

# **Mage The Ascension: Book Of Thoughts**

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A Netbook of Thoughts For Mage The Ascension

# The Souls of Cities

By Anders Sandberg

Cities all have souls. Everything is reflected in the Three Umbrae; the mortal, decaying aspect in the Low Umbra, the spiritual, living aspect in the Middle Umbra and the essence, the secret soul of things, in the High Umbra. Unlike the reflections in the other Umbrae, the High Umbral reflection does not reflect the actual thing and how it currently is, (its accident), it reflects the essence, the unchanging metaphysical core of the thing. And this reflection, or true nature, naturally affects and is affected by the material thing, being its soul.

Cities are unusual because they are manmade, but on a scale to rival that of many natural features. Only nations and ideologies are bigger. This gives their souls tremendous power, but still puts them in the reach of human hands. Normally the souls do not change except very slowly under a very long time, or when powerful events change the city. But they can often be affected somewhat by large movements, or the activities of the Awakened.

It is not unusual for the souls to find embodiment in landmarks or other things. If these landmarks are hurt, the soul (and the city) suffers. Typical examples are the Little Mermaid of Copenhagen, the EEC headquarters complex in Brussels, the Mosque of the Rock in Jerusalem and the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. Many of these serve other mystical functions (the EEC headquarters is a hotbed for NWO, Syndicate and Tremere activity, the Golden Gate bridge is somehow linked to the secret schemes of the Craftsmasons and close a circle around the Bay Area). Often lesser known places are influenced too, in a complex network over the city. The soul doesn't exist in the landmark per se, but is linked to it. Some mages have found that to communicate or perceive the soul seek out significant landmarks and seek it there.

Some rare cities have never developed their own souls. Brasilia is a good example. Created entirely by the Technocracy to become an ideal city, they kept it completely spiritually blank and no soul could develop. People didn't move to the city, the great highways were empty and the plazas echoed with silence. To become alive the city needs its soul, and if its soul dies, so does the city.

Most cities in the Old World are so old that their souls have become too powerful and static to change by any means; they are spiritual beings in their own right and independent of human will. Some can even defend themselves against change, like Kyoto. Younger cities, especially the ones in the New World, have not yet developed their true souls, and can be strongly affected by the schemes of the Awakened. During the middle ages the Craftsmasons were apparently seeking to focus these souls into the Cathedrals, in addition to their other occult uses. It is even possible for an Awakened to *become* the soul of the city, to identify himself with the soul to such an degree that they merge and become one. This mystical union both gives tremendous power and binds the soul of the city in the material world. If the lord of the city is defeated, killed or otherwise hurt, the city will suffer too. "The land and the king are one".

The lord of a city reflects it in many ways, and gains a subconscious understanding and power linked to it. He will know if something is going on, and have an intuitive feeling for what to do. Influence, usually on a very subtle level, will come easily to him, and sometimes he can affect events just by existing. At the same time, he will be somewhat limited by the shape of the soul he represents; some courses of actions are simply not possible or too hard to use. Being the soul of a powerful city also means that the city will affect you strongly, giving you some of its properties.

To actually become the soul of a city requires extraordinary means. The old soul either has to be removed/reshaped/defeated so that the new soul can gain ascendancy (the way of the conqueror), or the ambitious being has to seek out the soul, learn its secrets and gradually unite with it by mutual reflection and understanding (the way of the defender).

The way of the conqueror requires a lot of temporal power, planning and ambition. The old core of the city has to be found and excised, the mystical landmarks changed or removed and a new city created from the skeleton of the old. This process can take years, but in the end the city must have changed its character to conform to its new lord. One example of this is Stockholm. In the late 60's the Technocracy demolished parts of the central city and replaced them with a new downtown, and outside the city they extended functionalistic suburbs. The new soul of the city, personified in the gray glass monolith at Sergel Plaza is truly technomantic. Of course, the Technocracy did not see this as an attempt to replace its "soul" (such things do not exist), instead it was just urban planning for the future, an attempt to create a new and better city (which is the same thing).

The way of the defender is more subtle, and sometimes walked unwittingly by the Awakened. This is especially true for the kindred Elders, who shape their cities by their actions, thoughts and power for centuries, and

are themselves shaped by them. The dreams of Methuselahs sometimes merge with the souls of the cities they sleep under.

In some of the youngest cities, the soul has never developed on its own, and instead has passed from one lord to another. One example is Las Vegas, where the occult rulership (closely linked to the powers of randomness and money) has passed down a succession of mobster mages. It is said that to become the new ruler, the old ruler has to be defeated in a mystical card game.

In some cities the Awakened struggle against each other to shape the soul of the city. In Paris, there is a struggle between the Sons of Ether and their allies on one side, and the Technocracy on the other side. The new buildings along Champs Elysee and especially the new triumph arc are a magical strike against the power of the Eiffel Tower; beside locking down the quintessence flows they are intended to give a new image to the city, something the Sons of Ether desperately opposes.

#### Story Ideas:

##### Ambition's Prize

A mage has arrived in town, seeking to become its new ruler. At first he will just study the city, making measurements, meditating in various places and gradually learning its secrets. Then he will start his secret work to undermine the current order of the city, play out various groups against each other and finally undertake a journey to the soul of the city to defeat it in spiritual combat as his plans come into fruition, plunging the city into chaos and weakening its soul at the critical moment. This character could appear as a background character during an ongoing chronicle, a mysterious manipulator and watcher who gradually develops into a dangerous enemy or ally.

##### Metrophage

A Nephandi plans to eat the city - literally. By weaving complex enchantments (looking like unusual vandalism) around landmarks and vital points in the city, he plans to force the soul of the city to manifest in a complex ritual, where it will be literally eaten by him (or rather, by his lords through him). That would give him a lot of power, and dissolve the spiritual essence tying together the city.

##### The Great Battle

The Technocracy has decided to do some urban renewal, to make the city better, more static. And that of course means they will try to remove the old, dynamic and unsuitable from it, including the secluded areas where magic still works. The mages of the city have to fight this in a battle on all levels: from construction work and urban planning to the battle for the soul of the city. An unexpected complication could be that the soul already is embodied in an old and cunning vampire.

##### The Dark City

Not all cities are humane, some demand sacrifices. At certain times, the city claims a victim; suddenly all the functions of the city like traffic, subways, elevators, inhabitants, weather and garbage turns against the victim, attacking him and draining his life force into the dark soul of the city. The characters could witness how this happens, or maybe one of them is singled out as this year's sacrifice. Paranoia might be a survival trait when even the streets themselves are out to get you.

##### The Legacy of the Craftmasons

What did the Craftmasons really seek? And do they still exist? The Technocracy thinks they are defunct, except as a small, conservative group in the NWO working to establish control over the Masonic lodges in opposition to the Order of Hermes (but who cares today?). But maybe they still exist, and continue their secret plans? They designed the layout for many cities, directing their quintessence according to their own designs. They certainly knew about the power of cities, and probably used it for their own purposes. A group of mages may stumble upon some hints that something truly odd is going on.

## **Egyptian History in Mage**

Egypt was shaped by magic; nowhere else the barriers between the worlds, the past and present, the dead and living, the gods and men are so weak and convoluted. Through millennia the Nile valley has been shaped by gods and mages as well as the beliefs of sleepers.

### **Prehistory**

The prehistory of Egypt is only conjectural. According to the technocratic archeologists, there were humans there 250,000 BC. The Order of Hermes instead speak of how the Creator (either Atum, Chnum or Ptah) and the Pure Ones created the world from the first mound of order in the sea of chaos, and then created mankind. Some mages speculate that the secret of creation still exists hidden somewhere in the Nile Valley, and eagerly seek any hints of forgotten truths.

Many mages believe that what made Egypt unique was the closeness between the inhabitants and the gods; this explains the sometimes confusing mixtures between different gods and myths, since most umbrood have a very tenuous individuality and change appearance and properties depending on the viewer and his beliefs. In Egypt, human mages interacted freely with the gods, blurring the line between man and god.

