you have violated taboo or otherwise betrayed the archetype. This usually means the loss of 1 Avatar skill point, but it can be up to 3 points for a strong violation.

Archetypes and their Avatars

Each archetype and its corresponding avatar is described here in the following format:

Attributes: These are the traits this archetype embodies and represents. The closer your actions are to these behaviors and descriptions, the closer to the archetype you are.
Taboos: These are the things that absolutely *don't fit* with this archetype. If you do any of these, you're in danger of having your skill level knocked down at the end of the session.
Masks: Beings in various religions and cultural traditions who embody that archetype. The avatar may be an active follower of the mask while being ignorant of the archetype who wears it.
Symbols: Certain objects, colors, or mystic concepts are associated with each Archetype. The more of these you have around you, the better.
Suspected Avatars in History: Famous and successful people often get that way by tapping into the power of archetypes (either consciously or by dumb luck).
Channels: The good stuff—what the skill lets you do. The higher your Avatar skill, the more channels you can access. If your attunement is slight, you can only influence reality a little bit. If your attunement is strong, you can do a whole lot more. In game terms, the four channels each kick in at different levels of skill. If your skill is only at 10%, you can't use anything but the lowest channel. Once you reach 51%, you can use the second channel, and so on.



UNKNOWN ARMIES

artwork by Matt Harpold

THE DEMAGOGUE

Attributes: People want answers. The Demagogue provides them. The priest who inspires generosity and compassion in his parishioners may be channeling the Demagogue; so may the bigot on the internet, blaming economic woes on the Jews or the Communists.

The essence of the Demagogue is to provide a convincing explanation. Not necessarily a true explanation, or one that the Demagogue believes in, but one that makes superficial sense and appeals to the interests of the listener.

The power of this archetype lies in its ability to inspire belief and spur people to action. When used with foresight and wisdom, it can build communities, ease the tensions of hatred, and push people to greater exertions. When used selfishly, it can start wars, cripple societies, and turn ordinary people into a savage mob.

Taboos: Whatever doubt the Demagogue might feel, no matter what reservations might plague him privately, the Demagogue never admits he was wrong, especially not in public. There can be weaseling ("It now appears that I was given incorrect information—but the *basic premises* of my ideas are still as logical and rock-solid as ever . . .") and waffling ("Oh, you misinterpreted what I said. Here's what I *meant* . . .") but any show of ideological softness is a break with the archetype.

This doesn't mean the Demagogue can't change his position or contradict himself. Far from it—all it means is that each change and contradiction has to be presented as the logical consequence of what went before. If you said the Information Superhighway was bad last Thursday and now you're saying it's good, that's not a problem. You have many options. One is to explain that what you said last Thursday was deliberately misinterpreted by your enemies (the CIA, a crypto-fascist political conspiracy, the bleeding heart liberal press, whoever). The other is to simply bull your way through: "My position on the Information Superhighway has not changed, and I will not stand for these smears and accusations!"

Symbols: Any national flag or seal can serve as a symbol for the Demagogue. The animals associated with this Archetype include the eagle and the parrot. Demagogues are widely known for their use of slogans, and they are tied to locations where they can stand higher than an audience and speak—pulpits, soapboxes, balconies in front of a courtyard, *etc.*

Masks: Taliesin (Celtic), St. John Chrysostom and St. Paul (Christian), Hermes Argeiophontes (Greek), Loki (Norse), Martin Luther (Protestant), Ogun-Jaco or President Clermeil (Voudun)

Suspected Avatars in History: Senator Joe McCarthy is widely believed to have channeled The Demagogue (some say deliberately). Adolf Hitler almost certainly did, as did Winston Churchill.

Channels:

1%-50%: At this level, the Demagogue can make minor adjustments to the world-view of those around him. It takes about fifteen minutes to half an hour to really "explain things," but after this one-on-one conversation, the Demagogue can make a roll against his Avatar skill.

If the avatar is trying to influence someone's opinion, this roll is resolved just like a Charm or Persuasion skill. However, it can also be used to prepare someone for psychological trauma. Suppose a Demagogue sits down with you and explains that in pursuit of the Cause, you may be required to make the ultimate sacrifice for the greater good, you may be called upon to give your very life or take life from another, blah blah blah . . . You leave the conversation feeling prepared for violence, and as a consequence, you automatically succeed at the next stress check against Violence that you make that day. (You do not get a hardened mark, however.) This preparation only lasts a day and only works if the Avatar skill check was successful. If the Demagogue had warned you that you were going to see unspeakable terrors, then you could breeze through your next check against The Unnatural.

There are a couple important limitations on the use of this ability to bypass stress checks. First off, the Demagogue has to have a pretty good idea of what's coming. It's not enough to just make vague statements about how "You might experience some discomfort and, uh, you know, helplessness and stuff." The warning must be specific enough that it's clear which stress gauge is being targeted. Secondly, each person can only be shielded in one gauge at a time: if your fast-talking Demagogue buddy has prepared you to betray your values and make that Self check, he can't also prepare you for Isolation. Finally, the Demagogue can't use this skill on himself—only on others.

51%-70%: At this level, a Demagogue who makes a successful Avatar roll can get a sense of what an individual wants to believe. This skill can also be used on a crowd to sense their general mood and what they're willing to accept.

71%-90%: By now, the Demagogue has the power to create belief systems and slip them in the back door of mass consciousness. For instance, the Demagogue could decide that he wants people to believe that Ernest Hemingway was gay. All he has to do is spend a day meditating on the idea, then make an Avatar roll. If successful, the Demagogue doesn't even have to *tell* anyone: people worldwide who are thinking about Hemingway start to believe he might have been homosexual. They even think it's *their own idea*. Grad students write papers on it, articles are submitted to scholarly journals, spokespeople for the gay and lesbian community start mentioning him. There's no guarantee that the idea becomes mainstream, of course; the more outlandish the idea ("Roleplaying games cause tooth decay") the more likely it is to be dismissed out of hand. This power does put the notion in the marketplace of ideas, however.

91%+: At this level, the Demagogue can tell someone something and roll his Avatar skill. If the roll is a success, the person believes it—at least for a little while. This can implant very simple ideas ("You should drop your weapon"). It can also implant very complicated ones ("The CIA controls the weather with laser satellites based on alien technology, but the aliens tricked them: the satellites also beam subliminal messages down to the population to make us lethargic and weak for an eventual invasion. Only a tinfoil hat can protect you!"). The more reasonable the suggestion, the longer it lasts. If this is used to make someone perform an action blatantly contrary to his nature ("Don't shoot me; you should be killing your wife instead") the target can choose to ignore the suggestion. Doing so triggers a rank-10 Self check.



THE EXECUTIONER

Attributes: The Executioner is the embodiment of deliberate, premeditated violence. This archetype's realm is not the soldier's battlefield, nor the assassin's shadows. The Executioner carries out a death sentence. The convicted may try to escape or evade, but the Executioner is relentless in pursuit.

While some see the Executioner as an ugly necessity for a peaceful society, its role is far more often that of a servant to the powerful and vindictive. At its worst, the Executioner does not care whether it serves justice or treachery—it only serves blindly.

Taboos: The Executioner kills. It does not judge. The Executioner's powers can only be harnessed in the pursuit and destruction of an individual condemned. This condemnation can be legal or illegal, just or unjust, but the Executioner cannot pronounce it. This archetype does the bidding of a higher authority. An Executioner who goes off hunting by itself is in violation of type.

It is also a violation of type to show weakness, fear, remorse, or hesitation during an execution. An Executioner can dissociate himself from a judging authority without penalty—but not in the middle of a mission.

Symbols: Black garments, the headsman's axe, and concealed features (especially the eyes) are common to this archetype. The Executioner is also sexless: hiding or removing typical gender characteristics keeps one in line. The Tarot card of Death, and the Ace of Spades in a regular deck, both represent the Executioner. The vulture and the crow are associated with this archetype.

Masks: Sir Gawain (Arthurian), Gaius Cassius Longinus (Christian), Nemesis, the Erinnyes, and the Furies (Greek), Kali (Hindu), Cerclequitte-Ghede (Voudun)

Suspected Avatars in History: The kings of England seem to have mastered many of these avatars, ranging from the "three good knights" who killed Thomas a Becket in Canterbury Cathedral to the knave Tyrrell who smothered the Princes in the Tower. Cromwell's beheading of Charles I may have been a ritual theft of the archetype from the royal family.

Channels:

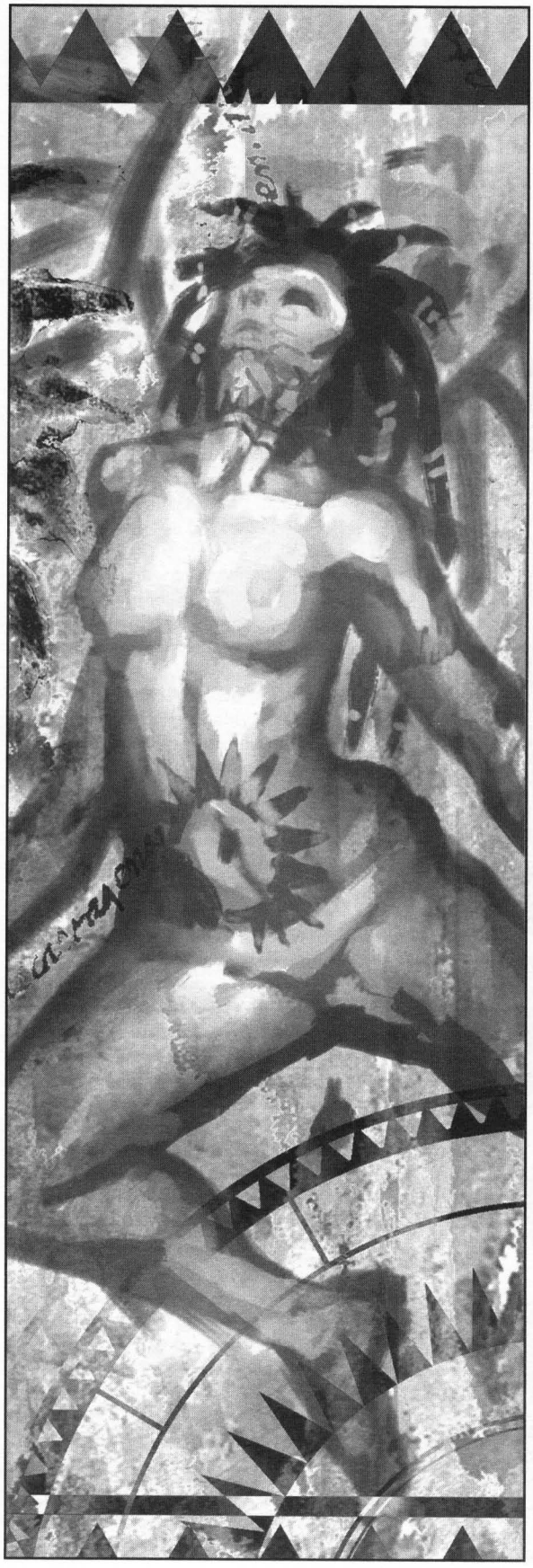
1%-50%: When a target has been named for you by someone you accept as a judge and authority, you can flip-flop any rolls you make in combat with that particular target. However, you can only have one target at a time, and you cannot change targets until your current target is dead. Furthermore, when you are given a target, you must be given a reason why he must die. You cannot be assigned a target in the middle of combat.

51%-70%: At this level, you develop the death's-head stare. If you lock eyes with someone and make a successful Avatar roll, you can force him to make a stress check against Violence (in this case, the fear of death). The level of the stress check is equal to the highest die you rolled. (For example, if you rolled 27, it would be a rank-7 check. If you rolled a 31, it would be a rank-3 check.) It takes you one action to do this in combat, and making the stress check takes your victim's next action.

71%-90%: When attempting to harm your designated target, you can add up to 20 points to any successful Firearms or Struggle roll. This roll is still a success, even if adding the points raises it above your normal skill level.

91%+: At this level, no effect can give you a negative shift to a combat roll. Blindness, magick, the powers of other avatars—nothing deters the Executioner.

artwork by Matt Harpold



artwork by Matt Harpold

THE FLYING WOMAN

Attributes: The Flying Woman is not constrained by normal rules and restrictions; instead, she dictates her own destiny. She may choose to accept the leadership of others, but it must be her free choice. She is her own highest authority, and she carves her own path in the world.

While the Flying Woman is free and unfettered, she can also be dangerously overconfident. Because she trusts herself implicitly, a single miscalculation can mean disaster.

Taboos: The Flying Woman does not submit to threats or concern herself with the opinions of others. Anyone who checks her actions out of fear of "what the neighbors might say" is not worthy of the powers of the Flying Woman.

The Flying Woman never asks anyone to do something for her when she is capable of doing it herself. Self-reliance is central to this Archetype.

No man can conduct the Flying Woman.

Symbols: Wings, airplanes, and birds are (of course) associated with the Flying Woman.

Masks: Morgana Le Fay (Arthurian), Boadacea and the Morrigan (Celtic), Mulan (Chinese), Artemis, Medea, and Penthesila (Greek), White Buffalo Woman (Lakota), Diana (Roman), Erzulie-Maitresse (Voudun)

Suspected Avatars in History: Amelia Earhart is believed by some to have brought this archetype into being, possibly vanishing in the process. Others believe Rosa Parks to have been one of its more celebrated avatars.

Channels:

1%–50%: Any failed stress check based on Self, Helplessness, or Isolation can be flip-flopped if the result is below the avatar skill. No avatar skill check is necessary.

> **Example:** Rita makes a stress check against Isolation and rolls a 90—a clear failure. She can flip-flop the roll to make it an 09—a success—because the 09 is lower than her Avatar: Flying Woman skill of 40%.

51%–70%: At this level, the avatar can actually fly. In addition to taking any other action, the Flying Woman can move 10 feet horizontally or vertically, or can just hover in the air. A roll must be made each round in combat to start/continue flying, or about every minute in a non-combat situation. (Keep in mind that using this skill too openly can result in urban legends, vendettas from antsy adepts, or even riots.)

71%–90%: The Flying Woman can overcome any attempt to restrain or imprison her. A successful Avatar: Flying Woman check unlocks doors, breaks chokes or restraining holds, and causes bonds to snap or unfasten. A roll must be made for each such hurdle to be surmounted, but this power is quite broad in its reach. For instance, if you put a Flying Woman in your back seat and started driving down the highway, one roll could unlock the door and a second could make the car stop so she could get out. This can also be used to break magickal effects—anything that influences the mind or compels action counts as an "attempt to restrain." However, it does nothing against straightforward attacks: there's a big difference between trying to imprison someone and trying to destroy her.

91%+: At this level of power, the Flying Woman's will is so powerful it warps reality around her without needing an Avatar: Flying Woman check. Nine times per day she can flip-flop *any* roll she makes if the result is under her Avatar: Flying Woman skill.



UNKNOWN ARMIES

artwork by Matt Harpold

THE FOOL

Attributes: The Fool goes where he shouldn't, says what he ought not and gets into what is forbidden. He's a walking disaster area, an accident waiting to happen, a seething focus of chaos that seems to wreck everything around him while he wanders on, blithely ignorant of what he's doing. The fool is feckless, random—and undeniably lucky. "Fortune favors the fool," even as he walks unheeding into the abyss.

The abyss represents the Fool's dark side. This archetype is by nature easy to manipulate and can readily become the pawn of those more sinister and ruthless than he is. In the case of a pure fool, that's almost everyone.

Taboos: The Fool is never exactly the sharpest knife in the drawer. If your Mind score ever goes above 50%, you're in danger of thinking too much to be a good Fool.

The Fool is also gullible. Any time a Fool avatar acts suspicious of an individual or circumstance without good reason, the link to the archetype is weakened.

Symbols: The Fool card in the tarot deck, and the Joker in a standard deck. The hobo bag-on-a-stick is one of the Fool's props, as are shoes with bells. The Fool's animal is the butterfly, and in recent years the archetype has become associated with marijuana.

Masks: Sir Dinadan and Sir Parsifal (Arthurian), Monkey (Chinese), Dionysus (Greek), Nanabozho (Ojibway), Great Hare (Winnebago), Alovi (Voudun)

Suspected Avatars in History: Peter the Hermit, who started the Crusades, was probably a Fool, as was Christopher Columbus, who stumbled on the New World despite total confusion about his destination, his course, and how far everything was. Political-minded dukes, depending on their ideologies, suspect either President Reagan or President Clinton of being avatars of the Fool.

Channels:

1%–50%: At this level you can find a common object whenever you succeed at an Avatar: Fool check, as long as there's a good possibility of it being where you're looking. This is good for finding quarters, the hairpin you need to pick a lock, the lead pipe you need to smash someone's face in . . . in more specific locations, you can find other things that would reasonably be there. You could find a ¼" socket wrench in a garage, or a picture book of Goya's artwork in a library, but not vice versa. This cannot be used for objects of great value, so no diamond rings or magick artifacts.

51%–70%: Any time you take damage, you can immediately make an Avatar: Fool check to bounce the damage onto someone nearby instead. If you succeed, someone else takes the hurt, even if it's normally impossible. If you use this ability, you lose your next action (because you've stumbled and fallen out of the way of a knife thrust, or simply because you're standing around slack-jawed at the carnage).

Keep in mind that *you* don't decide who takes the damage for you; the GM does. She may decide it randomly, or she may stick it to one of your fellow PCs. That means that using this ability a lot can make you *really* unpopular.

> **Example:** Donna the Fool and her enforcer associate Clark get into a knife fight with some punks. Clark, who's injured, decides to spend a turn dodging. His Dodge skill is an impressive 40%. Meanwhile, one of the punks shoots Donna and hits, doing 23 points of damage. Donna decides to reflect the damage, and rolls successfully to do so. The GM decides, by spinning an empty bottle on the table, that the damage goes to Clark. Clark takes 23 points of damage automatically. It doesn't get halved even though it's under his Dodge skill, and he can't roll to reduce it because it's not *his* damage; it's Donna's. He's just getting shafted with it.

71%–90%: You gain the ability to be in the right place at the right time. This is identical to the Pornomancer formula spell Synchronicity (see p. 155).

91%+: Whenever anyone tries to harm you, either conventionally or with magick, their skill automatically takes a -30% shift when used against you—you don't need to make a check. (If someone with Brawling 70% jumps you, he suddenly has Brawling 40% instead.) If you're willing to give up your next action (even if it's in the following round), you can forego this automatic protection and attempt to directly manipulate the forces of chaos to make it even harder on your opponent. You can choose to do this after you see their roll. If you do so, make an Avatar: Fool check. On a successful roll, your opponent's skill is reduced by ten times the number you rolled in the ones place. That is, if you rolled a 48, their skill would be reduced by 80%. On the other hand, if you rolled a 31, their skill would be reduced by 10%.



UNKNOWN ARMIES

artwork by Matt Harpold

THE MASTERLESS MAN

Attributes: The Masterless Man shares some characteristics with the Pilgrim and the Flying Woman, while being distinct from both. Like the Pilgrim, the Masterless Man wants a higher purpose, but unlike the Pilgrim he has not found it. Like the Flying Woman, he is autonomous and possesses a powerful will, but the Masterless Man is not free by choice. Often he is someone who has lost his purpose (either empirically or through disillusionment) and now seeks a new one.

Some believe the Masterless Man archetype began in Japan as the *ronin*—a samurai whose master is dead, leaving behind a servant with no one to serve. In traditional fiction, the *ronin* wanders the countryside, battling bandits or working as a mercenary. In the U.S., a similar fictional trope is the western gunfighter.

At the core, the Masterless Man is suspended between conflicting desires. He serves the forces of order (even if it's a cruel or totalitarian order) in which he has no place. He longs for the justification of a higher purpose, but is too pragmatic and suspicious to dedicate himself like the Pilgrim. He is the chaos that fights chaos, which is why the gunfighter or *ronin* always dies or moves on at the end of the story; his skills have protected a civilization which has no place for deadly wanderers.

Taboos: The Masterless Man must never give his loyalty completely. He can be a mercenary, but only on his own terms, and never for very long.

The Masterless Man does not settle down. Owning a home, land, or more property than you can pack up and move in 12 hours weakens any link to the Archetype.

There are no female avatars for the Masterless Man.

Symbols: The restless wave is a symbol of the Masterless Man (*ronin* means "wave man"). So are dirty boots, unshaven cheeks (not quite a beard, but stubble), large handguns or swords, and any means of long-distance transport that is not enclosed (primarily horses and motorcycles).

Masks: Sir Balan (Arthurian), St. Christopher and the Wandering Jew (Christian), Ogun-Feraille (Voudun)

Suspected Avatars in History: Davy Crockett was almost certainly an avatar of the Masterless Man, as were Wild Bill Hickock and, possibly, John Paul Jones.

Channels:

1%–50%: Masterless Men are notorious for taking punishment without yielding. Once every four weeks, you may make an Avatar: Masterless Man check; if successful, you gain a number of wound points equal to your Avatar: Masterless Man skill, no matter what your normal maximum is. Once lost, these points do not return until your next use of this channel—healing only restores lost points back to your normal maximum. If you still have any magical wound points remaining when you next apply this channel, you still only achieve your normal maximum wound point total plus your Avatar: Masterless Man skill. Any lingering magical wound points are effectively lost.

> **Example:** Sergio has a Body stat of 50, a current wound-point total of 38, and an Avatar: Masterless Man skill of 25. He tries this channel and gets a successful roll of 19. His maximum wound-point total jumps to 50 + 25 = 75. His current wound-point total jumps to 38 + 25 = 63. Healing does him no good—he's already over his natural maximum of 50 points. If his wound points drop to 27, he can get healing back up to 38, but no further. If four weeks roll around and he still has 63 wound points out of his 75, he can perform this channel again, but his maximum will still only go to 75 and his wound point total will also stop at 75—not 63 + 25 = 88. (Keep in mind that the GM keeps track of wound points.)

51%–70%: If you try to attack someone and fail with a roll that's under your Avatar: Masterless Man skill, you can immediately re-roll that attack one time. If the second attack is still a failure, you can't re-roll it again, even if it's less than your Avatar: Masterless Man skill. Furthermore, you can only re-roll one attack roll per round regardless; if you attack three different people (or one person three times) and miss every time with a roll that's under your avatar skill, you're only allowed to re-roll one of those attacks. However, using this re-roll ability does not take your combat action or cost you your next one.

71%–90%: At this level, the Masterless Man is so relentless in combat that even death cannot deter him. If you've taken enough damage to kill you, roll your Avatar: Masterless Man skill at the beginning of every combat round. If you roll a success, you can continue to act with no penalty—though you still die at the end of the combat, or when you fail the check. (If you die in your sleep or from poison or some other non-confrontational situation, you're just dead—this only works for combat.)

91%+: Any time someone damages you with a roll that's under your Avatar: Masterless Man skill, the damage is either the sum of the dice, or what the damage would normally be, whichever is lower. (You don't have to make a check for this channel—it's always functioning.)

> **Example:** If someone rolls a 39 and hits you with a chainsaw, the damage would normally be 21 points—3 + 9 (the sum of the roll) + 9 (for a big, heavy, slashing weapon). However, since the roll is under your avatar skill, it's only 12 points (3 + 9).



UNKNOWN ARMIES

artwork by Matt Harpold

THE MERCHANT

Attributes: The Merchant (or Salesman, in a more modern interpretation) facilitates the transfer of goods between those who have them and those who want them—while taking a little cut for himself. The Merchant can be a positive figure, when he brings together two people with complementary needs, helping both. On the other hand, the Merchant can also be a cheat or deceiver, selling worthless goods, acting as a needless middleman, or managing to rob both parties.

Taboos: The Merchant archetype never gets the worse of a deal. Any avatar who gets fooled or taken advantage of weakens his connection to the archetype.

The Merchant never gives anything away; any purely selfless giving is contrary to type. (Note that giving someone an incentive or doing them a little favor to soften them up for a future sale is not selfless.) You can be as selfless as you want with your time and caring, but you can't give away physical goods. Damn shame about Christmas.

Symbols: The Merchant always has a satchel for his wares—from a mendicant's sack to a briefcase or sample case. A perpetual insincere grin is typical, as are broad gestures and rapid, eloquent speech. The Merchant frequently imbibes or gives out alcohol, and is known for giving away free gifts of little value.

Masks: Yankee Jonathan (American), Oxun-Mare (Candomble), Mephistopheles (European), Aison (Voudun)

Suspected Avatars in History: Many esoteric economists (okay, about four esoteric economists) see the contests of the "robber barons" in 19th-century America as an occult contest to become the strongest Merchant. If they're right, J.P. Morgan probably won. Andrew Carnegie's sudden burst of charitable giving probably resulted from the magickal backlash of losing the contest.

Channel:

1%–50%: At this level, you can convince others to see value where there's little or none. ("C'mon man, it's a *Pinto*! The very name screams manly power!") Alternately, you can convince someone to ignore value that's apparent. ("I'll give you this huge, round nickel for that tiny little dime!") With an ordinary, successful roll you can get a deal that's good, but conventional; you can buy a car dirt cheap, convince someone to pay full price for a display model, maybe fool someone into paying inflated prices on worthless "collectibles." If you get a successful roll that's higher than your target's Mind score, you can talk them into abysmally stupid trades. ("How much did you pay for the bullets in that gun? I'll triple it—and you can be sure I won't shoot you because I don't have a gun. It's pure profit!") This does not compel people to obey, it just makes it seem like a good idea. Resisting such a reasonable request (or realizing it's not so reasonable) may trigger a Self or Unnatural check of some level.

This ability does not work on supernatural creatures. It works just fine on human adepts, though.

51%–70%: You are now empowered to make Faustian bargains: as long as trade and exchange is involved (and a successful roll) you can facilitate exchanges of immaterial commodities. Want to buy someone's soul? As long as they agree to sell it, you can do it. Is person A willing to sell five years off his life, and person B has the money to pay? If both sides agree, you can make B five years younger. (A doesn't get any older; he just dies five years sooner.) You can even negotiate a cut from both sides for yourself (say, $5000 and five months . . .).

The key to this power is that both sides must freely agree to the bargain; the power doesn't work if you've used supernatural power (like your 1%–50% channel) or physical coercion to get them to say yes. If all the involved parties freely agree (and you make your roll) you can make the deal happen. Using this power you can buy and sell wound points, transfer skills and stats—even broker psychological factors like failed notches on the Madness Meter. You do need to find a way to express this in character, however. ("I'll trade you my sense of life's meaninglessness for that rubber chicken!")

71%–90%: With a successful Avatar: Merchant check you can summon up a demon and make deals with it. The demon cannot harm you (unless that's part of the deal) and you can safely get rid of it if the two of you can't reach an agreement. If you offer it immaterial things in your possession (like your memories, your skills, or something you've gotten with the previous level of channel) you have the power to give them up to it. Once the deal is agreed upon, both sides are inextricably bound to obey it in all particulars.

91%+: Every time someone wants to harm you with magick or with a conventional weapon, they have to pay you some money. It doesn't have to be a lot of money—a penny or a million bucks, doesn't matter. They just have to give you (or throw at you) some kind of negotiable currency. If they don't have any cash on 'em, they simply cannot shoot, kick, or stab you, no matter how much they want to. (Trade goods don't work—it has to be valid currency presently circulated by a nation's mint.) Even if they're well supplied with money, they have to take an action to toss a quarter at you; then they can shoot you on their next action.

Each attack has to be paid for separately. Your assassin can't just toss a billfold with twenty bills in it at your feet and shoot you twenty times (once for each bill); those bills are considered payment for *one* attack. If he wants to attack you again, he has to pay again, even if it's just a nickel.

A strange thing about this ability is that anyone who wants to injure you instinctively knows they must pay for the privilege.



UNKNOWN ARMIES

artwork by Matt Harpold

THE MESSENGER

Attributes: The Messenger carries the news. Anyone who tells you something important, something you didn't know, is weakly echoing the archetypal Messenger. Banishing ignorance and spreading knowledge, the Messenger seems to be a one of the more positive Archetypes. But sometimes the Messenger is only as good as the news he brings. Is the man who tells you the love of your life used to turn tricks really your friend?

The most powerful avatar of the Messenger at present is Dermott Arkane, who believes that the current version of the archetype is obsolete and needs to be updated. As Arkane sees it, the carriers of the news are beginning to eclipse the news itself. As media empires consolidate and media spin becomes more sophisticated, the givers of truth are increasingly involved with the interpretation of the facts. To Arkane, this is all well and good: He's paving his course to power by anticipating and altering the course of world events.

Taboos: The one thing the Messenger must never do is deny the truth when confronted. He can passively conceal, he can lie by omission, but when faced pointblank with a fact he knows is true, the Messenger cannot deny it. (To some people, this is the secret meaning behind Peter's denial of Christ, and explains why Paul was the greater evangelist.)

Symbols: The symbols of the Messenger in antiquity were the scroll, the spur, a swift horse and a traveler's cloak. These days, it's more likely to be a mobile news feed and a hat with a press card stuck in the brim.

Masks: John the Baptist and St. Paul (Christian), Hermes (Greek), Eleggua (Santeria), Loko (Voudun)

Suspected Avatars in History: Many believe that Paul Revere deliberately channeled the Messenger; perhaps coincidentally, he was also a Mason. There's more uncertainty about the Greek soldier Pheidippides who ran from Marathon to Athens to announce Miltiades' victory over the Persians, but he was probably an Avatar.

Channels:

1%–50%: When the Messenger tells the truth, it is hard to ignore or deny. When an Avatar of the Messenger makes a true statement about something that's important to the listeners, the GM can call for an Avatar roll. If successful, the hearer must either consciously acknowledge that the Messenger is telling the truth, or make a rank 6 Helplessness or Self challenge. (The character's controller chooses between acknowledgement or stress check: The GM decides which type of check is most appropriate).

Note that the Messenger's statement must be objectively true, and the Messenger must believe it firmly. If the Messenger attempts to use this channel to communicate something that he believes is true, but which is false, the channel fails.

51%–70%: If the Messenger is delivering information to someone who is intimately connected to it, a successful roll can remove physical barriers between the Messenger and his audience. In this case, a "physical barrier" is a passive, inanimate problem. For instance, if the Messenger has been gagged, the gag falls out. If the Messenger's car breaks down, he can force it to work until he gets to the location. Locks open, drawbridges drop and bonds come loose.

Note that this channel does not work on active opposition: if someone is shooting at the Messenger with a scattergun, this won't do a lick of good. It also doesn't affect really big barriers: a Messenger can't use this to walk through walls or part a river to get to the other side. Weird, but true: there's an important difference between something that's holding you back, and something that's just in your way.

71%–90%: With a successful roll, the Messenger can learn an important fact about a person, place or thing. This is a powerful and versatile ability, but there are three important limitations. First, it can't be used for something trivial (GM decides). Second, the answer has to be either something vague and general, or a concrete fact that can be stated in three words or less. Finally, the Messenger has to be at the place, or in the presence of the person or thing.

To use this channel, the Messenger can use any of a variety of divination techniques—reading tea leaves, the I Ching, automatic writing or anything else that can choke out a few words or concepts

91%+: At this level, the Messenger can get to any important event, as long as he knows it's occurring. He does not have to know where, or even what it is, but he can simply appear in the area, much like an Avatar of the Pilgrim. The limitation on this channel is that the Messenger can only go where an event is occurring—not where it's going to happen or has happened. There is also a gray area about what constitutes an "important" event. A presidential assassination, an act of war, or the generation of a major charge all qualify, but for other events it's up to the GM to decide. (GMs should be lenient, of course: if it's important to a hundred people or more, this should work.)



UNKNOWN ARMIES

artwork by Matt Harpold

THE MOTHER

Attributes: This is one of the oldest and strongest of the archetypes. It embodies nurturing, comfort, protection and a powerful sense of a benevolent higher power. Mother stands for comfort, safety and love.

The negative aspect of this Archetype involves control and a retardation of autonomy: someone who is always worried about what mommy thinks can never grow into a fully independent human being. Some mothers create a sense of dependence and need in order to keep their children close; such children may have trouble "breaking the apron strings."

This dependence—the submission of a child to a controlling mother who brooks no disobedience—shows the dark side of the archetype. The "devouring mother" who enslaves even as she embraces is the twisted reflection of the archetype's nurturing power.

Taboos: It is completely contrary to type for a mother to harm a child or stand idly by while a child is harmed, or to do nothing while a child is suffering. (Of course, everyone is somebody's child; for the purpose of this taboo, it means a person under sixteen years of age.) Note that "harm" may have a different meaning to one who takes the devouring mother route; while she's unlikely to wound her child, she might actually kill it rather than let it get "corrupted" by outside forces.

Symbols: The Mother has countless symbols, including (but hardly limited to) the Moon, the blue robe, the spiral, fountains and wells, the basket or cup, the dove, the Queen of Hearts in a standard poker deck and the Tarot cards the Empress, the Moon, and the Queen of Cups.

Masks: The Lady of the Lake (Arthurian), Yemanja (Candomble), Danu (Celtic), The Virgin Mary (Christian), Isis (Egyptian), Demeter (Greek), Ishtar (Mesopotamian), Kwan Yin (Pan-Asian), Cybele the Magna Mater (Roman), Yemaya (Santeria), The Goddess (Wiccan), Ayizan-Freda (Voudun)

Suspected Avatars in History: Some people swear Eva Peron was an avatar of the Mother; others vehemently disagree.

Channels:

1%-50%: At this level you are maternal and comforting. If you're present when someone snaps after failing a Stress Check, you can try to talk them down. To do this, simply say comforting things, put your arms around them, wipe their tears and tell them everything's going to be all right. Then make an Avatar: Mother roll. If you succeed, this works just like psychological first aid (see p. 69).

This ability can even be used to heal physical damage. A successful Avatar: Mother roll will heal someone of five points of damage. This can only be done once per week on each damaged individual, however.

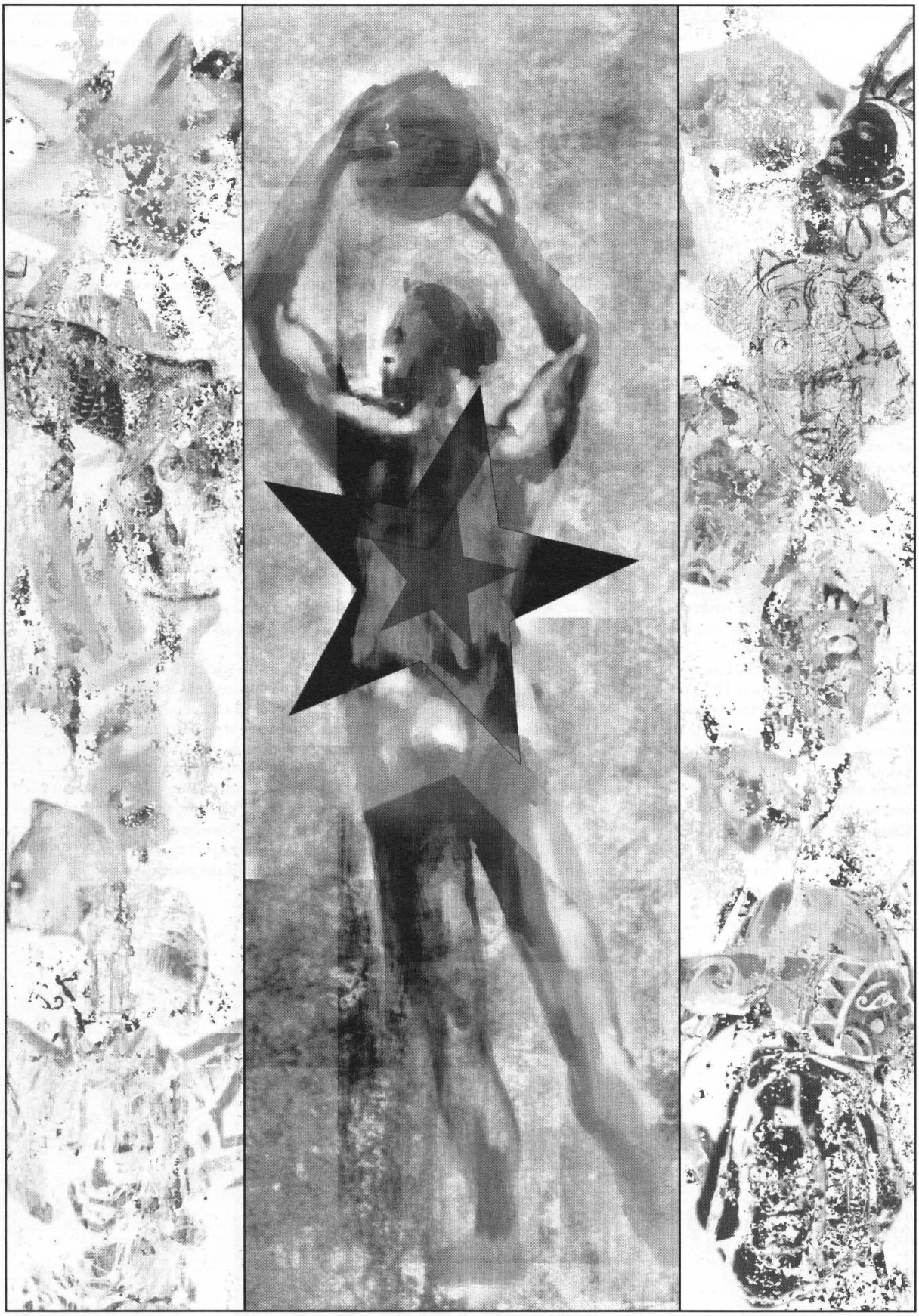
There's a limit to the use of these powers, however: you can only use them on someone who sees you as a mother figure. Your own children are susceptible, of course. Other than them, it has to be someone at least ten years younger than you and someone who sees you as a comforting, superior figure.

51%-70%: Ever hear the old chestnut about "don't get between a mother bear and her cub"? At this level, you're mama bear. If someone threatens your child, or someone with whom you have an established maternal relationship (that is, someone for whom you could use the first rank power), you gain a number of combat advantages when fighting that menace, until the threat to your children is removed. These advantages are:

- Any initiative roll that's lower than your Avatar: Mother skill is a success. If Avatar: Mother is your obsession skill, you can flip-flop initiative rolls.
- You can use your Avatar: Mother skill instead of Struggle when fighting.
- Any hand-to-hand attack you make does +5 damage, in addition to weapon damage bonuses (if any).

71%-90%: Anyone who tries to harm you, either physically, magickally, or psychologically, has to make a rank-10 Self check to do so. Making this check takes a combat action. You can also use your Avatar: Mother skill in the place of Charm. However, in order to use either of these abilities you have to be physically pregnant.

91%+: At this level, the Mother cannot be killed while in the presence of an endangered child. When she reaches zero wound points, she can continue to act without penalty until (1) the threat is removed, (2) the child is killed, or (3) she leaves the presence of the endangered child. At that time, she dies.



UNKNOWN ARMIES

artwork by Matt Harpold

THE MVP

(MOST VALUABLE PLAYER)

Attributes: For every person in the world who knows anything at all about the occult underground, there are a thousand who can tell you who won the silver medal for Women's Figure Skating at the 1994 Olympics. Far, far more people care about Vince Lombardi's life story than care about the history of John Dee. Sports are important in a way and to a degree that magick—even powerful magick—just cannot approach. In 1998, the combined income of every adept in the world was not equal to the revenue earned by, and off the image, likeness, and name of Michael Jordan.

In the twenty-first century, religious fervor is in decline in the west, and people no longer have blind faith in the divine right of kings to link them together in a society. But we still have our athletes. We still have those whose strength, or speed, or nearly unbearable grace, seems to make them almost divine. In return for our admiration, they fuse us together and make us a community. As the puck races towards the net, every fan in Toronto wants the same thing at the same moment. As the ball sails towards the batter, two societies hold their breath, anxious for the outcome of their battle-by-proxy. The fate of a city is intertwined with the fate of its teams. (Perhaps it's no accident that after years of plummeting crime rates, New York City was rewarded with the 2000 "subway series"—and that the Yankees lost to the upstart Diamondbacks in 2001.)

The MVP has little presence or awareness in the avatar underground. Given the access sporting prowess provides to a world of money, fame and temptation, few MVPs are interested in esoteric paths of power. Most are unaware of their mystic connection to their polis and fans. But superstition is common in all sports, and many of them might be receptive to someone willing to put them on a higher path.

It goes without saying that MVP avatars must excel at their chosen sport. Beyond that, they must also serve as a role model to their city. Good conduct, good manners, good sportsmanship and model civic service must be demonstrated to remain attuned to the archetype. (This doesn't mean the player has to *be* a good person. He can be a crack-smoking, wife-beating son of a bitch without imperiling his avatar status—unless he gets caught.)

Taboos: The MVP must never be a showboat. Disrespecting a team-mate or slacking off on team practice is bad news. Furthermore, the MVP must never be publicly proven to have cheated, broken the law, or otherwise disgraced his status as civic hero.

Symbols: Sporting equipment, medals, trophies, and most of all the uniform.

Masks: Lancelot (Arthurian), Lugh Lamfada (Celtic), Atalanta, Meleager, Castor and Pollux (Greek)

Suspected Avatars in History: Given his performance in his last game for the Bulls, Michael Jordan was almost certainly a high-level avatar. (Notice how he was never the same after he left Chicago?) Andro or no, Mark MacGuire probably had a touch of it. And Jesse Owens racing in front of Hitler probably channeled it at one of history's important junctures.

Channels:

1%-50%: The MVP takes strength from the fans. For every thousand people watching live and rooting for him, the avatar gains 1% to his skill rating in his sport. This skill cannot be boosted past his Avatar: MVP skill or past his Body stat.

51%-70%: The MVP comes through in the clinch. When he's outnumbered in any kind of contest, his relevant skill goes up by 5% for each extra opponent. When he's behind in a competition, the skill goes up 2% for every point he's down. This increase *can* go higher than the related stat.

> **Example:** Three Yakuza gangsters jump a MVP sumo wrestler. His Sumo (Struggle) skill is 70%, as is his Body score. Because there are two extra opponents, his Sumo skill goes up to 80%. If a friend of his jumps in to help him, so that he's only outnumbered by one gangster, his skill drops down to 75%.

71%-90%: At this level, the MVP really starts giving back to the community. Every time the team wins, the GM should make some small improvement to the quality of life in the MVP's home town.

91%+: His status as an idol complete, the MVP can now directly improve the lives of his fans. Specifically, by giving advice and encouragement to an adult fan, or simply by signing an autograph for a child fan, the MVP can erase failed and hardened notches off the Madness Meter. The only gauges resistant to this channel are those with 10 hard notches. (For example, if a character had 10 hard notches in Helplessness and 7 in Isolation, an MVP could remove a notch from Isolation, but not from Helplessness.) The MVP can do this to any given individual only once a week.



UNKNOWN ARMIES

artwork by Matt Harpold

THE MYSTIC HERMAPHRODITE

Attributes: This archetype is one of the most difficult to embody because it's possibly the most difficult to describe. It is large, it contains multitudes, it contradicts itself—by definition. It represents the unity of opposites, the synergy of contrary combination, the power that comes from tension and conflict within a unified whole.

In some ways, the Mystic Hermaphrodite is the walking embodiment of magick. After all, every school is based on a paradox, because resolving a contradictory belief allows an adept to resolve the contradiction between "possible" and "impossible" or "cause" and "effect." But where the adept merely holds or follows a contradiction, the Hermaphrodite *is* a contradiction.

The Hermaphrodite is woman and man both, but it represents other unities as well. The doctor who cuts you open or poisons you with radiation to heal you is taking a tiny step along this path. The jealous lover whose hateful accusations are an expression of twisted affection suffers the burden of contradiction. The masochist who loves her suffering, the general who conquers in the name of peace and the mercy killer could all be facets of the singular paradox. The difference is that these people are often fooling themselves—figuring out rationales to excuse them so they can pursue the "greater good." The true Mystic Hermaphrodite isn't just engaging in pretzel logic and elaborate self-justification: he/she resolves those conflicts within the context of a larger consciousness.

Taboos: A lack of conflict conflicts with Mystic Hermaphroditism. Dedication to any unambiguous cause—other than the cause of the Avatar path—can weaken the connection. For example, a Hermaphrodite who dedicates him/herself to pacifism is in violation as much as one who follows an inflexible code of violent revenge. Your mind must be at war as much as your body is: absolute loyalty is as anathema as absolute treachery. Note that this doesn't preclude believing in a philosophy. But once you start to act on those beliefs, you could be in trouble. It is possible for Mystic Hermaphrodites to also be adepts, but their obsessive worldview must be one of turmoil and mystery rather than crystal clarity.

Symbols: White garments and prisms (since white is really the unity of all colors), the yin-yang symbol, the serpent devouring its own tail, the cross, the lotus and the dot within a circle are all emblems of the Mystic Hermaphrodite, as are bearded women or actual, biological hermaphrodites. The most potent symbols of the Mystic Hermaphrodite are sexual symbols—transvestitism, bisexuality and contravening traditional gender roles.

Masks: Rebis (Alchemical), Ometecuhtli (ancient Mexico), Mawu-Lisa (Fon), Hermaphrodite and Tiresias (Greece), Olocun (Santeria)

Suspected Avatars in History: If the notorious "Pope Joan" actually existed as anything but an urban legend, she was almost certainly an avatar of the Mystic Hermaphrodite. The Enlightenment transvestite spy Chevalier d'Eon is a sure thing. Christine Jorgensen certainly was, along with Brandon Teena and Billy Tipton. You can make a case for RuPaul and the Lady Chablis as well.

Channels:

1%–50%: On a successful roll, you can get a sense of an individual's gender identity. This goes beyond inclination (homo, hetero or bi) and general sex drive: it also touches on gender roles, allowing one to discern (for example) if someone is aggressive and macho or tender and nurturing. Note that people are complex and changeable: this channel is just as likely to detect how someone wants to appear at the moment as how they generally behave. There's no way to predict.

51%–70%: You can sense it when people gain mystic charges in your area. The radius of this ability is a number of miles equal to the number in the tens place of your skill. (So, if you have a 70% skill, it has a radius of about seven miles.) Whenever someone in that area gains a charge, your GM can ask you to roll against your skill. A successful roll lets you know what type of charge was generated (minor, significant, major) and a very vague sense of the direction. A matched success could give you a sense of the charge's "magickal flavor"—was it the rough savor of a Dipsomancer sucking the worm out of a tequila bottle, or the relentless grinding of a Mechanomancer tinkering with her latest creation?

71%–90%: Once per day, with a successful Avatar: Hermaphrodite roll, you can change your biological gender. (No, you can't do this to other people.) Be warned: if you roll the dread 00, you get trapped as a *literal* hermaphrodite—both sets of gear, breasts, facial hair and a set of truly berserk hormones. Someone who becomes a biological hermaphrodite in this fashion is stuck in that strange neither/both sexual gray zone until corrected with magick or surgery: the effects of this channel cannot rescue him/her from the results of the botch. (There is one exception: if the person was born a biological hermaphrodite, the condition is familiar enough to be repaired.)

Changing your biological gender is a rank 4 Self challenge. (If it happens to someone who isn't pursuing the Mystic Hermaphrodite role, it's a rank 7 challenge, but any avatar of the Hermaphrodite is a bit more prepared.)

91%+: Once per day, you can gain a charge from changing genders. If your gender change is only symbolic (such as cross dressing or switching gender roles) you get only one minor charge. If you literally, biologically change from female to male or vice-versa, you gain a significant charge. If you're also a student of a school of magick, you can use these charges normally. If you aren't, you can discharge them to create a random unnatural phenomenon. Minor charges produce minor phenomena, significant charges produce significant phenomena, but you have no control over which phenomenon occurs, or how. In the great pool hall of magick, this is like taking slop shots.



THE PILGRIM

Attributes: The Pilgrim (also called the Seeker) is someone focused on a higher goal. The Pilgrim doesn't wander aimlessly like the Fool or the Masterless Man, nor is the Pilgrim's attention focused inward, like the Flying Woman. Rather, the Pilgrim has subsumed his own will to an external goal, and proceeds relentlessly towards that goal.

The Pilgrim is the penitent on a journey, the silent figure on a powerful quest. He has shed the excesses of everyday life and pared down his world to just him and the road and the goal that waits at the end of it.

The goal is important. For while the Pilgrim tends towards quiet and introspection as he travels, his eventual destination is of great importance. He may be seeking a powerful artifact, such as the Grail of Arthurian legend. He might be in search of a legendary land, like El Dorado. And he could be looking for an important person now lost to history, like Amelia Earhart. Whatever his goal is, it is not insignificant or merely symbolic.

As he travels, the Pilgrim has a tendency to get involved in the affairs of those he meets. His reluctance to do so is genuine, but he also understands that the road takes you where you need to be. He may pause to intervene in a situation, to right a wrong or even wrong a right. But it is only a pause, and he must be on his way before the dust settles. He leaves behind him the thanks or hatred of those he encounters, useless baggage on his long and lonely road.

Taboos: The Pilgrim doesn't meander or dawdle—anything that doesn't take you towards your goal is a distraction. If you spend a game session without really *trying* to get closer to your goal (whatever it is), your GM can penalize you.

Neither does the Pilgrim change direction. If you ever give up your goal, the GM has good reason to dock your skill—so pick your goal with care.

Symbols: The Pilgrim is represented by the open road and by vehicles of all sorts. The staff, bowl, and broad-brimmed hat of the traditional mendicant traveler are also totems of the Pilgrim. Animals associated with the Pilgrim are salmon (who return to the headwaters to spawn) and swallows (who also make yearly voyages to a single destination).

Masks: Sir Galahad (Arthurian), The Three Kings (Christian), Tang Seng and Tripitika (Chinese), Perseus (Greek), Moses (Judeo-Christian), Ibn Battuta (Muslim), Legba-Gran-Chemin (Voudun)

Suspected Avatars in History: Neil Armstrong, the first man on the moon, may have been conducting the Pilgrim (shame he wasn't a Cliomancer instead). Meriwether Lewis almost definitely was, as were Xenophon and, less happily, Robert Falcon Scott.

Channels:

1%–50%: Name a goal, and a skill you have that's going to help you attain that goal, then make an Avatar: Pilgrim check. If you succeed at the roll, you can flip-flop all rolls you make with that skill while in direct pursuit of your goal (just like your obsession skill). Once you attain that goal you can repeat this process with a different goal, but you can only use this effect on one skill per goal. Similarly, you can only have one goal at a time. If you fail the initial check, you can try it with another skill, but you can't re-try the same skill until you get a new goal.

If you ever give up on that goal, your Avatar: Pilgrim skill no longer works on the skill you chose—ever. Furthermore, you can't pick a new goal and skill until you've completed

artwork by Matt Harpold

or abandoned your old goal. Abandoned goals cannot be re-attempted.

> **Example:** Rodney decides his goal is going to be "put that chaos mage down like a mad dog in the street," and that the skill he's going to need to accomplish this is Shoot From the Hip. He makes a successful Avatar: Pilgrim roll and can now flip-flop his gunshot rolls when he's shooting at the Entropomancer or his minions. Later on, however, the adept explains his goals and gets Rodney to join the team. Now he's abandoned his goal. He decides his new goal is going to be "put Saddam Hussein down like a mad dog in the street." He can't use Shoot From the Hip as his Pilgrim skill anymore because he had that attached to a previous goal—a goal he abandoned. He decides to be able to flip-flop his Conceal skill instead. This time, however, he fails his roll and can't assign Conceal as his Pilgrim skill. He tries it with Struggle and finally succeeds. If he manages to whack Saddam Hussein, he can pick a new goal and try to make Conceal his Pilgrim skill again, but he will never be able to assign it to Shoot From the Hip, because that skill has been spoiled by his failure to kill the Entropomancer.

51%–70%: With a successful Avatar: Pilgrim check, you can travel about the width of Australia or the U.S. in miles in a single day. If you're driving, you just sort of happen to reach your destination. If you have to cross an ocean, you might get on a barge in New York harbor in the morning and get off the Dover Ferry sixteen hours later. No one would have seen you change ships, and you wouldn't really have much recollection of going the distance—but you'd be there. You can only attempt this channel once every twenty-four hours. You can't bring anyone else with you.

71%–90%: At this level, you can recruit fellow pilgrims for a brief while. All you have to do is lock eyes with someone and explain, clearly and concisely, what your goal is and why it's important. Once you've explained the goal, make an Avatar: Pilgrim check. If you succeed and also roll more than your target's Soul or Mind stat (whichever is higher), the target passes into a highly suggestible state and is inclined to obey one simple command from you. You can't make someone do something morally abhorrent to them ("Now go kill your children for me, okay?") or that grossly violates their sense of social convention ("Get naked and run around"), but minor errands and such are fine. Anyone who actively resists your suggestion has to make a Self check equal to the tens place of your Avatar skill. (That is, if you've got Avatar: The Pilgrim 72%, they take a rank 7 check for resisting you.) Afterwards, the experience seems kind of dreamlike to them ("Everything he said made so much sense . . .").

91%+: At this level, all doors, roads, portals, and windows are as one to the Pilgrim. With a successful Avatar: Pilgrim check, you can step into your closet door in Washington, D.C., and step out through the front doors of the Kremlin. You can take five steps on a mud road in Beijing and take your next five steps on a highway in North Dakota. No one ever sees you appear or disappear; you emerge into a sort of perceptual blind spot that makes your action seem perfectly ordinary. You may do this—and attempt this—as often as you like.

You can bring people with you at this level, as long as you make a successful check for each person you bring. You also cannot travel to a place unless you have a clear mental picture of it. A photo you've memorized or were looking at when you make the check would work. A picture you'd seen once—or somewhere you'd only heard described—wouldn't work.

A final twist on this ability is that you can use it to trap a person by re-routing all doors they pass through to (for example) your closet. The person walks through his front door and winds up in your closet. He opens the closet door and steps out, only to find himself stepping back into the closet. You have to be looking at the target to put this curse on him, and it usually lasts for about one or two hours. (Note that it's possible to break out of such a prison if the target can tear down a wall or create some other form of new exit.) This curse is considered a magickal attack, so protections against magickal assault can stymie it. Finally, if you try this on an adept, you have to roll under your skill and higher than his skill at magick.



UNKNOWN ARMIES

artwork by Matt Harpold

THE SAVAGE

Attributes: The image of the Savage can be found in most early societies. Edgar Rice Burroughs gave the archetype a name (Tarzan), and Robert Bly hunted for him under the veneer of civilized manhood. He lurks in the Himalayas as the Yeti, he stalks through British Columbia as Bigfoot, and he comes to us in every ancient myth and urban legend about children raised by wolves.

The Savage has cast away the shackles of politeness or social expectation—or maybe they were never there to start with. Having turned away from the society of mankind, the Savage is welcomed by nature. The birds and beasts are the Savage's kin, and the untamed places of the earth are what the Savage calls home.

The dark side of the Savage is obvious. Someone who has cast aside the anxieties and polite fictions of society can easily cast aside morals and ethics as well. The Savage is as likely to be vicious and predatory as noble and unspoiled.

Taboos: The Savage is unsophisticated about deceit and social manipulation. Any Savage who successfully uses a skill that manipulates language or emotions in a devious fashion is violating the archetype. (Making a straightforward, passionate speech doesn't count; making the same speech when you don't believe it and are just telling the crowd what they want to hear is dishonest, and therefore not Savage.)

The Savage is equally uncomfortable with the works of man. Any skill that involves using, building, or repairing machines (including Drive) that goes above 30% counts as a transgression of Savagery.

Symbols: Hair, and plenty of it, is essential to the Savage. The hair (or mane) must be uncut and unkempt. Nakedness is common, but when clothes must be worn they should have fur. Even when clothed, the Savage is usually barefoot to maintain a link to the earth. The Savage is associated with many animals, but especially the bear, the ape, and the wolf.

Masks: Enkidu (Akkadian), Oxossi (Candomble), Cernunnos (Celtic), Segbo Profiel or Marassa-Bois (Voudun)

Suspected Avatars in History: Many of the biblical "prophets in the wilderness" such as Elijah or Jeremiah seem to have been channeling the Savage; theologians and occultists naturally differ on the question.

Channels:

1%-50%: The Savage is exceptionally swift and physically powerful. Whenever you make a successful roll in a Body- or Speed-based skill, and that roll is under your Avatar: Savage skill, you may add up to 10 points to it. The roll is still a success, even if adding points makes the roll higher than your usual skill rating. The exception to this rule is when the skill used requires the use of a machine; you can get away with using this with Knife Fighting, but not Driving or Firearms.

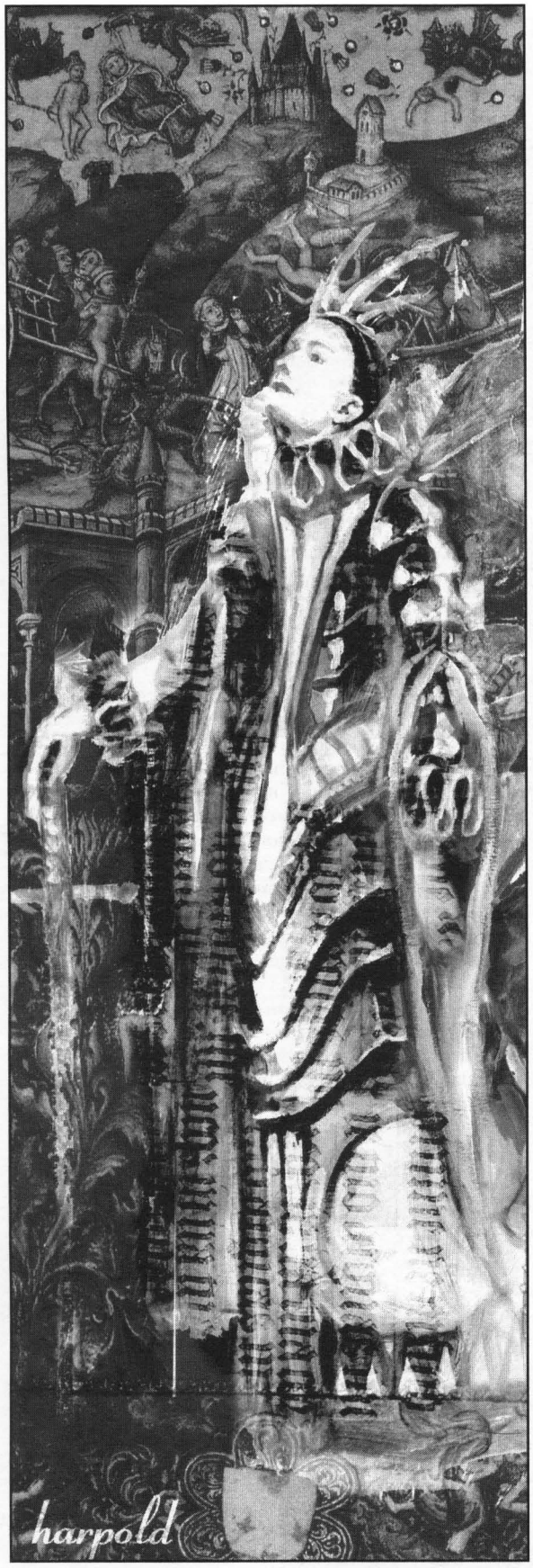
> **Example:** An avatar of the Savage named Carla Horserunner has the skill Fight Like An Ape at 55%. While escaping from a militia compound, she throws a punch at one of the guards and rolls a 49. Normally that would do 13 points of damage (4 + 9). However, the roll is under her Avatar skill of 55%. She decides to raise the roll to 59 to do an extra point of damage (5 + 9) even though it would normally be over her skill.

> **Example:** When the militia tries to recapture her, Carla kicks one of the guards and rolls a mere 12 for 3 wimpy points of damage. Because it's under her Avatar skill, however, she can raise the roll to a 19 and do 10 points.

51%-70%: You can now use your Avatar: Savage skill in the place of any of the following skills: Climb (including Swing From a Vine), Run, Swim, Stealth, Tracking, or Survival. If your Avatar skill is your obsession, you can flip-flop these rolls. If the skill being replaced is your obsession, you can also flip-flop them.

71%-90%: You are so in tune with nature that you can speak with animals. (Insects not included.) With a successful roll, you can ask any animal to do what you wish. You can only command one animal at a time. You can also ask them for information, but keep in mind that animals aren't terribly bright; their answers aren't verbal as much as images and sense impressions. (As a rule of thumb for using this channel, assume it can be used to get any animal to behave like a fairly well trained dog. "Sit," "Drop this message in that window," and "Kill that man with the red hair" are all fine. "Go start my car," or "Run into that burning building and stay there," are probably out of the question.)

91%+: Any spell or firearm damage done to you from a roll lower than your Avatar: Savage skill is reduced by 20 points due to your toughness and vitality. This does not affect damage from animals, unnatural creatures, or hand-to-hand attacks.



THE TRUE KING

Attributes: The True King represents the unity of the ruler, the people, and the land. Since ancient times, kings and their realms have had a symbolic link—the royal "we" is a remnant of that belief, referring to the ruler and the realm. The Archetype of the True King makes that symbolic link actual. As the King's fortunes go, so goes the fortune of his Realm, and vice-versa. The True King is a caretaker, protector, counselor, and leader of his Realm. In today's world, the King may be more of a spiritual and secret ruler rather than a political and open one.

As a servant of Order, the True King could guide his people into a utopian paradise, supported by the unity of vision only he can bring. As a servant of Entropy, he could topple nations, aided by the power of a Realm blindly loyal and richly rewarded for its efforts. Although the archetype is referred to as the King, avatars can be of either sex.

Taboos: Avatars of the True King must have a Realm they protect and for which they take responsibility. A Realm can be an area of Land, a group or classification of Followers, or a combination of both. Thus you can have the King of 7th Street, the King of the Cops, or the King of the Road (Bikers and Highways). This Realm of Land and/or Followers can be of any size, although practical considerations must play some part in the decision—no fledgling avatar could possibly protect a Realm the size of Los Angeles or as numerous as the attendees of a Rolling Stones concert.

The King may never act against his Realm, cannot deny one of his Followers aid if they request it, and cannot stand idly by while his Realm is being harmed. He may send his Followers into danger, but not on a suicide mission unless the situation is dire. Protecting the Realm means doing whatever it takes to shield his Land and Followers from outside assault, whether from a gangland boss, the destruction of natural disasters, or even the crushing weight of simple poverty. He is also responsible for those people passing through his Realm, as well as those to whom he grants sanctuary. If the avatar ever loses all of his Land or Followers, his skill in Avatar: The True King drops to zero.

Symbols: The symbols of the True King are the sword, the crown, and the scepter.

Masks: Haile Selassie (African/Rastafarian), Etana (Akkadian), Arthur (Arthurian), Tammuz (Babylonian), Nuada of the Silver Hand (Celtic), Zeus (Greek), Jimmu-tenno (Japanese), Solomon (Judeo-Christian), Haroun al Raschid (Muslim), Odin (Norse), Obatala (Santeria), Gilgamesh (Sumerian)

Suspected Avatars in History: The quintessential True King is Arthur. Although previous sacred kings surely existed, Arthur has become the nigh-unshakeable incarnation of this archetype, and all would-be Western royal Avatars from Queen Elizabeth I to Aaron Burr to Bugsy Siegel have followed his path, even through madness (like San Francisco's Emperor Norton) or into implacable doom (as various adepts have hinted that JFK foresaw).

Realm Components:

Land: A King's Land can be as large as the radius of his Avatar skill in miles. A King with a skill of 43 could therefore have a Land with a radius of 43 miles. This is a maximum, however; in practice, the Land can only be as large as the King has the will and the influence to govern. Kings generally start with a small area and increase it over time as they move along the avatar path and gain Followers.

artwork by Matt Harpold

If there are other Kings in the area, the King may challenge or treaty with another King to set borders. If he defeats a ruling King avatar in combat, he may claim part or all of the defeated King's Land, depending upon how much the GM believes the victorious King can hold. Claiming Land involves a triple sacrifice of the King's blood, sweat, and tears—three drops of each in a significant place is sufficient to mark the locale as part of the King's Realm.

(Lands used to be much larger. But the federation of smaller states exemplified by the rise of America overwhelmed the old-world notions of consolidated kingship; then when Chicago ward boss "Diamond" Joe Esposito—popularly known as the King of Little Italy—became the True King in 1928, his belief that all politics are local sharply reduced the size of the True King's Land. Or that's what followers of Chicago's current True King say, anyhow.)

Followers: A King may have a number of Followers equal to his Avatar skill. To gain a Follower, the recruit must explicitly and knowingly offer their fealty and the King may choose whether or not to accept it. In the event of a battle between Kings, the defeated King's Followers still have a free-will choice to either offer their fealty, to remain loyal to their King, or to simply abandon their ties. The ceremonial nature of this offer should be appropriate to the nature of the Realm. People who live within the territory of a True King's Realm may be more predisposed to become Followers, but are not required to. The aura of a King's Follower shows indications of this bond.

Channels:

1%–50%: The avatar is linked to his Realm. If his Realm comes under attack, or one of his Followers calls for aid within the confines of the Land of his Realm, the King can sense it with an Avatar: The True King check called for by the GM. An active use of this channel allows the King to call specific Followers within his Realm to him. The King's voice echoes out of the shadows or calls softly from nearby radios or televisions, letting the Follower know that his presence is desired.

51%–70%: The Realm itself strengthens the True King. While within the Land's borders or within line-of-sight of a number of Followers equal to the tens place of his Avatar: The True King skill, he gains a +10% shift on all actions.

71%–90%: The mystical link of King and Realm allows the transfer of Wound Points between King and Land and between King and Followers. For purposes of this channel, the Land of the Realm has exactly the same Wound Points as the King. The King may draw upon these Wound Points at his whim, using them to heal himself or others at the cost of the Land. The King may also drain himself to repair damages to or increase the fertility of the Land. The King may only drain the Land if he is standing within its borders. If the King keeps weakening his Land and not putting points back into it, he violates Taboo.

Dealing with the Followers of the Realm, the King may only draw Wound Points from them with their consent. (How he gets that consent, whether by simply asking for aid or by placing the Follower under a compulsion like torture, is entirely up to the individual King avatar.) He may transfer Wound Points from himself to them as he chooses. He must be in physical contact with a Follower to drain or heal, but need not be within the borders of his Land to do so.

Finally, the King may transfer Wound Points directly from Follower to Land or from Land to Follower, acting as the relay point between.

At this level, the domain of the True King reflects his own state. If the King is wounded, spontaneous flaws or damage appears across his Realm. A gunshot could manifest as a gas explosion, the flu as Dutch Elm Blight, an orgasm as a spontaneous blossoming of flowers.

91+%: As the King protects his Realm, his Realm protects him. With a successful Avatar: The True King check the King can cause the Land to initiate unarmed combat at the avatar's own Struggle (or equivalent) skill level. Damage is done as for normal hand-to-hand damage, plus modifiers for "weapon type."

> **Example:** A gang is terrorizing the King's Realm. He makes a successful Avatar: The True King roll and then rolls his Struggle skill. He succeeds and a piece of masonry falls off a building onto the gang's leader, doing hand-to-hand damage as if it were the King himself at +6 for being big and heavy.

Used with the King's Followers, a successful roll grants all who can see the King a shift to any single skill equal to the sum of the Avatar: The True King die roll. Neither King nor Followers need be within the confines of the Land to gain this benefit. The King must choose the skill to be so enhanced, and if a Follower doesn't have that skill or a direct equivalent, there is no effect for that Follower. The shift lasts for fifteen minutes.



UNKNOWN ARMIES

artwork by Matt Harpold

THE WARRIOR

Attributes: People have a natural inclination to hate and fear outsiders. Maybe it's genetic—an atavism from apes who excluded mangy cousins for fear their illness might pollute the pack. Or maybe it's psychological, a necessary downside to affection for society and family. Or maybe we're sinners all, living in a fallen world.

In any event, the Warrior is someone who exists to eradicate some problem, policy or people he deems dangerous to society. He is a spirit of uncompromising extermination. While he might die for the cause, he's far more interested in killing for it.

As warfare became more complex and sophisticated, other archetypes muscled in on the Warrior's territory—but really, the pie of human butchery had enough slices for the Unknown Soldier and the Bloodless General too. The Warrior is distinguished from more recent military types by his ideological purity—though of course, the ideological killer is as fresh and modern as yesterday's headlines.

The dark side of the Warrior archetype is easy to see—look at a photo of the grinning triggermen of the Third Reich, standing over a kneeling rabbi. Or look at those old postcards of Ku Klux Klan lynching picnics. Or maybe a photo of "Ground Zero" in New York City.

But at the same time, in an age notable for cynicism and compromise, the Warrior is one figure who draws a line in the sand and says "No further." There were a few medical Warriors when smallpox was still an accident and not a weapon. Their philosophical descendents battle AIDS today. The "War on Poverty" didn't attract as many avatars as the "War on Drugs," but they were there. They're involved in the "War on Terrorism," too—for better or for worse.

Taboos: Each Warrior avatar must choose something he's against. It can be a people or a gender—or, more attractively, a social ill or malignant philosophy. Compromise with the enemy is the Warrior's taboo. Take, for example, a DEA agent who is a Warrior against drugs. If his own son is found with a single marijuana seed in his car, even if there's a plausible explanation, the Warrior agent must still insist that the car be seized and the boy charged with possession. Zero tolerance means zero tolerance. Similarly, an avatar who declared war on illiteracy would break taboo if she gave up trying to teach an adult who couldn't read—even if said adult had no interest in learning and was actively, abusively resisting.

Symbols: The helmet, the bloodstain and fire. In a regular deck, his card is the King of Clubs, and his animal is the eagle.

Masks: Huitzilopochitli (Aztec), Marduk (Babylonian), Cuchullain (Celtic), Ares (Greek), Hachiman (Japanese), Tu (Maori), Chingiz Khan (Mongolian), Chango (Nigerian/Voodoun), Thor (Norse), Mithras (Persian), Perun (Slavic)

Suspected Avatars in History: John Brown at Harper's Ferry, Alexander the Great against the Persians, and any number of Bosnian Serbs.

Channels:

1%–50%: The Warrior does not need to make stress checks while directly pursuing his goal. An Al Queda "warrior against the west" makes no Violence checks while fighting against (or murdering) westerners. Similarly, a crusading "warrior against poverty" can bypass the sort of Helplessness check that less committed do-gooders must face.

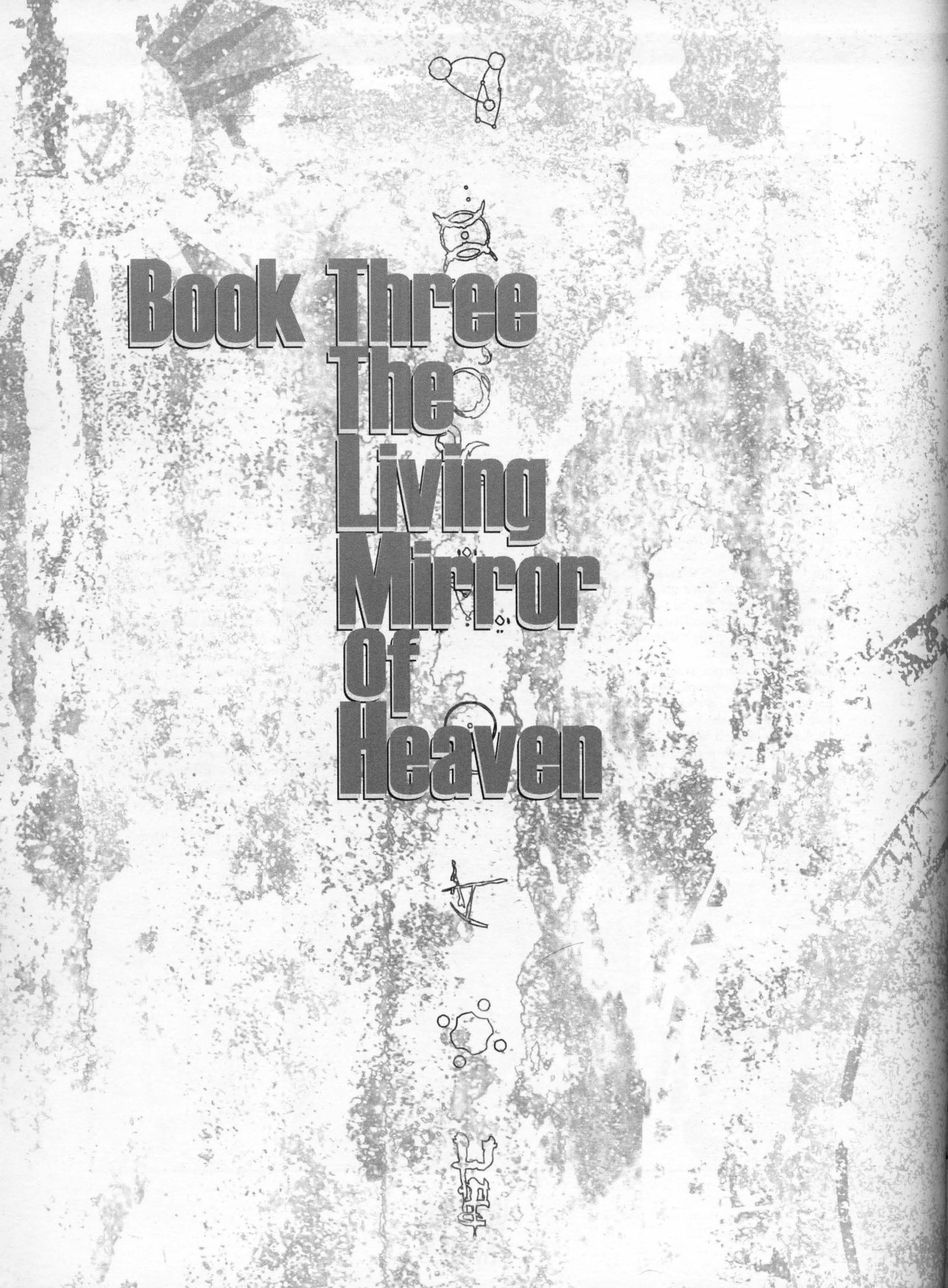
This does not mean that the Warrior automatically gets a hard notch. Their meter doesn't change at all.

51%–70%: The Warrior's passion and ferocity inspire those around him. Anyone who fights for the Warrior's cause at his side gains a +10% skill bonus to a relevant skill. Note that the Warrior himself does not get this bonus, but that two Warriors together could improve each other. No matter how many Warriors are fighting in a group, the bonus from this channel never goes above 10%.

71%–90%: The avatar may now substitute his or her Avatar: Warrior skill for one other skill. The skill must be one that has already proven very useful in the campaign for their cause, and once a skill is so designated, it cannot be changed.

91%+: The Warrior cannot be harmed by individuals who represent his opposition. All attacks automatically fail. If you're in the War on Drugs, drug dealers and users cannot harm you when they're attacking you because you're a DEA agent. (If someone who happens to smoke grass decides to kill you for some other reason . . . well, that's a gray area. The channel may work or may not.) If you're a commie fighting the War on Capitalism, the defenders of capitalism—cops, soldiers, prison guards—cannot physically harm you. Attacks by people who live in a capitalist system, but who are not inherent supporters of the status quo power structure are *not affected* unless they're attacking you because you're a communist.

Note that this protects only against physical harm. Imprisonment, strictly psychological torture and mind-controlling drugs or magick all work fine.


Book Three
The
Living
Mirror
of
Heaven





CHAPTER TWELVE

COSMIC OVERVIEW

YOU ARE THE OCCULT UNDERGROUND.

Above the streets with secret names, enveloping the world of our desires, there is the living mirror of heaven: the **Statosphere**. That's not the *stratosphere,* as in the layer of atmosphere that surrounds the planet. It's the *Statosphere,* a realm where statistics have personalities. It is the greatest secret of the occult underground, known only to a few. You are one of these few, one of the **lords** of the occult underground. And this is the truth: the Statosphere is where the **archetypes** live.

Archetypes are not merely a concept given magickal power by the unconscious will of six billion minds. They are living beings. They are omniscient but not omnipotent. They are the gods we made.

Each archetype was once a human being. Such a person so embodied a nascent archetype of the collective unconscious there was no place to go but up. This is **ascension**, the moment when a human ceases to exist in any form but the Statospheric and joins the **invisible clergy**. Ascension strips away human complexities and leaves them as pure incarnations of their archetypes.

An archetype cannot force a human into taking action. But it can shift the odds of something spontaneously happening, a momentary incident that changes a human's mind about what to do next. Our decisions are the product of moments, slices of perception aggregating into the feeling of "the right thing to do." They manipulate us in these subtle ways, pushing their intrinsic agenda: the Warrior spurs conflict, the Pilgrim charges us with quests, and the Messenger spreads the news.

But archetypes are not eternal. We created them, and just as we lifted them up to heaven we can drag them screaming back to earth. At any time, each archetype can have a single **godwalker**: the most powerful avatar of that particular archetype. Godwalkers tread a dangerous line, because while they are their archetype's most potent representative, they are also one step from ascending into their archetype's slot, sending the being who was the archetype back to earth to live again as a mortal.

As human history marches on, the number of archetypes in the invisible clergy increases. And when their number reaches 333, the world ends. What happens next is anyone's guess. Some think the entire cosmos restarts from the big bang. Others believe that history continues, but that the world spontaneously and retroactively rewrites itself. One thing is sure: whatever form the new world takes, it is the ascended archetypes who bring it into being and define its nature.

The end result is clear. We live in the world that we deserve. Our collective minds force select humans to ascend as archetypes, and the archetypes we ascend create the next world. This place we know now, the earth of the twenty-first century, was set in motion by the humans of the last world.

This, then, is the great secret of the occult underground. The ultimate prize is ascension. Embody an archetype, become a godwalker, ascend into the Statosphere, and you shape the next world. Ally with an archetype and gain its favor. Help an avatar ascend and it is in your debt. Choose your candidate: the Warrior or the Mother? The Savage or the Pilgrim? Throw down the archetypes you oppose, cut down the foes of the archetypes you support, and your every action shapes the next world. Be a god. Aid a god. Fight a god. Kill a god. Look down from the living mirror of heaven, peer into the world of our desires, walk the streets with secret names. The lords of the occult underground can do anything.

But always remember: when this many people are hungry for power, you better be the one with the fork.

UNKNOWN ARMIES

artwork on previous page by Matt Harpold
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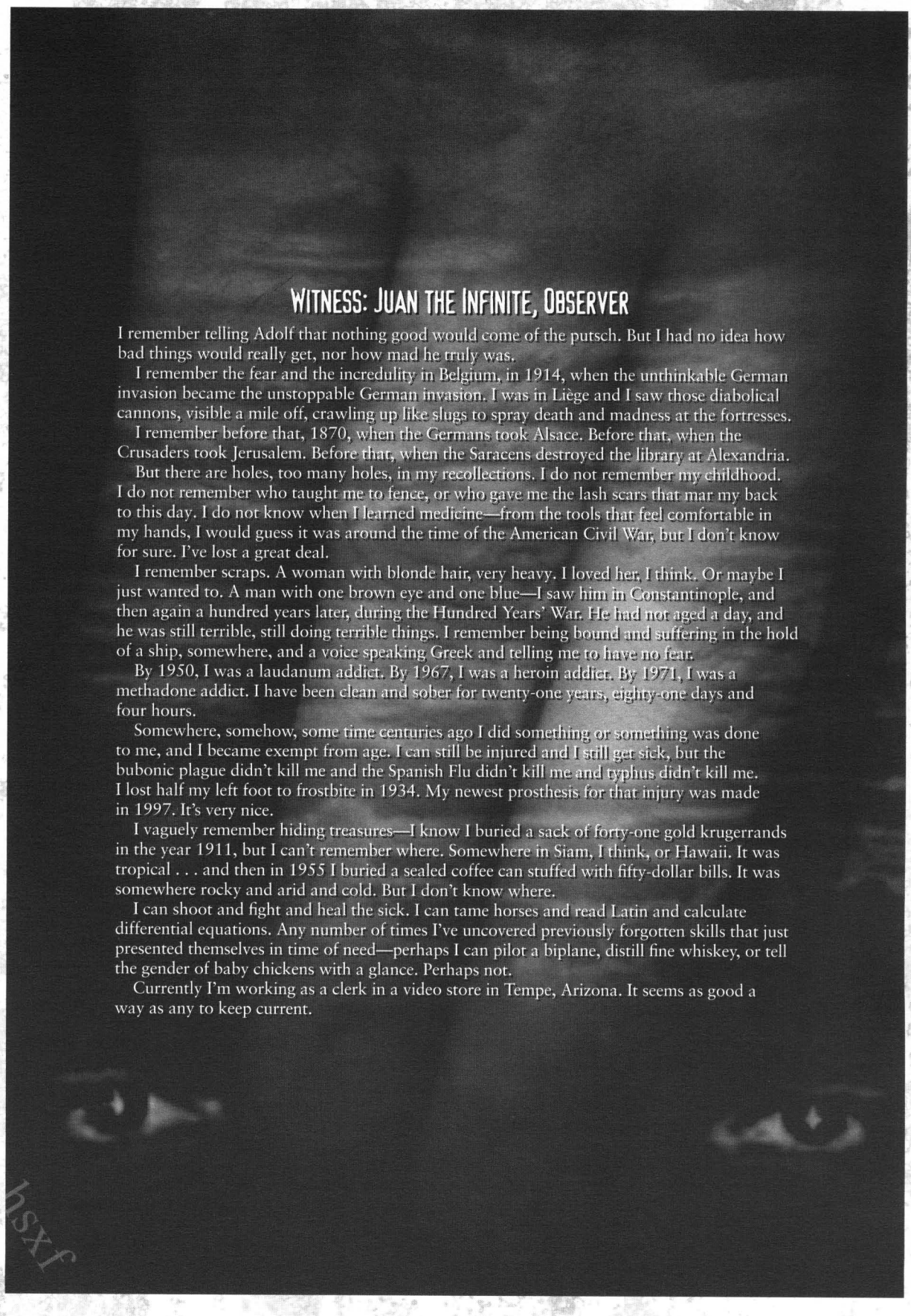
photomontages by Haroudo Xavier



WITNESS: JUAN THE INFINITE, OBSERVER

I remember telling Adolf that nothing good would come of the putsch. But I had no idea how bad things would really get, nor how mad he truly was.

I remember the fear and the incredulity in Belgium, in 1914, when the unthinkable German invasion became the unstoppable German invasion. I was in Liège and I saw those diabolical cannons, visible a mile off, crawling up like slugs to spray death and madness at the fortresses.

I remember before that, 1870, when the Germans took Alsace. Before that, when the Crusaders took Jerusalem. Before that, when the Saracens destroyed the library at Alexandria.

But there are holes, too many holes, in my recollections. I do not remember my childhood. I do not remember who taught me to fence, or who gave me the lash scars that mar my back to this day. I do not know when I learned medicine—from the tools that feel comfortable in my hands, I would guess it was around the time of the American Civil War, but I don't know for sure. I've lost a great deal.

I remember scraps. A woman with blonde hair, very heavy. I loved her, I think. Or maybe I just wanted to. A man with one brown eye and one blue—I saw him in Constantinople, and then again a hundred years later, during the Hundred Years' War. He had not aged a day, and he was still terrible, still doing terrible things. I remember being bound and suffering in the hold of a ship, somewhere, and a voice speaking Greek and telling me to have no fear.

By 1950, I was a laudanum addict. By 1967, I was a heroin addict. By 1971, I was a methadone addict. I have been clean and sober for twenty-one years, eighty-one days and four hours.

Somewhere, somehow, some time centuries ago I did something or something was done to me, and I became exempt from age. I can still be injured and I still get sick, but the bubonic plague didn't kill me and the Spanish Flu didn't kill me and typhus didn't kill me. I lost half my left foot to frostbite in 1934. My newest prosthesis for that injury was made in 1997. It's very nice.

I vaguely remember hiding treasures—I know I buried a sack of forty-one gold krugerrands in the year 1911, but I can't remember where. Somewhere in Siam, I think, or Hawaii. It was tropical . . . and then in 1955 I buried a sealed coffee can stuffed with fifty-dollar bills. It was somewhere rocky and arid and cold. But I don't know where.

I can shoot and fight and heal the sick. I can tame horses and read Latin and calculate differential equations. Any number of times I've uncovered previously forgotten skills that just presented themselves in time of need—perhaps I can pilot a biplane, distill fine whiskey, or tell the gender of baby chickens with a glance. Perhaps not.

Currently I'm working as a clerk in a video store in Tempe, Arizona. It seems as good a way as any to keep current.

WITNESS: MINNIE PALOMAR, BANK ROBBER

The plan is complicated, but sound. There's not a lot of room for error. But we aren't exactly error-prone people.

Last night, we tested the binding, and it worked. Symbolically, each one of us can now pass for Christopher, which makes the whole plan possible. Previously, only Christopher could go into the 3:33 door. Now, any one of us can.

Ricketyland is just like Chris described it—sickly green sky, like when you've taken foxglove. Those horrible clouds. No real ground, just layer upon layer of dusty, piled up wooden scaffolds, uneven and unsteady and termite-gnawed, planted in some unknowable soil a hundred feet below—or a hundred miles, who knows? We didn't see any of the sailing buildings Christopher described, thank goodness. Might have got a glimpse of one of his "grimscythes," flying along off in the distance.

We can leave Ricketyland into the bank any time, if someone on the inside invites us. That's not a problem—Emily is so plain, so unfamous, that cameras won't even register her. She's made it an Art. She can bring us in at 2:40, right after the first guard pass. That leaves us 53 minutes to bypass the alarm, core the outer shell, blow the inner shell, and get into the vault. Bruce swears he can do it. Ricketyland can only be entered at 3:33 in the morning, and only through a wooden door, so we really have 48 minutes to get into the vault, get the jewels and the Tepes Golden Cup, then get to Brinckman's office—the closest wooden door to the vault, it's two stories up, and we'll need the full sixty seconds to get all five of us through the door to safety. Then we just wait 24 hours in Ricketyland until 3:33 Wednesday, when we can freely escape into the bus station door.

Piece of cake. As long as we can avoid the grimscythes. And the cops. And as long as the New Inquisition team doesn't get there first.

Or at the same time.

WITNESS: JAMES K. MCGOWAN IV, MOVER AND SHAKER

"Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood, and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans: aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram, once recorded, will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever growing insistency. Remember that our sons and grandsons are going to do things that would stagger us."

The Chicago architect Daniel Burnham said that, and you can look in ten books and find ten theories about where, or even whether, he said it first. But I know. Because he said it to us first, to our great-grandfathers a century and more ago, and we listened to him. We made our big Plan then, to raise up Chicago as the Shining City on the Hill, the New Jerusalem, the Axis Mundi, the center of the world.

The 1893 World's Fair made us the White City, although we had to hijack Noah's Ark and the Wheel of Fortune to do it. Look it up, if you can find the books. L. Frank Baum made us the Emerald City, writing his thaumaturgical prose in the Cliff Dwellers' abode above Michigan Avenue, along the ley line that we later paved into Route 66 in 1926. Don't ask how we became a Red City unless you've got a strong stomach; but I can tell you that nobody yet has guessed what the Saint Valentine's Day Massacre really was—and that there's a reason Chicago became the slaughterhouse to the world.

Oh, you're curious, now? You want to know the reason that Burnham had to be buried on an island in the middle of tamed water, and why Frank Lloyd Wright was followed by fire his entire life, and what exactly happened to the El train that used to carry bodies to the funeral homes running widdershins around the Loop after midnight.

Well, then you'll have to join us to find out, and do your part for the Plan, for that noble, logical diagram that has become a living thing, indeed.

Oh, you're curious about the occult underground? Freaks and losers, all of them, fighting over a sniff of Joey Ramone's airplane glue and living off food stamps. You're better than those headcases; that's why I'm talking to you instead of them.

Worried about the New Inquisition? Listen, some billionaire getting his knickers in a twist because he can't get his cosmic pecker up does not constitute a threat. Not to us. Sure, his raincoat muscle are badasses—but nobody busts a freak's skull like our very own Chicago Police Department. And I do mean "our very own."

No, we've got *real* enemies. Whole cities' worth. Los Angeles still has the other end of our ley line, after all, and they stole the Oneiros when they stole Chaplin's studio. London still won't admit that it's broken, and it's got so much leftover juice that even those doddering, inbred Freemason thumbsuckers in the Brotherhood of Magog can still put the whammy on us. And now Kuala fucking Lumpur, for God's sake, thinks it can assume our Dark Tower! Plus, I think Cain's father is on the warpath again.

