

THE ORPHANS

SURVIVAL GUIDE™



A Handbook for Rebel Magi in Mage: The Ascension®

THE Orphans SURVIVAL GUIDE™

*Fear not what you haven't tried
Listen now, because your parents lied
Your body is all you will ever possess
So put a little effort into your pathetic flesh
— Deathride 69, "MK Ultra"*



A Handbook for the Magickally Fucked

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Fare Thee Well

Ironically, *The Orphans Survival Guide* will be the last book I develop for *Mage: The Ascension*. Once again, the '90s have worked their subtle magic at the Wolf (see Special Thanks), and this time I'm on the list.

To be honest it's not a bad thing for me. I've done the books that really mattered to me — *The Fragile Path*, *The Book of Mirrors*, *Cult of Ecstasy*, *Destiny's Price*, *Mage Second*, *Sorcerers Crusade*, and many others besides. It's been a good ride, but maybe it's time to get off after all.

For better and worse, I put everything I had into *Mage*, and she's been a hard but rewarding mistress. While I can't honestly say I'm happy about leaving, it's time to go. Five years is enough. I've given *Mage* to Jesse Heinig and Lindsay Woodcock, and they'll give the line the treatment she deserves.

Although I'll be moving on to other things, I won't be leaving the industry behind. I have several pet projects in the works, and might even return to White Wolf for a book or two. One door closes and another one opens, as the cliché goes, and I love this industry too much to leave it for good.

For those people I have gamed with, worked with, spoken with and argued with, thank you. *Mage* has been as much a reflection of you as it has been of me.

Take care!

— Phil Brucato, Fall, 1998

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Dedications

Aldyth's Dedications: To Andrew Vachss for teaching me to stand up in writing and in life. To Neil Gaiman for showing me that mythology can be modern. And to Grant Morrison for the monthly magic lesson.

Rachelle's Dedications: To Shadow, Ken, Troy and Gerald, for providing endless sources of inspiration.

Phil's Dedications: In Memorium, this book is dedicated to Rozz Williams (1963-1998) and Wendy Orleans Williams (1950-1998). Rest easy, guys. May things look better in the next life.

Note to the Terminally Dense

Be grown-ups about this book, people.

Do not steal.

Do not kill.

Do not run away from home.

It's only a game.

Thank you.

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Prelude to a Kiss...

By Rachelle Odell

The Majestic Café
January 10, 1998
2:19 A.M.

If coffee was the food of the gods, I'd be damn near immortal by now. As it is, I'm just old, jaded, and jumped up on too much caffeine. I sit in my usual spot in the dark corner of this grungy café watching the angsty kids who call themselves regulars here, and I wait. I suppose there was a time when I knew what I was waiting for, but I guess I've stopped caring and have long since forgotten.

The city is a bitch on wheels this time of year. *Winter.* We used to move through it so easily in our limousines and faux fur coats, the heels of our Italian leather shoes crushing the last leftover bits of Christmas tinsel into the snow as we alighted into our hotels and apartments, the elevators whisking us up to our glittering world of glass and light. I don't think we ever realized how cold it was outside as we planned our parties and our heists and fought the good fights. But things change, as I suppose they must. Things happened and time crushed us under its heel just like that tinsel.

Winter. I think of him as I pull my coat around me a little tighter, even though the coffee and the busy crowd of bodies have made it quite warm here. Our time in the sun is over. History might remember us. I wouldn't blame it if it

didn't, but if it does, I'd like to think that we were more than just a blip on the screen or a meteor blazing into nothing across the night sky. I'd like to think that I've learned a thing or two about life since then, about survival, about consequences — especially consequences. I suppose sitting in this grease trap of a diner waiting for who knows what is my way of paying for all of the shady fucked-up things I did in the interest of what I thought was right. I tell myself that I can go back. I still have the key to the penthouse. The rent's paid through the next five years. I still have the credit cards and the bank accounts. I could fly back to London in a heartbeat — first class, even. But I don't. Whatever I'm waiting for won't let me. So I sleep my days away in a nondescript room in a somewhat respectable boarding house, and I come to the cafe at night.

Every now and then, I play a bonus round with karma — see if I can't spare some of these kids my fate and save them from ending up in a no-name diner somewhere waiting for a sign from beyond. They come in here lost, but radiant with "star stuff" as some poet once put it. Who knows, maybe he was one of us.... Some of them seek me out, knowing who and what I am, but others stumble in blindly and happen to sit at my table. We talk. People love to talk — for example, the skinny girl in black sitting in

front of me now. Her mouth's been going non-stop for the past five minutes, a steady stream of babble pouring forth.

I've been doing that annoying incessant stirring thing with my coffee, but I finally look up at her. She's high and she's scared because "she's never had drugs like *these* before." I look at her and know that she thought she looked cool when she left home with her fake vampire teeth and raggedy black dress. She wears the requisite pale makeup and pouty red-black lips, and her fake heroin-habit eyes are truly a work of art. Jean Paul Gaultier would be proud.

"Why are you telling me this?" I ask her, knowing exactly what she's just gone through.

"I dunno," she mumbles. "You looked like someone who'd listen. Y'know? Not laugh at me an' shit."

"Take the teeth out; you'll talk better." She pops them out and puts them in a small plastic case marked "fangs." She's rummaging around in her purse, obviously nervous, so I decide to start the conversation.

"I'm Swarna. You are...?"

"Tarra," she says, not looking up just yet. "You from England? You sound like it."

"Yeah. I'm from London. So you wanna tell me what happened?"

"I got this tattoo," she reveals. "Wanna see?" She stands and hikes her skirt up to show me the back of her thigh. The tattoo is fresh, not more than two weeks old, and the ink hasn't quite settled in, so the colors jump right out in a lurid mix of green and blue and deep red. It's a lattice and knotwork design reminding me a lot of the henna patterns that Hindu women paint on their hands for special occasions.

"It's a nice tattoo, but what does it have to do with anything?"

"Well, I got it and it hurt like hell." She sat back down. "I was lying there trying not to cry, trying to think of anything else but that needle. Suddenly, I got this rush, like my whole head just opened up. I could feel the needle, but it wasn't bad pain anymore. The pain fed the rush, see?"

"Yeah. I've heard of things like that happening. Apparently that's what makes the whole bondage scene appealing, or so I'm told. That pleasure-through-pain thing." I know that's not what she means, but I wait for her to tell me so.

"Well, that's just it. I've done bondage and all that, y'know, done some scenes, been to a few parties, so I know what that high is like. This was different. It's like time stretched out and there was nothing but the feeling and the moment. I felt like I was there forever just wallowing in that sensation.

"I'm starting to worry though," she says. "I think they may have laced the ink or something. It's like I've been high for days now, but there's no sign that I'm gonna come down. Hell, coming down off *this* is gonna be a fuckin' bitch." She pauses to light a cigarette and takes a long drag. Her pose is perfect, and I have to laugh silently. Even in a trashy diner with a total stranger, she feels the need to be cool. She reminds me of myself at that age.

"It's not like your average high, either" she continues. "Everything's clear, not fuzzy like an alcohol buzz or like a slow trip, but it's a different kind of clear. It's like I've been looking at stuff in a mirror all my life and suddenly the mirror's gone and I'm looking at the real deal. Sometimes I feel like I'm moving in slow motion and I can savor everything — the water in the shower, the way this coffee smells, the sound of your voice. Other times things are rushing around me so fast it feels like a carnival ride! I want to get off, but then I realize I can't because I *am* the ride." Tarra is breathing hard, tears falling involuntarily from her eyes. Her makeup is washing away in black rivulets down her cheeks. I dip my napkin in the obligatory glass of water on the table and hand it to her.

"Wipe your eyes. You'll look like a manic raccoon if you don't."

"So what do you think?" she asks. "Was I, like, seriously drugged or something? I swear I'm *fucked*! I'll lose my job if I show up again stoned."

I decide it's time to tell her.

"The first time is always hard," I say. She blinks back at me, confusion written in that little line between her eyebrows.

"What? Getting a tattoo?"

"No. I mean the first time you really wake up and open your eyes." I have nothing better to do with my time, and she needs to hear it anyway, so I tell her.



Introduction

Your world is an ashtray
We coil and burn like cigarettes
The more you cry your ashes turn to mud
It's the nature of the leeches, the Virgin's
Feeling cheated
You've only spent a second of your life
— Marilyn Manson, "The Reflecting God"



I was dancing to "Temple of Love" (the "Stairway to Heaven" of goth) when I noticed that the screens behind me were flashing concentration-camp footage. Now, I was used to fucked-up shit on that wide white screen (H.G. Lewis carnage, B/D action, excerpts from *Wicked City*, *Urotsukidooji* and *Night of the Living Dead*), but that was real meat dying on the wall behind me. Can't say I liked it much, and the effect took the spring out of my twisty gothic dance. After a few puzzled seconds, I wandered off to the side.

No one else seemed to notice. Across the darkened floor, legions of Byronic waifs and tank-topped industrials jacked and slithered to the thundering drone. In the corner, two androgynes licked each other's tonsils. On the screen, Pol Pot's boys took a cattle prod to some poor dude's balls. The visuals were not cool, and frankly, they didn't seem like Amber's style at all. Who was running this show, anyway?

I took another look around, peering through the Roscoe fog and clove smoke, checking out the faces in the garish haze. Lots of regulars, no question, but when I scoped the deejay booth, Amber was conspicuously gone. Now that I thought about it, the night's mix hadn't sounded much like her to begin with. The guy at the door was new too, but bouncer turnover is no big deal. Hmm... new bartender also. Funny no one else had clued to the changes, but hey, if the screen hadn't started flashing torture shots, I might not have noticed, either.

In the alcoves by the bar, I caught a bit of razor action and a gleaming silver cup. The girl seemed only too cheerful about opening her veins, and the gentleman with the goblet looked like a king receiving tribute. The lily on his vest seemed theatrical, even for here, but I chilled all over anyway.

My favorite club was suddenly under new management, and they had very disturbing tastes.



The Trauma Coil

Ground Zero at the Freakout Zone. We've all been there.

Not long ago, you were as normal as normal gets. Hey, we were all kids once, and kids dream of better things. Maybe you had a nice little middle-class life. Maybe you were raised in a, shall we say, broken home. It could be that you were even born in some rural backwoods or urban slum. Perhaps you were even rich. Either way, we can assume that you were once a fairly human sort of person, maybe a little bent by mundane standards, but otherwise okay.

Then things went to hell. It could be that you suffered through vivid nightmares or waking dreams. Did you see the Virgin Mary, or hear the Devil talking to you through hissing radiator pipes? Maybe those things drew you to the darkness or, perhaps, you just saw things differently from Day One. You may have been an artist, a performer, or just a weirdo picked on by the other kids. Even if the clues had been floating around your head for months or years, I doubt anything could have prepared you for what was about to happen. I know nothing prepared me.

Call it the Awakening, the Plunge, the Vortex, the Kiss of Night, Illumination, Wintershine, or a dozen other names I've heard. They all mean the same thing: One day, you clued in to the fact that our so-called "reality" was a bullshit sham, that "magick" was real, that you could, if you

were so inclined, fuck with things in ways that made you both a pariah and a god. From that day forward, nothing could ever be the same again.

Hey, you may have gone looking for it, studying magical texts or following closet Crowleys until their wisdom sprouted seedlings. Chances are, though, magick came looking for you, found your sorry ass, and drop-kicked you through enlightenment's window. Some people see the truth gradually, in little bursts and flares of awareness that finally add up to an inescapable conclusion. Most times, though, it's a sudden bitchslap from the gods, liquid fire pouring into your eyes, quicksilver running from your cerebral cortex, an icy nuke detonating in the middle of your heart. Even after the first blaze fades, you still hear the echoes rolling around in your head for days or weeks afterward.

If you're like most people, it freaked you out. It blew down the doors in a rush so intense that it melted your preconceptions into toxic waste. To touch them was to burn. To step past them was to burn, too. There you were, trapped by the acid lake of your old life and chased by the fires of what you had become, wild power at your fingertips and madness setting your brain alight.

With a bit of practice, you could do odd, magnificent things: see with the eyes of divinity, move objects with a thought, raise winds or light candles without striking a

match. The Old Arts of the magician became your bedtime reading, and the promises they made went from fairy tales to possibilities.

It happens to people of all ages, you know. I've met Wintershiners who finally clued to the truth deep into middle age, and I've seen kids who had eaten the rose of awareness when they were still in grade school. Most times, though, it seems to be linked to the teen years and early adulthood, when the stresses of puberty, exploration and experience come together in a storm of possibilities. That storm tends to open a lot of eyes, in my opinion — and, sometimes, the force of it closes them, too.

Some losers never make it past that point. They explode in flames or insanity, becoming new casualties for conspiracy Websites, case studies, gutters, and cop blotters. Others end up on the streets, forsaken and poor, unable to cope with the screaming in their heads. Some are stranded by a society that has no place for talented malcontents, no place but prison, the streets, or the crazy house.

Welcome to the land of the "orphan." I'll bet you never thought of yourself that way, but that's how others see you now, forsaken, alone, without family, friends or guidance. The day you fell into the Vortex, you jumped the track of normalcy and fell into a pit. Only your own strength, skill and good luck can keep you sane and alive now. As far as most of the world is concerned, you're on your own — a strange, lonely child in a pit of wolves.

Project Pitchfork

Once you Awakened, you became prey. Trust me, there are a thousand dark whispers calling your name. Even mundanes feel the breath of the night on their necks; the minute you clued in to the real way of things, that breath got 10 times hotter and lots nastier. The usual predators — pimps, bangers, cops and chicken hawks — are all there, but a whole new crew comes to taste your blood... sometimes literally.

Vampires, for instance, are real and devious things. They'll seduce you with a liar's kiss and use you as a pawn in their eternal games. Ghosts hover in the corners, watching your every move; some, you'll forget, while others you'll wish you could forget. Dream-kin dance on the fringes of sleep, inviting you to join their bittersweet games. And in the woods and cities, wild creatures rage; run up against one, and he'll eat your fucking heart. This is the first point on a devil's pitchfork: the midnight people who laugh at your mythology and feast on orphans' bones.

The human monsters are less mysterious: the cops who bash our brains in for violating their ideas of order, the fanatics who see their Devil behind every smile, the freaks who peddle flesh like candy, the sheep who'd follow *anyone* if it means a ticket away from oblivion. I've seen people snatched off the street by do-gooders in mini-vans, been to

rehab where "clients" are beaten until their "addictions" have been purged. Maybe you ended up in one of those places, escaping only because your jailers had grown careless or your talents were too great for them to contain. This is the second spike in your side: the Sleeping masses who would burn us alive for being different.

Worst of all, though, are the others like ourselves: the tower-bound wizards, the mad scientists, the pagan freakos and the dudes with black-hole eyes. Maybe you've got talent. Maybe you learned a few tricks. These people have you beat — they move mountains, fry brain cells long-distance, and travel to dimensions you've never even heard of. They're The Man in magician's robes, stormtroopers at the gates of Reality, and they want you, want me, want anyone who dares to Awaken and think for herself. Here's the third and largest devil's barb: the so-called Traditions, cults, Technocracies and Orders of the magical underworld. To them, as I said, we are orphans, and they want to play Big Brother — or feed us to the rats.

FUCK THEM ALL!

Vision Thing

Call me the Bitch Queen. Lady Vannoy will do, but most people think the first name's much more appropriate. Let me tell you what I am *not*: I am not your mommy, your mentor, your big sister, your whore. What I am is concerned. I probably haven't met you, and probably never will, but I understand where you are, where you were, and possibly, where you're going. I've seen my friends hunted down, my family torn apart by dissent and pride, my own blood spilled across the Path of my Awakening. And I am fucking sick and tired of being seen as a victim.

I, for one, am ready to bite the night in the ass. Care to join me?

This is a handbook of rebellion, survival, attitude and belief. Without all of the above, you're horse meat. Awakened doesn't mean godlike — lots of stupid fuckers get waxed for thinking that it does — but it does mean that we see with a clarity few people ever achieve. We who have reached that clarity may have paid for it with our comfort, but the fact remains that we do not need our hands held by "traditions" that seek to mold our vision before we truly understand what we see. Given time and support, we can see just fine on our own.

There are reasons we lack respect. If you're self-Awakened, reality has used you like a bitch. Whether or not you're still in bed with it the next morning depends on how good you were the night before. And let me tell you, most people get kicked straight out. The insulting "orphan" label shows what our spell-crazy peers think of us: that we're lost children needing parental guidance. We don't have to live up to that image, but many of us do — running off at the behest of lame-ass cult leaders, slinging fireballs until we light up like



X-mas, or sulking around like Andrew Eldritch's bastard dumb-fuck-Jenny-Jones-loving' children. That's to be expected, I guess, when kids Awaken to discover the power of gods, but it doesn't exactly contribute to our life expectancies or public image.

Before you jump my shit here, let me stress that I am not advocating some big group-hug magickal kingdom with myself as the queen. Nor am I advertising for my own society, the loose-but-kind-sorta-organized Hollow Ones (although I have had a friend offer up some details about it for interested parties). What I *am* doing is compiling some survival tips from friends of mine, giving them up for your consideration, and asking you to think before you spell. To get a fucking *clue* before the Devil's pitchfork rams you in the gut and tosses you into the gutter. I've seen too many of us go down that way.

The night deserves better than that. So do we.

We've got your back, sweetheart. Let's kick some ass.

"Been There, Done That"

How many times can you thwart the Technocrats before the whole deal gets old? If you've been playing **Mage** for a while, a character who knows little or nothing about what she's doing can be a great break from the routine. Freed from **Mage**'s elaborate setting, an orphans game makes an ideal starting ground, too. So forget what you know from other books and return to the streets for some serious reeducation.

The following hints apply both to players who want to run orphans, and to Storytellers who want to run chronicles based around them. For more ideas, see Chapter V.

- **Repeat after me:** "They're not all goths." If you want to emphasize the goth/fetish/industrial underground, by all means, do. Just don't feel limited to that setting alone.
- **Get hardcore.** Defiance, alienation and survival are prime themes in an orphans-oriented tale. Stress that the characters are alone against the world, with only each other to trust.
- **Run Awakening Preludes.** While Traditions, Conventions and even some Nephandi guide beginners through the Awakening, most orphans get blasted out of blindness by trauma or disaster. Highlight this by actually playing out the beginning of the mage's new life, then going on from there.
- **Make mistakes, lots of mistakes.** Unless she's surrounded by "affiliated" mages, an orphan is learning everything from the ground up. Hence, she should botch things that an "informed" mage would understand. Let her do it. Screwing the pooch and living to tell about it is half the fun.
- **"Ascension what?"** Very few self-Awakened magi know anything about "battles for reality." Fewer care. As far as they're concerned, the only reality worth saving is their own lives. Fuck the rest.

- **Keep it earthbound:** For the most part, orphans don't visit Horizon Realms or the Digital Web. They don't know the names of Umbrood lords, and would probably go catatonic at the sight of a Nexus Crawler. Orphan chronicles tend to be "street-level" affairs with low power levels and familiar faces. Avoid fireball slinging and dimension hopping in favor of urban crime and gutter terror.

- **Emphasize impressions, intuition and mystery.** The self-Awakened often master their talents through trial-and-error, not formal instruction. The process includes extreme sensory impressions, odd hunches and uncontrolled bursts of talent. See "Wild Talent" in **Mage: The Ascension**, pp. 226-227, but allow the mage to use it more than once or twice. Check out some of the "chapter fictions" for examples of uncontrolled awareness, and remember—the character only barely understands what he's doing. Once the magick becomes reliable, it settles into the usual systems.

- **Throw other World of Darkness books away.** An orphan doesn't know the difference between a Toreador and a bullfighter, and she knows even less about the details. The night is big, dark and vicious. That's all you need to know. That's all she *should* know. Period. Let her learn the rest the hard way.

While you're at it, ditch the Trademarks™. Each orphan sees things her own way, in her own terms.

The "O" Word

Speaking of: "Orphan" is a pejorative, coined by the Council to define magi who had not received "proper" training and/or fellowship. To the wiggy wizards of the Nine, these loose cannons present a threat to themselves, other magi, and the people around them. In proper usage, an orphan is someone who has Awakened and learned to practice magick without a formal tutor, sect or apprenticeship. Applied to members of the Hollow Ones, the term is actually incorrect—the Darklings *do* have an established tradition and society, although not one as formal or respected as practices of the nine Council groups.

To the self-Awakened, "Orphan" is an insult. They rarely use the term, and almost never apply it to themselves. To reflect this disdain, we've avoided using the word whenever possible, and spell it with a lower-case "o" when it does come up. In character, an orphan will usually refer to herself as "talented," or by some other euphemism. Only freaks walk around calling themselves "mages," and even "orphans" have their pride.



Chapter I: Voices in the Night

What do you do when your whole world falls apart?
What do you say to take the guilt from your heart?
How many questions hold answers you cannot give
And the hope of dying becomes the only
Reason to live?
— Die Laughing, "Safe Little World"



It was hotter than fuckass the night they nailed Earthquake in the stairway. That stairway was always mugger's dark — they done broke all the lightbulbs in there a long time ago, and I don't know what Quake thought he was doin', comin' up like that. He wasn't alone, though. Mooseman, Taylor and Ricky D see him come in, and they think, "Man, I'm gonna get a piece of that motherfucker."

Earthquake, he's one big-ass nigga. I ain't never seen him cry, not ever. But in no time at all, they had his ass crying like a little girl, so I knew they had to have cut him bad. Ricky D is one stone motherfucker, and Moose was at least Quake's size. I didn't hear no gunshots, so I figured they wanted to do him slow.

Me, I grabbed Jose and Ton, and we was headed down with Ton's little nine when we heard screaming like the end of the world. Y'know, those stairways is concrete — wall to wall, you know what I'm sayin'? — and those screams was bouncing off the blocks like howls outta hell. I got me a flashlight and we went down ready to bust some motherfuckin' head, but there wasn't nobody in the stairway.

Nobody. And it was cold down there. Real cold. Like December-shit cold.

Quake, he wasn't cryin' no more. He was just sittin' there with a big smile on his face. Then he got up an' walked down the stairs an' into the dark.

Then the walls started screamin'. Like Mooseman, Taylor, and Rick D, they was screamin', but there was nobody there. It

was just dark and cold and empty. That close, the screams sounded like they was right in your ear, but there wasn't nobody there at all. Nobody but screams.

We flew up those stairs like faggots. Jose pissed himself, but I didn't say nothing about it, 'cause I almost did, too. Shit.

That was months ago. I ain't never seen none of 'em since then, not even Quake. But sometimes at night, I can still hear 'em, and that stairway is still cold as ice.

Fuck if I'm goin' down there again....

So Sayeth the Bitch Queen...

Okay, so we've walked away from Ground Zero with a few shreds of sanity and independence intact. Now what? Where do you go? What can you do? Who do you trust, and how far can you let them in?

There aren't any easy answers to any of those questions, sweetheart. They're going to depend on how clueful, lucky, connected, and — let's face it — pretty you are. If you've hit Ground Zero living in a Brooklyn crack house, all I can say is you're fucked. If you know the right people and have a good rack, you might be able to score some good friends in that midnight morass you call a life. Otherwise, you're going down hard. A Nebraska farm girl with a sweet little face has a better chance — provided she can dodge the Christers and hop a line into a small city without getting chicken hawked, she'll probably be able to find a good teacher or gather a family before the predators home in.

Yeah, "family." Without one, you are totally screwed. I know you probably consider yourself way too cool, aloof and paranoid to ever let someone else into your life, but let's face it, sweetheart, you've got to put down the pose and be real with a small, dedicated clan. Hey look, if an egotistical bitch like me can let down the mask once in a while (and you, Alvin, can wipe that smirk off your face before I rake the backyard with your testicles!), you can. It's a matter of survival. First and foremost, get someone else on your back — and stay away from the Closet Crowleys. Those bastards are bad news!

I'm turning you over to some friends of mine, Edge, Silver and Swarna. "Edge" is a pseudonym for an anonymous friend of mine; Silver's a so-called "orphan"; Swarna's an "Errant" — otherwise known as somebody who began in an organized group, but split to go solo. They're all pretty famous. Maybe you've

What's With the Stories?

Most of this chapter is made up of "case histories," of lessons made up of other mages' follies. So what has this got to do with your game?

First of all, the tales set down in this chapter can serve as inspiration for your own chronicle. Perhaps your mage has similar experiences, or has friends who've gone through them. Maybe these snapshots of misery can provide plot threads for you Storytellers out there, or inspire new ideas based on what has gone before.

Secondly, they make up a backdrop for gossip. Storyteller characters and potential new stories. What happens if the characters meet the ghost of Aphotic Tony, or encounter the remnants of his old band? Silver, Winter, Swarna and the rest are supposedly still out there somewhere (see Chapter IV); your characters could run across them, wander through their fallout, hear of their adventures, or visit places where they've been.

Most importantly, though, these bits of gossip show the world through the eyes of its inhabitants — not through charts of Tradition conflicts and Nephandi plots, but through the often-scared perspective of people actually living in the shadow of those "masters of reality." It's easy to forget the human element when all you see are lists of powers and plots. By meeting our "orphans" face to face, we see the people behind the label, and hear the stories they tell.

THE HERMIT
Stories that might reflect upon your own.

heard of them; if not (or even if you have), maybe you should hear them now. Based on their experiences and observations, they can lay you a rough map. As for the specifics, there aren't any. Each case is different. Every new Darkling has a slightly different vibe, sees with different eyes, and clicks with different friends. What worked for me didn't work for Swarna. What worked for Silver may not work for you. Hey, it's a start, a few survival tips. Read, enjoy, and for Lilith's sake, *learn something!*

How Not To Die



I don't have a black belt, I don't break boards, and don't fight in gymnasiums.

— Flood, from Andrew Vachss' *Flood*

By Edge

I am not a writer. I am not your friend. I do not give a fuck whether you live or die. Someone I do care about has asked me to provide you with some practical advice. I will. That is all you need to know.

Dying is easy, very easy when you live as we do. Every night, the police scrape bodies and bits of flesh off the pavement. Every morning, the corpses of winos, crazies and stupid kids wash up on beaches, rot in alleys or draw flies in the park. We who understand the hidden forces in the night think we are immune to death, but we are wrong. If anything, we are more likely to die than the crackheads and citizens who know enough to hide when the shit gets thick. Like bangers and slummers, we invite Captain Coffin into

our bedrooms, fuck him like a bitch, and ask him to pay us afterward. And so we die — every night.

“Everyone dies,” they say. While it is true, this expression invites people to be stupid and careless. I’ve seen death. I’ve watched friends of mine get cut down, and I’ve felt the many different *kinds* of death. Me, I’m a survivor. Sure, I’ll die someday, but I don’t care to ask for the privilege. When Captain Coffin comes for me, the motherfucker will have to fight to haul my fat ass to hell. I’m not going quietly. If you want to, that’s your problem.

Here are a few survivor’s tips for living through the night in our world. Some are standard toll for urban life, and others are intended for those of us with special talents. All of them can save your life. Blowing them off is not healthy.

Know When to Fight

The first rule of survival is not to die. This sounds simple, but many people do not understand it. They get involved in things that are not their business. They fight for no reason. They get into trouble to boost a rep or to show off. None of these things are healthy. Each one carries the risk of being hurt, caught or killed. Even the simplest barroom brawl can turn deadly if someone takes out a gun (many people carry them), a knife, or even a broken bottle. Until you have been stabbed with a pool cue or had your teeth broken by a hard punch, you cannot understand how dangerous even a simple fight can be.

Fights happen. Violence is inevitable. Knowing this, you should be prepared to defend yourself, your friends or your territory. Many people will not give a shit whether or not you wish to be left alone, or whether or not you have done anything to them. Against these people, you should always be ready to strike back. Peace is a lie, and a coward is a dead man. But fighting for no reason, and taking risks that you do not have to take is stupid, and deadly.

A survivor knows when to fight, how to fight, when to run, and when to leave the room. “When” is when you or someone you care about is backed into a corner. Any other time, you’re just risking your ass for vanity. “How” is as hard, fast and solid as possible. Killing someone is a last resort — you *will* have to answer to someone, whether it’s the cops, the dead guy’s family, or even his ghost — but you should be ready to do it anyway if no other choice is available. Don’t show off. As the ad says, just do it. “Running” is easy. The hard part is doing it without looking like a pussy, or turning your back on your enemy. Either one of those mistakes will cost you. “Leaving” is usually the best option, provided you can walk away like a man (or a woman), not like a maggot. Those of us with talents for hiding or disguise have an easier time than people without them. If you have such talents, use them. In the streets, any weapon is a good weapon, even if you don’t use it to fight head-on. Which is why...

Your Senses Are Your Best Weapon

In the streets, you are a dog. A dog lives by his nose, his ears and his bite. A lot of people just move through their days like the world was some big self-contained bubble

around their heads. If you want to live past your first week, learn to watch the world around you. It is full of surprises, most of them unpleasant.

We talented people have a real edge over most citizens, but very few of us ever realize what it is. You probably think that some stone-killer spell or Dirty Harry special is the ultimate survival tool. You are wrong. If you understand anything about the deeper nature of things, you can see patterns that most people can never notice. Those patterns — aura colors, energy flows, structure grids, weak points, emotional currents, spirit resonance and, of course, the presence of other living things your eyes can’t detect — can save your ass when you least expect it. Most human would kill to have those kind of senses, but many of us just ignore them in favor of magickal nukes. Not smart.

This survival tip is simple: When you go out your door, keep a “second sense” handy, just in case. Some night, you will need it.

Food Can Kill You

Everyone needs to eat. Citizens take this fact for granted, but as someone with no home and no money can tell you, food does not grow on trees, at least not downtown. Eating the wrong thing, too much of something, or eating it from the wrong place, can kill you. At best, you might end up shitting all day, dehydrating yourself and leaving yourself open to attacks and infections. So be careful where you eat, and how.

Unless you have something to trade, money is essential. Those of you without cash have four options: Beg food or money, go to a shelter, scam or rob someone, or eat from the trash. They all have their pluses and minuses.

Begging is easy, but fucking degrading. You might get some kind, generous soul, but chances are, you’ll catch lots of abuse and maybe a clout from a pissed-off cop or citizen. Even if you do get something, you will feel like the rodent that you are, and will probably have to look pathetic for a long time until you manage to score enough to chow. Prime begging places (parks, busy streets, outside clubs, restaurants and supermarkets) can net you some better stock — people feel guilty when they’re enjoying themselves, and you can play that to your advantage. Those places usually have regular beggars, though, and you might have to fight them to work the spot. If you *do* beg, there are two rules: Watch out for the pigs, and always be gracious. I’ve seen people go bugshit at citizens who won’t hand over money, and let me tell you, nothing will harden a person’s heart faster than a beggar with an attitude. On the other hand, a nice “thank you” will make the mark more ready to contribute next time.

That kind of guilt keeps the shelters open. The shelters, in turn, provide a good place to eat. The food is bland and the waiting is tedious, but if you have no pride, a soup kitchen can be a lifesaver. Most large cities have several,

and advertise them well. Anyone on the street knows where to find one. If you don't know where to go, just look for the warehouse or church with crosses and pretty signs all over it, and the huge fucking line of two-legged maggots in front. Soup kitchens aren't come-when-you-want facilities. They serve when and if the citizens running them have time to open the doors and cook the grub. Aside from that, the only real problems you encounter at a shelter are the waiting, the boredom, the stench and presence of human refuse, and the ranting of sanctimonious citizens "trying to make a difference." Fuck the difference. Let's eat, thank you.

To listen to the citizens, you'd think we all went around robbing and scamming them. Bullshit. It's too much trouble, most of the time, and there are easier ways to go. Still, some folks do get hard ripping people off. If that's your trip, just do it carefully. I don't feel like catching shit for your grift, fucker.

The easiest scam in the world is social services. They were set up to handle your sorry ass, so they're basically one-stop shopping — food, shelter, major medical, drugs, even dental care — if you want to deal with the hassles of paperwork, long lines and condescending looks from the public servants. Just go into any state-supported shelter, look respectable, talk a good game, and hope the politicians haven't been dipping too deep into the welfare funds. That happens a lot.

Scamming is an art form built on confidence, cool and charm. Most times, the mark won't even know what's going on until you're long gone. I'm not giving out any secrets here — if you're not slick enough to cough up your own grift, I'm not offering lessons! I will just tell you that a good con depends on fast talk, an honest face, a sexy bod, and greed... your mark's greed. Offer a man something for nothing, and watch him get stupid. By the time he pulls his head out of his ass, your hand will be long gone with his wallet. If he stays smart, back away and find someone else. The world is full of morons.

(Note to the ladies: You will have an easier time pulling a grift than a grab, but if you choose to steal outright, you have surprise on your side. No man thinks a woman can steal from him, and few women expect a sister to rip 'em off. If you get nailed, cry up a good sob story. Toss in a little tease, and chances are, you'll walk. Note to men: If you've got a lady-friend, let her do the talking and shut the fuck up.)

Robbery is easy. Just find a citizen too drunk, scared or stupid to resist, then grab his shit and run. Most sheep are easy to intimidate, especially if you look like Charlie Manson's inbred cousin. Lots of people turn this into a power trip, hassling the mark until some worse crime gets committed. That's the dumb-fuck route. I tell you now, if you're going to rob, you *will* get caught once in a while. When you do, it's easier all around if they don't add Assault, Battery, Rape or Attempted Murder to your sheet. Act like

a freak, and they will treat you like a freak. Be cool. Just let the citizen know what's in store if he resists. Nine out of 10, he'll hand it over and you can jam without further complications. If someone gets hurt, your survival factor goes down — way down.

Dumpster-diving is the last way to go, but if you're hungry enough, it'll do. If you can hit a restaurant's trash just near closing time, you might not have to get dirty at all. Most bus boys and dishwashers have been there, my friend, and they'll slip you what they can, especially if you're cute, pathetic or both. Should you need to take the big plunge, keep some newspapers around to clean up with afterward. Use a stick to push the really nasty stuff aside. As for the smell, you get used to it. Don't go near anything with flies or maggots on it, and stay away from meat — it spoils too quickly. Pizzas are golden if they're still in the box, and most people leave at least one piece inside. If you do raid a dumpster, make sure you have a secluded crapper nearby. Chances are, you will need it by the end of the night, and you do not want to be caught with your pants down.

By the way, there's a reason most homeless people drink booze, and it isn't just the buzz. You do *not* want to drink water unless you are either A: at a shelter, B: at a public water fountain, C: boiling the shit before you drink it, or D: dying right this fucking minute. A rat's asshole has nothing on the germs in urban standing water. Even most public bathroom sinks are poison.

Find a Place to Crash

Shelter is another thing citizens take for granted. Until it is gone, you never realize what it's worth. It's easy to stand around outside on a sunny day. It's fun to take a walk in the rain. It's neither easy nor fun to be caught outside on a really hot or cold day, and worse to be stuck outside at night. In case you're terminally dense, you'll notice that there are no beds outside, no comfy places to lay down without fear of attack. Park benches, thick bushes, alleys and fire escapes provide places to nap, but let me tell you, buddy, you learn to sleep very lightly when there's a possibility that you'll wake up surrounded, beaten or dead.

If you're homeless, weather is your worst enemy. A cold night can kill, and a hot one can make you wish you were dead. Rain's good for a shower, but a long, hard day (or night) of it can be the most miserable thing in the world, especially if you're trying to sleep, too. In bad storms — blizzards, frosts, heat waves and hurricanes — you have two options: seek shelter, or suffer and probably die. We talented folk have an easier time standing up to the elements, but you usually need some kind of spell or ritual that hardens you to the weather, first. Without one, you're as dead as anyone else. The only good thing about harsh weather is that it drives the maggots indoors. No one wants to walk around fucking people up when they could be comfortably inside.



George Carlin once said that home is where you put your stuff. No home, no stuff. Again, this is something citizens take for granted. If you're living out of a car, a box or a shopping cart, though, you soon learn that your stuff is community property. Sure, you might be able to stash that gold coin up your ass or hide a ritual dagger in a pile of clothes. Sooner or later, though, someone is going to go through your shit. You can't watch it all the time unless you keep it in a backpack, and then it's only as secure as you are. You live on the streets; my friend, you *will* get rolled — cops, kids, other losers, it doesn't matter. Anything you have, they will take, unless it has been disguised to look like something no one wants.

Here's another place where "our kind" has an advantage — with the right spells, we can make gold look like dogshit. Even then, though, you're limited in what you can carry. The Hermetic Wizard's Do Everything Ritual Toolkit From Hell will not fit in a knapsack. Unless you can learn to improvise with at-hand objects (something Hollowers and witch-types do much better than rite-wizards or mad scientists), your oh-so-cool magicks will be a thing of the past.

Oh yeah, funny joke: Man comes up to homeless dude, says "get a job," and walks away thinking he's just said something profound. Stupid fuck, *try* getting a job when you have no address, no place to wash up, no extra clothes, and probably no valid I.D.! If you're streetbound, you've lost a lot more than just a roof.

So where do you go when you have nowhere to go? A few suggestions:

- Homeless shelters are a "duh." That's where you're *supposed* to go, dumbass, and the best of them are fairly comfortable, provided you're used to worse. Good sides: staff to watch over you (sometimes); running water; beds, cots or blankets for sleeping; people to talk to; a roof that won't fall in. Bad sides: usually crowded (if not closed due to overcrowding); lines for everything; lots of losers; stench from selfsame losers; no privacy; and the same kind of sanctimonious bullshit that makes soup kitchens such a pain. Also, most shelters have limits on how long you can stay there. At best, they're a temporary option, but when you're homeless, everything's temporary except poverty.

- Crashspace is good if you can score some. Say you've got a friend who deals; he likes having good-looking chicks hanging around, and he doesn't mind paying rent for the privilege of their company. If you are said "good-looking chick," boom! Crashspace. (You can work out the deals as needed.) Hippies, bikers, bangers, priests and fags are good sources of crashspace, so long as you meet their price. Some just want you to be cool, some want dick or pussy, and some want religious conversion. Me, I'll settle for the first two.