In these mythical times, time, space and individuality were still undefined and liquid, a state not unlike the Australian concept of the Dreamtime. There was no contradiction between seeing the sun as the eye of Horus, a sphere of gold rolled by a scarab or twelve gods ruling over each hour of day - all were equally true. Everyone consisted of an agglomerate of souls that could move apart and meld together. To bring order and structure to the world the humans developed ritual and eventually magick.

According to the old myths the sun god Ra ruled both gods and men in the beginning. But the humans rose up against the gods, destroying their statues and upsetting the Law of Maat. Angered, Ra first intended to destroy the cosmos, but relented and led the gods to a voluntary exile in the worlds beyond the heavens. This may correspond to the first severing between the worlds of spirit and matter, and the creation of the Gauntlet. Needless to say, neither the gods or the humans could survive without each other and soon the temples were yet again inhabited by the manifestations of the gods and prayers rose to the sky, but gods and men no longer lived in the same world.

### **Predynastic Egypt**

Predynastic Egypt is largely unknown, but it is known that there were several smaller kingdoms, which were eventually united into Upper and Lower Egypt, which in turn were united by Menes of the first dynasty. Mages believe this corresponds to the mystical battle between Set and Horus, where Set represents Lower Egypt and Horus the victorious Upper Egypt. The struggle between the two gods continued for a long time, and the second dynasty swore allegiance to Set rather than Horus, but eventually Horus became the dominant god and the worship of Set declined.

Much of Egyptian dynastic history is influenced by the complex politics between the various priesthoods. These mage-priests had significant political power, and politics, religion and magick was intimately interwoven. Usually the priests of one city would work together against the priests of other cities, but sometimes political marriages between their respective divinities were arranged. Sometimes the Pharaoh would be weak enough to be influenced by the priests, sometimes the rulers were strong enough to make the priests obey and support him.

The priests of Hermopolis, whose chief divinity was Thoth (by the Greeks identified with Hermes), would later influence the Order of Hermes, although the Order drew on knowledge from many other priesthoods too. They envisioned the creation of the universe as the interplay between the eight gods of the Ogdoad (representing unformed reality) initiated by the divine word of Thoth. The solar priesthoods of Heliopolis and especially the priests of Amun influenced the Celestial Chorus, although to a much lesser extent. And the priestesses of Isis would secretly influence Egyptian history for millennia. The other priesthoods would play various roles in history, but in the end they died out or were assimilated into later magickal/religious traditions.

### **The Old Kingdom**

The Old Kingdom (2682-2181 BC) began with the third dynasty and represented the pinnacle of magickal power of Egypt. The magick of pyramid building was developed during the third dynasty; earlier the Egyptian kings and nobility had been buried beneath rectangular monuments called mastaba. But the influential priest- and architect-mage Imhotep realized that by building monuments in the right way, with

the correct consecrations, the flows of quintessence could be diverted into magick. He built the staircase pyramid of Netjerykhet Zozer at Sakkara to give his king immortality in the next world. The natural flow of quintessence along the Nile was led into a complex enchantment to provide the dead king with a worthy afterlife and reflect his majesty back into the world. It seems that Imhotep had found the secrets of redirecting ley-lines with the help of architecture and using Quintessence to strengthen the empire by locking the paradigm in a certain shape. After the ascension of Imhotep, the mage was himself worshiped as the son of Ptah and became the patron of scribes and doctors. Mages have sought for his vanished temple near Sakkara for millennia to divine its secrets.

During the fourth dynasty, Egypt had become a powerful and unified empire. The art of pyramid building had developed, and through temple complex and arcades the lifegiving quintessence of the Nile was channeled into the afterlives of the kings. But an unnamed priest-mage, possibly Imhotep himself, had seen further. He had a vision: an immense plan to create a great hieroglyph across the land, invoking the great god Horus, the god of the kings, to protect and empower for all eternity. Each pyramid, housing one of the descendants and incarnations of the God would be a part of this pattern, a kind of huge figurine for the god to inhabit. When he described his great vision to king Khufu (Cheops), the king listened. He ordered the construction of his own great pyramid to act as the center for the Pattern.

The successor of Khufu, Redjedef, was not as enthusiastic and built only a minor pyramid at Abu Roasch in the north, accepting but not encouraging the Great Plan. The next king, Khafre (Chefren) was more loyal to the priests of Horus, and built his own sizeable pyramid alongside Khufu.

But the Plan had also set dark powers in motion. Set, the ancient enemy of Horus, had awakened to this new threat. If the pattern was completed, the warrior-god would be invincible. But the god of the desert silently reached out with his unseen power and touched the land. He made people see the waste of building the huge monuments and the cruelty of their masters. He undermined the harvests with storms and drought. And he subtly corrupted the priests of Ra with ambition, forcing a subtle conflict between the priesthoods and a greedy amassing of wealth in the temples, undermining the power of the kings.

Khufu was warned by the mighty mage Djedi of Djed-Sneferu. The mage prophesied that in three generations time the chest holding the number of the secret apartments in the sanctuary of Thoth would be brought from Heliopolis to the palace by a wife of the priest of the sun god, who would bear three children of extraordinary power - which will inherit the throne of Egypt. But the king accepted this destiny and did not challenge it, thus making it real.

The successor of Khafre, Menkaure (Mycerinus), could not afford to create a pyramid as great as his predecessors, it was not finished at his death and instead of granite it was covered with bricks. After him strife and internal struggles followed, until the priests of Ra finally won and put the fifth dynasty onto the throne. Horus was no longer the god of the pharaoh, and Ra took his place. The great plan was forgotten, and while the next dynasties built pyramids none were as great or sacred as the old, and none were part of the Plan which was forgotten. Most of them crumbled after a few centuries, and the once great empire gradually disintegrated as Set spread dissent.

## **The New Kingdom**

During the New Kingdom (1567-1085 BC) beginning with the eighteenth dynasty, glory returned to Egypt. The kingdom expanded into an empire stretching from the Euphrates in the east to Kush (Ethiopia) in the south, its enemies were crushed and wealth from foreign lands accumulated along the Nile. The Priestesses of Isis began to assert themselves, and under their guidance Makare Hatshepsut (1503 BC) rose to the throne in the 18th dynasty. Queen Hatshepsut was a formidable woman, probably secretly initiated into the priesthood or even a full mage herself, who had helped her lethargic father Akheperkare Tuthmosis I rule the land even as a small girl. She married her easily manipulated half-brother Tuthmosis II, and ruled through him until he died in 1501 BC. At this point she married away her daughter Neferure with Tuthmosis III, the nine year old son of Tuthmosis II with a concubine and ruled in his place until he came of age. Unwilling to let go of her power she proclaimed herself King and Tuthmosis III as her co-regent. Their relationship was strained, to say the least, but she kept the reins of power.

Under her leadership Egypt prospered, although she let the army gather dust while she and her architect-mage Senenmut built a series of temples and monuments of uncertain use. It appears as the Priestesses of Isis were cooperating with the remaining architect-mages to develop a new occult pattern across Egypt, especially focussed in her famous temple complex in the Valley of Kings. This complex represents one of the major breakthroughs of sacred architecture, and links through a powerful ley-line to

the nodes at Karnak. It appears likely that this temple was intended as a sanctuary and stronghold for the priestesses of Isis and Hathor (in later eras a coptic monastery was built in the vicinity, probably to exploit the powerful node).

But the cooperation eventually turned into distrust, and other fractions began to support Tuthmosis III. Senenmut fell out of favor, and in 1482 Hatshepsut died. Her son systematically tried to erase her name from all monuments and inscriptions to obliterate her entire existence, possibly as a part of an occult purge against the priestesses. Little is known of the real conflicts at this time, but it appears that while the kings grew in power and glory (the rulership of Amenhotep III is often regarded as the zenith of the new kingdom) other forces were upsetting the magical balance of the Empire. The nephandic Servants of Nun grew in power, Set was once again worshipped and several magical traditions were weakened due to vicious infighting.

