



THE SILVER LADDER™

the World of Darkness

MAGE®
THE AWAKENING



THE SILVER LADDER



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THE CAGE IS THE LION'S HEART

He dreams like a Master, in layers as deep and strong as the rings of an eon-old tree. Every part of him is divided into wood-clad cells. Each one contains a vision, a secret and a plan. His mind's eye bores through concentric chambers with the ease of an impossibly sharp, white-hot steel drill, down to a rotten hollow in the pale heartwood of his mind. Behind the final layer a brick road and sputtering streetlights frame a bleeding young man who writhes on broken bones. Bright blotter paper crawls from his left hand at the behest of a sickly wind. Printed bears and skulls: LSD. It's why the bikers beat him so badly, to what *should* have been death, if not for magic.

The wounded man also dreams. He was Mark Long when it all looked like this, in '68. He is the Nemean, the Master, who crouches to inspect his younger self's face.

They're not alone.

• • •

"Fuck the Buddha."

In Cormant House, silence hits like a cleaver. Mages dodge its arc, away from the meeting table, but drop their conversations to listen in. At one end the monks, mages from an obscure, well-heeled Asian Legacy, discipline their expressions, but a few tics hit after the Nemean's insult. They shift their chairs and smooth their robes to buy a bit of thinking time. One of them breathes his way to a serene smile and opens his mouth to talk, but the Nemean chops the opportunity down with one of his big hands.

"Make no mistake; I'm not saying this in an ironic, mystical 'kill the Buddha on the road' vein. I want you to understand that I hate your religion."

The monk stops smiling.

"When the Buddha Sakyamuni was born, a sage prophesied that he'd grow up either to be a great teacher or to rule the world as a 'wheel-turning king,'" says the Nemean. "Priest or emperor? What a stupid question, to force a man to make himself a slave to win moral approval. My answer to your proposal is no. You won't be allowed to set up your racket..."

"Monastery!" blurts the interrupted monk.

"Shut up. Ax, show them out. Drag them all the way back to China if you have to."

Anacaona de Xaragua helps the oldest monk to his feet.

Two guests slip away early. They trade frowns all the way to the car. She traces a rune on her bracelet before she gets in. He hits the gas, turns to her and says, "That went well. I always wanted to make enemies in Asia."

"They're not our enemies. They're *his*."

"He's Hierarch."

"Not for long. We'll meet at the Emerald Scroll. I think tonight was the last straw. He was *pointlessly* rude. Did you talk to the Arhats? Scrolls, Artifacts, money – they'd share it all for the sake of a foothold here. Call the committee. We've got to use this opportunity *now* before he bribes and threatens it away."

• • •

"See him? See your first and greatest vision, ripped from the gods under the shadow of death? It's an ancient custom, to attain Awakening with a foot in the grave." The voice is bodiless and muffled. There's a familiar quality to it that irritates the Nemean.

He looks around but can see nothing out of place. It was a cold night back in '68 so he dreams himself up a thick wool robe.

"Grave or gutter, I guess," he says. "This is your third visit, isn't it? Good. There's always a revelation third time around. Like you said, it's the custom. It's the way dreams work."

"Yeah, it's about dreams. It's time to revisit this one: being Mark, helpless after they hurt you, blindly climbing your Watchtower to escape and rebuild yourself."

"Blindly?" Sure. Add 'stupidly.' Mention 'luck' in there. I didn't earn Awakening. It just happened on its own. I searched, did the witchcraft trip. Mother Nature, free love — it was all wrong.

"That's the trouble, Voice." The Nemean frowns for want of a proper name. "I cast the Stymphalian from Hierarchy and took his seat as easy as you please. I trapped a werewolf chieftain in the Empty House, even stole a scale from the Aeon Snake. But it means *nothing*; I didn't win my Awakening with thought and will. The drug-abusing, delusional hippie down there just *fell* into it, running from his voices, from the consequences of dropping out. I can't accept unearned rewards any more than I can give them."

The voice laughs. "So that's why you're a terrible Hierarch."

"I'm an excellent Hierarch if you're weak."

The cityscape flexes like a cold-stiffened muscle; street wreckage wraps around a patch of nothing, clasp ing it in chipped bricks, mist and car parts. He feels resistance as his will grabs something human-shaped but invisible.

"Got you," says the Nemean.
"Now it's time for your story, Voice."

...

The Emerald Scroll's full of big stained-glass tarot cards. Nobody sits beneath the Tower. Davy Jones always talks about getting rid of the table beneath it but he never does. Choice matters. If you can't choose doom (or its image) you can't choose luck, either. Even trivial choices — symbols, seats in very exclusive clubs — matter to the Awakened. The conspirators mutter over their drinks and hover at a few different spots, but in the end they shove a few extra chairs under Judgment. They hunch over a little table with bent necks and furtive waves: the clichéd body language of guilt.

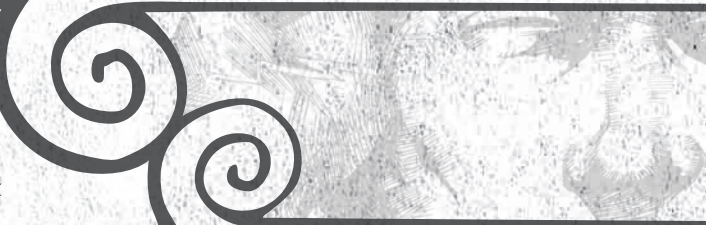
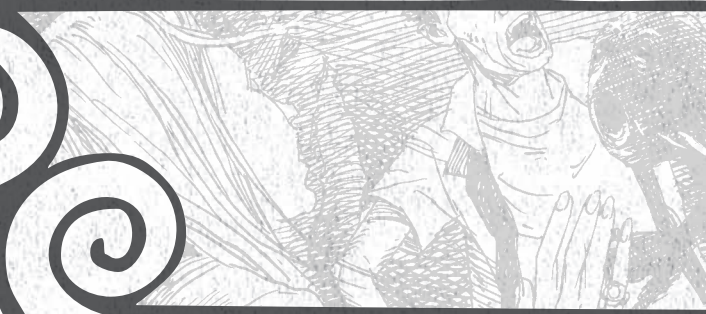
The Nemean feels sorry for them but pulls up a chair just the same. Khumeia smiles at him — well, at her cabal-mate Thanatos, as far as she knows. The Nemean copied his body for the occasion, matching mole for mole as precisely as Life's senses allowed. He checks his hands and can find no errors. He closes his eyes and follows a small thread of his crystallized desire. At the other end, the real Thanatos sleeps in a folded sheet of Shadow. Four of the spirits called Black Magistrates snap at their chains. They'll punish him soon enough.

Khumeia lets an hour of drunken, unstructured griping pass before she commands the gang's attention.

"This is it, then. Nobody thinks ejecting the Arhats was a good idea. We can ride the wave of his mistake, move in and cut him from the Noose."

"Way too simple." That's Eve from the Gravediggers. She's probably here without her cabal's consent. "The Ebon Noose is *tight*. Even if they let the Nemean go they still have all the cards. And Ahriman is the other Master. You want that spooky bastard running things?"

"Naturally, no. But they'll be too busy to throw their weight around at Council."
Ah, here's the twist, thinks the Nemean. He covers his curiosity with a grin.



Khumeia says, "I've made arrangements with the Company."

Eve frowns. "Mercenaries?"

"Why not? They don't care who's in charge as long as they're left to their drugs, mobs and that other Sleeper biz. Company mages will fuck up Salem something fierce. That'll force the Noose to protect their property instead of the Hierarch. I told the Company they can even keep the Noose's Hallow, if they want it."

The Nemean clears his throat and hums a bit, testing Thanatos' unfamiliar voice. Then he asks the usual question, the one all traitors answer for him sooner or later: "What would you do with a new Council, then?"

She nods, mistaking it for cooperative patter. "Let's be straight," says Khumeia. "The Company doesn't come cheap. That Hallow just motivates them to engage the Noose but they want cash, connections and some other things they don't want made public. These don't come cheap. The Illuminated Pentad will put a Master on the big chair but he'll give *us* a return on our investments. Don't worry: we'll be generous."

"A pity," says the Nemean. Something wriggles under the Nemean-as-Thanatos' skin. Bones shift; his back arches.

"What?"

Monsters answer, ripping their way out of the Nemean's face and chest.

...

Dreamscapes are like stages, film sets. Even in a mind as complex as an Awakened Master's there are boundaries; no memory captures every atom. Some things have weight and true dimension but others are nothing more than a curtain, a matte painting to hide the edge of an imagined space.

The intruder's under the dream's backdrop. The Nemean imagines a sheet of hanging paper there. He rips once; a triangle of street and sky falls and he sees his own face, older than Mark's era but younger than his own.

"Savham." His old Shadow Name.

Savham's hands rend their way out from behind the dream. Fingers blindly skid along stars and urban vanishing points. They find an invisible seam and pull the rest of the body out and forward, onto the road. The Nemean lets him go. Bricks and mist fall back into place.

"Nemean." The doppelgänger's voice is clearer now — as loud as he was in his arrogant thirties. "I wasn't sure you'd know me." He sits by Mark Long's side, cradles his head through the convulsions. "You never comfort him," he says.

"I haven't thought about you in years. Does the wasp consider the pupa? You were an intermediary stage."

He snorts. "That's great, really. You're complete! Congratulations: Ascension must be lonely. Is that why you're still Hierarch?"



Savham makes a big circle with one arm. That makes the window's borders. He yanks it open with the same paper-tearing trick. One memory spills into another, with '68 Boston on one side and Khumeia's screams on the other. A saw made of blood-mottled bone takes her hand off with one rough pull. The saw's a forelimb; its owner's face looks like it's made out of dirty pink clay and teeth. It licks arterial spray from its face, jumps a yard left and rips the right knee off another conspirator. Its brood-mates babble like angry babies.

"Fine example of governance there, Hierarch," says Savham.

"It is. Imagine those assholes in power. There's nothing but the Lion in them, power for power's sake. Let them bitch among the citizenry, but real power? Not in my Consilium."

"I could have sworn it was everyone's Consilium; you just manage it. I remember taking the Hierarch's seat to give Boston some harsh medicine, not make it my property. I know why I — why you, why we, whatever — turned the screws in the beginning, but now? I think you're just too attached to your job."

"If they were ready I wouldn't have caught them."

"You mean if you spent more time governing instead of laying traps for your enemies, you wouldn't have caught them. Your man calls Shanghai, the monks come, make friends — and you show them the door with a pissy little rant. How unfortunate. How convenient, too. It's sure to anger some people, maybe even force their hands."

The Nemean grins. "I remember why I'm not you anymore, Savham. You've got all the pride but none of the pragmatism. Things have changed. I read the Secret Concord. I think *he* is going to invoke the next clause. The Mysterium's already sending its little tomb robbers to figure out why the Shadow's changing. And you want what: Potestas drooling into his beard while the Pentad fucks around with little favors for their de facto subjects? The enemy will *eat* them."

"So that's why you've got to keep your post indefinitely."

"That's the way I see it."

"Bullshit, oh older-me. Bullshit."

• • •

Nobody identifies the monsters. They suspect the Nemean but it takes twenty minutes for the conspirators to calm down, ask questions and check for Resonance — time enough for Ahriman, the Ebon

Noose's Death-worker, to clean up the stench of the Nemean's magic and even turn forensic evidence to dust.

Amazingly, nobody dies in the attack. Two are so badly maimed they're put to bed in the Roxbury VA hospital, camouflaged among military amputees. Its administrator finds instructions in his coat, scrawled on snapshots of his youngest daughter. Every picture's marked with a stylized letter B: the Bunker Hill Boys. They faked his grades at Harvard, during his sophomore year. That's why he pulls six figures now. He stays after work to do as he's told.

Khumeia fares better, but the monsters secrete a poison that rots stumps and ragged wound-mouths. She watches corruption crawl up one arm and furiously dials with the hand of the other. It takes only an hour for her to spend months of carefully stored political capital. The Bunker Hill Boys do it for her. They're the Ladder's servants, one element in the order's great Cryptopoly. She activates their network. Money, blackmail and favors flow from her cell to the others, all to find a Life Master who will heal her.

At least Davy Jones lets her hide in the Emerald Scroll's storage closet for free. That's where her cabal-mate finds her. Faustina drags her into the Pentad's Mercedes and drives back to the Lodge of Eight Chambers. The Moon Chamber has a suitable couch. The IV, medical gear and morphine come courtesy of a bank executive who has either a complicated illness or a serious nursing kink, depending upon who's asking. Faustina gets the saw out of the sanctum's toolbox and sterilizes it with a propane torch.

By the time Arvantis calls back Faustina's amputated the rest of the arm at the elbow, an inch above the creeping rot. Black blood and puss mar the white carpet. The phone's next; Faustina holds it to Khumeia's ear with a messy, gloved hand.

"Magus, we've found a Master who will replace your arm and purge your body of any poisons."

"Good," says Khumeia, slowing as the morphine kicks in. "How much?"

Arvantis describes a cluster of financial transactions that probably won't ruin the Illuminated Pentad, but will humble it for months. "This accompanies the other items you promised in the course of the search, Magus. Our services will be...limited for the next quarter but our brotherhood will survive."

"When?"

"Immediately, Magus."

"Who?"

"He won't let me say, Magus."

Silence.

"He's sworn not to harm you, so I took the liberty of accepting his proposal. Forgive my presumption, but you'll understand soon. I couldn't refuse."

Ten minutes later the doorbell rings. Faustina glares at the door and finishes administering another morphine shot, but by the fifth ring she stands and opens it.

Drugs blunt her hearing; Khumeia makes out only angry tones, a hissed "No" from Faustina and Arvantis' conciliatory tone: thick bursts of human noise. But she isn't surprised when the Nemean walks in, pushing Thanatos in a wheelchair. Faustina runs to her side but Arvantis stays a customary three steps back. He's merely an Illuminate, standing ready for the enlightened ones' commands.

...

"Clever," says Savham, though there's no admiration in the tone as he lets go of a now-quieted Mark Long and stands.

"I'm not bloodthirsty." The Nemean shrugs and takes a closer look at his younger self. Savham's got a swimmer's build: flat belly, streamlined muscles and a weightless stride. He remembers those days. He used the Art to make himself handsome, put a bit more copper in his hair and start a cult that was equal parts charity and sexual opportunism. He could make himself that way again but he thinks of the fat, the brutal, top-heavy muscles he has now. Mean old man, Lion trapped in tweed. It has its uses.

Opening the window is like ripping paper, but closing it takes nothing more than his glance; 1968 rushes over the hole as fast as a crashing wave.

"You healed them all?"

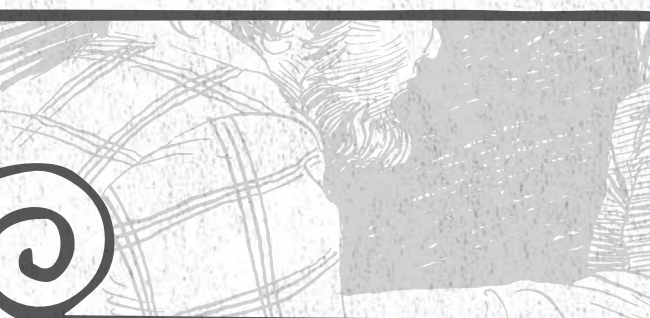
"I didn't put poison in all the Walking Bone Knives, just those I set on important people. The real beauty of it is that the Pentad used their Cryptopoly favors up. They knew they couldn't ask me to heal them so they used the network — and, of course, that network leads back to me."

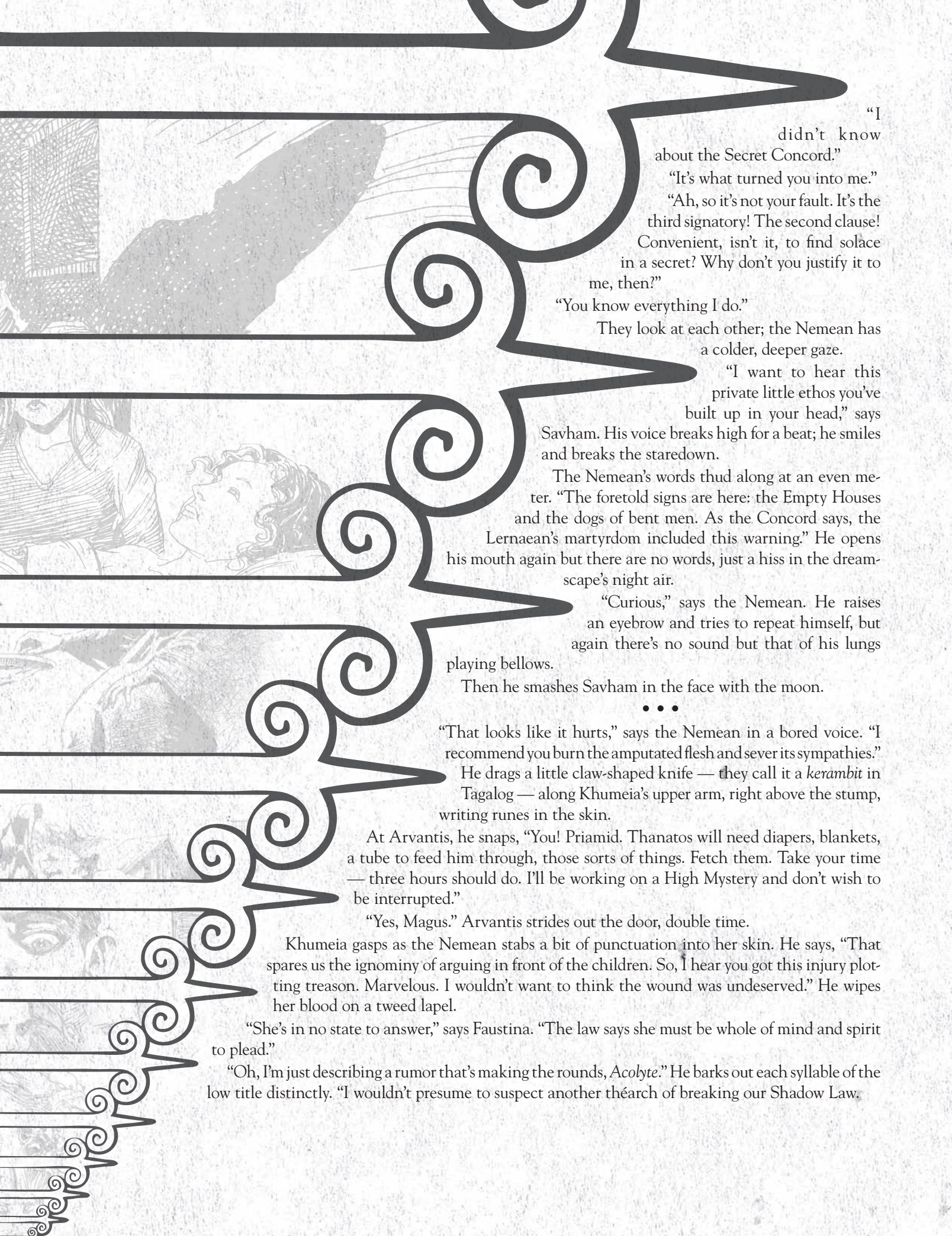
"Thanatos?"

"Khumeia knows the Mind's Mysteries. If he doesn't climb out of catatonia himself, she can heal him."

"Cruel."

"For a co-conspirator? I could have ripped his head off and used it as a centerpiece at the next Cormant House equinox dinner. I know the law better than you ever did."





"I didn't know about the Secret Concord."

"It's what turned you into me."

"Ah, so it's not your fault. It's the third signatory! The second clause! Convenient, isn't it, to find solace in a secret? Why don't you justify it to me, then?"

"You know everything I do."

They look at each other; the Nemean has a colder, deeper gaze.

"I want to hear this private little ethos you've built up in your head," says Savham. His voice breaks high for a beat; he smiles and breaks the staredown.

The Nemean's words thud along at an even meter. "The foretold signs are here: the Empty Houses and the dogs of bent men. As the Concord says, the Lernaean's martyrdom included this warning." He opens his mouth again but there are no words, just a hiss in the dream-scape's night air.

"Curious," says the Nemean. He raises an eyebrow and tries to repeat himself, but again there's no sound but that of his lungs playing bellows.

Then he smashes Savham in the face with the moon.

...

"That looks like it hurts," says the Nemean in a bored voice. "I recommend you burn the amputated flesh and sever its sympathies." He drags a little claw-shaped knife — they call it a *kerambit* in Tagalog — along Khumeia's upper arm, right above the stump, writing runes in the skin.

At Arvantis, he snaps, "You! Priamid. Thanatos will need diapers, blankets, a tube to feed him through, those sorts of things. Fetch them. Take your time — three hours should do. I'll be working on a High Mystery and don't wish to be interrupted."

"Yes, Magus." Arvantis strides out the door, double time.

Khumeia gasps as the Nemean stabs a bit of punctuation into her skin. He says, "That spares us the ignominy of arguing in front of the children. So, I hear you got this injury plotting treason. Marvelous. I wouldn't want to think the wound was undeserved." He wipes her blood on a tweed lapel.

"She's in no state to answer," says Faustina. "The law says she must be whole of mind and spirit to plead."

"Oh, I'm just describing a rumor that's making the rounds, *Acolyte*." He barks out each syllable of the low title distinctly. "I wouldn't presume to suspect another théarch of breaking our Shadow Law."

"But while I comfort poor Khumeia let's entertain the possibility that she took offense over a decision made above her station and decided to organize some kind of nightclub putsch from the Emerald Scroll. No surprise there, considering the Bunker Hill Boys worked overtime on all these odd projects. They've been talking to the Afghanis, gutting the odd drug mule from the old country, that kind of thing."

"It's a theory, Hierarch." Faustina's too disciplined for the usual signs of fear, but the Shadow will tell. He can hear little fear-eaters crawling near. They sense a feast.

"Strictly a thought experiment. It will help you refine your political skills. Imagine the Cryptopoly playing at big time heroin deals, creating gray-toothed addicts in my town. Disgusting, isn't it? I don't know any théarchs in that scene — just those sorcerers for hire in the Company. Of course, they'd be perfect allies in a coup. They don't care about Council seats so they won't step in with inconvenient ambitions. They just want to get paid — and they'd love some new connections in the drug trade. But what would they be doing for our theoretical traitors, my dear?"

"I don't know, Hierarch."

"Of course not. A more educated théarch like the Hierarch this plot's supposed to overthrow might narrow it down to a few options. Maybe they're supposed to kill him. Maybe they're supposed to keep his allies busy during some other maneuver. The Hierarch isn't afraid. In fact, he *demand*s that the plotters spring their trap. He moves up their plans, creates the 'right time to strike' by pretending a sort of public blunder. These hypothetical conspirators take the bait and move up their schedule. They have to improvise a bit too loosely for their own good. They meet in person instead of through scrying windows, maybe even in some shitty little club that exists to conveniently centralize discontent for the Council's pleasure.

"Imagine you were Hierarch. I'm sure you have before. Would you kill them?"

"No, Hierarch, please." The Mastigos' façade breaks; he hears her heart climb, sees the sweat bead.

"Why not?"

"Even if it was your right, the rest of the Consilium would hate you. And you'd have to answer in Convocation for killing so many other théarchs."

"You learn fast. Now hold Khumeia down. I'm going to grow the arm back fast. Growth is painful. Don't forget it."

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In the Nemean's hand, 1968's full moon is a bright disk an inch thick, big as a hoplite's shield. He plucked it right from the sky. He spins it into Savham's forehead. Blood flies; its wet hand smacks his copper hair, marking in a red too bright for nighttime. The Nemean's always dreamed his blood bigger than life.

Savham stumbles back, trips over Mark Long and pivots in a big, unbalanced lunge onto the concrete. His foot goes in ankle deep; the Nemean's dreamed the curb to be as soft as butter but it grips like quicksand. Savham can't pull out.

The Nemean chucks the moon back to its patch of sky. It sticks like a hat on a hook.

"You're not me. Who are you?"

"I'm your pupa or something, intermediate insect," mutters Savham, yanking his leg with both hands. It's no use. The concrete's solid again; his foot's completely submerged.

"No, I mean you're not a part of my consciousness. I swore a very special oath to keep the Secret Concord hidden. So special, in fact, that I can't break it accidentally. I can think about it as much as I want in a few parts of my mind — here, for example, since it's so intimate — as long as I'm truly alone. But I can't say a thing. Why do you suppose *that* would happen, younger-me? Unless you're *not* younger-me, and the spell kicked in to keep me from blathering to a spy — one I will hurt very, very badly when I follow the Resonance back."

"I'm part of you, Nemean, but part of me is *not* part of you. That's apparently enough to define me as a different entity for the purposes of your oath — a pity, because they want to know about it. That's my secondary function. If you were better at the Mysteries of thought and will you'd have detected the Trojan first time around."

"They? Tell me about them." A sharp wet bone snaps out from under the Nemean's thumbnail. It's casual shapeshifting, easy to dream. The talon's shaped like a *kerambit*. He hooks Savham at the collarbone and mines for nerves to tear — or maybe he imagines the dream-nerves and tries to summon them to the bone hook.

Savham grunts and then breathes out slowly. "You'd never break at a time like this so I won't, either. Part of the reason they picked me was that I'm the best in you; the other part is that they know you're such a prick you'll torture yourself if nobody else is around."

"This mysterious 'They,' again."

"The Convocation, Nemean. They sentenced you three days ago."

• • •

Khumeia's arm grows like a tree under time-lapse photography: in rhythmic growing seasons a few seconds long, pulsing through an hour and more. The finished product is covered in a film of watery blood. She screams when new nerves burrow through new muscle, and when bones creak, twist and separate into new fingers. The Nemean seals the form to its Pattern with an Atlantean phrase.

"Quite a poison," he says. "Take the least convenient features of cat-scratch fever and necrotizing fasciitis. Increase the brew's potency tenfold and quicken it. Make it a Pattern-eater. Fortunately there were only trace amounts left — enough to rot your face off, maybe, or rip a valve from your heart.

"It was easiest to purify your body completely. I'm sure I've killed incipient cancers and scratched away various arterial accretions. There's probably no better time to start a fitness program, especially since none of your cabal seem competent to maintain your health with more direct methods."

"Sure, Deacon," says Khumeia. She sits up, wipes the blood off her new arm and looks at him with dead, angry eyes. "Of all the ways the enemy could have struck, this was the one we weren't prepared for:

crude mayhem and mutilation. We generally plan for subtler threats."

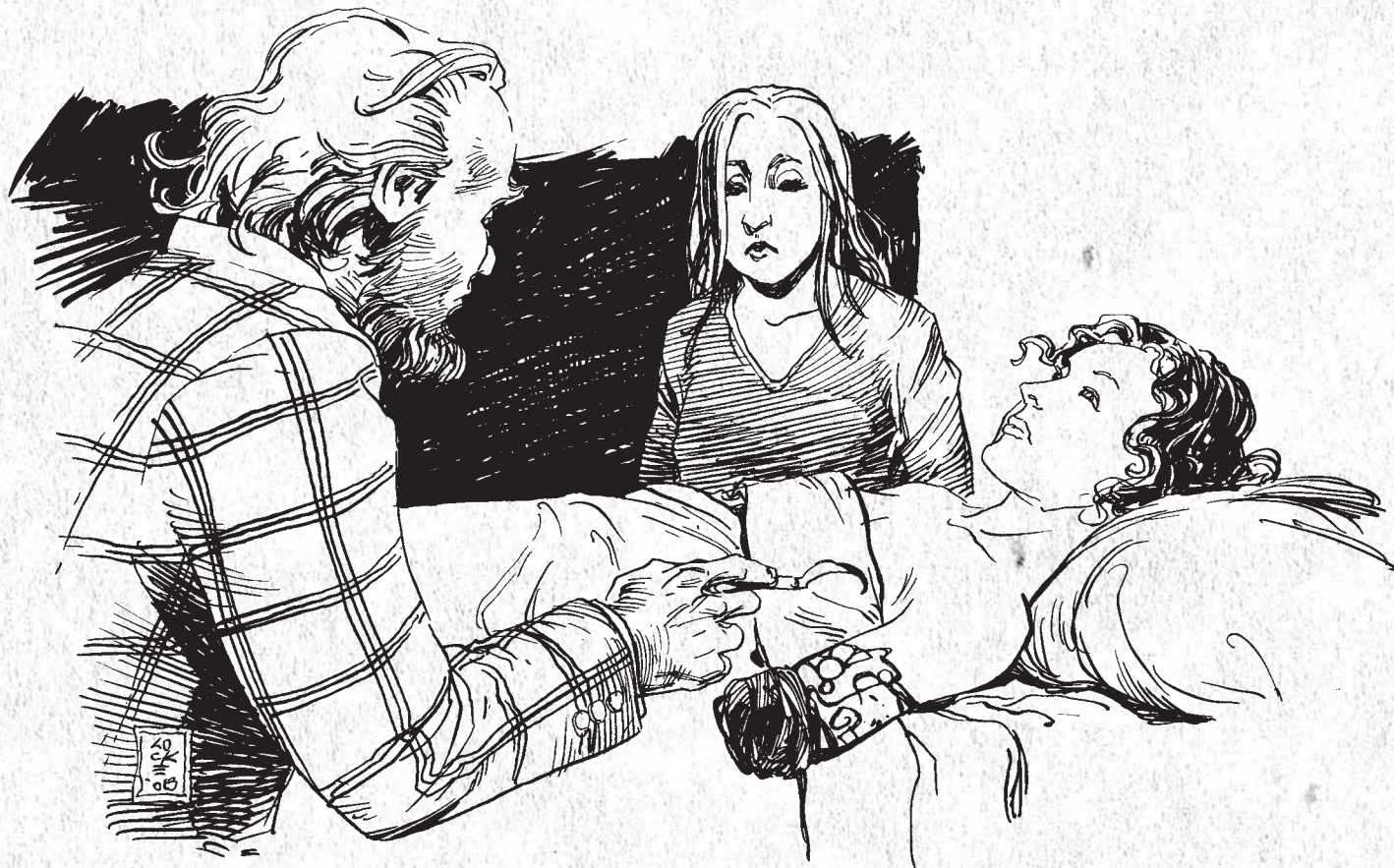
"Haven't you learned yet? Subtlety is relative. Fools make their thoughts a maze. They call intelligence the ability to lose themselves in it. Real cleverness cuts the Gordian Knot."

"I'll remember that, Nemean. I hope you know we won't make that mistake again."

"No," he whispers, "you'll make a brand new mistake." He grabs the pink flesh of her new arm and pulls her cheek to cheek. "And the next time, I'll cast your weak little soul in a slaughterhouse and let you feel the deaths of a hundred frightened pigs."

He pushes off his haunches. His jacket's bloody, so he throws it on the floor. "You can clean that and send it to Cormant House." He nods to Faustina, walks to Thanatos, slaps him lightly on the cheek and says, "Obey the law." Then he lets himself out.

Khumeia and Faustina share a slow, silent dinner until Arvantis arrives. He pulls in a cartload of boxes: liquid meals, cushions for the wheelchair — everything necessary for a life of stillness. The mages set him to cleaning the Moon Chamber. He orders them new furniture — they can afford that at least — and works until his tasks



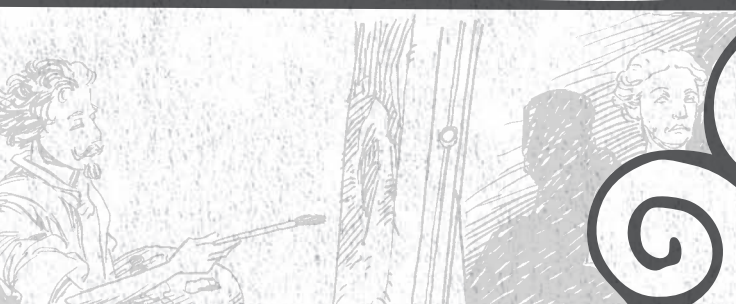


dwindle. He washes dishes, dusts. Finally, he walks into the dining room with the Nemean's jacket and a question on his face.

Khumeia smiles. "You can go, Arvantis. Take that with you. Burn it."

He obeys. When the door locks behind him, Khumeia smiles again.

"You got inside him," says



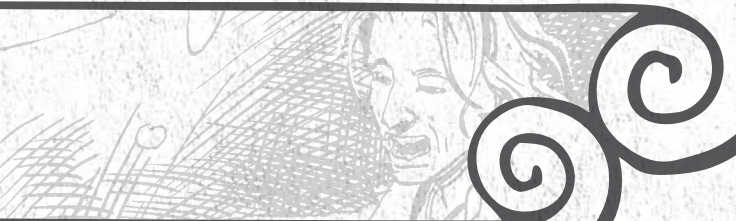
Faustina.

"Yes. Subtlety! Competence! All those lectures from a Mind novice. It was easy; his ego has a fissure a mile wide. I can visit again whenever I like. Now we go to the next phase."

"The Magisterium?"

"They'll make it legal. Some of those deacons have wanted the bastard for years."

...



"A little window in your mind, see?" Savham taps his forehead and points at the Nemean's, too. "We always loved primal, sensual things a bit too much, you see. Life and Shadow places, yearning, hate and appetites were enough to occupy our lives. That's how they got you. You came to them like a Lion claiming the first of the kill: single-pointed pride, stupid as it is powerful."

The Nemean slaps him, knocks him down. There's more too-red blood, but his white teeth still smile.

"She was a Mastigos; only part of her screamed and gave you your satisfaction. Another element of her mind entered yours, and in it earned a little privilege with me."

"And the Convocation?"

"You forget: the Ladder isn't built of law alone. Did you think you'd make yourself unimpeachable by playing the Lex Magica? No, older-self, your actions were *perfectly* legal, but they were *blasphemy*."

"How melodramatic."

"We became Hierarch to play the Lion, piss 'em off until they united, kicked the Ebon Noose off its pedestal and instituted a working Consilium. You got too attached to your part and made the system stronger. Did you think the deacons would let it stand? They met for a quick Day of Silver in Chicago. Khumeia even brought your Mace to



preside. Two Gryphon Knights were honor guards. There was a beautiful opening rite."

"A star chamber. Tried in absentia. Lovely."

"You were there. Of course, *you*, as in the errant personality called 'the Nemean,' were restrained: a sad necessity, given your penchant for grisly responses. Khumeia helped a Magister pull me out of mental mothballs to animate your body for the duration. Still, a trial was out of the question. Both lictors agreed that the American tradition forbids trials where the accused can't participate in his defense. That's why you're not being punished. You're being *healed*."

The Nemean smirks. "And they accuse me of perverting the spirit of the law? Let me see what's wrong, here, younger-self. No trial. An Adept invading the mind of a Master. You're lying. This is nothing more than a coup with a bit of hallucinatory trickery. Where are they keeping my body?"

"At your estate. Your Illuminate put you in a tent by your Hallow-tree to help you dream true. The Magisterium commanded it. It's no coup; you're still Hierarch, even, because you were right in part. We don't know the Concord as you do, can't know it, as every attempt to get you to talk has made quite clear. And sick as you are, you're still strong. One day we'll remake you into someone righteous, too."

The Nemean raises a hand and the concrete binding Savham's foot cracks. His younger self pulls it out and takes a few stiff steps while the Nemean watches, eyes narrowing more through the silent minute.

"Wait," he says. "You've been here twice before, but I don't remember what happened then — just that it *did* happen."

"The spell lets you recall each attempt, but nothing more. If you remembered your previous efforts you could use them to find a way to fake your rehabilitation. Every iteration starts with your journey here. A little kink in your will makes that part feel voluntary, like you want to dive down to your Awakening."

"If I remembered my failures I might find a trial and error way to hide my intentions. I'd pretend to be a good boy but I'd still be *me*."

"Correct."

"And why am I *here*, specifically?"

"This is your womb: the site of your bloody birth into the world's soul. You're here to be Mark Long

again, to hear the Avatar as he heard it. When he rises, you'll teach him to be a better mage than you were. We'll dream that history and give him second chances until he becomes me, then you. We'll see a better man grow — and you'll *become* that man. His personality will merge with yours when we reach the subjective present. You'll be a different mage: a true *théarch*."

Mark Long screams.

"Remember that!" asks Savham. "We cut out our tongue and wrote our name in blood on the World Tree. He's feeling it now: the wound, the red rune, the dragon crawling up our spine."

The Nemean follows his speaking beat. "The stump bleeds like a dragon breathing fire. My spine is a ladder."

And there is one mind, Nemean/Savham/Mark, remembering the Watchtower, red names on a Stone Book, spitting blood to add his own, burning in the hot breath of the world.

Mark Long sits up, out of the gutter, and whispers, "Yes!" The Nemean remembers that: the first second of magic in his life.

With big, knotted hands, he breaks Mark's neck.

"I won't be another man," he says.

Savham shakes his head and the dream collapses like a paper drawing crushed by a strong hand.

• • •

He dreams like a Master, in layers as deep and strong as the rings of an eon-old tree. Every part of him is stratified into wood-clad cells and each one contains a vision, a secret and a plan.

The Nemean cuts through every circle with razor intent until the last one between him and the heartwood's rotten hollow. He pauses to burn a window into the scene and sees Mark Long and the full moon in '68, the night those bikers left him for dead. Sheets of acid tumble in the night wind.

For a moment it feels wrong. There's no cold gulf of forty years gone by, no cobwebs on the oldest powerful place in his heart. Did he visit recently?

The sensation passes and he steps past the last threshold. Mark Long convulses and whispers nonsense. The Nemean stands at his feet, watches his face.

Then he hears a voice.

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*Coming Next
for Mage: The Awakening*

KEYS TO THE SUPERNAL TAROT



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THE SILVER LADDER

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INTRODUCTION

He who loves the world as his body may be entrusted with the empire.

— Lao-Tzu, the Tao Te Ching

The Awakened must have guidance. It's not power-lust or arrogance that gives birth to that credo: it's simple logic. One mage can work wonders. A cabal can change a city. A Consilium could direct the fate of a nation. An Awakened Nation could bridge the Abyss, guide all of humanity into Awakening — it could change the world. To have all this power and not use it to that extent is simply a waste. The only thing stopping the Awakened from this level of achievement is their collection of disparate, contrary, limited visions. But under one vision, they could remake existence.

Fortunate for them, then, that the Silver Ladder has such a vision.

The Silver Ladder is home to arguably the most extroverted philosophy the Awakened possess. The very foundation of life as a théarch is other people. The order teaches the necessity of cooperating with and leading other mages to a greater ideal, not the importance of focusing inward for enlightenment. More dramatically, the Sleepers play an important role in the order's dream of an ideal society — they aren't an obstacle, but a valuable resource. A théarch must look beyond himself to see the path to enlightenment.

Of course, he's still human. The Silver Ladder can be home to crippling arrogance or unsympathetic views of all others as simple resources to be exploited. The order has its flaws. But when its strengths are aligned, it can reach the stars.

Theme

The theme of the Silver Ladder is of the line between responsibility and ambition. Both come with a position of power or leadership. The Silver Ladder doesn't stand for power for its own sake; while its ideology clearly places itself at the head of other orders, as well as the Sleepers, this power structure is invariably cited as being established for the good of all concerned.

Frequently théarchs don't live up to this lofty ideal, but often they do. Their ambition can run away with them, but it can be balanced with duty.

Stories involving the Silver Ladder should touch on responsibility, as it frequently defines a member's role in a story. An iron-fisted, cruel Hierarch is abusing his power and ignoring his responsibility, and his ultimate fate will have something to say about the potential consequences of such actions. A more idealistic théarch finds great motivation in his duty to his fellows. Will his sense of responsibility erode under the pressures of the Awakened struggle and the lure of his ambition? Or will he be refined, made of star and thunder and blood and diamond?

Mood

The Silver Ladder is confident. The théarch is proud. Without this level of confidence, she wouldn't seek the reins of power in the first place. That, of course, runs the risk of hubris — but hubris isn't something that is avoided out of fear. Fear leads to timidity, false humility, and ultimately to a passive approach that will change *nothing*. Hubris must instead be avoided by truly understanding oneself, both limitations and strengths. And if one understands one's strengths, one takes pride in them.

Confidence ties into charisma. There's something magnetically appealing about a person who has great confidence in his own abilities. Just as it's easier to attract a potential partner if one gives off no aura of self-loathing, it's easier to convince those around one of a plan worth following if one believes it oneself. Too much confidence can be off-putting, of course, and théarchs are vulnerable to this as well. But when the Silver Ladder is involved in a story, it brings in a feeling of confidence and faith that can be infectious.

How to Use This Book

Chapter One: Hand Over Hand takes a short look at the history of the Silver Ladder, and at the lessons learned in the past that théarchs teach to this day. Also included is an overview of the world today, and the concerns that tug at the order from continent to continent.

Chapter Two: The Silver Dream examines the culture of the Silver Ladder. Its thesis and philosophies are recounted, as are its rules, regulations and methodologies. The dream of Hieraconis is revealed, as are the inner workings of the Cryptopoly. Also in this chapter are presented two families of Proximi, members of the Silver Dynasties that extend the order's influence (and sometimes pervert it) in various ways. Finally, a look at the titles granted to théarchs is given, along with the roles the various paths play within the order.

Chapter Three: An Enlightened Crusade details the society of the order, from the rituals and Mystery plays of initiation to the mad heights of a Magister's communion with the Oracles. The Silver Ladder's relations with those outside the order are also discussed, from Consilium politics and Sleeper involvement to what it knows and who it distrusts among the other supernatural beings of the World of Darkness.

Chapter Four: Factions and Legacies recounts the various divisions within the Silver Ladder, from the enlightened self-interest of the Powerbrokers to the mystical faith of the Theurges. Here also are found eight Legacies of the Silver Ladder, appropriate given the order's interest in the path to power — though one is a little too Left-Handed for the more prudent théarch.

Chapter Five: Magic is, of course, a guide to théarch spellcasting, elaborating on the mudras and other magical methods that inform their approach to harnessing the Supernal. There is also a collection of spells upon which the Silver Ladder has come to rely, as well as some of the Artifacts that have come under the order's control.

Finally, the **Appendix: Allies and Antagonists** provides a number of théarchs who can be dropped into a game, perhaps as contacts and allies for the players, or perhaps as bitter rivals.

Lexicon

Avatar: The godhead believed by the Silver Ladder to sleep in every mortal; the ultimate attainment of human mastery over the universe.

Convocation: A formal gathering of the order, expanding beyond the boundaries of a single Consilium.

Cryptopoly: The strategy of maintaining secret conspiracies to assist the struggle of mages and Sleepers against the Lie.

gnostocracy: The order's idealized system of political rule; a political system in which enlightenment and Awakening govern.

Hieraconis: The foretold Awakened Nation to come, one of the primary goals of the Silver Ladder. It is the civilization that will arrive when the Fallen and Supernal are joined once more, when humanity takes its rightful inheritance.

Lion: A term describing the human impulse for selfishness and ambition at the expense of morality; those humans who prey on their fellows.

Sage: The description of the best of human spirituality: the desire and will to create, teach, and improve the world without the passivity of the Stag or the amorality of the Lion.

Stag: A symbol for passive human spirituality, of beliefs and practices that emphasize human unworthiness and reliance upon others.

théarch: A common term for a mage of the Silver Ladder. The connotation of the word implies leadership and wisdom intertwined: one who leads because she is wise, and who must be wise because she is called on to lead.



CHAPTER ONE: HAND OVER HAND

There's a concept I had to explain to the Hierarch recently: the matter of iterations of design. See, where I worked, we had to essentially redo a project over and over again until we got it right. It was something like having the reset button hit when you're just about to finish.

He really didn't like the comparison. It didn't make much sense to him, and I guess I see why. To him, the order should be constantly building. Every time we screw up and a project is torn apart brick by brick, to him that's virtually a net loss. You lose the resources you put into it, and you gain nothing.

But that's not true. What you gain is experience. You gain additional perspective. And what is really important is that we've been going through iterations from the time some guys first tried to slap a bunch of mages on an island and call it a society.

We have all this material right at hand. Everything that's come before is a try at the same thing. And the more iterations you run, the more almost-there's you have on record, the closer you are to that final build that will be just right.

He doesn't get it. Well, that's fine. Because when he fails, that's one more iteration — and he was really, really close.

I wonder what that'll mean for me when it's my turn?

***Copy your forefathers, for work is carried out through knowledge;
see, their words endure in writing....***

***Do not be evil, for patience is good;
make your lasting monument in the love of you.***

— The Teaching for Merikare

Before the City

Before there was a city, there was chaos. The world was as yet unformed, a thing of blurred boundaries. Some would say darkness made war on light, and darkness was winning — but really, that's just so much poetic convention. There was no war. The sides weren't enough for it to be war. There were only a few scattered candles to take the side of light, a few garbled languages to make sense of the immense, unspoken world.

In the volumes written by the Silver Ladder, the tale of eons always begins with this chaos. Of all the lessons history has to teach, none stress the importance of the Ladder's creed more than the understanding of what came first. Because even when cities fall, libraries vanish in flame, and entire civilizations are put to the sword, not once has humanity fallen so far it has returned to the first, primal times. If the théarchs of the Silver Ladder have any life remaining in their bodies, humanity will never do so. Never again.

Remember.

There was a time when no law existed beyond the strength of sinew and the guile of a keen eye. The wisdom of planting, making, speaking — these things flew no farther than the limits of a clan. The accumulated knowledge of an elder was lost in his death, surviving only in the flawed memories of those who tried to learn from him. No person could safely own more than he and his family could carry: an injunction against far more than simple materialistic greed, when one thinks of the small children who could not be carried to a new hunting ground, and could not walk to catch up.

And humans were not alone. Would that they were. A world shared only by beasts with the minds of beasts, by trees that could not listen and watch and

reach out, by cold night winds that were directed by the shifting air alone rather than a keen, unfamiliar mind — that would have been a hard world, but it would have been fair. It wasn't fair. One of the few advantages humans had was their minds — and there were things out there as smart as any man or woman, but strong like a beast or elusive as smoke. Spirits and monsters set the only law in those times, and the only law was "Beware."

But humans survived all the same. They survived because they supported one another, because they knew to stand back to back instead of flee in all directions hoping their predators would take the slowest and weakest. And some survived through the power and wisdom of the first wise ones. The wise ones saw and learned and taught. They stole fire with singed hands. They walked in the darkness to learn the secret weaknesses and bans of the things that would hunt their clans. Even though the risk may have been to lose their souls, they kept their clans prosperous and safe where others would die out.

Even that might not have been enough. But they endured, until the time came to dream of dragons.

Remember. Even if the Tower is cast in ruin again and again, we must always build. No matter our failures, we have never been brought so low as once we were.

This is the heart and soul of the first history lesson the Silver Ladder teaches. Only a fool would give up hope that someday perfection would be attained. Despite all the pain and loss of millennia, the story of humanity before the First City carries with it a simple, strengthening truth: It is not as dark as it once was. Not all of the things we have built have been taken from us.

We are winning.

A Dream of Unity

The dragon-dreams changed almost everything. They changed the dreamers' capability to deal with the world. Now the threats that lurked in the shadows could be fought more effectively, perhaps even beaten. The dreams changed the dreamers' perspective on the world: there on the island they stood face-to-face with other humans from places they had never imagined, from across a world far more immense than they'd ever guessed. They changed the boundaries of what was possible. But what the dreams didn't change was the wise man's purpose. It still fell to him to make the world a better place, particularly for those who had yet to dream of dragons. With that in mind, the dreamers built their city.

The story of Marduk is often invoked in this stage of a Silver Ladder history. Sometimes the claim is that Marduk was one of the first mages; sometimes it's simply used as mystical metaphor. Whichever the context, the focus is upon the "god of cities," a being of great power slaying a figure of great chaos as well as her spawn and building a home for humanity from her corpse. The act of a creator building something from a stirring primal chaos or darkness is a powerful image in almost all creation myths around the world.

As the Silver Ladder points out, this authentically happened. Marduk, whether a historical person or a guise worn by the unified mages of Atlantis, created "the world." Not the physical world that is the Lie, as mortal myth explains — but rather a blueprint of the world as it should be, and the interface that would allow his successors to take the blueprint and make the world it depicted reality. Atlantis was the first attempt at that perfected world. It was so close.

The Ocean Spire

The roots of the Vox Draconis were set down even as the first buildings were raised upon the island. Many of the mages were accustomed to serving as the voice of their previous clans, and they felt no shame in giving a voice to their new society. As they raised the towers of Atlantis, they sang. They sang of joy and wonder, hymns to the miraculous power revealed in the dragon-dreams. When the mages rested for the evening, the singers would sing again, or simply speak of the glories they

A Dream Deferred

An obscure tradition among the loremasters of the Silver Ladder involves honoring lost brethren who were never actually part of the Silver Ladder at all. As the tradition goes, not all those who dreamt of dragons long ago followed their dreams to the First City. Some resisted the call of the dream because they would not leave their clan-mates and families behind. These shamans and visionaries are sometimes honored with an extra candle during a memorial service, or some similar token of respect. Though they died without ever seeing the Realms Invisible, they are considered brothers and sisters, or at least cousins, of the Silver Ladder. They refused magic, but for the right reason.

Others refuse to take part in this sentiment, seeing it as missing the point. The counterargument is that those who passed on their dream are still all around. Their lines continued, and they are reborn in a fashion in each new Sleepwalker who shows the promise of bringing humanity one step further. There's no point to honoring them as if they were fallen compatriots. One honors them when one meets them on the street, when one shows them a fragment of hope. They're all around, and one honors them when one does the Silver Ladder's work every day.

had already found and of the glories they would inevitably build.

These singers, storytellers and mediators would gather among themselves, as well as circulate among their other fellows. As they shared lore and insight, they developed the beginnings of a shared code of law. The taboos and customs of each visitor could be compared, and the common threads that emerged made an excellent basis for a shared expectation of duties and proscribed actions. The question was how to bring everyone under the same expectations?

The Birth of Rule

The mages who had come to the island had more in common with one another than they did with the

families and clan-mates they had left behind. Even so, they were hardly of one mind. It wasn't long before the first disagreements over how to proceed with the city emerged. It became clear that the new society would need its chiefs as well, or something greater: the first kings.

But how to determine who would rule? In most of the tribes and clans into which the mages had been born, leadership was typically a function of simple ability. There were no plutocracies in a time before wealth, no bloodlines that could convincingly govern a clan if those born of them weren't strong enough to fight and hunt for it or wise enough to ease its survival. In many cases, the mages had themselves been leaders, or at least advisors with great influence over their chieftains and matriarchs. The skills that brought them to that position were shared by all who had successfully followed the dreams. So what then? Who would have the final authority to make decisions?

As the assembled mages discussed the issue of leadership, a number offered to remove themselves from consideration for the role. Those who would rule would need to be the most qualified, and it was clearly best to have a third party determine whose qualifications were strongest. After some deliberation, the mages as a whole accepted the offer. The proctors withdrew as a group, and began to devise the necessary tests.

After one turn of the moon, the proctors began the process of testing the aspirants for the proper qualities of leadership. The tests measured the strength of the body to some extent, but the mind and soul above all. The judges presented riddles hung within riddles for the keenest of wit to unravel. They spoke of terrible ethical choices, and weighed each aspirant's responses. They measured the skill of the tongue as well as the weight of the heart. The tests ran the course of another lunar month before they were complete. By that point, few of the assembled mages could argue against the qualifications of those who had passed every test. Some of them seemed to be obvious choices, raising the question of why such tests were required — but the proctors knew they were necessary, because true faith in a leader required solid proof of capacity.

And so the ruling Council, the first noblemen and noblewomen of Atlantis, took their thrones. As proper rulers should, their first act was to honor many of their subjects. Those who had shown particular strength and martial skill were recognized

as the first and finest guardians of Atlantis, the Ungula Draconis. The wisest and most learned were encouraged to share their knowledge with one another and so increase it, and thus the Alae Draconis received support and encouragement. The rulers called aside certain aspirants who had shown great pragmatism and realism, and from their quiet conversations emerged the hidden Visus Draconis.

Finally, the noble Council called forward the judges who had overseen the tests. Thanking them for their foresight and impartiality, they asked the trials' proctors to serve as their advisors. The impartial wisdom that had helped select the Council was required to ensure Atlantis would govern well. The judges accepted, and gratefully.

They wore the name of Vox Draconis with pride. After all, it was the voice of the dragons that had called all of them to the island in the first place. To be the Voice of the Dragon was to keep the spirit of that first call alive. It was to remind all their fellow mages how they had come to the First City, and why.

As the years passed, the Voice of the Dragon continued to be strongly involved in the governance of Atlantis. The Silver Ladder views this, its first incarnation, as the height of its purpose. Atlantis was a near-perfect society, shaped in part by the power of the nobility and in part by the wisdom of the Vox Draconis.

Unfortunately, there was a flaw in the gem, one that lengthened and deepened over the generations. The noble Council became divided and proud. Many mages began to view themselves as more capable leaders than the Council, their undeniable power feeding their hubris. According to Silver Ladder lore, the Vox Draconis saw these conflicts arising and struggled to contain them. However, such efforts required power, and the more authority the Voice of the Dragon attempted to exert, the more was jealously withdrawn from them. Frustrated beyond measure, they could only watch when the war came.

In Halves, and Rejoined

The Vox Draconis was divided, two voices struggling to be heard over one another. When the war ended, it was in two halves. One remained with the victors, continuing to offer counsel on affairs such as governing those who lost but did not flee, and, inevi-



tably, the construction of the star ladder. The other half fled. They quickly found a place among the other failed rebels. Both sides raised their voices in thunder and song. Perhaps they still heard one another, half an ocean apart.

When the ladder was complete, the usurpers gleefully ascended. With them went some of the rebel viziers and priests. But not all. A few of the Vox Draconis stood at the foot of the ladder and looked at its glory, watching the others climb to the Supernal — and then they slipped from the city and sailed to the shores where their brethren were assembling. They described the work to the exiles, in particular to the five children of Atlantean nobility who stood at their forefront. The knowledge of the Vox Draconis was the final key, and with it in hand the exiles sailed to undo the hubris of the Exarchs.

Few others would call it a point of pride that the Silver Ladder can trace its origins back not just to the rebels who took up the good fight against the Exarchs, but also to the men and women who helped the Exarchs achieve their goal. The Silver Ladder feels otherwise. Its forebears saw the ladder, and saw that it could be good. The Exarchs were impure

and foolish — but they weren't wrong. They were simply the wrong people to make the climb to the Supernal. Once humanity is ready, once the right mages are ready, the star ladder can be reforged and the heavens retaken from the impure. The Silver Ladder will never forget.

The Five Kings

The actual names of the Five Kings are lost. The Silver Ladder, however, meticulously preserves volumes of lore on the deeds and natures of those who forged the Watchtowers. Its libraries contain faded allegorical plays in which the disguised five impart unusual lessons, dream-journals recording alleged memories of the final charge against the Exarchs' ladder, and, of course, transcriptions of the visions of théarch Magisters' communion with the Oracles themselves. The accounts of the five vary widely from source to source. Many accounts even disagree on the gender of each of the kings; it's traditional to refer to them all as "kings" regardless of implied gender. The Silver Ladder refers to the Five Kings by titles gleaned from *The Cambal Record*, a scroll dated back to the Etruscans with particularly vivid descriptions.

Some of the contradictions in this assembled lore are difficult to read properly. Most accounts ascribe the Five Kings with the powers of their given Supernal Realm even before they set foot in the heavens, which seems a little too convenient to some. Were the five born to build their specific Watchtowers, or do records confuse the king with the Oracle he or she was meant to become? The unanswered questions make it difficult to discern which sources are to be trusted most. Even so, each source is carefully recorded and pored over time and again. One never knows when one might stumble across a hint that would allow one to follow in the footsteps of one of the five — such as the legends of the five gifts they left behind before they ascended the ladder. These gifts may have been symbolic keys to perception, koans that offered greater enlightenment if one could divine their true meaning. However, the Silver Ladder believes they may well have been real, physical things, and as such Artifacts beyond price.

The Star-Cloaked King of Thunder

Several accounts have it that the King of the Aether's foot was first upon the star ladder. He was strong of body and will, filled with fury at the excesses of the usurpers. His emotion hung about him like a mantle, fusing with his halo of fire and thunder. Some works insinuate that the Star-Cloaked King of Thunder was dissolved from humanlike form as he built his tower in the Aether, and that he is a living chain of Mana and lightning that speaks in thunderbolts to his Magisters.

The King of the Golden Key threw down a sigil as a beacon as he began to climb the ladder. After the Fall, the sigil was taken by one of his disciples, where it fell from historical record. The sigil is said to be crafted of gold, and some sources speak of it as “the father of coins,” implying that coined money was inspired by this Artifact. The sigil was allegedly a source of great power, a battery that could store Mana and even more, allegedly even converting one form of energy into another if the bearer traced its engraved lines in the correct sequence. If the Oracle of the Aether still has the connection to his sigil he once did, it might even serve as a form of sextant, guiding the bearer into the Realm of Supernal Thunder.

The Youthful King of Thorns

Silver Ladder lore frequently records the King of Arcadia as a woman, sometimes depicted as forever youthful and almost boyish. She is sometimes de-

picted as a Divine Fool, a catalyst for understanding without explanation. The recorded utterances of the Arcadian Oracle are surreal and dreamlike, which has led some to believe the Youthful King of Thorns has perhaps lost a greater measure of connection to her former mortality. Yet her so-called “madness” is also theorized to be an unusual side effect of interfacing with the world around her. The ultimate master of Fate and Time, the Oracle of Arcadia sees each thing at every stage of possibility: she sees the egg, the chicken and the ragged bones all at once, every potential turn of the bird's fate at the same time. She is the sphinx that strides the Wheel of Fortune, her riddles the only speech that can contain the possibilities she sees.

The King of the Lunargent Thorn left a riddle behind, a last message to a cabal variously described as her children, her parents, or her lovers. The pieces of the riddle were deliberately broken apart and scattered when the cabal realized it was a prophecy invested with her power: speaking the entire riddle would make the prophecy come true, and it was not yet time.

The King of the Burning Voice

The King of Pandemonium climbed the ladder without fear or hesitation: he had undergone many ordeals even from childhood, burning away doubt and pain and confusion. He had hung from an iron tree, bedeviled by demons from within his own mind and without. There was no weapon the Exarchs could envision that he had not already endured. It takes great mental fortitude to withstand messages from the Oracle of Pandemonium, which come in the form of nightmares so vivid that the waking world seems like the dream. Only rarely does a Magister hear the Burning Voice from which he takes his name — when one does, it's difficult to classify the event as fortunate or unfortunate.

The King of the Iron Gauntlet bequeathed his followers with a door before he began his climb. The door was said to open to a place of ultimate succor, the safest place in all the multilayered cosmos to hide a person or thing. The hiding place must be all the safer since the door was lost, allegedly carried from the shores in an acolyte's very mind. The Silver Ladder is particularly interested in any scrap of lore or philosophy that might reveal the location of the King of the Burning Voice's bequest. Not only is the door itself a prize, it may contain an even greater one. After all, it may not have been opened since the time of Atlantis.

The Throneless King of the Heart

The King of the Primal Wild wore no crown but his own antlers, carried no weapon but his own hands, and climbed to heaven on bare feet. He — or she, for gender was one of the many aspects of the Throneless King that obeyed her will and not Earthly law — is frequently named the oldest of the five, wise in the wild lore that reigned before the First City was built. Silver Ladder lore contains a faint prejudice, or perhaps dread, regarding the Throneless King of the Heart (at least, in those works not set down by Thyrus théarchs). For an order built on powerfully humanistic principles, the Oracle of the Primal Wild is a fearsome figure, said to be close kin and advocate to beasts and spirits.

The King of the Stone Book set his hound at the foot of the ladder before he ascended, bidding it wait for him and watch over his kingdom. When the Fall came, the hound was alternately said to have loped into the forest or dived into the sea. The Silver Ladder has interpreted several key works to mean the hound was both animal and spirit, invested with a measure of Supernal power — and almost certain immortality. It is said to sleep in a deep grotto somewhere in the world, awaiting the voice of one who will ask it to return to its master.

The Sorrowful King in Gray

The King of Stygia is said to have loved, and deeply, one of the Exarchs he struggled against. His mastery over physical things was perfected by that love: the material had no power over him, and thus he took power over the material. Many renditions of his (or her) battles with his former lover are unavoidably romanticized, leaving théarchs to argue over whether or not the element of love is critical to understanding the Oracle's utterings or a sure means of misinterpreting them.

The most faithful disciple of the King of the Lead Coin was unable to follow his ascent, being lame of leg if bright of spirit. Before the King stepped onto the star ladder, he gave that disciple a sword, a short blade of dull-colored metal that cut through the physical as if it were metaphysical. Even more intriguing is the legend that speaks of the sword severing bonds between the soul and the material, allowing a mage to attain dominance over the Fallen World in ways currently impossible.

The Fall

Silver Ladder lore records that there was no greater treachery than that of the Exarchs. *The Awakened*

are one nation. And yet the Exarchs broke faith with their brothers and sisters, treated their fellow mages as enemies rather than as sacred kin. *Imperium is the right of humanity.* And yet the Exarchs betrayed humanity, casting off their own parents and siblings and children as if they were a pair of dirty and broken sandals.

"Remember the ladder," it said. "The Exarchs betrayed all of humanity, but that does not mean we cannot ascend again."

Though the rôle of the Vox Draconis was lost with the First City, the dream remained. The order continued, marking its members as followers of the Silver Dream, aspirants to recreate the ladder. Under the sign of the Silver Ladder, they spread to the corners of the world to begin again.

It's difficult to accurately track just where the Silver Ladder was active, and what Sleeper cultures it may have influenced over the years. According to the théarchs, they were everywhere. Where their fellows chased after conflict or scattered lore, the children of the Vox Draconis were interested in Sleepers, and followed wherever the Sleepers went. There are precious few civilizations of strong historical note that haven't had some claim or record of théarchs moving among them, encouraging them along the road to enlightenment.

Scattered Attempts at Unity

Every order made attempts to rebuild Atlantis after the Fall. The Silver Ladder was no exception. However, its tries at reconstruction were numerous for a few centuries after the Fall, then began to rapidly decline.

The last recorded attempt at a second Atlantis occurred eight hundred centuries before the birth of Christ, an aborted plan to build a city in the far north of Europe, shaping the land to resemble myths of paradisiacal Hyperborea. According to a battered set of scrolls dated back to that time, a group of théarchs calling themselves the Five Princes were responsible. Each claimed to be the chosen inheritor of one of the Five Kings, a Magister who could hear the Oracle's voice. They built a palace on an island in the North Sea, and began to work magics to both adjust the climate to their liking and to begin sending summons to other mages around the world. Careful perusal of the scrolls does not reveal whether it was the weather-magic or the attempt at the call that went awry, calling down another disaster on the tiny island.

The Long Count

The Silver Ladder claims some responsibility for influencing various Mesoamerican civilizations, including the ancient Maya. Though they don't claim credit for introducing such concepts as writing and the calendar to the Maya civilization, they do stress that théarchs were present, and that they did their best to guide the Maya kings to a form of enlightened glory. Even though the Maya civilization ended in collapse, a number of mysteries surrounding the Ladder's presence in Mesoamerica are said to endure.

One of these involves the Long Count, the calendar that was devised to measure dates across long spans of time.

Within the order, the Long Count is held to contain some potent mystery laid down by those mages who fled from Atlantis to the Americas. On December 21, 2012, the current b'ak'tun is scheduled to come to an end, and the thirteenth is scheduled to begin. According to the *Popol Vuh*, the previous age of creation ended the day before a thirteenth b'ak'tun, and the current one began on that day. Naturally, this has led to some speculation (particularly among various New Age figures) that the upcoming shift will in some way signify a great change to the world — perhaps a cataclysm, perhaps a shift in humanity that will herald a new age.

The Silver Ladder doesn't promote the idea that the change of the Long Count will signify an inevitable disaster, or that it will in itself change the "age of the world." After all, the last b'ak'tun didn't plausibly coincide with the fall of Atlantis: in 3114 BCE several of the various Sleeper civilizations that post-dated the First City were already established. It *is* widely accepted, however, that the Long Count records an upcoming opportunity. Something is likely to happen on that date — an upcoming winter solstice, no less — that will offer a fleeting chance for mages to achieve a near-impossibility. Unfortunately, the Ladder isn't entirely sure what that opportunity *is*. Popular theory has it that a temporary bridge will be laid across the Abyss, at some as-yet undetermined location. As the date draws nearer and nearer, the Silver Ladder is devoting an increasing amount of effort to deciphering the riddle of the Long Count, delving into obscure locations and texts that would make even the Mysterium raise an eyebrow.

These initial attempts, and the failures they induced, were key to the théarchs' strong reexamination of their purpose. In the millennia since the abortive, mad try for a Hyperborean Atlantis, the order took a considerably more conservative assessment of its ability to recreate the First City. The goal was still important, of course; more than that, it was pre-eminent. But the world after the Fall would demand much more from the mages who would found such a thing.

In analyzing former attempts and carefully laying out its plans, the order began to assemble the shared dream of Hieraconis — the Final Nation, the Final City. The théarchs insisted on teaching their students to dream a dream that would *work*, even if it wouldn't be seen for many lifetimes. This would prove to be one of the great keys to establishing the Silver Ladder as a true order. It had an ancient heritage as the Vox Draconis; it was refining the metaphysical truths of the Elemental Precepts. And with the dream of Hieraconis, it had a purpose — one brighter and purer than any other.

The Larvan Schism

The Silver Ladder and the Seers of the Throne are virtually mirror images, one dedicated to enacting the will of the Exarchs, the other guided by the dreams of the Oracles. In the early 11th century, this similarity was brought into sharp relief.

At the time, one of the most prominent Magisters in the order was a charismatic théarch who called himself Larva, after a Roman shade of the dead. Larva had a particular gift for oratory, and seemed also to have a particularly strong connection to the wisdom of the Oracles. Remarkably, he claimed to have assembled a plan for reconstructing the star ladder of old, without first achieving the Awakened Nation on Earth. Those who spoke with him were more often convinced of the plan's potential than not, and he swiftly built a strong power base within the order.

The teaching was that for the ladder to be built again, it must meet in the middle, with the Silver Ladder extending its portion up from the Earth, and its allies extending their portion down from the Supernal. In

the middle of the Abyss, the halves would join, and the light and heat from that fusion would dispel the yawning darkness. Larva was able to produce several signs that the plan had the Oracles' favor, enacting works that would otherwise have drawn down Paradox.

Many skeptics questioned the plan, but Larva and his followers began assembling the materials for the first stage all the same. However, the strongest opposition came when the Magister Ulfsdottir arrived from the north, proclaiming that Larva had no contact with the Oracles — but rather the Exarchs. Such an accusation could not be ignored even if Larva was innocent, and it was enough to spark a bloody conflict between the two and the théarchs on either side.

The struggle was merciless on both sides — and kept utterly secret from the other orders. Neither Larva nor Ulfsdottir went to the other orders for assistance, though they surely could have; even when Larva was cast down and revealed to have been the traitor Ulfsdottir claimed, the Silver Ladder did not speak of it to others. If Larva had been able to eliminate his rivals quietly, he would have been perhaps the best-placed Seer of the Throne in history, poised to disseminate the Exarchs' will under the guise of the Silver Ladder. If Ulfsdottir had gone to the other orders, she would have exposed a critical weakness in the Ladder, potentially destroying its members' credibility as leaders and advisors. The conflict had to be kept quiet. To this day, the Silver Ladder exhorts its members to remain exceptionally vigilant against the machinations of the Seers of the Throne. There are few motivators as heated as shame.

Ages of Ambition

The Age of Exploration excited the Silver Ladder into a frenzy of activity. It was akin to the old stories of dragon-dreams, with contact being reestablished with long-lost cousins, just as the scattered races of humanity had come together prior to the founding of the First City. Théarchs who had devoted themselves to gradually uplifting the cultures of Europe took a furious interest in the expanded contact with new peoples across the oceans. The dream of one grand Awakened Nation seemed as though it could be reached all the sooner.

Of course, the dream had to contend with reality. By the time some théarchs managed to travel to a point of contact where they could interact freely with another, formerly unknown culture, one group of Sleepers was already enslaving, murdering, raping

or plundering another. These conflicts polarized the théarchs — what to do? Some struck against the exploiters in their anger, only to find that their acts of terrorism fueled further reprisals against the “godless heathens.” Others found themselves unable to turn against the very men and women who they'd watched over for years, or who had shared in the journey across the ocean. The initial surge of hope was quickly tempered with disillusionment and despair. To this day, mages of the Silver Ladder speak of particular conflicts where a predecessor had done all he could to bring peace, only to be sabotaged by some outside force. Some philosophical members of the order simply say, “They weren't yet ready.” Galling though the implications are, they still serve as a call to arms for théarchs: if humanity wasn't quite ready then, that just means the Silver Ladder must work all the harder to reach more people now.

Not all anecdotes from the time end poorly, though. Now and again, the inheritors of the Vox Draconis found one another, and learned. One mage who had kept the dream of the Dragon's Voice alive among the American nations would come tentatively to speak with his European cousin. Each side offered up stories, lore, and even magic, in hopes of piecing together a few more fragments of the shattered vision. They spoke of the ladder that reached to the heavens, and of its sundering — and of how to build it once more.

At roughly the same time, the Renaissance was beginning to flower. The Mysterium took a strong interest in the rising tide of humanism, and even took some credit for the movement's progress — credit that may or may not be deserved. The Silver Ladder also found great interest in the movement, in particular in those aspects that showed promise for bringing greater education, enlightenment and quality of living to the Sleeper masses. The revival of interest in Greek art also stirred a revival of interest in democracy and philosophy, topics that encouraged people to *think*. Religious institutions employed artists to create magnificent works, imbuing base materials with an art suffused with love for the divine.

The Silver Ladder threw itself into the practice of patronage. While there were certainly accomplished artists, poets, musicians and the like among the order's numbers, the emerging interest in the arts represented a wonderful opportunity. By encouraging and promoting talented artists, the Ladder fostered inspiration. Each new Michelangelo would, it reasoned, inspire many more artists to try their hand. Each new Brunelleschi would assemble

buildings that would instill a sense of pride in a city's residents — pride in what human ingenuity and skill could accomplish. Furthermore, the act of patronage gave the Silver Ladder an opportunity to find and interact with some of the most talented and clever Sleepers of the time. Records indicate that this process was quite successful in locating several visionaries who would, with a bit of proper nurturing, fully Awaken. To this day, the Silver Ladder will often cite a reference to one obscure artist or another who managed a few talented works then dropped into obscurity. It wasn't that they lost their talent: it's that they were brought into the grander work.

One more cultural event was difficult for the Silver Ladder to ignore — the Protestant Reformation. This was one of the more divisive issues among théarchs. Some took the splintering of Christianity as a step backward from a unified nation, an obstacle that would make it all the harder to bring all of humanity together in a shared vision. Others argued it was a necessary step toward greater enlightenment, citing the elements of corruption within clergy and the upper class that helped fuel the Reformation movement. Ultimately, most of the Ladder wound up supporting the Reformation as an opportunity to promote the humanist ideal further.

Empire

There was a time when the sun never set on the British Empire; there was always some bit of soil somewhere in the world nominally under the control of the English monarch on which the sun was shining. Though the Empire was a long way from being even a half-hearted stab at Hieraconis, it still managed to spread one country's culture around the globe in a way that could not help but attract the Silver Ladder's attention.

The order's position on the ethics of the British Empire was frequently divided. The British weren't improving the lot of the colonies they oversaw quite as much as they liked to think. Many high-ranking figures within the central and colonial governments *meant* well, but their prejudices and assumptions often led them to do more harm than good. Often officials didn't even mean well in the first place. The théarch Zephrus openly condemned his fellows who supported (or even tacitly ignored) the atrocities committed against the native Australians. He argued that the Sleeper civilization that would permit, much less encourage, such a thing was not only not on the road to Hieraconis, it was actively undermining the path to such an ideal.

However, most found the practicality of the Empire hard to deny. As a citizen of the British Empire, a



mage could arrange travel to any number of colonies and expect to find at least nominal contacts there. The colonies were also a potential source of new mages and Sleepwalkers who could bring their own disparate lore into the service of the Silver Ladder. The order nestled itself comfortably into the British Empire, and more than one high-ranking théarch grew accustomed to pulling on strings that ran so far out into the world.

The Indian Rebellion of 1857 sent a shock through the order. Many théarchs who had tacitly approved of Britain's tactics there found themselves hard-pressed to justify the treatment of India under East India Company administration. The Crown's attempts at social reform had greatly alienated the native population, which called into question the Silver Ladder's own part in such tactics. By the end of the 19th century, more and more théarchs were actively questioning whether the British Empire could be maintained, and even whether it should.

To make matters worse, it soon became evident that the access to other cultures, and the mages who Awakened there, was not necessarily assisting recruitment. Many promising young mages who would otherwise have made upstanding théarchs backed away from the order; they sought out teachers who weren't as closely associated with the Crown, thanks to their past experiences with British governance. Where the Silver Ladder had once comfortably associated itself with the Empire, it gradually began to disassociate itself with it. It seemed this was another learning point for the dream of Hieraconis.

Another negative point that haunted the order for some time afterward was a matter of public perception. The Silver Ladder's seeming favoritism for the British Empire was frequently something of a negative for its public image among the other orders, particularly mages who sympathized more with the native inhabitants of a colony than with the British settlers. Where the Adamantine Arrow openly fought on both sides of a conflict, and was notorious for accepting warlike mages of any creed, the Silver Ladder was perceived as favoring British culture above any other. An Indian théarch recruited during the Raj was, according to most outsiders, more likely "appointed" to the post than granted full brotherhood. These accusations were largely untrue, but the Silver Ladder simply hadn't done enough to openly refute them. It would take

many more years before the Ladder would again be perceived as truly neutral where Sleeper nations were concerned.

Today

It's every true théarch's innermost hope that he will see the Silver Dream fulfilled within his lifetime. Unfortunately, the world is still beset with many troubles, and the Sleepers are far from unified behind the Awakened. That won't stop the Silver Ladder from trying, though. It isn't enough to have power just in this world, in the Lie, no matter how much it might have. Its work won't be done until all of humanity achieves Hieraconis.

The age of communication and travel presents a great many challenges for the Silver Ladder. On the one hand, it's now easier than ever before to coordinate efforts with fellow théarchs around the world. They can compare methods and exert influence on one another's behalf on a truly impressive scale of distance. On the other hand, the Sleepers are less of a captive audience than they ever were. It's hard to really reach someone who's already so close to information overload that she has to pick which information to pay attention to and which to filter out. Some théarchs say this is a good thing, at least philosophically speaking: the Sleepers have more choice and self-determination now, at least in the First World. But it's no tremendous secret that the Silver Ladder has plenty of mages who are just a little bit interested in personal control, and many are secretly resentful of having to compete with so many near-worthless public figures for the average Sleeper's respect and attention.

It can generally be said that the Silver Ladder has an interest in any event that has a large impact on the Sleeper population. In part, this is due to humanist or humanitarian concerns; in part, it's simply the pragmatism of looking after the resource most valued by the order. However, when one considers the number of events that impact Sleeper populations, it quickly becomes apparent that the Silver Ladder can become deeply involved in only a few. Wars, disasters, terrorist strikes, ecological issues that impact a large number of Sleepers, upswings in poverty or crime — every théarch in the world could devote his or her waking hours to aiding the lot of Sleepers, there's so much to be done. But if they did, the order would be unable to devote the time

needed to its own affairs — recruitment, governing the other orders, pursuing further enlightenment, recovering lost Atlantean Artifacts and lore, and fighting against the hidden threats of the world. Hard though it may be (and for some théarchs it's a less gut-wrenching choice than for others), the Silver Ladder needs to prioritize.

As a result, the order is often drawn to crisis points, and does indeed devote its attention to helping Sleepers rebuild their lives after a disaster, but that's more the province of individuals than an order mandate. In general, théarchs help where their consciences dictate, and thus might be found in any war zone or disaster area around the world. But the formal work of the order remains focused not upon helping humans through dark times, but in preparing those humans who are ready to lead their fellows. Teaching them to fish is the ultimate gift the order can bestow.

Europe

For now, things seem to be working out reasonably well in Europe. The Silver Ladder is hesitant to grow too confident — there's plenty of violence in the all-too-recent past where these closely packed nations and cultures turned on one another. The atrocities of Serbian and Croatian conflict are one of the most recent examples, but there were also two World Wars within only a century; not much time, in the grand scheme of things.

Yet at the moment, Europe seems to be doing fairly well for itself. It's a promising sign.

European théarchs, perhaps unfairly, have a tendency to consider themselves the core of the Silver Ladder, and thus of the entire Pentacle society. This prejudice began in the Age of Exploration, was heightened during the days of colonialism and Empire, and persists even today. The perception isn't based upon the relative temporal power of their home nations. Rather, it stems from the general belief that they have for many years been the best-traveled and most globally aware members of their order. "We came to them," runs the sentiment, "not the other way around." Even today, European théarchs tend to paint an image of themselves as more willing to travel and coordinate affairs around the world, such as when compared to a number of American mages who don't even bother to learn a language other than English. The prejudice is far from universal, and doesn't amount to much more than condescension. Rather, a European théarch

may tend to initiate travel to another region to "check up," and there's a general feeling among the order that any théarch traveling through Europe should make a courtesy visit and inform the local Ladder of the events surrounding her trip. Some even take it as an insult if an American mage flying to Beirut with a short layover in Frankfurt doesn't bother to check in with his German colleagues.

Recent outbreaks of terrorism have stirred the Silver Ladder into action. While they obviously can't act too openly in attempting to summon terrorist leaders out of hiding, forewarning authorities of an attack seen in their auguries or other potential uses of magic against mundane enemies, European (and other) théarchs despise terrorist activity and gladly work against it. If terrorism is successful, it divides Sleeper culture — it makes Sleepers fearful and hateful toward one another where they should be joining hands and working toward a common enlightenment. The attacks on Madrid on March 11, 2004, infuriated local théarchs, and the Silver Ladder allegedly spent some time divining the names and locations of those responsible, then passing that information on to a few notoriously "thorough" cabals of the Adamantine Arrow.

North America and Mesoamerica

Only a fool would ignore the influence of the United States on the rest of the world. The US government has an incredible amount of power, and yet by most sane standards, it seems to have little grasp of how to use that power responsibly. It is an incredibly polarizing nation — some governments and cultures consider it a great and valuable friend, while many others view it with distrust or outright hate. The Silver Ladder makes a careful study of US politics, carefully cataloging its successes and failures. Many of the nation's moves as a forefront force in world politics are held up as examples of how to lead others on a grand scale; tragically, many are also held up as examples of precisely what *not* to emulate.

Religion also plays an interesting role in the culture of the US. For a country founded on the principle of religious freedom, that holds the separation of church and state as a virtue, faith and dogma play an incredibly potent role in national politics. The Silver Ladder finds it difficult to condemn the principle of fusing faith and government, at least without being hypocritical. After all, members call themselves théarchs. In actual practice, though,

the US seems to be stuck in a pattern of one step forward, one step back. New ideas, whether based upon faith or secular concerns, have a hard time establishing themselves unless there's a clear profit to be made from them. To the Silver Ladder, this is a frustrating roadblock. The nation possesses the influence to be able to help many, many people, and could spread the ideals of the Silver Ladder perhaps more efficiently than any other — but it's difficult work just to get those ideals implanted in a few Americans of influence.

Some théarchs roll up their sleeves and use the frequent close ties between a politician and his religious constituency to their advantage. Many Silver Ladder willworkers were faithful in similar fashion, which allows them to point to virtues in their target's religion that reflect the greater Awakened ideals of the order. Others are a bit more cynical, and use worldly influence in much the way a politician expects to push the right sort of message into a speech where the right people might hear, or back a bill that would make things a little easier for the Ladder.

And, of course, there's the general issue of America's *other* religion: mass media. Most théarchs have an entirely contemptuous opinion of Hollywood, the major publishing houses, and the other purveyors of quick and easy escape. With every action movie, sugary chart-topper, romantic comedy or overwritten bestseller, more people decide to deal with the Lie by retreating into a comfortable nest of even more superficial lies. The order sees the necessity of involving itself in mass media as a means to subtly handing the keys to Awakening to as many people as possible. But most théarchs find it a very distasteful affair, and sometimes disheartening to boot. When people care more about the public disintegration of the troubled celebrity *du jour* than they do about their own lives, it takes an unpleasant amount of pandering just to reach them.

The tendencies of the quintessentially First World United States quickly shift as one moves further south into Mexico and Mesoamerica. The Silver Ladder's general priorities regarding the welfare of Sleepers affect its actions here to some degree; théarchs may spend time assisting with relief after an earthquake or invest in a poor community, but as around the rest of the world, there's too much to do, and they can't get involved with everything. Some identify heavily with the descendants of pre-Columbian civi-

lizations, and focus their efforts upon helping living Maya or unearthing Olmec lore. The pre-Columbian Americas are commonly held to be one of the primary settlement points for mages who fled Atlantis, and there have been enough Artifacts unearthed in Mesoamerica to provide some proof for that theory. A strong grassroots movement has begun to establish a powerful, perhaps even central seat of the order on the Yucatán Peninsula. This would place the Silver Ladder within range of the influential United States without actually associating itself as part of the nation. Adherents of this movement, the Obsidian Seat, also maintain an undercurrent of belief that their power to lead can be increased by sympathetic magic drawing on the successes of past civilizations — while carefully avoiding any duplication of their failures, of course.

South America

The various nations of South America may not add up to as much global influence as possessed by North America, Asia or Europe, but the Silver Ladder finds a great deal to interest it in the continent all the same. It's still rich with the resource that matters most to the Silver Ladder: humanity.

The strong presence of religion in most South American nations is, as usual, a subject of great interest to the Silver Ladder. It's a potential way to reach new acolytes with seeds of a Mystery play, and many of the devout are already predisposed to the idea of miracles. The Consilium residing in Rio de Janeiro approaches each new Carnival with intense focus, thanks in no small part to the encouragement of its Silver Ladder Hierarchy. The burst of hedonistic and profane activity as prelude to the abstinence of Lent is seen as a mirror for the ultimate goal of attaining the Supernal, and it's notable that there seems to be at least one Awakening in the middle of the festival each year.

Brazil's economy continues to strengthen, yet the Silver Ladder is concerned about how the new money's managed. Poverty and wealth sit side by side, with luxury apartment buildings casting shadows over the *favelas* where raw sewage runs in the streets and schooling is all but non-existent. Given the order's strong interest in humanist concerns, this is a troubling issue for the Ladder. Every person lost to violence or starvation is a soul that might have Awakened and helped build Hieraconis.

Indeed, poverty is a continual problem in much of South America, and that concerns the Silver

Ladder. It's not that it wants every family to have a two-car garage and a flatscreen television, of course. Materialism brings with it its own set of issues. But the trouble with being poor is having no real power, and a very real temptation to roll over for those who are willing to offer one even a pittance — or worse, if the still-thriving druglords of Colombia are any indication. A common, if not particularly popular theory, holds that the combination of strong religion and the pressures of poverty are more likely to breed mages susceptible to becoming Banishers — and there are Banishers aplenty in South America. Those théarchs who came from poor origins themselves find the theory rather insulting, but they find it hard to disagree that *something* should be done to assist the poor.

Many South American théarchs are working to move more power into the hands of the Sleepers, or at least to exercise their own power reliably on the Sleepers' behalf. There are forces that seem to be resisting the Silver Ladder's efforts, though, and with more effect than one would expect from simple unAwakened businessmen. The théarchs aren't sure what's at stake that they would have this kind of resistance — though there's a strong suspicion that a faction of Seers of the Throne is involved — but they intend to find out more, and then do something about it.

Asia

The Silver Ladder has always been strong in Asia, and recent world affairs are only heightening the order's interest. The occasional neophyte might show some form of romantic notion of the "mystic East," but such a viewpoint is rare; the Awakening goes a long way to prove that the world is mystic no matter where one is standing, and the Silver Ladder's focus upon unity usually means it's easy to introduce a starry-eyed neophyte to a senior Asian théarch who will quickly disabuse the youngster of any notions of secret ninja magical orders or other such rot.

The Middle East is a renowned hotspot, and the Silver Ladder's experiences are no different. The region has always been renowned for great faith and great conflicts, even without the recent American incursions. While the Silver Ladder has a long tradition of embracing Islamic mages and encouraging Muslim paths to the greater, Awakened truth, the order has never had much love for the more oppressive uses of Sharia law, particularly those

implemented by the Taliban. Some théarchs became entangled in local Sleeper affairs from a sense of responsibility, running underground schools for women to receive an education or quietly counter-proselytizing for a more compassionate role. The Iraq war has drawn more global attention to the Middle East, and some théarchs are considering ways of capitalizing on that attention to subtly broadcast their message. Several local members of the order insist that the Middle East will be where the Ladder will again stretch up to the Supernal, perhaps at the end of the Long Count (see p. 24). These théarchs frequently lobby for an increase in magical resources and assistance to stabilize the region. The focus of the Abrahamic faiths upon the Holy Land is no coincidence, they assert. The land holds old magic, and may be the foundation of Hieraconis — if it can be healed.

The former Soviet Union has been a place for hard-working théarchs to involve themselves for decades now, and there's still plenty of work to be done. When the Soviet Union crumbled, a strong aspect to its peoples' cultural identity was suddenly gone. The Silver Ladder combed through the populace looking for those people who, in the process of figuring out just how their lives might change now, would be prone to Awaken. It's proven difficult so far to guide the local authorities to create a nation closer to the Silver Ladder's ideal, but that's about par for the course. Gathering recruits, on the other hand, has been going quite well. The tidal change in society has indeed been reflected in an unusually large number of Awakenings. Unfortunately, not all of the new blood can be properly gathered and initiated into the Pentacle. The Seers of the Throne have also established a strong presence in the former Soviet Union. A race is currently on to gather several Artifacts allegedly gathered and hidden away by the government, then sold on various black markets as "exotic treasures." When the two forces come into contact, the race also erupts in bloodshed.

China is a hotbed of Silver Ladder activity. Here, théarchs draw on the examples of Confucian and Taoist philosophies alike, of imperial rule and even Communist methodology. The order is largely agreed that China as it currently exists is not aimed in the correct direction, and several members of the order have extended their support to various pro-democracy groups. Mirroring the almost nationalistic beliefs common to the Silver Ladder in other regions, the théarchs of China believe Hieraconis may be best achieved if

centered in the land that anchored itself mystically as the Middle Kingdom.

Japan has traditionally been a mixed bag where the théarchs' mission has been concerned. Certain aspects of the culture embrace new ideas from the West and elsewhere, acting as potential catalysts for change. Other aspects are extremely conservative, posing no small obstacle to those mages who attempt to seed new ideas. And yet, that conservative mindset also carries with it a heavy reverence for tradition, which in itself is a valuable resource for the Silver Ladder. Mages of the Ladder operate with a delicate precision as they tug at the strings of Japan's society, cautiously seeking to foster a worldview that blends the best of respected tradition and forward-thinking ideas.

Africa

There are few members of the Silver Ladder alive today without at least a few strong opinions on Africa. Cynical outsiders comment that the théarchs obviously have some interest in the frequent civil wars and regime changes that plague the continent, as they provide perfect opportunities for the Silver Ladder to entrench itself in positions of power. This is true to some extent, although the théarchs of Africa would sternly point out that one of the reasons to exert influence over a newly arisen Sleeper government is to *prevent* further wars and atrocities. African mages who join the Silver Ladder often go abroad to gain broader experience, perhaps a Western education, before returning home to begin their work in earnest. The order supports this activity, often funding a promising acolyte's studies in hopes that he will be able to establish himself more strongly at home, as well as share any Supernal lore that might be unknown in other countries.

Just as compelling to the order is the role of faith and spirituality in Africa. Islam, Judaism and Christianity all have a rich history in various cultures of the continent, but traditional faiths are also still present in many societies. Even more interestingly, Africa has engendered entirely new faiths very recently in the overall skein of history. Ethnic Yoruba taken elsewhere as slaves created new religions such as Santeria and Candomblé. The rise of Rastafarianism was inspiring to many théarchs, incorporating as it does the faith in Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia as God incarnate. In some ways, it seemed a tremendous sign of hope for the human race. While the religion itself attracted no proportionately greater number of converts within the order than any other faith, the vivid display of human-

ity's willingness to take up a new belief system and create wonders of art and music in its celebration was welcome. Humanity, said the Ladder, is not giving up. It is still open and receptive to new messages of hope. It will be ready for Hieraconis when it comes.

African théarchs are somewhat disapproving of what they call "magical tourism." The term is a broad and slightly unfair one, used to refer to mages from other countries coming to Africa in search of some opportunity — mystagogues on a quest for a forgotten Supernal Artifact, Arrows attempting to hone their skills in a brush war before returning to their original homes, and so on. Even if such visitors offer temporary help with a given problem, the African Ladder is generally uninterested in accepting a quick sop in exchange for hospitality. A cabal visiting Africa usually does well if it has one of the Silver Ladder in its ranks to vouch for it and address its hosts' concerns. This may involve staying a little longer than planned to assist with some local project or another, but the end-goal is (usually) worthwhile: effecting a permanent improvement in the local Sleepers' way of life.

South Pacific

The Silver Ladder's presence in the South Pacific is somewhat smaller than that of other orders, particularly the Mysterium. In many places, the human population isn't quite as dense as would normally attract the order's attention. Polynesia in particular has but a few scattered mages who have taken to the Silver Ladder. These théarchs indulge in quite a bit of communication with one another; they're social animals, after all, and though they are loyal to the Sleepers they oversee, they also prefer regular contact with other mages who understand.

Australia has a notable Silver Ladder presence, established during the days of colonialism. The local théarchs remain largely where the human population is densest, which is to say clustered along the coast. But they can't ignore the smaller settlements, lest they lose potential newly-Awakened to other orders, or worse. Each year at least one lictor makes a circuit around a portion of the country, following intuition and divination to find any potential new recruits or trouble spots. Though lictors are expected to handle this duty alone, they often accept volunteers for the journey — perhaps mages of other orders who can take in a just-discovered mage who doesn't seem to have what it takes to be a théarch.



CHAPTER TWO: THE SILVER DREAM

At noon, Balder watches from atop a trash bin. He chews on a rubbery pizza crust — a prize from the bin — and listens. One, two, three, four pairs of feet clang up the fire escape. Too many to fight. He makes the Sign of the Raven to warn the caucus but his winged thought-foram smacks against a Ban.

He glances at the gray sky, prays they'll get away, hops from his perch and gets to work.

At 1 PM, Balder finds survivors: two junior thearchs who are more scared than bloody. He tells them to crash at his apartment (most nights he sleeps on the big sewer grill at Queen and University instead) and works around their trauma with gentle questions. By 2:10, he knows the four wore identical green single-breasted suits. They shared a Nimbus like a shifting copper lattice. Puppets then, with a strong handler who can manage four at once.