If you can pass for a citizen, you can make your own crashspace. The lobby cops won't let Joe Stinky Homeless Fuckler anywhere near the hotel elevators, but a clean-cut tourist who "just forgot his keys" can scam an empty room,

or slip in behind a maid who just finished with one. If all else fails, you're only a picked lock away from some citizen's apartment — bad if he's coming home at five, good if he's gone for a while.

- If you have a car, live in it. Park it in places where people pass by occasionally (if it's totally secluded, you're all alone), but not so often that they notice a person living in the fucking car. Stay around the car during the day (but not so close that you'll be nailed for loitering or boosting), and crawl into it at night. If Officer J. Pigg wants to know why you're dozing in the car, tell him you're just sleeping off a bender. Keep your shit in the trunk, and make sure the keys are well hidden on your person at all times.

- Lots of people crash in junkyards, condemned buildings and wrecking sites. Those places are ideal if you can make friends with (or avoid) the guard dogs, and can beat the other losers who will undoubtedly want to keep that space to themselves. Chances are, any really good spot in a city has been marked by a gang. If you get caught on banger turf, you'd better be cool enough to impress 'em, bad enough to kill 'em, or fast enough to outrun 'em. They make shitty landlords.

- Parks and graveyards offer lots of good places to crash — jungle gyms and bushes in the parks, mausoleums, crypts and ornate monuments in the cemeteries. Parks tend to be safe during the days as long as you don't freak the kids out, but they turn into drug stores and meat markets at night. A lot of times, the regulars won't fuck with you if they've seen your face around, but sometimes you'll get a psycho roller or a beat cop with an attitude. Graveyards are a lot safer — most maggots are scared of 'em, most cops don't bother with 'em, and most Satan freaks won't give a shit if you're hanging around. Hell, if you play your cards right, you might even be able to form your own cult! Downside: There are worse things than Satan freaks. I stumbled across some undead initiation in Chicago one night, and I barely got out alive.

- If you are well and truly fucked, a box in an alley will do. Lots of down-and-outers do the cardboard palace routine, and while it isn't comfortable, it's safer than sleeping open. Sure, every once in a while, the cops will do some housecleaning, the bag ladies will go shopping in your stuff, and the rich boys will decide to play "stomp the winos." If you're prepared for that, though, you can make do in a newspaper-covered box shack.

A couple of pointers: Find, beg or steal a bigass box, preferably from an appliance shop or an auto-parts store. Waterproof it with blankets, newspapers or (best of all) plastic. Holding the 'proofing down with rocks, tape or your own special rituals. Set it somewhere out of the weather, like under a fire escape or overhang, but away from the citizens. Find a gutter to piss in, and keep a lot of newspaper and food wrappers handy for the big dumps. And

give up any idea of privacy or dignity. Final note: When rain or the Hawk (winter, dumbass!) comes screaming down, find better shelter. Cardboard means nothing in a storm.

- Sewers and subways are literally the last resort. While they're warm in winter and cool in summer, they smell like the Devil's colon and crawl with every form of disease, parasite and infestation known to man (and quite a few that aren't). Worse, there are things living there that no one should ever see, hardcore or not: corpse-cannibals, giant bugs, shit-eating crazy people, and stuff that would make H.P. Lovecraft gag. I've known a few people who spent nights in the undercity and lived to tell about it, but I wouldn't put their examples in a "survival guide," trust me!

Wherever you go, remember these things: Public pools and libraries are your friends (the first has showers, the second has washrooms, crash space and reading materials). Cops and old winos are not your friends. Hotel staffers can be duped. There's safety in numbers, so long as those numbers are five or less (more, and the cops get twitchy). Fast talk, charm and sex cover a multitude of sins.

Bare-bones Urban Survival Kit

- **Backpack, rucksack or shopping cart:** This is home. Without it, you have nothing.
- **Blanket:** Bed, wrap, overcoat, chair. Questions?
- **Knife:** Not necessarily a weapon, but a tool, too. Make sure it's sturdy, thick and can be concealed. Bigger is not always better; that Rambo shit is a liability.
- **Paper:** Wrappers, newspaper, whatever you can get. It's insulation, washcloths, toilet paper, even reading material.
- **Plastic bags:** You never know when you might need to carry something. Makes okay ponchos or waterproofing.
- **Shoes:** Hard to find if you need 'em, and the city's a bad place to go barefoot (though some people do).
- **Alcohol:** Not just for dinner anymore. Strong stuff's good for cuts, and you can always trade booze for other things if you don't drink.
- **Cigarettes:** You say you don't smoke? Get bored enough and you will. Besides, butts are cash on the street; you can tell time with 'em (count how many cigs you can smoke before something goes down); they make good signals; and in a tight spot, you can burn someone who's wrecking your shit.
- **Other stuff that's good if you can carry it:** Toothbrush, paperbacks, harmonica, matches, walking stick (heavy and pointed), extra clothes, lead pipe, razor blades (dull on one side, concealed in clothes), lighter, ball of string, zipper baggies with deodorant, soap, shampoo and shit inside. (Being homeless doesn't mean you have to smell medieval.)

Oh yeah, don't forget your witching tools. Just don't get too attached to anything. You won't have it long.

So what's good about being homeless? No responsibilities, no hassles with the boss, no time clock, and no taxes. What you can grab is yours, provided you can keep it. Go where you like, when you like. Just watch your ass, stay hard enough to stand but loose enough to roll, and it's not half bad. Luxuries are the biggest cage in the free world. Once you learn to let go of shit like indoor plumbing and regular meals, there are worse ways to live.

Know Your Neighborhood

Once you have a place to stay, get to know the area. You are on a fucking safari. Puzzle out the streets and map out the hidden corners. Plan good ambush and escape routes, and note the local watering holes. Watch the natives and learn their ways. Pick the best places to score sleep or a meal. Figure out who the big boys are, get to know the faces, check out the talk and learn to mimic it. At the same time, let the right people learn your face, too. Don't be an asshole. If you seem down with the scene and don't act like a tourist, you will probably be accepted, at least on the fringe. If you come in like Don Fucking Corleone, you will probably end up like Sonny instead.

A nice thing about being a maggot: People don't see you. If I am homeless, I am the fucking Invisible Man, blending in with the scenery. You would be amazed at how much information you can pick up just by being part of the landscape; add your "talents" to that access, and you become a regular encyclopedia of the neighborhood.

Once you've got the intel, you've got chips. Cops, bangers, rich freaks and P.I.s will be glad to give you some grease in return for good information. Again, this is a place where magick comes in very handy — if you know things no one should be able to know, and no one saw you learning them, you've got some powerful cards in your hand. Be very careful with the buy-and-sell, though; you can talk to some people, but talking to the wrong people at the wrong time is a good way to end up as some don's Thanksgiving turkey.

Make Family, Contacts and Allies

Part of that safari is learning who you can trust. No one can live long without a family — if the predators don't pick you off, your own depression will. We all need families. Hell, the baddest motherfucker in the world still needs someone to hold his hand on long nights. Chances are, you've lost your blood relations. When you set up shop, make an effort to grow another family. Lonesome is dead.

Allow me to make a few distinctions:

- Family is blood. They'd kill for you; you'd kill for them. There's all kinds of shit about gangs and mobs being "family" to each other, but that's fairy-tale stuff. Family is two or three people you would eat your own nuts for. These relationships take a lot of time to make, and a crisis or two to cement. Family is not asked for or purchased. It is earned.

- Friends are people you hang with. In most cases, you can count on them to do things that don't require much



devotion. Trust is usually there, but it's not worth testing too much or too often. Lots of people buy friends, either with gang membership, favors, dope, sex or cash. Some rely on their families to make friends for 'em, but those types don't last too long.

- Contacts are trade partners. You have something; they have something. You give, you get. Simple. Trust is minimal, but so long as your contact believes you have something he wants, chances are he won't jack you unless a better offer (or a more ruthless trading partner) comes along.

- Allies owe you. Maybe they're your gang, your cult, or people you once helped. Maybe they like you, maybe they're just paid to act like they do. Maybe you've both got a shared enemy. No matter. Chances are, you're not chummy, but will back one another in a fight. Allies are like the wind (or some Chinese bullshit like that): great at your back, bad in your face.

- Then there are beholders, people you owe. Nobody's debt-free, especially on the streets, but you want to be *really* careful who you're beholden to, and for how much. Sooner or later, you're going to have to ask someone for a favor. Just be sure you know the price before you seal the deal. It may be more than you could ever pay, talented or not.

- Hell, if nothing else, get a dog or some other animal. Animals don't fuck you over, bring their personal problems into your space, or back out if the shit begins to rise. No matter how many friends you think you have, get yourself a beast or two. (Hell, I know people who have whole packs, but that's usually a bit much, and they're a bitch to feed.) If you've done the mystick-familiar-animal-companion thing, great. Dogs, cats, crows, pigeons, rats, even spiders... lots of street witches keep their real buddies close, and those friends can see and do things no human could try.

Whatever you do, do not assume a relationship. Many people, especially bangers, cops and hardcore hobos, get very bent if someone acts like their buddy without earning the right to. Some will sucker you. Others will put a curb between your fucking teeth. When you are down, they will let you know. Till then, keep a respectful distance.

Cast a Long Shadow

Respect is everything, the respect you give and the respect you earn. The leading cause of getting dead is the dis — the insult, real or perceived, that's worth killing over. Draw your line, hold it, and stand up when you're called upon to be a man (or a woman). When you walk, walk confident. When you talk, talk sure. All this is true. But bragging is a fool's game, and the stakes can get high indeed. People will expect you to produce; if you can't, your ass will pay the toll for it.

As a rule, it is better to work by implication and reputation than to make threats or boasts. If you can pull off a few impressive jobs early on and take credit for them without getting wrecked, let those actions speak for you

later. If you can, arrange things so that they occur without risk to you, but leave the credit at your door, even better. Intimidating a roomful of hardasses, then leaving without them noticing that you've gone, that's the best trick of all (and one that people with our talents can pull off without much difficulty).

Quiet is good. No one respects a braggart, but everyone respects a legend. Although everyone expects a little bit of flash-n-trash from a player, it's usually better to let other people do your talking for you. One, you don't come off looking like a hyena. Two, your deeds will grow in the telling, so long as other people do that telling. It's never a bad thing to have "agents" out there to spread your fame, but be careful about what they say. Sooner or later, the legend gets called out. If he can't make good on his rep, he's history.

Always give respect where it is due. If you meet somebody's eyes, make sure he's a buddy, a mark or a pussy. Otherwise, you *will* rumble, and who knows how that will turn out? In general, if you act cool and stand up when you have to, people will leave you be. If you go around acting like Mike Tyson on a bender, you'll be eating shit instead of ears.

Along those lines, always keep your word. A liar makes enemies quick, and those lies follow him wherever he goes. Your word has to be law — to you and to others — if it is to mean anything at all. If you make a promise, you must keep it, whether that promise is to help a child, to move a piano, or to break some motherfucker's legs. If you do not stand by your word, no one else will stand by you.

Hidden is Best

The scariest fuckers in the world are the ones nobody sees. If you've ever seen that movie *The Usual Suspects*, you'll know what I mean. The world was frightened by that Kayser guy, even though the people who feared him worked alongside him every day. That fear, along with his intelligence, was the greatest power he had, and it made him stronger than a room full of legbreakers.

When you hit the streets, my advice to you is this: disappear. This is especially true for those of you who leave behind Traditions, Conventions, or other cults. The more hidden you are, the harder it is for them to find you. If you can, change your face, your name and your circle of friends. Dump everything you own, or at least everything that ties you to your old life and old name. Then start hacking out a new name for yourself — several new names, if you can manage it. This part takes time, but it stands up later on. Do lots of favors for the right people, but don't spend 'em yet. Save markers for later use.

When you get set up, keep escape avenues open. I know one ghost who keeps a loft in one name, has his mail delivered to another name in another place by people who owe him, works the streets under a third name, and operates a handful of mail-scams under three or four others. Anyone who wants his head has to trace through a half-dozen blind

addresses, phony I.D.s, and a jungle of casual acquaintances. If they happen to find him at home — which no one has so far — they have to deal with the hardest wall of all... his pals and the biggest dog in New York.

Never Get Too Fucked Up To Walk Away

We all get wild. That's just a fact. If you aren't partying, you might as well be dead. Your poison, your choice — it's not my place to judge. Coke, crack, booze, crank, cock, pussy... *bon appetite*, as they say. Just be sure you can walk away afterward.

If you lay yourself out, it's open season on your sorry ass. Predators can sense a wounded animal, and we're the only animals stupid enough to wound ourselves. I'm not saying that your head has to be crystal-clear at all times, although some people would. (There's no shame in sobriety; it just doesn't work for me.) I'm just saying that if you plan to

indulge, plan on walking away from it in functional condition. Junkies, drunks and potheads occupy the bottom of the urban food chain. The only thing lower is a slumming suburbanite. If you're one of them, you're already dead.

Do Not Fuck With the Big Boys

Just don't. Accept the fact that some forces — the cops, the government, the local vampires, the Mob — are bigger, meaner and richer than you. Going up against them may be all noble and shit, but it is not conducive to survival.

If you *must* play in traffic, do it through a false I.D., blame it on somebody else, make a dozen escape routes, and get ready to die anyway. Once you've made that peace with fate, you've learned the greatest lesson of survival: When you have nothing to lose, you lose your fear. When you fear nothing, everyone else fears you.

Word. Live. Peace.

To Live Outside the Law, You Must Be Honest



*Incurable disease on the day of rest
I'm walking on water in a sea of incest
I've got the image of Jesus imbedded in my chest
I can't leave home without my bullet-proof vest
— Christian Death, "Spiritual Cramp"*

By Silver, with help from Max and Da Bitch
The Bag o' Beans café is ready to close.

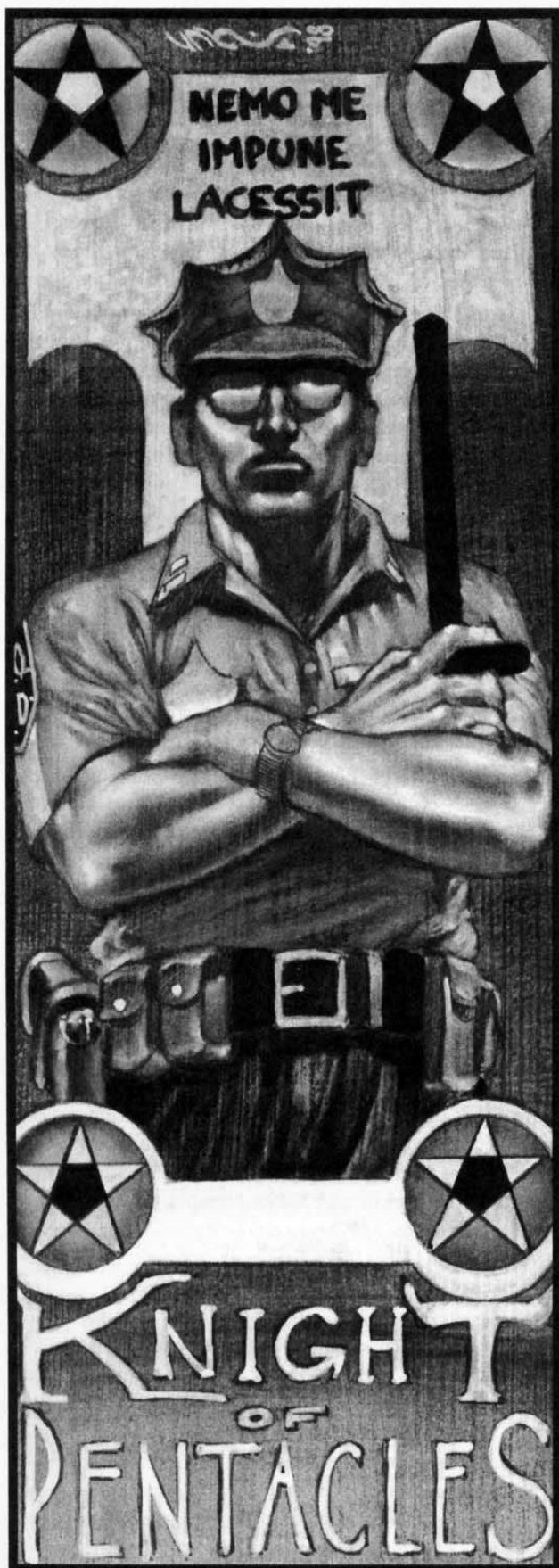
Max, the owner, stacks chairs on top of the tables, and the lone counter-girl dumps the last of the day's coffee. The Bag o' Beans is a small coffee house located a few blocks from the Chapel Perilous, and is the pre-club meeting place for many of the local gothlings who attend on those nights.

The décor of the Bag o' Beans is not particularly dark, but the atmosphere is welcoming, far more so than the slick, yuppie pick-up texture of the sarcastically dubbed "Café Get Laid" just down the street. Along with flyers for various bands and clubs, as well as display work by local artists, hangs a plain black poster with white block lettering: "DON'T BUY THAI!" it states in large capital letters, "Ask Me Why!" If asked, Max or one of his counter people will explain about child sexual slavery in Thailand, and how the only way to get the government to stop it is through economic sanctions. Apparently, he'll tell you, no amount of appeal to their government on moral issues has helped, and a boycott seems to be the only thing that will make a difference. Max also harbors a soft spot for kids in difficult situations, and a tired, hungry orphan can usually depend on him for a cup of coffee, a free pastry, and most importantly, no annoying questions. The word on the scene is that Max was part of the original goth/punk scene 20 years ago, and still remembers

how tough and exhausting it can be to survive when you're young and different. His "Carpe Noctum" tattoo definitely looks much older than the fanzine of the same name.

Tonight, Max is staying late. Silver's at her usual table, and sometimes, her talks with the kids take a very long time. Max has known Silver for more years than he can readily remember. The passage of time makes it foggy, unclear, but she's been on the scene about as long as he has, though he often thinks to himself that she hasn't aged a day. She started using the café for these "counseling" sessions of hers a couple of years ago, first reading Tarot cards, then just talking with the kids. It's been a good deal for him. Most of the kids come back, bring their friends, and usually buy something. When they can't, he tries to help in any way he can. Sometimes a kid will come in, wild eyed and scared, and Max won't ever see the kid again. Other times, things will be back to normal the next week. Looking over at Silver's table, Max sighs, flips over the This Mortal Coil tape, and heads to the back to read. Sticking around like this does make for some long nights. Maybe one day he'll give Silver a set of keys to the place and let her lock up when she's done. He believes he can trust her, but isn't ready to take that step yet.

Silver sits at her corner table, the one with a window view of the entire intersection outside. She's sipping chai, while the kids with her have dark "depth charges," coffee/espresso concoctions designed for late nights. Silver's wearing a simple ballet dress of dark-red velvet, and sports lots of glittery eye make-up, her own quiet protest against the ceaseless black wardrobes of her fellows. Her hair, tinted a similar color, shimmers with glitter. The kids with her, both draped in unrelenting black, are Raven and Janine, both look about 19 years old. Silver doesn't look much older. She is.



"Marc said you're really wise." Raven offers, after draining his cup. "He said we should talk to you if we're planning on staying around here." He puts an arm protectively around Janine. Apparently, he's here more for her benefit than his own. Silver senses this, but her smile is faint.

"I can't say that I'm 'wise'..." Silver's emphasis puts something vaguely sardonic on the word, "...but I've seen some things, and I've made some mistakes. I can tell you about them, and about some other friends of mine. After that, you can figure things out for yourself. I won't tell you what to do — that wouldn't do any good, and you wouldn't listen anyway. I'll just tell you about what I know."

So they listen, because the club's not open yet, and because they're a little scared (okay, sometimes a lot scared), do because Silver is pretty to watch, even if she is a little... um... bright. She's also the first person they've spoken with about all of this magick stuff who doesn't seem to have a bit of slime about her.

Besides, she's got something to say, something they should hear.

Four Stages of a New Life

We are, in some way, branded by what we are. Our lives are different enough in the beginning, but one day something just kicks us upside the head and forces our eyes so far open that nothing we can do will ever shut them again. I can see just by looking at you that you both understand what I mean, and I can see the scars that both of you hide because the wounds that left them are too painful to reveal, even to each other. Well, I don't expect you to reveal them to me — nor, frankly, do I want you to. The details aren't important. What you do *after* the freak-out, after the day when your life explodes, is important. It's *vital*ly important!

I've heard it said that we Wintershiners go through four stages in our lives. Most of the orphans I have seen burn out or die during the first two, but if you're smarter than they were, you don't have to. There's **The Burn**, the freak-out when enlightenment hits you like a lightning bolt; then there's **The Focus**, when you put things back together and start living a new life. Usually, our kind starts practicing some kind of magick, although some of us never bother to refine those talents and just sit on the fringes of society using "psychic powers" or whatever you want to call them, working phone scams or gambling on whatever faint talents they can call up. If you're smart, you might make it to Stage Three, **Stacking the Deck**, the point at which you actually achieve enough skill to use your understanding — and the powers it gives you — with some reliability. If you get really good, you might even reach **The Dawn**, and learn to see beyond this pathetic pretense of a life. I'll tell you right out that very few of us ever make it that far. Too many — *way* too many — either burn out, blow up, get busted or just stay stuck at the Deck stage, spinning powerful cocoons for

magickal moths, but never getting beyond the tricks and learning to ride on butterfly wings.

Like I said, the Awakening burns you, inside and out. And it's better to learn to ride that fire than to let it ride you. I could talk about theory all night and still not say a single word you would remember by tomorrow, so let me tell you what I've seen. Maybe it will sound familiar enough to strike a chord in you. Maybe it'll just serve as a warning. Either way, please use these stories as examples of what *not* to do. My own wisdom was purchased by the bodies of my friends. I was smart enough to learn from their mistakes. I hope you will be, too.

Because none of us are immortal.

The Burn: Everything Goes Crack!

Most of us don't handle the "Awakening" very well. Of all the four stages, this one is the hardest to survive. Between the wild burst of unexpected talent, the rush of madness and the complications that come with both, lots of Wintershiners either burn out, crack, or get snagged by someone bigger than themselves.

When I was in L.A., I knew a boy we called Aphotic Tony. "Aphotic" means "without light." But he didn't begin that way. When I met him, he was one of the most talented musicians in the city, with a sense of poetry that was delicate and sophisticated. But he *did* have an overfondness for the most disastrous chemical combinations, though. One night his band was playing at some East Hollywood dive, and he freaked out from too much crystal meth. The owner threw him out in the middle of the set, and while the band carried on without their leader, he wandered the streets alone.

There he was, dressed for the stage, in too much makeup and tight revealing clothing. His mind turned inside-out by too many chemical stimuli. The gang that found him beat him senseless, but when they attempted to slash his throat, his mind fought back. Some small sense of survival within him made him fight against actual death, and he lashed out. When I found him, moments later, moments too late, he was drenched in blood — theirs and his own. His system had cleaned itself of the drugs, and poor Tony seemed barely cognizant of what had transpired. He never recovered from that night, and he drew deeper within himself, using his magicks to enhance the effects of the chemicals he was now shooting regularly into his body. He became incapable of hearing or accepting any comfort that was offered. When he finally turned blue and died, it was a kind of mercy.

But he didn't *have* to go that way, and he shouldn't have. Suicide, even done slowly, is letting them win. It's saying they are stronger than you. That is one thing we never, *ever* want to do. Because they are *not*, not if you can reach deep within yourself, recognize the power that you

have, and learn to use it. Aphotic Tony is an example of great despair and horrible loss. And there is so much more to life than that.

Drugs didn't kill Tony. Self-destruction, the dark angel of hopelessness, killed him. No matter how bad things get, you can never let yourself be driven to that. Once you go down that path, it's too late for salvation. Then the laughing night wins.

Josie was another kid I knew a few years back. She wasn't smart, but she was good-natured, and always meant well, and would never have hurt anyone. But there were times that I had problems respecting her, because she also tended to behave like a perfect victim. Her life taught her that lesson.

Before the sky split open, Josie lived with her mom in a rough part of Los Angeles. At least she *had* a home, she thought. But Josie's mom wasn't very happy with her own life, and every time she got a new boyfriend, she made it clear that she expected Josie to disappear. Josie always said that she understood, and that when her mom was in love she didn't need anyone else around to spoil it. So she'd split for a while... sometimes all night, sometimes for nights at a time. Eventually, though, Josie would have to go home. When things inevitably soured with whatever man her mom brought home, Josie would be forced to take the blame... screaming, tantrums, sometimes beatings — you know, the usual. She would be so sweet about the whole thing, always saying, "Mom doesn't mean it; it's just so hard for her to meet nice guys." Things like that. Truth was, Mommy was a Grade-A skeeze, but it was never my place to comment on it. I'm just a good listener.

After a time, there was a new boyfriend who actually moved in. Apparently he acted real slick, like he thought he was going somewhere, and he claimed he would take Josie's mom along with him. Where they all went was hell. He caught Josie coming out of the shower, struck up a little conversation. She was embarrassed, but felt like she had to be "nice" to mom's new boyfriend. She excused herself to get dressed, and he followed her into her room. About this time, her mom arrived home, and Josie went crying to her. The girl was not what you would call "bright." Josie forced Momma to choose: boyfriend or daughter. I'm sure you can see what's coming, but Josie was clueless.

Momma had 14 kittens and a mule. In total spaz mode, she beat the living shit out of Josie. Then the boyfriend came running up, and he joined the fun. It became a real family bonding thing, a study in scarlet and blue.

Soon Josie wanted out of the party. As her eyes blackened, her vision became clearer. It was as if she could hear two voices coming from her mom's mouth, one out loud, the other one running through her mind. Momma thought the boyfriend's attack was Josie's idea — that she had wanted it, and wanted him! She believed all the other men had left because of Josie, including Josie's father! And last, clear, and black and appalling, Josie knew what many children suspect: that her mom had never wanted her, and had always resented her. Tears and blood painted Josie's face, and things in the house began to react. The television, the stereo, came on, loud. The lights went



out, popping in silent arcs of fire. The toaster sizzled, and the refrigerator smoked, and an outlet with too many appliances plugged in caught fire. No one noticed at first because they were too busy screaming at Josie, who was busy trying to block out thoughts even uglier than the words being hurled at her.

By the time they all noticed the fire, it was too late, and neighbors had called the fire department. Somehow Josie got out, singed but not burned by fire. Her eyes were huge purple orbs, but no one asked her about the bruises. The blaze was ruled "accidental." No one thought the screaming in the next room was "their business." When she could walk without help and see, Josie left for good.

Josie was taken in by a very kind woman — a feminist witch named Elisa, who's still on the scene, by the way. Elisa did her best to teach Josie self-esteem, and tried to coach her to focus her talents through magickal rites and meditation. But Josie's damage ran pretty deep, and she had a tendency to hook up with younger versions her mother's worst boyfriends. Elisa finally had it when Josie brought one of these freeloading losers back to the safe house where Elisa kept some of her herbs and incense. The guy looted the place and took off. Josie left quietly, like it wasn't a surprise. I think if she had tried to talk with Elisa, they could have worked it out. As it was, Josie went back out on her own.

The last time I saw Josie, she was doing much better. She was staying in the spare room of a very stable gay couple, and they seemed to view her as the daughter they always wanted but

never had. She still had deplorable taste in boyfriends, but she was learning some new tricks, and didn't allow herself to be pushed around so much. Those who tried to dominate her suffered unfortunate little "accidents." It was actually kind of amusing to see Josie fighting back, and I was happy to see her trying to better herself. It looked like she was bound on a one-way to termination, but she surprised me and turned herself around. Josie told me she was studying, and "developing her talents," she called it. She and her "parents" moved to Laguna Beach shortly thereafter, and from what I hear, all are well. Unlike Aphotic Tony, she survived, even if the road to doing it was a little rough.

Any of this sound familiar?

No one has an easy time Awakening. That is, no one of us, no one I've ever met. We are born into a shit storm, and it's up to us to get through it without choking. Tony choked. Josie didn't. Both went through hell, as did I, as will you. No matter what happens, though, you cannot let the trauma of The Burn force you to curl up and die a victim! There are so many other ways to go.

Focus: Putting it Back Together

If you keep your head and make it through The Burn alive, you hit the next stage. This is the stage where you

learn from your experiences, and figure out how to channel your talents into power, insight and company.

Things began very badly for Anna. She ran away to this city when she was very young, maybe 15. She had large amounts of pride and sense, but life on the street can take those away fairly quickly. She tried to get straight work, but she looked her age and tended to talk back to authority figures — which is usually a good thing, but not smart when you're a kid on the edge. It's a good idea to learn to be diplomatic, too. Anna never really learned that, and she was broke in no time.

So one of the kids encouraged her to try hooking. No heavy stuff, she was told, just front seat fellatio for the bridge-and-tunnel crowd. But fate hates to make things easy when you're at a crossroads. Anna's very first customer was a freak with a thing for inflicting pain on little girls. A freak, it turned out, with a previous record and a standing warrant for his arrest... a combination that saved Anna's skinny ass.

Skinny, maybe, but strong. When things went bad, Anna fought her way out of the car. Freak-boy didn't want to let her go, and he took off after her. She booked, trying to outrun the car, her head pounding, heart racing. Suddenly, she turned around and just *stared* at the guy. The next moment, the guy's car careened into a wall! Turned out freak-boy was wanted in connection with the murders of at least 15 young prostitutes. When the cops finally showed, Anna wasn't stupid. She was no hooker, she said; Freak-boy

just zoomed up and grabbed her into his car. Her friends backed her up, and freak-boy wasn't in any condition to argue. Dead upon impact, the EMTs said. No big fucking loss to the world. Good riddance!

Young or not, Anna recognized this pivotal moment in her life for what it was. She was truly Awake — she knew she was changed, and how. More importantly, she also knew it was no guarantee of survival. Anna recognized her power, but also realized her limitations, and saw that there were things out there that made her power look pathetic. Oh, of course she went on a purge when the shakes wore off.... Hell, *anybody* would do that! But Anna didn't let either sensation or oblivion take her away from herself. Once she settled down, the girl made some discreet inquiries... probably similar to the ones you made when you arrived here... and found her way to the Waydown. She made friends, observed, learned, then traveled to New York, and to England, to learn what she could over there.

In the course of her studies, Anna grew from a kid with talent into a young but dedicated magician — what some might call a mage. From teachers, acquaintances and even a few enemies, she picked up secrets of magick, grace and street survival. When she returned to San Francisco, she tried to look up some of her old friends. But many had died, lost to AIDS, drugs or stupidity. Others had died inside, or been imprisoned by blood-slavery, addiction, or the cops. Since then, Anna's been working with COYOTE, an



organization for prostitutes' rights and protection. Most nights, she's out on the streets herself, keeping her eyes open and protecting the people who work the streets at night from the predators that feed there. It's her own war, and it's as valid as the so-called "ascension war" that other mages speak of.

Beware the Wizard Behind the Curtain

In case you haven't heard of it, this so-called "battle for reality" is the greatest threat to your life and independence. It's a shadowy war between rival groups of sorcerers, the "ascension war" piles up body counts, conspiracies and backstabbing like some Byzantine court war on an epic scale. If you survive your new life and time at all, you'll be approached by members of the different factions in this war. All I can say is: Keep your distance! These homicidal egotists talk nice, but when the sun goes down, any one of them would sell out his own grandmother for a chance to get an edge.

Some of these odd folk seek to preserve the status quo of technological advances and esoteric science. Others are dedicated to bringing back the "old ways" of shamanism, witchcraft or Kabbalism. Some serve the Christian God. Some prefer Satan, and a few of them are crazy by anyone's standards. Not one of them is trustworthy, but they've all got centuries of magickal teachings, alliances and allies behind them. You can't fight these people — they're way too powerful! — and making friends with them is an invitation to a death-dance. If you meet "kindly old wizards" who offer to teach you Hermetic secrets, just say no. If some neo-pagan priestess wants to initiate you into her coven, thank her and disappear. If some mad scientist corners you with talk of chaos principles and his pet theories, make excuses and back away. And, for gods' sake, if you see dudes in black trenchcoats and mirrorshades, *run!*

This "ascension war" has been going on for centuries. Some people never get the hint, I guess. Trust me, the "old ways" are dead. Our job, should we choose to survive it, is to find new ways, better ways, to walk a Path that *we* choose, not to have one chosen for us. Still, plenty of people believe their little war is still winnable, and they'll try to convince you to join the "winning side" — in other words, them. Hey, maybe you will join one side or the other someday. Just be certain that it's *your* choice, not theirs. The most important war for you to win now is the one of survival.

Saving Your Own Ass

First, get yourselves stabilized and take inventory. If you're like most of us, Awakening robbed you of any shreds of "normalcy" your life might have had. That's not bad, because it means that you can stop trying to pretend that it ever *was* normal. Look clearly at the things you've lost: Was any of it something that really mattered to you? If so, can

those things or people be reclaimed? If not, then you're grieving because it's the conditioned response. Then study what you still have: No matter what has happened, you are still you, and you haven't been robbed of that! *Changed*, yes. More fully realized, true. But at the core of your being, you can still recognize the essence of your self. In time, you will find that much of what you do, especially in dealings with others of our kind, preserves that essence of your self as the world becomes more and more chaotic around you.

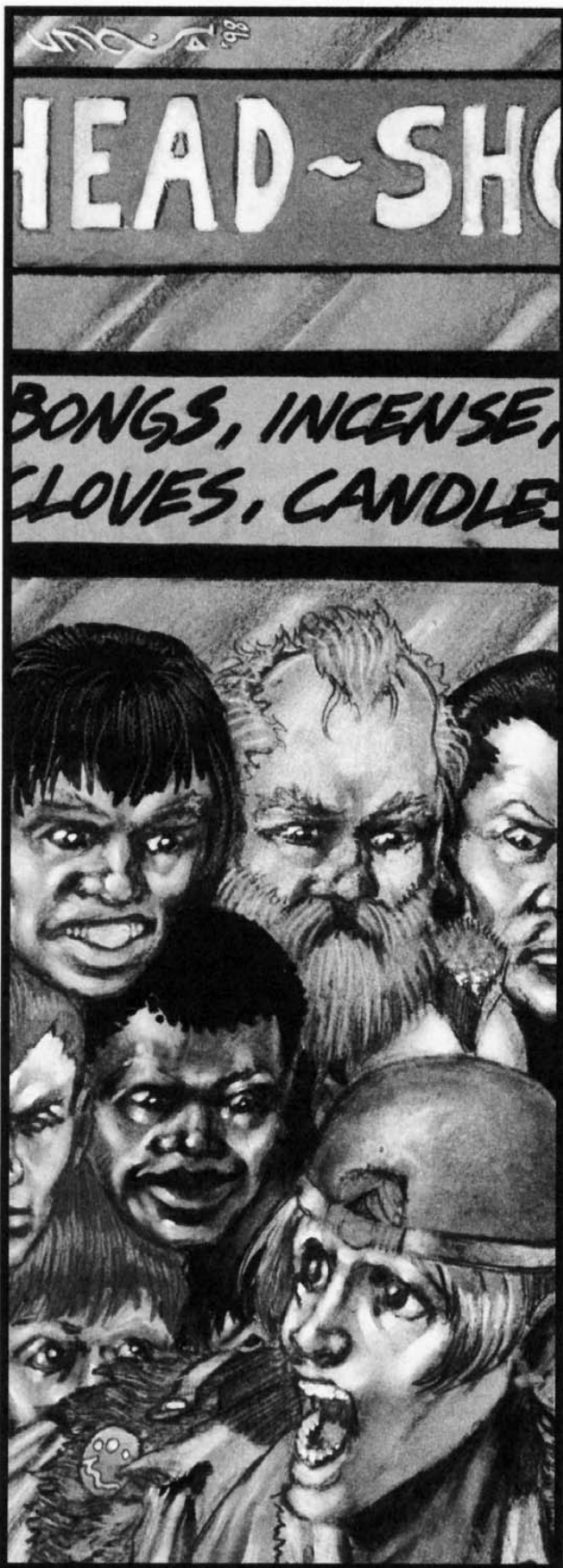
You'll need a place to stay if you haven't found one already. You don't want to actually live on the streets, even if it is useful at times for it to appear as if you do. There is space sometimes below the Perilous, though I can't recommend it. I can tell you about a couple of abandoned buildings that are reasonably safe, and can be made even safer with the proper workings. If you don't know how to do that, I will teach you.

Meanwhile, assemble a family — you know, friends, allies and loved ones you can trust. You've already got the foundations of that in the obvious love I see between you both, but you'll need more than that to survive. Love grows stale, especially at your age, and sometimes it grows bitter as well. To survive at all, especially in our world, you need a family; since most of us have forsaken — or been forsaken by — our blood relations, we need to find new brothers and sisters among others like us. By "like us," I don't necessarily mean other magicians. Sometimes, as I said, their company is more hazardous than anything else. No, I mean other outcasts — people from subcultures that quote-unquote "normal" people turn their noses up at: punks, Rastas, gays, musicians, goths... you know your own kind well enough. Still, don't limit yourself to a certain kind of crowd. Remember Josie, who fucked up six ways to Sunday until she found an older gay couple who would become her parents. Look for those you can trust, those who stand up in a crisis. Watch your back, and get someone else to cover it. If someone wants you to join his cult, get away from him at once!

In general, you just have to realize that your life has changed completely, and make the adjustment. Don't accept less from life than what you expect, because you now have the means to get what you deserve. You may not be used to having much, but that's changed too! Look deep inside yourself and recognize what your talents are. Once you do that, you have to learn to use them.

Stacking the Deck: Learning to Walk the Walk

There is so much that you will need to learn. You need to discover where your talents lie. After that, someone who knows those things well can teach you how to use those abilities to your best advantage. You need to learn what and who to avoid, and how.