In 1379 the son of Amenhotep III, Amenhotep IV, took the name Akhenaten and retired to his city Akhetaten (<sup>2</sup>The Horizon of the Aten<sup>2</sup>). He denounced the worship of Amun and the priesthood of Thebes, and tried to replace it with the monotheistic worship of Aten, the disk of the sun. This was one of the major junctions in the history of magick; the conflict was not only about political power, but also about the paradigm itself as the priests of Amun sought to retain the old system and the priests of Aten to unify all gods, all existence within Aten (it is uncertain how much these ideas influenced the later Celestial Chorus, although many choral scholars claim it proves that their tradition existed in this era or were founded here by Mentu-hetep the blind priest-seer). The king and his priests isolated themselves to invoke the powers of the new unitary god, but at the same time other groups opposed him and the disturbances in the law of Maat caused instability, invasion and plagues. Eventually the chaos rose to crush the king, and he died of plague.

...the temples of the gods and goddesses... were in ruins. Their shrines were deserted and overgrown. Their sanctuaries were as non-existent and their courts were used as roads ... the gods turned their backs upon this land ... If anyone made a prayer to a god for advice he would never respond - and the same applied to a goddess. Their hearts ached inside them and they inflicted damage left right and centre. *Stela from the temple of Karnak*

The priests of Amun seized the opportunity and began to influence the young son of Amenhotep III, Tutankhaton (who now took the name Tutankhamun), using him to restore the kingdom. Slowly the strength of Egypt was restored, but the magical power of the priesthood had been broken, possibly as a result of Sleepers witnessing the conflict. While the 19th dynasty rose to great power, the kings lacked the mystical leadership of earlier ages. The priesthood of Amun became a power equal to the king (during the 21st dynasty the priest-kings ruled Upper Egypt), but seems to have become corrupt and just another mundane power. Gradually the Empire began to decline, and foreign powers conquered the land - the libyans, the etiopians, the assyrians and the persians.

During the second Persian invasion in 343 BC the Cult of Nun took the opportunity of the unrest and vandalized the temple of Hermopolis and managed to steal some of the shards of the world- egg that were hidden in an enclosure of the temple. What happened to them nobody knows; it appears likely that the cultists didn't manage to exploit the powerful relics, but their current whereabouts are completely unknown.

## **The Hellenic Era**

Alexander the Great freed Egypt from the Persian rule in 332. Many mages have tried to fathom the true designs of Alexander the Great. It is unknown how much he knew of the nature of reality (although his teacher Aristotele is regarded as one of the major philosopher- mages of his time), but it is clear that his conquests served to bring together the disparate traditions of the orient and occident. It is known that the priests of Amun pronounced him divine, which may mean that he was a powerful true mage (or that the corrupt priesthood simply tried to survive). His ability to cross huge distances safely and quickly, together with the widespread belief in his invincibility gave him an immense tactical advantage. Regardless of his true aims, he died like any other man during his campaign against India and was buried in Egypt.

As his empire was split between his underlings, the Ptolemies ascended to the Egyptian throne, ushering in the new era of magical cross-fertilization initiated by Alexander. Ptolemy I Soter began the building of the Library of Alexandria, and his successors continued the work. Hellenic Alexandria became world capital of magick and philosophy, a meeting place for different traditions and the home for some of the most famous mages of all time. This was a golden age for Egypt, both magically and mundanely.

But Rome grew in power, and it was clear that sooner or later Egypt would succumb to the new political and military power of the mediterranean. At the same time there was a resurgence of the Cult of Nun, and the rulers became weaker. The Alexandrian Mob (a mixture between a lynch mob and a political protection racket) became a very real power, and even deposed some rulers; various groups did their best to influence it. The Ptolemies became more and more puppets of Rome and the Mob.

Cleopatra used the situation for her bid to the throne, seeking to both protect her land and to achieve her personal goals. She was an initiate of the Priestesses of Isis, but far too ambitious for their taste - while they wanted to spread the cult across the empire, she wanted it to rule the empire. One faction tried to depose her and force her into exile, but she began to rally an army in Syria to re- take the land from her brother, who was their puppet. Then Ceasar arrived, and she quickly made sure he became her lover and deposed her brother.

"As surely as I shall yet dispense justice on the Roman Capital" *Cleopatra*

Several factions of mages used the unrest to further their ends, including the Cult of Nun who in 47 BC used the Mob to burn part of the Library of Alexandria during Caesar's war.

For a while it looked like Egypt and Rome would be united as equals. Cleopatra was preparing to start a new dynasty with Caesar, a dynasty that would rule the entire world. But in Rome she had fewer allies, her grandiose plans were anathema to many of the roman customs and ideals. A counter-conspiracy emerged, and Caesar was murdered to prevent the dictator from officially marrying the New Isis, a marriage that would have had profound political and magickal consequences. She had to flee back to Egypt, politically weakened just as the land was suffering from plagues and famines.

She did a second attempt with Mark Antony but after his defeat at Actium in 31 BC the dream shattered. Cleopatra committed suicide in 30 BC, and Egypt became a Roman province. The Priestesses and many other mages retreated to the shadows, and spread away from their enemies among the mystery cults of the empire.

## **The Roman Era**

The next centuries were a relatively peaceful period, when Egypt acted as the granary of first the roman and then byzantine empire. The Library continued to act as the premier center of learning and philosophy. But the developing christian faith began to cause trouble during the second century AC. Alexandria became a central point in the growing church, the place where many influential choristers gathered to define the new faith. At first, many of them were allied with the library (the jews of the Library played a significant role in both translating the scriptures into latin, and in uniting greek philosophy with christian faith), but more and more the choristers began to regard the library as unnecessary and pagan. The Library was eventually forced underground, and the choristers stood triumphant. But internal schisms weakened them, and while the Church became stronger many chorist groups were thrown out, including the Coptic choristers of Egypt. As Constantinople grew in power, Alexandria began to decline.

## **The Arabs**

In 639-642 the arábians led by Amr ibn al-As invaded and conquered Egypt. The Copt chorist groups in Egypt aided them, happy to overthrow the corrupt rulership of Constantinople. A secret treaty of mutual tolerance was forged between the coptic choristers, the moslem choristers and the batini which still partially holds. The different groups had completely different goals, and went along with them without disturbing each other. While the copts tended their people and the moslems spread the faith, the Architects of Divine Measure, a group of mystical architects, explored the ancient ruins and buildings, doing their best to learn their secrets.

In time the kaliphate weakened, and the administrator of Egypt, Ahmad Ibn Tulun, became de facto ruler of the land. Although he was eventually murdered, the system he instituted went on and Egypt remained one of the major kingdoms of the Arab world.

## **The Fatimids**

A group of the Ahl-I-Batin, the Brethren of Purity, desired Egypt's occult power to fulfill their esoteric goals. Their founder, the Persian occultist Abdallah Ibn Maymun, laid down a subtle plan to gain control and defeat the Kaliph in order to set up a more mystical society. He established himself in Tunisia, allied with some of the Berbers, and helped set up the fatimid direction of Shi'i Islam; even as he died in 875 his followers bided their time while the Fatimid dynasty grew in power. They secretly made contact with the Architects of Divine Measure and other groups. In 969, as they had predicted, the ruler of Egypt

died and a series of low niles, defections and famines appeared; this was their signal to attack. They met little resistance.

The very night after General Gawhar had conquered the old capital, he founded the new capital. The reason for the speed was astrology: the Brethren had great plans for the new city and planned to use a powerful conjunction together with sacred architecture to make it the most powerful city in the world. The general placed workmen along the poles and ropes marking the planned walls, waiting for a bell signal at the exact moment of conjunction. Suddenly the bells started ringing without anybody giving the signal - a raven had landed on the ropes connected to the bells, and the diggers started digging. Instead of being founded at the supreme conjunction they had intended, the city was founded when Mars was ascendant. Since Mars in arabic is El Kahira, the new city was named El Kahira, "the victorious".

Although the founding of the city had been a partial fiasco, the Architects continued their long work of re-channeling the quintessence of the Nile valley. They built the Al-Azar mosque for the Brethren, one of the most powerful nodes ever constructed. The Coptic choristers allied with them, and for a time the Batini of Egypt were united and in harmony with the dynamic spread of Shi' i. When contact was made with the Library of Alexandria in 970 it seemed that even the Highest was supporting their plans.

