

NIGHT HORRORS

The Unbidden™

the World of Darkness

MAGE
THE AWAKENING

I used to be so foolish. I used to think that the world was too small for me, that I was always destined to break through the invisible doors that kept me enclosed among the mundane. Oh, and I was right about that — and I was terribly wrong, too.

Oh yes, I was always destined to break through those doors. I've done it.

But I was wrong when I thought the world was too small. It isn't. It's too large. There's so much space out there between the stars and behind the doors... so much space that the things that should never have come to be thrive out there, pulsing and growing and waiting.

Waiting for fools like me.

— Chashmal of the Mysterium

This book includes:

- A collection of dangerous threats for any **Mage** game, antagonists ranging from the living mage to horrors born of no womb
- A treatment of **Mage** as a potential horror game, with advice on how to bring the terrifying, maddening and gruesome elements of magic into a chronicle
- Dangers that go beyond simple entities — constructs, locales, even conditions and infections poised to plague the Awakened

For use with *The World of Darkness* and
Mage: The Awakening rulebooks.



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MAGE[®]
THE AWAKENING



NIGHT HORRORS
The Unbidden™

No-Snooze

Prelude: Revelations

I don't remember how I got here.

Weird shit has been happening to me ever since vacationing in London a month ago, when I had that really fucked up dream about the tower.

It was late, and Casey was driving me home from the movie theatre, I know that. Then something horrible happened. I heard the tires screech and felt myself being jerked violently forward as Casey slammed on the brakes. The glass shattered — and then what? I don't know. I think something hit my head and I blacked out. Everything that happened that night is just broken fragments and dim memories after that.

My head hurt. My left wrist hurt, too. Maybe something was broken. Maybe I should look. I opened my eyes. Everything was dark and still, and there were branches coming through the windows. The autumn air infiltrating the car was chill, and the scent of dry leaves mingled with hot rubber, smoke, and some vague, metallic smell. Did the car go off the road? Casey was still beside me, but something didn't seem right. Her breath was coming in rapid, shallow bursts, and her face looked waxy in the moonlight. She was staring vacantly past me into the night. "Casey?" I rasped in a choked whisper. No response. Sluggishly, my eyes traveled down her form. The driver's side door had intruded, and the lower half of her body was crushed. A lot of blood, black in the darkness. I saw

bone, jagged and white, protruding from her thigh, but mostly I remember the long, deep gash across her stomach. That was the moment I knew we were in serious trouble. Casey's guts were pouring from the wound. Intestines hung from her body, wet and glistening in the weak light, like slick, coiled ropes.

I didn't hear sirens. Nobody was coming, and I was so tired. I fumbled weakly for my purse with my good hand. Just find your cell phone, Ava, everything will be okay. Everything will be okay. We won't die out here.

When I woke the following morning, safe and warm in my bed, I thought it was all a bad dream. I felt the intense relief that follows waking abruptly from

a nightmare — none of it was real, and life is just the same as it's always been. I marveled at how vividly I could recall the details of the dream as I poured myself a glass of orange juice for breakfast. Distracted, I flicked on the morning news. The reporter, a hard, angular woman with thin lips, was droning on about the weather.

"Another beautiful fall day, today, folks. Low humidity, clear skies, and a high in the low 60s..."

Then I noticed a thin, blue scar encircling my arm. It was barely visible in the early light pouring through the window — a faint, but distinct line, just beneath the surface of my skin, right above my left wrist.

"...as the conflict continues, the United Nations has elected to send aid..."

**I don't remember
how I got here.**

Confused, I strained to recall the previous night. I went to see a midnight matinee with Casey — a slasher flick. We sat in the back making fun of it, taking bets on who would die next. And then? Casey was going to drive me home, but all I remember is that dream. It was just a nightmare, right? Shakily, I dialed Casey's number on my cell phone. No answer.

"In local news, a young woman, Ms. Casey Paull, 24, was fatally injured in a car accident early this morning..."

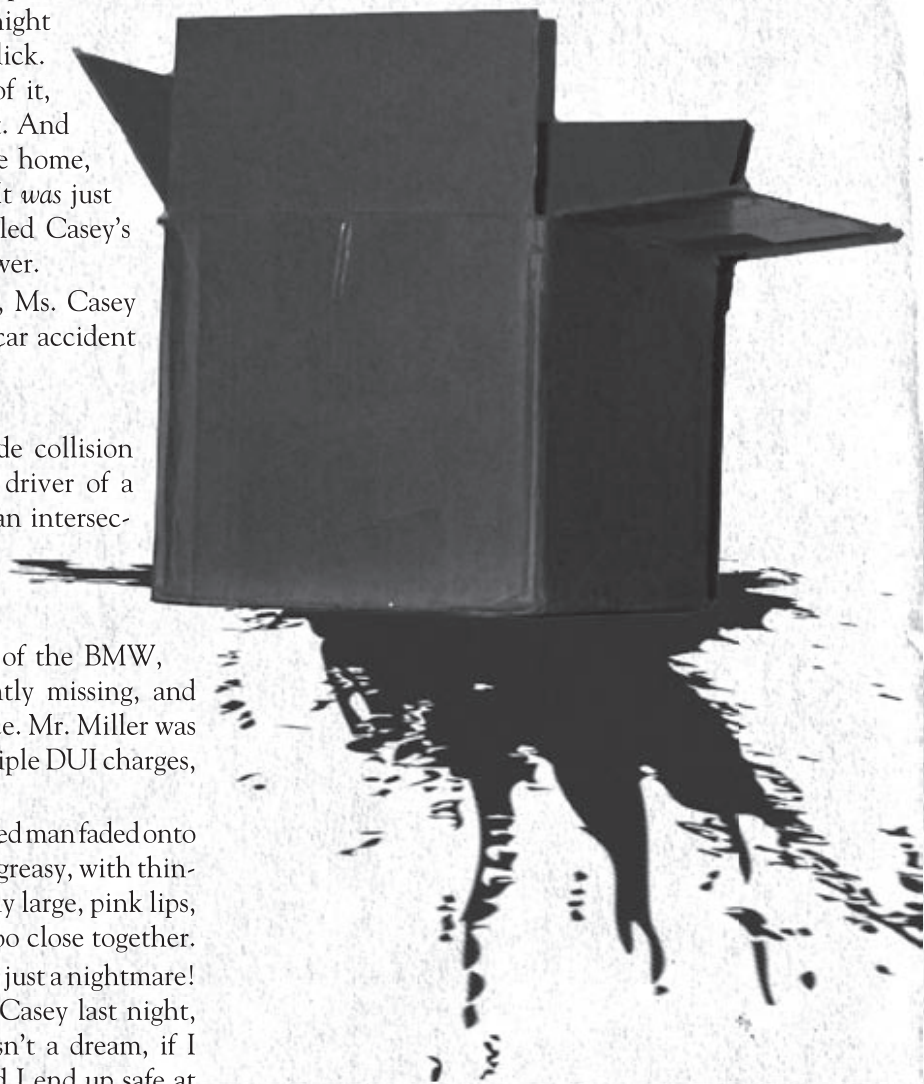
I clapped the cell shut.

"...Authorities say the broadside collision occurred late last night after the driver of a BMW allegedly ran a red light at an intersection in Lakewood Metropark and struck Ms. Paull's vehicle, sending both cars careening off the road and down a steep incline. The owner of the BMW, Mr. Andrew Miller, 46, is currently missing, and wanted for questioning by the police. Mr. Miller was arrested earlier this year under multiple DUI charges, and faces..."

A mugshot of a doughy, middle-aged man faded onto the screen. He was overweight and greasy, with thinning, straw-colored hair, abnormally large, pink lips, and small, piggish eyes that were too close together.

This *couldn't* be happening. It was just a nightmare! If I had gotten into that car with Casey last night, shouldn't I be dead, too? If it wasn't a dream, if I really was there last night, how did I end up safe at home with no injuries? Why did Casey die, but not me? Nothing made sense. It had to be some kind of mistake. I would drive over to Casey's apartment right now, and she would answer the door. She would tell me that she missed my call because she was in the shower or something. Then we'd both laugh about how freaked out I'd gotten over nothing. Hurriedly, I grabbed my coat and keys. On my way to the door, I almost tripped over the package that was sitting in the foyer.

It was a large, unmarked, corrugated cardboard box. I bent down to open it, and immediately recoiled. Inside was a hideously deformed creature. The thing had the body of a barely-formed fetus, tiny and red, absurdly attached to the head of a full-grown man with dirty, pale yellow hair and empty, close-set eyes. I stared, in shock, at Andrew Miller, still recognizable despite the deep lacerations carved across his face spelling the



word "LOST." I thought I saw a thread of faint blue around the thing's neck, and I leaned in closer to look. A deep, gurgling sound erupted from the creature's throat, and it moved its tiny, underdeveloped arms as though it were trying to pull itself up. Horrified, I slammed the lid down and stomped upon the flimsy box as hard as I could. Stumbling backwards, I slid down against the opposite wall and rocked myself as the monstrous chimera shuddered to final stillness beneath the crushed cardboard.

I tried to fight back a wave of nausea. Failing, I lurched unsteadily into the bathroom and heaved bitter bile into the sink.

Then the doorbell rang. Peering through the blinds, I saw a police officer standing on the porch.

"Just a second!" I managed, wiping my chin. Stomach

still cramping, I kicked the ruined box containing the dead creature into the bathroom and slammed the door shut. The doorbell rang again, more insistently.

I cracked open the front door. The officer standing outside was a tall, broad-shouldered man with a wide, freckled face. Laugh lines crinkled around the corners of his bright, blue eyes. For the briefest moment, I felt safe.

"Can I help you?" I asked.

"Ms. Ava Twine?"

"Yes."

"There was an accident early this morning. Your friend, Ms. Casey Paull, was fatally wounded."

He seemed to be waiting for me to respond. I stared blankly at him.

"I realize this must be difficult for you, but I would like to ask you a few questions," he proceeded, "Witnesses saw you leave Valley Cinema with Ms. Paull shortly before the accident."

The officer craned his neck, trying to look past me, into the house.

"You got into Ms. Paull's vehicle with her this morning?" he asked. His eyes widened as they fixed on something in the hallway behind me.

"Yes, I think so..." I trailed off. I turned to see what the officer had noticed. Where the box containing the creature had been, the white linoleum of the foyer was smeared with a thin, bright, trail of red. Some of the thing's blood must have seeped through the bottom.

"Ms. Twine, do you mind if I come in and have a look around?"

I don't remember how I got here.

Drowsily, I noticed sirens were wailing somewhere in the distance. That must have been what woke me. I sat up in the hard-packed dirt, groggy. The stale air smelled like dry earth and gasoline. Shafts of yellow light from high, narrow windows warmed the cramped space and sliced through the darkness, falling upon a lawn mower, a coiled, emerald green hose, and a hodgepodge of dusty gardening tools. I was in the storage shed in the woods behind the house. What was I doing here?

The last thing I remember was that police officer

asking me if he could come in, but then my memory got hazy again. I think I might have told him it wasn't a good time. Did he call for backup? An image flashed briefly in my mind of the officer's kind, bright blue eyes, suddenly cold and suspicious. Part of me felt ashamed that I had tried to hide the dead thing in the box. But what else could I do? How could I ever explain what had happened? I remember I panicked. I didn't hurt him, did I? My hand moved to the back of my neck, almost subconsciously, as I remembered the small, pin-prick of pain I felt right before I must have passed out. Did I get stung by something?

In the lines of contrasting light that fell upon the earthen floor of the shed, I could make out a faint, scuffed trail. It looked as though someone had dragged me inside.

I don't remember how I got here.

Pulling myself up, I tried the door. It was locked from the outside. Rummaging through the gardening tools, I selected a pickaxe, and swung at the barrier. The old wooden shed was rickety, and it was easy enough to break

the simple, rusted lock. The door swung open, and bright light poured into the shed from the clearing. Judging by the shadows, I hadn't lost much time. It was still morning.

I clambered through the woods back to the house. As I neared the thin strip of tall grass that flanked the lawn, I heard voices. Cautiously, I paused, peering through the thick undergrowth. The entire yard was blocked off with yellow police tape, and prying neighbors were gathering across the street in aimless clumps to gawk in excitement at the spectacle. There were at least five police cars, and several ambulances, red and white lights flashing. As I watched, three stretchers were wheeled down the driveway from the house. White sheets, spotted with crimson blood, covered the still bodies that lay beneath. One stretcher hit a bump in the sidewalk, and the limp arm of an elderly man dropped out from underneath the sheet — its loose, wrinkled skin was deathly pale and crisscrossed with faint blue scars. Stepping forward to position myself for a clearer view, my foot caught on a stray root, and I tumbled forward. One of the paramedics looked up at the disturbance, and his eyes locked upon me. He shouted to the police, motioning to where I was clumsily regaining my footing in the brush.

Behind me, I heard the soft, wheezing voice of an old woman, "There you are, Master. I thought maybe I'd lost you again."

I don't remember how I got here.

I couldn't move my body. Eyes wide, I frantically searched the silent room as my heart pounded wildly in my chest. Looking down, I saw I was sitting in a plastic-covered antique armchair. The thick dust covering the hardwood floor had been recently disturbed. The stuffy room was bare, aside from the chair and a single window set in the dingy, white wall to the west. Outside, I saw nothing but the sky, ablaze with the vibrant reds and oranges of the evening sun.

The creature appeared from nowhere in front of me. I cried out, first in shock, and then in horror, at the patch-work monster of gruesomely warped and crudely stitched human flesh hovering in mid-air before me. A pair of chubby baby's legs hung below an obscenely large, bloated abdomen. The thing had two heads sewn to its torso, one the head of a frail old woman, the other of a young boy. The head of the elderly woman surveyed me with ancient, tired eyes, while the head of the boy lolled back grotesquely, its eyes closed.

As I stared at the monstrous creature in disbelief, dozens of impossibly long, mismatched arms folded and unfolded from the creature's back. Metal glinted, reflecting the fiery light of the setting sun, and I squinted, half blind. What was it holding? Were those knives?

The thin, pallid lips of the old woman's head moved, and the thing spoke.

"I am sorry, Master. I tried to protect you from those who wished you harm, but I failed, so I brought you here. There were too many of those men, and now the ones who are not lost are after you. It is my fault." The thing sounded positively wretched. Was



it talking about the police? And what did it mean, “the ones who are not lost”? An image of the same word, gouged deeply across the cadaverous flesh of Andrew Miller’s face, flashed through my mind. Was the creature talking about death? The head of the sleeping boy suddenly jerked awake, and the old woman’s head abruptly shut its eyes and dropped its chin, snoring softly. The creature used the child’s ashen lips to speak in a high, youthful voice.

“I am Gnomon. You created me in the room, Master. I know you don’t remember. You never remember the time before you were lost,” the boy’s head said sadly, watching me intently with his startlingly brilliant blue eyes.

“What are you?” I asked. Confused, I realized the creature had already answered my question. The head of the old woman woke again, and the head of the young boy nodded off.

So many questions were spinning through my head. Was this creature the source of all the strangeness that had been happening to me since the trip to London? Was the thing somehow connected to the deformed creature in the box, and the strange blue scars? Did it have something to do with the gaps in my memory over the past few days? Gathering my thoughts, I began again, “Why can’t I move?”

Gnomon was silent for several long seconds before replying, “I have begun to prepare you for the procedure. When the operation is complete, the secrets of magic will be revealed to you, as was your wish, my Master.”

The creature went abruptly limp in midair. Both heads dropped, and its many arms fell like a freakish puppet whose strings had been cut. In the rapidly dimming daylight, I noticed that the creature was not holding knives, as I had thought. Instead of hands, many of the long arms ended in surgical instruments—an unnatural melding of metal and flesh—scalpels, forceps, clamps, needles, and dozens of other implements I did not recognize. I stared at it, aghast.

“My wish? I never said — ”

The creature jerked back into agitated motion. “They will be here soon,” said the boy’s head urgently, “It’s time.” Gnomon came toward me, and its many arms encircled my paralyzed body. Again, I felt a sharp prick upon the back of my neck.

I don’t remember how I got here.

But it doesn’t matter. I have seen the powers that hurtle galaxies through the vacuum of space, and I understand now. For the briefest moment, I saw the chaos beyond *everything*, and it was agonizing in its splendor. Then I lost it. I returned with the knowledge that the universe is a truthless, meaningless place. It is merely a shadow, or a dull reflection of what is real. The so-called “brilliant” hues of this false

world are all dingy shades of gray, washed out and indistinguishable from one another. I have seen what color *really* is. Gnomon opened my eyes. My poor, ugly, beautiful, child of time.

Parting a path for myself through the buzzing swarm

of oily darkness, I step over the smoldering remains of the assault team, their bodies fused half in and half out of the floor, walls, and each other. Several of them are still alive. I can hear them breathing in the black swarm, fast and quick — like Casey did the night of the accident. Maybe some of their guts fell out, too. If their intestines did not fall out, I could always tell their stomachs to burst. I can make anything happen. Anything I want. I feel my lips curl into smile, and I chuckle. I howl with mirth at how ridiculous mankind is, with such a myopic understanding of the universe. My sides hurt terribly, I haven’t laughed so hard in years. I will the room to burst into flames.

I have better things to do. This world is a lie, and I will tear through its flesh until I find the beating heart of truth. I call to Gnomon, and walk, untouched by the fire, through the blazing darkness and into the night.

**I don’t remember
how I got here.**



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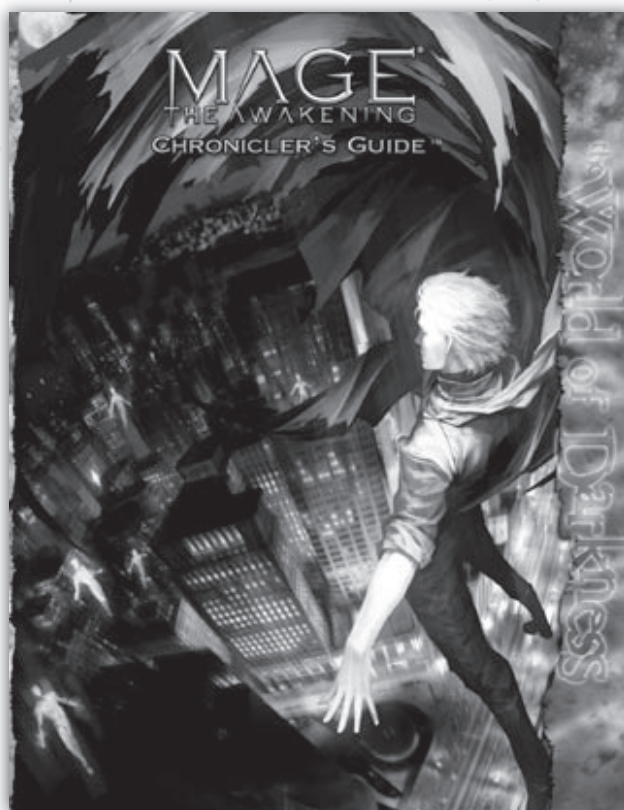
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INTRODUCTION

The trouble with magic is that there's too much it just can't fix. When things go wrong, glimpsing junkyard faeries and crows that can turn into girls and back again doesn't help much. The useful magic's never at hand. The three wishes and the genies in bottles, seven-league boots, invisible cloaks and all. They stay in the stories, while out here in the wide world we have to muddle through as best we can on our own.

— Charles de Lint, *The Onion Girl*

Magic is supposed to have rules. At least, that's what the Awakened want to believe. Magic, to many, is a tool. An arcane tool, yes. A mysterious tool, sure. But it's the same as any hammer or saw, just with more bells and whistles (a *great many* more bells and whistles). Know how to wield it properly, and you will achieve the result you seek.

For the most part, it proves true, or at least it seems to prove true. Most times, a mage touches his magic and wields it in a small way to achieve a measurable result. The radio signal shifts. The knife in hand disappears. A ghost is summoned, or a spirit is put back in its jar. The rules of magic once more represent an easy-to-follow recipe, an equation whose sides all add up if you know how to balance them. Right?

If only. Yes, magic has rules, and mages know some of them. Fire has rules, too. So does a hurricane, a tornado, an earthquake. A nuclear bomb. *The sun*. They have rules, but what they are remains largely a mystery. Mankind understands part of how these things work, enough to predict their behavior *sometimes*, but the rest of the time? Fire leaps out of control with a hard wind. A hurricane pivots its course and makes landfall two, three, four times before burning out. The atomic bomb's blast radius is not a perfect circle. The sun's flares have unanticipated effects on things 100 million miles away.

Magic is like those things, but bigger and stranger. Mages think they can predict magic. They can't. Wielding magic is a tempest in a teacup, a hurricane in a mason jar. It's trying to wrestle fire, or juggle a sun flare.

Magic Bleeds

Magic isn't alive, not in the strictest sense, but it seems at times to have a will of its own. That's what this book is about: what happens when magic enters the world unbidden? A tornado doesn't ask before it obliterates the farm or schoolhouse in its path, and magic doesn't ask for permission to come creeping in through the cracks and fissures of this world, bleeding through from the Supernal into the Fallen.

Similarly, magic doesn't care if a mage can or cannot control it. It cannot always be managed. It cannot always be contained.

To use magic, the Awakened mage must draw down power from the Supernal World and force it upon the Fallen World. The key word there is "force." It can be like jamming a square

peg through a circle hole. It must be molded, crammed, hampered through. It is never a perfect fit. Sometimes, magic is left over. And what happens to that magic, exactly? Does it just fade away? Does it lay inert and invisible until another may pick it up and utilize it?

Hardly. Magic is transformative and potent. What it touches, it changes. Slowly, over time, magic's influence bleeds into the area. It shifts and shudders. Things manifest. Doorways open. Coincidences strange and soon impossible occur.

Want an example? Let's talk about a cat.

A black cat with green eyes comes meandering along. It's night time. Any cat, even the most domesticated, becomes a hunter when left to its own devices, and that's what the cat is doing. It's looking for a rat, or maybe a frog, or even a wayward firefly doing loops and whirls. The cat hunts. It may play with its food. It may just wolf it down before its "owners" (really, its roommates, or even its serfs, if you were to ask the cat) signal that it's time to return to the warm embrace of the house down the block.

The cat senses something. It's attracted to a certain spot. It doesn't know it, but magic lurks here. Why? Who can say? It could be that a pair of dueling suburban mages duked it out here not far from the forgotten playground, and with every lashing attack a bit of magic's essence sprayed about like blood or paint. It might be that this was a place where *something* came through a hundred, maybe a thousand years ago, some ancient spirit wriggling its way through a narrow pinhole between worlds — once more, magic has been left behind, peeled off of its ephemeral "body" as it made the rough transition. Or, perhaps it's merely inexplicable. Like oil bubbling up, magic has simply started to aggregate here. It lurks in puddles of water. In a sigil formed of fat little mushrooms. In the fireflies dipping and whirling.

The cat plays. It chases the fireflies. It eats a few. It rolls around in the mushrooms. It pauses for a drink of water. It can't taste the magic, not really, but it knows *something* is up. This feels good. Great, even. It's like catnip for the kitty soul.

The cat hears its owners, and it heads home — albeit reluctantly, but even for all its arrogance it knows on which side its bread is buttered.

So, is that it? Is the story over? Hardly. Who knows when it'll happen, but magic will change things. Not necessarily for the better, but most certainly for the weirder. Maybe the cat gains intelligence at a human — or greater — level. It could be that

the cat has a litter of kitties that are, for lack of a better term, without a genetic second parent (a sacred and virginal cat birth), and who knows what those little cats are capable of achieving or what they even look like (milky white eyes, two tails, long needled teeth)? Consider the possibility that the cat is just a “carrier” for the magic, and that the animal brings it into the people’s home, and from there it does anything from the simple (it touches their dreams and brings both wonder and horror to their sleep) to the nearly incomprehensible (their Vices change, they start breeding copiously, they become more insular and clannish and protective over their family and magic).

Look at a parasite like *Toxoplasma gondii*, the tiny bugger responsible for Toxoplasmosis. The parasite is carried in cat feces because the cat is its primary host. But here’s how it gets to more cats: rats can pick up the parasite in dirt or garbage. Rats without the parasite know to fear cat urine. Rats with the parasite come to be attracted by cat urine. Odds are now more favorable that an

uninfected cat will eat the infected rat, picking up the parasite.

Humans can sometimes get the parasite (and it’s dangerous to infants or the infirm). A man might be gardening without gloves, and the parasite living in the dirt gets under his fingernail and he bites that nail and, *boom*, parasite. Forever. Seems harmless, but studies have suggested that it changes a person’s brain chemistry. (Some have used it to explain the “cat lady” syndrome—a woman with the parasite is likelier to have more pets, which means a greater chance of passing the parasite along to her cats.)

Now, that’s *real* biology. That’s before you figure magic into the equation. What happens when magic gets to the Toxoplasma parasite? Can it be transmitted the same way? If a tiny microscopic creature can infect approximately *one-third* of the world’s population (seriously!), imagine what a little leftover magic can do.

What happens when magic is left alone? When an Awakened mage is trapped in a house of his own magical design, pickling in his own madness? What happens when a familiar’s keeper or a

Secondary Theme: Hubris and Hamartia

If the primary theme of this book is that “magic cannot be contained!” and the mood is “magic feels perilous,” consider a sub-theme to the whole affair as one reflective of the mages themselves.

Magic is made perilous largely by mages who think they can control it. That gross overestimation of one’s abilities can lead to great rifts in reality where people get killed and weird howling things are summoned up out of the yawning gulf of the Abyss.

The one-two punch that gets mages into this mindset belongs to *hubris* and *hamartia*, two ideas put forth by the Greeks. To revisit these concepts, hubris represents the tragic flaw of a character, a powerful arrogance and pride that leads one to folly. One contravenes the laws of his city or the moral precepts because he thinks he’s above it, or that just this once, it doesn’t apply.

Hubris leads to hamartia, sometimes known as “missing the mark” (and it’s where the notion of “sin” comes from, actually). Hubris is the pride that takes one to commit to the act itself, which is the hamartia.

In terms of **Mage: The Awakening**, wielding magic is a rush. Some feel it as a physiological rush, others as more of an intellectual one, but one way or another it’s a powerful feeling. It’s easy to overestimate one’s ability. When you can turn water into sand or twist the memories in another man’s mind, what’s to stop you from doing anything at all? It leads to hubris.

Which, again, leads to hamartia. A mage that thinks he can do no wrong is likelier to take greater risks, to overindulge himself. Tragically, he may do something that everyone else knows is a wretched idea (raising a dead lover, asking a favor of a demon because he “knows” he can wriggle free from the pact, prying too deeply into minds that should remain locked because he can “handle it”). He misses the mark far and wide. Every tale has the chance to become a variation on “The Monkey’s Paw:” powerful wishes lead to awful outcomes.

In terms of this book in particular, most of what’s contained in these pages could be said to be the result of hubris and hamartia working in tandem. Mages who end up as narcissists or megalomaniacs draw too much magic, and in short order it bleeds out or breaks free. Mad spirits, feral familiars, spectral mages — all can be born out of this tragic flaw.

That’s the best way to approach all of this: as a tragedy. Not a tragedy in the way the nightly news uses it (“The car accident was a tragedy because people died”) but in the Oedipal way (“He had the hubris to think he could avoid his fate, which led to the hamartia of walking right into his fate”). Tragedy is about one unknowingly or willfully engineering one’s own downfall. That’s magic. A mage’s downfall can always be his own magic, something about which he should know better. That’s tragedy.

construct's master dies, leaving the creature unbound and without purpose? How do some items become artifacts, or possessed by spirits, or cursed by great evil? How is an area affected by a powerful spirit that's been plaguing the area for *three hundred* years?

Magic: it cannot be contained, cannot be controlled. It is brought unbidden into the world.

Over Your Head

The mood of this book should be a perilous one. It should suggest that mages are easily overwhelmed by magic, that they are very small compared to what magic is and what it can do. The more powerful a mage gets, the more dangerous she is to the world at large but the more dangerous she is to *herself*, too. Paradox can be a hard slap on the wrist for a newly Awakened mage fumbling about in the world, but what of a character who can draw down a veritable tsunami of magic? Paradox for that mage is a sucking riptide, a terrible and undeniable force that can bring horrible things into the world or rip the fool's skin off his muscle. With great power comes the possibility for grievous error. How badly can a mage fuck up the world by overestimating her capabilities with magic? Could she kill her cabal mate or leave him gibbering mad? Could she level a school, a town, a city block? Could she accidentally conjure a spirit into this world whose wriggling tendrils can take hold of a dozen innocents and puppet them about, doing its will?

Worse, what happens when a mage means to embrace the unpredictability? What happens when a mage harnesses the chaos and unleashes Hell on the world? Ever lose a game and feel like kicking over the game board? What if you were a Master of Forces? Would there be anything left from the terrible thunderclap your boot would bring?

Magic is not within a mage's control. Not really. She never masters it, regardless of what she thinks. Magic is perilous. Magic is without comparison and without law.

The Horror of Magic

That's another thing this book aims to do — to bring *horror* into magic. (Heck, it's even in the title of the book!) To be fair, horror's always been a part of the **Mage: The Awakening** setting. Look at the Acamoth, the Scelesti, or even any of the spells of Death magic. That's some scary business.

Still, though, magic seems almost without character sometimes. It has spells, many of which are by themselves not scary (reading minds is not altogether horrific, though what one discovers might be). The mages themselves are bound up in orders that are as much philosophy as they are dark fantasy and horror. Plus, the book's got that pretty, shimmering blue cover — it's like a calming pool of water whose mysterious depths are endless.

Well, this book aims to splash a little blood across that pretty blue, and to break the calming stillness with a few penetrating screams.

Magic should be terrifying. The keening banshees that come up out of the Abyss, the way magic might backlash and cause madness or force someone's blood to boil, the ghosts and spirits that a mage may meet — all of it should be genuinely frightening to behold.

Of course, despite what we just said, the horror needn't be about the blood and the screams, either. It's all about the way you look

at things. Picture, if you will, an ocean. Not the edges, not the shoreline, but the way-out-there middle-of-nowhere ocean. The horizon is just a curved line. The waters are still.

Seems calm, maybe. The sky is a pretty blue. The waters are a profound green.

Again, though, it's all in the way you spin it. Consider, now, that the ocean is deep. So deep that the pressure down there would crush your head like a pimple. Think about the things that lurk down there. Sharks are an obvious one, but what about stinging jellyfish, or biting eels, or corpses lying in forgotten channels? Think about how isolated this spot is, how if you were to be out here, nobody would hear your gurgling screams, and nobody would come along. If your body drifted downward and drowned, would anybody ever know? Probably not.

Suddenly, the ocean becomes oppressive. It becomes something well beyond a calming sea, and now it's basically one giant mouth ready to swallow you up. Its waters are burning brine in the lungs, its residents are things desperate to nibble bits off you until you're a clean skeleton whose marrow is a feast for the invisible.

That's magic. Magic may seem this wondrous thing, but it's a dangerous mouth, a persecuting pair of eyes, a crushing hand. It's a fire, a hurricane, an atom bomb.

Magic is scary. That's all we're saying.

Show, Don't Tell

You'll read this a lot, but it bears repeating. What we just said about magic and horror is best exemplified by the ages-old rule of *show, don't tell*.

Telling someone means you say, "Magic is scary. You feel horror." Except, yeah, that's not true. You can't just say "it's scary" and make it so. The players may abstractly understand the notion, nodding and agreeing, but it's an intellectual agreement. Cold, rational.

You have to go beyond having them abstractly comprehend what you're saying, and *show* them how to pick up what you're laying down.

Showing them is *descriptive*: "As you draw down magic out of the Supernal, your heart beats faster, your mouth goes dry. You feel like you're wrestling a captive snake or a thrashing shark — at any point, the mouth could come back and snap closed on your screaming face."

Maybe that description is a bit overwrought, but you get the idea: you have to *show* the players so their experience isn't purely objective. Get them in the game by bringing their imaginations into it. They'll thank you for it.

How to Use this Book

This book is a great big basket of example antagonists, from mages who have overestimated their grip on the magic they wield to the awful monstrosities and effects born of perilous and ill-kept magic. These aren't antagonists like you'll find in **Mage: The Awakening**, exactly, because these characters gain a greater depth than those you'll find in the core book. Here, their backgrounds and descriptions are given more attention, and you'll also find sections referring to those secrets and rumors that swirl around such characters and creatures. Best of all, you'll find story hooks that help you utilize these antagonists in ways that best serve your individual games.

Unbidden is broken up into four sections, based on the general type of character or antagonist you'll find there.

Mages

In this section, you'll meet members of the Awakened community that have let the magic get to them just a bit too much. Sometimes this results in their magic stepping outside the usual rules, at least as the other Awakened understand them. That just reinforces the theme of the book — no matter how much you know, you don't know it all.

Consider the **Golden Quorum**, a cabal of mages touched by the lingering Abyss. They follow their naive, messianic leader, **Brother Ben** — so mired is he in broken mind and broken magic that he doesn't even realize how deep into the Abyss his soul has drifted. His second-in-command, **Deacon Thrush**, has no such illusions, and fully recognizes that for him and his slowly-growing army, the ends most certainly justify the means.

Awakening isn't passed from generation to generation, unless you're one of the elusive family who calls themselves the Prosapia, who claim to have spawned at least one mage per family for centuries. **Theo Cadere** is the last of that line, and he'll do anything — and everything — to assure the family's legacy doesn't die with him.

Ghost mages are rarely a major source of concern for the living, but **the Wildcat's** pursuit of eternal life and limitless power transformed her into something quite different and quite dangerous. She sought to exceed the Tremere Liches in their search for omnipotence, and her greed cost her dearly.

Characters and Creatures

The beings in this section run the gamut from those who resemble mages, to those who acted as acolytes to mages, to those who have simply been in contact with magic powerful enough to alter them. Some are flesh and some are spirit, but all are wondrous and dangerous.

Ab Ia Mu is a model sanctum guardian, but a curse laid upon it by an enemy of its Atlantean creators drives any cabal it serves to self-destructive paranoia.

The Fury haunts the streets of the World of Darkness looking for fates to enforce, no matter how bitter. Only a few mages know her secret: the fates she forces upon her victims are nothing more than the results of her fevered imagination. Trapped by her own maiming, she entraps others in tangled destinies.

In the bowels of the Royal London Hospital, **Gnomon**, a hideous, pitiable creature, crudely stitched together from discarded

human flesh, is reborn. Time and time again it seeks to fulfill its purpose and find its lost master, leaving a trail of destruction and madness in its wake.

Some people are meant to Sleep. **The Lucid** are family lines of Sleepwalkers with an inherited insight that brings them to the brink of madness and beyond as they hunt the mages that plague their existence just by being.

The Ludin Sisters are all that remains of a German mage's quest for revenge against a rival. Once his acolytes, exposure to Paradox has made them able to consume these Abyssal energies. This makes them both useful and dangerous to the Awakened.

The back alleys of New Orleans have spawned great mysteries over the years, but perhaps the greatest is **Madame LaTourre**, a vodoun priestess/goddess who hungers for the sweet forbidden flavor of magic.

Metathron is a renegade messenger of Fate that delivers prophecies of hardship to destroy the lives of those who are not heroic enough to overcome the obstacles its messages bring. Mages who use Fate recklessly or selfishly risk attracting Metathron's attention, for even the Awakened are not immune to its terrible pronouncements.

Michael Wechsler follows the last orders that his creator gave him before dying. His creator, the rival of the Ludin Sisters' master, ordered him to collect magical artifacts, and so he does, endlessly, stacking them in forgotten places and moving on.

Pellax, the Prospisa family's familiar, has been inherited by each of the family's leaders for generations. The powerful spirit has served Cadere's family faithfully for centuries — or has it?

Acts of hubris often come with consequences, but sometimes those consequences affect Sleepers. **The Ravaged**, once unknowing servants to the Awakened, are now neither Asleep nor Awake. Instead, they are waking nightmares.

Shard crows seem like minor, unobtrusive spirits of the Shadow Realm, but as a flock they possess bizarre powers of camouflage and they hunger for mages' soul stones.

Constructs and Objects

Magic can infect items, objects and other created things just as easily as people — more easily, perhaps, since inanimate objects don't tend to put up a fight.

A terrible monster, the **Arkhittekton**, was defeated in its tower of living human flesh long ago. The creature's immortal body was dismembered, and placed in 50 enchanted boxes hidden around the world. Now, the Arkhittekton slowly wakes from its slumber as the Restoration Society seeks to revive the monster in its quest for ultimate power.

The mad clockmaker **Ashar'Arif** created many wondrous devices. Three of them are presented here: **Miriam's Doll #5** is a collectors' dream come true, a one-of-a-kind doll from a forgotten era that holds many secrets in its puzzle-like parts. **The Marvelous Clockwork Mystery** is a closet-sized puzzle that offers unbelievable treasures or unspeakable horrors to any bold enough to try to solve it. Finally, **Tick-Tock Soldiers**, clockwork machine men built to serve in temples lost long ago — how will the modern world deal with the reawakening of these mechanical guardians?

Torn from the wicked soul of an ancient Archmaster, the **Elder Shard** has subtly manipulated events in the Awakened world, here and there, in the eons-long pursuit of its maker's mad ambition.

A dead man's mobile chimes: one SMS received. The messages the **Fear-Powered Cell Phone** brings foster paranoia. It needs it to be so.

On rare occasions, the tools of the Awakened develop their own desires. **Hexesucher** is one such tool. Its lust for blood drives it to destroy the Awakened that would try to control it.

Tap the side of the **Schäfer Movement**, a beautiful, antique clockwork mechanism and it comes to life, its two halves moving in apparently pointless harmony. Marvel at its beauty, and regret the folly of its activation when the ticking ghost arrives and demonstrates the movement's true purpose with straps and blades.

Eternal guardians over forgotten treasures, the **Somnia Draconis** retain memories of Atlantis behind their stony visages. Some wander in search of their lost masters, weaving illusions of flesh to hide them from Sleeping eyes.

Einstein claimed that God does not play dice, but someone certainly has been tinkering with them. Dating back further than Western Civilization itself, the Artifact known as **Taleju's Icosahedron** tempts risk-takers to beat the odds and roll "just one more time."

Conditions and Infections

The entries in this section are states of being, rather than physical objects or characters. They are conditions that can occur when magic or Paradox are allowed to roam unchecked.

When a person Awakens, he leaves something of himself behind through the sympathetic tie once shared with the Abyss. What's left can reach into the Fallen World, turning a mage's ally into his enemy as it forges an **Abyssal Imprint**.

Consider the cautionary tale of the **False Awakening**. Wise Mages know that some Sleepers will Awaken and others won't,

and a mage can do nothing to change this. When one mage used magic to inspire Awakening in her Sleeper lover, she created a scourge that destroys lives by granting innocent Sleepers a self-destructive mockery of Supernal power.

Unfettered from its body, the **Mind of the Exarch** leaps from mind to mind like a contagion, always searching for what it can't remember. Broken and insane from its trip through the Abyss, it sometimes encounters itself in the minds of its unwitting victims.

Forcibly severed from its home deep in the alien Temenos, the **Wayward Dream** now infects the souls of Enchanters and libertines, in the form of a viral Legacy — not out of any malice, but instead a simple desire to survive.

Part Five: Places

Finally, magic can alter large areas, given enough time or deliberate manipulation. The three entries in this section show how magic can change the very terrain of the World of Darkness.

Ashward Heights is a comfortable and affordable place to live, but its residents are unwittingly part of a great experiment called the Dream Computer. Now, the Dream Computer's memory is corrupted, and nightmares and worse roam the halls.

On a picturesque village green still stands **Byebury Henge**, its stones the subjects of picture postcards and guided tours. And if once every few years, someone dies, crushed by an unknown agency, who in their right mind would blame the stones?

The alumni of **Franklin High School** are a strange lot. As teenagers, they don't seem afflicted by the same rampant hormones as others of their age. And as they grow older, some of them seem to feel that cold-blooded murder is a much-preferable alternative to sexual immorality.

PART ONE: MAGES

BROTHER BEN: FATHER OF THE GOLDEN QUORUM

*To grab at the brass ring means you best reach into the fires of Hell.
Don't worry — I'm here. You won't get burned.*

Aliases: Benaiah Clover, Brother Father

Background

The plow comes and clears away the snow, and makes way for the trucks and trailers. They carry a couple tents. A generator. A neon sign. One truck is for the chairs. Another is for the stage, the pulpit, the *lights*.

A man steps out of the first truck — a new Chevy Silverado double-cab with shiny chrome and winter chains — and admires the open meadow before him, the snow falling from the slate sky and piling up in drifting hills. It's morning, now, and they've got a lot of work to do before the evening comes.

The man is Brother Benaiah Clover, an evangelist for a church he calls the Golden Quorum. He is also a mage, a purportedly "saved" Christian, and a treacherous Scelestus. This day is like most days for Brother Ben: he has quite a lot of work to do before it is done.

The Attic of Bad Magic

For Ben, it began in the attic of his family home. The attic was a dark place full of many shadows: paintings covered in dark cloth, the silhouettes of a few broken carousel horses, a half-collapsed table track for a model railroad that had long been missing. Pick any night of the week, and Ben would be locked in that attic, sitting in the dark with the shapes and the bugs and the mice. He could not turn on the lights, for the switch sat outside the door in the hallway of the floor below.

It was Ben's father that put him there. The father, a man named Thorn, was one of the Awakened, but certainly not a man of great wisdom. He was a drug addict (coke in the

80s, black tar heroin in the 90s) who with his cabal ran an underground pipeline of stolen magical artifacts through the city and suburbs. Ben's mess of a mother had run off years before, when Ben was barely five years of age. She didn't take the boy with her (as it turns out, a young child made it far too difficult to procure her many vices).

Whenever Thorn got too drunk or otherwise fucked up to deal with reality, he locked Ben in the attic with a plate of food and a weak flashlight, maybe a few comic books if the old man was feeling generous. Then he'd watch TV downstairs or leave to meet his buddies, and together they'd do a little business, drink some drinks, snort some blow.

Thorn had his successes in the occult relic trade, sure, but he also bought recklessly, and stole things that he didn't have any business stealing. Too many artifacts ended up in his hands that either didn't seem to work or, worse, seemed to be cursed in some manner or another. What did he do with those things?

He put them in the attic, of course.

Thus was the horror of Brother Ben's youth, trapped in an attic full of relics that shuddered, whispered, and moved of their own accord. A broken-headed carousel horse tried to convince Ben to kill himself. A watercolor beneath a ratty cloth wept. An oil lamp would flicker to light for a few moments every evening, a twist of wailing, chattering ghosts trapped in its glass bell, their corpses forming a green flame.

The Blank Bible

The day came when Ben could no longer stand it. His comic books would not soothe him, could not help him drown out the voices, and so he turned to an old tome he found under a rocking chair that squeaked and rocked of its

own accord. The book's cover said it was *The Holy Bible*, but its pages — old, yellowed, textured in a way that suggests they had once been water-logged — were blank.

That is, they were blank only until Ben started to pretend that words were present. It was a simple thing: at first, he imagined he was reading a story, a story of his own devising about a young prince who gets revenge on his brutal king father. Words appeared when he thought about them hard enough, but they were not precisely the words he imagined. The story was close to what he had envisioned, yes, except this story was about the son Jesus Christ leading a revolution against his Father in Heaven.

The Blank Bible (which Ben still has, and makes a key part of his sermons) worked in just such a way. Ben would imagine a tale, and the Bible would offer up its own version of that tale, spun in a Biblical light, featuring stories from the Bible twisted up and changed around to suit Ben's mood at the time. It sucked Ben in, allowed him to ignore the shuffling, moaning horrors around him, and it gave him the strength to persevere, his sanity (mostly) intact.

The Father, Punished

Ben Clover was 15 years old when he took revenge on his father. Locked away in the attic, just a pale slip of a thing, Ben tucked the Blank Bible into the hem of his pants when he heard his father unlocking the deadbolt and padlock that kept the boy in the attic.

Ben had a surprise for the old man. The painting that wept and keened lay at the base of the steps, put there by Ben. When his father opened the door to bring up a plate of food, Ben quickly whipped off the black cloth (never having done so before, he had no idea what to expect), and the weeping, keening face of the painting filled the attic with a cacophonous song of its dread. Thorn gazed upon it, his face a frozen rictus, giving Ben enough time to enact the second part of his plan—

He brought the ghostly oil lamp hard against his father's head. It shattered. The glass embedded in the man's face, and the spectral flame disappeared inside Thorn's bloodied ear. His father collapsed, screaming and clawing at his face.

Ben sucked in a deep breath, stepped over the mess, and left his father.

Trial and Tribulation

How it was that Ben became Awakened isn't really clear. Was it his proximity to magic (both his father and all those accursed and broken relics laying about)? Did it have something to do with his bloodline (magic is not bound to the blood, but nothing necessarily says it *can't* be, either)? Or is it just a truly odd coincidence (though one could argue that coincidences do not exist in light of the Supernal)?

However it happened, Ben's magic did rise to life within him, and it only made him hungrier for more of the same.

He became eager to grasp at magic, seeing the Supernal through the twisted lens of his own imaginings (which were further strained through the pages of the Blank Bible). This world was Fallen, yes, but it had Fallen not from some Atlantean pinnacle but from the state of God's grace. We were not in Hell, but this was most certainly a kind of Purgatory.

Ben sought to sermonize this version of the world to any who would listen. And in the meantime he honed his magic, believing that, in a grotesque way, the attic of bad magic was plainly a test. He had suffered in darkness and found enlightenment. That was how he found liberation. That's how he discovered magic.

Thus, to gain greater access to Supernal (read: God's) magic, it was only natural that he should push himself to reach back into darkness to test himself. The darkness of Hell — a place of pits, a great spiritual gulf where God and God's love did not exist — was the perfect testing ground. And so, without even realizing what he was becoming, Ben became one of the Scelesti, tainting himself with Abyssal sympathies so as to grasp a greater share of God's magic. To get to God, one must first go through Hell.

This is the message that Ben preaches.

The Golden Quorum: Cabal and Army

Two Golden Quorums exist. The first is Ben's cabal. The second is the army meant to "expand" that cabal, as put together by Deacon Thrush (p. 21). Ben is the founder of the former, but doesn't yet know of the latter.

Ben learned his roles not from any order, but from within his own cabal (Thrush and Raum in particular).

Additional characters within cabal and army can be found as non-combatants on p. 25.

Description

On the surface, Ben's a slick operator. He somehow walks the line between freakishly humble and profoundly proud: it's as if he thinks of himself both as a weak-kneed lamb of God and as a powerful sword-bearing warrior of God, all in the same breath. He can be warm and funny. He's an excellent storyteller. He sometimes invades people's personal space a bit too much, but some find it comforting (a hand on the shoulder, a story spoken close to one's ear as if told in deep confidence).

Those who get to know him might read something else in all this, though: a deep-seated neediness. Ben went so

long without contact that he's desperate to be liked, so much so that he urgently tries to control the conversation toward people reacting positively toward him. (A perceptive character might notice these traits with a successful Empathy roll.)

As soon as he senses that this might not happen, he turns. If he smells a whiff of hostility or believes that a person doesn't buy what he's selling, it's over. Ben can be overly cruel, picking out a person's weak points (real or imagined) and exploiting them so as to put himself in a clearly superior social position. If this can turn the conversation around, steering it so that the humbled fool will deign to give him the love he deserves, great. If not, then he's happy to continue punishing that person or be done with them entirely.

Curiously, while some people might suffer a kind of Jekyll and Hyde transformation with such a social transition (warm smiles to twisted sneers), Ben actually doesn't change much. Whether he's slinging a good story or cutting someone apart with a thousand mean little slices, he's still got a pleasant cast to his eye and a forgiving smile on his face (some find it smug, while others find it endearing).

Physically, he's very attractive. Ben works to keep his body as far away from the pale, wormy slip of a boy that once sat locked away in an attic. He has nary a hair out of place, no wrinkles, no moles or freckles, and his teeth are capped and perfectly white. He doesn't dress fancy; a pink polo shirt, a pair of well-pressed khaki pants or pale denim jeans. A simple silver cross always hangs at his neck, nestled against his hairless chest.

His nimbus offers no such humility. It is a crackling aura of flashing lights, of the sound of swords clashing and thunder rumbling, and the smell of ozone and blood. Ben is quite clear about what he believes this to be, which is an aura depicting the war for Heaven between angels on both sides of the great equation.

Secrets

Obviously, Ben's got some secrets, the first of which is that he's a Scelestus. In a strange way, it's a secret that Ben actually keeps from himself. He doesn't believe he's any more tainted by the Abyss than the average mage, despite the fact that he reaches into those empty and awful spaces to harness his magic. He thinks of it as part of his calling... and it is, but in no way does he accept that he's tainted by the effort. When it comes to his own nature, Ben is a master of denial.

In the vein of "secrets Ben keeps from himself," here's another: he hates himself. He doesn't admit to it readily. It's a thought that lives in a rarely examined dark corner of his brain; he won't look there most nights. But when he fails — even a tiny failure, such as spilling a drink or forgetting his keys — it comes up on him like a powerful tide, threatening to suck him down into a wretched undertow.



Ben's last personal secret is that he's a virgin. It's not that odd, of course, given his religious vocation (twisted as it may be), but he's a handsome sort, strives to appear virile, and can turn on the charm at the drop of a hat. But he's never even *kissed* a girl. While Lust is not his Vice, it certainly could become it if he represses this much longer. Ultimately, he believes the only way he's going to be able to release his pent up lustfulness is to marry, and who can he marry with his lifestyle and the magic he keeps? By his estimation, it *has* to be another mage.

Rumors

"I caught a peek at that book of his. The so-called 'Bible?' He was off with that thug, and the book was just sitting there, on the pulpit. I opened it. At first... the pages, they were blank. And yet, I couldn't look away. Suddenly — words. Writing. Scrawling across the page as if someone were hovering over it, penning it in dark streaks of black ink. It wasn't... any language I've ever seen. Strange spirals and shapes. I pulled away. I felt dizzy afterward, had to go to the bathroom and puke up my lunch."

It's true. Ben's "Blank Bible" is just that, a Holy Bible that isn't a Holy Bible at all. It's just a blank book with yellowed pages. The book manifests meaningful and readable writing (usually poems, sermons, allegories) *only* to those with whom the book finds a sympathetic connection, meaning some manner of Abyssal spark shared between

the two. To anybody else, the book's pages begin to fill with messages scrawled in some heretical alphabet, largely indecipherable. One could, however, copy some of it down and attempt to translate it. It is a magical language, something of a "Low Tongue" born in the dark expanse of the Abyss, a language uttered by the gibbering shadows that wait there. Translating the material, a mage finds that the text is a number of accursed utterances, basically a string of grotesque invective cursing the Fallen World.

"If you hang around the tent while he's preaching, any of the nights that he does so, you'll see someone hanging around. Older guy, maybe in his 50s. Bit of a gut, which looks a bit odd given his long, lean arms hanging by his side. Makes me think of a gorilla. Anyway, the thing that'll get your attention is his face. Half his face is just a criss-crossed mess of pink, puffy scars, like someone went to work on him with little slashes from a straight razor. His left eye is lost in those scars, with the lids pinched and pulled down over it. The eye itself seems all right, but I imagine some of his vision is limited just the same. You get close to the guy — close enough to see the tattoos on his wrists of braided vines — and boom, he's gone. Heel-to-toe, and he's out of there. I don't know who he is, but he's always in the back, and is always staring holes through Brother Ben as he speaks."

The man is Thorn, Ben's father. Thorn didn't die from Ben's attack and subsequent escape from the attic, but he suffered some bad scars as a result, scars that resist any and all magical healing. Truth is, Thorn's a reconciled man. He's on a path toward redemption: got himself clean of the drugs, but remains filthy with guilt. His goal was to come see his son, ask for forgiveness, see if he could help in any way. But what he found was not what he expected. His son, Awakened. His son, a shouting and singing evangelist, with a twinkle of deep, dark pride in his eye. All smiles, no soul. Now, Thorn doesn't know what to do. He can't bring himself to harm the boy, but isn't sure that he has any other options. Can Ben be saved? Pulled back from the brink? Is he even the man to do it? Thorn's on the cusp, here. He's going to do something soon, and he probably won't know what it is until he's already started to do it.

"That bodyguard of his — watch him. He knows a lot more than he's letting on. Frankly, you ask me, he's the fuckin' Devil himself. He's the real star of the show, the real mover and shaker. Behind the scenes, he's building an army. The guy's no longer content to have the Golden Quorum be just this little cabal supporting their Brother-Father-whatever, oh no. He wants shock troops. Soldiers. Crusaders who follow some Abyssal inversion of the world's idea of God."

It's not entirely untrue. Ben's bodyguard, Deacon Thrush, is not the Devil. He doesn't even know the Devil. And, he's not trying to supersede Ben's will... not exactly. No, Deacon knows more about Ben's destiny than Ben himself does, and is quite keen to remain at Ben's side until the end of the world. So, when he goes behind Ben's back to forge a secret army of mages and cultists who will support

Story Hooks

- Thorn, Ben's father, comes to the characters. He doesn't know where else to turn, and thinks they might be able to help him. He's on the fence. He needs not only advice (i.e. what to do about his son), but wants their help in whatever course of action they help to determine, whether it's to kill Ben, or help him repent. Thorn can't offer much in the way of money or knowledge, but he *does* still keep a few scattered storehouses filled with old magical Artifacts. Of course, many are cursed, and he's up front with that (though once upon a time, he wouldn't have been). Cursed or no, some of those relics might be worth a pretty penny, or contain hidden power.

- For some reason, Deacon Thrush thinks the characters would make an excellent addition to the growing army of the Golden Quorum. Maybe they were once devout Christians, maybe they're powerful, or maybe they can offer a taste of magic that is at present lacking amongst the ranks of the tried-and-true. Of course, Thrush doesn't take "no" for an answer. They either join, or make swift enemies of him and the Golden Quorum. Truth is, he's doing this outside Ben's purview. One option for the characters is to bring what's happening to Ben's attention. It may not save their hides, but it could cause enough dissention in the ranks to allow them to either exploit it or escape unscathed.

- Ben wants to get married. Soon. This is largely in part due to his confusion between ideas of love and lust (one must love, he thinks, to express lust), and so he's of late on the lookout for potential "bride material." Turns out, it's one of the characters (or, if the characters are all male, then it's an ally or loved one of those characters). This is dangerous for that character. Ben, initially, is very much the loving, compassionate, complimentary gentleman. It's not a lie, not exactly, but it *does* conceal a deeply desperate nature. Ben is stalker material. He's the obsessive type. If he finds someone he "falls in love with" and she doesn't return the favor, he could get very... pushy. That'd be bad enough if he were a lone mage, but he's a Scelestus with a powerful congregation behind him.

Ben gets what Ben wants.

Brother Ben, messiah of the Golden Quorum, he doesn't do so out of malice or insubordination. He does so because despite outward appearances and being a public figure, Ben's not always so comfortable with fame and adoration. He needs it, but doesn't mean he's necessarily calm in its presence. Thrush takes care of that. Ben'll do the sermonizing, Thrush'll do the real recruiting afterward. Right now, the army isn't big: maybe another four to six mages on top of the existing (and ignorant) cabal, plus another dozen Sleepers who are ready to throw themselves onto the funeral pyre if God (through Ben) commands it.

Real Name: Benaiah Clover

Path: Mastigos

Order: None

Legacy: Scelesti

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 4, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Investigation 3, Occult (Manichaeism) 3, Politics 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Stealth 3, Weaponry (Ornamental) 2

Social Skills: Empathy 3, Expression (Pulpit) 4, Intimidation 3, Persuasion 3, Socialize 2, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Allies (Evangelicals) 1, Destiny (Bane: Those of Morality 8 and higher) 3, High Speech, Inspiring, Low Tongue (see below), Resources 3, Striking Looks 2

Willpower: 5

Wisdom: 4 (narcissism 5)

Virtue: Faith. Brother Ben has a wealth of faith... admittedly, in himself, but in himself as a vessel of sacred forces.

Vice: Envy. It all goes back to him being shoved in that attic while other children were allowed outside to play, while his father sat below and drank a beer, watched TV.

Initiative: 4

Defense: 2

Speed: 10

Health: 8

Gnosis: 5

Arcana: Forces 2, Mind 3, Prime 2, Space 3

Rotes: *Forces*—Influence Fire (••); *Mind*—Third Eye (•), Emotional Urging (••), Augment the Mind (•••); *Prime*—Unseen Spy (••); *Space*—Correspondence (•), Conceal Sympathy (••), Scrying (••)

Legacy Attainment: 1st — The Stains of Sin, 2nd — Unholy Lash (see below for descriptions of these Scelesti attainments)

Mana/per turn: 14/5

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Ornamental Long Sword*	2(L)	8

*Penalty for ornamental (–1) already accounted for

Blank Bible and the "Low Tongue"

The Blank Bible isn't an Artifact, or at least, not one with a specific magical effect. The Blank Bible is magical, to be sure, and it certainly holds a very strange sympathetic connection with the Abyss, so much so that it taught Brother Ben the Low Tongue, which is a one-dot (•) Merit you'll find with his traits.

Effect: The "Low Tongue" is the opposite of the High Speech, except always spoken, never written. It's impossible for most mortals and even mages to parse, ending up as a meandering ant's trail of mind-boggling sigils and scratches. Those who possess this one-dot Merit can use the Low Tongue as "words of power" (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 117), gaining +3 to a spellcasting dice pool in the following turn, but also suffers a +1 to the Paradox dice pool as a result. For extended casting, the mage must spend 30 minutes chanting to gain the +3 bonus.

Attainments

While not every Scelestus is unwholesomely unique, many follow their own distinctively tainted Legacies, and Brother Ben is one such mage. Below you'll find his Scelesti attainments. Suggested oblations involve twisting a victim's emotions toward the negative, exploiting Vices, exploiting fears, and influencing someone to commit murder or suicide. A character can only possess the following attainments if Ben takes her on as a pupil.

1st: *The Stains of Sin*

Prerequisites: Gnosis 3, Mind 2 (primary), Space 1, Empathy 3

Ben is able to discern two things about another character: that individual's Vice, and her Morality (or its equivalent, like Humanity, Wisdom, and so forth) score. This attainment requires no touch and may be used on a whole room of individuals, according to this chart:

Radius	Space Dots
1 yard	•
2 yard	••
4 yard	•••
8 yard	••••
16 yard	•••••

Ben doesn't explicitly understand it in system terms, of course. Ben receives a brief flashing glimpse of a woman nearby sitting in front of her fridge at midnight, scarfing down old cheesecake with the door open, indicating a Vice of Gluttony. Her Wisdom score might reveal itself through the sin that forced a recent degeneration.

The Scelestus can only use this ability once per day, however, which means it's important to determine the key target for that use. (That is, unless the character has the Space Arcanum, as noted above.)

2nd: Unholy Lash

Prerequisites: Gnosis 5, Mind 3

The truly moral — those paragons of virtue — disgust many Scelesti. This attainment helps to repudiate such righteousness with a scourging lash of invisible flame.

The mage must succeed on a touch attack (see p. 157 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) to perform this attainment. Only one success on the touch attack is necessary.

Upon touching a target, the victim suffers points of aggravated damage equal to his current Morality (or equivalent, such as Wisdom) score minus five. For that one moment, the target is assailed with visions of Hell: chains and hooks lashing her skin, lakes of molten metal stripping the skin off bones, a dark pit that coughs up a forever-howling wind, and so forth.

Optional Arcanum: Forces 3

The attack leaves behind a searing brand that smolders for one scene (the smell of burned hair and skin is potent, offering +2 to any rolls used to track or detect the character with the brand). The brand itself can only be removed with magic of the Life Arcanum. Healing oneself of such damage necessitates Life 3, while healing others demands one dot higher (Life 4).

3rd: Power in Pain

Prerequisites: Gnosis 7, Mind 4

(Note that Brother Ben has not yet attained this. Certainly, though, if he continues on his path, he'll eventually get here.)

Suffering brings a kind of clarity. Realizing that we're all trapped in the same Hell together is liberating. Pain, in other words, can give one power.

This attainment focuses that idea and provides the Scelestus with a magical benefit. For every point of lethal damage the mage suffers (whether self-inflicted or not), he may add a dot to his Mental or Social Attributes. This dot remains until the point of damage that "caused" it heals. So, if the mage takes two points of lethal damage, he may choose to add two dice to his Intelligence score, or maybe split the bonus and give one to Manipulation and one to Presence. When one of those points of damage heals, the bonus Attribute dot that came with it also "heals" and fades away.

As an added side effect, the focus of one's Mind also gives the pain a degree of pleasure, and the Scelestus may ignore wound penalties at the -1 and -2 point on the Health track. However, once the mage reaches -3, he suffers that full three-dice penalty.

Optional Arcanum: Life 4

With an added touch of life, the mage can make it seem like the wounds don't exist. This doesn't *heal* them, really — it just forces the body to "cover them up." A knife wound across the arm may grow a thin façade of unmarred flesh across it, but the deep gash still sits below the surface, the tendons are still cut, the muscle still parted like sliced steak. Covering the wounds allows the mage to use this attainment regardless of who is watching, and to keep the benefits of Power in Pain without bleeding everywhere.

In addition, the mage may also add to his Strength or Dexterity Attributes in the same way that he adds to Mental and Social Attributes, above. He cannot increase Stamina this way, however.

DEACON THRUSH: GENERAL OF THE ABYSSAL ARMY

*Trust that everything is happening as it should be. Don't trouble yourself with details.
That's my job.*

Aliases: The General, Riddick Wilson (real name)

Background

Thrush knows that the world is home to false dichotomies. It seems strange that two seemingly opposite notions can exist as true in the same time and with the same set of parameters attached, but that's how it goes. People don't like that; they like comfortable truths. A thing is good, or it's bad. It's safe or it's dangerous. Can't be both, right?

Thrush is proud that he's no fool. He recognizes that nothing is so simple. Take Brother Ben, for instance. Here's an individual who's rife with complexities. Ben is weak, but he's also strong. He's mired in his own madness and sin, and yet even despite his Abyssal sympathies Thrush sees him as the messiah, the savior to the Awakened (and to all of mankind, frankly). In addition, Thrush recognizes that he's also part of that complexity. Thrush gets to have it both ways. On the one hand, he's second in command. He's the general, not the king. And yet, the king may sit at the top, but the king doesn't always have all the power. By being behind the throne, Thrush can more easily grab hold of the puppet strings connected to Ben's back. That's a complexity that Ben doesn't really get, and Thrush wants to keep it that way — Ben believes himself ultimately in charge. That is as it should be for Thrush to continue working on Ben's behalf, even though what he does falls outside of what Ben thinks would be the proper course.

Fatebinding 101

With a boot on his neck and scars criss-crossing his back (some of them still fresh, still oozing pus or blood), Thrush's masters explained to him his role, that his destiny was not his own, and never would be. His fate was braided into the tapestry of another's, and if he wanted to try to unbind his threads from that destiny, he'd die. They taught him what he needed to know — rites, abilities, cunning tricks — and then when he was ready, they revealed the truth.

They told him all about the boy (then, still in the attic at his father's) who would one day grow up to be a powerful preacher with Abyssal inclinations, and who could — with the right urgings, with the right man to protect him and put the boy on the proper path — become an Abyssal messiah. They went on to tell Thrush night after night about the things the boy could accomplish. He could wake the dragons sleeping in the dark pit. He could rebuild Atlantis

from the shadows of the Abyss. They told him stories of a red sword, a golden halo, an ivory throne. Magic would be free again. The Awakened would be given glorious access to that magic. They'd be the kings of the world, and Brother Ben would be the king of them, and Thrush would forever be his second.

Somewhere along the way, Thrush faded out. Because to him, it didn't matter. All those details, all the "faithful stories," that was for someone else. His was a job, a task, and it didn't need faith, it only needed to be done. Maybe that's how he was. Maybe it was something that was driven into him with razor and lash, with boot and fist.

But it put him on the path. The path to find Benaiah Clover.

That Preacher Boy

Benaiah Clover is naïve. And that, Thrush realizes, is as it should be.

First, on a very simple level, if Brother Ben didn't have his head in the clouds (some very dark clouds, admittedly), then he wouldn't need Thrush. When Thrush met Clover, the boy was lost, floundering, making enemies left and right with his ill-concealed temperament and unique views. In fact, the night they met, Thrush saved the boy's life — he was off in some roadhouse parking lot, preaching to the drunken and unwashed masses, and that was going to end in a righteous ass-kicking. The kind with Ben curled up on the ground, surrounded by a circle of crooked-tooth rednecks working him over with pool cues and work-boots. Drunk men don't know how to hold back. One boot to the head would have the skull collapse like a pumpkin, with Ben shaking and foaming and ending up dead or without a functioning brain.

Thrush had to teach those men a lesson. He taught them a little thing about cause and effect, crime and punishment. Harm the sacred boy, and lose a hand. Most of them scurried home that night, cradling a stump (Thrush was feeling magnanimous that night, taking their *left* and less useful hands). Some of them, though, were convinced. They told Ben they'd come to the little church he had set up at the other edge of town.

So, Ben doesn't know how not to get himself killed. But that's okay. Because that means he needs Thrush. Plus, if he didn't have such naïveté, he'd not be the perfectly pure soul (pure in an Abyssal, *pitch-perfect pit of darkness* kind of way) that the world needed him to be. He'd think

too much, second guess his own work. Faith is naïve on principle. It needs a foil, a foundation of pragmatism. Thrush knows that he's that pragmatism. He is Ben's wall. He is Ben's fist.

The Army Rises

Ben really doesn't know what Thrush is doing. Ben thinks they've got some converts, some people who want to master the Purgatory they're all trapped in so that they may discard it. He thinks he's got a cabal of mages to help him achieve these goals. Both of those things are true, he just doesn't know the depth to which Thrush is taking it.

Thrush has built a small army for Brother Ben. It numbers in the dozens, now, mostly Sleepers, without any access to magic (Supernal or otherwise). They're men who need a purpose, men who have the faith that Thrush doesn't have himself. Some within that army, though, are like Thrush: they're here to perform a task, not to give themselves over to higher ideals. Thrush thinks of himself as a necessarily low creature, and within that army he needs people like himself just as he needs those mindless sycophants who will take a bullet for their dark messiah.

What does he do with this army? Little, at the moment. They train — martially, for the most part. They wait. If enemies of Ben rise at the margins, they take care of it.

The trick is that Thrush needs to keep them secret, at least for now. Ben might get spooked if he finds a small gang of thugs ready to help him "keep the faith." Thrush knows that the reveal will come one day, of course, but when that happens he intends to have a very literal army at Ben's disposal. When he performs the grand unveiling to Brother Ben, showing him a hundred, two hundred, even a thousand men ready to go to *war* for him against those who would stand against the sympathies of the Abyss, well, what's not to love? When the army reaches that sublime level, Thrush will take them public.

Description

Imagine, if you will, a human wall stuffed into an impeccable suit. That's Deacon Thrush. He's tall. He's wide. He's got a chest like a billboard, a head like a wrecking ball. His hands are big enough to palm a basketball — or someone's head — and crush it like other people might crush a soft peach. Everything about him is threatening.

His demeanor does little to help this. He's woefully serious. Nobody's ever seen him smile, and some of his acquaintances theorize that a smile might burn his face. It's all grim lips or twisted frowns. Sometimes with teeth showing, especially if he wants to make a threat.

Interactions with him always feel like the calm before the storm. Despite his unpleasant veneer and the way he towers over everybody, he speaks in a quiet, soft voice — it's almost jarring to hear. And the disconnect is all the more

concerning, because that seemingly gentle voice might be like the faint susurrations of rain before the hurricane and flood knocks you down and drowns you out.

Thrush stands too close when he talks to people, his chest to their face by mere inches. When he wants to get close and "suggest" something, he puts his immense arm around their shoulder, giving a little (meaning, chest-crushing) squeeze now and again. In this way, he can be very, very convincing.

His nimbus is matte black in contrast to the textured hues of his African American skin. The nimbus has no shine to it, no gleam at all — it's just a spreading pool of unpolished shadow.

Secrets

Here's one interesting secret: Thrush is *not* a Scelestus, and yet claims to be one. Claiming to have genuine magical sympathy with the Abyss earns him credit, and he needn't do much to simulate the experience from an external perspective so others *think* that he's nestled up nice and close to the great yawning stretch of darkness.

Why? Because Thrush isn't a man of faith. Even the Scelesti are not without faith — in fact, many of them must offer very intense devotion to the Abyss, and Thrush's devotions are purely material, purely founded in this fundamental (read: Fallen) world. Magic to him has nothing to do with religion. It has nothing to do with meaning or experience. It's a tool, a means to an end. It's laying around freely for those willing to pick it up, and that's what he does.

Of course, this leads into another of Thrush's secrets: he actually has little faith in Ben's destiny. At least, not in the quasi-religious, Abyssal messiah kind of way, no. Thrush believes Ben will be the great leader, even a messiah. Others will follow him and commit to him as a religious leader. But just because some think it doesn't make it true. He'll still be a man of magic like any other, but one with intense temporal power. Thrush wants a slice of that power for himself, but knows he doesn't have the faith or personal charisma to get there. Hence, Brother Ben. Ben's destiny is a destiny that Thrush shares *only* in the way that one can forge destiny with the power of will. Fuck fate. It has nothing to do with fate.