Choosing Friends

This city is filled with some incredibly talented people who could coax ability from sleeping souls. It's also full of wanna-be masters who'll fuck you up and make you thank them for the privilege! These last may seem beautiful beyond compare, and talk like they care about you, but they have their own agendas. I wish I could give you a blueprint for recognizing these magickal parasites, but there really isn't one. There are tricks to help you spot one, but that means making contact first, if the scammer is any good! And sometimes at that point, it's too late.

Watch how those around you interact with others, listen to *what* is said, and *how* it's said. Don't believe everything you hear, but believe that there is a reason for everything people say. If you know the reason behind a statement, you can judge its veracity, and the person saying it, more accurately. It's all social games, but games with a far deadlier edge than you ever dreamed of before.

Make no mistake: There are those who would kill you without hesitation. There are others, though, for reasons of their own, who actually give a damn whether you live or die, and in what condition.

For example, there's a guy in Hollywood named Icarus, known to most of the world as a talented producer of some very eclectic music. His particular form of magick is tied intrinsically to his music. He loves both that Art and that music deeply, but he's also devoted to helping out those of us who find themselves lost or in trouble. He's not as flash as the club queens there, but he gives young mages a safe place to stay. He's also an amazing teacher. We stay in touch regularly—he sends me tapes of his new material and passes me new information. He's also convinced that if we outcasts can unite, and bring all our disparate factions together, we can establish power, and a place for ourselves on our own terms. That's something I also believe, but we have to stop distracting ourselves with useless social games first!

There's a woman named Belladonna at Chapel Perilous with similar feelings. She's seen the social dance—has actually traced its steps for quite a while—but I think she's becoming disgusted with it at last. As she sees it, we'll never be truly strong until we stop cannibalizing each other emotionally. She's tired of seeing us get picked off by predators, and is finally getting serious about putting an end to it. You might want to look for her at the club tonight.

If **you're** talented and impetuous enough to find it, there's the Waydown. Perhaps you've heard of it—the revolving club that only the *right* people know how to locate? It's in a different place every week, so you have to move fast to find it! The search is worth it, though, because the people there have their acts together as much as any of us, and have been around long enough to understand all the game playing (although most of them don't really need it). Penny Dreadful is a great source of information, always

dispensed in an interesting manner. Neville Sinclair can often be found there as well; he won't necessarily say much. If he does, it will be in the most off-hand of manners. If you watch him, you can learn a great deal, and if you're very patient, he might deign to teach you some things.

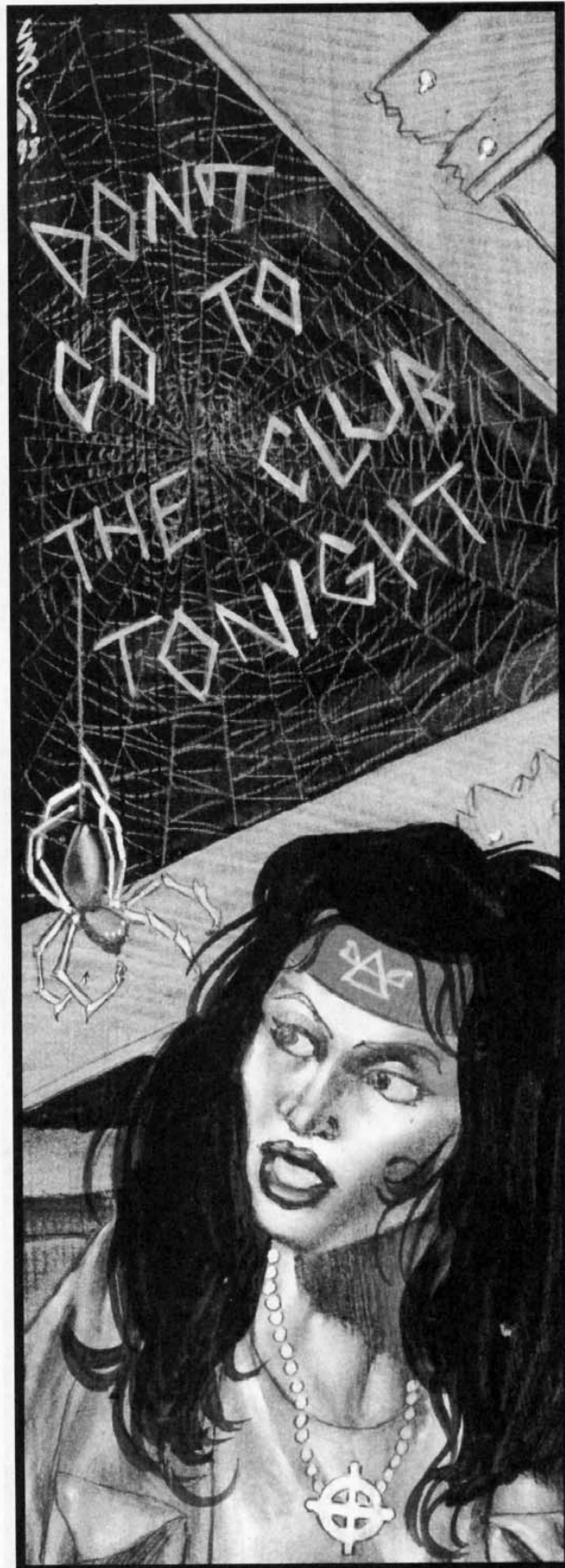
Wherever you go and whoever you hook up with, keep an eye on your companions. Most of the time, you can get an idea about a person's intentions just from watching how well their words and their actions match. If you're hanging around with someone who claims he's a good friend, but slags his other buddies behind their backs, watch out. A guy can look like Robert Smith's cuter younger brother, but if his girlfriends — or boyfriends — cringe and fawn when he's around, chances are there's some seriously non-consensual D&S going on, and you'll want to steer clear. Sometimes the wrapper pretty much states its contents clearly: If you're gravitating toward some chick with a taste for blood and a wet place for Satan, you're probably stepping onto the fringes of a relationship that will *not* do wonders for self-preservation! The darkness is fun — hey, I'd never deny it! — but there's dark, and then there's deeply fucked-up *dark*. When you are one of us, that second kind of dark can bite your soul in half.

The Art Inside: Affinity

Become aware of yourself and of everything around you. The first lesson you learn will be figuring out the right people to hang around. That will include choosing the right teachers, learning when (and when not) to play the social games, and reaching an understanding within yourself — an understanding of magick, its powers, and your talents with both.

When you woke up, chances are you experienced some drastic event. Something trashed you so badly that your inner talents had to blast through the surface to keep you from dying. Some people call that event a "spark"; the blaze that follows it points your talents in a certain direction and gives you a base to work from.

Let me tell you about Gina; from what I heard, she Awakened during a fire that totally consumed her parents' house. She woke up to the sounds of her mother screaming and her father trying to fight the flames with a dried-out fire extinguisher. The cheap-ass landlord had met the city fire regs, but furnished his tenants with devices that didn't work. Gina's parents burned to death. The only thing that kept her from doing the same thing was a dizzying burst of power that allowed her to drive the fire back by will alone. It was a "wild talent," a spell she couldn't do again no matter how hard she tried... until she learned the Arts of the Elements from a teacher she met in the Waydown a few months after her home was destroyed. Even now, I think, she still blames herself for the fire — maybe, she reasons, she might have caused it by accident in her sleep, or maybe she could have saved her parents if she had only tried to will the flames back a little sooner. She's still a bit fucked up by the whole deal, but I will tell you this: No one I've ever met, in this city or any other, shares Gina's affinity for fire-magick.



Finding Focus: Tools and Rites

Once you understand where your talents lie, you have to find things to focus on, tools and rituals that help you bridge your feelings, your intentions and your actions, then bring them all together into a spell. Here's where things get tricky. You see, lots of people (including those "ascension war" wizards I told you about earlier) would have you believe that there is only one way to perform magick. They'll offer you endless theories, stories and proof, perform tricks for you, even threaten you if they think it will make you see that their way is the only way. That's what they're fighting about, you know — for one truth, one practice, one vision. We know better, and they hate us for it.

Some of us use Tarot cards to bridge our understandings between the images and the truths they represent. Some of us prefer altering our bodies through pain and art, linking the pain of the act to the passion of the Art. Some use the traditional tools and incantations of witchcraft, the pagan rites of Greece, Egypt or the Celtic kingdoms to glide away from the modern mindset of disbelief. Others call upon the gods of their families, or call up the devils their parents taught them to abhor. I know Darklings who cast spells through computer programs, ones who dance their will into form, even those who simply close their eyes and wish things into being. None of us, though, have our tools and rituals crammed down our throats. We find whatever works for each one of us, consecrates our will to those rites, and changes them when things don't seem so magickal anymore.

You see, one of the secrets of magick, one of the things you won't find in the dusty libraries of the so-called "masters of the Art," is this: Magick must be special. It must be "other." It must grab you out of your everyday world and transport you to new heights or depths. Magick must be wrapped in passion, guided by will and set on its course by the spirit. And nothing sets the spirit free like novelty. Any tool or ritual, no matter how significant it might be when you pick it up, is ultimately just that: a tool or ritual. The power of the magick comes from inside yourself.

To reach it, you have to step out of what you know and expand your experiences and perceptions to new levels. In plain social terms, that means going to new places and doing new things. Although your family must always be important to you, it's equally important that you avoid stagnation. That stagnation is the enemy of magick, the inner ice that will chill whatever potential you seem to possess. I've seen too many people — like Aphotic Tony, for instance — who either get wrapped up in their own angst trip, O.D. on the social thing, or impress themselves so much with a few tricks that they lose sight of the real talent deep inside. Those people, I can tell you from watching them, are dead inside. They don't think so, but they are. All the power in the world can't disguise a rotting soul.

The Dawn: Becoming a Master

After a while — and not nearly so long as certain elder mages would have you believe — you will master your talents. Doing so is quite easy once you recognize what they are. By then, hopefully, the art of survival will have become a more natural thing, like breathing. That's also when the choices become more difficult: You're not just looking out for yourself; you've got a family to look out for, or maybe you decide that you're really happier on your own. So where do you go then? What ties do you form? I cannot tell you that. By the time you reach the crossroads of the Dawn, you should be able to make your own choices.

In the beginning of your experiences, you'll probably need a whole host of tools and spells to help you concentrate your intentions into results. As your understanding and experience grows, though, you might someday reach a point where certain tricks or perceptions become second nature. By will and will alone, you may be able to do things that mundanes can only dream about — levitation, elemental control, weather sense, and many other, greater spells. Eventually, the tools may become superfluous; you might want to keep them around for safety's sake, or out of sentiment, but you will not need them.

The Paradox of Power

What you *will* need is a bit of discipline... and I don't mean the leather and whips kind (though that is fun!). Despite all the predators in the night, despite the machinations of the other wizards and the shit that rises up from the sewers of any city, the single biggest cause of mortality among our kind is stupidity.

This is the paradox of power: The more you have, the more careful you have to be with it.

One last story, that of Lady Anais. She was a beautiful, graceful and altogether delectable member of the Black Rose Thorn coven in Seattle. Now, Anais had earned the title "Lady" through some pretty impressive achievements: ending a long-standing grudge between covens; suckering out a vampire sect that had been feeding on club regulars, then burning the fuckers; putting out a rather popular soft-core goth fanzine, and getting invited to *all* the right parties. Hell, she had even been elected Queen of Night several times over during Halloween festivities, and kicked the crap out of a gang of mad scientists that had set up shop in the U District. In mystical power, she was almost unmatched, and in charisma and physical beauty, I can't say I've met her equal.

It all went to her head, of course. First, she started making demands on everyone in her circle — their behavior, clothing, manners, even lovers all had to meet her approval. Although she had a steady, she bedded anything

that stirred her fancy, and she began picking fights with the local night-creatures. After the vampire pot roast, she wound up at the top of a death list; a "blood hunt" bounty was posted for her immediate, painful death. One night, the streets erupted with undead killers. In a few hours, everyone Anais had known was either dead, missing, captured or paid off. The cops seemed to have disappeared into the night, and every club that Anais had been welcomed at before closed its doors to her. The Lady's home was burned, her circle scattered. I personally saw what was left of two of her closest friends, and I still have nightmares about it — ME!

Backed into a corner, Anais whipped out some truly hellacious magick. Fire roared down from the sky, winds screamed through the alleys, vampires burst into flame or found themselves carried high into the air and dropped. Then everything got very quiet, and a little old man in a wrinkled suit came out of the smoke. "You're a very naughty girl," he chided, wagging his finger at her. "Do you plan to continue being such a nuisance?" Lady Anais responded with a blast of profanity so severe that even the vampires were impressed. The little old man simply shook his head and snapped his fingers. Lady Anais, the vampires, and the little old man all disappeared, and no one has ever seen any of them since.

Wipe that smile off your face, kid! I'm not telling fairy tales — I was there myself. I saw this go down, and let me tell you, nothing has ever scared me so much, before or since! Lady Anais spit in the face of the forces of the universe, and no one — not even our kind, hell *especially* not our kind! — can do that without getting burned sooner or later.

Master or no, you never truly own the world. The best you can do is make a pact with it, lease a little bit of it out when you need it, and pay your karmic debts when they come due. It may sound New Agey, but it's true. The world keeps track of everything you do — "for good or ill," as the saying goes — and occasionally sends a landlord to collect on late rent.

A true master never lets her account get overdrawn, and she hides her transactions well.

Keeping a Low Profile

As a general rule, avoid showing people what you can do. Even if you secretly achieve an almost mythic level of power, I tell you: *Do not show off!* The greatest masters are the most secret ones. The world has ways of picking off pretenders.

As I said, there are spirits out there — call them demons, angels, spirit-guides, nightmares, whatever you want — that watch us. The special insight that we share into the workings of the world attract these things to us like mosquitoes at a picnic. The more honey you eat out in the open, the more you get bitten. If you want to avoid these pests — and you do, trust me! — keep the sweet stuff under wraps until it's time to feast. Even then, eat it in the shade. Use your Arts carefully, and watch the skies when you do.

The best way to utilize the powers you possess is to cloak them in "accidents" — little twists of fate that look perfectly normal to anyone who might happen to be watching. A good teacher can give you plenty of coaching with the particulars, but I want to tell you to watch your steps. There is a time and a place for showy stuff, but the place is usually your own basement, and the time is usually about two seconds before you get your ass kicked. Until then, keep it simple, secret and silent.

We are all creatures of fashion. Nobody could accuse me of blending in with the landscape! Still, it's a good idea to fade into the shadows. Fortunately for those of us who favor black to begin with, that's not difficult. In the night, it's easy to disguise a spell or to duck into the darkness. When you hang out, as we do, with people who accept the so-called "supernatural" as a given, you can use magick more easily than a mundane could. When those around you favor bright lights, loud music, occult symbols and hallucinogens, it's a simple thing to pass your activities off as tricks of the light or mind, or as the work of hidden powers (which, of course, they are — it's just that the hidden power is you). Really, when you think of it, our kind hide in plain sight, clustered among the nightclubbers and outcasts that mundanes have learned to ignore. Considering that most of us were marginalized to begin with, it's not that big a step at all, and we don't have to surrender the things we love, as some other mages do. Hidden as we are, our numbers and our mystick skills grow. The so-called "ascension warriors" may never know what hit them when and if we ever decide to strike back from the night.

But I'm talking like a radical, and that's the last thing in the world you need now. You're just setting out on a long, confusing and often deadly Path. Don't worry about mastery or revenge or anything else for the time being. Trying to strike out like some badass in a Vertigo comic at this point is worse than suicide... it's damnation.

Quiet Wisdom

You don't have to go meditate on some mountain to achieve enlightenment. You don't have to study for lifetimes to master the magickal Arts, and you sure as fuck don't have to join some dead-dull fraternity of all-knowing psychopomps to be like them... or better. What you *do* need to do is this: Know yourself, learn, and survive.

As I said, that last part is the hard part. Death wears some of the prettiest masks in the night, and slavery looks even more appealing when you're desperate, young and horny. Some of the pits will look like gardens to you, while others will be as obvious as a splash of lace on black velvet.

Whatever you do, be true to yourself. There are too many chains, slavers and slaves out there. When you have a clear vision of your Path and talents — which will become obvious to you as you learn about the Arts, and experience your new lives — you can avoid the traps a little easier. If

you allow someone else to dictate that road — whether that “someone else” claims to be a master of magick, an enlightened being, a spirit guide or just a good lay — you surrender your freedom and open your own cage. Hell, you should take what I say with a bit of salt. *Everyone* has their agendas, and I’ll be the first to admit that I have mine. Ultimately, you have to make your own decisions.

Freedom — *true* freedom — is scary as hell. We’d rather have cliques, castes, governments and gods to tell us what to do than to seize our own destinies and take the consequences of those choices on our own shoulders! Society at large is fucked because people want to run away from their reflections and drown out the sound of Creation with their TVs, video games and gospels. Our kind ain’t immune to this — not hardly! — but we do see the options in front of us a little clearer.

One of those options is self-destruction. Too often, a young Darkling is drawn and quartered by smooth-talking enemies who know enough of our ways to be convincing tempters. There’s almost nothing worse than to watch someone you love lose himself to soul-destroying corruption, merely because his betrayer knew how to wear a charming face and speak in a stylish manner. The true wisdom of mastery is the ability to recognize evil (*real* evil, not that Marilyn Manson bullshit), even if it clothes itself in your epitome of beauty. What do I, a gothic princess with

attitude to spare, mean by “real evil?” Simple: self-destruction, the inner adversary; hopelessness; slavery, and worst of all, apathy. No Hell could be worse than the ones we make for ourselves from boredom, stupidity and disbelief.

Some Darklings consider me a “master”... “wise,” as you said. Perhaps all that means is that I’ve seen and done enough to be clear about my own choices. I know exactly what I can do, and I recognize my limits. Although those limits keep expanding the less I accept them. I looked at the groups, and our structure of power, such as it is. There is a great deal that can be accomplished within those circles, but I prefer to remain on the outside of any single clique, offering instead to assist those who need or deserve it. I don’t want to see a single one of us destroyed by some misled Hollow Child’s quest for personal power at the expense of her chosen family. I’ve seen too many souls die in that way to consider it a cool way to go.

You’ve heard my stories of others who have come and gone, or who have lost themselves along the way. You wonder why I do this — take the time from my personal pleasure to offer advice to lost newcomers? It’s because I’ve been there, too. How did I suffer along the way? I had to watch while my friends died, or were killed. I’ll do my best to prevent that from happening to anyone else. That’s my choice. That’s my agenda.

And yours? You’ll have to go and find out, won’t you?

Errant: The Uncertain Journey



I did the things I did to find the edge. Any thought you act on pushes you further out.

— Sandra, Kissed

By Swarna Jayani, with Memories to the Friends I’ve Lost

Swarna Jayani here. Back from the dead, so to speak. Like the proverbial phoenix from the ashes, I have risen anew, stronger and wiser than before. I’ve been “wandering in the wilderness” for the past five years trying to figure out where it all went sour, to pinpoint the exact moment when my life collapsed out from under me. I’ve heard whispers of legend, glamour and power in the darkened corners of clubs, cafés and java joints. Tied up in those whispers, I’ve heard my name and the names of many others lost to gunfire and history. I suppose there are some of you who bought this rag just because you heard that I’d be in it giving you words from on high, or manna from heaven or some bullshit like that. Maybe you’re right. I’ve got to say that in my wanderings, I’ve come to some pretty amazing discoveries about life and this thing we call magick. So if anyone is in a position to speak from the clouds, I suppose it’s me.

The Traditions and their allies, whom I left behind at an early stage of my journey and whom I still avoid, brand me an “Errant” — one who forsakes the cause, and thus

becomes a liability. To them, I’m one step up from a common enemy. I’m afraid that for a while, when I ran with a gang of magickal jet-setters called the Associates, I lived up to all their worst expectations. We lived the high life, looting our way across the world until our deeds caught up with us. Some of you might be tempted to do the same. Read what I have to say, then decide if it’s worth it to you.

Although my background as a renunciate still paints a big target on my back, it *does* grant me two large bonuses: a head start in the magickal foot race, and a bit of inside information. Why did I leave? Because I could not get what I needed from my original mentors, and because in the end, my independence was the only thing that saved me... even though it dragged me through the Underworld, too.

Let me explain....

Cradle of a Dead Woman

Vannoy wanted me to talk about belief, so I’ll start by saying that nothing exists without belief, not you, not magick, nothing. It’s that simple, yet so complex in its simplicity that most people, Awakened or otherwise, take a lifetime to figure it out. Even then, it doesn’t stop there. Belief is progressive. It moves as life moves, as the soul changes. As you believe, so the course of your life is charted.



The experience of Awakening is usually the first thing that challenges any beliefs you might have thought you had. If you'd have asked me what I believed in before that point, I couldn't have given a definitive answer. As it turned out, I would be asked to believe in much more than I wanted to before it was all over....

I was 19, and had just returned to Oxford after holiday recess. I was walking home from a night out with friends when abruptly my life started to play out in slow motion. The men came for me. The glint of light off of their knives was almost blinding as I froze in terror on the empty street. I threw down my purse and my jewelry, but they kept coming, their dark boots crunching in the new snow. Pain blossomed in my stomach first, then in my arm, as the world became a spiral of dark men and snow and blood. I couldn't cry out. I was drowning. What seemed like five hours passed in the space of five snowflakes, then there was pain again and strong arms around me. After that, there was just a voice, a man's voice. I could hear it clearly even as the last of the light faded and I felt myself drifting off into darkness. It was deep and soothing, like being wrapped in a thick, soft blanket. All other sound had stopped. "Let go," he said.

I was dying. I feared death. When I died, Kali the Destroyer would come with her body of pitch; her wild, white eyes; and sharp teeth, and her red tongue, the color of blood. She was mighty and terrible, and I would never escape her many arms. I finally let go because I thought I heard him say something else: "I'll catch you." I surrendered myself to him and to the dark. I imagined the sensation was like the one a suicide would get after jumping from a great height — no need to tense your muscles because you don't care about hitting the ground.

Ifloated in that spirit realm, experiencing more things than I can eloquently put into words. What it came down to in the end was this: I rode the Wheel of Life and Death, and I survived.

I woke up on the street, oblivious to the cold feeling of the snow and the pool of my own blood in which I lay. It was like waking up to sunlight after a lifetime of nothing but dark and turbulent skies. The voice was back telling me to stay calm and still. "My name is Winter," he said. "I'm here to help you."

Winter — the season, the man. Both have played such integral parts in all of the major events of my life. You see, Winter didn't just save my life; he changed it. To me, at that moment, he had hung the moon and the stars, and made them shine brighter. In the space of an hour, I had gone from being Swarna Jayani, boring history major from Oxford, to Swarna, The Invincible; Swarna, The Indestructible. I truly believed I could do anything, and that's the first thing that got me into trouble.

Reality is heady stuff. Its powers of intoxication are vastly underrated by the masses, and sometimes by unwary mages, too. I can't tell you how many kids I've seen crash and burn scarcely months after their Awakening. Nine times out of 10, it's because they're high on their newfound strength and the misguided belief that they're the masters

of the universe. So they run off and do things even certifiable lunatics wouldn't do. I figure I would be remiss if I didn't help some of you newcomers out here survive your first year, and maybe even your first 10 years.

Here, based on my experiences, is what I've learned about faith and magick.

Lesson I: Magick Does Not Render You Invincible

Rather, you're more at risk because of your newfound talents. Unfortunately, you also become your own worst enemy, so you've got to fight nature and control yourself. Magick is an interesting drug. The more of it you have, the more you want to use, but the more you use, the more you shine like a beacon to those things out there that lie in wait to suck you in and swallow you whole.

The key to surviving the habit and avoiding the traps is finding focus, discovering a purpose for your life, your energies, and your beliefs. I won't lie to you. It's not easy. A lot of people had to die before I got my first clue, and then it took my own brush with death and five years wandering the world for me to finally wise up. I just hope that by saying all this, I can keep some of you from making the same mistakes I did.

Lesson II: Choose Your Teachers Wisely

Looking back, I can say that my life probably would have been easier if Winter hadn't introduced me to the Chakravanti, but it was a logical choice for him. He'd been brought up in the Tradition, and the nature of my Awakening experience made it the obvious next step.

Many things can be said about the Euthanatos, few of them good. On the surface, they seem to be the hit men of the magickal world, indiscriminate killers with little respect for the lives they take. But beneath that stereotype lurks a precision, a purpose, and an extreme respect for all life that leads them to deliver what they call the Good Death to those who would disrupt its balance. Of the Nine Traditions, these reincarnationalists are one of the oldest, and their rituals, lessons and lore go back almost to the dawn of time. They are an extremely mystical group and they guard their secrets fiercely. To be quite honest, though, I really wasn't all that impressed with them, not enough to stay, anyway. So why did I? Because it was a Thanatoic master who gave me the answer to a question that had been eating at me since childhood.

My parents were murdered when I was seven. I stood on the stair landing and watched as their blood seeped into the cracks of the parquet floor. The investigation afterward was cursory at best, and the official report ended up listing the incident as a double suicide. I knew it was a lie. I had watched the men come through the front door, shooting my father and mother down like dogs. Still, the report stood. They never

found the perpetrators. In all that time, no one ever bothered to explain this to me, to tell me why justice wasn't being served. Up until the point I met the London sect of the Chakravanti, injustice and mystery were simply facts of my life. Well, Winter and his mentor explained it, all of it. They told me the who, what, why and how of it. There were names I didn't recognize and some I did. They spoke of Ascension and of war, of puppet masters and an Order of Reason, most of which I didn't understand. But I *did* understand the feeling of bile rising in my throat, that sickening heaviness of the stomach that comes with the hardening of one's heart. And the anger and rage I felt with the surfacing of all of this knowledge fueled me in my training as a magician and a member of the Tradition. It was a focus, but it was the wrong focus. Revenge always is. In four years, I never let go of my need to find and kill my parents' murderers and the people who had let them go free. That inability to release clouded my judgment and led me to actions that I will regret for the rest of my days.

Don't let my tale of gloom and doom scare you away from seeking out a teacher. Winter and I never knew that we could teach ourselves. If we *had* known, we never would have taken the route we did. That's not to say that the Traditions are a sure path to ruin. Just be aware that if you're approached by a Tradition mage, his agenda may be a hidden one, and one far from anything you had in mind. There is a grand political game being played amongst many of the Awakened. The self-Awakened, or "orphans" as they like to call them, enjoy a certain amnesty where this is concerned. Appreciate your position of relative ignorance. The slightest knowledge of their grand workings can pull you into the fray whether you want to be there or not.

Lesson III: Be Aware of the Sleepers

I never should have married Colin Masterson. It's that simple. My life with the Associates had already started its downward spiral, and I could see the hard future looming in the distance. I never should have brought a Sleeper into that, but I did it because Colin was safe. He was a constant reminder of everything I had been before my Awakening, a steady stream of normalcy in my increasingly bizarre world. I didn't want the responsibility that went along with Awakening. I wasn't ready for it. But instead of facing the inevitable, I married him as a means of escape, thinking that, somehow, he could save me from my own disaster.

There were other problems as well, magick notwithstanding. I was in love with Winter. I think that all students at some point harbor a certain admiration for their teachers, but my admiration for Winter went far beyond a simple "classroom crush." The man had saved my life, shared his knowledge with me. I knew his secrets, his fears. He was my life and I loved him.

Colin lived in ignorant bliss for three years before I dropped the bomb on him and told him the whole ugly truth

about my life and Winter. I couldn't live with the lies. Unfortunately, he couldn't either. He left me, and honestly, I can't say I blame him. In the end, however, it wasn't enough. All the deception and denial in my life grew strong enough to reach forth and entangle Colin in the mess that was the Associates. My lies were what killed him, and I have to live with that every day.

My grandmother used to tell me stories about powerful djinis who loved humans and gleaned great pleasure in making sport with us. Unfortunately, the humans were always injured by the djinis who knew not their own strength. Sometimes we're that way with the mundanes in our lives. We hurt them, not out of malice, but because we don't understand that the strength of our capacity for love or fun can kill. Sleepers are fragile. Treat them with the utmost care and reverence.

Lesson IV: The Night Has 10,000 Teeth

The Art is not your safety net, although it seems like it should be a good one. If you engage in destructive behavior, don't expect magick to bail you out of it. There are people out there who have the power to render you magically inept by the push of a button. Also, don't forget, you constantly have to keep an eye out for the mundanes. One or two people who cannot and will not accept what you do, and you're out of luck.

We in the Associates took our fight to some pretty powerful people. Unfortunately, we had the misfortune of becoming enough of a nuisance to attract the attention of the Order of Reason, or the Technocracy as they're more commonly known. To simplify to an extreme, the Technocracy exists to eradicate anything that challenges its concept of reality. To this conspiracy of shadows, magick, the supernatural and the unknown are threats that must be studied and either neutralized or destroyed.

The Technocracy has three ways of dealing with mages who get "out of hand." Minor nuisances, like kids who poke around where they shouldn't or hack into the wrong computer files, are subjected to a wipe. Imagine waking up one day and finding that your driver's license has been revoked, your credit cards have been canceled, and your bank account is gone. That's what I mean by a wipe. These people have the power to completely delete you without laying a finger on you. Think it can't happen to you? Take a trip down to the Majestic and talk to the Mad Poet. He'll tell you how easy it is. In the case of mages who prove to be a pain in the arse but who show superior talent, the Technocrats will try conversion and mental re-programming tactics. Their reasoning is that talent like that can be bent and used for their own purposes. Snake, our computer liaison, had this happen to him once, but managed to weasel his way out of it. In cases where re-programming won't work, they either kill you or send you off to MECHA, a dismal, hell-hole of a work camp that makes hard time at

Alcatraz look like a deluxe vacation at Club Med. This was what they had in mind for Winter and myself. As it happened, we had to use more conventional means to get them off our backs, but we did so at the risk of pissing off the wrong people. That would come back to haunt us later.

Fortunately, you will probably never have a run-in with the Technocracy, at least not to the extent that I did. It's very rare for the Technocracy to come beating down your door just because you're Awakened. You have to do something to really irritate them in order for them to take notice of you. So the advice here is: Let sleeping dogs lie.

I mentioned this earlier, but it now seems like a good time to bring it up again. The Technocracy may be relatively easy to explain and avoid, but there are things out there that you cannot even begin to understand, things that will eat you alive and make you suffer while they do it. All the stories are true. Vampires do exist, and werewolves, and bogeymen — *especially* the bogeymen. But the vampires don't look like Bela Lugosi. They're just as glamorous and subtle as we, and several times more deadly. It might seem cool to be a vampire-mage, but let me tell you: Go down that road, and you'll lose everything. They can only take your gift from you and leave you either dead or undead. Either way, it's not a fair trade.

Werewolves don't just come out on the full moon. They're out there 24/7, 365 days a year. They have day jobs, active roles in society — I mean, *please!* They're not going to walk down the street in the form of giant wolves all the time, now are they? More often than not, you'll never run into one. They keep to themselves mostly, and with reason, but it's helpful to know that they're out there just the same.

The bogeymen, or "Nephandi" as some call them, are the subtlest of them all. These are the ones who will actively seek you out when the others merely wish to be left alone. They won't be spooky; they won't be frightening or horrific — not at first anyway. Instead, they'll lure you down into the depths with a smile and a song, like the Pied Piper did with the children of Hamelin. If you don't listen to anything else I say, listen to this: Be always on your guard and stay away from them.

You may fool yourself into believing that you're the biggest badass on the block. "Hey, look guys! Look! I can turn a werewolf to silver!" That may be possible, if inadvisable; the upper reaches of the Arts are pretty damned powerful. But no matter how bad you think you might be, there's always someone — usually a whole gang of someones working together — who can nail your soul to the wall. Sure, you might be able to turn that one werewolf into a howling pile of bloody silver, but what about his friends... the ones in front of you, the ones behind you, and the ones off to the side in the shadows. No matter how powerful you might get, you'll never see them all coming. I can assure you, the 10,000 teeth of the night rarely bite as obviously (or as cleanly) as you might expect.

Lesson V: Necessity is an Excellent Teacher.

I'm sure you've had at least one moment in your life when you've gotten so deeply into trouble that nobody, not your parents, not your friends, could bail you out. And so you do what you can to get your own arse out of the flames. The Associates had bitten off more than we could chew and we were suffering the rather nasty consequences.

After many struggles, car chases and shooting wars, Winter had been captured and was being taken to MECHA. I went to the only people I could think of: the London Euthanatos. After they emphatically refused to help me, mocking me for my intense stupidity, I severed all ties with them, deciding to blunder my way out of the situation myself.

I had five days. In those five days, I learned more about magick and more about my ability to use magick than I had in years of training with Winter. I discovered ways of doing things that I'd never have considered possible were it not for the incredible deadline I was up against. For example, did you know that it's possible to enter the spirit realms through mirrors? Lenora and I discovered that fact purely by accident. Also, in a move to rival McGuyver, I created a homing beacon using a piece of string and a drop of blood. It was this serendipitous knowledge that prevented Winter from living out the rest of his life in hell.

Some will tell you that magick is definitive, that you can prescribe set ways in which it moves and works, but that's a lie. Magick is a fluid substance, and it flows where it needs to flow. Sometimes I think the self-Awakened have the potential to be the greatest of all magi, because we set no limits on what we learn and how we learn it. Look for your mentors. Look at their strengths. Look at their faults and learn from them, but always remember that, sometimes, you are ultimately your best teacher.

Lesson VI: The Best Intentions Can Breed the Worst Mistakes.

That's what the Associates were in the end — a terrible mistake. You know the history, so I won't bore you with rehashing all that. I will say that we all had the best of intentions at the time. We wanted to take the fight to those who would destroy us, and annihilate them first.

We spent the next few years indulging in bank robberies, assassinations and murders. And we got filthy rich doing it. Despite the severity of what we did, we lived such glamorous lives, all of us. We threw legendary parties and invited the jet set and fabulous from society circles everywhere. They had no inkling that we were an international crime syndicate. They simply saw us as more of their own kind — young, beautiful, and obscenely wealthy.

This is by no means an encouragement to go out and do what we did. People died. Sometimes innocent people died. I've got that blood on my hands, and as Lady MacBeth discovered, it almost never comes clean. If you do decide that you and your club-hopping friends want to become the next group of gangster mages, the best advice I can give you is to think things through before you go out and tear people's lives apart. That, and be prepared to face the consequences of your actions — all of them.

Lesson VII: Paradox is Not Mocked

(Or, What Goes Around Can Come Back to Kill You)

Remember back in school when you learned that little phrase: For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction? Well, Paradox is what happens when you use showy displays of magick that go out of their way to defy the confines of belief, and the universe spans you for it. Those of you who have an affinity for manipulating the laws of time are particularly susceptible to the backlash, as I learned with Glenn Matthews on the day it all ended for us.

First of all, we had decided to disband several days before we stepped foot into the Gencoe factory. Lenora Farucci and Snake had already taken off for greener pastures. It was just Winter, Glenn and myself. This was the last hurrah, the closing chapter in the chronicle of the Associates. It was over. I had long since laid my parents' murderers to rest, along with most of the others involved. The desire for revenge had grown stale, and in its place there was a yearning for quiet, for the peace of anonymous normalcy. No more guns, no more bombs, no more hidden agendas, politics and power plays. We'd had enough. We just didn't believe in it anymore.

Normally, we targeted individuals or small groups. The only large jobs we'd pulled off had been museum robberies and bank heists. The Genco factory had been pointed out to us as an ideal target. It was supposedly abandoned and inoperational, but still filled with expensive equipment and merchandise. The plan was to go in, set explosive charges and then get lost. What we didn't count on was a man by the name of Eldridge Holloway, a Technocracy pawn we'd managed to piss off several years before. When we got to the supposedly deserted factory, he was waiting for us along with several cybernetic assassins. That's when Paradox decided to fuck Glenn.

Glenn was never much for magickal subtlety. His work with Time magick was particularly reckless. He had a favorite spell he liked to call "Freeze Frame," which essentially stopped time for a specific object or magickal opponent — in this case, a spray of oncoming bullets. He tried to use it, and then he just froze like a statue as those bullets tore into him. Exit my friend, dying.

I was at a loss. I was outnumbered, outgunned, and using magick was a definite no. Screwing with Paradox

while it's screwing with someone else is a surefire way to get yourself screwed harder. I could only crouch in my hiding place and watch my friend get riddled with gunfire.

After what seemed like an eternity, the gunfire stopped, and our attackers just walked away. This should have concerned me, but at the time I was far too concerned about Glenn to care. I ran to my fallen friend, but it was too late. The movies make death seem so beautiful and touching, but I'll tell you what: Holding a dear friend in your arms while he coughs up blood and gasps out the last breaths he will ever take in this world is the most sickening, heart-wrenching thing anyone could ever experience. Worst of all, it was taking him a while to die. The bullets had torn him to bits, but hadn't ruptured anything immediately vital. I wouldn't wish his pain on my worst enemy. I gave him the Good Death — released his soul to ride upon the great Wheel of Life and Death. Better that than another five minutes of suffering. It's funny. I'd given the Good Death to many people, but this was the only time I felt it truly mattered.

Every once in a while, an event brands itself upon your consciousness and its mark lingers through eternity, playing itself out *ad infinitum* in the dark places behind your eyes. Glenn, Winter and I had set our charges before the encounter with Eldridge and his chrome companions. In the fray that ensued, our enemies had effectively managed to separate us. By the time we regrouped and ran, we had little more than five minutes to get clear of the factory before it blew. I raced to the exit with Winter only a step behind, gunfire ringing out anew behind us. Then I heard a thump, and Winter fell to his knees, clutching his shoulder. I stumbled to a stop, but he just screamed at me to keep going. So I did as I was told. I ran as fast as I could. I stole a brief glance over my shoulder after a second or two, but there was no sign of him. Then I ran for all I was worth towards the door as I heard the first of the charges explode. I hadn't run more than 20 meters outside when the blast caught me and slammed me hard into a concrete drainage ditch. After that, there was nothing else but dark, cold and silence, broken only by three distant words: "I'll catch you."