At 3:05, he finds their tailor: a thin Kenyan who won't let Balder in until he yanks a billfold from his filthy cords and counts out \$320 for the cream Egyptian cotton shirt in the window. The green suits are a lot cheaper. A short man bought four of them with his debit card.

At 3:30, Balder buys a cheap cell phone across the street. He stretches on a nearby park bench and fumbles with the buttons.

At 3:40, Sister Mirage returns his call; she's hacked the Kenyan's transactions with a Space and Forces trick she won't shut up about. Balder interrupts with his gratitude. He owes her for a change. At 3:56, he reminds a bank's IT security chief why his wife doesn't have cancer anymore. He scores ATM records that cluster at a Convenience King in High Park. At 4:15, the Arrows call back and say they'll handle it — if Balder plays point and follows them into the thick of things.

"If it's a legit threat you get a chunk of the glory," says the First Talon. "If it's political bullshit we'll deliver a punitive beating on the spot. Deal?"

Balder says he'll meet them at the store.

At 4:38, he gets out of a cab and sits against a tan brick wall, around the corner from Convenience King. He panhandles. Everybody ignores him except for two guys in green suits. They both say "Get a job!" at exactly the same time and head for an old, beautiful house. A polished brass plaque says Caravaggio Consulting.

At 5:00, Balder flattens against the plaque and the wall; he's seen cops do it on TV. Beside him, the First Talon kicks in the front door. The other three are already on the balcony.

At 5:07, Balder steps over a corpse in a green suit. He vomits in the trash, takes a few deep breaths and aims his gaze for a spot in the room that isn't bloody. He whispers the High Speech and checks the spell binding Caravaggio. It's tight; bands of blue light choke his copper Nimbus. His body needn't be restrained; they broke his arms and legs. His suit's green but it's not from the Kenyan, who doesn't deal in silk.

"You killed three of my students," says Balder. "Thank God you've got a uniform fetish. Might've missed you otherwise."

"Students?" Caravaggio chuckles and then winces when an Arrow pulls a bullet out of his leg. "Thought they were head guys. You, you're... poor."

"Who's poor? I've got friends," says Balder.

***Man is a rope stretched between the animal and the Overman — a rope over an abyss.
A dangerous crossing, a dangerous wayfaring, a dangerous looking-back,
a dangerous trembling and halting.***

What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not a goal...

— Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra

Hubris is a coward's word. Weak men and women use it to excuse their fear-blunted dreams. They give timidity the glorious raiment of gods and the mechanical inevitability of natural law. The other orders have their virtues, but each one leavens the Art with shame and forces its disciples to eat of that bitter bread: a communion of defeat and, to the Silver Ladder, the greatest blasphemy. There's no ruling God to placate with bent knee, no secret that humanity wasn't meant to know. There is no higher power than humanity and nothing more sacred than its dreams.

Enlightenment is glorious and cruel, amoral in all ways but one: Awakening itself is virtue. Some mages envision the Mysteries as an intricate structure, a chain of jewels that connects every mote of meaning into a cosmic pattern, but the Vox Draconis of old told a different story. They said magic breaks all barriers, renders all systems fluid. Into the torrent dives the Awakened will, baptizing its naked desire. It partakes of the flow and solidifies it into miracles. The miracles evoke definitions, techniques and laws, but always at the sufferance of the divine currents of the Supernal. Once, Atlantis was a unique pearl of concentrated will, solid and strong in the storm. The early théarchs saw the beauty of this accomplishment and vowed to extend it even to the source of magic, to destroy the crude duality between will and power and make the Awakened City an Ascended Empire. There would be no masters or slaves, gods or demons, but a paradise where desire would never levy a price in pain.

Atlantis' fall is not a story of hubris, but of a particular cowardice. Even in the days before Fallen history, there were men and women who reveled in their own small-mindedness. Today, such people are easy to find. They cannot be satisfied with pleasure, wealth or strength unless they use it to injure and belittle others. They would be masters for want of slaves, gods

for want of worshippers, demons for want of sinners to punish. The game of domination is a continuous, fearful passion play that reassures its actors *they* are in control because they're afraid that some day the world will strike back. Today, Sleepers call them bullies, tyrants and sociopaths. In Atlantis the very same types Awakened, climbed the celestial ladder, smashed it behind them and took the title of Exarch.

The world is Fallen: a realm of slaves enduring the continuous punishments of frightened, hidden beings. The Silver Ladder doesn't believe the state of the world is a sign that mages "overstepped their bounds." There are no boundaries outside of the human soul, and it is to it, not ancient runes or Realms Invisible, that the order directs its campaign. Like any strategy, the Lie reveals something of its author. It hides magic, discourages Awakening and through agents like the Seers of the Throne seeks to keep mages afraid and divided. The enemy fears a world that believes in miracles, learns occult secrets, Awakens and unites — the very things théarchs want to accomplish.

The order can't do it alone. Every mage is a newly-christened prince in search of a stolen kingdom, a priest fighting to bring Heaven to his flock, a rebel raising his fist against the ultimate oppressor. United, the Awakened could smash the walls of Sleep and flood the Abyss with conquering magic, but apart, they bicker and hide, desperate to preserve the mote of power they won when they answered the Oracles' call. Mages have Awakened, but their liberation — their Nation — sleeps still. That greater Awakening is not the aim of some vague, spiritual yearning, but a plan as real as the elements of Creation. It will transform Earth to unbreakable Diamond, Air to foe-burning Thunder, Fire to a Star of imperishable hope and Water to the living, singing Blood of empowered humankind.

Thesis: *The Elemental Precepts*

The Silver Ladder unites behind convictions, not theories. It doesn't lack the intellectual sophistication of the other orders, but all of its magical workings, spiritual experiments, writings and arguments are subordinate to the dream of a new Awakened Nation: Hieraconis. The order is driven by faith and reason together, clasping hands tightly enough to justify a comprehensive ideology aimed at uniting mages and testing the prison of the Lie.

It's hard to see the zeal inside a hardened théarch politician. The Ladder is pragmatic, secretive or bombastic according to the given situation. But behind it all, an ideal member of the order is devoted to the dream of a liberated humanity. She dreams of the Awakened Nation that will guide it beyond all suffering. The Silver Ladder's no stranger to betrayal, harsh judgments and manipulative policies, but its mission is a compassionate one. It doesn't exist to serve humanity but to *save* it: a crucial distinction that justifies virtually any tactic, but never complacency.

Every good théarch needs ambitions. She has personal dreams to fuel her journey to Supernal Ascension, and political goals to help mages form a powerful, idealistic community. Théarchs aren't just rulers and judges, but priests, questing for the immanent divine power of humanity. The order is almost a religion where humanity is both flock and object of worship, where the so-called Avatar, the god in mortal flesh, is the central preoccupation. There is no more apt symbol for this than the Elemental Precepts, which name themselves after transfigured versions of the mundane elements. As the Precepts portray every part of the cosmos becoming something more glorious, so do the priest-judges of the Awakened imagine the Avatar, the human-god in universal triumph. What follows, then, is not just a political agenda, but a faith, too: a description of spiritual and temporal aims united under one doctrine.

Diamond

The Awakened are One Nation

Earth, long the object of Fallen toil, is nevertheless a symbol for unity, but only when people transform it with wisdom and effort, searching for the scattered gems of Supernal lore hidden beneath the surface.

Change Your Perspective

When you woke up today you were a little tired, maybe a bit hungry. Maybe you checked your mail and fretted over bills. Outside it might be a bit too hot, or cold. Maybe you have a headache right now, or you're contemplating the fact that you weigh a bit too much, or too little. But that's living, right?

Wrong. It's the Lie.

To the Silver Ladder, each and every one of these discomforts is a crime, imposed by the Exarchs when they denied Supernal privileges to the rest of humanity. Your animal pains, finite wealth, unfulfilled dreams and eventual death are *curses*. You deserve to be a *god*, and you will, even if the order must set the heavens aflame to make it so.

Mages put their hands to mining truth, cutting their price into faceted Artifacts of polished magic — and, sadly, hoarding them, fearful someone will steal them or even use them against the discoverer.

It's time mages stopped looking at magic with the loathsome attitude of tomb robbers, breaking into the past to live on its value like archeological parasites. This isn't to say mages should deny or ignore Atlantis — quite the opposite, because Atlantis teaches mages they can create wonders in the here and now. Not only does every Artifact and weathered scroll prove the Awakened City existed and created unmatched works of magic, but the fact that these secrets are *still* potent proves the ancients can be matched, even surpassed in the modern age. The Silver Ladder doesn't believe mages should express their love for the past by cringing in its shadow. They should stand proudly on its foundations to build anew.

Progress requires study. For too many, Atlantis is a mirror that reflects a mage's laziness, selfishness and shame. She lazily imitates ancient secrets without adding her own innovations. She hides tombs and locks away dusty collections to selfishly keep their Mysteries to herself. Shame rises when she learns legends and repeats their lie: Atlantis overreached and justly fell.

These errors cannot go unchallenged.

Atlantis was mighty because it *was* Atlantis: one nation, built on the principles of magic, whose Awak-

ened citizens devoted their will to all the wonders that lesser, modern mages merely harvest for their own selfish ends. The lesson of ages is that an Awakened polity is the ultimate font of magical creativity. Atlantis is no cautionary tale. It's an ideal to which to aspire, even surpass. Hieraconis will be to Atlantis as Atlantis is to the most squalid nations of the Fallen Earth. That's why mages have a moral duty to unite behind common laws. If they don't, they'll be mere scavengers of the past. The order urges mages to emulate the glories of the lost age and extend them into new spells, new projects — new victories against the Lie. The Consilium system is a first step: an enlightened fiefdom holding a torch in the darkness.

Enemies of Unity

It almost goes without saying that any enemy of unity is an enemy of the Awakened — and in accord with the precept of Thunder, the rest of humanity, too. Traitors deserve merciless punishment. Banishers adhere to a heresy of self-loathing. Seers of the Throne are slaves of the Exarchs: foot soldiers in an army determined to keep humanity weak and ignorant. They share a common blasphemy: neither believes the common person deserves to be liberated from the pain and darkness of the Fallen World. Putting this poisoned doctrine into practice is the greatest moral crime. It's an attempt to abort the Avatar before he rises, offering violence to the order's unborn, human gods. Merely suggesting that mages don't deserve Ascension is obnoxious, but not criminal.

Ranking slightly below these groups are twisted Legacies like the Tremere and Scelesti. While it's true that such Left-Handed mages are as evil as anything to be found in the Fallen World, the order doesn't believe they merit the same kind of vigilance for the simple reason that, when viewed pragmatically, they come off as a bit pathetic. The Exarchs can tempt their servants with power and the Banishers arouse the witch-hunting instinct, but who really *wants* to serve a demon or scrounge for mortal souls? The order doesn't mean to underestimate them, but harnesses the power of contempt to put them in their place. It's better to preach that these renegades are pitiable mad dogs to be put down than emphasize their power, and in doing so, give them the tempting mystique they need to win converts.

Of least concern are competing doctrines from other orders. The Awakened Nation to come serves the will of its citizens, so censorship should be avoided (but not banned; it's a useful political tool). Let the rank

and file prattle on about hubris as long as it supports the Consilium and obeys the law. The Silver Ladder appreciates the opportunity to justify itself against challengers. Disagreement breeds discussion; discussion is the gateway to indoctrination. Every Libertine gadfly helps the order. They start conversations théarchs feel more than qualified to finish.

The order is not *infinitely* tolerant. It intervenes when mages try to overthrow a system honed by the ages with errant notions of democracy. The Awakened Nation doesn't invite equal participation by any fool who chooses to open his mouth. A "democracy of mages" is an ideologically incoherent notion. For all the Free Council's talk of equal rights, few members would give Sleepers a vote in Awakened affairs. Why? A Libertine might stammer out something about Sleepers not being qualified to make such decisions. He might go on about the dangers of exposing unprepared Sleepers to the Mysteries.

And the théarch answers, "How does that make them any different than an apprentice exposed to the strongest spells, or an Obrimos confronting the greatest Mysteries of Death? You would seize the power to make ignorant decisions for yourselves but deny Sleepers that same privilege. Why?"

Some mages really are wiser than others. It's their duty to pass on what they've learned about occult, spiritual and political matters. If every mage had an equal voice, apprentices would ignore their masters. Mages who aren't qualified to deal with the Shadow Realm would decide what to do when dangerous spirits come calling. Every mage is student and mentor both; she advises her inferiors, obeys her superiors and always studies, experiments and searches for the secrets of the Imperium Mysteriorum.

Hieraconis

Hieraconis is the Awakened Nation to come: Atlantis reborn and more, triumphant against gods and Exarchs, as joyful as the paradises of every religion — but unlike them, Hieraconis is not a reward for blind faith, but a right. It is humanity's deserved place in the universe. Historians aren't sure when Hieraconis became the most common name for the nation to come. There are other names — Tianguo, Shambhala-lokha, the City of God in Man — and none is considered more authoritative than the other, but Hieraconis is the best known. Some théarchs believe the name comes from Hieraconopolis, the Greek name for Horus' holy city. It symbolizes victory over the forces of darkness and children who fulfill the promises of their parents.

The order has a long tradition of mystical literature that describes Hieraconis. The *Cygnus Visions* says, "Hieraconis' lords crush rubies beneath their feet but wear necklaces of granite, tin and iron: the precious signs of labors long abandoned, yet hallowed by the blood and pain of their Fallen ancestors." The scrolls describe a thousand-story pentagonal ziggurat at the

heart of the land: perfected Watchtowers that memorialize the Fallen Age. Other works say Hieraconis is a city of five infinite precincts, each a Supernal Realm containing everyone who ever lived, or an unspoiled wilderness where the smallest stones and fiercest predators submit to human commands. The texts contradict each other all the time, so most Silver Ladder mages

believe they're allegorical works. A few cults base their beliefs upon one book or another, but for the most part the order's very broad-minded about the vision, if not its meaning.

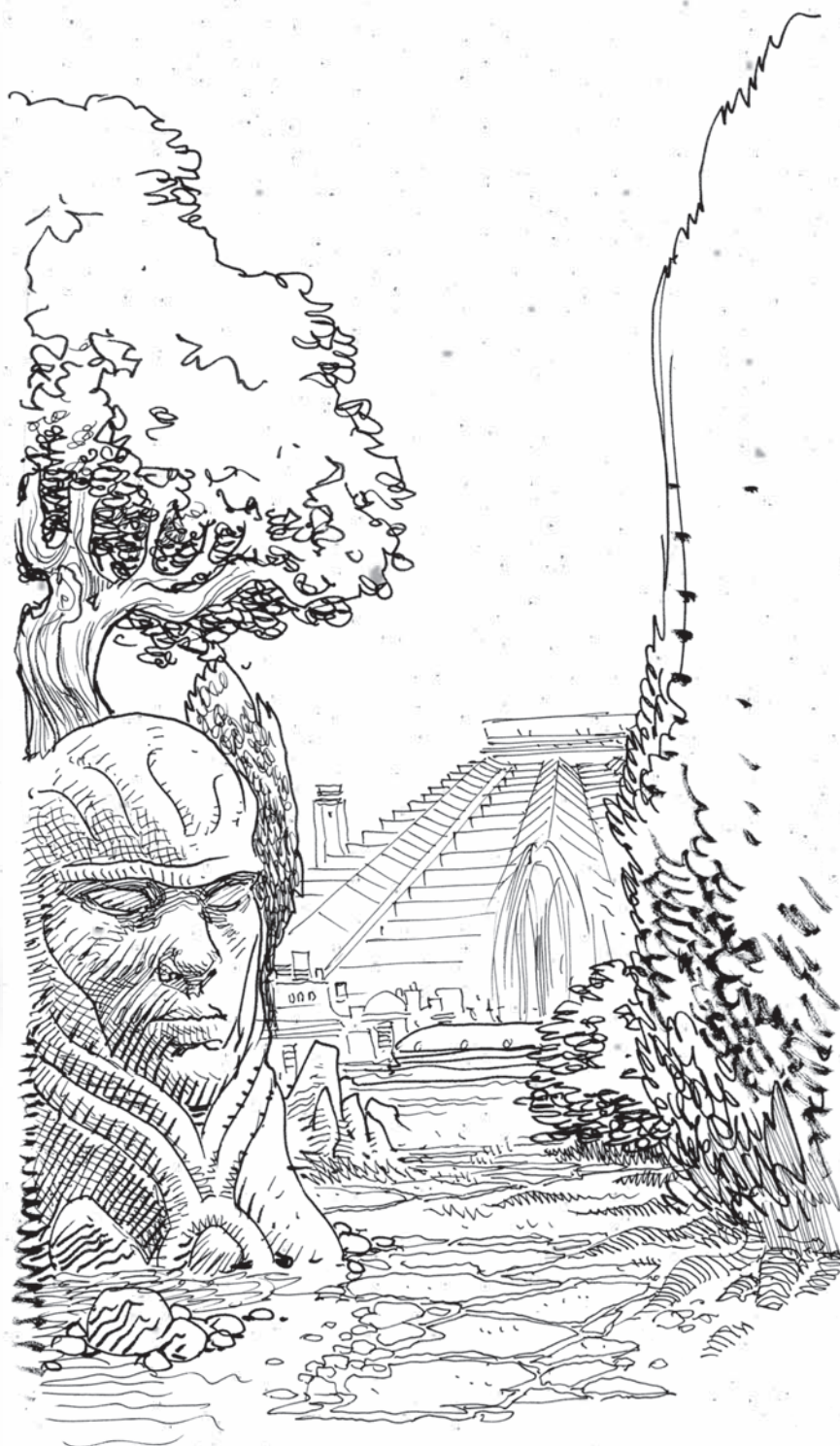
Hieraconis isn't just Atlantis' successor — it surpasses it. Its people successfully bridge the gap between the Fallen and Supernal Worlds, destroying the dualism of ages and freeing all humanity from pain, sorrow and want. All thought is magical; men and women create universes as works of art and none can be harmed or forced to do anything against their will. It's humanity's destiny, but thanks to the Lie it won't be easy to attain.

Thunder

Imperium is the Right of Humanity

Air isn't just a medium for the million breaths of a mortal span. It carries sound, scatters light and, driven by the Earth's turning, can flatten nations with its wind. Every molecule is part of a growing storm, giving birth to Thunder, the symbol of humanity's rightful destiny.

Humanity deserves the power of magic. The Silver Ladder knows Sleepers endanger the glorious Mysteries but that it doesn't mean it's their fault. It's a broken world, cursed with spiritual deceit. It's no easy thing to Awaken and resist. The other orders blame Sleepers for their lack of vision. Guardians of the Veil say the unworthy poison the Art. Mystagogues hide the secrets of the universe in secret



libraries, demanding code words and cult ties of anyone searching for them. The Silver Ladder doesn't believe Sleepers have the capacity to understand magic right away, but it doesn't fault them for it. Théarchs treat the mass of humanity with compassion. They guide them to mystic revelations when they can and teach them about the supernatural according to their capacity to learn. They prepare as many people as possible for the first bolt of Awakening so they'll more easily grasp the final Thunder of Imperium Mysteriorum: total dominion over the Art.

Few mages would admit it, but the Lie taints their opinions just as often as it does those of the Sleepers around them. For mages, the Fallen World is a point of view that tells them to imprison their own desires. It promotes a diseased spirituality and encourages false humility of those who, afraid of power, tell their flock that celebrating it is sinful or unenlightened. The Lie says might and wisdom are divergent paths on the quest for Ascension.

These are convenient myths for the Exarchs to foster. They trap the very people who might smash the locked gates of the Supernal and confront the world's jailers. Looking for enlightenment, these spiritual heroes encounter the false doctrine. It tells them to avoid using magic, turn to pure contemplation and beware of hubris. They never attain the raw power needed to climb the heavens. The secret lords of the world laugh whenever a saint abases herself. The order believes the Exarchs' agents had to teach people to hate power at first but as time went on, the lessons turned into traditions, clothed in many religions. The Fallen World seems to prove the doctrine of self-enslavement. It makes miracles rare and difficult to work, even punishes witnesses. Fearless, miracle-working priests are turned into hated witches. It's the order's job to teach mages and Sleepers to be proud of their power. It's just a taste of the true human birthright.

The Stag, the Lion and the Sage

The Silver Ladder divides human spirituality into three categories. Some théarchs have undertaken especially deep studies that recognize dozens, even hundreds of types, but all descend from three main spiritual vehicles, commonly called the Stag, the Lion and the Sage. The Silver Ladder has complex philosophical descriptions of each, but for the new apprentice, parables and allegories suffice.

The Stag

It quietly roams the wild, treading lightly, leading the herd with its silent example. The Stag abhors violence but respects its pageantry. It fights as a last resort or in passionate rituals but never truly imposes its will upon the world. It represents peace, restraint, asceticism — and slavery. For all its strength and grace, it exists to be hunted and devoured. The Stag is meat, destined to run from the jaws of stronger beasts.

Stag morality emphasizes restraint, humility, self-sacrifice, and other so-called “virtues.” It's the moral vehicle most people identify with piety and enlightenment. “Harm none, lest you be harmed,” it says. “Pride goeth before the fall.” The Stag's children drown the world in sutras, fables, myths and prophecies designed to turn listeners into more meat for the Lie, slaves for the Throne. They tell people to go to a church to find God, sit with a monk to find enlightenment or pay a New Age “shaman” thousands of dollars for the right to explore the spirit world. The Stag tells humanity to pray for miracles, pay for miracles, and thank God for the few miracles He “allows” them to work — but never, ever tells human beings they *deserve* them.

The Silver Ladder would dearly love to slay the Stag for good, but Sleepers have long since learned to enslave themselves. It's a sign of the enemy's will in the world, but it can't be dismissed with fiery sermons and cataclysmic spells. For one thing, radical action would send Sleepers into a state of psychic shock; the Stag encourages dependency, but it also comforts the herd into thinking the strong will protect them. And if the order used magical force, people would switch from serving God and country to serving *them*. The order wants obedience, but from citizens, not serfs. For now, the Stag can be manipulated, not conquered. The order exploits submissive behavior for pragmatic reasons, but prays for the day Sleepers won't be so easily cowed.

The Lion

Ah, the Lion: lord of the wild! Fearless, strong, taking any prey — Ladder novices are easily seduced by the prince of predators. The Lion wears a golden mane but it can be stealthy at will — and will is its only guide. Young Lions hunt alone, winning their territory with threats and bloody brawls. Older Lions gather their prides, earning sex and protection in exchange for the best of the kill. The Lion is selfish-

ness incarnate — what most people would call evil, if they had the bravery.

Humanity tolerates the predators in its midst. Psychopaths become CEOs, city councilors, bishops and teachers. They lay down the law of the Stag for others while they secretly indulge their own unusual desires. Society catches only the most psychologically deformed and inept Lions: serial killers and sexual predators. It obeys the more competent but equally selfish leaders. Many mages take the Lion's mantle when they Awaken. They revel in their superiority, taking whatever they want from Sleepers, while they battle rivals for occult lore or political dominion. Unchecked ambition serves them well; they have no qualms about seeking Imperium themselves, but other people are potential threats or instruments of the Lion's pleasure.

Mages have a duty to protect humanity from the world's Lions. They have to be on guard, lest they become Lions themselves. Théarch pragmatism can easily sour into exploitation, especially as, like the Lion, the order doesn't fear power. Slaves of the Stag can be educated, brought out of the darkness little by little, but the Lion's followers are harder to convert. A psychopath doesn't need permission to think of himself — only opportunities. The Lion type is a danger to Sleepers and mages, and if the order determines these mages will never change, they need to be banished from the community or killed.

The Sage

If there's one great misconception about the order, it's that it believes in power for power's sake. It's a lie propagated by the envious or a claim made in ignorance because the critic doesn't understand the true purpose of a political maneuver. There are also a few (okay, more than a few) mages who join the Silver Ladder with an appetite for power. The order can't keep them all in check. Théarchs know the Lion has its uses, but they obey the Sage. It's the only valid moral vehicle because it demands that no person should submit to the Lie. The Sage will not be a slave and will not take slaves. He is a bodhisattva, a culture hero — the mage who loves power, because power will set the multitudes free.

The Sage is the order's own spiritual vehicle: a vestment of power, pride and compassion woven together by intelligence and will. The Sage is the best in humanity. He's the world's friend, not its master. He doesn't pray for miracles; he creates them. He doesn't leash his feelings, or ask the gods for mercy. He seeks Imperium to benefit humanity, like Prometheus floating

back to Earth with a burning brand and the secret of fire. The Stag is a natural slave and the Lion exploits and devours, but a true Sage wants power because he loves humanity. He wants to share what he's learned, cure the sick, comfort the mad and help all meet their material *and* emotional needs. Common humanity is at the heart of his quest for power and Ascension. As a hunter, he chases the Stag, forcing it to respond with superior guile, driving its evolution. The Sage turns the Lion's greed against it, denying it the power to rule societies.

Morality versus Wisdom

When you read about the Silver Ladder's beliefs — Thunder in particular — you might ask yourself how they stack up to the cold realities of the **Mage** setting, especially when it comes to Wisdom. At first glance, it looks like any orthodox théarch would lose Wisdom at an alarming rate by refusing to moderate magic with humility. Silver Ladder characters can't get a look at their own sheets but they'd still notice that Paradoxes linger a little longer when they repeatedly throw caution to the wind.

The Ladder does in fact have a very rough idea of Wisdom's laws and consequences but it's no evidence they're wrong. It's just a symptom of the Fallen World, inseparable from Paradoxes and Quiescence. Thus, magical acts that risk Wisdom loss aren't necessarily immoral — but then again, they aren't automatically moral, either. To put it in concrete game terms, a théarch blames Wisdom risks that result entirely from magic on the Lie. Anything that would provoke a Morality check in a human is still a personal failing, whether or not magic had a role in it.

Inspiring Power

It isn't enough for a théarch to believe in Thunder. He has to encourage *everyone* to believe or at least serve the principle, voluntarily or not. False belief is so prevalent that it's an uphill battle even when the order preaches to other mages. The Lie creates societies driven by the interplay of Lion and Stag. People are predator or prey. The order exists to reveal the Sage as a third alternative. Without power, compassion is toothless. Without compassion, power corrupts.

The Silver Ladder's developed many ways to preach the Thunder's way. Members utilize any channel they can, from political alliances to fierce sermons. Mages bribe, blackmail, make love and inspire hatred to stir the Thunder within. The order plays a dangerous game here. Sometimes expedience dictates that théarchs ride the edge of lesser moral systems. They bend knee to the unworthy to give them a taste of power and advise them to use it for the betterment of all. They inflict cruel tyrannies on entire Consilii, daring them to rise up and understand they deserve something better. If politics is theater, the Silver Ladder appoints excellent actors to their roles. Like many great actors, these servants and overlords sometimes forget they're only *pretending* to follow the Stag or Lion. False Stags are less likely to do this because, even among mages, members of the Silver Ladder are known for their forceful, prideful personalities. But the Lion revels in unchecked force. It's so close to Thunder's ethos that a théarch can easily believe his personal desires must be good for everyone else. If they're not, a budding tyrant can tell herself she's ruling her subjects for their own good — and that dissidents serve the Exarchs. In Boston, Ladder mages whisper that the Nemean's tyranny was once a pretense, designed to unite the city against him, but that he no longer wishes to release his grip on Hierarchy for any reason. They see the Lion symbols in his appearance and Shadow Name as a forgotten code for his role and hope to find someone strong enough to make him honor it.

Thunder isn't for mages alone. The Silver Ladder ministers to Sleepers with all the vigor and flexibility it uses in the Consilium. The first tactic it uses is charity. It feeds the poor, comforts the distraught and attacks everyday corruption. Every city has a pride of Lions terrorizing a herd of Stags. Kill the Lions and show the rest they don't have to be afraid anymore and you've taken the first step in giving people the freedom to be strong. The order delicately balances these operations. It cures starvation and destroys injustice but does its best to make only gradual, positive contributions to local culture. If a Ladder caucus simply solved everyone's problems, it'd attract dependency. People would depend upon miracle workers and reduce themselves to Stags once again — and once again, human predators would enter the mix, drawn by potential victims. The program for Sleepers provides enough comfort to let them look beyond their worries to the great things they might accomplish. When Sleepers act on their dreams, the order takes the next step: through charities,

governments and private patrons it encourages people to explore their talents. Mages fund artists, scientists, philosophers and priests, especially if they're skeptical about the world's nature. If they break with the Stag's slave morality, they deserve special attention. Théarchs recruit the most promising prodigies into the Cryptopoly to manage every part of their development. They have a greater chance of Awakening, making them potential apprentices or potential enemies. If they turn to the Lion, the order tames or eliminates them before they ravage the lives of everyone they know.

The Path of Thunder

Thunder is a shout at the world, but it should also be directed inward. A théarch can call others to Thunder only when she puts it into practice in her own life. Silver Ladder mages should constantly improve their command of the Mysteries. They must study deeply, experiment continuously and never settle for the spells handed down by a lineage or old grimoire. Théarchs examine ancient theories alongside the bleeding edge. They bridge the past and future, channeling ancient knowledge into new forms as often as they can imagine it. Study is pragmatic, too. How can a Silver Ladder mage exercise authority when he doesn't know what he's talking about? How can he offer Thunder to the world when he doesn't claim it for himself?

Théarchs study magic according to an ethos of innovation and constant improvement, but they're firmly within the Atlantean tradition. Libertine conceits about reinventing magic are nothing more than willful stupidity, a refusal to learn from the past. Then again, the Mysterium has the opposite problem because it's positively drowning in history. Mystagogues scour ruins in the hope that some scroll or Artifact will teach them the great Mysteries, wasting energy that could be used to put hammer and pen to wondrous new works. The Silver Ladder sees its legacy as a starting point. Atlantis took humanity halfway to the Imperium Mysteriorum. The order will finish the job. A common motto is, "Work your will as if Atlantis never fell, for within your soul, it never has."

The order's experiments are all focused upon ultimate mastery: Ascension as an attainable goal, not an abstract state of being. There's no room for a lifetime of contemplation. Occasional meditation and periods of austerity are legitimate strategies to refine one's soul, but a théarch never sits and waits for understanding — she wrenches it from the grip of a hostile universe. Silver Ladder members should be

willing to take substantial risks on the path to Imperium because, as the Star reminds them, they are the leaders and role models of Awakened society. If not them, who? Besides, slow, gradual methods smack of the Stag, because they camouflage passive spirituality. Ascetics and mantra-chanters who wait for the “gift” of insight will uncritically accept anything they experience, whether it comes from a supernatural deceiver or mundane charlatan. A true théarch is Daedalus’ heir, willing to assault the sky on waxen wings. He knows the tragedy of Icarus’ fall is only prominent because of the Lie and wonders if the ancient scientist had more successful sons. He wants to follow their flight no matter how far he might fall.

Ascension and Imperium

Théarchs tend to use the terms Ascension and Imperium Mysteriorum interchangeably, but to most mages they represent two distinct but related attainments. Ascension is a spiritual state that allows its possessor to reach the Supernal Realms without a Watchtower, guided by enlightenment alone. Imperium Mysteriorum is a state of complete magical knowledge, ranging from the slightest Unveiling to the mightiest Imperial arch-Practices or every Arcanum.

In other orders, mages believe these are separate goals. Some Awakened even say excessive magical power is a barrier to Ascension. This theory says after learning ever more intricate ways of commanding the Fallen World, the mightiest mages cannot perform the spiritual exercises necessary for Ascension. Archmages are trapped; they look upon the Supernal Realms as mere instruments for an unenlightened will.

The Silver Ladder disagrees. The order believes power and enlightenment go hand in hand. Magic is no trap, but a way to surpass the limits of the Fallen World. Therefore mages need raw power to Ascend. What théarchs sometimes forget, however, is that the order also holds that spiritual development should go hand in hand with magical ability. A Ladder mage should become as powerful as possible, but should have an equivalent understanding of her psyche. She should be compassionate *and* strong.

Star

The Silver Ladder is the Path to Victory

Stars are made of primal Fire: the source of all light, heat and life. It’s the nature of Fire to spread, consuming its fuel until it holds everything in its grasp. Literal fire destroys what it touches, but elemental Fire is an agent of transformation. It’s the flame of an alchemist’s furnace and the zeal of an evangelist. The Silver Ladder’s Star is the inexhaustible Fire of Awakening. Every soul has its spark, but it’s the order’s duty to fan it into something greater. That’s leadership, the théarchs’ special role, ordained by Atlantis. The Voice of the Dragon was never silenced and can never be ignored.

The order believes it exists to guide other mages and in turn those mages guide the rest of humanity. Not every Consilium needs a Silver Ladder Hierarchy, but the order deserves the lion’s share of political power. If it can’t have the seat of command it wants the ruler’s ear. If it can’t have *that*, the order can’t guide mages according to the Diamond and Thunder precepts. As far as the order’s concerned, that means the Consilium’s an illegitimate body and can be disobeyed or overthrown at will. Without the Elemental Precepts, it’s nothing more than a conspiracy of selfish mages who contribute nothing to the world’s liberation.

Outsiders accuse the order of intolerable arrogance. What gives the Silver Ladder the right to decide what constitutes a real Consilium? Why does it deserve so much power? They don’t understand that the order demands the strictest service from its own. All mages should help humanity, but the Silver Ladder charges itself with an even heavier responsibility: to keep every mage on that path, away from the errors of self-defeating humility and callous arrogance.

If not the Ladder, then who? Mystagogues who prefer occult anomalies and dead words to living, breathing human beings? Arrow warrior-sages who’d kill on a promise? Libertines who can’t conceive of the might of Atlantis and who will never abandon their limited vision for the sake of the world to come? Guardians who hate and fear the very Sleepers they should save? It’s not the fault of the other orders that they can’t assume the mantle of judge, regent or priest effectively. Their places were set by the kings of Atlantis; they do only what was asked of them before the Fallen World was born. Even the Free Council follows only the primal template of the Nameless, the chaos that keeps the orders from stagnation. Every order has a purpose;

each should step aside when a given task doesn't suit it. Commands, advice and inspiration have always issued from the Voice of the Dragon, and in every incarnation it will continue, even to the world's end, when the walls of Hieraconis rise.

Millennia of theory and practice have evolved into a comprehensive political strategy. The Silver Ladder aims to be nothing less than the glue that holds Awakened society together. It cultivates influence through a number of channels to achieve this and has been very successful, but there's always room for improvement. A théarch's work is never done.

Spirituality

The most underestimated aspect of the Ladder's agenda concerns religion and philosophy. The order will stoop to blackmail, favor trading and other brute force political tools, but it prefers allies who honestly believe in the Elemental Precepts, love humanity and willingly accept the order's guidance. Self-interest aside, the order wants every mage to be a good person who exploits the Mysteries for more than profit and pleasure.

Théarchs are evangelists, always willing to discuss the Elemental Precepts. Members learn how to present their beliefs during their apprenticeships. Masters engage them in debate, promote specific talking points and coach them about the other orders' philosophies. To counsel mages, théarchs learn their ways: local customs, myths, history and anything else that might help them make their teachings relevant.

The order wants a strong Diamond collective to rise from the chaotic Consilii of many nations. It's the Fallen World's nature to inspire passivity and disunity, but that's not *human* nature. Humanity is the flower of Creation, with boundless potential and an instinct to look beyond what's possible. The order believes the dissonance between the Lie and human souls creates spiritual unease, especially in mages, who are more sensitive to the situation than anyone else. Mages have powerful dreams but live in a world that punishes them. Too many Awakened fall into a deep melancholy after they climb their Watchtowers. Some théarchs liken it to postpartum depression, because, like new mothers, sorcerers cope with the fallout of a radical change in their lives brought about by an intense, creative act. Others compare it to a mid-life crisis, because

after they Awaken, many feel they've experienced the most glorious moment of their lives. Everything else feels dull and colorless.

These spiritual casualties join an order, learn whatever they must to survive and live day by day, using magic to avoid trouble and win a bit of pleasure on the side. They've been traumatized into a self-centered perspective, so when they gather, they form societies based upon mutual distrust, a bare minimum of cooperation and all the other characteristics that happen to be hallmarks of the modern Consilium system. Mages should be better than the mobs and fraternities they so often emulate. They're demigods, suspended between the Fall and Ascension, joining universes with their souls! The order preaches to disheartened sorcerers. It tells them history's left them with a powerful duty: the roles of prophets and heroes in a world that relegates them to legend. Mages exist to make legends real and strip them of the old cautions and controls imposed by generations of Fallen imprisonment. Every mage is a potential Achilles or Merlin who can avoid the arrow to the heel, or Nimue's treachery.

A théarch preacher begins with his charge's problems. He provides as much comfort as he can. He pays a sorcerer's bills, scares away enemies, even offers himself as a lover, all to prepare him for the day he can look past himself to the wider world that needs him. Pure charity isn't the only tactic; some mages need a slap in the face to help them change. They don't get the message until they lose friends, family and even their health. The convert has to adopt the Elemental Precepts to solve his problems. The théarch sees to it. Once his charge feels a little more secure, he delves deeply into Ladder lore. He makes it clear that every mage has to do her part and that together they will find her special destiny. If the order can convert groups of mages all at once, so much the better.

Law and Justice

Mages can't cooperate unless they trust each other. Trust grows out of common customs, when people know what to expect from each other. When trust is a matter of life and death, customs become laws formal enough to clearly state what may or may not be done and severe enough to dissuade those who'd harm the community. The Silver Ladder asserts its right to rule by defending the Consilium's laws. When they fail, the order adheres to an unwritten principle of justice that serves all mages, even if it sacrifices a few of them along the way.

The Lex Magica isn't perfect, but no system is. Laws rely upon rational actors. Nobody can depend upon the law to turn away a killer who isn't afraid of punishment or aware of it when he attacks. In Sleeper society, alcohol, drugs, mental illness and sheer desperation drive crime for this very reason. Mages are susceptible to every one of these problems, though they sometimes manifest in unusual ways. For example, most sorcerers are too disciplined to take the classic route to drug addiction, but they're more easily seduced by any substance with occult properties.

The Awakened can't afford jails or treatment centers, so they use death, exile and certain magical sanctions to enforce community standards. A competent théarch is expected to have an above average understanding of the Lex Magica, including its theories and practical effects on Consilium life, but mages are strange enough people that even newly-Awakened lawyers have trouble comprehending the complete code. Between the intimidating complexity of Awakened law and the practical limitations of a Consilium, some matters fall through the cracks. These do not escape the order's attention.

Outside the law, théarchs campaign for peace and order. They resolve conflicts outside the Ruling Council's scrutiny. They tell the aggrieved parties what to expect from a formal hearing and offer them a better way. They negotiate deals that leave everyone satisfied because they know if their quarrel fell under public scrutiny, they wouldn't like the results. This is a common phenomenon because Ruling Councils often frown on mages who can't effectively settle their own affairs. They punish all petitioners for their incompetence.

Silver Ladder mages arbitrate everything from inheritances to murders outside formal channels but if that won't work it is they who often act as official judges, deciding guilt and innocence on the Ruling Council's behalf. Théarchs are the Lex Magica's best students, so they're often asked to advise the Hierarchy on rulings. Lictors are the order's dedicated judges, but unless they're specifically asked to take the gavel they must limit their work to that which affects Silver Ladder members. Outside the power structure, Ladder members advise people who run afoul of the Lex Magica. Some even act as "defense lawyers" when they believe the accused is innocent or risks disproportionate punishment.

The order tells members to dispense justice with an even hand and blind eye, but this is one rule

théarchs routinely break. The order looks at events on a grand scale; if there's any doubt about the verdict, it goes with the answer most likely to benefit the entire Consilium. It might recommend an inordinately harsh verdict for theft in a Consilium plagued by thieves to warn mages that stealing won't be tolerated. An influential sorcerer might go free if he has the best chance to unite mages against an approaching threat. The order usually considers only these factors when the evidence is too weak to make any other assessment.

These are rare situations, however. For the most part, the order applies the Lex Magica with fairness and sophistication. Its reputation depends upon upholding the rules fairly. Even when a judge sets them aside for the sake of some greater aim, she should produce results the Consilium respects.

Government

The Consilium is a shadow of the dream of unity. The system prevents violence and provides a way for strong-willed mages to compromise. The order would prefer a more formal system, but the Consilium is still an incredible achievement. Through it, Atlantis children meet again and forge bonds that echo the most ancient laws.

The current state of affairs is a philosophical conundrum. On one hand, the order values passionate, independent minds because they're the ones who see through the Lie and can convince others to do the same. It wants to nurture enlightened will and destroy everything that frustrates it. That means treating every mage as a sovereign individual who can't be easily stripped of his freedom. Consilii fit the bill because they generally stay out of mages' lives. They provide a framework for conflict and negotiation, even ways to politely kill fellow sorcerers, but they don't interfere unless somebody wrecks these social arrangements.

On the other hand, Consilii are raucous, cliquish communities that barely pull together against a common foe. The order isn't sure what form Hieraconis' government will take, but most théarchs are pretty sure it won't be the vendetta-filled anarchy that exists now. The order wants to build an Awakened state capable of managing complex situations, even openly ruling Sleepers (though this last goal is a long way off) without unduly stifling the desires of its citizens.

The Blood of the Dragon

When the order gives public talks about reviving an Atlantean state, it usually leaves out one important ancient position: the monarch. Legends say Atlantis had kings and queens who ruled all the orders, though scholars sometimes postulate that the royal "Blood of the Dragon" were only ceremonial overlords, objects of devotion who left governance to other mages. Monarchy is an unpopular concept in the modern age, so théarchs often avoid discussing it at all, but not all of them personally object to reviving the royal line — provided they could find its heirs.

Of all the orders, the Ladder knows the most about the Blood of the Dragon, but even its knowledge is filled with apocrypha. Many believe the royal line died with Atlantis. Nobles stayed with their sinking towers or met their end by Exarch treachery. Some say the Blood *are* the Exarchs, that the royal house betrayed humanity, but the order dislikes the implications of this story because it calls Atlantis' virtues into question. A more positive spin says the Oracles are five siblings of the Blood who have vowed to save the human race. The Merovingian Proximi (see pp. 66–68) claimed they had the Dragon's Blood, but the Ladder doesn't believe them.

Prophecies say the Blood of the Dragon still walk the world as a sixth order, hidden in the shadows of the others. Princes monitor the world's Consilii, waiting for the day that mages prove themselves worthy. They study the secret gifts of the Dragon's Blood — and perhaps they guard a final Watchtower of ultimate Mysteries.

Most théarchs believe the answer lies in the past, with the ancient structure of the orders. The Awakened already have Arrow soldiers, Mysterium scholars and Guardian security agents. Even the Free Council members can find a place once they've been suitably chastened, as jacks of all trades who add a spontaneous, dynamic element to the Awakened state. The Silver Ladder oversees it all, focusing the orders' abilities

upon shared goals. Théarchs were the Voice of the Dragon before, so they should be again. Within the orders, magical ability should determine a mage's status. Mages are supposed to win Imperium for humanity, so it stands to reason that the most trusted sorcerers are those who've personally come closest to that goal. The order knows some Masters are shortsighted and corrupt, but their very existence still challenges the Fallen World and they still know secrets lesser mages can't even imagine.

The human condition is so desperate that théarchs will use any effective tool to encourage political unity. Convocations, stirring speeches and affordable, positive incentives (what critics might call "bribes") are preferred, but they don't always work. Deception, extortion and even assassination are valid parts of the political arsenal, but most Ladder mages use them reluctantly. Many have no need for them and a few have sworn them off completely because they believe the fallout — distrust, revenge and injury to the order's reputation — just isn't worth it. Most caucuses are willing to use dirty tricks in exceptional situations and a few formally (and secretly) split their membership between "honest" théarchs and underhanded operatives.

Blood

The Sleepers Follow

Blood is the occult apex of Water, the element of continuity, flow between times, places and states of being. Human beings are born in Blood, a mother's gift that sustains them throughout their lives. It connects humanity to the world because Blood is an evolutionary descendant of sea water. It carries the history of the Earth across generations. That history has a goal: Ascension. The Silver Ladder encourages mages to lead humanity there. Otherwise, Sleepers would wander in the dark, ignorant of the fact that the world they know is a dull facsimile of what it should be — what they deserve.

The order encourages sorcerers to respect, help and protect Sleepers. It treats every one of them as a potential mage: an apprentice in waiting or someone who will find her power at the end of history, when the Lie falls. If the Silver Ladder didn't love the Sleepers it wouldn't care about guiding them; they'd be just another part of the Fallen World, to be avoided in favor of more enlightened companionship or used as transitory playthings for its base desires. Instead, the order wants mages to

carefully cultivate relationships in which Sleepers and Awakened both benefit, working ever closer to mutual enlightenment.

Mages have more authority *and* more responsibility than Sleepers because they know the truth about the cosmos and Sleepers don't. Mere words can never describe a mage's insights. The gulf can be narrowed only by carefully introducing Sleepers to the secret world, starting with strange coincidences and secret texts and concluding with overt miracles, real occult theory and finally, a Mystery play.

There aren't enough mages to mentor every Sleeper, but even if there were, not every Sleeper can truly comprehend what they would have to teach. Nobody's quite sure what works and what doesn't, but most mages Awaken during some pivotal moment in their lives. It's hard to force the moment and for some Sleepers, it's already passed. They've had their great love, terrible breakdown or brush with death, but nothing happened. Others lack ambition, hope or a dozen other qualities they need to Awaken. Some théarchs believe studying Awakening thoroughly enough will eventually teach them how to enlighten anyone, but most think both destiny and choice have a powerful effect on Sleeper readiness. They might consciously reject Awakening (and if they're only half-sincere, become Banishers) or might not be destined to Awaken in this lifetime. Théarchs still think these people will become Avatars, but it will either take place in another incarnation or they'll rise from the dead at the founding of Hieraconis, when humanity frees them using its collective power.

The diehard majority of Sleepers can still serve the Elemental Precepts in their daily lives. Sometimes the order needs money. It needs someone out of the county jail, or wants a neighborhood rezoned by the city government. The order uses its mundane connections aggressively, driven by the conviction the Sleepers will benefit in the long term even if the immediate situation makes them party to political corruption, fraud or other offenses.

Religion

The order believes Sleepers are its ministry. Mages need to inspire hope, belief in miracles and a desire to test the limits of the Fallen World. The Fallen World is rife with Stag faiths that tell their followers to stay weak. Sleeper religions are not entirely tools of the Exarchs but are more like battlefields for the

souls of humanity. Each side sends its priests and theologians into the fray, conquering a percentage of the religion's doctrine. Sleepers glue the ideas together into ramshackle ways to pray, meditate and consider life's ultimate questions. For countless generations, the Seers of the Throne have promoted the way of the Stag, making Sleepers easy prey for the psychopaths that dominate the Fallen World. The order subverts these "slave faiths" with the concept of personal empowerment and the idea of a higher, truer plane of existence. It's not the only reason Gnosticism keeps infiltrating mainstream religious doctrine, but it is a reason. Gnosticism isn't the truth, but it points the way. This fits the agenda of théarchs who map a gradual path to understanding. They hope to take the flock from traditional religion to Awakening because they believe the process minimizes the strain magic places on the Lie-bound spirit. Otherwise, Sleepers risk traumatic encounters with the Supernal; these might frighten them away from Awakening.

Others advocate quicker, more intense spiritual journeys. They found fringe sects within an existing religion or independent cults. These movements advocate some sort of intense practice. They often build isolated compounds where members completely devote themselves to spiritual matters. Corrupt théarchs enslave their followers, but most such communities don't do any harm and some even show results. Devotees turn into Sleepwalkers and a few even Awaken. The order can't guarantee enlightenment; the best efforts are still half-blind when it comes to cultivating the human soul. But these ashrams, basement temples and rogue churches comfort people even when they don't spark Awakening. The Silver Ladder has a positive message for humanity: suffering is not inevitable, the answers are out there and enlightenment is a right.

Almost every mage has spiritual insights to offer Sleepers but it would be best if everyone preached the Silver Ladder's message. Sleepers have long searched for answers that most mages know. Does the supernatural exist? Mages know it does. Does the soul exist? Most definitely. Is there life after death? Heaven? Hell? Good? Evil? Mages know of Stygia and the Underworld; they've seen the secrets of minds, Astral paradises and realms of horrific torment. Most importantly, mages know there are no absolute secrets — just questions that have yet to be answered by a sufficiently enlightened mind. Every religious experience should point to Awakening; every mage

is a potential priest. The Awakened are the true way to salvation and the Silver Ladder provides the correct doctrine for attaining it.

Politics

Awakened knowledge also justifies political influence — even direct rule. The Ladder uses the term *gnostocracy* to describe the ideal political system. Mages attend to Sleepers' welfare and spiritual development. Learned sorcerers supervise their juniors and Silver Ladder mages direct the other orders according to Star doctrine. Supporters and critics alike have compared it to the society described in Plato's *Republic*. Théarchs are philosopher-rulers who direct an intermediate caste of warriors, scholars and police. They in turn protect the Sleeper populace. The order claims its model is superior to Plato's because the Sleepers are not left to an unenlightened fate. The orders nurture them to Awaken and join the elite. When a critical mass of Sleepers Awaken there's no need for a "worker" caste because magic attends to everyone's needs. One Awakened polity will lift others up. Everyone will Awaken and claim the Supernal Realms.

This isn't going to happen tomorrow. So the order needs to rule by conspiracy. It dreams up enlightened plots designed to engineer harmonious but ambitious societies — especially ones that respect the role of priest and prophet. Théarchs speak approvingly of premodern China, where the emperor was the high priest and merit launched commoners into high offices. They're well aware China's history includes brutal, repressive periods, but that's to be expected — Sleepers ran it. The order loves stories about priest kings and enlightened oligarchies because it believes they've all been influenced by Atlantis' occult echo, a lingering Resonance that still has the power to influence entire nations. Sleeper despots aren't enlightened, so Atlantis' unconscious heirs each have their flaws.

To help Sleepers, mages need to help themselves. Idealism makes way for practical schemes when the situation calls for it. A Silver Ladder caucus might stock a city council with philosophers and friends to enlighten the citizenry, but that doesn't mean it won't use connections to quash criminal charges, avoid taxes or get erased from local files. This is perfectly justified because a gnostocracy needs its mages. Threats to the Awakened threaten ordinary people, too. What will they do without enlightened souls to show them human potential in action? How will they cope with

supernatural danger without sorcerers standing guard? If that means the odd Sleeper needs to suffer so a mage lives, so be it, but théarchs would rather avoid these dilemmas. There are always careless exceptions, but even corrupt mages would rather exploit happiness than pain. It's easier.

Secret Societies

The world is a prison with secret guards — so secret most of them don't even know they are guards. The Seers of the Throne are the exception; they monitor the Lie, maintaining its toxic belief systems against the Sleepers' surviving instincts for liberty. The entire system might crumble without them, but who knows how long that would take? For the most part, governments, churches and businesses oppress humanity out of ignorance. To attain power, each needs to construct ideologies and strategies that accommodate the Lie. They need to justify their existence. In doing so, they find new ways to convince humanity of its essential powerlessness. These organizations aren't necessarily malicious,

but if they know anything about magic, it's little more than rumor and distorted legend. The highest levels of every organized power are filled with amoral personalities because the structure of things makes their madness an asset. Fear, scarcity and suffering are the Fallen World's strongest characteristics, so organizations use them to maintain power. They help divide the world into haves and have-nots, Stag-followers and Lion-followers.

The world needs ideological counterweights: conspiracies that assert humanity's divinity and help mages across the world. Théarchs call them the Cryptopoly. The order founds fifth columns inside powerful organizations. It formulates plans to take over government agencies and key economic sectors, but these don't have much of an effect on day to day operations. Open world rule is part of the Silver Ladder's long-term agenda but the average conspirator thinks it's a symbolic goal. Cryptopoly is the cornerstone of the order's strategy against the Seers of the Throne, a conspiracy against its conspiracies, but

Exarchs and Other Enemies

The Elemental Precepts are focused upon enlightening humanity, overthrowing the Exarchs and reaching the Supernal Realms. The order's disdain for the Fallen World and its thirst for Ascension narrow its perspective to the point where many threats don't get as much attention as they would in the other orders. The Silver Ladder knows the Abyss and Left-Handed mages are trouble but sees them as aspects of the Fallen state of the world. The attitude is that these problems can't really be solved. Banish a demon and another one will take its place. Kill a Tremere, and someone else will eventually discover his secrets. All these threats will vanish when the order begins the next phase of its campaign to overthrow the Lie (whenever *that* happens) so it's better to concentrate on the order's great dream than get bogged down with relatively unimportant enemies. Besides, the other Atlantean orders can deal with this sort of thing. The Ladder was *meant* to work on a grander scale.

This is why the order has a reputation for poor judgment when it comes to "lesser" problems. It's why the archetype of the power-hungry, demon-cursed wizard fits them especially well. Théarchs really do make deals with demons when they think they can get away with it, especially if they can justify the arrangement as part of a plan to fulfill the Elemental Precepts. Officially, this sort of thing is strictly forbidden, but many caucuses aren't that interested in enforcing the rules unless the mage involved is out of his league. The order's pretty good at knowing its members' capabilities. In fact these deals often don't cause problems. (There wouldn't be stories of deals gone bad if the deals never worked, because if they didn't, who would try?) Success breeds confidence. Combined with the order's disdain for the entire concept of hubris, confidence tempts théarchs to summon and negotiate with entities that are just too smart or powerful to reliably control. The Silver Ladder keeps these lapses a secret to preserve its reputation, but when this fails, it asks the other orders to help clean up the mess. It's embarrassing, but at least it fosters a stronger Awakened culture. When théarchs owe outsiders favors it improves the ties between orders. It's hard to ignore people who owe one a favor.

its most important practical role is to funnel power and privilege to connected théarchs. Cryptopoly's a common subject for the order's critics, and rightly so; mages inside the conspiracy often devote time to their own enrichment over Blood's ideals.

Praxis: When the Dragon Speaks

The Elemental Precepts define the order's goals. There's no vague prattle about conflicting occult energies, the secret nature of knowledge or Abyssal metaphysics. Mages know the cosmos' basic nature and must pursue the higher Mysteries through direct experience, including quests, experiments and great works. All worthwhile knowledge comes from revelations saved from the jaws of the Lie. These don't just come from dead texts or strange encounters, but the inmost stirrings of a soul who acts on behalf of the entire species. The ideal théarch is no martyr; self-sacrifice is a strategy, not a virtue. She loves magical power, wealth and political clout because these things all give her the power to act on compassionate sentiments. When she's wealthy, she invests in charities. When she's powerful, she lifts up allies with her into key positions in government and business. When she learns powerful spells, she uses them to help humanity and destroy its enemies. Mages cannot beg for liberation from the Fallen World. They must take it by force. Nothing less than total liberation will suffice. Call it arrogant, accuse the order of "hubris" even. What could be more arrogant than believing that one day humanity will cast down the Exarchs and raise a universal nation over their ruined thrones?

Actually, there is one thing more arrogant than the dream: the plan to make it reality. The Exarchs should be afraid; the Silver Ladder's coming for them, armed with absolute conviction, ready to reverse the ancient formula of hubris. The gods have overstepped their bounds, and the hand of Man will issue their doom.

Convocation

The world must be seized on many fronts: souls, nations, Arcana and secret places are all assets in the struggle. Convocation is a strategy designed to fill a critical requirement in the order's great plan. Convo-

cations unite a shattered Diamond beneath the Silver Ladder's Star. Convocations gather théarchs from multiple Consilii to coordinate policy. They're also a forum for mages from any order to share their opinions. At least one deacon from each participating Consilium must attend, but the order encourages other théarchs and delegates from every order to join them.

Convocations are formal affairs, conducted with all the sober ceremony of parliaments, senates or religious conclaves. Their traditions can change at different times and places, but once they're approved by the ruling Magisterium they're set in stone. Magisters consult Atlantean legends, Fallen history and local custom to construct Convocation rituals, but that in no way affronts their solemnity. The key Western reference is a document called the *Secret Charter*. Copies that date back to the 12th century refer to still-earlier versions and claim ultimate authority from (as one English version states) "God and His Unvanish'd Isle." It appears to be some sort of treaty, where signatories (identified by Atlantean sigils, not names) agreed to hold Convocations under the terms and conditions the order embraces today, "Until the End of Tyme."

The Silver Ladder knows Awakened customs change from country to country and that for all their pride of heritage, mages rely upon local beliefs to help them understand their past. There is no genuine, complete Atlantean precedent for Convocation rites, but even so the order's synthetic, modern gatherings must be respected. They're proto-councils for the Awakened Nation to come. Unless they're treated as such, participants won't take them seriously. Scorn damages mages' will to unite and interferes with a Convocation's occult significance. The order believes customs serve a mystical purpose by building a specific Resonance and a strong sympathetic bond between delegates. Therefore, while the following guidelines apply in most of Europe and the Americas, local preferences flavor them. Elsewhere, théarchs use divergent customs but are just as strict about respecting them. Most Magisteriums appoint delegates to tell newcomers about the exact rules they're expected to follow.

Convocation Fundamentals

There are two types of Convocation by schedule and four by size. By schedule, there are Ordinary Convocations that take place in a specific year during an equinox of the Magisterium's choice, and Extraor-

dinary Convocations form whenever a Magisterium believes it necessary. An equinox meeting symbolizes unity and the old celestial ladder: reminders of what was and what will be when the Ladder wins the world. In the modern era, Extraordinary Convocations grow more common and some théarchs call Extraordinary Convocations at regular times that still defy tradition. In such cases, protocol demands that the Magisterium hold its Ordinary Convocation anyway, but these tend to be sparsely attended compared to their “Ordinary Extraordinary” counterparts.

When théarchs classify Convocations by their size and territorial scope this determines how often Ordinary Convocations should gather and in any scheduling conflict, which merit attendance. They are:

Least Convocations: Least Convocations unite delegates from at least two Consilii. These are usually neighbors but some are between “Sister Consilii” that have a history of cooperation that transcends geography. Some caucuses rotate Least events between several neighbors or issue invitations based upon the current diplomatic situation. In the latter case, the invitation either demonstrates the caucus’ approval or signals a problem so serious that a formal meeting is in order.

Ordinary Least Convocations occur annually. They’re usually the friendliest Convocations because of their frequency, more intimate atmosphere and because member Consilii usually have ongoing common concerns. For example, delegates from Newark and New York City have always traded friendly insults and argued over the economics of maritime shipping, but their Convocations haven’t led to bloodshed in 35 years.

Lesser Convocations: Lesser Convocations gather delegates from at least three Consilii (usually more) who share a large region or an important history. In the US, Lesser Convocations tend to cluster around one or more geographically contiguous states — multiple states with small populations, or a single state with a large population. California, Texas and Florida have two Ordinary Lesser Convocations each. Many Ladder members who live in New York State believe it’s past time to add another Lesser Convocation to its roster, but a combination of apathy and rival political interests prevent it thus far.

Ordinary Lesser Convocations occur every three years. These gatherings tend to be raucous and rife with inter-delegate espionage. Théarchs debate rival interpretations of the Elemental Precepts. Deacons finalize backdoor deals with the sorts of people to

whom they’d never talk were they members of the same Consilium. Lesser Convocations usually finish with a loose resolution to uphold a peaceful alliance and work toward some abstract mission, such as eradicating Scelesti cults or training more apprentices. More specific agreements are rare and usually born of necessity. For example, in 1989 the Great Lakes Magisterium agreed to forbid mages from entering Chicago for the purpose of discovering Atlantean Artifacts because the city was mired in violence and confusion over the legendary Celestial Flange (see **World of Darkness: Chicago**). The damage had been done and the worst excesses were over, but so-called “Flange Fever” had spread far past the city limits. Opportunistic latecomers threatened to blow the whole thing open again.

Great Convocations: Great Convocations are supposed to meet every five years, but there hasn’t been a bona fide meeting of this caliber since 1900. Even before then, Great Convocations were never as frequent as they were supposed to be.

The 1900 European Convocation might not have met if it weren’t for the Free Council, its great war against the Seers of the Throne and the epochal shift in Awakened politics. It would surprise the average, modern Libertine that the Silver Ladder played an important part in this order’s rise to power. Many Consilii wanted to treat the Council the way they’d always treated its members: as a rabble made of idealistic communards, rogue scientists and errant cultists. The Great Magisterium of Europe encouraged European mages to recognize the new order. The rest of the world followed its lead. This exemplifies the power of a Great Convocation. It’s why the order wants to see them revived — but it’s why successive attempts have failed, too. Many Consilii resented the Free Council’s rapid integration into the system but couldn’t ignore the combined political clout of Convocation delegates. Ever since then, Great Convocation attempts have been fraught with difficulty as member Consilii try to swing future proceedings in their favor.

The last serious attempt at a Great Convocation was in LA, during the spring of 2000. Millennial hype overrode the usual politicking. Unfortunately, the Seers of the Throne got wind of it. They assassinated Magister Antitherion, Deacon of Los Angeles. This ruined confidence in the gathering, reducing it to a skeleton crew of junior delegates with no particular clout. The sting of failure faded over the intervening years and there’s serious talk

of 2010 Great Convocations in Paris, Hong Kong and Seattle.

Grand Convocations: It's supposed to happen every seven years but, of course, never has. The order doesn't waste a lot of time campaigning for the Grand Convocation because it knows that without regular, effective Great Convocations, a Grand Convocation will be a sham. Some believe there will be no Grand Convocation until the brink of a great battle with the Exarchs. After that, it will be the revolutionary committee that controls the world, commanding it to restructure itself under Awakened rule. A more mystical view says the Oracles will convene the Grand Convocation in dreams. There are théarchs who want a practical Grand Convocation, but the idea has such a pie in the sky quality that it embarrasses many mages to talk about it in public.

Modern théarchs campaign for transnational Convocations based upon a region's particular characteristics. The 1980s saw proposals for Free World and Socialist International Convocations but these never got anywhere. In modern times, proposals for hemispheric, Developing World and G8 Convocations are frequently proposed. They may yet coalesce into new traditions, but without some pressing need that's specific to mages these ideas drift in political limbo.

The Magisterium

Every Magister is a deacon, but not all deacons are Magisters. Together, they form the Magisterium: the Convocation's supreme Council. Least Convocations have small Magisteria, often composed of the only two attending deacons. Tradition encourages the Magisterium to have at least one member of each Path, but smaller gatherings don't have the numbers to permit it. There are honorary Great and Grand Magister titles given to deacons who've served the order with special distinction, though technically these are meant for mages who actually gather Great and Grand Convocations. There are allegedly a few real Great Magisters left from the European Convocation of 1900, but these supercentenarians are said to be either bedridden and senile, or have cracked the secrets of Archmastery and hidden themselves away.

The Magisterium has total authority over the Convocation, its hosting Consilium and every visiting

delegate. Well, Silver Ladder tradition says it does, at least. The reality is that even though participating Consilii rarely contest the Magisterium's authority, the Magisterium usually leaves existing arrangements alone. If pressed, the body issues warrants and punishes mages, but it's a risky move. If the other orders object strenuously enough, it sets back the order's reputation. Convocations have hosted executions but these are always exceptional events, used to answer a gross offense or clear away opposition to an important agreement.

Despite mutual compromises, the issue of competing sovereignty is prickly enough for some Ruling Councils to move the Convocation to neutral ground, outside the Consilium proper. Technically it's the Magisterium's call, but the Council's will is never contested. In Boston (see **Mage and Boston Unveiled**) the ruling Ebon Noose cabal has used this trick for ages. Even though the Noose runs Salem, it claims that for Convocation purposes it isn't Boston Consilium territory — something any Awakened Bostonian would tell you is thin reasoning.

The Magisterium makes decisions by vote; at least two-thirds must agree for any ruling to pass. In two-Magister Least Convocations, this means consensus. The custom extends deliberations and forces Magisters to make compelling arguments for their positions. Modern Magisters often appeal to delegates for support so they can claim a pragmatic mandate. The order may not believe in democracy, but it knows when a majority of mages express a preference about something, a smart politician should incorporate it into his stance.

Magisters set the agenda, lead rituals, mete out justice and declare policies that are supposed to affect all participating Consilii. Whether they in fact do the latter depends upon the Silver Ladder's power in a given Consilium, but as the order usually has quite a bit of pull, Magisterium rulings are often worth heeding.

Other Officers

Magisters appoint other delegates to serve in various capacities. Some win time honored offices; others, ignoble chores. Junior théarchs deal with catering and visitors' lodgings. This is unusually challenging when important guests are paranoid about sympathetic magic, vengeful ghosts and ley

line nexuses — especially when they're *right* to be paranoid. The custom is to call these minor functionaries *pages*. Every Convocation has at least one and larger events boast a handful.

Aside from the Magisters and pages, other positions can be filled by members of any order. The Silver Ladder wants all mages to feel a sense of participation because it legitimizes the Convocation. Least Convocations rarely feature the full slate of positions. Fewer positions do double duty or Magisters do their jobs themselves. The other traditional positions are:

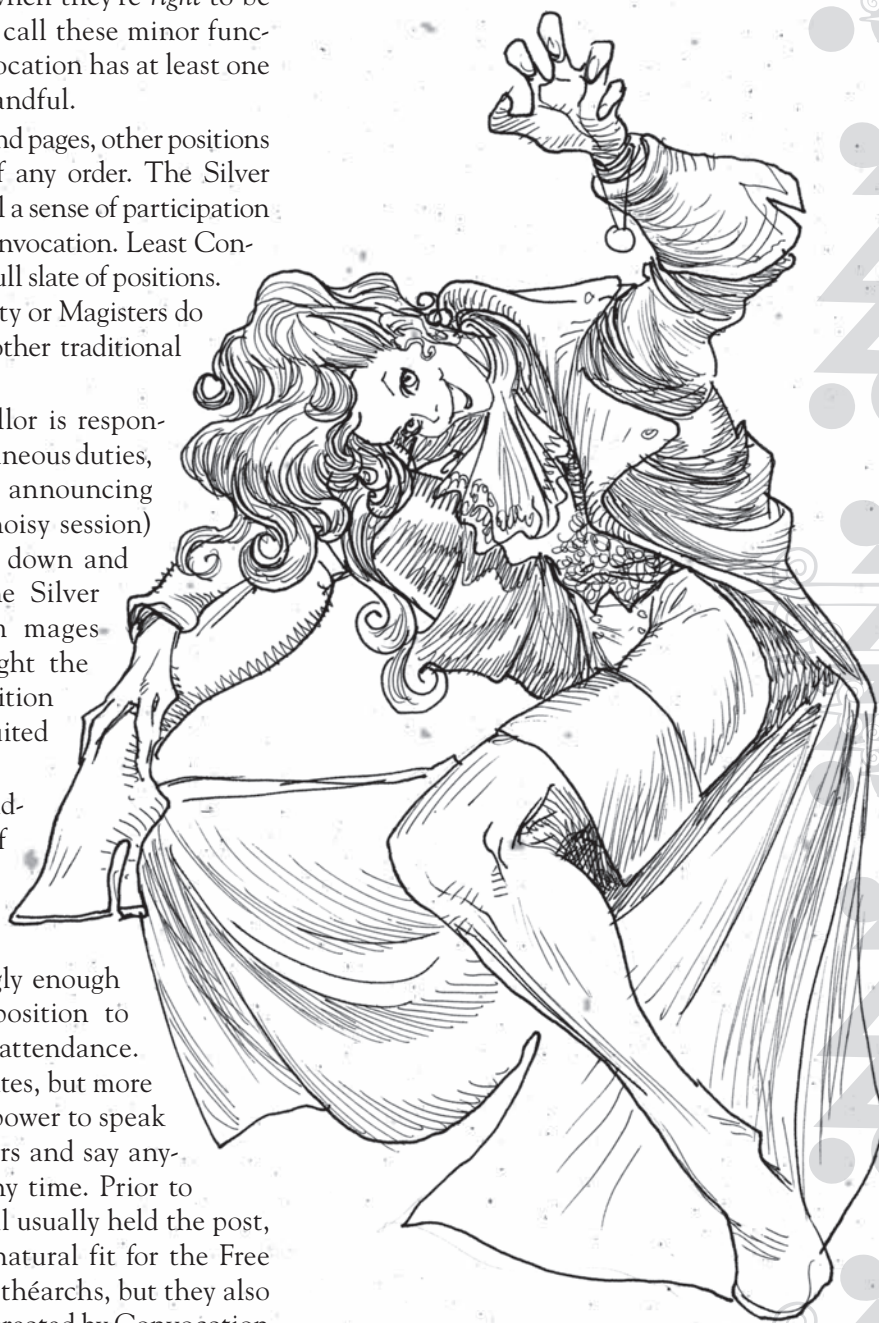
Chancellor: The chancellor is responsible for a number of miscellaneous duties, including directing pages, announcing the agenda and (during a noisy session) compelling delegates settle down and speak in proper order. The Silver Ladder prefers Mysterium mages for this position. It's thought the scholar order's taste for tradition makes its members best suited for the job.

Harlequin: The Silver Ladder would love to get rid of the harlequin's office, but the *Secret Charter* clearly lays out the need for such a position — and annoyingly enough says it must be the last position to be eliminated due to low attendance. Harlequins entertain delegates, but more importantly they have the power to speak out of turn, heckle Magisters and say anything else they please at any time. Prior to 1900, a Guardian of the Veil usually held the post, but since then it's been a natural fit for the Free Council. Harlequins annoy théarchs, but they also release some of the tension created by Convocation ritual and procedure.

Orichalcum Stick: Sometimes called the Sergeant at Arms, the orichalcum stick (often shortened to just the Stick) is the Magisterium's bodyguard and the chief security officer for the entire Convocation. She uses force at the command of a Magister, chancellor or on her own initiative, but an intimidating glare is often enough. When necessary, she expels unacceptably rude or violent delegates. The Stick signals the opening and closing of business by carrying the Convocation's ceremonial mace (see sidebar) to and

from the venue. Adamantine Arrows almost always hold this position, but are always selected less for their personal fighting ability than their personal demeanor. If the Magisterium approves, the Stick may have deputies to command as well.

Scribe: The scribe writes down everything that happens during the Convocation. Tradition says the scribe can't alter or omit any detail but can be asked to make corrections by a Magister or the chancellor. The reality is that some of these "corrections" are



driven by vanity or political concerns. The scribe is obligated to provide copies of the official record to all attending Consilium Heralds. For this reason, she's usually a Herald herself. The Silver Ladder prefers mystagogues for this job.

Talionist: The talionist metes out punishments at the Magisterium's command. Some regions provide a ceremonial sword to anyone holding this position — and some of those are rusty and stained from old blood.

Talionists are permitted to perform any punishment without fear of retaliation, so long as it proceeds from a legitimate judicial ruling, but to be on the safe side the order often employs an interfechor from the Guardians of the Veil.

Protocol

With the help of its staff, the Magisterium secures a large private venue. Delegates usually arrive the day before the Convocation's scheduled beginning. Some mages do most of their politicking then and use the Convocation to give their arrangements some kind of official standing after the fact.

The next day, all delegates are expected to attend the Rite of Convocation. The details of the ceremony vary from place to place but always include a formal procession of officials, ending when the orichalcum stick places the Mace of Convocation on display and stands at attention. At this point, the chancellor lays out the day's agenda.

By default, discussion takes place in a "fishbowl"

format; Magisters debate the issue at hand in public and have no obligation to allow other speakers (though the harlequin interrupts them freely). In practice this is rarely done. Instead, each Magister calls for one delegate in turn. Magisters can either pick a delegate (or a class of delegate based upon Path, order, magical ability or some other requirement) or prompt the chancellor to go to the next name on a speaker's list. The focus moves from Magister to Magister (or delegate to delegate, at the Magister's command) until the matter has been thoroughly discussed. After that, the Magisters vote. If they fail to reach the necessary two-thirds majority, they'll open a new round of discussion.

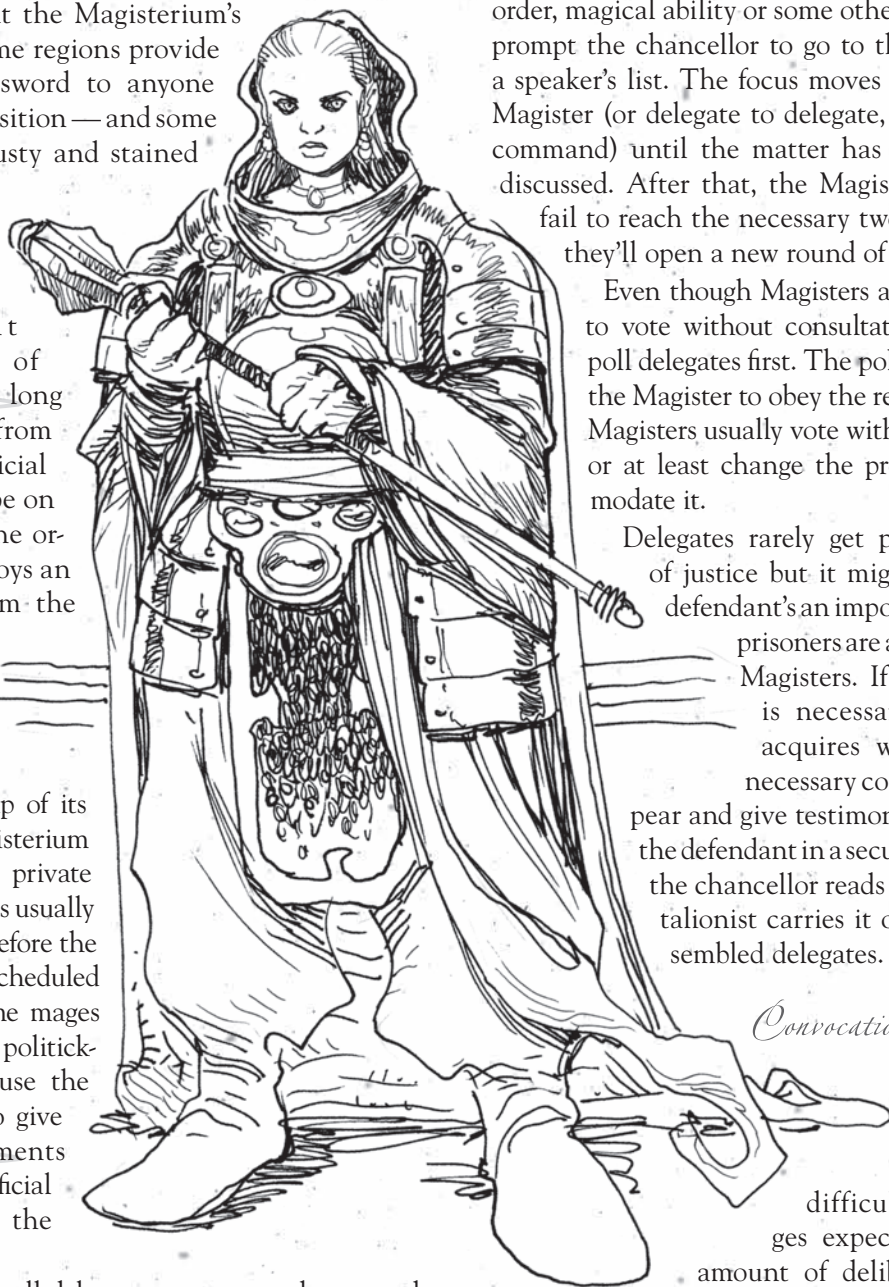
Even though Magisters are legally entitled to vote without consultation, they'll often poll delegates first. The poll in no way forces the Magister to obey the results, but modern Magisters usually vote with the poll winners or at least change the proposal to accommodate it.

Delegates rarely get polled in matters of justice but it might happen if the defendant's an important figure. Most prisoners are at the mercy of the Magisters. If an investigation is necessary, the talionist acquires witnesses (and if necessary compels them to appear and give testimony) and imprisons the defendant in a secure location. Once the chancellor reads the sentence, the talionist carries it out before the assembled delegates.

Convocation Days

In the old days, Convocations lasted for weeks.

Travel was more difficult then, so mages expected a significant amount of deliberation to take place in exchange for having to ride, walk or encorcel their way to a foreign Consilium. Modern gatherings take place over a few days. Some even last a single day, but these are unusual and normally occur during an Extraordinary Convocation, when delegates gather to do one thing and get on with their lives. Contemporary tradition divides an ideal Convocation into six days, with each devoted



The Mace of Convocation

The Mace of Convocation represents the Atlantean monarch. All Ordinary Convocations have one. The senior Magister stores it away between sessions. It's a heavy ceremonial weapon that's four to five feet in length. Most Maces have an elaborately sculpted head of precious metal inlaid with jewels, though a few Convocations have simpler examples, variations from other cultural traditions. Most Maces are not real close combat weapons. If violence is imminent, the Stick carries the Mace between potential combatants as a warning. Enchanted Maces are common, however, so the Stick might have its powers to command. As a general rule, the bigger the Convocation is, the fancier its Mace will be. Old Great Convocation Maces are eagerly-sought items, but most have been lost, including the one used in 1900.

The Mace's presence determines whether or not Convocation is actually in session. The Stick lays it on a table in public view at the beginning of every session, and carries it out at the end. In the epoch-shattering event that a legitimate King or Queen of Atlantis ever shows up, protocol orders the Stick to cover the Mace because its function is redundant. Technically, a Convocation can't proceed while the Mace is absent because if it wasn't around, the proceedings would not have the "monarch's" approval. Dishonoring the Mace is considered to be the same as dishonoring the person of the monarch, and as such carries with it brutal punishment. Nevertheless, Libertines and other assorted malcontents steal the Mace from time to time. The Magisterium pulls in favors to recover it, or as a last resort consecrates a new one.

Some Convocations have other ceremonial items: Talion Swords, Chancellors' Orbs, even Harlequin Masks. In distant regions where traditions deviate greatly from the Euro-Western standard, the array of items (and the positions themselves) may be entirely different.

to a particular issue. Most Convocations are actually shorter than this, but cover each day's subject regardless. The custom is to declare a new "day" when it's time to discuss the next category, even if each one lasts only a few hours. The Convocation days are:

Day of Silver: This day concerns Silver Ladder delegates. They discuss common policies and other internal issues. This day is divided into two segments. In the first, the Stick ejects delegates from other orders along with all other Convocation functionaries. He's allowed to stay but swears an oath not to reveal what goes on. In the second part, the Stick lets everyone back in and the agenda moves on to general political discussion. The order provides a truncated analysis of its own concerns that it's culled from the secret meeting and invites commentary. This rare (if limited) glimpse into the théarchs' agenda prevents other orders from resenting the day too much, but tensions are often a bit high nonetheless.

Day of Swords: Enemies and dangers dominate this day. When it can, the Magisterium interviews Adamantine Arrow delegates to learn about potential threats. The day is an informal forum about the Arrows themselves. Delegates hold their actions up

to scrutiny but this doesn't always lead to criticism. Indeed, a Convocation's praise is one of the highest honors an Arrow can get from an outsider. The Day of Swords sometimes develops the offense, too, sparking campaigns against entire Seer Ministries or deeply entrenched Abyss cults. Most Days of Swords are less intense, however; they're about analyzing threat patterns and entering enemies' characteristics into the official record.

Day of Scrolls: The Day of Scrolls is a symposium on the Mysteries. At the Magisterium's command, delegates discuss recent discoveries. New rites, treatises and eyewitness reports populate the Magisters' table. The chancellor manages access to these items and keeps a speakers' list. The Silver Ladder wants mages to share information, so the Magisterium offers incentives to the most creative or generous contributor. Prizes include boons from the Silver Ladder, minor enchanted items and grimoires. The Mysterium often takes the lead, so the Scroll's day has become a day to talk about mystagogues, too.

Day of Sleep: The day's name explains its purpose. Traditionally discussions become debates between Guardians of the Veil and Ladder mages. The Guard-

ians concentrate on the Sleepers as a threat on both metaphysical and practical grounds. They say the Sleepers have a bit of the Abyss in them and might poison the Mysteries. The Silver Ladder would rather teach them gradually and with a firm hand so they come to realize how miraculous the world could be. Aside from such debates, mages talk about Sleeper politics and encounters between the mundane and the supernatural.

Day of Justice: The Day of Justice is a time for mages to air formal grievances. The Lex Magica resolves most such disputes before they ever get to Convocation, but when Ruling Council officials, rogues and entire cabals are suspected of a crime, the Magisterium provides a higher authority whose deliberations can be scrutinized by all. Some come to a Convocation hoping for a better form of justice than they'd get from their Consilium or the Duel Arcane.

The Free Council claims this day as its own whenever its delegates bother to show up. It uses the day's theme to challenge traditions by arguing that they violate universal principles of justice. Magisters rarely silence them out of hand but won't tolerate filibustering or insults.

Results

A Convocation has several objectives. The order strives to get its own affairs in order so deacons come away with agreed policies on regional issues and common strategies that deal with the general vagaries of Awakened life. The resulting political harmony is the order's lifeblood. Other orders produce fractious, parochial sects, but Convocations bind Ladder caucuses ever more tightly to fulfill the Star's promise.

After that, Convocations refine the Lex Magica. The Magisterium creates precedents with its criminal and political rulings. These are supposed to apply to all participating Consilii. Many Hierarchs balk at this sort of thing because they don't want to share power with a self-appointed pack of théarchs, but the fact remains that the order is the law's traditional guardian. The Convocation's open format adds authority to its rulings, for any mage can read about the debates and personalities surrounding a particular judgment. Mages are used to taking care of things with private deals, duels and the odd bit of brutal violence, so a well-documented, carefully reasoned judgment

You're Not the Boss of Me!

Mages from any order can attend a Convocation, but as one can see, the Silver Ladder has all the advantages. It runs them all, decides who's right and wrong and even exerts authority over Consilii. Why do outsiders bother with them?

The system is horribly lopsided, but no other order has ever mustered a sustained alternative. The Free Council talks about "Awakened Internationals," but it hasn't exerted the required collective influence in over a century. The Mysterium focuses upon interpersonal ties, Arrows have their oaths and nobody likes the Guardians of the Veil. The Ladder's the only game in town.

It's a *good* game, too. A delegate from another order might not get the ruling she wants, but it probably takes her concerns into consideration. A Hierarch who terrorizes his subjects like some monstrous prince on his own turf is just another Consilium delegate — and if his subjects are brave enough, they can even get him punished for his behavior.

Finally, the Silver Ladder has *vision*. Théarchs are true believers, touting the ultimate positive message. Mages dodge malicious conspiracies and study dangerous enigmas; they have trouble sleeping at night, much less kindling a hope for the future. The Silver Ladder's path offers survival through unity, transcendence through power and not a hint of shame about Awakening. The other orders give their adherents a purpose, but only the théarchs seem to *love* mages.

is uncommon enough to merit attention. Even though the order bends the law from time to time, it conducts Convocations with particular strictness to earn the community's confidence.

Magisterial policy decisions are greeted with less enthusiasm. Magisters distill Convocation Days into loose suggestions ("Consilii should preserve their Heralds' memories against supernatural alteration by using magical operations and legal sanctions") but Ruling Councils pay attention to them only when local mages press for them, they're uncontroversial or they're easy to implement. For instance, Awak-

ened IT workers who'd boost Linux as the de facto platform for Consilium business at the Convocation's command will ignore another order directing a tenth of their e-commerce ventures into funding demon hunters.

Cryptopoly

Inside the order and out, mages think Cryptopoly is a plan for world domination. This isn't true but it isn't exactly false, either. Cryptopoly is a model, an overarching concept théarchs use to manipulate Sleeper society. It prepares the way for Hieraconis, seeding key institutions with people and customs to help mages and hint at the existence of the supernatural. The Cryptopoly's component groups are the scaffold upon which humanity will build a better world. Mages will rule, guiding Sleepers because they must. No one else can to take them to the true gates of power. The Silver Ladder reminds other sorcerers that they don't rule for themselves but to exalt all people. Without that mission, Cryptopoly isn't any better than the Seers' slave cults or the Guardians' Labyrinth or lies. Théarchs form conspiracies that uplift members and outsiders alike.

It's a long, delicate process. Mages know for a fact that if you push Sleepers too hard they can go mad, even turn into witch hunters. Few people Awaken simply because they're told the truth. Not even vulgar displays of power can move a soul unless it wants to be moved. Enlightenment enters like a thief, slipping into a Sleeper's soul stealthily, under cover of a familiar face. It's a trickster that convinces its mark that magic follows from what she knows. It alters the orthodoxy that rules her life until she reaches a point on the very edge of mundane experience and must stop — or step across the Abyss.

Structure

The Silver Ladder believes people (and other intelligent beings) can be divided into functional categories. These aid théarchs who want to recruit allies or defeat enemies, because they can select a catalog of traditional strategies that fit the subject's type. Ladder mages study political philosophies from all eras to sharpen their skills. You'd be hard-pressed to find a théarch who's never read *The Prince* and the *Han Feizi*. Old scrolls and oral traditions record millennia of political analysis within the Ladder it-

self. As a result, no two théarchs will have the same ideas about how to deal with a particular person, but from a broader point of view one can uncover certain trends. Not all Ladder mages recognize the following types. They represent the dominant school of thought, but not the only one. The traditional structure divides humanity into the following roles, from the most powerful to the least.

Mages: Mages should be philosopher-princes, benevolent rulers who teach humankind the true nature of the world and the power it deserves to grasp. When Hieraconis reaches apotheosis, this will be the only type of person in the world. Everyone will Awaken; the Imperium Mysteriorum will be a thought away. The Cryptopoly exists to empower mages who believe in the Silver Ladder's ideals. Other orders cultivate private cults and selfish rackets, but the Ladder's conspiracies are open to any sorcerer who'd use them to help Sleepers.

One of the order's most difficult tasks lies in teaching mages to be responsible leaders. Most mages believe in the false choice between Stag and Lion. When offered temporal power, they either meekly refuse it or leap headlong into corruption. Théarchs teach the Sage's way to anyone who'd use the Cryptopoly. They appeal to a sorcerer's pride. Most are a bit arrogant, so it's the best way to manipulate them. A smart théarch draws that quality out — turns the pretentious Stag into an honest Lion — and then cages the beast by teaching the moral obligations that come with power. She might offer an Adamantine Arrow a security firm to run. He can lead the employees through all the brutal drills he desires, as long as he can tell the théarch *why* he wants to train them in a certain way and what he hopes to accomplish with disciplined, armed Sleepers — and what Sleepers are getting out of the deal.

Hiereoi: A Hiereos is a Sleeping philosopher or priest. He provides religious comforts, practical rules to live by or complex theories about the world. Sometimes he's not ordained or schooled at all but has an introspective nature. Whatever the reason, other Sleepers go to him for guidance. They listen to his sermons, read his books and confess their sins to him. He's usually *wrong* about the nature of things but that's not his fault; the Lie is all he knows. Most of them follow some variation of the Stag. They call it the true morality, God's command, even "rational self-interest." Radicals espouse the Lion's way for shock value but rarely practice what they preach. Hiereoi are the most

important people in the Fallen World after mages. They create their societies' ideological structures. Change their minds and you change a thousand, even a million others.

After identifying a Hiereos, the first thing to do is correct his errors. This is something of a challenge; most have powerful faith or well-rationalized beliefs. The théarch gradually introduces the Sage and Supernal ontology, but when she encounters too much resistance, it's time to batter it down with carefully selected miracles. The mage feeds the poor, destroys an immoral person the Hiereos hates — anything the subject desires, as long as it would be a moral act in and of itself. As much as he devotes himself to a higher ideal, a Hiereos is a creature of flesh and feeling. If his beliefs can't be argued away, bribe him to abandon them. Once the théarch's won a conversion, she tells him to spread the message to his own flock, carefully altering his position so other Sleepers won't think he's betrayed his faith or school, but that he merely found a new way to think about it.

Technoi: Technoi are Sleepers who have practical expertise. They're physicists, IT team leaders, historians and car mechanics — anybody with a high level of skill in a mundane field. Technoi play with the Fallen World's rules but can't break them. This frustrates them all, but not all will say so. They point to failed experiments, lousy tools and factory defects — aspects of the Lie that limit human power. Within these boundaries Technoi shape their world, forging the tools politicians use to impose their will upon the world. Experts and their works define what people believe is possible. That's why the order needs to recruit them.

Let a Technos realize her impossible dreams. Lead historians to secret documents; give engineers perfect materials for their projects. Teach them a bit of the truth about each gift. Couch early explanations in familiar language. Learn science to justify magic first, but when Technoi commit to the cause, reveal the occult.

Polemarchs: Polemarchs direct the masses. They're surprisingly low priority targets for recruitment because their efforts depend upon others' competence. They organize excellence — they do not *create* it. Whenever possible the order influences politicians and business figures through their advisors. When the priests, poets and craftspeople are of one mind, it's hard for their leaders to disagree.

To tell the truth, most théarchs hold Polemarchs in contempt because they're sad shadows of the Awakened leaders humanity deserves. They love venality and status, not true wisdom. Unfortunately, they're an integral part of Fallen societies. No revolution's ever managed to exterminate them. Managers and dictators arise, cockroach-like, from the wreckage of vanquished organizations. Many are dedicated Lions because the Fallen World rewards that kind of behavior.

Rehabilitating the Polemarchy is a daunting task; théarchs attempt it when they've already compromised the leader's inner circle or can't find another way to influence an organization. The Silver Ladder uses severe methods because it has to "humble the Lion:" teach him that pure selfishness will be his downfall. A théarch reduces the CEO of a multinational to a raving homeless wreck in a matter of days — and raises him back when he proves he'll be generous to his inferiors and loyal to the Ladder. If he agrees to join the Cryptopoly he's rich again, and knows his masters will destroy him if he goes back to his old ways.

Stratiotoi: Mob enforcers, cops, soldiers — they're all Stratiotoi. They use violence and threats to enforce the rules. Violence follows from rules of engagement, codes of honor or formal investigations, but none wash away the shadow of brutality, even when it's only a threat. There's no police without prison and truncheon, no peacekeeping force without arms. Stratiotoi aren't necessarily violent people, but take professional pride in their ability to use violence according to a code. The contradiction between their pride and the horror of violence weighs heavily on them. They take comfort in camaraderie: the thin blue line, omerta, bushido, the flag — symbols, brotherhoods and codes. Even so, the Stratiotoi possess pent-up energy born of the tension between their capacity for violence and the fact that society determines when and where it will be used — not them. Criminal Stratiotoi feel this way because they might be punished by law, while police and soldiers tread lightly between pragmatism and society's expectations. Kill but don't torture him. Interrogate, but don't humiliate.

Théarchs liberate them from society's rules. If a cop wants to get rough during an interrogation, the mage makes sure she can get away with it. Théarchs cover for friendly fire, misplaced corpses and other fallout when a violent act serves a greater

purpose. They appeal to esprit de corps, earn the trust of their targets and indoctrinate them with a new moral code. The Cryptopoly replaces their previous allegiance and tells them when they can use their skills, but it also permits them to exact rough justice on targets their old superiors would never let them touch.