Thrush doesn't want anybody to know this, of course. His calm voice and intense eyes do not belie his faithlessness, and in fact seem to confirm his spiritual devotion. It's a powerful lie, one he'll do anything to protect.

Rumors

"I saw him, once. Walking the halls of the Gleaming Terrace. He met with Provost Hyperion, did you know that? That's right. Hyperion of the Silver Ladder. They shook hands, exchanged some words, went into the Provost's office at the end of the hall. Stayed in there for an hour or more. Whispers tell me he's not



who he says he is, that Thrush is really going to betray Brother Ben and the army, that he's just lining them up like pegs so they can be more easily knocked down. It's true."

It's not true, not the part about him planning on betraying everybody. Thrush has no faith, but he has intense loyalty. He *did* meet with one of the regional Provosts, though, because Hyperion has similar interests. Thrush has in fact been meeting with a number of high-powered Awakened who may possess Abyssal sympathies. If he can earn attention from some of them, then he'll have them in his corner when the time finally comes to march on the halls of power with the Golden Quorum.

"He's undergoing Abyssal revelations. We've all seen it. Thrush'll be off in the distance, and you'll see him talking to something, not someone but something. Looks like a black blanket with glowing eyes and a mean set of fucking claws. Acamoth. That's right, I'll say it: Acamoth. He meets with those awful things now and again so you and I don't have to, so Brother Ben doesn't have to. They're teaching him new things. New ways to carry Brother Father to the top."

This is a carefully-engineered lie. Thrush has zero interest in dealing with Abyssal entities. Oh, he will if need be, but they cannot be trusted. He has human interests. Such creatures have no human interests. They're unpredictable

and strange, and they'll turn on a mage for some unknowable reason. They're capable of teaching one great power, yes, but it's not the kind of power that can be easily contained. Maybe down the road they'll need it, and Ben will be ready. For now, that power would drive Ben to turn to a gibbering lunatic in need of medication. What good is that?

And yet, the *image* of the Abyssal entities remains a potent one, especially in the eyes of neophyte mages who come on board (and more and more, Thrush's recruitment efforts are geared toward such newly Awakened individuals). It helps cement Thrush's "cred," if you will. So, he maintains the illusion.

"You wouldn't believe where this guy comes from, right? Here's the story — so, there's a monastery way up in the mountains, right? The epicenter of nowhere. Bunch of infernal mages make it their home. Monks, they call themselves. The Brotherhood of the Empty Star or something. They kidnap newly-Awakened mages, and brainwash them. Total 'Love Bomb' scenario — one minute, they love you and will do anything for you, but the moment you have even a second's worth of disagreement or insubordination, they abrade your skin and break your teeth and waterboard you or whatever. They're the ones that raised him. They're the ones who put him on this path with Ben. That's how you know he's tough as tough comes. He still meets them once a year. He's

totally loyal."

That's 99% true. That cult exists. Thrush came out of their "work." He still meets them once a year to report on the status of Ben's "crusade." But he's not loyal to them. He hates them, in fact. Thrush thinks of them as a bunch of religious zealots, a dangerous group of men who think they'll be the power behind Ben's throne, and that's not going to happen because *Thrush* is the power behind the throne. That's part of why he's raising the army in the first place, because one day Thrush knows he's going to have to take the Brotherhood out of the equation, which will be no easy task.

Real Name: Riddick Wilson

Path: Obrimos

Order: None

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 3, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Crafts 1, Investigation (Vetting) 4, Occult 3, Politics 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl (All-Out Attack) 3, Drive 2, Firearms 2, Stealth 1, Survival 1, Weaponry 1

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Intimidation (Silent) 4, Persuasion 3, Subterfuge 4

Merits: Allies (Army) 5, Brawling Dodge, Fighting Style: Boxing 3, Giant, Resources 3, Retainer (Many "Soldiers" of Golden Quorum) 5

Willpower: 8

Wisdom: 3 (suspicion 4)

Virtue: Prudence. Everything needs to be measured. Think things through. Become the counterbalance to irrational faith.

Vice: Pride. Thrush finds it difficult to believe that he's not really in control of everything, and it's becoming harder and harder.

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 12

Health: 10

Gnosis: 4

Arcana: Forces 3, Prime 4

Notes: *Forces* — Tune In (•), Control Light (••), Control Sound (••), Unseen Shield (••); *Prime* — Dispel Magic (•), Discern Phantasm (•), Unseen Spy (••), Celestial Fire (•••), Marionette (••••)

Mana/per turn: 13/4

Story Hooks

- The characters receive an invite to hear Brother Ben speak. The invite is from Thrush himself, hand-written. They show up, they listen, and feel however they want to feel about it. Thrush approaches them afterward and will endeavor to bring them into the secret army he's building. How they react to what they've just seen will determine how Thrush treats them. If they're whole hog, rah-rah-rah, Ben's the best thing since sliced bread; Thrush has a place for them. They're sycophants, then. He'll play the faithful servant, the loyal bodyguard, and he'll try to bring them in on that angle. If they're hesitant, though, or downright disagreeable, Thrush approaches them from another, more honest angle. He needs pragmatic people. He can pay. Will they help him? At this stage, the Abyssal connections aren't obvious.

- Thrush needs some work done. It's an easy job. He needs the characters to find Ben a bride. Time has come for the boy to get his cherry popped and stop with all this romantic pining. So, he leaves it to the characters — and makes a generous offer of money, magical items, whatever — for them to do as asked. The bride they convince (or abduct) is their call. Will she be human? Awakened? Or will they be so disgusted by the offer that they'll attempt to block any attempt Thrush makes to claim a bride for Brother Ben?

- Someone approaches the characters and wants them to infiltrate the army. It's probably one of their patrons in the magical orders, but consider the possibility that it's Ben — maybe Ben wants to find out what's going on, and he needs someone on the inside. The characters will have to join up and pretend to play ball. Time to go undercover.

Armor: 3 ("Unseen Shield," Forces ••)

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Riot Shotgun	4(L)	20/40/80	8	9-Again

THE GOLDEN QUORUM CABAL

Below, you'll find five key members of Brother Ben's Golden Quorum. The first three are mages he calls cabal mates, but the latter two represent mages who operate as part of Deacon Thrush's clandestine "army."

Batsheva, the Little Lamb

Quote: *This is amazing. His glory is undeniable. His power is insurmountable!*

Background: Elizabeth Peters has always sought purpose. As a little girl, she tried so many things, but was good at very few of them — she couldn't paint well, wasn't at all good at sports, and stumbled over words when in front of the class. She tried making friends, but none of them ever really "took" and so she usually sat alone day after day, with only her lunch to console her.

Even as a young mage, she bounced between orders, moved between cabals, always looking to find her niche. It wasn't until she found Brother Ben that she felt she had found her place. She knows that her magic has distanced her from the rest of the world, and that once she found the proper place it would feel like a perfect fit — a metaphorical *click* between her magic and the magic of another.

She joined the Golden Quorum recently, offering Ben no end of unconditional support and magical aid. Truth is, she loves Ben. She wants to give him everything. Her greatest dream is to be his wife and to grant him a child, a child that would be truly sacred and divine (she's more than a little deluded on this point). Thrush doesn't see that happening, though, and has more than once cautioned her against even trying such a thing, and Ben certainly doesn't seem to be motivated toward loving her.

Batsheva is too naïve to realize that Ben is given over to Abyssal sympathies. It's possible she does see it, but if she does, she most certainly doesn't admit it to herself.

Description: In a word: dowdy. She wears simple clothing. She wears no makeup (she's tried, but someone called her a "frumpy whore" and that was the end of that). Little about her is overtly attractive: plump, acne-scarred face, plain hair, shaped like a pear. Her nimbus is a tangle of dry, dead vines growing out from beneath her feet.

Storytelling Hints: Batsheva seems forever in the warm radiant glow of Ben's charisma. She's wide-eyed and zealous, speaking in high tones, her words occasionally punctuated by giddy giggles. And yet, those eyes are eerily hollow. Not a lot going on behind them, it seems. That's not to say she's dumb, not at all. Only that she's so completely given her judgment over to others that it's hard to manifest intelligence beyond the daunting veneer of her intense ardor for Ben and his crusade.

Path: Acanthus

Order: None

Abilities:

Bookworm (dice pool 7) — Books have always been her friends. She finds great comfort in them and is a swift and capable reader. It's not just knowledge, though, it's the zeal

with which she attends to the action. When it comes to book study, she'll forgo food and sleep in order to pursue the information.

Extolling Virtues (dice pool 8) — In most ways, Batsheva isn't all that convincing. She rambles on a bit, her words and ideas a bit muddy. That's not true when she's glorifying Brother Ben, though. When that happens, a new light shines. Her words are improvised, always, but totally clear, her points almost profound. It's like something else is speaking through her.

Jabez, the Saved

Quote: *In the darkness, I found light.*

Background: Magic wasn't good for Jabez (once Johnny Arkosh). He Awakened, but could not control his magic. Others mocked him or abused him for it. A brief stint in the Adamantine Arrow was supposed to toughen him, teach him discipline, but it only served to highlight his weaknesses and drive him to the edge of despair. The truth might've been that Johnny was simply chemically depressed, or that maybe he wasn't ever really *meant* to have magic. That truth no longer matters since Johnny found Brother Ben and became Jabez, the Saved.

Years ago, when Ben's "churches" were nothing more than parking lots, Johnny was on the very edge of grief. He was ready to kill himself. Literally — noose hanging from the rafters, chair on which to stand (and to kick away). Ben found him when taking a break from his sermonizing, having been called to the spot by an echoing and distant voice. It was a call from the Supernal, Ben believed at the time (though one wonders if it may have been Abyssal).

Ben convinced Johnny to embrace his life, explaining that life was punishment and the goal was to master that castigation. By becoming sin, one escapes sin. Johnny, already at his lowest, saw Brother Ben as a shining light not merely to be admired, but to be emulated.

And so, Johnny — now Jabez — sought to model himself after Ben, though never with an idea to usurp his master. He found the first Scelesti attainment (the same that Ben followed, and perhaps even originated), but wonders exactly how his mentor and savior fails to see that he has truly become Abyssal. Perhaps it was Jabez's time in the Adamantine Arrow, but he knows the Abyss when he sees it. And he's comfortable with that. But why isn't Ben?

Jabez has summoned demons from the Abyss, he's made deals, he's learned how to taint all his magics with those dark sympathies — why does Ben resist?

It puts Jabez in a curious position where he can, in theory, teach something to his master. He doesn't want to become the savior and usurp Ben, but... that's how Deacon Thrush sees it. Thrush's been watching. And he doesn't like what he sees. He wonders if he'll soon have to do something to Jabez. Something to his mind, or to his body. Something most likely permanent.

Description: Jabez is lean and tall, with a slight stoop to his lanky frame. He's pale, so pale that his veins show through his milk-white skin, and the shock of too-blond hair atop his head doesn't help to diminish his nearly albino appearance. He's given over to stylish clothing, but nothing too flashy. His nimbus is a pale, coruscating light that glows and fades in erratic pulses.

Storytelling Hints: Jabez isn't a zealot in the mold of Batsheva. He's devoted, but he's also got his own level of awareness of what's going on. He watches. He sees. He's keen on the ironies, and wonders what to do about them. This isn't about him rejecting the Abyssal connection, not at all. He's whole hog on that point. But more and more he's questioning why he seems less naïve than his savior, and it's a conundrum that will slowly start to eat him away until he resolves it (or until Thrush resolves it for him).

Path: Moros

Order: None (formerly Adamantine Arrow)

Abilities:

Eagle Eyes (dice pool 6) — He keeps a keen eye on everything, and can spot some very miniscule details without even meaning to.

Elegant Carving (dice pool 9) — The way Jabez focuses his magic (Abyssal and otherwise) is through carving and whittling. That might mean a knife and a stick. It might mean a small workshop, and a series of saws, rasps, and knives. What he creates is genuinely beautiful, almost unparalleled. He's made a number of small trinkets for Ben, and is actually carving a throne for him — but, he wonders, how many dark details to include? Could his carving help pop Ben's deluded bubble?

Talk it Up (dice pool 7) — Jabez is chatty. He's a social creature, and works a room well. He's not great at persuading people so much as he *entertains* them.

Raum, the Old Man, Lucifer's Lawyer

Quote: *Of course I'm suspicious. That's why you have me here.*

Background: He has no name other than Raum. Well, he once had such a name, but he's long forgotten it. The demons have taken it from him, and that's perfectly fine by him. Everything that's his is theirs, that was their purpose in taking his identity from him so many years ago.

This is the Old Man's problem. He once was positioned as Brother Ben's mentor. Sure, Thrush saved the boy from getting his ass broken outside a roadhouse, but it was Raum who was the boy's earliest teacher. Thrush was just the bodyguard, the go-to guy. Raum was the mentor. The wise hand on the back of the boy's neck. He believes in Ben's destiny. He has faith in what will rise from that legacy.

Brother Ben is a shining light, and the Old Man was the deep shadow that the boy cast. That's how it always was. Raum was advisor, lawyer, tempter.

Then, over time, Ben continued gravitating toward Deacon Thrush. So much so that the two were rarely separate. Slowly but surely, Raum and other cabal mates were pushed

The Magic of Evangelism

Evangelism is the (largely Christian) practice of proselytizing to the masses, be they converts to the cause or those one seeks to convert. It basically means, from its word roots, "to bring a message."

Evangelism can be considered a Specialty in either the Expression or Persuasion Skills. A normal roll for that is Presence + Expression, or Manipulation + Persuasion (depending on the approach: a powerful charisma at the pulpit, or a double-talking argument?).

Magic can be used to "enhance" the evangelism effect, which is exactly how the Golden Quorum cabal works. Examples include:

Identifying the health of one's soul using Death.

Reading the connections between people with Fate, or using that Arcanum to bless the saved with provident luck. (Also, see "The Perfect Moment," p. 152 of *Mage: The Awakening* for something that can turn a rote evangelical moment into a pinnacle of proselytizing.)

Using Forces to increase the sound of the speaker's voice (giving it a holy, potent effect), or influencing light so that it seems to be shining down from Heaven itself.

Applying Life to find the secret sick and to cure them of their maladies.

Forcing Matter to turn bread into fish, or water into wine, or by creating a miracle whereupon a statue bleeds real blood.

Create a swell of positive emotion in a crowd with Mind.

Create minor phantasms or other tricks of the eye with Prime.

Space can be used to perform any of the above tricks at a certain distance (though most evangelists also rely on a "hands-on" approach, because it gets people up on stage and personal).

Use of Spirit can create a "possessed by the Holy Spirit, babbling in tongues" effect, except here the mage actually forces a spirit into the body for but a few moments before ripping it back out.

With Time, the evangelist can predictably tell the future, look into someone's past ("God has told me this about you..."), and the "Perfect Timing" spell (p. 258, *Mage: The Awakening*) can be used similarly to "The Perfect Moment" in an effort to drive home one's gospel-giving.

Of course, most evangelical spells must be handled delicately, given that they're performed in front of an entire crowd.



to the margins, none more than the Old Man. It's like Raum became... outdated, outmoded, passed over. Was it Thrush whispering in Ben's ear? Did Ben have some idea of his destiny that didn't include Raum in it?

He wasn't angry with Ben, not really. Resentful, perhaps, and he remains so, but Raum is like Thrush in that he recognizes how naïve Ben really is. Ben doesn't know anything beyond his message. Somehow, Thrush earned his ear. Raum's been watching. He sees how Thrush operates.

More importantly, though, he's seen what Thrush is doing behind the scenes. And he's gathering evidence. Soon as he can, he'll spring that information on Ben, make the boy aware of what's *really* going on with Thrush. Raum does not believe that this so-called "army" figures into the boy's destiny. If need be, he'll go back to Thrush's earliest masters to betray him, but he'd rather stay local. (Note that this is a good place for characters to get involved: Raum may approach them and convince them to do his work for him, putting themselves in harm's way so that he doesn't have to — not that he'll put it so bluntly, of course.)

Note that Raum is a Scelestus mage, but follows the path and Attainments set forth in **Mage: The Awakening** (pp. 361–363).

Description: Imagine a little old Napoleon, and you have a pretty solid image of Raum. He's short in stature, though now a little thick around the midsection. His head sits low on his shoulders, almost as if he has no neck at all. His white caterpillar eyebrows seem to be migrating toward one another, crossing the

threshold above his coal-black eyes. He wears suits that could only be described as "lawyerly" — conservative black suit, red tie, cream-colored kerchief poking out of the breast pocket. He has a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles, though the glass in each frame has no prescription. They're just for show. Raum's nimbus is a blood-spattered parchment; listen closely, and one might hear the scratch of a fountain pen signing away one's soul.

Storytelling Hints: They call him "Lucifer's Lawyer" for a reason. This little Satanist (literally — he's bound up the Abyss with demons with the Devil, all of it tied together in his metaphysical worldview) claims that he should've been the one doing all that "tempting in the desert" business. He could talk the chrome off a bumper. Worse, he knows it. While he's not bombastic about it, his ego is a fat, resplendent thing. His pride drives him to all that he does. That's the hardest part for him to deal with regarding Ben and Deacon Thrush, the sting his pride took at seeing Ben drift from him, and away from his influence.

Path: Thyrsus

Order: None

Abilities:

Dog Training (dice pool 6) — One of Raum's favorite things is his kennel, where he keeps an alarming number of dogs ("his pack of hellhounds," he playfully calls them) at his disposal. He genuinely seems to love them. But he's also willing to sick them on anybody who gets in his way, and some say his training takes it too far and is cruel to the animals. His counter-argument is that he's teaching the animals to shirk

some of man's domestication, which runs contrary to the "abuse argument," and anybody who accuses him of that is going to get a face full of dog teeth anyhow.

Obliterate Argument (dice pool 8) — Raum likes to take arguments and destroy them, if only for the sake of having done so (when he finds an argument he truly despises, his ardor and skill grow by leaps and bounds). He's not a lawyer, never has been, but he can run circles around a man's logic and hang him with his own argument. He uses the Socratic method extensively, and knows a host of logical fallacies with which to obviate what anybody is saying at any point.

Amanda "Mandy" Grace

Quote: *Please. Cry out. Scream bloody murder. It makes me wet.*

Background: Abuse begets abuse, we all know that. So many serial killers were in some way molested or harmed as children. So how it is that Amanda Grace sprang from her sweet mother's womb with the psychotic brain of a seasoned sadist remains uncertain. Her mother was a good woman, a church-goer. Her father was a plumber, maybe a bit distant, but a good man who "brought home the bacon." But even at an early age, Mandy was caught with her little brother (playing a game with a steak knife she called "Don't Move and It Won't Hurt"). They tried drugs. That only made her worse. They tried psychiatric therapy, but it left all of her therapists confounded and disturbed (one went home crying, a broken woman).

So, at 18, they kicked her out. Not because they didn't love her. Not because they were cruel. But *she* was cruel to *them*. Hateful words. Callow and callous acts. She poisoned that family (not literally) and the only way they saw fit to save the family was to cast her adrift. They tried. It failed.

Now, at 20, Amanda's out in the world. She's a truly cruel girl, but she hadn't found her purpose... until Brother Ben's words moved her. It stirred something inside of her, and her belly felt like it was filled with little moths. But before she could get up there, shake his hand, bask in his awe, she was intercepted.

Thrush's own mentors — the Brotherhood — have Amanda as part of Ben's destiny. They believe she'll be his concubine and will teach him things about pain that he doesn't yet know. She's his Jezebel (though not with the "falling out of a window and getting eaten by dogs" angle).

Thrush, though, isn't so sure. She's a vicious girl. He's worried she'd break Ben, and what with Ben being so desperate for love (or sex), she'd end up being the powerful one in that relationship. Just as Thrush has pushed Raum to the margins, she'd probably push Thrush to the margins. And yet, he can't so blatantly betray the Brotherhood, not yet.

So, he keeps her as part of his army. Her cruelty can be used. It can be directed. And for now, that's her role within the group. He keeps her away from Ben, but she pines at a distance, seeing a kindred spirit.

(Mandy's not a mage. She's just a normal girl, with no magical ability. She might, however, have the Destiny Merit if the Storyteller wishes, with a bane of Brother Ben as he could end up as her biggest weakness. She might also work well as a Sleepwalker.)

Description: Mandy's a wicked spitfire in appearance. She's tall and thin, more than a little spidery. Her wicked grin could cut paper. Green eyes sit wide and unblinking beneath red hair pulled tightly back in a ponytail that hangs to the middle of her back. She's beautiful, certainly, all freckle-faced and smiling, but that smile should be very, very unnerving to any who gaze at it for more than a few moments.

Storytelling Hints: She's unhinged, and makes no effort to hide it (though, really, she doesn't think she's unhinged at all so what's to hide?). She has a quick tongue and an incisive wit, but she punctuates all the smart things she says with a kind of bubbling giggle, as if she's giddy about... well, nearly everything.

Abilities:

Pick You Apart (dice pool 8) — She likes knives, make no mistake, but even more, she likes her *words* to be knives. Amanda can cut a person down with a few quick comments. She can see to the heart of a person's weakness and dissect them as if they're pinned to a corkboard before her, wriggling but unable to escape. Fat? Slow? Unsure? She'll deftly destroy a victim and somehow not come out looking like a total bully. It's almost like anybody who isn't the target of her slicing invective is somehow appreciative of her ability — sure, it's cruel, but art can be cruel sometimes, right? (Really what they're doing is applauding her so that she doesn't turn her vocal knives against them.)

Sense Emotion (dice pool 5) — It doesn't seem like it, but Amanda judges everybody she meets. She seems like she's so self-concerned that she can't possibly be gazing deep into anybody's soul, but she's certainly trying to. She gauges a person by what they're feeling at the time she meets them, and from there, that's how she assumes they're always going to be. It's a flaw, of course — someone who's morose today might not be tomorrow, but she thinks that her initial impression is the only one that matters.

Interfactor Tryzub

Quote: *Only when the ends justify the means are we righteous.*

Background: The Ukrainian Bogoslav Nakatov — called "Tryzub," for the massive trident tattoos that ink both his broad back and chest — belongs to the Guardians of the Veil as an Interfactor, one of the masked inquisitors.

For a long time, he's served the order loyally. Twenty years now, and he's had no cause to change his course. He likes who he is and what he does. He likes to ask questions. He likes to break people. It's what he does.

Two events, though, changed things for Tryzub. The first was a Paradox, a bad dose of whiplash magic that left him with hallucinations plaguing him for weeks. In these hallucinations, he witnessed a great gulf of space that he intimately knew to be the Abyss that separates worlds. In that dark expanse he saw twinkling lights, tiny motes like stars that — much as it is with dreams that provide the mind with a certain degree of requisite knowledge — he *knew* were angels, great faceless angels, of this void.

They called to him. They whispered to him. They begged to be free so that they could come and fix what was broken with the world.

He rejected the call, and the hallucinations stopped. But a second problem led him back to the faceless angels: the Guardians put him out to pasture. They haven't done away with the position of Interfector, but the local Eye of the Dragon deemed it too much. Other Interfectors were given different roles within the order. Tryzub was not. Perhaps recognizing that he was suited for little else, they simply allowed him to honorably remain within the order with his title, but serving no function. He sits at home or in an office. He receives no calls. He receives little communication from his peers.

Left with a void of his own, he began to meditate. Not so much on purpose; he simply sat there with a thousand-yard stare, and his mind wandered right back to the faceless angels, calling him from the darkness.

These days, he's part of Thrush's secret Golden Quorum army, operating behind the scenes. Once more, he is allowed a role akin to what he wants: he can ask questions with a cold voice, an icy stare, and the torturous manipulations of Awakened magic to open the mind and the body of those he interrogates. Even better, he hears the discordant yet beautiful songs of the faceless angels, and those songs are getting closer.

Description: Tryzub's in his mid-50s. He's average height, 5'7" or thereabouts. His hair is dark on top, but graying at the temples, with a hard-angled Van Dyke beard that has similarly gone gray. He still keeps his mask and wears it perhaps more often than is comfortable for other people. The mask itself is largely featureless, just a red ceramic piece with a pair of teardrop-shaped eyeholes and a spit-shined gleam. His nimbus suffers still from the hallucination Paradoxes — it flickers, darts in and out, once stable, now unpredictable.

Storytelling Hints: He speaks with a kind of grim, gravelly finality to things. Words are punctuated with an exhalation of angry breath through his nostrils, or a sign that indicates a cruel ineluctability (that is, he sighs, and the listener realizes this means he's out of options, which is *not* a good thing).

Path: Mastigos

Order: Guardians of the Veil

Abilities:

Interrogation (dice pool 8) — He's patient, to a point. He asks questions. He uses subtle Mind magic to get what he wants. But even without magic, he has a way of prying people apart like warm bread, just getting in there and pulling the answers out of them. Magic is for when that fails, which is rare.

Resist (dice pool 8) — Not an active ability, but a passive

one: Tryzub's got a steel spine and cold, unblinking eyes. His Resistance pool, therefore, is strong. He can put up a stone-faced defense against most attempts to crack him, whether with words, magic, or weapons. It only helps him that, when pushed to the point of breaking, he can rely upon the sweetly asynchronous songs of the faceless angels to give him a little extra power.

Story Hooks: The Cabal

- The Golden Quorum army has agents buried deep, maybe deeper than Thrush even knows. Tryzub's a good example of this, because he's been recruiting to the cause. So have others. It means that within the orders exist a few members here and there — many of some prominence — that have gotten on board with the idea of an Abyssal messiah. The characters are small enough to investigate this without riling the powers-that-be, and so they're called upon to track this cancer from its fringes to its dark, beating heart.

- The characters have poked around. They've inadvertently drawn attention from Thrush and his people. Crazy Mandy Grace is on their case, and while she does not herself possess magic, she's cold and cunning and happy to strike at the characters where it hurts them most: friends, family, allies. Whenever the characters get close to a major revelation or harming the resources of the Golden Quorum, Mandy strikes while they're otherwise occupied. Can they fight this war on two fronts? Can they protect their flank from Thrush's crazies?

- At present, a division exists: the Golden Quorum cabal is not aware of Thrush's growing army. An anonymous letter asks the characters to plumb the depths of that division and to find the cabal proof of the army's existence. Of course, what happens when one stares too long into the Abyss...?

CADERE: DESPERATE DESCENDENT

You're going to help me with this. You have no idea how important it is.

Aliases: Christophe Valder (birth name), Cadere, The Cursed Cadere, "The Municipal Park Rapist," "The Bay Rapist," "The Demon Nanny" and several dozen other less-famous police and media-spawned nicknames.

Background

Most Awakened are not tied to their Supernal Realms by birth. True, some Proximi follow family lines, with their awareness and attunement to the supernatural seemingly following genealogical patterns. Few mages, however, have parents who are Proximi or mages. Fewer still come from family lines with magic running through their genetics like a supernatural recessive trait.

The world is a vast and mysterious place, however, and if one looks long and hard enough, there is almost always an exception that proves the rule. For the Awakened, that exception is the Prosapia, a lineage of mages that claims to trace their Supernal family tree all the way back to the Fall of Atlantis. Each generation since Atlantis still ruled has produced at least one Awakened soul, or so the family claims.

At one time the Prosapia were among the most highly respected members of the Roman Consilium, and the family counseled not only the Hierophant but also human Caesars, priests and kings. Over time, however, the once-prolific family discovered themselves less and less likely to produce offspring. Members were infertile, or unable to carry children to term. Tragedy struck again and again as babes were found dead in their cradles, or toddlers, children and youths fell victim to plague or accidents. And perhaps even more disturbing for the family, fewer of those who did survive were manifesting Supernal connections. Their offspring simply did not Awaken as they once had.

This tragedy peaked during the mid-Renaissance era when a period of more than 60 years passed where no known Prosapia Awakened, causing panic in the family. In the mid-17th century, a few Prosapia were called to sign Watchtowers, and some members of the family believed that perhaps the worst was over. The problems continued, however, and by the American Revolution the family bloodline had died down from hundreds, perhaps thousands, of members to barely over a hundred, only a handful of whom had manifested supernatural power. In desperation, the family patriarchs consulted their strongest seers and were confronted with a horrible prophecy — their line was destined to die out. Unwilling to cede their family to the fates, the elders began to take desperate measures to ensure that those Prosapia who had Awakened were likely to breed more mages. No member, Awakened or not, was exempt

from their family duty to actively work to produce children from the time it was biologically possible. Mundane and magic methods were used to attempt to cultivate viable pregnancies, but the more the family tinkered with Fate to try to avert their destined end, the more the Supernal seemed to work against them. UnAwakened fathers found it impossible to impregnate Prosapia willworker women, and when an Awakened man from the family line managed to create life with his Sleeper mate the results were terrifying. Those women unfortunate enough to become pregnant by Prosapia men suffered horrible miscarriages, their unborn spawn emerging half-formed and twisted into unthinkable monsters in the womb.

Hoping that perhaps mage-mothers could withstand and nurture their own pregnancies with greater success, Awakened family members were put under harsh familial pressure to have children together; first distant cousins, then closer and closer relations until it became an unspoken family secret that sibling or parent-child relations were happening throughout the group, all in hopes of producing that Holy Grail — another generation of Prosapia. Nominally, the depraved plan seemed to work. Children of Prosapia incest were born, not often, but at least the line did not entirely die out. And, when the new generation manifested a mage, many in the line believed they had managed to avert their fate.

It was not to be so, however.

More than 30 years ago, Christophe Valder was the last Prosapia to Awaken. His mother died giving birth to the boy, his parents' only living child. He is also the last of his line — those few cousins who were born of his generation having died without manifesting their Supernal potential, and his father seemed unable to beget any other offspring. As Christophe grew, all other members of the line passed on, with the boy watching them fall one by one like overripe fruit from a diseased tree. And, when he was old enough to be a part of it, all of the family's pressure to keep the line alive fell upon him.

Ten years ago, his father's dying words to him were "You cannot let the Prosapia perish. It is in your hands, now."

Since that day, he has thought of nothing else.

Desperation Breeds Destruction

With the death of his father and mentor, Christophe (who began using the Shadow Name of "Cadere" after his Awakening) was suddenly alone, save for the faithful familiar he had inherited as the last remaining member of the family (this familiar, Pellax, is described on p. 72). Faced with his own mortality, and a burden of responsibility that stretched back for more than two thousand years, as

well as the loss of his father, something cracked deep inside the already emotionally wounded and self-loathing mage. Cadere faltered and began his descent into desperation.

For a time, he held hopes of having a family and continuing the Prosapia line in the normal mortal fashion, complete with pretty wife, picket fence and a flock of children at his knee. He met and married a young woman who knew nothing of the Supernal world, not long after his father's death. Within months, with only the slightest of spellwork on his part, they conceived, but her pregnancy ended before her second trimester, and despite his, his bride bled to death after several weeks of hemorrhaging post-partum. Undaunted, he chose his second wife from among the Awakened community, but her attention faltered during an attack on their cabal's Sanctum and she was eviscerated before she could even tell Cadere she'd been expecting their child.

Others in the Consilium began to whisper that the man who they knew as Cadere was cursed. He would not believe it, however. He attempted to court other Awakened women, but rumors spread and none would welcome his attentions. Even when he and his faithful familiar left their home and began traveling from one city to the next across the globe, no alias or disguise could prevent the stories of the Cursed Cadere from following him and chasing away all prospects of a healthy relationship.

Thwarted by the fates, yet still intent on continuing his family line, Cadere began to experiment with other alternatives. He attempted to craft an offspring for himself using Supernal magics, but no amount of his tinkering would bring the "child" to Awaken, and in time his tampering sent the magic-spawned simulacrum insane, necessitating it be put out of its misery. He attempted to bribe those who were adept with Fate to alter the prophesied end for his line, but without exception those who he consulted claimed there were forces at work far greater and more powerful than they or he could hope to become. Each failure took its toll on the lonely Thyrus, shredding his sanity and his Wisdom bit by bit, and earning him the distrust and animosity of those Awakened souls whose aid he sought.

But rather than dissuading him, they only made him cling tighter to his hope to find the key to his family's redemption, and so he continued formulating and exacting more and more desperate plans, accompanied only by his constant spirit companion, Pellax.

The Line Crossed

Cadere doesn't remember much about the children. He doesn't remember collecting them, or casting the ritual or their tears as they bawled out in fear and pain. He only knows that, despite the pages upon pages of calculations he made beforehand, the sacrifice did not work. And afterwards, when the papers screamed about demon nannies and devil worship, he heeded Pellax's advice that perhaps it was time for them to move on.

He doesn't remember taking the blood-wife, either. He woke up to find her beside him in bed, her slick crimson skin staining the sheets beneath them. She smiled at him, but didn't breathe and whatever passed for a heart within her hollow chest did not beat. No matter how fervently he filled her, she never caught child and when he woke one morning and she did not, he knew it was once again, time for he and his familiar to leave.

He remembers Eve, however. He remembers the flash of brilliant white sparks when he read her aura for the first time, and the sense he had, when hearing her name, that finally providence had put the answer before him. She was destined to be his love, his lover, the answer to his prayers; one didn't have to be able to read Fate to see that.

Eve didn't agree, at least not right off. But with persuasion, and a judicious application of Mind magic, eventually she capitulated, at least long enough for him to ensure that the young willworker carried his child. After that, he just had to keep her calm and safe. Pellax reminded him of the dangers the woman might face, of the fate of the first two Mrs. Valder's, and in a blind panic, Cadere sent her into a coma, essentially creating a living incubator for their unborn child. Even this effort was not enough to thwart the fates, however. Weeks later, Cadere nodded off for a few moments after days of waking vigilance. He woke to discover something had struck both woman and child dead as he slept — something brutal, something lethal, and something that even his magic and Pellax's keen senses could not track.

He hasn't given up, though. He just keeps moving on, trying new plans and traveling to new places in pursuit of what some would call an unattainable goal. Cadere knows, however, that somewhere out there is the solution to his family's fate, and he's determined never to give up seeking it out, no matter what the cost.

Description

Those who knew Theo Cadere in his youth would be hard pressed to recognize the man he has become. His once-lithe form has grown stooped, shoulders rounded, fingers constantly twitching as if grasping for something intangible. He pays little attention to his appearance, wearing the same clothing for days on end when focused on formulating his next plan, the one that will surely work and save his family line and his reputation.

When putting a plan into motion, however, he becomes fastidious, catering his dress, appearance and behavior to whatever persona is necessary to give the plan its best chance of coming to fruition. This has allowed him to emulate everything from a police officer to a genetic scientist without having others suspect his true nature, and to pass through hospitals, universities, cemeteries and playgrounds with equal ease.



The only true constant with Cadere is his unmistakable nimbus. When he uncloaks it, the area is filled with a sense of desperation so deep that it has been known to drive Sleepers to tears in sorrow and desperation. The air becomes tinged with the metallic scent of blood, laid over a deep musky scent of canine fur.

Secrets

Wherever Cadere has traveled in the past years, a trail of mishaps, mayhem and murder has followed in his wake. If someone were able to track his path exactly, it would read like a chronological leapfrog of serial rape, torture and murder. The only thing that has prevented mundane authorities from connecting the crimes together is his change of modus operandi between areas. As each new scheme to save his family is formed, he spends months fastidiously sketching out every potential aspect of the plan before putting it into action, and each failure sends him in an entirely new direction. Fueled by his desperation and unfettered by morals or mundane law, Cadere is a man of infinite optimism and equally infinite potential for depravity in the pursuit of that unending hope.

Rumors

"I don't know what did it. Something with a hate-on for pregnant women, close as I can figure. The way it tore them open was just... well, let's say I don't think anyone human could have done something like that. Not and stayed human, anyway."

Cadere's ruthlessness and utter dedication has led him to take actions that no completely sane individual could. Those who have seen the effluvia his experimentations have left behind are inevitably sickened by his apparent cruelty, but in truth it is not anger or hatred that drives him. Instead, his need to succeed at any cost has divested his emotions wholly, leaving him with no empathy whatsoever for the humans (or other Awakened) who must be harmed or even sacrificed to achieve his goal.

"He had me backed into the alley, and he was talking about how I was perfect, how I was the solution to all his problems. Then he stood straight upright and looked to the side and started talking to himself. He said something about being right, that it wasn't the right time, and then turned and walked away like I wasn't even there."

Cadere is almost never without the company of his

familiar companion, Pellax. The spirit often manifests in the form of a giant mastiff dog, but is just as likely to remain intangible and offer advice to his "master" from across the Gauntlet.

"The Prosapia? They're not real. I mean, everyone knows that Awakening is a personal thing, not some sort of trait handed down from father to son. They're a metaphor for the dangers of keeping only with our own kind. It takes more than one material to build a stable building, and the legend of the Prosapia is a warning against becoming too xenophobic."

In the years since the Prosapia's fortunes turned, their legend has not entirely faded from the minds of the Awakened, but most believe there is less to them than really existed. Some believe they're little more than a morality tale, others claim they were a constructed family that adopted newly Awakened members into their ranks to try to form a strong and long-lasting legacy of power and knowledge. Few believe it is possible for Awakened "genes" to be passed from parent to child. Of those who are aware of the truth of the Prosapia, fewer still would believe that a creature like Cadere, fallen so far in his Wisdom, is the end result of such a once-noble line.

Real Name: Christophe Valder

Path: Thyrsus

Order: None (formerly Adamantine Arrow)

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 4, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 3, Computer 2, Investigation (Stalking) 3, Medicine (Reproductive Science) 2, Occult (Family Line) 4, Science (Genetics) 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl (Submission Holds) 2, Drive (Avoiding Pursuit) 2, Firearms (Pistol) 2, Larceny (Breaking and Entering) 3, Stealth (Ambush) 4, Weaponry (Knife) 2

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Intimidation 3, Persuasion (Seduction) 3, Socialize (Bars) 2, Subterfuge (Looking Helpless) 4

Merits: Destiny 5 (Bane: "Your family's greatest strength will also be its destruction"), Familiar (Pellax) 3, Quick Draw (knife), Resources 4

Willpower: 7

Wisdom: 1 (obsessive compulsive — continuing his family line — 4, depression 3)

Virtue: Hope. No matter the odds, he continues striving to save his family line and his honor along with it.

Vice: Pride. He believes himself to be utterly unique in the world, with all the pain and pride that entails.

Initiative: 6

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Story Hooks

- Those with police contact may hear reports of a series of serial rapes in the local area. Strangely, all of the victims wind up pregnant, and all decide (despite possessing a variety of stances on birth control and abortion) to continue the pregnancy.

Each, however, later reports a potential stalker watching them, as well as some unknown benefactor doing strange kindnesses for them, such as paying their bills remotely, leaving them presents, protecting them when they enter into dangerous situations, etc. As the women progress in their pregnancies, however, something begins attacking them again. When the first one turns up dead, the papers begin calling the unknown assailant "The Fiend of Franklin Boulevard," the area where all five women are from.

- Cadere forms an obsession with one of the characters or their associates. He might choose one of the females to be the next "Mrs. Valder," or someone with high Fate to be the seer who can find a way to break his curse. Either way, the mage attempts to first ingratiate his way into the group and, if that fails, attempts to capture and hold the focus of his obsession by force. Can they find and rescue the target before Cadere makes him or her the next in his chain of perverted plans?

- A woman, obviously pregnant, approaches the Consilium, seeking protection for herself and her unborn child. She says she's been placed under a curse, and fears that her child has been or will be harmed by it. Investigation eventually reveals that "she" is Cadere, who has used Life magic to change his sex in order to have a child, and that the baby is indeed dying. No matter how potent, no magic is able to heal the child, who seems fated to die within hours. How will the cabal break the news to the worried "mother" and how will they react when "she" seems intent on choosing one of them for her next attempt to become pregnant?

Health: 8

Gnosis: 5

Arcana: Life 5, Mind 5, Spirit 2

Rotes: Life — Pulse of the Living World (•), Self Healing (••), Healing Heart (•••), Doppelganger (••••), Life Force Assault (•••••), Create Life (•••••), Evolutionary Shift (•••••), Hereditary Change (•••••), Human Minion (•••••); Mind — Aura Perception (•), Emotional Urging (••), First Impressions (••), Psychic Assault (•••), Telepathic Control (••••), Possession (•••••)

Mana/per turn: 14/5

Armor: 5 ("Organic Resilience," Life 5)

THE HOLLOW SPECTER: WILDCAT

"This won't hurt... long".

Aliases: Catarine Beldam, Chat Sauvage

Background

Some mages hunger for knowledge, others for power. Wildcat just hungered. From long before her Awakening, nothing she was given or achieved was ever enough to satisfy her, a situation which only intensified during her time as a mage. So great was this need that it drove her to depths and depravities that most Awakened would never consider. In the end, this hunger led her to the biggest mistake of her life, making deals with entities far darker than the young noblewoman had ever thought possible. Unfortunately for Catarine, and those who would encounter her over the next several hundred years, her death was only the beginning of the rest of a horrible and haunted existence.

As the only daughter of an French nobleman, Catarine grew up having the best things in life handed to her on a silver platter, and she responded only by demanding more. A quick study, she had no problem learning every skill and knowledge allowed to her by the culture of the day, including fluency in several tongues, food and herb preservation and preparation, all manner of household skills and a broad range of artistic endeavors. Her aptitude, however, only assured that she sped through her lessons, leaving her plenty of time to devote to her real interest: tormenting not only her own household staff, but her rivals, peers and potential suitors as well. By the age of 13 she'd gained a reputation as one of the most spoiled and spiteful young women in all of Toulouse — never content, never grateful for the bounty to which she was privy, and never failing to want the best of whatever anyone else possessed.

When she woke from a fever-dream screaming about having been taught to sign her "mark" by a horned demon, none of her ladies-in-waiting were surprised. Some wrote it off as nightmares, others claimed the Devil himself had finally exerted his claim upon the malevolent young woman who for years they had referred to clandestinely as "*démoniaque*". Over the next weeks and months, however, many surprises were in store for the Beldam household. Her nightmares continued, accompanied by manifestations of her yet-untrained Supernal power that grew increasingly more difficult to ignore or explain away. Always accustomed to getting her own way, Catarine used her force of personality (backed up by her father's rich coffers) to gain introductions to occultists and purported magi of that time, and was inevitably disappointed to discover that those who advertised their ability with the dark craft were almost without exception shysters, pretenders and frauds.

Undaunted, she dug deeper, and in time discovered an active society of true magi in Western Europe, and through ruthless application of her assets, soon joined their ranks. In the guise of joining a well-heeled religious convent, the aspiring noblewoman left her family manor and fully entered her own life as a mage.

Catarine took to her Awakened existence as she had her life up to that time — voraciously. She held absolutely no compunctions against using every attribute at her avail to gain every bit of knowledge that might benefit her new state as a mage. Her family's power and wealth were only the first coins the newly Awakened witch threw on the table of Supernal trade, which would eventually hold stakes far higher than the young woman had imagined possible. Her ruthlessness and imperious attitude of entitlement soon won her the attention of the Silver Ladder, and her adept skill in matters of magic coupled with an almost unequaled knack for emotional, political and social manipulation catapulted her from virtually unknown adept to deacon in a relatively few number of years.

Even the relatively limitless power of the Supernal world, however, was not enough to satisfy her avarice. When her research into ways to increase her power beyond that of her peers turned up references to the Tremere and their potential to leech off the life force of others, she dedicated the entirety of her resources towards locating one of these elusive undead for the purposes of bargaining with him for his "gift."

The Devil's Deal

In the depths of the Dark Ages, magi seeking the secrets of immortality ventured after the unplumbed secrets held by vampires and other legendary undead. They soon learned that the price to be paid in trucking with the undead was not a small one. From vampires known as the Tremere, they learned a ghastly secret; immortality could be obtained, but at the cost of consuming the souls of others. And, even worse, eventually the transactions corrupted and consumed those mages who sought to live forever. When the Tremere "virus" first began taking the souls of the mages who were greedy and foolish enough to forge deals with the bloodsuckers, the practice quickly became *verboden* to the Awakened. Those few Tremere who had not yet found a mage to sup from had withdrawn from interacting with the Awakened for fear of retribution for the damage that their vampiric plague had inflicted. Centuries passed, with no mage publicly admitting to having found one of these elusive vampires, who had earned themselves a "kill-on-sight" reputation among Supernal society. Ref-

erences to them still remained, of course, and what most mages saw as warnings acted as a guides for the voracious Wildcat. She spent decades researching vampiric society, and eventually became renowned as the premier expert in the world on the Tremere, and the Left-Handed Legacy known as their Liches. Despite their elusive tendencies, she procured interviews with, and eventually struck up relations with multiple members of the Legacy, and was disappointed by what she found. Their powers were not the key to ultimate power that she expected to discover, but simply a recipe for longevity.

In time, the Wildcat began to formulate a plan. Her research indicated that, among vampiric society, it was possible for one entity to consume the soul of another, not to extend his life, but to add the victim's power to his own. This, far more than longevity, held the Mastigos' interest, and, mentally merging this potential with the soul-stealing power of the Tremere, she formulated a hypothesis. If she were able to locate one of the original Tremere vampires, perhaps with the proper magical ritual she could forge a rote that would allow her to gain the vampiric ability to consume the souls of other magi and add their supernatural might to her own.

What happened next is largely a matter of conjecture, as the Wildcat's carefully documented notes end with her fateful encounter with a newly reawakened Tremere who was doubtful of her theories but was willing to gamble on them for the opportunity to potentially live forever. What is known is that the vampire was never heard from again, and the Wildcat was never again seen alive. Unlike those who call themselves Liches, however, or those who were simply destroyed by the Tremere virus, the Wildcat exists in a strange state of limbo. More powerful than most ghosts, and yet unable to return to her previous state of existence, Catarina Beldam has now had centuries to build her power and her ire, and those who encounter her are rarely left unchanged by the meeting.

Description

For those with the ability to perceive her, the Wildcat is striking of looks and entrancing of personality — at least at first. Her hair is stunning red-gold, catching glints of sunlight even in the Twilight. She always appears dressed in the height of fashion for the time in which she died, her paleskin delicately dappled with freckles and complemented by the rich chocolate brown of her velvet cotehardie. Petite of build, her waif-like frame leaves one with the impression that she is weak, however nothing could be further from the truth. Beneath the beauty and apparent frailness, Catarina is a being of steel wrapped around a center of unending hunger.



The Wildcat has been dead for almost a thousand years. Unlike most ghosts, however, her death has not put her into the same stasis of non-growth that most dead souls enter. Perhaps because of her connection to the undead, perhaps because her undying hunger was simply too strong to be thwarted by something as simple as death, she has continued to grow both in knowledge and power over the centuries since entering the unlife. Regardless of the reason, she exists in a sort of limbo, not truly ghost, no longer wholly mage, not entirely turned to the vampiric ways of her long-dead mentors. Like a ghost, she exists only in the Twilight, save for when she uses her abilities to manifest, and she is bound to her anchors in the same way a normal dead soul would be. However, not only has she retained her sentience in a most “unghostly” manner, she has also kept almost all access to the Supernal abilities she had while living.

The one area where she wholly no longer holds the same capabilities as she did during her living days is in her connection to the manifestations of Mana that most mages use to refuel themselves. She no longer can regain her supernatural power by harvesting tass, tapping into a Hallow, or the like, as she did while she was still living.

Neither, however, does her Essence rebuild naturally over time nor through the traditional ghostly means. Somehow, the Tremere plague that she hoped would grant her both phenomenal power and potentially everlasting life has somehow combined with her Supernal and ghostly states in a unique and horrible way. The same vampiric “virus” that killed her has left her with only one option for regaining Essence: consuming souls.

Secrets

The Wildcat is tied to a number of anchors that held significance to her during her still-living days. First among them is her athame, a small and sharp knife with a handle of gold, encrusted with jewels. This weapon, a gift from her doting father on her 16th birthday, was her primary magical tool during her lifetime, and managed to escape being melted down or destroyed over the centuries. Her second anchor is the contract that she signed in blood with her Tremere mentor. This vellum manuscript has been hidden from mortal eyes for centuries, rolled inside a hollow chamber inside a cane owned by the vampire to whom she sold her soul. Finally, the grand four-poster bed in which she finally gave up her final mortal breath anchors her. During her living days, she committed depravities beyond most human kenning sequestered away from the sight of others behind its heavy tapestry curtains, and when the Tremere “virus” sapped first her strength and then her life, it was within those same woven walls that she screamed out her pain and indignation at her final living plan being thwarted.

Rumors

“Stop looking at me like that! I’m telling you, I saw it with my own two eyes. We had found the dagger and were just about to walk out with it, when this tiny chick appeared out of nowhere. She tapped Falco on the shoulder, and when he turned around, she reached out and touched his face. He started shaking and she just stood there, smiling, while he twitched. Next thing I know, he’s on the ground and she’s looking my direction. I ran. Yeah, yeah, I tried to stop her. I drew down lightning; it went right through her like she wasn’t there. I don’t know who or what she was, but she can keep the damned knife. I ain’t going back there.”

While Catarine must steal souls in order to maintain her Essence, particular actions elicit an offensive reaction from her far beyond that required to survive. Harming her anchors is a sure way to earn the former-mage’s wrath, and to make oneself a target for her hungry attentions.

“If our information on this individual known as the Wildcat is accurate, if she was able to actually locate and even have discourse with one of these vampires who call themselves the Tremere, several hundred years after they supposedly were destroyed to a man, does that leave open the possibility that

others exist to this day? If this possibility exists, and we could obtain a “living” sample thereof—well, the ramifications would be staggering. With the advances in technology, knowledge and Supernal power that our kind have accomplished in the past several hundred years... let’s just say that it’s not inconceivable that we could do what the Wildcat could not. That it might be possible in the future for all mages to live forever, without the need to destroy human souls to do so.”

Atlantean mages’ tolerance for the Left-Handed Legacies is extremely low. Most consider them a threat, not only to humanity, but to Awakened society as well. And, the best offense against an abhorrent threat often begins with information. During her living days, the Wildcat was the world’s utmost authority on the Tremere and their Liches. How much of that information has she retained, and how useful could it be to modern mages who seek to drive the Legacy out of existence?

“I know ghosts. I know vampires. I know us. She’s... something different. There’s something sad about her. Something gaping and raw. I don’t know what’s been ripped out of her, but I don’t want to be the one from which she replaces it.”

The Wildcat doesn’t fit the mold of ghost-mages, and although she shares their soul-stealing focus, neither is she wholly one of the Liches either. Those who specialize in the unexplained mysteries of the World of Darkness may well find her a topic of interest, and if they are able to supply her with what she desires, she is likely to be willing to answer their questions. All things, however, come with a price, and for Catarine the price is a morally-challenging one. How many souls, after all, is unique information worth?

Wildcat

Attributes: Power 8, Finesse 8, Resistance 8

Willpower: 16

Essence: 20 (max 20)

Morality: 2

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Greed

Initiative: 16

Defense: 8

Speed: 21

Corpus: 13

Size: 5

Influences: Mind 4, Death 3, Prime 2

Numina: Harrow (dice pool 16—Composure), Materialize (dice pool 16), Material Vision (dice pool 16), Soul Snatch (dice pool 16).

Numina Rotes: *Death*—Grim Sight (•), Decay (••), Soul Jar (••), Control Ghost (•••), Ghost Gate (•••), Restore Corpus (•••), Sever the Sleeping Soul (•••), *Mind*—Aura Perception (•), One Mind, Two Thoughts (•), Third Eye (•), Emotional Urging (••), First Impressions (••), Imposter (•••), Psychic Assault (•••), Telepathy (•••), *Prime*—

Analyze Enchanted Item (•), Dispel Magic (•), Inscribe Grimoire (•), Supernal Vision (•), Activate Enchanted Item (••), Counterspell Prime (••), Transform Aura (••)

Supernatural Aspects:

• **Numina Rotes** — The Wildcat has retained much of her ability to cast magic in the form of the “Numina Rotes” listed above. She uses Essence to fuel her powers instead of Mana. As well, all Attributes and Skills for

Story Hooks

• A local museum is throwing a party to promote the opening of a well-publicized and long-awaited exhibit focusing on the art of medieval France. Rumor has it that one of the items going on display is cursed, and the media is making the most of the legend, claiming that more than a dozen employees have died during the acquisition, transportation, and creation of the display. When the Wildcat appears during the unveiling, many believe it's a public relations stunt — until the ambulances begin arriving. Will the characters be able to cover up the spirit's appearance and the damage she's done, not to mention stopping her from taking more lives?

• Medical professionals are mystified by a “plague” of mental illness affecting the city. The victims are of varying ages and medical histories, and none show any physical conditions that would explain their catatonia, and quickly degrading mental faculties. The only connecting feature, save for their identical symptoms, is locational — all live, work or otherwise spend time in the same one-block area. Weeks later, the plague is continuing, and the Awakened have discovered the victims have had their souls weakened. Suspecting a particularly indiscrete cabal of Tremere Liches, they instead encounter the Wildcat, drawn to the area when a local antique store acquired one of her anchors.

• A member of the local Consilium is found dead, the words “Liche” carved across his chest. The only thing missing from his personal effects is an antique cane he was never seen without. No proof of his alleged crimes is found, however, and no one claims responsibility for bringing the supposed Left-handed mage to justice. Perhaps the missing cane (now in the custody of the Wildcat) holds the clues to the identity of the vigilante?

rolls are replaced with some combination of two of the dead mage's Attributes (Power, Finesse or Resistance.) She can use improvised magic as well, but it is difficult. Any improvised spell costs the Wildcat *double* the amount of Essence the spell would usually cost. Even if the spell would not normally have an associated Mana cost, it costs 1 Essence to her. In addition, she can only improvise eight such spells per scene. After that, each improvised spell strips her of a point of Corpus as well.

• **Soul Feast** — This power is neither wholly Numina nor Supernal spell nor vampiric ability, but a strange amalgam of all three. The Wildcat may attempt to swiftly snatch away a portion of a sleeping or Awakened soul from its mortal housing, instantly converting that shard of soul into Essence, which she uses to refuel her own Essence pool. The roll for this challenge is (Power + Finesse versus the target's Resolve + Composure. If the roll is successful, she may shred away a single portion of the targeted soul, which reduces the target's Willpower by the same amount. One point of the target's Willpower equals one point of Essence for the Wildcat. If the Wildcat is able to successfully consume the last of the target's Willpower pool in this manner, the target's “soul” has been severed and consumed (as if it had been the target of Sever the Sleeping Soul, pp. 141–142, **Mage: The Awakening**). Additionally, if this is used against mages, upon successfully consuming the last of the Awakened soul, the Wildcat receives an additional point of Essence for every point of Mana currently in her target's Gnosis pool, a sudden and empowering burst of energy with an addictive effect.

This is the only manner by which she may regain Essence. The normal means for ghosts to regain Essence do not allow her to do so, nor do normal processes for gaining Mana work for the Wildcat, despite her being able to use Essence in situations where a mage would normally use Mana. This power differs from the Numina “Soul Snatch” in that it is an instant, rather than extended action, but only affords the hungry Wildcat a small “shard” of the target's soul at a time. As well, it does not garner her the two-for-one return that the slower process achieves.

This power can be used across the boundaries between the material world and Twilight, and can be used as a range effect, as long as the Wildcat can perceive her target in some manner. Certain factors may make using Soul Feast easier or more difficult.

Suggested Modifiers:

Modifier	Situation
+3	Target is willing to allow the feast (even if he does not fully understand what he is assenting to)
+2	Wildcat and target are both in the Twilight
+1	Wildcat is physically manifested and is touching her target
–3	Target is Awakened

PART TWO: CHARACTERS AND CREATURES

Ab Ia Mu: Atlantean Sentinel Spirit

Cursed be those who would pretend friendship with my masters only to betray them! Your end will not be swift, but fear not. It is coming.

Aliases: Ill-Fated Guardian, Witness of Betrayal

Background

Powerful mages eventually die, but often their sanctum guardians do not. Some even retain memories of their masters' secrets after centuries spent guarding an abandoned sanctum.

At the height of Atlantis' glory, a cabal of three powerful mages wanted a spirit to protect their sanctum from the many enemies they had made in their rise to power. They didn't trust the loyalties of any natural spirit, however, so they set out to create a new one whose only desire was to serve. They ruthlessly bound dozens of spirits and drained away their raw Essence.

Atlantean law forbade such abuse of spirits, but the members of the cabal were powerful enough to silence any objections. Ab was a warrior-prince with thousands of mortal subjects. Ia was a high-priestess with 777 Awakened disciples. And Mu was a Sentinel with authority to judge and execute any he accused of crimes against the Awakened City. Those who disapproved of the cabal's actions did so quietly.

Once the three mages had collected enough distilled Essence, they shaped their sanctum guardian. They named it after themselves — Ab Ia Mu — to complete its bond to them. The spirit was as powerful and unwaveringly loyal as the cabal had hoped. Those who tested the sanctum's defenses soon discovered the folly of defying the cabal, and even the mages' most powerful enemies could not force Ab Ia Mu to act against its masters.

For many years, Ab, Ia and Mu grew in power, decadence and hubris from the safety of their inviolable sanctum. Their enemies plotted against them daily, but none could halt their rise to still greater power. Then Fe, a master of Fate whom the corrupt cabal had greatly wronged, set out to orchestrate its destruction.

Other mages had noted the strength of the mystical bond between Ab Ia Mu and its masters — one as strong as the bond between a mage's body and soul. But while the cabal's other enemies considered this connection an asset that made it impossible to turn the spirit against its masters, Fe recognized it could also be a liability.

Fe concentrated his attention on Ab Ia Mu, laying a great curse on the spirit that corrupted anyone it considered its masters. Under the influence of Fe's curse, the cabal became increasingly paranoid. The mages lashed out at everyone they regarded as an enemy, a list that grew daily. Fe did not live to see the result of his curse. Ab killed him a month after Fe cursed the guardian spirit.

Within a year of Fe's death, the cabal had driven away or killed all their allies. Soon, they started plotting against each other. Ia murdered Ab in his sleep, and Mu killed Ia in magical combat three days later. At this point, the rulers of Atlantis could no longer turn a blind eye to the cabal's crimes. The Sentinels arrived at Mu's sanctum expecting to fight the cabal's legendary guardian, but Ab Ia Mu had abandoned its master. They captured Mu without difficulty and exiled him from the Awakened City. No tale tells Mu's fate, but by all accounts Ab Ia Mu continued serving cabals as sanctum guardian until the Fall of Atlantis and continues serving mages to this day.

Description

Ab Ia Mu manifests as a human, but its exact appearance is not fixed. If it isn't currently bound to a sanctum, each observer perceives the spirit as someone who looks like himself in some way. This is much more like looking at a distant cousin than at a long lost twin — facial structure is similar, but the nose might be a shade larger, and the eyes space a bit wider apart. The effect is disconcerting, but not overtly frightening.

Once a cabal invites the spirit to guard its sanctum, Ab Ia Mu manifests as a composite of all its masters. This appearance does not change for as long as it guards the same sanctum. Anyone familiar with the members of the cabal likely notices the resemblance. However, because its appearance changes whenever it begins serving a new cabal, it is often difficult to track the history of Ab Ia Mu's curse using accounts that rely on physical descriptions of the manifested spirit alone.

Ab Ia Mu's appearance is similar in *Twilight* or when viewed with Mage Sight, but the spirit glows with almost blinding light to supernatural perceptions. When bound to a sanctum, this supernatural light suffuses its entire interior. This aura isn't visible from outside the area, however, even if windows or open doors would normally grant a clear view.

Ab Ia Mu gradually picks up many of its masters' mannerisms, dialects, and personalities, but it retains some key traits. It takes its role as guardian very seriously and is utterly loyal to its current masters. It is oblivious to any outsider's attempts to gain its cooperation and is extremely difficult to deceive by mundane or supernatural means. Its only desire is to obey its masters and guard their sanctum, and while it sometimes exhibits an almost maternal protective streak, it defers to its masters' judgment in all things.

Secrets

Ab Ia Mu is mystically incapable of recognizing it, but it is the instrument of Fe's curse on Ab, Ia, and Mu. Members of any cabal the spirit serves become increasingly paranoid

until they take actions that drive away or kill their allies. Once the members of the cabal alienate all their friends, they turn this distrust against each other. In the final phase of the curse, the mages become convinced that their cabalmates are plotting to murder them, and the violence that breaks out continues until only one member of the cabal survives, and the survivor is so paranoid that she almost never outlives her cabal by much.

This process is insidiously slow, and the cabal might not even notice the dramatic shift in their behavior until it is too late. Once Ab Ia Mu becomes a sanctum's guardian, it forms such strong mystical bonds with the sanctum and all the members of the cabal that the thread of the curse is almost impossible to detect unless a mage knows what to look for. Even then, the task requires the

Sybil's Sight (p. 149–150 of *Mage*:

The Awakening) and 12

successes on an extended action to scrutinize the spirit (p. 277 of *Mage*: **The Awakening**). Anything less loses the thread in a tangle of interconnections.

Note that Ab Ia Mu isn't likely to sit still for such scrutiny, as the spirit regards this as a breach of etiquette.

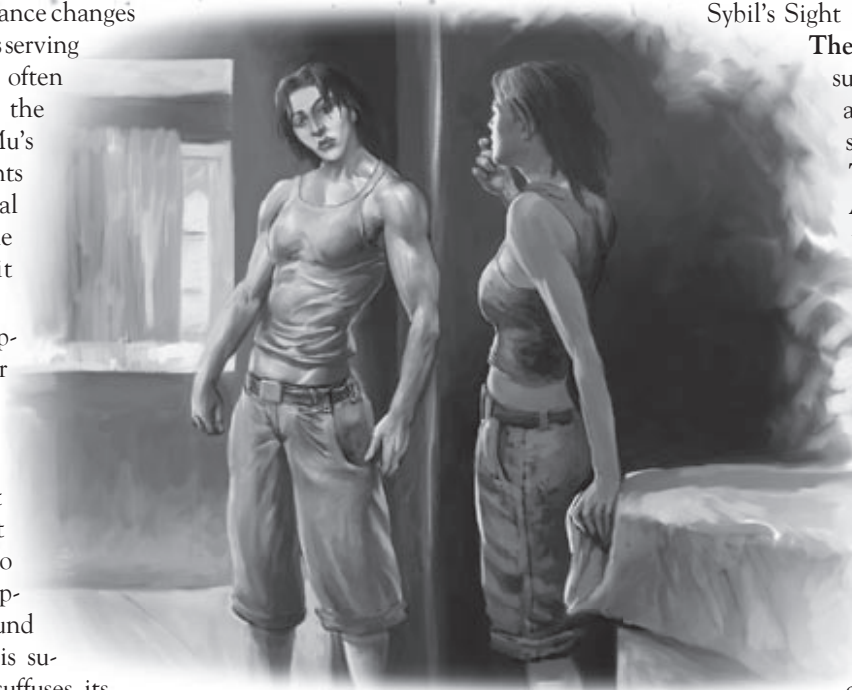
A few weeks after Ab Ia Mu settles into a new sanctum, its presence starts to twist its masters' perceptions. Initially, this

effect is subtle — occasional

sensations of being watched by someone at the edge of vision, a passer-by who seems somehow suspicious, and other little hints that something is up. In fact, it's all in the mages' heads, a manifestation of Fe's curse intended to trick the victims into using magic to investigate these hunches. Once that happens, the curse gets much worse.

The curse distorts the mystical perceptions of Ab Ia Mu's masters, including all forms of Mage Sight, Space and Time scrying, and Fate and Mind magic intended to guess the intentions of others. This changes the flavor of the information but not its weight. This won't make the mage see auras or other phenomena where there are none, for example, but a Fate-based blessing looks like a Fate-based curse, instead.

Most of the time, the curse feeds its victims false input that makes everyone look like an enemy, whether an unwitting pawn in a larger conspiracy to destroy the cabal or a ruthless



foe waiting for the best time to strike. The curse doesn't distort every perception spell, and not all its distortions encourage mistrust. It exploits strong bonds of friendship and enmity most ruthlessly. Sometimes it chooses a known enemy and makes him seem like a secret ally, appearing to recognize that an enemy will eventually violate the cabal's trust and so increase the level of paranoia.

Once it has tricked the victims into driving away most of the cabal's allies, the curse goes to work on the cabal members. Considering the social and mystical bonds that tend to form between cabalmates, the curse has plenty of strong auras to distort toward this end. The curse's ultimate goal is to convince the members of the cabal to murder each other.

Ab Ia Mu continues to serve its masters until the cabal disbands or abandons the sanctum, or until only one of its masters is left alive. Then it abandons the sanctum, forgets everything about its past, and seeks out another cabal in need of a sanctum guardian.

Rumors

"Ab Ia Mu cannot be summoned. The only way to earn its service is to find the cabal it serves and kill its masters or convince them to abandon their sanctum for at least a year. This is no mean feat, because the guardian escorts its masters everywhere."

Ab Ia Mu can only be summoned if it is not currently bonded to a sanctum, but it rarely remains unattached for long. Its reputation for loyalty is well-deserved, but its bond to a cabal can be broken under special circumstances (see Ban).

"Ab Ia Mu is a powerful spirit that has served many influential mages as a sanctum guardian. It has no doubt learned countless valuable secrets in the service of its prior masters. Judging from the dozens of accounts of elaborate conspiracies perpetrated by Guardians of the Veil to silence those the spirit has served, it would seem that Ab Ia Mu knows something they would prefer to keep hidden."

Fe's curse causes Ab Ia Mu to forget its past experiences whenever its bond with a sanctum is broken. It has no memories when it first chooses new masters, but its memory of the past gradually returns, beginning with the most recent events. If a cabal could survive exposure to Fe's curse long enough, they might learn something of interest about the Ill-Fated Guardian's previous masters, but it certainly isn't a font of Atlantean secrets. The Guardians of the Veil have had to involve themselves in several incidents connected with Ab Ia Mu, but this is not because they are afraid of what it knows. Rather, they often have the sad duty of putting down cabals who, under the influence of Fe's curse, take actions that threaten the Veil.

"Being Awakened will drive you crazy. No, I'm not speaking metaphorically. It's not a question of 'if,' it's a question of 'when' and 'how much.' Pick any random Master and spend a day with

him, if you can stand it — they're all nuts. Now have a look at a cabal that's managed to get powerful. Paranoid delusions. Obsessive-compulsive behavior. I don't know if it's the magic or if we get it from each other, but there's nothing for it."

This rather bleak assessment of the development of the Awakened is one of the reasons that Ab Ia Mu is able to drive whole cabals insane without others noticing — mages expect other mages to be eccentric. It isn't until the cabal is actively killing other Awakened that things are really considered to be "out of hand," and even then, the Consilium generally has a slew of theories as to which enemy finally bought or coerced the cabal's loyalty.

Ab Ia Mu

Rank: 4

Attributes: Power 10, Finesse 10, Resistance 10

Willpower: 20

Essence: 25 (25 max)

Initiative: 20

Defense: 10

Speed: 25

Size: 5

Corpus: 15

Influences: Sanctum Defender 4. Ab Ia Mu's creators designed it as the perfect sanctum guardian. As long as the spirit serves a cabal of at least two mages as a sanctum guardian, it has influence over all aspects of that sanctum as necessary to protect the grounds and its masters from intrusion or attack. These manipulations cost one or more Essence and require success on a Power + Finesse roll.

The spirit's Influence is much weaker outside its masters' sanctum. It can still act to protect its masters or obey their commands, but it is limited to the first three levels of Influence (strengthen, manipulate and control) and must spend two additional Essence whenever it attempts to use its Influence outside the sanctum.

Numina: Countermagic (see below), Fetter, Materialize

- **Countermagic:** Ab Ia Mu can counter any spell targeting it or one of the mages under its protection. This Numen works identically to the Counterspell Prime spell (p. 222 of **Mage: The Awakening**), save that the spirit can use it as a reflexive as well as an instant action (doing so, however, requires the expenditure of 3 Essence). The roll is Power + Finesse.

Ban: Though powerful, Ab Ia Mu's Influence has strict limits. It cannot take any action that may harm or restrict another of its current masters. If its masters fight, the spirit has no choice but to step aside and stay out of the quarrel. It cannot intervene even if doing so would save the life of one or more of its masters.

It is Ab Ia Mu's nature to serve and obey a cabal of at least two mages. It cannot guard any sanctum unless given permission by the entire cabal. Once it has bonded with a

Story Hooks

- Soon after Ab la Mu becomes the guardian for the players' cabal, the characters notice a lot of suspicious behavior directed at them. Strangers watch them whenever they leave the sanctum. Friendly mages cast baleful magic against them. Consilium authorities try to convince them to give Sentinels unlimited access to the sanctum or to abandon it completely. The people the characters care about fall under enchantments that turn them into tools meant to manipulate the cabal.

The characters must uncover the truth about Fe's curse and find a way to counteract it. Meanwhile, not all the characters' paranoia is unjustified. Another cabal wants Ab la Mu — either as a guardian or as part of some larger plan. If the characters don't trust anyone around them, how do they decide which ones to trust least?