And so it goes. I woke up in a local hospital, checked in as a Jane Doe. The force of impact with the concrete had shattered my shoulder and fractured two ribs and my hip bone. I lay unconscious for two weeks. When I woke up, I learned that I had been the only survivor. I later asked the doctor who had called emergency services from the scene of the blast. "No one," he said. It was just a coincidence that the EMTs were driving past when the blast occurred. I know from experience that there's no such thing as "coincidence." I recovered slowly and, after some time, was released. I've been wandering ever since.

So now you know what happened. I feel it is important to share that with you, because that was the turning point for me. It changed me. Winter was gone. Glenn was dead, as was I to everyone else who knew me. For the first time

since my parents' murder, I was completely alone. I had reached the bottom. I had lost everything. Climbing out of the grave I dug for myself was the hardest thing I've ever had to do in this lifetime. I seriously hope I never have to go through that again.

Lesson VIII: Faith Provides When Power Fails

Jesus won't you touch me

Come in to my heart

Where the hell are you

When the fire starts?

— Christian Death, "Spiritual Cramp"

Here's another lesson I can give you: Seek faith. Someone once said that a man who believes in nothing will fall for anything. It's true, especially for the Awakened. So if you're falling off the proverbial mountain, faith is a good, strong clump of grass to cling to. In fact, through religious faith of some sort, you may be able to pull yourself up out of the abyss. (Note the difference between *faith*, which is belief in some other power, and *religion*, which defines that power, usually through dogma and ritual. I'm talking about the former, though it's often attached to the latter.)

It's far too easy in these cynical times to junk faith and its rewards in favor of apathy, antipathy and atheism. While it's an easy leap to condemn faith as hypocrisy, extremism or whitebread bullshit, I can tell you from experience that a lack of faith is far more devastating than religious orthodoxy... especially for a mage.

Choosing a single faith to cling to can be a sticky wicket, but it's ultimately a learning experience. At least it was for me....

Deus Gloria: The Sisters' Hymn

While I was in the hospital, I used the small amount of talent I had in body magick to speed up the healing process. If I hadn't, I would never have regained full mobility in my arm and my leg. After I was released, however, I refused to use magick in any way, shape or form, relying instead on the honest work of my own two hands, and the steady rhythm of my stride as I walked, hitchhiking across the country and down into Mexico.

I was empty. I lost track of days and months, walking steadily and alone, grieving violently for Winter. When I came to the small convent just south of Mexico City, I felt a sudden twinge for sisterhood and companionship. I must have looked needy enough, because the sisters spent little time in finding me food and a place to stay. I remember a story the Christians tell about a stranger who comes to a man's home in search of food and shelter. The man lavishes

all the comforts of his dwelling upon this stranger, treating him like an honored guest. Eventually the stranger reveals himself as an angel and rewards the man greatly for his kindness. I like to think of myself as that angel, who came hidden and downtrodden to the home of these kind women, only to receive their best with no question or complaint.

I never considered myself a religious person, but in the words of a Jewish carpenter touched by the universe, I found something that nourished me for a time. Religion is a wonderful anchor, especially for the mage. There are things that we can see within the elements of faith that the average person cannot. While some flavors are decidedly more dogmatic and destructive than others, on the whole, Christianity works because its message is a simple one: love God and love others, and that love will be rewarded. I learned much during my time with the Sisters. The God they worshipped was one of simplicity, mercy and love. They soothed my heart and healed my physical wounds.

Eventually I left the convent, more at peace than I had been, but still in need of some answer that would put my troubled mind to rest. While the religion of that carpenter could not satisfy my craving for meaning, his words soothe and guide me to this day. Like the angel, I rewarded the Sisters for their kindness. They will never know the source of the great donation I made for them — I made sure of that — but it washed a bit of the stain off some badly bloodied money.

Cantos del Diablo: Voodoo in Rio

From Mexico, I got work aboard a boat headed to Brazil. One of the most phenomenal sights in this world is the statue of Christ the Redeemer that stands illuminated on a mountain top above the bustling city of Rio de Janeiro. The people there say that waking up to that statue makes you feel like you've got a guardian and protector. And believe you me, in Rio you need one.

It was close to Carnival, so I got work as a dancer. Basically, they paid me to wear next to nothing and wiggle my ass. I have to say it was the easiest money I've ever come by honestly. One of the women I worked with was an acolyte of a local Candomble priestess. Over time, she introduced me to a shadow-image of the Redeemer: the Loa — spirits who watch, guide and occasionally assist the followers of the faith.

Candomble, one of the faiths that make up "voodoo," is some fucking weird shit. It's dark, primal, and just plain erotic sometimes. So what exactly is this thing called voodoo? From what I've gathered, it's an amalgam of certain African tribal customs and Catholic Christianity. Essentially, the practitioners believe that through enacting certain rituals and by employing certain objects, animals, and potions, it's possible to conjure the Loa and make offerings to them in exchange for a favor or two. The conjurer occasionally offers herself up to the Loa as a vessel — a *chevaux*, or "horse" — for the spirit to ride. Through wild dances, drugs, sex and other forms of physical



abandon, the horses surrender their bodies to spirit possession. The experience is said to be as intense as death itself, and often opens up spiritual channels that can last for days or months afterward. Lesser worshippers — that is, most of them — offer simpler sacrifices of rum, sugar, tobacco or animals, or beseech a more-experienced practitioner (a mambo or conjure man) to intercede with the Loa on their behalf.

This spirit-faith has a sinister reputation. Sometimes, it's deserved. The Loa run hot and cold, and many of them are as temperamental as the worst human beings. (It's said in some circles that they *were* once humans, who were elevated through some great understanding, or condemned by some great sin.) Some Loa favor lighter aspects of existence — love, joy, wealth, etc. — while others dedicate themselves to pain, war, fire and death. Even the best of them, however, are capricious; there are no "good" or "bad" Loa, just those who serve your purpose. If that purpose is comfort, there are many favors to be had; if you want to cause destruction, voodoo offers that option, too.

Voodoo's power comes partly from intense belief and partly from fear. After all, if you don't believe that some evil is working against you, then there's no need for you to visit your local priest or priestess, now is there? Likewise, if there is no fear of evil working against you, then nothing holds any power over you. This balance of faith, power and fear drives the voodoo culture in many American cities. Quite a few urban mages find the religion to be a rewarding and fulfilling one. Think about it: When you're essentially trapped and bound by the urban machine, a faith that promotes the freedom of the spirit and the assumed power of the gods can be the only thing that keeps you going.

There are dangers, though. Some people get caught up in greed, or exploit the fear and ignorance that surround voodoo. Malicious sorcerers — *bokor* — enslave, terrify and even kill their enemies with aid from the Loa. People around them live in fear of the zombi curse — of eternal slavery long past the point of death. When you think about the cultures that gave rise to voodoo faiths, this makes sense. To the slaves who were dragged from their homes and put to work in the sugar cane fields, slavery even *after* death must have seemed like the worst fate imaginable.

Yet this eerie faith offers comfort for its devotees. In addition to the help of spirits more powerful than oneself, a voodoo follower gains material rewards, social respect, extraordinary perception, and the certainty of something else better beyond poverty, labor and boredom. While fearsome displays of carnality and passion seem to epitomize voodoo to the layman, the devotee knows a comfort that life without such revels and spiritual guidance could never have.

I dealt with all sorts in Rio. Most of them kept quiet about their faith, content to make what sacrifices they could against a greater future need. There were others, however, who did their best to seduce me into their wild rites. It was a darkness that I was fortunately able to resist. When you've seen Death from both sides, you cease to fear it. Besides, some people I met didn't feel right. You know what I'm talking about: Those

people you meet who just give you the creeps from the moment you make eye contact to the time they disappear. Not that they *act* creepy — they're intriguing, sexy and intelligent. It's only when you spend time with them that you realize there's something horribly wrong with them.

Sound familiar, kids?

My earnings from Carnival got me to Portugal. As soon as I had money in hand, I bought my ticket and left, eager to free myself from Rio's powerful undercurrent.

Chansons de Nuit: **The Power of the Moon**

Portugal was beautiful and uneventful, a welcome change from my life's constant turbulence. I worked my way across Spain, stopping for a short time in Madrid. That's where I met Simon Christie. Those of you who wander in Pagan and Wiccan circles should recognize that name; Simon, or Lord Lucien as he likes to call himself, is not Awakened, but he operates on a higher plane than most Sleepers do. He has seen our reality, if only once or twice, and he understands.

At that time, he was on vacation, hiking across Europe to explore the mysteries of the Goddess. Having no decided plan or path, he asked if he could accompany me on my journey. I wanted to say no, but my desire for companionship was too strong. What can I say? We traveled together through Spain, France and Italy, sharing stories, confessions, secrets, lore, and eventually ourselves. Of all the people I've met since my fall, Simon was the only one who never judged me, choosing instead to share his faith with me as aid and lesson in one.

Wicca is a common outlet for many of us. Its principles are so closely linked to what we are as Awakened beings that it's an easy step to make. We already know that we can cause things to happen through the application of will, so our belief in magick is already there. Also, some of us are already acutely aware of our connection to the universe and everything in it, so that concept is also quite familiar. But as with any who seek truth, what you get out of the Craft is determined by what you put into it. The ethics, tenets and laws ask much of the follower — more, sometimes than many are willing to give. It is not a path for the weak. Belief in the self, and more importantly in the power and *responsibility* of the self, are the keystones of this philosophy.

Simon and I were in Greece when I told him my story. We lay under the full moon on the slopes of Mount Olympus counting the stars. "The first witch was Aradia, daughter of Diana, the Moon," he said. "And it was Diana who decreed that all of the wise should come together beneath her light, and worship."

I looked up into that silver light and remembered that the first time I'd ever truly seen the moon, I'd been lying in my own blood in the snow with Winter. The memory was the first one I'd allowed myself since leaving the States. It shook me up, and I asked Simon, "Where did I go wrong?"

"The moment you used your gifts to harm others," he replied. It was an honest response with no judgment beneath it. A simple statement of fact. I had to think about that. I didn't start out that way, obviously, so when did it get that bad? When had I come to the point where I didn't care who got hurt, so long as I got what I wanted? Like I've said before, I started out — Winter and I started out — with the best of intentions. We wanted to save the world, not condemn it to death.

Simon told me that before we can truly understand the universe around us in all its contrasting beauty and cruelty, we must first know ourselves truly and openly. We must seek out and accept all that we are. We must find those dark places within, discover our web of self-deception and the spider within that spins it. Through meditation and extreme self-scrutiny, we may confront them and bring them forth into the light.

I was no stranger to "looking within"; it was one of the first techniques Winter taught me after my Awakening. However, I realized that I hadn't done that since I learned of the circumstances surrounding my parents' death. As Simon and I made our way into Turkey and through to the Middle East, I spent time searching myself, looking for the dark places of my soul. I found them, and staring into the abyss unleashed a flood of sorrow that seemed as if it would never end. For a week, I lay in a hotel room in Beirut hoping the earth would open up and swallow me whole. I couldn't eat nor sleep, and I didn't feel much like talking.

The moment revealed itself to me in short order. The first innocent person I ever killed was an FBI G-man by the name of Harper Dale. I remember his name because it was so square-sounding and ordinary. I even remember what he looked like — tall, dark-haired, with a strong featured face still showing the last lingering signs of adolescence. When the bullet hit him, an invisible exclamation mark of surprise hung above his head, like somehow he'd never really believed in his own mortality. It was an accident. I was aiming at a light fixture on the opposite wall. He stepped into my line of fire before I could reposition my gun. A moment's pause was all I gave. He was 23.

I told Simon about Harper Dale. I cried the whole time, and he held me long past the end of my tears. "Riding the wheel of Karma is never easy," he told me after hours of silence. "It hurt you pretty badly, but you weren't crushed, and for that you can be happy. Accept what you've done and what's happened to you because of it. Learn from this. You need not feel guilt or anguish any longer."

Killing a man is easy. Living with it afterward is a lot harder. No matter who you are or how bad you think you might be, each death you cause hangs a load on your soul. Sooner or later, it comes back to crush you — before or after your death. Don't make my mistake. Kill carefully, if at all, and never take it lightly.

Lesson IX:

As Long as You're Alive, You Can Make It

(But Once You're Dead, You're Pretty Much Fucked)

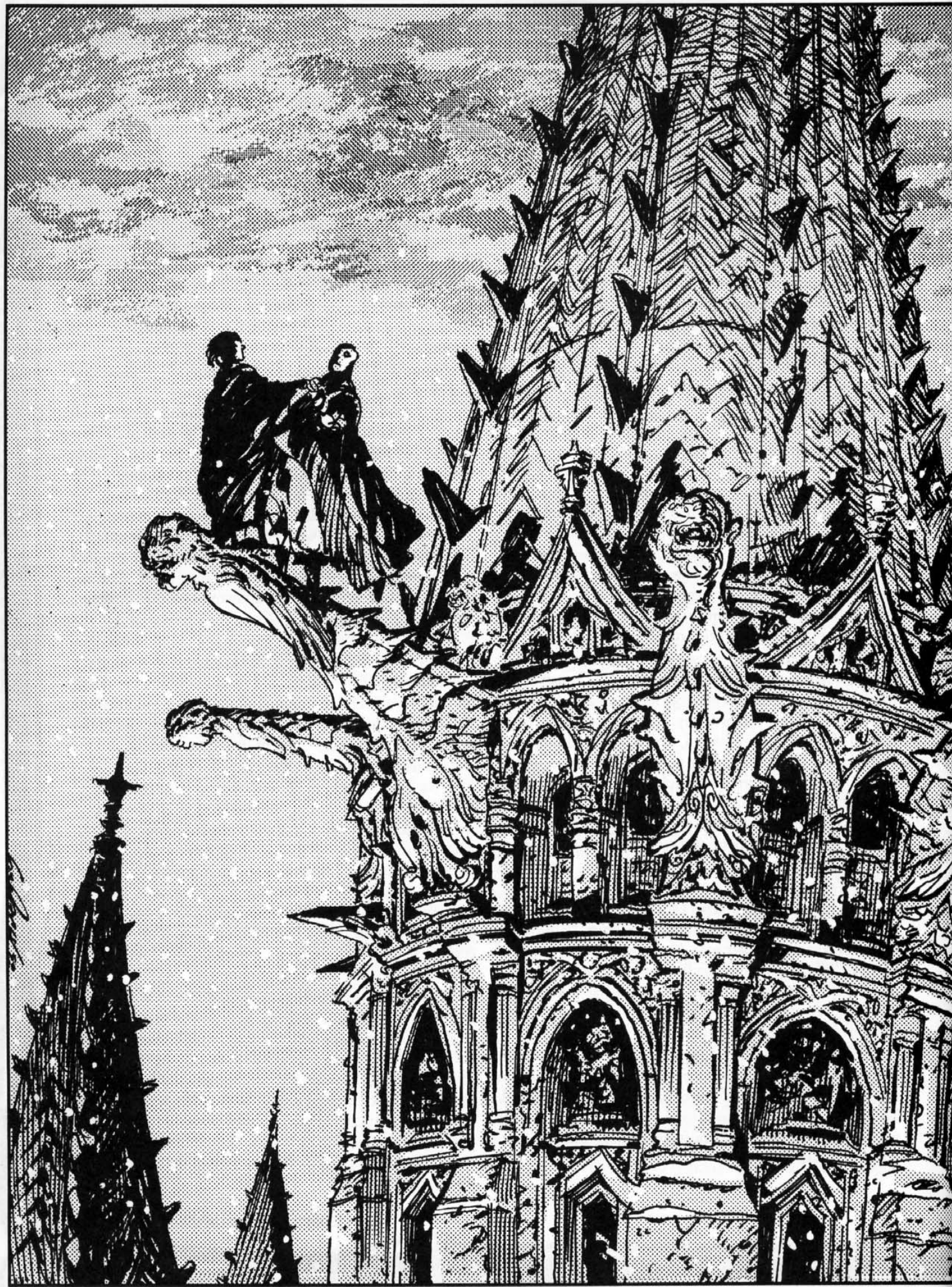
Simon traveled with me as far as Kathmandu before he had to return home. I found lodging in the Indian countryside, close to the Ganges, and that's where I stayed in self-imposed exile for the next four years. I bathed in that great river every day, cleansing myself of all the old blood, all the dark times. I was a secret worker of miracles for the poor and outcast, even though I was living with close to nothing myself. I spent four years atoning, making things right, but it wasn't just that. I was getting to the heart of myself — finding my roots.

The Hindu gods come together in a rich pageant that marches across all of India in tapestry and in stone. Although my belief is Wiccan in basis, the gods I identify with are the Hindu deities of my childhood. The great god Shiva and the goddess Shakti dance the world into creation, while the gentle Krishna and Radha exemplify perfect love. The deity I hold closest to my heart is smiling Ganesh, the remover of obstacles. He has truly worked wonders for me. I have learned, partly with Simon's aid, that all gods are one. It's not important what we call them in the end, for they are but masks worn by the universal mind, that all-encompassing force that rules and connects the universe.

I think that's what brought me back to the land of the living. I believe in my connection to the Universal and my oneness with it and all there is. So I know that by seeking out the young Awakened Ones and teaching them, I'm doing good in the universe. Every kid I save from the Traditions or the Technocracy or himself, saves some sort of grief in the grand scheme of things. And in this, I am content.

So what now? Well, one of the first things I did when I got back to this behemoth of a city was go to the theatre. No matter what I do, I can't seem to stay away from a good show. I had to wonder, while watching the barely adequate actor on stage, whether things would have worked out for Glenn had he lived. Above all things, even above magick, he held an unparalleled love for the stage. The world is darker without his light. I've seen the others — Lenora and Snake — around town. I still haven't come up with the courage to say hello. Besides, to them I'm dead. Maybe it's best to let the dead stay buried.

But then again, maybe not. I still believe in Winter, the season and the man, and in their power to constantly challenge and change me. There are days I imagine that I see him walking across a crowded street, leaving my favorite diner, or turning a corner. My eye catches a shade of red, the same as his hair, or I hear something like his laugh over the noise of the city. And then my heart does that little dance in my chest, only to dissipate a moment later. He's never really there, but I hold out hope nonetheless. Some things, you can never let go.



Chapter II: The Hollow Ones

*If you want to know how
To fly high, then go now
To the place where all the concubines...
Meet and converse with them
Marvel at their pale skin
— Rasputina, "Transylvanian Concubine"*



Graveyards make me wet.

I lost my virginity to a ghost when I was 12. No human cock slipped through the buds, but blood flowed just the same. Inside me, the underworld swelled to bursting, cold, yet bracing as a winter breeze. He delved so far inside I swore I could taste him. No living skin could reach so deep, nor leave such designs upon my soul. Although I took many breathing lovers after that, I still prefer the dead ones best.

I still prefer to take my pleasures among the dead. Even when I bag some young cock, I drag him (often willingly) into my parlor of cold paramours. While he fumbles with my skin,

swarms of icy lovers spin like whirlpools through his body and my own. Sometimes I close my eyes and revel in sensation alone. Sometimes I lie with eyes wide open, watching the parade of restless souls riding us both like helpless horses, too mortal to resist, too enraptured to want to. Cascades of hot blood and cold mortality wash through us like the Lethe, and we forget the shallow pleasure we call "sex." For a time, all is communion.

I have favorite spots, of course: The granite slab marked "S.B. Wilson" is just the right height for a wild ride; the angel on the Marson tomb watches over us with solemn disapproval; the mound at the far end of Hollyrood offers us a glimpse of rolling hills; and the copse of trees in Ravenhurst shelters us on

rainy nights. Even so, I take my pleasures in as many places as I can find. The ghosts know me wherever I go; I need only call, and we all come.

When the shudders stop and the chill passes, my lovers lick blood from my abraded knees and caress my back with spider's fingers. The meat-boy may or may not offer such considerations, but my ghostly partners always do. To them, I am a sacrifice, the warmer of the dead. To me, they are the glimmers of soul-shard and the lovers of eternity.

In short, I love fucking the dead. Meat-boys just come along for the ride.

So Sayeth the Bitch Queen...

Of course the following is fiction, you fucking moron! You think we'd just sit in a nightclub and babble our secrets to wannabes? Seriously, though, our little guided tour of the Darkling Path, courtesy of Sister Denise (a conceited little bitch I love like life itself!), is worth looking at, if only to dispel some of the ungodly bullshit we've been spattered with over the years. Is it true? Does that matter? Hey, if it is, you'll know soon enough. If it's not, same deal.

As always, this is an "invite-only" affair. Consider this an invite to all the right people, and wrong directions to those who really should be there in the first place. How will you know? Trust me, you will. We'll make sure of that....

Midnight Mass

The mist in the cool night air glitters as you step through the nightclub's heavy double doors. The doorman, an impressively large, muscular man, fixes you with a flat, appraising stare, but he allows you inside without incident. Likewise, the woman who takes your money and stamps your hand looks you over with an interest that exceeds idle curiosity. Her hair is dyed a blue that matches her lemur-painted eyes, and her smile is feral, with sharp little teeth. Surprisingly, her smile feels almost friendly.

The club is a converted hotel, and its history sings through every beam of wood, every ornate window dressing, every brass railing once polished, now tarnished from neglect. The lights flicker about you in dark rainbows as the music throbs in your ears, rhythms of destiny and enchantment. You recognize the song, "Body Electric" by the Sisters of Mercy, a song long cherished in goth danceclubs. The familiarity is soothing, but in a way it also makes you anticipate the night's revelations more impatiently.

Just as you begin to question if you truly belong here, you feel the whisper of a touch on your hand. You pull away and turn in a fluid second, to stare into a pair of eyes that seem as ancient as the night sky.

The woman's smile is amused, cool without being cold. You're surprised to hear her deep, husky voice clearly above the volume of the music: "Have a drink, lover, and come speak with me."

You need no coaxing, as she is to you all things beautiful and rare. Her skin is moon pale, luminous, her features exotic in the manner of an Erte print. On first glance, her clothing is the goth princess' uniform of black antiques. As you study it, however, the blend of modern design and rich tapestry color surprises you. She tosses back lush purple dreadlocks and laughs, as if sensing the theme of your thoughts.

She slides gracefully into a secluded back booth, gestures a command for you to join her. Then she speaks: "Abandon your notions of what you will find here. I will show you the truth."

Reality splinters, cracks. Impressions swell then fade away in a haze. To your subtle yet inhuman senses, the club becomes a maelstrom, a whirling cloud of hot bodies, sweet smoke and desperate passions. Before you, Denise — exotic, unpredictable, a powerful Darkling Queen — flashes her wicked smile and begins to draw you into her world:

"Cast your eyes around you. What do you see? At first you'll notice random collections of night creatures, resplendent in our lace and velvets, dancing to morbid tunes. Look beyond that, and you'll see the joy hidden behind a scrim of sheerest black. We are contradictions, embracing the world, disdaining it, glorifying its harshest realities even as we reject them. Watch the complex tapestries of our social games, our patterns of romance and rejection. These are our masks, the roles we play for our detractors, chameleons' disguises in a swirling pit. Your vision, however, carries you past the garish illusion, and you see the splendor that is truly ours!

"We are the ones who have chosen our own ways. Our strength has been honed by the ugly realities of the world, by acts of hatred and destruction, and so we treasure beauty even more. Each and every one of us knows that only a hair's breadth separates laughter from a scream, and you cannot embrace one without acknowledging the other. The Dark Children have a society all our own. Our loyalties are deeply embedded in our souls, bonds formed on the battlegrounds that are the streets, the nightclubs, the shadowed back alleys, and all the other unlikely places that birthed us. It's a bond stronger than blood, deeper than addiction, more beautiful and rare than the madness in a zealot's eyes.

"You're a part of it now. The mysteries that poets weep for throb through every pulse of your blood. Ultimately, the magick within you is what led you to us; otherwise, you'd be just another kid on the dance floor, feeling vague hints of the magick but never truly touching it, never experiencing the volcanic force as it burns your soul. And because you're one of us now, there are things I can tell you, as well as things you should know. This night I'll share with you our history, a few of our secrets, and some slivers of knowledge that could help you survive."

Denise gestures with a pale hand; her silver rings catch the rotating rays of light reflecting from the dance floor. With the movement of her hands, the rest of the room, its noises and distractions, recedes into spectres. The tale of the Hollow Ones begins.

Denise Speaks of Things Both Dark and Bright



*So celebrate while you still can
'Cause any second, it may end
And when it's all been said and done,
Better that you had some fun!*

—Oingo Boingo, "No One Lives Forever"

One does not "choose" our way. It is chosen by the spirit, by the soul, by everything you have endured as you've tried to hang on in the shitstorm. Those who come to us are *made* Hollow, shaped by every fucking horrible thing that has happened to them on the rock-strewn road to awareness. Some are born with that indefinable *something* that sets them apart, while others have been shattered by tragedy or hollowed-out by bitter loss. Regardless of the circumstances of their "births," those who find their way to our welcoming hearth have suffered deeply, abused until there's nothing left but a dark knowledge that the ability to survive depends solely upon one's determination to do so.

The Dark Children have traveled this path for hundreds of years, far longer than anyone truly knows. Always, we have been like guests in a garden maze, lost without maps or guides, who have found our own ways through. On occasion, this means ripping out the walls with bloody nails or chainsaws until we find the path we need... but we *always* find it! We stand apart from other so-called "mysticks" who've been suckled on the warm tit of comforting orthodoxies. Our milk is cold witch's brew. In a tempest, we are a beacon in the night that says, "You're not alone. Give me your hand, and I will not lead, but simply guide." We are the family most of us have never had. Our bonds are formed by the heartaches we have endured and the bruises our bodies bear. Though we bicker and peck amongst ourselves, we stand loyal to one another against anyone who demonstrates *extremely* poor judgment by fucking with one of us.

We are the pack of starving wolves, the murder of crows forsaken by other flocks. Our detractors call us "orphans," and in a way, they're correct. To them, we are motherless children, adrift and unguided; but we understand the truth — that we are our *own* children, freed of parental constraint. The world has cast us aside. Now we gather and dance in its shadow.

The Tarentella of Time (History)

We are, in many ways, the bastard children of Reason and Mysticism. Both have been banging away like libertines during the last 200 years, and we are, in many ways, their offspring. Without Reason, we would simply be mad savants, dancing to an aimless tune. Without Mysticism, we

would be poseurs, desperately trying to be rebellious without the insight to truly pull it off. Magick, you see, is the ultimate rebellion, and we are its best chance for the future.

Our magick is drawn from the world as we view it, bits and pieces cast off that we've discovered and adapted to help us. Old jewelry, toys, fables, even modern devices are the tools of our Arts. Magick is magick because we consider it to be so, not because some ancient magus made an arbitrary decision in ages past. And don't doubt for a single minute that our enchantments are any less powerful than theirs! A thrice-blessed medallion anointed at midnight has no more inherent juice than my CD player unless the magician behind it has the will to back it up. Our enchantments are our own, unique and improvisational. Reading spells from a book is lazy magick. And if we get lazy, we die. Grand incentive, that!

Look deeply into the faces you see tonight. Observe their movements, their expressions. If they seem beyond time, beyond place, it is because we ourselves transcend both time and place. The club, the setting, is new, but the feelings have existed from the earliest days of humanity. And our kind has existed from the earliest times of magick. We knew that there was darkness beyond the fires, but that darkness was the other side of light. We played in that flickering place without fear. So, of course, we were shunned.

That separateness is part of what made us strong. We survived on our own because we had to. Sometimes it made us feral and harsh, but it also made us fiercely loyal to those who earned our trust. There is a strength in being alone that those who have always had a group's support will never know.

One of the strongest of our number is a gentleman of whom you've doubtless heard. His name is Neville Sinclair, and he is bound to the history of our current Craft. It was he who gave our kind a name — "Hollow' ones" — and who gave us, in many ways, our modern identity. Neville has, like many of us, a very dry and sardonic wit. Lady Astria Moonshade, an apparently well-meaning Verbena, once asked Neville and his fellows, "Who are you?" In response, Neville quoted T.S. Eliot: "We are the Hollow Men. We have always been here." In saying this, Neville had unexpectedly given a name to a concept that had existed for as long as magick. I think it both frightened and impressed the Verbena, who understood the significance of names, but at the time, it was merely a smartass retort to an idiotic question. Retort or not, it was true, and remains so to this day.

As any mystick knows, there is power in a name. To name something is to give it shape, form, identity. At the time, we had none of those things. Soon afterward, we assumed them all.

Independence is a gift, one we cherish without question. Time and circumstance, though, conspire to force even the most independent to unite. Alone, we were targets, or pawns for the wizards' endless wars. Together, we could search for greater treasures than crumbs from the magicians' high feast. It is our nature to want something more. And we are, above all, creatures of nature.

The Romantic Rebellion

*There was in him a vital scorn of all:
As if the worst had fall'n which could befall,
He stood a stranger in this breathing world,
An erring spirit from another hurl'd...*
— Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Lament*

As Neville Sinclair said, we have always been. When other magicians cosseted their Arts in hidden circles and frightened folk slept closer to the fire, we went forth, naked and alone, to embrace the night. Our roots twine among the pagan trees and shaman's trails, but we have always set ourselves apart. When the codes of men or the decrees of gods sent others scurrying to the groves and chapels, we danced with devils and tended our own fires. It has never been our way to seek out rite or fellowship. What we did, we did alone.

Well, *almost* alone... In every age, a few of us would have our secret gardens, our hidden meeting places. From dancing in the bone gardens of Europe in the plague days, to dancing to hot jazz in the 1920s, to the tattered elegance of our clubs today, we have been drawn to secret places in society; to mysterious chambers of art and artifice, where lusts and curiosity could be sated in an atmosphere of grace and challenge.

Others called our kind "satanics," and occasionally, we were. Our forbears cast lots with God's dark reflection and conjured the elements with the aid of his servants. We are the children of Lilith, who was banished because she would not submit, and the cousins of Lucifer, cast from heaven for his pride. Yet even among the Bahari (the dark flowers of Lilith's garden) and Luciferians (who follow the Fallen Angel's steps), our kind stood apart, refusing to bow before cult leaders and orthodox liturgies, even blasphemous ones. We would revel in the shadow of Milton's Lucifer, but would not serve him.

Do I confuse you with my talk of the Christian gods and pagan ones all at once? Good! It is against our natures to accept one binding "truth" or faith over others. We generally draw our icons and gods from the pantheons of imagination — sometimes Judeo-Christian, sometimes pagan, sometimes wholly original. To many of us, all gods, yet no gods, are true. As Whitman said, I contradict myself because I contain multitudes. Maybe that should be, "because we contain multitudes..." multitudes who refuse to follow any single path.

Even loners must have company, however, and we found it in the wine-cups of Hellfire Clubs and the stanzas of demented poets. Where once we cavorted in remote

Black Masses or howled away the silence of barren moors, we soon sought solace in the company of other mad artists. Some of our kind hailed from the so-called "disparate," medieval wizards who would not choose sides when a war erupted between magickal factions. Because they would not choose, many were considered targets for witch-hunters and mystick assassins. As the fires of the Renaissance burned away the secrets of the night, the careless among us fell to racks and branding irons. But as Reason and Science took hold, the people set aside their brands and stakes; someone needed to ply the dark waters, though, and many of our kind were happy to take that ride.

It isn't that the Hollow ethos condones evil for its own sake — quite the opposite. We are neither the pawns of devils, nor the enemies of virtue. We are simply curious, pragmatic and rebellious — too curious to be timid, too defiant for morality, and too pragmatic to wreck shit "just because." Pure evil for evil's sake is *stupid*, my friend, and if our kind prizes anything in this life, it is intelligence and grace.

In the rising culture of European aristocracy, we soon found both. As learned noblewomen established salons and corrupt noblemen built Hellfire Clubs, our forebears came in from the shadows and stretched out like cats at the hearth. Soon enough, a society of loners became a society of peers. The drawing rooms and galleries of the Romantic Rebellion became our first great meeting ground. Our kind posed nude for Rodin and fucked wildly with Baudelaire, drank absinthe with Keats and shared free love with Mary and Percy Shelley. Lord George Byron became our patron saint — an artist, an adventurer, a benefactor and a demon all in one. In his halls, mysticks like Laura Kelly, Angeliqe Matisse, Virgil Matthews and Dr. John Polidori — early members of our fellowship — melded ancient rites and modern poetry, traversing "the labyrinth of sin" and coming out with treasure on the other side. Was Byron a magician himself? Does it matter? He certainly shared our vision and appreciation of arts both magickal and mundane. In time, the bridge between them disappeared. As the facade of Reason cracked to reveal the occult spiders in the woodwork, the early Darklings scooped their magick from the dust and worked it into Art. Writing, sculpture, poetry, music, seduction... all became instruments in a new yet ageless mystick craft.

Spirits, Steel and Mustard Gas

... bitterness there is, to the full. But there is also a wild extravagance, a mad gaiety, a verve, a gusto, at times almost a delirium. A continual oscillation between extremes, with bare stretches that taste like brass and leave the full flavor of emptiness.

— Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*

No one attempted to truly draw us together until the 1920s. We were — and remain — far too fractious to be united under one leader, philosophy or practice. Even so, a combination of friendships, partnerships, sexual circles and unfortunate circumstances spun a thick web between the Darkling cliques. From England (the Silver Thorn, Golden



Dawn, Fellowship of Crotona and Fool's Society) and Scotland (the Canticle of Mist) to New England (the Bessington Grove Ring and Order of the Second Dawn) to France (Le Pan d'Mystique) and Germany (Der Kalt and the Order of Thule), a collection of occult societies numbered our kind among their ranks. Yet despite the exalted company of mystics like Cagliostro, Crowley, Levi, Clutterbuck, Pickingill, Mathers, even the anti-magician Houdini, the Darklings refused allegiance to any sect or leader.

From time to time, our forebears brushed up against the secret intrigues of the so-called "traditions," a council of warrior-mages wrapped in a "battle for reality" with a group of Rosicrucians called the Order of Reason. When that Order did a half-twist and became a "technocratic union" in the mid-1800s, several of our kind were caught in the crossfire. Black-clad assassins and mad scientists crossed swords with pagan shapechangers and Hermetic wizards. Drawn to the conflict like moths, many Darklings were burned. When the survivors limped back to their sitting-rooms and circles, they passed on an important credo to their closest friends: *Meddle not in the affairs of wizards!*

We meddled plenty with the mundanes, though. As I've said, we have always been drawn to darkness, sometimes out of sorrow or anger, often just for the fuck of it. As the Industrial Revolution smeared mortal souls into grease, the common folk dreamed sour phantasies of shadowy figures, looming ghosts and keening spirits. Neo-paganism,

spiritualism, ritual magick and the ever-popular Black Masses distracted these disaffected souls. As people flaked away from their machines like rust, some of them floated to the occult. A few Awakened and joined our kind; others followed the warring factions or simply disappeared.

Then the Great War fell upon us all.

Raised as you and I have been on Vietnam fables and John Wayne's battlecry, it's easy to forget the impact of the First World War. As one who has spoken to the ghosts of the conflict, I assure you that *nothing*, from the Crusades to Gengis Khan's mountain of skulls, resembled the massacre that spilled forth when man and machine first cried "War!" Clouds of poison floated across blood-gorged trenches; machine-guns tore bodies into rags; airplanes and high explosives pounded the earth into smoking ruins, and the men on that earth became gory bits of stuffing. We're used to this sort of thing now, but it was new not so long ago. A clusterfuck of treaties and archaic strategies sent hundreds of thousands of young men marching into a meat grinder. The resulting abattoir gutted proper Victorian ideals, and the world went up for grabs.

A storm ripped through the Underworld, whipped up by the hundreds of thousands of howling ghosts unleashed by the Great War's carnage. Since many Darklings were spiritualists, we felt their pain far worse than the "traditions" and their rivals did. A few of us — like Gladys Littleton, Abraham Balliston and George Cray — reached

across the occult webworks, establishing friendships to aid the mourning ghosts. Several others did the same, but with an eye toward opportunity. Lord Wade Anders and "Countessa" Elyria d'Marque amassed great fortunes courting and exploiting the dead. From these contacts, our "society of loners" assumed a more-organized form.

Meanwhile, the huddled masses threw their morality into a sea of blood. The polite social illusions so carefully cherished by Queen Victoria and her admirers were irrevocably destroyed by this "War to End All Wars." Nothing remained but bitterness, insanity, and the spectres of battlefields, headstones and mustard gas. So many subcultures were born, most of them drenched in rebellion and license! The old ways were undeniably dead, so it became a matter of what to do with the corpse. Some people chose to fuck it. As Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies*, Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby*, and Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* display, the post-war world was alive with revelry — dark revelry. And in that darkness, we found our flower.

The Unseen Society

It is better to drink of deep griefs than to taste shallow pleasures.

— William Hazlitt, *Characteristics*

One of the first to pluck that flower was a young woman named Gladys Littleton. Gladys would have been a unique woman in any age, but the 1920s were her era, and she reveled in every aspect of the age. Vivacious and insightful, she dressed in short, glittering frocks and draped furs, and was the toast of rich society and the jazz clubs. But glamour was a prison, and Gladys was far too talented to remain locked away in it. Her love of life was tainted by the sorrows of the dead she sensed on her periphery. Rather than drown them out with excess, she mastered spiritualism and forged links between others like herself. Traveling the world, she led grieving spirits back home and conducted seances for the departed. Occasionally, she would allow ghosts to ride her as she lived the high life, sharing the sensations with those who missed them. Soon, she led a triple life: the hot young socialite, the earnest occultist, and the sad but determined ghost-mistress. As the strain of travel, spirit-ferrying and overarching sorrow wore away at her gaiety, Gladys adopted the trappings of a proto-goth night queen: silver jewelry, skull motifs and yards of black cloth and skin. Even then, though, her humor and charm carried her through the tunnel of night. She proved with a wink and a laugh that style and substance need not be contradictions in the world of magick!