But gradually corruption set in, possibly due to influence from the Cult of Nun or opposing batini groups that exploited a series of incompetent or insane rulers (Kaliph al-Hakim was so bizarre that many mages believe he was not human). The Brethren finally lost their grip on power 1074 when the commander of Acre, Badr al- Jamali moved in to restore order, and eventually he and his descendants became viziers. His son al-Afdal destroyed the spiritual leadership of the Shi'i by choosing the younger son of the kaliph as successor instead of the elder son, thus making the spiritual succession of the movement go to Hasan-i Sabbah of Alamut. The purists among the Brethren followed the leadership into the east (where they eventually became the power behind the Aga Khans of India), while the more pragmatic Brethren stayed behind or joined up with the Library.

## **The Ayyubids**

In 1169 Salah al-Din (Saladin) became ruler of Egypt, and formally abolished the Shi'i rulership once and for all. He also opened up the royal city, allowing common people to live and work in Kahira; Cairo began to emerge. Egypt began to prosper, and other groups of batini supported the spread of trade, science and culture. During this time the Templars came into contact with the batini and Library. An exchange of secrets occurred, and some of the knowledge of the Architects came to Europe, where it helped found the Craftsmasons.

The Ayyubids fought off several christian invasions, but grew more and more dependent on their mamluk slaves (slaves mainly from Turkey) as they weakened. In 1249 al-Salih Ayyub died, but his favorite wife Shajar al-Durr kept this secret, and ruled in his name. It appears likely she was yet another of the Priestesses of Isis who got too ambitious; although she had showed her competence and had the support of the mamulks who proclaimed her sultan, the kaliph and the ortodox were angered by this and forced her to re-marry. When her attempt to re-gain power failed, she was arrested and was thrown under mysterious circumstances from the red tower of the citadel.

## **The Mamulks**

The Mamuluk era was a slow decline for magick in Egypt. The Mamuluk system was based on slavery. Young slaves were converted to Islam, educated and given a military training. If they managed to work their ways up the ranks they were eventually freed and pledged their loyalty to their former masters. Most high government posts were open only to the former slaves. To support their private armies they imported more slaves, creating a hotbed for intrigue, power struggles and violence. The batini tried to use this to regain power, but instead fragmented and became part of the confusing and deadly infighting, sometimes dragging other groups into the struggle. It was a slow descent into chaos, and the Cult of Nun ruled. The Nile shifted, the black death ravaged the land.

When the Ottoman empire invaded in 1517, little changed. During this time some of the mages had become aware of the changes in Europe, and decided to deliberately ignore them. They instituted a policy of closedness, stopped the spread of the printing press and planned to let the european mages fight their own battle; Egypt seemed safe from the Order of Reason.

## **The French Invasion**

In 1798 Napoleon invaded Egypt. The fragmented and weakened magical groups were unprepared for the arrival of the Technocracy. The Ivory Tower had already prepared the way by encouraging the



infighting through connections at the Ottoman court and by striking alliances with some batini sects. While the Egyptian mages managed to unite, it was too little too late. When Napoleon arrived in Cairo, he brought with him a wide array of disorders and also Europe.

The Technocracy used Napoleon as a tool. They knew he had no real chance of holding on to Egypt and they needed him elsewhere, but they used him to crush all the local magickal groups and introduce technomancy into the Egyptian paradigm.

On one hand, they used the struggle between the french and the local resistance against them as a cover to crush the tradition mages they could find. They executed batini mages as revolutionaries, forced their way into Al-Azhar killing several leading choristers supporting the rebellion but also instated a swift and largely successful eradication program against the Cult of Nun.

On the other hand, they did their best to demonstrate western ideas and technology to the Egyptians, in order to change the paradigm. The presence of several thousand french soldiers was a first step, the second step was founding Institut de l'Egypte to educate people. The Institut was quite successful; french scholars taught western industry, science, mathematics, health, art and literature, and they demonstrated balloon flight.

In the end Napoleon was forced to leave, but the seeds planted by the technomancers began to grow. They had broken the back of the traditions, and now began the lengthy process of bringing Egypt into the western world.

The Napoleonic invasion of Egypt had profound repercussions for the Arab and Muslim world which continue to influence the region's political and social development. This was the first European conquest of a major Arab country in the history of Islam and it signalled the rapid decline of Islam as a world political power. Although it could be said that the Ottoman Empire was by this time already a spent force, the humiliation of Napoleon's entry into Egypt was a devastating blow to pan-Islamic pride. It has been said that contemporary Muslim fundamentalism traces its psychological origins to this initial shattering defeat.

[http://www.arab.net/egypt/history/et\\_euroconquest.html](http://www.arab.net/egypt/history/et_euroconquest.html)

## **Modern History**

In the chaos after the British forced away Napoleon the weakened and splintered traditions were unable to resist the emergence of a local technocracy. Muhammed Ali rose to power with the support of the Technocracy, crushed the remaining Mamuluk resistance and began the modernization of Egypt.

As Egypt opened up to the West, there was a rush between the european Order of Hermes and the Technocracy for the magickal treasures of ancient Egypt. Explorers and archeologists (many little more than grave robbers) hurried to find talismans, nodes and papyri to ensure that they did not disturb the paradigm or to put them in safety. The remaining Egyptian mages had a hard time resisting the invasion, and were forced to work together with the western traditionalists despite the plundering.

The Suez channel was a masterstroke of the Syndicate; not only did it sever Africa from Eurasia, disrupting magick across the entire continent and making it easier to colonize, it bankrupted the khedive Ismail and put Egypt in European debt, and it greatly simplified trade.

Unfortunately the local Technocracy was relatively weak and dependent on the support of the whole Union. After the failure of the khedives Britain occupied Egypt in 1882, corresponding to an external coordinator taking control over the egyptian Technocracy. This continued the westernization process, and the technomancers worked hard at remaking egyptian society so that it would become more standard. One unusual aspect was that they supported nationalism and demands of independence, a way of ensuring that no god-ruler would ever get the chance to rule unchallenged in Egypt again.

## **Independence**

In 1922 Britain recognized the independence of Egypt, but remained the real power until after World War II. During this time the choristers began a slow but steady come-back, and gradually regained some of the power they had lost a century ago.

The Technocracy decided it was time to set up a modern society, and supported the coup d'etat in 1952: now they had the chance to re-make society and start anew, with the old washed away. After some serious discussion inside the Technocracy they settled on Gamal Abd Al-Nasser as the president of the republic. His Arab-socialism fit the Technocracy perfectly, and he implemented their policies: repressing the Muslim Brotherhood, social programs, building the Assuan Dam and NWO experiments in

international politics. But Nasser and the local technomancers also had problems, and after the Six Day War they were forced to change approach, and they replaced Nasser with Sadat.

Sadat and the new board of directors began to rule in their own way, becoming increasingly independent of the rest of the Symposium and often employing policies on their own that complicated the local Timetable. Eventually the higher echelons of the Technocracy stepped in and ended the Sadat experiment, replaced the coordinators and tried to put Egypt back on track.

## Virtual Adept Koans

by Anders Sandberg

Once a student asked Moore, "If all objects we see are parts of the user interface, then why not regard their graphic representations as part of the model?". Moore answered, "are their coordinates arbitrary?". "Yes, of course". "Then the model is arbitrary". The student was enlightened.

A master once asked Moore, "What is between the one and the zero". "Line noise".

When a thunderstorm hit the system, several terminals broke down and had to be repaired. "This wouldn't have happened if we had had a voltage surge protector", one electrician pointed out. "Does the voltage surges need to be protected?" asked Moore. "No, the terminals". "Well, protect the lightening instead, it is much more general".

A student had created a clever pattern in Game of Life, and proudly showed it to Moore: "I can prove that it's behavior is undecidable, since it is equivalent to the Halting Problem". Moore ripped out the power cord from the computer, and the pattern vanished. "It has halted" he said. The student was enlightened, but the pattern was lost.

"Why do we have to learn about electronics when we seek to become software engineers?" an impatient person complained. Moore overheard it and plunged a soldering iron into the complainer's workstation: "So that the software has somewhere to live".

One day a student asked Moore: "Does Marvin Minsky know what he is talking about? Is the mind really a society of independent agents?". "Why did you ask?". "Because if that is true, then there is no me". "Is there a Minsky?". The student was confused, and told Minsky about it; Minsky smiled and said: "No".