Bardoi: Bardoi are important because they're famous. Movie stars, musicians and socialites belong to this class. They don't need to have any other special qualities. Indeed, théarchs are frequently amazed at the poor quality of people Sleepers admire. Society is a funhouse mirror of what it should be, so its Storytellers play to that twisted reflection. Even transgression is worthless because it just asks Sleepers to move from one foolish point of view to another. Some théarchs make exceptions for artists whose work has transcendental qualities. They're fond of classical musicians, theater as ritual and spiritual themes. It can't be denied that Bardoi are important to any attempt to influence society. Many people know movie stars better than their governments. In the 21st century, information networks make celebrity an omnipresent, infinitely malleable phenomenon.

It's hard to get a handle on Bardoi because there's no prerequisite for fame; people attain it from all walks of life. The Cryptopoly offers to help Bards reach the next level of fame by using its connections with powerful people. Some théarchs intervene directly but few want to play agent or producer for long. They also counsel insecure celebrities. A mage with the right skills can expunge addictions and rebuild fractured confidence, turning careers around. Such people feel as if they've lost their sense of purpose and are as vulnerable to the Cryptopoly as they would be to any other cult. After joining, they serve the conspiracy by adding cryptic hints to their art and interviews. Magic enters the cultural conversation and prepares the masses for a future full of miracles.

Demoi: The Demoi are everyone else: laborers, service workers, the homeless and middle managers — the people one sees every day. It's tempting to think they can serve the order's agenda only in groups, but every Demos has unique talents and social ties. They lack the opportunity, imagination or will to use their abilities to change society. The Lie lulls them into the Stag's victim mentality and keeps them fast Asleep. Fortunately, the situation

also breeds resentment; people at the bottom of the heap scramble for a way up and often Awaken because it's the only alternative left. Enemies treat the Demoi like a faceless mass where every person is interchangeable. The Silver Ladder makes that stereotype its asset. When the great battle for Ascension comes, the Seers of the Throne won't be able to draft foot soldiers from the streets. The Demoi will resist them and flock to Atlantis' ancient banner.

That's the goal, but the reality is the order finds it hard to suppress its elitist tendencies. Théarch strategists say the order should enlist common people by cultivating individual talent and giving it room to grow, but a mage just can't get the same material rewards from a longshoreman as she can from a wealthy executive. It takes time and effort to find what makes an average person tick. It's easier to invoke the mob. Théarchs who explore the bottom rungs of society usually treat it as a religious duty instead of a practical strategy. They spread a bit of hope around, perform simple miracles and tell people there's a better world out there — one they deserve by birthright, not as a reward for doing what they're told.

Terata: Terata are outside the social hierarchy. They're intelligent, inhuman beings like vampires, werewolves and changelings. The order doesn't let these creatures into the Cryptopoly and generally considers them Fallen World aberrations: an embodied error in the world system that proves how arbitrary and flawed it really is. Théarchs hope once humanity reaches a certain level of spiritual awareness it will be able to either exterminate the Terata that threaten humanity or incorporate them back into the untainted, magical main line of the species.

The order makes deals with Terata on a conspiracy to conspiracy basis if it has no other choice. Chapter Three details the order's outlook on particular supernatural creatures.

Advancement

Théarchs make no bones about wanting to accumulate as much influence over worldly affairs as possible. There are no ethical difficulties to consider. Normal human beings don't know enough about the true nature of the world to be trusted with it. They pollute. They believe religions and political theories designed to enslave them. They manipulate those

ideologies to satisfy sadistic urges. Individuals are responsible for their actions, but humanity's general incompetence isn't the species' fault. People are *cursed*, after all. They grope in the dark, so mages must carry a torch for them.

But like a torch flung to someone who's spent a year alone in the dark, human beings are liable to be blinded by sudden revelations. They need to be carefully coaxed to a distant light in slow, considered steps. Ideas are footholds in the dark, whispered by better-illuminated superiors. The allegory describes the basic structure of a conspiracy well, because members use their privilege as a ladder to wisdom. The order showers them with worldly rewards but also gradually reveals why their conspiracy exists.

A Sleeper joins a conspiracy. In the beginning, all she knows is her cell seeks to control an everyday institution. Every conspiracy has a specialty that's usually keyed to members' abilities. Bardoi actors suggest dialogue changes in their latest films. A Technos working for a powerful brokerage firm makes a few key trades and the target corporation's share values crumble. Conspirators don't always know why they're doing these things. The instructions come from several layers up. Besides, they're almost never asked to do anything dangerous and they're always richly rewarded. Actors get better roles; brokers' secret accounts fill with money.

The conspiracy has a rough ideology and some rituals. Low level members chant phrases like, "We work in secret, dark as blood in an unwounded body so that one day the world will know fire." There are secret handshakes and telling pieces of jewelry. Senior members mutter about allied cells and levels beyond their understanding.

Perceptive conspirators notice the rewards for service go beyond anything a normal plot could provide. The plotters are uncommonly lucky. The actor's sister, long a family problem (and PR nightmare) because of her addictions, suddenly drops the needle, completes rehab in record time and says God appeared to her and set her on the right path. The broker gets in a fender bender and misses his plane — and good for him, because it explodes on the runway under mysterious circumstances.

A conspirator who recognizes supernatural influence (*real* supernatural influence — attributing dumb luck to a higher power doesn't count) is ready to move up. She learns a new liturgy and secret signs, and

most importantly how to manage people who were once like her. New secrets make unsettling claims about the world. They say there are rival conspiracies that keep humanity in bondage. At the middle rank, she learns her cell doesn't just accumulate power; it counters the enemy's plots. Her superiors allude to *their* masters: enlightened miracle workers devoted to helping humanity. Her new supervisors — the Illuminated — are eccentrics. Some might even be insane. If she knows their real names she might recognize nobles, old money — even lines that were said to have been extinguished in wars and revolutions.

In the middle, a conspirator rises through various ranks and duties. Each one adds more pieces to the puzzle. Illuminates order her to read strange books on the occult. They describe lost cities and outline an "Elemental Pilgrimage." The Silver Ladder's social model trickles down but she doesn't yet know who the "Magi" at the summit are. This helps them identify and recruit potential conspirators, if an Illuminate approves. She learns the difference between a Bard and a Technos. The Illuminated put her through severe ordeals designed to test her creativity and determination. The broker wakes up in the desert with just enough food and water to hold him until he finds his way back to civilization. The actor has to impersonate a mob consigliere, get his boss to a quiet place and put a bullet in his brain. If they fail (and survive) they won't rise any higher. Illuminates assign them simpler duties and reward them well enough but will never tell them the whole the truth.

The Illuminated

The truth is a reward for the most willful, perceptive conspirators. It begins with a sign — *the* Sign. One of the masters introduces an anonymous figure: a théarch who directs the cell from afar. He casts a gloriously vulgar spell. An Atlantean rune made of floating fire is common but Ladder mages also make statues dance, summon ghosts into plain view or give candidates treasures plucked from their own dreams. After the Sign, the nameless mage and her masters interrogate the candidate about what she saw down to the slightest detail. If she perceived the Sign accurately, she becomes an Illuminate. If not, she might get tested again in a few years, but if she fails three times, she's finished rising through the ranks.

If she sees the Sign, she's ready for magic. She's either Awakened, a Sleepwalker or possesses a will powerful enough to reveal the truth. Awakened members fall under the personal control of a théarch; they begin the Elemental Pilgrimage. Sleepwalkers are often Proximi: bloodlines with magical abilities the Silver Ladder has cultivated since before memory (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 334). Proximi Dynasties are often fast-tracked to Illumination once they show evidence of their line's gifts.

The rest receive direct counsel from the caucus that has always ruled their particular conspiracy. The examiner reveals his Awakened status. She learns of Atlantis and knows its true heirs — the Pentacle's children — are enlightened beings. She should obey her controllers' will first — other Pentacle mages come after that.

An Illuminate knows about allied conspiracies: the network that forms the Cryptopoly. The Illuminated cooperate when they want to dominate large corporations, governments and even religions. They win privilege for conspirators and mages, use it as their masters wish and destroy enemy plans. The most dangerous opponents are the Seers of the Throne, but they aren't the sole focus of the Cryptopoly's attention. Vampires have their blood addicts; Abyssal demons take slaves. Competing Pentacle operations get in the way. One is called the Labyrinth; it spreads disinformation to its own members. Another is a false front for an order of passive scholars. There are chaotic clubs of radical mages and their Sleeping friends. The Cryptopoly isn't allowed to harm members of these organizations, but it can interfere with lies, tip off the authorities and otherwise hinder them.



Cryptopoly Design

To design a Cryptopoly cell, begin with a name, ideology, practical goals and esoteric goals. Choose a group of théarchs to lead it. This will usually be the local théarch caucus cabals, and even powerful individuals have started cells of their own. A few conspiracies are "orphans;" their ruling mages died or abandoned them. Most die in short order, but a few mutate into strange cults. Some of these find new, sinister masters. Some conspiracies bounce between caucuses and even orders.

Boston's Golden Dawn (see **Mage**, p. 372) is an excellent example. It started as part of the Guardians' Labyrinth. Part of it turned into a Cryptopoly society, but that collapsed along with its parent when the Free Council subverted the whole thing. You don't need to start with an origin quite so complex, however. A name, ideology, goals and controller will do.

Example: Boston's Sisterhood of the Triple Moon is a neopagan conspiracy attached to the Nemean and his Ebon Noose. It believes

the Hierarch of Boston is a god who is prophesied to raise his servants to divinity. Its practical goal is to purchase valuable real rural estate, especially around ley lines and supernatural phenomena. Its esoteric goal is to guard strange places for the use of mages alone.

Every cell is headed by at least one Illuminate. An Illuminate is a 5 dot Retainer who serves his supervising caucus. The entire Ladder caucus can pool its dots to add Illuminates to its collective assets. A single Illuminate comes in three varieties. There are Awakened Illuminates, Sleepwalkers and Sleepers with 8 or more Willpower dots. Awakened Illuminates are player- or Storyteller-controlled characters, so only the latter two types can be purchased as Retainers. They are detailed below.

All Illuminates possess 4 dots in the Occult skill and have other exceptional abilities based upon their personal backgrounds. An Illuminate doesn't reach her status without either exceptional mundane talents or magical abilities, so every Illuminate Retainer has either the Sleepwalker Merit or 8 dots of Willpower. Their théarch masters can expect extreme devotion (but not suicidal fanaticism), including full access to their Merits. On the other hand, each conspiracy has a life of its own. No matter how much an Illuminate wants to procure funds and special access for his masters, there are times the appropriate Merits are tied up in conspiracy business.

A basic Illuminate has 10 dots divided among the following Merits: Allies, Contacts, Resources, Status and their own less powerful Retainers. Allies and Contacts usually represent lower-level conspirators. Illuminates who are Sleepwalkers, Proximi or have other Merit-based supernatural gifts must spend some of the allotted dots on their special Merits. Two Illuminates who run a cell together can pool their dots but can't acquire Merit ratings above those listed in the **World of Darkness** core without the Storyteller's consent. We recommend the power of only 6+ dot Merits for exceptionally strong conspiracies — they aren't for beginners. These Merit dots define the cell's characteristics. Spend dots in a fashion consistent with the cell's basic description.

Example: *The Sisterhood's "high priestess" Rowena is a Sleepwalker (4 dots) with Resources (4 dots) earned from real estate development and Contacts (2 dots) with Essex County's local governments.*

The Illuminated can devote Allies dots to the Cryptopoly as a whole, indicating how much pull they have with other conspiracies. They can even take them at a discount by sacrificing autonomous control of their cell. Each dot that's discounted represents an obligation to act as Allies of other Cryptopoly groups. A discount of 1 dot indicates she must share information with these groups regularly. 3 dots could represent occasional material favors, while 5 dots indicate an Illuminate who owes her colleagues regular, extensive access to her own connections and resources. The more efficient the conspiracy, the more integrated it is with others of its kind. These cells sacrifice flexibility for reach.

Example: *The Sisterhood of the Triple Moon is well integrated with other conspiracies. It used to be more independent, but a Convocation rebuked the Nemean*

(and pared down his cell) for forming a conspiracy that reported to him instead of Boston's Silver Ladder caucus. Rowena has Allies (Cryptopoly) 4, but this costs nothing, as other cells can claim 4 Allies dots' worth of obligations from the Sisterhood at any time.

Illuminates help mages from any order, provided they don't ask for anything of which a supervising caucus might disapprove and utter a code word, use a secret sign or somehow indicate they're "enlightened" Pentacle mages. The order teaches the required signs to trusted sorcerers. A desperate, knowledgeable mage can use a Cryptopoly mansion as a bolt hole, borrow a small amount of money or beg other forms of charity. Of course, the ruling Ladder caucus is always informed; Illuminates won't keep secrets from them.

Mapping Conspiracies

To sum up: The Cryptopoly is a system of exerting influence on the Fallen World's institutions. It's composed of individual conspiracies; each one is headed by one or more Illuminates. The Illuminates know their counterparts in other conspiracies. This creates a global network of secret societies. Each one is directed by a Silver Ladder caucus, but trusted outsiders can make use of their resources.

When two caucuses are at odds, the Cryptopoly loses cohesion. Some cells are tightly integrated with others but many are not. Complex structures rise from these relationships. Don't worry about them until you need to add detail, but if you do, consider the guidelines in this section.

For all intents and purposes an Illuminate (or group of them) is her conspiracy; her traits (especially Merit dots) determine its characteristics. Allies (Cryptopoly) dots reflect her cell's connections to others. Divide the dots any way you wish and assign them to other conspiracies. The dots rate the cell's power over others. One cell with Allies (Cryptopoly) 5 has near-total access to one ally. Another conspiracy with the same trait might have 2 dot connections to two different cells, and a minimal, 1 dot connection to a third.

As we stated before, Illuminates can purchase Allies dots at a discount; each dot of discount represents another Cryptopoly group's power over the Illuminate's cell. In effect, these *other* conspiracies have Allies dots with her group as the target. Split the discount between these privileged cells and note the effective Allies dots they can claim with

the original conspiracy. In many cases these will be reciprocal bonds. Two cells might claim Allies 3 with one another, or three conspiracies could take each other as Allies to various (but not necessarily equivalent) degrees.

To represent this visually, draw a box or bubble representing the first conspiracy and draw arrows radiating outward, listing the associated dots beside each. The arrows go to other boxes representing other conspiracies. If other cells can claim privileges from the first cell (represented by the cell's Allies discount), draw arrows from those cells to the first cell. Again, list the dot rating of the connection. Keep in mind that from the perspective of another cell it has the Allies dots. These connections don't have to be symmetric; plenty of cells hold a little something back for themselves and pay full price for Allies that don't come with strings attached.

Once you've established connections, define them. Add a note to each arrow about the nature of its bond. You can lay out some back story here, but if you want to keep it simple just note whether or not the connection is friendly (an enthusiastic mutual alliance), selfish (a pure matter of convenience) or hostile (the result of blackmail perhaps, or an arrangement forced from on high).

Example: *The Sisterhood of the Triple Moon has a mutually hostile alliance with the Bunker Hill Boys: The Boston Silver Ladder's "official" caucus-based community. The bond is the Nemean's punishment for hoarding power. The Boys claim the Sisterhood as a 4 dot Ally and abuse the privilege whenever they can. The Sisterhood has the short end of the stick; it has only a 3 dot alliance to it so can't turn the screws as much. It also has a one way, friendly 1 dot Ally in New Jersey's Spiritual Housing Pact. Rowena lent them startup funds back when her cell was better financed.*

Actions and Connections

Unless someone else is using a cell's Merits, ruling théarchs can take advantage of them. Caucuses should coordinate their actions because a conspiracy can do only so much in a given period. If the Sisterhood of the Triple Moon is investing money in a plot of land at one mage's command, another mage can't ask it to bribe a local official. The fluid cash just isn't there. In game terms, the required dots for an action are occupied until it's been completed.

Other Conspiracies and Systems

You can use the cell system to map Guardian Labyrinth elements, Free Council groups and even secret societies that have nothing to do with mages. All you need is a description, founding Merits (including Merits the Illuminated don't normally have) and the Allies/obligations web.

There's another great **World of Darkness** book all about designing political connections, but it's not for **Mage: Vampire: The Requiem's Damnation City** is full of ways to visualize and resolve political matters.

Just keep in mind that mages aren't as rooted to physical territory (they don't need secure "feeding grounds") and don't have a feudal government. The Consilium is a more anarchic institution that arbitrates as often as it rules.

Alliances also suppress a conspiracy's practical value. Assume Allies dots represent the maximum number of Merit dots of which a conspiracy can request temporary use. The Merits' owners can't use those dots until they've accomplished whatever they were set to do.

Théarchs and their Illuminates can use Allies dots through multiple connections. One cell's immediate allies might not have Status (Police), but if one of them has an Ally with that advantage, the original cell can make a request through the chain. This has a price: it ties up 1 Allies dot for every connection past the first. The request's scope is also limited to the lowest Allies rating in the chain. Each intermediary also loses the use of 1 Allies dot apiece. Relaying a request is easier than making it yourself.

Example: *The Sisterhood needs to get rid of a private investigator who's looking into shady land deals in Essex County. Magical intervention is out of the question; divination reveals the PI has some supernatural ties who might be alerted if the Nemean intervenes. They know the PI drinks and drives so they decide to get him arrested for it. Unfortunately, the cell doesn't have an agent in the state police, but the Bunker Hill Boys know a conspiracy that does: the Web of Roads. It requires only 1 dot of Allies (state police) to get the*

Staties to arrest someone who actually is committing an offense. The Sisterhood ties up 2 dots of Allies when it makes the request through the Bunker Hill Boys — 1 dot for the favor and 1 to make it through the Boys instead of right to the Web. Each cell regains the use of its Merit dots as soon as the police hit the road to make the arrest.

Remember: This is a set of rough guidelines that assume dot for dot equivalence. No cell ever gains or loses dots permanently without some exceptional action (preferably one driven by player-controlled characters). These rules define what a Silver Ladder Cryptopoly cell is capable of at any given time, but not how it evolves over time.

The Silver Dynasties

The greatest Illuminated masters are *Proximi*: members of bloodlines that have been touched by the highest Mysteries. Only gods and Imperial Mysteries can make *Proximi*, raising them from the Lie to a state of grace. Sometime *Proximi* pass their blessings on to descendants. In ancient times these were the bloodlines of mighty kings and theocrats. Their deeds burned bittersweet myths into the Fallen narrative.

Ever since the Fall the Silver Ladder's guarded and commanded *Proximi* allies. Ancient bonds created mighty nations with ruthless laws. *Proximi* god-kings and *théarchs* alike thought they could turn Sleepers' souls heavenward with brute force. Revolts ripped these tyrants from their thrones, so the order helped them to exile. It was time for lesser men to rule — for now. The order bid its *Proximi* — its Silver Dynasties — to aspire to greater things than Earthly kingdoms. They should shepherd the world into an age of Awakened philosopher-kings. The Dynasties would rule in secret, through the Cryptopoly, and learn the secrets of magic from the Silver Ladder. If they worked with the order they might Awaken fully and finally, master the world that cast them down so long ago.

Not all *Proximi* agreed to the arrangement, but many did. The order has more Allies among the Dynasties than any other faction. The order doesn't covet the Adamantine Dynasties, Veiled Dynasties or Mystery Dynasties. It thinks the Free Dynasties are fools, hardly worth the effort of conversion. The order's satisfied with its Silver Dynasties and with few exceptions they love the order in return.

The Silver Dynasties enjoy power in the Cryptopoly — so much so it's virtually a right — and are confident that in a world where all people will one day be kings of their own destiny they'll be kings first. Some complain that their blood, not a mystic Awakening, should confirm the right to rule, but the Silver Dynasties haven't challenged the Elemental Precepts since the Merovingians rebelled over a thousand years ago.

To the order, the Silver Dynasties are evidence that the Imperium Mysteriorum is attainable. They hope more powerful *Proximi* will reveal themselves as the world approaches Ascension. Some *théarchs* believe every human being will become a *Proximus* in the final days, as ambient Supernal power rouses their souls.

Nevertheless, the order doesn't believe *Proximi* are the Awakened's equals — a position that causes friction between the Dynasties and their self-appointed keepers. Silver Dynasty children rebel against the order from time to time. Branches of a Dynasty rarely defy the order's will because they know the Ladder would rather wipe them out than see them wallow in heresy. Opting out of an alliance is permissible, but attacking Pentacle mages, joining the enemy or blasphemy against the Elemental Precepts attracts the Silver Ladder's full wrath. No full family has rebelled since the Merovingians (see pp. 66–68) committed *lèse majesté* against the Atlantean throne.

Birth of a Silver Prince

Not every member of a Dynasty is a *Proximus*. A few families have only one living member with the gift. A few cycle over set generations or arise under special situations. They are seventh sons of seventh sons or kill their mothers when they're born beneath a full, red moon. The most powerful Dynasties have a handful of *Proximi* at a time, but as a rule, the *Proximi* families have more Sleepwalkers than full *Proximi*. (Every *Proximus* is a Sleepwalker, but not all Sleepwalkers are *Proximi*.) They usually discover their Blessings at puberty, but a few have used the family's magic since before they could walk. They learn their innate powers through a combination of instinct and traditional training.

The first manifestations herald the family Curse's arrival. All *Proximi* suffer a Curse. Some say it's because *Proximi* are unnatural, born of meddling on high, attempts to skew humanity's magical development.

The New Proximi

Proximi were designed to be a minor part of **Mage**. They were given only the briefest treatment and next to no rules. This section expands the sparse description, adding enough detail to allow their play, if desired. This doesn't mean Proximi are terribly common, however.

Note that even though groups are called "Dynasties," not all Proximi inherit their abilities. They've been born of alleged alien abductions, intense training under mysterious hermits or exposure to potent Verges. Mages know Proximi can't be created by the lesser Arcana ranks detailed in the **Mage** core book, but aside from that they know little. Still, many Proximi can trace their lineage back to Proximus forebears. The order's Silver Dynasties are family lineages wherein Proximi status reliably transfers across generations.

Théarchs don't believe it; they blame the Exarchs or the Fallen World.

Character Creation Templates

Storytellers will want two sets of guidelines: one for standard Proximi and one for Illuminates.

Basic Proximi

In a game where ordinary human beings are the baseline, the Sleepwalker and Proximus Merits have to be purchased with a character's standard 7 Merit dots. Proximi in most **Mage** games are more potent figures. Their heritage puts them a step above street thugs, hapless reporters and over-curious investigators. If they're smart and experienced, they can even get the drop on an arrogant sorcerer, but when both sides are just as learned and crafty, the mage probably has the upper hand.

If you want Proximi to play this role in your chronicle, add the Sleepwalker and Proximus Merits to the standard human character creation plan (see **The World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 34-35) for free. Proximi can spend their 7 starting Merit dots on Blessings and the Awakened-only Merits permitted them. This puts a starting Proximus on roughly the same footing as a thaumaturge (see **World of Darkness: Second Sight**). A Proximi and thaumaturge

chronicle can be a viable side story or break from your main **Mage** game.

If you want Proximi to have more magical ability right from the start, let them purchase 6 extra dots of Blessings at character creation. Remember that each Blessing costs 1 dot more than the equivalent rote. The fifth dot of a 5 dot Blessings (a 4 dot rote) costs two Merit dots.

Illuminated Proximi

Proximi Illuminates are extraordinary figures: geniuses or veterans in their fields. You might represent this by adding Experience to the basic Proximus template, but it can be quicker to use the following basic guidelines. Anything not listed below uses the standard rules for starting human characters.

Attributes: Use a spread of 8/6/4 for each priority. Remember that the fifth dot costs 2 dots.

Skills: 13/9/5. Once again, remember that the fifth dot costs 2 dots. An Illuminate must possess at least 4 dots in the Occult skill, drawn from the allotment above.

Morality: 5. An Illuminate's responsibilities inevitably lead to moral failings or traumatic episodes, lowering his base Morality.

Merits: Add the Sleepwalker and Proximus Merits for free. Spend 7 Merit dots on any other allowable Merit, including Blessings and the Awakened-only Merits that Proximi are allowed to acquire. These Merits represent the Proximus' personal background.

Spend an additional 5 Merit dots on conspiracy related Merits: Allies, Contacts, Resources, Retainers and Status. Keep these Merit dots separate unless the Proximus combines his personal assets with the Cryptopolis's. If he does, his Awakened masters and allied cells can use them as well, even against the Proximus' will.

The fifth Merit dot costs 2 points in every case.

Game Systems

All Proximi have the Merits Sleepwalker and Proximus, both listed on page 334 of **Mage: The Awakening**. They provide several benefits and drawbacks in addition to those listed in the **Mage** core book.

Mana

A Proximus can store up to 5 points of Mana. He can spend one point of Mana per turn. Proximi recover

Mana from Pattern scouring, gifts, mages or other beings that channel Mana or by performing an oblation at a Hallow. Lacking Gnosis, a Proximus' oblation dice pool uses Composure alone. Every Dynasty has its own oblations, but members can learn others. Proximi can't recover Mana in other ways.

Proximi can perform Pattern restoration as if they were mages. As a side effect of their magical nature, most Proximi live about 25% longer than they would if they were ordinary humans.

Blessings

A Proximus' most potent powers are the so-called Blessings. Blessings are rites a Proximus learns through a combination of intuition and family training. Proximi use smaller dice pools than mages casting the same rites because they don't possess Arcana. For example, a Proximus casting "Influence Light" rolls Intelligence + Occult (or Science, depending upon her upbringing), *not* Intelligence + Occult (or Science) + Forces. Most Dynasties use the same rote dice pools as their allied orders (or other magical traditions) but they don't use and (unless they Awaken) can't learn order-based rote specialties.

Blessings are purchased as supernatural Merits with a cost equal to the rote's level + 1. Every Dynasty has its own Blessings; it may not learn others. It has the potential to access 30 dots worth of these rites, but no single rote can require more than 4 dots in an Arcanum. Blessing rites are tied to the Proximus' inherited Path. The first 20 dots require the Path's Ruling Arcana. The last 10 can belong to any primary Arcanum except for the Path's Inferior Arcana. Blessings are usually well known rites. There have been exceptions; Proximi who Awaken often refine these into rites any mage can use, expanding the breadth of magical knowledge.

Blessings don't grant the ability to use creative thaumaturgy. Only Blessings with countermagic abilities grant the ability to repel enemy magic. Proximi may not augment Blessings with words of power, Atlantean runes or magical tools. Proximi can learn the High Speech but can't use it for magical purposes.

Blessings are less powerful than comparable rites (there's no Arcana rating to boost their dice pools) but do have distinct benefits over Awakened spells. Blessings don't invoke Paradoxes, but Sleepers misre-

member them as if they were true spells. They don't require rote mudras or especially intense concentration, so Proximi don't suffer penalties for using them while grappled (see **Mage**, pp. 111-112).

Unlike mages, Proximi have no innate ability to sense supernatural phenomena. They must possess the Unseen Sense Merit or use a Blessing that grants supernatural senses.

Merits and Privileges

Proximi may acquire the following Merits despite the Awakened requirement: Destiny, Dream, High Speech and Occultation. As previously mentioned, all Proximi are automatically Sleepwalkers; they see magic as it is. Certain innate supernatural abilities do not affect them. A Proximus cannot be incapacitated by the ecstasy of a vampire's bite or driven mad by a werewolf's war form. The Storyteller determines the extent of these immunities, but they should be no more potent than a mage's.

Proximi have Nimbuses, but they're less intense than mages'. A mage who has experience with Proximi can tell the difference between Awakened and Proximi Nimbuses.

The Curse

Every Dynasty has a special Curse. All of its Proximi possess it, as do some Awakened members, but Sleeper or Sleepwalker relatives don't suffer from it. The Curse is a part of the Proximus' soul; no known power can undo it.

Some mages and Proximi believe there's an intelligent force behind the Curse because it also reacts to any attempt to defeat it in *spirit*. Creative work-arounds eventually fail because the Curse changes to counter them. Altered Curses often manifest in particularly twisted and powerful ways. Dynasties hide their Curses to avoid trouble from allies and enemies alike. If a proud sorcerer tries to help a Proximus with her Curse it could lead to terrible things. The Storyteller arbitrates such effects. If several Proximi work around their Dynasty's curse repeatedly, it not only changes, but the changes pass on to future Proximi.

The Merovingian and Priamid Curses are typical Dynasty afflictions. The Priamid Curse is an example of an affliction that's changed over time.

Awakened Proximi

Proximi Awaken more often than most people, but in a different fashion. A Proximus has an inherited bond with a single Supernal Realm. If she Awakens, she usually intensifies that bond, joining her heritage's Path. She retains her Blessings, after a fashion. They become full-fledged rites. They require significant concentration, use mudras and draw Paradoxes as usual. She can even cast them without the required Arcana. She can't learn Blessings after Awakening. She can learn rites with the same effects, but must have the prerequisite Arcana as usual. Awakening replaces her old reflexive power with a deep, enlight-

ened understanding. It gives her more flexibility at the price of a few vulnerabilities.

Proximi rarely Awaken on a Path outside their Dynastic heritage. Exceptions rely upon a moment of powerful, enlightened will to discard their pasts, remaking their own souls. They escape their Dynasties' Curses but lose their Blessings, too. They don't get any advantages to compensate, but at least they're free. Treat renegades like normal, human mages in every way, for they retain nothing of their soul's prior condition. Conservative Proximi hate rogues who reject the family bond — and envy them, too, for escaping the Curse.

Other Transformations

One dubious fringe benefit to being a Proximus is immunity to the vampire's Embrace, blood addiction (and ghoul status) and similar threats from other creatures. When a vampire forces blood into an all but drained Proximus, the result is a dead Proximus. Likewise, no Proximus has ever been twisted by the True Fae, turned into a shapeshifter like a werewolf, or for that matter had body parts successfully incorporated into a Promethean. Proximi corpses do behave strangely from time to time. They don't rot or rot *too* fast. The body disappears when nobody's looking. Mages don't know why these things happen.

Proximi are capable of becoming psychics, thaumaturges and other minor miracle workers (see **World of Darkness: Second Sight**) — and thanks to their heritage they're usually very, very good at it. The power sources, Merits and other benefits of these methods do not combine with Proximi abilities in any way, but a Proximus can help them accumulate magical knowledge.

The Silver Ladder discourages these studies. To théarchs, lesser magic is just another science, a tool that plays with the Lie but never challenges it. They believe minor magicians destroy their ability to Awaken. The Storyteller decides whether or not this is true.

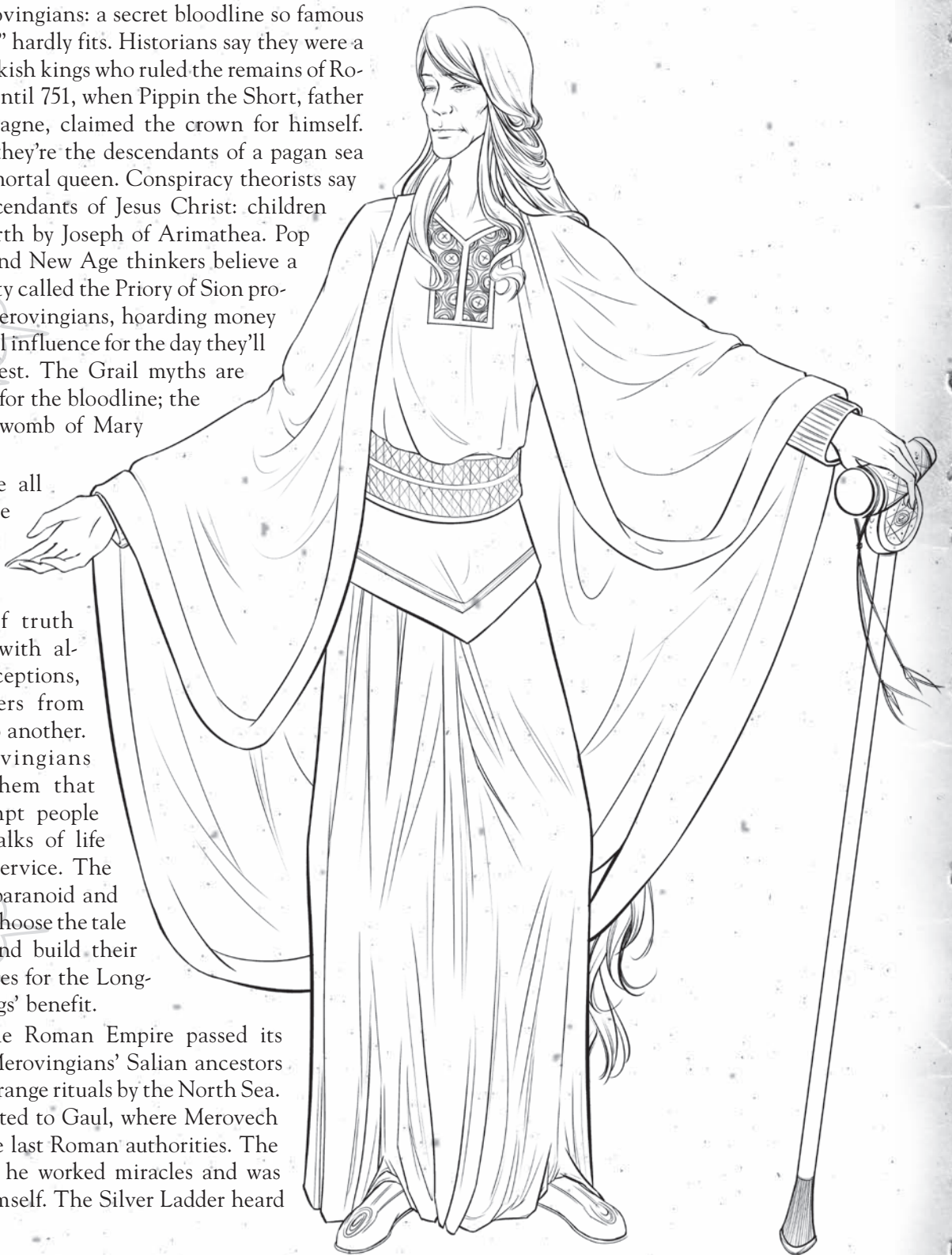
MEROVINGIAN

Loved servant or hated slave? Choose now.

The Merovingians: a secret bloodline so famous that “secret” hardly fits. Historians say they were a line of Frankish kings who ruled the remains of Roman Gaul until 751, when Pippin the Short, father of Charlemagne, claimed the crown for himself. Myths say they’re the descendants of a pagan sea god and a mortal queen. Conspiracy theorists say they’re descendants of Jesus Christ: children brought north by Joseph of Arimathea. Pop occultists and New Age thinkers believe a secret society called the Priory of Sion protects the Merovingians, hoarding money and political influence for the day they’ll rule the West. The Grail myths are an allegory for the bloodline; the cup is the womb of Mary Magdalene.

These are all lies of the cleverest kind, cloaked in particles of truth and filled with alternate deceptions, skeptic veers from one trick to another. The Merovingians designed them that way to tempt people from all walks of life into their service. The pious, the paranoid and the greedy choose the tale they like and build their small empires for the Long-Haired Kings’ benefit.

While the Roman Empire passed its apex, the Merovingians’ Salian ancestors practiced strange rituals by the North Sea. They migrated to Gaul, where Merovech subdued the last Roman authorities. The people said he worked miracles and was half-god himself. The Silver Ladder heard



Son of Queen and God

Who is the "sea god" that was supposedly Merovech's father? Conspiracy theorists say the myth is code for Merovech being a descendant of Jesus (the fish being a Christian symbol) and historians say his birth was mixed with pagan mythology — that Merovech might be a hazy memory of the Salian Franks' old gods from the North Sea. The Dynasty says this myth refers to Atlantis; the "sea god" is the exiled Atlantean king. He came to the Netherlands from an arctic Atlantis and founded the tribe.

Other myths say the sea god was utterly inhuman: a shapeshifter (legends call it a *quinotaur*) who raped Merovech's mother. Some théarchs suspect it was an Abyssal creature and in the last 30 years, Sleeper legends about a shape-changing, inhuman bloodline in Europe's noble families have gained a bit of traction in Awakened circles. The Merovingians' secret rites may hold the truth, but nobody's ever witnessed them and lived to tell of it.

the rumors, investigated and inducted his family into the Silver Dynasties.

The Merovingians grew strong. Between their powers and théarch allies, the people thought they were living saints — or pagan gods. The Dynasty made no attempt to correct them. It tolerated Christianity, entering its members into the rolls of saints with displays of miraculous power. They privately claimed to be divine beings worthy of sacrifices. Court administrators fed their appetite for worship, offering wealth, burnt offerings and slaves to the hidden "gods of the Franks." They turned from overlords to parasites, wallowing in the kingdom's wealth while others fought and ruled. In secluded towers the Awakened among them performed strange experiments. They occasionally traveled to their ancient Salian shores but refused to speak of anything they did there.

The order was slow to chastise them. Prophecies said, "Men will whisper the sons of Merovech are divine kings for an eon and more." The Silver Ladder didn't think a Dynasty that had achieved greatness and seemed destined for a thousand

years of legendry would fall from grace. In 745 CE, Childeric III made the Merovingian position clear: The Awakened must recognize them as Atlantis royalty come again or they'd order the Franks to hunt and kill mages.

The Silver Ladder wasn't completely unprepared. It had long bypassed the Merovingians' authority to deal with the more reasonable Mayors of the Palace. Théarchs encouraged Pippin to take the crown despite his fear of the Long-Haired Kings. History says the coup was quiet, but it truth, palace towers burned in magical battles. Pippin exiled the survivors; the order imprisoned Childeric in a monastery, bound by a magical oath to forsake his Blessings.

The order forgot about their connection to the Dynasty but the Merovingians never forgot about them. It watched and learned. It secretly studied the order, aping its Cryptopoly. It even pretended to be a faction of the Silver Ladder to steal followers — a tactic it uses today. Its false Cryptopoly tempts entire cells into heresy. Members believe they serve the real Silver Ladder but end up worshiping the self-styled god-kings of Atlantis.

There was a real Priory of Sion, several in fact, all devoted to spreading the myth of the Merovingians' divine right. The Ladder's prophecy came true. The Long-Haired Kings made it so by whispering in the ears of fringe historians and amateur occultists. Modern Merovingians pretend to be théarchs when it suits them, but when they feel especially confident they claim the Blood of the Dragon, gathering deluded mages to their banner. They indulge their old habits whenever possible, living inside richly appointed estates while their servants preach and fight. In these inner sanctums they practice rituals from the oldest days, when they were barbarians by the sea. Even after all these years, the order doesn't know their purpose or the power they call from the ocean depths.

Heritage Path: Obrimos

Nickname: Long-Haired Kings

Appearance: Traditional Merovingians never cut their hair. Servants decorate it with jewels and braid it into complex tresses. Their hair's thick, lustrous and dark: a sign of vitality that seems out of place on these thin Proximi. They're usually pale-skinned from lack of sun. They're tall and slender but lack muscle tone. Merovingians usually move with a stiff, upright gait. High, sunken

cheeks and red-rimmed eyes are testaments to a poor constitution, decadent lifestyle or both. They're fond of faux-Atlantean regalia. Many use gem-studded canes with runes beaten into their gold grips. When they must meet dupes who believe they're Jesus' children they switch to crosses and dour, conservative clothes.

Blessings: *Forces* — Influence Light (●), Influence Fire (●●), Telekinesis (●●●), Levitation (●●●●); *Mind* — Alter Aura (●●), Beast Control (●●), First Impressions (●●), Telepathic Control (●●●●); *Prime* — Supernal Vision (●), Celestial Fire (●●●), Phantasm (●●●), Supernal Dispellation (●●●●). Note that the dot ratings are for the original rites. Add 1 dot to determine the Merit rating of each Blessing.

Curse: The Merovingians are sickly, fragile and weak. They move with trembling slowness. Some say this is the result of inbreeding or self-destructive, hedonistic lives, but anyone versed in the lore of the Proximi knows that modern medicine or Life magic can't cure them.

Merovingian Proximi do not get the 10 again benefit from dice pools that use Strength, Dexterity or Stamina. Furthermore, every 1 rolled on a die in these pools subtracts a success from the Merovingian's total.

Oblations: Immersion in cold water, coronation rituals, worshipers' ritual praise.

Character Concepts: Decadent noble, freemason, corrupt priest, fringe historian, trust fund dilettante.

PRIAMID

You wouldn't believe me if I told you.

They say they're the descendants of Priam, king of Troy, but the Priamids say many things that turn out to be false. People who don't know about the Dynasty's Curse are taken aback when a Priamid appears to lie, but it doesn't happen often. The Priamids know their flaw; as they master their heritage they learn it's better to say nothing than lead their friends astray. That's why mages who know them call them "Laconics." The family is a true Silver Dynasty, having served the théarchs for as long as anyone can remember. Despite their taciturn ways, the order's learned to trust them. Priamid Illuminates are common allies, known for their attention to detail and a knack for being in the right place at the right time.

Legend has it that after the fall of Troy, Priam's daughter Cassandra took refuge in the temple of Athena, but to no avail; Ajax the Lesser raped and kidnapped her. The gods slew Ajax for his blasphemy — a fault Cassandra warned him against, but which warning he ignored. Agamemnon took her as his concubine next. The Curse struck again; Agamemnon's wife cajoled him into an act of hubris and he ignored Cassandra's warning, sealing his doom at the hands of Agisthus. The Dynasty says Cassandra's warning wasn't sincere; she knew her Curse would *compel* him to act against her warning.

Cassandra had two children by Agamemnon. Sleeper legends say guest-slaying Agisthus killed Pelops and Teledamus but the Dynasty knows otherwise. Cassandra told Agisthus that Teledamus would grow up to kill him. Cassandra's Curse struck again; he didn't believe her and slew Pelops instead. Priam had other children in Agamemnon's household, slaves won at Troy. They took Teledamus away from Mycenae to Delphi. The oracle learned Teledamus' tale and wove it into her next prophecy, when she ordered Orestes to exact revenge. Thus, Cassandra spoke the truth.

The Dynasty traces its association with the Silver Ladder to the meeting at Delphi. It says ever since then it's been the order's detectives, defenders and co-conspirators. Priamids harnessed their original Curse so effectively that it had to change, twisting

their own words instead of other peoples' beliefs. The Proximi responded by adopting an ironclad code of honor. Through devoted service they've reached the point where the order trusts them to act without explaining their motives. A few members abuse this trust, but never for long; the family punishes them soon enough. The Laconics' Blessings make them remarkably farsighted, but their Curse forbids them from justifying the decisions that follow. It makes them look impulsive and arrogant. To avoid personality conflicts Priamids like to work alone or in groups of relatives. They decide what they need to do, get it done and report the results.

Heritage Path: Acanthus

Nickname: Laconics

Appearance: Many Priamids display their history on their faces with an olive complexion, wavy black hair and robust facial features. They're broad-shouldered, and if they're fit have powerful muscles. This isn't universal; the centuries have added all sorts of variety to the family line. Priamids prefer a neat, understated style: a suggestion of austerity in cotton and silk. Most wear light, solid colors with subtle accents. They sometimes wear reproductions of the jewelry found in Troy's ruins. Collectors in the family wear original Artifacts they've acquired at great expense.

Blessings: *Death* — Forensic Gaze (•), Grim Sight (•), Speak with the Dead (••), Ghost Summons (••), Touch of the Grave (••), Suppress Own Life (•••); *Fate* — Interconnections (•), The Evil Eye (••), Fabricate Fortune (•••), Destroy Bindings (••••); *Time* — Perfect Timing (•), Postcognition (••), Divination (•••), Prophecy (••••). Note that the dot ratings are for the original rites. Add 1 dot to determine the Merit rating of each Blessing.

Curse: Priamids originally inherited the Curse of Cassandra. They could predict the future, but nobody would believe them. They'd actively defy honest advice. Priamids learned to use it as a rough form of mind control, ushering people to their doom by telling the truth. Like all Dynasty Curses, the Priamids' adapted and grew more severe.

Modern Priamids can never accurately relay information learned through the use of personal supernatural abilities. These include Blessings, Awakened rites and thaumaturgical spells. The Priamid involuntarily tells falsehoods or omits information, even when magically commanded. Telepathic examination yields false visions and for the purpose of supernatural oaths, Priamids are not considered to be lying when the Curse affects their testimony. They know their Curse but are never consciously aware of its effects on their speech and



actions. Thus, they can't identify their own errors unless someone else points them out. Even then, the Priamid makes inaccurate corrections, compounding the problem.

The Dynasty adapts to the situation by keeping its collective mouth shut. When members know something's up they act and ask for any help they need without explaining themselves. This tends to rub uninitiated allies the wrong way, but théarchs who work with the Dynasty have learned to take their requests on faith.

Oblations: Mock funerals for Hector, offerings to Apollo, ecstatic chanting.

Character Concepts: Private investigator, rescue worker, veteran, solo investor.

Lex Magica

The first exiled Voices of the Dragon taught their students fragments of Atlantean law and charged them with enforcing it. These legendary lictors went to the wild with nothing but swords and the will to raise the Awakened from anarchy. They made accommodations for local customs but demanded consistent precedents. They preached compassion and responsibility; they punished the cruel. Most of all, they appealed to sorcerers to come out of their enclaves and enforce the law themselves. Thus Consilii were born, and with them the Lex Magica.

The order takes full credit for the rise of the Consilium, but its true origins are obscure. Consilii evolved into their current form from a variety of similar customs. Lodges, alliances and cults met and compromised to create a more homogenous system. They turned their similarities into laws and left many differences behind. Nowadays there are still many different Awakened societies, but any intelligent person can look beneath strange titles and protocols to find a common underlying pattern. The order has always played an instrumental role in diplomatic affairs, so it can rightfully claim to have had a hand in the pivotal events that shaped the modern Consilium. The mythic warrior judges who brought law to the lawless probably existed in some form, but the true extent of their achievements are debatable.

Nevertheless, the Pentacle orders leave it to the Silver Ladder to guard the law. Théarchs are learned judges who issue consistent decisions. They hate bending the rules to benefit themselves, but that doesn't mean they don't play loose with the law at all. They believe the Lex Magica is a tool used to satisfy moral imperatives, but it should never be confused for morality itself. The Fallen World is an imperfect, confused place so even the best system will fall out of synch with its goals. The Lex Magica's structure is designed to compensate for this by combining ancient laws with regional customs.

The Fourfold Scepter

The Fourfold Scepter is the basis of the modern Lex Magica. Théarchs believe true laws come from four sources. A law that cannot be traced to these four is invalid; no mage is compelled to obey it. The Scepter is hierarchical metaphor composed of four metals: gold at the top, iron at the bottom, and, in between,

silver and bronze. A law that emanates from the top of the hierarchy takes precedence over a contradictory law from further down, but lesser laws clarify the greater. From highest to lowest, the Fourfold Scepter's aspects are:

Gold: Atlantean Law

Surviving Atlantean traditions are the highest laws. All Consilii are subject to such laws. The real trick is deciding what constitutes a genuine Atlantean tradition. According to théarch jurisprudence, a Gold Law must possess at least one of the following justifications.

- **By Artifact:** The law was recorded on a reputed Atlantean object that could not be reproduced for a thousand years after its discovery, or ever. Testimony from Annake and artificial sentinels are sometimes accorded this status.

- **By Harmony:** The law is known to three or more Consilii who have no recollection of its invention and practiced it before ever communicating with each other. These Consilii must have arisen a significant distance from one another. The exact distance has increased over time to the point where modern théarchs use the mnemonic "A + A + A = A," meaning "Africa plus Asia plus Anywhere else equals Atlantis." Some laws that are Atlantean by Harmony have aged badly. The world's a smaller place, so a law that was given credence by having existed in Germany, Libya and Anatolia won't wash today. Modern théarchs also feel more comfortable if the law in question is known to more than three Consilii.

- **By Supremacy:** The law has stood without any record of ever being contested, is of unknown provenance and was thereafter recognized by a Lesser or better Convocation as being Atlantean.

These requirements are not without their flaws. Revising the list of "true" Atlantean Laws is typically one of the first things a Lesser Convocation tackles. Lictors frequently discuss how much credence they give particular laws. This determines how zealously they enforce them. Lictors won't break a poorly proved Atlantean law, but they won't enforce it either. They'll advise the next Convocation to demote it.

Gold Laws include the Great Rights of mages (see **Sanctum and Sigil**) and the right of mages to challenge one another to legally binding duels on neutral ground. The particulars of dueling law are

not so hallowed — just the right to do it. There are peculiar Atlantean Laws that don't apply to modern society. An Atlantean automaton might declare, "The Exchequer of Immanent Verbs is forbidden from authorizing trade with the Topaz-Eyed Mummery," but it's hardly something that will influence 21st century jurisprudence. The order keeps records of these just to be on the safe side. Some well-supported Atlantean Laws are widely disliked. For example, a Guardian of the Veil interfactor's right to murder has been written on stele of Time-frozen blood, chanted by Annake and recorded in pre-Columbian codices, but mages still hate it (and claim the evidence is a concerted Guardian forgery campaign).

Silver: Consilium Concords

Strictly speaking, a Silver Law or Concord is any law or set of laws that has been ratified by a majority of a Ruling Council. They're local in scope, losing force as soon as a mage leaves Consilium territory.

A testy situation exists between the Silver Ladder and non-traditional Consilii over alternative legislative processes. If a Consilium presents a Concord that was imposed by a Hierarch or Awakened mob against the Council's will, the Ladder considers it specious. This can be a problem for Consilii when a lictor wanders in and makes it known that nobody has to obey it. Smart Consilii who want to do things their own way usually have powerless Councilors rubber stamp their Concords. That's how local tyrants and Libertine Assemblies get a pass from the order.

Consilii are expected to track all standing Silver Laws and weigh their relative precedence, but very old Consilii have hundreds or even thousands of such rulings. In Vienna, an 800-year-old scroll that hasn't been assigned precedence in the body of Concords can radically alter the legal landscape — at least until the ruling Council issues a new Concord rendering it null and void. Ruling Councils frequently issue Concords that nullify previous Concords. After a violent transfer of power some Councils cancel all previous Concords: an act théarch wits call "Magica Rasa." Boston's Secret Concord demonstrates there's no obligation to make Silver Laws public, so an old or especially legalistic Consilium often finds itself awash in a web of confusing documents.

The modern trend is to use constitutions as a model for Concord law. Lictors advise Ruling Councils to develop Prime Concords that take precedence over all others. These delineate the rights and responsibilities of Consilium subjects and nullify any contradictory Bronze Laws (see below) on a case by case basis. Petitioners can challenge a Common Law on "constitutional grounds": a common defense for mages accused of crimes wherever Prime Concords reign.

Bronze: Common Law

When the authorities kill someone for destroying a Hallow, Bronze (or Common) Law dictates they execute anyone else who does the same, provided the circumstances are largely similar. Even if they aren't, old rulings are guidelines for new. Lictors and other legal scholars are expected to translate these judgments into general principles. Like Concords, old rulings pile up over time. This can be a problem or an opportunity, depending upon the situation. A desperate mage might find an ancient precedent that gets her off the hook for an apparent crime, but an obstinate judge can demand precedent after precedent to support an argument.

There are two types of Bronze Law. Lictoral Law consists of generations of lictors' rulings. The order insists it applies to all Consilii, but in practice it's normally only upheld when a lictor personally judges a case. Consilium Law is made up of the Ruling Council's judgments and applies no farther than the Consilium's borders. Théarchs lobby for harmony between Lictoral and Consilium Common Law. The order's had mixed results. Most dueling law (see **Tome of the Mysteries**) is harmonized Common Law, as are the Precepts described in **Sanctum and Sigil**. The order counts these as great successes and hopes for more. Lictors lobby Ruling Councils to elevate pivotal points of Bronze Law into Concords with mixed success.

Any public matter where Ruling Council members act within their office technically falls within the Bronze Law's canon. For example, if two mages ask the Hierarch to interpret an oath for them, the ruling enters local Common Law. Formal Council decisions typically have more standing than these ad hoc judgments. Mages who want to make secure legal arguments research major rulings first, saving the dregs for desperate moments.

Iron: Oathbound Law

In the Lex Magica, oaths are the basis for all enforceable agreements. Sorcerers who swear an oath before their peers obey it or draw their community's wrath. If one party breaks his oath, the other is allowed to enlist allies to help cure the breach. They can intimidate the oathbreaker into making good on his promise or even take whatever's owed by force. When a cabal steals a grimoire a sorcerer promised to hand over, he can't complain of theft. When a sorcerer swears on her life to heal another sorcerer's lover, he's legally entitled to kill her if she fails.

Not every case is so clear, however. What if the sorcerer in the case above never specified when he'd deliver the grimoire? In the second case, did she really mean she'd give up her life if her efforts failed, or only if she did anything less than her best? For these and other reasons broken oaths spark cycles of retribution, Concord and Common Law typically demand these matters be brought to the attention of the Ruling Council for arbitration. Higher laws also restrict the kinds of oaths mages may swear. For example, most Consilii forbid oaths that would aid the Abyss' servants or Seers of the Throne.

An Iron Law isn't any old promise. It's not necessarily a Fate-bound agreement like those defined by "Swearing an Oath" and other rites, or a vow such as those made by Adamantine Arrows. It *can* be any of these, but only if it possesses the characteristics scholars call the Three Voices:

- **Vox Contractus:** All parties agree it's an Iron Law. They don't have to use the Silver Ladder term but have to make it clear they expect support from the Consilium should any party renege. Any oath where some call it Iron Law at the time of declaration and others don't doesn't qualify.

- **Vox Publicus:** They swear the oath before Awakened witnesses. Classic traditions mandate three witnesses per two oath-takers: one for each mage and a third neutral party. This isn't set in stone; most Consilii accept oaths made before the Hierarch. Hearing Iron Laws occupies a great deal of the Hierarch's time, and frankly many get bored enough with the duty to pass it along to another official.

- **Vox Libertas:** They swear it from a position of liberty. Iron Laws can't be forced; any excessive duress invalidates them. The definition of "excessive duress" changes from place to place. Some Consilii protect

mages from most forms of extortion. Others guard only against supernatural compulsion or specifically allowing Ruling Council officials to force oaths on citizens. This requirement also bans mages from swearing an Iron Law to do anything that would be illegal under a higher law or would break a previous Iron Law oath.

Cabal Protocols (see **Sanctum and Sigil**) are the most prominent examples of Iron Law, but any oath that possesses the Three Voices qualifies.

Procedures

Sanctum and Sigil goes into extensive detail about how most Consilii use the Lex Magica. See that book for information about trials and punishments. Two things to note in that book are the role of *factotum* (a legal expert who sometimes argues before the Ruling Council) and the fact that most Consilii demand a two-thirds vote to convict anyone accused of a crime. Pages 65 to 73 of **Sanctum and Sigil** have suggested trial proceedings, including ways Storytellers might resolve the outcome.

Pragmatism and Shadow Law

The Silver Ladder believes the law has a rational, intricate structure. One of the order's goals is to make the law universal, but there's a long way to go. Adamantine Arrows prefer honor and the chain of command. Mystagogues rely upon favors and academic ties and Guardians of the Veil merely want any system to conform to their own, half-hidden moral standards. The Free Council is an occasional ally in the quest to codify the Lex Magica. Libertines who work inside the system see formality as a way to increase accountability. The Silver Ladder isn't overly fond of these overtures, but it never dismisses a pragmatic alliance out of hand.

Despite the differences orders have regarding the law, representatives usually respect the Silver Ladder's positions. Some revere the order's mythic heritage and reckon the judges of Atlantis should be judges still. Others recognize the order's raw competence. Théarchs aren't always fair but they're usually rational and thorough. Therefore, the Fourfold Scepter applies to many Consilii but only really flowers when the Silver Ladder's in charge.

Virtually every Western Consilium benefits from the order's work to some extent. Protocols, Great Rights, the two-thirds vote required to convict — all these derive from Ladder initiatives handed down from Convocations or promulgated by zealous lictors. The Fourfold Scepter is a work in progress. Someday it will put every mage under the same law — and when one law speaks for all, how far away can a nation be?

No matter the local state of affairs, the Silver Ladder applies the Fourfold Scepter to its own members. It even issues unofficial Concords: Silver Laws it believes should be in force. This ideal system is called the Shadow Law. The order expects théarchs to obey it at all times to lead their peers by example and promote its adoption by the Consilium as a whole.

When a théarch swears an oath under the Iron Law's guidelines, it's Iron Law for her, even if she knows the Ruling Council doesn't give a damn about mages' promises. If enemies attack her for breaking her word, her caucus may not intervene — and might even help her enemy. If the other party fails to live up to his side of an Iron bargain, her caucus might help her through methods *it* considers legal even when the Ruling Council thinks otherwise — or would, if someone told it about the situation. Practically speaking, a caucus won't disobey a bad law or ruler directly, but does fail to mention violations it believes should be legal under Consilium law. If théarchs openly defied the Consilium, they'd be setting a bad example for everyone else, but if they offend quietly and for a good reason they do no harm.

Lictors render judgments based upon local law and Shadow Law, but in any conflict between the two, Shadow Law has preeminence. Lictors have Bronze Laws of their own that don't always agree with Consilium precedents. Thus, no théarch can justify an offense by appealing to local standards alone. Even if the Ruling Council pronounces her innocent, a lictor can try her anyway.

Houses of Silver

Between a complex philosophy and the rule of law, théarchs rarely find themselves without a doctrine to guide them. This infuses order members with a level of confidence that's easy to call arrogant — and rightly so, at times. But powerful convictions

alone don't make the Silver Ladder an effective order. Théarchs are one part of a rising Awakened Nation, destined to give it form and purpose. On the streets and before the Ruling Council, the order presents a unified front. In some ways, it acts as if Hieraconis is already here; even in an alliance of two, there are formal offices and duties. It looks stiff-necked, but it's a manifestation of hope, for if they left smaller matters to mere friendship they would be admitting the Awakened are some marginal subculture — not the rightful rulers of the world who *make* governments.

Caucus

A théarch caucus is part church, part political party and part law school. It's a formal body, bound by ritual and rule into something greater than its parts. The caucus isn't just a local Ladder fraternity, ready to melt into the background when a théarch's cabal calls. It exists to keep the order strong and use that strength consistently. The Silver Ladder doesn't send mixed messages to outsiders except as part of some political tactic, so it's important for every member to know the caucus' policies. Acting out of step with the caucus makes it look weak, confused or filled with inner rivalries. That cannot be allowed — *especially* if any of those conditions really exist. Théarchs should argue in caucus, never outside it. Internally, a caucus can be filled with turmoil. The order is no enemy of ambition so rivalries are to be expected, but the caucus should always project a united front. This isn't just a political tactic, but a spiritual necessity, because Ladder mages must comfort and guide other mages. Vicious infighting compromises the order's credibility among its flock. Truly enlightened outsiders would soon realize the competitive culture of the order is a spiritual practice itself, but most mages are too caught up in the Fallen World's spiritual errors to see the righteous nature of intrigue.

A Consilium can have multiple caucuses, but the order discourages it. If the Consilium is the basic unit of government, why should one of its offices have a duplicate? The existence of two or more caucuses calls into question the formal authority of the Consilium itself. Without a set political form, a Consilium is a mere social club, not a government. When a Consilium has more than one caucus it's almost always headed by rival théarchs. Each caucus inevitably tries to conquer and absorb the others. There are

a few peculiar exceptions to the rule brought on by necessity or history, but two or more caucuses usually indicate a deep enmity.

Agenda

Every Silver Ladder caucus has a fourfold agenda:

Cryptopoly: It's the caucus' duty to manage its part of the Cryptopoly. Deacons have the power to set the local conspiracy's agenda, but doing so without deliberation is suitable only for emergencies. The caucus sends théarchs on fact-finding missions to help produce the best strategy. It also determines whether or not it needs new agents or whether a loyal servant should be shown the Sign. Proximi and Awakened Illuminates often participate in Cryptopoly-related discussions, but are subordinate to a caucus mage who acts as their "handler."

Justice: Caucuses monitor the state of the Lex Magica and develop ways to lobby the Consilium for a more formal process, moving ever closer to the Fourfold Scepter. Topics include specific cases, unclear points of local law and suspected corruption in the local Ruling Council. Caucuses also refine the Shadow Law and discuss whether or not they need to summon a lictor. The deacon has absolute authority, but rarely exercises it without majority approval.

Political Influence: The Elemental Precepts say the Silver Ladder should lead the way, so the caucus isn't shy about planning for political supremacy. Discussion is frank and to the point, bereft of any platitudes about why other mages need to be led. Théarchs already know why they must dominate Awakened politics; there's no point being defensive about it like a cringing Stag-follower. The caucus identifies allies and enemies. It plans ways to exploit their weaknesses. Most caucuses have an informal rule wherein they don't ask théarchs to screw over members of their own cabals, but will ask them to provide information. A recalcitrant théarch can avoid this by swearing himself to secrecy under Iron Law. The caucus won't compel him to break the law. Théarchs who *want* to be able to inform on their cabals assiduously avoid swearing secrecy oaths with their cabal-mates. Experienced mages from other orders often know about this and are on their guard for reluctant théarchs.

Spirituality: Don't underestimate the Silver Ladder's religious dimension. The order's concerned with the

spiritual well-being of humanity, especially mages. The caucus plans ways to spread the word about humanity's divine destiny, from infiltrating Sleeper religions to planning interventions for mages who are spiritually "lost." Caucuses also identify groups they believe are ideologically poisonous and undermine them in every way imaginable.

Organization

Ladder caucuses meet weekly in a space specifically reserved for that purpose. The Silver Ladder is part of the future government of all humanity; it's not to be ruled from church halls or members' basements. Ideally, the caucus should own the building and make it a veritable temple of the Atlantean tradition, but a long-term rental is acceptable for those of meager means.

Caucus meetings begin with a ritual that affirms the Elemental Precepts. The rite's nature varies from group to group. Some caucuses meditate together; others sing, speak in tongues or cast simple spells to invoke the presence of the Supernal World. Next, a claviger states the meeting's agenda as determined by the ranking deacon. Every caucus makes room for general business on its timetable, but barring emergencies or the deacon's discretion, meetings unfold strictly according to schedule. If decisions need to come out of the process, deacons make them at the end of the designated segment or schedule a future meeting at which they'll render judgment. Some matters require several meetings to resolve.

The deacon is the absolute leader of the caucus, but even he is subject to the Lex Magica. He can't ask his inferiors to break the Shadow Law, but can show them how to interpret it creatively. Multiple deacons are encouraged to reach consensus on any decision, but the highest-Status deacon can overrule the others. Clavigers enforce the deacons' decisions when necessary and can stand in for a deacon when he's busy. Acolytes learn, obey and add their input during caucus meetings. Some forward-thinking caucuses feature deacons who rubber-stamp the caucus' consensus or a majority decision, but this in no way reduces leadership to a symbolic role. Technically, democratic caucuses merely advise deacons. Multiple Convocations have ruled that no Iron Law can force a deacon to accept mob rule, so would-be reformers can't change the system with oaths.

Positions

The Silver Ladder has two types of hierarchies: overall authority (represented by the Status Merit) and the relationships between specific positions. A position implies a certain Status level but doesn't guarantee it; there are deacons with only 2 or 3 dots of order Status and lictors who command respect from powerful Magisters. If a mage has less Status than her position, she's considered an interim functionary. She should relinquish her station to a more qualified théarch as soon as the opportunity presents itself. Of the positions below, acolyte and claviger are the only ones théarchs are expected to hold during their careers. A lictor is a special profession, not a broad level of reputation. A deacon is a formal office, but there are high status clavigers whose advice is treated more seriously than many deacons' commands.

Théarchs who have lower positions than their Status implies still command respect unless they're acolytes. A mage with a Status of 3 or higher stays an acolyte only when another théarch is specifically blocking her advancement opportunities. Otherwise, these individuals would be clavigers. At the very least, a good deacon should promote an acolyte who's getting a little long in the tooth to "claviger at large," who wears the title but isn't expected to constantly report to a superior.

The order doesn't like weak ambitions. Théarchs who aren't trying to rise through the ranks will eventually fall. When they do, they can play the acolyte once again. The order has a significant number of powerful mages who have surprisingly low Status, including Masters who've decided to retire to a lesser rank. Théarchs who relinquish Status can't recover it at a whim and are beholden to their superiors as much as if they were newly initiated members. Deacons keep "retirees" busy with all kinds of trivial jobs, but this doesn't necessarily make self-demotion any less attractive. It's lonely, stressful, soul-searing and potentially deadly at the top.

Acolyte (Status ●)

Junior members of the order have one primary duty: to obey. They follow the Shadow Law and Elemental Precepts, but whenever an unusual situation arises they should consult a superior. The order doesn't trust acolytes to think for themselves beyond the very fundamentals of being a Silver Ladder mage. Some

caucuses treat acolytes badly, but this is considered poor form. A higher-ranked théarch should treat them like younger siblings — well-loved children at least — and educate them. The order demands much of its neophytes, but rewards them well. The entire caucus should devote itself to training them. Many caucuses give grimoires, special training and cold, hard cash to exceptional acolytes.

Acolytes take care of general low level business. They deliver messages, cast simple spells and keep the caucus' meeting place in order. If the deacon wants to spread a rumor, she sends acolytes to Consilium meetings and Awakened haunts. Some deacons take acolytes as personal servants, but in these cases they're expected (though not required) to provide tutelage in return.

Acolyte Path Roles

Acanthus: Acanthus acolytes are difficult acolytes. To inexperienced mages they look downright rebellious because they consider forces others can't perceive. Sensing an ambush, an acolyte refuses to pick up a grimoire the Mysterium owes her caucus, or steals it an hour before the scheduled meeting. A good leader gives an Acanthus a great deal of latitude in how she carries out her duties. "Use your own discretion but get it done," is a common command. Since most acolytes don't command this degree of trust this occasionally spurs jealousy and suspicion in the lower ranks.

Mastigos: Mastigos acolytes are the ultimate retainers. Their Arts give them the ability to know what their superiors want and to provide it anywhere at any time. A Mastigos acolyte can be counted on to consider his own emotions, never letting them get in the way of his duty. Théarch Mastigos have a reputation for constant vigilance and dry wit: a mental focus that survives the worst provocations. One deacon called her Mastigos servant "the perfect butler. I can demand canapés or covering fire from anywhere in the world and get it in the time it takes to say, 'Yes, Deacon.'"

Moros: Moros acolytes are the mages least suited to deliver messages or work on political operations. They have a reputation for being unfriendly, more interested in the dead than the quick, but this dispassionate perspective makes them astute observers. Moros deal in material fact, not social niceties; they can tell whether physical clues match someone's statements. Lictors often employ Moros assistants to collect evidence. Of course, Stygia's

children also know how to *hide* evidence, too, so they're summoned to deal with the fallout from failed plans. They destroy fingerprints and alter bodies to remove suspicious signs. Given that they can be socially inept, deacons often tell them nothing more than they need to know. A deacon might send two Moros to banish a ghost or ruin a shipment of steel without letting them in on the reason or possible outcomes.

Obrimos: Obrimos acolytes readily understand the order's mindset and often consider themselves above other acolytes. They have an instinct for authority; the Silver Ladder's focus upon political dominance appeals to many theurgists. Obrimos zealously spread the good word about Ladder initiatives, and when necessary play the hot-headed demagogue, challenging doubters to debate and duel over ideas. If they lose, deacons write it off as youthful impetuosity, wash their hands of the incident and send subtler agents to spread the same message. Obrimos become difficult only when they follow a religion that conflicts with the Elemental Precepts. It takes time and effort to wean them from the Stag and Lion, but the Silver Ladder has answers to please most doubting acolytes.

Thysus: Thysus acolytes present an opportunity for the order to demonstrate its good will and broad perspective. The order is speciesist to the core because it believes humans are the natural masters of the cosmos. Thysus acolytes show the Consilium this doesn't mean the order will abuse the natural world. Young shamans are responsible stewards of the local ecology who let the order know what's happening in the Shadow or wild. Thysus are excellent healers, too. The order encourages them to treat Awakened patients without asking anything in return. Charity demonstrates the virtues of the Diamond, for in a united Awakened Nation, citizens take care of each other.

Lictor (Status ●●)

It's not easy being a lictor. You can't have apprentices or a permanent home. The order expects you to travel widely. You can pick a regular circuit or go where the wind takes you, but you're always at the Ladder's beck and call. You need to be able to go anywhere at a moment's notice, absorb the minutiae of local laws, judge fairly, and if nobody else steps up, deliver the punishment yourself. These requirements ensure only the smartest, most

Factotums

One way an acolyte can improve his meager standing is to study the Lex Magica. If she's skilled enough, a deacon or lictor can recognize her as a factotum: a lawyer for the Awakened. The acolyte studies on her own time. Once she feels ready, she tells the caucus to give her the factotum exam. In game terms, the mage needs the following skills: Academics 3 (Specialty: Lex Magica), Investigation 1, Occult 2, Politics 2 and Persuasion 2. The exam doesn't require any dice rolls unless a deacon or lictor adds his own requirements to the basics. Some of them test would-be factotums with mock trials, telepathic exams or arguments with justice spirits. Some large caucuses open up a limited number of factotum slots every few years, instigating fierce competition between candidates.

If she graduates, the new factotum is entitled to wear a special robe of office and is immediately elevated to 2 dots of Silver Ladder Status. (The player doesn't have to pay the usual Experience cost.) Théarchs who already have this rank don't gain any Status, but they get the robe, along with the factotum's ability to argue cases before lictors and the Ruling Council. A deacon who never "won his robe" is a rare thing and is usually accorded less respect than his better-qualified counterparts.

For more information about a factotum's role see **Sanctum and Sigil** and Chapter Three of this book.

resourceful théarchs take the position. They have to be dedicated, too; lictors are virtual nonentities in the political process. On the other hand, *former* lictors can be highly influential. The order respects anybody who's done a stint as lictor, so once she moves on she might look forward to a fast track to leadership. This works only if the théarch was an effective working lictor. Just taking the job and sitting around means nothing to the order.

Only a lictor can name another lictor. Lictoral Law says a lictor must retire after installing a successor unless a Convocation specifically orders the lictors to expand their ranks. This keeps lic-

tors from forming power blocs bound by lineage. An experienced lictor trains his successor on the road for about a year. Despite numerous attempts to standardize lictor education, the exact requirements for graduation still depend upon the lictor's judgment alone. Some regions have powerful, brilliant lictors; others have weaklings who spend more time sampling the local bars than working. (Even incompetent lictors are rarely corrupt, however, because the punishment is torture followed by spiritual annihilation.) Lictors usually operate in overlapping territories, but a deacon can call any lictor in to try a case. If she summons a lictor from far away, most people see it as a snub directed at the local office-holder.

Lictors have considerable powers. They are:

Immunity: It's against the Lex Magica to challenge a lictor to a duel over any matter related to his duties. Lictors are not beholden to oaths that would impair their official activities. If there are questions about whether immunity applies, the local Consilium or Convocation settles them. Only retirement or a Magisterial discharge relieves a lictor of his position; the latter is a significant black mark on a théarch's reputation.

Judgment: A lictor's judgment is final; there is no appeal. It applies to Silver Ladder mages of any rank. It may apply to other mages if they submit themselves to the lictor's justice — something the order encourages. This happens quite often in areas with highly-regarded lictors, corrupt Consilii or both. Many Consilii have arrangements wherein the lictor's decision is automatically considered Council justice. This grants the lictor immunity in all actions related to delivering the stipulated punishment. In death penalty cases, the traditional thing to do is ask the local Guardian interfactor to kill the guilty party. This way, the interfactor exercises *his* immunity, simplifying the political process.

Lictors determine the format of any trial over which they preside with the sole restriction that there must be a prosecuting and defending factotum. (The accused can dismiss his defender.) Most lictors use the adversarial system, but a few reach decisions by cooperative means or even trial by combat. Unlike in the Sleeper justice system, the lictor directs the primary investigation. Participating factotums are entitled to inspect the evidence and find their own clues.

Support: A lictor can command any and all Silver Ladder resources in the course of an investigation or trial. Some lictors abuse this for personal perks, but a caucus indulges only so much of that before it complains — and the lictor risks the most excruciating punishments the order can devise. A reasonable lictor can order acolytes to help him uncover the facts or ask deacons to set oathbound Arrows to guard a prisoner — anything the order can provide.

Lictor Path Roles

Acanthus: An Acanthus lictor has two powerful tools at her disposal: oaths and Time perceptions. Acanthus can demand binding oaths to tell the truth and obey her judgment. She can use Time to witness a past crime herself or explore the outcome of various sentences to see whether or not a guilty mage will offend again. Acanthus lictors run a confusing court; they ask meaningless-sounding questions and make odd demands that nevertheless reveal the truth. Acanthus lictors are proactive in their duties. They always seem to show up the moment they're needed.

Mastigos: Mastigos lictors are expert interrogators. They telepathically extract secrets and fan the flames of guilt to elicit confessions. They're a study in contrasts. Some run gentle investigations and spend as much time caring for the victims as capturing wrongdoers. Others run courts of cruelty, insisting on precise protocols that instill honesty through fear. Mastigos are especially skilled at uncovering conspiracies because they can sense the sympathetic energies members share. And if the guilty run, there's no place on Earth they can hide. Lictors from other Paths recruit Mastigos colleagues to capture fugitives.

Moros: Moros lictors are often recruited early on. Their forensic and necromantic skills make them ideal in cases where the suspect is still on the loose or might have killed someone. A Moros can raise the dead to confront their killers and detect the slightest disturbance in a crime scene. Mages who know how to defeat precognition and sympathetic spells still leave fingerprints and fibers. Moros trials are as somber as one might expect, but far from indulging the Path's attitudes, this calm, serious atmosphere draws the focus to the facts of the case instead of speeches and flashy rituals.



Obrimos: Obrimos lictors have a reputation for severe judgments. Some say this is because investigations are not their forte. If a crime involves powerful magic or sacred places, the Obrimos is well-equipped to study it, but other situations lie outside their traditional magical skills. This makes Obrimos justice a collective project; lictors aggressively employ expert advice, hear many witnesses and, overall,

compensate for their magical deficiencies with a sheer volume of evidence. Once they feel the community has confidence in their judgment, they impose telling sanctions. Some théarchs frown at these lictors' penchant for blasting the guilty with elemental power; only Banishers should burn witches, they say.

Thysus: Thysus lictors dispense justice in the wilderness. They uncover evidence in places only survival experts can visit. They're sensitive to the Resonance behind everything, so they can identify the powers associated with particular crimes. Spirit testimony is unreliable, but is born of straightforward motives. Murder spirits seek out murders, so following one at a distance is a wise choice for any Thysus on the trail of a killer. Shamans levy punishments based upon how they'll affect the entire community. If they satisfy someone's thirst for vengeance they might disfigure the local Shadow, turning Sleepers treacherous and spiteful.

Claviger (Status ●●●)

Clavigers ("key holders") are the caucus' "party whips." They're responsible for maintaining the Silver Ladder's ideological purity. Clavigers have proven they understand the Elemental Precepts well enough to interpret them in difficult situations, but they aren't so wise they can overrule a deacon. They're the caucus' emissaries to the Consilium. Deacons allow them latitude in interpreting the order's goals when it comes to negotiating with outsiders. Even deacons who have a bone to pick with the Ruling Council still send clavigers to take care of basic relations. When deacons sit on the Council, clavigers are usually their provosts.

Clavigers are the order's main preachers. They convince other mages the Elemental Precepts are necessary. This is an unhappy job; as a rule, mages don't respond well to evangelism. A skilled claviger sweetens her words with gifts: spells, secrets and political favors. Some clavigers are extremely popular

for their open handed ways; others are reviled for being obnoxious martinets.

As liaisons, clavigers are the théarchs most likely to speak to strange supernatural beings. Deacons are too valuable to risk in direct meetings and acolytes don't know the order's wishes well enough to take care of business, so it falls on clavigers to make contact with vampires, werewolves and the other occult detritus of the Fallen World. Clavigers who perform these duties invariably learn their human-centered faith doesn't fly with monsters.

Inside the caucus, clavigers report to their deacons regularly. They turn general directives into specific instructions for the order's acolytes. Middle management is a less than spectacular job, so it's hard for a good claviger to get the recognition she needs to advance. Too often, her expertise is credited to a deacon's superior leadership or an acolyte's exceptional performance.

Claviger Path Roles

Acanthus: Acanthus clavigers are famous for acting as ambassadors to the Fae-folk, but that's a rare duty. Most use their talents to anticipate a deacon's needs. Like Acanthus acolytes, clavigers are allowed to interpret their instructions more freely than colleagues from other Paths. They need to tell the deacon *why* they won't do what they're told, but if they have a good reason the deacon isn't going to take umbrage. Still, it's better for an Acanthus to present her deacon with alternatives. That's where the Path shines. Acanthus clavigers are experts at contingency planning. They watch multiple futures unfold from a simple question and lay out preparations for all of them. When destinies coalesce they know exactly what to do.

Mastigos: No other Path is as adept at telling people what they want to hear — or what they *need* to hear. Mastigos deal in desire and interconnection; few of their clavigers are ever left speechless in the face of some outrageous political situation. They excel at networking; a Mastigos introduction cements powerful alliances. Then again, Mastigos are just as good at destroying bonds. They use innuendo to shatter rival factions, start love affairs designed to provoke jealousy and bring up embarrassing secrets at the most damaging times possible. Best (or perhaps worst) of all, they can switch between the courtier and bastard so smoothly that it's difficult for enemies to even hold a grudge.

Moros: "We're Death and Taxes personified," said one of their clavigers, "Unpleasant at times but inevitable nonetheless." Moros aren't great diplomats, but they've mastered the human condition's basic currencies. Moros find wealth trivial but know well that other mages hunger for it. They don't exactly bribe anyone, but lavish gifts find their way to anyone who upholds the caucus' interests. Moros understand mortality and the fear it inspires, especially among mages who know how precious — and how fragile — human souls are. Death is useful for a number of services, many of which their procurers aren't eager to advertise. Moros clavigers are called on to meet vampires, but most find the duty distasteful, like negotiating with a robot powered by avarice.

Obrimos: Obrimos are often marked for that most odious of duties: military service. The Silver Ladder likes to leave fighting to the Adamantine Arrow but there are times when the Dragon's Talons need to be reassured they aren't going it alone. Enter the claviger, flush with burning Forces and the Arts of illusion and enchantment. If the Silver Ladder wants a fight, Obrimos lead their cadres into the thick of things. They aren't great warriors, but the fact they *will* enter the breach sets a good example. Otherwise, Obrimos are excellent preachers, with temperaments as energetic as the Arcana they command.

Thysus: Thysus are the order's usual representatives in the Shadow and among primal shapechangers. They don't necessarily know how a werewolf's mind works, but they can plainly see the Shadow-born hazards with which Uratha deal. When these creatures want some sort of idiotic physical contest that would kill most people, it's a Thysus' honor to get clawed, gored or suspended from hooks for the greater glory of the Silver Ladder. Besides these very foreign affairs, the Path's healing talents help cement alliances. An acolyte heals for charity, but a claviger expects his greater talents to earn favors for the caucus.

Deacon (Status ●●●●)

Loneliness at the top would be a comfort. Instead, the deacon is all things to all théarchs: leader, lawgiver, priest and chief representative. His duties aren't confined to his caucus; when Convocation calls he must answer, and if necessary assume

Magisterial duties. Deacons are ambitious, socially gregarious, and above all worldly. Other théarchs of this stature avoid the position, opting to intensify their quest for the ultimate Mysteries. Thus, the deacon's chair represents something of a sacrifice. Time spent ministering to the order is time away from researching Archmastery.

There are deacons who aren't Masters, but unless they have some other exceptional talent they don't get a full measure of respect. Enlightenment and power are twins, coiled snakes of a caduceus. There's no wisdom that does not proceed from competence — no Ascension without the Imperium Mysteriorum. A respectable deacon should be a qualified factotum, too, and knows the Ruling Council almost as well as his family. It is his family — he's its father, mother and elder role model whether they acknowledge it or not.

The deacon has many duties. He sets the caucus' agenda. He calls lictors when he needs to and lays down the local Shadow Law. Along with his brothers in other Consilii he organizes Convocations and carries out their decisions. He sits on the Ruling Council or chooses the claviger who does — and if he goes for the latter option, the claviger speaks the deacon's words, not her own. If the Consilium has a théarch Hierarch, he's usually made a deacon to prevent internal conflict.

A caucus can theoretically have any number of deacons, but the general sentiment is that multiple leaders will inevitably compete for power. Unless deacons work out a strict pecking order the whole caucus understands, there will be trouble. Clavigers will join one clique or another; toadying acolytes will try to play them against each other. One successful model sets up an archdeacon and lesser deacons with particular duties: one for the Ruling Council and one for Convocations, for instance.

Deacon Path Roles

Acanthus: The Acanthus deacon plays chess with destiny. Her gambits occupy multiple boards, each a matrix of Time and Fate awaiting some key maneuver. She's a cryptic figure; her instructions don't make sense until some pivotal event brings all efforts into focus. She's cautious, but always leaves room for a bit of spontaneity. If she follows Fate's threads too closely, she'll get tangled, so she always carries a sharp sword: a maneuver that will let her drastically alter the political situation, renewing the polity's flexibility.

This could be a Convocation, a bit of blackmail — even an assassination. She encourages her subjects to think outside the box so they won't get caught in Fate's web either.

Mastigos: Mastigos deacons are social chameleons. They can be kindly parents or harsh taskmasters as the situation demands, even both at the same time, showing different faces to different people. Shadow Law is not a Mastigos forte. They know the human heart well enough to regard it as a nearly deterministic system of its own and chafe at the added obligations of the Lex Magica. They would never say as much, but most would rather rule through emotional manipulation than legislation. They make excellent Magisters because their gifts endow them with the ability to plan across vast distances.

Moros: Moros leadership can be a bit tedious, like working for an accountant, at least until ghosts come to the table. Moros deacons prefer formality; they want the caucus to work like a well-oiled machine. Moros are excellent logicians. They can determine how expensive an initiative is at a glance. This applies to money and lives, for the deacon knows the dead well enough to remember their failures. Death is the final teacher; a Moros is privileged to be among the few who can hear its lessons while he breathes. Stygian visions remind him that all things crumble; he doesn't have plans that don't have a decent failure mode and never, ever believes his actions will permanently fix anything.

Obrimos: Obrimos emphasize the order's religious aspects. The caucus is a seminary; it's the deacon's job to enforce the rules and tend to the spiritual condition of its inhabitants. She teaches théarchs to believe in themselves, believe in the Elemental Precepts and carry the word to every mage in the Consilium. An Obrimos deacon is strict but consistent because she acts within established doctrine. Her flock can be confident in its purpose, but woe betides it if members stray from the true path.

Thyrsus: Like the Mastigos, Thyrsus leaders sometimes wish they could rule with their own insights, unhindered by the Lex Magica. Their caucuses are one part of an Awakened ecology that proceeds according to secret natural laws. It's filled with various perversions — memes like endangered species, threatened habitats of belief — but it's the Lie's nature to ruin what it touches, and the deacon's charges are no exception. She's

an unsentimental leader, viewing mages as inhabitants of a functional niche, not individuals with their own rights. She loves humanity in the plural but individuals vex her. She always monitors the Shadow to see how events affect the world's spiritual makeup. Some Thyrsus prefer to take an active hand in this Invisible World and make themselves the lord of local spirits.

Magisters

Every deacon is expected to attend Convocations or send representatives to them, but a Magister is specifically charged with managing them. Each Consilium is permitted a single Magister. Some caucuses have a permanent Magister position; others pick deacons for the job on each occasion.

A caucus' choice of Magister subtly signals how much it values its neighbors. If it doesn't give a damn, it sends the least-qualified deacon possible. Some caucuses express their ire by temporarily promoting an acolyte to the rank of "deacon extraordinary," making him Magister and giving him a bus ticket to the Convocation's venue. Politically speaking, the position is neither good nor bad — it's what a mage *does* with it that counts. A Magister associated with well-run, productive Convocations earns Merit. Even "deacons extraordinary" can turn the joke into an opportunity, leaping to a permanent clavi-ger rank with a few notable deeds. Some exceptional (or old) théarchs are called "Great Magisters" or "Grand Magisters," but these are only honorary titles.

Calling the Avatar

The Avatar is the root of the théarchs' faith. The world of suffering will burn away in the final days, leaving perfect human souls more divine than any Supernal being. The term "Avatar" is a partial neologism. Over the centuries the order's used many names for the god that sleeps in every mortal. "Avatar" comes from heretical Vedic texts, written by ancient théarchs who appropriated the

word *avatara*. In orthodox Hinduism, the *avatara* is the human incarnation of a higher being, but the early Silver Ladder turned it into code, saying the incarnation is the god. It must Awaken to its destiny and seize the power the Fallen World's self-styled deities keep for themselves.

Ladder doctrine says humanity is the only worthy object of worship in the universe. Mighty spirits and Astral godforms are servants who've usurped aspects of the human condition. Human beings should wield lightning without a thought, but the Lie limits them to the feeblest forms of influence. The instinct is there, but people can only dream of power and loose their Resonance upon the Shadow Realm. These energies feed spirits and errant thoughts. The phantoms call themselves Zeus, Thor or crackle in the Shadow, reveling in offensive inhumanity. Some théarchs believe they collaborate with the Exarchs to keep the world fallen, but most of the order considers them mere opportunists, parasites on a human-centered cosmos.

There are higher beings, Supernal entities who rarely sully themselves with the Fallen World. Their manifestations are the stuff of legends. Witnesses weep and fall before angels or babble in the wake of impossible shapes and sounds. Before the Fall they had free access to the mortal world, where they rained disasters and spawned nightmarish monsters. The celestial ladder was a quest to put these amoral powers under humanity's compassionate will. It was betrayed by the Exarchs, but the principle is as righteous as ever. Even the highest beings must submit to humankind.

The Avatar and Religion

The Avatar is the godhead; everything else is a lie or delusion. This is a potential problem for acolytes who believe in Sleeper religions. Not only does the order appear to hold their faiths in contempt, but that contempt is almost an article of faith itself. This is one reason the Silver Ladder inducts apprentices slowly and gradually, taking them from their native religions through the Elemental Pilgrimage, and finally to the order's supreme truths.

Nevertheless, the order can't shake off Sleeper religion completely. Théarchs have made considerable effort to explore positions that reconcile ordinary faiths and Ladder doctrine. Four main schools of thought exist. They are:

Eidolonism: Eidolonists believe Sleeper religions are imperfect copies of true faiths. Their real doctrines can be expressed only in the Supernal Realms. Fallen Christianity is wrong, for instance, but there is a perfect Christianity compatible with the Elemental Precepts. It can be fully understood only by the Ascended, but until that great day the Fallen version is an acceptable substitute. This school is often criticized for begging the question but not solving it.

Reconciliationism: Sleeper religions are hidden forms of Avatar worship. Deities and saints are really symbols of humanity's inner potential, so it is acceptable to do them honor. Some supporters believe ancient mages hid the truth in these religions; others say all faiths are fragments of the true Atlantean faith. Critics point out that many religions specifically deny such doctrines.

Transcendentalism: Transcendentalism describes a layer of reality that is to the Supernal Realms as the Supernal is to the Fallen World. They often point to Plato's discussion of "the Good" and the Gnostics' Sophia as precedents. The higher powers of Sleeper religions might exist on that plane. Even if Sleepers get the details wrong, what they revere are true gods that deserve worship. Opponents say if an even higher realm exists than the Supernal World, humans should rule *that*, too.

Supernal Realism: This school seeks no compromise at all. The order is right, Sleepers are wrong and acolytes should get over their doubts. Many théarchs spout this line with bravado, but few enforce it in their caucuses to any serious degree.

Myths to Master

Twisted though they are, humanity's myths have Supernal power. The Silver Ladder doesn't evoke gods and legends out of reverence. It makes them its servants. The order is known for subjecting myths to radical reinterpretations. Théarchs say they cut the Lie out of them and exchange false morals for true. There's no room for cruelty or submissiveness in the Mysteries. Some caucuses have a catalog of approved rites, culled from human legends that have been altered (or "explained") by the order's Masters.

The Aether (Obrimos): Genesis' serpent is Atlantis' Dragon. It destroys the false gulf between wisdom and power and puts both in human hands. In the order's

telling, Genesis is a battle between the Dragon and the Exarchs. The Exarchs wanted newly fallen humanity to call them gods but the Dragon interfered, whispering the secrets of the trees — or Watchtowers — of power.

Many Obrimos use Western ritual magic and Gnostic philosophy, but they don't abase themselves before God. They take His place. They purify their own desires with ceremonial meditation and use the command words they were born to say. Thus, angels submit to their true masters. In China, some of them assume the mantle of Heaven's Emperor and set the divine state to its duties. Other Obrimos take Horus' mantle, vengefully reclaiming a throne from the world's betrayers.

Arcadia (Acanthus): The Wyrd? Inescapable Fate? There's no such thing. Desire and Fallen law fight — the winner weaves the world's threads. Acanthus celebrate hubris; they adore heroes who battle their destinies. Anyone cursed by the gods might be a hero in disguise: Cassandra who gave birth to the Priamids, or Achilles who was persecuted for putting vengeance before his war-duties. They invoke Gilgamesh who quested to end mortal sorrow, and Mordred who sacrificed his life to kill his tyrannical father and forever hide the slave-faith's Grail.

Enchanter rituals also call upon tricksters. They use cunning to renege on their deals with gods and spirits. Some Acanthus even use apocalyptic legends. They pray for a Ragnarok wherein old hierarchies die and a new, righteous order will rise.

Pandemonium (Mastigos): Mastigos demonology fits the Silver Ladder's mindset perfectly. The order believes there's no shame in passion, but that doesn't release théarchs from moral responsibilities. If a mage makes a demon of his thoughts and binds it to his will, it's an expression of self-acceptance without selfishness: the middle way of the Sage.

Mastigos théarchs explore metaphysical duality. They explore good and evil, force and passivity so they can unveil every element of the soul, no matter how disturbing. They indulge in excess and asceticism according to the examples of Taoist recluses and reconcile with Ahriman in pseudo-Zoroastrian psychodramas. They use esoteric Buddhist rites to manifest the highest and lowest thought-incarnations — gods one moment, animals the next.

The Primal Wild (Thyrus): A shaman doesn't worship the spirits, but bargains with them for the

good of her people. Anything that looks like veneration is nothing more than an economic transaction that pays the spirit in its ritual currency. Of course, if a Thyrus can get the upper hand, there's no need for any of it; the world's soul should be hers to command.

Ancestor worship is popular among the order's shamans. Ancestors represent the best in human nature. Thyrus who practice Afro-Caribbean religions lean heavily toward the theory that *Orishas* and *Loa* were human beings: mighty saints and mages who earned a place in the pantheon by fighting the Lie.

Stygia (Moros): Eastern and Western alchemy are well regarded by the order's Moros because they lay out a path to power any learned human can explore without asking higher beings for permission. These practices also fall in line with the order's emphasis on spiritual self-improvement, especially when it yields tangible results. The Moros turns real lead into real gold, mirroring the evolving Great Work in his soul.

Ladder necromancy focuses upon freeing the dead from their sorrows. Rituals recall Orpheus' bravery and curse the gods who punished him for it. Necromancers also invoke prophecies that say the dead will rise, including the biblical Day of Judgment and Hel sailing forth at Ragnarok.