Unfortunately, her unashamedly high profile and spiritual crusade brought her into, shall we say, disfavor with certain occultists, notably "Countessa" d'Marque. What began as a war of words became a series of curses, assassinations and demonic summonings. D'Marque even sent agents of the "technocratic union" after her elusive rival, who soon wound up with a death-price on her head.

Not that she was alone. Gladys' activities and charisma gave her a seemingly endless source of allies, lovers and personal friends. When black-garbed assassins or raging spirits attacked, a small corps of admirers was usually there to protect their friend. One of these, Gardner Morse, laid the greatest cornerstone in our Darkling tower. A writer and mage from his earliest days, Morse defined the best of us. His literary peers — Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Faulkner and Gertrude Stein — admired his passion for learning and his bottomless capacity for booze. Brilliant, creative, sacrilegious, darkly inspired, Morse was supposedly Awakened from birth. He pioneered the speculative fiction genre despite the derision of his literary fellows, exploring concepts of otherworldly realms and alternative timelines. Gardner also became a source of wonder and dismay for other wizards of the time, due in part to his radical ideas, and in part to his uncompromising personality.

Gardner and Gladys transcended romance. They both possessed questing minds, rebellious souls, and a complete disgust for the status quo. Together, they hosted a gathering of young, like-minded mysticks, and settled down to a very long weekend of debate, drinking and debauchery. At the end, Gardner announced the birth of the Unseen Society, a loose gathering of Darklings and disenchanted "tradition" mages. Their goal: to break the stranglehold of "traditions" and "technocracies" and allow each mage — or *Wintershiner*, as he dubbed us — to find his or her own Path.

This was not entirely to be a peaceful mission or a romp: Independent sorcerers had a tendency, by this time, to be picked off by rivals, corrupted by evil spirits, or immolated by their own mistakes. Morse and Littleton wanted to change that; by teaching some elementary magick skills and a bit of discretion, the pair hoped to head off the worst of the casualties, allowing others like them to come into their own. Not everyone was thrilled by the idea. Although the gathering centered around Gladys' circle of friends, some accused her of building a wall of bodies between herself and her rivals. Since several of her friends had already died protecting her, the charges were not without merit. As for Morse, some dubbed him "King Gardner" and left the party in a huff. Even so, many guests stayed. The gathering became a nativity — the conception of the Hollow Ones.

The Unseen Society made its home in Hazelton Manor, a large abandoned estate on the outskirts of London. The place had long been considered haunted or cursed. The rumors fascinated Gardner, who was compelled to purchase the estate and add his own mystique to its history. The fallen elegance of an abandoned manor appealed to his young allies, who devoted their skills and energies to reshaping the place into a home befitting their eclectic tastes. Gardner and Gladys, along with 11 other Dark Young Things, made a permanent home in Hazelton, creating a haven where ideas, magick and the outrageous were not contradictions, but companions.

As befitting the home of an "unseen society," the Darklings soon moved Hazelton to some new, undiscovered location; or perhaps they cloaked it with enchantments so powerful that not even the agents of the "technocratic union" could find it. Every so often, the mansion still presents itself to unwary travelers, or offers sanctuary to self-Awakened sorcerers or innocents in need. Sometimes, the place is simply *there*. Whenever anyone tries to seek it out, however, no trace of Hazelton manor can be found.

From the halls of Hazelton, Gladys and Gardner spread their vision of a fellowship of equals, a modern "druids' grove" where Darklings could gather and exchange love or secrets without surrendering to anyone's rulership. Although the "authority" of the clique's founders ended outside Hazelton's walls, their influence rippled through each meeting of our kind. The Society's fame spread across the sea, and many other small sects followed Morse's example. When Neville Sinclair made his famous remark to Lady Moonshade, our kind found a name. But with the Unseen Society, we found a home.

Sadly, Gladys' candle has been extinguished, snuffed out by "Countessa" d'Marque during the Second World War, when their rivalry reached its climax. Her partners built a shrine for her outside Hazelton's walls, and keep a flame burning for her even now. It's been said that her many lovers become ravens each night and search the spirit worlds for her, without success. Despite his loss, Gardner remains active in his own wild, unique manner, still tweaking the mustaches of overly serious magicians.

Gardner's most recent project fits his skewed sense of humor. He writes a comic-book series titled "The Unseen Society," which not only features highly fictionalized tales of his exploits, but which (he claims) is actually a giant magickal working that will be complete upon the series' conclusion at the millennium. Each issue is seeded with key phrases and symbols that will supposedly encourage Awakening amongst its readers. The comic's publishers do not know this, of course; they merely consider Gardner, who works under a pseudonym, to be just one of a handful of eccentric but popular British writers under their banner.

Morse and Littleton are hardly the only influential parties in the Hollow Ones' history: Abraham Balliston and George Cray founded the Circle of the Dancing Spirit, a Boston group that exists to this day; from the coffee houses and head shops came the Deathbird's Cry, an occult group founded in the early '60s and dedicated to end-time prophecies; the ageless Bahari cult, a sect devoted to Dark Mother Lilith and her lessons of pain, provided a torture garden where many Darklings found enlightenment and pleasure; in the 1950s, Lord Wade Anders founded the Nocturnal Order of the Silver Chalice, a short-lived group of English diabolists who provided the foundation for a dozen Hollow One sects a decade later; and so it goes. Rays of light and clouds of shadow move across the landscape. In their shine or shade, the Darklings grow.



J. Robb



But like Neville Sinclair, the Unseen Society presents that pivotal moment — a moment when the scattered potential of a hundred thousand Darklings could be molded toward a single, revolutionary purpose. Gardner and his group represent that moment after which all things are different. With his lover, he brought us together, and helped form our first “Chantry.” No longer did we need to remain scattered, alone, victims of our individuality. In the Unseen Society’s vision, we could all maintain our autonomy, and yet have others of similar convictions to call upon if the need ever arose.

Graves for the Chosen Few

Man is the cruelest animal.... when he invented hell for himself, behold, that was his very heaven.

— Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

In the last few decades, there have indeed been times when our survival depended upon our numbers and some degree of unison. World War Two came with a fearful inevitability, mocking “the War to End All Wars.” The first conflict slaughtered soldiers by 10s of thousands; the second slew civilians by 10s of millions. Mercy had fled, humanity was at its most monstrous, and the death toll was incalculable. Nothing before or since has rivaled the shockwave of World War Two, and no event has done more to rattle the balance of power among the Awakened Ones.

The war affected everyone, regardless of philosophy or practice. The Oh-So-Enlightened “traditions” and “technocracy” split along nationalist lines, pitting pagan German against pagan Brit and French wizard against Italian wizard. Naturally, our emerging societies were swept up into the conflict — it was not exactly a time when you could stand on the sidelines smoking clove cigarettes, you know — and many Darklings were ground between the wheels of war.

By all accounts, it was a horrific time, even by our standards. Bombs shattered the cities. Soldiers massacred the innocent. Camp ovens burned and refugees starved as every ounce of effort and materials went to building new and better ways to kill. In the ruins, human monsters and malignant spirits picked off anyone luckless enough to be caught in the shadows. The worst threat, though, came from the Infernal, and from those who embraced it with their souls.

As I’ve already said, we have always danced with demons and diced with devils. It’s a part of who we are. But the best of us always resisted kissing Satan’s ass — independence, not servitude, is our ideal. Some sorcerers, though, revel in the power the darker spirits gave their slaves. For the price of a few spells or a pile of gold, they literally sell themselves to the Masters of the Pits. We Darklings may taste infernal wine on occasion, but these folk drink it like water and piss it all over everything they touch. Some call them “nephandi” (the opposers of divine law), or “infernalists” (the worshippers of all that is unclean). Where we cultivate both light and darkness, they prefer to shun the light... and to snuff it out. Drawn as we are to the dark side

of the magickal fields, many of us have fallen to these "nephandi." During the War, which brought out all that is worst in humanity, perversity lured many Hollowers in. Soon the gates of hell slammed shut on them.

Dancing along the Abyss is pretty cool. Falling into it is not, especially not if you drag your friends down with you. If nothing else, that kind of shit is not conducive to survival. At the time, though, it must have seemed like evil held all the Major Trumps. Therefore, many Darklings went along for the ride. But as the devil-worshippers spread their cults and cast their spells, the other warring factions turned on us — on *all* of us. I guess it took threats like genocide and technological holocaust to get the big babies to put aside their 500-year-old war. Once they worked out their internal problems, though, the wizards and mad scientists united and kicked the living shit out of the infernalists. Guess who got caught in the general ass-kicking? You got it: We did.

In their crusade to wipe out this corrupting force (or whatever), they tore through the magickal underground and started killing people! Lots of people! *Our* people! Did they ask, "Why are you in black?" or "Excuse me, are you making deals with demons?" No, they just killed and killed and killed! Okay, a few of them had the presence of mind to ask, to test, or to watch who was doing what. But the rest were just fucking brutal killers! Real "enlightened" of them, that's all I can say! By the time the war had ended, many Darklings had joined the piles of bodies all over the world. Because we were mostly loners, nobody noticed and fewer cared.

And so the example of the Unseen Society took root and flowered. We had to look after our own, to guide the orphans and teach the new kids and bury the ones who had died, because nobody else fucking would. Finally, the other groups started to take us seriously — which was both a good thing and a bad thing.

Is Anybody in There?

Neither cast ye pearls before swine, lest they trample them under foot, and turn again and rend you.

— Jesus of Nazareth, Matthew 7:6

As I said before, our kind was not exactly unknown to the warring wizards. Some of the "traditions" even considered us little brothers and sisters, kids who might someday grow up to be just like them. I've already mentioned the pagan Verbenas, who make magick from the cycles of the elements and spirits. They always looked on us with surprise and a bit of pity. Another group, the Cultists of Ecstasy, has danced right alongside us for centuries, sharing their loves and lovers while mixing a little philosophy and debate into the absinthe. A collection of shamans, called Dreamspeakers, understand the spirit world far more than many of us do. Occasionally, we've met under friendly circumstances. Then there are the Euthanatos, whose name means "good death"; as you can imagine, we have a few things in common. When the blood and spells started flying during World War Two, these four sects made an effort to bring

us into their Council under the banner of the Unseen Society — something about needing a ninth "tradition" to replace one that had left a few years before the war.

It didn't work. For starters, we didn't want to belong to their fucked-up little club. They wanted us to take a bunch of oaths, set down a creed and start including or excluding people based on some set of rules that *they* would give us. *Fuck that!* Morse replied, and he took his friends and went home. The other problems came from a posse of wizards and clerics who talked and acted like *D&D* characters that had come to life. To them, we were a bunch of children playing with forces we didn't understand. To be respected, they said, we would have to play the magickal game their way. Again, *fuck that!* Despite a few other attempts on both sides (which I'll get to in a minute), we have kept our distance from the "traditions" ever since.

On the other hand, the "technocracy" offered us nothing but trouble. From the start, we were branded "reality deviants," and hounded by stormtroopers. In the eyes of this conspiracy of gangsters, technophiles, cyborgs and spies, we Hollow Ones were just another collection of satanists and dope fiends. To these anti-occult occultists, magick is a dangerous myth and disobedience is punishable by assimilation, slavery or death. In the wake of the two World Wars, they stepped up their crusade against our kind; when they found Darklings, they shipped them off for "reeducation," or simply murdered them. In the name of their "New World Order," nothing else is acceptable.

So we stayed underground, developed secret codes and signals, and nurtured our own. Coffee houses, back alleys, nightclubs and homeless shelters became like the courts of the artists — gathering places for our wayward kind. In time, Neville's offhand remark caught on. We became the Hollow Ones, and assumed an identity we had never wanted before.

The Cultists call the 1960s "the Great Awakening." By that time, we had emerged as a group, our eyes wide with knowledge. While so many others reveled in the supposed innocence of the time, the first Hollow Ones saw the blackness swirling behind the garish colors. It's easy, I guess, being born as you and I were long after the party ended, to see the '60s as a rampage of smelly, stupid hippies. Talk to the ghosts and survivors of that time, though, and you'll see that the "wild hippie innocence" we hear so much shit about was just a mask for a wild, Bacchanal rage. Another war, Vietnam, lit the fuse, and the explosion of drugs, sexuality, music and rebellion shook the pillars of polite society. As the '60s became the '70s, then the '80s, the subcultures where we breed became a new mainstream. Punk, metal, gothic and industrial rock replaced the peace hymns. Black leather, white lace, and red blood became the colors of the new era. The old world, which the "traditions" sought to preserve, has been revealed for what it is: a cooling corpse. While they try, even now, to resuscitate the old fucker, we're dancing on its grave. And there are many more of us than the other groups suspect.

I have a theory that may account for the explosive growth and coalition of our self-Awakened kind: Reality itself is stirring in its sleep. With each burst of dream or nightmare, it sends out ripples of Awakening among sensitive souls. Those ripples rouse the inspiration that lies within every human being (and within animals and objects as well), touching off new rounds of "supernatural" activity. If you look at crisis points in human history, you can see upswings of "paranormal" or "mystick" events. Now consider the massive jolts Reality must have suffered between the two World Wars, the Space and Information Ages, mass communication and worldwide transportation. No other age has seen the marvels and the horrors of the 20th century. Is it any wonder Reality can't sleep anymore? And is it any wonder that so many of our kind have Awakened lately?

Kinda makes you wonder what will happen next year, doesn't it?

Blood and Black Leather

oh i miss the kiss of treachery the shameless kiss of vanity
— The Cure, "Disintegration"

Still, it's not smart to get cocky. There are enemies everywhere, even within. Take Blessed House, for example: In the mid-'70s, a glam boy named Harold fronted an influential band called The Blessed. In a heroin seizure, he Awakened. Soon he cleaned up his act, bought some warehouse space downtown, painted it black, and opened a nameless but very exclusive club. He wasn't trying to organize anyone, but like the cries of ravens, word got around. Dark Children were drawn to his door, some by the sepulchral beauty of his lyrics, others by a sense of belonging they'd never felt in any other place.

Eventually, Harold did attempt to make contact with some other mages. He was totally blown off. The Hollow Ones kept coming, though, as more kids Awakened on their own, or on the streets. Eventually, the club became known as the Blessed House, and became a magnet for the early goth subculture that formed the backbone of our Craft.

Wherever you have people, you have cliques. Wherever you have cliques, you have rivalries. Blessed House had its share of both. Among the regulars, a golden-haired kid named Garbo assembled a clique that rivaled Harold's own. Stylish, beautiful and charismatic, Garbo soon split off from Blessed House to found his own Chantry, a Crowleyesque gathering called Ravenscream. Garbo made some alliances with two English cliques — the Shuttleford Lane Circle and Club Menmoth — which set off trouble between the British Hollowers and Blessed House. The usual series of curses and intrigues ended when all four Chantries were overrun. In a blitzkrieg of court orders, license revocations, beatings and assassinations, nearly two dozen Darklings were wiped off the magical map.

Soon afterward, Harold cracked. Something snapped inside him one night, and he went screaming through the New York streets. Supposedly, he became some demented

chaos mage. I hear he's still marauding about, annihilating those unlucky enough to run into him.

Or take Jeremy Case, an influential Darkling who tried for nearly a decade to get the Council to recognize our Craft. From the Waydown to Guilty Pleasures (an English fetish club), he led fierce debates about the "Darkling's" future. Time after time, he organized diplomatic missions to the Council's hidden home realm; time after time, his missions failed. Despite the friendship of several top wizards, Case could not get the "traditions" to accept us.

Finally, he broke. Last year, some hotshit whacko calling himself Heylel-Something-Or-Other led a charge on that same hidden realm. Although most of us sat the whole thing out, poor, bitter Jeremy Case joined the fight. With two dozen Hollowers and a pack of other young mages, he attacked the Council. Case and Company were slaughtered, as was the Heylel dude who started the trouble in the first place. Since then, we've been even less welcome at the "traditions" door. After all his efforts to win respect for us, Jeremy Case fucked the whole deal, making us more outcast than before.

And Now, Our Present State

Acceptance is surrender — vile and vicious slander
We don't want to be ruled — by a handful of fools
— KMFD, "Search & Destroy"

By the 1980s, the early gothic movement emerged from the riots of punk, glam and metal. Harkening back to Byron's revels and deSade's dungeons, this subculture seemed custom-made for us. (By some accounts, we started it to begin with, but one should never believe too many rumors!) Sensual, occulted, glamorous yet wild, this gothic aesthetic suits our approach to life and the Arts. The fact that it has endured, even prospered, for almost 20 years testifies to its complete validity!

The growing goth scene and the birth of the "floating club" did our sect a tremendous boon. The massacre of Garbo's group did not go unnoticed by Neville Sinclair. With some help from rich Hollowers like Morpheus D, Neville launched the Waydown, the ultimate floating house for lost young mages. The location changes regularly; no one can find it unless they know who to ask, what to ask, and how to ask. Those who come looking, but don't belong, get the wrong directions, if they get directions at all.

We have other places to call our own, too: the Unseen Society's hidden manor house, the Blessed House's "abandoned" ruins, the Sepulcher in Chicago, Gethsemone Garden in Scotland, Guilty Pleasures in London... any place where the dark and beautiful congregate, we find a home. Each is so very different from its "cousins," but each reflects a part of who we are. There are many other sanctuaries there, smaller, hidden, for the lost ones with the courage to search. And each has two faces: the tragic-cool facade a tourist sees, and the hidden splendor of the truth within — Dark Children gathered in a secret garden, sharing confidences and dreams, making magick from nightmares.

As the other sects fight their endless wars, we watch from hidden corners and try to stay alive. It doesn't matter if they accept us or not. *We are.* We will not go away. *We are.* If they want the respect from us that they seem to covet, they must grant it to us in equal measure first. Thus far, they have not — not as a Council, at least. Few do seem to understand our ways, though; perhaps they have seen that the future, if there is one, lies with us.

If You Wanna be in My Gang



We are the Hollow Men, the Stuffed Men, the folk of rags and tatters, the crows of the battlefield and the beggars at the gate. We have nothing that isn't lost, discarded or stolen... We are the mourners who prepare the dead for burial and the thieves who steal the coins from their eyes. Yet not until they pay the ferryman, for we are nothing without the dead and that which has passed before. We are the Forgotten Tradition, pieced together from the rags and tatters of every age. The beggars who have come to town, in rags and tatters and velvet gowns.

— Neville Sinclair, from James Moore's *Outcasts*

Denise smiles with a hint of cruelty: "Now that you have found us, my precious little newcomer, I suppose you intend to stay, at least for a bit. But there are rules to be followed, and there are tests — simple ones if you have style and brains. You will, as they say on the streets, have to prove that you can 'stand up.' With us, that involves an intricate weaving of wits and humor, knowledge and panache.

"You can see the dual levels of the realities around us at this very moment. That ability to see beyond the veil of mundane reality is our first test. The second is your perception of those alternatives: What you perceive within our realms are the fluttering spectres of our dreams and nightmares — things lost and wondrously found again. Are they fearful, fascinating, or a thrilling combination of both?"

In Denise's smile, there is knowledge. As her expression lingers in the smoky dimness, her features gradually shift from focus and change, morphing like some video diva. Her face, now a death's head with dreadlocks, grins coldly: "Could you dance with death?" she whispers with velvet smoothness.

In answer, you cup one hand over the other and produce, in perfect simplicity, a single black rose. Matching her smile, you present it to Denise. She reaches to touch it and the rose melts into smoke. The fragrance of roses lingers in the air, and you take her hand instead. Together you rise and join the dance. As you move languidly to the beat of "Haunted," by Love and Rockets, Denise speaks archly: "This means nothing. You merely passed a simple test." She adds a wink. "But you passed it with style. That counts."

The song ends. Denise studies you carefully as you both slide back into your seats. Amazingly, even with the crowds in the club, no one has usurped your table. "This is my table," Denise replies.

For the most part, we want nothing they can offer. Still, the question remains: Do we join the "traditions" for safety's sake, and conform to their rules and standards, to ideals that are not our own? Or do we remain solitary, easy targets, as our numbers grow?

For now, at least, I've got no answer for that question. We simply *are*. Everything else is speculation. A survivor lives day by day.

"No one would dare snag it while I was dancing." Her voice contains the absolute certainty of experience. "Now," she begins, "perhaps you would like to learn a little more about what we do, and how...?"

Initiation: Weaving Lies from Truth

There are many people here who will try to teach you, and you can learn from each of them. We all possess different kinds of knowledge, and each of us has our own talents... and our own tricks. Learn what you can from all, but remember as well that not all of what you are told will be the truth. That is the third test: weaving lies from the truth. An old trick, and a crass one, but it's effective in its own way. There are those who walk among us who have yet to discern the difference. Much of our strength and safety lies in misdirection, so cultivate the ability to both know the truth, and to hide it when necessary. But remember as well that there are shades of truth, just as there are shades of black.

You sought magick, and you found it. But can you use it? Obviously you can weave charming illusions, and see through some cast upon you. But can you save your own life? If you are brought within our shadowed family, could you save the lives of those who would do the same for you?

We cast ourselves as frail nighttime blossoms, but we are nails of steel. We do not fear death, but we would not toss away our lives like ragged lace, torn and forgotten. We seem to love death, but we cherish life, even if it's only our own lives we prize.

You will learn that there are times that you must fight. We're too angry to be wiped out, and we may be the only ones who have a fucking idea of the truth of things. I do suspect, however, that for many of us, that knowledge is submerged beneath the enchantment of each night's new wonders. Every once in a while, you have to fight to keep it.

Each small family among us is called a "circle" or "clique" — we are, I confess, an exclusive lot. Once you have proven yourself trustworthy, you'll be invited to find a teacher among us, one who'll help you expand your talents and perfect new abilities. Once you know what you're doing, your only boundaries are those of imagination. Think what you can do, and you probably can.

The Status Game

You will, in time, be drawn to certain people within our Craft, either as friends, lovers, or both. If they accept you, these people may become your family, the brothers and sisters you no longer have. They will have tests, challenges of their own devising, that you might have to pass to be accepted among them, but you probably won't be aware of these tests until you've passed them, or failed. Since we are, in our way, creatures of fashion and whim, you're not always judged by what you can do, but by how you do it... and, perhaps, by how good you look while doing it.

In Los Angeles, there are two queens, Madelyne and Lady Zee. Both approach fashion and the Art in very different ways, but there are similarities between them nonetheless. Each one expects an almost vulgar display of flash and flesh from her chosen circle members... unless a potential companion is cute, British and male — then all he has to do is smile pretty and say hello. In the Unseen Society, by contrast, a Dark Child has to show a devastatingly wicked wit to draw admiration. Tacky magick is frowned upon there. In my own Chapel Perilous, we value subtlety and excess equally, depending on the application. Our city thrives on strangeness, and it seems that anything we do contributes to the mythos of the city. Watch the examples set by those around you, and use their deeds as guidelines for your own.

Among us, status is a matter of style, grace, wit and charisma. We are, after all, the scions of artists and poets, and we expect our best and brightest to live up to that legacy. It's easy to become a slob when you're cast out of society. We make it a challenge to rise above the common pariahs and assume places of distinction. Although the Dark Children abhor formal titles, we often style ourselves after the sitting-room courts of our forebears: the wittiest and most glamorous of us assume titles — king, queen, count, countessa, lord, lady, what have you — and arbitrate fashions and disputes among the clique. Other capable members become favored functionaries — scribes, artists, diplomats, assassins, whatever suits the leader's whims and the clique's circumstances — while the remaining members strive for status as they will. Naturally, the resulting gamesmanship leads to many social intrigues and reversals of fortune, but such things keep the blood fresh and flowing within our families. The one unforgivable tactic is betrayal to outsiders. So long as everyone remains loyal to the circle, any sort of edge — from sexual favors to social insults to magickal influence to outright challenges — is not only acceptable, but commendable. I myself lead my clique, and let me say that I am not a kind mistress!

Loyalty: Fire, Tears and Blood

As you may have noticed, we prize both rebellion and conformity: A talent for graceful defiance is a wonderful and valued trait, but we prefer to nurture demimondes, not thugs. Ours is a strange and beautiful weirdness, and we like to keep it that way.

Besides, as members of a noted and exclusive subculture, we can screen potential threats and supplicants, or hide in plain sight as occasion warrants. Thus, a few protocols are essential, even among rebels.

As you move among our circles, you may note that you're being watched. Some may ask you to join them, either for company, instruction or other games. Sometimes, they'll be testing you, asking loaded questions or putting you into awkward situations to see how you react. They'll test your loyalties, your knowledge, your fashion-sense and etiquette, your attitude and passion and a hundred other things. You may be invited to debate books or music, or you may be drawn into heated "arguments" on magickal theory in which everyone but you knows the right answers. You will almost surely be invited on sexual adventures, to see how far you'll go; or on reckless midnight missions, like shoplifting from Bryce Grimm's Shoppe or pulling pranks on the local cops. In all things, your deeds and answers will be weighed. Eventually, you'll either be accepted or thrown to the wolves.

Where Are the *Black Hollow Ones*?

Given the pasty veneer of the "lost tradition," many people wonder "where do the black orphans go?" Surely they don't all get scooped up by inner-city gangs or fried by the Technocracy, do they?

Of course not. Actually, the Hollow Ones, like the gothic and industrial rebels they live among, have many black members. The white-faced stereotype has a basis in truth, but it fails to include the many different people who gravitate toward the tragically hip lifestyle. In general, the Hollow Ones don't discriminate by color; among some cliques, black, Oriental and Hispanic orphans are actually more welcome than another round of white boys and girls; fashion is often all about being exotic, and few people seem more exotic (or intimidating) than a studly black dude in full goth-fetish gear, or a Japanese girl in flowing midnight lace.

Which isn't to say that the group is a total P.C. hug-party. Certain cliques do exclude "outsiders of color," or condemn their "exotic" members to the roles of pets or secondaries. Many a clique "court" keeps its ethnic members off to the sides, flattered by compliments, but ultimately excluded from real status.

More often than not, however, it's the black orphans who shun the Hollow Ones. The gothic fashions of the Darklings are often considered "too white" for any self-respecting Nubian. Other sects, like the voodoo-inspired Vévés and the *True Children of the New Way* [see Chapter IV], the L.A.-based *Freedom Posse*, Chicago's *Candymen* and the *English Painted Face Tribe*, prefer a more Afrocentric approach to magick, faith and fashion. Unlike the Hollow Ones, these groups are small, recent and autonomous, staking out their own territory and keeping it pure (often by driving out the white folks). Like the dozens of other orphan groups, they mind their own business and avoid contact with the Hollow Ones.

In short, orphans are individuals. Some belong to race-based sects, while others just join whoever happens to be convenient. In any case, the Hollow Ones are not as strictly Caucasian as they might first appear. Not everyone makes a big deal of his ethnicity.



Such testing may seem cruel, perhaps, but we have learned to guard against betrayal. Loyalty to our family must be tested with fire, tears and blood. Anything less is suicide.

We value loyalty above all other things. The bonds between each Hollow One here have been formed in battles for survival. We are the lost, the out-caste, and we have nothing and no one to trust but each other. To betray us is to wind up *truly* alone, friendless, an anathema even among outsiders.

Punishments and Crimes

Do not doubt for a moment that word of a betrayal will spread. We communicate in many ways. Some ways are mundane, others astounding. Our gossip is on the Internet, in fanzines, in songs, in the cry of a city crow well after midnight. Many Dark Children travel from place to place simply to pass on news of current events, sharing their own experiences and those of others. All information eventually becomes useful, and we know that as well as anyone!

Likewise, never doubt that betrayal will be punished. A few snipes among friends are to be expected, but wholesale treachery, especially on behalf of the "technocracy" or other magickal rivals, is unforgivable. Our survival depends almost entirely upon trust. Sell out that trust, and there will be hell to pay!

We find punishment crafted to fit the offense — and the betrayer's personal sense of hell — to be most efficient. What retribution could be more appropriate than strangling a poison-

ous spider in her own web? One Chicago pretty boy tried to destroy a club with fire; he was burned from the inside out. Another betrayed friends to his vampire lover; he was buried alive with a host of horny reanimated corpses. A girl who talked too freely about secret affairs had her tongue and ears magickally silenced, and a technocratic infiltrator had her body chopped and retrofitted with rusty machines. We do not tolerate turn-coats, and find gruesome "rewards" a worthy deterrent.

Our rules are simple and straightforward:

- Do not steal from a member of your circle, or from another member's companion.
- Do not dose your friends with drugs or other substances.
- Do not attempt to compel sex from a member or a member's companion. We get enough of that shit from the outside!
- Do not attack or kill one of your own unless you can prove you had a good reason to do so.
- And never, *ever*, inform on your clique, or set your family up to take a fall.

Other things are simply *not* done. They're not *crimes*, as such, but they're not going to make you very popular. We do, after all, have standards — we are not the urchins that outsiders perceive us to be!

First, retain your dignity. Look good, speak well, perform your Arts and activities with grace and flair, and avoid vulgar displays of power. Even if you're enmeshed in a

disagreement, maintain your wits and style. Battles are lost with a lapse in temper, a loss of "cool." There are other ways to deal with conflict.

Regardless of well-meaning tripe about direct confrontation, I've found that the best way to solve a problem is with subtlety. Discover the reasons behind a person's actions, then turn those circumstances against him. Discover that person's weaknesses and reveal it with style. If someone has the poor judgment to confront you directly, blow her off as if she's overreacting. You'll find that your life will run more smoothly if you keep your own behavior above reproach while revealing the frailties of others.

We do not like to be drawn into unnecessary conflicts, especially not with outsiders. Do not taunt the fur-and-fangs crowd, or tempt fate by challenging other mages. Do not piss off the cops, the bangers or the local Mob, and for all the gods' sake, do not take on a vampire prince! Picking fights puts our whole family at risk. As Jeremy Case's story shows, all of us feel the heat when one of us plays with fire!

Sometimes you can't avoid a problem. If an altercation occurs because of you, please do your very best to try to resolve it on your own. If you can do so without making a fuss, so much the better! If, for some reason, things spiral beyond your control, then, of course, you must let us know. We *are* family, after all, and we look out for our own!

We *all* despise rejects who draw their circles into battle over nothing more than simple glory. If you want to get yourself killed on a matter of principle, please feel free to leave the rest of us out of it! That shit only plays in action movies, and has no place in our survivor's game. Our hidden places should remain hidden. If you're nurturing dreams of being the next big hero, take them elsewhere!

If, on the other hand, trouble finds its way to our door, we expect you to stand with us as loyally as we'd stand with you. If we have to fight, and you (and we) come out of it alive, then you *will* be a hero. To us.

And in the end, that's all that matters.

Magick: Wings of the Soul

We are avatars of intuition. Where other mages hone their Arts in endless study, we reach for them in the night, plucking the fruits of awareness and *le mystique* by instinct. There are, of course, certain roads one must travel when seeking the Eternal Art, but first of all, you must learn to trust your intuition. Without that, all the rest is ashes.

Awakening is different for all of us. Some Awaken in violence, to hard slaps of Fate, and some Awaken in ecstasy, gyrating to a favorite song. Tragically, for most of us, violence is a more profound trigger than ecstasy. Regardless of the circumstances, that feeling, the clarity that cuts through the confusion of the moment, is unmistakable! Have you heard that Bauhaus song, "Kick in the Eye?" That's it completely — a kick in the psychic eye! Your perceptions are not *altered* so

much as *augmented*. Awakening is like the moment you realized everything your parents and teachers taught you was bullshit, only more so! Actually, for most of us, those two moments are inextricably linked; once you discover that one reality is built on falsehoods, it's a short step to understanding that Reality itself is a lie! A lie you can control if you have the will to do so....

Avatar: The Nightbird

i thought i saw an angel. he reminded me of you. dark. tall. long hair. your hair. gliding through the air. just out of reach. turning back in anger. my angel? he reminded me of you. fallen.

— Black Tape for a Blue Girl, "wings tattered, fallen"

Sometimes, that concept of will takes on an essence of its own. Other mages call it an "avatar," the seed of divine essence; personally, I prefer "the Nightbird," bearer of messages from beyond human sight. Ultimately, this inner messenger enables us to use our magick. Depending on our relationship with this entity, it can be very helpful, or a royal pain! I know one girl whose Nightbird manifested at the club, and the thing walked her through Awakening like it was a midnight stroll on the beach! For others, the spirit pushes and coaxes, convinced that it can draw you along magick's Path with tricks and traps. Helpful or harassing, the Nightbird glides through your senses like a raven, like Thought and Memory on the shoulders of a god.

To most of our kind, the Nightbird does indeed take avian shape. Some see her as a crow or raven, while others labor under the stare of Lilith's own owl. I've known Darklings who danced beneath the wings of black doves, or laughed with a vulture's voice. Sometimes, it takes the form of an angel — a Uriel or Azrael — clad in sad shadow; other times, it becomes Death, a scythe-wielding mentor of mortal lessons. Whatever shape this "avatar" prefers, you can be sure it will have wings. In our eyes, it always does.

Certain mages claim that "avatars" are actually the fragmented spirits of an older race of beings, more pure than anything that remains on this world. Supposedly, what remains has done so to guide us, to evolve our magickal souls. It's a lovely concept, and even wizards should have fairy tales. Whatever "avatars" are, those who practice magick possess them... or are likewise possessed.

Like the Ba, the spirit of physical and mystick vitality spoken of by the Egyptians, the Nightbird soars from its physical prison, taking an Awakened One along for the ride. When the intuition is blocked, when the hang-ups of daily life impede magickal awareness, the Nightbird takes a Darkling on an inner journey to Seek what has been lost. Through dark tunnels and elemental tests, you will tread a path of tears; until you can face the fears and passions that block you, your magickal power will be frozen in place like icy bones. I tell you this because I can see you're going to have trouble overcoming the obstacles of this world. Many of our kind cannot get past those obstacles, and very few of us ever rise to truly sublime awareness or power because of it.

If and when you reach the final summit of awareness, your physical body slides away like a snake's discarded skin. Our war-mongering "cousins" like to call this "ascension," but it's really about transcending this rotting mortal shell and journeying outward, uniting the Ba and its Ka (the spirit) in a single entity. Until then, the dance between Ba and Ka, between flesh and the Nightbird, keeps us like courtesans: privileged, perceptive, powerful and freer than most people can imagine... so long as we tend the toll.

Tools of Instinct

As said, magick is a function of instinct; each Darkling does what suits her needs. To reach outward and pluck that mystick fruit, we need rituals and tools to focus our intentions. The "traditions" and "technocrats" make a big deal over their rites—that's what a lot of the fighting between them is about!—but our kind have always seen the arts within the Arts, if you know what I mean. The rituals are merely steps toward an end.

We choose those steps from things that are important to us... usually from the cast-offs of our respective upbringings. I've always had a way with words and charm; thus, my "rituals" involve knowing what to say, how to say it, and who to say it to. A friend of mine was raised to think she was some kind of slut; now her rituals involve lots of masochistic sex. One pretty Samoan boy I know uses tikis and melodic chants, while a former rival of mine cultivated her interest in Wicca. We use what works best for us. What works for me probably won't work for you. Each Darkling custom-makes her own rites. The magick is in the mage, not the tool.

Really elaborate spells demand a lot of concentration—in other words, rituals that let you get your fingers into the magick and shape Reality like a sculptor shapes clay. Although many of us fall back on the tried-and-true rituals of witchcraft—the whole "bell, book and candle" thing—I have to stress that we do not limit ourselves to such rites. Again, each Dark Child finds tools and incantations that seem significant to her—like my slutty friend's sex rites—and puts them to work. Generally, it's a good idea to get your family to help with powerful rites. A chain can move more than a single link can.

I'll share this with you. It's not a secret, but it is private: One night, very soon after I came here, I climbed to the top of a church tower. It was after midnight, very dark and cold, and the roof tiles were slippery. But I made it to the top, and from there I was able to see over the entire city. As time passed, I watched the city move through the dark, eventually go to sleep, and begin to wake again as the sun reddened the distant sky. Soon I became a little afraid, like the cat that climbs the tree but doesn't know how to get down. The ground was very far below me, and the dawn was coming. I didn't want to be spotted in my predicament by some passer-by... or by a cop.

I was startled by a huge crow flying low over the peaked roof. Its wings brushed my hair, and I almost lost my balance from the surprise. The Nightbird perched nearby and studied

me, its head cocked in that unlikely angle only birds and reptiles can achieve. Then it cawed once and flew away. As it flew, a single feather dropped into my lap. I picked up the feather, stared at its beautiful silky blackness. I was able to get down from the roof then. I don't remember how I did it now, but at the time that didn't matter. I've kept the feather, because to me, at that moment, it was magickal. Perhaps there was more to the encounter. Perhaps it was only coincidence.

The point is, every person has things that hold meaning for him and him alone—some general, some specific. Tarot cards are symbols, magickal because we believe them to be so, yet for many of us, they work. A pentagram necklace sold from a basket filled with dozens of pentagram necklaces is only magickal because you make it so. To you, a black candle may be mere wax, but I can introduce you to people who can make miracles with its smoke. As you grow into your talents, you will find the things that are magickal for you. Just remember: The True Magick is inside of you.

Steps in the Dance

We are unique individuals. Each one of us has different talents, different things we can do, and different ways of looking at both. We've had endless discussions over what we call those abilities, how to describe them. No one's suggestions capture the exact nature of those inclinations perfectly. Magick is too ephemeral to be defined precisely.

Nevertheless, Reality has a few common elements; once you can take them by the hand (or throat), it's easy to lead these elements where you want them to go. You might think of them as steps in a dance, or words in an intricately woven song. I call them:

- **The Arts of the Web, the Connection Between All Things and Places:** In old spells, this element represents the ties of similarity and the bridge spanning great distances. To invoke it, use tools that connect you to the thing you wish to influence or join.