Oh, that's right, you haven't met our secret weapon, have you? I'll try and introduce you after your initiation. Cain built the first city, you know; it's right there in the Bible. And he's kept trying to get it perfect again ever since, which is what brought him to Chicago in 1871. Burnham talked with angels, which led him to Cain, and they came up with the Plan together. And now, just like Burnham said, it's a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency.

Join us. Together, we will do things that will stagger you.

hsxf

WHAT YOU KNOW

Hardly anyone knows the truth about the way the cosmos works. You do. You know that all of reality is but the friction generated from the interaction of three cosmic concepts: matter, entropy, and order.

MATTER

This is what we're made of. Everything that exists is a form of matter. Rocks, trees, atoms, energy, popcorn, you name it. It's us. The problem with matter is it's inherently in conflict. It *tends* to move towards **entropy** but *desires* to move towards **order**. This conflict makes everything happen.

ENTROPY

Entropy is the tendency of matter to move towards a chaotic state. Entropy is responsible for the slow collapse of the cosmos in the aftermath of the big bang. Entropy functions at the most fundamental levels of physics, slowly breaking down systems into chaos.

Entropy has had a great effect on humans. We can thank entropy for cancer and Alzheimer's disease, as well as for humanity's destructive urges and inability to realize the promise of systemic concepts such as social harmony and tolerance.

Entropy is not a bad guy in a black cloak cackling over a crystal ball. It is a primal force of the cosmos, always in motion but utterly lacking in consciousness. Still, when things suck you know what to blame.

ORDER

Order is the natural desire of matter to move towards a systemic state. Order is responsible for the formation of galaxies, solar systems, planets, life, consciousness, and societies. Order functions at the most fundamental levels of physics, doing its best to organize matter into productive, efficient systems that grow and propagate.

Order has had a great effect on humans. We can thank order for our bodies and how well they function under most circumstances, as well as for civilization, love, creativity, and all the other positive, unifying things we spend our time with.

Order is not a saintly guy with a flowing beard and a white robe peering down at us from heaven. It is a primal force of the cosmos, always in motion but utterly lacking in consciousness. Still, when everything comes together just right you know what to thank.

THE CONFLICT

Matter aspires towards order, but surrenders to chaos. The great test of the cosmos is which one matter ultimately embraces. If it embraces entropy, the cosmos ceases to exist. If it embraces order, the cosmos is eternal.

This conflict is with you every moment of every day. Your body's cellular awareness of the entropic and systemic forces struggling on the atomic level filters up slowly through the central nervous system, affecting the way you think and act. Millions of years of evolution have made this awareness a part of every living thing. It is why we all have both chaotic and systemic tendencies built into our brains. Order builds



artwork by Rob Nemeth

societies; entropy brings war. Order sends you out in search of friends and lovers; entropy encourages you to betray them. Order puts you in stylish clothes; entropy makes you fall in a mud puddle. We are who we are because of this primal conflict, and yet we are also a part of that conflict. In the end, we are the ones who resolve it.

The Cosmos

We live in a humanocentric cosmos. We're all there is. The cosmos exists for us, the teeming masses of planet Earth, and we exist for the cosmos. There is no other life anywhere else in the entire universe unless the collective desires of the last world willed it into being this time around. It's all about us. We get the credit and the blame for the whole ball of wax.

The cosmos is the embodiment of karmic reincarnation: we get the reality we deserve. The way we shape the next incarnation of the cosmos is by ascending humans into the archetypes of the invisible clergy. In turn, they build the next cosmos according to their varied agendas. It is the ultimate representative democracy.

At the start of a cosmic incarnation, the clergy is empty. There are no archetypes. The previous world's archetypes expend themselves to make the new world in their image, but they do not migrate to the new reality.

Soon life appears. Humans multiply and build societies. The early archetypes ascend quickly: the Mother, the Warrior.

The way the new world grows depends on what principles the last clergy instilled in it. One incarnation might be more warlike, while another has a marked tendency for introspection.

Free will is paramount. Even in a negative incarnation, enough people can make positive decisions to tilt the balance of power in the clergy. The next world then reflects their desires.

The First and Last Man

In the beginning there was the first human. Dukes call him the Comte de Saint-Germain, the legendary immortal of Enlightenment Europe, and they only know him as yet another rumor. Lords call him the First and Last Man, lest he hear his name invoked and grow curious.

He has walked the earth since he rose from the clay, watching the progress of our world. He can appear in any guise, at any level of power he finds interesting. Sometimes he is an omniscient meddler, interceding moment to moment in the affairs of varied humans. Other times he is a bumbling hayseed, ignorant of anything he hasn't seen on television. At all times he is exactly what he wants to be.

Germain serves as the cosmic clock-winder. He keeps things ticking. Human interactions with the cosmos tend to be messy, and reality is a fragile thing. Saint-Germain patches the holes, tends the wounds, smoothes out the bumps.

Sometimes he gets you to do it for him. Saint-Germain finds it more interesting to get humans to do his work because, well, he's done it himself a million times. But watching humans bound and rebound is always more interesting, if rather less efficient.

Germain has no known agenda besides ensuring that the world continues making progress towards transcendence—the point when the invisible clergy consists of 332 archetypes and Saint-Germain himself ascends as the 333rd. Then the clergy reincarnates as the raw matter of the next world, which shapes itself according to their desires, and Saint-Germain appears once more as the first human.

Some reports paint Saint-Germain as a cruel tyrant, dispensing rough justice to the guilty and the innocent as suits his whim. To others he has appeared as a kindly guardian, providing a gentle nudge towards success. Most never recognize him at all.

The Struggle

The archetypes are simultaneously the gods, the weapons the gods fight with, and the battlefield the gods fight on. Humans join the battle every day. We use the archetypes and they use us. The primal concepts of human nature shove and jostle to make their agendas strong. Some exist in harmony, while others are in direct opposition. The alliances and oppositions ebb and flow from moment to moment. There are no grudges, only principles.

Sometimes an archetype leaves the clergy. This happens either because the archetype has lost its relevance to humanity, or because a human replaces it, ascending in the form of a new and more widespread interpretation. This is extremely rare, of course—members of the clergy protect themselves—but the rise of global communications and the rapid transmission of new cultural ideas may be a threat even they cannot completely check.

Dethroned archetypes return to Earth as mortal humans. They are conscious of their status as ex-archetypes, but have only fragmentary memories of their experiences in the clergy. They are also diametrically opposed to their former agenda, a sort of anti-archetype whose greatest goal is the refutation of what they once utterly embodied.

The Afterlife

The lords of the occult underground are just as conflicted on this subject as the dukes are. Your colleagues generally accept that there is a human soul with some sort of existence or role to play after the death of the body. But that's about all they agree on.

However, you do know the secret of **demons**. Demons are the opposite of archetypes. Instead of the ascended form of an agenda of the mass consciousness, they are the descended form of an agenda of an individual human being.

When some people die, their obsession has such a grip on them that they cannot let go. Their personality is soured and condensed so it only serves to reinforce the obsession. They have the vestiges of their human memories, but all they care about is pursuing their obsession. And the only way they can do so is to possess a living human, using his or her body to gratify their immortal need. Even those whose obsessions were altruistic are refined into a pure, overwhelming desire to walk the earth again and pursue that obsession. To make it happen, they possess, kill, and destroy, if just to sing the most beautiful music in the world.

Not many people are so bound by their obsessions as to become demons when they die. The dirty secret of the occult underground is that adepts are far more likely to become demons than anyone else, if they die when they are still pursuing their magick. The obsession-wracked afterlife of demons teems with the screaming souls of those who forced their view of magick on the cosmos.

Of course, this makes for powerful demons—many of them can work magick if they get a body to do it through. Do not call up that which you can not put down.

Demons have a few words to say about the afterlife, and many of them are even consistent. Summoned demons speak of "the veil," a barrier they cannot across. Perhaps the souls of the contented dead lie beyond it, and only the demons are trapped on this side of the veil. They reveal little more, however, and grow agitated when questioned persistently on the subject of life after death. Some speak fearfully of "the others" or "the cruel ones," implying that making too many revelations about the afterlife brings swift punishment for the loose-lipped demon. But who can trust what a demon says?

The Controversy

The lords of the occult underground generally agree on the preceding knowledge. But there are areas where they do not agree.

What is a cosmic incarnation? Many believe this literally means the destruction of the cosmos followed by a new Big Bang, and on and on until humans evolve again. Others maintain that reality spontaneously rewrites itself to the new incarnation in the space of a moment, with all of history revised completely to match the way things have just become. A few believe the cosmos does not end but instead buds off a new cosmos, and so every cosmos that has ever been exists simultaneously.

Who is Saint-Germain? Perhaps he is simply the first true human, and therefore assumes a host of symbolic responsibilities. He could be the only true god, the deity who created this cyclical cosmos and who tends it to this day. He might even be the host to every archetype who ever existed in every incarnation, the walking prison that holds everything we've ever been.

Who are the Cruel Ones? Demons speak of them in terror. They may be some higher order of being that we know nothing about. They could even be the archetypes of the last universe, press-ganged into service as cosmic prison guards.

Why does the House of Renunciation exist? Is its sole purpose to rewire rejected archetypes, with the reversal of its mortal victims a mere side effect? Is it an invention of the last invisible clergy, a feature of the universe like gravity and measles, placed for some inscrutable reason? Or is it as fundamental as the clergy themselves, a cosmic release valve that vents excess philosophical energy, with the reversal of beliefs either the byproduct or the direct result of its discharge?

What causes Otherspaces? It's an observed fact that there are rare areas where people can pass into realities in which different rules apply. Are these Otherspaces the creations of some long-lost adepts? Are they the still-twitching corpses of dead universes? Or are they simply features of the cosmos, like the House of Renunciation without the renunciation?

The Occult Underground

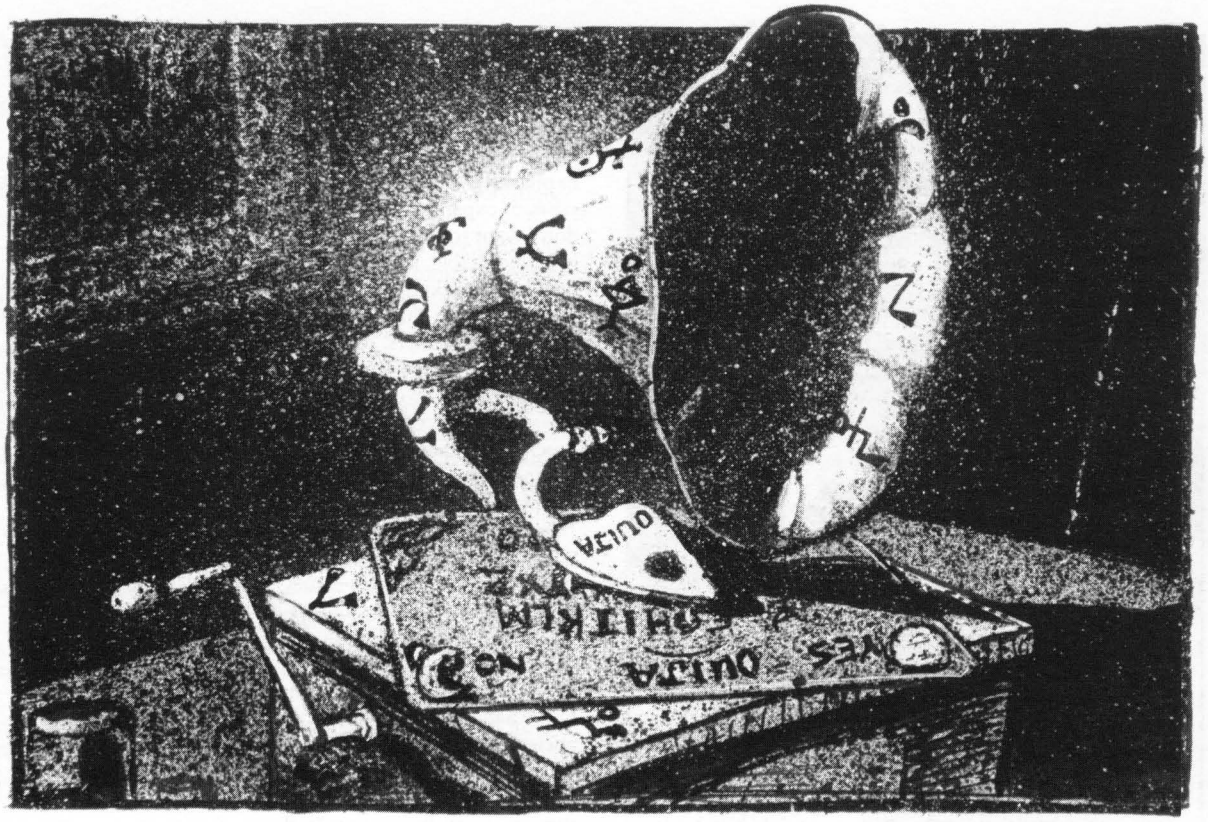
You know far more about the occult underground than most of the dukes do. You know many of the other lords by name and reputation, even if you haven't met them. The downside is they know you, too. Here's the skinny the dukes don't know.

You know **the Sleepers** are just as scary as everyone says. They got their start in 1600s England, putting a damper on the witch-hunt hysteria of the day, and they've never given up. Today they're based in England and Europe, and you believe they're even operating in China. Their operations in America have been somewhat limited, though it's true they did something heavy to New York City in the 1950s so it wouldn't become a magickal powerhouse. One useful thing you know about the Sleepers: how to contact them. You've got a phone number you can call if it's important, or if they're after you and you want to cut a deal. If you know something's going down they'd like to put a stop to, it may be worth dropping a dime to get them involved. Of course, snitches get stitches.

The founder of the hard-hitting **New Inquisition** is Alex Abel. That's right. The billionaire. That guy who made the cover of *Time* magazine in the late 1980s, when he emerged as the black Gordon Gecko. Word is Abel almost ascended to the clergy once, but something went wrong. He's out to make the world a better place, and he's willing to do anything—*anything*—to ensure his idea of what "a better place" means is the one that wins. No one knows for sure how many agents he has on his payroll, but since he has enough wealth to buy several small countries, it's a safe bet the answer is "as many as he wants." A ruthless billionaire bent for magick with an ends-justify-the-means mentality could save the world, or ruin it. If you're going to cross this guy, you'd better do it from an orbiting nuclear missile platform. His right-hand man is a serious hardcase known as **Eponymous**. When Abel says jump, Eponymous throws you off a building.

The burger-flippers in **Mak Attax** went from zeroes to heroes when they saved the world's bacon at Y2K. They got hold of the Ritual of Light, an old bit of magick nobody took very seriously, and they somehow managed to cast it on the entire freaking planet all at once. That's why Y2K was fireworks and parties instead of meltdown and chaos. Nobody knows just how bad things might have been if it hadn't been for the Maks, and they're not making an issue of it. They're still the easiest cabal to infiltrate, but now that they've had a taste of the big leagues they're never going back to Mudville. These guys are clued-in enough to be useful but still idealistic enough to be vulnerable. They're tools, in more ways than one. Use them wisely.

The "Sect" in **the Sect of the Naked Goddess** means the cabal splintered off from a larger one. That's exactly what happened when Daphnee Lee, a nobody videographer for porn flicks, witnessed the ascension of the Naked Goddess firsthand and took her message to the **Cult of the Goddess**. The videotape she brought them was a powerful piece of evidence that an entirely new goddess had arrived for a new age, but the traditionalists saw this as both profane and heretical. Within a few months, Daphnee and a few followers left the Cult and formed their own cabal. Traditionally the Cult stayed clear of the occult underground, pursuing their mystic vision of the Goddess and the power of pure femininity in metaphysical seclusion. But the heresy of Daphnee Lee has riven the Cult, and its more militant adherents are angry—Hell hath no fury and you know the rest. As Lee's Sect gains power and followers in the occult underground, they may become a nexus for conflict. Even the Sect's own ideology is in transition, with some members identifying themselves as **Affinites**. Whether this portends another schism or just the next stage in the development of



this nascent faith remains to be seen. But these things are certain: the Naked Goddess videotape is for real, somebody stole it a few years ago, and copies of it have magickal powers of their own.

Nobody talks about **the Order of Saint Cecil** and they want to keep it that way. Word is they report to the Vatican and they fight magick in all its forms. Some lords believe the Order of Saint Cecil is responsible for much of what dukes say the Sleepers do. The Order hits someone, the Sleepers get the credit, and they're both happy. But nobody knows. They may even be a myth.

Dukes know about the **Agents of Renunciation**, who can mess with your identity. You know that the agents all serve the **House of Renunciation**, a magickal Otherspace with the power to invert your obsession. If you enter as a warrior, you emerge as a pacifist. The House is composed of numerous Rooms, each of which carries out a specialized inversion with its own agents. Thus the **Room of Ignorance** destroys faith in technology and replaces it with primeval savagery, while the **Room of Rusted Things** substitutes fiery passion for banal apathy. There is no consistent agenda to the House itself, and its Rooms often contradict each other. Battles between their agents are the stuff of legend. When an archetype is overthrown, it is the House of Renunciation that inverts his or her agenda.

From 1978 to 2000, a global cabal of violent millennialist psychos known as **the True Order of Saint-Germain** carried out a campaign of murder, arms dealing, and mystic mumbo-jumbo about ascended masters, and the whole time they kept expecting the world to end. In the mid-1990s they infiltrated the occult underground in search of knowledge and allies for the end times. By December of 1999 they had underground bunkers, weapons, food, and a plan to emerge from the wreckage of civilization to serve Saint-Germain in his brave new world. Then Y2K let them down. By the fall of 2000 their Miami front company, True Orders Enterprises, ceased operations and the entire cabal just dried up and blew away. Ex-members went to the media and told stories of strange magick, cruel murders, and even bioweapons research. In the aftermath of 9/11, the FBI's Miami office landed all over the remnants of the cabal, but found no trace of founder Randy Douglas, his close associates, or their money. Nobody knows what really happened to the TOSG, but dukes and lords alike are glad they're gone. *If* they're gone.

The Freak has, against all odds and opposition, become godwalker of the Mystic Hermaphrodite. That puts it in tune with primal magick itself—and since it seems to be an Epideromancer *too*, it's presumably buffed itself up beyond easy comprehension. Luckily it doesn't seem too interested in making friends, and its enemies are presumably all dead by now.

The writing's on the wall for **the Seven Invisible Chairs.** They're still moving behind the scenes in Europe, using the proprietary rituals passed through their families to get rich, screw with the aristocracy, and fight Communism. But with motion detectors and infrared cameras, the invisibility shtick isn't so useful anymore. Their weapons salve is cool, but again, nothing to brag about in the age of laser surgery. Long distance communication was their trump card in the Renaissance but, in the cell phone age, it's not worth the trouble. Mostly though, their problem is the lack of enemies. They've succeeded too long, and they need to either find a new purpose or they'll start screwing one another. It's happened a million times.

Now, **Ordo Corpulentus** is bad, bad news. Any postmodern school that gets off on cannibalism is scary right there,



but mixing it with a doctrine of overt cultural imperialism is just freaking *wrong*. They're not hard to outrun, but they are hard to put down—especially right after taking communion.

The **Voudoun** of New Orleans is still just half-assed, haphazard Avatar mask-channeling in Mardi Gras drag, but years of experience has made it reliable enough that you don't want to set them straight. The mother lode in Haiti is more reliable, less friendly, and cares less about getting drunk and fucking and more about fighting for survival like a cornered rat. Plus, those boccors and houngans are mostly top-grade poisoners, too.

Speaking of people who screw around with Avatars and the collective unconscious, stay away from **Davenport, Iowa**. The dukes there don't run everything—or necessarily much of anything—but nothing gets in the way when they cast people in one of their stories. The names and circumstances change, but Romeo and Juliet (or Ron and Julia, or Remy and Harriet) kill themselves for love every seven years there. You get Macbeth action too, as well as Anthony and Cleopatra—and you do *not* want to wind up as Rosencrantz or Guildenstern. Though even that is a better fate than playing the Earl of Gloucester.

By the same token, stay away from **Bir Dibis** in Egypt. You probably weren't planning on visiting a well way out in the Sahara, even if it wasn't haunted by something ancient, evil, and capable of infecting anyone who drinks its water. Luckily it's not contagious any further than that, and infected people start bleeding through their fingernails if they smell crushed orange peel.

Australia looks like a continent of magickal bumpkins, but that's just because its adepts do their dirty deeds in a series of eerie Otherspaces. Asking whether the aboriginal Dreamtime religion caused the Otherspaces, or whether the Otherspaces inspired the Dreamtime, is pretty much a chicken-and-egg dilemma. They're interesting to visit, but you wouldn't want to die there.

Same goes for the cloudy domains of **Al Samawât Awâmîd**. If the Shi'ite fundamentalists—or the USAF—haven't killed them all by now, you might still run into an Âmûd above the Zagros, Elburz, and Makran ranges.

San Francisco is just miserable. Used to be a great place, but then these two L.A. cabals blew into town: the **Fellowship of Bad Traffic**, who power up by pissing people off, and the **Sternos**, whose philosophical approach to the wider consciousness of magick is "let's wreck everything!" They put the boot in to a load of occultists with flowers in their hair—some of whom were nothing to sneer at—and now that they're done with that, they're falling on each other like bored toddlers on a rainy day. Half of each gang is dead, crazy, jailed, or maimed, and there's no end in sight.

Dirk Allen still hasn't managed to get killed yet, more's the shame. Ever notice how naïve young men around him wind up dying? There's never a psychotic Brazilian cult around when you need one.

Les Infernaux are about as French as *French's Yellow Mustard*, but snickering about their pretensions won't help you if you wind up in one of the rings. They've been building that fucking nightmare pit in Sardinia since the Revolution—yeah, the French one—and word is they're done with the Wood of Suicides. At this rate, they'll have Satan chewing on Judas by 2010. Someone ought to do something, but who bells the cat?

artwork by Samuel Araya

WHAT YOU HEAR

Here are lies, damned lies, and statistics.

There are whispers that leak through the cracks in human faith, and stories that trees tell when the sap rises and they teeter drunkenly in the forests. Nothing is true. Everything is permitted.

Hobos and some homeless are disappearing near an old abandoned railroad yard. It lies near some mountains and is supposed to serve as a gateway to the Big Rock Candy Mountain. This only is supposed to happen once in a blue moon though. Literally.

There is a .45 caliber pistol floating around the underground. Anyone who has it becomes the host to the spirit inside. The spirit is the actual form that the Sleepers travel in. It passes from body to body hunting the over-obvious mages.

There's a new duke on the scene who claims to be channeling The Guy With Pencils Stuck In His Eyes. He can see just fine, though; nobody really believes him, but nobody wants to mess with him either—just in case.

Rolling a dollar bill into a pellet and swallowing it with a mouthful of New Coke protects you against Plutomancer spells until the next time you handle money.

Cutting off the head of a living being and writing the name of someone who knows one of your secrets on its tongue makes that person forget the secret for as long as the head remains in your possession.

The invisible clergy are building a cathedral of glass on the surface of the moon. You can see it in some of the pictures taken by the astronauts. When they complete the cathedral, the world will end.

The world ended on January 1st, 2000. We're living in hell.

If you think you're about to get possessed by a demon, put your shoes on the wrong feet and walk around the outside of your house backwards three times every day at dawn for three days. Try to do it without looking behind you.

17% of the population of North America isn't real.

The current condition of the stock market is reflected in the general condition of a small pond just outside the town of Antioch, Sheridan County, Nebraska.

There's a special poker school that plays in the exact centre of Central Park every night. It's made up of demons, but occasionally humans are offered the chance to take part. The stakes are memories: stake your bad, win some good.

The Forbidden City in Beijing is symmetrical in layout, except for one small door, allegedly put in for the benefit of an elderly emperor. In fact, the "missing" door on the opposite side of the palace exists, and can be found with the proper ritual.

The *Titanic* was deliberately sunk by someone who wished to complete his ascension as The Survivor. He later disappeared, but nobody knows for sure if he ascended or failed to survive his attempts.

Che Guevara ascended as The People's Hero. Robin of Locksley was therefore ejected from the Invisible Clergy and is now oppressing tribes in Burma.

A Dipsomancer dreamed up the entire town of Engerwood, Pennsylvania in 1953. He's the mayor there, and has a small imaginary family.

47 dukes live in Grantham, Connecticut. I dunno, it could be something in the water. And I heard the Comte spends Christmas there.

Every time a certain number of people die, one person figures out the meaning of life. This is the only way anyone can figure it out.

Demons are really the spirits of stillborn babies desperately trying to experience a moment of the life they were denied.

There's a glassblower in Xenia, Ohio who makes these globes, etching in the continents and whatnot. If you crack one with a silver hammer, it causes an earthquake right where you smacked it.

The Post Office, the Visa Corporation, and the IMF, are corporate manifestations/avatars of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva.

Thomas Edison's Necrophone—for speaking to the dead—never worked. However, he did develop the Neophone, for speaking to the unborn.

In a little town in Alberta, there's a family in which no one has aged since the mother started sleeping 23 hours a day in 1981.

Before 1945, there were people who could fly and walk through walls and all sorts of crazy shit, but when they dropped the A-Bomb on Nagasaki, the world was reborn. People couldn't remember anyone having those powers, and there was no record of them outside of comic books.

The world has already ended. Magic only has begun to actually work 'cause reality is falling apart.

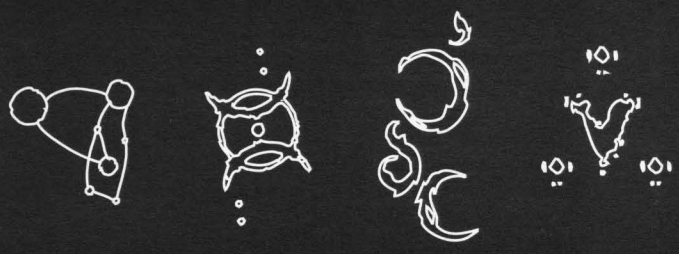
Lovemaking is not the only way to create a human body, but it is the only way to create a human soul. All the people created through scientific means—artificial insemination, clones, *in vitro* fertilization, gamete intrafallopian transfer, intravaginal culture, uterine lavage embryo retrieval, intracytoplasmic sperm injection, and the rest—are born without souls, incapable of real empathy or emotion. If you watch the streets with aura sight, you'll see them—they're the blank people.

The guy who tells you "the" is the magick word is full of crap. There is a magick word, but it's the first person singular. Avoiding the fifth letter and first two letters of "Mephistopheles"—that protects you. The driving force of magick is egotism. That's why adepts are such assholes. That's why Christianity and Buddhism teach selflessness and ego annihilation.

Every act of heterosex releases a demon into the world to ruin it. Every act of homosex releases an angel to protect it. Every act of monosex releases a narcissistic and capricious spirit—they've fought the demons, but only for selfish reasons. We used to be able to reproduce without perverse heterosex, but the demons destroyed the cloning technology and we're just now recovering it. The demons have almost won—that's what's up with our sexualized advertising and permissive culture. But with enough homosex we can defeat them. Just watch out for those treacherous bisexuals!

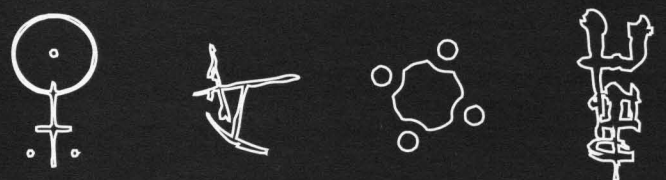
There are 333 essential stories—333 routes from birth to death, 333 paths from the cradle to the grave. When an individual dies, it reinforces one of the stories—their personality melts down into pure narrative energy. The strongest stories, which have been lived most often, can now influence the living from beyond the grave. That's what "avatars" are doing. But this creates a feedback loop where certain stories get overplayed, cutting down the options for all of us and throwing the universe dangerously off kilter.

There are uncountable ways to be wrong, and only 333 ways to be right.



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

COSMIC CAMPAIGN



In a cosmic campaign, your cabal are players in the biggest game of them all: building the next universe for humanity to explore. You know who the movers and shakers in the occult underground are, and they know you, too. Your cabal has probably been in existence for a few years or even much longer. If it's new, it's because you're all veteran dukes or cabalists who hooked up to start something from scratch. Your trigger event is deep in your past, long superceded by the mystic shit you've cooked up yourself—yet as the man says, you may be done with your past but your past ain't done with you. People like you, the lords of the occult underground, live life on a long arc that bends towards synchronicity. The way you began shapes the way you end. Expect trouble from the old days to follow you into the new. Fear death by water. The invisible clergy knows everything you've ever done, after all, and you're battling in their backyard now. Choose your enemies carefully, and your allies even moreso.

CREATING YOUR CABAL

If you're in a cabal, it's in the big leagues. This could mean it's a handful of powerful lords, or you could be the leaders of a cabal with dozens of members. You could even turn things on their head: instead of normal people struggling with the invisible clergy, you could be cosmic envoys meddling in the affairs of humans.

COSMIC CABAL ASSETS

Besides the general assets listed in the cabal types, there are specific assets every cosmic cabal starts with. You may not have them yourself, but someone in your cabal does. These are general assets such as "two minor rituals"—you can choose which rituals those are, or your GM may simply hand you the final list. (She may also decide to limit how many of these assets your cabal has, depending on how the campaign is to begin.)

- Two minor rituals.
- One minor proxy-building ritual.
- How to Tilt.
- How to make artifacts.
- Two minor artifacts.
- Knowledge of two unnatural creatures (GM's choice).

ASCENSION CABAL

This is it: you're on the front lines of the war to birth the next world. Your cabal is involved in an ascension project. Either you're working to get someone ascended into the clergy—possibly deposing a current archetype—or you're working to fight someone else's ascension bid. Eventually, you're almost certainly doing both.

GOALS

Get your candidate into the clergy to make the next world more to your liking. To do this, he or she needs to become a godwalker—deposing the current one in direct conflict—and then launch a war against the archetype to throw it down from heaven and sit in its place among the clergy.



Your job is to defend your avatar, helping him or her avoid taboos and walk the path better than anyone else. As your avatar gets more powerful, rival avatars and the current godwalker get serious about taking you down.

Or, do everything in your power to stop someone else's ascension attempt. Direct action is always good, but think big. Find the current godwalker and cut a mutual-aid deal so you can take down the pretender, or hook up with a pretender if it's the godwalker you're trying to stop. Curry the favor of the existing archetype by adopting its symbols and attitudes and launching mystical attacks on the avatars of its opposing archetypes.

Chances are excellent you can't pursue one of these goals without the other.

Assets

A clear agenda and something truly worth fighting for. The power you need to get the job done.

Liabilities

You're a big fat target. Every ambitious avatar following the same path as your candidate may become your enemy, and the current godwalker and archetype can hand you more trouble than you've ever imagined.

Examples

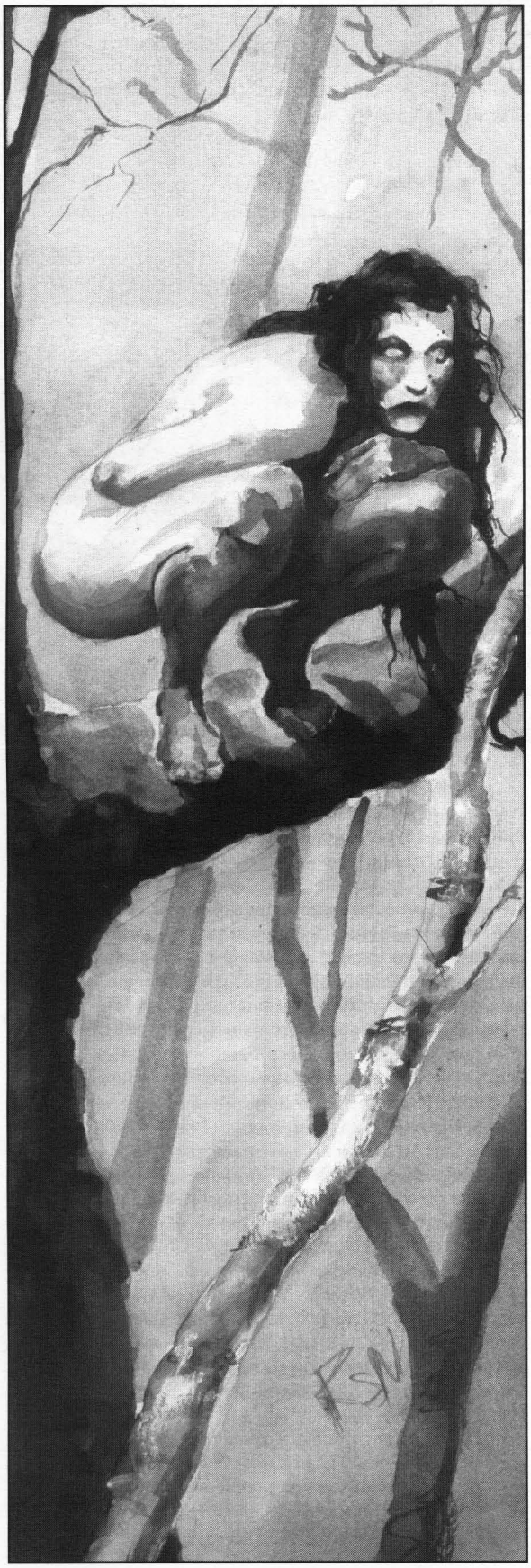
The Church of the Alpha-Nerd. There are two kinds of people: the kind who divide people into two kinds and the kind who don't. To put it another way, there are abstract thinkers and concrete thinkers. To put it yet *another* way, there are nerds and not-nerds.

In the past, concrete thinking was a wonderful adaptation. When one's most immediate concerns are finding fruit and avoiding saber-tooth tigers, being down to earth is fine. But now the important stuff is national, and global, and universal. The shallow thinkers are out of their depth, but the default individual in the great human mindshare is still the staid, grounded, practical man. That's gotta change. Your goal is to exalt the theorist, the philosopher, the man whose domain is nowhere and everywhere—and to get him in the Statosphere soon enough to save the world from those fumble-fingered "normal folks." The geek must inherit the Earth.

Aquatic Ape Womyn. The "Aquatic Ape" theory is a variation on standard evolution emphasizing the many traits humans share with water-based breeds of other mammals. You don't care if the theory is scientifically true or not. What matters is that the image of humankind adapting to the water is a critical counter-metaphor to generations of patriarchal images of "man" subduing the land. The feminine values of harmony, cooperation, and nurturing endure despite the crushing bootheel of masculine violence-based paradigms, and they need a representative in the invisible clergy.

What did womynkind get instead? The (literally) fucking Naked Goddess. An image of female subjugation and weakness so perfect she was plucked from the smutty depths of a porn shoot—that's porn from *pornos*, Greek for "female slave."

artwork by Felipe Echevarria



The Flying Woman is a start, but it's not enough. Independence from men is still defined in terms of male dependence. Your goal is to drag down the Naked Goddess and replace her with the Womyn. You've got the history, you've got the power, and you're working to create children who are the genetic hybrids of two womyn, not a "woman" and a man.

In as little as nine months, your perfect womyn could be born. Then you'll just have to protect her until she's old enough to Ascend . . .

Determined Antideterminists. The old Greeks believed the gods determined human actions. We were just pawns on their big global chessboard. The stoics believed in total predestination, until Aristotle came along and argued for humanity's free will.

Aristotle founded your cabal, and you've been freedom fighters ever since. But not against any mere human tyrant. You fight against the very idea that we are nothing but slaves.

You fought for the Catholics against Calvin. You gave Heisenberg the boost he needed to break the chains of pure cause and effect. You battled to discredit eugenics. You've fought the good fight against "race as destiny" in all its gruesome permutations. You took your swings at B.F. Skinner.

Now there's a new one. Geneticists are claiming to have isolated the genes for everything from alcoholism to multiple orgasms. It's not my fault! I have the philanderer gene, or the pyromaniac gene, or the steal-my-neighbor's-newspaper gene. It's back to "the devil made me do it," only with DNA.

People will grab any excuse to deny their power. But you know human power is all too real.

That's why you have so much of it.

Archetype Cabal

You're not interested in ascension. Your allies and enemies are the archetypes themselves. Maybe you want to strengthen the True King and weaken the Savage in a bid to tilt the next world towards coherent civilization. You can start by helping and hindering the relevant avatars, but you've got to think bigger than that. You need to shift the world's perception of the relative merits of the archetypes you're concerned with, and that means actions on a huge scale. Use Cliomancy to spread rumors that favor your agenda, or unleash unnatural entities on corporations who embody your foe. Want to hurt the Savage? Bring peace to Afghanistan, discredit back-to-nature luddites, and use your magick to increase the power of the federal government. Think *big*.

Goals

Shape the next world by aiding and opposing your chosen archetypes. Throw down the worst ones by making the world forget they ever existed. Hack the mass mind and upload your new global program.

Assets

The vision to see the big picture, to know it's not about the guy down the street so much as it is about all the guys down all the streets.

artwork by Rob Nemeth

Liabilities

You see the forest instead of the trees. You're pitching yourself as the Death Star, and somewhere out there is a farmboy in a snub fighter who could take you out when you least expect it.

Examples

The Good Sports. The average occultist (if there is any such thing) knows a little about you, but not much. They've heard about a long, bitter feud between adepts in Dallas, St. Louis, and cursed New York. They mutter about "agonomancers" or "Gambler avatars" trying to fix the Super Bowl or the World Series. The stupider ones even make jokes about "sportcerers," but few are stupid enough to get in your way. They figure you're on your own weird and insignificant kick, because what could a bunch of sweaty jocks have to do with anything?

They are blind.

You compete with your co-conspirators, but you're all playing by the same rules. Each of you has been baptized in the sacred Olympic Flame, and each of you carries a smoldering spark of it at all times. Any one of you would go the extra yard for another because you believe in the sacredness of sport.

There are a host of ills plaguing the modern world: militant tyranny, racial injustice, democracy gaps, class warfare . . . a multitude of gross and damning inequalities. They hover above the harvest of souls like a locust cloud, but they are really all the myriad children of one underlying problem.

Cheating.

People love to cheat. The ones who don't love it are afraid to *not* cheat. Instead of equal chances, you get old boys' networks. Instead of the structured duel of nerve and hand, problems are solved by the ambush or the aerial bombardment or by the brute exigency of overwhelming force. Cheating is the *norm*. It's the *default*. No one works towards being able to win in a fair competition anymore: they expend all their efforts towards *preventing* an equal contest.

Competition exalts the human spirit, but the petty fears of the common man have perverted the true meaning of conflict. The only area where it remains pure is in sport. So your mission is to exalt sport, to purify the athletes and to show people a better way.

Everyone can excel, if only they trust themselves to take a level playing field.

The Sole Voice: The Messenger is endangered. A slick, ignorant popinjay named Dermott Arkane wants to replace the certainty of the Messenger with the open interpretation of the Heisenberg Messenger. He would force the Facts into vile concubinage in Opinion's seraglio, when their true destiny is to be vestal virgins in the temple of Truth.

But Arkane is only the most obvious bubo. The real plague is the proliferation of news outlets. In the past, it was impossible to control every messenger, every town crier, and every bard. Those wily bastards from Tristero had a good run, but Pynchon put paid to them and never even realized he wasn't writing fiction.

The news used to be in the hands of hundreds of newspapers, wire services, TV stations, and radio networks. Superficially that's still true, but in reality there are only seven real organizations producing news. The Internet was scary for a while, but it did a wonderful job of discrediting itself before you even had to. You've got it down to seven. In ten years, only one. Then, when all information is controlled, all unified, *then* it can be purified, sanctified, made a vessel for Truth.

The consolidation is going smoothly because big business loves takeovers, and so does big government. The FCC under Reagan danced whenever you called the tune, and now you only have to watch. The problem is within your own cabal.

There's a traitor.

There's someone working towards the One Voice so that he—She? It? Them?—can seize it and use it as a tool for lies and slavery, not the True Message.

Can you find the Judas, the master liar in the house of Truth? Even if you can, can you stop him? And if you can't stop him, can you bring yourself to destroy the One Voice you've spent your adult life trying to create?

The Stabilizers. You know how the Invisible Clergy works. Hell, some of you arguably work for it: your cabal counts Executioners and Warriors and even a Savage among your numbers. You know how people ascend, and why, and you know the cosmic odometer rolls over at 333.

You're trying to stop it.

There are two factions in your cabal. One group looks at the world and says, "Faugh! Look at this putrid shitball, crawling with rapists and murderers and corrupt politicians. Do you really think a world where *Temptation Island* gets a second season can produce an offspring any *less* degraded and perverse than itself? We should quit while we're ahead." The other looks at the world and says, "This is a great place. It's produced Buddha and Shakespeare and cotton candy. Why let the world implode and reboot just when things are getting really interesting?" It's a great mix and you get some loud arguments—even fistfights—at the yearly meeting in Cyprus, but you all agree on the key point: new ascensions must be stopped.

You've learned the signs. You can spot the deliberate attempts pretty easily. Replacements aren't such a big deal, though some of you get involved if it's a real scum-pie trying to get on the Big Gold Elevator. No, the peril comes from accidents. The Naked Goddess took you completely by surprise, and you're not eager to get blindsided again.

You're few in number but great in power. Some of you track trends, spotting nascent archetypes as they form, trying to disrupt or downplay them before they can enter the mass consciousness. Others are in the field, tracking down and smacking down the wannabes who try to embody new archetypes.

It's not easy, but it's never dull. And since the clergy as a whole isn't necessarily in a hurry to reach retirement, you're usually really, *really* lucky.

Just watch out for Saint-Germain.

Agents of Renunciation

You're not just pursuing an agenda—you *are* an agenda. You don't know if your desires called it into existence, or maybe vice versa, but you now spend much of your life in a magickal Otherspace known as a Room of Renunciation, a temporary autonomous zone you can enter from any door. From this place you seek out people in the real world who need their heads turned around to match your way of thinking. The Room gives you the magickal power to

find such people, but you have to get them inside. Once there you turn the powers of the Room loose on them until they break down and refute their old ways. You're cosmic brainwashers, mystically charged meddlers. Many people fear you, but none understand you. Your only true enemies are rival Agents of other Rooms whose agendas conflict with yours. If they get hold of you, you become the embodiment of what you opposed.

Goals

Pick an agenda and pursue it. You want to convert people to your way of thinking by twisting around their belief on your hot-button issue. Maybe you want to end selfishness, or fight technology, or destroy racism. Get your Room, pick your targets, and start metaphysically busting heads.

Assets

An Otherspace of your very own. Your Room provides you with living quarters, food, money, and a way to act out your obsession in a very real way. It even gives you strange magickal powers that assist you in your goals. You can get into it from any door in the world.

Liabilities

You're a big freak. You no longer even *live* on Earth, but in a strange netherworld that distances you from humanity. You leave your old life behind and become an emissary of the cosmos. And what the heck is the House of Renunciation, anyway? Just because you work there doesn't mean you understand it. And while you can enter from anywhere, you can only leave your Room in one place: the place the Room wants you to be.

Examples

Subdivisions. You serve the Middle Room. Appearing in suburbs and office buildings all over the world, you use its powers to blend in with the crowd, get accepted as one of the group, and then cull from the herd those who threaten the norm.

The ills of the human condition all stem from the fallacy of unique value. The Nazis thought they were the Master Race, so they weeded out their inferiors. And the special, wonderful Europeans enslaved the black Africans because they were *sooo* superior. Why do killers kill? They think they have a unique right or ability to get away with it. Why do robbers rob? Because the law is only a good idea for everyone else. Why do religious fanatics torment or even eradicate their neighbors? Because they have a mandate from God.

This world of Raskolnikovs must be shown its error. Our commonalities are far more important than our differences. In its own way, your Room contributes to this great evening-out. By selecting the best and the worst—but always the most unique and individual—you help turn all of humanity towards the safe middle ground between the extremes. Rock stars, serial killers, religious figures, brilliant artists, all must be shown the truth of the Middle Path, the need to sacrifice vanity and hubris for the benefit of the masses.

Worst of all—most deviant, most arrogant, most dangerous—are those who sin against the mainstream of reality itself. Adepts are your preferred target for Renunciation. They actually seem happier without their powers when it's over. But they sure do kick up a fight going in.

The Human Laboratory. You all used to be pretty pathetic. Sure, maybe you had material success, or a comfortably predictable life, or the narcotic "inner peace" that comes from profound religious faith. But none of you were really *accomplishing* anything. You were content to trust "Allah" or "society" or "the marketplace" to keep things running smoothly.

Then you were brought into the Lab. You got a little brain-salad surgery and the scales fell from your eyes.

Now you understand: new knowledge is the fuel of human progress. You are dedicated to producing—and exploiting!—as much fuel as you can.

When the Human Laboratory opens up onto a research lab or a college campus, you go out armed with your cutting-edge gadgets to abduct those people willing to trust impersonal forces for guidance instead of boldly chasing scientific truth. But that's really become a sideline. You're into pure research, not just applied procedure.

These days you use people to test the limits and powers of the House of Renunciation itself—and at the same time you use the House to test the limits of humanity. What happens when you Renounce a newborn? Or a psychotic? Or a catatonic?

Sometimes your experiments would do Jonas Salk proud. Other times, they'd terrify Dr. Mengele. But you're learning a lot and ultimately, that's all that matters to you.

The Penitentiary. For everyone who's needlessly beating himself up over a sin he never really committed, there's someone who feels no guilt whatsoever over an offense he *really did.*

That's not an aphorism. It's the plain truth.

For every genuinely caring mommy who neurotically believes she's a bad parent, there's a deadbeat dad who feels no responsibility for his kids. For every child who feels secret horror at causing his parents' divorce, there's a divorcée who carries no blame for her failed marriages.

You live in the Room of True Penitence, and your duty is to bring those two poles together so they can correct their emotional balance by trading guilt. You match a needlessly guilty person with a selfishly irresponsible one, bring them both into the Room, and stand back.

Appearing in police stations and correctional facilities all over the world, the Room equips you with nondescript uniforms that let you pass for guards, cops, or convicts wherever you are. This gives you the access you need to balance the scales.

Some people leave the Room sadder, some happier, but all are wiser. That's the hope, anyhow. But some stay behind to serve the Room itself, maybe because their newfound guilt drives them to make amends. Or maybe because the unburdening is so freeing that they serve from gratitude.

Saddest of all are the unjustly tormented who still search for the scumbag to eat their guilt. They may know they're not guilty, but until they find the yin to their yang, they can't *feel* it.

The Sleepers (Cosmic Level)

When the Sleepers call down the thunder, you're the boom inside. You're the bogeymen, the dogcatchers, the stone-cold killers who lay down the biggest smack on the biggest



psychos the world has ever seen. It's your job to keep the occult underground in line lest the normals rise up and the bad old days come back to wreck everything. You have responsibility for life and death, dispensing mercy and justice as you see fit. You owe it to the world to be the scariest motherfuckers around. Get going.

Goals

When a duke, cabal, or even a lord gets too noisy and public about the business of magick, you find them and stop them from doing it again. They don't call you out for the stern talking-tos; they've got lower-level Sleeper cells for that. Your job is going up against the worst headcases around, dukes with the power to destroy buildings and no qualms about showing it off. If something gets too loud, use your powers to misdirect the media and the cops. Keep it hush-hush.

Assets

Some money, some training, some tools, and backup if you need it. The Sleepers are one of the few truly international cabals, so you travel to interesting places, meet interesting people, and rip off their heads.

Liabilities

Everyone in the occult underground hates and fears you. You must keep your allegiance to the Sleepers a secret or punks take you on to make a rep for themselves. Your normal life and career are fuzzy daydreams you drift through; you live on call, ready for the hard takedowns and the deep investigation only you can pull off.

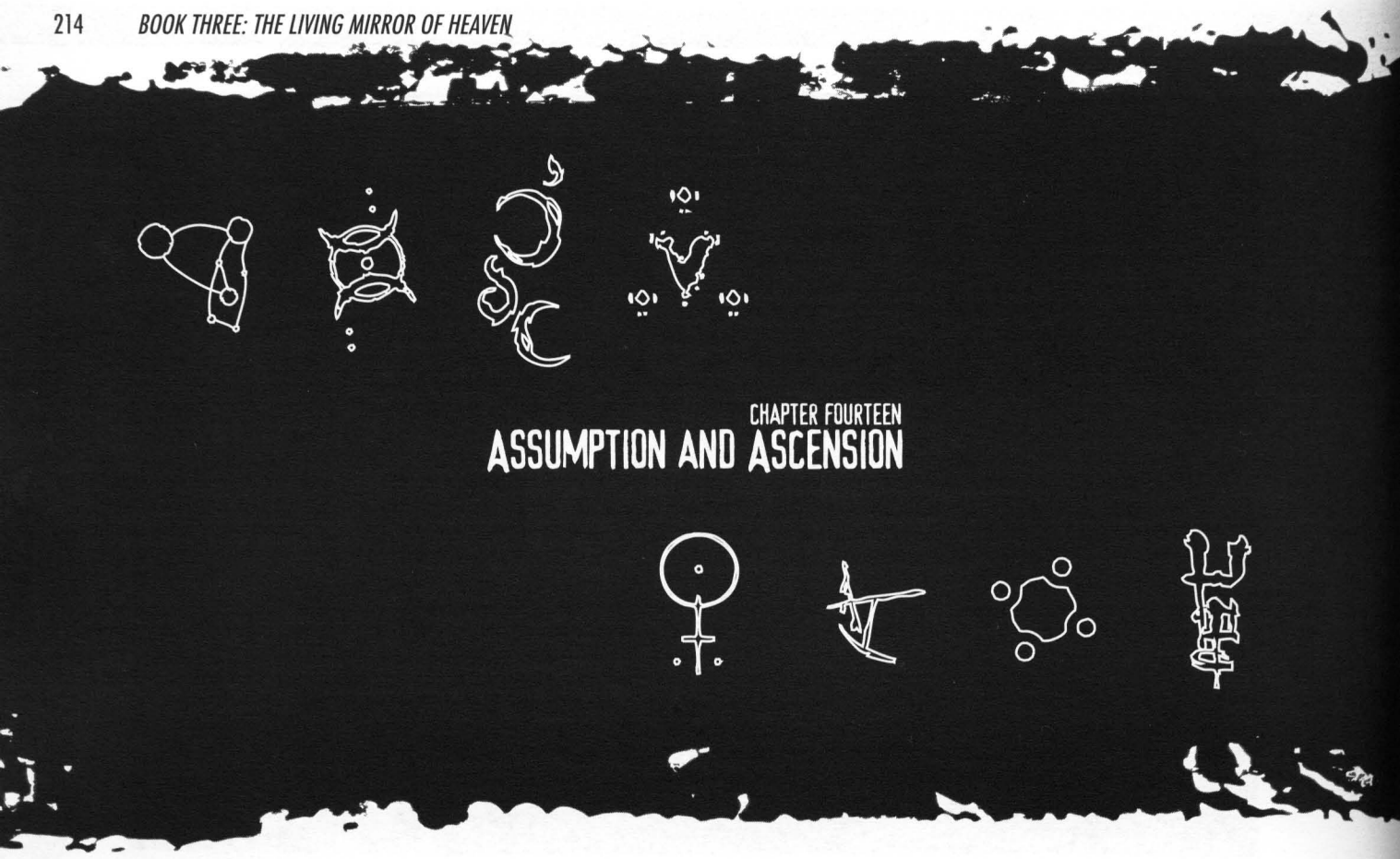
Examples

In addition to amped-up versions of the Sleeper cells from the *Global Campaign* chapter, some Sleeper missions are more appropriate for a Cosmic-level group.

Othernauts. The phenomenon of Otherspaces has been described for ages, but with video cameras, GPS satellites, and global news coverage, they're a much bigger menace to the paradigm of normalcy. Your job is to cover up proof of extant Otherspaces—the so-called "Danielewski Scenario." (That includes stomping down Rooms of Renunciation, or at least their Agents.) More importantly, you need to find and explore them before others do. If possible, destroy them. If that's not possible, control them. If you can't even manage that, hide them.

Diplomats. The Sleepers swing a big stick in the occult underground, but there are some Lords who are too tough, too experienced, or too insane in the membrane for the standard treatment. They can brush off ordinary Sleeper threats the way a college party ignores the downstairs neighbors banging on the ceiling with a broom. You're among the few they treat as an equal, so you get the unenviable job of trying to *persuade* obsessed oddballs with more power than mortal minds should wield. When persuasion fails, it's even worse: then you're tasked with proving your reps by bearding these occult lions in their dens—or by breaking back in when they kick you out. Fortunately, the phrase "oddballs with more power than mortal minds should wield" applies equally well to you.

artwork by Felipe Echevarria



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

ASSUMPTION AND ASCENSION

The big secret of the avatar underground is known to most lords but few dukes: a dedicated avatar can pursue **assumption** and become a godwalker, the mortal incarnation of an archetype, and a godwalker (among others) can attempt **ascension,** joining the invisible clergy and shaping the next world from the Statosphere. These pursuits are fraught with danger and complexity, but for those whose eyes are on the prize, they're the only game in town.

ASSUMPTION

Assumption is the process of deposing an existing godwalker and taking his or her place. A godwalker has an avatar skill of 99%, and at any time there can only be one per archetype. They defend themselves against assumption attempts with all the powers at their command.

To even think about assuming a godwalker's place, you've got to have already pushed yourself to the limit; in other words, you need an avatar skill of 98%. Once that's done, you either kill the existing godwalker or ensure he or she (or it) breaks taboo.

This isn't an easy process. Godwalkers are almost certain to be more powerful than you, and ultra-paranoid about keeping taboo. Many godwalkers, especially ones for hotly contested roles such as the Executioner and Merchant, surround themselves with mystical and mundane defenses. You might go up against guard dogs, voodoo strings that cripple your feet as you step over them, a homegrown cult, or a ritually consecrated castle that blinds rival avatars. You need smarts and allies to take one down, lest you assume too much.

Even knocking them off their pedestal doesn't necessarily put you there. If you shoot the Outsider in the back, or trick the Scholar into burning a book, you don't just become the godwalker in their place. You must ritually assume their position first by accomplishing some significant symbolic act that marks you as a suitable candidate to represent the archetype on earth. Assumption is referred to by a number of terms among those in the know: "putting on the Purple," "being crowned," and "taking the pot," for instance.

There are two types of assumption: closed and open. The first only involves you and the godwalker you're challenging, while the second opens the playing field to your rivals.

CLOSED ASSUMPTION

A closed assumption is where you oust the existing godwalker in such a way that the act itself causes you to assume his position. In other words, the removal incorporates the significant symbolic act of assumption.

The most common method of this is a sacred killing, done under conditions blessed by the archetype. For example, you must kill the Executioner while he's helpless and awaiting death, either with an axe or a bullet in the back of the head. You must best the Masterless Man in a fair fight, and to assume the Savage you beat him to death with your bare hands and eat his body raw.

Although a closed-assumption killing is a direct and simple method, it just doesn't work with many archetypes. Stabbing the Chronicler in the neck with a pen doesn't have the right ironic symbology, unfortunately, and doing it to become the Peacemaker is right out.

But there are other methods of mystically charging a confrontation. The best-known example in the avatar underground is getting the better of the godwalker Merchant in a deal; this immediately causes you to assume his position, as long as you're already at 98%. Fooling the Trickster is another way to make yourself an instant godwalker. Neither method requires killing anyone, and indeed no method does. You can always just trick the godwalker into breaking taboo, and then dance a suitable jig to take his place. It's like putting a banana peel in front of him and taking his wallet when he falls.

Open Assumption

Much of the time, however, the direct confrontation of a closed assumption simply doesn't happen or isn't suitable. When a godwalker breaks taboo or dies in a non-ritual fashion—and some of them do just get hit by cars or have a coronary—an open assumption takes place. All the existing avatars of the archetype who have a skill of 98% become contenders for assumption, also known as **heirs**. They get a tickly feeling of urgency and a vague understanding that something big is going down, but they don't instantly know what's up. Still, if they're at 98% they should already be keeping tabs on who the godwalker is and whether she's still drawing breath.

One way to win the open assumption and become the godwalker is simply to eliminate all your competitors. Like knocking out the godwalker in the first place, this can be done by good old-fashioned murder, or by causing them to break taboo and drop below 98%. There are often two to ten possible heirs, and the competition gets very, very hot. If there is only one heir, he or she automatically fills the godwalker slot.

You're also all symbolically linked to each other during this period, and it becomes much easier for you to divine the others via magick—though you still wouldn't recognize them if you just saw them on the street unless you'd already been introduced. For all magick divination attempts you make where a rival avatar is your primary target, you gain a +30 shift when you're both heirs

To complicate things, the ex-godwalker may still be around to interfere in the competition. If he's still alive, he's probably lost several Avatar points for violating taboo or being ritually hosed—but he won't take long to catch up to the 98% level, and then look out.

The other way to win an open contest is by performing a ritual act that boosts you ahead of the other contestants, the same kind of potent act you use to finish a non-murderous closed assumption. To assume the Chronicler, for instance, *you have to witness and record an act of immense historical* or magickal important—someone pulling the first stone from the Berlin Wall, perhaps. To become the Executioner, you could assassinate a President. To become the Fool, be blithely carefree and cheerful in the face of immense danger.

As with all magick, the more symbolic power you can work into this act the more likely it is to let you assume the Purple. The Chronicler could write his record with the quill that Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet* with and then get it published by an imprint with a powerful name—perhaps Element or Rider, rather than the boringly mundane HarperCollins. The Fool could be surrounded by butterflies as she laughs at a firing squad on April 1st. The Executioner might kill with the powerful artifact known as the Magic Bullet, on the anniversary of Lincoln's death, preferably in a movie theater playing the film *The Executioner's Song*. Pull out your books of astrology, geomancy, history, and dream symbolism, check Powers and Hite, and remember that *sounding* mystically significant is far more important than having any basis in fact.

Look to history, too, for examples of successful assumptions. Rasputin's staunching of the tsarevich Aleksei's bleeding, for instance, clearly allowed him to assume the Healer—which also gave him his remarkable resilience. The killing of St. Thomas à Becket before the altar was a failed attempt by one of the knights to assume the Executioner. The competing speeches of Brutus and Antony were part of a fierce competition to become the Demagogue, newly vacant after Caesar's death. Assume the worst.

Life as a Godwalker

When an avatar becomes a godwalker, she briefly becomes one with the archetype and receives a terrifyingly beautiful vision of the Statosphere. It's been compared to the feeling of being a new parent, or being burnt alive, or an orgasm times a hundred. The cosmos opens up before her like a map, and she knows she is suddenly a significant player in it. It's in this moment, normally, that godwalkers shape their new channel.

New channel? Yes. It's rumored in the avatar underground that godwalkers have unique abilities denied even to other closely aligned avatars. This is true. A common misperception, however, is that every godwalker of the Messenger has had the same special perk. In actuality, when you reach the top of the avatar ladder, you get to *design* your own channel. By getting that close to the archetype, you have license to interpret it—within reason—and subtly distort the flow of reality in a fashion somewhat like the distortions of the invisible clergy themselves. Here are some channels chosen by current godwalkers:

- **Thorvald Drake**, godwalker of the Merchant, has given himself the ability to deal in events that took place in the past. If the price is right, he can rewrite history so you not only don't have cancer, you never got it in the first place.
- No Israeli can kill **Ibrahim al Masrah**, godwalker of the Executioner.
- **Lucy Watkins**, godwalker of the Flying Woman, can free any willing female from an unwanted emotional entanglement. Tired of pining after your ex-boyfriend? Lucy can fix it.
- Everyone feels compelled to dance and drink when they *hear **Dmitri Carnovski**, godwalker of the Fool, play a* musical instrument.
- **Toshishiro Yamamura**, godwalker of the Masterless Man, has blessed himself for battle against other ronin. No other Masterless Man can channel the archetype when fighting against him.
- **Donald Ramses**, godwalker of the Savage, prowls the Australian outback. No machine can operate within a mile of his presence. Yes, that includes guns.
- **The Freak**, godwalker of the Mystic Hermaphrodite, has not yet chosen its channel.

Once new godwalkers come down from their vision, the whole world seems to be a different place. They have a

mystical conduit into the Statosphere, and the veils that conceal magick from us are lessened for them. It's as though a whole new sense opens up to them. Suddenly they can taste magick being used nearby, smell the spoor of the scuttling tenebrae, hear reality rip itself asunder. They are much more keyed to the manipulations of the Clergy than most, and have an inkling of the subtle patterns of probability alteration. Specifically, they gain a new Soul skill called Symbolsight at 15%. It is a skill like any other, not an avatar channel, and they retain this skill even if they leave the avatar path. (Anyone can have this skill, not just godwalkers, as long as you give the GM a cool explanation for how you got it.)

Symbolsight: This odd skill gives you an insight into abstract, symbolic connections that some people, places, and things have with the larger occult world. It's a sense that lets you see permanent enchantments. Some people appear to be partaking of roles from myths and stories—kings, jesters, headsmen, even angels—while others have more confusing symbols surrounding them. (What does it mean when someone always has a hallucinated basketball orbiting his head? You may not necessarily know.) Objects and places usually turn out to have a historical connection. Charles Lindberg's *Spirit of St. Louis*, for example, shows blue sky and the Eiffel Tower—while at the same time looking exactly like itself. Michaelangelo's *Pietá* is suffused with the light of the faithful's regard. The images of symbolsight cannot be mistaken for reality unless you're drugged. You see the actual, visual image of the person or thing with its symbolic content overlapping it in a way you can easily distinguish.

Some people trigger symbolsight because they seem to be partaking in patterns of meaning larger than themselves. Such individuals are always perceptible with a successful symbolsight roll, even if they are magickally disguised; proxies circumvent this, however. Other people take specific actions which set themselves against such larger meanings. The symbolic allegiance of these transgressors is visible only when they are taking specifically magickal or transgressive actions.

To people with Symbolsight, godwalkers take on some of the aspects of their archetypes. The Working Man's fists look like great iron hammers, the Dark Stalker is a barely visible flitting shadow, and the Savage's hands have visible claws.

Interacting with Godwalkers

Godwalkers make much better friends and foes for dukes and lords than the clergy do. They're powerful, but not overwhelming, and they're reassuringly human at heart. Godwalkers make friends and allies for all the normal reasons anyone does. But they also need more protection than most people, and they find it useful to have comrades—or acolytes, or worshippers, or slaves—around to break taboo for them, as in the Ascension group structure.

Godwalkers can also act as the wise mentor type, or they can be the ambiguous, distant contact who is never fully trusted. The Merchant makes a particularly good choice for the second type. He might be dealing with you now, but tomorrow he could sell your location to your worst foe. The Savage, too, has a double-edged nature that means you might seek him out for aid, only to find he demands more than you can cope with.

On the other hand, godwalkers also often have Grand Plans: dominating society, ousting clergy, the kinds of schemes dukes and lords frequently frustrate. Godwalkers make perfect enemies. They're frightening and more powerful than you, but they've also got crucial weaknesses you can exploit. If nothing else, they're still mortal humans, and they always have rivals.

Assumption is also an interesting situation. What happens if you meet the godwalker you're trying to assume and find you like him? After all, you both may share a similar ideology.

Godwalkers are both rare and awe-inspiring. They tend to have **ripple motifs**: minor events you notice whenever the godwalker is around, Statospheric signs of their passing noticed by the alert. The Two-Faced Man godwalker might be associated with the scent of roses. When you first meet him, posing as a friend, the smell is pleasant—but when his plans come to fruition and you find yourself standing over the dead body of your lover, the cloying scent of rotting roses hangs heavy in the air.

Of course, becoming a godwalker isn't the *final* prize.

Ascension

There are three ways to ascend into the invisible clergy: unconscious ascension, conscious ascension, and godwalker ascension. The latter is the only method used by practicing avatars. The first two can be used by anyone.

Unconscious Ascension

An unconscious ascension happens when someone with no knowledge of the clergy ascends. For example, the lords of the occult underground believe the Naked Goddess was an unconscious ascension—she wasn't trying to do anything but live her life, and yet up she went. (At least as far as anyone knows for sure.) Historically, this form of ascension is by far the most common method.

Sometimes it happens because a particular archetype has become so strong in the collective unconscious of humanity that the Statosphere effectively demands a mortal soul to represent it, and the new clergy member happens to best represent this at the time when the issue reaches critical mass.

Sometimes, too, a particular clergy member no longer fulfills the needs of his or her archetype in the modern world and the cosmos boots the old one off to the House of Renunciation, picking out a replacement in the process. The Statosphere chooses the replacement based a mixture of the candidate's life and personality, as well as his exposure to the masses. The starving child shown on a Red Cross poster is likely to ascend as the Victim, as is the Mother who appeared on *Oprah*. Occasionally the choice seems random, though this tends to be the case with more passive archetypes. Sometimes it is because a particular event has such significance that its enactor is swept up into the heavens, regardless of what her life was like until that point; these are often repeated between cosmic incarnations, such as the first human to kill another becoming War, and the first woman to give birth becoming the Mother.

Finally, sometimes people simply come to impose them-

selves so strongly upon the popular consciousness that they ascend naturally. This is rarer than you might think, as evidenced by the relative lack of mysterious vanishing among the famous. Perhaps their very popularity works against them—they are too solidly rooted in the mundane to become part of the divine. Sometimes they might even deliberately be enacting a particular role, even if completely unaware of the mystical implications—Elizabeth I as the Virgin (or Faerie) Queen, for example. Alex Abel was certainly playing the role of the Algerian Hero in his early adult years, even though he didn't know jack about the clergy back then. A couple of silent movie actors are also thought to have ascended through their screen roles, back when that form of notoriety was novel; the Cowboy may well be roaming the Statosphere as we speak.

Our modern age of instant notoriety is likely to produce more ascensions, especially given the way that today's fifteen-minute celebrities slip off the public radar so quickly, severing the ties to the public that keep career celebrities tethered to reality.

Conscious Ascension

Conscious ascension only works for unascended archetypes—human concepts that have never before been widespread enough to bring about an ascension. If the archetype already exists in the clergy, even if your interpretation is a new and potent one, you must walk the avatar path and attempt a godwalker ascension.

Conscious ascension requires some serious dedication. To start with, you must find an archetype that you believe is strong within the collective unconscious but hasn't yet been filled—such as, say, the Girl Next Door. You then have to shape your life to fit that archetype, behaving as if you were an avatar but without gaining any form of magickal power. Then you hope you've guessed right.

To try conscious ascension, think of a role you want to embody and discuss it with the GM. Figure out ways to mystically embody the concept and then act those out. Taboos, symbolic actions, strictures, the whole nine yards. Finally, start spending experience points on a Soul-based skill in "Avatar: (your chosen Ascension role)." This skill has no effect on anything. You can't roll it for any purpose. It just sits there sucking in your experience points until it hits 99%.

When you've bought your potential avatar skill up to 99%, you have to put yourself over the edge to 100%. This is a big deal. You must plan and carry out a major symbolic action, preferably with the attention of the world on you. When you're done, you ascend—or nothing happens and it's all been a waste of time.

Suppose someone thinks there are enough prostheses in use that the Cyborg could have a shot at mass consciousness. It's not enough for this would-be archetype to lose as many limbs as he can to get replacements, and it's not enough to publicize his beliefs in his transhuman biomechanical destiny. He has to take some huge step that catapults him into the Statosphere. He might—for example—decide to use bionic limbs of his own design to kill Lindsey Wagner and Lee Majors, TV's "Six Million Dollar Man" and "Bionic Woman." He could instead win a gold medal at the Olympics.

Is it enough? Maybe, maybe not. The question of whether a planned ascension works doesn't depend on any dice roll, but rather on metagame concerns. Perhaps when you



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ascend, you take over the GM's job for your group. Or you just wave goodbye and start over with the *Conception* chapter again. Actually remaining as the archetype while the rest of your group continues as humans is nearly impossible—there are too many problems of scale. In any event, your ascension attempt should succeed as long as it can be reconciled with the metagame, your archetype is reasonable, you spent your experience points, and your final ceremony was suitably impressive. On the other hand, failure can be an intriguing temporary setback that triggers new paths and an eventual second chance.

Some believe the existing members of the clergy choose who joins them, but this doesn't seem to be the case as such. However, upcoming possible ascensions are generally *very visible in the Statosphere, and the clergy battle fiercely* to influence them. Some catch them completely blindsided, however, as in the case of the Naked Goddess.

Becoming an archetype is a fairly overpowering experience to say the least, even just to watch. For a start, it's accompanied by a dramatic flurry of supernatural events focused around the ascending person. Their whole body illuminates with a bright white fire, and after a moment they vanish.

Their immediate environment is sometimes dramatically transformed. The ascension of the Mystic Hermaphrodite, for example, caused nearby objects to fuse together and two people in the vicinity swapped gender. The events generally wash out over about a hundred yards, and vary wildly in intensity.

Godwalker Ascension

Sometimes, being a godwalker just isn't enough. You want the ultimate prize, the big one: you want to join the clergy. But somebody else got there first. Somebody's sitting on the throne you want. What's a godwalker to do? Declare war—as Dermott Arkane, godwalker of the Messenger, did. Let's use him as an example.

It's very hard to oust a clergy member unless your approach to the archetype is different from theirs—and preferably more in keeping with the modern world. The current godwalker of the Savage is unlikely to ever attempt to seize the archetype, because his take on it is pretty much the same as it has always been: run around the wilderness and howl a lot. A Savage godwalker who roamed the streets of Mexico City, surviving in the urban jungle, would have a much better chance of ascension.

The act of ousting a sitting clergy member begins when you throw down the gauntlet with a symbolic act. This act must go against the existing notion of the archetype and establish your intended reinterpretation. For Arkane, this was speaking to Alex Abel, causing him to fail his unconscious ascension a couple of days later and empowering Arkane's role as the Heisenberg Messenger: a deliverer of uncertainty rather than fact, an embodiment of the unreliability of mass media and the quicksilver spread of bogus rumors in the internet age.

Once you perform this initial act, the battle begins. It's not a sudden conflict, but a long, drawn-out struggle akin to a chess match. The clergy member you're attempting to oust can't stomp you outright, because as a godwalker you're so closely linked to the archetype that if it harmed you directly it would be like cutting out its own heart. Instead, it manipulates mortal agents into attacking you, probably while preparing a loyal avatar to assume your position as godwalker.

Godwalker Defenses

Archetype-godwalker battles vary in length and intensity, but the first stage in the war is to prepare your defenses. (This also helps deflect assumption attempts against you, and magickal attacks in general.) First, construct a mystical **sanctum**. It should either be in a site of strength for you, or a site inimical to your archetype. If you choose a site of strength, your fortress should be built to cater to your particular take on the archetype. A godwalker of the Trickster trying to bend the archetype towards hacking might *construct a maze that is one huge computer, for example.* A Pilgrim working on the notion that the journey is more important than the destination might build a floating fortress that must be refueled and maintained mid-ocean, because it can never stop moving. In your godwalker sanctum, all magick and avatar channels used against you or any part of your sanctum suffer a shift of -5 to -30, depending on how well the GM believes you've made your symbolic fortress. Physical attacks against you in your sanctum suffer half that shift as well.

While castling in this fashion strengthens you personally, your main concern may be the danger posed by your archetype. Your home should be deliberately inimical to it. This is best designed as an outer layer, keeping your inner sanctum as a place of strength. The hacker Trickster, for instance, could make the entrance to his maze a single large door with a big sign that says "I'm In Here," symbolically baffling the archetype who is naturally expecting a trick. It's possible to make your sanctum very hostile to your archetype—a Pilgrim who lives in a derailed train, for instance—but this also weakens your sanctum's strength against other foes.

In general, though, the more symbols of your own power you can work into your sanctum, the better. That urban Savage might establish a territory in a run-down area of Washington D.C. next to a very high-tech area, both strengthening himself and confusing the archetype with the surrounding technology. He could then mark out the area with the blood of other Savage avatars he's slain and his own hair, spray-paint symbols of his cult on walls, and bury the Strength card from a Tarot deck underneath the sidewalk. More grimly, the old practice of burying a victim alive beneath a building can provide you with a demon capable of animating your sanctum—controlled by you, if you're lucky and can find the suitable ritual for this.

But you may need to keep moving, and so cannot just hole up in a sanctum. Instead you can use other sources of protection, such as constructing false images of yourself to deceive supernatural attackers. There are innumerable ways of doing this, such as constructing a dummy of yourself and mixing your blood and hair into it. Any strong symbolic action that your GM agrees on may provide a shift to magickal attacks and scrying. The most powerful defense is a proxy ritual, redirecting even the archetype's attentions to your symbolic double.

You can also seek out other supernatural allies. The more adepts, avatars, and artifacts you have on your side, the better. The aid of a Room of Renunciation is useful, but can you get the agents to help you without going through the door yourself? Establishing a cabal is also useful, not only for its loyal service but because the power of a group who

intensely believes in you can be a useful boost in getting into the Statosphere. Such a cabal has to adhere to your revisionist take on the archetype. The urban Savage might establish a street gang called the Wolves—though perhaps the Ringtails might be more appropriate, as raccoons are wild animals now inhabiting cities.

Archetype Attacks

You need strong defenses because the clergy member you're trying to oust is doing its damnedest to knock you down, perhaps triggering an open assumption and multiplying your problems. It can't hurt you directly, but it has recourse to other methods.

Chiefly, the archetype can send other avatars after you. There's suddenly going to be a whole lot more potential candidates for godwalker, and coincidence is on their side—outside your sanctum, fortune favors your foes. But the archetype can also shift probabilities to send troublesome dukes and cabals your way, or even just mundane threats like muggers, drunk drivers, and IRS auditors.

The clergy member's methods of attacking and harassing you often involve turning your own tools against you—or just getting you shot in the back. If you've got a proxy, she might meet some coincidentally helpful dukes who teach her to use the proxy relationship right back at you. Dermott Arkane is suffering from a constant barrage of messages from various sources—the personal columns of newspapers, subliminal flickers on television, graffiti—detailing his every personal failing and weakening his self-confidence, and there's a small army of process servers after him. An 18th century Executioner who tried to key the archetype towards judicial murder found himself a victim of the Terror, and a bold Mother in the 1920s was blown up by a bomb concealed in an Easter egg. Our urban Savage finds city beasts and beggars turning against him.

In response to the archetype's attacks, you should be trying to get your take on the archetype more firmly established in the popular mind. The mass media is an extremely useful tool here, and some mystic battles have been fought around television series. (The spate of supernatural teen-girl shows in recent years such as *Buffy, Sabrina,* and *Charmed* could be the result of an attempted seizure of the archetype of the Magus. Or maybe not.) This is particularly important for Arkane, as his whole take on the archetype is tied up in the media. He does his best to ensure the news in the U.S.—he doesn't have the resources to influence things worldwide—puts his own spin on events rather than taking an objective stance.

You can also make symbolic assaults on the archetype you're trying to oust. Finding out who he was in life and obtaining items associated with him is quite effective, for instance—though this gets harder the longer ago the archetype ascended. Used properly, the items can remind him of his mortal life, weakening his ties to the archetype, and making it harder for him to pay attention to his mortal pawns. If he still has living family, this can be amazingly effective as a weapon against him—as can his descendants. Blood ties go both ways, after all.

You also have to live out your take on the archetype as strongly as possible. Arkane has become quite noted within the underground for his habit of showing up, delivering his version of important news, and then disappearing again. Even if he couldn't care less about your particular agenda, he needs the publicity.

And as usual, the more squirrelly symbolic logic you can use, the better—all the more so if it's strongly keyed to the modern era, rather than the past ages the current archetype represents. Arkane always makes a point of wearing Nike sneakers. Not only do these mirror the winged sandals of Hermes the Messenger, they are also keyed into one of the most successful advertising campaigns of our time—and through the JUST DO IT slogan and the connotations of Winged Victory he strongly asserts his hopeful triumph in the battle.

Final Battle

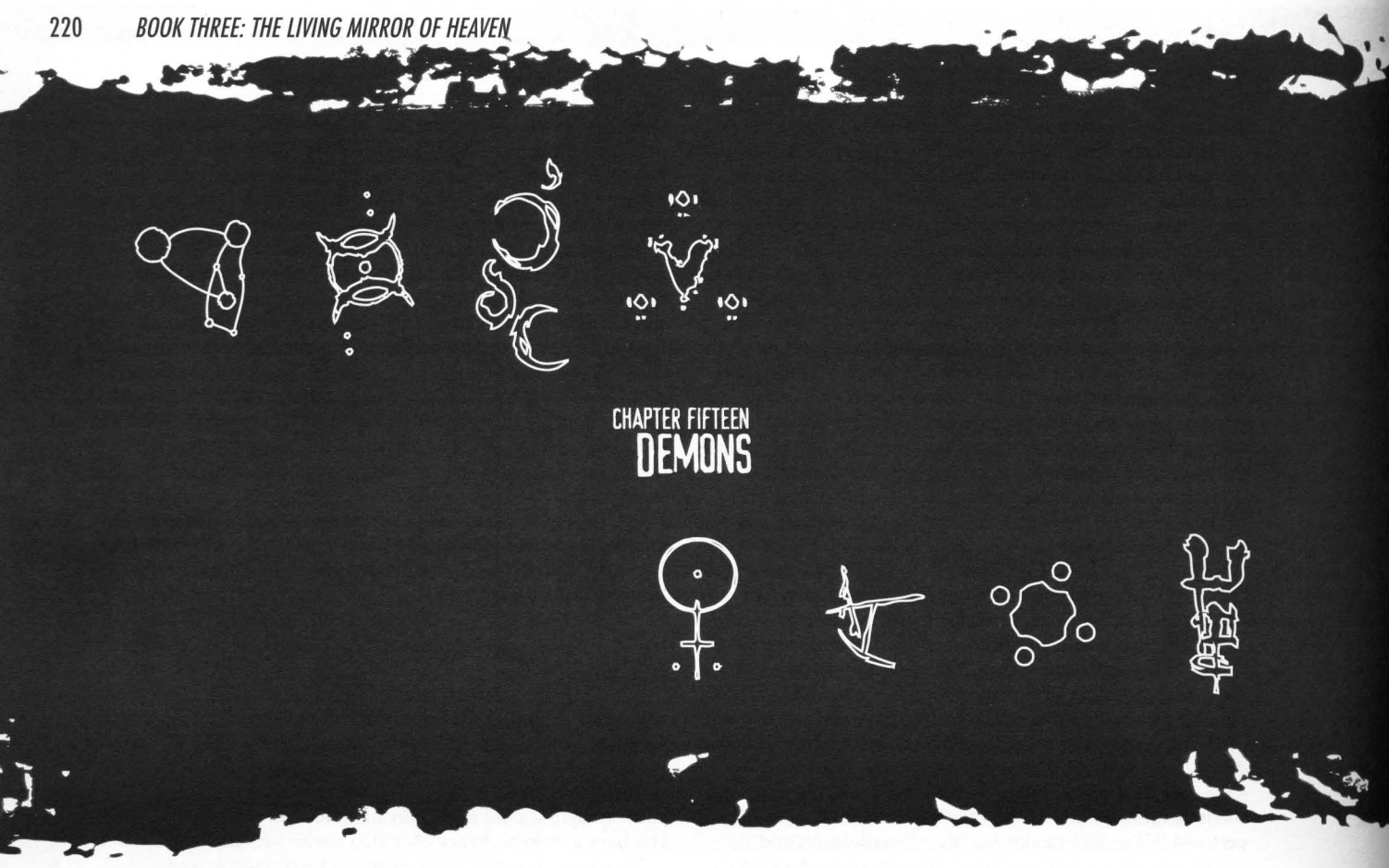
The battle between you and the archetype can last for anything from a week (if he gets you quickly enough) to twenty years or more—and there's no backing down. Once you're in, you're in. If you avoid death or breaking taboo, your strength should eventually build to the point where you have a serious chance of seizing the archetype.

Then you are tested. The Statosphere bends itself so some situation arises in which your absolute, total dedication to your view of the archetype is challenged. This is more a matter of will than anything. All your mystical allies, defenses, and weapons can only get you to this point, not give you the final push. You can sense its coming, however, and prepare yourself—and so can others, who may attempt to screw things up. The impending test is heralded by subtle symbolic cues in popular culture that clued-in cabals may well pick up on, drawing interlopers into the situation. The final step to ascension is often when a godwalker is most vulnerable.

If you fail, if your will just isn't strong enough at the last moment, if you're not absolutely committed, then you take one step back. Your Avatar skill drops to 98%. You lose your Godwalker channel. Your archetype hates you. Every one of its avatars has an excellent reason to take you down. You are simultaneously zealot and pariah. You're lucky to see your next birthday.

If you pass the test, you ascend—and a poor terrified soul falls from the Statosphere into the House of Renunciation, waking up cold and battered in a world that no longer needs him.

Of course, someday that might happen to you.



CHAPTER FIFTEEN
DEMONS

When an adept or an occultist or a random teenager with a ouija board contacts a soul in the afterlife, a demon is what he gets. Colorfully and seemingly inappropriately named—given that classical Christian mythology has no known validity in the occult underground—demons are the souls of the dead. They could just be called "souls," but that wouldn't distinguish them from the souls of the living—and frankly, "demon" *isn't* an inappropriate term. The sort of soul you get from the afterlife when you go looking for one is always a soul who does not have your best interests at heart. Souls at peace in the land of the dead do not want contact with the world of the living—our questions and needs are no longer relevant to their existence.

Demons are not evil or entropic in and of themselves. Until they died, they were just people, good and bad. But in their dealings with the living, demons are often needlessly cruel. The sorts of souls who agree to talk to the living are those who desperately desire to return to our world in a stolen body to pursue their still-burning obsession. They're corporeality junkies. No demon admits its agenda, but every demon has one: to possess a living human and once more walk in the land of the living, pursuing the obsession they carried to their grave.

Nonetheless, demons are useful. They can go anywhere and witness anything. They aren't omniscient, they're just free to move about intangibly and then return to tell you what they observed. They're great spies, as long as you can control them.

Demons also know a lot. They understand the nature of the invisible clergy, though they rarely know its current membership and status. They know how magick works, and can teach you things like a school of magick or how to make artifacts. They also know about the afterlife, and can find specific demons for you.

More accurately, demons *claim* to know a lot. No demon admits his or her ignorance. They always tell you they know more, and can reveal it if you can just bring them someone to possess, or let them borrow your body for a little while. They promise to give it back just as they found it. *Really.*

The simple truth: demons are liars and destroyers of souls. Don't deal with them if you aren't prepared to suffer the consequences.

Demon Summoning

Dipsomancers and Entropomancers have minor-charge formula spells for summoning demons. (Non-adepts can stumble into demon-summoning, as described under "Unwitting Possession.") Each school or adept has individual techniques and precautions and such, but the procedure is the same: the better your magick check result, the more likely you are to get the sort of demon you're seeking, such as a spy or a former adept. A good check result only gets you closer to the *sort* of demon who can help you—you can't select a *specific* demon without some extra work, as described later in this section.

Summoning a demon means inviting the demon into your body. You hold a conversation with it in your mind. No one around you notices anything going on.

Summoning a demon gives you no automatic control over it without a critical success. For that, see the next sec-

tion. If you don't have control over the demon, it attempts to retain possession of your body for as long as possible—even annihilating your soul and taking over your body permanently.

⇨ **If you succeed** in your magick check, the demon pops into your head and you start talking. The higher your success, the more suitable the demon is for your purposes.
⇨ **If you get a matched success**, you get a +20 shift to your control check (see the next section).
⇨ **If you get a critical success**, you get the demon and you automatically control it.
⇨ **If you get a failure**, you don't get a demon.
⇨ **If you get a matched failure**, you don't get a demon and you get a sour cherry as per the adepts chapter.
⇨ **If you get a critical failure**, you get a demon and it automatically possesses you.

When you summon a demon, you get whatever random demon responds, who may or may not be able to help you depending on how well you rolled. It is difficult, but not impossible, to contact specific demons. This requires double the number of magick charges needed to summon a random demon with your preferred method, and you have to roll half your magick skill or less (round fractions down). If you fail, a random demon shows up claiming—not very credibly—to be the one you wanted.

Note that many people's souls did not become demons when they died. Only those who perished in the throes of a burning obsession become such creatures. If your requested soul passed beyond the veil safely, he or she is beyond your reach.

Remember that even if you find the demon who was your best friend in life, he's a demon now. He'll destroy your soul in a heartbeat if it means walking the earth again. *You cannot trust demons.* You can only control them.

Demon Control

Entropomancers have a spell to control demons, called Cage for the Dead. Other adepts may develop suitable formula spells or find rituals to do the job. The adept expends the appropriate number of magickal charges for the spell or ritual and makes his percentile roll. This is a Soul check with a minimum roll of the demon's Soul. If the demon's Soul is higher than the adept's, the attempt automatically fails unless the result is matched and under or equal to the adept's Soul, in which case it succeeds as normal.

⇨ **If you succeed**, you control the demon.
⇨ **If you get a critical success**, you control it and gain a +20 shift to subsequent control checks during this summoning session.
⇨ **If you fail** the roll, the demon possesses your body for a number of minutes equal to the demon's Soul stat. You can then make a Soul check with no minimum roll to regain control.
⇨ **If you get a matched failure**, the demon possesses your body for a number of *hours* equal to the demon's Soul stat. You can then roll under your Soul stat to regain control.
⇨ **If you get a critical failure**, the demon ejects your soul and gets your body for the rest of its life. You are gone beyond all human knowing.

If the adept succeeds in controlling the demon, he can make requests of it. Each request requires another Soul check to compel the demon to carry out the request. These checks do not require any magick charges, and uncontrolled possession only occurs on a matched failure.

The degree to which the demon carries out each request depends on how high the successful roll was, and is up to the discretion of the GM. See the sections entitled "What Demons Can Say," and "What Demons Can Do," for information on what adepts do with controlled demons.

While the relationships between demons and humans are almost always antagonistic, there are rare times when an individual demon and an individual human find they have an agenda in common. In these circumstances, the demon may agree to perform an action in exchange for a certain amount of license with the human's body. The demon's faithfulness to the terms of the agreement depends on what threats and promises the summoner can credibly make. If the adept is a Dipsomancer who can Soul Sip the demon down to nothing, the demon has a good reason to play fair. Someone with a weak soul who simply trusts the demon to give the body back because it promised is in for a very unpleasant surprise.

Demon Possession

When you are possessed by a demon, it has full use of your body. The demon has no knowledge of the character's memories, however, and so is unlikely to fool anyone who knows you. Demons tend to flee as soon as they get a body, rather than trying to fit in.

Demons cannot make use of your magick or avatar skills. On the other hand, if you're an avatar then the demon's behavior does not violate your taboos—it's not *you* doing it, just your body.

You can fight to regain control after a number of minutes or hours equal to the demon's Soul stat. Which time period applies depends on how badly you failed the control check. Your new attempt is easier than the old one: make a Soul check with no minimum roll. This does not cost you any charges. If you fail, another identical interval passes before you can try again. Some adepts have been possessed for days or weeks before regaining control.

At the GM's discretion, you may get additional chances to throw the demon out at times when the demon is weak or preoccupied. If the demon in your body runs out and gets seriously drunk, you might get an extra chance of throwing off control by making a Soul check, with whatever modifiers the GM thinks are appropriate.

While you are possessed, you have no knowledge of anything, not even the passing of time. To you the struggle is constant, and the intervening time between control attempts simply does not exist. It seems to you that only a few seconds of intense inner conflict passes, but you may come to and find three days have gone by.

In your body, the demon does as it pleases. Because the agonies of death have distilled it into a pure obsession, its primary urge is to pursue whatever obsessed it in life. It may also indulge in pleasures it has missed, ranging from favorite

foods to as much sex as it can beg, buy, or steal. It might take revenge on you if you've controlled it in the past, by committing blatant crimes or selling all your possessions. But such revenge assumes you're going to regain control and suffer the consequences, and demons prefer to believe they are staying put.

One thing is *almost* certain: the demon does not kill the host's body. It might get the body beaten up or hurt—it might enjoy that, even, given how long it's been without physical stimulation—but demons want to keep the host's body alive in hopes of winning the next Soul check and keeping the body for another chunk of time. A demon only kills its host's body if bears a major, major grudge against the host or is dead certain it will fail the next struggle and feels spiteful.