Oblations

Silver Ladder oblations celebrate the Avatar within. Théarchs never beg for Mana; they demand it. It's their right, the right of all humans. Someday everyone will enter into communion with the high powers, but until then it is up to the order to use what it can gather for the good of all. That's why oblation rites emphasize purity of purpose. It's easy for a mage to demand her due without using it responsibly. An oblation commands the universe to give its rightful bounty, but it also charges the mage with using it generously on behalf of the weak and purposeless. The order's rites affirm the Elemental Precepts and the Silver Ladder classifies oblations accordingly.

Earth and the Diamond

Earth is the element of unity, the "common ground" that makes the Awakened one nation. With few exceptions, all mages know the truth about Creation. That truth deserves to be spoken

and investigated further; those who know it must govern each other to remove philosophical errors. An Awakened Nation is vigilant and relentless in its quest for perfection, like the heat and pressure that create diamonds. Earth and Diamond give rise to many powerful metaphors, from mining for hidden truth to creating a polity with the measured craftsmanship of a blacksmith working the anvil.

Oblations: Polishing a diamond or other gemstone, forging a ritual weapon or tool, meditating in a stone building or cave, sitting beside an empty throne that symbolizes the Atlantean monarch, polishing and repairing a Mace of Convocation, holding a caucus meeting, chanting Atlantean Law.

Air and Thunder

Air is life itself; breathing stokes the metabolic furnace. Magic is life as it should be, where every breath sparks a new miracle and everyone might speak with a voice of thunder. Air and Thunder are the order's symbols for magical study and its mission to exalt humanity. Oblations involving breath, thunder, lightning and study are common.

Oblations: Studying a grimoire, teaching a rote, shouting commands to a darkening sky, yoga and other breath control exercises, attracting lightning with a spell or metal rod, generating visible, free-standing arcs of electricity with a Tesla coil or other apparatus.

Fire and the Star

Fire requires wisdom. It's life-giving heat or burning death, according to the will and intelligence of its master. Use it carefully and morally, else it will consume what you hold dear. The Silver Ladder must reign supreme because it alone combines ambition with a righteous purpose. It is the bridge between Earthly Fire and the Star: the imperishable flame of human destiny. Astrology is a popular focus for oblations. Hearth and bonfire rituals are popular among some sects. The Silver Ladder itself is a symbol.

Oblations: Meditation before a sacred ladder or pillar, wearing a silver torc or coronet, lighting a bonfire, consecrating a hearth, creating a horoscope for a théarch, receiving a blessing from a deacon, hearing a lictor's judgment, lighting incense.

Water and Blood

Water is the element of human community. It transcends culture, gender and even Sleep, for all must drink. Everyone bleeds the same saltwater and hemoglobin inherited from the dawn of the species. Community is not equality, for the Awakened are wiser than their Sleeping cousins, but bonds of Water and Blood compel the powerful to guide the weak.

Water sharing and bloodletting symbolize a mage's duty to Sleepers.

Oblations: Sharing water or wine from a chalice, sealing a written vow with a bloody thumbprint, bleeding into a cup and giving it to another to drink, preaching to or healing a Sleeper, baptism, exsanguinating an animal and cooking it to share a meal.



CHAPTER THREE: AN ENLIGHTENED CRUSADE

Nox examined the Consilium Councilors as the Hierarch read off the judgment of guilt, a foregone conclusion after the damning evidence and testimony had been presented. The accused, a neophyte mystagogue called Cairo, had murdered one of the city's Libertines in a spectacularly vulgar display witnessed by at least three Sleepers. Deliberations had been tense but expedient. The Free Councilor wanted his head. The Guardian Hierarch wanted his soul. Nox didn't blame them. Audrey had been part of her cabal, and her absence ached in Nox's stomach like a cancer.

She observed the carefully guarded expressions of the Mysterious Councilor, the Adamantine Arrow Councilor, and the Silver Ladder Councilor, her mentor. The former was an intelligent woman, and while she would defend her order-mate's soul, she wouldn't defend his life without being offered a good enough case to avoid jeopardizing her appearance or propriety. Given the right precedents, though, she would quickly fall in line against the Libertine Councilor. Nox knew what her mentor wanted. The rogue element, then, the one that needed to be appealed to, was the Arrow, a member of the very cabal that had brought Cairo in.

Nox stood, dressed in the traditional robes of a factotum of the Silver Ladder, and asked to address the Consilium on the matter of Cairo's punishment. The Hierarch nodded, spoke her Shadow Name, and gestured for her to rise, and as she did so she could read the cold judgment in his eyes, the hunger to uphold the Veil at all costs. She opened a thick tome, one of the many books of the Consilium's past rulings that made up the Lex Magica, painfully aware of the attention of the entire Consilium suddenly turned upon her. There was an air of the theatrically routine to it, each of them only going through the motions. They all knew Audrey, they all knew her position in Nox's cabal, and they all knew exactly what Nox would say next.

They were wrong.

Nox's eyes slipped to her mentor for only an instant. He had taught her the foolishness of unnecessarily snuffing out an Awakened spirit. He had spoken to her of the greater good. He had warned her of the danger of a precedent in the Lex Magica that called for the soul of a mage who performed an act of vulgar magic before Sleepers. He had taught her well, and she knew that, given his political allegiances, he couldn't argue for Cairo's life and reeducation himself. His own gaze was carefully aloof, but his eyes held more scrutiny in them than the Hierarch's. Failure meant making an enemy of both the Hierarch and her master. It would be anything but easy, but she was a thearch, and failure wasn't an option.

Nox cleared her throat, squared her shoulders, and began to speak on the murderer's behalf.

Behavior that's admired is the path to power among people everywhere.

— Beowulf

The Guardians of the Veil are mistrusted and reviled and have a mindset regarding willworking that is practical only when turned against the most blatant and harmful of magics. The mystagogues are hopelessly mired in tradition and history, with an attitude toward the Mysteries the other orders perceive as equal parts convoluted dogma and mercenary salesmanship. Conversely, the Free Council blatantly bucks traditions, its eyes forever toward an ideal utopian future even as it disseminates information to anyone and everyone without regard to the repercussions. No one denies that the Adamantine Arrow's ranks are filled with honorable and loyal Awakened, but the order lacks the drive and vision to see beyond the personal physical perfection of its individual members. Only the Silver Ladder sees the large picture. Only the Silver Ladder learns from the past to perfect the present and bring forth a brighter future. Only the Silver Ladder has ever organized and guided a society of highly individualistic willworkers during the height of an Awakened city, and only the Silver Ladder has the strength of purpose, the vision, the integrity, and the will to preside over an Awakened society that is, in many ways, more fractured and heterogeneous than ever before: the Awakened society of today.

The théarchs are not the aristocracy of the mages. They are not kings. They do not rule Awakened society as a whole, nor dictate on a nightly basis how the members of the Consilii spend their time or what forms of address they use. They do not hoard power, sharing it only with their fellow order members. No, the Silver Ladder takes on the most thankless mantle of all: that of leader and moral guide. The Silver Ladder leads that the Awakened, and the Sleepers behind them, may follow. At its best, it is made up of priests and judges of vision leading by example and holding themselves to the Lex Magica in the strictest sense, so there is no question as to

what direction Awakened society is to proceed. At its worst, its théarchs are corrupt politicians and avaricious gangsters. Without fail it is the driving force behind the society of the enlightened, a position that garners it authority, influence and no small portion of resentment.

Initiation: Taking up the Mantle

The Silver Ladder doesn't need to advertise for membership. Most newly Awakened mages see the théarchs as the order of power, and, as Silver Ladder mentors are quick to teach their pupils, power attracts. Mages of other orders, having been taught time and time again by mentors and leaders that hubris is folly, that pride comes before the fall, and that use of magic to further personal goals risks sundering the veil, experiencing paradoxes, and threatening the entire Arcanus Mundus, sometimes watch the pride with which willful théarchs perform the Ars Mysteriorum with unabashed envy. The strength and flair with which the Silver Ladder seems to flout the adage "pride goeth before the fall" century after century (even if the adage often holds true for individual théarchs) seems to them a refreshing change from the skulking maneuvers and shadowy plots of the other orders.

It is no surprise then that the Silver Ladder does not hurt for initiates. And with so many Awakened clamoring at the gates for membership, the Silver Ladder can afford to be very selective.

Recruitment

To say the Silver Ladder accepts only the cream of the crop into its fellowship is neither accurate nor wholly inaccurate. While it is true the Silver Ladder

takes a great deal of time and effort to fully assess any potential recruit, both for mystical potential and social and political acumen, it is also true the Silver Ladder values an adherence to the teachings and philosophy of the Silver Ladder over any raw magical ability, wealth or political connections.

The Silver Ladder further purports an utopian ideal in the Elemental Precept of Blood, and attempts to live up to it, within reason. Because the Quiescence makes sparking the Supernal Fire in the unAwakened such a dangerous proposition, the théarchs proceed slowly and carefully, seeking out those they believe most likely to attain a Watchtower and wield the Mysteries responsibly. In most cases, this means they seek out Sleepers and Sleepwalkers who already possess a natural inclination toward leadership in the pursuit of a greater good and are amicable to the order's ideals. From there, an unAwakened needs merely prove her will to take reality by the wrist and find her way to a Supernal Realm.

Apostates, converts and the rawest of newly Awakened neophytes interested in joining the Silver Ladder, on the other hand, have already proven themselves of sufficient moral strength to challenge the Lie and shatter the shackles placed upon their souls by the Exarchs. They face a different challenge upon seeking entrance to the society of the théarchs: they must prove they are willing and able to take up the mastery of the Mysteries, but also a mastery of themselves and the whole of Awakened society in order to lead the battle for Ascension.

As one might expect, this means the mages of the Silver Ladder prefer to lead their hand-chosen Sleepers and Sleepwalkers through their Awakenings and directly into the order, untainted by the ultimately deluded humility of mentors of the other orders. This is rarely the case, however, and the Silver Ladder is not so powerful that it can turn away every Awakened who doesn't exactly fit its mold of the perfect théarch.

Recruiting Sleepers

It is no secret the Silver Ladder considers itself an association of guides, organizers and leaders of Awakened society. What is less obvious to outsiders (and sometimes even to the théarchs themselves) is that the philosophy of the Elemental Precepts essentially places the Pentacle in the position of a shadow government that leads the efforts of the Sleepers against the agents of the Lie (all without

their knowledge) and asserts the Silver Ladder as the pinnacle of this government. They believe they act in the best interest not only of mages, but of the Sleepers. The fact that the Sleepers had no say in the election of their leaders does not give théarchs pause. After all, they are *obviously* better suited to understand the challenges of the Lie and make appropriate decisions since they perceive reality through the Awakened context. Furthermore, many théarchs see failure to Awaken as a moral flaw. Some cynical théarchs go so far as to say the Sleepers choose to allow the Silver Ladder dominion over them by not Awakening themselves. That said, every mage begins a mere Sleeping mortal, a fact of which the théarchs are acutely aware, and the Silver Ladder, hoping to swell its ranks with the best and brightest humanity has to offer, is constantly on the watch for promising hopefuls to exalt from the position of unenlightened weapon to that of Awakened soldier.

The mages of the Silver Ladder are nothing if not supporters of tradition (usually tradition for which the order claims responsibility), and the order certainly extends its traditionalism to the manner in which it elevates the Sleeping. The process typically begins when a théarch who is ready to take on an apprentice finds a prospective mage she recognizes as a dedicated individual. What, precisely, defines a dedicated individual varies between regions and cabals. In most cases, the Sleeper is an individual who has taken on a mantle of authority and wields it with aplomb for what she considers the greater good. Leaders exist in every facet of society, from priests (or Sunday school teachers or youth group councilors) to organization leaders (such as the chairs of local Parent Teacher Associations or Boy Scout Troop Leaders) to the department heads of businesses (Human Resources directors are favored candidates for enlightenment), and the mages of the Silver Ladder rarely limit themselves to those who wield obvious power. A student who shapes the opinions of her clique and manages its social activities with equal poise on sheer charisma is at least as useful to the théarchs as a corporate CEO whose orders are followed because he speaks with the weight of the company behind his words. On rare occasions the Silver Ladder seeks out unconventional leaders in the world of crime or other less wholesome sectors of society, but gang leaders and petty tyrants rarely muster the selfless devo-

tion to law, order and the Ars Mysteriorum the Vox Draconis seeks in its membership.

Once the mentor has found her prospective pupil, she guides the Sleeper into the Cryptopoly (though in some cases the potential Awakened is discovered through the self-replicating Cryptopoly itself. See Chapter Two for more details). She arranges for the Sleeper to uncover some small trinket or hint of esoteric information that promises a greater power for those willing to step forward and take it. This most regularly comes in the form of an aphorism planted by the théarch where she is certain her pupil will see it. The aphorism usually takes the form of a traditional myth of a leader who finds an object of power or an arcane secret and then utilizes it, unknown to others, to better himself and the world. The archetype is instantly familiar, from Arthur, son of Pendragon, to Spider-Man, but the Silver Ladder mentor takes care to polish the aphorism and contemporize it sufficiently that it reverberates with the individual in question. A mentor hoping to Awaken a Human Resources director might see to it the Sleeper finds a short article left on the table in the company cafeteria where she always eats that mentions a new process being employed by a rival company to maximize the results of the hiring process while minimizing costs. The process thus far has been highly effective, earning the rival company's HR department accolades. Obviously the aphorism is something that can't easily be checked up on: the "article clipping" doesn't contain the other company's name or perhaps takes the form of a clandestine letter between another company's employee and an employee at the Sleeper's company regarding company secrets. It must be purposefully but believably vague, encouraging contemplation.

The mentor allows the prospective pupil to ruminate on this initial aphorism and its secret advantage for some time, usually a few days, but sometimes up to a month, depending upon the individual in question, before proceeding to the next step, induction into the Cryptopoly. This is the first step of induction, and the mentor is rarely tempted to rush it. After the idea of the secret advantage has been allowed to percolate in the mind of the Sleeper, the teacher offers her a chance to attain the advantage for herself. This chance *always* possesses some overt price or danger. In the example above, the HR director may have a

chance meeting with an individual purporting to freelance in the field of corporate espionage who is familiar with the classified hiring process being used by the Sleeper's rival company; she can always hire him to uncover the secret new methods being engaged by her rival company, but the risk of the unemployment or imprisonment that comes with such a decision seems very real. Any Sleeper cowed by the potential danger or unwilling to make a short-term sacrifice for a long-term gain is not cut of the right cloth to be a théarch, and her induction ends with this refusal, usually without the Sleeper aware she was ever under consideration for initiation. The théarchs are good judges of character, however, and a Sleeper chosen for recruitment in this manner rarely turns away at this stage.

A candidate willing to delve into the possibilities presented to her is made aware of a conspiracy, a secret society of sorts, at odds with other similar societies. The purpose of the society seems primarily the development of wealth and power and the securing of secret methods to increase both, typically keyed to whatever form of business the Sleeper deals in. A member of the society seeks the candidate out, offering a position within the conspiracy, sometimes backed up with subtle threats. Few candidates refuse.

This begins a long, patient game of cat and mouse that rarely lasts less than a year.

The Elemental Pilgrimage

The first occluded interaction between mentor and pupil sets the stage for the journey to come. In theory, the journey ends with the pupil Awakening and being fully inducted into the Silver Ladder. This is not always the case, however, and the Elemental Pilgrimage, as the willworkers of the Silver Ladder name their lengthy rite of initiation that forms an internal metaphysical framework to the sociopolitical branches of the Cryptopoly, is no more reliable a manner of provoking Awakenings, even among those who successfully fulfill each of the rites, than the Labyrinth of the Guardians of the Veil.

After the pupil enters the Cryptopoly, the mentor considers the Sleeper a full pupil rather than simply a candidate. Sometimes, however, théarchs decide to elevate a promising individual already within the Cryptopoly, while on occasion the Cryptopoly does the work of the théarchs for them, leading an unsuspecting Sleeper through the Elemental

Pilgrimage and to full Awakening without the théarch's knowledge. The ways of the Oracles are nothing if not mysterious.

Initiates within the conspiracies of the Cryptopoly often discover them beset with internal questions, and each query of the other members of the conspiracy uncovers not an answer, but rather another question, and that question invariably leads to an answer obtainable only through greater risk than the question that preceded it. The form the metaphorical pilgrimage takes from this point on varies widely between mentors (and sometimes between pupils of the same mentor, as a wise mentor tailors the journey to the individual Sleeper), but four aspects of the trial remain almost constant throughout the order. It is these aspects that are called the Elemental Pilgrimage or, among the more vulgar youth of the order, "exposure to the elements."

If the mentor does not already have some manner of relationship with the pupil, she typically introduces herself to her pupil at some point shortly after the pupil makes her bid for the secret advantage. The mentor never reveals herself as a mage, much less as a member of the Vox Draconis, instead posing as a fortuitously met companion and confidante, often using a little Fate or Mind magic (sometimes both) to ease and expedite the introduction of the mage into her life and confidence. It is not uncommon for the mentor to already know the pupil, since the pupil was chosen by a mentor familiar with her virtues, and in these cases the mentor opens herself to the pupil, offering to be her nonjudgmental companion in times of stress or difficulty. The goal here is for the mage to have access to the Sleeper's insecurities willingly given, and to be able to offer the aphorisms and advice that make up the Lesser Elemental Precepts.

The Cryptopoly functions well without the influence of the théarchs, however, and usually individual conspiracies are inundated with the philosophy of the Lesser Elemental Precepts, each of which is given as a higher level of understanding to those advancing within the conspiracy. The Cryptopoly is designed to guide Sleepers through the lessons of the Elemental Pilgrimage even if a will-worker is not available to take a hands-on approach to managing the conspiracy. Even when taught by a mage, the following lessons are not delivered as written below in tidy lectures. Instead obstacles are laid before the recruit that can be overcome only

through an understanding of and commitment to the philosophical precept the lesson espouses. The recruit is guided through this philosophy by her mentor, who provides aphoristic advice outlining the philosophy of the moral Awakened individual, or the Cryptopoly itself. The goal of the Elemental Pilgrimage is to challenge the false philosophies of the Lie and replace them with an internalized understanding of a higher and more morally pure system of thought. It is through this process that the Silver Ladder urges Sleepers to stand upright and open their eyes.

Once the mage has ensured the Sleeper accepts her as an advisor and intimate, she surreptitiously guides the pupil through the Elemental Pilgrimage. The order of the tasks and lessons matter not, though Air is almost universally the final seal unlocked, while Earth is traditionally the first. Each task is initiated by whatever the pilgrim finds at the conclusion of the task that came before, each task is more difficult and entails greater danger than the task before, and each provides a tiny trickle of occult knowledge. The occult knowledge is carefully chosen in the hope of bringing the initiate closer to the Supernal truth. Furthermore, as the difficulty of the tasks increases, the reward becomes geared less to an advancement of the individual and more to the advancement of a larger group, usually one within which the individual claims membership. In the above example, the secret advantage directly benefits the HR director. Later secrets may aid her department as a whole, then the company, and finally every customer the company services. Some small benefit always remains to the individual, however. One of the most important lessons of the Elemental Pilgrimage is an understanding that through helping others one helps oneself. The self-sacrifice comes through the willingness to make the effort involved to grasp the reins of leadership, not through martyrdom.

The Lesson of Earth

The initial lesson théarchs teach Sleepers and Sleepwalkers drawn into the orbit of the Silver Ladder is that of Earth. Earth is the central element, the core, the home. The Earth is the world of the Lie, and, divorced from the Supernal, Earth is not one single ideal element but a stratified collection of Fallen materials. Yet the stratification provides necessary functions within the context of the Lie, and those capable of reading the layers of cracked

lime from lines of slick obsidian can read into the history of the world, or at least the history of the world as the Exarchs have crafted it. The lesson of Earth is that the stratification of society is both true and false. It is true inasmuch as it is a necessary and useful part of the Lie that can be leveraged and utilized as a weapon against those who propagate the Lie. It is false in that humanity is ultimately one nation in accord, struggling as one against the shackles imposed by self-made god-kings, and that which affects one stratum cannot help but affect the others. No action occurs in a vacuum. On Earth, there is no void.

It is not important that the prospective théarch understands the lesson of Earth in the above terms. At this point in the Sleeper or Sleepwalker's instruction an intuitive understanding is sufficient. What a théarch hopes to instill in her charge regarding the Earth is that the sundering of mankind into arbitrary divisions, such as race, caste, nationality, social level, clique and wealth, is ultimately a falsehood, and that no group of humans in the world can divorce itself sufficiently from the others to truly remain undisturbed by turmoil across the globe... or across the tracks.

Practically, the lesson of Earth is one of careful, patient consideration, thoughtfulness, empathy and responsibility. Each action must be deliberate and intentional, like a move on a chessboard. Each word reverberates through the halls of power, and the careless invite ruin upon themselves with each poorly considered quip. The mentor may mention the adage of Marie Antoinette at this stage (and perhaps note that it wasn't really her quote), an admonition that those without bread would do well to eat cake that is often linked directly to her execution at the hands of a revolutionary government. But mere politic carefulness is not enough, the teacher warns. One must truly empathize with those one leads, lest one fall into the moral decay that plagued the Exarchs and their slaves, the Seers of the Throne, and become enslaved by her own need to enslave others in order to retain her power. The mentor upholds the kings of the old epics, who made gifts of their victories to those under their charge and ensured the happiness of those who flocked to their banners. It is the goal of the leader, the théarch teaches, to uplift all under her dominion.

A Debased Philosophy

The Lesser Elemental Precepts are widely taught in some form among the Silver Ladder worldwide. They are not, however, as widely followed. The Lesser Precepts are often debated, and considered more open to debate than the Greater Elemental Precepts. Part of this comes from an attitude on the part of established théarchs that the Lesser Elemental Precepts are a Sleeper philosophy rooted in the Fallen World, or, in other words, laws based on a careful study of the Lie, but part of the Lie nonetheless. Like Sleeper science, the Lesser Precepts can be useful, but are ultimately part of the greater falsehood. Other established théarchs believe the Lesser Elemental Precepts are ultimately just a watered-down version of the faith for teaching to recent converts and non-believers.

Even among those théarchs who believe the precepts useful, most consider them a sub-philosophy of the Elemental Precept of Blood. The order as a whole sees this philosophy as a philosophy of children, and basing arguments upon it or living one's life by it is considered a sign of immaturity.

In the modern era of global communication, trans-continental travel on the cheap and war waged against non-geographic concepts like drugs and terror, this lesson has become increasingly easier to teach to recruits, at least at the level of theory. Truly internalizing and making intuitive the lesson of Earth, however, especially as the gulf between the wealthy and powerful and the destitute widens, is not as easy. Despite human interest stories and scores of sociological textbooks, sympathy between the affluent and the impoverished is difficult to establish.

Most théarchs teach the lesson of Earth by revealing to the initiate that she is more like than unlike her fellow Sleepers. She possesses the same drives, the same goals, the same wants and needs. While there are numerous ways of teaching someone to empathize with her fellow man, the lesson of Earth must also teach that actions result in reactions and that the strata the Exarchs have



erected for mankind can be utilized against the Lie. Since the Fall, one specific rite, often called The First Rung, has become almost synonymous with the lesson of Earth.

The First Rung is based on the drive to provide for oneself that has been built into the Fallen World by the Exarchs. Initially, and typically before recruitment of an individual begins, the mentor ascertains which social group the recruit wishes to join. This social group almost always holds some power or sway over the individual, and the individual wishes to usurp that power for herself. It is a testament to the subtlety of the Exarchs that the mages of the Silver Ladder almost never find a candidate who doesn't want to climb higher on the social ladder. The janitor wishes she were the nurse who wishes she were the doctor who wishes she were on the hospital's board of directors who wish they were the hospital's wealthy benefactors who can demand treatment at any time who wish they had greater political or social sway and so

on. The mentor arranges for an apparent opening into the next rung on the ladder, apparently won through the Cryptopoly conspiracy. The opening grants the initiate a taste of what life is for those at the next level, and the individuals at the next level seem accepting of the newcomer. A permanent invitation to the inner circle seems to come in the form of a request of a favor by an individual the initiate respects, often an Ally or Retainer of a local théarch. The favor poses little risk to the recruit, but stands to elevate her to the inner circle by aiding the inner circle as a whole. Only after the initiate has successfully completed the task and been admitted into the inner circle does she realize the inner circle has used her, just as they have in the past. Furthermore, the favor was the result of an external pressure placed on the inner circle, and even by joining them, the initiate has failed to reach the top of the proverbial dog pile. And then, when the full emptiness of her success has had time to sink in, the mentor ensures the

initiate uncovers evidence that her actions on behalf of the inner circle have harmed the group she formerly considered her peers.

Example: *The above-mentioned HR director, a woman named Laura Clyburn, whose new method of vetting applicants (learned through her association with the Cryptopoly) has resulted in major gains for her company, receives an invitation to one of her company's CEO's exclusive dinner soirees (the inner circle). She attends, and the soiree is appropriately opulent and decadent enough to wow even the most jaded HR director's sensibilities. She feels the need to belong, and everywhere she looks she sees evidence of how much better her life could be if she made the most of her new connections. The company leaders seem willing to give her a leg up, but they need help in return. They ask Laura to push a small group of individuals through the hiring process and get them into specific positions within the company, a simple bit of nepotism that might hurt her career if it is uncovered, but poses relatively little risk. She does so, but soon finds these individuals are utterly inept, and the rank and file of the company is taking the brunt of the work: She asks her new contacts among the company leadership about the new hires, only to find out they are children of some of the company's largest investors...*

Obviously there are any number of ways a prospective Silver Ladder might approach The First Rung. Those who refuse the favor, not out of fear of the risk, nor out of simple moral opposition to what is asked, but due to an understanding of what will unfold through the task's completion, are accorded the most respect, and obviously understand the lesson of Earth without excessive prodding on the part of their tutors. Those who refuse for other reasons are either weak-willed, closed-minded, or cowards, none of which make for good théarchs. Those who go on to fulfill the favor but fail to empathize with those they harmed by doing so have likewise failed to understand the lesson of Earth. Those who feel genuine empathy for those they harmed have learned the lesson of Earth, even if they make no effort to correct their wrongdoing. Those who do attempt to make up for their error in judgment often do so at great personal risk, and are highly valued by their mentors... at least if they succeed.

The Lesson of Water

Earth holds its shape. Water does not. Earth inspires reason, contemplation and responsibility.

Empathy and Sympathy

An individual's pattern is more than simply a Supernal understanding of her flesh, blood, and the other gross reflections of her nature. She is as much what she is as she is what she was and where she came from. A Storyteller who feels a character has shown a sufficient lack of empathy for a particular class of individuals, or who seems particularly divorced from the travails of a group of people, may levy an additional -2 penalty to attempts by that character to utilize sympathetic magic against a member of the group for whom the character lacks sympathy.

This is especially appropriate for mages who have lost Wisdom through acts of hubris and no longer have a connection to the material world (though such mages may, themselves, be more difficult to target through sympathetic magic). This penalty never applies to an Awakened who has an intimate connection by way of an item of intimate importance to the target, even if the sympathetic level is lowered due to not knowing the target's True Name.

Water demands emotion and the quick, intelligent thought known as intuition. Water moves without effort, is guided by the world as it changes the world. Once an initiate of the Silver Ladder understands the lesson of Earth, she begins to understand how Earth can be used to subvert and ultimately destroy the Lie. Water follows the course open to it in the Earth, but at the same time dissolves the Earth, carving deep lines into the face of the planet. Caution is important, but it must be balanced with action.

Humanity has been indoctrinated by the agents of the Lie to blindly follow in willing subservience. Just as a river travels along its bed without thought, so, too, is humanity hemmed in by the metaphorical Earth, the social strata and structures of the Lie. It fulfills its predetermined roles without sight or thought, flowing from its source at birth to its eventual dissolution in the sea of death. This aspect of the Lie is so deeply ingrained into the Fallen World that humans the world over use the river as a metaphor for life. This only exacerbates their difficulty.

Like a river, however, humanity possesses great power. Just as a river slowly carves a canyon into the Earth, the inertia of humanity can tear at the fabric of the Lie. Cynical mages point out that this only deepens the riverbed, limiting the possibilities for the river, and making it more difficult for later generations to do anything save what has been done by those who have come before. The sages of the Silver Ladder agree that the metaphor holds true here; the Lie, they say, was designed to self-perpetuate. They counter, however, that it is the *potential* that matters. Just as a river floods, humanity, both in the form of the individual soul and the societal whole, has the potential to throw off the shackles of the riverbed and flow forth, becoming something simultaneously greater and unrecognizable.

A mentor teaching an initiate the lesson of Water hopes to impress upon her charge that the masses seek guidance. Society needs and wants leaders, priests and judges. It is the moral obligation of a wise individual to confer that wisdom to others through strong mentorship and governance. The ideal of the *wise* leader is paramount here. While a wise leader can exalt those in her charge, a foolish leader debases others as she debases herself.

Obstacles placed before a recruit by a mentor teaching the lesson of Water are manifold, but almost universally involve placing a recruit into a group ruled by anarchy and convincing her to take the reins of power for herself. It is important the recruit understands that guidance is an important facet of the lives of those around her, and that she may improve those lives by taking on the responsibility of guide and teacher. Within this archetype, however, there are innumerable variations. A Sleeper recruited from among schoolteachers may be given an unruly class of high schoolers (or placed in a PTA with no clear leader). A Sunday school teacher may be encouraged to take the administrative reins of her church when its priest leaves it before a replacement can be found. A popular story among théarchs of lesser means relates that an unusual and open-minded théarch chose to recruit a Sleeper with a known substance abuse problem, then led him to usurp the ineffective councilor of his support group and become the moral guide to his peers. He has since, according to the tale, become a Provost in his region's Consilium.

The mentor often, though not always, makes subtle use of magic to make the task more difficult, promot-

ing chaos and discontent among the leaderless group, and ensuring any other strong personalities either fail to take charge themselves or rise to power with ideals significantly different from those of the recruit (which can lead into the lesson of Fire, below). Mind and Fate are most often used for this purpose, but a subtle use of Forces or Death to cause frustration (by knocking over files, frying hardware or ensuring a lock jams) can be similarly effective.

Example: *Laura finds the manager for her level of the company has left his position (he may have been laid off, left for another company, retired, or, if she has caught the attention of a less-scrupulous théarch, he may be dead). The position leaves a gap in the leadership and the company does not offer a guiding hand. Infighting becomes constant and productivity swiftly falls. Does Laura take the position for herself? Does she become a leader without taking the position? If she applies for the position, what happens in the meantime? Does she wait for the bureaucracy to work itself out, or grasp authority for herself?*

The Pilgrimage of Elemental Horror

The World of Darkness, first and foremost, is a game for telling stories of personal horror. For a mortal being guided into the world of the Awakened by the esoteric Silver Ladder, those first steps toward enlightenment can be the most horror-filled moments of the character's life... at least to date.

Storytellers should feel free to inspire terror in the player characters as their perceptions of the world around them are challenged by the Pilgrimage. Horror can be found in the shadowy power of the obscenely wealthy and influential to whom the player might be drawn while learning the lesson of Water. Or the horror can be the personal horror the character uncovers when she realizes just how far she has gone to achieve power and the effects her decisions have had on her underlings during the lesson of Fire.

The path to Awakening is bordered by danger, and the greater the stakes for the characters, the more meaningful their eventual ascension to the Supernal Watchtower.

Success in the lesson of Water requires understanding that leadership is necessary, and that people will follow a leader. Mistrust of authority merely for being authority is banished. Most théarch recruits achieve this understanding by taking the mantle of leadership on themselves, but this is not always the case. Sometimes merely seeing another leader rise to become a tyrant is enough for the Sleeper to realize the people are going to follow *someone*; it should be someone who will uplift them.

The Lesson of Fire

The lesson of Earth teaches that social stratification is a fiction and the lesson of Water teaches that people need to be guided. At this point in recruitment, many Sleepers tend toward becoming solipsistic or tyrannical as they take these two understandings to heart. It is the object of the lesson of Fire to burn away selfishness and petty philosophies of self-aggrandizement. Fire is the quintessential energy, and that energy can be turned to destruction as easily as to creation or sheltering warmth. The ideal Fire warms the Earth, boils Water into vaporous air, and remains constant and controlled. The unideal Fire rages with unrestrained abandon until it starves against the Earth or is extinguished by the rains.

The lesson of Fire ignites the passion of the individual will. Yet the will must be tempered by the controlling focus of the Earth and the Water in order to be effective. The mentor leading a recruit through the Elemental Pilgrimage hopes to illustrate to her charge the dangers of tyranny and uncontrolled hubris. Fire is the energy and will to make a change for the better, but that change must be made within the context of what is good and right. The Silver Ladder has no room for moral relativism, and the recruit unwilling to temper her ambition with the legalistic precepts of the Silver Ladder has no place in Awakened society. Ultimately, the lesson of Fire teaches a moral code, and is often a Sleeper's first exposure to the true philosophy of the Silver Ladder.

The moral code of the Silver Ladder, however, is always couched in a Sleeper philosophy, typically one with/for which the recruit has a particular association or fondness. The mentor picks and chooses from the religion or philosophy, taking choice quotes or parables that underscore or reverberate with the théarch's beliefs while playing down or denying those contrary to the principles of the Silver Ladder. Most théarchs who have progressed far enough in their own journey to take on a recruit have become

manipulative enough that this tactic doesn't backfire. There are, however, the occasional extremists the Silver Ladder must abandon at this stage due to their unwillingness to be open to other philosophies or change their own philosophy.

The obstacle the recruit faces during her exposure to the lesson of Fire is inevitably some form of tyranny, whether in the form of a leader who puts himself before the goals of the assembly he leads or a set of outdated corporate bylaws that favor the company owners and investors at the sharp expense of the workers and customers. Quite often the tyrant is the recruit herself, who has likely taken charge of a group during the lesson of Water if she didn't hold a position of leadership beforehand. The Awakened mentor finds the appropriate tyrant figure before using magic to emphasize its negative effect on those it harms. As the recruit sees the harm being done by the tyrant figure (or by her own works, if she is the tyrant), she is guided by the mentor, who, as her confidante, offers her the advice and wisdom necessary to make her a strong leader. Inevitably this is the philosophy of the Silver Ladder in the form of watered-down versions of the Elemental Precepts (see p. 35) and the more philosophical aspects of the lessons of Earth and Water (or whichever lessons the recruit has already passed through). The end result, theoretically, is the transformation of a leader into an individual who *leads well*.

Example: *Laura finds herself in the position of leadership over her former level of management vacated by her predecessor during the lesson of Water. Her mentor, who notices she favors her former branch of the HR department, utilizes magic to emphasize that proclivity in the recruit or to ensure the harmful decisions made by the recruit have the maximum negative impact on the other employees. The mentor then revisits the lesson of Earth, revealing to the recruit the negative impact her actions have had; then she reveals to the recruit records from the company CEOs, similar decisions they made in the past that harmed her. At first, the former HR director is demoralized, but with careful guidance from her confidante, she begins the path toward righting the wrong decisions she made, with an eye to reforming the leadership of the entire company.*

Success in the lesson of Fire takes the form of a newly awakened desire to embrace the precepts drawn from the Silver Ladder and to throw down the domination of tyrants. This may take the form of a tear-filled confession to the mentor, the pupil becoming a whistleblower regarding the policies of the tyrant to a higher authority, or merely resignation or a sincere shift in

policy if the tyrant turns out to be the recruit herself. Fire, however, is also the element of persistence, and many mentors require more than simple realization; their charges must act on their new understanding. There is great danger in working to overcome a tyrant (or even in ceasing to be a tyrant oneself), and the benefits almost always favor the liberated rather than the liberator. This necessary contradiction is often the greatest difficulty in overcoming the obstacles of the lesson of Fire, and more than one tyrannical employer or sycophantic yes-man has been made of the théarch's failed recruits.

While the lessons of Earth and Air almost always bookend the process of initiation, the lessons of Water and Fire are often reversed, and sometimes taught at the same time. Those who favor teaching the lesson of Fire feel it is easier to set fire to the dry Earth than it is to burn Water. They follow the lessons of the stratification of society with the hatred of tyrants before dousing the flame in Water, in the lesson of the necessity of leadership. These mentors claim that a recruit who understands the lesson of Fire before the lesson of Water is less likely to see the Silver Ladder as an unnecessary and tyrannical evil upon Awakening, and thus less likely to defect to the Free Council. Those proponents of teaching the lesson of Water feel, first, the difficulty of the journey is precisely the point, and the slow revelation of initially apparently contradictory ideals strengthens the eventual understanding of the recruit. Furthermore, the lesson of Fire may be lost in the lesson of Water if the latter is taught after the former, and these mages purport that the passion inspired by the lesson of Fire helps the recruit ascend to full Wakefulness. Ultimately, tradition holds that the proper method is to ascend from the base to the pinnacle, and that traditionally means rising from the rocky soil to the sea to the flame and finally to the sky.

The Lesson of Air

Air is the element of the spirit, the intellect and the soul. Air demands freedom, and cannot be held by shackle or chain. Air rises. Air is the invisible firmament: It parts for baser matters, but can muster force enough to drive a straw through a tree or to seem a solid wall against an enemy's approach.

Air is the soul in lust for sovereignty in an enslaved world. Simply put, the lesson of Air is simply the lesson of Awakening. Imperium is the right of man, and Awakening is the morally responsible rejoinder to the Lie. If a recruit has not otherwise Awakened during the course of the Elemental Pilgrimage, it is up to

the mentor to release to the recruit a small shred of the Truth. This occasionally comes in the form of a display of vulgar magic, but most mentors know the Sleeping mind is capable of rationalizing even the most impressive feats as the illusions of charlatans. In the case of Sleepwalkers, who have already witnessed vulgar magic, the sheer presence of magic is hardly enough to spark full Awakening. A willworker capable of changing the memories of her charge may even grant her recruit the Mage Sight and attempt to teach her the basics of a spell, secure in the knowledge that if she fails, the memory of the event can be wiped from her mind and the mysteries protected.

The Elemental East

While the Greater Elemental Precepts represent a higher law, the law of the Oracles, and are thus similar for Silver Ladder mages throughout the world, the Lesser Elemental Precepts are laws of the Lie, the mundane Fallen World. The number and substance of the basic elements varies in different locales across the globe and even during different time periods within the same area.

The Storyteller is welcome to declare that the elemental lessons listed here also represent a higher Supernal understanding rather than a rarified mundane understanding, and therefore are common among Silver Ladder caucuses around the globe. Otherwise, the Storyteller should feel free to include local cultural customs for the Silver Ladder in her particular chronicle.

For example, perhaps the Consilii of the East teach the lessons of Earth, Fire and Water similarly to those of the West, but teach the lesson of Metal, the importance of inner strength of will, and the lesson of Wood, the importance of bringing life into the inner soul, rather than the lesson of Air. The Storyteller is encouraged to research local customs when designing this aspect of her Consilium.

The more common route taken by recruiters is to provide the recruit with some form of treatise or spell description she deems likely to inspire Awakening. These tracts are often passed from mentor to charge, meaning any Sleeper may Awaken into a neophyte willworker of the Silver Ladder by careful study of the same esoteric manuscript that brought her mentor to Awakening. This is one of the many ties of tradition

that bind the Silver Ladder together. The treatises are usually works of metaphysical philosophy or arcane theory. While they are universally difficult for a Sleeper to grasp (and can even prove difficult for an expert mage to fully understand, as they are not transcribed in the Supernal jargon and formulae of Atlantis, but rather in a mundane, Fallen language), the effect or benefit described by the text theoretically proves great enough for the recruit to persevere and overcome.

Numerous recruits Awaken to the Lie during the course of one of the earlier lessons. If this occurs, the neophyte becomes an Illuminate (see Chapter Two), and the mentor comes forward, explains who she is and what the neophyte has become, and continues the Elemental Pilgrimage to its completion, even if she has to be more subtle in doing so.

The Elemental Pilgrimage, however, is a far from fail-safe method of bringing Sleepers and Sleepwalkers to full Awakening. Only half those recruits approached satisfactorily complete The First Rung, and a smaller percentage of those who remain successfully walk the pilgrimage to its mundane end. After all, only those willing to seek power in the face of great danger, and those who prove they serve a greater good, are given a tiny hint of the Truth to push them toward full Awakening. Of those who complete the lessons of Earth, Water and Fire, only a handful actually Awaken. Those who make the journey and return enlightened are welcomed into the order as brothers. Those who do not remain cogs within the Cryptopoly and are watched.

Many of these, Sleepers who have glimpsed the truth of the Supernal, find their way into the occult societies of the Guardian's Labyrinth. This suits the purposes of the Silver Ladder fine, as they keep tabs on the unAwakened mortal and get a better sense of the scope of the Guardian's machine. Those Sleepers who seemed worthy candidates but are unwilling to follow through on the information provided to them by the Silver Ladder (or those turned away by the danger), are let go without complaint. They obviously didn't have what it takes, the courage, the intellect, or the sheer moral integrity to become a willworker. Those who entered the pilgrimage only to take on the spiritual mantle of the Lion are removed from the conspiracy lest they pollute its higher purpose. Sleepwalkers who fail to Awaken often become valued retainers and are considered Illuminates within the Cryptopoly.

While the Silver Ladder purports to spread the flame of Awakening whenever it can, the reality of the matter is that it interprets "whenever it can" rather liberally. Not only does the Quiescence make the practice of disseminating information on the Supernal incredibly dangerous, but the Silver Ladder treasures the Sleeping population as the order's secret weapon against the greatest of all enemies, the Exarchs. The end result is that the Silver Ladder spends relatively little time attempting to inspire Awakenings among the Sleeping populace, sparing the attention mentioned above on only the very best and brightest prospective recruits (such as the players' characters). See below for more information on how the Silver Ladder interacts with the Sleeping world.

Flashbacks

Recruitment into an order is a highly personal journey, and rare will be the group of player characters who want their characters to be members of the same order who Awakened at the same time under the same circumstances. Flashbacks are an excellent method of exploring the truth of how a player character came to Awaken and join her order while still beginning the story in media res.

If the Storyteller has plotted the general content of the flashbacks in advance, they can be used during a lull in the action, after the players have made a decision for which they were in no way prepared, or just to illuminate the current plot. She can keep the other players involved by letting them take on non-player characters during the flashback. Don't feel bound to let fate be decided by dice rolls during the flashbacks; flashbacks are more story devices and methods of further defining the players' characters than they are important parts of the current action (though, of course, they can be both).

After all, it's already happened.

Proximi

Of special interest to the Silver Ladder are the scions of Proximi families. Common stereotyping in Awakened society has it that almost all the Proximi families traditionally belong to the Silver Ladder, and those that don't will eventually drift that way

in time. While this is far from true, the théarchs do boast more than their fair share of Proximi family support, as there is quite a bit in the Silver Ladder philosophy that appeals to those who aspire to create dynasties of willworkers heir to fortune, influence, mystical power and prestige. For their part, Proximi who have grown up aware (at least dimly so) of their birthrights are already half-Awake. They have already seen magic with their own eyes. They already know a hint of that potential power. And with few exceptions, they covet that power for themselves. Common wisdom holds that they are more likely to Awaken. Most importantly, they are used to influence and affluence. They have beheld the advantages available to those who lead from the shadows. In short, they are as perfect potential théarchs as the Silver Ladder could hope for.

This is not, however, an immutable rule. No Proximus is more immune to the typical pitfalls of being raised in a family of influence and wealth than any Sleeper scion of the upper class. Despite the best efforts of their families, many Proximi become spoiled and ineffectual sluggards or fall into addiction. Some Proximi who may seem a perfect fit for the Silver Ladder never fully throw off the Lie, and remain no more than Sleepwalkers (though these become some of the théarchs' most trusted and capable, if perhaps somewhat resentful, agents in Sleeper society). Finally, many of the influential Proximi families are well known within their Consilii, which makes the heirs to such families prime targets for recruitment from every powerful order in the city. This often results in the young Proximus being sheltered from the world by his family, sometimes to the point that he never develops the leadership skills or the social acumen that made the family great in the first place. Finally, there is the pressure of the parents. Rare is the Proximus who Awakens to join an order different from her mother or father, even when the relationship between them is strained. Proximi who reject their parents' orders almost always take up the banner of the Free Council, and rare is the proto-Libertine who wants anything to do with the "oppressors of all Awakened society."

Nevertheless, the Silver Ladder often welcomes those former Proximi who Awaken to an awareness of the Supernal, even if they hold ideals that might better match one of the other Atlantean orders. Though these Awakened are perhaps more likely to renounce the Silver Ladder down the road, the

Proximi as Player Characters

Starting a game as a Proximus requires 5 dots of Merits, 4 for the Sleepwalker Merit, and another 1 for the Proximus Merit (see p. 334 of **Mage: the Awakening**), yet offers very little in the way of readily obvious, tangible benefits to the player. A player who buys the Proximus Merit at character creation is making quite an investment, and the Storyteller is encouraged to keep that in mind when at the game table (assuming she doesn't use the rules presented in Chapter Two).

Proximi are valued in mage society, especially by the Silver Ladder, and often rewarded handsomely for their assistance and, more importantly, their loyalty and discretion. Furthermore, Proximi often come from family lines with connections to the Supernal, and it may be significantly easier for a character who began as a Proximus to justify experience expenditures toward Mentor, Resources, Imbued Items, and even Artifacts. These Merits don't cost less for former Proximi, they just should require less effort on the part of the character to obtain.

Perhaps a long lost uncle arrives to take the newly-Awakened mage under his wing. Perhaps upon entering Awakened society an ally of the character's long-dead father (who, unknown to the character, was Awakened himself) provides the character with a powerful heirloom. Finally, one of the most subtle boons of the Proximus Merit (which is more a boon to the player and the Storyteller than to the character) is the tendency for magic to seek out the Proximi, leading to any number of story hooks to get a group involved in the unusual and unnatural.

Stories about Proximi families should be about the secrets of an esoteric bloodline, the ties between ancestors and descendents, and the skeletons kept in the closets of dusty manses. Inspiration for stories that revolve around mystical bloodlines (and their mystery-shrouded origins) is easy to come by, and children's literature is especially rife with stories of young people who discover there is far more to their family than they ever expected.

elder théarchs are more than willing to disregard that in favor of the advantages such neophytes bring. Not only does the order benefit from the continued wealth and prestige of the former Proximus's family, rare is the théarch who doesn't appreciate having an ally capable of empathizing with the enemy's point of view. Having a neophyte with exactly the right outlook to serve as an emissary and ambassador to a rival faction is an advantage; having one who can help predict how that order will react in any given situation is even better. Needless to say, however, these are the théarchs most closely watched by the Silver Ladder for signs of betrayal or defection.

There are no free passes into the Silver Ladder, however, no matter how skilled and prestigious a Proximus's family is.

Sleepwalkers who are not part of an established magical heritage are cherished by the Silver Ladder, as well, and while those who prove to have the same qualities listed above for Sleepers are welcome additions to the Silver Ladder, should they Awaken, few Sleepwalkers are pursued with the zeal the théarchs reserve for members of established magical lineage.

Recruiting Mages

While the Silver Ladder would prefer to mold each of its initiates through a series of aphoristic rites and lessons, building the ideal Silver Ladder before the initiate even Awakens, the sad reality is that most of the order's neophytes come from the ranks of the already Awakened. Though offered the expected modicum of respect due to an Awakened individual, each recruit can expect to be required to more than simply demonstrate a capacity for Supernal magic before being granted a place among the théarchs.

Recruiting the Newly Awakened

The vast majority of new recruits to the Silver Ladder enter the order after having Awakened independently. Most of these novices are found by a cabal of théarchs (or a multi-order cabal with a strong théarch among them) and taught almost from the moment of Awakening to view and approach Awakened society through the philosophical praxis of the Silver Ladder. Silver Ladder mages often assume a rank novice they discover is a strong potential recruit for the Silver Ladder. While grabbing up

every orderless mage the order finds on the street may seem an exercise in foolishness, the Silver Ladder recognizes the occult law of like attracts like. A théarch is more likely to come across a potential théarch than a potential Guardian. Théarchs of a more sociological bent simply point out that théarchs have a tendency to haunt the halls of power, so any newly Awakened they find are also the type of individual attracted to power. The Silver Ladder is not blind, however, nor does it appreciate turncoats. If a Silver Ladder mentor decides his charge would be far more at home in another order, he is likely to contact an allied member of that order and provide the neophyte to his new family. This allows the Silver Ladder to maintain numerous ties to friendly mages of other orders who are (theoretically, at least) appreciative of the théarch's assistance and guidance in the early days of their Awakened existence and helps keep the order on good terms with its allies among the other Awakened orders by providing them promising new recruits.

The Silver Ladder teaches every single young mage who comes into its orbit, whether or not it suspects he is an excellent potential théarch, the lessons of the Elemental Pilgrimage. It does not lead the Awakened novice through the philosophy in the same manner it does a Sleeper or Sleepwalker. The Awakened novice has already proven his moral integrity by Awakening, and the théarchs know they do not have to hold her hand. She has more respect by dint of having Awakened at all.

Instead, the Lesser Elemental Precepts are taught as the Elemental Pyramid, an occult contrivance that posits Air, the Awakened spirit, as a central element bounded within a context of the morally mature points of the solid Earth, the flowing Water, and the burning Fire. Each is taught not only in its practical context (which is what Sleepers and Sleepwalkers are exposed to during their pilgrimage), but in its theoretical context (listed above at the beginning of each lesson). Mentorship in the Silver Ladder is based on the traditional roles of master and apprentice, and mentors teach through aphorisms and the Socratic method, explaining truths of Awakened life through tales of the Silver Ladder's successes and failures while eliciting from the neophyte the conclusions taught by the lesson. This helps the mentor ingrain the philosophy within the new student, making it seem as if each aspect were obvious and that the student came to it of her own accord. There is often a mystical



or spiritual aspect to the teachings, and many young théarchs describe these lessons as having been drawn from their own Awakened souls. The teachings of the Silver Ladder, such neophytes claim, reverberate with the mage's connections to the Supernal Realm. This method of teaching does much to secure a mage's loyalty to the ideals of the Silver Ladder.

The théarchs do not consider the Lesser Elemental Precepts of Earth, Water, and Fire to be anything remotely resembling order secrets. Quite the opposite, they argue. Every mage, regardless of order, should conduct herself with a thorough understanding of these self-evident (from the perspective of the théarchs) truths. The lessons of Earth, Water, and Fire form the basis of an ideal Awakened and Sleeper society within the context of the Lie, and the théarchs are quick to spread them. Mages who eventually enter other orders typically have a better understanding of the Silver Ladder, its actions,

and its goals, and are less likely to be resentful of every ruling handed down by the Consilium. For their part, the other orders, save the Free Council, typically find the Lesser Elemental Precepts relatively harmless, and do little to re-indoctrinate new recruits outside each order's typical initiations. This remains one of the Silver Ladder's most potent tools of control; individuals are less likely to argue with a leader on the particulars if they already agree on the basics.

Newly Awakened mages often have the least difficulty entering the order, at least so long as the city's théarchs feel they would be appropriate additions to their intrigues. After they have been taught the basics of existing in Awakened society (usually having been fostered by a Silver Ladder cabal; see p. 38, **Sanctum and Sigil**), the novice's mentor or foster cabal puts forward a petition for her membership, typically at a caucus of the region's théarchs, but sometimes simply to the most elder

Silver Ladder willworkers of the city. Promising young willworkers have been watched carefully and tested thoroughly, and the mentor or foster cabal almost always provides an extensive portfolio of the potential member's achievements. If the novice meets the approval of the caucus, the mentor or foster cabal returns to her with an offer of membership, coupled with a task of initiation. The task is rarely terribly difficult, is usually of a social or political nature (though often a mixture of the two), and provides the initiate an opportunity to put her understanding of the Lesser Elemental Precepts into action. As the recruit fulfills the task of initiation, her mentor guides her to a basic understanding of the Greater Elemental Precepts.

Initiation tasks are usually goal-oriented. A typical task may be securing a specific position in a specific company. The task may be given in a straightforward manner ("We need you to become the head of IT at Enrond Electronics"), though it is more often laid out in a more circuitous manner ("We need you to gain long-term influence over the way internal systems are analyzed and repaired at Enrond Electronics"). A recruit who finds a creative method of completing the task is often granted a great deal of respect, relative to her experience, from the moment she undergoes the induction rite (see below). Use of magic during the task, however, is strongly frowned upon, and an obvious reliance upon magic to complete the task is grounds for reconsideration of membership. Théarchs are expected to be able to stand on their own two feet when the use of magic isn't an option.

Converting Mages

Experienced apostate willworkers and converts from other orders are treated similarly to newly Awakened mages, though with significantly greater suspicion. Such converts are *always* expected to find a Silver Ladder cabal willing to foster them, and their freedom is even more restricted than that of the newly Awakened. Converts do not have to find a foster cabal until after they have broken ties with their former cabal, though most wise potential théarchs find a cabal willing to take them in before making enemies of their former order.

Théarchs rarely approach members of other orders to seek converts. Indeed, théarchs appreciate converts less than the other orders; membership in an order is a responsibility and an oath, two things the Silver

Ladder holds in particularly high esteem, and converts have already proven themselves willing to disregard them. When a member of another order approaches a théarch to ask to join the order, the théarch brings the request before the local caucus. Such conversions are discussed at length, and the political ramifications of the conversion are often granted at least as much, if not more, attention than the desires of the convert. In order to take in a convert, the caucus must be convinced the value of the converting mage outweighs the potential costs of taking in an oathbreaker and making enemies of her former order (and sometimes cabal mates).

Apostates, assuming they have not belonged to another order in the past, have the advantage of being judged primarily on their merit rather than the possible fallout of allowing them entrance into the order. Such concerns *are* considered, however, and any enemies the order may inherit due to the apostate's past actions are balanced against her capabilities. Unfortunately for the apostate, an extensive period of time outside Consilium society is considered something of a lapse in moral judgment at best and a reason for extreme suspicion at worst.

Sheer magical ability and potential are not, of course, the primary consideration in the caucus's decision to admit or refuse a conversion. Converting mages are expected to be the kind of individuals the order approaches when recruiting Sleepers. Leadership skills, political acumen, a strong moral center, a lack of excessive humility, and a willingness to take on the mantle of spiritual guide to the whole of the world are required of the converting willworker. In most cases, the Silver Ladder within a region already expects any mage of another order it is willing to accept into its membership to convert, due primarily to how obviously better she would fit into the Silver Ladder. The order rarely accepts a willworker whose conversion comes to them as a surprise.

A convert the caucus has decided to bring into the fold is required to immediately break ties with its former order and join a cabal as a fosterling. Breaking the oath the convert has made to the other order is crime enough without increasing the dishonor by skulking about between the two orders like a spy. The Silver Ladder, for its part, stands behind those rare few conversions it accepts, and the order leadership and the fostering cabal step forward to publicly announce their acceptance of the convert. The tacit statement:

the Silver Ladder will protect the convert from her former allies. If the caucus decides it will not accept the convert for whatever reason, it immediately informs the convert of its decision, sometimes asking some small favor in return for its trouble. On occasion, the Silver Ladder has been known to inform the leadership of the failed convert's current order of her attempt to act the turncoat. This is rare, however, and usually only when the théarchs are allied with the failed convert's order or believe there is significant gain to providing the information. Sometimes the internal strife such a revelation will cause is gain enough.

Apostates and converts from other orders who attempt to join the Silver Ladder are taught the philosophy of the Elemental Pyramid, just as if they were newly Awakened. If the mage was initially taught by willworkers of the Silver Ladder, this may be her second exposure to the philosophy. The foster cabal is as thorough with those who are getting the information a second time as they are with those first hearing it; after all, the lessons did not seem to stick the first time around. An initiatory task is then handed down from the region's caucus. Unlike the tasks granted to newly Awakened mages, the tasks provided to converts and apostates are quite difficult and always relate to the mage community. The Silver Ladder knows the mage's accomplishments to this point, and the task is always some matter of sociopolitical acumen that exceeds the mage's greatest success to date. Typical tasks include forming a successful cabal, gaining the position of leadership within the mage's current cabal, or successfully navigating the Lex Magica as a factotum (see pp. 66-67 of **Sanctum and Sigil**) in some manner of Consilium business. For older converts this can be exceptionally difficult, and initiatory tasks have, on occasion, included such demanding undertakings as securing the position of Provost. Unlike a raw recruit, however, there is no stigma against an established mage wielding magic in his quest so long as she remains within the constraints of the Lex Magica.

For her part, the initiate who has converted from another order has little recourse but to successfully carry out the task assigned her. Failure to do so sees the recruit returned to her former order, an order she publicly decried, and the best fate has in store for her is reduction to the status of a rank apostate and betrayer. Those mages who fail to successfully convert usually leave their Consilium for a new city and a new start

rather than remain in a region where their reputations are irreparably blighted. This is a relatively rare occurrence, however. The Silver Ladder does not make a habit of inviting a mage to convert unless they are sure the Awakened has what it takes to succeed in her initiation challenge.

The Star and Betrayal

Despite the apparently benevolent that the Silver Ladder takes with its converts from other orders, it demands quite a bit from the few it accepts. Not only is the initiatory task set by the convert's new superiors very likely to be the most difficult assignment the mage has ever set out to accomplish, the Silver Ladder demands loyalty from its adherents, and a willworker willing to turn her back on her former friends and teachers has quite a way to go to prove she is loyal to her new order. Ironically, the first step in proving her loyalty to the Ladder is very likely to be a further act of betrayal against her former order.

The Elemental Precept of the Star, the Supernal Fire, represents the bond between the willworkers of the Silver Ladder and the Oracles within the Supernal Watchtowers. It teaches that the Silver Ladder is the one true way, that it is the right of the théarchs as representatives of the Oracles in the Fallen World to guide the Awakened in the war against the Exarchs. By joining another order before coming to the Silver Ladder, a converting mage has already put the goals of another order before the teachings of the Silver Ladder. The théarchs require of such an individual a major sacrifice, a true betrayal of his former order, before he is allowed full standing as a neophyte among the Silver Ladder.

Converting mages are required to provide some major secret from their former order, whether of an occult or political nature. This secret is rendered directly to the local Magister, and while they may check up on the information to verify it (though they prefer to rely simply upon their own abilities of lie detection, both Supernal and mundane), they never directly and openly utilize the information. If the information is something on which the théarchs feel they must act (a converting mystagogue, for example, warns the théarchs of a coup against the théarch Hierarch planned by a local hierophant of that order), they will do so in a manner that seems providence or happenstance. The betrayed order likely suspects betrayal by its former member; the

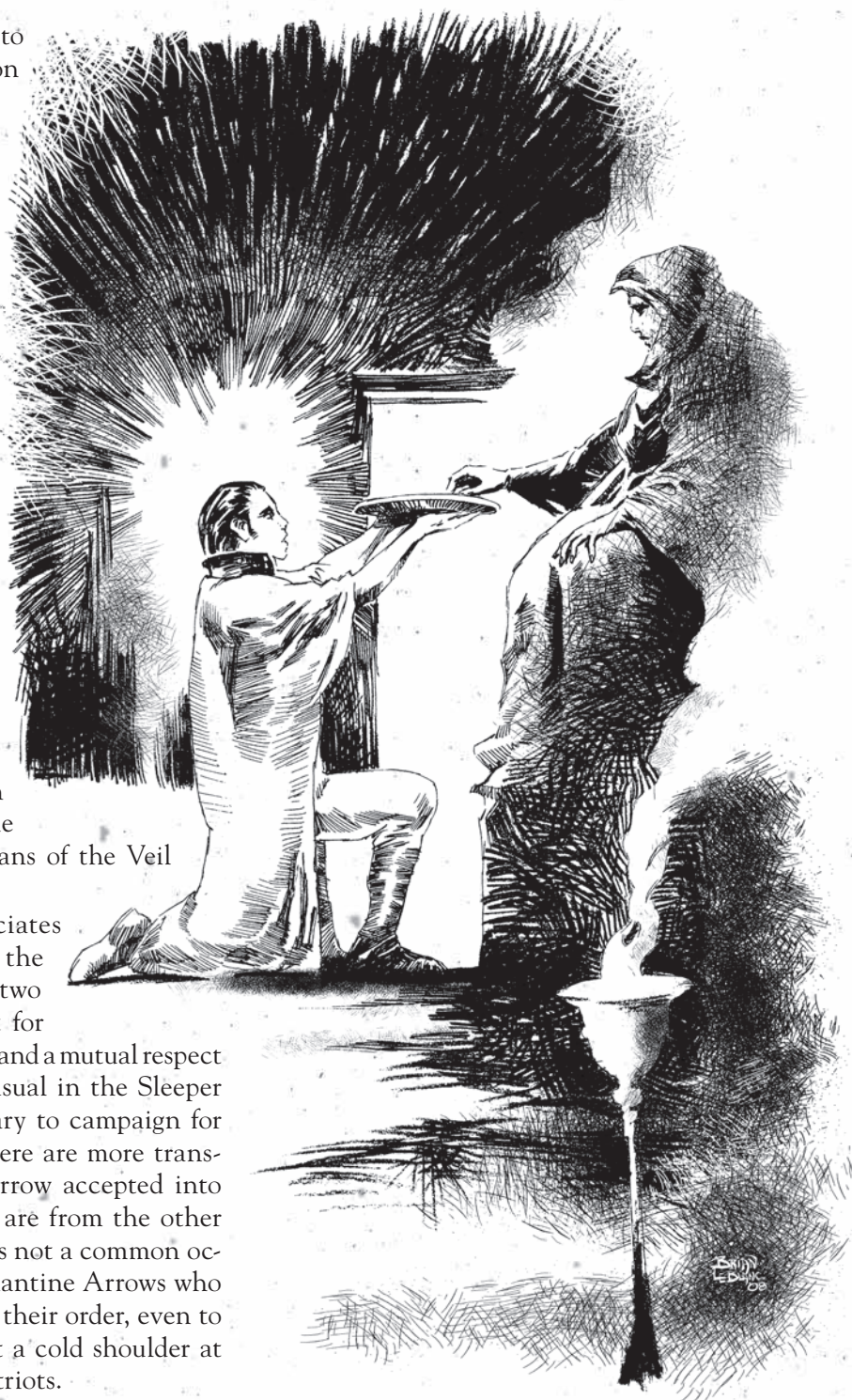
onus is on the Silver Ladder to make sure the seeds of suspicion never find soil in proof.

The Other Orders

Converts to the Silver Ladder are rare creatures, even by mage standards, and among those who convert, the vast majority are strong (though usually young) leaders within the Mysterium and the Adamantine Arrow. The order as a whole holds these two orders in higher regard than the other two, and experience has shown time and again that members of these orders are most likely to make a successful transition into the new traditionalist and legalistic paradigm of the théarchs. Experience shows, too, that the difficulties that come with accepting converts from the Free Council and the Guardians of the Veil far outweigh the benefits.

The Silver Ladder appreciates the efforts and abilities of the Adamantine Arrow, and the two orders have a similar respect for tradition, honor and authority, and a mutual respect for one another. It is not unusual in the Sleeper world for a man of the military to campaign for public office, and similarly there are more transfers from the Adamantine Arrow accepted into the Silver Ladder than there are from the other three orders combined. This is not a common occurrence, however, and Adamantine Arrows who have abandoned their duty to their order, even to join the théarchs, can expect a cold shoulder at best from their former compatriots.

Awakened swayed from the Mysterium are far less common than from the Adamantine Arrow yet far more common than those from the Guardians of the Veil or the Free Council. While mages of the Adamantine Arrow are more likely to convert out of a desire to lead after many years of service, the mages of the Mysterium are more likely to convert young, before being initiated into the deeper mysteries of that sect. There are numerous reasons a



mage might leave the Mysterium for the Silver Ladder, but by far the most common is a desire to *do something* with the lore they have gained. The effort the Mysterium demands of its youngest members is grueling, and the disappointment that can come of finding a secret and powerful Artifact only to have it vanish into a dusty warehouse never to be

seen again can take its toll on a young mystagogue. Théarchs are careful to either accept such mages, encourage them to remain with their own order, or find a more productive outlet for their efforts (such as the Adamantine Arrow); these apostates are the mages most likely to break from Atlantean tradition entirely and join the Free Council if they are not given a more acceptable alternative.

Attempted conversions from the Free Council are rare, and the Silver Ladder almost never accepts them. Even if a repentant Libertine convinces the local caucus he has become disillusioned with an order he entered in the folly of youth, the théarchs are far more likely to steer the apostate toward the Adamantine Arrow or Mysterium. This is the general tactic taken with all mages who attempt to convert from the Free Council; better they join an Atlantean order than be denied membership in the Silver Ladder and remain a Libertine. At least thereafter the willworker will be a productive member of Awakened society. An unusual few among the Silver Ladder, however, are converts from the Free Council. Typically these mages were approached and indoctrinated by the Libertines shortly after Awakening, and have come to the greater wisdom offered through the Atlantean paradigm over their years in Awakened society. They tend to be the most vocally supportive of Silver Ladder tactics and philosophy... and the least trusted among the order.

As a rule, the Silver Ladder never accepts converts from the Guardians of the Veil. (Rules may be bent or broken from time to time, of course, but the intention is clear.) Given that order's penchant for secrecy, espionage and fanaticism, converts are simply too much trouble to make it worth the time and effort of the Silver Ladder to attempt to transition them into its order. The Guardians have bizarre rites of entrance and indoctrination that result in hardwired tendencies toward manipulation and paranoia that make them mix poorly with the théarchs, and rare is the Guardian who can still inspire trust among the Awakened, and the ability to inspire trust is a trait prized among théarchs above most others. Unlike attempted converts from the other orders, converts from the Guardians of the Veil are not directed by the théarchs toward other orders; the Silver Ladder has no interest in being later accused of bringing spies to their allies' doors.

In general, the Silver Ladder does assist the mage who is unhappy in his current situation to find a new order within the society of the Awakened, usually

by arranging meetings with members of other orders the Silver Ladder suspects will be a better fit for the mage in question. They rarely leave a mage to stew unassisted in discontent. Upset mages tend to become enemies, both to the Silver Ladder specifically and to the greater Awakened population in general, as they are more susceptible to the influence of the Seers of the Throne and more esoteric threats, such as the acamoth. The Silver Ladder considers it one of its many duties to prevent such subversion before it starts.

Induction

The mages of the Silver Ladder are ardent supporters of tradition, and the traditional rite of induction has changed surprisingly little in the order's recorded history. While local variations on the following rite are common, the ritual that welcomes a new mage into the Silver Ladder is surprisingly similar worldwide. Upon completion of whatever introductory task has been assigned to the novice mage, her mentor or foster cabal petitions the caucus for full acceptance of the Awakened as an Acolyte of the Silver Ladder. If the caucus approves her ascension to the rank of Acolyte, the regional leaders of the Silver Ladder convene a special caucus, inviting the Councilors and Hierarch (if they are not members of the Silver Ladder) as well as any other luminaries of the regional Consilium who don't claim membership in the order. Additionally, the mage to be inducted is allowed to invite any Awakened she deems fit, whether friend or enemy. (A surprising number of neophytes invite enemies, whether as a sign of conciliation or, more commonly, a display of triumph.)

Induction into the Silver Ladder is a public exhibition, but not mere spectacle. The willingness of the mage to swear allegiance to the order before so many people is a reassurance of her loyalty and faith in the teachings of the Silver Ladder. The oath sworn before the multitude is a gesture that echoes in each of the Supernal Realms, and sympathetic bonds are forged between novice and order along with the oath. The neophyte *becomes* the Silver Ladder through the ceremonial aspects of the rite. Additionally, the ceremony is an equally public acceptance on the part of the Silver Ladder of the neophyte to its ranks, along with the protection and support such acceptance implies. The message of the publicity of the ceremony is clear: *this mage has proven herself to us, and we to her. Any attack*

upon us is an attack upon her. Any attack upon her is an attack upon us.

The ceremony takes place in a large, round or semi-round room such as a lecture hall or auditorium whenever possible. When such a room is not available, seating is set to be semi-circular. Guests are seated in concentric circles or half circles about the central ceremony space by rank of importance. The innermost circle includes the Hierarchy, the Councilors of the Consilium, and any Magisters of the Silver Ladder who are in attendance. The second circle includes Provosts of the Consilium and familii superior of the Silver Ladder, as well as any luminaries of other orders specifically invited by the caucus for the event. The third circle includes any Awakened who hold the title of Sentinel or Herald within the Consilium or the rank of famulus within the Silver Ladder, as well as personal guests of the mage to be inducted. The final circle includes the Acolytes of the Silver Ladder, whom the inductee will soon join as peer. In some Consilii, especially those where the Silver Ladder is far and away the most dominant power in the region, the rite is open to the whole of the Consilium, and a fifth circle includes the "general public."

The ceremony begins with a rite to sanctify the area. This is performed by prominent thérarchs, typically of the famulus or famulus superior rank, and is typically similar (save in Consilii in which the Silver Ladder is unusually weak in city politics) to the rites that open a gathering of the Consilium. The rite almost always includes the casting of a ward (though such a casting is typically more symbolic than practical, and in a Consilium where a powerful ward is truly necessary for such a gathering, such as one in which the Consilium is engaged in open and violent warfare with the Seers of the Throne, a more potent ward is cast prior to the beginning of the induction ceremony), but other spells utilized at this point in the induction can vary dramatically. A Consilium on good terms with the local spirit courts may include spells to lower the Gauntlet and encourage spirits to attend, believing such a connection to the Shadow further strengthens the bond between inductee and order, or that the presence of spirits somehow sanctifies the proceedings. (This is particularly common among members of the Thrice-Great Legacy; see p. 110, **Legacies: The Ancient**.) Conversely, a Consilium with an antagonistic or domineering attitude toward spirits will likely strengthen the Gauntlet and add a ban against the presence of spirits to the ward. The

spells used at this stage also depend largely upon the personalities and magical practices of the Magisters of the Silver Ladder. A Consilium that includes a particularly potent Necromancer, for example, can expect ghosts to be summoned and given ectoplasmic substance, that the spirits of the ancestors of the Consilium may bear witness to the induction of the new member.

After the space is ritually consecrated, the master of ceremonies, typically the Magister of the region's Silver Ladder, calls forth the inductee's mentor or foster cabal and swears them to speak no words save the truth during the ceremony. The master asks that the abilities and accomplishments of the mentor or cabal be publicly given, a bit of ceremonial pomp designed to illustrate how worthy the inductee's trainers are to speak for her admittance into the order. The mentors are then asked whether or not they feel the inductee should be elevated to the Silver Ladder. The answer to this question is always affirmative, or the ceremony would not be taking place. The master of ceremonies then enjoins the mentor or cabal to provide the abilities and accomplishments of the inductee, concluding with the satisfactory completion of either the Elemental Pilgrimage (in the case of recruited Sleepers) or the initiatory task.

At this point in the ceremony the inductee is called forth, well-dressed and draped in a robe of cotton. In many regions, she has just come from a night of required vigil and meditation on her impending ascension to the Ladder. The inductee is directed to the center of the room, where she undergoes rigorous questioning on the local Lex Magicus. The caucus's Magister typically performs most of the questioning, though in some regions it is not unheard of for the Hierarchy or her Councilors, even if members of other orders, to question the initiate. In cases wherein the neophyte performed actions of dubious legality during the course of her initiation, a lictor may be onsite to administer a few questions of her own. In some regions, this questioning is little more than a formality, and the inductee has been coached on which questions will be asked and given the appropriate answers. Even in these situations, however, at least one question is posed to the inductee that she has to answer for herself.

An inductee who has arisen from a Proximi family is then given the public history of the known accomplishments of her family, sometimes learning much of it for the first time. If the history is tainted (this sometimes includes "crimes" as petty

as having been sworn in the past to another order), the inductee is asked if she will make up for and restore the honor lost by her ancestors. If it is honorable, she is enjoined to maintain the family's excellent name.

Once the inductee has sufficiently answered questions of law and honor, a théarch comes forth with a censer, wafting curls of incense smoke in a wide circle about the standing inductee. The théarch makes this orbit seven times before the initiate is asked to kneel and commune with the Oracles and her ancestors. A second théarch, a lictor when possible, comes forth and removes the cotton robe. As the inductee meditates on the Supernal, the first théarch brings the censer nearer her and wafts the purifying vapors over her, again making seven orbits of the kneeling initiate. Finally, the second théarch returns bearing a robe of a finer material, usually silk, and drapes it over the kneeling willworker. The color of the robe depends upon the Path of the inductee: white trimmed with silver for theurgists, black trimmed with blue for enchanters, red trimmed with gold for warlocks, green trimmed with auburn for shamans, and violet trimmed with brown for necromancers. Depending upon the wealth of the mentor or cabal, the robe may include clasps, broaches or chains of gold, silver, iron, stone or lead, as the Path dictates. This is considered a central aspect of the induction rite, and the ceremony as a whole is often colloquially known as "taking the mantle" as a result.

The mage is asked to stand, and the mentor or foster cabal then presents the newly inducted théarch with a simple mask (often one kept specifically for this ritual, and considered property of the cabal or Consilium as a whole). As the inductee takes the mask, the mentor or foster cabal asks for her Shadow Name (and at no point earlier in the ritual was a name, either Shadow or True, used for the mage, save in the case of Proximi, whose family's surname (often a Shadow Name itself) is given). The inductee gives the name she has chosen, and the mentor then presents the inductee to the ranking théarch. In the last major action of the ceremony, the Magister leads the inductee to swear an oath to the service of the Silver Ladder, the Consilium, the Awakened Nation and the Awakened City (a reference only the uninitiated believe refers to Atlantis). This oath is only occasionally sanctified through the use of Fate magic.

Each action of the induction ceremony is rigidly formal and carefully choreographed. Even minor hand gestures, some of which bear some resemblance to

Silver Ladder mudras, are carefully formalized, and a well-performed ceremony is believed to serve as a positive omen for the newly-inducted théarch's career as an Awakened. After the stiffness of the ritual, some informal celebration is welcome, and most mentors and foster cabals host a reception afterward for all who attended. The reception is a warm and festive gathering, as well as a time for the hosts to show off and socialize. While fine wines and cheeses are by far the most common fare, some cabals prefer heavier foods, and it is not unknown in some more casual domains for the cabal to host a church-style potluck. In many Consilii, invitations to the reception are extended to cabals and willworkers who were not invited to the induction ceremony itself. This helps keep the Silver Ladder in other cabals' good graces, but more importantly offers the mentor or foster cabal an opportunity to give the new théarch a crash course in city politics.

Rank and Privilege

Rank within the Silver Ladder is largely determined by activity outside the order. The théarchs are quick to recognize greatness and merit within their ranks, and members find there are multiple paths to greatness when ascending the Silver Ladder. The typical method of climbing the Ladder's rungs is a careful combination of political acumen and magical potential. Too strong a focus upon the mundanities of power politics results in a mage weak in the mystical arts, and what good is a Hierarch easily deposed by a senior *neokoros* of the mystagogues? A dusty scholar does equally little to further the orders' goals. The result is that ascension through the ranks of the Silver Ladder is a relatively slow road, but théarchs tend to be more temporally and mystically powerful than their peers of the same rank in other orders. When a théarch ascends from the rank of neophyte to that of famulus, you can be damned sure she has earned it.

Rank is important to many théarchs, and most provide their rank to other Awakened in introduction. Each ascension of rank within the Silver Ladder is a formal affair marked with ritual and pomp. See the induction rite above for an example of the form this might take. Typically the only times in a théarch's career she dons the robe she was given on the day of her initiation is when she rises in rank or when she is granted a title of function. See Chapter Two for more information on titles.

Neophyte (Status 0)

The novices and Acolytes of the Silver Ladder are some of the most visible of its membership. Like the born-again religious and the newly employed, the unproven théarchs are the most overtly zealous of true believers, though for a few cynics, this is little more than an act. Silver Ladder neophytes typically have a close relationship with their mentors, even when they do not share a cabal, and they are granted access to greater mundane resources than neophytes of other orders. Successful and intelligent utilization of these resources is often a major step toward the neophyte's second dot of Order Status.

Publicly, the neophytes are the salespersons, advocates, messengers and lawyers of the Silver Ladder; most, however, double as spies and enforcers. The neophytes form one of the most important resources of the Silver Ladder, as they are the only théarchs mages of other orders tend to trust (so far as trust goes among the Awakened). Neophytes are a fount of information for their leaders and mentors about the situation on the street, the activities of other cabals, and the actions of political rivals. Those Awakened savvy enough to recognize the use to which their mentors are putting them often do everything in their power to ensure they remain in their master's good graces.

There is a marked difference between the way neophytes without Order Status and those with a single dot in it are perceived and treated within the order. Neophytes without Status have yet to complete their initiatory task or perhaps Awakened during the Elemental Pilgrimage but have yet to complete it; these individuals are not truly considered part of the order. Once initiation is complete and the willworker has "taken the mantle," she gains Order Status • and is considered a full member of the order with all the benefits and responsibilities that entails.

Community

The neophyte community within the Silver Ladder combines all the self-congratulatory back-patting, petty-minded hazing and seniority-based deferment of a college fraternity with all the squabbling over half-misunderstood theories of a college philosophy club and the zeal of a fundamentalist church group. It's little surprise then that neophyte théarchs spend as little time together as they can manage. Most prefer the company of their cabal, wherein they often have a position of leadership, to hearing yet again how accomplished their fellow's mentor was at his age.

For the most part, this tendency is encouraged by the magi's mentors. By spreading out, the Silver Ladder is able to influence a greater segment of the polity than it would otherwise. The older théarchs would rather their new recruits become like-minded allies than friends who bicker over notes written in the margin of the *Lex Magica*. This, the famuli feel, will allow the théarchs to grow into a stronger, more mature order than they would otherwise. Familiarity, after all, breeds contempt, and the most common lament voiced by many young théarchs is "what were they thinking if they let *her* into the order?"

The main exception to this tends to be théarchs who share a cabal. While these willworkers can share bitter rivalries or major differences in opinion regarding magical theory, most tend to become incredibly close friends. More than a few become lovers, and some of the strongest partnerships in Awakened society begin as a tryst between neophyte théarchs. So, too, some famuli warn, do some of the bitterest fragmentations.

Outside the Order

Neophyte théarchs can be some of the most irritating and abrasive mages in a Consilium, their condescension and rigid traditionalism vying for the title against the wild anti-authoritarianism and iconoclasm of the most inexperienced Libertines. Most théarchs, however, quickly pick up on how things are done in their region, and after they learn the ropes they make for the best company around.

Most neophytes of the order are incredibly friendly, quick to strike up a conversation, and even quicker to offer assistance. They form the strongest bonds with members of their own cabal, often assuming a position of leadership. Théarchs are also the likeliest mages at the novice level to form cabals, many of whom do so with members of several other orders if possible.

Théarchs tend to have an irresistible urge to socialize with older, more experienced mages, both within and without the order, and many petition their mentors to become messengers to local luminaries they find particularly appealing. The mentor often acquiesces. Experience has shown time and again that even elder mages tend to let down their guard when plied with questions by someone who so obviously admires them.

On the whole, neophytes spend a great deal of time in study, whether with their mentors and cabals, over dusty tomes in a secluded sanctum, or in the political repartee of the Consilium. This is expected to be a

period of learning for the neophyte, and that applies equally to learning how to deal with people from outside the order and to learning rotecraft.

Interactions with Famuli

All Silver Ladder neophytes have at least a single master, and many have a second famulus to whom they have attached themselves. Neophyte théarchs are expected to meet with their mentors no fewer times than once a week, during which time the pair have an informal discussion regarding all the neophyte has learned over the time since their last discussion. The mentor corrects any misconceptions the neophyte reveals, and often explains more fully the small things a novice théarch is already learning to pick up on in social situations but likely relegating to intuition.

Neophytes tend to look to their mentors and the other regional famuli with a sense of awe, and rarely treat them with anything but the utmost respect. Even those who resent the leaders of the order and want to be on top themselves are willing to toe the line until such time as they are able to take the position they covet for themselves. Either way, neophytes tend to soak up every word their mentors speak, and most take their suggestions incredibly seriously. For example, most mentors advise their apprentices to take up the study of law and possibly act as a factotum; most théarchs do. Some Awakened suspect this relationship is the reason so many théarchs think in terms of “how things are and aren’t done.”

Interactions with Magisters

Neophytes rarely interact with Magisters outside the annual Convocation. Magisters do oversee major ceremonies, such as the neophyte’s initiation into the order, but otherwise tend to be mysterious figures with a connection to the divine. Most théarchs make at least one pilgrimage to speak with a Magister during their neophyte years, often shortly after being informed they are being considered for the rank of famulus. The experience is always unique, and often life-changing.

Neophytes almost never find a mentor in the form of a Magister. Each region is limited to a single Awakened of this rank, and the rare mage at this level of advancement is typically involved with other matters (communing with the Oracles and guiding the broadest strokes of Sleeper and Awakened society alike, if rumor is to be believed). Still, it does happen occasionally, and when it does, the neophyte’s former mentor is expected

to cut all ties to the neophyte. Why this is is unknown to the neophyte and often to the famulus, but at least the latter knows neophytes singled out for mentorship by a Magister tend to come to bad ends.

Characters as Neophytes

Neophyte characters have the advantage that relatively little is being asked of them save to learn and experience all they can. Neophytes who do little, however, can expect little in return, and most neophytes spend this time establishing themselves, often quickly gaining Consilium Status as at least a Liegeperson, though often a Herald if the position is available. Additionally, neophytes usually spend this time gaining control over a cabal, either by forming one of their own, wresting the official position of leadership from whoever held it before, or becoming an invaluable advisor whose words are almost always heeded.

It is assumed most beginning characters possess Order Status ●, and thus are full members of the Silver Ladder. At that level, the character gains the High Speech for free, knows most of the information presented in the Theses section of Chapter Two, is familiar with the Lesser Elemental Precepts, and has a competent command of the Lex Magica. Not only do they get the most out of this book at the cost of very little in the way of starting points, they tend to have the fewest mundane administrative responsibilities and be the most fun to play. Mages with Order Status 0 gain little from their membership in the Silver Ladder, though likely have the Mentor Merit and are working their way toward full initiation. An Order Status 0 Silver Ladder mage is never referred to as a théarch, more often referred to as novice or initiate.

Famulus (Status ●●)

When a théarch has successfully reached the Adept level in a single Arcanum or holds Disciple-level understanding in two Arcana and has taken up a prominent position in either a cabal or Consilium politics, she becomes a candidate for the rank of famulus. Ascension to the rank of famulus is a matter of peerage more than anything else, and when a théarch rises to the point where she may be added to the city’s famuli, the current famuli typically recognize the fact. (The Consilium is, after all, a small world.) Meetings between individual famuli often involve discussions of the merits and flaws of the strong neophyte, and by the time the next caucus is held, they have taken

an informal census and decided whether or not to admit the neophyte among their number. There is rarely pressure from the Magisters above either for or against a candidate, though Magisters occasionally provide advice on the matter (and even famuli are not wont to ignore the advice of a Magister).

When the famuli of the region are in rough consensus in support of the candidate, the decision is announced as a minor bit of caucus business and a date for a full ceremony of ascension arranged.

Famuli are the leaders of the Awakened community. They hold positions of power, administrate the ranks and efforts of the Consilium and generally direct the exertions of the order toward Ascension. Famuli are universally mages to be reckoned with, but there is a marked difference between famuli of Order Status •• and Order Status ••• (a difference recognized within the order, differentiated with the addition of the suffix “superior” to the rank of famulus and a second ceremony to cement the recognition). Théarchs of Order Status •• tend to be the cabal leaders, Provosts, judges, and managers of the Awakened effort. Many are just beginning to develop a Cryptopoly cult, and most are still more concerned with solidifying their power-base and expanding their personal knowledge, both mundane and Supernal, than directing the larger efforts of mage society. Most importantly, they are teachers and mentors, both to the neophytes of the order and the non-believers outside the ranks of the Silver Ladder. They are priests, but not bishops. Théarchs of Order Status •••, on the other hand, have usually taken up a major mantle of leadership in the larger society of the Awakened. An Order Status ••• théarch may hold the rank of Councilor or Hierarch, or she may simply be the leader of a prominent faction within the Consilium, but her words are attended by mages of every stripe (if not always heeded). The ascension from famulus to famulus superior is the shift from the private sphere to the public; famuli guide individuals, famuli superior guide the Consilium.

Community

Willworkers of the rank of famulus form the backbone of the Silver Ladder. While not as close-knit a community as some other groups of willworkers, the famuli of a region are far more likely to gather both formally and informally than the neophytes in the same region. Famuli have come to a higher understanding of the Silver Ladder and its aims, internalizing the framework of the Elemental Precepts rather than

whatever watered-down philosophy (or lust for power) led them into the order. Stereotyping both among the neophytes and outside the order paints the famuli as host to somber gatherings of their membership, planning the course of the Consilium from the shadows over glasses of wine while listening to classical opera.

The stereotype is more accurate than not. Of the ranks of the Silver Ladder, the famuli are the most likely to meet socially, although whether or not such meetings are of an informal or professional concern depends largely upon the Consilium and individuals in question. It is not unusual for other mages of influence or close allies to be included in these gatherings, but it is rare that neophytes of the Silver Ladder are invited. The théarchs of Chicago, for example, dispense with gatherings of the famuli entirely, given that every théarch who holds the rank is a member of the same cabal, while the rare (and often extremely tense) meetings of the famuli of Boston are typically meetings between the leadership of the Ebon Noose and White Putnams (see **World of Darkness: Chicago** and **Boston Unveiled** respectively).

Outside the Order

While many of the negative stereotypes of the mages of the Silver Ladder as proud and condescendingly dogmatic come from the other mages’ interaction with the neophytes, the famuli embody the higher ideals of the order. That doesn’t make them pleasant company, though, and many outsiders find the théarch famuli and famuli superior disturbingly intense and frighteningly zealous. They are, however, incredibly persuasive, charismatic, and most importantly capable. The famuli are the generals of the Awakened, the ambassadors to other orders, and the administrators of a millennia-long war many believe is nearing its endgame. For all their faults, the famuli of the Silver Ladder are leaders, and where they lead, the Awakened follow.

Most interactions between members of other orders and the famuli of the Silver Ladder are professional in nature. When meeting with those mages outside their cabal and order, the famuli rarely step outside the role of whatever position they hold. When a non-théarch approaches Altus Vulcanis, Silver Ladder Councilor of Chicago, she is speaking to Altus Vulcanis as Councilor, not as an individual. Of course, the appearance of stepping away from the role can be a powerful tool, as well, and most théarchs can affect a very convincing display of informality in order to bring another mage into her confidence.

Interactions with Neophytes

Most neophytes experience more interaction with a famulus of the order than they do with one another. The famuli keep it this way, assuring the traditions are passed down from master to apprentice over the decades without a great deal of dissent from the lower ranks. Most famuli of Order Status •• are expected to mentor at least a single trainee, often two to three, while famuli superior may take on protégés if their duties allow.

Famuli see the neophytes as little better than members of other orders (or sometimes, especially in regard to novices who have yet to become full théarchs, little better than Sleepers), with the major advantage that they have decided to take up the right path and been found acceptable by the order. As such, most famuli have little compunction about using the neophytes as pawns in their schemes, though as the actions of the apprentice reflect on the mentor, such uses tend to be relatively benign. They do, however, feel the same obligation to uplift the neophytes from their penury of understanding, and most famuli take their duties as mentor *extremely* seriously. It is not unheard of for a neophyte of exceptional understanding of the Mysteries with a strong talent for instruction to be granted the lesser title of famulus if only so that she can be loaded down with neophyte apprentices. This is rare, however, as such false famuli tend to ferment resentment among their former peers, especially among those who have been with the order longer than the newly raised famulus.

Famuli constantly watch the neophytes for members who show the promise and drive necessary to achieve the rank of famulus. They provide their charges with a great deal of free time and relatively little responsibility specifically so they can see what the mages do with it. Unambitious willworkers do not succeed within the Silver Ladder, and without a healthy drive, a mage will languish at the rank of neophyte indefinitely.

Interactions with Magisters

Famuli don't interact with Magisters much more often than do neophytes. While neophytes tend to view the eldest théarchs as semi-divine mystics, the famuli and famuli superior defer to them as the sagely elder statesmen and wizened cardinals of the Silver Ladder. Each Magister has receded from the political game at the Consilium level, instead making movements that reverberate throughout the Fallen World. Famuli superior do seek mentorship from the Consilium's

Magister, and are usually granted it, but the form it takes is often as frustrating as whatever problem is at hand. When dealing with the famuli, the Magister can be exceedingly abstruse; famuli tend to find a Magister's advice comes in simple legalistic maxims that offer little until fully unpacked and fable-like aphorisms that can be studied for years without being fully understood. A newly-appointed famulus often finds the Magister speaks in only the most patently obvious and inscrutably irrelevant terms. Her elders among the famuli superior warn her *nothing* that issues from a Magister's lips is irrelevant.

For the most part, the famuli treat the Magisters as a Sleeper might an aging family patriarch. They are given the space they need to do whatever inexplicable thing they choose, listened to when they choose to speak, and sought out only when the advice of the older and wiser is required.

Characters as Famuli

While it is feasible to begin play as a famulus, even a théarch with only Order Status •• will be desperately underpowered compared to other théarchs of the same rank unless the Storyteller is granting a large pool of experience points before play begins. Storytellers are encouraged to remember that progression through the ranks of the Silver Ladder tends to be very slow, requiring both strong mystical skills and potent political and social acumen, before granting starting characters more than a single dot in Order Status. Additionally, the théarch with Order Status •• or above and no Consilium Status is an extremely rare individual.

Théarchs of Order Status •• and ••• have many, *many* expectations of them, and a théarch who fails to fulfill her responsibilities and obligations can expect to be chastised. Famuli spend the vast majority of their time serving in whatever administrative role they have taken on, garnering research, magical knowledge and mystical Artifacts from the more active apprentices under them, the hidden libraries to which their rank admits them, or the stores of knowledge they can buy with political favors owed them by the Mysterium and Guardians of the Veil.

A famulus player character is equal parts priest and politician. She is a leader among leaders, and her words can sway the Consilium. With her power comes the responsibility to administer it wisely, and despite the perks, being a famulus can entail any number of thankless jobs for a théarch. Characters at this level of development usually take either a position in the Consilium, in the order, or both.

Typical positions within the order for famuli are lictor and claviger, each of which is detailed in Chapter Two. A rare few of those willworkers with Order Status ●●●, often those who serve as Councilor or Hierarch, take on the mantle of Deacon, serving as one of the chief administrators of the local efforts of the Silver Ladder.