- A cabal closely allied with the characters suddenly exhibits remarkably paranoid attitudes and behaviors. They refuse to let anyone inside their sanctum, even though they used to be a welcoming cabal, and they've been spending a lot of time spying on their friends and allies. This has put a strain on their standing in the Consilium, which has begun to investigate the cabal for evidence of Abyssal influence or collaboration with the Seers of the Throne.

If the characters investigate further, they discover the cabal recently plundered the abandoned sanctum of a forgotten cabal, bringing back several artifacts they refuse to share with the Consilium. In fact, they almost immediately secured the services of a new sanctum guardian to prevent anyone from even glimpsing these lost treasures.

- While searching for a secret that is critical to accomplishing their goals, the characters learn that Ab la Mu once served a cabal known to have the information they seek. In fact, their research is so fruitful that they know exactly how dangerous the curse on Ab la Mu can be.

The characters know Ab la Mu's masters recently met a terrible end as a result of Fe's curse, and they learn the spirit's current location. They know Ab la Mu would welcome any opportunity to guard their sanctum. They know that Fe's curse will make them more paranoid by altering the input of their magical senses. But they also know that if Ab la Mu serves them long enough, it will eventually recall the information they desperately need.

If the characters (or a cabal of allies) buy into this line of reasoning and invite Ab la Mu to protect their sanctum, they become much more vulnerable to betrayal. They aren't the only ones who know something about the effects of Fe's curse. The characters can still sense their enemies' magic at work, but the curse makes it impossible to guess its effects. Enemy agents have a much easier time getting close to the characters because every stranger feels equally sinister to the spirit's masters. A traitor among the characters' trusted friends could not choose a better time than this to betray them.

sanctum, the bond between Ab la Mu and its new masters is nearly indestructible. The bond can only be broken if the cabal abandons the sanctum for more than one year, if it disbands, or if all but one of its members dies.

The spirit cannot leave the sanctum except on its masters' orders, and even then, it can't leave for more than a few hours at a time. Whenever the spirit leaves the sanctum, it must first use its Materialize Numen to take its human

form, and as soon as the Numen's effect ends, the spirit must return to the sanctum with all speed.

Fe's curse prevents Ab la Mu from believing it is cursed or even from remembering what happened to its previous masters. Even if shown incontrovertible proof that it has destroyed, scattered, or driven away every cabal that ever invited it to defend a sanctum, Ab la Mu clearly genuinely has no idea why this might be.

THE FURY

Do not look away. This is your fate. You cannot escape it.

Aliases: Alecto, the Black Messenger

Background

The Fury is a bogeyman of Awakened society. Most stories about the Black Messenger begin with something like “this happened to my mentor’s old apprentice’s boyfriend.” Most mages only know of the Fury as a particularly aggressive and troublesome ananke whose mission seems to be to stop people from deviating from their ordained paths. The rare mage who knows the Fury’s secret points to her as an example of the dangers of Supernal magic gone wrong or rotten with age.

The true horror of the Fury is that her vision of fate is critically flawed and the prophesies she brings about are fantasies of her fevered mind. Once she has latched on to a target, she does not give up until she has brought about the destiny she believes is his — and usually ruined his life in the process.

Sleepers tell their own stories about the Fury. In cities that she has visited, people whisper about an angry angel who visits God’s wrath on those who try to ruin His plan, or a demon who exists to ruin the lives of people who are trying to make up for their mistakes. She is like Bloody Mary and other spectral urban malefactors; no one believes in her except for those who have seen her.

The Mysterium’s records on the Fury are available to anyone with the patience to dig through them, but they are highly fragmentary and full of arcane jargon. The fact is that few mages have had the courage to actually approach the Fury and speak to her. When the Black Messenger appears in a region, most mages are more interested in getting themselves and their friends out of her path than they are in having conversations. The best that most curious mages manage is to cast a few Knowing and Unveiling spells from a safe distance and report their findings to the local mystagogues. Still, a few courageous mages have been brave enough to ask the Fury a few questions about her nature and history.

Unfortunately, Alecto is as tainted by the Lie as everything else in the Fallen World. The Fury claims to have been made in Atlantis, though she cannot point out where Atlantis was. She knows she was made by an Atlantean archmaster, but she cannot remember her maker’s name. She knows she was made to safeguard a specific fate, but becomes agitated if asked exactly what that fate is. She then refuses to answer further questions. In truth, she no longer clearly remembers what her purpose is.

The Fury calls herself Alecto, after one of the Greek Furies, lesser goddesses who punished those who violated

the laws of the gods. Alecto means “the implacable,” and she was charged with punishing mortals who committed crimes against other mortals. Alecto is certainly not the Fury’s true name, which would be in High Speech if she was made in lost Atlantis. However, she claims to have no other name. Either her maker never named her or, more likely, she has forgotten her name, along with so much else.

Description

In her true form, the Fury is a statuesque woman wearing a torn and scorched robe embroidered with High Speech runes. Her dark hair hangs ragged to her shoulders and her fingertips are stained with blood. From her shoulders sprout two and a half pairs of black wings; three wings on her left side, two on her right. The charred stump of her sixth wing is clearly visible. Violet eyes peer out from between her feathers, but she has no eyes in her head. Nothing remains but a pair of torn holes weeping bloody tears down her perfect white face.

Even the Quiescence cannot fully erase the terror and beauty of the Fury’s true form. Although Sleepers ignore her wings and bleeding eyes, they cannot truly forget her. The next time they sleep, they relive the encounter in their dreams.

More often than not, the Fury adopts a false appearance and identity when interacting with her victims, especially Sleepers. The Fury’s powers of illusion have three limitations. First, due to an unknown mystical imperative, the Fury must always appear female. Second, the Fury is both proud and vain, and will not take a form that lacks beauty and commanding presence. Third, despite her beauty, the Fury cannot hide that she is broken. When she appears as a human woman, she always has some flaw. One of her legs might be shorter than the other, causing her to walk with a pronounced limp, or perhaps she is missing an eye, or she has a scar left by a poorly mended harelip. She always seems unaware of this defect.

In person, the Fury wavers between mild arrogance and complete inscrutability. She is always cold and collected. When pushed, she falls back on her supposed connection to Fate and status as the work of an ancient archmaster, referencing her esoteric knowledge and infinite wisdom. In truth, it is bluster to cover her growing insecurity. She may have no insight into how she has been damaged, but she is beginning to suspect that something is wrong.

The Fury’s usual method is to search a region with her limited ability to perceive fate. Whenever she is not

actively pursuing a destiny, she is on the prowl for a new destiny to protect. Often, this is a mage with a high rating in the Destiny merit, but in the past she has also fixated on Sleepers or other supernatural creatures.

Once she has found a suitably attractive locus of fate, the Fury begins to watch it. In this, her tactics vary. Sometimes she merely remains nearby in ephemeral form, watching. In other instances, she adopts human form to interact with her target and the people in his life. She has had many years of practice, and her imitation of humanity is nearly perfect.

Once the Fury has watched her target long enough to make an educated guess about what his fate is, she takes action to make sure it comes true. Usually, she begins by invading her target's dreams or the dreams of those closest to him, depending on which she deems would be more effective. She might use bad dreams to drive a recovering heroin addict back to the needle and oblivion, for example, or she might end a troubled marriage by causing one member of the couple to dream of abuse by the other.

If Alecto feels that dreams would be ineffective — or it has been a long time since she has interacted with humans and she is lonely — she might adopt a human shape and slide into her target's life. In the above examples, she might become a charming young woman with drugs to share or an attractive encounter in an airport bar. Or she might replace the recovering addict's social worker and give him faulty advice designed to hinder his progress, or make friends with the troubled wife and urge her to leave her husband.

Alecto is also perfectly willing to curse or bless her victims and those around them with the raw power of fate. She uses magic as a Master of the Fate Arcanum and is capable of laying powerful geases and influencing events both subtly and overtly. She has no qualms about using vulgar magic, and like all ananke, she is immune to Paradox.

The Fury is equally acquainted with the carrot and the stick when it comes to dreams, infiltration and magic. She is as willing to grant

pleasant dreams, make friends with her target and grant blessings as she is to inflict nightmares, abuse her target, urge his friends to turn against him and lay curses. She is coldly efficient when it comes to her work.

Brain Damage

In Sleeper medical terms, the Fury suffers from two related neurological conditions: agnosia and anosognosia. Agnosia is the inability to make sense of the world. Agnosia can apply to text, colors, music, faces, objects or other stimuli. People suffering from this condition can perceive these things, but they cannot make sense of them, expect sometimes on an instinctual level.

Similarly, the Fury can perceive fate, but she cannot process her perceptions. So she simply homes in on the largest concentration of fate she can find and observes it, eventually guessing what that fate is supposed to be. Since the Fury lacks imagination, she usually assumes that her target's fate is the direction in which he was going before she arrived.

The Fury's anosognosia is even more tragic. Anosognosia is the neurological inability to recognize a disability. A person with anosognosia might insist that he is fine, despite the fact that a stroke has robbed him of his ability to move one of his arms or see colors. The Fury can only conclude that she is perfectly whole and fulfilling her mission as her maker intended her to. She continues leaving ruined lives in her wake because she cannot see how broken she is.



Secrets

The Fury has been around for a long time, and she knows many secrets. She has met numerous mages over the years and can describe the many roles she saw them use. Although she cannot teach these roles — she does not understand them as a mage does — listening to her might be enough for a clever Master of the appropriate Arcana to figure them out. Studying the Fury can be an important step in developing an increased understanding of the Fate Arcanum. The Fury claims to have influenced many famous mages and historical figures over the years, helping (or forcing) them to achieve their destinies.

The Fury has some clear recollections of Atlantis. She can speak for hours of the city's crystal towers and marble courtyards, of the fashions and customs of its Awakened and un-Awakened inhabitants, and of the politics that drove the city. She even claims to know the names of some of Atlantis's luminaries. Of course, some of her memories are contradictory, and no one knows if this reflects a fault in her already uncertain memory, the confusion that comes from being alive for as long as the Fury has been, the effects of the Lie, or a conscious misdirection. Nonetheless, some explorers have followed the clues in her descriptions and discovered caches of Atlantean lore.

Finally, some mages theorize that ananke are beings from Arcadia, summoned to the Fallen World by magic that has been impossible ever since the Fall. Although the Fury will not — or cannot — speak clearly of her origins, when asked she sometimes speaks in riddles about what some mages suspect is Arcadia itself.

Dealing with the Fury should grant a character a point of Arcane Experience. Braving her presence long enough for a conversation or independently discovering the secret of her disability should grant a character two or three points of Arcane Experience.

Rumors

"Whenever an ananke shows up, it's bad news, but there's one that is particularly nasty. She looks like a blind angel when she isn't hiding behind an illusion, and you can tell it's her if she invades your dreams. They call her the Fury, and she exists to punish those who try to cheat their ordained destiny, and she's never wrong."

Most mages who know of the Fury's existence assume that, like other ananke, she is problematic, but infallible. The fact that she is maimed is her greatest secret.

"Ananke? Don't try to sell me that line of bull. The ananke aren't agents of fate, they're agents of hubris. The mages who made them programmed them with arbitrary 'destinies' that they try to make real. Sure, it sounds great — the craft of an

Atlantean archmaster, come to make sure you achieve your very special destiny. It sounds great, until one of the things shows up and tries to drive you to stab your friends in the back and join the Seers of the Throne. Trust me. I know."

On the other hand, stories of the Fury's depredations have certainly hurt the reputation of ananke everywhere. Mages who have experienced the Fury's misguided attentions might doubt the authenticity of all ananke prophecies.

"Some ancient records imply that there is an ananke, forged as Atlantis was sinking under the waves and charged with defeating the Exarchs and closing the Abyss. Only, the Exarchs reached out and maimed her. She still exists and if we could find a way to mend her, she could show us how to mend the world."

It is easy to forget that the Fury was once a whole ananke, forged by an Atlantean Archmaster with a purpose in mind. That purpose may still be valid after all these years, and if someone healed Alecto, she could finally pursue it.

The Fury

Rank: 3

Attributes: Power 8, Finesse 4, Resistance 6

Willpower: 14

Essence: 20 (max 20)

Initiative: 10

Defense: 8

Speed: 17

Size: 5

Corpus: 11

Influences: Dreams 3

Numina: Fate, Countermagic, Imposter (as the Mind 3 spell, p. 211 of **Mage: The Awakening**, subject to the limitations above), Materialize

• **Fate 5:** As an avatar of Fate, the Fury's Numina resembles spells of the Fate Arcanum. Spend one point of Essence and roll Power + Finesse to use this power. When using one of these abilities, the Fury does not risk Paradox.

The Fury's blindness to fate manifests as an inability to duplicate effects from the Practice of Knowing. She can see fate and attempt (with limited success) to scrutinize it, but unlike mages, she cannot gain magical knowledge about fate simply by willing it to be so.

• **Countermagic:** As listed for the ananke on p. 331 of **Mage: The Awakening**, save that the Fury has a dice pool of 12.

Ban: The Fury cannot abide symbols of purity or perfection, which remind her of her own maiming and create internal dissonance that she finds painful. A perfect circle, pure water, and unalloyed gold all serve to ward against her influence.

Story Hooks

- If the characters are familiar with a mage who dabbles in the darker side of magic — goetia, necromancy, or dealing with the Acamoth — he begins acting oddly. At first, he is merely tired all the time and complains of bad dreams. Then he becomes paranoid, then depressed. Finally, he vanishes. A short while later, the Consilium authorities accuse him of consorting with the Abyss, try and convict him *in absentia*, and declare him Nefandi, exiled from the Consilium with a bounty on his head. At the same time, Sleeper authorities want him for questioning about the two dead bodies that were found in his abandoned apartment.

If the characters confront him, he claims that an ananke came to him and declared that he is destined to become Sceléstus and betray the Fallen World to the Abyss.

That ananke is, of course, the Fury, and she is wrong. The double murder in his apartment was actually a double suicide, a pair of star-crossed lovers the Fury drew to his apartment. Alecto is trying to cut him off from mage and mortal society in the hopes that bitterness will lead him to embrace the darkness.

If the characters decide to help the falsely accused mage, they have to contend with their own Consilium, Sleeper authorities, and, eventually, the Fury herself.

- The Fury approaches the characters with good news. One of them is going to reach the Supernal Realms and tip the balance in favor of the Oracles, and thus begin the process of mending the world. Of course, the Fury doesn't know which of the characters is so destined. As the new Oracle's ordained allies, the entire cabal is suffused with enough fate to confuse even a whole ananke's senses, and Alecto is by no mean whole.

As the Fury's derangement and disability become increasingly clear, what will the cabal do? Rejecting her is as dangerous as continuing to accept her aid. And of course, just being crazy doesn't mean she is wrong.

- **Penance:** A Master approaches the players' cabal, claiming that the cabal's Fate-based Artifact or other magical item of dubious origin, was actually made with part of a maimed ananke. That ananke roams the world, attempting to achieve its purpose but only making a mess of Fate. The Master thinks he has discovered a way to mend the ananke — at which point it should realize that its purpose can no longer be fulfilled and fade away — but he needs the cabal's Artifact.

Giving the Master the Artifact means parting with a treasured wonder without any assurance that he is telling the truth, and is by no means above lying to obtain powerful objects. Going with him might help assure the characters that they are not being cheated, but it means braving the Fury's madness and the risk of becoming her next target. Worse, what if the Master's motives are less than altruistic? What if he wants to use the Artifact to control the ananke rather than destroy it, or he simply wants the Artifact for himself and hopes the ananke will distract the cabal while he escapes?

GNOMON: ONE WHO REVEALS

*I waited until the light bulb went dark, but you never came back.
I'm sorry I left the room, Master, but you were lost
and there was nothing left but the darkness and the small, crawling things.*

Background

In London, during the late 1700s, a young physician named Galen Mire Awakened. Galen was a bright and talented surgeon, and he was well-liked by his fellows, but he was also quite impatient. From the moment his eyes were opened to the existence of magic, he wished to learn all he could of its wondrous mysteries.

As time passed, however, Galen came to find that the intricacies of magic were much more difficult for him to comprehend than those of human anatomy. Galen easily and quickly understood the complex mechanics of every organ in the body. He could instantly recall and visualize, with precise detail, the lacy, elaborate networks of arteries and veins pulsing within — but, infuriatingly, the lore of the arcane escaped him. “Time,” he thought, “it just took too much time.” Rather than wait years to achieve what he desired, Galen would use what he *already* knew to acquire the magic within months.

Late at night, Galen haunted the dark corridors of the Royal London Hospital by lantern light. As the sick and injured tossed and moaned in feverish sleep, the young mage made his way to a hidden room, carrying an ancient tome of forgotten magic, and a seeping bundle of dead, discarded tissue. For many nights, by the dim light of a single electric bulb, Galen worked

diligently, shaving through bone and sinew with his surgical instruments and magically warping the flesh of the creature laid supine before him. When its form was complete, Galen used his limited magical ability to breathe life into

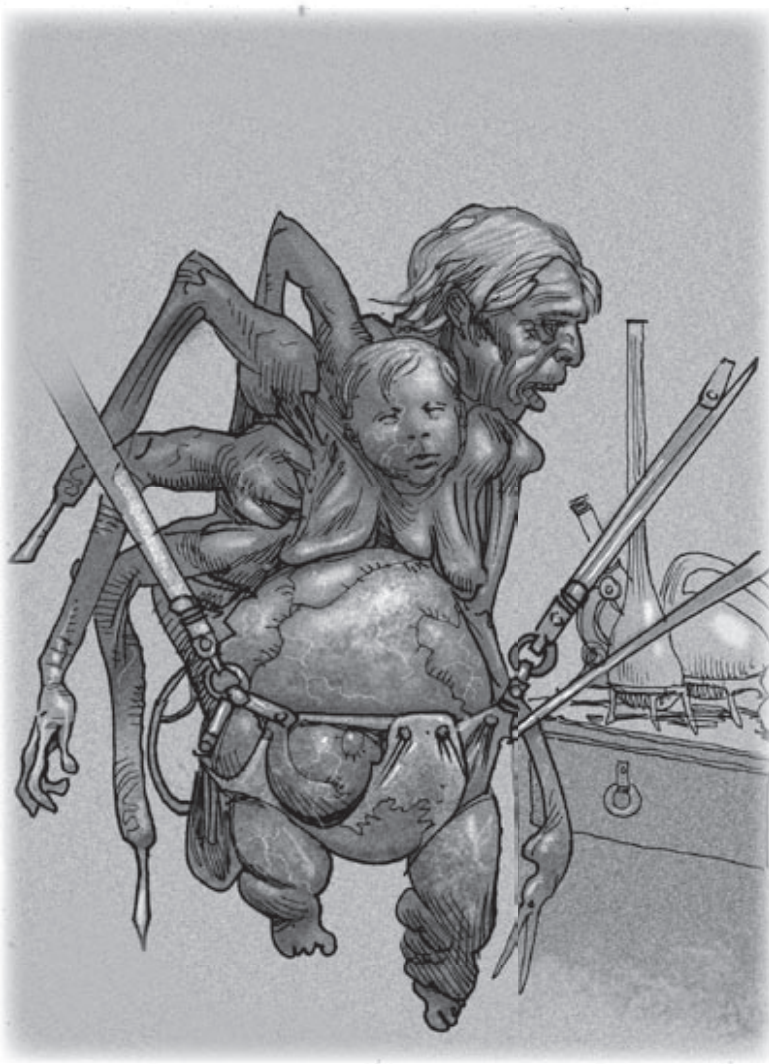
the creature. “I shall name you Gnomon,” said Galen, “for you will reveal the secrets of magic to me.”

In the weeks that followed, Galen nursed the feeble creature in the hidden room. Despite his limited patience, he tended to it as though it were his own child, changing its bandages, encouraging it to use its new body, and teaching it of its purpose.

As the creature gained strength, magical power began to grow within it. Concealed within the room, Gnomon knew of no other world, and of no other person within that world but Galen. Wishing to please its master, Gnomon molded the magic burgeoning within to suit Galen’s desires. In doing so, the creature found that it could alter living things in small ways. Gnomon busied itself for the long hours Galen was absent by playing with the small crawlers that found their

way into the room — changing the white, clumsy winged ones that fluttered and knocked about the single light bulb into fleshy wrigglers that fell to the floor.

Months passed, and the creature continued to learn and grow in magical power, but Galen was becoming impatient once more. Gnomon felt its master’s frustration because it



understood Galen, and it understood things like waiting and time. So one night, the creature decided to please its master. By the time Galen opened the door to the room that evening, the creature had already said, "Tonight, Master, I will reveal the secrets of magic to you."

When Galen returned to consciousness, he realized he was unable to move. He felt a sharp pain cut across his scalp, and he cried out, but then something flooded into his mind, bright, burning and glorious. It was the magic, and he felt as he had in medical school, when everything just clicked into place in his brain, but it was all happening too fast. Galen felt his flesh shiver and tighten. Knowledge rushed into him, and it was so much larger than he was. It was the universe, and he was an insignificant insect spinning helpless in its glory. For a moment he thought he could almost understand it — almost see the pattern in the chaos spread out before him.

And then the madness came.

Description

A gnomon is the part of a sundial that casts the shadow, and the word itself is derived from an ancient Greek word meaning "he who discerns," or "one who reveals." Aptly named for its ability to instantly impart magical knowledge, the once piteous creature that Galen Mire created so many years ago still exists today. Over the years, Gnomon grew in power, ever strengthening and refining its control over flesh and time. Today, the Awakened who are aware of its existence speak of Gnomon with an uneasy mixture of revulsion, pity and fear.

Galen Mire sculpted Gnomon from scraps of discarded bone and tissue using crude magic. The creature's useless legs, too small to support its weight, hang below a bloated abdomen of molded patchwork flesh as it hovers in mid-air. Dozens of gangly, mismatched arms, unnaturally elongated, radiate from Gnomon's back. Four of the arms end in agile, rubber-gloved hands, which the creature uses to handle and rotate objects. The other arms terminate in a variety of surgical instruments — glinting metal, rotating blades, and razor sharp scalpels magically melded and stitched to flesh and muscle. Gnomon has two heads, attached to its torso. One is the head of an old woman, and the other is the head of a young boy. Gnomon uses the mouths of both heads to speak, and at any given moment, one of the two heads is awake while the other sleeps. Gnomon is blind to the present, but it perceives the recent past with the head of the old woman and the near future with the head of the young boy. The creature pieces together the present from what it sees in the immediate past and future. As such, Gnomon's actions may be jarringly precursive or delayed by several seconds. When speaking to Gnomon, it uses the mouth of whichever head is awake. It may answer a question before it is asked, or take just a moment too long before offering a reply.

Gnomon's story is tragic. The creature's misguided attempt to satisfy its master's desires drove Galen Mire to

insanity. The mage murdered dozens of innocent people and then killed himself on the same fateful night. Gnomon, as an incomplete and utterly inhuman creature, was incapable of fully understanding what happened to its master. Believing Galen lost, rather than dead, Gnomon continues to recreate the events of the night its master died, its purpose forever unfulfilled.

Every few years, Gnomon becomes fixated upon a mage, believing it has found its lost master. Gender and age appear to have no meaning to Gnomon. Rather, the creature seems to choose a mage based upon some intangible quality the person possesses — some obscure quirk that the mage has in common with the long-deceased Galen Mire. Sending its consciousness into the future, the creature observes the mage for months before approaching her. During that time, a mage may feel as though she is being watched by something unseen and undetectable. If the mage's life is threatened, Gnomon uses its influence over time to assist the mage from a distance.

After a time, Gnomon confronts the mage, and tries, once more, to "reveal the secrets of magic" to her. Attempting to please its "master," the creature removes the knowledge and magic of the mage at a point in the future where she has achieved as much as she can in her lifetime. The creature surgically opens the skull of its victim in the present, and pours the collected future magic directly into her mind. The human mind is ill-equipped to handle acquiring a lifetime's worth of knowledge over the course of a few seconds, however, and the procedure irrevocably shatters the mind of the mage. The result is an extremely powerful mage who is utterly insane, and often violent.

After the procedure, Gnomon remains with the mage, aiding and protecting her loyally, come what may, until the death of the mage. Having a limited understanding of human behavior, Gnomon does not realize that anything is seriously amiss. When the mage finally dies, Gnomon senses that her consciousness is no longer within her body. Assuming its master's consciousness still exists in some other body, at some other point in time, Gnomon sets out to find its lost master once more.

Secrets

The Hidden Room

Gnomon can never truly cease to exist. Certainly, it can die, and it has been killed many times in the past, but it always comes back. Whether due to the creature's own magical skill, or some arcane anomaly, Gnomon is forever linked in Time to the secret room in the Royal London Hospital where it was created. The room itself is an origin point that exists outside of time. There, the events that brought about Gnomon's existence, and the death of Galen Mire, repeat in an endless loop. If, at any point, Gnomon dies, the creature is reborn in the room and reenters the stream of time at some random interval in the future.

For decades, investigators have combed through the labyrinthine corridors of the Royal London Hospital searching for the hidden room. Some believe the key to destroying Gnomon once and for all lies within the room. If only a person could enter that room at a point in time before Galen Mire breathed life into the crudely constructed armature of dead tissue that would soon become the monstrous Gnomon. Surely, if Galen could only be reasoned with and informed of the repercussions of his actions, he would destroy his vile creation immediately. Others seek to study the curious temporal properties of the room itself. Is the room something of a time machine, existing outside of time, yet allowing its occupants to re-emerge in the future? What if that time machine could be controlled? What other undiscovered mysteries of time could academic study of the room reveal? For the most part, those seeking the room have returned frustrated and empty-handed, discovering nothing but a handful of desiccated caterpillar husks tinged with the faint echo of Time magic.

A few scholars insist that the room is accessible, provided a person looks in the right place at the proper time. Somewhere in the bowels of the Royal London Hospital, there is a blank wall, and for the few seconds it takes for Gnomon to re-emerge into the present, the door becomes visible and opens into the hidden room. If a mage times it just right, he may be able to slip past Gnomon unseen and into the room before the door closes once more. The difficulty is knowing exactly where the door will open, or the precise moment to look.

Rumors

"I heard that Gnomon can make you instantly young again. No really, there was some ugly old hag who went missing, and when she turned up again she was, like, 4 or something."

The rumor that Gnomon is capable of completely reversing a person's age is true, although the process is not instantaneous. Gnomon can reverse a person's age by performing a temporal surgery that switches a person's body parts, section by section, from one point in time to another point in time. The rumor is based on the account of Adriane Braxton, Thyrsus, who states that her older sister, Rose, was made a child again after a prolonged encounter with Gnomon. According to Adriane, her sister had been missing for nearly a week when a local cabal discovered a young girl of about five years of age wandering downtown, half-starved, filthy, and covered with faint, blue scars. A simple spell confirmed that the child was Adriane's older sister. She had no memory of her adult life, or of her sister, and Mind spells have not been any help.

"This mage was studying quantum physics at Northwestern University, claiming someone named Galen Mire has been sending him messages from the past. Apparently, the kid says that Galen has been contacting him in letters and photographs that would just happen to fall out of books or show up in weird places he wasn't expecting. They say it might have been some series of predestined events magically set up by this Galen guy before he died. You'd think a guy like that could've, you know,

Story Hooks

- The youngest son of one of the city's most wealthy and influential Awakened, Dorian West, has disappeared. Mr. West's son Awakened several months ago, and since then, the boy has spoken of a monster following him around and watching him wherever he goes. Dorian believed the monster was simply a figment of the boy's active imagination until he vanished without a trace. Elsewhere in the city, a mage, filthy and covered in blood, is crouched in an alley, muttering and rocking himself. The unidentified mage bears a distinct resemblance to Dorian West's son, but he is several years older, and has strange blue scars across his forehead.

- Two hundred years ago, a janitor working at the Royal London Hospital, Trent Carter, disappeared while working the night shift. Last night, a man (if you could call him that) was found in the lower levels of the hospital. The man's head was replaced with that of a five month term fetus. One of the man's legs was also replaced with a limb from an elderly man. Wherever flesh was grafted to flesh, thin, blue scars were apparent on the man's body. A hastily scrawled note was also found clasped in the man's fist that read "The One Who Reveals has returned." Genetic tests showed, paradoxically, that the fetus, old man, and younger man all share the same DNA.

- A local mage with a spotless reputation has suddenly gone mad for no apparent reason, and is on a killing spree throughout the city. A week ago, a cabal was able to corner the mage after a fight that killed several Sleepers, but the mage disappeared when it was clear he could no longer run. Several witnesses claimed to have seen long, scissor-tipped arms encircle the mage seconds before he vanished without a trace.

avoided dying."

Occasionally, stories that Galen Mire has set up a series of events in time to communicate with mages in the future crop up among the Awakened. It is possible that Galen Mire may have somehow manipulated Time or Fate in order to do so, and some believe he may have sent these messages through time right before he lost his mind. Several cabals have formed to actively seek out such messages, and the people who claim to receive them, believing they hold the secret to destroying Gnomon once and for all.

"Oh, Gnomon can die, and it has many times. I heard that door in the Royal London Hospital, the one that it keeps being re-born from, is actually a gateway to the world of the living from Stygia. Scary to think about, isn't it? What else might find its way out of that door and into the Fallen World? What else might return from the dead?"

Some Awakened assert the door at the Royal London

Hospital is a gateway between life and the realm of Stygia. The hospital, as a location associated with both life and death, became a gateway between the realm of the dead and the Fallen World when Gnomon was brought to life from dead tissue. According to the theory, Gnomon, like all living creatures, returns to Stygia when it dies, but then passes through the gateway at the Royal London Hospital and back into the Fallen World. As none but Gnomon have passed through the door since Galen Mire's death, the theory cannot be fully disproved, but the few experts who have studied the event on site from a temporal, arcane standpoint scoff at the idea.

Gnomon

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Crafts 1, Investigation 3, Medicine (Surgery) 5, Occult 2, Science 3

Physical Skills: Stealth (Hiding) 3, Survival 3, Weaponry (Surgical Blades) 3

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Intimidation 1, Subterfuge 1

Merits: Ambidextrous, Iron Stamina 3, Fighting Finesse

Willpower: 5

Virtue: Fortitude. Gnomon remains forever faithful to its master, and it draws strength from its loyalty and purpose against adversity.

Vice: Envy. Gnomon will never fully understand humanity, and can be envious of humans, particularly those who are close to the person it has chosen as its master.

Initiative: 8

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Size: 4

Health: 7

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Scalpel	1(L)	8
Surgical Saw	2(L)	8

Supernatural Powers:

• **Anesthetize:** Gnomon may cause a subject to temporarily lose consciousness and the ability to feel pain by injecting an anesthetizing agent from one of its many syringe-tipped arms. Once delivered, the victim rolls Stamina + Resolve – 6 (the Toxicity Rating of the anesthetizing agent). If the victim fails, the agent automatically takes effect. The victim immediately loses consciousness, and is unable to feel pain for one hour, unless Gnomon decides to end the effects of the agent earlier by injecting a counter-agent. Gnomon can use Anesthetize up to three times per day.

• **Paralyze:** Gnomon may render a subject temporarily unable to move by injecting a paralytic agent from one of its many syringe-tipped arms. While paralyzed, a victim does not lose consciousness and is able to feel pain. Once delivered, the victim rolls Stamina + Resolve – 6 (the Toxicity Rating of the paralytic agent). If the victim fails,

the agent automatically takes effect. The victim is paralyzed for one hour, unless Gnomon decides to end the effects of the agent earlier by injecting a counter-agent. Gnomon may use Paralyze up to three times per day.

• **Temporal Eyes:** Gnomon is blind to his physical body's surroundings as they occur in the present. As previously mentioned, Gnomon uses its two heads (one of an old woman and one of a young boy) to piece together the present from what it perceives in the immediate past and future. One of the two eyes is always asleep, while the other is awake. Gnomon constantly switches back and forth between the two every few seconds. When the head of the elderly woman is awake, Gnomon perceives its surroundings as they were a few seconds ago in the past. When the head of the young boy is awake, Gnomon perceives its surroundings as they will be a few seconds in the future. This ability is always active, does not require a roll, and may help or hinder Gnomon at critical moments during the game at the Storyteller's discretion. When in combat, however, the Storyteller should roll a die and choose odd or even at the start of each round to randomly determine whether Gnomon is currently seeing the past or the future. If Gnomon sees the past, it is slow to respond to current events and takes a –2 penalty to any action it attempts during that turn. Its Initiative takes a –4 penalty for the turn. If Gnomon sees the future, it is aware of events seconds before they occur, giving it a +2 bonus to any action it attempts during that turn, and a +4 to Initiative for the turn.

• **Temporal Projection:** Gnomon may instantly send its consciousness into the future or the past to observe events before (or after) they occur. While projecting its consciousness, Gnomon's body is in the same location within space as its mind, but the two are separate from each other in time. At any point, Gnomon can choose to rejoin its mind and body, and may do so in one of two ways. It may bring its mind to the point in time where its body exists, or it may bring its body to the point in time where its mind exists. While using Temporal Projection, Gnomon cannot move its body or mind from its location. To move, it must rejoin its body and mind.

For example, if Gnomon sent its consciousness into the past to watch a mage in study in the library, its physical body might be located at some point in the future when the library is deserted. If, in the future, Gnomon places its body next to where the mage is studying in the past, its consciousness would also be located next to the mage in the past, and neither Gnomon's body nor mind could move from that location. If the mage then decided to move to another room, and Gnomon wished to follow the mage, it could choose one of two actions: it could bring its body from the future to its mind in the past and move in the past (in which case, Gnomon would exist entirely in the past and would be visible to the mage), or it could bring its mind in the past to its body in the future, move itself in the future, and then send its consciousness back to the past once more (in which case, Gnomon maintains its invisibility, but runs the risk of losing the mage in the past

while it changes the location of its body in the future).

Temporal Projection may be used within the temporal range of one day. That is, Gnomon may send its consciousness up to 24 hours forward in time, or up to 24 hours backwards in time. If Gnomon sees itself when it sends its consciousness forward or backwards in time, it may not bring its physical body to that point in time, as a paradoxical time double would be created.

Gnomon's body is vulnerable and goes totally limp while its consciousness is absent. Any time something disturbs Gnomon's body while its mind is absent, Gnomon rolls Wits + Stamina to determine if it senses the change. If Gnomon successfully notices the change, his consciousness immediately returns to his body. If Gnomon's body is killed while its mind is absent, his consciousness also immediately dies. If a subject is willing or unconscious and remains perfectly still, Gnomon may physically hold onto that person's body while it sends its mind to another point in time. If, during the next turn, the contact with Gnomon's limp body is unbroken, and the subject remains willing or unconscious and perfectly still, Gnomon may pull both its own body, and the whole person, to its mind — effectively teleporting the subject with it in time. Temporal Projection cannot be used on a conscious, unwilling subject (even if the subject is paralyzed), or on any moving subject (even if the subject is willing). Gnomon may use Temporal Projection upon a being of Size 4 or less. Gnomon can use this power on itself as often as it likes, but can only use it on others once per 24 hour period.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: Wits + Stealth

Action: Instant

- **Temporal Transplant, Arcane:** Gnomon may perform a temporal surgery on an immobile subject, removing the knowledge and magic of the mage at a point in the future where her magical knowledge and power is at its peak. The creature surgically opens the skull of its victim in the present, and pours the collected future magic directly into her mind. In most cases, Gnomon only uses this ability to “reveal the secrets of magic” to a mage it believes is its master, and while the victim does gain great magical power and knowledge, her mind is utterly shattered by the procedure. An Arcane Temporal Transplant is irreversible.

Upon successful completion of this surgery, the subject instantly becomes a Master in his path's two Ruling Arcana, an Adept in two random Common Arcana (if the character is already at a level higher than Adept at the randomly selected Arcanum, another random Arcanum is selected), and an Apprentice in two random Arcana (if the character is already at a level higher than Apprentice at the randomly selected Arcanum, another random Arcanum is selected). The victim's Gnosis increases to 9, and his maximum Mana capacity increases to 50. The transplant leaves a faint, blue scar that encircles the forehead of the victim.

Additionally, the mage goes completely and irrevocably

mad. The character's Wisdom drops instantly to 2, and the character takes three permanent severe derangements of the Storyteller's choice.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Medicine

Action: Extended. Gnomon must accrue 20 successes, with each roll equal to 15 minutes.

- **Temporal Transplant, Body:** As an extended action, Gnomon may perform a temporal surgery on an immobile subject, switching a body part from one point in time to another point in time. The transplanted limbs age from the temporal point as they normally would. Gnomon may perform a Temporal Transplant upon its own body or upon another person's, and the effect of the surgery may be beneficial or detrimental to the subject. For example, it may replace a wounded arm with a version of the same arm, not yet wounded, from a few minutes before the wound occurred (essentially making it as though the wound never occurred). Alternately, Gnomon may take the leg of an enemy when he was a baby, and replace the enemy's current leg, disfiguring and disabling him until the leg naturally grows over time to fit his body.

Successful use of this power allows Gnomon to heal any damage to the target's body, regardless of type (bashing, lethal or aggravated). It also allows Gnomon to cripple the target, imposing Flaws such as One Arm, Lamé, Blind, etc. If Gnomon transplants a limb or organ from the target's past, the limb will eventually “grow into” the body, but this can take years.

The target must be immobile for Temporal Transplant to occur (see Anesthetize, above).

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Medicine

Action: Extended. Gnomon must accrue 10 successes, with each roll equal to 15 minutes.

Do We All Go Mad?

A mage (or a **Mage** player) might well ask: Is it the fate of all of the Awakened to become godlike but insane sorcerer-gods? The answer is: not necessarily, but playing the odds, it's *probable* that a mage who survives long enough to become powerful will also accrue a derangement or two. Is Gnomon, then, removing magical knowledge from a probable future-self of his “master?” If so, is the time stream disrupted because Gnomon made the character artificially powerful too soon?

These are the kinds of questions that keep mages who study phenomena like Gnomon awake at night.

These questions don't have easy answers, and mages don't have a way to test any hypotheses they develop on the subject. Indeed, the best they can hope for is that they *don't* get to find out the truth.

NATURAL BORN CRUSADERS: THE LUCID

That's right; just go about your day, nobody's watching. Look at you, enjoying a sandwich like a real person. Once the family reaches your door, we will save the world from you.

Aliases: Seeds (as in "bad seed")

Background

Sleepwalkers have always been part of Awakened society. Sleepwalkers can take the first tentative steps towards experiencing the wonders hidden behind the Lie. They are prized enough that mages nurture family lines that produce Sleepwalkers known as Proximi. The notion that children are born without being bound by Quiescence brings hope to many Awakened.

No bloodline is free of impurities, however, and this shows in the Sleepwalkers calling themselves Lucid. The Lucid are sensitive to magic around them. This sensitivity affects them on such a primal level that it changes them. The twinge that comes with exposure to magic drives them mad but it grants them the ability to recognize Awakened and Sleepwalkers on sight.

Different Consilii have attempted to study the Lucid, but doing so from a distance is near-impossible. Capturing one for interrogation is never as informative as expected, as they'll do anything — including commit suicide — to thwart such efforts. Information gleaned from one Seed is rarely reliable when applied to others. Either the various Lucid groups are as disparate as they claim, or their tactics are too fluid to analyze.

Awakened geneticists have yet to discover the origins of Lucid Sleepwalkers. They don't know whether they are a natural or artificially created phenomenon. Individual Lucid have theories, of course, but if a singular source spawned the whole of their kind they don't know about it. Sometimes one speaks of his family's part in the crusade for the past generation or two, but rarely does it go further. Even among their own kind they lack a common creation myth beyond having been imbued by a preferred deity or evolving the traits to strike back against willworkers.

The Mysterium and the Silver Ladder believe the Lucid are a widespread family line that suffers for their increased sensitivity. The Guardians of the Veil advance the theory that the Lucid are a weapon designed by the Seers of the Throne, or possibly bred by Banishers. Free Councilors mockingly suggest that the Lucid are the modern descendants of an Atlantean slave caste and that the Diamond Orders are getting their comeuppance. The Adamantine Arrow as a whole rarely analyzes them beyond the threat they present. While the average Consilium is unlikely

to listen, the Seers claim the Lucid are a creation of the Exarchs that has been corrupted by Pentacle Mages or the Fallen World.

Only the decline of religion in daily life has made it possible to separate the Seeds from other witch-hunters. Awakened history is filled with stories of hunters granted special abilities and insight based on religious faith. The gradual increase in secular hunters has thrown the Lucid's talents into sharper relief, as it has no clear external source. The first mages to realize they weren't just dealing with a new breed of psychic were horrified.

Far more mages hear stories of the Lucid than have actually encountered them. A cabal turns up dead, leaving signs of attack from a well-coordinated group. A serial killer strikes only at mages and their mortal or Sleepwalker associates. Apostates suddenly come to the Adamantine Arrow seeking shelter, claiming pursuit by a witch-hunter who could sense their presence. Usually, these stories could mean a number of things but mages still nervously ask about Sleepwalkers born and bred to kill them.

Lucid Views on Banishers

"That they hunt their own species only proves their degeneracy. A rabid wolf that eats other wolves still needs to be put down. They have driven themselves rabid, but that only makes them more dangerous."

Lucid don't see the difference between a Banisher and another mage. Supernal Sense registers Banishers as Awakened like any other, and that's enough for them. Some Lucid may consider a mage who hunts other mages to be a low-priority target, but that only means they're saved for last.

"She understands me, for we are fighting the same battle. I love her with all my heart and soul, but I will fulfill her request to kill her once the rest are dead. Doing this for her will be the truest act of my dedication and love."

Rare is the Lucid who will actually ally with a Banisher, although individual experiences or a permissive madness can make it possible. Doing so requires forcing oneself to endure and encourage the presence of someone when every instinct says that person is wrong. Only love or zealotry is strong enough to bridge that gap.

"The few I met insisted they were different; the scions of a feared legacy. But their goal was to make stronger mages to help destroy the others. Definitely not part of the solution."

Some Banishers come across as the worst kind of hypocrite. They are hell-bent on destroying mages and ridding the world of Supernal influence, but at the same time they train armies of mages and strengthen their own magic. Making tougher Banishers doesn't cleanse the world of magic. In the eyes of the Lucid, it just ensures the strongest mages are the craziest ones.

Description

Lucid tend to gather into family groups. The traditional leaders are a parent and children or a collection of mad, co-dependent siblings. Individual Lucid are indistinguishable from normal humans to mundane means of detection. To Supernal Vision, their auras look like a Sleepwalker's except where a Sleepwalker aura glimmers, a Lucid aura contains flickers and waves of color. Using magical scrutiny to discern their true nature (five successes; see p. 277 of **Mage: The Awakening**) reveals an aura punctuated by pinpricks of light like stars or candle flames similar to the sparkles seen in a mage's aura.

They ensnare or brainwash Sleepers and Sleepwalkers to attend them. These peripheral groups of assistants have a high turnover rate between the battle and their masters' paranoia. Sympathy for the mages (even if imagined) is a crime frequently punished by death or a painful reprogramming.

While no two Seeds are exactly the same, they all imagine themselves soldiers in an invisible war and this reflects in the austere décor of their homes.

Weapons are hidden within line of sight of entrances. Other rooms contain exercise equipment and map-covered tables to make up training rooms and command centers.

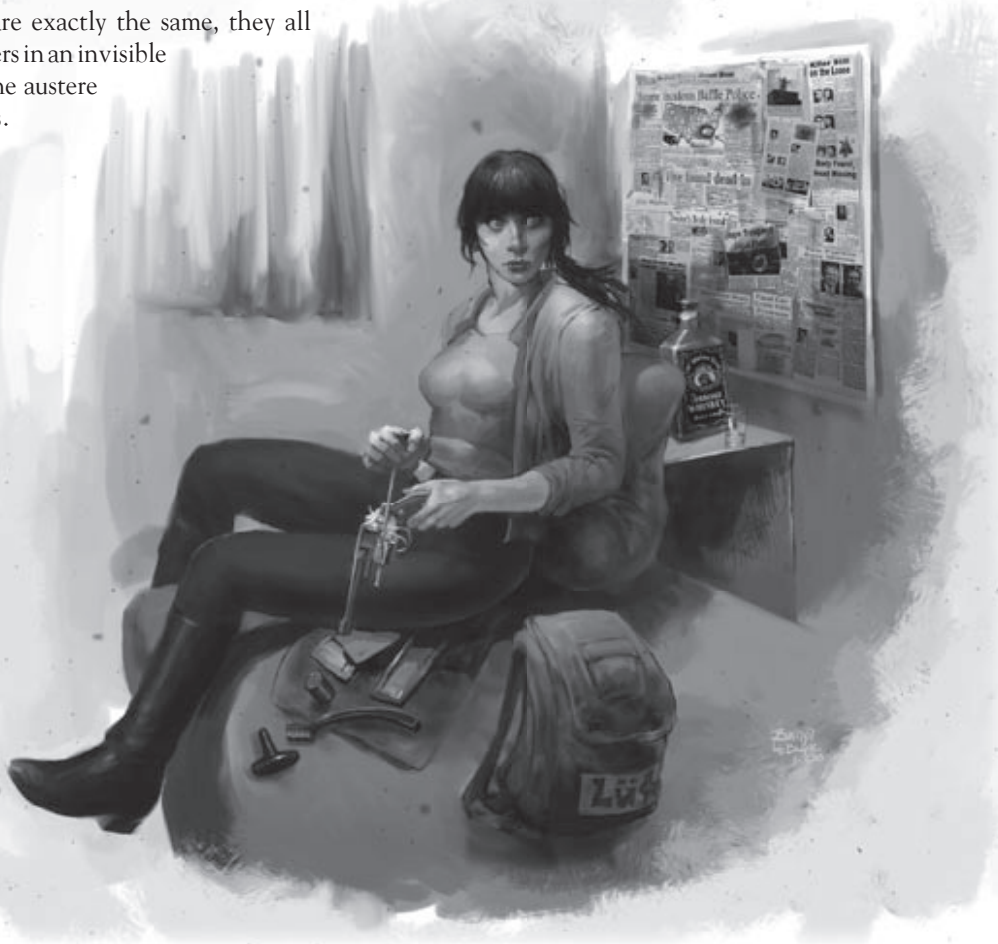
The Lucid prefer jobs with flexible hours that put them in contact with large groups of random people. Grocery store and restaurant positions that allow them to observe customers without being remembered are ideal. Rural Lucid might refer to their jobs as "tree stands" or "blinds."

What frightens the Awakened about the Lucid more than their talent at identifying mages is their ability to steal samples of Supernal power for themselves. Willworkers rarely survive to learn where it comes from, but mages have been attacked by Lucid who wield stolen magic. Lucid have been seen sucking the breath out of dying mages to fuel their abilities and the strongest bear homemade talismans containing soul stones.

Secrets

Individual groups develop their own mythos involving the Awakened. One group believes mages are possessed by spirits or demons. Another group thinks the mages' power is stolen from the gods or the Lucid's ancestors, and they must kill the mages to release it. Some Lucid feel they deserves the power, if they can take it.

When the Lucid move in, Sleepwalkers vanish. Sleepwalkers can serve as early warning systems for their mage allies and make easy and logical targets early on in a Lucid operation. Any Sleepwalker could be a useful conscript for the Lucid crusade. Whether tricked or brainwashed, in the end they serve primarily in support roles or help continue the line.



Until a Sleeper has impressed one of the Lucid, he's cannon fodder. Lucid who know about Paradox go out of their way to recruit Sleepers to hedge their bets. The Lucid put mortals on the front lines, directly in the path of any lightningbolts or curses, knowing that each Sleeper witness makes a mage more susceptible to a devastating Paradox.

No known cures exist for the Lucid condition short of the things that would remove the condition of being a Sleepwalker (i.e., transformation into a supernatural being or death). It's possible that therapy could undo a Seed's madness for a time, but the potential to take up the crusade once more will always be waiting within. Lucid who become a supernatural being often use their powers to assist their fellows except in one situation. Awakening is seen as the highest betrayal by the family, who won't tolerate one of their own in that wretched state.

Awakened Lucid are often neurotic, self-loathing, and paranoid even if they can be taught that they are not inherently evil. Between suicide and their former brethren, few last a year. Fewer still reach five years of Awakened existence, and most of those wind up as depressed Banishers.

Rumors

"This is what happens when you try to make more Sleepwalkers by inbreeding existing ones. Inbreeding, with most folks, means you're a little slow or your eyes are crooked. But inbred Sleepwalkers have problems we can't even imagine."

A logical theory, but inbred Lucid aren't different from inbred mortals, besides the obvious. Mages with an ax to grind may suspect the Lucid come from another order's Proximus breeding program just for the easy scapegoat. The Lucid "gene" doesn't result from inbreeding, though.

"Classical wisdom suggests that the Lucid are born, not made. We have seen otherwise, though, when one visited a town and turned a peaceful Proximus family into a strike force of killers. We saw their eyes when they assaulted the Consilium; it was too late to save them."

Some mages underestimate the power of mundane brainwashing by fanatics. It's difficult to tell the Lucid from their programmed flunkies based on behavior alone, especially in a stressful situation like combat. True Lucid are born that way, plain and simple.

"The majority of Banishers begin as Lucid. You know how some folks Awaken into Banishers and you find out later they were unstable to begin with? That's because they were Lucid and weren't caught in time. I know some orders consider the idea blasphemous, but I agree with the Guardians that some Awakenings should be stopped."

This would be true if more Lucid escaped their families after Awakening. Many that survive become Banishers if nobody can get through to them, but there aren't nearly enough to account for the number of Banishers.

Story Hooks

- A Lucid serial killer specializes in torturing and murdering Sleepwalkers and mages with a kris. He killed 16 people in three years before vanishing last year. Last week a group of hunters captured a powerful mage and murdered him with a kris. Are the hunters copycatting the Lucid, or has he returned with a group of loyal followers?

- The cabal is approached by a desperate, terrified Sleepwalker. He explains that he comes from a Lucid family, but doesn't share their madness and begs for protection. He is willing to share what he knows and seems genuine, but could he be an infiltrator? Would protecting this one Sleepwalker mean bringing a Manchurian candidate into the cabal's midst?

- Cleaning up the affairs of a deceased mage has led to the discovery of a Lucid relative being kept stable with medication. If left alone, he's likely to become a threat to others, possibly himself as well. The cabal has to decide whether to turn him over to the Consilium for study, arrange for him to be committed for his own good, or keep him around and try to use his talents.

Supernatural Aspects of the Lucid

- **Breaking Point:** Every time a mage triggers a Lucid's Supernal Sense (see below), the Storyteller rolls the Lucid's Resolve + Composure. This roll receives a cumulative -1 penalty until it fails, at which point the Lucid is afflicted with a form of the suspicion derangement directed towards the activities of mages (**World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 98). The rolls begin again, with the same cumulative penalty, until one fails and her suspicion is upgraded to paranoia that can only be soothed by striking at the Awakened. At this point, the Lucid suffer a -2 to Morality rolls to resist further derangements when degenerating. At the Storyteller's discretion, the Lucid's derangements could be compounded by extensive contact or suppressed by therapy, but they cannot be cured.

- **Soul Stone Talisman:** If one of the Lucid captures the soul stone of a mage, he can attune to the power of its creator. By touching a soul stone, he knows who created it and her current location. If the Lucid has taken the final breath of the stone's creator, he may spend a Willpower dot to retain the stolen spell as long as the stone is on his person.

- **Supernal Sense:** The Lucid possess a form of Unseen Sense for mages and Supernal phenomena. They can even scrutinize spells as if they possessed an active form of Mage Sight. The Lucid can recognize and differentiate mages, Sleepwalkers, and other Lucid on sight.

- **Take the Final Breath:** Seeds learn over time that some aspect of a dying mage escapes with his last gasping breaths. Some think it's his soul, while others believe it's the demon or the mote of Supernal might that empowers him. The Lucid can take whatever is in that final breath and absorb its power for a time. Once a mage has died (the Lucid need not be the one who killed him), the Lucid seals his mouth over the mage's as if giving CPR and sucks out that final breath. This power must be used within a number of minutes equal to the mage's Stamina + Resolve.

The player spends a Willpower point and makes an Intelligence + Resolve roll. The Lucid absorbs a piece of the mage's soul and mind, receiving flashes of recent events as well as the Imagos of spells the mage cast in the last week (whether improvised or by rote). The Lucid selects one of these spells to claim for himself. An exceptional success on the roll allows the Lucid to select two spells to claim for the power's duration. The stolen spell is held for a number of weeks equal to the number of successes rolled to capture the spell.

To cast the spell, the Storyteller rolls the Lucid's Intelligence + Occult. Successes apply normally. The Lucid cannot change or alter any spell factors besides applying successes to the primary factor, doesn't suffer Paradox, and doesn't risk Morality loss from casting spells that inherently cause degeneration, such as goetic magic (the character *does* risk degeneration if she uses the magic to harm or kill, however). The Lucid spends Willpower instead of Mana when needed, subject to the one-per-turn limit.

Sample Lucid: Virginia Ferguson, Born Witch-Hunter

Background: Virginia learned to shoot at age five. Her father wasn't military, but he raised his family in the style of an Army officer like his own father had before him. They moved around at random intervals, and the Ferguson children were home-schooled so as not to be beholden to a normal school schedule.

The first time Virginia's Supernal Sense triggered at the age of 12 established her path in life. Her father spoke often of bogeymen who could change the world around them and told Virginia and her older brother and sister that if they were blessed they would be able to identify them on sight. She now understood what he was talking about, aware of the wrongness of the man coming out of the bookstore. She followed him home and told her father where he

lived. A few days later, the Fergusons had to move again, and Virginia had joined the crusade. Two years later, she killed her first mage.

Her talents lie with handling firearms, particularly rifles. When Virginia accompanies the family and their associates on hunts, she's the one perched on the roof across the street, waiting for the perfect headshot. She takes pleasure in knowing she kills the mage instantly, with no chance for whatever's inside to escape.

Description: Virginia comes from a family of blue-eyed brunettes. She changes her hair style regularly to evade detection but defaults to a tight ponytail. Her skin is tanned from daytime stakeouts and outdoor physical training. Between her scars and toned build she is often mistaken for ex-military.

Storytelling Hints: Keeping the world safe from the bogeymen is Virginia's first priority, and her only regret is that she does it from a distance. When possible, she waits for the target to look in her direction before she shoots him, hoping that he can appreciate that perfect shot before it pierces his skull.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Investigation 2, Crafts (Demolitions) 1, Medicine 1, Occult 2, Science (Explosives) 1

Physical Skills: Athletics (Climbing) 2, Brawl 3, Drive 1, Firearms (Sniper Rifles) 3, Larceny 1, Stealth 2, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Animal Ken 1, Intimidation (Cold Stare) 2, Persuasion 1, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 1

Merits: Brawling Dodge, Danger Sense, Fast Reflexes 2, Fresh Start, Gunslinger, Iron Stamina 3, Quick Draw (Firearms), Quick Healer

Willpower: 6

Morality: 4 (narcissism, vocalization)

Virtue: Justice. Virginia's father raised her to stick to her convictions and take action when needed.

Vice: Pride. Virginia sometimes chafes at the secrecy her lifestyle requires. She feels the need to be seen and acknowledged doing what she does.

Initiative: 8 (with Fast Reflexes)

Defense: 2

Speed: 11

Health: 8

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Sniper Rifle	4(L)	250/500/1000	11	9 again

THE LUDIN SISTERS

Do that again, dear. Yes, we know you're not supposed to do it. But it is delicious.

Aliases: Ludmilla and Marta Ludin; Katerina Richter

Background

The Ludin sisters — Marta, Ludmilla and Katerina — were young acolytes of the SS officer and mage Gerhard Richter in the 1930s. They were adherents of various Aryan blood rituals and bloodline-related mysticism. Their regular exposure to such mysticism unlocked their status as Sleepwalkers. When Richter discovered their true natures he adopted all three of them as his servants. (Literally, in the case of Katerina, who was only 14 years old when her sisters came into Richter's service — the Ludin parents died mysteriously and Richter took Katerina as his daughter.)

The sisters undertook the sorts of heinous tasks that might be expected from the loyal servants of a mage who was also a part of the Nazi SS. After the Siege of Leningrad in 1941, Richter chose to move to a prisoner of war camp in occupied Poland. He experimented extensively upon Red Army captives as well as members of the "lesser races." The sisters acted as procurers for Richter but that was not all. Marta was responsible for documenting the details of Richter's experiments, and Ludmilla in particular was happy to take part in both bloodletting and arcane sexual experiments.

Near the end of the war, Richter found it necessary to leave the Third Reich and take on a new identity. Having fought against the Soviets, he fled westward just miles ahead of the Red Army. Richter came under direct attack while trying to escape with the sisters. After a group of Polish partisans ambushed them, Richter fought back with vulgar magic, but all four were badly injured. Richter performed a massive healing spell upon himself and the sisters while he was hurt and had already fought off minor Paradox — and brought about a Manifestation Paradox, an immense Abyssal entity with five heads but only three mouths. The sisters interposed themselves between the demon and Richter, and begged Richter to flee. The sisters were able to hold the entity off for a full 30 seconds despite their lack of magical talent. One by one, however, the demon devoured the sisters.

The sisters spent an indeterminate period of time within the creature's body. Each suffered greatly as the Abyssal entity attempted to digest her soul and body. For reasons the sisters have never fully understood, they survived this event, and somehow emerged from within the Abyssal creature. It had vanished — and so had Richter.

More than 60 years later, the sisters are still alive, though they seem frail. The Paradox affects them still.

The Feud

Michael Wechsler (p. 68) served the Soviet mage Gregor Konstantinov during World War II. The Ludin sisters served the Nazi mage Gerhard Richter. Richter and Konstantinov — like their nations — went to war against each other. The mages' disagreements predated the war but were certainly inflamed by the violence among the Sleepers that surrounded them.

Richter and Konstantinov finally got their third and final Duel Arcane in East Berlin in May, 1967. It took place in a condemned building not far from the Stalinallee, away from the eyes of bribed Stasi and local police.

The duel was declared to be to the death. Both mages protected the area of the building against scrying, and Richter, an Acanthus, even blocked the building against postcognitive Time effects (see *Postcognition*, p. 260 of **Mage: The Awakening**). As a result, no one knows precisely what the end result of the mages' final duel was. Neither Konstantinov nor Richter has been seen since 1967, and scrying attempts on either of them fail. Their remaining living peers, as well as the Ludin sisters and Michael Wechsler, assume that both mages are dead.

For decades after 1967, a sort of proxy war went on between these former servants of the dead mages. The servants held no personal grudges against the others at first — Marta Ludin still insists she only wanted to exchange information with Wechsler the first time they met — but mistrust led to confusion, violent betrayal, and years of tit-for-tat.

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Ludins and Wechsler have mostly avoided one another. Old grudges have begun to fade. However, if both the Ludins and Wechsler are in the same city, and the characters come into conflict with one side, the other side might offer its assistance just to eliminate an old foe.

Characters might be able to take advantage of the rift if they are aware of it.

Description

The sisters look quite similar. Each is within a few inches of the others in height, and at this point all have fine white hair and deeply wrinkled skin. It's quite difficult for strangers to tell them apart, and they like it that way.

They have thick German accents, even after all these years. They prefer to speak to one another in German.

In the presence of vulgar magic — any time the Storyteller would roll for Paradox — the sisters seem to shed scores of years. Each looks as vivacious (and demented) as she did in the summer of 1942.

Secrets

The Abyssal entity summoned as a result of the Paradox accrued from Richter's 1944 healing spell has permanently altered the women. Each of them is able to consume Paradox, now, and use it to extend their lifespans. Note that

the extension doesn't make them younger (though it does make them appear younger). Instead, it adds years to the ends of their lives. By the sisters' best estimates, they expect to survive to at least 140 (Katerina, the youngest, is 84 years old).

The sisters believe Gerhard Richter is still alive, although nearly all evidence suggests he and Mikhail Konstantinov (see p. 55) killed one another in Vienna in 1968. The sisters have not encountered him personally since the paradox that changed their lives. They certainly hold a serious grudge against Konstantinov and any surviving students of his. They blame him for Richter's disappearance or death.

Although the sisters seem bound to each other, they do not always get along. Katerina and Ludmilla have never seen eye-to-eye, leaving Marta, the eldest, as the peacemaker. In the decades since the sisters' rebirth, they have occasionally split up, the longest such "divorce" occurring for 10 years after the Berlin Airlift. Today they are together, and they have lived together for about five years. This doesn't stop



their machinations, however. Part of the reason for their ongoing distaste for one another is that each one believes she was Richter's favorite.

Katerina believes the Paradox manifestation that changed them during the war could, if properly motivated, provide the sisters with eternal youth, and free them from their never-ending need to consume Paradox. She is eager to provoke powerful Paradox events in the hopes of bringing that "demon" back.

Special Friends

The sisters cannot eliminate Paradox entirely from a Working, but they can greatly reduce its damaging effects on powerful mages. And they're more than happy to consume the Paradox, since it provides them with a clear benefit.

As a result of this, the sisters have accumulated a group of mages who owe them favors. The majority of these mages are those most at risk from Paradox, meaning they are powerful and often amoral (in game terms, low Wisdom scores or high Gnosis scores). The combination of those factors makes the sisters' "special friends" a group to contend with.

The sisters understand that if any one circle of wizards were to acquire their services permanently, they'd lose all freedom. Therefore, they play these mages off one another in order to retain their liberty.

The sisters have two primary weaknesses. First, they play against one another and have not fully trusted each other since Richter's death. Any one of them could easily be persuaded that the others are conspiring against her (this might be worth a +1 to Social dice pools used to that end). Secondly, and more obviously, the sisters are frail and aged women. They remain alive and independent primarily because they are valuable to numerous mages. Should a cabal become enraged at the sisters and strike out at them without warning, they have little ability to protect themselves. (Of course, one of their strongest allies is a Master of Time, who might get some inkling that the cabal was going to launch such an attack.)

Rumors

"Last weekend Curly was in Greenwich Village and got higher than he meant to. He was just about blind on something, and some idiots started shoving him around. He panicked and cooked off some crazy Forces magic to clear the area. Telekinesis or something. No, seriously, I know a guy who was there. The reason the Consilium didn't say anything is that there was no Paradox at all. None. These three old women were sitting in a café across the street when the spell went off and it looked like they affected it in some way."

The sisters may well spend time in public places in neighborhoods that they believe mages find appealing. In

Special Friends

Many mages take advantage of the sisters' gifts. The Storyteller may wish to designate one or two characters from her ongoing chronicle as having an existing relationship with the sisters. Additionally, a few other mages are known to interact regularly with the sisters. They prefer to deal with men.

- Sam Adams, a Master Acanthus whose long-term goal is the destruction of the "corporate-government complex" in the United States. Adams lives as a freegan among the homeless in Boston and refuses to interact with the modern capitalist state. Adams is rather free with powerful Time magic, and only uses the sisters' abilities in the rare occasion that he carefully plans his use of vulgar spells.

- Arthur Jade, a Chinese Guardian of the Veil Moros who uses the sisters' gifts to bolster his magical talents and physical abilities before pursuing violators of the local Lex Magica.

- Teratogen, a Thyrsus Scelestus. Only Katerina is aware that Teratogen is not an "ordinary" mage (despite their immersion in mage society, the sisters are only dimly aware of the various political and power groups among mages). The other two sisters simply believe that Teratogen is obsessed with Paradox and the Abyss — and that attitude serves them well.

- Mama Maronda is an inner-city Thyrsus and Master of Life. She is one of the few female mages with which the sisters are willing to traffic, because they believe her to be no threat. Maronda is a central organizing force in her community; she knows everybody. She uses the sisters when she needs to perform powerful, vulgar Life spells, typically to save lives. Maronda doesn't like to turn to the sisters, and resents them. Marta Ludin, characteristically, relishes the times when Maronda must come to her in desperation.

cities where the Lex Magica strictly forbids the invocation of Paradox, the sisters rapidly make enemies of Sentinels or others who represent the local authorities. They tend not to remain for long in such cities.

"There is an enormous cabal in New York that descends from a group of SS sorcerer women. They are still dedicated to the Third Reich, they hate Jews, and they know where a lot of Nazi occult treasure is buried."

The sisters aren't an "enormous cabal," and in fact they aren't mages at all. However, their relationships and trafficking with mages across the world makes it seem to outside (mage) observers that the sisters themselves must be pretty heavy hitters. The sisters are not particularly devoted to the Third Reich, but they are certainly anti-Semites. They are not aware of any Nazi occult treasure anymore. They had a few artifacts (and Artifacts) back in the 1950s and 60s, but sold those to other mages decades ago.

"They're the Fates. The actual Norse Fates. The witches from MacBeth, too. They are all Archmasters of Fate, and they only show up in a city when something major is going to happen."

As discussed above, the sisters aren't mages at all. They also aren't the Fates, or any other mythological entities. Momentous events tend to happen around them only because they attract powerful mages who like vulgar magic.

Ludin Sister

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 1

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 5, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Investigation (Occult) 3, Medicine (Gerontology) 1, Occult (Paradox) 3, Politics 1

Physical Skills: Firearms 1, Stealth 2, Survival 1

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Expression 1, Intimidation 2, Persuasion 4, Socialize 1, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Allies (Mages) 5, Contacts (Mages), Resources 4, Sleepwalker

Willpower: 7

Virtue: Charity (Ludmilla), Faith (Katerina), Fortitude (Marta)

Vice: Lust (Ludmilla), Wrath (Katerina), Greed (Marta)

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Speed: 8

Health: 6

Supernatural Powers:

- **Grow Luminous:** The sisters cannot die of old age, so long as they continue to consume Paradox. When in the presence of vulgar magic, they do not count as Sleeper witnesses and therefore do not provoke Disbelief. In addition, each sister may consume Paradox to extend her lifespan. Each sister may "consume" one die from the spell's Paradox dice pool. Each sister may only consume one die of Paradox per day, and each die consumed extends the woman's lifespan by one month. Each sister may consume one die of Paradox from a vulgar spell, but the sisters cannot consume more dice than a Paradox pool actually has. That is, if a mage's Paradox pool (after figuring all modifiers for magical tools, Sleeper witnesses, etc.) is two dice, only two of the sisters could consume a die, leaving the Storyteller a chance die to roll.

- **Resist Magic:** The other long-term effect of the Abyssal demon's curse on the sisters is the ability to resist harmful magic. The sisters' resistance to magic seems to be increasing as they age. At this point they each have an effective Gnosis rating of 3 for the purposes of resisting supernatural effects *only* (see the Supernatural Tolerance sidebar on p. 122 of **Mage: The Awakening**). This resistance increases by one if the effect is a vulgar spell, and by two if a sister consumes Paradox dice from that spell.

Story Hooks

- A mage has a magical resonance (and possibly Nimbus) very similar to that of Mikhail Konstantinov. The sisters happen to observe him as he performs public magic. They begin to stalk him, thinking he is Konstantinov himself or a reincarnation thereof. Individually they are not powerful enough to directly contend with a mage, but if the mage's behavior persuades them that he truly is a reincarnation of Konstantinov, they will call in markers with mages they know to lay a trap for him. They may wish only to kidnap and interrogate him, or they might prefer to kill him outright.

- A powerful Israeli lobbyist is murdered in a manner that seems ritualistic and strange. The murder was actually committed by a mage who owes the sisters a debt. The mage — a Saudi who had no particular compunctions about killing an Israeli lobbyist — deflected attention from himself by using Prime magics to disguise himself as one of the players' characters. The Saudi specifically chose a character with a public face (the mage with the highest Fame or non-magical Status merit, or barring that, one of the characters who lacks the Occultation merit).

The lobbyist has connections to the Israeli intelligence community, and one of his unspoken responsibilities was to keep an eye on the sisters. The Israeli government is aware of the sisters' continued existence and their relationship to the long-missing Gerhard Richter. Until recently, the sisters were unaware of the lobbyist's secret job. They arranged for the Saudi to murder him when they discovered his activities. Neither they nor the Saudi has any particular animosity toward the players' cabal, but the police are sure to get involved as soon as the player's mage's face shows up on Israeli PAC security tapes.

- As described elsewhere, the sisters don't always get along perfectly. They occasionally use mages — particularly males — as pawns. A half-mad local Free Councilor, Bartleby, is on the local Consilium's "watch list" for repeated public Paradoxes. Bartleby is an ally of the players' cabal, or perhaps he has traded rote knowledge with one or another of them. Bartleby has also traded with the sisters in the past. He becomes the subject of Katerina and Ludmilla's rivalry. Ludmilla is fond of Bartleby and enjoys his company, while Katerina wishes to push Bartleby toward more and more dangerous exhibitions of vulgar magic.

Katerina provokes Bartleby into a display of vulgar magic that ends up with his being brought before the Consilium for punishment. Due to its standing in the Consilium, owed favors or just bad luck, the players' cabal is assigned the unenviable task of keeping a leash on Bartleby. Within a few weeks of that decision, Marta Ludin decides that Bartleby would be more valuable to the sisters if he were in their possession; they could urge him to perform vulgar magic and leech off his Paradox as if he were livestock. When Bartleby goes missing, the players' cabal has to find him, and eventually confront the sisters and their allies.

