

BOOK OF

CRAFTS



©BOOK OF CRAFTS

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Whispers of Dissent



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Staley "Mega-Mommy" and Mike "Bad Seed" Krause, for siring a new wolf-child.

...and a special welcoming howl to little **John McDonough** and his proud (tired) parents **Ann and Chris**. *Haaa-Woooo!*

¹ Sort of.



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Prelude

By Kathleen Ryan



Shangri-La is home to the Tellurian's oldest true alchemist's shop. On the crest of Red Hill Street, it towers above its neighbors, five half-timbered stories of cracked plaster and rotting, black-oak beams. A sign above the door swings noisily on wrought-iron hinges, the picture upon it faded beyond recognition. Only the word "Apoteke" is legible.

Inside, Jeremy Hurst sits restlessly behind the counter, his laptop propped against the ancient brass cash register, his lab notes scattered in loose heaps beside a box of ginseng and bundles of sage. He bites his lip in intense concentration, his red hair falling into his eyes, pencil drifting back and forth between the complex formula in front of him and the intricate doodles that cover the margins.

The front door rattles.

"We're closed!" He yells, without looking up. "Come back at one o'clock."

The doorbell chimes, and he sighs, laying down the pencil. "Sorry, I must have forgotten to lock up." The customer, black-shadowed in the bright doorway, shakes her head.

"You didn't forget." The voice is low, solemn.

Jeremy stands, hands under the counter.

"Your lock is broken," says the stranger.

She steps forward. She holds a rusted, crumbling block of metal, and he recognizes her. He raises the shotgun above the counter, aiming steadily at her heart.

"Amanda."

"Jeremy."

They wait.

"Put it away. I didn't do the lock."

He studies her, shifts the weight of the gun to one hand, finger *just* off the trigger, and reaches out with the other. He hits "No Sale" on the register, and pulls a small pebble from the open drawer.

"Here." He tosses it, and Amanda plucks it out of the air, careful not to move closer to him. "Hold that, and tell me again."

"I did not destroy your lock. I did not break your lock, except to pull it free of the door to show you. I have not come here to harm you or anyone here. I am running an errand for the Old Man." The young Euthanatos sets the ruined lock down on a barrelhead, watches him. "Satisfied?"

"Yeah." He puts the gun back, catches the pebble, walks over to her. "Jesus, but you scared me. I thought for sure you'd come to kill Doctor Scherer."

"No." Amanda's eyes dart around the room, her face puzzled.

"I suppose it's inconvenient," Jeremy begins, laughing nervously, "being known as an assassin. You try to go pick up your laundry, the clerk screams, hides in terror... you go to the corner grocery, they put rat poison in your milk in self-defense... but your disguise is great. I almost didn't know you. You don't look a thing like last time."

She smiles at him. "Last time *was* the disguise."

"Oh."

He turns to the door. "Look, if you didn't witch the lock, who did?"

"Good question. Time you started thinking about it." She takes off her jacket, sets her back against the wall, and rummages in her bag, loosening her knives in their sheaths. "When you closed for lunch, the lock was fine?" Jeremy nods, and she goes on. "Have you been in this room the entire time?"

"I leave for lunch. There's a good, cheap place at the market four blocks over. Um... I go out the cellar, and I came in that way, too, so I wouldn't have noticed the shop was open until after the break. And Doctor Scherer takes his nap now... oh, *shit*. They must have gotten to him!" He jumps up, heads for the door at the back of the room. Amanda follows, grabbing him by the arm.

"Wait!" She turns him to face her. "Grab the gun. Get your tools. Be ready."

"Right." He swallows hard, and fills his pockets with the contents of the drawers under the counter.

Amanda watches him. "You know, I wasn't sure you were a mage. I thought you worked for the Second Seven — as a consor."

He shakes his head. "Why? Because I drew the short straw that night at Anne's place, and was outside, man? Because all you saw me do was drive the getaway car?" Jeremy shuts the last drawer. "I *am* a mage. Let's go."

Together they open the rear door. Amanda leads, checking the hallway, Jeremy covering her, whispering directions. The kitchen is empty, the apprentice's rooms untouched. They reach the doctor's chambers. There are voices within, and she looks to him expectantly.

The corner of his mouth twitches. He shrugs, changes holds on the gun — hidden now by his long legs — and knocks on the door.

Rustling movement, footsteps. More muffled voices, the open door.

Amanda feels her companion relax. The man before her, then, must be Doctor Scherer. She examines him with interest but no less anxiety. Her fingers stay close to the knife hilts.



a.s

"Yes, boy?" The old alchemist raises one bristly brow high over a dull, dark eye, deeply set in wrinkles. "What do you want? Who is this?" He points to Amanda with a twisted walking stick, held in far more crooked hands. He sets dusty pince nez in place, peers through them. For a moment, the eyes lose their shadows, and she can see him clearly: He expects her; he has just realized who she is; he is terrified.

From further in the room, a man's voice speaks. "Please, Johann, introduce me. Your *protégé* was out when I arrived."

Doctor Scherer steps aside, and now there are four people in the doorway, including the newcomer all in black: jeans, dyed hair, gauze T-shirt, leather jacket, high boots.

"Richard, this is my pupil, Jeremy Hurst. Jeremy, this is Richard Somnitz. He is a *most* powerful young man." The doctor's tones hold a warning.

"And the lovely young lady?"

"I have never seen her before in my life... and I still do not know what she is doing in my shop while it is closed, Jeremy." His apprentice frowns, opens his mouth to speak, stops short. "I will speak of this to you later, boy," Scherer continues, with rising hostility and irritation. "Now return to your studies, and have your friend come back *after* one o'clock."

"Yes, sir." He turns, puzzled but obedient, keeping the gun out of sight. "Come on, 'Manda."

"Oh, my," Somnitz sighs. "Not *the* Amanda, not the *widderslainte* we have all heard so much about? I've been looking forward to meeting you. Please, let's all sit down and talk. What a wonderful... coincidence."

His voice is conversational, pleasant, demanding. Amanda, watching everything except his eyes, sees the tic at the side of his jaw, sees the saliva seeping to the corners of his mouth, tightening to hide... something. Her chest hurts. She senses the bodies of Jeremy and his master stiffen. Shaking off the magicks, barely, she draws her knife, still avoiding her enemy's eyes, and attacks.

Somnitz meets her, blade for blade, crowded in the doorway. He moves like nothing she's ever seen: fast as a rumor, and smooth. Even as they meet, his style is changing, altering to fit her weaknesses — she faces a strategist, a cat-and-mouse fighter. Half a second, and he reads her feints before she does. Now his attention turns to magicks, and the telltale play of light and texture around him warns her: His defenses are strong and ready, and he only waits to take her measure there as well.

She focuses her power, raw and unchanneled, around her, clearly drawing in for a long fight — the kind of fight he wants and expects *her* to want — to give the others a chance to break free. He settles back, patiently, dodging the merely physical blows almost automatically, braced securely behind his shields.

Amanda ignores them, and slits his throat.

After a startled moment, she kneels to wipe her blade on his jeans. The other two stagger, Jeremy silent, his master gagging, cursing in German and Latin with equal proficiency. The young man leans against the door jamb, the elder paces and jabs at the air with his cane, gradually becoming louder and more coherent, until the room shakes to his final shout:

"*The Old Man has lost his mind!*"

"Master..."

"How could he... what does she... do you realize what has just happened? Do you know what is going to happen to us?" The alchemist falls onto a ragged sofa, still gesturing with his stick. He breaks into German, glaring at the girl.

"This spawn of hell's demented imagination has just killed a member of the House of Helekar in *my* shop! The House! That man there, he's a killer a hundred times over... the House is full of them. And, my God, Senex's apprentice has seen a member of the House in *my* shop! Do you think she realizes? Does she understand what... Perhaps I can explain to him... But my God, why worry about Senex at all! The Freedom Razor will come for us long before anyone on Cerberus troubles over us. We are trapped between a *mad* Euthanatos fanatic and a *sane* Euthanatos fanatic!" He calms down, speaks in slightly more reasoned, more despairing tones, returns to English. "The House, boy. They will tear us limb from limb. Probably Gilgul for both of us. Wretched." His rheumy hands flutter helplessly. "Sleep lightly, my boy. They come in the night."

He trails off weakly, almost to a whisper. "She's killed him."

Amanda stands, expressionless.

"What did you expect me to do?" She perches on the side of a creaking armchair, sheathing the knife. "This man attacked you in your own sanctum. He broke in. He would have killed us all, and not quickly."

"You don't know that, girl."

"He would. Trust me. No one can know that better than I do."

And she meets his gaze levelly, not challenging, but daring him to deny her. The doctor is shaking still, terrified as he was before, and now she sees he also fears her.

"Here. This is what I came for." From her bag she pulls a package, wrapped in unbleached cloth and marked in silver. "It's from Senex."

Scherer nods his head wearily. "Take this letter back to him. And tell him that when we next meet, we will discuss his messenger."

The apprentice stirs. "I'll see you out."

•••••

Jeremy returns to the doctor, and finds him in the laboratory rather than in the study. Scherer is pacing again, but has abandoned the cane for a stick of chalk. He circuits the room slowly, adding a few numbers and symbols to the blackboard as he passes, pulling a bottle or three off the shelves on his way to the tables, rearranging the apparatus there, and on to the board again.

"Master, what do you want me to do with the body?"

"Mmm... Find old Lucianus Magnus' rotten, ranting, old dissection book. There's a few good exercises in there.

Figure out which ones I mean, follow them, and store the components. Never can tell when you're going to need 'liver of serial killer' as an ingredient."

His pupil turns to leave.

"Just a minute, boy. That girl. Does she have a safe route home?"

"Yes, sir. Senex gave her a thread to walk."

"She's walking a thread all the way back to Cerberus?"

"Yes, sir."

Jeremy waits, wondering, but the old alchemist says nothing more. His steps take him to the blackboard. Now he draws up a stool before it, settles in with his chalk, and after a few moments, the young man leaves him alone.

•••••

Deep in the Umbra, somewhere between the Horizon Realm Shangri La and Pluto's second moon Cerberus, Amanda walks. In her hands is a silver cord, strong and light, stretching behind and before her for as far as she can see. The minutes pass into hours, but she keeps on patiently, knowing that at the end of the walk is home, knowing that her friends keep the thread secure for her.

The thread snaps.

(To be continued...)





JEHOVA

MESSIAH

ERIGION

EMINIANUETI

JIAH

JESSENA
SBRONA

A
NIOYN

a.s.

Introduction

*We are not beginners
we will not be fooled
the times have been our teachers & they
teach an iron rule, we do our
best work in the dark, we do our
thinking on the run
we will hang together
'till the longest day is done, because
A fire is burning in our House
A fire is burning up the House of Man
— Oysterband, "A Fire is Burning"*



Once, they were called the *Disparates* — magickal societies that refused to join the heralds of the Grand Convocation which formed the Traditions. Some left during the negotiations, some declined to join, and many never heard the call in the first place. Nevertheless, the early Council mages branded these outside mysticks *Disparates*, and con-

sidered their “crafts” a lesser form of magick. *If you’re not with me, went their reasoning, you’re clearly against me.*

Things haven’t changed much. Although the Council’s “official” distrust for outsiders has subsided a great deal in modern times, those who belong to unallied factions are viewed with suspicion by the more paranoid Traditionalists. While some independent mysticks simply end up as “Orphans” or “solitaries,” many gravitate toward groups

that practice a more familiar Art. Called “Crafts” for lack of a better name, these small magickal societies make little or no distinction between so-called “hedge wizards” and the Awakened; most of them believe that everyone has the capacity to use these innate talents. Not everyone, however, has the courage, skill or dedication necessary to truly prosper. Few Crafts recognize anything as prosaic as “Ascension”; for them, a mage’s Path involves personal power, community service or any number of other goals. While such goals may actually be considered forms of Ascension, few groups make Ascension itself their goal. Consequently, high-minded Tradition mages consider the Crafts aimless children with dangerous toys. The Technocracy, of course, makes no such distinction; in its view, mystick mages are to be subverted, recruited or eliminated.

What’s a “Craft”?

Some Crafts (a name they never apply to themselves) have existed for centuries; others have sprung up only recently as the Information Age. Whatever their pedigree, all Crafts share these common features:

- A formal structure of apprenticeship and rank;
- A declared common magickal belief (that is, they all agree that magick works the same way);
- A set of practices (a style; see *Mage Second Edition*, Chapter Eight), spells and teachings;
- A common mundane culture which influences the above (the Bata’a follow voodoo lifestyles, the Sisters of Hippolyta are modern Amazons, etc.);
- A declared purpose for existing.

Few people, mage or mortal, spend their lives in perpetual warfare. Although some of them struggle for their survival or independence, most independent magicians couldn’t care less about the so-called “Ascension War.” Although few Crafts fight to establish their paradigm over others, each one considers its way the *best* way — at least for them — and they live and die by that culture.

Crafts do not, as a rule, welcome outsiders, and for good reason. Each of the Crafts in this book is under attack from some opposing force. Maybe its people belong to an oppressed minority, or to a die-hard subculture that refuses to go away. Perhaps its area of influence is small, or its numbers too sparse to survive in the modern era. While those small numbers make it easy for them to remain out of the larger factions’ sight, the effects of the Ascension War can be felt by even the most remote mystick societies. Each of these groups, therefore, is an endangered species, trying to hold onto its chosen niche whatever the cost.

How to Use this Book

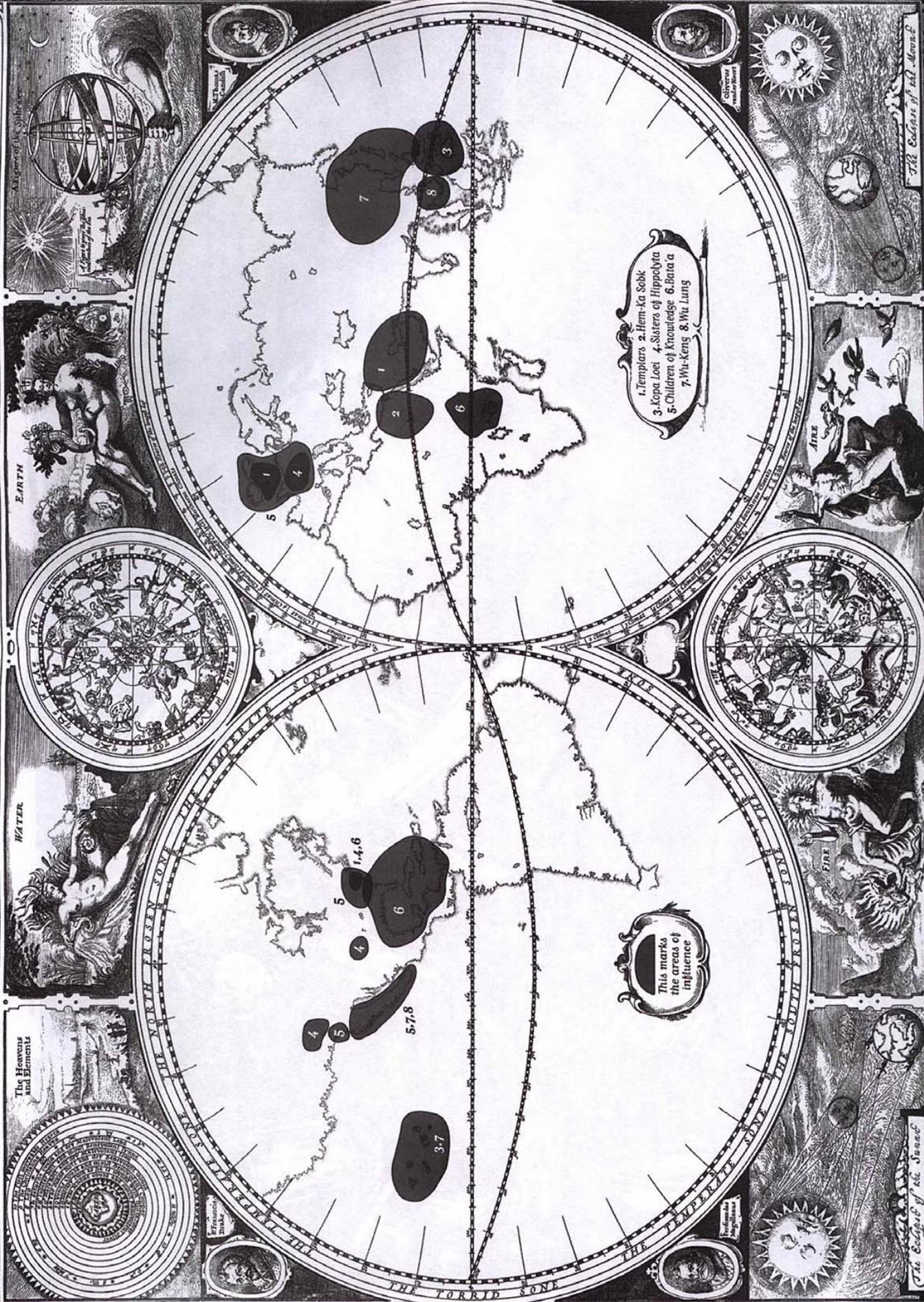
The *Book of Crafts* presents eight of the largest magickal societies outside the familiar four factions. This sourcebook works equally well for either players or Storytellers. Most of these groups are pretty well-kept secrets, however, and players should remember that *nothing* in this book is common knowledge among outsiders. Many of these mages consider themselves under siege, and with good reason. They will not *ever* babble information about their group to strangers, and may be hard-pressed to reveal some details even to close friends or torturers. If the secrets revealed about these Crafts — hell, if the *existence* of some of these Crafts — became common gossip among the Awakened, most of these groups would cease to exist. So go easy, guys; don’t assume that because you’ve read about the Hem-Ka Sobk, your character will be looking over her shoulder for them every time she goes to Cairo!

Each chapter describes a different Craft in full. To make things easy, each description follows a similar format. Although each chapter presents its own special features, this layout remains constant throughout:

A **Fiction Piece** introduces us to the Craft itself; the **Introduction** sums up each group in a few short paragraphs, while the **Lexicon** defines the special terminology that Craft uses. As many of these groups come from foreign cultures, this lexicon can be vital to understanding the group itself. From there, the **Background** sketches out each Craft’s essential history, highlighting key events in its evolution. **Culture** introduces us to the internal structure and society of the Craft as a whole, including its **Beliefs**, **Magickal Style** elements, and the **Spheres** in which the group specializes. Such Spheres might be considered “affinity Spheres” (*Mage*, page 226), or one of the “free Spheres” a player character gets during creation.

From there, the **Common Foci** section details several important items Craft members might use to enact their magicks, while the **Organization** section covers the group’s hierarchy, ranks and approximate membership tally. **Initiation** tells you how new members enter the Craft; **Acolytes** explains a bit about the un-Awakened people who affiliate themselves with the group. The **Concepts** section examines a few possible character types, and the usual **Stereotypes** box covers the Craft’s general feelings about outside groups. A sidebar’s worth of **Storyteller Ideas** offers a few extra tidbits that may inspire events in your chronicle. Finally, a sample **Companion** “beastie” suggests a unique supernatural Ally for a Craft character; the Cost listed is the Background rating the companion requires to stick around. A sample **Template** character, like those in the Tradition books, rounds out each chapter.

Have fun, and take nothing for granted. The world is always larger than it seems....



- 1. Templars
- 2. Hem-Ka Sobk
- 3. Kopa Loei
- 4. Sisters of Hippolyta
- 5. Children of Knowledge
- 6. Baia a
- 7. Wu-keng
- 8. Wu Lung

This marks the areas of influence

The Heavens and Elements

EARTH

WATER

FIRE

AIR

The Edge of the Universe

The Edge of the Universe



Montgomery ©96

Bata'a: Spirit Music

By Phil Brucato and Jim Comer

The soul is only sure when it sings.
— old voodoo adage



Washington Freyre stared at Amparo as she undulated to the drumbeat. Worshippers, half-crazy from the wafting scent of drug-laced incense, filled the shrine; tonight was what they'd anticipated for so long. Suddenly, Amparo stopped dancing and began to writhe and shudder. The crowd stared, amazed at the transformation. "Bring me rum!" roared the heathen saint in a man's voice.

"Here, sir." Wash gave Amparo a swig from his hip flask. "Here are the gifts we promised." He pointed to herbs, candles, rum and sacrificed beasts. She nodded, stroking an imaginary beard. "The new president at the plant fired eighty-one of us, and my children have nothing to eat," he continued. "What can you do?" His fingers moved to draw the Bantu glyphs that bound the spirit, one fist tightly wrapped around a river stone.

She drew on the cigar that some worshipper had handed her and gave a deep chuckle. "Bring me a pottery jar and broken glass. Bring me a scorpion and a poison toad, jimson weed and pennyroyal oil. Bring me a mortar and pestle and make the hoodoo sign." They hastened to help her while she sat on a milk crate drawing vévés in the dust. "You serve me well. Now he shall serve you. Willing or no." Her follower's face bent in a grim smile.

"Living or no."

Introduction

Long ago, members of seven African tribes were hauled from their homes in chains and dragged to the islands and bayous of the New World. Some brought ancestral ghosts and traditional magick with them. Long before their ar-

rival, however, the original peoples of the region had formed bonds with the spirits of the land and the departed. Although the first natives disappeared early during the “settlement” of the Caribbean, their ways melded with the practices of the slaves, giving birth to new religions, new magicks and a new magickal society — the Bata’a.

Named after the sacred drums which awaken the spirits, these mysticks draw their Arts from a mixture of African, island and Catholic faiths. Although their members follow a variety of religions — Voudun, Candomble, Santería, Umbanda, even Spanish Catholicism — the society pursues a collective goal: freedom and prosperity for their people, and a reunion with the sacred ghosts of their new land. It’s not an easy task; nearly 200 years have passed since the Bata’a first came into being, and the goal seems further away than ever. Worldly poverty, environmental devastation, spiritual chaos and supernatural manipulation keep the entire region in virtual slavery, and internal rivalries skew the Craft’s cooperation. Still, the holy folk continue. 400 years is only a blink of Legba’s eyes, and those wise in the Arts know that death is merely an obstacle, never a barrier.

Outsiders fear the Bata’a, and with good reason. This society’s ways are as mysterious, brutal and morbidly beautiful as the region itself. Yet compared with the mannered practices of the Hermetics or the Akashics, the Caribbean mages display amazing vitality, passion and energy. Their magick is more than a simple discipline or dogma — it’s a way of life. And, of course, of death.

Background: Broken Bridges



In the beginning, before the slavers or the slaves, lived the island people. Some tales call them Qua’ra. Scattered across the fringes and islands of the Caribbean, these Qua’ra tribes dwelled alongside the Arawaks and the Carib natives that gave the region its name. Like most native peoples, these tribes understood the link between flesh and spirit — a link broken by the barrier called the Gauntlet in later times. Even so, with a bit of knowledge and the willingness to forsake one’s self for something greater, that gulf — and other human limitations — could be transcended.

They called their Art *quinshi* — a word which translates both to “surrender to the will of the gods” and “to cross.” Through *quinshi*, the early ones gave their bodies to spirits and to ghosts, who performed favors for those who did so. This wasn’t as peaceful as it sounds; the spirits liked to take wild rides on their fleshbound hosts, and the excesses they indulged in often killed the host. Some of the



Lexicon

- Adoration:** A song of thanks and praise, given after a sacrifice or a stroke of good fortune.
- Asagwe:** "The salute of the loa"; the sacred dance used to call forth the spirits. In asagwe, the dancer spins, sweeps and swings herself around in circular arcs, hoping to catch a loa's attention.
- Aché:** The Divine power channeled by a Bata'a mage; the lifeblood of the universe, i.e., Quintessence.
- Baka:** Evil spirits. Some come from corrupted nature (called "Banes" by the Garou), while others are angry ghosts ("Shades" and "Spectres" in *Wraith* terminology).
- Bokor:** A sorcerer or evil mage.
- Cholé:** "Godflowers"; the old term for a *horse*, a person who willingly gives himself over to be ridden by the spirits.
- Couché:** The ritual seclusion initiates to the mysteries undergo before they're brought into the Craft.
- Conjure Man:** Popular term for a *houngan*; often used to refer to any man who uses magick.
- Gris-Gris:** Common Bata'a term for a focus, fetish or Talisman.
- Gros-bon-ange:** The human will, called "a grand good angel." United with the *ti-bon-ange*, this essence creates a soul — an Avatar. When the two grow especially strong and aware, they Awaken the Avatar, allowing a devotee to become a True Mage.
- Horse:** Common term for a person possessed and ridden by a loa or ghost. Also called *Le Chevaux*.
- Houngan:** A Voudun priest, literally "the master of a god."
- Hounfour:** A sacred space; in Voudun, a hounfour is a temple, but among the Bata'a, the name applies to any area set aside for worship.
- Hounsins:** An initiate, apprentice or minor mage.
- Jingo:** The call by which a Bata'a summons spirits.
- Les Idiots:** Outsiders, usually white, who don't understand Bata'a ways. Singular is *l'idiot*.
- Les Invisibles:** Spirits and ghosts, who sometimes ride their mortal followers. (See also the *Wraith Players Guide*.)
- Loa:** Powerful spirits which grant devotees favors, usually for a price. (See "Beliefs.")
- Loup Garou:** A wolfman, dangerous to meet but wise in mystical secrets. In this region, the term usually applies to members of the Uktena tribe. (See *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*.)
- Mambo:** A priestess of Voudun. Also, *Conjure Woman*.
- Marassa:** The partnership between a male and female Bata'a, signifying union.
- Marre:** The sacred "marriage" between a skillful horse and her Loa rider. Considered "proper" magick. (See *Quinshi*.)
- Mjane:** The practice of magick without the spirits' help. Considered selfish and vain.
- Mokolé:** Gigantic swamp monsters said to preserve the memories of the Earth (see *Werewolf Players Guide*).
- Mojo:** A spell, hex or charm. A *Mojo Bag* carries sacred tools and charms.
- Obi:** Common term for Bata'a magick; also, *Obeah*.
- Ogã:** Respected outsiders. They can't play, but they can watch.
- Orisha:** The old god-spirits who came over from Africa with the slave ships. Followed instead of the loa in Santería.
- Quinshi:** "Surrender to the will of the gods"; the old practice of the original inhabitants of the islands, who let the spirits use them as vessels in the mortal world.
- Ronde des Ames:** "The Chain of Souls"; the Bata'a network, which runs between towns and cities. Spirits pass information back and forth between "links" in this Chain in return for favors. Each *Rangi* controls its own *Ronde*, which causes communication problems and worse.
- Rangi:** Literally, "color"; a name for the tribal divisions within the Bata'a. Inspired by the colors of Ayida-Wedo's rainbow.
- Saci:** Distrustful term for changelings and faeries, especially mischievous or malicious ones like Redcaps and Pooka. A more respectful term is *Aziza*, an old name for magickal teachers (possibly Eshu) from the old country.
- Setite:** A Follower of Set, one of a group of vampires who exploit the Bata'a homeland and encourage its corruption. (See the *Vampire Players Guide* and *Clanbook: Setites*.)
- Ti-bon-ange:** "The small good angel" which forms half of a soul. The *ti-bon-ange* is the conscience and love-essence that combines with will to fuel creative powers and awareness.
- Vévés:** Ritual drawings, often made in sand, rice or sugar, which lead the loa through into mortal space. Used to conjure spirits or to set events in motion.
- Voodoo:** An often-misunderstood term covering hundreds of practices linked to nearly a dozen religions. As a blanket term, voodoo signifies an unorthodox magickal tradition which serves spirits (loa), often in return for favors.
- Zombi:** A soulless walking corpse created by magick. A *houngan* usually commands the zombi's soul, and thus the zombi itself.

spirits had dark appetites, and sent their hosts off to murder those who annoyed them. Some *cholés* (“Godflowers”) ate rotting meat and dirt, seared their flesh with fire or danced on mountaintops to pass the experience along to their patrons. Even so, the natives learned to take these things in stride. A *cholé* would be forgiven a great deal by her community, and might be handsomely rewarded by the spirits as well, for the things she did during *quinshi*. An especially devout *cholé* won rewards for her whole village — bountiful harvests, helpful weather, warnings and other good fortune.

Then, explorers trekked to the Caribbean in search of gold, slaves and land. Pirates, runaway slaves and diseases followed these adventurers, and the *Qua’ra* died in droves. Spanish and French settlers occupied the islands, dragging the natives off to work their farms. Black slaves, imported when native slaves died, fled across the islands and took refuge with other natives, while rival tribes clashed over any remaining territories. By 1550, the *Qua’ra* were remembered only by the spirits.

Hispañola (now Haiti and the Dominican Republic) quickly became a major Spanish settlement. This same island had been sacred to the *Qua’ra* and favored by the spirits. The intense magickal nature of the land itself made the newcomers uneasy, especially those who feared Satan’s powers. *Quinshi* was quickly forbidden, and those possessed were often burned alive. Even the buccaneers who favored the island feared the powerful spirit entities, and they made charms to protect them from the “demons” in the woods. Affronted by the destruction of their people and the newcomers’ disrespect, the more benevolent spirits went into slumber or retreated into the oceanic depths. The darker spirits went on a rampage.

The spirits’ anger turned into chaos on both sides of the Gauntlet. When people died in the new lands, their ghosts were drawn into screaming maelstroms; the living saw the weather worsen as the island’s bounty dried into dust. The malefic spirits — *baka* — fed the worst aspects of man and animal alike, and cruelty became commonplace. In the bayous and hidden pools, the ancient *Mokolé* rose up to devour trespassers. The arrival of vampires — the Followers of Set — in 1700 capped off a new legacy of misery. If Hispañola seemed cursed, there were certainly enough reasons for it.

The New Ways

Not everyone who came to the islands disregarded the old ways. The last *Qua’ra* taught the earliest black refugees the ways of *quinshi*. The general tenets resembled those of traditional African beliefs, and over time the newcomers melded the two together. Christian influences colored the brew some more, giving rise to faiths like Voudun and Santería. The lost spirit-gods of the old folk became the loa

and *orisha* of the new religions, and the ghosts of loved ones remained healthy through remembrance. Naturally, the landholders punished devotees of these new faiths, but the combination of human will and spiritual assistance provided its own weapons. The mages who inevitably rose from these new beliefs were as adept at cursing as they were at curing.

With respect, the loa grew strong. They paid off that debt by granting their followers incredible powers — strength, flight, healing and other talents. The ghosts of the dead rode their own “horses,” and the people reforged the bonds between mortals and spirits. To the faiths that arose, the living world mirrored the spirit world (a fact most mages know to be true). By becoming a link between them, each devotee became part of her religion — a living miracle.

Miracle or not, this new faith could be as harsh as the land that bred it. The magick that gave rise to the Bata’a Craft was — and remains — bloody-minded and carnal. The ages of conquest, piracy and slavery tainted the island’s magickal energies, turning beautiful sites into corrupted Nodes. Runaway slaves established their own communities in the mountains and jungles and killed anyone who trespassed. Other slaves rebelled, were suppressed, and rebelled again. As the slaves’ magicks grew stronger, however, they cursed their masters and poisoned the plantations. New masters tortured rebels and cultists, but the uprisings continued. The Bata’a, the spirit drum of unity and freedom, rumbled in the night. *Zombis*, possessed slaves and phantom agony always followed the sound.

Some Setite vampires added to the confusion by taking on the names and appearance of the loa themselves — an act of blasphemy for those who noticed. Disciples with spirit-sight discovered the difference between the blood-suckers and the more familiar entities; spirits were clearly spirits, while the so-called “loa” from the clan of Set seemed like pale mortals surrounded by a haze of screaming baka. Naturally, the Setites quickly disposed of anyone who exposed their charade, so many worshippers still followed the pretenders as if they were true loa. The blood-cults that arose, combined with the deeds of angry ghosts and spirits, drenched the magical islands with blood.

Congo Square

Legends credit Marie Laveau and the original Dr. John with welding various factions into the Bata’a society; of course, legends credit these luminaries with *everything* that happened in that region. Those who might know aren’t speaking. All accounts agree, however, that the formation of the Bata’a Craft can be traced to Congo Square, a slave quarter in New Orleans, and the wild ceremonies presided over by Marie Laveau in the early 1800s. Within a decade, dozens of *houmfours* (voodoo temples) had established a cooperative network across the islands and mainlands,

exchanging favors, information and occasionally cash and other goods. Somewhere along the line, the normally fractious groups of houngans, mambos, bokors and conjure-folk had become convinced that they had greater enemies than each other. Cooperation certainly beat extinction. Thus, the Craft was born.

Over the years, certain groups — especially Christian mages from the Chorus, Ecstasy Cultists and pawns of the Order of Reason — went over to Hispañola. These trips often went poorly; most emissaries had no idea what they were dealing with. Many died. Some reappeared as zombies. A final crackdown attempt from the settlers (backed up by agents from the Cabal of Pure Thought) backfired. The resulting war broke the European hold on Hispañola in 1804, and other colonies followed. The 19th century saw a rash of rebellions and wars; when they ended, the Caribbean was free.

Or was it?

U.S. troops invaded Haiti in 1915; the racism that came with the occupation carried a bitter taste for the former slave colony. Years of plantation farming (and magical fighting) had drained the nutrients from the soil, forcing the country to import food while its exports — coffee and sugar — faced worldwide competition. As is usually the case, a handful of people ended up with the few resources available in the region, and the common people, including many Bata'a, suffered even more. In the night, factions clashed over the scraps that remained. A line of dictatorships, including the infamous Papa Doc Duvalier, made pacts with various voodoo cults and used their influence to loot what remained of the country's economy. Some of these cults were affiliated with the Bata'a, while others sprang from the Setites' deceptions or carved their

own paths in the region. The magical wars and mundane violence continues to this day. The recent AIDS and hepatitis epidemics provide icing on a truly foul cake. Between the economic slavery, the disease and starvation, and the constant violence and corruption, the Caribbean area, especially Haiti, remains as oppressed under its own rule as it ever was under the slavers' rule.

Even so, the Bata'a remain determined. Although some of the Craft's members have sided with politicians, drug runners, the Setites or all three, most have stayed true to their people. These mages and devotees forego the power and wealth they could have for the services they provide for their communities and for the spirits. Not all *Les Invisibles* and loa work with profiteers; some still remember the old days and the bonds between flesh and spirit. The group's struggle to bring back the spirits' favor has been slow and unrewarding, though. So many ghosts have gone into the spirit-storms around the Caribbean, and so many of them come back seeking vengeance. Those Bata'a who cling to their decency have a hard time of it. Desperation, hatred and spiritual corruption can poison even saints.

In 1868, a houngan named Amparo and his consort, Seven Flowers, opened a gateway into the spirit world and beyond — a Horizon Realm they christened Palmares. Drawing Aché from three hidden Nodes, the founders laid out a small Realm to preserve the Haiti that even then was beginning to fade. A massive waterfall, luxurious forests and a hounfour of polished teak became the centerpieces of a tribute to *Les Invisibles*, and to the sacred land that once had been. Family spirits and trusted friends were given the *vévés* signs that opened the portal to the Realm, but Palmares was kept — and remains — a secret.

Culture



The Bata'a, as a rule, don't like *les idiots* (outsiders). Even well-intentioned strangers bring disasters, so the Craft as a whole would just as soon keep everyone else out. It's not that easy, though; the strategic and economic importance of the area, on top of its natural beauty and accessibility, make it prime picking grounds for mortals. Worst of all, though, is the region's magical potential; this, more than any other factor, has made the Caribbean a prize for a number of supernatural invaders. Some of them call the place home. The Craft, therefore, has a long fight ahead of it if it wants to drive the outsiders away. Many Bata'a wonder if they're up to the task.

The Land

For reasons lost to time, the entire Caribbean region is a powerhouse of mystick energy, rivaled only by the British isles, the Fertile Crescent, the Australian Outback and the

Himalayas. Tales speak of cities sunk before the Cro-Magnon Age, of the alien Ka Luon, the Pure Ones or "simple" geophysical phenomena. In any case, the entire area between the Central American and Gulf coast to the Bahamas is a massive generator or storehouse of Aché (Quintessence).

It's also extremely unstable, both politically and metaphysically. Even before the white men arrived, the region had a more violent temperament than comparable areas like the Pacific Islands. Constant respect for the land and its spirits and ghosts allowed the Qua'ra and Arawaks to live there in relative peace (the cannibalistic Caribs were another story...). When the Europeans began carving up the region and importing diseases and slaves, this balance disappeared and never returned. The settlements of vampires in and around Haiti have not helped matters. The Setites consider the Caribbean their new homeland, and have gone out of their way to turn it into Hell.



The lands themselves, once luxurious rainforests and mountains, have been stripped by centuries of harvesting and construction. Many of the people no longer care about the consequences of breaking their pact with the land; who cares about tomorrow when you have to eat today? The spirits, however, don't take this disrespect lightly, and they return the favor threefold. The Umbræ around the region seethe with baka and spiritual whirlwinds on all three Umbral levels. Without the spirits' goodwill, the soul of the land itself crumbles like eroded soil. *When one half of the mirror cracks, goes the saying, all things are fractured.*

The mirror is an important concept to the Bata'a. The living world is only one half of a whole. This idea extends to the Craft's organization, its practices and its Arts. The Bata'a recognize their link to the land and its spirits, and to the ghosts of their own ancestors. When the Craft was formed, Marie Laveau and Dr. John (who supposedly formed the group's first *Marassa*, or sacred partnership) gave it two goals: the prosperity of the people, and the prosperity of the land. Simple goals, yet hard to meet; the task of surviving while putting the mess to rights seemed impossible for a group so small. This conflict drove some Bata'a to assemble their own power bases, ignoring everyone else. The modern Craft is hardly unified, and given its agenda, this division might make the whole alliance fall apart. Some Bata'a wonder if wars with *les idiots* are the only things that keep them from each others' throats....

Sacrifice

Sacrifice — as in “making sacred” — is as important to the Bata'a Craft as it is to the religions its devotees follow. Nothing comes without cost. With so little to offer, most folks sacrifice what they can: their food, their livestock and themselves. Tales of chicken-killing and wild possessions scare the crap out of *les idiots*, but to the Bata'a, it's all a part of life. The Verbena understand, but few others do.

The pop-culture “voodooist” writhes on the ground bathed in chicken blood; while the image isn't necessarily untrue, there's more to it than outsiders realize. *Les Invisibles* need to eat, they like to drink, and they love to feel. The worshipper — mage or not — who helps the spirits do these things wins their favors. Besides, it's simply respect. Would you deny food to your father, or ask your mother for money without at least telling her you love her? Sacrifice is an act of giving that forms a bridge and a pact between the living and spiritual world. If outsiders don't get it, that's their problem.

Among the services that the living perform for *Les Invisibles* is the rite of *retirer d'en bas de l'eau*, which “re-Fetters” those wraiths unlucky enough to be unanchored by their families. The ceremony ties the loose wraith to an earthenware pot called a *govi*, which then serves as a Fetter; the wraiths' gratitude for this service is often both tangible and plentiful.

Mortal service is also a form of sacrifice, and all Bata'a serve their communities, as well as *Les Invisibles*, somehow.

Most teach children, grow food, heal the sick (a real job in itself), and try to repair the damage to the land — the erosion, deforestation and decrepit towns. It's an uphill fight; smuggling, tourism and the vice trade offer easy rewards with minimal effort, and even Bata'a get sidetracked. Still, in all, the Craft has a very powerful work ethic, and uses unpleasant means to deal with those who ignore it. . . .

Fear is a weapon the Bata'a understand well. When drums of human skin thunder in the night, when the bokor's whip cracks and the zombis rise, even the Setites pause. Four hundred years of terror and hardship have produced one of the most terrifying magickal societies in history, and the Bata'a play up all the "classical" lore. Half the time, an enemy's fear will do the work for them, and the Bata'a can use all the help they can get.

Fear is also their companion. The same tools that make *les idiots* shiver carry potent mojo, and voodoo devotees understand that power. Governments across the region are corrupt, and torture is a common practice on both sides of the law. *Les Mysterés* are just that — mysteries. Even seasoned bokors don't know quite what to expect from them. Each time a devotee uses magick, a doorway opens between worlds. *No one* knows what might come across. In short, a Bata'a must master fear — others' fear and her own.

Bata'a have a different perspective on good and evil than most Westerners. Given their heritage, who can blame them? Justice is far more important to them than kindness, and justice has a different meaning to someone from a poverty-ridden battlefield than it does for an American middle-class college student. Justice means you earn what you receive and pay for what you get. In some cases, that payoff may be pretty damned bad. So long as it seems just, a Bata'a will have no reservations about trapping a soul, laying a curse or flaying a man alive. Hey, if he asked for it, who was *she* to refuse? A member of this Craft will warn you *once*. After that, the consequences of your actions are not her problem, even if she brings them about.

Family

According to Tradition, members of seven different tribes were brought to the Caribbean during the early years of the slave trade. Most Bata'a claim lineage to one of these tribes, and can often call up an ancestor or two to prove the claim. Within the Craft, these seven tribes are remembered as *Rangi*, or colors. Although the connotation sounds like a gang term (and is taken as such in the U.S.), the name comes from the many hues of the Rainbow Serpent creatrix, Ayida-Wedo. As with any other society, members of different *Rangi* war with each other occasionally. This makes it hard to trust anyone, even your own kind. Within your *Rangi*, however, no secrets are necessary. While all Bata'a are sworn to protect each other in need, the members of a given *Rangi* share a blood-trust. The infrequent betrayer's

of such trust are skinned alive, then turned into zombis so they can feel the pain of their punishment forever.

Such harsh measures are rarely necessary; many Bata'a work together and consider themselves and their relations as part of an extended family, with the local communities as their children. The mages provide for these folks as best they can. A sacrifice is never wasted. While the loa consume the spirit-essence of the offering, the material part is often given to the poor. It's not as nourishing as "whole" food, but it beats starving.

It's easy to think of Bata'a sitting around darkened rooms being sinister, flickering candles and drums setting up an ominous mood. For *les idiots*, this is the true face of voodoo. Like the other stereotypes, it's not entirely untrue; voodoo practitioners know how essential it is to set up the right mood, especially when dealing with magick and/or outsiders. Amongst themselves, however, these mages can be warm and friendly, if a bit guarded. After all, in a place where people routinely disappear in the night for any number of reasons, it's always a good idea to keep your back to the wall. Even so, the people of this Craft value their kinship with each other, and appreciate the simple beauties of life. Even longtime rivals help each other out when necessary. The aid may come with a price, but it's better than nothing. And a houngan who helps his enemy and asks for nothing in return gains a lot of respect, even from his foes.

The family concept extends into the *Marassa* relationship. Each Bata'a takes a partner of the opposite sex as his or her "twin." Most twins are married, or at least consorts, although a few nonsexual *Marassas* exist. If one twin is Awakened, chances are they both share the gift. These partners live together, work together and perform their magicks together, often mirroring each other's actions. To the Bata'a, the *Marassa* represents the mirrored whole, a mystickal union which makes both partners complete. Few *Marassa* survive a partner's death, although Marie Laveau, who supposedly still lives, has survived her apparent twin by over a century.

Beliefs

Voodoo does not exclude, it includes.

— modern voodoo saying

Although outsiders call the Bata'a "voodoo mages," the Craft actually reaches across religions like Voudun, Umbanda, and others, uniting them. Those religions are to the Bata'a what Christianity is to the Celestial Chorus — religious foundations to their magickal society. A Bata'a's religion is not as important as her beliefs. Most Craft terms and practices meld the different religions together into a potent gumbo. Bata'a are nothing if not eclectic.

Magickal Forms

To the Bata'a, no one attains magick without a loa's help; on the other hand, a person doesn't have to be Awakened to ask for — or to receive — spiritual aid. Although a close

relationship with your *ti-bon-ange* and *gros-bon-ange* (which combine to form your soul, or Avatar) grants you more potent magick, plenty of un-Awakened folks give themselves over to be ridden, and receive favors for it, too. Temporary favors, but powerful nonetheless.

The two halves of the soul, the *ti-bon-ange* and *gros-bon-ange*, often remain together but apart, like mirror halves forming a whole. In many cases, one prospers over the other, causing an imbalance. In death — or undeath, in the case of vampires — these pieces separate forever. Some bokors willingly split their souls into parts and store one half in a magicked container for protection. Control over the soul is very important to the Craft's beliefs. Loss or slavery of the soul creates the zombi. *No one* wants to become one of those.

Personal power comes when the two halves unite completely and merge — Awakening the Avatar. The spirits grant this Awakening as a sign of favor, and a person who achieves this state is destined to do great things. Unfortunately, *les idiots* often claim to have reached it on their own, and abuse their powers without thanking the spirits who granted them. This really pisses off the Bata'a — it's akin to accepting a huge gift, claiming you earned the money yourself, and then wasting it. This knowledge, combined with bad past blood, keeps the Craft from getting too close to other magickal groups, even for its own benefit.

To the Bata'a, magick falls into two categories: *marre* and *majane*. *Marre* magick is based on service. You serve the world, the world serves you. You serve the loa, the loa do as you ask. Sometimes. If you're lucky. Ironically, the Bata'a work toward freedom, yet give themselves over to be ridden by spirits. Maybe it's the *decision* to serve, not the service itself, that's important to them. The *marre* bond between *Les Invisibles* and their cholé "godflowers" helps both parties, and forms a sacred bridge between their worlds. Really special cholés are Awakened by the loa and attain real power.

Mjane magick uses spirit fetishes, magickal objects and personal power. Most people consider such magick suspicious; the *majane* magician may be using the spirits, but is he treating them with respect? Most Bata'a would say no. This prejudice is one of the reasons the Craft wants no part of the Traditions and their fight. To the practitioners of *marre*, those who rely only on their Avatars are shallow, disrespectful fools.

Possession

The ultimate service and sacrifice a devotee can offer is to let a spirit use her body to cross into the living world. This offering is a gift of trust, and the loa often repay it with superhuman powers, knowledge or prophecy. The spirits of nature and the departed are less generous, but still grant their horses, or *Les Chevaux*, some favor, secret, or nudge of mortal influence.

To the Christian missionaries, these horses left themselves open to be ridden by the Devil. Sometimes they were right. The spirits aren't always kind, and demons and baka

often take advantage of voodoo's ways. Bata'a teach their fellows how to handle a possession, but even then, the sacrifice is always risky. Possession is said to be the ultimate ecstasy, the melding of two spirits in one body and the surrender of the self to another. Like great sex, it turns trust into transcendence. It's dangerous, because the devotee isn't always aware of which spirit she'll be giving herself to. Still, to the Bata'a, faith is a part of the game. Without it, one gets nowhere. Ever.

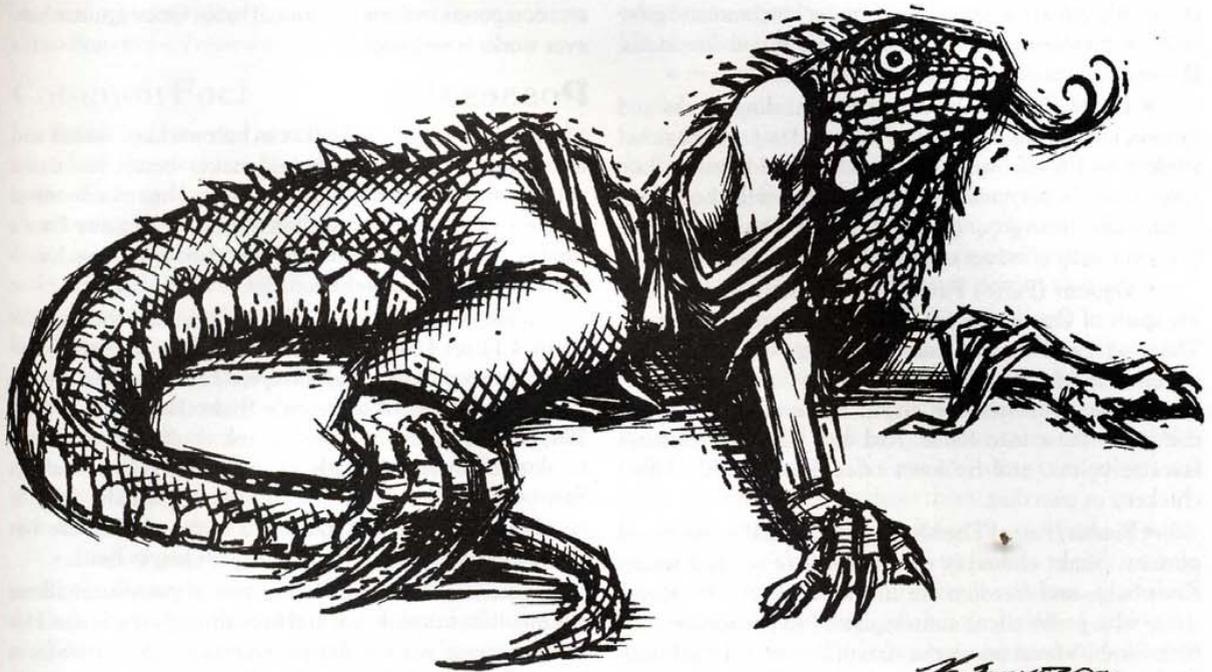
Spirits

Les Invisibles come in many forms, from the ghosts of past relatives, to the nature spirits and the loa. Even the animals are said to have souls, and recognize a worthy person or deed. Keeping the ghosts happy is always important in a land with so many Restless Dead (see the "Dark Kingdoms" Chapter in the *Wraith Players Guide*). Nature spirits are more difficult to deal with; the desolation of the land has left many of them corrupted. These spirits, and those of the angry dead, become evil *baka*, and there are plenty of those around. The loa are not "gods" in the usual sense of the word; their other name, *Les Mystères*, says more about them than the word "god." Loa are mysteries, living secrets from the spirit world. A wise person can get these secrets to speak. According to some tales, all loa were once human, too, and even they need company.

Some legends claim that the true *Les Mystères* dwell in Guinée, deep in the spirit-sea, and that the loa actually serve them. The wisest Bata'a know that the traditional loa have become the voices of these forgotten spirits. Those who have journeyed into the spirit lands have heard of the Island Beneath the Seas, where the elder spirits retreated early on. Those few wise ghosts who make the passage through the spirit-seas may be granted favors and teachings in exchange for service. Those who "survive" the process and pass the many tests may someday become new loa. The original Dr. John is said to be such a man; his cult is small, but growing.

Unlike most religions, Voudun is a faith in motion, and new loa sometimes appear. It's not common, but it does happen. The two most powerful groups of loa, and the ones most Bata'a deal with, are known as the *Petro* (sinister spirits, often connected to the elements and conflict) and *Rada* (nurturing spirits of knowledge and healing). Some loa have aspects of both, and change between them. Different *Mystères* are called upon for different favors; a woman in love with a man brings her case before Erzulie; if she wanted to kill him instead, Baron Samedi would be more appropriate. Many Christianized Bata'a place God, Jesus and Mary above all the loa, but the exact hierarchy varies from person to person.

A bare-bones roll call of the most popular loa can be found below. As with everything connected to the spirit world, their preferences change constantly. The loa are



fickle, as they say, and have at least as many quirks and mood swings as any mortal.

- **Ayida-Wedo:** (Rada) The Serpent Lady of a Thousand Rainbows, this creation goddess favors humankind and protects her followers. Some mystics, especially among the Bata'a, consider her either the consort or feminine aspect of Damballah; her provinces are wisdom, color and protection, and Mind and Life magick lie in her domain. Those she possesses writhe like snakes on the ground, and flick forked tongues.

- **Baron Samedi:** (Petro) The Haitian God of Death, for all intents and purposes. The Baron kills, revives or enslaves, and often grants divinations which can bring on or ward off death. Life and Entropy are his obvious specialties. His favorite color, naturally, is midnight black, and he insists on sacrifices of fish and black chickens. Those he rides laugh disturbingly, and often conceal their eyes.

- **Chango:** (Petro) Also called **Shango**, this warlike spirit commands weather, the elements and physical power. Guns, explosives and fire fall under his command; like them, his temper is explosive. Those he rides become killing machines or tireless lovers. Although his obvious powers embrace Forces, his lust for Life gives him power over those Arts, too. Blood, red roosters and gunpowder are worthy sacrifices, especially if they're either burned or blown up.

- **Damballah:** (Petro) The serpent of wisdom and flame, known as the Father of Falling Waters and the Serpent of the Sky, assumes many of the same roles as Ayida-Wedo, his consort. New initiates, or Bata'a invoking natural Forces or Prime Aché, call upon this grand and fiery snake. His followers sacrifice red garments, goats and rum to win his favor.

- **Erzulie:** (Rada) One of the most popular loa, the Wealthy Lady smiles upon love, lust and beauty. On the other hand, she sometimes comes as a weeping woman who cries for love, or as a furious harridan wreathed in fire. Either way, sacrifices of cake, sweets and liquor are good ways to get her attention. Life and Mind Arts are her specialty. Erzulie's powerful femininity carries over into her horses; those she possesses flirt and dance girlishly, even the men.

- **Ghede:** (Rada) Another form of Baron Samedi, this loa also watches over death and the dead. Like Samedi, he favors black, although he doesn't wear it himself. Unlike his "cousin," Ghede is often a happy, lustful spirit. Those under his possession can eat and drink past human limits. Those who invoke Entropy and Mind magicks call upon Ghede. He loves gifts of food and good booze, especially live chickens and roosters.