When a virus attacked the system, Moore was unperturbed and didn't try to remove it: "It is not proper to do it before observing the correct signs". "What are they?" asked a fellow master. "To watch the network load grow, to sacrifice the root partition to nothingness and to see the users learn fear."

"Is there anything other than information in your world?" an ironic philosophy graduate once asked Moore. "No. That question was never asked".

A student was struggling with his project, but with no success. Finally Moore asked him what the problem was. He answered: "I try to make this distributed database automatically migrate to unused nodes, but my processes deadlock since they cannot synchronize over the net?". "Are they all running in the same direction?". "Yes, of course". "Well, backtrack randomly in time then". The student was enlightened, and the program ran.



by Anders Sandberg

We had come to seek the Raging God, but so far I had mostly seen an incomprehensible jumble of places, pictures, sounds and ideas. Inviolata called it the purity of experience, and said it was really just a new way of seeing the world that was much truer than the ordinary one-dimensional perspective. Personally I thought she made it up as she went on, just as she made up the way we traveled by mumbling free associations and throwing her bible pages into the air. Of course she was insane, and I was just as mad - but at least she made the Things go away.

Suddenly she stopped, whirled around towards me and shouted "Glory be to those who build their houses on sand!". She threw a couple of fluttering pages at me, and the view cleared. We were standing in a nightly desert. A breathtaking place: rocks and dunes stretching forever beneath a sky so clear and sharp that the stars felt painful, and lit up by flickering auroras: red, green, purple.

"So, is this the home of the Raging God?" I asked, somewhat relieved by the normality of the place. Inviolata just laughed, and began to skip across the dunes. Tired, hungry and afraid that They would appear even here (are there any places safe from Them?) I followed her.

Just a few hundred meters away, we suddenly came upon a structure. One moment I was limping after the maniac Inviolata in an empty valley, and the next we were standing just before a huge cubical building. The stone was black as space itself, dimly reflecting the auroras and our shadows in a way that it shouldn't. I think I would have noticed it long before we got this close. Inviolata didn't care, she just burst out in some kind of benediction and began to search along its side.

The entrance was a big block of solid steel, cold to the touch and with no hinges. In the middle there was a depression shaped like a hand. Inviolata asked me, "So, do you really want to behold the face of the Raging God, my son? Do you want to know the fire in the equations?"

"Will it drive away the Things?"

"No, YOU will drive them away. Once you have awakened the wild power in yourself - by basking in the fire of God". She pressed her hand into the depression, and ripples spread over the metal. She stepped into it as if it was a liquid, leaving me alone. I hesitated just for a moment, already hearing the wailing of the Things from the desert. Fearful, I put my hand into the depression (it fit perfectly), and felt something inside me move, dissolving the strength of the steel. Holding my breath I stepped through the cold metal liquid...

... and emerged from a liquid metal rectangle set in the face of a jet- black cubical building standing in a desert. The stones were identical, even our tracks in the sand looked exactly like on the other side. But the sky, oh the sky! It was fire and light and power - a wild and untamable power raging against the tame reality outside. It was beyond life, sentience, stability. Pure divinity. I fell to my knees beside Inviolata to worship the Raging God.

Marauders are not known for their religiosity, so the Temple comes as a much greater surprise to everyone who encounter it.

The Temple is located in the High Umbra, said to lie not far from the Shard realm of Forces. From the outside, the Temple is a forbidding cube of black stone, standing in an immense nighttime desert lit by constant auroras. Its surface seems to reflect shadows a few seconds after they had occurred, warping them and giving them a life on their own.

The Entrance is a simple rectangular opening flanked by 2 heavy pillars. The door is a single massive steel slab absolutely impossible to move without superhuman strength. At the center there is a depression, a handprint in the metal surrounded by concentric circles. If visitors places their hands there, all Paradox is suddenly drained and the steel becomes liquid for them, allowing entrance.

The interior is also the exterior - visitors emerge from a rippling steel surface set in the face of a cubical temple identical to the first, set in a desert landscape similar to the landscape on the outside (inside?). But here it is day - the entire sky burns with a fierce light as if it every part of it was the sun. The light twists and turns, erupts and reforms in unimaginable ways, sometimes sending down streamers of power that almost hit the ground before arching back.

The desert is hotter than any earthly desert, and farther away from the Temple it becomes more and more impassable and dangerous. It is as if it moved closer to the raging sky, and the stones began to reflect its fierceness. And the Presence of the Raging God becomes ever stronger.

The Raging God is the supreme manifestation of the wildness of existence, the intensity of being and non-being that cannot be tamed or limited. It has no form, no goal, no allegiance, just sheer Will. It is the blazing sky of

the Temple-desert, the sharpness of the rocks, the hate and love between the sky and ground. Anybody in the realm will begin to reflect it, becoming wild and powerful.

Many Marauders have made pilgrimage to the Temple, to gaze with awe upon the manifestation of the God. Few could resist the temptation to wander farther out into the desert; some died, but several reached their destination and merged with the God at the horizon in ecstatic union.

#### Story Ideas

A group of Marauders have had a vision uniting their Quies: they will set the Raging God free from its temple. Together they begin to travel to the realm to seek the means of permanently opening the portal between the inside and outside.

Disturbing new images and ideas are appearing in rock videos, suggesting to knowledgeable (high Cosmology) mages that someone, or something, in the music industry is aware of the Raging God. Who? And why? Is somebody trying to create a true cult of the God? Or is it a Syndicate plot to make money on its power, rendering it a saleable symbol for middle-class teenage rebellion?

A Master needs rocks infused with the essence of the Raging God for his supreme ritual. Guess who is sent to fetch them as payment for their education? Right.

# Sanctum Sanctorum

By Reverend Kinesys

I got to thinking about Sanctums the other day and it occurred to me that it was one of those little corners of the WoD that wasn't exactly painted (if you take my meaning). I think each and every one of us has an idea of what a Son of Ether Sanctum looks like and what a Child of Knowledge Sanctum might look like too. So the challenge becomes to define what other sanctums look like.

What do all Sanctums share in common?

1) They are places where bending reality becomes easier for the mage or mages in question. In this respect they are like places of power for mages without exactly being a horizon realm. (Which is a good thing since it gives a haven to mages without all the baggage of horizon realms and ancient chantries and extra-planetary jaunts and all that stuff that is completely out of place in a Destiny's Price style chronicle. It also precludes the mages from chickening out and ducking into the realm for a while when pissed off vampires or werewolves show up.)

2) They offer an additional amount of anonymity and arcane, thus enabling the mage to work large magics without being a huge blip on the nearest manar scope. They enable a mage to attack remote targets without being discovered. They enable mages to hide when the heat is on ("No... I'm sorry. You people want Doktor FrankenSTERN! He's the next castle on the left!"). They also enable mages to hide awkward things that need hiding like diabolic summonings and Nodes. Sanctums also keep others from knowing what you are up to and is perhaps the sole reason why Convention mages use them too. Arcane keeps that pesky Time scrying off of you while you plot your enemy's bureaucratic demise.

3) They act as a good places to put all the mage's assorted mathoms like their library, their tass supply, ritual equipment, old foci, alchemical labs and other whatnot. Because of the place's Arcane, others will not find them. In fact, Sanctums seem to gain power based on the amount of magic junk they have stored in them (sort of a weird quasi-resonance thing).

Akashic Sanctums:

These sorts of sanctums break down into a couple of different types. Many follow the form and function of a traditional kwoon or dojo. These types of Sanctums tend to accumulate weapons on the walls, pictures of former masters, scrolls of the teachings, the heavy bag, the speed bag, arrow and shuriken targets, maka wara boards, bricks, wooden practice dummies and exercise equipment of all types. Also herbalogical equipment in large lacquered wooden cabinets, tatami (a soft floor) and numerous other training tools.

Some Akashics, particularly Orange Robes are more at home in a monasterial setting and might make a combination shrine/library sort of arrangement. While a Blue Skin might just find a waterfall and start to build a Zen garden around it (the act of creating the Zen garden would be roughly analogous to act of gathering stuff – the same effect would be achieved).