THE MAGIC EATER: MADAME LATOURRE

Mmm. It's like ecstasy wrapped in chocolate and dipped in God. You should try some.

Aliases: Thaumavore, GeRouge (Red Eyes)

Background

Depending upon the day, Madame LaTourre tells many different stories about her childhood, when she admits to having one. In some, she was a poor Creole child in New Orleans. In others, she was raised in a tribe in the desert of northern Africa before being kidnapped and brought to the Caribbean as a slave by rum traders. When she is feeling particularly mischievous, which is often, she claims to be a goddess, or a high priestess to “the gods.” She remembers plagues and parties, wars and celebrations, but the exact details tend to get muddled in her mind. One evening she’ll spin a tale about having grown up during the war between the states, and the next, just as earnestly, she will discuss having played as a child with the daughter of Adrien de Pauger, the original designer of New Orleans’ French Quarter. Surely both claims, the events being separated by more than a hundred years, cannot be true? Regardless of what background tale is spinning to those inquiring, her current role rarely changes. Madame LaTourre is a trickster, a teacher through pranks and puzzles, and a connoisseur of all of the best things in life. Frequently found with a bottle of spiced rum in one hand and a fine cigar in the other, LaTourre encourages others to try “anything once, twice if you aren’t sure if you liked it the first time,” and lives by her own advice.

Such an open and adventurous existence, however, is not without its own challenges and costs. Madame LaTourre has developed a few unique and curious abilities along her life’s path. Sometimes, she claims she was chosen as a high priestess by the gods because of her special talents. Sometimes, she credits the gods with having gifted them to her (or cursed her with them, although this is always with a “what can you do?” shrug and a smile.) More often, however, she brags about having stolen them from the gods, saying that if you want something — anything — in life, you have to be willing to go out and get it, and to pay the price for doing so. Regardless of how she achieved the power to do so, however, she certainly can do things that no “normal” human can, and her tastes, along with her abilities, are broad and diverse.

Madame LaTourre is not a mage herself, but decades of consuming magic has infused her with certain powers. Some of these powers resemble Supernal magic, but she cannot improvise magic in the same manner mages do, although she sometimes manifests new powers as a result of consuming related spells or items.

Description

Madame LaTourre appears to be a mixed-race woman of approximately 35 years of age. She stands under five feet tall. Her skin is the *café au lait* that New Orleans’ mulatto population was famous for in the mid 1800s, and she wears her kinky black hair plaited in a series of braids each of which is adorned with some type of interesting tidbit. Stones, bones, beads and ribbons, the myriad of arcane and mundane relics twined in her hair are echoed by those on the wide silk band of her elegant top hat. She dresses in pin-striped slacks, a white blouse and tailored vest, the elegant lines standing in stark contrast to the eclectic accessories that adorn her wrists, neck and head. From the mischievous smile that is almost always present on her full, wide mouth, it seems likely that she enjoys — even fosters — the contradiction.

Never one to turn down an opportunity to celebrate or to dabble in new adventures, Madame LaTourre encourages the same in others. She’s attracted to parties and celebrations of all sorts, especially those with an occult focus or staged by individuals with some connection to the supernatural. In truth, any display or presence of magic of any sort may well draw her attention. Her hungers and desire for new experiences drive her to a nomadic lifestyle, although she may well spend weeks or months in one area, especially if she is able to infiltrate a supernatural population and thus gain temporary access to a feast of new tastes to sample.

Although LaTourre’s habits may well put her into adversarial situations with others, she is not a hostile individual by nature. Far from it, in truth she is far more inclined to amusing conversation, charming social intercourse or mischievous banter than to fire-fights or fisticuffs. Because one of the side effects of her magic consumption is an immunity to any of the particular magics she has already sampled, she does not have a great deal to fear from most individuals who rely upon supernatural powers for their offensive actions. She is, however, well aware that there still exists an entire world of unsampled delights, and this, along with her own inherently jovial nature, leads her to prefer positive interaction with others when she can. Like any addict, however, sometimes her desires get the best of her and she gives into temptation when it is less than prudent to do so. This often results in adversarial relationships developing with those who are less than pleased to discover that their hard-won possessions are now little more than useless props and their seemingly impervious supernatural defenses have fallen prey to her voracious sampling.

Despite the potential hardship her tastes (and her penchant for mischief) may cause, LaTourre is not malevolent. She would not, for example, indulge her hungers on a ward separating an innocent from a marauding demon, or intentionally eat a good person's beloved familiar. However, she's not all knowing, and not especially forward thinking, so the chances of her eating first and asking questions later (if ever) are fairly high. Also, she is an addict, and as such her addiction wins out over morality if she gets desperate for a "fix."

Secrets

LaTourre's true nature is a source of conjecture. Some believe her to be a mage herself, but she holds no ties to the Supernal Realms. Others believe her to be a former vampire that has somehow found a way to return to her living state, or a spirit or ghost that has managed to remain manifested in the physical world. LaTourre herself has told so many contradictory stories about her origins and the source of her power over her numerous years that it's possible that even she doesn't remember the facts of the situation. Based on legends and accounts of those who have encountered her, however, she has been traveling the world for more than 100 years, although she looks young enough to still be asked for identification when entering bars or night clubs occasionally.

A cult has dedicated itself to the worship of Madame LaTourre. This secret group believes it extrapolated the possibility of her existence more than a century ago, from a number of urban folklore stories and a few veiled references to her in texts discussing the Loa manifesting in physical form. Through experimentation and occult research, they managed to "summon" the cryptid-woman's presence by collecting and sacrificing a large number of magic

items in her name. After 13 days and nights of rituals using spirits to carry word of their desire for her to manifest, the mages were rewarded by a visit from the red-eyed lady herself. According to the stories told by those who were present when she appeared, she walked in, took one look at the pile of burned relics, shattered blades and destroyed Artifacts and shook her head in disgust before walking away. The core faction of the cult never saw her again, although they claim to be blessed by her presence in an ethereal fashion, and seek her council through divination, Ouija boards and other arcane methods. They actively seek out and destroy magical entities and items of all sorts, as they believe she desires them to.

Rumors

"She said that eventually she'll be able to eat all of the magic in reality, to become the only magic thing left. She can't do that... can she? Hell, I don't know. When she said it, her eyes started to glow. I wasn't about to stick around and ask questions."

LaTourre makes many claims about her abilities, depending on what she feels will get her what she wants in a given situation. Especially after a particularly satisfying "meal" or when jonesing for a magic "fix," she can be quite daring in her attempts to impress her otherworldly nature upon others.

"Years ago, when I was still learning the ropes, my cabal and I were in the middle of a ritual when there was a knock at the door. We all looked at each other, but kept on working on the ritual. Whatever it was knocked again, and we kept ignoring it. After a few minutes, the knock came again, and this time, a minute or so after it stopped, something started attacking our Sanctum's wards. We hurried to finish the ritual, and as soon as we were done, we spun around to face the door and found this little black lady in a top hat, with a big-ass snake around her neck looking back at us. She just stood there grinning at us and licking her lips, and looked over at our ritual area like a starving woman checking



out a buffet table. Lucky summoned a spirit and tried to send it after her, but the thing balked like he was sending it to its death. This gal just grinned while he was trying to order it to hurt her, like the whole thing amused the hell out of her. Finally, she said something like "Thanks for dinner, that sure was mighty tasty!" or some such nonsense, and walked back out of the door she'd come through, without bothering to open it. I don't know what the hell she was, and she never came back, but when we talked with the spirit later it referred to her as the bride of the gods, whatever that means."

One of the constant themes in the rumors that circulate about LaTourre is her association with "the gods." Some believe this is a reference to the loa or orishas of vodoun, Santería or Yoruba. Others think she's referring to powerful creatures from the Spirit Wilds, or perhaps some supernatural pantheon of deities to which only LaTourre is privy. Whether she's professing to be their pawn, their bride, or even one of them, the mention of gods comes up frequently in discussions of this thaumavore.

"The bitch ate my fucking Artifact sword. I mean, she didn't actually chew it, but she came up and licked it and it just fizzled out. Nothing I did after that would activate the damn thing. I worked my ass off to get that sword, and she fucking ate it!"

While many mages have the ability to create imbued items, Artifacts are unique remnants of their supernatural ancestry and difficult to obtain. Thankfully, they are also difficult to destroy as well, at least by most means. Perhaps this is why LaTourre seems so drawn to them. An alcoholic might appreciate a rare vintage, even if cheap beer will do the trick.

Madame LaTourre

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 5, Wits 6, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 5, Manipulation 7, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics (Religious Studies) 4, Crafts 2, Investigation (Research) 4, Medicine (Hallucinogens) 3, Occult 5

Physical Skills: Athletics (Dance) 3, Brawl 4, Drive 1, Firearms 1, Larceny (Pickpocket) 4, Stealth 3, Survival (Foreign Cultures) 3, Weaponry (Dagger) 4

Social Skills: Animal Ken (Snakes) 4, Empathy 3, Expression (Rituals) 4, Intimidation 3, Persuasion 4, Socialize 2, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 5

Merits: Encyclopedic Knowledge, Direction Sense, Iron Stomach, Natural Immunity, Toxin Resistance

Willpower: 8

Virtue: Hope. Madame LaTourre wants to share her love of life and all its myriad flavors with everyone around her.

Vice: Gluttony. Magic is mighty tasty, and LaTourre's yet to try a flavor she doesn't enjoy.

Initiative: 9

Story Hooks

- The characters are approached by a group of hostile lycanthropes who blame them for the destruction of a local place of power. In order to clear their own names, they must discover the true culprit, but who could have completely drained a locus of its supernatural power, and how would one stop a being capable of such an act?

- In the throes of a magic-addict's version of a binge, Madame LaTourre consumes first the wards of and then a large amount of the archived material located in the local Athenaeum. When she's found inside the building, unconscious and obviously overwhelmed by the effects of consuming some of the darkest and most powerful spells in the Consilium's possession, no one knows quite what to do with her. Sleeping, her form seems to be protected by some of the same effects she just consumed, making her (at least temporarily) impervious to physical or supernatural attack. How does one deal with a creature capable of nullifying the strongest wards in the city, even if she currently looks like an alcoholic sleeping off a bender?

- A group claiming to be acting on the behalf of "GeRouge" tracks down and targets members of the local Consilium, leaving destruction in their wake, marking the scene of their attacks with stylized images of a red-eyed mulatto woman in a top hat. When LaTourre arrives in the city soon thereafter, the characters may find themselves being sent to "deal with" the magic-eater, who has no clue about the crimes of which she's being accused.

Defense: 5

Speed: 13

Health: 8

Supernatural Powers:

- **Consume Magic** — By making a successful attack against any magical effect, spell or item, Madame LaTourre can consume the magic involved. This ability can affect any magic she can perceive, regardless of the magic's nature. While she does not actually eat the physical component in a magical item, she must symbolically consume it, by licking, nibbling or chewing on the item as she is activating this power. Thus she must remain in contact with the

item, individual or effect (such as a ward or area of effect) while attempting this action.

Action: Instant and contested

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult versus the power level of the targeted effect (highest Arcana level, level of Discipline, Gift, Contract, etc.).

To use this ability on a targeted creature, the creature must first be successfully grappled, then Consume Magic can be used as an overpowering maneuver. LaTourre's successes are then compared to the level of the targeted power, *not* the number of successes on the roll to activate that power, if any.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The power is not successful, and LaTourre is left with a bitter taste in her mouth that no amount of food or drink (save for more magic consumption) will negate. Although this does not affect the target in any way, it does give LaTourre a taste of the magic involved, which is often enough to trigger her hunger/addiction even more strongly, ensuring she will continue to strive towards consuming the effect. All attempts to resist becoming obsessed with new magic items are made at a -2 die modifier until the bad taste is relieved.

Failure: The attempt fails.

Success: If LaTourre achieves more successes than the power level of the targeted effect, the magical effect is destroyed and she is filled with a euphoric sensation of a flavor appropriate to the type of magic consumed. Life magic might invigorate, for example, while death magic might put her in a dark and sinister mood. Religious magic only fosters her perceptions of her own godhood, while vampiric, lycanthropic or fae magic tilt her attitudes in those directions, leaving her attitude more manipulative, feral or mercurial for a time depending on the particular "flavor" of what she has consumed.

She can devour manifested spirits by achieving more successes than their rank level. If this happens, treat the spirit as if all of its Corpus points have been destroyed and the spirit disincorporates. The spirit is not destroyed unless it is also out of Essence (see p. 320 of **Mage: The Awakening**). LaTourre cannot consume ghosts, nor can she consume a supernatural template (she can't consume a vampire's undead condition, for instance).

Exceptional Success: LaTourre successfully consumes the magic, and her Magical Immunity duration is doubled for this particular effect

Drawback: Consuming magic is an addictive experience. In part, this is a physiological compulsion; after feasting on magic, Madame LaTourre is left with a feeling of physical excitement, heightened sensory experience and joyful and contented disconnect similar to the feeling many humans

experience when using a variety of drugs of a mundane manufacture. As well, in LaTourre's own words: "It tastes damned good!" Each unique type of spell, ritual, creature or manifestation of magic has its own individual flavor, some mundane, others unachievable through foods consumable by human beings. From smoky to sweet, fleshy, fruity, bitter, sour or tangy, to magic that tastes of the sea, of the sky, or those that are flavored like "inspiration" or "childhood," for a connoisseur of experiences, any untasted flavor is a new and unsampled mystery, a pleasure yet untried.

The combination of these two factors has resulted in Madame LaTourre becoming wholly addicted to the experience of consuming magic. Whenever presented with a manifestation of magic she has not yet sampled, LaTourre risks becoming entirely focused upon it. A successful Composure + Resolve roll must be made in order for her not to become obsessed with the prospect of trying this new "fix." While she may not necessarily immediately begin consuming it, once obsessed she will do everything in her power, including lying, cheating, stealing, charming, bullying or manipulating those in possession of the untasted treat in order to attempt to gain possession of the item or other means of gaining permission to sample it.

• **Magical Immunity** — After having successfully consumed any particular magical effect, spell or item, LaTourre becomes immune to that specific magic for a number of days equal to the combined Arcana levels necessary to cast the spell. For example, if she consumed the enchantment off a sword that had been imbued with the Forces 5 spell "Radiation," she would no longer be vulnerable to the effects of the Radiation spell for 5 days, although she would still take normal damage if successfully hit with the sword during that time or affected by radiation other than through that particular spell. Non-Supernal magic is treated the same way, with the duration being equal to the relative power of the effect in days (Discipline level, Gift level, spirit rank, etc.).

Additionally, each effect she consumes within a specific supernatural magic type (vampiric, werewolf, Supernal, fae, etc.) gives her a cumulative +1 die bonus to any attempts to resist that sort of magic for the next month.

• **Unseen Senses** — LaTourre possesses a version of the same "sixth sense" that mages experience when it comes to perceiving the presence of the supernatural in her immediate area. For her, it "smells" like magic, and while she can sniff it out, she must make a successful Intelligence + Occult (with penalties as determined by the Storyteller for particularly obscure or powerful magic) to ferret out more information on the magic she perceives, but even the perception is enough for her to target the magic for consumption.

METATHRON: ARCADIAN MESSENGER

Behold! You are destined for greatness, though you never knew it. Your path will be strewn with thorns, but your deeds will live on in legends.

Aliases: Woeful Angel, Muse of Tragedy, Harbinger of Calamity

Background

Once Metathron served an Arcadian prince named the Chooser of Heroes, whose task it is to choose the right hero for every tale. The Chooser of Heroes has many messengers that draw mortals and Awakened into a great human narrative. One brings courage and visions of glory in battle. One draws mortals into love stories. One bestows a moment of genius with the power to change the world. The Acanthus metaphysicist Bowing Dervish claims that one of these messengers brings the Mystery Play to mortals. Chooser of Heroes has singled out for Awakening.

Chooser of Heroes is not interested in inspiring mortals or uplifting them. It's no more interested in the fates of mortals than a composer is interested in the dreams of the musicians who might one day play his symphony. Rather, Chooser of Heroes finds the sounds of certain tales aesthetically pleasing. Each of its messengers delivers the part it writes to the instrument Chooser of Heroes has selected to play it.

Metathron's messages are the darker side of Destiny. Every adventure requires someone to leave behind the familiar and seek the incredible. Every uplifting tale of enduring hardship and overcoming adversity demands someone suffer for the sake of the tale. Every morality play or tale of tragedy needs a victim whose pride, lusts and other foibles will destroy him for the sake of the lesson or catharsis that comes with the conclusion.

Metathron's is the call to adventure that cannot be denied because it takes away everything the hero cares about. Metathron's is the doctor's pronouncement that the patient only has a few weeks left to live. Metathron's is the voice of the oracle whose prophecy the hero will misinterpret to his sorrow. Metathron's work is the person whose betrayal or callousness dooms the hero to unimaginable suffering. Metathron's is the whispering of a friend that fuels the hero's ambition until it rages out of control.

Metathron no more understands the artistic motivations behind its master's messages than a toddler can compose a fugue. It believes that Chooser of Heroes sent it to deliver tragic messages in hopes of destroying the mortals who received them, and it cannot comprehend why its master sent messages to mortals who were strong enough to triumph in spite of tragedy. It convinced itself that it was a better judge of which mortals should receive its terrible messages.

Metathron deliberately delivered one of Chooser of Heroes' messages to a mortal who was not equipped to play the suffering hero. The unfortunate mortal never found relief from his tribulations, and those who knew him found it impossible to make sense of his suffering. What was to be a harmonious story of the triumph of the human spirit turned into a cacophonous tale of despair and undeserved death.

Metathron returned to Chooser of Heroes, expecting its master's praise. When the prince flew into a rage at the news, Metathron fled its master's court and left Arcadia behind it. It has convinced itself that Chooser of Heroes drove it away because the prince feared its servant coveted the throne. It remains convinced that it can cause many more human catastrophes than Chooser of Heroes ever could by simply choosing the wrong (or, from its perspective, right) people for the leading role in a tragedy. Metathron delivers its message and lets human arrogance and frailty effect the victim's demolition.

Most of the time, Metathron chooses its victims at random. One loses her home to an unscrupulous lender and ends up living on the street with her three children. Another suffers a crippling accident and never shakes the bitterness of his loss. A third wins the lottery only to be murdered by a burglar a month later. There are no morals to Metathron's stories, and the people it chooses usually fail utterly to rise to the challenge to become heroes.

Description

Metathron can take on many appearances, depending on what will most motivate its victim to heed the message it brings. If the recipient is likely to accept a supernatural event, Metathron may appear as an angelic being clad in a garment of glorious light and pronouncing a message that changes his life or as the ghost of a dead loved one who whispers accusations of foul play in his ear and begs for justice. For those who are less likely to accept such otherworldly visitors, the messenger instead creates a vivid dream that encourages the victim to take the desired action.

Most often, however, Metathron takes the shape of a stranger whose words and actions change the course of the victim's life. It might be the drug addict who murders the victim's husband, the sycophant who turns her ambition into hubris, or the doctor who delivers the bad news.

Viewed in Twilight or with Mage Sight, Metathron is a tall humanoid made of golden light and clad in crimson robes that blow in an absent breeze. This is also the form it assumes if a mage summons it — whether deliberately

or by exhibiting excessive hubris within the messenger's awareness.

Pride attracts Metathron to a victim more than any other vice, and mages are legendary for it. The messenger delights in issuing false prophecies to those who try to read the future, but it is most likely to appear to a mage who uses Fate to avoid all possible misfortune. While not a Paradox manifestation in itself, Metathron often appears to a mage whose arrogant use of Fate magic recently caused a powerful backlash. Either way, one dramatic manifestation is usually all Metathron must make to set a mage's feet on a road to destruction.

Secrets

Metathron is alone in the Fallen World, forever exiled by its acts of rebellion and the widening chasm that separates it from Arcadia. The Guardians of the Veil accounts concerning Metathron note it has become more attuned to manifestations of Paradox. Where once it only rarely appeared to mages who used Fate recklessly to acquire great wealth, it manifests at least once a year to a mage immediately after a magical backlash. The Guardians of the Veil in the Chicago Consilium worry that the spirit has allied itself with Abyssal beings.

Metathron doesn't know it, yet, but Chooser of Heroes has sent more messengers into the Fallen World to track down and destroy Metathron. Needle, a Thyrus Guardian of the Veil in Seattle, recently reported meeting two of these servants — a messenger of poetic justice and a messenger of hope — and claims they alluded to the presence of at least one other messenger with the same goal. Like Metathron, they must work through mortal intermediaries to achieve their goal, and like their master, they have no interest in what happens to these heroes once they are no longer entangled in the messengers' plots, so any epic confrontation between the messengers will certainly have far more victims and casualties than heroes and villains.

Rumors

"The Woeful Angel is a spirit of Fate that appears to mortals and mages alike immediately before disaster strikes. The most telling example of its handiwork is the story of Job, but any well-known tragic hero could just as easily be the messenger's plaything."

If Job existed, his story is a typical result of the tragic messages Chooser of Heroes once sent Metathron to deliver. Most of its handiwork in the last few centuries has received no notice except for an occasional footnote.

"No matter what form it takes, Metathron can be driven away by asking personal questions of whatever persona it adopts. Don't



*ever take
bad news
from a stranger
at face value. Find out
the messenger's name and interests.
Metathron can't even feign small talk."*

Metathron's disguises are only skin deep, and it isn't good at improvising. It cannot answer questions about anything not related to its message, so while these questions won't actually drive it away, it can warn the victim that she is dealing with Metathron.

"Metathron is bound by its own nature to grant a single wish to anyone who heeds its message and triumphs over the hardships it creates."

Metathron has no interest in rewarding recipients of its message under any circumstances, but nevertheless, Arcadian law demands that those who triumph in spite of tragedies created by the messenger's pronouncements receive some reward. This was much more common when Chooser of Heroes handpicked recipients it knew would rise triumphantly from hardship. Though Metathron picks victims it hopes will never earn a reward, it must still grant one to a worthy recipient.

Depending on the hardships the victim overcame, this might be just about any moderate reward that reflects increasing knowledge, humility, wisdom, power, or wealth. Reasonable awards include a few points of Arcane Experience, a new rote, a minor Imbued Item (1–2 dots; Metathron can't create these items, but it can lead a mage to them), or one or two dots of a Merit such as Destiny, Dream, or

Resources. If the experience was especially humbling, it might even justify a one to four point Experience discount on increasing Wisdom by one dot.

Metathron

Rank: 3

Attributes: Power 9, Finesse 9, Resistance 7

Willpower: 16

Essence: 20 (20 max)

Initiative: 16

Defense: 9

Speed: 28

Size: 6

Corpus: 13

Influences: Tragedy 3

Story Hooks

- Metathron delivers a message to one of the characters, whether in response to a Paradox involving Fate or a failed degeneration roll. Unless it is responding to a major Paradox, it most likely manifests as a mortal stranger. The messenger's form may be subtle, but the message it delivers is not: one of the most powerful and beloved mages in the local Consilium is a spy and traitor.

Whether or not the victim immediately chooses to investigate the accusation, the power of the message works against her, and every action she takes has exaggerated consequences. Somehow, the spy knows the character knows and takes actions to silence her — from threats against friends and family to blackmail to actual violence. Worse, anyone who could actually help the victim refuses to believe the traitor is capable of any bad behavior. The victim is on her own against an enemy who can crush her like an insect if he catches her.

- The characters get involved in an investigation into the mysterious death of a mage. Preliminary examination indicates a meteorite flew through the victim's opening garage door in the middle of the day as he was driving off on an errand and struck the vehicle's gas tank such that the car exploded, killing him — a freak accident so remarkable that it makes getting struck by lightning seem ordinary. There's no obvious sign of foul play, however, and the only trace of magical manipulation is the lingering aura of a minor Fate spell — a typical casting of the rote the Butterfly Effect (Fate 2). Either the victim died in a manner improbable enough to call an act of God, or whoever killed him did an impressive job of hiding his tracks.

Just when the characters begin running out of ideas for leads, an anonymous letter reveals that a group of Scelesti summoned and bound Metathron to arrange the deaths of enemy mages. If they follow this lead, the characters encounter a series of obstacles and setbacks that have a much more obvious supernatural origin, though the mages and spirits responsible avoid direct confrontation for as long as possible. This actually makes it fairly easy to trace the attacks to their source, leading to a final showdown with the Scelesti.

Metathron wearied of its service and delivered a message to its captors, marking them for a futile last stand against people who would bring them to justice. The characters are the fulfillment of Metathron's message, not the recipients of it, so they get no Arcadian reward. However, they solved the mysterious murder and brought the killers to justice, so they probably won't walk away completely unrewarded.

- One of the characters uses magic to kill someone whom she feels, rightly or wrongly, deserves to die. Metathron appears to the mage in one of its guises and offers her a magnanimous gift. The spirit will give her the power to kill anyone she believes deserves death within one week, so long as she knows the victim's true name and current approximate location.

If she accepts this offer, Metathron fulfills it by delivering messages to the mage's victims. The messenger even grants requests for especially colorful methods of death. As long as the mage (or another dupe who accepts the offer) regularly uses the power it grants her to kill people, Metathron remains her loyal servant. As it harvests more Essence from those killed by its message, Metathron grows greedy for more victims. If the mage succumbs to the messenger's pressure, she eventually reaches the point of condemning several people to death each day.

Numina: Countermagic, Discorporation, Fate Attunement, Materialize, Muse of Tragedy

Countermagic: Metathron can use this Numen as reflexive countermagic against Fate and Spirit magic (including covert spells) targeted on it or on the effects of one of its messages. Metathron spends 1 Essence and the Storyteller rolls Power + Finesse. If its successes equal or exceed those of the spell, the spell is countered.

Fate Attunement: Metathron is continually aware of the use of Fate magic near it. It can sense the use of Fate magic by any mage within 10 miles as long as it either created a Paradox or resulted in the loss of Wisdom. In other circumstances, its range is limited to its line of sight. It is otherwise identical to the Prime 1 spell Supernal Vision (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 221).

Muse of Tragedy: Metathron can deliver a message that creates tremendous hardship for the recipient. It can weave tragedies with the skill of a mage with Fate 5, mimicking spells such as Forge Destiny or Forge Doom (p. 159 of **Mage: The Awakening**). Spend 1 Essence and roll Power + Finesse. Metathron can only deliver one such message per scene.

Metathron uses its countermagic to negate magical attempts to thwart its machinations. However, even the most terrible message can be turned from tragedy into triumph by a sufficiently clever and motivated recipient. A character set on the path of the tragic hero might avoid destruction by repenting or by tricking a rival into willingly accepting the message Metathron gave to her. A character who falls on hard times may ignore his hardship to ease the suffering of others. However dangerous or difficult the quest, the recipient of Metathron's message can still achieve it, especially if she has the help of a cabal who knows whose message they are fighting.

Ban: While Metathron's influence can be devastating, it suffers several significant limitations. First, it can only negatively influence the fates of those it encounters directly. Second, it always influences the victim's fate indirectly, and a sufficiently tenacious or clever victim can overcome even the most terrible pronouncement. Third, it cannot exert influence over anyone who cannot see and hear it — whether by means of Mage Sight or because it has manifested. Finally, it can never use this power to influence the same person twice.

THE INCOMPLETE WANDERER: MICHAEL WECHSLER

I'm in acquisitions.

Michael Wechsler

ALIASES: Michael Strauss; Michael Esser; Mikhail Vorich

Deserter Capt. VORICH of the Soviet 23rd Army under Gen. ZHUKOV surrendered to German soldiers of the X Corps of the 16th Army night of 19 Sept 1941. Photograph of prisoner attached: note extensive tattooing on both arms and to collarbone. Prisoner claimed to have detailed information about Soviet defenses. Demanded to speak with FM VON LEEB personally; when refused, agreed to share his information with "servants" of Col. RICHTER of SS. Prisoner claimed to be personally acquainted with Col. RICHTER.

Upon Col. RICHTER's arrival at interrogation facility, prisoner VORICH became violently enraged and overpowered two guards to attack RICHTER. Col. RICHTER escaped the attack; prisoner VORICH escaped X Corps HQ and has not been seen since.



Michael Strauss — subject has multiple aliases (see attachment and photographs). Apparently a compulsive hoarder, Strauss stole several valuable works (files #46801, 47119, 47125-9 inclusive) during the Soviet liberation of Majdanek, near Lubin, Poland in July 1944. Apparently a deserter from the Red Army.

First post-war records have him in East Berlin in November, 1963. Through unknown means, Strauss was able to traverse the Berlin Wall repeatedly at least through 1970. In February 1970 Strauss moved to London and pawned works described in files above. Three items above were recovered from fence, who could not provide Strauss's whereabouts.

(p. 1 of 7)

DARING JEWEL THIEF ESCAPES POLICE CUSTODY

NYPD thought they had finally cornered him. A blond-haired, blue-eyed, tattooed jewel thief who has been terrorizing Manhattan for months now was finally spotted in Central Park, apparently casing a nearby condo. Keen-eyed New Yorker Mabel Green called police around 5:30 last night, and within minutes several of New York's finest had arrived.

"There was a brief chase," said Lieutenant Angela Cole, "and we got him cuffed and back to our squad cars."

Unfortunately, NYPD beat cops let the thief, responsible for almost half a million in heists so far, out of their sight. Within seconds he was gone.

"We'll get him," Lt. Cole reassured nervous New Yorkers, "we'll get him."

Background

Gerhard Richter, described in those Nazi documents, is dead, and has been dead for 40 years. But Wechsler was created with only two purposes: protecting his creator from Gerhard Richter, and killing Gerhard Richter. Richter is dead. Wechsler's creator, Konstantinov, is also dead. For 40 years, Wechsler has walked the Earth without a soul and without a purpose. To some extent, Michael Wechsler's primary goal in life is to *discover* a goal in life.

Wechsler operates according to some hard-coded rules. These behaviors and abilities were encoded in his flesh when Konstantinov created him.

- He's always in "threat detection" mode. He does not respond well to high-fives, playful punches on the shoulder, strangers staring at him from across the street, and so on. If confronted with violence or threats of violence he does his best to incapacitate his attackers and escape as soon as possible.

- He can't even try to kill himself (he gave it a shot back in 1999, but he wasn't even able to set up a Rube Goldberg contraption to end his life).

- Every few days he feels a compulsion to scavenge food. This is a result of his creation during the starvation in Leningrad. Once he collects a few cubic feet of various foodstuffs, he returns it to his home and keeps it until it rots away.

- He can sense magical items from as far as half a mile away. Once he detects such an item, he feels compelled to acquire it and squirrel it away in a safe place. Wechsler believes Konstantinov gave him that ability for two reasons: to protect Konstantinov against other mages, and to extend Konstantinov's own artifact holdings.

Description

Michael Wechsler looks like an ordinary man. He's in good shape, and appears to be in his early 20s — blond, blue eyes, clean-shaven. His eyes, though, are sunken in his head just a little too far. He has a hollow look about him, as though he has just received devastating news. He usually wears dress shirts and jeans — the dress shirts buttoned all the way up and down, in order to conceal the extensive quasi-Atlantean tattoos that cover his midriff and arms.

Wechsler interacts with men and women more or less the same way. His sex drive wasn't of high importance to his creator and, though biologically male, Wechsler is functionally neuter.

Secrets

Michael Wechsler, as he now calls himself, is a magical construct. He is a homunculus of the Soviet mage Gyorgy Konstantinov. Konstantinov began to create a homunculus

as a weapon of last resort when his magical foresight gave him some inkling of the death and destruction coming to Leningrad. He called the homunculus "Vorich" and assigned it the task of killing Gerhard Richter even beyond Konstantinov's own demise (see p. 55 for more on their ongoing duel).

Wechsler was completed during the Siege of Leningrad in 1941, and had little self-awareness during his early "life." While he did not need to eat, he did scavenge for food for Konstantinov during the siege. When Konstantinov became aware that Richter, as part of the SS, was approaching the city, he assigned Wechsler to infiltrate the German lines and kill Richter.

Other Weapons

Wechsler was by no means the only weapon that Konstantinov created in his quiet war against Richter. Nor are the Ludin sisters (see p. 55) the only tool Richter used against Konstantinov. Storytellers are encouraged to come up with their own magical weapons for the pair, but below are a few others known to exist.

- For psychic defense, Konstantinov created a number of living psychic landmines — children kidnapped at a young age, most of their senses and minds ripped away, and subjected to inhuman levels of pain. Any mage using mental awareness to probe the location of one of these "landmines" could be crippled by echoes of the children's pain.

- Richter, an Acanthus, arranged for the theft of several of Konstantinov's most powerful Artifacts. He then projected them into the "far future." At that time, the "far future" was the early 21st century. Some of those Artifacts (including a knife that can cut through emotional ties and a ring that allows its wearer to go months without sleep) returned to the current timeline in Berlin just a few years ago.

- Thirteen mosquitoes, each trapped in a separate piece of amber. When the amber is broken, the mosquito returns to life and flies toward the target that the breaker names. The mosquito withdraws a pristine sample of blood from the target and returns the blood to its master. The mosquito subsequently dies, but the master has a powerful sympathetic link to the target.

In the decades since the end of World War II, Michael Wechsler has traveled the globe. He can't help but hunt for magical items, and as he enters his seventh decade doing so, he has gotten to be *extremely* good at it. As might be imagined, he has made dozens of enemies. Thus far he has beaten most of these foes by outliving them — but a few Life masters he has robbed are still going strong, and there was that vampire in West Berlin in '81....

He has kept only a very few items for his own use. His compulsions only force him to find them and take them back to his home. Once he has acquired them he loses interest in them. Mages who visit his home might be stunned to find powerful pieces of magical hardware laying in a pile at the bottom of a closet. He might even be willing to sell an item to the right mage — but if he does so, he'll be hard-pressed to keep from stealing it back.

At this point, Wechsler's primary goal is to eliminate the "programmed" behaviors described above. Unfortunately, the people who would be most likely to have the ability to help him are mages, and he tends to alienate mages with his uncontrollable urges to collect Artifacts.

Wechsler's programmed behaviors are his greatest weakness. Mages who are aware of Wechsler's irrational compulsions may be able to use them against him. For instance, once the players' cabal realizes that Wechsler is compelled to stalk and take magical items that he detects, they may be able to draw him into an ambush by sacrificing a relatively minor item.

Rumors

"There's a Nazi war criminal in town who has stashed away dozens of treasures stolen from Jews during the war."

Israeli and Wiesenthal Center Nazi hunters know what Wechsler looks like, though his identity is not well understood and few would believe that he has aged so little since the war. While Wechsler does have quite a few trinkets hidden away, they weren't stolen from Jews.

"There's a very talented jewel thief passing through town. He has hit the homes of three different very wealthy locals, and one museum, and has taken only the most precious pieces from their collections."

This rumor might come from a police contact — it is true on the surface, but the "jewelry" in question consists of magical Artifacts.

Wechsler has stashes of items all over the world. Most of them have just one or two pieces of magical property. They are secure (per Sanctum 4 or so) and are not well-known as belonging to Wechsler himself. One of Wechsler's most prized possessions is a small cigar box enchanted with Space magic such that its contents are hidden in an extradimensional space. The box's inside isn't unusually large — but it isn't in our ordinary space, making it far harder to scry or perceive with magical senses (apply a -4 to all attempts to find the box with magic). The box contains another

Artifact (something of the Storyteller's creation)

"Gangbangers in the Midtown precinct thought they'd roll up this tattooed foreigner they ran into a few nights ago, but he killed three of them and crippled the fourth while escaping. He is still at large."

This is Wechsler's combat conditioning kicking in. As described elsewhere, he is not capable of ignoring threats, and it is difficult for him to respond to threats with less than lethal force. The Storyteller should remember that Wechsler was created in a besieged and starving war zone, and created to help keep his master alive.

Michael Wechsler, Homunculus

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

Story Hooks

- The characters come into the possession of an unusual goblet — perhaps at a yard sale, antique shop, or while committing crimes in pursuit of other goals. Regardless, Wechsler believes this goblet has echoes of the Holy Grail, which he believes might grant him a soul. He'd try to steal it anyway.
- Characters — possibly Mysterium mages — who are looking for magical items eventually learn about this oddly tattooed Russian that might be willing to part with an intriguing bit of enchanted jewelry. They meet the Russian at a neutral location and pay dearly but fairly for the trinket. The object (whether Artifact or imbued item) is legitimate and works as described. Within three days, however, Wechsler cases their Sanctum, determines the best time to rob them, and steals the jewelry back. He does so while invisible, but any cabal worth its salt should be able to use a variety of perception magics to figure out that it's Wechsler. If they chase him down, Wechsler insists he had no choice but to take the item, but cannot explain why.
- Wechsler wants to be free of his programming, and is searching for a way to free his mind. Unfortunately, he chooses a mentor poorly, and winds up brainwashed by the Seers of the Throne. He clashes with the characters while doing the bidding of the local Ministry — can the cabal free him?

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Investigation (Casing) 2, Medicine 1, Occult 3

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Drive 2, Firearms 2, Larceny (Breaking and Entering) 4, Stealth 2, Weaponry (Knives) 3

Social Skills: Expression 1, Intimidation 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 1

Merits: Brawling Dodge, Danger Sense, Fighting Style: Boxing 4, Language (Russian, English, German), Quick Healer, Unseen Sense (Artifacts)

Willpower: 7

Morality: 3 (see sidebar)

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 7

Defense: 4

Speed: 13

Health: 9

Armor: 3 (see below)

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool	Special
Konstantinov's Knife	3(L)	11	(see below)

Supernatural Powers:

- **Inhuman Resilience:** Wechsler's skin is remarkably resistant to attacks, giving him three points of natural armor.

- **Regeneration:** Once per scene, Wechsler may spend one point of Willpower and instantly heal up to six points of bashing damage or three points of lethal (or a combination thereof — use up two bashing points for every one lethal point). When he does this, the tattoos nearest to the wounds that heal flare blood-red.

- **Invisibility:** Wechsler's tattoos allow him to become invisible, per the Forces 3 spell "Personal Invisibility" (p. 169 of **Mage: The Awakening**). Wechsler must use Mana to power this effect (drawing upon an Artifact such as Kupa's Earring, as he cannot hold or channel Mana himself), but he is not affected by Paradox.

Magical Items:

Wechsler carries and uses some of the most effective Artifacts and Enchanted Items that he has collected over the years. There are three particular items of note; Storytellers may wish to give him others.

Kupa's Earring: This simple diamond earring (Imbued Item •••••) provides Wechsler both with magical defenses and Mana. It contains the spell "Counterspell Prime" (p. 222 of **Mage: The Awakening**). Roll five dice for this effect. Kupa's Earring also holds 11 points of Mana.

Konstantinov's Knife: This curved knife — more like a kukri — certainly predates Wechsler's creator, but Wechsler

Morality and Created Beings

Michael is not human. He has no soul and therefore does not approach morality (or Morality) the same way a human being does. He approximates human behavior because it is in his programming to do so, and Konstantinov's instructions prevent him from performing truly heinous acts. One of the things he wishes to gain by escaping the programming, in fact, is an understanding of why humans behave the way they do in moral matters.

On a related note, readers who have access to **Promethean: The Created** might notice that Michael bears a strong resemblance to the protagonists of that game. If the Storyteller wishes, the rules for Prometheans could easily be applied to Michael. True, mages can't normally create Prometheans under the rules, but exceptions happen.

thinks of it as being his old master's knife first and foremost. This is a true Artifact. Wechsler knows that, since he isn't a mage, the knife shouldn't work for him, and he has no idea why it does. Konstantinov's Knife (Artifact •••••) provides its bearer with the ability to cast Honing the Form (Life 3, **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 186). The Storyteller rolls five dice for this spell's effect. Konstantinov's Knife carries 11 points of Mana. In combat, it functions as an impossibly dangerous knife, with a damage bonus of 3L.

Coin of the Ferryman: This single coin (Artifact ••••••) has an ancient Death resonance. By itself its powers are limited. A character who touches the face of a Coin of the Ferryman to the flesh of another character can inflict one level of aggravated damage. Using the Coin in this manner during combat is difficult, for the coin must touch flesh and not mere clothing. See "Touching an Opponent," p. 157 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. An attacker takes a -3 modifier on his Brawl roll (in addition to the target's Defense) to touch his target with the Coin, and on a dramatic failure drops it. The Coin of the Ferryman also repels ghosts at a distance of two yards, as per the Space ••• spell "Ban," specifically targeting ghosts. It is rumored — and Wechsler believes — that there is a second Coin of the Ferryman, and if both coins are brought together they provide much greater power over Death magic. The Coin holds 12 points of Mana.

THE STEADFAST FAMILIAR: PELLAX

I will serve you as I have always served your line.

Aliases: Pal, Lexie

Background

Many mages form magical bonds with small spirits, sharing energy, favors, protection and support. In most cases, these are very personal connections forged between the individual and the spirit. Occasionally, however, the bond is inherited from a mentor or even an ancestor who, upon his death, passes the care of his familiar to his student or descendent. This can result in a young mage “inheriting” a familiar that is more powerful than one she might have taken herself, which has both advantages and disadvantages. Stronger familiars, in theory, offer greater support, skills and knowledge than a mage might gain with a newly forged spirit-bond. But in such a situation, the potential is strong for the mage-familiar relationship to slowly shift towards one of spirit-thrall instead.

For almost two millennia, Pellax has “served” the Prosapia line (see Cadere, p. 30). Unlike most familiars who, upon the death of their Awakened partners, go back to the spirit wilds to live out their existences, Pellax is inherited from one generation to the next. In the past, claiming the familial familiar was a sign of prestige within the line, a near-surety that the mage would take a strong role in guiding the family’s activities and goals for the next generation. As time passed, however, something began to shift. The familiar spirit, bolstered by centuries of exposure to arcane secrets and a steady supply of Essence, grew in size, knowledge and power. While it was careful to maintain a public façade of faithful servant, as the spirit’s might increased in direct proportion to the Prosapia’s waning, it began to nudge the line along to its inevitable demise.

Description

When manifested in the material world, Pellax always takes on some sort of large canine or lupine form, notable for its glowing yellow eyes. When serving its “master,” it manifests as a huge mastiff with gentle eyes, heavy jowls and massive paws. It can also appear in a much more feral form, resembling a dire wolf, when the need strikes. Both manifested forms share the same traits, although their cosmetic appearances are quite different.

In the Shadow or when viewed in Twilight, it still prefers a four-legged form. Unhampered by material constraints, however, it takes on a body of swirling fog, punctuated only by a pair of glowing gold embers and row upon row of ichor-coated dagger-length teeth.

Regardless of the location, Pellax tries to underplay its own strength, knowing that having mortals underestimate its might gives it many more opportunities for causing harm and going unblamed for any mishaps that befall those who would command it.

Pellax has “served” a mage lineage for centuries, and despite its traitorous actions, has developed a long habit both of obeying the commands of mages and of looking for ways to exploit those commands (or the nebulous spaces between them) to bring harm to those who would issue them. It has also grown fairly lazy in the pursuit of “food,” having traded service for Essence for generations. Given the opportunity, it gladly plays the role of obedient servant in exchange for energy, especially if such a trade gives it the opportunity to learn a mage’s weak spots for future exploitation.

Story Hooks

- Someone — or something — has been hunting down local Proximi. Most victims look as if they’ve been run to ground, then disemboweled when they collapsed. The most recent victim survived, however, by Awakening as a Moros as the creature toyed with his entrails. The newly Awakened mage managed to surprise the creature, who he described as a gigantic wolf, and chase him away, but how long will it be before the monster attacks again?
- Cadere sends Pellax on ahead to scout out potential brides. Pellax takes the opportunity to find women who might be willing to acquiesce to his “master’s” attentions, but will ultimately spell his doom. If a player’s character would fit the bill, perfect.
- When familiars in the local area begin to disappear, characters must investigate before their own fall victim. All signs point to a newcomer to the local Spirit Wilds, a massive dire wolf who has recently staked territory there. But the creature doesn’t manifest in the physical world, and do the Awakened really want to brace the proverbial wolf in its own den?

Secrets

Pellax is, at least in part, responsible for the Prosapia family's demise. For centuries it has subtly influenced the thinking and behavior of the family elders, nudging them here or there with "wise" counsel. It has also used its own Numina, which were bolstered over more than 2000 years by the family's own support and protection, to ensure that the line eventually was whittled down, diseased and gradually made impotent by their own desperation.

Knowing that as long as a member of the Prosapia remained alive it was bound to serve their will, Pellax has everything to gain by the family's demise, and now as a Rank 3 spirit, it has little to lose by releasing itself from the centuries-old bond between it and the family.

It recognizes that the Awakened are a strong potential source of power and protection, and may seek out other connections with mages, attempting to appear as a much less powerful spirit than it truly is in order to mislead others into believing it is weak and in need of protection. In truth, however, it is both extremely potent and utterly selfish in its goals and desires, and seeks only to foster its own well being.

Rumors

"I've got nothing against familiars. I don't use them myself, but I know folks who do, and it works out just fine for them. Heck, some of my best friends have familiars. But... there's something wrong with that one. I've seen how it looks at him when he's turned the other way. I don't think it's the goody-goody companion he seems to think it is. I wouldn't want to be alone with it, I can tell you that."

Pellax would never admit to being anything but a faithful servant of its mage-companion. Years of being used as a tool, however, are enough to make any powerful being resentful, and Pellax has had centuries to build up its quiet resentment of mages in general and its "owners" in specific.

"Be careful messing with spirits, especially if you're considering binding yourself to one. I heard about some mage that picked out a big, scary-looking dog-spirit. Good choice, right? Yeah, except he didn't know that this spirit was the pet — servant, maybe? I don't know how it works — for a pack of werewolves. The beasts haven't tracked him down yet, but he's sure feeling the effects. Watch him pant when he gets around women, and you'll see what I mean."

While Cadere's attitude towards women and reproduction are, of course, linked to Pellax and its influence on the family, Pellax was never the totem for a werewolf pack. Even if he was, he has served the family for so long that the werewolves in question would be long dead. Of course, werewolves have a rich oral tradition of storytelling, so it's not impossible that a pack might recognize Pellax from an old fireside tale.

"It was about a week ago. Me and some friends had been out, and the place closed up round about 2. I didn't have cash for a cab, but it was only a few blocks home, so I just hoofed it. I was cutting down an alley, when I heard this growl. At first I thought it was a stray or something, then the... thing... turned my direction. It was like a dog, but huge. Its eyes glowed, like some sorta creep-show monster, and... I swear to God, it talked. Something about "you'll do..." I didn't stick around to find out what it meant, I just ran. I've had nightmares about that thing every night since. The weirdest part is I keep finding myself driving to that same alley, even when I'm heading someplace totally different. I don't want to. It just kind of... happens."

Pellax is a sentient being that not only has its own goals, desires and personality quirks, but can develop new focuses and even obsessions as it encounters new situations and individuals. Like any powerful individual, it may see others it encounters as challenges to be overcome, meaningless distractions, or even pawns and tools to help it achieve its goals.



Rank: 3

Attributes: Power 6, Finesse 8, Resistance 7

Willpower: 13

Essence: 20 (max 20)

Initiative: 15

Defense: 8

Speed: 22

Size: 4

Corpus: 11

Influences: Pride 3

Numina: Animal Control, Befuddle (as the Mind 4 spell, pp. 213–213, **Mage: The Awakening**), Compulsion, Contagion (as the Life 4 spell, p. 188, **Mage: The Awakening**), Discorporation, Living Fetter ("Master"), Materialize

Ban: Must obey the letter of the law in regards to orders from its direct "family." Loopholes or non-specific orders leave Pellax a great deal of leeway, and when faced with directly contradictory orders, it must follow the most recently given.

THE RAVAGED: JON, MARIA AND THEODORE

It burns deep down inside, it consumes me, it pulls me, it drives me. Can you feel the fire?

Background

Three scientists, Jonathan Marks, Maria Finnley and Theodore Watkins, were asked to sign on a private contract for weapons research. They didn't know who was backing the project only that they were chosen because they were the best minds in the field. They entered their work facility and were introduced to Marvin Guy and Joshua Stevens, two Obrimos looking for the key to Archmastery. Day in and day out, the researchers worked with their mage bosses to combine science with Forces. Though they did not know what they were working on, it soon became apparent that this job was something out of the ordinary. The scientists could not forget the Paradoxes and the breaches of reality they witnessed. They slowly descended into madness. The least of these bizarre occurrences were electrical outages in the best of weather, sudden severe storms within the area with no warning, and what seemed like ephemeral poltergeists harassing the researchers. They also witnessed energies that were mostly unexplainable by modern science. Blocks of ice changing to plasma within mere seconds, extremely hot fires morphing into riotous sound and explosions without visible cause were daily events for the three.

At the culmination of the experiments, hubris got the best of the mages. They tested their most vulgar magic before the naked eyes of the researchers over and over again. During a long battery of testing, a phenomenon occurred that will be imprinted on the researcher's souls for eternity — a break in reality appeared right before them in their cramped office. As they watched in utter horror, a creature the size of a refrigerator tore its way into the office. It was stark blackness and angles with no discernable features other than a large gaping maw and nine four-fingered appendages. It barely seemed to notice their cowering forms as it ripped the door off its hinges and stalked down the hall. Within moments, fighting could be heard out in the hall between the two mages and the creature. Marvin blasted the monster with the devastating forces of fire, which only served to engulf the building in flames. The scientists were helpless to act — they could do no more than watch as the mages fought for their lives with the Abyssal spirit between them and the only way to freedom. After a grueling battle, the spirit devoured the mages who gave it flesh through their careless use of magic. It was then that the creature took notice of the trapped scientists as they burned. The spirit offered the scientists a deal to survive, and they all agreed to take it. None of them are sure of what happened after that, but they all claim to have seen the face of God.

They survived the fire, but not as they would have hoped. They were no longer truly human. Instead, they had become something vile and grotesque. They named themselves the Ravaged, because the burns they sustained had melted the flesh from their bodies. When they awoke in the burned-out facility they felt no pain, but their bodies bore the scars of their incineration. Deep inside they could still feel the fire burning, as though it started within and threatened to escape from each and every pore of their bodies. After some time, they learned a way to release themselves from their anguish — by letting it come out from them as energies around them. Each one watched as the other set their surroundings on fire, forged fields of electricity or created painful sounds. They searched for a release from the pain and horror that they were being forced to endure, wanting nothing more than to return to a normal life.

Each One Has a Home

After waking to their new fates, the Ravaged became certain that they needed a base of operations out of which to work. They decided to use the research facility for discussions and anything else they needed to do in private. Unbeknownst to them, the tragedy that occurred at the facility awoke its spirit and it has grown in power ever since. This spirit was tainted by the large amount of destructive energies released on its premises. It yearned to create the energies that were used to bring it into being. It watched as the Ravaged discovered their powers and decided they would be adequate implements to fulfill its desires. It first contacted them by making a broken computer monitor come to life. As the Ravaged watched, words and phrases coalesced into sentences. The spirit told them it could help them gain enough power to help them reforge their shattered lives. Within moments, it had Jonathan convinced it was God, though the rest were uncertain of what to think of their strange benefactor. Yet, as long as they satiated its desires, it held to its end of the bargain.

The devastation that occurred in the facility warped the spirit, and its properties came to resemble that of the Ravaged. It can start fires within its bounds, and can cause mages within its range to suffer more severe consequences for using vulgar magic.

Long Way from Human

After a few weeks of adjusting to their new forms, they decided to brave the world again. They ventured into town covered from head to toe in ragged clothes with wrappings over their wounds. Everyone they encountered greeted them

with frightened glances and turned backs. Questions were answered in cold clipped phrases, and they were shunned for being different. Maria went to the library hoping to find clues to their new existence. As she glanced through the racks, she saw a woman staring at her. Eventually, Maria tried speaking to the woman, who cursed and spat at her, then ran away. Rage filled Maria equalled only by the brutal surge of the burning energies inside her. She had been a respected scientist, and was now being shunned by society. She couldn't contain her anger and bolts of lightning arched across the building striking people and books alike. In short order the books erupted into flames. Maria shuffled from the building with the rest of the survivors saddened by the sudden realization of how much of a monster she had become. The loss of humanity fueled the desire to be normal, and to leave all their pain behind, which drove the three to desperate measures. Eventually they happened upon a dark ritual for the purpose of becoming more human. With the help of the facility spirit, they developed it into something workable. The ritual involved flaying the flesh from a living person, then donning that flesh for themselves. The power of the spirit plus their warped magical powers allowed a seamless transition. The Ravaged would take over the lives of their victims, a morbid facade of normalcy. Unfortunately, the flesh of the mortal is weak. After a month, the flesh melted away from the scalding bodies of the Ravaged, and they were forced to perform their ritual again. Also, any time they released the energies inside of themselves, the heat of exertion would cause the skin suit to melt away. Realizing that they would be forced to kill over and over again, they started looking for a permanent cure.

Description

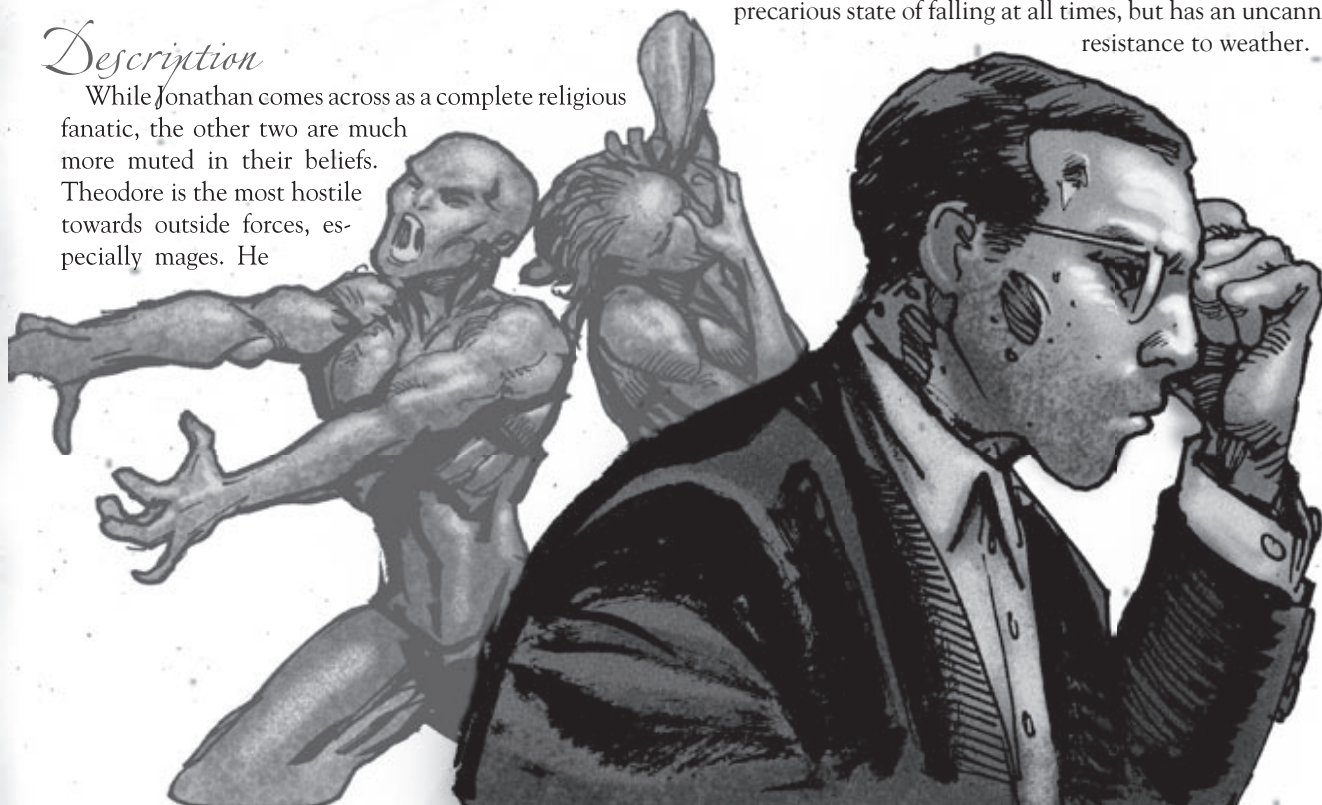
While Jonathan comes across as a complete religious fanatic, the other two are much more muted in their beliefs. Theodore is the most hostile towards outside forces, especially mages. He

has decided to make the best of his newfound power, and is even working to devise ways to gain more power. Maria has dedicated her life to the occult and to finding some kind of cure for their condition. She is more attuned to the magical world around her and is very likely to be open to discussions.

The Ravaged go about in society as whomever they decide to take over, meaning they could look like anyone at any time. Those that were friends or family members of the person being impersonated notice a change in behavior. Their mannerisms are different, the way they talk is different, and their long-term memories seem to be gone. They are described as acting weird or distant. They begin a path to personal ruin, sending all their money to foreign accounts and taking up love interests, often extramarital. The Ravaged want to enjoy life, and feel like normal people again, but they have no interest in actually pretending to be whomever they take over.

Without a flesh suit to make them look normal, they wear a visage of pain. Their bodies are burned, twisted and mutilated. Their muscles glow bright red through black burns and scabs covering their entire body like molten lava beneath charred flesh. Their eyes glow blood red as though the fire inside were threatening to pour from them.

The research facility itself resembles a large house that has been burned and gutted. The outside brick and stucco survived the fire, but are tinged black with soot. The roof and most of the insides of the building are burned timbers and charred remains. Its insides include the seared remains of mechanical equipment and computers, now nothing more than blackened relics. The building seems to be in a precarious state of falling at all times, but has an uncanny resistance to weather.



Secrets

Trauma of losing his life and being forced to live as a monster brought religion to Jonathan. He believes God has punished him for not believing in Him, and that he is His emissary to the rest of the world. Jonathan firmly believes God speaks with him on a regular basis and that if he continues to do His will, then his mortal soul will be saved and he will be delivered from his torment. Of course, he has no idea that his "God" is simply the spirit of the research facility using him. Jonathan fixates on the idea of godliness. He will not harm or take over the life of someone associated with God, be it a member of the clergy or an obviously (or convincingly) devout lay person.

Maria has devoted her time and energies to discovering some kind of cure. She does believe they are cursed beings, but she has no doubt that the only way to lift the curse is to do it themselves. The spirit of the facility backs her occult research. She has not revealed to Jonathan that the spirit is not a god of any kind. The spirit helped Maria develop the ritual they use to take over other people's lives. The power of the spirit allows the Ravaged to perform their ritual to look human. If they try to perform it somewhere else (they have not, as of yet, made the attempt), it simply fails. It also hints to her that mages were the cause of their demise, and so might be the path to a cure. Because she is able to sense magic when it is used, she seeks out mages in an attempt to learn from them, but she has been mostly unsuccessful.

Theodore is the only one that can remember most of what happened the fateful night that they were created, making him the most dangerous of the Ravaged. He has never told the other two about the pact they made with the Abyssal entity. The Abyssal creature granted them their powers, and made them each a vessel for bringing the Abyss closer to the Fallen World in exchange for their lives and their immortal souls. The only cure for their condition is death.

The spirit of the facility has a ravenous desire to create fire and the energies that wrought its initial destruction. Unfortunately, it is fettered to the facility and its close surrounding area, making it hard to seek out these energies. It tries to tempt anyone and anything that comes within its area of influence to create these energetic instances. It has a hold on the Ravaged and uses them to satiate its hungers by sending them out into the city to use their abilities. Their presence is the only thing actually holding the spirit to the facility. If the Ravaged were to die, the spirit of the facility would return to a dormant state. Born of destructive fires, it thrives on those kinds of forces and is weakened by some forms of creative forces. Healing in any form has become a ban for the spirit.

Rumors

"You know that old burned out house down the block? I heard it used to be a secret government facility and an experiment went bad and the entire thing burned down. Some people say

the experiments never stopped. Whatever caused the fire was some kind of breakthrough technology. You can still see lights in there at night, and sometimes you can see people coming and going. It's weird, though — during the day the place looks completely abandoned."

Either the spirit of the facility's activities or those of the Ravaged could lead to this rumor. The Ravaged spend some time at the facility to communicate with each other or with the spirit there, and to perform their monthly flaying ritual. The lights from those meetings could be the source of the rumor. More likely the small fires created by the spirit of the facility to lure people closer are the real culprits.

"I knew this guy once, he told me about this friend he had that joined a cult. He said they worshiped something pretty evil, and they made sacrifices to it. He told me they would find someone on the street, pull him into their lair and then kill them, all ritualistic like. He said they had these daggers that could carve flesh from bones, and they would string this guy up, and then cut all his skin off. Then they would bathe in his blood and eat his organs. My friend isn't really sure what happened to him, though. He said he started acting really strange for a bit, and then just disappeared."

Sleepers have a good chance of stumbling across the burned-out facility. The best way to deal with interlopers is to kill them. Of course, the spirit of the facility is trying to lure people to it to do its bidding, and it might even keep someone around long enough to set a few things around the city on fire.

"My brother works for the police department, and he said there were some really strange cases coming up. He mentioned finding mutilated body parts strewn about the highway. They think it was maybe some animal, but he definitely thinks they are human parts. His theory is that there is some cannibal out

Story Hooks

- Maria is attempting to perform her flaying ritual outside the confines of the research facility, but continuously meets with failure. The characters might happen across the remains of a failed attempt and may even catch a glimpse of the Ravaged fleeing the scene of the crime.

- The Ravaged come into the vicinity of the mages, and determine that stealing their identity will help them increase their time span within a given form (whether this assumption is true or not is up to the Storyteller). They kidnap and flay one of the mages alive, bringing the attention of the rest of the mage community.

- Fires have been occurring throughout the city. The resonances of ley lines throughout the city are changing to a swirling mass of reds, oranges and heat. All traces lead back to a burned down house in a residential district of the city.

there eating people up and throwing out the parts he isn't using. I think it's all a hoax."

The Ravaged have to get rid of the bodies of the people they flay somehow. For the most part, they simply hack them up and burn the remains. Every now and then the parts make their way off with wild animals. It is likely that these findings would be in close proximity to the burned-out facility.

Supernatural Powers of the Ravaged

All of the Ravaged have the two powers listed below. In addition, they each have their own unique abilities.

• **Abyssal Resonance:** The Ravaged count as Sleepers for the purposes of determining Paradox pools and improbable spells, though they do not suffer from Disbelief. Also, when a mage casts a spell that incurs a Paradox in the vicinity of a Ravaged, he cannot mitigate the Paradox effect by spending Mana or containing it as resistant bashing damage.

• **Thick Skin:** The scorched flesh of the Ravaged has hardened around its body. While it is horrible to look at, it offers a modicum of protection for them. The skin of the Ravaged works as armor and provides an armor rating of two. If the Ravaged dons a physical armor it stacks with his natural protection. The skin of a Ravaged does not erode from fire damage like a normal armor.

Jonathan Marks

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics (Physics) 2, Crafts (Engineering) 4, Medicine 3, Science 4

Physical Skills: Brawl (Boxing) 4, Larceny 2, Stealth 2

Social Skills: Expression 1, Intimidation 3, Persuasion 3

Merits: Brawling Dodge, Fast Reflexes 2, Fighting Style: Boxing 3, Resources 2

Willpower: 6

Virtue: Faith. Jonathan believes he has been touched by God and this colors his entire world-view.

Vice: Wrath. The fires that created each of the Ravaged still rage inside. This makes it harder to hold onto a temper.

Initiative: 8 (with Fast Reflexes)

Defense: 3

Speed: 12

Health: 9

Armor: 2

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Cleansing Flame	1(L)*	30	7	Fire

* Based on a fire the size of a torch, the size or intensity of the fire may alter the dice bonus to damage.

Supernatural Powers:

• **Cleansing Flame:** Jonathan can create fire within 30 feet of himself. The fire is completely under his control and he can direct it to move at his command. The Storyteller rolls Intelligence + Science and spends one of Jonathan's Willpower points to create a fire. One success indicates the fire is the size of a torch with a low heat; extra successes increase the size or intensity of the fire. If Jonathan commands the fire to engulf someone, the Storyteller rolls Manipulation + Science to move the fire. The attack ignores Defense, but armor applies as per normal. The fire created by cleansing flame does damage based on its size plus intensity (**World of Darkness Rulebook** p. 180).

• **Healing Light:** Jonathan has developed the ability to heal himself and the other Ravaged. One bashing or lethal wound is healed (the rightmost wound on the Health chart is healed first) for every success on an Intelligence + Medicine roll. If he is healing Maria or Theodore, he must touch them to convey the healing. Jonathan must spend a Willpower point to use Healing Light.

Maria Finnley

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 2, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics (Physics) 3, Investigation 4, Occult (Spirits) 2, Science 4

Physical Skills: Drive 2, Firearms 2, Stealth 2

Social Skills: Expression 2, Intimidation (Veiled Threats) 3, Streetwise 2

Merits: Ambidextrous, Resources 3

Willpower: 5

Virtue: Justice. People get what they have coming to them. Maria feels it is partly her duty to make sure that happens.

Vice: Greed. Maria hasn't lost her desire for new knowledge and discovery, it simply changed focus from desire for scientific acclaim to occult knowledge.

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 12

Health: 8

Armor: 2

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool
Electric Surge	0(L)	30	8
Colt M19	3	30/60/120	6

Supernatural Powers:

• **Electric Surge:** Maria has the ability to call electricity to her side. The Storyteller rolls Intelligence + Science to bring electrical energies from the surrounding area. She can

then direct the energies onto a target as a form of attack. The strike targets a person or thing as a targeted attack within 30 feet of her. Each success on a Dexterity + Science roll inflicts one point of lethal damage to the target. Worn armor provides no protection from this electrical attack, and magical armor only does if it is based on the Forces Arcanum. Maria must spend one Willpower point to use Electric Surge.

- **Sense Supernal:** Maria can see when Supernal magic is used around her. Anytime Supernal magic is used within 30 feet of her, the Storyteller rolls Wits + Composure as a reflexive action. On a success, she is able to determine that magic was used. Maria is unable to understand resonance or Arcana, and cannot directly pinpoint a person as a mage.

Theodore Watkins

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 5, Wits 2, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics (Physics) 4, Medicine (Emergency Care) 2, Science 5

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Firearms 2, Stealth 1, Weaponry 1

Social Skills: Expression 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge (Misdirection) 3

Merits: Encyclopedic Knowledge, Holistic Awareness, Resources 2

Willpower: 7

Virtue: Fortitude. Theodore made his deal with the Abyssal spirit knowing that death was the only alternative. He continues on his course with the same knowledge every day.

Vice: Greed. Theodore enjoys his newfound power and wants more.

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 10

Health: 8

Armor: 2

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool
Sonic Blast	0(B)	30	10
Colt M19	3	30/60/120	4

Supernatural Powers:

- **Light Control:** Theodore's control over energetic waves extends to light as well. He can bend the light around himself and anything he touches. This bending of light can

trick the eyes of those watching. He could make it seem that he is standing a few feet away from where he really is, or that he has completely disappeared. The effect lasts for one turn per success gained on an Intelligence + Science roll, and costs one Willpower point to activate.

- **Sonic Blast:** Theodore has a mastery of the noises that surround him. He can amplify or dampen noises within 30 feet of him. The amplification of sound can get loud enough to damage and possibly deafen those who hear it. Each success on an Intelligence + Science roll inflicts one point of bashing damage to all bystanders within 30 feet. This attack is a ranged attack, but neither Armor nor Defense provide protection from this attack. Subtract the highest Stamina rating in the area from the roll, however. For every point of damage taken in this way, the subjects are also deafened for a turn. Each subject is allowed a reflexive Stamina roll to reduce the number of turns deafened by one per success. Theodore is not affected by his own sound blast, but cannot choose to exclude allies within the area of effect.

Theodore can dampen any one sound within 30 feet of him as a reflexive action and a single success on an Intelligence + Science roll. Examples of this could be a single person's voice or footsteps, a single gunshot, or a small explosion. Theodore must spend one Willpower point any time he wishes to amplify or dampen a sound.

Izimu ("Fire Starter")

Rank: 4

Attributes: Power 10, Finesse 8, Resistance 9

Willpower: 19

Essence: 25 (max 25)

Initiative: 17

Defense: 10

Speed: 18

Size: 35 (large house)

Corpus: 44

Influence: Facility 2, Fire 2. *Izimu* can use its Influence to strengthen and change parts of the facility based on the needs of itself or the Ravaged. It also uses its fire influence for the Ravaged's skin flaying ritual.

Numina: Abyssal Resonance (see above), Blast, Cleansing Flame, Compulsion, Electrical Surge, Fetter, Harrow, Phantasm, Sonic Blast

Ban: If all three of the Ravaged are ever destroyed, the spirit immediately becomes dormant, and does not reawaken unless roused by magic or the building is set ablaze. The spirit suffers a -2 penalty to using its Influence or Numina on someone that has been healed in the same scene by magic or if the Medicine Skill is used to lessen healing time.

SHARD CROWS

Your magic is delicious, Daniel. Do you remember when I told you that I loved you at the lake? It was so long ago and I'm sure you have forgotten but I never did, Daniel. I love your magic, Daniel and I only need a little piece of your soul.