- **Legba:** (Rada) The Walking God, spirit of stories, crossroads and journeys, Legba guards the ways of the Earth and the spirit Realms. Any magick involving Correspon-

dence, Time or Umbral passage must invoke this loa first. Some tales credit him with creation itself, and most ceremonies begin in his name. Those under his command grow strong but violent, and their limbs twist in odd directions. He dearly loves good rum and fine cigars.

- **Loco:** (Rada) The Mystery of healing, herbs and visions, Loco forms the Root of Will, and imparts magickal wisdom to his followers. Those who use Matter or Life magick invoke his name. As the Guardian of the hounfour, he provides a firm grounding for the Bata'a, and they return the favor with offerings of green herbs and pure water.

- **Ogoun:** (Petro) Fire, wrath and liberation embody the spirit of Ogoun the Chainbreaker, God of the Blade. Those who call on him must be strong — weaklings are useless to this Mystery. The most violent Forces and Matter spells demand his attention, and his horses often fly through the air or burst into flame. Red and black are Ogoun's favorite colors, and he loves offerings of freshly killed chickens or iron dust.

- **Simbi:** (Petro) The Mystery of magickal powders and potions, Simbi embraces the elements of air and water. Knowledge and freedom are his domains, and he favors those who prefer silent contemplation to passionate conflict. Simbi's favor opens the Arts of Forces and the Mind. Herbs, fruits and spring water please this loa, who often wears green and yellow when he appears.

Magickal Style

All magickal acts involve rituals, whether the Bata'a is Awakened or not. First, a gateway to the spirit world must be opened by calling upon Legba and driving a stake into the ground; after that, the devotee enters a trance, either through drugs, dancing, music, prayer, an ordeal, or some combination of all of these elements. This usually takes at least a turn or two and often longer. From there, a spirit might possess the caller (or callers), or simply allow her to open the channel between her intentions and her soul. Note that for Bata'a mages, this rite is a focus for *all* their magick; different foci apply to different magickal workings, but all of them begin with a trance and invocation. It's a vital part of *marre* magick.

Specially prepared items carry some mojo of their own. By imbuing an item with the power of the land (or using one that already has that link), a conjure-man can focus his powers on a spell. Really powerful items become *gris-gris* (Talismans and fetishes). Bata'a consider these tools, which carry their own magick, more suspect than "clean" spirit workings, but, as usual, whatever works is helpful.

Most Bata'a have problems with technomagick. While some modern mambos and hounsans have mastered scientific toys, they rarely accept them as substitutes for the old standbys. Some vital link to the land is missing. While many Bata'a in the U.S. understand the spirits in technol-

ogy, those spirits are odd, somehow just not right. Even so, some young Bata'a prefer drum machines, electric guitars and computers to their traditional tools. Once again, whatever works is welcome.

Possession

Even un-Awakened folks can become *Les Chevaux* and use spirit powers. A mage just makes better and more permanent use of *Les Invisibles'* gifts, and has more control over how and when possession occurs. While any Bata'a can call upon any loa, most devotees choose a patron loa — or the patron chooses them.

In game terms, a mage invokes possession through the Spirit 4 Effect **Living Bridge**. A mundane devotee (voodooists can hardly be called "Sleepers") either uses Ephemera Hedge Magic (see **Ascension's Right Hand**, pages 103-104), which allows for some control, or offers herself up to be skinridden (see **Wraith and Wraith Players Guide**). Spirit Charms do not invoke Paradox, but usually drain or endanger the horse. A possessed mage cannot use her normal Sphere magicks until the spirit leaves her.

Possession takes two forms; partial possession allows *Les Invisibles* to speak, see and hear through the horse. Her body language, voice and appetites become the spirit's for as long as he chooses to stay (usually a minute or two, rarely longer than five minutes total), but her abilities are her own. Total possession makes the horse a vessel of the spirit's power; until he leaves, he can do what he will with her body. Thankfully, most horses receive a "loan" of three to six dots in their Physical Attributes during the possession. Considering the beating *Les Chevaux* often take, they need them.

The Charms a horse might employ depend on the loa channeled. All loa have elemental powers like Create Fire, Create Wind, Flood, and Control Electrical Systems. Rada loa will usually add Airt Sense, Cleanse the Blight, Mindspeech and Healing (like Life 3); Petro loa add Armor, Blighted Touch, Corruption and Lightning Bolts. The Dice Pools for these powers range from three to seven, depending on what's being done and who's doing it. (See **Mage**, pages 238-239 for Charm rules.)

Spheres

The Bata'a call their collective magicks *obi* or *obeah*, and make no distinction between True Magick and Hedge Magic. All Awakened Bata'a learn the Spirit Arts first, and Life magicks after that. Like most Crafts, they have no concept of the Spheres, and the idea would probably sound ridiculous if you explained it to them. Magick comes from the spirits. That's all you need to know. If you want to invoke a power, ask the loa responsible for it (see above). In game terms, a Bata'a mage still has to learn the Spheres he wants to use, however. It's one thing to get a gift from the loa, another to understand how to use it consistently and to your best advantage.

Un-Awakened Bata'a learn the Hedge Magic Paths of Ephemera, Cursing and Enchantment. Devotees without any real training simply offer themselves as vessels for skinriding or the Possession Charm.

Common Foci

Ritual tools are vital to *marre* magick; they connect the spirits with the magician. More importantly, they please the spirits. Working magick without the proper tools and observances will get you in trouble in the eyes of the Bata'a. Traveling Bata'a carry a pouch, often called a *mojo bag*, with ritual tools and items inside. Mystick significance aside, most voodoo tools carry a mystique all their own. And voodoo practitioners know how important setting the right mood can be.

- **Altars:** *Marre* magick is a sacred Art; thus, many rites demand an altar or a sacred space which the spirits appreciate. Devotees prepare these places with icons, *vévés*, personal effects, candles, incense, food and rum, and dishes of salt, water, earth, herbs or blood. Some home altars are table-sized or smaller, while others may take up a whole room.

- **Body Parts:** Flesh and spirit are connected; thus, parts of bodies carry mystick links to the soul. Blood, hair, skulls, bones and nail clippings are common foci, but some ritual items require organs or tanned skins. Objects made of or prepared with body parts include potions, drums, jewelry, weapons and the sickening *nganga*, which stores Aché in a stew of animal parts, herbs and human brains.

- **Dance and Song:** As any Ecstasy Cultist can tell you, music is the pulse of creation. Songs please the spirits, and drum rhythms carry even the dumbest mortals along to where the line between worlds blurs. A skilled musician can lower magick-roll difficulties for himself or for others (see **Mage**, page 175-176), and sets a good mood for the rite. A dance called *asagwe* pays tribute to the loa and songs or calls called *jingo* summon their attention. A good hard dance also helps a devotee surrender herself to the loa, opening her up to possession.

- **Gris-Gris:** Simply put, a Bata'a uses trance, prayer and possession to request a spirit's aid. Even "independent" spells involve a plea to the loa and a minor trance, unless some specially prepared focus — called a *gris-gris*, a *mojo*, a witch bottle, or a dozen other names — has been blessed by the spirit beforehand. Most ritual tools need to be blessed anyway (making them unique foci; see **Mage**), but a *gris-gris* allows the mage to cast her Effect without going into the trance and calling up the spirit as she does.

To make a *gris-gris*, the devotee calls up one of the loa and asks for a favor. Once made, the *gris-gris* works only once or twice, unless the Bata'a actually creates a fetish (**Mage**, page 245). Several *gris-gris* can be prepared at once, but doing so demands a bigger favor. A *gris-gris* can be anything, but common ones include: balls of black wax (used to kill), bone tools or weapons, *vévés* or hex signs, cards, herbs or potions, dust, candles and animal companions.

- **Powders:** Like body parts, powders carry an object's essence in concentrated form. Some powders, especially salt, sugar and grave dirt, have power of their own; others, like chalk and ash, are used to mark out scars or *vévé* signs.

- **Prayer and Icons:** While the loa and ghosts seem to be the obvious avenues for help, many Bata'a consider themselves at least partially Christian. Thus, Catholic saints, the Virgin Mary and sometimes Christ Himself are invoked in many magickal prayers, and icons of them are common ceremonial trappings. Some bokors prefer to pray to Satan or other devils, but sinister as their practices may seem, most voodoo wizards stop short of actual demon worship.

- **Sacrifice:** The "Beliefs" section already explains the role of sacrifice in voodoo magick. Common sacrifices include sweets, rum and whisky, cigars, sugar, gunpowder, herbs, water (fresh or salt), animals (especially roosters, chickens and goats), fruits, bodily fluids (sweat, blood, tears, semen), coffee, milk and cash. Most loa are very picky about their tribute, and will not appear unless it pleases them.

- **Scars:** Most Bata'a scar themselves as marks of initiation or loyalty, or brand their skin with *vévés* or other symbols. Tattooing is practiced, but is not really common. Scars don't actually help focus the magick, but the ordeal of getting one may. Many adepts of certain loa or specialties mark themselves with particular brands, scars or tattoos, and someone in the know might recognize a devotee by his markings.

- **Serpents:** In Caribbean magick, serpents are givers of wisdom and power; both Ayida-Wedo and Damballah often appear as serpents. The snake also carries a poisonous bite, and represents both desire and a threat. The Followers of Set revere snakes, too, and often become serpents. Many Bata'a wrap themselves in snakes, wear snakeskin boots, drink snake venom, or send snakes to punish their enemies. One infamous bokor, Papa Joe Coffin, even changed his eyes to look like a snake's.

- **Whips and Blades:** Legacies of the slave times and the revolts that ended them, whips and blades shed blood and command respect. Most Bata'a consecrate their weapons to a certain loa, and use them accordingly. Knives, often machete-length, carve *vévés* and kill sacrifices. Whips create a flash of spirit-essence, and many rites climax with the crack of a whip.

Organization

Of all the Crafts, the Bata'a can claim the largest membership. Over 100 million people follow the related faiths worldwide, and at least 10,000 of these have active ties to the Bata'a. Roughly half of these have some mystic talent, and between 300 to 400 of these are Awakened mages.

- The Craft makes no distinction between hedge wizards and mages (see "Beliefs"), but refers to respected members as **mae-de-santos** (momma saint) and **pae-de-santos** (papa saint). While Master-level sorcerers are rare,



the Bata'a command a formidable amount of mystick power — more than many Traditions. Nearly all of this power is concentrated in the Caribbean region, Central America, the southern United States (especially Louisiana) and parts of New York City. Small links exist in Central and South Africa. All these areas are “hands off” for other magickal societies. Trespassers are warned *once*.

Even so, the Bata'a don't carry influence in proportion to their numbers. Their countries are poor, their lands often desolate. *Les Invisibles* are tricky allies, and the vampires and outside voodoo cultists are nasty enemies. Disease, crime and hopelessness cripple their communities, and inter-Rangi distrust undercuts Craft unity. Lack of central leadership doesn't help. Once, Marie Laveau is said to have pulled the factions together peacefully; these days, the Bata'a have grown too large to be governed.

- This Craft's organization is simple and local. Each town or neighborhood which follows voodoo, Santeria, or one of the other related faiths has at least one **link** to the **Ronde des Ames** (or **Chain of Souls**), the Bata'a network. Each link has at least one **Marassa** couple. These conjure-folk may not be mages, but they'll have some talent, and act as spiritual and material advisors to their “cousins.” Each link establishes a **hounfour**, and keeps in touch with other links. All seven **Rangi** keep their own networks, and that's where trouble usually starts. Although everyone belongs to the same group, their bickering resembles Hermetic intrigues. The level of violence, though, is much higher.

A voodoo war is terrifying. Fear is more important than magick, and neither side takes prisoners. Fighting ranges from drive-by shootings to long-range curses, and gruesome weapons — chainsaws, mutilations, dead animals and zombies — are the rule. Hounfours are the first targets; break the altar and you break the link. The enemies list includes vampires, baka, drug cartels, corrupt officials, inner-city gangs, outside cults and cops. Sometimes Rangi stand together against *les idiots*, but it's not something to count on. Wars usually last until at least one link and its allies are annihilated.

Initiation

- To join the Craft, a devotee of the faith must approach a known member and petition her for teaching. Connections and reputations help a lot, and few — if any — white students are even considered. If accepted, the student must donate all his time and money for a year before becoming a **hounsis** (initiate), and show wisdom, devotion and talent. Until then, his teaching is limited to running errands, listening to stories and doing chores. Few candidates go further than this.

- Once admitted to the group, the hounsis begins to learn the ways of *Les Invisibles*. Scarification, purification, prayers, fasts and lessons pave the way for the initiate's first possession. Secluded in a *couché*, he is given jurema (whisky laced with hallucinogenic herbs) and left to walk with the

spirits. If he comes through the ordeal intact, he is admitted. If he's any good (and survives the Craft's frequent conflicts), he slowly grows in power. All the while, the hounsis and his sponsor search for a **Marassa partner**, a twin to help him achieve totality. Once they find her (or she finds them), the two become one in almost all ways possible. If one or both are married to others, they respect the marriage vows; otherwise, they become lovers and set up house.

- The Bata'a do not keep official ranks; a member progresses or fails through his own efforts. In time, he may come to be called **pae** or **papa**, and his twin becomes **mae** or **mama**. These "titles" reflect popularity, not power. Many so-so mages go by titles like Papa Bones or Mama Le Flambeau, while their betters are simply called John or Mother Jones. Many an ominous conjure-name disguises a lack of real talent.

Acolytes

As mentioned earlier, the Bata'a consider their communities extended families. Like any parent, these relationships aren't always kind, but the mage's word carries weight. Anyone in the community, from a farmer to a nurse to a gangster, can offer *something* to the local mambo or conjure-man. Be rest assured, all favors will be called in. Bata'a serve their communities, and those people should serve them in return. Few Haitians would dare to cross the local houngan, and even American devotees fear his power. Thus, anything a Bata'a wants from his "cousins," he gets, whether out of respect, love or terror.

Members of the mage's Rangi are special cases; close "cousins" are under the Bata'a's protection, and anyone who troubles them must deal with him, too. This doesn't keep vampires or other mages from starting a war, but any attacks on the "cousins" will be met in kind.

Concepts

Bata'a professions depend a lot on where they're from; a conjure man from New York might be a street preacher, gang member, teacher or cop, while one from Haiti might be a struggling doctor, a farmer or a musician. Lots of conjure-folk tend to make a full-time living at what they do, like clergy, or run shops for clueless tourists (with back rooms for smart people). Most Bata'a come from poor communities, and this



Many Spirit Effects—especially **The Spirit Kiss**, **Awaken the Inanimate**, **Free the Mad Howlers**, **Living Bridge** and **Create Fetish**—are a Bata'a's stock in trade. A spell similar to **Psychic Sterilization** protects a hounfour or other guarded site. The infamous voodoo doll Effect demands a "simple" Correspondence 3/Life 3/Mind 2 spell, or a favor from spirits who'll do the deed themselves. Other spells include:

Stereotypes

Traditions: These are a very mixed bag indeed; I know some of their kind who know and revere our ways. Others among them are *les idiots* of the worst kind—ungrateful majane bokor who want to use me and my family as cannon fodder. No thank you, says I. We do not need your help or your poison.

Technocracy: I have heard their name, I have seen their handiwork, and I do not like it. But here, I am king. Their machines are just toys to be broken, and I have a large hammer to make them so.

Marauders: The loa dance inside their heads. It must be wonderful to be so blessed.

Nephandi: Speak to me of serpents—I understand. Some snakes talk wisdom, some snakes got poison eyes and fangs. Snakes do not frighten me. Then you speak of souls and dark mirrors. This, too, I understand. If one of these dark mirrors comes to me, I will shatter him. Until then, I have more important things to do.

Others: My land is my own. Leave it in peace. In the woods, Loup Garou and Mokolé wait for fools. Some nights, I feed them.

Followers of Set: Some days, I wonder why the loa do not kill them for their presumption. Baka feast on their souls, and fools lap their blood like babies. They hunt us in the night, we drag their bones into the sun. The snake eats his own tail, hey, and maybe we and the Snakes are one in the end.

shapes their viewpoints and personalities a lot. They don't tend to be patient folk, and often intimidate *les idiots* with sinister ways and eerie rumors. Other Bata'a prefer to avoid the creepy theatrics, and act deeply mundane unless circumstances push them into a corner.

Age carries wisdom; youth brings fire. Both tend to work together for the Craft's common ends. Youngsters drawn to the Bata'a tend to be dancers, musicians, run-aways, rebels and vision-children, who are marked by supernatural favor like stigmata, prophecy and spirit-sense (the Awareness Talent).

Common Magicks

Hoodoo Man's Heartbeat (•• Mind, or ••• Spirit)

Any conjure man worth the name knows how to intimidate outsiders. While most rely on props and presence, a Bata'a with the right skills can actually disturb his quarry's mind. As he speaks, shadows seem to lengthen and his voice echoes in the poor fool's ears. Soon the beat of his heart becomes the thunder of drums, and it rises to a deafening pitch until the spell ends—or the target goes mad....

Storyteller Ideas

• **Les Invisibles:** Between its history, its mystickal presence and its proximity to the Colombian drug cartels and Amazon War, the Caribbean region is an epic chronicle setting. The set of reality here favors primal magick over technomagick (see **Mage**, page 185), so wild things are possible. The exotic cultures and unbearable poverty in most areas, especially Haiti, are eye-openers to mages accustomed to air-conditioning and MTV. What better place for a quest?

The spirits who call themselves *Les Invisibles* have many possibilities, too. Most loa can be seen as Totem Avatars or Umbral Lords by Hermetic reckoning, but they're an unpredictable lot with a lot of worshippers behind them. Ghost lore claims they came from Africa and reside beneath the sea, serving greater powers than themselves. What might *their* true motives be?

• **The Spirit World:** The Caribbean's Umbrae are a mess; vast portions of all layers are either blights, glens or swirling Maelstroms, and corrupt spirits poison the air. Any mage or werewolf with respect for the spirit world would be dismayed to see the wreckage this lovely region has become. Although the Horizon Realm of Palmares recalls the islands' past, few visitors ever see its wonders. What, if anything, can be done to stop the damage?

• **Outsiders:** Bata'a have every reason to be paranoid; even so, not every outsider is labeled *l'idiot*, at least not for good. Respected nonbelievers are called *OgÅs*, and are welcomed into the homes of Bata'a. Most *OgÅs* are black, and often come from shapeshifter stock. Although the Loup Garou and Mokol  can be dangerous adversaries, the Bata'a often share a common cause with them — respect for the land, service to the spirits, and the ejection of the vampires.

[The Mind variation sets up a **Subliminal Impulse** based on the subject's heartbeat, after twisting the victim's perceptions just a tad.... A good Manipulation + Intimidation roll (difficulty set by circumstances) can add immeasurably to the Effect; the greater the roll, the longer the heart-thunder lasts. The Spirit version calls up *Les Invisibles* to torment the victim. This method is much less reliable than the first.]

One With Beasts (•••• or ••••• Life, or ••••• Spirit)

Powerful mambos and hounsans assume the shape of animals, especially serpents, dolphins, goats and owls. Sometimes the loa bestow this form as a short-lived gift; others achieve their new bodies through their own spirit-granted powers. A long dance and song dressed in the skin of the animal in question brings on the change. Most Caribbeans fear shapeshifters, and avoid one who knowingly sheds her own skin to run with beasts.

[Depending on the forms attained, this spell resembles the Life Effects **Lesser Shapechange** or **Perfect Metamorphosis**.

The Technocracy has never made much headway into the Caribbean; while the two U.S. military efforts (which improved conditions in Haiti, at least) set up a conduit for Technocratic infiltration, every attempt they've made since the 1500s to establish squatters' rights to the Quintessence pool have been undercut, either by the Setites, the voodoo factions, or the people themselves. The islands have a long magickal history, and no one is going to tell the son of a mambo that magick is a fraud! Still, a certain Syndicate comptroller has his hands deep in the Caribbean tourism business, and those hands have become pretty dirty. The Fallen Ones have their claws in him; as of yet, no one else has noticed.

The Nephandi themselves have a long history in the islands. While many of the outsider voodoo cults have their imprint if not their presence, the slave trade and genocide have made the region's powerful Nodes a steady source of power. In the humid nights, cultists and their Fallen masters twist the service of *Les Invisibles* into a worship of baka, and of the vampires who so foolishly believe that they act alone....

Twice in the Council's history, representatives from the Dreamspeakers and Verbena have approached members of the Bata'a with the possibility of membership. The first offer, in 1846, was refused outright. "We have enough problems without getting into another white man's war," went Marie Laveau's response. Later, after the defection of the Ahl-i-Batin, another group of emissaries went forth into the Caribbean. They disappeared forever. Council gossips claimed the Bata'a had made the messengers into a *nganga*, a gruesome concoction made from herbs, blood and brains. Other rumors speculated that vampires or other monsters had enslaved or devoured the mages. No one yet has discovered the truth. No other offers have been forthcoming. The Bata'a are a Craft alone.

A really lucky bokor can get a spirit to shift his body while it rides him, but this, like other channeling spells, is risky.]

Hear and Obey (••••• Spirit, ••••• Life, or ••••• Life, ••••• Mind)

This dreaded bokor mojo traps a person's soul and compels obedience from his corpse. Thus the zombi is born. Methods vary; most of them involve a potion or powder mixed into the victim's food. Soon, he painfully dies. His corpse is dug up, ritually prepared, and revived to walk forever, soulless. The *ti-bon-ange* falls into the spirit tempests, but the *gros-bon-ange* remains in a conduit — usually a locket, witch bottle, animal or skull. For further tortures, the Bata'a might threaten the conduit, mutilate the body, or both. No worse a fate exists in voodoo lore.

[Spirit magick traps the soul, tearing its essence in half, while Life magick kills the man and revives the corpse. The *gros-bon-ange* is destroyed forever — even if some miracle-worker manages to free the *gros-bon-ange* and restore the body

to life, the victim remains empty, loveless and without compassion. A different version imprisons the subject's mind in his own rotting corpse, then yanks it around like a puppet until it falls apart. This fate is often reserved for informers, traitors and *les idiots* who ignore the bokor's warnings.]

Talismans

••• Chango's Blade

Arete 3, Quintessence 15, Cost 6

In a land with many enemies, it's good to have a magickal blade at your side. This knife, often a machete, is consecrated in fire and sacrificed to Chango. If he favors it and agrees with its purpose, the Blade flares white-hot around the Followers of Set, blinding them until the Bata'a can hack them to pieces. Obviously, the Blade deals out aggravated damage when burning, but it only flames when unsheathed in *any* vampire's presence. Each fight uses one point of Quintessence. When this *Aché* runs out, Chango has withdrawn his blessing.

Knife: difficulty 5, Strength + 3 (aggravated), Conceal J

••••• Coco Macaque

Arete 4, Quintessence 20, Cost 8

This sorcerer's stick, often a black walking-stick dedicated to Baron Samedi or a crutch devoted to Legba, moves by itself. Dancing and hopping, the Coco Macaque spies ahead for danger, alerts its owner to coming events, and exudes death magick to those who would harm its master. Some are said to give bad dreams to naughty children, or to reveal a spouse's lies. The man or woman with a Coco Macaque is a person to be feared.

In game terms, the Coco uses Correspondence 1 to spy, Forces 3 to hop, Time 2 to discern the future and Life 4 to kill. Some variations use Mind 2 or 3 instead of the other abilities. Such canes are said to be unbreakable, but burn readily.

Companion: Zombi (Cost: 2)

It begins with a cough. Harsh, racking. The pain starts in your gut like a rusty fishhook and rips its way through, raking the back of your eyeballs and shredding your throat. The breath in your lungs turns to dust, then to sand, then to mud. Soon, things go black.

Then the pain *really* begins.

Welcome to the world of the zombi, slain by ghosts, revived by magick, and damned to follow the bokor's commands. Your soul has been torn in two, one half damned to a swirling hell, the other locked in a conjure-



man's toy. As your body decays, you feel each layer of skin slowly peel and drop away. That damp reek in your nostrils is you. And as the tendons creak beneath crackling skin, your master chuckles, uncoiling his whip.

It's going to be a long night.

Image: In the beginning, a zombi resembles a tired normal man; as decay sets in, his skin toughens, cracks and sloughs off in handfuls. The muscles beneath this rotting shell grow iron-hard, and they regrow any damage short of burning or mulching. The skin, however, falls away, leaving bare tendons and hints of bone. No amount of damage can destroy a zombi — unless he either burns or dissolves completely — until his soul is set free. Some tales claim that a mouthful of salt can release the trapped soul, so many bokors sew their zombis' mouths shut. Worst of all are the eyes. Those who read the zombi's gaze see some echo of his fate.

Those eyes are alive. And still aware.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 1, Stamina 5, Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 2 to 0, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 1

Abilities: Alertness 1, Brawl 4, Intimidation 5, Melee 3, Stealth 3

Spheres: none

Willpower: 10 (but 0 against the bokor who created it)

Health Levels: OK x 5, -2, -3, -5, destroyed

Armor Rating: 3

Attacks/Powers: Regeneration (1 Health Level/turn except against fire or acid.)

Damballah's Daughter

*Babaluaye spins on his crutches,
says leave if you want to,
you want to leave.*

— Paul Simon, "The Rhythm of the Saints"

Quote: *Walk in light and the darkness runs from you. Cower, and it eats you alive.*

Prelude: Once, you were a good girl, singing in the choir and dancing like a child for the joy of living. Your family was poor in money but rich in spirit, and Grandma Mamba brought you sweet gifts and tales of Haiti — not the rotting shell of a gutted nation, but the Haiti of Grandma's time. A green place, rich with promise.

Then the serpent came. At first, he spoke silently as you huddled on your corner of the bed, gasping in the humid night. Over time, he came to you when no one else could see. As you carried water, chopped onions, read your bible. No prayers drove him away. The serpent called to you, and terrified you. Because you wanted to go with him, and knew that was a sin.

The serpent came for real one night, slipping through a doorway and sweeping you into the night. His eyes held you silent, but you wouldn't have screamed anyway. At 15, you wanted to know the serpent's hunger, to hear his lies and learn his wisdom. He took you to a pool and dragged you down to the bottom, where bones rose from the mud. There he sang to you, and his voice was thunder and sweet rain. Damballah Awakened you to join him, and soon you did.

They call her Grandma Mambo. Your grandma. Your teacher. Her voice speaks the serpent's wisdom. And her words carry Damballah's blessing.

Concept: A growing girl who has just recently discovered her magical heritage. Raised in a slum by good Catholic parents, you've strayed out after your Grandma's crazy ways. Now you wait tables at Jellyroll's and study *Les Invisibles*. The cot in Grandma's living room is softer than the bed you shared at home. Mom and Dad don't speak to you, but it's okay. Life is good.

Roleplaying Hints: Flirtatious, smart, a bit obnoxious, you're restless and enthralled by this new life. You dance the rainbow dance and swallow wisdom like a snake with an egg. Damballah's blessing is your birthright. No one can hurt you. Ever.

Magick: Your new Arts flow from you like dancer's sweat. Life and Prime grant you influence over the living parts of Damballah's creation, while Spirit lets you converse with and even touch *Les Invisibles*. You're young and not yet powerful; still, the serpent has his plans. You can read them in his eyes.

Equipment: Switchblade knife, dancing clothes, mojo bag filled with herbs and a rosary, bottle of Jack Daniels whisky.





Children of Knowledge: An Ancient Brew

By Wade Racine and Aaron Anderson;
based on concepts by Kevin Andrew Murphy

The substance of the vessel will exhibit a great variety of forms; it will become liquid and again coagulate a hundred times a day; sometimes it will present the appearance of fishes' eyes and then of tiny silver trees, with twigs and leaves. Whenever you look at it you will have cause for astonishment, particularly when you see it all divided into beautiful but very minute grains of silver, like the rays of the sun. This is the white tincture....

— The Introitus Apertus



Jet inhaled the last sweet breath of the rose-scented smoke as she left the dance floor. Her favorite song by an incarnation of her favorite band made dancing an almost religious experience for her, and the Chapel Perilous was her favorite club. As usual, she went straight to the bar.

"Makes you feel alive, doesn't it?" the bartender commented as he mixed her drink. Jet looked at him, then smiled. He understood how she felt when she was dancing, becoming the pale empress that was the focus of the song.

"More like I'm in another world, beyond life, beyond death," she answered, paying for the drink. "I don't know how to describe it. It's like I become someone else — more than just me." The bartender nodded with a knowing grin. Jet couldn't believe it. She knew for certain that he understood exactly what she was talking about.

"I mixed that one extra-strong," the bartender said, handing her the drink. "If you don't like it, it's on the house." She sipped, then greedily sucked at the incredible liquid coming through the straw. It hit her mind like a bolt of lightning. She could see; not with her eyes, not with her mind, but with

something else. She could see people dancing, pale halos around their bodies. She knew what they felt, how they felt. "Welcome to the world," the bartender said as she quickly finished the drink. "I'll make you up another, but you gotta pay by sitting here and talking with me for a while." Jet readily agreed, for she also understood the bartender somehow, and for some reason the light around him was the brightest of all. She wouldn't be happy until she knew why.

Introduction

The Children of Knowledge are perhaps the most secretive of the nonaligned practitioners of magick, and with good reason. Originally known as the *Solificati* (the Crowned Ones), they participated in the Grand Convocation and joined with the Council of Nine Mystick Traditions, holding the Seat of Matter. But things went horribly wrong, and the *Solificati* disbanded several years later. While many went their separate ways, several of them regrouped and called themselves the Children of Knowledge, hoping to hide their *Solificati* origins. Since then, they have kept to themselves, being secretive for fear of retribution, staying out of the conflict between the Traditions and what is now called the Technocratic Union. Time is working against them, however, and soon they may have to choose sides or perish.

Internally, the Children of Knowledge still call themselves the *Solificati* (singular *Solificato*). They consider their Tradition to be the oldest of all, and trace their magick back through the European alchemical research of the Middle Ages, then to the art of Spain's Moors. The Moors had actually adopted their craft from the Greeks, who had developed alchemy in Egypt in the fourth century B.C. The Children of Knowledge revere the ancient Hellenistic figure Hermes Trismegistus, the Thrice-Great, as the founder of their magickal tradition, and some even honor his original form, the Egyptian deity Thoth, god of mathematics and science.

Far from being the dusty and socially isolated laboratory rats of medieval folklore, the modern Children of Knowledge enjoy spreading their form of enlightenment in the mortal world. They do this by taking advantage of their knowledge of chemistry (which is the modern "child" of alchemy) and pharmacology. Originally, alchemy was devoted to the purpose of changing one physical form into another, with the ultimate goal being the transmutation of lead (or another base metal) into gold through the so-called "Philosopher's Stone." Awakened alchemists realized, however, that this was simply a parable, and that the true mission of magickal alchemy was to turn the spiritual being of mankind to an Awakened state, an epiphany of unity with the universe. The Philosopher's Stone was not simply about turning lead into gold, but about helping humanity

transcend the bonds of spiritual ignorance. All the Children had to do, they believed, was get the collective consciousness of humanity to open itself to the possibility of transcendental enlightenment, and then knowledge would make itself known to all.

As followers of this philosophy the Children of Knowledge are squarely at odds with the Technocracy, for such universal transcendence forms the virtual antithesis of Technocratic beliefs and goals. The Children have seen their ultimate goal of spiritual transcendence grow further and further out of reach as the Technocracy imposes its paradigm of banality on the masses. This very thing may yet drive them into the arms of the Traditions. Although the Children of Knowledge believe that most of the Traditions' philosophies are flawed, they do not believe they can stand alone against the Technocracy. For them, the old adage, *The enemy of my enemy is my friend*, rings increasingly true with each passing day.

Lexicon

Great Awakening: The name for the event that, triggered by the Children of Knowledge, will cause a massive paradigm shift in the belief of the nature of reality among the Sleepers, thus causing the creation of the Tenth Sphere.

Cununctio: "Conjunctions"; three ranks of achievement within the Craft.

Hermium: True Mercury; also the name of the third and most powerful Cununctio.

Lunargent: True Silver; also the name of the second Cununctio.

Prima Materia: The first and original material of all creation.

Prima Vis: Primal energy within all things; Quintessence.

Orichalcum: True Gold; also the name of the first and lowest level of Cununctio.

Shop: Common slang term for the laboratory; short for workshop.

Solificati: (singular *Solificato*) The original name for the Children of Knowledge, cast out of the Traditions during the Great Betrayal; means "Crowned Ones"; also the highest rank within the Children of Knowledge.

Transcendental Enlightenment: Alchemical jargon for Ascension.

Unity: The fabled "Tenth Sphere" of the Children of Knowledge.

Background: Crowned Ones



Medieval alchemy was simultaneously an art and a science. The original premise of alchemy, as written in the *Corpus Hermeticum* in the first four centuries A.D., was that base metals could be transmuted into gold and silver by freeing them from their inherent impurities. From Aristotle, they took the theory that all substances were made from *prima materia*, which comprised the four elements of earth, air, fire and water. All things were considered combinations of these elements in different proportions.

Alchemy flourished, and alchemists started to come together as a secret mystickal community of magical research and practice. Astrology was introduced as a way to help determine the most influential times to attempt transmutation, and a Chinese concept of medicine, adopted by the great Arab alchemist Jabir ibn Hayyan, further purported that if one ate gold that had been transformed from base metals, one could achieve immortality.

The golden age of alchemy was achieved in Europe in the 12th and 13th centuries. Some of the greatest alchemists of all time — Arnold of Villanova, Albertus Magnus and Roger Bacon — worked in this age. Many alchemists met during this time and formed an informal but influential

organization, which they called the *Solificati*. Knowledge and effort shared, they believed, brought everyone closer to discovery. Rank was not so much a matter of how much knowledge one had accumulated, but of how much one had discovered. They worked closely with the Order of Hermes (with whom modern Solificati claim a common history, though the Order denies it), and with them discovered many new properties of magick.

Then came the Order of Reason, which threatened to undo all their work. For this reason, the Solificati joined the Traditions at the Grand Convocation in 1457, sending their greatest researcher of the time, Diplomat Luis, to become their Primus. A talented Solificato, Heylel Teomim, was even chosen to be part of the First Cabal, to help spread the word among Sleeper and Awakened alike. But Heylel was also the catalyst of the Solificati's downfall, when, in 1470, he led the Order of Reason to ambush the others of the First Cabal. At his trial, Heylel proclaimed that he had done it to teach the Traditions a lesson, showing them that the Order of Reason was more unified than the Traditions, and that the Traditions could work together when they put their minds to it (as they had when they hunted and captured him). For his part in what became known as the Great Betrayal, Heylel was sentenced to death, and his twin Avatars were ripped from him and destroyed (see *The Fragile*



Path). The appellation *Thoabath* ("Abomination") was added to his name on all records of the trial. Many Solificati defended Heylel's actions, proclaiming that he took the bold step of self-sacrifice to bind the Traditions. Others despised Heylel for his betrayal and saw his goals as lofty but corrupted, no doubt by the Order of Reason itself. This rift further damaged the Solificati and, when combined with the distrust of the other Traditions, it caused their collapse.

Throughout the Inquisition, alchemists of all kinds were hunted down and killed as heretics and evil sorcerers (some say this was part of the revenge of the Celestial Chorus for the Great Betrayal). But this did not stop their work. Disunited though they were, their research still managed to filter through the informal communications chains, and they prospered in quiet, hidden laboratories. Many Solificati defected to the Order of Reason, within which, in time, they gave rise to the Electrodyne Engineers and Difference Engineers (which in turn became the Etherite and Virtual Adept Traditions, an irony that has not been lost on the Solificati). Most Solificati returned to solitary workshops, living and dying by personal fortune. One group consisting of 12 survivors of the original Solificati retained its old name and continued its research. These 12 holdovers often relied on old friends in the Order of Hermes for protection and secrecy; many Tradition mages, especially Celestial Chorists and Verbena (who felt that Heylel had also betrayed his lover, their representative Eloine, and had hidden her children within his Tradition), held a grudge against "Thoabath's Brood." In return, the 12 provided research of astounding quality, far surpassing any alchemical possibilities that the Hermetics had contemplated. The Order of Hermes kept the continued existence of the Solificati secret, unwilling to kill the goose that laid the alchemical golden egg. In 1500, the group renamed itself "The Children of Knowledge."

The Renaissance was a respite and a time of rebuilding for the last Solificati. Over time, the survivors took on new Apprentices, and the Craft's ranks swelled to several dozen members by 1700. The old masters taught their students the lesson of the Great Betrayal — the lesson that the Traditions failed to learn: True unification and balance, just as in alchemy, could only be achieved when all the elements had been gathered together in their proper proportions. This Great Knowledge, as they called it, was linked heavily to the numerology that was rapidly becoming popular with the alchemists. The Traditions were only nine in number, but Heylel, as part of the First Cabal, had actually been two people — a hermaphrodite created through the joining of two other Solificati. Thus, the number of the First Cabal was actually 10. In numerology, the numbers that form 10 (1 and 0) make only one when added together. They believed that this was the lesson Heylel was trying to teach as part of the Great Betrayal, that only true unity of purpose would win the Ascension War. But how was the unity to be attained?

It was only during the Industrial Revolution, after a few more centuries of soul-searching and intellectual discovery,

that the Children of Knowledge finally realized how to achieve their goal. To create true unity among the Traditions they had to unify magick. Since the Council of Traditions had only designated nine Spheres of magick, the former Tradition should discover the Tenth Sphere. The Children called this holy grail *Unity*, a lofty achievement that would only manifest itself when the Sleepers had been Awakened to the magick in the world. A simple look at the dreary conditions of the masses and the tightening grip of the Order of Reason (soon known as the Technocratic Union) was enough to convince them to achieve this goal. The Sleepers must be Awakened at all costs, and the alchemical formulae of the Children of Knowledge were just the thing to accomplish the task. Only they could work magick under the guise of science. Once the Sleepers were Awakened, the very power of the movement would be the catalyst to open the Sphere of Unity to the alchemists.

Division of the Elements

The big breakthrough occurred in 1943. A Swiss Hermium alchemist named Dr. Albert Hoffman accidentally discovered a substance that induced unusual visions, strange patterns of thought and experiences almost akin to madness. In the years to come, many people who took the substance would say it opened their minds to the wonders of the universe and helped blaze new pathways of spiritual enlightenment. The substance that Hoffman had discovered was *d-lysergic acid diethylamide*, or LSD. (It is rumored he was promoted to the Solificati for this discovery.) The mystical and alchemical uses of this substance were kept even from the Order of Hermes (though many suspected the Cultists of Ecstasy already understood the concepts, if not the formulae themselves). Even though the Hermetic wizards were long-time friends and covert supporters of the Children, the alchemists feared that the powerful Tradition mages would attempt to steal what had been so long in the making.

Immortality (or longevity, at least) was one of the prime goals of alchemical achievement. Although many of the 12 surviving Solificati succumbed to age, infirmity or happenstance by the 20th century, four survived to the modern era. These four, and their classically trained Apprentices, were less than amused by the concept of a psychoactive drug providing the "ticket" to enlightenment. A schism, which had gradually risen throughout the turbulent 20th century, fractured the Children into two camps — one that followed the old beliefs of enlightenment through achievement, the other that looked toward the "hallucinogenic cornerstone" of future change.

Today, most young Children of Knowledge follow the latter path; to them, LSD is the modern Philosopher's Stone, the way to open the masses to the possibility of magick in the universe and the foundation of the Tenth Sphere. Buoyed by their successes in the 1960s and again in the 1990s, they are prepared to take the fight for magickal enlightenment to the streets. While old alchemists still labor alone in secret, the new breed prefers to work



among the masses. They point to the fact that the Traditions are nine in number again, lacking only the Tenth Sphere, and thus the tenth seat, to make them into one force, with one mind, one vision. The young Children of Knowledge intend to found the tenth Tradition, and to create their own seat: the Seat of Unity.

Culture



Despite what many might think of the Children of Knowledge given their recent association with LSD and other mind-altering chemical substances, they are not behind or even remotely part of the illegal-drug industry. They believe that such substances are a means, not an end, and they abhor drug abuse as much as, if not more than, the Cultists of Ecstasy do. To both groups, drug addiction (physical or psychological) focuses on the bricks in the road as opposed to the journey experienced on the road. While several Children distill and distribute potent psychoactives, they do so for enlightenment, not profit.

The Children of Knowledge are sober researchers and scholars, perfecting their methods, readying them for a single masterstroke. Awakening a few Sleepers at a time will not cause the tremendous shift in Reality necessary to create the Sphere of Unity, but it's a start. Despite their intense pursuit of the creation of the Tenth Sphere, they still excel at the art of transmutation; indeed, the theories behind the art are the first to be taught to new apprentices, so that they may start making the mental associations of physical transmutation and the transformation of consciousness on their own.

While old, traditional Children of Knowledge tend to sequester themselves, the new generation spreads chemical consciousness socially, taking careful note of the effects on a wide variety of people in vastly different locations. For now, they primarily look for those who seek enlightenment, then steer them to it in whatever way seems best for the individual. Thus, many of the new-generation Children tend to venture out of the lab or make their labs "open" places to encourage contact with society. "Smart-drink" bars, New Age supply stores and even a few head shops might have alchemists' workshops in their back rooms or basements.

One of the major character flaws of the alchemists, however, is that they have something of a superiority complex. History shows that the Solificati were reviled because of the Great Betrayal, and that the other Traditions distrusted the Solificati because of the number of them who supported Heylel's actions. Their modern cousins (and survivors) take great glee in their secret role as the salvation of the Traditions, as the catalyst that will make all the Traditions one. They must be very careful with this knowledge, though, for they fear a backlash should the Traditions discover their plans. In a slightly reckless show of arrogance, modern Children proclaim their unity with Heylel Teomim by wearing white robes for

formal occasions (with appropriate markings depending on the rank of the alchemist). To pronounce his true innocence and purity, Heylel wore white robes to his trial.

The Children of Knowledge pay scant attention to the unaffiliated magickal societies. Like the Traditions, they tend to dismiss the societies as "Crafts," when they acknowledge them at all. The only exception to this are the Wu Lung of China (see Chapter Eight). These ancient wizards have their own long-lived alchemical tradition, and over the centuries they have freely exchanged secrets with the Children. For all their occasional modern trappings, the Children of Knowledge are an aristocratic lot; they mix well with the imperial culture of the Wu Lung.

Paternalistic as the Children's view of Sleepers may be, few among them would refer to the un-Awakened as "inferiors." These benighted souls are to be pitied rather than dominated. All Sleepers are seen as potential converts, the masses of humanity whom the Children of Knowledge will someday save from the sleep of ignorance. An alchemist will often do his best to engage in deep philosophical conversations with people who wander into his establishment or hangout, and will try to guide the mundanes' progress on the journey to enlightenment. The sooner the Children can acquire more data and find more people to test their concepts and theories on, the sooner the Children can hope to find the process that will trigger the Great Awakening.

Beliefs

All intelligent creatures in the world have the potential to Awaken. It is the natural order of things. Just as all things in the universe come from the *prima materia*, so too does all enlightenment in the universe come from a common pool of wisdom. By opening the mind to enlightenment, a person may seek enlightenment from within, tempered by her outside experiences. The Children of Knowledge seek to reopen Sleepers' minds to the *prima vis*, the primal energy that pervades all. Harnessing that primal energy will allow the Children to change Reality itself.

The Children of Knowledge back up their claims about the *prima materia* in two ways: First, they point to the modern big bang theory; they say if *that* isn't proof enough that everything started as the same thing, then nothing is. Second, they point to the existence of Primum, a metal stronger than any other, made from the *prima materia* in perfect balance. The Children of Knowledge know the secret of creating Primum, which verifies their belief that an alchemist may create any substance from another by a simple rebalancing of its material composition.

Just as an alchemist alters physical compositions to turn, say, lead into gold, so too can he alter the mind and spirit by changing the balance of the forces composing them. This metaphysical Philosophers Stone is the current goal of the Children of Knowledge. They seek the one formula, the one compound, the one process that will turn

the minds of Sleepers toward enlightenment, bringing on the Great Awakening. They have had some success on an individual basis, but the failure rate is still far higher than the Children of Knowledge would like. Through a variety of different methods, they seek to discover the formula that, when introduced *en masse* to the populace, will result in a vast transcendental experience.

To this end, most Children of Knowledge spend a great deal of time in the laboratory, poring over dusty tomes written in almost-forgotten languages. They then take their creations out for "field testing." Powders, salves, foodstuffs, drinks, drugs and all other sorts of concoctions have been distributed. Smoke intended for inhalation is gaining in popularity, and some modern initiates have begun to experiment with light and sound as means to open perception's doors. The Children of Knowledge are heavily dependent on foci for all the magick they perform; this is inherent to the nature of the magick they practice. The very basis of alchemy is things of substance, and even the alteration and expansion of the mind must start by altering the balance of its composition.

Magickal Style

Alchemy is a curious mixture of science and philosophy, rife with secret words, powerful patterns and ancient, arcane rituals. The Children of Knowledge still hold the basic alchemical truths as the foundation of their magick, but many Children have become more philosophical in the last few centuries. This is not surprising, considering that even the early nonmagickal alchemists realized that belief is just as important as fact.

The Children of Knowledge rely on the physical workings of their art; their science has always worked and probably always will. This rigidity confines them, like Technomancers, to Effects based on some physical foci; regardless of the alchemist's Arete, she cannot discard her foci. The Children's belief in potent concoctions and methods, however, makes alchemical magick flexible and often coincidental. The broad nature of alchemy itself enables an alchemist to assimilate new concepts of magick and science easily, and, to the Children, proves the validity of their Tenth Sphere. Science and magick are reconcilable, and Unity will be the key. After all, nothing is truly "artificial," as everything still comes from the *prima materia*.

Though traditional Children strive for perfection in solitude, the radicals (who now outnumber the traditionalists) consider the outside world to be the *real* laboratory. Thus young ones prepare to deal with the outside world; in faraway labs, these "agents" create foci for off-the-cuff magicks — smoke bombs, contact-salves and liquids, potions, even clothing. Like an alchemical "Q Division," these mages imbue their tools with necessary ingredients and preparations through both ancient and modern rituals. Many Children of Knowledge carry such prepared items with them to be used on the spot. This reliance on foci also makes normally vulgar activi-

ties seem somewhat coincidental. After all, it's much easier for a Sleeper to believe that the smoke from a grenade made him dizzy than it would be for him to accept a streaming cyan bolt of light that did the same.

Experimentation is just as important as learning that which has already been discovered. Thus, Children of Knowledge of both camps seek new techniques and experiences. Through experimentation, one gains the insight necessary to follow new paths of research. Even simply rediscovering a sense of wonder about how an object works is enough to motivate an alchemist to explore new paths of thought and research.

Alchemy is also heavily laden with symbology. The very equipment alchemists have used in their laboratories for centuries has attained a certain significance. This translates into laboratories full of very special equipment, and into exacting methods of focus creation. For example, an alchemist who wishes to make a potion that melts concrete must use tools and containers made of clay, since clay is closely related to the earth, and helps put the potion in proper balance. Bringing a Sleeper closer to enlightenment is more complex, and depends a great deal on the person involved. If the subject is fond of music, the alchemist might play anything from Mozart to the Violent Femmes, in combination with the burning of incense (hidden in the smoke of a nightclub, for example) and the administration of a potion, to help prolong the potentially transcendental experience.

Spheres

The first Sphere that all Children of Knowledge learn is Matter. It involves the foundation of all alchemical experimentation in the most basic form: the transmutation of one physical substance into another. The Children of Knowledge have written extensive (some would even say exhaustive) works about the Sphere. Many of these books have found their way into the hands of Tradition mages, and are among the most prized works in any Hermetic wizard's collection.

Matter is considered a means by which to work changes in almost any nonliving thing. The Children start by learning the base powers of the elements and the times at which each of the elements is at its strongest. By studying matter's different components, the alchemist learns how to subtly change those components, making true transmutation possible. Through this, she improves things to states of perfection. The creation of the "true" metals is only the beginning, just as the creation of the orderly mind is only the first step toward enlightenment. The modern alchemist uses her powers of Matter to make the world itself a magickal place.

Supporting Matter is the Sphere of Mind. Used mostly in conjunctive Effects with Matter, the Child uses Mind to discover hidden secrets and mysteries. From there, it's an easy task to steer him to a transcendental state. Childhood dreams, adult fantasies and simple wishes are all things the alchemist weaves into a pattern of discovery. The true problem, however, is finding a *universal* pattern for all

people, and then implementing it all at once. Only when that pattern is found can the Great Awakening take place.

Mind Arts are also used to read psychic impressions on objects. Just as objects are affected by the balance of their components, so too are they affected by the impressions left upon them by those who use them — that is, by Resonance. The Children of Knowledge often perform elaborate cleansing rituals upon their foci and other objects they inherit or discover, to make sure that previous users' impressions don't cloud their own magick. Finally, the Children use Mind to conduct astral travel, the supreme method of meditation, wherein the mind separates itself from the elements and achieves balance in its own right.

Common Foci

An alchemist's most common foci are her laboratory tools. Such equipment is often used to create other foci rather than their own magickal Effects. The most common product of the alchemist's laboratory work is the **elixir**, a generic term for any compound. Four major types of elixirs exist:

- **Potions** are elixirs in liquid form, ingested to enact magickal Effects. Potions are often stored in vials or small bottles or stashed in convenient potion pouches. Potions are the most common form of elixir, and are usually associated with the element of water.

- **Powders** are usually transported in small pouches or vials. Their versatility makes them very useful; a powder used to make the color of the alchemist's clothes blend into a brick wall, for example, would be sprinkled over the clothing, whereas a powder used to make someone fall asleep could be sprinkled into food or drink. Powders must be kept in sealed containers until used. This springs from the tradition that powders are closely associated with earth, and that air, the opposite of earth, will degrade the effectiveness of powders.

- The **pastille** is one of the more unusual forms of elixirs. This tablet, usually the size of a thumbnail, is set aflame to release alchemical smoke. Although the more common pastilles take time to use, some of the more modern-minded alchemists incorporate them into small explosive devices — homemade smoke grenades. Anyone who inhales the smoke becomes a target of the alchemical magick. Pastilles are, of course, associated with fire.

- Finally, there are **unguents**, creams or jellies that are spread onto skin or objects. An unguent quickly adheres to and bonds with whatever surface it touches — thus alchemists are careful to wear gloves when using such elixirs. An unguent placed on some object will remain effective for about a month on average. Unguents meant to affect people can even be applied to objects and affect the first people who touch the items. Unguents are associated with air as they must interact with air in order to work properly.

Still, individual foci depend on each alchemist's research; many "special discoveries" count as unique foci



(Mage, page 182). Some alchemists are starting to experiment with light and electricity, relying on modern knowledge of chemistry and physics to enact magickal transformations. Other common foci include astrological charts, sampling equipment, alchemical reference books, chalk (for marking proper alchemical symbols), and special inks that are used on unusual surfaces (like human skin or smooth, nonporous metals).

Organization

The Children of Knowledge are organized into Apprentices, three lesser groups of Cununctio, and the highest group of all, the Solificati. There is little internal structure or enforcement within the Children of Knowledge; they have no need for it. Individual alchemists are proven by their work, not by any supposed positions of power or authority. The alchemists praise those who share their discoveries, and others seek them out to learn new knowledge. This encourages open communication. To the Children of Knowledge, the old saying of “publish or perish” is painfully true.

- **Apprentices** are the lowest ranking Children of Knowledge, those who still study the basic tenets of the Sphere of Matter. Apprentices learn from a Cununctio Hermium at the least; becoming an Apprentice to a Solificato holds great honor and prestige. Aside from learning the ways of magickal alchemy from a teacher, an Apprentice also performs mundane chores around the laboratory, including restocking, measuring ingredients for experiments, cleaning lab equipment, and even mending, washing, cooking and ironing. An Apprentice spends many hours alone, contemplating his lessons, becoming familiar with the patterns of thought that are critical to alchemical discovery.

- The first rank an Apprentice receives after passing his Test of the Philosopher’s Stone (in which he must demonstrate the ability to turn lead into gold — in game terms, achieving Rank Two in Matter) is that of **Orichalcum**, a word meaning “True Gold.” This is the first and lowest level of the Cununctio. At this point, the newly appointed Orichalcum often sets up his own laboratory and begins long hours of patient work to create his own unique magickal rites and Effects. To be promoted to the next Cununctio, the Orichalcum must create a new rite or magickal Effect or an effective variant of an existing one. He succeeds if other alchemists can read his treatise and reproduce the Effect with regular, predictable results. The Orichalcum expands his ability to go beyond simple, logical transmutation by seeking more radical changes in the substances with which he works.

- After publishing his first magickal alchemical formula and having it accepted by at least five higher-ranked Cununctio, the Orichalcum ascends to the **Lunargent** Cununctio, the conjunction of True Silver. Now the alchemist explores beyond the transmutation of physical matter, moving on to transmute thought and perception. The

Orichalcum uses alchemical substances and mind-altering pharmaceuticals to open mystic senses to the pattern of creation, and then to the inherent possibilities of changing that pattern (in game terms, he learns to use at least one dot in every Sphere). At this point the alchemist learns to mend that which was broken, and to create things that have not yet been created from the very stuff of the *prima materia*.

- The next level of recognition is promotion to the **Hermium Cununctio**, the conjunction of True Mercury. Having mastered the ability to transmute substances into other substances and forms that are radically dissimilar (Matter 4), the candidate creates a dissertation on an aspect of alchemical thought and presents it to a group of seven alchemists of the Hermium Cununctio. This work must not only delve into the physical aspects of transmutations, but must also tie into the philosophical theories behind them. After the dissertation is accepted, the alchemist rises to the Hermium rank, the loftiest of all the Cununctio. At this point, the alchemist generally starts looking for an Apprentice, as his work now demands a great deal of assistance.