Magisters (Status ●●●●)

Ascension to the Magisterium is an honor coveted and feared in equal parts by the théarchs of lesser ranks. There is no doubt a Magister is powerful; a mage cannot expect to be offered an invitation into the Magisterium's membership without being a Second Degree Master of the Arcana and a former holder of the position of Hierarch or Councilor (though exceptions do occasionally occur). They are deferred to as some of the most learned Archmystics of Awakened society, and their pronouncements can have effects that echo in the Consilii of other nations. Membership in the Magisterium implies a tremendous amount of responsibility, however. Not only are the Magisters responsible for convening and running Convocations, they are expected to guide the region's Silver Ladder. Furthermore, the Magisterium is something of a cult within the Silver Ladder, and each member is rumored to have some connection with the Oracles. Each word and gesture of a Magister is carefully examined and interpreted for insight into the Supernal. Add to that that most Magisters are suspected to be on the very edge of Archmastery, and the overall strain on a Magister must be maddening.

Entrance to the Magisterium is determined by the sitting Magisters within the bounds of influence of a Lesser Convocation or greater. How the inductee is chosen is unknown to those outside the Magisterium, but new entrants almost always fulfill the basic qualifications listed above. The pronouncement of ascension is made during the closing of the Day of Silver, usually without the Magister-to-be's prior knowledge. A short, strikingly austere ceremony is performed, and the new entrant to the Magisterium is presented with whatever potent Artifact marks the position for a given Consilium. Business is then called to a close and the Magister is led from the room by his peers into a private chamber. *This*, many théarchs suspect, is where the true initiations begin.

Community

The Magisterium is a loose-knit community, given that only one Magister exists in any given Consilium (though this rule is sometimes circumvented by appointing Greater and Grand Magisters, both of which are ranks of Order Status ●●●●●). While many communicate regularly with one another by written or typed correspondence, they rarely interact in real time (though rumors persist of meetings in other worlds or layers of reality such as the Shadow or Underworld). Part of this is due to the intense connection each Magister possesses to her Path, a connection that colors her every conviction and can make interaction between members of different paths quite tense. Magisters most regularly see one another during Convocations, and they rely upon the legalistic ritual of those occasions to help mediate these encounters.

Magisters are not homebodies, however, and they often vanish, sometimes for months or years at a time, without word. Where these luminaries travel is unknown to all save them, though many suspect they are guided by the Watchtowers to plumb the depths of the Astral Realms, the mysteries of the Shadow, or other planes more esoteric yet. Eventually, most Magisters simply fail to return, leaving those who remain to wonder whether they have perished within an ancient Atlantean tomb, been driven mad in the Underworld, unlocked the Imperial magics of Archmastery, or Ascended to the Realms Supernal.

Outside the Order

Every Magister is a Deacon, and as such, is expected to provide guidance to the Silver Ladder of her region. Most Magisters interpret this position far more widely, providing wisdom and mentorship to those most in need, those outside the order, and as such Magisters often act as augurs, high priests and spiritual guides. As a result, the Magisters are surprisingly available to officiate over matters of ceremony. In addition, though they typically live at a distance from the center of a Consilium's population, many are willing to entertain visitors, théarchs and members of the other orders alike, so long as they seek enlightenment. While Magisters rarely take on full apprentices, they consider it a duty to pass on much of their knowledge to those willing to seek it out.

This knowledge is not without price, however, and Magisters always require something, usually a task performed on the part of the supplicant, before they part with their hard-earned knowledge. These tasks are always strangely suited to the personality involved, and typically help illuminate whatever quandary the supplicant was facing, even before she returns to the Magister for her reward. The completion of the task usually furthers the goals of the Magister or the Silver Ladder, as well. When the supplicant expresses amazement at the Magister's abilities, she often simply smiles and replies with an occult maxim such as, "Whatever is below is like that which is above."

Magisters have a well-deserved reputation for reconditeness, and interactions with these sages rarely disappoint. Nothing about a meeting with a Magister who speaks in riddles and demands the performance of enigmatic tasks is mundane or obvious, save for the aged mentor's connection to her Path. Each Magister is nothing if not a representative for her Path, and most are ruled in

a large part by it. Most are changed physically by this sympathy and the extensive practice of the craft; an Obrimos Magister likely seems somewhat angelic and preternaturally puissant, while a Thyrsus Magister is a primal entity almost more totem spirit than human. (Such individuals invariably possess Merits from **Tome of the Watchtowers** appropriate to their Path.) Many Awakened claim this embodiment of the Path lends credence to the rumors the Magisterium has some well-hidden rites that allow access to the Oracles.

The Magisters have a long history of becoming targets for members of the other orders, whether in the hope of wresting occult secrets from the ancients or seeking to silence the spread of Supernal knowledge. Though Magisters are truly potent mages, more than one has bled out at the hands of a Seer of the Throne, Guardian of the Veil, or mystagogue. This remains a rare occurrence, however, and most Magisters either expire of old age or the dangers of their profession. Some simply disappear.



Interactions with Neophytes

Magisters don't generally interact with neophytes outside of officiating over ceremonies, but neophytes do have a tendency to eventually come to a Magister for guidance. Magisters tend to be even more obtuse with junior members of their own order than they are with outsiders, typically to ensure the apprentice's worthiness for whatever secret or wisdom is being granted. Magisters occasionally summon neophytes to them if they have a direct interest in some matter in which the neophyte was involved, but otherwise allow information to filter up through the famuli.

In rare instances a member of the Magisterium will recognize in a neophyte some element that corresponds with an esoteric occult truth or some vision granted by the Oracles, and take on that neophyte as an apprentice. Such individuals *always* feature prominently in the plans of the Magister, some little more than pawns sacrificed for the greater good and the dream of Ascension. While under the tutelage of a Magister, a neophyte is provided one of the most incredibly thorough magical educations extant in the Fallen World. Yet it is rarely enough to save the neophyte when the Magister's plan or prophecy comes to fruition. Those few neophytes who survive that pivotal moment rarely remain the focus of the Magister's attention for long after their part is played, and the apprentice, for her part, typically wouldn't have it any other way.

Interactions with Famuli

The Magisterium doesn't belabor its relationship with its erstwhile peers among the famuli. The Magisters know they have the respect of the famuli, and they know even if an individual Magister is disliked by a region's famuli, the respect for tradition engendered by the order almost always keeps them in line. The Magisters are able to rule their home Consilii almost effortlessly. Not only do they have a lifetime's worth of connections and contacts among Awakened and Sleeper society alike, they have access to the webs of influence of each of the famuli, which includes the much smaller webs being actively crafted by the neophytes. The Magisters are incredibly well-informed, and they direct the famuli superior through subtle hints and suggestions, observing as their minor actions cause carefully constructed plans to come to fruition. Anything with which the Magister does not wish to sully the

order's hands can be accomplished by one of the many supplicants who come to the Magister seeking wisdom.

Magisters have not, as the famuli suspect, abandoned the game of Consilium politics. They simply play it on a different level, dedicating relatively little time to guiding those they have already taught well, and devoting much of their energies to unlocking the final keys to enlightenment.

Interactions with the Oracles

The Magisters are, almost without exception, completely mad. Decades of Paradoxes caused by displays of vulgar magic and mental deterioration due to constant acts of hubris take their toll on members of the order, and many have ceased being anything any rational Sleeper would consider sane around the time they reach the rank of famulus superior. Magisters, however, operate on an entirely different stratum, and many identify more closely with the aspects of their Path than they do with the living, breathing beings around them in the Fallen World. This madness, this tendency to evaluate stimuli in a nontraditional, parabolic and seemingly elliptical manner, provides each Magister with a potent insight into the world. Most Magisters are chosen for entrance into the Magisterium only upon demonstrating a tendency to this sort of behavior, and those who haven't already dipped into the madness of the Supernal are quickly stripped of their remaining sanity by the older, more experienced Magisters.

This is not to say, however, that the Magisters are non-functional or entirely irrational creatures. Quite the opposite, in fact, and many are so mired in the Lex Magicus that the language of the law of magic becomes a set of behavioral guidelines. Most have an intense, semi-alien intellect with a sense of morals that owes more to the mage's Supernal Realm than any Sleeper morality. (This is not to say that all Magisters of a single Path agree... There are many interpretations for each of the Supernal Realms.) Some claim an enhanced communion with their inner God, their Avatar, the unbound perfection of their enlightened and exalted soul. Most see the movements of the hands of the Oracles and Exarchs in every aspect of the Fallen World, from tabloid headlines to press conferences to the direction the stem of a fallen leaf points. Many hear voices and see visions, and almost every Magister



interprets this as a gift from her patron Oracle in the Watchtower to which she Awakened.

These are the hands that guide Awakened society.

Characters as Magisters

Magisters are not appropriate for beginning characters save in a game in which characters begin with a great many experience points. Magisters view the world in a manner no other mage can, their perceptions twisted (or perhaps expanded) through years of throwing caustic vulgar magic against the bars of the Lie only to have it splash back in their eyes. They usually have low Wisdom ratings, two to three Derangements (one of which is often Severe), and have further distorted their soul by forging it into a Legacy and hacking away bits of it to establish a Demense. Furthermore, they universally possess high Gnosis, Mastery of two or more Arcana, a wealth of Rotes, at least one major Artifact (their badge of office), and a Dream Merit rating of at least 4. Many have developed a Destiny over the course of their Awakened lives, and some are rushing toward its fulfillment.

The Storyteller should take care when describing the world to Magister characters, especially when the character is alone. Magisters tend to see everything in terms of their own Watchtower (one of the reasons having willworkers of every Watchtower present at gatherings is the tradition among Consilium Councils and Convocation leaders), and reality should seem even more slippery and malleable to them than even to other mages. For Magisters, the Lie seems like a flimsy paper bag over the vast potential of reality; *if only they can figure out how to tear it to shreds.*

Remember that Magisters are not stark raving lunatics. Were that the case, the Silver Ladder would have been wiped out millennia ago. Instead the Magisters make strikingly good leaders, often incredibly intuitive and ruthless. A sense of the other hangs around these powerful willworkers at all times. Perhaps, just perhaps, in their madness they see the cracks in the rational façade of the Lie. And perhaps, through the cracks, they hear the song of the distant Oracles.

Sleepers

In general, the Silver Ladder takes a paternal approach to the unAwakened masses of humanity. While it claims to exalt the masses and spread the flame of enlightenment, the Silver Ladder ultimately condescends to Sleepers, viewing them as a single mass of sightless victims, prisoners in a jail they patrol themselves, or weapons to be used against the Exarchs. While most théarchs couldn't articulate this prejudice (or even recognize it in themselves), few Silver Ladder mages feel that Sleepers have anything of worth to offer an Awakened soul (after all, if they did, why have they not Awakened themselves?), and they are particularly disgusted by those who uphold the spiritual role of the Lion, psychopaths, remorseless tyrants and cold, merciless leaders.

It is not the fault of the Sleepers, however, that they wallow about in the mud like fattened pigs, and the Silver Ladder has dedicated itself to protecting the Sleeping world from the vile predations of enemies Supernal and mundane and to exalting them above their current half-lived existence.

The Dream of Hieraconis and Sleeping Humanity

In the end, there will be only mages.

Théarchs don't exactly discount Sleepers. The expressed intention of the Silver Ladder is to forge an Awakened utopia. Until that day comes, the Sleepers must be protected, not only from the tyrants above who impose the Lie on the Fallen World, but from each other, from the threats that exist within the Lie (such as vampires), from the Quiescence, from Mysteries they do not yet have the moral integrity to understand, and from themselves. The Sleepers are the flock, and the Silver Ladder the shepherd that protects it from the wolves that bay incessantly at the edges of their perception.

While this philosophy seems beneficial to Sleepers on the surface, unfortunately it also infantilizes the Sleeper populace and dehumanizes it. With the exception of those individual members of the order deem talented (with all the internal prejudice an individual brings to her judgments), the Sleepers remain an amorphous, faceless mass that many théarchs feel they can manipulate and use with impunity. After all, if the Sleepers are the order's most potent weapon, they intend to wield it.

The Silver Ladder *does* intend for every Sleeper possible to reach Ascension, and that means teaching them. Those mages who operate Cryptopoly cults and lead Sleepers through the Elemental Pilgrimage keep that dream alive, fanning the flames of Awakening among the masses. Relatively few of those approached, however, Awaken, and while the Cryptopoly cults allow théarchs to become more familiar with certain promising Sleepers, the inability of many to *get it* often breeds contempt in their erstwhile charges.

The best among the Silver Ladder, however, actively work to foster hope and joy among the Sleeping populace. Mages of the Silver Ladder often ensconce themselves within religious institutions, academies of higher education, corporations and charities, and from these positions work to ensure the light of righteous, optimistic faith doesn't gutter and die entirely. For if there ever comes a day when mortals cease to hope, mages will cease to Awaken, and the Exarchs will have won.

While Silver Ladder mages may not appreciate Sleepers in general, many individual théarchs become intensely interested in the work of Sleepers. They recognize that aspects of Supernal Truth filter down from on high through the arts, writings, and occult philosophies of the Sleepers, and more than a few théarchs found cults based on some esoteric bit of Sleeper lore. Many revitalize this lore, bringing it back to spread among the Sleepers, this time from an Awakened perspective.

Thus, while the Silver Ladder doesn't ignore Sleepers, it doesn't thoroughly live up to its claims of protecting them either. For most théarchs, the ends justify the means, and if a willworker of the order has to choose between saving an Awakened life and a Sleeping life, she will choose the Awakened almost every time. The Silver Ladder has a clear hierarchy of priorities, with the goal of universal Ascension at the top, the other goals of the Silver Ladder and its individuals just below, and the concerns of the Sleepers somewhere near the bottom. The Sleepers are important in the long run, and can be extremely important when taken as individuals, but as a populace they're only semi-relevant to the day-to-day activities of the average théarch.

The Grand Weakness of the Tyrannical Lie

In crafting the crude bars of the Lie, the Exarchs have exposed their own weakness and greatest fear. The

Silver Ladder views the ancient gods as petty, spiteful autocrats who have enslaved themselves by enslaving others. The ultimate crux of the order's philosophy relies upon this belief: that to free oneself, one cannot deny others freedom. The nature of the Fallen World demands constant attention from the Exarchs and their pawns among the Seers of the Throne. Every display of vulgar Awakened will invites censure from the celestial wardens. Every Sleeper acts as an extra layer of security, ensuring brutal alterations to the skein of reality inflict pain and suffering on those who would deny the will of the gods. Yet every Sleeper's soul is imprisoned within a soft and numbing blanket of its own Quiescence.

Just as a Sleeper prison's closely-spaced bars, small, thin windows, utter lack of privacy and thick concrete walls clearly portray the guards' fear that prisoners may slip through the cracks, burrow through the walls, or hide handmade weapons in their cells, the metaphysical prison of the Lie reveals to the insightful exactly what the Exarchs fear: Awakened humanity. So long as humanity remains comfortably Asleep, the Exarchs are safe. When the celestial ladder is again forged and the world is healed, the masses shall be exalted and the former tyrants dashed upon the remnants of their ruined thrones.

In the meantime, however, the Seers and other minions of the tyrant false gods busy themselves with keeping mankind ignorant and blind. This leaves the Silver Ladder with something of a conundrum. Obviously the théarchs hope to infuse the Sleeping populace with the ability to see through the Lie and witness the miracles of magic for themselves, but they also recognize that the Sleepers are incredibly useful for keeping occupied and limiting the movements and abilities of the Exarchs' minions within the Fallen World. While the Silver Ladder would dearly love to take up the banner of Hieraconis and lead an Awakened army swelled by Sleepwalkers wrapped in the self-actualization engendered by the Cryptopoly against the heavens, more than a few see the wisdom of utilizing the laws of the Lie against the minions of the Exarchs. After all, every vulgar spell cast by a Seer of the Throne against an Atlantean mage invites Paradox upon the caster, just as it would were the spell cast by a théarch.

In reality, this mode of thought is a subtle and insidious fear within the order. Many théarchs see a day when the critical mass is reached, when enough Sleepers Awaken that the world is flooded and the new paradigm smashes aside the old, when every Sleeper at

least half-Awakens to the state of Sleepwalker if not floods to full awareness of the Supernal. Almost as many of these mages fear just what the Exarchs and Seers will be willing to do when they no longer have to worry about maintaining the Lie.

Destroying the Lie may be only a fraction of the battle, and perhaps the easiest fraction, some Silver Ladder philosophers whisper in the backrooms of Convocations. What lies between the collapse of the prison walls of the Lie and the erection of the protective ramparts of Hieraconis when the old laws of reality become as malleable as words writ on water, may be nothing less than an apocalypse of unimaginable horror limited only by the cthonic imaginations of the antediluvian tyrants. It may be better, such quiet philosophers murmur, to keep the multitude safely Asleep until the théarchs know exactly how they will engineer the fall of the Exarchs.

Politics

Despite the perceptions of other orders, surprisingly few théarchs consider themselves *politicians*. Politics is a lesser, distracting pursuit, and most théarchs are in agreement that the Awakened are a single nation and that the Silver Ladder leads that nation. The théarchs instead consider themselves proselytizers, administrators, organizers and guides, ensuring the various resources of the Consilium and its member orders are turned toward proper pursuits, namely the furthering of Awakened society toward ultimate Ascension. If, in order to appropriately administer society's resources, certain deals have to be struck and positions taken, that's not playing politics, that's just getting things done.

Consilium Politics

There's no doubt mages of the Silver Ladder can be uncomfortably intense. Théarchs have a tendency, when they are able, to simply steamroll members of the other orders into doing what they want. While open to minor compromise, they are notoriously set in their beliefs, and while it's relatively easy to convince a théarch to alter some minor component of what she is suggesting, she does so only to massage egos while pushing through the breadth of her own agenda. Some members of other orders suspect the théarchs anticipate at least a token resistance to any effort they bring before the Consilium, and thus include minor aspects they are willing to change or

exclude from the finished product just so they seem amenable to the concerns of the other orders. Some of them would be right.

The truth is the Silver Ladder possesses a particularly powerful advantage over the other orders. Every aspect of the modern Consilium is based in Silver Ladder tradition. Each position exists because a théarch argued for it. Each individual Council is an echo of the enlightened Awakened City to come. The order invented the Lex Magica, the very laws by which Awakened society governs itself, and the manner in which they are administered. The position of Hierarch, the strongest position in the Consilium, is almost ubiquitous with the order, so often does a théarch hold it. In short, traditional mage society was born of the Silver Ladder, and this grants the order a commensurate amount of control. While being the traditionally honored order of leadership brings an incredible amount of influence in and of itself, the true political power of the Silver Ladder lies in its knowledge of and ability to fully utilize (some would say thoroughly exploit) the system.

Unlike many members of the other orders, théarchs aren't terribly interested in swelling the ranks of the Silver Ladder. Too many cooks in the kitchen can lead to a bureaucratic bloat and an inability to effectively make decisions. The Silver Ladder is less concerned about ensuring every mage follows the order's tenants and accepts its beliefs, so long as every mage is willing to be guided by the order's wisdom and reason. Indeed, the Silver Ladder values the other orders, for their mere presence as well as their varied abilities. Defending their beliefs in the face of the different convictions and values of the other orders ultimately defines and strengthens the beliefs of the théarchs, and the constant need to do so ensures the ideas of the Silver Ladder are constantly being disseminated throughout the Consilii in which the théarchs hold any sway at all.

Ultimately, the Silver Ladder feels it is the duty of the order to prove its philosophy true by bringing it to fruition, reestablishing the celestial ladder, throwing down the tyrannical Exarchs and bringing the Awakened City into being. One of the primary strengths of the Silver Ladder's philosophy is its idealism; the Silver Ladder presents a glorious Awakened utopia to work for while the Guardians of the Veil, Adamantine Arrow, mystagogues and even the Free Council primarily offer their neophytes something to work against. Such constant conflict against abstract ideals or apparently ever-encroaching and utterly amor-

phous universal evils can erode a mage's confidence and grind down her will. The théarchs, on the other hand, are revitalized with every success toward their ultimate goal. The relative sheer apparent *happiness* (or at least contentment and faith) of théarchs lends them a subtle and powerful advantage when dealing with the mages of other orders.

But the strength of the Silver Ladder mages as leaders comes from their ability to see each of the other orders in the larger context of the tapestry of enlightened society. The théarchs are acutely aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the other orders, and they tend to think of their fellow mages not as rivals, but as extensions of their own will. Let the mystagogues jockey with the Guardians for control of resources, seats in the Consilium, or sites of mystical import; the Silver Ladder is above such squabbling. While this attitude often engenders a commensurate frustration in the non-Silver Ladder mages, few can argue the théarchs aren't particularly good at ensuring the right mages from the right order for the right job end up in appropriate positions or aware of the supernatural situations with which they are best-suited to deal. The advocates of the Silver Ladder often claim it is largely due to this "selflessness in administration" that the Seers, despite their excessive influence and homefield advantage, have yet to overcome the remnants of the Atlantean tradition.

A major part of knowing how to administer the various roles of the various orders is to keep up with who in the city is capable of what. While the duty of keeping such information organized (and utilizing it wisely and appropriately) falls largely to the order's famuli, the bulk of the responsibility for gaining that information falls to neophytes. While this is one of the major reasons neophytes are encouraged to form cabals that accept members from multiple orders, the primary reason for using neophytes to gather such evidence stems from the fact that the leaders of other orders tend to underestimate neophytes. While a neophyte might not be able to accurately scrutinize a Guardian famulus's veiling spell or fully comprehend the metaphysical structure of a mystagogue hierophant's demon-binding ward, théarch neophytes are specifically trained to recognize the larger strokes. When something *happens* in Awakened society, it is rare there isn't at least one théarch novice who doesn't know who did it (though the "who" may be as general as a cabal or an entire order). Thus the famuli of the Silver Ladder are able to keep up with what their compatriots in the city are capable of accomplishing, and thus they

know precisely which cabal, order or faction to seek out when a task needs to be accomplished.

The Silver Ladder prefers to lead through the gentle caress rather than the forceful blow, and often members of other orders are set to achieve the Silver Ladder's goals without even being aware of the théarchs' involvement. The théarchs implement such maneuvers through carefully careless words and dropped hints that lead the appropriate group the théarchs believe will act in accordance with the Silver Ladder's objectives (and is capable of doing so). While the leaders of the other orders suspect the Silver Ladder is much more involved in the lives of their orders than the théarchs claim, most inexperienced mages would be shocked (and likely enraged) to find out just how often the Silver Ladder surreptitiously manipulates the Atlantean orders to its own goals.

That said, the willworkers of the Silver Ladder are not above getting their hands dirty themselves, and if a théarch considers herself the best mage for the job, she'll do it herself. The Silver Ladder prefers to lead through example, and the obvious zeal with which it adheres to its beliefs does much to protect it from accusations of hypocrisy.

Consilium Positions

Rare is the Silver Ladder mage who has not attained the position of Liegeman or Liegewoman within his or her Consilium. The position is considered a stepping stone into Awakened politics and it can be difficult for a mage to be taken seriously without it. The sheer zeal with which many neophyte théarchs enter the Awakening often leads to early victories that cement the mages into the mosaic of local politics. While perhaps the majority of the Silver Ladder never rise above the position (though many hold Order Status greater than 1 as their reputations, rather than their official ranks, sway opinion), the entire Consilium system is synonymous with the order, and very few Consilii operate without a member of the Silver Ladder in several of the following positions, and the Consilium in which *at least* one of the following positions isn't held by a théarch is almost unheard of.

Hierarch: It has been conservatively estimated that a théarch holds the high chair of Hierarch in two of every three Consilii in the world in which the position is recognized. The order is ubiquitous with the position, and the Awakened life of a théarch is so dedicated to building alliances and influence that by the time a théarch is experienced enough to claim the position,

it seems the obvious next step in her career.

Ultimately Silver Ladder Hierarchs come in two breeds: those who lead by example and those who lead by counterexample. The former are the true sages of the Silver Ladder. Often surrounded by true cults of personality and protected by so many webs of alliance, patronage, debt and largesse (not to mention metaphysical sympathetic webs to the Consilium and the city it governs), these théarchs prove preternaturally expert at the administration of the region's mages and almost impossible to oust. Each of these true believers shows the very best of the Silver Ladder, acting as high-minded judge-priests who remain even-handed in matters of politics and law, interfering surprisingly little in the lives of constituents while inspiring them to the ideals of universal Ascension. A Consilium with such a leader is likely one of the strongest the world has to offer.

Unfortunately, such leaders are rarer today than ever before. More often Silver Ladder Hierarchs are of the second form, falling into the easier path, that of leading by counterexample. By embodying the philosophical opposite of the order's spirituality, typically by donning the veil of tyrant, the Hierarch hopes to inspire her Consilium to aggressively pursue its freedom. The goal is not merely to motivate an uprising against her own rule, but to galvanize the Awakened community against the Exarchs, that it might storm the gates of heaven and throw down its ancient jailers. Unfortunately, this tactic is less successful than the Silver Ladder might hope or expect (after throwing down the tyrant, the mages inevitably again collapse into a mire of petty vendettas and paranoia), and the tendency to take this tact to leadership earns the Silver Ladder much of the enmity it enjoys to this day. Even worse, the Silver Ladder Hierarch occasionally *becomes* the false mantle she took up, and the tyranny becomes less an act than a habit. The théarchs remain idealistic, however, and the tyrant who inspires the final battle for Ascension will make every past failure worth the effort.

While many neophyte théarchs aspire to the position of Hierarch, few famuli actively campaign for the position, and many Magisters give up the position as soon as they can find a suitable replacement. The théarchs' discomfort with the position that is so ubiquitous with the order is unknown outside its ranks, and even within the Silver Ladder the théarchs tend to refrain from discussing it with their peers. This may initially seem incongruous with the entire bent of the order, but by the time a théarch has amassed enough power to take the chair of Hierarch, he often has his eyes

turned to higher issues than the mere administration of a Consilium. Senior famuli and Magisters seek no less than the downfall of the Lie, and once a willworker has mastered two or more Arcana, unlocking the secrets of the Mysterium holds far more appeal as a method of doing so than playing babysitter to a squabbling city of lesser mages. Théarchs respect tradition and duty, however, and many feel obliged, if somewhat reluctant, to take the position of Hierarch.

Councilor: If it is rare for a Consilium to place a mage of another order in the chair of Hierarch, it is even rarer that such a region doesn't have at least a single théarch among its Councilors. Théarchs rarely chafe at such a position unless their advice is being actively ignored. Many théarchs prefer to be the voice behind the throne rather than the mage on the throne, so the position of Councilor is a popular position for théarchs to aspire to. Members of other orders would likely be surprised to find how many théarchs *want* to become Councilor compared to how many feel thrust into the position of Hierarch.

Théarchs take advantage of the position of Councilor to ensure the Consilium remains true to Atlantean tradition while working toward a better future. When a théarch sits on the Council, she often becomes an enlivening presence. Théarch Councilors suggest and argue for new laws that uplift Sleeping humanity and the Awakened alike, inspiring quests to uncover greater mysteries and Artifacts and bringing war against the Banishers and Seers of the Throne. She also acts as a stabilizing figure, advising caution in the Consilium's actions, upholding tradition and the Lex Magica, and carefully and tactically bringing the Consilium's resources and talents to bear on the various difficulties the Consilium faces.

Théarchs often make successful Councilors, so long as they can keep their own ambition in check. Luckily the Magisters of the Silver Ladder keep a careful and discerning eye on members of the order who ascend to the Council and carefully advise them from behind the scenes.

The organization of the Council subtly promotes advancing théarchs to the position of Councilor. By placing the primary emphasis on Path rather than order, the Silver Ladder ensures that, when need be, it can dominate Consilium politics by advocating multiple théarch Councilors. This tactic is not employed as often as might be expected, as the théarchs appreciate the conversation inspired by other viewpoints (and prefer to have their rivals close to them, to better understand them), and is reserved

primarily for regions in which another order (typically the Guardians of the Veil or the Free Council) whose goals directly contradict the Silver Ladder has gained an unusual level of power in the Consilium. The Silver Ladder also occasionally utilizes this approach during wartime in order to exclude Councilors who might advocate weak tactics in the face of a threat from the Seers of the Throne.

Provost: Théarchs rarely take up the position of Provost, unless they act as Provost to a Silver Ladder Councilor. Even that is a relative rarity, as many Silver Ladder willworkers prefer a Provost of one of the other orders. The way the théarchs see it, mages of the Silver Ladder function best in roles of leadership, delegating responsibility to others and having them carry out their will. Ironically, this very attitude makes théarchs excellent Provosts on such occasions that they are appointed to the position. Théarchs train from their inductions into the order to administrate Awakened society, and the duty of making sure everything falls into line with the Consilium's edicts falls largely to the Provost.

Herald: Herald is a relatively common position for théarchs to hold. Most théarchs are "people persons," capable of inspiring and persuading, even if they are a little intense. Heralds act as representatives of the Consilium, and in that role a Silver Ladder théarch is able to form numerous political friendships and alliances. Most of all, taking on the mantle of Herald allows a young up-and-coming théarch to acquaint herself with the various cabals and factions of the Consilium.

If there is a failing among théarch Heralds, it is that they have a reputation for overstepping their bounds and acting less as liaison and more as ambassador, brokering deals and putting plans into motion they consider for the best of the Consilium or their order, all without the Consilium's prior knowledge or approval. This shortcoming is especially common among Acanthus Heralds, but that is perhaps only because the Acanthus most commonly rise to this position.

Sentinel: Théarchs rarely seek the position of Sentinel, preferring to leave such violent activities to the Guardians of the Veil and the Adamantine Arrow. On those occasions a théarch becomes Sentinel, he tends to react in much the same manner as a théarch ascending to the position of Hierarch: he either becomes a paladin-like paragon of the law or a browbeating, corrupt enforcer. Though they would never admit it to outsiders, Silver Ladder mages often have difficulty performing the duties of the position and

retaining a strong connection to the order's philosophy of upholding the weak.

Primacy

A Consilium that does not acknowledge the Silver Ladder is a rogue Consilium.

It is the duty of the Silver Ladder to throw down a Consilium that is not fulfilling its purpose.

These two statements sum up the Silver Ladder's stance on Consilii in which no Silver Ladder mage holds a position as Hierarch or Councilor or in which a Silver Ladder Councilor exists but is consistently ignored. It may seem harsh, but the Silver Ladder demands the Awakened strive against the constraints of the Lie, and a Consilium that as a whole refuses to acknowledge the higher purpose of the Awakened is almost as grave a threat to Ascension as the Seers of the Throne. The Silver Ladder has no qualms about overthrowing such a regime, and until the coup is concluded, every théarch within the region is expected to give aid to toppling the blind fools who would run the Imperium Mysteriorum into the ground through petty squabbling and draconian policies toward the exercise of the enlightened will.

The Silver Ladder utilizes three primary tactics when securing Consilii for the order. The first, arguably easiest and most commonly accepted is through widespread revolution. The Silver Ladder considers a region administrated by any one of the other orders as fundamentally flawed. The trick, it theorizes, is equally convincing the other mages of the area of these flaws. The Silver Ladder focuses upon members of the orders who are inimical to the controlling order: if the Guardians have established a council of spies, the Ladder will approach the Mysterium and Free Council first, for example. Once the latter has subverted those most opposed to the current regime, it encourages its new allies to subvert those closer to the regime, spreading discontent to the breaking point. The Silver Ladder utilizes a combination of the Cryptopoly, propaganda and covert frame-ups (typically an increase in criminal or unpopular actions for which the regime is already known and despised) to fan the flames of revolution. Despite their tendency to take positions of power, the mages of the Silver Ladder are astonishingly good at inspiring others to join in a crusade against an oppressing foe, even if the order's allies don't know or fully understand the Silver Ladder's true motives for initiating a coup.

The second tactic, usually used when the rival mage government, often a Seer Ministry, an Assembly or some other *alternative* to the Consilium system is in power, is thoroughly entrenched and enjoys popular support, is a covert full-out war of influence. During this form of coup, the Silver Ladder erodes and eradicates the structures the ruling regime utilizes to maintain power, seeking to bring the entire tower toppling down upon itself. The théarchs turn the Cryptopoly against the plots of the ruling power, making sure businesses are ruined, allies are compromised and contacts receive false information. Any allies the Silver Ladder has in the region are brought together and formalized into specific taskforces: the Silver Ladder bends the Adamantine Arrow to perform special operations against selected targets, the Guardians of the Veil to dig up every skeleton in the regime's closet and assassinate key enemies, and the Mysterium to uncover the supernatural capabilities of the enemy, analyze the enemy's webs of contacts, and identify possible weaknesses therein. Unfortunately, in situations in which the Silver Ladder must resort to this tactic, it rarely has the support of more than two of the other Diamond orders, and the Silver Ladder mages must step forward to take up the slack.

The third and least popular tactic is employed only when the ruling government is weak and its utter destruction would not turn the other mages against the théarchs. Often used in conjunction with either of the two tactics above, the third option is the endgame when a weak ruling government is against the rocks but too entrenched or fanatical to surrender power. In situations where violence is the only possibility, the Silver Ladder is more than willing to lead a force against the enemy, annihilating it utterly. This tactic rarely makes friends of the other orders, and Consilii established in the wake of such destruction are almost always uncomfortably authoritarian. Only the Seers of the Throne, the Banishers, or the scions of various Left-Handed Legacies earn such a wrathful fate.

In reality, the Silver Ladder rarely has to resort to any of the above methods. Most Consilii boast a Silver Ladder Hierarch, and few are the non-théarch Hierarchs unwilling to heed the counsel of a théarch advisor. Thus the vast majority of political coups exercised in the Awakened world take place on the political battlefield, wars of words and ideals, a battlefield the Silver Ladder created and of which it is uniquely situated to take advantage. The most common battleground in which these struggles unfold is the Lex Magicus.

Lex Magica: The Law Will Set Us Free

It goes without saying that Silver Ladder members are true believers in the Lex Magica, the laws of the Consilium. Not only do they provide a common ground (and trust) between individuals quite capable of reshaping reality with their will, they form the foundation of the political power of the Silver Ladder and an example of how the Awakened government of the enlightened future might function. The théarchs so thoroughly believe in the body of the Lex Magica that the order enforces it among its own ranks, even when the Consilium is so vulgar as to refuse to uphold it. In most Consilii, including those with a Silver Ladder Hierarchy or a strong Silver Ladder presence among the Council, the laws with which the order governs itself are stricter, more thorough, and more labyrinthine than those that circulate among the larger body of Awakened society. The order goes so far as to appoint lictors, traveling judges who are forbidden to keep a sanctum or an apprentice, to enforce the law within the larger théarch community.

The théarchs are invariably experts in the varied subtleties of the Lex Magica, which is not so much a list of laws as a body of former precedents that implies what is legal and illegal in the semi-anarchic society of the Awakened. (For more on the Lex Magica, see p. 55 of **Sanctum and Sigil**.) A strong working knowledge of the local laws as upheld within the Consilium is requisite for full induction into the order, and despite the air of ignobility imposed on the position by the other orders many masters of the Silver Ladder encourage their apprentices to serve as factotums. Neophyte factotums often argue cases for members of other orders who don't have as strong a command of the law, and many young politically-minded théarchs gain their first early political favors while serving in the position. Most importantly, the Lex Magica is a powerful force in Awakened society, weighted by years of insightful writing and layers of sympathetic importance that resound throughout the chambers of Consilii around the globe. Careful study of the Lex Magica is nothing less than a thorough and difficult education in occult theory.

Members of the Silver Ladder view the Lex Magica dogmatically, considering it a legalized version of their personal philosophy. Without the Lex Magica, Awakened society would fall into utter anarchy, the Mysteries would falter and gutter out, power-mad despots would

rule over small colonies of Awakened or Sleepers, and the dream of a greater city than Atlantis would die with a shallow breath. In short, the Lex Magica keeps the Exarchs from winning. The Lex Magica also preserves the traditional Consilium structure and takes as self-evident many of the bylaws, positions and methods of thought that keep the Silver Ladder in power. These combine to lend the Lex Magica an impressive metaphysical weight, and that power is lessened every time the Lex Magica is disregarded or undermined. The théarchs cannot afford to be flippant about the Lex Magica, their marching orders against the Exarchs; they rarely subvert it and *never* outright ignore it. This isn't to say they mindlessly kowtow to the law. Many théarchs break the Lex Magica numerous times during their careers, but never out of disregard for the law; the théarch must weigh the potential cost of following the legal precepts against the obvious and inevitable loss to the authority of the Lex Magica if it is broken.

The law does, however, often subvert itself in its own way, and as a law of magic it tends to be surprisingly flexible if a mage is well-versed in it. Rarely is the full body of the Lex Magica in a given Consilium open to public inspection, as each order has its own "surprise" precedents it hopes to trot out to support actions it will inevitably take. The Silver Ladder keeps the most thorough records of the previous rulings of the Consilium and insists its initiates are well-versed in them, putting far greater emphasis on the study of magical law than do any of the other orders. The primary reason for this is that for every ruling condemning a willworker for striking down another, there is a more obscure, more nuanced ruling that acquits a mage for the same crime. Often the reason for acquittal can be extremely broadly interpreted; there is a marked difference between "Thou shall not take the life or soul of another willworker" and "Thou shall not take the life of another willworker save when said individual threatens your sovereignty as an Awakened individual." The latter can be interpreted to include the obvious enemies of the Awakened, such as the Seers of the Throne or the Left-Handed Legacies, but is infinitely more useful when a defendant can prove she was acting in self-defense when her victim had been attempting to exercise some form of mental control over her. These legal "secret weapons" are not brought before the Consilium save as a last resort, when all other forms of defense have failed. There is, after all, always the chance the Consilium will ignore the precedent, rule against the théarch anyway, and

cause the previous ruling to carry considerably less weight than it did before.

For this reason, the Silver Ladder prefers to try its criminals in-house, a tendency that annoys the other orders to no end when they learn of it, largely because the Silver Ladder is so insistent on hearing cases against members of the other orders within the Consilium. The Silver Ladder cannot flout the Consilium any more than it can the Lex Magica that underpins it, and in order to maintain the other orders' respect for the law, known Silver Ladder criminals are tried in an open Consilium hearing. Whenever possible, however, whenever a crime is unknown to the larger Awakened community, or whenever an obscure bylaw is broken that is not recognized by the Consilium as a whole, the order calls in the nearest lictor to hear the case and pronounce judgment on the accused.

External Relationships

Members of the Silver Ladder are not only expected to provide leadership but are encouraged to reach out to people outside their own order to form relationships both personal and business related. This expectation extends even beyond the ranks of the Awakened, to the other denizens of the World of Darkness. Everyone can help play a part in the birth of Hieraconis, whether or not they want to. This section discusses how the Silver Ladder interacts with other orders, as well as the creatures of the world. Troupes aren't bound by the generalizations presented and Storytellers should feel free to alter them to fit their chronicles. The views expressed here are of the Silver Ladder as a whole, not of individual members who may have more or less knowledge about the person (or thing) with whom/which they are dealing.

High Legalese

Much of the Lex Magica is extracted and refined from occult law as applied to human society. As a result, many of the concepts contained therein can be articulated in the High Speech. The additional mystical sympathies that resonate between the Lex Magica and the High Speech have been known to empower the spells of a lawful willworker. A Storyteller may allow a factotum, lictor, or other théarch extremely well-versed in the Lex Magica to add a +4 bonus rather than the usual +2 when using the High Speech to empower a spell.

Using the High Speech in this manner is an instant action taken in the round prior to casting, just as otherwise empowering a spell (see p. 117, **Mage: the Awakening**). Additionally, the following limitations apply:

1. The théarch must be using the spell to actively prevent the target from breaking some aspect of the Lex Magica. Casting a spell to befuddle a Guardian of the Veil who is driving a knife into the théarch's cabal-mate counts. Casting a spell to befuddle a Guardian of the Veil, who *might* attack a member of the théarch's cabal does not. This bonus applies *only* when trying to prevent the law from being broken. It does not count when attempting to punish an individual for breaking the law after the fact. In addition, the spell cannot be empowered in this manner if the spell itself breaks the Lex Magica.
2. The target must be an individual whose actions fall under the auspices of the Lex Magica and could theoretically be punished for breaking the law in a trial before the Consilium Council. Sleepers are obviously exempt, as are Seers of the Throne, Banishers, any apostate who exists outside the Consilium, and non-mage supernatural creatures such as vampires, werewolves and spirits (including familiars). The metaphysical weight of the Lex Magica simply does not extend to these entities.
3. The caster must, during the instant action of chanting, use the High Speech to admonish the target for breaking the law the théarch hopes to prevent. This must be done loud enough that the target can hear and understand it, though actual comprehension is not necessary. (The target does not have to be able to comprehend High Speech for the bonus to apply.)
4. The caster must cast the spell by rote. The Lex Magica is the language of the law of magic, and a spell must be formed through the orderly and potent mudra of the Silver Ladder to gain this benefit.

Adamantine Arrow

Traditionally, the Silver Ladder and the Adamantine Arrow have worked together in a cordial, if not necessarily harmonious, relationship. Since the days of Atlantis when the Vox Draconis served as judges to the earliest form of the Elemental Precepts, the Silver Ladder has depended upon the Arrows to help enforce Awakened law. Most notable Arrow forces include a Ladder advisor, and few lictors are without a strong Arrow contingent in their staff. Both orders understand well their appointed role within Awakened society and are content to lean on each other to fulfill that role.

It isn't all love and joy between these two orders, however. The Adamantine Arrow takes a dim view of Silver Ladder plans to recreate the great experiment of ripping a hole into the Supernal. Arrows, sensibly, point out that the idea didn't work so well the first time and is unlikely to work any better if attempted again. They are also dismissive of Ladder claims that it wasn't the *magic* that went wrong, but the Exarchs who caused the world to nearly collapse in on itself. This difference in opinion causes only mild frictions between the orders, particularly since the Arrows see no point in waging battle against a scheme that has no chance (at least for the moment) of working. Greater friction between the two is more commonly caused by how the Ladder treats the Arrows. When the Ladder gets too comfortable giving the Adamantine Arrow orders, the Arrows may pick an inconvenient (though tactical) time to reject those orders, just to remind the Ladder that the Ungula Draconis is made up of much more than mindless thugs.

Free Council

There is little love lost between the Silver Ladder and this fledgling (from a Ladder perspective) order. The Ladder sees the Free Council almost as a rebel movement within Awakened society. The Council claims that Atlantis never existed as more than a morality tale or that if Atlantis did exist, so what, don't sit well with an order dedicated to the ideals of that long vanished city. Free Council attempts to introduce democracy and new models of learning into the mage worldview are met with outrage and hostility from the Ladder, which promotes the idea of the Consilium ruling over all mages. Outright violence between conservative thérarchs and radical Libertines isn't unheard of, though more moderate voices in both

orders attempt to keep their disagreements limited to verbal discussion.

For all the animosity, the two orders can come together in their shared belief that all humanity is magical. The Council and the Ladder form the base of the Awakened community that wants to work with Sleepers rather than just shunt them to one side. Unfortunately, even though the two orders agree on the idea of an Awakened world, they disagree on the means to accomplish that feat. Many Free Council members would have mages throw open the doors of secrecy and share their knowledge freely with Sleepers. Silver Ladder members are horrified by that idea, insisting Awakening is a slow form of evolution and knowledge must be trickled into the Sleeper psyche until the Fallen World is healed.

Guardians of the Veil

The Guardians of the Veil and the Silver Ladder are at the same time intrinsically linked and diametrically opposed. The Ladder acknowledges it is mainly through the efforts of the Guardians and the Adamantine Arrow that the Awakened have survived their many enemies through the millennia and that the three orders embody a sort of triumvirate that forms the backbone of the Consilium. Without the efforts of the Guardians, the Seers of the Throne and other magical miscreants would enjoy a far greater ability to cause mayhem than they do. None of those facts keeps the Silver Ladder from despising the Guardians just a little bit. Secrecy is the main bone of contention between the orders. The Guardians of the Veil are obsessed with secrecy, with keeping mortals ignorant of magic and mages. They see little place for Sleepers in Awakened society and are disdainful of the idea Sleepers will ever be more than a flock of sheep to be herded one way or another. This view is anathema to the Silver Ladder and causes no small amount of conflict between the orders.

Philosophical differences aside, the one issue both orders can agree on is that of a strong Consilium. The Silver Ladder wants the Consilium to act as a sort of priesthood to the masses for the coming of the Avatar. It behooves it, therefore, for the Consilium to present a strong and united face. For the Guardians of the Veil, the Consilium provides a framework through which wayward mages can be brought in line and forms an institution that brings validity to their work. Even though neither order may like it, both realize they are dependent upon the other to

accomplish their goals and a strong Consilium is the best guarantee of their efforts.

Mysterium

The Mysterium is the only order other than the Silver Ladder that seeks answers in the past just as often as in the present or future. The Silver Ladder backs Mysterium efforts to recover and record lost Atlantean Artifacts and lore. The task of recording the more modern history of the Awakened also falls to the Mysterium and here, again, the Silver Ladder backs it and approves of its efforts. Ladder members see the Athenaeum as storehouses of mystical knowledge that will one day assist the Awakened citizens of Hieraconis in claiming their rightful magical heritage. The great works kept in these repositories are studied by Ladder scholars looking for hints of power in the writings of the ancients. Many members of the Silver Ladder believe only through the efforts of the Mysterium will they uncover the secrets of the Exarchs and return in triumph to the Supernal. Certainly the work done by the Mysterium allows the Ladder to concentrate more on the here and now than would be possible if the order didn't exist.

This all leads to the major bone of contention between the orders, which is *access* to the secrets uncovered by the Mysterium. From the Mysterium point of view, anything it finds is its to keep and to share, or not, based solely on the discretion of the order. The Silver Ladder, regardless of its contributions, has no more right of access to Mysterium collections than does any other mage. Needless to say, the Silver Ladder disagrees with this position. The Ladder points out that, without its cooperation and encouragement, the Mysterium would have a far more difficult time recovering items from the murky past, and without the Consilium to shelter them, no safe place to study them. This problem causes only slight friction between the orders since only the stodgiest of Curators is likely to cause difficulties for Ladder mages who seek to learn from the lore contained within their hoards, but it comes up with enough frequency to be the subject of numerous debates.

Apostates

There is nothing worse than a traitor. Apostates are traitors not just to the Awakened but to all mankind. By choosing to serve themselves first (the Tremere), by choosing to serve the enemy (Seers of the Throne) or by choosing to do battle with other mages (Banishers) the apostates make the job

of the Silver Ladder just that much more difficult and delay the inevitable rise of humanity. Out of the three major groups of apostates named above, the Silver Ladder has the most sympathy for the Banishers — such as that is. Determined research into the Banisher phenomenon has produced results that suggest these mages frequently suffer from a variety of serious mental conditions and that their Awakenings were possibly side effects of being witness to Paradox. The Silver Ladder works to redeem those Banishers who can be cured of their sickness and has made some progress to that end. Not every Banisher can be saved, however, and the Ladder puts down those beyond redemption. The Ladder does see a silver lining in the cloud of Banisher darkness. If these poor wretches can Awaken, even by accident and under difficult circumstances, it might mean all of humanity is only a small push away from enlightenment.

The Tremere liches are given far less leeway than the Banishers. These mages have intentionally traded away their souls for power and the Silver Ladder views that as the worst possible kind of hubris. As much as the Ladder would like to wipe out the Tremere, the fact is that it is extremely hard to find them. Mages who become liches are frequently accomplished mages on their own merit, even before they add decades or centuries of experience to their abilities. These creatures can hide even in plain sight, by pretending to be less than they are or by simply stealing the identity of another mage, and those Tremere are the *easiest* to find. Tremere who keep to themselves and more actively hide from Awakened society are nearly impossible to find, so tightly do they weave their spells of obfuscation around them. Every once in a while the Ladder finds the presence (or rumors of the same) of a Tremere useful. When Ladder experiments go horribly wrong and it needs someone to blame, the Tremere make perfect scapegoats.

The Banishers and the Tremere are both considered apostates and both are rightly deemed traitors by the Silver Ladder, but neither group evokes feelings of hatred like the Seers of the Throne. The Ladder is merciless in its efforts to track down and wipe out Seer cells wherever it finds them. Not only do these mages seek to actively consort with the arch-foe of the Silver Ladder, the Exarchs, the Seers compete with the Ladder for Atlantean Artifacts and information. These puppets of pretender gods would throw humanity to the wolves in their quest to reach the Realms Supernal and their stranded hidden masters. The second great-

est goal of the Silver Ladder, next to the recreation of the celestial ladder, is the eventual infiltration and annihilation of Seer ranks.

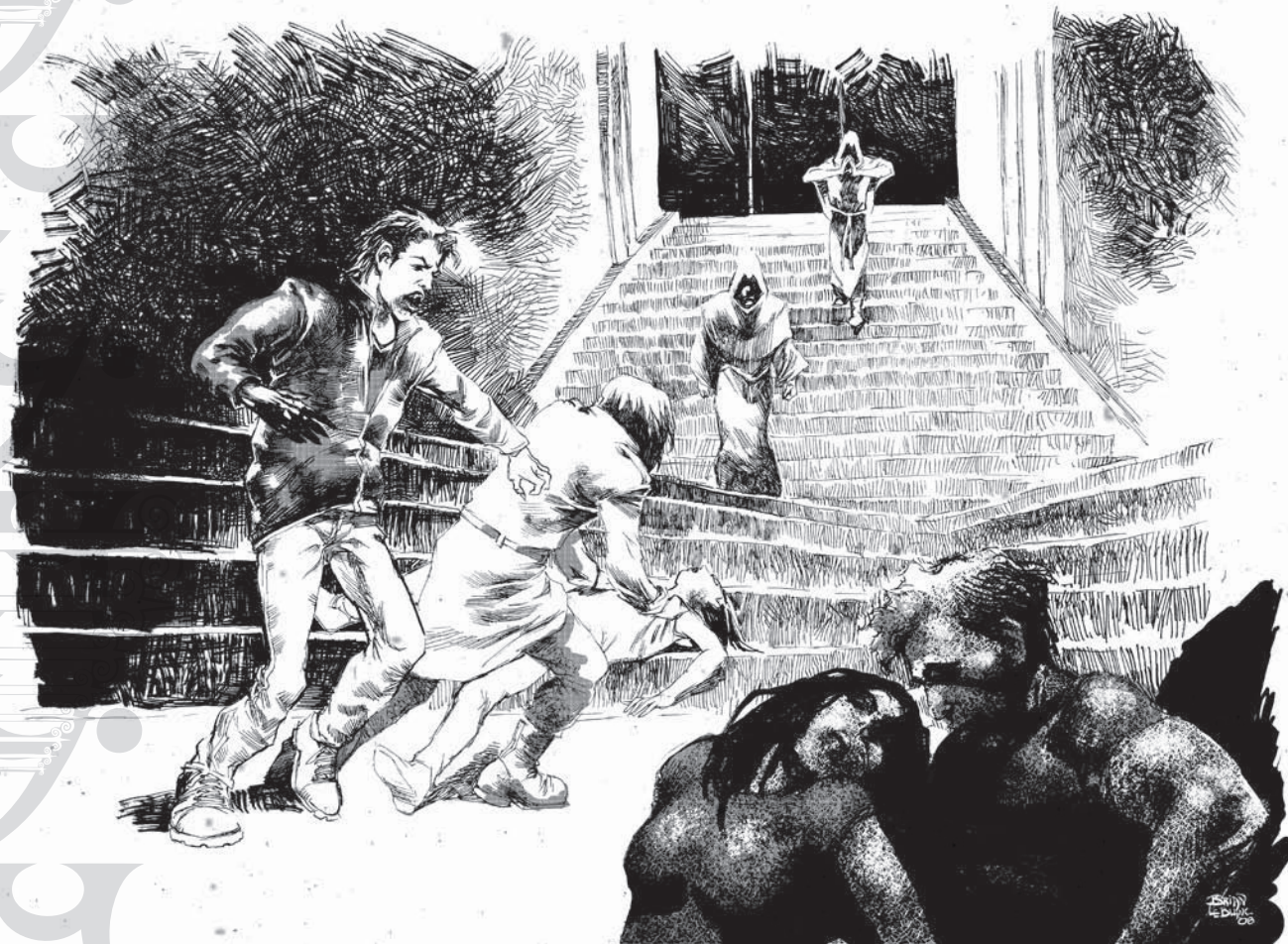
Outsiders

The Terata, as the Silver Ladder sometimes refer to them, have no proper place in Hieraconis. They aren't Sleepers with a capacity to Awaken. They are broken, cut off from the Supernal. Yet they might serve the dream of an Awakened Nation in some way — those that still feel some connection and sympathy to human beings, that is. Those that would treat humans as prey, they are more threat than potential ally.

Vampires

Vampires are a blight on the face of the world. Every human transformed into one of these monsters is a dead end in evolution, a leech draining the vitality from civilization. Hieraconis holds no place for these blood suckers and they will eventually be wiped from the planet. That, at least, is the Silver Ladder's party line on vampires.

The reality differs. Realistically, the Ladder realizes it has neither the personnel nor the resources to conduct a campaign of destruction against these night stalkers, at least not yet. For the time being the Ladder is forced to wait and try to minimize the effects of vampires on mortal society. Vampiric assets are constantly monitored and dutifully recorded, all with the intent of eventually compiling a comprehensive map of the leeches' activities. Skirmishes break out between the Ladder and the vampires from time to time when their social, political or industrial interests collide. Both sides work within mortal arenas, gathering resources and influence, and more than one Adamantine Arrow strike force has been sent out during the light of day to deal with an overzealous opponent. Unfortunately, not every vampire can be dealt with so directly, having enmeshed themselves so tightly in a web of political alliances and business dealings that a direct strike has the potential to cause more problems than it would solve. When this is the case, the Ladder is forced to deal with the undead predators via direct negotiation.



Preconceptions: Most Silver Ladder members don't know any more about vampires or their labyrinthine society than an average American knows about European politics. Basic common knowledge available to most Acolytes is a collection of the common myths available to the general public. To wit, vampires drink blood, are allergic to sunlight and live forever. Opinions vary on the effectiveness of crosses, garlic, wooden stakes and silver and plain old bullets. Acolytes who seek out more in depth information about vampires can delve into the records of the order. This is an extended action that follows the rules for research (see *The World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 55) and the number of successes gained indicates the amount of factual information gleaned.

Successes Information

5	Stakes in the heart work. Crosses, garlic and other common myths are largely myth.
10	Sunlight, fire and slashing weaponry are most effective against vampiric opponents.
15	Vampires are divided into both clans and covenants with political infighting and backstabbing featuring as common events.
20+	Names and descriptions of the common clans and covenants are found along with minor explanations of how they interact.

Sample Ally: She calls herself Divine and there is truth in the claim. Legs that never stop vanish into the silky folds of her blue dress, which highlights her blond hair and oh so pale skin. Her eyes draw you in and you long for a kiss from those pouting lips. At a social gathering of high powered executives your character saw her enter on the arm of a CEO; eye candy to die for. Later that evening she approaches your character, untouched drink in hand, and offers you a deal. Whispering in your ear (her perfume intoxicating, her breath sending shivers down your spine) Divine says she knows who you are and what you are after. She gives you a card with just a phone number on it and when she smiles you see her fangs protrude, teasingly, over her perfect lips. If your troupe has access to *Vampire: The Requiem*, Divine is a Daeva/Invictus.

Sample Foe: Brill owns the gangs that own the docks, smuggling in everything from drugs to slaves. He isn't picky about who he sells to and his white teeth shine against black skin when he laughs. He

was never really a problem, just another lowlife in a city full of lowlifes, until he began to import more exotic merchandise: grimoires full of spells that could only be called black, Imbued Items with nasty effects that find their way into the hands of Sleepers and drugs that send their users on a one-way trip. Your character has traced some of these toys back to Brill, but circumstances have forced you to restrain your allies. Brill told a prostitute who survived his charms that he gets his goods from a powerful wizard looking to expand into the city. Finding the apostate is more important than wiping this scum from the city. More complications arise with Brill's gangland connections. Killing Brill would leave a vacuum in the underbelly of the city and likely start a turf war for dominance over the docks that could result in the loss of innocent lives. If your troupe has access to *Vampire: The Requiem*, Brill is a Mekhet/Circle of the Crone.

How Much Do I Know?

Differentiating between character knowledge and player knowledge can be a problem for all roleplayers and tends to be especially trying for long-time World of Darkness players. Occult rolls help only so much in determining how much a character knows, mainly because the skill represents the amount of general occult knowledge possessed by the character rather than down and dirty specifics. One of the intentions with the creation of the Preconceptions sections is to assist players and Storytellers alike in determining exactly how much about other supernatural groups a character is likely to know.

The Preconceptions sections assume a character has little (1 dot) or no occult knowledge. Even for characters with a moderate amount of occult knowledge (say, 3 dots), information uncovered through research is still likely to be useful considering it is verifiable. Alternately, troupes can use the successes rolled benchmarks as equivalent knowledge dots in Occult, with 5 successes equal to 1 dot, 10 successes equal to 2 dots and so on.

Werewolves

There is a fair amount of discussion among Silver Ladder Deacons about exactly how werewolves

fit into the greater picture. The *Uratha* (as they call themselves) aren't really human or not solely human at any rate. Factions within the Ladder call for the eventual hunting down and killing of every werewolf, but make up a small minority. The body as a whole has yet to come to a firm decision. The werewolves could make for useful allies; no one denies this. They seem to have a gift for shamanism that rivals the Spirit Arcanum. It is their unfortunate tendency to fly into berserk rages and terrify Sleepers by doing so that makes the Ladder hesitant to bring the *Uratha* to a bargaining table. Then there are the rumors. Some mages insist the werewolves actually hunt, kill and eat human beings to satisfy their unnatural appetites or that the shapechangers gained their powers through unholy ritual. Reports that certain packs dedicate themselves to the spread of disease or seek to bring ruin to the world are also hard to disprove. For the time being the Silver Ladder has decided to wait and watch the activities of the werewolves. As long as they continue to help the Ladder by acting as bounders to the Shadow Realm, the Ladder is mainly content to leave the werewolves alone until they become a problem.

Preconceptions: The popular image of ravaging, man-eating beasts that are slaves to the changing phases of the moon is a difficult one for many Acolytes to shake (possibly the result of ancestral memory). Common knowledge of members of the Order is that there are indeed werewolves abroad in the world and some part of their condition makes them allergic to silver. It is also generally agreed that the shapeshifters seem to share some special kind of relationship with spirits and they travel in packs. Opinions vary about whether the bite of a werewolf carries the disease of lycanthropy or whether werewolves really eat people. The search for more information requires access to the records of the order. This is an extended action that follows the rules for research (see **The World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 55) and the number of successes gained indicates the amount of factual information gleaned.

Successes Information

- | | |
|----|---|
| 5 | Werewolves may shift form independent of the phase of the moon. |
| 10 | The bite of a werewolf does not cause lycanthropy. Werewolves are born, not made. |

15

The sight of a werewolf transformed causes madness in Sleepers that forces Sleeper witnesses to forget or misremember what they've seen.

20+

Werewolves form into tribes and packs, with subdivisions based on the phase of the moon. There seem to be two separate factions of werewolves and they will usually attack each other on sight.

Sample Ally: Ezekiel Yoder is a giant of a man... wolf... whatever. Standing over 7' in height, Zeke (as he prefers to be called) moves with unnerving speed and agility for a man his size and possesses the uncanny ability to meld with the shadows. Zeke is part of a pack that claims the city park as its territory and he has friends among the street people who sleep there on the benches. After a series of particularly savage murders in the park by assailants unknown, Zeke approaches your character as you are sitting outside a coffee shop reading the newspaper. Looming over your table, he tells you in a deep, gravelly voice that his pack has nothing to do with the murders and it is looking for help finding those responsible. Zeke says the things don't leave a scent and the few tracks the pack has found don't look quite human. For troupes with access to **Werewolf: The Forsaken**, Zeke is a Hunter in Darkness/Irraka.

Sample Foe: When your cabal finally gets around to creating a sanctum, you do so in a section of town that has been destroyed by flooding and is slowly being rebuilt. For some reason you feel uneasy as you go about your tasks to get the sanctum up and running; it is as if you are being watched. You express your concerns to your cabal and after some magical workings it discovers the house you are helping to rebuild is awash with spirits: lingering spirits of the flood, spirits of death and even a spirit of love that had claimed the place when the former owners of the home refused to evacuate without their beloved pets. Not long after that there comes a knock on the front door.

The woman outside is wearing business attire, sunglasses and has a Bluetooth strapped to her ear. Without preamble she introduces herself as Sylvia Montclair and briskly informs you that you are trespassing on her territory. When pressed, Sylvia explains that when the flood had come through, killing the owners of the home and their pets, the spiritual echoes of those intense feelings had created the possibility of a locus at the home. The locus is slowly gaining in power and she expects it will become active very soon. Of course,

your cabal tells Sylvia it has properly bought and paid for the house and politely suggests she bugger off.

"Fine," she says. "I'll be back with my pack."

For troupes with access to **Werewolf: The Forsaken**, Sylvia is an Iron Master/Ithaeur.

Ghosts, Spirits and the Shadow Realm

The specters of the restless dead offend the sensibilities of the Silver Ladder more than just a little. While there is no proof that more ghosts form as the Abyss widens and the Supernal gets further away, the mages can't help but suspect this might be the case. Whatever the cause, members of the Ladder feel that the dead should be moved along to peace or reincarnation rather than bound to the Fallen World to wander lonely and confused for decades or even centuries. This belief is just another aspect of their respect for humanity on which the Ladder prides itself. Whenever the location of a haunting becomes common knowledge to the order, members (especially Moros) are dispatched to the scene to help the poor, benighted soul pass on from this world to the next. If the ghost in question is actively assaulting or otherwise interfering with Sleepers, this policy is carried out with even more haste than might usually be the case. It is hard for most Sleepers to come to the peace of mind or self-realization necessary for Awakening when they are disturbed by flying toasters or, in worst case scenarios, possession.

Outside of those mages who deal with spirits as part of their studies, very little time is given over to thought about them. For the most part, spirits are contained behind the Gauntlet and fill their part in the world by behaving in accordance with their natures. If a spirit finds a way to slip the Gauntlet and begin causing problems, the Ladder is more likely to send the Adamantine Arrow or other combat-capable cabals to deal with the problem than it is to make it a priority to deal with it themselves. Occasionally an Acolyte might find he needs to make a deal with a spirit to find a piece of information vital to his current project. In situations like these, the Acolyte is pointed to more experienced members of the order to assist him with his problem. A small, but vocal, minority of the Ladder feels the order is making a mistake in not dealing with the more powerful spirits to aid the Ladder in its efforts to recover Atlantean Artifacts and lore. This group claims high-ranking spirits of water, of death or other ancient spirits could contribute to the Ladder's efforts, maybe to the point they would no longer be reliant upon the Mysterium. The critics of this idea point out that even the oldest and most powerful

spirits take very little interest in the goings on of the material realm and are unlikely to have even noticed the death of Atlantis beyond, perhaps, remembering it was an especially good day for expanding their particular influence.

The Shadow Realm itself is seen mainly as a kind of spiritual reserve by the Silver Ladder. Ever since the sundering of the cosmos, the Gauntlet has kept the spirits (mainly) contained in the Shadow Realm. To the Ladder's way of thinking, this isn't a bad thing. The order does recognize the ability of powerful spirits to influence the material realm through the Gauntlet and has had occasion to send teams into the Shadow to deal with a spirit contributing to the problems of the Fallen World. Mages realize the Shadow is a strange and dangerous place in which to travel that has rules all its own and in which there are beings with powers that far exceed their own. This is another reason the order is content to leave the Shadow Realm well alone for the most part. Only when the Gauntlet is torn and a verge forms does the Ladder become actively concerned with the Shadow Realm and, more specifically, with the spirits that can escape into the material realm through the verge. Protecting Sleepers from this kind of calamity requires a rapid response from the Ladder and the order works within the bounds of the Consilium to bring together cabals of mages that can effectively isolate and seal the verge.

A small number of Ladder Acolytes are working on a theory that the Shadow Realm could be tapped, harvested almost, to provide mystical energy. These mages claim that if they can find a way to make the ambient energies of the Shadow Realm work for mages they might be able to reach into the Realms Supernal, paving the way for a new ladder made of shadow rather than light.

Preconceptions: A surprising number of Acolytes don't believe in ghosts until they experience one for themselves. Older Ladder members suspect this is a side effect of the mass rationalization of the 20th century that dismisses reports of anything unusual as either a hoax or the workings of a feeble mind. Once an Acolyte comes to accept the fact there *really* are ghosts, most don't really know much more than that.

Spirits are more easily accepted among newly Awakened members, especially those who come from a society with roots in animism. Common knowledge about spirits among Acolytes includes the idea that spirits are reflections of naturally occurring events, places and emotions in the material realm. Most Acolytes understand the theory of a pecking order among the

spirits, and the mages who study the Spirit Arcanum have a firm grasp on the Rank structure.

Acolytes who follow Paths that avoid the study of spirits show a remarkable lack of knowledge about the Shadow Realm. The general image shared by these order members is that the Shadow is simply a reflection of the material realm, inhabited by spirits. They understand the Gauntlet divides the two realms from each other and that verges are tears in the Gauntlet that allow two-way access.

Seeking out more factual information requires access to order records. This is an extended action that follows the rules for research (see **The World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 55) and the number of successes gained indicates the amount of factual information gleaned. Listed below are charts for information gained about ghosts, spirits and the Shadow Realm, respectively.

Ghosts

Successes Information

5	Ghosts can be the souls of mortals who have died, yet remain bound to the Twilight Realm as the result of unfinished business, or can be mere echoes of the dead, imprints of a personality left behind in Twilight.
10	All ghosts have anchors, material items that bind the ghost to this realm. Ghosts can exert their wills in the form of Numina to produce magical type effects.
15	Destroying the anchor of a ghost will destroy the ghost itself. Ghosts can manifest physically in the material realm.
20+	Blessed and magical weapons can be used to physically attack a ghost.

Spirits

Successes Information

5	Spirits are bound to follow their nature and show little interest in anything outside their nature. One result of this is the Bans that can be used to negatively affect spirits. Spirits with enough intelligence to speak do so in the spirit tongue.
10	Spirits not tied to any one place tend to gather around springs of essence, which they call loci, from which they feed. A particularly powerful locus will usually be claimed by a spirit or group of spirits and other spirits may be banned from feeding there or will have to make concessions to the ruling group in order to feed.

15 Spirits can reach through the Gauntlet to influence the behavior of Sleepers. Spirits use this power in keeping with their nature. Anger spirits cultivate anger, domesticity spirits encourage good housekeeping and so forth.

20+ The Gauntlet is much weaker in the area around a locus and spirits can physically materialize in these areas for limited amounts of time.

Shadow Realm

Successes Information

5	Places and objects that show up in the Shadow Realm have built up a degree of spiritual resonance as the result of intensity of emotion directed at them or because of the length of time they've existed in the material realm.
10	A locus forms as a result of a large amount of spiritual resonance gathering in one place, in much the same way places and objects reflect into the Shadow.
15	Paradox is far less likely to occur in the Shadow Realm, likely as a result of a realm that isn't influenced as heavily by the Abyss as the Fallen World.
20+	The body of a mage traveling in the Shadow Realm is reconstructed as he passes through the Gauntlet. Instead of flesh, this new body is made of the same ephemera as the bodies of spirits and, without knowledge of the Spirit Arcanum, mages are exceptionally vulnerable to attack by hostile spirits while in the Shadow.

Sample Ally: While idly surfing the Internet one day you receive a strange IM from someone calling himself RazOr. RazOr claims he is a ghost who died while working on his company's servers and the servers now act as his anchor. From that anchor, RazOr found he could transfer the energy of his ghostly form into information and slip into the World Wide Web. The ghost goes on to explain there is no database he can't crack and no place on Earth connected to the web he can't manifest, which he then proves by materializing in your living room. RazOr wants to make a deal. He says he'll work for you supplying information and monitoring the Internet for magical knowledge or interference if you'll agree to support the wife and children he left behind. Full rules for the creation of ghosts can be found in **The World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 208.

Sample Foe: You have been asked to help clean up a city playground that is overrun by gangs and is strewn with used condoms and needles as part of your duty to the Silver Ladder to provide inspiration to the Sleepers and just as general community service. The gangs can be more or less easily moved along by simply replacing missing light bulbs in the streetlights and a greater police and neighborhood presence, but you hadn't counted on the spirit that had claimed the playground for its own. Made up of equal parts fear, anger, pain and disease, the spirit has become powerful by influencing the behaviors of the dealers and junkies who frequent the playground and isn't pleased with your plans. The entity is a Rank 3 spirit named Jos'thot and full rules for the creation of spirits can be found in *Mage: The Awakening*, p. 317.

Sample Location: Recently your character has noticed an upswing in the amount of spiritual activity in the neighborhood. Tracking the activity back to a common source you find that a verge has opened up behind a recently demolished building. After examining the verge with your cabal you come to the conclusion it can only be properly sealed from inside the Shadow Realm. As soon as you set foot in the Shadow you hear screams of rage and pain coming from the spirit of the building that was demolished. The spirit was maimed and horribly wounded by the spiritual resonance of the blast and is attempting to

reach through the Gauntlet to fix its broken body. The area around the building spirit is heavily populated by spirits of fear and pain drawn to the suffering of the building spirit, feeding on its distress. This volatile situation isn't improved by the appearance of your cabal, but you have an obligation to close the verge before it begins to seriously affect the Sleepers in your neighborhood.

Prometheans

The relatively small number of Prometheans to be found wandering around the world has helped to keep them (mainly) off the radar of most mages. There are always the tales of mages using automatons as unthinking assistants for manual labor and other unpleasant jobs, but Prometheans aren't mindless drones. It is possible that some mages have figured out ways to bind Prometheans to their will, forming the basis for these tales, and there are certainly mages who wouldn't hesitate to do so. The Silver Ladder's position on Prometheans, such as it is, is that the Created could be used to serve humanity when Hieraconis arises. This position is based on the idea that Prometheans will need someone to look after them when the world is transformed and has probably been influenced by the Disquiet generated by these creatures. The Ladder doesn't have much of an issue with the fact that most Prometheans are created from dead flesh; the



souls that inhabited those bodies have no further use for the bodies anyway. The idea that new forms of life can be created from the dead, imbued with the fire of life, intrigues Ladder Deacons who see a variety of possible uses for the knowledge of how to achieve the task. In essence, the Ladder would like nothing more than to study the Promethean phenomenon with an eye toward creation of servants to fulfill future needs. The fact that the Prometheans themselves are unlikely to respond well to this idea hasn't really entered into the equation at all.

Preconceptions: There is a general lack of knowledge among mages about Prometheans. All the mages can be sure of is Prometheans are made from the flesh of dead humans and most Prometheans constantly wander, apparently in search of enlightenment. Rumors about the Created say they are filled with a divine fire in place of a soul and they can absorb colossal amounts of damage before being killed. Even the records of the Silver Ladder don't provide much more in the way of information and characters seeking to research Prometheans may well have to go further afield to find their answers. Storytellers should feel free to modify the results of research or add penalties to the research roll to reflect this lack of information. Additionally, characters should be able to vindicate their research efforts beyond a simple dice roll. This search for knowledge could, possibly, form the basis of a story arc.

Once a significant amount of information has been gathered, the characters can conduct their studies in the normal way. This is an extended action that follows the rules for research (see **The World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 55) and the number of successes gained indicates the amount of factual information gleaned.

Successes Information

- | | |
|----|---|
| 5 | Ironically, even though Prometheans are filled with the divine fire of creation, normal fire is the most expedient method of killing one. |
| 10 | The fire of a Promethean is so intense that, combined with something indefinable about its very nature, the presence of a Promethean is enough to cause the very Earth to reject it, blistering and blighting in its wake. Other people, even mages, aren't any more immune to this effect than the Earth is and form irrational and intense feelings of hatred and animosity toward Prometheans. |

15

Prometheans travel in order to reach what they term the New Dawn, an experience of enlightenment so profound it lets them grasp the nature of humanity. At the end of this pilgrimage, if successful, a Promethean claims a new soul for himself and becomes human.

20+

A number of Prometheans believe their pilgrimages are guided by entities comprised wholly of the divine fire. They dub these beings *qashmallim* and say they are messengers of a god-like being referred to simply as the Principle. These *qashmallim* are inscrutable, with their own plans and missions that will sometimes aid and other times hinder a seeker. Whatever else they may be, the *qashmallim* are extraordinarily powerful entities with the ability to change reality if it serves their needs.

Sample Ally: While exploring the mountains in search of an Artifact, your character comes across an area that seems to be in the midst of a severe blight. The ground is dry and cracked to the extent that it is unable to support plant life and sinkholes pock the landscape pulling crumbling stone into their depths. In the midst of a dust storm, you seek shelter in a small cave only to find it is already inhabited. The man living there speaks quietly and asks you to do the same, explaining that the cave isn't structurally sound. He says his name is Moses and asks what you are doing this far from civilization. After listening to your tale, Moses says he thinks he can help you; no one knows the region better than him. In return for his help, Moses wants you to figure out a way to return life to the land around his cave. For troupes with access to **Promethean: The Created**, Moses is a Tammuz following Cuprum.

Sample Foe: For nearly a month your cabal has heard rumors that the spirits have been fixated on a single word: Black. More recently small rifts and verges have formed in the Gauntlet surrounding your sanctum and the voices that whisper through the tears in reality all say the same thing: Black. The Consilium is concerned that the verges will soon expand large enough to allow spirits to cross into the material realm and, worse, to allow unwary humans to cross into the Shadow Realm by accident. In the midst of these worries you receive a letter in the mail. The letter is from someone who claims to be responsible for the disturbances and promises the problems will only get worse unless the cabal agrees to meet with him. The author claims the cabal has a book that belonged to

his father, a book he wants returned to him. Once he has the book, he'll make sure the verges stop forming. The letter is signed Marty Black. For troupes with access to **Promethean: The Created**, Marty is an Ulgan following the Refinement of Silver.

Changelings

If the Prometheans are rarely known to the Silver Ladder by reason of rarity, changelings are just as rarely known by reason of secrecy. These odd hybrids of human and Fae are very difficult to discover even with magical senses; a potent enchantment disguises them as human, one and all. Worse, they are highly secretive, actively avoiding the attention of anyone who might be a potential threat... which includes mages of all orders. Therefore, the base amount of information commonly available is very slim.

Those théarchs who do manage to make contact with changelings and learn something of their origins find a story that infuriates them. The plight of the Lost is another example of the failings of the Fallen World exposing humanity to danger. Humans are taken by unnatural forces from the material realm and forcibly changed into creatures that only vaguely resemble the people they once were. Worse, there is no way of telling exactly where these forces will strike and against whom. While a changeling may no longer have a place in the Silver Ladder's dream, he may yet prove a valuable asset and source of information on these so-called Others that threaten so many more Sleepers. The Ladder hopes that by reuniting the Fallen World with the Realms Supernal, the True Fae will have a more difficult time taking human playthings.

Some few Acolytes (mainly Acanthus) lobby the Ladder to try and return to the Supernal through the Hedge. It can be no coincidence, they say, that the place to which the changelings are taken is called Arcadia. These mages theorize that, somehow, the True Fae have made a compact with the Abyss that allows them to pass from the Realm of Enchantment to the Fallen World without having to navigate that chasm. It is possible the Hedge is a Fae formed manifestation of the Abyss, given form and shape to allow that travel. The descriptions of Arcadia taken from the hazy memories of changelings seems to suggest that even if the Arcadia of the True Fae isn't the Arcadia of Supernal lore, it must at least border on the realm that holds the Watchtower of Lunargent Thorn.

Preconceptions: If you ask most people what they know about fairies, you will probably get responses about small, delicate, winged creatures that feature in

the sanitized versions of what pass for fairytales today. Mages who haven't specifically studied changelings will probably realize the stories they were told or read as children don't, can't, really apply to the sad merging of Fae and human that results in a changeling. Common myths about changelings in Awakened society include the notions that cold iron is somehow an anathema to them, that faerie magic works on completely different principles than Awakened magic and that changelings were kidnapped as children by unknown forces. Less commonly believed are stories that claim changelings can't stand to hear clapping or a ringing bell, that changelings can bind the unwary in word and deed for making a promise to them or that setting out a bowl of cream at night will make a changeling more apt to like you. Seeking out more factual information requires access to order records. This is an extended action that follows the rules for research (see **The World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 55) and the number of successes gained indicates the amount of factual information gleaned.

Successes Information

5	Changelings are difficult to distinguish from humans; an illusion cloaks them, one difficult to see through even with magic. They are created when a human is kidnapped by some sort of Fae entity, possibly from Arcadia.
10	Cold wrought iron will carve through the magical defenses of a changeling, but the metal itself doesn't cause an unusual amount of damage to the body of a changeling.
15	Changelings are taken to Arcadia through a realm they call the Hedge. The Hedge connects the material realm to Arcadia and is detrimental to a traveler's soul. Changelings can apparently navigate the Hedge without repercussion.
20+	During their time in Arcadia, changelings are replaced in their daily lives by a quasi-magical intelligent creation called a fetch. The fact that changelings can hide themselves most effectively combined with the creation of fetches makes the true number of changelings difficult to guess.

Sample Ally: The large black bartender to whom the other patrons of the bar refer as Jones sidles up to your character, whiskey bottle and shot glass in hand. Jones introduces himself in his liquid honey Haitian accent then leans across the bar and whispers that he

knows your father. Jones says he has sworn an oath with your father to watch out for you when you come into his bar and to feed you small, interesting tidbits of information every now and then. The first bit of information he tells you is about two patrons of the bar watching you with more than idle curiosity. Jones helps you escape from that trap and has kept his word, sending you information you can't understand how he comes to possess. For troupes with access to **Changeling: The Lost**, Jones is an Ogre/Stonebones.

Sample Foe: The first words Deputy Alwin ever said to your character were, "Hello, boy," in that subtly insulting manner only a career policemen from the Deep South can manage. Since that time Mars Alwin has been a continual pain in your neck. You aren't sure what set him against you; maybe he really doesn't like the way you look, like he says. What you do know is that every time there is a disturbance on the block on which you live or around the sanctum, Deputy Alwin shows up in his police cruiser ready to annoy and interfere again. Luckily, you haven't yet given him any real reason to arrest you, though you get the feeling creating evidence wouldn't particularly bother him. Eventually there will have to be an accounting between the two of you and it isn't likely to be pretty. For troupes with access to **Changeling: The Lost**, Mars Alwin is a Beast/Windwing.

Hunters

Sleeper hunters of the supernatural pose something of a conundrum for the Silver Ladder. On the one hand they seek out and destroy many of the threats of the Fallen World, doing work the Ladder would otherwise probably have to take care of itself. On the other hand they seek out and destroy *anyone* they think is a threat, even Ladder mages. Since humility isn't a strong Ladder characteristic, the possibility that some of the Acolytes killed by hunters deserved killing hasn't really occurred to them. The Ladder has been trying to push through broad rules in the Consilium to protect and aid the best of the hunter groups, but the other orders have resisted this effort, since they, too, have suffered casualties at the hands of these determined Sleepers. So while the Ladder would like to treat hunters as valued partners in its struggles in the Fallen World, this combination of circumstances has forced the Ladder into treating hunters as one might treat a child with a shotgun. One tries to convince the child to hand the gun over or at the very least to point the barrel at the ground, but when he doesn't listen someone ends up getting shot.

The single hunter or small, local cell doesn't really present much of a threat to the Ladder since most mages are capable of hiding what they are even from a determined seeker. Occasionally one of these groups might figure out the identity of a mage and become a cause for small concern to the local Consilium, though this happens only rarely. More often the hunters find practitioners of other kinds of "magic" on whom to vent their frustration and anger and Awakened society is rarely lessened as a result. The Ladder acts as a kind of fairy godmother to small hunter groups, subtly assisting them in their efforts and bailing them out of trouble, always from a distance and rarely seen. The greatest hope of the Ladder is that members of these groups might Awaken during their brushes with the supernatural and serve as a common link between mages and hunters.

There are greater forces abroad than just local cells of hunters. Rumors of multi-national agencies dedicated to the hunting, or worse, the collecting of the paranormal are carried to the ears of the Deacons with increasing regularity. The rumors are whispers about a black ops style US military organization dedicated to the annihilation of anything more than human, of corporations with secret agendas and even more secret laboratories where experiments are conducted on monstrous subjects and, ludicrously, that the children of demons are at work in the world, wiping out other supernatural entities to make room for their fathers. Even the Catholic Church has supposedly secretly reactivated the Inquisition. Although some of these rumors are certainly nothing more than tall tales, the Silver Ladder must take each seriously and devote at least some effort to finding the truth. If these more powerful hunter organizations do exist, the Ladder wants to meet with them, to provide leadership to them in a partnership to secure the Fallen World.

Preconceptions: Every mage knows Sleepers can be dangerous when riled. The magic of the Awakened is powerful, but mages are hugely outnumbered by Sleepers, and a war between the two wouldn't end well for mages. This knowledge forces the Silver Ladder to walk a tightrope of how much information to impart to Sleeper society to encourage growth and how much must be kept secret to ensure the survival of the Wise. The existence of Sleeper hunters of the supernatural makes that equation even more difficult to balance. Even Acolytes are aware there are Sleepers with knowledge of their existence who hate and fear mages for no other reason than the fact they can do magic. There is some inkling among Ladder members that hunters band together to form groups and those groups become even more dangerous and tenacious

as a result of their shared experiences. Only a very few Deacons believe the rumors about larger organizations, with member numbers running in the hundreds, with powers, equipment and abilities to match anything mages can throw at them.

Researching hunters can be very dangerous. Order records talk mainly about single or small, local hunter cells that are easy to keep an eye on. Any information beyond that requires the researcher to cultivate his own contacts in Sleeper society and to gain access to the records kept by other orders. Storytellers should feel free to modify the results of research or add penalties to the research roll to reflect this scarcity of information. Once the Storyteller decides a mage has gathered enough information to begin actually studying hunter society, that character can begin to research hunters in the usual manner. This is an extended action that follows the rules for research (see **The World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 55) and the number of successes gained indicates the amount of factual information gleaned.

Successes Information

5	Hunters are possessed of a will far stronger than that of most Sleepers and can accomplish astonishing feats as a result of their fanatical intensity.
10	Groups of hunters are known to practice and drill each other in the use of specific tactics designed to take advantage of the weakness of their prey. The information used to design these tactics is sometimes flawed, but more often than not is surprising accurate, leading some mages to theorize hunter groups have developed some kind of information sharing network.
15	The existence of international hunter organizations is fact, not myth.
20+	Depending upon the type of information gathered, at this level of successes the mage uncovers the name of one of the international organizations. The easiest to uncover are the Cheiron Group, Ashwood Abbey and a mainly Muslim based group named the Sixth Pillar.

Sample Ally: Victoria Watson was a honey-tongued lawyer with a reputation for taking any client who could pay. She defended vicious criminals, represented jilted wives and pursued class action lawsuits with equal aplomb and vigor. Tall and athletic, though not really what you might call pretty, Victoria frequently made the front page and was recognizable to most people

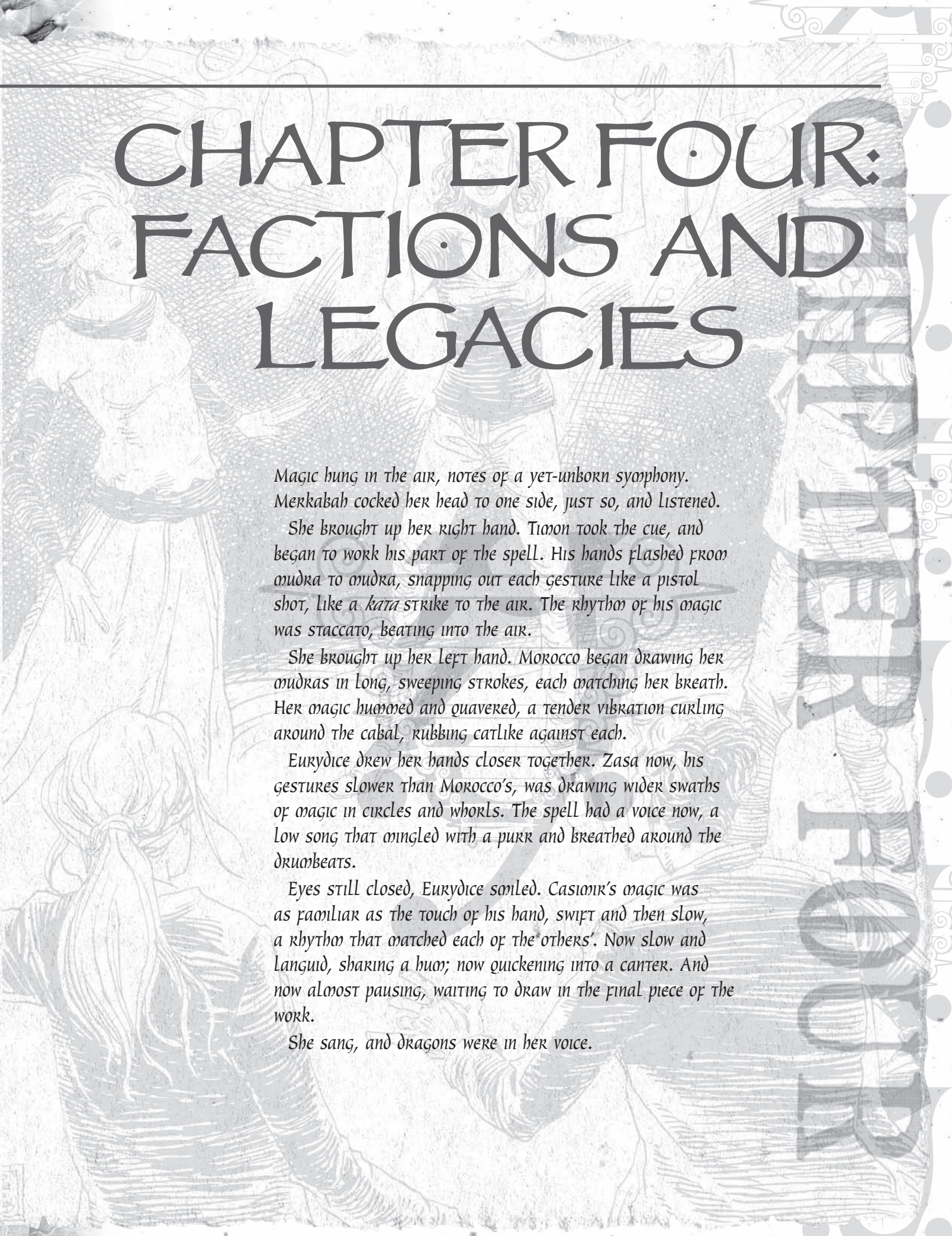
in the city. Driving home after a nice dinner with the family, your character noticed a woman struggling in an alleyway with an assailant. By the time you made it to the alley, the woman had raised a piece of wood over her head — broken free from a pallet — and plunged it into the heart of her attacker.

As you hurried forward you recognized Victoria from pictures you'd seen in the newspaper. She was bleeding profusely from a bite wound to her neck, the scarlet stain slowly spreading down the left side of her blouse. After calming her down, you tended to the wound before checking on the body of her attacker. To your surprise, the eyes of the body followed your movements and you could see fangs protruding from its mouth. You turned to say something to Victoria but she, too, had noticed the fangs and the eyes. Shrieking like a banshee, she pulled a gun out of her purse and emptied the clip into the vampire's head. Since that day, Victoria has done more work for you, and through you the Consilium, than for any other client. She also hunts vampires, stalking the night armed with a wooden stake and a gun loaded with API rounds. For troupes with access to **Hunter: The Vigil**, Victoria is a tier one hunter with the Professional Profession.

Sample Foe: Sammy Ortiz always has a bible and a sawed-off shotgun close to hand, along with the willingness to use both. As far as your character can determine, Sammy first came to realize you could use magic as an accident. You were fighting an enemy behind a restaurant when a Mexican busboy exited the back door, carrying a large trash barrel, just in time to see you launch a vulgar spell at your opponent. You had all but forgotten about the incident when Sammy showed up at your house with a bible and religious pamphlets in hand, beseeching you to turn your back on Satan and accept Jesus Christ as your savior.

You rebuffed his efforts to convert you, especially when he became more fervent in his attempts and began to call you a witch. Then the deaths began. Other mages with whom you met on a frequent basis began to die, at first seemingly from accidents, but eventually as obvious murders. The trail led back to Sammy, and your cabal was just ready to confront him when he disappeared. Sammy has recently returned to the city after his long absence and there is something different about him. When you confront him at his house about the murders you try to enter his house and find you can't. Sammy tells you the Lord is with him and the day of reckoning is at hand. For troupes with access to **Hunter: The Vigil**, Sammy is a member of Malleus Maleficarum with the Laborer Profession.





CHAPTER FOUR: FACTIONS AND LEGACIES

Magic hung in the air, notes of a yet-unborn symphony. Merkabah cocked her head to one side, just so, and listened.

*She brought up her right hand. Timon took the cue, and began to work his part of the spell. His hands flashed from mudra to mudra, snapping out each gesture like a pistol shot, like a *kata* strike to the air. The rhythm of his magic was staccato, beating into the air.*

She brought up her left hand. Morocco began drawing her mudras in long, sweeping strokes, each matching her breath. Her magic hummed and quavered, a tender vibration curling around the cabal, rubbing catlike against each.

Eurydice drew her hands closer together. Zasa now, his gestures slower than Morocco's, was drawing wider swaths of magic in circles and whorls. The spell had a voice now, a low song that mingled with a purr and breathed around the drumbeats.

Eyes still closed, Eurydice smiled. Casimir's magic was as familiar as the touch of his hand, swift and then slow, a rhythm that matched each of the others'. Now slow and languid, sharing a hum; now quickening into a canter. And now almost pausing, waiting to draw in the final piece of the work.

She sang, and dragons were in her voice.

*Politics are almost as exciting as war, and quite as dangerous.
In war you can only be killed once, but in politics many times.*

— Sir Winston Churchill

Factions

The Silver Ladder shares unity of purpose, but that certainly doesn't prevent it from demonstrating diversity of methods. Its goals are important enough that it's necessary to try different paths to power, different approaches to achieving the overall dream. The same loyalty to the Ladder's vision also fuels a strong loyalty to the best possible route to achieving that vision. What that route might be — well, therein disagreements arise.

Technically, the differing factions within the Ladder are not supposed to clash vigorously with one another. Too much dissonance and they undercut the principles of Diamond and Star; an order divided does not support the Awakened Nation, and it does not demonstrate that the Silver Ladder is the path to victory. However, théarchs are still human. They argue over ideals, they attempt to outdo one another, and some even take the battle to levels it should never go. Even so, most within the Silver Ladder prefer to downplay the presence of factional rivalry when dealing with mages of other orders. It's far more important to present a unified front, to inspire the other orders to join in the grand vision of one strong Awakened Nation.

The Powerbrokers

The Powerbrokers are the most notorious faction within the Silver Ladder. This faction is honestly named; the members are interested in power, although not always for its own sake. More specifically, the members are mages who have an interest in controlling and directing others in both the mortal world and the society of mages. Also, regardless of their other interests, most Powerbrokers consider themselves to be the rightful rulers of the Sleepers.