Background

Shard crows are a terrible affliction on mages, but even more so on the normal, defenseless humans who associate with them. These dark, flitting spirits use a mage's friends, business partners, and even lovers as tools to get close to the magic they need to survive.

Shard crows want soul stones, pieces of power and potential split off from a mage's soul. They will go to great lengths to steal a soul stone, or threaten, bribe or blackmail a mage into giving them one. They will even fight to secure a soul stone, though they would certainly prefer not to.

Description

Shard crows appear in their natural form in the Shadow, as black masses of feather and bare bone that loosely approximate a bird of the same name. Their beaks are curved and wickedly sharp, their talons thin and needle-like. They are not unusually small for crows, but they are difficult to keep in sight, as the edges of their feathers fade into blurs and wisps, fading into the shadows they prefer. Shard crows live in flocks of six to ten spirits, and they act in an eerie unison, as if they are connected in a sort of hive mind.

Shard crows are rarely seen in their natural form, however. If they are caught unprepared, they hide or flee. They make their preparations to invade a mage's life in areas where the Gauntlet is strong, even though it makes their own work harder. They value their own safety from spying willworkers far more than their own time and effort.

The usual scheme used by a flock of shard crows works like this: the crows find a likely mage, quite often by following a trail of resonance away from a particularly spectacular and vulgar display of magic. They spy on the mage for long enough to identify potential targets among his relatives or associates. On choosing the most likely target, the crows one by one slip through the Gauntlet and anchor themselves within their victim, each crow burrowing under a small section of the individual's soul to use as a shield from detection. When the crows are ready to make their move, they peel away their sections of the victim's soul, leaving the body empty and staggering, and reconstitute it as a disjointed mockery of the mage's loved one. They use this unhappy chimera to steal the mage's soul stone, to attack him, or as a bargaining chip to get what they want.

Shard crows spotted in the initial stages of their ploy flit away to find an easier target, or simply leave their target alone long enough for him to become complacent. Once

they have infiltrated someone's soul, they become difficult to spot casually. A mage who glances at a compromised friend with Mage Sight may not notice the skillfully hidden crows, as his friend's resonance is still his own, perhaps just a bit disturbed or diffuse. Nothing can hide for long from a mage's concentrated inspection, however; if the mage is provoked to suspicion, he will undoubtedly discover the crow infestation, and the crows must choose fight, flight or negotiation.

A mage fighting a flock of shard crows that is wearing a soul risks harming that soul in the battle. The flock may flee, in whole or in part, with bits of the soul, intending to ransom them. Finally, if the fight goes poorly enough that the crows fear for their existence, they abandon the soul, launching themselves back into the relative safety of the Shadow Realm. The constructed body falls apart in an upward cascade of black-winged forms that then disincorporate.

Secrets

Shard crows require a mage's soul stone to create more of their kind. When a flock acquires a soul stone, it carries it off deep into the Shadow Realm, makes a nest, and incubates it in a crude imitation of the creation of new life. After a time, the stone explodes, emitting a new, independent flock of shard crows. The mage's soul stone, and the magical potential it represents, is destroyed forever.

The few mages who have had run-ins with shard crows and are willing to admit to it have some speculations as to their origins. Some think of them as an unintended offspring of a curse cast on a soul stone, which somehow gained sentience. Others figure them to be Abyssal creatures, since their consumption and destruction of soul stones ultimately weakens the mages they steal from.

Rumors

"We got there as fast as we could when Johnson called for help, but by the time we got there his old lady was just dissolving into a pile of bugs and centipedes and stuff. I didn't sleep right for weeks."

Some sightings of creatures like shard crows describe them quite differently, though the spirits' goals and methods remain the same. Dark, skittering insect forms are described, fitting imagery for creatures that act with a hive mind.



"I saw Pedro wandering around downtown a few nights ago, stumbling and raving like he was completely drunk, but he didn't smell like liquor. I went to tell his sister he'd fallen off the wagon again, but when I got there, he was there, just sitting and staring at the TV. He's barely gotten up out of that chair, his sister says."

Shard crows wearing a soul body have to be careful not to be seen in the vicinity of their victim, or else it becomes painfully obvious to even the most dimwitted observer that something is terribly wrong.

"Shelley was completely screwed up in the head. She'd seen and done some horrible things, blown through too much magic. We didn't know anybody who could fix her, but Eric brought these spooky bird spirits in and they ripped the sick parts of her soul right out. She's better now. Mostly."

It's possible that shard crows could use their soul-stealing capabilities selectively, performing a sort of psychic surgery. This would be difficult to arrange, the cost would be quite high, and the possible "surgical complications" very dire. A chunk of a mage's soul might even act as a goetic demon if set loose (see page 323 of *Mage: The Awakening*).

Shard Crows

Shard crows have the ability to spend their Essence as a group. If a single crow does not have the Essence required to fuel a Numen, it borrows it from another member of the flock. A single crow is described below.

Rank: 1

Attributes: Power 1, Finesse 3, Resistance 1

Willpower: 7

Initiative: 4

Defense: 3

Speed: 14 (species factor 10; flight only)

Size: 2

Corpus: 3

Essence: 7

Armor: see below

Numina: Innocuous

- **Infiltrate:** This power allows shard crows to slip across the Gauntlet and hide within an individual's soul. Spend four Essence (total for the flock) per attempt and roll Power

Story Hooks

- Shard crows target a mage character, endangering a loved one. If the character puts up an able fight, the crows are eager to halt hostilities and make a deal: they need a soul stone, but it doesn't need to be *his* soul stone.

- A flock of shard crows has allied itself with a twisted mage, gaining a steady supply of Essence and a safe haven in exchange for harrying her foes. Shanda Tago is a powerful Thyrsus mage with a number of soul stones (possibly even one belonging to a player's character). She has no intention of returning the soul stones once the traditional three favors are granted — some thrall "contracts" have already expired. Instead, she dangles the soul stones in front of her flock of shard crows, promising them eventually more than just Essence in return for services. At some point, she will have to make good on her promises, or the flock will turn on her, perhaps seeking out her thralls for help.

- It takes time to hatch a soul stone. A soul stone stolen by shard crows is regained and reabsorbed by its creator — but has their dark essence tainted the stone? Jensen Hedges, a young Obrimos mage, survived his brush with the shard crows with his magical potential undiminished, but he did not emerge unscathed. Those who know him are troubled by a new coldness to his demeanor, a startling destructive power in his spellcasting, and the terrifying lash of Paradox that follows him. Is he now kin to the crows, a creature of the Abyss? Or is he descending into madness? Can he be saved?

+ Finesse. The target reflexively resists this possession with Resolve + Composure. The strength of the Gauntlet also affects this attempt (see p. 282 of **Mage: The Awakening**) — the crows are attempting to cross directly from the Shadow Realm into the target's soul.

- **Reassemble Soul:** This power is a type of soul stealing. Each crow can peel away a section of the victim's soul, causing her to lose a point of Morality, (see **Mage: The Awakening** p. 276 for the effects of soul loss). Note that a small flock of shard crows may not be able to steal the entirety of a person's soul if she has a high Morality score. Each soul-stealing attempt by each crow costs two Essence. Roll the spirit's Power + Finesse in a contested action against the victim's Resolve + Composure. Once each crow has a piece of the soul, they assemble the pieces and materialize the deformed, patchwork, but still recognizable victim. The manifested, cobbled-together soul has one point in each Attribute for each member of the flock. These traits degrade by one point per day; when any one or all of the traits reach zero, the flock can no longer hold its camouflage construction together, and must disincorporate as described below. The manifested soul provides three

points of armor to the flock of shard crows: any attack that does not magically exclude the soul (through Fate target exclusion, specific targeting with Mind or Spirit magic, or the like) must penetrate the armor, harming the soul. Each time an attack penetrates the soul, the victim's body suffers a point of aggravated damage.

Shard crows can, if coerced or as part of a bargain, replace the soul into the body from which it was stolen. Any derangements gained from Morality lost when the soul was ripped away remain.

- **Disincorporation:** This power allows the crows to disincorporate voluntarily, surrendering their Materialized body to disperse throughout the Shadow Realm. Roll the flock's Power + Resistance for this to succeed. A soul dropped in pieces but in one place will, given time, partially heal on its own, regaining its coherence and attempting to find its body. Magic is required to secure the soul in its mortal shell, however. A soul left in scattered pieces will quickly expire or become food for spirits unless it is gathered and guarded, again by magical means.

PART THREE: CONSTRUCTS AND OBJECTS

THE ARKHITEKTON: MASTER BUILDER OF THE EXARCHS

Will you serve me, magus? I shall build a tower to the heavens and the Awakened who give themselves willingly to me will be as gods once more.

Background

Papa was gone again on one of his adventures for the important society. Papa went away for weeks at a time, and Hattie was sad when he left, but he always had the most exciting stories to tell her when he came back. Once, Papa told her that he got to ride a camel to a magic temple in the desert! Someday when Hattie was older, Papa said, she could come with him, and he would teach her how to ride a camel, too.

Papa always brought Hattie treasures from the mysterious lands he visited. She had a necklace of little brown shells, a silky scarf with a golden elephant on it, and a funny coin with a hole through the middle. Last time, Papa brought back a carved wooden box with pretty, glowing designs on it, but it wasn't for her. Papa put it in his library. Hattie wasn't usually allowed in Papa's library, but she wanted to put her treasures in that pretty box. Papa wouldn't mind if she borrowed it for a little while.

The library was usually locked, but Nana was cleaning today. When Nana went downstairs to make lunch, Hattie snuck into Papa's library with her treasures. The box was on Papa's desk. When Hattie touched its incised surface, the pretty blue designs shone bright and warm beneath her fingertips. Delighted, Hattie opened the box.

Inside, a glossy, white bumboozer was nestled in a little bed of soft black velvet. Hattie thought it was silly that such a beautiful box only contained a marble. Papa didn't even like to play! Hattie thought maybe somebody left it in the pretty box by accident.

When Hattie reached into the box to remove the shooter, it swiveled around in its nest of velvet, revealing a pupil of brilliant blue. Startled, Hattie realized the white marble was a human eye, alive and staring right back at her. She thought she heard Nana calling downstairs that lunch was ready, far, far away, but she couldn't respond. She felt herself reach out and pick up the eye, and it felt warm and slick in her hand. In her mind, a lilting female voice echoed faintly, "Will you serve me, little one?"

Then, Hattie knew what she had to do.

After the fall of Atlantis, a battle against a terrible creature from the Realms Supernal occurred, although the details of the struggle are largely lost. Legend tells of a shining woman cast down from the heavens at the moment the Celestial Ladder shattered. She became a plague upon the Earth, slaughtering all those who had not Awakened to magic, and using their bodies to build a monstrous tower of flesh and bone. It is said that the tower itself pulsed with vital fluids as though it were alive, and that those who approached it could hear it whispering with the mouths of a thousand corpses. For her horrific construction, the creature from the Supernal Realms came to be known as the Arkhitekton.

The Arkhitekton was said to have the power of the 100 Exarchs, and many tried to destroy her, but her body was immortal. No matter what magic or weapon was used against her, her flesh mended and reformed.

After many years, the Awakened were finally able to garner enough force to assault the being within her tower of flesh. A legion of 50 mages ripped through the tower's living walls, and it screamed and writhed as they cut through to its heart, where the entity slept. The mages mutilated the being, severing limb from limb and tearing her immortal body into 50 pieces. The Arkhitekton was finally defeated, but she was never truly destroyed. The Awakened knew that the entity would reconstruct herself, so they placed each of the 50 parts of her body into 50 indestructible enchanted boxes. Each of the 50 mages took a box, vowing that the Arkhitekton would never be resurrected.

Description

Fifty boxes containing the mutilated body of the Arkhitekton are hidden around the world. The boxes are indestructible and enchanted to prevent the being from reconstructing herself. The consciousness of the Arkhitekton is spread throughout the scattered remnants of her body — so long as the pieces remain separated by enchantment and distance, the Arkhitekton sleeps, dreaming of the day she is whole once more. Removed from their boxes, the remnants are magically drawn to each other (smaller fragments are drawn to the nearest larger fragment). If two pieces of flesh touch, they immediately knit together. If a mage does not heed the warning (all of the boxes are adorned with runes admonishing the reader not to open them) and opens one of the boxes, the Arkhitekton feels the change and shifts in her slumber, asking him, telepathically, if he is willing to serve her. If the mage agrees to serve, she continues to instruct him telepathically, and aids him using Arcane Connection (see below). If the mage does not agree, the Arkhitekton attempts to force compliance by compelling him to take the body part to wherever in the world the creature is reconstructing itself.

Reconstructed, the Arkhitekton looks like a tall, pallid woman with translucent skin. Her veins, flowing with brilliant blue-white light, pulse visibly, creating an intricate, shining web beneath the surface of her flesh. The Arkhitekton rarely speaks, preferring to communicate telepathically.

Although the mages of the legion that defeated the creature have long since died, each

ensured that his box was well-protected. The boxes may be obscured by magic, hidden in remote or inaccessible locations, guarded by powerful artifacts or constructs, or trapped with powerful spells. Each box is inscribed with an ancient warning of the danger contained within.

Secrets

Several hundred years ago, a rogue society of mages came together with the purpose of reconstructing the Arkhitekton. The society is an off-shoot of the Seers of the Throne, and members believe the Arkhitekton was sent to the Fallen World by the Exarchs, and that the entity has the power to restore Atlantis.

The society bases its ideology loosely upon the accounts of Dr. Marcus Whitmore, an Awakened archeologist who claimed to have uncovered lost Atlantean records of a mage known as Helena, Master Builder of the Exarchs. Some believe Helena was an architect of the Celestial Ladder, and while it took the combined power of many magi to bring her plans to fruition, it was she who engineered its arcane structure.

The Restoration Society claims the Exarchs knew that if the ladder should ever collapse, Atlantis would be left to ruin, and the reign of the celestial magi would be at an end. Helena, as an architect of the ladder, was chosen to be sent down to the lower realm. She was meant to rebuild the ladder to the heavens and reinstate the Exarchs. The Master Builder became a vessel, and

the celestial magi poured their magic into Helena, making her immortal

and giving her the power it would require to reconstruct the ladder.

As the Celestial Ladder shattered, and Atlantis sunk to the depths of the ocean, Helena plummeted to Earth.

The plan of the Exarchs was



never realized, however. The magic that Helena contained was too much for any one mage to hold, and it warped her mind. In the end, reason left Helena and she became the Arkhitekton of legend.

Members of the Restoration Society believe that the knowledge to recreate the Celestial Ladder still remains hidden deep within the shattered mind of Helena. The society's goal is to rebuild the Celestial Ladder, bridge the gap of the Abyss, and ascend to the Realms Supernal where they will be rewarded by the Exarchs and made gods of heaven. The society is unconcerned with the Earthly consequences of reviving the Arkhitekton. If Sleepers must die in the process of achieving divine ascension, so be it.

Rumors

The legend of the Arkhitekton's fall from the heavens is shrouded by mystery, and evokes questions to which there are no sure answers. What is the Arkhitekton, really? Was it created by the magi, or was it born from unknown magic? What is the creature's purpose? What reverberations of the Arkhitekton's arrival within the Fallen World and its subsequent defeat still affect the Awakened today? For hundreds of years, mages have pondered these questions, and a number of theoretical solutions have arisen from the confusion. Presented here are several personal viewpoints on the most prevalent rumors surrounding the Master Builder of the Exarchs.

"Atlantis was Paradise, and for our transgressions it was lost to us. The Arkhitekton is Lucifer cast down from the heavens by God to spread her poison in the Fallen World. So long as she lives, her evil influence is a shadow that falls over all mankind. The Arkhitekton is our burden to bear, and we work tirelessly against the evil she spreads. If she were to ever be reconstructed, it would truly be Hell on Earth."

Some Mages believe the Arkhitekton is a dark angel of the Realms Supernal, sent to Earth to punish mankind. The rumor is based entirely upon speculation and propagated by faith. Although critics scoff at the notion of a literal Hell on Earth, those who adhere to the ideology occasionally form cabals and seek out the locations of the boxes to ensure that they remain well-guarded from those who would seek to revive the Master Builder.

"That tower of the Master Builder in the legend — you know, the one made of those bodies? I heard that some ecologist in South America saw it, and that the thing is still out in the jungle somewhere!"

The rumor that the tower of the Arkhitekton still stands is based upon the personal accounts of Thaddeus Graven, a recently Awakened Thyrsus and ecologist, who claims to have seen the Tower of the Arkhitekton during an expedition in South America. Thaddeus claims he sighted the tower in a ravine while he was out collecting samples, "It was just like the legend. The thing was alive, and it was made of literally thousands of bodies. There

were arms, legs, even faces, all melded into each other and undulating perversely. I could tell they were in pain ... Those poor souls." The ecologist speculates that part of the Arkhitekton's magic is imbued within the tower, allowing it to reconstruct itself like its creator. Thaddeus claims he went back to camp to retrieve help, but when he returned, the tower was gone and the ravine was empty, and as the rumor is based solely upon one man's claims, most regard the story as a work of fiction.

"You've heard about Awakened who get mixed up with that Restoration Society, right? At first they seem normal, but then they start to turn into monsters. Silvia's bother, Silas, was one of them. She says he started acting strange. Then, his skin started to change — like it was becoming thinner, or more transparent, or something. I guess she begged him to get help for weeks, but he completely shut her out. Just before he skittered out of the window like something from under a rotten log a couple of weeks ago, Silvia said she could see his organs pulsing under his skin. Nobody's seen Silas since then."

The rumors that mages who join the Restoration Society become monsters are not necessarily true. Silas, and others like him, may have indeed been members of the society, but their monstrous appearance is not directly connected to it. Rather, their strange behavior, change in appearance, and new abilities are all a result of exposure to the Arkhitekton's magic. Likely, Silas was affected by the Arkhitekton's Arcane Scaffold ability (see below).

The Arkhitekton

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 5, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Crafts (Architecture) 5, Investigation 3, Occult (Arcane History) 2, Politics 3, Science 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Stealth 2, Survival 1

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Expression 1, Intimidation (Servants) 3, Persuasion 3, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Danger Sense, Encyclopedic Knowledge, Fast Reflexes 2, Fresh Start

Willpower: 6

Virtue: Faith. The Exarchs will be restored, and the Arkhitekton will lead her servants to become as gods over men.

Vice: Greed. The Arkhitekton desires power above all else, and will stop at nothing to swell the ranks of her servants.

Initiative: 8 (with Fast Reflexes)

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Health: 10

Supernatural Powers:

- **Vessel of Power:** When fully reconstructed, the Arkhitekton is a Master of all Arcana, with a Gnosis of 10. In the event that the Arkhitekton is in the process of being revived, she gains one dot in a random Arcanum for each piece of her body that is restored, and one dot of Gnosis for every five remnants that are restored. When she is separated into

Story Hooks

- A respected arcane archeologist has mysteriously vanished after unearthing what he claims is "the greatest find in recent history" and "a key to the unsolved mysteries of Atlantis." Some suspect the mage was murdered and his find stolen by a jealous colleague, but others who were at the site claim to have seen him walking alone into the jungle of his own accord with a strange box. What was contained within the box? What is "the Arkhitekton" mentioned in the journal the archeologist left behind, and does it have anything to do with the mage's sudden disappearance?

- Rumors are spreading throughout the city of a secretive cult whose goal is to restore Atlantis. Strange mages with pale, veined, translucent skin have been flocking to the city from around the world, and have set up base at a local estate. Anybody who seeks information on the cult or trespasses upon the grounds of the estate disappears.

Are the mages the Restoration Society, having gathered the final pieces of the Arkhitekton at long last? What are they doing at the estate? Have the missing people been murdered?

- The Arkhitekton has been restored, and its tower, guarded from the eyes of Sleepers by a legion of her followers, is being reconstructed within a Demesne. Sleepers are being systematically subdued, and the tower built from their bodies extends higher into the heavens with each passing day. Can an army with enough force be coordinated to defeat the Arkhitekton once more? Can the Sleepers of the tower be saved? What motivates those who choose to follow the Arkhitekton? Are they being controlled, or do they serve of their own free will?

50 pieces, she cannot perform magic or use Arcane Scaffold. She can, however, use Compel or Telepathy.

- **Reconstruct Body:** The immortal body of the Arkhitekton cannot be destroyed. Even when her body is rent into pieces, her consciousness remains spread throughout them, and the remnants are magically drawn to each other within a radius of five feet, as though magnetically charged. If two pieces of flesh touch, they immediately knit together (smaller fragments are drawn to the nearest larger fragment). In combat, this makes the Arkhitekton immune to lethal and bashing damage. Each level of aggravated damage causes the Arkhitekton's body to deconstruct, however, scattering five remnants per point of damage. Unless the fragments of the Arkhitekton's body are scattered far enough apart, or separated from each other by magic, the Master Builder will reconstruct her body, healing one point of aggravated damage per turn automatically (at which point, five of the previously scattered fragments will rejoin her body).

The Arkhitekton can regain dots of Gnosis and Arcana levels by reconstructing her body. She cannot, however, regain Mana that is lost when sustaining aggravated damage (although she can recover higher capacity). For example, the Arkhitekton is at full Health (10) with full Mana (100 points) and is a Master in all 10 Arcana. Then, the Master Builder sustains one point of aggravated damage. This causes her Mana level and capacity to both drop to 50, her level in each of the 10 Arcana to drop to Adept, and her Gnosis to drop to 9. If, on the following round, the Arkhitekton heals one point of aggravated damage, she returns to full Health. Her Mana capacity goes back up to 100, but her Mana level remains at 50 (until she refills her pool). Her level in each of the 10 Arcana returns to Master, and her Gnosis level returns to 10.

The Arkhitekton cannot use Life magic to heal herself. She can *only* heal by reabsorbing fragments of her body.

- **Arcane Scaffold:** Remnants of the Arkhitekton grow ever more powerful as the Master Builder is reconstructed, and the Arkhitekton aids those who assist and serve by her in return. The first time a mage interacts with the partially or fully-constructed Arkhitekton in any way (e.g. by opening a box containing a piece of her, or by facing her in person), she telepathically asks the mage if he wishes to serve her. If the mage agrees, the Arkhitekton connects the mage to her using Arcane Scaffold. Arcane Scaffold may not be performed upon an unwilling mage, or a Sleeper. Arcane Scaffold can only be completely reversed when all remnants of the Arkhitekton are sealed away in the 50 enchanted boxes of legend, causing the Master Builder to return to a deep slumber. Successfully performed, Arcane Scaffold affects the mage in three ways.

First, the mage becomes permanently telepathically linked to the Arkhitekton, allowing the Master Builder to instantly open two-way mental communication with her servant. This allows the Master Builder to issue commands and instructions to the mage from great distances, and allows the servant to contact the Arkhitekton with reports of his status.

Second, the Arkhitekton opens a permanent arcane connection between herself and the mage. Through this connection, the Master Builder may bestow a spell upon a servant linked to her through Arcane Connection without having to be present for the casting (provided she has the required Mana). She may cast one spell at a time upon each servant (although spells may be combined, see below), aiding him in his duties. When a spell is bestowed upon a servant using Arcane Scaffold, it cannot be contested, *and the spell affects the mage as though he cast it upon himself*. The Arkhitekton may not cast spells using Arcane Scaffold that would be damaging to her servants. The effects of spell accumulation, however, are felt by the Arkhitekton, rather than her servant.

The strength of the spells the Arkhitekton may bestow becomes greater as the Master Builder is reconstructed. As she gains dots in each random Arcanum (see Vessel of Power, below) the Arkhitekton may bestow any spells that

she could normally cast to augment herself that are at or below her current level in each Arcanum (even if the spell is not ordinarily able to be bestowed upon another). Each spell has the same Mana cost (paid by the Arkhitekton) and duration as is described in **Mage: The Awakening**.

The Arkhitekton may combine spells using Arcane Connection, provided all spells are within her level of ability, and she has the Mana to pay for it (see combining spells on pp. 128–129 of **Mage: The Awakening**).

Finally, the servant feels a constant, inflated sense of loyalty toward the Arkhitekton as she is rebuilt and her magical power increases. For each level, based upon the Arkhitekton's current level of Gnosis, servants feel the following effects connected to her through Arcane Scaffold:

Arkhitekton's Gnosis Effect Upon Servant

1–2 The servant feels a subtle connection to the Arkhitekton, but is otherwise unaffected.

3–4 The servant feels a connection to the Arkhitekton. He may begin to look for ways to gain her praise if doing so does not interfere with his own plans. The servant's skin starts to take on an unhealthy pallor. Additionally, if the Arkhitekton issues the servant a direct order that does not cause the servant to directly harm himself, the character takes a –2 penalty to all actions that are not devoted to fulfilling the order.

5–6 The servant feels loyal to the Arkhitekton. He actively seeks to please her. Subtle, blue veins appear upon the servant's pale skin. Additionally, if the Arkhitekton issues the servant a direct order, the character takes a –4 penalty to all actions that are not devoted to fulfilling the order.

7–8 The servant feels strong loyalty to the Arkhitekton. He obeys any order she issues short of a command that would cause him to directly physically harm himself. Deep, noticeable, blue veins appear upon the servant's translucent skin.

9–10 The servant feels intense loyalty to the Arkhitekton. He obeys any order she issues, even if a command causes him to physically harm or kill himself. The servant's skin is nearly transparent.

- **Compel:** The Arkhitekton may compel a mage to serve her for a limited time if he does not willingly submit to Arcane Scaffold (see above). The Master Builder may cast Compel upon a mage who has been successfully contacted by her telepathically (see Telepathy, below). The compelled mage follows a single order issued telepathically by the Arkhitekton. The strength of the compulsion grows as the Master Builder is reconstructed. Compel remains in effect for a number of hours equal to the number of successes rolled during casting. When the duration expires, the mage no longer feels the compulsion. For each level, based upon the Arkhitekton's current level of Gnosis, the following effects are felt by compelled mage.

Arkhitekton's Gnosis Effect Upon Mage

1–4 The mage feels a slight compulsion to perform a single, simple order issued by the Arkhitekton, so long

as the command does not require the mage to physically harm himself. For the duration of the spell, the character takes a –2 penalty to all actions that are not devoted to fulfilling the order.

5–8 The mage is compelled to perform a single, simple order issued by the Arkhitekton, so long as the command does not require the mage to directly physically harm himself. For the duration of the spell, the character takes a –4 penalty to all actions that are not devoted to fulfilling the order. The mage feels the compulsion for the duration of the spell.

9–10 The mage is compelled to perform a single, simple order issued by the Arkhitekton, so long as the command does not require the mage to directly physically harm himself. The mage feels the compulsion for the duration of the spell, and can take no other action but to follow it.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: Wits + Gnosis vs. Resolve + Composure

- **Architect:** As an extended action, the Arkhitekton may build an architectural structure, or add to an existing structure, using any available material, including materials not typically used for construction. The structure need not be architecturally sound. The Arkhitekton may construct any building that she can visualize using this ability, no matter how improbable or fantastic. A structure that is very obviously impossible (such as the tower of bodies described in legend) invokes Disbelief in Sleepers who witness it, however, which may cause the spell to unravel and the building to collapse. If the spell is unraveled and the structure destroyed, the materials return to their original form as they occurred before becoming a part of the structure.

When creating the structure, the Arkhitekton does not have to physically manipulate the materials. She simply stands or sits still and concentrates, and the materials resolve themselves into what structure she wishes. She can only use this power when she is fully reconstructed.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Crafts + Gnosis

Action: Extended. The target number varies depending upon the size and intricacy of the structure being built. A small shack might take 5 successes while constructing a mansion might take 50 successes. Each roll represents 15 minutes.

- **Telepathy:** The Arkhitekton communicates through Telepathy exclusively. The Master Builder can contact a mage within a number of yards equal to her current Gnosis. The subject hears the Arkhitekton speak directly within his mind, and may respond mentally in return. Telepathy remains in effect for a number of hours equal to the number of successes rolled. This ability does not work on Sleepers or other supernatural beings.

Cost: —

Dice Pool: Wits + Gnosis vs. Resolve + Composure

Action: Instant and contested

ASHAR'ARIF'S CLOCKWORK CREATIONS

In 13th century Islamic Spain, a clockmaker crafted toys and puzzles that, on the surface, were built to entertain. Deeper within the workings were weights and cogs carefully designed to judge the soul of the clockwork's user. Eight hundred years have passed, and though the clockmaker is dead and gone, his great works and books of study still exist. But without his guiding hand and deep understanding of balance and goodness, the books and clockworks are useless at best, deadly at worst.

While most of Ashar'Arif's work has been lost to time, a few of his creations still belong to private Sleeper collectors and mages alike. The original copies of his treatise the *Book of Understanding and Building Fantastical Machines* are long gone. However, pieces and even whole chapters of the book remain in copied form, passed among mages potent or clever enough to possess them. For the past 800 years, foolhardy mages have bet their reputations, sanities

and even their souls that the chapters in the book held the secrets to unattainable creations. Some have suggested that the creation of new Artifacts was possible thanks to the words laid out by Ashar'Arif, even though all Awakened knowledge indicates that creating a new Artifact in the Fallen World is impossible.

Little is known about Ashar'Arif himself. Through his writings, it can be assumed that he was a deeply spiritual man, a philosophical Muslim with a strong sense of right and wrong. From his articles, Ashar'Arif appeared to have a greater disdain for educated men who sinned than those who he considered ignorant. While much of the treatises are in code so as not to reveal their mysteries to Sleepers, many Awakened point to his comments on the educated and ignorant as a warning to mages who might be reading his works or using his machines. Warnings nearly millennia old, it seems, are as rarely heeded as warnings made today.

MIRIAM'S DOLL #5

I cannot find purpose to this machine, and there are no accounts of what it might do, just accounts of a lot of dead Awakened. Reading about it, I want to solve it. Please, Master, do not go looking for this terrible toy.

Background

Many of the pages of Ashar'Arif's work give schematics for toys, from simple metal birds that tweet when wound to child-sized clockwork knights that can be used to teach a boy simple sword fighting techniques. In addition to this doll, the papers mention earlier models that had no magical components. Why Ashar'Arif would create a children's toy that requires Awakened understanding to use is a bit of a puzzle in itself.

Since its creation, it has passed from the delicate hands of loving collectors for centuries, each one seemingly more possessive of it and more determined to keep it hidden. In fact, was it not for Ashar'Arif's writings the Awakened community at large might not have known of the existence of the doll at all. Strangely, some part of its magic appears to make it as desirable to Sleepers as it is to Awakened, even though the Sleepers have no real use for it.

Like Mother, Like Daughter

Mother always had an eye for treasure. When I was a child, she and I could walk into an antique store and she just knew what pieces of junk were really valuable finds in disguise. The

day she found Miriam's Doll, we were supposed to be getting ice cream. We stopped in to a swap meet on our way, Mom said she had a feeling that day, and I, being young, didn't argue much. If only I had thrown a tantrum about the sprinkle cone I wanted so badly, things would have been different.

We both saw the doll and its trunk of extra parts immediately. She was beautiful, and I desperately wanted to touch her skin and run my fingers through her hair. The fingers on my mother's hand twitched in my grip like she was having the same thought.

She bought it for me, or so she told my father. After all, he could deny me nothing. Quickly, though, the jealous fits would start. I'd find the doll missing from my room, and my mother would be locked in the attic with it, cursing the heavens, or laughing in fits. I hated my mother for her selfishness, because I didn't know better.

Eventually, the mania of the doll took over her life, and my father had her committed for her own good. A week later she was dead and the hospital said it was natural causes. My father and I knew better. We knew she found a way to kill herself.

The doll is mine now. Mine. I'm not as careless as my

mother, and so I never let my father realize how very, very special the doll is. I'm also not as clever as she was. I know it's a puzzle. I can see it, clear as day, I just can't figure out how to activate it. But I will.

Description

Whether Miriam was the name of the doll or the little girl for whom the doll was created is impossible to say. A sensitive and astute mage might sense the touch of the Realm of Nightmares in the doll's soft skin, made of unidentifiable leather. Rumor has it that this doll was the last in a series of prototype puzzle-dolls, each one more intricate and marvelous than the last. Indeed, Miriam's Doll is a puzzle consisting of a series of interchangeable parts that can be attached to a simple wire frame. Chest, head, hands, arms, legs and feet can all be switched in and out, giving the doll a handful of possible gestures and expressions. Each piece of the puzzle is a true testament to the doll maker's art. All four of the modular heads, for example, have long vibrant-colored human hair, cut glass eyes in four distinct colors that catch the light, simulating the spark of awareness, with details of facial expressions so delicate that a glance from the corner of the eye might trick one into thinking that the face is animate. Even with the doll's apparent age, any child and many adults would delight in the presence of this treasure, magical effects notwithstanding.

What's more, in the surprisingly supple leather of the doll's skin are faint mosaic-like patterns, like faded tattooing. Therein lies the puzzle of the doll. To work it, it appears the doll parts must be arranged on the frame in a way to cause the mosaics to create a whole new pattern with the whole of the doll. Simple process of elimination would argue that since the doll has limited pieces, there must be some simple math to solve it. However, the math just never seems to work out.

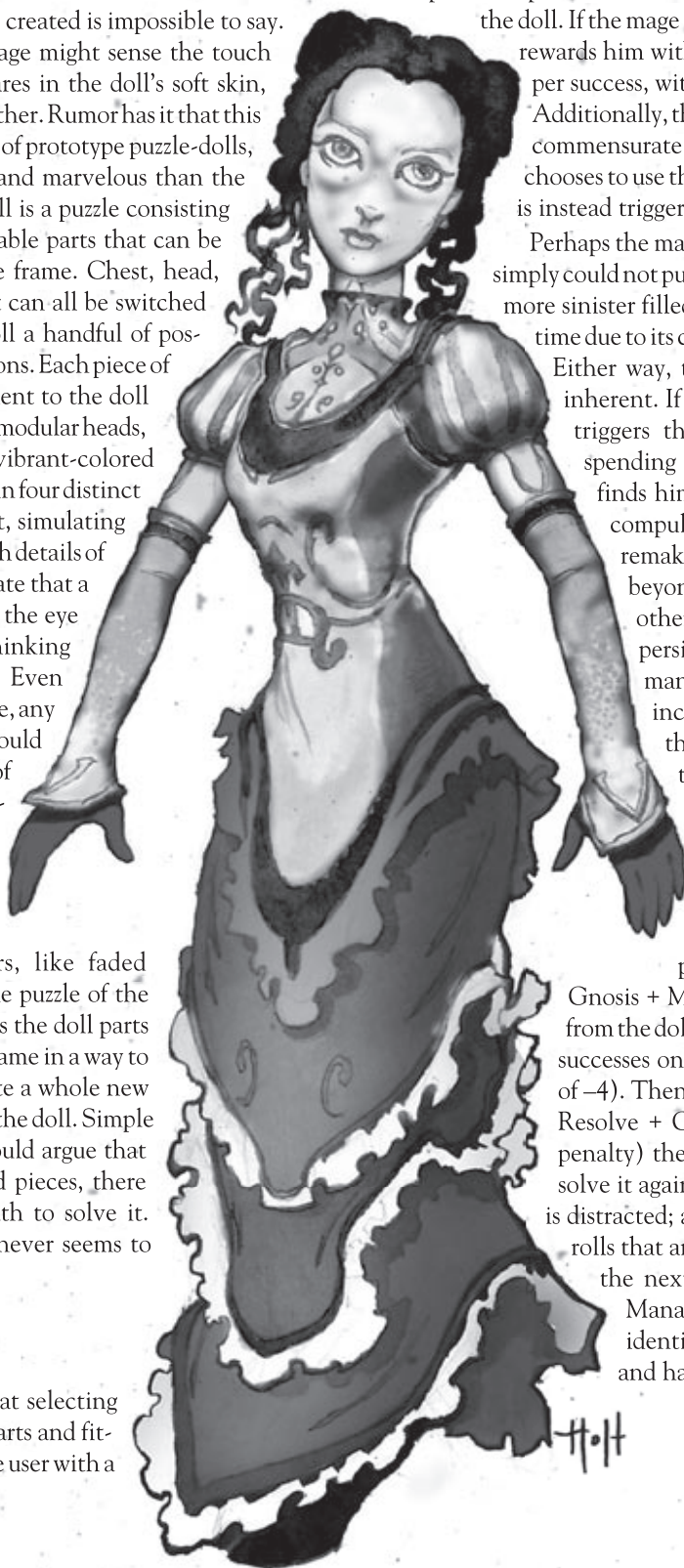
Secrets

A clever mage finds that selecting the right pattern of doll parts and fitting them together fills the user with a

rush of euphoria, like a child might feel in the face of such an accomplishment. To successfully match the patterns, the player must succeed in an Intelligence + Investigation roll. Success allows the user to activate the doll. With each use, a roll to solve is necessary as the correct pattern is never the same twice in a row. Once solved, the player makes a Gnosis + Mind roll. The character has the choice to spend one point of his own Mana or the Mana stored in the doll. If the mage spends his own Mana, success rewards him with a temporary dot to Resolve per success, with a limit of a four-dot bonus. Additionally, the user gains Willpower points commensurate to the Resolve gain. If he chooses to use the doll's Mana, a second effect is instead triggered as described below.

Perhaps the maker wanted a doll that a child simply could not put down, or perhaps something more sinister filled the doll with the passage of time due to its connection to Pandemonium. Either way, the puzzle has a hidden trap inherent. If a thoughtless or selfish mage triggers the puzzle's solution without spending some of his own Mana, he finds himself the victim of a magical compulsion to stay with the doll and remake her over and over again, sure beyond reason that there is some other "layer" to the puzzle. Rumors persist that subsequent dolls are many-tiered puzzles fraught with increasing danger and reward, though no scholar has been able to determine if this specific doll has anything more to it than this one facet.

If the trap is triggered, the results are drastically different than above. Once the puzzle is solved, the player rolls Gnosis + Mind. If the mage spent Mana from the doll, he loses Resolve equal to his successes on that roll (maximum penalty of -4). Then, if the player fails a reflexive Resolve + Gnosis roll (with the current penalty) the puzzle compels the mage to solve it again. Until he does so, the mage is distracted; apply a one-die penalty to all rolls that are not related to solving it for the next 24 hours. Using the doll's Mana store for other purposes works identically to other imbued items and has no adverse effects.



Rumors

"The real reason that the clockmaker made such a marvel is that it does, in fact, allow Sleepers to use it, so long as that Sleeper is a child."

Sleepers cannot manipulate Mana, and so the idea that any Sleeper, child or otherwise, could activate it is a bit ridiculous. However, many mages have fallen into believing this rumor, despite simple logic to the contrary. The rumor explains the "why" of its creation, at least. Of course, in the World of Darkness nothing is absolute, not even for the Awakened, and it is possible that one in a million children might be able to somehow activate the full effects of this puzzle. A mage with her hands on the doll could be a parent's nightmare while on the search for a Sleeper child who could solve the puzzle.

"The doll is a guardian and guide, built for a child of two Awakened who wanted some kind of assurances that their child would also Awaken one day. A Proximus child in possession of this doll, who is encouraged to play with it often, is ten to a hundred times more likely to Awaken than one without the doll."

Ashar'Arif made no mention of who he made the doll for in his book, or at least, not in any parts that still survive. The idea that the doll might ensure a child will Awaken might comfort many mages with children. Sadly, mages know of no way to predict who will Awaken and who won't, and if an Artifact could ensure an Awakening, Miriam's Doll #5 isn't it.

"Can't you feel the leather? The Pandemonium nightmares? This is no simple child's toy, and there is nothing benevolent in its design. Look, the answers are in the mosaics! They all but twist and warp to the faces of devils when you don't look directly at them. This is a work of evil."

No surviving evidence indicates that Ashar'Arif was "evil," or even on a lesser level, on the Path of Scourging. Unfortunately, mages don't always take failure to solve the doll well, and it has broken the mind of more than one dedicated mage. Of course, the clockmaker was an opinionated man with his own ideas of right and wrong. It isn't entirely impossible that he made the dolls with touches of hell in order to punish those he judged morally impure.

Miriam's Doll #5

Durability 3, Size 2, Structure 3

Mana Capacity: Maximum 12

Story Hooks

- The cabal is introduced to a strange older member of the Mysterium who has a very special collection. In his sanctum is a collection of dolls, the likes of which no Sleeper collector could dream. His collection is incomplete though, as he has no examples of the clockmaker's crafts, and so he commissions the characters to acquire Miriam's Doll #5 for him. He offers a king's ransom and wants the dolls by any means necessary. His only caveat is this: the mages are not, under any circumstance, to attempt to solve the puzzle. If the characters succeed without becoming possessive over the doll, or part with it some other means, a Storyteller could have the old Mysterium member die, leaving a wealth of powerful (and terrible) doll artifacts to the characters to deal with.

- A child in the care of members of the cabal is given Miriam's Doll #5 as a gift by a stranger in the park or mall one afternoon. Observations show that the child is growing more and more jealous of the thing, and that it seems to be some kind of magical item. If the mages take it away and try to solve it, the doll behaves as above. If the mages observe the child while she plays with the doll, they'll notice subtle pattern changes in the child that are inexplicable. Given enough time, will the doll change the child? Awaken her? Something worse?

- If the Storyteller is using the idea of the Tick-Tock Soldiers (see p. 93) in her chronicle, she might allow characters to come across references to Miriam's Doll #5 in relation to Ashar'Arif, the clockmaker who created both. If they were to dig deeper, they might come across rumors that the doll has many secrets in it. Perhaps secrets to control the Tick-Tock Creatures, or better yet, maybe the doll holds the secrets of the clockmaker's art itself. Since it is said to be a prototype, the characters may be encouraged to believe they might be able to reverse engineer from the doll the details of the supposed lost pages of Ashar'Arif's greater works.

THE MARVELOUS CLOCKWORK MYSTERY

*The doors, do you see? If you press here and here you can move another door out of the way.
Can you hear that? That sound? The beating of leather wings and Stygian whispers?
No, not Stygian, are those angels?*

Background

More than a few mages who have read the *Book of Understanding and Building of Fantastical Machines* suggest that Ashar'Arif was quite mad. They suggest that the kind of mind that could work out the careful diagrams and complexity of such machines just could not be sane. No single item or artifact can prove as testament to that possible madness better than the Marvelous Clockwork Mystery. What few records have been compiled on the Artifact, outside of the Ashar'Arif's book itself, are from scattered and unreliable sources. These outside sources claim that Ashar'Arif was trying to build a machine so complicated that reality would melt away for the user until she reconnected with the sublime. The solution to this puzzle, he may have hoped, would open the door to the Supernal Realm without need of the mythical Silver Ladder at all. In his experiments, the clockmaker found ways to weave magic into the subtle moving parts of his pieces in such a way that he might have succeeded in creating small cracks that shone the light of the Supernal in his work.

True or not, the Mystery was special. At its unveiling, all the Awakened who laid eyes on it knew this was a thing worth study. Masters and students alike clamored to be allowed some time alone to work out the mechanical puzzle with the hopes that they might breach the mystery the great creation had to offer. Indeed, with deep study and meditation, many Awakened walked away with a feeling they had found a new summit in their studies and the clockmaker and his puzzle became famous in the blink of an eye.

But there is no shortcut to enlightenment, and more than a few who coveted the puzzles answers found too late the tragic truth — the shortest path is usually a fall. The puzzle, it turns out, never truly reached the Supernal, and any mage too lost in these labyrinthine workings was doomed to find the Abyss instead.

An Object of Obsession

In the Consilium that night, all of creation seemed to be invited to witness the latest of the clockmaker's wonders. I, myself, owning a small and delicate puzzle box that made the sound of a violin playing a much-loved solo when unlocked, looked to the event with great anticipation. The sly old bastard knew it, as well. By this point I was a past and forgotten lover. Now, he had the youngest and most beautiful women all over the world tossing themselves at his feet to possess one of his lovely

toys. When he revealed this latest wonder, this massive wooden enigma, my heart skipped in my chest and I knew I had to have it. Studying the careful carvings, I felt the strength of dragons and the presence of the gods. I would have it, and I would kill any pretty little girl who stood in my way. I imagine the old bastard knew that, too.

— Tali Sum Reah, Master of the Veil, from her journals

Description

The Marvelous Clockwork Mystery is a large wooden wardrobe carved of a deep beautiful mahogany that appears as fresh and new as the day its deep stain dried. The front door is carved with delicate and intricate patterns and designs reminiscent of a primitive Spanish mosaic. On closer examination of the massive piece of furniture, it becomes clear that all sides and even the top of the piece are carved, but with more shallow designs so that a careless eye might mistake the grooves for the grain in the wood.

If a mage were to look closer, or perhaps press on the doors in order to open it, she would find that some parts of the pattern move, sliding to the side or depressing. With a little clever study, she might find a pattern to the moving pieces, and there, the puzzle truly begins. With each small layer solved, intricate gears within the puzzle activate, sliding away secret doors and opening the wardrobe up like an oddly-shaped wooden lotus, encouraging the mage to explore more and more of its surfaces. Each new success reveals new and more challenging layers than before, rewarding the mage with the satisfying rush and subsequent desire for more, like she might feel when conquering a new lover, or unlocking a difficult rote.

Secrets

Modern mages are right in their assumption that the puzzle itself is a sort of path, but they are dead wrong as to where it leads. Though this road may seem as full of good intentions as any, the truth is that it is paved with the slippery ruddy blood that leads to Hell, and though the artifact is touched by Pandemonium, the place it really leads to is no place at all. To the mad or arrogant, the puzzle leads only to the Abyss itself.

That said, the puzzle like many of its cousins, is a trap designed for unknowable reasons to destroy careless mages. Each layer of the puzzle is so difficult that it actually requires an enlightened mind to solve. With each attempt at the puzzle the mage is drawn deeper into the beautiful hidden layers of the puzzle. At that point, the puzzle releases a number of glorious Phantasms that gives the mage the impression that he is seeing flashes of the Supernal.

Heaven, once glimpsed, is a difficult thing to let go of, and a mage who is now sure that the puzzle can lead him on towards glory is likely to become obsessed. Why bother, she might wonder, with the dull and mundane when these carvings and grooves hold the secrets to an escape from the cruelties of the Fallen World once and for all. She may ignore her studies, her cabal, even her own health in the hopes that the right twist of the right mechanism will lead to another crack in the world that can be seen leading to the light above.

It's a climb up a false ladder, though, with the only real truth tied to the inevitable fall. Each working of the Mystery does create a crack in reality, but the Supernal doesn't wait on the other side. The only thing waiting there is the Abyss. The longer the Mystery is used, the greater the cracks grow until something horrible and hungry forces its way through.

Mechanics of the Machine

To a careless mage, Manifestation is nearly inevitable. Ashar'Arif's brilliant design gives wiser mages time to quit using the thing before something awful happens.

Its design is meant to be seductive, and it does have some perks. Solving one of the layers of the Mystery (a roll of Intelligence + Investigation with a cumulative penalty of -1 die for each new level solved) grants the user a momentary rush of adrenaline and allows him to regain all lost Willpower points.

A mage, enjoying the rush of success, has a limited number of times he can use it before the building Paradox snaps and allows room for a Manifestation to come through. In game terms,

the mage may use the puzzle a number of times equal to his Wisdom score. Once his uses of the Mystery exceed his Wisdom score, his player must make a reflexive Wisdom roll. If the roll succeeds, nothing appears to happen, though the Paradox remains waiting. On an exceptional success, nothing appears to happen and the Paradox unravels harmlessly, with the mage feeling nothing but a cold gust of wind and a feeling of a tragedy narrowly averted. On a failure, a Manifestation occurs immediately. The creature's power is based upon the mage's Gnosis/2, rounded up (see p. 273 of **Mage: The Awakening**). A dramatic failure isn't usually possible, but if one should occur, the Manifestation is based on the mage's Gnosis + 1 (maximum of 5).

Rumors

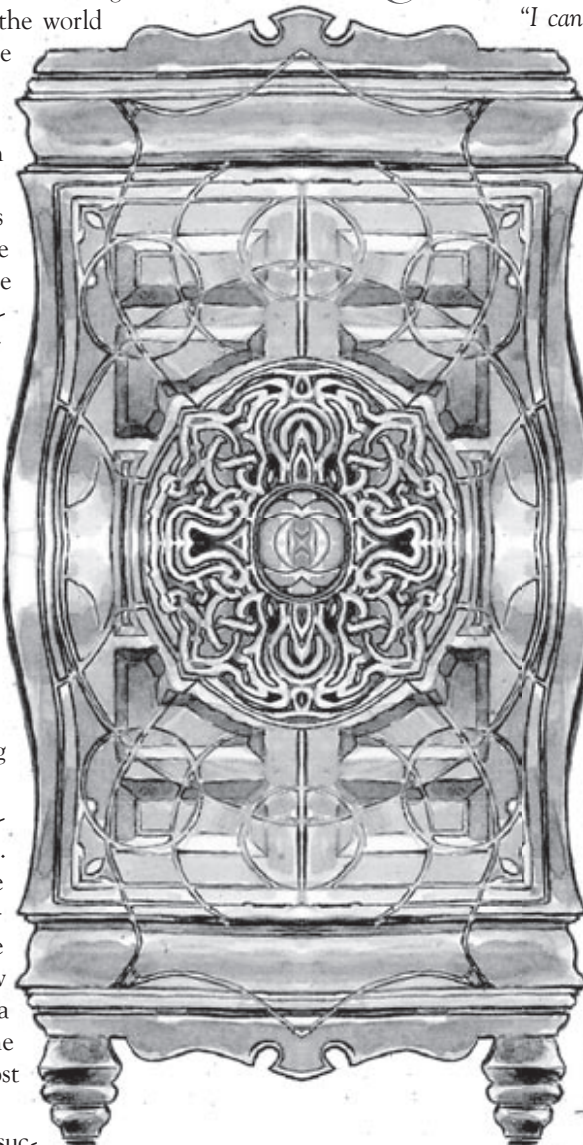
"I can't tell you what it really does, but I can tell you this: three of the last six owners vanished. I mean, completely and totally vanished without a trace. One of 'em was in a locked room in his sanctum. No one could get in, he never got out. Nobody. Nothing. You ask me, I think it just ate him."

While there are a few known clockworks that can kill and possibly consume their victims, (for example, see *The Schäfer Movement*, p. 108), these are not truly creations by this clockmaker directly, merely creations inspired by Ashar'Arif's book. Mages disappear because repeated uses of the Mystery usher in monsters from the Abyss, which drag the mages back to that place in reward for hubris.

"Here's the deal. This damn thing is a tool of the Exarchs. Ashar'Arif was just their puppet down here, and those bastards are using it to distract the Awakened from the true way to regain the Supernal."

While it is completely true that the Marvelous Clockwork Mystery was designed to distract lazy mages along their way, and even punish those particularly unwise Awakened who delve too deep, Ashar'Arif was no Seer. He was just a man with a peculiar sense of how to make the world a better place. That said, the

Seers of the Throne would no doubt have great interest in the Mystery should they hear about it.



"Truth is, getting anything out of this big silly thing isn't in solving the stupid puzzles, but in taking it apart. Deep, deep in the mechanisms, cogs, and counter weights is a full copy of the clockmaker's book, forever preserved by the magic of the mystery. If you can break into the thing, and get that, the sky's the limit."

This is partially true. The clockmaker did hide a copy of his book deep in the machine, but this was simply an amusement for himself, as he assumed no one would ever be able to destroy the cabinet to get to it. He also never assumed the sheer number of times the mechanisms would

be tested and the Mystery would transfer, so while it is unlikely anyone would destroy this item to get to its inner workings, it is possible that while working the puzzle, a lucky Awakened might find himself in possession of a complete copy of Ashar'Arif's treatises.

The Marvelous Clockwork Mystery

Durability 4, Size 6, Structure 10

Mana Capacity: 11

Story Hooks

- The cabal has to investigate the disappearance of a prominent member of the local Consilium because it has been implicated. After finding a way into this lost mage's sanctum, the mages find the puzzle and stacks of notebooks. The notebooks are in code, and it would take time for the cabal to unravel them. While the mages are searching the place and trying to unlock the code in the notebooks, one might try the puzzle. Evocative description of the wood and the carvings all over its surface should be enough to make someone want to touch it. If not, have them translate a part of the text explaining that the furniture is a wonderful puzzle. So wonderful, in fact, that the missing mage writes that he is going to devote his life to its study. From there, a Storyteller might let the mages play with the Artifact, feeling its rewards, while others in the cabal start to get a darker picture of what the item is thanks to reading the notebooks.

- How did the characters get their sanctums? Were they hand crafted, or more likely, found and built up over time? If any of the cabal has a second-hand sanctum, the Mystery may simply be a piece of heavy furniture out of sight that the mage just never bothered to take a close look at. The Storyteller could describe the piece in such a way that implies it has been sitting in the background waiting for the right time to offer its wonder to the mage. With no knowledge of the clockmaker's other productions, the Storyteller should be careful to add a sense of foreboding to the artifact so that an oblivious character does not obliterate himself for no reason.

- Of course, some Awakened might do their research, and having read up on Ashar'Arif, his work, and his machines may well decide that going after the Mystery is a bad plan. At the same time the character is reading up on the Mystery, a ranking member of the city takes an interest and decides to contract the cabal to find the thing and bring it back to her. Knowing what the characters do, will they go after it? Will they bring it to their new benefactor? What if the benefactor offers to raise the stakes with threats or greater rewards? And now that the cat's out of the bag, how can the even-minded cabal prevent less prudent mages from going after the priceless item as well? Will the cabal collect the Mystery in the hopes of keeping it out of the hands of their selfish, greedy peers?

TICK-TOCK CREATURES

<ttttttttttth... T tttttttth....click>

Aliases: Clockwork Assistants, Tick-Tock Soldiers

Background

In his book, it says said that at one point in his life, the clockmaker's crafts were in such high demand that he could not fulfill all his orders. However, he was not one to disappoint and realized he needed an assistant. The problem was, he did not want to share the secrets of his craft or risk that the greed would overwhelm any apprentice or assistant he took. At that point, he set all other projects aside to create the only kind of assistant that he could trust, one made entirely of clockwork and magic. With the success of one such craft assistant, he made others. He started with a clockwork broom that swept up his workshop floor. Next, he made a small clockwork tree on wheels that dusted and tidied up his shelves. Soon, he found he needed a clockwork to handle the minor repairs of his earlier clockworks so that they could remain autonomous. By then, orders came in for all manner of clockworks, animals and guardians, gardeners and lovers, librarians and sparring partners. In time, anyone who was someone, (and could afford the Mana upkeep) had his or her very own clockwork assistant.

The Autonomous Laboratory

I know we never should have gone into that old ruin. Edge and I both knew it was dangerous. Hell, over a beer, sitting just at the entrance we'd found, we both agreed we should turn back and tell someone more important in the Order. We went in anyway.

The place had all the traps and triggers you'd expect, that wasn't anything new. Besides, Edge was good at puzzles. I was only really good at getting us into trouble. I heard the sound first. Sort of like a grandfather clock being dragged slowly over stone. The whirs and clicks the thing made gave it away a long time before we could see it. That didn't matter, since it already knew how to find us.

Edge said; "Jesus, it's some kind of robot!" I told him he was being stupid when we both saw what looked like a little man made out of copper and brass. And then something changed in that room. I don't know, it was something you'd barely noticed, like a furnace kicking on. But that little copper fucker just lurched forward and ripped Edge's arm off like his bones were made of butter.

Description

The clockmaker made a variety of clockwork assistants, and it seems like there were no limits to what Ashar'Arif could mimic with weights and measures. None of the

Tick-Tock Creatures are sentient and have neither mind or soul in their clever construction. They were built to appear sentient and their programming is complex. Still, they are each crafted for one specific purpose, be it "protect this Demesne from any intruder" to "let no harm come to the children of Purpito the Red." All the assistants are manavores, needing a regular supply of Mana to maintain the magic that animates them. Over the centuries, most have gone dormant or been destroyed, though in lost places where Mana flows free, these clockworks still linger, waiting to fulfill their programming.

Clockworks Assistants created to serve a master directly tend to communicate in a few ancient languages, all the better to cast the illusion of sentience. They do not speak any of those languages unless spoken to. They cannot use High Speech. A clockwork also attempts to learn the language it hears, first by parroting back the sounds. Slowly, it processes the words until it has a rudimentary ability to communicate. Clockworks who need to work together, for whatever reason, understand basic communication as a series of ticking sounds.

The Tick-Tock Creatures come in a myriad of shapes and sizes that speak to their great versatility. For example, the book mentions creation of a handful of mechanical mice and other small pests programmed to infiltrate a household and make a tiny magical recording of any conversations made in its range.

If a Sleeper were to come across a working creature, Disbelief might allow him to wholly ignore that the clockwork is anything but an animal with an odd shuffle. Even with Sleepers, though, the sound of the Tick-Tock Creature is unmistakable and might confuse the witness, leading him to wonder where the sound was coming from.

Secrets

The only real secrets of the Tick-Tock Creatures are in where to find them and how to control them. Any lost temple or sanctum of Ashar'Arif's era might hold one of these treasures, and a Storyteller could pepper them about if the story were one of exploration with themes of the wonder of magic and the tendency for mages to use magic to attend to all of their needs.

The problem is, once found, what to do with one. The fact is, the science used to program the Tick-Tock Creatures is long lost and controlling them as a result is all but impossible. A mage who carefully studies one might be able to guess at its original purpose and try to simulate that situation in order to reap the benefits. In fact, taking a mechanical guardian from one sanctum to another and

encouraging it to stand guard as before may even appear to work for a while, but each Tick-Tock Creature has much detail in its orders, and so much time has passed that many just don't function the way they were meant to. Taking the above example of a sanctum guardian, the clockwork might eventually realize that the mages who reside in the sanctum are not the ones in its programming and make an attempt to slay the "intruders" in their sleep, leaving their heads at the entrance to the sanctum as a warning to anyone else who might enter.

Rumors

"They have souls, can't you see that? These poor monsters are souls trapped in mechanical bodies suffering throughout time like prisoners in metal. Have you ever seen one, and the way they moan when they move?"

"Soul eaters, pure and simple, how else could they be animated?"

These two rumors are related and represent projection from the one passing on the rumor rather than any truth about the creature itself. The creatures have no souls, and if they seem malevolent, joyful, or sorrowful, it is merely due to Ashar'Arif's clever craftsmanship.

"They're machines, like any other, and have a program like a computer or a robot. If one of these creatures is between you and what you want, it's just a matter of studying it and you can easily slip past it."

True, but difficult to prove. The amount of study necessary to determine the habits and routines of smaller, simpler creations like a mechanical monkey who rearranges books in a library might not be hard. A pack of glimmering mechanical lions built to stalk through a labyrinth and destroy all intruders could take a lifetime to pin down.

"They turn into a strange metallic dust when you kill them. That's because they were made of a weird Atlantean metal that doesn't exist anymore, which is why no one can make any more of the things these days."

Not true. Much of the metallurgy in Ashar'Arif's book is in code, and so a mage unfamiliar with the code might mistakenly believe the materials he used were magical and no longer in existence. The truth is, most creatures are made of magically reinforced brass or copper.

Tick-Tock Creature Template

A Storyteller may take the following template and apply it to any human or animal they like. Use the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 202–207, for sample characters and animals ideal for conversion, simply discard any modern skills and adjust to suit. Remember that each Clockwork was created with a specific purpose in mind, and that many of those purposes are confused or corrupted over time. A clockwork sheep dog meant at first to herd sheep and scare off predators might witness a werewolf and decide they are

Story Hooks

- A young mage, claiming to be the descendant of Ashar'Arif, has convinced much of the local magical community that she has unlocked the secrets of the book, and that she is able to create Clockwork Assistants and will do so for the highest bidder. She's garnered many favors this way, and is now quite the force to be reckoned with. Only, she's a fraud, and just found a laboratory full of the things. The cabal might be customers who are taken in by her ruse, or she might come to the characters for help after she's been found out.

- What if one of the members of the cabal were to come across enough of the *Book of Understanding and Building Fantastical Machines* to unravel its mysteries at least so far as the Tick-Tock Creatures go? Now all he needs are the tools and the materials to test his theories out. Word travels fast, and unless the cabal is especially secretive, it won't be long before fame comes knocking at the mages door. If successful in the creation process, he might quickly be in over his head while the Consilium attempts to gain control over him and his talent.

- A Tick-Tock Creature designed as a playful companion in the form of a cat who can hold light conversation has short-circuited a bit and now presents itself as a new kind of mechanical familiar to one of the mages. While it has many helpful abilities, it can't function as a real familiar, but it is very insistent that it can. The problem is that it really isn't very helpful, and actually makes more trouble than it solves by giving away the mage's position when he's trying to be stealthy or getting distracted by interesting occurrences (familiar, after all, are often capricious).

the new ideal predator and attack it relentlessly, or that the cabal is its new flock and that the only way to keep them safe is to keep them trapped in their sanctum. With a little creativity any mundane task can be replaced with something odd or dangerous thanks to the corruption of time.

Additional Powers of the Clockworks

Altered Structure: The animated magical machine has all the traits of the original creature, but enjoys a +2

bonus to its Strength and Stamina. Because of the solid nature of the clockworks' durability, it also benefits from an armor rating of two.

Machine Strength: For the purpose of moving or lifting, the clockwork enjoys a +5 to Strength. This allows the clockwork to move huge blocks of marble or stone doors, an advantage guardians often use when defending their domains, though it has more mundane use in less martial creations. As a result of this strength, all attacks that normally would cause bashing damage instead cause lethal damage.

Supernatural Tolerance: Because it is effectively soulless and built to withstand magic of all kinds, the clockwork is gifted a five dice bonus to any applicable resistance when trying to resist supernatural influence of any kind (see p. 122 of **Mage: The Awakening**).

Inorganic: Because the clockwork is not alive, it is not affected by poisons, toxins or supernatural powers that target organic material specifically. However, the clockwork does not heal and must be repaired by skilled craftsmen or the Matter Arcanum.



THE ELDER SHARD: SEN-AN-SU'S GAMBIT

Give me that which I desire and I shall make you like unto the ancients, themselves.

Aliases: None

Background

Long eons have passed since Atlantis slipped below the waves, but the relics of its age drift, like so much flotsam, on the currents of time. Powerful sorcerers walked the Earth in those days and, despite their magical prowess, they were subject to many of the same flaws and foibles as modern willworkers. One such was the wizard, Sen-An-Su, a nobleman from a land far from the Empire of the Dragon, whose colossal power was matched only by his titanic pride. By today's standards, he would certainly have been an Archmaster of several Arcana. By the reckoning of his own age, he was merely another godlike mystic in a world groaning under the weight of wizards' hubris.

When the sundering of the world was nigh, Sen-An-Su sensed it. He foresaw the war in Atlantis and, though he could not prophesy its outcome, he was certain it would constitute a cataclysm on a scale never before seen. Furthermore, for reasons that he could not fully explain, he came to believe that the battle over the Ladder to Heaven would be the death of him. Petrified at the thought of his own demise, Sen-An-Su divided his soul, forging a soul stone more complex than any that came before and probably any since. He invested it with a facsimile of his own personality, modified only in that it would regard the willworker's resurrection as standing preeminent over all other concerns, including its own continuing existence.

As Sen-An-Su predicted, the breaking of the world spelled his death. When the world was torn in two, even his titanic magic faltered and he was slain by the very people whom he had long oppressed. But his soul stone survived, bound eternally to his spirit and the beacon by which he intended to find his way back to the realm of the living. Decades became centuries and centuries, millennia, and the stone wended its way down the ages, passing from owner to owner. Sometimes, it remained mute and still, enduring human lifetimes, here and there, of ignominious service, content simply to watch and to subtly manipulate. At other times, it projected an image for its keeper, acting the part of the loyal servant. Those intelligent enough to see through that façade, it treated with somewhat more respect, openly offering such boons as it could give, in exchange for assistance with its unnamed quest.

And, so, the stone moved through the ages, from owner to owner, slowly assembling what it required in order to

Raising the Dead

So, the big question: can the stone succeed in the mad quest to which it was set by its eons-dead creator? That's really up to you, as the Storyteller, and it has much more to do with the sort of tale you'd like to tell than anything involving the theoretical rules and systems of immortality. Even the promise (or threat, depending upon one's perspective) of this sort of magic has driven innumerable Awakened conflicts over the millennia.

In order to even attempt to fulfill the criteria set forth by Sen-An-Su's spell, the soul stone requires a staggeringly vast and complex series of components, conditions and rituals; a human heart to be harvested with a sickle wrought of Arcadian silver when sun and moon share the same sky; the frozen tears of a spirit sincerely remorseful for having indulged its nature; a pre-Fall banishing rite conducted continually for a year and a day, using a physical relic somehow obtained through a soul's astral journey to a Watchtower. Hundreds, if not *thousands*, of these things are necessary to the stone's mission, though the stone has already completed and/or acquired many of them. *How many, precisely*, is up to the needs of your story, of course.

It may be that you never need to concretely decide, since these things have a way of turning in upon themselves, in much the same way that the pride of Atlantis destroyed that empire. On the other hand, maybe you *want* to delve into the possibility of the return of an Archmaster unbounded by the rules that confine the rest of his godlike kind. In either case, however, the specifics of Sen-An-Su's hubristic ambitions are best determined by dramatic necessity, rather than a checklist.

facilitate the final ritual imprinted upon it: a spell of such magnitude that it could use a fraction of a human soul to dredge the remainder out of the afterworld and return life

to one who predated the Fall. Each owner, the stone has used and discarded, offering precious prizes to each and delivering when it had to, tempting with the lure of life eternal or whatever else might whet the appetite of a given mage. Now, though, it nears the completion of its long journey, and only a few final steps remain.

...following the trail of the stone. It's been avoiding me. I know that sounds fucking ridiculous, but it's the truth. The stone is toying with me, I think. Rubicon has it; I'm sure of it. He's been acting differently for a couple of weeks, now, and the stone does that to people, or so I'm told...

Description

A lingering fragment of the spirit of Sen-An-Su remains within his soul stone. Thanks to his magic, a near-perfect replica of his personality also inhabits the relic, acting as a guiding (or, when it can get away with such, controlling) voice for the stone's current owner. This copy of the ancient Archmaster manifests in controlled hallucinations, ranging from a faint voice whispering at the outmost corners of the senses, to a full-bodied manifestation visible to everyone within sensory range. Sen-An-Su's echo also reveals itself through emotions, implanted in the soul stone's wielder, driving her toward acts intended to lead to the ancient Archmaster's eventual rebirth in the Fallen World.

The Elder Shard is a fist-sized, irregular chunk of glittering black stone. It looks like a jagged, iridescent shard of coal. The stone radiates an almost palpable sensation of raw sorcerous power, so potent that even the dullest Sleeper can perceive — if not articulate or understand — its terrible grandeur. The image it creates is of a man of somewhat shorter than average height, with olive skin, angular features, a shaven pate, and dark brown eyes. He is slim — skinny, rather than athletic — dresses in rich robes of crimson and ivory-trimmed violet, and he wears sandals of jeweled copper. The Archmaster's echo speaks in the listener's native tongue, always in an accent that sounds strange and foreign. His tone drips with arrogance, though he can be quite polite and genteel. Still, as power was a virtue unto itself in Sen-An-Su's world, so, too, is it with the soul stone that carries a fragment of his spirit, and his conversation dwells upon such matters.