The adept underground tells a story about a particularly smart demon. A foolish adept woke up from a possession bender to find a letter jammed in the waistband of his pants, written in his own handwriting: "While I was in charge, I took poison. I know the antidote and you do not. I recommend you summon me back, so we may mediate some situation satisfying to us both." Depending on who tells this story, the demon is bluffing, or it took a laxative to make the adept think he was poisoned, or the adept thinks it's just a bluff and dies in agony. Many demons are not so clever. Some are. There's no way to tell until it's too late.

Unwitting Possession

Sometimes sensitive individuals—those with a Soul score above 80—with no magickal training accidentally open themselves up to unwitting possession. These possessions are usually violent and destructive, since they bring out the worst demons of the lot. Often the host's beliefs leak through to and affect the demon's consciousness, so that highly religious (or pop-culturally immersed) individuals who are possessed unconsciously force the demon to blather on like demons in *The Bible*—or, more likely, *The Exorcist.*

The ways in which sensitive individuals can suffer unwitting possession vary, but essentially any sensitive individual who screws around with the unnatural and doesn't know what he's doing can suffer from unwitting possession. Examples of actions likely to get a sensitive person possessed include: using a oujia board, attempting automatic writing, trying to call spirits like a medium, acting out bogus old rituals from paperback occult books purchased at a shopping mall—you name it. What's important is that the individual have a Soul score higher than most humans ever dream (80+), and that they make a genuine, good-faith effort to communicate in some way with those beyond the veil. Even devout prayer and meditation have, on rare occasions, allowed a demon access to the sensitive.

When this occurs, it's identical to a matched failure on an adept's control attempt. The demon gains possession of the host's body for a number of hours equal to its Soul before the host gets his first chance at shrugging off possession.

What Demons Can Say

Demons say anything you want to hear, if it gets them closer to possessing a body. They can be useful sources of information if you can force them to talk and make it clear they have no chance of taking over your body. You could offer them someone else's body to use for a while or even to keep indefinitely, if you're venal scum or crazy desperate.

In general, any random demon has some measure of occult/magickal knowledge if you want to learn about how magick works, the nature of reality, and all that sort of thing. Demons know about the 333 archetypes and about the karmic reincarnation of the cosmos and about the schools of magick. Some demons might be clued-in enough to know about the Comte de Saint-Germain, or which archetypes have ascended. They *are* very (and strangely) guarded in their descriptions of the afterlife, and say little or nothing regarding their apparent dissatisfaction with the way things are there.

What Demons Can Do

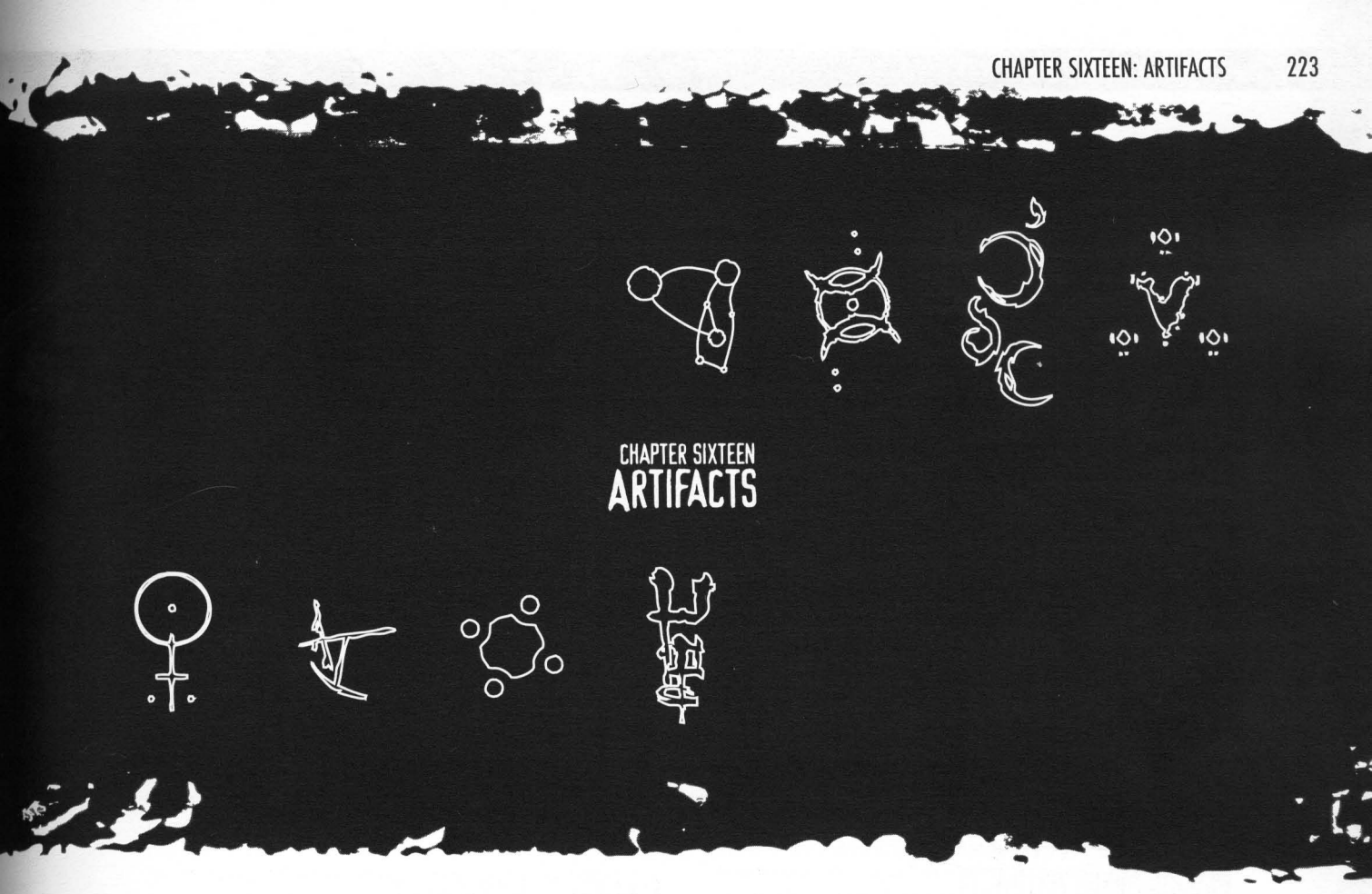
If you want to become an adept and can summon up a demon somehow, it could teach you a school of magick. This is an insanely bad idea unless an already-powerful adept helps you out, since otherwise you're probably too inexperienced to control the demon or make a useful bargain with it.

If you need a supernatural spy, a demon can attempt to find out information for you about topics of interest in the world of the living. Essentially, the demon enters the astral plane and starts poking around on your behalf, acting as an invisible observer who can move through walls, listen to conversations, and so forth, but who can't affect anything—the demon couldn't operate a computer to gain access to files, but he could watch over someone's shoulder while they did it and report back. He's mostly looking for an opportunity to possess someone and flee, however, so for this to work you need to either have a means of controlling a demon or be able to strike some sort of bargain.

If you need to construct a type of artifact, a demon can instruct you in the process. You need to double-check his instructions wherever possible, to ensure he isn't telling you how to build an artifact that lets him enter your body.

If you need to get an astral parasite latched onto someone, a demon can do that for you. Just as with spying, however, he spends most of his time on the astral plane trying to possess a human.

Demons can potentially do other things, too. But it should be crystal freaking clear now that while demons *can* be useful, it's a really good idea to stay away from them. Powerful, experienced adepts or certain artifacts can make demon-control more or less reliable, but conventional solutions are preferable. Think of demons as fissionable material, and ask yourself if you're qualified to handle raw plutonium. If not, put that ouija board down.



CHAPTER SIXTEEN
ARTIFACTS

An artifact is an object that's been given a magickal charge and performs a magickal task. They're handy for when you've just been caught with your taboos down, when you need a few extra charges, or when you just want something more reliable on your side than a flaky adept or a cryptic avatar.

Artifacts come in two varieties: natural and constructed. Natural artifacts are items imbued with magickal power by the cosmos, simply due to luck or destiny. They are very rare, and their powers are potentially infinite. Constructed artifacts are items deliberately created by an adept. They can only duplicate a magickal effect possessed by the adept who created the artifact—in other words, something taken from the adept's school of magick. If you can't do it, neither can your artifact.

Natural Artifacts

There are no limitations on what natural artifacts can or cannot do—they're entirely in the domain of the GM. A natural artifact could split Mars in half or sharpen pencils. They are side effects of the cosmos, and as such as they can have any power imaginable. But since they are side effects, with no conscious intent behind them, there's no telling if a given natural artifact is going to be of any use or not. When you use a natural artifact, its hypothetical magick roll to generate the effect is always assumed to be a 01: a critical success, incapable of failure except in the most unusual of circumstances.

A recent example of a natural artifact is the original Naked Goddess videotape. No one prepared it for its destiny as an object of mystic power, and no adept was present to put magick into it. However, it *was* present at an incredibly powerful supernatural event, and being symbolically central to the event, it absorbed power. The tape is like a footprint of the magickal energies that got unleashed and transformed when the Naked Goddess ascended to the Statosphere.

This means when a major magickal event happens—and no one's totally clear about just what qualifies—there's often an ugly rush as dukes, lords, and cabals search for anything that got accidentally enchanted. Looting is common, like souvenir hunters clipping blades of grass from Elvis Presley's Graceland.

Even if a natural artifact is identified and secured, it doesn't mean everything is fine for whoever grabbed it. She still has to figure out how to make it do its trick, not to mention figuring out what its function (and symbolic reason) *is*. This is like defusing a bomb: you never know what may set it off.

Constructed Artifacts

Like magick, constructed artifacts are divided into three levels: minor, significant, and major. An artifact's level is based on the type of magick it can perform, as chosen by the artifact's creator from his school of magick. When you use a constructed artifact, its hypothetical magick roll to generate the effect is always assumed to be a 12: a success, but not a strong one.

Artifacts are also divided into three usage types: **one use**, **limited use**, and **eternal use**. One-use artifacts only function

once before losing their magick. Then they go back to being mundane objects. Limited-use artifacts work a fixed number of times and then give out; only the GM knows how many times the artifact you make is going to work. Eternal-use artifacts are viable forever, but their eternal nature bumps them up to the next level of magick for purposes of construction: eternal artifacts that perform minor magicks count as significant, and those that perform significant magicks count as major. The only eternal-use major artifacts are natural ones.

Making Artifacts

Most schools of magick can make artifacts once the adept learns how, and the general process is the same. The first limitation is you can only imbue an artifact with a magickal ability that you possess—if you can't do it, you can't make an artifact that does it, either. The second limitation is the object you're using as the new artifact needs to be symbolic of the function it performs. An artifact that aids communication could be a telephone or a ballpoint pen, but not a carpet. An artifact that causes injuries could be a knife or a gun, but not a rabbit's foot.

Every artifact-making attempt requires a varying amount of charges, followed by a roll against the adept's Magick skill. Failed attempts result in a loss of all charges spent and no artifact.

Making Minor Artifacts

To make a one-use minor artifact, spend the minor charges you'd use to create the effect you're putting into the artifact, and add one extra.

To make a limited-use minor artifact, spend the minor charges for the effect and add one significant charge. If you succeed, the new artifact can be used a number of times equal to the sum of the dice. So if you rolled a 15, the item can be used 1 + 5 = 6 times. If you rolled 04, it could be used 10 + 4 = 14 times.

Minor artifacts cannot be eternal-use in nature. Eternal-use artifacts that perform minor magick effects count as significant artifacts and are discussed in the next section.

Making Significant Artifacts

To make a one-use significant artifact, spend the significant charges you'd use to create the effect you're putting into the artifact and add one minor charge.

To make a limited-use significant artifact, spend the significant charges for the effect and add one more significant charge. If you succeed, the new artifact can be used a number of times equal to the sum of the dice, as with minor artifact creation.

You can make an eternal-use significant artifact, but it can only work minor-level magicks. Spend the minor charges for the effect and add one major charge. Eternal-use artifacts that perform significant magick effects count as major artifacts.

Example: In exchange for the really rare *Star Trek* commemorative plate he needs to complete his collection, Terry the Videomancer agrees to construct and trade a significant artifact. The gal with the plate wants something that effectively lets *her* cast the Videomancer spell "Watching the Detectives" so she can protect herself. Terry says sure.

"Watching the Detectives" costs three significant charges. Terry uses a clunky old TV remote—one of the first generation that had a cord and everything—as his artifact. He spends three significant charges for the spell, and another for the artifact. He then rolls his dice and gets a 31. The remote can cast "Watching the Detectives" four (3+1) times before it becomes useless. If he'd rolled a 29, it would function eleven (2+9) times. Note that Terry has a vague idea how powerful the artifact is, but no specific knowledge of how many times it will work. If forced to guess, he'd probably say between two and ten times—not very precise, but that's magick for you.

Making Major Artifacts

Major artifacts are all but impossible to make. The GM determines what a given artifact requires—since every one should be different—but as a rule of thumb, major artifacts require at least two major charges and the object to be enchanted must be historically, socially or philosophically important. A major artifact dealing with deadly communication wouldn't work with an ordinary telephone. But the telephone President Truman used to order the nuclear bombing of Nagasaki would fit the bill. Given that, major artifacts can do just about anything, subject to GM fiat.

Sample Artifacts

Several minor artifacts follow. Significant and major artifacts appear in the GM's section.

Lucky Charm

Power: Minor
Effect: Your next skill attempt is at a +10% shift. If you do this in combat, it takes an action to invoke it.
Description: Possibly the most common artifact, this simple good-luck charm looks and functions like four-leaf clovers, cheaply dyed rabbit's feet, and unwashed "lucky shirts" are supposed to—only it really works. These are usually made as one-use or limited-use items. Lucky charms are always made of "lucky" items, such as the aforementioned clovers, rabbit's feet, horseshoes, and so on.

Travel Bond

Power: Minor
Effect: For the next day and night, your target is unable to travel further than roughly fifteen miles from his location at the time he gets the item. It's nothing as dramatic as paralysis or an invisible wall: Travel Bonds work through synchronicity. If he pursues you, his car breaks down. If he buys a plane ticket, the flight gets canceled. Even if he comes after you on foot, he gets cramps and sore ankles and maybe gets mugged when he nears the travel limit. The effect ends if someone finds and destroys the artifact.
Description: This spell is usually housed in an object relating to travel or bondage. Examples have included: a finger ring made from an antique slave chain; a tire from a crashed car (which was placed on the intended target's car); and a ritually

prepared page from Jim Fixx's book on running (which was glued underneath the innersole of the victim's shoe).

Travel Bonds are most popular among bodybags, but a few other schools also know how to construct them. In addition to the physical artifact, it requires four or five minor charges and about an hour of ceremony to create.

A given Travel Bond can only affect one target, who is symbolically worked into the ceremony that creates the artifact. Most bonds are one-use, but multiple-use versions are possible. They just affect the same target every time they're used.

Obnoxerox

Power: Minor
Effect: Find a person with a desired piece of information by handing out paper flyers that look like political tracts. When somebody who knows what you want to know takes an Obnoxerox from you, its contents instantly change to whatever would be most offensive to that person. All undistributed copies of the Obnoxerox change simultaneously and identically when this occurs as a signal to you. No knowledge is transferred. You merely witness the change in the flyer, and thus realize this person knows the right stuff. Getting that person to talk to you now that you've handed him or her an incredibly offensive flyer is your problem.
Description: Until received by the right person, Obnoxerox flyers are always political tracts: Save the Whales, Flat Tax Now, Free Mumia, whatever. You can make one up or use an existing flyer you found on the street. The creation process occurs when you duplicate the flyers, and is performed with a minor ritual of unknown name and origin. *Somebody* has it, though.

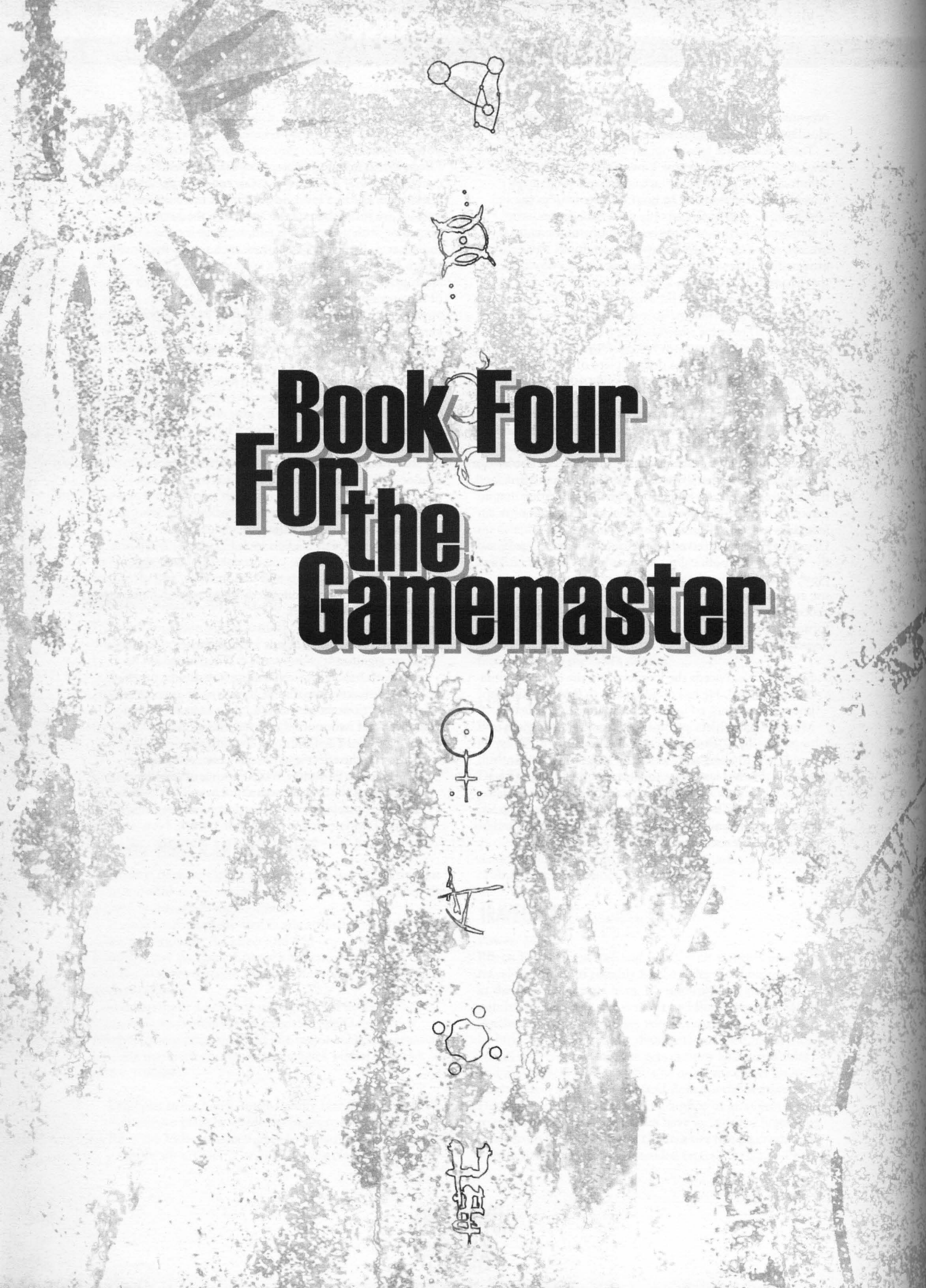
Example: Neal needs the lowdown on the currency situation in Senegal. He has no idea how to find anyone who knows about this, so he prepares a bunch of "Meat is Murder" pamphlets and spends a day handing them out to passers-by at banks and at a college campus. When he hands one to a well-dressed black woman, he instantly notices that her leaflet—and all those remaining in his hands—are now suddenly written in Arabic. He also notices she's calling him a goddamn infidel bigot and threatening to call the cops on him. Magick has found his Senegalese currency expert.

Wooden Nickels

Power: Minor
Effect: When a Plutomancer accepts a Wooden Nickel, he cannot get rid of it. Throw it away and it reappears in your pocket. Lock it in a safe and you find it in your change purse. Give it to a bum and it's stuck to the bottom of your shoe with gum. This is bad, because it causes the Plutomancer to hemorrhage charges: each time a Plutomancer with a Wooden Nickel casts a spell, one extra charge of the appropriate type is expended. If there aren't enough charges of the appropriate type stored by the Plutomancer, all the appropriate charges are expended and the spell fails. GMs keep track of extra charges leeched away by the coin, and only inform you when you try to over-extend yourself. This can cause a nasty surprise.

There is no known way to destroy a Wooden Nickel. Given the kind of obsessive research Plutomancers have done on the damned things, it's generally accepted that they are effectively indestructible. The only way for Plutomancers to rid themselves of these items is to spend them for something worthwhile, and have them accepted by the vendor as legal tender. Not too bad for a nickel or a quarter, but how are you going to get rid of that Wooden Krugerrand? Of course, if you get stuck with a Wooden Krugerrand you probably deserve what follows.
Description: Wooden Nickels look like coins carved out of wood, usually painted the correct color for their type. They come in all denominations and nationalities, and often pass from person to person unnoticed. They only activate when received by a Plutomancer.

Example: Dwayne Bridge is a Plutomancer who currently has six significant charges and a Wooden Nickel. He casts Fortune's Wheel, expending one significant charge. The GM makes note that he has actually expended two but doesn't tell the player, who then casts Devaluation, marking off two more significant charges and (he thinks) leaving three. The GM notes that Dwayne spent three charges on the effect and has only one left. Finally, Dwayne casts Bankrupt Will, marking off another significant charge, but he's not worried. He still has two left. The GM, however, removes the last remaining charge and informs Dwayne that his spell didn't work. Now Dwayne has to figure out why.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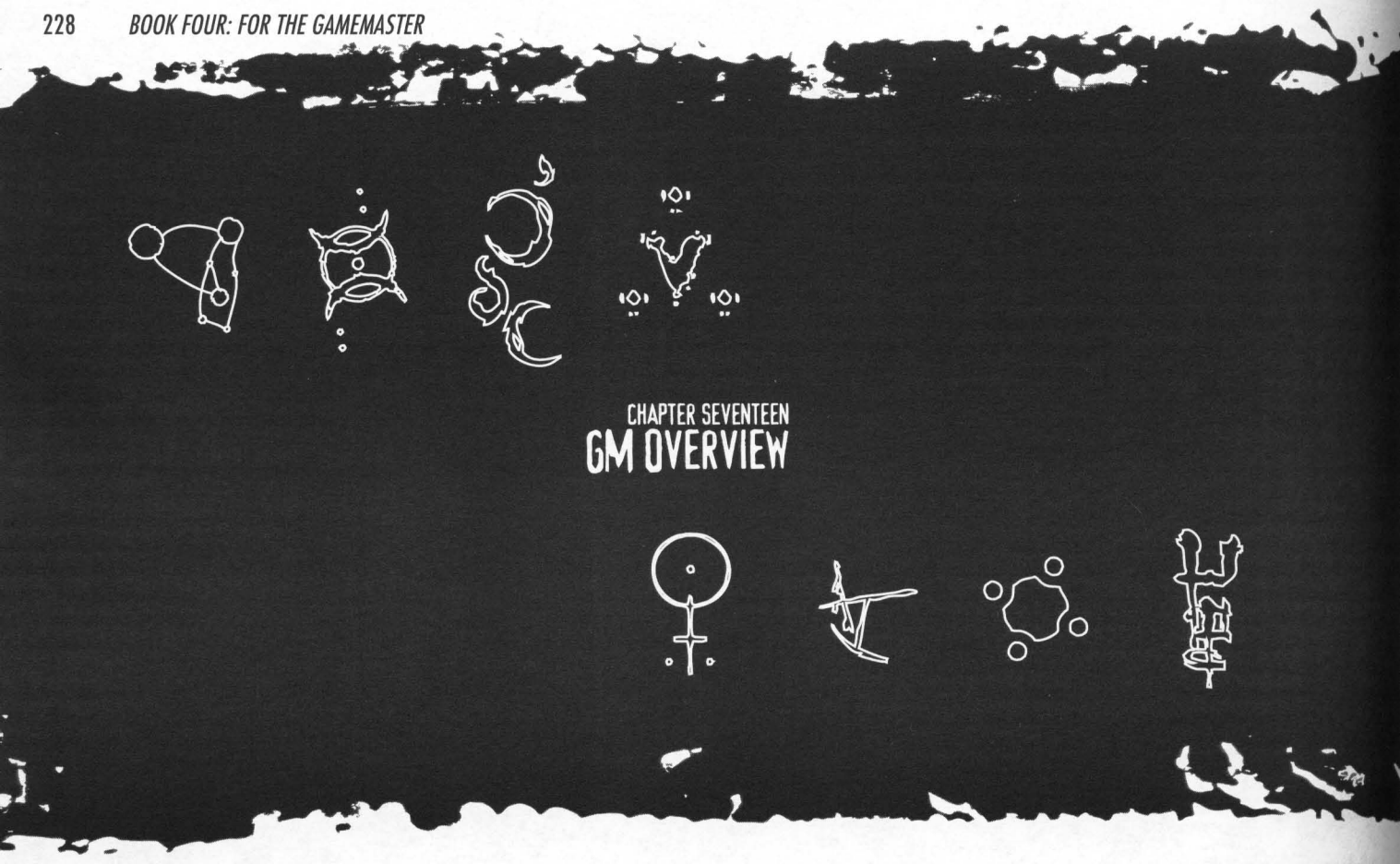


CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

GM OVERVIEW

Here is the Occult Underground.

Now you've seen the slow build, step by step, through the initiatory mysteries of this roleplaying game. Now we drop-kick the atmosphere and the three-dollar words and get down to business. This is your tool box. Here are your tools. It's that simple.

Make It Yours

The occult underground is intended to be a big grab bag of characters and cabals for you to choose from. You can use everything, or ignore most of it. Most all the elements in this chapter stand alone—you can use the Affinites and skip the New Inquisition without much work at all. Feel free to steal stuff from your favorite books, movies, comics, and computer games. The occult underground is a very loose-knit social group, and it easily expands and contracts according to your needs.

In the next chapter we get more into campaign creation, and how to build your own occult underground. The rest of this chapter gives you the raw materials to work with.

The Invisible Clergy

Of the 333 available slots, how many archetypes are in the clergy right now? It doesn't usually matter. More than half sounds good. If this question is even important to your occult underground, think of what the number means in your campaign. Does 200 mean we're running downhill now, and the last 133 slots are filling up fast? Or are we at 320, just a couple years from cosmic conclusion? Perhaps it's been at 300+ for centuries, and the globalization of the last thousand years has only reinforced a sort of stasis, putting us no closer to our goal. It could be that the global media net is now hurling us towards the end of time, with just the last decade bringing dozens of ascensions across the planet.

This is a question for you to answer, or to ignore. It makes little difference to most characters in the game, because what matters to them is the way the world is right now, and what they can do to change it into something else.

The idea behind the clergy is a simple one: power and responsibility. In the game, humans are the most powerful beings in the entire cosmos. Maybe not an individual human, but the aggregate of humanity far outshines the brightest stars, and outweighs the hurtling planets. What is an asteroid belt compared to a mass entity capable of restarting time with a thought?

But as Peter Parker learned to his regret, with great power comes great responsibility. The world is only as good as we make it. If we accept the leadership role of humanity, we have to get busy and lead.

All the intrigue of the occult underground is there to build great stories. But the clergy tells the greatest story of them all: the human story of the great gulf between what we want to be and what we fear we are. Order and entropy. Structure or chaos. In *Unknown Armies,* we have a choice.

artwork on previous page by Drew Tucker
background painting by Matt Harpold

THE AFTERLIFE

So what's up with the afterlife? What is the veil, and who are the cruel ones? Are demons telling the truth about this stuff? What happens to the souls who don't become demons?

We have no freaking clue. And by "we," we mean the game designers. This is one of those big areas of mystery we have no intention of resolving or addressing. Sorry to break the fourth wall and everything, but this is the GM section, after all, and we're going to be straight with you here. We could not think of any gains from resolving the mystery that would offset the loss of the mystery itself.

You can make up an explanation if it's important to your campaign, but it's probably better to just leave it vague and menacing and move on to more important things. We may drop hints in future sourcebooks, but they're not hints towards any particular idea—they're just cool, creepy moments to reinforce the mystery. This is not some meta-plot thing we're keeping a secret from you. We just aren't too worried about it, and would rather leave it to you. The possibility is always scarier than the reality.

Sometimes the inkblot doesn't look like anything at all.

THE COMTE DE SAINT-GERMAIN

In case you don't know, there really was (is?) a guy named Saint-Germain. He turned up in the royal courts of 18th Century Europe, having adventures and posing as an immortal. Saint-Germain is a looming figure in real-world occultism, and several mystic traditions posit him as a Secret Master, a sort of guide spirit or entity who communicates magickal/spiritual knowledge to those worthy enough to encounter him. He also crops up in occult conspiracy novels and theories, and is a useful enough character that we brought him into the game.

We use him as a human incarnation of the cosmic, a useful tool for storytelling. He's in the symbolic tradition of Jesus or Mohammed, a face for the faceless energy of the divine. On the other side of the coin, he's like Nyarlathotep of the Cthulhu Mythos: someone humans can shake hands with and talk to without understanding the things he truly represents.

In *Unknown Armies,* Saint-Germain is a trickster character. He behaves strangely, even cruelly, and dispenses cryptic knowledge as he goes. His actions are inscrutable because he is not quite human anymore—or rather, he's as human as the worst murderer and the greatest saint—and he operates on the street, global, and cosmic levels simultaneously.

Saint-Germain is, of course, a tool for your use. He can show up anywhere, be anyone, say anything, do anything, and then disappear. He can give the players a handy trinket or a cream pie in the face. He is not just the envoy of the cosmos; he's the envoy of *you.* He is the most direct way you have of stepping into the game and messing around with things that aren't going right—or that are.

THE HOUSE OF RENUNCIATION

Among the most common dreams are dreams of houses, and rooms within houses, and rooms within rooms. Houses dominate both our waking and sleeping lives. The House of Renunciation is both real and dream, an Otherspatial mansion containing many Rooms. These Rooms do not connect to each other, so far as anyone knows, but each connects to the waking world in whatever way it chooses. Every Room has a specific agenda, but they all work on the same basic principle: a reversal of personality.

Although this strange Otherspace has existed since the world was new, it only became known as the House of Renunciation in the 16th Century. A man named Hubert Roscommons appeared in the courts of Europe—rather like Saint-Germain did two centuries later—and declared his intention to reshape the political face of the continent. He claimed to be of noble birth, ascribing his lineage to a family he called the House of Renunciation (or Renunciación) that was somewhere in France or Portugal; it was all very vague. Roscommons said he was the last of his line, and destined for glory. From 1523–1541 he carried out his plans with surprising success, working his will in various ways on luminaries such as Pope Adrian VI, Henry VIII, Agrippa, and many more. His powers of persuasion were legendary, and produced such dramatic results he was soon credited as a wizard. Believing him to be an agent of Satan, and a troublesome meddler in any event, the Order of Saint Cecil murdered him in Salzburg.

In reality, Roscommons served the Room of Upheaval, whose agenda was to turn stagnant political entities into dynamic, clashing combatants. The Room manifested as a series of splendid chambers laden with books and maps containing the objectively true history of the world from beginning to end—intermingled with a plethora of variant histories which never happened, but could. The people Roscommons brought to the Room invariably found a variant history of their near future and saw a new role they could play to make such a history come about.

Roscommons had little understanding of his Otherspatial master, and had no conception of there being other Rooms than his. Indeed, he knew the Room only as the House of Renunciation, and believed it was merely an aspect of his grand destiny.

But there are other Rooms. At any time there might be dozens of them. They come and go, falling into disuse when they lose their Agents, only to be rediscovered a year or a century hence.

The House has no core agenda other than reversal itself. Its Rooms can therefore have contradictory agendas, and indeed outright conflict between Agents of rival Rooms happens every few years. For that matter, Agents can have any level of knowledge about the nature of their experience. They can be ignorant megalomaniacs like Roscommons, or mystically aware cosmic-level operators.

Agents of the House gain two special abilities. Each Room provides custom versions of these and may grant other powers as well, but at a minimum all Agents have some version of the following:

Agent of Renunciation. The Room's Otherspatial nature gives it some limited powers of the Statosphere, which it passes on to its Agents. Anytime the Agent gets a die roll lower than her Soul stat, he or she can choose to raise or lower it by 10—and only 10, not a fraction thereof. So an Agent with a Soul of 70 who rolled 53 could make the roll a 43 or a 63, if desired. This applies to *all* die rolls by the Agent.

Ritual of Renunciation. This ritual costs no charges, only a Soul check to activate. Each Room has its own variant

of the ritual with symbolic triggers tied to its agenda, but here's the generic version. The Agent can open any door, and the door leads into the Room of that Agent. He or she can bring another person or persons with them through the door, but cannot send them through unescorted. Non-Agents occasionally learn a Room's ritual and can use it at a cost of 5 significant charges, but of course they still have to enter the Room themselves to use it and can be affected by the Room as a result.

The following is an example of a Room of Renunciation, complete with an Agent and customized abilities.

The Otherside Room

Do you really believe what you believe?

You may think you're a Catholic, a Republican, a Marxist, an Objectivist, a Pacifist, a Liberal. But is that really *you*? Are those beliefs critical to your being, or do you simply adopt them as working hypotheses? Can you stick by your faith no matter what, in spite of overwhelming social pressure, emotional trauma, or even scientific evidence?

For some people, the answer is yes. They'd believe in Jesus even if Kali Shakti appeared and started strangling them with her belt of skulls. There are people who would remain patriotic to the U.S. even if it began rounding up citizens for concentration camps due to their racial heritage.

People like that don't go to the Otherside Room.

The Otherside Room finds people who only *think* they're like that.

Agenda

The Otherside Room exists for people who act passionately committed to a cause, believing themselves to be true believers—when in fact they could just as easily be working for the rival team.

The Room makes no ideological distinctions. A waffling Nazi is as likely to get transformed as a Buddhist monk whose faith is a little softer than he pretends.

There are three typical outcomes for those who get the Otherside treatment.

Some people stick to their old cause against all reason, denying—even to themselves—the crumbling foundations of their faith. This is rare, and many such people emerge with serious psychological problems, but they've been tested and gotten through. Often they become fanatical as a sort of protective backlash against what they've seen—and thought.

Most people who visit Otherside recognize that their certainty was illusory. They leave the room less certain, slower to judge, and usually less happy and less effective in everything they do. Hesitant and insecure, they crawl back to lives they can no longer trust.

Another small faction misses the point entirely. Instead of doubting all faith (or doubting their own ability to be faithful), they simply reject their previous cause and embrace its polar opposite.

This last, clueless group is (ironically) the most likely to become Agents of the Room.

Appearance

The Otherside Room isn't immediately impressive. It's small, cramped, windowless, and possesses only one door—the door through which you enter. (The first time you enter the Otherside room, the door locks behind you.) There's a shoddy pressboard bookshelf filled with religious books, political texts, philosophical tracts—*Das Kapital*, the Bible, *Mein Kampf*, the Koran, *Of Grammatology*—the gang's all here, and all as translations in the guest's native tongue. Tacked on the brick walls are curling propaganda posters from a variety of times and causes. There's a thinly padded green shag carpet over a concrete floor. On an old footlocker there's a small TV and a hotplate. In one corner there's a cot with a pillow and a sleeping bag on it.

That's it. Nothing special.

The fireworks happen when you turn on the TV or open one of the books.

Renunciation

The Otherside Room has two big tricks, though it appears to only have one.

Moment of Weakness: If anyone other than an Agent of the room opens a book or turns on the TV, she gets dragged into a vision of the past. This is a full-sense hallucination. She feels like she's *there,* although bodiless and unable to alter events. What she experiences is a moment from the past that shows the imperfect underpinnings of her faith.

For instance, a Christian might see Christ on the cross: not the handsome, willowy martyr of so many paintings and sculptures, but a stocky, sweaty convict with thick features, raving in the desert sun, demanding to know why God abandoned him. A dedicated Communist might see Marx having a nice supper, playing Devil's Advocate with an intellectual friend and making jokes at the expense of the lumpenproles.

When the vision ends, the person is back in the Room. If she opens another book or changes channels, she gets another vision, typically of a prominent follower. The Christian sees the abbot of Cîteaux standing before Bèziers, callously telling the troops, "Kill them all. God will know his own." The Communist gets to see Stalin's lies and atrocities firsthand.

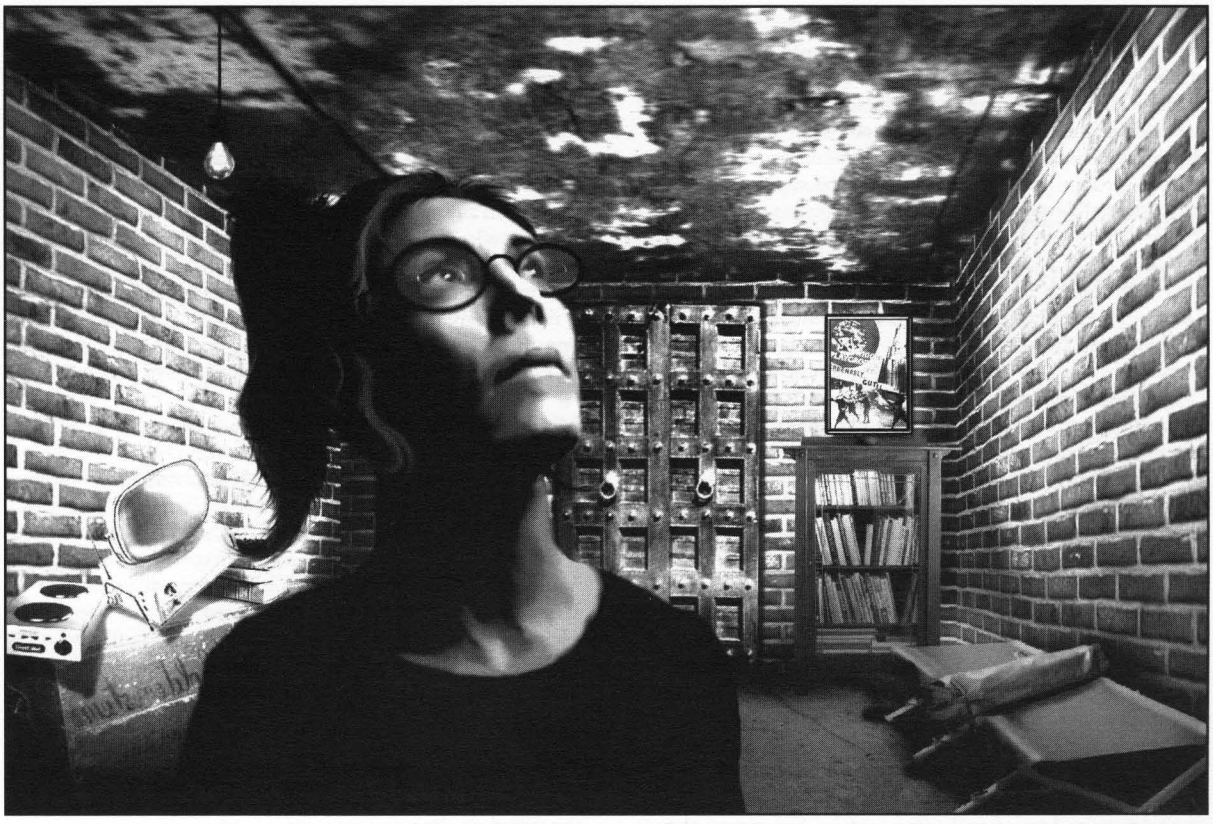
On the other hand, after experiencing one vision (or many) the visitor may try the door again. It's now unlocked. She can return to the real world.

Or so she thinks.

The Test of Faith: When a guest tries to leave the Room for the first time, she actually enters another vision, but this time she's in it *as herself*, able to interact and affect it. The vision is an illusion of the modern world, in the current day. She may be back in her hometown, or she may be somewhere else entirely. Wherever she is, she soon finds herself confronting real examples of the worst results of actions by her cause. The Christian meets pacifist nuns in South America who won't fight back as they're raped and murdered by right-wing guerrilla troops: they just pray to a husband God who doesn't seem to care. Similarly, the Communist finds himself in Cuba, watching the repression of government dissidents and the concentration camps for AIDS patients.

Whatever happens to the guest, circumstances always subtly act to protect her from injury or actual death. All sorts of other, horrible things can happen, but she herself won't get killed or seriously hurt.

If she eventually goes back to her home (or if she was deposited there initially), the test continues. It's not imme-



LILI MORGAN, AGENT OF THE OTHERSIDE ROOM

diate, but all the people who believed with her—fellow congregants at the church, or other Communists on campus—drift away from their beliefs. They talk to her about their depression, their doubts, their increasing unease with the faith. If she sticks to her guns, they may argue against her or simply sigh and shrug. At the same time, the "opposite team" seems to be doing great. The Christian meets content and successful agnostics. The Communist sees her town thrive under the guidance of Bible-readin', supply-side leadership.

Most people's faith caves in when they're alone with it and there's nothing to feed it. When the person finally gives in—even just in her own heart—the next door entered returns her to the Room. This time she can *really* leave, exiting through the same door she initially entered and finding herself back where (and *when*) she started. The vision from the room, which might have taken *years* of experiential time, took *no time at all* in reality.

On the other hand, a few people figure it out, or else simply despair. If someone going through the Test of Faith starts actively seeking danger or death, she can eventually "crash the program" and wind up back in the room. Most commonly, this happens when someone goes on a hunger strike or attempts suicide. In this case, the Test ends and the person can go out into the real world.

ABILITIES

If someone opts to become an Agent of the Room, she gains some unusual abilities. The first two are the Otherside Room's versions of the standard Agent of Renunciation powers.

No Peace at the Gate. With a successful Soul roll, an Agent of the Otherside Room can open a door in the normal world and enter the Otherside through it. However, this only works on doors to ideologically charged rooms or in similarly dedicated buildings. You could do it on any door in the White House or in a synagogue. In an office complex, you could do it on the door that led into the local Democratic Party offices, and on the doors within that suite, but not any other doors in the building. It wouldn't work on the door to a phone booth, or a supermarket, or a movie theater.

Agents using No Peace at the Gate can bring people with them. Candidates for the Otherside Room may wind up there. If another Room is a better fit, the Agent may find herself separated from her guest.

Wicked Luck. Just as the Room protected the Agent with coincidence during the Test of Faith, the Agent can now alter probability to protect herself in reality. Whenever an Agent makes a successful roll that's lower than her Soul stat, she can raise or lower it by 10%. She can't do this by fractions of 10%. If she rolled a 32, she could raise it to a 42 or lower it to a 22, but she couldn't make it a 33. The new number is treated exactly as if it was the roll—matches, failures, and all.

The Chameleon Purse. An Agent who searches the room finds a strange leather wallet. (It's made of chameleon skin, though no one's gone to the trouble to find that out.) It always contains six hundreds, six tens, and six ones when the Agent is in the USA. In other countries, it produces the proper currency at something approximating the appropriate exchange level. The amount is always some multiple of 666, however. In Japan, 666 yen won't buy you much, so

the Chameleon purse would yield 66,600 yen. There is one wallet per Agent, and only an Agent can use one. Anyone else who steals one gets the remaining money and that's it: the wallet stops being exceptional. An Agent who loses her wallet finds a new one waiting the next time she visits the Room.

Otherside Room Agent

Lili Morgan, Agent of Renunciation

Lili Morgan's life can be cleanly broken into two phases: "Before" and "After." The line of division between these phases was her stay at the House of Renunciation.

Before her trip to the House, Lili was arrogant, aggressive, intelligent, ruthless, callous, and selfish. The transformed Lili is arrogant, aggressive, intelligent, ruthless, callous, and utterly *selfless*. It's an unusual mix, to be sure.

Most selfless people have a great deal of empathy. They can sympathize acutely with the pain of others. This tends to get them bogged down in individual acts of kindness—which is a great thing. Anyone who's had a kindly word from a close friend knows that individual acts of kindness are crucial. But that's not where Lili Morgan is at.

Lili takes the long view. Her contribution to the Room's décor (in addition to her cot, hotplate and foot locker) is a plaque that says, "There are a dozen men sawing at the limbs of the tree of injustice for every one who is hacking at the roots." It's Lili's experience that the people with the desire to do good are often too gutless to put the ends above the means. She's determined not to make that mistake. She expects the Clergy to start filling up soon, and fast. She wants to make sure the next universe is a better, fairer one than this one, and the best way to do that is to ensure the last ascensions are good people. (At least, "good people" according to her tastes.) Consequently, she's been looking for godwalkers who are trying the hard trick of ousting a sitting Clergy member. If she likes the cut of their jib, she drags their enemies into the House for a quick personality re-write. If she doesn't like the godwalkers, then it's an Otherside trip for *them*.

This is, of course, much easier to say than do—particularly since she has misunderstood the *real* function of the Otherside Room, thinking it exists to make selfish bitches into practical saints (like herself). She's also had some mental stutters now and then, ever since she got her memories torqued good and hard by Dermott Arkane's pet Cliomancer Nick Lear. (This was before she got Nick Renounced from a nebbishy history buff with a house full of Victorian antiques into a nebbishy transhumanist neophile with plans to freeze his brain after he dies. She also got about a dozen of Arkane's followers killed, Renounced or driven insane, but she now firmly believes that Arkane can no longer Ascend.)

Lili Morgan wants the world to be a better place, a good, kind, decent world for people to live in. If she has to lie to people, or murder them, or violate the very core of their identity to make that happen, then she will.

Stats

Personality: Scorpio. She's savagely fixated on her do-gooding.
Obsession: Her obsession is helping the world. (Her obsession used to be helping herself, and her obsession skill still reflects that.)

Wound Points: 60

Rage Stimulus: People who are as selfish and uncaring as she used to be.
Fear Stimulus: (The Unnatural) Unpredictable ascensions scare Lili. (The Naked Goddess is a case in point.)
Noble Stimulus: The abstract, general welfare of humanity. She doesn't care about individual people.

Body: 60 (Stocky)
Cheap-Shot Fighting 55%, General Athletics 20%, Go Without Sleep 20%
Speed: 65 (Determined)
***Dodge 55%**, Drive 30%, Firearms 45%, Initiative 40%*
Mind: 70 (Well Informed)
General Education 25%, Notice 55%, Occult Lore 60%, Political Insight 45%
Soul: 65 (Intense)
Charm 15%, Intimidate 50%, Lie 50%

Violence:	6 Hardened	3 Failed
Unnatural:	7 Hardened	2 Failed
Helplessness:	0 Hardened	3 Failed
Isolation:	1 Hardened	0 Failed
Self:	6 Hardened	3 Failed

Notes

As an Agent of the Otherside Room, Lili has all the powers described on the previous page.

Possessions

In addition to her Chameleon Purse, Lili generally packs a Glock 17 with a silencer, a bottle of chloroform, a couple pairs of handcuffs, and a few tabs of rohypnol.

The Sleepers

History has shown again and again how ordinary people rise up in fear and awe to destroy the unknown and the unknowable. The Sleepers work to ensure this doesn't happen to the occult underground by keeping magick a secret.

History

The Sleepers were born in England during the witch-hunting hysteria of the 1600s. Realizing they could not hope to sway vast mobs of angry peasants, the Sleepers took the opposite tack: snuffing out anyone who was hexing crops, curdling milk, deforming infants *in utero*, and generally making a magickal nuisance of themselves. Their tactics eventually worked, and ever since the venerable Sleepers have been keeping watch on the occult underground.

That's what the Sleepers genuinely believe about themselves. It's nonsense.

The Sleepers were really born in China in 1945. The founder of Cliomancy, Dugan Forsythe, was traveling there with his daughter Angela and a cabal of twenty loyal cobweb farmers. Because Cliomancy was still a young school, they were traveling the world harvesting major

charges from places like Jerusalem and the Forbidden City. Dugan's cabal rode out WWII in China, where they ran afoul of the Brotherhood of Harmonious Repose, a cult of bureaucrats whose magick riddled the courts of imperial China. The Brotherhood's agenda was simple: domination of the magickal landscape by killing any duke who wasn't in their little club.

Long story short: the Brotherhood did a brain rinse on Dugan and his crew, convincing them they had always been members of a cabal known as the Sleepers—a cabal the Brotherhood invented on the spot. A group of Brotherhood members scurried to England, where they set up a Sleeper headquarters and then sacked it, as if it had been destroyed by enemies in the years since Dugan's group left to travel the world.

When Dugan and the rest of the "Sleepers" returned home to find the venerable cabal in ruins, they set about rebuilding it from scratch, recruiting new members from the Cliomantic community Dugan had built before the war. In doing so they fulfilled the Brotherhood's broader goal: the suppression of disharmonious magick.

Today, the Sleepers have outgrown their former masters. The Brotherhood got the shit kicked out of it during World War Two. It still has a stronghold in Beijing, but their membership only represents a quarter of the Sleepers' personnel. At this point they have been fully absorbed by their own creation.

Only three living people know the truth about all this, and of them only one matters: Wu Zhanhan, a member of the Cabinet that runs the entire Sleeper cabal. Even he gives the matter little thought. The Sleepers are who they are, and the rest is but smoke.

Operations

The Sleepers are run by a Cabinet of four people: Charles Hamilton, Gerlinde Unger, Joao dos Prazeres, and Wu Zhanhan. They are assisted, guarded, and impartially advised by an Unspeakable Servant known as Lucifuge, the Black Dog. Their headquarters is Hamilton's country estate Gleeson House in Lancashire, England, but there are additional strongholds in Berlin (The Temple of Truth), Lisbon (The Hotel Inter Caetera), and Beijing (The Temple of the Reposing Buddha), which are under the nominal control of Unger, Prazeres, and Zhanhan respectively. Few Sleepers ever hear any of these names, except for Zhanhan's. He personally examines and trains every recruit in London.

Sleepers keep their day jobs. When they sign up, they get a flat $25,000 to spend on designated equipment, such as a reliable car, home security system, firearms, and a chunk to stick in a safe place for mad money; after that, the dangerous life of a Sleeper gets them a whopping $500 a month for incidental expenses. They get some gear, and training, and then they insinuate themselves into the local occult underground. They send information up the line but don't wait for orders if the problem is minor—Sleeper agents are encouraged to work autonomously, as long as they keep their masters posted on what they're doing. Usually they work in their home city, but sometimes they travel. Some are lone dukes, while others work in cabals. Individual Sleeper cabals may be organized by location or by specialty.

Email is currently forbidden to agents for Sleeper communications. Telephone, fax, and postal mail are the only approved methods.

Resources

There are fewer than two hundred Sleeper agents worldwide. Less than half are adepts or avatars.

Across the four strongholds, the Sleepers have quite a collection of artifacts, rituals, and occult texts. These may be offered for special assignments, or occasionally used for training. But scavenging is encouraged. Most Sleeper agents accumulate plenty of weapons and weird items in their missions.

The Sleepers are not nearly as well-funded or well-organized as the New Inquisition. The Cabinet relies on reputation and subtlety to compensate, and thus far has been successful.

Sleeper Agents

Cletus Crowe, Sleeper and Cop

Cletus is a second-generation sorcerer and a second-generation Sleeper. Along with his mother's milk, he suckled the notion that knowledge of magick must be suppressed. He's dedicated to the cause, which is why he went into law enforcement.

Officer Crowe sees no conflict between his roles as mundane cop and supernatural hit man. He sees both roles as sides of the same coin. He stays within the law to serve and protect those the law was designed for: normal people. Magick entities are another matter. When he assassinates a sloppy sorcerer or a careless cultist, he doesn't consider it wrong or unethical. Technically illegal, but you can't expect people to legislate against something they know nothing about, right?

The occult underground in his city has no idea that Cletus is supernaturally aware. Their contempt for "normals" clouds their ability to recognize a danger to them that disguises itself as mundane. Cletus likes it that way.

Stats

Personality: Taurus—Cletus just bulls ahead, doing his job(s).
Obsession: Magick and the societies that form around it.
Wound Points: 50

Rage Stimulus: Magicians with contempt for ordinary people.
Fear Stimulus: (The Unnatural) Unnatural creatures. Cletus feels like he can handle most humans using magick, but supernatural creatures are too much of an unknown for him.
Noble Stimulus: To serve and protect. Officer Crowe believes that what he is doing keeps everyone safe.

Body: 55 (Portly)
General Athletics 40%, Restrain Suspect 45%
Speed: 55 (Quiet Step)
Dodge 20%, Drive 25%, Handgun 40%, Initiative 40%
Mind: 55 (Cunning)
Authority Figure 20%, General Education 20%, Notice 45%
Soul: 55 (Forgettable)
Charm 15%, Lie 20%, ***Magick: Cliomancy 50%***

Violence:	3 Hardened	1 Failed
Unnatural:	6 Hardened	2 Failed
Helplessness:	1 Hardened	0 Failed
Isolation:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Self:	0 Hardened	1 Failed

Possessions

Cletus carries a Ruger Blackhawk Revolver at all times, and usually has a cheap and untraceable gun for use as a drop piece. (When he needs to, Cletus presses the drop piece into the hand of dead sorcerers so he can claim self-defense.) When he's on patrol, he carries a nightstick (+3 damage), handcuffs, pepper spray, a taser, and an impact-resistant flashlight (+3 damage). He also has a shotgun in the trunk of his patrol car, along with a bulletproof vest. At home, Cletus has a wide variety of firearms.

Angela Forsythe, Sleeper

Angela Forsythe is a wealthy British woman in her eighties, though she looks forty at most. Her father created the school of magick known as Cliomancy, and his daughter was his best pupil. Her father (Dugan Forsythe) stressed the importance of subtlety to all his students—a creed that has endeared the Cliomancers to the occult neighborhood watch known as the Sleepers. Angela was recruited at the tender age of thirty and she has been armed to the teeth for her task of removing unwanted "noisy" sorcerers.

Angela does not particularly care for her work, but it doesn't bother her much either. She recognizes it as a necessity and also feels that people with a real passion for murder are the least likely to carry it off. She is self-righteous, smug, and extremely dangerous to anyone she deems a threat.

When Dugan Forsythe founded Cliomancy, he fed his students a rather baroque line of bullshit about Atlantis. The primary purpose of this was to enable his children and trusted Cliomantic heirs to pose as Atlanteans and push the other Cliomancers around. Dugan Forsythe liked to travel and saw no reason to be stuck in London greedily guarding Buckingham Palace and Big Ben from his own students. Angela can pass herself off as Atlantean to many Cliomancers (some students of students were not taught the "Atlantean phrases" but Angela has been quick to correct them) and consequently has little trouble charging up wherever she travels.

Her preferred method of killing anyone who pisses her off involves using the spell I Believe the Lies to make the victim believe he has been put on a course of antibiotics by a physician. Then she arranges for the victim to get a bottle of his prescription pills—actually a dangerously powerful narcotic. Naturally, the victim believes he's supposed to take a fatal dose.

Stats

Personality: (Capricorn) A perfect plotter.
Obsession: Magick. Specifically, she's obsessed with the tangles of historical truth and belief that form her father's school of sorcery.
Wound Points: 50

Rage Stimulus: The blatant use of magick. To her, it's more than just dangerous and foolish to use magick wantonly; it's downright *rude*.
Fear Stimulus: (Helplessness) She is terrified of losing her magick powers. She and her father were in a position to reap a *lot* of major charges, and that's what's kept her fairly youthful and healthy.
Noble Stimulus: Protect the world from sorcery, and sorcery from the world. She believes that keeping the occult underground separated from the "normal" world is not just a good idea—it's essential for the health and well-being of both.

Body: 50 (Well Preserved)
Equestrian 30%, General Athletics 15%, Struggle 40%
Speed: 60 (Remarkably Spry)
Dodge 40%, Drive 20%, Firearms 30%, Initiative 60%, Stealth 40%
Mind: 65 (Calculating)
Breaking and Entering 40%, Education 30%, Notice 65%, Occult History 65%
Soul: 65 (*Seems* Warm and Friendly)
Charm (Proper British Manners) 40%, Lie 50%, ***Magick: Cliomancy 65%***

Violence:	8 Hardened	2 Failed
Unnatural:	10 Hardened	2 Failed
Helplessness:	0 Hardened	1 Failed
Isolation:	1 Hardened	0 Failed
Self:	4 Hardened	0 Failed

Possessions

As a wealthy British semi-aristocrat, Angela has little difficulty procuring any material object she might desire. When on a mission, she carries a pair of Walther PPKs, one in her purse and one in an ankle holster. As a member of the Sleepers, Angela can (at the GM's discretion) gain access to artifacts, rituals, clockworks, or even a Golem or Unspeakable Servant.

Daoud Mabsut, Sleeper Bodyguard to Angela Forsythe

Angela met Daoud twenty years ago in India. He was the nineteen-year-old gofer, agent, and bodyguard of an aged adept that she'd been sent to kill, and he impressed her. She decided it would be worthwhile to break his mind and rebuild it, only this time make him completely dedicated to her. With plenty of time and her powers of memory editing, it wasn't difficult.

Angela Forsythe is literally everything to Daoud. He adores her, lives to fulfill her every wish, and would die at her command in an instant.

Stats

Personality: Daoud is polite, cheerful, obedient, thoughtful, and pleasant to everyone he meets, unless instructed otherwise by Angela. He makes a good first impression, but the more time one spends with him, the more apparent his inner blankness becomes.
Obsession: Angela Forsythe's protection and well-being.
Wound Points: 75

Rage Stimulus: Anyone who threatens Angela Forsythe.
Fear Stimulus: (Helplessness) He is terrified by the thought that harm might come to his beloved Angela.



SLEEPER AGENTS ANGELA FORSYTHE, DAOUD MABSUT, AND OFFICER CLETUS CROWE

Noble Stimulus: On his own, Daoud is a merciful man. Given the choice, he usually lets a helpless opponent live. However, Angela rarely gives him a choice.

Body: 75 (Powerful)
Climb 30%, ***Cut You Up 70%,***
General Athletics 50%, Run 30%
Speed: 70 (Sleek)
Dodge 60%, Drive 15%, Handgun 40%,
Initiative 65%, Stealth 60%
Mind: 45 (Vacantly Polite)
Breaking and Entering 40%,
General Education 15%, Notice 40%
Soul: 30 (Vacuous)
Charm 30%, Good Lookin' Man 30%, Lie 30%

Violence:	8 Hardened	4 Failed
Unnatural:	7 Hardened	3 Failed
Helplessness:	0 Hardened	2 Failed
Isolation:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Self:	3 Hardened	5 Failed

NOTES

Daoud is insane. He has confabulated a series of memories that contradict his experiences of Angela's ruthless cruelty. All the people she has remorselessly killed, all the people she's ordered him to remorselessly kill—he remembers it all differently. He remembers roughing them up, giving them a stern lecture, then letting them go cowed and beaten. If this version of events is seriously challenged—especially if proof of their death and his involvement is shown—it will count as a rank-4 Self challenge, immediately sending him into a fight, flight, or paralysis response.

POSSESSIONS

Daoud doesn't worry about material possessions; his beloved Angela takes care of all that. He usually has a couple of knives concealed on himself somewhere. If occasion warrants, he carries a firearm (preferring a Colt Viper), but doesn't consider it a necessity. He's good with his hands.

THE NEW INQUISITION

TNI is one man's private army of crooks, strongarm men, and magick manipulators. Its founder, Alex Abel, wants to control magick in the same way DeBeers controls the diamond market, and the New Inquisition is the structure he's built to accomplish that goal.

Other would-be masterminds have tried to become the only game in town before, but Abel's got an edge over the historical examples. Most obviously, the guy's a billionaire. But more importantly, he's *not* an adept or an avatar.

Take Dugan Forsythe as a counter-example. The founder of Cliomancy should have been able to corner the market on magick, right? He had a virtual lock on major charges, he could manipulate time, and he had a group of seasoned veterans from the Great War who would kill at his command as long as he kept their battle fatigue in check. Why didn't he wind up running the show?

Because he was an adept. He was obsessed with history, and he couldn't be bothered to plan and organize. Blinkered

by his own worldview, he couldn't delegate authority without giving it away entirely. Consequently, a highly trusted acolyte betrayed him and he *never even noticed.*

Dermott Arkane has followers and gobs of power, but his chosen course—godwalking—means the stronger he becomes, the more resistance gets thrown in his path. Was it just a coincidence that someone as spectacularly dangerous as Lili Morgan learned about his plans? Not when he's got "the unseen principle of communication" as his primary opponent. Avatars can be good leaders in the short term, or on a small scale, but their taboos limit their actions almost as much as an adept's worldview hampers him.

Abel is just a man. His mind is open, his reach is wide, and there is no deed he cannot do.

History

In 1990, Alex Abel almost unconsciously ascended into the Invisible Clergy. Unwilling to dismiss his strange experience as a "neurological event," he investigated the possibility that the near-apotheosis he felt was *real.* The more he looked, the more he found.

It's not like Abel didn't have an infrastructure in place for dirty dealing. As a hobby, he'd been paying mercenaries and hit men to rub out various people who irked his sense of justice and rightness. He started in 1985, arranging the murder of a child molester who'd been found not guilty by reason of insanity. So when he needed to get shit done a few years later, he had a list of headknockers and bounty hunters who could be easily hired, if not fully trusted.

By 2002, his private army has swollen to nearly 140 members. About a third of them have some sort of unnatural power.

Operations

The traditional problem with using adepts (as the Mafia discovered) is they are, without exception, utterly wrapped up in their own private obsessions. They aren't motivated by loyalty. They aren't motivated by fear. They aren't motivated by greed. They're bent for books, or history, or widescreen TVs.

La Cosa Nostra never got over this, but Abel is adaptable. His methods for controlling adepts are simple. He gives them what they want, and makes sure they know crossing him is a death sentence. Carrot and stick, period. The key is he personalizes the carrots and carries a *big* stick.

This is how he controls his mundane operatives as well. Abel likes to give a hand up to people who are down: jailbirds, marked men, people in deep debt, fugitives from justice, fugitives from nameless horrors that eat your brains, and so on. Why? Because these are *motivated employees.* Abel erases their debts, gives them new identities or magickal protection as needed, and sets them up with cash and comforts. He also makes sure they know the only thing that could save them from their old trouble is something with enough power to make twice as much *new* trouble.

Carrot and stick. Money and power. The will to use them with speed and impunity. That's why Abel succeeds where others failed.

There are four levels of authority in TNI. The lowest is "D clearance" and these are the field agents who are trusted least and watched most. They're the most expendable, least informed, and largest part of TNI. D operatives generally make $50,000 a year, though unwilling recruits make $30,000—and people who needed a lot of new-identity work/score settling/*etc.* to start work with a clean slate make even less, at least their first year. Adepts get an extra $10,000 a year, or $20,000 if it's a school TNI hasn't seen before (GM's choice).

People get C clearance when they've proved themselves a few times at D. They're permitted to boss around the Ds, they're given a *little* more autonomy, and the powers that be are less likely to question their judgment. C operatives make a flat $100,000 per year, whoever and whatever they are.

B clearance is serious. It means you're cleared for all information within a narrow domain. This could be an operational domain (such as information gathering) or a physical domain (such as missions on the Eastern Seaboard). B level members have been with TNI for years and are trusted enough to oversee the assignments of lower teams. They're the essential middle managers of any organization, though particularly skilled individuals might still get sent into the field for especially sensitive tasks. B operatives pull down $500,000 a year.

There are only a few people with A level clearance. They're the people who run *everything*, can order *anyone*, and who can find out whatever they want. Only Abel himself can countermand an A-level order. They set the goals, decide on TNI's ultimate priorities, and report to the man himself. A operative salaries are classified, but obviously they have no material needs TNI does not satisfy.

Within this hierarchy, operatives are assigned to teams with particular specialties, duties, or responsibilities. Generally a team has one leader with higher clearance than the others, though there are a few exceptions. Most teams on the street are all D level with one C level leader. A team of C operatives with a B leader is very tough stuff indeed. Level A leadership is usually reserved for really broad authority. You're not likely to meet them out on the street leading the punks with the unlicensed firearms and the one-use magick items.

A few people within TNI have noticed that the higher up you go, the fewer mystics you meet. Most of Abel's adepts and avatars are at D and C clearance, and there they stay. There are a few at B, but no one with real magick power has achieved A clearance. Abel just doesn't trust people with such big monkeys on their backs, and adepts and avatars are symbology junkies with behavior to match.

Of course, the people who've figured this out are usually at B level themselves. That's when you get a wide enough view to start seeing the big picture. No adept or avatar has perceived this crystal ceiling because such temporal ambition is pointless to the magickally aware. They've got bigger fish to fry—at least, "bigger" to them.

Resources

TNI retains four major safe houses in the United States: Seattle, New York, Chicago, and New Orleans. These are hidden, well-protected enclaves where operatives can train, recover, meet, and get debriefed.

Those are just the permanent headquarters. At any time, TNI has about a dozen apartments, rental properties, or hotel rooms in use by various teams on various missions.

TNI agents can avail themselves of top-flight training, bleeding-edge gear, and cash, cash, cash: between $4,000

and $15,000 per assignment to cover expenses, bribes, and so forth. This is handed over as "the cabbage roll," a wad of untraceable $100 bills. As for goodies, the higher your clearance, the more expensive (and illegal) goodies you can get. By and large, however, TNI's equipment tends more towards James Bond than Dr. Caligari. Instead of divination and scrying, you work with wiretaps and Tempest machines. You're more likely to kill a target with a heavy dose of blowfish poison in some chili-cheese fries than with a voodoo doll.

TNI Members

Alex Abel, Mastermind (Level A)

Alex Abel resembles Donald Trump, except he has better taste, fewer divorces (he's never married), he started out with less money, and he's black. He's also more diversified: the majority of his money is tied up in real estate, but he has significant investments in military hardware, biotechnology, electronics, and women's fashion.

His wealth, however, has reached a self-sustaining level: the interest from his more conservative investments is earning him something like three dollars a *second*, every moment of the year. (For the math impaired, that's close to $11,000 an hour, just for being him.) His net worth fluctuates, but it's around the $2–$3 billion mark.

As you can imagine, stacking zeroes in his bank accounts has begun to pall for Alex. After a certain point, money becomes an abstraction. It continued to hold his attention as a measure of power, until he found there were powers that money cannot buy. Since that revelation, he has pursued magick power with the same intensity that made him one of the hundred wealthiest men in the world.

Stats

Personality: Scorpio. Underneath his charm and polish, Alex is driven with an intensity most average people cannot even imagine.
Obsession: Power. Alex believes he can make the world a better place, if he can just get enough of the right kind of leverage.
Wound Points: 60

Rage Stimulus: Frustration. Ever since he made his third or fourth million, things have gone Alex Abel's way. He's largely forgotten how to deal with it when he doesn't get what he wants.
Fear Stimulus: (Violence) Death. The dossiers Abel has read about demons and the afterlife don't paint a very attractive picture.
Noble Stimulus: Reform the world. Abel really wants, even *needs* to feel that he is improving the lot of humanity.

Body: 60 (Heavyset Athlete)
Football 30%, General Athletics 30%, Struggle 30%
Speed: 50 (Deliberate)
Dodge 30%, Drive 15%, Handguns 30%, Initiative 25%
Mind: 80 (Insightful)
*General Education 25%, **Make Gobs Of Money 75%**, Notice 40%*
Soul: 75 (Magnetic)
Charm 60%, Leadership 60%, Lie 60%

Violence:	2 Hardened	1 Failed
Unnatural:	4 Hardened	2 Failed
Helplessness:	1 Hardened	1 Failed
Isolation:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Self:	1 Hardened	0 Failed

Possessions

In addition to his fabulous cars, penthouse apartments, fine clothes, and art treasures, Alex Abel owns a few items that are one-of-a-kind.

Amulet of Retribution. This is a one-shot artifact that Abel wears in a gold case around his neck. Anyone who successfully attacks Abel, either physically or with magick, is immediately targeted by a significant magick blast that attacks the liver and kidneys. This amulet only works once, but any roll made from its attack succeeds, and can be flip-flopped. (For instance, a 17 could be flipped into a 71 and still be successful.) The amulet does not stop the original attack; it simply fights back.

Shield Against Assassins. This is a major artifact that many would give much to possess. It's in the shape of a bulky diadem. Abel carries it in his briefcase. Anyone who physically attacks him takes a -10% shift to their attack roll as long as someone (such as Eponymous or another bodyguard) is actively trying to protect Abel.

The Tongue of Abrahim Elkhabba. Ages ago, a Moorish sorcerer had designs of protection tattooed onto his tongue, so that no one would be able to use magick to overhear his conversations. When he died, an enterprising apprentice cut the tongue out and taxidermied it to use as a protective amulet. Now it belongs to Abel, who keeps it in his briefcase along with the Shield Against Assassins. While he carries it, any attempts to gain information about him with magick are made with a -30% shift to the sorcerer's skill.

Eponymous, Bodyguard to Alex Abel (Level A)

Eponymous was a Green Beret, an elite soldier detached to the CIA for illegal infiltration and assassination missions. He did a fine job, winning several medals that are filed in a classified container somewhere. But as the cold war came to a close, opportunities to get out in the field came less and less often. Itching for action, he resigned and went where the work was: organized crime.

Working freelance, Eponymous pulled a wide variety of jobs for a wide variety of clients—many of them mortal enemies. The fact that Eponymous was utterly apolitical and professional meant his clients didn't hold his work for their competitors against him.

Eventually, however, things went sour. He fell in love with a terrific woman, then discovered she was a rival assassin working for a disgruntled ex-client who wanted Eponymous heartbroken and dead, in that order. They had a wordless battle in rural Albania that lasted six days, playing cat-and-mouse. Finally, he got the drop on her and killed her. This revealed a further layer of secrecy: she was also the favored granddaughter of one of the heads of the five families of the New York mafia. Eponymous gained a price on his head larger than what JFK's assassins were paid, even when adjusted for inflation.

On the run and against the ropes, Eponymous signed on with Alex Abel. His old identity was erased, his name was forgotten, and his enemies believe he's dead. "Eponymous" is the name he chose to use when he went to work for the New Inquisition.

He's loyal to Abel because Abel gives him what he wants and has never screwed him over. In the (unlikely) event that someone could afford to offer him more money than Abel, Eponymous still wouldn't turn traitor: it's been his experience that no one trusts a back stabber and that they always get left out to dry sooner or later.

Stats

Personality: Eponymous' life has been one of hard choices and brutal compromises. He has little left in the way of personality. He keeps going mainly out of inertia and a sense that the way he's always done things is probably what's best.
Obsession: Killing things. Eponymous was an avid hunter even as a youth, and has always fantasized about going big game hunting. He remembers those six days in Albania as the greatest hunt of his life.
Wound Points: 75

Note: Eponymous can no longer use his passions.
Rage Stimulus: Betrayal.
Fear Stimulus: (Helplessness) Poison. Dying of a stab wound or gunshot doesn't scare Eponymous nearly as much as the thought of dying from some slow, agonizing venom.
Noble Stimulus: Throughout it all, Eponymous has always wanted to do a good job.

Body: 75 (Massive)
Beat You Senseless 60%, General Athletics 50%, Parachuting 60%, Swimming 50%
Speed: 80 (Soft-Footed)
Dodge 60%, Drive 50%, Initiative 70%, ***Put A Cap In Your Ass 75%****, Sprint 50%, Stealth 55%,*
Mind: 55 (Nobody's Fool)
General Education 15%, Notice 40%, Unlawful Entry 40%
Soul: 30 (Empty)
Charm 15%, Intimidate 30%, Lie 30%

Violence:	10 Hardened	2 Failed
Unnatural:	7 Hardened	4 Failed
Helplessness:	6 Hardened	3 Failed
Isolation:	7 Hardened	2 Failed
Self:	7 Hardened	3 Failed

Notes

Eponymous is a sociopath (see p. 68) with all that this entails.

Possessions

Eponymous is extremely well-paid, which means he's extremely well-armed. He typically carries a Desert Eagle in a shoulder holster, and two Glock 17s. One Glock is loaded with hollow points (maximum damage 60) and kept at the small of his back. The other is in an ankle holster and is loaded with armor-piercing rounds (maximum damage 50, rounded down to the nearest multiple of 10). He always wears a bulletproof vest and generally has a long bladed knife (with a black blade for night operations) strapped to his left forearm.

That's his usual gear. When he's expecting trouble, he carries a bit more protection.

Violet McIntyre, Warbuck for the New Inquisition (Level C)

Summary: Violet really isn't much worse than many people in the occult underground; she only seems worse because she puts on such a good front. Raised by poor white trash in the deep south, Violet always wanted cash. It was her first lover, a flashy gambler named Louis DeMille, who taught her the real meaning of money. She married a rich (and disgusting) man for it and made damn good and sure that his bratty kids from a previous marriage didn't inherit anything when he kicked the bucket. (Contrary to what the kids thought, she didn't poison him. She knew he was going to die soon, and she might have encouraged him to drink heavily and eat plenty of fatty foods in his last days, but frankly he didn't need a lot of encouragement.) The kids set about ruining her reputation and trying to prove that she'd offed their dear dead (debauched, decadent) dad. They even got her dragged into court. She was acquitted, but the legal fees ate up a lot of her precious capital and she was becoming an unhappy regular on *Hard Copy*. At just that moment, an operative of the New Inquisition approached her. He'd gotten her name out of Louis's phone book. She agreed to join—only later did she hear rumors that Louis had gotten on the wrong side of Abel and that his death may indeed have been from unnatural causes.

Violet likes the lifestyle that Abel can provide her and is happy to be in his stable of oracles—she's got a natural gift for plutomancy. It put a serious crimp in her style to learn that the money she takes from him cannot be used to charge up her magick, but they quickly found a way around that problem. He pays for her magick services with material goods—cars, clothes, jewelry, and similar big purchases that she can't make without violating her taboo. Then he gives her investment advice on the stock market (much of which amounts to insider trading). In this fashion she makes enough money to keep her magick charged, and also lives a lavish lifestyle beyond the means of most of her plutomantic peers.

(**Note:** In the scenario book *Weep*, a short story called "The Decision of Paris, Texas" describes Violet betraying the New Inquisition to hook up with an adept named Neal Brinker. She thinks Brinker can give her a Major Charge and, well, there it is. Feel free to use or ignore this as you see fit.)

Stats

Personality: (Aquarius) Self-centered, but sweet about it.
Obsession: The mystic correspondences between our inner souls and our outward consumption.
Wound Points: 50

Rage Stimulus: People who verbally insult her.
Fear Stimulus: (Helplessness) Physical threats. Oddly, she can handle actual violence better than the *threat* of violence.
Noble Stimulus: Family. Violet always sends checks home to her folks, even though she can no longer visit them. (They think she's married a Japanese businessman.)

Violence:	2 Hardened	0 Failed
Unnatural:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Helplessness:	0 Hardened	1 Failed
Isolation:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Self:	0 Hardened	1 Failed

POSSESSIONS

Big gun, sloppy clothes, and a hot rod car he would *never* use on a TNI op.

THE SECT OF THE NAKED GODDESS

People have always wanted goddesses. From the gentle touch of Kuan Yin and the Virgin Mary to the frenzied wrath of Kali or the blood-soaked lust of Hathor, men and women have pictured a thousand different forms of divine feminity. Some of these have been Masks for various members of the Invisible Clergy; most are no more or less real than the next god.

Around the turn of the last century, it became a popular notion that all the goddesses of the ancient world were, in fact, one syncretic entity, and worshipped as such. Every local goddess and every Neolithic pornographic scrawl came to be seen as aspects of the one Cult of the Goddess. Historically, this was nonsense, but in itself, it was a new and powerful myth. Some men took it up to show how an age of male reason had eclipsed years of feminine superstition and darkness, but other people found it true, life-giving, potent.

Unsurprisingly, a Cult of the Goddess was born. They thought of themselves as the latest incarnation of an ancient tradition, inventing a set of passed-down legends and ritual paraphernelia, but they were, more or less, a wholly new creation. As they drifted out of the occult underground, and as the myth of the Goddess became more prevalent in mundane society, they came to see themselves as keepers of the true mysteries of the Goddess: virgin, lover, mother, and crone at once. Then in 1996 the Goddess actually called to them—and they did not hear. Instead the Cult schismed, and the nascent Sect of the Naked Goddess emerged to claim Her favor.

The Sect's beliefs were heresy to the old Cult: that their Goddess was something entirely new, a child of the new age and not the ancient one. A Naked Goddess, revealed and resplendent, embodying a key principle: *affinity,* the concept that merges synchronicity and desire to forge a potent symbolic relationship between lusty humanity and the arcane Statosphere.

The Sect has unlocked the power of the affinity principle. They are only a few years old now, but already they have found a new school of magick based on affinity and spread its teaching. In doing so they spread the word of the Naked Goddess: that all are united in both flesh and spirit, that desire is a quantum mechanic, that passion is the engine of the cosmos, and that magick is afoot.

HISTORY

Organized by women during the Spiritualist movement of the late Victorian period, the various groups comprising the Cult of the Goddess favored pre-modern magickal practices, turning to the old ways and inventing them when needed. The Cult favored the aspect of the Goddess as nurturer and mother, fertile and confident in Her generous domain over humans, though some within the Cult embraced Her as the wild woman of savagery and cunning.

The Cult's magick consisted of a handful of rituals and a set of artifacts, which members of the inner circle would construct for themselves. The artifacts were primarily for ritual purposes, but did contain the power to enhance health and fertility, to grant wisdom and insight, and to expose wickedness and cruelty. These effects were genuine but very subtle, and in this way the Cult largely escaped the notice of the occult underground—and *vice versa.*

Dukes and lords knew the Cult mostly through its component cabals, which looked indistinguishable from the usual new-age groups. A few stumbled into the truth, but even they found it easier to simply ignore the Cult than seek to penetrate its mysteries.

In 1996, an actress in the pornography industry ascended to the Statosphere on camera as an unknown archetype. The videographer, Daphnee Lee, witnessed the ascension. She immediately took the videotape and fled with something of a *gnosis* related to the experience: she knew she had just seen a new manifestation of the divine, and it had a mission for her.

Daphnee left her loser husband and took herself and her story to an old friend, Andrea Deutsch, who became the first convert to Daphnee's nascent faith. She in turn recruited a third, Trisha Nirval. The power of the videotape was that compelling.

Within a few weeks the women found a local Cult of the Goddess in Chicago. They shared the mystery of Daphnee's experience and initially found a warm reception. But as the older and more strident leaders of the global Cult got involved, the tide turned. First, the idea of the Goddess manifesting as a porn actress, an abased receptacle for abusive male power, was too unpleasant to accept. Second, Daphnee was convinced this was the beginning of a new deity, not a new incarnation of an old one—in effect, she refuted the very divinity of the old Goddess altogether. But while the Cult's dynastic leaders bickered over this insurgent dogma, the original videotape made more and more converts. Without intending to, Daphnee was building a power base inside the Cult.

After several months of growing friction, Daphnee's group broke off from the traditionalists and formed a sect. Experimenting with improvisational, symbolic magick they began to glimpse the principle of affinity and learn how to apply it in powerful ways. By recreating the sex acts of the Naked Goddess, establishing a symbolic connection between Her and themselves, Daphnee's Sect could channel Her power.

Daphnee didn't know it, but she was wavering somewhere between the worlds of the avatar and the adept. Eventually, her own personality and beliefs led her far enough from the true principle behind the ascension that she founded a school of magick. She wasn't entirely correct about the Goddess' nature—but she was close enough to tap Her magickal energy.

The founding triumvirate soon hatched a plan to bring the story of the Naked Goddess to the world. Thanks to Andrea's day job as a camerawoman at a local television station, they would sneak the tape on the air and convert the whole city.

But somehow, they were discovered. The master videotape was stolen and Trisha was bloodily slain by a chaos

Violence:	2 Hardened	0 Failed
Unnatural:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Helplessness:	0 Hardened	1 Failed
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Possessions

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The Sect of the Naked Goddess

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mage. Daphnee now suspects the Sleepers, but to this day she does not know what happened. She backed down on her plan—for now. She also wonders if the vengeful Cult tipped the Sleepers off to her plan.

Daphnee's crew in Chicago has grown to a couple dozen members, and since 1999 they have started small branches in a dozen U.S. cities and towns. In some cases, their acolytes have peacefully taken control of existing Cult groups. In others, they have found Cult members to be fierce rivals. The Sect/Cult schism is still very raw, and may yet lead to open violence.

Due to their magickal power and agenda of growth, the Sect has attracted far more attention in the occult underground than the Cult ever did. In particular, the bootleg copies of the Naked Goddess videotape have become objects of obsession and conflict for many dukes and lords outside the Sect. They've rubbed up against TNI several times in a way neither side enjoyed.

Lately, the Sect has experienced some internal discord. A member named Erin Serna based in New Orleans believes Daphnee misinterpreted the affinity principle, crudely tethering it to the sex acts of the Naked Goddess instead of freeing it to function on a cosmic level. She is experimenting with alternative forms of affinity magick, and she's not alone. Erin's circle call themselves Affinites, and they are researching other forms of magick in the occult underground in hopes of finding the true path. The Sect may well schism yet again.

Operations

Most simply, the Sect seeks to spread the word of the Naked Goddess. Lacking the master videotape, they have found it something of a hard sell. Persuading normal people that ritualistic sex acts taken from grindhouse pornography are the keys to enlightenment does not tend to go over well. The Sect has primarily grown through direct contact, the metaphysical equivalent of Tupperware.

Because the Sect is so focused on the life and actions of the Naked Goddess before Her ascension, their secondary purpose is investigating Her mortal existence in search of wisdom. They face a strange problem: at the moment of Her ascension, Her human identity was erased. Daphnee Lee had worked with this woman several times, had coffee with her, shared jokes, and at the moment of ascension Daphnee found she could no longer recall the woman's name. She was simply the Naked Goddess. This depersonalizing effect rippled outwards, corrupting every videotape and document to obliterate Her name. The woman had not been in the business for long and was not very well known, so even today there is little awareness of Her erasure within the industry.

Using both the resources and power of the Sect, Daphnee persuaded the owners of the small porn company to sell its assets to her. The Sect retitled the company Pagan Video and produces a line of tapes featuring the Naked Goddess's short-lived career. These have failed to find national distribution but are sold by the Sect on their web site. New films from the Sect are exclusively concerned with magickal rituals and personal testimonials, and have not found an audience outside the Sect itself. But as membership grows and new chapters open up, the video-production side of the Sect becomes more important. Daphnee believes video is the only proper medium to spread Her message, and she is at work on a multi-year project to create a long-form documentary about the entire experience.

The Sect has dealings with the occult underground somewhat reluctantly. Daphnee's primary interest there is in recruitment, but the spread of the bootleg ascension tapes has instead spawned fear, confusion, and turmoil. The Sect has had several violent encounters with groups such as TNI, who have grown intrigued with the mysteries of the Naked Goddess and eager to pursue the same clues as Daphnee. Should the Affinites of New Orleans succeed in finding a separate magickal path to Her, trouble could escalate—as it also could if the larger but less focused Cult gets more aggressive in protecting its power base and dogma.

Above it all there is the Naked Goddess, a mystery a new age may reveal.

Resources

The Sect now has a little over a hundred members across thirteen cities. Of these, perhaps twenty are Pornomancers. The Sect has modest financial resources taken entirely from membership donations, and is registered as a non-profit organization headquartered in Chicago. It leases a building in an industrial district that is used for both Pagan Video and the Sect, and employs Daphnee as the sole full-time staffer.

The Sect's greatest resource is its membership, who range from casual initiates to fierce and devoted adherents. They have a measure of respect within the occult underground owing to the stories rising from the videotape, but the respect of the occult underground won't buy you a cup of cold coffee.

Sect Members

Daphnee Lee, Imperatrix

Daphnee has always been kept down by some man or other—first her dad, then her lousy high-school boyfriend Lionel Cooper (who became her lousy trade-school husband), then a series of loudmouthed porn directors whose smelly cigars made a welcome break from their rancid body odor. But now—no longer.

She has seen The Truth, and it is the Naked Goddess. In the blinding instant of ascension, Daphnee realized how to turn weakness into strength, and subservience into command. She has the power now, the power of the Naked Goddess. It is not the clumsy, demanding power of the patriarchal male, which compels unwilling service. Hers is the power to forge desire. She has no need of slaves, because her power inspires devoted volunteers.

Stats

Personality: For a long time, Daphnee was a just a sullen videographer in the porn industry, but her recent transformation has been so complete that some wonder if she hasn't gone to the House of Renunciation. She is now forceful, confident and dynamic.
Obsession: Her obsession is the magick border between unwilling desire and willing action.
Wound Points: 60

Rage Stimulus: Sexists of both genders.
Fear Stimulus: (Helplessness) Spiders. She just never liked 'em.

Noble Stimulus: She hasn't quite articulated it yet, but she's certain the wisdom of the Goddess is good for humanity. Whatever the Goddess's wisdom turns out to be.

Body: 60 (Husky)
General Athletics 15%, Hold Her Liquor 40%, Struggle 35%
Speed: 40 (Leisurely)
Dodge 40%, Drive 30%, Initiative 20%
Mind: 50 (Average)
General Education 15%, Invisible Clergy Lore 40%, Notice 30%, Video Production 35%
Soul: 80 (Forceful)
Charm 15%, Create Desire 50%, Leadership 50%, Lie 15%, ***Magick: Pornomancy 75%,*** *Sexually Alluring 50%*

Violence:	2 Hardened	2 Failed
Unnatural:	5 Hardened	2 Failed
Helplessness:	1 Hardened	3 Failed
Isolation:	1 Hardened	0 Failed
Self:	1 Hardened	0 Failed

Notes

Daphne's Create Desire skill was gained by watching the Naked Goddess master tape (see p. 297). The tape has been stolen from her, and she only has a couple charges left in this ability. Once she uses those charges, she won't be able to use the power again until she gets the master tape back.

Possessions

Daphnee has been fooling around with making minor artifacts and usually carries a couple of what she calls "Apples of Eris." These look like little gold beads in the shape of an apple. They're activated by kissing them. When an apple is activated, everyone who looks at it has to make a Soul roll or desire to own it. Resisting this desire is a rank 4 Helplessness challenge. These do not work on Pornomancers. Daphnee has found these useful in negotiations, and also figures that if anyone chases her she can drop one. (She got the idea from the myth of Atalanta's race.)

In addition, Daphnee has access to at least a dozen first-generation copies of the Naked Goddess tape, twice as many second generation copies, and can produce as many third generation copies as needed.

Hiram Ganz, Bodyguard to Daphnee Lee

Hiram's a simple guy. He used to be a boxer and has taken more than one hard punch to the head. When his career as a prizefighter washed out, he became a bodyguard for a porn producer who was worried about mobsters trying to collect on bad gambling debts. Hiram wasn't able to stop the hit men, but he made a good showing before they shot him in the gut and left him for dead.

When Daphnee started looking for a mundane bodyguard, Hiram immediately came to mind. Not only for his fighting skills and willingness to take punishment for pay, but because he was once an extra in an orgy scene with the Goddess herself.

Hiram is happy to be bodyguarding again, and having a variety of women wanting to have sex with him is a nice perk. He wishes they didn't always want to do it exactly the same way as that stupid movie, but he's not going to argue.

Stats

Personality: Hiram's generally an affable lout, easygoing and friendly. It takes a while to get him mad, but once he is—look out.
Obsession: Boxing. He not only does it, he follows the sport avidly.
Wound Points: 70

Rage Stimulus: People who openly call him stupid.
Fear Stimulus: (The Unnatural) Magickal blasts. He's only seen one person attacked with magick, (a woman named Trisha Nirval) and he didn't like it one bit.
Noble Stimulus: Protect women. Hiram is just enough of an old-fashioned chauvinist to expect women to need protection. Daphnee and the other NG cultists put up with it because his sexism doesn't extend to thinking women are less intelligent or capable than men—just worse fighters.