- **Solificati** are masters of magickal alchemy. Their works are widely distributed both among the Children of Knowledge and the general populace. Every magickal alchemist is familiar with Solificati, and portions of Solificati's works are often at the top of an Apprentice's reading list. No limit has been set regarding the number of Solificati, but less than 20 such Masters exist. To become a Solificato, an alchemist of the Hermium Cununctio must have trained at least five Apprentices who have passed into the Orichalcum Cununctio, and she must have published several scholarly works about transmutation and philosophical enlightenment. An alchemist does not apply to become a Solificato; rather, she is invited to appear before a gathering of them to present her theories and insights. Such invitations are based on alchemical credentials, published research and general disposition and demeanor. If the Solificati deem the Hermium worthy, they invite her to become one of the Crowned Ones in an elaborate, secret alchemical ritual.

Roughly 150 Children of Knowledge exist; many of them reside in Horizon Realms and Sanctums where their experiments won't cause trouble. The Craft meets as an entire body once every four years at an agreed-upon time in a known locale. There, they debate many things, not all of them magickal. In the last three meetings, serious discussions about approaching the Nine Traditions, seeking their help and knowledge in pursuing the Tenth Sphere, have arisen. Some radical elements have even suggested that the Children of Knowledge might attempt a formal return to the Traditions before they discover the Tenth Sphere, thinking that perhaps the mere presence of a Tenth Tradition will create a positive atmosphere for the completion of the quest. So far, the Solificati have stopped the radicals cold, but a significant minority of the Cununctio is beginning to rally to the cause.

Initiation

The Children of Knowledge have no difficulty finding recruits. They simply look for people who have avid interests in alchemy, chemistry and the occult. An open mind is also important.

A teacher usually starts by socializing with the initiate, often inviting her to parties, where the teacher and other colleagues engage her in metaphysical and magickal discussions. All the while, they gauge the strength of the initiate's Avatar. If they deem her suitable, the real training begins.

To start with, the teacher shows the initiate a few simple alchemical tricks. He explains the processes, and then invites her to try them. If she succeeds, even partially, the alchemist offers to take the initiate in as an Apprentice. This is, of course, not as easy as it sounds. Many potential Apprentices fail their first tests even though they have strong Avatars. However, they may try as many times as they like. Those who persist succeed. Those who do not persist fail, and never become alchemists. Many of the finest alchemists found it difficult to master their first magickal Effects, but they say it taught them to persevere in the face of adversity.

Conducting the ritual of Apprenticeship is a simple matter, something that every Hermium knows how to do. It requires a purification of the body, a balancing of the essential components of matter and mind; the teacher brings the new Apprentice into the necessary state of receptivity for new enlightenment. Ways of doing this vary from individual to individual, depending on what the Apprentice needs to attain this state, and often center on activities that make her feel alive. The Hermium paints alchemical symbols on his body and on the Apprentice, as well as in the "workspace" in which the balancing takes place.

One element common to all initiations is the Alchemist's Oath, in which the Apprentice promises to devote her life to the exploration of the mysteries of the universe, and promises to share discoveries with her brother and sister alchemists. In return, the Hermium promises to teach the Apprentice truly and well. Breaking this oath can cut the Apprentice off from the society, or can lead to official censure for the Hermium. Censure is the complete dismissal of what the dishonored Hermium has to say on any subject, and the refusal to share information with him. Censure can last for any amount of time; the longest censure ever known lasted for over 100 years.

Acolytes

Lab assistants make common acolytes. They are usually students with lab science majors, and even some bright (but not yet Awakened) high-school students who apply for part-time, after-school jobs. A few acolytes come from the "top" of the drug culture, the cream of the hallucinogenic

crop — not drug dealers, but vision seekers who prove more reliable than simple dopeheads. These people are less likely to be alarmed by some of the more unusual things they might see while working in and around an alchemical laboratory. Such acolytes are not the stereotypical “stoners,” but often extremely intelligent people with esoteric abilities and interests who have much to contribute.

Life working for the Children of Knowledge can be strange, to say the least. Most alchemists treat their assistants well, regard them as valued employees and pay them generously for the work they perform, usually in cash (after all, it's a simple matter for an alchemist to make money or valuables). Students also often seek help and advice regarding their mundane studies, although the alchemist is careful to stick to “straight” science in these cases. The last thing the alchemist wants is a nosy professor hanging around the shop asking odd questions about “True Mercury.”

Mundanes

In general, many alchemists treat Sleepers like sheep or, worse, like lab rats. Conducting alchemical research on mundanes is often frustrating, as the masses sometimes seem almost willfully uncooperative. The ongoing search for the

Stereotypes

Traditions: Many years ago we tried to join them, to become one with their idea of unity of Spheres. They're blind for missing the lesson in Heylel Teomin's “Great Betrayal,” but it took us years to recognize the truth ourselves. We'll return to them yet — as saviors, delivering the greatest weapon in the Ascension War. Then we will join with them and become One, leading them to victory over the Technocracy. As Heylel was once first among mages, so too shall we be first among the Traditions.

Technocracy: They would grind the bones of the world to chalk if they thought they could get anything from it. In trying to impose their ridiculous order on the world, they will destroy the very magick that helps them create it. They have squandered their once-great unity.

Marauders: They must be stopped at all costs.

Nephandi: Twisted. Disgusting. Their bodies are out of balance with their minds and with the order of Nature. The only way to bring them back into balance is to destroy them.

Others: Many paths of magick exist in the world, but all of them merely reflect the Unified Theory. Some sects, of course, have been our allies for centuries — the Wu Lung have a sublime understanding of the alchemical arts and sciences, and our Hermetic brethren continue to guide our steps and cloak our presence. Magickal creatures watch us from afar, but only those vampires based in the ancient House of Tremere have anything useful to share with us. The rest are vermin at best, fatal threats at worst.

catalyst for the Great Awakening keeps the tempers of the often-haughty Children from boiling over. Stories lingering from the Inquisition prove that Sleepers have teeth when provoked, so wise Children watch their actions carefully and continue to work in secret, blaming large scale-field tests on “government agency experiments,” (like the C.I.A.'s LSD tests in the '50s and '60s). There is, however, little true concern for the well-being of Sleepers in large tests, when an alchemist may drop some new elixir into the local water supply. After all, results, not test subjects, are the most important thing. Those who “test” on an individual basis are not as callous, and tend to have a more compassionate outlook. Some alchemists have night jobs as club bartenders for this very reason — it gives them a chance to observe the long-term effects of their concoctions.

Concepts

Character concepts for the Children of Knowledge can vary greatly. However, a few constants exist. First of all, the character must have the Knowledge Ability of Alchemy (see **The Book of Shadows**, page 26). Apprentices must have at least two dots in this Skill, Orichalcum and Lunargent at least three, and it is unheard of for a Solificato to have anything less than five dots. Many Children of Knowledge also have the High Ritual Knowledge Ability, used in their laboratories, and the Science Knowledge Ability, most often in chemistry. One final requirement is the Knowledge Ability: Secret Code Language. This describes the wide range of alchemical symbols used in the Craft's magick, and it's the only means by which to make heads or tails out of in-depth writings. The Sanctuary Background is also common, and reflects the more personalized nature of alchemists' laboratories, especially for those labs of mages who have high Sanctuary ratings.

Besides the usual antisocial lab rat type (a dwindling minority these days), Child concepts include: bartender (supported by Abilities like Carousing and Empathy — a good bartender always listens, after all); rare book seller; headshop owner; eccentric university professor; and even the librarian who knows the most about the restricted stacks in the back vaults.

Common Magicks

Seeds of Gold (•• Matter)

One of the many variations on the ancient Philosopher's Stone, this Effect avoids the possible vulgar backlash of turning things into gold before the eyes of Sleepers. By sprinkling a specially prepared powder on any seed and then by planting the seed, the alchemist causes that seed to transform the metals in the earth around it into gold. The mage



then digs up the gold, “discovering” it before anyone who may be watching.

[For each success, the alchemist may create a half-ounce of unrefined gold. The mage must exercise care, however, as many metallurgists, geological assayers and cops grow suspicious when lots of gold is “found” by the same person.]

Change the Resonance (•• Matter, •• Mind)

An item’s Resonance is very important in regard to its magickal suitability (see the “Magick Difficulties” chart in **Mage**). Many alchemists specialize in changing an item’s Resonance by altering its physical composition, thus changing the “emotions” tied to those physical components. Items thus “tuned” can give bonuses to other related magickal Effects.

[Since this Effect makes few visible changes in its target, the spell is usually coincidental. The stronger an item’s Resonance, the more difficult it is to change. Also, certain items have an inherent Resonance. It would be hard to make a bullet have a peaceful essence, and almost impossible to make a feather have a Resonance attuned to weight.]

Smart Drink (•• Mind, •• Life, • Prime, • Spirit, • Time)

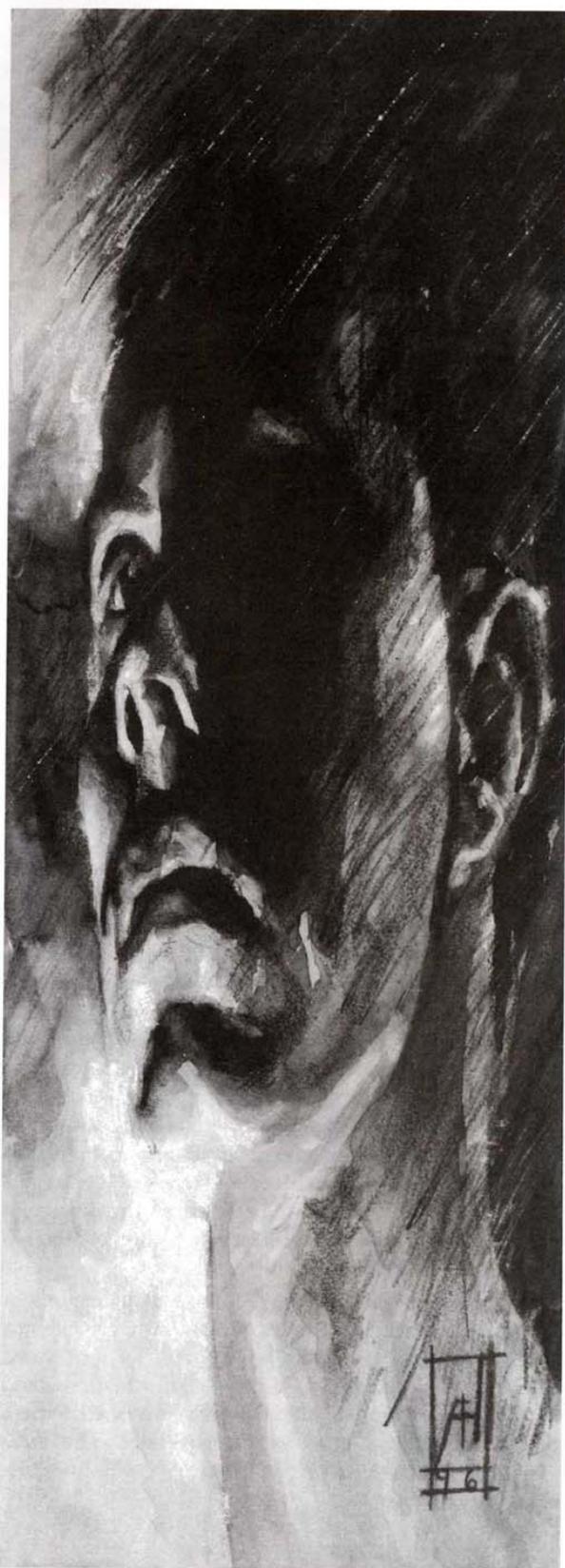
This is the elixir of enlightenment, or so the Children of Knowledge would like to believe. By passing this magickal drink to a Sleeper, the alchemist lets her see the world as it really is. Cultists of Ecstasy use a similar spell to treat drugs or food, and the original idea may have come from them. Unfortunately, the recipient still has to assimilate the drink’s effects without freaking out. Considering that the most potent versions induce hallucinations and a physical rush with a mystickal look behind the scenes, it’s not surprising that some folks just can’t handle them.

[Given that so many people expect the **Drink**’s effects to be simple hallucinations, the spell is totally coincidental. Mind magicks open the drinker’s mental perceptions and induce hallucinations. Life gives her an energizing boost and helps her appreciate the reality of the living things around her. Prime stimulates a rush (like the Prime 1 Effect) and lets her see creation’s lifeblood. Time and Spirit let her glimpse the fluctuations of time, and perhaps see through the Gauntlet.

[As you can imagine, a **Smart Drink** provokes heady insights, especially for the un-Awakened. The drinker’s reactions depend on the person and circumstances — some people can handle it, others crack. The Storyteller may ask for a Willpower roll to determine if a character retains her sanity while under the influence. The difficulty depends on what’s going on at the time; if the **Drink** is downed in a club full of Banes, things may get sticky. The Children lose more good customers that way.]

Perfection of the True Form (••• Matter)

Everything has a perfect form or state. From this state, all other things come. This rote allows the alchemist to finely tune the composition of an item to idealize its nature. Bulletproof glass can become impervious to all bullets, even ones fired at point-blank range. A perfect knife becomes



unbreakable and capable of piercing virtually any object. This is a matter of function more than of form.

[Alchemists have a great deal of fun with this one, but also use it for very serious business. This Effect is also dangerous, as it is easy to apply it in a vulgar way. Remember, a thing can only become what it should be in its ultimate form, and no more. Bulletproof glass could not be penetrated by any kind of bullet, but would be useless against a rocket. Also, all items treated with this Effect lack the imperfections that all things have in the "real" world. As such, they're more likely to be noticed not only by the Awakened, but also by Sleepers. In other words, this Effect is rarely used when stealth or subtlety is called for. Exact bonuses for successfully using this Effect are up to the Storyteller, and depend on the item and the ways it's used.]

Proof Against Immolation (••• Matter, •• Prime)

Burning a pastille and standing in its smoke gives the alchemist and others the ability to resist the harmful effects of heat and fire. This not only affects the alchemist's clothes, but her skin and hair. Proofs against other things (such as cold) are also possible.

[This works against magickal and mundane fires alike. For each success, the alchemist adds a die to her Dice Pool when soaking fire-based damage. The mage must burn one pastille for each additional person the spell protects, and make a separate roll as well.]

Bottle of Smoke (••• Entropy, Forces or Life, •• Prime, or •• Mind or Matter, •• Prime; really advanced versions might include •••• Time)

One of the Solificatis' oldest weapons, this concoction (which may be prepared as a powder, potion or pastille) creates a cloud of magickal smoke. Depending on the elements involved, this cloud can scramble mechanical workings, redirect the paths of probability, explode, burn exposed skin, cause disabling hallucinations or corrode inert materials. The moniker "Bottle of Smoke" comes from one of the spell's many forms: a brass or crystal bottle that an alchemist leaves behind to distract his enemies while he gets away. Variations include a glass egg that's thrown to the floor, a vial smashed against a wall, a paper burned to trigger the Effect or a glass of "water" splashed in a target's face. All of these foci must be prepared in advance, a procedure that allows the alchemist plenty of time to concentrate the potency of the smoke.

[This Effect takes as many forms as an alchemist can imagine. Entropy causes things to break down, Forces burns or explodes, Life burns the targets' skin for aggravated damage, Mind invokes an array of hallucinations, and Matter chews up inanimate substances. Any or all of these Spheres can be combined for a massive kick. The Time variant sets a delayed trigger, allowing the Solificato a chance to get far away.

Storyteller Ideas

• **Aequipondium: The Horizon Realm of the Solificati**

When the Solificati collapsed 20 years after the Great Betrayal, their remaining leaders decided they needed a safe place to plot their return to the mortal world. Completed during the early phases of the Inquisition, Aequipondium is a Realm of perfect beauty. Every plant, animal and structure seems to be the epitome of its type. Fires burn brightly and with just the "right amount" of heat, plants are colorful and provide potent ingredients when dried and ground-up. The Realm's very atmosphere clears the mind and helps one concentrate on the task at hand.

Unfortunately, there's trouble in paradise. Only the Solificati and Hermium know about, or are permitted to travel to, Aequipondium. The alchemists decided to impose this restriction centuries ago, when the Solificati hid from the Traditions and Order of Reason alike. Attacks by Marauders have increased in recent years, though, and one Solificato, backed by many of the Hermium, has called for the Solificati to inform the lower ranks that Aequipondium exists, so they may aid in its defense. The other Solificati worry, though, that if this happens word will get out to the Traditions that the Solificati still survive, and that the Celestial Chorus, among others, would call for their destruction. The debate continues, with the original Solificati strongly against letting "upstarts" into their private sanctum, and newer Solificati and many of the Lunargent sensing a desperate need to reinforce their defenses.

[The "casting time" is actually a ritual that allows the character to generate a fair number of successes (typically three Arete rolls, with the successes added together). There are two ways to reflect the **Smoke's** potency; the easy way is to offer three extra dice to the character's Arete roll when the Effect goes off, and say that it begins as a 10-foot-radius cloud that grows 10 feet per turn for four turns and then dissipates (or that it simply explodes for massive amounts of Forces damage). The hard way is to roll all three Arete tests separately, and divide up the resulting successes to see how much damage the **Smoke** creates, how large its area is, and how long it lasts (**Mage**, page 166). Frankly, we recommend the former option. Under most circumstances, the **Bottle of Smoke** and its variants are coincidental.]

Talismans

This Craft's emphasis on physical magicks gives its practitioners a wealth of Talismans from which to choose. Even so, true "magickal items" remain rare and costly.

••• The Testing Flask

Arete 3, Quintessence 15, Cost 6

By putting any liquid into this flask and swirling it around, the alchemist can detect poisons or toxins in that substance, and transform harmless liquids into poisons or acids, or vice versa. By pouring the contents of the flask into a body of liquid of the same type, up to five gallons of that liquid can be tainted or purified. Changing simple poisons and acids requires two successes; changing complex ones requires three.

••• Talisman of the Mask (3)

Arete 3, Quintessence 15, Cost 6

This coin, when worn around the neck on a chain, allows the user to change his aura, making him seem like a Sleeper to someone "reading" him with Mind magicks. Another power makes the wearer appear physically different by "casting" a subtle illusion around him. This latter Effect does not actually change the alchemist in any way — he only *looks* different. Onlookers who have Rank 1 Mind or Spirit magick can see through both deceptions.

The coin is inscribed with several alchemical symbols, and the user kisses it to activate its Effects.

Companion: Homunculus (Cost: 2)

The creation of a tiny artificial man is a time-honored alchemical achievement; most Lunargents have at least one homunculus in their service, and some have several of them acting as eyes, ears and extra sets of hands. Such companions begin as soulless matter, but often become beings with their own personalities, requests and needs.

In an elaborate ritual involving weeks or months of study and exotic ingredients (and, in game terms, Mind 5/Matter 4/Life 3/Prime 2, difficulty 9, and five successes), the alchemist prepares the inert body of his companion from a mixture of powders, elixirs and raw materials (wood, metal ore, clay). Once the ingredients are mixed together into a mold, the result is heated under special conditions. A botch blows the whole thing, while a failure just makes the process more difficult (see **Mage**, pages 163-164). If the Child of Knowledge succeeds, a tiny humanoid pulls itself from the mold, rubs its eyes and lives. Once alive, the creature should remain hidden in a distant Realm or workplace — homunculi are subject to Unbelief Paradox and quickly waste away if exposed to observation.

These little creatures are not familiars in the usual sense of the word, though they resemble them. Unlike the spirits-made-flesh, a homunculus begins its life with no identity other than that which the alchemist designed, and it cannot impart any information that the alchemist didn't already know. As life is an ongoing process, things never



stay this simple for long. Sooner or later, a homunculus takes on a personality of its own — often a not-so-flattering caricature of the alchemist who created it.

Obviously, creating such creatures involves serious magick; occasionally, a generous mentor will bequeath a homunculus to a favorite student, but this is rare. More often than not, the companion must spring from the alchemist's own labors. After all, most Children of Knowledge pride themselves on their *own* skills, not on the things they get from others.

Image: A tiny humanlike figure roughly 6" tall, a homunculus otherwise looks like whatever its creator desires. Some resemble winged gargoyles, while others look like old lovers, china dolls or tin soldiers. Although still composed of inanimate matter (and thus affected by Matter, not Life, spells), the homunculus moves as freely as any living thing.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1-3 (depends), Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 2, Awareness 2, Dodge 4, Stealth 4 (Some unusual specimens may be trained in Alchemy, Computers, Herbalism, Lore, Science or Technology to better help around the lab. Such Abilities can't go above 3. Homunculi don't make good fighters.)

Spheres: None

Willpower: 3

Quintessence: 5 (can only be harvested when dead)

Health Levels: OK, -1, -2, -3, -5, Incapacitated

Attacks/Powers: Depends; some can fly (10 yards per turn), bite and scratch (1 Health Level), or see in darkness, while others have poison stingers, camouflage or other minor abilities.

Club Owner

The Psychedelic Correlates of these evolutionary and genetic concepts are to be found in the reports of almost every LSD tripper. The experience of being a one-celled creature tenaciously flailing, the singing, humming sound of life exfoliating... you leave the warm broth of water and take over the earth.

— Dr. Timothy Leary

Quote: *I know what you see, but how do you feel?*

Prelude: Medical school just wasn't the place for you. The instructors droned on and on, and good grades and a sheepskin weren't worth the terminal boredom. Going to the party was a whim, a way to blow off steam. When you tried drugs for the first time, it was if something exploded in your brain. A glimpse into the secrets of the universe awakened new senses. The pretty grad student who gave you the stuff really *understood* what it was like; she introduced you to some friends who made it. They were into some pretty freaky things, but that was par for the course in the hills above the East Bay. Soon those freaky things began to interest you. There was a fascinating truth in them, a truth that evaded you in med school.

After reading some of the dusty old tomes in their library, it was apparent that a life of enlightened pharmacology was worth pursuing. After learning more about alchemy, you discovered that your friend was a lot older than she appeared. About 100 years older! Maybe there was a lot *more* to this stuff....

You dropped out of school, passed the test of the Philosopher's Stone and became Orichalcum just a few years later. Combining your hedonistic tendencies with your knowledge of pharmacological alchemy, you turned enough lead into gold to open your own nightclub. Remembering your own Awakening, you've tried to pass the experience on to others through secret house "specialties." Most folks aren't terribly receptive, and you're growing discouraged. Still, there are worse ways to change the world....

Concept: Although you once tried to play the good little student, it was sickening to live a lie. Now you've dropped out of the rat race and begun a crusade for Ascension with a twist. It's certainly good to be on the winning side, and there's no law against having a good time. Well, not *many* laws against it.

Roleplaying Tips: You aren't the life of the party — you *own* the party. Talking to people and helping them with their problems is fun, and it provides you with data for new experiments.

Magick: Your equal command of Mind and Matter allows you to concoct your various specialty drinks to explore the limits of enlightenment in your club's clientele. If only one of them would actually wake up, things would be so much better....

Equipment: Hip flasks, tobacco pouch and rolling papers, a dozen tabs of really good "stuff," a stout knife and a backpack filled with potions, powders, pastilles and unguents in pouches, vials, jars and small plastic bags. You also keep a shop in the club basement, and maintain a library of your favorite books.



BOOK OF CRAFTS

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: Bon Vivant
Essence: Pattern
Demeanor: Bon Vivant

Craft: Children of Knowledge
Mentor:
Concept: Club Owner

Attributes

Physical	Social	Mental
Strength _____ ●●●●●	Charisma _____ ●●●●●	Perception _____ ●●●●●
Dexterity _____ ●●●●●	Manipulation _____ ●●●●●	Intelligence _____ ●●●●●
Stamina _____ ●●●●●	Appearance _____ ●●●●●	Wits _____ ●●●●●

Abilities

Talents	Skills	Knowledges
Alertness _____ ●●●●●	Do _____ ○○○○○	Computer _____ ○○○○○
Athletics _____ ○○○○○	Drive _____ ●○○○○	Cosmology _____ ●○○○○
Awareness _____ ●●○○○	Etiquette _____ ●●○○○	Culture _____ ○○○○○
Brawl _____ ○○○○○	Firearms _____ ○○○○○	Enigmas _____ ○○○○○
Dodge _____ ○○○○○	Leadership _____ ○○○○○	Investigation _____ ○○○○○
Expression _____ ○○○○○	Meditation _____ ○○○○○	Law _____ ○○○○○
Instruction _____ ○○○○○	Melee _____ ○○○○○	Linguistics _____ ○○○○○
Intuition _____ ○○○○○	Research _____ ●●●●○	Lore _____ ○○○○○
Intimidation _____ ○○○○○	Stealth _____ ○○○○○	Medicine _____ ●●○○○
Streetwise _____ ●●●●○	Survival _____ ○○○○○	Occult _____ ●●○○○
Subterfuge _____ ●●●●○	Technology _____ ○○○○○	Science _____ ●●●●○

Spheres

Correspondence _____ ○○○○○	Life _____ ○○○○○	Prime _____ ●●○○○
Entropy _____ ○○○○○	Mind _____ ●●○○○	Spirit _____ ○○○○○
Forces _____ ○○○○○	Matter _____ ●●○○○	Time _____ ○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds	Areté	Health
Avatar _____ ●○○○○	● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Bruised -0 <input type="checkbox"/>
Library _____ ●○○○○		Hurt -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Resources _____ ●●●○○		Injured -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Influence _____ ●●●○○		Wounded -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
_____ ○○○○○		Mauled -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
		Crippled -5 <input type="checkbox"/>
		Incapacitated <input type="checkbox"/>
Other Traits	Willpower	
Alchemy _____ ●●●○○	● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	
Herbalism _____ ●●○○○	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Secret Code Language _____ ●○○○○		
Night Club (Merit) _____ ●●○○○		
_____ ○○○○○		
	Quintessence	
	Paradox	
		Experience
		<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100%; height: 30px;"></div>



Hem-Ka Sobk: Eaters of Sins

By Lucien Soulban

*I am the crocodile within his terrors. I
am the crocodile god. I bring destruction.*

— *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*



Within the tight confines of Cairo, the buildings huddle closely together like frightened children. From the thin streets below, the ever-expansive sky above shines like a river of stars coursing around the shores of the surrounding buildings. In the early morning's solitude, a hunted man stumbles along the narrow roads, his enemies invisible but implacable. Although he has committed no crime, he feels the enemies' judgment in his heart. He is a condemned man running for freedom, but running down the same corridors that will eventually lead him to the executioner's block.

Blinded by the deadly concoction of fear and fatigue, Abid cares not where his steps fall. In one stride, he stumbles upon a shallow puddle of water and vanishes into it as if it were a deep well carved out by the hand of Allah himself. No sound marks his

passage; even Abid's own ragged lungs are unable to let out a scream as he falls into the water that claims him whole.

From the shadows of the alley, a man steps forward. His clothing is tattered and torn, his face marked with deliberate scars. With sensual ease, he runs his tongue along the edges of his sharpened teeth, eagerly anticipating tasting Abid's liver. The hunter walks over to the puddle and slowly sinks into its murky depths to join his prey. Sobk had judged Abid and found him lacking. It now rested upon the Hem-Ka Sobk to deliver his fate.

Introduction

To the unlearned observer, the Hem-Ka Sobk is a Craft of emotionless assassins, disguising their destructive natures beneath the cassocks of worship for a crocodile deity whom they blame for their actions. The image, though prejudiced,

is not entirely inaccurate. Few outsiders, save those who have delved into Egypt's past, recognize the deity known as Sobk. The crocodile-headed god of the *Faiyum* and *Kom Ombo*, Sobk's roles, through the warping of history, have marked him as both the face of fair fortune and the harbinger of destruction. He is equated with Osiris in funerary rites and with Set in his penchant for evil. He has been called "Rager" within the argot of the Old Kingdoms and "Suchos" by the later dynasties of Ptolemies. So many faces, so many identities, and still nothing is certain.

The Hem-Ka Sobk share the enigmas that surround their deity. Many neophytes view these "priests" as nothing more than dangerous cultists. The learned, on the other hand, know that they are far more than they allow others to believe. How else does one explain their existence before the Nile bore the weight of the Giza Pyramids, their ancient friendship with Isis when she was but a *Hekau*, and their knowledge of Set before his Embrace?

Background: The Heri-Shi



Pre-dynastic worship in ancient Egypt centered on the precept that all things lived in one fashion or form. From the sky to the earth, from insects to animals — all things were owed their due. These deities later changed, adopting human actions, then eventually acquiring human characteristics and appearances.

Sobk is believed to have been a pre-pharaonic crocodile deity, worshipped by various tribes around the lake region of the Faiyum and within the land of Kom Ombo. As the first dynasties came to power and subsumed the Nile cultures that existed before them, the new dominant beliefs took expressions and divine inspiration from their predecessors. Gods and goddesses changed roles, their popularity waxed and waned, and even their very functions shifted to polarized extremes. Throughout it all, the Egyptians accepted these changes and differences. To them, the seemingly divided nature of their deities was an understood and accepted way of life; they were never thought to fulfill just one function.

The deity first appears within Old Kingdom texts as "Rager," son of Neith, husband of Hathor and the father to Khonshu. Rager's main function resembled that of Ptah, "The Opener of the Ways," whose very words were the catalyst for creation. In funerary rites, Rager was equated with Osiris as "The Judge of the Dead" and "Devourer of the Unworthy," while others placed him as a source of destruction, closely related to the evil ministrations of Set. Sobk was also called "The Lord of Bakhui," a mountain in the



Dream Realms, on the fringes of what is now the Digital Web. In ancient years, his temple could be found upon the slopes of Bakhu. In ancient times, this judge of souls was held in high esteem, as many temples and ceremonies can attest. Curses were engraved using his name on ancient tombs, and Egyptian animal necropoli held the mummified remains of crocodiles. One oasis city, later dubbed "Crocodilopolis," kept live crocodiles in pools and decorated them with jewelry. Even today, the crocodile (considered to be good luck by many Egyptians) is revered in Sudan.

Sobk was already ancient at the beginning of time. The knowledge of the crocodile god that comes from time's cemetery, history, is limited and contradictory. What most call "fact" is instead a strange marriage between supposition, superstition and subjectivism. When the once-fertile lands of northern Africa vanished beneath the awakening yawn of the Sahara, many nomadic tribes settled upon the banks of the prospering Nile. After their arrival, they discovered already-ancient people in those lands — the hunters of the Faiyum.

Divinity Politics

The Hem-Ka trace their lineage to this community of hunters. Before the arrival of the West African tribes, they lived quietly within the fertile fields of the Faiyum, worshipping the crocodiles that dwelled in the great lake. Their tribe's name, *Heri-Shi*, forgotten by history and known only to them, remains a secret to this day. It is, they claim, their communal true name.

When the Heri-Shi did nothing but watch the West African newcomers, the latter mistook this as a sign of weakness. Those tribes who tried to raid the Faiyum quickly vanished; the survivors learned not to infringe upon those lake regions. From the hunter's practice of devouring the hearts of their enemies, they became known as *Nequai-hatu*, "the fiends who tore up hearts." While cultures such as the Tasian and Badari flourished within the Nile region, the Nequai-hatu remained within the Faiyum, watching with quiet patience, waiting with reptilian tranquillity. During the growth periods of the first kingdoms, bands of hunters left the Faiyum as the power of the vampire clan known as the Setites spread across Egyptian soil. These hunters, acting as traveling priests, advocated the worship of a god they called "Rager" to the various tribes across the Nile. Many outsiders who saw these latter hunters in action believed the Nequai-hatu had split into two camps, the first of which wished to maintain the status quo, and the second of which realized that they could no longer remain hidden.

Over the second millennia, the worship of Rager grew from its home in the Faiyum and spread to the surrounding regions along the Nile. The Nequai-hatu soon permitted outsiders to become *Unu-t*, cult priests. They later stepped back and allowed the cult of the crocodile god to fall away

Lexicon

- Aakhu-t sheta-t:** The "secret horizon," better known to modern mages as the Digital Web.
- Aat-t:** Plague or disease; a reference to Quiet, Paradox, and the Flaws which accompany them.
- Ab:** The heart; source of power and good and evil thoughts.
- Agb:** Water focus used by the Hem-Ka.
- Akha-t:** Scar focus used by the Hem-Ka.
- Aakhu:** Hedge magic used by the *Kheri heb ashau*.
- Bakhu:** A mountain within the *aakhu-t sheta-t* where Sobk's temple once rested. Also known as Mount Qaf.
- Heka:** The ability to wield magick.
- Hekau:** Traditional Egyptian mages; also used for mummies and potent hedge-wizards.
- Hem-Ka:** The priest of the Ka soul. A designation used for all members of Sobk's Craft.
- Heri-Shi:** The tribe of Sobk.
- Kheri heb ashau:** The most-common type of priest within the Hem-Ka.
- Kheri heb tep:** "Chief reader of the divine words." Head priest of the Hem-Ka.
- Nak:** Invulnerable; Damned. Designation for vampires.
- Nequai-hatu:** An ancient description of the Hem-Ka.
- Nuta Akha-t:** Divine scars; the marks of Sobk upon his followers.
- Rager:** Believed to be the first name of Sobk; a false deity.
- Sekhem:** The power that fuels magick; also used to identify a mage's Avatar.
- Sekhet-Aaru:** A marshy field in the underworld where the dead are judged.
- Sunu:** Divine hunters; the Hem-Ka responsible for hunting down the guilty.
- Unu-t:** Ordinary priests; those deceived into promoting the false worship of Rager.
- Xeper:** "Scarab," or a True Mage. One whose powers are self-created.

from their control and into the hands of those who ruled the approaching 11th and 12th dynasties.

Hekau priests who were hoping to usurp the Nequai-hatu swiftly transformed Rager's role as a deity. His very name was changed to *Sobk* to lessen his importance, while newer deities stole the functions once ascribed to the crocodile god — especially the judgment of souls and guardian of the keys to the afterlife. Sobk was eventually identified as an "aspect" of the Sun God, Re, while the crocodile god himself was relegated to simply consuming the souls of the damned. The Hekau of the El-Lisht court, in what they thought to be a decisive blow against Sobk's cult, advised King Amenemhet I to cultivate the Faiyum and reclaim the land for "agricul-

tural” purposes. By destroying the lakes, they hoped that the power of Neqai-hatu would diminish and eventually vanish. Their surprise must have been something to behold when it was discovered that the Neqai-hatu had *already* disappeared from the Faiyum.

The 12th-dynasty kings were responsible for reclaiming 450 square-kilometers of fertile land for cultivation. The Ptolemy Pharaohs later helped to make the Faiyum one of the most heavily populated regions of the countryside. Eventually, the land wore out; the lake is currently one-fifth of its former glory and most of the cultivated land is now desert. The enmity of the Hekau stemmed from their knowledge that the Neqai-hatu were propagating a false worship. Though they never revealed this fact to the populace at large, the Hekau had discovered Rager never existed; he was a fabrication. The Heri-Shi knew that neither they nor their living god could remain within the Faiyum, nor could they keep their secrets forever. So they created a fictional deity named Rager and spread a false worship throughout Egypt. This allowed the Heri-Shi more time to search for a new sanctuary somewhere within the confines of the Nile without arousing suspicion. Rager was a well-implemented red herring, based on half-truths.

Regardless of where they hid, the *Hem-Ka Sobk*, as they began to call themselves, always stayed several steps ahead of their enemies. The Hem-Ka managed to ingrain themselves in the customs and traditional lore of the Nile tribes,

and this infuriated rival Hekau to no end. They knew that the Hem-Ka had now taken the name of Sobk as their own to mock them, and there was little they could do about this secret crocodile god.

Eventually, however, grander problems arose and the tales of the Hem-Ka faded into crumbling memory. Sobk had been forgotten about by the time a newly emerging dragon called the Islamic Empire spread its blazing wings across the face of the Middle East. Sobk's name was not remembered until the Grand Convocation of 1457. Ali-beh-shaar, the Batini representative to the Convocation, spoke of a temple on Mount Qaf that belonged to a cult of crocodile worshippers. Though the temple was difficult to approach, a Batini named Zaffir Ujma accompanied two tribal Shiekha (Arabian wise-women, later grouped into the Tradition of the Dreamspeakers) to Thebes, where the crocodile cult was said to practice. Though Sobk was still revered in Thebes, the Hem-Ka had already left the city for parts unknown.

Attempts to contact the Hem-Ka were finally halted after several failed attempts. Nothing was heard of them until the mid-20th century, when stories of Sobk's cult began to resurface after the departure of the Ahl-i-Batin from the Council of Nine. Following the sundering of Mount Qaf (see *Digital Web* and *The Book of Shadows*), a Chantry of Dreamspeaker mages reported sighting the Hem-Ka amongst the growing homeless population of Cairo. They had stopped watching and started judging.

Culture



By the reckoning of millennia, Cairo is still a babe floating on the edge of the Nile. This city, built for the comfort of two million people, contains 13 million more. Even the restless must sleep sometime, and in Cairo a bed can be a rooftop, graveyard or even the festering gardens of the city's trash dump. Sometimes, these are the only options in the cities of the Nile; 96% of Egypt's population lives on 4% of its available land space.

Egypt's New Tribe

The Hem-Ka live within Egyptian society as part of the growing transient populace who scour the trash heaps of Cairo in search of meager scraps of food or tradable commodities. This new community of vagrants has recently banded together in the absence of governmental assistance. They care for each other's young within a communal "nursery," comb the city dumps in groups, share the spoils of their scavenging expeditions, tend to one another when they are ill, and defend each other from adversity. The community they have formed heeds neither the nationalistic cries of country, sovereign king nor flag; rather, the tribe that the

Hem-Ka live within comes together through necessity. Even religion has proven to be fickle in the eyes of the destitute; despite the constant presence of Islamic ideology that surrounds them, many homeless now believe in Sobk and his priests. Individuals who find themselves living on the streets are welcomed into these communal bands as long as they can pull their measure. Often, notions they once embraced fall by the wayside. It is a simple matter of reality versus ideology; religion does not kill the hunger, and nationalism does little to warm the nights. On the harsh streets, only that which helps the individual survive from day to day becomes truth, despite how right or wrong it may seem.

Perhaps this is why the Hem-Ka have become a part of the landscape. Rather than spouting rhetoric, they teach children practical lessons in survival. Instead of bemoaning their fate, they work within it. Because the Hem-Ka act upon their beliefs rather than simply profess them, they have garnered the loyalty of the destitute and have gained new members to the congress of Sobk. The worship of Sobk is not a rigid obligation; it's carried out simply through the daily struggle to survive. Eat when hungry; hunt when there is a need for food; protect the young; revere the old; make love without shame; seek shelter when the elements demand; and survive within the world around you. Everything is

owed its due, if not in sacrifice, then in memory. These are the ways of Sobk, the way of the silent hunter.

Living is a matter of survival, not luxury. The Hem-Ka operate best within the new wilds erupting in the hearts of "civilization." They serve the homeless people of their "tribe" as their priests, and hunt for Sobk whenever he demands. Community and worship are their twin obligations.

Those Who Serve Sobk

The Hem-Ka are divided into two different groups. The first are the part-time priests, the *Kheri heb ashau*. While they possess some spells (in game terms, hedge magic), they are no match for True Mages. It is the responsibility of the *Kheri heb ashau* to watch over the mortal flock and care for them; they serve Sobk by delving through the refuse of the trash dumps and bringing items of interest to their superiors. Everything eventually finds its way to the garbage piles and into their hands.

The second group consists of Sobk's Awakened followers — the *Sunu* and the high officiate of the Hem-Ka known as the *Kheri heb tep*. It is the former group's responsibility to find those whom Sobk seeks out, destroy them and then devour portions of their body. Sobk bequeaths a greater portion of his power to them and they have earned the name *Neqau-hatu*. The latter group, the *Kheri heb tep*, listens for and interprets instructions from the crocodile god himself. Although both the priests and hunters bear Awakened Avatars, neither group believes its magickal talents come from within. Magick flows from the gods, and the gods alone.

The Kheri heb ashau

All Hem-Ka serve as priests, both to Sobk and the people of their tribe. The majority of them are considered *Kheri heb ashau*, or "priests of the people." These *Kheri heb ashau* live primarily among the homeless, helping them find food, educating the young in the ways of survival, gathering with them to share in music, tending to the ill and even helping arbitrate justice. When Sobk does not demand that they hunt the refuse piles, the *Kheri heb ashau* fulfill the obligations of within their communities.

While they are considered part-time priests (a practice that dates back to Ancient Egyptian times), the *Kheri heb ashau* are not expected to follow the same restrictions as the *Sunu*. They can let their hair grow long, wear whatever clothing they need, marry, have children and even retain incomes from either an honest day's work, begging or stealing (they must share the spoils with their community, however). In essence, they are allowed to carry on a life outside the priesthood, while the *Sunu* may not. Unlike the *Sunu*, the position of *Kheri heb ashau* can be passed along from parent to child. Despite their honored status within the Hem-Ka, however, these priests are rarely brought into the *Sunu* ranks, for their past is rarely as colored.





The Sunu and the Kheri heb tep

Without the pharaohs to speak to the gods for the people, the Kheri heb ashau represent the will of Sobk to the community. Even they, however, are not privy to Sobk's words. It falls upon the Kheri heb tep, "the chief reader of the divine words," to act as the direct intermediary between Sobk and the general populace. A circle of priest-magicians assists the Kheri heb tep — the *Sunu*, or the Divine Hunters.

Sunu command formidable magical abilities and inspire fear and respect among all who understand their philosophies. These cannibal-mages serve as the teeth of the crocodile god — literally. Their duties are not gifts, however, but acts of penance for crimes they committed as Sleepers. The Sunu all share sordid pasts and desires to redeem those blemished memories. All Hem-Ka practice the rite of scarring and self-mutilation, but it serves a purpose far greater than simple religious piety. Called *Nuta Akha-t*, these scars act as foci through which Sobk grants the Hem-Ka their spells. The Hem-Ka do not believe that their powers come from within, but through their services to the gods.

Like the Kheri heb ashau, the Sunu live amongst the poverty-stricken masses. They're also obligated to tend to Sobk, however, and study the lessons of the past and future. At least two hours a day are spent studying; another five are spent watching over Sobk's sleeping body; each Sunu must spend at least one hour a day in contemplative meditation, remembering and mourning his past crimes; three hours in the evening are spent hunting.

The Sunu suffer much emotional pain for their past sins (as Sleepers, they were murderers, rapists, blasphemers and thieves) and often feel alienated from the community which they protect. When not fulfilling their obligations, they choose to drown themselves in indulgence and vice, hoping that the memories of their actions will fade. It then falls upon the Kheri heb ashau to watch over their morose brethren and care for their needs.

Within the transient communities of Cairo, the Sunu and Kheri heb tep are revered. There is nothing that the Kheri heb ashau would not give them, including their own bodies (if they are not already married). Sunu may only have intercourse with other members of the Hem-Ka, though they cannot marry or have children. They are also required to stay bald and remain clean-shaven, and may only wear that which is given to them as donations. These, and other strictures, are part of their penance for past crimes.

Sunu duties require an almost reptilian mindset. Naturally, these Divine Hunters seek releases of all kinds; unlike the Muslim God, Sobk is more understanding of human needs — or of vices, at least. Most Sunu have many different lovers and drown their emotions through a variety of indulgences. Some spar and duel amongst themselves, while others hunt *all* during their spare time, bringing judgment upon those they

encounter. Some Sunu take less physical roads to absolution and use their powers to explore themselves and the world in which they live. The Sunu are *not* permitted to engage in any chemical vices that bring harm to the body, however. Physical perfection is paramount — Sunu are vessels through whom Sobk acts by instilling his *Ka* (a living and independent manifestation of Sobk that merges with whomever he pleases) and *Sekhem* (Quintessence). Because health is an important aspect of devotion, many Sunu spend their free time training or sparring with one another.

Practices

In service to Sobk, the Sunu and Kheri heb tep observe daily meditation, devotion and prayer. They are also required to sharpen their teeth and engage in ritualized cannibalism upon a successful kill. When a Sunu begins his hunt, he becomes detached and emotionless, the living embodiment of the patient crocodile waiting for the kill. He is no longer the human who serves a god, but a living manifestation of the god himself. His identity is secondary to Sobk's will. Some claim that the Hem-Ka merely justify their actions by claiming divine guidance. Others who have encountered Sunu during the hunt are not so certain. Before they vanished, the Ahl-i-Batin who dealt with the Hem-Ka on the slopes of Mount Qaf claimed that their minds were

disconnected and in tune with some greater power. It may very well be true that when a Sunu fulfills a mission for Sobk, it is not the mind of the follower that guides him, but that of Sobk himself.

Crime and Punishment

For the Hem-Ka, crimes against the community or priesthood include: not sharing in the burden of labor; harming a member of the community; taking more than is needed; taking what is not given; revealing secrets to those not chosen by Sobk; and not helping others when they are in need. Sunu trespasses include: resorting to the methods of their evil past; polluting their bodies with drugs or alcohol; and not returning Sobk's *Sekhem* when the hunt ends. Those accused undergo the *Aai-ab* ritual, or the "Washing of the Heart" (see the "Common Magicks" section). Should they be found guilty, punishment is allotted according to the gravity of the crime.

Minor infractions require greater service to the community, the temporary loss of abilities, or corporal punishment in the form of public flagellation. More-grievous punishments include the tearing away of scars, the pulling of teeth, or expulsion from the Hem-Ka with all memories altered. When the crime is great enough, a death sentence is carried out by the Sunu, with the offender's heart given to Sobk.

Beliefs



There is power in belief; it justifies the unthinkable and empowers the otherwise incapable. If the Sunu and Kheri heb tep shared any commonalities before their service to the crocodile god, it was that they died and were guilty of sins not pardonable by any amount of indulgences. If the Kheri heb ashau serve through a sense of compassion, then the Sunu serve guiltily for having committed crimes of rape, murder and torture.

As Sleepers, the Sunu, responsible for the misery of many, carried out that task with brutal efficiency. Their reasons — religious canon, political dogma, desperation or just pure malice — do not matter. Nothing, in the eyes of Sobk, could pardon their actions. Each Sunu recounts the same tale of death: the one that came during quiet slumber and stole away her breath as she dreamed of black marshes and a pair of terrible yellow eyes.

The Sunu believe that upon death, they are offered a choice of redemption or damnation. Both carry a heavy cost. The price of damnation is the destruction of their souls, while the price of repentance is to become conduits for the crocodile god and his powers. The harvesting of *Sekhem* is the service demanded of these chosen few. When a person accepts his lot, Sobk cleanses the initiate and replaces his

meager *Sekhem* with a shard of his own. When Sobk commanded faithful legions countless generations ago, he bestowed upon them this same gift. As his worship fell away, the *Sekhem* he bequeathed to others was lost. His greater self was scattered and reborn into those who either never reawakened to the power within themselves, or who turned away from their benefactor.

It falls upon the Hem-Ka Sobk to find those who have been born with an aspect of his *Sekhem*, and to judge them. Those who are worthy to keep their aspect of Sobk are either invited to join the Hem-Ka or left in ignorance. Those who fail Sobk's mysterious standards are hunted and killed, their liver devoured in an act of ritualized cannibalism, and their heart given to Sobk. The Sunu believe that by devouring the liver, they prevent the person from ever being reborn and, that by giving Sobk the heart, they return his *Sekhem* to him. When a heart has been reclaimed for the crocodile god, it is given to the Kheri heb tep to offer to Sobk directly. Those Sunu who venture far from their elders use Correspondence magicks to send the hearts to the sewer labyrinth of Sobk.

Paradox and Quiet

Paradox often manifests according to regional influences. In Egypt, backlashes tend to assume the shape of divine wrath — avenging creatures (hawks, cats, scorpions,

crocodiles, or even old Egyptian gods), blasts of light or darkness, insanity, plagues of insects, or even entombment alive (a terrifying form of Paradox Realm). Oddly enough, the Hem-Ka do not view Paradox and Quiet as self-defense mechanisms for reality. Rather, both are seen as ancient enemies of Sobk trying to interfere with the duties of the Sunu. The mythological forms of many Egyptian Paradox spirits enhance this belief.

Though the magicks of the Hem-Ka are not generally vulgar, there are instances when either Quiet or a Flaw occurs. These are called *Aat-t* or plagues, and are generally treated as such. Anyone who manifests a Flaw is quarantined from the community until the “plague” symptoms subside.

Magickal Style

The Hem-Ka do not believe that *Heka*, the power to cast magick, is something inherent. Their powers come from Sobk, and their expression of *Heka* is based entirely around various foci, whether these foci involve scars, water or ritualized cannibalism. Therefore, *Heka* is an act of devotion and service to a greater god, not to oneself.

The Kheri heb ashau practice *Aakhu*, or hedge magic. Their spells encompass various areas of knowledge to better serve their community, for magick is given on a basis of need, not want. Various Kheri heb ashau are familiar with the Paths of Ephemera (*Akhiu*), Healing (*S-utcha*) and Herbalism (*Aneb*; the ingredients for such concoctions are difficult to come by in a city). Each Path and Ritual requires a different *Nuta Akha-t* (or scar) to act as a focus. The Sunu and Kheri heb tep, on the other hand, wield True Magick. Four Spheres, however, are forbidden to them; no Hem-Ka is allowed to learn Entropy, Forces, Matter or Prime. Such power is solely the domain of the gods.

Sphere

In the absence of four of the “usual” nine Spheres, the Hem-Ka Sobk specialize heavily in the remaining five, especially:

- **Correspondence:** Like the crocodile, the Hem-Ka use water to travel from one location to another, and to sense their surroundings. All Effects using Correspondence must involve water as foci in some capacity.

- **Spirit:** The Hem-Ka believe that between the body and soul, there are nine separate aspects of each person. In this view, the spirit is divided into the following: the *Khat*, or the physical body, that which is likely to decay; the *Sahu*, a spiritual manifestation of the body; the *Ab*, or the heart, which serves as the source of all emotional thoughts; the *Ka*, an independent and identical mirror of an individual's personality; the *Ba* or eternal soul; the *Khaibit*, or shadow; the *Khu*, or intelligent spirit; the *Sekhem*, or a person's power, and finally, the *Ren*, or true name of an individual.

The one that concerns Sobk the most is his *Sekhem*, the personal power he seeks to retrieve.

The Hem-Ka Sobk believe that most Awakened beings, including ghosts, vampires, werewolves and even other mages are spiritually unbalanced. In vampires, the natural development of the *Khat* has been halted; werewolves allow themselves to be ruled solely by their *Ab*; ghosts and other spirits manifest when either the *Sahu*, *Ba* or *Khu* is torn away from one's *Khat*, while Marauders are caught within the embrace of their *Sekhem*. Immortal mummies are the only Awakened entities whom the Hem-Ka Sobk believe are perfectly balanced. (See **World of Darkness: Mummy**.)

Common Foci

Like many “bridge” philosophies of magick, the Hem-Ka Sobk belief does not allow a mage to toss away items which focus his powers; to work magick without channeling the power of Sobk through sacred objects is profane. Thus, even the most advanced Masters still utilize the following ritual foci:

- **Akha-t:** This Craft utilizes many scarification techniques to mark their bodies, including branding and piercing, cutting and abrading, and rubbing ash into an open wound to produce nodules. Each set of marks represents a Path, rote or Sphere the Hem-Ka has access to, and these specific scars represent separate foci. A priest need only trace his fingers or tongue over the scar tissue to activate the spell.

- **Agb:** When using the Sphere of Correspondence, the Hem-Ka use water as a conduit through which to travel or extend their senses. Spittle, in some cases, is thought to be particularly potent.

- **Hersh:** Oddly enough, this may be one of the first foci based on a spell Effect. Unless the Hem-Ka first uses the Hersh spell before any other Ritual or rote, she is not in tune with Sobk and her *Heka* does not work.

Organization

The Hem-Ka seem to operate within a loosely defined hierarchy which equally employs both men and women. The priests are placed within specific categories, but this has to do more with their functions within the society rather than with the powers they wield. All Hem-Ka are respected equally by the people they aid and amongst one another. After all, nobody is anything compared to Sobk himself.

- From an outsider's point of view, the Hem-Ka on the lowest rung are the **Kheri heb ashau**, or the part-time priests. They serve the mortals of their communities using limited magic. Within the organization, however, the Kheri heb ashau are well-treated and highly regarded. Their duties are not discounted, for they fill a variety of functions from guardians to healers, and from teachers to parents. Their services are given from the heart and fulfilled as labors of love and devotion. The power they wield is not a reflection of their worth. Rather, Sobk gives only what is needed for survival.



- Again, from the eyes of an outsider, the **Sunu** would be placed above the **Kheri heb ashau** in importance, but this impression is deceiving. The **Sunu** are a different division of the priesthood, and they fill a more specific function for **Sobk**. The magick afforded them is necessary should they encounter those of equal or greater power. The **Sunu**, though respected, intimidate mortals, who recognize them only as one would **Potiphar**, the Pharaoh's executioner.