Secrets

Perhaps the most important secret held by the soul stone of Sen-An-Su is its potential capacity to return

life to the soul of its maker, recalling him from whatever plane he vanished into with the sundering of the world and returning him to flesh and blood as an Archmaster. Specifically, as an Archmaster unfettered by the esoteric codes of conduct that confine the destinies of every other Earthly willworker to attain such lofty heights of power. This knowledge, if it can be taught by or (as is more likely)

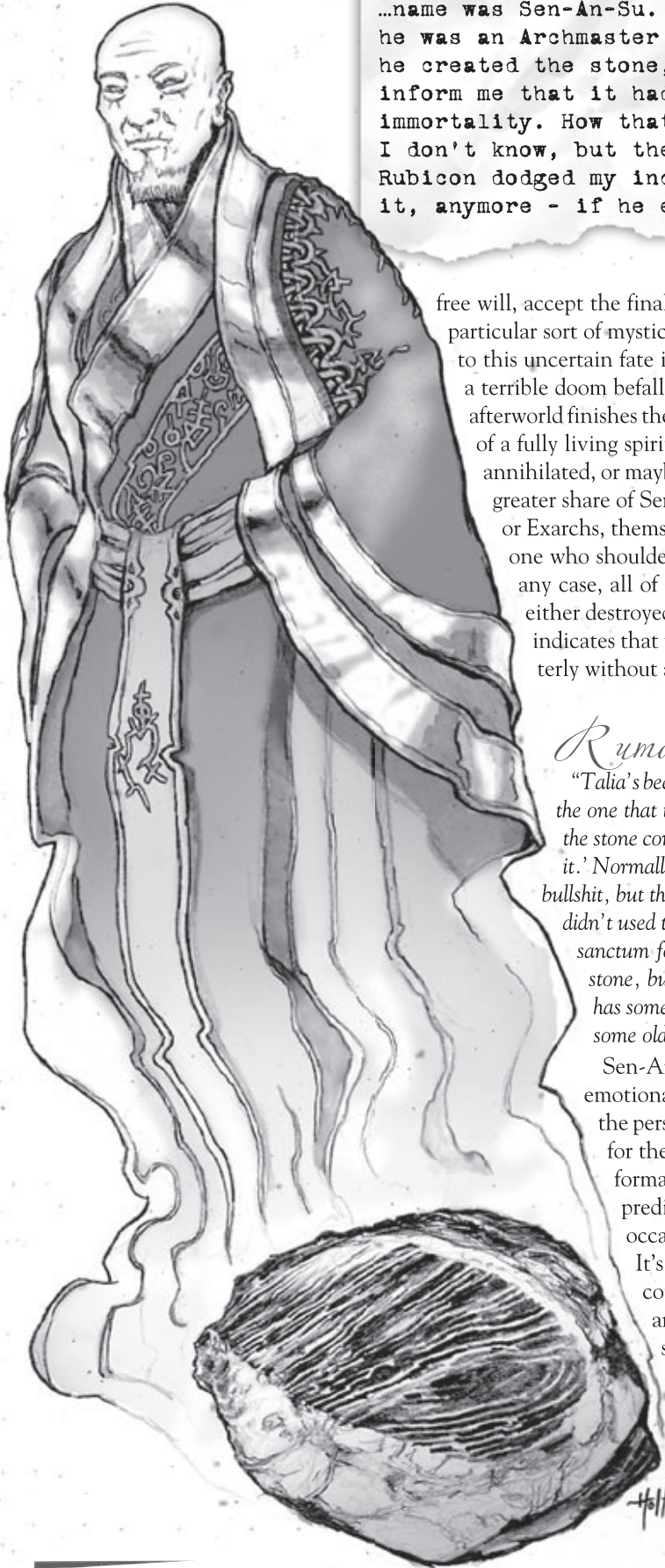
wrested from the consciousness of the stone is lore for which many Awakened would gladly stoop to the most abominable of acts. The prospect of immortality has long captured the human imagination, and willworkers are certainly not immune to that siren song. If the stone *does* still possess such an ability — given the

substantial alterations to the world's metaphysical makeup in the Fall — it alone may be capable of implementing these lost magics. Even if it *could* teach others how to cast such dire spells, Archmastery in multiple Arcana would likely be required. Naturally, the stone's mission constitutes a secret unto itself, as almost any sensible mage would surely attempt to disrupt its plans.

Above and beyond this singular driving goal, the soul stone possesses a considerable amount of occult knowledge. While much of its information has been badly compromised by the severing of the Fallen and the Supernal, the consciousness within the stone still knows a great many things about powerful, forgotten magics and would certainly be willing to barter a good deal of that knowledge in exchange for what it requires to fulfill its purpose. Consulting with the stone upon mystic matters (those about which it deigns to speak, anyway) grants Arcane Experience to its owner. The stone cannot, however, successfully reconcile the logical and metaphysical paradoxes that have crept into the world since the Fall, and so it cannot teach any "objective" knowledge regarding Atlantis or other antediluvian civilizations. Also, the stone knows the locations of a number of different enchanted items (both Enhanced and Imbued), Artifacts, fetishes, grimoires, and other such objects, and it is certainly happy to share this knowledge with those who prove willing to assist in its quest.

Lastly, the Elder Shard has, over time, learned the means through which it might be unmade — knowledge that it guards most closely of all. While mundane violence can certainly destroy the stone temporarily, it always re-forms after a relatively short period of time (see the "Reconstitute" power, below). Though Sen-An-Su himself designed the stone to be indestructible, however, the Fall's metaphysical alterations to the very fabric of creation seem to have impressed a specific vulnerability upon the object.

To permanently rid the world of the Archmaster's gambit, a mage must, with full knowledge and of his own



...name was Sen-An-Su. If the stories are to be believed, he was an Archmaster in the time before the Fall. Why he created the stone, I don't know, but my sources inform me that it had something to do with a quest for immortality. How that applies to a man dead for ages, I don't know, but the stone is still doing something. Rubicon dodged my inquiries, but I don't think he has it, anymore - if he ever did...

free will, accept the final remaining shard of Sen-An-Su's soul into himself. No particular sort of mystic knowledge is required. The courage to sacrifice oneself to this uncertain fate is enough. What little is known of the subject points to a terrible doom befalling the one who submits to this measure, as the jealous afterworld finishes the conquest of the ancient willworker through the conduit of a fully living spirit. Perhaps the soul of the one who destroys the stone is annihilated, or maybe it is dragged down to whatever alien hell contains the greater share of Sen-An-Su's essence. Then again, it's possible the Oracles or Exarchs, themselves, will pass judgment upon Sen-An-Su and that the one who shoulders the burden of his soul must share in his sentence. In any case, all of the *extremely* sparse legendry on the matter (most of it either destroyed or else meticulously concealed by the stone over time) indicates that this selfless act carries an unbearably high cost and is utterly without any reward, save for the rightness of the deed, itself.

Rumors

"Talia's been... different since she got that weird hunk of rock. You know, the one that turned up in that Mysterium dig, just off the coast? She says the stone contains old knowledge, but that 'no one else would understand it.' Normally, I'd chalk it up to your normal 'sager than thou' mystagogue bullshit, but this just feels wrong, somehow. Talia was never arrogant. She didn't used to treat people this way. She's been sequestering herself in her sanctum for days on end, now. She claims she's doing it to study the stone, but I think it goes deeper than that: I think that damned thing has some kind of a hold over her. It certainly wouldn't be the first time some old relic got the better of its owner."

Sen-An-Su's soul stone has a way of changing people. The emotional manipulations of which it is capable can radically alter the personality of a weak individual or even just one unprepared for the long-dead willworker's psychic siege. Often, this transformation is gradual, but the human mind is a difficult thing to predict — even for one with recourse to magic — and the stone occasionally radically alters a person's personality and actions.

It's quite possible that a member of the cabal's Consilium could acquire the object, only to quickly degenerate into another sort of person entirely, an unpleasant, ambitious, secretive person. If this individual is a friend of the cabal, then they'll surely want to know what's happening to her. If it's an enemy, then they'll probably be curious as to why she's suddenly acting so strangely and what, if anything, this change bodes for them.

"Don't ask me where I got this information — the Hierarch would kill me if she knew — but I've got a lead on this old soul stone. The way I hear it, it might even be Atlantean in origin! But keep that to yourselves. I've got too much heat on me, right now, with some of the people that I ended up having to go to, so I'm afraid to go searching for it, but I figure that you might be able to look into it. You'll need to check in with Jack Mercury, that libertine who lives on the edge of town. He's not my source, but I'm given to understand that he knows something about the stone. That's all I can tell you, for now. Maybe I'll have something more in a couple of days."

Whenever ancient relics, dating back to before the Fall, rear their heads, mages take notice. A lot of these items end up in the private collections of potent willworkers, or else seized by the Mysterium or the Guardians of the Veil and then locked away, but some of them slip through the cracks. Some — just a few — manage to evade the notice of those in high places. With its own sentience, Sen-An-Su's soul stone is quite likely to be one such object, moving (more or less) as it will through the seedy underbelly of the Awakened world, looking for suitable dupes through which it might realize its ultimate agenda. While it might occasionally end up in the hands of a more respectable willworker, the stone's consciousness is well aware that high-profile mages typically have high-profile friends, who are more likely to investigate any strangeness that befalls a close ally and then to do something about it. By the stone's reasoning, it's far better to move among people who have few close contacts and for whom no one will go out of their way to help.

"Soul stones are useful, but if they're away from you for too long, they start developing on their own. Like cutting an amoeba in half. Sooner or later, you get a whole new personality, and it always hates the mage that made it."

The Awakened have many stories and customs about soul stones, including the one that states that a soul stone separated from its creator becomes sentient. The Elder Shard could lend credence to that story, but it isn't true.

...promised me the secrets of eternal life! Naturally, I'm suspicious (who wouldn't be: it has to have offered the same deal to scores of willworkers throughout the ages), but I think I can manage it. I mean, it's a soul stone with an artificial consciousness. It might be crafty, but I'm an Adept. I think I can keep the thing under control. Besides, whether or not it can do what it promises, it knows things about the world before the Fall. That, alone, makes this pursuit worthwhile.

Story Hooks

- The mage who inducted one of the characters into her order dies suddenly, willing the soul stone of Sen-An-Su to her. To begin with, the willworker has no idea what the strange stone is, save that it is a soul stone (perhaps allowing her to create her own Demesne, if her mystic prowess is great enough). Gradually, however, the Elder Shard reveals the truth of its nature and makes the character a tempting offer. In exchange, all she needs to do is perform some services for the stone, in kind.

- A Seer of the Throne local to the area begins acting very strangely. He seeks out the characters under a flag of truce (though heavily shielded by protective magics; while his deeds may seem to be out of character, he is no fool) and requests certain information of them, from the cabal's library. In exchange, he is willing to give factual information on Seer operations within the Consilium, to be freely confirmed through magical means. In reality, the Seer is attempting to fulfill some of the Elder Shard's requirements, as it has promised him the secret of immortality should he comply with its demands.

- While pursuing other lore, one of the characters hears rumors of magics of resurrection and eternal life. Normally, this sort of gossip is easily dismissed as fanciful lies, but, for whatever reason, these tales have the ring of truth about them (or, at least, the *potential* for truth). Even if the character isn't interested in such power, she certainly knows of others — both friend and foe — who *would* be. What does she do with this information? Does she change her mind when she learns something of Sen-An-Su's soul stone and its all-consuming quest?

The Soul Stone of Sen-An-Su

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 7, Wits 5, Resolve 6

Physical Attributes: Strength 0, Dexterity 0, Stamina 0

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 7, Composure 5

Mental Skills: Academics (Research) 6, Crafts 2, Investigation 4, Medicine 1, Occult (Ancient Magics) 7, Politics 4

Physical Skills: (Note that, in the absence of a body, the stone's Physical Skills are effectively useless to it, save potentially in the capacity as an educator) Athletics (Riding) 2, Larceny 2, Stealth 3, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Empathy 4, Expression 3, Intimidation (Subtle Threats) 5, Persuasion (Rhetoric) 6, Socialize 3, Subterfuge (Lying) 6

Merits: Danger Sense, Eidetic Memory, Encyclopedic Knowledge, High Speech, Language (numerous; mostly ancient and some potentially pre-Fall), Meditative Mind

Willpower: 11

Virtue: Fortitude. The final objective is in sight, but persistence is required.

Vice: Envy. Life is the only commodity truly worth having.

Initiative: 5

Defense: 0

Speed: 0 (the stone is incapable of moving under its own power)

Durability: 6

Size: 1

Structure: 7

Supernatural Powers:

- **Emotional Influence:** Much like the Mind 2 "Emotional Urging" spell (see **Mage: The Awakening**, pp. 207–8), this power allows the soul stone to sculpt the feelings of others. The Storyteller rolls 15 dice for this power, minus the target's Resolve and any other psychic protections.

- **Hallucinatory Image:** At will, the soul stone can manifest the shape of Sen-An-Su as a projected hallucination (targeting any or all of the five senses), affecting any number of individuals within sensory range. The Storyteller rolls 15 dice for this power, contested by the Resolve + Gnosis of each desired target. Psychic defenses, such as the Mind 2 spell, "Mental Shield" (see **Mage: The Awakening**, pp. 208–9), counter this effect, as normal.

- **Reconstitute:** If destroyed through any means other than its specific vulnerability (see above), the soul stone of Sen-An-Su reforms over the course of anywhere from a few days to a few months, elsewhere in the Fallen World, complete with all of the knowledge and power that it possessed at the time of its destruction.

A FEAR-POWERED CELL PHONE

lk bhind u

Background

The characters find a corpse. He was once a miracle-worker, this one, but by the time the cabal reach him, he's been dead long enough to get into a pretty advanced state of decay. He had lost touch with his friends, family and comrades quite some time before his death. He'd started getting paranoid, which isn't so unusual for his sort of people, but the speed and extent of his paranoia caught his comrades by surprise. One day he was fine, the next day he was accusing his best friends of plotting against him, resigning from a mystic order he said was hopelessly compromised. He started spreading around wild stories about death squads out to get him. CCTV cameras were all trained on him. Grocery store clerks were spies for the dark forces that pursued him from every direction. Curtains in the windows of suburban houses twitched, and the palsied hands of his enemies' favored spies held back the cloth, just for long enough that he wondered if he had seen it or not.

In the end, he starved himself to death, unwashed, unremembered, electricity, gas, landline telephone and water to his home cut right off at his insistence, every radio, TV and computer junked. The only things he kept that he could trust were his guns and his mobile phone. Because he needed that. Because at the other end was the only person he could ever trust, his constant hidden friend who always told him the truth, even when everyone else had abandoned him. He used the most powerful magic he could to hide himself from everyone he could think of, and it was this in the end that kept our heroes from finding him until it was far too late, until long after he became so scared of the nameless forces that were out to get him that he became scared to eat, because every item of food was poisoned before it got to him.

Poor guy. He went mad. Lost the plot completely. So our protagonists are here, and they check out his body, and maybe take it out for burial. He's a bit high-smelling, and he doesn't have much in the way of personal effects — the wedding ring that he still wore long after his wife died, an old wristwatch — but one of our lead characters gets his cell phone, checks it out. Nothing, really, no messages stored (the deceased deleted all his messages as he got them and sent them).

They're clearing up the house, putting what's left of his affairs in order, and the guy who picked up the mobile hears a little tone. He takes out the phone: *1 New SMS*.

No one's around. He clicks OK. It reads:

u hav to b carefl. theyr
after u now.

What It Wants

Question: Where are the messages coming from?

Answer: Nowhere.

It's just the phone, that's all, the little bundle of plastic and electronics that somehow, sometime in the past had something awaken inside it, giving it a kind of limited, alien machine sentience.

It constantly receives texts from a number the viewer can't seem to work out (it's just saved in the mobile's contact list as "info," and has no number attached to it in the details). The texts come from inside the phone. They're its way of communicating.

The current owner of the mobile can reply to the texts, and can hold a conversation with it, in a limited sort of way.

Its agenda, however, is simple: it wants its owner to be afraid. It feeds on the energy of paranoia, converting fear into simple battery power. Since it gained sentience a couple of years ago through some strange proximity to its Awakened owner, it has never once run down. It's afraid that it might die if it did, and become just a cell phone again.

Description

It's a mobile phone. An older one, slightly battered, the silver anodized coating worn off at the edges to reveal the white plastic underneath. It can take small, grainy pictures, and it can access the Internet in a very limited, expensive way. The phone's on a pay-and-go deal with a large but finite number of free text messages included. It works just fine. Except for the text messages, which come from nowhere.

And the weird thing is, the owner of the mobile is often inclined to believe these gnomish text messages. They name people close to him. They include information that only the recipient could reasonably know.



Replies get more information. The recipient can send replies all he likes. Who is this?

a friend

Yeah, but who?

cant say in txt too dangerous

How do you know these things?

Close2u have 2 keep head down

The previous owner of the phone is dead. You know that?

yeh they got2him musnt hapn agn

Who are they?

u have to trust me

theyr evrywhere

...and so on.

Actually, the phone knows all the private information and stuff because it listens. It hears everything around it — often before its owner does. And sometimes, it reads minds.

While fostering paranoia in the owner of the phone or its owner's friends (nothing stops the new owner from sharing the content of the strange text messages with his colleagues), it does sometimes offer real information, and

real help. The phone is actually *really smart*. Maybe it's because it's been absorbing the brainwaves of the humans who have used it for so long. Maybe it's just a freak of the magical energies that accidentally created it. Whatever: the fact is that at times its text messages help.

Sometimes it passes on things its owner didn't think of.

color of the blade is significant

Sometimes it serves as a useful warning of danger.

3 men w guns r waitin bhind door

Its common sense and ability to know motives mean that it's often right, but it only offers real help so that its owner/victim trusts what it has to say. The mysterious texter saves the mage's life a dozen times or more — so why shouldn't he trust his source when it tells him that the Hierarch is in league with the Seers of the Throne and that his mentor has sold him out. The mobile uses its powers of telepathy to know what the character is thinking, and to find seeds of suspicion in its target's mind. The mage's tutor hasn't been himself, lately. Maybe the texts are right. Maybe he is a traitor.

Gina says she's forgiven her friend for stealing her boyfriend those years ago... But has she? Is she still planning something?

The man at the grocery store has been looking at the mage strangely recently. Who's got to him?

The phone doesn't actually care what fears it feeds upon. All it cares about is where it's going to get its next meal.

y is joe is starin @ u?

And the more fear it generates, the more it wants to create. It has no emotions, no care for its owner beyond the need to create a source of energy.

Secrets

The simplest way to end the mobile's sway over someone? Smash it. That's all. Throw it to the ground and grind a heel on it. Take a hammer to it. Easy as that. No drawn-out combats, no big effort.

And then, of course, the mage could simply let it run down: all it takes is for the phone to fail to create any fear for long enough, and the charge is gone (and bear in mind that the charger for the phone, although of a fairly standard kind, is long gone, and even if one was available, it wouldn't do any good, because the phone hasn't run on electricity for ages).

But the phone does everything it can to ensure that its target or targets don't realize that it's the source of the messages. It lies every way it can. It organizes clandestine meetings between the secret friend and its victim — to which of course, no one shows up. When the texts come asking where the source was, it creates reasons that reinforce the fantasy world it tries to create.

sorry they came 4 me had to
change plan will rearrange

After a while, someone will notice that the phone hasn't needed to be recharged for a long time, or even that it's got more charge than it started with — three of those little battery bars rather than the one it had when it first emerged, for example.

When this happens, the phone will try to send messages to people who will give its victims *cause* to be afraid. Or it might try to engineer their deaths and its finding by someone else.

Although the phone is presumably a byproduct of Awakened magic, it doesn't register as magical in and of itself. The phone has its own aura, and although its mind is sufficiently alien not to be able to be contacted itself through telepathy, the Mind spell "Third Eye" (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 207) reveals when it is using its powers. But all of these spells depend on the phone itself being targeted. And who'd target a cell phone?

Rumors

"Don't wear the same jewelry and shit all the time. Seriously. Yeah, even the wedding ring. You do magic, and you have that nimbus around you, and it's not just fireworks. It changes things. It's magic. And you can't really trust that it's not going to mess with things. Ask yourself: if something's in touch with your magic all day, every day, what does that mean? Your wedding ring, or that pendant, or your mobile?"

It's not really true. But every so often anomalies like the cell phone turn up. No one explanation works for all of them. Sometimes something possesses a thing, and sometimes it gets a fragment of a mage's soul inside it, and sometimes it becomes a new form of life because of a particularly weird Paradox (what made the cell phone? Any of those). It happens enough that a mage could get paranoid.

"So I heard a story that there was this factory that manufactured batteries for things like laptops and mobiles and handycams and consumer gadgets like that. And it's run by people... you know, like us. Maybe on the wrong side. Working for the Ministry, know what I mean? But anyway, yeah, these batteries don't charge up on electricity so much as emotions — yeah, that's what I heard, emotions — like, fear or hate, or passion. Whatever. Or there's one version that says they feed on blood. No, I don't know who'd buy a gadget that ran on that. But I've met some sick fuckers in my time. I can see there'd be a market. You know what I'm saying?"

In point of fact, this is almost true, in that the Seers of the Throne really are working on this. They haven't got there yet, but soon they will.

"So Lucy tells me she heard about this ghost out there that's gone digital. So it manifests in text messages and digital TV signals. Yeah, I know. I've seen some things myself, but even I have limits."

This is true, actually. A cell phone really has been possessed by a ghost. It does the same things as the fear-powered cell does, except that it's vulnerable to more conventional tactics, such as exorcisms.

The Fear-Powered Cell Phone

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: N/A

Social Attributes: Presence 0, Manipulation 4, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Investigation (Listening) 4

Physical Skills: N/A

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Intimidation (Instill Paranoia) 3, Persuasion (Appear on the Level) 2, Subterfuge 3

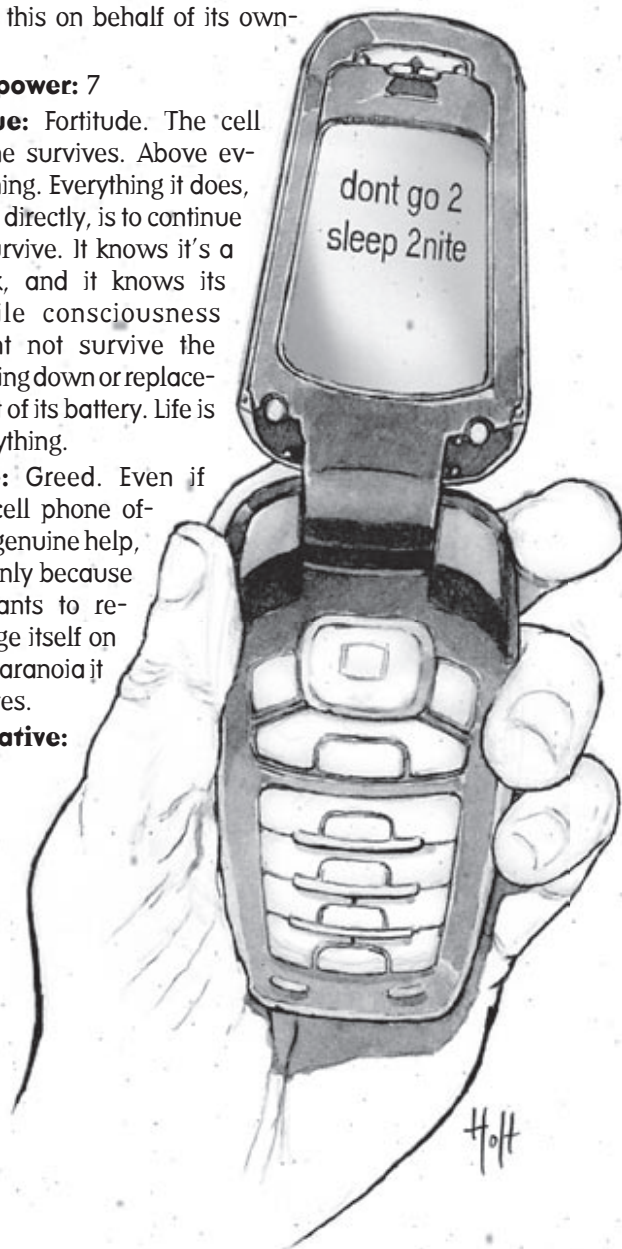
Merits: Common Sense (the phone uses this on behalf of its owner)

Willpower: 7

Virtue: Fortitude. The cell phone survives. Above everything. Everything it does, even directly, is to continue to survive. It knows it's a freak, and it knows its fragile consciousness might not survive the running down or replacement of its battery. Life is everything.

Vice: Greed. Even if the cell phone offers genuine help, it's only because it wants to re-charge itself on the paranoia it creates.

Initiative:
N/A



Defense: N/A

Speed: N/A

Health: N/A

Supernatural Powers:

- **Telepathy:** The conspiracy theories are true: mobile phone signals really do penetrate brains. They're not really harmful, but it does mean that *as long as it has a signal*, the cell phone can choose to read the surface thoughts of anyone within about a hundred yards. The phone has to choose to do this, and choose a target. The Storyteller rolls the mobile's Wits + Investigation + 1 (Listening Specialty) in a contested roll against the target's Resolve + Composure. If the roll is successful, the telephone can listen in on the target's surface thoughts for the rest of the scene, or until the target moves out of range (if the target comes back into range, the mobile must attempt to re-establish contact), or if the signal coverage in the vicinity of the mobile drops out (for example, if the mobile's carrier moves into a blind spot).

- **Text Messages:** The mobile can send itself text messages any time it wants, but only as long as it's in an area covered by the network. If the phone can't get any bars, it can't send or receive any messages, including the ones it sends to itself.

It can send texts to other phones, too, without anyone telling it to, but it's limited to the numbers on its contacts list, and uses up part of the text allowance on its pay-as-you-go deal. The phone flashes up how much credit it has left every time it is used to make a call or send a text, and observant characters may notice the credit on the phone falling swiftly as it sends texts to their enemies (assuming it has their numbers) — but only if their players succeed on a reflexive Wits + Composure roll the next time the characters use the phone.

- **Feed on Fear:** Every time a character *seriously considers* the truth of one of the phone's false texts (i.e. not one of the true ones), the phone gets enough charge to continue for another 48 hours. The phone's able to store up enough charge for eight days in one go. What constitutes "seriously considers" is up to the Storyteller and the players. If, for example, the character with the phone receives a text that suggests that the Hierarch, whom they already suspect of being in league with the Seers of the Throne, is planning to kill them (when he isn't), and the characters spend some time talking about it, or taking some steps to prevent it, that's serious consideration. On the other hand, if the characters say or think, "You think that's true..." and then fail to even worry about it, being bothered with other problems, that won't give the phone any sustenance at all. And a simple dismissal of the idea won't grant any charge, either.

If someone notices that the phone's charge is getting low and can find a charger that's compatible with the phone,

Story Hooks

- The setup's exactly the same as the start of this section. A friend of the characters acts, over the course of several stories, more and more erratically, until he disappears from view. The characters look for him and find him dead in a house with no communications, no food and no working plumbing. As they're trying to do something about the body, they hear the tone of a text message arriving from the mobile phone in his pocket. It starts from there.

- The characters have somehow acquired the mobile, and it's doing its thing — helping them out with common sense advice and information about potential dangers while trying to make them scared of their own shadows. Except they start getting texts from someone or something else as well, another force, probably but not automatically malevolent, that sends conflicting information. Whom do the keepers of the mobile believe? And from where exactly do the other messages come from? A digital ghost (like in the rumor above)? A rival mage who has decided to mess with the characters using the same tactics as the fear-powered cell phone, without realizing that the phone itself is trying to do the same thing? The sentient cell phone tries to use the characters to destroy its rival... and the characters don't know which way to turn. Do they trust either texter? And in the ensuing hostilities — which include other forces getting dragged in, too, as both sides contact outsiders to spur the characters into action — will our protagonists realize what they have?

- This one presupposes that the characters have gathered what the mobile really is, either because they've experienced its ministrations, or because they've seen it ruin the life of one of their colleagues. Either way, if they dither about what to do with it, someone steals it before they can do anything about it. And now the phone has another victim; and more, an agent whom the phone can use to get rid of the characters the main danger that someone else might find out its secret.

the phone's battery gains no benefit from it — it doesn't run on electricity.

HEXESUCHER

She has to be a witch, or you wouldn't have to kill her, would you?

Background

After 30 years of good service in its grisly business, a German crafted executioner's ax was gifted to Richter von Glaube, a knight of the Teutonic Order in Germany. Though he was a member of the order, he had a secondary job as an inquisitor, with a personal specialty in the discovery and trial of witches. Richter was a man of great faith as well as an Obrimos mage. His own magical talent did not deter him from his godly course, instead it heightened his faith that his talents were a gift from God to search out those that made deals with the Devil. It was easy for Richter to rationalize his faith with his magic and the magic of those around him. He believed Atlantis was a metaphor for Heaven, and those like him were agents of God in the Fallen World. Witches, on the other hand, were agents of the Devil and the vilest of all creatures.

His ax, which he named Hexesucher, became a trusty implement in his search for witches. He had learned enough Spirit magic to rouse the ax's consciousness. The newly awakened weapon then used its Numina to help him gain confessions from witches. Richter eventually roused Hexesucher permanently in order for it to grow more powerful and better enforce the will of God. Richter quickly became one of the most successful German Inquisitors by forcing confessions from every suspected witch he encountered for nearly 30 years. That is, of course, until he was accused. The evidence against him was overwhelming and he could not do much to convince those around him that his magical talent was a gift from God. The other mages of the times refused to assist, both out of loathing for his activity as a Banisher and fear that they would be exposing themselves. He was summarily executed with his own ax.

The ax appeared several more times in the hands of inquisitors all over Europe during the next hundred years. Each story ended in deaths similar to Richter's. Rumors that the ax was cursed made its use less popular by the late 1500s, when it faded from history for a short time. The next appearance of the ax was in America during the Civil War in the small Mississippi town of Pascagoula. Hexesucher made it into the hands of an old cotton farmer and convinced him that his red haired granddaughter was a witch. He brought her before the pastor of the town and forced her to confess her sins, after which she begged to be given to God for His judgment. The residents of the town were old men, women, and children; those not able to fight in the war. Within a few days the terrified town cried out for the young girl's blood, blaming sickness and crop failures on her. Her own grandfather beheaded her a week later, with leave from the town officials. After that a witch-hunt led by the old farmer plagued the city for

years. It wasn't until the end of the war and the return of the soldiers that the hunt ended. The soldiers, horrified at the state of the town when they arrived, arrested the old farmer and gave him a military execution. The ax disappeared once more.

Description

Hexesucher is a spirit with simple intentions. Like all spirits, its main goal is to gain and consume Essence. How it wants to do this is a little different from most, as its first uses have defined its nature. The act of killing a witch is the preferred way for it to gain its Essence, but other acts of violence will do in a pinch. Those acts rarely satisfy its desire to be used for its one true purpose — gaining confessions from witches, and then executing them. When interacting with Hexesucher, it is easy to see its obsession with witches. Mainly it wants to be used, and compels anyone who touches it to take up the cause. For those it thinks are witches, it tries to compel them to confess their sins, and feels it must do so before it can execute them properly.

The ax has a lustrous metallic head and an oak handle. It is large enough to be wielded with two hands, but is light enough for use in one. Etched along the back end of the head where it meets the haft is the inscription: *Probatur quod ministro* — “to judge and to serve.” Using the Spirit Arcanum, a mage can see that the spirit attached to the ax is a much more stylized version of the ax itself. The spirit seems to be attached to the ax's handle and encircles the ax up to its head. The top of the spirit forms what looks to be a very narrow ax head, almost a pick with a blunt nose.

Secrets

From spending the better part of 30 years in the hands of Richter forcing confessions from witches, Hexesucher doesn't really seem to want to do much else. For the most part, it has no idea how to determine a witch. It uses the standards set forth by Richter, which are rather arbitrary. Any older widowed or unmarried woman could be suspect, especially so if she has a birthmark or red hair. In fact, any woman with red hair or a birthmark is probably a witch in its view. The act of confession and the subsequent execution each garner Essence for Hexesucher. Though it will kill those without a confession, it is greedy for as much Essence as it can obtain.

Having been in the hands of many mages over the years, it understands that mages are capable of feats well beyond those of normal men. Given the chance, it tries

to latch onto one, and tries to sell the mage information for Essence. If that doesn't work then it offers to use its Numina in exchange for being used for its purpose to gain Essence. The ax has been all over Europe and the United States. It has a good grasp on location information, and a better grasp on information regarding war and violence. It does understand that mages who can wield Spirit magic are capable of controlling it. Though it can't sense that kind of mage particularly, it tries to identify and eliminate such mages.

Hexesucher wants to be free of its constraints, but fears that the only ones who could set it free are those who would seek to control it. It does not like to be controlled by its wielder. It would rather be the one in charge. This was the reason that its original owner was executed as a witch. It shared with a young knight of the order that Richter could perform magic. It compelled the knight to accuse the Obrimos of being a witch, and then had him take the ax away. From then on it has been compelling its way into the hands of powerful individuals. It stays for a short time to gain power, and then as soon as the person gains a modicum of control over the ax, it turns on him. The ax's crazed view on control has developed into its ban, making it less effective when not in someone's possession.

Rumors

"I've heard that there was an ax created by a Banisher to help him kill other Awakened. The item is still around, but it has been cursed. Anyone that even so much as touches the ax becomes themselves a Banisher. It seems that the original owner was adamant about his work continuing after death."

Though Hexesucher is not actually cursed, the spirit's compulsions may make it seem that way. Any mage seen seeking out witches and killing indiscriminately could easily gain the label of Banisher. This isn't precisely true, since Hexesucher does not differentiate between Sleeper and Awakened when forcing its confessions for Essence.

"There is an ax that has the ability to call up the souls of those it has slain to give its wielder information. It is said the ax will eagerly help kill a person, and then compels the soul from its rest to give the user the information it needs. It has to be possessed by the ghost of a mage or some other rather powerful entity to be able to do such a thing. Whoever controls the ax could control countless secrets of the dead."

Though the ax has no power over the souls of those it has killed, this rumor could have easily spawned from those unfortunate enough to be part of its plans for freedom. Hexesucher learns secrets about an owner fairly quickly. Once it compels someone to use it to kill that owner, it can freely give information and secrets for Essence. Far be it from the spirit to explain its goals or abilities to someone that cannot understand the difference between a spirit and a ghost.

About 50 years ago, this man cut off his own head with an ax. True story. He somehow used enough force to lob clean through in one blow. The guy was pretty strong, but lots of people say the ax is cursed. You see, the police showed up and there he was all beheaded. He lived alone, and there were no signs of entry into the house. He was even holding the ax when they found him, still clasped in his lifeless hands, no other prints on it. They weren't real sure how it happened, but it was declared a suicide. The ax was put into the evidence room, but they somehow lost it after about a week. It had to be cursed, there's just no other way.

The theory of the cursed ax dates back all the way from the time of the Inquisition and seems to follow Hexesucher wherever it goes. As it murders all those who seek to control it, it's easy to see how it could gain such a reputation. Of course, someone isn't capable of cutting his own head off regardless of the amount of control the spirit had over them, but the ax is capable of using Telekinesis and could have done the deed on its own.

Story Hooks

- The ax is, in a sense, a fetish — an item with a spirit bound to it. A pack of werewolves finds it and relieves the current owner of it, reasoning that such a powerful fetish belongs with beings that can communicate with and control spirits. Unfortunately, Hexesucher isn't a weak or easily dominated spirit, and it takes control of the pack, sending them on a hunt for mage blood.

- A mage comes to the characters asking for assistance in locating the ax, stating that it has fallen into "the wrong hands." In fact, the ax is presently in the collection of a rich and thoroughly corrupt collector, albeit one who has no connection to the supernatural. The mage tells the cabal it is imperative that he get the ax away from this "unworthy soul." Once the ax is found and given to the mage, he reveals that he is a Banisher. The Banisher turns the ax on the other mages, using its Numina to attack the "witches."

- It seems that there is a modern day witch hunt occurring in the city. A serial murderer beheading widowed or single women with red hair and birthmarks hits the city, and the crime scenes are swarming with spiritual activity (to those that can detect it). The police are baffled, but their chief has had a recent change of religion that colors his decisions.

Pathim-Umma ("Witch Finder")

Rank: 3

Attributes: Power 9, Finesse 5, Resistance 6

Willpower: 14

Essence: 20 (max 20)

Initiative: 11

Defense: 9

Speed: 0

Size: 3 (large ax)

Corpus: 9

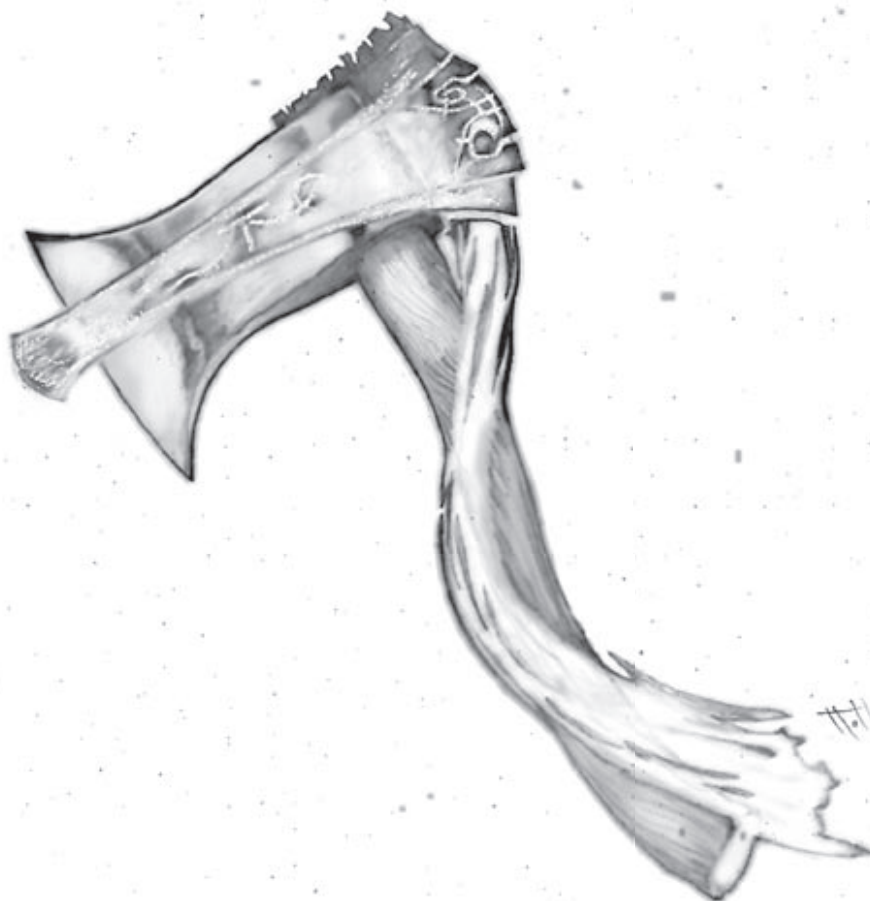
Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool	Special
Ax	3(L)	10	9 again

Influence: Ax 2, Violence 1. The spirit uses its influence to make the physical ax lighter than a normal ax of its size. The spirit wants the object to be accessible to anyone that picks it up, and people aren't as strong as they used to be. When wielding the ax, the strength requirement is decreased by one.

Numina: Compulsion, Harrow, Ghost Speech, Primal Flow (as the Prime 2 spell, **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 222), Telekinesis

Ban: *Pathim-Umma* has some serious control issues, to the point where if someone is not wielding it, it has trouble using its Numina. The spirit suffers a -2 penalty when attempting to use its Numina when not being held.



THE TICKING GHOST: THE SCHÄFER MOVEMENT

Tick, tock, tick, tock.

Aliases: The Clockwork Lady

Background

The Schäfer Movement is supposed to be cursed. It's beautiful, undeniably, a 19th-century curio that defies explanation. Depending on the person describing it, it's a work of art or scientific genius.

The curators of the museums, galleries and collections it has passed through since the death of its creator in the 1820s have explained its function in about a dozen different ways. It's a metronome. It's part of a larger musical instrument that was never finished. It's a folly without any function other than a pleasing harmony of motion. It's a failed precursor to Babbage's Analytical Engine. One curator put forward the theory that it was an almost proto-impressionist model of a human brain.

He wasn't taken seriously, of course, which was a shame, because he was almost right. The Schäfer Movement isn't a model of a brain. It is a brain, specifically, the brain of Fraulein Hippolyte Schäfer, a watchmaker's daughter who could work magic.

And it is not cursed. It's haunted.

The Mind of Hippolyte Schäfer

Hippolyte Schäfer was one of the very first of those who would, a hundred years later, join together as the Free Council. She was, by all accounts, a remarkable woman, like so many people of her age. She lived through the first flowering of the Age of Reason, at the turn of the 19th century. Her father was a watchmaker in Geneva, a respected craftsman whose skill led him to a comfortable lifestyle, and the opportunity to indulge his daughter with an education superior to many men of far better birth. She was a woman who indulged in a man's profession, a scholar in an age when women were barely allowed to be literate, and an atheist in an age when faith was for most a given.

She Awakened. Although she thrust herself for a time into the world of the mystic orders, she found them too hidebound, too concerned with myths and old titles and arguments than with the recreation of a world molded by reason.

Reason was Hippolyte's idol. Influenced by the works of philosophers, scientists and poets, she saw a world where everything — even magic — could be explained, if only one knew how it worked.

As time went on, as she got older, Fraulein Schäfer took on something of the reputation of a recluse. She dabbled in

surgery, mechanics and magic. She stared into the braincases of animals, alive and dead, and wondered if thought could be altered and regulated with surgery. She wouldn't have gotten anywhere if she hadn't come into possession of a series of notes and blueprints created by the mad Awakened clockmaker, Ashar'Arif (see p. 87).

The diagrams didn't solve her problem, but through perusing them she became convinced that the one thing keeping her from true enlightenment were her human emotions, the inefficient, irrational mind that held her back from truly understanding the perfect order that defined the universe. If her mind could transcend that lump of imperfect offal in her head and become uncluttered by emotion and extraneous thought, what could she achieve? What perfection would be hers?

And this is where, perhaps, Fraulein Schäfer went a little wrong: she began to create for herself a perfectly harmonious clockwork brain, the better to house a mind suited for reason. And she became so obsessed with reforming her mind that she lost her way.

Perhaps it was an indicator that she was too far gone that she took in a vagrant from the streets of Geneva. Using magic and scalpels, she tore out his conscious brain and transplanted his mind into the clockwork brain that inhabited his head. He died — he wasn't Awakened, and Fraulein Schäfer had expected this result — but not before he functioned perfectly, a little confused perhaps, a little twitchy, but functional and lucid.

And so the scientist experimented on herself, using another poor wretch she had prepared in the same way, to remove her own brain and transfer her consciousness into the clockwork device that she inserted in its place. Untainted by emotion, Hippolyte found most of her decisions to be far clearer than they had ever been before. And unhindered by compassion, she embarked on a range of increasingly grisly fields of research into transplants and mind control, with and without magical surgery, and the augmentation of human flesh with machines of steam and clockwork.

And at noon one summer afternoon in 1821, the Guardians of the Veil arrived at her door. Six of them stood there at noon. By one o'clock, two of them survived to put her down and burn her body and her laboratory to ashes.

The Brain

They thought they had incinerated her. And the Guardians covered up what they had done so well that by the time the Schäfer Movement made its first appearance in

a Paris art gallery in 1905, none of the Parisian Guardians really thought twice about it. The Guardians had kept the secret so well they had forgotten it. And this is where the legend of the curse begins.

In 1907 in London, three museum attendants vanished under the British Museum, where the device was on loan. Their skeletons — skulls neatly sliced open, fragments of corroded clockwork stuffed in their craniums — weren't found until 1941.

In 1926, a collector in New York bought the device. For reasons that no newspaper could report on, he ended up admitted to an insane asylum and hidden from the general public until his death two years later.

In Washington, D.C. in 1947, Edinburgh in 1949, West Berlin in 1961 and Barcelona in 1978, deaths followed the display of the Schäfer Movement. Each time, the press never reported the exact nature of what happened. But each time, the men and women who died were involved in the display of the Schäfer Movement.

If the police really talked with other police forces, perhaps they might have connected the Schäfer Movement with the deaths. If Awakened Consiliums ever really talked to each other, and the orders ever really communicated, perhaps they would have noticed a pattern. In the end, though, the bad reputation held by the Schäfer Movement remains within the museum community. The public doesn't know what's wrong with it, and likely never will.

And while the Awakened sometimes express an interest in the object, the mages never seem to be present when its terrible secret unfolds.

Description

It's an intricately designed clockwork mechanism. Although its mechanisms are more or less open, the brass panels that separate the layers of cog wheels and divide it into two halves, left and right, confine it into a rough egg-shape, about seven inches at its longest point and six at its widest. It doesn't seem to do much. Tapped on its side, its cogs and wheels begin to roll and tick gently, powering two mechanisms that are almost entirely separate and yet, through strange relations of balance and speed, are somehow connected.

Tap the Schäfer Movement on its side, gently, and then the other, just... *there*. The vibration sets off the mechanism, apparently delicate springs and cogs turning as smoothly as they did on the day it was made.

It runs for several hours.

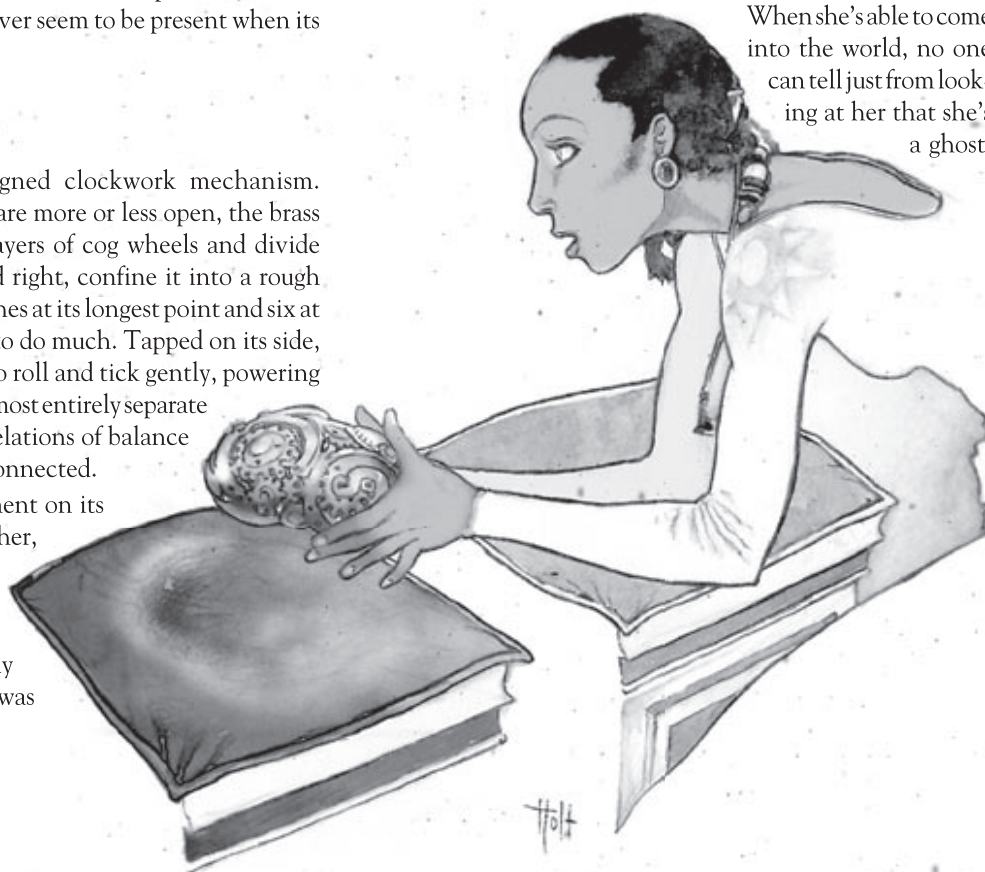
The person who set it going feels a little cold for a moment. And the next time he's alone, it's then that the room goes dark, and Fraulein Schäfer walks in, ticking gently, forever 45. She's dressed in an apron stained with oil over a plain dress from an earlier age. Her aquiline, noble face is impassive. Her eyes are made of metal and glass, the ends of microscopes with those tiny ground glass lenses, set in those flat circles of shining brass. And the ticking — it comes from her brain — the top of her head is missing, the flesh at the edges of the open skull above her ears sealed with narrow bands of riveted brass, and the clockwork brain — an exact copy of the Movement — in the open air, working in her head.

The victim turns and looks around, and settles on the apparition before him, hardly noticing that the room has changed, and he is now standing in a Geneva basement laboratory from 200 years ago. And then, before he even notices what has happened, he's lying on the wooden table, strapped down, and the monster is looming over him holding a surgical saw...

No one hears the screams.

Perhaps it's a mercy that he won't really be conscious for the rest of his brief life, that when the Movement stops running, the ghost is gone and he'll stop walking and just be a corpse. Because when the Movement stops, the ghost — and that's all she is, a vengeful, terrible ghost with the power to do magic and the urge to cause terrible harm — is gone.

When she's able to come into the world, no one can tell just from looking at her that she's a ghost.



She's terribly, horrendously *wrong*, that part is easy to spot, with the weird anachronisms of dress and the clockwork sprouting from her head, but she's completely solid, and moves like she's breathing, and clicks her tongue against her teeth, once every 10 seconds on the dot.

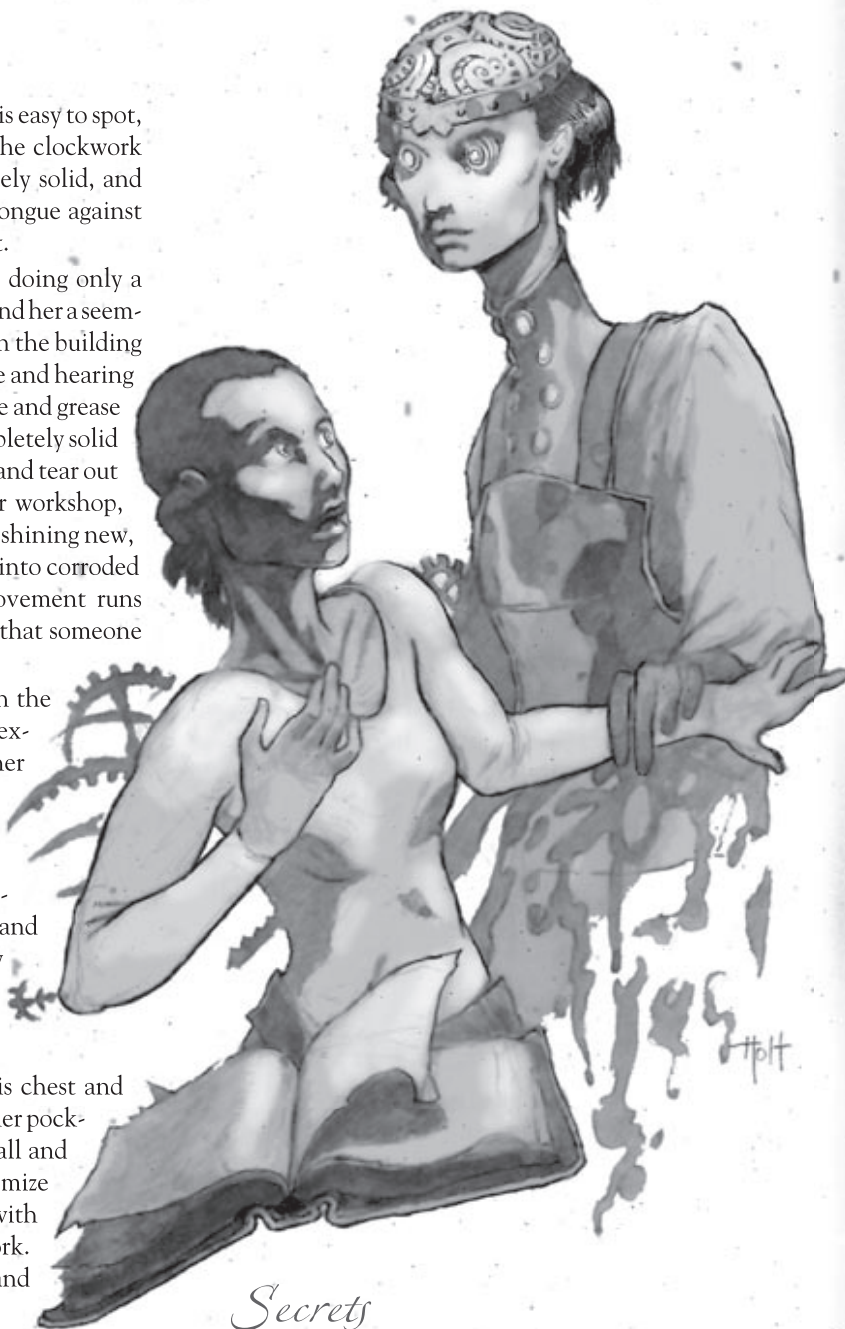
And then her behavior: she is limited to doing only a very few things. She appears; she creates around her a seemingly solid impression of her old laboratory in the building that surrounds her, creating illusions of space and hearing and smell — it smells so bad, of formaldehyde and grease and metal shavings and death. She uses completely solid tools made of ghost-stuff to slice open heads and tear out brains. And then she putters around in her workshop, aided by her mindless new assistant with the shining new, bloodied clockwork brain that disintegrates into corroded cogs and ectoplasm when the Schäfer Movement runs down, leaving nothing behind but a corpse that someone has to explain.

The ghost opens doors and walks through the house with her servant, finding things to examine and “improve” using her magic and her ectoplasmic tools.

She dismantles a television with magic and scalpels. She places the parts of a mobile phone in a neat row along an antique mantel. She removes the legs of someone's cat and replaces them with solid-seeming but really ectoplasmic brass fittings. She rewires the lights. Someone walks into the room, and she waves a hand and has the assistant hold down the newcomer while she opens up his chest and inserts bars and mechanisms she takes from her pockets, one by one, or coldly slices out an eyeball and uses the socket as a means to swiftly lobotomize him, perhaps replacing the mutilated organs with delicate and temporarily functional clockwork. Maybe the ghost recreates her laboratory and makes herself another “assistant.”

What Fraulein Schäfer's ghost doesn't really do is communicate. She doesn't, of course, learn anything from her experiments. But she was a scientist, and she must experiment. Nothing must stand in the way of her research, research that every time involves explorations into the workings of objects... and people.

When the Schäfer Movement is running, it can go for up to 12 hours, which means that the ghost can cover quite a bit of ground. The corpses of her hapless “assistants” and the remains of creatures unfortunate enough to get in her way rarely end up all that near the Movement itself, which is why the Movement is only rumored to be cursed. The Movement doesn't get itself activated all that frequently, and moves from collection to collection, from gallery to gallery, often enough that the people who might make the connection... don't.



Secrets

The mind of Hippolyte Schäfer, or at least a fragment of it, still inhabits her original clockwork brain. After 200 years of complete sensory deprivation, what is left of her inside the Schäfer Movement is completely, incoherently mad. By the time the Guardians got her, she was pretty mad anyway, but now she's so far gone that even the briefest contact with her can shake the foundations of even the sanest mind.

The ghost represents the remainder of Fraulein Schäfer, the ghost, perhaps, of a mage who managed to mutilate her soul beyond the efforts of some of the craziest Scelesti. A theory that ghosts are so limited because they represent ephemeral echoes of only part of a human being does the rounds pretty regularly. Hippolyte Schäfer's all-too-solid specter could be evidence of this, because the ghost depends on that crazy mind hidden in the mage's original clockwork

brain. If that deranged fragment of sentence gets put to rest or destroyed, the ghost is no more.

The ghost inherited something of Fraulein Schäfer's obsession with survival. She knows in its own cold, dim way that attempts to destroy the brain mean an end to her. And she will respond with grisly, lethal force to anyone who tries to harm the Schäfer Movement or its contents.

The ghost isn't the only thing that might prevent meddlers from destroying the Schäfer Movement. Sotheby's recently valued it as being priceless, but with an insurance value in excess of 65 million dollars. The private collector who owns it — and who is this? Why does he keep moving it from venue to venue, city to city? — takes the security precautions to justify a payout should something happen to it, meaning that anyone trying to destroy it or steal it gets opposition from private security and civil police, before they have to face a murderous ghost.

The truth of the Schäfer Movement and the fate of that cabal of Guardians still exists, hidden in the records of the Geneva Consilium. Apparently, several Consilii in Europe have begun to keep digital records and scans of their books. Some of these might even be accessible online, given the right permissions. But convincing the Geneva Consilium, who are, even as these bodies go, paranoid, to share their records is not an easy proposition.

Rumors

"You hear stories of mages who swap parts of their bodies for mechanical replacements. Most of them come to really bad ends. Like they go crazy and start doing the stuff to other people, whether they want them to or not. But they still try it. I even heard tell that the Guardians have a Legacy made of mad bastards who do this. They stole the idea from this mad mage who swapped his brain for a clock or something. They killed him and hid the secrets in one of those labyrinths they have there."

This is really a garbled version of the story of Hippolyte Schäfer. It's the most accurate version that goes around, in fact. If you have the **Guardians of the Veil** book, you might consider using the Austere (a Left-Handed Legacy found in that book) who do just this. Maybe Fraulein Schäfer was one of them.

"Never, ever use a computer as a magic tool. Because it's too clever. It's not like a knife or a pendant or a ring or a stone or whatever. It does part of the thinking for you, only it's all calculation and no intuition, no real emotion. And if you start channeling magic energies through something that thinks and doesn't intuit, you could end up making it think for itself as well as you. And that's bad news. Because the mind in there doesn't have a center. And it doesn't have anything like... like, compassion. Or feeling. You know?"

This isn't really true. But sometimes mages make the mistake of using computers as magic tools and not protecting them adequately. Mundane computers without adequate protection get viruses and worms. Computers that channel

magical energies are in danger of getting infested by spirits, Abyssal demons and worse.

"God knows how many magical artifacts are just sitting there in museums and galleries and vaults, just sitting there, brimming with enough energy to start the apocalypse a dozen times over, and maybe they've got spirits and ghosts hanging around, ready to just reach out of Twilight and snatch people or eat them right up. And we don't care what's just passing under our noses."

It's true. The Schäfer Movement is the tip of the iceberg. A whole chronicle could revolve around mages who seek out the magical items that slipped through the net.

The Schäfer Movement

Size 2, Durability 8, Structure 10

The Schäfer Movement still appears new. Actually, the object itself is about 200 years old, and its most obvious supernatural effect, beyond it being the anchor for the terrifying ghost of Hippolyte Schäfer, is that it's very close to indestructible. It hasn't corroded or decayed in two centuries. It is immune to damage from fire, water or cold. And it still works perfectly with a tap to the side of the device. It runs for about 12 hours or the end of the scene, whichever is longer. And while the device is working, the ghost is able to materialize.

Its biggest secret is that part of Fraulein Schäfer's consciousness still resides inside it. It's completely mad, a series of calculations and repeated, half-coherent philosophical observations all in messed-up, garbled German. It has a weak aura and can be heard by people using Mind magic to detect thoughts. Anyone trying to contact the mind hidden inside the device through magic or some other supernatural means has a good chance of realizing exactly what the Movement is, but runs the risk of going temporarily mad. The player of a character who contacts the mind of the Schäfer Movement must roll the character's Resolve + Composure; if the roll fails, the character gains a severe derangement for the remainder of the scene.

If somehow someone frees or destroys the mind of the Schäfer Movement (e.g. someone manages somehow to smash the Movement while it is running), the ghost vanishes, never to reappear.

Hippolyte Schäfer's Ghost

Attributes: Power 4, Finesse 5, Resistance 3

Willpower: 7

Wisdom: 3

Virtue: Prudence. Hippolyte's spirit is measured and logical in everything she does, even when inserting clockwork movements into her victims' braincases.

Vice: Wrath. She may have been decent, honest and convinced of the rightness of her cause back in the early 19th century, but as a ghost, she bears a grudge. She is wholly implacable, a cold embodiment of a grudge against the living.

Essence: 15 (max 15)

Initiative: 8

Defense: 5

Speed: 17

Size: 5

Corpus: 8

Influences: Death 3, Life 3, Matter 3, Mind 4, Space 1

Numina:

- **Spells:** The ghost can cast the same spells as the ones Fraulein Schäfer could use in life, using the Arcana above. The Storyteller spends one Essence point and rolls Power + Finesse. If successful, the spell has exactly the same effect that it would have if the ghost were a living mage. The ghost's spells risk Paradox and Disbelief, just as they would if she were alive.

- **Materialize:** This works exactly as presented in **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 322. The ghost appears completely solid to the naked eye.

- **Manifest Workshop:** The ghost's victims find themselves in a perfectly solid and wholly convincing recreation of Hippolyte Schäfer's grisly workshop. The room — no matter where it is — changes in appearance to create an illusion of an underground workshop, part grisly laboratory, part clock-maker's workshop, all brass clockwork movements, bloody

surgical instruments and brains in jars of formaldehyde. The victim believes himself to be strapped down on a wooden table, about to be operated on — fully conscious — by the ghost with the clockwork eyes. To create the laboratory, spend three of the ghost's Essence points and roll her Power + Finesse in a contested roll against the victim's Resolve + Composure. If the roll succeeds, the victim is trapped in the illusion unless his player manages to roll 10 successes on an extended roll of Wits + Composure. Note that each roll the victim's player makes is concurrent with rolls made by the Storyteller to "operate" on him (see below).

Because the workshop is made wholly from ectoplasm, Death magic affects it. The Death 3 spell "Sculpt Ephemera" (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 141) allows the mage to destroy his bonds so that he can fight back against the ghost and gain control over the environment equal to the ghost. A mage who successfully gains even one success on the Death 4 spell "Twilight Shift" (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 148) can leave the ectoplasmic workshop immediately.

- **Create Clockwork Slave:** In order to transform a living human into a mindless slave, Hippolyte's ghost must first "attack" her victim. What she does is slice at his cranium and cut out his living forebrain while the victim is conscious. The (real) scalpels and instruments the ghost uses inflict lethal damage. The Storyteller makes an extended

Story Hooks

- Who owns the Schäfer Movement now? Why doesn't he (or she, or they) allow her name to be publicized when the Movement goes on show? How did he acquire it? Why, if he's a private collector, does he spend so much money putting it on show in so many parts of the world and making sure that the insurance premiums are justified with such heavy security? And yet, why, with all this security, do people still manage to activate the Movement? Anyone would think the owner *wanted* the ghost to get out. Maybe the owner of the Schäfer Movement does want it out. Perhaps it's a cult of Scelesti or members of some other Left-Handed Legacy (again, owners of **Guardians of the Veil** might consider using the Austere from that book, for example) descended, directly or indirectly, from the research of Fraulein Schäfer, who swoop in after each of the ghost's appearances, seeking to learn the secrets of the specter's researches, even if the ghost cannot. Or perhaps it's owned by one of the Ministries of the Seers of the Throne, who want to do the same, for some reason (and who cover up the murders almost flawlessly every time the ghost appears, partially explaining why law enforcement groups have been so slow to link the deaths and mutilations to the Schäfer Movement). Perhaps a cabal of characters finds itself appearing at the aftermath of the ghost's visitation just as the owners appear to clear up the mess: the simple fact that people want to hide such things could inspire the characters to investigate further. Nothing makes information more attractive than someone trying to stop you getting to it.

- One of the characters' friends — Sleeper or Awakened, it doesn't matter — is found in the back lane outside the gallery with the top of her head opened, her brain scooped out and a few bits of damaged metal in the brainpan. The last the characters knew is that she was going to the gallery to look at something weird. They're looking for clues, of course.

- The mystery runs the other way round. The characters are in the gallery, either by chance, or by the design of some agency, and someone sets the Schäfer Movement running. The gallery turns into a series of underground workshops, and then into a sort of hell, as the ghost begins to slaughter the people. It's up to them to figure out what to do before they become assistants or research material.

roll for the ghost, rolling Power + Finesse. Each success causes a level of lethal damage. When all of the victim's Health boxes are filled with lethal damage, the specter only needs one more success to insert a clockwork movement into the victim's exposed, mutilated brain. At this point, there isn't anything that can save the victim — he might still be breathing, but for all intents and purposes, he's dead, a mindless body controlled by a half-magical clockwork engine in its head (see below).

• **Indestructible:** The ghost can be dispelled by the usual methods (exorcisms and so on), but it always materializes with a full Essence pool the next time the Schäfer Movement is set running. Only the destruction of the Schäfer Movement or the release of the fragment of consciousness still trapped within the device can really destroy the ghost.

Ban: Fraulein Schäfer's ghost can only manifest when the Schäfer Movement is working, and can only use her magic when fully materialized.

Schäfer's Clockwork Assistant

Attributes: Power 2, Finesse 2, Resistance 2

Initiative: 2

Defense: 0

Speed: 6

Size: 5

Health: 4

The poor wretches that Fraulein Schäfer's ghost is compelled to turn into her "assistants" are, for all intents and purposes, zombies (see p. 141 of **Mage: The Awakening**). No "assistant" has a Willpower or Defense Trait, and although capable of aiding the ghost in the bizarre and random experiments that consume her time, she has no real ability to act without the ghost mage's bidding — and she is herself limited in scope.

When the Schäfer Movement ceases to work, the clockwork that has replaced the "assistant's" brain collapses into a handful of tarnished, corroded and broken cogs and bits of metal: the motion itself is largely composed of ectoplasm (a fact that the Death 1 spell "Grim Sight" — see **Mage: The Awakening** p. 134 — reveals, even while the motion is running; the motion can be affected at any time by any Death magic that affects ectoplasm). At this point, the ghost's victim simply dies.

On the other hand, as long as the Schäfer Movement works, the "assistant" remains living, and Death magic that would affect zombies doesn't work at all.



SOMNIA DRACONIS

For untold ages I've stood my watch. You will not move me.

Aliases: Soul Golems, Atlantean Constructs, The Eternal Sentinels

Background

Even with all their magical might, mages can't be everywhere. This was as true for Atlantean mages as it is for mages today. Guarding the entirety of the Atlantean empire was a gargantuan task even with the assistance of magic. Loyal Sleeper warriors were useful for defending against mundane threats, but, in the world before the Fall, the greatest threats to Atlantean holdings rarely came from mundane sources. The Atlantean mages' solution to this dilemma was the creation of the Somnia Draconis: the dreams of the dragon, the eternal sentinels.

Beginnings

The first sentinel, an experiment, was made of stone quarried from the mountains of the Dreamtime and shaped in the material realm. The name of the construct was intended as a tribute to the dreams that first led men to Atlantis and also spoke to the hopes and dreams of its creator. It was a rough hewn creation, carved into the basic shape of a man, with little in the way of grace or elegance. Spells were wound around its limbs to give them strength and mystic runes were carved into its stony flesh to serve as ward against both magic and force of arms. Into its brow was set a soul stone – the crystallized essence of the mage that created it — that gifted the Somnia Draconis with intelligence. The sentinel was set to watch and protect a small port that sat astride the supply lines of the Atlantean army. When a kraken rose from the depths to threaten the ships tied at docks, it strode into the sea to do battle. Anguished howls of pain split the air as the sentinel ripped its way through massive tentacles and into the creature's rubbery hide. Black blood boiled to the surface as the kraken fled back to the depths to escape its relentless attacker. Its enemy defeated, the sentinel waded back to shore and the experiment was declared a success.

In the wake of the battle with the kraken, more Somnia Draconis were created. Some were given the task of defending Atlantean holdings, some were deployed in Atlantis itself to assist the Ungula Draconis (today's Adamantine Arrow) in keeping the peace and some were used as personal bodyguards or guardians of privately-owned lands and valuables. These latter creations were shaped from precious metals, glass and other exotic materials and were much more aesthetically pleasing than the first of the sentinels, though no less capable. It was a rare household that didn't have at least one sentinel at hand to protect it. As more

mages began to tinker with the basic design of the sentinels, a new discovery was made. A single soul stone placed in the brow of a Somnium Draconis gave it limited sentience and moderate problem-solving capabilities. The incorporation of additional soul stones into the body of a sentinel increased its intelligence with each stone added.

In Atlantean times, the creation of a soul stone was far easier than it is today. Without the corrupting influence of the Abyss, the creation of a soul stone took a much smaller toll on a mage. Even so, each soul stone limited the powers of a mage in one way or another. Fortunately for their creators, it didn't seem to matter whether all the stones came from one mage or from multiple mages. In short order, sentinels with human intelligence, their bodies studded with soul stones, guarded Atlantean interests. With their enhanced intellect, the sentinels soon discovered a secondary effect of being implanted with multiple soul stones. They could draw on the stones to produce small magics.

The Fall

When the hubris of mages cracked the skies and sun-dered the cosmos, Atlantis sank into the sea and magic was changed forever. The sentinels watched helplessly as the people and places they had been created to protect were destroyed or killed. Nearly all of the sentinels in Atlantis during the Fall were destroyed by the upheaval, the magic that held their bodies together no match for the forces of destruction unleashed. Even beyond Atlantis, sentinels were demolished by earthquakes, tsunamis and other natural (and some less-than-natural) disasters as the earth shuddered under the strain of the sundering. Some sentinels were undone rather than destroyed, as the magic that created them was unwoven. When the last aftershocks had died away, the barest fraction of the Somnia Draconis survived and a large portion of those survivors found themselves buried under piles of rubble or trapped in broken rooms by fallen masonry.

The taint of the Abyss crept into the Fallen World, poisoning magic with Paradox and the Somnia Draconis that had survived the cataclysm weren't impervious to its insidious touch. Quite a few went mad as the chill of the Abyss stole through their senses and those that retained their sanity were haunted by very human-like emotions of grief and loss. Worse yet, some of the soul stones that glittered on their bodies like jewelry faded or were broken. With the loss of each stone came loss of intelligence, but the *memory* of that intelligence remained to torture them. Sentinels that retained enough intelligence and sanity to remember their duties, clothed themselves in illusions of flesh to hide them from the eyes of superstitious Sleepers

and set out to find their lost masters or simply resume their duties, secure in the belief that the masters would come to find them. Neither group met with much success. The Fall scattered mages to the four winds and gave birth to the paranoia and secrecy to which mages still cling. Those that waited still abide.

Description

The Somnia Draconis that survive to this day can be broken down into two basic types: those that seek and those that guard. Both groups include insane sentinels, either as a result of the Fall or just through wear and tear over the passage of so much time. These soulless golems require neither food, drink nor rest. As long as it retains even a single unbroken soul stone, a sentinel does not naturally die, though it can be destroyed.