In all cases, you will be able to find joss, and ritual purifications (the calligraphic form of hedge magic and the sight may also have to abide by the rules of feng shui and may in fact provide some additional abilities if in a really good site).

Celestial Sanctums:

These sorts of sanctums are a lot like a miniature shrine or temple of their own. They differ from a church proper because they are sustained by the will and faith of parishioner only. The best way to picture the kind of stuff that is available in a Celestial Sanctum is to picture a Catholic Mass. The priest enters into a fenced off area (to separate himself from the parishioners mentally – proximity is very important in magical theory). He wears a special set of clothes (vestments) and works with a special set of tools and helpers (altar-people, holy water, and the cup and plate). He consecrates the wine and wafers (symbolic representation of the deity) and even the air he breathes is changed to be made otherworldly (often with a censer – smell is a very important trigger for changing consciousness). This collection of theurgical material is also important for magical workings and is also augmented by religious books and in some cases music as well.

Naturally the trappings are going to be vastly different if your Celestial mage is a Hindu or a Bantu. But the ideas and processes for touching the divinity are universal and even they are ultimately unnecessary. Other stuff might include healing paraphernalia, candles, musical instruments, scourges (to mortify the flesh) hallucinogens (for the purpose of prophecy) and a natural source of water or fire.

#### Cult of Ecstasy Sanctums:

Try to picture the coolest bedroom in the world. Nice big comfy futon, game system that will run just about anything, shelves and shelves of books and sheet music, keyboard and guitars, incense and other head supplies like that and psychedelic lighting and other weird stuff of that sort. Other stuff might include stick-on glow-in-the-dark stars, day-glow mandalas, black light painting, a lava lamp or two, a Chinese rug on the floor candles, a skylight or maybe a mirror over the bed, a closet filled with every sex toy known to mankind – heck, maybe even a hot tub. This would be the place where the Cultist would go to safely stimulate himself or another or where he would go to seek refuge from stimulus. In many cases, these sanctums can be made as devoid of sensory stimulus as possible (many are light tight). Some Ecstatic cultists try to live in very small homes so as to be able to claim the whole house as a sanctum.

#### Dreamspeaker Sanctums:

These are usually naturally occurring structures or are built in such a way as to be part of the ecology. While the Urban shaman might have some difficulty in this regard, tree houses are becoming increasingly popular as a means around the problem. Mages in the wild will use old trees, caves and burial mounds as well as any hidden spot where the ley lines are particularly strong.

So how do Dreamspeakers accumulate stuff? Well... they don't really. However, they might grow a garden, paint some cave paintings and such sites often attract animals (peaceful ones, generally). Some Dreamspeakers also partake in Verbena-like lore and might have some books and herbs stored nearby. The Sanctum could take the form of a shack or cabin way out in the middle of nowhere. The sanctum might also accumulate cultural arts and crafts like drums, hand built snowshoes and bows, bullroarers and other caboodle like that.

#### Euthanatos Sanctums:

These sanctums often blend elements of Chorus Sanctums and Akashic Sanctums. Some are temples to Shiva, some are workshops for assembling bombs or distilling poisons, almost all have an area set aside for combat training and for using dance as a focus. Like many types of sanctums these places often rely heavily on music and incense to create a particular mindset and to remove the mage from worldly concerns.

There are so many ways to deal death and there are so many tools to do so that a list of Euthanatoic stuff could be a post all by itself. But here is a short smattering of ideas:

- tools
- a forge
- explosives
- poisons
- statues to Kali
- booby traps
- torture implements
- bones and other dead stuff
- sharpeners
- books of stolen kindred and wraith lore
- targets
- sacrifices
- maybe a prisoner or 2

#### Hermetic Sanctums:

While Hermetic Sanctums are not without their Theurgical elements, they are mainly used as studies and places to experiment. Odds are good that their magical library is here. If the Hermetic in question has an interest in anything personal and time-consuming it will be here as well. (Computers? Herbology? Alchemy? Ships in bottles?)

Alchemical labs are useful for a few things. Qabalistic high ritual magic requires a number of diverse foci while Enochian mages will require a tablet of Solomon and every single Hermetic sanctum has at least one permanent protective circle for summonings and other major workings. Some also have thaumaturgical triangles and Sephirothic trees. Hermetic Sanctums are often very comfy as Hermetics spend a lot of time in them.

#### Etherite Sanctums:

If there was any group that this Background was invented for, this is it. Where else are you going to keep all that equipment and those monsters(not to mention that assistant)? *See other files for SoE lab ideas. --editor*

#### Verbena Sanctums:

Verbena and Dreamspeaker sanctums often share a lot of common characteristics. For example, outdoor settings (or very close to one), a lower gauntlet, friendly local animals, artsy-craftsy stuff, healing supplies, apothecarial junk, gardens, an ephemeris, incense, ready access to samples of the 4 elements and sacrifices (maybe). Some Teutonic Verbena go a lot further with old weapons and runes on everything. Santeria practitioners rival both Celestial mages and the Bataa'a for sheer volume of Sacred materials and icons. Goblets, altars and some kind of knife or axe are usually the only universal elements in this group. Verbena Sanctums react badly to being desecrated. It is known that those who do usually end up horribly cursed.

#### Virtual Adept Sanctums:

In some respects, a sanctum is often the only place that an Adept can really relax and play a bit of Marathon. While VA's pride themselves on their self sufficient nature and self contained power they perhaps need a sanctum as much if not more than the Sons of Ether. The sanctum is often dominated by the VA's sit-down mainframe computer, desk and an electronics workbench. The place is often heavy with multiple monitors, modems, printers, laminators, phone lines, VR gear, tech manuals, CD-ROM's, backup software, a portable fridge and microwave. Most sanctums also have technology built into the walls and the phone lines that is similar to a fighter jet's ECM package to produce that Arcane feeling (never mind that this is probably impossible). There is at least one VA in our campaign that has transformed an old reconditioned Bookmobile into a Sanctum.

One might think that Technocrats wouldn't need sanctums. In fact official policy might state that they are against the rules of the Union, they endanger the prevailing paradigm, make members of the Union difficult to find, and there is no reason that convention members can't use open general labs for their work. This is, of course, nonsense. Technocrats need sanctums just as much as Tradition mages if only to keep prying eyes from their own side off of them. Technocrats need a place to experiment with the cutting edge of the paradigm, plan their bureaucratic vendettas, turn nephandi, plan their escape, and of course store their junk.

#### Progenitor Sanctums:

It is heavily frowned on for Progenitors to use Convention resources to make things for their personal use. Never mind that everybody does it. That's what Progenitor Sanctums are for. There are Progenitors that study herb lore, keep bees, grow custom orchids, make pets (some of them lethal) and stow away a spare tank for the clone they're growing on the sly.

#### Iteration X Sanctums:

Rare, but not impossible. They violate orthodoxy, but some Iterators do find that they work better alone. Picture an immaculate workshop with every kind of tool that you can imagine – then double them.

#### New World Order Sanctums:

Every NWO member needs a place that he is sure is not bugged and will often go to great lengths to secure such a place. Most Sanctums are extremely anonymous offices in near empty office buildings somewhere out of the way. They also use small cramped labs for those members well versed in brainwashing techniques. Since members of the NWO must usually account for every piece of equipment that they handle, sometimes stocking the Sanctum can be a real hassle.

#### Void Engineer Sanctums:

Void Engineers, because of the sheer weight of secrets that they must keep, often need a sanctum. Research and Execution always needs a lab away from the prying eyes of those not in on the big joke. Cybernaut sanctums are practically identical to VA sanctums and anyone involved in Chronal or Spiritual Research has to have a sanctum if he's going to be working Earthside for any reason. In fact, it is a good idea to assume that any Void Engineer that is working on terran soil has got to have a lab/bolthole tucked away somewhere. If only to be able to use techniques that he's grown used to in other places that he can't use here.