- Normally, any **Hem-Ka** guilty of some infraction against the precepts of the priesthood or the community is severed from the gifts of **Sobk** until he can make restitutions (which are dictated by the **Kheri heb tep**). Should judgment be delivered against the offending priest (a decision only **Sobk** can make), then it is the **Sunu** who carry out the verdict. Of all the priests, the **Kheri heb tep** are recognized as second only to **Sobk**, not in terms of divinity, but in authority. This position has always been occupied by one of the **Sunu**, but one whose impetus to serve **Sobk** and his people is born of love. The **Kheri heb tep** is somebody who has finally come to terms with the atrocities he may have committed, who is at peace with himself. The position he fills is no longer one of penance, but of nonsecular devotion.

Most of this wizard-priest's time is spent either in communion with the **Sekhem** of **Sobk** or tutoring new **Sunu**. He is known by no other name than his title. Currently, 12 communities of homeless people exist, linked through the

Hem-Ka. Each of these tribes has its own **Kheri heb tep**. The two largest tribes dwell in the **Darb-el-Ahmar** and **Darb-el-Barabrah** slum districts of **Cairo**, each containing well over 400 people. In all, the **Kheri heb ashau** comprise over 100 priests across **Cairo**, with 41 **Sunu** (including 12 who travel across the world) and 12 **Kheri heb tep**.

Initiation

- **Kheri heb ashau**: Those who voluntarily enter the priesthood of **Sobk** are first interviewed by the local **Kheri heb tep**. Only those willing to live among the members of the community are accepted. For this, he uses a variation on the ritual of **Aai-ab**, the "Washing of the Heart" (see the "Common Magicks" section) to determine their dedication and truthfulness. Through this rite, the initiate finds himself in the **Sekhet-Aaru** marsh, hip-deep in water. His skin is mottled with the taint of his prior sins, and it is here where he first glimpses **Sobk** and beholds his power. The crocodile god holds a scale upon which rests the feather of the Goddess **Ma'at**, and the Initiate is given a blade to cut away all those measures of himself that have become corrupted and evil. If, by the end of this painful process, the Initiate retains some portion of his heart which is pure and untouched, he may weigh it against the feather. Should his heart be heavier than the feather, or should nothing remain of his heart, he is turned away; should it be lighter, he is accepted.

If he passes, the Kheri heb tep assigns the initiate to an elderly Kheri heb ashau for tutelage. This phase has no preset limit, and may take as long as the Hem-Ka deem necessary. After all, if service to Sobk is a lifetime endeavor, then what is a year within that life? Upon finishing his apprenticeship, the initiate is sent through the Rite of Akha-t, the placing of the first scars. This is done in the presence of all in the mortal community and followed by a celebration.

• **Sunu:** All Sunu pass away in their sleep, dreaming of water and a great crocodile with yellow eyes that comes slithering for them. After death, the initiate appears within the marshy reed of the Sekhet-Aaru, before a tribunal of Sobk in all his forms. As Judge, Opener of the Ways, Weigher of Hearts and the Devourer, Sobk tears from the mortal's chest his Ab, then tells him that his choice lies in this decision: Should he weigh the Ab and find it wanting, it is devoured and destroyed. The only way for the initiate to be redeemed is to surrender to the will of Sobk as his adjudicator on earth — to choose either death or repentant servitude.

Those who accept Sobk's offer reawaken in ancient sewers, healthy, alive and in the company of the Kheri heb tep. It is he who trains the new Hem-Ka in the ways of magick and ensures that the proper Akha-t are carved into his body. This period of training and meditation lasts for a year, as the initiate is taught to control both his emotions and Sobk's gift to him. After this intermediary period, the Sunu is quietly introduced into the new community. From this point on, the Sunu is a True Mage in all senses of the word.

Acolytes

The communities that the Hem-Ka serve are generally regarded as their acolytes, since the Hem-Ka rarely rely on those outside their "tribes." Though the mortals of these communities are treated with equality, status and influence are given to those who can carry their weight (the elderly and very young are exceptions). It is the law of the tribe that everybody must be capable of helping not only themselves, but the people around them. Mortals within these new communities believe in Sobk through the abilities of the Kheri heb ashau (who, because they lack the gift of True Magick, might be considered acolytes themselves by many mages). The Sunu and Kheri heb tep rarely display their magickal abilities openly, but many within their tribes remain aware of the great powers they possess.

Concepts

This new world has created a great deal of uncertainty, and while the Hem-Ka do not try to change their surroundings, they show people how to adapt and survive within them. This sense of community and understanding attracts many people who would otherwise be loners, lost souls or misfits in a "normal" world.

All who enter the Sunu are people who would prefer to forget the sins of their past. Murderers, rapists, thieves, terrorists, fundamentalists who have lost their cause, tired soldiers of fortune, and many others who have seen (or perpetrated) many horrors, find themselves before Sobk. Though their epiphany was induced, they still strive for change.

Common Magicks



As hunters and servants of their people and their god, the Hem-Ka specialize in a variety of traveling, summoning and obfuscating magicks. Many of these resemble the following Effects in the **Mage** rulebook: **Land-scape of the Mind** (used to puzzle their way through dark caverns and streets); **Open/Close Window** (used to spy upon sinners from a distance); **Chain** (used to link a Sunu with her target, or with a close friend or dependent); **The Seven-League Stride** (for quick or uninterrupted travel); **Rip the Man-Body** (to punish sinners from a distance; often used by the Kheri heb tep to enforce Sobk's law on his tribe); and **Accelerate** or **Slow Time** (to quicken or slow a chase or fight). The rituals of these magicks demand that practitioners wet their scars with blood, spittle or mixtures of both.

Hersh, "To be Patient" (• Correspondence, • Mind, • Spirit)

Rubbing spittle over his closed eyelids, the Hem-Ka enters a semi-meditative trance in which he clears away all doubts and hesitations, and attains an emotionless calm. His surroundings flare into acute sharpness and he feels the Sekhem of Sobk flow through him. He then becomes one with the crocodile. Without this rote, none of the Sunu or Kheri heb tep can access their Heka. Those who perform an action contrary to their role as priests or hunters may also find themselves bereft of Sobk's gifts.

Utchatti, "The Two Divine Eyes" (• Correspondence, • Spirit; also a Level Two Ritual for the Path of Akhiu/Ephemera)

After touching the scar patterns around their eyes with wet fingers, the Hem-Ka can sense objects within their immediate vicinity that have been touched by great Sekhem

(that is, things which have been touched by magic or magick). The impression received makes no distinction between Sobk's essence or a *Hekau's Sekhem* (an object handled by a mortal or a Nak). Nonetheless, the item is often kept for further examination.

Aai-ab, "Washing the Heart" (•• Mind, • Spirit)

Holding a feather, the representation of the Goddess Ma'at, and using it to follow the scar pattern over his own heart, the Sunu can see the symbolic manifestation of his target based on his spiritual nature and thoughts. With this, he can determine the type of being who stands before him (mortal, Nak, Hekau, etc.) and its potential power. Should the feather become heavy in the hands of the Sunu, then Sobk has decreed the destruction of the judged. If the feather remains light, then the person is spared.

[This Effect uses Spirit to read the being's aura and Mind to scan its surface thoughts. The "decision" should be made by the Storyteller, but Traits like Humanity, Paradox, Angst and Rage will figure into the equation.]

Abh-t-ab, "Biting the Heart" (•• Correspondence, •• Mind)

A poetic way of describing the sensation of fear; with it, a Hem-Ka priest induces either the "flee" or "freeze" response found in panicked animals. By wetting the scars on the roof of his mouth with his tongue, then whispering threats, the Sunu makes it seem as though danger is coming from a specific direction. Sunu often use this attack from a distance and project the emotion so that the victim, who believes he is escaping from a threat in the other direction, runs directly into their arms — or into a puddle which serves to hold the victim fast. Standing water, the most common focus for this Effect, is swallowed when the victim is about to fall into the trap. When there are no puddles available, Sunu have also been known to carry around bottled water, drinking and spitting it in the faces of their prey.

Deceive the Eyes (•• Life; possibly with •• Mind, or simply ••• Mind)

By rubbing ash into a cut on her arm, a Hem-Ka can mask her scars and tattoos from the eyes of those who would not understand them. By blowing dust into the faces of those around her, she may disguise some thing, person or item that she does not want discovered.

[Life magick shifts skin pigments to hide the Hem-Ka's markings for a while, while the Mind element keeps people from questioning her if she wants to move unmolested. The Mind-only variation keeps bystanders from seeing something that's really there by convincing them that it isn't. Obviously, the larger or more prominent the item, the more successes the Hem-Ka must roll to conceal it. This isn't true invisibility, but simply "clouding men's minds," as it were. The first version of the spell is often vulgar without witnesses, while the obfuscation variation is often coincidental. A concealed object will not simply fade from the gaze of a direct observer.]

Stereotypes

Traditions: Why do they seek to make common that which is not theirs to begin with? These blasphemers seem doomed to commit the same folly time and time again.

Technocracy: In the grand race to makes everyone equal, they have forgotten to look back and help those who have fallen overboard. They have become ships with no passengers.

Marauders: Chaos' minions! These demented ones will be trapped in the flood of their own power, and it is we who will drink from their water-filled hearts.

Nephandi: We offer these vile things an eternity of suffering in the belly of Sobk. Then, maybe, he will grant them mercy and excrete them into oblivion's gullet.

Others: We remember our immortal brethren (mummies) fondly, and hope they recall us the same way. Our Kheri heb tep all speak well of these soul-travelers, and every once in a while, we meet their kind again. The pollution of those fiends called the Followers of Set spills into the streets, poisoning even the communities of our forsaken ones. We wish them eternal death and grant it to them when we can, but they are too many and we are too few to fight them openly. Occasionally in our travels, we meet the last remains of our old cousins the Ahl-i-Batin. While it is good to know that their kind has not perished, there is little we can (or will) do to aid their fatal crusade. Our way is survival, not suicide.

Amon Maat, "Hidden Justice" (••• Correspondence, •• Life, or ••• Spirit)

Sometimes it's only just that those who have plenty give to those who have nothing — willingly or otherwise. Before entering another person's dwelling, a Sunu may wash his feet with cold water and, by sprinkling a bit of the water on the door or windowsill and whispering a chant to his protector, ease past the door into the room itself. Anointing his eyelids with the same water allows the wizard to see everything in the room, even if it's dark. If he mixes a bit of blood into the water and does the same, Sobk grants the Sunu a vision of the other rooms in the house as well. Meanwhile, the residents of the home sleep soundly, at least until the water dries. A clumsy Sunu will still wake them, though. Stealth is left to the hunter, it is not granted by his god.

[Correspondence magick allows the Sunu to pass through the door or window without opening it. This is vulgar, but obviously done without witnesses. Additional Correspondence extends the Hem-Ka's senses around the dwelling, while Life deepens the residents' slumber or brings sleep to those who might still be awake. In the latter case, the victim might be able to resist the spell with a Willpower roll (difficulty 7).

Storyteller Ideas

• **The Truth:** Sobk is real. Though few outside the Hem-Ka have ever seen him, the Craft's god rests deep within the ancient sewer labyrinth of Cairo. By all accounts, he is monstrous, nearly double the size of any Nile crocodile. His scales are blood-red and he emanates an aura of such power that the hieroglyphs that adorn his body seethe like coals. His eyes are a piercing yellow, and seem far too ancient for the likes of this world.

Some theorize that this crocodile manifestation of Sobk may be nothing more than a receptacle for a greater entity's essence. Many have arrived at the conclusion that Sobk is an Umbrood — a lord or Incarna to be precise. This degree of power could explain why his lair is so well hidden.

The Cairo sewers would take years to search properly, and even then nothing would be uncovered. Sobk's lair is actually an Umbral extension of an abandoned sewer system. Judicious magicks loop the tunnel passages back upon themselves, creating a small Horizon Realm. Spirit and Mind crafting hides this bubble from prying eyes. Unwary wanderers might stumble upon the Realm by accident, while searchers may explore for years without discovering a thing.

• **Mysteries in the Web:** Why would such an abode be used by a supposed god? The tunnels are a recent lair, but before then, Sobk lived in a grand temple on Bakhu, the secret mountain on Aakhu-t sheta-t once known as Mount Qaf. The temple had been abandoned for several years prior to the destruction of the Web of Faith because Sobk had seen the cataclysm coming. In recent years, crocodile-headed figures, bearing the markings of Sobk, have been seen flitting in and out of the various sectors on the Digital Web. What are they searching for? Perhaps for something that was never taken out of the temple in time. The Hem-Ka have recently been encountered outside Egypt, as far away as North America, following what is assumed to be a continuation of their duties to Sobk. Occasionally, webslingers have met poor vagabonds with sharpened teeth in VR itself, but who knows what kind of icons a hacker with an imagination could cook up?

• **A Better Death:** As several unfortunates can attest, the Hem-Ka hate the Euthanatos. In ancient tradition, evil was often equated with disorder and chaos, and the Hem-Ka seem to have carried on with this belief. They deem the Euthanatos evil for their control over the Entropic forces of the universe, and take them down whenever possible.

Islamic fundamentalists, especially those responsible for attacks on tourists throughout Egypt, have also gained the Craft's enmity in recent years. Initially, Sobk and his priests remained fairly neutral about Islam, due partly to the goodwill of the Ahli-Batin. Now, with them gone, the differences between the Islamic Sleepers and mages (particularly those within the Celestial Chorus) and the animist Craft of Sobk have proven to be the sources of increased friction. The matter has yet to culminate in warfare, but in the explosive Middle East, anything can happen.

[A Spirit-oriented variant does the same things, but uses an opening in the Gauntlet to bypass barriers and summons spirits to distract residents, or to put them to sleep if the spirits have the power to do so.]

The Endless Pool (** Correspondence, possibly with *** Life and **** or ***** Time)**

Knowing that her prey will pass through an area soon, a skillful Sunu may lay this magickal trap. First, she finds or creates a large puddle or pool. She then spits around it and marks the pool's borders with her own urine. A drop of blood in the water sets the trap, which a victim is herded toward when he appears. As the sinner steps into the pool, he is drawn into the water and transported to another place, where the Hem-Ka can dispose of him. A horrible variant "hangs" the victim in time, trapping him for as long as the Sunu can manage to hold him. Kheri heb tep sometimes use this spell as a punishment for wayward fellows or important (but not irredeemable) outsiders.

[Correspondence magicks open a portal to another location and blur the borders of the pool, making it easier for the victim to misjudge his distance and fall in. Once he steps into the water, the magick draws him down.

[An offshoot spell, which adds a Time warp to the portal, suspends the victim in place and time, underwater, but unable to drown. The Time 4 version dumps the subject into another place after a certain duration. The Time 5 variant lasts indefinitely, which can do hideous things to the victim's mind. Imagine falling forever, yet going nowhere in space. Now imagine it underwater, plunging downward yet never drowning. Horrible? Yes, it is....]

Ap-Sobk, "Last Judgment of Sobk" (** Spirit)**

The palms of the greatest priests bear scar hieroglyphs dedicated to this rote alone. If a Sunu or the Kheri heb tep is in great danger, he can petition Sobk for assistance by spitting into his palms, and rubbing them together. Should the god approve, the Hem-Ka becomes possessed by the crocodile deity himself. Should the Sunu be found guilty of employing this spell without good reason (just trying to save his life is often not a valid justification), he is slain — often by Sobk himself, who consumes the sinner's heart in a dream.

[See the Spirit Effect **Living Bridge** for particulars. Assume the Hem-Ka can use the following Charms in addition to the Physical Trait boosts, with 40 Power points to draw from: Airt Sense; Armor (5 extra soak dice); Blighted

Touch; Cleanse the Blight; Corruption; Create Wind; Flood (causes all nearby waters to rise and overflow area; 5 Power to use); Mind Speech; Short Out; Tracking. (See **Mage**, page 219 for the Effect, pages 238-239 for the Charms.)]

Shattered Spirit Dust (••••• Spirit, ••••• Mind, ••••• Life)

With a shattered goblet and the mightiest magicks that Sobk will bestow, a Kheri heb tep smashes the bond between the nine aspects of body and soul. First, he fills a clay goblet with a mixture of water and the spit, blood and hair from a doomed prisoner, the target of the spell. As he spits into the cup, the priest intones the list of sins that the victim has committed, and smashes the goblet to the ground. If the ritual has been performed properly, and if Sobk agrees that the punishment is fair, the victim's body turns to dust, his soul flies into pieces, his mind scatters and his essence returns to Sobk, where it belongs. This punishment is worse in some ways than damnation — it is complete, eternal destruction. Still, with especially heinous crimes like treason, it is the only appropriate punishment.

[Obviously vulgar, this rite tears the subject's soul to bits through Spirit magick, transforms the subject's body into a handful of dust through Life, and rips his mind from his body, flinging it into the astral void through Mind. This Shattering inflicts its successes as Health Levels of damage as well; if those successes are not enough to kill the person, the victim-turned-dust survives the transformation, horribly alive, if mindless and soulless. The shattering takes a few agonizing seconds, during which a foul-smelling wind rises from the ground, whirls into a storm and sucks the various aspects out of the victim piece by piece.]

Talisman and Equipment

A poor Craft, the Hem-Ka Sobk do not rely on magickal aids aside from the Abh-t knife, though they do utilize a few pieces of special "equipment." Valuable items which come their way are passed on to the Kheri heb tep and used for the good of the local "tribe."

•• Abh-t Dagger

Arete 2, Quintessence 10, Cost 4

Upon completion of their first hunt, a Sunu initiate is given an ornately carved dagger with a rough surface on the flat of the blade, which he uses to file his teeth. Such Talismans are blessed by Sobk and used to make incisions on the dead to remove their hearts and livers. These daggers inflict aggravated damage and can damage a spirit as well.

Abh-t knife: difficulty 4, Strength + 1 (aggravated), Conceal P

Equipment

• **Canoptic Bags:** A cloth bag with drawstrings, anointed with preserving oils and used to store mummified body organs. Such bags hold human hearts for delivery to Sobk.

• **Sef-t:** Sacred oils used by the Hem-Ka to wash themselves and purify their bodies upon devouring victims' livers.

• **Filed Teeth:** Not "equipment" *per se*, but a weapon all Hem-Ka possess. With a successful Dexterity + Brawl roll, the followers of the crocodile god can bite their victims with their sharp-filed jaws (see the "Brawling Table"; difficulty: 5, damage: Strength +1). This damage is normal, not aggravated.

Companion: Uha-t (Cost: 3)

Spirit consors to the Hem-Ka are called the *Uha-t*; the Seven Scorpions of Isis. Each one manifests as seven small scorpions free-floating through the air, attached to one another through their tails. Egyptian belief held that dead crocodiles turned into scorpions, and that Isis was accompanied by seven scorpions in her search for Osiris. These potent spirits could be the catalyst for such legends.

There are only seven *Uha-t* known to exist, and they distribute themselves amongst the Sunu and Keri heb tep. Each consor remains with that one person for seven days before moving on to another member of the Hem-Ka. Of the seven, one special consor flits in this manner between the 12 Sunu who wander the world.

Willpower 6, Rage 6, Gnosis 7, Power 25

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear, Mind Speech, Poison (as per Prime 2 Effect **Rubbing of the Bones**, but roll Rage instead of Arete; 5 Power to use), Tracking



The Sebi-t, "Traverser of Eternity"



Quote: *Do not search your memories for me, for you have nothing to remember yet.*

Prelude: You lived a lie, believing that others' religious failings justified the tortures and miseries you brought upon them. Then your own death came. The journey began when the eyes of Sobk first washed over you, revealing the horrors you had made your life, and you quaked with shame — and with fear. Finally, he offered you a choice. It was painful, but you have not regretted it.

Now, in these cities of glass and steel teeth, you wander silently, watching rich nations squander their money on new ways to ignore the poor. Though the outcasts of your new lands are not your people, you still help them in the name of Sobk. Though your journey is lonely, you are not alone. Other Hekau cross your path, mistaking you for one of their own or dismissing you as an "orphan." The distance between you and your old home has brought back your old sins, but you refuse to give in to them again, nor to the urges that once drove you to become a heartless fiend.

Concept: A Sunu traveling outside the territorial confines of Egypt. Portions of Sobk's Sekhem have hidden themselves within the hearts of sleeping mortals; it has fallen upon you to find them and carry through Sobk's judgment. In your mind, however, you believe that there must be more to the world behind its facade of greed and power. Your quest has also become a search for the greater good in humanity. Perhaps in the redemption of others, you may find the ability to forgive yourself, the strength to continue fighting, and a time when you can return home.

Roleplaying Hints: Observe and listen, for prey will not approach a known hunter. Duty and quiet perseverance have always been your hallmarks. Strike quickly and without hesitation — the battlefield is no place for stoic heroism or cunning speeches. Prepare your spells beforehand and improvise only when the situation calls for it. If survival is doubtful, send your Sekhem back to Sobk before it too is lost. This dedication to your duty makes you somewhat uncomfortable around others. You want to laugh at their jokes, but your smile betrays you as a hunter. You long for physical contact, but your scars are not meant for others' eyes.

Magick: Magick is water, a fluid state of power; scars are the conduits for that water, holding it until the need arises to release it. You believe in this, and know that magick is not your domain of knowledge, but Sobk's gift to the parched soul. As a hunter, you must always be aware of your surroundings (Correspondence); to know the enemy, you must know his Ab, his heart (Spirit and Mind). The latter Arts serve a far greater purpose than murder — they are the means by which you know who needs your help, and the keys to your own salvation.

Equipment: Abh-t Dagger, canopic bags, seft-t vials, water bottle, sleeping mat, dried meat and walking-stick.



Kopa Loei: Magick from the Land

By Andrew Ragland

*May I one day sing the song of my being in
the land of my heart's desire.*

—Debra F. Sanders, *Hawai'ian Book of Days*



You like hear how all dis wen happen? Sit down, keiki, an' listen. One time, eh... Tupua Nui wen go kick our okole... big time. You like make kaua against Tupua Nui... an' leave your keiki ways behind? You listen good den.

Try look den... one time, eh... long ago... us folks wen live our own way. Maka'ainana work da land... ali'i move da mana, so da land stay fertile. Kahuna heal da sick... blast da wicked... make He'iau... pray. Akua favor us all. Across da ocean... get ho'okele-manua, wayfinders. Menehune an' Rokea, bruddahs an' sistahs of da land an' sea... alla time stay wit us.

Tupua Nui, but... dey no like. Dey make everyting hard for do magick... everybody gotta do everyting dere way... wit metal boxes an' could-happens. All ovah da world... Tupua Nui an' Ha'ole Kahuna slap ali'i ovah da head. Ha'ole Kahuna go make one

big council... wen tell everybody fo' get together... bumbai Tupua Nui take ovah da world. We tink we akamai... can take care... kick some Tupua Nui okole. We tell 'em no.. no get involved.

Enden... Tupua Nui take da ha'ole land... enden dey go come west. Wen dey wen spock our islands... Ho! Plenny mana steh move around... j'like free. Tupua Nui like stop 'em.

Tupua Nui wen hear one mele... about Lono... who wen come back on top one floating island. Tupua Nui go figgah... eh, we get big ship... look j'like one island... can hang plenny sails... bumbai going look j'like da white tapas of Lono's akualoa. An' can get one Tupua Nui wit light hair... fo' sail da ship... enden da islanders going tink Lono wen come back. Dey going listen da akua... do what we tell 'em... enden can stop da free magick.

Kanakas wen go bite... big time. Blond buggah... wen sail into da harbor... Kahuna Kilokilo wen tell everybody da buggah look j'like Lono. Bumbai, but... wen some folks go tink da blond

Lexicon

The opening story is written in a pidgin dialect used by the *kanaka maoli*. It's not used to be racist, but instead to show how this pidgin sounds. Many natives use this mix of Polynesian and English as a mark of community, and as a way to further identify themselves as *kanakas*. These people are capable of speaking what the Western world thinks of as proper English. They choose not to in order to identify themselves with their fellow Polynesians — and to exclude nonnatives.

The mix can be hard to understand, especially if the speaker affects a thick native accent. A *ha'ole* attempting to speak in pidgin will sound ridiculous and may be accused of mocking the natives. Don't overuse pidgin in your chronicle. Kopa Loei characters should only use it within the native community, amongst themselves or when they want to exclude nonnatives from the conversation, never to mock their own community.

Polynesian is a complex language; words often change meaning according to context. Because of the close ties between these ancient mages and their fae counterparts, many titles refer to them both by the same terms. In the old days, no distinction was made between them. Why start now?

Common Parlance

Aina: The Land, in both a mundane and sacred sense.

Akua: Spirits, both good and evil.

Ana'ana: Using Life magick to kill from a distance.

Aumakua: Personal god, sometimes an avatar of a major deity and often associated with a given family. Also, the Avatar of a True Mage, seen in visions as a totemic figure.

Bayanihan Spirit: The view of all Polynesians as one great extended family. See "Culture."

Ha'ole: Anyone not a *kanaka*. Usually derogatory when used to refer to Caucasians. Also, a Tradition mage other than Dreamspeakers and some Verbena.

He'iau: Temple of old Polynesian traditions. A platform of stone, sometimes with walls or a roof. Also a Chantry or Kopa Loei meeting place, usually with a Node.

Ho'o-komokomo: Using Life magick to cause sickness.

Ho'okupu: Awakening; literally "to sprout" or "grow," but used to mean a gift of Spirit.

Ho'o-piopio: Working with Forces.

Ho'o-unauna: Summoning *akua lapu* (evil spirits) to cause death and destruction.

Iwi: Bones. A person's essence (or Resonance) remains in his *iwi* after death. Works as a Fetter for ghosts.

Kadugo: Of the same blood; Kinfolk or kith. Also a term for "cabal."

Kahuna: Priest, shaman, magickal worker. The type of magick is appended to the title; Kahuna Ho'o-piopio = Adept of Forces.

Kanaka: A native Polynesian. Formally, *kanaka maoli*. Used by natives as a term of identification. Should not be used by nonnatives, as it's assumed to be derogatory coming from *ha'oles*. Also *moke*.

Kahuna-nui: Oracles. Very few are able to connect with their people since the downfall of the Kopa Loei.

Kapu: Forbidden, sacred, taboo. Equivalent in some uses to the Celtic *geas*, a stricture or forbidding. Also used on "Keep Out" signs.

Ke aka nui: The Great Shadows, the Nephandi.

Keiki: Literally "children"; initiates.

Kilokilo: Divination using Time.

Kua'aha: Altar, especially the stone altar of a He'iau.

Kuhikuhi pu'uone: He'iau location and construction. Complex art using Prime to find Nodes, Matter to reinforce the building and Time and Spirit to find auspicious sites, materials and assistants.

Kupuna: Elders, mentors. Teachers of the old ways, guiding new initiates from keiki to kahuna status. Also used for Mastery of a Sphere or style; Kupuna Lapa'au = Master of Life.

Lapa'au: Healing with Life.

Luakini: He'iau built for human sacrifice. Construction and use are illegal by current American law. Native sovereignty activists don't talk about it, but some want to make the luakini legal again as punishment for breaking kapu.

Malihini: Literally "newcomers"; Tradition mages.

Mana: Quintessence.

Mele: Chants, specifically recitations of ancestry or events. See "Culture."

Menehune: The Polynesian fae; the Kopa Loei consider themselves cousins of these kith, and many common folk consider them one and the same. (See the **Changeling** supplement **Shadows on the Hill**.)

Moe'uhane'na: People whose souls are asleep; Sleepers.

Mu: Assistant to a kahuna; an acolyte or consor.

Nana-uli: Weather forecasting, using Forces, Entropy, Time and Matter to sense winds, presence of clouds and probability of weather patterns.

Oneone-I-honua: Representing people to the *akua* as a priest, using Spirit, Prime and/or True Faith.

Poi-uhane: Using Spirit magick to contain and repel harmful spirits.

Puna'lua: Sharing of mates; not restricted to those of opposite gender. Also, a slang term for sleeping around indiscriminately.

Rokea: Weresharks. (See the **Werewolf Players Guide**.)

Tupua Nui: Great Builders; the Technocracy.

Titles

Ali'i: Specialists in Prime who link themselves to the *aina*, and move *mana* around to keep the land fertile. Used mundanely to mean "chief." The sanctity of such wizard-priests is so important that death taboos protected them (see "Beliefs"). Not to be confused with the kith of the same name.

He ho'okele moana: Wayfinders using Correspondence and Forces to navigate small crafts across the ocean.

Ho'omana: The Polynesian magickal tradition. Literally, "to make *mana*."

Ho'omaka: Initiate, newly Awakened mage.

Maka'ainana: Peasants or farmers. Literally, "people who are owned by the land."

Slang

Haka'uhane: Technocracy members, especially those of NWO. Literally, "empty soul."

Kahea'uli: Callers of evil death spirits. Vulgarly, Euthanatos.

Kanakahuna: True Mage of the Kopa Loei.

Kapuhuna: Vulgar magick, so-called because vulgar magick is apparently "punished" by Paradox. Old form, 'a'e'ku, means to break kapu wantonly.

Wikilele: Using Correspondence for instantaneous movement. Literally, "fast jumping."

buggah stay just one blond buggah... too late. Get plenny kanakas believe Tupua Nui. Plenny believe Tupua Nui! Mana wen go stop... j'like one stream come dry. Da Kahunas... da ali'i... da wayfinders... all lose mana... lose power... no can do magick no mo'. Tupua Nui take ovah. Everybody go fight-fight... ehn Tupua Nui wen go bus' us up.

Kanakas akamai, but... clever. We no ma-keh coz we no go fight-fight Tupua Nui army head one. We go behind 'em... make trouble insai da city... tell people about da old ways... secret-kind. We go teach da keiki to believe in da old ways... make da old ways strong one mo' time. Tupua Nui nevah notice. Da best way fo'

Background: The White Ships



According to the *mele*, the Kopa Loei evolved in an organic fashion. Some mages Awakened spontaneously; others were born that way. The island mythos, rich with magical lore, already carried tales of Rokea weresharks and the Menehune. Here, the godspoke openly, wayfinders navigated across miles of open ocean, kahunas held power over life and death, and ali'i controlled the flow of *mana*. In time, those people with mystickal talent rose above the maka'ainana.

fight... wit da mind... not wit da fists or ihe. Go teach... help da community... get people fo' believe in da old ways. Wen get nuff believe... Tupua Nui going bag... no need spill kanaka blood.

Eh! You like go fight? Go 'head! You listen dis old kanaka, but. I not pupule yet... I not makule yet. Long time I survive already. Learn from kahuna-nui... learn from Menehune. Get plenny fo' learn... if you akamai.

Introduction

More a gathering of specialties than an organized Craft, the Kopa Loei has been under attack by the Technocracy for over 200 years, and were nearly destroyed. Although their current incarnation organized fairly recently, their ways are as old as human habitation. Scattered across the Polynesian islands, this Craft is most prevalent in the Hawai'ian archipelago. They keep the ancient Polynesian shamanistic magickal Arts alive by continuing to practice as their ancestors did. Despite a variety of pressures, the Kopa Loei refuse to adapt to the changing paradigm; the elders of the Craft insist that doing so would betray all they have worked for.

Formerly members of priestly and royal castes, the original Kopa Loei came from the elitist of the elite — Awakened nobles who used their magick not only for the benefit of their people and their lands, but to maintain their social positions as well. A system of religious law, *kapu*, ensured that the abundant natural resources of the islands would continue to flourish, and that the Kopa Loei would remain the dominant force in local government.

The Technocracy overthrew these mysticks, after thousands of years of Kopa Loei dominance. Native government is a thing of the past; the social order of the islanders has been largely destroyed, and Western ideas have been substituted wherever possible. Relegated to working covertly within native communities, the Kopa Loei are a pale remnant of the might they once commanded.

But their anger will not be denied. They know that a paradigm shift is possible, and they have time — the islands aren't going anywhere. The spirits still speak to them, and the old beliefs are regaining strength. The Kopa Loei will rise again.

These mages soon specialized in different Arts, and taught their keikis to do likewise while the maka'ainana produced food and took care of daily necessities.

When explorers passed through the Polynesian territories in the 1700s, they discovered an elaborate and generous culture. The Kopa Loei, while not an organized Craft at this time, held life-and-death influence over the un-Awakened. They tended the kings and queens, told the stories, helped the fishermen, served the gods, enforced the laws and punished those who violated *kapu*. Although starvation

and disease were not unknown, the islands as a whole yielded fabulous bounties of food and mystical energies — Quintessence and Tass. As they returned to Europe, the travelers brought back tales of magick, wealth and willing sexual partners. Naturally, the Technocratic Seekers of the Voids had to explore such reports.

In 1778, Order of Reason forces set up an elaborate ruse. The mele of Lono told of the god's return to the land on a floating island draped in white *tapas* (drapes). Captain Cooke brought his vessel into harbor in Kealakekua Bay with all sails set. With his arrival coinciding with the Makahiki festival, the tall, fair explorer easily passed himself off as Lono. New diseases, introduced through sailors and the local custom of *puna'lua*, ripped through the islands, weakening morale and resistance. Within a century, the native population decreased by 90%, reduced to near-slaves working on plantations that were once their own lands.

By 1810, King Kamehameha had united the Hawai'ian archipelago under his rule, acting as a puppet for the Order of Reason. With a single government in place over the *kanaka maoli*, the Order of Reason could more easily implement its will. In 1819, Liholiho, the first king fully under the Order of Reason's control, was crowned, and the *kapu* system was abolished. With it went the primary protections for the native belief system and the paradigm it supported.

Acting in unintentional consort with the Order of Reason came well-meaning missionaries, with a few knowingly antagonistic Choristers hidden among them. Arriving in the Pacific beginning in 1820, they set about converting the natives to Christianity and destroying their traditional beliefs. They nearly succeeded. The legend of Pele the Volcano Goddess was shattered by Christianizing the wife of a high chief of Kona. Their monotheistic doctrines clashed with the native polytheistic traditions, and many on both sides suffered.

The Meeting of Lli'ili'opae

During the conquest, *kupunas* and *kahunas* from across the islands met in Lli'ili'opae, a sacred place rich in magick and favored by spirits and Menehune faeries (see **Shadows on the Hill**, page 39). In 1825, under the leadership of Nakai'i ka the Shark Rider and Lani, a priestess of Pele, these magicians officially created a society for the teaching and preservation of their Arts — the Kopa Loei. Their first task involved forcing the Ha'ole from their lands through diseases and curses. A series of storms tore through the islands that year, but still the white men remained.

Hope arose when America recognized Hawai'i's independence in 1826, and when Kamehameha III enacted the

First Constitution of the Republic of Hawai'i in 1840. The Kopa Loei seemed to be succeeding at its mission. However, three years later, the British Navy seized the islands. On March 8, 1848, the Cabal of Pure Thought implemented what was felt to be the final solution to the mystic Polynesian ties to the land. Land was declared property — ownable and divisible — and the Great Mahele, the first great division, began. The resulting paradigm shift from the land owning its people to people owning the land broke the links of many lesser ali'i (those who specialized in Prime energies). More directly, all known sorcerers were rounded up during a midnight raid in 1886. Those who resisted (most of them) were shot and then fed to sharks.

On July 7, 1887, the Bayonet Constitution was forced upon the *kanaka maoli* by the all-white Hawai'ian League. King Kalakaua was forced from his throne and the sovereignty of Hawai'i ended. After the U.S. Marine Corps imprisoned Queen Lili'uokalani, in 1898 Congress declared the islands a territory of the United States. The few remaining Kopa Loei learned from their mistakes; for decades to come, they spread their word very discreetly. Over time, they rebuilt.

Before and during World War II, thousands of Visayan and Ilocano islanders were brought to Hawai'i to work in the factories, separated from family and cultural supports, and indoctrinated in Technocratic beliefs. In a short time, they were almost completely brainwashed. The *bayanihan* spirit held, though. As the vote for statehood in 1959 did not allow the option of independence, the seeds of future change were sown in bitter discontent within the native communities.

Spitting in the Face of Gods

Following World War II, the United States ran a series of atomic tests in the South Pacific. While many rationales were offered for the tests, they threatened the mystical and geographical stability of the region. Worse, to those who lived near the test sites, the U.S. mandated moves to new communities, thereby breaking up families, and inflicting a huge insult against the gods. Some who refused to leave their homes died under brutal conditions, and their ghosts still wander the test sites howling for vengeance. Some among the Kopa Loei heard the cries; a puzzling but seemingly unrelated series of accidents and illnesses slew many white military scientists, marines and officers over the next several years.

In the modern day, the Kopa Loei remain underground. Robbed of much of their cultural heritage, they struggle to keep their traditions alive and relevant in a changed world. They've won a major battle by having the United States Congress declare the invasion of Hawai'i and the overthrow of its throne illegal in November of 1993. Technocracy outposts on the islands of Oahu and Hawai'i watch for signs of trouble, but the *kahunas* have been

careful. There's been a lot of activity, even a Constitution for the Nation of Hawai'i signed in January of 1995, but some of it may just be elected officials pacifying the general populace with empty gestures. Certainly nothing supernatural about *that*, is there?

The Kopa Loei now find it easier to gain new recruits. Angry young people have begun to swell their ranks, frustrated at the way Western society has treated them and returning to their ancestral ways to find meaning within their own lives. They won't stand for the passive approach that the kupuna have been taking, though, and open conflict may be in the works. The kupuna advise against this, as the Technocracy has greater resources and is well entrenched, but tell a keiki not to chase waves on the beach... he nods, runs off and gets wet anyway.

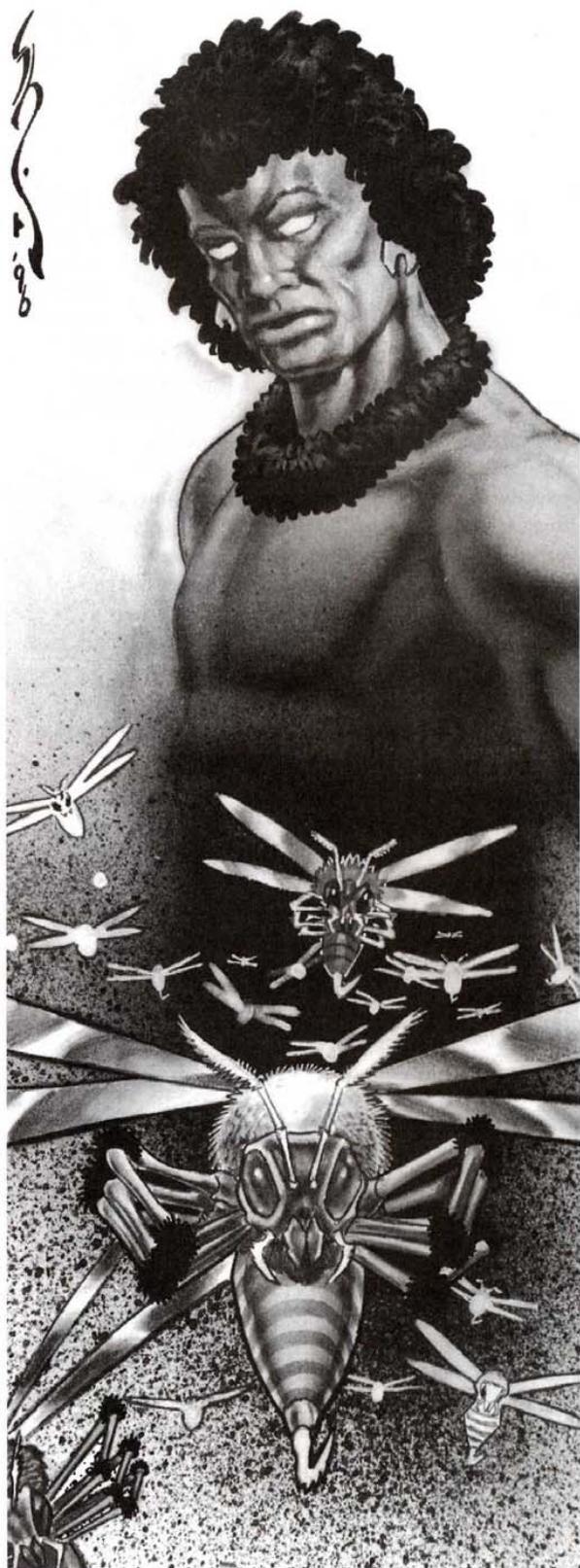
Culture



Reduced to easily digestible shreds for the tourism industry, the society that spawned the Kopa Loei was more complex, more vital and more dangerous than the *Aloha Spirit!* brochures would have the Sleepers believe. Scattered across thousands of miles of ocean on a few scraps of land, the Pacific Islanders managed to maintain a unified culture largely due to the early Kopa Loei. Wayfinders maintained the physical connections, while Spirit kahunas routed messages from one island to another in a complex web of communications.

Now the island culture is in tatters, but many of its basic institutions remain. Primary among these is the bayanihan spirit, the glue that binds Polynesians into a community. All kanakas are linked by bonds of ancestry, language and experience into an extended family. Newcomers to an island can find a place to stay and a job by relying on their connections with other kanakas. Family trees are kept in memory and taught to every kanaka. Knowing your cousins and distant relatives is as important as knowing your parents. This is even more important to the Kopa Loei, whose ties to Menehune or even stranger creatures may become significant. Drawing on mundane family connections can get you baby-sitting jobs; drawing on Kithain connections can get you reinforcements so you can stop a clearcutting operation.

Insularity is another major feature. No matter how well a ha'ole speaks the language and knows the customs, he's still a ha'ole. Only kanakas may draw on the bayanihan spirit. Some things just aren't discussed with outsiders. Bitter experiences with condescending anthropologists have taught the kanakas that ha'oles find native religious customs amusing, and are more interested in cataloging them than understanding them. Sharing with outsiders contaminates the mana, draining power from the system. Only by



holding the true ancient beliefs secret within the native community can they be revitalized.

Kopa Loei work within the native communities, drawing the people closer to each other and to the spirits of their ancestors. They teach the native language and crafts, and network the kanaka maoli together to make them more powerful in Western civilization. Many are active in the native sovereignty movement, pushing for the reinstatement of kapu as the need for harsher environmental protection laws becomes more urgent. Some retreat into the native communities, to islands where Western culture rarely penetrates, and live outside the Technocracy's system entirely, returning to the old ways as much as possible.

Some Kopa Loei are supposedly related to sharks, and may be Kinfolk to the mysterious Rokea. Aumakua appear to their family members in dreams to bring communications from the ancestors. Some of these aumakua appear as sharks, slipping into the dreams of their chosen and taking them into the depths. Native fishermen often work together with white tip, black tip and gray reef sharks when surf fishing, the humans handling the nets and the sharks driving the schools of fish into them. Both then share the catch. When known man-eaters like tiger sharks or hammerheads show up, shark allies band together to protect their human "friends," driving away the man-eaters. In return, certain shark breeds were made kapu long ago, and remain protected from hunting to this day.

Chants

Chants are vital to the kanaka maoli. Not only do they focus the kanakahuna Arts, they also serve to keep the memories of the people alive. Four major kinds of chants should be noted:

- **Mele:** The common histories. Frequently these record the genealogy of the ali'i, but also teach the history of the kanaka maoli.

- **Moolelo:** Ancient legends of the kanaka maoli. By tradition, these are only sung by day.

- **Kanaena:** The genealogical chants. Everybody knows their own kanaena, which details ancestry back for several generations. Knowing this chant keeps your connections within the community straight in your mind. When entering a native community that lives by the old ways, you aren't recognized as a person unless you can sing your kanaena.

- **Kumulipo:** The Creation Chant. Kumulipo details the creation of the world, the pantheon of deities and the beginnings of humanity. All of the basic precepts of the native faith are found in this chant.

Beliefs

Kopa Loei magick is based on literal acceptance of the Polynesian pantheon. The gods and goddesses are every bit as real as the sky and the land. Lono and Pele, Kane and Ku



may very well be Incarna, or even Celestines by other mages' reckoning. Whatever the truth (and truth is such a subjective thing when dealing with paradigms), many Kopa Loei have True Faith as a Merit (see **The Book of Shadows**, page 38). To understand the Kopa Loei, you must understand their deities and customs.

- **Kane:** Chief of the gods, with domain over the forests, the land, the sun and fresh water. Human sacrifice is never offered to Kane — he is the god of life, and death would offend him. Normally worshipped under the name of the family aumakua.

- **Ku:** God of war and power. Sons of chiefs are dedicated to Ku as children. In the luakini, human sacrifices are made to Ku, usually war prisoners of great standing. These ceremonies may only be attended by high kahunas and ali'i.

- **Hina:** Goddess of fertility, wife of Ku. Controls growth and reproduction. Legends of her many affairs form the theological basis for puna'lua (mate sharing).

- **Kanaloa:** Squid god, rival of Kane as god of the sea. Blamed for sickness and misfortune, as he seduced the wife of the first man, and got both of the first people banished from Mokapu, the Polynesian Eden. Ruler of Po, the underworld. Also seen as patron of Marauders, as Po is a dark, chaotic land.

- **Lono:** God of clouds, harvest, rain and weather. Invented boxing and the fall harvest festival, the Makahiki, during which time war is kapu. His standard is a tall pole with an image atop it, and a cross-pole hung with long banners of white tapa cloth. Prayers to Lono bring good weather and relief from disease.

- **Pele:** Goddess of fire and volcanoes, who currently lives in the caldera of Kilauea. Ill-tempered and quick to anger, she despises pigs after being ravished by Kamapua'a, the Hog God. Appears to believers as either an old hag or a stunningly beautiful young woman, and warns them of impending disasters. True believers who follow her instructions are generally spared. Carries a magic stick, Pa'oa, with many powers.

- **Maui:** Demigod, trickster. Son of Hina, conceived after she went to sleep wearing a man's loincloth she found while beachcombing. Raised the sky so men could walk upright, and raised the islands from the sea floor. His brother looked back during the process and the rising land fractured into many small islands. Slowed the sun so that daylight lasted more than an hour, and brought fire to the humans.

- **Kamo-ho'ali'i:** Shark god. Taught the kanaka maoli how to surf. Protector of travelers on the water. Possibly a totem spirit of the Rokea. Pele's favored older brother, and king of all Hawai'ian sharks. Some stories of man-eating kupuna call them the offspring of his unions with human women.

Kapu

A complex set of restrictions with harsh penalties. Many kapu (the word is both singular and plural) focus on protecting natural resources; it is kapu to remove all the edible shellfish from a rock. Some must be left to spawn, so

that later there will be more shellfish. Other kapu deal with the flow and collection of mana. For a maka'ainana to allow her shadow to fall across an ali'i is a breach of kapu, contaminating the ali'i's mana, resulting (in the old days) in the death of the peasant and a long ritual cleansing for the ali'i. Some forms of magick are kapu, due to the strong probability of Paradox backlash, while others are kapu because they go against the natural order and harm the environment. Kapu can also be declared by the kahunas and ali'i, sometimes in very specific cases. King Kamehameha I declared the body of his child-bride Kaahumanu to be kapu. Unfortunately, it didn't stop her from carrying out puna'lua with anybody available.

Magickal Style

Kopa Loei magick (ho'omana) is focused through the invocation of natural powers. Deities are considered to be parts of nature, therefore prayer is a valid approach. Fire and wind are also considered natural powers, and can be addressed directly without personification.

The concept of direction lies at the root of ho'omana. Forces, spirits, mana — all have natural channels. Rerouting those channels in ways that do not conflict with nature forms the core of all Kopa Loei magick. The mage calls out to the power that he wants to direct, using a symbol of this power (a focus). For example, if the mage wishes to direct the fire of a volcano, he uses a chunk of lava as his focus (preferably one taken from the caldera and not the slopes — one gathered with appropriate prayers to Pele so that the act of taking the rock would not breach kapu).

Magick is performed in a time-honored fashion. Innovations are examined for conflicts with kapu and appropriateness for the goals of the Craft. Tradition and precedent are vital; maintaining a link with the past is half the power of the mage. The other half comes from acting in accordance with the right and natural way. Kapu and other customs determine what is right, so the natural way should be obvious. If an act goes against the basic essence of a thing, then the act is unnatural — hence, the Craft's hatred of the Technocracy. Magick is meant to maintain, restore and enforce the relationship between land and the beings living on it, between hunter and hunted, between people and the gods.

Kopa Loei mages cannot use technological foci. Their tools must be as close to their natural forms as possible, and preferably gathered with some sort of inspiration — a rock that feels right in the hand, a feather dropped by a bird flying overhead. Unique foci are common among Kopa Loei mages. Native dress is important when performing great rituals, as are ritual cleansing and purification. The more closely one follows the ways of his ancestors, the more effective his magick will be.

Spheres

This Craft does not recognize "Spheres" as such; instead, it defines the Craft in natural concepts. These concepts are

defined below. Similarly, the Kopa Loei as a whole do not prefer one “specialty Sphere” over another. A keiki’s talents (and the teachings of her kupuna) dictate where she begins her training.

- **Correspondence: Kealanui (“The Way”)** — Finding the Way is as easy as opening your mind to the landscape around you, and simply being aware of your presence within the world. An expert at finding The Way can even shorten voyages by clever routing.

- **Entropy: Ka Makani (“The Voice of the Wind”)** — Good air is taken in, bad air is expelled, life and death alternate in regular cadence. Kanakahuna assess the health of the world by testing its breath. Can you not smell sickness in the air when you walk into an invalid’s room? Test the Breath of the World, and it will tell you of harmony and illness and which is present.

- **Forces: Ke’kai’huna (“Magickal Tides of the Sea”)** — Everything comes down to motion — the winds, fire from the volcanoes, ocean currents. All energy is based on the dance of the world. Those who can dance with the world can lead, directing the motion where they desire. While the dance can be sped up or slowed down, it cannot be stopped completely, nor can a rhythm that does not naturally exist be created. Yes, this restricts the Effects Kopa Loei mages can cause; they may only redirect what already exists, not create forces from nowhere.

- **Life: Aka’aina (“Mirror of the Land”)** — Everything that is alive shares in the energy of the Land. Life itself is a reflection, a shard of the great Life that is the world. Working with Life means working with fragments of the Land, guiding them into harmony with the world. Kahunas are reluctant to use Life to cause disharmony with the Land (forcing crops to grow, for example, or creating new life from nothing, or transforming something other than yourself). Any such use risks breaking a great kapu, bringing ruin on the kahuna and possibly on the Land itself.

- **Matter: Mole’aina (“Roots of the Land”)** — Working with Matter deals with the body of the Land, just as Life deals with the bodies of the beings living on the Land. All nonliving material is still part of the Land. Its “modern appearance” (metal, plastic, glass, etc.) is an unnatural — if useful — facade; only the original form (ore, oil, sand, etc.) really matters. To remain in balance, such “hybrids” should be transformed to their original elements.

- **Mind: Uhane’hana (“Soul Working”)** — The Kopa Loei regard Mind as an extension of Spirit, so both work in similar ways. Common conjunctive Effects use Spirit to read a person’s basic nature (aura) and Mind to steer his thoughts until the aura gives the desired reading. Ali’i also use Mind to give commands that must be obeyed, exerting their ancient rights as the chiefs of the people.

- **Prime: Mana (Quintessence)** — The energy that flows through everything living. The Land is alive — can’t you feel it? Moving mana from those of low standing to

those in high stations creates reservoirs, and channels the power to those who know how to best direct the flows. From there, ali’i apportion the power, giving to each person according to their own needs. Mana must be purified, then kept pure by strict observance of kapu. Violations of kapu regarding mana have terrible results.

- **Spirit: Kahea Noho-loa (“Calling the Eternal”)** — Speaking across the barrier between life and death, between physical existence and transcendence of the physical. Kanakahunas never *force* a spirit. They bargain, they remind the spirits of past and present obligations, but they never coerce. Only evil spirits may be bound without their consent, and only by the *kahuna poi-uhane*. To make a spirit fetish, then, a mage must first strike a deal with the spirit to be bound.

- **Time: Ke kilonae (“The Chant of the Signs”)** — Events happen in a stately progression. Knowing the pattern of the chant tells you what the next line will most likely be. Time has a rhythm and a rhyme, a pace that will not be denied, but while moving in Time is impossible, reading the signs of what lies ahead is a simple act for a clever kanakahuna.

Common Foci

Just as certain Kopa Loei specialize in particular Spheres, those same mages utilize special foci for their needs. In general, the different “mage types” the Kopa Loei recognize include **ali’i** (sacred priest-chieftains), **kahunas** (wizards, shamans or priests) and **wayfinders** (talented commoners).

- **Ali’i:** *Kahili* (the emblem of a chief — a feather-topped staff which looks like a long-handled feather duster); prayers and invocations; chants; He’iau (temple); images of the gods; hand gestures and curses; purification and cleansing.

- **Kahunas:** White tapa banners (especially for Spirit magick); chants; chunks of lava; lantern; fire-hardened spear; invocations of Pele or Ku (for Forces); body painting; candles made of kukui nuts and coconut leaves; percussion instruments (including gourds, split bamboo sticks and drums); invocations of Hina or Lono (for Life); offerings of sweet potatoes to Lono or Maui (for Matter); fishhook, especially one made of bone; He’iau temple; invocations of Kane (for Prime); fire built in a sacred space or with kapu woods, or both (for Spirit); divination bones, usually from a kapu fish.

- **Wayfinders:** Gourd with a map charred into its interior; star compass made of wood and twine; prayers; seeds; seabird feathers; poultices and drinks.

Organization

Although the Craft as a whole operates as a loose confederation, its members observe a fairly strict hierarchy when it comes to specializations. Each type must abide by a set of kapu and respect the roles and rights of the other “ranks.” This isn’t to say that everyone plays by the rules — kahuna are notorious for pursuing their own agendas, and



can be quite evil by many peoples' standards, especially if they deal with Entropy or the dead.