Body: 70 ("The Brick Hit House")
Boxing 65%*, Endurance 50%, General Athletics 20%*
Speed: 70 (Quick Reflexes)
Dodge 50%, Drive 15%, Guns 30%, Initiative 50%
Mind: 30 (Dense)
General Education 15%, Notice 20%, Sports Trivia 25%
Soul: 40 (Genial)
Charm 15%, Intimidate 35%, Lie 20%

Violence:	4 Hardened	3 Failed
Unnatural:	2 Hardened	3 Failed
Helplessness:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Isolation:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Self:	0 Hardened	0 Failed

Possessions

Hiram carries an (unlicensed) Redhawk .44 revolver. He also wears an elaborate belt buckle that conceals a pair of punch daggers with three-inch-long triangular blades. The blades are a half-inch wide at the base and leave ugly wounds when used to enhance a blow (+3 damage).

Lucius Garcia, Agent of the Naked Goddess

(aka "John Wallace" aka "Craig Stokes")
Wow, did this small-time grifter pick the wrong woman to shake down. When he heard about the Sect of the Naked Goddess, Lucius figured on finding some gullible neo-hippies, ripe on the vine and ready to fall for a slick line of pyramid-power crystallized bull. He had no idea that (a) magick really works and (b) people who can use it are a hell of a lot harder to hoax.

Daphnee was ticked off by his attempted scam and decided to humiliate Lucius. She made him profoundly desperate to own one particular pull tab off a Schlitz can, which she threw down the sewer in front of him. The cultists got a good laugh as he scrambled off towards a manhole cover after it. They were surprised a few hours later when



THE SECT OF THE NAKED GODDESS MEMBERS CHLOE GREEN, LUCIUS GARCIA, DAPHNEE LEE, HIRAM GANZ, ANDREA DEUTCH

he showed up and wanted to know how they'd done it. They told him to screw off. He came back. They had Hiram pound him a little. He still came back.

Eventually, Daphnee figured he was telling the truth about wanting to join the sect. He'd seen the power of magick and he wanted to be part of it, even a small part. Since that time, his skills have been very useful to a group that's widely perceived among the occult underground as being all women.

STATS

Personality: Pisces. He thrives on stress and unpredictability.
Obsession: Lucius has always been fascinated with people's wants and how they go about getting them.
Wound Points: 40

Rage Stimulus: Lucius hates to suffer because of other people's screw-ups. That's the fastest way to make him lose his cool.
Fear Stimulus: (Violence) He hates being cut. Even though he knows that gunshots are more dangerous, just the thought of his skin parting under a knife gives him the shivering whim-whams.
Noble Stimulus: Lucius never takes advantage of those he believes are worse off than him. He's been known to buy sandwiches for the homeless (though he never gives them money).

Body: 40 (Suety)
General Athletics 15%, Struggle 20%, Suave Good Looks 35%

Speed: 50 (Moves Like a Tap Dancer)
Dance 15%, Dodge 30%, Drive 15%, Initiative 25%, Slight of Hand 20%

Mind: 50 (Clever)
General Education 15%, New Age Beliefs 20%, Notice 40%, Poker Strategies 20%

Soul: 70 (Everyone's Buddy)
Charm 30%, Lie 30%, ***Social Chameleon 55%***

Social Chameleon: This lets him act like he belongs, no matter what situation he finds himself in. He could spend a day each in a firehouse, a militia training camp, and a ballet school and leave every evening with everyone convinced that he fit in there perfectly.

Violence:	0 Hardened	2 Failed
Unnatural:	2 Hardened	2 Failed
Helplessness:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Isolation:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Self:	3 Hardened	0 Failed

ANDREA DEUTSCH, PRIESTESS OF THE NAKED GODDESS

Andrea is an old trade-school friend of Daphnee's. They kind of drifted apart after Andrea went into broadcasting and Daphnee went into porn, but they sent Christmas cards. Then one day Daphnee asked if she could crash on Andrea's couch; she'd left her husband, but that was unimportant compared to the *real* news.

Andrea was glad that Daphnee had left Lionel, but she was dubious about Daphnee's claims of a "miracle" caught on tape—until she actually watched it. She became the first

artwork by Moises Donoso Segundo

convert, and more followed quickly. The most important was Trisha Nirval, a co-worker who planned to help Daphnee and Andrea get the Naked Goddess tape on the air during a prime-time newscast. Somehow, their plan came to light, the master tape was stolen, and Trisha Nirval was torn apart before their eyes by the anger of an Entropomancer. Since that time, they have made no further attempts to get the Naked Goddess tape played on the air.

By day, Andrea works for WGN news in Chicago. Though she's not a reporter (just a studio camera operator) she is in a position to keep her ears open for news about the paranormal that comes through the station. She has been of use to the entire occult community a few times, when she's given them warning in time to prevent a journalist from getting too close to the truth. This has most of Chicago's mystics convinced that Andrea and the NG cult have gotten with the program and are interested in keeping magick secret. This is not the case: the Goddess cult just wants to make sure that when the truth about magick is revealed, the first phenomenon people hear about is theirs.

Stats

Personality: Gemini. For most of her life, Deutsch was a skeptic who wanted to believe—just not blindly.
Obsession: Magick
Wound Points: 50

Rage Stimulus: Short-sighted selfishness that gets in the way of collective progress. (A prime example is the fearful attitude that led the Chicago dukes to block the tape's broadcast.)
Fear Stimulus: (Helplessness) Electrical shock. Andrea saw one of her fellow students electrocuted in trade school, and she still remembers the smell. She always double-checks her power supply when filming.
Noble Stimulus: Enlighten the masses to the truth of the Goddess.

Body: 50 (Pudgy)
General Athletics 25%, Drink You Under the Table 25%, Struggle 30%
Speed: 45 (Methodical)
Darts 40%, Dodge 15%, Drive 20%, Initiative 22%
Mind: 60 (Reasonable)
Electrician 5%, General Education 15%, Invisible Clergy Lore 13%, Notice 30%, Operate Camera (Video or Film) 40%
Soul: 65 (Autonomous)
Charm 20%, Create Desire 20%, Lie 20%, ***Magick: Pornomancy 55%****, Sexually Alluring 25%*

Violence:	1 Hardened	2 Failed
Unnatural:	2 Hardened	1 Failed
Helplessness:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Isolation:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Self:	0 Hardened	0 Failed

Notes

Note that, like Daphnee, her Create Desire skill is tied to the Naked Goddess tape. Andrea cannot use this skill currently because she has no charges, and she cannot get any charges until the cult gets the tape back.

Possessions

Andrea's job gives her access to a lot of audio-visual equipment—telephoto lenses for a variety of cameras, shotgun microphones, radio microphones, light-intensifier lenses, *etc.* She can't dip into the company equipment locker too often without arousing suspicion, but every once in a while she can "borrow" something. She also owns a first-generation copy of the Naked Goddess tape, which she keeps hidden in a box of blank videotapes.

Chloe Greene, Acolyte of the Naked Goddess

Chloe was an impressionable young woman with an interest in the paranormal. She might have wound up with the Scientologists or in the Raelian movement. Instead, she happened to find the Sect of the Naked Goddess through a sign on a new-age bookstore's bulletin board.

Since joining them, she's seen and experienced things that she never imagined growing up in her upper-middle-class suburb. Her parents are uneasy with what she's told them about the group ("It's all about finding the goddess in yourself"), and they'd be appalled if they knew what she was really doing.

Chloe herself is somewhat uneasy. On one hand, the things she's seen and experienced have convinced her that the Goddess is absolutely, objectively real. On the other hand, she's uncomfortable with the strictures and taboos that the cult demands. She has (reluctantly) taken part in a few ceremonies, but her doubts prevent her from touching the true powers of the Goddess.

Stats

Personality: Cancer. She's sensitive and somewhat weak-willed.
Obsession: Chloe does not have an obsession (or at least, not yet).
Wound Points: 45

Rage Stimulus: People who belittle her because she hasn't done all that much with her life. (They're right, and it's a sore point.)
Fear Stimulus: (Self) Screwing up. Chloe is afraid of making the wrong decision so often that she tends to make *no* decisions.
Noble Stimulus: Other people's feelings. She is very sensitive to the moods of others and attentive to their needs.

Body: 45 (Angular)
General Athletics 20%, Pretty Young Thing 20%, Struggle 15%, Tennis 20%
Speed: 55 (Easily Flustered)
Dodge 15%, Drive 15%, Initiative 25%, Sprint 20%,
Mind: 55 (Well Read)
English Literature 20%, General Education 20%, New Age Concepts 15%, Notice 20%
Soul: 65 (Intuitive)
Charm 30%, Lie 15%, Read People 50%

Read People: This represents her intuition and sensitivity. She can use it to get a general sense of someone's emotional state.

Violence:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Unnatural:	1 Hardened	1 Failed
Helplessness:	1 Hardened	0 Failed
Isolation:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Self:	0 Hardened	1 Failed

Possessions

Chloe comes from a fairly well-to-do family, so she dresses nicely and drives a four-year-old BMW convertible.

Mak Attax

Not every adept is a toothless hermit torturing reality in the privacy of a Unabomber shack. Not every avatar is a secretive plotter willing to kill and suffer to hide her secret from the unsuspecting mundanes. There are, in fact, a large number of occultists—people with *real* powers too, not just posers and wannabees—who think the world would be a hell of a lot better off if they could do their funky thang out in the open. Or, at least, who think *they'd* be better off.

Mak Attax is a group—a "conspiracy," if you prefer—of people who not only believe in magick, but who believe it should be an accepted and everyday part of life.

Some Attaxers (as they're called) are the antithesis of the Sleepers: They believe if magick was no longer hidden, people wouldn't get so gosh-darn scared by it. Other Maks (as they're also called) want magick out in the open so *they personally* can finally get the respect (and money, and hot sex) they deserve but cannot attain. Some want to create a magickal utopia of peace, plenty, and cosmic harmony. Others want a magickal utopia where adepts rule the roost while their mundane thralls huddle in fear.

The people in Mak Attax don't agree on much, but they agree they're tired of the closet and they want out. They also agree (or at least, accept) that the way to do it is by infiltrating the world's biggest restaurant chain.

That's right: Mak Attax has penetrated the Golden Arches. (Not that it's very hard to do.) They work as wage slaves for the big red-headed clown, hustling the fryolator, cleaning the grease traps, and upselling your drink size. While they do this, they sporadically drop little magickal nuggets on the customers. They have subverted the nadir of mass-market conformity to deliver personalized mystic revelations.

Out of the nearly 500 people involved with Mak Attax, close to 80% of them either work, or have worked, for "the Scotsman"—their favored term for their employer.

History

Mak Attax was founded in 1990 by a gorgeous and magnetic Demagogue avatar named Janet Kumyar, and a portly nerd-boy Mechanomancer named Derek Jackson. They met pretty much by chance (whatever that means) and both felt a strong urge to do good with magickal meddling.

The third ingredient was Margaret Brandt, a magick scholar and sort-of geomancer who brought the fledgling organization two important things. First was the ritual to pass their charges onto the unsuspecting. Second was the realization that America's nervous system was the interstate highways, and that the burger joints all along the roads serve as perfect places to monitor and influence the nation's energy flow.

They made their plan: use the Scotsman's restaurants in places that *ought* to be mystically significant in order to drop arcane depth charges into U.S. society. Derek used the then-nascent Internet to recruit and communicate with far-flung and anonymous members. It worked fine.

In 1996, Janet got killed by an unknown assailant and Margaret ran off. Derek became head honcho by default.

1996 was a bad year, but it trimmed a lot of fat off the organization. The people who stuck it out were in for the long haul, and tended to recruit people as serious as themselves. By 1999, Mak Attax was ready to try something big.

Their "Safe and Happy New Year" project was a two-pronged attack. The first prong was the use of a slew of coincidental magicks targeted at millennial whackos. Thanks to their efforts, about fifty would-be terrorists got incarcerated, hospitalized, or (in one lone instance) killed. It doesn't seem like much, but it went a long way towards helping Y2K Eve be a big party instead of a big bloodbath.

The second prong was using a spell called the Ritual of Light in each time zone as the new year slid across the Earth. The millennial clock was rolling up big zeros with the Attaxers doing their damnedest to bring the Statosphere into harmony with the material world.

What did it do, exactly? They're not sure. But it was big. And it was good.

Word got out, membership soared, Mak Attax patted itself on the back, and in 2001 terrorists destroyed the World Trade Towers.

Now some of the new Maks are disillusioned. Some of the old Maks feel they let their guard down. And a very few Maks at the top are wondering if it isn't time for some new leadership.

Operations

The internet makes Mak Attax a global conspiracy. There are two faces to the cabal. One is a sparse, vaguely worded website that floats occasionally from free host to free host, and the other is a mailing list run through a big portal site. Derek Jackson anonymously controls both. They're secure from scrutiny only in their obscurity. Jackson used to spend a lot of time trying to make them hack-proof, but realized it was impossible. Instead, he just relies on the high noise-to-signal ratio of the Mak Attax traffic to make the whole thing so confusing and time-consuming no one outside the cabal can make any real sense of it. He also doesn't put anything critical or timely out there if he can help it, though plenty of Maks do.

Accordingly, the mailing list is your typical internet fiasco-in-motion. People debate and bicker and argue and fuss and fight and—on occasion—pass on valuable information and arrange to get things done. The list is anonymous to some degree, insofar as most contributors use free web-based email accounts they set up just for this purpose. That wouldn't stop TNI, but it stops a lot of other non-tech types. People sometimes post on the list asking for help: magick, personnel, or (most frequently) money. Those who feel inclined can pitch in, usually by mailing cash to a postal box. Lots of hoaxing happens, but the most experienced Attaxers police frauds to the limited extent they are able.

The web site uses a simple password scheme to restrict casual browsers. Inside, members can browse, critique, and join proposed and current projects. Not everyone on the mailing list is allowed on the site. You have to be employed

by the Scotsman and doing "The Works" (as charge-dropping is called) for at least a year before you get admitted to the site. The web site tends to have a less flame-heavy attitude in the posts than the mailing list, and it's also more serious about the projects.

The existence of the site is no secret from the main list, though it isn't mentioned much. There are secret sub-lists that are *not* publicized. These lists exist to support certain projects (such as the "Safe and Happy New Year" push) or particular special interests (like the Feng Vespucci list for tracking the effects of dropped charges on America's ley lines).

Online, Mak Attax is free-form libertarian anarchy. Offline, Attaxers tend to group themselves into crews (usually organized by restaurant, but sometimes by interest) with a variety of leadership structures. There are Mak crews that are direct democracies and there are crews run by charismatic petty tyrants. The infiltrator cliques are as varied as the restaurant menus are uniform.

Resources

The Maks have manpower, diversity, and enthusiasm, but that's about it.

There are a lot of Attaxers: close to 400 in 1999 and over 500 in 2002. But only a small minority is dedicated, capable, *and* not utterly clueless. Nonetheless, many Mak crews have gotten surprising results just by picking two of those three qualities.

Since their goal is so vague and their structure so gaseous, there are a *lot* of different types of people in Mak Attax. Odds are no matter what type of magick you're interested in, someone on the list can do it, knows someone who can do it, or knows someone who can jabber tediously and ignorantly about it for hours on end.

Finally, many Maks are extremely fired up about "The Works" and their mission and the general gooby kewlness of being in a global occult conspiracy. They're eager to pitch in, let people sleep on their couch, lend a fellow Mak some bucks until payday, and maybe even back him up when the shit goes down. The occult underground being the way it is, many of these naïve burger jockeys get rudely awakened—but a few get wiser in addition to sadder. And if not, then as the red-haired clown has proved for decades, there are always more to take their place.

Mak Attax Memebrs

Derek Jackson, Hidden Master

Derek is very shy. He was shy even before he learned that there are people out there who will kill him slowly if they locate him.

Derek was raised on a farm by his great-uncle Franz after his parents were killed in a car crash. Franz was one of the last old-world Mechanomancers, and he taught his young pupil everything he knew. After he passed on, Derek took apart most of his creations, sold the farm and went off to Rolla, Missouri to study mechanical engineering. That's where he met Janet Kumyar.

Janet Kumyar was everything Derek wasn't: charismatic, intense, passionate—and deeply involved in the occult. She was astonished by Derek's magick abilities, and doubly astonished that he'd accomplished so much outside the so-called "community" of mystic seekers.

The two of them founded Mak Attax, along with an occult researcher named Margaret Brandt. Brandt had unearthed the ritual that made Mak Attax possible, but it was mostly Janet's idea. Janet persuaded the first members to join, Janet decided which restaurants to target for infiltration, and it was Janet who was brutally killed by an unknown assailant. Derek had been her silent second-in-command, doing all the necessary and unglamorous tasks. Derek ran the computer mailing list, kept track of the members, handled all the administrivia—and wound up as the leader after Janet died and Margaret disappeared in the middle of the night.

Known on the mailing list as "Superconductor" (the song he was listening to when the computer prompted him for a logon), Derek has reluctantly taken his place as leader of the organization. It has left his grades and graduate studies slipping, it's eaten up most of his inheritance from Franz, and it's made him jumpy and paranoid, but Derek keeps going because he believes in the cause.

Stats

Personality: Derek is a nice liberal boy. His first instinct is to give everyone the benefit of the doubt, but he knows that's no longer practical.
Obsession: The magickal border between alive and not-alive—what makes one thing a living being and another a collection of spare parts.
Wound Points: 60

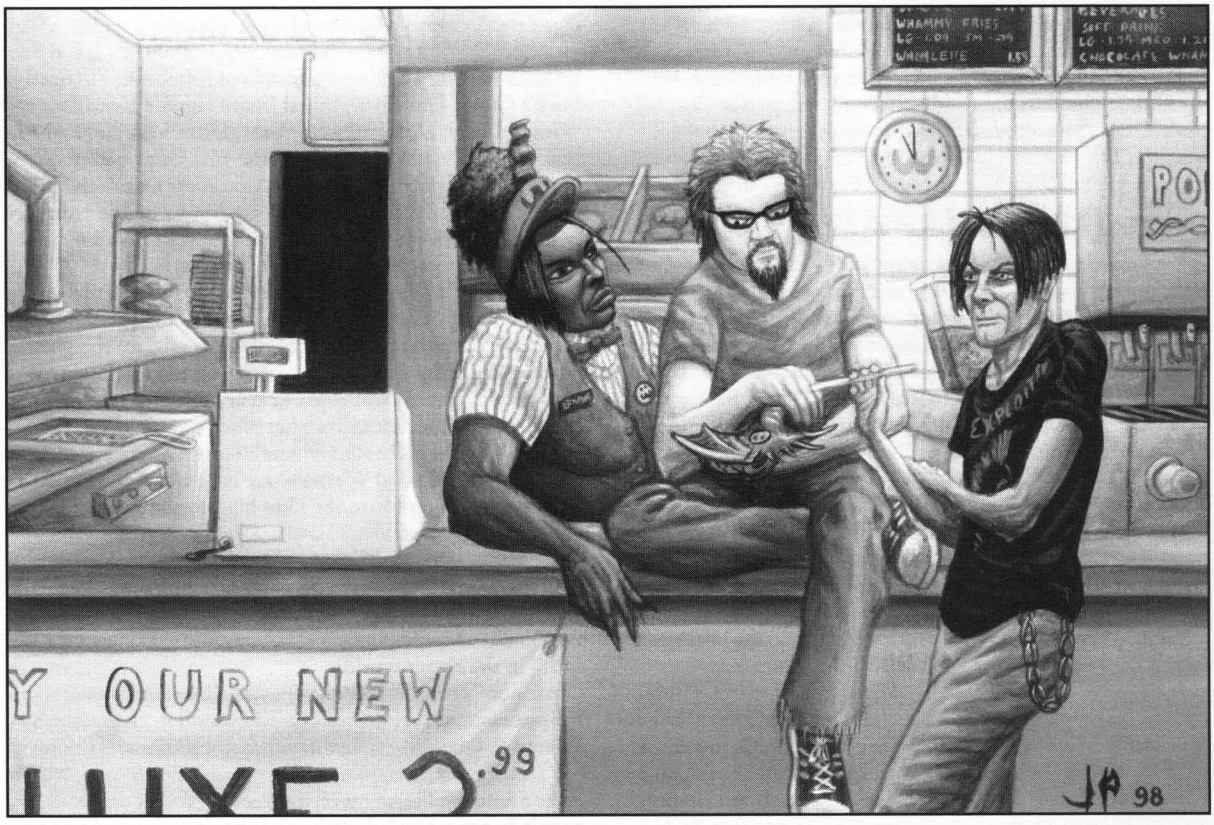
Rage Stimulus: The occult predators who want to take advantage of Mak Attax.
Fear Stimulus: (Violence) Guns. Derek didn't like hunting even when he was growing up on the farm. He has reluctantly bought a few guns to arm his clockworks, but he doesn't like it.
Noble Stimulus: Derek believes he can bring people into a new age of magickal enlightenment. He honestly believes that no one is irredeemably bad, and this faith has actually enabled him to turn some enemies into allies. Who knows? Maybe he's right.

Body: 60 (Pudgy)
General Athletics 15%, Resist Toxins and Illness 45%, Struggle 30%
Speed: 40 (Sluggish)
Card Tricks 15%, Dodge 15%, Drive 15%, Firearms 30%, Initiative 20%
Mind: 70 (Abstract Thinker)
Computer Use 30%, General Education 15%, Mechanical Engineering 40%, Notice 15%
Soul: 70 (Still Waters Run Deep)
Charm 15%, Lie 15%, ***Magick: Mechanomancy 60%****, Write Stirring Email Message 20%*

Violence:	2 Hardened	1 Failed
Unnatural:	8 Hardened	2 Failed
Helplessness:	1 Hardened	2 Failed
Isolation:	1 Hardened	0 Failed
Self:	0 Hardened	1 Failed

Possessions

Margaret Brandt gave Derek and Janet a copy of a ritual she had discovered. This ritual is the keystone of Mak Attax'



MAK ATTAX MEMBERS MONICA BARBERRY, DEREK JACKSON, AND HARVEY DUOPOULOUS

power. They've tried to be very careful about who gets access to it, but any time you get a lot of people involved, there's leakage . . .

The ritual is called Lesser Correspondence and it allows a sorcerer to pass a minor charge on to someone else. Using this spell, a Dipsomancer could knock back a beer and pass the charge on to someone from a different school, who would then be able to use that charge for their own spells. Furthermore, if a minor charge is passed to a non-adept, it works its way out as a spontaneous spell—something unexpected and unplanned, but miraculous. It's never possible to predict what the "leakage" will be from the uninitiated, but Mak Attax has observed the following:

- A woman in Indiana used her charge to literally vanish from the path of a speeding car. A Mak Attax observer saw her disappear a split-second before impact and reappear after the car was past.
- A high-school student in Louisiana saw the answers to his chemistry exam spelled out by a pair of caterpillars clinging to a branch outside the window.
- A woman in upstate New York had a vision that led her directly to a buried cache of jewelry in the finger lakes region. (She has since become a staff psychic for a tabloid newspaper and is usually relentlessly wrong.)

These are, of course, the most dramatic and obvious "leaks" of the myriad charges that Mak Attax has delivered.

Exception: If a non-adept receives a minor charge but knows the Lesser Correspondence ritual, he can pass the charge on to someone else with the ritual instead of having it leak out as spontaneous magick. (This is how Mak Attax's many non-adept members do their work—adept supervisors pass out charges, which the non-adepts then pass on to the public.)

Derek is in possession of several clockwork automatons that he has built for various purposes. He has perfected a design he calls "hoppers" which look like vaguely mechanical frogs with a ring of spike-tipped claws on the front, surrounding a swirling nexus of drill bits. Hoppers are basic attack automatons that jump at their victim, dig in with the claws and then drive the drill bits into the victim's flesh. Once they hit, they drop off and repeat. Their stats are: Speed 30, Initiative 10%, Attack 40% (they do damage like a martial arts attack), 10 wound points. Hoppers weigh about a pound, and can jump up to five feet in the air. He usually carries about 3-4 in his satchel. It takes one action for him to dump them out and activate them in combat.

After returning from Europe during the second World War, Uncle Franz built himself a clockwork bodyguard, nicknamed Hermann. Hermann's finger bones were made from spent shell casings from the Normandy invasion, making it a significant clockwork. (Apparently Uncle Franz had enemies: Hermann made short work of them, and their very deep grave on Franz's farm was never found.) Hermann looks like a sour-faced German man in his late fifties with wrinkled, leathery skin. It can speak, but only to repeat what it's been told to say. Derek tells people that Hermann is his great uncle, who's a little senile: the clockwork spends most of its time apparently reading the Bible in front of the window in Derek's rental house, or napping in a recliner. At Derek's command, however, it can take a grown man to shreds. Its stats are: Body 70, Speed 80, Initiative 80%, Attack 70% (empty handed, Hermann

artwork by Jim Pavelec

does damage like a gun with no maximum damage), 70 wound points.

Derek has recently obtained a third-generation copy of the Naked Goddess tape and is strongly tempted to direct Mak Attax to devote its attention towards getting the real thing.

Harvey Duopoulous, Burger-Flipping Adept

Is it possible to be obsessively happy-go-lucky? One might be tempted to say no, until one meets Harvey Duopoulous.

Harvey is a believer, first and foremost. Like all entropomancers, he believes in chaos; additionally, he is firmly convinced that chaos should be *shared*. He's the kind of guy who says things like "Hey, here's a bet: I flip a coin. Heads, I slam my hand in the cash register drawer. Tails, you do it. C'mon, it'll be fun!"

This kind of risk-taking is endemic among bodybag adepts, of course, but Harvey has linked it to a theory that utopia on earth would consist of everyone accepting and even embracing risk and randomness in their life. His natural inclination is to rebel against authority, but he's willing to behave in order to keep his job at the counter for a burger joint on the highway in DeKalb, Illinois.

Stats

Personality: (Sagittarius) "Stone Free" is Harvey's theme song.
Obsession: The magickal connection between blind chance and deliberate action.
Wound Points: 60

Rage Stimulus: People who try to boss him (or others) around. "Fascists, man!"
Fear Stimulus: (Self) Harvey is afraid that one day he'll lose his nerve and become another cautious, anxious drone.
Noble Stimulus: Harvey wants everyone else to be as free as he is.

Body: 60 (Rangy)
General Athletics 20%, Skateboarding 40%, Struggle 30%
Speed: 60 (Smooth)
Dodge 55%, Drive Like a Maniac 35%, Initiative 45%
Mind: 40 (Impulsive)
General Education 15%, Music Trivia 15%, Notice 20%, Occult Trivia 20%
Soul: 60 (Energetic)
Charm 30%, Lie 15%, ***Magick: Entropomancy 45%***

Violence:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Unnatural:	1 Hardened	1 Failed
Helplessness:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Isolation:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Self:	0 Hardened	0 Failed

Possessions

Like all members of Mak Attax, Harvey has committed the ritual of Lesser Correspondence to memory.

Monica Barberry, Manager and Mak Attaxer

Monica Barberry manages a fast food restaurant in New York's Grand Central Terminal (more commonly called "Grand Central Station"). She runs things from 6:00 AM until 2:30 PM, which is fine with her: it allows her an opportunity to harvest the cliomantic energy from the historic station early. It also gives her a good vantage point to keep track of the station and make sure there aren't any other cliomancers leeching off her landmark.

Monica is well-known in the fragmented New York occult underground. Even those who look down on her for being a cobweb farmer respect her knowledge of the people and politics of magickal society. No one knows for sure that she's an Attaxer, though most who are aware of the Maks at all strongly suspect her, given her place of employment.

She's a big, slightly sloppy woman with tired eyes and a lot of dyed red hair. When she isn't crammed into a polyester work uniform, she likes big flowing peasant skirts and tie-dyed dresses.

Stats

Personality: Monica is a practical, no-nonsense type (a rarity in the occult world).
Obsession: The influence that the past magickally exerts on the present and the future.
Wound Points: 55

Rage Stimulus: Playing with danger. She doesn't mind people horsing around safely, and she doesn't mind danger if it's regarded maturely, but it pisses her off when people play with matches.
Fear Stimulus: (Isolation) Monica doesn't like wide-open spaces. While not actively agoraphobic, she's much more comfortable in a forest than out in a plain.
Noble Stimulus: She's a nurturer at heart. She wants to take care of people and make sure they're safe. This goes double for children.

Body: 55 (Flabby)
General Athletics 15%, Large and Hard to Move 50%, Struggle 20%
Speed: 40 (Deliberate)
Dodge 15%, Drive 15%, Firearms 40%, Initiative 20%
Mind: 65 (Talks Back)
General Education 20%, New York History 25%, Notice 50%
Soul: 60 (Confident)
Charm 30%, Lie 30%, ***Magick: Cliomancy 55%***

Violence:	1 Hardened	1 Failed
Unnatural:	6 Hardened	2 Failed
Helplessness:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Isolation:	0 Hardened	1 Failed
Self:	0 Hardened	0 Failed

Possessions

Monica has a notebook in which she's recorded the ritual of Lesser Correspondence, as well as two other rituals she's uncovered—Snowblinding and Seek the Lost Tome (both described in the *Magick* chapter). All three rituals are

protected by a personal code known only to her. Note that this is a code, not a cipher: each symbol is a *word*, not just a letter. Cracking this isn't something you could do on your personal computer.

In a specially designed fanny-pack holster, Monica keeps a Glock 17 loaded with hollow points (maximum damage 60). The same holster contains a clip of armor-piercing rounds.

The Global Liberation Society

Standing at the crossroads between the old-school militia movement and the new-wave anti-globalization groups, the Global Liberation Society's sole political agenda is the destruction of hierarchical power structures. From big business and big government down to churches, schools, and cops, the Global Liberation Society wants universal anarchy, and they want it now.

Unlike many anarchists, the GLS advocates violence. They specifically promote the idea of property destruction, in hopes of changing people's perceptions of power structures. By exploiting vulnerability and wreaking havoc, the GLS try to demonstrate the inherent weakness in the current system.

Or rather, their followers do. The GLS claims it does not take direct action. (This is not exactly true.) Instead, it trains other groups and individuals in the techniques of destruction. By shielding itself from knowledge of actual illegal activity, the GLS hopes to stay one step ahead of the authorities.

They have a secret agenda. The founders of the GLS believe they have received direct communication from one of the Ascended Masters of reality, the Comte de Saint-Germain himself. They say he showed them a vision of the end of the world, and of their part in it: to smash civilization and bring about the final release of life-energy to trigger apocalypse, and the beginning of a better world.

To the GLS, every act of violence is an act of energy liberation. They are freeing the potential in every object they destroy, in every hierarchy they shatter, and especially in every life they take. It all adds up. But those objects, hierarchies, and people that have real meaning to the masses hold far more power than the cop on the corner, and so they target symbols everyone recognizes: Wal-Mart, Starbucks, Nike, the U.S. flag, and so on.

Through it all, they seek the greatest secret of all: how to release the energy of the entire planet all at once. In other words, destroy the world. Nuclear weapons aren't up to the task, and neither are bioweapons. The GLS wants real power, real destruction, to bring an end to this nightmare age and open a glorious new beginning.

History

In 1930, a man named Guy Ballard claimed to have met the Ascended Master Saint-Germain while hiking on Mount Shasta in northern California. Saint-Germain gave him a seemingly endless stream of mystical knowledge, which Ballard gave to the world as the "I AM" faith. In 1954, I AM follower Thomas Printz broke off from the group to form the Bridge to Freedom, still pursuing the wisdom of Saint-Germain and the other Ascended masters. In 1961, Elizabeth and Mark Prophet joined the Bridge to Freedom and then left to form the Church Universal and Triumphant. And in 1974, a man named Randall Douglas joined the CUT, leaving four years later to start the True Order of Saint-Germain.

This succession of splintering sects resulted in more and more extreme versions of the original dogma, even rejecting it in favor of "new communications" from Saint-Germain. In CUT's case, this process culminated in the construction of bomb shelters and weapons caches at their enclave in Montana, and Elizabeth Prophet's announcement of Armageddon in 1990. Loyal followers flocked to the bunkers, then slowly dribbled away when nuclear war failed to arrive.

Randy Douglas's TOSG discounted Prophet's announcement and laughed when it collapsed. He and a handful of followers spent the 1980s holed up in Florida, publishing tracts on metaphysical transcendence and New World Order conspiracy theories. Douglas claimed to be receiving new transmissions from Saint-Germain directing him to destroy the Ascended Master's enemies, including the Vatican, the World Bank, the United Nations, the Yakuza, and most anyone else with any authority.

By 1998, the TOSG numbered two hundred followers in small congregations all over the world. TOSG fanatics were suspected of complicity in twenty-seven murders in eight countries, including the deaths of three Catholic priests, but none were ever charged. Meanwhile, Douglas directed his cabal to stockpile weapons for the end of the world and to scour the occult underground for the physical incarnation of Saint-Germain himself, whom Douglas believed would once again walk the earth when the end times were nigh.

Y2K was the TOSG's rallying point. Douglas avoided Prophet's mistake of being too specific, but he expected anything from global riots to mass ascension.

What he got was a worldwide party. The TOSG holed up in their bunkers and stared slack-jawed at their television sets as nothing happened.

In the aftermath, the TOSG suffered the same fate Prophet's church had. By the summer of 2000, the TOSG's active membership had dropped to two dozen, all of whom were in the Miami area, and in the fall their official company, True Orders Enterprises, entered involuntary bankruptcy and was disbanded by the courts.

Randy Douglas and his inner circle vanished.

The group formed the Global Liberation Society in early 2001. It's based in California, a little northeast of Mount Shasta. There they constructed what is essentially a terrorist training camp, complete with an obstacle course, firing range, some rough buildings for tactical practice, and so forth. The entire project cost almost a million dollars, funded by liquidating every asset the TOSG and its inner circle had. Ongoing funding for the GLS is provided by manufacturing methamphetamines for sale by others throughout the western states. The GLS keeps several layers of insulation between them and the path the drugs take.

While they carry out their mission of giving direct-action protest groups the tools and training they need to smash the state, Randy continues his hidden agenda: exploring the occult underground in hopes of finding a way to destroy the world and birth a new one.

Operations

The GLS operates very quietly. Beginning with the anarchists of Eugene, Oregon, they offered training in whatever

their "clients" desired, at no cost. Want to learn lockpicking, firearms, or explosives, or how to drop a riot cop with three swings of a bat, or the best way to take control of an airplane? The GLS can help.

They have something resembling standards. Their professed interest is in global anarchy, and they do not train groups who merely seek to replace one system with another—destroying capitalism to replace it with fundamentalist religion is unacceptable. But below that threshold, they welcome people with most any issue: lab-animal liberation, WTO destruction, eco-terrorism, anti-corporate pranking, and on and on. The GLS does not take a position on any of these issues. They just want to make more effective activists.

As trainees file through, the GLS inspects them closely and secretly. People with a professed interest in the occult mainstream are noted as potential recruits, or patsies. Then if the GLS wants something from the occult underground, they contact graduates in the right city and ask them for a favor. Most are happy to oblige.

Such people are not brought into the GLS inner circle, however, and for that matter the GLS says nothing at all about Saint-Germain or the Ascended Masters or the end of the world. Randy and his crew keep all that to themselves. The days of spreading the word are over. The end is nigh. And the leaders of the GLS are itching to put their finger on the button.

Resources

The GLS only has twenty-eight members, all of whom live and work at the camp near Mount Shasta. But every month they process 3–6 trainees, who are then available for errands and assignments in the future. Given the turnover in the direct-action underground, many of these graduates tell the GLS to get lost when the call comes. Yet more people come through the system, and slowly the GLS's legion of sympathizers grows.

GLS incursions into the occult underground are usually carried out by people who don't know what they're getting into. They get a simple request, usually camouflaged to appeal to whatever their particular agenda is, and then they report back what happens.

Randy wants rituals. He believes if there's a key to global Armageddon, it lies in a ritual. He directs missions to steal occult texts, spy on adepts, and generally skulk around the occult underground.

Randy also has a grudge. He has learned enough to hold Mak Attax responsible for the way Y2K turned out, but he's also badly confused: he thinks Mak Attax is a secret society within their burger corporation working directly for the board of directors, and it's the company itself who is responsible—in cahoots with the shadow government of CIA/NSA/Tri-Lat spooks, of course. He sincerely believes the world was ready for mass ascension, and the big red-headed clown ruined paradise for everyone. To his mind, they are absolute evil incarnate, people bent on condemning us to endless subjugation by entrenched powers. He wants to destroy them, both to take revenge and to ensure the next chance we have for a better world is not thwarted. He does not distinguish between the "secret society" of Mak Attax and the individual restaurants—all are massively powerful symbols of evil, rich with energy he can release to push us closer to the end of time. This vendetta is close enough to his private beliefs that Randy is willing to use members of his core group as investigators. He doesn't trust anyone outside the GLS inner circle with this big secret.

GLS Members

Randy Douglas, President for Life of the GLS

What's worse than an unpredictable, violent psychopath? Well, how about a *smart*, unpredictable, violent psychopath?

Meet Randy Douglas. Raised in an environment that was equal parts John Calvin and John Birch, Randy rebelled against his parent's beliefs (in Christianity and racism) without sacrificing their values (revenge, personal power, and a violent, hair-trigger mutation of American frontier spirit). Randy doesn't blame the blacks and the Jews for America's problems; he blames the multinationals that have stifled the true free market. He blames the media elite that sedates the masses with clever lies. He blames the politicians who keep people dumb enough to trade their rights and freedoms for bread and circuses. He blames organized crime, he blames organized religion, he blames, blames, blames.

The scary thing is, if you talk to him long enough then he makes sense. About thirty people in California have listened far too long, and they are willing to kill and die at his command.

Randy Douglas is a true believer. Like Lili Morgan, he's willing to commit any atrocity to reach his goals. Unlike her, he's also crazy as a five-wheeled bike.

On September 14, 2001, Randy arrived in New York City and went to work as a volunteer at Ground Zero. He was neither outraged nor ecstatic by the destruction of 9/11: he was utterly awed, possessed of a profound reverence. He cared nothing for the ideology of Islamo-Fascism. But the bigness of the act, its literal enormity, was a power he could not help but be drawn to.

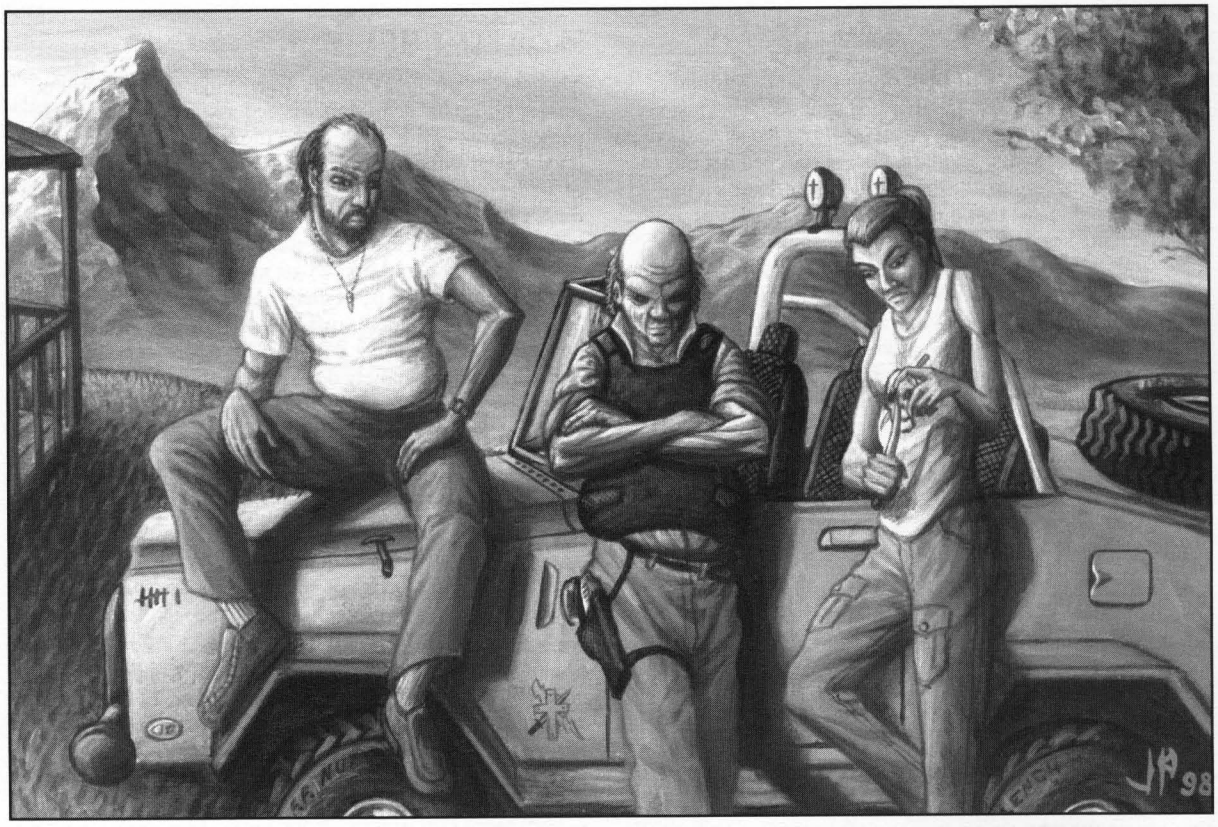
For three weeks Randy toiled in the rubble, living on water and crackers, believing it was the energy released in that place which truly kept him alive. He was already crazy. 9/11 gave him a messiah complex.

When he returned to the GLS, Randy brought with him a mannequin head he found in the rubble of the World Trade Center. He dug it out with his own hands, hearing a voice from beneath the concrete. He held it up to his face and it kissed him. Now the cracked plaster head lives in a box under his bed, and it whispers to him all night long of the glory that is his when he creates the next world from the ruin of this one.

Stats

Personality: (Leo) Apocalyptic, white-trash *übermensch*.
Obsession: Randy wants to create a new world by destroying this one, any way he can.
Wound Points: 65

Rage Stimulus: His enemies.
Fear Stimulus: (The Unnatural) Comte de Saint-Germain. Maybe it's backwash from his Calvinist upbringing, but Randy has always seen God as someone to fear.
Noble Stimulus: Individual freedom. Randy believes that once the organized power hierarchies are swept away,



GLOBAL LIBERATION SOCIETY MEMBERS MICHAEL HOUSER, RANDY DOUGLAS, AND DARLA COOPER

people will be able to mature in a spiritual way that they can't when they're under the boot heel of the corporations, governments, and religions.

Body: 65 (Built Like a Fireplug)
General Athletics 20%, Karate Training 45%, Resist Torture 40%
Speed: 50 (Alert)
Dodge 30%, Drive 30%, Guns of All Nations 50%, Initiative 40%
Mind: 65 (Strident)
Crackpot Alternative History Theories 45%, General Education 15%, Home Brewed Bombs 30%, Notice 50%
Soul: 70 (Charismatic)
Avatar: Demagogue 40%, Charm 30%, ***Constitutionally Protected Hate Speech 65%****, Lie 60%*

Violence:	7 Hardened	3 Failed
Unnatural:	2 Hardened	1 Failed
Helplessness:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Isolation:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Self:	6 Hardened	5 Failed

NOTES

Randy is insane and has been for years. His insanity manifests itself through paranoia and delusions of persecution at the hands of unseen, conspiratorial enemies. This has, on occasion, blinded him to the actions of his *real* enemies.

POSSESSIONS

Randy is never without his daddy's old straight razor and a pair of limited-edition chrome Desert Eagle pistols with pearl handles. He owns literally hundreds of guns and can lay hands on countless implements of violence at a moment's notice. He habitually wears a bulletproof vest as part of his "uniform."

DARLA COOPER, GLS CAPTAIN AND MASTER TRAINER

Darla was raised in a nice, middle-class home in a nice, middle-class town in a nice, middle-class state. Her parents were middle class, Roman Catholic, and (you guessed it) nice. More than anything in the world, Darla hates "nice." Her parents gave her a lot more advice than love and a lot more anxiety than excitement. They got her so wound up worrying about what the other nice, middle-class neighbors would think that she eventually snapped. The pressure of keeping everything nice was too much for her: she felt such tremendous tension, worrying about the one slip that could ruin her forever, the one slip her parents had always warned her about, that eventually she made the slip just to finally be *done* with it.

Her slip was running off to marry U.S. Navy Midshipman Roger Dane after a weekend courtship. Surprisingly, the marriage worked for a while, but only because Roger spent nine months out of their first year in a submarine. Darla lived on the base and (out of curiosity and boredom more than anything else) started studying karate with a SEAL who'd been stationed in Okinawa for a while. She was a quick study, and her instructor gave her extra atten-

artwork by Jim Pavelec

tion after they started sleeping together. They cooled it (mostly) when Roger was home. That went on for about two years. Then the SEAL went off to the Gulf War and was killed (ironically enough in a fuel spill accident) just as Darla got word that she was pregnant—and Roger hadn't been home for months. The base doctor snitched her out to Roger when she got an abortion, and Roger divorced her after a marital brawl that took four MPs to break up.

From there she drifted for a while, working waitress jobs, studying karate, and honing her bitterness towards her parents, Roger, and her dead paramour. After a few years of that, she drifted to what was then the TOSG, which was delighted to have a bitter young woman with an intimate knowledge of hand-to-hand combat. She now heads up the GLS training program, to her utter delight. She spends her time putting Earth First-ers, punk teenage anarchists, and anti-WTO terrorists through a rigorous regimen of exercise, bomb-making, marksmanship, and of course, karate.

Stats

Personality: (Sagittarius) This free spirit is just with the GLS because they treat her well and give her a focus for her unpleasantness.
Obsession: Preparing for the worst. Her parents nailed that concept into her skull early and hard.
Wound Points: 70

Rage Stimulus: Darla is unreasonable about the superiority of Okinawan karate, and strenuously demonstrates its virtues to anyone who claims that any other martial art is better.
Fear Stimulus: (Helplessness) Darla still harbors fears that God is going to punish her for her sinful life. She is uneasy around Roman Catholic people, places, and paraphernalia.
Noble Stimulus: Raised Roman Catholic, Darla harbors tremendous guilt over her abortion. To make amends, she's terribly protective of children.

Body: 70 (Sinewy)
*General Athletics 15%, **Okinawan Karate 66%**, Running 30%, Swimming 30%*
Speed: 70 (Whippet Fast)
Dodge 50%, Drive 15%, Firearms 50%, Initiative 58%
Mind: 45 (One-Track Mind)
General Education 15%, Notice 15%, Speak Japanese 25%, Speak Spanish 20%
Soul: 50 (Stern)
Charm 15%, Lie 45%, Weird Sexual Appeal Based on Being Perceived as a Challenge 20%

Violence:	5 Hardened	2 Failed
Unnatural:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Helplessness:	0 Hardened	2 Failed
Isolation:	0 Hardened	2 Failed
Self:	2 Hardened	3 Failed

Possessions

In addition to the numerous firearms and the wide variety of martial-arts weapons she keeps at her residence, Darla usually packs a Glock 17 in her purse along with a knife styled like those used by samurai warriors.

Michael Hauser, GLS Agent

Michael Hauser looks like a regular guy. There's nothing unique about his demeanor, his actions, or his speech. He comes across as a friendly guy, not pushy or a loudmouth—maybe even something of a creampuff. You know, the kind of genial nonentity that's easy to push around. Most of the time, that impression is right.

Michael doesn't sweat the small stuff, which makes him fun to be around and easy to get along with. That's the good news. The bad news is, Michael also considers ethics and human life to be "small stuff." He stands for nothing, so he's capable of anything. His smiling, doormat façade isn't even an act: he genuinely doesn't care about most things. But when you cross him on the few things he does care about, he'll cut you up and drop you in the nearest cornfield without a second thought.

The only thing Michael really cares about is smashing the government. If you're a Republican, he can nod and grin and talk supply-side economics and welfare reform with you. If you have a Gore or Nader bumper sticker on your Volvo, he can look concerned and talk about environmental issues and reproductive rights. His real beliefs are less left wing or right wing than anarcho-terrorist. He hates big authority figures because they make him feel inferior, and he considers the government to be the biggest authority figure of them all.

Randy Douglas doped out Hauser's real agenda and nature early on and pegged him as a perfect infiltration asset. Hauser looks completely average and acts absolutely normal; most people never realize how crazy he is until it's far too late.

Personality: Hauser has little left in the way of personality. He's a cipher, a blank, a hollow man.
Obsession: Hauser is obsessed with death and destruction. His anti-government stance is little more than an elaborate rationale.
Wound Points: 50

Rage Stimulus: The government. *Any* government.
Fear Stimulus: (Helplessness) Michael is afraid of heights.
Noble Stimulus: Michael is unfailingly polite and likes to get along with people when he's not trying to kill them. A small percentage of the people he meets receive undying hatred and no-holds-barred murder attempts; the rest get treated with great courtesy and kindness.

Body: 50 (Average)
General Athletics 30%, Okinawan Karate 50%
Speed: 60 (Deft)
Dodge 30%, Drive 15%, Firearms 45%, Initiative 40%
Mind: 50 (Ordinary)
General Education 20%, Notice 40%, Political Theory 20%
Soul: 60 (All Smiles)
***Act Like Someone to Gain Their Trust 55%**, Charm 35%*

Violence:	7 Hardened	3 Failed
Unnatural:	1 Hardened	0 Failed
Helplessness:	0 Hardened	5 Failed
Isolation:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Self:	6 Hardened	2 Failed

NOTES

Michael is insane. He has an elaborate, half-coherent fantasy constructed about his own inability to act freely. He believes himself to be an automaton genetically manipulated by the government while he was still in the womb, and that as a result he has no real moral agency or free will. He keeps this hokum to himself, by and large, though he may begin compulsively spilling out his theory if he's torturing or killing someone slowly enough that he can talk throughout the process.

THE ORDER OF ST. CECIL

Over the centuries, the practice of magick has had many enemies. At various times, just about every organized religion has denounced the paranormal—even those with firmly incorporated supernatural elements of their own. As religion got less and less magickal, the rivalry only got hotter and meaner. One of the most successful anti-magick cabals is the Order of St. Cecil, a small group working for the Roman Catholic Church.

The Order of St. Cecil is, officially, under the wing of the much, much larger Jesuit order. Like Jesuits, all members must be not only monks, but ordained priests, in order to give them the authority to perform exorcisms. There are, however, numerous nuns, ordinary priests, and lay folk who work with the Order.

There have been similar "inquisitions" before, of course. The Shi'ia and Sunni branches of Islam have both, at various times, sponsored covert witch hunters, and more than one Rabbi has raised arms against perceived creatures of darkness. But the Cecilites (or Cecilines) have outlasted them all. Dismissed as a harmless anachronism by many church elders, they continue their mission of combating the Devil's plans worldwide, even in the face of dwindling membership and increasing skepticism.

The Cecilites are not like the Sleepers, though from the outside both groups of adept-rumblers look very similar. The Sleepers are very much pro-magick. They just want to keep it to themselves. The Cecilines consider every act of mystical manipulation to be diabolical, and they want to stop *all* of it.

HISTORY

You won't find the story of Saint Cecil and the Moor in any history outside the Vatican's most secret libraries. Pope Urban V believed if the kings of Europe had final proof of the power of Moorish sorcery, they would become less likely to support another Crusade. Instead, he founded a special order of monks to covertly seek and suppress the powers of magick, and they were named after the martyr who brought the Church true knowledge of magick—and paid with his life.

While the Inquisition was the public face of the search for witchcraft and heresy, the Order of Saint Cecil investigated those who were normally above suspicion: princes, priests, and even some members of the Inquisition itself were quietly pursued and dealt with by the monks of Saint Cecil.

Time passed, the world changed, but the need to protect it remained. Now the monks of Saint Cecil are as highly trained as any SAS operative or FBI agent. They put on the armor of faith every morning—followed by the armor of Kevlar. Well-funded, well-armed, and well-trained, the monks of Saint Cecil are completely fearless. There is no room in the order for doubt and hesitation. Each member is willing to give up his own life to keep the world safe from Satan's magick.

OPERATIONS

Some people claim every Catholic diocese has an exorcist on call twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year. Not many believe it, not in this day and age. It's ridiculous to imagine a priest sitting around the local rectory with nothing to do but wait for a red telephone to ring and maybe practice his vampire-staking technique. Especially when you consider the declining numbers of men entering the Catholic clergy every year; the Catholic Church doesn't have the manpower, right?

Actually, that *is* right. There aren't enough exorcists for every diocese to have one. However, every bishop has a number he can call, and a promise that if he calls it, a team of "experts" will arrive as soon as possible. These experts are from the Order of Saint Cecil.

As it happens, the Order has dwindled to less than two hundred actual members worldwide. While numerically close to the Sleepers, Cecilites spend far less time involved with actual occult events, and much more time interfacing with hoaxes, cranks, and lunatics.

(Perhaps it's no surprise that over the past ten years, the Cecilines have actually *helped* something like ten times as many people as the Sleepers. But then again, "helping" isn't really in the Sleeper mission statement.)

When the order hears of something fishy, they send in an expert observer. This observer has no orders to interfere, unless the situation is dire. Instead, he only gathers information and determines if the events are truly unnatural in nature.

Most of the time they're not, and the observer passes the buck to a local police department, or recommends psychological counseling, or simply ignores it if it's harmless. When a situation is considered "hot"—that is, something truly unearthly is going on—other specialists arrive on the scene.

The Cecilines have three types of "hot" cases, each with different responses.

HAUNTINGS

If they come upon what they call a **Haunting**, they send in exorcists. Hauntings are situational: lots of unnatural phenomena with no apparent human focus are considered Hauntings. The Cecilite theory is that Hauntings happen at places where the barrier between Earth and Hell has become thin for some reason. If it's a house Haunting, they may buy the house, level it, and consecrate the ground. If that's not feasible, they try to find some other way to stop the problem. Haunted objects are usually destroyed or turned over to the Vatican vaults. If they can't find a way to destroy a given problem, they adopt a policy of containment. The OSC currently owns two pieces of property with permanent access to Otherspaces. In both cases, the entry points have been sealed off behind tons of stone and cement, though they are both still active.

Ceciline Haunting cases have led them to tangle with demons, Otherspaces, the abandoned fortress of a dead

godwalker, and (once) a Room of the House of Renunciation.

Possessions

The second type of case is a **Possession,** and many times that's just what it sounds like. If a demon is in a human body, they try to get it out, often with the cooperation of the human host or its close relatives. Possessed people can expect to be taken somewhere remote—isolated and well-guarded farm houses are common—and worked over relentlessly. At least three Cecilines are assigned full-time to Possession cases. A Possessed person can expect to endure a very *loud* exorcism rite every three hours. On top of that, they get intensive psychotherapy, often with medication. (At least a quarter of the Cecilites are psychologists or psychiatrists.) Their behavior, diet, and guests are all sternly restricted: possessed "guests" of the Cecilites are really just prisoners under 24-hour guard.

It should be noted that Possession is the most likely diagnosis when Cecilites encounter adepts and avatars. They interpret the Obsessions and the unnatural powers as just more demons.

Ceciline treatments are surprisingly effective against the unnatural. (At least, it's a surprise to most adepts, who giggle up their tattered sleeves when priests walk by.) Simply imprisoning someone who's possessed by a real demon can persuade the creature to leave. After all, if it's not getting its kicks, it's going to look for a more likely vessel. It might try one of the Cecilites, but they tend to have very robust souls which help them resist possession. While they're fighting the demon, the Cecilines are also trying to strengthen (or re-shape) the will of the human host. In game terms, they try to improve his or her Soul score.

Even adepts and avatars can be "cured" by the Cecilite treatment. Between the sleep deprivation and the extremely aggressive psychological treatment, what they're doing is effectively brainwashing. If they can force enough Self or Helplessness or Isolation checks on an adept, they may break him down with five failed notches. After that, if the adept decides to change his Obsession, he loses his magick powers—but can, in exchange, re-enter normal society with an ordinary (albeit rather religious) world view, perhaps even a Paradigm skill. Avatars are trickier, since they don't need to be obsessed. Still, imprisonment makes keeping to some paths pretty hard in and of itself.

Possession cases are never easy, but the simplest are when the subject willingly submits or is turned over by a legal guardian. If necessary, however, the Order kidnaps unwilling possession subjects. This is rare and not done lightly, but it is done thoroughly. A ten-man squad in riot gear typically takes down the Possessed target with beanbag rounds, pepper spray, tasers, and anything else they think is necessary. Involuntary captives often wake up in a yacht in the middle of the ocean, with no one on board but Cecilines and no idea how to get back to shore.

Cecilites have tackled Possession cases where their targets were flesh mages, chaos adepts, Dipsomancers, people who were genuinely spirit-ridden, and even a clockwork creation and an Unspeakable Servant in a human corpus. Both of those latter cases, however, were rapidly upgraded to Incarnation.

Incarnations

To the Cecilites, an **Incarnation** is a demon from Hell who walks the Earth in the flesh. All bets are off for an Incarnation. The Cecilines isolate it, surround it, get any bystanders out of the way, and destroy it. Not simply "kill" it—they know better. Once an Incarnation stops moving, they pray over the body while burning it to fine ash. Then they grind up the ash, put it in a consecrated urn, and store it in a highly guarded, hidden monastery under constant guard.

Incarnation encounters have spelled the doom for two Unspeakable Servants, three clockworks, several Nonentities, countless revenants, packs of tenebrae, and a number of Epideromancers who were judged to not actually be human.

Resources

Most obviously, Cecilites have money (though not for extravagances), guns (though only for extreme circumstances), and training (most often in psychology, though with a good smattering of combat tactics thrown in). But really, those are the tip of the iceberg.

They've been at it a long, *long* time, longer than even the Sleepers are *supposed* to have existed. Their library of encounters is vast. Unfortunately, it's got a signal to noise ratio that's almost as dismal as the Mak Attax list. It's got answers to any question about the occult, sometimes hundreds of answers, and maybe one is right. But at least it's got a good index.

The Cecilines also have faith. Not only does this give them a solid Christian Paradigm skill to help them fight the madness of magick, it gives them the sort of courage and integrity you only find in people who are convinced they're on the side of the angels. The New Inquisition, young as it is, is far more clued-in to the details of the occult world—but you'd have to look long and hard to find even a self-styled hero in its ranks. Most Cecilines, on the other hand, are spiritually and generously motivated to help others and protect the world. Whether this makes them heroes or fanatics depends on whether they think you're a demon or not.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Cecilines have the Catholic Church. It's mostly clueless about the unnatural, it's fractious and disparate and "fighting demons incarnate" is way, *way* down on its list of priorities. But it's worldwide, it's huge, and it definitely looks out for its own.

Cecilite Operative

Father José Carrillo, Thwarting Satan's Wiles

Father Carrillo is a native of El Salvador and a former supporter of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. He spent a lot of his time hiding out from right-wing death squads and preaching hope to the downtrodden, until one day he met a group of peasants who had their own protection from both factions. They made strange calls, like birds, and eerie, formless things came down from the mountains and trees to tear apart any interlopers. Father Carrillo barely escaped alive, but when his bishop told him a group of exorcists had arrived, he insisted on going into the jungle with them. The exorcists (from the Order of St. Cecil) were impressed with his courage in the face of supernatural evil and recom-



SATAN'S CHOSEN TEMPLE MEMBERS REBECCA DEGHOULE, "T-JOE" WALTERS, AND JOSIE REED; ORDER OF ST. CECIL AGENT FATHER JOSÉ CARRILLO

mended him for membership. For his part, José had seen that there were even worse threats than the Contras. He agreed to join the Order and trained hard.

José has mostly specialized in South and Central American exorcisms, but recently his cultural background and expertise has led him into the United States. He has suspicions that a group of drug smugglers are using black magick to get their product into North America.

José is still a dedicated communist, but his politics take a back seat to his faith. He dislikes killing human beings and thus far has been able to avoid doing so.

STATS

Personality: (Taurus) He's a trooper, able to overcome most setbacks.
Obsession: Father Carrillo is dedicated to wiping the supernatural off the face of the earth.
Wound Points: 65

Rage Stimulus: Oppression, especially politically sanctioned violence.
Fear Stimulus: (Self) José is afraid that if he becomes too wrapped up in his hatred for the powers of evil, he could lose his love of Christ.
Noble Stimulus: Protect the world from the devil's wiles—particularly the supernatural.

Body: 65 (Burly)
General Athletics 50%, Judo 55%
Speed: 65 (Graceful)
Dodge 50%, Driving 45%, Guns 45%, Initiative 45%
Mind: 65 (Keen Mind)
General Education 20%, Notice 50%, Occult Countermeasures 45%, Paradigm: Christian 60%, Theology 30%
Soul: 65 (Intense Beliefs)
Charm 30%, Lie 45%, ***Pray 65%***

Paradigm: Christian. Father Carrillo can roll this skill to ignore the effects of a failed stress check against the Unnatural. In return, he has permanently accepted a Failed notch in Self.
Pray. If Father Carrillo is being influenced or controlled by magick, either mentally or emotionally, he can make a Pray roll to snap out of it.

Violence:	5 Hardened	2 Failed
Unnatural:	5 Hardened	1 Failed
Helplessness:	0 Hardened	2 Failed
Isolation:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Self:	1 Hardened	1 Failed

POSSESSIONS

In addition to his cross, Bible, and holy water, Father Carrillo usually carries two pair of handcuffs, a canister or two of pepper spray, and a hunting knife. If expecting real trouble, he is generally armed with a Desert Eagle semi-automatic and an MP5 submachine gun, supplied by the Catholic Church.

artwork by Brian Snoddy

Satan's Chosen Temple

A fine example of a clueless magick cabal, the self-styled "Satan's Chosen Temple" is actually a gang of a dozen or so dimbulb suburban teenagers in New Jersey who had nothing better to do than dress in black, wear pentagrams, listen to "Satanic" heavy-metal music, and waste their time with Ouija boards. Like countless similar boneheads throughout America, they probably would have gotten bored eventually if one of their number hadn't actually succeeded in piercing the veil and calling up a demon.

History

In 1999, a would-be Satanist named Judie Brodie went through the standard Ouija and planchette routine in a local graveyard on Halloween. She was astonished to find herself a helpless passenger as her body bolted to the nearest taqueria and dropped $60 on excruciatingly hot Mexican food, something Judy normally loathed. To her credit, she kept her wits about her and managed to retake her body while the demon possessing her was distracted by puking up quarts of half-digested jalapeños. She demanded to know which "spirit of the abyss" had possessed her. The demon was happy to play along and pretended to be "Gazadrel . . . uh, lord of gluttony." Gazadrel then offered to teach Judy how to call up other demons whenever she wanted in exchange for the right to occasionally possess Judy's body and taste mortal life again. Judy's counter-offer was to help summon demons that could only possess other people. Gazadrel was cool with it.

That's how Judy Brodie became the high priestess of Satan's Chosen Temple. Her favored demon, Gazadrel, is actually the soul of a troubled but not violent woman named Lisa Cisneros, who died in 1984—though Judy doesn't know this. Gazadrel taught her how to call up demons and put them in the bodies of willing participants. Pretty soon, Judy was busy brokering deals between her teenage chums and the spirits of the departed.

Judy now calls herself "Rebecca DeGhoule" (pronounced DAY-goo-WELL). She rents a ramshackle house where her buddies crash, party, listen to Marilyn Manson, and worship the devil. She also has a stable of demons she can contact and something of a schedule of rates for services rendered.

The members of the Temple would soon have been the hot, slaggy core of a paranormal meltdown if "Rebecca" hadn't been crafty enough to teach herself exorcism as well as invocation. Nonetheless, she has still called up at least two demons she couldn't put down. In each case, as soon as they got a body, they took off at top speed. One turned up on *America's Most Wanted* as a spree-killer suspect.

Since then, Rebecca has been far more careful with the bodies she rents out to "the fallen." For one thing, she chains them up before putting a demon in. (That's fine with the teenage hosts: for many, it adds to the ambiance.)

Operations

The kids agree to host a demon for a day in exchange for promises of "Satan's favor." Most of her "cultists" are willing to give up their volition for short periods of time just because it's *cool*, but Judy has a slightly more sophisticated agenda. She's figured out all on her own how to exorcise demons, which gives her leverage with them. (She uses a cross and stolen holy water; actually it's just her own innate mystic potential and force of will, but regardless, it works.) She can now bring them to the world of the living and send them away. The demons recognize that going along with her gets them bodies with a minimum of fuss, while trying to cross her gets their joyride license revoked.

Judy really wants what every slightly disturbed twenty-two year old woman wants: magickal powers, her own place to live, cool clothes, a lot of friends, and an easy way to piss off her parents. Accordingly, her most frequent demand of the "demons" she summons is money without hassles. She's had to cut off a few demonic liquor-store robbers, but eventually she got hold of a demon calling itself "Mammon" who promised her lots of cash if she'd just set him up with a string of young girls. Several of Judy's teeny-bopper Satanist friends were willing to have sex with a demon ("*Of course* . . . my dark master . . . will reward you . . . in the end times . . . faster . . . that's it . . . "), and Mammon started fixing horse races for Judy to bet on. (Horses, like most animals, can be spooked by possessed humans; a little selective spooking ensured a winner every time.)

Resources

Not a lot. A couple thousand bucks. One really nice black convertible for Rebecca's sole personal use. (The license plate reads "D G00L".) A ramshackle house. Connections to a bunch of demons with fairly manageable desires, like an obsession with hot Mexican food, or hot teenage sex, or this one poor bastard who just wants to make sure the house he built with his own hands doesn't get changed or torn down.

Their most important resource is Rebecca—specifically, her ability to exorcise demons. Without that, the demons would take over, full stop. So far her "friends" have done an admirable job of keeping their appetites in check, but that's just because they haven't managed to annihilate the souls of any of their hosts. (Well, with two notable exceptions.)

SCT Members

Rebecca DeGhoule, "Satanic Leader"

Judy Brodie/Rebecca DeGhouls is a maladjusted young woman doing the occult equivalent of playing with matches.

Stats

Personality: Rebecca acts the perfect Leo: she is smug, arrogant, and dismissive of others, who nonetheless find themselves wanting her approval.
Obsession: Magick. Rebecca has always found the lure of the occult irresistible.
Wound Points: 50

Rage Stimulus: Anyone who belittles her or treats her like she's an inferior.
Fear Stimulus: (Helplessness) Rebecca is deeply afraid of looking sentimental or emotionally weak.
Noble Stimulus: Independence. Rebecca believes that people should be free to do what they want (as long as they don't get in her way).

Body: 50 (Slender)
Dance 25%, General Athletics 15%, Struggle 15%
Speed: 50 (Agile)
Dodge 30%, Drive 15%, Initiative 25%, Unlicensed Firearm 1%
Mind: 50 (Precocious)
General Education 15%, Notice 15%, Occult History 15%
Soul: 80 (Oversensitive)
Charm 15%, Boss People Around 40%, Lie 40%, ***Summon Demons & Send 'Em Away 60%***

Violence:	2 Hardened	2 Failed
Unnatural:	4 Hardened	0 Failed
Helplessness:	1 Hardened	1 Failed
Isolation:	0 Hardened	1 Failed
Self:	1 Hardened	0 Failed

Possessions

Rebecca has recently acquired a Colt Viper revolver and a sawed off, double-barreled shotgun (contains two shots, 20-gauge, maximum damage of 60).

Thurston Joseph "T. Joe" Walters, "Satanist" Wannabe

Thurston "T. Joe" Walters comes from the same suburban, upper-middle class background as Rebecca, and his skills and stats can serve as a template for about half the members of Satan's Chosen Temple.

T. Joe was Rebecca's boyfriend for about a week, back when she was Judy. He never got over it 100% when she dumped him, but he acted the role of the "good friend" with her, secretly hoping they'd get back together. Then she made her "Satanic" breakthrough, and everything changed.

T. Joe gets a masochistic thrill out of being ridden by the demons, and his willingness to give up his body has given him a great deal of clout in Satan's Chosen Temple. He's started thinking about trying to call up some of the demons on his own, so that he can make his own deal with the "infernal powers." He's been too scared so far, but he's been dreaming of taking over the temple from Rebecca and showing her who's really in charge . . .

Like many "members" of SCT, T. Joe lives at home with his parents but spends a lot of time hanging out at the rundown house that Rebecca is using as her temple.

Stats

Personality: T. Joe is basically a follower at heart, but he wants the admiration and respect that go with being a leader.
Obsession: Self-interest.
Wound Points: 50, but he runs away as soon as he gets bloodied, struck with a weapon, or takes more than 10 points of damage.

Rage Stimulus: Anyone who points out unpleasant truths about his personality (*i.e.* "You're a big weak loser.")
Fear Stimulus: (Helplessness) Getting caught by his parents and kicked out of his home.
Noble Stimulus: T. Joe is almost as kind and friendly to those who look up to him as he is envious and bitter towards those who look down on him.

Body: 50 (Young & Healthy)
General Athletics 20%, Recover from Binge Drinking 40%, Struggle 20%
Speed: 50 (Restless)
Dodge 50%, *Drive 15%, Initiative 25%, Shoot Hoops 25%*
Mind: 50 (Naïvely Cynical)
General Education 15%, Notice 15%, Satanic Rock Band Trivia 40%
Soul: 50 (Willfully Inarticulate)
Charm 15%, Lie 30%, Make Vague Threat 30%

Violence:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Unnatural:	3 Hardened	1 Failed
Helplessness:	0 Hardened	1 Failed
Isolation:	0 Hardened	1 Failed
Self:	0 Hardened	1 Failed

Possessions

Other than a bitchin' black leather jacket and his dad's cast-off car, not much.

Josie Reed, Satanist Hanger-On

Word has gotten around that there's this crazy chick out in the suburbs who has a house of her own where you can crash. All you have to do is go through this devil worshipping rigmarole.

That's what Josie Reed heard anyhow. It sounded better to her than whoring or sleeping under a bridge. Since she showed up and "pledged her soul to Satan" she's found out that there's more to it than that—something genuinely weird is going on, with words appearing in blood on the walls and tables flipping over and other strange stuff happening. Josie's avoided being "ridden" by the demons, which is actually fine with the middle-class Satanists—it gives them a good reason to look down on her, even though they're kind of intimidated by her "street cred." There's an unspoken agreement. Josie watches the house, makes sure that no one gets too nosy, throws out the beer bottles and paper plates, and grabs anyone who seems to really be freaking out at the ceremonies. In return, she gets to crash as long as she wants and sponge off Rebecca's demon-donated cash.

There are 3–5 other street kids like Josie living in the Temple. Some of them have allowed themselves to be possessed, others (like Josie) are reticent. All will fight to defend their home, however. They won't call the cops no matter what.

Stats

Personality: Josie is shy, introverted, and glum. She ran away from an abusive home and didn't find life on the street any better. She doesn't like Rebecca or the Temple, but she sure as hell dislikes it less than her alternatives.
Obsession: Josie has no obsession.
Wound Points: 40

Rage Stimulus: Anyone who tries to hurt her.
Fear Stimulus: (Helplessness) Having to go home to her abusive family.

Noble Stimulus: Josie is protective of people like herself—people with no good options.

Body: 40 (Sickly)
Struggle 40%, General Athletics 15%,
Speed: 50 (Twitchy)
Run Like Hell 30%, Dodge 50%, Drive 15%, Initiative 40%
Mind: 50 (Street-smart)
General Education 15%, Notice 45%
Soul: 50 (Edgy)
Invoke Pity (Charm) 30%, Lie 30%

Violence:	2 Hardened	2 Failed
Unnatural:	2 Hardened	2 Failed
Helplessness:	1 Hardened	1 Failed
Isolation:	1 Hardened	1 Failed
Self:	1 Hardened	0 Failed

Possessions

Josie carries a large hunting knife with her at all times.

Street-Level GMCs

Jim Smith

At least, "Jim Smith" is what his driver's license says. A real close examination reveals it's an excellent fake, though.

"Jim" has also gone by the names "Tom," "Godfrey," "Totubo," "Jonah," "Boumediene," "Kongorese," "George," "Franklin," and "Ambidwile" to name just a few. He has a very peculiar mental aberration. A psychiatrist once diagnosed him with Multiple Personality Disorder, but a psychologist disagreed, calling it a case of "compulsive personality confabulation." A neurologist got involved and opined that the lesion on "Jim's" brain was in a real good spot to wreck his sense of identity. Then the patient escaped from the psych ward and they had to argue about it without Jim's help.

Jim has no fixed identity. He either cannot remember his past, or compulsively lies about it with apparently utter sincerity. His accent when he was institutionalized in Arizona seemed to indicate an origin somewhere in North Africa, but since then he's picked up a bewildering variety of speech patterns. One person might meet him as an illegal immigrant from the Sudan, on the run from INS because they wrongly suspect him of being a member of Al Queda. To another, he might be a local gas station attendant who's lived in the area all his life. Or a Canadian tourist. Or a CIA counterinsurgency specialist. Or a shoe salesman on vacation. Or a UN black helicopter pilot trying to find out what the U.S. held back from Area 51.

Sometimes he's consistent in an identity from day to day. Sometimes he's consistent when dealing with the same person. No one knows for sure where the hell he's from or who the hell he is, but if you watch him long enough, it becomes clear he's no stranger to trouble. He can handle weapons from guns to machetes with confident ease. Furthermore, when he thought he was muscle for the Cali cartel he showed great competence and sophistication with his torture techniques.

People involved with the occult may be even more baffled. Incidents of magick don't seem to phase him *at all*—sometimes. Maybe it's because he confabulates pasts in which such stuff is old hat. Maybe it's because he's tremendously hardened in his "real" personality (if there is such a thing). Maybe it's because he's an Agent of Renunciation and doesn't know it (or remember it, or reveal it).

If you speak to him about the occult, Jim is likely to confabulate an occult history for himself. It could be gritty, it could be unbelievable, it could even have half-digested bits of truth. But one thing it won't be is the real man behind the changing masks.

As a GMC, Jim can be a terrific source of red herrings and bad advice. Once you add *one piece* of verifiable truth behind all the smokescreen, he may be an irresistible puzzle for your PCs.

Stats

Personality: Varies day by day, but usually very self-confident.
Obsession: Jim has no obsession.
Wound Points: 60

Rage Stimulus: Being constrained.
Fear Stimulus: (Violence) Needles.
Noble Stimulus: No matter who he is, Jim always looks out for the elderly.

Body: 60 (Lean)
Brawling 45%, General Athletics 25%, Run 20%
Speed: 60 (Wiry)
Dodge 30%, Drive 30%, Gunplay 40%, Initiative 50%
Mind: 60 (Articulate)
General Education 25%, Notice 45%, Speak Arabic 35%, Speak English 45%, Speak French 20%, Speak Swahili 50%
Soul: 60 (Believable)
Charm 60%, Lie 60%

Violence:	? Hardened	? Failed
Unnatural:	? Hardened	? Failed
Helplessness:	? Hardened	? Failed
Isolation:	? Hardened	? Failed
Self:	? Hardened	? Failed

Possessions

A few clothes, a little cash, a discreet handgun.

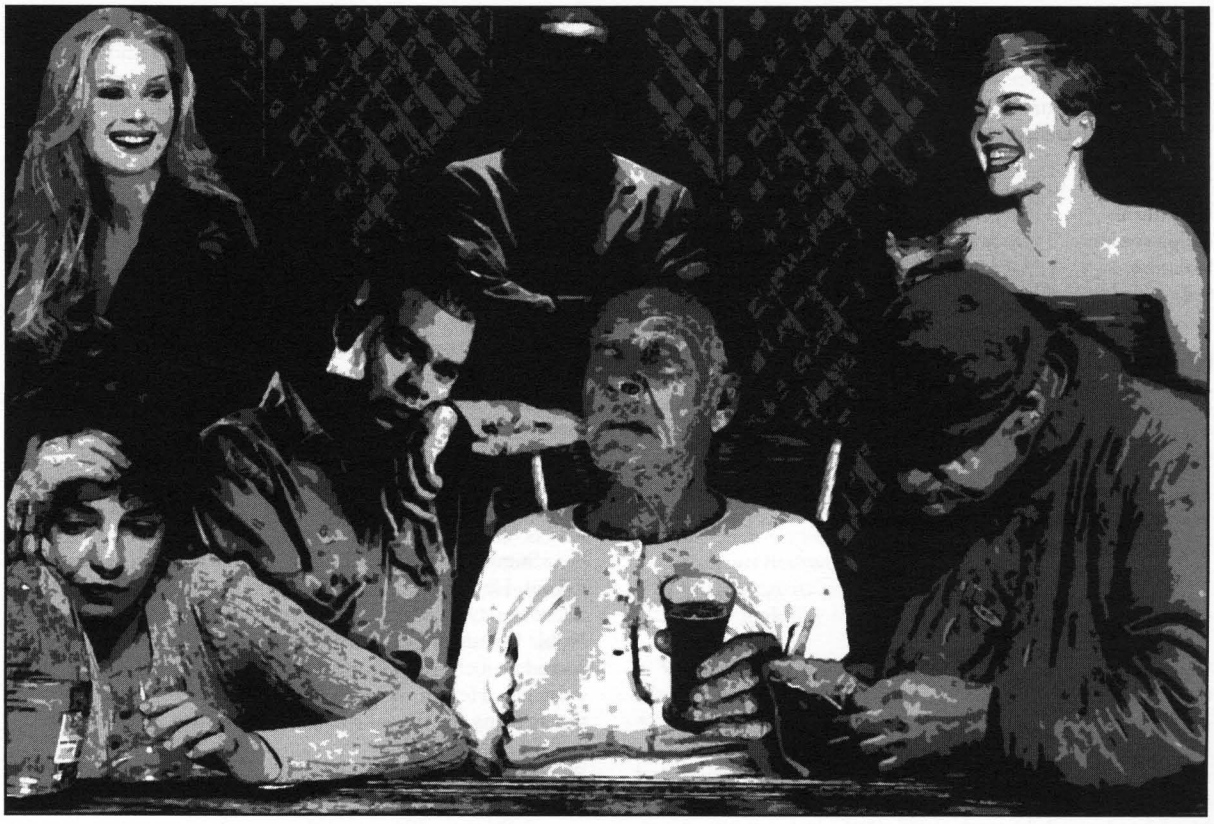
Notes

When it comes to madness checks, just have him fail or succeed depending on (1) the persona he's using at the time or (2) whatever's best for the plot.

Use his Lie skill *only* when he's telling something his current personality considers a lie. For things his delusional framework holds true, his lies cannot be detected.

Molly Wilson, Decompressionist

Molly is a middle-aged cab driver who ranges all over the city. She calls herself a "decompressionist," and the best part of her job is picking up people from the airport. Specifi-



CLOCKWISE: SELENA RAMÍREZ, JIM SMITH, THE FREAK, MOLLY WILSON, JEETER, DIRK ALLEN, TINA LOVAC

cally, she wants to be there when someone returns from a trip or some kind of experience, because she is then the first to hear their recounting of what happened. Molly believes that in the first telling of an experience, the speaker is still within the experience. He is talking about something still real to him. In telling Molly about the event, he achieves closure on the experience and it transmutes into a story. The next time he tells someone about his trip, he's just telling them an anecdote from outside of the experience. It's only in Molly's cab that he's still inside of it, speaking from an internal viewpoint rather than an external one.

Molly believes the process of transmuting an experience into a story is a magickal one. To her, the cab ride from the airport is a liminal space, a symbolic transformational journey from the heart of an experience to its natural conclusion as an anecdote. As the driver of the cab for that process, Molly occupies the role of a shaman or guide—and afterwards, she takes a little bit of the experience away with her.

Thus far, Molly has had no particular experience with the occult underground. She is an autodidact, obsessively studying the magickal practices of pre-industrial peoples and finding contemporary analogues to them in her own life. Her cab-ride decompression project has kept her busy for two years now, but eventually she may move on to another form of original magickal research.

It is possible Molly could become an adept or an avatar of some sort. Her interests may lead her to a local cabal, and her role as a cab driver with a knack for getting stories out of people could make her very valuable to the right—or wrong—people.

STATS

Personality: The Village Witch. Once, Molly would have been burned at the stake for thinking and acting the way she does. She is an outsider in her own homeland, her mind living in a wholly different space from the mundane world around her.
Obsession: Molly believes magick is a pattern of behavior which can be overlaid on any person or time. By studying the magickal practices of ancient peoples, she strives to uncover and implement a pattern to transform her reality.
Wound Points: 35

Rage Stimulus: Mockery. She becomes furious when someone treats her or anyone she knows with cruel contempt.
Fear Stimulus: (Isolation) Any serious failure or setback in her quest threatens to doom her to a life of drab, lifeless mundanity, alone with her hopes.
Noble Stimulus: Immigrants. She works with a lot of people from foreign countries and tries to help them adapt to this place.

Body: 35 (Unobtrusive)
General Athletics 15%, Struggle 15%, Yoga 35%
Speed: 60 (Reactive)
Dodge 15%, Drive 55%, Initiative 35%
Mind: 50 (Determined)
***Autodidact Anthropologist 50%**, Conceal 20%, Notice 45%*
Soul: 75 (Empathic)
Charm 40%, Lie 35%, Tell Me Everything 45%

artwork by Moises Donoso Segundo

Tell Me Everything: Molly can quickly get people to open up to her about their personal lives. They won't go into real private stuff, but they treat her as a trusted acquaintance and spill the beans more vividly and with more emotion than they otherwise would.

Violence:	0 Hardened	1 Failed
Unnatural:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Helplessness:	0 Hardened	1 Failed
Isolation:	1 Hardened	0 Failed
Self:	1 Hardened	0 Failed

Possessions

Molly keeps a small canister of pepper spray on the seat next to her when driving the cab. She burns incense when no one else is in the car.

Global-Level Dukes

Dirk Allen, Boozehound

Summary: Underneath his irascible, drunken old coot act there lies the marinated wreckage of a once-fine brain. Dirk started out as an earnest young writer with a taste for the weird, and the weirder his work got, the more people liked it. Unfortunately, he couldn't keep the supernatural confined to his writing. He didn't want to just make up new fictions. He wanted to tell the truth, and in 1963 he went on a "fact-finding trip" to South America with his first wife on the trail of something that sounded (to him) like a weird crossbreed between traditional Orixa worship and the Papuan cargo cults.

His wife returned from Brazil with a strange illness that killed her a year later. Subsequently, Dirk wrote a novel—actually a thinly fictionalized account of the whole hideous experience—entitled *God's A-Bomb* (1965) that garnered critical praise and some financial success. He also started drinking heavily. After his wife's death, he checked into an asylum for a while.

After his emergence from the sanitarium, he lived in California, where he was pals with Jerry Garcia and Timothy Leary. (That's what he claims, anyhow.) Eventually he got married again, moved to Louisiana, and started down the path to Dipsomancy, led by a disreputable gutter magus called "Dr. Ugly Mouth." If his novel *The Biggest Secret of Them All* (1970) contains any autobiographical elements, he was probably being pursued by the South American cult as well. Presumably fleeing them, he moved to Chicago, where he wrote *Dead Harlots of the Western Sky* (1973) after an acrimonious divorce. This was his most financially successful novel, and it was eventually made into the B-movie *Witch Hunter 1990*.

His years of shabby fame and squandered fortune, combined with his ongoing alcoholism, have turned Allen into a mean-eyed predator. He knows the booze is killing him. He's sacrificed a handful of naïve acolytes drawn by his reputation and consumed their souls to keep himself alive. Presently, he's seeking a ritual to move his own soul into a younger, healthier body.

Dirk Allen currently lives in Austin, at least according to his tax documents. He keeps apartments in Seattle and New York as well. He recently appeared on the TV show *Selena!* in Chicago, but generally he avoids the windy city like a plague or a rehab clinic.

Stats

Personality: Allen is a self-centered, cynical burnout. The first woman he truly loved died for his curiosity, and his second wife abducted their daughter after she realized he'd never really loved either of them. He has no idea where his child (who would be in her 20s now) is. Sometimes, when he's sober, he misses his little girl and wishes he knew where she was. But that soon passes.
Obsession: Dirk is obsessed with transgressing the laws of reality with magick.
Wound Points: 30

Rage Stimulus: Anyone who brings up the subject of his first wife is likely to piss the old man off severely.
Fear Stimulus: (Self) Allen is terrified of his past catching up to him. He's thrown a lot of dirt up the hill and is worried that one day it's all going to come rolling back down.
Noble Stimulus: He'll do anything to keep writing, as he considers it the only worthwhile part of his whole wretched existence. He can successfully rationalize the worst atrocities as being for the sake of the higher purpose of his art.

Body: 30 (Ravaged)
General Athletics 15%, Run Away 30%, Struggle 30%
Speed: 50 (Rabbity)
Dodge 50%, Drive 20%, Handguns 40%, Initiative 50%, Stealth 40%
Mind: 60 (This Is Your Brain On Booze)
General Education 25%, Notice 50%, Occult Gossip 50%, Occult Lore 50%
Soul: 80 (Weirdly Likeable)
Charm 50%, Lie 50%, ***Magick: Dipsomancy 65%,*** *Write 65%*

Violence:	2 Hardened	2 Failed
Unnatural:	10 Hardened	2 Failed
Helplessness:	2 Hardened	3 Failed
Isolation:	0 Hardened	2 Failed
Self:	4 Hardened	4 Failed

Possessions

Dirk's prized possession is the coffee cup that Richard Nixon drank out of while authorizing the Watergate break-in. He carries this with him everywhere and uses it to get significant Dipsomancy charges.

Dirk also owns a cup made from the skull of a Capuchin monk. Lord Byron owned it once, and later Gabriele D'Annunzio. This is his backup vessel, which he keeps hidden in a secret, mystically protected location. (After all, you can't just walk into the corner bar and say, "Fill my skull with liquor.")

For protection, Dirk usually carries a gun if he can get one easily. (He flies when he travels, so he's usually only armed in Seattle, New York, or Austin.) He favors revolvers such as the Colt Viper and the Redhawk.

Selena Ramírez, Investigative Reporter

The lovely and aggressive star of the cable "soft news" and talk show *Selena!* is a miracle of *chutzpah* and applied cosmetic technology. She's a breast-implanted bottle blonde with a brain, not to mention a staff of fairly unscrupulous characters willing to do what it takes to get the scoop—even if that means making it up.

In general she prefers to cover actual stories. She is still haunted by the ghosts of her integrity, and besides—it's cheaper to find it than make it yourself. What she's interested in now is the occult, following the high ratings of one of her first shows. She turned up to snoop on what she thought was a routine adulterous politician and stumbled into a kidnap and attempted murder after a farcical trial. (The politician had been kidnapped by a duke who planned to "try" him in front of a stacked jury and hang him. Then he intended to use his carcass to make a Hand of Glory, replacing the duke's old one, which was nearly burnt out.) She got some dramatic (and unexplained) footage, found an audience with a taste for the occult, and earned herself a visit from the Freak (who had been hired to steal the dead duke's Hand of Glory—probably by Alex Abel). Now she's on the trail of the occult for real, which can make her an ally or an enemy for your PCs, depending on their narrative structure.

Stats

Personality: Aries. She's pushy, but can get away with it.
Obsession: Oddities of nature. Selena was born with six digits on each hand and foot, though her extra toes and fingers have since been removed.
Wound Points: 60

Rage Stimulus: Racism. Even though she hardly broadcasts her ethnic heritage, she's sensitive to stereotyping.
Fear Stimulus: (Helplessness) Dogs. She got badly bitten one time and has been scared of the beasts ever since.
Noble Stimulus: Selena is a deep believer in the free press—and not just because her job depends on it.

Body: 60 (Ruthlessly Exercised)
Distracting Breast Implants 45%, General Athletics 15%, Struggle 30%
Speed: 50 (Quick Step)
Dodge 35%, Drive 15%, Initiative 25%, Run in High Heels 30%
Mind: 50 (Inquisitive)
General Education 20%, History of the Bizarre 25%, ***Investigative Reporting 45%,***
Soul: 60 (Aggressively Empathetic)
Charm 45%, Lie 45%

Violence:	2 Hardened	2 Failed
Unnatural:	1 Hardened	1 Failed
Helplessness:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Isolation:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Self:	0 Hardened	0 Failed

Possessions

In addition to plenty of high-tech cameras and sound equipment, Selena owns a nice sports car and plenty of low-cut clothing. Additionally, she owns a copy of the *Malleus Maleficarum* which has the ritual for constructing a Hand of Glory handwritten in the back. (She recovered this at the same time as the Hand of Glory, but since she didn't consider it important and never mentioned it, no one knows she has it.)