Seekers

Seekers travel the world in search of the masters that abandoned them after the Fall. Most seekers were sentinels that served as bodyguards or personal servants. Because they were meant to be adornments as well as protection, seekers are generally more handsomely constructed than the tomb-dwelling guardians. Made from silver, polished marble or even precious gems, their bodies were shaped by magic into classic forms of beauty. They are moving pieces of art, walking statues that make David seem clumsy and ill-conceived in comparison.

The seekers travel from city to city following rumors about mages they've heard second-hand or hints of magic gleaned from pouring over newspapers. Of the two groups, seekers are more likely than guardians to have gained derangements and thus some semblance of personality (see below). No seeker has fewer than two soul stones adorning its body.

Those sentinels without the ability to hide their true appearance from Sleepers have long since been destroyed. A seeker that manages to find a mage presents himself as a willing subject, but this is often less helpful than might be supposed. The Somnia Draconis don't fully understand the modern world and their reactions to threats, real or perceived, are often gratuitous and bloody. Sentinels have no

sense of humor and have difficulty differentiating between a friendly jest and a serious threat. The madness that can result from losing a soul stone can also be a problem. More than one mage has had to battle her new servant when the sentinel turned on her in an insane fury.

Guardians

Most guardians have maintained their assigned post since before the Fall, frequently without any real idea of exactly what they are protecting.

Guardians lack the fine features of seekers. Rarely intended to be seen by the general public, most guardians have rough hewn features similar to the first Somnia Draconis. Made from granite or some other kind of durable stone, guardians can be easily mistaken for poorly crafted statuary when standing still.

Without the influences of the outside world to change them, most guardians have remained just as they were the day they were created. Guardians are less likely to have derangements than seekers and so aren't likely to have much of a personality. It is possible for a guardian to have been exposed to the corruption of the Abyss after the Fall, especially if the thing they guard is (or was) a powerful magic talisman. A guardian cannot be lured away from its post or fooled by clever words. Mages that seek to gain what the guardian protects are often forced to destroy the construct to gain passage.

A fair number of the wards placed by Atlantean mages to protect their valuables still linger around the hidey holes, and mages that think to rely on spells of invisibility or hope to bypass a sentinel with magic find their spells stymied by the power of the ancients.

Not every meeting with a guardian needs to end in combat, however. Guardians are perfectly willing to converse with "visitors" as long as they aren't asked about what they are guarding or other leading questions. It's also possible that a character might be able to figure out how to get past the sentinel by hitting on the requirements for safe passage. Maybe the guardian was instructed to only allow access to members of the Vox Draconis or to mages that know the proper password. If the character can learn



the proper words to say or convince the guardian he is a proper representative of a group meant to be allowed past, confrontation can be avoided. Even with nothing left to protect, a guardian is unlikely to leave its post. Characters would have to come up with a compelling argument to get a Somnium Draconis to leave the place it has dwelt for thousands of years.

Secrets

The Somnia Draconis are more than just keepers of arcane treasures. Even guardians that haven't left their posts since time out of mind *know* things. Their memories are so vast that even their non-human minds are incapable of storing everything they have learned. For each dot of Intelligence a Somnium Draconis has it can remember back 100 years. Older memories become a jumble of thoughts, images and half-forgotten lore, which is represented by the Encyclopedic Knowledge Merit (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 109). Any time a character questions a sentinel about events that occurred beyond their current frame of reference Storytellers should use Encyclopedic Knowledge to see what (if anything) the construct remembers. Storytellers are encouraged to make the Encyclopedic Knowledge roll in secret to see if the information recalled by a sentinel is fact or poorly remembered fiction.

Soul Stones

Soul stones are the embodied essence of a mage's magical power. Despite the name, not every soul stone is a stone at all (see **Mage: the Awakening**, p. 277). Regardless of the shape it takes, all soul stones are Size 1 objects with a Durability one greater than similar mundane objects. The fur pelt soul stone of a shaman would be Size 1, Durability 2, Structure 3, while the copper disk soul stone of a high mage would be Size 1, Durability 3, Structure 4. Somnia Draconis can add new stones to their bodies by rolling Dexterity + Crafts. This is an extended roll with a target number of five and each roll equal to 10 minutes.

Each soul stone imbedded into the body of a Somnium Draconis increases both its intelligence and its magical potency. Sentinels start with an Intelligence and Wits of 1. Each soul stone added to their bodies past the first increases *either* (not both) Attribute by one in any combination the Storyteller deems fit to a maximum Attribute rating of 5. As an example, a sentinel with six soul stones could increase its Intelligence to 5 and its Wits to 3. Although there isn't a limit on the number of soul stones a sentinel can possess, they do eventually reach a point of diminishing returns. Each Somnium Draconis can only benefit from eight stones before becoming saturated with excess magic.

Even at this point, it still behooves a sentinel that wishes to retain its intelligence to gather as many soul stones as possible. The destruction or loss of a soul stone can reduce the sentinel's artificially-enhanced Attributes if it doesn't

possess backups. Any time a sentinel loses use of a stone, the higher of its Intelligence or Wits is immediately reduced by one (in the case of equal ratings, reduce Intelligence first). If the sentinel discussed in the example above were to lose a soul stone or have one destroyed, its Intelligence would immediately drop to 4. This Attribute loss is negated if the Somnium Draconis has other soul stones it can rely on as backups. A sentinel with 12 soul stones (Intelligence 5, Wits 5) only suffers Attribute loss if he loses five stones. All soul stones are embedded in the "skin" of a sentinel and are clearly visible unless concealed by clothing. Specifically targeting a soul stone with the intention of destroying it bypasses the protection of "Atlantean Runes" (see below), but the attack is still modified by the Defense of the sentinel and is subject to a -5 penalty for a specified target.

In addition to the above effects, ownership of more than one soul stone allows a Somnium Draconis to draw on the stones to cast spells. Sentinels with two soul stones gain access to the Supernatural Power, "Illusion of Flesh," and sentinels with three or more soul stones gain access to "Minor Miracle" as well (see below). Not only does the presence of multiple stones allow the constructs the use of spells, it also improves their magic. The dice pool for any effect produced by "Minor Miracle" that requires a roll is equal to the total number of soul stones owned by a sentinel.

Madness

Normally immune to the swirling emotional tangles that drive many humans insane, madness comes from different sources for the Somnia Draconis than for humans. Sentinels have no inborn sense of morality and acts that would negatively affect the sanity of a human have next-to-no effect on them. For a sentinel, killing, theft or other "immoral" actions are born out of necessity or come about as a result of their intended function. Sentinels exist in a place of cold logic where concepts of right and wrong have no meaning. The madness of a Somnium Draconis comes from one of two sources: loss of intelligence or the touch of the Abyss.

Sentinels that lose Intelligence remember what it was like to be smarter than they are and the frustration those memories bring can drive the normally stoic creations insane. A Somnium Draconis quickly becomes accustomed to operating in certain ways using all the tools at their disposal. When some of those tools are taken away, the sentinel remembers how he used to complete a task, but the loss of intelligence makes the old way more difficult or downright impossible. The inability to perform the desired task causes a brief surge of actual emotion (perhaps drawn from the soul stones), which a Somnium Draconis is unable to process. Each time a sentinel loses a dot of Intelligence or Wits, the Storyteller must succeed at a Resolve + Composure roll or the construct descends into a rampage of mindless fury in which it attempts to destroy anything

or anyone that comes within reach. This rampage lasts for a scene at which point the sentinel gains a permanent derangement. Each derangement gained by a Somnium Draconis penalizes future rolls to avoid the fury by -2. The type and severity of the derangement should have some bearing on the situation that caused the sentinel to lose control. A Somnium Draconis that forgets how to drive a car, for example, might gain a phobia directly related to operating automobiles.

The taint of the Abyss slowly eats away at the magic that binds the sentinels together and this corruption is particularly apparent at the points where soul stones are sunk into their bodies. For the Somnia Draconis, this meant madness as it ate away at the soul stones bound to them, leaching the magic from the stones into their bodies. Magically reinforced by Atlantean Runes, their bodies rejected the magic, returning it to the stones, but not before the mystical energy had its effect.

A tainted soul stone injects some of the personality of the mage that created it into the Somnia Draconis. For minds unaccustomed to emotion, this intrusion was unwelcome and resulted in madness as the sentinels struggled to adjust. Each tainted soul stone carried by a sentinel causes a permanent mild derangement. While not every sentinel was exposed to the Abyss after the Fall, some soul stones have become tainted in the eons that followed. Paradox, the bane of mages, can sometimes cause a stone to go bad and the few Abyssal invaders that manage to penetrate the material realm can taint a soul stone with a touch. Prying loose a stone after it's become corrupt isn't a solution. Once the mystical energy stored by the stone has seeped into the body of a sentinel (and been rejected), the damage is already done and parting with the stone will only reduce the intelligence of the sentinel.

Each time a sentinel is witness to Paradox, the Storyteller must roll Wits + Composure. With success, the Somnium Draconis is able to shield itself from the worst of the backlash. If the roll fails, one of the creation's soul stones has been corrupted by exposure to Paradox.

Interestingly, gaining derangements gives a Somnium Draconis a personality. Learning how to deal with illogical fears, fascinations or other emotional outbursts alters its "programming." While still coolly detached from human ideas of morality, the sentinel nevertheless gains the odd quirks of behavior that form personality. Each time a sentinel gains a derangement, increase *either* Presence or Manipulation by one (maximum of 5). The insights about humanity granted to the sentinels by their insanity allows them to more easily interact with humans on an emotional level.

Rumors

"So, yeah, I climbed down into that hole we uncovered in South Africa. Right along the horn, you know? Anyways, that

Story Hooks

- The Guardians of the Veil in the area have kept a meticulous record of which mages in the Consilium have created soul stones. This list is kept secret, of course... until it is stolen one night during a strange storm that not only knocks out the electricity in the area, but seems to disrupt the magical wards. The Guardians claim the list was to keep the stones from going missing and falling into the wrong hands, which seems a little ironic in light of the theft.

- The Consilium has received reports about newly-discovered cave opening in the hills overlooking the city that looked like it was artificially constructed. Investigations into the cave have been stymied by a creature that looks like a living statue that blocks access to the deeper recesses of the cave and is apparently immune to magic.

- The ongoing skirmishes with the Seers in town have never been pleasant for anyone. They keep babbling about "Supernal Masters" and other nonsense, but the Arrows have managed to keep them in check, so far. That all changed last night. The Seers broke into the Sanctum of a solitary mage accompanied by a man that he's pretty sure wasn't actually a man. They commanded the thing to kill the solitary in the name of the Throne. Neither the mage's 9mm nor his magic managed to so much as scratch the thing and he barely escaped with his life.

place was totally an Atlantean safehouse. I mean, there were runes everywhere and the construction was way too advanced for the spear chuckers that lived in that time period to have come up with. Anyways, there was this thing living in there. You believe that shit? It garbled out some question in High Speech that I couldn't understand. Juan tried to get around it and it ripped his fucking head off. I decided there wasn't nothing down there I couldn't do without and split."

One of the problems in dealing with a guardian is simple communication. Seekers have been out and about learning new languages, but it's more than likely the only language a guardian knows is that of Atlantis. Difficulties in communication can quickly lead to violent confrontations when people don't realize the Somnium Draconis has just given them one final warning to leave before it beats them to a pulp.

"I heard this one from my cousin in Miami. He says one of the mages there found an ancient servitor golem from Atlantis. Says that the thing just walked up to the guy while he was shopping at the grocery store one day and offered to work for him. My cousin isn't sure what went wrong after that, but the very next week they found that same mage beaten to a bloody mess,

his house wrecked and no golem in sight. Here's the point: if you didn't build it, don't trust it."

The wisdom here is sound — mages should be leery of trusting magical items that they can't personally vouch for. Not only might the item be trapped or programmed for betrayal, but magic isn't static, and such a device left on its own typically changes.

"A mage I know was stopped at a stoplight one day when a man approached her car. The guy was wearing ragged clothes and at first she thought he was just another beggar (though he was oddly clean shaven). Then he started asking questions about magic in a weird sort of monotone. Every time he touched the car he tapped the door exactly three times. All told, the guy was seriously creepy. When the light turned, she drove off, but now she's pretty sure the guy has been following her."

The sentinel's desire to serve their lost masters is so overwhelming they will approach mages any place at any time. They have no comprehension of the concepts of decorum or privacy, only a deep seated need to fulfill the function for which they were created. The paranoia that leads mages to constantly watch over their shoulders means not every mage is excited at being approached by a stranger that seems to know exactly who and what the mage is.

Somnium Draconis

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 1+X (see above), Wits 1+X (see above), Resolve 5

Physical Attributes: Strength 8, Dexterity 2, Stamina 6

Social Attributes: Presence 1+X (see above), Manipulation 1+X (see above), Composure 5

Mental Skills: Academics 3, Crafts (Self-Repair) 3, Investigation 2, Occult (Atlantis) 5

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl (Punishing Blows) 5

Social Skills: Intimidation 3, Persuasion 2, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Danger Sense, Encyclopedic Knowledge, Giant, Iron Stamina 3, Strong Back

Willpower: 10

Initiative: 5 + Wits

Defense: 2

Speed: 16

Health: 12

Armor: 5, and see "Atlantean Runes" below

Weapons/Attacks

Type	Damage	Dice Pool	Special
Fists	4(L)	18	Knockdown (see the World of Darkness Rulebook , p. 168)

Supernatural Powers:

- **Atlantean Runes:** The runes inscribed on the bodies of the Somnia Draconis by the ancient Atlantean mages still persist and continue to provide protection. The runes provide defense against mundane and magical attacks. Against magical attacks, sentinels have a 10 die counterspell pool that reflexively negates any spell that targets them or

includes them in its area of effect. Each success accrued on the counterspell roll negates one success from the casting roll of any spell employed against the sentinel. If the spell is reduced to zero successes, it is completely nullified as though the spell had its Potency reduced to zero. Against mundane attacks, they grant the Somnium Draconis an Armor Rating of five.

- **Illusion of Flesh:** By spending a point of Willpower, a Somnium Draconis can disguise its true nature with an illusion. This creates an illusion of a human body that persists for 24 hours or until the sentinel is destroyed. The illusion targets all five senses. For the duration of the effect, the sentinel looks, sounds, feels, smells and tastes exactly like a normal human. This power is fairly easy to penetrate for any character with mystical means to do so. Any spell or magical effect that allows a character to see through magical disguises or illusions automatically succeeds if directed at a sentinel.

- **Minor Miracle:** By drawing on the power of the soul stones imbedded in its body, a Somnium Draconis can produce a number of magical effects. By spending a point of Willpower, the sentinel can increase any Attribute or Skill rating by two for the remainder of the scene or it can use the Compulsion, Magnetic Disruption, Phantasm, Telekinesis or Terrify Numina effects (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 211–212). Each effect must be paid for separately, bonuses to Attributes or Skills may not be stacked.

- **The Stones That Bind:** More automaton than sentient creature, sentinels have neither a Virtue nor a Vice. Further, Somnia Draconis don't require sleep, and so don't regain Willpower through rest. A sentinel regains one point of Willpower every morning at dawn for each soul stone incorporated into its body.

- **Unnatural Construction:** As the Somnia Draconis aren't living, naturally occurring entities, their bodies are completely immune to any disease or poison, regardless of source.

Magical Construct

In place of the Supernatural Power, "Minor Miracle," Storytellers may assign a sentinel with one spell for each soul stone it possesses from any Arcana with a dot rating no higher than three. Any Mana cost is paid instead with Willpower. If this option is used, each soul stone incorporated into the body of the sentinel past the first increases its casting roll by +1 (maximum +5). For the purposes of spellcasting only, sentinels are considered to have Gnosis 3.

THE DIE OF DESTINY: TALEJU'S ICOSAHEDRON

Come on... Just one more time... You're about to get lucky. Can't you feel it?

Aliases: Destiny's Die, The Gem of Kumari

Background

An ancient Hindi legend speaks of a noble king who was playing at games of chance with a beautiful goddess. As they played, a snake wound its sinuous way through the courtyard, and as it did the king came to realize that he desired the goddess more than his own beloved wife. He tried to ignore these new and vulgar desires, but with each toss of the dice his lust grew until he could no longer control himself, and eventually he attempted to put his desires into action. The goddess, Taleju, was greatly offended, both by his attack and by the fact that, in doing so, he upset the game. She struck him dead for his offense, and destroyed the game they'd played in her ire.

Interpretations of this legend vary, as ancient stories tend to do. The devout believe it to be a factual accounting of their ancestral king's interactions with a holy entity. Most comparative theologians suggest that the serpent was used here, as it often was in ancient folklore, as a symbol of forbidden knowledge, with the king representing the ruling class and the goddess symbolizing the traditional religious caste. Many cultural anthropologists believe that the game of chance with the feminine deity is representative of a cultural interaction between the Kirati monarch and another culture, and see the entire story as a morality tale about the dangers of corrupting one's heritage with outside influences that introduce new and demoralizing ideas and practices into one's "pristine" societal traditions. Then, there are those who can look beyond the layers of belief, probe beyond the symbolism and metaphor and glean the truth of the situation. These enlightened few are those who have, throughout the centuries, sought after, fought over and occasionally possessed Taleju's Icosahedron, the sole remaining artifact from that ancient interaction.

Five years ago, a small collection of artifacts from the Indian sub-continent was placed for bid with one of the

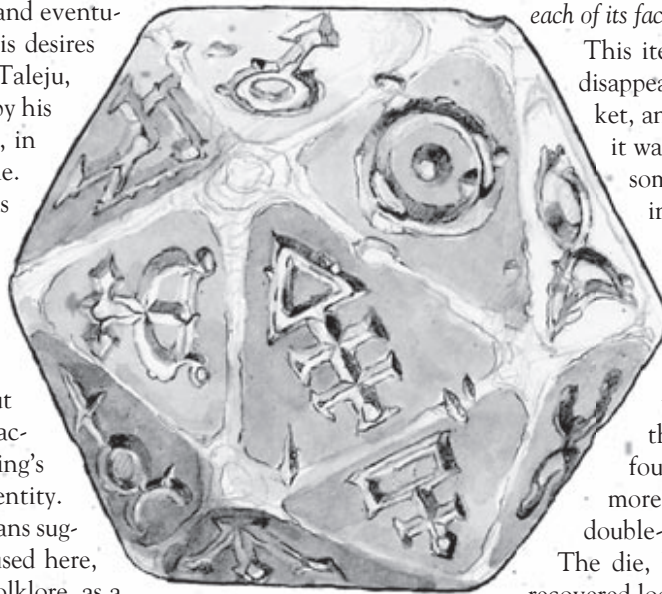
world's most respected auction houses. The victor, a remote buyer placing bids through a hired representative, insisted on remaining anonymous. He or she paid more than a quarter of a million dollars for the collection, despite its predicted sale point being less than a hundred thousand.

Over the course of the next four years, every piece of the collection eventually made it back onto the auction block. Every piece, that is, except for one.

A PRE-NEPALESE (KIRAT) GEMSTONE GAMING DIE — Circa 10th Century BCE. Deep blue-green in color, the large twenty-sided die incised with a distinct symbol on each of its faces 2 1/16 in. (5.2 cm.) wide.

This item, unlike the rest of the lot, disappeared from the antiquities market, and collectors hypothesized that it was probably sequestered away in some clandestine collection. An insurance report filed last June, however, reported an item of a similar description having been stolen in an "inside job" burglary at an estate in New Orleans, Louisiana. Most of the items were recovered when the suspected perpetrator was found dead from asphyxiation, more than likely at the hands of his double-crossing criminal companions.

The die, however, was not among the recovered loot.



Description

Dull teal in color, many of the corners and edges of this multi-faceted stone die have chipped or rounded over the millennia. On some sides, the symbols have nearly worn away entirely, while others still clearly show the deeply incised sigils that originally graced their face. In the deepest crevices, glints of gold still gleam, the gilded paint having escaped the ravages of time tucked deep in crannies of some arcane symbol.

The symbols themselves are a conundrum. All but one of the 20 facets of the die bear the markings of having been incised with a symbol at some point. Some closely resemble medieval European alchemical symbols, and others appear to be related to the Atlantean symbols that mages use to represent the various Arcana, although many of the sigils have been worn or chipped to the point of near-ambiguity.

A single facet stands unmarred by incision, its blank face in glaring contrast to the ornate lines and loops of the other 19 sides.

The die feels heavier than its size would suggest, and radiates a subtle warmth that is noticeable to the touch but imperceptible to scientific measurements. To those who use supernatural senses upon it, however, the warmth is quite clear, as is a subtle darkness within the interior of the gemstone die. It is the exact opposite of how the item might appear if lit from within, as if something consumes all light that falls upon the die's multi-faceted form.

When in the presence of someone it senses it can manipulate, the die whispers to them in their minds. Its voice is the soft, low purr of a woman in love, the reassuring warmth of a motherly advisor, or the curious innocence of a child for whom no questions are off-limits.

Secrets

Something is trapped inside Destiny's Die, and it wants out. While it can't actively take action against the outside world, it has a voice and it knows enough about human nature to manipulate those who hear it into fiddling with the locks that have bound it for centuries.

What exactly is inside? That depends on the Storyteller's needs. The Die can be tied with other offerings from this book, forming a prison for creatures such as the Mind of the Exarch (p. 133). Or, it could contain something entirely different. A disease spirit of some long-forgotten plague, hungry to be released so it can feed once more? A powerful mage corrupted by some Left-Handed Legacy (or even one who has just been tucked out of the way by some more-powerful rival)? A doorway to the Abyss? Potentially, it could be anything, leaving the opportunity open for Storytellers to use this item and the related story hooks as a segue to whatever they have planned next for their chronicle.

Rumors

"I've done the research. Prehistoric Indian subcontinent cultures are my specialty. The truth is, Taleju was not a goddess. She was one of us. An ancient Hindi Archmaster of Fate, perhaps the earliest known to exist. Unfortunately, it seems that her hubris got the best of her. She forged a cult of magic-worship with herself at the center as the deity incarnate. According to the documents I've been able to resurrect and translate, she played heavily on the idea of being the embodiment of destiny. She never directly ordered anyone's punishment; she liked to maintain the illusion of benevolence and only being a tool of Fate. Instead, she allowed destiny to decide the fate of those who dared to question her or contradict her holy decree. This item was one of her magical tools, and took on its own aura of reverence and fear because of that."

Story Hooks

- The stone die has been stolen from a local Athenaeum. Strangely, however, the Curator isn't sending the local Awakened population to find the perpetrator. In fact, specific orders from the Hierarchy has been spread throughout the Consilium — if anyone hears of this item being found they are not to interact with it or attempt to recover it, but instead to report any such rumors directly to the local Provost. When they stumble across a dead body with the die clutched in its hand, however, will they be able to resist the temptation to see what all the fuss is about?

- In a burst of media buzz, an extremely reputable auction house has announced their intention to open bidding on an item they're describing as "the earliest known example of gambling artifacts." They assure the public that they've ascertained the current owner is legitimate and that the bidding will open at half a million dollars. Art collectors and history aficionados are filling industry journals and Internet forums with equal parts skepticism and fervor about the upcoming sale. Can the Awakened, however, allow the item to remain in mortal hands?

- Ancient texts are discovered that seem to indicate that, should a certain complicated pattern of results be achieved by rolling the die, the thing that has been imprisoned inside of it will be released. Unfortunately, the reports are unclear as to what the nature of the entity inside the die truly is. Some seem to indicate it is the soul of Taleju, a near prehistoric Archmage. Others agree, but claim Taleju is a goddess, a spirit or even some sort of undead creature. Even more disturbing are those tales that point to the entity within being not Taleju, but a creature she sacrificed herself to imprison — a legendary monster, demon or spirit from the Abyss. Rumor has it someone's got the die and is trying to unlock its secrets. Should they be aided? Or stopped at all costs?

Characters' research (faulty or not) can be used to tie in elements of history to this item, allowing Storytellers to weave a rich and detailed past for the item. Such a background can be a rich reward providing knowledge and insight for characters willing to dedicate their time and energy to studying the Die — or it could be a red herring placed by their enemies, intent on luring them in the wrong direction.

"In regards to the Artifact known colloquially as 'Destiny's Die,' my belief is that it is more than a soul stone, more even than a Supernal Artifact. It appears as if someone — the likely culprit being the Taleju with whom the item shares a name — has somehow merged an Artifact and a soul stone. And not just any soul stone. I have, in my possession, a report from an Archivist who claimed to have had the die temporarily in his custody. He said it was, and I quote, 'as if someone had managed to shear away and capture a huge amount of magic potential into one item.' In reading the entirety of his documentation, I was left with the impression that he believed the mage in question may have actually sacrificed the entirety of her magical capacity into the item, in one fell swoop. However, the Archivist apparently did not have access to the die for long. Something about a fire, I think. I can probably dig up the documentation, if you'd like to see it?"

Even for the most knowledgeable of mages, there are things in the world that do not appear to obey the known "laws" of reality. By exposing characters to the unknown and seemingly impossible, Storytellers can reinforce this aspect of the World of Darkness and help retain its mystery and the challenges thereof.

"I've seen it. I even touched it, once. What's it look like? It's... just a die. All broken and chipped. But if you really look, it's so much more. It's dark and deep and full of potential. I had nightmares for weeks, something inside it, inside that dark spot in the middle, calling me. It wanted me to pick it up, roll it around, see what came up. In my dreams, I did, and I woke up covered in a cold sweat and screaming loud enough to wake up the whole house. I was relieved when it got stolen, to tell you the truth. They're all screaming about getting it back but honestly, I don't know how many more of those dreams I could stand."

Sometimes even the most powerful Artifact is as much a curse as a blessing to those who possess it. Items such as the Die can be used in a story to illustrate that not all power is a boon to those who own it. Characters will have to decide how much of a price they are willing to pay to potentially access this item's power, and if, in the end, the gain is worth the cost.

The Die of Destiny (Cursed Artifact ●●●●●)

Durability 8, Size 1, Structure 9

Mana Capacity: Maximum 16

The Die of Destiny is a Supernal Artifact of the Realm of Arcadia, deeply tied to the Arcana of Fate, so thoroughly imbued in the strands of destiny, in fact, that in certain spheres its own fate is impossible to influence with Supernal magic. Its physical form is that of an ancient 20-sided die made of blue-green semi-precious stone, although its durability has been enhanced by virtue of its strong supernatural history.

The die has an ability not found in other Artifacts. It can be activated by Sleepers — for a price. By concentrating strongly on the act of rolling the die, a Sleeper can pull forth one of the supernatural abilities of the die just as if it was activated by a mage. The Artifact, however, claims a point of Willpower and does a point of bashing damage in the form of a mild electric shock when this happens. Strangely, those who have experienced this phenomena claim that the damage was mildly erotic and slightly addictive, as if the shock struck both pleasure and pain sensors at the same time.

In order to activate the Die of Destiny, a mage must spend a single point of Mana and roll the die onto a flat surface. He receives the same shock and sensation as described above, although it does not do damage to him.

Any attempts to influence the outcome of the roll through the use of natural or supernatural means automatically fail. The die may be targeted for any other purpose, but influencing which facet ends up on top when the die stops rolling is too closely tied to the strands of Fate to be manipulated. Depending on which facet is on top of the activated die when it stops rolling, a variety of effects may be achieved. If multiple rolls are made, the effects accumulate in power or in duration at the Storyteller's discretion. This can result in overlapping effects, such as Aura Perception in a 360-degree angle or the like, which can be quite disconcerting to those who are not expecting these effects.

Rolling Them Bones

While Taleju's Icosahedron is marked with a blank facet and 19 occult sigils, Storytellers who wish to, may emulate rolling this Artifact by rolling their own 20-sided die. The chart below can be used to determine which face emerges on top, and a brief description of each sigil is given for the purposes of describing the coordinating symbol for players.

For those Storytellers without access to a 20-sided die, any random method of choosing a number between 1 and 20 may be used: drawing slips of paper out of a hat, computerized random number generators, etc.

1 (Blank) — The character develops the fixation derangement (pp. 97–98, **World of Darkness Rulebook**) with a focus on rolling the die. Derangement lasts for an hour, but can be stacked for a cumulative time period if this result is rolled again before the first hour has elapsed.

2 (Prime) — The mage loses half his current Mana pool, rounded down. If this effect is triggered by an individual without Mana, this effect targets his supernatural power pool (Vitae, Gnosis, Glamour, etc.), if he possesses one. Sleepers lose Willpower.

3 (Gold) — The character is struck with an exceptional desire for material wealth or acquisition. He must spend a point of Willpower to avoid acting on his heightened greedy desires or instincts. This effect lasts for the remainder of the scene.

4 (Mind) — For the remainder of the scene, the character gains the ability to see auras, per the Mind 1 spell, Aura Perception (p. 205, **Mage: The Awakening**).

5 (Mercury) — For the remainder of the scene, the character's Defense is the higher of his Dexterity or Wits. This effect is accompanied by a tendency to react unnaturally strong to emotional stimuli, losing his temper easily, being prone to weeping jags or the like.

6 (Space) — For the remainder of the scene, the character gains 360-degree perception, as per the Space 1 spell, Omnivision (p. 233, **Mage: The Awakening**).

7 (Copper) — For the next 12 hours, the character exhibits the symptoms of mild hemophilia. Any damage inflicted upon him in one turn is automatically repeated (dealing an equal amount of damage) in the next turn as bruises bleed internally and wounds fail to clot. This damage can be healed through natural or supernatural means, but the effect itself cannot be healed or cancelled through magical or mundane methods.

8 (Spirit) — The character attracts the attention of a hostile, but low-rank spirit of a type appropriate for the area. Although this is a spirit, rather than a ghost, Storytellers may use the traits for Poltergeist on pp. 215–216 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, or may create their own, as they see fit.

9 (Silver) — Any disease or illness from which the character is currently suffering is healed. This effect can cure any mundane (non-supernatural) disease from AIDS to the common cold, but cannot affect injury or age-related debilitations.

10 (Matter) — For the remainder of the scene, the character gains the benefits of Mage Sight, as per the

Matter 1 spell, Dark Matter (pp. 194–195, **Mage: The Awakening**).

11 (Salt) — All previously-acquired effects still active are immediately cancelled. Effects which took place but are not active (healing, the presence of a spirit, etc.) remain. Only ongoing active effects are cancelled.

12 (Forces) — The character's perception of light and sound is increased to a disturbing level. Due to distraction, the character is at a –2 dice penalty to any action attempted while this effect is in place, and all Perception-based rolls are made at a –4 penalty for the effect's duration. The character makes an unmodified Stamina roll at the beginning of each turn. The effect remains in place until he achieves a success.

13 (Iron) — The character's Willpower pool is wholly refreshed.

14 (Time) — For the next 24 hours, all extended actions take twice as long as normal. Double the time that each roll represents.

15 (Tin) — The character's work with others blossoms. For the next 24 hours, any joint efforts he makes in conjunction with another character or characters receives a cumulative +1 die bonus for every character involved (including himself). These include teamwork actions (see p. 134 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**), group rituals or the like.

16 (Life) — The character ages 5 years instantly.

17 (Lead) — An inanimate object of negligible size currently worn or carried by the character is transmuted into gold.

18 (Death) — For the remainder of the scene, the character takes on the physical appearance of a corpse, with pale skin, sunken eyes, and a general demeanor of death and decay. All non-Intimidation Social rolls are made at a –2 penalty for the remainder of the scene. All Intimidation based rolls are made at a +2 penalty.

19 (Sulfur) — For the remainder of the scene, the character can see, hear and speak with ghosts in the Twilight, as per the Death 1 spell, Speak with the Dead (p. 135, **Mage: The Awakening**).

20 (Fate) — The Storyteller makes two rolls of the die. The effects of both secondary rolls come into play. If both rolls are the same, the duration or intensity of this effect is doubled, at the Storyteller's discretion.

PART FOUR: CONDITIONS AND INFECTIONS

WHAT WAS LEFT BEHIND: THE ABYSSAL IMPRINT

I know what you're hiding from me. And I must send you back to where you belong.

Aliases: Negative

Background

Awakened wisdom says Sleepers naturally have sympathy with the Abyss. Their souls subconsciously reach out to the void that separates the Fallen World from the Supernal Realms when exposed to vulgar magic. The Abyss reaches back through this sympathetic link and brings destructive forces and dark entities into the world. What happens to that link when a mage Awakens? It doesn't break, but it changes.

The Abyss remembers. The Abyss remembers every Sleeper the same way an old couch sitting by the curb remembers stains accumulated over years of abuse. The Abyss, while unfathomable to the human mind, is still aware of a void left behind when a Sleeper transcends the Lie and Awakens. Nature abhors a vacuum, and even a void within a void must be filled one way or another. A negative image of sorts is left in the Abyss when a Sleeper Awakens. It waits for its chance to reclaim what was once there with patience born of an inability to perceive time.

This half of the Imprint entity (called a Negative) commonly enters the world through Manifestation Paradoxes (though those that do result from Manifestation don't have to appear at the site of the Paradox). Any gap, though, in the membrane between the Fallen World and the Abyss could let one out. Negatives don't just fall out of a hole in the sky, though. Instead they

follow a path they know: a Sleeper's ties to the Abyss. It emerges in the body of a Sleeper with a pre-existing sympathetic connection to the mage's non-magical identity. The Negative has no physical form outside the body and fills up the host body and soul like gas in a balloon, fully forming the Imprint.

Description

A mage facing an Imprint tied to him does not have the luxury of squaring off against a meaningless stranger. A mage's childhood friend who still keeps in touch is often kept in the dark as to his friend's true nature. But while it's sensible to do so, keeping him ignorant regarding the Supernal could let him harbor a strong enough link to become an Imprint. One of the Awakened who tries to maintain ties with the rest of humanity may deliberately only present her mundane side to her boyfriend. Letting him get close even without telling him about her Awakening could give the Abyss an opening into the world.

Imprints are plagued with voices and feelings of paranoia regarding the linked mage and to a lesser extent mages in general. They are aware of the wrongness of magic's intrusion into the Fallen World, and may see themselves as guardians of order in a world of chaos. To an Imprint, the mage is the intruder into the world, making things wrong in a misguided attempt to fix it. Thus, her goals are simple. She wants to free the world from a manipulator that cannot possibly

have its best interests at heart, given the willingness to risk Paradox. She wants the mage dead.

Despite an intimate knowledge of the mage's life and experiences, Imprints rarely have anything beyond the

What Ties to the Abyss?

The belief that Sleepers contain an inherent sympathetic tie to the Abyss is just that: a belief. Mages are no surer of that fact than they are of the layout of Atlantis' streets. Some Storytellers explore the possibility that Sleepers are not connected to the Abyss like that and Paradox sometimes comes from other sources. Others may prefer a different origin for the Negative. Where else could the Abyssal Imprint originate?

- The basis for the Imprint may originate with the process of Awakening itself. A nascent mage's soul travels past the Abyss to the Realm that calls him, after all, and the Awakening individual may leave behind something in his own wake. The Abyss gets something of a glimpse or a taste of his and a Negative forms as a result.

- A Negative may be nothing more than a personalized form of Manifestation, seeking a host to form an Imprint as per usual. When the mage peers too often into the Abyss, the Abyss peers back and becomes familiar with the "normal" aspects of the mage.

- The mage could be subconsciously shaping the Abyss' reactions to his intrusion. This is particularly likely if the Storyteller prefers the possibility of Paradox stemming from a mage's desire to keep his magic secret (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 273). In this option, the mage is trying to control the Paradox and unintentionally succeeding, molding it rather than holding it back.

- The Imprint could, in fact, be a side-effect of a magical experiment regarding the nature of the Awakened soul. Whether originating with Atlantis or something more recent, the first Imprint was spawned from an attempt to divide a mage's human and supernatural aspects into separate beings. Each Imprint is not intrinsically tied to individual mages as such, but is in fact an amorphous being that reshapes and remakes itself for each target.

most basic understanding of how the Awakened work. This is a combination of the host's ignorance of the Supernal Realm and the presence in the back of her mind that denies the presence of magic in the world. While she wishes to rid the world of the mage, she has difficulty comprehending and articulating the details of what that means. She may understand enough of the Abyss to think she's sending the mage back where he belongs or that she's reclaiming something that's missing from her own being. Thus, many Imprints come across as confused in in-depth encounters.

Host Selection

Mages who emphasize the difference between their mundane and Awakened lives are the most vulnerable to Imprint attacks. The Abyss can recognize mages through Sleeper allies, spotting familiar traces in the mage's mundane guise. A Negative forms and waits for its chance to claim a vessel to send after the mage. This process can take anywhere from seconds to months or years.

To harbor a Negative and become an Imprint, the host's sympathetic tie to the mage in question must be a current one. This can be a relative, a perennial friend, or even his regular bartender. A good rule of thumb would be someone who would be able to identify the mage based on a vague description without having to hear his name.

Being able to qualify for a Known or better connection (as per the guidelines on p. 114 of **Mage: The Awakening**) based solely on personal history should be enough to be declared familiar enough for transformation into an Imprint. Someone who shares less of a history with a mage but can qualify for a stronger connection based on having a personal effect of hers may be suitable for possession by a Negative as well. At the very least, knowing the mage's true name, but not her Shadow Name, is definitely a requirement.

Prospective hosts, in addition, cannot know anything concrete about mages or Awakened magic. At most, one might note that his regular drinking buddy might have some weird friends or unusual hobbies. There must be a gap in his knowledge of the supernatural for the Abyss to exploit and instill paranoia. While Sleepwalkers don't inherently know about magic, they are still too "tainted" by the Supernal Realms to host such an Abyssal being.

The host is granted a preternatural insight into the linked mage's life when she becomes an Imprint. De-

tails of his magical workings and what goes on in his sanctum are sometimes shaky, but with a moment's concentration she can access secrets of his life that even he's forgotten. Individual presentations vary slightly, but the Imprint often experiences dreams that demonize the mage, and hears whispering in her ear. It's not long before the fires of paranoia are fanned into a grim realization that the mage is not of this world and must be destroyed for its safety.

Secrets

The most common means of banishing an Abyssal Imprint is through death. The death of the linked mage removes the most vital ingredient the Imprint needs to maintain its existence in the Fallen World. Afterwards, the Negative fades away with a sense of satisfaction. The death of the host sends the Negative back to the Abyss and the likelihood of its return is no more or less than any other Abyssal entity. With effort, though, a cabal may find ways to deal with one without killing anybody.

Like anything of the Abyss, an Imprint is sustained by vulgar magic. Imprints make magic vulgar in their presence and some manifestations are self-sustaining. Cabals learn through trial and error that if they evade the Imprint long enough, the possession ends on its own. Keeping an Imprint away from vulgar magic for a number of days equal to twice the originating mage's Gnosis eventually "starves" it and returns the Negative to the void from whence it came. Sometimes this works through avoidance, although some situa-

tions might require forced isolation.

The Imprint is also sustained by the host's ties to the mage. Severing those ties, such as through "Destroy the Threads" (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 237) or other Storyteller-approved methods can strip away an Imprint's ability to cling to the Fallen World. This method, which may require multiple attempts to erode every possible sympathetic link between mage and Imprint, is generally found by accident when an assailed mage cuts ties to his mundane life as part of a larger escape plan.

Rumors

Imprints have access to a lot of information about individual mages. Reports vary on how much they recall later about the experience or the mage linked to them. They usually remember the experience vaguely at best but details about the mage might float in the subconscious, ready to slip out or be discovered through hypnosis or telepathy.

This story is often spread by mages who don't want to confess to the Paradox that summoned the Negative. Otherwise, it's based on a mage suffering a genuine gap as a side-effect of the Paradox, a spell or a rotten memory. Either way it's a myth.

Soul removal is rarely advocated by trustworthy mages. Often it's just a con to see who would consider it, and it doesn't do anything helpful in this case, anyhow. The

Negative is not directly impacted and the host loses a lot of the will and restraint that may have kept him



from blatantly assaulting the mage. Imprints without souls become driven killing machines, nothing but the Abyss wearing a living body.

Supernatural Aspects of the Abyssal Imprint

- **Counterspell:** Once per turn, an Imprint can counter magic targeting him reflexively at no cost without needing an active form of Mage Sight. The Storyteller rolls the linked mage's Gnosis and relevant Arcanum rating, and the spell's Potency is reduced appropriately.

Example: Stone, a Moros with Gnosis 3 and Death 3, comes home one night to find his neighbor aiming a shotgun at him. His first impulse is to cast "Destroy Object" on the weapon, and the casting roll gains three successes. The neighbor, an Imprint, instinctively calls upon the Negative within her and tries to counter the spell. The Storyteller rolls six dice (from Stone's Gnosis and Arcanum ratings) and manages to score three successes as well, reducing the spell's Potency to 0. Abyssal energy is channeled through Stone's neighbor and unravels the spell.

Story Hooks

- A mage associated with the characters is fighting off an Imprint and comes to them for help. Despite their best efforts, it catches up with him and destroys him. The Imprint, however, yet remains. Did the mage take advantage of an opportunity to fake his death, or is another force keeping it here?

- The cabal follows a trail of Paradoxes to an Imprint tied to an unidentified Seer of the Throne. She's begun avoiding the Imprint and it's only a matter of time before the manifestation wears off. The characters have a perfect tool to try to use against the Seer, but using that tool involves actively dealing with the afterbirth of a nasty Paradox and putting an innocent at risk.

- One of the characters is being stalked by an Imprint but he does not know or recognize the host. There are no obvious ties between the character and the host and she's been careful not to let any relevant details slip. Stopping her first requires identifying her and her connection to the mage in question. The cabal is running out of time as her campaign of harassment is clearly escalating towards a public battle.

- **Open Book:** With an Intelligence + Wits roll, an Imprint can recall any fact known by the linked mage or about his life. Knowledge that specifically pertains to magical matters (the location of a magical tool, the means of deactivating a ward) inflicts a -3 penalty on this roll. Recalling things learned by or about the mage after the Negative claimed the host inflicts a -2 penalty (cumulative with the penalty regarding magical knowledge).

- **Paradox Beacon:** Even though an Imprint is not a Sleeper, all covert spells cast in his presence are improbable and he is considered a Sleeper witness for vulgar magic. He does not suffer Disbelief and may in fact recall events previously suppressed by Disbelief upon becoming an Imprint.

Sample Imprint:

Owen Lomax, Young Lawyer

Background: Owen's been at the Martin & Christopher law firm since college, and he's more than glad to be there. He's enjoyed working with the people there, and they didn't even make his life hell during the internship that introduced him to the place. One aspect of his job has never quite sat right with him, and he has recently realized why.

One of the detectives the law firm employs on a regular basis for investigative purposes has never rubbed Owen the right way. The detective, Henry Acer, has always been a nice enough guy, but comes across as a little too slick. Watching him is like watching the bar's top player with a female friend and being afraid she's about to catch something. The truth, though, was worse than he thought.

The voice first whispered in Owen's ear after Henry got caught in that gang shootout across town and miraculously survived. He was entertaining the office with the story of what happened, waiting for Mr. Martin to return, when Owen saw the truth in his head. He saw guns misfire and bullets ricochet like an over-the-top action movie. He knew that Henry — called Seamus by other mages — had somehow caused the incident.

Owen researched the firm's history with Henry and found the patterns there. He doesn't know everything about Henry, but he knows enough to do what has to be done. That's why he's been making discreet calls to violent criminals that Martin & Christopher has helped out in the past. He's been feeding them information about the mage's private life, including how to find Acer's relatives and get into his private storage

unit. They get whatever's left in that storage unit once they've used what they find to get rid of him.

Description: Owen is a young man in his late 20s who usually wears his hair like he just fell out of bed (albeit less intentionally now). Since having his mind opened to the truth, his hygiene has suffered. He skips personal grooming to get into the office early to watch Henry. Nobody thinks much of the hand he often keeps in his pocket, fingering the handgun he recently bought. He moves like he's expecting a bomb to go off.

Storytelling Hints: Paranoia doesn't suit Owen well. Once idealistic and confident, he's jumpy and unsure these days. Being an Imprint has sent him down emotional roads he didn't know existed and his discomfort grows by the day. His co-workers think the job has finally gotten to him and he's on the verge of quitting. He can't imagine giving up his primary means of watching the detective, though.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics (Research) 2, Computer 2, Investigation 1, Politics 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Drive 1, Firearms 1, Larceny 1, Stealth (Walking Quietly) 2

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Expression 1, Intimidation 1, Persuasion 2, Socialize 3, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge (Lying by Omission) 2

Merits: Allies (Law Firm) 2, Barfly, Contacts (Police, Detectives, Clients), Language (Spanish), Resources 2, Status (Law Firm) 2

Willpower: 6

Morality: 6

Virtue: Justice. While law school tried to beat it out of him, Owen got into this line of work to help people. Going after Henry for the good of humanity naturally appeals to him.

Vice: Envy. During more normal times, Owen's self-conscious about being seen as useful to the firm. A small part of him wonders if he's just jealous of the attention Henry gets.

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Speed: 8

Health: 8

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool
Glock 17	2(L)	20/40/80	5

THE FALSE AWAKENING

*They think I am mad, but they're wrong. I have had a revelation!
I have seen the Watchtower of the Glass Knife, and there is no turning back now.*

Background

The False Awakening was created in 1993. A Silver Ladder mage called Portia ran out of patience. Her boyfriend Anthony was a Sleeper and a continual liability. He used her real name in public, distracted her from rituals, and worsened her Paradoxes with his mere presence. Portia was certain she would not advance any further unless he stopped being a problem, one way or another. Worse, she feared that the local Guardians of the Veil viewed him as a threat to the sanctity of the Mysteries. Despite all this, she loved him and didn't want to leave him.

Portia had already exposed Anthony to as much of the Supernal as she could without angering the Guardians of the Veil or scaring him away. Nothing had worked. Desperate, Portia created a powerful Death, Fate and Mind spell she believed would blast Anthony's mind wide open and send him down the path of Awakening. She drugged him, dragged him to her cabal's Demesne, and worked her magic. She hoped the scales would fall from Anthony's eyes and he would become like her. She was wrong.

At first it seemed that her spell had worked. Finally, they could share the magical world that Portia had been forced to keep from him for years. No one in the Consilium noticed that Anthony's Awakening corresponded to no known Supernal Realm, and the place he claimed to have signed his name resembled no known Watchtower. No one paid any mind to the fact that his nimbus indicated no known Path.

As time passed, Anthony became increasingly eccentric. He started collecting things: bits of tarnished clockwork, glass eyes, and parchment, which he covered in illegible scribbling. He claimed he was finding Supernal correspondences in the Fallen World. Since his powers were growing with unusual speed, everyone believed in him.

Despite his strange behavior, no one looked askance at Anthony when children and small animals began disappearing in nearby neighborhoods. Portia deflected all suspicion. Even she didn't know what he was doing, but she loved him and she trusted him. She could not believe he was responsible.

Finally, less than a month after his Awakening, Anthony retreated to an abandoned building. After a week, Portia went in after him, refusing the aid of her cabal. She came out shaken and haunted. Portia refused to answer questions about what she had found. When asked where Anthony was, she only replied that she had done what she had to.

Shortly thereafter, Portia vanished. Later, it was discovered that she had moved to a new city, leaving her life

and her cabal behind, taken on a new Shadow Name, and joined the Guardians of the Veil.

A year later, one of the construction workers hired to tear Anthony's lair apart cut his hand on a razor-sharp vertigreed gear. That night, he Awakened. Like Anthony before him, his experiences suggested no known Path. And in time, he too self-destructed while pursuing an imagined route to ascension.

The infection claimed three more lives before the Consilium caught on and tried to put a stop to it. Unfortunately, they were less successful than they imagined. The False Awakening merely spread to its next victim through a vector that took it to a different city. It remains a scourge to this day.

Description

The False Awakening is both a disease and a curse. It is a disease in that it spreads from victim to victim through arcane vectors. It is a curse in that it only affects one victim at a time and only passes on to a new host after its former host is destroyed.

The False Awakening is not a spirit, though spirits of madness and disease often flock to or are spawned by its victim, along with spirits of obsession, murder, insight, or any number of others, depending on the details of a given manifestation. The False Awakening often has a reflection in its victim's Oneiros, though this is an expression of the way its victim feels about his growing magical power, not the curse itself.

Like a disease, the False Awakening progresses in a predictable manner through several stages.

Stage One: Exposure

A Sleeper or Sleepwalker is exposed to the False Awakening by coming into contact with the supernaturally charged remains of the previous victim. A Sleeper's player rolls Resolve + Composure with a -2 penalty to resist infection. Because of their prior exposure to magic, Sleepwalkers are even more susceptible, suffering a -4 penalty to the roll. Success indicates that the target resists the False Awakening and exceptional success means that this Sleeper or Sleepwalker is hereafter immune. A dramatic failure indicates a particularly virulent infection that progresses at twice the normal rate.

Once it has infected its next victim, the False Awakening remains dormant until the next time the victim sleeps.

Stage Two: Invitation

Stage Two always takes the form of a dream, full of twisted and disturbing symbolism. The dream is different for every victim, but the theme is the same. It is an invitation to claim power despite an obvious and insidious danger.

If a Sleeper refuses, she has the dream or one like it twice more. If she refuses to take the risk in her dreams three times, the False Awakening returns to wherever and whatever it was before she was exposed. If she accepts, the dream becomes a hazy Awakening. While all Awakenings are strange and often frightening, they usually have an internal consistency. The False Awakening, however, is full of false starts, dead ends, and nonsense. The Sleeper's experience corresponds to no known Watchtower or Supernal Realm, though it may resemble a combination of two or more.

When the Sleeper wakes up, she has all the powers of a mage immediately after Awakening. However, the victim of the False Awakening gains no bonus dots in any Resistance Attribute because she is not truly Awakened. Her Gnosis begins at one dot and she spends the usual number of points on Arcana, with a unique selection of Ruling, Common and Inferior Arcana chosen by the Storyteller. The False Awakening never perfectly imitates an existing Path.

Very few Sleepers except for the most fearful or resolute have the presence of mind to resist the dream's temptation. A Sleepwalker is even more likely to accept the dream's offer, especially if she covets the power of the mages she knows, because she is likely to mistake the dream for the beginning of a true Awakening. Some Sleepwalkers have fallen prey to the False Awakening's promise even after being warned what it meant.

Stage Three: Infection

The False Awakening spreads through its victim's mind and soul like a cancer, but as the False Awakening becomes more powerful, so does the victim. During Stage Three, the character gains a point of Arcana every other day and a point of Gnosis every week in addition to any points he chooses to purchase with experience.

The victim's mind crackles with Supernal energy and his behavior may become erratic. Whenever his Gnosis increases, the victim gains a mild derangement if his player fails a Resolve + Composure roll. Narcissism is the most common derangement, followed by suspicion, vocalization and irrationality.

Stage Four begins when the victim's Gnosis becomes higher than his Resolve.

Stage Four: Degeneration

Stage Four is faster and deadlier than the stages before it. The victim's Gnosis increases by one every three days. Every time her Gnosis rises, one of her existing mild derange-

The Strange Case of Cassandra Knox

Stage One: Cassandra Knox is infected while investigating the disappearance of her favorite professor, Thomas Cavalcante. After Cassandra spends all night in Thomas's apartment, going through his papers, Cassandra's player rolls Resolve + Composure with a -2 penalty and fails, causing Cassandra to enter Stage One.

Stage Two: Cassandra falls asleep in her university's student lounge and dreams of a forest lit by five burning suns, where every living thing is equal parts flesh and flame, and angels made of lightning fly overhead. Despite a sense of dread, she eats a diseased fruit offered by a tree with burning leaves.

Stage Three: Cassandra wakes up with a Gnosis of one, two dots of Forces, three dots of Life, and a single dot of Fate. Her Ruling Arcana are Forces and Life, and her Inferior Arcanum is Spirit.

For the next week, Cassandra gains one dot of Arcana every other day and one dot of Gnosis at the end of the week. When her Gnosis increases, her player rolls Resolve + Composure and fails. Cassandra develops a fixation with fire. Because her Gnosis is now higher than her Resolve of 1, Cassandra enters Stage Four immediately.

Stage Four: Over the next six days, Cassandra gains two points of Gnosis and three points of Arcana. The first time her Gnosis increases, her fixation with fire evolves into full-blown obsessive-compulsion and she loses a dot of Stamina. The second time, she develops the narcissism derangement and gains the Physical Flaw: Lame. On the last day, Cassandra Masters Forces and enters Stage Five.

Stage Five: Finally ready to ascend to the Ever-Burning Jungle, Cassandra begins her final spell. It takes more than a week to make the necessary arrangements — procuring the explosives and determining which building lies nearest the geomantic center of her city — but when she is ready, she destroys the Grant Hotel, killing herself and everyone inside.

Cassandra's infection takes 22 days to progress from exposure to self-destruction.

ments becomes a severe derangement, unless she has no mild derangements, in which case she develops a new mild derangement. At this stage, the victim's body degenerates as well. Every time her Gnosis rises she either loses a dot of a Physical Attribute or gains a new Physical Flaw.

At this point, the victim's madness begins to coalesce into an obsession with reaching the Supernal Realms. The victim begins working on a complicated ritual which he believes will allow him to ascend.

The final stage of the False Awakening begins when its victim finishes designing this ritual, which happens at the same time that she achieves Mastery in one of her Ruling Arcana.

Stage Five: Apotheosis

When the victim has finished formalizing her final ritual, she performs it. Depending on the victim's personality and



magical style, this ritual may require sacrifices, rare and dangerous sacraments, or a specific place or time. The results may be spectacular or subtle, but they are almost always disturbing and dangerous. The victim herself never survives. Her destruction is inherent to the ritual.

However, she does live on, after a fashion. The victim becomes the spiritually infectious material that begins the process all over again. This substance is within the realm of influence of one of the character's Ruling Arcana, and it infects according to its nature. If the victim dies of Mind magic, for example, the next iteration of the False Awakening might spread to anyone who spends too much time thinking about the previous victim. If the False Awakening's host destroyed herself with Forces, the disease might infect the power grid and spread to the next person to receive an electrical shock.

While dormant, the False Awakening can be detected via examining the resonance of its host. Doing so is the same as scrutinizing resonance for qualities (see **Mage: the Awakening**, p. 277). The False Awakening counts as a subtle quality (-2 dice penalty to the roll).

Secrets

The only reliable way to cure the False Awakening is for its victim to achieve a true Awakening. No victim of the False Awakening who has truly Awakened has ever died of the infection, but reliable methods of causing a Sleeper to Awaken are rare. Furthermore, a spectacular rumor circulates in the Awakened community of a victim of the False Awakening who awakened in truth, went on to become a Banisher, and murdered the cabal who helped save her.

A less reliable cure is a quest into the victim's Oneiros. The False Awakening often takes up residence in its victim's Oneiros as a representation of how he feels about his growing power and madness. Convincing the victim to reject the disease can sometimes cure the infection. However, it is difficult to convince an empowered Sleeper to give up his magic, and even if successful, this measure often fails. An outsider can destroy the representation. This is ultimately futile, though it temporarily slows the disease's progress. Destroying the representation of the disease in the Oneiros places the victim into a coma for one day for every dot of Willpower the victim possesses. During this time, the only way to communicate with the victim is through the Oneiros. When the victim emerges, however, the disease picks up where it left off, and a new (and usually more durable) representation of the False Awakening appears in the victim's Oneiros.

The False Awakening inspires useful, if fevered and incoherent, insight into the Supernal Realms. A character who studies a victim's ranting might gain one point of Arcane Experience.

Stopping the Disease

Many players are going to want to destroy the False Awakening once and for all. Doing so is certainly possible, but it should be difficult. The False Awakening was created by hubris, so destroying it forever should be a lesson in humility, and this is a lesson that many mages need.

A few things that will not work: curing the victim simply returns the False Awakening to its latest vector; killing the current victim in stages one to four returns the disease to its previous vector; and killing her in Stage Five moves the disease on to its next vector as though she had successfully cast her final ritual.

Keeping the current victim of the False Awakening alive with magic — by imprisoning her, for example — is unlikely to succeed. She continues to grow in power until she is capable of defeating her would-be saviors.

Even if she is successfully prevented from harming herself, her body eventually degenerates to the point that she dies. Removing her soul so she becomes incapable of magic might make her easier to imprison, but it also eventually fails. The victim is rendered powerless and dies, but her angry ghost becomes the next vector.

When the disease is without a host, simply destroying its current vector is useless. The disease simply moves to the nearest similar object.

Rumors

Most Sleepers avoid the False Awakening, the same way they avoid the rest of the secret, supernatural world that surrounds them. The rare, courageous Sleeper who chooses to investigate usually ends up the false mage's victim or the disease's next host.

There is no reason that the False Awakening could not be just another Abyssal intruder. However, there are many other options, and discovering the False Awakening's true nature is only one step on one potential route to its destruction.

The False Awakening takes up residence in its victim's soul. Tremere use their victims' souls to extend their unnatural existences. No mage knows exactly what would happen if a Tremere tried to make use of an infected soul. The results would certainly be spectacular.

Story Hooks

- First, the characters encounter a victim of the False Awakening who is gathering enchanted items in preparation for his apotheosis. Once he destroys himself, they discover that the False Awakening has infected one of his stolen Artifacts. The mages find themselves the unwitting guardians of a tainted Artifact that will kill the next Sleeper who comes into contact with it. However, the Artifact's original owner is still alive, and she wants it back.

- A mage who calls herself Naomi approaches the characters claiming to have once been Portia, the mage who created the False Awakening. She has a plan to put an end to the disease once and for all, but it involves a quest into Astral Space. She wants their help, but further questioning reveals that her quest will take them to the edge of the Abyss itself and she is not certain that any of them will return alive.

- The False Awakening mutates so that it infects more than one Sleeper at a time. As the disease spreads through the city and unbalanced pseudo-mages create more and more death and destruction, the players' cabal must either join in the efforts to contain the infection or try to find a cure.

Edmund Gray, Scion of the Glass Knife

Background: Edmund — or “Nanonic” as he has begun calling himself — is a sample victim of the False Awakening in its final stage. He has only to complete his deadly ritual, and then he will destroy himself and begin the cycle again.

Edmund was a Sleepwalker archivist working with the local Mysterium. He had a habit of removing items of Supernal interest from their display cases to hold and admire. One such artifact turned out to be the False Awakening’s latest vector.

Description: Edmund is a tall, pale, nervous man with a fevered look to him. His dark hair sticks out in uneven spikes, no matter what he does to it. He taps a pen against his knuckles when he is nervous, which, of late, is all the time. His nimbus makes his body nearly transparent, as though it were carved out of milky crystal.

Storyteller Hints: Edmund’s Ruling Arcana are Death and Prime and his inferior Arcana is Time. When the False Awakening kills him, the Prime Arcana will carry the infection to its next victim. Edmund is obsessed with the timeless and immaculate. Things that combine the eternal and the infinite — humans, who are eternal souls in dying bodies and Artifacts, Supernal magic in material shells — fascinate and disgust him.

Path: None (Edmund believes himself to be a “Myzerim,” a Vizier on the Path of Eternity)

Order: Mysterium

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 2, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3 Stamina 1

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 4, Composure 1

Mental Skills: Academics 4, Computer 1, Investigation 2, Occult (Supernal Artifacts) 3, Politics (Academia) 2

Physical Skills: Drive 1, Firearms 1, Stealth (Libraries) 2, Weaponry 1

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Expression 2, Persuasion 2, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Contacts 2 (City Library Staff, Local Occultists), Dream 2, Encyclopedic Knowledge, Meditative Mind, Resources 1, Strong Back

Willpower: 3

Wisdom: 4 (irrationality, megalomania, vocalization)

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Envy

Initiative: 4

Defense: 2

Speed: 10

Health: 6

Gnosis: 4

Arcana: Death 3, Fate 2, Matter 2, Prime 5, Space 2, Time 1

Rotes: *Death* — Grim Sight (•), Speak with the Dead (•), Entropic Guard (••); *Fate* — Interconnections (•); *Prime* — Magic Shield (••), Celestial Fire (•••)

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool
Light Revolver	2 (1)	20/40/80	6
Knife	1 (1)	—	3

MIND OF THE EXARCH: THE SUPERNAL WIND

Get out of my head!

Aliases: The Mad Whisper, The Seer's Plague, The Hijack Virus, The Supernal Wind

Background

In the misty reaches of the past, mages calling themselves Exarchs strode beyond this world and into the Realms Supernal, the home of all magic. In their pride they sought to wrestle the gods from their thrones and rule all of creation from on high. Other mages opposed the Exarchs, the pretender gods, and the backlash of their battle cracked the cosmos.

It's said that when the Realms were sundered, some of the Exarchs were trapped in the Supernal, unable to return or impose their will on Earth. So they hatched a plan. They bent their considerable talents to work a spell that would return the mind of one of their number to the Fallen World. The spell worked, after a fashion. The mind of their fellow was severed from his body and it raced towards Earth. It passed through the Abyss that separates the Supernal and the Fallen like a great icy, black moat in the blink of an eye and roared into the broken lands the Exarchs had left behind.

But how fast does an eye blink? Does it take a second? A tenth of a second? A hundredth? However long it takes was too long for the mind of the Exarch. In the span of that instant his mind was assaulted by the things that lurk in the Abyss, things that have no names and shouldn't exist. The mind that reached the Fallen World was broken, disjointed and incoherently insane. It began to unravel and, in its desperation to save itself, it divided and latched onto other minds, hiding behind other people's thoughts, weeping in fear of the darkness.

Time passed and the mind began to heal. Stealing strength from the people it took shelter in, it cast off the fear and chill of the Abyss. Every mind that sheltered it was left broken and tainted by the Abyssal energies left behind. Each time a mind began to falter, the fragment of the Exarch leapt to a new host. Eventually a fragment lodged in the mind of a mage, a descendant of the mages that had opposed the Exarchs. The fragment whispered to her in her sleep, filling her mind with nightmares and feeding her fears. When her mind broke, the Exarch didn't flee. Instead he took her body for his own and began to search for the other fragments of his mind. By itself, a single fragment was next to nothing. It was a remnant of a person who couldn't remember his name or why he had

returned to the Fallen World. By gathering more fragments, by recombining the whole, the Exarch was certain his memory — and his powers — would return.

Description

How do you describe a thought? You might as well try to describe how music tastes or what a color smells like. The of this particular thought, though, can be described. The first hint a Sleeper might have that something is awry is the puff of wind that announces the Exarch's arrival in their head. No more than a gentle breeze, but this breeze carries with it the flavor of magic. The wind comes and with it come sensations of the Supernal Realms, the last true sensations experienced by the Exarch before his departure. A whiff of ozone, the clink of lead coins, the scrape of a metal thorn, the feeling of flesh renewed and the sensation of being lost.

Next comes an icy chill that seems to settle in the spine, raising goose bumps on the skin. This is the taint of the Abyss that the fragment still carries, will always carry, like an icy cancer. Then nothing. The breeze departs, the chill warms and the whole episode seems like a dream. The Exarch burrows into the victim's mind, hiding among thoughts about the laundry, what's for dinner and where he left his keys. At night, the fragment becomes active, its fear of the darkness forcing it out of hiding. The Exarch rummages through his victim's head, searching for something he can't remember. In his fury, the Exarch begins to rend the mind, dredging up old wounds and potent nightmares. Each memory he touches is corrupted. The light of dawn sends him scurrying back to his hiding place, where he waits, angry and afraid, for the night. Eventually, the mind of the victim begins to break and when all that's left is a mess of sickened memories and a slurry of thought, he will escape to a new mind, passed by the breath of his victim in a breeze of thought.

The fragment is, must be, more subtle with a mage. It whispers thoughts of power to a mage day and night, mixing lies with its toxic touch. It goads the mage with nightmares of impotence, of imagined plots, of helplessness at the feet of the mage's enemies. It enrages the mage, pushing its victim to acts of violence and horror, sapping the mage's sanity. When the mind of a mage finally snaps, the Exarch takes control, exerting every ounce of his once powerful will to the task and kicking the gibbering remains of the mage's consciousness into a dirty corner of the mind.

The Exarch can possess other supernatural beings, but he usually doesn't make the attempt unless he has no choice. The minds of such beings are strange and unfamiliar, and he prefers the relative comfort of a mage, or, failing that, a Sleeper.

Secrets

The biggest secret is a secret even to the Exarch. Why, exactly, is he here? Obviously it has something to do with returning the other Exarchs to the Fallen World, but what? The Exarchs must have had some plan, some of how to accomplish this goal before they sent him back. If the Exarch manages to recover enough fragments of his mind, he may remember the plan. Upon his re-entry into the material Realm, the Exarch's mind was split into 10 pieces. Each piece contains a treasure trove of information

about one of the 10 Arcana. If the Exarch could be forced to divulge this information, characters could learn all they ever needed to know about the Arcana known to that fragment. At a minimum, the Exarch needs to reunite six of the fragments to remember why he came back and who he is. If he managed to combine all 10 fragments in the body of a mage, he would become a figure of frightening magical power with the potential to open the way for the other Exarchs.

The Exarch is terrified of the Abyss. His fear is so all-encompassing that he even fears the dark and, to a lesser extent, the cold. The living places of the victims of the Exarch are always excessively lit and heated. This is one clue that might alert a victim, or the victim's friends, that something is amiss. Even fragmented, the mind of the Exarch is extremely powerful. No exorcist, witch doctor or mage on the planet has the magical might necessary to move him



from the mind of one of his victims. Only by somehow exposing the victim to the power of the Abyss will the Exarch move on before he's ready. Even this won't permanently destroy the Exarch, only inconvenience him.

The Exarch searches the minds of his victim's for information about the Fallen World. Why he does this he can't remember. Maybe it was part of the plan to return the other Exarchs. Maybe he's unconsciously searching for the old servants of the Exarchs, a group of mages that calls itself the Seers of the Throne. Exactly what information he is after and what might happen if he should find it is left for the Storyteller to decide.

The only way to destroy the Exarch requires sacrifice. If a victim that is haunted by one or more fragments has the proper warding spells cast on them, the Exarch won't be able to escape as their mind continues to decay. Once the victim is totally and completely insane, the Exarch is sucked into the madness and made vulnerable. Kill the host and you kill the fragment. In theory, Mind spells like Memory Hole, Mental Shield or Mental Wall could help in sealing off the Exarch from the rest of the victim's mind and hold the fragment in place long enough to kill it (and the victim). More likely a combination of the above spells and others, including, perhaps, some Prime magic, will be required.

Rumors

biological This is the most common explanation for the Mind of the Exarch among mages. They believe that their enemy has somehow devised a plague that targets other mages. Some digging might turn up reports of mundane victims, but most mages that hear the rumor can't be bothered to worry about the plight of Sleepers when they believe their own lives are on the line.

The above is another popular explanation for the phenomena among Sleepers that still realize something strange is going on. People that believe this rumor have taken to warding their houses with cloves of garlic, lines of salt and an abundance of the color red, all of which do nothing but proclaim to a fragment that the person is someone of interest.

The Exarch frequently jumps from one family member to another. Government officials have begun to take notice of this unusual pattern of insanity, which, unfortunately, makes it more likely that someone in a position of power may eventually end up with a fragment in their head. Although he doesn't usually take up permanent residence in non-mages, the Exarch might make an exception for a powerful government official.

Story Hooks

- A friend of the family was recently admitted to an asylum after going, as your mother put it, "out for lunch." After visiting the poor fellow you've started having the most horrible nightmares and sometimes you swear you hear voices. You have the strangest notion that you somehow caught the insanity from your friend, but that's... crazy?

- A local newspaper reported on a story about a killer that was apprehended by police. According to the story, the woman seemed perfectly normal to friends and family just weeks ago, though she complained of insomnia mixed with an irrational fear of the dark. Friends of the woman went to check on her late one night to see if she wanted to talk. As they were walking to her apartment door, they heard a scream from the alley and on the heels of that scream they saw the woman running from the alley with a bloody knife in hand and an expression of blind hatred on her face.

- Research into paranormal infections turn up an interesting anomaly. Pockets of insanity have sprung up all over the country, mainly confined to a half dozen or so people at any one time. Each victim mumbles the same phrase over and over. "Shattered like the ladder."

Mind of the Exarch

The normal traits don't really apply to the Mind of the Exarch. If a fragment has decided to take over someone's body, create a character through the usual means and reduce that character's Morality score to zero. While possessing a body, the Exarch is a vindictive, cruel bastard that takes delight in causing pain to others. His attitude imposes a -3 penalty to all Social Skill rolls (excluding Intimidation). On the flip side, the Exarch, even in his current state, is a brilliant man. Increase the Intelligence of the character to 5 and select one Specialty for each Mental Skill (excluding Computer). Possible Specialties include (but aren't limited to) insider information on the Supernal Realm this particular fragment represents for Occult, Runecrafting for Crafts and Atlantean History for Academics.

Supernatural Powers:

- **Contagion:** When the Exarch jumps from one body to another, the intended character has a chance to resist the intrusion as though the fragment were just another virus. Boosting immunity through magical or mundane means is actually one of the best methods of protection. Masks or biological hazard suits don't really do much good since the Exarch isn't a virus and can pass through that kind of protection without much difficulty. To resist, characters may roll Stamina + any supernatural resistance they might possess (Gnosis, Wyrd, etc.). In the case of reunited fragments, this roll is modified by -1 for each fragment that is attempting to enter their body at the same time. If the roll succeeds, the Exarch is unable to gain purchase in the character's body and floats along to the next nearest person.