#### Syndicate Sanctums:

It doesn't matter what the place looks like as long as it has electricity and a connection to civilization. As long as that's the case, hey – why not go all out? Some Syndicate members consider their offices to be their sanctums, some keep mountain retreats where they go to recharge from the office. A palatial penthouse somewhere



in the city is also a possibility – especially if that place is well stocked with alcohol, cable T.V., a Jacuzzi, and a few buff sorority girls. In fact, in Syndicate circles, sanctums are a form of status symbol and only a low level shmuck doesn't have at least one. Within the Union, Syndicate members are the most likely to have some sort of trophy room and all sorts of junk is likely to accumulate here.

#### Other Kinds of Sanctums:

##### Hollow Ones Sanctums:

While Orphans tend to run the entire gamut of sanctum types, Hollowers have sort of taken on a distinctive look and feel to their Sanctums. Like every other type of mage they have some sort of incense (in the case of Technocrats, in case you are wondering, it is either Spic-n-Span or burning solder) and they also have books (although they are just as likely to have them jammed into a disused closet as on a bookshelf). Some Hollowers like graveyard crypts for their sanctums while others will decorate a room with decayed black lace and real cobwebs to get that oh so important ambience. Their choice of music is liable to be as laid back as Enigma or Orbital or as violent as the Ramones or the Dead Kennedy's. Some might have musical instruments or computers. Others might have bongos and the odd wraith fetter. No Hollow One sanctum is complete without a set of Tarot cards and a Ouija board. Any place that is abandoned is ideal for making into a sanctum.

##### Craft Sanctums:

Any of the Asian Crafts (such as the Wu Keng and Wu Lung) will usually conform to the kinds of sanctums that the Akashics have. As far as the Bataa's go, a voodoo hounfor is basically the definition of a sanctum. Their will always be plenty of wide open space for dancing. Children of Knowledge will have plenty of alchemical equipment. Sisters of Hippolyta and Kopa Loie mages are likely to conform in many ways to both Dreamspeaker and Verbena sanctums. Kopa Loie sanctums are always near water (which isn't exactly hard in the Hawaiian islands). Templars will have sanctums that are identical with their Chorus counterparts (although the musical elements will be conspicuously absent) and as far as the Hem Ka Sobk go... well, they probably have sanctums but nobody has seen the inside of one and lived.

##### Nephandi Sanctums:

Small, out of the way temples, in building basements, in deep subterranean fastnesses, in old abandoned barns in New England somewhere – these are possible sites for the sanctums of the Fallen. Some nephandi sanctums reside side by side with Tradition and Technocrat areas. Some like to reside near Spiral Dancer caerns, Jhuvunka warrens, and large nihilis. Nephandi have even been known to create havens out of radioactive test sites, on islands crawling with smallpox, and in neighborhood graveyards and junkyards. Icons to their master often have links to them as well, and may prove dangerous (especially in the case of the outsider things who have a history of statue animation). Nephandi sanctums are likely to be littered with slaves and pets (who may or may not be able to leave) and all sorts of equipment. The sanctum will often conform to their former tradition's or convention's standards unless of course, they are not barrabi and follow the Nephandic tradition itself.

Such Sanctums are a Satanist's wet dream and occasionally make Spiral Dancers nervous and ornery. Their incense is a cloying sickly sweet reek that leaves itself embedded in your clothes. Their books are those worm-eaten but carefully preserved tomes of utterly damned literature. Their trophies are likely to be real heads on the wall. Some historically minded Nephandi have become attached to particular eras of history and/or particular atrocities and they have started decorating their sanctums in those fashions. This is a fad that is beginning to catch on as it make it very easy to link these sanctums to certain areas of the Atrocity Realm. The current favorite decorator fashions include Concentration Camp, Ancient Rome, Spanish Inquisition, Soweto, Jonestown, and Khmer Rouge. Also remember that most Nephandi sanctums are seriously booby-trapped (if only to keep out their fellows).

# Thoughts on Familiars in Mage: The Ascension

By Tachyon

## Part 1: The Peanut Gallery

Lately I've been thinking about how familiars are used in Mage games. Although I've seen some players devise truly original familiars to aid their mages all too often I see them cut from the same cloth; cutesy talking animals that serve as comic relief who occasionally spout incomprehensible wisdom (with the same forethought as a hiccup). Familiars such as these certainly have their place in the world of Mage but when you run into too many cute talking animals you start feeling like a character in children's literature. It is with this in mind that I offer the following 6 examples of familiars and their masters. It is my hope that this article will stimulate an idea or 2 for your players or perhaps give you some for an NPC to spice up your games.

### 1. George

Quote: "Are you going to finish that sandwich?"

George is a beagle whose number one priority is the same as most other dogs: food. Any activity or conversation in which he's involved gets dropped when his sensitive nose detects a ham sandwich. George lives with a paraplegic Chorister named Janice. Although Awakened, Janice is confined to a wheelchair and spends the majority of her time in magical research in her secluded home on the edge of town.

Janice was given a beagle puppy a few years ago and named him after her family pet when she was a child. When the puppy became ill she dreaded the thought of being alone again and used her magics to call an angelic being. She pleaded with the representative of the Almighty for the animal's life and when that proved impossible she requested a companion to aid her in the Lord's work. Her request was granted and the puppy was fully healed and filled with a helpful spirit.

George isn't nearly as intelligent as his master but his keen nose and hearing help him pick up things that she would otherwise miss. George is useless as a source of magical or even mundane learning and is rather simple minded. However, he removes a good deal of the paradox that accumulates during Janice's experiments and is a welcome companion. Janice thinks of George as the child she was never able to have. She's also trained George to watch TV and cable news broadcasts in the morning and parrot back what he hears. In this way Janice can at least marginally keep up with current events without wasting time in front of the TV. George has learned to hold his tongue when Sleeper guests visit but loves chatting with other mages when they come to ask Janice for wisdom.

### 2. Alec

Quote: "I'd be a lot more enthusiastic about your spy work if you didn't make me give back the stuff I snatch."

Jake is also a Chorister but quite a different one from Janice. Jake is well-trained in martial arts and travels the world and the Otherworlds as a messenger and trouble shooter for an influential Chorister chantry. On one of his journeys he traversed a silvery road through a domain dominated by Luna and found a fox caught in a ward by the roadside. After freeing the fox it was full of gratitude and offered undying loyalty if he would show it the way to Earth. After reaching the physical world the fox was overjoyed but discovered his oath was binding and asked Jake to give him a new name. Jake decided on Alec.

Alec would prefer to be free of his oath of loyalty to his new master but considers it a worthwhile price to pay for the chance to live outside the realms of spirit. Besides, he's grown rather fond of the easy-going Chorister. Alec doesn't understand why he is only able to speak at night but uses the time to share his knowledge of umbral matters and pick Jake's brain for everything he can learn about Earth. Alec is high strung and very active. With his aversion to anything technological the fox avoids keyboards and doesn't have the patience to study methods of communication. As a result he keeps quiet during daylight hours but follows most orders that Jake gives him (it's worth it for the benefits). Jake uses Alec as a spy as the fox can squeeze into places no human would fit and is very good at sneaking around. Unfortunately, Alec also uses these gifts to snatch just about anything that looks "shiny."

### 3. Nick

Quote: "Nothing on the Web about that but your buddy Trigger just Emailed me back. He said to try this..."

During a raid on a Progenitor laboratory Rob, a young Virtual Adept, felt an uncharacteristic moment of sympathy and rescued a white lab rat from its cage. He brought it home and named it Nicodemus after a character from "Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH" by Robert C. O'Brien. Rob was stunned when the rat headed for the keyboard of his desktop and typed out a thank you note for the nice new name.

Nick quickly proved himself to be a useful addition to Rob's life. Although Nick can't talk he's a pretty fast typist and loves the keyboard. In fact, Nick loves anything that has buttons and Rob has to keep new inventions

wrapped up if he doesn't want Nick playing with them. Nick has even taken to composing tunes on a synthesizer keyboard that was gathering dust in Rob's apartment. Nick's small size limits his talent, though and at times his simple and repetitive tunes drive Rob crazy. Nick more than makes up for this with the computer help he provides. Nick is skilled at finding information both on the Internet and the Digital Web and loves doing it. Always full of energy, Nick has become a regular in Virtual Adept chat areas of the Web and novice Adepts mistake him for a mage.