- **Fate and Decay, the Arts of Mortality and Fortune:** In many ways, these are the oldest magicks, spells that twist the threads of chance and change. The trappings of death (dust, grave-soil, bones and such) work well for spells that invoke the power of decay, while objects of fortune (coins, dice, cards, etc.) twist the threads without snapping them.

- **Elemental Forces, the Arts of Fire, Wind and Darkness:** While some elements, like Earth and Water, are solid and heavy, these Arts command the fleeter aspects of creation: electricity, light, shadows, the air. Like these elements, spells that employ them must be swift and merciless—hot passions, fierce rages, sharp weapons, even power tools. Force enchantments are the most destructive of all, and make excellent fighting spells. Even then, though, a subtle hand is preferable to a clumsy one. As I said, we are not thugs.

- **The Leaf and the Flesh, the Songs of Life:** Healing, harming, shaping and shape-changing... this powerful yet

beautiful series of Arts links the mortal flesh to the eternal spirit. Make-up, body art, sex and bodily fluids make this a messy but potent specialty, but it's helpful if you never want to grow old.

• **Elemental Matter, the Arts of Stone, Wood and the Deep:** Scientists and priests would call such things "inanimate" objects; my pagan friends would disagree, claiming all things have souls. Whatever. All I know is a mage with the right tricks can bend steel, see through walls and turn leather jackets into kevlar with a little know-how and a few tools — tools like laboratories, a carpenter's toolkit and a knack for craftsmanship.

• **Charm-Song, the Arts of Persuasion, Perception and Possession:** My personal favorite, this specialty grants you power over the pathetic monkeymass we jokingly call "humanity." Seriously, a master of Charm-Song can rifle through the mental drawers of anyone around her without being noticed. Hard stares, kind words, good looks and the eternal power of suggestion focus this near-invisible magick into a Darkling's best friend.

• **Primal Force, the Dance of the Fifth Invisible Essence:** You know about the fifth point on a pentacle, don't you? The one that goes up or down, depending on which side of the God Squad you're pitching for? This Art focuses on the energies of that fifth point, on the raw creative force spawned by passion and life. By attuning yourself to it with sex, drugs and rock-n-roll (or any other kind of music or artwork), you can sense these forces and channel them to your purposes.

• **The Wing and the Voice, the Arts of the Gods:** Sometimes you call them; sometimes they call you. Either way, that fifth point on the pentacle has a self-motivated aspect, too: spirits. Call them by whatever names you like — Loa, ghosts, elementals, gods, sprites.... The fact is, they exist. Darklings with Christian inclinations refer to them as angels and demons, but pagan ones simply see them as the elements incarnate. Anyone who practices ghost-talk and shamanism invokes these tricky things with seances, fasts, sacrifices and invocation rites, but be careful. This Art bites back!

• **Chronos, the Aria of Time:** It's all a matter of perception, they say. If you can train yourself to view time differently, you can look into the past or future, notice ripples in the timestream, or even (so I've heard) bend time around you. I know a few people who've mastered these tricks; at the base level, you can read the future in a deck of Tarot cards, or postcognitize the history of a place or item. Advanced spells use drugs, sex, drinking and fasting to take a wizard out of her usual perceptions of time, letting her manipulate it as she will.

These are my definitions, the names I choose to give the steps in the dance. There are no "official spheres of magick," or any of that bullshit. Chances are, any Darkling will give you different names, if he chooses to name them at all. That's the beauty of our way: Unlike the hidebound sects of our rivals, we refuse to be bound to a single Periodic Table of Magick. Woo the Mysteries as you see fit.

Playing Nicely



*You don't scare us with your badges and banners
You know fuck-all about heavy manners
— The Business, "Suburban Rebels"*

Meanwhile, as you woo magick, the night woos you. With a 1000 different voices, with caresses and threats and vague seductions, the currents of humanity and its dark counterparts flow around you like a vast, powerful sea. Careful, my little friend — here be sharks, and urchins, and remorseless undertows. Not a one of us is safe, but if you're smart, you'll learn to swim without being dragged down.

I've told you about the other secret societies who want to enslave us. Some, like the wild Cultists, pagan Verbena and cyber-weirdo Virtual Adepts, make helpful friends. We're not so different when you get down to it. If they could just quit their Council and dance with us in the night, they might see us as the equals that we are. Most of the other "traditions," though, view us as children to be herded, taught or spanked as the whim takes them. Fuck that! We may not have their centuries of expertise, but we understand the modern night better than the best of them.

I'll be the first to admit that the "spirit traditions," the Dream-shamans and their Good Death buddies, understand god-craft better than we do. These sorcerers don't believe in death, and so they don't really die, just cycle through endless incarnations. While a few of us can master that trick, too many Darklings surrender to the illusions of heaven and hell. Consequently, we sometimes get stuck in between, joining the ghosts. Not these mages, though. Truth to tell, they're a creepy lot, even by our standards. When you look one in the eye, you can see eternity. Good thing they don't hate us! Still, for all their wisdom, they're stuck at the same Last Supper as their friends. Too bad.

The others, as a whole, do not care for us at all. The Order of Hermes, with the exception of a small House called Thig, is astoundingly reactionary. The Jet Li psychos who call themselves "akashic brothers" and the equally demented Singing Christers hate us, too, and I can't say there's much love lost on our end. When Jeremy Case went to the Council chambers, these guys put the smack down on him, hard. The mad scientists — the Sons of Frankenstein or something like that — spend all their time enmeshed in their experiments, building a web of science and magick. They frighten the other sects

as much as we do, and yet they are accepted. Very random choice. Maybe they asked more politely than we did.

But even though there's very little chance of it, we could someday call the "traditions" friends. The real threats to us come from the walking dead men of the "technocratic union," and from the subtle machinations of those infernalists I mentioned earlier. Both of these sects play the game too well for our comfort, and many Dark Children have been led off by Pied Piper infiltrators from either side. Although some infernal sects have made overtures of friendship to Hollow cliques, I can tell you that those kind of bargains are liar's games. Sooner or later, you'll have to bend your knee at someone's altar. The moment you do that, you're no longer one of us.

Every once in a while, the Nightbird takes wing inside a human body, sending the mage insane. It happens a lot, especially to our kind. These Mad Ones are too dangerous to be called friends, but they make good cover when you have to run. If you can manage to get one talking, listen; no Nightbird speaks truer than a demented mage.

But rival wizards are only part of the midnight tapestry of the streets. You could go months, even years, without meeting one. There are other, more prominent members of the urban drama — like the club kids, for example, who surround us like moths drawn to our flames. Or the local street people, who understand the territory better than we do; they hear the gossip, know where the good drugs are, know who's new, and who doesn't belong. Don't forget the cops; most of the time, they don't bother us, but when they do, they can send your sorry gothic butt to jail — or the morgue — for the price of a little paperwork. Then there are the poseurs, kids who just come down for a weekend of club life; these lame fucks are usually easy to spot — they look uncomfortable in their clothes, or don't bother to dress up at all. Still, a rich frat boy cruising goth pussy can be 10 kinds of useful, and you don't even have to touch the creep.

Every so often, we throw an open party or two. Many very fascinating creatures turn out for those events — beautiful, beguiling, wondrous entities with flint hearts and mortal hungers. Oh, they're hot... so hot you'll want to burn your skin off dragging them to bed. I can tell you, from more than a few knock-down fuck-fests, that nothing remotely mortal can match the entrancing power of the not-quite-dead, but you have to be very clear when and where to draw the line. Make no mistake; these are beings who can hurt you badly if they choose, and too much intimacy with one of them could kill you... or worse.

There's a gentleman who attends our Halloween soiree every year. He dresses eccentrically, in a black suit with a brightly patterned shirt and a top hat, but no one ever mocks him. I've spoken with him many times, and he's as witty, charming and sensual as the French courtier he claims he once was. He's also a vampire, and makes no attempt to hide the fact. I've seen him walk off with many a Dark Young Thing's soul in his hand. Take

my advice: Look, play, but do not get too close. Whatever you do, don't ever share blood with one; three drinks of a single vampire's blood, and your will becomes his toy. They call those toys "Blood Dolls," and there are quite a few Darklings among them — Hollow Ones who have been filled with a vampire's commands.

But although we may resemble the vampires among us, our closest night-kin are the ghosts — those who have died, but have not passed on. Held to this earth by unsolved sorrows, they weep and rage in the corners of our world, yearning to taste life again. As spiritualists from Day One, we make room for the dead at our tables; sometimes we call them up to join the party, or allow them to ride us for a while, or do them a favor or two. In return, they tell us secrets, watch our backs, and act as mentors when and if one of our own crosses into the Shadowlands. Should you meet a ghost, treat her with courtesy and compassion. She may once have been one of us. Someday, she could be you....

A Final Thought

She draws away from you with a slight, malicious smile. "... not that this would be such a bad thing. Death is overrated, and far from an eternal ending. Would existence as a forlorn spirit be that much different than the life you recently led? So many people are nothing more than fleshy ghosts, moaning around a haunted castle in chains of their own inanity.

"You claim to have transcended that. But are you so sure? Or are we all ghosts, even now, just waiting for the dawn to make us disappear?"

The candles on your table burn brighter, suddenly, and Denise rises to her feet, holding out her thin left hand. Like a supplicant, you bestow a kiss on her cool, ringed fingers, and she smiles like a princess. A dark princess with a favorite toy. "The lesson is over," she says. "My throat is dry. Why don't you get me a drink?"

In response, you close your eyes and gesture, thinking cool, liquid thoughts. A moment later, a pretty boy, eyes limned with kohl, presents you with a fresh glass of wine. You smile, nod your thanks, and present the gift to Denise. "Well done," she remarks. "You learn quickly...."

Now you know something of our secrets, our history, our dreams. Are we, as some have called us, a "lost tradition?" Hardly. We are the new world, the new way. Bred in fire, blood and shadow, nurtured by hatred and dementia, and inspired by poets, artists and madmen, we ask for no one's favors. Everything we know, we've learned on our own terms — how to be strong, how to survive, how to grow.

Maybe it's the "traditions" time to change, now. The old ways don't work anymore. The old world is dead. This world is ours. They'll have to accept us for their own survival. Maybe we'll learn something in the process, but those lessons will be gained on our conditions; no more bartering janitorial services for small lessons, like that hopeless kid in "The Sorcerer's Apprentice!" No, our "cousins" will have to deal with us as equals, nothing less! In this war that is life, we have earned respect.

Good night, beloved, and fare well....



Chapter III: Crashspace

Hell eats its tourists.

— Andrew Vachss, *Strega*



The blood is long dried, but I can still see the place where I beat my head against the bricks until the voices inside quieted down. Sometimes, I still feel the comforting “crunch,” and see the spinning bright lights flaring and dying like novas in the dark.

On a good night, I can walk past the place where Jennifer and I kissed for the first time. If you look closely, you can see our ghosts leaning up against the lamppost, drinking each other as only young lovers can. On a really good night, I can make it past the spot without breaking down. Most times, though, I walk away blind with tears. I’m glad the ghosts still look happy.

There’s a mural of a girl painted on a crackhouse wall down on Fifth. It’s pretty fucking old. When I look at it in the right light, I can see the hands that painted it, and hear Janis Joplin blaring from the speakers and drowning out the faint crackle of smoked rock ice.

The city sandblasted the “A WOMAN WAS RAPED HERE” signs off the pavement. The words had bordered silhouettes sprawled naked on the sidewalk. Apparently, the images upset people. If I’m having a particularly bad day, I can hear the muffled cries and wet sucking sounds; on better nights, I taste the tears of the artist who stenciled her warnings on every rape-site on campus, and smell the spraypaint on the wind.

It’s not all bad. I can still smell the musk of the first girl I made love to, hear the whispered assurances of eternal devotion and all that high-

school stuff. When I dare to walk past my parents’ house, I savor the sweet melt of ice cream and the sugar kiss of my 10th birthday cake. My favorite club still holds impressions of drunken revels, the dancing spectres of a freer time. If I really care to focus the sensations, they’re as real as the day I felt them.

But then, I’m not that much of a sucker for pain. This city crawls with ghosts, and a lot of them are mine.

The Living Landscape

Everyone needs to sleep, to party, to meet friends, dodge rivals and stage all life’s little dramas. To some people, mages especially, the landscape is one more character in the play. Far from being a backdrop, the area takes on a bit of life from the events occurring there. Orphans don’t really call this life-spark “Resonance,” but they feel it just the same.

This chapter describes a few of the many places where the self-Awakened gather. The first location, Chapel Perilous, has been left “vagabond” and ready-to-run. The Storyteller can place it wherever she wants, and begin new scenarios there as she sees fit. Some of the other places, described in less detail, but with more possibilities, have been left with “revolving door” casts. Any or all of these places can find their way into rumors, tales and plots as your chronicle expands beyond the doors of the local nightclub and overflows into the shadows....

The Chapel Perilous



*Their razor-sharp tongues
Invite to relax
As they slip the skin on your
Eyelids back
Invasive spectators
Get into the act
With roses and candles
Silver knives and spoons*

— Christian Death, "Figurative Theatre"

The blackened church dominates the entire block. Everything nearby has been laid to waste. Man-made cracks run down the stairs and expand like a web across the sidewalk and street. At night, blacklights bathe the area in an eerie glow, bringing out twisted artwork and sigil scrawls amongst the layered graffiti.

Inside, music threatens to at once transport and deafen. Drugs flow into young gullets, lungs and veins. A mob of painted and powdered waifs dance alone in outfits too darkly perfect to be real. In small clutches, children of the night dispense cruelties and pleasantries. Giant, but quite genuine spider webs hang from the high rafters amongst statuary both angelic and demonic.

The club dubbed Chapel Perilous is located in a huge deconsecrated Catholic church between two burned-out apartment buildings. The neighborhood is filled with lavish Victorian buildings now fallen into disrepair and decay. Despite the club's reputation as being the easiest place in the city to score ex and speed, police have a hands-off policy with the popular nightspot. Four nights a week, Perilous caters to a stylish but politically uninfluential goth clientele. But on Mondays, it's a sex club specializing in S&M, patronized by a selection of the area's richest and most powerful citizens.

The demographics of Chapel Perilous vary crazily from night to night. On Tuesdays, the self-styled gothic elite holds court to discuss the important matters of the night. Topics invariably include who is cheating on whom, which of those people are junkies, what to wear on Friday, and who can and cannot dance. Other gossip is shouted from mouths close to ears over the alternating deep, melodic gloominess and industrial frenzy of the dance floor.

Wednesday is drag night. On those nights, many of the men have bigger hair than the women, and the competition for the hottest dress is fierce. The music on Wednesdays is a heart-pumping blend of techno and dance, with inevitable interludes of Madonna favorites.

Thursday has gone through a variety of themes, but usually winds up as a try-out night for fledgling bands. A number of truly over-the-top industrial and death-metal

bands got their start here, ignited by the creative fire of the moshing orphans in attendance.

On Fridays, the goth community shows up *en masse* to show off its finest black Victorian clothes, dental-cap fangs, and darker-than-thou attitude. The smoke generators are cranked up in earnest, but it's other varieties of smoke that cause the clientele to cough quietly under the heroin-inspired vocals and electronic beats of the thundering sound system.

Every Saturday, the club is packed to the rafters with seething, moshing humanity. Minds are twisted and eardrums are shattered during live concerts by some of the best bands the industrial, goth, and metal genres have to offer.

Sundays are relatively staid, informal gothic affairs. Despite the reserved air, there's a vicious undercurrent to these nights. Ambient music, far-less frenetic than the usual din, allows cruel gossip to circulate with devastating psychological effect.

The club is officially closed on Mondays and the dance floor is almost never used. But on these evenings, limousines discreetly maneuver into the defunct church's back lot as aging men in expensive suits furtively jog to the upstairs entrance with bags full of fetish gear. Inside, rich patrons indulge in perverse acts with an expendable staff of male and female prostitutes, coupling and dying beneath the unseen lenses of silent video cameras.

Layout

The foreboding exterior of Chapel Perilous, once white, is now covered in soot. Its twin towers and ornate construction suggest pretensions of being a cathedral rather than merely a large church. At night, black lights radiate from the windows, adding to the otherworldly feel of the place.

The ground-floor interior is dominated by the stage and the scarred dance floor. When the fog machine isn't running, you can even see where most of the pews used to be. On many nights, there's a line waiting to use confessionals. The kids call them "the blow rooms" for both of the obvious reasons.

Backstage is a dimly lit labyrinth connecting the dressing rooms and the office of the owner, Norm. On most nights, invite-only parties are held in each of the dressing rooms. Various perverse (and, occasionally, supernatural) indulgences keep these bacchanals... interesting. Norm's office, however, is inaccessible to clubgoers. Inside, he sits alone, surrounded by dust, skin mags, closed-circuit monitors, and an extensive collection of inflatable sex dolls.

Nearly a score of speedfreaks and a few orphans live in the chic squalor of the church basement. Most of the place's 10 minuscule rooms are insanely overcrowded and seriously

fucked-up from constant turnover and prolonged neglect. A few long-termers have their own rooms, each one decorated in black lace and *Crow* posters. These favored few burn enough incense to cover the worst of the foul odors coming from their neighbors... and from the bathroom.

Years ago, someone rather appropriately nicknamed the men's common toilet "Malfeas." Almost nobody living there knows the meaning of the term, but the name stuck anyway. Urine stands in pools that take months to evaporate, and many joke that the mold growing in the toilets has achieved a dark sentience. The hallway and women's bathroom, while chokingly dusty, are actually relatively free of food and human waste. Anyone who dared to foul either area has had to answer to Denise, the reigning queen of Chapel Perilous. That reckoning has never been pleasant.

Denise's room stands in contrast to the rest of the basement. The walls are lined with mirrors, making the place seem almost palatial. The purple lace covering the seams at the corners matches the velvet of her diminutive canopy bed. Despite the small size of the room, the draperies, mirrors and lush cushions scattered around the place make it seem more like a queen's secret boudoir than the cramped quarters of a self-Awakened kid. But then, illusions are stock-in-trade in Denise's little world.

The club's upstairs "playroom" has been covered in EZ-Kleen plastic. Although there are a few couches and beds in recessed alcoves, most of the "furniture" is an inventive variety of torture devices. These range from relatively staid racks to nameless, intimidating, and often lethal creations. Since the "employees," rather than clientele, often end up on the receiving end of the Monday-night torture sessions, the truly vicious equipment sees a fair amount of use. A hidden chute leads to a pit far below the club's basement; there, hideous shambling *things* emerge from catacombs and collect the leavings of the night's festivities... including the occasional half-dead survivor.

The left-hand church tower is the domain of Strange. He allows few guests into his sanctum, but those who have visited describe it as either wondrous or haunted. The furnishings, other than a grand piano that couldn't possibly have been brought up the spiral stairs, are relatively mundane. Tolkien, musical scores, and military psych-ops manuals sit stacked on the many bookshelves. Several containers of Asian delivery food overflow the garbage can. The truly distinguishing feature of Strange's realm, however, is the presence of odd, aethyric entities that float through harmlessly at random intervals. Most of these creatures take no notice of their surroundings, and appear in the form of bloated primordial fish. A few resemble human ghosts, and rant silently to anyone unfortunate enough to see them.

Scenes, Mind Games and Cliques

Clubgoers from various subcultures haunt Chapel Perilous, and many of these socialites belong to more than one scene. While "gothic" types, bisexuals and junkies dominate

the scene, debate rages over what constitutes "gothic" and who (if anyone) can really be considered bisexual. (Nobody really cares about the junkies.) While many of the club's most dedicated customers show up at least once a week, a smattering of fresh hangers-on, thrill-seekers and poseurs keep the social blades sharp and the victim-pool full.

Awakened orphans — Hollow Ones and non-aligned magi alike — comprise a small but influential portion of the club's clientele. Two cliques dominate the Awakened scene. The Revelers, led by Denise, essentially strive to preserve the status quo; the shunned remain shunned; the cool are still considered cool, and kids can still get all the drugs they want. The other clique is nameless, a mutating, informal beast comprised of Hollow Ones, a few other orphans, and their fuck-bunnies. About three times a month, this group meets outside Perilous to share spells, theories and gossip. Half of these meetings degenerate into ego-strutting, in-fighting and melodrama. Despite (or, perhaps, because of) the chaos, a newly Awakened mage can gain a wealth of information at one of these meetings — if she manages to get invited.

Most of the club regulars claim to be bisexual; for the most part, this allows them to dress androgynously and fuck anyone they please without considering the true nature of their sexuality. Despite the fact that very few people at Perilous care who fucks whom, most openly gay locals keep their distance, even on drag night. (*"Honey, I have enough problems already!"*)

Amidst the atmosphere of casual drug use at Chapel Perilous, there exists a desperate junkie subculture. A few junkies regularly steal, mug or murder other patrons to feed their addictions; most, however, stay high by dealing — the club's always full of customers. Ecstasy's pretty popular among the lightweights, but speed (dangerously cheap in the area) has a larger following. Heroin and coke have their devotees as well, but few of the hardcore junkies can afford to stay stoned on those drugs regularly. Occasionally, a batch of angel dust arrives at Perilous; usually, blood flows and Paradox is unleashed in the wake of the PCP.

Regulars

On any given night, the club is packed with Sleepers; even so, the prevalence of drugs, occult trappings and sheer chaos makes the club a minor nexus for supernatural activity. A half-dozen vampires consider the place a prime feeding ground, and several ghosts haunt the basement and upstairs chambers. A posse of evil Bane spirits infests the lower reaches of the club, and several hover around the playroom on Monday nights.

Given the wild and often corrupt nature of the Perilous, its Resonance is thick, dark and bitter. Magi who favor such heady brews find the club's aura intoxicating, but others, wary of such a sinister nexus, have been trying to

either shut the club down or reform it from within. So far, neither side has had much success. Several members of the nameless clique wage a silent war with the so-called Revelers, but so far, this conflict has involved more mind games and trash talk than fistfights or magick duels.

When magick is in the air, it flows rather freely. The regulars have been so conditioned to weird shit that occult-style spells, black-magick rites and odd events are considered coincidental. Really powerful rites or Technomagickal Effects remain vulgar, but the regulars are not considered "witnesses" when Paradox or casting difficulties come into play.

The club's usual cast of characters includes (but is not limited to):

Denise

Background: Denise leads the Reveler clique, a gathering of Hollow Ones who command the local scene. As Queen of the Night's Children, she concerns herself with maintaining the social pecking order among both the Awakened and the gothic elements of the Chapel Perilous.

The child of fading film stars, Denise grew up in Beverly Hills amidst decadent, declining fortune. In her terrible two's, she set fire to the house three times and threw 48-hour marathon tantrums. Since then, she has been raised by psychologists, spending half her childhood in various private institutions for "emotional disturbance." By age 10, she had caused countless residential counselors to give up their careers in favor of nervous breakdowns. The psychologists, however, were treated better; Denise enjoyed learning (and winning) their mind games. By age 14, she blackmailed her way out of institutional care and entered public school. She Awakened at 16 when her then-boyfriend tried to rape her. He was put in traction after following her command to screw himself. Not long after that, Denise ran away and went Hollow.

Denise has been living at Chapel Perilous for about three years. Early on, the regulars discovered that it was both dangerous and unwise to ignore her dictates. Denise's looks can literally kill. Certain overly friendly patrons and bouncers can only attest to this fact posthumously.

A master of the smear campaign, Denise is currently poisoning the reputation of at least three other club regulars, for slights both real and imagined. At least twice that many are trying to drag her from her position as head chick of the clique. Norm Burns, on the other hand, kowtows to her in most things, although he *does* charge her rent. Denise makes her money by going up to boys and saying, "Hey lover, can I have a 20 to get us some drinks?" and then wandering off with it. It causes some melodrama, but there are plenty of guys who pony up every week.

Although she favors a "queen of Set" demeanor, Denise's magick flows through mental spells. Although she learned to work Mind magick without a focus, she often concen-

trates on the target of her attentions, and channels spite or favor through remarks, dreams and gestures. Although she's been known to hurl the occasional curse, Denise prefers to work on a person's passions, nerves and sanity.

Image: Denise looks about 20, with a model's height and figure. She's pale as death, and twice as sexy. Her porcelain skin and waist-length dreadlocks draw most of the attention. Her clothing is always dark or at least darkly saturated; her clothing tends toward webbing, lace, strapless or backless, but manages a surprising amount of variety within those parameters. Her fashion sense is accented with dental-cap fangs and Egyptian paraphernalia. On special occasions, she'll even wear a pharaoh's headdress or carry the traditional scepter and crook. The total effect of her wardrobe has caused Trevor Seeker to comment on several occasions that she looks like a Settite, but nobody else gets the joke.

Roleplaying Hints: You *must* be in control, the center of attention in every situation. Flatter your friends and devastate your enemies. You're the life of the party as long as people do things your way. Otherwise, there is hell to pay — you will not relax or relent until you are given proper respect! Psychoanalyze everyone, take personal note of their faults, and keep everything you learn as ammunition for later attacks (social, emotional and, sometimes, magickal).

Notes: In game terms, Denise is an Adept-level mage (see the **Mage: The Ascension** rulebook, p. 275), with Mind 4, Arete 5, and minimal skills in Correspondence (1), Entropy (2), Life (2) and Spirit (3). Her other Traits include Manipulation and Appearance 4, Brawl 2, Intimidation 4, Seduction 4, Subterfuge 3, Occult 3, Science (Psychology) 3, Willpower 7, and the Allies Background at 5.

Clarence

Background: Several bouncers work at Perilous, but Clarence is *the* bouncer. The others combined aren't as big as he is, and he's the one who works the door. Contrary to the popular stereotype, Clarence is pretty sharp and quite efficient. Rarely does he need to resort to violence, or even restraint.

Clarence falls somewhere in the gray area between wild talent and total Awakening. Unconsciously, he causes coincidences to go his way more often than not, and he seems immune to mental tampering (which irritates Denise to no end). Before he started as a bouncer, Perilous often had problems when many of the club's Awakened patrons "happened" to arrive at the same time, each demanding to be let in first. Several of the irresponsible and/or impatient orphans would attempt to get in first by using mind control; the result was an endless parade of delayed lines and burned-out bouncers. Both ended abruptly under Clarence's tenure.

Born on the outskirts of a white ghetto, Clarence grew up poor. Even as a child, he was physically imposing. Because of this, most adults mistook his shyness for menace.



The only teachers who encouraged him taught physical education. Clarence excelled under the attention of coaches, but despite aptitude and interest, he was only a "C" student in academics. After high school, he started getting offers for weightlifting competitions, but decided to take the steady and overtime pay of bouncing instead. He's been doing it at various clubs for about six years now, and is wondering where to go from here. Like many people who base their careers on physique, Clarence worries that age will leave him jobless and without useful skills. He suspects he might be able to make useful contacts through his current job, but isn't sure how to go about it. He's used to asking customers to show their I.D.s, not striking up conversations.

Image: Nearly seven feet tall and built like a fleet of trucks, Clarence presents an imposing figure. He wears black muscle T's, leather armbands and either sweatpants or one of the two sets of jeans he's been able to find in his size. In contrast, his skin is pale, with facial features both delicate and somewhat attractive. Even more attractive is his spiky black hair. His movement are sure but understated — competent, not showy.

Roleplaying Hints: Politeness and cool control are the watchwords. By nature, you're quiet and shy, but you have no problem being firm in doing your job. When you must be firm, make it clear that you are only implementing policy, not making personal challenges. There is an emptiness to your smile — the grin of a professional rather than a friend.

Notes: Although un-Awakened in the usual sense, Clarence invokes slight turns of fortune; at the Storyteller's option, things go the bouncer's way. Additionally, he has the Iron Will Merit, a Willpower of 8, and the following other Traits: Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Social Traits of 2, Mental Traits of 3, Brawl and Dodge 4, Intimidation 4, Etiquette 3, and a host of other useful minor skills.

Norm Burns

Background: Norm owns Chapel Perilous. Before that, he was just a small-time pimp with problems keeping a stable of girls. His first "break" came when he discovered which cops were on the take. By paying off police in both cash and favors, he was able to keep his prostitutes from being arrested while turning the pigs on girls who tried to go into business for themselves. In time, higher echelons among the police came to sample the services; later, other members of the city's elite showed interest as well. One of these elite, Councilman Solomon Gray, outlined exactly what they wanted: a discreet location where there were no limits. There, adolescent boys and girls, not professionals,

would be provided to indulge whatever perverse whimsies the "cream of society" could imagine.

"Graduating" from pimp to promoter, Norm purchased Perilous at a foreclosure auction. He hired some goths and metalheads to get the club together, then leased out the rooms in the basement. His sole criteria for selecting tenants were beauty, desperation, and the inability to pay rent. Those who could not pay when rent came due were told to prostitute themselves. Anyone who refused was harassed by police or evicted with surprising swiftness.

Soon afterward, Norm discovered the pit below the club — a former ritual site for Satanic activities that desecrated the original church. Although the cult that had gathered there disappeared long ago, Norm quickly learned that bodies dumped down into the pit also disappeared. Not one to waste an opportunity, he had a chute built from the playroom to the pit. The downstairs neighbors don't seem to mind, and their activities avert a lot of embarrassing questions.

Norm enjoys the influence he has as the owner, but covets the greater power of his Monday-night clientele. At first, he installed hidden video cameras upstairs so that he could watch the live show. Now he's tempted to use it for blackmail, but fears retaliation. In the meantime, he keeps his operation quiet by using corrupt cops as enforcers. Minor threats are arrested for "intent to sell" drugs planted during the arrest. Serious threats are murdered in jail.

Image: In his 40s, Norm has thinning greased-back hair and a noticeable beer belly. His wardrobe is reminiscent of 1970s disco, replete with thick gold chains. His voice resembles nothing so much as a New York cabbie mixed with high-pressure car salesman. Norm has a way of slouching and sweating that makes him resemble an animated sack of potatoes, but his quick eyes and clever questions indicate that he's much smarter than he lets on....

Roleplaying Notes: You try to ingratiate yourself with most people, but an unwholesome sliminess is apparent in everything you do. Occasionally, you catch yourself unconsciously leering or scowling. You speak quickly, the words liberally punctuated with curse words and obscene remarks. Wipe the sweat off your forehead or scratch yourself occasionally, and get as close to the girls as they'll let you get.

Notes: A Sleeper with no special talents, Norm has a lot of mundane influence and a fair amount of money, but not much else of note... other than a video collection that could make you lose your lunch while simultaneously wrecking half the local government. No dummy, Norm has backups of the tapes hidden in several safety deposit boxes, along with secret letters to be opened by his lawyer upon Norm's disappearance or death. No one, not even Denise, knows how extensive Norm's failsafes are, but everyone who knows what he's up to understands how risky his demise would be....

"Uncle" Trevor Seeker

Background: Trevor used to be a hot-for-glory technomage of the Order of Hermes' up-and-coming House Thig. There were even whispers that he'd make it to Doissetep some day. Then the rest of his cabal was cut to ribbons by parties unknown. Trev, who was out taking care of some personal business, returned to find his Chantry a smoking, burned-out shell. Suspected of treason and collaboration, he left House Thig amid a hail of insults and a cloud of gossip.

You wouldn't peg Trev as a Hermetic these days. Now he's more of a drunk veteran. He shows up at Perilous almost nightly, mumbling war stories to anybody who'll listen (and plenty who won't). He never dances, but makes up for it by drinking a lot. "Uncle" Trev's always willing to buy a round for a stranger off his never-ending roll 'o bills, too. There's a price, though; Anybody looking for free drinks had better be ready to have their ears bent for an hour or two. Trev mixes wild fantasies about his own adventures with rather accurate info about the Ascension War, the Deep Umbra, Marauders, what have you. (Not that many regulars believe any of it...)

These days, the extent of Trev's ambition is to occasionally crawl out of his huge, but slovenly apartment and visit Perilous. There, he's known as a lush rather than an Errant. Once in a while, he even gets a chance to give advice to a wet-behind-the-ears orphan. Trev cherishes these opportunities, but his conversational track meanders too much for the information to be particularly intelligible.

Most club patrons think Trevor's just a weird old fart. He's friendly enough, though, and the free drinks go a long way toward ingratiating him with all and sundry. Trev's only real enemy at Perilous is Strange — the two argue incessantly whenever they run into each other. Occasionally, they even engage in "burnout certámen," in which drinks spill like rain and bizarre figures take shape out of the smoke machine's fog. These misty apparitions battle with each other, blank walls, or random passers by until either Paradox or the wizards make them disappear.

Errant or not, Uncle Trev's magick still favors the Hermetic model. Elaborate rituals peppered with glyphs, Enochian incantations and words of power weave oddly disconcerting patterns in the smoky club. Theoretically, Trevor could produce some powerful juju if he really needed to; after his long and precipitous downward spiral, however, he might not even be able to ignite a glass of whiskey, let alone the air itself.

Image: Trevor has shoulder-length gray hair and perpetual stubble. His clothes are strictly army surplus with a noticeable homeless person edge. Trev's voice sounds like he's been smoking for too many years, and his complexion verifies that he has been drinking for too many years.



Roleplaying Notes: You call everyone you meet either “kid,” “pal,” or “brother,” slapping them on the back and starting up long conversations, stranger or no. You can’t go for five minutes without talking about magick and points related, and once you start on such topics it’s impossible to steer you elsewhere. Even when no one is listening, mumble about it to yourself as if you’re telling a funny story to another listener.

Notes: In his burned-out state, Trevor sits at the low end of the Adept scale. Although his Arete (4) and magickal knowledge (Correspondence 1, Forces 3, Prime 2, Spirit 3) should allow him to do more than he does, it’s an open question as to whether or not he *could* do anything more than stir smoke, alcohol or tricks of the light.

Belladonna Spector

Background: Donna Spector (or “Belladonna,” as she’s called) is Denise’s chief rival at Perilous, the unofficial leader of the nameless orphans who don’t belong to Denise’s clique. This group has taken the form of a series of short-lived “magickal recipe groups.” Membership is constantly changing in this informal circle, as new orphans join and others leave to pursue other interests. There is, however, a core group that remains in place, united by a secret agenda: to protect residents from Norm and other predators, and to make Chapel Perilous a safer place in general. Progress is slow on both fronts, and those

few members who have been unfortunate enough to attract attention have either been arrested or disappeared.

A latchkey kid, Belladonna grew up on TV and bad spy novels. She Awoke in the wake of a Mad One’s rampage. When Men in Black showed up to do damage control, she instinctively understood they were a threat. Playing dumb during the agents’ brief interrogation, Belladonna took off at the first opportunity. Adjusting to her new condition was difficult; the only potential tutors she could find demanded either sex or voluntary enslavement of other sorts. Still, she persevered, studying on her own and learning (by trial and error) what to do and what not to do.

She learned politics the same way, going from an near-outcast to a nominal leader by dint of stubbornness and charisma. On a trip to Perilous, she was both attracted and repulsed by the club’s powerful mystick overtones. Over time (and the constant objections of Denise), she has built up a following of orphans who want to see the most evil taints of Perilous purged. Only Belladonna’s popularity and magickal skill have kept her alive this long, but things have a way of changing overnight....

Magickally, Belladonna is subtle and self-taught. Her rituals favor turn-of-the-century spiritualism mixed with a bit of social hypnosis (calming the subject through words and gestures). Every week, she attempts a minor warding on the club grounds. So far, it has done little good.

Image: Belladonna dresses exclusively in vintage '20s flapper clothes, and is never without her long cigarette holder filled with either a hash or tobacco coffin nail. She's thin, tall and graceful, with large, high cheekbones and a melodious voice. Startling blue eyes blaze from beneath short, slicked-down black hair — hair Belladonna shapes into artful waves. There's a modest elegance to her movements that conveys sincerity, even when she's dragged into unpleasant situations (like verbal duels with Denise).

Roleplaying Hints: Cool and poised, your demeanor is that of a lady holding court, and your compassion is masked in diplomacy. You know that atrocious things are happening to kids not much younger than you are, but to act without subtlety would invite disaster. Verbal fencing is your forte; even amongst friends, you can carefully steer a conversation in very revealing directions.

Notes: An Adept of some skill (Arete 5, Life 2, Mind 3, Prime 2, Spirit 2, Time 3), Belladonna has many Allies (4), a bit of Influence (2), and high Social Traits (Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 4). Outside the club, she courts a member of the local skinhead scene, a Sleeper with a lot of dangerous friends....

Erika Zoficka

Background: Erika's one of the residents who covers rent by working as a sub on Mondays. She's both attractive and talented, so Norm sees to it that she doesn't run into any life-threatening abuse on those nights. Erika would rather be doing almost anything else, but none of her recent interviews have panned out, and her limited magical abilities don't seem to be too helpful in the cashflow department.

Her childhood was spent fruitlessly attempting to avoid the verbal abuse of parents. Awakening was largely a process of withdrawing from the world around her. These days, her Avatar (a weeping angel) is in the process of drawing Erika out of her near-Quiet. Unfortunately, the mage is sinking deeper into the Umbra — a frightening place to be when you consider the corruption going on within the club. While she doesn't have the ability to cross the Gauntlet yet, Erika may soon wander off into some distant nightmare forever.

Erika is shy, and her overactive fantasy life has an unfortunate way of leaking into the few conversations she has. Additionally, her self-conscious movements and indefinable, ethereal presence tend to make people uncomfortable. This is not the case amongst her Monday night clients; to them, these qualities make her an ideal submissive. She dresses darkly enough to be counted as a goth, but nobody has stepped up to claim her. Occasionally, she's used as a pawn in Hollow One social games: In these activities, she is tempted out of her shell with the promise of companionship. After a few days of fighting her natural shyness, however, Erika inevitably finds herself rewarded by being left back in the position of pariah. This only strength-

ens her inclination to withdraw, and makes her even more suspicious about overtures of friendship.