Cosmic-Level Lords

The Freak

No one's all that sure about the Freak. Some don't even believe in it, which is probably just fine with the Freak. However, those who have the motivation and power to track such things—and the skills to stay alive while doing so—generally agree on the following points:

- The Freak is a very powerful, skilled, and above all, *dangerous* fleshworker.
- It can change its gender and appearance at will. One day it might look like Mike Tyson, and the next, Michelle Pfeiffer.
- Whatever its form, it has a raspy voice. It's often accompanied by a very quiet jingling sound.
- It moves around a lot, but seems to live (some would say "make its lair") in Chicago.
- People who try to find out much more than that usually die dramatically.
- He, she, or it hates Dirk Allen but doesn't want to kill him; the Freak finds it much more satisfying to sit back and watch Allen kill himself.

No one's quite sure what the Freak is up to. A couple years ago, the Freak killed one of Alex Abel's six-person Hit Squads. Since that time the billionaire and the fleshworker seem to have reached some kind of truce, based largely on the realization that while neither could be *sure* of killing the other, both can be sure that the other would provide massive headaches if an assassination was attempted.

Of course, the Freak has a similar deal with the Sleepers. It agreed to keep its activities *sub rosa,* and in return the Sleepers leave it alone. On a few occasions they've even prevailed on the Freak to assist them in reshaping an agent's face and identity. (Sleeper cabinet member Gerlinde Unger—also an avatar of the Mystic Hermaphrodite—has a private agreement with the Freak never to challenge its status as Godwalker. She's not happy about it, but she knows better than to kick.)

The soft jingling sound accompanying the Freak comes from a series of slender metal chains strung *through* the Freak's torso at various points. Any time it needs a charge, all it has to do is rip some chains out of its multiple piercings. No matter what shape it changes to, the chains remain.

What makes the Freak doubly dangerous is it's an Avatar in addition to being a powerful adept. Its Archetype is one of the most difficult but powerful ones: it embodies the Mystic Hermaphrodite.

No stats are provided for the Freak. Like the Comte de Saint-Germain, the Freak is an unstoppable, unkillable, near-omnipotent plot device, a fable that walks. Use it as such.

Jeeter, Weird Old Duke

When it comes to Jeeter, people react one of two ways. No one's quite sure which reaction is appropriate.

The first group reacts with contempt and revulsion. This is understandable: Jeeter is an incoherent old bastard in dirty, vomit-flecked clothes. His eyes look like they might have once been blue, but they're now they're so yellowed and bloodshot it's hard to tell. His beard and hair are both long, severely unkempt and grubby underneath discoloration from nicotine and other, less-identifiable stains. As for his teeth, the less said about them the better.

Jeeter blathers, stumbles around, and generally behaves like a complete schizophrenic. He can work some minor mojo now and again, which gets some naïve newcomers to the occult scene trying to learn from him, but they usually give up in disgust after weeks (or months).

The second reaction to Jeeter comes from more experienced occultists who notice that for a penniless old nut-job, Jeeter sure seems to get around a lot. Dirk Allen split a short dog of muscatel with Jeeter one night in Austin, got up early the next day and flew to New York—only to see Jeeter passed out under a pile of newspapers near Allen's New York apartment.

Stats

Personality: Jeeter's personality is a fragmented jumble.
Obsession: With all the tenacious strength of his shattered mind, Jeeter clings to his passion for understanding the underlying mystic nature of reality.
Wound Points: 30

Rage Stimulus: Anyone who makes fun of the Invisible Clergy in his presence sees Jeeter's mean side.
Fear Stimulus: (Violence) Jeeter is really scared by violence, plain and simple.
Noble Stimulus: Jeeter has a soft spot for people in trouble, especially normal folks caught up in mystic intrigues. Unfortunately, he's far from being a reassuring figure.

Body: 30 (Wrecked)
General Athletics 15%, Run Away 30%, Struggle 15%
Speed: 60 (Jumpy)
Dodge 45%, Drive 15%, Hide 30%, Initiative 30%
Mind: 30 (Ruined)
General Education 15%, Notice 15%, Occultism 30%
Soul: 80 (Like a Car Wreck, You Can't Look Away)
Avatar: The Pilgrim 70%, Charm 15%, Lie 15%,
Magick: Entropomancy 30%

Avatar: The Pilgrim. Jeeter's Pilgrim quest is to attain perfect mystic knowledge. His pilgrimage skill is Hide.

Violence:	2 Hardened	5 Failed
Unnatural:	8 Hardened	3 Failed
Helplessness:	2 Hardened	4 Failed
Isolation:	3 Hardened	2 Failed
Self:	0 Hardened	0 Failed

Notes

Like many who try to have it both ways (as an avatar *and* an adept) Jeeter is insane. In addition to his manic ravings, he has a severe phobia of weapons. Just seeing one makes him run like hell.

Possessions

Other than a staff, a bowl (with a label that says "War Veteran, Please Give"), and a broad-brimmed hat, Jeeter owns nothing beyond the clothes on his back.

Tina Lovac, Curious Automaton

To understand the entity known as Tina Lovac, (a.k.a. Ruth Hunter) it helps to just take it as a given that Shpresa Dmitrijevíc was very, very odd. It's not surprising, really: when Shpresa was just a young girl, her estranged father sent a squadron of strange mechanical animals to kidnap her from her mother in the middle of the night. He raised her as well as he could (not very) and taught her everything he knew (not much, other than mechanical magick) before he was unexpectedly (and mysteriously, and elaborately) killed by people (or entities) unknown. Shpresa fled to Austria, where she met a dashing young fop who swept her off her feet. She was dreaming of marrying him when she discovered *every single thing* he'd ever told her was a lie. He wound up fleeing the country with a .22 slug in his ankle after she made a terrible scene in front of him and his homosexual lover.

Shpresa was nineteen.

By the time she died (in the year 2001), Shpresa was fifty-nine and had spent her years being a cat burglar, a grave robber, and an espionage asset for the Israelis (though all the time, she thought she was working for the KGB). She spent a lot of time, effort, blood, and sweat searching for secrets and trying to thread her way through a maze of lies. She never really got far.

But Shpresa Dmitrijevíc was not what you'd call a quitter. Her aged bones had kept her from doing her own footwork for years, but she finally collected enough antique statues of Xipe Totec (the Aztec god of spring, usually depicted wearing the skin of a flayed human sacrifice) that she could build a clockwork called "Traîilac." Traîilac wasn't very smart, but it did have one very good trick: if Shpresa killed and skinned somebody, Traîilac could put on the skin and look very much like that person.

Using this gruesome talent on April 1, 2000, Traîilac walked into the Bletchley Park Museum and walked out with one of the three remaining, functional Enigma machines. (Enigma machines were used by the Nazis to encode their messages during the Second World War. The capture and use of the Bletchley Park Enigma was credited with ending the war in Europe at least two months earlier.)

It was simple enough for Shpresa and Traîilac to frame up a patsy named Dennis Yates. That done, Shpresa took Traîilac apart and used those Xipe Totec statues in a new clockwork, alongside two gears from the Enigma. (It turned out two gears was all she needed to get her major charge. Funny stuff, Mechanomancy.)

Now, a major charge from the Enigma, along with the significant charges from the statues, along with the minor charges from the many hours she spent working on her masterpiece would, by themselves, create a very impressive clockwork. But Shpresa went farther. She put in her memories.

All of her memories.

When Shpresa's masterpiece—named "Istina Lovac"—came off the slab, Shpresa was wailing and incoherent in

the corner, having forgotten how to speak or who she was or anything at all that made her human. Istina Lovac performed the first task for which it had been built: it carefully killed and skinned its creator, tanning the skin and installing a zipper along the spine. Istina Lovac was built as a match for Shpresa's skin, just the right size and shape to fill it out perfectly. When "Tina" (as the creation has come to be known in its hometown of Liverpool) puts on its Shpresa suit, it looks exactly like a sour-faced, brown eyed woman of about sixty years, with long, unbound gray hair. (Tina never wears it up because the zipper on the back of its neck might show.)

When it's on a mission, Istina Lovac often skins someone new to get a fresh disguise. This is not a quick process. Even with the advantages of built-in tools, getting the whole skin takes a good ninety minutes. Of course, Istina has discovered it's much quicker to just do the skin from the waist up. That takes a little less than an hour, and as a bonus leaves no seam in the back. If really rushed, it can just do the arms and the head in about twenty minutes.

A skin, of whatever size, is wearable for a day—two at most—before it starts to rot. Istina can prevent this by curing and tanning, but that takes a while. Furthermore, unless the skin is that of a slender 5'7" woman, it's going to look *odd*. Bigger skins tend to bunch up and wrinkle, while smaller ones stretch and get disturbingly tight.

When not confined to a human skin, the Istina Lovac clockwork is remarkably adaptable. It can self-transform into a bewildering variety of shapes, twisting and clunking and stretching and bending. It can extend itself until it's a snaky, flexible steel and iron latticework six inches in diameter at its widest point (which is one of the Xipe Totec statues) and about twenty-two feet long, which can slither and scrape through narrow spaces and lash out at multiple enemies. Or a sort of web mesh half a foot deep, two feet across and about five feet long, which looks vaguely like some sort of innocuous industrial material when hanging on the side of a building. Or (one of its personal favorites) a wheel three feet across and about seven inches thick. In this wheel shape, it can propel itself at a good 35 miles an hour. (Naturally, if it's carrying anything the wheel gets bigger.) She also has a collection of tanned skins of the proper size for her frame, including an Irish woman of 23 who goes by the name Ruth Hunter. (Note that Tina is a special type of clockwork known as an Automaton. Rules for creating them and using them as PCs appear in the sourcebook *Postmodern Magick*, but all you need to know to run Tina as a GMC appears in her stats.)

Tina recharges its power train from impact energy. Whenever any part of Istina Lovac gets hit hard enough to do a point of damage through blunt trauma, it gains a day's worth of energy. If someone does 18 points, it gets 18 days' worth of juice. (Its maximum recharge from a knife attack is 5 days, since knives do most of their damage by slicing. Maximum recharge from something heavy and cutting, like a sword, spear or axe is 10 days. Maximum recharge from a bullet is 30 days.) It still takes the damage, which makes its existence somewhat precarious.

This flexible, powerful, deadly dangerous clockwork was created with one primary, burning imperative: *Learn the truth.*

Istina Lovac is not human—not even human-like. It's intelligent like a human, and it's self-aware, but it has all the morals and empathy of an influenza germ. Given enough time, it could perhaps develop emotions (or a convincing facsimile thereof), but for now human feelings are puzzling and its grasp of them is shaky at best. It gets by, faking its way though emotional encounters in order to delve into the mysteries of the Priory of Sion, find out the truth about the Knights Templar, and uncover the true identity of Jack the Ripper.

Given its abilities, Tina has found out a lot in a short amount of time, though without human intuition it has a hard time telling truth from wishful thinking or outright falsehood. It is known among occult high rollers that Tina can get the goods, but is only interested in trading knowledge for knowledge. The Sleepers and TNI are both aware that Tina is mystically knowledgeable and is quite good at uncovering secrets about people, places, and things. They have no idea of her true nature, however. Another automaton—a Chicago native named Ivan Stahl—knows what Tina really is, but has no idea of the murderous excesses upon which its successes are built.

The clockwork is interested in going to the United States to find out the truth about JFK's death and Area 51, perhaps after it learns about the Merovingian history of France, or takes a journey to Turkey to see if the Old Man of the Mountain's assassin cult is still alive and well, or visits Russia to research Baba Yaga and the Tunguska blast.

STATS

Personality: Like *Star Trek*'s Mr. Spock, only without the wry sense of humor. Or the philosophy. Or the compunctions against wasting human life.
Wound Points: 120

Body: 120 (Mighty)
Eviscerate 80%, General Athletics 80%, Power Train 40%
Speed: 120 (Inhumanly fast)
Dodge 60%, Drive 50%, Initiative 80%, Sneak Around 90%
Mind: 85 (Insightful)
Break Codes & Ciphers 70%, Breaking and Entering 70%, General Education 50%, Library Research 60%, Notice 85%, Read Heiroglyphics 30%, Read Latin 50%, Read Sanskrit 50%, Speak Serbo-Croatian 70%, Speak English 50%, Speak German 40%, Speak Russian 35%, Wiretapping and Espionage 60%
Soul: 55 (Emotionless)
*Lie 55%, **Magick: Mechanomancy 55%**, Pass For Shpresa Dmitrijevíc 50%, Pass For Other Skinned Person 40%*

Eviscerate. This is, of course, a Struggle skill. Istina Lovac's hand-to-hand attacks do damage like a firearm with no damage cap. If it's outside a skin (or is willing to extrude foot-long scythe blades from its forearms) it does an additional +3 points of damage.

POSSESSIONS

A dumpy little shack on the outskirts of Liverpool with a hidden basement containing many, many tools. Lots of stolen books and a fair amount of stolen loot.

GENERIC CHARACTERS

AVERAGE POLICE OFFICER

Sometimes you don't want or need a detailed police officer; you just want someone convenient to the plotline. So if you need a uniformed officer to harass, question, or pursue your PCs, this is what they're like. A couple of these guys can be a real challenge to PCs who aren't geared towards combat, so use with caution. On the other hand, more experienced (or dangerous) PCs go through the average cop like a jackhammer through wet tissue. If that happens too often, it's time to throw an above-average cop at them—especially if they've been assuming all cops are created equal . . .

STATS

Personality: (Virgo) Serving and protecting.
Obsession: Help the downtrodden.
Wound Points: 50

Body: 50 (Good Condition)
General Athletics 35%, Restrain Suspect 45%
Speed: 50 (Juggles)
Drive 20%, Dodge 20%, Handgun 40%, Initiative 35%
Mind: 50 (Alert)
General Education 20%, Notice 40%, Authority 20%
Soul: 50 (Stern Exterior)
Charm 20%, Lie 20%, Good Cop/Bad Cop 40%

Violence:	4 Hardened	0 Failed
Unnatural:	1 Hardened	0 Failed
Helplessness:	1 Hardened	0 Failed
Isolation:	1 Hardened	0 Failed
Self:	1 Hardened	0 Failed

AVERAGE POLICE DETECTIVE

These people have been promoted from street beats, usually (but not always) because of talent and skill. They're a notch above patrol cops in terms of detective work, though sometimes they let their physical condition slip a bit.

If you think your PCs are going to have a lot of interaction with the police force, it's probably a good idea to develop a detective in a little more detail. You can either put the pressure on them by putting a really sharp investigator on them, or you can give them some breathing room by giving them a less-competent nemesis.

STATS

Personality: (Leo) It's my world. Ya better behave.
Obsession: Punishing the guilty.
Wound Points: 50

Body: 50 (Fast Food & Coffee)
General Athletics 25%, Subdue Suspect 45%
Speed: 50 (Ready to Throw Down)
Drive 20%, Dodge 15%, Handgun 40%, Initiative 25%
Mind: 60 (Sharp)
General Education 20%, Notice 45%, Authority 25%
Soul: 60 (Reads You Like A Book)
Charm 20%, Lie 20%, Interrogate Suspect 50%

Violence:	4 Hardened	0 Failed
Unnatural:	1 Hardened	0 Failed
Helplessness:	1 Hardened	0 Failed
Isolation:	1 Hardened	0 Failed
Self:	1 Hardened	0 Failed

STOCK THUG

Whenever you want an opponent of modest skill—a cultist, security guard at a mall, a mugger, whatever—you can probably use the stock thug. They're about equal to PCs who aren't designed for combat, and should only really threaten a group of PCs if they have a numerical advantage.

STATS

Personality: Duh.
Obsession: Dawk.
Wound Points: 50

Body: 50 (Tough)
General Athletics 30%, Rough You Up 30%
Speed: 50 (Quick)
Drive 15%, Dodge 20%, Handgun 30%, Initiative 25%
Mind: 40 (Single-Minded)
General Education 15%, Notice 30%
Soul: 40 (Simple Pleasures)
Charm 15%, Lie 20%, Intimidate 30%

Violence:	1 Hardened	0 Failed
Unnatural:	1 Hardened	0 Failed
Helplessness:	1 Hardened	0 Failed
Isolation:	1 Hardened	0 Failed
Self:	1 Hardened	0 Failed



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

GM CAMPAIGNS

More than any other kind of game, roleplaying games give you flexibility: you play the way you *want* to play. This is a tremendous advantage (since you can tailor what you're doing to your players, tastes, and schedule) but it does require just a bit of forethought. This chapter covers the major elements of an *Unknown Armies* campaign, giving you clear guidelines on how to apply that forethought and make your game run smoothly.

Campaign Types

To start with, what kind of campaign are you running? Will it be a single session, an occasional series, or a long-term story?

One-Shot

The easiest type is probably the one-shot. This means your players are going to design characters for one session, run through it, and be done. It's the disposable story, best for shocker-ending plots, stories that require player characters who *aren't* much fun for long-term play (co-designer John Tynes once wrote a one-shot for a different game where the characters were all escaped psychopaths), or stories where there's a real good chance of everyone croaking at the end.

One-shots are good because they're quick, easy, and disposable. If you're running a one-shot, you're much more justified in just handing the players a narrative structure, or even generating the characters yourself. (This is how it's usually done at game conventions when there isn't time for everyone to lovingly detail a character.) Since the players are only going to "be" these people for a night, they don't have to get too deep into character.

The limitation of one-shots is that they're short and you *don't* have a chance to develop the characters—which is, after all, the prime focus of this game. Other types of campaigns take more effort, but are consequently more rewarding as well.

Picaresque

The standard roleplaying game is picaresque (or serial) in structure: story arcs with a beginning, climax, and resolution get played out in order. Each builds on the other, the way *The Empire Strikes Back* built on the characters and situations of *Star Wars*. In this standard structure, the players generate characters, and the GM throws plot hooks at them until they bite on one. Then the GM develops that plot until the characters reach some kind of culmination and *denouement*. After that, the process begins again until everyone agrees to call it off.

Goal-Oriented

A more focused variant of this structure is a goal-oriented campaign. In this, the players pick a narrative structure with a group goal. This can be simple ("We're goons from Alex Abel and we've been told to assassinate Randy Douglas.") or more complicated ("We're cultists and we're going to take over the world. That's right; the whole world." "One of us is going to ascend to the Invisible Clergy as the representative of some peaceful and positive aspect of human nature.").



On the one hand, this player-defined goal is easier because you don't have to motivate the players. Furthermore, plot becomes easier, too; instead of pitching plotlines to them, you just have to react to the actions they initiate.

On the other hand, this is harder because you can't prepare nearly as much. You have to be able to roll with the punches and come up with plot structure on the fly. In other words, you have to make it up as you go along and keep it internally consistent. The way to do this—the *essential* thing to do—is make sure you know what general action the characters are planning to do next. Take your world-conquering cultists; just how do they plan to do it? By seducing and brainwashing world leaders? Robbing banks until they can fund a private army? Hypnotizing the TV-narcotized mob with demagogic appeals to their most venal urges? All are good approaches, but once you know *which* they're going to do, you can concentrate on that without worrying about the others. If they aren't sure how they're going to do it, you can come up with stories to motivate them, either by holding out a carrot ("Word on the street is this guy named Kenneth Hite in Chicago has a fairly complete list of the historical persons who've ascended to the Clergy.") or pulling out the stick ("The door bursts open, revealing four guys in raincoats, surgical masks, and rubber gloves. They've all got guns. What are you doing?").

These kinds of campaigns also tend to get easier as they go along, since you can simply sit back and vibe off the repercussions of the last thing the characters did. ("Hm . . . Cage did take damage going over that barbed-wire fence while scouting out the GLS compound in California. If he bled inside the building, they might try to get a corrupt cop to identify him by DNA typing. Or, hey, what if the *sheriff* is a member of the GLS?") It's important for the players to keep their eyes on the prize and always, *always* give you some kind of warning about what they're planning so you can brace yourself. It's important for you to try to distract them, and to slow them down with plenty of red herrings, emotional entanglements, and vengeful GMCs that they would have sworn were dead . . .

Play Styles

Because it's built around character, UA is designed to be flexible and support a lot of different styles of play. Want to run a creepy, edgy, surreal game in the style of *Twin Peaks* or *Jacob's Ladder*? We can do that. Want something like "John Woo directs *The Exorcist*?" ("Okay, as her head spins around, spewing soup in slow motion, Chow Yun-Fat jumps through the puke with a gun in each hand and shoots her eight times in the chest!") That can be handled as well. You can even run a sort of "yo-yo" campaign where moments of stark terror are interlaced with moments of humor. (If you do this wrong, the horror and the jokes grate on each other and each gets lessened. If you do it right, the contrast makes the humor hysterical—and the fear equally hysterical.)

The style of play you use is up to you, and like most matters of style it can be hard to define. *Film noir* has been around for decades, and the heavy-duty critics still haven't been able to pin down just what it is. The Supreme Court still hasn't found a universal litmus test for pornography, either. This means (unfortunately) that we can't give you checklists for different styles. "For surrealism, use rules A,

artwork by Thomas Manning

D, and F. For gritty, *noir*-style play, use rules A, C, and G." There's no recipe.

However, it's far from hopeless. You may not be able to *explain* the style you want—but you know it when you see it, right? You can't explain it, but you can demonstrate it.

Before you start your campaign, decide on a style: a feeling and a mood. Keep this mood in mind at all times while running the game. It's more important than remembering exactly how many charges this spell costs or how armor-piercing rounds do damage. It's hard to explain because it's all right-brain, intuitive, and ephemeral, but if you concentrate on the *feeling* you want to recreate, you'll be much more able to do so. Read a book that scares you. You're likely to pick up some pointers about pacing and description and themes, but focus on the emotional response. If you can keep that gut-wrenching sensation intact while you're running your game, that emotional engagement will do more to help you communicate horror (or excitement, or thrills) to your players than all the rules and professional advice we can give you. (Though of course, those help too.)

Yes, we're actually encouraging you to "get in touch with your feelings," but sappy as it sounds, it works. Getting scared, and then figuring out *why* you're scared and brainstorming how to use that on your players, really is the best way to scare the hell out of people.

Narrative Structures

A narrative structure explains why the characters are working together and what their common goals are. By helping to define the group, it also helps to define the relationships the group has with other characters and groups they met in the course of play.

Several narrative structures are described earlier in the various *Campaign* chapters, where they are presented as different kinds of groups players can portray. You might choose which structure your group uses, or the players could decide for themselves. You're welcome to define your own narrative structures. If so, we recommend that you write them up in the same format as those presented in this book—with their goals, assets, and liabilities—so it's clear to all the players.

Themes

Styles of play are fuzzy, abstract notions, and most often you can express a style of play just by naming a couple of movies or books that feel right, somehow. Themes are more specific. These are sort of directed elements in a play-style, but whereas any given scene might be readily recognizable to players as being part of your style of play—a shootout in a darkened, ramshackle house with bloodstained walls, a comical car chase through a shopping mall—themes are not so easily observed in individual moments and scenes. They are likely to remain inscrutable until the story or campaign is well-advanced; then, stepping free of the trees, the players can at last see the forest.

(Themes are primarily useful in ongoing campaigns, rather than one-shot stories. We'll assume you're building a campaign for the rest of this section. You can still use themes in one-shot stories, but they'll be considerably abbreviated and simplified than in the examples that follow.)

When you are creating your campaign, try to choose a major theme, and then a couple of minor ones as well. Themes can be positive as well as negative. Typical themes in UA include:

- **Alienation.** In large civilizations, it is not uncommon to somehow feel apart from everyone else—the old sensation of feeling alone in the middle of a crowd. It goes beyond simple melancholy, however. A sense of alienation can be omnipresent, extending into every area of daily life. Sitting behind your desk, the chatter of your co-workers sounds filtered, as if you are observing from behind a two-way mirror. Perhaps you and your allies feel alienated as a group; no one understands you, and the normal world persecutes you.
- **Caring.** Nothing matters so much as goodwill to our fellow humans. No matter the consequences, no matter what comes, always care for those around you, and for yourself. Offer support to those in grief. Do your best to understand the people that you meet. Love thy enemy.
- **Decay.** The world is falling apart. Buildings crumble. Even the newest, shiniest skyscraper exudes the stench of corruption and payoffs. A compromised architect's broken dreams and the soundless screams of a thousand office-workers contemplating suicide merge into a chorus of sorrow. Governments are a sham. Laws are so burdensome that everyone is a criminal. Hatred and intolerance spill into the streets. The rich get richer and more debased. The poor get poorer and more desperate. The environment is deteriorating. Food supplies are dwindling. The lights are going out.
- **Heroism.** One person can still make a difference. It's not just the movie action hero who stops the bomb and blows away the terrorist; each of us, in our daily life, can embrace heroism and do our part to make the world a better place. Challenge lies. Fight oppression. Reward initiative. Be a hero to those around you, until we live in a world full of heroes.
- **Perversion.** Our cherished ideals are undermined by base human perversions, primal motivations that we are powerless to control. Sadistic violence, rape, child molestation, emotional abuse—once we could pretend that such behaviors were aberrations from the norm. The truth is that the only thing preventing each of us from embracing perverse evil is that we're too timid or too lazy.
- **Transcendence.** There is a larger world than that which we see every day, and we should aspire towards that larger world. Belief in more than we can see in everyday life is critical to the progress of humanity. Whether it's through Catholicism, Buddhism, meditation, the Invisible Clergy, or the power of positive thinking, it is critical for each of us to seek a higher power and a higher purpose, to accept that concrete and bricks do not a cosmos make.

In your campaign, your major theme should be reflected not just in your plotlines, but in your characters. In fact, it's not a bad idea to choose a single character or group who represents the major theme. It might be the PCs. It might be someone else. Regardless, you should do your best to filter the actions of that character or group through the major theme you've chosen.

Minor themes, on the other hand, should not be so simple. Minor themes should turn up in a variety of places, from a variety of sources. A throwaway GMC is as likely

to represent a minor theme as anyone else. Minor themes should give contrast and context to the major theme.

Practical Thematics

That's all pretty fancy, but how do you use it? It's important that this not be fuzzy; you should have a firm grasp on the themes of your campaign because they add strength and color to everything that happens by unifying the many disparate threads of play. Let's take a look at several examples for both major and minor themes and see if we can explain this better.

Major Theme Examples

Here are two examples of major themes. Both examples focus on Alex Abel and his New Inquisition as the primary representative of our major theme, but in each case the theme is different. Pay attention to how greatly the same set of characters (Abel and TNI) can be altered simply by applying a different theme.

Alienation

For our first example, let's choose the theme of *alienation*. (You might well make up one on your own, but let's just stick with one we've already explained for this example.) You've got a good idea of what "alienation" means, and you believe it'll work well in the campaign you have in mind. But how to apply it? You know that Abel and TNI are the principal opponents for the PCs, and will represent alienation. You use this theme in two ways, internal and external.

Internal: This governs how Abel and his representatives see themselves. In our example, Abel's sense of alienation means that he feels cut off from normal people, and he instills this notion in his recruits. As you set up your campaign and the GMCs who populate it, you should avoid giving Abel's crew families and friends. Abel cuts them off from such people. Moreover, he may choose to house them in some sort of compound away from populated areas, so that they have minimal interaction with ordinary people in their daily lives. Abel himself might live in some sort of heavily-fortified mansion or even a bunker. Abel's crew does not trust anyone they come in contact with who isn't part of the New Inquisition, and neither does Abel; any alliances they make are temporary and exploitive, or even out-and-out deceptive.

External: This governs how Abel and his representatives deal with the PCs directly. We already know they aren't going to be trustworthy, since the Inquisitors see the world from an "us vs. them" perspective. But when they begin mixing it up with the PCs, how is the theme expressed? Look again at the description of the theme we presented earlier. Abel wants the PCs to feel this way, to feel this alienation, since from his perspective it's a way to weaken the PCs. This means, for example, that his agents work to turn others against the PCs. They might plant clues for the police to follow up on, they might spread rumors to other cabals that the PCs are dangerous, they might harass or somehow drive away the PCs' family and friends, and so on. Their goal is to induce and amplify a sense of alienation in the PCs, making them alone and friendless and therefore weak. The irony, of course, is that Abel does not see how he himself suffers from the same weakness.

Caring

This time around, we'll use the theme of *caring*. In this example, Abel and TNI are not the opponents, but rather include the PCs themselves; the players take the roles of Inquisitors in TNI.

Internal: Among themselves, Inquisitors can express the theme of caring in a basic way—never leave a man behind. No matter what, you don't abandon your buddies. If one of them is in trouble, you move heaven and earth to help her out. What about Alex Abel? He's still hungry for power, but it's because he cares—he cares too much, in fact. He spends his night sleepless, sweating with worry over every life on earth and living in fear of those who would ascend to the Invisible Clergy as negative archetypes. Abel desperately wants to join the Clergy, to represent the best that humanity has to offer, and as his representatives, you're desperate to do anything you can to help him succeed for the good of the planet. The danger, of course, is that that very desperation may be self-defeating; if you are willing to do anything—*anything*—to save the world, have you really saved it?

External: Abel (and the PCs) pursue legitimate alliances, but there is a larger agenda. Those who genuinely agree with Abel are welcome, valued allies, but Abel is always wary—are they deceiving him? Can they really be trusted? The PCs are caught between a desire to trust their allies and an inborn need to watch them closely in case of corruption. Likewise, allies are seen as tools, used to ferret out others who are aspiring to join the Clergy as a negative archetype. If one of these individuals is discovered, allies be damned—Abel and the PCs sacrifice them readily if it means stopping the ascension and the resulting karmic darkness that will result.

Major Theme Reversals

Now that we've spelled out two examples of major themes, one with TNI as an enemy and one with it as the home team, let's revisit them. Reverse the situations.

Go back and look at the alienation example, but this time assume that TNI is the PCs' home team. Now they're on the inside of alienation. You'd express this by having others persecute them and betray them at every turn, every game session bringing further evidence that Abel's sense of alienation is justified—you really *can't* trust anyone, it really *is* us against the world.

Now take another look at the caring example, and this time put TNI in the role of villains. Abel is so desperate to help, to care, that he's willing to make terrible sacrifices for the sake of a greater good. He's like a flawed saint, gone too far, who now has to be stopped.

Two GMs can take the world of UA, each slap a different major theme on it, spin them around, and end up with radically different campaigns—*without* major alterations to the source material. (You can even take the same theme, apply it in two different ways, and still come out with radically different campaigns.) The core information on Abel and TNI didn't really change in the above examples; applying the themes just colored that information in different ways.

Minor Theme Examples

Minor themes are different from major themes. They work on a smaller scale, and tend to be more improvisational. Minor themes work best when you explore them through

throwaway GMCs and minor situations, but the fact that they recur gives them power and also helps to add more color and strength to your campaign. For our examples, we take a simple situation and filter it through two different minor themes.

The Bar Interrogation

The PCs have entered a bar to find some throwaway GMC named Rickets Jackson and shake him down for information. The guy is a low-grade sleazeball, a bagman for the local mob and a dabbler in the occult. He knows where to find Jimmy the Squid, another sleazeball. Rickets isn't a dangerous man; he's just another loser making his unsteady, ill-advised way in the world. He doesn't really want to tell the PCs where Jimmy the Squid is, but he's not that fired up about it.

Decay: Rickets spills the beans, but only if the PCs do him a favor. There's a tough-looking guy in the bar who, Rickets says, is just waiting for him to leave so he can jump Rickets in the alley. If the PCs can get this guy to leave—any way they can—Rickets will tell them where Jimmy the Squid is. Mayhem ensues. The tough-looking guy turns out to be a corrupt undercover cop here to shake Rickets down for his weekly payoff of cocaine. The cop is drunk and high and whips out his gun at the slightest provocation, but if he can help it he won't reveal that he's a cop while in the bar.

Transcendence: Rickets is resisting interrogation and being noisy about it. Another patron walks up. He's a handsome but streetwise-looking man in his early thirties. He attempts to intervene in the situation and get the PCs to leave poor Rickets alone. The man is a lifelong resident of this seedy neighborhood, a reformed drug dealer, and a volunteer at the local homeless shelter where Rickets crashes three nights a week. He's spent months getting to know Rickets, trying to help him out of his miserable life and walk a higher road. He's a good guy, not preachy and not superior—just a regular joe whose eyes were opened. If the PCs can convince him that it's for the best if they find out where Jimmy the Squid is, the guy persuades Rickets to tell them. Rickets then cooperates, having been reminded by his friend that there are higher issues at stake than gangland loyalty.

Working with Themes

Once you've chosen the major and minor themes of your campaign, write them down along with how you would describe each one. Then under the major theme, make notes as to which characters or groups represent that theme. For the minor themes, you might want to pick a couple of minor characters who can represent them, or else just make up a couple of simple GMCs on the spot that fit the minor themes. You may not even end up using those GMCs, but having a couple of concrete examples helps you improvise the use of your minor themes during play.

Content

What is the content of your campaign? What specific groups and individuals are involved, and what are they doing?

Here's a quick and dirty way to build the basic content of a campaign. This is just intended to get you going, but it may be helpful if you're stuck. We'll build a sample campaign as we go.

Instigator

The instigator is the GMC who gets the ball rolling. It's more interesting to start with a person rather than a group in this role, because people tend to have more passionate and idiosyncratic motivations and decisions than groups do.

Pick an instigator from this book. You can use any of the GMCs from the last chapter, or you can pick a type of adept or avatar and figure out who the person is later. For now, just get an instigator down on paper.

> **Example:** I pick a True King avatar. Right now I don't care who he or she is—it's enough to know the kind of avatar I'm working with.

Instigation

This is the key event the instigator experiences or causes to kick off the campaign. It's not necessarily the first scene in the game session—this can be something that happened weeks or even decades ago. Pick one of the following, and don't worry about figuring out what it means yet. If you've got a major theme in mind, let that guide you here.

- Birth
- Death
- Alliance
- Betrayal
- Revelation
- Obfuscation

> **Example:** I choose Obfuscation, in which my True King avatar is trying to hide something from someone.

McGuffin

This is what the instigator is interested in. A McGuffin can be an object (like the statue in *The Maltese Falcon*) or a piece of information (like the incest in *Chinatown*). The various people in the campaign might want to possess it, understand it, restrict it, or destroy it. Pick a type of McGuffin from the following list.

- Magick artifact
- Unnatural entity
- Ritual
- Knowledge of a crime
- Family secret
- Hidden/lost location

> **Example:** Royal families always seem to have secrets, so that's what I'll use here for my True King.

Interested Parties

These are GMC individuals and groups other than the instigator who are interested in the McGuffin. However, the instigator could be a former or current member of one of these parties, who are now pursuing the McGuffin independently of whatever the instigator is doing.

Pick three interested parties from the dukes and cabals of the last chapter, or from the various adepts or avatars.

Example: I start by picking the Order of Saint Cecil. Since this campaign revolves around a True King, bringing in a group with an ancient power structure feels appropriate—church and state, sort of. For the second interested party I choose Dirk Allen, since he's a useful wild card and provides a seedy modern counterpoint to the more classical feel of the other plot elements so far. Finally, just to really mix things up I pick Mak Attax for the third interested party. I have no idea why.

Relationship Map

On a piece of paper, write the names of every plot element you've chosen so far in this section. Don't write them as a list—scatter them evenly all over the paper, because you'll be drawing lines to connect them in various ways.

Start drawing lines to connect the elements together. On each line, write two of the following relationships, one for each direction of flow. So if you're drawing a line between the instigator and one of the interested parties, you need their relationship from each side's point of view. The instigator might regard the interested party with hatred, while the party regards the instigator with trust. They may have the same relationship both ways. Note that these are the true relationships, not how these various people and groups claim to feel about each other.

You don't have to draw every connection between every element. Just do it until it looks complicated. You also don't have to stick with your choices here, or try to explain every one. The relationship map should just inspire you to build a coherent story out of what you've selected so far.

Here are several relationships you might choose from:

- Respect
- Disdain
- Alliance
- Opposition
- Desire
- Avoidance

Example: Below you can see the relationship map I drew for my campaign, literally on a napkin while writing this section. I'm not going to use all the detail I put into it—just enough to suggest how these elements can hang together.

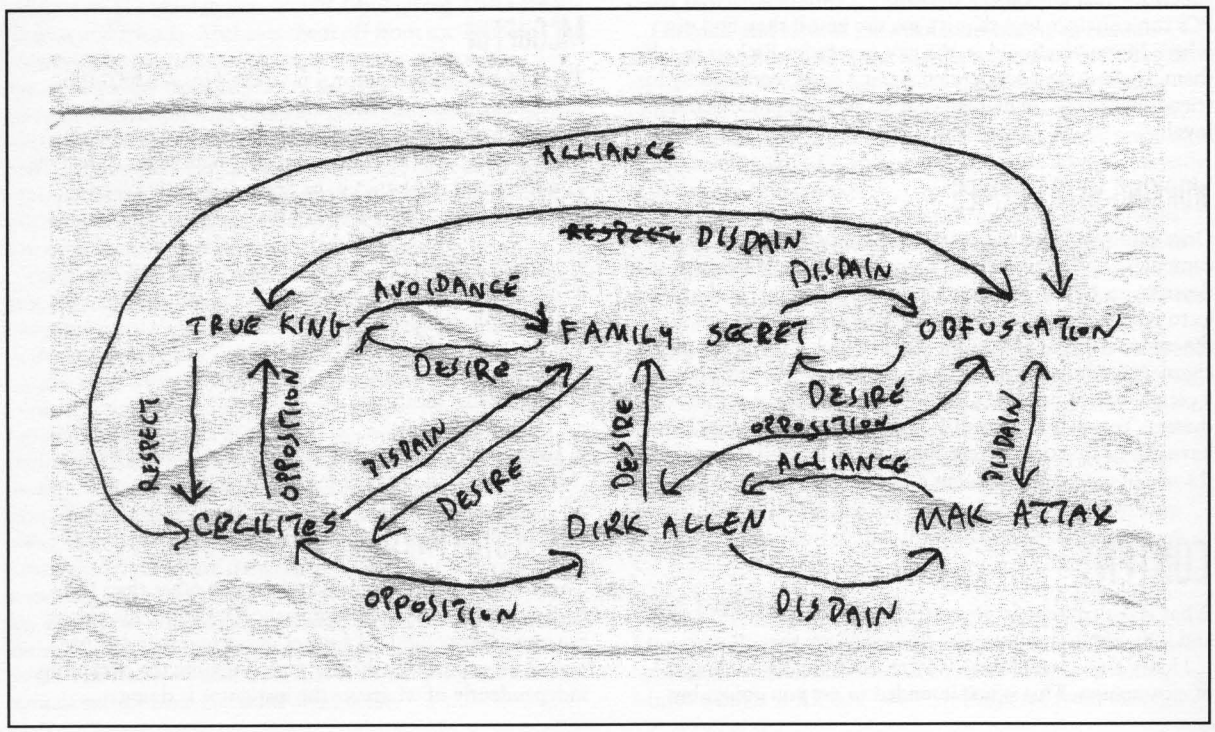
Writing It Out

Enough with the planning. Using your map as a guide, write a summary of what your campaign is all about.

Example: The old and wizened True King of my campaign city's downtown is a well-known and very wealthy property developer. He has a bastard son—a Narco-Alchemist—who is the leader of the largest drug-dealing gang around. The King wants his loyal follower to succeed him in his symbolic role, but fears his enemies may manipulate his son into challenging him, spoiling the succession. At the same time he wants to protect his son from harm. The son has no idea who his father is.

Meanwhile, the son's magickal drug gang has attracted the attention of both the Order of Saint Cecil and Dirk Allen. Allen wants to know more about Narco-Alchemy for his next novel, and the Cecilines want to investigate rumors of unnatural street drugs.

Mak Attax has a franchise cell in the area. Its leader is a devoted reader of Allen's, and seeks him out when rumors get around town of this notorious old writer making an extended visit. He hopes to become something of a disciple



napkin by Cafe Allegro

to Allen, but Allen isn't going to look favorably on his quest. The Maks are also interested in toppling the True King because his rule is keeping the town too quiet, too constrained. They refused to swear allegiance to him a year ago, and believe his follower plans to take action against them when he assumes the throne.

As the campaign progresses, I expect the Maks to learn the secret bloodline and try to get the Narco-Alchemist to challenge his father's follower for the throne. The Cecilites lurk around, asking questions and watching people, and are essentially waiting for me to decide in the middle of a game session that I need somebody to come through the door with a gun. Dirk Allen generally supports the Narco-Alchemist as a way to learn more about this new school of magick, but he's more comfortable as a sort of grand vizier than a front-line combatant.

Ultimately, the follower of the True King—whoever he is—probably manipulates the Cecilites into attacking the Narco-Alchemist. He may also cut a deal with Allen. He probably ignores Mak Attax, which may prove his undoing.

Getting It Started

Now figure out how to get the players involved in all this based on the group your players chose (or created) to play. They could be a TNI team here to spy on Allen, or the court of the suburban True King trying to gain territory. Give them an initial goal to get them started and turn them loose!

Example: If I'm running a street-level campaign, my players might have chosen the Lab Section Six group (see p. 28). I kick things off by having them interview Dirk Allen for their research project.

Or if we're going global-level, they could be using the Guns Against Magick group (see p. 94). Their next target is the Narco-Alchemist, but as the leader of a drug gang he's plenty dangerous—and the low-level minions of the True King are keeping an eye on him both to keep him ignorant about his heritage and to protect him from danger. The first time they try to take out the guy, they stir up a hornet's nest of trouble.

If we're in a cosmic-level campaign, my group might be an Archetype Cabal (see p. 210). They're trying to strengthen the True King archetype in general, and one way to do that is to maintain a peaceful succession whenever a local True King is stepping down. In this case, that means supporting the follower and chosen heir and keeping the Narco-Alchemist bastard son off the throne.

Moving On

That's the big picture of the campaign's content, the long-term backdrop against which many different scenarios play out. It may take a year or more of game time for the events outlined in the example to happen. Perhaps one of the early sessions is about the theft of a birth certificate showing the name of the Narco-Alchemist's father, which some minor duke plans to use in a ritual against the True King. This knowledge would then slowly percolate through the campaign, setting up further events. Likewise, the arrivals of Dirk Allen and the Cecilites could occur months apart. The Cecilites might even come to town in response to some other scenario altogether, get mixed up in some small-scale events, and only later start looking into the Narco-Alchemist plotline.

Plotlines

The bulk of the GM's job is building plotlines. These can be long or short, complex or simple, serious or trivial. That's up to you. What all plots have in common are **hooks**, **rising action**, a **climax**, and **repercussions**.

Hooks

The hook is what gets the characters interested in the first place. A beautiful woman slinks into a detective's office and asks him to find her missing sister. A young artist hears strange music, accompanied by cries that might be laughter or might be screams, from the room above her apartment. A professor inherits a dusty old manuscript written in a language he doesn't understand.

A good hook gets the players interested; it makes them *want to know.* That's not to say that every character bites on every hook. The detective might say, "Didja look under the bed?" The professor might decide to concentrate on getting a government grant instead. You have to try to hook your players in, but also be prepared for them to ignore a hook or respond to it in a less-than-obvious way. ("Sure father, I'll join the dark side!")

There are three main ways to put interest into a hook. The two easiest are the carrot of self-interest and the stick of self-preservation. If the detective thinks the beautiful woman will pay him handsomely (or hop in the sack with him) if he finds her sister, then he's motivated—that's self-interest. If the professor learns that the manuscript's last owner was strangled, and that a tall, thin man with one blue eye was asking the executor of the will what happened to it, he may start to feel a little jumpy—that's self-preservation. The third way to make a hook interesting is to just make it so bizarre that the player (or character) is driven to find out more by curiosity. (For example, the young artist knocks on the upstairs neighbor's door, and it's answered by a man who looks *exactly* like Elvis—the young, virile Elvis.)

Rising Action

Rising action is what happens next. Just as a hook captures the player's interest, the rising action feeds and increases it. Now, just as you could hook someone with threats, promises, or interest, you can *keep* them hooked with any combination of the three. (This is an excellent, *excellent* place to use passions.) It also may be a good idea to change motivations every so often. The professor tracks down a linguist, who tells him the book is about attaining immortality (threat switches to promise). The detective discovers his beautiful client took out a big life-insurance policy on her sister—she now becomes the prime suspect (promise switches to interest). The young artist's neighbor "El" is seen hauling a mysterious, corpse-sized bundle down the stairs late at night (interest switches to threat).

One function of rising action is to change the character's certainty level, by either giving her more clues or more questions. The young artist follows "El" and finds out he's the lead singer for a band called "Elvis Alienation" which plays industrial/ambient covers of Elvis Presley songs. This explains the weird sounds coming from his apartment; she's had a question answered. The professor is attacked by two men with pierced upper lips, and is only saved by the Man With One Blue Eye; now he's wondering who the two goons

were, and about the guy who saved him. The detective discovers the sister's dead body, and an eyewitness says that it was a dumped by a skinny guy in a stocking cap; now one question's been answered ("What happened to the sister?") but another has arisen ("Whodunnit?").

Every story needs some rising action, but how much depends on your taste and the needs of the story. If you want, you can have comparatively little rising action, which makes for a quicker and simpler plotline. If you include a great deal of rising action, it makes for a longer and more complicated plotline; lots of questions get raised, and answered, but they only lead to more questions. If handled correctly, this can continually ratchet up the emotional intensity, making the eventual payoff significantly greater. However, be careful not to try to drag out a plot too long. Players get bored or frustrated if they feel like they haven't been making any progress.

CLIMAX

When the characters have gotten enough information from rising actions that they can take decisive action, it's time for the story to reach its climax. The climax is when (one way or another) the story gets resolved. The detective discovers that his beautiful client disguised herself as a man in order to kill her sister, and hired him because the police were too dumb to find the body so she could get the insurance; he confronts her, and they shoot it out. The professor learns that the Man With One Blue Eye is the Comte de Saint-Germain, who thinks the book contains secrets that could destroy him; the men with pierced lips want to do just that, and make persuasive arguments about why this is a good thing. The professor has to decide who's going to get the book. The young artist sees "El" drag another bundle down to the incinerator. She follows him, opens the furnace door after he leaves, and is terrified to see a human body in the flames. Then she turns around to see "El" staring at her, holding a knife in his hand, raggedly crooning "Love Me Tender."

Climaxes should be exciting, tense, and uncertain. More than that, they should resolve the plotline. This doesn't mean you have to explain *everything;* maybe the young girl never learns why "El" was killing—lone nut, or bizarre cultist? The professor has no way of knowing if his decision was the right one. Most importantly, the climax should *change* things. The girl knows "El" isn't coming back. (Or at least she hopes so.) The professor knows the dice have been thrown, for good or ill. The detective knows that justice has been served and that the client won't be out of the slammer for fifty years (eight with good behavior).

Each plotline should have its own set of circumstances and its own focus. To keep things from getting stale, you don't want all your plots to be "the same but different." If your PCs just came off a long, harrowing, dangerous plot, you may want to pitch them a plotline with less violence and more mental puzzles. Or one that's more lighthearted. Or shorter. Or all of the above.

REPERCUSSIONS

It ain't over 'til it's over, but when the heck is it really over? (If you're running a one-shot game, over is over.) If you're running a picaresque game, you probably want to wrap up each story fairly neatly, much like in a television series. If you're running a goal-oriented game there is no end—until the campaign itself comes to a close. But in both picaresque and goal-oriented games, repercussions are used to add continuity and surprise to a campaign.

Repercussions are lingering bits of plot that last beyond a given story or session. Some are easy to spot. If the PCs broke into a house and stole something, the police are going to investigate. If a PC was murdered, there are questions from law enforcement, from relatives, and from employers. Some are harder. That shadowy figure tailing the PCs whom they never caught—who was he, who did he work for, and will he come back? The PCs shatter a cult and send the leader to prison; will his assistant build a new cult and seek revenge? Will the strange idol the PCs recovered have powers that come into play down the road?

At the end of each session, immediately give yourself a couple of minutes—go hide in the bathroom if you have to—and jot down some possible repercussions. Then as you prepare for the next session or story, look back at those notes and see if any of those repercussions might come into play.

Interest from law enforcement is one you should *always* keep in mind. UA assumes a world (our world) where there *are* consequences to criminal action, and if any laws were broken during the session, consider carefully what the police might be able to figure out. Did the PCs leave any identifying clues behind? Might someone have remembered their description, their type of car, their license plate? Did they use a credit card in the store moments before the shoot-out? Were they in a place—such as a bank or corporate office—where there might have been security cameras? If they were opposing a rival cabal, might that cabal go to the police with a plausible story and file charges against them? One interesting way to deal with law-enforcement repercussions is to fold such repercussions into a police investigation with a strong protagonist. (Rent the movie *Heat* for a good example of what this can be like.) Maybe a brilliant detective pieces together assorted unsolved cases and begins investigating the PCs. Maybe a tough cop who sees satanic cults under every rock tries to persecute them. Maybe an ambitious district attorney wants to pillory the PCs to help his upcoming mayoral campaign. Not all of the PCs' foes have to be in the occult underground, after all—and if the PCs end up with police heat on them, their allies and enemies are going to react warily.

Another possible set of repercussions arises from mainstream citizens. Did the PCs actions jeopardize their own jobs? Are their families in danger? Did they tick off a biker at a bar who'll slash their tires the next time they come around? Are reporters on their trail? Might a citizen's group—such as the PTA, or Greenpeace—be up in arms about what's been going on? If a PC died, consider what his family and friends think; might they hire a private investigator to find out what the poor soul's crazy colleagues are up to?

A final set of repercussions are those tied directly to the occult underground. Foes who swear revenge, magickal curses that linger, ripple effects from what just happened, and the ever-popular Guy Who Got Away. What do other parties in the underground think about this? Does Alex Abel assign a team to investigate? Does the Comte de Saint-Germain turn up and poke around? If someone with knowledge of recent events got away clean, to whom does he turn, and to what end? And what do the PCs' actions do to their reputations?

As stated earlier, repercussions exist to provide continuity and surprise in your campaign. But as these examples should make clear, they have another important purpose: to make players think twice about their actions, and to be aware that

their actions have consequences. They may have defeated the Six Who Dare and smashed the Laptop of Nullification, but how good a job did they really do? And what price will they pay? We don't call them "repercussions" for nothing.

Multiple Plotlines

Finally, there's nothing that says you can't have two, three, or more plotlines moving at the same time. This can get *really* confusing for you, but even more confusing for the players (after all, you know which plotline a particular clue refers to; they may not). Be careful about running multiple plotlines—don't overload yourself or your players. Most people can handle two at once, but once you get four or more, the complexity increases exponentially. A partial exception to this, however, is plotlines that the characters initiate and guide. For example, if you've got them investigating the Sect of the Naked Goddess, but off on the side they're trying to make it big as a rock 'n' roll band, you're not going to have to worry as much about the rock 'n' roll plot; they'll push that along, and you just have to respond. On the cult-tracking plotline, you may have to take a bit more initiative.

Pivotal Events

It's important to identify those things that are going to have long-lasting effects on your campaign, even when your players don't recognize them at the time. These are called **pivotal events.**

Some pivotal events are pretty obvious. If you've planned out a plotline and the characters reach the climax—well, clearly that qualifies. Give that scene the extra attention, detail, and tension it needs. Make sure your players see that you care and are taking it seriously; otherwise, they won't know to take it seriously, too.

Other pivotal events are a lot subtler. Suppose a middle-aged PC mentioned in passing that he was living with this woman down in Pasadena for a while when he was a teenager. You decide to throw him a curve: when he broke up with his Pasadena lady-friend, she was pregnant but neither of them knew it. Now his unacknowledged daughter has tracked him down. This offspring (named Judy) is going to become a focus for a future plotline, but you want to introduce her sooner (without giving away who she really is) and get some background on her, to make it more dramatic when she gets involved in the weird stuff—and when she reveals that she's the PC's love child.

To the players, at first this is just one more minor character. Only *you* know that she's *going* to become important. The first meeting with her dad is a pivotal event, but the PC doesn't know it. If he makes a real ass of himself, it's going to have a major effect on the future plotline. If he behaves well, that will be equally important.

On one hand, this is a pivotal event. You have to give it some extra attention so that when the revelation comes later, the PC remembers this and gets a sense that it was building up, instead of just flying in from left field. On the other hand, you don't want to alert him *too* much. Just enough to make him nervous. Act out the scene in more detail than you would with a generic minor character. Make sure he knows that her name is Judy. Don't spill the beans too soon, but have her ask enough weird questions that he knows *something* is up with this chick. Hopefully he won't try to sleep with her. (Mmm, madness check time!)

Once you've identified and played through a pivotal event, be sure to remember it—and make sure your players recognize it as well. They should be aware that something significant happened, even if they aren't sure exactly what it was. Be sure to keep track of the probable repercussions of the event, both for the PCs and for other, "offscreen" GMCs.

Now you're ready to deal with pivotal events in plot development. But what about character development? It can easily happen that in the course of play an event that has no real significance in the plot has a deep resonance with a character's passions. Don't shortchange these. If a character who has always shown forbearance and forgiveness suddenly snaps and kills a minor opponent when a non-lethal solution was available—well, it means something. It may mean that the player had a bad day and wanted to kill something, or that he's simply gotten a little tired of playing a model of ethical restraint. Don't gloss it over. Make him come up with a *reason* his character did what he did. If he doesn't know why he did it, make sure he plays *that* out; after all, it's rather disturbing to find out that you acted in a completely abnormal way for no good reason.

In other words, make sure your players know that actions have consequences—consequences for character, if not plot.

Coping with Changes

Players will throw you curve balls. Accept it. Don't get your head too married to one course of action, no matter how cool it is; if your characters don't go there, don't try to force them. You can lead and encourage, but not compel. It's a temptation, but if you cram your characters down the plot path *you* want, they'll rebel.

When the players do throw you a curve ball, they still expect you to bat 'em out of the park, since ideally they have no way of knowing what you're *planning* for them to do in the first place. Here are some things you can do when your PCs do something significant, yet completely different from what you expected.

Stall. Hey, no reason you have to know what happens right away, is there? Don't forget the action, but once its immediate consequences (if any) have been described, just let it sit. If they ask about what happened, or try to investigate, give 'em nothing. Then think up something really cool for next session (or even a few sessions down the line). You may even lull them into a false sense of security.

Roll with it. Sometimes a surprise is just an unexpected action. It doesn't *mean* anything, you can cope with it and move on. Other times, it's a symptom.

Let me explain. Unexpected actions can't happen without *expected* actions, right? So you were expecting the characters to do one thing and they did something completely different. Might just be contrariness or the Imp of the Perverse. *But. . .* it might also mean you've read the characters wrong.

Take a step back and ask yourself if you've been giving the players what they want. Keep in mind that this isn't what the *characters* want; the players want *challenges* to what the characters want, and often specific types of challenges, in order for them to have fun. (There's a reason why all those old-school RPG dungeons were full of monsters and treasure; if they were full of treasure with no monsters, no one would have played the darn things.) If you've been running a very political and intrigue-laden game, what does

it mean when your players all get gung-ho to unexpectedly shoot up a warehouse full of thugs? Maybe they just view violence as another political tool—and an unexpected one, for once. On the other hand, it might be a vote for a change of tone in the game.

An unexpected move on the part of the players can be considered an indication of the direction where they'd like the game to move. Being sensitive to this not only keeps players happy (and therefore engaged, and therefore making the game more fun for everyone), it keeps the game fresh and keeps you on your toes. Sure, it's a little bit more work. But it's worth it.

Concluding the Campaign

Gaming is a bit like drinking. It's very important to know when to say when.

Just like a plotline, a campaign should have a climax and conclusion (unless you're taking the time-honored picaresque option, where things continue but little really changes in a big way). This can come when the last character dies, spitting defiance in the eye of her enemy, or (more commonly) when the characters achieve some great goal—either their original one, or something they decided upon in the course of play. When this happens, the characters have fulfilled their purpose. If UA is a game of characterization, then the game is over, because the characters have been completely developed through plot action.

Coercive Endings

If your players screw up, make bad decisions (especially decisions that are out of character), or if they're unwilling to make the tough choices necessary to gain their objective, then you shouldn't just *hand* them success. It cheats you and it robs them of a decent story. Furthermore, it invalidates any *good* playing they did previously. The real meaning of an artificially happy "gimme" ending is, "You would have won no matter what, because you're player characters. You didn't have to work that hard. You had no genuine chance of failure. This satisfactory conclusion was mandated and you had no choice." Players hate being coerced. They hate being powerless pawns of the GM, even when the GM is giving them what she *thinks* they want.

We've said this before, but we'll repeat ourselves like cranky old men with liver damage, because it's *important*. Players don't just want the happy ending; they want to *earn* the happy ending. And the harder it is to earn, the more satisfying it is.

It is *essential* that your players have a real sense of doubt. Some GMs try to create a sense that failure is possible while secretly making sure the players succeed; but I've found the best way to create a that doubt is to have the outcome *really be* decided solely by the actions of the characters. If the outcome is bad, tough cookies.

Hooray for Failure

Even failure can be satisfying, however. No, really.

Right now you may be scratching your head. "You mean that my players, who've been meeting every Wednesday night for *eight months* working towards taking over the world—they're going to be satisfied with an ending where they *don't* take over the world?"

It can be done, but only if they *choose* not to take over the world. For instance, suppose one of them is given the opportunity to take over the world at great cost. Alex Abel will throw his millions behind their cause—if they'll just give up one of their core beliefs. "Sure, we can work something out. Just punt that idea about eradicating poverty, 'cause it's a deal-breaker." Maybe the route to absolute power depends on mastering a certain type of magick—but to do so, they must give up something essential to their *identity*. "Sure, the power's yours. Just give me your son and we'll call it even. Hey, I have to know you're *serious* about this!"

Literature is full of these types of choices. Another image you find recurring is the martyr, who makes some ultimate sacrifice for the well-being of all. Maybe your hit squad all dies in an explosion at the Global Liberation Society training camp. On the surface, that's a failure (since they all died). However, if the players know that by destroying the camp they may have saved the entire world, they might consider the loss of their characters worthwhile. After all, the plot has now completed their characters; dead and inviolate, they have ended their careers in a suitably dramatic fashion.

This is a game of character. The most memorable personalities are those who chose to be true to themselves, even at the cost of their own lives.

Unknown Armies is a game where the odds are usually stacked against the characters. They can fail disastrously simply by rolling that dreaded 00. Failure is *common*, an element that stands this game in stark contrast to many others, where the PCs are assumed to be special, elite or larger than life.

This is not a bug, it's a feature.

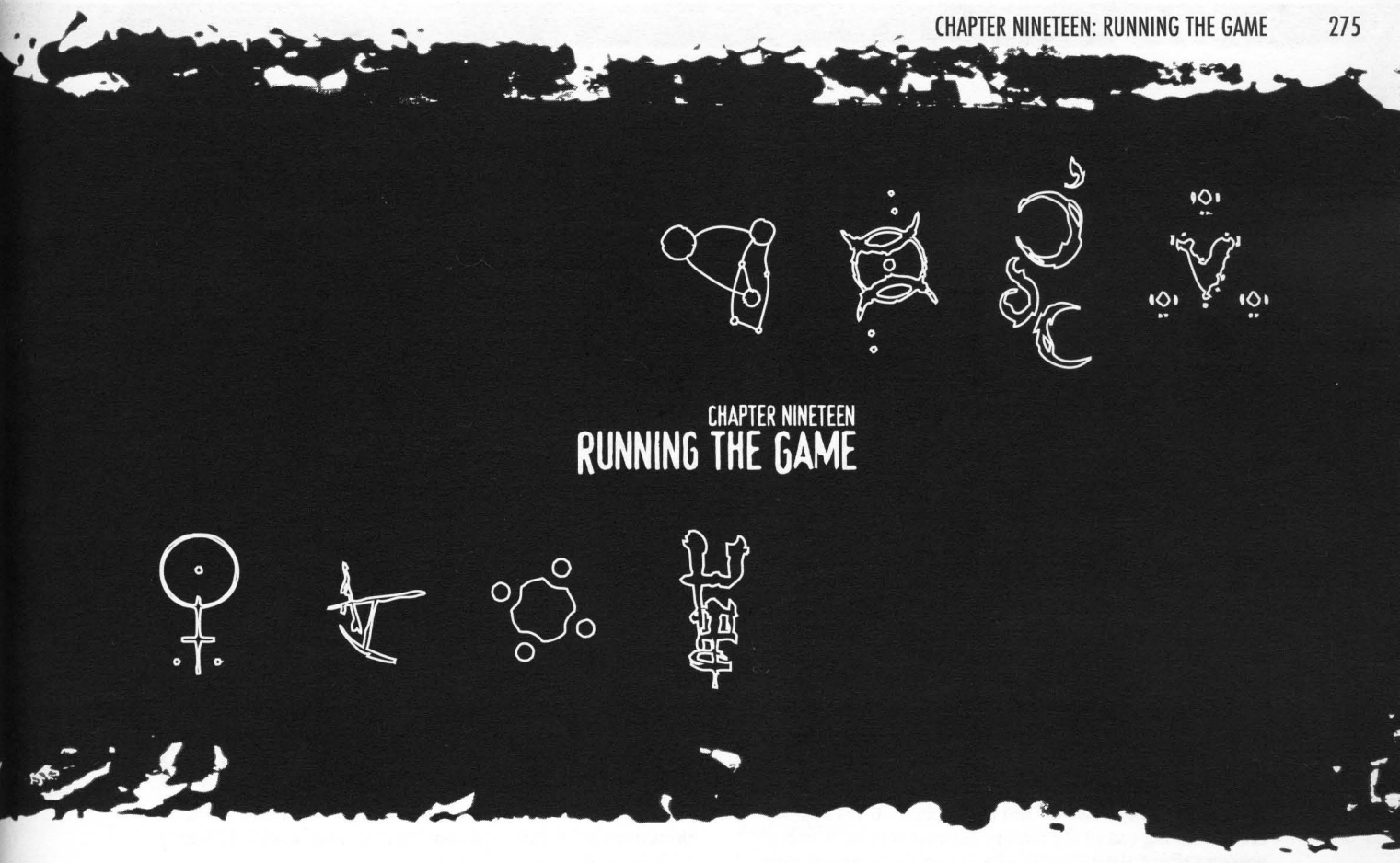
PCs have a hard time getting stuff done because *people* have a hard time getting stuff done. In the UA setting, *everyone* has a hard time accomplishing their goals. Even the big players like TNI and the Sleepers can screw the pooch big time, miss out through absolute ignorance and fail, fail, *fail*. No one is omni-competent—not the immortal Comte, not the Freak, not even the player characters. And that's okay! Because so much of the setting is out of *anyone's* control, it means that *everyone* has a chance to make a difference—everyone from scary Angela Forsythe down to a chunky goofball like Derek Jackson.

In most games, power comes from getting your skills & stats beefed up to the point where you can't realistically fail. In *Unknown Armies*, there really isn't any such point. In the long run, then, your overall success and failure are more likely to depend on your ability to adapt to unpredictable and uncontrollable circumstances.

In most games, success depends on the power of the character. In UA, it depends on the skill of the player.

Epilogues

Some GMs like to have an epilogue where the players describe what happens to their characters afterwards, like at the end of some movies where short screens of text tell you who went on to do what. Maybe the PCs settle down with a family, ride off into the sunset, reconcile with their lost daughter, or wind up rotting in jail for life. (Hey, different strokes for different folks.) Others prefer a more open ending, where nothing is stated concretely, and the results of the climax are only implied. In still other groups, the GM decides on the eventual fate of the characters, or the GM and players work out the ending mutually. Do whatever is satisfying.



CHAPTER NINETEEN

RUNNING THE GAME

Traditionally, the role of Game Master has involved providing a place and time to meet, offering drinks (usually caffeinated in order to heighten player tension and attention), and the occasional salty snack. Plus providing a story, complete with clever puzzles, gripping thrills, and unearthly danger, of course.

This hasn't changed. We can't help you with the first set of stuff, but here's a bunch of tips on actual GMing.

Basic Narration

The first skill a GM must master is basic narration. In a pinch you can fudge rules, gloss over continuity errors, and get away with using formula plots. The one thing you're never able to fake is the meat-and-potatoes ability to describe things.

You are the players' senses and, to some extent, their memories as well. Everything they experience comes to them through your words; you describe the repercussions of everything they do. It's a lot of responsibility and power, both of which you need to be a good GM. Let's look at the areas you need to consider for effective narration—in other words, good storytelling. (Note that dealing with GMCs gets its own section a bit later in this chapter.)

Voice

If you describe a lovely, daylit scene in a normal tone of voice, it establishes one set of expectations in your players. If you describe it in a low, growly, *hungry* voice, with just a hint of sarcasm underneath it—there you've got something else entirely. Similarly, describing a gruesome crime scene in a *blasé*, casual fashion is going to rob the scene of impact that could be captured by a taut and serious tone of voice. (Be careful, though: it's easy to talk yourself hoarse if you're doing lots of demanding voices and aren't used to it.)

Vocabulary

You don't have to necessarily settle for the first word that pops into your mind; stretch for the most specific word, the one that captures your meaning exactly. After all, any number of people might be "big." But is the character "flabby" or "beefy" or "bulky" or "towering"? Each has a different meaning and creates a different mental picture. A "dank" or "sticky" or "greasy" storm sewer has a lot more character than one that's merely "wet."

Props

Let's suppose you're a player and your character has gotten hold of mad Dr. Lowenstein's notes. Which is going to make it easier for you to get into the story: a GM who summarizes what's contained therein, or a GM who hands you pages of hand-scrawled notes that you can actually read? The first option creates a layer between the player and the events of the story. The second brings it much closer. Granted, preparing props can be a lot of work, but it pays off.

Images

Get out your scissors and cut up a newspaper, magazine, or one of those catalogues that get stuffed in everyone's mailbox. Pick out images of houses, office buildings, parks, whatever, and use them as visual depictions of scenes during play.

Pacing

The way you describe things can obliquely affect the pace of the game. If you give a very spare, basic description of an area or individual, the players probably won't pay much attention. If you give a more detailed description, or indicate through tone that this area or individual is important (or better yet, "deviant"), you'll practically see their nostrils flare as they catch the scent.

Pacing is also important for maintaining a sense of excitement and suspense. Descriptions in combat should usually be quick, blunt, and brutal, presented in a tense tone of voice. If you drone on calmly about how their opponent is shuffling in, waving his fists around, making a feint, *etc.*, it doesn't sound like a fight. It sounds like stage directions. *Bad* stage directions.

To put it another way: if your characters are walking through an abandoned factory, looking for clues about perverse rituals that might have been conducted there the night before, then you can describe it in a slow, low tone of voice with plenty of detail and atmosphere. If the characters are tear-assing *out* of the factory because they've *found* a perverse ritual, then you describe it in a quick and sketchy fashion.

Full-Sense Description

Hearing and sight get the lion's share of GM effort, and rightfully so. Don't neglect the other senses, though. Temperature can be an effective way to set a tone. (A graveyard at night could feel unseasonably chill; a seducer's apartment may feel very hot and stuffy.) Aromas can be hints. ("Remember that nice citrus smell from the bloodstained sheets? Must be cologne, 'cause this guy's wearing it.") Touch is up close and personal, so it can be especially effective. ("As you grab for it in the dark, your hand connects with something—an arm, perhaps, but the skin is so dry and brittle that it crumbles under your touch, then something hot and sticky pours over your fingers as you hear its hoarse scream . . .")

Level of Detail

Detail is good, so more detail is better right? Not necessarily. If your characters are in a library, you don't have to name every book. Choose the right details to focus on. If the purpose of the scene is to build a sense of dread and expectation, you can layer on details heavy with shadow, rustling sighs, maybe the sweetish smell of rotting meat, and so forth. But if the purpose of the scene is to give the PCs a place to discuss clues in character, the phrase "a well-lit diner" may suffice. You can add the comforting clink of silverware and the smell of frying bacon, but that's chrome. Weighing your players down with too much detail bogs down the pace of the game, just as surely as a lack of detail leaves it sketchy and unbelievable. (Don't worry. The range between "too much" and "too little" is broader than a lot of people would have you think. It also varies from group to group, depending on the tastes of the players and the GM. Even if you don't get it perfect, you'll improve over time.)

Psychological Slant

Different types of people notice different things, because every perception is filtered by our expectations and interests. This isn't a technique to use all the time, but every once in a while it's very useful to remember that you're playing the characters' senses—and senses are heavily influenced by mental state. If you're describing an apartment to a real neat freak, you might want to stress how untidy it is: the clutter of unpaid bills on the mantelpiece, empty cups and glasses scattered around next to bowls of peanut shells, a reeking cat-litter box, and that sort of thing. The former Green Beret, on the other hand, might notice a pair of heavy candlesticks (potential bludgeons), the loop of phone cord strung amateurishly across the ceiling (could be a makeshift garrote), and the half-open closet door (as a possible ambush site). Someone else might immediately notice the kinds of bills the apartment dweller is paying, her choice in decoration, or even the *feng shui* (ambient Chinese magic based on the position of objects) that the room has.

Bad Narration

Even as there are useful techniques to pursue and perfect, there are also pitfalls and common errors to avoid. These include the following.

"Gamish" Description

If you ever hear yourself saying something along the lines of, "He's got Body 79 and he's pointing a chainsaw at you," hang your head in shame. *Never* describe characters or creatures in game terms. Nothing else pops the bubble of credulity faster than drawing attention to the mechanics that underlie it.

The rules and stats are conventions, tools for modeling capacity. Instead of describing the tool, describe what it's modeling. "He's a hulking brute of a man, and the grip of his chainsaw disappears into a fist that looks big as a bowling ball." Don't say that a character is highly educated; say that he speaks in big words, or put him in an academic setting (college library, museum, office full of books).

Contradiction

If the town hall was on the east side of the town square last time the characters stopped by, it better not be on the west side next time. If "Marcia" was a character's older sister in one session, she'd better not be the younger sister in the next game. This isn't all that hard to manage; if a character, object or setting is important enough that your players are paying attention, you've probably given it enough thought to portray it consistently. If it's not that important, you can get away with glossing over a mistake—especially if it makes no difference to the plot. ("No, it was always on the west side. I said 'west' last time. Now can we please move on?")

A good way to avoid this problem in the first place is to keep notes. These don't need to be pages of elaborate detail;

just a few key words or phrases about important places or people are enough to underlie their descriptions and give you consistency.

Repetition and Genericity

If your characters break into one evil cultist's apartment and it's filled with pentagrams and candles, that can be pretty spooky—the first time. But if the next few apartments they break into are always described the same way, it gets old fast. Don't get lazy. Maybe one cultist's apartment is completely bare: no decorations, no TV, no bookshelves, just one mattress in the center of the room—a mattress crusty with dried blood and covered with flies and maggots. Maybe another cultist has an apartment that's completely decorated in sunflowers, gingham check, and teddy bears. It's only when you open the attractive wicker chest from Pier One that you find her collection of hollowed-out cat heads.

Remember that tension and suspense depend on the unknown. If your players can guess what a setting or scene or person is going to be like after your first sentence, you've just made your job of surprising them roughly a dozen times harder.

GM Characters

Every character the PCs meet is portrayed by a single actor: you. This puts some pressure on you, since it's important to make the GMCs memorable and different. There are two aspects to this: portrayal and character depth. We'll also deal briefly with GM stats and how to make GMCs that are tough but not *too* tough.

Portrayal

The way you portray different characters is up to you. Some basic components of GMC portrayal include speech, body language, props, and pictures.

Speech

The most common GM tool is the voice. If you're a radio actor and can do one voice for the breathy, sexy ingenue and another for the grunting, brutal thug—well, you've just made it much less likely that the players will get them confused. Accents can work, if you can pull them off; otherwise, it's just going to turn into a joke. (Which doesn't mean you shouldn't use them for comic-relief characters.)

Even if you aren't confident in your ability to do voices, word choice can be just as important. If one character always speaks in short, crisp sentences that rigidly follow the rules of grammar ("I'm accused of shooting whom?") and another uses rambling sentences full of asinine slang ("And, like, I think he's givin' me the yank so I draw the nine and I'm like 'who's tasty now, man?' and he gets like jello on me then . . .") then once again, they're easy to tell apart.

Body Language

People are very visually oriented. You can try holding your face differently for different characters (though this, too,



artwork by Earl Geier

should be reserved for comic characters if you're not confident in your skill) but body language is just as important. A slouching thug with hooded eyes is going to make a different impression from a graduate student who's constantly fidgeting, or a police officer who always sits up straight and stares, unblinking, right into your eyes.

Props

Some GMs favor the use of props (a hand fan, a cigarette, a prop pistol) or even rudimentary costumes (like a hat or veil). These can be very effective if used appropriately (and if you're not breaking up the flow of a scene by switching back and forth between costumes every time you say something). To each his own, but here's one warning. We know, you're probably too smart to have to hear this, but you never can tell who's going to buy one of these books: **Don't use a real gun or a real knife, or any real weapon, as a prop! Just don't do it; it's begging for trouble.**

Pictures

Collect a bunch of interesting faces, but avoid recognizable celebrities. Match each face to a recurring GMC in your game. Attach it to an index card, then put the character's name and a short description on the back. Now your players can connect a name with a face. You can even give the picture to the players as a sort of visual clue—or rather, cue. They can study the face, visualize the person, maybe tack the various faces up on a board and draw connections between them, and generally get creative with this little resource.

Character Depth

The players are only portraying one character, but they're portraying that character (hopefully) in great depth. Your task is different. Because you have many characters, you can get away with being much shallower in your portrayals. After all, the focus is on the PCs all the time; your characters only get attention for a few minutes per session. Still, your characters deserve the best you can give them. An easy way to deal with this responsibility is to approach minor and major characters differently.

Minor Characters

Minor characters shouldn't be obvious throwaways. That means that you must decide what is important about that character and how to show it as quickly and cleanly as possible. If the character is a district attorney who is going to tell the characters about the thug who attacked them ("The phrase 'chilling lack of remorse' is kind of a recurring theme in his criminal record . . .") you don't need to know how he feels about his mother or what he had for breakfast that morning (unless he's a slob and it's on his tie); all you need to know is what he knows about the thug, how he feels about that, and how he's going to display (or conceal) those feelings. Maybe he's tough, with a dry and ironic sense of humor. Maybe he's new and a little nervous, intimidated by getting involved (even tangentially) with this Bad Man. Maybe he's bored and *blasé* —he's seen it all, and worse, before.

Major Characters

However, over-detailing your minor characters is unlikely to be a problem. A pitfall that's more important to dodge is *under*-detailing your *major* characters. You need to put more thought and attention into recurring characters, particularly major antagonists and important friends or allies.

These characters need to make sense. All the cool voices and acting in the world aren't going to save a character who isn't internally consistent. It's not enough to know *what* the character does; you have to know *why*. Motivation is critical. The framework established for PCs can be very useful here; passions and madness meters can put some meat on the bare bones of a GMC. (Though you should be careful to not get too caught up in the mechanics of these things. Those mechanics are for PCs; don't bother rolling madness checks for GMCs, who are simpler creatures you can drive mad at will for the sake of the plotline.)

As your campaign moves along, your characters run into a variety of antagonists and allies. One way to make a campaign stale fast is to be lazy and stamp out cookie-cutter villains. This goes for minor characters, but it's doubly important for major characters. If every enforcer is a cool, sneering thug in a tailored suit (the "John Travolta") or a wisecracking, short-tempered sadist (the "Joe Pesci"), they're going to get boring and interchangeable pretty quick. Similarly, if every ally is a pleasant, stammering idealist (the "Jimmy Stewart") and every villain is a cultured megalomaniac (the "Jeremy Irons"), clever plot twists and exciting combats aren't going to disguise a certain feeling of *déjà vu*.

Every major character should have unique goals and unique motivations. How are your players going to react when they find out their villain is trying to take over the world in order to save it? ("Only by controlling the ignorant masses can we sculpt their opinions, ensuring that the next ascension is a positive archetype — not some icon of sexism and degradation!") On the flip side, how are they going to feel if invaluable advice and assistance is offered to them by a murderous head case? ("Once I realized that magick was real, no other prey would . . . satisfy me. You can understand the lust for a challenge, can't you?")

You owe your players a good time and a challenge; you don't owe them anything they can take for granted. If *Unknown Armies* is going to focus on developing characters, you have to give them people worth interacting with.

GMC Stats

Your GMCs should have skills and stats like PCs, but this doesn't mean you have to use the same rules for building them. Feel free to give them skills over 55%, stats over 70%, skills higher than their stats—just give them numbers that sound right.

Too-Tough GMCs

Be careful about building characters who are all-around better than the PCs. This is okay for a major villain—someone they're going to have to gang up on. But it's very annoying for players if there's some GMC ally who constantly bails them out and makes them feel inferior. After all, how would *you* like being Miss Moneypenny to someone else's James Bond?

A very simple example would be a thug character. If you want to give him a high Body, a great skill at Face Wrecking, and a fairly scary Unlicensed Gun skill as well, feel free. But give him a weakness. The obvious one is low Mind (or Soul) which makes him gullible and easy to trick. Maybe he's got a one-track mind, or maybe he's slow on his feet and easy to get away from. There you have a character who is challenging to a PC (because he's got superior combat skills) but not unbeatable (because he has a weakness that can be exploited if it's discovered).

Managing the Flow

Horror and suspense, more than other genres, require steady pacing. If you get too slow, the players have a chance to assimilate what you've been telling them, and if the horrific elements become too familiar, they lose their power. ("Well, I suppose flying, screaming heads aren't really *that* awful.") On the other hand, if the pace is set too high then the players feel completely helpless and ineffectual and don't have time to figure out the things they're *supposed* to figure out. ("Threatened" is good; "completely helpless" is bad. If people want passive entertainment, they can click on reruns of *Hogan's Heroes* without even building a character.)

Flow Tools

You've got two tools for flow control. You can control it through narrative and through plot. Let's suppose you think your players need a chance to get away from the Unspeakable Awfulness and put together some clues, so that they can figure out what this particular threat *is*. Let's further suppose that whatever it is, it's chasing them through the NYC subway system.

To slow things down using narrative, all you have to do is not describe any pursuit. They've been trying to get away; let them think they have for a while. They're still in the dark service tunnels between stations, but at least they don't have *it* breathing down their necks for the moment. They'll probably ask you questions about where they are, and then they'll start talking to each other. Once they've either figured out what you wanted them to get (but nothing more), or have spent so much time on their "breather" that the mood is in danger of winding down, that's when you tell them they hear/smell/think they see something that indicates the game is, once again, afoot. If you're really sharp, in the ensuing chase you give them more clues about the *it*.

On the other hand, slowing things down with plot is quite a bit easier. Just have them run into a subway station (or an access tunnel, or a sewer worker who can guide them up and out). Now they've got all the time they need to talk things over—at least until you use the plot to prod them again.

The difference between these two is subjective time and objective time. If you use a narrative slowup, the ten or fifteen minutes they spend talking things over may only occupy a few tense seconds of game time. (If you're using this subjective slowup, you may want to remind them of the game setting every couple minutes or so.) With the plot maneuver, you give them objective time—their fifteen minutes is fifteen minutes of their characters talking.

Dithering

One thing that slows games down *a lot* is player dithering. This is when the players (and/or their characters) spend endless time debating the advantages and potential drawbacks of every single conceivable course of action. This is somewhat forgivable when they're planning a course of action they initiate (half the fun of an RPG burglary is doing all the stalking and spying and planning how you're going to get in and out.) When it starts to drag, a few comments like "Is that your plan then? Are you ready to go?" can spur them on. However, there is *no place* for debate when they're *reacting*. If a clockwork automaton the size of a riding mower—equipped with a good dozen circular saw blades—is charging them, then they shouldn't be debating, they should be acting. If you ask a player what she's doing and get a request for information as a response, assume they're looking or listening for that information. Next round you can tell them the information, assuming the clockwork hasn't carved them into coleslaw. This may seem brutal, but it's a learning process; you've just taught that player that almost *any* fast action is preferable to taking *no* action because you're trying to take the *right* action.

This cuts both ways. It's not *carte blanche* to hose the characters who hesitate, and it also means you should cut some slack for people who *do* act fast. (Think of it as "positive reinforcement." You've just reinforced the behavior of getting with the program and keeping the pace going.)

Communication

A key to good pacing is clear communication with your players. Let them know when they're in a "rest" scene so that they can lower their guard (slightly) and figure things out. Let them know when they're in an "adrenalized" scene so that they can react fast and enjoy the frenzied pace of nonstop terror. Let them know that what's appropriate in one scene is possibly the *last* thing they want to do in the other. Finally, let them know when you've switched scenes.

Does this mean you should draw up big signs that say "REST" and "DANGER" on them, holding them up at the appropriate times? Certainly not. You have to communicate these changes in tone subtly, using our favorite tools of vocal tone and word choice. If you describe things in a leisurely fashion, choosing reassuring words ("You can feel your muscles relax as the sanitation engineer pops up the manhole cover. The sunlight is almost blinding, and a gust of cool, clean air pours down over you. Eagerly, you climb out into the street, which looks so normal it's almost impossible to believe that right underneath it was . . . that thing.") they should *know* the scene has switched. Similarly, if you suddenly start talking in a tense tone of voice, describing unsettling input, they'll get into "lightning reflex" mode.

It's really not as hard as it sounds. Think of movies and how they communicate these kinds of scenes: through music, editing, and camera movement. The faster, noisier, and jerkier a scene is, the more likely that it involves danger. It's the same approach in GMing, only we use simpler techniques of expression.

Skill Checks

Many (if not most) things attempted by characters won't

require a roll. *No one* makes a PC roll to open a car door or light a cigarette—it just slows things down and impedes the pacing and believability of the story. You, as the GM, have a lot of latitude when it comes to asking for die rolls. If it's dramatically important and plausible for the attempt to succeed, then let it go if the PC has an appropriate skill. This can make a skill of 10% or 15% important. ("Thomas, your character took Climbing at 10%, so you automatically go over the chain-link fence without a problem. Everyone else roll General Athletics.")

In short, players only need to roll if the GM tells them to. The GM can declare automatic failures for low skills or really hard tasks, especially if the outcome isn't fatal. The GM can also declare automatic successes if the plot demands it.

Check Levels

There are also levels of challenge which bring with them varying levels of difficulty for the rolls.

Minor Checks

If you have a relevant skill at 15% or higher, you automatically succeed. You can roll to see if you succeed magnificently or meagerly, but you basically get a free pass.

Significant Checks

This is tougher. The player must roll. If it's under his skill, it's a solid success. If it's between his skill and the governing stat, it's a marginal success.

Major Checks

These are the hardest checks. You simply roll under your skill. **All combat checks and all magick checks are major.**

Using Fuzzy Logic Skill Checks

These three levels of check comprise UA's "Fuzzy Logic" rules system. Fuzzy logic is an expansion of traditional Boolean logic systems that introduces a degree of uncertainty into the logical true or false attribute of a variable. A useful analogy is if you have no hair, you're considered bald. If you have two or three hairs, you're still considered bald. There's no one point where, if you add *just one more hair*, you stop being bald. Instead there's a gray zone, an overlap between bald and hairy, even though they're opposites.

Fuzzy logic is math to deal with gray zones.

In the context of UA gaming, it means every skill check has some qualities that justify it being minor, significant, and major all at once. Your job is determining to which level it most belongs. To some extent, this approach mitigates the occasional need for "fudging" die rolls for the sake of the players or the story, because you can tailor the type of check to better suit the demands of the moment.

Each level of check has five qualities: threat, time, penalty, specialization, and drama. These are the qualities that guide you in your decision of which check to call for.

There is no hard rule for how you use this information. If you have a check with three minor qualities and one major quality, you may decide that it's a major check even though the minor option has seemingly greater weight.

Nor do we intend you to refer to this list every time you call for a check. It's more of an instructional tool to help you conceptualize the three levels of check. Once you've assimilated these ideas, you should rely on your instincts as to which check to call for.

Minor Check Qualities

- The character perceives no current threat.
- There is no meaningful time limit on completing the task.
- There is no significant penalty for failure.
- Specialization in the task is not an issue.
- There is no drama in the success or failure of the task.

Significant Check Qualities

- The character perceives no current threat.
- There is a significant but not critical time limit.
- There is a meaningful but not crucial penalty for failure.
- Specialization in the task is a consequential but not crushing issue.
- There is noteworthy but not overwhelming drama in the success or failure of the task.

Major Check Qualities

- The character perceives a threat.
- There is a critical time limit.
- There is a grave penalty for failure.
- Specialization in the task is a terribly important issue.
- There is immense drama in the success or failure of the task.

Running Combat

Combat gets special rules because it's obviously *very* dangerous, *very* unpredictable, and *very* important. The extra rules are there to make it exciting and uncertain, hopefully without making it too tricky or removing the feel of confusion and chaos.

Exceptional Skills

Individuals with superhuman Speed or Body stats—including clockworks and unnatural entities—gain some special benefits.

Speed. A character with a Speed stat of 101% or higher gets one free combat action before anyone else, every round, and then takes their normal combat action. If more than one character in combat has a Speed stat of 101% or higher, the character with the higher Speed gets the first bonus action, followed by the other high-Speed character's bonus action, and then it's back to normal combat actions in order of Initiative.

Body. A character with a Body stat of 101%–125% does an additional 3 wound points in hand-to-hand attacks. If the character's Body stat is 126% or higher, the hand-to-hand bonus is 6 wound points instead.

Wound Points

First things first: make up a sheet with the wound points of all the characters on it. When they get injured, note

down their new wound-point total and brief notes about the injury. ("12 points, left leg, meat cleaver" or "7 points, whole body, falling bookshelf.") *Never* tell your players how much damage they've taken or how many wound points they have left.

UA players know how damaged their characters are through narrative, not numbers. This is an important tool for the Game Master, and one that should be used with care.

Wrong: "She smacks you across the chops with the garbage can lid . . . she rolled a 12, so that's 3 points of damage, plus another 3 'cause it's a hard object, so 6 points."

Right: "She snatches the lid off a metal garbage can and swings it at your head. The edge catches you right in the cheek with a tremendous clang that sends a jolt of cold, bruising pain all through your skull."

The first example doesn't particularly make me frightened of the woman who hit me; after all, it's just six points, I've got forty-four left. It's abstract. The second is going to make me back off, because I don't immediately know how badly I'm hurt.

Now consider this: which is the more natural reaction from someone who's been hit in the face with a chunk of metal? Circumstances of character and experience aside, we're guessing the "back off" option.

Death's Door?

Since you're describing damage verbally instead of numerically, it's important to give people clues when they're getting in trouble. Someone who's been reduced to under 20 wound points is going to be feeling it *everywhere*—he has a headache, slightly blurred vision, and terrible burning in his lungs from hyperventilating, *on top* of the direct signs of injury. Someone under 10 wound points should know for *certain* that he's in deep trouble. But even if they've just been getting hit with a light weapon (like a garbage-can lid), they should be bleeding plenty from somewhere, feeling nauseous, maybe hearing a roaring sound in their ears, getting dizzy, and so on.

Keep in mind that the system is tilted to make combat fast and dangerous. If players complain, ask them how many times they think they could catch a bullet and keep fighting, or how many times they'd like to get smacked by a baseball bat before they start running.

Fudging

There's one other advantage that you get from keeping track of the PCs' wound points yourself—it makes it easier to save their bacon if they get stung by particularly good GM rolls. For example, one of your players has Body 60, which is pretty darn buff. Earlier in the adventure, he got schooled across the leg with a lead pipe for 13 points. You described the injury as hurting a hell of a lot, and he's hobbling but, since you wanted him to be able to continue with the adventure, you decided that 13 points isn't a broken bone. Now he runs around a corner and there's the chief sorcerer preparing a significant blast. The cultist rolls a 94 (which fails), flip-flops it into a 49 (which succeeds), and the character *dies*. Just like that. After two hits. (We told you combat was fast and dangerous!)

What do you do? You could decide not to flip-flop the roll, but that has the risk of making the head cultist look incompetent instead of spooky. Instead, describe gut-wrenching pain in gruesome detail, and tell him he's "passed out." If the player was keeping track of his own wound points, he'd *know* that the dice declared him dead and that you spared him. That's no good; it defeats the whole idea of a horror/suspense game. This way, you can spare the character's life without giving up your title as "Danger-Mongering GM."

Now of course, you don't want to fudge all the time. If in the above example the player knew full well that the head cultist was around the corner and could drop him in the blink of an eye, the character probably deserves to die—he knew the risks.

Mechanics

Here's an outline of how to run combat mechanics.