Nick isn't able to offer much knowledge on "elite" matters (i.e. technomagic) but is a great source on mundane technical skills and Web navigation. Nick can even enter the Digital Web with Rob and appears there as a small sphere of glowing light that bounces along the ground like a rubber ball. When Rob leaves home he usually leaves Nick behind in front of the desktop. From there, Nick keeps in communication with Rob via Email and Adept-written programs similar to ICQ. Rob carries a palmtop with a cellular modem and has Nick look up information on the 'Net or Web for him. Nick uses sophisticated applications that Rob wrote to infiltrate data networks.

#### 4. Nauthna

Quote: "Beware Titanus' domain. Too many paths and not enough destinations."

Nauthna is a parrot, a red macaw, that lives in the laboratory of a solitary named Wilkins. Nauthna is a mysterious creature and is at times unsettling even to Wilkins. Nauthna is silent for long periods of time and never squawks or makes any noises typical of parrots. It can fly but never wants to leave the laboratory. It surveys its surroundings and all visitors with stone gray eyes and only responds to people when it wants to. Nauthna's voice is the same as other parrots which only heightens the strangeness of its cryptic advice.

Wilkins does not know why the creature came to live in his laboratory and wonders how it got past his magical defenses. He's determined that Nauthna means no harm and is a source of true wisdom. Nauthna has uncanny knowledge on a wide range of topics and has offered many insights that have aided Wilkins in advancing his magical prowess. Nauthna reduces paradox but demands tass in return. Wilkins considers it a worthwhile arrangement but wonders how long it will last.

#### 5. Melkolir

Quote: "Yes, I do know that name. But first you'll have to prove worthy of the answer. Perhaps chess?"

Janus has been a mage of note for years within the Order of Hermes. A member of House Tytalus, he's never shrunk from a challenge. When he bested an umbrood in its own domain in a contest of logic he was perplexed when the being bade him leave. Janus demanded the pact be honored but the umbrood simply said "later" and Janus found himself alone on an umbral pathway. He made his way back to his sanctum and was still stewing over it a few days later when a cat triggered his wards of protection and sauntered into the room. Ready to drive the interloper away, the cat took a seat by the fire and told Janus not to bother. The cat introduced itself as Melkolir and informed the mage that the umbrood sent it to honor the pact. After sharing a few useful bits of occult lore the cat announced that the fine print of the pact stated that she would stay.

Although initially unwelcome, Melkolir became Janus' familiar. An orange Persian with elegant long fur, she looks regal even by feline standards. She speaks with an exotic accent and is wise on all manner of topics. However, her help is not free. When Janus wants to hear anything beyond chantry gossip he must defeat Melkolir in a contest. She usually prefers riddle contests and chess but has tried all kinds of mental puzzles. Melkolir usually doesn't feel inclined to help people other than Janus but she occasionally accepts a challenge.

#### 6. Jaeger

Quote: "Grrr..."

Alice Awakened at the age of only 11 and was discovered by the Euthanatos. Coming from a violent and troubled background their teachings on life and death offered solace to the frightened girl. The Euthanatos saw her incredible potential and thought that hers must be an old soul. She took up residence in one of their chantries and was followed everywhere by a servant's pet Doberman Pincer. The dog revealed itself to be more than ordinary when it fiercely protected Alice from a fellow student during training. The dog manifested a potent aura and the chantry leaders declared it was now Alice's protector and no longer anyone's pet.

Jaeger looks like a typical Doberman and is unable to speak. He communicates with Alice through a mixture of telepathy and subtle body language that only Alice is able to interpret. Jaeger considers himself Alice's guardian but also gives her hints at times to help her along in her magical studies. Jaeger is trying to convince his charge to take combat training but Alice has an aversion to violence. Some think Jaeger was sent by one of Alice's previous incarnations to protect her in this life while others think her avatar quietly summoned the aid. Jaeger has told Alice that he was sent to protect her until she's ready. Alice can't get any more information than that from him but she feels his affection for her and considers herself lucky to have such a faithful friend.

## Part 2: Some Assembly Required

In the previous section I gave some examples of possible familiars. Hopefully it inspired you to make a few of your own and toss them into your games. For those players who would like a method for devising more detailed and versatile familiars I've devised a set of house rules for doing so. Storytellers with a copy of World of Darkness: Bygone Bestiary already know how to create player character familiars and familiars for NPC's. What follows is a system for building familiars for player characters. For this to be useful you will need to have World of Darkness: Bygone Bestiary.

### Original Familiar Background from Mage Players Guide:

- 1 Needs 1 Quint per week. Eats 1 Paradox per month.
- 2 Needs 2 Quint per week. Eats 1 Paradox every other week.
- 3 Needs 3 Quint per week. Eats 1 Paradox per week. 1 dot Mentor.
- 4 Needs 4 Quint per week. Eats 2 Paradox per week. 2 dot Mentor.
- 5 Needs 5 Quint per week. Eats 1 Paradox per day. 3 dot Mentor.

### Tachyon's House Rules Revision for Familiar Background:

The Quintessence requirements are the same but the familiar does not automatically eat Paradox. If you want it to eat Paradox you should buy Feast of Nettles (pg. 114 Bygone Bestiary). In 2<sup>nd</sup> edition Mage familiars still act as Mentors but in 3<sup>rd</sup> edition they become the same dots in Library.

Use the same physical stats and Willpower as those listed in the books for your chosen animal (Bygone Bestiary, Book of Mirrors - Mage Storytellers Guide, and the back of Vampire: Dark Ages Companion). Either have the storyteller determine the social and mental attributes or set each to one and distribute 6 additional dots among them. I'd recommend an additional die be added to the familiar's dice pool when making Willpower rolls against things that would make them harm or annoy their master. Toss out the listed Abilities for your animal and use the information below, based on how many dots you put into Familiar.

- 1 4 Ability points, 0 Backgrounds, 1 Special Advantage point, 10 freebies points
- 2 6 Ability points, 0 Backgrounds, 2 Special Advantage points, 12 freebies points
- 3 10 Ability points, 0 Backgrounds, 3 Special Advantage points, 14 freebies points
- 4 14 Ability points, 1 Backgrounds, 4 Special Advantage points, 16 freebies points
- 5 18 Ability points, 2 Backgrounds, 5 Special Advantage points, 18 freebies points

Now you can decide your familiar's abilities using the Bygone Bestiary. Use the Freebie Points chart on page 101. I'd recommend letting players choose appropriate Abilities from the Mage core book and the Bygone Bestiary (for example, a python with Firearms is not appropriate). No Abilities over 3 unless freebies are spent. If you think this creates familiars that are too powerful then try the alternate method: Give the familiar the Abilities listed in their animal description, toss out the extra Ability points and cut the freebies points in half.

Design Notes: This was designed so that even the highest rating in Familiar will not get a familiar as powerful as one made as a player character. There's just no substitute for a player character familiar. If players start abusing the Feast of Nettles Special Advantage then perhaps you should double the cost. An interesting idea is to allow players to spend their own experience points on improving their familiar. If you do this use the Experience Costs chart on page 101 of Bygone Bestiary but I'd recommend making Special Advantages (cost x2) or even (cost x3).

Familiars designed under this system are more powerful and versatile than those created under the old rules. Storytellers might be concerned that players will become too powerful or dependent on their familiars. However, there are a few things worth pointing out. Familiars usually aren't all that tough. As they get more and more involved in the action the risk of them getting injured, killed or kidnapped increases. One or 2 lessons should be enough to remind your players how fragile their companions are. Also, the more useful the familiar is, the more the mage's enemies will notice it and try to harm it.

## Appendix: Additional Animals

Here are 2 animals I couldn't find in the Bygone Bestiary.

Rat (from Vampire: Dark Ages Companion)  
Str 1, Dex 2, Sta 3

Abilities: Alertness 2, Brawl 1, Dodge 3, Stealth 3  
Willpower 4  
Health Levels: ok, -1, -5, incapacitated  
Bite for 1 die of damage

Mouse (from house rules)  
Str 1, Dex 2, Sta 2  
Abilities: Alertness 2, Brawl 1, Dodge 3, Stealth 4  
Willpower 4  
Health Levels: -1, -3, incapacitated  
Bite for 1 die of damage