Image: Erika wears her mousy brown hair short and covers her well-formed body in drab, ill-fitting clothes. Her cute button-nose and almond-shaped eyes retain a childish innocence. She rarely speaks. When she does, her voice never raises above a near-whisper (almost inaudible in the club din). On Monday nights, Erika's nudity reveals a hidden glory: She seems transported, almost possessed. An intricate black tattoo curves from beneath her breasts and runs down her belly. A similar design brings out the shape of her buttocks and adorns her lower back.

Roleplaying Notes: You can't help but blend into the background. By hovering at the periphery of other peoples' discussions, you've become privy to many secrets. It hasn't really occurred to you to pass any of this information on, but some of the details do occasionally work their way into your fantasy life. In your tentative attempts at conversation, you tend to fidget and look at the floor. You often change subject mid-sentence to topics such as rainbows or dreams about being able to fly.

Notes: Although possessed of a low Arete and a bit of Spirit and Prime magick (both at 2), Erika could hardly be called a mage. Untaught and unguided, Erika's "magick" is entirely intuitive, focused through dreams and trace-states. Sometimes, while dancing or "performing," she opens herself to spirit possession. At those times, she acquires whatever characteristics the "guest" wishes to employ. Several ghosts, Banes and even her long-suffering Avatar sometimes manifest, making Erika far more than the mousy girl she often appears to be. See *The Living Bridge Effect* in *Mage*, p. 219, and the Puppetry Arcanos in *Wraith: The Oblivion*, pp. 158-159, for details about possession. While she cannot manifest *The Spirit Bridge* consciously, Erika is a natural Consort for Puppetry and other forms of spirit-riding.

Strange

Background: Mages are known for their eccentricities, but Strange is definitely an odd one for the breed. One gets the definite impression that when he talks about having tried to take over the world he isn't joking. He doesn't name names, but goes into detail about the power structures of various international corporations, religions and governments, and describes methods of influencing each. Listening to him, it's easy to go into a trance, a willing suspension of disbelief and accept the idea that Strange once quietly stood on the edge of global domination. A few clubgoers have asked him why he doesn't make another bid for rulership. His answer is always a vehement denial of interest in such an endeavor. He is similarly dismissive when asked about the possibility of re-launching his musical career. In fact, when fans approach him with compliments, his favorite reply is, "Oh, are you the one who bought the album, then?"

The Phenomenal Rise and Fall of Strange

Back in the 1970s, in that odd time between the fading of glam and the birth of punk, there was a band called Strange Therapy. They combined the best elements of both musical styles with many quirks of their own. Fronted by Strange (no known first name), who also wrote all the songs and provided some bits of guitar and keyboards, the band's music was driven by electric violin, bass and drums. Their music invoked a swirling miasma of dark, electronic layers embellished with Classical riffs from a heavily treated violin. Strange's lyrical imagery focused on insanity, emotional decay, and a frantic interpretation of life. They were then, and are to this day, unique in the musical world.

Strange himself was fated to be much more than a pop singer with angst in his soul and delusions of grandeur. Following the release of the band's second album, a turning point occurred. Strange Therapy's management arranged to have the launch show of the tour recorded for broadcast. Tensions and excitement ran high. Strange began complaining of crippling headaches and recurring nightmares — "often transpiring whilst I'm awake."

The show began well enough. Those who survived (and could recall the experience) described it as the group's most wildly intense performance. It would be their final performance as well. During the fifth song, "The Others Have Gone," Strange fell into an apparent seizure. What he felt was an explosion of agony behind his eyes, as his brain forced him through a vision of conquest that ended with his downfall and execution.

In the wake of his vision, Strange went mad. The resulting surge of metaphysical power caused the spontaneous combustion of most of the electrical equipment in the area. The cameras and film were utterly destroyed. An amplifier exploded, killing bassist Urban Madness, and injuring drummer Jack Dragon. Falling light fixtures injured a dozen audience members and killed two, and a soundman was permanently deafened by the feedback. Strange was reduced to a blathering heap of insanity, and carted off to an institution. The press claimed faulty wiring was to blame, and that Strange, in his sensitive state, had simply heard and reacted to the deadly feedback first.

Strange, meanwhile, was pronounced insane, and spent the next two years in one of England's fine mental-health facilities. The incarceration may have been a blessing. The cool, dark quietness forced him inside his own mind, and he formed his own path therein. Behind his eyes, he observed a phenomenal story: He, Strange, cult popstar and lunatic, would finesse his way into political power, and come very close to uniting Europe under a single leader — him! Then it would end; he would be deposed, arrested, executed, then the dream would end.

Eventually, he could control the visions, learn the details of his own plans, and watch closely for the points where he would make mistakes. After a time, the screaming stopped. And so after two years, he was released.

Appallingly, knowing full well the outcome, he set his plan in motion! He manipulated the minds of the politicians, the hearts of the people. He was a new entity without fault or past, and he made it appear that he was the hope of the future. Until someone saw through him. It fell apart swiftly, brutally. Strange disappeared in a sleek gray car, and politically was never heard from again.

He spent many years living in a bordello in Paris, speaking quietly to the women between their shifts. Later, he returned to England and opened a floating cabaret, which returned the music world's attention to him.

Meanwhile, the old Strange Therapy albums were bought by Dark Isis music and repackaged into a double CD release. To support the reissue, a tour was booked with a new band. The surviving original ST members refused to have anything to do with Strange. The U.S. tour was a surprise success. The new material was received enthusiastically; even the "elder statesmen" of music criticism agreed that Strange's new work demonstrated a riveting world vision.

Following the tour, Strange remained in the States. These days, he can be found regularly at the Chapel Perilous nightclub. Although he will not seek out companionship or conversation, he engages in it when offered. If asked about the incident in Europe, he merely rubs the bridge of his nose beneath his shades. He is rumored to be recording new work for Dark Isis, and sometimes performs solo shows at local clubs, accompanying himself on piano.

An incorrigible chain smoker, Strange is fond of saying that cigarettes are chock-full of vitamins. He talks about Strange Therapy, the band he fronted in the '70s, like it was yesterday. He clams up when people mention that the album was recently reprinted. He'll go on interminably about ancient history; it's just the future that's a bugaboo.

Strange doesn't seem to notice most of the social Darwinism that occurs around him when he deigns to come down from his tower and visit the rest of the club. The exception is Trevor Seeker, who gets his goat without even trying. Club regulars speculate that the enmity between them stems from unwelcome competition in the tall-tale-telling department — or a secret crush. (They *do* seem to carry on like an old married couple.) Both of them are a few cards shy of a full deck, so it's impossible to be sure exactly *why* they hate each other. For whatever reason, it always stops short of violence, though both hurl the most creative threats at each other....

Magickally, Strange seems almost intuitive. Obviously, he possesses years of occult study, and his gestures and incantations (often Hermetic in nature) betray a practiced grace. Still, he rarely needs tools to work his Arts — they appear upon command, and sometimes display startling imagination. In his tower, it is said that he conjures ghosts and demons, feeding them with the souls of the conquests he occasionally leads up those stairs. When asked, he merely smiles charmingly and asks if you would like to see for yourself....

Image: Strange is over six and a half feet tall and razor thin. His cigarette and shades are constant companions, indoors or out. Black T-shirts or turtlenecks and dress pants are his usual clothes, often covered by a trenchcoat and fedora. His English accent lends a bit of style and charm to his usual bitter expression.

Roleplaying Hints: Always mumble through your cigarette when you talk. Your speech, slurred though it is, remains gracefully British. Most of that talk concerns conspiracy theories — usually a few notes short of the full “truth” of the matter: “The Technocracy doesn't know it, but UFOs are bio-engineered *X-File* alien-looking creatures that some Technocrats cooked up for God knows what reason. They're trying to get a hold of the orbital mind-control lasers to make the tabloids print their papers with an LSD-laced ink....”

Boasting about your history is another favorite conversational bid. However, you refuse to discuss future plans. In fact, you try to avoid even *contemplating* future plans. Occasionally, though, you catch yourself dreaming of recapturing past glories.

Notes: A self-Awakened mage of high Adept power, Strange has an Arete of 6, Mind and Spirit of 4, and some talent with Correspondence (3), Entropy (2), Life (2), and Time (3). Those talents, complemented by his powerful Charisma (4), good looks (Appearance 4) and wit (Etiquette 3), scare the hell out of Denise. While she finds him



almost irresistible, he blows her off like smoke from his cigarettes. Strange drifts along the edges of Quiet most of the time, and his hobgoblins often manifest as ectoplasm in his room... or, occasionally, around the club.

Silver (a.k.a. Rose Argent)

Background: Silver is known to be a veteran of the original gothic/ new romantic music scene, though rumor places her subculture origins to well before that era. She has a love/hate relationship with the whole club scene, but an obvious affection for the kids enmeshed within it. She rarely ever visits Chapel Perilous, but when she does, many of the regulars flock to her table. They remember her from what she refers to as her "chronic club days," or from conversations with her elsewhere. Silver detests Norm; when she's at the Chapel, she fastidiously ignores him, despite his oiliest attempts to cozy up to her. Denise is uncomfortable around Silver; although she wouldn't dare harm the elder, she refers to her at every opportunity as "that old lady." No one knows where Silver actually resides, but those who wish to visit with her can find her via the Bag O' Beans, a nearby coffee house.

An "elder mage" according to local gossip, Silver has lived through the birth and demise of a variety of subcultures. She's also experienced the grief of losing too many friends to the "on the edge" lifestyle that so often accompanies subculture. An idealist beneath her cynical veneer, she tries to steer newcomer kids in what she considers to be a more positive direction, away from Norm Burns' sleaziness and Denise's artificial social hierarchy.

Silver does have one secret — a crush on Strange. Strange himself is only vaguely aware of her feelings, and is a little uncomfortable around her.

Image: Silver appears to be in her early 20s, but is actually much older. The gothic influence is inherent in Silver's style, but she plays it uniquely, eschewing unrelieved black as she blends jewel-toned velvets with touches of glitter. Her multi-hued hair swirls uncontrolled around her pale face, framing meticulously painted eyes. If Denise is Egypt, Silver is Babylon.

Roleplaying Hints: (See also Chapter I.) Be sweet to almost everyone except Norm. You're fully aware of the social games enacted around you, but care little for them — it's all quite foolish, and there are other more important things to be considered. You prefer to relish the beauty of the night, though you're relentlessly aware of its murderous side, too. You're especially sympathetic to any little gothling who's having a particularly cruel evening. You'll dance, but only to music you truly adore — classic bands like Bauhaus and the Sisters of Mercy.

Notes: In game terms, Silver is a low-level Master, with more Arete (6) than raw power. Although her talents with mental and spiritual spells are impressive (Mind and Spirit 4), she rarely uses them. In a pinch, she can whip up storms (Forces 4), heal injuries (Life 3) and conjure Etheric forces (Prime 2). Again, however, she rarely does.

Instead, she prefers to let people around her do as they will, and lets the currents of fortune take her where they will. (Her Entropy 2 or Time 2 divination spells don't hurt, though....)

Solomon Gray

Background: Councilman Solomon Gray is by no means the most famous of the politicians who attend the Chapel's private parties; he is, however, amongst the most influential. He has run unopposed in the last three elections. His record in office appears to be a shining example for others to follow, and the reported crime rate in his ward has dropped to record lows.

Solomon's success is paid for in human blood and suffering. He has run unopposed because his political opponents are blackmailed, threatened into compliance, or injured in "accidents." Threats often involve having people kidnapped, gagged, tossed into open graves, and partially buried. Solomon's connections with both corrupt cops and the Mob ensure that other criminal elements can be forced out with brutal efficiency, while Mafia activities are ignored.

For some time, Solomon has been content with his position as a councilman. A higher position would attract unwanted scrutiny. Instead of seeking promotion, this "servant of the people" consolidates his influence over city and state government officials through cash, blackmail and, occasionally, police triggermen or Mob extortion experts.

The councilman displays his personal sadism, normally only enacted by proxy, at Chapel Perilous. He has personally injured or killed nearly two dozen Perilous kids while indulging his cruel lusts. The injured are sent to a nigh-medieval street doctor. The deceased are dropped down the chute to the waiting things below.

Image: Solomon is in his late 50s, and has a gentle, grandfatherly appearance and demeanor. His hair, though white, shows no signs of balding. It is his eyes, however, that convey the Councilman's vitality. His movements are measured, mature but confident, and his voice carries with the surety of a man who understands power, emotion, and the uses (and abuses) of each.

Roleplaying Notes: The amiable, competent mask you wear before the public is unflappable. You can flawlessly become the center of attention when it suits your purposes, or effectively remain in the background. Outside the public eye, you're a calculating and sadistic tyrant. You politely demand total compliance from those around you, and keep plenty of people on hand to give "reminders" to those who attempt to test their reins.

Notes: There's nothing supernatural about Solomon — he's a simple, if charismatic politician with lots of skills, resources, Allies, Influence and Ties. Even so, he's a bad man to fuck with; between his personal stubbornness (Willpower 7), political influence, underworld connections and social popularity, he can make life extraordinarily unpleasant for anyone he dislikes... no matter who they might be.

Other Important Places



Wise blood, the sky's on fire

Away, away

— Oysterband, "We Shall Come Home"

Any place can be important in the shadowy dealings of the Awakened — coffee shops, drive-ins, cemeteries, even movie theaters provide meeting places for magi, particularly self-Awakened ones with no better place to call home. The following places provide a brief look at some of the more famous night spots in this twilight world; although their "regulars" have been hinted at, most of them are left to the Storyteller's discretion. The best tales, after all, are peopled by the characters you create.

The Heights

Situated in the penthouse of an uptown New York high-rise with a stunning view of Central Park, the Heights is just the place for the wealthy and fashionable amongst the Awakened to mix and mingle over Bombay Sapphire martinis and fine cigars. A modern-day salon is exactly what Lenora Farucci was going for when she opened the place. Having never identified with the hard-edged underground scene, Miss Farucci established the salon for other jet-setters like herself. In recent days, however, she has relaxed the rules slightly to include anyone who wishes to come up and mix and mingle with the well-heeled guests.

The Heights' popularity can be attributed to many sources. The parties thrown there are legendary, chock-full of celebrities both magickal and mundane. Rumors abound that this particular penthouse served as the operating headquarters of the Associates. For many visitors, coming to the Heights is like journeying to Mecca. There's a certain mysterious draw, something even Lenora Farucci herself cannot explain. The place has a powerful, invisible aura of accumulated energy, an egregore built up over the course of several years. Although the penthouse is not a Node in itself, it shares the blazing energy and powerful Resonance of a magickal nexus. Anyone aware enough to sense mystickal currents can feel the spark of vitality that blazes through the place, day or night. Outside the room, however, that spark has been shielded by powerful wards. Like the Waydown, The Heights are renowned to all the *right* people and a mere rumor to everyone else.

On a typical evening at The Heights, you can find non-aligned mages trading stories, comparing notes, sharing spells and, generally, having a good time. The atmosphere is lively but not overpowering. A jazz band usually plays the classics, although from time to time Lenora brings in a good acoustic rock band. It's a place to see and be seen, a place that encourages its Awakened patrons to be glamorous and

classy. As such, there's a pretty strict dress code: Ladies appear in their most dramatic evening wear, and men often sport well-cut, designer suits. Don't be surprised if you think you see a vampire or two; this is one of the few places where they're welcome to mix and mingle with magickal society... so long as they behave.

The Starling building, located on the northern perimeter of Central Park, is a sight to behold in its own right. A modern building constructed in the old art-deco style, the tower sports sensuous lines, curves and frosted glass. The interior doors are reproductions of famous Frank Lloyd Wright stained-glass creations. After a check-in with the doorman, a guest is ushered into the lobby. There, the *maitre d'hôtel* personally escorts you to the private elevator. A 37-story trip later, the doors open up to a large foyer where you can hand your coat off to the valet, then it's through the ornate double doors and onto the landing of a sweeping double staircase.

From here, you have a great view of the main room below and a stunning view of the city through the floor-to-ceiling windows. Walking down either side of the staircase takes you to the main floor. There, a fashionable arrangement of couches, chairs and coffee tables awaits, accented by standing lamps, various pieces of artwork and plant arrangements. A huge built-in bookshelf runs across the far-left wall, filled with a vast collection of works.

To the right, you can see the fully appointed kitchen and dining area. Down corridors to either side of the stairways sit private rooms where visitors may stay if they're seeking sanctuary, if they're new in town, or otherwise too tired, drunk, or stoned to leave. A "rent" of favors (the longer the stay, the bigger and more elaborate the services) keeps the place from becoming a flophouse.

If you're lucky, you might be invited into the secret study, reached through a revolving section in the wall. Within, a visitor may partake of fine cigars and vintage brandy. Despite the elaborate decor and air of privilege, there isn't anything especially valuable in the study. The exclusivity of the place is desirable enough.

Aside from the Sleeper hotel staff and a few skillful consors, there aren't any "regulars" as such. Noted magi (see Chapter IV) often visit, however, along with whatever famous (or infamous) characters seem most appropriate to the Storyteller. Although The Heights is a neutral, open area, a strict air of decorum and code of honor keeps things from getting out of hand. To date, no one has ruined Lenora Farucci's wonderful gift. Everyone who attends the parties realizes what a good thing they have. Anyone threatening that good thing would surely call down the wrath of some of the most powerful orphans — and their friends — in the land.



The Majestic Cafe

In 1957, the Majestic movie palace closed its doors forever. That same year, Arthur Smith opened up a small diner in the East Village. He bought the old "Majestic" marquee sign at an auction, and installed the extravaganza of neon and flashing lights above the diner, where it's been ever since.

Essentially, the Majestic is your typical hole in the wall diner, where breakfast is always cookin' and the coffee's always fresh and hot. Arthur Smith, Jr. (or "Artie," as everyone calls him) is the cook and present owner. He's got a real soft spot for a kid down on his luck and in need of a good meal. The booths, although showing signs of age, are nice and comfy, and the tables are usually clean. The food is tolerable, neither good enough to make the place famous, nor bad enough to send regulars running to the toilets. It's the kind of place that seems to say, "Sit down, relax, and stay a while." It's also pretty incongruous with the rest of its surroundings. Maybe that's what draws so many people, mundane and magickal, to its doors.

By day, the Majestic's shiny chrome exterior stands out against the drab, smutty grayness that pervades the surrounding streets. By night, the bright lights of the old movie marquee make it shine like a beacon. It shines to the Awakened for other reasons: Old Art Smith was no fool. He could have built his diner anywhere in New York, but for some reason, the little run-down corner in the Village was

the only place that spoke to him. Some say he might have been Awakened, and others postulate that he was simply a Sleeper with a natural ability to sense magickal networks. Regardless of the explanation, regulars agree that stepping into the Majestic is like diving into a swimming pool in the dead of summer: cool, refreshing, and invigorating — no wonder so many lost souls seek sanctuary within its walls.

There's a grand parade of regulars at the Majestic: "Cockroach" Dave (otherwise known as the Mad Poet) is the Majestic's very own artist-in-residence. During the day, he works the grill with Artie. At night, he sits at the counter writing his verse. Darlene, the head waitress, goes back to the kitchen at 4:00 PM sharp every day to make fresh crullers for Officer Avery, the local beat cop, who eats them with his cup of coffee at five. Joe's the strong but silent doorman of sorts who comes in around sunset and doesn't leave until the sunlight is streaming in the windows. Other folks, Awakened and otherwise, hunker down in the comforting confines of the diner, sometimes to eat, sometimes to meet, but most often, just to rest.

The diner is L-shaped, and wraps around the corner of an old apartment complex. Booths run in twin lines along the windows; in the "leg" of the "L," a counter extends the length of the longer section, intersected by a couple of cash registers and napkin holders.

The Majestic shows its age badly. The leather on most of the counter seats has cracked and worn, exposing the

yellowing foam beneath, but the chrome still shines as brightly as ever. While the counter section is pretty well-lit, the booths in the back of the diner lie shrouded in a dim haze. The restrooms leave a good deal to be desired; between the lack of soap, the gritty paper towels and the ancient plumbing and fixtures, most visitors prefer to wait until later. Despite the wear, however, the diner feels like home. For some of the place's more down-and-out clientele, "home" is as good a word for the place as any.

Devotion House

Life on the streets can be lethal for anyone, self-Awakened or not. Crime, addiction and exploitation thrive in forgotten alleys. Pimps, con artists, gangs, hustlers and other parasites prowl the fetid avenues searching for a certain *look*: the wide-eyed, fearful runaway, the newcomer, the bait. Even if a young person evades these solo predators, far deadlier ones lie in wait, be they members of organized crime or random psychos. Each stalker specializes in a certain type of prey: the new arrival, the foster home runaway, the starstruck actor wannabe — and even the newly Awakened.

Shelters, halfway houses and similar organizations exist to help those persons suddenly forced into a life on the streets. The self-Awakened, however, require the sort of help that far outstrips the resources of such organizations. Enemies operate on a much higher level in the magickal realm. For an orphan to guard against such foes, her allies must be on an equal plane.

Devotion House, a sort of "shelter" exclusively for orphans, acts as one such ally. Built from a four-story Boston brownstone, the House came about as the brainchild of one Edmond Devotion, a former caseworker for the Department of Youth Services in Boston. Devotion specialized in cases with particularly troublesome offenders, juveniles who rejected all conventional attempts to place them in foster homes or shelters. Because he possessed a singular propinquity with such youths, Edmond Devotion tended to get his pick of hopeless cases — cases that he always closed. What no one (not even Devotion) knew was that the vast majority of his charges were, in fact, orphans floating through the foster system, self-Awakened kids who gravitated to Devotion for some small portion of guidance and security. It was his connection to these young outcasts that marked the first steps of Edmond's own Awakening.

When that moment arrived, Edmond Devotion left the DYS and hung out his own shingle, in order to give his "kids" and other wayward orphans a place safer than the streets. He sold his car, put his house on the market and scraped together enough cash to purchase an old halfway shelter in the heart of Boston's mean streets. Edmond's "kids," learning of their old friend's new enterprise, flocked to the shelter, which soon became known as Devotion House.

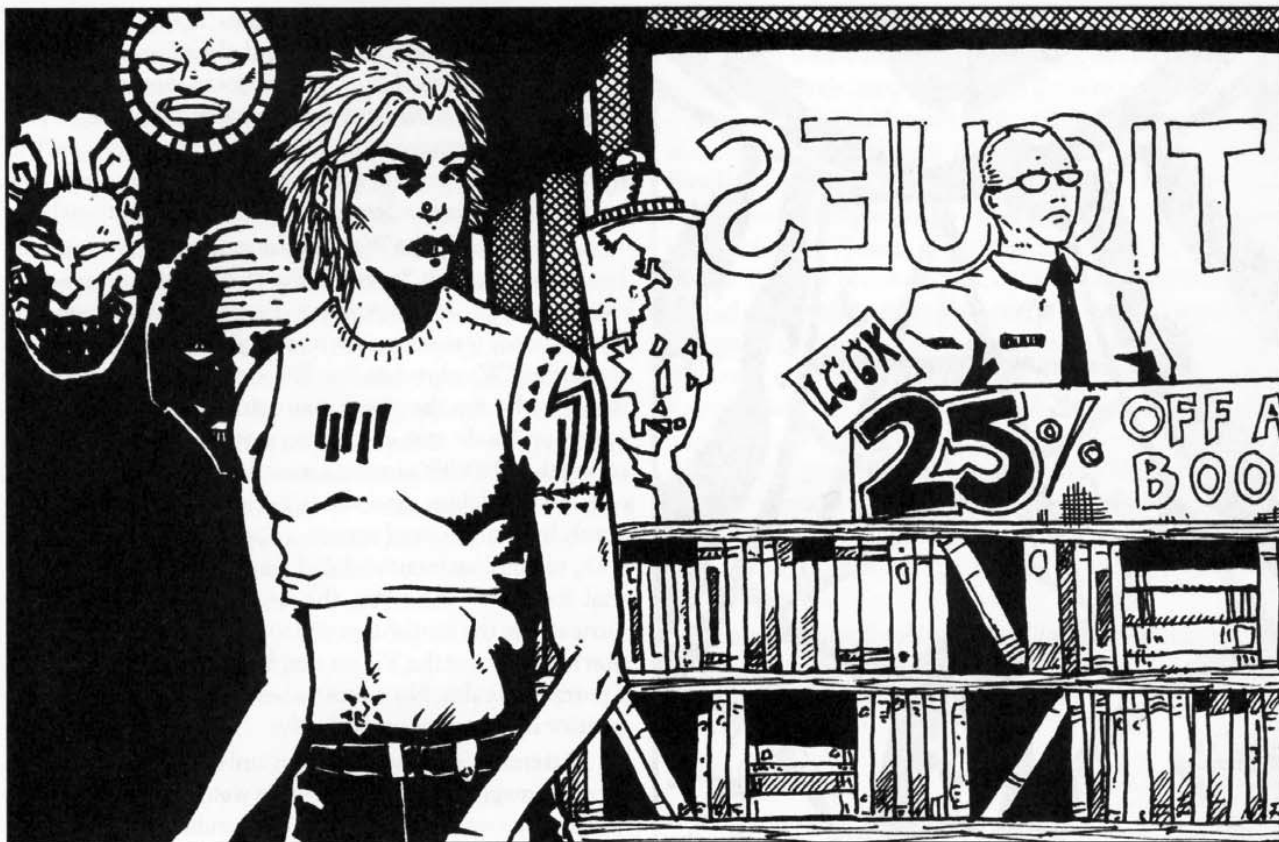
To the outside world, Devotion House operates as a shelter of last resort, a place where "tough love" is standard procedure. In truth, the House is a waystation and semi-permanent residence for newly aware orphans whose only alternative is the abattoir of the streets. Edmond Devotion runs the House with the help of a handful of his oldest, most-trusted residents, searching for and taking in self-Awakened drifters. "Devotees," as Edmond's assistants call themselves, regularly patrol the many neighborhoods in the city, gleaning orphans and orphans-to-be from the street populations. As all of Edmond's Devotees are former street children themselves, they know all the traps and enticements used by the wolves of the urban landscape.

Most young people who end up at Devotion House have already gone through the worst the streets have to offer — addiction, prostitution, rape porno — before they self-Awakened. Even though Devotion and his cadre understand these young victims' need for revenge, they also understand how dangerous it would be to have unskilled, angry kids blasting away at the night with uncontrolled powers. Devotion's constant nightmare concerns Sherri T, a young orphan who destroyed herself trying to strike back at her former tormentors. Edmond and his Devotees pledge that every person who comes through the door learns to harness her power before pursuing any personal agenda.

Such promises can be difficult to keep. Turnover at Devotion House is relatively high, and the amount of guidance Edmond and his staff can impart to the average hateful, disoriented orphan fluctuates. A few orphans stay at the House just long enough to learn how *not* to fry themselves; the minute they figure out how their magick works, they're off to wreak vengeance (and undoubtedly havoc) on anyone in sight. Devotees try to rein in such wild cards, but they're not always successful. An orphan in Devotion House can be her own worst enemy. Naturally, these loose cannons are but one of many threats to Devotion House. Apart from the street gangs, pimps, cult-leaders, chickenhawks and organized criminals who're looking to get their "investments" back, other entities try to pull Edmond's "kids" back into the dark whirlwind.

Project AMEND, Hardcore and Cultbusters

One such entity is Project AMEND, a non-profit organization dedicated to pulling kids off the streets, "deprogramming" them, and sending them back to Mom and Dad in a more compliant, "normal" state. Wildly popular in an age of media violence and family instability, Project AMEND takes teenagers into "safe houses" and councils them with peer pressure (not to mention shame, sleep depravation, marathon harangues and the occasional beating). Although most "clients" are signed into the Project by their parents, some are snatched off the street in "Hardcore Interventions"; with the parents' consent, a



vanload of Brothers and Sisters visits the client's usual haunts, jumps him, tosses him in the back of the van, and takes him to a care facility. If he resists, they tie him up, drug him or even beat him senseless with rubber clubs. After all, it's for his own good.

Behind a maze of bureaucracy, P.R. and government endorsements, the Association for the Maximization of Education and the Neutralization of Deviance is a Technocracy-fronted "reeducation" center for wild youth. While the staffers, councilors and Brothers and Sisters of the Project are usually Sleepers (often "reprogrammed" kids who went through a bad phase but were saved by AMEND), the Union keeps close tabs on "special cases" (read: Awakened teens), especially ones with "occults fixations" or "Satanic practices." If noted, deeply disturbed clients (read: orphans) are tagged for "Cultbuster Therapy" and sent to NWO Constructs for reeducation and study. While the Cultbuster program actually does weed out a few of the more-dangerous orphans, it treats all clients equally: transportation, mind-wipes, intensive mental conditioning, and finally either release (often as part of a Technocratic sting operation) or containment (at the Deep Universe Construct MECHA).

Project AMEND is a recent arrival on the scene, but has already proven to be a thorn in the side of lone orphans and Devotion House alike. Backed by a multimillion dollar PSA campaign ("AMEND the hurts. AMEND the scars.

AMEND your child back to sanity," and "Cultbusters! Erase the Devil!"), AMEND's representatives visit schools, police precincts, community centers and town meetings throughout North America, promising parents that AMEND will get their kids back. Such parents know nothing of AMEND's real nature, and probably wouldn't care if they did, so long as AMEND gets their children off the streets — or out of dubious shelters like Devotion House.

The Waydown

Like there's anyone who's anyone who *hasn't* heard of the infamous crib of the Hollow Ones! Wannabes search for the place in the foggy San Francisco nights. Cops trace rumors of Satanic celebrations, but never come across their source. Agents of the Technocracy and Traditions keep trying to infiltrate the place, to find out what beats at the heart of the Darkling Clique, but aside from a few reputed visits, no one, from streetwise hackers to ancient wizards, has been able to crack the code of silence that surrounds this famous Chantry.

There are reasons for this. To start with, no one who frequents the Waydown would spoil the party. Everyone who's on the guest list prizes exclusivity, so nobody wants "the wrong elements" to bring the place down. Sure, every so often an outsider might be brought along for a night if she seems pretty, clueful or interesting enough. Those people are usually brought through a maze first, however, so they'll



never be able to find the place again. Then there are the wards, all set by master sorcerers and placed so as to obscure the presence of the club. The Waydown moves a lot, too. Rarely is it held in the same place twice in a row. Just in case someone *does* manage to find his way to the club, a pack of spirits waits just around the corner. If shit goes down, the backup arrives with orders to kill first and ask questions later.

Like any club, the Waydown does have a few constants. No matter where it "arrives," the club's doors always open somewhere in or around San Francisco. Although any Hollow mage is welcome there, a single cabal dominates the scene: the "Waydowners," or Waydown Vitkai (see Chapter IV), who run the place, maintain the wards, screen the guests, and make sure everything stays cool. It goes without saying that the club's interior is extraordinarily *Gothik*, with ornate candelabras, fine wines, eerie tapestries, and a top-notch light-and-sound system. (Supplied with all the best goth, techno, ambient and darkwave, with a hint of industrial for flavor. And yes, the deejay takes requests.) So intricate are the furnishings and so perfect is the atmosphere that rumors insist the Vitkai simply cart the place around in a portable Realm. No matter where the club winds up, its interior is always set up perfectly.

Attendance is by invitation only, for the most part. Mortals, magi and other entities are welcome, so long as the Vitkai approve. Darklings in good standing with the cabal receive directions to the new location one night before its next appearance. Hollowers with homes get their invitations through e-mail, or in letters which mysteriously arrive before morning. Darklings without homes "coincidentally" discover fliers, maps or the occasional engraved invitation. From there, it's each person's choice whether or not to attend; Hollowers who ignore more than two engraved invitations, however, never receive a third. Occasionally, fliers will be left laying around the most fashionable Bay Area clubs, summoning mortals to dance at a new and anonymous club. The response to such fliers is so profound that new club owners have taken to using the same approach to bring in business (which naturally obscures the Waydown's *real* location even further). Still, there's only one Waydown; you can feel the difference when you step through the doors and enter the shroud of fog.

The fog marks the threshold between the mortal world and the Darklings' kingdom. Visiting magi claim it scrambles your sense of direction, unhinges your sense of time, and loosens your inhibitions. Within the swirling dreamland, graceful figures spin and waltz like spectral ballerinas. Music rises from the floor, cascades from the ceiling, and presses in from all sides, permeating you like smoke, working its way into your bones. A massive dance floor, lit by candelabras, dominates the main chamber, but half-a-dozen smaller rooms and alcoves radiate back from the bar. Couches, low tables and tapestries furnish these recesses with archaic splendor, and a small but well-lit stage plays host to the

occasional concert, torture garden or fetish show. Although the accouterments are modern, the setting evokes a bygone Byronian decadence. The harsh props of punk and industrial clubs are forsaken here; in the Waydown, grace is the rule.

That rule applies to visitors, too. Although they appreciate a taste for high living (or living death, as the case may be), the Vitkae have a remarkably low tolerance for bullshit. The founding sorcerers keep a staff of over a dozen consors, allies and hangers-on; together, they can eject nearly anyone short of a major demonic entity (and have even booted a few of them, too). Anyone unwise enough to misbehave and misguided enough to survive the experience will have the spirit pack set on his tail. Lesser offenders are simply excluded from the club; snubbed publicly and privately. These lame individuals are barred from the Waydown for as many incarnations as it takes for them to get the hint. Cool is the word in the Waydown, and that word is enforced by magick, manners and social exile.

How old is the Waydown? Rumors place the club's foundation somewhere in the early '80s, but Darkling elders insist it descends from the Unseen Society's manor, or even from some secret garden or Hellfire Club. In its present state, the club originated as a collaboration between Neville Sinclair and two long-vanished partners, Shalandra and Morpheus D. People like to claim that Rozz Williams wrote much of *Only Theatre of Pain* in the old club, scribbling furiously in one of the alcoves, or that Andrew Eldritch was kicked out for throwing up all over a bartender. For the last few years, the current Vitkae has run the show, delegating the lesser chores to consors while taking care of the social scene. Thus, the club's "openings" depend on the cabal's mood or activities. Although the Waydown usually opens at least twice a month, it has been known to "disappear" for up to three months at a time. During such absences, the Bay Area nights grow much duller, and the scenesters whisper that perhaps *this* time, the famous Waydown has finally closed its doors....

Some evening, they'll be right. Till then, the revels continue.



Chapter IV: The Chosen Few

*Nobody asked me, but here's my advice
For a young man or woman living this life
In a world gone to hell
Where nobody's safe
Do not go quietly unto your grave
— Morphine, "Do Not Go Quietly Unto Your Grave"*



The sensations of the rape are beside the point. Only a ghoulish would want to hear about them in the first place. The point is, I remember everything — each grunt, each thrust, the taste of the blood in my mouth.... You get the picture.

The worst part is, I could read their minds as they did it. No, actually, the worst part is that I could feel what they felt, hear what they thought, and add those wonderful sensations to my own thoughts, feelings and total fucking violation. That was years ago, and I still wash myself till I bleed every morning. No matter what, I still feel like a condom dragged from a faggot's ass.

Did I avenge myself, you wonder? Did I come back after I learned how to control the magick, and turn them into charcoal? No, I didn't.

No matter what they did, I can't hurt my brothers. After all, they're family.

Rise Above

Check it out: *Not all orphans are Hollow Ones!!! Not all orphans are goths!!!* Not all orphans run around in face paint and attitude, listening to the Sisters, and they sure as shit do not moan about "ascension wars," the Wyrms, Sphere magick and Kindred politics! Each one is an individual, blessed or cursed with self-Awakening. Very few of them know any of the details of arcane conspiracies, and even fewer of them care. There's some truth in the stereotype — the folks in question do tend to be rebelsub refugees looking for a cause — but *THEY'RE NOT ALL GOTHSS!!*

Are we clear yet? Cool.

Two threads unite the disparate company of modern orphans: the vision and power of the Awakening, and the defiance of fate that keeps them going in a world where society, sanity and reality itself have left them behind. The following templates are merely ghosts in a large haunted mansion. Ultimately, an orphan is whoever she wants to be.

Self-Competitor

Prelude: Everybody thought you were just a good kid... a bit competitive, but hey, you were ambitious. It wasn't good enough to outdo other students; you had to constantly outdo yourself.

When you first started studying martial arts, you had never seen *Kung Fu* or the *Karate Kid* movies. Philosophy and meditation weren't important — you just wanted to keep from getting the crap beat out of you. With fanatical determination, you honed your body and mastered the arts, growing into an introverted, perpetually annoyed young man with no illusions and a strong streak of perfectionism.

Growing up was easy compared to the tasks you set for yourself. Eventually, you settled on teaching martial arts at a local school. After a particularly late, exhausting night, you finally realized that there *are* no limits. Constant improvement is your reward for unceasing practice and patience. Teaching others what you know is just a sideline. For you, the real joy is taking that next step and helping others discover just how far they can go, too. Someday, you'll break the barriers of humanity and push yourself beyond human comprehension. Maybe a few lucky students will follow in your wake.