The ruling Menehune kith call themselves ali'i and kahunas also; no one can say for certain whether this similarity stems from mistaken identity on the part of the commoners, identification between the fae and their magickal counterparts, or ancient bloodlines uniting the two. Many kanaenae chants indicate that both the humans and fae have common ancestors among the gods; this may not be the literal truth as Westerners understand "truth," but all Kopa Loei and Menehune believe it, and call each other *kadugo* ("those of the same blood"). In any case, many Kopa Loei have the Faerie Affinity Merit (See *The Book of Shadows*, page 36).

- By the standards of Western outsiders, the religious awe surrounding the ali'i can be mystifying. In the not-so-distant past, a person could be slain for simply letting his shadow fall across an ali'i's own, and many priest-chieftains imposed kapu across whole islands that no Westerner would accept — no one but the ali'i could wear shoes, for example, or eat the meat of birds. These prohibitions, however, protected the sanctity of the ali'i, and often cut both ways for him (a character would have to buy the Magical Prohibition or Imperative Flaw from *The Book of Shadows* to be an ali'i). This link to the Land and its people made an ali'i's health and behavior vitally important in a culture so dependent on the goodwill of nature and the gods. This tie, and the restrictions that went with it, became

the reason so many ali'i were targeted by the Europeans (especially Order of Reason agents) during the conquest and purge of the islands. These days, very few ali'i remain.

- More independent sorcerers are called **kahuna**, a word that's been sadly bastardized by surfer culture. Such mages work in many different Arts; although traditional kahunas specialized in one type of magick over all others (a *Kahuna Ho'o-unauna*, for example, summons malicious spirits), the last century has forced modern kahunas to generalize their Arts for flexibility. As the *Kahuna Ho'o-unauna* example illustrates, these shamans and wizard-priests can be fairly ruthless and selfish, especially when angry. Whether a kahuna's magick heals, harms, divines or destroys depends on the personality and goals of the mage herself.

- **Wayfinders** are *maka'ainana*, common folk whose gifts allow them to do their jobs better. These people often utilize Hedge Magic rather than True Magick, although a few wayfinders do have Awakened Avatars. Such "intuitive folk" use subtle spells to help them swim or dive, navigate, fish, farm, predict the future or build. Like kahuna, a wayfinder's whim often dictates the uses to which she'll put her magicks. While most ali'i and kahuna are men, wayfinders tend to be women. Although their talents are noted and respected, wayfinders aren't afforded the same reverence and fear that ali'i and kahuna receive, and they're as bound by kapu as any other common person.



- Teaching and apprenticeship occurs between a **kupuna** (elder, mentor) and his **keiki** (child). While not formal “ranks,” these distinctions mean a lot within Kopa Loei society. As with any other magickal society, a kupuna is often measured in the respect his keiki regards him with. Although most Kopa Loei generally take the headstrong nature of youth into account, a mentor whose apprentice runs wild (or a keiki who does so) is considered a dangerous risk.

- The mysterious **Kahuna-nui**, like the fabled Oracles, seem lost to the eyes of mortal man. While great mele tell of these heroes’ adventures, their spirits rarely speak to the Kopa Loei any more, except in occasional dreams.

- The **he’iau** forms the sacred meeting place where many rituals are enacted. During the conquest, these places were often burned by missionaries or torn down by landowners. With interest in “picturesque native culture” on the rise, however, a group may build their he’iau openly, charge ha’oles to see it, and use it properly later. Surely the gods understand....

Construction of the he’iau building requires consultation with a *kahuna kuhikuhi pu’uone* (a mage skilled in Prime, Matter, Spirit and Time). Her work establishes a Node where the building is constructed. Establishing a proper He’iau is difficult even now, and most of the older ones are gone; most Kopa Loei groups simply meet wherever they can and travel to a He’iau when necessary. As of yet, no central meeting place exists, and the kupuna feel that it’s still unwise to gather a large number of Kopa Loei together in one place or time.

- Instead of cabals, Kopa Loei gather into **kadugos** (groups of the same blood); these small packs (between two to seven members, plus associates) operate on a cell basis; each member knows a member of another kadugo, and so on. Information is passed between kadugos through a network of such contacts.

This Craft’s Awakened membership comprises between 15 to 30 individuals, many of whom reside in the Hawai’ian islands. Several more live in Micronesia, the Philippines and Samoa. The majority of the active Kopa Loei (another 200 members or so) specialize in hedge magic rather than the Arts of the Spheres. Like most Crafts, they make no distinction between the two forms, but simply accept that some people have more talent than others.

Initiation

Magickal initiation, once a large ritual attended by many other kahunas, is now a private affair, usually attended only by the kupuna and his keiki. Potential initiates are sought out from among the native population through social groups, religious-instruction organizations and political movements. To qualify for initiation, the candidate must be of at least half native Polynesian blood, and must have a passion to learn the old ways.

Promising deeper knowledge, the kupuna leads the candidate through an experience proportionate to the candidate's potential: getting home from the deep woods or open ocean without maps or instruments for wayfinders; healing, killing or talking with a spirit for the kahunas. The most important part of the initiation remains the same: reliance on the old knowledge and the potential within the kanaka bloodline instead of on the modern world. The kupuna evaluates the candidate's potential over the course of the experience. If he finds the candidate acceptable and other elders agree, the candidate is taken through an Awakening ritual.

The candidate spends each night of a week at a religious He'iau, lying on a slab of volcanic rock and being massaged by a *kahuna na'auao* (a specialist in initiation), using oils laced with psychoactive plants. Guided meditation leads the keiki through previous kanaka lives, connecting the potential mage with her Avatar and her people. The experience sends the new mage through an epiphany, Awakening her to the true nature of reality and her place within it.

Common Magicks



Mele Lapa'au (•• or ••• or •••• Life)

This spell is a necessary adaptation of the elements that was perfected by the wayfinders who dove for shells and spearfished in the depths. By chanting a mele to the gods, a Kopa Loei achieves a short but useful tolerance to things that would kill a mortal. Meles to different gods work to allow a person to breathe water (Kamo-ho'ali'i, Kane or Kanaloa), withstand fire (Pele) or cold (Kane or Lono), heal injuries (Kane), change appearance (Maui), increase potency or fertility (Hina), and toughen skin (Ku).

[A wizard with Life 2 can only heal himself or become a better lover. Life 3 allows for most of the Effects described above. Life 4 lets the Kopa Loei alter someone else, although he can heal others with Life 3. If the Kopa Loei is clever, he can channel the spell's effects without drawing attention (and Paradox) to himself.]

Find the Sun (• Correspondence)

In the old days, a wayfinder would use this chant to find his way home in the dark. With it, he may locate any of the major (north, south) and minor (southwest, northeast) directions. Normally, a gourd map or hand-sightings of the stars and the horizon serve to focus the mage's concentration. Older wayfinders trust in their abilities and discard the foci.

North: *kealanui polohiwa a kane* ("black shining highway of the sun")

East: *keala'ula a kane* ("red track of the sun").

Acolytes

Because the tie between a mage and her land and people is so important, the Kopa Loei keep close ties with their un-Awakened associates, often called *mu*. Naturally, *mu* must come from native blood; ha'oles, even well-intentioned ones, can only get so close. Common *mu* include fisherfolk, divers, cultural educators and storytellers, and native language and sovereignty activists. Occasional odd allies include the island faeries (Menehune) and, it is said, the enigmatic weresharks called Rokea.

Concepts

- **Cultural artists** (dancers, canoeists, painters, storytellers).
- **Native workers** (farmers, sugarcane growers, police officers, old wise folk, fishers and divers).
- **Activists, teachers, criminals and ecoterrorists**, especially those who target the large military presence and tourism industry in Hawai'i.

South: *kealanui ka piko o waka* ("highway to the middle of the earth")

West: *kealanui ma'awe'ula a kanaloa* ("wide red track of Kanaloa")

Stereotypes

Traditions: Clueless *malihini*. Mostly a bunch of *kapuhunas* who know nothing of the sacred ways and couldn't care less. The so-called Celestial Chorus is the worst of the lot — we smell the smoke of burning He'iaus on their breath! The Dreamspeakers, Verbena and Cultists of Ecstasy often understand our *ho'okupu*, but the rest are no better than the Tupua Nui whom they despise.

Technocracy: Those same Tupua Nui came and took our lands, dispersed our people and did their best to destroy us. Our spirit is still strong. The kanaka maole are hard to kill. One day, we will regain what is ours.

Marauders: Great weapons. Point them at the Tupua Nui and leave.

Nephandi: Their darkness, like that of *ho'o-weli-weli*, (the threatening clouds), must pass. Lono grant strong winds to clear them away.

Others: We have many allies the *malihini* will never understand — the sharks, the Menehune, the slumbering gods and *akua* of our islands. All we want is our home. What do we care what a bunch of ha'oles do to themselves? Leave my land to me!

Back to the Earth (••• Matter)

Artificial materials are an affront to nature. This spell reverses the refinement of such objects, returning them to a state more pleasing to the gods. This is often vulgar in the modern world unless it's done subtly.

[The target object reverts to its component raw materials. Plastics turn into crude oil, metals into ore, glass into sand, etc. The more successes the caster rolls, the larger the object he can revert.]

Holopuni'au'nei (••• Spirit)

Literally, to sail around the world; more accurately, to walk around (avoid) the physical world — in other words, to **Step Sideways**. While this Effect has become harder since the Tupua Nui invasion hardened the Gauntlet, that barrier's strength is lower across the islands (average Gauntlet: 4-7) than on the mainland. Originally developed to teach keiki how to journey into the spirit realms (or to spy on rivals), this Art has come in handy when conducting covert warfare....

Bug Off (••• Life, •• Prime)

This favorite of ecoterrorists creates a swarm of insects with one reflex built into their tiny little brains: to attack any target the kahuna specifies. This can be a person, an emblem (like a company logo), or "all the white people in this clearing." This can easily be made to seem coincidental in heavily forested areas; after all, who knew there was a hornet's nest in that tree?

Storyteller Ideas

- **Magick and Warfare:** The Kopa Loei make their gains by working within the system. They don't confront the Technos directly, as they're outmatched in a stand-up fight. Guerrilla tactics, sabotage and propaganda are their tools. By teaching kanaka children the old ways, they help to restore traditional beliefs and make their own magick stronger. Kapu are believed to be natural laws, the causes and effects of screwing with things better left alone. Anyone breaching kapu is going to be punished by the natural world. Vulgar magick is kapu. Paradox is viewed as the punishment for the breach.

- **Enter the Luakini:** Although native beliefs include human sacrifice, it's never performed as a means of getting rid of a person, but rather to honor that person by attempting to take on their powers and mana. A sacrifice, as opposed to simple murder, is highly ritualistic and often performed in a special place — the luakini. Human sacrifice is a perilous art, easily corrupted by bad intentions. Every use of the sacrificial temple must be carefully monitored by kupuna to prevent kanakahuna from becoming *pelau* (evil).

Pele's Wrath (•••• Forces)

Using a chunk of lava and a prayer as foci, a kahuna directs the power of a nearby volcano (there's always one) to cause a minor volcanic eruption at the target zone. This can be a small cone with magma spouting from its top, or a crack in the earth that opens into a previously unsuspected lava tube, causing molten rock to well up like a spring. In the geographically unstable islands, this Effect is more coincidental than most ha'oles would suspect....

Anger in the Land (••• Spirit, ••• Matter or Forces, •• Prime; possibly •••• Spirit, ••• Matter or Forces, •• Prime)

The spirits rest fitfully in the land; with a little encouragement, they might burst from bondage and crush the invaders who despoil their sacred home. This spell summons forth an elemental, gives it a body and sets it loose to do as it will....

The magick begins with a long, heartfelt chant and a large body of the element in question. As the spirit finds its way through the Gauntlet, it manifests and awakens into the material world. With any luck, the Kopa Loei can convince the elemental to go trash a couple of ha'oles before it returns to its slumber.

[Through a really vulgar summoning, the Kopa Loei calls a spirit into a material body, then lets it go to work. Matter animates an earth elemental, while Forces creates an air, fire or water elemental. Prime keeps the material body moving until the Effect fades (that is, after the duration expires). Consider a materialized elemental to have the following statistics:

Social and Mental Traits: 1 each, **Health Levels:** 10, **Armor Rating:** 2

Earth: Strength 10, Dexterity 2, Stamina 10, Alertness 2, Brawl 3, Intimidation 5

Air: Strength 5, Dexterity 8, Stamina 3, Alertness 4, Brawl 2, Intimidation 4, Stealth 5

Fire: Strength 5, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Alertness 5, Brawl 5, Intimidation 8

Water: Strength 8, Dexterity 5, Stamina 10, Alertness 2, Brawl 3, Stealth 4, Intimidation 3

These crude shapes manifest as vaguely humanoid figures that look more like *tikis* (Hawai'ian god-statues) than people or lumps of clay. They do not take Health Level penalties, but dissipate when their physical forms are destroyed or when the Effect's duration ends. While mobile, an elemental can do things that seem reasonable for its form (turning to dust for Earth, becoming virtually invisible or turning into a whirlwind for Air, setting things ablaze for Fire, or trickling down a wall or pooling into puddles for Water). Any kahuna who summons an elemental had better have good reason for doing so — the gods frown on such a wanton misuse of power.

Talismans

•• Pele's Lamaku

Arete 4, Quintessence 20, Cost 6

A torch consisting of several strands of kukui nuts strung on the ribs of coconut leaves, Pele's Lamaku burns with a smokeless yellow light that does not consume the nuts. When the torch is lit in the presence of a large blaze, it invokes a Forces 2/Time 2 Effect. Images of the past or future (as specified by the presiding kahuna) form in the flames of the larger fire. The Talisman's "Arete" roll determines the accuracy and clarity of the images.

••• Kamo-ho'ali'i's Gift

Arete 4, Quintessence 20, Cost 7

This dagger or club with a shark-toothed edge contains the *akua* (spirit) of a shark, which directs its wrath against supernatural beings and ha'oles. Against a normal kanaka, the Gift's edge inflicts normal damage (see below); against newcomers or other targets (shapeshifters, vampires, mages or changelings, but not spirits), the fetish rolls its "Arete" against difficulty 6. If it scores one success or less, the damage is normal; if it scores two or more, the cut inflicts aggravated Life magick damage in addition to the normal cutting damage. Despite the Quintessence rating, this Effect costs nothing, though it ends if the Gift's *akua* is drained.

Knife: difficulty 4, Strength + 2, Conceal P

Club: difficulty 5, Strength + 4, Conceal T

Companion: Akua Mu (Cost: 3)

Like many animistic cultures, the Kopa Loei occasionally get aid from spirit-animals. In the case of kanaka maoli, these companions usually take the form of small island owls, mynah birds, wild pigs, sharks and sometimes octopi (although the latter two mark a dark god's favor). While none of these mu can talk (except the mynah birds, who talk *too much!*), a Kopa Loei often understands her *akua mu*'s needs and feelings without words. Most companions visit their mages in dreams and take them on journeys no normal human could endure, flying high above the mountains, into volcanoes or deep into the sea. In dreams, the *akua mu* speak quite well. Like most allies, an *akua mu* remains by its mage so long as she remains faithful to the old ways and the gods.

Image: All *akua mu* look like typical, if somewhat large, examples of their species.

Attributes (birds/pig/shark/octopus): Strength 2/3/5/4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2/4/6/6, Charisma 2/1/0/0, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3/1/1/1, Perception 5/3/2/3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 4, Awareness 3 (*birds* only), Brawl 3 (*pigs/sharks/octopi* only), Camouflage 3 (not *sharks*), Dodge 4, Intimidation 4 (*sharks/octopi* only), Lore (Menehune) 2, Stealth 3, Survival 2, Cosmology 3, Occult (island ways) 3

Spheres: none

Willpower: 5

Quintessence: 5 (can only be harvested when dead)

Health Levels: *Birds:* 3; *Pig/octopus:* OK x 2, -1 x 2, -3, -5, Incap.; *Shark:* OK x 3, -1 x 3, x -2, -3, -5, Incap.

Attacks/Powers: *Birds:* flight (20 yards/turn); peck (3 dice); magickal sight (as all Rank One Sphere senses); **Spirit Speech** (as Spirit Effects); *Pig:* gore (5 dice); run (15 yards/turn); running gore (7 dice, diff. 8, must run 20' or more); **Spirit Sight** (as Rank One Spirit); *Shark:* bite (8 dice); sharp skin (4 dice to all who touch except the mage); water breathing (given to mage once per day; lasts one hour); *Octopus:* squeeze (4 dice); bite (5 dice, difficulty 8); mass grab (difficulty 7; each success wraps target in one tentacle and adds one die to squeeze attacks); water breathing (as per shark); ink cloud (darkens water for 10' or so)



Reformed Thug

Quote: *Ascension? Gimme a fuckin' break. This world is it, get it? After this, it's the spirit world and a whole new set of rules. You want status there, you better build it up here. This world's comin' apart and somebody's got to set it right. Ditch your shirt and get to work.*

Prelude: You've been in trouble most of your young life. Fights with ha'oles in school, small crime with a gang, a car theft that got you 90 days... it all left you a grenade looking for someplace to explode.

Then there was the old man. *Easy money*, Sammy had said. Except that old man wasn't no pushover, no. Sammy pulled a knife, and the old man pulled a chunk of *pa'hoehoe*. Sammy screamed and dropped the knife and the blade ran like water. Well, you had to know about this kupuna. How could he heat up a knife like that?

So you found him, and you apologized. It was wrong anyway to go muggin' a kanaka. The kupuna asked you why you acted like a ha'ole if you hated them so bad. The silence went on for a long time; you didn't have an answer. *Come home with me*, he said, and you did. He led you down a path to a tin shack where he pulled out a bottle of *okolehau* and talked about the old ways. As the bottle went down, you made a choice. Ha'ole ways had messed you up all your life, and you were through with them. *Teach me*, you begged the kupuna, and he complied.

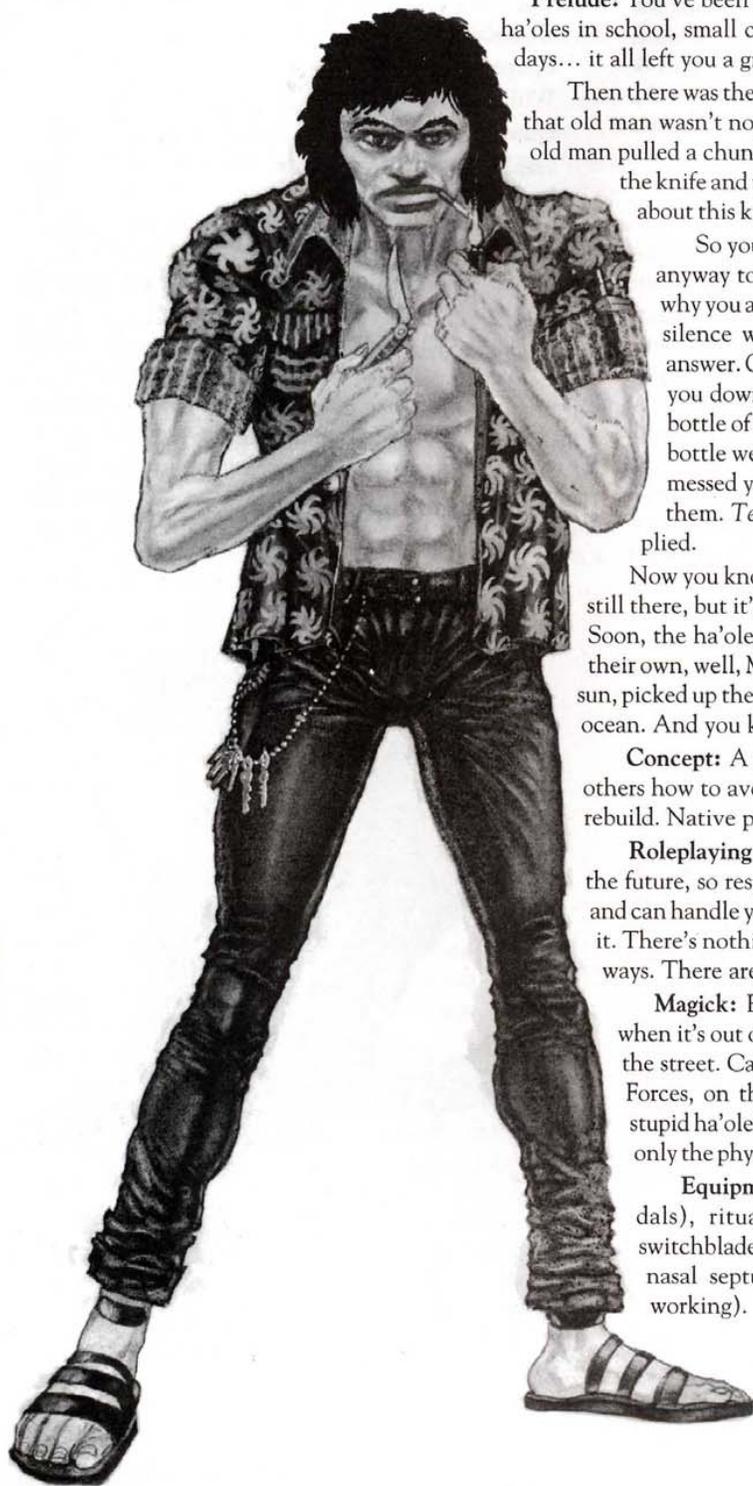
Now you know the truth behind the legends. Your anger is still there, but it's focused now, and you can aim it like a spear. Soon, the ha'oles will have to leave. And if they won't go on their own, well, Maui was a skinny little guy, but he stopped the sun, picked up the sky and raised the land from the bottom of the ocean. And you know his secrets.

Concept: A former street tough, you've gone on to teach others how to avoid your mistakes. Tell stories. Counsel. Help rebuild. Native pride, not stupid violence, is your new calling.

Roleplaying Tips: Ha'oles are a waste of time. Keikis are the future, so respect them and teach them. You're still tough and can handle yourself, but you've outgrown the need to prove it. There's nothing cool in being stupid, or in imitating ha'ole ways. There are better ways to get revenge.

Magick: Entropy tells you about the natural order and when it's out of balance. Knowing the odds also helps you on the street. Calling in the local Spirits or redirecting natural Forces, on the other hand, can seriously mess with some stupid ha'ole's day. They need to learn that the world — not only the physical, but the spiritual — can *and will* fight back.

Equipment: Street clothes (loud shirt, jeans, sandals), ritual dress, keys to the community center, switchblade knife, pocketful of fetishes, chrome stud for nasal septum piercing (for day wear, bone for ritual working).





Sisters of Hippolyta: Wind-borne Seeds

By Deena McKinney

*If you put new ideas before the eyes of fools
They'll think you foolish and worthless in the bargain;
And if you are thought superior to those who have
Some reputation for learning, you will become hated.*

— Euripedes, *Medea*



Lydia lies by the warm fire, watching as embers rise into the air like fireflies in the early autumn night. Damp from an earlier swim in the river, she pulls a blanket around her to guard against the night's chill. Others sit near Lydia, laughing and singing softly as the moon rises and stars wink from above. Still, Lydia shudders. Something isn't right. Ice touches her blood. The confining blanket doesn't soothe her chills. The sky above does not comfort her, but stings her eyes with its full-moon glare. Lydia struggles to clear her hazy mind, to peer through the blinding puffs of smoke...

Gentle hands cool Lydia's sweaty cheeks and forehead; comforting fingers stroke her damp hair and aching temples in rhythm to the murmur of voices that mingle with her own moans of pain. The lovely dream of the fire and the moon fades into cold steel and the scent of antiseptic. Blood, slick and abattoir-fresh, soaks the sheets

of her bed. Lydia squeezes her eyes shut to block out the glaring light above, and prays for the seemingly eternal agony to end.

Slowly and cruelly, something rips her body in two, and she loses even the will to scream. But then, the pain stops entirely and release washes over her. The seven women huddle around Lydia's bed, sighing in wonder and delight as the new child's cry rents the air. Lydia feels a tiny wet body strewn across her stomach, still linked to her flesh. She senses its frustration, its hunger, its curiosity at the strange lights and beings around it. Lydia reaches out to soothe the fears of the infant girl, and welcomes her into the shadows of the world.

Introduction

Not all mages wage war. The Sisters of Hippolyta are an extended family of Awakened willworkers and enlightened Sleepers, all of whom are female. Their historical roots lie

with the ancient Amazons, but the Sisters today have little in common with their violent, man-hating ancestors. These Sisters dwell for most of their lives in isolated communities called “conclaves”; in the conclaves, they work together to produce food and commodities, engage in enlightened shared governance, and nurture each other’s spiritual growth.

Many Sisters spend considerable time away from their conclaves working in the outside world, helping needy men and women, then bringing back new skills and learning tools to the community. Among the Sisters of Hippolyta are physicians, computer programmers, teachers, accountants, farmers and chefs; any woman who professes her belief in the Sisters’ communal lifestyle, with both its joys of sisterhood and its isolation from the outside world, is welcome. The Sisters do not neglect the magickal Arts. Skilled healers of both the mind and the body, and intuitive diviners of time and nature, these mysticks conduct their Arts as rituals and celebrations of family ties. Their magick glorifies the uniqueness of the woman’s body: her voice, her inner strength, her link with the Earth and her ability to create life. Each Sister is a power unto herself, but within the framework of communal magick, the group becomes mightier than the individual.

The Sisters keep careful records of blood relations among their members, and occasionally “foster” the transfer of young members of the Craft from one conclave to another. In most cases, a Sister is judged by who her mother and mentors were, and their deeds are often looked upon with more importance than the Sister’s very own. A Sister can spend a lifetime living down another’s sins, or getting credit for things she had no hand in achieving. “One herb, sweet or bitter, flavors the whole batch,” goes the saying.

Background: Roots to Branches



The history of the Sisters of Hippolyta is the culmination of two Greek legends. The first tells of a city on the steppes of the Caucasus Mountains called *Themiscrya*, the land of the Amazons. Whether or not the city formed from a collection of Greek refugees fleeing their oppressive society, from a network of women from various city-states, or from a separate society altogether, is a matter of debate. Legends support all three ideas. In any case, no men were permitted within *Themiscrya*’s walls except as chained breeding-slaves. The company of women, it was felt, should be enough.

Like any society, these Amazons needed to defend themselves against invaders — especially conquerors bent on rape and slavery. Under the supposed guidance of a group of warrior spirits (who may or may not have belonged to the Black Furies werewolf tribe), the Amazons quickly equaled or exceeded any male warrior’s combat skills. These

Lexicon

Chorodia: A group of seven Sisters who create their magick collectively; also, any group of Sisters working together toward a common goal.

Conclave: The place where groups of Sisters live and work together; often used interchangeably with the term “community.”

Epitropi: The elected septarchy, which rules each conclave for seven years.

Patriarchy: General term for the forces of masculine oppression. Seen by some as an actual spirit entity (an *Incarna*).

Samantha: Derogatory term for a Sister who has left the conclave to pursue a so-called “normal life.”

Themiscryain Compact: The oath that proclaims that no Sister shall be taken alive into slavery, even if it means the entire conclave must die to prevent it.

This near-fanatical devotion to the group over the individual is the thorn bush in its paradise. Those who forsake the community and return to “the outside” are cast out of the Craft completely. Whether the Sister leaves due to love, filial duty or disagreement is immaterial. While the Craft fully expects temporary sojourns from the community, the Sisters consider each member who leaves permanently a lost thread in the tapestry the Craft weaves. In the Sisters’ minds, those who depart and don’t return have joined with the enemy, and their relatives and companions share the blame.

women warriors allied with Troy and fought to defend the honor of Helen under the leadership of a valiant and wise ruler named Penthesilea, who was reportedly slain by Achilles. However, not all women who dwelled among the Amazons followed their leader into battle. Some were healers and gardeners who knew how to wield swords but who chose the tools of life and beauty instead. Likewise, some of these women rejected the notion of having no male companions except as breeding stock. This dissension disgruntled Hippolyta, Penthesilea’s successor, but she took no action — until after the Trojan War.

The Sisters’ oral tradition relates a tale of the goddess Athena appearing to Hippolyta in a dream, bespeaking her wrath that the Amazons, warrior women of her own blood, had joined forces with Paris and the cursed Trojans who had scorned her. Athena demanded a sacrifice — a blessed exile of all women who would not lift arms against Athena’s allies, the Greeks. Their departure, the goddess swore, would remind the world of her wisdom and ease the insult

done to her by the Trojan allies among the Amazons. Hippolyta agreed — though Themiscyra could ill afford the loss of its greatest healers — and sent forth the women who refused to live a warrior's life.

After their exile from Themiscyra, these women led a somewhat nomadic life, wandering Asia Minor and assisting the sick, caring for children and governing themselves as an egalitarian community. These women took nomadic tribesmen as mates and companions, keeping female children with the community but sending male children to live with their fathers or foster parents. Some of the women's medical wisdom found its way into the repertoires of later healers such as Avicenna and Dioscorides. These wanderers called themselves *Exiles of Hippolyta*, in reference to the Amazon leader who had ordered them to leave their homeland.

Years passed and the Exiles' descendants continued their wandering, becoming stronger advocates for peace in a world that seemed to do nothing but wage war. Around the fifth century B.C., as the second legend has it, one Exile came forth with the idea that to protect peace, women of the warring city-states of the Greek peninsula should use any means necessary, even celibacy, to convince the men to cease their battles. A number of Greek women, tired of death and destruction, followed her lead, and for a time, peace prevailed among the city-states. In 411 B.C., the poet Aristophanes wrote a humorous play about this Exile, and though he misrepresented her origins and philosophies, he preserved her name: Lysistrata. The Exile Lysistrata was the first to extol the power of women as a gendered, united community, and the first to refer to her cohorts as the *Sisters of Hippolyta*, despite the fact that their exile from Themiscyra continued.

In 329 B.C., the exile became permanent. Themiscyra was leveled by the forces of Alexander the Great for refusing to surrender or pay tribute. If any Amazons survived, they were probably carried off in slavery. Sisters' folklore states, however, that no one in that city would willingly have endured such bondage; supposedly, the city's remaining defenders swore an oath to slay any wounded sister rather than see her taken alive. The last seven Amazons are said to have sung a final song of vengeance which obliterated both Themiscyra and its attackers in a cataclysmic earthquake. *The Themiscyrian Compact*, a universal suicide pact, calls for similar resolutions of impossible odds.

The Lady's Not for Burning

The years following the Classical period held mixed blessings for the Sisters. During the ninth century, the nomads finally settled in a tiny enclave in southwest Europe, near the present-day Dauphine region of France. Their timing was not a coincidence; at this point in history, agricultural techniques changed considerably, allowing for a stronger growing season, the development of more efficient plows, and the three-field rotating-crop system. For the first time, the Sisters built permanent homes and



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enjoyed an agrarian lifestyle and community growth. Many Sisters found men living near the conclave who were willing to be “temporary companions,” friends who, with no strings attached whatsoever, fathered the Sisters’ children. The magical education of the Sisters, previously devoted solely to the study of herbal medicine and healing, branched into the connections between the mind and the body, and those between the body and the Earth.

Yet this was also a time of darkness and superstition. For the next six centuries, the Sisters watched the rise and fall of the oppressive feudal system, where cruel overlords took the crops of peasants and left them to starve. Many Sisters openly worked among the sick, creating what some would call miracles and others would brand witchcraft. An independent community of women, who acted outside the law and had sex out of wedlock with many men, scandalized the neighboring communities and incensed the clergy and lords alike. For helping the less fortunate, many Sisters paid with their lives at stakes and gallows. Witch-hunters and kings’ men forced the conclave to break up into semi-nomadic groups again, groups which hid away from “outside” society or worked in secret throughout the Middle Ages.

Only during the late Renaissance did the Sisters attempt a cautious reunion with the world outside their conclaves. Even then, they had to work carefully; the witch-fires burned brightly during this so-called “enlightenment.” Conclaves remained permanent homes for most Sisters, but many others became restless or paranoid and traveled to centers of culture and knowledge in the Italian city-states, Paris and London before returning home to share their knowledge. Thus, two important traditions were born: First, the Craft’s leaders encouraged members to learn and live for a time in the outside world; in the end, however, they were always to return and share their acquired knowledge with their families. Secondly, they were to avoid ties with any places or people outside their extended families; betrayals (often won through severe torture) destroyed many conclaves over the years, and forced others to remain on the move.

Through the 18th century, the entire population of the Sisters of Hippolyta never exceeded 40. At the dawn of the 19th century, a debate centered largely around the liberal-feminist writings of Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stewart Mills began among the Sisters as to their greater role and purpose. One faction, under the leadership of elderly Sister Kara Philodes, advocated the traditional lifestyle: a majority of time spent in the community with only occasional forays into the outside world, all for the purpose of returning to the conclave with new information. The outside world, they said, placed no value on women save for childbearing. The second faction, lead by a young Sister from Great Britain named Eleanora Pritchett, argued that if women wanted to achieve an equal place in society, they would have to work for it. *How could this be possible*, they asked, *if the Sisters are cooped up in a conclave?* This faction advocated

spending the greater portion of time outside, helping those in need and carefully reforming society, returning to the conclave only as a means of contact and mutual support.

The result of this ideological division was a geographical split among the Sisters as well. The traditionalists remained in Europe, isolating themselves in Europe's few remaining wildernesses, where they still survive. The largest group of Traditionalists maintains a conclave near the coast of France. It's said that some of these Sisters went back into the Caucasus and rebuilt Themiscrya, but if so, no one outside the city has heard much from them. Those who agreed with Pritchett saw the community as a "launching point" and a center of nurturing, and migrated further west. New opportunities existed for them in North America, particularly in the American West and Canada and among abolitionists and temperance societies. The two largest settlements of these latter Sisters sprang up in the late 19th century in British Columbia and Colorado. From these

points, the Sisters could travel and serve where they were most needed, be it in rural communities or in the rapidly growing cities. Today, these three main conclaves remain influential to the Sisters' activities. The number of Sisters is still small, though — less than 200 total.

Throughout the 20th century, the roles and rights of women have come to the forefront in much of the world, and the modern Sisters have moved out of isolation, allying with other like-minded groups, both magickal and mundane. These include many Verbena covens, the Black Fury Sisterhood network (see **Black Furies** and **Caerns: Places of Power**), several neopagan and Wiccan groups, and political action groups like NOW and NARAL. Even now, however, the Sisters are clannish and secretive; a Sister won't be announcing her Craft's existence to outsiders — even in exclusively feminist company — without a very good reason. The Themiscryain Compact remains in force, and it's still occasionally necessary.

Culture



For the Sisters of Hippolyta, culture implies three things: interaction, values and creativity. First, the Sisters ask their members to work together to create their community. Each member in the conclave works with the *epitropi* (a group of seven Sisters elected to govern for seven years) to decide what tasks best suits her individual talents. A Sister with physical disabilities may learn computer skills to coordinate membership databases and educational efforts instead of hoeing a field. In some way, everyone contributes to the community on a day-to-day basis. Food must be grown and basic material needs satisfied to allow for outside work and study. Operating within the framework of shared governance, with no power inequities, each Sister can supposedly give of her talents, great or small, without fear of criticism or scorn.

This interaction also extends to the external community. Even Sisters who followed Philodes' vision believed that some time working outside the conclave is essential; practically and spiritually, it's important to exercise your skills and bring knowledge from outside sources back into your community. For those who migrated to North America with Pritchett and her followers, this "ministry" became integral to their view of future change as well. How, they asked, could they convince anyone of the need for cooperative, peaceful existence if they did not first give of themselves to the greater family of humanity?

All Sisters hold several common values: nonaggression, mutual respect, shared governance, equal voice and reverence for life. These values are instilled and reiterated constantly — to new adult members as well as to children born to the Sisters — through a strong oral and symbolic

tradition. Despite rumors of male infanticide or castration, male children are highly valued; the Sisters view these infants as great opportunities to teach members of the opposite sex and send them out to "spread the word" in a male-dominated world. While no men other than young male children live in the conclaves proper, the small number of Sisters who choose to establish permanent relations with men often have them nearby to share in the joys of childrearing.

The Sisters also prize creativity. While formal education and talent are not required to become part of the Craft, and common sense and life experiences are laudable, the Sisters rejoice when a woman with advanced professional skills or true artistic abilities joins them. The Sisters recognize that culture must have a material base as well as an ideological or social one. Without doctors, writers, painters, poets, scientists and technicians among them, the community would lack the benefits of both visionary and technological resources.

If this culture sounds too loving, egalitarian, and nurturing to be true, it is. Although equality, creativity and group support are the rule in conclaves, all rules have exceptions. The Craft's insistence on community over the individual chafes many newer members, and the strict rituals which govern many conclaves leave some younger members bored and restless. All conclaves demand absolute loyalty, even in the face of destruction, and that's sometimes a hard code to live by. And, people being people, some Sisters grow jealous, possessive, spiteful or exclusive within their communities. Someone is always prettier, more popular or more talented, no matter how egalitarian the conclave tries to be. Occasionally, these rivalries spill out openly, and must be dealt with by the *epitropi*; more often, though, they

remain secrets which creep out in subtle yet distressing ways.

The difference between True Magick and "hedge magic" often puzzles the equality-minded Sisters. No one, even the wisest elders, can tell why some Sisters can paint murals in reality while the rest are left finger painting. Both groups employ the same rituals and study the same lore. Beneath all the talk of equality, most Sisters suspect the Goddess favors some women over others. Similarly, jealousy often erupts between women who can bear children and others who want them but cannot, either because of physical disability or lack of a viable partner. Another hotly contested topic among the Sisters comes to mind: relationships.

Those who choose to have relationships outside the conclave most often do so with men, but occasionally bond with women. To the Sisters, the worst sin imaginable is leaving the community permanently, thereby forsaking the Craft. A woman who leaves the conclave to love an outsider is especially hated; the Sisters believe that there should be love enough within her family. As each Sister is viewed as an intrinsic building-block, her departure weakens the community structure. Choosing to leave is unforgivable, even today. The loss of a Sister is a loss to the Craft's collective heart, and its collective ties to the magickal Earth. A woman who walks away from her conclave forsakes the Craft for life, and dishonors her loved ones in the bargain. Hence, sisterhood's double-edged sword: Freedom and the rights, needs and talents of the individual Sister are respected and cherished... but only if they are used for the Sisters of Hippolyta and their beliefs. Otherwise, no matter what the reason, a Sister loses everything: her voice, her home and indeed, her standing as a human being.

Beliefs

*All the sweet things growing in their good places,
the sun's burning never touching them, or the rain or wind;
living their happy little joyfulness, until the virgin's name
is wife and then she knows anxiety and the night
and how to tremble for a husband and children.*

— Sophocles, *Women of Trachis*

Despite their long strides away from Peleponnesia, many Sisters still look to their ancient Greek forebears for philosophical guidance. The Greeks saw a bond between humans and the natural world — an implicit connection with earth, plants, minerals, bodies of water and so on. The Greeks believed in a sort of "miracle" of old things passing away or changing to give way to things new. This endless cycle concept resembles the beliefs of the Euthanatos and the Verbena, though many Sisters would be loath to admit it. Neither killing nor blood sacrifices are necessary for their willworking.

Not that magick comes without sacrifice. Members of this Craft practice their own form of the dialectic, where old

ideas combine with their opposites to create something new. Change is never accomplished without pain or loss. This view explains the agony of childbirth; new life is created from the suffering and pain of the mother. Likewise, while the death of a family elder is mourned, the Sisters also see this emptiness as a spot to be filled by a new child or initiate. As those forced to choose between an outside relationship or the Craft can tell you, membership in the community is not bought without sacrifice.

The Sisters view themselves as living metaphors for the Earth, and as living extensions of the Creatrix. Creation and fertility are their birthrights — not simple sciences, but parts of a mystical connection which flows from women alone. Modern feminist thinkers who have shaped the Sisters' philosophies include Adrienne Rich, bell hooks and Mary Field Belenky. These women have greatly contributed to the Sisters' representations of women as unique beings, capable of tasks and functions no man can possibly understand; Rich through her explanations of a continuum of women's relationships from heterosexual sisterhood to homosexual love; hooks through discussions of feminist pedagogy; and Belenky through essentialist explanations of women's special knowledge and comprehension of the world.

Magickal Style

The Sisters view their magick as unique to women; men cannot comprehend it, and therefore cannot work it. Magick practiced by the Sisters of Hippolyta is usually performed in a group called a *chorodia*; ideally seven Sisters join together in song, dance or recitation of poetry, although a Sister can work magick alone if need be. Not all members of the *chorodia* need to have Awakened Avatars, but at least one of them must for the effects of the ritual to truly alter reality. (See "Acting in Concert" in the *Magick* rulebook, Page 172.)

No Sister, Awakened or not, walks around talking about "Spheres" of magick. Instead, she speaks of themes and purposes to her Art, purposes which include healing, celebration of birth and renewed life, and — since the Middle Ages — knowledge of the inner workings of the mind. While different conclaves (indeed, different Sisters) view the Goddess differently, all of them revere some form of female divinity or metaphor, whether they call Her "Mother Earth," "Mary," "Gaia," "Artemis," "The Feminine Principle" or simply "The Goddess." The Sisters know that only women are able to harvest life from within their own bodies. No man can ever understand what it is to have life grow within him; therefore, he can never completely understand the bonds between mother and child, between crone and maiden, or between a woman and her own kind. Thus, he cannot grasp the importance of women working together toward a common goal, and this forever excludes him from their *chorodia* and their Craft.

Because they view magick in intuitive rather than metaphysical terms, the Sisters make no definition between Awakened and un-Awakened; one simply has more willworking talent than another (at occasionally greater cost — Paradox). All Sisters of Hippolyta study the mystic arts, so all of them have some degree of talent. In game terms, this means that each Sister has either an Awakened Avatar or one to five dots in a Hedge Magic Path or two (See *Ascension's Right Hand*, Chapter Five). Common Paths include Cursing, Enchantment, Healing and Herbalism. Ironically, those who pursue the Paths draw themselves further away from the Spheres. Sadly, it's rare for a Sister who doesn't begin her conclave membership in already Awakened to discover the power of her Avatar.

The significance of the number seven as related to the chorodia is unknown; present-day Sisters theorize that it may have something to do with a particular variety of ancient rose called the Seven Sisters, which has legendary healing powers of healing. Some believe that the first exiles from Themiscyra numbered seven.

Sphere

Life is the Sphere the Sisters of Hippolyta favor — the realm of healing, growth, change and creation which figures so prominently in their culture. Forces knowledge is also common wisdom; the Craft fosters the link between one's body and her surroundings. Since the Middle Ages, many Sisters also study the Sphere

of Mind, pointing out the basic physiological and psychological links between women, their progeny, and the natural world that surrounds them. Awakened Sisters who understand all of these Spheres are incredibly powerful individuals. They have not only a deep level of self-understanding, but also possess clear insight into their other Sisters' motivations and well-being. These women often serve as members of a conclave's epitropi.

Common Foci

Both chorales and individuals use dance, poetry, songs, meditation and herbs as foci for both Life and Mind magicks. Sisters skilled in healing also utilize massage to facilitate their magick, and some of the more technologically oriented Sisters utilize computers and medical equipment as foci. It's important to understand that Sisters do not view foci as something to abandon when their Arete rises; over time, a woman may realize that she doesn't need the usual things to use her link to feminine power. Still, those things provide comfort, stability and a sense of community. A Sister who works her Arts without help will engender jealousy, if not suspicion.

Organization

Conclaves are well-organized; each member of the Craft has a permanent home in one of the three main conclaves in France, Colorado or British Columbia (unless, of course, she belongs to a secret conclave in a reborn Themiscyra). Smaller



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conclaves in other parts of the world are affiliated with one of these main conclaves, much in the way that branch offices of a corporation answer to a regional office. Thus, a Sister may live in a conclave in Tennessee, yet also belong to the conclave in British Columbia. This plan imparts a sense of place and family to the members of the Craft.

- Within each conclave, the total membership nominates and elects, by simple majority, a committee called an **epitropi** consisting of seven Sisters who govern for seven years. Each major conclave has an acting epitropi, and each smaller one has another which answers to the larger one when necessary. No Sister may serve two consecutive terms except by the rare unanimous nomination and vote. At the end of the sixth year of the sitting epitropi's term, the committee is responsible for making arrangements for the next election. This entails contacting all Sisters working outside the conclave and agreeing on a mutual time for a caucus. Nomination and voting are generally accomplished by secret ballot. The presiding epitropi tabulates the votes and then presents the new epitropi with much celebration. A Sister, if nominated, may choose not to run, but this is rare.

- Within the conclave, the epitropi has final authority, though most members firmly believe and practice the concept of shared governance and consensus rule. Amongst themselves, and in consultation with those living in the conclaves, the members of the epitropi make decisions

about delegations of duties, funding, upkeep and the guiding philosophies and goals of their individual communities. Many form **subcommittees**, grouped according to interest and need, which include members of the conclave who don't belong to the epitropi itself. For example, a Sister from the epitropi may form a focus group of three or four women from the conclave at large to discuss the issue of recruiting efforts. She would then report back to the epitropi so that further actions could be taken. Most conclaves (though not all) keep permanent subcommittees in charge of food and resources, defense, finances, maintenance, medicine and magic.

- At least one member of the epitropi (and usually more than one) is an "**information keeper**." She keeps records of the conclaves' membership, who works where, and how to get in touch with them. The information keeper also organizes records of bloodlines and births among the Craft. Awakened Sisters with this duty often use mystickal means of communication; others rely on e-mail, telephones or the postal service. Another member usually keeps tabs on the conclaves' accounting. Those who join the Craft are expected to offer monetary contributions or marketable services which bring in funding. The epitropi then makes reasonable allowances based on the individual's means, talents and abilities, but divides the majority of the resources into a communal pool.

• Perhaps the most important members of the conclave are the **mentors** who pass on magickal, artistic, medical and military skills to others. Everyone must be productive somehow, and essential skills, like basic first aid, ritual magic, planting and self-defense, are taught to everyone. Almost any skill a community might need has at least one prime mentor, and some conclaves have several. "Classes" usually depend on the needs of the conclave; one located in a downtown area would train extensively in self-defense and healing, while a farm commune would concentrate on carpentry, animal husbandry and agriculture.

Initiation

When a Sister of Hippolyta meets a potential initiate, she generally spends a great deal of time getting to know the individual's likes, dislikes and philosophies. The Sister then reports to her conclave about the potential recruit and seeks advice about whether or not to pursue the individual further. If the epitropi and others agree, the Sister then approaches the potential initiate and invites her to spend time with the conclave — a probationary visit. Some women decline at this point, but those who come to the conclave usually stay for several days or weeks. At the end of her stay, if members of the conclave agree and the visitor's beliefs, talents and interests match those of the Sisters closely enough, the woman is simply invited to join. During her next menstrual cycle (symbolic of change and loss), a welcoming ceremony is performed within the conclave, and the woman is considered to be a member of the Craft, with full rights and responsibilities.

This initiation is beautiful in its simplicity and trust... and therein lies its danger. Though it rarely happens, women have been initiated into the Craft who wish to destroy it. Many infiltrators are simply religious or political extremists who view the Sisters as a threat. Occasionally, though, more inhuman entities have entered the circle, then fed upon the conclave from within. The Sisters do not know the true nature of these destroyers, but some whisper that they are machine monsters, undead creatures... or worse.

A Sister who turns her back on the Craft becomes an exile. She's not hounded, but neither is she helped. Word of her defection spreads to other conclaves, and she's forbidden to enter another one for any reason, even to save her life. Once she decides to leave, no Sister will ever aid her again, on pain of her own exile. Few other misdeeds are punished this way; most thieves or liars (rare but not unheard-of) simply work off their crimes. Only murderers, sexual offenders and turncoats are forced to leave forever.

Acolytes

Pro-choice advocates, feminists of all varieties, lovers of self-sufficiency and women separatists all work alongside the Sisters of Hippolyta, although few ever learn of the Craft's existence. The group itself does not acknowledge terms like "acolyte" or "apprentice." When a woman be-

comes a member of the Sisters of Hippolyta, she is viewed as an equal part of the conclave.

Concepts

Personal independence within service to a larger cause is essential for anyone who would join this sisterhood. Ambitions and skills are also integral. Midwives, teachers, computer programmers, veterinarians, herbalists, vegan chefs, social workers, Red Cross volunteers, or homeless/rape crisis-center counselors make ideal Sisters of Hippolyta, although more esoteric characters (mystics, artists, survivalists and fanatics) occasionally fit in.

Stereotypes

Traditions: Those who know us frequently spurn our communal life of separatism and equality. With rare exceptions, they revel in hypocrisy and play games of power, isolated in dark towers and wrapped in high-minded, selfish dreams. What good have they done for those who cry for aid and comfort in the night?

Technocracy: Technology is a great equalizing force. Look, for example, at the tools for healing and communication we have gained. However, these are not without price. These fanatics have let their worship of phallogocentric theories and devices interfere with their instincts, and they force others to conform to that blindness. Too much technology too fast may imprison and separate us all.

Marauders: These folk are well-meaning, but sick. They need our healing, help and sympathy. Rather than spurn them, assist when you can, but be careful of the strange forces of nature that always prowl around them. Many of them have their own variety of wisdom and insight we cannot even begin to comprehend.

Nephandi: Life in our conclaves is not easy, and some may be tempted to choose an easier path to avoid the work and pain we often suffer for our beliefs. These demons and their servants will appear when we are most vulnerable, offering power and a seemingly gentler way. Flee from them at all costs... if you value your very soul.

The Black Furies: Our legends tell of benevolent spirits cloaked in the bodies of wolf-women who worked with us to overthrow the chains of oppression long ago. Our contact today with these shapeshifters is rare but always celebrated. Except for their terribly violent methods, they seek many of the same goals we do.

Others: This world is full of power-brokers of all kinds, mortal and otherwise. These people will take everything we have away from us if they get the chance — they always have before. Keep your distance, especially if you're faced with someone who is not what he seems to be.

Storyteller Ideas

• **Visions of Sisterhood, Dark and Light:** An endless number of sources exist on sisterhood and feminism to help evoke the right mood when running a chronicle involving the Sisters of Hippolyta. The works and authors mentioned here and in the text are good places to start. Allison Jaggar and Paula Rothenberg present a broad range of women's perspectives, both academic and popular, in *Feminist Frameworks*. Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* presents a dark view of sisterhood corrupted by patriarchy; the movie is also worth seeing. *Re/Search: Angry Women*, by V. Vale and Andrea Juno, offers a number of intriguing interviews with feminist artists, scientists and philosophers. Other notable fictional accounts of sisterhood include *Possessing the Secret of Joy* by Alice Walker, *The Love Songs of Sappho* and any of the Ayla books by Jean Auel. Spider Robinson's *Callahan's Lady* and Piers Anthony's *With a Tangled Skein* offer more technological and mystical views. Children's books, such as *Heather Has Two Mommies* by Leslea Newman and *The Matmaker's Daughter* by M.C. Helldorfer, offer interesting perspectives of sisterhood from a child's point of view; these would be good reading materials for a player whose character has grown up in a conclave.

• **The Waters of Lethe:** Desperate times have called for more intrusive measures. If a potential recruit of the Craft declines to join or is found to be lacking somehow after she has been told about the Craft, she is free to leave in peace... after a farewell party where she drinks a magickal herbal potion called the Waters of Lethe. Developed by a Sister with extraordinary skills in Life and Mind, this drug causes selective memory loss. The former recruit will remember the culture of women separatists, but neither the location of the conclave nor the mystical lifestyle she may have seen. The Sisters abhor this trickery, but after conclaves have fallen to forces from the outside, they have learned to be more careful.

• **The Themiscryain Compact:** The Sisters combine three attributes that draw fire in today's political climate: separatism, feminism and alternative spirituality. It's not unlikely that a conclave might be exposed to outside notice, either from the FBI, a fanatical Christian militia brigade, the press or a simple group of rednecks. Though not warriors, the Sisters refuse to become hostages of any kind — to the patriarchal law, to publicity, or to would-be conquerors. The fireworks that might ensue if one or more such groups stumble onto the Craft's existence should be obvious, especially if the conclave feels its back up against the wall.

Common Magicks



A peaceful Craft whenever possible, the Sisters have developed an array of "quiet" magicks. Even so, many of them still work out "tricks" that help balance out nasty problems. The former spells work like the following Effects in the main rulebook: **Whereami?**; **Open/Close Window** (to keep an eye on others, or on guarded locations); **Ward**; **Chain** (often performed as part of a love-bonding ceremony); **Binding Oath**; **Midwife's Blessing**; **Darksight**; **Mold Tree**; **Telepathy**; and **Better Body** (for peaceful and aggressive purposes).

The more aggressive magicks include Effects like **Slay Machine** (especially to make guns malfunction); **Tempest in a Teapot** (to bring forth storms for good or ill); **Rip the Man-Body**; **Animal Form**; **Enchant Weapon**; **Awaken the Inanimate** (to safeguard their homes, or others'), and other "gifts of subtle violence."

Petals of Love (•• Mind)

This potion brewed from rose petals helps to strengthen Sisters' emotional ties to each other. It's often cooked into foods and mixed with drinks, especially during festivals. Occasionally used to "sweeten" outsiders who need a "change of heart," this magick subtly sets emotional wheels in motion through a coincidental **Subliminal Impulse Effect**.