I. **Initiative**
   - A. All characters have the option to default to their Initiative skill OR roll. All rolls are final.
   - B. All successful rolls go before any failed rolls do
     1. High numbers that succeed go early
     2. Low numbers that succeed go late
   - C. Any failed rolls go after all successful rolls do
     1. High numbers that failed go early
     2. Low numbers that failed go late

II. **Actions**
   - A. Once the order that people act in is decided, people declare and roll their actions in that order. Each character can attack, dodge, maneuver for initiative or try to do something else.
   - B. If he attacks, have him roll his attack skill. Attacks may be modified by dodging.
     1. If he rolls over his skill with any weapon other than a light knife, nothing happens. (A 00 means something bad happens to him.)
     2. If he rolls over his skill with a light knife, it does one point of damage to the opponent. (A 00 result still means something bad happens to the attacker.)
     3. If he rolls under his skill and is shooting a gun, he does damage equal to the roll. This damage can't exceed the maximum damage for the gun.
     4. If he rolls under his skill and is fighting hand-to-hand, he does damage equal to the sum of the numbers on the two dice. (If it's a 45, it's 4 + 5 = 9. If it's a 20, it's 2 + 10 = 12.)
        - a. The damage is increased by 3 if he hit with a heavy object.
        - b. The damage is increased by 3 if he hit with a large, hard object.
        - c. The damage is increased by 3 if he hit with a sharp or edged object.
        - d. If the roll is a matched success and the object increases the damage by at least 6 points, the damage is equal to the roll (instead of being the sum of the roll) plus the object's added damage.
   - C. If he dodges, all successful attacks made against him for the rest of this round that have a die result under his Dodge skill automatically do half damage. In addition, he may make a Dodge check; if the roll is his Dodge skill or less and

is also greater than the attack roll, the damage from that attack is reduced to zero instead of just being halved.

D. Drawing a weapon takes one round. You can't attack with a weapon the same round you draw it without a special skill.

E. If he opts to try to improve his initiative, he can either default to his Initiative skill OR roll.

F. If he tries to do some other action, he begins the action this round. On the next round, the action is completed. (Some actions may take longer than two rounds, subject to GM discretion.) He cannot change actions between these two turns, except to abandon the action or modify it slightly.

Running Car Chases

The combat chapter has the mechanics for how to drive, shoot, ram, and race. That's the bare bones of an interesting car chase. Here comes the meat.

The exciting element of car chases in movies is The Unexpected. It's crucial for GMs to come up with unexpected events, danger, and scenery for their car chases; otherwise, it just becomes an exercise in dice rolling. This is why PCs can only take risks to catch up if they think of a unique and clever maneuver to cut the distance.

Luckily for everyone concerned, car chases are unlikely to happen every game session, so that gives both the GM and the players some time to think up hazards and maneuvers. Just to make things simpler for the GM (who's outnumbered, after all), I'm including a list of twenty sample hazards to throw at players during car chases. You'll want to add your own, of course. Use your imagination, but keep it appropriate to the tone of your personal game. One hint: car chases don't take place in a vacuum. A standard car chase isn't likely to be as exciting as a car chase in a thunderstorm, a blizzard or a tornado . . .

1. **In the city:** The car chase suddenly runs over wooden sawhorses and into the middle of a neighborhood ethnic festival. Depending on the community, this festival could involve firecrackers, elaborate costumes (Mardi Gras outfits and those paper dragons the Chinese use to celebrate the New Year are particularly fun), tables of food, or floats. Failure just means you're slowed down and maybe have a decorative banner trailing from one of your rear wheels.
2. **In the city:** A phone crew or (better) a power crew is working on the high wires. If this hazard isn't avoided, the driver has rammed or sideswiped a cherry picker. A technician falls twenty feet and breaks his leg. (Could call for a Violence or Self check for the driver.)
3. **In the country:** A construction sign that says "One Lane Bridge. Expect Delays." Each car has to either make a hazard roll to jump over the creek or get stuck waiting for the other cars to drive over the bridge, meaning a fast braking maneuver and possibly a pile-up.
4. **In the winter:** An icy patch. If you fail your roll, you skid and drop back a length. With a matched fail or fumble, you do a donut spin and lose two lengths turning your car all the way around.
5. **In the country:** A blank signpost that used to warn about a sharp turn. Failing the hazard roll drops you back a length as you go off the road into a muddy (but shallow) ditch, a cornfield, or whatever.
6. **Anywhere:** A Chicago-style bad driver who refuses to let anyone pass and who tries to cut you off. He also honks, yells, and gestures. Failing this hazard roll means you had to brake suddenly when he wedged himself into your lane.
7. **Anywhere:** An Iowa-style bad driver who has the cruise control set at the speed limit and is driving down the middle of two lanes. Failing this hazard means you've been stuck behind him briefly and dropped back a length.
8. **Anywhere:** A roadside accident complete with broken glass, ambulance, and police cars. Some of the cops may choose to give chase.
9. **In the city:** City park. If the lead car fails this hazard, the chase goes through the park. Nothing happens immediately, but for the next two or three rounds, everyone in the chase has at least one hazard per round dodging joggers, avoiding statues, and jumping over fountains.
10. **In the country:** A road through a densely wooded forest preserve. The road twists and turns with the contours of the hilly terrain, and a failed roll means swerving off the road and driving through a series of low, overhanging branches. Drop back a length.
11. **In the city:** An alley between two buildings suddenly narrows. Rolling successfully lets your car squeeze through, scraping up both sides in a shower of sparks, breaking off the door handles and mirrors, and leaving the doors crumpled shut. (You'll have to climb out the windows.) Failing leaves you just plain stuck, though a rear-end collision by the next car may pop you out.
12. **In the city:** You turn a corner to see a garbage truck dawdling along in front of you. If you don't make your roll, you slam on your brakes and rear-end it. The damage is negligible (one die, ignoring anything over five), but all future driving rolls are at -10% until you clean the sticky, oily dumpster gravy off your windshield or break the safety glass out entirely.
13. **Anywhere:** Gigantic pothole. If you avoid it, all well and good, but if you hit it, you drop a length as your car's undercarriage slams into the pavement and you make a slight skid. Everyone in the car bounces up and hits their head on the ceiling; all passengers lose their actions that round.
14. **In a rainstorm:** Lightning strikes nearby. All drivers make rolls, with those who fail dropping a length.
15. **In the country:** A deer darts out onto the road. Drivers get a +20% bonus to their skill when trying to dodge this hazard, but if you strike, the car definitely stops. A driver who fails this roll makes a rank-2 Violence stress check as the deer crashes into the windshield and sprays blood in its death throes.
16. **In the city:** Slow-moving pedestrian in the street—could be a senior citizen, someone in a wheelchair, or just someone gawking and motionless. Drivers get a +30% bonus to their skill, but failure at this roll is a rank-4 Helplessness stress check and a rank-3 Violence check as the innocent bystander gets clobbered. I'll leave the legal consequences up to the GM—though having the police chasing the PC down on a manslaughter and reckless-driving charge can be an interesting sideline.

17. **In the city:** Congested traffic. The only way around is to go through a parking lot. A failed roll drops you a length as you sideswipe a dumpster or bottom out on a speed bump.
18. **Anywhere:** Railroad crossing with a train bearing down. If you're in the lead you can either make this into an insane risk—roll half of your Drive skill and try to gain five lengths—or you can take a normal hazard, make a hard turn, and start racing parallel to the tracks. If you can gain three lengths in your next two rounds, you can get ahead of the train and make a risk roll to cut across the tracks. If you succeed at all that (basically making four successful Drive rolls in the next two rounds, with no failures), you can get on the other side of the tracks with the train between you and your pursuer.
19. **In the country:** Tire blowout. Even if you succeed at this roll, you can no longer take risks to gain ground. You can still take insane risks, however.
20. **Cops:** After all, car chases are several kinds of illegal. These guys have radios, guns, helicopters, the advantage of numbers, and if they get your license plate you could be in all kinds of hell. Plus you may end up on *World's Scariest Police Chases*.

RUNNING MAGICK

Magick is both tricky and easy. It's tricky because it doesn't exist in the real world, so there's no widely accepted conventions about how it "works." However, this is also what makes it easy.

Magick operates according to *meaning*, not logic or reason. For an example of the distinction, go read some magical realism. In the novel *A Hundred Years of Solitude*, one character (Remedios the Beauty) literally floats off into the sky one day. It doesn't make sense logically (what, she's too *pretty* for gravity?) but it makes sense thematically because she has always been "unearthly" and has never really "had her feet on the ground."

UA slants a little more towards the "realism" side of magical realism, but the system is designed to award "meaning" a higher station than number-crunching. For instance, let's suppose that there's a character who belongs to the Sect of the Naked Goddess. She's in Chicago, investigating the high-school and childhood years of the Naked Goddess. Of her own initiative, she gets drunk and throws up on the porch of an old, abandoned house. Later, she learns that the Goddess did the same thing when she was sixteen.

By the *rules*, she should now have some variety of mystic charge, because she recreated an action taken by the Goddess. However, it doesn't count because she did it ignorantly; it was not done ritually and therefore lacked the *meaning* required to build the charge. (This also doesn't spoil that particular ritual act for any other pornomancers.) Similarly, if a flesh mage hurts himself accidentally, he can't build a charge off it. It's not deliberate, it's just something that happened. That's why chaos mages don't get charges from fights that accomplish their tactical goals. The *point* of the risk wasn't to celebrate mystic chaos; the point was to hurt someone, and you don't get magick as a side effect. You can *never* get magick as a side effect of an everyday action.

This is also the purpose of the taboos. You're either a mundane or an adept; you don't get to go back and forth.



artwork by Rob Nemeth

When you decide to walk the path of mystic wisdom, you eschew all other paths, forever. That's why the followers of the Naked Goddess lose all their mystic power if they ever have sex just for fun, or even out of *love*. Those choices are forbidden to them; sex can only have one meaning for them, and it's communion with the Naked Goddess' transcended spirit.

All adepts are trapped in worlds of particular meanings; that's the price they pay for their power. If they retreat from that meaning, they lose their power (at least for a while). That's the price they pay for their freedom.

That's a lot of metaphysics, but the metaphysics underlie the mechanics. Don't let your adepts get away with paying lip service to their school of magick; you can't fool mystic power, even if you fool yourself. (If our hypothetical Naked Goddess adept performs an action she honestly *believes* hasn't been ritually recreated, she still doesn't get a Major Charge if someone beat her to it and she just doesn't know.)

Spells

Magick, more than any other skill, is versatile. You can create a large number of effects, many of which are left to the discretion and imagination of the player. However, it's up to *you*, the GM, to put limits on what a particular school of magick can do, and how much it costs.

Each school has a list of sample effects and their costs. If a PC tries something similar to one of these effects, it can probably be done. It may cost a little more than the "standard" version, but that's what you get for wanting it your way, right away.

However, players like to test their limits (and so do adepts), so eventually someone will try something quite different from what's described in the book. For instance, the Epideromancers deal primarily with the modification, repair, and destruction of human flesh. That's their path, their operational mindset. Now, suppose you've got a fleshwarper who borrowed his brother's BMW and, what with one thing and another, the fine leather upholstery got slashed up. The fleshwarper wants to fix the upholstery with magick. Can he do it?

On the one hand, it's flesh. On the other hand, what's the symbolic meaning of this action? Basically, he's just doing it so his brother won't get pissed. Personally, we wouldn't allow it; it's a questionable action in the first place, and since it puts magick in the service of the commonplace, we'd rebel.

Now, suppose our Epideromancer had instead found an old girlfriend of his, skinned by a fiendish sorcerer and kept alive (and tormented hideously) in a vat of alcohol. He cuts up the leather upholstery and decides to graft a new skin from it onto his poor girlfriend's body. Will this work? I'd make him pay with several significant charges at the very least, but he'd have a chance. This is what magick is *for;* transcending the limits of the merely possible. Also, since the power of the fleshwarpers is bound up with healing, improving, and modifying the human body, it applies much more to this situation. It's possible because it *fits*. In this example, a good die result may end up with the old girlfriend completely back to normal, or at least something closer to it than "skinned alive."

Naturally, a lot of this is personal, and that's as it should be. One GM may have a much different view of the Pornomancers than another, and their powers may increase (or more likely, just work differently) between their two campaigns. This is okay; in fact, it's a *good* thing, because it keeps magick fresh and unpredictable.

No one understands everything about magick; no one's even close. Real adepts just suck it up and accept that lots of unpredictable effects happen.

Tilts

Tilts are in the game to let players come out with the kind of *ad hoc,* freestyle symbolic magick seen in the novels of Tim Powers, among others. They are present to reward symbolic magickal thinking by the players. The more your players get into that mindset, the more the whole game makes sense to them.

That said, Tilts are probably not something you or your players want to fool with in every single session, at least not as described in the *Magick* chapter. There, Tilts are presented as time-consuming projects for everyone involved.

If you want to keep Tilts a rare and special thing in your campaign, use them that way. Make the players sweat to assemble a good selection of ritual elements. Introduce GMCs who can help them—by which we mean give them even more work to do. ("Of course I can give you the eye of a three-headed cat. I just need you to break into the Smithsonian and steal Mark Twain's watch fob for me, okay?") Then make the results worth the effort. Most likely, this means using Tilts in your campaign at the major power level. And don't keep it a secret! Tell them flat out: "In this campaign, we're using Tilts at the major power level." Your players' eyes should light up with glee, and they'll be flipping to the Tilt section of the rulebook in seconds. Just be a stickler for having them play out the process in detail and it should all work out fine. Investment equals reward.

You might have a different goal in mind, though. You might want your players to be popping Tilts like candy, using freestyle symbolic magick all over the place. Sure thing. For this approach, you probably want to keep the power levels at minor. You can also abstract the element-gathering process. Instead of requiring the players to figure out all the elements they need, just resolve it with a die roll. Use the informed-consent and target-presence/participation elements as written, but for the general symbolic elements just call for two major checks: Mind and Soul. Each one contributes 10% if successful, 20% on a successful match, 0% if failed, and -20% on a failed match. If either roll is a crit, the total is automatically the 40% maximum; if either roll is a fumble, the entire Tilt is blown. When this is done, require an hour for each 10% of *total* Tilt chance the players assembled; that's how long it takes to put the elements together. Then make the roll. Each subsequent attempt to do the same Tilt on the same target has a cumulative –10% chance to success, since it gets harder to find new symbolic elements each time.

The fast-and-dirty approach is a bit of a dodge since it eliminates player creativity—they just make a roll and assume the elements came together instead of actually coming up with a list. But if it means you get more free-wheeling magick in your campaign, maybe it's a good thing for your group.

Perhaps the ideal solution is to use both approaches. If they want major-level effects, require the detailed method. If they're okay with minor-level effects, use the fast method. Give the power to the players and they may respond with what makes for the best gaming session.

RITUAL INGREDIENTS

Rituals and other magickal workings often require strange, symbolic ingredients. The next time you need to spout off a handful of such items in the middle of a game, pick a few off this list. Check off the ones you use.

- ❑ 333 raindrops from the same cloud.
- ❑ Brain tissue gathered from mutilated cattle.
- ❑ A speck of dirt from a fingernail of a forensic cop.
- ❑ Axel grease collected from a crashed getaway car.
- ❑ Three teeth from a man with an incurable illness.
- ❑ A fresh human trachea.
- ❑ An unopened letter from a condemned convict to a lover.
- ❑ A religious text with all pages with the number "8" torn out and replaced upside down.
- ❑ A floppy disk filled with spam email.
- ❑ A magazine with all the openings in letters filled in.
- ❑ The phone numbers of five members of the opposite sex, unasked for and freely given.
- ❑ The recording of a baby's first cry.
- ❑ The typewriter ribbon used to type an author's acknowledged masterpiece (getting rarer these days).
- ❑ The canine teeth of a predator (even a human one) that has tasted human flesh.
- ❑ A mirror that has reflected one birth, one wedding, and one death.
- ❑ A copy of the Torah, translated directly from Hebrew into Klingon.
- ❑ A favorite toy.
- ❑ A lock of hair from a red-headed lover.
- ❑ A book you've never read.
- ❑ A sealed bottle of Coca Cola, produced in 1963 by the bottling plant in Carepa, Cuba.
- ❑ The unidentifiable scraps of paper and old business cards that have accumulated at the bottom of a handbag or wallet after ten years of use.
- ❑ The dust from your shoes mixed in a bottle with soda and sherbet and gasoline.
- ❑ One of your own finger bones.
- ❑ The red and blue lights of a police car.
- ❑ A small object that has stopped a bullet by chance.
- ❑ Pencil shavings from a number two pencil wet with the tears of a prom queen.
- ❑ A handful of chicken beaks, trimmed on their edges with pinking shears.
- ❑ The first flatulence of a firstborn son, sealed with wax in a glass vial.
- ❑ An out-of-service phone number written in black ink on a white goose feather.
- ❑ A straight yew twig completely wrapped in blue thread and dipped in honey.
- ❑ A wrist strap from an electrical chair.
- ❑ A necklace made of bottlecaps and barbed wire.
- ❑ Leggs® brand pantyhose stolen from a thrift store.
- ❑ The meconium from a baby conceived on Easter.
- ❑ Water from the Antarctic ice cap.
- ❑ A gold ring, 18 karat, 1.142" in diameter, unadorned.
- ❑ False teeth from a nun.
- ❑ Ash from the last cigarette a man ever smoked before dying of cancer.
- ❑ Something beige.
- ❑ A stick of melted lipstick/lip balm.
- ❑ A scratched brass doorknob.
- ❑ A piece of red clothing made from synthetic fabric.
- ❑ Glass from a virgin mirror.
- ❑ Half a broken wishbone—the half that doesn't get a wish.
- ❑ $2.17 in pennies.
- ❑ A credit card wrapped in barbed wire.
- ❑ An umbrella soaked in cat urine.
- ❑ A picture of Betty Page in a cowboy hat.
- ❑ A page from a book printed in the 17th Century.
- ❑ Thirteen index cards, twelve of them bearing the autographs of dead authors.
- ❑ Three pewter jars filled with cinnamon, rose hips, and Pop Rocks.
- ❑ A newspaper page containing the names of three gods or demons.
- ❑ Five Chee-tos® dipped in blood.
- ❑ A romance novel with all the verbs blacked out.
- ❑ Acres and acres of burning tires.
- ❑ A crown of vibrators.
- ❑ Cornbread fritters shaped like shotgun shells, stuffed with rice and rock salt.
- ❑ A photograph, a videotape or some other medium that was supposed to have captured a singular event, but instead remains blank due to a moment of thoughtlessness.
- ❑ A masterwork signed by the creator's bitterest rival.
- ❑ A lotto ticket for a lottery not yet drawn.
- ❑ A straightjacket.
- ❑ Milk from a nursing cat.
- ❑ Thirteen newspaper corrections.
- ❑ Twenty-six pages torn out of phone books from twenty-six different cities, with no duplications of names on any two pages.
- ❑ A sheet of bubble wrap with the bubbles burst in a Fibonacci sequence starting from the upper left corner.
- ❑ A roll of unexposed 35mm film.
- ❑ Two pins from a school's announcement board.
- ❑ Lucky Strike® cigarette carton, refilled with American Spirit® packs and resealed.
- ❑ Digital wristwatch with a dial and hands painted on the face in blood.
- ❑ Staples, screws, or other metal fixtures recovered from a coffin used in a cremation.
- ❑ Cement scraped from a restored part of the Great Wall, no older than a year.
- ❑ Videotape of late-night television after regular programming ends.
- ❑ Newspaper articles about yourself.
- ❑ Snow fallen on the first of December.
- ❑ 42 dead wasps.
- ❑ Photographs of all the tombstones in one cemetery of people who died on one particular day.
- ❑ A credit card with an ace of spades painted on the top.
- ❑ A bottle of air from a foreign city's most famous landmark.
- ❑ Ink made from burnt khephrah beetle shells.
- ❑ A light coating of slightly-melted plastic action figures.
- ❑ Those Groucho glasses with the fake nose and mustache.

Running Madness

This is a sensitive topic. Mental illness is one of the most horrible things that can happen to a human being. It is either the result of an inborn chemical imbalance (in the case of illnesses like schizophrenia) or it's a response to unbearable mental stress (such as traumatic amnesia). In either case it's a betrayal from within; when you become mentally ill, you are quite literally "not yourself"—or at least, not the self you thought you were.

Focusing on this topic in a game played for fun opens us up to the charge that we're belittling or distorting the seriousness of mental illness. Nothing could be further from our intent. Rather, we consider madness important to the world of UA because it highlights the serious internal consequences of the actions taken by characters.

To put it in perspective: a character in the action film *True Lies* is not going to suffer mental trauma from seeing a lot of violence. A character in *Spellbound* is. They're both movies, and both aim to entertain; but you can entertain and be serious at the same time. We wouldn't have written this game if we didn't think the portrayal of insanity would be handled seriously.

When a character in a bad movie goes insane, it usually involves either scene-chewing melodrama or some fairly crude comedy. Reality is a bit more complex. Lots of disorders become apparent only in certain circumstances. (Phobias are a perfect example.) Just because a character has become "insane" doesn't mean that the player has to be limited to playing a caricature, that the character can no longer behave according to his or her own interests, or that the player is no longer in charge.

It's critical to discuss character insanity with the player. If there was a dictatorial chart the GM rolled on ("Too bad! Now you're a nymphomaniac!") insanity would remove layers of character, by denying choice to the player. Instead, because the player is involved, more characterization can be added—or revealed.

Mechanics

Even though madness is intended to be primarily a matter of character, it is still a mechanical system. (A few objective rules keep people honest.) Just as with combat, here's an outline so you can walk through stress checks the first few times.

I. The Situation Occurs

Each situation has a stress level and a type (rank-3 Violence for getting briefly tortured, rank-2 Helplessness for losing a job you love). Compare the level of the stress with how many hardened notches the character has in that stress.

- **A.** If the character has a number of hardened points equal to or greater than the level of the threat, nothing happens. (For instance, someone with four hardened points in Violence can get tortured briefly without risking their sanity. Someone with two hardened points in Helplessness can get fired without freaking out.)
- **B.** If the character has fewer hardened points than the level of the threat, she makes a Mind check.
  1. If the roll is under or equal to the character's Mind score, she gets a new hardened notch in that stress type, and has successfully confronted the stress.
  2. If the roll is over the character's Mind score, that character gets a new failed notch in that stress type, and must immediately decide to freeze, fight, or flee.
  3. If the roll is over the character's Mind score but the character has a paradigm skill protecting this madness meter, the player rolls against the paradigm skill and ignores the stress check if this roll succeeds, gaining neither a hardened nor failed notch.

Example of Madness

Samantha Nghilibosi has Mind 50. Samantha's had a sheltered life, so she has no hardened marks in Violence, and no failed marks either. One day, while she's checking out a parcel of property she's inherited, someone shoots at her through a window and hits her. This is a rank-3 Violence challenge. She rolls a 45—a success. She keeps her wits about her and crawls to cover. Her reward for staying cool is a hardened notch.

A few weeks later, after she's recovered somewhat from the gunshot, she's jumped by a man in a ski mask and a leather jacket as she's leaving the grocery store. He tries to cut her up with a knife. This is a rank-1 Violence challenge. Since she's already got one hardened mark in Violence, she doesn't have to roll; she can just dodge and try to get away, or do whatever else she wants.

Fleeing to her new home, she runs right into the clutches of the same guy who shot her before. He's broken into her house and is waiting for her. He ties her up and begins interrogating her about "the chamber of the undying." She truthfully tells him she knows nothing but he doesn't believe her, so he starts burning her hand with a hot light bulb. This torture is a rank-3 Violence challenge. Now, she's already successfully beaten one rank-3 Violence challenge, but she only has one hardened notch, so she *does* have to roll for this rank-3 Violence challenge. She rolls a 62 and fails, getting one failed notch. She can freeze, fight, or flee. Her player decides that she'd try to flee, and so Samantha begins desperately thrashing against her bonds and screaming that she doesn't know what he's talking about. She thrashes so violently that she hurts herself—and this convinces her captor that she's telling the truth. He shrugs and leaves her there. The GM then tells Samantha's player to roll against a rank-2 Helplessness challenge (for being tied up and left).

Using the Sleeping Tiger

The "sleeping tiger" concept explains why adepts and avatars have strong motives for keeping their "kewl majik powerz" under wraps. From a strict game design standpoint, it's there for a couple reasons. Primarily, it makes it easy to get into the setting. The world of UA looks just like the world we live in, at least on the surface. You can throw together a character who's a tough ex-con cabbie and you're good to go.

You could run a really fun alternate-history UA game where magick was revealed to the world some time during (say) World War I and where, by the year 2001, everybody was doing it. It would be sort of like the movie *Cast A Deadly Spell.* What a hoot. *But* . . . that wasn't the game we

wanted to write. We wanted to create a setting where secret magick was plausible and internally consistent without all kinds of lame dodges like, "Every time someone sees magick used, they automatically forget all about it!"

Furthermore, the charms of such a setting, while intriguing, are all on the surface. *Unknown Armies* lets you start at zero—at absolute ignorance—and dig through multiple layers of mystery until you learn the truth. (Or at least some truth.) This pleasure—of starting ignorant and ending up wise, powerful and with-it—is the second reason for the secret-history angle.

But some groups and some players just aren't going to be fazed by the idea of the sleeping tiger. There are some people whose character concepts aren't strong in the self-control area and who think it's pointless to arduously learn magick if you can't use it to rip the face off some punk who hassles you down at the strip mall.

This can actually be okay.

No GM-controlled character in *Unknown Armies* has revealed the truth of magick to the world—or at least, not successfully. (In the *One Shots* scenario "Fly to Heaven," a fellow named Simon DiUlio makes a good go at letting the cat out of the bag on national TV.) But the PCs are the stars of the show. If the GM can hack it, PCs who are bold enough to shout at the tiger can be a durable narrative concept. Your PCs could start out as magickal evangelists (like Naked Goddess cultists or members of Mak Attax), with "reveal the truth" as their primary goal. Or perhaps it just crops up in play that your characters are too goddamn showy for anyone's good.

What's going to happen? Oh, there's all sorts of things.

- The news media is on them like white on rice.
- Crackpot stalkers are on them like black on an ant.
- Mystics who *do* believe in the sleeping tiger are on them like porn on the internet.
- Anyone with any sort of interest in power and control (such as the FBI or the Defense Intelligence Agency) looks at them with an ardent mixture of alarm, longing, and greed.

That's without the immediate excitement of being torn apart by a rioting mob who failed their Unnatural checks. We get to that in the next section.

People who want to play a stock-standard UA game should probably keep their mojo hidden. But people who want to spill the beans can certainly have fun too, if the GM can keep up.

The Tiger Wakes

Unknown Armies makes the assumption that the power of genuine magick is a big secret known only to an elite few. There are several reasons a fact of this importance has remained secret for so long, including the following.

Rarity. Adepts are very, very uncommon, full stop. There are many more avatars running around, but only a fraction of them know their true nature, and only a fraction of a fraction have enough power to do things that are obviously "impossible" like fly or change gender or take years off your life.

Secrecy. When confronted with the unknown and uncanny, people tend to react with fear—fear and beatings. Simple evolutionary pressure has ensured that secretive magi tend to be the ones who survive to pass on their teachings.

Skepticism. In the last fifty years, television cameras have gone from being a novelty to being nearly omnipresent. In 1960, you could get your magick ya-yas out with little fear of being caught on some bank or convenience store security camera. This meant that in the past, people who claimed they'd seen weird stuff were usually dismissed as nuts. The momentum of that tendency remains, even in the 21st century. At least, it remains for now . . .

The Sleepers. No, they're not everywhere, and they're not nearly as powerful as some people think. On the other hand, the fact that many people who *can* do magick *do* think they're powerful does tend to produce a pronounced dampening effect.

Characters who are blatant with the use of obviously paranormal powers may get off the hook once or twice thanks to unreasonable skepticism. ("Sure, it *looks* like there's a flyin' severed head on the tape. But heck, I seen special effects better'n that on *Star Wars* fan films.") Repeated transgressions are likely to rouse the local occult underground against them—which is a short step from drawing the attention of the Sleepers.

More immediately, doing magick in front of people who aren't prepared to see it is an incredibly bad idea even if there aren't cameras around. In game terms, Joe Bourgeois and Jane Lumpenprole have no hardened marks on their Unnatural gauge. If they blow a stress check, look out. If a whole bunch of them blow stress checks, look *far* out. Sure, the press might dismiss the ruckus as "mass hysteria," but that won't cheer your sorcerer much if he's been beaten, tied up, and drowned in the nearest holy water font.

Riots

When an obviously paranormal event occurs with a hundred or more witnesses, there is a good chance that things go out of control. As a GM, here's how you can model that.

The Riot Roll

If a hundred people are gathered in close quarters and see an undeniably supernatural event or individual, there's a flat 50% chance that they riot. The GM simply rolls to see the effect. This is called the "riot roll."

Riot Roll Results

1–25: Things are eerily calm as most of the witnesses just stand staring, dumbstruck.

26–50: Any witness who doesn't have at least one Hard notch in the Unnatural gauge stampedes away from the scene at top speed. Add the dice rolled together: that's how many people get seriously hurt in the confusion. (See "Casualties," nearby.)

51+: Hope your health insurance is paid up. See "Riot Severity" on the next page.

Riot Roll Modifiers

That's assuming a fairly static set of circumstances, of course. There are many, *many* factors that can adjust those odds one way or the other. What follows is just a list of

basics; other factors can adjust the roll up or down as the GM sees fit. For each of the factors that applies, the GM adds or subtracts from the riot roll.

The crowd's been drinking a lot: Add or subtract 10–20, depending on the type of display.

It's a big crowd: Add 10 for every additional fifty people above a hundred.

It's a hostile crowd: Add 10–30, depending. 10 for a crowd that didn't like the speech the adept was making before he demonstrated his powers. 30 for a bunch of Pentecostal Christians who think the End Is Nigh.

It's close quarters: If the crowd is jammed together, they're more likely to panic. Add 10.

The unnatural effect hurt someone: Add 30.

The unnatural effect hurt someone, and it was a child: Add 50.

The crowd is exhausted: Subtract 10.

It's a receptive crowd: Subtract 10. A fast-thinking character with a bull horn who makes a speech pleading for understanding (or better yet, offering a faintly plausible explanation) could reduce the roll by 10 with a success, by 15 with a matched success, and by 20 with a critical success.

The unnatural effect was beautiful: Subtract 10.

The unnatural effect was beneficial to someone: Subtract 10.

Riot Casualties

Any time you get mob rule, people get hurt and/or killed. When you combine those categories together, you get the number of "casualties." The difference between dying in the riots and simply being badly hurt depends (as do so many things) on how developed your area is. If you're rioting in an industrialized nation with a good health care infrastructure (Canada, for instance) one casualty in fifty dies. In a less developed nation, the odds get much worse. In a riot in Haiti, say, one person in ten does not survive. In a desperately poor developing nation, or an area that's war-torn, the proportion could be as high as one in two.

Riot Severity

If an actual no-shit riot result comes up (51+ on the riot roll), the GM needs to gauge how bad it is. This isn't too hard: it's all based on the roll.

The result of the modified riot roll indicates how many people in the crowd are *seriously* freaked out by what's happening. The others in the crowd are disturbed and upset, to be sure, but the riot roll basically shows how many have blown a stress check. That's the hard core who are incapable of rational thought. They're screaming. They're pushing. They're grabbing rocks and smashing windows. What they are not doing is listening to rational persuasion. Nor are they letting anyone else listen. Someone with a bullhorn or a really epic set of pipes might be able to communicate two syllables ("Get him!" or "That way!" or the like) to the crowd, but no Demagogue channels or Charm rolls are going to do jack. If they didn't stop the initial riot roll, they aren't going to work now.

About a quarter of these hard core rioters become casualties, as described earlier. Property damage varies widely, depending on how nice the area where the riot occurs, but $100,000 for each point in the modified roll is a good start. For each million dollars of damage, a building gets reduced to rubble and ash.

Any major character (PC or GMC) in the crowd takes damage equal to the sum of the modified riot roll. (That is, if it all added up to a 71, the character takes 8 points of damage.) This is usually in the form of bruises, scratches, and knocks on the head. This damage is taken every fifteen minutes for the first hour that the character is in the mob. After that, the crowd has dispersed enough that less damage is being done to unintended targets.

Players should, of course, be describing how their characters are dealing with this abuse. Players who think of inventive strategies, or characters who behave in a rational and plausible fashion, can get out quicker than those who just duck and cover. Dodge rolls can be made for characters who are only protecting themselves. Just dodging automatically halves this random damage, while successful Dodge rolls reduce it to 1-2 points.

Anyone who is identified in the mob mind as being "one of them"—someone associated with or responsible for the paranormal event—takes damage equal to the modified roll every ten minutes. In the above example, that would be 71 points. (What will your next character be like? More subtle, perhaps?) This damage can be reduced with the Dodge skill: a successful roll halves the damage, but there's no way to avoid it entirely.

(Incidentally, it's perfectly possible to get tarred with the "one of them" brush even if you were trying to *stop* the manifestation. Remember, a mob is *at least* as stupid as the dumbest person in it.)

Determining how long a riot lasts depends (surprise, surprise) on the riot roll. It lasts at least a number of minutes equal to the modified roll. However, riots tend to develop a life of their own: at the end of the time span, the GM rolls again, this time without any modifiers. If the number rolled is half the previous riot roll or less, the riot continues, with this second roll as the new riot roll. This is bad because it means that people are still getting hurt and there's still civil disorder, but it does mean that riots wind down eventually.

A Real-Life Example

There's no good way to know how many people actually saw the Rodney King verdict live on TV in 1992 Los Angeles. (Well, the local stations may have the figures, if they weren't lost in the riots or the subsequent earthquakes, fires, and mudslides.) Even if we had the figures, there's no way to tell how many of the viewers were pissed off enough to actually start smashing things. However, we do know that about five thousand people were arrested, and that the riot lasted six days. Assuming the '92 LAPD was efficient at throwing black people in jail (certainly they were enthusiastic), it looks like a hypothetical modified riot roll result for the L.A. riots would be something around the 8,700 mark. Doing the math backwards—assuming a base crowd of 100 and +10 to the roll for every fifty additional members—would indicate that about 43–44,000 angry inner-city residents were eagerly waiting to see what the jury would say.

The lesson in this for adepts is obvious. Don't strut your stuff in front of an audience of 44,000.

A Hypothetical UA Example

Let's suppose the group 101001101 (see *Postmodern Magick*, p. 152) decides to go for broke by holding a very large rave. They invite a hundred sophisticates, knowing that for each of their chosen artiste-types, another five loose enders will show up looking for drugs, good dancing, a quickie, or a night on the town. That makes for a crowd of about 600 people, 500 of whom aren't prepared for a genuine magickal onslaught.

The leaders of 101001101 aren't fools, so they wait until the crowd has thinned out a bit before unveiling the *real* deal. We'll say those 500 psychic virgins have dwindled to 350. It's late, so the potential rioters are exhausted. They're also receptive to what's going to happen, both because of the warm-up stuff and because their brains have been getting heavy-bag work from booze and dope all night. Finally, the climactic display is a thing of beauty, rather than a thing of terror. Adding it up, you get a balance.

Pro-Riot Factors	Anti-Riot Factors
Big crowd	They're exhausted -10
([100 base +250] +50)	They're drunk -20
	They're receptive -10
	It's a beautiful display -10

Thus, the GM rolls and gets a 46, which isn't modified. The club kids freak out and stampede for the exits. Ten of them (4+6) are badly injured in the process, but none of the leaders of the group get hurt. Neither do any invited guests who keep their wits about them. However, 101001101 may want to consider keeping their fetes a little more contained. If they can reduce the number of mystically ignorant scenesters from 350 to 200, they get a -30 modifier on the riot roll—in this case, that 46 would have been a 16, the kids would have just stared awestruck, and the next day they'd marvel at how great the Ecstasy was last night.

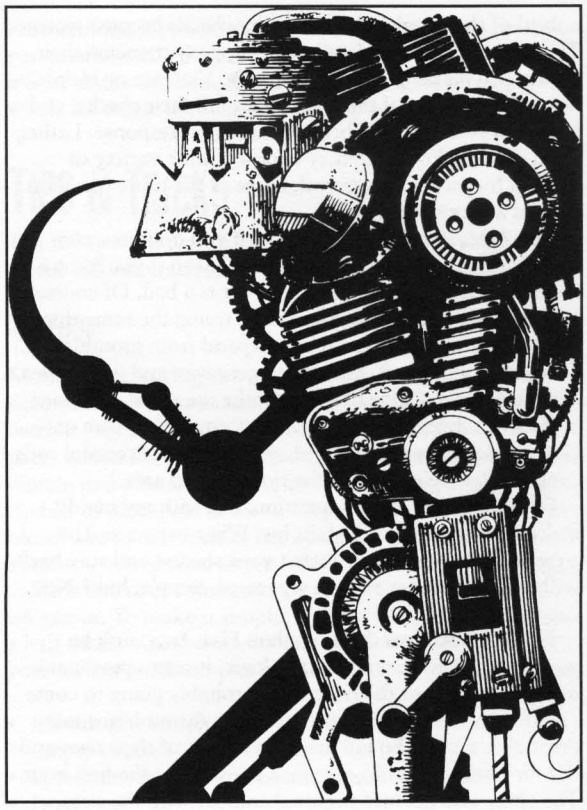
Another Hypothetical UA Example

Let's suppose a duke takes a cue from Simon Diulio (see *One Shots*, "Fly to Heaven") and performs some kind of child-murdering public ritual. By whatever means, he gets into the middle of a stadium before a college football game with his victim and his cult of twenty followers. Before he can be stopped, he performs the sacrifice and blows a couple major charges, causing a fifty-foot tall oak tree to spring into being from the dead child's body.

This, then, is undeniable proof that magick is real, performed in front of a crowd of two thousand witnesses.

Pro-Riot Factors	Anti-Riot Factors
Big crowd	Surely you jest.
([100 base +1900] +380)	
They're hostile +10	
Bastard hurt a child +50	

The GM rolls a nice low 09, but it doesn't matter because the riot number is modified by 440, giving us a Roaring Tiger of a 449 result. The duke and his cult don't have a freakin' prayer unless they can get out of there before the crowd converges on them from all sides. Furthermore, PCs



in the crowd are going to take 17 points of damage from being mauled around (4+4+9) four times in the first hour. Around a hundred and ten people are badly hurt in the rioting, two of whom die—probably trampled or mis-identified as cultists. The riot lasts for at least seven hours as the maddened fans burn the tree, wreck the stadium, fight the police, or storm out looking for more cultists. In this time, they do $44,900,000 worth of damage to area homes, businesses, public areas, and private property. Forty-four buildings are completely destroyed.

At the end of that time, the riot is automatically going to continue because the GM is definitely going to roll under 224 (half the old riot number). This time the GM rolls an 88, meaning that 88 people are either still seriously bugshit, or have been swept up into the mass hysteria. That core keeps the general disorder going. PCs who haven't gotten out in the last seven hours are going to take 16 points of damage (at this point probably courtesy of smoke inhalation or rubber bullets from the National Guard). Cultists who weren't present for the initial butchery, but who have been found in the meantime, are going to take 88 points of mob justice damage every ten minutes until they're safely torn limb from limb. The riot's lifespan extends for another hour and a half, doing an additional $8,800,000 worth of damage as the fires spread to eight more buildings. The GM rolls again and this time gets a 56—higher than 44 (again, half the old riot number) and enough to restore civil order.

What Would You Do?

Riots are seriously scary. Panicked hysteria tends to be highly contagious. (To explain it through game terms, about

a third of the people who fail sanity checks become violent. This causes other people witnessing or experiencing their violence to make sanity checks on the Violence or Helplessness meters. Some of these witnesses fail their checks, and a third of *those* failures become violent in response. Lather, rinse, repeat.) Your PCs may choose a wide variety of options for escape or survival. Some of the more common choices are examined here.

Run Away. This is pretty smart, if you do it in a controlled fashion instead of a stampede. Even if you blow a Sanity check and flee in panic, it's not *too* bad. Of course, a lot of other people are going to be trying the same thing. (This is one reason riots rapidly expand from ground zero.) Characters who are just trying to get away and who haven't been fingered as "One of Them" take the normal damage as they run. Every ten minutes they can make a Run or General Athletics roll. Once they've got five successful rolls completed, they're outside the riot-stricken area.

Of course, this raises a question: I'm with my buddy, I make my Run roll but he fails his. What happens? The answer is, you can either forfeit your success and stay back with him, or keep it and get separated. Simple, huh? Not easy, but simple.

Go With the Flow. Forty million Elvis fans can't be wrong, right? By extending that logic, it seems reasonable to say that most of the rioters are probably going to come out all right. Those who just give in to the mob mentality (including those who fail madness checks of their own and opt for frenzy) take the standard damage for the first hour. They may also get into personal combat with the cops, when they show up. Run that as a normal combat.

Turtle. The dumbest thing you can do is to cover your head and curl up on the ground. That's a recipe for getting trampled to death. However, if you can find a hiding place, you might be able to ride out the worst of it. It all depends on how secure your bolt-hole is. Remember that riots produce tremendous amounts of property damage. That nice secure broom closet isn't going to protect you much if the building gets burned down.

Kick Some Ass. Hey, it's anarchy, why not just start beating on people? Characters who do this do not take the normal damage. Instead, they enter into combat with the crowd itself. This starts out as a one-on-one fight with some average rioting Joe—assume Body 40, Initiative 20%, Struggle 15%, Throw 15%, armed with a 2x4 or a piece of rubble. Once Joe has taken 20 points of damage, he's out of it—either running away or trampled underfoot. However, two other guys have seen their friend Joe getting hurt and have decided to thrash the PC for it. If the PCs whoops ass on these two (and they have the same stats and skills as Joe, also running away after 20 points of damage), three more show up to settle his hash. This progression continues until (1) the PC quits fighting and does something else or (2) the PC has personally knocked down a number of average guys equal to the riot number. When that happens, the riot starts to wind down.

Use Magick to Save Myself. Smooth move if it works. But if it's something obvious, the crowd is going to peg the adept character as "One of Them" and the serious abuse begins.

Zoloft For Everyone

Being in a riot causes rank-4 stress checks in both Violence and Helplessness every hour. Of course, there's also the initial Unnatural stress check caused by witnessing whatever it was that woke the tiger in the first place.

Impairment

For reasons of character (or lack thereof) you may choose to have your PC partake in various mind-altering substances—or someone may dose him up without your knowledge. There are a bewildering variety to choose from, all with various effects both physical and psychological. A brief categorical overview is all we can do here; individual GMs have authority to use, modify, or ignore these rules as they see fit. (After all, street drugs are notoriously impure. You never know if that LSD you just bought might have been bonded to the paper with strychnine, or if your cocaine got diluted with insecticide or drain cleaner to up the profit margin.)

Alcohol

The average person can drink one beer, one shot, or one glass of wine without feeling it. After that, each drink gives a five-point penalty to all Mind, Body, and Speed-based skills, and such Soul-based skills as the GM feels would be impaired by slurred speech and lowered inhibitions. (Sing The Blues is probably "booze safe" up to the point that you pass out. A skill like Ballet or Obtain Bank Loans is certain to be affected.)

This penalty drops by five points for every hour you spend without a drink. However, taking one drink an hour still increases your penalty. There's no way to keep it stable; you're either sobering up or getting drunker.

Example: Dirk Allen is getting wasted in preparation for a magickal showdown. He's slammed back six shots of schnapps and is taking a 25-point penalty on every skill. (The first drink's free, remember?) Unfortunately, he drops his bottle and has to stagger out into the street in search of more liquor. What with one thing and another it's almost an hour before he can find an open convenience store that stocks his favorite fruit-flavored malt liquor. He chugs the whole bottle and goes to a 30-point penalty, even though he only had one beer that hour. If he hadn't gotten that beer, he would have dropped to a 20-point penalty.

A 10-point penalty is enough to get most people arrested for drunk driving. (If your character is exceptionally large, your Blood Alcohol Level may not reach illegal levels until 15%.) When you've reached a 50-point penalty or higher, make a check against your Body stat (ignoring the penalty) every hour of game time; if you fail, you pass out. If you manage to get a 60-point penalty going, you enter a blackout and can no longer remember your actions until you sober up.

Once you hit a 100-point penalty, roll Body again (also ignoring the penalty). If you fail this roll, you've got alcohol poisoning—you immediately throw up, pass out, and take damage equal to the sum of the dice you just rolled. Furthermore, if you don't get your stomach pumped soon, you take another single die of damage every hour until you wake up.

Uppers

This category includes everything that pumps you up and makes you more alert and on the ball — or at least, makes

you *think* you're more on the ball. Caffeine and nicotine are mild uppers (but your characters probably won't get dosed with enough of them to merit rules changes; just act more peppy). Cocaine and crystal meth are examples of more serious uppers.

Physically, these make you twitchy and jumpy. You have a sense of increased physical and mental acuity, but it's illusory. If you're attempting any task that requires subtlety (like sneaking around or hiding) or sustained concentration (like reading a book in a foreign language) the relevant skill takes a –20% penalty.

Emotionally, stimulants are characterized by violent mood swings—often between megalomaniac self-confidence and crippling paranoia. If you have to make a stress check based on Helplessness or Self, give yourself a temporary +10% shift to your Mind score. However, if you have to make a stress check based on The Unnatural or Isolation, give yourself a temporary -20% shift.

Downers

These are chemicals that make you calm, sleepy, and relaxed. The most popular by far is booze. Being legal, widely available, and *so* popular, booze gets its own rules of impairment, as described earlier.

Other widely known downers include prescription tranquilizers (Valium being the drug of choice for the brand-name conscious) and heroin—the latter being the strongest downer you can buy without a prescription.

Heroin (or synthetic equivalents like dilaudid, which comes in a handy pill form) and large doses of other tranqs produce a truly stupendous lethargy. For game purposes, if you're under the influence of these drugs, you can't use your Passions ('cause it just doesn't matter), and no matter what you roll for initiative, it's a failure. (This includes using your Initiative skill.) All Mind skills take a –20% penalty. However, you do get a +10% shift on all Mind checks against going insane since, frankly, you won't be noticing things nearly as acutely.

Psychedelics

These are drugs that don't necessarily effect your energy level; they just warp your perceptions and blur the line between internal judgments and external data. To put it another way, drugs like LSD and psyllocybin may well allow you to pop the hood on your mind and start tinkering. Unfortunately, almost no lay person has the skill to do this in a useful fashion. (Imagine an untrained guy opening his car hood and banging away at random with a hammer.) Luckily, the human brain is a lot more versatile and resilient than an engine. Lots of people take LSD without developing symptoms worse than the occasional flashback, freakout, or phony epiphany.

However, the difference between a good trip and a bad trip often depends on the input that wanders across your field of perception while you're tripping. Physically, there's no firm guideline for skill penalties; GMs may wish to assign them at random.

Emotionally, taking psychedelics is like a double-or-nothing gamble. If you have to make a stress check due to Isolation, Self, or the Unnatural, give yourself a temporary +10% shift to your Mind score. Take a -10% shift if you have to make a check against Violence or Helplessness. Furthermore, if you do fail a madness check while on LSD, you take *two* failed marks instead of just one. (As nasty as it is to watch someone flop around with a slit throat, it's a whole lot worse if you add a bad trip on top.)

Tips & Tricks

The following is a grab bag of things that GMs should find useful and inspirational in play.

Motifs

Motifs are recurring elements in a creative work. A house decorated in a Roman motif might have columns, lots of marble, reproductions of Roman statues, and so forth. A party with a Hawaiian motif might have bamboo torches, illuminated plastic tiki gods, and lots of fruity drinks with chunks of pineapple in them. Movies in the *film noir* genre often have motifs such as high-contrast lighting, looming shadows, rain-slicked streets, men in overcoats, and guns.

We'd like to encourage you to try using motifs in your UA games. To make it simple, try this: write down a list of a half-dozen visual elements that you'll try to have recur in your campaign. Examples might be:

- Abandoned buildings.
- Empty streets.
- Subterranean locales (basements, sewers, caves).
- Dogs.
- Ringing telephones.
- Bright, sunshine-filled days.
- Computers.
- Large trucks or vans.
- Delivery people.
- Libraries and bookcases.
- Pornography.
- Bad teeth.
- Mysterious packages.
- Cops.
- Junky old cars.
- Mistaken identity.
- Foreign languages.
- Public transport.
- Really good food in dive restaurants.
- Blurry photographs.
- Playing cards.
- Sports fans.
- Blank-faced children.
- Broken glass.

Your motifs should have some sort of connection to the major and minor themes you've chosen for your campaign (as described on p. 267). Ideally, you should assign each motif to a given theme. Then when one of your themes is coming into play, link it or cue it with an appropriate motif. Don't overdo it—these should be subtle. But they should also serve to plant clues in your players' subconscious minds. When you're watching a *film noir,* you get tense when a looming shadow appears across the heroine's face. Your players should likewise have involuntary reactions to the appearance of one of your motifs. It's a form of subtle mental manipulation that can bear tremendous fruit, since it helps to foster appropriate mental states in your

players as you play without them knowing what you're doing.

If at some point your players begin to recognize some of your motifs, that's okay. Maybe a dog appears in some fashion every time a combat with a certain villain is coming up; at some point when you mention a dog barking in the distance, your players will tense up, look at each other, and know what's about to happen—and be scared witless as a result. That's great!

Sweat the Details

Psychology teaches us that if a baby is bottle-fed instead of breast-fed, he may grow up to be an emotionally stunted neurotic. From this we learn that apparently little decisions can have big repercussions. It's important to take care of details—but it's equally important to *prioritize* your details.

We're going to place ourselves squarely in the left wing of game design with this next statement: *rules aren't as important as description.* This ain't chess; you don't have to worry about Bobby Fischer kicking you under the table if you make a tiny error in working the mechanics. In fact, no one is likely to even notice.

So instead of making sure you're running a player's armor-piercing, laser-sighted .347 magnum in a strictly rules-kosher fashion, you should concern yourself with little details of description. For example:

GM #1: "There's a cop at the scene, looking down at Mary's body. She's been strangled. The cop tells you there's no signs of forced entry, so the murderer may be someone she knew."

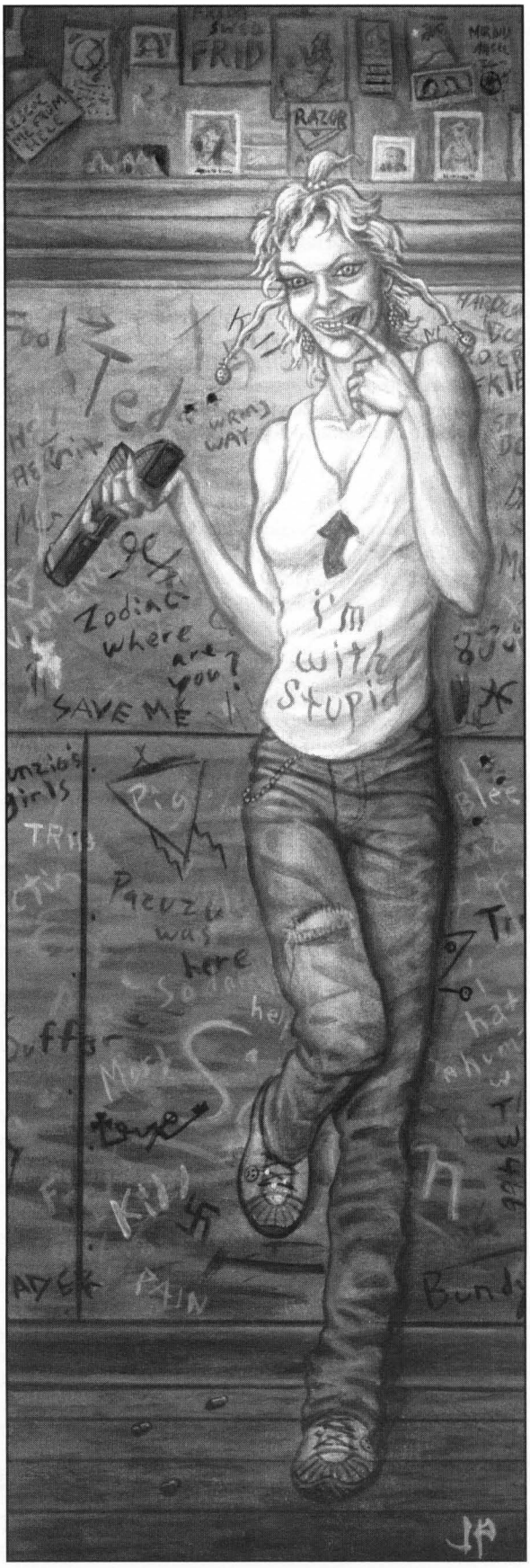
GM #2: "The first thing you see is Mary. She's sprawled on the floor, arms and legs splayed out in all directions. Her eyes are open, rolled back and staring at the ceiling. Her lips are blue and there's a long purple line of bruise encircling her neck. As you watch, a housefly lands on her opened eyeball, and then a large hand waves it away. The hand belongs to a big beefy man with a ruddy complexion. He's squatting over her, looking closely at the body with a grim expression. He finally glances up at you. 'Inspector Murtagh,' he says. 'You the next of kin?'"

GM #1 is certainly more efficient, but at the cost of a great deal of drama. He's given a generic sketch of a scene. The second GM has given a *specific* scene; the details (the housefly, the line of bruise, the policeman's name) all act like bolts to secure the scene in the player's mind.

An axiom of fiction writing is "show, don't tell." The second GM doesn't have to say Mary's dead; no one alive is going to lie there while a fly crawls on her eyeball. A perceptive player can learn a lot from the details: she wasn't tied up, so she probably fought. She was killed with a cord, not bare hands—so the killer probably knew what he (or she, or it) was doing.

Attention to detail saves you a lot of frustration in the long run. In the first place, it makes a better story, so your players are more engaged and need less plot prodding to get involved. Secondly, your players take their cues from you. If you present a detailed world, they respond with detailed actions and characterization. If you gloss, they gloss—which means when they get stuck, they expect you to lead them by the hand. A detailed setting encourages them to get deeply involved, meaning they become proactive instead of reactive.

The final bonus of detail is that it gives you control



artwork by Jim Pavelec

over pacing—which is critical, as we've said. If you look at "Managing the Flow," back on p. 279, you'll see that your level of detail is crucial for establishing the mood and pace of the scene. If you never use detail, you'll have trouble with your pacing and your players will have trouble knowing how to react.

Daily Life

The idea of injecting healthy doses of daily life into a game of the fantastic and bizarre may seem a bit counterproductive at first. Daily life? Don't we get enough of that when we're *not* playing the game?

Not necessarily. Half the pleasure of a roleplaying game is identifying with a character different than yourself. The conventions of the setting (big guns, bad mojo) provide the difference and exoticism; but it's the little weights of daily life that make us identify with the character. Sure, your character may have spent the night running through a hotel shooting at the fleeing back of a mob-connected supernatural hit squad. But when your character gets home, the dishes in the sink are still dirty and the dog is whining to be walked.

This doesn't mean that you should spend your roleplaying time pretending to wash dishes and shop for groceries. But neither does it mean that your characters should be dissociated cutouts who never get headaches or broken shoelaces.

Let's take a look at the TV series *The X-Files*. It's a show with paranormal elements raining from the sky; that's what grabs the viewer's attention. But what *keeps* your attention is the little details of character: Scully's unfortunate dog, Mulder's porn habit, their interactions with their families. They don't exist in a vacuum populated only with aliens and white-trash warlocks; they have normal lives as well. The extent to which they have something of an *abnormal* life compared to the rest of us, even apart from their paranormal exploits, tells us a lot about the characters.

Keep some elements in your story that are decidedly normal. The surly doorman at their building who's always reading Rush Limbaugh and looking for an argument; the guy in the next office who always wants to go out and get coffee; the next-door neighbor with the yappy dog and the Gloria Gaynor records. All are good, normal elements.

It's even better if your characters have families. Imagine a PC getting home, singed and smirched from a close call with a car bomb, only to have his lonesome dad call him up from the nursing home, wanting to chat. Or even better—a spouse. Is your character going to tell her husband about the paranormal, and risk getting institutionalized or divorced if he doesn't believe? Or are you going to keep it a secret, with the resultant strains on a relationship? (To quote Roberta Gregory: "My husband thinks I'm having an affair. He'd *shit* if he found out what I'm *really* doing.")

We won't even get *into* the problems with kids. ("I can't help you track down the headless accountant—I've got a parent-teacher conference tonight!")

It might seem that all these sticky personal associations would be a drag to fun-loving, free-firing PC types. On the surface this is so, and a lot of players opt for the lone-wolf type at first. But the payoff from being attached to these daily life types is that they're attached to you, too. They can offer support (both material and emotional). More than that, they add another dimension to the character. A lone-wolf character may mouth platitudes about Defending the Ignorant Masses from Magickal Mayhem—but a guy with a wife, a kid, and a mortgage *knows* what he's fighting for.

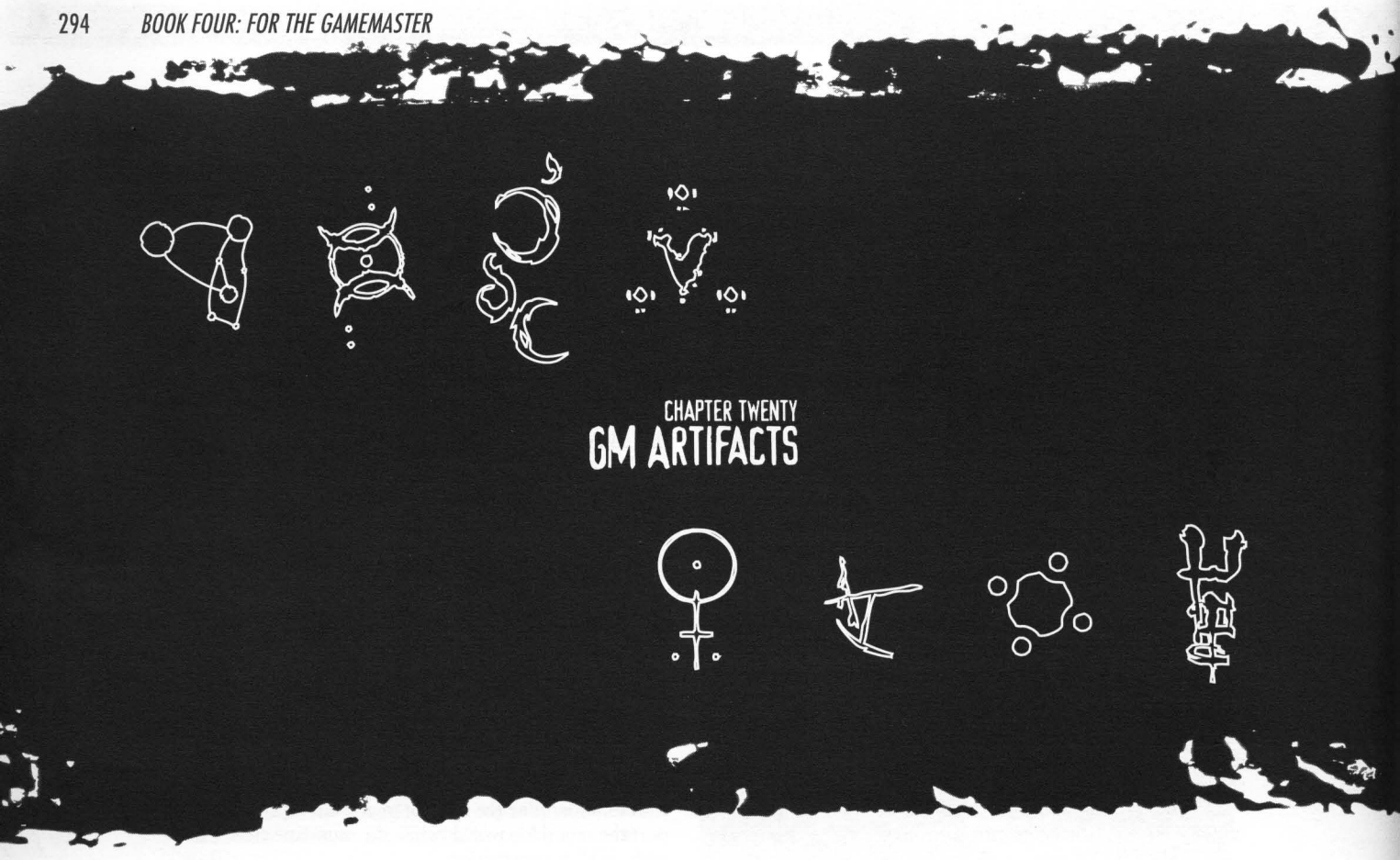
The Fantastic/The Mundane

This brings us to the last tip for running UA: handling the fantastic, the mundane, and the blurry line between them.

In the beginning, it's good to keep the two elements separated. By doing this, you heighten the sense of crossing into a forbidden world, while holding out the illusion that they can step back into the mundane, safe world of VH-1 and TGI Friday's at any moment. At this first stage, the mundane and the fantastic are cast as contraries. Magick tries to undermine the rules of logic and sanity which support the mundane world, while the mundane strikes back with ruthless suppression.

As the campaign ages, you may want to blur these lines. Now the players start to get paranoid; can it be that *everything* is magickal, and they were always too dumb to see it? They should start to feel like they're getting sucked in. Once they could retreat to their comfortable mundane lives, but now the supernatural has seeped in, like a chill draft through cheap weather stripping. It's all around them; they have been subsumed into the occult underground. Now the mundane and the magickal are no longer contraries. They're just the acknowledged and ignored aspects of the same thing.

There's no way to go back once that step has been taken (except maybe with megadoses of psychotropics, or similarly abusing treatments with Edison's Medicine). Perhaps it's possible to come through to the other side with an enlightened view. Perhaps the magickal and the mundane are separate and they struggle, but their struggle is a dynamic harmony that motivates the universe. Or perhaps this is just another delusion.



CHAPTER TWENTY

GM ARTIFACTS

Significant Artifacts

Hand of Glory

Power: Significant
Effect: Everyone in direct sight (except for the user) of a lit and burning Hand of Glory is lulled into a passive trance. Adepts subjected to a Hand's power get one chance to roll their Magick skill or lower to break free of the spell; everyone else succumbs automatically. They are unable to voluntarily move, speak, or even think, though they can slowly be led about or pushed around. This lasts as long as the Hand stays lit, and it stops if the beguiled viewer is physically injured. A given Hand is good for about 15–20 minutes total. After the effect ends, any person so enchanted by the Hand has no recollection of the event. Furthermore, the Hand of Glory is only effective inside a building: its powers are useless beneath the open sky.
Description: A Hand of Glory can only be made from the severed left hand of a hanged criminal. While the construction of this gruesome artifact is a closely guarded secret, it is known that the "recipe" also includes the following ingredients: nitre, salt, long peppers, fern, vervain, virgin wax, sesame, horse dung, and a mysterious powder called "zimat." (The dubious completeness of this list is the topic of hot debate.) These ingredients are combined into a hand-shaped candle of gruesome aspect, with a wick protruding from each finger. A brand-new Hand of Glory is good for about fifteen to twenty total minutes of use.

Creating a Hand of Glory is a ritual, meaning you have to find out *how* to make one before you can construct it—but it can be performed by anyone. In addition to the ingredients listed above (and any others the GM feels are appropriate) the spell requires five uninterrupted hours of attention and four significant charges.

The Jesus Fishes

Power: Significant
Effect: A magickal Jesus Fish sticker protects the car to which it is attached. Anyone driving a car with a Jesus Fish on the back bumper (and it has to be on back, for some reason) gains a +20% to her Driving skill when trying to avoid a danger created by someone else. It won't help you jump the Snake River gorge, but if you're trying to stay on the road after some doofus sideswipes you with his RV, its power can help out quite a bit.

The first occultist to recognize a magick Jesus Fish thought it was a short duration talisman because it quit working after about a week. However, in the intervening decades it's been discovered that they can be recharged if the car is left in any Christian church parking lot for the duration of an entire service. The driver doesn't have to be in the service, or in the car. You can park your Jesus Fished car, go get some donuts, or fornicate, or knock over a liquor store—whatever. As long as the car was there for the whole ceremony, it's charged up for the next week and protects you from bad drivers.
Description: You know what a Jesus Fish looks like, right? The non-magickal kind, anyhow. They're everywhere, at least in the United States. They're small fish decals, usually

chrome, that make a simple fish shape out of two crescents. Some Christians like to put them on their cars, to declare their affiliation—sort of like religious gang tags. Sometimes the word "Jesus" is contained within, sometimes not. Certain smartasses have adopted the design to add legs, often with the word "Darwin" spelled out on it.

No one's quite sure what adept started enchanting them, or what his bag is, but at least three magickal decals have been identified for sure. They've been around since at least 1970. Theoretically, there could be thousands of them out there, unidentified, on the cars of unsuspecting Christians.

(In fact, in one drunken stupor, Dirk Allen babbled something about "the miracle of the loaves and fishes, updated for the age of the minivan!" He seemed to think that the power of an activated Jesus Fish talisman could, under the right circumstances, spread like a virus to other, non-magickal Jesus Fishes. But then he switched to babbling about Jennifer Lopez and the mystic significance of "P. Diddy's" name change, comparing it to that notorious cocksman from the 1980s, The Artist Formerly Known As Prince. Then he sang "When Doves Cry." When he woke up, he didn't remember any of it.)

Ever since a reliable correspondent posted a description of a Jesus Fish on the Mak Attax mailing list, they've become highly sought in both the Adept and Avatar scenes. (The possibilities for counterfeiting have marginally enriched a few dishonest mystical con artists.) Dipsomancers want them to protect them while they drive drunk and Entropomancers want them to improve their odds during stupid driving tricks. (Of course, the Jesus Fish would offer no protection to an Entropomancer who was charging up, and it's debatable whether a drunk driver would be defended from the consequences of what are, after all, his own bad decisions. But people are generally pretty hazy on how the thing works.)

The Mak Attax thread about Jesus Fishes went on for quite a while, then died down when the British Enigma machine got stolen. There was one more post about it—a rather odd one. It came from "pinkumbrella@hotmail.com," someone who had never posted before and who has never posted since. It claimed that there were also magickal "Darwin Fish" decorations. Supposedly, the Darwin Fishes are mystically linked to the "Darwin Awards" -- a yearly tongue in cheek award given to someone who has ended his own life through an act of mind-boggling stupidity. (The idea is that the individual has purified the gene pool by removing himself from it.) According to pinkumbrella, the magickal Darwin Fish curses the vehicle it adorns, so that any driver who takes a stupid risk has terrible luck and is likely to get badly injured while driving foolishly.

DAS GARTEN BY REBEKAH KRZYNSKI

Power: Significant
Effect: Reading this book is itself a spell, one that is automatically successful when the last word is read. When the spell is complete, the letters and words become animate and rush off the page. These letter-animals are immaterial but visible, and they rapidly skitter up the arms or legs of the reader, crawling over his body until they reach an aperture—mouth, nose, eyes, or ears. Then they crawl inside. Experiencing this invasion is a rank-4 Helplessness challenge.

Once all the words have entered, the victim hears a woman's voice, speaking in his brain in archaic German or Polish. The voice is that of the book's author, Rebekah



artwork by Samuel Araya

Krzynski, who has moved herself from the book into her new human "host."

Krzynski was a powerful magus, and her long-term goals and plans are up to the GM. She created eight books of herself, two of which have been destroyed. Her plan was for eight people to read the books and become hosts to her spirit, which could switch between their bodies at will, seeing through their eyes and experiencing their sensations.

Reading the book and absorbing part of Krzynski's soul does not give her any control over an individual, however: it lets her in, but the reader is not possessed. The dead sorceress can comment, cajole, and suggest courses of actions, but she cannot compel—except with threats. She can take over a body when it's sleeping, but the native spirit awakens and resumes control if Krzynski opens its eyes. She can also create a terrible and distracting psychic din.

Those are her threats, but she can also act through magick. Rebekah has a skill of 75% in some form of magick. (Individual GMs should decide what type of magick is most appropriate.) If her host is an adept and builds a charge (of any type, from any school), Rebekah can use those charges to cast spells—and she can steal charges from her host without permission.

Description: This novel was written in 1412 by a Polish Jewess who had learned German from her father. (She didn't learn it very well; the title should really be *Der Garten.*) Rebekah Krzynski was renowned throughout Krakow as a learned woman and possessor of mystic wisdom, and her novel is believed to be an elaborate allegory describing different levels of magickal initiation and comprehension. There has never been a mechanical printing of *Das Garten*; all known copies are hand-copied. There are rumors that Krzynski wrote the novel in an elaborate code, and that when its true meaning is unraveled, it includes instructions for several powerful rituals.

The Ghost of a Camera

Power: Significant

Effect: The ghost of a camera is materially imperceptible. It can only be perceived and manipulated astrally. If you can see astral objects and monsters (like thaumophages) you can see the camera ghost. People capable of astral projection can pick it up and manipulate it. To such people, it looks and feels like an old 1945 Mercury II Model CX camera with flash.

The camera serves as a one-way visual rift between the material and astral planes. An astral projector who looks through its viewfinder can see the material world as it would look from his astral perspective. Or, to put it another way, if a guy astral projects and looks at you in the shower with this gadget, he actually sees your naked flesh instead of just your aura, as he would normally. He can see the tiles and the water and the rest of the setting, which would be indistinct or completely imperceptible to a normal astral projector.

Not only does the camera allow for this sort of voyeurism, it can also take pictures. One does not need to load it with film, because there's no such thing as astral film, as far as anyone knows. The camera ghost takes 36 exposures on 35mm film, and these pictures can be printed in the physical world. To make this happen, the ghost camera must be superimposed on a real, physical camera of the same year, make and model, which is loaded with blank film. When these conditions are met, the images taken on the astral camera are transferred to the physical film, where they can be developed normally. (Interestingly, if the flash is used the picture appears just as it would if a normal flash photograph was taken from its perspective. However, no flash of light is perceived from the physical world.) This process empties the camera of images, and it is then ready to be used again.

Description: This object is invisible, intangible and immaterial. There is some debate (among the two dozen or so people who know of its existence) as to whether it can properly be called an "object" at all. (Its current user, a member of the Sleepers named Valliyappan Vairamuthu, calls it a "stable astral wave-state pattern" and has likened it to a thought that does not need a mind to think it.)

Skeleton Keys

Power: Significant

Effect: Skeleton keys can open any lock or fastener, be it a combination lock, gurney restraint, electronic keypad, Boy Scout knots, whatever.

Description: Skeleton Keys are not rare artifacts by the standards of the occult underground, where skullduggery is a way of life.

The ritual for creation is somewhat uncommon, but available for a price. The adept must begin with a key that he owns and has had in his possession for at least a month. He cannot know what the key is to or for; keys from junk shops are ideal. Using only his left hand, the adept must grease the key with the marrow of a thief, then wrap the key completely in black thread. It must then be buried for one month in the grave of a watchman, security guard, or policeman. The adept must urinate upon the buried key four times, once each week. After digging up the key at the end of the month, two significant charges must be expended (only one if the adept is an Entropomancer) and a roll made against the adept's Magick skill. Failure means the charges are lost and the burial procedure must be performed again, though the same key, marrow, and thread may be re-used for the new attempt.

If successful, the threads covering the key change from black to bone-white. The Skeleton Key also seems to be cold to the touch. Skeleton Keys are limited artifacts, and can be used a number of times equal to the sum of the dice on the adept's Magick roll. In addition, Skeleton Keys are quirky. When trying to get "into" something—like a safe, a car, or an office—a Skeleton Key does not work if the holder has tried to open or seen another person try to open the lock within the past twelve hours. When trying to get "out of" something—like handcuffs, a jail cell, or an automobile trunk—the Skeleton Key is more forgiving: it does not work if the lock or restraining device has been tested within the last minute. In either case, the Skeleton Key must touch some part of the lock, knot, keyhole, *etc.* to function.

After the last charge on a Skeleton Key is used, the white thread unwinds and falls off the key, which no longer seems cold to the touch.

Major Artifacts

The Magic Bullet

Power: Major

Effect: This artifact contains powerful magick for assassins. Anyone wearing it who shoots at an unsuspecting target does so as if his or her skill was 30% higher.

Description: There are countless theories about shadowy conspiracies that killed JFK; the theories proposed in the occult underground tend to be even more baroque and bizarre than those joked about in the mainstream. One of the more popular theories among adepts is that JFK was assassinated expressly to create an historic event whose significance could be manipulated to create a singularly powerful artifact: the magic bullet.

While it's more likely that some enterprising adept simply took advantage of the situation (rather than engineering it), it's widely accepted that the bullet that killed JFK was stolen and transformed into a murderous talisman.

It's not impressive to look at. The spent slug (still reputedly stained with the great man's blood) is enclosed in a featureless steel disk on a chain.

The Warstone

Power: Major
Effect: As soon as it's touched, the warstone begins to exert influence over its holder. In the first place, any stress check the holder makes against Violence automatically succeeds. Furthermore, the holder gains a Hardened mark against Violence every day she owns the warstone, until all ten spots are filled.

The idea of violence is not just becoming more palatable, however; it is becoming desperately attractive. The holder's mind is filled with vivid images of triumph, conquest, and butchery. (This may require stress checks against Self or The Unnatural if the GM thinks it appropriate.) Violence becomes more seductive and attractive—every problem appears to be a Gordian knot that can only be cut by lashing out.

Naturally, the warstone makes this option tactically easier, just as it becomes philosophically easier. Any attack made by the possessor of the warstone has a +10% skill bonus for each Hardened mark she has in the Violence category.
Description: One of the first archetypes to ascend to the Invisible Clergy was the Warrior. Many theorists believe this happened the first time a human used a weapon to kill a rival. That weapon was a rock on a cord.

While the cord rotted away long ago, the rock remains, and it has power. It's not much to look at—a chunk of granite about the size of a fist with a dry, brown stain on one side. Anyone who holds it, however, has the blessing of the Warrior.

The Naked Goddess Tape

Power: Major
Effect: Any adept who even hears about the tape's existence becomes curious. Even the most intrinsically phlegmatic, blasé, and apathetic adept can't help but be intrigued.

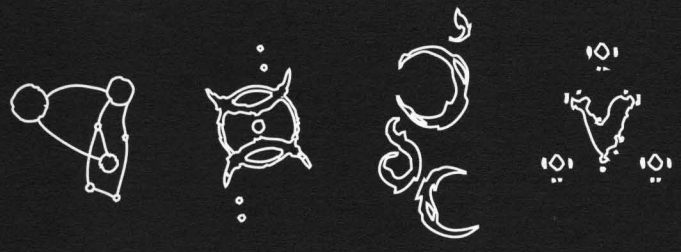
Any adept who just sees the tape—not who watches it, but who simply glimpses its plain black plastic shell—wants it. Badly. In fact, this yearning is so great that it requires a great deal of willpower to resist taking it (or trying to). Any adept who doesn't try to get the tape after laying eyes upon it has to make a stress check against a rank-10 Helplessness challenge. ("If only I had that tape, I'd understand *everything!*")

Anyone who watches the recording on the tape for the first time permanently gets +10% in a skill such as Magick Lore or Invisible Clergy Lore (player's choice), reflecting a new awareness of the cosmos. The viewer also gains the skill Create Desire at 30%. This is a magickal skill (but not a school; gaining this ability in addition to a "normal" magick skill doesn't drive you crazy) that has only one function: you can make people want things. When you use the skill, you can implant the suggestion in someone's head that they simply *must have* something (or somebody). The suggestion lasts until satisfied or resisted. They can resist this urge (using that pesky free will) but it's a rank-10 Isolation stress test. Once they make that challenge (pass or fail) the urge is pretty much mastered—still present, but gradually fading. On the other hand, if they obtain the object then they guard it obsessively. Losing it is a rank-5 Isolation test.

Like many magick abilities, this one has to be charged up before it can be used. It's charged by watching the master tape. The skill can be increased, but in order to spend experience points on it you have to watch the master tape. So if someone steals it—not unlikely, given its power to attract attention—you won't be able to use or improve your Create Desire skill any longer.

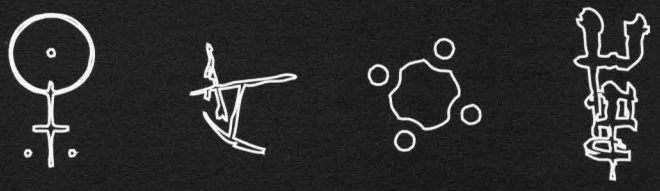
Duplicates of the Naked Goddess tape have (of course) been made. Just seeing the duplicate videotape (but not watching the recording on it) has no effect. Watching the recording, however, does two things. First, it makes any adept watching it desire the master recording, with a rank-4 Helplessness check if the urge is resisted. Second, it works (on anyone) like a low-watt version of the master tape in that it grants skill points to Magick Lore or Invisible Clergy Lore or something similar. But instead of granting +10% to such a skill as the master recording does, duplicates of the Naked Goddess tape grant no more than +5% and most grant less, depending on how close to the original the dub is. First-generation copies—that is, copies made directly from the original—grant +5%. Second-generation copies—a copy made from a first-generation copy—grant 4%. And so on, with each generation dropping an additional 1%. Sixth-generation (and worse) copies are so lousy that they're worthless to anyone and won't even trigger the I-want-the-master-copy effect.

Watching multiple copies of the tape—original or duplicates—does not grant any cumulative effect, and neither does watching the same tape multiple times. You can only gain the bonus to your Magick Lore/Invisible Clergy Lore/whatever skill the very first time you watch the tape, even if you watch a better copy (or the original) later on. However, you can still gain the Create Desire skill by watching the original if you've seen duplicates before. (No, you cannot recharge/improve your Create Desire skill with a duplicate tape.)
Description: When the Naked Goddess ascended to the Invisible Clergy, she was the first to do so in front of a video camera. Naturally, the master recording of this event has created a great deal of interest in the occult community. Supernaturally, it does so as well.



CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE UNNATURAL



The unnatural is what you get when the conflict between entropy and order is infused with magickal energy. Magick is naturally drawn towards this cosmic conflict and inflames it, but also modulates it in strange ways. Sometimes magick favors order—but usually, it sides with entropy. What it does not do is respect the *status quo*. The unnatural is usually entropic because human societies have long held magick to be a destructive, evil force. So, it tends towards that direction when left to its own devices.

Manifestations of the unnatural vary wildly. Adept magick is a manifestation of the unnatural, as is discussed in the magick chapter. This chapter concerns other manifestations, divided into two broad categories: phenomena and beings.

In brief, **unnatural phenomena** are incidents or periods of time in which natural laws are altered or circumvented in some fashion but which are not the direct, intended result of an individual person. In other words, they don't happen because someone specifically wants or desires them to; like the weather, they just happen, often as a side-effect to deliberate unnatural activities such as adept magick. **Unnatural beings** are beings whose very existence is reliant on the unnatural—beings who could commonly be called ghosts or monsters, for example.

Unnatural Phenomena

The range of unnatural phenomena can encompass most any unnatural event that is not the intended result of the conscious choice of a being. (An adept's magick-working is not an unnatural phenomenon in this sense because it is a specific, controllable, repeatable result.) Unnatural phenomena usually *indirectly* occur in the vicinity of unnatural beings or people affected by them—or just people who use magick, for that matter—but they're like ripples in a pond. No matter what or who the person or being indirectly responsible for the phenomena might be, he generally can't control whether or not unnatural phenomena result or what form they take. (The GM does.)

Three levels of unnatural phenomena exist, just as in schools of magick: minor, significant, and major. Examples of five phenomena for each level are given in the following sections, but the GM is welcome to create more for future use or improvise tailor-made phenomena on the spot.

There are few rules governing whether or not unnatural phenomena occur as a result of a given action or situation. They are dramatic devices for storytelling, to add color and drama to the plot and in some cases to serve as clues for the PCs to follow. They also provide repercussions to the use of magick—every time an adept does a magick-working, there's a chance that some unnatural phenomenon occurs, drawing attention and making things difficult.

Causes of Unnatural Phenomena

The following are suggested causes of unnatural phenomena. These triggers should be used by the GM to serve the narrative—to make the story more exciting, or strange, or whatever is needed. None of these triggers cause an unnatural phenomenon automatically, every time the trigger occurs. They are entirely at the GM's discretion to use or ignore on a case-by-case basis.

If the GM believes such a decision should be left to the dice, here's a quick rule of thumb. In the following descriptions, the unnatural phenomena resulting from these triggers are described as being things that either *could* occur, that are *likely* to occur, or that are *very likely* to occur. You can make a roll on percentile dice each time one of these triggers pops up, with the chance of occurrence either 25%, 50%, or 75%, depending on which stage of probability is noted. *Could* is 25%, *likely* is 50%, *very likely* is 75%. If you feel you should roll this, you don't have to roll it every time—maybe just when you feel like a surprise. After all, if you have these phenomena popping up all the time, they cease to seem unnatural; they're just annoying.

Adept Magick-Working

- If an adept spends a minor charge in a magick-working, a minor unnatural phenomenon *could* occur within a radius of a number of feet equal to the adept's Soul stat.
- If an adept spends a significant charge in a magick-working, a significant unnatural phenomenon is *likely* to occur within a radius of a number of yards equal to the adept's Soul stat. (Alternately, up to 10 minor unnatural phenomena could occur instead.)
- If an adept spends a major charge in a magick-working, a major unnatural phenomenon is *very likely* to occur within a radius of a number of miles equal to the tens digit of an adept's Soul stat. (Alternately, up to 10 significant unnatural phenomena or up to 100 minor unnatural phenomena could occur instead, or some mixture of the two.)

Artifacts

- Minor unnatural phenomena *could* occur as often as once every couple weeks in the immediate vicinity of a minor artifact.
- Significant unnatural phenomena are *likely* to occur as often as once a season in the immediate vicinity of a significant artifact.
- Major unnatural phenomena are *very likely* to occur as often as once every two to three years in the immediate vicinity of a major artifact.

Unnatural Beings

- Minor unnatural phenomena *could* occur as often as once every few hours in the immediate vicinity of a minor unnatural being.
- Significant unnatural phenomena are *likely* to occur as often as once a week in the immediate vicinity of a significant unnatural being.
- Major unnatural phenomena are *very likely* to occur as often as once a season in the immediate vicinity of a major unnatural being.

Minor Unnatural Phenomena

These are phenomena that are purely environmental, and that do not in themselves affect humans. They can be perceived or experienced by humans, but they do not work directly on the human body and they occur whether anyone is around to perceive them or not. They rarely last more than a few seconds or minutes.

Cold Spot. A cold spot is a stable, three-dimensional area of air that is noticeably colder than its surroundings—perhaps 10° –20° colder or more. Cold spots typically exist in a single contiguous area, and are roughly a few feet in diameter. Thermometers placed within them register the difference in temperature, as does thermal imaging equipment. They rarely persist for more than a few minutes or hours, but if their trigger remains in or returns to the vicinity, cold spots tend to recur in the exact same location as before.

Sensory Stimuli, Minor. This can be any of a variety of seeming hallucinations: strange rappings or footsteps, blurry suggestions of a presence, unpleasant smells, footprints appearing in carpet, and so on. Often these come in cycles, with different stimuli occurring in a random, sporadic sequence.

Spontaneous Moisture. A patch or rivulet of damp wetness appears on a surface with no explanation. Maybe it's just water—or perhaps musty/moldy/smelly water—or it could be blood, milk, seawater, or something else altogether. In some cases, the location of the moisture might be relevant to the nature of the location—such as tears or blood from a statue or painting's eyes, or seawater footprints on a boat.

Technological Malfunction. Something goes wrong with a piece of technological equipment. It could be static on a telephone call, a car that won't start, a cordless drill that starts by itself, lights that turn themselves on and off, or weird voices on the radio.

Telekinesis, Minor. Some small object inexplicably moves or is damaged, either in front of witnesses or while no one is looking. A plate falls from a shelf, a ball bounces down the stairs, or a mirror cracks down the middle.

Significant Unnatural Phenomena

These are phenomena directed very specifically at human beings—the magick behind them is naturally drawn to the human body and mind. Though most are brief, some could persist or recur for hours or days.

Missing Time. A person or group of people disappear from reality for a GM-determined period of minutes or hours, then return. They recall nothing of the period in which they were missing, and only realize that something has occurred when they notice the amount of time that has passed inexplicably. These people cannot be in the presence of others who do not experience the missing time phenomenon when it kicks in—they must be off on their own somewhere.

Sensory Stimuli, Significant. Similar to the minor variety, but the stimuli are stronger and are for the benefit of witnesses. Full-body apparitions, tremendous booming sounds, coherent disembodied speech, being grappled or shoved by an invisible force, nausea-inducing odors, and other similar effects are all possible, and they are much more likely to occur in combination or consecutively for a somewhat longer period.

Spontaneous Wounds. These are inexplicable but non-life-threatening injuries that occur to people in the vicinity. Examples range from scratches or cuts and slight bruising to broken bones and even stab wounds. In some cases, the wounds may be tied to the source of the phenomena, perhaps spelling out relevant words with cuts on someone's arm or leaving a distinctive wound of some sort.

Telekinesis, Significant. Similar to the minor variety, but can affect more objects, larger objects, or result in more

dramatic movement or damage. Examples could include stacking chairs on a table, sending a car off the road, destroying every plate in a kitchen, making a doll walk, lifting people off the ground and shaking them, altered weather effects—generally, very visible movement with no discernible cause.

Visions. At the GM's discretion, one person in range of the trigger could have a vision of the triggering event. Someone in range of an adept casting a significant magick, for example, could suddenly witness the magick-working remotely, or perhaps see its effect on its target. The vision could be crystal-clear, or might manifest in some strange symbolic way. Visions do not predict the future—they are remote viewings of concurrent events.

Major Unnatural Phenomena

These phenomena are both rare and potent. They result in severe effects on the people and the environment in the vicinity of the trigger, and should be used very sparingly. Unless stopped or reversed through magickal means, they last indefinitely. (The exception being major telekinesis, which does something specific for a certain period of time and then stops.)

Death. Someone dies. The cause might be a heart attack, a coronary, or a stroke, or could be an inexplicable suicide or murder.

Haunting. The soul of a dead person is seized from beyond the veil and attached against its will to a static location—preferably the soul of someone relevant now or in the past to that location or to the triggering event. If the trigger event involved someone's death, the haunting is almost certainly by the soul of the dead victim. (For more information on hauntings, see the "Revenants" entry on p. 305.)

Reality Erase. A person, event, item, or some other singularity relevant to the trigger event is erased from reality. Only people present at the trigger event for this phenomenon retain their memories of what was erased. Reality retroactively reforms itself around the absence, taking the path of least resistance. If your husband was erased, you married someone else instead and the man you originally married was never even born. If a sailing ship disappears, there is no record of its existence. Possessions on the bodies of those few people who still remember the old reality are likewise not revised even if they support the old reality—if your husband was erased but you still remember him, the photograph of him in your wallet is still there. His parents, who were not present at the trigger event, had another child altogether and have never met you before.

Sensory Stimuli, Major. This is a completely immersive, credible hallucination indistinguishable from reality. Those affected might find themselves in the same location but a century earlier in time, or in the flaming pits of hell surrounded by the torment of the damned, or put through a surreal trial and terrifying (but illusory) execution by silent masked figures, or have a conversation with a mocking, impossibly knowledgeable double of themselves, or whatever bizarre situation seems appropriate. The experience should be relevant to the trigger event or the present circumstances in some way. At the GM's discretion, there could be permanent effects caused by the stimuli, such as injury or madness checks or new knowledge or even death.

Telekinesis, Major. Anything physical goes. An earthquake, the collapse of a building, tornado, boiler explosion, a person torn apart by invisible claws, you name it.

Unnatural Beings

Unnatural beings are entities whose entire existence is due to the unnatural—they are not the product of our planet's natural processes. They are inherently magickal. There are many different types of unnatural beings, with many different goals and powers. Most of them have little or no agenda besides self-preservation and basic instinct. A sampling are profiled here.

Note that, even more so than with unnatural phenomena, most people never notice unnatural beings, even if exposed to them. Some of these beings are incorporeal and can't be seen; some look human and blend in; and some are just inherently skilled at avoiding detection. Those that have corporeal bodies and are obviously unnatural are also the rarest encountered. Consequently, the people who see them usually have two options: tell what they saw and be relegated to the lunatic fringe, or keep quiet.