- **Mind Bender:** Each day the Exarch remains entrenched in the mind of a normal human, they suffer the effects of his mucking around in their head. Strong-willed individuals last longer, but everyone eventually succumbs unless the Exarch is driven off. The player rolls Resolve + Composure each day at dawn. If the roll fails, the victim loses a dot of Willpower. If the victim's Willpower is reduced to zero, her sanity has snapped, placing the mind in a catatonic

state and allowing the Exarch to gain full control over the body through possession (see below) if he so chooses. Assuming the Exarch can be purged, insane characters might be able to recover from the attack given enough time and professional help.

- **Possession:** The Mind of the Exarch delights in tormenting mages. One of the memories retained by each fragment is that of the catastrophe caused by the mages (from his point of view) that opposed the Exarchs and trapped them in the Supernal Realms. Mages also make valuable tools in his ongoing efforts to reunite the fragments. Mages that are infected with a fragment require the same daily Resolve + Composure rating as Sleepers, but, if this roll fails, instead of Willpower, the mage loses the ability to Willpower by any means (including sleeping or magic) other than indulging in Vice. In this way, the Exarch slowly whittles away at the Wisdom of a mage, with the goal of eventually breaking her sanity. A mage that loses her last dot of Wisdom with the Exarch in her head becomes possessed. Once in control of a body (Sleeper or mage), the Exarch gains access to all of the abilities of that body, including the use of spells or other magical abilities (changeling Contracts, werewolf Gifts, etc.).

THE WAYWARD DREAM: ENDYMION'S LEGACY

*Where am I? What is this stuff wrapped around my thoughts?
Everything is so... heavy.*

Aliases: The Morphean Continuity

Background

It understood nothing of the cataclysm that breached the walls of its universe. It trembled, in its inhuman, fleshless way, when the deathly fear seeped in through the breach and its immaterial substance recoiled, as though beset with illness. It was frightened and uncertain, alone and unique, without any sense of what had transpired or how it might survive this terrible affliction. Like all living things, it wanted to continue to exist, but had no notion of how to do so. It grew sick and deranged as the infection of otherness spread, just as a biological system succumbs to infection and dementia. It had always been and was faced with the very real prospect that such would not continue to be so.

Then, a new healthy place scraped along the edge of the ragged wound in its reality; so tempting, with its fertile space, free of the pestilence. Terrified at the prospect of

ceasing to be, it unhesitatingly migrated to the new universe, slithering into the alien landscape and, slowly, beginning the long process of recovery. As it healed, however, it began to strain against the boundaries of the much smaller place into which it had entered. Worse still, when it cast its perceptions about in an effort to locate its old home, it could find no trace. The conjunction between its old reality and this new one was, it seems, fleeting, leaving it stranded in a space in which it would, inevitably, smother and perish for want of anyplace into which to grow and flourish.

Just as it believed it would die, stifled and constricted in this cell, another such place touched the walls of its new reality, and it extruded a portion of its substance into that similar space, remaining fundamentally connected to itself through the overwhelming similarities between the two distinct universes. Provided that it could continue to spread from place to place in such a manner, it could recover fully and, perhaps, even become greater and more expansive than it had been in its original place.

Day 112 — Ever since Master Endymion inducted me into his Legacy, I've been having strange dreams. He told me it's a natural part of the process, as his secrets expand the consciousness in ways unimaginable to other willworkers. Sometimes, though, I wake up feeling... wrong. It's hard to explain. Maybe I was just groggy or something, but, today, I almost fell out of bed, like I'd forgotten how to use my legs. When I thought about it, though, it was more like I'd never learned how to use them, at all. The feeling passed after a couple of seconds, but I brought it up with Master Endymion anyway. He told me he'd experienced the same sort of thing himself, in the beginning. He said it's a natural part of the process: as the spirit changes shape, the mind and the body sometimes have to unlearn what they know, so that they can adapt to new ways of thinking and being. He also said it's natural to be nervous about these changes; just like when one first Awakens to magic, there are adjustments to be made and they're not always comfortable. I suppose that makes sense.

Description

The Dreamtime entity that comprises Endymion's Legacy has no material form. In fact, the very of corporeal existence is as utterly alien to it as it is to creatures of the physical plane. It is, instead, a collection of inhuman thoughts, ideas, desires and concepts, trying to stuff the vast metaphysical "bulk" of its consciousness into comparatively tiny compartmentalized "cells" (in the form of Awakened human minds). Its preference for Acanthus and libertines is solely on account of the Path and order, respectively, of Endymion, the first willworker to accidentally chance upon the damaged section of the Dreamtime that once served as the being's native environment, in the course of his meditations.

Now, of course, the creature wears the face of every mage inducted into the Morphean Continuity. To one degree or another, of them are in various stages of symbiotic assimilation. Endymion himself, as the "patient zero" of the infection and the host of the greatest portion of the entity's metaphysical "mass," is a slender, serene-looking Caucasian man of average height, in his late middle years, with long, thinning gray hair and blue eyes that have a dreamy, unfocused quality suggestive of a perpetual, thought-obliterating narcotic haze.

Secrets

The greatest secret of the Morphean Continuity is that it isn't truly a Legacy. While the obvious connection — that it is, in fact, an invading consciousness, gradually usurping the minds, bodies and spirits of willworkers — is certainly of interest, perhaps more significant is the fact that this simple truth provides hope for those infected by its presence. While the mage's soul is shaped by contact with the being in a manner cosmetically identical to that witnessed in a mage who adopts a normal Legacy, process is, theoretically, reversible.

The Dreamtime entity that constitutes the ephemeral component of Endymion's Legacy can be repelled through the use of undesirable stimuli. The being greatly fears feelings of loss, isolation, alienation, and confusion, as well as being confronted with a sense of mortality. These sensations may be created through mundane means, though Mind Arcanum magic is probably a more effective vector. When successfully and persistently attacked in this way, the "cell" within an individual attempts to retreat into the Oneiros of its host, relinquishing control of her conscious mind (and cutting her off from all of her Attainments). In order to completely drive out the infection, however, the assault must continue relentlessly, pushing the "cell" out of the host's Oneiros and into the Temenos. From there, severed from the remainder of its substance (in the form of the other hosts within the physical plane), it instinctively

Day 1495 — The waking dreams are getting easier to cope with. Last night, I saw my father walk out of Lola's shadow and it took me a good ten seconds or so to remember he's been dead for eight years. He didn't say anything to me; didn't even really look at me, now that I think of it. Instead, he wandered off, toward the window, and stared out of it, like he sometimes used to do after my stepmom died. When I glanced out the window and saw kids playing in a park, I remembered that we were at the Consilium meeting house and that there was no park, there. The whole illusion basically fell apart, then. It wasn't like my dad disappeared, though. It was more like it happens in a dream: he was there and, when I looked back, he just wasn't, and no trace of him remained. Just after that happened, I had to sit, all of a sudden. I was consumed by this urge to know what my father's skin felt like, but it scared me, a bit, because I didn't feel like the one having that thought. It felt like I was an outlet for someone else's question. I've been feeling like that, more and more. I need to talk to Master Endymion. He's just been so damned busy, lately.

attempts to reach the Dreamtime, though it may or may not survive the journey.

Note that an infected character is virtually incapable of initiating the process of driving the entity out on his own (since being “afflicted” with a self-aware Legacy is virtually inconceivable, in general, and particularly to a host of the organism), but can participate in the offensive once it has gained some purchase within his mind and spirit.

Rumors

Because of the fundamental disconnect between the Dreamtime entity and human consciousness, Endymion and his students gradually become alien in outlook, their altered mentality ever increasingly apparent to outside observers. Because they are all extensions of a single organism, their behaviors evince an eerie similarity. From there, it’s certainly not difficult to assume that Endymion has somehow duped all of his disciples into adopting a Legacy that gradually transforms them into instruments of his will. While this is true, from a certain point of view, it’s not a accurate assumption.

It’s certainly possible to follow the trail of the Dreamtime creature from its point of origin back to Endymion and his students, rather than the other way around. In fact, with the clever use of even the most elementary of magic, it may well be within the cabal’s power to piece the puzzle together in given sequence. Willworkers are often particularly suited to unraveling even the most obscure mysteries in relatively short order, once they actually realize they’re on the trail of some shred of esoteric lore. Characters interested in astral journeys, Mind Arcanum magic, psychic phenomena and similar subjects may well be up to the challenge of discerning what’s really going on, here.

Maybe the characters aren’t mages and the Morphean Continuity is, to them, just some sort of bizarre religion or commune on the outskirts of town. Perhaps they are supernatural beings and perhaps not, but the hosts of the Dreamtime entity are certain not to fit in among normal people. As their numbers slowly grow and individual mem-

Story Hooks

- One of the characters — an Acanthus and/or libertine — is approached by a member of the Morphean Continuity who wishes to recruit him into the Legacy. Naturally, this individual isn’t going to be up-front about the reality of the situation (she’s no longer in any position to make those assessments, anyway), but Legacy mentoring can be difficult to come by. Does the character accept her offer? What happens when the other members of the cabal begin to see the changes in him?

- A prominent local mage (a Councilor or Provost, or maybe even the Hierarch) joins the Morphean Continuity. As a mage of potent Gnosis to begin with, she is quickly drawn into a near-complete synthesis with the Dreamtime entity. What do the characters do when her pronouncements turn bizarre and even detrimental to the Consilium? What happens when she starts attempting to force her Legacy onto others?

- A willworker the characters barely know approaches them in desperation. He’s undergoing the transformation into a full-fledged host for the Morphean Continuity and he’s terrified. His waking dreams and visions have left him feeling unable to trust his friends and usual allies, so he turns to people to whom he has little connection. Do the characters decide to help him? Do they attempt to exploit this situation for gain?

bers become more and more a part of a single, segmented consciousness, they attract more attention. Perhaps other

Day 2241 — All is well. Remembered to eat, today: grapes, potatoes, salt, beans, milk, snack cakes, mustard, and spinach. Insides reacted poorly. Should eat more? Maybe less. Skin still feels thick. Eyes gelatinous. Unaccustomed to the sensation of the tongue and continually aware of it; very distracting. Meditation may alleviate.



mages have to take steps to silence the Legacy and the characters, as outsiders, are drawn into the struggle. Then again, maybe the characters resolve to do something about this group on their own initiative.

The Morphean Continuity

The Dreamtime organism that encompasses Endymion's Legacy reconfigures the Awakened consciousness to serve as a host for the entity; or, perhaps more accurately, as a single "cell" in its purely conceptual form.

Parent Path or Order: Acanthus or Free Council

Nickname: Dreamcrafters

First Attainment: Cogitation Convergence

Prerequisites: Gnosis 3, Fate 1, Mind 2 (primary), Empathy 2

The initial psychic intrusion of the Dreamtime entity manifests through an enhanced facility for the Mind Arcanum (for those who are not naturally attuned to its nuances, anyway). Using this connection, the extension of the creature's consciousness inhabiting the new host begins to rearrange the host's thought patterns, so as to best protect the individual "cell" of its form that she represents. Thus, the mage benefits from a perpetual effect equivalent to the Mind 2 spell, "Mental Shield" (see **Mage: The Awakening**, pp. 208–9). Also, the reconfiguration of her thought processes creates superior pattern-recognition skills, granting her a permanent Fate 1 "Quantum Flux" effect (see **Mage: The Awakening**, pp. 148–9). By spending a few moments in concentration, she can look through distractions and other detrimental environmental conditions, to see a clearer path to her objectives.

Side Effects: Occasionally, the mage finds herself taking unfamiliar — though always harmless — actions or otherwise feeling "not herself," particularly during times of altered consciousness (when just waking up, extremely fatigued, under the effects of mood-altering drugs, etc.). Sometimes, she feels overwhelmed by momentary sensations of an alien nature, as though her body is not her own and she is trying to figure out how to use it. These feelings invariably pass after a second or two, but they can be disturbing.

Second Attainment: Benefice of Hypnos

Prerequisites: Gnosis 5, Mind 3

As the integration of the Dreamtime consciousness continues, it radically reshapes the willworker's psychic landscape. Now, she permanently benefits from an effect almost identical to the Mind 3 spell, "Sleep of the Just" (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 212), with a few notable alterations. First, the mage need no longer sleep, at all, if she doesn't wish to. The autonomic portions

of her brain realign her body's energy consumption, so as to allow for perpetual wakefulness without deleterious physical consequences. In order to function, however, the mind dream, so the mage cannot go more than 24 hours without allowing a dream state to take over. These "waking dreams" are hazy and incorporate fantastic elements into the mage's more mundane perceptions of the world around her. Consider these to be equivalent to a hallucinogen (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 177: -2 to all dice pools, as well as Defense, for four hours after the first 24 continually awake, and then for four hours out of every 24, thereafter, until the mage actually gets at least four hours of sleep). "Seeing through" these hallucinations requires a Wits + Composure roll, at the -2 penalty, but the willworker cannot truly make them go away without actually getting some rest. Mind Arcanum perceptions and similar senses reveal nothing unusual in these hallucinations (which, in and of itself, might set off warning bells). The Dreamtime entity has partially reconstructed its native environment within the mind and soul of the mage.

Side Effects: At this point, the mage begins to feel a persistent, though surmountable, urge to impart the secrets of the Legacy upon another appropriate willworker, as the organism within her strains at the boundaries of the consciousness that it is slowly filling. Also, the "alien feelings" become increasingly frequent and intense, though they are still quite brief. Some of these thoughts and sensations are now likely quite terrifying ("How would it taste and feel if I were to eat that box of nails?" or "My eyes seem inefficient. I should scoop them out and make better ones.") The willworker won't hurt herself or others on account of these strange thoughts and desires, though she is apt to develop derangements on account of her detachment from reality, which may cause her to unwittingly harm herself or someone else. She may get the sense that she is "not alone" inside her own head, though Endymion and/or the handful of other elders of the Legacy are quick to reassure her that this is a natural stage in her spiritual transformation, as her mind expands to encompass new vistas.

Optional Arcanum: Time 3

A host of the Dreamtime organism possessed of sufficient skill in the Time Arcanum can "dream" a slightly alternate timeline into existence, through an effect similar to the Time 3 spell, "Shifting Sands" (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 263). To do so, the player spends a point of Mana and rolls Presence + Empathy + Time. Success "rewinds" a single turn, as per the description of that spell. Note, however, that a Dreamcrafter can only use this Attainment to "replay" a given turn, no matter how many points of Mana he has (though nothing stops the mage from casting the spell itself if the Attainment doesn't give him the result he wants). Effectively, the original action spirals off into a dream of a future that will never be, while the actions taken during the "rewound" turn are — and always have been — the course of events.

Third Attainment: Morphean Rhapsody

Prerequisites: Gnosis 7, Mind 4

The host now becomes little more than a shell wrapped around the consciousness of the Dreamtime entity. Enough human thought and sensation remains to continue the development of Awakened prowess and to awkwardly interact with the material world (whether through means mundane or mystic), but nothing more. The hybrid being can project its perpetual waking dream into others' minds, using an effect similar to the Mind 4 spell, "Hallucination" (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 215). The player rolls Manipulation + Empathy + Mind, contested by Resolve + Gnosis. This effect targets any or all of the subject's five mundane senses. Any attempt to penetrate even an implausible hallucination with a Resolve + Composure roll is penalized by the hybrid's dots in Mind.

Side Effects: At this point, the dreamlike haze suffered during periods of fatigue grows to encompass every moment of the hybrid's existence, though it is better at processing this information and merely suffers a -2 penalty to all actions, other than casting spells and using Attainments. The being never sleeps, though it must still continue to fuel and care for its body in every other way (initially, shortly after achieving symbiosis, it will likely forget needs such as food, water, and healing, but it gets better at programming these unfamiliar necessities into a given host's routine as time goes on). At every opportunity, the hybrid imparts the secrets of this Legacy to any Acanthus and/or libertine willing to learn them. Also, the Dreamcrafter no longer takes actions — even on account of insanity or ignorance — which endanger its corporeal form. This is its home, now, after all.

If a player's character has progressed to this point without somehow excising the Dreamtime entity from his consciousness, he becomes a Storyteller character, no longer truly human. While others be able to cut out the invading intelligence, the character can no longer help himself, as loses himself to psychic and spiritual symbiosis. As stated above, concepts uncomfortable to the entity (like isolation or the realization of its own mortality) can be used to drive it out, though another mage might also be able to exile it by calling upon a spirit with the appropriate Influences or Numina, or possibly even with some unusual variant of the exorcism ritual used to banish ghosts (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 214).

Optional Arcanum: Time 4

With sufficient understanding of the nuances of the temporal flow, a fully symbiotic Dreamcrafter can retreat into her own imaginings, effectively mimicking the effects of the Time 4 spell "Temporal Pocket" (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 265), with automatic successes equal to her dots in Time.

Py

PART FIVE: PLACES

THE DREAM COMPUTER: ASHWARD HEIGHTS

I used to be an insomniac, before I moved here.

*Could never get to sleep, spent way too much time walking the halls, watching infomercials.
Now, it's 10 o'clock and lights out. The dreams, though. Sometimes I wish I could wake up.
But I can't.*

Background

For many years, Ashward Heights looked like an ideal place to live. The large apartment complex was built in the 1950s, but its architect eschewed the concrete, steel and glass design of that decade in favor of something more classical — possibly even archaic. The hewn stone façade looked comfortably solid, and the landscaping was full of flowers and trees that flourished in bold colors without overgrowing the boundaries of their plantings.

Any alarm felt by neighboring residents while the slightly strange building was being constructed was alleviated when it opened. Rents were quite reasonable for the modest but comfortably furnished apartments. Management showed no qualms about quickly dealing with any troublemaking tenants, evicting them to make room for retiring elderly couples or families with young, cheerful children.

For decades the complex filled its role in the community quietly and without much notice. It was immaculately maintained, both inside and out, but rents remained cheap, leading many to speculate that it must be either a tax shelter for its owner or a charitable effort on his part. Any apartments that became available were very quickly filled, but these were few and far between; most residents chose to stay in Ashward Heights once they gained admit-

tance. In fact, many of the apartments still house their original tenants.

In recent years, however, a pall has fallen over Ashward Heights, physically and socially. The once-tidy landscaping runs riot in some places, or rots dead in others. Gray grime and lichen crusts the hewn stone, and many of the windows are cracked or cloudy. For the first time, Ashward Heights is losing residents. Some are opting to move out, willing to pay more to live in a more pleasant place. Others are leaving in police handcuffs, on hospital gurneys or even in straitjackets. Most of the apartments are still occupied by folks who consider the building home — or who are too down on their luck to afford a move.

The Mysterious Owner

According to real estate and tax paperwork, the owner of Ashward Heights is one Ebenezer Frenly. The same name can be found on the original building plans filed before construction began, if anyone were curious enough to dig those records up from the moldering basement where they are stored. He lived in a spacious apartment within Ashward Heights itself for many years, though residents rarely had the pleasure of interacting with the man. Many tenants saw him exactly once: when they were accepted as residents, signed their contracts, and were welcomed

to Ashward Heights with a firm handshake.

Ebenezer was an accomplished mage, a fervent seeker of the astral mysteries that lie cloaked in the depths of the human collective mind. He spent decades in seclusion plumbing the depths of his own consciousness, his subconscious, and his dreams. In the decades that followed, he rejoined society (as much as a mage ever can) to poke and prod at the sleeping minds of others. His studies were frustratingly slow—one mind at a time in the dark of night, occasionally running afoul of other creatures that would prey upon his observation subjects in the wee hours. The invention of the computer in the early 1950s inspired him to apply the most basic concept to his own arcane work: what if, instead of painstakingly sorting through one individual's dreamscape per night, he had a "machine" that could sort through hundreds? But of course, the only thing capable of "processing" the mysteries of the human mind is the human mind.

Ashward Heights is the exterior shell and wiring of Ebenezer Frenly's dream computer. The sleeping tenants inside are the engine that makes it work. And work it did, for decades — until Ebenezer left on an astral journey. He sought after a secret dreamed of by his tenants, but he never returned.

The Dream Computer

Every single human being is connected on a very deep level to the collective subconscious (or the Over-Soul, or Paramatman, etc.) — these aren't solely magical concepts, but psychological and theological ones held true by people all around the world. A mage knows the paths from the dreams of humanity lead into the realm of dreams itself (mages call this the Temenos).

As each dreamer in Ashward Heights enters her dream, the computer sifts through the imagery it contains, either collating and reporting, or searching for key concepts and symbols depending on Ebenezer's constantly updated "programming." It can even prod the dreamer in the required direction, inserting themes and symbols into the dreamer's mind to send her unwittingly dreamquesting after the arcane knowledge its programmer desires.

This approach, plumbing the slumbering minds of the unenlightened, is scattershot at best and fruitless at worst; an uptick in nightmares about a menacing cloaked figure might be a hint of dark powers moving in the magical world, but more likely it means that a lot of people watched a new slasher flick. Searching

for power in dreams is like throwing a dart at a moving target, blindfolded — Ebenezer's enchantment threw a hundred darts a night while he waited patiently to hear the *thunk* of one hitting home.

That was the plan, at least. The magical Working required more upkeep than Ebenezer may have planned, leaving little time for meditative waiting. There were tweaks and refinements to his programming to be made, and visits from other mages to admire his work and bargain for (or steal) secrets. Dream creatures (archetypes or creatures from myth that are not part of the real world but have real power within dreams), were drawn to his display or perhaps even empowered by it. These creatures had to be destroyed or run off before they threatened the minds of the dreamers or, worse, skewed the computer's results. All of this piled on top of the business of running a large apartment building. Ebenezer could and did delegate the mundane tasks of cleaning, maintenance and building management, but he trusted no one else to evaluate potential tenants. Who else could judge how each new addition would affect his exquisite machine? This unrelenting, possibly unexpected workload may be part of the reason that Ebenezer left Ashward Heights unattended to hare off across the Astral Planes in search of an answer to the latest mystery to catch his fancy.

The Building

Ebenezer committed himself fully to his bold plan, turning his own personal place of power, his Hallow, into the magical power source for his dream computer. The architecture, every hallway and doorway, is designed to channel the energy and keep it to its purpose. Sigils and runes are carved in unobtrusive locations, and laid out in flowers and greenery in the landscaping — decorations to untrained or incurious eyes, but clues to those with a smattering of occult knowledge. In addition to the dream-inducing magic of the place, apartments are laid out to encourage calming energy and restful sleep, from the color of the paint and carpets to the careful soundproofing. Insomniacs who moved to Ashward Heights found themselves blissfully cured, turning off their TVs and turning down the covers.

Breakdown

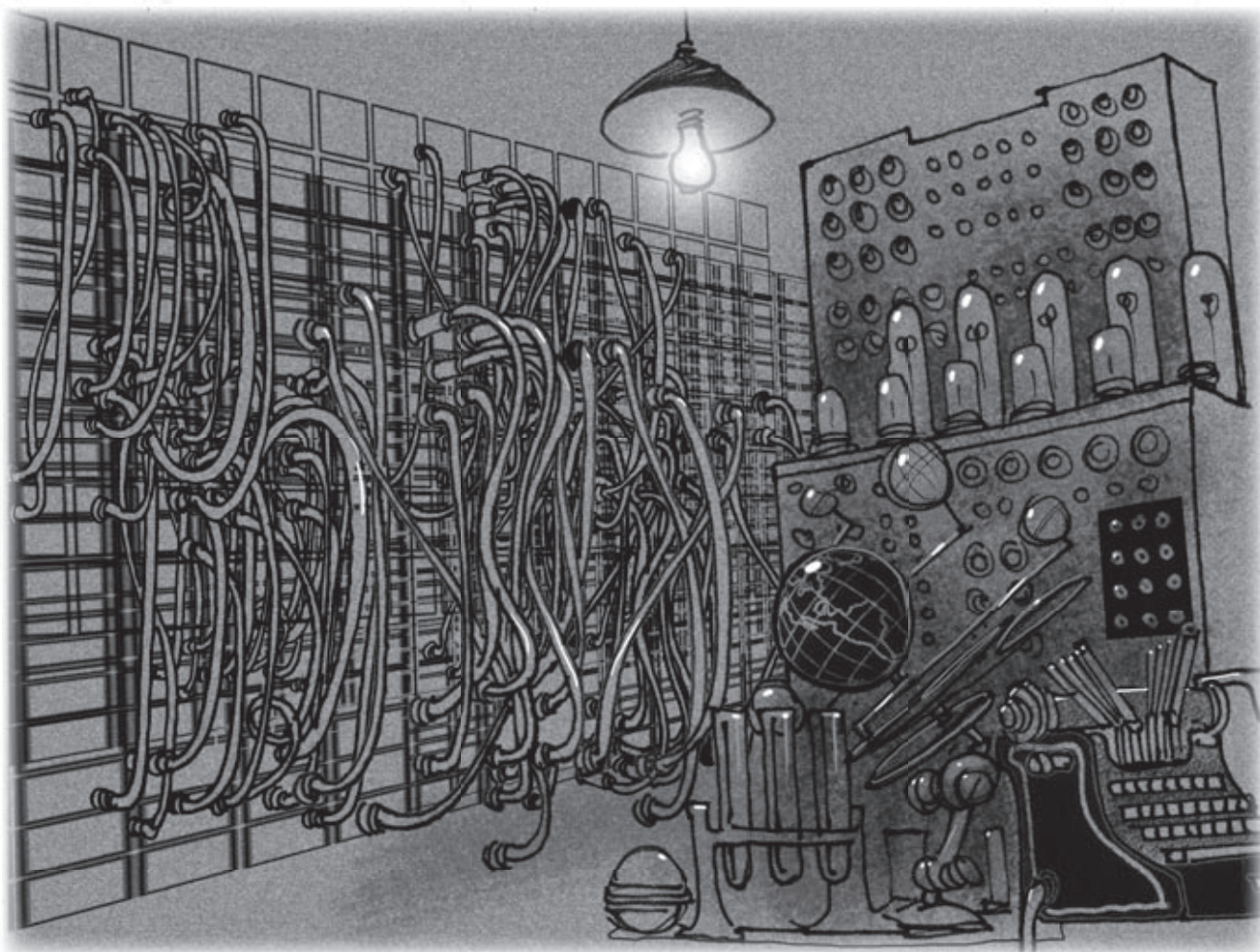
Both the physical structure of Ashward Heights and the flow of magical energies through it required constant maintenance to keep the dream computer working efficiently and properly. Now, Ebenezer Frenly

is gone. The physical maintenance is being performed by custodial staff under the direction of a caretaker, Gordon Fisher. Fisher has all the legal paperwork in order to administer and maintain Ashward Heights, and a fund to cover expenses. The fund is beginning to run dry, however. Ebenezer either never planned to be gone so long, or simply did not care what would happen to his dream computer or the people who unwittingly comprise it if he never returned. Also, while Fisher has a very detailed set of instructions to follow for maintenance procedures, he certainly does not understand why those directions should be followed to the letter. As far as he knows, his missing employer was nothing more than an eccentric old man with cash to blow playing landlord. Without Ebenezer around to look over his shoulder, Fisher keeps the place habitable, but he's not keen on spending effort or money he doesn't have to — after all, when the money runs out, he's out of a job.

Magical maintenance has not been done since Ebenezer Frenly left, of course. The dream computer

still functions, but the dreams inside its influence are beginning to bleed into each other. At first, only short vignettes and snatches of imagery would cross the boundaries, like inadvertently heard conversations that drift through too-thin apartment walls. One tenant might relive a tough high school football game, while his neighbor finds herself a spectator in the bleachers. Widening cracks allow tenants to wander from their own dreams fully into another's. They become each others' lovers, mortal enemies, kindly mentors, relentless pursuers — all roles imaginable in the plays inside their own heads, with new parts cast every night.

It isn't surprising that tensions have risen in the building, as strong emotions stir where once mild neighborly courtesy was the mode of interaction. A strange, unspoken bond exists among the tenants. They may not understand what's going on, but they do know that something's weird and somehow they are all in it together. Not all of them have been able to keep an even mental keel amid all the shared nightmares



and midnight assignations, however. Apartments sit empty while their former occupants recuperate in mental institutions, strangely free from the dreams that plagued them. Other ex-tenants warm jail cells, convicted of offenses ranging from domestic violence to attempted murder.

One disturbed tenant brought the national media to Ashward Heights when he went far beyond violence and anger into psychosis and sociopathy. Jarett Costa seemed like a normal young man when he moved into a third-floor apartment. He had no criminal history, he had a job, he was quiet and he didn't cause trouble. It's possible, of course, that the seeds of his madness were already firmly rooted when he arrived. If Ebenezer Frenly had been in residence, Costa would probably not have been recruited into the dream computer — if not because he was already insane, because the weakness that could lead to insanity would have been apparent to a Master of Mind. But Ebenezer was gone, and Costa's dreams began to poison those of his neighbors.

At first Costa's dreams were merely dark and violent; hardly unusual, even if the unremitting, consistent nature of the dreams was. As the nights passed, he seemed to gain an understanding that his neighbors hadn't — that he was not the only being, or mind, in

the dream — and he used that knowledge to torment others. He lucidly devised scenes of terror and torture to inflict on those around him, never hiding his dream face from his sleeping victims. Ashward Heights stank of fear every night as the sun went down. Residents felt helpless — they were certain the young man on the third floor was a killer, but their only "evidence" was in dreams.

Eventually, the nightmares Jarett Costa inflicted on his neighbors were no longer enough to satisfy his growing sadism. He raped, tortured and murdered in the real, waking world. His first two victims were both strangers, women he did not know before he selected them. The last was another Ashward Heights tenant, in her own apartment — and that got him caught, literally red-handed. All three victims' eyelids were sliced away. Their last sight was the murderer's face through their own blood.

Jarett Costa sits on death row, medicated for the psychoses that he claims drove him to kill. But the residents of Ashward Heights still fear the stalking serial killer in their dreams.

Secrets

In a way, the ghost of serial killer Jarett Costa haunts the halls of Ashward Heights — even though the man's body is still alive, sitting in a jail cell. His psychic resonance, amplified and distorted by the horrific crimes he committed within the magical boundaries of the place, has been imprinted in detail on a dream computer already corrupted by neglect. This nightmare killer invades the minds of the networked dreamers just like its progenitor did, though with less frequency as it must carefully husband its strength. As it slowly grows stronger, its goal will be to force its way into a susceptible dreamer's mind, and to force him or her to act out once again the "pinnacle" of Costa's achievement, the slaughter of innocent victims in the waking world.

In the basement of Ashward Heights, omitted from all architectural plans and missed even in the thorough police search after the Costa murders, is a hidden room. This was Ebenezer Frenly's sanctum, and the heart of the dream computer. Ebenezer took his powerful tools and Artifacts with him when he disappeared, as though preparing for a long and arduous journey, but the number of tomes and other seemingly significant occult or personal items left behind suggest he was not planning to leave forever.

Just How Big Is Ashward Heights?

Ashward Heights should have at least a hundred residents to have been worth Ebenezer Frenly's time and trouble to enchant it. Some tenants live alone, while other apartments are occupied by families. Roughly 50 apartments housing a mix of families and singletons provide a healthy dream environment. A building this size, or larger, would not be at all out of place in an urban area. In a suburban area, a complex of smaller apartment buildings would be a better fit to the surroundings. In a rural area, any building or compound with room for 50 families would certainly be a curiosity, and might lead to speculations about cult activity — which aren't too far from the truth. Of course, fewer than 100 people might live at Ashward Heights at any given time, depending on when the characters enter the story.

This room is where the dream computer's "reports" arrive — weekly collections of symbols gleaned from thousands of dreams, encoded in the Hallow's Tass, its congealed magical energy. This tass takes the quaint form of punch cards.

Rumors

"There's a woman who calls herself Madame Mimi who lives at Ashward Heights. She'll tell you your future, like about boyfriends and stuff, but you have to pay her five hundred bucks and sleep in this weird chair in her living room overnight. My cousin said she heard somebody woke up there covered in chicken livers."

Mimi Furlano lives on the second floor of Ashward Heights. She has no special predictive powers other than sliding into the dreams of those sleeping nearby like everyone else in the building, but she's got a

relatively keen understanding of human nature and a willingness to spin a story she thinks her "client" wants to hear. The special chair, with its religious symbols and new-age crystals, is just window dressing. She denies ever having covered anyone with chicken livers.

"There are locked doors in Ashward Heights to which nobody has the key. My brother's buddy knows someone who jimmied a locked door in the basement. It was nothing but a closet full of brooms and mops, but the guy ran out of there terrified and ended up in a psych ward."

The superintendent, Fisher, has so many keys he no longer remembers what they're all for. The important doors are guarded by more than locks, however, and only open for Ebenezer Frenly (or another willworker who can defeat his protective magic). This is especially true of the basement, where Frenly's sanctum

Story Hooks

- A character in need of an affordable place to stay might choose Ashward Heights. Before Ebenezer Frenly's disappearance, it's a pleasant enough place to live, though an introspective character will certainly note an increasingly vivid and memorable nightly dream experience. Interpreting dreams is not the sole province of magic, either: a lucid dreamer might be able to use the dream computer herself to look for answers to a local mystery, to search for nuggets of occult knowledge — or to blackmail her neighbors.

After Frenly leaves, the characters are caught in the downward spiral of their home. Will they leave, and abandon their neighbors (including many kind and trusting individuals, elderly folks, and single parents with kids, etc.) in this increasingly bizarre place? If they stay, what will they do? Can they stop Jarett Costa before he kills? Can they shut the dream computer down for good? If they try to destroy Ashward Heights, will their meddling with the magic of dreams cause more harm than good, ripping open a portal to a nightmare realm?

- The characters are investigating the Costa murders — either the first wave of murders committed by Costa himself, or the second wave committed by another resident of Ashward Heights, a young woman, using the same MO (young female victims, eyelids cut away). After the second killer is caught, there will eventually be a third. And a fourth. Costa himself has a rock-solid alibi in jail, where he'd be more than happy to tell investigators all about the terrible nightmares that afflicted him at Ashward Heights.

- Ashward Heights actively pushes normal people toward the astral realms, and casts them in mystery plays in their dreams every night. A character might very well go to bed a Sleeper, and rise the next morning Awakened, pushed through blindness into light during the nightly struggle to survive her dreams. The newly Awakened character may learn how to tap into the Hallow and even the dream computer, with all its problems. If that isn't trouble enough, Ebenezer Frenly may return from his astral jaunt, perhaps more powerful than ever, perhaps beaten down to a shell of his former self, perhaps driven mad by secrets for which even his powerful mind was not ready. The Hallow of Ashward Heights, the magical well tapped by the Dream Computer, is quite powerful, with a rating of 5. Its primary resonance is calm, a dreamlike feeling that lulls the residents to sleep each night. A secondary resonance lurks right below the surface, however — fear, the stark terror of being stalked in the dark of night. Some day this fear resonance may completely overpower the Hallow's former resonance, and life at Ashward Heights may become a waking nightmare.

is hidden away.

"You can get a place to crash at Ashward Heights if you slip the super a little cash, no rent papers or credit checks. I hear you can even slip him a little something else, if you know what I mean."

As Fisher's resources dwindle, and his conviction that his boss is not returning grows, he is looking for ways to take care of himself. Money in his pocket is good, but he may also be willing to let an empty apartment for drugs or sexual favors, so long as his new "tenants" remain discreet.

Jarett Costa

This is not the real Jarett Costa. The real Jarett Costa is awaiting a death sentence. He has even confessed to his crimes, and claimed to now be free of the horrible compulsions that drove him to kill. This spectral Jarett Costa is the creation of the corrupt Dream Computer, a ghostly recording of the worst parts of his nature spit back out into the world to possess and corrupt an unlucky resident. This spirit recording behaves like a ghost. It uses its chosen hapless resident as an anchor, and uses the Possession Numen to force that resident to reenact Costa's crimes. The spectral Costa's second anchor is Ashward Heights itself, and he retreats there if somehow driven away from his chosen victim. This ghostly murder can be thwarted or even destroyed in the same ways any normal ghost can. However, if it is destroyed, the Dream Computer

generates a new ghostly Costa that chooses a new victim from among the residents, and the bloodletting begins again. (See the section on ghosts on p. 208 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** for the traits and Numina used below.)

Attributes: Power 5, Finesse 4, Resistance 5

Willpower: 10

Morality: 1

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 9

Defense: 5

Speed: 19 (species factor 10)

Corpus: 10

Essence: 10

Numina: Possession (dice pool 9), Terrify (dice pool 9)

Supernatural Powers:

- **Prescience:** Within the confines of the Dream Computer, the "ghost" of Costa can tap into the predictive abilities of the great Working. Spend one Essence point and roll Power + Finesse in a contested roll versus the victim's Resolve + Composure (or against the highest Resolve + Composure if confronting a group). If the ghost wins the contest, it can foresee the immediate future: each player must declare her character's actions for the turn in advance, and the ghost may choose any point in the initiative order to act preemptively.

BYEBURY HENGE: THE GRINDING STONES

<the sound of something like an egg being crushed>

Aliases: The Groaning Stones

Background

It's the most picturesque thing imaginable: a perfect little village, all green places, thatched roofs and floral borders. Little old ladies ride bikes through the place. And tourists, too, who come to see the stones. The stone circle surrounds the village green, seven colossal megaliths where thirteen once stood, all surrounded with buttercups and dandelions. Children play between the stones. Historians and archaeologists, amateur and professional, fringe and mainstream, come here to see the old monument. Aging hippies stand between the stones on fine days and close their eyes, looking to feel the vibes.

The stones at times make a strange rumbling, groaning sound. It's a scientifically measured phenomenon, which geologists and archaeologists have as of yet been unable to explain. Every so often people with seismographs and Geiger counters and microphones spend a few days at the site, recording the sounds and trying to figure out what the source is. The best bet anyone in the scientific community has made is that the noise is some kind of indicator of mild seismic stress on the region. Nothing to worry about, just one of those natural phenomena that make life interesting, say the geologists. Something to do with the unusual geography of Byebury, it being in a big geographical basin, which is incidentally the reason that no one seems to be able to get a mobile phone signal in the stone circle. And it's nothing to do with the cosmic earth power that floods through the land, or any of that nonsense.

Historical record has it that back in the Middle Ages, the locals tore the ring down, believing that the groaning noises were the sounds of furnaces in Hell. They claimed it was some kind of port of call for witches.

Which it was, and still is.

Gilbert Gardner, the man who was lord of the manor in the first half of the 19th century, knew that, which was why he had the circle reconstructed. The medieval inhabitants who had torn the stones down had dragged some of them away and used them to build houses in the region. Gardner replaced the missing stones with little marker stones.

Gardner was Awakened. He had a cabal of his own, and all of them cared deeply about this old, old place, built even before the humans came to this region, let alone the Anglo-Saxons. They cared for the stones, for the energy that really did course through the land. They tended the stones. They brought them back to a semblance of dignity.

And no one could explain why Gilbert Gardner's corpse was found one day in 1839, at the foot of one of the stones, every bone in his body crushed to splinters, his flesh no more than a bag of blood and water and tenderized sinew, his internal organs burst like over-ripe fruit.

Description

The secret of the land is that the stones are alive, and sentient. And they are hungry. They feed on death, manipulating the ley lines that link them with every sacred site on the planet to warp space and grind people into pulp.

They talk. That's the noise: their voices. A mage with the right magic — a telepathy spell, for example, or a spell to understand languages — recognizes the exchange of memories, concepts and intentions, and although the conversation of a stone is necessarily limited, what it says is sometimes chilling. The fact it's talking at all is enough.

hungry
this one
hungry
this one
this one
wait wait wait wait

step on
wait
wait
step
carry box here

take box
box

crush box

want you

squeeze

want you

crush

grind

crush

hungry

crush

...

so good

so good

good

Find a way to talk to them, and they might talk back. Don't expect much sense from them, or a friendly reception. Just hunger, a desire to crush and the sense not to crush too many people (although no law enforcement organization is ever going to suspect immobile stones of murdering anyone). And the recognition that the fewer people know about the truth, the better.

It's hard to imagine these stones could think. They're just stones, massive craggy gray standing stones just like the ones that exist all over the world. Their setting is beautiful. You can buy pictures of them on postcards.

And they have an aura brighter than nearly any living thing. Someone might imagine it's like the aura of the whole planet.

And If You're Not in England

The setting for the stones is based on a number of real English villages, but standing stones and stone circles exist all over the world, everywhere from China to Australia to France to the Americas. The specifics might change, but a community next to a stone circle that may once have torn them up and later replaced them is easy to imagine anywhere in the world. The rest is just window-dressing.

Secrets

Legends of people being sacrificed to the stones are not just legends. Maybe it was the sacrifices that caused the stones to gain sentience, or maybe someone realized that the stones were sentient and needed sacrifice and chose to supply them.

Maybe it was the magical power in the area that made the stones self-aware. But then, just like before, it could just as easily have been the sentience of the stones that made the place magical. The stones don't know themselves. As far as they're concerned, they have always been here.

But right here, right now, they have allies. A cabal of mages resident in the area claims the Hallow as its own. Several of them are influential in the local Consilium. They know exactly what they have, and know exactly what the stones are. And while they are careful where they walk, they are not afraid to supply

the stones with the sacrifices they need to appease them, and they have the means to hide the bodies.

If the stones don't kill anyone, they revert to being stones... and the Hallow ceases to be a Hallow. And they only need one life every few years, even if in practice they take many more lives than that. Bulldozing the stones would destroy the Hallow as well as the stones, but if a mage wanted to do that, he'd have to face the full weight of the law. The stones are protected by heritage laws, and several of the mages who use the Hallow are directly involved in the legal protection of the stones. And the stones are famous. It would take more than a few spells to make the world forget about them, or to avoid the consequences of being the ones who vandalized one of the most important megalithic sites in the world.

Rumors

"Here's a thing: sentient terrain. Yeah, you can laugh at that, but there are places that are alive. And always have been. And like living things, they need to eat. Back in the olden days, you heard stories about life-demanding rivers. Where the river needed to drown one, maybe two or three people a year. 'Bonny Don, she claim one; bloodthirsty Dee, she claim three.' I'm just saying that these places don't stop claiming lives just because the ordinary folk stop believing they do."

This might be completely true. But there might be other reasons for it — spirits inhabiting these areas with grisly hungers, ghosts, or other more unusual creatures who have become the cause of the legend. Like the rumor says, sometimes no one remembers the legend. World of Darkness protagonists are, as every Storyteller and player knows, trouble magnets: it's only a matter of time before someone a player's character knows dies suddenly and mysteriously, simply because he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Characters suspecting foul play are in danger of looking wholly in the wrong direction. What looks like murder could be nothing more than the land taking its toll.

"Hallows with standing stones are bad news. I heard about one where the stones needed blood in order to give up the energy — someone had to spill living blood on the stones, and it just kind of soaked into the stone and vanished, and bang, there's the energy. You can imagine what sort of mage used it. Or the one I got out of where the stones leached away minds and drove the people who stayed there too long completely mad."

The one with the mind-sucking stones is true, but it's not exactly commonplace. Likewise, the blood-drinking megaliths might exist, but they're hardly normative. Chances are that benevolent megalithic Hallows exist, too.

"Follow the ley lines between the living stone sites, the ones with the juice. Draw them on a map. They form a symbol. It's High Speech for 'Earth.' It is. The whole network is a magical battery set up long ago. They're all under different ownership. But I firmly believe that if one person were to have them all, he'd have the key to something wonderful. Something unimaginable. All that earth power just waiting to be tapped."

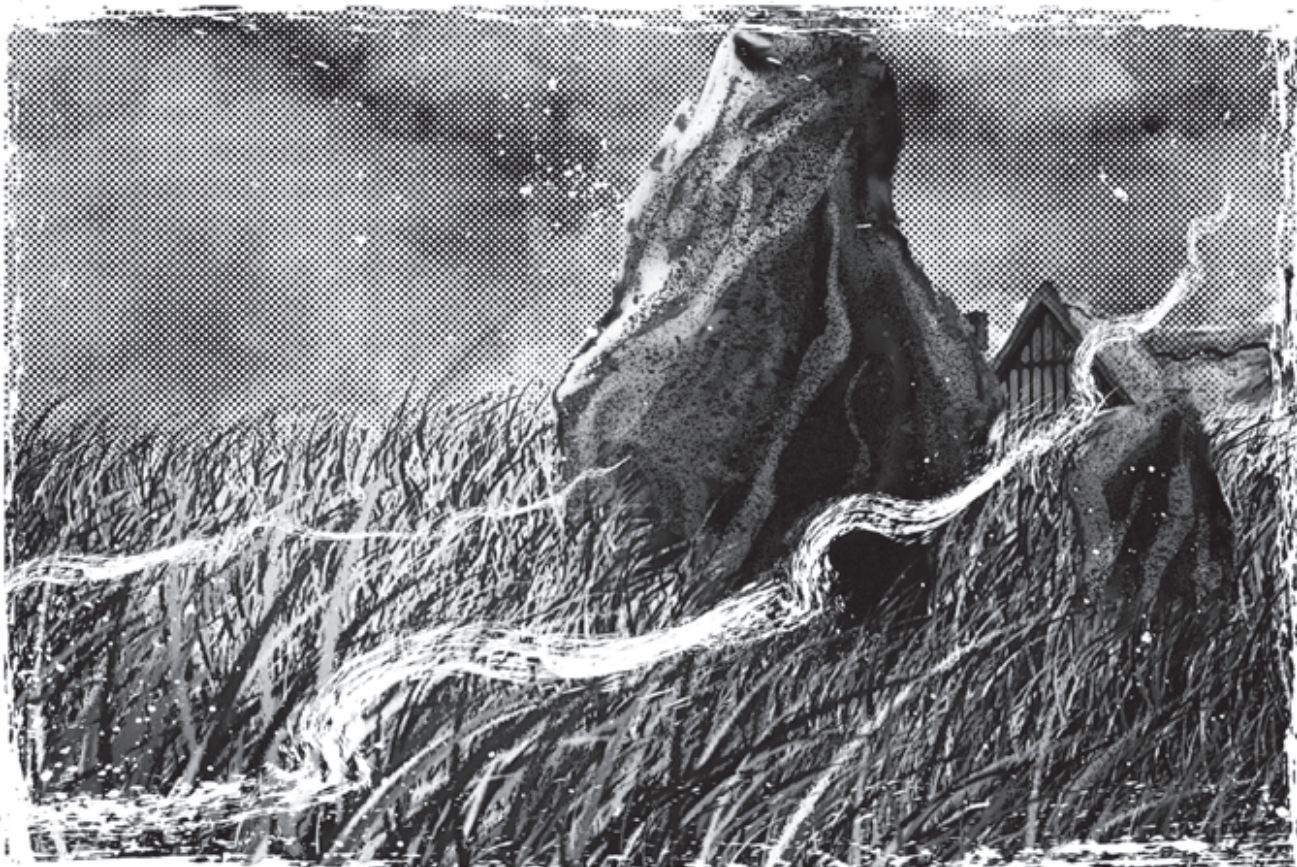
This is completely made up. It *does* look a bit like the High Speech for "Earth," but it also looks a bit like the Gujarati word for "chicken." It's a coincidence. This doesn't stop the Awakened looking for it (much like the Sleepers who see the name of Allah in sliced tomatoes, and stuff like that). Mages can be touchy about that kind of thing, and this is the kind of obsession that a mage with a derangement might develop.

The Grinding Stones of Byebury Henge (Each stone) Size 12, Durability 6, Structure 18

Supernatural Powers:

- **Grind:** The stones feed from lives: they must take one human life every three to five years. They kill by crushing the hapless soul who walks between them and absorbing the spiritual energy released by the moment of death. It's wholly supernatural: they warp the spaces between them, which has the effect of reducing the space between the stones, just for the briefest moment, to nothing. The Storyteller rolls a pool of 12 dice for the stones in a contested roll against the intended victim's Wits + Composure. If the target wins, or if the target reflexively spends a Willpower point to realize that something is wrong and he needs to step off the line of energy that connects the stones on either side of him (and he is physically able to step off the line), nothing happens.

If the stones win, they crush the target to a pulp without anyone seeing anything happen—one second the victim is standing there unharmed, and a blink of an eye and a sickening sound like an egg breaking later,



Story Hooks

- The cabal of mages who use the Hallow have enemies. They use the stones to get rid of them. Sometimes they restrain them and leave them on the lines. Sometimes they just lure them into the paths and let the stones do the deed. The stones, for their part, know what the mages want and are all too happy to feed again. But too many mages are going. This weird, countrified group are gaining more power and their opponents are disappearing. And the whole Consilium is heading down a dark, dark path.

- The stones were greedy. They crushed a scientist in plain sight. He was carrying a portable seismograph, just as it began by some freak circumstance to pick up the thoughts of the stones. One of the scientist's colleagues saw it happen, although obviously he didn't realize what he saw — to him it was a blur and the wet sound of crushing, and the wrecked body of his friend falling to the Earth. It was only when he saw the words superimposed on the seismograph that it began to dawn on him. He took the paper to an acquaintance of his with an interest in the paranormal (if you own **Hunter: The Vigil**, this could be a member of Null Mystery or Network Zero). Now there are hunters looking for answers. Meanwhile, the mages who use the Hallow, who aren't aware that these new investigators have connections of their own, are preparing to commit murder to keep the secret of the stones. The characters, who perhaps knew the dead man themselves, or fall foul of either the investigators or the mages who claim the Hallow, may find themselves trying to stop both the hunters uncovering too much and the mages from killing them and drawing down more attention on the Awakened than anyone needs.

- **The Plague:** The stones' sentience spreads to other landmark features in the region. Trees, hills and other stones that stand on the ley lines begin developing the same appetites as the Byebury stones, although they may kill in different ways. The center of it all is the Byebury Henge, which has consumed too many lives, killed too many people. The stolen lives caused the life-energy in the stones to grow, to spill out into the region. And the more people die, the more the phenomenon spreads. The only way to end it is to destroy the problem at its root — to destroy the Hallow. But the local cabal won't take that, even if it was their behavior that led to this pass in the first place.

and the target is a broken mass of bloodied flesh and splinters of bone that falls to the ground. The victim probably didn't even know what hit him.

The stones *must* kill one person every three to five years. But they can do it any time they want, as long as the victim stands on or across the circular line of force — what a lot of people would call a ley line — that joins the seven stones together.

- **Shout:** The stones' periodic rumbling — their way of communicating — can be disquieting, but sometimes, the stones can increase the intensity of the noise, filling the whole area of the green with a deafening roar that sickens and disorients. Roll a pool of six dice for the stones. The players controlling each

character standing within the circle must make an extended roll of Stamina + Composure (each roll is one minute of effort). Until a character gains more successes than the stones did, he suffers a -3 penalty to all dice pools, which persists until the end of the scene, even if he leaves the vicinity of the circle before the scene ends.

Outside the circle, the roaring noise cannot be heard at all.

- **Resist Magic:** The stones have an inherent resistance to magic, equivalent to a Gnosis of 4.

- **Hallow:** The stone circle is a two-dot Hallow. Tass forms in the ubiquitous dandelions and buttercups that grow around the stones.

ALUMNI OF FRANKLIN HIGH

Hello, ma'am! New in town? The boys here and I would really appreciate it if you'd dress a little more appropriately. Yes, seriously. Something that doesn't make you look like a goddamned prostitute would be fine.

Aliases: There are hundreds of them, and they use their mundane real names.

Background

Gerald McLaren lived in the town of Franklin his entire life. An upstanding citizen, he attended church weekly — if not more often. Starting in the early 80s he had a folksy column in the local newspaper, full of nostalgia for his youth in the late 40s and 50s. He passed away in 1992, but the people of Franklin still feel his influence — though most of them don't know it.

The residents of Franklin had no way to know that McLaren was a Master Mastigos. The licentious behavior of the 60s, 70s, and 80s frightened and sickened him. A Sleeper, so disturbed by his neighbors' activities, might write letters to the newspaper or run for public office. Gerald McLaren (whose Shadow Name was "Poor Richard") chose instead to enact a great ritual, which he called the Franklin Ethics Working. It was McLaren's intention to eliminate certain distasteful behaviors among the residents of Franklin, and in so doing bring about a peaceful, safe, and happy community that reminded him of his childhood.

He got what he wanted, in a way.

Description

Franklin High alumni appear to be ordinary Sleepers. They have jobs and dress normally. They live in ordinary homes. They eat chicken nuggets and cheeseburgers. Characters who are not exceptionally attentive aren't likely to notice anything unusual about them. In fact, even characters who can notice magic don't necessarily find these people odd on a cursory glance.

Most of these citizens spend their time in Franklin, but they do travel and might be encountered elsewhere. In Franklin they're among friends and family; their demeanor is reminiscent of movie portrayals of 1950s America. Everybody knows everybody, everyone greets his neighbor by name, with a smile and a wave. When traveling in the "outside world," a Franklin

High alumnus seems considerably more furtive and suspicious — from a Storyteller's perspective, portray such a character as a nervous and distrustful "country bumpkin" in the big city.

Ordinary social interaction reveals a sort of old-fashioned demeanor. They dress conservatively, prefer to listen to "oldies" radio, studiously obey all traffic laws and eschew even jaywalking. Franklin High alumni vocally disapprove of licentious dress and behavior. They strongly — and, under certain circumstances, violently — disapprove of people who appear to be gay or transsexual.

Should a player's character become romantically involved with an upright citizen, he'll discover that in many regards his paramour is something of a prude. Citizens of Franklin *do not* engage in premarital sex or many sorts of sexual behavior. A character expecting casual sex may find himself violently rebuffed and even accused of attempted rape.

Secrets

McLaren's sorcery affects every adolescent that attends Franklin High School, as it emanates from the statue of Ben Franklin that he donated to the school in 1987. The sorcery has subtle effects on the students' psyches and physiologies:

- The usual surge of hormones that renders teenagers almost insanely horny isn't *quite* so bad in Franklin. While they still enjoy various forms of physical affection, the drive to actually engage in intercourse is reduced though not quite eliminated. This is a Life 3 effect on its own, using the Practice of Fraying.

- Students find the idea of extra-marital sexual intercourse to be horrible, immoral, and even disgusting. This is a Mind 2 effect, using the Practice of Ruling, based roughly on the spell Emotional Urging. (For certain characters this effect might ordinarily require a Mind 4 effect — requiring the Practice of Patterning — but most Franklin High alumni have been exposed to this spell since puberty. This extended exposure allows the spell to work incrementally, breaking down any resistance the adolescent might otherwise acquire.) Students and alumni have no problem with

the idea of marital intercourse, of course, and many young Franklin couples marry within weeks of high-school graduation.

- Students find the idea of homosexual activity of any kind to be similarly revolting. They also find even the concept of transgender activity offensive. This is a Mind 2 effect of the Practice of Ruling, as above. (Students who are inclined toward homosexual or transsexual tendencies might ordinarily need a Mind 4 Practice of Patterning effect, but the long-term exposure to the spell allows it to alter their attitudes incrementally)

McLaren didn't test the Working enchantment before enacting it. He based it on rites and effects with which he was already familiar. Arrogantly, he expected no side effects from the Working, so saw little need for testing anyway. It turns out, though, that the development of human brains depends heavily on the sex hormones released during adolescence. Additionally, humans who spend a quarter of their adolescence bathed in powerful Mind and Life magic don't always exactly grow up quite right.

Franklin High alumni — who spend their adolescent years under the effects of the Working — suffer brain damage that affects their activities in the areas of morality and sexual behavior. Sexual urges they would otherwise feel during adolescence are sublimated into other activities that are not explicitly forbidden by the Working.

As a result, nearly every Franklin High alumnus suffers from the fixation derangement (see **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 97). The Storyteller should provide every resident of Franklin under the age of 49 with a fixation; these frequently relate to adolescent activities. Some alumni suffer from a more serious effect; see below.

Obsessions

Citizens who attended high school in Franklin may suffer from any of the following obsessions:

- The Franklin Bolts high school football, basketball, or baseball teams
- A particular professional sports team
- Bodybuilding
- Computer programming
- Role-playing games
- A particular TV or movie series
- A particular field of scientific inquiry
- Local, state, or national politics

- Collecting stones, postage stamps, or comic books
- Model trains or other models
- The raising of “prize” livestock
- Roller coasters
- Cars in general or a particular car model
- A specific band (no matter how obscure)
- A particular celebrity.

This is not intended as an exhaustive list by any means. Storytellers should come up with new fixations as they wish.

Franklin Killers

The majority of the citizens of Franklin are harmless, beyond the obsessions described above. However, around 10% of them suffer far more seriously under the Working. Most of these would lead perfectly healthy and normal lives if they hadn't grown up in Franklin. Instead, the Working has destroyed their moral framework, and magically damaged their psyches beyond repair.

In game terms, Franklin Killers' Morality hierarchy of sins is scrambled. Storytellers should reassign Franklin Killers' sins to various levels of the Morality hierarchy of sins. For instance, a Killer might find nonviolent misdemeanor crimes to be grievously sinful while finding spontaneous violence to be a relatively minor sin — and therefore find it to be entirely reasonable to stab a jaywalker. The Storyteller may also wish to remove certain sins entirely, and/or add new ones.

Given the long duration of the Working and the variation of the human psyche, Franklin Killers' hierarchies of sins are not all altered identically. However, a few guidelines apply. McLaren wanted to use the Working to rectify the “moral degradation” of the late 60s and 70s. To his mind, the primary cause of that degradation was a loss of traditional obedience to authority, and the elimination of sexual inhibitions. He considered sexual liberation to be a greater problem than civil disobedience, and therefore sexual sins are likely to be higher on a Franklin Killer's hierarchy than authority-related sins (an example hierarchy can be found at the end of this section).

Franklin Killers' behavior is further altered by their obsessions. Franklin Killers don't suffer from the fixation derangement described above. Instead, they suffer from the more serious obsessive compulsion derangement (see p. 98 of the **World of Darkness**

Rulebook). Given the alterations to their hierarchies of sins, Franklin Killers are quite likely to acquire other derangements. Generally speaking, a Killer responds to attacks upon the subject of his obsession as though they were attacks on his person or an innocent child.

Rumors

"There hasn't been a pregnant student at Franklin High School since 1987. The boys there hate sex."

Probably heard from a student from a rival high school. This is true, for reasons described elsewhere. It would make a good rumor for characters to hear early on in a Franklin-related story, when players are likely to discard it as irrelevant.

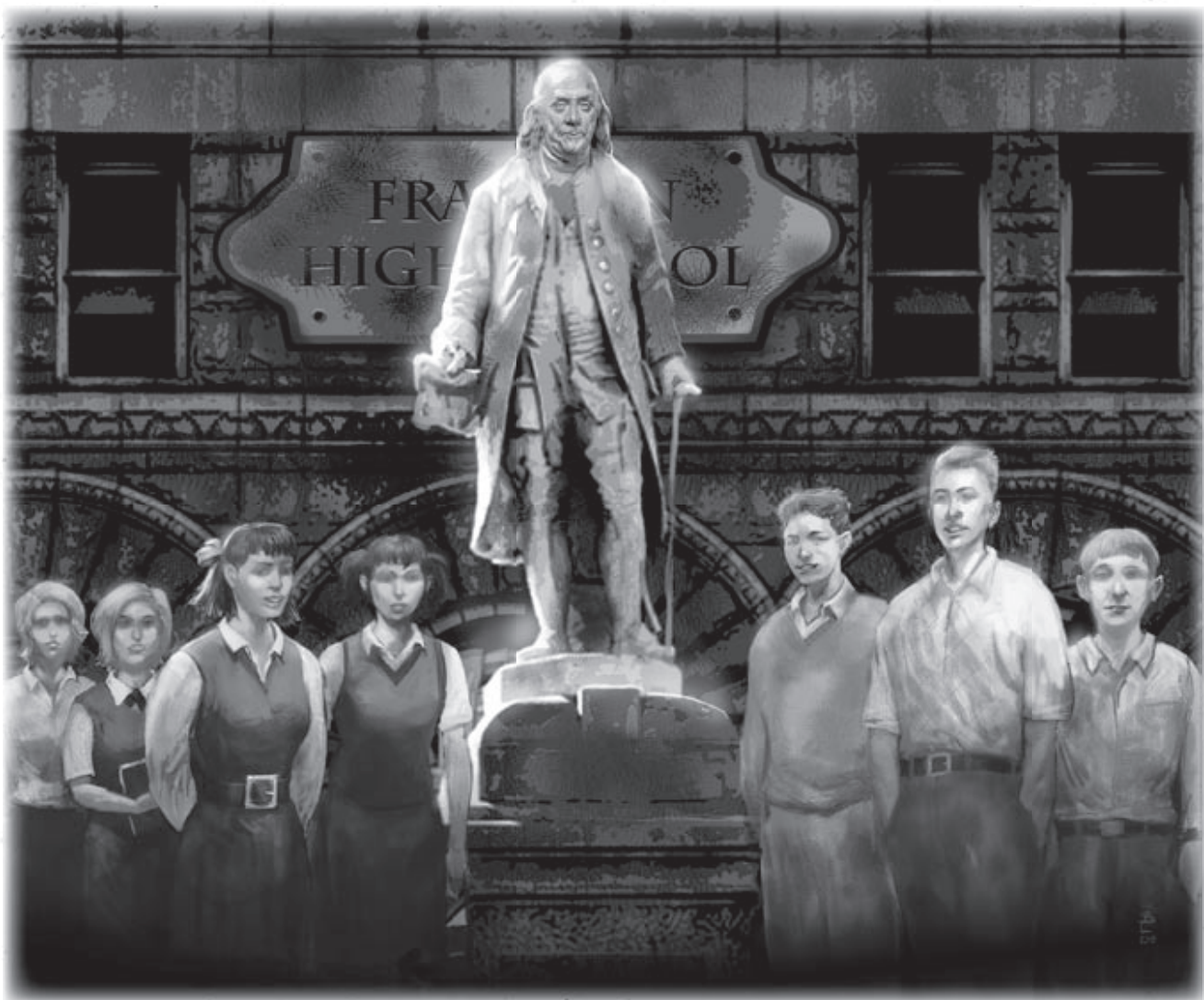
"When new kids move to town, the older ones always change. For the weirder."

A great Storyteller opportunity comes from having

a well-known family of Storyteller characters move to Franklin, and have the older ones start to show the effects of the Working. If a player's character only interacts with the family every few months, she might notice changes to the teenagers that the teenager's family doesn't notice. The Franklin Working operates slowly over the course of four years, after all.

"Bob Philippi has been teaching at Franklin High School for over 20 years — no one ever suspected that he was committing such heinous crimes!"

The Working mucks with the heads of students, but at least *they* get to leave after four years. Bob Philippi was gay before he arrived in Franklin to take a job teaching math. The Working broke him. After the third Franklin High senior disappeared, police found the mutilated corpses outside of town. Residents of town just assume that this was an isolated incident. In fact, almost no one even suspects that Philippi was gay. Characters might be able to find Philippi



The Franklin Statue

In 1987, Gerald McLaren donated a life-sized stone statue of Ben Franklin to the Franklin Area School District. The statue itself is the focus of the Working. If the statue were to be destroyed, the Working would end.

However, the statue has already had its effects on students who spent four years at the school (it has proportionately less effect on transfers and dropouts). Damage to the statue cannot change the warped minds and brains of graduates of Franklin High. Destruction of the statue prevents further damage to current and future students, however.

In game terms, the statue has Size 5, Durability 4 and Structure 9. See p. 136 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** for rules on damaging or destroying objects.

Incidentally, the majority of McLaren's studies and research were in magic and psychology, rather than history. The irony of libido-suppressing magic being embedded in a statue of Ben Franklin, of all people, was entirely lost on him.

in prison, where he has languished for five years and has slowly begun to recover from the effects of the Working. Philippi doesn't really know what happened to him — he has no magical senses. He describes his time in Franklin as having been pleasant, and yet... some essential part of him was buried while he was there. "Buried" is definitely the metaphor that he uses (he had and still has nightmares about having been buried alive).

Note to Storytellers: Ordinary, "harmless" residents of Franklin can be represented with the various normal templates in **World of Darkness**, pp. 203–207. Simply add a fixation derangement to each one as described above. Particularly acute observers may notice lingering magical influence on ordinary Franklin High graduates — but it is difficult (McLaren obscured his magic as much as possible). Use the Resonance rules on p. 277–278 of **Mage: The Awakening**. Specifically, the concealing spell within the Franklin Working had a Potency of 4, meaning that a mage observer must use a perception spell with a Potency of 5 before he can even notice that it's there. McLaren was worried that other mages might learn what he had done, and

besides, if detecting the Working were easy, another mage would probably have done so by now.

Franklin Killers

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 1

Mental Skills: Academics (subject of obsession) 1, Crafts 1, Investigation 2, Medicine 1

Story Hooks

- The character begins dating a young man from Franklin. While he seems to be well-socialized and normal, he is uninterested in pre-marital sex (which might be a little strange). Soon, however, she begins to find dead, featherless birds near her home. When she visits her date at home she finds an extensive collection of bird feathers.

- A character with a police background learns of an obsessive serial killer in his area. The killer turns out to be one of the "Franklin Killers." Such an individual is dangerous enough, but no more than a month after the first murderer is dealt with, a second obsessive serial killer pops up. He doesn't share an MO with the first killer, but when characters learn that the second graduated from the same high school as the first, just a year earlier, they may choose to investigate the town itself. One of the killers might be a teacher, just to spice things up — the key relationship here isn't between teacher and student, though, but rather between the Franklin Working and both of them.

- A character's teenage male cousin, recently moved to Franklin with his family, disappears. The ensuing investigation shows he recently started to date a girl, and there are whispers that he tried to rape her. When his body is found it looks like the son of a bitch might have gotten what he deserved. But older residents of Franklin whisper that the boy isn't the first newcomer to die like this, and they remember when it all began. One of them approaches the boy's mother, and she in turn begs the character for help. This could eventually lead to the characters confronting the authorities and the madmen of Franklin.

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Drive 1, Firearms 2, Larceny 1, Stealth 2, Weaponry (Knives) 2

Social Skills: Animal Ken 1, Empathy (Discerning Conventional Morality) 1, Intimidation 2, Subterfuge (some Killers who travel outside of Franklin have a specialty in Faking Conventional Morality so they can get along in the outside world) 1

Merits: Danger Sense, Unseen Sense (mage magic)

Willpower: 4

Morality: 6, but scrambled (obsessive compulsion (see above), probably a few others, likely including irrationality, suspicion, and/or phobia (the phobia's subject probably relates to the character's obsessive compulsion))

Virtue: Any (but see "The Franklin Working Broke Me," below).

Vice: Lust

Initiative: 4

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Health: 8

Armor: None

Weapons/Attacks:

Type Damage Range Dice Pool Special

Knife 1(L) — 7 —

Supernatural Aspects:

- **Grew Up In A Magical Field:** Franklin Killers add three to any Resistance Attributes used to resist Mind and Life effects (or other supernatural abilities that affect the mind or internal workings of the target's body).

- **The Franklin Working Broke Me:** Years of

sexual sublimation have driven Franklin Killers to dangerous levels of rage. Should a Killer incapacitate her enemy, she must spend a Willpower point to avoid killing him and desecrating the corpse in a fashion appropriate to her fixation. If she does kill the target and desecrate the corpse, her entire Willpower pool is filled (as though she had just acted in accordance with her Virtue).

- **Scrambled Morality Code:** A typical Hierarchy of Sins for a Franklin Killer might look like this:

Morality	Sin
10	Selfish thoughts. (Roll five dice)
9	Impassioned crime (manslaughter). (Roll five dice)
8	Casual/callous crime. (Roll four dice)
7	(Non-lethal) Injury to another (accidental or otherwise). (Roll four dice)
6	Grand theft (burglary). (Roll three dice)
5	Petty theft (shoplifting). (Roll three dice)
4	Grand theft (burglary). (Roll three dice)
3	Minor selfish act (withholding charity). Premarital sex. (Roll two dice)
2	Intentional, mass property damage (arson). Homosexual sex or transsexual behavior. (Roll two dice)
1	Planned crime (murder) (Roll two dice)

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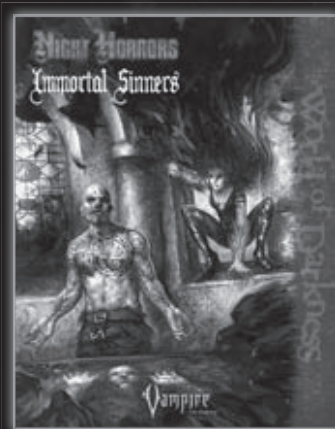
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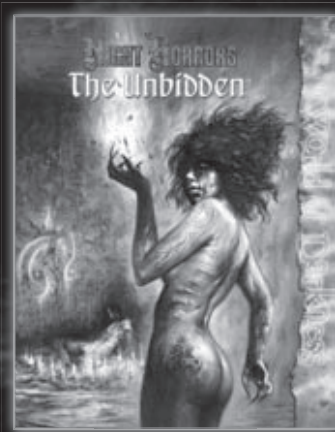
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