Conclave Wellness Works (•• Entropy, •• Mind, • Life)

The epitropi performs this simple ceremony at the start of each new season. In concert, the Sisters burn heady incense and sing a song of welcome to the new season while extending their perceptions and consciousness to identify the status of their community (i.e. the health and mental pattern of the conclave in which they live). This alerts the epitropi to any potential problems or illnesses within the conclave.

[Entropy targets disorders or fate-fluctuations, while Mind-empathy reads the community's "vibes" and Life scans for illnesses. This coincidental ritual requires 10 or more successes, but is quite accurate.]

Green Thumb (•• Life, or •• Life, •• Prime)

Throughout the spring and summer, the Sisters of a conclave work in several chorales to bless their gardens. They keep a close eye on the health of the plants during the growing season and do not cease this ritual until they pluck the last stalks at harvest time.

[Life helps the crops grow and sustains nutrients in the soil; adding Prime to the equation helps plants grow from damaged or infertile ground.]

Massage Therapy (••• Life, or ••• Mind, or both)

With specially prepared oils and herbs, a Sister skilled in massage can clean almost any blemish, ache or wound from her client's body. Another version lets her ease mental traumas as well, and an advanced variant allows her to heal both. With time and treatment, almost any amount of minor healing may be coincidental this way.

Ease of Passage (•••• Life)

The pain and joy of childbirth are part of the dialectic cycle the Sisters follow; the delight in bearing children is balanced by the agonies a woman must suffer. Yet in some cases, the lives of the child and mother hang precariously close to death. This ritual, usually accompanied by extensive massage and some sort of gentle exercise, allows the chorodia invoking it to make beneficial changes in the mother's body, lessening the risks involved with childbearing. The Effect might widen the mother's pelvis or enlarge her birth canal slightly; the ritual seeks to normalize the process, not detract from the experience of pain and excitement in any way.

The Weeping Willow (••••• Life)

Perhaps inspired by the variety of classic "metamorphic" myths, this magickal ritual is only used to aid women in dire situations with no means of escape. When a woman is pursued against her wishes and cannot defend herself, she has occasionally "disappeared" from her tormentor. In fact, a chorodia may have taken pity on her, turning her into a beautiful tree rather than allowing such suffering to continue. In rare instances, this ritual has been used on devoted lovers outside the conclaves who suffer too much at the coming and going of their partners.

No Surrender (••••• Forces, •• Prime, or •••• Entropy, •• Prime)

Every large conclave has at least one Sister who knows the fatal rite which destroys the place and everyone in it. Like most ritual magicks, the larger the group, the easier the spell becomes. This suicidal ritual forms the last-ditch strike against a group of conquerors. It's rarely used and rarely needed, but unleashes earthquakes, firestorms, plagues or explosions that demolish the entire conclave area in a vulgar display of pure magick.

[In extreme cases, one or two final survivors might be able to enact this ritual, even if they normally wouldn't have the knowledge to do so (see "Wild Talent," *Mage*, pages 226-227). Naturally, it means their death, but the enemy dies with them. Each assistant in the rite adds successes to the roll (see "Acting in Concert," page 172); with the Forces Sphere, the resulting destruction can be quite extreme.]

Talismans

With few exceptions, the Sisters do not employ magickal Talismans or Devices. Occasional **herbal remedies** and **healing salves** (Life 3), **scrying mirrors and pools** (Correspondence 2/Time 2), or **magical seeds** (Life 2, Prime 2)

might find use, but enchanted weapons and esoteric charms are discouraged by the Craft's self-reliant code.

••••• Treasures of Themiscyra

Arete 6, Quintessence 30, Cost n/a (cannot be purchased)

Two unique items survived the destruction of the Amazon city and remain with its heirs: The first, **The Girdle of Hippolyta**, is a simple silver-linked belt which allows the wearer to strengthen the unity between her mind and body. Sisters who wore this in the past displayed incredible physical feats as well as strange insights into the hearts and thoughts of those around them. Rumor has it that a tribe of Black Furies rescued the Girdle from the ruins of Themiscyra and centuries later presented it to Pritchett before she left Europe to build the conclave in British Columbia.

The second, **The Mirror of Penthesilea**, resembles a simple wooden handmirror. A gift to the Amazons from Queen Hecuba of Troy, it mentally attunes itself to those women who gaze into it, and reveals their true visages. A beautiful woman with a wicked heart might see herself as a scaled monster, whereas a homely Sister with a good heart will see her own inner beauty. The Mirror remains with Philodes' followers in southern France.

Companion: Animal Helpers (Cost: 1)

Although few Sisters of Hippolyta summon magickal "familiar," many keep companion animals close at hand. These critters are not magickal in the conventional sense, but all of them are quite intelligent (Mental Traits of 2), empathic (like Mind 1), and always loyal to their mistresses. In many cases, these companions are named, fed well and treated like family. Common companion animals include dogs and cats, farm animals, raptors, reptiles and songbirds.



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Roving Healer

Crawford saw that in this place, Starling was heir to the granny women, to the wise women, the herb healers, the stalwart country women who have always done the needful, who keep the watch and when the watch is over, wash and dress the dead.

— Thomas Harris, *The Silence of the Lambs*

Quote: *These hills have a lot of secrets and wisdom that no city-schooling can ever replace. But I promise you, I've learned a few things since I've been gone that are going to make life a lot easier for us all.*

Prelude: Born into a mountain family of rural laborers, you worked hard at home taking care of your six brothers and sisters. Late at night, after putting the other kids to bed, you studied hard, making good grades all through school despite your hated factory job. Excuses were not your way.

Early in life, you learned to be tough and independent. Folk medicine, lore and healing became your gift; some even said that you could work miracles. Secretly, you applied to a nursing-midwife program, and were admitted with a scholarship. Your delight turned to misery, though, when you told your folks; you were expected to work in the local mill, meet a man, get married and have babies — not run off to the city! The morning you left behind the land and people you loved was the hardest one of your life.

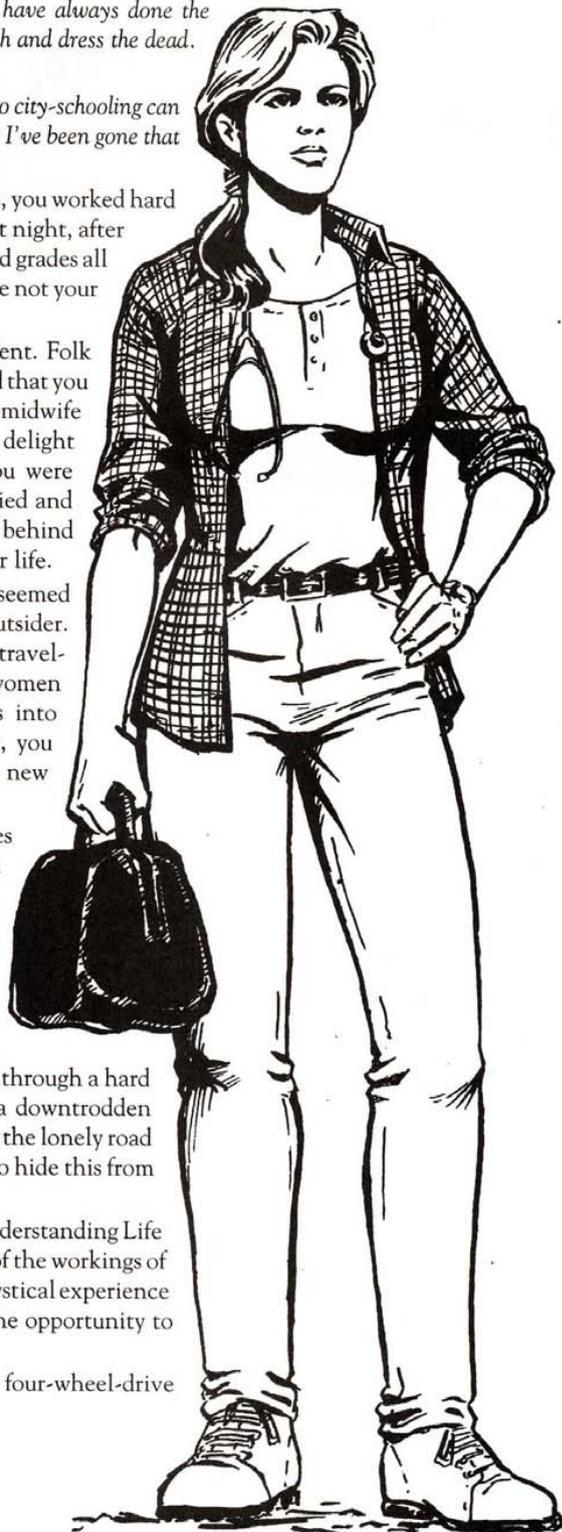
Finally, you graduated and returned home. Everyone seemed to have forgiven your departure, but you had become an outsider. Things got worse when you started hanging around with a traveling doctor with uppity ideas about communal living and women working together. Even so, she channeled your talents into directions you'd never dreamed possible. When she left, you went with her, and have only now gone out on your new "residency." The world awaits.

Concept: Helping people take better care of themselves is your goal in life. You want to see the women around you improve their own self-worth instead of defining themselves by husbands, children and dead-end jobs. Yet you'd still give freely of your abilities to anyone who needed them, man or woman.

Roleplaying Hints: You try to work within the system, but no one pushes you around twice. In times of stress, you pull upon a deep inner strength that has sustained you through a hard life. Joy for you comes with seeing a new baby born or a downtrodden woman develop self-confidence. At the same time, though, the lonely road you follow lends a sadness to your personality. Take pains to hide this from all but the few who know you best.

Magick: You practice healing magicks exclusively. Understanding Life came as naturally to you as breathing. Your understanding of the workings of the Mind is much weaker, but has potential. The greatest mystical experience you've had so far involved a group ritual, and you crave the opportunity to enjoy this pleasure again one day.

Equipment: Bag of herbal medicines, medical kit, four-wheel-drive truck, good-natured blue-tick hound.





Templars: Militia Christi

By James Estes, Looking Eagle

The soldier of Christ...is the instrument of God for the punishment of evildoers and for the defense of the just. In fact, when he kills evildoers it is not homicide but malicide, and he is considered the legal executioner for Christ...

— Bernard of Clairvaux, *Liber Ad Milites Templi De Laude Novae Militiae*



Charles Kennerly, long suspected of treason, is dead, and with his passing comes proof of his treachery. A quick but thorough search of his computer revealed the attached document, last modified within the hour before Kennerly's suspected time of death; we disk-doctored the file before the document could be made public.

I have notified the Grand Master of our efforts.

We are currently endeavoring to determine the document's intended recipient, or if it has been viewed by an outsider prior to Kennerly's demise. We pray that our secrets remain safe.

Thank Heaven for Kennerly's weakened heart; it was a sudden heart attack that ended his life before he could complete his betrayal.

—Duty log of Graeme Hopkins, Knight of the Temple; Commander of Security

Dear Geoffrey,

It is with equal measures of pride and shame that I write to you about a fellowship that has remained close to my heart for much of my life: For 30 years I have maintained my vows to protect and preserve the secrecy of the Knights of the Temple of Solomon — or, as we are more commonly known, the Templars. Now, however, I am prepared to abandon these vows and disclose to you the history of this secret Knighthood; the discussion which we began so many years ago in Copenhagen will now be complete.

You have, no doubt, seen much ink spilled regarding the secrets of the Templars. Realize this: All you have read is a lie. That being said, I will now tell you, in the selfsame writing which I just denounced, the truth about the Templars.

Or at least the truth as I have learned it. History is filled with lies, and our experiences may be colored by deception or miscon-

ception. What I pass on to you, I swear, is the truth which I have learned, experienced and believed. What you learn after you read these words may contradict everything I know. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and truth is in the mind of the believer.

— Charles Kennerly

Introduction

Who are the Knights Templar? Although changed by time and circumstance, they are now much as they were centuries ago: a religious Order of men — and men exclusively,

for they do not admit women into their ranks — who are brothers in arms and in faith. They are united by the common bond of their devotion to Christ, and proponents of his “fifth gospel”: no secret biblical book, but the ongoing word of Christ as manifested in their actions. They are His vanguard, preparing the world for the Reckoning (Christ’s Second Coming) by warring on the many enemies of Christ. The Templars are the original Christian militia; do not confuse them with racist bigots sequestered away in mountain retreats. Likewise, neither are they narrow-minded fools like the Society of Leopold, those simple-minded toadies for the Church in Rome.

Background: The Militia Christi



The Templars formed as the fusion of two medieval Christian ideals: monasticism and knighthood. Some would say that such a marriage is already doomed for divorce, for poverty and prayer cannot wed with chivalry and carnage.

The founding of the Templars began in A.D. 1119 when Saracens slaughtered some 300 pilgrims (weakened by their Lenten fast) who were on the road to Jerusalem, and took another 60 prisoner. This outrage led nine knights to take vows to protect pilgrims journeying to the Holy Land.

The Knights’ holy orders enjoined them to poverty, chastity and obedience, and made them regular canons of the Church. Baldwin, the Latin King of Jerusalem, granted the Knights a wing of his own quarters, on the north side of what was once the Temple of Solomon. From this location they took their full title: The Military Order of the Knights of the Temple of Solomon.

These warrior-monks operated for nine years, although little is recorded of their activities until the Council of Troyes in 1128. St. Bernard, abbot of Clairvaux and a Council presider, drafted the Latin *Rule* that defined the Order; this *Rule* would subsequently be modified, expand-

ing from 72 articles to over 600, and it covered every aspect of a Templar’s life, from when to eat to how to dress to what weapons to use. Membership in the Templars swelled, and their fame spread throughout Europe. By the year 1130 — two years after the Council — membership numbered over 300 Knights, and this growth continued. Later, papal bulls granted Templars the ability to build their own chapels free from diocesan control, the permission bury their own dead, and allowed them to keep booty taken from the enemy.

The Templars were regarded as brave and valiant warriors, though analysis of their military history may also show them to be poor tacticians. They were the first to fight the enemy and the last to retreat. (Their own *Rule* forbade retreat, even if outnumbered three to one; this resistance to insurmountable odds is one of the reasons the Templars have survived to the modern day.) The enemy? Saracens, the Muslims, anyone who threatened the Christian territories, citizens or pilgrims of the Holy Land. High on their list were the Infidel sorcerers called the Ahl-i-Batin. This rivalry, which would become significant later, was apparently mutual.

They also maintained Templar houses, or Preceptories, throughout Europe. Ironically, many Knights who were dedicated to defending pilgrims never saw the Holy Land. The core of their militia was a small body of well-trained highly disciplined Knights, surrounded by a retinue of lay-brothers, servants and esquires. The actual number of Templars present in the Holy Land was one Knight to every four retainers; elsewhere, it often equated to one Knight for every nine retainers.

These servants of the Lord were more than just warrior-monks; soon, they became bankers as well. Travelers could deposit funds in one treasury, receive letters of credit, and redeem these chits at any other Templar house. In time, the Knights also became money-lenders, and their clients were more than just pilgrims; kings and nobles drew upon these fiduciary services. The Knights’ prestige rose steadily for over two centuries, as did their revenues and land-holdings; the Templars funded kings, and their famed wealth bred the envy of many powerful individuals.

Lexicon

Grand Master: The Templars’ leader.

House: Informal name for Preceptory.

Knight-Magus: An Awakened Knight.

Rule: The body of literature which expounds upon the Templars’ duties and beliefs.

Preceptory: An official abode for one or more Knights, usually containing a Temple, and administered by a Preceptor.

Reckoning: Christ’s Second Coming, as foretold in the Revelation of St. John the Divine.

Temple: A place in which Templars meet and perform rituals.

Temple, The: A Templar metaphor for lost Christendom.



Rumor and innuendo surrounded the later Templars. Many spoke Arabic, the enemy's language, and became comfortable with foreign customs; this led to gossip of secret alliances with the Assassins, of the adoption of Middle Eastern heresies, and more. Internal dissent over a multitude of issues gradually fractured the Order's stability. With the eventual decline and loss of Latin Jerusalem, the *raison d'être* for the Templars diminished. The Holy Land fell firmly into Muslim hands, and there were no Christian citizens or pilgrims therein to protect. The new motivation for the Templars became the recovery of the Holy Land — but this new goal was not enough to save them, as rumor became accusation.

In 1307, King Philip the Fair ordered the arrest of all Templars throughout France, on the charge of heresy. It was odd for a secular authority to issue such an accusation; it was something which the Inquisition typically managed. Nonetheless, Philip took it into his own hands to deal with the Templars — no doubt because he envied their power and coveted their wealth, though some hint he may have been manipulated further by vampiric “advisors” or grudge-bearing Batini. Over the next seven years, French Templars were arrested, tried, tortured and convicted of heresy. Some were burned at the stake, but most recanted their “heresy” and joined other Orders as penance.

That so many Knights recanted mystified many; these Knights of Christ admitted almost as a whole to sodomy, heresy, devil worship and defiling the name and image of

Christ. Considering the horrific tortures to which they were subjected (and, perhaps, the mental magicks they suffered as well), however, this may not be surprising. In the very end, Jacques de Molay, the last Grand Master of the Knights Templar, recanted his heresy, then actually recanted his confession; his only treason, he claimed, was against the Temple, by admitting a fraudulent guilt. As a relapsed heretic, he was condemned to death, and in 1314, he was burned at the stake.

The French debacle was not repeated throughout Europe. The papacy did dissolve the Templars, however, though its members were allowed to live as penitents in other Orders. And thus they faded from “official” history.

Occult lore speculates further; the Knights supposedly guarded the Holy Grail, became the secret authorities behind the Freemasons, founded the Society of Leopold, or other such claims. Over the centuries, many occult groups insisted they had ties to the stifled Order, or that they had risen from its ashes. Although some of these claims may have some merit, the essential truth was far different.

The Cabal of Pure Thought

The original nine founders included three Christian magi who belonged to the Cabal of Pure Thought — a secret brotherhood of magi which strove to unify all humanity under a single religion. These three men suggested an alliance between the

Cabal and the new Knighthood; all people were pilgrims in this world, and the most dire threats were supernatural in origin. The Cabal and the Templars would be covert allies; while the Cabal strengthened the Templars' image and increased its resources, the Knights acted as the strong-arms of the Cabal. This agreement was mutually beneficial, ensuring that Christianity would be an unchallenged and a safe haven in a dark world.

Another magickal society — which would later be known as the Celestial Chorus — held ties to the Knights as well. Unlike the Cabal, these Christian mysticks often held more eclectic beliefs than the established Church. The Cabal of Pure Thought, entirely Christian, demanded absolute conformity to the teachings of the Church — *One Faith, One Church, One World* was the early motto of the Cabal, much to the chagrin of many Choristers. The groups' differences sparked their share of conflicts over the years, and may have inspired the distrust which weakened the Order.

Unlike the Cabal, the Templars did not focus on the study of magick. Either Knights were gifted with mystickal abilities or they were not, and many notable Knights lacked any such talents whatsoever. Some Knight-Magi also belonged to the Cabal, but for the most part, each group had its own agendas, which occasionally overlapped. Unfortunately, the Cabal's influence widened and intensified. Soon, it became clear that the Templars' "allies" considered themselves the Templar's superiors.

In the Holy Land, the Knights protected pilgrims and battled the Ahl-i-Batin; in Europe, their battle was more

subtle, as they combated the Cabal's targets: pagan magi and sorcerers who promulgated heretical superstitions; vampires who sought to control and manipulate innocent mortals; lycanthropes who terrorized the countryside; and heretics who challenged the voice of the Church — all of whom threatened the safety of Christendom.

Unfortunately, the battle against heretics proved to be the Cabal's undoing. The Cabal decreed the slaughter of the Albigensian heretics in the Languedoc. In 1245, the internal schism between Cabal members and the nascent Choristers broke the Knights' unity and created a gulf between both societies. This transition would soon have grave effects.

The Knights Templar were still a public Order at this time. Even in those intolerant times, the mass slaughter left a poor taste in many Christians' mouths. When the accusations of heresy fell upon the Knights themselves some 60 years later, canny Templars were not surprised; they were powerful, and rich, and had made idols of themselves. It was inevitable that their pedestal would come crashing down beneath them. That the pedestal became the heretic's pyre, however, surprised even the cynics.

Members of the Cabal warned Jacques de Molay before his arrest, and in a private ceremony he abdicated his position and installed a new Grand Master, Henri du Marquet. Henri escaped along with a few other select Knights (who knew many of the Order's secrets), fled to the hidden keep of Montsalvat, and was



joined there by other refugee Templars. Representatives of the Cabal appeared, and proposed a revision of the original alliance. The Templars could still safeguard Christendom, but had to do so in secret, like their allies—and who better to lead the Knights than the Cabal itself? Battered and demoralized, the Order agreed to this proposal. This time, it was clear that the Order was to be little more than the Cabal's strong-arm.

A New Order Riset

In 1325, various factions united under the Order of Reason, seeking to end the hegemony of the Hermetic and Chorus magi. The Cabal of Pure Thought, with their *One Faith, One Church, One World* doctrine, joined the alliance. Soon, they became a strident voice—and a ready sword—for the unification cause. New tactics were decided, new strategies were formulated, and new religious philosophies were nourished. The religious humanism of the Renaissance, designed to counter the superstitions of the Mythic Ages, became a more effective tool for conversion than the fire and the blade.

Although many still thought the Templars dead, they stood at their masters' sides during the Convention of the Ivory Tower. Cabal mages still had some tendrils in the Inquisition, but the Knights were the true soldiers, protecting Christendom from the horrors of the supernatural while striking out at the Order of Reason's enemies. The Templars benefited from the alliance; from the Artificers, they learned the secrets of smelting magickal alloys, the forerunners of modern Primium; soon, Templar Knights were outfitted with the finest armor and weapons.

Then came the Reformation, the heyday of Luther, Zwingly and Calvin. Despite the suspicions of some of the Awakened, none of these Reformers was manipulated by the Order of Reason; their actions were sincere attempts to change the Church. Their actions, though, had repercussions in the Cabal and Templars. While some Knights held to the "One True Church," others became caught up the Reformers' zeal.

The Cabal could no longer argue for One Church, as Christianity splintered into many denominations. Debates rocked the Order over which path to follow—should the Order actively support any Christian church in battle, or would it be wiser to let things go as they would and then take advantage of the obvious victor? Perhaps this strife began the Cabal's movement away from religion—especially as it became clear that there would be no single "victor" in these theological disputes. For centuries, the Cabal struggled over various philosophies, seeking to replace the medieval Christian faith now abandoned. In the meantime, the Order of Reason paid increasingly less attention to the Order of the Temple.

For years, the Templars promulgated their own existence, recruited successors, and continued their mission.

Religious division took its toll, but they adapted. With definitions of orthodoxy so malleable, they could no longer fight heresy. They accepted any who accepted Christ, and limited their struggles to the supernatural—vampires, werewolves, other magi and their like. As the Age of Reason progressed, many Templars wondered what their future in the Order of Reason would be like.

The Judas Edict

The greatest treachery occurred in 1837.

By this point, the Templars were but an afterthought in the Order of Reason's plans. Some members of the Cabal of Pure Thought became discontent with the Cabal's growing irreverence, and came to Montsalvat to reveal a dire plan: The Order of Reason was to abandon religion altogether. Even so, the Knights would be required to unquestioningly serve the Order of Reason as purveyors of enlightenment and opponents of religion—any religion.

This revelation was too much. Over the following weeks, Templars gathered at Montsalvat to plan a course of action. The current Grand-Master, Roland the Third, began preparing for the fight which would break out when the Knights refused the Order's directive, and he laid plans for the Order's future. His contemplation was cut short by the appearance of the forces of the Order of Reason at Montsalvat, weeks before their expected arrival. The Order's legation delivered the pronouncements, now known as the Judas Edict. Roland rejected these demands, and all hell broke loose.

Montsalvat was besieged. The Order of Reason's forces were led by the Templars' former masters the Cabal, and these forces included the outlandish war engines of the Artificers. The Siege of Montsalvat also saw the debut of the Artificers' Hyper-Intelligence Mark III. Clearly the Temple's void was already filled.

Then came the next betrayal. Templar forces included Cabal sympathizers; a triad of these sympathizers magickally arranged safe passage for the Order's forces to Montsalvat's interior, and the battle was over scarcely before it had begun. For the first time in memory, the Knights fled *en masse*, many of them struck down by the death-engines of the Order. Roland the Third perished and the walls of Montsalvat came crashing down.

Over the next few weeks, the Knighthood's survivors covertly gathered, again contemplating their fate. It was clear: Their already-underground Order had to go even further underground. Like Jacques de Molay, Roland had appointed an eleventh-hour successor to lead the Templars after his death. This new Grand-Master, Christopher the Just, rallied the handful of survivors and called upon the Lord for a sign. As a sudden cooling rainstorm washed away the Templar's blood and obscured their escape, the Knights once again took holy vows to continue their mission. This

time, Christopher knew, they would have to be even more discreet than they ever had been, and they could trust no one but their own kind.

The Templars hid for years, devising their new plan and allowing the Cabal to think they had been defeated. Templar revenues, long-since secreted away in financial networks, remained safe. These funds were used to begin rebuilding the Knighthood. Many of their properties were lost, abandoned in the flight from the Order, but the Order survived. Under Christopher the Just, it prepared for the future.

The New Knights Templar

From the ashes of the old, the maxim says, comes the birth of the new; thus did the Temple begin again. The Templars revised the Rule, with the following precepts, called by some "the Edicts of the Just":

- the establishment of a new Christendom;
- the defense of innocents from the horrors of the supernatural;
- the defeat of the Order of Reason — betrayers and promulgators of irreligion;
- the preservation of the Order itself, with secrecy as a paramount directive.

Some Templars considered joining the Society of Leopold, but Christopher's Seneschal-at-Arms, a Calvinist, prevailed upon him to veto this proposal. Others proposed approaching the Celestial Chorus, which also sought a theocentric society, as a valuable ally against the Order of Reason. This suggestion was also abandoned — few Templars trusted the Chorus' assortment of pagan and Infidel allies, and even this motley assortment had fallen as badly before the Technocrats as had the Templars themselves.

In spite of all, the brotherhood restructured, and was renewed. No longer would the Templars serve anyone but the Lord. Only He would master their swords and faith. An apocalyptic tenor slowly developed under Christopher's administration; the final betrayal and the fall of Montsalvat came to be seen as a sign and rallying call. The old

Christendom was gone, and the Templars were to pave the way for a new one. The Order of Reason, once the hope of humanity, was actually the Whore of Babylon, and her bastard children were skepticism, irreverence and atheism. The weapon of disbelief would render the innocent helpless against the forces of Hell.

The Templars took on new methods of achieving their goals. Their famed wealth became a covert fund to Christian institutions — universities, think-tanks and publishing houses — and supported sympathetic political candidates or caucuses. The new Knights became warriors on both the intellectual and physical fronts; rather than replacing the guns and swords, they added to their arsenal. The old weapons were ill-suited to this new world. The renewed Knights worked through inspiration, manipulation and occasional force. Conflicts with the Order of Reason (now transformed by the modern age into the Technocracy) and with the supernatural were violent and swift, and the Knights proved that they remained true warriors. By the time the Technocracy suspected that the Templars still existed, they had become shadow-warriors, little more than rumors to most.

This transformation was not entirely beneficial. In their early days, an openness prevailed within the Order. A marked change followed the Judas Edict and its ensuing paranoia. The administration of Christopher the Just was succeeded by the more covert ways of Phillip the Subtle (called by some "Phillip the Sneak," though never openly). In time, the Knights resembled their previous masters in the Cabal of Pure Thought, manipulating both Knights and outsiders with equal skill. As the Templars retreated from society, their leaders retreated from their own people. The hierarchy was still clear, but decisions often were not. Through time, an air of privileged secrecy became the Order's hallmark.

This is not to say that they Templars "became the evil they fought" — this would be cliché, a *reductio ad absurdum*, and a misrepresentation of their Knighthood. But an air of distrust seems necessary when one is at war, and that distrust deepens when the war is secret. For survival's sake, the Templars are *always* engaged in a secret war. Thus, the Knights always distrust, and they do so mightily. Many of them are God-loving Christians with only the noblest goals at heart. Too many of them keenly aware of the horrors that are to come.

Culture



The Templars epitomize the warrior-monks. Unlike mere "Crusaders," a Templar merges knight and monastic into a true soldier of the Faith. Such Men of God — armed with prayer, cunning and physical might — protect humanity from the myriad threats posed by the supernatural world. Although they come directly through the lineage of the medieval Templars, both time and circumstance have forced their society to change.

The Templars are no longer exclusively Catholic, but consider themselves guardians of a universal Christian Church. Many of the Order's early prohibitions have been abandoned or modified, as times have changed. For example, modern Templars no longer abhor chess or daily bathing. Although they remain common, the old vows of celibacy have been eased; more than one Knight has married and raised children, though such Knights rarely have a normal domestic existence. Most live double-lives, sheltering their true calling from their loved ones. Some Knights



actually raise their children with the hopes of initiating them and continuing the Templar tradition. Many family groups have retreated into the wilderness and secured sanctuaries where they await the coming Apocalypse.

Knights can no longer live together as they once did, supported by many servants; most Templars live apart, congregating only rarely in larger gatherings on more formal occasions. Almost every large city has hidden Temples, where members meet, pray and, if necessary, hide. Larger cities (such as New York or London) have Preceptories associated with their Temples — buildings offering living and research-space for a few resident brothers. In spite of their prodigious ability to adapt to changing times, these Knights still cling tenaciously to antiquated traditions and customs. Many of their Preceptories and Temples are located in remote estates and ancient keeps. The main Preceptory is hidden in London.

Beliefs

Knights frequently refer to “The Temple,” referring not to any of their safe-houses, but to the original Temple of Solomon. This Temple, destroyed in A.D. 70, is the ideological crux of Templar belief and action; it represents the lost Christendom which the Knights defended and fought for. Many Templars believe that the Temple of Solomon shall be restored upon the establishment of a new

— and true — Christendom on Earth, and its restoration shall herald the Reconciliation.

The Templars, despite their previous association with the Order of Reason, do not take part in the Ascension War. Although their warfare is ideological, reality's command is not their goal. They feel that they already have God at their side, and He is, ultimately, the final arbitrator of what is and is not real. These days, their tactics are more subtle and far-reaching than simple sword-thrusts. Where once the Templars limited their struggle to the battlefield, they now pursue their agenda in courts, universities, parliaments and other vehicles for societal change. Many a politician advances the Templar cause without realizing it. Money has many friends.

Templars come from many denominations within the Christian tradition, and believe that they preserve the Christian Church in anticipation of the Second Coming. Assuming that all Knights are either conservative Christian fundamentalists or high-church Catholic traditionalists would be foolish. The Order represents all spectrums of Christianity, and its Knights must simply agree on the primacy and sacred truth of the Gospels. Beyond that, room for interpretation exists, although doctrinal argument is expressly forbidden — transubstantiation versus consubstantiation, works versus faith, and other metaphysical nuances are best left to the theologians, not warriors. Moral



standards, however, are quite clear, and accusations of potential immorality—rampant fornication, idolatry, thievery or murder (except in the cause of the Order)—bring serious criticism from the Order's leaders.

Magick Style

Templar magick is deeply rooted in Christian ritual and tradition. While spontaneous miracles have their place, most Templars favor ritual magick derivative from Christian liturgy. The Templars are not a magickal society, and do not have official interpretations of the magickal Spheres (though for game purposes, their Effects still function this way). Those who question the origins of magick view the Spheres as Emanations of the Divine. Or of the Infernal.

Other Knights study some measure of hedge magic, similar to the Theurgic arts of the Inquisition. Few make any distinction between "true" or "hedge" magicks, and view them all as aspects of the same powers. Most Templars, regardless of magical or mystickal talents, possess the True Faith Numina to some degree. (Hedge magic and True Faith are more thoroughly discussed in *Ascension's Right Hand*, a **Mage** supplement; Theurgy and Faith are fully covered in *The Inquisition*, a **Vampire** sourcebook.)

Spheres

Awakened Knights traditionally focus on the elemental Forces, as manifestations of the Wrath of God; the Cabal of Pure Thought encouraged and nurtured such emphasis in the Templars' early days, when they acted as the Cabal's shocktroops. After the fall of Montsalvat, Knights began studying mental magicks—once the domain of their masters—to enhance their covert operations and defend themselves against the Cabal.

The Templars have found that the old ways rarely work as well as they used to. Gone are the days when Templars could burst into a room, swords swinging or magickal fires cascading. Thus, modern Knights explore more secretive magicks—Life, Entropy, Mind and Matter—to subtly twist an opponent's mind and neutralize threats to the Temple.

Common Foci

The following foci are traditional, though not exclusive, among Awakened Knights:

- **Bible:** The Bible—whether a pocket edition or an enormous tome—is the Word of God, and a just means for focusing His powers.
- **Altar:** Altars are typically consecrated architectural features and are usually not portable without major effort. Ritual magicks, however, often include sanctified altars or other holy places.

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• **Breviary/Hymnal:** Such books may be of any denomination, from Greek Orthodox to Roman Catholic to Methodist. A Knight will use a book appropriate to his personal beliefs.

• **Cross or Crucifix:** This almost goes without saying.

• **Flagellation (Self):** Self-flagellation is a superior, if painful, method of liberating the spirit from the body.

• **Guns:** Although such weapons are considered crude tools when compared to swords or lances, any modern Templar recognizes the practical aspects of firearms. Almost exclusively used for Forces Effects.

• **Incense:** Burning incense — particularly in a thurible — is a popular focus among more ritualistic Templars.

• **Knight's Mantle:** The white mantle with a red cross has been a symbol of the Templars for generations.

• **Monstrance:** This metal receptacle for holding the Eucharistic wafer is typically used in churches on special occasions.

• **Shields:** Shields — both classical models and more symbolic modern versions — make popular protective foci, insignias and Talismans. One traditional model sprouts spikes and blades to slash opponents (difficulty 7, Str. + 2) who get too close.

• **Sword:** The sword is many things to a Templar — a ceremonial object, a ritual focus and a weapon. (The cruciform shape of a common European sword is obvious, and such representation is often played upon in Templar ritual.) A wealth of tales and rituals revolve around the sacred blades, which are traditionally sanctified to Christ before use. Although maces and lances have similar significance, no weapon approaches the sword's favor and symbolism.

Organization

The Templars are an unabashedly and unconditionally hierarchic organization; strict obedience to one's superiors is expected. This feature of the Order has remained unchanged since its inception. Templar hierarchy is made up of various levels:

• **Knight-Aspirant:** Those being prepared for Knighthood.

• **Knight-Brother:** The lowest active grade of Knighthood, and the highest rank which many Knights attain.

• **Sergeant of the Convent:** This is now merely an honorary title referring to an exalted Templar.

• **Preceptor:** Preceptors are Knights given command of a Preceptory and its surrounding environs.

• **Marshal:** The administrative leaders of the Order; smaller countries might have a single Marshal, while larger nations will be divided into various districts, each with its own Marshal. Particularly small neighboring countries, or those deemed irrelevant by the Order, may be grouped together under one Marshal.

• **Seneschal:** Chosen from among the ranks of Marshals are the nine Seneschals — the Grand-Master's advisory cabinet. Some Seneschals are given more consistent long-term duties, such as the Commander of Security, who maintains the Order's internal security, the Commander of Arms, responsible for coordinating strikes, and the Commander of the Treasury, whose duties are self-evident.

• **Grand-Master:** The highest-ranking Knight, whose word is absolute, and position, lifelong. Each Grand-Master chooses his own successor; upon a new Grand-Master's installation, he must immediately designate an heir. Only a unanimous vote by all nine Seneschals can remove a Grand-Master from office, and this would only be attempted in desperate situations.

By internal accounts, some 1500 Templars exist worldwide. Few of these (perhaps 70 in all) have Awakened, but all remain capable, competent warriors. Templar society breaks down into geographic divisions; some regions (the U.S.A.) may have more Knights or Preceptories than others (like Bangladesh). Communication within the New Templars is extremely secretive: Few Knight-Brothers are aware of the activities outside their jurisdiction except through the discretion of their Seneschal. Most Templars believe the Order's membership to range from a few score to a few hundred, but only the Grand-Master and his Seneschals are aware of exact demographics and statistics.

Wealth is still one of the hallmarks of the Order. The French Templars who escaped Philip the Fair's arrests secreted much of their treasure out of France, and the Order of Reason was equally frustrated by its inability to locate the Templar's funds after sacking Montsalvat. This treasury has grown immeasurably through wise investment. Although new Knights no longer sign over their property to the Order, they must tithe 10% of their income to the Templars. Assets are hidden in many global financial networks, routed through front companies, hidden in genuine business ventures, or simply buried in secret vaults.

The original Knights were misogynists; the new Knights are somewhat improved, but still refuse to admit women into their ranks. Every few years, the dispute springs up that membership could easily double if women were initiated. Templar leadership summarily ignores such arguments (often citing biblical injunction or "morale complications"), even in the face of reports about the courage some female Inquisitors or Choristers display against the Infernal. Liberally minded Templars chafe under these strictures, but are tradition-bound to obey them; more radically inclined Templars have recently suggested simply shunning tradition and initiating women, thus forcing the issue upon the Order.

Initiation

Templars cannot rely upon their old reputation to attract new Knights, since for all practical purposes they no longer exist. Instead, they must carefully recruit new mem-

bers through cultivated relationships. An invitation to join is only extended after the Order is convinced that the recipient agrees with the Templars' goals, and will accept. A commitment to Christ, a shared vision of the spiritual poverty of the modern world, and the crusading spirit are required attributes. The potential Templar must be ready to fight for Christ on the intellectual or the physical front; savvy public-administrators are sought as eagerly as willworkers or strong-arms.

The Knight's ritualistic initiation is remarkably unchanged from earlier days. Days of fasting, prayer and indoctrination precede the ceremony itself. Garbed in a white mantle (now worn over a tuxedo), each Knight-Aspirant is sponsored by a Templar who vouchsafes for his charge. Stern vows of blood and soul loyalty are demanded and given. The officiating Knight, usually a Preceptor, offers an ancient broadsword (representing both the cross of faith and the Knight's weapon) which the Knight-Aspirant must kiss while making vows of obedience to the Order. At the ritual's conclusion, the sponsor presents the new Knight-Brother his ritual sword (or other melee weapon) and a new mantle, white with a red cross emblazoned on it.

Not every advancement in rank is recognized through ritual, but major hallmarks — the positions of Marshal and Grand-Master — are recognized by additional rites. The Grand-Master is presented with a ceremonial broken lance, a reminder of the glories of the past and the betrayal at Montsalvat.

Stereotypes

Traditions: This gathering of fools is a useful tool against the Technocracy. They cannot be our allies, for we still consider their many heresies to be threats to humanity. We share a common history with the Celestial Chorus, and they prove to be a good training ground for some of our members, but their liberal ecumenism is folly.

Technocracy: Judases all, we dream of their downfall. We still bleed from the many treacheries of the New World Order, which we count among our greatest foes. The knife they plunged into our back shall be the blade that slits their own throats.

Marauders: Madmen, the embodiments of the dangers endemic to the Mythic Ages.

Nephandi: Servants of the Anti-Christ, spawns of Satan, harbingers of the Ancient Enemy. They are blood to be spilled in Christ's name.

Others: The world runs screaming with the hordes of Hell — werewolves, vampires, demons and other pit-spawn. Save the innocent and avoid the Infernal; though our arm is strengthened by God, we have not the numbers to prevail — yet.

Abandoning the Order is not tolerated. Past betrayals and religious conviction place anyone who forsakes his vows into the Whore of Babylon's bed. To protect themselves (and avenge their honor), the Templars exact a death-order on any man who leaves their company. Once in, you're in for life.

Acolytes

Recruits are rarely sought on the basis of magickal leanings, although those who demonstrate such talents are highly valued. The Order does realize how much strength can be drawn from such members; conservative members of the Celestial Chorus and Theurgists of the Society of Leopold are monitored and considered for possible Knighthood.

Potential willworkers or hedge magicians with Christian bents can find mentors within the Knighthood to instruct them on their paths, though such "sponsorship" is often covert. Likewise, Preceptory libraries are filled with occult tomes taken as booty from raids on the supernatural. Although no library can compare to the lost library of Montsalvat, many resourceful students still endeavor to glean the ancient secrets buried within.

Otherwise, the Templars do not differentiate their members on the basis of magickal abilities. A Templar is recognized by his accomplishments and his devotion to the calling of Knighthood, not by his mastery of miracles.

Concepts

• **Broker** — more useful (and manageable) as a supporting character than a player character, brokers are consummate sources of whatever is necessary — funding, equipment or information — all courtesy of the Temple. These folks are prone to call in the occasional favor in return for their services.

• **Knight-Errant** — the epitome of Knighthood come to fruition in the modern day, Knights-Errant are Templars who actually seek conflict and adventure. These souls often forsake the Templars' more ideological motives and manipulative tactics in favor of glory and honor.

• **Rogue-Knight** — a Knight who has abandoned the Templars for any reason (dispute over their motives, discovery of a horrid secret, etc.) and who now must live on the run.

Common Magicks



Thief in the Night (• Correspondence, • Forces, or •• Entropy, •• Forces, • Correspondence)

This simple Effect developed to counter electronic alarm systems. A Templar using this Effect can detect the localized presence of electronic security systems of any sort, determine their effects, and sense how they are activated. For example, a Knight-magus

breaking into a building casts this spell to determine that the first floor is rigged with motion-sensor alarms, and to figure out where the sensors are located. Higher-level versions of this Effect can render such systems ineffective.

[Correspondence senses scan the surrounding area while Forces senses detect the alarms. A similar variant using Matter instead of Forces can detect mechanical traps. Entropy-related versions disrupt the currents which supply the monitors (though this in itself may require some systems). Using this Effect successfully often requires a Wits + Technology to counter the alarms, although Streetwise, Computer or Traps may be more appropriate for some systems. The difficulty may range from 6 for simple light-beams or electric locks, to 10 for layered grids or magically enhanced systems.]

Spatial Sheath (•• Correspondence)

The days of openly bearing swords are long since past, but this Effect circumvents the problem. Cast upon a scabbard, it transports all but the scabbard's opening into a nether-space. A sword blade entering the scabbard may effectively disappear, leaving only the hilt in view — something more easily concealed with minimal covering like a leather jacket. Actually *drawing* a weapon from invisible space should *not* be done directly in front of the un-Awakened!

[People or places sensitive to magical emanations will be able to sense this Effect in action. Any metal portion of the blade (like the hilt) will still register to metal detectors and practiced searches.]

Recant (•• Entropy, •• Mind)

Heresy is a dangerous thing; it begins as a glimmering of doubt, a slight perception that maybe things are different than we were taught. From there it develops and grows into something greater, with layer upon layer of argument and justification further enforcing the original error.

Recant nips heresy in the bud. Full-fledged heretics, or those with long-standing beliefs, will be immune to this Effect, but those who simply flirt with the heresy will, after judicious use of this rote (in conjunction with conversation or debate), decide that their original heretical glimmering was false.

[This rote does not determine absolute Truth; the Knight himself determines what "heresy" is, and uses the Effect to dismantle the subject's new creed. Far from true mind control, this Effect simply channels the subject's doubts into more "agreeable" modes. Doing so requires some sort of convincing argument from the Knight, followed by more persuasive magical tactics.]

Quo Vadis? (Whither Goest Thou?) (•• Correspondence, •• Mind, •• Time)

Templars use this rote when trailing someone; the rote gives the Knight a good approximation of the suspect's intended route, and how successfully it will be followed. A Templar could determine that the suspect will probably stop at a particular coffee shop, stay there for 30 minutes, catch the bus to a rendezvous, and arrive 15 minutes late. It

will not anticipate sudden changes of plan or unanticipated events (such as chance meetings or bus accidents) — but it does make following an individual that much easier.

[By reading mental impulses (Mind) and connecting them with the route followed (Correspondence) and time taken (Time), the Templar may anticipate his target's arrival. The longer and more complicated the route, the more successes he must garner to do it.]

Disk-Doctor (••• Entropy, •• Mind, • Forces)

This rote was developed in the mid-1970s by a Templar systems-programmer. With it, a Knight may quickly scan a computer's storage media — hard-drive, CD-ROM, tape backup, etc. — for any given data. Such files can be systematically purged. This rote is normally used to search and destroy files that refer to the Templars — in word or *idea* — but it may be used for whatever key concepts or terms the magus seeks.

[Successfully **Disk-Doctoring** requires at least one dot in Computers, and may demand a Wits + Computers roll to catch all references to the idea. This Effect does more than simply delete the file (an act easily countered with the right software); it removes its existence from the medium in question, replacing it with blank space, as though the files never existed. The larger the medium, the longer it takes for the process to occur — anywhere from a few seconds for a floppy disk to an hour or more for a mainframe. The larger the data store, the higher the difficulty.]

Talismans

•• Endless Ammo Clips

Arete 2, Quintessence 10, Cost 4

Templars discovered long ago what an asset Endless Clips were in a firefight, giving "Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition" a whole new meaning. These magically converted standard sidearm clips hold 50 bullets at one time; by comparison, nonmagical clips for heavy pistols hold around seven bullets.

When the gun is fired, the user rolls the Clip's "Arete" against difficulty 5; if he fails, the Clip jams and cannot be used that scene. Damage is normal for the gun — the Clip itself just supplies ammo. These Talismans cannot be fired endlessly: the "expanded space" within the Clip Correspondence-links the Talisman to an ammo store elsewhere (which must be prepared ahead of time). Each shot depletes the store, which typically maxes out at 50. After this point, the ammo store must be replenished, though another Clip with a separate store may be used.

Endless Clips are particularly popular among nonmagi Templars; although unable to cast magicks themselves, they can take advantage of the Clips' benefits.

••• Samson's Gauntlets

Arete 3, Quintessence 15, Cost 6

These Talismans, once iron gauntlets (some of which survive in ancient magick caches), are now made to resemble normal gloves. Obviously, they're rare and made to

size. Assuming they fit, these Gauntlets amplify the wearer's natural Strength by one point per success rolled (difficulty 6); this Strength can exceed normal mortal limits, and lasts for roughly 10 minutes of game time. Each use expends one point of Quintessence. Some versions, even more uncommon (•••••, Arete 5), can cause aggravated damage by spending an additional Quintessence point.

••••• **Primum Blade**

Arete 5, Quintessence 25, Cost 10

The Templars' armory of Primum melee weapons has long been depleted through time and circumstance; few Templars possess the ability to smelt this gold-silver magical alloy, an act for which the Artificers (now Iteration X) were necessary. (For more details on the Matter 5 Effect **Smelt Primum** — which requires a nuclear furnace as a focus — consult **Technocracy: Iteration X.**)

These highly valued blades come in many types, from katanas to claymores, though broadswords are the most common. Primum swords inflict aggravated damage (which can be soaked), are incredibly light-weight, noncorrosive and resilient, and roll their "Arete" as countermagic to protect their wielder. Some Primum weapons may have other Effects woven into them — the ability to heal, cast light, etc. — but such blades are even rarer. Primum weapons without additional Effects do not have stored Quintessence.

Primum blades' abilities are inherent in their making and do not require an expenditure of Quintessence. They can also be used by the un-Awakened, although additional magical Effects can only be used by Awakened Knights.

Companion: Comes Caelestis (Divine Comrades) (Cost: 2)

Traditional lore states that the servants of the Lord — angels — occasionally manifest in the higher animals as companions to His chosen servants. While such pagan creatures as unicorns or pegasi are clearly unsuitable for Templars, many holy Knights-Magus have been blessed with a horse, dog, hawk or even lion with uncanny intelligence, miraculous abilities and remarkable beauty. Such companions are rare, of course, and their Divine natures remain hidden from jealous eyes (and the Unbelief effect of Paradox) unless absolutely necessary.

Especially reverent Knights who have performed great and worthy services to the Lord may be greeted by unusually intelligent and devoted animal companions on their next quests. The Divine companion then remains close by the

Templar as often as possible; so long as it's treated respectfully and gratefully, and so long as the Knight remains pure in his devotion to God, the companion will help the Knight-Magus any way it can, unto death. While it's said one should never look a gift horse in the mouth, some Templars remain suspicious when such animals appear and offer their services. Who knows what infernal origins a companion might actually have? Is its presence a gift, a temptation, or a plot for corruption? Only the Storyteller knows....

Attributes (those in parentheses are for horses): Strength 4 (7), Dexterity 3, Stamina 3 (7), Charisma 3, Manipulation 1, Appearance 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 2, Awareness 2, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Intuition 4, Stealth 3, Survival 4

Spheres: none

Willpower: 5

Health Levels: OK x 3, -1 x 2, -2, -3, -5, Incapacitated.

Armor Rating: 2

Attacks/Powers: **Dog:** bite (6 dice), +2 Perception; **Hawk:** talons (5 dice), flight (15 yards/turn); **Horse:** bite/trample (8 dice), running (40 yards/turn); (sadly, lions are almost unheard of these days). Rare companions exhibit strange powers like empathy or telepathy, healing, or a burning aura of light in extreme situations. These unusual consors should be built and run by the rules in *Ascension's Right Hand*.



Storyteller Ideas

- **Montsalvat:** Early in their history, the Templars raided a Hermetic magus' keep at the Cabal's bequest. Hidden high in the Pyrenees, this keep was already ancient, its origins lost to history. The Templars kept this fortress as booty per their *Rule*, and the Cabal, eager to appease the zealous warrior-monks, acquiesced. The Knights chose this mountain fortress as their true home, free from the prying eyes of kings and priests, and christened it Montsalvat.

The Templars hid Montsalvat's existence from all outside the Order, and even from some within it; to many, it became a fable. When the Knighthood went underground after its apparent dissolution, they converged at Montsalvat, and it became their headquarters.

Montsalvat was lost in the 19th century, and its loss has haunted the Templars ever since. It was destroyed after the Judas Edict, but later visits showed the site empty, as if no fortress had ever existed. The true ruins of Montsalvat were taken from our world to another Realm by parties unknown, and may even have been rebuilt. Where this Realm exists, and whether it can be reached, remains a secret, but many Templars have since quested for their lost home. They have never returned.

- **The Lance of Montsalvat:** In the 13th century, a Knight-Magus in the Holy Land discovered an ancient spear rich in mystick power. He brought it to Montsalvat, where Knights gathered to study its nature. Some believed it to be the lance of Longinus, who pierced the side of Christ during the crucifixion, but others disagreed. Studies continued, and it was used in the field as part of these studies.

In time, the Templars attributed many powers to the Lance — that its bearer was strongly immune to harmful magicks, its touch was anathema to the Infernal (which, according to Templars, includes vampires and werewolves), and that it could heal great wounds. The Knights called it simply the Lance of Montsalvat, and it was a prized possession of the Order.

It became a special honor to bear the Lance, and soon only the most honored could bear it (for example, the Lance-Knight, a champion chosen after many tests and trials, who would wield the Lance on special occasions). Raphael Sponza, an aide to Roland III, was the last Lance-Knight, and he was slain during the siege of Montsalvat. The Lance was last seen beneath his broken body as the ceiling of the great Keep of Montsalvat came crashing down upon him.

- **Hidden Lives, Public Lies:** Participation in a secret society has its difficulties, particularly when the society in

question becomes increasingly paranoid. One difficulty is reconciling the duties of Knighthood with "real life."

Once a Templar, always a Templar — one can never truly abandon the duties of Knighthood. Retirement is certainly possible, as a Knight step downs from active duty; however, he is still bound to the Templars' vows, and knows that at any given point he might be called upon by the Grand-Master.

The Order keeps retired Knights under regular surveillance, for fear that inactivity will lead to indiscretion. Any Knight suspected of treachery (or even just "loose lips") may face serious reprisal — depending on the extent of the crime — from mere reprimand to much harsher punishment.

Some Templars are called upon to make a weighty sacrifice: They must die to society in order to work unhindered by the constraints of the public. Extreme situations may find a Templar's activities compromising the Order's security — his "death" may help lead pursuers astray, or distract those coming close to the Templars' secrets, while at the same time allowing him more mobility in the future. Such Knights are typically well-taken care of, living at a Preceptory in a new city, under an assumed identity, and often receiving financial assistance from the Order. In the days before the Judas Edict, these Knights would live and work at Montsalvat; this, sadly, is no longer possible.

- **Let Slip the Dogs of War:** The Templars are one of the most hidden of many groups in the secretive World of Darkness (which is seemingly overrun with cults, secret societies, and covert agendas to begin with. See *World of Darkness*.) Templar chronicles should be about secrecy and sincere faith. Anyone claiming to be a real Templar is most likely an occult "wannabe"; true Templars act in the shadows of society.

Most current Knights restrict their conflicts to the ideological battlefield; the days of Phillip the Subtle influence the modern Templars more than the headstrong ways of Roland III and his predecessors. The Order has not abandoned its military roots, however, and some bands of Knights still concentrate on physical warfare with the Technocracy or the forces of darkness. Such warriors do not engage in random "witch-hunts," but aim their strikes against the most efficacious targets — those who directly threaten the Order or who pose the most long-term damage to society. These Templar strike-forces typically work in conjunction with the ideologues in determining the most effective targets.

Templar Knight-Magus

*The peace of heaven is theirs that lift their swords
in such a just and charitable war.*

— William Shakespeare, *King John*

Quote: *The laws of man are subordinate to the laws of God.*

Prelude: Where did it all go wrong?

This was the question you asked in your youth. When did society start to crumble? When did meaning vanish from the world, and hope disappear? You remember childhood, reading the tales of Charlemagne's peers, Arthur and his knights, and the Quest for the Grail; you wondered why the heroes of today only kicked ass, and never fought for anything higher.