Because of their efforts and the power some of their members hold in both mage and mortal society, many mages from other orders consider Powerbrokers to be synonymous with the Silver Ladder. Some from other orders worry that Powerbrokers consider themselves to be the natural rulers of the Pentacle mages and fear the degree of covert control and hidden influence members of this faction possess over other mages. However, the majority of Powerbrokers are largely more interested in attaining both wealth and power in the mortal world. The power and influence wielded by these mages gains them no shortage of allies among other orders. In their own way, their wealth and connections aid the great struggle in ways that are as potent as magic itself.

Means and Methods

Although all Powerbrokers are interested in leadership and authority, their choice of means and methods are divided into two primary types, covert and overt. The majority of Powerbrokers seek to avoid being in obvious positions of authority, especially in Sleeper society. Instead, they work to attain positions of significant influence where their actions will have great impact, but where they can escape the notice of most observers.

These mages seek to become advisors, trusted confidants and occasionally even the puppet masters of those Sleepers and mages who officially hold the reins of power. Within the insular society of the Pentacle mages, gaining true power without the Powerbroker's role being obvious is exceedingly difficult; simple influence is usually a more achievable ambition. Avoiding notice by other mages requires a mixture of great discretion and a talent for secrecy and subterfuge that is rare even among members

of the Silver Ladder. However, Powerbrokers who manage to insert themselves into positions of hidden influence within the society of mages often wield great power.

Performing the same function among Sleepers is considerably easier, in large part thanks to the advantages granted by prudent use of covert magic. Even a relatively minor effect like the Mind 2 spell "First Impressions" can greatly aid in gaining the confidence of powerful mortals. As a result, the Mind and Fate Arcana are particularly popular among Powerbrokers. Most develop a moderate amount of skill with at least one of these.

For others, the more subtle the methods the better. Direct actions like blackmail are considered both risky and heavy-handed. Worse, if such actions fail they usually produce results that are the exact opposite of those the mage desires. Instead, the best manipulations are those where no one, including the target, has any idea they were manipulated or influenced in any fashion, or where the target willingly goes along with the mage's wishes.

Many Powerbrokers seek out mortal allies, pawns or even mind-controlled thralls who do their bidding. Some approach ambitious mortals and offer aid in return for various favors and consideration, others simply manipulate mortals as they see fit. The primary limit on these activities is that fact that famous people are more difficult to affect with magic. To help offset this problem, some Powerbrokers attempt to control the friends, allies, aids and relatives of well-known political and business leaders. Most Powerbrokers interested in mortal authority attempt to manipulate political leaders, but some instead focus the majority of their attention upon mortal commerce and to a lesser extent upon wealthy and powerful businesspeople. Believing that among mortals money is power, these mages are often quite skilled at finding ways to use their magic to allow them to amass vast fortunes.

Powerbrokers who prefer to work in a more overt manner also excel at using subtlety to attain their ends. However, they pair this ability with a desire for obvious power and a talent for being leaders who can command respect. These mages deliberately seek positions of authority, both within the Pentacle and in the mundane world.

Overt Powerbrokers who are interested in attaining positions of power in the society of mages must deal with the distrust of their fellows. Most combat

fears of their ambition by attempting to demonstrate both their good intentions and their excellence, and many of them seek to obtain positions of importance in the various advisory councils made up of members of most or all of the orders and other positions from which they can help direct the entire society of mages.

However, the majority of these Powerbrokers look to the original purpose of the Silver Ladder and attempt to hold or influence important positions within various mortal governments and large corporations. In most cases, they don't bother trying to obtain highly public positions, like holding federal office or being the CEO of a large corporation. Having a significant amount of fame opens the mage's life up too much to mortal scrutiny. In addition, being an important public figure leaves little time for a mage to actually pursue his magical interests.

However, dozens of Powerbrokers hold more modest and less famous, but still influential, offices like mayor of a medium to large city, a seat on a state legislature or corporate vice president. By combining their direct and public authority with the easy access to more powerful individuals their positions grant them, these Powerbrokers can be exceptionally effective. However, attaining such a position often requires years of hard work, and, once attained, the mage still has little time for any other endeavors.

Powerbrokers interested in overt power rely a great deal upon subtle magic. They frequently excel at magics that enhance their ability to appear attractive and charismatic and to seem knowledgeable and well spoken. In addition, mages who hold public positions among Sleepers also often learn various magics that allow them to disguise themselves or to move from one place to another without being noticed, so they can devote time to their magical studies and their work in the society of mages without the risk of being followed or noticed by curious Sleepers.

Motivations

A few mages join this faction because they enjoy the idea of power for its own sake. But most are relatively heavy-handed leaders, ill suited to the complexities involved in wielding significant amounts of power. As a result, such members rarely attain the power they desire. In contrast, many successful Powerbrokers are individuals who are passionately

devoted to accomplishing some specific goal they need significant amounts of power and authority to achieve. Others are equally passionate ideologues who wish to visibly demonstrate the superiority of their chosen ideology and most are also devoted to making certain important power structures, both within the Pentacle and in Sleeper society, run well and effectively.

Most Powerbrokers regard this last motivation as the most noble and important reason to join this faction. To gain significant power or respect from their follows, Powerbrokers must demonstrate that they possess a talent for organization and effective leadership. While the vast majority of Powerbrokers also have other motivations, anyone who lacks an interest in and talent for basic leadership skills like long-term planning, delegating responsibility and working well with both subordinates and superiors will have a very difficult time gaining allies within this faction.

Powerbrokers in Power

Naturally, the faction clearly admits its focus is upon power. However, definitions of power differ. Some members see themselves as the natural leaders of the Pentacle mages and concern themselves with gaining positions of leadership and authority within the orders. Most are interested in controlling and directing mortal society. Because they see themselves as the natural leaders of humanity, such mages see little harm in using their abilities to influence mortals in ways they find advantageous. As a result, the more prideful regularly attempt to manipulate everything from the votes of a board of directors to the reaction of the public at a campaign speech.

The most skilled and successful Powerbrokers combine power and authority in Sleeper society and similar levels of influence in the society of mages. To accomplish this, the mage must hold or be in effective control of some form of mortal authority that can significantly benefit other mages. Mages who use their mortal power to help other mages can become invaluable to their allies and some are sufficiently powerful that even their bitter rivals will occasionally be forced to bargain for their services.

One Powerbroker holds a position of significant influence in the United States National Science Foundation. This mage is able to direct grants to willworkers within the Mysterium or Free Council

who use mundane research as a cover and source of funding for their more esoteric efforts. More importantly, she is also able to keep mortals who are investigating areas the Guardians of the Veil find problematic from obtaining the funding they require. In some cases, she and her allies are also able to discredit these mortals, thus effectively stifling this avenue of research without the necessity of drawing the Guardians' attention.

Powerbrokers and the Veil

Powerbrokers who focus their efforts upon power over other mages rarely have time to help actively maintain the Veil. However, most actively support others who do and rarely come into conflict with the Guardians of the Veil. In sharp contrast, Powerbrokers who focus their efforts upon mortal society sometimes care less about helping to maintain the Veil than they do about finding ways to increase their authority and their wealth.

Some of these Powerbrokers can be fairly cavalier in their use of magic. As long as nothing can be conclusively proven, many see nothing wrong with publicly using vulgar magic in ways that will advance their positions. However, this can be a risky tactic. Even if Sleepers do not remember the nature of an incident that provoked their Disbelief, the incident provokes a degree of unease and distrust in most Sleepers and can negatively affect the popularity and reputation of mages who are public figures.

The most skilled and politically savvy of these Powerbrokers find allies within the Guardians of the Veil who agree to help them cover up any problem that may arise from their use of magic in return for both money and access to some of the various other resources these Powerbrokers possess. Such allegiances enable the Guardians of the Veil access to a variety of otherwise confidential information gathered by intelligence and law-enforcement agencies and sometimes even the ability to redirect various sorts of mortal investigations that might prove problematic. As a result, some Guardians of the Veil have a close alliance with these Powerbrokers.

One serious problem faced by Powerbrokers who focus their efforts upon mortal power and wealth is that many of them possess at least a little fame. As a result, they have considerably more difficulty than other mages avoiding the attentions of the mass media. These Powerbrokers must be even more careful than their fellows to avoid performing vulgar magic anyplace



it could possibly be seen. Like all famous people, they understand someone could easily be watching them at any time. Even purely mundane activities like meeting other mages to discuss matters concerning their order carry a risk of being followed and overheard. Most Powerbrokers who are at all well-known learn a variety of magics that enable them to avoid notice when they need it.

Appearance: Some Powerbrokers prefer to appear as innocuous as possible, while others attempt to stand out and appear both impressive and charismatic. However, in both cases public image is of central concern to the members of this faction. For a Powerbroker, appearance is not only vitally important, it also has nothing to do with expressing one's inner nature or feelings and everything to do with conveying the right sort of public message. In addition to frequently using Life and Matter magics to temporarily alter their bodies and clothing, some Powerbrokers use Mind magics to temporarily reshape their own minds, giving them the ability to drop or pick up an accent, to temporarily not forget the name of someone they

meet or to never accidentally mention some touchy and problematic topic.

Sanctum: As many Powerbrokers attract at least some notice by Sleepers, their sanctums tend toward either appearing perfectly ordinary, not in the least bit unusual without an exceedingly careful search, or being hidden exceptionally well. A few Powerbrokers sometimes even go so far as to use magic to excavate secret sub-basements that can be entered or even located only by using magic. The rest simply attempt to make certain that if a mortal reporter makes her way into this Sanctum she would notice nothing out of the ordinary. Some Powerbrokers even test this by leaving their sanctums open and showing them off to mortal acquaintances as their "home offices."

Powerbrokers who confine their efforts to the society of mages usually employ a similar level of secrecy because they wish to make certain any mage who invades or sries their sanctums will be unable to uncover anything about their plans or alliances. Power, especially behind-the-scenes

power, works most effectively if the user's motives, goals and true allies and enemies remain unknown. As a result, many Powerbrokers make do with well-appointed home offices, in which their computers feature both magical and mundane security, and where their most sensitive and powerful items are safely locked away behind concealed doors or simply in reinforced cabinets with excellent locks. Powerbrokers do their best to avoid any appearance of anything unexpected or out of the ordinary or a hint of anything deliberately hidden or well-guarded, since they are all well aware the best way to protect something from being seen or stolen is for no one to know of its existence.

Background: Becoming a Powerbroker involves having both an interest in and some degree of skill with power and authority. A few members learned this in organizations like the military or the police, but far more were involved in mortal politics or business, where they honed their abilities to administer and control others.

Concepts: Politician, political campaign manager, corporate vice president, corporate lawyer, lobbyist.

Theurges

Theurges see themselves as the direct heirs of the priest-kings of Atlantis. For them, magic is not merely a source of potentially endless power and knowledge: it is also a source of spiritual enlightenment, enlightenment their predecessors in Atlantis used to spread to the Sleepers. While Theurges often differ on what they see as the proper role for spiritual seekers and teachers, they belong to the most mystical and spiritually focused faction within the Silver Ladder. Almost all agree that both seeking a deeper understanding of spirituality and using this knowledge to help shape the beliefs of Sleepers are vitally important activities.

Their efforts can take them in radically different directions. Some become fascinated with the Shadow Realm or the Underworld and seek deeper understanding there. Others strike up strong friendships with mystagogues and help them in their search for ancient relics and archaic tomes. However, almost all Theurges also seek both spiritual understanding and spiritual power within the Astral Realm. Here, they can seek to understand both themselves and the more esoteric aspects of the Fallen World, while also occasionally attempting to manipulate the Astral Realm in ways

designed to reshape mortal opinion and belief. This fascination with the Astral Realm is one of the most important commonalities between Theurges, and they are one of the organizations within the Pentacle most concerned with and interested in exploring, understanding and controlling both Temenos and Anima Mundi.

Theurges differ as to what they believe the exact nature of their mission should be, but all agree they have a duty to assist mortals in dealing with spiritual and supernatural problems. Some focus upon attempting to protect mortals from the threats of the Abyss and other supernatural dangers. Others attempt to provide spiritual comfort and understanding, and a few give mortals who come to them seeking knowledge as much of an understanding of the nature of the Fallen World and its relationship to the glorious Supernal Realm as they believe these mortals are capable of understanding.

Means and Methods

For almost all Theurges, accomplishing their goals involves communicating with Sleepers. Some preach, others write and these days a few make videos for public access television or the internet. Regardless of their methods, many find some way to share their wisdom, encourage useful beliefs or otherwise reshape the minds and hearts of Sleepers. Prior to the 20th century, writing and public preaching were the two most common means of wisdom, but over the last century, Theurges have learned the value of various forms of mass media. Today, some sell meditation or self-hypnosis tapes with magically buried subliminal messages, while others attempt to create popular web-forums for spiritual discussion.

However, while most other mages consider this sort of communication to be the primary means used by Theurges, they also have other far more subtle methods of shaping the beliefs of Sleepers. Some seek out mortal spiritual figures and use their magics to influence these individuals' minds and messages. Even a brief statement about some issue or event by a major religious figure can have vast impact. While affecting famous individuals is exceedingly difficult, the rewards are equally great.

In addition, some Theurges look outside the human realm for ways in which to accomplish their goals. Many are skilled astral travelers who organize expeditions into the Astral Realm, where several cabals

work together to effect some change in the beliefs of the inhabitants of a city or town. A few Theurges are exceedingly skilled in working with spirits or ghosts and enlist their aid, by either convincing or controlling them to influence mortals by means ranging from sending mysterious spectral messages to possessing Sleepers.

Also, there is more to the work of a Theurge than changing the opinions of Sleepers. Most Theurges are also exceedingly interested in uncovering the spiritual and magical truths about the Supernal Realm, the Fall, Atlantis and the other profound secrets. While their interests are often highly pragmatic, research-oriented Theurges rival members of the Mysterium for their dedication to uncovering esoteric truths. However, instead of focusing upon locating Artifacts in the Fallen World, Theurges mostly seek answers in other realms. Some explore the Shadow Realm; a few seek answers in the Underworld, but the majority look to the Astral Realm. The most dedicated and skilled seekers risk their sanity by regularly traveling into the Anima Mundi, and even the depths of the Whorl itself (**Astral Realms**, pp. 83-89), pursuing answers they believe can be uncovered only by undergoing some form of spiritual transcendence.

Some then attempt to share the knowledge they have obtained with mages or Sleepers. Most also use this knowledge to help them decide what information, both true and not, they should share with others, and how precisely they should shape it to produce the results they hope to achieve. Even when communicating with other mages, most Theurges distinguish between truth and wisdom, and seek to impart wisdom, even if their methods involve limited or deceptive versions of what they consider to be the truth.

Motivations

Theurges largely fall into one of two groups. Some see their role as the spiritual leaders of humanity as a mandate to manipulate and influence the beliefs of Sleepers. For some of these mages, this control is used as a means to personal power, and some achieve great wealth and influence through their efforts. Most sincerely attempt to help Sleepers, as well as control them.

Other Theurges see themselves more as spiritual leaders. They believe their duty is to help mortals spiritually grow and eventually overcome the limitations imposed upon them by the Fall. Some of these

mages consider Theurges who focus most of their efforts upon obtaining personal power to be selfish and power-hungry fools who have forgotten that all mages began life as ordinary mortals.

In actuality, these two motivations, of seeking power and dispensing wisdom, are present in the vast majority of Theurges. A few care only for personal power and others care for nothing but their perceived duty to lead Sleepers to wisdom and enlightenment, but most feel the compulsion of both goals to some degree. Essentially, all Theurges are priests. Some see their role as powerful priest-kings, others as humble but wise teachers, but everyone who belongs to this faction ultimately feels spiritual knowledge is the path to power and wisdom for both themselves and the Sleepers and other mages to whom they minister.

Theurges in Power

The most common stereotype of the Theurges is that they are eccentric and unworldly mystics who spend their time contemplating the allness of the universe and occasionally writing odd books or giving esoteric lectures in which they attempt to introduce some of these concepts to others. While there are certainly Theurges who are much like this, a great many are far more canny and ambitious.

Theurges not only seek out various esoteric forms of knowledge, they see these mysteries as a path to power. Some consider this power in the most direct and obvious terms, as a method to provide them the ability to control others, especially Sleepers. However, the majority of Theurges have more complex and subtle ideas about the nature of power. Most believe the first key to power is understanding and gaining control over themselves and seek to understand the spiritual and metaphysical connections they have, including their relationships to both the Astral and the Supernal Realms. In addition, many consider their greatest power to be their ability to share and teach knowledge that is hidden from mortals by the yawning chasm of the Abyss.

The majority of truly ambitious Theurges seek positions of spiritual authority among Sleepers. Some of these use their magic and their knowledge to help strengthen the Veil and carefully circumscribe the limits of Sleeper knowledge, while others attempt to expand the consciousness of Sleepers, but

both sorts attempt to place themselves in positions where Sleepers will listen to and believe them. Some Theurges have little concern with their status within mage society. However, even the most unworldly Theurges are aware their status and position among their fellow mages greatly influences what they will be able to accomplish. In addition, some Theurges seek to spread their wisdom to other mages as well as to Sleepers.

Theurges and the Veil

Theurges understand that the Veil requires some degree of protection, but opinions on how best to protect it and how much protection it requires vary wildly. Differences of opinion on the Veil are largely determined by what role the Theurges see themselves taking. Those interested in using their knowledge to control mortals are usually strong proponents of maintaining the Veil. These mages are often the staunch allies of the Guardians of the Veil and are not infrequently at least loosely associated with the Labyrinth. On more than one occasion, the Guardians of the Veil have asked for the help of a group of these Theurges in either manipulating the Astral Realm or using their spiritual authority to influence the Sleepers more directly.

Believing knowledge is power and mortals need only know what their spiritual superiors tell them, most of these Theurges are convinced that diverting mortal attention away from mages and magic weakens the Abyss and derive some manner of satisfaction from their efforts in this regard. However, some recognize their primary motivation for protecting the Veil is their firm belief that knowledge is power and that keeping mortals from learning about magic serves only to increase the ability of Theurges to manipulate them. For them, mortals are spiritually blind and helpless and must be treated like children and kept away from all manner of supernatural dangers, and most especially from the threat imposed by the Abyss and its creatures and agents.

Theurges who hold this position do not concern themselves with bridging the Abyss and undoing the Fall. These mages concentrate on helping mortals lead safely circumscribed and spiritually happy lives. While a few think of little beyond their own wealth and personal power, most are sincerely interested in helping Sleepers. In addition to protecting the Veil,

most of these mages also attempt to protect mortals from other aspects of the supernatural such as vampires, werewolves and ghosts.

Theurges who see their primary goal as enlightening mortals have a far more problematic relationship with the Veil. Unlike some of the more naïve or radical members of the Free Council, these mages fully understand the problems caused by provoking Disbelief and the dangers of the Abyss. However, they also firmly believe that with proper spiritual education, mortals can learn to understand some aspects of the Truth without risk. In addition, most believe it is possible to help the more spiritually advanced mortals become Sleepwalkers and to help others Awaken. A few have even studied various forms of non-Awakened magic and help mortals learn thaumaturgy (detailed in **World of Darkness: Second Sight**), in the hope that the study of this limited sort of magic will lead to deeper spiritual insights and eventual Awakening.

Although hard evidence is difficult to come by, many Theurges are convinced their efforts have at least helped increase the number of Sleepwalkers and possibly even the numbers of Awakened mages. These Theurges regularly come into conflict with the Guardians of the Veil because their teachings often hint at the existence of greater truths. While many members of the Free Council consider them to be needlessly obscurantist mystics, alliances between Theurges who see themselves as spiritual guides and Free Council members are not uncommon, and this is the sub-faction of the Silver Ladder with the closest ties to the Free Council. On more than one occasion, there have been literal battles in the Astral Realm between mages seeking to keep mortals ignorant of the supernatural and those seeking to gradually lead mortals into a deeper understanding of it.

Appearance: Mystics by nature, some have the same disregard for convention and physical appearance common to many ordinary human dabblers in spirituality or the occult. However, many also recognize that ill-kempt wild-haired zealots can at most influence a very few. As a result, the majority of Theurges work to appear to be the sort of approachable and visibly wise spiritual figure most Sleepers are inclined to trust and listen to. As a result, while few appear conventional, most spend as much time working with their appearance and the messages it conveys as members of the Powerbroker faction.

Sanctum: For most Theurges, the sanctum is a place for both magical work and spiritual contemplation. As a result, their sanctums are equally suitable for prolonged ritual magic, extended meditation and deep and profound prayer. What this actually means depends upon the Theurge. Some prefer the pristine emptiness of a monastic cell that would fit perfectly in a traditional Zen monastery. Other, more indulgent Theurges decorate their sanctums with religious and spiritually focused art, silk hangings, exquisite-sounding bells and scented smoke from well-blended incense. These sanctums are in many ways material reflections of the Theurge's inner spirituality and so anyone who sees them can learn a great deal about the Theurge. This is one of the reasons Theurges invite only mages and Sleepwalkers with whom they have very close emotional or spiritual connections and are even more reluctant to allow others into their sanctums than most mages.

Background: Unsurprisingly, most Theurges were deeply religious before their Awakening. Some belonged to traditional faiths, while others were attracted to various forms of alternative spirituality. A moderate number were priests or others who ministered to and instructed people in various religious or spiritual practices, but most were simply people of deep faith. For all of them, their understanding of their faith and the spiritual nature of the cosmos has been changed and expanded by their Awakening.

Concepts: Priest or other religious official, professional fortuneteller, New Age author, professor of comparative religions or theology, professional counselor.

The Ascended

While many mages hope to eventually gain sufficient power and understanding to be able to become Archmages, members of the Ascended specifically focus their efforts upon attaining this goal and eventually achieving the even more legendary one of Supernal Ascension. Many of their efforts involve seeking out whatever information they can about existing Archmages and the methods by which they attained this exalted status. In addition to sharing a single-minded dedication to magical excellence, members of the Ascended are fascinated by the nature of magic and are driven by some mixture of ambition, perfectionism and desire for magical transcendence.

Methods and Means

For the Ascended, all magical knowledge is potentially useful. Since there is no clear or obvious path to Archmastery, most Ascended seek to understand as many of the more eccentric and unusual aspects of magic as they can. Like the Theurges, many investigate the various supernatural realms. Others collect or at least study all the Artifacts and powerful grimoires to which they can gain access, while some investigate the mysteries of the various other supernatural beings in the World of Darkness. A few even seek their answers in the Abyss, but even among the Ascended the vast majority understand that this path may offer much transitory power, but it will never yield the sort of transcendence they seek.

Motivation

The Ascended are remarkably consistent in their basic motivations. They all seek Archmastery and eventually Supernal Ascension. However, while few reach this goal the plans for what they wish to achieve when they have reached either goal differ greatly. Most hope to be able to find some way to help bridge the Abyss or at least help others Awaken. Others have goals that are more esoteric. These range from creating their own worlds deep in the Shadow or Astral Realm and ruling them as unquestioned god-kings to using their power to transform some facet of the mundane world. A few even wish to control all the leaders of a nation, wipe out a particular type of supernatural monster or produce seeming miracles so as to attract more Sleepers to a particular faith.

Ascended in Power

The Ascended have nothing resembling an overarching organization. Instead, a few are solitary seekers and most organize themselves into loose interest groups and small dedicated cabals of mages with similar ideas and approaches. While the Ascended usually have little or no interest in Sleepers, many excel at networking with other mages, both in their own faction and in a variety of other factions and orders. Many cultivate contacts in both the Mysterium and the Free Council in an effort to learn all the secrets about Archmastery and the history and techniques of the few known or rumored Archmages. Some of the Ascendant have gained much renown for their ability to collect and synthesize information obtained from disparate sources.

Some mages consider the Ascended to be a group of self-obsessed megalomaniacs. While this stereotype is clearly true for some members, others are considerably more politically savvy and regard power within both the Silver Ladder and influence with the other orders as exceptionally useful tools to help them attain their goals. For the Ascended, an interest in power is largely synonymous with an interest in knowledge.

The Ascended and the Veil

While the path to attaining the first 5 dots in any Arcana is relatively straightforward, if often quite difficult, attaining the nearly mythic sixth dot is never a straightforward process. While there are no clear roadmaps or guides to Archmastery, most mages believe the key to attaining it involves various types of magical experimentation, often involving the most powerful sorts of vulgar magic. As a result, all but the most careful Ascended are potential risks to the Veil. While the Guardians of the Veil do not formally oppose this faction, many Guardians ask any Ascended they encounter to perform the more powerful of their experiments in a Demesne, preferably a Demesne located in a remote location, far from any Sleepers. Most Ascended are eager to abide by such requests, in large part because they recognize that exercising a sufficient degree of care in their quest for Archmastery makes it far more likely other mages will be willing to help in their efforts.

Unfortunately, there are always a few Ascended who care more about the possibility of immediate and dramatic results than about their own safety or the integrity of the Veil. Nevertheless, while some of their methods can potentially risk the Veil (and sometimes a great deal else) the Ascended are largely concerned with their own spiritual advancement and have no trouble with the idea that Sleepers must be kept away from all knowledge of magic. However, the vast majority of the Ascended consider protecting the Veil to be something with which others should concern themselves.

Since most of their efforts that might risk the Veil take place far from mortal eyes, few Ascended see any reason for them to take time out of their efforts to help protect it. Fortunately for the Guardians of the Veil, many Ascended seek their knowledge

in the Astral Realm and so spend a large proportion of their time deep in meditation, exploring its remote corners and thus having little effect upon the Fallen World.

Appearance: Most Ascended stand out in a crowd. Being members of the Silver Ladder, they have learned that appearing impressive and worthy of notice helps them recruit the aid they often need for their various projects. As a result, many Ascended dress somewhat flamboyantly, attempting to attract positive notice and to make themselves as unforgettable as possible. However, Ascended are also by their very nature eccentrics, and so the degree of success they have in managing their appearance varies widely. A fair number make themselves difficult to forget by appearing both outlandish and socially awkward.

Sanctum: Ascended often have the most unique and often the most dangerous sanctums of any of the members of the Silver Ladder. Their sanctums are where they perform the various magical experiments by which they hope to increase their power and eventually raise themselves to Archmastery. As a result, the sanctums of the Ascended tend to contain all manner of unusual objects, from exotic relics brought physically back from the Astral Realm to ancient Artifacts or strange and potentially dangerous grimoires.

Even more than other mages, Ascended attempt to build their sanctums on hallows, verges, loci, or in Demesnes. If possible, they seek to combine more than one of these options into one location. As a result, such sanctums often attract all manner of supernatural attention and a few have become exceptionally haunted or even infested with ghosts and spirits.

Background: Unlike the majority of the members of the Silver Ladder, many Ascended have a tendency to be loners. Like all members of this order, they understand the necessity of working with others and of the uses of power, but many Ascended are most comfortable on their own. Most had an interest in the supernatural well before their Awakening and their drive from Archmastery sometimes stems from a desire to conquer and master the supernatural because of some incident in which it threatened them.

Concepts: Psychic researcher, eccentric scientist, devout mystic, power-hungry eccentric.

Cults Powerbrokers: Révolution Permanente

One of the central tenants of the Silver Ladder is that its most valuable and treasured resource is the Sleepers. *Révolution Permanente* takes this idea to heart and the members also believe Sleepers who are mired in hunger, endless drudgery, sickness or ignorance have far greater difficulty Awakening and are also much less useful as a potential army against the Exarchs and their allies. Moreover, since the Silver Ladder exists to guard and protect the Sleepers, the members of this cult firmly believe failing to protect them from poverty, oppression and ignorance is a serious failing. As a result, the members of RP, as *Révolution Permanente* is popularly known, work behind the scenes to help improve the lot of all Sleepers.

This cult was founded in 1874 by a pair of Powerbrokers who had been part of the 1871 Paris Commune, in which revolutionary socialists held the city against the government for two months. These two mages initially based their ideology upon a mixture of the socialist rhetoric of the Paris Commune and the recently published works of Karl Marx. As the 19th century drew to a close and power struggles between rich and poor and between management and workers grew more intense, RP grew in membership as an increasing number of members of the Silver Ladder grew to feel they had a duty to protect the Sleepers from the depredations of the various industrial robber barons.

By the first decade of the 20th century, RP had several dozen members across Western Europe and the United States. The members used various forms of magic to aid socialist and anarchist groups and to expose the depredations of the wealthy and powerful to the popular press. Many members of RP helped protect labor leaders from harm during strikes, using subtle Mind magics to warn anarchist leaders when the authorities were after them. Others used a variety of magics to help reporters more easily uncover clear evidence that workers were abused by their employers. Some of the angriest and most desperate members even risked the ire of the Guardians of the Veil by using their magic to kill or disgrace various important business leaders and politicians who were staunch opponents of RP's goals.

Other less hotheaded RP members went even further and became public figures. Most became well-known socialist activists and labor leaders who used their magic to enhance both their popularity and their effectiveness. A few got involved in politics, using their magics to help them get elected to various relatively low-level offices. Once elected, they did their best to support their ideals. Meanwhile, their more discrete allies in RP worked behind the scenes to influence the votes and emotions of various politicians, sometimes in direct contradiction of instruction by members of the Guardians of the Veil to avoid tampering with the minds of well-known public figures.

Between the two World Wars, many members of RP redoubled their efforts in the United States and Western Europe, while others turned their attention to the experiment in communism occurring in Russia. By the early 1950s, members of RP were generally pleased at the progress that had been made in the US and Western Europe, but were disturbed that the established power structures had adopted a minimal number of reforms in order to keep themselves in power. However, the swift transformation of the USSR and then the PRC from communist ideals to totalitarian brutality turned many members of the Silver Ladder against their cause and membership in RP declined.

At the same time, some RP members began for the first time looking beyond Europe and the United States to the dozens of desperately poor colonial nations. Both to help increase its membership and because it began to understand the true magnitude of the problem facing the newly decolonized nations, RP began actively recruiting mages in these nations. Since the 1980s, the neocolonial oppression caused by corporate globalization has served to greatly increase membership in RP. However, that membership now largely comes from the developing world. China and the entirety of Sub-Saharan Africa are currently the two biggest sources of recruits, but RP welcomes mages from all nations and backgrounds.

Joining RP is a relatively simple matter. Meetings are moderately well publicized, and consist of two parts. First, there is a lecture or discussion on topics ranging from anarchist history to the labor practices and anti-union tactics of various transnational corporations. Newcomers are welcome to attend these meetings and a number of interested mages do so. Afterward, there is a formal meeting open only to the attending RP members.



Before this meeting starts, newcomers may petition to join RP. At this point, the candidate is invited to attend a meeting and asked about her reasons for wanting to join and what she hopes to accomplish in RP. Mages who seem too attached to violence or advancing their own personal power at the expense of others are rejected, most other mages are welcomed and become candidates for membership.

At this point, various members investigate the candidate's history, using means ranging from Time magics to review her past to Forces magics to gain access to all manner of electronic databases. In addition to seeking evidence the candidate is a competent mage, RP also evaluates whether or not the candidate seems sincere in her interest to join. Almost all candidates pass this step.

Next comes the hardest part of the candidate's initiation. The candidate, along with one RP member, journeys to some location where Sleepers are being openly oppressed. Examples range from African villages where most of the inhabitants are effectively

enslaved by oil drilling companies, to the worst Asian sweatshops, to various small revolutions where Sleepers attempt to rebel against abusive and murderous governments or businesses. Candidates are free to ask for advice, but are also expected to make their own decisions and are evaluated on the choices they make. More than a quarter of the candidates are so overcome by the horrors they see during this test that they leave before their mentor declares the work to be done. By doing so, they automatically forfeit their membership. Others attempt to randomly strike back at the oppressors, often injuring themselves with Paradox and risking the Veil. The RP member does his best to stop such incidents and then sends the candidate home. Candidates who avoid both of these responses and who handle themselves well are welcomed as full members of RP.

Full members are largely independent operatives. This cult operates by consensus, and most members soon learn the basic principles of working in an organization that uses this sort of decision-making

process. The most important rule is that with no formal hierarchy or decision-making structure, members can count on aid only from individuals they can convince to help them. As a result, successful projects proposed by members typically have fairly broad appeal.

Proposing a project is a very simple matter: a member simply contacts every other member with whom he is interested in working, which sometimes includes asking every member. Then, individuals who are interested either respond positively or suggest they would be interested in helping if the proposal was changed in some specific fashion. At this point, all the interested members usually meet and work out the details of the project. Members now keep in contact via cell phones and the internet, both of which have the great virtue of being available in the various Third World nations where RP is currently most active.

When a member discovers some problem that affects the entire RP or one of the cult's close allies, the cult's consensus-based strategy is highly effective. Members typically talk out the problem fairly rapidly, while individually preparing to deal with it in the manner that seems best to them. This style of organization works well for RP members in large part because of the shared experience of dealing with an unimaginable crisis even their most powerful magics could do only so much to help. To make this process even easier, RP also does its best to allow in only new members it believes will be comfortable dealing with making decisions via consensus.

RP has fairly distant relations with many other cults and subgroups of Powerbrokers because its ideals are considered unusual, and in some cases problematic. It also often has problems with the Guardians of the Veil who worry about the degree to which it uses magic to affect Sleeper society. However, RP also has fairly close relations with many Theurges, who respect its efforts to help provide Sleepers the freedom to engage in serious spiritual contemplation without the contrast threat of either want or harm. RP also has a very close alliance with some branches of the Adamantine Arrow who wish to use the order's martial talents to help protect Sleepers from harm.

Theurges: The Metaphysical Research Society

Widely regarded as one of the oldest New Age organizations, the Metaphysical Research Society, often called the MRS, is a public foundation dedicated to

spiritual teaching and esoteric study located in Los Angeles, California. However, unknown to both the Sleepers who participate in its classes and those who dismiss it as a purveyor of wacky nonsense, it is controlled and administered by a group of mages and their Sleepwalker allies.

The Public Facade

The MRS is a private foundation that publishes books, gives lectures, sponsors speakers and otherwise works to promote spiritual exploration and understanding. Founded in 1949 by a small group of occultists and spiritual seekers in Los Angeles, with the growth of both New Age publishing and the internet, it has become a large and thriving foundation with several hundred employees. Today, it publishes a variety of books about New Age and alternative spirituality and is widely considered one of the best and most discerning of the various New Age publishers. It also holds daily lectures and classes in its LA headquarters. In addition, the MRS now has subsidiary chapterhouses in San Francisco, Seattle, New York City, Boston, Chicago, London, Manchester and Budapest. These chapterhouses hold regular meetings and lectures, including a regular series of visiting lecturers, both from the Los Angeles headquarters and a variety of prestigious spiritual figures.

More than a million people have read books published by the MRS and tens of thousands have attended at least one lecture. In addition, there are several thousand individuals who regularly attend MRS lectures and workshops and pay an annual fee to become public members of the society. This membership gives these people access to private lectures and classes. Many of the classes are quite intensive and some require public members to pass an interview with the instructor to determine their suitability.

There are occasional rumors that some of these classes involve everything from exotic orgies to learning all manner of alleged magical or psychic powers, but, naturally, none of these allegations have ever been proven. During the early 1970s, the MRS was briefly investigated for allegations of drug use, but this investigation was dropped due to lack of evidence. Many people involved in the New Age and occult subculture regard the MRS as simultaneously a bit old fashioned and exceedingly reliable and worthy of respect.

The MRS investigates and discusses all aspects of alternative spirituality, including lucid dreaming, meditation, ancient mysticism, lost civilizations, ghosts, reincarnation, magic, psychic powers and even

cryptozoology. The MRS has published more than 500 books and New Age and metaphysical authors of all sorts regularly send their manuscripts to the MRS in the hope they will be published. Books, tapes and DVDs published by the MRS are available online and in major bookstores all over the planet.

The Hidden Truth

The MRS is most definitely a society dedicated to learning, understanding, and promoting spiritual truths, but the source of these truths is far stranger than most Sleepers could understand. In addition, while few realize it, this organization performs a fair amount of actual research. Specifically, it has developed a wide variety of tests to discern whether mortals are Sleepwalkers or on the verge of Awakening. In addition to its other work, the MRS is a major source of research on Sleepwalkers; Disbelief and Awakening.

The three mages who originally founded the MRS still run it. All have used Life magics to slow their aging. One of these three regularly disguises herself as someone who appears in her late 80s, while the other two faked their deaths more than a decade ago and created new legal identities as disciples of their previous identities in order to retain control of the MRS. The leaders are Sharon Perez, known as Cloud, Stephen Manly, known as Platinum Road, and Lisa Hauptman, known as Quod Extremis. Cloud and Platinum Road are both skilled travelers in the Astral Realm, the first to understand its nature, the second on quests for the secrets of Atlantis. Quod Extremis is a specialist in Spirit magics who has explored the depths of the Shadow Realm.

To aid in their efforts, these three have recruited several dozen additional mages to help them. The three founders direct the Los Angeles headquarters and each of the organization's chapterhouses is administered by at least one mage and several Sleepwalker assistants. The MRS has become quite skilled at detecting and locating Sleepwalkers, and after subjecting them to a careful but highly discrete magical and psychological examination to determine their suitability, several mages reveal both their true nature and the true nature and purpose of the MRS to them and then offer employment in the organization's inner circle. Currently, the various branches of the MRS employ more than 100 Sleepwalkers and are always looking for more. However, ordinary Sleepwalkers rarely rise to positions of significant authority. The MRS also employs more than 30 Proximi, a few of whom hold positions

equal to some of the lower ranking mages in the organization.

The relationship between the MRS and the Guardians of the Veil is complex and occasionally troubled. The mages in charge of the MRS have on several occasions been cautioned by the Guardians of the Veil that some of the information they are discussing and publishing is too sensitive. However, in return for allowing it to publicize some pieces of potentially questionable information, the MRS regularly works with the Guardians of the Veil to help discredit, obscure and explain away more serious and obvious problematic incidents like mortal archeologists stumbling upon Atlantean Artifacts or modern recording media capturing evidence of vulgar magic. In return for help solving some of their most difficult problems, the Guardians of the Veil largely leave the MRS alone, but they continue to monitor its activities.

The MRS has moderately close ties with groups within both the Mysterium and Free Council interested in the MRS's work on Awakening and Sleepwalkers. However, most members of the Mysterium are deeply suspicious of the desire of the MRS to reveal important occult truths to the Sleepers, just as much of the Free Council dislikes its emphasis on the MRS's role as the appropriate gatekeepers of knowledge for spiritually inclined Sleepers.

Joining the MRS requires both scholarship and dedication. Mages and Proximi who wish to join must first demonstrate a profound grasp of spiritual principles. Most are required to either submit a manuscript or make an oral presentation to a group of MRS members. Those who make a positive impression are then either asked to write a long article for an MRS publication or invited to give a lecture before an audience of Sleepers. Prospective members who demonstrate a knack for moving and informative speaking or writing are always welcome. In addition, mages who have useful knowledge, especially those who have extensive knowledge of the Astral Realm, are much in demand.

However, the MRS is no place for either novices or pure theoreticians. The leaders of the MRS insist that all mages and Proximi who belong to this order contribute to both metaphysical study and spiritual teaching. They also understand the vast majority of members have considerably more skill and interest in one of these two fields.

The three founders must personally approve all new members. As a result, this cult is relatively

small, with most of its day-to-day operations maintained by several hundred Sleepwalkers, aided by a support staff of Sleepers who have no idea they are working for anything more mysterious than a New Age publishing house and research society. In addition to approving all new members, the three leaders must approve all major projects, including everything from founding new chapterhouses to adding new subdivisions to the publishing department. Fortunately, the three leaders are all reasonably sensible individuals who listen carefully to their advisors and are willing to admit and attempt to correct their mistakes.

Current Projects

Groups ranging from the Guardians of the Veil to the Free Council are both concerned and curious about the MRS's latest plan. After publishing several books on lucid dreaming and giving in-depth lectures about both it and the possibility of sharing dreams, the MRS has now decided to embark upon an ambitious plan to hold a series of regular meditation sessions wherein mages will bring select groups of Sleepers with them into the Astral Realm. The purpose of this effort is two-fold. First, the mages hope direct exposure to Temenos and Anima Mundi will help at least some of these mortals become Sleepwalkers, or possibly even Awaken. In addition, the mages involved in this effort hope to work with the mortals in the Astral Realm to perform complex manipulations designed to see whether it's possible to help decrease the effect of Disbelief for a radius of several miles around the organization's Los Angeles headquarters. The mortals involved have all been through a lengthy class in lucid dreaming and have been told the new meditations they are using are designed to help all members journey together into humanity's collective unconscious. The outcome of this effort is unknown, but many mages are awaiting the results with interest.

The Pentacle Supernal

Leadership comes in many forms, ranging from simple guidance, to firm but compassionate rule, to iron-fisted despotism and many shades in between. But the Silver Ladder's duty — or, at least, the duty of the spiritual ancestors of modern théarchs — was not always one of genuine governance, or so some Ladder mages maintain. After all, in the days of lost Atlantis, it was those sorcerer-kings

and -queens who would become the Oracles and the Exarchs who presided over the great empire of the Awakened. The predecessors of those sworn to the Voice of the Dragon were priest-nobles of an enlightened nation, with faith in only the power of the human will to move Heaven and Earth. They weighed the hearts of their fellows, offered wise counsel to the high and low alike, and interpreted the law handed down from the immortal thrones of Atlantis.

But they did not rule.

And these willworkers were not alone in their duties as stewards of the ways and traditions of their ancient homeland. This responsibility they shared with the bureaucrats and courtiers of Atlantis, whose keen minds and cunning words were reserved for matters wholly temporal. While the motions of the sun and stars could tell many things to those who truly knew how to see them, such meditations could not, for instance, equitably divide surplus grain between districts of the city. Likewise, while the interpretations of the cryptic words of cloistered kings could sanctify and legalize a marriage between willworkers, contracts still had to be drawn up and documents filed with the proper authorities. And the mages of the Pentacle Supernal believe they know who were the Awakened attending to such tasks — the civil mirror to their forebears' sacred obligations. According to such willworkers, the ideological descendants of these mages still exist today: the Seers of the Throne.

The Pentacle Supernal hides deep within the fold of the Silver Ladder, and for good reason. These Awakened aspire to what they believe is a reconciliation with the Seers of the Throne, and the complete and inevitable reunion of the five Atlantean Orders. Of course, their beliefs are tantamount to treason in most Consilii, and so these willworkers keep their heads low and do nothing to attract undue attention, all the while working toward the unity they believe is requisite to restoring the glory of their fallen empire.

History

The notion of Ladder mages suing, whether secretly or openly, for reconciliation with the Seers of the Throne probably dates back to the foundation of both orders' modern incarnations. As no other fellowship of Awakened is so like unto the théarchs themselves as the Seers, it makes sense ideologies

would develop, every now and again, that seek to hold these two warring factions find common ground. Very nearly all the few surviving records of every such attempt indicate disastrous failure — usually, but not always, on account of preemptive betrayal on the part of the Seers — but a handful, just enough to inspire hope, tell of small successes along a long and perilous road.

The Pentacle Supernal is believed to have begun as a secret society for théarchs in the late 14th century, probably somewhere in the Near or Middle East. Certain historical documents in the cult's possession suggest one or more large population centers in the area experienced a drop in numbers of Guardians of the Veil, allowing both the Silver Ladder and the Seers of the Throne to deeply entrench themselves in various Sleeper institutions. This commingling of assets eventually led to tentative interactions between the sides. Most of the mages involved reacted poorly, bringing the Ladder and the Seers into a protracted period of cold war, which seems to have lasted for over a century in one form or another. Whole generations of willworkers were brought up with a suspicious dread of “the other side,” and some, predictably, sought out their avowed yet unknown nemeses to learn what was so terrible about them. Somewhere along the line, théarchs and Seers of the Throne began trading rumors, and then information, and then secrets. By the time the Guardians returned in numbers to flush out the “treasonous element,” bonds too powerful to be easily silenced by long knives and inquisitors' magic had been forged.

The surviving members of the conspiracy, both Ladder and Seer, fled, taking their dissident beliefs and practices with them. They scattered far and wide; different accounts within the Pentacle Supernal tell of exiles traveling to the edge of the Atlantic, into the wilds of central Asia and deep into the African heartland. In these places, the théarchs and Seers parted ways, but kept alive the connections they had forged, passing down the knowledge of such to their apprentices, in time. And, so, this dangerous brotherhood — peopled with naïve hopefuls, scheming double agents, seditious collaborators, true believers in the manifest destiny of the Silver Ladder and more — persists to the modern day, an institution that could bridge the gap between two opposing forces of the Awakened world, were the ambitions of each not as inherently, eternally and mutually exclusive as they are.

Philosophy

The Seers of the Throne are the heirs to the courtly bureaucrats of Atlantis, just as the Silver Ladder descends from its philosopher-priests. Each side is incomplete without the other; the Ladder too focused upon the spiritual needs of the Awakened and the Seers too profane and materialistic. Only when the two sides reach an accord can the *true* Pentacle of lost Atlantis be reunited, with all five of its ancient orders working in harmony to rebuild its forgotten glory. By pursuing the lore of the Seers and working toward closing the rift between the Atlantean Diamond and its wayward kinsmen, a théarch of the Pentacle Supernal brings the world that much closer to restoration and wholeness. Of course, “idealistic” does not necessarily equate to “gullible,” and mages of the cult absolutely do not put blind faith in *any* Seer, no matter how seemingly sincere; they've been burned far too many times in the past to take such a trusting approach with a culture in which treachery has come to be a virtue.

Members of the Pentacle Supernal are often (at least on the surface) far more concerned with spiritual than worldly matters. They eschew positions of overt authority in favor of offices that allow them to exert indirect influence; the former sorts of duties are reserved for the rehabilitated Seers of the Throne. Such théarchs often dwell extensively upon the “will of the Oracles” and frequently pray, meditate and perform divinations and other rituals as a show of their allegiance to the “proper order” of lost Atlantis.

Organization

As a secret society within the Silver Ladder, the Pentacle Supernal generally does not use ranks or titles to identify its own. Most such mages agree it's already difficult enough just to get by as a member of the cult, let alone organize on any level that warrants divisions of authority. The waters are further muddied by the opposing viewpoints within the Pentacle Supernal itself. Three major factions divide the cult. On one side stand those who sincerely believe the redemption of the Seers is demanded by the tenets of Wisdom, and must necessarily lead the Awakened closer to reclaiming the mysteries of Atlantis. Another side is comprised of those who desire to chasten their wayward cousins and seize the Seers' lore as penance for their crimes before admitting them back into the fraternity of Atlantean orders.

The last major group within the Pentacle Supernal consists of infiltrators who use the cult as a vehicle for their ambitions, stealing secrets from the Seers, gathering blackmail on fellow théarchs, and otherwise embracing a lifestyle the Exarchs themselves would probably find admirable. Add to this the Seer and Guardian infiltrators, and the Silver Ladder's own spies within the cult, and it's easy to see why the Pentacle Supernal remains more a philosophy than an organization.

Appearance: Members of the Pentacle Supernal can look like just about anyone. They often shun excessive possessions, however, and some rare few go so far as to live as mendicants or ascetics. Such mages tend to remain mindful of their outward appearance, though, regardless of their philosophies on wealth; the denial of materialism need not go hand-in-hand with shabbiness. Of course, those with less sincere belief in the cult's avowed purpose may attire themselves much differently.

Sanctum: The true believers of this cult usually maintain Spartan accommodations, opting for elegant simplicity. Those who use the Pentacle Supernal as a vehicle for their own desires, however, often luxuriate in more opulent surroundings.

Background: Some members of the Pentacle Supernal come to it through induction into the Silver Ladder itself, brought into Awakened society by adherents to this perfidious sect. Others find their way in by chasing legends and rumors, after being scouted and deemed suitable by unseen watchers, or simply by accident. In the end, all sorts of mages are drawn into the cult for many different reasons. No one Path is more commonly called to the Pentacle Supernal than any other; *all*, potentially, have their reasons — however benevolent or malign — for joining.

The Sublime Architects

The destiny of the Vox Draconis is not, as many believe, understanding of the rites and rituals of ancient Atlantis. It is not even rule of the Awakened as a people. No, the true birthright of the Dragon's Voice is mastery over magic *itself*. Not the reserved and clinical cataloguing of lost spells and new rites practiced by the Mysterium, nor the efforts to leash and confine magic until the barest whispers of it are silenced, as is the way of the Guardians of the Veil, instead, it is the sacred purpose of the

Silver Ladder to unify with the very substance of the Supernal, thus manifesting the apex of human potential in flesh and blood, so that magic sings within the soul, its harmonies as flawless as they are everlasting.

Practitioners of many mystical doctrines in the Sleeping World have struggled to encapsulate this ideal. The Hermetic precept of “as above, so below,” for instance, tells of the sympathy between the perfected realms of the spirit and the profane reality of the flesh, as well as the interrelation between the universe and the self. The concept of Nirvana, similarly, speaks to the end of ignorance and the flowering of perfect awareness within an individual whose perceptions move beyond the knowing of every being subject to earthly limitation. Sufism teaches reunion with the Divine and rejection of all that impedes the progress of the soul toward a state in every way ennobled by holy virtues. It should come as no surprise, then, that there exist those willworkers within the Silver Ladder who aspire to a fully Awakened and (by their estimation, anyway) purer vision of this very objective.

Some Sublime Architects look upon their quest through the lens of one or more Sleeper faiths, philosophies or schools of mysticism, though most opt to deny all attachment to such “flawed” practices. Others study these belief systems, but only inasmuch as they inform the Awakened seeker's transcendent experience. While seen as odd by many other théarchs — and, often, as obnoxious and self-obsessed by members of other orders — the Sublime Architects are usually tolerated. Indeed, in a few Consilii throughout the Fallen World their presence is welcome, due to remarkable breakthroughs in the study of magic, often freely distributed to other willworkers as the chaff shed by their minds and souls while the Architects move toward their avowed goal of perfected union with the Supernal.

History

The origin of the Sublime Architects is unknown. Due to the innumerable transcendent philosophies interspersed throughout the breadth of both Sleeper and Awakened history, any attempt to discern when and how they first came to be is essentially doomed to failure. Historians among the Architects argue their pet theories to one another, but none amount to more than speculation and wishful thinking. The cult may or may not have existed in multiple

prior guises, eternally reinventing itself with each new generation, or it might trace an unbroken line of descent from the spiritual traditions of Atlantis; the truth will, almost certainly, remain forever unknown.

Most recently, however, the emergence (or reemergence) of the Sublime Architects coincided with the rise of spiritualism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and its membership very slowly but steadily grew from there, until the late 1960s and early '70s. At that time, the cult's theosophical leanings merged with the new *mélange* of mysticism inherent to the age, and more *théarchs* joined its ranks. While many willworkers of the prior generation within the cult clashed with the new blood at that time, all agreed the rapid growth of its membership could only be beneficial to the group's goals. Eventually, the divisions between the old and the young among the Sublime Architects subsided and all found entirely different things about which to argue.

Today, the Sublime Architects remain a significant minority within the Silver Ladder; too few to wield any real power over policy in all save the most unusual *Consilii*, but just numerous enough to make their voices heard. Its members are no more unified in their respective approaches than they ever were, but most also recognize the influence they possess when they put their differences aside and speak with one voice, a voice they hold — irrespective of the cult's internal disagreements — to be fundamentally more enlightened than any other within the Fallen World.

Philosophy

Power, unto itself, is a temporal concern, beneath the ideals of the Silver Ladder. While many *théarchs* have become corrupted by the lure of worldly authority, the Sublime Architects look to the unsullied destiny of the Awakened. Likewise, those Ladder mages who become caught up in the pomp and ritual of their order miss the forest for the trees; they simply go through the motions, devoid of any sort of genuine understanding of the Supernal symbols encompassed by words and gestures, objects and places. While the Architects themselves do not yet comprehend the secret meanings behind these transcendent correspondences, they are at least *looking* for them, and so — as the mages of the cult reckon — they are considerably closer to realizing the true purpose of the Dragon's Voice: union with the Supernal.

Of course, as members of the Silver Ladder, Sublime Architects have an obligation to instruct the ignorant, those less enlightened than themselves (among whom the majority number almost everyone, Awakened or otherwise). Most Architects recognize a "lost cause," however, and don't waste their time on those who are resolute in their spiritual blindness — anyone who rejects such a mage's offers of instruction and guidance. If others interpret surety of purpose and steadfast commitment to Supernal excellence as arrogance, then such willworkers merely demonstrate the depths of their ignorance, and they are to be pitied for their small views of the world. One day, the Architects reason, they *will* come around, and they will ask for the lore of the one true Path with humility and sincerity in their hearts.

Organization

The Sublime Architects subscribe to a mystic hierarchy of being, inspired by such ideas as the circles of initiation in secret societies, the ascending Sephirot of the Tree of Life, and even the degrees of knowledge within the Ten Arcana. Movement toward synthesis with the Supernal, they maintain, occurs by degrees and such progress can be perceived even while the ultimate expression of this journey remains elusive and incomprehensible. The cult's degrees of initiation are few, but the ascent between tiers is a deeply significant event in the life of an Architect.

Acolyte

An Acolyte is a newly inducted Sublime Architect, often young and relatively inexperienced as a willworker. These mages are frequently tasked with the unpopular obligation of dealing with the cult's worldly concerns, an especially onerous responsibility in the rare few *Consilii* in which the cult actually holds sway. The majority of Architects never move beyond this stage.

Preceptor

Balancing the nebulous middle ground between the profane concerns of the Fallen World (as represented by the Acolytes) and the divine contemplations of the Supernal (embodied in the *Æons*), the Preceptors educate new members of the cult and attend to issues too weighty, complicated or dangerous to entrust to the less enlightened, while keeping such matters from troubling the remote and ruminative *Æons*. To be accepted into the ranks of the Preceptors, a mage must

possess a strong connection to the Supernal (in the form of Gnosis) and considerable proficiency with at least several Arcana.

Æon

The final earthly degree of esteem among the Sublime Architects, Æons concern themselves with Supernal lore and the next long leg of the journey toward oneness with the infinite. These willworkers, more so than even the rank and file of the cult, want nothing to do with worldly power or “empty ritual;” they are *becoming* living incarnations of what other mages merely wield. Only those who have progressed far along the path of Supernal union (with extremely potent Gnosis and expansive knowledge of the Arcana, including multiple Masteries) are accorded the rank of Æon, and only then after demonstrating profound and consistent understanding of the mysteries of magic itself.

Appearance: Sublime Architects are highly varied in their appearance. Some neglect or even castigate their bodies, while others believe perfection of physical form is necessary to perfection of the inmost self. Few opt for any outward reflection of wealth, however, and most tend toward simple attire, whether threadbare and poorly kept, expertly mended and maintained, or habitually replaced.

Sanctum: Members of the cult often share common sanctums, living like a monastic order and taking shared responsibility for all chores in the sparsely appointed living quarters. Even those who live alone usually have little more than a cell, with perhaps some

books, a few personally meaningful tokens, some spare clothes, a mattress on which to sleep, and maybe a simple garden to tend. A handful of Architects live as vagrants, depending upon the charity of their fellow Awakened for a place to sleep.

Background: Typically, only those who were deeply spiritual before the Awakening – specifically in transcendent faiths or schools of thought – come to the Sublime Architects, though some are trained into the cult by early mentors within the Silver Ladder. Others eventually come to it after growing dissatisfied with the temporal concerns of the order, and a rare few powerful Masters join when they come to feel they’ve no more to gain as politicians or priests.

Theurgists and Warlocks are the willworkers most commonly drawn to the Sublime Architects, though for very different reasons. Slightly less common are the Shamans of the Primal Wild.

Legacies of the Ladder

The Silver Ladder possesses a great love for tradition and vision. The fusion of old learning with youthful wisdom has great appeal for a théarch. As such, the principle of a Legacy can attract many adherents within the order — as long as that Legacy has some genuine relevance to the world around the mage. A théarch has little use for soulcrafting simply for the purpose of bettering one’s personal ability or insight. The true path is one that empowers the individual while still keeping a sharp interest in the world around her.

BENE ASHMEDAI

I am a prince amongst demons and a servant to men.

This tale is true. This tale is a lie.

The history of the Bene Ashmedai begins with the nameless apprentice of Solomon the Wise; a young Sabaeen in the entourage of Queen Makeda. Many sources have named him, but all these names are known by his descendents to be falsehoods, meant to lead outsiders astray, for the practitioners of this dark and hazardous species of goetia are ill-understood by many and often vilified for their thankless work. They treat with demons, after all, and hold themselves to be nobles among the nightmares that haunt the Realm of Scourging, from which, the self-proclaimed “Diabolists” maintain, the incarnations of Vice emanate.

The lore of the Bene Ashmedai recounts the torments of the infernal sovereign, Asmodai, shackled to the will of Solomon the sorcerer-king. That lore tells, too, of the many long journeys of Solomon and his periods of scholarly seclusion, during which the nameless apprentice stole into the chamber in which Asmodai was imprisoned. A heathen by birth, he was not bound by the Hebrews’ religious law, and so sought to truly comprehend the terrible spirit his king had subjugated. Upon the occasion of the Sabaeen’s first visit, Asmodai, enraged at the youth’s presumption, roared and bellowed and displayed many fearsome magics, but the intruder was unmoved. Instead, he asked, simply and without guile what was the source of the demon’s great anger. At this, Asmodai’s fury abated, for it came to understand this was no errand boy sent with chores from Solomon, nor some curious spectator hoping merely to gawk at the spirit in chains.

“Return to me at the next darkening of the moon,” Asmodai replied, “and you shall have your answer.”

So began the instruction that, the Bene Ashmedai claim, laid the foundations of their Legacy. While Solomon toiled away at the staid lore of locking away his human nature, his apprentice studied in secret the arts of wresting self-mastery out of the gilded talons of indulgence. Sometimes the Warlock was educated through unearthly delights and, at other times, unimaginable torments. Eventually, however, Asmodai became concerned that the king suspected its rebellious behavior and bade the apprentice to flee Israel, taking with him all he had learned. When the young man expressed sincere concern for his mentor’s fate, the demon smiled: “We are not born of men; our flesh

is not your flesh. And yet, I see in you a spirit like my own, and so I name you an heir to my kingdom, shattered and incomplete. Go forth, my child, to preserve what I have shown you. In time, Solomon will be dust and my freedom returned to me. A human lifetime of ignominy I endure happily should my teachings survive. You are now a prince amongst demons.”

The legends of the Diabolists go on to recount the travels of the nameless apprentice, as well as the many adventures of his nine students. None, though, could draw the secrets Asmodai gave freely into themselves as Solomon did with those he stole. Generation upon generation, as centuries turned into millennia, they handed down their demonic sorcery, and many grew powerful in such magics, though none learned to master them. Interestingly, it was one of the heirs to Solomon’s teachings, the willworkers known as the Clavicularius, in whom Asmodai’s sorcery came into fullest flower.

The year was 5490 by the reckoning of the Hebrew calendar — 1730 to those who held to Gregory’s count of years — when a Clavicularius by the Shadow Name of Ahab chanced upon a handful of the surviving disciples of the nameless Sabaeen in North Africa. Upon first encountering these willworkers, Ahab’s wrath was vast, and he resolved to destroy them and their heretical knowledge. While he went with murderous intent into the sanctum of those he most despised, the willworker emerged from that hidden place wise in the sorcery of Asmodai, and calling himself Ba’al Hammon. To this day, none know for certain how it was that Ahab abandoned one Legacy for another; the Clavicularius claim he did so only through infernal magics, while the Bene Ashmedai maintain he was enlightened through his exposure to the demon’s teachings.

Almost immediately, Ba’al Hammon set out to ingratiate himself with the local powers within the Vox Draconis, to counter the inevitable backlash from those he had betrayed. His ploy earned the Warlock the protection of the Hierarch, who became one of his first students. Ba’al Hammon was a prolific teacher, and he demanded that each of his apprentices adopt similar practices, until such a time as the numbers of what he came to call the Bene Ashmedai — the Children of Asmodai — were strong enough both

to weather the enmity of the first Diabolist's former Legacy and to have something of substance to offer the Silver Ladder as an order. To counter the natural (and dangerous) desires engendered by such close communion with the demon within, Ba'al Hammon set forth an unyielding policy of service for his disciples: through indulgence, they would make of Asmodai's lessons a beacon by which to light the way for the long, dark journey of the human soul.

On account of their founder's capable scheming, as well as not a little bit of luck, the Bene Ashmedai survived their tumultuous foundation and prospered within the Vox Draconis unto the modern day. Though ever few, their great ambition, married to their humble mandate, serves them well within their adoptive order, and so the Diabolists continue to seek the lofty heights of the Supernal at the end of the long road of excess.

Parent Path or Order: Mastigos or Silver Ladder

Nickname: Diabolists

Appearance: Diabolists often dress lavishly, and usually not in tasteful, conservative garb. Instead, most favor attention-grabbing fashion, demonstrating wealth and comfort with the spotlight, as well as the social aggression needed to be trendsetters or even celebrities. Leather, snakeskin, fur and feathers are more common, by far, than a simple suit and tie or modest evening gown. Tattoos, piercings and distinctive makeup (whether the liberal use of thousand-dollar cosmetics, the kohl and rouge suggestive of a sacred whore of the ancient world, or even just tastefully drawn eyeliner on a man) are often seen on Diabolists. Accoutrements that specifically suggest Vices (such as peacock plumes for pride, images of cats for lust or sloth, and fangs or claws for wrath, for example) are favored by the Bene Ashmedai as well.



Changing Legacies?

It's impossible. Everyone knows that.

How, then, did Ahab transform his soul twice within a single lifetime? Of the few Awakened scholars outside the two Legacies involved who know anything of the tale, many believe he did not: Ba'al Hammon was not Ahab, reborn and renamed, they say, but instead perhaps his killer. Others think, maybe, Ahab's efforts to forge his soul into that of a Clavicularius were at just the right stage of incompleteness to permit him to catalyze a new Legacy from Asmodai's teachings. Both the Key-Bearers and the Diabolists remain stubborn in their respective interpretations, of course.

Still, what if there *is* a kernel of truth to the stories? Perhaps it is actually possible to move between Legacies (or, at least, between Legacies as tightly interrelated as the Clavicularius and the Bene Ashmedai), exchanging one set of Supernal gifts for another. Even the rumor of it is deeply intriguing to the few willworkers who lend credence to the legends, especially as the Bene Ashmedai believe Ba'al Hammon's personal journals, chronicling his creation of the Diabolists as a Legacy, still exist somewhere, either in this world or in the astral plane.

Background: Bene Ashmedai tend to come from one of two backgrounds — either those who have always been used to being daring, adored and the center of attention, or those who have lived lives of mediocrity and repression and been subsequently “unleashed” either by the Awakening or some other, similarly powerful experience. In both cases, they take well to the limelight and many are natural leaders. By nature, Diabolists are usually better at inspiring others than they are at developing strategies, and so they tend to become influential demagogues rather than effective bureaucrats. Most sincerely believe their manipulations can be used for the greater good and, if such influence over others profits them a bit along the way, so much the better.

Organization: In keeping with the traditions set forth between Asmodai and Solomon's nameless

apprentice, most Diabolists educate their students through a combination of beneficence and cruelty. They act as friends, confidantes, and, sometimes, lovers to their protégés, as well as tormentors. The desired end result of this staccato flow of both positive and negative attention is intended to make each such willworker self-sufficient and capable of dealing with the slings and arrows of life among the Bene Ashmedai. Because the Diabolists are often confused with Left-Handed mages by the ignorant, they avoid any large-scale organization, preferring instead to work in ones and twos, occasionally swapping stories, advice and new magics when they happen to encounter one another, whether in the world of flesh or in the realms of the mind and the spirit.

Suggested Oblations: Acting as a guru or other spiritual authority, building up or tearing down a celebrity, conversing with goetic demons or other goeticists, demonological research, engaging in a seduction (either as the initiator or as the pursued), giving in to Vice without concern for the consequences (or inspiring another to do so), indulging in the fear and/or adulation of others, psychoanalyzing oneself or others.

Concepts: Connoisseur of Vice, devilish seducer, goetic historian, grim demonologist, itinerant exorcist, student of human nature, walker at the edge of the Left-Hand path.

Attainments

Through the embrace of one's daimonic self, a Diabolist obtains power first over the spirits without and, at last, over the spirits within.

1st: Diabolist's Circle

Prerequisites: Gnosis 3, Mind 1, Spirit 2 (primary), Persuasion 2, Meditative Mind

The Diabolist permanently benefits from an armor rating equal to his dots in the Spirit Arcanum. Further, he may, as a reflexive action, activate an ability similar to the Mind 1 “Aura Perception” spell, save that it serves only to discern the emotional state of spirits. For the purpose of penetrating any power of occlusion possessed by a spirit that might mask its emotions (whether used to directly conceal its feelings or even its nature as a spirit), the mage is considered to have successes equal to his dots in the Mind Arcanum.

Daimonic Magic

Diabolists, as do the Key-Bearers from whom they descend, make use of the basic magics of goetia in the pursuit of understanding both their own demons and those of others. Like the Clavicularius, a Diabolist benefits from rites through which to tame such perilous magics:

Bene Ashmedai Rite: The Secret Seal

Dice Pool: Resolve + Subterfuge + Mind

This rite is based upon the "Goetic Struggle" spell and enables a Diabolist to grapple with her inner darkness — or, if she is skilled enough in the arts of Mind, to help another do so.

Bene Ashmedai Rite: Ascendancy of the Other

Dice Pool: Resolve + Persuasion + Spirit

This rite is based upon the "Goetic Evocation" spell and is perhaps the most dangerous magical secret taught to Diabolists, who use it to give form to their own demons and, for especially puissant members of the Legacy, to others'.

2nd: Daimon's Measure

Prerequisites: Gnosis 5, Spirit 3

The willworker subtracts her dots in the Spirit Arcanum from the dice pool of any spirit attempting to use an unwanted Numen or Influence upon her. By reflexively spending a point of Mana, she may also attempt to counterspell any power used by a

spirit within sensory range using Resolve + Persuasion + Spirit.

Optional Arcanum: Mind 3

By yielding to her Vice, the Diabolist masters herself. With an instant action, the willworker may "tune out" her Virtue completely for the remainder of the scene. While under the effects of this Attainment, she does not regain Willpower for satisfying her Virtue, and neither does she receive any other benefit from it; it is as though the Virtue simply does not exist for her. In exchange, while her Virtue is suppressed, she receives an extra point of Willpower for indulging her Vice and gains a +4 bonus (rather than the customary +2) whenever spending a point of Willpower on any roll involving a Resistance Attribute. To terminate this Attainment's effects — both good and ill — before the end of any scene in which the Diabolist uses it, she must take an instant action to make a Gnosis + Mind roll, contested by *her own* Resolve + Composure, and accrue more successes on the former roll than the latter. If the roll is failed, it may be attempted again, with a cumulative -1 die penalty to the Gnosis + Mind roll for each previous failure.

3rd: Pandemonium's Mirror

Prerequisites: Gnosis 7, Mind 4, Spirit 4

The final secret of Asmodai teaches the Diabolist how to invert his innermost self, giving true substance to his demon. By rolling Resolve + Persuasion + Spirit, the mage can make use of an effect identical to the spell, "Goetic Evocation," save that the willworker need make no degeneration check, regardless of his current Wisdom, and is limited to successes equal to the Attainment's dice pool. The use of this Attainment costs a point of Mana.

KEEPERS OF THE COVENANT

I am neither flesh nor spirit, and both; that is my destiny, and my power.

Since long before the Fall, certain among the Awakened have acted as intermediaries between the spirit and the flesh. Perhaps it was in that age the Keepers of the Covenant first came to be, bridging the gap between mortal men and the gods who walked, unseen, throughout the world. Certainly there are none alive today who can point to the origin of the Legacy. Because of this, and because of their inextricable ties to the animistic and primordial Shadow, these willworkers know themselves as “Elders,” and even to those who doubt the antiquity of their pedigree these mages often seem to possess old souls and they certainly wield old knowledge. Strangely, even the Elders themselves are uncertain as to the specific nature of the “covenant” described by the title of their Legacy; most of their lore, however, indicates it refers to the secrets of their Attainments, passed down to mortal willworkers by entities of the Shadow Realm.

Ancient records within the Silver Ladder tell of feats like those performed by the Keepers of the Covenant, often far outside the lands considered “civilized” by city-dwellers. The Elders consider this to be evidence of the venerable age of their Legacy, as the majority of them have ever been far more at home in the wild places than among the works of men. As with the mages described in those old tales, the Keepers walk within the material and unseen worlds with equal facility, developing strange magics of Shadow and commanding the services of the spirits to be found there. Leaders and mystics among their people, as well as bastions of tradition and aspirants to the grandeur of the Supernal, they embody the primal majesty of the invisible world, tying their own destinies forever to that other plane.

But human beings — both Sleeper and Awakened — fear the things they do not understand, and the Keepers of the Covenant often became scapegoats for those of differing faiths. Their ways were labeled “unclean” and they were suspected of consorting with demons and other, far fouler things. The explosive spread of monotheistic religions, particularly Christianity, was the most grievous

blow to be dealt to the Elders, whose membership was almost exclusively drawn from among peoples practicing a considerably different sort of relationship with the spiritual world. Before then, Keepers were often able to bring feuding parties to an equitable compromise; in the shadow of the Cross, however, when conversion by the sword became an acceptable practice, their magics were dealt with as unpardonable sins. Almost without exception, wherever the newcomers spread, the Elders of those regions came to seek out the théarchs among their would-be saviors. While many Keepers were by that time Apostates or adherents to other orders, the majority remained faithful to the Vox Draconis, and they sued for peace on those grounds.

Some Elders found their entreaties fell on deaf ears, but the majority reestablished common ground with their brethren in the Silver Ladder. Though these alliances often did little to save the cultures from which those Keepers came, they *did* manage to preserve the Legacy itself and the secrets of the Keepers passed, perhaps for the first time, into the urban centers of Europe, North Africa and the Near and Middle East. As the great religious conflicts of the first millennium spilled into the second and time marched, mercilessly, onward, théarchs were among those who sought out new lands. Some were deeply surprised to find Keepers of the Covenant scattered here and there among the indigenous peoples they encountered. The lore of these Elders, too, was incorporated into the knowledge the Vox Draconis had amassed, and many Keepers celebrated to learn their kin were to be found in every corner of the world. The oppression, exploitation and slow decimation of the majority of the civilizations in which these Elders thrived made this joy bittersweet at best, but, again, the beliefs and esoteric magics of the Legacy survived.

The stories told among the Keepers of the Covenant regarding the latter half of the second millennium are bleak: great leaders and magnificent societies laid low by disease, treachery and violence; persecution and enslavement; the slow eradication of ancient faiths. Some Elders stood their ground

and perished, while others vanished into Shadow (sometimes with a handful of their people) and were never seen again by mortal eyes. For those who learned, however grudgingly, to assimilate, ignominy was their inheritance. Once proud and admired for their facility with the ways of Shadow, they became curiosities at best, and, at worst, objects of scrutiny, scorn and even hatred. For centuries, their numbers — never all that many to begin with — steadily declined, and the Keepers of the Covenant seemed doomed to extinction, their secrets to be forever lost to the Silver Ladder and to the Fallen World.

Modern accounts of the gathering that brought about a revival of the Elders in the early 20th century are both sparse and convoluted. Indeed, most such stories are mutually contradictory. The rare few scholars within the Ladder who've studied them to any degree note that the tales seem to be *deliberately* labyrinthine, so as to eliminate any possibility of piecing together the truth. On only one premise do they agree: a handful of Keepers from around the world, none of whom had ever met, contacted one another to assemble a Great Council and discuss the future of the Legacy, and the majority of Elders were somehow convinced to attend. Some records indicate a grand ritual was conducted, rearranging the skein of fate to perpetuate the Keepers of the Covenant. Others say the most skilled and powerful of the Elders all resolved to take on apprentices, regardless of their personal wishes, so that the Legacy's secrets would live on. Still others recount

dire pacts with spirits, mysterious omens and the invocation of long-forgotten magics.

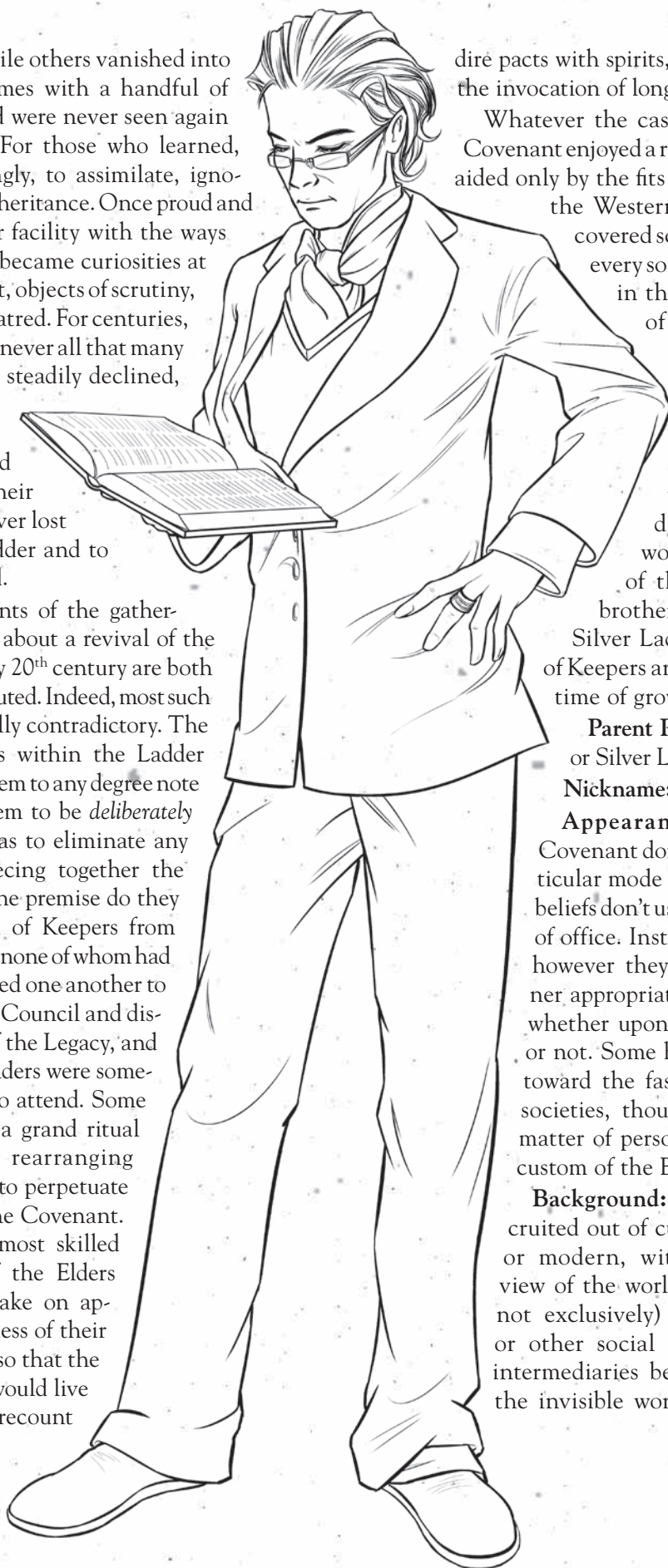
Whatever the case, the Keepers of the Covenant enjoyed a resurgence, a movement aided only by the fits and starts with which the Western world gradually discovered scientific, scholarly and, every so often, spiritual interest in the values and practices of "traditional" societies. Still by no means numerous, the Elders' numbers stand stronger in this day and age than they have for many years. Deep divisions and lingering wounds still hold some of them apart from their brothers and sisters in the Silver Ladder, but the majority of Keepers are content to enjoy this time of growth and renewal.

Parent Path or Order: Thyrsus or Silver Ladder

Nickname: Elders

Appearance: Keepers of the Covenant don't often adopt any particular mode of dress; their spiritual beliefs don't usually call for a uniform of office. Instead, they tend to dress however they please, or in a manner appropriate to the task at hand, whether upon the Legacy's business or not. Some have a rough tendency toward the fashions of "traditional" societies, though this is far more a matter of personal preference than a custom of the Elders as a whole.

Background: Elders are often recruited out of cultures, either ancient or modern, with a more animistic view of the world, commonly (though not exclusively) from the priesthood or other social classes designated as intermediaries between humanity and the invisible world. Prospective Keep-



ers of the Covenant are almost invariably deeply spiritual people long before Awakening and continue to be so after inscribing their names upon the Watchtowers. Sometimes willworkers without any particular cultural inclination toward animism take a strong interest in the workings of Shadow and so attract the notice of an Elder, though this sort of induction is uncommon. Regardless of the background from which a Keeper of the Covenant comes, mentors within the Legacy tend to look for forceful, assertive personalities; most also look favorably upon a bit of cunning and charisma in their students.

Organization: One-on-one relationships between students and mentors are common in many of the traditions of mysticism out of which Elders are often recruited. Thus, Keepers of the Covenant generally take on only single students at any given time and one or the other commonly moves on from the Consilium after the education is complete. Otherwise, each Keeper's relationship with the local spirits might come to interfere in some way with the other's arrangements. On the rare occasions Elders must gather in any numbers, however, the oldest, wisest and most powerful are invariably afforded great respect and their counsel heeded in all save the most extraordinary of circumstances. It is virtually unheard of for more than five or six Keepers of the Covenant to come together for such a meeting, and even that many would be an extraordinary occurrence; the Great Council of the early 20th century is an event that will likely never be repeated.

Suggested Oblations: Communing with and getting to know the local spirits, constructing or studying structures intended to serve as passages between boundaries, creating an object eventually intended to serve as a spirit fetish, meditating upon the dichotomy of flesh and spirit, presiding over a non-magical ceremony intended to honor or appease the spirits, seeking out a Verge, studying the site of a naturally-occurring spirit locus.

Concepts: Consilium representative to the local spirit court, cultural anthropologist "gone native," dissembling trickster, fetish-crafter, priestess of the

Old Ways, reluctant witness to the truth of his people's faith, urban shaman.

Attainments

The powers of the Elders enable them merge their mortal destinies with those of the unseen world of spirits, becoming more than merely human, mage or spirit.

1st: Oath of Synthesis

Prerequisites: Gnosis 3, Fate 2 (primary), Spirit 1, Occult 2

The Keeper of the Covenant binds her destiny to the Shadow Realm; she gains a bonus to all Spirit Arcanum spells — whether improvised or rote — equal to either her dots in the Fate Arcanum or half her Gnosis, rounding down, whichever is less.

Additionally, the Elder may see, hear and speak with spirits in Twilight, at will, as per the "Spirit Tongue" spell.

2nd: Emissary of the Pact

Prerequisites: Gnosis 5, Fate 3, Spirit 3

The Keeper of the Covenant draws ever closer to oneness with Shadow. The mage can now create a locus, producing points of "neutral" Essence per day (usable by any kind of spirit) up to his dots in Spirit, as an extended Presence + Persuasion + Fate roll, requiring successes equal to the Essence to be produced each day. This roll is subject to the penalty for local Gauntlet strength. The locus may not be used by a spirit without the willworker's consent, regardless of whether or not he is present. If the mage allows a spirit access to this locus, it must consent to perform a service for him in exchange, as per the "Control Spirit" spell, with successes equal to the points of Essence consumed. If the mage has Spirit 4, this service's Duration may benefit from advanced prolongation. The Keeper may produce only such a locus per day; creating a new locus causes the old one to wither.

Also, the Elder may perceive and communicate with spirits as per the "Peer Across the Gauntlet" spell, at will.

3rd: Eidolon of Union

Prerequisites: Gnosis 7, Fate 4, Spirit 4

The Elder takes the final step in tying her destiny to that of the invisible world. Effectively, the mage treats the local Gauntlet strength as 1 level lower for every dot she possesses in the lesser of her Fate or Spirit Arcana. This effect applies only to the

willworker herself and only to her benefit; a spirit trying to attack her from the opposite side of the Gauntlet, for instance, is still penalized by its full strength. If the local Gauntlet is reduced to zero for the Keeper, she may enter or leave Shadow, as an instant action, as though through a Verge, or else simultaneously exist on both sides of the Gauntlet, according to her wishes.

LORDS OF THE INANIMATE

The statement that everything is alive and contains a spirit is not a metaphor or a proverb; it is a path to power and wisdom.

The practitioners of this Legacy understand everything in the Fallen World has a voice, if only one knows how to listen well enough. Moreover, they can do more than listen to the voices of the objects around them, they can also command the objects to do their bidding. Their ability to command the inanimate world comes with a far deeper understanding of and sympathy for the objects and devices around them. Once they have the ability to do so, most Lords of the Inanimate permanently awaken the spirits of the objects and devices they used most often. As a result, many have spiritually awakened houses, cars, computers, and occasionally cell phones or handguns.

For Animists, as they are often called, these awakened objects are more than simply loyal servants, they are valued companions. Lords of the Inanimate care for these objects as they would valued retainers and beloved pets. In return, the spirits within these objects typically do their best to aid and protect their owners. A few Animists have no interest beyond power and control and care little for the feelings or lives of the spirits they order around, but their fellows usually regard such mages as coarse and ill-mannered brutes.

Animists rarely regard even the most powerful and intelligent spirits in objects as equals or colleagues. Instead, most feel a sort of noblesse oblige toward these spirits. They often care quite deeply about the spirits with whom they work, but also regard them as lesser beings whose proper place is to serve the mages who work with them. Even spirits that have been permanently awakened to full consciousness are seen as servants, in large part because these spirits owe their consciousness and intelligence to the actions of their owner or some other Animist.

Animists are surrounded by the voices of the objects around them. By simply pausing to listen, they can hear a chair complain about the weight of the person sitting in it, a kitchen knife's murmurs of contentment when it is sharpened, or the pleased sounds of a file as it is expertly used to shape a piece of wood. Without being roused, using the Spirit 3

spell "Rouse Spirit," the spirits of objects have an exceptionally limited and singular awareness of the world. They can sense themselves, they understand the purpose of the object they inhabit, and they enjoy being used properly and being kept in good repair. However, they are completely incapable of abstract thought, and talking to one is much like talking to a somewhat dim-witted dog that also happens to be able to speak. Neglected objects have no purpose and even without being roused with Spirit magic, their spirits can faintly call to be used to anyone who can listen.

In vivid contrast, spirits awakened with the "Rouse Spirit" spell are intelligent, self-aware beings, much like any of the many inhabitants of the Shadow Realm. Their initial desires and motivations are the same as before they were woken up, but almost always grow more complex the longer the spirit remains awake. In time, the spirit of a permanently awakened object can be as much a friend or a companion to an Animist as the other members of her Cabal. As a result, a few Animists spend more time talking to the objects around them than they do to other people. Also, despite possessing magic that can reshape the world to their whims, the majority of Animists very much enjoy working with their hands. As a result, almost all see the Attainments they learn as a method to enhance their ability to manipulate and work with objects and not a replacement for close-up, hands-on work. The few members who do not enjoy working with their hands are widely regarded as objects of scorn and pity.

Parent Path or Order: Silver Ladder or Thyrsus

Nickname: Animists

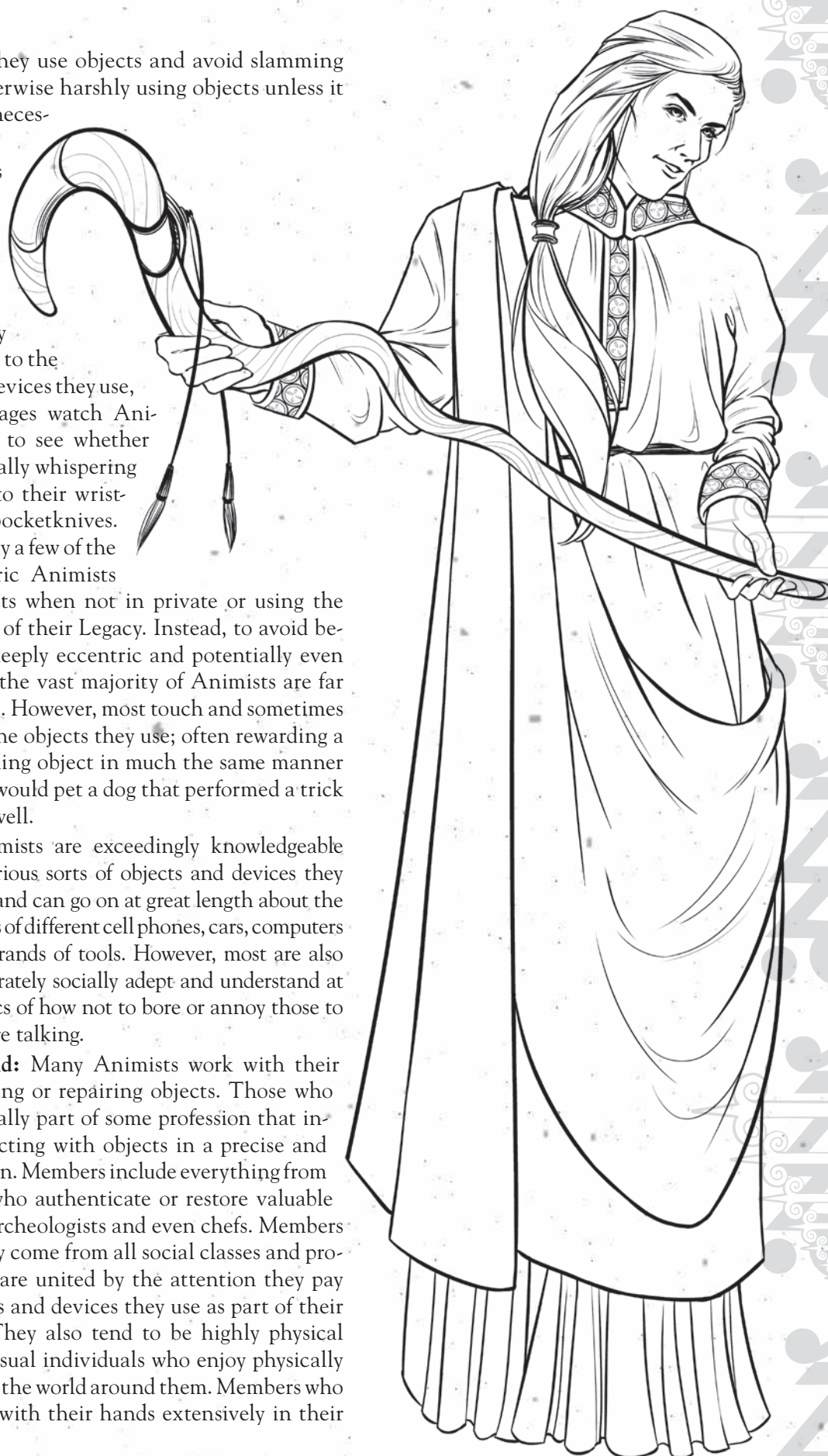
Appearance: Animists pay close attention to all the goods they regularly use. Regardless of whether they prefer rugged outdoor clothing or expensive and fancy suits, all their clothes are well-made and maintained. Few Animists would consider purchasing shoddy or ill-made goods or goods that will wear out quickly. They prefer to have time to develop a close relationship with their possessions. Animists are also unusually careful

in the way they use objects and avoid slamming doors or otherwise harshly using objects unless it is absolutely necessary.

In stories about Animists told by other mages, the followers of this Legacy regularly talk to the objects and devices they use, and some mages watch Animists closely to see whether they are actually whispering or listening to their wristwatches or pocketknives. In reality, only a few of the most eccentric Animists talk to objects when not in private or using the Attainments of their Legacy. Instead, to avoid being seen as deeply eccentric and potentially even unbalanced, the vast majority of Animists are far more discrete. However, most touch and sometimes even caress the objects they use; often rewarding a well-functioning object in much the same manner a dog owner would pet a dog that performed a trick particularly well.

Many Animists are exceedingly knowledgeable about the various sorts of objects and devices they regularly use and can go on at great length about the relative merits of different cell phones, cars, computers or different brands of tools. However, most are also at least moderately socially adept and understand at least the basics of how not to bore or annoy those to whom they are talking.

Background: Many Animists work with their hands, building or repairing objects. Those who don't are usually part of some profession that involves interacting with objects in a precise and careful fashion. Members include everything from individuals who authenticate or restore valuable antiques to archeologists and even chefs. Members of this Legacy come from all social classes and professions, but are united by the attention they pay to the objects and devices they use as part of their daily lives. They also tend to be highly physical and even sensual individuals who enjoy physically experiencing the world around them. Members who do not work with their hands extensively in their



chosen professions almost always enjoy hobbies where they do so.

Organization: Some Animists get along better with the spirits of their favorite objects than with other humans, including other mages, and many have little time for formal ceremonies or bureaucracy. As a result, Animists have a fairly loose organization, where members keep in touch on a moderately informal basis. In the past decade, this trend has been further exacerbated by the fact that an increasing number of Animists are rousing the spirits of their cell phones and answering machines and having them screen calls and deal with most callers like an especially skilled 24-hour secretary.

In most cases, Animists are connected to one another by ties of personal friendship, with those who are well liked or respected by their fellows having far more contact with other members of this Legacy. The only exception to this loose and informal contact is during the Legacy's yearly Conclave. Held in a different city each year, this Conclave is a chance for members to meet, for individuals who wish to become members to attempt to convince an Animist to teach them, and for the various Animists to show off the various spirits with which they are working.

With an atmosphere somewhere between an academic conference, a high-end craft fair and a dog-show, Conclaves are chaotic events wherein members report about interesting or unusual applications of their abilities. The most chaotic and prestigious part of the Conclave consists of the more experienced members showing off objects whose spirits they have awakened using their version of the "Rouse Spirit" ability. In addition, Animists also discuss and demonstrate ways they have found to be able to work in tandem with their spirits. As noted, the Conclave is also where prospective members can attempt to convince an Animist to teach them. This in-person contact is crucial, because many Animists decide whether those prospective members are worthy to join this Legacy by watching them interact with the objects around them.

Suggested Oblations: Polishing or caring for tools and equipment, knitting, carving or performing other handicrafts, selecting materials for use in some craft project.

Concepts: Sculptor, field archeologist, car mechanic, electronics technician, safe cracking burglar.

Attainments

The Attainments of the Lords of the Inanimate depend upon both the ability to speak to spirits and the ability to command matter. Also, unlike the ordinary study of the Matter Arcanum, Animists specifically learn how to convince the spirits dwelling within matter to help them, thus making their task easier, but also basing their control of matter upon their ability to persuade these spirits to do what they want.

1st Attainment: Commanding the Inanimate

Prerequisites: Gnosis 3, Matter 2 (primary), Spirit 1, Persuasion 2, Craft 1

The mage can control mechanical and electrical devices in a manner similar to the "Control Object" spell (p. 198). The mage accomplishes this control by verbally speaking to the device and asking it to perform the desired function. In addition, the mage gains the ability to hear, speak to the spirits in objects and also to sense the presence of and communicate with unseen spirits in Twilight, in a manner similar to the "Spirit Tongue" (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 246). Using any of these abilities requires the mage to make a Presence + Persuasion + Matter roll.