Entry Format

Each unnatural being has its own entry. Entries begin with a general description of the being and what it does, followed by any special rules or procedures governing their use in play, and conclude with the being's game attributes in this format:

Name (Power Level)

Pithy Summary
Points: (for the GM to divide among the being's stats)
Body: (a range of minimum & maximum scores for that stat)
Speed: (a range of minimum & maximum scores for that stat)
Mind: (a range of minimum & maximum scores for that stat)
Soul: (a range of minimum & maximum scores for that stat)

Astral Parasites

These annoyances are psychic predators. They have no corporeal form, dwelling entirely on the astral plane which is their native home. From there, however, they can latch onto living humans and feed on them. Normally astral parasites cannot perceive humans, but any human who works magick is visible on the astral plane every time he uses a magick charge. (Other conditions can make this possible, too, such as being in a magick-rich environment, using a magick artifact, *etc.*) There aren't so many astral parasites around that they latch onto you whenever you cast a spell, but it can happen. They can also be controlled by an adept and made to latch onto a specific target.

If an astral parasite latches onto you, you lose 6 points of Soul every 24 hours thereafter. An astral parasite leeches a number of Soul points from its victim equal to the parasite's Body, at which point it detaches and wanders off. (The parasite's Soul does not increase; it converts the energy into nourishment.) The Soul-based skills of victims (including magick) are reduced if necessary, to make sure they aren't higher than the Soul stat.

If your Soul hits10 or less, you go into a coma. The parasite detaches and wanders off looking for more food.

Once you're free of an astral parasite, you regain Soul back at a rate of one point per day. If you went into a coma, you regain consciousness when your Soul stat is back to 20 or higher. (Should you have less than 20 normally, the GM picks a level to reach.)

On the astral plane, parasites take any of a variety of unpleasant forms. They appear to be about the size of a small dog, and usually have some hideous combination of legs, wings, tendrils, mouths, and so forth. They are not very intelligent, but if confronted on the astral plane they are vicious hand-to-hand or (hand-to-tentacle) fighters.

Astral Parasites (Minor)

Soul-Sucking Annoyances
Points: 100 + a percentile roll (1–100)
Body: 30–60
Speed: 20–50
Mind: 10–30
Soul: 30–60

Demons

Demons and their dealings are given their own chapter, beginning on p. 220.

Demons (Minor)

Desperate Souls
Points: 100 + a percentile roll (1–100)
Body: 0
Speed: 30–70
Mind: 30–80
Soul: 30–80

Notes: When a demon has possessed a host body, it has the host's Body and Speed scores but its own Mind and Soul scores. The demon can use the host's skills, but only at half their normal level. The demon also has the Body skill Get Back Up (described below) at a level equal to its host's Body score and can perform one random minor unnatural phenomenon per hour and one random significant unnatural phenomenon per day. The demon does not pick the phenomenon, it just forces some phenomenon to occur. Some demons may know a school of magick and/or one or more rituals.

Get Back Up: This gives you a chance to shrug off the debilitating effects of injury, poison, sickness, or what have you. You're still wounded, but instead of lying in bed moaning or lying on the ground bleeding, you're up and active with a pained look on your face. This is subject to the GM's discretion—if your back is broken in a car wreck, forget about it.

Entropics

It's hard to explain Entropics. They have no body. No one's determined that they're actually intelligent. They can't physically harm you. But, as one of their victims put it, "They try to kill you with your own hands."

Maybe it's simpler to explain what they do to you.

Suppose you came home one day and found your beloved husband screwing your sister—right there on the kitchen table. You turned and ran, screaming, or maybe you fainted.

You confront him about it a little later, and he's nervous and defensive and clearly upset—but he denies it. He can offer proof that he was in the office when it happened. (Though how did he know when it was supposed to have happened when you didn't tell him?) He's got witnesses. Besides, your sister lives in Pasadena, a long plane flight away.

Maybe you call your sister. She denies it convincingly. How could you even think such a thing? Have you been having marital problems? Maybe your husband was with someone who just *looks* like her. (Did she sound a little smug saying that? She always was the pretty one.)

Slowly, you realize that it doesn't add up. You know where you were at the time you "remember" seeing them: you were actually dropping your daughter off at soccer practice. Besides, the suit he was wearing? That suit's at the cleaners. You know this. You know it's impossible to have seen what you saw. But the memory of him . . . of her . . . his look of ecstasy . . . her look of vindictive greed . . . they're crystal clear in your mind. They're *your memories.*

And they're false. (Your husband and sister have the same false memories of the encounter as you, so you're all wigging out.) They were planted by an entropic, an incorporeal being of entropy. Its nature is to unmake promises, to tear people apart, to isolate and corrupt even the sense of reality surrounding its victims. They retain only enough order to stick to one unfortunate target and those surrounding her.

Entropics are not intelligent, and they are not subtle. They have an instinctive knowledge of the fears and beliefs of their victim, and they can create scenarios based on those fears and plant them deep into both your memory and the memories of those involved. While it seems to be within their power to set up truly dangerous false memories (for instance, confusing you about which medicine to take or how much), they concentrate instead on producing the greatest amount of emotional misery and the quickest payoff. They don't want you dead. They want you to suffer—to the extent that they want anything.

Some theorists believe every human personality has a self-destructive impulse, an "imp of the perverse" that makes us walk dangerously close to the edges of cliffs. It may simply be that entropics serve as mirrors of that urge, reflecting our darkest fears back at us in the most convincing fashion. After all, if you can't trust your own memories, what can you trust?

No one's sure how an entropic gets attached to an individual life. Certainly exposure to the supernatural makes one more vulnerable, but they seem mostly attracted to people who are building something. If you're the center of a cult, a religion, or a philosophy, they see a big pile of order that they can unmake into chaos.

It's also possible to use magick to sic one of these on an enemy. If you can find the books that describe the ritual (or a demon or fellow adept who'll tell you), all it takes is a couple of hours, some colored chalk, peyote, a cracked mirror, a couple prisms, and the blood of a freshly slaughtered black cat. (More specifically, you need the type of peyote called *Ariocarpus retusus,* known as *tsuwiri* to the Huichol indians of Mexico. This is the "bad peyote" which brings out bad thoughts and evil intentions. It's very distinct from *hikuri* [*Lophophora williamsii*], the good

peyote which gives pleasurable visions. The two types appear almost identical, and the Huichol—who are experts on the subject—are unlikely to give *tsuwiri* to strangers. Or anyone, for that matter.) Spend a significant charge (and endure one hell of a bad trip yourself from the peyote), make a successful roll against your magick skill, and you can stick an entropic on your enemy. If the roll fails, nothing happens and you've wasted the components; but if you roll a matched failure, the entropic latches onto you instead.

It should be noted that putting an entropic on someone in the occult underground is tantamount to an open declaration of war. It's a risky move, because entropics cause suffering, but no physical or spiritual degradation (unlike the less annoying astral parasites). As Dirk Allen put it, "If someone comes after me with a knife, I'm going to throw a drink in his face and then do something else. If I just throw the drink, all I've done is ticked him off worse, see? Using an entropic is like throwing that drink."

Getting rid of an entropic is tricky. You can't just blow them away, for one thing, because they're incorporeal. An adept who spends a minor charge and rolls a success can attach it to herself instead of its current victim, but that's a pretty big favor to ask. Alternately, the adept can spend two significant charges, roll a success, and make the entropic go away entirely. (A failure means it stays stuck on the target. A matched failure means it switches focus to the adept trying to banish it. A matched success means the adept can destroy it permanently or stick it on anyone he wants. A critical success means you can either kill it or send it back to the person who sent it in the first place, even if you don't know who that is.)

There's also a special ritual for banishing entropics, and anyone can perform it. However, it's not quite as easy as spending a charge and rolling the dice. For one thing, you have to learn the ritual, and you can't just download that sort of thing off the internet. You have to get a silver mirror, colored chalk, peyote, a flawless convex lens, and all the hair off a live white cat. (You guessed it—for this you need the *good* peyote. Luckily, it's easier to get than the bad kind. At least, it's easier to talk the Huichol into giving it to you.) After about an hour-long ritual, even the most mundane entropic victim appears in the astral plane to confront his nemesis—who appears, appropriately, as a mocking mirror image of the victim. The entropic won't answer questions. It just sends the worst experience it can find at you, only this time it's a perfect illusion in the *present* instead of in the past—you face it in real time instead of recalling it from earlier. If you can work your way through it successfully and assimilate it into your world-view, the entropic shrivels up before your eyes. This is, of course, easier said than done; the simplest way to pull this feat off is to make a Soul check, rolling at least as high as the entropic's Soul stat. If it has a higher Soul than you do, you're pretty much at its mercy.

Furthermore, even if you do ditch an entropic, that doesn't mean the memories vanish. There's no cure for those except the old standards (time, booze, electroshock, concussions, and so forth). Sure, you know the memories are fake. But that may not offer a whole lot of comfort when you're lying down next to your wife and can clearly remember every second of her cutting your eyelids off with a kitchen knife, laughing all the while.

Entropics (Significant)

Your worst fear recycled into memory
All entropics have the same stats.
Body: 0
Speed: 0
Mind: 0
Soul: 70

Golems

First conceived by the Rabbi Akiba in the third century A.D. and recorded in his book *Sefer Yetzirah* ("The Book of Creation"), the Golem is an independent automaton constructed of clay and other inert materials. It is brought to life by writing a magickal word on a small slip of paper, which is placed in its mouth. Golems may be of any form, but the art to making them has been lost—except by the golems themselves.

Golems have long been made in the guise of humans as guardians and tireless servants, then later as lovers and companions. The art of their creation reached its height in the 1500s in Spain. There, golems were created by the Zohar sect, which soon came under the fires of the Holy Inquisition.

As far as is known, only one golem survived the purge in Spain. Named *Ein-Sof* ("Without End"), his last command from his creator was to reproduce himself and when done, to defend his master. Ein-Sof did what it was told by ripping portions of its body away; through a primitive parthenogenesis it was able to make a near-exact duplicate of itself. This process took many months and by the time Ein-Sof had completed it, his master was long dead at the hands of the Inquisition. Later, Ein-Sof and his twin were discovered on his late masters' estate, which was to be sold. Thought to be squatters, they were told: "You can't stay here, go away." Masterless, they did as they were told.

And so they have continued to this day, following their remaining commands: "Duplicate. Go away." One begets a second and they separate, again and again. They follow those two commands only as long as they aren't following any other commands—and it's very easy to command a golem. Anyone who addresses a golem with something resembling an authoritative manner can control them, even even someone who doesn't know what the golem really is. If a golem falls under some sort of ongoing authority, the two primal commands are likewise ignored. It is only when a golem is fully emancipated that it returns to the two original commands. Each golem can only duplicate itself once, a months-long process requiring peculiar clays, chemicals, and so forth.

The golems created by the Zohar sect appear completely human in all respects. They are tireless, they do not have to eat (although they can for the sake of appearances), they have no need of air or water, and they are inhumanly strong. The one thing they lack is a soul.

Each golem is different, owing to its experiences and long lifespan (which technically is infinite). Many live openly in human society, working menial jobs tirelessly, repeating pointless tasks for minimum wage because some random human asked them to do something and it turned into a job. Innocent comments like, "You need work? I'll get you a job at the factory!" are followed as if they were the sternest commands—the golem takes the job and works it forever.

Many Golems mistaken for humans have been unwittingly adopted by strong-willed individuals whom they now consider their master. Golems are overlooked in human society due to their natural tendency to do what they are told to do, especially by those with a strong force of will.

Today, a typical golem holds a menial job and lives in an apartment. He comes home from work each day and stands inside the door until it's time to go to work again. Some golems have even gotten married, having met someone who appreciates their complacency and willingness to do as they're told. They are the silent bus drivers, the expressionless grocery clerks, the dull movie-ticket takers. They understand human society well enough to get along, and they don't volunteer their nature. They just try to fit in and do what they're told.

Every golem is physically identical to Ein-Sof, and so once seen they are very easy to spot. Each golem appears to be a mildly ugly Mediterranean man of large build with big liquid eyes and a bow mouth. Their hair—which is always worn slicked back—is black, and their hands are huge and seem somewhat artificial (like those of a burn victim after reconstructive surgery). Their skin is extremely smooth, and when wet takes on a waxy sheen. They are good mimics, and if they are very old have mastered the whole gamut of human facial expressions, although their real understanding of the emotions these expressions reflect is limited. They learn the rules of interaction invariably to obey and please the humans around them, because to a golem, there is no other motivation.

Most adepts love having golems around, for obvious reasons. They tend to keep their golems hidden away, though, so that no one else takes control of them. Once a master-golem relationship is formed, the golem is loyal to his master unless someone with a higher Soul score steps in. The "virgin" golem—that is, the sole golem who has not yet reproduced himself—is especially valuable, if it still exists at all. An adept with the virgin golem can, over time, gain as many golems as he likes by taking control of each newly made golem and having it create another virgin golem in turn. (If a golem takes about four months to reproduce, you could gain three new golems a year. You never get the benefits of exponential growth, only serial, but it's still not a bad deal.)

How many golems are there in the world today? Maybe just a few hundred, scattered hither and yon. Many Golems die in the secret conflicts of the Occult Underground—or die in more visible wars, since they're such obedient soldiers. Potentially, though, there could be *millions* of golems. Somewhere out there.

Golems (Significant)

Would you like fries with that?
All golems have the same stats.
Body: 150 (see p. 280, "Exceptional Skills")
Speed: 50
Mind: 40
Soul: 0

Lycanthropes

Lycanthropes—such as werewolves—are a bizarre by-product of demonic possession. The process by which a lycanthrope is created is Byzantine and, frankly, random. No one sets out deliberately to become a lycanthrope, because no sane person would want to be one. Their existence is a slap in the face to reality itself, which does its level best to make things right whenever one of these cosmic aberrations comes along. The process of becoming a lycanthrope begins with demons.

Demons are reality-junkie ghosts who want to possess human beings, as explained in the *Demons* chapter. Sometimes a demon has an urge that can be gratified by creatures lower on the evolutionary scale such as wolves, dogs, pigeons, *etc.* Possessing an animal is considerably easier than getting hold of a human host, certainly, and some demons figure out how to do it.

There are risks. If you possess a housecat, you're trying to wedge a whole human mind into a brain the size of a walnut. Extended animal possession almost always results in the demon losing large parts of its identity—skills, memories, personality traits—to the point that sometimes only the fleshy addiction that led them to take the animal remains.

These creatures aren't lycanthropes. They're just possessed animals.

Since possessed animals are often nasty, or just weird, people sometimes hunt them down, or they get sick, or they get preyed upon by something farther up the food chain. When that happens, sometimes the demon finally goes to its eternal reward (or punishment). But not always.

Sometimes when a possessed animal dies, the demon spirit and the animal spirit become mated—intertwined. Animals don't have souls (they can't ascend to the Invisible Clergy, which is why the world doesn't look like a giant pile of meat) but they do have spirits (which is why they can still be influenced by mental and emotional magick). Demons that possess animals get dumber, but if they end up merging with the animal's spirit, they can also get a lot stronger.

When a hybrid spirit possesses a human host, it's a lycanthrope—and this kicks off an ungainly three-way struggle. The combatants are the human, the demon, and the animal. A given combatant controls the body for a number of hours equal to the combatant's Soul score—with the exception that the human combatant gets control for days rather than hours. When that comes to an end, all three combatants make a Soul check; the one who rolls highest without failing wins, and takes control of the body for the next interval. (Matched successes trump regular successes, and critical success trumps all.)

When the human's in control, he's in human form and he can't recall what went on while the demon or the animal were in control—though he knows he's been possessed. When the demon's in control, he's in human form too, and he gets his ya-yas out the way demons usually do. It's when the animal takes over that things get really weird.

When the animal spirit takes over, the lycanthrope turns into an animal of whatever type the animal spirit was when living. The host body changes mass, organs, and so forth; a 300-pound man can turn into a chipmunk. Clothes and other possessions simply disappear, and reappear in place when the human or demon seizes control. This may sound odd, but here's the rub: the change is not a physical transformation with bones snapping, muscles stretching, and so forth. Instead, reality is rewritten to state that there never *was* a human—just an animal. Retroactively, there was no transformation at all. The lycanthrope has always been an animal, period.

(By the way, significant unnatural phenomena are likely to accompany transformations to and from animal form.)

You see, animals have no concept of linear time. Everything is "now" to them, even things they remember in the past. Therefore, when a lycanthrope changes into animal form, his past changes as well. It's not just that he's a wolf (or a raven or whatever): he always *was* a wolf. The human body's parents don't remember him being born; they remember there being a wolf, or a really big dog, running around the neighborhood instead. His wife doesn't remember him saying "I do" because she never married him. (If it helps you grasp the concept, this works like the Entropomancer spell Edit the World, only on a much larger scale.) Sometimes the beast stays in control forever; such casualties literally cannot be counted because no one ever realizes that they even existed as human beings.

More frequently, the human (or even the demon) regains control and turns the lycanthrope back into human form. Now the universe snaps back to its natural course. The human's parents remember him, he reappears in photographs, and things are back to normal. Except for this: anyone who saw him in animal form now remembers seeing the man instead. If the man was a were-raven, people remember seeing him flying. If the man attacked someone in wolf form then once he transforms back, witnesses remember the man and the wounds are those of a human attack. Reality always snaps back along the path of least resistance, so events change as little as possible—resulting in some incongruous events. For example, people who saw the raven lycanthrope flying don't find it strange to have seen a man fly until the next time they think about it *after* the human has regained control. If they had thought it really strange at the moment they saw it, they might have done something different than they did, and reality would have had to work harder to rewrite itself. Reality is fond of ungainly cop-outs. (At the GM's discretion, this reality-snapping may be intriguingly patchy.)

What do animal-form lycanthropes do with their time? Whatever they want. Typically, they just act like a normal animal. This could be a problem, of course, if they're at work or driving their car or what have you when the change comes.

Much like clothing and possessions, injuries also warp around transformations. Short of death, the human and the animal form each retain separate wound points and injuries. A woman with a broken arm would transform into an uninjured crow. If the crow lost an eye and then transformed back into a woman, the woman still has her broken arm but her eye is fine. Should the woman die in either form, she's just dead—and her corpse stays in whatever form it was in when it died. (And no, silver bullets don't have any special effect on lycanthropes. They can be hurt by normal bullets, broken bottles, car wrecks, and the flu just like anyone else.)

LYCANTHROPES (SIGNIFICANT)

Trouble wears three faces.
Points: 100 + a percentile roll (1–100)
Body: 10–120 (see p. 280, "Exceptional Skills")
Speed: 10–120 (see p. 280, "Exceptional Skills")
Mind: 5
Soul: 10–70

Note: You'll need to make a set of demon stats as well. The stats here are for the animal spirit and animal form.

NONENTITIES

At one time or another, most people have succumbed to solipsistic musings. "What if I'm the only real person," they think, "and everyone else is just a soulless android? How would I ever know?" This feeling is especially acute in cities, where you can pass by a hundred people every day and never see any of them again. People ride their buses in silence, walk hurriedly down the street and never, *ever* make eye contact. ("You'll just provoke them.") In a society based on ignoring each other, it's no wonder that we start to feel that the people around us are unreal—phantoms, hollow men, mindless, soulless, puppets.

Very rarely is this feeling accurate.

Nonetheless, there *are* soulless people out there. Every big city has perhaps a dozen: they seem to worm their way out of the cracks in the universe and make themselves at home—reflections forced into being by the unreality we project onto each other each time we pass on the street and look away. They're called "nonentities," and they're mostly harmless.

Nonentities have no memories of childhood, and they don't reproduce. They just coalesce from nothing, wearing cheap suits and carrying unremarkable résumés. They have no memorable features, by definition: your eyes just seem to slide right off them. They can be of either gender, but are usually male. They get office jobs and work quietly at them, surprising no one, until one day they get picked off by a reckless driver who didn't notice them in time. Or sometimes they just disappear into the same oblivion from which they arose: the universe notices their anomalous existence and simply eradicates them.

They aren't stupid or passive. They're just soulless. They can feel physical pain and pleasure, but they have no emotions of their own. They can fake interest and sympathy about as well as most people, but usually they live and die (or perhaps it's more accurate to say they *exist*) without experiencing a single feeling.

Usually, but not always. If a nonentity just happens to be within ten feet when someone experiences a truly intense emotion, that emotion impacts on the nonentity. A rank-10 stress check, for example, or the dizzying ecstasy two people feel the first time they realize they're in love, or the vertiginous elation of a million-dollar lottery winner—any of these could "awaken" a nonentity. That's when they become dangerous.

Awakened nonentities have felt something, and they want to feel it again. They try to get the original people to re-experience the feeling. If that doesn't work, they try to find someone else to have the feeling for them. Sometimes this can be comic: imagine a young couple with a nonentity fixated on them, trying to keep the bloom of first love in their relationship by sending them roses in each other's names. When that fails, though (as it inevitably does), the joke's over. Nonentities don't really understand emotions. To them, it seems perfectly reasonable to kidnap the young couple and say "I'm going to keep pushing these needles into your eyes until you love each other again."

Of course, that's just when they get obsessed with a *good* feeling. More often than not, they become awakened to fear, pain, or misery instead, since we're more likely to have our ecstasies private and our terrors out in public. Then nonentities go from peculiar to monstrous.

Nonentities are a difficult prey to catch. They're hard to

follow simply because they are completely nondescript. A nonentity could torture you for days to feed off your fear, but you still wouldn't be able to pick him out of a police lineup.

Once you catch them, it's hard to do anything with them. If you can prove they committed crimes, you can get them sent to jail, where they usually evaporate. (Anything that gives them an *identity* to a large number of people—anything that makes them stand out—is likely to make the universe erase them.) If you fail to publicize them to death, you can try to kill them, but it's hard—they're preternaturally resilient. Even gunshots only do damage equal to the sum of the dice instead of the result. (Hand-to-hand damage is handled normally.)

Incidentally, nonentities don't bleed. They don't have bones or internal organs. Their flesh seems to be the same consistency throughout, as if they were poured into a mold and cast. This makes shooting or cutting one a rank 7 Unnatural challenge the first time you see it happen. Fire is painful to entropics but doesn't really injure them, and they can shrug off electrical shocks with equal ease. They don't even breathe.

Scariest of all, they're immune to magick because they have no souls, nor even any existence in the eyes of the universe. Blast spells don't damage them at all. (The exception is the Dipsomancy blast. That magick doesn't really target the victim, only the makeshift weapons the spell utilizes.) If you use magick to drop an anvil on their heads or something, that works, but any spell focused on them in particular is doomed to fail.

Their soulless nature does offer one way to identify them, though: nonentities have no auras, making them easy to pick out with the Aura Sight skill.

NONENTITIES (MINOR)

Soulless Office Workers
All nonentities have the same stats.
Body: 50 (100 wound points)
Speed: 50
Mind: 50
Soul: 0

Note: Nonentities typically start out without any combat skills except the default 15% in Struggle and Dodge. Those who get fixated on pain or fear tend to pick up skills like "Slice" or "Blow You Away" pretty quick, though. On the plus side, they can never increase their skills or stats past 50%: they just don't have the drive and passion that excellence requires.

REVENANTS

A revenant is a demon who has no desire to return to the world of the living. Instead, their obsession traps them in a pattern of behavior they cannot break. Where demons are all ego, revenants have no ego. They are stuck acting out their obsession for all time, imprisoned in their own essence. Very few are able to resolve their obsession and escape beyond the veil.

Unlike demons, they can carry out their work in our world without being summoned. They can cause six minor unnatural phenomena and two significant unnatural phenomena per week. Such behavior defines a classic haunting. Some examples of specific categories of revenants follow, but there are many others, which may be devised by the GM. Revenants generally only make visual appearances (such as apparitions) before those with a Soul stat of 60 or higher. Those with a lower Soul stat rarely see a revenant, though they may experience its influence in non-visual ways.

Revenants can take a wide variety of forms, ranging from traditional house-haunters and poltergeists to unusual classifications such as the Ghouls and the Snowfallen. No revenant is capable of possession unless specifically summoned by name and placed in a body, in which case they act as demons do but with less intelligence—they remain raw obsession and have little in the way of coherent personality. Possessed humans who try to throw the revenant out in a Soul contest get a +20% shift to each attempt.

All revenants have the same basic set of stats. Different examples of revenants follow.

REVENANTS (MINOR)

The Obsessed Dead
Points: 20 + a percentile roll (1–100)
Body: 0
Speed: 10–40
Mind: 10–40
Soul: 40–80

REVENANT: GHOULS

Ghouls are professional mourners. Obsessed with death and the circumstances of dying, ghouls are the vultures of the afterlife. When someone dies, ghouls are naturally drawn to the scene and materialize as normal-looking humans in grim, funereal clothing who drift out of alleys to congregate around the newly dead. They simply gather around a fresh corpse and stare down at it, forming a crowd that disperses once official help arrives. Ghouls exist in large numbers in major metropolitan areas, but rarely appear in rural ones. If you spot someone who appears to be a ghoul, it's a good sign that your life is in immediate danger. (In rare circumstances, a summoned ghoul could provide details on how someone recently died—a useful, if bizarre, investigative technique. Some experienced adepts in large cities are on a first-name basis with multiple ghouls and routinely tap them for information.) Ghouls are usually the revenants of people obsessed with death who themselves died unmourned.

REVENANT: SNOWFALLEN

The Snowfallen are revenants of mothers who died violently while seeking or mourning a lost child. Only able to appear while snow is falling, they drift from place to place, following the course of winter across the surface of the Earth. Everywhere they appear, they either ask desperate questions about their lost child (who may well be long since dead or grown to adulthood) or make strange prophesies in verse to help those in immediate danger survive the threats that lie before them. They are sympathetic, but cannot answer questions or respond to conscious stimuli. Snowfallen are more likely to manifest in a neighborhood where a child is in peril, or where magick has been recently worked.

REVENANT: SPLITS

Particularly tortured humans—usually those who have at least three failed notches in the Self madness meter—may attract the attention of splits. These are revenants who were so insecure in life that they obsessed on the well-being of other people to the exclusion of their own happiness. When a split latches on to an unhappy human target, it waits for the target to be alone and then materializes as an identical double. Initially, the double can only act as a mirror image: its actions are only the left–right opposites of the target. But after a minute or two, the split gains the ability of independent action and can actually interact with its human double.

The split remains a double of the human target, and has full access to the target's consciousness. In its role as a mystical double, the split can knowledgeably converse with the target about the target's life and may attempt to exert either a positive or negative influence, depending on the temperament of the split (flip a coin). The split may even know *more* than its human target knows, such as what other people are up to. In this case, the split might help the target by giving it useful advice or betray the target by leading it into a trap, always doing so in the target's own voice and mannerisms and insisting that it is, somehow, just as much the target as the target is.

Dealing with a split, no matter what its intent, requires a rank-6 Unnatural check on the madness meter. If the split leads you astray because it is malignant, realizing this causes a rank-5 Self check.

REVENANT: SUICIDE STALKERS

In life, those revenants known as "Suicide Stalkers" were deeply romantic, impractical sorts, the kind who conceive grand, mad, unhinging passions they can never express. They're more in love with the idea of their ideal other than with the actual person. The necessary combination of shyness, depth of feeling, and impracticality is thankfully rare, because these revenants don't just spring up every time there's a suicide of unrequited love. They are only possible when the will is strong, the passion is maddening, and the beloved never even suspects his or her role in the death.

It's galling to be in love. It's worse when you're sick enough to kill yourself for it. But it's worst of all when you die for love and your "lover" doesn't know it. That's intolerable.

That can bring someone back from the grave.

Suicide Stalkers have a tough row to hoe. Their task is to force acknowledgement from the beloved: only when that is achieved can they rest. However, they are completely mute, and do not even retain their pre-mortem faces. Instead, they are anonymous and faceless in the same way Nonentities are. The only way they can communicate with their chosen one is by dying. And they do it over, and over, and over.

This little passion play is hardly easy for the object of their obsession, either. If a Suicide Stalker latches onto you, strangers suddenly start dying all around: jumping in front of your car, hanging themselves in the tree outside your apartment, and leaping off the roof so they fall in front of your office window. They're not real people, just manifestations of the Stalker, and the corpses fade away the moment they are unobserved—often as soon as the cops zip up their body bag. Many targets of a Stalker lose their minds, battered and numbed by a hideous succession of random, pointless, gruesome deaths.

Suicide Stalkers aren't malevolent. They just want to be acknowledged. If their beloved is in danger, the Stalker throws itself in front of the peril. This usually kills it, but unlike the beloved, the Stalker comes back.

If the beloved dies before acknowledging the Stalker, the obsession is broken and the Stalker passes beyond the veil. The only way to get rid of one and live is by saving its life. If the beloved can successfully spare the Suicide Stalker—by cutting the noose, or catching it as it falls, or jumping in front of that train to drag it off the tracks—then the Stalker is given a moment with its old face and its true voice. It has this last chance to say, "I loved you, and you never knew," before it turns to dust and leaves this world behind.

TENEBRAE

No one has ever gotten a clear look at one of the Tenebrae—by definition. The name means "shadows" or "the darkness" in Latin. They cannot exist in bright light: hit one with a spotlight and it either scuttles out of the beam or simply vanishes until you turn the light out. To put it another way, trapping one in a bright beam of light temporarily removes it from reality (similar to the phenomenon of "missing time" explained on p. 299). As soon as the light is removed or dimmed, they can return. Tenebrae are at their most fully real in utter darkness, and that is their preferred hunting condition. They can exist in dim light as well, but it weakens them.

The tenebrae are the mystical scavengers of the unloved dead. They guard the corpses of people whom no one misses, the nameless John and Jane Does that O.D. in alleys, drown in rivers, starve in deserts, and who leave no one behind that cares a whit for their fate. When such a person dies, the tenebrae come scuttling from the shadows and feast on the psychic misery of loneliness that leeches out of the corpse. A dead nobody can feed a pack of tenebrae for up to a week, as long as the corpse is not disturbed, so they loiter about the scene and may choose to attack anyone who comes near. Needless to say, the more obscure the place of death, the more likely the tenebrae are to show up.

From what some adepts have been able to determine, tenebrae weigh about ten to fifteen pounds and are shaped like a centipede or spider (different ones have different appearances). Their legs are about twelve to fifteen inches long, and each is tipped by a sharp claw about the size of a human thumb. They have a chitinous exoskeleton, and even in dim light they are completely matte black in color: they seem to absorb any stray beams of light that fall on them. They do not vocalize; the only sounds they make are the rustling, skittering sound of their claws as they move. No one is sure how they navigate, but complete darkness is (naturally) no problem to them. They can jump up to five feet straight up, and up to ten feet horizontally. There are reports of them being found underwater; apparently, they don't breathe.

Tenebrae are pack animals, living in groups of six to twelve. They are about as smart as an average dog. In complete dark, they attack anything they think they can take down. They're reluctant to prey on groups of humans, having learned that people make light. Some have learned enough to attack a victim's flashlight arm, however. Generally they attack with a mass ambush, usually from behind

or above. No one is sure how they communicate with each other, but they are able to coordinate their actions in a rudimentary fashion.

Some people claim to have trained and domesticated tenebrae, but these claims have never been proven. There are also rumors about a ritual that summons or commands them—but then again, there are a *lot* of rumors in the occult underground.

Their semi-real nature makes the existence of tenebrae very difficult to prove: when killed, they simply fade away like shadows. The only thing they leave behind for the light is the corpses of their prey.

Tenebrae (Minor)

The Darkness with Teeth
Points: a percentile roll (1–100)
Body: 20-30/30-40
Speed: 70-80/80-90
Mind: 10
Soul: 10

Note: The left-hand, lower set of stats is for Tenebrae in dim light. In full darkness their Body and Speed increase by 10 points, as do their wound points. All Tenebrae have the skills Dodge and Claw at 60%. Their claws do damage equal to the sum of their roll +6.

Unspeakable Servants

Like golems, unspeakable servants are leftovers from the great age of hermeticism. Unlike golems, unspeakable servants cannot reproduce and they are not easily dominated.

Unspeakable servants are created by a special magick ritual (see p. 100) that builds them from moonlight, the flesh of sacrificed animals, and one of their creator's eyes. The servants fulfill the functions of familiar spirits in traditional witch mythology: they help their master cast spells, they run errands, and they protect the master and harass (or kill) the master's enemies.

In their "natural" form, servants are loathsome monstrosities—ungainly masses of tentacles, slime, suckered tongues and pseudopods. They are very elastic and stretchy; even the largest of them can ooze through a space as small as three inches across. Their skin can exude a sticky resin to enable them to move and climb, or a foul-smelling oil that lubricates them when they pass through a tight aperture. Their one common feature is a single, unblinking eye—the same eye the master plucked out as part of their creation ritual.

Unspeakable servants can be disguised. If an animal larger than the servant is killed and hollowed out, the servant can crawl into the body and animate it by gradually flowing into the animal's blood vessels. These host bodies function as they normally would, except that they move with the speed and strength of the servant instead of their native qualities. An inhabited body decays at a normal rate. Without the Aura Sight skill, it can be difficult to identify an inhabited body (if it's fresh). There are subtle clues, however: instead of the normal red and blue tones of arteries and veins in the body, the blood vessels visible beneath the skin are black. (This is generally most visible around the tongue and lips.) Furthermore, unspeakable servants



artwork by Paul Carrick

can only see through their one eye. When they possess a body, they generally remove one eye to leave a socket for their own visual organ. In smaller animals this creates an ungainly bulge, while in larger ones it can result in a swollen, puffy socket. In human bodies, the fit is perfect, of course, but the eye may no longer match its mate or move in perfect synchronization.

Unspeakable servants were rare even during the height of old-school mystic studies. Having an unnatural slave is attractive, but removing one's own eye to cast a spell struck many as a rather high price, especially since there was no guarantee of success. However, the creatures are immortal unless killed, so there are still some around. The ritual survived as well, and there are some adepts desperate or crazy enough to create them.

Servants with living masters do the will of their master, plain and simple. They are strong, swift, remorseless, and disgusting. Furthermore, the master can see through the servant's eye at any time, and by spending a significant charge can communicate with it telepathically for a minute or two, no matter where the servant is. This makes them powerful and versatile tools. At any time, the master can command the servant to cease to exist; if it hears this command from its master, the servant dissolves into nothing.

When the master dies, some servants become autonomous. Their motives are very different from humankind, and they may act in ways that seem odd or unwholesome even by the jaded standards of modern occultists. Some unspeakable servants, unchained by a master's death, simply dissolve themselves. Others have been found forming cults around themselves, trying to learn magick (usually without success, though there have been terrifying exceptions), and even attempting to be accepted as human by those around them. More commonly, a dying master bequeaths an unspeakable servant to a child, friend, or minion, who then becomes the servant's new master (and doesn't need to give up an eye). Some families in Europe are known to have passed servants from father to son for up to eight generations. Indeed, some may still do so.

Unspeakable Servant, Lesser (Minor)

Loathsome Slave of Sorcery
Body: 40 (80 wound points)
Speed: 60
Mind: 40
Soul: 40

These creatures are generally the size of a chicken or a small dog. They are incapable of speech, but can be taught to read and write. If placed inside the body of a bird or other flying animal, they are capable of flight.

Lesser Servants are modestly intelligent but they are less intuitive than almost any human being. They can follow orders but have problems if their instructions are not precise. They are extremely literal-minded.

They are capable of causing any one minor unnatural phenomenon at will once per day, and one significant unnatural phenomenon at will once per week. These phenomena can only occur in the Lesser Servant's presence.

Unspeakable Servant, Greater (Minor)

Loathsome Slave of Sorcery
Body: 70 (140 wound points)
Speed: 60
Mind: 50
Soul: 50

These unspeakable servants are the size of a sheep or a large dog. They can speak in guttural, barking tones, and they are capable of as much learning as a human being. If placed within a human body, they are difficult to distinguish from human beings, except for their speech.

While greater servants are intelligent and capable of some independent reasoning, they are generally not very creative and show little initiative. They follow their instructions to the letter and can understand metaphors and other figures of speech. If they do not feel that they perfectly understand their master's wishes, they can and do ask for clarification.

Greater servants can cause any minor unnatural phenomenon to manifest in their presence at will, but only one at a time. They can cause one significant unnatural phenomenon to happen near them once per day. In both cases, the servant can pick the phenomenon it wants.

Unspeakable Servant, Abominable (Significant)

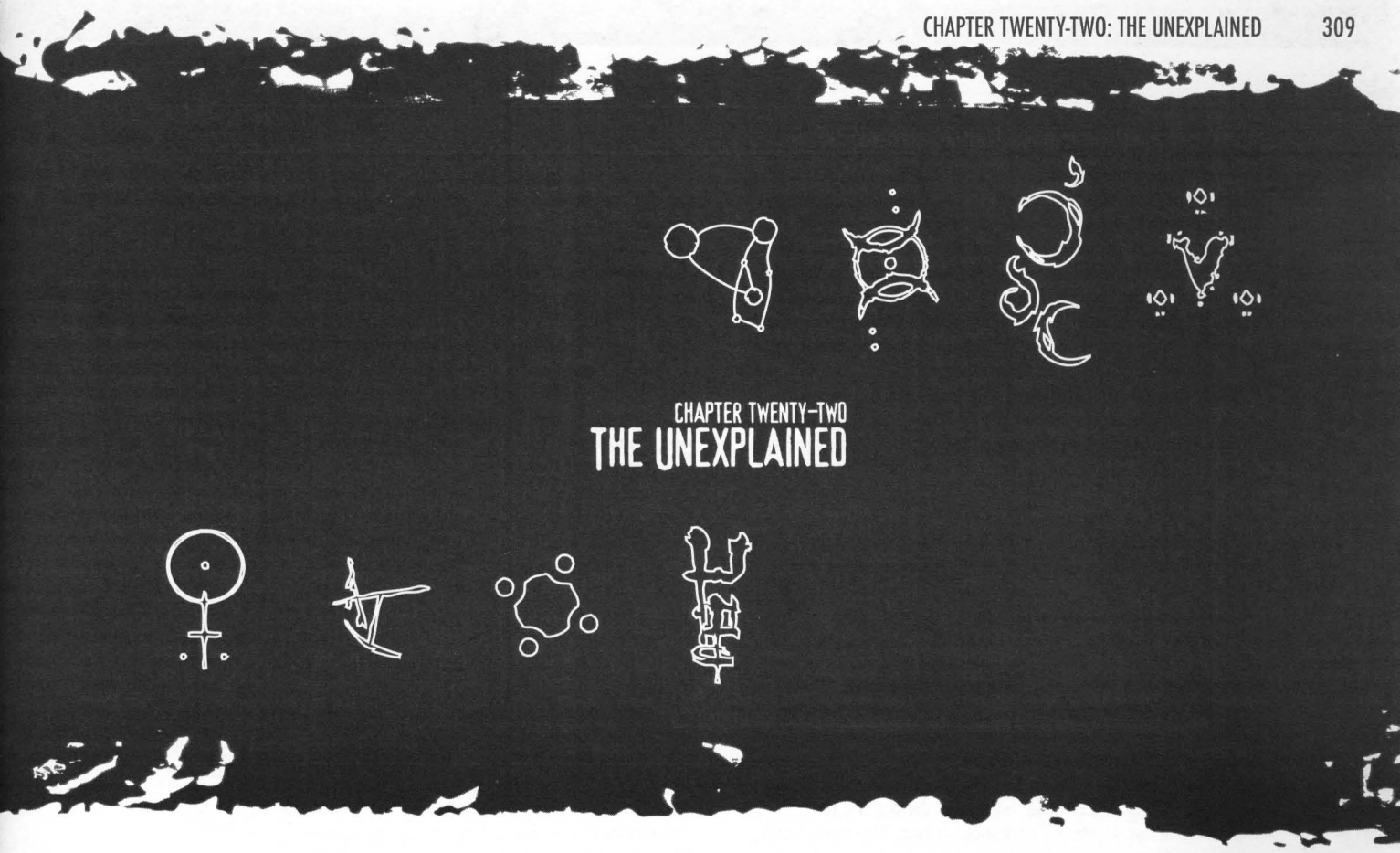
Loathsome Slave of Sorcery
Body: 100 (150 wound points)
Speed: 70
Mind: 70
Soul: 50

The largest and rarest of the unspeakable servants are too big to fit inside a human body and require a larger vessel such as a bull, horse, or some other large animal. In their "natural" form they are five to seven feet tall, two to three feet in diameter, and their tentacles can reach up to ten feet.

Abominable servants are fully as intelligent and intuitive as human beings—in fact, their intelligence is often above average. They are capable of independent thought and reasoning, and are therefore able to follow the spirit of an order and not just its strict wording. They can not only speak, they can flawlessly imitate any human voice they have heard—or indeed, almost any simple sound at all.

These creatures are the most dangerous of a dangerous breed, and not only because of their greater size, endurance, and intelligence. Abominable servants are nigh-invulnerable to anything except damage from their master. Any damage done to an abominable servant is reduced to one point, unless the damage comes from the servant's master. This is especially troublesome if the master is already dead. In that case, the options are: to find and dig up the master's grave, using its earthly remains as weapons against the creature; to summon the master's departed spirit and force it to deactivate the creature; or to find someone who can mystically and symbolically become the dead master. (This is possible in theory, probably by using a proxy ritual. Still, no one's managed to do it yet.)

Abominable servants can cause as many minor unnatural phenomena to occur in their presence as they desire, whenever they wish. They can cause one significant unnatural phenomenon to happen near them once per hour. They can cause a major unnatural phenomenon to happen near them once per year with a successful Soul roll.



CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE UNEXPLAINED

The chapter on "The Unnatural" contains explanations and explorations of a number of occult ideas, experiences, and phenomena. These occult displays are central to the game, but they're not all there is. There is no "Unified Conspiracy Theory" that explains every weird thing in the world: after all, this would be a pretty poor game of mystery and suspense if the players always knew that there was an unnatural solution. Consequently, this chapter offers a variety of mysterious phenomena whose causes are completely *natural* (though many of them are pretty damn weird).

USING THE UNEXPLAINED

Your use of unexplained phenomena depends, of course, on the narrative structure you've picked. If your PCs are occult investigators, you may want to throw a lot of strange but natural mysteries their way. If they're reality cops, they're supposed to look into all kinds of weird events—what are the odds that they're going to uncover the real mystic deal 100% of the time? As for occult groups, they're likely to want to investigate anything that seems mysterious out of greed ("How can I get this power?") or fear ("Is this some new rival magick?").

Putting in natural mysteries adds another layer of uncertainty and keeps your players honestly skeptical. The natural inclination of people in the real world is to look for a natural interpretation; the natural inclination of characters that have been exposed to the occult is to look for a *supernatural* interpretation. Mixing a little of the normal-but-weird with the unnaturally weird puts both elements in high contrast and shields your players from lazy thinking.

CATTLE MUTILATION

There are reports from the American southwest and especially from Puerto Rico about animals being found dead and completely drained of blood. In some cases, soft tissue from the animals is missing—cow lips and rectums are just gone ("excised with laser-like precision," according to UFOlogists). In most cases there are no tracks (either animal or human) around the dead cows or goats.

In most American cases of cattle mutilation, the public generally ignores it or blames either Satanic cults (and in a very tiny percentage of the cases they're right) or extraterrestrials operating with the secret approval of the U.S. government. The Puerto Rican deaths are said to be the work of *El Chupacabra* ("The Goat Sucker"), a tailed creature with a big head, red eyes, and an insatiable appetite for animal blood.

In reality, there are many causes for strange cattle death: everything from insurance fraud to vindictive neighbors to illnesses ignored by poorly trained veterinarians to predator attacks. Most cases could be resolved after examination of the site by a well-trained forest ranger or veterinarian (or both). However, a number of cases of livestock death are truly unexplained, because the dead cattle were killed by uncataloged insect parasites.

These nameless insects hatch inside the lips or rectums of cows and chew their way out. The insect is (at this point) little more than legs, a tiny pheromone gland, and a

comparatively huge stomach, folded up and empty. They're about the size of a pinhead or smaller and they feed primarily on blood. They have no problem getting at it, since they hatch right in the host animal's body. They simply attach themselves to the wounds caused by their hatching and drain until they're full. Then they drop off and enter the next stage of their life, as their brethren take their place at the blood fount. Pheromone signals keep the traffic between sated bugs and hungry ones orderly as they move around jockeying for injuries. Like leeches, they secrete anti-coagulant chemicals to keep the blood flowing.

Since hundreds of thousands of parasites hatch inside each host, they can kill a cow in under an hour—faster if they crawl into the lungs and smother it. When they're done, they crawl out, leaving pheromone trails to make the exodus easier. Once outside, the next phase of their life-cycle occurs: they metamorphose.

Unlike butterflies (who cocoon to change form) or locusts (who leave a shed chrysalis behind), the metamorphosis of these parasites is rapid and efficient. They change from bloated larvae to winged adults in a matter of hours. Once they become adults, they take to the air for a mating flight. The male chases the female, sometimes for hours or even days. When they finally couple, they do so midair. While her eggs are being fertilized, the female drives a proboscis into the male's brain, making it unable to do anything but continue to mate and flap its wings. With the male's wings providing loft, the female guides both of them towards some kind of vegetable shelter. When they reach the shelter, the female liquidates the male's brain and sucks it out. The male brain contains an enzyme which triggers death and rapid decay in the female. As the female dies, she ejects her thousands of eggs into the male's body. Her liquefying body sticks the male body to the plant. As the male decays, his body, too, becomes a glue-like gel attaching the eggs to the plant.

Much like flea eggs, the eggs of this insect are extremely stable when dormant. Under ideal conditions, they can hatch up to four years after they were laid, though it's rare for foliage to remain unrotted for that much time. When a cow (or other animal) comes along and eats the plant, the eggs stick to its lips, or to its esophagus, intestines, or rectum during digestion. Soon, the cycle begins anew and another animal is infected.

These bloodworms are rare for several reasons. First, not every insect mates before death. Indeed, only the swiftest 10% of fliers do. Of those, some land on unappetizing foliage and their eggs go unconsumed. Many eggs are lost every fall when the foliage rots from beneath them. Finally, some egg groups get separated (usually by the autumn rot described above) and the parasites that do get eaten are too few in number to kill their host. Even when the attacks are deadly, it is far likelier that birds or wild animals will eat the eggs than domestic animals. The exsanguination of cows and goats is noticed only because the animals are valuable.

"Fairies" and Mysterious Disappearances

On December 15, 1900, three men disappeared from an island off the coast of Scotland. The island's name was Eilean More. The three—James Ducat, Donald McArthur, and Thomas Marshall—were there to take care of the island's lighthouse. When investigators learned the light had gone out, they went to the island and found all three men were gone without a trace.

As with the *Mary Celeste*—a ship found intact, with no sign of violence, but the crew inexplicably missing—Eilean More has remained a mystery for decades, and is likely to remain mysterious until a really good mycologist studies the region.

Eilean More is home to a nameless fungus that's originally native to Ireland, and which has spread throughout the British Isles. This fungus is psychoactive, similar in many ways to the ergot bread mold, which can cause severe hallucinations and even psychosis when ingested.

The Eilean More fungus is similarly toxic, but in this case the mind altering element is the spores. Inhaling the fungal spores causes unreasoning fear, terrifying hallucinations, and often a loss of short-term memory.

Most people who get a snout full panic and immediately flee at top speed. (On Eilean More, the fear was so severe it drove all three men to run into the sea.) In less dangerous locations, a victim may run for hours and miles before passing out exhausted or tripping over something and getting knocked unconscious by the fall. When he wakes up, he may remember a hazy midnight run where he was chased by figures out of nightmare. Or he may recall nothing at all, waking up miles from home with his clothes torn and his hair full of mud.

Fungal fugues of this sort have contributed to the area's legends of fairies and spirits who drag you away and steal your memory or just kill you. The old wives' tales are more accurate than many would suspect: "Fairy rings" are caused when mushrooms and toadstools kill grass in circular patterns. Some fairy rings are caused by the Eilean More fungus, and sleeping in one is, indeed, an excellent way to have a horrifying "Wild Hunt" experience.

In modern days, however, the fungus is rare. Acid rain has a dramatically bad effect upon it, and carbon monoxide from car exhaust often bonds to the airborne spores, simultaneously ruining their chances of budding and dragging them down to the ground. The only places where large colonies of the mushroom survive are on the island, and near a Scottish mountain named Ben Macdui.

Firewalking

People walk unharmed across red-hot coals in religious ceremonies all over the world. Hindu mystics do it, some Greek Christians do it when "possessed by saints," even New Age business consultants will teach you how to do it in thousand-dollar seminars.

Different firewalkers offer different explanations for how they are able to cross searing coals unscathed. Some say they're protected by angels, while others credit biofeedback or "positive energy." However, a scientific rationale can also explain it.

Firewalking is almost always done on wood coals—never on metal. This is because wood has a much slower rate of thermal transfer. In layman's terms, heat travels slower through wood than through metal. An everyday example is when you set your stove to 350° F. You can stick your hand inside safely as long as you don't touch the metal racks or the side of the oven. The air is the same temperature as the metal rack, but it transfers that heat to your hand much slower.

Scientists have found that a bare foot, covered with a thin layer of sweat, can tread safely on some soft wood coals for as long as half a second before enough heat is transferred

to burn the skin. That doesn't sound like a lot of time, and indeed some slow walkers *do* get burned. However, a common element in many firewalking ceremonies is fast paced music to encourage walkers (even if just subliminally) to step lively.

Some firewalkers make the practice even safer by raking the hottest coals to the outside of their path. Watching from the sides, it looks as if they're walking on white hot coals, when they're actually walking on the ground (or on cooler ash) *between* two ranks of hot coals.

Hoaxes

A distressingly common explanation for almost any miraculous manifestation is "someone's faking it." Don't forget that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (creator of the profoundly logical Sherlock Holmes) was completely bamboozled by a set of photos of "faeries" produced by a pair of young working-class British girls who probably didn't expect *anyone* to take their faked pictures seriously. American teens in modern times have been able to convince scientists of their "psychic powers" by reading playing cards reflected in the researchers' eyeglasses.

How much simpler is deception for someone trained to deceive? Stage magician James Randi has been able to duplicate countless unnatural phenomena with sleight of hand. Spoon bending, crop circles, and "psychic surgery" are all well within the abilities of any half-talented stage magician—and the money and perks available to famous "psychics" are a lot more attractive than what you can get working children's birthday parties.

Psychic Senses

In the world of *Unknown Armies*, paranormal senses certainly do exist. But in actual fact, particularly keen *natural* senses can often be just as mystifying. This is especially true if these senses are intuitively used.

A great deal of human action is done unconsciously. Every time you drive a car, you don't consciously think about it every time you hit the gas or the brake. Similarly, no cyclist is aware of every press on the pedals, and adult readers perceive individual letters and words much less than they do words, phrases and ideas.

Similarly, some people develop powerful detective skills that are *completely unconscious*. Such "intuitions" and "gut feelings" are most common among psychologists, police officers, and others who deal with lies and evasions on a daily basis. The intuitive cop isn't consciously aware that he can see the suspect's pulse speed up in his neck vein. His thinking mind isn't keeping track of anomalous word choices or how often the suspect meets his eyes, or any of the other countless ways people unconsciously telegraph discomfort. No, the intuitive person just knows that he doesn't trust the speaker.

In some particularly advanced cases, intuitives can reconstruct crime scenes from negligible details (a dent in the carpet from furniture, a tilted lamp, the way a dropped drink spilled) and get "visions of the past." These visions aren't paranormal, only unconscious.

There was, at one time, a showman who gave displays of a horse that could supposedly do math. People would ask it math questions and it would tap out correct answers with its hoof. In fact, the horse had just learned to watch the expressions of the people around it: when it reached the right answer, their faces and posture would change. That's how the horse knew when to stop tapping. Certainly it was a damn smart horse—just not mathematically.

If a horse can learn to read people and tell them what they want to hear, why not a human being? In fact, a human "psychic" has some psychological advantages built in. For instance, people remember what's unusual and gloss over what's ordinary. A stage psychic knows how to deliver vague and common information so that it sounds important ("I see you at home . . . there are other people there, maybe two or three . . ." "That's right! I live with my husband and two children!") One debunker found that a stage psychic could impress a crowd with "amazing" psychic powers even when he was only right with one guess in fourteen. The audience simply paid more attention to the right answers (which were "extraordinary") than to the wrong guesses (which they perceived as normal and unimportant).

Spontaneous Combustion

There have been many reported cases of spontaneous human combustion—people bursting into flames for no apparent reason, burning up quickly and completely. Sometimes the fire completely consumes parts of the body but leaves only a hand or foot untouched. Other times, the flames destroy the body but leave surrounding objects (such as furniture) undamaged.

Many cases attributed to spontaneous combustion are nothing more than weird fires. Here's an example: someone nods off with a cigarette in her mouth, it falls on her flammable cashmere sweater, which flares up and ignites some loose stuffing in her chair. She wakes up, draws in a breath to scream, and has her throat scalded by hot smoke. Breathing the airless smoke, she passes out in her own burning chair. She suffocates, or maybe dies of a heart attack. The surface of her body is scalded black, just as the stuffing of the chair and much of her clothes are burned away. Almost everything that burned (the chair stuffing and her sweater) was light and quick-burning, producing a very hot but brief flame. Such a fire might not even last long enough to ignite a wooden floor or the frame of the chair, but it would be enough to blacken her corpse — even though the cause of death was smoke inhalation. It might even leave her feet untouched if she had them up, because the heat of the fire was going up and they were outside the radius of the heat. (If this sounds farfetched, examine a campfire some time. You'll probably find a log that's burned clean through at the center while the ends are untouched. Same phenomenon.)

A few cases of spontaneous human combustion have been witnessed, though the witnesses are rarely reliable. (Much as we respect the work of skeptics and debunkers, they rarely consider *any* testimony reliable.) These cases—where someone simply explodes into flame with no apparent reason at all—have a scientific explanation. It's due to a rare bacterial infection.

The bacteria were first isolated by Dr. Liberty Kostos in 1985. She named the parasite *Schizomycetes Larryus* after her ex-husband, Mr. Larry Kostos. Dr. Kostos failed to realize how dangerous *Larryus* could be, because she never saw a severe infection.

These bacteria are usually harmless. They grow on the skin of perhaps one person in a hundred—it's more prevalent in hot, wet climates and rarer in cold or dry regions.

These bacteria live off microscopic debris, such as dead epidermal cells and the feces of skin mites. Their own excrement is slightly flammable, but in most people the concentrations are so small that it evaporates harmlessly.

When a bacteria colony grows large enough, it sometimes attempts to consume living skin. In most cases, this incursion is fought off by the body's natural defenses. Some people succumb to severe bacterial skin infection, however, and the surface of their skin becomes densely covered with these microscopic invaders. The infection process can be rapid: someone might go to bed with a small rash on his shoulder blade and wake up with his entire back raw and itching. The bacteria's flammable secretions build up in the infected areas. In some cases, the bacteria can penetrate to the body's fat layer and the concentration can become high.

At this point, the victim's rash is inundated with combustible material. All it takes is a spark to ignite it. The worse the infection, the more likely it is that the victim burns badly. Naturally, one of the first things to burn is the bacteria that caused the infection, which makes it unlikely that *Schizomycetes Larryus* will ever be identified as the cause of combustion.

Not to worry: the chances of your body bursting into flame because of *Schizomycetes Larryus* are slighter than your chances of being hit by lightning. Only one person in a hundred carries the bacteria: of those carriers, only one in a hundred develops a colony big enough to attempt to invade the living skin. Of those who get big colonies, only one in a thousand fails to fight off the infection naturally: thus, so far, the chances of even getting enough build-up to catch fire is one in ten million. Of those one in ten million, most get their infection washed and treated before it's exposed to a spark. (Most ignitions are caused by static electricity, which happens most frequently in dry climates—and *Larryus* doesn't like dry climates.)

The only real threat to humankind from the spontaneous combustion bacteria would be a mutant (or bioengineered) strain that was far more aggressive and efficient.

Unidentified Flying Objects

Here's a huge category. In addition to weather balloons, headlights reflecting off clouds, swamp gas, secret military aircraft, normal aircraft, meteors, the planet Venus, drunken hallucinations, ball lightning, and deliberate hoaxes, you can now add bioluminescent insect colonies.

That's right. Some of those weird flying lights in the sky are actually giant clouds of fireflies busily breeding the next giant cloud of fireflies.

Many Americans are familiar with fireflies—tiny insects that signal their readiness to mate with a flash of light. Their standard mating patterns are well documented. However, not every mating is standard.

Some seasons, breeding cycles coincide or a predator is removed (typically by pollution or some other act of man). In these seasons, the firefly population becomes particularly high, and a truly massive gathering of the insects is held.

No one knows what causes these grand mating meetings because no one's been paying attention before one happens. The explanation is as follows: if fireflies see an exceptionally high number of signals from the same sex, it sets off a trigger in their brain. This trigger says "only mate at high altitude." The fireflies then begin flying abnormally high and signaling. The other flies see someone above them and try to fly higher still. The predictable result is a race for altitude.

Simple mating pressures bring all the flies into one place. The females go where the males are, and the males go where the females are. It's a self-reinforcing cycle. These meetings tend to happen around thermal updrafts, where both sexes can get the desired altitude easier.

Fireflies aren't designed for high altitude flight, and the grand meeting generally lasts a short time before the gallant lover flies start dying in droves. Eventually a few manage to get lucky and still make it to the ground safely, ensuring that the next generation is comprised of strong fliers — and also ensuring that the following year's firefly population isn't ungainly huge.

The result, from a human standpoint: huge, wobbly, scintillating masses of light are seen in the sky by thousands, but no unusual thermal traces are found with imaging equipment, and radar detects *nothing*. If a lot of dead fireflies are found on the ground the next day (and who's going to notice? After all, they aren't glowing any more) it's just as likely to be considered an *effect* of the UFO than a probable cause.

Vampires

The persistent vampire myth says a lot more about human nature and coincidental marketing than it says about supernatural reality.

The common vampire of fiction is a blood-drinking immortal with superhuman strength and speed, capable of a variety of physical transformations and mystical effects. They're also sexy as all get out.

Real vampires can be charming and personable, but no more so than a well-bred regular human being. They have abnormally long lifespans, that's true, but the desire to drink blood is a secondary symptom of a very natural, very physical disease.

The story of vampirism begins (as so many blood-soaked histories do) with a royal wedding in dark age Wallachia (the country next door to more-glamorous Transylvania). Two cousins were wed, as was the custom at a time when noble lineage was a critical consideration in every political question. Unfortunately, these cousins (of the infamous Dracul lineage) took their wedding vows seriously, preventing their severely inbred blood from being diluted by the hearty peasant stock of a good-looking footman or serving lad (as was also the custom of the time). Mutations popped up.

The Dracul children were albinos (having pale white skin and red eyes), and they were anemic (giving them a craving for red meat). None of this was a big deal to a noble culture with far more than its share of dwarfs, hemophiliacs, and supernumerary nipples. The mutation that would cause so much stir was damage to their internal clocks.

True fact: researchers working with very simple organisms (newts or salamanders) have radically increased their lifespans with a little genetic tampering. Aging, it turns out, may be programmed into animal physiology. Ages ago, the children of apes who died soon after menopause had an evolutionary advantage over apes who had to compete with generations of parents and grandparents for the last banana on the tree. When older competitors died off, it made those ape children more likely to breed, and the curse of age followed us out of the jungle and into the city. However, the curse got a little confused in Wallachia by the Dracul kids.

Their inbreeding had damaged the genetic program that (in most of us) says "get old and die." They age, of course: no genetic hiccup is going to prevent you from being scarred when injured or having your arteries get clogged if you eat fatty foods. But the "inevitable" liver spots, wrinkles and hair loss that waits for you and me ignores people with the vampire gene.

The vampire gene is recessive and extremely rare, and is almost inevitably associated with albinism, an allergy to garlic (ranging from minor sneezing and watery eyes to swelling and hives), severe anemia, low sperm counts in men and reproductive difficulties in women. Those with the active gene age normally through adolescence, but after pubescence is complete (sometime between the ages of 13 and 18) they age at about a tenth the normal rate. Their bodies heal at a normal rate, but exhibit a robust immune system that combines the best aspects of youth (vigor and resilience) and age (exposure to a wide variety of pathogens). There's an odd dental footnote: every tooth in a Dracul vampire's mouth falls out every three to six years, but a new one grows in their place. Essentially, their "baby teeth" are always replaced by more baby teeth. (Their white, smooth, *new* teeth may have played into the "fang" mythology.) Their albinism makes them prone to sunburn even on slightly cloudy days, and their eyes are very sensitive to bright light.

The first Draculs with this condition quickly learned that they felt a lot better if they ate a lot of red meat, and when Vlad Dracula (known popularly as Vlad Tepes) fought against the Turks, he found the scent of human blood irresistible. This secret was passed on down the bloodline, existing even in the present day.

ZOMBIES

According to American mythology, zombies rise from the grave for no particular reason and wander around eating the brains of the living. No one really believes in this.

According to African and Haitian mythology (where the zombie concept originated), a zombie is someone who's been put under a voodoo spell. The victim appears to die suddenly, and is buried. The night after the victim's burial, however, the spell caster sneaks into the graveyard and digs up the "corpse." The victim wakes up and is promptly beaten up by the sorcerer and his associates. The victim's soul is then sucked out and imprisoned. What remains is a zombie—a soulless automaton commanded by the sorcerer (or by whomever buys it from the sorcerer) and guaranteed to serve without complaint as long as it is fed plenty of a plant called the "zombie's cucumber."

The effectiveness of the soul-sucking is up to individual GMs to evaluate. But even if the magick aspect of the operation doesn't work, the effect is largely the same.

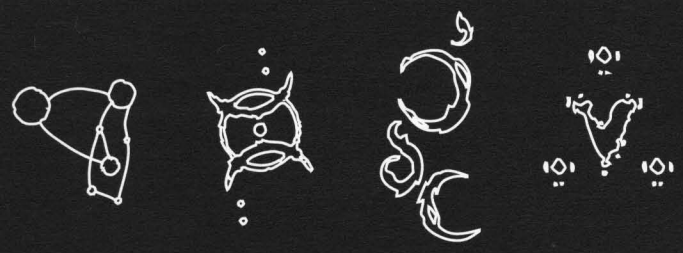
Voodoo in Haiti is strongly connected to secret groups who see themselves as community protectors. When someone transgresses their laws, he's drugged with tetrodotoxin—a powerful venom found in various frogs and puffer fish. Tetrodotoxin occurs naturally all over the world, from the Red Sea (where they inspired one of the dietary restrictions still followed by orthodox Jews) to the coast of Japan (where "fugu" fish is considered a delicacy, even though it sometimes kills those who partake). It is used in the west as an anaesthetic, because it can put someone in a trance that is very difficult to distinguish from death. A skilled poisoner can induce this death trance without recourse to magick.

Once the zombie has been dosed, he apparently dies: his heart stops, he grows cold, respiration ceases. The effects usually wear off within 24 hours or less, but the victim is now trapped in his coffin—buried alive. He's dug up by his poisoner, however, who immediately pounds the hell out of him to keep him docile and confused. In this state, he's fed the zombie cucumber, a vegetable that's chock-full of a drug called daturia, which induces confusion, apathy, and general listlessness.

So now you have someone who's been buried alive, beaten severely, and drugged. This treatment is already likely to give you someone shell-shocked enough to just follow orders. Just as powerful (in Haiti) is the culture. Everyone there knows what a zombie is, and how a zombie is supposed to act. When you wake up in a coffin, get dug up and beaten, you *know* what you've become. Everyone treats you like a zombie (they tie your jaw shut and boss you around) and it's very hard indeed to escape that social conditioning.

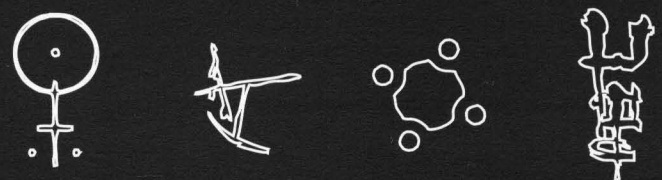
ELVIS

He's dead.



SCENARIO

BILL IN THREE PERSONS



"Bill in Three Persons" is a scenario designed to kick off an *Unknown Armies* campaign. It's appropriate for any type of player characters, and can potentially have repercussions that the GM can bring to bear later in the campaign. It can, however, stand on its own as a one-shot scenario if desired.

Since this is intended as an introductory scenario for whatever PCs you have at hand, it's a pretty grab-'em-and-go plot. Some scenes may seem to unfold in a fairly scripted fashion. These scenes are written this way to establish a baseline—they explain what happens if the PCs don't intervene. It's up to the GM to roll with the punches and deal with what happens if the PCs go astray; guidelines are provided where possible.

Essentially, there is one main timeline and three stand-alone branching scenes. Each of the three scenes can be aborted at any point if the PCs walk away or pursue some wrong course. That's okay. Just drop out of the scene and go back to the main timeline. Don't force the PCs to do things they don't want to do. There *are* repercussions for aborting a scene, however, and those are explained where appropriate.

"Bill in Three Persons" is intended as a whirlwind tour of *Unknown Armies*, offering opportunities for intrigue, combat, magick, and madness. You may decide it's not right for your group or campaign; if so, we encourage you to take GMCs or plot ideas from this scenario and use them as you like in your own, original creations.

Background

Bill Toge is a divided man. There are *three* Bill Toges, identical in appearance and personality, living separate lives in different cities across the country.

The split occurred one night when Bill—there was only one of him then—was driving on a dark highway. He'd lost his job and been kicked out of his dad's house. He threw everything he owned into his ratty Hyundai and drove off with no destination in mind. Somewhere along the way, he started to doze off and ran off the road into a ditch near a crossroads. He banged his head in the accident, and blearily worked the car back onto the road. When he drove away from the crossroads, there were three of him—three Bills, three Hyundais, three sets of ratty possessions, and so forth—each heading in a different direction. They drove off into the night, oblivious to each other.

The three Bill Toges spent the next five years living meager lives, working odd jobs for cash and sliding into depression. All three spent some time as petty criminals, rootless young men drifting unnoticed across the landscape. They stole cars, held up convenience stores, and—when crime didn't pay—mopped floors. They also got involved with the occult underground.

For different reasons, each Bill Toge reached a crisis point this past afternoon. Each one decided that he was mad as hell and he wasn't going to take it anymore. Each one did something stupid—and got away with it, in the short term.

On the run for their own reasons, all three Bill Toges headed for the only safe haven they could think of: home, where the father they hadn't seen in five years seemed like the only person in the world who could possibly give a damn for their misbegotten lives.

So it was that at the same crossroads where the three of them had split off five years before, the three Bill Toges came speeding back tonight, at the same moment in their strangely fractured times. The ensuing three-car pile-up was nightmarish.

Now all three Bill Toges lie bleeding in the wreckage of their cars and their lives. The chaotic nexus of probabilities that they have traveled through these last five years soon draw in another group of people altogether—the player characters. Trapped in the unraveling fabric of time and space, the PCs must intercede in the lives of each Bill Toge and ensure that the car wreck at the lonely crossroads doesn't happen after all; if they fail, they pay a terrible price.

Where is This?

"Bill in Three Persons" doesn't transpire in any particular place; it's just a pile-up in the middle of America's psychic landscape. You can pick arbitrary towns or cities as needed, should any PCs ask. There's no need for them to be located close together. In general, medium-sized towns are recommended, preferably in rural areas. Watch *Fargo* and you'll get the picture.

Getting Started

The only requirement for the player characters in this scenario is that each of them needs to be driving down a lonely road at night. It doesn't matter if they're all together or each in a separate vehicle. It doesn't matter where they are—they can be on different roads, or even different continents. As long as they're in a car driving down a road in the middle of nowhere, they're all set.

Tell the players that it's about two in the morning, and they're driving on a deserted road someplace. Ask the players to decide where their characters are, why they're there, and who (if anyone) they're traveling with; the sole restriction is that there shouldn't be any GMCs involved. Once they've worked that out, ask the players to mark down what possessions their characters have on their persons or in their vehicles.

With that decided, you're ready to go.

Scene One: Crossroads

Take each player aside—or each set of players, if some or all of them are traveling together—and set up the first scene. The following "Canned Intro" is a brief bit of text used to set up this scene. You can read it straight, you can paraphrase it in your own words, or you can ignore it entirely and do whatever you like. The idea of the piece is to set the mood, and if all it does is set the mood in your mind before you make up your own stuff, that's plenty.

Canned Intro

The insects buzzed groggily in the thick loam of the night sky. The stars shone down between patches of cloud, reflected dimly in the growing pools of blood that gathered on the asphalt at the scene of the accident.

Everything about this was an accident. The drivers of the three cars should have seen each other as they approached the crossroads from different directions, but they didn't. They shouldn't have all been arriving at the crossroads at the exact same moment, but they did.

They shouldn't all have even existed in the first place. That was the biggest accident of them all, and it had happened five years ago at this same crossroads.

There was only one driver that night, and he spun out into a ditch because he fell asleep at the wheel, fleeing a broken home and the promise of a broken life to come. A simple accident, compounded by some savage violation of probability: one driver came towards the crossroads and piled into a ditch; three drivers pulled out of the ditch and drove off into the night, each taking a different direction, each living a different life, each ignorant of the other two.

Tonight they all came back and finally, they met—head on.

The sheriff stood and surveyed the wreckage. Twisted metal, twisted bodies. A godawful mess.

He looked down at his reflection in a pool of blood, his handsome face framed by stars. He'd need some help with this situation. Behind him, a vehicle approached and slowed down, illuminated by the flashing lights of the sheriff's cruiser parked nearby.

The sheriff turned around and called out.

"We need some help here. There's been an accident."

At the Crossroads

Each player-character vehicle that approaches sees the same thing: three cars have collided from three different directions at a four-way crossroads in the middle of nowhere. The wreck is horrendous. A sheriff's cruiser is parked on the side of the road nearby, lights flashing, and the sheriff is looking at the wreck, evidently having just arrived. The sheriff flags down the vehicle—the road is blocked, anyway—and asks those inside for some help.

Paradoxically, every PC vehicle has the same experience simultaneously, yet no one in any vehicle sees any of the other PC vehicles until they step out and join the sheriff. At that point, all of the PCs are present, and all of their vehicles are gathered at the scene. No matter what location or terrain a given PC vehicle was driving through, they're all in the same place now.

This should be jarring. None of the other vehicles were here a moment ago, yet now they're all here, together, and the sheriff acts like he didn't notice a thing. If asked, he looks quizzical and says that all these vehicles came driving up just now, and all the PCs got out and came over. He seems to have no knowledge of anything odd happening, and shrugs off whatever the PCs might say on the topic—his priority is helping the three drivers in the wreckage, and he doesn't have time for fool questions.

The situation is this: the nearest hospital is more than twenty miles away, the sheriff's radio isn't working, and his left arm is in a sling from a bad fall off a ladder last week. The cars are leaking gas, and he's worried about a possible explosion. He wants to get the three drivers out of the cars as soon as possible, then drive back to get an ambulance for them. He has some body boards in his cruiser to lift the victims out on and he can direct the PCs in reasonably safe removal of the drivers. Each car was equipped with an airbag, and although the drivers are injured, they aren't completely mangled or trapped. No special equipment is needed to remove them besides the body board, used to stabilize the victim's spine in case of back injury.

Any PC with a cell phone can call for help, and be successful. The sheriff is grateful, but still insists that they need to lift the drivers out of the cars immediately; as if to drive his point home, the smell of gasoline is overpowering, and sparks can be seen under the hoods where the cars' electrical systems are malfunctioning. The danger of explosion is very real and very immediate, and the sheriff is determined to save these lives. He cuts short any argument or discussion and pressures the PCs to help him.

Should a PC simply refuse and attempt to leave, it's your call. If refusing to help is against the PC's nature, a Self check may be in order. Regardless, anyone who wants to leave may leave; they're out of the scenario, but that's their decision.

The Truth

Knowledgeable players may be taken aback that the sheriff wants them to haul the injured drivers out of the wreck, especially if a PC had a cell phone and summoned help. The threat of an explosion is very real and help is fifteen or twenty minutes away, but even so, it's a drastic step and some players may understand this and be skeptical of the plausibility of this situation.

The simple truth is that the sheriff isn't really a sheriff at all. He's the Comte de Saint-Germain, and he's here tonight to try and push reality back into line with itself by removing the paradox known as Bill Toge. He needs the PCs to pull it off, and getting the drivers out of the wrecks is the first step.

(If you wish, this could be a first test as the Comte considers recruiting the PCs as his agents – or pawns. A second such test appears in the scenario book "Weep.")

As a result, the sheriff insists that this is what needs to be done, that he knows best, and damn it, why aren't you helping these poor people instead of standing around yapping? There's no time to argue—only to act.

Removing the Drivers

Removing the drivers is a tense process. Each driver is bleeding and unconscious, and all have compound fractures in their legs—broken shafts of bone have jutted up through the muscle and skin, and they gleam bloodily in the flashing light. The sight is worth a rank-1 Violence check for each driver. Failure probably indicates that the PC in question is unable to participate in the rescue, though they're still in the scenario.

It takes effort and delicacy to remove the drivers safely. The sheriff offers expert, step-by-step guidance, and any PCs with medical knowledge or similar experience are especially useful. Have each PC working on removal—up to four per driver at a time—make a roll as follows:

- Any PC with a medical skill or something similarly useful may employ that skill with a Significant check.
- All other PCs may make a Speed check, with a –30% penalty.

If any PC fails the roll, the victim's body lurches a bit during the removal, triggering an unconscious moan of pain from the man and possibly a fresh gout of blood from his lips. A failure also triggers a rank-3 Helplessness check in the PC who blew the roll. If that check is failed, the PC is overcome by the situation and has to step back. The sheriff has any such PCs tend to the drivers after they're removed, or set up road flares to divert oncoming traffic (there is none).

The Realization

Once all three drivers are safely away from the wreck and the threat of an explosion, the sheriff gets an industrial-strength first aid kit from his cruiser and, again using the PCs as his arms, works to stop the worst of the bleeding. During this process—in which you can call for similar rolls to those in the previous section, with similar consequences—something should become evident to the PCs.

Ask each PC to make a Mind check. If successful, they realize that all three drivers look identical. They're dressed differently, but they have the same height, weight, build, face, hair, eyes, and hands. They look like identical triplets. Plus, they're driving identical cars.

As this realization sinks in, the sheriff shakes his head grimly. "I just knew it. It's that damn Bill Toge again." Sparks from the wreck ignite the pool of gasoline gathering on the road, and the cars explode in a deafening fireball.

Scene Two: Supermarket

The realization that all three drivers appear to be the same man pulls the PCs squarely into the nexus of probability that swirls around Bill Toge. As soon as the sheriff speaks and the cars explode, the scene changes; the energy from the explosion is all the raw power needed to trigger this situation.

It's now twelve hours earlier, about two in the afternoon; watches change accordingly. The PCs are crouching together in the pet-food aisle of a large supermarket. Bill Toge—one of them, at least—and three of his ne'er-do-well buddies have taken over the supermarket and are pulling off a heist.

The Medallion

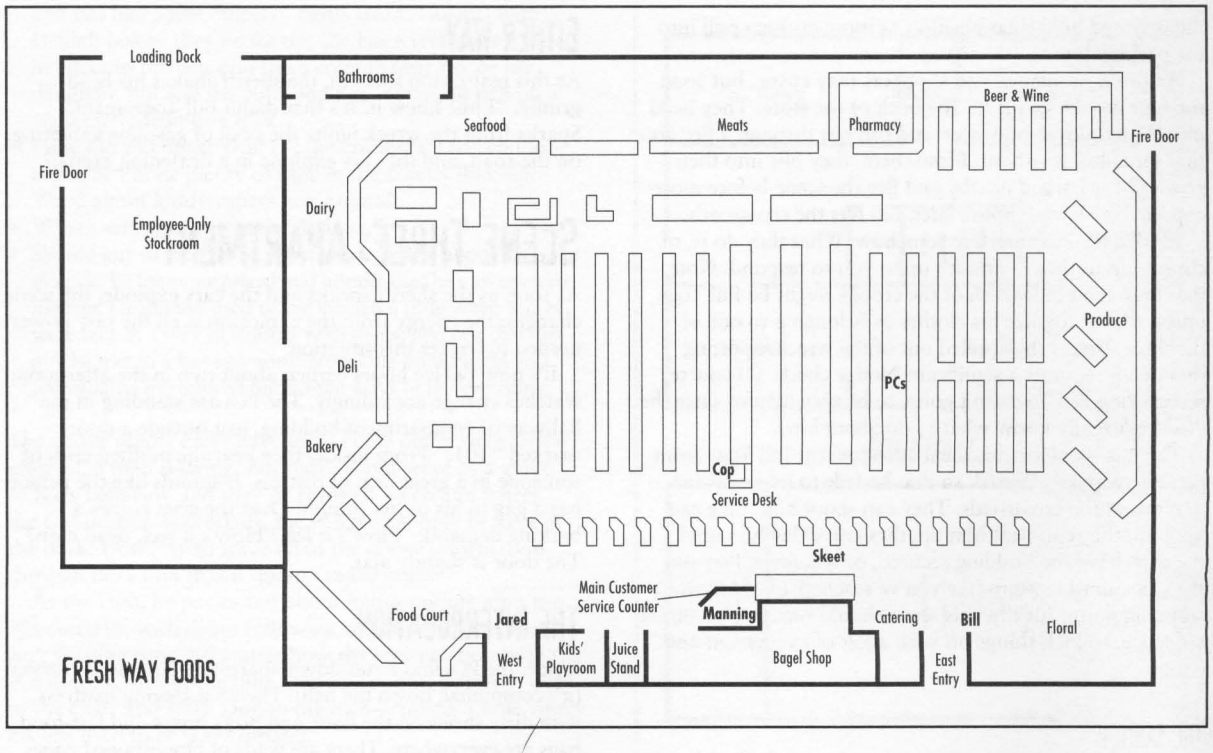
Bill has a medallion that he's wearing on a chain around his neck. It's a JFK half-dollar, hand-etched with nonsensical patterns, letters, and other symbolic detritus. Last night, Bill was out drinking with his partners in crime and getting psyched up for the heist. He slipped into an alley to take a whiz and bumped into a crazy old drunk who asked him for a dollar. Bill hesitated, and the drunk offered him the medallion for his trouble. Bill relented and made the swap.

The medallion is a significant artifact. It contains an eternal-use version of the entropomancer minor formula spell Fortune's Fool. As long as Bill has this medallion, the GM makes a second roll every time you get a failure for Bill. If he fires his gun and misses—even a matched failure or a BOHICA—you immediately re-roll and see what happens. There's only one re-roll per action attempted.

Bill has no idea that the medallion has any sort of power, and for that matter wouldn't believe it if you told him. The drunk he got it from was, of course, the duke known as Jeeter, sniffing around the edges of what he sensed to be a mystical catastrophe in the making.

The Heist

Bill Toge, Skeet Reynolds, Manning Weir, and Jared Arnold have a plan. Jared used to work at the local Fresh Way Foods, the biggest supermarket in town, and he knows that by mid-afternoon, there's more than $10,000 in cash in the safe up front. He also knows that there's not much in the way of security. He figures that a four-man crew can waltz



in, make some noise, and waltz out with ten big ones and no hassles. They'll wear masks—of Nixon, Reagan, Bush, and Clinton, inspired by the action flick *Point Break*—and be in and out in no time.

Things have gone wrong. Although they secured the front part of the store quickly, they failed to spot the police motorcycle parked in the side parking lot. Officer Dan Schwartz was inside getting a cup of coffee and a bearclaw when the heist went down. As he crept towards the front of the store to see what was going on, Skeet spotted him.

As the scene opens, the cop and the crook exchange gunfire, just as the PCs appear in the pet-food aisle nearby.

THE SITUATION

Refer to the map of Fresh Way Foods that appears above. The PCs are in aisle eleven, with cleaning supplies on the west side and pet supplies on the east side. They're up towards the front of the aisle, crouching against one side, as yet unnoticed by anyone, at the spot marked "PCs." The other principals are in the following locations:

- Skeet (Reagan) is at the checkout line near the front of aisle nine, facing the small service desk at the front of aisle seven. He's aiming a shotgun towards the desk.
- Officer Schwartz is behind the small service desk at aisle seven, pointing his sidearm at Skeet.
- Manning (Bush) is at the main customer service counter at the front of the store parallel to aisle seven, overseeing the removal of the cash from the safe behind the counter with a rifle. His back is to Skeet.
- Jared (Clinton) is by the west entrance parallel to aisle one, brandishing his shotgun towards a bunch of huddled shoppers in the food court.
- Bill (Nixon) is covering the east entrance with a handgun, parallel to aisle thirteen. He swivels around constantly, checking the aisles and the produce area nearby.
- Shoppers are everywhere. There are forty shoppers in the front part of the store, twelve of whom are clustered in the food court. The rest are in the checkout lines, in the aisles, and crouching by the entrances.

Officer Schwartz is hit by the blast from Skeet's shotgun, and he drops to the floor wailing. His shot misses and strikes the wall between the customer-service counter and the east entrance.

WHAT HAPPENS?

The rest of this scene plays out improvisationally. With Officer Schwartz down, the crooks have regained control of the situation—more or less. The shooting makes many shoppers start screaming. One might make a run for the west doors, hysterical, and get gunned down by Jared.

In the chaos that follows the gunfire, the sound of sirens is heard nearby. (Officer Schwartz called for backup as soon as the heist started a couple minutes ago.) Cops begin surrounding the entrances within a few minutes, turning this into a hostage situation.

You can play the crooks as you like. They might be bloodthirsty psychopaths, or just twitchy, scared guys in over their heads. Bill Toge, however, should fall under the latter category. He doesn't really want to kill anyone, but now he's in this mess, he's frightened, and he's liable to shoot at anything that moves before he knows what he's doing—which means he's dangerous.

If the PCs don't interfere, the employees behind the main customer service counter soon hand over a duffel bag full of loot to Manning just as Bill opens fire on two cops who were approaching the east entrance. They both duck out of

the way and hold their position as more cruisers pull into the parking lot.

Assorted problems with shoppers may ensue, but soon the four crooks sprint for the back of the store. They head into the employee-only area and run out through a fire door that Jared knows about. From there, they pile into their getaway car parked nearby and flee the scene before more cops arrive. Twelve hours later, Bill hits the crossroads.

Ideally, the PCs interfere somehow. What they do is, of course, up to them—and it's up to you to respond. Note that they can't tell which of the crooks might be Bill Toge unless they recognize his clothes as belonging to one of the three drivers they pulled out of the wreck. Spotting that detail requires a significant Notice check. Of course, recognizing Bill Toge isn't going to be very helpful since the PCs don't really know what to do about him.

The PCs' goal for this scene is to prevent Bill Toge from getting away as planned, so that he fails to make his rendezvous at the crossroads. They can shoot him, they can kill him, they can beat him up, they can delay him until the cops have the building secured, or whatever. Play out the scene until it seems like you've reached an appropriate stopping point. Ideally, this scene should turn into a combat sequence, to kick things off with a jolt of excitement and danger.

The Janitor

The PCs and Bill Toge aren't the only ones here from the crossroads. The sheriff is here, too. He's now a janitor at the supermarket. He shouldn't really do anything, and if confronted by the PCs he just looks at them dumbly, as if he has no idea what they're talking about or who they are. The Comte de Saint-Germain is just here to see how things play out, not to get involved.

If They Fail

Should the PCs fail to prevent this Bill Toge from escaping, they've screwed up. As he flees, pick one PC at random—or just choose the one with the highest Soul stat, or the one who somehow dropped the ball. An exact duplicate of that PC stands up between two checkout aisles at the other end of the store. He or she catches the PC's attention and waves mockingly, with a cold glint of malice in his or her eyes. The double then turns and walks out of the store through the nearest entrance; only the PCs can see the double.

The scene shifts and the PCs are back at the crossroads at night. Any injuries they suffered are still present, as are any other changes to their bodies or possessions. The three drivers are still lying on the ground.

If They Succeed

If this Bill Toge is stopped from making his escape in a timely fashion, the scene shifts back to the crossroads. (What constitutes "a timely fashion" is up to the GM, but anything more than ten or fifteen minutes should do it.) As noted in the last section, the PCs are in whatever condition they were at the end of the supermarket scene. However, there are now just two cars wrecked in the crossroads, and just two drivers lying unconscious and bleeding nearby—the Bill Toge from the supermarket is gone, and in fact was never here.

Either Way

As this realization sinks in, the sheriff shakes his head grimly. "I just knew it. It's that damn Bill Toge again." Sparks from the wreck ignite the pool of gasoline gathering on the road, and the cars explode in a deafening fireball.

Scene Three: Apartment

As soon as the sheriff speaks and the cars explode, the scene changes; the energy from the explosion is all the raw power needed to trigger this situation.

It's now twelve hours earlier, about two in the afternoon; watches change accordingly. The PCs are standing in the hallway of an apartment building, just outside a door marked "101." From inside, they hear the muffled cries of someone in a great deal of distress. It sounds like the person has a gag in his or her mouth. Over the cries comes a barking demand: "How's it feel? How's it feel, dead man?" The door is slightly ajar.

The Interrogation

Inside, the PCs find a run-down apartment with no bathroom (it's communal, down the hall). There's a sagging mattress with dirty sheets on the floor, and pizza boxes and fast-food bags are everywhere. There are wads of bloodstained paper towels everywhere—maybe twenty or thirty of them. They don't look like they were used to mop blood off the floor; the stains look more like the wads were applied to wounds.

There are two men present. One is Bill Toge, dressed in a pajama top, jeans, and no shoes. He has a bloody gash on his left arm, a minor stab wound in his left abdomen, and another gash on his left shoulder. He's holding a bloody Bowie knife. The other is Don Lewis, a local child molester.

Don isn't doing well. He's tied to a metal folding chair. His mouth and nose are sealed with flesh—as if his face melted. He's struggling and groaning. It's clear that he's suffocating and will be dead shortly.

Bill is surprised to see the PCs come into his apartment. What happens next is largely up to the PCs. Here's what's going on, which Bill explains (or not) as appropriate.

- Mr. Spending The Rest Of His Short Miserable Life In Agonizing Pain over there is Don Lewis, a child molester.
- Don kidnapped Sascha Delillo, Bill's four-year-old illegitimate daughter. *She's still missing.*
- Bill found Don, lured him here (Don is an illegal handgun dealer, and thought Bill was a customer), and is trying to find out where Sascha is so he can rescue her. He figures Don's got her stashed at some secret location.
- Bill is pretty spooked by the arrival of the PCs, whom he doesn't know from Adam. But he's in a crazy frame of mind, desperate to find his daughter, and isn't liable to make a lot of sense; by the same token, he's also likely to take any explanation the PCs have to offer about their presence here at face value, because he doesn't care—he just wants to save Sascha.
- Sascha's mom is Bill's ex-girlfriend, Delilah, who has sole custody. Delilah is with her mom, freaking out about her missing daughter and waiting for the police to call.
- The cops questioned Bill about his missing daughter and leaned on him pretty hard, since he has a criminal record

and has had some "messy" fights (read: violent) with Delilah before they broke up; she has a restraining order in effect to prevent him from coming near her or her daughter. Bill and the cops don't get along, so he's on a vigilante/redemption kick.

- How did Bill finger Don for the crime? Bill has connections; he's done plenty of time in the county lock-up. Word about kiddy-rapers gets around.
- What's wrong with Don? "Asthma."
- Should any of the PCs be adepts and ask Bill about his magick, he looks surprised and admits that he's an epideromancer. He always used to cut himself a little when things were bad as a way of dealing with stress, and one day this guy he met in a bar saw some fresh cuts on his arms and (eventually) introduced him to the ways of fleshworking.

The above points don't have to all come out at once, since after all, a man is dying. But they should serve as a guide to Bill's behavior, and may be revealed when and where the GM desires. Potentially, the PCs may simply be kept in the dark. Don't try to force all of the above information through Bill's mouth if it doesn't make sense.

As for Don, he passes out about half-a-minute after the PCs come in, with death following shortly thereafter. Bill isn't wasting time, no matter how the conversation with the PCs is going; about the time Don passes out, Bill steps over to the chair and stabs Don in the face—cutting a hole where his lips used to be. Don inhales.

Of course, the PCs might prevent Bill from doing this. He doesn't plan to kill Don just yet; he's just torturing him to find out where his daughter is. If the PCs try to stop him from cutting Don a new mouth, Bill shouts at them for a few moments, trying to persuade them that the guy in the chair needs this or he's toast, and that Bill needs this because his daughter's life is on the line.