It had to have been some time after the Middle Ages, and after the Renaissance; at some point, disbelief replaced belief, and despair replaced hope. The chaos began with the loss of Christendom — even if it seemed to be a world of disparate nations, it was still a single society.

A chance holiday meeting with a wealthy uncle who had common interests started a close correspondence which lasted many years. What began as a summer visit became a longer stay; you became part of your uncle's intellectual circle, a circle which, after much secret discussion, selected you as an eager Knight-Aspirant. Another Knight soon recognized your inherent mystickal talent, and almost immediately after initiation began your magickal tutelage.

Concept: You feed both body and mind; if you're not working out at the gym, you're at home or at the library, reading. Unfortunately, experience has shown that the ancient glories of legend are accompanied by the elder horrors of legend, and the good fight has begun.

Roleplaying Tips: Trust in the greater good. There are always things greater than our mere selves, so carry this conviction with you and pass it along as needed. Like Templars of the past, show courage in battle, but temper it with conventional good sense. Yearn for olden days, and uphold the Christian faith however possible.

Magick: Your magick, like that of most Templars, is clothed in Christian ritual, enriched by years of study of medieval lore.

Equipment: Glock 17 (and a shoulder holster), Endless Ammo Clip, ceremonial long sword, commando knife.





JAMES DALY 1996

Wu-Keng: The Night Watch

By Derek Percy

*O divine art of subtlety and secrecy!
Through you we learn to be invisible... and
hence we can hold the enemy's fate in our hands.*

— Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

To remain whole, be twisted.

— Taoist assertion



Bobby relaxed in his master's sanctum, his scarlet robes sweeping across the couch. The only sound to be heard came from dust motes colliding into each other as they settled in his wake.

His real name was Chuang, though he was raised as Bobby to the other kids in his apartment building. His parents aspired to be more Western and hoped he would eventually move to America... but that was a long time ago, when Hong Kong

offered no mystery for him.

Since discovering his magick, he'd learned how many mysteries remained in Hong Kong — one of which, he began to suspect, was creeping up behind him using magick of its own. The

figure was a gray wash in Bobby's mind, exuding a contradictory sense of balance and emptiness, perfectly yin and yang while at the same time neither.

"I didn't dare to hope one of your kind would grace my master's library with an appearance while I was present," Bobby whispered.

The figure stopped, so quickly that the young man could almost hear air rushing into the sudden vacuum created by the presence.

"You demon-tools were supposed to have been destroyed long ago; even our greatest scholars have stopped keeping track of you," he cast into the silence.

"We are... honored... that you take notice of our comings and goings," said a soft voice. The invisible intruder stepped slowly

toward the back of Chuang's chair, its feet making solid yet muffled contact with the floor as though wrapped in layer after layer of thick gauze.

"You see," the young Wu Lung mage said, trying to exude contemptuous calm, "the Nung Wu are like cockroaches, easy to crush underfoot, but difficult to spot in the cracks and the darkness. You are a stubborn people."

Chuang raced through his head for a spell, but he panicked. Better to reach up his silken sleeve for the dagger hidden there.

"We prefer the word tenacious," rasped the place where no one was.

And then it struck.

Introduction

The Wu symbolized the pagan religions of ancient China. They were the holders of wisdom, interceding in spiritual matters for peasants and rulers alike. Up until 3,000 years ago, every village was home to a Wu. Invested with power by the spirits themselves, they were respected and cared for by the villagers they served.

Lexicon

A-ma: Mentor; literally "mother."

A-ji: A Wu-Keng's superior, but not her mentor; literally, "aunt."

Chou yan: Collectively or individually, the six surviving Wu who began the *Sam chin* ak pact; literally "smoke," these sorcerers are among the most powerful in existence.

Chu-sheng: Awakening.

Feng-tu: The netherworld of the dead, what the Wu Lung call the Dark Kingdom of Jade. Its capitol is T'ai-yin, in the far north, where the Princes of the Slain hold court.

Juk ak: The spirit to whom a Wu-Keng has vowed obedience wears a jade bracelet into which is inscribed the mage's name. A Wu-Keng uses this term to refer to both the bracelet itself and the specific spirit for whom he works; literally, "jade bracelet."

Kei tsip si: A Wu-Keng who controls his Ngan through sexual means; literally, "concubine."

Mui: Wu-Keng of equal or lesser status than the speaker — no one is mui in more than one Ng; literally, "girl."

Ng: The five-person cabal that a Wu-Keng belongs to, consisting of one a-ma, one mui, and three a-ji; a Wu-Keng may belong to several Ng.

Ngan: The person to whom a Wu-Keng mage has been assigned to attach himself; literally, "eye."

Sam chin ak: What the Wu-Keng call their 3,000-year period of servitude, referring to the 3,000 bracelets (representing the souls of individual Wu-Keng mages) which the demons will own before granting the magi their freedom.

Te: Latent power, used to refer to Avatars.

Outlawed by the secular regime of the Chou dynasty around 1000 B.C., many Wu avoided death by pursuing scholarly endeavors while others steadfastly remained in the villages of their ancestors. Of those who remained true to their calling, a handful aspired to restore the greatness of their past. Banding together to form the Wu-Keng, the Night Watch, these shamans guarded the secrets of the spirits and prepared for the time when their wisdom would again be needed. To insure success, the Wu-Keng made a deal with the ancient spirits of Feng-tu, the land of the dead, who had guided their existence since before recorded history. These spirits, demons by the definition of modern magi, promised that after three millennia of devout service, they would renew the power and authority of the Wu over the affairs of man. There was a catch, of course: The humble magi would have to stay hidden behind the scenes of civilization, operating their magick in only the most subtle of ways so as to be serviceable tools for their heartless masters.

Though they survived, the Wu-Keng suffered tremendously under the watch of their patrons. During their most memorable trial, imprisonment at the hands of the cruel First Emperor, around 220 B.C., the Wu-Keng's otherworldly masters disguised them as women and helped them escape. As payment and punishment, the ancient spirits ordered the Wu-Keng to maintain their female disguises through the remainder of their servitude. With feminine yin forces to balance the aggression of the masculine yang, they became almost invisible against the background noise of the world's magick.

Today, the Wu-Keng still keep their conspiracy silent, subtle, almost beyond notice. Little is known about them — until recently, they were thought of as little more than a loose collection of beggars who had no clue about what real power was.

Today's Wu-Keng, based out of Hong Kong, are rapidly becoming the most talked-about Crafters in magical circles, despite the lack of any hard evidence about their existence. They appear to have positioned themselves as the true masters behind many figures of power, both religious and secular. While only rarely leaving Hong Kong, the Wu-Keng have built a nearly invisible web of power across the Pacific Rim, though at times they seem deathly afraid of mainland China.

No one knows what the Wu-Keng or their masters really want. The Traditions and Technocracy only know one thing for sure: the Wu-Keng are diabolists who still kowtow to the same demons their ancestors colluded with three millennia ago. Their pretense of being humble peasant women, scratching out a living through diabolical servitude, doesn't change the fact that they've given their freedom and their souls to inhuman monstrosities in exchange for power and the promise of future glory. And just because they don't know — or refuse to admit — that their souls are damned doesn't change anything.



In its defense, Wu-Keng nature is certainly in keeping with the country that bred it. China is ancient and has seen many ages. To the Wu-Keng, the struggle between the Technocracy and the Traditions is merely one story in a long and epic saga of the history of magick across the Earth. Yet, it's a struggle that the Wu-Keng conceitedly think they shall win as the final millennium of their indentured servitude comes to an end within the next decade.

Background: A Hard Bargain



As organized magick edged out peasant Arts, powerful sorcerers enslaved the villages of ancient China, shackling the resident spirits and disgracing or destroying the old sages. Desperate, a group of Wu made a pact with local demons to act as obedient servants for 3,000 years, in return for restoration of their honorable position in Chinese culture. The agreement between Ku of the Thousand Tears, Lord of the Slain, who spoke for the Feng-tu, and these humble Wu was made in a forest outside of the tomb of the legendary Yellow Emperor. The Wu who agreed to the deal convinced themselves that their new masters were not evil, and for 3,000 years have lied to themselves and their initiates.

Each mage swore fealty to one of the 50 local spirits. The spirits fashioned beautiful jade bracelets from the obedient mages' souls, inscribing a single servant's name into each one. The Wu-Keng call such a symbol of ownership, and any being who owns one, a *juk ak*. The spirits that control the Wu-Keng may take many forms, but a mage will always recognize his master when he sees the jade bracelet that bears his name and that resonates with the energies of his soul.

The spirit who arbitrated the ancient pact prophesied what the three millennia would bring for the Wu-Keng if they survived. The first, he said, would be Secrecy, during which the Wu would remove themselves from the world of men. The Wu-Keng would cast aside any aspirations for their former glory and forge no plans for action, spending the first thousand years in reclusive soul-searching. The second millennium would be Silence, when the Wu-Keng would be allowed to again involve themselves with civilization, but only to serve their masters. The third millennium would be Motion, when the entrenched forces of the Wu-Keng still could not make their presence known, but would be allowed to act on their own in the affairs of humanity in preparation for their eventual triumphant resurgence.

"Every year," Lord Ku continued, "you may increase your number by one. Initiates must be male, preferably stolen at childbirth and raised with other Wu-Keng. Before turning 10 years of age, each child must be presented to his

juk ak and invested with the power of a shaman, after which he may begin his magickal education. Lastly, you shall forswear any magicks which manipulate either souls or the passage of moments." To demonstrate the severity of the charge, Ku ripped the tongue from a man who asked too many questions, then wove the tongue into his belt. "So will all oathbreakers suffer," Ku declared.

Over the next 800 years, the ranks of the Wu-Keng grew to over 200 strong. The original Wu who bargained for servitude did not grow old, though later initiates had to resort to magick to slow the ravages of time. The mages survived apart from other humans until the last vestiges of the Chou kingdom fell in the early 400s B.C., and the land degenerated into warring states. Constant battle over territories and holdings tore the people apart, and the long-lived Wu-Keng felt obliged to use their mastery of magick to put a stop to it — with the greatest subtlety possible, so as not to attract the attention of their overlords.

Working behind the scenes through court intrigues, the Wu-Keng staged a series of plots which culminated in the first unification of the Chinese people under a single government, ruled by Shih-Huang-Ti, the First Emperor.

The Lotus of Pain

The peasant wizards hoped that the ruler of Heaven's Kingdom, aided by his own magi, the Wu Lung, could protect the Wu-Keng from their demonic masters. After eight centuries of dodging and hiding, the Wu-Keng left the shadows and offered their services to their regent. They didn't realize they were stumbling into an even larger shadow play, directed by the Wu Lung, who'd been using promises of eternal life to control the new emperor. Seeing the chance to secure their hold on the imperial mind and wipe out the magickal rabble they knew to be hiding in the hills, the stately Wu Lung had already primed the emperor with stories of immortal wizards who chose to disguise themselves as peasants.

But the Wu-Keng weren't devastated merely by the Wu Lung, they were ruined by their utter ignorance of the two most common faults of mortal tyrants: The inevitable demand for immortality, and the thought that peasants are expendable. Being consumed by the first, and taking the second to heart, the First Emperor ordered his magickal agents to capture the Wu-Keng when they presented themselves at his court. He watched while his men sawed off the wizards' feet, and then imprisoned the peasants in the imperial dungeon. The emperor said he would boil one Wu-Keng to death every day until they divulged the secrets of their longevity. He was met with silence.

Months passed. Eventually, the Wu Lung's patience with the game grew thin and their spokesman announced to Shih-Huang-Ti that in a dream, a Wu-Keng traitor appeared as a grasshopper and whispered the secrets of immortality in



his ear. Satisfied, the emperor ordered the remaining Wu-Keng to be slaughtered the following morning.

Knowing their ranks held no traitors, the remaining Wu-Keng summoned the spirits of their masters and groveled before them. The spirits disguised the magi as women and helped them hobble off to freedom.

That night, the demons rewrote their contract with the Wu-Keng. "First," they said, "you must forever remain disguised as women, in your bodies and your souls. It is an excellent disguise for our most promising tools, and we thank you for providing an opportunity to discover it. Second, so that the significance of today's lesson will not be lost on your descendants, all future initiates must bind their feet in cloth strips. These bindings will curl and twist their feet into beautiful lotus shapes, attractive to see but painful to walk on. This will focus the initiates' attentions away from dreams of Heaven, reminding them of their station. And third, you will never use any means, magickal or otherwise, to reverse the mutilations of your feet.

"Now go very far away from here, before the winds of our will change direction and sweep you all away."

The Wu-Keng made a painful trek across the Chinese mainland, occasionally leaving members behind in villages along the way like bread crumbs dropped to mark a trail. The remaining wizards settled near the Canton province, in a coastal town far from the cruelty of the emperor. They maintained their female disguises and eventually found that their new feminine yin balanced their masculine yang forces, casting them for the first time in centuries into powerful positions of balance and peace. From that point on, the Wu-Keng and all who entered their ranks — though male from birth — dressed, acted and thought of themselves as women.

History records that the First Emperor died within a decade of rising to power. Wu Lung hold that he Ascended, thanks to their magickal prowess. Regardless of his fate, the state which he (and the Wu Lung) worked so hard to forge fell into anarchy in just four years. In the peasant uprising that followed, over 200,000 trained imperial troops were massacred. An angry peasant army marched on the capitol, slaughtering the imperial family and laying waste to Shih-Huang-Ti's tomb. The Wu-Keng nodded with satisfaction while pillars of smoke rose from the desecrated burial ground.

Time passed and, though the peasant mages recovered their strength of numbers, each new initiate was a reminder of the Wu-Keng's shame during the flight from the Yellow Emperor. And, the Wu-Keng watched bitterly as the power of the Wu Lung grew until it stretched as far as the sky seemed wide.

In the next millennia, the spirits began calling upon their servants to work diabolical magicks. Without a complaint, the Wu-Keng followed orders. The second millennium of their servitude, while volatile for the outside world,

remained calm for the humble wizards. They became accustomed to the yin of their disguises, and local peasants knew them only as a traveling sisterhood of some obscure religious sect. By A.D. 1000, in an ironic twist which their cruel masters take credit for, the Wu-Keng found that female foot-bindings had not only become common, but were considered attractive.

Though the number of sorcerers in China grew with time, the Shaolin (known to the outside world as the Akashic Brotherhood) was the only other magickal society that the Wu-Keng dealt with. Even though the millennium of Motion had begun, the Wu-Keng lacked the courage to break from the previous millennium's agenda — fear of reprisal from their masters still ran high. The Akashics therefore knew the Wu-Keng only as crippled witches. The Brotherhood interacted with them regularly for centuries, but always respected them enough not to inquire about their origins. In the early 18th century, when the hated Wu Lung mounted an attack against the Shaolin Temple, many Wu-Keng came to help defend — the first time they acted in the affairs of the outside world in almost 2,000 years. The Shaolin Temple fell despite the Wu-Keng's efforts, and many of the mages were killed, stirring the survivors to reassert their pride and initiate machinations that would grind the Wu Lung into Yellow River silt.

The Midnight War

Slowly, the karmic wheel turned. The history of China is marked by regular invasions by barbarian forces. The Wu Lung, masters of the soul, always thought that even if barbarians won military victories, China would prevail. But even the Wu Lung were unable to stop the fiercest and most violent barbarians to invade the East: the Europeans.

By the 1700s, British troops were making a mockery of the Wu Lung. Armed with knowledge gained from centuries of observation, the Wu-Keng helped the Westerners demolish the Wu Lung and pointed all blame at the Technocratic traitors within the ancient Artificers.

The proudest moment in the Wu-Keng's revenge against the Wu Lung was also one of their most conniving. After putting down the Boxer Rebellion at the turn of the 20th century, British negotiators saddled the Chinese government with a set of degrading surrender conditions. Not the least of these involved removing Hong Kong, home of the Wu-Keng, from Chinese jurisdiction for 99 years. By the mages' calculation, that would bring their island home back into China's sphere of influence just three years before the end of the sam chin ak. Adding insult to injury, the Wu-Keng "convinced" the British to run their victory parade through the Wu Lung's sacrosanct Forbidden City.

As the Wu Lung staggered from the blows they had suffered, the peasant magi took the opportunity to strike directly. One of the original Wu, a chou yan called Zhen Di,



raised a shadow army to confound the remaining Wu Lung and exact revenge for centuries of suffering. Wu Lung temples were “mistakenly” marked as ammo dumps on maps supplied to the Japanese, and when the red sun rose over Manchuria during World War II, the Wu Lung were devastated almost overnight. Between the military might arrayed against them and the increasingly vicious tyranny of Ch'ung T'u (what the Wu Lung called Paradox), the imperial wizards soon found themselves without allies or options. The scholarly Chinese mysticks cursed as they found themselves resorting to the ways of the Wu-Keng — seeking the comfort of the shadows and knowing the constant fear of discovery — and the warriors of Zhen Di laughed with joy.

Fueled by hubris, the Wu-Keng's victory was not to last. With the help of their remaining servants, the Wu Lung fled south, toward Hong Kong and their last chance for freedom. At the same time, Zhen Di's army marched north from Hong Kong to claim the mainland, and the two forces collided. The tattered Wu Lung fought with all their mystick might, cutting a bloody path through the Wu-Keng ranks.

Unfortunately, the magical battle acted as a clarion call to local Technocrats. Iteration X attacked the Wu-Keng from the west while a Communist army (under the New World Order), attacked from the east. In a dark irony which only their demonic masters truly appreciate, the Wu-Keng thought the Wu Lung had somehow come out of World War II more powerful than ever. Before the sun set, Zhen Di was killed and the survivors retreated to their ancestral home. The New World Order swept the battlefield clean of bodies and told the world a story about another random conflict in the ongoing civil war between Nationalist and Communist forces. In 1958, the People's Great Savior, Mao Tse-tung, launched the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and its hysterical lynch mobs aided the New World Order in wiping out most of the Wu Lung and Wu-Keng.

For the surviving mages, the problem with seeking sanctuary in the shadows was in not knowing what else lurked there. The Wu-Keng never guessed that they were shoulder to shoulder with the decimated Wu Lung in the Hong Kong underworld. Today, over 200 Wu-Keng continue to hide between the cracks of Hong Kong's highly industrialized society. They've continued acting as self-appointed shamans for the masses in anticipation of the conclusion of the sam chin ak. They believe the Wu Lung still control the mainland, and have yet to learn just how many of their ancient enemies actually live among them.

Culture

Beliefs



China's history is the product of cultural clashes. Maintaining a stable yet secret society through 3,000 years of strife and havoc has given the Wu-Keng a bad case of multiple-personality disorder. Putonghua, spoken by about 80% of the Chinese in the world, is the official language of the nation. But most of today's Wu-Keng are Cantonese, and prefer that dialect over the more modern one. This

has caused something of an ideological schism between modern Wu-Keng, who are torn between traditions of the past and attitudes of the modern day. How can they lead people if they're perceived as "behind the times"?

In ancient China, it was primarily women who acted as shamans, though they had a lower social station than men. The Wu-Keng, who only allow men to learn their secrets, are also divided sexually. Even though they're male, they think of themselves as female, dressing as women and taking traditionally feminine social roles. To preserve their balance of yin and yang, Wu-Keng seldom entertain lovers of either sex.

Only recently have Wu-Keng ventured to the West, but they never stay away for more than six months at a time. Even so, they have many allies abroad. Safe houses exist for them in the shadows of San Francisco, Vancouver and San Antonio, and many tongs (see *Destiny's Price*) respect the crippled lotus, the symbol of the Wu-Keng.

The crippled lotus is all that a *Ngan* (a human who serves as a Wu-Keng's eyes in the mundane world) ever sees of the society. Every Wu-Keng has a *Ngan*, who provides an important source of information and power. Better still, he becomes a puppet for the mage when the time is right. To help insure a base of power apart from their malevolent masters, the Wu-Keng have infiltrated countless organizations across the Pacific Rim. Crippled by the now-unfashionable practice of foot-binding, Wu-Keng generally hold lower-class jobs in society; many *Ngan*, however, are among the most powerful people in the Orient.

The *chou yan* (original Wu-Keng), only six of whom still live, refuse to reveal to lesser members any details about their plans for retaking the mainland. "Silence is strength," they say. Some of the Craft's young members suspect that the once-idealistic dreams of the elders have degenerated into little more than a front for focusing power at the broken, lotus-shaped feet of the "humble" *chou yan*. But not even the most cynical of the order know how deep the corruption really goes — the six ancient magi are the only Wu-Keng who know how evil their masters truly are, and that the jade bracelets worn by the demons they serve don't represent ownership of a mage's obedience, but of his tainted immortal soul.

Quantification, for the Wu-Keng, is restrictive. Speaking or even thinking an idea looses it into the world, where it can be used by one's enemies. Wu-Keng are not inscrutable merely because they want to keep their tongues; they find power in lack of definition. They believe in the fable of the caterpillar who, after trying to define how he orchestrated his many legs, found himself unable to do so. Members of the Technocracy might say that the Wu-Keng have an uncanny talent for avoiding the collapse of a probability wave until they believe it will fall in their favor.

Over the ages, Tradition delegates have tried contacting these reclusive shamans, but Wu-Keng have always suffered from the great prejudice of old: They consider all non-Chinese, even other Orientals, to be barbarians whose existence must be acknowledged — and, when necessary, cruelly manipulated — but not necessarily suffered. Wu-Keng don't distinguish between Sleepers and the Awakened; there are only those who are Wu-Keng and those who are not.

The foremost law of this Craft is total secrecy. After almost 3,000 years, they'd no more appear at a meeting of other magi, however discrete, than they'd list themselves in the phone book.

Any scrutiny is unwelcome. Since the Wu-Keng believe that so much as speaking about their plans steals their power, they handle information leaks ruthlessly. From delivering a finger wrapped in rice paper to thrusting bamboo shoots through a traitor's eyes, the Wu-Keng go to extreme lengths to silence the loose of tongue.

In the end, Wu-Keng get their power from their nameless demonic overlords (see Chapter Four of *The Book of Madness*). None of these magi are Awakened by any other means, as this would put them beyond their masters' total domination.

Magickal Style

The style of the Wu-Keng, like everything else about them, is slow and steady. Most of their magick involves carefully prepared rituals and, because of this, they rarely invoke Paradox.

The spirits they serve forbid the use of magicks which Tradition mages would associate with the Spheres of Spirit and Time, forcing the Wu-Keng to focus on the here and now. Some Wu-Keng fear that their masters outlawed magick of the spirit so that the mages wouldn't discover the price they paid for power. The spirits, of course, would never confess to being demons, and would do nothing but reassure the Wu-Keng that their souls are their own — for the time being.

The demons lie. Mages not aligned with diabolical forces and familiar with the Spheres of Mind or Spirit may recognize the black stains of diabolical corruption that have spread across the souls of the Wu-Keng like a kind of magickal cancer.

Spheres

The magickal practices of the Wu-Keng focus on what other mages have codified as the Spheres of Entropy and Forces. The delicate balance kept between the Wu-Keng's yin and yang is illustrated in the dichotomy of their mastery of these two Spheres.

While the extremely disciplined Wu-Keng have a remarkable degree of control over the normally unwieldy Forces, their proficiency with Entropy comes from a different source altogether. Chaos, they reason, cannot be controlled. The mage must give himself in to it, refusing the urge to define it, riding its waves so as to avoid being dashed upon its rocks. In addition, many members of this Craft have mastered magicks belonging to other Pattern Spheres, and most accomplished Wu-Keng have learned Prime Arts.

Magicks belonging to the Sphere of Mind are not forbidden, but bad luck has befallen those who have delved too deeply into their mysteries. One tale involves a Wu-Keng initiate who was charged with destroying a fellow Craftsman and friend, the friend having dared to break the spirit of her oath by using Mind to walk the astral plane.

In addition to their magick, Wu-Keng may buy up to 10 points in Demonic Investments (*The Book of Madness*, Appendix). Those who do so suffer even greater agonies than their fellows. Their feet permanently crumple into twisted claws (+4 to all Dexterity difficulties, maximum move of four yards per turn). They also suffer nightmarish insights into Ti Yu, the Earth Prison (see the *Wraith* supplement *Dark Kingdom of Jade*).

Common Foci

Art and language are the most common tools of the Wu-Keng. These take many forms, from the grace of dynamic brush strokes to the precision required of wood carving. Since they rarely speak of their conspiracy, Wu-Keng rely on art to passively express their emotions, the yin to the yang of their aggressive desires.

Organization

The Wu-Keng are organized into *Ng*, cabals of five magi who support each other and pass information to each other and other *Ng*. The five members of a *Ng* are:

- the **a-ma**, or mother, who heads the *Ng*;
- the **mui**, or girl, who must be blindly obedient to the other members of her *Ng*; and,

- the three **a-ji**, or aunts, who oversee the training of the mui and do most of the *Ng*'s actual work.

An a-ma of one *Ng* may be the mui of another, but no one is mui or a-ma to more than one group. Wu-Keng may act as a-ji to as many *Ng* as their a-ma assigns them to. No magickal action may be taken by any member before consulting the *Ng* as a whole, the members of which may vote to override the action. Punishment for disobedience is mutilation, usually a rending of the tongue, or death. Most punishments are meted out by the members of the offender's *Ng*, though spirits have been known to administer "justice" themselves.

About once a month, the spirit who wears a Wu-Keng's *juk ak* will visit her subject's dreams. If the mage is an a-ji or mui, his master will appear friendly, congenial, inquiring about his health and general well-being. If the mage is an a-ma, his *Ng* will be given a mission. The a-ma must see the mission completed within a month or face the wrath of her master. The assignment is either diabolical ("destroy this person's life slowly and cruelly") or inscrutable ("bury this stick beneath an ant hill on the far side of the island"). The demons rarely ask to have someone killed directly — they seem to prefer misery over death.

Each member of the Wu-Keng is Awakened by infernal power, though few have risen above Adept level and most are at Disciple level. They only know other Wu-Keng in the cabals they belong to, but may occasionally meet others of their kind through the course of missions. The actual number of Wu-Keng in existence is a mystery, even to the Wu-Keng themselves and perhaps their masters.

- The ancient **chou yan** hobble above the whole Craft; few ever see them, but tales abound. Their decisions filter down the tangled lattice of interwoven *Ng*. In recent centuries, with the end of their servitude finally in sight, the *chou yan* are more strict than ever. The demons have hinted to the remaining six that even the slightest disobedience may be grounds for extending the *sam chin ak*, and these bitter magi don't want to give their overlords any excuses.

Initiation

Every year, one a-ma is allowed to take a prospective mui on the arduous journey inland to the secret site of Huang-Ti's tomb. The a-ma tells her mui the history of the Wu-Keng, one of the few times any of their heritage is spoken of.

For almost 3,000 years, the Wu-Keng have stolen babies from their homes and raised them as their own. From childhood, a Wu-Keng mage learns about the glory of serving the spirits of the earth, and of the period of peace a soul enjoys between the death of her body and the rebirth of her soul at the end of the *sam chin ak*.

Each new Wu-Keng provides a fresh soul. The Wu-Keng cannot spare an innocent soul by abducting an infant

Stereotypes

Traditions: We have traditions of our own, far older than you may imagine. They have served us well; please leave us alone to practice them in peace.

Technocracy: The tools of the state are still only tools, while the architect of the state is its master.

Marauders: Entropy runs thick in our veins, but we are not so foolish as to allow ourselves to be consumed by it. The chaos these madness-bringers embody is no different than a child's ignorant babblings: uncontrolled, immature, meaningless.

Nephandi: Many of these infernalists have thought us allies or servants. But we do not sully our hands with the person who grasps for power at the cost of her soul—we accept unpleasant responsibilities so our culture may live again.

Others: Pity those whose loyalties lie only with themselves. They will die as they lived — alone. Shapechangers and undead things may stalk the mortal world, but in the end, we shall govern them all. So it is promised, so it shall be.

who has the Avatar of a previous initiate; as the mages pass on their souls are bound to their *juk ak* until the end of the *sam chin ak*. Indeed, the whispers of dead *Wu-Keng* can be heard echoing from the countless jade bracelets lining a demon's arms. The *chou yan* find it very reassuring to hear dead souls murmuring from their jade prisons; it lends credence to the spirits' promises of eternal life.

Even if an *a-ma* knows the truth of the *Wu-Keng*'s predicament, he never implies that the spirits the *Wu-Keng* serve are evil. If a child becomes afraid for his fate and escapes his mentor before being fully initiated, the *a-ma* is likely to replace him by ensnaring a local boy of the appropriate age with flowery tales of the beauty of magick and the glory of serving the spirits of one's ancestors. The spirits are not particular; they'll take any soul that's willing to be given.

After the initiate and *a-ma* arrive at the hidden temple of *Huang-Ti*, the spirit whom the *a-ma* serves arrives to Awaken the *mui's Te* after inspecting his feet and finding them properly bound. The spirit forges the initiate's *juk ak* from a piece of the boy's *Te* during the Awakening, and the spirit slides the bracelet around its wrist or ankle to join the rest.

Acolytes

Each *a-ma* assigns his "sisters" a *Ngan* to supervise and command. Such pawns are the only mortals that most *Wu-Keng* bother with. They come from all walks of life, but often hold positions of power in industrial, commercial, criminal and political arenas. Each is carefully selected for a *mui* by his *a-ma*, or assigned at the inscrutable whim of a *juk ak* spirit. Although most *Wu-Keng* still reside in *Honk Kong* themselves, their influence is truly international.



Storyteller Ideas

- **Accents:** If you're playing a scenario based in or around Hong Kong, many of the characters you'll introduce will probably be Wu-Keng and Wu Lung. Here's a hint on accents — don't do them. If the majority of your characters are Chinese, play without accents, in a normal speaking voice. After all, to someone who grew up in China, no one "sounds" Chinese; it's just the way people talk. Sure, there are different dialects, but don't worry about "trying to get it right" just for mood's sake, especially if you know little about China or its culture.

Instead, when introducing Westerners to Chinese, exaggerate the foreigners' language and accent. This will mark the Westerners as "outsiders" and allow the Chinese to carry on normal conversations with one another, as well as open the players' ears to how speech is perceived.

- **Shadows Within Shadows**

The Wu Lung controlled the mainland for the better part of 2,000 years, until the Wu-Keng played the Artificers and the British government against them, breaking the stately sorcerers' hold on China. When the Japanese invaded, the Wu Lung were swept out completely. Between the fear-driven Wu Lung and the Technocratic forces which showed up to attack both sides, the Wu-Keng mistook their enemy's exodus for a massive retaliatory strike and retreated to Hong Kong, as did the Wu Lung. Both sides believe their enemy controls mainland China, presumably trapping each on the small island nation. Each is too busy fighting the Technocracy to stage forays into "enemy territory," and too afraid of the other to discover its error.

So who controls the mainland and, more importantly, who's riding herd over more than a billion human souls? The demons, of course. In a master stroke, they not only pushed out the stagnation of the Wu Lung and the imperial bureaucracy they represented, but also conned their puppet Wu-Keng magi into limping to the island.

On June 30, 1997, the ownership of Hong Kong will revert back to China after its 99-year lease to the British. While

the powers-that-be who run Communist China have said they won't meddle with a system that works, chances are they'll tax the hell out of it to fuel their broken economy and lay waste to the greatest experiment in uncontrolled capitalism in the history of mankind — regardless of what the Wu Lung, the Wu-Keng or anyone else has to say about it.

Taiwan has also been under a lot of pressure. That's where the *Kuomintang*, the Nationalists, retreated when Mao's Communists won and took power. You can bet that the demons on the mainland are going to try to leverage Taiwan into their plans to rid themselves of the mainlands' Technocracy forces.

It's also a safe bet that, after having a cadre of humble and powerful tools at their beck and call, the demons aren't about to live up to their promises of freedom. After all, with their little trick of exiling most of the Awakened humans in China to a single island, it seems unlikely that they would give up the mainland's billion-plus souls to spineless magi. Besides, the demons have hardly scratched the surface of the experiments that they hope to conduct with a fifth the world's population. (Peasants, you'll recall, are expendable.) Chances are the demons will get along well with the Progenitors.

Yet, the six surviving *chou yan* are not stupid, nor are they powerless. Perhaps they've found some previously Awakened souls and brought them into their Craft, unbeknownst to the demons. Perhaps some Akashic mages even number among their Ngan. Such wizards would make excellent weapons against the diabolical overlords if, as suspected, the next few years do not bring freedom. And who knows? Maybe after seeing countless generations of faceless countrymen pass them by on the road of time, the Wu-Keng may decide it's better to die free than live enslaved. Without the certainty of foreknowledge that the Sphere of Spirit grants, the fate of their souls may be their greatest secret yet, kept even from the Wu-Keng themselves.

Concepts

Wu-Keng, though all men, are limited to female roles in society. Some are nannies to upper-crust Hong Kong families, noodle cooks, maids, nurses or butchers. Others avoid physical labor, becoming tutors, personal secretaries, fortunetellers or librarians. The members of a Ng must approve a mage's cover job, but anything that puts him in a position to ingratiate himself to his Ngan is acceptable. The most ancient Wu-Keng spend much of their time in hidden meditation, supported by their juniors.

Even though the Wu-Keng disguise themselves as women, they still have male genitalia. Few Wu-Keng initiate sexual relations with their Ngan, but it's not unheard of for one to alter "her" body through Life magicks to seduce a male Ngan.

The Wu-Keng feel that the most important link in a chain is the most subtle one, and so it is with their Ngan, such as a textile magnate's acupuncturist, or the mother of the boyfriend of the daughter of a presidential candidate. The Ngan become these people's baby sitters, fortunetellers, secretaries and house cleaners. A Wu-Keng mage works his way into his Ngan's heart over years, and manipulates him in ways he could scarcely understand. In extreme situations, an outright command is called for; the sign of the crippled lotus accompanies most urgent messages. Most Ngan know better than to refuse — or expose — such "suggestions."

The secrecy of this Craft — and the failed legacy of Zhen Di's peasant army — prevents Wu-Keng from utilizing retainers like the consors of the Traditions are used. Some Ngan, however, suspect their handlers' secrets and double their cooperation out of respect, loyalty or fear.

Common Magicks



As a group of manipulators and artisans, the Wu-Keng favor many tricks of Mind and Entropy. Some common spells mirror the following Effects from the Mage rulebook: **Ring of Truth**; **Locate Disorder** and **Games of Luck** (all of which are invaluable when dealing with gangsters); **Binding Oath**; **No Mind** (for walking carefully); and **Pathos**, **Subliminal Impulse**, **Possession** and **Manipulate Memory** (all useful for manipulating and dominating a Ngan). Ironically, a group whose members began as shamans is forbidden to use the very Spirit Arts that the wizards once treasured. That, too, is one of the demons' evil gifts: the theft of the one thing that made the original Wu-Keng what they were. By doing so, the demons broke the old Craft into bits and rebuilt it to their will.

Silent Promise of the Spring Tortoise (• Entropy)

The Wu-Keng who made it to the coast during their escape from the First Emperor were struck by the ironic combination of humility and ferocity exhibited by the spring turtles which lined the ocean shore. They took to adopting the turtles as pets, impressing their psyches onto them by painting beautiful patterns on the animals' hard green shells.

Only one turtles may be adopted at a time. It takes a week for a mage to become one with it, after which the turtle is boiled and eaten. The shell, when held over the cooking fire, cracks in a pattern from which the mage may divine the probable success of his next undertaking.

[By detecting the currents of probability, the Wu-Keng reduces the difficulty of one nonmagickal roll in his next mission by -1 per success. Multiple **Silent Promises** are not cumulative, at least not for the same mission.]

Lotus Bloom (••• Forces)

This vulgar magick is usually reserved for magickal battles when staying alive is more important than staying quiet. Upon command, giant purple lotus flowers unfold and explode from the caster's bound feet. Their outlines flicker like ghostly flames as they immolate the mage's chosen foes.

[This Effect requires that the **Footbind** Effect, below, has been applied to the caster of this magick. By harnessing the stored Quintessence, the Wu-Keng can summon up an unearthly flaming lotus and direct it at his enemies. Each point of Quintessence so "burned" reduces the **Bloom's** difficulty by -1, up to the usual -3 maximum. This is usually enough to do some serious damage.]

Luck of the Lotus/The Crippled Lotus Curse (••• Entropy, ••• Mind, often with •• Correspondence)

To those he favors, a Wu-Keng can bestow the **Luck of the Lotus**, a gift which makes fortune smile upon the mage's Ngan. By painting a picture inspired by his intentions, and then sprinkling dried lotus petals onto the wet ink, the mage

calls upon the spirits and asks their favor. This boon causes things to go *just right*, gives the recipient a mental lift, and makes others feel happy to be around him. The reverse blessing, the **Crippled Lotus Curse**, makes everything that can go wrong do so.

[Entropy manipulation causes things to go either very well or very poorly for the person in question. Correspondence allows the gift to work at a distance. The additional Mind Effect generates a "good feelings" impulse which spreads to others in the area, at least for a while. A Wu-Keng might cast this spell on his Ngan at the beginning of the day, every day, showing the benevolence that the gods shower upon her for her association with the wizard. Some Wu-Keng even use it on themselves, to increase their own good fortune. Obviously, a run of really bad luck can be attributed to the **Curse**, particularly if the victim has received a broken lotus in the last few days. Even so, this magick is so subtle that its effects often remain coincidental.]

Shih-Huang-Ti's Marvelous Game (••• Life, often with •• Correspondence)

This horrific doom, often reserved for the Wu Lung but occasionally used on others, boils a victim alive in his own skin. The pain begins when an a-ma fashions a fine sculpture of the victim, then immerses it in boiling oil or water. As the Wu-Keng tosses bits of parchment inscribed with riddles into the fire beneath the pot, the victim grows fevered, hot, then agonized as his vital organs stew in a caldron of his own blood. Eventually, the victim dies and his boiled corpse sogs to the floor, spilling gruesome soup from his ears and nose. When someone dies in this horrific way, most Hong Kong triads know that the victim questioned the wrong orders, and they endeavor to learn from his example.

Sometimes, the **Marvelous Game** is only performed as a warning; the figure is fished out of the oil before the victim dies. The point thus made, the a-ma sends new orders or issues some other statement. Not surprisingly, the victim usually obeys.

[Correspondence is necessary to cast this Effect from a distance, which the Wu-Keng often do. The Life damage is aggravated, of course, and cannot be soaked, but occurs at one Health Level per turn. The symptoms build gradually unless the a-ma wants to kill her victim quickly. In game terms, the damage from a single roll is calculated from a single Arete roll, then "dealt out" one Health Level at a time. If the subject still lives, the a-ma can roll again or may elect to stop the torture. Obviously, this spell is a vulgar one, and often leaves investigators puzzled but intrigued.]

Footbind (••• Prime, •• Life, •• Forces)

Usually performed by an a-ma on a mui when the subject is initiated into the Wu-Keng, the caster must have two 10-foot-long strips of cotton, prepared by soaking them

for a day in a mixture of four-parts salt water and one-part loess, a fine-grained yellow dirt. The cloths should still be wet from their treatment when wrapped around the subject's feet, and his toes are folded under the flats of his feet. The process takes 10 minutes to complete, and won't have effect without the cooperation of the subject. Once the wrapping is complete, the bindings store magickal energy which may be channeled for various purposes. When this energy is used up, the bindings remain but must be magickly reinvested to channel energy again.

[For every success the a-ma rolls in performing the wrapping Effect, the wearer absorbs one point of Quintessence from his surroundings into the bindings. The total Quintessence absorbed by the bindings may exceed the caster's Avatar rating. After the process is complete, the wearer may spend the stored Prime Force in all the usual ways. The presence of the bound Quintessence is invisible even to masters of Prime.

[When he wishes to, the wearer of the bindings may also use an additional Forces Effect to warp light around himself, rendering *him* largely invisible (treat this as a Forces 2 Effect). This Effect "burns" one Quintessence each time it's used.]

[Unfortunately, the nature of this magick is excruciatingly painful. When the Wu-Keng taps the Quintessence in his bindings, all difficulties increase by +1. Botching an Effect that involves tapped Quintessence mangles the subject's feet permanently. The caster thereafter suffers the same Dexterity and movement penalties as those Wu-Keng who have Demonic Investments.

Once all points of Quintessence have been burned up, the wrappings may be reinvested by their wearer through a ceremonial re-wrapping. The bindings remain on the subject's feet, as the Wu-Keng's deal with infernal powers demands; the wrapping motions are simply feigned by the wearer. The Effect reinvests the caster's wrappings with Quintessence as if his a-ma had put them on all over again.]

Field of Yin (••••• Entropy, • Life, or ••• Life)

Wu-Keng can completely disguise themselves as women by generating a field of chaotic yin energy around their static yang natures. Even when a Wu-Keng mage is naked, onlookers see a woman.

[Lesser Wu-Keng actually alter themselves with Life magick rather than use this Effect. Mastering the Field of Yin Effect, however, is considered superior magick, and far more honorable than "lowering" one's self to Life.]

New Demonic Investments

Those who serve demons gain Investments by performing favors for their masters. The bigger the favors, the greater the rewards. Most Wu-Keng have one to five points worth of "favors" to spend on powers; really old mages may have as many as 15 or more. A small favor might involve teaching a child of the glory of the Juk ak; a major one might involve killing a Wu

Lung mage by slow torture and sacrificing his soul to the master spirit. Most Wu-Keng who have gained Investments have begun to guess at the less-than-benevolent nature of the Juk ak, even if they don't know the whole story. Even so, they continue to deny their fate, often out of ambition, fear or both. (For other Investments, and more information about them, see **The Book of Madness Appendix.**)

The Hearts of Gods (variable): The sign of eternal favor is art. For every 2 points spent on this Investment, the Wu-Keng gains an extra dot in either Expression, Crafts, Singing, Dancing or Artistic Expression. The maximum rating for any Trait is 5, but the Infernalist can spend as many points as he wants to on this "talent." If the Infernalist insults his masters, however, all favors are revoked — forever.

Nails of the Poisoned Concubine (2 pts): The Wu-Keng's nails grow long and sharp; when he uses them to scratch or pinch someone, a black poison seeps from the edges and causes a burning rash that lasts for weeks. The Nails won't kill anyone larger than a baby or dog, but pain will flare through the victim's joints for some time (+1 difficulty to all physical feats; not cumulative).

Living Shrouds (6 pts): By calling on this power, an Infernalist can turn loose garments into snares, lassos or tentacles. These Shrouds have an effective Strength of 5 and can strangle or bind a person up to 15 feet away. The Wu-Keng need not be wearing the garments at the time, but he must be touching them. Manipulating them requires a Dexterity + Melee roll, difficulty 6 (to bind), to 8 (to grab a moving target).

Talismans

• Tsu-Ti (Divine Bamboo)

Arete 1, Quintessence 5, Cost 2

These short stalks of bamboo, grown along the seashore, can be dipped in a mage's blood and used to write messages on stone. When a message is complete, the blood seeps into the pores of the rock, and is undetectable by any means. When anyone whose Avatar was Awakened by demonic forces touches the stone, the blood rises to the surface, revealing the message. The blood disappears back into the stone when the reading mage breaks physical contact. Since only the person who physically touches the stone is able to see the message, the Effect is considered coincidental.

•• Classic of the Plain Lady

Arete 2, Quintessence 5, Cost 4

Careful study of this treatise on chamber pleasures, which takes several days to complete, charges the reader with knowledge and skills beyond those of the greatest mortal seducer. This experience grants the reader a number of points equal to his Arete in the Seduction (or Subterfuge) Trait until the next time he falls asleep. Thereafter, he retains the memory only in dreams. The Classic may be used this way only once per year per person.

•• Juk Ak

Arete 3, Quintessence 10, Cost 4

The souls of the Wu-Keng are bound to (or, actually, fashioned into) jade bracelets which are worn by the spirits who call the mages their servants. Each bracelet has the mage's name and likeness carved into its exterior.

The bracelet alters its size to fit its wearer. It doesn't grant any real control over a mage's will — but the mage to whom it's linked can always be tracked by the bracelet's owner, no matter where the mage is.

Companion: Jin He (Minor Spirit; Cost: 3)

Willpower 6, Rage 5, Gnosis 7, Power 25 (plus 1 for every successful mission his a-ma has overseen in the past year)

Charms: Airt Sense, Blighted Touch, Materialize, Reform, Spirit Away, Tracking

Nature: Conniver

Demeanor: Bon Vivant

Materialized Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3 (use Gnosis for Social and Mental Traits)

Abilities: Awareness 3, Expression 4, Intuition 3, Intimidation 5, Subterfuge 5

Materialized Health Levels: 5

Background: Jin He, "Nearby River," is one of the newer arrivals to this long-running infernal game. He is a spirit who owns four juk ak, only one of which comes from an a-ma. As mentioned above, every time the Ng that his a-ma heads fulfills one of his monthly missions, Jin He's Power goes up by one.

Jin He has existed in his current identity for more than 20 years, and hopes to parlay his Ng's deeds into a more prominent position for himself in the Feng-tu court. The missions he assigns don't appear dangerous, and they're not

— he doesn't want to waste his precious tools on anything that doesn't obviously increase his prestige among other demons. But don't think he won't consider his mages' lives expendable when the time comes.

Image: Jin He manifests as a gaunt, thin-lipped young boy who is covered from neck to navel in a tattoo that depicts a smooth-running stream which turns into a violent tidal wave as it reaches his belly. Occasionally, he appears as a mangy tomcat with a buzzing purr. In either form, he moves sprightly, with two juk ak on each wrist.

Roleplaying Notes: You were given your juk ak at the whim of Lord Ku, and the sorrow you inflict upon your mages is your proudest achievement. Surely, the fun is just beginning! If you put your mind to it, you could think of some way to extend the game a little longer, and maybe gather a bit more power in the meantime.

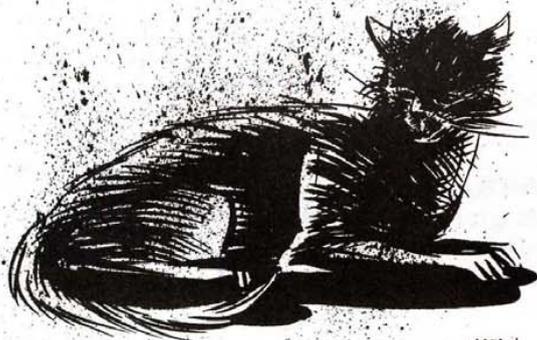
Suspend What You Know

Yes, as we can see from this description, the Wu-Keng serve Infernal entities. The joke on many of them is, they don't realize it. Instead, they remain convinced in spite of themselves that their masters are merely ancient spirits that have granted them miraculous powers in return for strict obedience. How can this be? And how will a player, who knows the truth behind the Craft, resist having the *one* Wu-Keng who knows his fate in advance?

The first answer is easy enough: Throughout history, people have turned a blind eye to the things they did not want to face, even when those things became too obvious to deny. People remained in Pompeii, even as the volcano spewed ash across the city. People continue to fill their veins with junk, even as their heroes fall to heroin and coke addiction. People denied the existence of extermination camps even as they sneezed human ashes into their handkerchiefs, and now deny that such camps even existed — all because they didn't want to think they lived in such a world. Denial is a powerful force, and the Wu-Keng are afraid to face what they have become.

The second answer is simple, too. It's called roleplaying.

All too often, people in games assume that their characters know everything that the players learn through reading a host of rulebooks and supplements. The fun comes in when a player, who knows things that her fictional counterpart would never dream of, has to pretend *not* to know things that might doom her character. The challenge of roleplaying, particularly in a dark horror setting like the World of Darkness is to get into character and pretend that you don't know what's going on. So if you choose to run a Wu-Keng character, just remember: The contents of this book are not common knowledge — to anyone.



JIM DALY
76

Quiet Artist

Quote: (Don't say anything, just nod and disappear into the night.)

Prelude: You've lived in Hong Kong your whole life, and the Ng has been the only family you've known. A-ma has been your only mother, and her name is a mystery. For almost 20 years, you were raised as a girl among women, and you think of yourself as such even if your body claims otherwise. The Wu-Keng are the foundation upon which your life has been built, and their ancient secrets were your young heart's dearest hope. Serve, you were told, and your soul shall never die.

You served well — until A-ma and your three a-ji were killed by their guardian spirit for countermanding his orders. When he brought their heads to you at your home, rolling them around in a large wicker basket, it made you quiet, serene; your spirit achieved a state of calm that few ever know, and you have preserved that peace ever since.

"You have served me well," said the spirit who ruled your life, placing the basket at your feet. "Now, you will serve my purpose alone. I will see you in a month." It was only as he turned to go that you noticed your master's monstrous forearms, covered with clinking jade bracelets. One of them was yours.

After that, you fled to your Ngan, a young woman whose parents ran a local soup kitchen. When they heard you were homeless, her parents tried to make you part of their family. Working at the soup kitchen is fine; you're never asked too many questions. Some people give you a hard time about your feet, but since foot-binding has been out of style for 40 years, that's to be expected.

But, regardless of where you sleep, your *juk ak* comes to you once a month in a dream. He gives you an assignment — don't think about it, just do it. Most tasks involve hurting people, but every mission you complete helps earn the freedom of all the Wu-Keng, even A-ma and your a-ji, whose souls are now trapped in your master's jade bracelets. Now if you could only find some others of your kind....

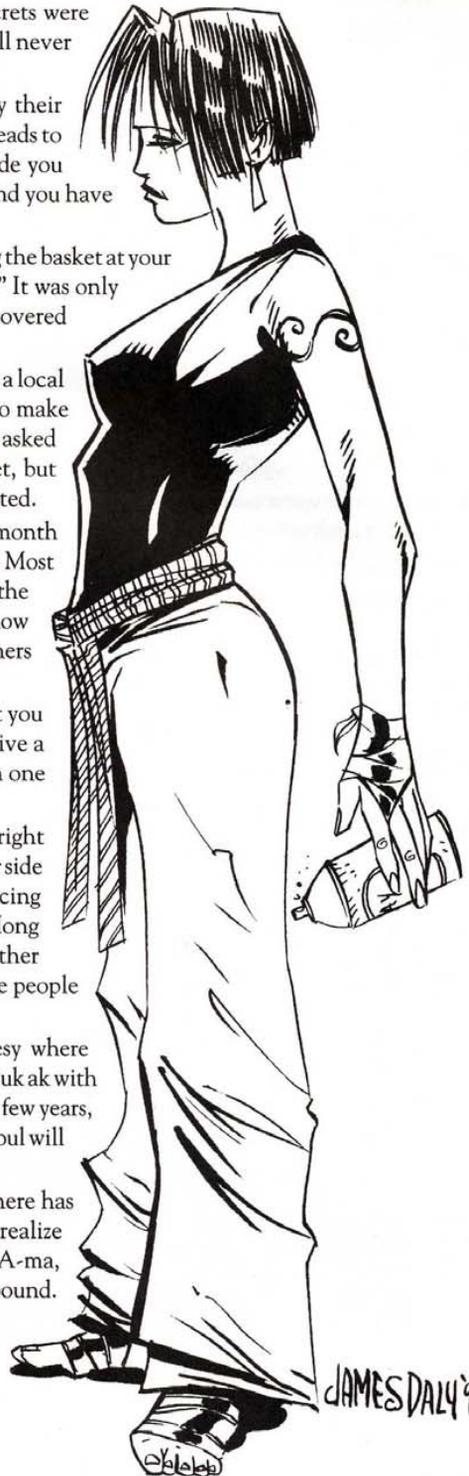
Concept: Just a few more years and it will all be over — that's what you were told. But if you can't find someone who can help, you might not live a few more weeks. The missions you're going on are meant for more than one person to handle; you've thought yourself dead more than once.

Already trained in the art of the brush by one of your a-ji, you took right to the case of spray paint that someone donated to the soup kitchen. Your side of town hasn't looked the same since. After a job, you spend the nights racing through the city subways, silently spray painting nonsense across Hong Kong. If you can use the city as a canvas, surely you can use it to contact other Wu-Keng — but there's always the fear of unwanted attention from the people you've been told are your mortal enemies, the Wu Lung.

Roleplaying Tips: Shrug off everything. Show respect and courtesy where necessary, but don't let anyone inside your shell. Fulfill obligations to your *juk ak* with the most mercy that you can dare show. Go with the flow, survive the next few years, and magical freedom will be yours — though it remains to be seen if your soul will be.

Magick: Entropy controls your destiny, and knowledge of that Sphere has brought you a great sense of security. Still, you're only now beginning to realize the life that your vows to the Wu-Keng are denying you. Yet you love A-ma, and you'd never abandon your promise to her while her soul remains bound. Spraying paint across a wall in wild strokes is the only joy left in your life. Perhaps there's some magick there, as well....

Equipment: Tape recorder, eight cans of spray paint, cotton foot-wrappings, poison darts.