By talking to the spirit of an object, the mage can also sometimes learn roughly how and when it has been used and other similar details even its limited awareness might notice. The spirits inside ordinary objects understand little about the surrounding world, but they know themselves exceedingly well. Any successes rolled when talking to a damaged object about what is wrong with it give the mage 1 additional die to roll for attempts to repair the object.

2nd Attainment: Shepherd of the Craft

Prerequisites: Gnosis 5, Matter 3

Lords of the Inanimate learn to sufficiently control and affect non-living matter so they can bolster and aid the spirits of objects and thus repair any broken object or device. This effect works almost exactly like the "Repair Object" spell (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 199), except that the mage must

touch and speak to the object briefly in order to repair it.

Optional Arcanum: Spirit 3

The mage can awaken the spirits within objects in a manner similar to the “Rouse Spirit” spell (*Mage: The Awakening*, pp. 250-251). In addition, the mage can spend 1 dot of Willpower to permanently awaken the spirit of any object he has owned or regularly used for at least one full week. The mage can later regain this dot of Willpower by spending 8 XP. Also, if the mage has 4 dots in Spirit, he can use the advanced prolongation table on this effect.

3rd Attainment: Honor of Transmutation

Prerequisites: Gnosis 7, Matter 4

Having mastered this Legacy, the mage can now shape matter to his desire, enabling him to manipulate matter in a manner similar to the spell “Reconfigure Object” (*Mage: The Awakening*, p. 201). Simply by speaking to and gently touching an object, the mage can transform it into whatever form he desires. As with the spell, the materials the make up the object are unchanged, but the mage could transform a hunk of steel into a complex gear driven mechanism. However, complex devices usually require additional successes.

THE PURE SOVEREIGNS

You most certainly should go out to eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow, or perhaps in a few years you will most certainly die. I, on the other hand, have other plans.

Across the world, there are a series of ancient traditions saying any suitable ruler must be a superlative physical and mental specimen. The members of this Legacy, often referred to as Blue Bloods, firmly agree with these traditions. They use their knowledge of this path to power to transform themselves into exceptional physical and mental specimens. These mages are healthier, faster, longer-lived and brighter than ordinary mortals. They become physical and mental paragons who consider themselves above the ordinary ranks of humanity. The fact that most of them live as much as a century longer than ordinary mortals only serves to help maintain the distance between them and others.

The Pure Sovereigns prefer to socialize with their own kind or with other mages who have also learned to master their bodies and minds. Most of the Pure Sovereigns consider both Sleepers and mages incapable of these feats to be somewhat inferior beings. In addition to not regarding other, less perfect individuals as equals, many of the Pure Sovereigns also consider themselves to be the rightful rulers of these "lesser beings." To many outsiders, the Pure Sovereigns seem haughty and self-obsessed. However, it is also true that Blue Bloods who devote themselves to the study of this Legacy are physically and mentally superior to those around them. They remain in perfect health while those around them become ill, can easily make calm small talk with a hated enemy and fool almost all lie detectors. Moreover, they can accomplish all this with little or no effort on their part.

Some use their physical and mental prowess to become extreme hedonists who need never worry about hangovers, diseases or excessive fatigue. However, these Blue Bloods are rare exceptions who are often regarded as failures by their fellows. Most are passionately dedicated to accomplishing some goal and simply wish to avoid having their bodies or their minds interfere in any way with their ability to succeed.

Parent Path or Order: Silver Ladder or Obrimos

Nickname: Blue Bloods

Appearance: The Blue Bloods almost universally appear to be relatively young and in the peak of health. The vast majority dress expensively, but whenever they

are not in formal situations, they tend to wear clothing that shows off their bodies. Close-fitting, designer athletic gear is common attire for both male and female members of this Legacy. Even Blue Bloods who appear to be somewhat older are in unusually good physical condition and rarely suffer from any of the various age-related maladies. In addition, many who appear to have graying hair or wrinkles actually look much younger, but use magical or conventional techniques of disguise so as not to make Sleepers wonder why someone who is supposedly in her late 70s actually looks like she is in her mid 30s.

Background: Some Blue Bloods were born to wealth and many of those who were not found some path to wealth, power or influence before they joined. However, there are also a number of members from far more modest backgrounds. The primary commonality between members is a high degree of self-discipline and a desire to attain some goal that requires large amounts of time and effort.

Members of this Legacy typically see health and longevity as another path to power and are people who have learned the value of long-term planning. However, the particular goals they seek are exceedingly diverse. Because of the Legacy's association with the Silver Ladder, most members have political, financial or social ambitions. However, a substantial minority are scholars engaged in various extremely long-term research projects.

A few members are simply individuals who are obsessed with health, longevity and attaining physical and mental perfection for the sake of becoming as perfect as a person can become in the Fallen World. As a result, this Legacy contains everything from wealthy businesspeople seeking greater wealth and power to advanced yoga practitioners who strive to perfect themselves both mentally and physically. However, in all cases members have learned patience, self-discipline and the value of single-minded dedication to a goal.

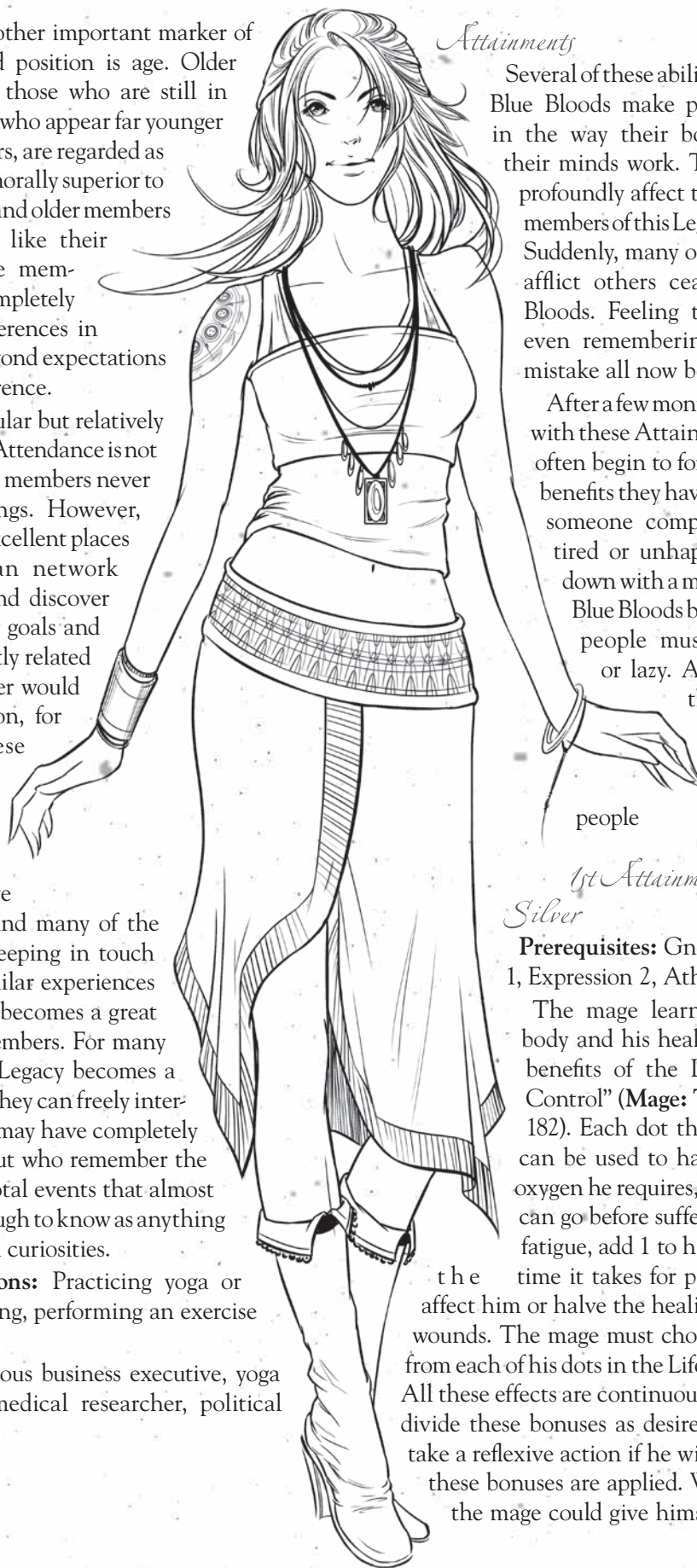
Organization: The Pure Sovereigns are an exceptionally independent Legacy, but when they meet they also make certain to strictly define their status with relationship to one another. In addition to their level

of Attainment, the other important marker of members' status and position is age. Older members, especially those who are still in excellent health and who appear far younger than their actual years, are regarded as both magically and morally superior to both younger mages and older members who look anything like their actual age. Because members often have completely unrelated goals, differences in status mean little beyond expectations of courtesy and deference.

Members hold regular but relatively informal gatherings. Attendance is not mandatory and a few members never attend any gatherings. However, these meetings are excellent places where members can network with one another and discover whether any of their goals and projects are sufficiently related that working together would be useful. In addition, for older members these meetings often become a valuable source of social stability. Because Blue Bloods usually outlive all of the Sleepers and many of the mages they know, keeping in touch with others with similar experiences and memories often becomes a great comfort for older members. For many older members, the Legacy becomes a social club in which they can freely interact with others who may have completely different interests, but who remember the same trivial and pivotal events that almost no one else is old enough to know as anything other than historical curiosities.

Suggested Oblations: Practicing yoga or martial arts, mediating, performing an exercise routine.

Concepts: Ambitious business executive, yoga master, dedicated medical researcher, political campaign advisor.



Attainment

Several of these abilities require no rolls. Blue Bloods make permanent changes in the way their bodies and possibly their minds work. These changes also profoundly affect the way most of the members of this Legacy see themselves. Suddenly, many of the problems that afflict others cease to affect Blue Bloods. Feeling tiredness, anger or even remembering an unfortunate mistake all now become choices.

After a few months or years of living with these Attainments, Blue Bloods often begin to forget others lack the benefits they have. As a result, when someone complains about being tired or unhappy or even comes down with a minor ailment, many Blue Bloods begin thinking these people must be either weak or lazy. As others age while they do not, most Blue Bloods become even more distant from the people around them.

1st Attainment: *Blood of Silver*

Prerequisites: Gnosis 3, Life 2, Mind 1, Expression 2, Athletics 1

The mage learns to enhance his body and his health, giving him the benefits of the Life 2 spell "Body Control" (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 182). Each dot the mage has in Life can be used to halve the amount of oxygen he requires, double the time he can go before suffering deprivation or fatigue, add 1 to his Initiative, double the time it takes for poisons or toxins to affect him or halve the healing time of bashing wounds. The mage must choose how the bonus from each of his dots in the Life Arcana is applied. All these effects are continuous and the mage can divide these bonuses as desired. The mage must take a reflexive action if he wishes to switch how these bonuses are applied. With 3 dots of Life, the mage could give himself +2 to Initiative

in a fight and halve the time it takes bashing damage to heal. After the fight, the mage could switch the bonuses and cause all his bashing damage to heal four times as rapidly as normal and double the time before he suffers deprivation or fatigue. No rolls are required to use this ability.

As a side benefit, the mage also learns to affect his own instinctual drives and emotions in exactly the same manner as if he were using the Mind 2 spell "Emotional Urgings" (**Mage: The Awakening**, pp. 207-208) or the Life 3 spell "Control Median Life" upon his own mind and body. By making a Resolve + Expression + Life roll, he can feel happiness, perfectly suppress rage or seem appropriately submissive to an authority figure in whom he actually has no trust or belief.

Optional Arcanum: Mind 2

By studying the Mind Arcanum, the mage also gains the ability to alter the workings of his own mind. The first step in doing so is learning to control it. By learning Mind 2, the mage is able to edit his memories in a manner similar to the "Memory Hole" spell (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 208). By making a Resolve + Expression + Mind roll, he can subtract the desired memories for up to 1 hour. In addition, while he does not know what he has forgotten, as long as the mage makes another roll every hour, he can keep from remembering the information as long as he remains awake.

2nd Attainment: Flesh of Gold

Prerequisites: Gnosis 5, Life 3

The mage now heals more rapidly and ages more slowly. Each dot of the Life Arcana the mage possesses allows the mage to halve the time (round down) it takes to heal bashing, lethal and aggravated damage. Possessing 3 dots of Life allows a mage to heal 1 lethal wound in 6 hours and one aggravated wound in around

18 hours. This healing is compatible with the Quick Healer Merit, but not the healing bonuses to bashing damage from the previous Attainment. Each dot in Life magic also acts as 1 automatic success on all extended and instant rolls to resist diseases, poisons or drugs. Finally, the character's lifespan is increased by 25 years for every dot of the Life Arcana he possesses.

Optional Arcanum: Mind 3

By learning Mind 3, the mage learns to greatly enhance his mind, enabling him to perform multiple mental actions, in a manner similar to the Mind 3 spell "Multi-Tasking" (**Mage: The Awakening**, pp. 211-212). The mage can use this effect as often as desired, for as long as desired without any effort or discomfort. No rolls are required to use this ability.

3rd Attainment: Incarnation of Diamond

Prerequisites: Gnosis 7, Life 4

The mage gains an almost complete mastery of her physical form. She can reshape her body so as to look like any other person, down to precisely duplicating finger or retina prints or even vocal patterns. The character accomplishes this transformation using an effect similar to the Life 4 spell "Doppelganger" (**Mage: The Awakening**, pp. 188-189). The character can maintain a new form as long as desired, even while sleeping. Changing her appearance requires the mage to roll Intelligence + Expression + Life.

Impersonating someone else's appearance sufficiently to fool individuals who know the person being impersonated well imposes penalties upon this roll, depending upon how familiar the mage is with the person she is trying to imitate. These penalties range from -0 for imitating a close friend or someone the mage has spent at least a week watching closely, to -5 for someone the mage has never seen in person and of whom all she has seen are a few video images and photographs.

THE REALITY MAKERS

*Reality is what you have to deal with,
at least until you can make something better come along.*

Some mages focus their efforts upon the ability to command reality itself, creating both objects and luck at a whim. Considering themselves to be almost minor lords of creation, these mages are able to move easily through life because they always have needed objects or cash on hand and few material obstacles can block their way. Known as Drifters, these mages are not prone to accept rules made by others. Instead, they see the world as something that is theirs to shape and alter as they will. Some care little about others, most are at least moderately compassionate, but few see any point in allowing anything other than their own choices and desires to dictate their actions.

The history of the Reality Makers is as unusual as their abilities and attitudes. They are an offshoot of the Sisterhood of the Blessed (see p. 174). During the mid 1920s, a cabal of the more progressively minded Blessed agreed to train a male mage who went by the name Utopian in their Legacy. However, word of the cabal's efforts reached the leaders of the Blessed, who regarded the idea of men among their number as a threat. So the cabal was ordered to cease training Utopian, who was then left with only a partial knowledge of the Blessed's first Attainment. One of the cabal's Sleepwalker servants, who had recently Awakened, joined him. She chose the Shadow Name Celesta and had hoped to be accepted in the Blessed until she noticed most members' attitude toward Utopian and also how the more conservative members reacted toward any members of lower class birth.

Together, Utopian and Celesta used the small bits of knowledge they had gained from the Blessed to create their own Legacy, one that used luck not as a tool for Byzantine manipulations, but simply as a way to allow members to more easily make their way in the world when they lacked the benefits of wealth and social class. To this, they added the ability to create objects out of nothing, an ability that proved exceptionally useful to poor mages seeking to advance themselves.

Members of this Legacy are commonly known as Drifters in large part because they believe a sufficiently able person should never need to exert herself except when she wishes to and that with enough skill and cleverness it is possible to bypass or eliminate any ob-

stacle. For most Drifters, directly attacking an obstacle is both foolish and a mark of desperation.

Reality Makers seek to swiftly and easily bypass and avoid obstacles put before them and to reserve their attention for matters that interest them. The idea that there is any virtue in struggle or needless hard work is completely antithetical to members of this Legacy. Instead, for them the best evidence someone is successful and worthy of respect is if this person never has to work at anything he does not enjoy. Reality Makers also believe no problem is insoluble and that skill and cleverness are far superior ways of solving problems than hard work or any similarly direct approach.

Although few discuss their feelings outside the Legacy, many Drifters sincerely feel they deserve to be treated well by the world and are completely entitled to all the benefits this Legacy provides. Some members feel they have some special destiny or purpose this Legacy will help them pursue. However, most are simply seeking wealth and power and regard finding the easiest and most elegant method of accomplishing these goals as the best possible choice.

Many mages find Drifters strange and even paradoxical, and often describe them as highly dedicated dilettantes or as being exceptionally ambitious in their laziness. To the Reality Makers themselves, there is no contradiction in their views, because they firmly believe success should come easily if one knows the right tricks to achieve it. While they can't precisely pull live rabbits out of hats, pulling fifty-dollar bills, high security ID badges or similar items out of their pockets is often far more useful.

Parent Path or Order: Silver Ladder or Mastigos

Nickname: Drifters

Appearance: Some Drifters prefer to use their abilities to fit in perfectly with their surroundings, while others prefer to stand out and impress those around them with their wealth and taste. However, all dress and act in ways specifically designed to influence the people with whom they are dealing. Unless being unkempt or awkwardly out of place is necessary for some plan, Drifters are almost never found in such a condition. Their Attainments allow them not only to always appear at their best, but to appear appropriately

attired for every situation. To someone who knows what to look for, they are often fairly easy to spot. If a group of people is walking down the sidewalk just after the start of a sudden torrential rainstorm, the Drifter will be the only one who is never splashed with water by passing cars, and who just happens to have a small umbrella in her purse or bag.

Background: Unlike many of the members of legacies and other organizations associated with the Silver Ladder, most Drifters started life relatively poor. The vast majority were dissatisfied with the circumstance of their birth, but saw suggestions about working hard to get ahead as a trap for the foolish and the overly naïve. Instead, most Drifters sought a wide variety of non-standard ways to advance their wealth and station. Some resorted to various sorts of criminal endeavors and others created their own unusual options like bluffing their way up the social ladder or taking a job because it allowed them spend time around wealthy and powerful people and thus obtain the personal contacts and patronage they needed to improve their lives. Most Drifters grew up believing they were either destined for greatness or just as entitled to the privileges of wealth and power as people who were born to it. Drifters are almost always as ambitious as most other members of the Silver Ladder, but their ambitions are usually purely personal and often involve finding a position of wealth, comfort and respect.

Some Reality Makers have other, somewhat darker ideas. They enjoy playing various sorts of clandestine games or finding ways to retaliate against the wealthy and the powerful by infiltrating their social circles and then using this access as a means to facilitate theft, blackmail, corporate espionage or various similar pursuits. When they Awaken, these individuals often develop even larger ambitions, and take great joy in being able to humble the powerful with so little risk or effort.

Organization: Drifters keep in touch with one another, but their organization is far more like an informal social club than any sort of official association. No member is considered superior to any other, and no member has the right to tell another member what to do. Instead, members meet and communicate to share information, socialize and most importantly to network. As people who specialize in finding unusual ways to accomplish goals, Drifters excel at networking and upon joining this Legacy most find they can easily turn to other Drifters for the help they may need. However, Drifters have little tolerance for members who are either stupid or useless. Drifters who either



consistently ask for help because they have caused themselves problems they should have been able to avoid, or who frequently ignore requests for aid from other Drifters rapidly develop a bad reputation and soon find themselves unable to obtain aid from other members of this Legacy unless they pay for these services in advance. Drifters in this problematic position also often find themselves asked to perform services significantly more difficult than any favor they are asking. In this way, the informal network of Drifters maintains order and helps to insure members act responsibly toward one another, even if they often seek to evade other responsibilities.

Suggested Oblations: Playing a game of chance, spending time grooming and getting dressed up, lying in order to impress someone.

Concepts: Cat burglar, freelance industrial spy, professional gambler, ambitious but lazy businessperson, successful con artist.

Attainments

Learning these Attainments involves learning to consider the world to be far less fixed than most mortals consider it. Drifters learn to manufacture both their reality and their luck. For many, having this degree of control over the world around them causes them to view life much like an enjoyable game.

1st Attainment: Marked Cards

Prerequisites: Gnosis 3, Prime 2, Expression 2, Craft 1

The mage can change the appearance of any item she touches or stares at intently simply by making a successful Intelligence + Expression + Prime roll. This effect is similar to the Prime 2 spell “Ephemeral Image” (see p. 200). The mage can change the color of her clothing, the denomination of money, or the name and address on her passport. This change lasts for up to an hour, but can be maintained for longer if the mage remains within sight of the object and periodically thinks about maintaining it.

Optional Arcanum: Fate 2

Drifters who also learn Fate 2 gain an impressive degree of luck. They are continually under the benefit of the “Winds of Chance” spell (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 150) and need do nothing to gain this benefit.

They cannot affect other’s luck, but they are assured a host of minor coincidences that make their lives easier and more pleasant. In addition, by simply wishing for something and making a successful Manipulation + Subterfuge + Fate roll, the Drifter can gain the benefit of the “Shifting the Odds” spell (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 153), thus allowing him to cause luck to help him attain a specific goal.

2nd Attainment: Acquire the Sleeve

Prerequisites: Gnosis 5, Prime 3

The Drifter can now create solid ephemeral objects much like those created using the Prime 3 spell “Phantasm.” To create an object, the mage need only imagine it and make a successful roll, but the mage can create objects only in locations he can either touch or see clearly. These objects last for 1 hour, longer if the mage takes time to periodically maintain them.

Optional Arcanum: Fate 3

Drifters who study Fate 3 also find they do unusually well at anything to which they turn their hands. By making a successful Manipulation + Subterfuge + Fate roll, the Drifter gains the 8-again quality to a number of future rolls equal to the number of successes he rolled, in a manner similar to the Fate 3 spell “Superlative Luck” (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 156).

3rd Attainment: High Stakes Prize

Prerequisites: Gnosis 7, Prime 4

The Drifter has mastered the art of phantasmal creation and can make ephemeral objects that are almost indistinguishable from real ones. The Drifter creates them in a manner similar to those created by the Prime 4 “Phantasmal Weapon” spell. These objects last for 1 hour, longer if the mage takes time to periodically maintain them.

Optional Arcanum: Fate 4

Members of this Legacy who learn Fate 4 truly fit their nickname. By making a successful roll, they can duplicate the effects of the Fate 4 spell “Coincidental Travel,” thus allowing them to easily travel to any desired destination. Also, if combined with their other Attainments, even the minimal financial cost demanded by this Attainment can be avoided through the use of phantasmal money.

THE SISTERHOOD OF THE BLESSED

Sometimes, the difference between blind luck and superlative skill is less clear than you'd imagine. However, let's not worry about that now...

This Legacy was founded in the mid 18th century by a group of wealthy and powerful British, French and later American women who were also mages. Given the constraints of social expectations about their proper role as wealthy society women, female mages who did not wish to give up their social position or family ties needed to learn to use their magic in a particularly subtle and discreet manner. This Legacy developed as an outgrowth of this effort and by the early 19th century it had become very popular with middle and upper class female mages from Western Europe and North America.

Although it opened its membership to men in the early 1970s, the Legacy's basic principles remain the same — members are people who maintain a mundane and socially respectable front in mortal society. The Blessed, as they are known, are especially skilled at the art of deception and specifically in keeping up appearances. They have learned to use their magic and their Attainments to accomplish their goals in a manner that avoids drawing any attention to themselves. Some members strive to be overlooked, while others discretely work to become centers of social attention. However, above all else members make certain they avoid any appearance of secrecy or ambition beyond their station and most of the Blessed make certain to keep their goals as secret as their magic.

Even within the society of mages, many of the Blessed strive to work behind the scenes. A few appear as unworldly scholars of magic, and others seem to be amusing but largely harmless dilettantes, but most have as many ambitions within their order as they do in the mortal world. Rival mages often suspect the Blessed of all manner of intricate and devious plans, but have great difficulty separating fact from speculation or deliberately stopping their efforts because the Blessed are protected against discovery or opposition. Blessed who are especially interested in power within the various orders of mages often conceal their membership in this Legacy.

Blessed who allow other mages to learn of their membership usually focus their efforts upon bending mortals to their wishes. However, they are often able to use their influence among wealthy and powerful mortals as a way to bargain with other mages who need their aid.

Parent Path or Order: Silver Ladder or Acanthus
Nickname: The Blessed

Appearance: Although membership criteria loosened considerably during the 1970s and '80s, members remain well-off individuals who work behind the scenes. As a result, the vast majority are well-dressed individuals who value taste and refinement. Handmade suits turned out by companies that have been in existence for at least 50 years, expensive but not ostentatious jewelry and elegant personal electronics are all hallmarks of the modern Blessed. Also, regardless of whether they were born to wealth or have carefully studied the manners and customs of the wealthy, members know how fit into "high society" and to act with the confidence and self-assurance of people who know their wealth can both command obedience and shield them from almost all the world's troubles.

Regardless of their background, members of this Legacy are dapper, articulate and highly skilled at discretion and misdirection. They appear to be wealthy or well-connected individuals who are innocuous and not in the least threatening or suspicious. Members also know how to avoid notice at least as well as they can attract it, and many can easily manage to leave a room several minutes before anyone notices they are gone.

Background: Until the early 1960s, the Sisterhood of the Blessed was an almost exclusively female Legacy open specifically to women from wealthy and upper middle class backgrounds. Women who joined the Sisterhood used it to help them simultaneously accomplish their goals via subtle means and to maintain the respectability their social role

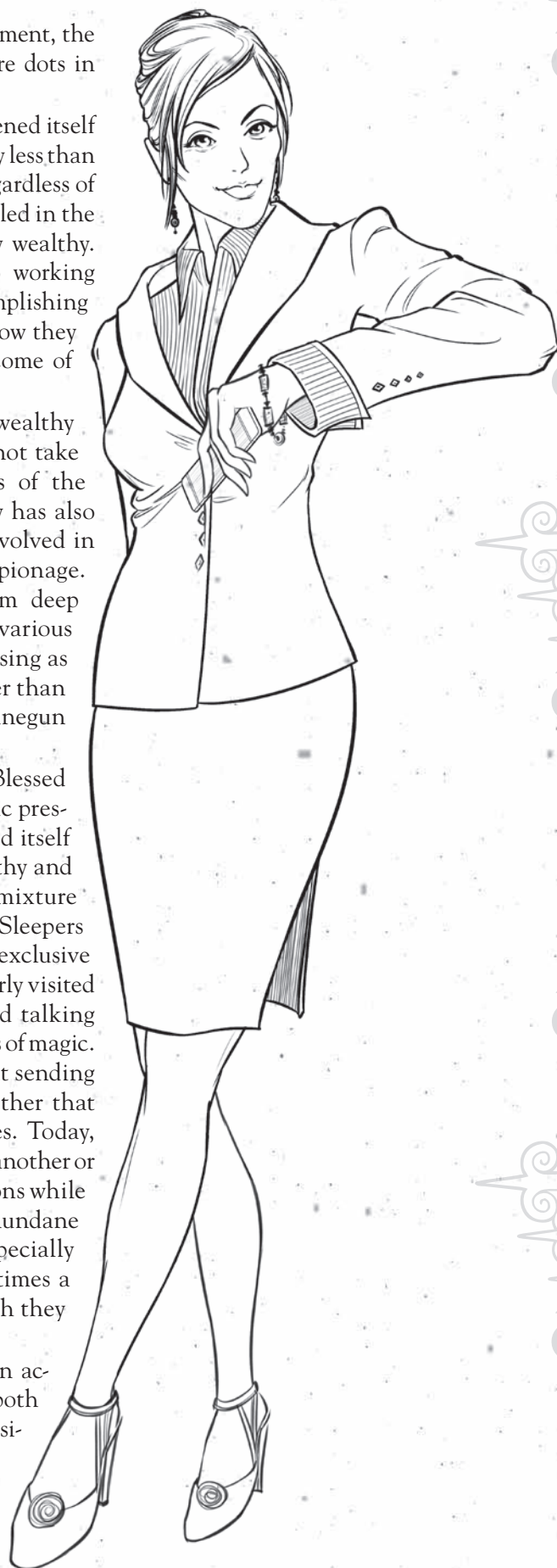
demand. Although not a formal requirement, the greater portion of members had 3 or more dots in the Resources Merit.

Since the 1960s, the Sisterhood has opened itself to male mages; however, even today slightly less than a third of the members are men. Also, regardless of their sex, members are expected to be skilled in the social graces and most are still relatively wealthy. In addition, members must be used to working behind the scenes and skilled at accomplishing their goals without allowing others to know they were involved in any way with the outcome of their schemes.

Many members are society wives, wealthy dilettantes, and similar people who do not take an obviously active roll in the affairs of the world. Since the late 1960s, this Legacy has also attracted the attention of a few spies involved in both corporate and governmental espionage. Almost all of these excel in long-term deep undercover work. They typically gather various forms of protected information while posing as diplomats or well-paid consultants, rather than acting as covert commandos or sub-machinegun wielding assassins.

Organization: The Sisterhood of the Blessed is one of the few Legacies to have a public presence. The Sisterhood originally disguised itself as a small but exclusive sorority for wealthy and influential women. Members then used a mixture of Fate and Mind magics to make certain Sleepers rarely had any interest in joining this exclusive organization. In the past, members regularly visited one another, staying at their houses and talking about both seeming trivialities and secrets of magic. Members were also exceedingly skilled at sending seemingly innocuous letters to one another that were actually written in elaborate codes. Today, members learn to subtly text message one another or hold long distance telepathic conversations while talking on the phone about seemingly mundane matters. Because travel is so easy now, especially for the wealthy, members meet several times a year as part of the exclusive club to which they belong.

This club, like the actual Legacy, is run according to a strict hierarchy based upon both length of membership and the social posi-



tion the member occupies in Sleeper society. Most of the time, this hierarchy is largely symbolic, with higher ranking members being granted various minor privileges such as having the choicest rooms in the hotel in which the club meets. However, if problems arise for the Legacy or its leaders, members are also expected to obey their leaders and help them in any way they can.

Suggested Oblations: Extended and careful grooming, selecting and putting on fancy dress, planning social events.

Concepts: Society matron, trust-fund dilettante, millionaire playboy, deep cover corporate spy.

Attainments

To master this Legacy, the Blessed must learn the intricacies of the Fate Arcanum, while also mastering the complexities of polite deception and social subtlety. Many of these Attainments are either permanent effects or can be activated at will. Becoming one of the Blessed is as much about learning to be constantly surrounded by luck and helpful coincidence as it is about actively manipulating fate.

1st Attainment: Good Fortune

Prerequisites: Gnosis 3, Fate 2, Subterfuge 2, Socialize 1

Members of this Legacy are blessed with perpetual luck. Unless they exert themselves and deliberately seek to turn fate to their benefit, this blessing is relatively minor, but they can choose to make it more powerful and focused. The Blessed are continually under the benefit of the “Winds of Chance” spell (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 150) and need do nothing to gain this benefit. While they cannot use this effect to give others bad luck, they are assured a host of minor coincidences will make their lives slightly easier and more pleasant than they otherwise might be. In addition, by simply wishing for something and making a successful Manipulation + Subterfuge + Fate roll, the Blessed can gain the benefit of the “Shifting the Odds” spell (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 153), thus allowing her to cause luck to help her attain a specific goal.

Optional Arcanum: Mind 2

If the mage also knows Mind 2, she learns to remain unnoticed by those around her by blending in perfectly with their expectations. Even in places where she would be exceptionally out of place,

her presence seems unworthy of comment and is forgotten soon afterward, as long as the mage does nothing to call particular attention to herself. This Attainment is similar to the Mind 2 “Incognito Presence” spell (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 208). To activate this Attainment, the mage merely performs an instant action; no roll is required. The effect lasts for up to an hour.

2nd Attainment: Exclusive Benediction

Prerequisites: Gnosis 5, Fate 3

Part of learning the ways of luck involves protecting one's luck from outside interference. The Blessed now render their own fate very difficult for others to sense or affect. The mage is permanently protected by an effect similar to the “Occlude Destiny” spell (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 156), which protects the mage with a Potency equal to the number of dots the mage has in the Fate Arcanum. The mage has no control over this effect.

Optional Arcanum: Mind 3

If one of the Blessed also possesses Mind 3, she learns to gain notice and acclaim whenever she desires. By simply rolling Manipulation + Subterfuge + Mind, she gains the benefits of an effect similar to the “False Fame” spell (**Tome of the Mysteries**, p. 66). However, this Attainment affects everyone with whom she interacts. Everyone whose reflexive Composure + Gnosis roll is less than the number of successes the mage rolled treats the mage as a minor but important celebrity or someone otherwise of importance. Many Sleepers will then make assumptions about who the mage must be.

3rd Attainment: Accidental Auspices

Prerequisites: Gnosis 7, Fate 4

Masters of this Legacy learn to focus their luck to a superlative degree. They can almost guarantee the success of any action they take through the use of an effect similar to the “Probable Cause” spell (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 157). The mage need only spend 1 turn concentrating and make a Manipulation + Subterfuge + Fate roll. In addition to this effect granting the Blessed the possibility of an unparalleled degree of success at a task, her success seems to be the result more of a strange and lucky chance than of superlative skill. By taking a 2-die penalty on the dice pool for the roll to activate this effect, the mage can even make the effort seem completely accidental. The character might drop a basketball

she is carrying, which then bounces and seems to go through the basketball hoop completely by happenstance. Similarly, the character might shoot someone by dropping a gun, which then seems to accidentally fire when it hits the ground.

Optional Arcanum: Mind 4

Blessed who become Adepts of Mind master an especially subtle form of deception. By making a Manipulation + Subterfuge + Mind roll, they can duplicate

the affects of the Mind 4 spell “Hallucination” (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 215). While they can cause the target to experience anything imaginable, most of the Blessed prefer vague and subtle hallucinations, like causing the target to overhear a bit of fictitious gossip spoken in the voice of an enemy, or perhaps of a dear friend. Careful use of this Attainment allows the Blessed to control and manipulate those around them to an exceedingly precise degree.



STEWARDS OF THE CELESTIAL ORRERY

I have beheld the future that you would, in your ignorance and greed, create and, by the grace of the Oracles, I am here to stop you.

Self-appointed interpreters of the ineffable “will of the Oracles,” the Stewards of the Celestial Orrery are prophets whose methods are decidedly colored by the forceful ways of the Aether. Not content merely to witness things to come, these willworkers feel called to involve themselves in the futures they witness, whether to facilitate a just and wise outcome or to thwart a dark and hubristic one — as the Stewards themselves reckon such things, of course.

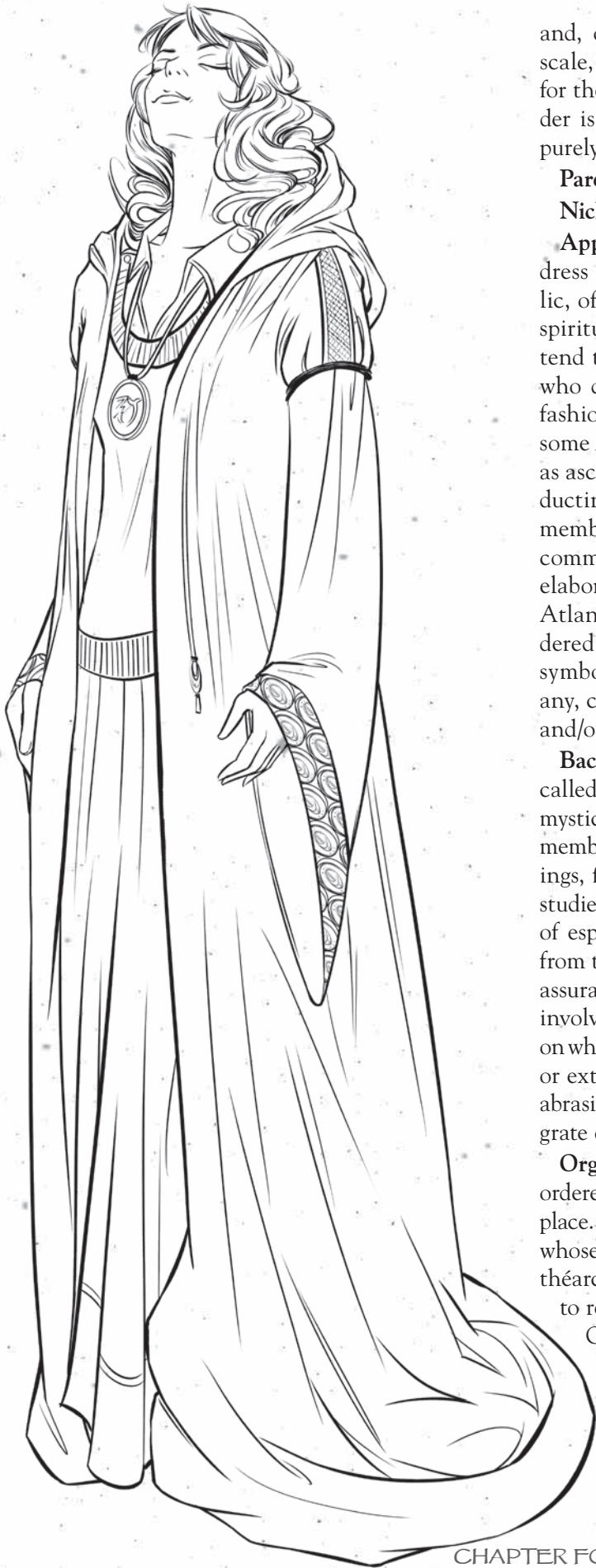
While some few of the so-called “Augurs” hold theirs is a Legacy that reaches back to the days of Atlantis itself, more pragmatic historians among them concede the present incarnation of the Celestial Orrery likely began sometime during the early Renaissance, among the Italian city-states. At that time, heavenly bodies were simultaneously objects of both scientific and mystical scrutiny, and even the most learned perceived no paradox in studying the motions of the stars as a scholar while also reading them for omens of the future. But the Stewards, as they are known today, were not, it seems, the creation of any renowned astronomer or celebrated mystic. Rather, they are the descendants of a mysterious and virtually unknown Theurgist who went only by the name Valeria. Modern Augurs, unfortunately, have no surviving records by which to know whether this was her real name, her Shadow Name, or merely an alias; only a scant few notes and that one name. Attempts by Stewards to study Valeria with the Time Arcanum have invariably met with failure, however, suggesting she may have gleaned secrets never handed down to her students.

The Augurs and the Silver Ladder were a natural fit for one another and the Stewards of the Celestial Orrery were soon absorbed into the order almost completely and without complaint on either side. The Legacy’s devotion to the ineffable “will of the Oracles” was admired by many other théarchs, even those who found its members’ implicit belief in their superior access to Supernal truth a bit off-putting. Those few Stewards who opted to go into other orders

were closely watched (especially those who chose the Guardians of the Veil), but were permitted to go their way in peace. If any Augurs accepted the path of the Apostate, there exist no records of the Legacy to tell of them, and such sad hermits, if any, likely lived and died as nothing more than unsung historical curiosities.

The years following the Renaissance were good ones for the Stewards, whose knowledge of the flow of time enabled the Silver Ladder to make some meaningful gains throughout Europe’s great age of colonization. The théarchs of one or two particularly old Consilii in the New World claim the visions of the Augurs directly led to the settlement of Awakened colonists in the area. Some Stewards, calling upon their knowledge of the essential energies of magic, learned how to bring to life ancient machineries crafted by willwork scattered here and there in the places conquerors and missionaries first trod upon unknown shores. By the time the era of exploration began to draw to a close and the nebulous edges of the map became firm and inviolate, the Augurs were scattered all over the globe, following their prophecies and seeking to discern the inscrutable will of the Oracles of Atlantis.

As the 19th century drew to a close, however, an event the Stewards of the Celestial Orrery *did not* foresee came to pass: the creation of a self-proclaimed “new order” in the Great Refusal of 1899. Mentors and students sought one another out, over even vast distances, and old colleagues corresponded on the contentious subject. In the end, none could explain this singular aberration, and the Augurs collectively determined the so-called “Free Council” was the direct result of a temporal error, the product of flawed causality, effectively, an idea that had no right to exist. The confidence of the Silver Ladder in its prophets was shaken, however, and the Stewards were thereafter no better or worse regarded, overall, than any other Legacy within the Vox Draconis. Still, the efforts of individual Augurs have, in the intervening years, greatly benefited cabals, Consilii



and, occasionally, Awakened society on a wider scale, and so these willworkers are still esteemed for their divinatory powers, even if the Silver Ladder is no longer willing to take their predictions purely on faith.

Parent Path or Order: Obrimos or Silver Ladder

Nickname: Augurs

Appearance: For the most part, Augurs prefer to dress in stately, conservative styles when in public, often in ways that hint at civil or (especially) spiritual authority. Thus, even young Stewards can tend to appear older than they truly are to those who don't know them well. In private, however, fashion commonly gives way to comfort, though some Augurs opt to go so far as to attire themselves as ascetics when out of the public eye. When conducting rites (whether alone, within the Legacy, for members of the Silver Ladder, or for the Awakened community as a whole), Stewards often dress in elaborate robes suitable for the priesthood of lost Atlantis. Such garments tend to be richly embroidered and may depict glyphs in the High Speech, symbols indicative of the mage's Sleeper faith, if any, celestial bodies, scenes from Atlantean myth and/or other, similar imagery.

Background: Augurs are often drawn from those called to leadership within religious, spiritual or mystical hierarchies: ambitious clergy and ranking members of secret societies with metaphysical leanings, for instance. Some come out of astronomical studies, however, as the motions of the heavens are of especial interest to the Stewards. Others come from the ranks of watchmakers, machinists, quality assurance professionals and the like, vocations that involve the establishment and maintenance of order on whatever scale. Such willworkers may be introverts or extroverts, but they are often at least a little bit abrasive, as the chaos of social interaction tends to grate on their sensibilities.

Organization: Stewards invariably believe in an ordered universe in which everything has its proper place. At the pinnacle of this structure are the Oracles, whose wisdom descends from the Supernal to those théarchs with the courage and humility necessary to receive it. As direct servants to the will of the Oracles — as handed down to them through visions and divinations — Augurs maintain they are true philosopher-priests of fallen Atlantis, and are owed the respect (and, depending upon the views of the individual Augur, the obedience) of other mages of the

Atlantean Diamond. Those who best distinguish themselves in positions of spiritual authority among the Awakened earn the greatest esteem within the Legacy, and the counsel of such theocrats is heeded by other Stewards, both young and old. Important to note, however, is the fact that an Augur's ambition must be married to an ethic of sincere service; she must genuinely desire greater temporal power for the purpose of improving her utility as an instrument of the Oracles' will, first and foremost. Otherwise, her brethren will quickly see through her lies and know her hubris for what it is.

Suggested Oblations: Advising others on future activities, building or maintaining an orrery, clearing one's mind of all awareness of the passage of time, contemplating the wisdom of the Oracles, performing (non-magical) divinations, devising plans for improving the future, reflecting upon personal past failures and how best to make amends for them in the present and in days to come.

Concepts: Alternative historian, day trader with an unfair edge, oracular politico, perfectionist watchmaker, quantum physicist, reclusive diviner, self-proclaimed "hand of the Oracles."

Attainments

Stewards of the Celestial Orrery realize within their souls the power to connect to the sublime mechanisms of the cosmos, as reflected by the pattern of time and the threads of subtle power that move between the Earth, the stars and the remotest reaches of the universe.

1st: Skein of Heaven

Prerequisites: Gnosis 3, Prime 1, Time 2 (primary), Occult 2

The first secret learned by the Steward is how to conceal her own motions within the weave of time. She permanently benefits from an effect identical to the Time 2 spell "Shield of Chronos" with successes equal to her dots in the Time Arcanum. Additionally, the Augur may, as a reflexive action, make use of Prime 1 "Supernal Vision" for all purposes save reading aura signifiers, with successes equal to his dots in Prime.

2nd: Celestial Diagram

Prerequisites: Gnosis 5, Time 3

His gaze fixed upon the infinite and resplendent pattern of the ages, the Augur sees clearly what oth-

ers perceive dimly at best. Whenever casting a spell that makes use of temporal sympathy (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 259), the Steward benefits from a two-step modifier in his favor. (A "described" connection becomes "acquainted," for example.) An "unknown" connection, however, cannot be improved by way of this Attainment.

Optional Arcanum: Prime 3

Wherever the Augur goes, she carries with her an auspicious alignment of Aetheric forces. She may, as an instant action, make use of the Prime 3 "Ley Lines" spell, irrespective of the present configuration of subtle energies in her immediate area, with successes equal to her dots in the Prime Arcanum.

3rd: Supernal Clarity

Prerequisites: Gnosis 7, Time 4

The Steward learns to focus upon the events of the future with flawless precision. With an instant action and a successful Intelligence + Investigation + Time roll (subject to temporal sympathy and modified by this Legacy's second Attainment), the mage may look upon a given moment in time, as specified by the Augur. One turn per success is glimpsed, though spells and other abilities that conceal temporal senses penalize this roll by 1 per point of Potency (or 1 per success for powers not derived from the Arcana). The willworker must be exacting regarding her desired objective — "the Hierarch's office" is insufficient. Instead, she might wish to see "the Hierarch's office when it is next entered by someone other than the Hierarch," "Daniel Nolan at exactly 3:10 AM, Eastern Standard Time, on Tuesday the 28th of this month," or "the very beginning of Lee and Marion's fiftieth wedding anniversary party."

Note that the Augur must somehow be in the presence of the individual, object, location or phenomenon the future of which she wishes to see, in order for this Attainment to work. (Standing in a room, for example, allows the mage to view any point in that room's future, while being near a person or Artifact enables her to peer forward and see what is in store for the object of her scrutiny.) Also, events that will not come to pass (if, say, Lee and Marion should get divorced after three years of marriage, one of them dies before the start of their fiftieth year together, or they simply do not have a party to celebrate the occasion), then the Steward receives no vision. Also note that the very act of

witnessing the future can set into motion events that change the outcome the mage has foreseen (which, many Augurs argue, is, indeed, the very purpose of their Legacy). The use of this Attainment costs a point of Mana.

Optional Arcanum: Prime 4

An Augur sufficiently potent in her connection to the Supernal and highly skilled in the arts of Prime is her own foremost source of arcane power. After realigning the energies needed to create the Ley

Lines effect (with the optional secondary component of her previous Attainment), she may — with the expenditure of a Willpower point — effectively *become* a Hallow of a rating equal to her dots in the Prime Arcanum. Just like a normal Hallow, the mage may produce Mana in this fashion only once per day. While the Augur may not perform an oblation to recover Mana through the use of this Attainment, other Awakened may draw upon the power that radiates from her refined spirit.



THE CARNIVAL MELANCHOLY

(Left-Handed Legacy)

Death, like me, is a liar, a thief, and a trickster. Where he is cruel, though, I am kind; what he pilfers by degrees, I take all at once.

No inheritors of ancient secrets handed down from remote ages of the world, the so-called Charlatans of the Carnival Melancholy trace their origins back to the Great Depression — particularly to the droves of migrants wandering throughout the vast desolation of the Dust Bowl in the 1930s. At that time, across the American Midwest, Consilii, like Sleeper populations, trickled away and disappeared utterly as arable land withered and the dust storms closed in to devour the remains. Those were bleak times, hopeless times, and people did whatever they had to in order to escape from it, in whatever small ways they could. Some, however, aspired to a somewhat more literal deliverance from the death that surrounded them.

He went by numerous aliases, depending upon which one-horse town his carnival happened to be visiting at the time: Alaric Swift, Jacob Brauer, Hezekiah Munson, and many more. He was good-looking, with a quick wit and an easy charm in the manner of many Acanthus. To the Awakened of his acquaintance he was called Lucius Nero, fiddling while the world as they knew it burned. Within the Silver Ladder he was regarded as a joker and a bit of a rogue, lining his threadbare pockets with the meager wealth of dust-caked yokels in exchange for a few hours of wonder and laughter. And, if one or two people went slowly mad in the wake of his passing, none were the wiser, for those were days in which crushing, endless sorrow took hold of many hearts and did not let go. To Nero's thinking, he gave a little bit of joy and he took a little something in return — a fair trade.

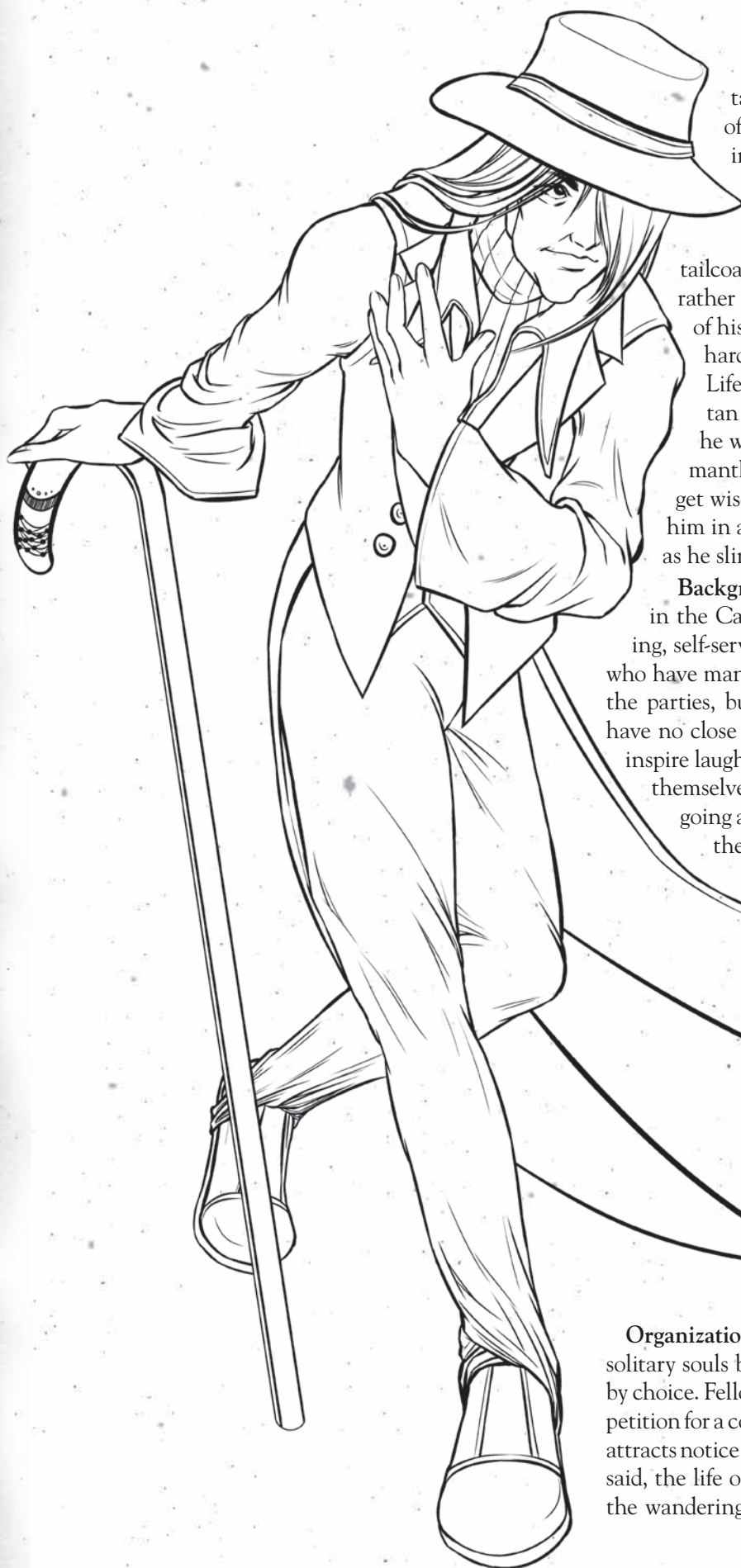
The truth of the matter is that Lucius Nero delved into many dark magics during his long circuits through the Dust Bowl, searching in vain for some way to rise above all the dying he saw and so desperately feared. Eventually he learned to steal the miraculous light that burns within every person and used those plundered spirits as the ante in his gamble to swindle the Reaper. Nero never found what he was looking for, but he did manage to transform himself into something else, something more than merely Awakened — something blasphemous. When the day at long last came that the

dust-stopped choking the nation, Lucius Nero, showman of the wasteland, chiseler of souls, was the first Charlatan of the Carnival Melancholy, and his was the power to extinguish the human spark in exchange for a wink and a nod from Lady Luck. In time, he passed down his lore to a handful of others who carried it to the far corners of the nation and beyond.

Nowadays, the Awakened of the Carnival Melancholy remain faithful to their roots as clowns and comedians, mummers and mountebanks. They hawk their dross and walk away with a prize more precious than gold. An infection within the Silver Ladder, these willworkers are possessed of all the skills of showmanship necessary not only to enact the old rites of the order, but also to make them compelling and even entertaining. Following their own skewed view of the Elemental Precepts, the Charlatans see the Awakened as one nation in exile doing whatever is necessary to survive and prosper, while they themselves seize the Imperium Mysteriorum and ascend the Silver Ladder upon the backs of the Sleepers, dragging along their disincarnate souls as they walk the path toward the everlasting Supernal.

Some, as did their spiritual ancestor, Lucius Nero, still search for the secrets of immortality, but others are content merely to have their fun at the Fallen World's expense and to crack wise at the terrible grandeur of its bleakness until they choke on laughter and shuffle off the stage, smiling. Socially cunning and too damned charming for *anyone's* good, Charlatans often manage to ingratiate themselves into some comfortable corner of local Awakened society, whether as long-term residents of the Consilium or just as transients bartering for a few nights in a comfortable bed and at a well-stocked dinner table. From the good, old-fashioned, "Step right up!" to offers to sell MP3 players that "fell off the back of a truck," to games of three-card Monte on street corners and in back alleys, the Carnival Melancholy keeps alive the ways of the charismatic grifter, running a long con on life itself.

Parent Path or Order: Acanthus or Silver Ladder
Nickname: Charlatans



Appearance: Above all else, a Charlatan is a showman. He dresses to impress, often in ways that make him stand out in a crowd. Such a willworker tends to adopt bold, distinctive styles that enable him to grab attention and, just as importantly, be remembered for his tailcoats, bowler hats, elaborate canes and such, rather than the cast of his features, the color of his eyes, or other details that can be a bit harder to change without recourse to the Life Arcanum. In many ways, the Charlatan surrenders his identity to the costume he wears, allowing him to hide behind the mantle of the performer. That way, when folks get wise to his con, no one thinks to look for him in a simple windbreaker and stocking cap as he slinks out the back door.

Background: Those who accept membership in the Carnival Melancholy tend to be charming, self-serving and insincere, the sorts of people who have many acquaintances and get invited to all the parties, but who no one truly knows and who have no close friends. They're the class clowns who inspire laughter not for the benefit of others, but for themselves. They're the ones who con others into going along with their crazy schemes and who then walk away scot-free with the prize in hand while everyone else takes the rap.

They do with a disarming smile and a bit of fast-talking what others can't accomplish with a dozen geniuses and a hundred well-armed thugs. Prospective Charlatans like the

spotlight, but they also know when to sneak away in the middle of the night.

Organization: Charlatans are, for the most part, solitary souls by nature, by circumstance and, often, by choice. Fellow practitioners of the Legacy are competition for a commodity the theft of which inevitably attracts notice from all the wrong sorts of people. That said, the life of a Charlatan is a lonely one and, like the wandering carneys of days long gone, the mage

occasionally takes in a promising young protégé and educates her in the tricks of the trade, passing on to another generation the secrets by which he has entertained, made a halfway honest living, and stolen the rarified essence that makes people human. Only in the rarest of instances do Charlatans gather in any numbers, and then only two or three at a time. In such a case, the willworkers often act like something between a family, business partners, old pals, a gang of crooks and a cabal, working in concert to fleece the marks of their hard-earned dollars and, every now and then, a soul ripe for the picking.

Suggested Oblations: Engaging in or running games of chance (fixed or otherwise), entertaining a crowd with games or tricks, holding an audience's attention with a flamboyant speech, leading others on an aimless journey, selling worthless junk (good luck charms, "miraculous" cure-alls, etc.) for an appreciable profit, successfully preying upon the charity of strangers.

Concepts: Amoral fortuneteller, devil at the crossroads, jester who laughs to conceal her own sorrow, life's ringmaster, Michelangelo of the long con, repentant huckster, snake oil salesman.

Attainments

Put simply, the Attainments of the Carnival Melancholy enable willworkers to harvest and exhaust human souls for a bit of good luck, selling the misery of others to destiny in exchange for fortune's favor.

1st: Nothing Up My Sleeve

Prerequisites: Gnosis 3, Death 2 (primary), Fate 1, Persuasion 2, Subterfuge 2

The mage can attach a disembodied soul to herself, using an effect similar to the Death 2 "Soul Jar" spell, save that the willworker rolls Presence + Subterfuge + Death to do so, and that she, herself, is the vessel in which the soul is contained. Because of the non-magical nature of the Charlatan's Attainment, such misplaced souls are undetectable. A member of the Carnival Melancholy may, at any one time, have a number of extra souls attached to herself equal to her dots in the Fate Arcanum. For each additional soul attached to the Charlatan, she receives a +1 die bonus on all rolls to use the spell, "The Sybil's Sight."

2nd: The Slow Hand

Prerequisites: Gnosis 5, Death 3

The Charlatan learns to harvest the human soul, cozening it free from the flesh – an extended action

requiring a Manipulation + Persuasion + Death roll, reflexively contested by Resolve. Unless specifically possessed of some extraordinary means of doing so, neither the subject nor anyone in the vicinity senses that her soul is being gradually finessed out of her. If the Charlatan is successful, the customary effects of soullessness take hold, as normal. With Death 5, the mage may perform this effect at sensory range. When making any roll based upon Social Attributes and/or Skills against a Sleeper stripped of her soul in this manner, the mage gains bonus dice equal to his dots in the Fate Arcanum. Note that this Attainment may not be used on another mage.

Optional Arcanum: Fate 3

The willworker can "burn out" a severed soul attached to her (via the Legacy's first Attainment) for good luck. Before making a die roll, the Charlatan forcibly expends a point of the soul's Morality and reflexively rolls Presence + Subterfuge + Fate. If successful, the mage may gain the 8-again quality on the next dice roll she makes. If the soul is reduced to zero Morality, it is destroyed utterly.

If the mage, for whatever reason, releases the soul before it falls to zero Morality and it is successfully reattached to its original owner, the forced degeneration is permanent, and the Sleeper must check for a Derangement for every individual dot of Morality lost (just as though the dots were lost normally). Lost Morality dots may, of course, be regained with the passage of time and the expenditure of experience points. The individual is unaware of his soul's experiences while it was detached from him.

3rd: Nostrum Remedium

Prerequisites: Gnosis 7, Death 4

This Attainment is named for the "miraculous home remedies" sold by wandering quacks, for it can, indeed, temporarily make even a novice seem to possess great skill. The Charlatan may now attach a severed Sleeper soul to a mundane (in other words, non-magical) object, which conveys upon its wielder the benefits of the optional Fate 3 component of the previous Attainment for dice rolls specifically using the item. (Strength + Weaponry for a knife, for instance, or Wits + Medicine for a doctor's bag.) The object's user – who may be a mage or a Sleeper – must somehow be made aware that it is a "lucky" item (allowing her to subconsciously make use of its properties), though she need not truly believe in its powers. The soul trapped within the item is undetectable and its Morality is consumed

with each use, as per the second Attainment, above. If the Charlatan possesses the third optional Attainment of the Carnival Melancholy, he may allow the use of that ability to the item's wielder, as well as (or instead of) the first one, though the choice is fixed when the soul is impressed into the item. The mage benefits from a two-step modifier when attempting to forge a sympathetic tie to an individual currently carrying a soul-bonded object of his creation; this bonus goes only one way, to the Charlatan's benefit, and is undetectable by magic.

A Charlatan may impress Sleeper souls into as many individual items as he has dots in the Fate Arcanum;

excess attempts simply fail. To create another such object when he is at his current limit, the willworker must either release 1 soul from its prison (which he may do at any range as a reflexive action), or else wait for at least 1 soul to be fully expended by an item's current wielder.

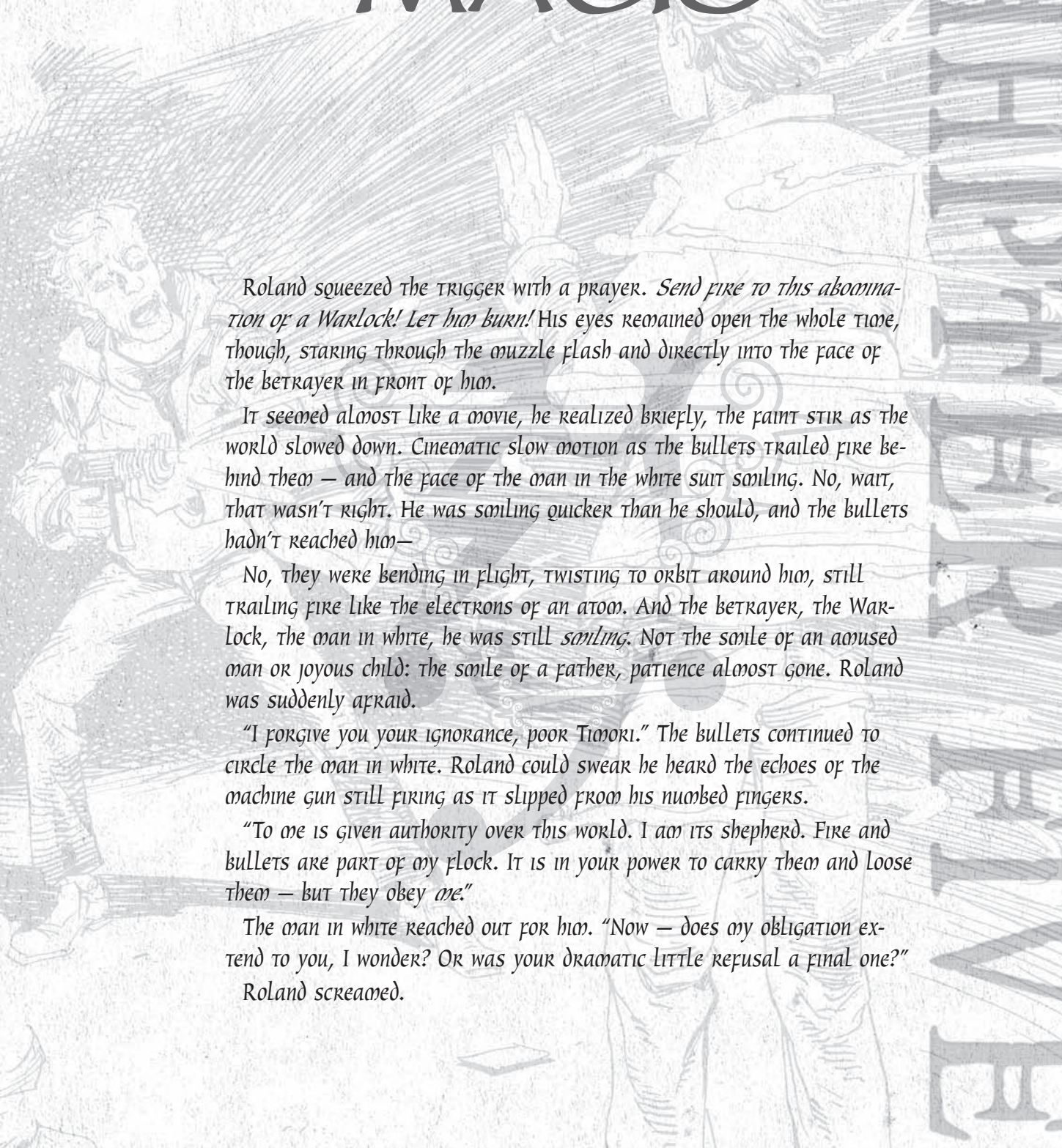
Optional Arcanum: Fate 4

As the previous optional Attainment ability, except that the mage may expend a point of Morality *after* a die roll to re-roll. Regardless of the outcome, however, he must accept the results of the second roll; he may not continue to spend points of Morality in hopes of getting a better roll.





CHAPTER FIVE: MAGIC



Roland squeezed the trigger with a prayer. *Send fire to this abomination of a Warlock! Let him burn!* His eyes remained open the whole time, though, staring through the muzzle flash and directly into the face of the betrayer in front of him.

It seemed almost like a movie, he realized briefly, the faint stir as the world slowed down. Cinematic slow motion as the bullets trailed fire behind them — and the face of the man in the white suit smiling. No, wait, that wasn't right. He was smiling quicker than he should, and the bullets hadn't reached him—

No, they were bending in flight, twisting to orbit around him, still trailing fire like the electrons of an atom. And the betrayer, the Warlock, the man in white, he was still *smiling*. Not the smile of an amused man or joyous child: the smile of a father, patience almost gone. Roland was suddenly afraid.

"I forgive you your ignorance, poor Tidori." The bullets continued to circle the man in white. Roland could swear he heard the echoes of the machine gun still firing as it slipped from his numbed fingers.

"To me is given authority over this world. I am its shepherd. Fire and bullets are part of my flock. It is in your power to carry them and loose them — but they obey *me*."

The man in white reached out for him. "Now — does my obligation extend to you, I wonder? Or was your dramatic little refusal a final one?"

Roland screamed.

*And yet me thinks I see it in thy face,
What thou shouldst be: the occasion speaks thee, and
My strong imagination sees a crown
Dropping upon thy head.*

— William Shakespeare, "The Tempest"

Magical Methods

The techniques employed by the Silver Ladder in the pursuit of its Supernal mandate tend to be traditional (some would say "conservative" or even "old-fashioned"), but such adherence to ancient practices means Ladder mages benefit from millennia of refinement in their mysticism. While the order as a whole doesn't look down upon innovation, neither does the Vox Draconis openly embrace it, meaning théarchs often find many interesting ways of using the same old tricks.

Tactics

Awakened magic is more than merely a process; it is a calling, a blessing and a sacred experience. Such power is to be treated with reverence and respect, and the Silver Ladder teaches its initiates, first and foremost, to apprehend the magnificent gift and responsibility bestowed upon them by the Realms Supernal and the incomprehensible will of the Oracles. Thus the magic used by Ladder mages tends to be heavily based in the order's sorcerous theology.

This means théarchs are almost never cavalier about the use of magic. While they may, when the situation calls for such, *appear* to be nonchalant about the power they wield, most such mages — almost all, in fact — actually consider deeply the moral, ethical and spiritual qualities of their willwork. Further, Ladder mages will often adopt an orthodox approach to the use of magic even when a maverick solution may seem, on the surface, to be more beneficial. Some willworkers go far enough as to remain inflexible in the use of their spells even when presented with strong evidence that unconventional tactics may result in superior performance, for if the Vox Draconis does not preserve the old way against shortcuts and slapdash magics, such théarchs reason, who will?

Death

The Death Arcanum is one of secrets and shadows, enabling a willworker to summon up (or conceal) the knowledge of that which is dead and gone to dust. Further, it is a potent Arcanum of battle, directing deleterious energies at one's enemies. Both uses are celebrated and employed to great effect by the Silver Ladder. Perhaps most importantly to théarchs, however, the Death Arcanum is one of control. According to the Atlantean cosmology, the shades of the dead are neither people nor the spirits of people, but instead merely animate ephemeral objects, pseudo-sentient constructs that arise from a psychic imprint of the individual consciousness upon the Tapestry of the Fallen World. This view is one many Ladder mages preserve and propound. As a rule, the corporeal undead that can be created with this Arcanum are of somewhat lesser interest to most non-Necromancer théarchs, though they, too, see some use when the situation calls for mindless labor with human capabilities or, in a pinch, highly expendable shock troops.

Fate

The Silver Ladder has many uses for the Fate Arcanum, particularly Supernally-sanctified oaths, manipulations of destiny and curses. Oaths are important to the function of the Silver Ladder in many Consilii, and, in such places, the Ladder often aspires to make them vital to the operations of the Consilium as a whole. Of course, oaths are easily tampered with by those with the appropriate knowledge and skill, so théarchs generally advocate the careful (and regular) maintenance of such mystic vows. As for shifting destiny, the Ladder sees this application of the Fate Arcanum as being particularly useful in establishing a leadership role for the order within the Consilium. When other Awakened understand that following the path dictated by the

Ladder leads to success, they are encouraged to continue to do so. Conversely, the curses levied by potent Fate-wielders illustrate the other side of the coin. Those who defy the will of the Vox Draconis — whether Seer of the Throne, Apostate, Pentacle mage or whatever — find luck simply isn't on their side, and even the most basic of endeavors seem perpetually doomed to failure.

Forces

The Forces Arcanum is often ignored by mages of the Silver Ladder in favor of subtler (and usually less vulgar) sorts of magic, but some within the order manage to find creative uses for this versatile Arcanum. For those with a flair for the dramatic, these sorts of magics can create or modify a location's atmosphere, setting the best possible conditions for a rousing speech, a scathing invective or even heartfelt condolences. Lighting, acoustics and ambient temperature have all been used by great leaders for many years to manipulate an audience's emotional responses. With more blatant spells, a théarch might communicate over great distance, using her magic in lieu of a telephone or computer, or express her displeasure with a display of telekinetic force. Other Ladder willworkers might put the power of invisibility to great use, for instance, and spy upon enemies, rivals or (in some cases) allies, in the hopes of asserting a political advantage. Still others might use less grandiose enchantments, summoning a whispered word from clear across a crowded room, or placing one in the ear of an accomplice.

Life

Silver Ladder mages tend to shy away from many of the more obvious manifestations of the Life Arcanum, if only because these don't often aid in the business of leadership and are often vulgar in aspect. Instead, théarchs often focus upon more delicate manipulations. The ability to control a subject's pulse and respiration, for example, can easily make an honest man seem like a liar (or vice-versa), while animals can be made preternaturally loyal and effective through a little bit of control over their instinctual responses, and the power to mask oneself as another person can be invaluable. The Life Arcanum's healing arts are particularly treasured by the Silver Ladder, as healers tend to accrue the esteem of their fellow Awakened, a useful means of insinuating oneself into the good graces of other mages. Further, leaders tend to be targets of the attentions of enemy forces, and the ability to mend hurts might just make the difference between

a living théarch and a dead one. Some few Ladder mages do make use of more blatant transformations of Life, but even these acknowledge discretion and a conservative approach accomplish much more in this respect than the willingness to sick clouds of biting flies on every disrespectful Libertine who crosses one's line of sight.

Matter

The Matter Arcanum fills an interesting niche within the philosophies of the Silver Ladder. It grants control over the base and inert substances of the Fallen World, and so is perhaps the most alien to the lofty ideals espoused by the order. On the other hand, Matter magics offer avenues through which such a mage might develop control over others (especially Sleepers) and fortify the usefulness of those who follow the willworker's direction. Turning lead into gold (or even just creating a suitcase full of \$100 bills out of thin air) may not be the most enlightened of procedures, but it can be an easy way of ensuring the loyalty of Sleepers at a critical juncture. Further, the arms and armaments of other Pentacle willworkers can be enhanced to improve their effectiveness in the field. Somewhat more mundanely, a théarch can transform a thrift store wardrobe into cutting edge fashion, useful for making a good impression on others, whether Sleeper or Awakened.

Mind

Within the Vox Draconis, few Arcana are as esteemed as Mind. The ability to influence, perceive, and outright control thought, imagination, perception and comprehension is invaluable to an order founded upon a mandate of leadership. By manipulating the ways in which others think and act, a théarch can alter the patterns of how such individuals interact with the world. A single misremembered word can save (or damn) diplomatic relations within a Consilium, or with a valuable family of Proximi or even wholly ignorant Sleepers possessed of important assets, while wholesale memory alteration or outright domination of another's consciousness can avert or create many difficulties, as the individual Ladder mage sees fit. Ultimately, there is no ability under the purview of the Mind Arcanum for which an enterprising théarch cannot easily find some use, from the alteration of one's own aura when lying directly to another willworker's face, to telepathic communication with allies, to temporarily reprogramming another's entire personality and mode of thought. In fact, the only drawback to the Mind Arcanum, so

far as the Silver Ladder is concerned, is the ease with which its incautious use can lead mages astray from the path of Wisdom, transforming capable leaders into iron-fisted tyrants drunk on their own incredible power over others.

Prime

Magic is a gift from the Supernal and the Silver Ladder is, at least in part, something of a priesthood of traditional Atlantean values, venerating the majesty and power of the Realms Supernal. Thus, it is unsurprising that the Prime Arcanum sees a great deal of use by mages of the Vox Draconis. Mages of the Ladder who pursue the mastery over magic itself represented by the Prime Arcanum learn how to unmake the spells of others (cutting the unworthy off from the power of the Supernal), create and manipulate Tass (stockpiling the very fuel of magic for time of need), and generate phantasms (coalescing needed equipment from out of the very substance of the cosmos). Théarchs tend to concentrate most of all upon the study of how to control the magic of other Awakened; while the Guardians of the Veil may preserve the secrecy of magic, and mystagogues advance the study of Awakened sorcery, it is the mages of the Silver Ladder who rightfully regulate the power of the Supernal *itself* within the rude confines of the Fallen World.

Space

The Space Arcanum is largely one of supplementary utility to most mages of the Silver Ladder. While the ability to, say, teleport over vast distances or transpose the spatial axes of one person, place or thing over another is occasionally useful to théarchs, the *true* value of this Arcanum to the Vox Draconis is found in its subtler applications. Mages of the Ladder tend to heavily practice scrying (and counter-scrying) techniques, as well as the means to create and circumvent wards and bans. Further, teachers of the Space Arcanum within the order often dwell upon the lessons of ranged magics and the power over sympathetic ties necessary to understand and make use of such spells. Not only does such an education enable a Ladder willworker to expand upon her ability to affect subjects far away, but it also helps her to avoid being targeted by such magics and to manipulate the gossamer threads of connection that give meaning to the relationships between entities, objects and locations. These sorts

of powers are typically far more useful to the average théarch than a spell intended to phase an enemy's body halfway into the nearest wall.

Spirit

If the tales of Atlantis are to be believed, many gods and spirits bent knee to the willworkers of the Awakened empire of old, and some théarchs keep that tradition alive today. Particularly important to note is that it is unusual for mages of the Silver Ladder to acknowledge a spirit's right to self-determination or free will to any extent greater than that absolutely required to keep it in line and functioning at its most efficient. That said, Shamans of the Ladder tend to make better allies than taskmasters to the denizens of Shadow, but almost all mages in the order who choose to pursue the perilous arts of the Spirit Arcanum do so with the understanding they stand at the apex of the invisible hierarchy; whether they share that distinction with any tier of the spirits, themselves, is a matter for debate. Ladder willworkers often focus upon summoning, binding and commanding spirits, as such beings can make for extremely effective instruments of the théarch's will, given their diversity as well as their resiliency and the comparative rarity of powers that specifically defend against their unusual powers.

Time

The Time Arcanum can be a frustrating one for mages of the Silver Ladder. What the order most wishes to know about the past — objective knowledge regarding Atlantis — is clouded to this Arcanum's sight. What the order's willworkers learn about the future becomes mutable through the very observation of it, rendering Time Arcanum divinations less useful than they would be in the absence of the protean nature of free will. Still, the power to interact with temporal phenomena is not without its uses. Cautious and discerning théarchs can amend their mistakes before they ever make them, gain a sense of the history of a person or place, and move quickly enough to sidestep the fists, blades and even bullets of would-be assassins. Particularly powerful practitioners of the Time Arcanum can "rewind" short term history, compelling all within an area to relive a moment in time — perhaps to the benefit of a quick-thinking Ladder mage — or retreat into a sanctuary in which time flows as the willworker wishes, enabling grand rituals to be cast in mere moments, or for a mage to step out of time's flow for a few seconds, only to return days later.

Rote Specialties

An order of leaders and politicians, priests and judges, the Silver Ladder teaches its initiates the magics of social graces and manipulation. To mold the body politic, théarchs must be capable of influencing thought and opinion. In some cases, this calls for an impassioned rallying cry and, in others, for treacherous whispers in a darkened corner of the Consilium's gathering place or even just a bar on the outskirts of town.

The rote specialties of the Silver Ladder are rooted in the cold realities of the order rather than its lofty ideals. In a perfect world, after all, *every* willworker would readily defer to the wisdom and guidance of the Vox Draconis rather than needing to be inspired, cajoled or even deceived into doing so. But the perfect world toward which the Silver Ladder reaches is lost on the far side of the Abyss and, sometimes, those Awakened whom the order directs toward the reclamation of the Supernal need to be nudged one way or another so their abilities are best employed to the benefit of all.

Expression

The power to express oneself both articulately and accurately is one of the pillars of effective leadership. Art, literature, music: these and more are tools by which public opinion can be shaped and subtly directed in ways that advance a prospective leader's agenda. At its best, the Expression Skill creates art that encapsulates the human experience (whether Sleeper or Awakened) and elevates thought and imagination. Indeed, at its utmost heights, such works serve to allow the briefest sense of the Supernal, inspiring others to reach toward the splendor of the true reality.

The Silver Ladder makes use of the Expression Skill as one of its rote specialties because of its mandate as a leadership caste within the Atlantean Diamond, and well as its role as a Supernal priesthood. In many ancient world societies, holy men and women were commonly entrusted with the creation of artistic works, or given oversight as to what was or was not appropriate for artists to render. Effectively, the use of the Expression Skill as a specialty for the Silver Ladder is a reflection of the order's identity with the creative process, elevating the entire sum of human endeavor with passionate words and powerful images.

Persuasion

The fine art of conversation unlocks many doors that stubbornly refuse to yield to either intellect or

force. Thus the Silver Ladder teaches its initiates to embrace the subtle arts of word-craft. Those skilled in Persuasion can influence both individuals and groups with equal facility, allowing the mage to direct her attentions with pinpoint accuracy or to spread her message far and wide, as the situation warrants. This is the Skill of getting others to conform to one's own point of view, not to trick them and not to inspire them, but merely to convince them of the rightness of one's argument.

In many ways théarchs view this as perhaps the most fundamental mundane knowledge a member of their order can possess. It is the ability to directly insinuate one's social will into the thoughts and behaviors of others in a lasting manner, potentially redefining what they believe and how they act. When this sort of power is wielded wisely, Ladder mages can sculpt individuals and even societies in ways that make manifest small aspects of the Supernal within the Fallen World. Magics that depend upon the Persuasion Skill, then, are those that exert a théarch's prerogative through active social interaction (as opposed to the often-passive interaction of Expression).

Subterfuge

It is an unfortunate fact of the Fallen World that a leader cannot always practice full disclosure, or even necessarily honesty, with his constituency. People don't always want to know what's true; they'd much rather hear about the way they'd like things to be or, failing that, they'd prefer to know nothing at all. Not everyone believes this way, of course, but enough do — even among the Awakened — that the Silver Ladder teaches its initiates the art of social deception as an inherent facet of responsible leadership within the order. Even the most honest and open théarch must occasionally withhold information for the good of other Awakened, after all, and that's much easier to accomplish when others don't know the mage is hiding anything in the first place.

Magics based upon the Subterfuge Skill are, for the Silver Ladder, the grudging and unfortunate admission that not all wise ends can be accomplished by upright means. Sometimes a little white lie can put another willworker back on the straight-and-narrow, or facts concealed prevent a calamity. Likewise, an out-and-out deception is sometimes needful, enabling the Vox Draconis to do its work without the problems occasionally engendered by a damaging truth. Subterfuge is the knowledge

of intimating falsely, misleading deliberately, and concealing with words and body language realities that would otherwise be obvious to any with eyes to see.

Rote Mudras

These ritual gestures direct and focus the mystic prowess of the Awakened, reflecting as they do certain abstract symbols echoed within the Realms Supernal. For the Silver Ladder, these take the form of motions intended to encapsulate ideas of leadership, reverence to ancient ways, and social adroitness. Some are believed to stem from the time of the Atlantean priesthood itself, handed down through generations and centuries.

Silver Ladder mudras can be extremely complex and ornate; some go so far as to be quite graceful and even beautiful when enacted by a practiced willworker. Théarchs are likelier than members of any other order to incorporate whole-body movements into their rote mudras, often in ways that suggest the enacting of specific sacred rites or ritual dances. Many Silver Ladder mudras are not meant for use “in the field,” as members of the order often see this sort of “rushed” approach to magic as disrespectful of the wonder of the Supernal. Still, even the most hidebound théarch must also cave to necessity, and so at least a few such gestures for every Arcanum can be executed at a moment’s notice.

Death

For the Death Arcanum, théarchs use mudras that reflect the responsibility of the priestly caste in matters of death, or those that demonstrate mastery over the dead: actions indicative of anointing a corpse for burial, cremation or some other method of disposal; offering blessings or comfort to the survivors of the deceased; or gesturing as though to draw another up out of the sleep of the grave. Gestures that show defiance for the inevitability of death (and thus an embrace of the eternal nature of the Supernal) are also common within the order.

Examples: “I can’t express how important your uncle’s work was to all of us” (clasps the subject’s hands sympathetically in one’s own). Resting a hand upon the earth while kneeling, with one’s head bowed respectfully.

Fate

The Silver Ladder’s Fate Arcanum mudras often involve bold gestures that imply mastery over the uncertain tides of destiny or faith in the wisdom of the Oracles: a firm and sudden grasp (as though seizing hold of disparate threads); outward arcs of both hands to indicate all the willworker surveys; or standing with arms and gaze upraised to the heavens. Also popular are motions that indicate the recognition or fulfillment of vows, such as by taking the hands of two individuals in one’s own and then joining them as though to sanctify a pact between the two.

Examples: “You should’ve seen how that window cracked when he slammed into it” (splays fingers and gestures out with arms, as though indicating a spider-web centered upon the mage). Standing over another who is making a promise, hand raised over the subject’s head in acknowledgement of the oath.

Forces

Forces mudras usually indicate the vital, energetic nature of the Silver Ladder and its power to effect positive change, both in the Fallen World in general and in Awakened society specifically: hands and arms (and perhaps the entire body) undulating like a flame; a sudden outward motion of the hands and arms suggesting an eruption of light, sound or another such force; sharply drawing the hands together into a position of prayer (and making a loud clapping noise in the process). Cupping the hands around the mouth (as if to project one’s voice) or one hand around the ear (to better listen) is a gesture common to some théarchs in acknowledgement of the order’s duty both to speak and to hear.

Examples: “The wind carried most of the debris away and up onto those ledges” (slowly rotating both hands at the wrists, while raising arms upward). Fingers interlocked, in a slight arch, as though indicating the sun at daybreak, and then slowly unweaving them and moving each hand outward, away from the other.

Life

Life Arcanum mudras for the Vox Draconis typically involve motions that encapsulate the simple ends toward which théarchs typically put such



magics: tapping the palm of one's hand over the heart in time with the beating of the heart; raising the hands from a loosely crossed position in front of the diaphragm while inhaling deeply to touch the fingertips together in front of the chest; or going through the motions of a graceful ceremonial dance (complete with elaborate arm, hand and, sometimes, finger movements).

Examples: "The surgeons managed to completely remove the scarring from his face; he looked like an entirely different person when they were done" (drawing the hand down the side of the face to suggest the smoothing or another such alteration of features). A soothing hand set near a wound while gently stroking the cheek of the injured with one's free hand.

Matter

When performing rote mudras for the Matter Arcanum, théarchs often perform gestures indicative of great value, or the refinement of base materials into precious ones: dropping phantom coins one by one from one hand into the palm of the other; or pantomiming

the motions of using a hammer and tongs as would a blacksmith. Also, touching one's brow (to indicate a crown), or finger (where a ring of office might rest) can be appropriate for Ladder mages.

Examples: "That guy is *made* of money" (rubbing the thumb and forefinger together repeatedly). Mimicking the motion of a grain flail, to separate the wheat from the chaff.

Mind

Rote mudras for the Mind Arcanum within the Vox Draconis often suggest control over oneself or authority over others: serene stillness, or casting a net, for example. A théarch may move her cupped hands out from in front of her face, symbolically opening her eyes and taking in the entirety of her surroundings, or place them on the head of another who is kneeling or seated before her.

Examples: "Is that *really* what you believe? C'mon, man, *think!*" (taps the other's temple lightly with an extended forefinger) Facing the palms inward, fingertips lightly touching the mage's forehead, and then gracefully arcing both arms downward at the elbows.

Prime

When performing mudras for the Prime Arcanum, théarchs often employ gestures indicative of the Awakened tie to the Supernal: raising one hand reverently upward, drawing both hands down slowly to cover the heart, or moving one hand from the center of the chest to interlock fingers with the other.

Examples: "That thing was seriously stuck" (pantomimes tugging a rope with both hands toward the center of the body). Swinging one arm in a wide arc, while cupping the hand into a loose fist and drawing it in.

Space

Silver Ladder mudras for Space usually evoke a sense of either the broad-sweeping scope of the entire Fallen World, or else a direct tie to the person, place or thing in question: gesturing widely with one's hands to the entire vault of the sky, or pointing in a straight line at the subject of the spell. Gestures suggesting measurement of the heavens are also rather common.

Examples: "You want to follow this road until it ends" (sweeps hand downward, along the road, off to the horizon). Connecting the "dots" of a constellation with a fingertip.

Spirit

When using rote mudras for Spirit, théarchs typically use motions that recall ancient pacts between the Awakened and the invisible world, most of which have been passed down for so long they no longer make sense to those not educated in the long history of the Vox Draconis. Thus, a Ladder willworker might move quickly through a series of interlocking finger positions, trace a symbol on the palm of one hand with the index finger of the other, or move the hands and arms in time with the steps of an ecstatic dance.

Examples: “If I’m remembering clearly, it looked kind of like a tree” (traces a complex glyph with lines vaguely branching out from the center). Moving the hands through a series of slow, smooth motions, as if performing *tai chi chuan*.

Time

Time Arcanum mudras for the Silver Ladder typically involve the order’s antiquity and the infinite nature of the Realms Supernal, the Watchtowers and the Arcana: mimicking the motion of turning many pages of a ponderous tome; counting on the fingers the numbers one through 10 and then back down again to one; executing a series of complicated patterns with the fingers and then concluding with a single, simple ritual gesture. Motions intended to convey a sense of looking into or (especially) steering the future are also common.

Examples: “He was patrolling the grounds roughly in a figure-eight pattern” (traces the ‘sideways eight’ symbol for infinity in the air with a fingertip). Cupping the hand over the eyes and looking from east to west, in the direction of the sun’s movement through the heavens.

Magical Tools

The willworkers of the Silver Ladder employ a number of magical tools in their spellcasting to act as buffers against the scourge of Paradox. Such items are typically used by théarchs solely as ritual objects and not in any mundane capacity. If necessity forces the use of a dedicated magical tool for its Fallen purposes, many Ladder mages will perform extensive purification rites upon the item, to cleanse its symbolic tie to the Realms Supernal.

Badges, uniforms and other indicators of rank, responsibility and privilege — especially sacred and/or

ceremonial — are the foremost magical tools of the Silver Ladder. Such implements are many and varied, including (though by no means limited to): scepters or rods; jewelry; gavels; crowns, laurels or diadems; robes of office; garb of noble, royal or priestly styles and/or colors; scales or balances; documents of authority or investiture; holy texts or religious symbols; ornate and purely ceremonial weapons or armor.

In addition to objects that evoke a sense of power and position, the Vox Draconis employs magical tools that recall tradition and adherence to ancient laws: family heirlooms; old contracts; class or company rings; sporting trophies; historically significant antiques; law books; cultural treasures; very nearly *any* mundane Atlantean or Diaspora-era relic, regardless of function or state of repair.

Either sort of object may be incorporated into rote mudras (such as by brandishing a badge or gesturing with a rod of office), if appropriate. Because of the great diversity of potential magical tools identified with the order, mages of the Silver Ladder don’t tend to look outside those two broad categories of objects when seeking to mitigate the sting of Paradox.

Sacraments

Apart from their ritual instruments, théarchs can employ certain objects as magical sacraments, enabling them to forge a meaningful connection to the Realms Supernal. Many objects used as sacraments by mages of the Silver Ladder hint at leadership, tradition and great worth (or great cost). The most powerful of these resonate with the symbolism of the higher realms and can convey a +1 bonus to a ritual spellcasting pool.

Death: Burning a ritual burial shroud or oil used to anoint the dead. Destroying a precious keepsake handed down from one’s ancestors, or scattering the ashes of a friend laid to rest according to an ancient tradition. (+1)

Fate: Breaking a set of gilded scales or an antique loom. Destroying a coin from an Atlantean Diaspora settlement or a perfectly symmetrical spiderweb that’s somehow been preserved for over 100 years. (+1)

Forces: Destroying an exquisite sundial or the flint that enabled a lost camper to start a lifesaving fire. Releasing a bound lightning spirit in an ancient fetish, or melting a first-generation wax cylinder recording. (+1)

Life: Shattering a vial containing an unusual variety of blood (of a rare blood type, for example) or

destroying a piece of pelt, bone or other such remnant from an animal noted for its regal qualities. Opening a flask containing the preserved breath of a dragon, or burning a fresh cutting from a living tree over 1,000 years old. (+1)

Matter: Melting an ounce of platinum or emptying a vial of rare and fragrant oil onto the ground. Destroying an Artifact taken from the Seers of the Throne or a mundane object handed down from the time of Atlantis. (+1)

Mind: Breaking the corporate pin of a CEO or a judge's gavel. Smashing the crown worn by a monarch who died centuries ago or a thaumium scepter. (+1)

Prime: Dissolving a phantasm back into the Tapestry or sacrificing a piece of Tass. Breaking an Imbued item made by the mage's own hands or one created by a powerful Scelestus. (+1)

Space: Shattering a cobble from an ancient Roman road or any object that has naturally come to constitute an Intimate sympathetic connection to its owner. Ruining one of Tycho Brahe's astronomical sextants or a 300-year-old map of the North American Atlantic coastline. (+1)

Spirit: Pulverizing the fragments of an object that was once a fetish or any object created by a spirit's Numina or Influences. Breaking apart the physical vessel of a pact with a god (Rank 5+ spirit) or a grimoire of Spirit Arcanum rites handed down through seven generations. (+1)

Time: Smashing a family heirloom pocketwatch or an antique hourglass. Dispelling a spell that has persisted for over a century, or breaking an object sent at least that far forward through time with the "Future Legacy" spell. (+1)

Death Spells

Martyr's Bequest
(Death ●●● + Life ●●● and/or Mind ●●● and/or Prime ●●●)

When the cold chill of impending death takes hold of a mage, it is possible for her to willingly give up what life remains to her for the benefit of her friends and allies, enabling them to continue the good fight, fortified in mind, body and spirit by her sacrifice.