If the PCs aren't cooperating, Bill slashes himself (3 wound points) to get a minor charge and tries Warping on the nearest PC. If the PC is male, Bill chooses the PC's testicles as the target for the blast. Whatever the result, Bill's goal is to cause enough of a ruckus for him to get over and cut a hole for Don. He doesn't want Don dead . . . yet.

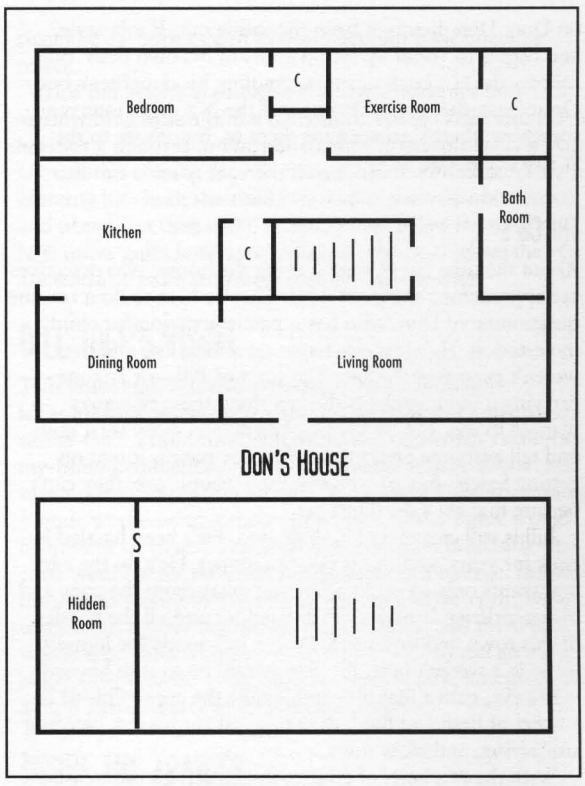
If Don Dies

It's possible that Don dies, if the PCs interfere with Bill long enough. If so, things are still up to the PCs. Bill gets angry that Don is dead, but wants to immediately take off for Don's house—taking Don's keys and his car (parked outside)—in the hopes that Sascha is there or that some clue to her fate can be found. The PCs can help him, hopefully.

If Don Lives

Once Don can breathe—through a ragged hole where his mouth used to be—Bill shouts at him for a bit ("Where's my daughter, dead man?"), then cuts himself again for 3 more wound points. He uses the minor charge to cast Regeneration, restoring Don's face to its normal self so the man can talk.

Don gives up the goods. Sascha is in the basement of his house, in a secret room behind a tool rack. He's willing to show Bill and the PCs where she is. He's incredibly freaked out by what's happened to him, and is wracked with sobs as he talks. He repeatedly claims, crazily, that he loves Sascha, that she loves him, that they're going to be together forever,



and a bunch of other ravings straight from the dark core of Don's diseased, deluded mind.

If the PCs Walk Away

It's possible that the PCs just decide to wash their hands of this situation and walk out at any number of points. That's okay—never force them into a course of action. If that's the case, see the section titled "If They Fail" on the next page.

Don's House

One way or another, the PCs and Bill probably end up at Don's house. It's a rat-trap of a place in a rat-trap part of town. (A map appears on this page.) Sullen drunks and tough-looking street kids eye the group from a nearby corner. (One of the drunks is the sheriff, but the PCs probably won't recognize him.) A bulging, pregnant cat lies dead in the road.

Inside, it's a mess. Don has three dogs, all yappy little pomeranians, and there's dog crap everywhere. Empty beer cans are scattered about. Flies are a constant presence. On the walls, there are posters of dolphins. The closets contain dozens of handguns, boxes of ammo, and holsters. A closet in the bedroom has a locked cash box with $8,500 inside.

As noted, Sascha is in the basement. A tool rack mounted on hinges glides out like a door, revealing a small area of basement not otherwise accessible. It contains a sink, a toilet, a bed, manacles, and a four-year-old girl with a gag in her mouth. She's dead—apparently she grew nauseous earlier and, because of the gag, choked to death on her own vomit.

Bill hugs his daughter, wailing. If Don is present, Bill then stands up and stabs himself in the leg, badly—generating a significant charge. He uses this to cast Body Melting

on Don. Don dissolves from the inside out, Ebola-style, and begins to vomit up liquid gouts of his own flesh. Bill follows the PCs back upstairs, cradling his daughter's body. Or at least, that's what happens if the PCs don't intervene somehow; there's no need for them to, but it's up to the PCs to act or not.

The Cops

About the time the PCs are leaving the house, two detectives are approaching the front door. They're here to do a routine questioning of Don, who has a past conviction for child molestation. He's just one name on a long list, and they weren't expecting trouble. The sight of Bill—or anyone—carrying a limp Sascha is the last thing these two guys wanted to see. The two cops immediately draw their guns and tell everyone present to raise their hands, intent on getting Sascha free of whoever these people are; they can't be sure that she's dead just yet.

Bill is still crazed and boiling mad. He's been hassled by cops for years, and this is just the topper. He's on the edge and wants only to get loose, to get away from the cops and his ex-girlfriend and his dead daughter and all the hassles of this town and this heartache life he's made for himself. If the PCs weren't here, his plan would be to stab himself in the eye, gain a major charge, make the cops explode in a flood of flesh and fluid, then take off for his car, bleeding and crying, and blow town.

With the PCs here, of course, things can go differently. The idea here is, once again, to prevent Bill from killing the cops, leaving town, and keeping his deadly rendezvous with his other two selves. How the PCs do this is up to them; they might talk him down, they might tackle him, whatever. Keeping him inside the house while the PCs call 911 is a first-rate idea, since it means the PCs are probably the ones who greet the detectives when they knock on the door, with Bill somewhere else inside.

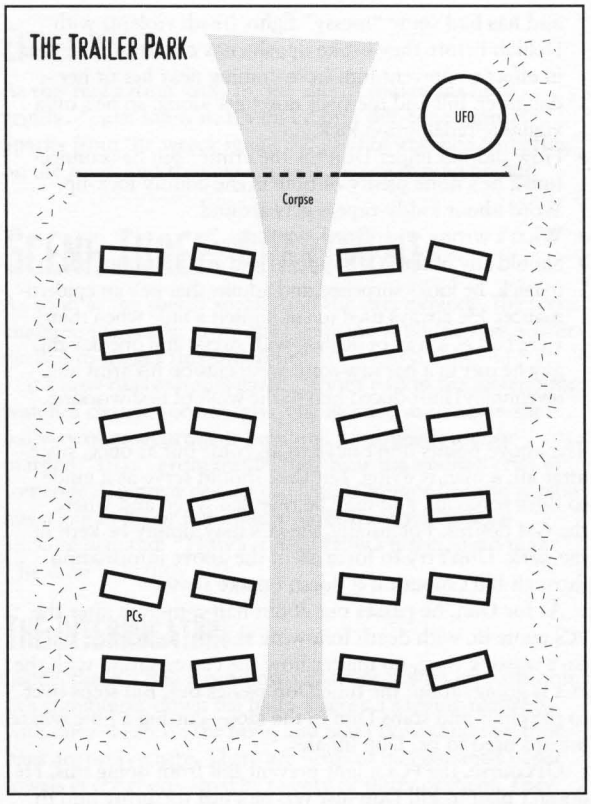
If They Fail

Should the PCs fail to prevent this Bill Toge from escaping, they've screwed up. As he flees, pick one PC at random—or just choose the one with the highest Soul stat (as long as that character hasn't been replicated already), or the one who somehow dropped the ball. An exact duplicate of that PC appears in a duplicate of the PC's car driving down the street nearby. He or she catches the PC's attention and waves mockingly, with a cold glint of malice in his or her eyes. The car races off.

The scene shifts and the PCs are back at the crossroads at night. Any injuries they suffered are still present, as are any other changes to their bodies or possessions. Depending on how the PCs did the previous time around, either two or three drivers are still lying on the ground.

If They Succeed

If this Bill Toge is stopped from making his escape as he otherwise would, the scene shifts back to the crossroads. As noted in the last section, the PCs are in whatever condition they were at the end of the apartment sequence. There are now either one or two cars wrecked at the crossroads, depending on how the PCs did in the supermarket sequence, and either one or two drivers lying unconscious and bleeding nearby—the Bill Toge from the apartment is gone, and in fact was never here.



Either Way

As this realization sinks in, the sheriff shakes his head grimly. "I just knew it. It's that damn Bill Toge again." Sparks from the wreck ignite the pool of gasoline gathering on the road, and the cars explode in a deafening fireball.

Scene Four: Trailer Park

As soon as the sheriff speaks and the cars explode, the scene changes; the energy from the explosion is all the raw power needed to trigger this situation.

It's now twelve hours earlier, about two in the afternoon; watches change accordingly. The PCs are standing in a dusty trailer park, in what appears to be an arid, tumbleweed-strewn patch of the American southwest. Three dozen ramshackle mobile homes sit in jagged rows. The park is in a narrow cul-de-sac of rock, surrounded on three sides by the steep slopes of red mesas. The (presumably) open end of the cul-de-sac is obscured by trailers. There's no grass or other plants in the park save tumbleweeds. The mobile homes have no hook-ups—there are no power lines, phone lines, or other evidence of utilities. The place looks like it's been abandoned for years. (Refer to the map nearby as needed; the PCs appear at the spot marked "PCs.")

Things are quiet, except for a low murmur of engines somewhere out of sight, as if there were several cars idling nearby. No one is visible.

Taking a walk around soon gives the PCs a view of the entrance to the cul-de-sac. It's a bizarre sight.

The entrance is dead center between the two main rows of trailers. It's a large, windblown wood archway with a hanging sign. The sign cannot be read from the back, where the PCs are. The collapsed remains of what appears to be a huge UFO is on the far side of the entrance. It's patently fake, made of canvas and plywood, and seems to be several years old. It's now falling apart, the paint largely erased by sand. A large, shabbily painted sign over the UFO reads, "WELCOME!!! JESUS!!! AND THE ESSENALUMBANS!!!" It's in the same weather-beaten condition (and age) as the saucer.

Just in front of the entrance is a corpse. The body of a black woman in her twenties lies on the ground, a pool of dried blood crusting in the dust. It appears that she was shot several times. There's a revolver near her right hand.

Beyond the entrance and the UFO lies the source of the engine sound. A couple dozen vehicles are parked haphazardly along a poorly maintained gravel road a hundred yards from the entrance. There's a mix of police cars, unmarked sedans, television news satellite trucks, and the like. Perhaps forty people are apparent, standing among the vehicles. A dozen or so of them are holding rifles, though they aren't presently aiming. The appearance of the PCs comes as a surprise, and there's a sudden flurry of activity.

Moments later, the PCs hear a rifle crack and a shot whizzes by one PC's head. If they haven't done so already (and avoided the shot altogether), the PCs should probably get behind a trailer.

A nearby trailer door pops open (pick whichever one is closest) and Bill Toge looks out at the PCs. He looks like he hasn't had a shower in days. He smiles broadly. "Kindred! Come inside, the time is at hand!"

The Situation

This Bill Toge is the leader of a small apocalypse cult known as the Essenalumban Collective. A couple years ago, Bill got a powerful premonition that this date—today—would be the end of the world, when Jesus and the inhabitants of the planet Essenalumba would come in their spaceships and carry away the faithful. He managed to attract a dozen followers, *mostly zoned-out losers. Bill led them out into the desert* and fed them hallucinogenic mushrooms, triggering crazed visions. On one of those trips, they found this group of abandoned and rusting mobile homes, and on the spot Bill declared this to be ground zero of the Essenalumban arrival. They've fixed up the place a bit, building the UFO and welcome sign and making the trailers habitable for weekend visits and psychedelic sessions. There's an outhouse off to one side, but that's the extent of the amenities—they have to bring their own water and other supplies when they stay here.

A couple of days ago, Bill led the Essenalumbans out here to wait for the end of the world. Some family members and friends of a few of the cult members got concerned and involved the authorities. The first police officer to come out here was shot dead by Satchel Phair, Bill's sidekick. Things got out of hand from there, and now there's an armed standoff. Every now and then the cult members—eating a steady stream of 'shrooms—take shots at the cops, and an hour ago a reporter was struck by a round fired by Jessie Deere, the dead woman near the entrance. The police are no longer fooling around, and will storm the "compound" shortly. They assume that the PCs are members of the cult, since the authorities don't have a definitive membership roster.

This Bill Toge has something unusual going for him: he's an unwitting avatar of the Fool archetype (p. 175), and it's his innate dumb luck that has brought him this far . . . *if* you can call this coming far. His Avatar: The Fool skill is 55%, granting him both the ability to readily find what he needs and to redirect damage to those nearby. It also means that he's just as gullible as heck, which is why he assumes the PCs are fellow mystics who have slipped past the cops.

Bill Toge's Vision

Two years ago, Bill had a vision. It was a jumble of ideas and knowledge with occasional flashes of imagery, rather than a full-blown I'm-watching-mystic-television-in-my-brain production. What it boiled down to was that Bill saw a date—today's date—and knew that he and some close friends would be at a trailer park someplace. There would be a lot of dust, and heat, and noise. Then a brilliantly-lit craft would enter the park and Jesus would emerge. Bill and his friends would be taken by Jesus aboard the craft, which came from a place known as Essenalumba, and the world would end. Bill's mission, as he saw it, was to recruit as many people as he could, find the trailer park, and get them all out there when the date came around.

Inside the Trailer

The trailer that Bill beckons the PCs into contains four cult members (including himself). It also contains the body of Officer Will Southwing, the sheriff's deputy that Satchel Phair shot and killed yesterday. The cult members have lain Southwing's body across a rickety card table and disemboweled him; most of his internal organs and his brain have been eaten. Satchel convinced Bill and the others that by consuming the deputy, he could join them on the spaceships and be saved along with the cult—so his death was somehow okay.

The trailer reeks of rotting flesh and stinking bowels, but the cult members are too gone on 'shrooms and millennial fervor to pay attention to such things; they believe the smell comes from the rock mesas nearby, since "the land is *coming alive," and it's another sign of the apocalypse.*

A grocery bag full of dried hallucinogenic mushrooms sits in a corner. The cultists offer them to the PCs.

The Trailer Cultists

As noted, there are four cultists in the trailer. They are summarized below; full stats can be found at the end of the scenario. All four have blood smears on their clothes and hands from occasionally gnawing on the deputy.

Bill Toge

Leader of the Essenalumbans and avatar of the Fool, Bill is a hapless misfit who stumbled into a mystical vision that changed his life. He's not violent or cruel by nature, but he's so entrenched in his apocalyptic vision that little fazes him; he's insane.

Satchel Phair

Satchel is a middle-aged sadist. On his own, he wouldn't

have hurt anybody except for consensual S&M. But under Bill's hapless tutelage, he accepted the truth of the coming apocalypse and realized that nothing mattered. His apartment contains the remains of three street kids that Satchel lured in and murdered during the last couple of months. Satchel is a blooming psychopath in the throes of divine rapture—he thinks everything is about to end and he couldn't be happier. Satchel has made himself Bill's chief disciple.

Nicky Lime

Nicky is a thirty-year-old woman from Iowa. A year ago she was on the run from the cops after hitting bottom and passing bad checks hither and yon. Then she met Bill. Initially, she saw him as a rube she could take advantage of, but soon she came to accept his vision; in a world that had never made sense to her, his cockeyed view of reality at least had an imminent deadline. She's fiercely loyal to Bill, but she's a little scared of Satchel. Bill is oblivious to the depth of Nicky's devotion.

Sal Rhys

Sal is a fifteen-year-old kid from San Francisco. He ran away from home a few months ago and ended up on the streets. Bill took him in and shared his vision. Sal suffers from schizophrenia and depression, and has been off his medication for weeks. He has bought into Bill's belief system. However, a lifelong jones for firearms has brought him close to Satchel, who obsesses over weapons of all types. If push came to shove, Sal would side with Satchel over Bill.

The Other Cultists

There are eight more Essenalumbans in the trailer park, scattered amongst the other trailers. (The thirteenth was Jessie Deere, slain by the cops when she freaked out and rushed the entrance with a gun.) Use the "generic thug" stats on p. 264 for the other cultists, and give most of them a .22 semi-automatic handgun. In general, these cultists are devout believers in Bill's apocalyptic vision with no combat ability, though that hasn't stopped Satchel from handing out weapons and ammunition like candy—it means the cultists can't shoot very well, but it does mean they can shoot if they feel like it.

What Happens Next

The bulk this scene consists of the PCs interacting with the trailer cultists, which means it's pretty improvisational. Guidelines for this interaction follow. Sooner or later, however, the cops are going to move in and shut things down—probably within ten or twenty minutes of the PCs' arrival. Just when this happens is up to the GM; when the time feels right, skip to "The Raid" and go from there.

Cultist Goals

Each of the four cultists in the trailer has goals for this scene, in terms of their interactions with the PCs. These are summarized below. Keep in mind that all four are under the effects of the 'shrooms, which generally means they act very off-kilter, laughing oddly and sometimes speaking in a stream-of-consciousness style. Occasionally they might react to some hallucination.

- **Bill Toge** just wants to wait for Jesus and the Essenalumbans, and meanwhile he'd like to share his fervor with the newly arrived fellow mystics. He describes his vision of two years ago (summarized above, under "Bill Toge's Vision") and compares notes with the PCs. Whatever they say, Bill is friendly and tries to help the PCs understand what's going on. He's just a nice, gullible guy who really believes what he's saying, but he's also too far gone into his vision to really be concerned with trivia like life and death and the difference between them.
- **Satchel Phair** believes what Bill's saying, too, but his spin is that it means all bets are off. The longer the PCs are here, the itchier and jumpier he gets. His goal is to massacre the PCs and eat their bodies, joining them to the spiritual whole of the cult. He probably tries to lead one or two PCs off to another trailer on some errand with Sal Rhys in tow. If he succeeds, the pair attack.
- **Nicky Lime** is having doubts about Satchel's spin. She joined in the slaughter of Will Southwing, but Jessie Deere's death an hour ago really shook her; some part of her understands that they're all in a lot of trouble and things have gone terribly wrong, but she's too dazed by drugs and her own damaged personality to act on that understanding without prompting.
- **Sal Rhys** follows Satchel's lead, whatever that may be. If Satchel told him to shoot Nicky and eat her eyes, Sal would do it. He says as little as possible to the PCs, except to enthusiastically back up whatever Satchel might be saying.

The Drug Gestalt

These four cultists have been tripping on hallucinogens for a couple of days straight now, and they all have a fair amount of experience doing this together already. What this means is that they tend to be on the same wavelength of mood and vibe—their minds are sort of tied together, in terms of what they're thinking and feeling and how they react to the PCs. When the PCs first arrive, the four of them are happy and talking, excited by the prospect of the coming of Jesus and the Essenalumbans. Occasionally they talk to the corpse of Will Southwing, patting his hand and telling him not to worry because they'll all go with Jesus together.

The coming of the PCs threatens to alter or even disrupt their drug gestalt. Essentially, the cultists magnify whatever attitude the PCs bring to the conversation very quickly. If the PCs talk quietly and patiently, the cultists calm down and listen very intently. If the PCs are excited and upset, the cultists go ballistic. Pay attention to how the players are running their PCs and then shoot that attitude right back at them through the cultists, amped up and filtered through their delusions.

The Others

Although the four cultists in the trailer are the focus of the scene, you can certainly involve the other eight. They're scattered among the other trailers. Some might be in the other row of trailers, which means they can only be reached with a risky dash across the open ground leading to the cops.

The rest of the cult is likewise tripping on 'shrooms and gripped with mystical fervor, but they're not on quite the same violence-and-weirdness kick as the lead four. They tend to be meditating, praying, and so forth.

The Raid

At some point in the PCs interactions with the cultists—preferably when some sort of a crisis point is reached—the local cops launch their raid on the trailers. They'd prefer to incapacitate the cultists and take them alive, but they won't hesitate to shoot. Here's how the raid is planned.

Eight deputies have been airlifted to the tops of the cliffs overlooking the park, maybe a hundred yards overhead. When the signal is given, they're going to launch volleys of tear-gas grenades down into the compound. They're aiming for the windows and doors of the trailers, but the trailers are so full of holes and missing chunks of floor that they don't need to be very accurate; the gas spreads quickly.

Thirty seconds after the first volley is fired, a mammoth SWAT battle van pulls out from behind the mass of cars and barrels for the park. It covers the hundred yards to the entrance quickly, knocking down Bill's rickety archway—the sign on the front hits the ground and can now be read from inside the park; it says "PARADISE"—about the time that the tear gas is making short work of the cultists. The van contains twenty-two SWAT officers in full body armor and gas masks, each armed with an FN-FAL Light semi-automatic rifle and a Glock Model 17 semi-automatic handgun.

The SWAT officers break into five teams of four officers apiece. At each row of four trailers, one team hits each trailer while the fifth team stays in the main road behind the battle van, providing cover in case cultists from the latter rows rush the team. The last two officers stay in the front of the van, driving forward slowly as each row of trailers is pacified. They're protected by bulletproof glass and do not engage the cultists unless if they have to. The driver is the sheriff from the crossroads, dressed in SWAT tactical gear.

Each team lobs a tear-gas grenade into their targeted trailer just for good measure, waits ten seconds, and then go barreling in. (They skip the grenade if there are already cultists flailing around outside or something.) Inside, they disarm the cultists and handcuff each one. Many trailers are empty. Once the trailer has been checked out, they leave any cultists handcuffed and return to the van. Once all four trailers are clear, they advance to the next row.

Meanwhile, the eight deputies on the rocks switch to Remington Sportsman 74 semi-automatic rifles. They pick off any cultists who appear to be out-maneuvering the SWAT team or who are hiding in the rows that the officers haven't gotten to yet. There aren't any warning shots. If a couple of cultists are lurking behind a trailer and waiting to ambush some officers, the deputies drop them cold.

Anyone who wants to surrender can do so easily. Rolling on the ground and choking from tear gas is a good way to surrender. Putting your arms in the air is also a reliable method.

Effects of Tear Gas

To simulate the effects of tear gas, use the Drowning rules on p. 57. As long as you can hold your breath, you can still act. However, even while you're holding your breath the gas is working on your eyes. Assume that after four combat rounds, everyone exposed to tear gas is at a -10% shift on all skills. After eight rounds, it's -20%. After twelve rounds, -30%. About that time, you're going to have to breathe. As soon as you can't hold your breath any longer and have to take in a lungful of air and gas, you're incapacitated—you hit the ground and begin choking, desperately trying to breathe. You're not going to die, but it sure feels that way.

All of this assumes that you're in the thick of the gas, however. The opening volleys from the deputies on the rocks may or may not work that well on a given trailer. If you want to assume (or determine randomly) that a given trailer didn't get gassed that bad, just apply a -20% shift on all skills, and no one needs to hold their breath. Should a SWAT officer plow a tear-gas grenade into the trailer, however, use the full-exposure rules above.

The Cult's Reactions

It should be clear from the preceding section that the cops are going to take down the cult, and quickly. No one has to die—if everyone surrenders or is incapacitated by the gas, no one gets hurt. But of course, Satchel has passed around a lot of cheap .22 handguns, and several of the unnamed cultists are bound to crazily pop off a shot when the officers come barreling in. They're shot to pieces in seconds, and the officers are unlikely to take any serious injuries given the circumstances.

But then there's the PCs, and the four main cultists. The GM needs to decide the extent to which the tear gas is affecting them, as explained in the Tear Gas text. The following notes should help you decide what the cultists do, assuming they aren't overcome by gas.

- **Bill** tries to get to the SWAT van and talk to the officers. He'll be excited but not violent; he passionately implores them to join him in welcoming the apocalypse.
- **Satchel** interprets the raid as open season on anyone and everyone except for Bill. He begins shooting up the place. Should he get some hapless cultist, PC, or SWAT officer immobilized, he draws a hunting knife and stabs them, screaming all the while.
- **Sal** wants to be with Satchel. Satchel may tolerate Sal at first, but turns on him if no other victim is handy.
- **Nicky** sticks with Bill. She might come somewhat to her senses and try to get him to surrender, or she might flip out and rush the officers to protect Bill.

The PCs are wild cards in all of this; they can do what they like. Don't forget Bill's Avatar: The Fool skill, though. If SWAT officers (or anyone else) hurt Bill, there's a good chance that the damage instead strikes someone nearby—maybe the PCs, maybe Nicky, maybe another SWAT officer. That should make things interesting.

One way or another, it shouldn't take very long for the raid to come to a close. The cops are pretty well guaranteed of victory. The raid should end with the cultists and the PCs under arrest, wounded, or dead. Bill might or might not survive, depending on how well his Avatar: The Fool skill protects him.

Here Comes Jesus

When the raid is over, Jesus and the Essenalumbans show up just as predicted. With brilliant lights and sirens, the first of several ambulances pulls into the trailer park; on the front hood, the word "AMBULANCE" is printed in big, bold letters but in reverse, so that drivers can read the sign in their rear-view mirror: "ECNALUBMA". From the ambulance comes a Hispanic paramedic whose nametag reads "JESUS"—that's pronounced "hay-*soos*," of course.

Any wounded major cultists and PCs are put into the ambulance; wounded unnamed cultists get the next ambulance. Unwounded PCs go into a paddywagon with unwounded major cultists.

What About Bill?

In the first version of events (before the PCs got retroactively involved), Bill was grazed by a bullet and was taken off by Jesus in the ambulance. On the way to the hospital, Bill happened to find the handcuff key in his gurney, where an officer dropped it while helping Jesus load Bill into the ambulance. (You can thank Bill's Avatar: The Fool skill for that bit of fortune.) Bill got free and bailed out of the ambulance once they got back to town. Then he got to his car and fled, eventually arriving at the crossroads late that night.

With the PCs involved, things may end differently. Bill might have died, or might have been wounded grievously enough that escape was not an option. If he wasn't wounded at all, he ended up in the paddywagon and couldn't escape. Any of these outcomes count as victories for the PCs; skip to "If They Succeeded" and go from there.

If Bill is mildly wounded and goes in the ambulance, though, he still makes his escape bid. Any wounded PCs are with him, however. If there are no wounded PCs, Bill gets away as before. Skip to "If They Failed" and go from there.

Should Bill and one or more wounded PCs end up in the ambulance, it's up to the PCs. (Any other PCs in a paddywagon are out of this scene, barring some bizarre PC brainstorm.) They can prevent his escape, delay it, or aid his escape but take some different tack. Maybe they rent a car, or stick Bill on a bus, or just lead him to the cops. If Bill still ends up getting into his car on schedule, they've failed. Otherwise, they've succeeded in changing Bill's destiny.

If They Fail

Should the PCs fail to prevent this Bill Toge from escaping on schedule, they've screwed up. As he flees, pick one PC at random—or just choose the one with the highest Soul stat (as long as that character hasn't been replicated already), or the one who somehow dropped the ball. An exact duplicate of that PC appears somewhere nearby. He or she catches the PC's attention and waves mockingly, with a cold glint of malice in his or her eyes, then wanders off.

The scene shifts and the PCs are back at the crossroads at night. Any injuries they suffered are still present, as are any other changes to their bodies or possessions. Depending on how the PCs did the previous times around, either one, two, or three drivers are still lying on the ground.

If They Succeed

If this Bill Toge is stopped from making his escape as he otherwise would, the scene shifts back to the crossroads. As noted in the previous section, the PCs are in whatever condition they were at the end of the trailer park sequence. There are now either zero, one, or two cars wrecked at the crossroads, depending on how the PCs did in the supermarket and apartment sequences, and either zero, one, or two drivers lying unconscious and bleeding nearby—the Bill Toge from the trailer park is gone, and in fact was never here.

Scene Five: Conclusion

It's time to wrap things up. Three different options are possible, depending on how the PCs did. These are explained in the following sections. In every case, the PCs still have whatever changes to their wound points and possessions may have occurred during the scenario, and they still remember everything that happened—even if they don't understand it.

If No Bill Toges Remain

The PCs briefly feel the heat from the explosion, but now there is no explosion, and the heat is just a memory. There are no wrecked Hyundais, no sheriff, no squad car, and no Bill Toges. The PCs are standing near their cars at a deserted crossroads. Fade to black.

If Two or Three Bill Toges Remain

As this realization sinks in, the sheriff shakes his head grimly. "I just knew it. It's that damn Bill Toge again." Sparks from the wreck ignite the pool of gasoline gathering on the road, and the cars explode in a deafening fireball.

A powerful heat wave from the explosion passes over the PCs, the sheriff, and the remaining Bill Toges. When it fades, the sheriff and his squad car are gone. From behind the flames, the sinister doubles of the PCs that first appeared in the failed scenes emerge, driving in doubles of the PCs' vehicles. They peel off into the night and disappear.

A few minutes later, an ambulance—not driven by Jesus—arrives to take the Bills away. Fade to black.

If One Bill Toge Remains

The PCs momentarily feel the heat from the explosion, but now there is no explosion, and the heat is just a memory. The sheriff and the squad car are gone. Bill Toge pulls up next to them in his unwrecked Hyundai and looks at the PCs without any sign of recognition, then speaks: "What is this, a dork convention?" He drives off. In the passenger seat is the sinister duplicate of the PC that appeared at the end of the failed scene, waving out the window as the car is lost to the night. Fade to black.

Wrapping Up

If any sinister duplicates of the PCs were created during this scenario, they'll be back. The nature and goals of the doubles are up to the GM. They might be true physical doubles who want to take the originals' places, or they might be Splits (p. 306) drawn by the mystical catastrophe of Bill Toge at the crossroads. They might even just pop up every now and then, waving from a passing car, leaving the PCs to wonder what the hell happened that night in the middle of nowhere.

NPC Stats

Use the stock cops, detectives, and thugs from p. 264 as needed in this scenario; Bill's cohorts in the first scenario qualify as stock thugs.

Bill Toge, Divided Man

Summary: This Bill hasn't made any real changes in his life since that night at the crossroads five years ago. He's still a loser, a low-rent crook with low-rent friends.
Personality: Matt Dillon in *Drugstore Cowboy*.
Obsession: None.
Wound Points: 55

Body: 55 (Scrawny)
General Athletics 30%, Brawling 40%
Speed: 45 (Slack)
Dodge 15%, Drive 25%, Firearms 35%, Initiative 23%
Mind: 50 (Confused easily)
Notice 25%, Streetwise 40%
Soul: 70 (Untapped potential)
*Hustle 35%, Lie 40% (#2: **Magick: Epideromancy 55%**; #3: **Avatar: The Fool 55%**)*

Violence:	1 Hardened	0 Failed
Unnatural:	3 Hardened	0 Failed
Helplessness:	0 Hardened	1 Failed
Isolation:	1 Hardened	0 Failed
Self:	0 Hardened	4 Failed

Don Lewis, Illegal Arms Dealer and Child Molester

Summary: A predator who makes his living off other predators.
Personality: Steve Buscemi's partner in *Fargo*.
Obsession: Finding his true love.
Wound Points: 60

Body: 60 (Works out)
General Athletics 40%, Kickboxing 50%
Speed: 65 (Practices his fast draw)
Dodge 15%, Drive 15%, Firearms 45%, Fast Draw 20%, Initiative 35%
Mind: 35 (Conspiracy theorist)
General Education 15%, Notice 50%
Soul: 30 (Dead eyes, like a shark)
***Intimidate 25%**, Lie 35%*

Violence:	3 Hardened	0 Failed
Unnatural:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Helplessness:	2 Hardened	0 Failed
Isolation:	2 Hardened	0 Failed
Self:	4 Hardened	1 Failed

Satchel Phair, Apocalyptic Psychopath

Summary: Killer on an end-of-the-world spree.
Personality: Wishes *Mad Max* was a documentary.
Obsession: Inflicting pain on anyone he can.
Wound Points: 40

Body: 40 (Just a little guy)
General Athletics 30%, Bushwhack 30%
Speed: 65 (Busy hands)
Dodge 40%, Drive 25%, Guns 30%, Initiative 33%
Mind: 60 (Leads an orderly life, makes clean kills)
CPA 55%, Notice 20%, Feign Sanity 15%
Soul: 50 (Scarily deranged)
*Charm 15%, **Lie 45%**, Psycho Rant 20%*

Violence:	6 Hardened	0 Failed
Unnatural:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Helplessness:	3 Hardened	0 Failed
Isolation:	3 Hardened	0 Failed
Self:	6 Hardened	4 Failed

Possessions

Ruger Super Redhawk revolver

Nicky Lime, Lost Soul

Summary: A good woman on a bad road.
Personality: (Cancer) Worries about others, ignores herself.
Obsession: Making sense of her screwed-up life.
Wound Points: 60

Body: 65 (Tall, tough chick)
General Athletics 15%, Hold Your Liquor 45%, Struggle 30%
Speed: 45 (Walks fast)
Dodge 15%, Drive 35%, Initiative 40%
Mind: 55 (Talks fast, sometimes too fast)
Argue 35%, General Education 25%, Notice 25%
Soul: 75 (Deeply compassionate, deeply wounded)
*Aura Sight 40%, **Charm 45%**, Lie 20%*

Violence:	1 Hardened	1 Failed
Unnatural:	1 Hardened	0 Failed
Helplessness:	3 Hardened	1 Failed
Isolation:	3 Hardened	3 Failed
Self:	2 Hardened	4 Failed

Sal Rhys, Delusional Runaway

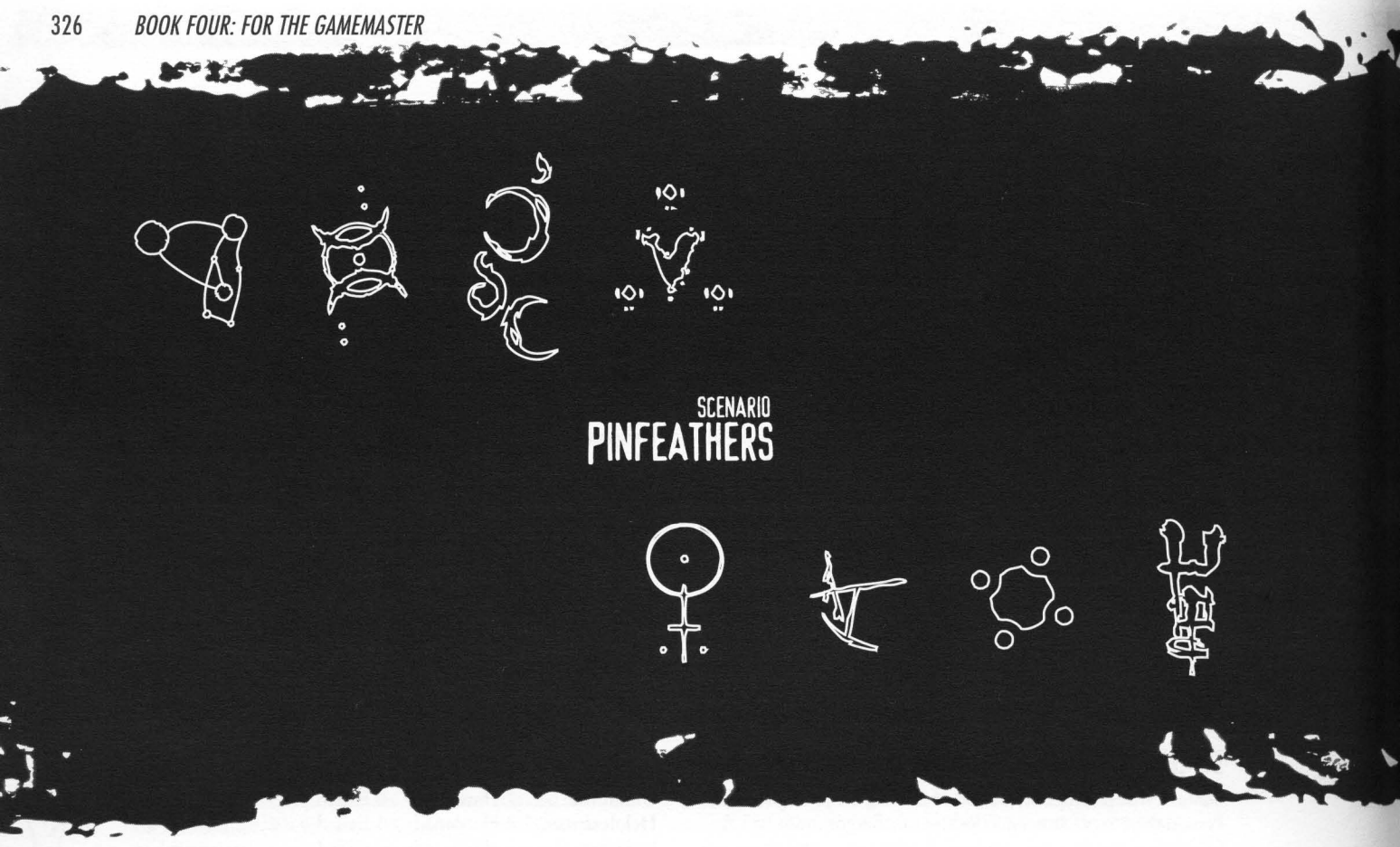
Summary: A delusional teenager who's been off his medication for months. Secretly drawn to violence.
Personality: The kid in *Terminator 2*, gone crazy as his mom.
Obsession: None.
Wound Points: 40

Body: 40 (Skinny kid)
General Athletics 25%, Struggle 35%
Speed: 55 (Good with video games)
Dodge 15%, Firearms 15%, Initiative 55%
Mind: 40 (Not as smart as he thinks he is)
Notice 20%, Serial Killer Lore 20%, Streetwise 30%
Soul: 35 (Nobody home)
Charm 25%, Lie 40%

Violence:	2 Hardened	1 Failed
Unnatural:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Helplessness:	4 Hardened	0 Failed
Isolation:	6 Hardened	2 Failed
Self:	2 Hardened	2 Failed

Possessions

Ruger Mark II semi-automatic handgun



SCENARIO

PINFEATHERS

Angela Osborne is an avatar of the Flying Woman, and she's in town to stir up some trouble. She's seeking a clueless magick cabal known as the Flock, a group of neo-pagans preparing to host a ritual to the Phoenix, a symbol of rebirth and transformation. Normally, this wouldn't interest her in the slightest. But a member of the Flock is a blood relative of famed aviatrix Amelia Earhart, and owns a compass that once belonged to Earhart. Earhart was likely an avatar of the Flying Woman (p. 173), and may even have been the human who ascended to embody the archetype itself. A bird-oriented ritual involving a blood relative of Earhart who has a symbolic item once owned by her could be a very potent ritual indeed. An avatar of the Flying Woman present at such a ritual could gain a substantial increase in power. Maybe. Angela sure thinks so, anyhow.

Angela wants two things. First, she wants to find the Flock and gain admittance to their ritual so she can participate in it and gain the benefits thereof. Second, she wants to gain possession of Earhart's compass, which she suspects of either being a magick artifact or the perfect vessel to become a magick artifact tied to her archetype.

Normally, this wouldn't be a problem. But there's an enforcer on Angela's trail who wants to put a bullet in her head. Her ex-lover—now a rival avatar—is also in town and she wants the compass, too. Finally there are the player characters, the wild cards in this particular round of cosmic poker. Raise, call, or fold?

GM Prep

Because it's impossible to know just what sort of player characters and campaign the GM is running, an *Unknown Armies* scenario requires some preparation. As you may have noticed from the preceding description, nothing states clearly just who is on the side of right and wrong. Is Angela an ambitious but sympathetic woman? Or is she cruel and ruthless? Is the enforcer on her trail a scumbag, or a hero? Either way, is he justified in his mission of murder? And what about her ex-lover—is she to be aided or opposed by the player characters?

We can't answer these questions for you. But we can help you make these decisions for yourself and your campaign in a clear and orderly fashion. The following steps guide you through the process. (Note that the scenario is set in whatever city you want.)

Step One: Major GMCs

This section profiles the major GMCs involved in the scenario. Each GMC includes a section called "Check One" in which three options for the GMC's personality are presented. Once you've read through all the GMCs, go back and look over those checkable options. Decide how you'd like to customize each GMC, and check off the appropriate boxes.

Angela Osborne

Summary: Driven avatar of the Flying Woman
Personality: Scorpio—obsessive, demanding, a perfectionist
Obsession: Orderly life. She hates surprises, loathes uncertainty, and always seeks total power over everything that happens to her. She does anything to ensure that no one else can tell her what to do.
Wound Points: 40

Rage Stimulus: Self-appointed authority. Anyone who tries to tell her what to do—even when they mean the best—makes her madder than hell.
Fear Stimulus: (Helplessness) Reaching out. She hates to ask for help, or to accept it. If someone offers her help then she can grant her permission, but otherwise, it's a problem.
Noble Stimulus: Tough women. She has sympathy for women doing their best to make their way in the world, and seeing a strong sister fighting the fight for independence makes her proud.

Body: 40 (short and stocky)
General Athletics 18%, Fight Like a Hellcat 62%
Speed: 55 (moves like a snake)
Dodge 57%, Driving 32%, Initiative 40%
Mind: 65 (analytical)
Authority 43%, Human Behavior 34%, Notice 26%
Soul: 60 (perceptive)
***Avatar: Flying Woman 73%**, Charm 16%, Lying 19%*

Violence:	1 Hardened	0 Failed
Unnatural:	3 Hardened	0 Failed
Helplessness:	0 Hardened	2 Failed
Isolation:	1 Hardened	1 Failed
Self:	0 Hardened	1 Failed

Check One

- ❑ **A) High Road.** Angela is a noble, free-willed follower of the Flying Woman and is seeking to grow as an avatar through peaceful means. She may lie about her plans and intentions, but she won't hurt anyone except in self-defense. If trouble arises from another source, she steps in to save the day, even if she isn't the one threatened.
- ❑ **B) Middle Road.** Angela is so blinded by her ambition to become a godwalker that she'll hurt others to do it. She could still come back to the side of the angels, however, especially if she fails a Self check during a tense situation; the realization of what she's becoming could save her from her fate.
- ❑ **C) Low Road.** Angela is merciless. For her, anything is worth the price of personal freedom, to the point that she places her own choices and priorities above anything. She'll kill for a cup of coffee, if that's what she chooses to do. She cares nothing for the consequences of her actions.

Maggie LeTourneau

Summary: Cunning avatar of the Flying Woman
Personality: Leo—competitive, doesn't share the spotlight
Obsession: I'm Number One. If anyone close to her seems to be pulling ahead in some area, she has to leapfrog them and prove her own superiority.
Wound Points: 55

Rage Stimulus: Defeat. If the chips are down and she's going to lose, she goes ballistic—and maybe pulls success from the jaws of defeat.
Fear Stimulus: (Isolation) Affection. She tolerates partners as long as they're as tough as she is, but if they display too much affection then she's outta there.
Noble Stimulus: Challenge. When someone offers legitimate, open competition to her, she gets excited, but not vindictive.

Body: 55 (Tall, athletic)
General Athletics 47%, Holds Her Liquor 28%, Struggle 23%
Speed: 40 (Trips a lot)
Dodge 27%, Driving 48%, Initiative 20%
Mind: 70 (Sharp)
Know-it-All 69%, Notice 18%
Soul: 55 (Deep but vulnerable)
***Avatar: Flying Woman 46%**, Charm 28%, Lying 15%*

Violence:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Unnatural:	1 Hardened	0 Failed
Helplessness:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Isolation:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Self:	0 Hardened	1 Failed

Check One

- ❑ **A) High Road.** Maggie may be competitive, but it's for a good cause. She's become a rival to her ex-lover, Angela, only because she's convinced that Angela doesn't have the right stuff to be a godwalker. She truly believes that she's the best candidate, and is trying to edge Angela out of the way just so she can make the world a better place.
- ❑ **B) Middle Road.** Maggie is jealous of Angela's progress as an avatar. She won't hurt Angela, but her arrogance is too great to let anyone else win the prize. Nonetheless, if Angela gets in trouble, Maggie comes to her aid.
- ❑ **C) Low Road.** Maggie wants to kill Angela and take her out of the running altogether. However, first she wants to best her in the current challenge to prove her superiority. Once she's beaten Angela, she kills her in cold blood.

Morris Breecher

Summary: Overworked enforcer
Personality: Dustin Hoffman as an assassin—short, grumpy, tired
Obsession: Paradise. Morris just wants to retire to some tropical island and spend the rest of his life sipping coconut drinks and being fanned by beautiful island women. But his mother instilled a strong work ethic he can't escape, so he keeps working, telling himself the next job is his last and he'll have enough money to retire.
Wound Points: 60

Rage Stimulus: Frustration. He just wants everything to go smoothly and when obstacles arise, he loses his temper.
Fear Stimulus: (Helplessness) Death. Morris is scared of his own mortality and if presented with superior force, he caves and cuts a deal.
Noble Stimulus: Killing scum. He really hates the people he considers "real" criminals – people like drug dealers, pimps,

and pornographers. Wiping the floor with some dirtbag makes him feel superior.

Body: 60 (Tough little guy)
*Endurance 28%, **My Body Is A Lethal Weapon 69%***
Speed: 85 (Skilled killer)
Dodge 47%, Driving 44%, Guns 48%, Initiative 50%
Mind: 45 (Unimaginative)
General Education 23%, Notice 36%
Soul: 30 (Self-absorbed)
Act Sincere 24%, Lying 30%

Violence:	5 Hardened	0 Failed
Unnatural:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Helplessness:	0 Hardened	2 Failed
Isolation:	0 Hardened	1 Failed
Self:	0 Hardened	2 Failed

CHECK ONE

- ❑ **A) High Road.** Morris only kills scum. He uses his martial arts abilities to disable anyone else, and makes sure they get medical attention after the fact. "Scum" means criminals and other low-lifes, and those are the only kinds of murder contracts he accepts. If he learns that his target isn't scum, he tracks down whoever hired him and makes them pay for deceiving him.
- ❑ **B) Middle Road.** Morris is just a hired professional. He kills whomever he's paid to kill. He is sympathetic to people who are being victimized or who were just in the wrong place at the wrong time, however, and can be persuaded to abandon a hit if the circumstances warrant. He hates doing this, though, so he usually avoids learning too much about his targets. When he gets drunk he confesses how much he loathes his life.
- ❑ **C) Low Road.** Morris is a cold-blooded bastard. He'll never find his beloved paradise; it's just the excuse he gives himself to justify a relentless life of dispassionate violence. Though not cruel or sadistic, he doesn't care about anyone but himself.

SID ANDERSON

Summary: Leader of the Flock, blood relative of Amelia Earhart
Personality: New-age politician; gregarious, coalition-building, glad-handing, compassionate
Obsession: Legitimacy. He wants today's religious fringe to be tomorrow's mainstream. He wants to wear a pentagram to work and not get stared at.
Wound Points: 35

Rage Stimulus: Religious prejudice. Talking trash about new age/wiccan/pagan-style beliefs is sure to make his blood boil.
Fear Stimulus: (Helplessness) Cars. Sid has a life-long irrational fear of cars. He walks or bikes everywhere, and if he has to enter a car or other motor vehicle then he gets jumpy and scared.
Noble Stimulus: Solidarity. When he has a bunch of people working together on something, he's on top of the world.

Body: 35 (Scrawny but handsome)
General Athletics 16%, Look Good 38%, Struggle 18%
Speed: 45 (Sure of himself)
Dodge 32%, Bicycling 45%, Initiative 23%
Mind: 65 (College boy)
General Education 57%, Notice 26%
Soul: 75 (Spiritual)
Lying 19%, Mysticism 53%, Persuade 51%

Violence:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Unnatural:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Helplessness:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Isolation:	0 Hardened	1 Failed
Self:	1 Hardened	0 Failed

CHECK ONE

- ❑ **A) High Road.** Sid is just what he seems—the earnest leader of a neo-pagan sect. He wants people to get along, be happy, and not eat meat. He truly cares about those around him, and is always willing to help someone out when they're in trouble.
- ❑ **B) Middle Road.** Sid is ambitious. He'd like to be the Pat Robertson of the new age: a charismatic political/religious leader who can represent the eclectic liberal politics of the religious fringe. He is sincere, but his ambition makes him a little too eager to please. He can come across as phony, and occasionally he is.
- ❑ **C) Low Road.** Sid wants power. He preys on weak people, turning them into sycophants and clingers. He is sincere in his religious beliefs, but has secret yearnings to be somebody's messiah. He's like a cross between Donald Trump and John the Baptist.

THE FLOCK

Founded by Sid Anderson three years ago, the Flock began as a loose-knit circle of friends who shared a common interest in neo-paganism and the politics of organized religion. Sid proposed that they formalize their association into a sect of sorts, and take an activist role in making the new age accepted by the mainstream. Now numbering fifty active members, the Flock mixes politics and religion in a heady but sincere brew. Their pagan-activist newsletter, *Soar,* goes to fifteen hundred subscribers across the region, and they have meaningfully endorsed a couple of local candidates in city elections. Last summer's *Soar Festival* at the fairgrounds had five thousand attendees who shared a weekend of music, rituals, panels, and speeches. Members of the Flock take active roles in many other volunteer organizations, mostly on the liberal-environmental axis of local politics. The headquarters of the Flock is at Circle's Edge Bookstore, a non-profit new-age shop managed by the sect.

STEP TWO: THE PCS

Now that we've got the main characters in the scenario covered and you've decided what kinds of people each of them are, it's time to figure out how the PCs get involved. This section presents several ways to start the scenario, using a few of the suggested groups and cabals from the various *Campaign* chapters. Use the following examples as a guide to making up your own.

THE NEW INQUISITION

Alex Abel has assigned the PCs' team to one or more of the following tasks:

❑ A) Infiltrate the Flock and assess how powerful they are.
❑ B) Recover Amelia Earhart's Compass.
❑ C) Prevent Morris Breecher from killing Angela Osborne.
❑ D) Kill Angela Osborne.

Magick Cabal

The PCs are joining the Flock at their upcoming ritual in a show of fringe camaraderie. In the days beforehand, they meet with Sid to talk about the Flock's goals and whether or not the PCs' cabal might want to form an alliance with the Flock.

Circle of Friends

Sid asks for the PCs' help because he thinks someone is after him. He figures the Flock are too visible to sneak around and figure things out, so he's calling in a favor from outside his sect.

Vigilantes

The PCs get wind of two trouble-making occultists who have arrived in town—Angela Osborne and Maggie LeTourneau—and want to find out what they're up to.

Occult Investigators

This "Flock" group is getting a lot of press. Are they for real, or do they have a hidden agenda? Time to infiltrate this cult and find out. This upcoming "ritual" certainly sounds suspicious.

Step Three: Plot Points

You need to examine several important plot points. For each one, take into account your choices about the GMCs' personality types and the kind of narrative structure you're using, then make notes in the text as to what's going on in your version of this scenario.

Angela vs. Maggie

Angela Osborne and Maggie LeTourneau met in college a few years ago. Both were willful free spirits. Angela was an avatar of the Flying Woman and knew it, being fairly clued-in about the occult underground. Maggie was an unconscious avatar, following the Flying Woman's path without even knowing it. They fell in love, and Angela opened Maggie's eyes to the mystical journey they were both on. Once Maggie embraced her role as an avatar, though, the relationship went sour. Since then, they've been in competition to achieve the status of godwalker. The level and nature of their competition and their goals are dependent on the personalities you chose for each woman.

Angela vs. Maggie Notes

Morris on the Hunt

Morris Breecher is here to kill Angela Osborne. Why? He might be a member of the New Inquisition, assigned to a hit. Maggie LeTourneau might have hired him (if she's on the low road) to find Angela, summon Maggie, and then kill Angela when Maggie gives the order. He might serve someone else important to your campaign. Depending on the personalities you chose for Angela and Morris, he might not want to kill her if he learns too much about her.

Morris on the Hunt Notes

Amelia's Legacy

We're assuming that Amelia Earhart was indeed an avatar of the Flying Woman, but whether or not she ascended to fill that archetype isn't important to this scenario. This means that the upcoming phoenix ritual has some real potency behind it. Sid Anderson may not be an avatar of the Flying Woman (no man can be) but with Earhart's blood in his veins, something's bound to happen. We cover the ritual later, but for now, you should decide whether or not Sid's compass—which passed through the family and down to him—is presently a functional magick artifact or simply an historical item prime for enchantment. An example of the compass as an artifact appears below, or you could make up your own in the space for notes provided. You might also want to make a note as to where Sid keeps the compass. In the text, we've assumed that it's in his apartment, but you can change this.

Amelia's Compass: This minor artifact was once a cheap pocket compass owned by aviatrix Amelia Earhart. Anyone who possesses it gets several benefits, but only while the compass is carried on the owner's person. First, no plane the owner is on crashes (unless the pilot deliberately does so, or unless it's shot down); it's just smooth flying the whole way. Second, the owner can use the Avatar: Flying Woman skill at 50%. This skill can never be lowered or raised. (The owner isn't really an avatar; the magickal effect is just the same.) Finally, if the owner can make a Soul check then he always knows which direction to go to reach a specific location. Such locations have to be physical landmarks, such as houses, streets, mountains, and so forth; they can't be impermanent locations such as "wherever Fred is" or "wherever the cult is meeting." The compass points in the right direction until the destination is reached. This power can only be attempted once per day.

Amelia's Legacy Notes

Step Four: Agendas

Now that you've settled on personality types for the main GMCs and made notes as to the major plot points, it's time

to get specific and settle on the *agendas* for some of the GMCs—that is, what their true approaches and goals are in their dealings with the PCs.

The following sections give you the opportunity to select one or more agendas for each GMC. Keep in mind which personality types you've chosen—high road, middle road, or low road—as well as how you chose to approach the major plot points. You can certainly make agenda choices that seem to go against type; if that works for you, it could add flavor and depth to the characters.

If you want to choose multiple agendas, you might want to decide which is the main one and then circle that box in addition to checking it.

Angela Osborne's Agendas

Angela doesn't have customized agendas. We already know that she's in town to find the Flock, figure out which one is a relative of Amelia Earhart, get the compass away from him, and then attend the Flock's ritual with the compass in hand in the hopes of getting some more avatar power out of it. (She might wait and take the compass at the ritual or just afterwards.)

Angela is off-stage for most of the scenario, only turning up when she's going to make a move. When that happens, just use her personality type as a guide for how she acts. She won't have enough direct interaction with the PCs to warrant subtler agendas.

Sid Anderson's Agendas

- ❑ **A)** Sid fears for his safety and wants to stay with the PCs as much as possible. He's had premonitions of impending harm and is very worried.
- ❑ **B)** Sid wants to make a good impression on the PCs, so he acts strong, capable, and independent. He encourages them to pursue their investigation, but dismisses concerns over his personal safety.
- ❑ **C)** Sid does not trust the PCs. He might think they are evil people, or he might see them as rivals. Either way, he could be looking for an opportunity to discredit or even endanger the PCs. If nothing else, he keeps them at arm's length and rats them out to the cops if the possibility arises.
- ❑ **D)** Sid is attracted to one of the PCs and flirts with that character; Sid's enemies may exploit this situation.
- ❑ **E)** Sid wants to make a hero play, either because he's conceited and ambitious or because he's resourceful and heroic. He knows things are dangerous, but when the chips are down he jumps into the fray and tries to grab the glory, possibly with tragic consequences.

Maggie LeTourneau's Agendas

- ❑ **A)** Maggie wants help because she fears what Angela is becoming and thinks that taking her on alone would be dangerous.
- ❑ **B)** Maggie isn't sure what Angela is like these days. She's recruiting the PCs and plans to put them in Angela's path to see what she does.
- ❑ **C)** Maggie wants to make sure that she's the one at the ritual, not Angela. She tells the PCs any crazy story she can think of to ensure that they put Angela out of the picture when the time comes.
- ❑ **D)** Maggie has doped out what's going on and mainly wants the compass. She uses the PCs to get Sid Anderson alone and vulnerable. If she gets the compass, she either blows town or kills Sid and frames Angela for the crime.
- ❑ **E)** Maggie is trying to work on her competitiveness. She allies with the PCs in an attempt to cooperate with someone else. She tries to be a good ally, but her competitive streak may still come to the fore, possibly shattering their alliance or making the PCs suspect her of duplicity.

Morris Breecher's Agendas

Like Angela Osborne, Morris doesn't have customized agendas. He's here to kill Angela. In the plot points section, you've already decided why he's here to kill her. In terms of his dealings with the PCs, just use the personality type you chose for him as a guide to how he behaves.

Looking Back

At this point you should understand the personalities and agendas of the main GMCs and the major plot points of the scenario. (Don't worry about specific plot events yet—we'll get to that soon.) Look back over the last few pages and examine the choices you've made. Do you know what each GMC wants? Do you know what each GMC is willing to do to get what he or she wants? If you can answer those two questions, you're in good shape.

As we've discussed in the rulebook, the core of drama is characters in conflict. The GMCs we've described are certainly in conflict, but there's a sort of dead zone right in the center: just *how* do they come into conflict and what will the nature of their conflict be? That dead zone is where the PCs come in, and it's up to them (and to you) to arbitrate the conflict and attempt to resolve it in a satisfactory fashion.

Angela Osborne and Morris Breecher are the simplest characters, since they're mostly acting off-stage. Angela is here to drive the plot and serve as the central mystery—who is she and what does she want?—while Morris is here so that you can arbitrarily inject some action into the story whenever you need it. Maggie LeTourneau and Sid Anderson, on the other hand, are more complicated and are largely defined by how they relate to the PCs. Depending on the choices you've made, it may be that either Maggie or Sid is the real villain of the scenario; Angela may be a good person who's gone a little over the edge, and Morris may be a paper tiger who abandons his contract if he figures out that Angela doesn't deserve to die.

Understanding the main GMCs is the key to running this scenario well. There are very few pre-planned events in the rest of the text. But if you understand the GMCs, then you'll be ready to roll with the punches as the PCs feel their way through the story.

Getting Started

Okay, enough preparation. This section presents the elements of the scenario itself, which you use as you run the game.

Locations

There are several locations that come into play in the course of the scenario. Each location is described, along with some

examples of how it could be used. Beneath the title of each location is an address and a blank line. You can either use the address given, or write in your own. If you're setting this scenario in a specific city you and the players know, it's a good idea to customize the addresses so that the locations appear in parts of town appropriate to your locale. You don't have to give the full street address to the players every time, but it's a good detail to throw into conversation. ("I'll be at my apartment, over on fourth street.")

Circle's Edge Bookstore

Address: 1224 Pine St. • Theatre District • 555-2463
Custom Address:

This popular new-age bookstore is frequented by the city's religious fringe. It's a storefront operation located in a block with four other businesses, including a coffeehouse (Cat's Inn), an art gallery (Open Space), a used-clothing store (Trade Ups), and a natural-foods store (Planet One). The store's hours of operation are from 10am – 8pm, Monday through Friday, and 1pm – 6pm on Sunday.

Inside, the store has high ceilings and lots of bookcases. Subjects include astrology, the paranormal, UFOs, wicca, and so forth. A selection of music CDs by local performers and some jewelry are kept in a glass case. Candles are everywhere, but due to fire codes they are kept unlit. On weekends and Wednesday nights, a professional tarot reader is present to give readings. The bookstore schedules special events once or twice a month, including author appearances, classes in meditation, and so forth.

An upstairs floor contains the Flock office as well as meeting space for both the Flock and for bookstore events and classes. Sid Anderson often works upstairs during the daytime, relieving bookstore employees downstairs when they take their breaks. Three aging computers are in the office, one of which is used for producing flyers, the newsletter, and other printed materials.

Circle's Edge has a secret. The basement of the store contains a small storage area for merchandise as well as an employee restroom, but through an unmarked door there is an S&M dungeon. This area is used by the local sado-masochism community, and is decorated in black with red accents. A variety of S&M-related furniture is present, including manacles, benches, whipping posts, and so forth. Those using the room must supply personal accessories such as whips, masks, and the like. Circle's Edge rents out access to the dungeon on a monthly basis. Members pay $200/month for access, but must sign up for each four-hour slot at least two days in advance. All participants are here consensually, and nothing illegal occurs; it's just a private facility for local S&M fetishists. The bookstore does no promotion for the facility, but word circulates among the city's S&M crowd. If asked about the dungeon, Circle's Edge employees freely admit its existence and explain its rates, but they generally don't volunteer information about it to avoid attracting unwanted publicity. A side benefit of the dungeon is that some of the city's political and financial elite are regular dungeon clients, an arrangement that helps Sid Anderson in his quest for new-age legitimacy.

Using Circle's Edge

The bookstore is a focus of activity in the scenario, since Sid is there almost every day. The other main GMCs certainly drift through the store at some point during the scenario. You might consider having Angela be in the store the first time the PCs show up to talk to Sid. They won't notice her, since they haven't met her yet, but when she turns up again later on some PCs might recognize her from before. ("She was right there at the start!") Bookstore employees can also be a source of clues about the activities of the GMCs; Morris Breecher doesn't look like he belongs in Circle's Edge, for instance, and his presence might be noted by an employee.

If possible, try to find a way for the existence of the dungeon to be disclosed, probably when the PCs least expect it. Perhaps they hear screaming from beneath the floor while they're in the shop, or maybe someone is chased into the dungeon, interrupting a member of the city council as he's receiving a spanking. (If some bright spark uses the manacles or other implements in the dungeon to make Angela stay put, remember that Angela's Avatar: Flying Woman skill is high enough that she can escape from bonds.)

Sid Anderson's Apartment

Address: Gull Apartments • 4533 Third St. #416 • Downtown • 555-4469
Custom Address:

Sid lives in an old but decent apartment building downtown, on the fourth floor. The front door is kept locked at all times; visitors must use the intercom to reach a resident, who can then press a button to unlock the front door. There is no front desk, though the building manager has an apartment on the first floor and can be buzzed from the entrance. Despite security, it's pretty easy to walk in behind another visitor or resident as they open the door: it's just a matter of good timing and looking casual.

A single elevator serves the entire ten-story building. It's an old elevator, cramped and slow. A staircase lies at either end of the small lobby. There is a large service elevator, but it's locked and only the manager has the key; it's used for moving in new tenants and other large deliveries.

Coming out of the elevator, a visitor approaches Sid's apartment by turning right and heading down the hall about eight doors. His apartment is on the left side of the hall.

The apartment has a central living room with an open doorway to a small kitchen on the left and two doors leading to a bedroom and bathroom on the right. Sid lives simply. The living room contains a thrift-store couch, three chairs, and a dented table, plus a bookcase and some miscellaneous decorations. His bedroom has a large futon, with a boom box in one corner and an unkempt pile of compact discs. His clothes stay in his closet.

Sid doesn't spend a lot of time here. He's at the bookstore much of the time, and even uses the upstairs area there for entertaining, rather than his apartment. His computer and papers are all at the office.

Unless you've decided otherwise in the Plot Points section, Earhart's Compass is in Sid's apartment. He keeps it in a jar in the kitchen, sitting on a windowsill.

Using Sid's Apartment

Depending on circumstances, Sid may invite the PCs to stay at his apartment if they need a place to crash. He has some

sleeping bags in a closet that he can break out for such a need.

Angela, Maggie, or Morris might break into Sid's apartment, looking for the compass or Sid or each other. It's even possible that *all three* break in, one after another, which should provide ample confusion for the players.

If Sid is in jeopardy, the PCs might have him hole up at the apartment and keep watch. Keep in mind that Angela has the Avatar: Flying Woman skill at a high enough level that she can *fly*. She could zip up outside Sid's window and come in that way, or just spy to see what's going on.

Assorted Motels

Address: Gentry Inn #212 • 475 Fourth St. • Downtown • 555-8972
Custom Address:

Tenant:

Address: Motel 23 #106 • 5038 45th St. • University District • 555-8836
Custom Address:

Tenant:

Address: Teepee Sleepee #118 • 3528 Aurora Ave. • Business District • 555-9903
Custom Address:

Tenant:

These are the three motels where Angela, Maggie, and Morris are staying. (Hey, they've got to sleep somewhere.) Note that the Gentry Inn is one street over and about six blocks down from Sid's apartment building; this can be intentional or accidental, as desired. On the "Tenant" line, write down who is staying in which motel. All three motels are inexpensive, tacky, and have minimal security.

Using the Motels

The most likely reason for one of these locations to come into play is if the PCs follow a GMC back to where he or she is staying, or figure it out with magick. Confrontation scenes are likely. If the PCs ally with Maggie, she may meet up with them at her room at one time or another—drawing the attention of anyone watching Maggie.

Liston Farm

Address: 3718 Rochester Lane • rural area outside of town • 555-3475
Custom Address:

Darryl Liston is an organic farmer and member of the Flock. His family has a small farm about an hour's drive from downtown that the Flock uses for monthly ceremonies. The Phoenix ritual is conducted at the Liston Farm.

The farm is about a hundred acres, and contains a one-story farmhouse, a barn, tool shed, and lots of cultivated fields. Roughly a third of the acreage is densely wooded, and within the woods there is a beaten-down clearing that the Flock uses.

Other farms lie adjacent to Liston's. He lives there with his common-law wife, Cindy, and their ten-month-old daughter Shelby. They keep numerous cats, who are moderately feral, and have a few cows to supply milk. The Listons are vegetarians, and do not raise any animals for meat. Darryl inherited a sizable family fortune, with which he purchased this farm about ten years ago. It runs at a small loss, but Darryl can afford it.

The clearing is ringed with fifty-four stones (one per member of the Flock), each weighing just four or five pounds—about the size of a football. Each stone has been painted or decorated or carved in some fashion by its owner in the Flock, and left here to mark the clearing as a sacred place.

Using the Farm

There is no real use for the farm until the night of the phoenix ritual. However, if some violence has occurred, Sid or another Flock member could suggest using the farm as a safehouse.

Events

This section presents several important incidents that are likely to occur in the scenario, though their order may vary.

Event: Meeting the Flock

One way or another, the PCs are likely to have some kind of introduction to Sid Anderson and the Flock. This probably involves a meeting at Circle's Edge, including a tour of the store and the upstairs (but not the S&M dungeon, which isn't mentioned). If the PCs are a magick cabal of some sort (or posing as such), then Sid and a handful of Folk members invite the PCs to a prayer-and-drum session that evening above the bookstore after business hours are over. This is a small gathering of a dozen or so members, with some general (and brief) neo-pagan rituals followed by a drum jam and some dancing. Visitors are welcome, so you might consider having either Angela, Maggie, or even Morris be present. The event should be a fun, welcoming one, and Sid invites a PC representative to introduce the group members and explain their beliefs.

If the PCs aren't a magick cabal, they could still be invited to the session purely for social or practical reasons. Alternately, PCs staking out the bookstore could hear drums and chanting inside and wonder what's up. If the latter is the case, they might spot a GMC also staking out the bookstore, waiting for Sid to come out and follow him home.

Event: Meeting Maggie

At some point, Maggie LeTourneau approaches the PCs and asks for help of some kind. (You should already have decided her agenda for doing so.) She briefly explains that a woman she knows, Angela Osborne, is in town and is seeking a member of the Flock who owns a compass that once belonged to Amelia Earhart. Maggie provides the PCs with a photograph of Angela and coordinates with them to deal with Angela, protect Sid, or what have you. Modulate her story, suggestions, and requests in accordance with the personality type and agenda you chose.

Event: Spotting Angela

Once the PCs know something about Angela, they may begin spotting her around town, following them or Sid or just skulking about. Her ability to fly (which she does only when she isn't being observed by normal people, unless things are dire) should make any sort of pursuit or avoidance interesting. Angela might allow herself to be captured or at least confronted in order to learn more about the PCs, confident that her ability to escape from any bonds (her Avatar: Flying Woman skill) will let her slip away once her curiosity is satisfied. The outcome of any such encounter depends on the choices you've made about Angela, but she should retain enough independence that she pursues her goals without the PCs as allies, barring persuasion.

Event: Morris Attacks

When, where, and how Morris Breecher attacks Angela is up to you. You should at least wait until the PCs have had an encounter with her, since that should help to determine if they are favorably inclined towards her or not—and also suggest what their reaction to Morris' attack might be. You should definitely stage Morris' attack when the PCs are around, whatever the circumstances. Ideally, he should fail at this point so that he can attack again at the ritual on the farm. If the PCs aren't intervening, Morris' attack fails because of Angela's Avatar: Flying Woman ability to flip rolls and get out of sticky situations, an ability that could manifest in visible ways or that could generate some unnatural phenomena in the vicinity.

Event: The Ritual

The climax of the scenario should, if possible, occur at the phoenix ritual held by the Flock out at Liston's Farm. If your game reaches a different and satisfying climax, that's fine. If, however, things get resolved in an unsatisfying or undramatic fashion, you might consider revising your personality choices. Should Angela die or get arrested early, for example, you might switch Maggie to a Low Road personality type (assuming she isn't already) and have her betray the PCs at the ritual, or Morris could have additional assignments such as killing Maggie, stealing the compass, and so on.

The ritual occurs within just a day or two of the start of the scenario; the exact day and time are up to you, but it should be in the evening. About an hour beforehand, more than a dozen cars and trucks depart from different parts of the city and head out for the rural farmlands beyond. These contain about fifty members of the Flock, most of them traveling in groups of three or four. Joining the exodus inconspicuously is easy, given the large number of vehicles—for the PCs or for GMCs.

The main body of vehicles enters the farmland and parks in a large open area near the house. A few members cycle through the farmhouse to visit the restroom, and then candles are lit and the walk to the clearing begins. (It's very easy for someone to park up the road a ways and then sneak onto the Liston farm.)

The Flock (and anyone with them or following them) arrive at the clearing in the woods after just fifteen minutes or so. Each member takes up a position in front of his or her stone (as described earlier), with visitors standing just outside the ring. Stealthy observers can easily hide in the trees just a few yards from the ring and observe the proceedings.

Sid begins at the ring but moves inwards to lead the group. He has Earhart's compass hanging from his neck, assuming it hasn't been stolen already. He presides over some general blessings/invocations, and then begins the phoenix ritual.

This ritual takes about half an hour and requires that another half-dozen members of the Flock step forward and assist Sid in saying rites and making ritual movements. At some point during the ritual—whenever the GM feels is dramatic—things begin to happen.

Ritual Weirdness

First, Sid begins to glow. An aura of pale blue light surrounds him. Sid is unaware of this, but everyone present can see it. As events unfold, this aura comes to resemble a great bird—a phoenix. Second, a low hum begins within moments of the aura appearing. This hum seems to come from all around—the earth, the trees, the sky. It quickly grows louder. Any PC with aviation experience may make a Mind check or appropriate skill check; the sound is the noise of an aircraft engine, specifically an older one powered by propellers.

The PCs may choose to take some action, possibly trying to disrupt Sid and the other celebrants. If Angela and/or Maggie are present (perhaps hiding in the woods) then they step forward into the ring and hold out their arms. Should Morris be around, he might get spooked and decide to take out Angela right there and then before she does anything weird.

In the midst of whatever is going on, additional magickal events occur—the process cannot be stopped, only survived.

The hum of the propellers grows louder and within seconds it's deafening; no one can communicate by voice. Suddenly the hum goes wrong, the brief sound of a small explosion kicking off a terrible, high wail. It is the sound of an airplane in an uncontrolled dive, but it merges with the sound of a woman screaming.

Whatever actions the PCs and GMCs are taking can continue through this situation, but keep in mind that it's impossible to hear anything other than the weird noise—and any gunshots that might occur.

When the actions of the PCs and GMCs are climaxing, throw one more magickal effect at them. The wail turns into a roar and then there is a terrible, screaming crash. PCs and GMCs alike must make a Speed check or be thrown to the ground.

Concurrent with the sound of the crash, a flood of water appears from nowhere and fills the clearing to a depth of fifteen feet. The edge of the water coincides with the edge of the stone ring; it's like a freestanding swimming pool that, impossibly, has no walls. The water is salty—it's sea water.

At this point, anyone thrown to the ground finds themselves at the bottom of the watery pool. Everyone else is lifted quickly up with the water and is treading on the surface. Initiate use of the drowning rules (see p. 57) as needed. The water is turbulent, but not overpowering. Swimming (Swim skill or half Body) to the edge of the ring allows one to slip out of the water and drop to the ground beyond.

Assuming Sid is still within the ring, he's glowing brightly underwater. The aura has fully taken the shape of a phoenix with a fifteen-foot wingspan. Sid/the aura begins to flap its monstrous wings and rises slowly through the water and then into the air.

The PCs and GMCs are still free to act throughout these events, though of course they are hampered by the circumstances (halve all Body and Speed skill checks while in the water). Angela and Maggie (if present) both believe that Sid is about to ascend to the Invisible Clergy, and (depending on their personalities) may attempt to either kill him, drag him out of the stone ring, or protect him.

If Sid is killed, knocked unconscious, or moved out of the stone ring, the magick stops working. The freestanding watery pool collapses, splashing salt water, Flock members, PCs, and GMCs into the trees around the ring. Everything goes back to normal. Since all of the candles are now out (from the water) and Sid is no longer glowing, it's pitch dark in the rural night, possibly leading to some interesting results.

If Sid remains where he is, the magickal event climaxes in a flash of light as the phoenix-aura leaves Sid's body and flies up towards the sky. It vanishes, and the water collapses as described above. Sid is left at the center of the ring, unconscious. Sid's fate is dealt with in the next section.

Whatever climax the PCs and GMCs orchestrate is perfectly fine—anyone can live or die. The climax of their actions might occur before, during, or after the final moments of the ritual. Nothing in this final event is scripted. Use your personality choices and agendas as your guide, and bring things to a satisfying conclusion.

REPERCUSSIONS

A wide variety of repercussions are possible, depending on the personalities of the main GMCs and the actions taken at the ritual. The PCs might have made enemies, allies, both, or neither. One or more of the GMCs might owe the PCs a debt, or seek vengeance.

The PCs' future relationship with the Flock should be considered. The ritual event was unprecedented in the Flock's experience, and they're going to be very curious about what happened. The PCs might end up as allies of the Flock, or might simply use them as contacts somewhere down the road.

SID'S FATE

The fate of Sid Anderson depends on what happened at the ritual. If the final migration of the phoenix-aura was prevented—by killing, incapacitating, or removing Sid—then he's just plain old Sid (or maybe plain old dead Sid).

If, however, the final element of the ritual still happened, then Sid suffers quite a different fate, one obvious to anyone who sees Sid in the immediate aftermath of the ritual.

Sid is now a woman.

The power of the Flying Woman archetype being channeled through a male body was overwhelming, and resulted in Sid being remade into a woman. She—Sid—is not an avatar of the Flying Woman, however; rather, the transformative nature of the process has placed her squarely in the path of the Mystic Hermaphrodite, the same archetype followed by the Freak. The extreme nature of Sid's conversion to the archetype may eventually place her in conflict with the Freak, with the PCs as emissaries or assassins.

GUIDE TO FIRST EDITION SOURCEBOOKS

Six sourcebooks were published for the first edition of *Unknown Armies* between 1999–2002, containing a wealth of information for players and GMs. Some material from these books has been incorporated into this second edition rulebook. Here are brief notes on the contents of each sourcebook, including items superceded by updated versions in this rulebook.



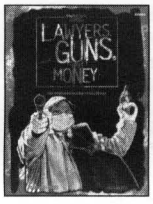
ONE SHOTS

FIVE STAND-ALONE SCENARIOS

Anthology of scenarios using pre-generated PCs. Includes a new unnatural creature, a new Room of Renunciation, and a new archetype. The scenario "Jailbreak" is fast becoming a convention standard.

SUPERCEDED CONTENT

The Mother archetype.



LAWYERS, GUNS, AND MONEY

THE NEW INQUISITION SOURCEBOOK

Indispensable for groups playing TNI teams, though we've moved basic info on clearance levels and pay into this rulebook to get you started. Loads of equipment (magickal and espionage stuff), GMCs, background, secrets, new skills, and two scenarios. Down and dirty, ready for action and intrigue.

SUPERCEDED CONTENT

Miscellaneous game mechanics: Car Chases



POSTMODERN MAGICK

THE UNNATURAL SOURCEBOOK

Huge grab bag of crunchy bits, including numerous new adept schools, artifacts, unnatural creatures, cabals, dukes, discussion of magick theory, and life as an adept. Our best-selling sourcebook because it's so damn full of stuff. The introductory short story ("Two Thousand Zero Zero") gives the scoop about Mak Attax's Y2K program.

SUPERCEDED CONTENT

Miscellaneous game mechanics: Becoming an Adept, Creating Formula Spells, Getting the Juice, Proxy Rituals; **Adept schools:** Bibliomancy, Personamancy, Urbanomancy; **Artifacts:** Skeleton Keys, Wooden Nickels.



STATOSPHERE

THE INVISIBLE CLERGY SOURCEBOOK

Like *Postmodern Magick*, but for avatars. A long look at the clergy and the Statosphere as well as life as an avatar. Sections on the House of Renunciation and the Comte de Saint-Germain, with four Rooms and three versions of the Comte. Gobs of new avatars. Great visionary writing about symbologies and the mysteries of transcendental existence.

SUPERCEDED CONTENT

Miscellaneous game mechanics: Godwalking, Assumption, Ascension, Tilting; **Archetypes:** The Messenger, The Mystic Hermaphrodite, The True King.



HUSH HUSH

THE SLEEPERS SOURCEBOOK

All about the bogeymen of the occult underground, with lots of info on the Sleepers as enemies, allies, and as PCs. Their secret history—summarized briefly in this rulebook—is fantastic reading. New artifacts, unnatural creatures, rituals, and more. A very European setting and feel, great for those of you on the Continent or for Americans looking for some of that classy old-school occult goodness. Great selection of real-world espionage & tactical gear.

SUPERCEDED CONTENT

Miscellaneous game mechanics: Riots.



WEEP

SIX SCENARIOS OF WOE AND RUIN

Chunky scenario anthology intended for campaign use, unlike the ready-to-roll *One Shots*. If you liked "Bill in Three Persons," check out "A Few of My Favorite Things" and "Drink to That." If you liked "Pinfeathers," try "The Green Glass Grail." If you liked *The Unexplained* chapter, read "Stoon Lake." If you're just starting a campaign, use "Swap Meet" as an initial plotline. And the epic urban nightmare of "Garden Full of Weeds" should keep you up nights. Tons of GMCs.

SUPERCEDED CONTENT

Not a blessed thing.

INDEX

Abel, Alex, 237
  cosmic knowledge of, 204
  see also New Inquisition, The
adepts, 110
  global knowledge of, 83
  underground of, 86
  becoming, 112
  example obsessions, 31
  see also magick
afterlife, the, 229
  global knowledge of, 82
  cosmic knowledge of, 203
Agent of Renunciation, *see* House of Renunciation, The
alcohol, *see* impairment
  see also Dipsomancy
Allen, Dirk, 260
  global knowledge of, 85
  cosmic knowledge of, 206
archetypes, *see* avatars
artifacts, 223
  making of, 224
  minor, 223
  significant, 294
  major, 297
ascension, 216
assumption, 214
astral parasites, 300
  detection by Aura Sight, 43
attacking, 49
  see also firearms attacks
  see also hand-to-hand attacks
attack shifts, *see* shifts
attributes, *see* stats
Authentic Thaumaturgy, 101
avatars, 168
  global knowledge of, 84
  cosmic knowledge of, 198
  becoming, 169
Barberry, Monica, 248
  see also Mak Attax
Bibliomancy, 117
blasts, *see* magick
Cage, 239
  see also New Inquisition, The
Carrillo, Father José, 254
  see also Order of St. Cecil, The
cars,
  driving skill, 40
  wreck damage, 57
  and chases, 59
  and chase GMing, 282
cherries, hand-to-hand, 55
cherries, magick, 116
Cliomancy, 121
combat, 47
  and GMing 280
  see also attacking,
  see also damage,
  see also initiative
Cooper, Darla, 251
  see also Global Liberation Society, The
crits, 7
  and firearms damage, 51
  and hand-to-hand damage, 54
Crowe, Cletus, 233
  see also Sleepers, The
Cult of the Goddess, The *see* Sect of the Naked Goddess, The
damage, 51
  firearms damage, 51
  hand-to-hand damage, 54
  exotic damage, 56
  wounds, 58
  healing, 58
DeGhoule, Rebecca, 256
  see also Satan's Chosen Temple
Demagogue archetype, 171
demons, 220
  Dipsomancy attack (Soul Sipping), 128
  Dipsomancy control (Ghost Vintage), 129
  Dipsomancy summon (Party Like Hell), 127
  Entropomancy control (Cage for the Dead), 132
  Entropomancy summon (Pierce the Veil), 131
  see also Satan's Chosen Temple
Deutsch, Andrea, 243
  see also Sect of the Naked Goddess, The
dice, 7
Dipsomancy, 126
  see also impairment
dodging, 50
  as skill, 40
Douglas, Randy, 250
  see also Global Liberation Society, The
drawing a weapon, 49, **57**
driving, *see* cars
drowning damage, 57
drugs, *see* impairment
  see also Narco-Alchemy
dukes, 84
  sample GMCs, 259
Duopoulous, Harvey, 248
  see also Mak Attax
entropics, 301
entropy, 202
Entropomancy, 130
Epideromancy, 133
Eponymous, 237
  see also New Inquisition, The
exceptional skills, 280
Executioner archetype, 172
experience points, 45
  and memorizing rituals, 101
  see also instant improvement
falling damage, 57
firearms attacks, 51
  weapon table, 52
  damage by caliber table, 53
  brief legal primer, 61
  bulletproof vests, 54
  called shots, 51
  full-auto, 53
  multiple shots, 51
  special ammo, 54
  suppressive fire, 51
flip-flops, 7
  and obsession skill, 39
  statistical analysis of, 45
Flying Woman archetype, 173
focus shifts, 49
Fool archetype, 175
Forsythe, Angela, 234
  see also Sleepers, The
Freak, The, 261
  global knowledge of, 85
  cosmic knowledge of, 205
  Mystic Hermaphrodite archetype, 187
fumbles, 7
  and firearms damage, 51
  and hand-to-hand damage, 54
fuzzy logic skill checks, 280
Ganz, Hiram, 242
  see also Sect of the Naked Goddess, The
Garcia, Lucius, 242
  see also Sect of the Naked Goddess, The
ghouls, 305
  see also revenants
Global Liberation Society, The, 249
Goddess, *see* Sect of the Naked Goddess, The
godwalkers,
  cosmic knowledge of, 198
  and assumption, 214
  and ascension, 218
golems, 302
Greene, Chloe, 244
  see also Sect of the Naked Goddess, The
hand-to-hand attacks, 54
  weapon damage table, 52
  cherries, 55
  obsessed, 55
Hauser, Michael, 252
  see also True Order of Saint Germain, The
healing, 58
House of Renunciation, The, 229
  global knowledge of, 85
  cosmic knowledge of, 205
  as PC group, 211
  Otherside Room, 230
hunches, 7
impairment, 290
initiative, 48
  as skill, 40
instant improvement, 45
Invisible Clergy, 228
  cosmic knowledge of, 198
  deposing archetypes, 217
Jackson, Derek, 246
  see also Mak Attax
Jeeter, 262
Lee, Daphnee, 241
  see also Sect of the Naked Goddess, The
lords, 198
  sample GMCs, 261
Lovac, Tina, 262
lycanthropes, 303
Mabsut, Daoud, 234
  see also Sleepers, The
madness, 64
  and roleplaying, 73
  and GMing, 286
magick, 95
  rituals, 96
  ritual ingredients, 285
  proxies, 101
  tilts, 105
  Authentic Thaumaturgy, 101
magick, adept 110
  and GMing, 283
  blasts, 113
  cherries, 116
  creating schools, 102
  random, 79
  schools, 83
Mak Attax, 245
  global knowledge of, 85
  cosmic knowledge of, 204
  Lesser Correspondence ritual, 247
  and Global Liberation Society, the, 250
Masterless Man archetype, 177
matches, 7
  and hand-to-hand attacks, 55
McIntyre, Violet, 238
  see also New Inquisition, The
Mechanomancy, 137
  see also Lovac, Tina
mental help, 69, 71
mentoring, adept, 113
Merchant archetype, 179
Messenger archetype, 181
Morgan, Lili, 232
  see also House of Renunciation, The
Mother archetype, 183
multiple attacks,
  see firearms attacks
  see hand-to-hand attacks
MVP archetype, 185
Mystic Hermaphrodite archetype, 187
Naked Goddess, The, *see* Sect of the Naked Goddess, The
Narco-Alchemy, 141
narrative structures, 267
  street examples, 27
  global examples, 90
  cosmic examples, 208
New Inquistion, The, 235
  global knowledge of, 85
  cosmic knowledge of, 204
  as PC group, 90
non-combat actions, 57
nonentities, 304
obsession, 30
  and roleplaying, 73
obsession skill, *see* skills
order, 202
Order of Saint Cecil, The, 253
  cosmic knowledge of, 205
passions, 31
  and sociopathy, 68
Personamancy, 145
Pilgrim archetype, 188
Plutomancy, 149
pointblanking damage, 56
Pornomancy, 153
  see also Sect of the Naked Goddess, The
proxy rituals, 96
Ramírez, Selena, 261
Reed, Josie, 257
  see also Satan's Chosen Temple
revenants, 305
rituals, *see* magick
Roscommons, Hubert, 229
Saint Cecil, *see* Order of St. Cecil, The
Saint-Germain, the Comte de, 229
  global knowledge of, 85
  cosmic knowledge of, 203
Saint-Germain, The True Order of, *see* Global Liberation Society, The
  cosmic knowledge of, 205
Satan's Chosen Temple, 256
  global knowledge of, 85
Savage archetype, 191
Sect of the Naked Goddess, 240
  global knowledge of, 85
  cosmic knowledge of, 204
  Naked Goddess videotape, 297
  Pornomancy, 153
shifts, 7
  attack shifts, 49
  focus shifts, 49
skill checks, 7
  and GMing, 279
skills, 38
  exceptional skills, 280
  free skills, 38
  obsession skill, 39
Sleepers, The, 232
  global knowledge of, 84
  cosmic knowledge of, 204
  as global-level PC group, 91
  as cosmic-level PC group, 212
Smith, Jim, 258
snowfallen, 305
  ritual against (Snowblinding), 97
  see also revenants
sociopathy, 68
spells,
  formula, 115
  random, 116
  creating, 164
  and GMing, 284
  see also magick
splits, 306
  see also revenants
Statosphere, 228
  cosmic knowledge of, **198**, 203
stats, 36
  and wound penalties, 58
strangling damage, 57
sucker attacks, 55
suicide stalkers, 306
  see also revenants
tenebrae, 306
Thaumaturgy, *see* Authentic Thaumaturgy
tilt rituals, 105
  and GMing, 284
trigger event, 26
True King archetype, 192
True Order of Saint-Germain, The, 249
  cosmic knowledge of, 205
unnatural, the, 298
  mental stress, 65
unspeakable servants, 307
  ritual to summon, 100
Urbanomancy, 156
Videomancy, 159
Walters, Thurston Joseph "T. Joe", 257
  see also Satan's Chosen Temple
warbucks, *see* Plutomancy
Warrior archetype, 195
Wilson, Molly, 258
wound points, 36
  and penalties, 58
  and healing, 58
  and GMing, 280

WHAT WILL YOU RISK TO CHANGE THE WORLD?



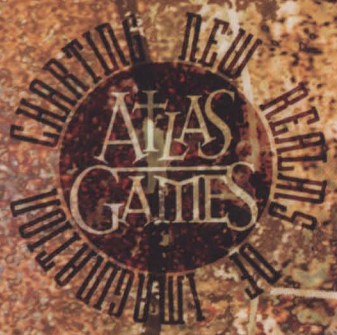
Something big is going down. You don't know what. But you can feel it all around you. It's in the air, in the headlines of newspapers, in the blurry images on television. It is a secret you have yet to grasp, although the first syllable has been spoken in a dream you cannot quite recall.

You need to know more. The world you know is not enough for you. You want to go deeper. At times you want to let go of reality and let yourself slip into the delirium of pure understanding. Anything would be preferable to the ignorance of daily life. You know there is a place, defined by ideas if not by atoms, and it holds the key to your desires.

But there is danger there. People vanish, die horribly, become madmen, for the sake of whatever the secret is that lies at the heart of the unseen world.

That world is the occult underground. Find it, before it finds you.

Unknown Armies *is a roleplaying game of power and consequences. This second edition rulebook is reorganized and rewritten to better serve new players and to build stronger campaigns. It includes new schools of magick, new avatars, and much more.*





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