BOOK OF CRAFTS

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: *Martyr*
Essence: *Questing*
Demeanor: *Loner*

Craft: *Wu-Keng*
Mentor:
Concept: *Quiet Artist*

Attributes

Physical	Social	Mental
Strength _____ ●○○○○	Charisma _____ ●○○○○	Perception <i>Visionary</i> ●●●●●
Dexterity _____ ●●●●●	Manipulation <i>Charm</i> ●●●●●	Intelligence _____ ●●○○○
Stamina _____ ●○○○○	Appearance _____ ●●○○○	Wits _____ ●●●○○

Abilities

Talents	Skills	Knowledges
Alertness _____ ●●○○○	Do _____ ○○○○○	Computer _____ ○○○○○
Athletics _____ ○○○○○	Drive _____ ○○○○○	Cosmology _____ ○○○○○
Awareness _____ ●●●○○	Etiquette _____ ●●○○○	Culture _____ ○○○○○
Brawl _____ ●●○○○	Firearms _____ ●●○○○	Enigmas _____ ○○○○○
Dodge _____ ○○○○○	Leadership _____ ○○○○○	Investigation _____ ○○○○○
Expression _____ ○○○○○	Meditation _____ ○○○○○	Law _____ ○○○○○
Instruction _____ ○○○○○	Melee _____ ●●○○○	Linguistics _____ ○○○○○
Intuition _____ ○○○○○	Research _____ ○○○○○	Lore <i>English</i> ●○○○○
Intimidation _____ ○○○○○	Stealth <i>Graceful</i> ●●●●●	Medicine _____ ○○○○○
Streetwise _____ ○○○○○	Survival _____ ○○○○○	Occult _____ ○○○○○
Subterfuge _____ ●○○○○	Technology _____ ○○○○○	Science _____ ○○○○○

Spheres

Correspondence _____ ●●○○○	Life _____ ○○○○○	Prime _____ ○○○○○
Entropy _____ ●●○○○	Mind _____ ○○○○○	Spirit _____ ○○○○○
Forces _____ ●●○○○	Matter _____ ○○○○○	Time _____ ○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds	Arete	Health
Allies _____ ●●○○○	● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Bruised _____ -0 <input type="checkbox"/>
Avatar _____ ●○○○○		Hurt _____ -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Arcane _____ ●●●●●		Injured _____ -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
_____ ○○○○○		Wounded _____ -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
_____ ○○○○○		Mauled _____ -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
		Crippled _____ -5 <input type="checkbox"/>
		Incapacitated _____ <input type="checkbox"/>
Other Traits	Willpower	Experience
Archery (Blowgun) _____ ●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	
Poisons _____ ●●●●●	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Herbalism _____ ●●○○○		
Artistic Expression _____ ●●○○○		
Acrobatics _____ ●●○○○		
	<h3 style="margin: 0;">Quintessence</h3> <div style="text-align: center;"> </div> <h3 style="margin: 0;">Paradox</h3>	



a · s

Wu Lung: The Dragon Wizards

By Wade Racine and Aaron Anderson

*Heaven's net casts wide.
Though its meshes are coarse,
nothing slips through.*

— Lao Tsu, *Tao Te Ching*



Michael Lee carefully picked his way through the nighttime crowd that jammed the streets of the International District. Many people had come out to watch the spectacle as dragons made of finely crafted lamps wriggled their way through the darkness, celebrating the end of the Chinese New Year and the arrival of spring. Firecrackers banged and popped, while drums and cymbals clashed in accompaniment.

Michael did not stop to watch. The dream he had of his mother was still fresh in his mind. It had felt so real, although she had been dead for five years. She had told him to seek out a man called Master Qu Yuan, who would show him something important — something involving a legacy — or a birthright. He couldn't believe he was actually going through with it.

He climbed the narrow stairs, a sense of dread growing within him with each step. Looking at the peeling paint on the door, he considered turning back. "I'm already here, so I might as well," he muttered and knocked on the door.

An old man, stooped with age and wearing a loose golden robe, opened the door and stepped aside, motioning for Michael to enter. "Master Qu?" Michael asked, receiving only a nod in reply. He stepped in.

The room was bare, and he turned to question the old man as the door closed. Michael gasped in shock. Before him stood Master Qu, but not old and hunched over as he was before. He stood tall and proud, wearing the jade-green robes of a Manchurian lord. "Yes, Michael, it is time that you sought out the secrets," Master Qu said in the Manchurian dialect Michael knew from his mother. "For you are one of us."

Lexicon

Ch'uang Shih: An initiate, accepted as a senior student of the Wu Lung.

Ch'ung T'u: Paradox.

Chi: Quintessence.

Chi Neng: Arete.

Feng Huang: Phoenix, a Chinese representation of the eternal bird, different from the Western belief, and one of the powerful creatures seen as a part of the Trinity of the Magickal Bureaucracy.

Feng Huang Hou Wu: The Phoenix Empress-Wizard, the magickal wife of the Dragon Emperor-Wizard.

Hu: Tiger, one of the powerful creatures seen as a part of the Trinity of the Magickal Bureaucracy.

Hu Kuei Tsu Wu: The Tiger Lord Wizard, the highest of the Lords of the Wu Lung, and leader of the Dragon Emperor's military forces.

Kuei Tsu: Lord, one of the direct servants of the Dragon Emperor. The Tiger Lord is the most powerful of these.

Kuei Lung Ch'uan: Spirit Dragon kung fu, a martial art refined by the Tiger School (see end of chapter).

Lung: Dragon, one of the powerful creatures seen as a part of the Trinity of the Magickal Bureaucracy.

Magickal Bureaucracy: The name for the bureaucratic structure of the Wu Lung.

Nan Wu: Wizard, the rank of a fully vested Wu Lung mage.

Nung Wu: Literally, "peasant wizards," a derisive nickname for the Wu-Keng

Pu Chang: Minister. There are ministers for each of the nine Spheres, the most important being the Pu Chang Ching Shen, the Minister of Spirits.

Sheng Shou: A novice, the lowest ranking of the Wu Lung.

Shih Li: Tass.

Sifu: Master or teacher.

Spheres: The Wu Lung names for the Spheres are as follows: T'ung Ch'ing (Correspondence), Hun Luan (Entropy), Yao Su (Forces), Sheng Ming (Life), Wu Chih (Matter), Hsin (Mind), Li (Prime), Ching Shen (Spirit), Shih Chien (Time).

T'ien K'ung te Huang Ti Wu Lung: Heavenly Emperor of the Dragon Wizards, commonly called the Huang Ti Wu Lung or Dragon Emperor-Wizard.

Tsu Tsung: Ancestor; also used for the Wu Lung's Avatar.

Wu: Wizard, used in reference to anyone who practices any form of magick.

Introduction

Tracing their magickal history back over 4,000 years, the ancient magi of the *Wu Lung*, or Dragon Wizards, have long been a force in Chinese culture and politics. Although the Craft had little formal structure prior to the reign of the First Emperor, the Wu Lung have always been bound together by the magickal veneration of their ancestors. Supposedly, their magick springs from this source. Until recently, the Wu Lung had always been advisors and sorcerers to the Chinese Imperial Court; many emperors have been Wu Lung sorcerers themselves. The changing modern world cost them their power briefly, but recent years have seen a resurgence in proper Chinese culture and ancestry outside the bounds of China.

The Wu Lung have become very secretive in the last five decades, since Mao and his followers won China's bloody civil war and turned many people against traditional ways. No small part of the blame for the Wu Lung's fall rests with the Wu-Keng, or Nung Wu (peasant-wizards) as the Wu Lung derisively call them. As the common man's star has risen, so the stars of the ancient dynasties have darkened. For now...

Wu Lung magi practice magick based on and concentrated on the spirits of the dead, and the many heavens and hells that make up the Chinese afterlife. They hold that the world has a natural order, that some are destined to rule, and others are destined to toil. They also believe that the Heavens themselves are ordered by the Celestial Bureaucracy, and that the lands *under* Heaven should emulate this organization.

The Wu Lung strictly regiment their magickal arts. They discover *Sheng Shou* (novices) through divination and consultation with their ancestors and the ancestors of the chosen. These ancestors are sent to the chosen to help guide them into their rightful place within the rigid Wu Lung hierarchy, and they constitute the Avatar of the chosen one. As the *Sheng Shou* progress and shows themselves worthy, they are promoted within the bureaucracy, and are taught new rituals.

Frequent contact with the dead inspires the Wu Lung to affect archaic mannerisms and clothing. Although they rarely display these affectations in public, in private it is not uncommon to find a Wu Lung dressed as a noble Manchurian lord, with fine silk robes, jade jewelry and elaborate makeup. Newer *Sheng Shou*, who hold more to the modern ways, are less likely to dress in ancient ways, though many still do.

The Wu Lung believe — although they consider it a dark time in China and the world in general — that they will survive as they always have through adjustments of the Heavenly balance. This is not the first time they have been deposed from power in China, and it will not be the last; the Dragon Wizards always manage to come out triumphant. They also believe, however, that it is a fool who waits for luck. The wise man makes luck for himself through his righteous and harmonious actions. The Nung Wu will once again be driven out, and the Wu Lung will advise the new rulers of China in the Hidden City.



Background: Rivals Under Heaven



The Wu Lung have existed since the beginning of the veneration of ancestors by the Chinese, almost 4,000 years ago, but began as a disunited, inharmonious group. It wasn't until the reign of Qin Shihuang, the First Emperor to unify China in 221 B.C., that the Wu Lung truly worked as one. Taking advantage of Qin Shihuang's fear of death and the afterworld, a Wu Lung named Fu Xia assisted the First Emperor in securing a place of power in the afterworld. Through this arrangement, the Wu Lung gained incredible power in the temporal world and Fu Xia was named the First Emperor of the Wu Lung. Since then, virtually all the emperors of China were advised by the emperor-wizards of the Wu Lung; many of these emperors were Wu Lung themselves.

Throughout those centuries, the Wu Lung's power grew, and they became totally entrenched in the bureaucracy, embracing Legalism, the system of harsh but realistic laws followed by the powerful rulers of the ancient land. Even through the reign of the Mongols, the Wu Lung remained in power, advising the Khans, and through them making contact with the West. Over time, the Dragon Wizards brutally and ruthlessly crushed all magickal rivals

in China, giving special "attention" to the Wu-Keng and the Akashic Brotherhood. They were largely successful, and able to bounce back quickly during the times they were not. Although the Wu-Keng occasionally managed to hamper or destroy imperial rule, the Wu Lung were quick to restore the harmonious balance dictated to them by Heaven.

In 1321, a small group of Wu Lung, Artificers who had heavily embraced Legalism, split from the Magickal Bureaucracy to attend the Convention of the White Tower. They eventually joined the Order of Reason as part of the Artificer Convention, and paved the way for centuries of good relations with the Wu Lung. After all, the Order existed to curb rampant and undisciplined hedge-wizards like the Wu-Keng, not the stately and orderly imperial servants that the Wu Lung had become.

When the Wu Lung themselves were invited to participate in the Grand Convocation, they declined, based on their early (and hostile) contact with the Order of Hermes. The Wu Lung saw no benefit in associating with these barely enlightened Western barbarians, especially since the Grand Convocation had also invited the Akashic Brotherhood.

In the late 17th century, the Wu Lung decided to take a more forceful hand in aiding the Imperial Court. The emperor was fearful of the fighting power of the Shaolin



monks, and feared they may turn against the state. The Wu Lung knew that the Shaolin Temple was an Akashic stronghold, and offered the emperor magickal aid to fight a magickal foe. The emperor wisely accepted. As the conflict escalated, the Wu Lung and the Akashics fought duels of magick and martial arts through the city streets and country villages. These legendary battles became the source of many Chinese tales of sorcery and the supernatural. This war culminated in 1735, when the Shaolin aided a peasant rebellion against the Manchurian Chi'ing dynasty. The Shaolin fighting style was far superior to that of the emperor's own soldiers. The emperor, fearing the monks would overcome his troops, asked Li Te-yu, the Thousand-Tiger Lord, to help storm the Shaolin Temple. The attack was successful, and Akashic power in China was shattered. Relations between the Wu Lung and the Akashic Brotherhood have remained hostile to this day.

Unfortunately, even the Thousand-Tiger Lord could not foresee the treachery that lay in store when the Order of Reason became the Technocratic Union. Aided by the Artificers' insights into the Wu Lung, the Technocracy invaded China with guns, ships, and industrial and mercantile swindling. When the Japanese invaded in the 1930s, the power of the Wu Lung finally collapsed. With the Communists now in control of China, the Wu Lung will have a hard time regaining their glory and power.

Culture



The Wu Lung belief in the power of tradition and the wisdom of ancestral spirits leads outsiders to consider them old-fashioned. Their ancient rituals and elaborate rites are very powerful, however, for the ancient pact of Fu Xia and Qin Shihuang still holds. The Wu Lung, for their part, continue to seek ancestral aid and guidance in virtually every major undertaking, and they enact their incredibly powerful rituals to regain their lost place of power in China.

The Dragon Wizards are not blind to the advantages of the modern age, however. With an influx of new apprentices — many of whom were born outside of China, and do not strictly adhere to traditional Chinese ethics, beliefs and practices — the Wu Lung are changing. The actions of the modern Phoenix Empress, have openly brought women into the Wu Lung for the first time, and their influence changes things further. The current Heavenly Emperor of the Dragon Wizards prefers a simple philosophy of venerating ancestors for their wisdom instead of their power, and has begun to dispense with some of the less-useful trappings of the Imperial court.

Still, all Wu Lung realize that China has a beautiful and rich culture. They do not ignore such beauty and heritage for the sake of the aesthetic idea of the Taoist "empty vessel." Instead, they believe that the vessel should be filled, consumed, assimilated, and then refilled. Hence, they surround themselves with reminders of their culture to inspire them to do what is harmonious under the eyes of Heaven.

Currently, the Wu Lung occupy Hong Kong, but keep their existence a secret (see Chapter Seven). Working outward from there, the Dragon Wizards expand their influence into Chinese communities throughout the world, especially in the Americas. Many new Sheng Shou come from such communities, bringing ideas of harmonious integration between East and West with them. The Craft is especially strong in the Chinese communities of Vancouver, Seattle, Los Angeles and San Francisco. From San Francisco, they hope to strike back into China, and the time is coming very soon.

The Wu Lung attitude toward the mundanes changes as more young Sheng Shou enter the bureaucracy. Instead of treating peasants as serfs, some modern Wu Lung regard them as the consors of the Traditions — valuable servants and allies with their own rightful place in the Magickal Bureaucracy. Some of them have even learned a few basic rites and rituals, although they cannot progress further without being chosen by the Tsu Tsung (i.e., Awakening). Contact with mages outside the Wu-Keng, the Technocracy and the Traditions has been sporadic at best, but the Wu Lung have a more open mind toward such contacts than they once did — especially if other wizards could aid them in their ultimate quest to return to power in China.

Beliefs

The metaphysics of the Wu Lung are complicated to say the least, and follow closely traditional Chinese mythology and legend. To them, the universe consists of Heaven, the spiritual realm; Earth, the base realm; and Man, who stands between the two. Everything is orderly under the eyes of Heaven; this order is established and maintained by the Celestial Bureaucracy. The Heavenly Kingdom of Jade is ruled over by the August Personage of Jade, and the Dark Kingdom of Jade is ruled over by the First Emperor, Qin Shihuang. Both of them are run, according to the traditions of Legalism, by the Celestial Bureaucracy.

The Dark Kingdom of Jade (see the *Wraith* book of the same name) is not a hell, but simply the place where the dead go when they pass from Earth. Few Wu Lung have gone there, and those who survive refuse to speak of the journey, saying only that it showed them a greater path of enlightenment.

The Heavenly Kingdom of Jade, by contrast, is not where the dead go, but rather the destination of the bodily ascension of the most worthy. This is the core of the Wu

Lung Ascension belief: Those who prove themselves within the Magickal Bureaucracy of the Wu Lung will come to the attention of the Celestial Bureaucracy, and may join it in the Heavenly Kingdom of Jade. Those Wu Lung who do not Ascend, but die, are assured a place in the Bureaucracy of the Dark Kingdom of Jade.

There is also the home of the Celestial Bureaucracy itself, which other mages refer to as the Eastern Umbral Court, home of the many mythic creatures of Chinese legend, including the Celestial Dragons. Although the Celestial Bureaucracy does not dabble directly in the affairs of Man or Earth, the Wu Lung see themselves as the vital link between the will of the Celestial Bureaucracy and the mortal world. It is the divine providence of the Wu Lung to make the will of the Celestial Bureaucracy a reality.

Through venerating their ancestors in the Heavenly and Dark Jade Kingdoms, the Wu Lung gain their power to enact magick. But the Celestial Bureaucracy has very strict guidelines about how that power may be tapped; any deviation from the ritual and ceremony will result in dire consequences. Although the older Wu Lung can remember when Ch'ung T'u (Paradox) was not a problem, younger ones have begun to believe that the Technocracy has forced the hand of the Celestial Bureaucracy to enforce stricter rules. By bringing back the old ways and beliefs, they theorize the Celestial Bureaucracy will be appeased and Ch'ung T'u will fade in importance.

Magickal Style

Practicing magick is not something the Wu Lung take lightly. All aspects of magick should be carefully considered, a belief reflected in strict adherence to ritual. Despite their isolation (geographical and intellectual) from other magi, the Wu Lung have a highly sophisticated understanding of magick and the Spheres. They believe in the trinity of Dragon, Phoenix and Tiger, just as the Akashic Brotherhood does. Their hierarchy reflects this belief, with the Dragon Emperor, Phoenix Empress and Tiger Lord comprising the top rulers. Still, they prefer to concentrate their actual magickal practices on the Spheres of Spirit and Forces, representing the powers of Heaven and Earth.

The Otherworlds offer the Dragon Wizards many possibilities denied to them on Earth. Even now, the upper levels of the Magickal Bureaucracy prepare a mighty ritual in the Hall of Seven Clouds, their prime Horizon Realm. Though the exact nature of this ritual is unknown, rumors abound among the Ch'uang Shih and Nan Wu. The most widely believed rumor points to the excavations of the clay warriors of the various emperors. These clay warriors, it is said, were the basis for the pact between Fu Xia and Qin Shihuang, and gave the First Emperor his power in Heaven. The warriors would be powerful foci, possibly to summon

the power of Qin Shihuang to aid the Wu Lung, or perhaps even to bring back Fu Xia himself.

Politics are as much a part of the Magickal Bureaucracy as the actual study of magick, and the Wu Lung practice political intrigue with a subtlety and skill that would make Machiavelli look incompetent. The Wu Lung are patient in all things, and often take decades to nurture a political move to its fullest potential. Politics and magick are intertwined; only by climbing the ladder of the Magickal Bureaucracy may one gain access to more powerful magick and to the instruction of the most skilled Chu Jen (Masters). The Wu Lung extensively use these skills in business, and they are very wealthy, both individually and collectively.

Despite material wealth, most Dragon Wizards feel comfortable in the Hall of Seven Clouds, where lesser dragons cavort in a beautiful land and the world seems peaceful, orderly and comforting. Many young Ch'uang Shih are granted passage to this Hall as a reward, and in going, they learn of the true beauty and harmony at the foundation of the Wu Lung magickal philosophy.

Spheres

The most important Sphere for a Wu Lung is *Ching Shen* (Spirit). This Art gives him contact with his ancestors, binds him with his Tsu Tsung (Avatar), and gives him knowledge of the dead (even his dead enemies). The Wu Lung have a sophisticated understanding of this Sphere, intricately linked to their concepts of the Tellurian and the Tapestry. Other mages, even Hermetics, have a difficult time understanding these complex concepts. Ching Shen is the first Sphere taught to each Sheng Shou, and forms the basis for the Wu Lung view of reality; by seeing the spirit worlds, one understands the fabric of the Tapestry. Without this Sphere, a Wu Lung is nothing. The Dragon is the heavenly symbol for Ching Shen.

To utilize Ching Shen, the Wu Lung must be on the best of terms with his Tsu Tsung — his ancestral Avatar. If he does not appease the Tsu Tsung with prayers, gifts and offerings, he forsakes his ability to contact spirits (lose his Spirit rating), and word of his disrespect quickly spreads throughout the Celestial and Magickal Bureaucracies. If he offends his Tsu Tsung badly, he may be sent on a great quest of amazing hardship to appease it.

Traditionally, *Yao Su* (Forces) is the second most important and commonly mastered Sphere. The Wu Lung believe there are five elements in the world, and that all things are composed of these elements. This belief is not taken literally, however, and the elements are seen as energies rather than as physical matter. The most common Yao Su Effects draw from one or more of these elements. Wu Lung alchemists are the greatest teachers of this Sphere, and are proficient at combining it with *Wu Chih* (Matter). Using Yao Su of fire and gold, a Wu Lung alchemist may use Wu Chih to form

Chinese Elements

The Chinese use five elements instead of the traditional four understood by Western alchemy. They are fire, earth, metal, water and wood. It is important for the Wu Lung utilizing Yao Su to understand how they relate to each other, so they may create or counter Effects properly.

Element	Associations	Creates	Destroys
Fire	summer, growth, joy	Earth	Metal, by melting it
Earth	transformation, thought	Metal	Water, by retaining it
Metal	autumn, harvest, worry	Water	Wood, by cutting it
Water	winter, storage, fear	Wood	Fire, by extinguishing it
Wood	spring, birth, anger	Fire	Earth, by covering it

Thus, if a Wu Lung wished to use Yao Su to create something made of earth, he might use Yao Su of Earth, the basis for the creation, as well as Fire, for fire helps to create earth. Destroying the same object would be accomplished with Yao Su of Wood, and the magickal Effect would somehow involve the smothering of earth. In game terms, all such Effects come from Forces, but the elements make a difference in story terms.

them into the Seven Golden Swords of the Tiger, an impenetrable wall of magickal blades. Yao Su Effects are often dangerously vulgar in the modern world, although older Chinese folk are not considered Sleepers when viewing such magicks in action. The Tiger symbolizes Yao Su.

“Women’s Magick”

As women have become openly accepted into the Wu Lung through the influence of the Phoenix Empress (and her insistence that the Wu Lung need more women in their ranks to harmonize with the ways of Heaven), they have been drawn less to the Sphere of Yao Su and more to *Sheng Ming* (Life). All female Sheng Shou learn Sheng Ming as part of the Phoenix School, and the sole female Chu Jen, Moonflower, is a Master of it.

Female Wu Lung, following the teachings of the Phoenix School, believe that Sheng Ming is subtler than Yao Su, yet achieves the same results. Through this Sphere, female Wu Lung hope to avoid the problems of Ch'ung T'u (Paradox). The Phoenix Empress is even said to be able to use Sheng Ming in conjunction with Ching Shen to achieve a kind of immortality, through the passing of her immortal essence into a new body at the time of birth. The Phoenix Empress herself has been reincarnated over 300 times, and her mastery of this conjunction is without equal.

Common Foci

Different wizards (and, in fact, different tasks) require their own foci. The rules for casting the Wu Lung style of magick are very strict about the items required for a given task, so it is not uncommon for a traveling Wu Lung to carry a large bag of these items. For example, a small jade figurine of a medieval Chinese warrior must always be used for the rote **Summon the Jade Warrior**. The exact way the figurine is used, however, depends on the individual mage. Common foci include:

- Silk; fans; incense; a variety of items made of jade or gold; imperial emblems and sigils; pure powder of the five elements (either separated or mixed); portable ancestral shrines; prayer sticks; prayer beads; rice paper with Chinese alchemical or astrological symbols; hexagrams; rice; Chinese coins; firecrackers; prayer, chanting and meditation; and virtually anything associated with Chinese dragons.

Organization

A strict hierarchy governs the Dragon Wizards; advancement involves a complex progress of magickal, personal and spiritual perfection (and, perhaps, a bit of political savvy as well). All told, there may be as many as 100 Awakened Wu Lung living. The majority of them are Nan Wu-level or lower. The top five ranks are strictly limited in number, and no one may displace them while they live (which may be centuries).

- The **T'ien K'ung te Huang Ti Wu Lung**, or the "Heavenly Emperor of the Dragon Wizards," sits at the top of the Wu Lung Magickal Bureaucracy. His word is law throughout Wu Lung society. The current Dragon Emperor is reputed to have lived for over 1,000 years continuously. In accordance with Wu Lung tradition, he has no name other than his title.

- His wife, the **Feng Huang Hou Wu**, or "Phoenix Empress-Wizard" sits below the emperor himself. She provides the yin to the Dragon Emperor's yang, and forms the second part of the triad that leads the Magickal Bureaucracy. She too has no name other than her title.

- The **Hu Kuei Tsu Wu**, The Tiger Lord Wizard, forms the third part of the triad of leadership. First among the nine Lords, the Tiger Lord commands the Dragon Lord's military forces. The current Tiger Lord is Meng T'ien. The Tiger Lord is the one designated to ascend to the Dragon Wizard Throne should the Dragon Emperor die.

- Eight other Lords, or **Kuei Tsu**, oversee Education, Intelligence, Legalism, Provisions, Records, Religion, Tradition and Treasure. Each serves his particular function and commands separately from the others, but they must work together to make the Magickal Bureaucracy function properly.

- **Pu Chang**, or Ministers, keep the records of the Wizards' magickal knowledge. There are nine Ministers,



one for each Sphere of magick, who also review new candidates for the position of Master. Each Minister is chosen by the Dragon Emperor himself.

- A **Sifu** (Master or Teacher), is not a part of the Magickal Bureaucracy. The term Sifu is simply an honorific given to one who has shown Mastery of the Ching Shen Sphere, and any one other Sphere. Sifu are the only ones permitted to teach the Sheng Shou, and have a pecking-order of sorts, based on knowledge, outside of their other ranks. The more they know, the higher their status.

- **Nan Wu**, or wizards, make up the Wu Lung rank and file. These Nan Wu are divided into nine levels, called "offices," and each of them is further designated by the lord they serve. Thus, a new Nan Wu in the service of the Lord of Intelligence would be "a Nan Wu of the First Office of Intelligence." Promotion through the offices is given by the lords themselves, and often requires a tedious Magickal Service exam. Nan Wu are free to switch lords if a vacancy opens.

- Below the Nan Wu sit the **Ch'uang Shih**, the senior students (the rank at which most player characters will start). Each student officially studies under one Sifu, but the Ch'uang Shih often find out as much from each other (and the tasks they undertake) as they learn directly from their Sifu. Like the Nan Wu, the Ch'uang Shih are divided into nine offices, and serve the lord of their Sifu. To be promoted to Nan Wu, the Ch'uang Shih must pass written and physical tests, and sometimes must complete a quest determined by his Master and his lord. For example, those of the Tiger School must prove their martial prowess (both physical and magickal), and must pass a test on the writings of Sun Tzu. Someone who studied under a Sifu of the Dragon School may have to prove he has a high degree of Chi Neng, and he may be asked to recite the names of the rulers of the Dark Kingdom of Jade. The Phoenix School, the newest of all and made up entirely of female Wu Lung, has only recently started issuing written tests, focusing more on the balance of life and death and the renewal of the ever-changing cycle.

- Finally, there are the **Sheng Shou**, the lowest of the low, the junior students and novices. The Sheng Shou are also divided into nine groups, called "chairs" instead of offices. Each serves only his Master, and may not yet claim to serve a lord, as he is not yet worthy of the title. Sheng Shou become Ch'uang Shih after passing the tests designated by their Master.

Initiation

Initiation into the Wu Lung is a very orderly affair. When a Master prepares to take on a new student, he seeks a *Sheng Shou* on the cusp of awareness. The Master contacts his *Tsu Tsung*, who then contacts other Avatars until a potential *Sheng Shou* is found. The Master's *Tsu Tsung* accompanies the novice's Avatar, often appearing to the



initiate in a dream. In this dream, ancestor-spirits, both immediate and distant, Awaken the novice's Avatar and forge the link between them. The novice is then guided to the Master, and instruction begins. After a time determined by the Master, the novice is taken to the Horizon Realm to continue his studies. There he begins to learn the rituals and rites that make up the heart of the Wu Lung practice.

Eventually, the Sheng Shou is ready to advance to Ch'uang Shih, or Initiate. After being given a highly complicated, standardized test, he usually undergoes some sort of quest devised by his Master. Upon successful completion, the new Ch'uang Shih is invested with the jade symbols of his place in the Magickal Bureaucracy.

Ch'uang Shih either continue to study with their Masters, or find other Chu Jen from which to learn. The brightest and most promising Initiates may even find a *Pu Chang* (minister) to teach them or sponsor their studies, and a very few, the best of all, are taken in by one of the *Kuei Tsu* (lords). Still, it is not uncommon for Ch'uang Shih to spend much of their time in independent study and soul-searching, pondering the very nature of being a Wu Lung in the 20th century.

To advance to *Nan Wu*, a Ch'uang Shih must pass many tests, both written and demonstrative, and the initiate must have made it to the highest circle of the Ch'uang Shih. Fully vested *Nan Wu* are free to travel without servitude to a Master (although many enter the service of a lord or even the emperor). The ranks of the *Nan Wu*, decimated by the fall of the emperor and the war against the *Nung Wu*, have begun to swell again at last. As their population increases, the Wu Lung prepare to reach into China once more, and many *Nan Wu* slip into China through Hong Kong to assess the strength and power of the *Wu-Keng*.

Chu Jen (Masters) are highly skilled, and enjoy vast respect throughout all levels of the Magickal Bureaucracy. Many consider them the hope for the future, since they teach the mages of tomorrow. *Chu Jen* are chosen by a council of *Pu Chang*, and must demonstrate their mastery of Spirit and one other Sphere.

Recently, Moonflower (see above) became the first of her gender to attain *Chu Jen* rank. She demonstrated an amazing mastery of the combined Spheres of Spirit and Life, and now teaches several students, all female.

The existence of a female *Chu Jen* disturbs many *Wu Lung*. Until very recently, only one woman at a time was permitted to be *Wu Lung* (although a few scattered female mages secretly learned the *Wu Lung Arts*). Called the *Feng Huang Hou Wu* (Phoenix Empress), she is the consort of the Heavenly Dragon Wizard-Emperor, and gives birth to herself as the daughter of the previous Phoenix Empress and the Dragon Emperor. As her spirit passes into the new body, her old body dies, and she is once again raised and trained to serve as the balance to the Dragon Emperor. Since the

fall of the Chinese monarchy, modern influences have undermined even this ancient tradition. Several women have become Ch'uang Shih, and a dozen of those have risen to higher positions of power.

Advancement beyond *Chu Jen* is by appointment of the *Huang Ti Wu Lung* himself. A mage can become a *Pu Chang* of a particular Sphere, or even one of the mighty *Kuei Tsu*. The rituals involved in this sort of advancement are very secret, and depend upon what post the *Wu Lung* wishes to attain. All of them, however, involve traveling to the land of the dead itself — the Dark Kingdom of Jade.

Acolytes

The *Wu Lung* have a large number of servants, advisors and other associates. In the past, most of these were treated badly. With the loss of their Chinese homeland, however, the *Wu Lung* are adopting a less condescending policy toward their servitors in order to retain their valuable services. Recently, the Dragon Emperor declared that any person who had a necessary and valuable skill and who honored traditional Chinese values, as determined by the Lord of Legalism, should be treated with respect, as if she were a Ch'uang Shih.

The most valued of all acolytes practice *Lien Chin Shu* (alchemy), *Feng Shui* (stone lore/geomancy) and *Ts'ao Pen Chih Wu* (herbalism) all as per the Abilities listed in **The Book of Shadows**. The *Wu Lung* value them for their ability to assist in the creation of artifacts, foci, potions and charms; such skills can be useful during elaborate magickal rituals. Although very few *Feng Shui* actively work with the *Wu Lung*, the wizards, especially in Hong Kong, made it a priority to recruit these respected folk. The *Wu Lung* see this as a path to reestablish respect for traditional Chinese teachings, especially the veneration of the *Tsu Tsung*.

Beyond that, most other *Wu Lung* acolytes are simple servants. A few of the newer *Nan Wu* take on "business partners" in their various communities to help finance their efforts, but this is relatively rare. Still, the life of an acolyte of the *Wu Lung* is comfortable, if a bit stratified, and few would leave it even if they could.

Concepts

Character concepts for the *Wu Lung* may seem restricted at first to the stuffy, overly ceremonial types that used to rule the tradition. This is not necessarily true. With the influx of many young *Sheng Shou* and *Ch'uang Shih*, the possibilities are endless. The only real restriction is that the character must be at least partially Chinese. Some modern *Ch'uang Shih* are Chinese Americans; a few of these *Wu Lung* have only one Chinese grandparent (usually of great spiritual power). So long as the novice or initiate honors his ancestors and is ready to embrace his Chinese heritage, the *Wu Lung* will consider him seriously.

Since time passes at a different rate in the Horizon Realm where many Wu Lung are taken for their initial studies, you can have great fun in making anachronistic characters, such as turn-of-the-century Chinese nobility. Modern characters, such as businessmen, scholars and archaeologists are also possible. A traditional martial-artist concept can also be fun. Wu Lung martial artists consider themselves warriors of the Dragon Emperor-Wizard, and often fall under the command of the Tiger Lord. Unlike the sober practitioners of the Akashic arts, such warriors are full of the fiery spirit of the Earth Dragon and the wrath of

Heaven. They possess an ability that teaches special maneuvers that are similar to Do, but more fierce and emotional.

Remember that women have only been openly permitted to be Wu Lung for the past 45 years. As such, they gain little respect, and often have to go to greater lengths than men to prove themselves to their peers and superiors. The women of the Wu Lung banded together to form the Phoenix School, and oppose the more violent servants of the Tiger Lord. The Phoenix Empress believes that it is possible to take China back without bloodshed, through subtle rituals that celebrate the cycle of life and death, rather than simply sending more souls on their way to the heavens and hells.

Common Magicks



Leap of the Celestial Tiger Lord (•• Forces)

A simple yet potent martial talent, the **Leap** suspends gravity and accelerates the mage's momentum until he spans incredible distances with one bound. The Kuei Lung practitioner merely marks the signs of Heaven and Earth upon his hand, shouts a mighty kiai, and jumps. The Akashic Brothers use a similar spell to hurl themselves in or out of harm's way.

[For each success he rolls with his Arete, the caster can jump 20 feet in any direction. Yes, this can turn vulgar quickly, but it's quite the traditional ability in Chinese folklore. In many rural areas, a martial arts master can perform incredible jumps without provoking disbelief. Distances greater than 60 feet take a turn or so to cover, and trips of 100 feet or more may take two turns.]

[When added to the damage of a kick or some other blow, the **Leap**'s momentum grants one additional die to the damage roll for every **Leap** success the caster gets. This is not magickal Forces damage, just a bonus to the usual Dice Pool. While airborne, the caster has an effective Dodge of 2; using it, however, splits his Dice Pool, which may spoil the blow he makes at the end of his leap.]

Levitation Walk (•• Spirit)

By attuning herself to the subtle influences of the spirit world, the mage can reach in and briefly touch the Umbra, connecting to it in a mild fashion. This allows the mage the ability to move as quickly as if she were in the Umbra itself. Her feet glide silently a few inches above the ground.

[This rote allows the mage to levitate a short distance — up to about 30 feet per turn, about six inches off the ground — and lasts one turn per success (difficulty 6). All she needs to do is see where she wishes to move to in that short time. Any small obstacle — a hole, but not a wall — may be bypassed while “in flight.” This is typically done when Sleepers are not looking, since it is vulgar enough to cause trouble otherwise.]

Voice of the Jade Ancestors (•• Mind, •• Spirit)

Communication with those who have passed into the afterlife is vital to the Wu Lung. Relatives or wise elders who have passed away may offer significant advice. A

wizard might even use it to speak to a dead enemy for information that might not be freely given. Using the name of the deceased, the mage can speak to the soul, either by coercion or by making appropriate offerings.

[This Effect allows the mage to contact a wraith in the Shadowlands, especially in the Dark Kingdom of Jade. The

Stereotypes

Traditions: An inharmonious amalgamation of fools, with some notable exceptions. The so-called “Akashic Brotherhood,” we know well from their days as the Shaolin; their blood-foes the Euthanatos have put aside an ancient quarrel, and so might we. The ones called “Dreamspeakers” have started to approach us in our travels through the spirit realms, but we do not trust their motives.

Technocracy: Once known as the Artificers, the vile traitors called Iteration X were once our brothers. They have forsaken their souls and their people for the culturally bankrupt technology of the foreign devils. We shall never forget their crimes. Upon them we wish a swift journey to the Hell of Being Skinned Alive.

Marauders: Although merely a nuisance, these barbarians are beyond redemption for their unprovoked attacks, and should be quickly sent to the Hell of Boiling Oil.

Nephandi: Such demon-worshippers should be destroyed. Nothing pleases my Tsu Tsung more than offering the head of one at the ancestral shrine.

Wu-Keng: These Nung Wu are our sworn enemies, and we will never forget the day they drove us out of China. The demons that plague us now may come at their behest, making us wonder just how deep their corruption goes.

Others: Beneath our notice, except for the Children of Knowledge, whose arts of alchemy rival even our own. To them we show respect, for we have honorably shared our knowledge and discoveries with each other many times. The other petty groups are fools, practicing magick with no true purpose other than their own amusement or stalking each other as part of some arcane game even they do not understand.

mage must go to the burial site (or urn) of the dead and call her by name. An item that was closely associated with the deceased (i.e., a Fetter) may also be substituted, but the mage must still know the ghost's name. Depending on the ghost's fate (see **Wrath: The Oblivion**), the wizard may get a ghostly apparition, a disembodied voice, or nothing at all. The ghost is under no compulsion to stay, and may leave at any time.]

Yao Su Dragon Thunder (••• Forces, ••• Spirit, •• Prime)

All things are possible under Heaven, especially when one has the magickal knowledge of the ages behind him. This spell, an old favorite of the Tiger Lord's forces, harnesses the power of Yao Su to conjure wind, water, thorns and fireballs which sear even spirit flesh (ephemera). By painting the symbol for the element he wishes to conjure on a piece of paper, the Dragon Wizard captures the essence of that element. When he wants to discharge the magick, he burns the paper, points and shouts the name of the element. In a flash, the paper is consumed and the force in question bursts forth from the ground.

[Depending on his wishes, the Wu Lung can summon a fiery explosion, a gust of wind, several dozen gallons of water, a shower of dust, a thorn bush, a thunderbolt or a shower of molten metal. The damage is always based on the mage's Arete roll, but the results differ from element to element (air buffets while fire burns). Conjured water or wood remains for several days or until they're consumed somehow. The rote's extra kick comes from Spirit magick; with it, the Wu Lung can harm even discorporal opponents as if they were living flesh.]

The Seven Golden Swords of the Tiger (••• Matter, ••• Spirit, •• Correspondence, •• Forces, •• Prime)

A mighty alchemical spell, the **Seven Golden Swords** creates either a whirling circle of blades or a sharp-edged barrier. Both variations block the protected area from passage by spirits, people and even Correspondence magicks.

After performing an extensive forging ritual in which seven tiny golden swords are imbued with the essence of fire, the Wu Lung alchemist sprinkles the blades with dust from a shrine and wraps them in paper that is covered in verses. The swords are kept this way until the magick is used. At that point, the wizard calls upon the powers of the elements and tosses all seven swords into the air at once. If he has performed the rite successfully, the seven swords appear full-sized, leap into formation and begin to spin in the air. Anything that crosses their path is harmed, if not destroyed.

[The **Seven Swords** damage a target as if they were a normal Forces Effect, and remain in the air for one full day unless called down before then. Anyone who remains in the protected area is hit each turn by the spinning blades, which continue to do normal damage.

[A conjunctive Correspondence Effect blocks any attempts to bypass the barrier (like a **Ward** Effect; each success reduces all Correspondence Effects used through

the barrier by one success), while Spirit harms ephemeral creatures who would pass the blades. Although they may seem like normal weapons, the **Golden Swords** are far stronger than steel. Anyone who tries to break down the barrier must use counter-magick to undo the caster's successes; no mortal feat of strength will destroy the wall.]

Sense the Demon's Weakness (• Entropy, • Spirit)

By focusing through the spirit realms, a Wu Lung may concentrate on a demon and discern an essential flaw or weakness in the creature.

[To the Wu Lung, demons are many things. True demons, demon hordes, false demons (Banes, Paradox spirits, black magicians, vengeful wraiths), and other Umbrood are all susceptible to this rote (see **The Book of Madness** for more information about demons). The Storyteller may set the difficulty and the minimum successes required to find a weakness on a "demon"; simple diabolists rate one success at difficulty 5; true servitor demons and powerful Umbrood rate five successes at difficulty 9 or 10. "Weaknesses" include susceptibility to a certain type of attack, personality flaws, legendary rituals which bind them, etc. The rote itself doesn't inflict damage, but it may offer the key to defeating a powerful adversary.]

Body of the Spirit (••• Life, ••• Spirit)

The transformation of the physical body into ephemera occurs when the mage enters the Umbra, but with this Effect, the mage may move about the physical world in spirit form. The Wu Lung have used this since the ancient days, enabling them to make their innermost sanctums inaccessible, and to defend themselves against physical attack.

[The mage appears normal to all who view him, but may not interact with physical matter in any way. His body simply passes through all physical things, and all physical things do the same to him. Again, this rote is very vulgar, so is generally performed away from Sleepers.]

Repel the Hungry Dead (•••• Spirit, •• Prime)

When dealing with powerful spirits and wraiths, the Wu Lung must be careful to safeguard themselves against possession. With this Effect, a wizard places a spiritual barrier around his body that is completely repugnant to a potential possessor.

[For each success, the mage increases the difficulty of the possessor's roll by +1. This can be used against any creature who has the power to possess the mage's body. Note that this does not work against mental possession, only spiritual possession.]

Conjure the Jade Warrior (••••• Spirit, ••• Matter, ••• Prime)

By weaving the forces of Li, the Wu Lung may summon the giant image of an ancient warrior clad in jade armor, carrying a jade sword. Into the weave, the forces of the Ching Shen imbue the Jade Warrior with a mighty spirit to guide the new form, and Wu Chih gives it a material form. The Jade Warrior exists simultaneously in the spirit realms

and the physical realms, and is therefore a versatile body-guard or champion.

[For the statistics of the Jade Warrior, the Storyteller can use those given for Olonga the Whisperer (*Mage*, page 282) with modifications as desired. The Jade Warrior has two Materialized Health Levels for every success the mage rolls, to a maximum of 10.]

Talismans

- Three Pearls of Thunder and Lightning
Arete 4, Quintessence N/A, Cost 8

This silken pouch contains three pearls of near-perfect beauty. These pearls have one of three Effects, as desired by the person casting the pearl. One, when thrown, explodes (five aggravated Health Levels to all within 10 feet of impact). Another Effect puts a spirit to sleep if it hits the

pearl (which drains 20 points of Power). The third turns one living target to stone (Life 4/Matter 2, lasts one week/success of Pearl's "Arete" roll, difficulty 8, one Scene if no successes are scored). Each Effect depends upon the caster hitting his target (Dexterity + Melee, difficulty 7, difficulty 4 if thrown at the ground), and destroys the Pearl. All Effects are accompanied by claps of thunder and flashes of lightning.

- Silver Fan

Arete 4, Quintessence 20, Cost 8

When unfolded, this silver-painted fan protects its user, who chooses the Effect. The first option turns a damaging Forces Effect directed at the holder of the fan to a harmless flash of smoke. The second reflects it back at the caster. In each case, the Fan grants an additional four dice to the user's counter-magick rolls (*Mage*, pages 172-174). The first protection costs one Quintessence, the second costs two.

New Ability: Kuei Lung Ch'uan (Spirit Dragon Kung Fu)



Since the martial arts were introduced to China from India centuries ago, Wu Lung of the Tiger School have been eager and skillful practitioners. Their own art form, unlike the Akashic art of Do, is not a combination of magick and physical technique, but rather a system of effective fighting maneuvers. This art—Kuei Lung—represents centuries of practice and refinement by the Tiger School of Wu Lung training. Although it has been its special area of interest, the Tiger School teaches this style to any Wu Lung who have the desire and discipline to study it. It is *never* taught to outsiders, on pain of death by torture.

This special Martial Arts Ability replaces the Brawl Talent, and has different difficulty ratings for the basic Brawl maneuvers (see chart). All damage is normal. Kuei Lung Ch'uan is a "hard-style" martial art, and only a handful of Akashic Brothers can recognize it in use.

Special Maneuvers

For each dot in Kuei Lung after the first, the wizard may choose one of this style's special maneuvers (see chart for effects):

- **Dragon Tail Sweep:** When successful, this spinning leg-sweep knocks the Wu Lung's opponent to the ground. Treat this maneuver like a Throw without having to grapple with the opponent.
- **Thunder Kick:** This deadly leaping kick delivers significant damage.
- **Tiger Claw:** This open-handed blow specializes in targeting the opponent's vital organs. Difficulty 6, damage of Strength +1

- **Withering Grasp:** This maneuver disarms an opponent who is using any hand-held weapon with a successful Dexterity + Brawl roll, and inflicts some damage as well. The Wu Lung must score at least three successes to win the contest; with five, he may take the weapon away for his own use.

Kuei Lung Ch'uan Maneuvers

Maneuver	Difficulty	Damage
Strike	5	Strength
Kick	6	Strength + 1
Grapple	6	Strength
Throw	7	Special; see below

Special Maneuvers

Maneuver	Difficulty	Damage
Dragon Tail Sweep	8	Opponent's Str.
Thunder Kick	8	Strength + 3
Tiger Claw	6	Strength + 1
Withering Grasp	7	Strength + disarm

Throw: Having successfully grappled an opponent, the Wu Lung may throw him to the ground with a Dexterity + Brawl roll. The damage Dice Pool equals the attacker's Strength. A successful throw can also stun an opponent if he takes three or more Health Levels of damage after soaking. Stunned characters are at -2 dice for all actions for a number of rounds equal to the number of levels of damage taken.

Companion: T'ien Kou (Celestial Temple Dog; Cost: 4)

The T'ien Kou, or Celestial Temple Dogs, are fiercely loyal traditional guardians and protectors of sacred sites. They also aid individuals who are virtuous, honorable and worthy. These servants of the Celestial Bureaucracy follow the edicts of the Eastern Umbral Court, and defend their culture's centers of learning and knowledge. Many visit Kun Lun when they're not wandering the Heavenly Kingdom of Jade, consorting with the leaders of the Magickal Bureaucracy.

Image: Gold in color, T'ien Kou have puggish, doglike faces, lion's manes, powerful and muscular bodies, caninelike paws that end in sharp claws and beautiful flowing tails. They are comparable in size to horses.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 6, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 1, Perception 5, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 4, Intimidation 4, Stealth 3, Survival 2, Cosmology 3, Court Lore (Eastern Court) 2, Linguistics 2 (Mandarin, Cantonese, and the native language of the area surrounding their temple), Occult 1

Spheres: none

Willpower: 8

Quintessence: 10 (Tass, only harvested after death)

Health Levels: OK (x2), -1 (x2), -2 (x3), -5 (x2)

Attacks/Powers: Claw or bite (7 dice, difficulty 7); Armor (stone skin, 4 extra dice to soak); Cause Fear (Charisma + Intimidation vs. victim's Wits +3, one success and victim is cowed, three or more and victim flees in panic); Step Sideways (as the Spirit 3 Effect)

Storyteller Ideas

• **Kun Lun: The Horizon Hall of the Seven Clouds:** Here exists a wondrous Realm where the Wu Lung can bask in a place that resembles the China that once was — at least, according to them. Here, a mountain rises from the center of a large island; atop the mountain, guarded by two very powerful celestial-temple dogs, sits the Heavenly Palace of the Dragon Emperor. In the surrounding ocean, it is rumored that the Lung Wang, the King of the Dragons, sleeps until called forth by the Celestial Bureaucracy. The Monkey King is also said to pay visits to the Dragon Emperor, and some say portals to both the Heavenly and Dark Kingdoms of Jade exist here, as well as one to the Realm of the Celestial Bureaucracy itself.

At some point during training, all Wu Lung are taken here to pay homage to the Dragon Emperor and Phoenix Empress, and to continue their studies and training at one of the three Great Schools (Dragon, Tiger and Phoenix). Vulgar magicks are of little concern here, and it is an excellent location for fantastic quests and adventures.



Demon Hunter

Bring me a sword and I will rid you of your demons. From this day on, no traveler will die in this pavilion.

—The Tale of the Haunted Pavilion

Quote: *I'm going in. No matter what happens, do not come in after me.*

Prelude: Your parents died when you were only five, and you traveled from Chicago to live in San Francisco's Chinatown. Your grandparents were a very traditional Chinese couple, and who loved you dearly. Life for the child of a Chinese father and an Anglo mother was not easy in Chinatown, though, and the taunts (and worse) thrown by your schoolmates were hard to withstand. Through many fights, you learned to defend yourself well. It was the only way to survive with dignity.

Through your grandparents, you discovered ancient Chinese culture, and books about dragons, mystic warriors, spirits and demons filled your shelves. They also taught you to venerate your ancestors, including your parents, and every night you prayed at the ancestral shrine in the living room. Your offerings included things dear to you and things that would help them in the afterlife: portions of your allowance, your report card from school, silk cloths, fruits and drink.

Your grandparents were not young people, though, and they died while you were still in high school. In the traditional Chinese manner, you grieved by wearing white and making offerings at their graves. You dreamed of your grandparents, of Mother and Father, and distant ancestors, and soon it seemed they all were urging you on to something greater. You sought out your uncle, who ran an apothecary in the heart of Chinatown. Somehow he knew you were coming, and expected you.

Your family, he said, was a great line of demon hunters, stretching back hundreds of generations into ancient China. Uncle taught you how to contact your *Tsu Tsung*, an ancient demon-hunter ancestor, and Awakened you to the ways of the spirits. Now you roam the countries of the Pacific Rim, helping people protect themselves from the depredations of the fox spirits, demons, and supernatural evils that threaten all that is righteous and harmonious under the eyes of Heaven.

Concept: Always living in two worlds — one American, the other Chinese — you now live in two more, the temporal world and the spirit world. Through the *Wu Lung*, you have discovered the path of harmony and the attainment of your valiant dreams.

Roleplaying Hints: You're honorable and proud, looking upon the Sleepers as your flock, and the demons and evil spirits as wolves to be chased away. Take risks to prove your worth, and never surrender, never give up.

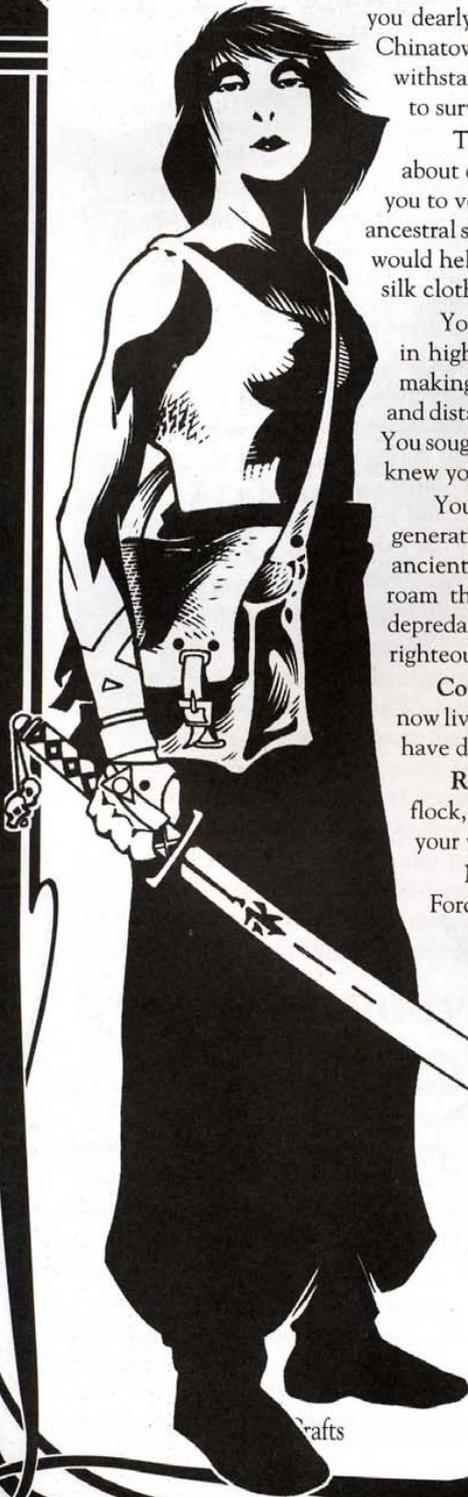
Magick: Your command of Spirit helps you bind and then drive away the spirits. Forces and Prime aid you when things get nasty.

Talisman: •• Ancestral Sword

Arete 2, Quintessence 10, Cost 4

Although this sword of your ancestors appears to be an antique sword to most, it exists in the spirit realm as well as in the temporal, and causes aggravated damage to Materialized demons, spirits and other supernatural creatures (see the Forces Effect **Enchant Weapon** in *Mage*).

Equipment: Ancestral Sword, Ceremonial Robes (used when meditating or demon/spirit hunting), bag with demon-hunting paraphernalia (bells, whistles, coins, candles, etc.), portable shrine, loose and comfortable street clothing.



BOOK OF

CRAFTS

Walking Secrets...

Once, I met a Chinese woman with hobbled feet and ancient eyes. Once, I fought a knight whose armor shone like burnished light. In the streets of Cairo, sharp-toothed men gnaw sinners' bones; in Haitian midnights, the Loa dance.

Not all magi go to war, my young friend. Many dwell in the Titans' shade, the shadows of shadows. These so-called "Orphans" have families, Son, and their ways may be more ancient than our own.

Don't piss 'em off.

— Hapsburg, Orphan Seer

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Those who see only the four sides of the Ascension Conflict ignore the "Crafts," magickal societies that forsake Traditions and Technocracy for the Paths of their ancestors. Templars, voodoo priests, alchemists and modern Amazons are just a few of the nine groups detailed herein. What tales might they tell?

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MAGE

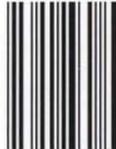


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