Practice: Perfecting

Action: Instant

Duration: Lasting

Aspect: Covert

Cost: Special (see below)

Successfully casting this spell, which may be used only by a mage who is unconscious due to damage (with all his Health boxes filled with lethal damage, and who has "rolled over" into at least one box of aggravated damage) — an exception to the normal rules for spellcasting — destroys the casting willworker's body, killing him instantly and irrevocably. If the mage is a Disciple of Life, he may freely distribute his body's remaining fortitude (every Health box not yet filled with aggravated damage) to anyone within the spell's Area (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 120), out to a limit of a person's current maximum Health, healing any injury, whether bashing, lethal or aggravated, on a one-for-one basis. If the mage is a Disciple of Mind, he may distribute his remaining points of Willpower in a similar manner, out to an individual's current maximum. If he is a Disciple of Prime, the willworker may distribute his remaining Mana and/or Tass (which dissolves to become Mana) to any individual capable of using such, adding it directly to her current stores, up to the maximum allowed by her Gnosis. Any or all of these effects may be combined into a single casting by a suitably skilled mage.

The caster's body disintegrates completely upon the successful completion of this spell and he may not subsequently be summoned up in any form, unless somehow previously and willingly metaphysically bound to such a fate. Théarchs believe this is because such a mage, by definition, is at peace with his demise and passes on in a spirit of generosity and Wisdom. As to why this spell is covert and not vulgar, none can say for certain, though certain scholars within the Silver Ladder believe the giving of the self in such a manner is somehow protected against the Lie of the Exarchs, making the use of this spell an act of holy martyrdom in the eyes of the Oracles.

Silver Ladder Rote: Sacrifice of the King

Dice Pool: Presence + Persuasion + Death

In ancient times, some cultures practiced a form of sacred regicide, with rulers going willingly to their deaths in time of need so the people might know prosperity and wellbeing. So, too, do some willworkers of the Silver Ladder give of their lives when circumstances become dire so others might draw strength from their fallen comrade and, renewed, struggle onward to victory.

Fate Spells

Coincidental Travel (Fate ●●●●)

The willworker reshapes the threads of fate to inevitably move her toward her chosen destination. She simply selects her destination, uses this spell and then all manner of coincidences help and even impel her along her way.

Practice: Weaving

Action: Instant

Duration: Lasting

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

When using this spell, the mage does not need to purchase a ticket in advance, and the total money spent need be no more than can easily be purchased with 1 dot of the Resources Merit. The primary thing the mage needs to do is to be willing to go along with the chain of events carrying her to her destination. If a mage in Chicago casts this spell to help her get to Los Angeles, a host of coincidences help her along her way. When she goes to purchase a ticket for an airplane or train, she is offered an exceptionally low fare as a special, a free ticket is handed to her by someone who is canceling his travel plans at the last minute, or some similar coincidence occurs. Traffic seems to move out of her way, stoplights turn green just as her cab approaches them, lines to checking in and security are exceptionally short, and her cross-country flight is not only not delayed, it benefits from strong tailwinds. A single success on this spell is sufficient to allow the mage to make an easy and low-cost journey to any destination in 10% below the absolute minimum time normally required. Each additional success reduces the time by another 10%. Even on an extraordinary success, this spell cannot reduce the total time by more than 50% of the normal minimum time, but it can allow a mage to step out her door and end up in a city all the way across the US at minimal cost in a matter of hours.

Despite not requiring the Space Arcanum, this spell is still somewhat bound by the laws of sympathetic connection. The closer the connection a mage has to her destination, the easier this spell is to use. A mage using this spell to return home suffers no penalty. However, using this spell to travel to a distant city or nation the mage has seen only in photographs or on television gives the mage a -4 or -5 penalty, depending

upon how many relevant photographs or TV shows the mage has seen.

In addition, this spell bends fate, but cannot break it. Locations difficult to get to bring penalties. If the mage wishes to see the inside of some secure building like the Pentagon or Fort Knox, this spell might get her inside on a public tour, but it's not going to get her through high security checkpoints that do not allow unauthorized personnel inside. This spell will not allow the character to bypass or otherwise get around active opposition (like guards instructed to keep out all but a few specially authorized personnel). The spell allows the character only to cheaply, swiftly and easily go to places to which she could normally go.

Silver Ladder Rote: Traveler's Luck

Dice Pool: Wits + Persuasion + Fate

Often a big part of being able to control a situation is the ability to be at the right place at the right time. Members of the Silver Ladder use this spell as a way to easily move themselves to their destinations faster than their opposition.

Forbidden Fate (Fate ●●●●)

The willworker alters someone's destiny so the person has great difficulty accomplishing a single specific goal. Attempts by the target to accomplish this goal are fraught with ill fortune and literally everything that can go wrong does. Microphones screech or go dead at particularly inopportune times, the target stumbles while running, and fragile objects the target uses are far more inclined to fall and break.

Practice: Ruling

Action: Instant

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: 1 Mana

The character must declare a specific goal the target cannot reach. This goal must be a deliberate choice on the target's part and not something necessary for survival, such as breathing or eating. This spell can ban "getting to work on time Monday morning," but not "ever getting to work on time" or even "getting to work on time each Monday." Examples of valid goals include attacking or defeating a particular enemy, attempting to steal or otherwise acquire a particular object, applying for a specific job, giving a particular speech or presentation, running for an elected office, creating a work

of art, and any similar actions. For the duration of this spell, any actions the target takes to directly accomplish the forbidden goal suffer a dice penalty equal to the number of dots in the Fate Arcanum the caster possesses.

Silver Ladder Rote: The Hobbling of Enemies

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Subterfuge + Fate

One of the best ways to win an election or convince others to accept your ideas is to make certain anyone opposing you looks sufficiently bad that you and your ideas look better in comparison. This rote ensures those who oppose members of the Silver Ladder often fail quite badly in their efforts, because this spell can easily make an expert seem a rank amateur.

Forces Spells

Modulate Speech (Fate ● + Forces ●●)

A leader's ability to communicate successfully is dependent upon many factors, not the least of which is her ability to use her voice to the greatest advantage in the pursuit of conveying intent. A mousy, timid voice does little to inspire — even when making a grand, stirring speech — while a low, rasping tone might incite a reflexive sense of trepidation, even when one wishes to offer comfort. Even a clear, resounding voice can benefit from a little careful manipulation, subtly downplaying or even phasing out all the little vocal imperfections people take for granted, leaving words too powerful and compelling to be denied. With this magic, a passable speaker can sound like a good one or even a great one, and a great speaker can move others to heights and depths of passion reserved for the most legendary of orators.

Practice: Ruling

Action: Instant

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

For each success accrued in the casting of this spell, the mage may add a bonus die to all her non-magical rolls involving speech, whether trying to sway a crowd with her moving words, to threaten a stubborn Seer of the Throne into backing down, or to whisper at just the right pitch so as to be clearly heard by her companion and not at all by the guard standing six feet away. Forces takes all the auditory flaws out of the character's speech,

allowing her to gain *precisely* the vocal quality she desires, while Fate takes care of any small variables: the mage finishes (or, if it is most advantageous, starts) speaking just before the car blaring loud music drives by outside, or she happens to stop right where the acoustics in the Consilium's meeting space are most favorable before delivering her scathing invective toward the Hierarchy.

Silver Ladder Rote: Words of Grandeur

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Expression + Forces

The ability to express oneself accurately is, in many cases, requisite to strong, stable leadership. A thearch who cannot convey her points in a manner that motivates others to follow her finds her ability to guide and direct other Awakened failing when she most needs them; allies are not roused to her causes, and rivals and enemies exploit the shortcomings in her delivery. Thus this magic is used to bestow upon such willworkers — from the most shy and retiring to the most socially adept — a helpful edge.

Life Spells

Image of Striking Beauty (Life ●●● + Mind ●●)

The mage can subtly alter his body in order to make himself appear exceptionally attractive.

Practice: Weaving

Action: Instant

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

This spell alters the mage's features, while also influencing the emotions of everyone who sees the mage so they find him to be more attractive. The effects of this spell are sufficiently subtle that the mage remains easily recognizable. Others simply see him as more attractive than before and are likely to attribute the improved appearance to some change in clothing or grooming on the part of the mage or perhaps never having looked at him closely before. Each success on this roll provides the mage with a +1 modifier to all Presence and Manipulation rolls when he attempts to use his looks to entertain, persuade, distract or deceive others. The bonuses gained from this spell are compatible with those from the "Striking Looks" Merit.

Silver Ladder Rote: Impeccable Bearing

Dice Pool: Presence + Expression + Life

Attractive people are usually quite successful. Looking sufficiently good can give a member of the Silver Ladder an important edge when dealing with others.

Physical Reconfiguration (Life ●●●, optional Mind ●)

By selectively altering certain aspects of his physiology, a mage can temporarily replicate certain exceptional — if entirely non-magical — capabilities. Further changes can be affected by those with minimal proficiency in more cerebral magics.

Practice: Perfecting

Action: Instant

Duration: Transitory (one turn)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

By successfully casting the basic version of this spell, a mage can temporarily acquire the following Merits (see **The World of Darkness**): Fast Reflexes (● to ●●), Fleet of Foot (● to ●●●), Iron Stamina (● to ●●●), Iron Stomach, Natural Immunity, Quick Healer, Striking Looks (●● or ●●●●), Strong Back, Strong Lungs, or Toxin Resistance. By casting this spell conjunctionally with Mind 1, the willworker may add the following Merits to the list: Ambidextrous, Eidetic Memory, Fresh Start, Quick Draw (for either Firearms or Weaponry), and Stunt Driver. Successes of Potency must be divided among Merit dots, and the mage must meet all prerequisites for any Merit chosen. Thus, with three successes, a mage might select Fast Reflexes ● and ●●, and then Fresh Start (provided he meets the prerequisites for Fast Reflexes, that is), with a success left over. With only one success, however, he could not select Fresh Start unless he already otherwise possessed 2 dots of Fast Reflexes.

Note that any benefits granted by this spell end when its effects fade, so a mage who grants himself the Fresh Start Merit, for example, returns to his original position in the initiative roster (minus the bonus conveyed by Fast Reflexes, if he has also supplemented his initiative in that manner) if the spell's Duration expires in the middle of a combat.

Silver Ladder Rote: Flesh Follows the Will

Dice Pool: Resolve + Subterfuge + Life

A leader must be many things. Sometimes, he must be what he is not and make use of capabilities he does

not truly possess in order to best guide and serve his people. By way of this magic, a willworker of the Silver Ladder learns that even the subtle nuances of his own physical form are subject to the dictates of his will, making him faster, more durable or imposing, or whatever else is needful.

Matter Spells

Control Object (Matter ●● + Spirit ●)

The willworker can speak to the spirit of a device and ask it to perform an action that is within the normal range of the device's function. In effect, the mage talks to a device and asks it to work.

Practice: Ruling

Action: Instant

Duration: Concentration

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

With a successful roll, the mage convinces the spirit of the device to act in the manner he desires. He could cause a gun someone else was holding to fire or put its safety on. Similarly, the character could cause a car to start and drive forward or swerve suddenly left simply by speaking to it. The mage can even cause a lock to open or an alarm system to turn off. However, he can affect only a device he can clearly see and is within comfortable speaking range of. If the alarm system on a door is controlled by a distant mechanism, the willworker cannot affect it. Also, while the mage could type commands into a keyboard merely by asking the keyboard to type his request, he could not discover a computer password or gain access to files he does not already know how to access.

In addition, devices cannot be made to perform actions that are not part of their normal function. They cannot break or disable themselves unless that is a normal part of their use (such as a fire alarm that is set off by breaking glass) and while the character can cause a gun to fire, unless the gun is something like a boat's deck gun in a swivel mount, the character cannot cause it to aim itself. However, a character can often disable a device by asking a visible screw or similar part to unscrew itself.

Silver Ladder Rote: Commanding the Inanimate

Dice Pool: Wits + Persuasion + Matter



In addition to commanding other mages, members of the Silver Ladder also often learn to command various facets of the natural world. The mage typically addresses the object with tones of great authority, invoking the ancient relationship between the world and the willworker.

Animate Object (Matter ●●● + Spirit ●●●)

The willworker can temporarily awaken the spirit within an object or device and animate it so it can move and act on its own.

Practice: Ruling

Action: Instant

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Vulgar

Cost: None

The mage can cause any object or device, from a car to a handgun, to become temporarily conscious and animate. The willworker awakens the spirit within the object. Use the rules for the Spirit 3 “Rouse Spirit” spell (**Mage: the Awakening**, pp.

250-251) to determine the rank and characteristics of this spirit. Also, the device can perform its designed function as well as if it was wielded by someone trained to use it. The object’s dice pool for performing actions is always Power + Finesse, with no penalty for lack of skill.

Because of the power of the Matter magics involved, the object can do more than simply perform its function. In addition to cars being able to turn themselves on and drive, guns being able to fire, and locks being able to lock and unlock, animated objects can also move on their own. Pieces of furniture can roll on their wheels or walk and run on their legs, knives and guns can hop around and even throw themselves at targets, and drawers can slide out with sufficient force to injure someone. When an object attacks, use the spirit’s Power as its Strength. Animated objects can bend and flex in various unnatural ways. Most of their more extreme types of movement, such as a chair running across a room, are subject to Disbelief.

One limit on this spell is that unless the mage also uses Spirit magic like the “Control Spirit” spell, the object is free to act as it chooses. Objects owned by the mage will typically obey her commands, as will objects not asked to do anything self-destructive or against their inherent nature. (Guns normally attack people, drawers and chairs do not.) Objects that have been treated well by someone will not normally attack this person. Guns owned by a gun collector who takes excellent care of them will not attack the collector simply because the mage asks them to. In fact, the guns are more likely to fire at anyone attacking their owner, including the mage who cast this spell.

This spell can be used to animate any object of size 20 or less, +10 per additional Target factor. If the mage animates a large object like a house or car, all fixtures both inside and outside the object are under the spirit’s control. While affected by this spell, an object also exists in Twilight and can both sense and affect beings and objects there.

Silver Ladder Rote: Commanding Inanimate Allies

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion + Matter

Members of the Silver Ladder prefer to have allies working by their sides, even if these allies sometimes include animate furniture. As with the above rote, the théarch typically addresses the object as if it were already a sworn ally, calling upon old allegiances.

Mind Spells

Diplomat's Protection (Mind ●●●)

The mage can make herself seem too impressive and awe-inspiring for potential opponents to be willing to attack. Would-be attackers look at the mage and find themselves psychologically incapable of attacking her in any manner. They can attempt to block the mage's path, but cannot attempt to harm her in any way. This spell works equally well on humans, animals and supernatural beings, but has no effect on any sort of automatic defense or anything completely mindless. In addition, this spell is insufficiently powerful to overcome the target's survival instinct. As a result, it functions only as long as the mage does nothing to directly threaten the target's safety.

Practice: Ruling

Action: Instant

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

Record the number of successes the mage rolls on this spell. If a character who attempts to attack the mage has a Resolve score lower than the number of successes the mage rolled, then this individual cannot attack the mage. If the character's Resolve is higher than the number of successes rolled, then each success the mage rolled acts as 1 point of armor that is applied to all attacks on the mage made by the target. This armor comes from the attacker struggling to overcome the residual compulsion not to harm the mage.

If the mage attacks a character or otherwise directly threatens a character's safety or the safety of someone close to him, he is then free to attack the mage, but still treats the number of successes the mage rolled as armor. In effect, the character is now treated as if his Resolve was higher than the number of successes the mage rolled. A mage using this spell can yell at people or berate them, but if she draws a weapon in a threatening manner or orders an associate to attack someone, then that person is free to attack the mage. If the mage actively threatens a number of people at once, such as by brandishing a gun in their general direction, they are all free to attack the mage. By spending 1 Mana, the duration of this spell can be made to last for 1 day. Many mages who use this spell

cast it at the beginning of the day, as part of their morning rituals.

Silver Ladder Rote: Glorious Shield

Dice Pool: Wits + Expression + Mind

Théarchs often enjoy using a rote that enables them to walk freely among their enemies with no risk of harm. This rote invokes the ancient protection of the Vox Draconis in their sacred role as Heralds of Atlantis.

Prime Spells

Ephemeral Image (Prime ●●)

The mage can create purely two-dimensional inanimate phantasms. These creations possess no substance at all; they are simply flat images that must be overlaid upon some existing surface. However, using this spell the mage can change the color or pattern of a suit, the picture and written information on an ID card, the appearance of a photograph, or even the apparent value of a piece of currency. The mage could also attempt to disguise a blank piece of paper as a valuable oil painting, but anyone touching it would feel smooth modern paper and not rough and aging paint.

Practice: Weaving

Action: Instant

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Vulgar

Cost: None

This spell can change the appearance of the surface of any item of Size 5 or less. The mage must make an Intelligence + Crafts or Intelligence + Expression roll (depending upon the nature of the image being created) to create the desired appearance. Excess successes on the casting roll each add 1 die to this roll. This spell cannot affect the texture, size or shape of an object, only the colors, patterns, pictures or text on its surface.

Silver Ladder Rote: Ethereal Disguise

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Expression + Prime

Whether they wish to ensure they are wearing the height of fashion or are attempting to impersonate someone by using an ID with the person's name and their picture, this spell can be an invaluable tool for mages engaged in any form of intrigue.

Spirit Spells

Otherworldly Armory (Matter ●●● + Spirit ●●●, optional Space ●●●)

By calling upon a spirit whose aspect aligns with a particular sort of physical endeavor, the mage can draw the entity through the Gauntlet and shape it into a material form suitable to the task at hand.

Practice: Weaving

Action: Instant and contested; target rolls Resistance reflexively

Duration: Transitory (one turn)

Aspect: Vulgar

Cost: None

Successfully casting this spell enables a mage to draw a spirit through the Gauntlet and shape it into a form suitable for the task at hand. Only a spirit aligned to the endeavor the mage has in mind (a spirit of violence for a weapon, for instance, one of protection for armor, or one of communication for a cellular phone) can be thus manipulated. For each success accrued in the casting, the item created has a +1 equipment bonus, up to the mage's dots in the Matter Arcanum. If the spirit is willing to be summoned and used in this manner, it may use its Influences and Numina to aid the mage (and, if the endeavor is within the spirit's purview, it will gain Essence by doing so). This item has a presence in Twilight and in Shadow, and can be used, without any other effects, to interact with beings or objects in either; armor will guard against attacks originating in Twilight, while a phone can call another phone presently in Shadow (even if said phone would not normally be able to receive calls there).

If the mage wants a specific spirit and that spirit is not nearby, then she must use Space 3 in the casting of the spell. Doing so enables the spirit to immediately come to the mage's location (or compels it, in the event that the spirit is unwilling and the willworker overcomes its resistance). The mage cannot call a non-specific spirit (whether willing or unwilling) at range with this spell; she must do it through some other means, drawing the spirit through the Gauntlet and reshaping it only after it arrives.

This spell is subject to the normal penalties to bind a spirit (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 317), even when used on one that is willing.

Silver Ladder Rote: Divine Artifice

Dice Pool: Presence + Crafts + Spirit

As the spiritual leaders of the Awakened, mages of the Silver Ladder enjoy converse with the beings Shadow. Those sufficiently skilled in such lore can enjoy their service, as well, even altering their very shapes into instruments useful to almost any task.

Time Spells

Legacy of Power (Fate ●● + Prime ●● + Time ●●●●●)

The mage shunts some of her personal stores of Mana forward in time, to a moment when she will need it.

Practice: Making

Action: Instant

Duration: Lasting

Aspect: Vulgar

Cost: Special (see below)

For each success accrued in the casting of this spell, the mage may send a single point of Mana from her current total forward into the future, using the table given for the "Future Legacy" spell (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 267) to determine how long the character has to recover her Mana. Because the caster attunes her spell to the threads of her own destiny and because the Mana within her is essentially stored within her Awakened spirit, she effectively chooses the moment that constitutes her "hour of need" and may freely recover the Mana at that time, circumventing even wards and other barriers that prevent the flow of such energies; the Mana exists out of time and place until it is needed and never actually "goes" anywhere. No willworker may have more points of Mana readied for use in this way than she has dots in Fate or Prime, whichever is less. The Mana sent forward is lost from the character's current total and recovered points may not bring her over the normal maximum Mana permitted by her Gnosis. Mana not recovered before the maximum allowable span of time is lost back into the Tapestry.

Silver Ladder Rote: Supernal Reserve

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Subterfuge + Time

A capable leader knows her true power lies not merely in what she has at hand, but also in what she can bring to bear when the need is dire. By exercising a bit of resource management, a théarch well-versed in the lore of time's flow can put aside some much-needed Mana in times of feast, knowing a time of famine must, inevitably, follow.

Artifacts and Relics of the Silver Ladder

The pedigree of the Vox Draconis is old and grand, the result of millennia of leadership and spiritual guidance. Over those long years, a number of enchanted objects have come into the possession of the Silver Ladder or been created by its members, and some of these are particularly iconic to the order.

Important to note is the fact that mages of the Silver Ladder tend to draw a very significant line between an Artifact and any other sort of enchanted item. An Artifact is a piece of the Supernal history and destiny of the Awakened; other sorcerous objects are merely tools. This isn't to say a théarch can't treasure an imbued item she created, found or was given, but she'll tend to treat it like a normal piece of property — a valuable and important piece of property, to be sure, but not a precious and irreplaceable family heirloom, for example (such as how she might see an Artifact with the exact same properties).

Celestial Urn (Artifact ●●●●●●●●)

Durability 5, Size 3, Structure 8

Mana Capacity: Maximum 11

When the théarchs of Marrakech seized this Artifact from a cabal of Scelesti in the early 1950s, they had no idea what to make of it. The largely nondescript urn (three-and-a-half feet tall, narrow, and of a neutral beige material akin to ceramic) was traded between mages of the Ladder for several years until, finally, a member of the order in New York City managed, by luck, a bit of Fate and Mind magic, and some favors owed him by the local Mysterium, to translate the tiny glyphs etched around its base. This mage, a Shaman known by the Shadow Name of Slander, figured out how to activate the urn's amazing power in the late 1980s. Sadly, he was killed shortly thereafter, and the Artifact was moved out of Slander's Consilium by the Silver Ladder out of fear that the Thyrsus' assassination was part of a plan to acquire the Celestial Urn. Its present whereabouts are unknown.

After depositing a handful of human ashes (whether fresh, old or even ancient), nine pomegranate seeds, a teaspoon or so of any fermented alcoholic beverage (the glyphs, according to Slander, specifically called for wine or beer, though similarly prepared potable liquids also work), and a single drop of the

willworker's own blood into the Artifact, the mage may use the Spirit 5 spell "Create Spirit," crafting a Shadow Realm entity to her exact specifications. This spirit is a persistent creation, lasting for as long as the willworker is the owner of the urn. (In other words, until it is lost, stolen, given away or destroyed.) Whatever spirit the mage creates, however, she's stuck with it until she is no longer the owner of the Celestial Urn; whereupon, the spirit simply ceases to be. Interestingly, the items placed into the urn are not in any way consumed by the Artifact's power when used and must be removed from it by other means.

Grim Sanctum (Artifact ●●●●●●●●)

Durability 4, Size 2, Structure 6

Mana Capacity: 13

This unique and disturbing Artifact is a plum-sized jet pendant made in the form of a skull. Anyone who wears this Artifact and spends a point of Mana is instantly transported to the Underworld via the Death 4 spell "Twilight Shift." The mage emerges in the Underworld in a small but richly appointed mansion approximately 8 yards on a side. Inside the dwelling are all manner of useful furnishings, and the character can create more at will, because this Artifact also allows the user to cast the Death 3 spell "Sculpt Ephemera" at will.

Since users can also carry anything on their person into the Underworld, when found, this mansion typically includes a variety of the possessions of the previous owner. In at least one case, it contained the previous owner's dead body. Other than those additions, all the fittings and other accoutrements in the mansion are appropriate for the Underworld and have a somewhat funereal appearance.

As long as the user wears the pendant, he can also command ghosts, using the Death 3 spell "Control Ghost." In addition, unless the wearer orders them to do so, ghosts cannot enter the mansion, but the mage can easily leave and re-enter it. The user can also leave the Underworld using this Artifact, but the mansion remains behind in the Underworld, secure from ghostly invasion and containing all the objects previous owners have created, acquired in the Underworld or brought from the mortal world. If desired, the wearer can transport others into or out of the Underworld simply by touching them and spending 1 additional point of Mana for each individual he wishes to bring along.

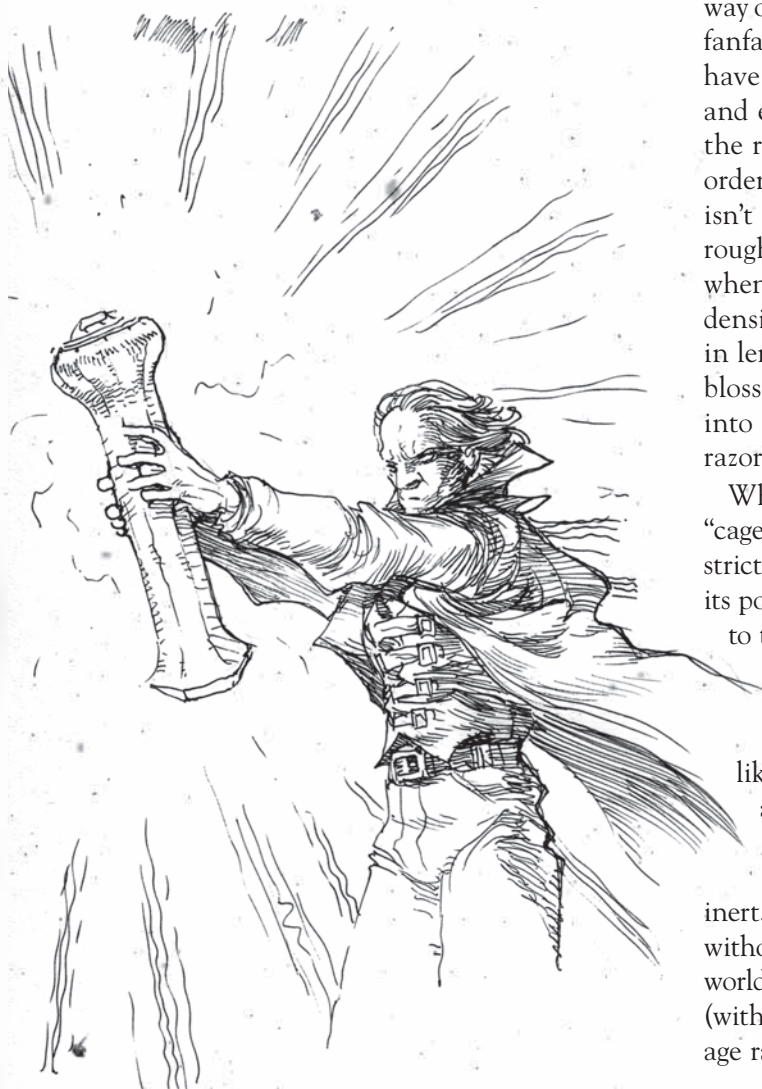
Liar's Mask (Artifact ●●●●●●●●)

Durability 5, Size 1, Structure 6

Mana Capacity: Maximum 11

Every ruler must, at some point, be a liar; though some lies are less harmful than others, a rare few lies harm no one at all, and do only good. Certainly, several of the théarchs who have, at one point or another, held this Artifact feel its power is a lie of the latter sort. The Liar's Mask covers the entire face (though it need not be worn thus to be used), and its serene, androgynous expression is rendered in some manner of mirrored metal, shot through with thin veins of a deep, matte crimson.

When a willworker whispers his real name over or into the Liar's Mask, the Artifact creates an almost exact duplicate of him (as a Prime 5 "Complex Phantasm" spell) as a contingent effect. This replica is directly controlled by the mage's will, but doing so requires full concentration — the duplicate collapses,



inert, otherwise. The mage may mentally command the phantasm to leave his presence and he remains attuned to its senses by way of a sympathetic link. This replica can be used to do most anything the willworker himself would do, though most Ladder mages who have held the Liar's Mask in the past used it as a body double for dangerous (or even potentially dangerous) situations. The Artifact's present whereabouts are, unfortunately, unknown.

Opener of Ways (Artifact ●●●●●●●●)

Durability 6, Size 2, Structure 8

Mana Capacity: Maximum 13

This wondrous and terrifying Artifact has been utilized only sparingly by the Silver Ladder for centuries, as its incautious use easily leads mages astray from the path of Wisdom. Once a generation, it is moved between Consilii under heavy guard — by way of mundane transportation and utterly without fanfare (often in the hands of a cabal whose members have no idea what it is, exactly, they're carrying) — and entrusted to one or more local théarchs with the resources necessary to keep it safe against the order's enemies. Interestingly, the Opener of Ways isn't much to look at: a rod of what appears to be rough and rusted iron (but of a substance that, when held, is clearly of an unnatural hardness and density), hexagonal and approximately 30 inches in length, flaring out very slightly at one end, and blossoming out and opening up at the other end into what appears to be something like a small razorwire cage.

When a Mastigos soul stone is placed within the "cage" at the end of the Opener of Ways (which constricts to hold the stone fast and relaxes to release it), its powers become active. The Artifact may be used to teleport anywhere the mage wishes as a contingent effect — even into (or from) Twilight or Shadow — *without Paradox*. The soul stone fitted into the Opener of Ways acts something like a Demesne, protecting its wielder from the ravages of any Paradox that would normally result from the Artifact's powers. If the soul stone is removed, the Opener of Ways again becomes inert. It may also be used to teleport others, with or without their consent, to anywhere in the material world, Twilight or Shadow. If wielded as a weapon (with or without soul stone), the Artifact has a damage rating of 3L. Needless to say, the careless use of

this item may easily lead to hubris and degeneration under the best of circumstances.

Ring of the Unvoiced Herald (Artifact ●●●●●●●●●●)

Durability 4, Size 1, Structure 5

Mana Capacity: 11

The origin of this Artifact is unknown. It was found nearly a century ago in the ruins of an ancient mountain temple first mentioned in a passage in the mysterious *Book of Transformation* (detailed in **Grimoire of Grimoires**). The Artifact is a ring made of a silvery green metal large and carved with images of unknown plants and animals. The metal is an alloy of titanium and some exotic green element. In the ring is set a faintly glowing greenish golden sphere the size of a child's marble. This stone glows with light sufficient for the wearer to see to a range of 5 meters even in complete darkness. In addition, almost no one can attack the wearer. The ring provides the wearer a persistent and improved version of the "Diplomat's Protection" spell (p. 200).

There are only two ways someone can attack the wearer. If the attacker has a higher Gnosis or other similarly functioning Trait (such as Blood Potency or Primal Urge) than that of the ring's wearer, she can attack the wearer. In addition, if the wearer attacks someone (either physically or magically), the victim of the attack can attack the wearer. However, the victim's friends and allies cannot attack the wearer unless they are also attacked by the wearer. In addition, the stone makes all attacks on the wearer more difficult than usual, as attackers must struggle to overcome their awe and reluctance to attack. The wearer gains the benefit of 3 points of Armor against all attacks by beings that are not wholly mindless. However, attacks by ordinary automatic machines and mindless creatures are unaffected by this Artifact.

Seat of Kings (Artifact ●●●●●●●●●●)

Durability 4, Size 5, Structure 9

Mana Capacity: Maximum 11

The Silver Ladder wrested this Artifact out of the possession of the Seers of the Throne over two hundred years ago. The pylon that was in control of the Seat of Kings used the Artifact to maintain a stranglehold on several Sleeper cults through the superhuman powers of persuasion it bestowed upon its owners. The Artifact takes the form of a

rather large, though plain, throne, carved out of what appears to be a single piece of an unidentifiable silver-white wood and engraved with elaborate sigils in the High Speech unknown to modern Awakened. Presently, this precious — and dangerous — object is believed to be part of a private collection of antiquities held in trust by a small consortium of théarchs in or around Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

When a willworker sits in the Seat of Kings, the Artifact bolsters her Presence and Manipulation, as per the Mind 4 "Supreme Augmentation" spell. This contingent effect lasts only so long as the mage remains seated. Further, it automatically nullifies any other effects bolstering the character's Presence and/or Manipulation Attributes, and such effects may not be activated for so long as the mage sits upon the Seat of Kings.

Shadow and Silence (Artifact ●●●●●●●●●●)

Durability 5, Size 0, Structure 5

Mana Capacity: Maximum 12

This potent Artifact takes the shape of a ring woven of two slender strands of metal — one the whitish color of platinum and the other a mirrored, iridescent black metal of unknown origin — apparently without seam or other evidence of having been fitted together. Regardless of who tries to put the ring on, it always somehow fits on at least one of the wearer's fingers. The Artifact was discovered nearly a century ago by a cabal completely comprised of théarchs who coveted its power. The ring traded hands (via Duels Arcane, mostly) for years, until the cabal finally broke up and its members scattered to different Consilii. Still, challenges would occasionally be made from distant shores and accepted, and the ring would pass from one Ladder mage to another, a feud handed down to most of the apprentices of the original discoverers of Shadow and Silence. The "tradition" likely continues to this day, making the ring's whereabouts a matter of anyone's guess.

Shadow and Silence's wielder may, at will, gesture with the hand upon which the Artifact is worn to use the Death 5 spell "Quell the Spark" as a contingent effect (either for an individual or an area), with a Fate 2 target exemption, if so desired.

Imbued Items

Mulligan's Widget (Imbued Item ●●●)

Durability 2, Size 0, Structure 2

Mana Capacity: None

In golf, “mulligan” is a term used to describe a do-over, a second chance to compensate for a flawed action. Of course, Awakened life doesn't offer opportunities for many of those; especially not the demanding life of a théarch. Thus these clever little creations are carried by a number of mages in the Silver Ladder, enabling them to quickly and efficiently cover up their mistakes by correcting them before they ever happen. Usually incorporated into something small and innocuous like a metal pen, a silver dollar or a lapel pin, a Mulligan's Widget enables its owner to make use of the Time 2 spell “Glimpsing the Future” as a contingent effect, simply by fiddling with the item. A charismatic speaker might tap his pen on a desk while giving orders to other members of the Consilium, while a leader in the field idly thumbs her lucky coin before laying out the final step of the plan. Rumors exist of more potent Mulligan's Widgets incorporating the Time 3 version of “Glimpsing the Future.”

Plausible Deniability (Imbued Item ●●●●)

Durability 2, Size 0, Structure 2

Mana Capacity: None

Sometimes, it's better for a leader *not* to have all the facts. When unwelcome knowledge is unavoidable, however (whether on account of a mage's own actions or not), it pays to be able to strike a given memory from the record, so to speak. These Imbued Items come in a variety of shapes — commonly small pieces of jewelry: rings, necklaces, tie tacks, wristwatches, earrings, and the like — and create for their owners a persistent Mind 2 “Memory Hole” effect when worn or otherwise carried on the person, allowing a willworker to ward a single, specific memory against recall.

Puppet's Barble (Imbued Item ●●●●●●●●●●)

Durability 2, Size 1, Structure 3

Mana Capacity: None

This item consists of a pair of rings or bracelets, a matching set of wristwatches or any other pair of

small and identical items designed to be regularly worn. One of these items must be worn by the target the mage wishes to control, the other by the mage. As long as he wears the item, the target is automatically affected by the Mind 4 spell “Telepathic Control,” under the control of the wearer of the other item. In addition, the target is also under the influence of a version of the Mind 2 spell “Emotional Urgings” that continually makes the target feel any actions she takes while under telepathic control are both reasonable and like her own decisions. In addition, the mage gains the ability to use the Mind 3 spell “Telepathy” to both observe the target's thoughts and to receive all sensory impressions the target is receiving. Finally, the mage is also subject to a version of the Mind 3 spell “Multi-tasking” that allows her to act normally while simultaneously keeping track of the thoughts and actions of the target and controlling the target whenever desired.

The mage can control the target, regardless of how far away the two of them are from one another. In addition, this control continues for as long as the mage and target both wear the item. Since almost all mages order the people they control to never remove the item, this control can be maintained for a very long time. Although this is difficult to create, it is relatively popular with powerful mages who are interested in working behind the scenes in mortal politics. Using this item, the mage can easily and discretely control someone for months or years.

Supernal Wardrobe (Imbued Item ●●●●●●●●)

Durability 1, Size 3, Structure 4

Mana Capacity: None

When acting under the auspices of his Sleeper alias, Vittorio D'Arco, the Necromancer théarch known by the Shadow Name of Tessitore (“Weaver”), is a man of high fashion, a well-respected designer and popular jetsetter. In his Awakened life, he's essentially the same, though he tends to reserve his very best creations for his friends in the Silver Ladder. The Supernal Wardrobe is, in its unmodified form, a simple full-body jumpsuit of extremely fine silk, complete with an attached pair of slippers made of the same. When donned, the wearer may simply specify aloud a particular outfit she wishes to wear and the substance of the cloth transforms instantly with a Matter 4 effect to become exactly the sort of clothing she desires, a fine garment for those



who must occasionally find ways to fit into many and varied sorts of crowds on short notice. Naturally, Tessitore's design has been replicated by others... but, the Moros asserts, never equaled.

Talisman of Universal Safety (Imbued Item ●●●●●●●●)

Durability 3, Size 1, Structure 4

Mana Capacity: 12

As the saying goes, uneasy lies the head that wears a crown, and one of the reasons important mages worry is the threat of attack, both from enemies like the Seers of the Throne and from rivals within their own orders. This talisman is typically made in the form of a wristwatch, ring or other small personal item the owner can easily carry anywhere. The item provides a persistent version of both the Mind 3 spell "Diplomat's Protection" (see p. 200) and the Prime 2 spell "Magic

Shield;" in addition, it contains a Mana pool that automatically powers the "Magic Shield." This item is exceedingly popular with mages in positions of power since it helps them avoid physical attack and to be protected against hostile magic. In addition, some members of the Silver Ladder provide these items to important mortals they consider useful for their plans.

Universal ID (Imbued Item ●●●●●●●●)

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2

Mana Capacity: None

This item can transform itself into a wide variety of identity documents, including driver's licenses, police or FBI IDs, passports or even credit cards. In addition, the user can place this item on top of another ID card or similarly sized object and permanently transform it into a different ID card of the mage's choice. This second ability allows the user access to multiple forms of identification at once.

In addition to duplicating a limited version of the Matter 3 spell "Plasticity," this item contains two other enchantments that work with that spell. The first is a version of the Mind 3 spell "Imposter" that convinces anyone looking at the card both that it is valid and that the holder is who he claims to be. In addition, this item contains a version of the Forces 3 spell "Control Electricity" that allows the item to function as electronic ID, a key to electronic card locks and a credit card. When used as a credit card, the item automatically fools the electronic verification process and does not identify the user or place charges on his account. However, to avoid drawing too much attention, it cannot be used to make purchases with a value higher than either several Resources ●● or a single Resources ●●● purchase during a single day. Alternately, if the user desires, the card can instead withdraw money from his own account or from any other account to which he has access, regardless of the name or number on the card.

Universal Outfit (Imbued Item ●●●●●●●●, ●●●●●●●● or ●●●●●●●●)

Durability 1-2, Size 1-2, Structure 3

Mana Capacity: None

Mages with an interest in respect and social status always need to be able to dress for the occasion, and

this item allows them to do so. Typically made in the form of either a small worn item like a ring or wristwatch or some piece of close-fitting clothing, the universal outfit is enchanted with a persistent version of the Prime 3 spell “Phantasm” that allows it to create any imaginable suit of clothing. Any clothing created by this item fits the wearer perfectly and remains indefinitely unless the wearer either removes the imbued item or the clothing is magically dispelled. The user can instantly change the form of the clothing simply by taking one turn to concentrate on the desired changes to the clothing and making an Intelligence + Crafts roll. Because this item is persistent, this change requires no Mana to be spent and the roll merely determines how much the clothing is like what the wearer wanted to create. Every change counts as a vulgar effect, but with two dice subtracted from the Paradox roll, since this item counts as using a rote and using this item also counts as using a magical tool.

In an instant, the wearer can go from sporting a brightly colored ball gown to a black jumpsuit suitable for sneaking around dimly lit corridors or to a

full military dress uniform, complete with medals and insignia. This item can create comfortable, weather appropriate clothing from bathing suits to cold weather gear, but it cannot create armor, fire-protective clothing or similar sorts of protective gear. In addition, clothing made by this item is no more durable than any of ordinary cloth.

There are also enhanced versions of this item that cost 1 dot more and use a persistent version of the Prime 4 “Phantasmal Weapon” spell, which is capable of creating everything from a firefighter’s protective gear to military grade body armor to a fine three-piece suit. These items all have 4 points of Durability and can provide up to 4 points of bulletproof Armor against all attacks. Armor with a rating of 3 or higher has a Defense penalty of -1, and Armor with a rating of 4 also has a Speed penalty of -1. There is also a 7 dot version of this item that duplicates the Prime 5 “Create Complex Phantasm” spell that can also create specialized clothing like an NBC suit (*Armory*, pp. 170-171) that provides a +5 bonus against all inhaled or contact toxins, a set of scuba gear complete with full air tanks or even a functional spacesuit.

APPENDIX: ALLIES AND ANTAGONISTS

Those outside the Silver Ladder often picture the “stereotypical” member of this order as an arrogant, self-righteous prig who expects to rule those around him by virtue of his order affiliation. While there is certainly a kernel of truth to this characterization, it is a vast oversimplification, and the majority of Silver Ladder mages are much more complex than this personification would suggest. From “humble” advisors and dedicated scholars to self-help professionals and fanatical enforcers, the Silver Ladder is a highly diverse and wide-ranging order.

While the order attempts to present itself as a unified front to other Awakened, it is, like any other order, a group of individuals, and theoretical common goals do not always override individual viewpoints and motivations.

The following archetypal characters are offered as suggestions to Storytellers as a foundation for the types of individuals who may be associated with the Silver Ladder, or Silver Ladder théarchs themselves.

Non-Combatants

Claviger Emissary

Quote: *Of course there is a place for your people in the grand scheme of things. However, that necessitates you not getting in our way at this point in the game.*

Background: The Claviger Emissary originally used the outdoors as a means of escape from situations at home with which she was powerless to deal in any other way. Eventually the wilderness became the goal, not just a method of avoiding other things.

Her Awakening was a result of her first (but not her last) interaction with some of the wild creatures who called those same pristine places their home. Now, as a Claviger, she has official sanction by her order to walk the wildernesses, so long as she helps gather information and keep the peace between the Awakened and the supernatural beings who claim the wild places as their territory.

Description: She prefers comfortable and durable handmade clothing that stands up well to a variety of climes and conditions – leather boots, wool pants, woven silk shirts and the like. She also wears or carries with her a variety of tokens, from small stones bound in a leather thong to bones, fur and feathers. Whether these are decoration, burdens from spirit transactions or tokens of esteem from wild things, she does not say. Her nimbus is the scent of fresh breezes touched with the gurgle of swiftly moving water.

Storytelling Hints: Some members of the Silver Ladder claim the Claviger Emissary prefers her feral associates to members of her own kind. The Claviger declines to answer directly, noting only that she serves her order’s interests well by going places few others would and ensuring those who might otherwise stand in the way of the order’s plans are placated into cooperation.

Path: Thyrsus

Abilities:

Spirit Negotiator (dice pool 9) — Not all Clavigers have the skill to negotiate not only with corporal beings but with spirits and ghosts. This particular emissary is quite persuasive when dealing with those of a non-tangible existence.

Sense the Land (dice pool 7) — Walking the wilderness (and a strong sense of Life) gives the Claviger Emissary the ability to determine at a glance whether or not a particular area is “healthy.”

Conspiracy Theorist

Quote: *It's all very clear if you're willing to accept the possibility. Until then, of course, there's no way you can see it.*

Background: For almost 40 years, he saw conspiracy in everything around him. Upon his Awakening, the Conspiracy Theorist discovered that even the theories humanity had woven to explain the unexplainable were part of the über-conspiracy no Sleeper could truly understand — the Lie. When the Silver Ladder invited him into the Cryptopoly, he enthusiastically accepted the chance to fight fire with fire.

Description: The Conspiracy Theorist is a skinny man who, although he has aged very little in the 30 years since Awakening, still bears the weight of his



50+ years of life as a Sleeper. He wears thick glasses, as much an affectation and habit as a vision tool, peering through them with a pointed air of skepticism. His nimbus surrounds him with the quiet susurrus of conspiracy.

Storytelling Hints: The Lie does not affect only Sleepers. Mages who are not wary can be caught in its throes as well, and the Conspiracy Theorist is constantly alert for that possibility. He spends the majority of his time seeking out the true causes behind situations of import to the Silver Ladder, serving as a ferret-like watchdog against Seer and Exarch conspiracies that might otherwise harm the order's interests. His time spent navigating the Cryptopoly has only aided his ability to know what to look for.

Path: Obrimos

Abilities:

Encyclopedic Knowledge (dice pool 10) — It is often in the tiny details that the truth (or falsehood) of a situation reveals itself. The Conspiracy Theorist's inherent knack for remembering factoids virtually ensures he's capable of dredging up the minutest facets of a given situation, even long after it has passed.

Tap Records (dice pool 8) — Over the years, the Conspiracy Theorist has made contacts and connections throughout the world, both among theorists such as himself and among those who prove useful to them — hackers, phone operators, wire-tap experts, archivists, journalists, video documentarists and the like. There's a good chance that, if there are any witnesses to a given act, Novus can get his hands on someone who knows someone who knows what happened.

Fanatical Factotum

Quote: *I think you'll see, Honorable Counselor, that the preponderance of evidence is clearly weighing against the defendant. If you will allow me to reference Alexander versus Salome, circa 1968...*

Background: There's one in every crowd. The statistic quoter. The rules lawyer. The nitpicker. Fortunately for the Fanatical Factotum, there's not only a place for such individuals within the Silver Ladder, there's an entire role within the order for them. The Factotum was well on his way to a career in corporate law when he Awakened. He quickly proved himself an exceptional Acolyte and aced the factotum exam in record time, taking his place among other théarchs who will dedicate precious time and energy to arguing cases before lictors and the Ruling Council.

Description: The Factotum's wardrobe and personal accoutrements are fastidious, if not fashionable. He prefers to wear his robes of office when appropriate, and since his Awakening has grown his hair out into a carefully appointed plait, much reminiscent of historic London's magisterial wigs. His nimbus manifests in a clarity for the minute details of any situation, leaving those around him frequently picking at previously unnoticed specks of lint or dust which suddenly have become apparent and annoying.

Storytelling Hints: The Fanatical Factotum painstakingly researches every detail of any case he takes part in, preparing copious contingency plans to cover any possible direction the examination may turn. He is not a personable man, but he is amazingly efficient and has an almost perfect case record. Unfortunately, he rarely sees the bigger picture or takes hints from his superiors in terms of which cases might be more expedient for the order for him to let slide rather than pursue vehemently. Because of this, he is used by the order much like a piece of powerful artillery — carefully targeted and then let to run his course to its natural conclusion.

Path: Mastigos

Abilities:

Research (dice pool 10) — By fine-tuning his own Mind, the Factotum's research abilities take on superhuman acuity. He gets an additional die if the research topic is Lex Magica, and another when he has access to his own library.

Correspondence (dice pool 6) — While he prefers hard, cold facts, the Factotum also understands some situations require intuitive jumps of logic (which can then be fortified with carefully researched precedents). Correspondence allows him to glean context for his premises, a valuable skill in the courtroom.

Guidance Counselor

Quote: *An entire future of possibilities lies before you. What are you going to do with it?*

Background: For more than three decades, she has been serving her city's school district as a specialty guidance counselor, called in to help with especially challenging situations. She's consulted with children who are, or are the victims of, physical, sexual and mental abusers, drug dealers and addicts, alcoholics, prostitutes, teen parents, suspected suicide risks and those who have lost family members to accidents, murder or worse. She keeps an eye out for those whose

challenges may stem from interactions with the supernatural world, and has been the first point of contact for many in her area who Awakened in their teens.

Description: The Guidance Counselor has a maternal air to her; she favors simple skirts and dress jackets accented with dramatic pieces of jewelry, both while on the job and off. A few strands of silver adorn her hair, lending a gentle air of age and authority to her visage.

Storytelling Hints: The Guidance Counselor has years of experience in dealing with troubled and recalcitrant youth. Her obviously caring nature and no-nonsense demeanor make her a particularly adept advisor and advocate for those in their teens and early 20s. She will go out of her way to protect and aid any youth, but prefers to teach them how to think for and protect themselves.

Path: Acanthus

Abilities:

Access Records (dice pool 7) — The Guidance Counselor's experience with local schools and juvenile services (as well as a bit of creative computer magic) has earned her unusual levels of access to local, regional and national computer databases. She can pull up academic, criminal or medical (including mental health) records on almost any youth, or youth records for adults.

Backward Glance (dice pool 9) — Whether it's used to determine she's being lied to, or to help a victim who has suppressed memories, the Guidance Counselor finds it's often helpful to be able to look back and see what happened in a particular situation some time in the past.

Political Lobbyist

Quote: *I think we can throw our backing behind that bill... if you can lend us your support on this other matter.*

Background: The Political Lobbyist grew up in a family that had felt first-hand the power political leaders wield. His great grandmother had been a slave in Alabama before being freed by the Emancipation Proclamation, and his grandfather regularly told the story of the first time he (and other African Americans) were given the right to vote. There was no doubt in the Lobbyist's mind that he was going to be a politician; he was giving acceptance speeches and trying to get the other kids to engage in political debate before he'd entered junior high. Unlike many of his peers, however, he never lost his idealism or his belief

that within the democratic system lies the tools for an empowered system of leadership by the people, of the people and for the people.

Description: The Political Lobbyist is slim and carries himself with a vibrancy that infects those around him. He's quick-witted and as adept at making pointed jests to get his point across as he is at thoughtful debate. A tall man, he seems to go out of his way to avoid looming or intimidating others with his physical presence — his emotional intensity and sharp intellect, on the other hand, are fair weapons. The Lobbyist is just as comfortable in sweats and a t-shirt as in a three-piece suit, and regardless of what he's wearing, he looks as if his clothing was tailor-made for him.

His nimbus is intense and those who interact with him are left with the feeling that even if they disagree with what he's saying, every word from his lips is sincere and genuine.

Storytelling Hints: The Political Lobbyist lobbies in Sleeper politics for causes that will serve not only to foster and better conditions for humanity in general, but especially those that hold the potential to allow the most aspiring to catapult out of the Lie-shackled situations into which they were born and to achieve as much of their full potential as possible. Realizing that hunger, illness, crime and abject poverty often preclude Sleepers from seeing beyond survival issues, he is an advocate of free meals for schoolchildren, work and training programs for the underprivileged and the expansion of education beyond the basic 3 Rs for those of all ages, income levels and socio-cultural backgrounds.

Within Awakened society, he's sometimes teased for coddling his "pet Sleepers," but he holds strong to the idea that only with a strong foundation beneath their feet can people truly reach the heights of which they are capable.

Path: Obrimos

Abilities:

Sway Votes (dice pool 8) — Taylor's allies in state government can be brought to bear on any legal issue he deems vital to "the cause." An additional die is added to the pool for issues related to children, education or underprivileged families.

Fitful Sleep (dice pool 9) — Sometimes getting a glimpse of the magical potential beyond the Lie is enough to inspire a soul who might have otherwise been lost to mundanity forever. Taylor's reputation for discretion has earned him a bit of leeway when

using this spell with which he sometimes shares the Mysteries with those who seem to have the potential to appreciate such things — or even to Awaken.

Progressive Rabbi

Quote: *God doesn't want us to be sheep. He gave us potential, and it is a sin not to use it.*

Background: The Progressive Rabbi grew up in a home that had long since lost any sense of heritage or connection to its Jewish roots. While "looking for herself" in college, she stumbled across a largely defunct Jewish student group and immediately felt as if she had come home. Under her thoughtful ministrations, the group grew to one of the largest and most active on campus, and she changed majors to comparative religion and, after graduating, entered a progressive Jewish seminary where she spent another several years studying. On her year-long pilgrimage to Israel, she Awakened. The combination of her newly Awakened perspective and her previous views on Judaism and its role in humanity's future led her to a progressive (and decidedly unorthodox) path that blends her religious heritage and Awakened Path into an outlook the Silver Ladder immediately recognized as resonating with its own.

Description: The Progressive Rabbi has gentle features and mild mannerisms that decry her unflagging devotion to her faith and to her order's cause. She dresses in a practical manner, preferring dark colors and comfortable clothing over fashion sacrifices such as high heels and pantyhose. Her inner beauty, however, glows brightly regardless of how little time she spends on outer affectations. The Rabbi's nimbus glows, figuratively and literally. Her voice carries a warmth and light that encompasses those who hear it in an aura of acceptance and protection. When working magic, this manifests as a palpable golden glow emanating from her person and warming those in the surrounding areas with a reassuring, gentle touch.

Storytelling Hints: The Progressive Rabbi walks a thin line within the order, merging a faith many Awakened see as a facet of the Lie, heretical to the Invisible Truth. Those who take the time to listen to her philosophies, however, often see she is no Stag-bound follower of a Lie-shackled religion, but instead has woven the strength and glory of a centuries-old faith and culture with the weft of Truth, creating a seamless whole that encourages humans, Sleepers or Awakened, that it is their right, privilege and duty to become all they can. In her views, to do anything less than fulfilling humanity's destiny is a sin against

the godhead (which is no elderly man in a robe, but rather the wholeness of the Mysteries as embodied by all human potential).

The Progressive Rabbi serves not only as missionary to those who are capable of understanding her views, but also as counselor, protector, comforter, therapist and community leader. Not all the members of her congregation wholly understand or accept her “progressive” views, but her good works speak for themselves, and the strange rabbi is not only welcomed but loved by those who know her. She hopes through her actions she keeps the potential for her community members to evolve to a state wherein they can see the Truth not only within her words, but in themselves.

Path: Thyrsus

Abilities:

Banish Plague/Healing Heart (dice pool 9) — Among the other roles she performs in her community, Sara is often called upon to pray at the bedsides of the ill, injured and infirm. Knowing a life lost to cancer or car accident is one that cannot go on to fulfill its potential, she discretely aids in healing those she can. Her patients heal 1 point of lethal wounds per success. Curing diseases requires varying levels of successes (3 for a cold, up to 10 or more for Ebola or the like).

Inspiration (dice pool 7) — The path of faith is often a long and arduous one, and those who turn to Sara for advice are often in desperate need of bolstering. Once per game session, Sara can inspire those in her company, allowing them to regain their Willpower at a rate of 1 point per success.

Self-Help Guru

Quote: *The power to change your situation rests entirely within you.*

Background: The Self-Help Guru grew up in horrific conditions. Both parents were drug addicts who spent more time fighting than raising him, and during the numerous “break-up” periods in which one or the other left the household during a separation, the remaining parent inevitably brought in “uncles” or “aunts” who were even worse influences. Despite the meth and the booze, the beatings and the neglect, he managed to pull straight As in school, and his situation (and hard work) were noticed by a member of the Silver Ladder who worked in the school system (see High School Guidance Counselor). In his third-hand clothes and too-small shoes, he sat in the counselor’s office and applied for scholarships that allowed him to escape his one-horse town and go on to college. He studied

psychology, Awakened, and eventually wrote what would become a best-selling self-help novel “Beyond the Abyss,” in which he uses barely-veiled references to Awakening as a symbol of a true human super-potential everyone can achieve.

The Guru’s Awakening unlocked in him what he believes is a potential every human being can achieve. He credits his mentor’s aid in seeing his potential and helping him to achieve it, and is dedicated to spreading that message to all who are willing and ready to hear it.

Description: The Self-Help Guru is a PR agent’s dream, with impeccable hair, flawless skin and a brilliant white smile. He dresses as if he’s conducting an on-the-air interview at all times, in three-piece suits, pressed shirts, power ties and mirror-shined shoes. His hair is always impeccably cut and styled, and even when angered he maintains a winning smile. His nimbus manifests as an aura of self-confidence contagious to those around him.

Storytelling Hints: The Self-Help Guru believes every human being has the potential to Awaken, although few are willing to claim that fate for themselves. He sees his own role as helping to reach those who are willing, but who need encouragement to achieve their full potential. He hopes, by spreading the word with his book and various self-help conferences, to reach more of those who are seeking and only need a little hand-up to fully Awaken.

Path: Mastigos

Abilities:

Opening Mental Doors (dice pool 10) — The Self-Help Guru has the capacity to bring out others’ hidden potential. He can raise a target character’s Mental or Social attributes by a number of dots equal to the number of successes he achieves on this roll, up to a maximum of 4 extra dots. These effects last for 1 scene.

Publishing Contacts (dice pool 8) — The Guru’s success as a self-help author has given him access to significant contacts in the publishing industry. He is likely to know someone (or know someone who knows someone) from whom to pull favors in most aspects of the publishing industry, from writing, editing and research to publishing and marketing.

Spiritual Guide

Quote: *I really sense some clogging in your upper chakras. Have you considered qi gong, or reiki? I really think you might be blocking your true potential.*

Background: The Spiritual Guide dabbled in all the latest cultural fads, from raw foods to sweat lodges and everything between. Because she Awakened while experimenting with intense “energy work,” she believes it holds the key to Awakening humanity’s potential as well. She’s still an apprentice as far as actual magical theory goes, but her intuition is serving her well so far.

Description: The Spiritual Guide’s wardrobe is a cacophony of color, and her makeup, jewelry and hair tones change drastically from day to day, depending upon her mood. She’s been seen in everything from goth black and heavy kohl eyeliner to rainbow patterned broomstick skirts and antique Japanese silk shawls, and the only constant where her looks are concerned is that she always makes a strong impression upon those she encounters. Her nimbus manifests as ethereal wispy lines of energy that reach out and interconnect with everyone with whom she interacts, uniting them in a barely-perceptible web.

Storytelling Hints: While some members of the order find the Spiritual Guide’s views a bit “flaky,” there’s no denying her track record. She’s identified and mentored an astounding number of Sleepers through their Awakening, so many that other orders have occasionally wondered whether she’s developed a method of actually triggering Awakening rather than just waiting and hoping it will happen. The Spiritual Guide claims no such power, but stands firm in her belief that any Sleeper can Awaken; it requires only that he find the right access to his inner potential.

Path: Acanthus

Abilities:

Forge Destiny (dice pool 9 vs. reflexive Resolve + Gnosis) — While no known power can ensure a Sleeper will Awaken, anything short of that fate is fair game to those who can manipulate the threads of Fate. Farzana’s teachings of positive affirmations, visualization and other empowerment techniques carry the weight of her Mastery of Fate along with them.

Prophecy (dice pool 8 - Destiny) — Even a glimpse of possible futures aids one in knowing how to help people attain their full potential. With the use of this Time spell, Farzana often gets a glimpse of how her actions can affect others in the future, and uses that to guide them into greatness.

Théarch Mediator

Quote: Of course you have a right to trial by the Ruling Council. Of course, the Moros Counselor owes the

aggrieved a major favor and rumor has it the Acanthus Counselor’s mentor is still smarting over the insult you paid her last year. Perhaps settling this matter out of Council would be in everyone’s best interest.

Background: Born the middle child of a large and rowdy family, the Théarch Mediator quickly developed a knack for understanding the subtle and overt motivations and desires of those around him. He grew to excel at using those skills to achieve his own goals. His distaste for pointless conflict led him, upon his induction into the Silver Ladder, to put his talents to use smoothing out squabbles between the orders.

Description: To call the Mediator simpering would be an unkindness. He may be retiring, even deferential, but beneath the seemingly pliable mannerisms lies a spine of hardened steel. The Théarch Mediator’s visage has been compared to that of a serpent, and much like a snake, he knows just when to strike for full advantage. His nimbus gives the impression he is striking a submissive stance no matter what is his actual body position.

Storytelling Hints: The Théarch Mediator doesn’t like to pick sides. He prefers to remain as emotionally neutral as he is compelled to remain ethically neutral. Of course, he comports himself as sympathetic to both sides in a dispute, and perhaps just a bit more so when it’s “just between you and me.”

Path: Mastigos

Abilities:

Glean Motive (dice pool 9) — With a moment’s observation or a short conversation, the Mediator can garner an individual’s primary motive or goal in a given situation.

Interconnections (dice pool 8) — By merely watching, the Mediator can determine a great deal about the inter-relationships between various individuals, a valuable tactic in negotiations.

Negotiator (dice pool 9 vs. Composure + Gnosis) — With clever words and emotional manipulation, the Théarch Mediator can bargain almost anyone into an agreement. Better yet, he can usually convince all parties the situation is win-win.

Transhumanist

Quote: They say humans utilize only 10% of their mind’s true potential. The real story is we just use 10% at any given time. Now think about what we can accomplish if we can just get at that other 90% all at the same time.

Background: Some théarchs believe it is humanity’s supernatural destiny to Awaken and shake off

the shackles of the Lie. The Transhumanist believed humanity's destiny lay beyond its current state long before he Awakened, and he experimented extensively with herbs, chemicals, body modification and altered states of consciousness in order to attempt to achieve it. An avid proponent of the Transhuman movement, he now sees Awakening as the missing key to unlock the puzzle of humanity's post-human destiny.

Description: The Transhumanist is a handsome man with dreadlocks that reach past his waist. His body shows signs of extensive body-modification work: scarification, symbolic tattoos, subcutaneous implants and permanent jewelry. His nimbus is a heightened sense of energy in his general area, which fades quickly after he departs.

Storytelling Hints: The Transhumanist has always sought answers that seemed to lie just beyond his grasp. Now he has the ability to gather the wisdom of those who have gone before him, a source that has become an obsession. He *knows* somewhere in the secrets lost in the past lies the one that will allow all Sleepers to Awaken with ease. It is just a matter of finding the right combination of substances and procedures to do so. To this end, he has dedicated himself to interviewing dead Awakened souls in hopes that somewhere in the course of his research he will discover the key components that will ease future generations into Awakening (and attaining their post-human potential).

Path: Moros

Abilities:

Interview the Dead (dice pool 10) — The Transhumanist prefers to deal with the dead in a positive manner if possible, calling them forth to ask questions of them and trading favors for information.

Restore Corpus (dice pool 11) — Healing the dead is one of the favors the Transhumanist exchanges for information. It can also be useful when his no-longer-living allies are in danger, allowing them to continue aiding him for a while longer.

Combatants

The following characters are examples of those among the Silver Ladder who are most likely to be involved in dangerous behavior or who might be spurred into violent altercations. All can be used as either allies or antagonists for players' characters, depending upon the Storyteller's needs and the characters' actions and goals.

Baron Steele

Quote: *No problem. I've got it handled.*

Background: Baron learned early to use whatever tools he had at his avail. His size was one. Another was his utter willingness to do whatever needed to be done to ensure others left him alone — no matter how dangerous, disgusting or morally depraved. Awakening (and being recruited by the Silver Ladder) was just one more situation with which to be dealt, and magic just another tool. Baron Steele now specializes in doing what the order needs done, especially jobs at which others would pale. In exchange, the Silver Ladder gives him sanctuary where none (save for them) will bother him between jobs.

Description: At nearly 7' tall, Baron is a mountain of a man, and his silent glower only reinforces the "don't mess with me" attitude that surrounds him. He's clean shaven, and wears his jet black hair in a barely-there cut that is only a shade darker than his skin. Baron normally wears custom-made leathers: boots (steel-toed), pants, jacket and fingerless gloves, with dark reflective glasses. His nimbus makes him appear even taller than his already gigantic height.

Storytelling Hints: Baron has been a Silver Ladder Acolyte for more than a decade, and is unlikely to progress further in the order than that. That is not to say, however, that he is not valued or important to those who do have higher rank and Status among the théarchs. He is quite efficient and those he serves value his discretion and dedication as greatly as they do his powerful skill with magic. He is simply, however, not suited to roles with greater responsibility, nor is he inclined toward positions wherein he is forced to accept compromise or submission as preferable. It's uncertain whether he'll develop to the point at which he has a place in an Awakened society where a "cleaner" is no longer needed. At the moment, he's more an asset than a liability. At the moment.

Dedicated Magic Tool: Ox's Thighbone, sometimes used as a club (Death)

Real Name: Josiah Bakerfield

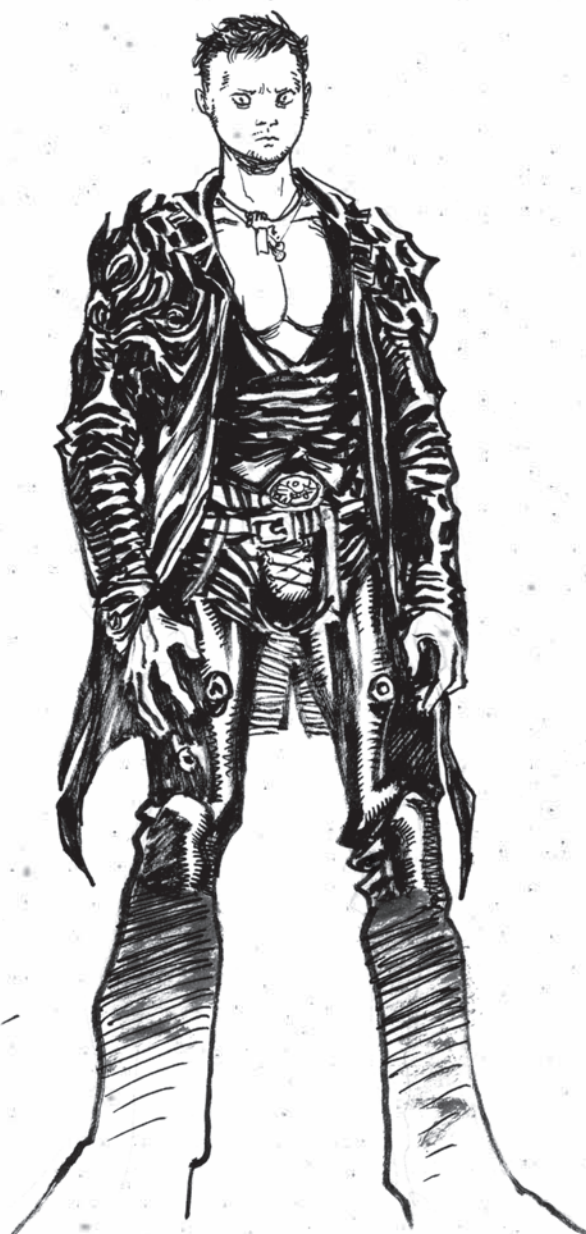
Path: Moros

Order: Silver Ladder

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 2, Composure 4



Mental Skills: Academics 2, Investigation 2, Medicine (Anatomy) 1, Occult (Practical Magic Applications) 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 5, Drive 2, Firearms 4, Larceny 2, Stealth 3, Survival (Urban) 3, Weaponry (Club) 4

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Intimidation 5, Persuasion (Overt Threats) 3, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Fighting Style: Boxing 5, Giant, Order Status (Silver Ladder) 1

Willpower: 7

Wisdom: 3

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Sloth

Initiative: 7

Defense: 3

Speed: 13

Health: 10

Gnosis: 5

Arcana: Death 3, Matter 3

Notes: *Death* — Forensic Gaze (•), Corpse Mask (••), Decay (••), Entropic Guard (••), Touch of the Grave (••), Destroy Object (•••); *Matter* — Find the Hidden Hoard (•), Alter Accuracy (••), Unseen Aegis (••), Armor Piercing (•••)

Mana/per turn: 14/5

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Clip	Dice Pool
Club	2(B) -	-	10	
Revolver, Hvy 3		35/70/140	6	10

Armor: 1

Magic Shield: 3 (Unseen Aegis)

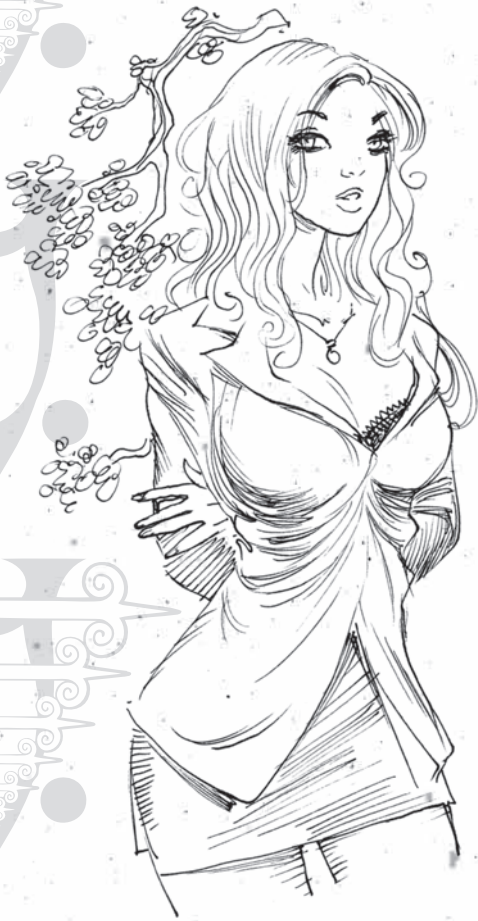
Disir — Fate-weaver

Quote: *It's for his own good. No, he wouldn't see it that way, but we know better.*

Background: Long before her Awakening, Disir discovered the power to manipulate others for the greater good (as she saw it). She excelled at defusing bullies' anger, distracting those who targeted the weak and awkward for cruel pranks, and using social and emotional manipulation to prevent volatile situations from escalating. The same skills, however, were also handy for getting out of detention (and later avoiding being fired), escaping from traffic tickets or sweet-talking her way into (or out of) almost any situation. When companions complained, Disir simply smiled and shrugged, claiming, "I'm just lucky, I guess."

Upon her Awakening, Disir spent her first months eschewing joining an order. She preferred to play fast and loose with her newfound powers, using them much in the same way she had always used her beauty and charm. Eventually, she was shown the error of her ways, with the nudge of a théarch who showed her the danger of using her power for selfish goals, akin to the Lesson of Water used in recruiting Sleepers. The Silver Ladder gained a new initiate that day, and Disir found a role within the order, wielding the threads of Fate for the greater good — as she sees it.

Description: Disir is a beautiful woman with golden hair and cornflower blue eyes. She is buxom and flirtatious, and regardless of whether she is wearing casual,



business or formal wear, it is designed to catch the eye and the attention of all. She stands almost 6' tall, making it difficult to miss this curvaceous Valkyrie. Disir's nimbus manifests with the sweet scent of mead, mildly intoxicating and unquestionably addictive.

Storytelling Hints: Not all dangers come in the form of a gun or blade; Disir wields treacherous intangible weapons no armor can shunt aside. Between glimpsing the future and scrying the past, few are able to keep secrets from her. And, with her fingertips on the strands of Fate, she can ensure an individual's good fortune or bring about his doom without that individual ever knowing he's earned her wrath.

For the most part, Disir acts in accordance with her mentor's will, allowing him to teach her the subtleties of Awakened politics and how they differ from the social games of Sleepers. When her ire is raised, however, she tends to react impulsively, bringing karmic wrath (as she sees it) down upon whomever has raised it.

Dedicated Magic Tool: Golden Mirror

Real Name: Katya Ostermann

Path: Acanthus

Order: Silver Ladder

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 4, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Computer 1, Investigation 3, Occult 3, Politics 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Larceny 1, Weaponry (Dagger) 2

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Expression 2, Intimidation 1, Persuasion 3, Socialize 3, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Striking Looks 4, Mentor 3, Order Status (Silver Ladder) 2

Willpower: 4

Wisdom: 6

Virtue: Charity

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 6

Defense: 4

Speed: 11

Health: 7

Gnosis: 4

Arcana: Fate 4, Time 3

Notes: *Fate* — Interconnections (•), The Sybil's Sight (•), Winds of Chance (•), Exceptional Luck (••), The Evil Eye (••), Shifting the Odds (••), Bestow Exceptional Luck (•••), Probable Cause (•••); *Time* — Temporal Eddies (•), Augury (••), Glimpsing the Future (••), Postcognition (••), Divination (••)

Mana/per turn: 13/4

Elle Walker

Quote: *Don't waste my time with your half-truths.*

Background: For a decade, Elle Walker has been a name that strikes fear in the hearts of those who use the trappings of Awakened justice to promote their own selfish agendas. Known sometimes as the "Walking Judge," Elle has a reputation for getting to the absolute truth of any matter. She owes no boons or favors to any Awakened, including the members of her own order, and relies heavily upon research gleaned from impartial witnesses (including animals and spirits) to either support or contradict that given by human sources.

As a nomadic lictor with a large territory, Elle travels extensively and can be called in to judge cases in a broad area. She's frequently asked to judge cases wherein the Silver Ladder fears overt favor-swapping

and corruption may influence the trial in a way that is harmful to the order, a fact that has earned her the ire of many local lictors who feel that for a Deacon to call on Elle rather than using a local lictor is a blatant insult. They are frequently correct.

Description: Elle's unkempt clothing and near-constant accompaniment by various animal familiars has only added to her reputation. It is not unheard of for her to attend a trial with a dirt-smudged face and twigs still caught in her shaggy hair. Her nimbus is that of woodland forest sounds, from faintly chirping birds to the rush of the wind through tall pines.

Storytelling Hints: While Elle listens to factotum testimony, she prefers to do her own independent research to corroborate (and sometimes contradict) the facts presented in the formal trial. She is more apt to listen to the testimony of a non-human witness than that of a human, figuring animals and spirits are less likely to lie about their motives than even the most trustworthy of humankind. While

it is unusual for lictors to carry out their own justice, Elle is dangerous to wrongdoers because of her unusual methods of investigation. She is also more than capable of defending herself should some ill-intentioned individual attempt to cut her investigations short before she can uncover incriminating evidence against him.

Dedicated Magic Tool: Wooden Flute

Real Name: Margaret Clark

Path: Thyrsus

Order: Silver Ladder

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Investigation 4, Medicine (Herbalism) 2, Occult (Spirits) 4, Politics (Awakened Trials) 3

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl (Dirty Tricks) 4, Stealth 3, Survival (Wilderness) 4



Social Skills: Animal Ken 4, Empathy 4, Expression 2, Intimidation 3, Persuasion 3, Socialize (Spirits) 3, Subterfuge 1

Merits: Familiar 4, Order Status (Silver Ladder) 3, Consilium Status 3

Willpower: 7

Wisdom: 7

Virtue: Justice

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 7

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Health: 9

Gnosis: 4

Arcana: Spirit 3, Life 4

Notes: *Life* — Sense Life (•), Control Base Life (••), Control Median Life (•••); *Spirit* — Coaxing the Spirits (•), Second Sight (•), Spirit Tongue (•), Gossamer Touch (••), Lesser Spirit Summons (••), Control Spirit (•••), Familiar Pact (•••), Greater Spirit Summons (•••), Harm Spirit (•••), Numinous Shield (•••), Restore Corpus (•••), Rouse Spirit (•••)

Mana/per turn: 13/4

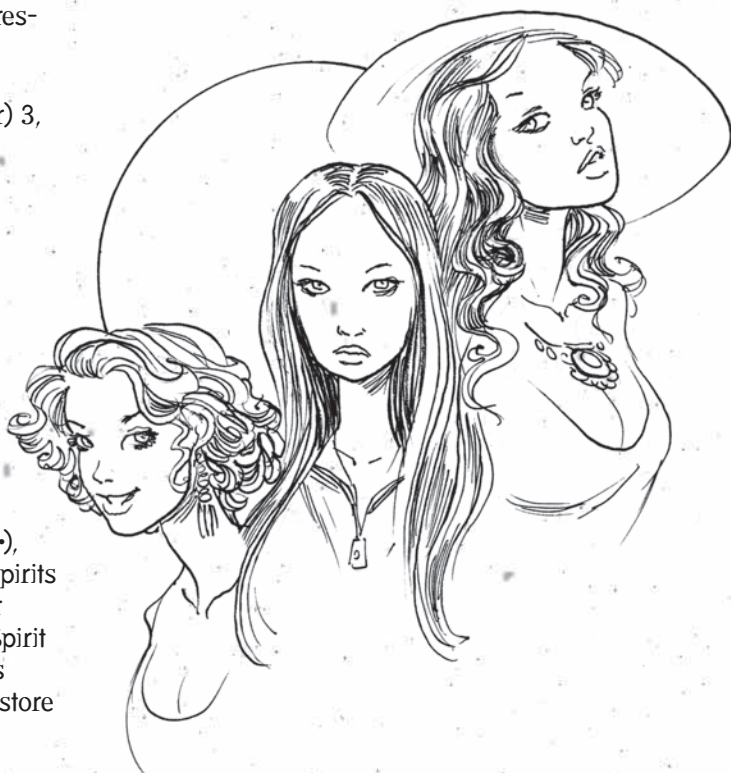
Rhea Sylvia/Mercy

Quote: *Not all paths can end in enlightenment. But those that don't must end quickly.*

Background: Sabine Mercedes Awakened during her senior year of college (BS in Physics, 3.43 GPA), where she had served as the Secretary of the Student Assembly and Assistant Vice President of the Students For A Better World campus branch. She was recruited into the Silver Ladder after being identified as the behind-the-scenes organizer for a student-led rally that raised tens of thousands of dollars for underprivileged students to attend college courses. She took the Shadow Name of Rhea Sylvia, and began working for an even better world than she'd ever previously imagined.

Mercy, on the other hand, was born much later. When Rhea was attacked by a Tremere lich, Rhea's unassuming looks and mild manner ensured the creature underestimated his prey. She destroyed the Left-Handed monster, but sustained horrific damage to body and soul. During her recovery, her mentor approached her and impressed upon his young ward that her talents were needed by the order in order to serve the greater good. A few weeks later, Mercy had her first assignment, and Rhea has been living a double life ever since.

Description: Rhea's looks are deceptively harmless. She appears to be between 19 and 25 years of age, slim



to the point of boyishness, with straight dark hair and plain features. She dresses discretely in skirts and blouses, normally carrying some sort of book with her when not actively pursuing an assignment as Mercy.

When on an assignment as Mercy, however, Rhea may adopt a wide variety of looks, depending upon the requirements of her job. From black leather that serves as basic armor while aiding her at blending into the night, to cocktail dresses and full “party girl” makeup to intimidating business attire — if it's necessary to get close to her target, Mercy's capable of pulling it off.

Her nimbus is a slippery sense of not being worthy of further investigation, a feeling which serves her well both in her wallflower persona as Rhea and while on a job as Mercy.

Storytelling Hints: Rhea is tasked to carry out those jobs that must be done with utter discretion, targets that fall outside the bounds of Lex Magica or that, while clearly benefiting the greater good, are tied up in too many layers of political red tape among the Awakened community to allow them to be dealt with in less violent manners. Her assignments are those the Silver Ladder does not trust even to farm out to the Adamantine Arrow, and she has yet to fail her order. In the past this has included those on Left-Handed Legacies (who were exterminated quietly and efficiently so those with weak wills might not hear of their ex-

istence), spies deemed to have been working for the Seers, and those whose political agendas stood in the way of Silver Ladder goals (although they had taken no overt actions that could have allowed for them to be dealt with in more traditional manners).

Only those with very high Status within the Silver Ladder have heard of Mercy by name, and even among those, only a very few know how to contact her, and perhaps a handful are aware of her double life.

Dedicated Magic Tool: Steel Knife

Real Name: Sabine Mercedes

Path: Obrimos

Order: Silver Ladder

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Computer (Research) 2, Crafts (Traps) 3, Investigation 4, Medicine 1, Occult (Left-handed Legacies) 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl (Blindfighting) 4, Drive (Tailing) 3, Firearms (Sniper Rifle) 4, Larceny 2, Stealth 4, Survival (Tracking) 4, Weaponry (Knife) 4

Social Skills: Intimidation 2, Persuasion 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Danger Sense, Disarm, Fast Reflexes 2, Fighting Finesse (Knife), Fleet of Foot 3, Quick Draw (Melee Weapons), Occultation 3, Sanctum Size 1, Security 4; Order Status (Silver Ladder) 2

Willpower: 7

Wisdom: 3 (It occasionally creeps much lower, but Rhea actively seeks out Wisdom affirming activities to bolster it and takes Wisdom violating actions only in the service of her order.)

Virtue: Justice

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 10

Defense: 3

Speed: 15

Health: 9

Gnosis: 4

Arcana: Forces 5, Prime 2

Notes: *Forces* — Nightsight (•), Read Matrices (•), Receiver (•), Tune In (•), Control Light (••), Control Sound (••), Influence Electricity (••), Kinetic Blow (••), Unseen Shield (••), Control Electricity (•••), Personal Invisibility (•••), Telekinetic Strike (•••), Burst of Speed (•••), Friction Knife (•••), Thunderbolt (•••); *Prime* —

Dispel Magic (•), Counterspell (••), Magic Shield (••), Transform Aura (••), Unseen Spy (••)

Mana/per turn: 13/4

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Clip	Dice Pool
Sniper Rifle	4 (9 again)	250/500/1000	10+1	13
Knife	1	—	—	9

Armor: 1

Magic Shield: 2 (Unseen Shield)

Cypselus

Quote: *Depose me? Take my place? You are welcome to try.*

Background: More than a decade ago, the Silver Ladder took over leadership of a Consilium that had grown decadent and indolent. Its former Hierarch (with the help of like-minded Counselors) had transformed the Consilium into little more than a debauched pit of iniquity where the Supernal powers of its members were used not to fight the Lie or aid humanity in attaining its destined Awakening, but instead to fulfill every depraved desire the Consilium leaders might have.

When the group's abuses came to light, the Silver Ladder acted swiftly. Nearby thérarchs staged a surgical intervention on many levels: pulling strings among the Sleepers in the area to cut the Consilium's influences and resources, calling in favors to weaken the Awakened in power through the reassignment of efficient and not-yet-tainted Initiates and Apprentices to less controversial locations, and encouraging higher-Status (and appropriately minded) mages to move into the area and thus stack the political deck. Further manipulations by the order ensured that Cypselus, a former Hierarch who had willingly stepped away from the position in a different Consilium to pursue greater in-depth research in the Lex Magica, was "appointed" to replace the former Mastigos Counselor who came to an unfortunate but timely end not long after the situation came to the Silver Ladder's attention.

Cypselus' experience and skill (backed by his order's political and magical might) served him well, and within a year the Mastigos had become Hierarch of the Consilium, and had influenced, intimidated and (if rumors are to be believed) even assassinated the remainder of the Counselors into what the Silver Ladder would consider a more appropriate organization.



Cypselus' assignment was to show the Awakened (including those on the Consilium) that their weakness and lack of dedication had left them ripe for the plucking, should a strong leader set his sights upon them. Unfortunately, in playing the role of despot, Cypselus found that not only did he enjoy flexing his mental, emotional and supernatural "muscles" to herd the Awakened community into rightful action, he was also very good at it — so good, in fact, that the Silver Ladder quickly turned its attention to other, more problematic matters, leaving Cypselus in control of the area.

Description: Cypselus was once a handsome young man, and he remains to this day a leonine and regal figure. His hair flows in a carefully groomed mane around his shoulders, its silver sheen only adding to his air of authority. The Hierarch's dark eyes take in the world, shining with an alert luster that belies his obvious years. His face is lined heavily with creases that speak more of furrowed brow than laughter.

Cypselus never appears in public anything less than immaculately outfitted. He prefers precisely pressed dark silk suits over impossibly white dress shirts. His shoes are consistently polished to a shine that would put most mirrors to shame. He wears a single silver

signet ring, its crest that of a roaring lion's head with jet-black eyes.

His nimbus is a predatory air that raises the hair at the back of the necks of those upon whom he turns his glowering gaze.

Storytelling Hints: Once upon a time, Cypselus had the purest of intentions. He returned to the position of Counselor, and attained that of Hierarch fully intending to rule the Consilium (and through it the local Awakened community) with an iron fist, trusting the oppression would stand in stark contrast to the debauchery of the former Consilium. Surely, with the metaphorical rug pulled out from beneath them, the Awakened of the city would find the strength in themselves to decide for themselves the rightful path and go forward tempered by the two extremes they'd experienced to find a strong and positive middle ground.

Unfortunately for Cypselus (and those who now dwell under his nigh-tyrannical rule) his skills as a leader were all too efficient. His manipulation of the Consilium effectively silenced all dissent as the local Awakened fell into line under his leadership and began to look to him as a near-messiah. In an attempt to provoke a reaction from them, Cypselus undertook greater and greater acts of demanding oppression. For all but the few who had prospered under the decadent reign before, however, even this was far better than what they'd formerly experienced. They banded together, not to rebel and create a more rightful system, but instead to fulfill every one of their new Hierarch-tyrant's demands with such efficiency that Cypselus found it difficult to continue to press them into independence without blowing his own cover and revealing his intentions.

In time, Cypselus has grown complacent in his own manner. He no longer believes those under his counsel will rise up and throw off their leader's yoke; in fact, he no longer sees himself as a tyrant at all. How could he be, when the entire Consilium is running far more efficiently than most could even hope?

Unfortunately, there is a price to be paid. Radical thought, new growth and exploration, anything that might upset the balance (or the Hierarch) is rooted out and squashed long before it can reach Cypselus's ears. The entire Awakened community now acts to ensure the peace rather than to fight the Lie. They have become a pack of predatory Lion-Stags, policing outsiders and their own kind, rather than the Sages Cypselus hoped they would rise up to become. And Cypselus himself, deluded

at the seeming effectiveness of his reign, has long since given up any hope or desire they (or he) will ever be anything else.

Dedicated Magic Tool: Silver Signet Ring

Real Name: Ari Koenig

Path: Mastigos

Order: Silver Ladder

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 5, Manipulation 4, Composure 5

Mental Skills: Academics (Machiavelli) 3, Occult (Lex Magica) 5, Politics 4

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Larceny 1, Stealth 2

Social Skills: Empathy 4, Expression 4, Intimidation (Subtle Threats) 5, Persuasion (Understanding Motives) 4, Socialize 1, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Sanctum Size 4, Security 3, Consilium Status 5, Order Status (Silver Ladder) 5

Willpower: 9

Wisdom: 7

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 8

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Health: 8

Gnosis: 7

Arcana: Fate 2, Forces 2, Mind 6, Space 5, Time 2

Rotes: *Fate* — Lakshmi's Touch (•), Winds of Chance (•), Fortune's Protection (••); *Forces* — Brilliant Flow (•), Receiver (•), Tune In (•); *Mind* — Third Eye (•), Emotional Urging (••), First Impressions (••), Mental Shield (••), Augment the Mind (•••), Telepathy (•••), Belittle the Brain (•••), Breach the Vault of Memory (•••), Read the Depths (•••), Telepathic Control "Crown of Kings" (••••); *Space* — Conceal Sympathy (••), Scrying (••); *Time* — Perfect Timing (•)

Mana/per turn: 20/7

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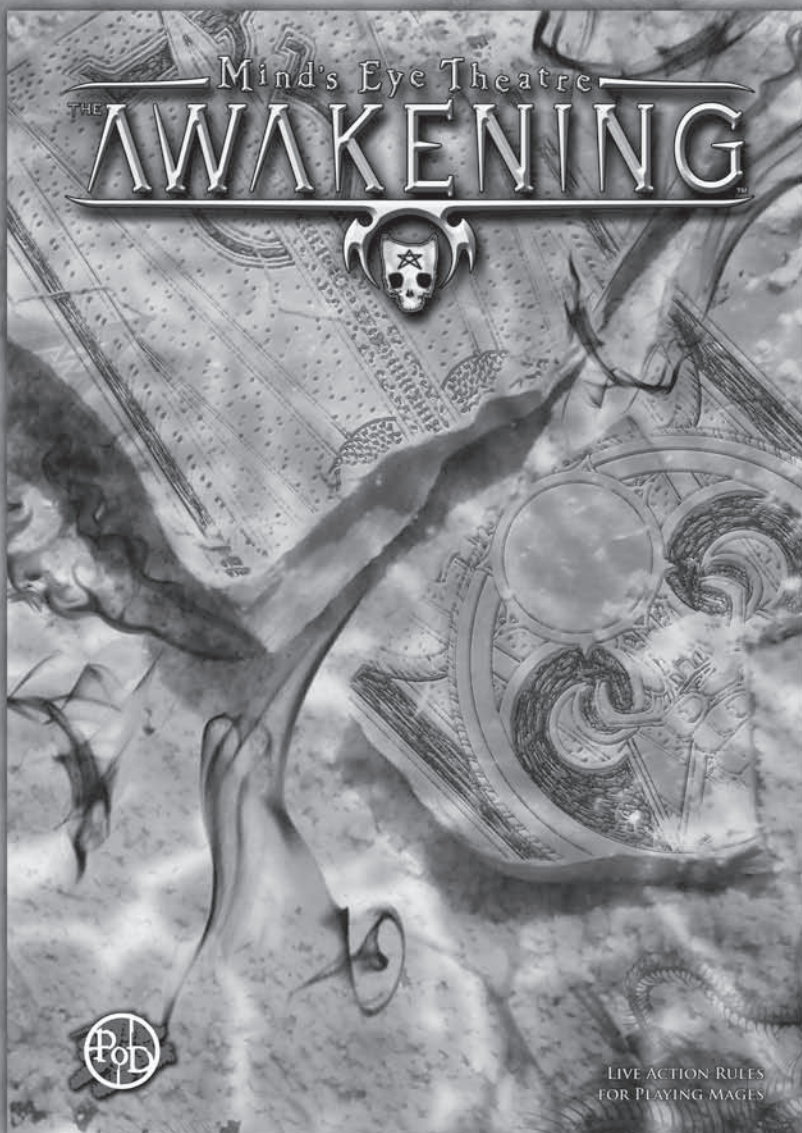
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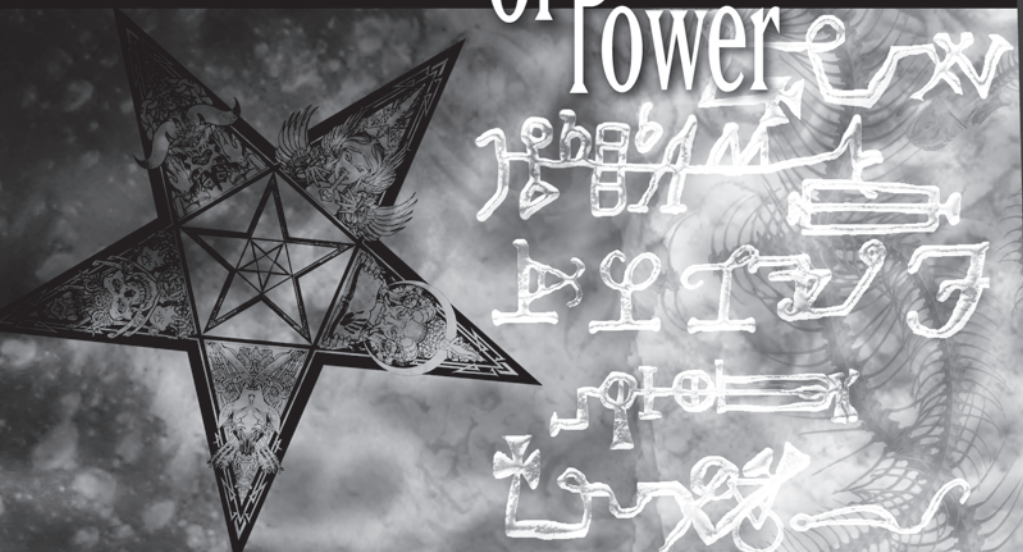
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