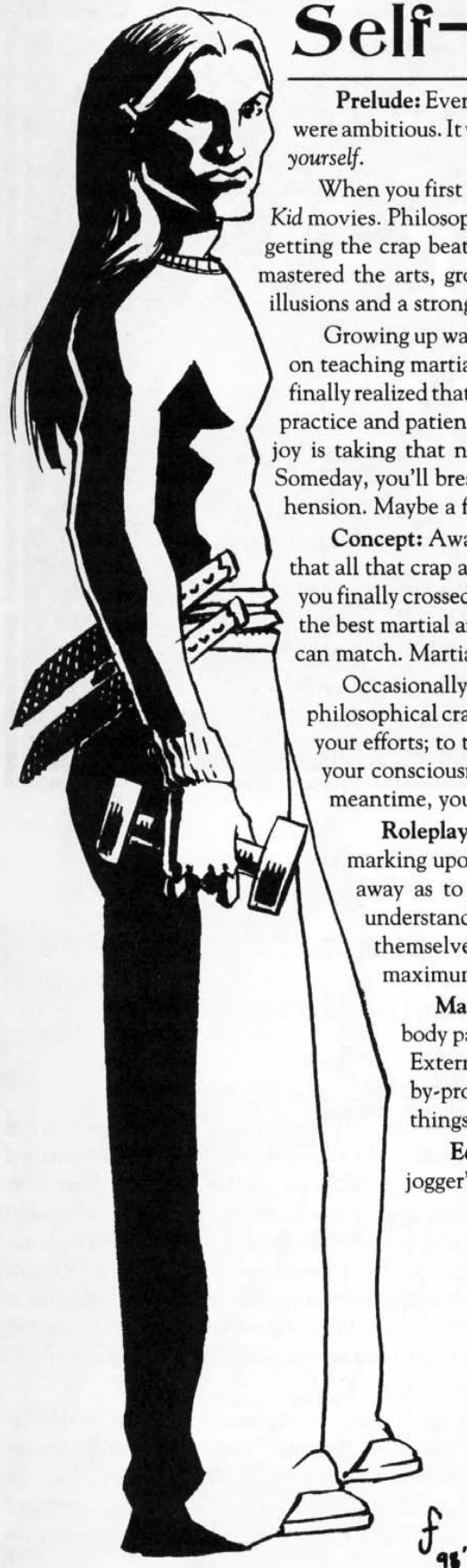
Concept: Awakening didn't change your life that much; you just suddenly figured out that all that crap about "stress tolerance limits" was wrong. Pushing yourself to the limit, you finally crossed that line between human and more-than-human. Although you aren't the best martial artist in the world, you have a sense of perseverance and dedication few can match. Martial arts are just a means of challenging yourself.

Occasionally, other mysticks try to talk to you about the "ascension war" and other philosophical crap. Whatever. Other magi just don't understand your need to internalize your efforts; to them, there's a whole war for reality out there. Well, once you expand your consciousness and being to encompass all that reality, you'll work on it. In the meantime, you're going to redline this meat body until something gives.

Roleplaying Hints: Internalization is your greatest tool. Nothing's worth remarking upon unless it impacts on you directly; even then, you're as likely to walk away as to change things. People don't understand your drive, and you can't understand why other people don't get off their asses and do something for themselves. You may not be the best of the best, but you *always* give *everything* your maximum effort.

Magick: Magick is an exercise in discipline and control. Expanding your body past normal human limits is just the start; you expand your mind as well. External effects — affinities for Forces and Matter, for instance — are simply by-products of your own self-development. You have a hard time affecting things you can't touch. To you, magick springs from inside.

Equipment: Loose clothing, running shoes, fighting knives (licensed), jogger's weights.





THE Orphans

SURVIVAL GUIDE



MAGE: The Ascension™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: *Fanatic*
Essence: *Questing*
Demeanor: *Director*

Concept: *Self-Competitor*
Mentor:
Affiliation: *None*

Attributes

Physical

Strength *Powerful* ●●●●●
Dexterity ●●●●●
Stamina *Tough* ●●●●●

Social

Charisma ●●●●●
Manipulation ●●●●●
Appearance ●●●●●

Mental

Perception ●●●●●
Intelligence ●●●●●
Wits ●●●●●

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ●●●●●
Athletics *Martial Arts* ●●●●●
Awareness ○○○○○
Brawl *Tai Kwan Do* ●●●●●
Dodge ●●●●●
Expression ○○○○○
Instruction ●●●●●
Intuition ○○○○○
Intimidation ●●●●●
Streetwise ○○○○○
Subterfuge ○○○○○

Skills

Do ○○○○○
Drive ●○○○○
Etiquette ○○○○○
Firearms ●○○○○
Leadership ○○○○○
Meditation *Zen* ●●●●●
Melee ●●●●●
Research ○○○○○
Stealth ●○○○○
Survival ●○○○○
Technology ○○○○○

Knowledges

Computer ○○○○○
Cosmology ○○○○○
Culture ●●●●●
Enigmas ○○○○○
Investigation ○○○○○
Law ○○○○○
Linguistics *Mandarin* ●○○○○
Lore ○○○○○
Medicine ●●●●●
Occult ○○○○○
Science ○○○○○

Spheres

Correspondence ○○○○○
Entropy ○○○○○
Forces ●●●●●

Life ●●●●●
Mind ○○○○○
Matter ●●●●●

Prime ○○○○○
Spirit ○○○○○
Time ○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds

Allies ●●●●●
Avatar ●●●●●
Dream ●●●●●
Resources ●○○○○
○○○○○

Arete

● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Willpower

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Quintessence



Paradox

Health

Bruised -0 ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

Experience

Wanderer

Prelude: "I'll never get out of this god-forsaken, podunk town!" is what you used to think. For an inquisitive kid like you, a perfect afternoon was sitting in the cool semi-darkness of your grandfather's cellar devouring the countless yellow stacks of *National Geographic*. Your imagination strained against the confines of small-town life, and you wished more than anything to leave. So you studied and stretched the boundaries of your narrow, poverty-stricken life, but it was no use. Now most of the kids you graduated high school with have gotten married and gone to work, or settled down to have babies. That kind of life has no challenge, no spark. It will soon stagnate, stifle and die. But a life of travel, a life on the road — *that's* where a person can think, learn and grow.

While sitting on your porch watching cars go by one late-Summer evening, you started daydreaming about where each person might be headed as they journeyed past. The guy in the red Trans-Am was on his way to Dallas, Texas — a city slicker with dreams of joining the rodeo. That pretty young thing up in the cab of the big-rig had been hitching rides all the way from West Virginia. She was going to L.A. — gonna be a star. Suddenly you saw yourself walking down the road, each step taking you miles away from your pitiful blink-and-you-miss-it town, miles away from America, even. You walked through London, saw the Mona Lisa in France. You drank beer in Austria, rode a camel in Egypt. Slowly, you realized that you were really *there*. After what seemed like hours, you made it back to Nowheresville, Indiana, and the sun had hardly set. Everything looked new, even this lousy place, and you knew that something special had happened.

Concept: Although your life up to now has been the constant, steady drudge of small-town life, you've always had a spark of something better. Now that you have magick, there are no obstacles. You've found the key you've been looking for all your life — an understanding of Correspondence that allows you to travel anywhere. Finally your wanderlust can be sated... but then again, will it ever?

Roleplaying Hints: You're free from your boring, so-called life. This new adventure you've embarked upon is what you've been waiting your whole life for, and while you enjoy all the places you travel to, you don't want to stay in one place for very long. There's so much to see and do.

Magick: Your affinity for Correspondence is extraordinary. With a little study and a lot of practice, you've learned how to utilize your Arts to judge distances and travel them in short spaces of time. Other Arts simply aid you on your journey. A compass, and your trusty Doc Martens are the only tools you need.

Equipment: Doc Martens, compass, backpack, Walkman.





THE Orphans

SURVIVAL GUIDE



MAGE: The Ascension™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: *Bon Vivant*
Essence: *Questing*
Demeanor: *Loner*

Concept: *Wanderer*
Mentor:
Affiliation: *None*

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●●●●●
Dexterity ●●●●●
Stamina *Tireless* ●●●●●

Social

Charisma *Likable* ●●●●●
Manipulation *Friendly* ●●●●●
Appearance ●●●●●

Mental

Perception ●●●●●
Intelligence ●●●●●
Wits ●●●●●

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ●●●●●
Athletics ●●●●●
Awareness ●●●●●
Brawl ●●●●●
Dodge ●●●●●
Expression ○○○○○
Instruction ●●●●●
Intuition ○○○○○
Intimidation ●○○○○
Streetwise ○○○○○
Subterfuge ○○○○○

Skills

Do ○○○○○
Drive ○○○○○
Etiquette ●●●●●
Firearms ○○○○○
Leadership ○○○○○
Meditation ●●●●●
Melee ○○○○○
Research ○○○○○
Stealth ○○○○○
Survival *No Gear* ●●●●●
Technology ○○○○○

Knowledges

Computer ○○○○○
Cosmology ○○○○○
Culture ●●●●●
Enigmas ○○○○○
Investigation ○○○○○
Law ●○○○○
Linguistics *French* ●○○○○
Lore ○○○○○
Medicine ●○○○○
Occult ○○○○○
Science ○○○○○

Spheres

Correspondence ●●●●●
Entropy ○○○○○
Forces ○○○○○

Life ●●●●●
Mind ○○○○○
Matter ○○○○○

Prime ●○○○○
Spirit ○○○○○
Time ○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds

Allies ●●●●●
Avatar ●●●●●
Dream ○○○○○
 ○○○○○
 ○○○○○

Arete

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Willpower

● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Quintessence



Paradox

Other Traits

Scrounging ●○○○○○
 ○○○○○○
 ○○○○○○
 ○○○○○○
 ○○○○○○

Health

Bruised -0 ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

Experience

Wall-Street Wizard

Prelude: Money fascinated you from day one, mostly because you really never had any. Growing up, it was just you and Momma living in a sorry excuse for a studio apartment in Harlem. The only escape you had was school. Who needed new clothes or shoes when you could have knowledge? Momma always said that knowledge was the only power a poor black kid had, 'cause that was the only thing they couldn't take away from you. So you studied hard, especially math and economics. The thought of all that money whizzing around in the world made you dizzy sometimes.

Daydreams fueled your desire to succeed, and your hard work was richly rewarded with a full scholarship to attend a prestigious Ivy League school. At commencement ceremonies, you wore an honor cord, but Momma cried because you were the first in the family to graduate.

A broker with Merrill-Lynch gave you your first job. Despite your college record, you started out as low woman on the totem pole — on the trading floor of the New York Stock Exchange.

That first day was intense! Blood coursed hot through your veins as the numbers scrolled past. You shouted and signaled with the rest, and everything seemed to be going all right when suddenly it all got weird. The numbers scrolled faster and faster, like the wheels on a slot machine. Stocks rose and fell like pistons in an engine, and a steady hum rose in your ears. Somehow you knew that this fast-forward flash of numbers and money was something that would take place in the future. Next thing you knew, you were on the floor, a little bruised, but relatively unhurt aside from the whispers you heard from the people around you — "...couldn't cut it... too weak... just like a woman...."

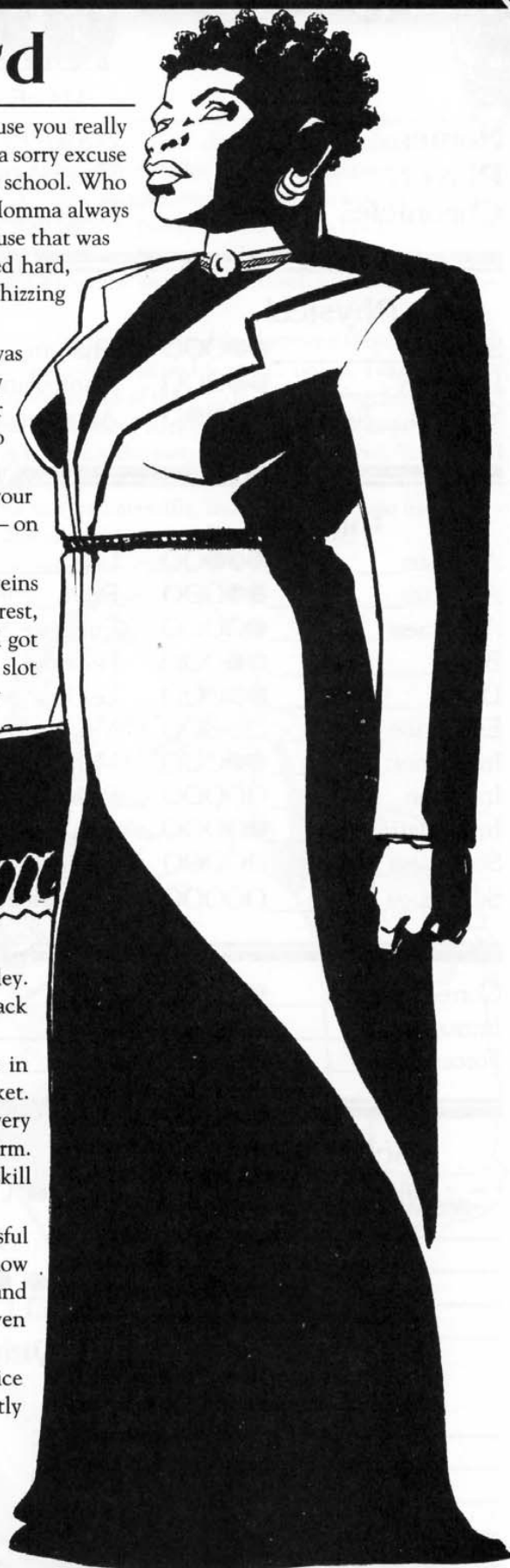
You felt like crying, but then you looked up at the ticker. *There!* The first change. Even though the numbers had been speeding by, you remembered every peak and valley. You left, resolved that with your newfound talent, you'd come back and you'd show them you weren't weak. You'd show them all.

Concept: Since your Awakening, you've used your talents in Time and Entropy to great advantage in predicting the stock market. Your magickal ability and natural intelligence have made you very rich — so rich, in fact, that you've started your own brokerage firm. Nobody would ever suspect that you're the C.E.O., however. Your skill in the Arcane arts keeps you virtually invisible.

Roleplaying Hints: The perfect picture of a wealthy, successful businesswoman. Never forget where you came from, though, or how fortunate you've been. Keep a sharp eye out for corruption and corporate greed; such injustices make the poor suffer and the rich even richer.

Magick: A dual talent in Time and Entropy weighs the dice firmly in your favor. A small clock and a market ticker run constantly on your desk, helping you focus your energies.

Equipment: Laptop computer, pocket-watch.



f
98'



THE Orphans

SURVIVAL GUIDE



MAGE: The Ascension™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: *Survivor*
Essence: *Pattern*
Demeanor: *Director*

Concept: *Wall-Street Wizard*
Mentor:
Affiliation: *None*

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●●●●●
Dexterity ●●●●●
Stamina ●●●●●

Social

Charisma ●●●●●
Manipulation *Savvy* ●●●●●
Appearance ●●●●●

Mental

Perception *Good Breaks* ●●●●●
Intelligence ●●●●●
Wits ●●●●●

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ●●●●●
Athletics ●●●●●
Awareness ●●●●●
Brawl ●●●●●
Dodge ●●●●●
Expression ●●●●●
Instruction ●●●●●
Intuition ●●●●●
Intimidation ●●●●●
Streetwise ●●●●●
Subterfuge ●●●●●

Skills

Do ●●●●●
Drive ●●●●●
Etiquette ●●●●●
Firearms ●●●●●
Leadership ●●●●●
Meditation ●●●●●
Melee ●●●●●
Research ●●●●●
Stealth ●●●●●
Survival ●●●●●
Technology ●●●●●

Knowledges

Computer ●●●●●
Cosmology ●●●●●
Culture ●●●●●
Enigmas ●●●●●
Investigation ●●●●●
Law ●●●●●
Linguistics ●●●●●
Lore ●●●●●
Medicine ●●●●●
Occult ●●●●●
Science *Business* ●●●●●

Spheres

Correspondence ●●●●●
Entropy ●●●●●
Forces ●●●●●

Life ●●●●●
Mind ●●●●●
Matter ●●●●●

Prime ●●●●●
Spirit ●●●●●
Time ●●●●●

Advantages

Backgrounds

Arcane ●●●●●
Avatar ●●●●●
Influences ●●●●●
Resources ●●●●●
●●●●●

Arete

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

Willpower

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Quintessence



Paradox

Health

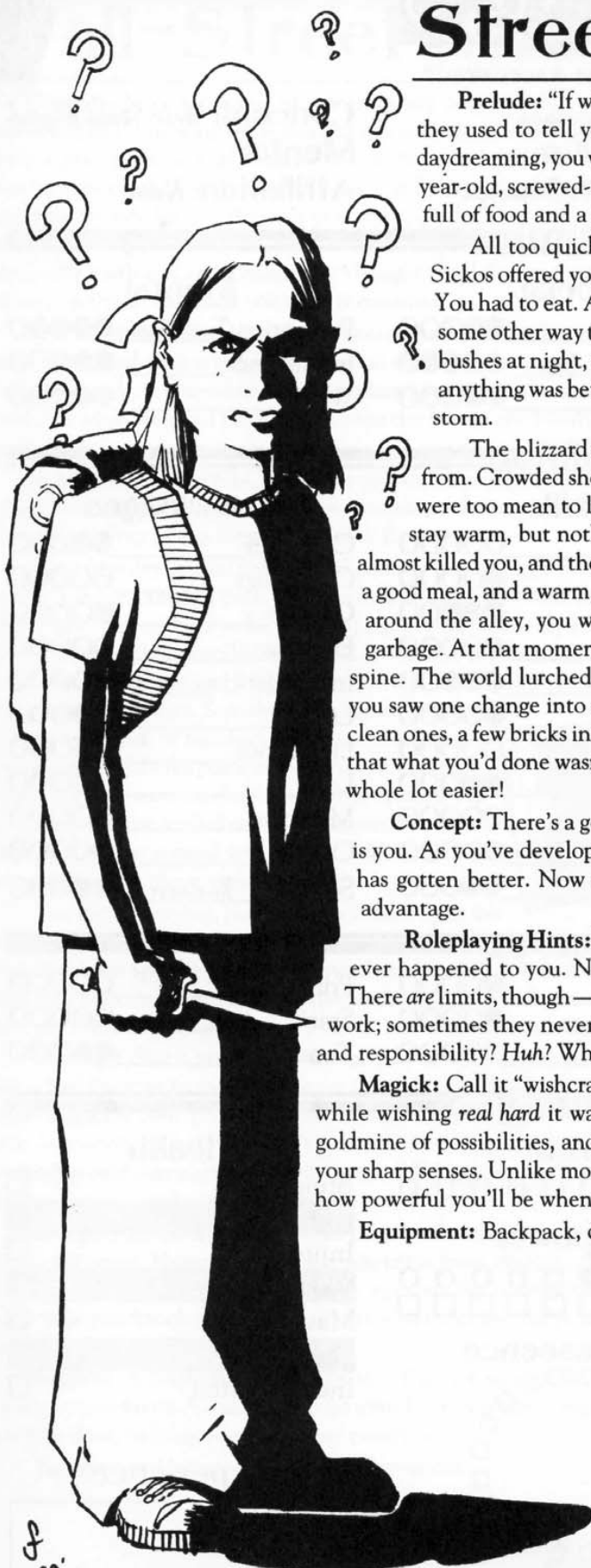
Bruised -0 ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

Other Traits

●●●●●
●●●●●
●●●●●
●●●●●
●●●●●

Experience

Street Kid



Prelude: "If wishes were horses, then beggars would ride." That's what they used to tell you at the orphanage, before you ran away. Despite your daydreaming, you were a realist at heart. Nobody was going to adopt a seven-year-old, screwed-up kid. So you left one night with nothing but a backpack full of food and a change of underwear.

All too quickly, you learned that the streets could be fatal for a kid. Sickos offered you food for sex, but couldn't care less about you otherwise. You had to eat. After a while, turning tricks got stale, so you searched out some other way to survive in hell. You begged by day and slept underneath bushes at night, never *really* sleeping for fear of the cops... or worse. Still, anything was better than the orphanage — or so you thought until the ice storm.

The blizzard shut the city down. Suddenly, there was nobody to beg from. Crowded shelters were turning folks away, and the grizzled old drunks were too mean to let you share their space. You gathered what you could to stay warm, but nothing could keep the wind and hunger away. That night almost killed you, and the frosty gray morning found you wishing for clean clothes, a good meal, and a warm, dry place to sleep. Looking at the scraps of paper blowing around the alley, you wished harder than anything else that it was money, not garbage. At that moment, you felt a strange stirring in the air and a tingle up your spine. The world lurched like a subway car; when you looked down at the scraps, you saw one change into a fresh \$10.00 bill. Transforming your dirty clothes into clean ones, a few bricks into bread, and the newspapers into a warm blanket proved that what you'd done wasn't a fluke. Suddenly, life on the streets was going to be a whole lot easier!

Concept: There's a genie with an unlimited amount of wishes, and that genie is you. As you've developed your raw talents with Matter, your life on the streets has gotten better. Now the trick is to make these wishes work to your greater advantage.

Roleplaying Hints: You're a *kid*. Think like one. Magick is the best thing that ever happened to you. Now you can have all the cool stuff you ever wished for! There *are* limits, though — sometimes things happen easily; sometimes it takes more work; sometimes they never happen at all. Still, this shit is awesome! Consequences and responsibility? *Huh?* Whatever...

Magick: Call it "wishcraft," a talent focused by concentrating on a single object while wishing *real hard* it was something else. A strong affinity for Matter equals a goldmine of possibilities, and other Spheres (which you don't define as such) reflect your sharp senses. Unlike most magi, you're a natural. If you're this good *now*, imagine how powerful you'll be when (if) you get older....(see "Wishcraft," p.123.)

Equipment: Backpack, cash, switchblade, items to wish upon.



THE Orphans

SURVIVAL GUIDE



MAGE: The Ascension™

Name:

Nature: *Bon Vivant*

Concept: *Street Kid*

Player:

Essence: *Dynamic*

Mentor:

Chronicle:

Demeanor: *Survivor*

Affiliation: *None*

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●●●●●
Dexterity ●●●●●
Stamina ●●●●●

Social

Charisma ●●●●●
Manipulation ●●●●●
Appearance ●●●●●

Mental

Perception ●●●●●
Intelligence ●●●●●
Wits *Quick* ●●●●●

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ●●●●●
Athletics ●●●●●
Awareness ●●●●●
Brawl ●●●●●
Dodge ●●●●●
Expression ○○○○○
Instruction ○○○○○
Intuition ○○○○○
Intimidation ○○○○○
Streetwise ●●●●●
Subterfuge ○○○○○

Skills

Do ○○○○○
Drive ○○○○○
Etiquette ○○○○○
Firearms ○○○○○
Leadership ○○○○○
Meditation ○○○○○
Melee ●●●●●
Research ○○○○○
Stealth ●●●●●
Survival *Urban* ●●●●●
Technology ○○○○○

Knowledges

Computer ○○○○○
Cosmology ○○○○○
Culture ○○○○○
Enigmas ●○○○○
Investigation ●●○○○
Law ●●○○○
Linguistics ○○○○○
Lore ○○○○○
Medicine ○○○○○
Occult ○○○○○
Science ○○○○○

Spheres

Correspondence ○○○○○
Entropy ●○○○○
Forces ○○○○○

Life ●○○○○
Mind ●○○○○
Matter ●●○○○

Prime ○○○○○
Spirit ○○○○○
Time ○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds

Avatar ●●●●●
Dream ●●●●●
Resources ●●●●●
 ○○○○○
 ○○○○○

Arete

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Willpower

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Quintessence



Paradox

Health

Bruised -0 ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

Experience

Other Traits

Scrounging ●●●●●
 ○○○○○
 ○○○○○
 ○○○○○
 ○○○○○

Struggling Mother

Prelude: When you were 16, Eddie said you were his one and only. So you eloped. A year later, the baby came and Eddie went, leaving you a mountain of debt and a new life to care for. Your parents turned their backs and gave you the "I told you so" routine. His parents never liked you.

Nevertheless, you picked up the pieces and made the baby your only priority. But no matter how many jobs you took, the money wasn't enough. One night, a customer at your diner suggested you take up exotic dancing. At first, you laughed it off, but later you decided to take it seriously. Dancing was a gift from God. Money rolled in, and you could pay off the debts of the past and focus on the future.

Unfortunately, with the money came trouble. Eddie's parents found out you were stripping and sued to take away your child. Social Services turned your life upside down. Finally, the court decided to place your daughter in a foster home until the trial. That night, you lay awake thinking about all the people who conspired against you. If only they could see how much you loved her... and how fiercely you'd fight to keep her! You drifted slowly into sleep, but it was like no sleep you'd ever had before.

In the dream hung several moving pictures, each one different. In the first, you saw Eddie's mother. You could only shout "Don't!" before she disappeared and you were in another dream. As the parade of tormentors passed before your eyes, you shouted that one word, putting all your sorrow and pain and love for your child behind it. You awoke to an urgent pounding on your door the next morning. Eddie's folks stood there with a social worker, their emotions radiating off them so strongly it made you light-headed. They were dropping the lawsuit. Inherently, you knew your dream had worked, and that something else had worked too — a new, secret power you could use to protect yourself and your child.

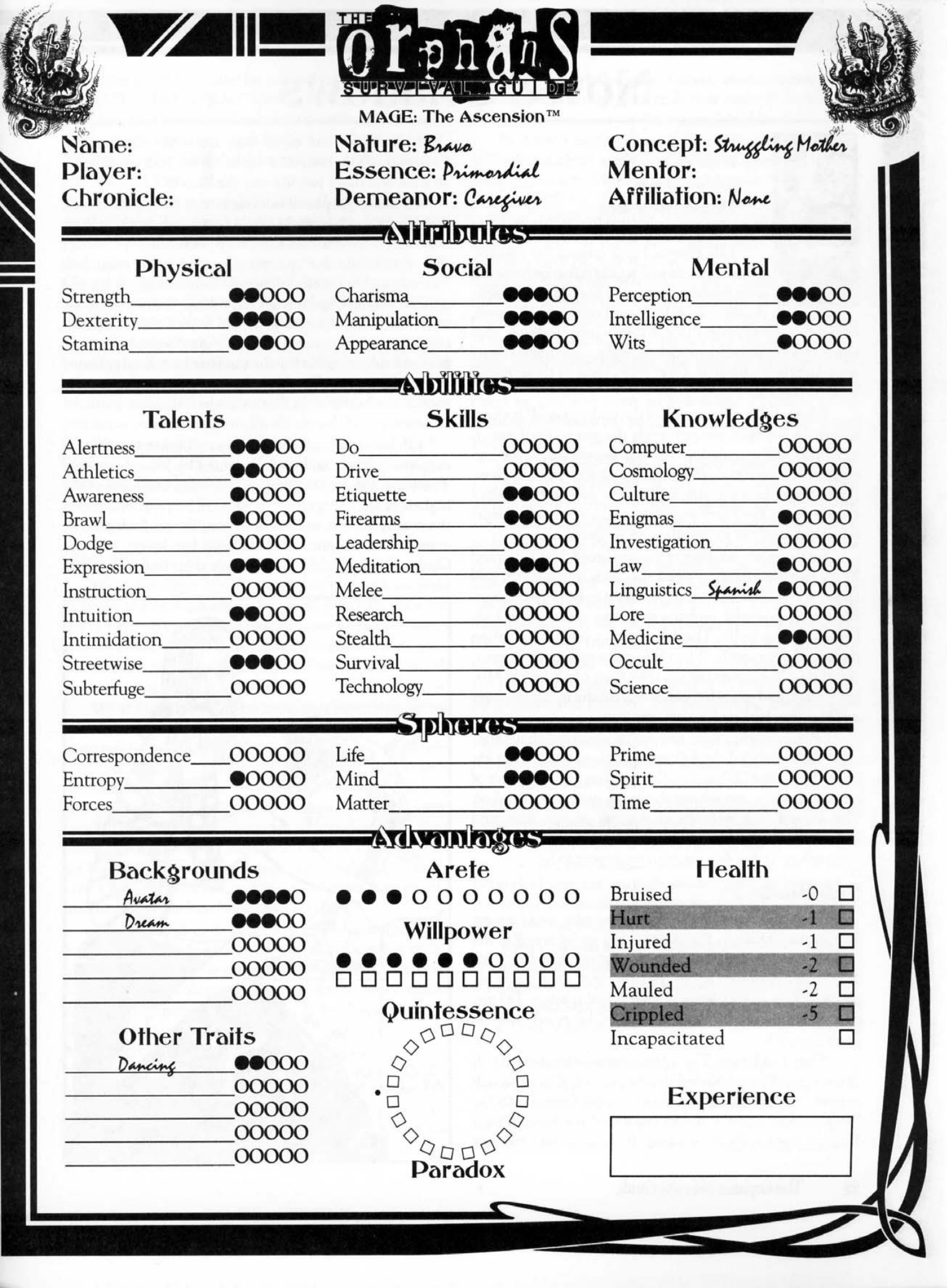
Concept: Like a lioness protecting her cub, you'll do anything to shelter your child from harm. Awakening from that first magickal dream has made you aware of your talents in Mind. Now that you understand this gift, you spend time honing and strengthening it.

Roleplaying Hints: Despite life's hardships, you're still young and vital. Most of that energy is focused upon your child. She's the world to you, and no sacrifice on her behalf is too great. Despite your trials, the world hasn't stolen your innocence and optimism. You're a survivor, not a victim.

Magick: Mind magick (focused through a lucky amulet you never remove, and through dance or an impassioned gaze) allows you a "sixth sense" against danger, and gives you an uncanny influence over other people. It also grants you a deep bond with your daughter and others you care for.

Equipment: Street clothes, amulet, baby items (toys, diaper bag, etc.), exotic "costumes" and props, spray can of mace.





THE Orphans

SURVIVAL GUIDE

MAGE: The Ascension™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: *Brava*
Essence: *Primordial*
Demeanor: *Caregiver*

Concept: *Struggling Mother*
Mentor:
Affiliation: *None*

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●●○○○
Dexterity ●●●○○
Stamina ●●●○○

Social

Charisma ●●●○○
Manipulation ●●●○○
Appearance ●●●○○

Mental

Perception ●●●○○
Intelligence ●●○○○
Wits ●○○○○

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ●●●○○
Athletics ●●○○○
Awareness ●○○○○
Brawl ●○○○○
Dodge ○○○○○
Expression ●●●○○
Instruction ○○○○○
Intuition ●●○○○
Intimidation ○○○○○
Streetwise ●●●○○
Subterfuge ○○○○○

Skills

Do ○○○○○
Drive ○○○○○
Etiquette ●●○○○
Firearms ●●○○○
Leadership ○○○○○
Meditation ●●●○○
Melee ●○○○○
Research ○○○○○
Stealth ○○○○○
Survival ○○○○○
Technology ○○○○○

Knowledges

Computer ○○○○○
Cosmology ○○○○○
Culture ○○○○○
Enigmas ●○○○○
Investigation ○○○○○
Law ●○○○○
Linguistics *Spanish* ●○○○○
Lore ○○○○○
Medicine ●●○○○
Occult ○○○○○
Science ○○○○○

Spheres

Correspondence ○○○○○
Entropy ●○○○○
Forces ○○○○○

Life ●●○○○
Mind ●●●○○
Matter ○○○○○

Prime ○○○○○
Spirit ○○○○○
Time ○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds

Avatar ●●●○○
Dream ●●●○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Other Traits

Dancing ●●○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

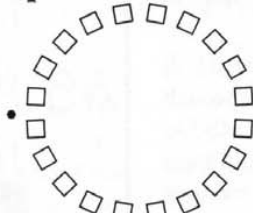
Arete

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Willpower

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Quintessence



Paradox

Health

Bruised -0 ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

Experience

Noted Shadows



*She came to me
Whilst times were low
And smiled at me
Through eyes of stone
— Death in June, "Carousel"*

Talk travels. Fame spreads her blanket, and even those who would rather be nameless are sometimes invited to her bed. As the self-Awakened underground comes into its own, circulating information through e-mail lists, Websites, club talk and notes posted on backstage walls, some names figure prominently in the chat. Over time, some of those names become legends.

Who are these living gods of the underground? It's hard to tell. By the time you peel aside the wet walls of rumor, innuendo and speculation, the real people inside the legends are obscured past recognition. Like rock stars or actors, their images become larger than the people themselves could ever be. Even archwizards have their limits, and most self-Awakened are far less than archwizards.

For the most part, they're a young breed. Hard lives and harsh enmities tend to weed the midnight garden, and those "weeds" without deep roots tend to be the first to go. Most truly powerful orphans sink into obscurity or hide behind mirror-walls. The figures who remain are often flavors-of-the-month. When they grow stale or melt away, novel new legends spring up, take their place beside Mistress Fame, and enjoy her caresses until the moment passes and she goes looking for new company.

Because truth, rumor and opinion make such a difference, we've divided the following sections into "What He (She) Says" and "What You Know." The former is a bit of self-description, something the mage might say if asked. The second is a melange of rumors, proven facts and speculations. The truth behind the lot is up to you, the Storyteller. None of us are who we appear to be.

Jodi Blake

What She Says: *I have my own agendas, and I am my own master. That's it. I'm just standing up for myself in this pathetic wasteland of "enlightened" society. And I get condemned as a devil-worshipper? Please! As if! Sure, I take my pleasures dark — who doesn't? That means nothing. Tell me, does anyone outside the P.T.-fucking-L Club even believe in devils anymore?*

What You Know: The solitary mage calling herself Jodi Blake is familiar to most of the Awakened, if not through personal experience, than through rumor. Gossip calls her "Nephandus," a *barabbi* renunciate who threw her soul away for gold, greed or sheer perversity. If she is indeed what they

claim she is, no one could truly name the Tradition or Convention she originally hailed from. Jodi's past is an enigma, and that's just the way she likes it.

As names get passed from ear to ear, the legend of Jodi, the defiant and beautiful Lady of Lies, grows in the telling. A sworn enemy of all the sects, cults, orders and fellowships that recruit from the "spawning pool" of young magi, Jodi has acquired a sizable following. Omnisexual, witty and possessed of prodigious magickal talents (among other assets), she trails admirers, male and female alike. A poster child for mystick anarchy, Blake defies wizards far more powerful than herself while keeping her roots firmly planted in the night scene. The more perversely she acts, the more popular she becomes. In short, she's bad, she's cool, and she kicks ass.

Oh, sure, there are those rumors of human sacrifice. Of demonic tortures and souls devoured by Jodi's "masters." There are those who claim she's a black magician of the highest order, a shapeshifting agent of betrayal who makes the cranky wizards and mindless borg-drones look good by comparison. Supposedly, Jodi leads her lovers into the Cauls, pits of mystick torture where their souls are turned



inside-out and their bodies are twisted into agonized works of art. "The Lady of Lies" has an infamous reputation, including (but not limited to) child sacrifice, mass slaughter, exquisite torment, and every conceivable form of blasphemy. Those tales, of course, just make her more popular than ever.

Not everyone is fond of the Lady of Lies. In some clubs, especially the Waydown, the bouncers have been warned to watch out for the charming chick with the midnight smile. In others, though, she's a welcome guest; The Chapel Perilous, for instance, celebrates her visits with orgies on the dance floor and backmasked Christian prayer-mixes. Sure, everyone says, Jodi's a servant of Darkness. But fuck it, aren't we all?

Is it an act, or is she really pimping for the Pit? Jodi swears she's just playing a role, acting as the Queen of Night in a huge and glorious pageant. *Of course* she doesn't serve demons or torture children! That's absurd! No one actually *does* those sort of things, and demons aren't real. Jodi relishes her fame, but cautions her confidants that she's just a simple, pretty girl. The whole Satanic pageant is fun, but it certainly isn't for *real*!

Or is it?

Baron

What He Says: *Me? I'm just an old man with too many memories and too much time on his hands. If it's tales you want, you're better off with Penny Dreadful or some other wild whack of a storytelling siren. But, hey! Since you asked, I'll tell you a little secret about the Mockingbird Man: (leans down close) He can be a real asshole if you piss him off.*

What You Know: Baron is the only name this orphan answers to, though he has told a few trusted souls what his name was in the past. Most people who don't know him refer to him as "the Tattooed Man," although another nickname, "the Mockingbird Man," recalls his fondness for perching and preening. While Baron is average in height, over-muscled from years of working out, and tends to dress like a biker in a 1960's exploitation flick, his dark hair and beard are both graying and his age is definitely starting to show. Like a bird, he crouches, perches and hovers over people, ominous, yet somehow humorous, too.

Aside from his unusual dress style, the most noticeable feature about Baron is the collection of tattoos that covers his torso and both of his arms... tattoos that tend to change when no one is looking. Only a few of the tattoos remain unchanged from encounter to encounter with the man: The Weidjot Eye and the Eye of Horus remain prominently emblazoned on his chest, connected by an illustration of barbed wire that runs from his belt line, and loops that cover his arms and wrap twice around his neck. At the front of his throat, just below the line where a dress-shirt would hide the writing, the word "Forgive" is prominently displayed. Aside from these stable markings, other images — bird cages,

stacks of dollar bills, guns, knives, mystic runes, roses, flames, grave markers, dice and other assorted illustrations — have all been seen on Baron's arm's and body.

In Baron's case, the tattoos are removable and usable. Baron has made an art form of hiding weapons and various paraphernalia on his body, a trick he's even taught a rare few others.

Baron is one of the older members of his cabal in San Francisco, and has ingratiated himself with all of its other members over the last four years, since he moved to the area from New York. His original plans were only to visit the area, seeking the Technocracy spy who killed his friends in Manhattan. Instead, he and the other members of the Waydown Vitkai captured the double agent and have since made him see the error of his ways... by reshaping his soul and making him a slave. Baron originally came to San Francisco with a woman named Sascha Winters, and while the two are still friends, they have long since stopped being lovers.

This elder orphan admits to having been a professor of European History somewhere on the East Coast, and is often willing to share his insights with those who ask him properly. While no longer working as a teacher, he writes both fiction and non-fiction books, many of which reveal the truth of the Ascension War to the careful reader. His latest trilogy of best-selling fiction novels, *The Convention Of The White Tower*, *The Great Black Storm* and the concluding epic *Mistridge And Beyond*, have left many mages seething and others laughing; the series is set in a fictitious world that strongly resembles ancient Europe, and features informed (and often unflattering) caricatures of real figures in the early Order and Council. His pseudonym, Bonni Moore Summers, has been wrongly identified as Penny Dreadful or Marianna of Balador. Word of "Summers'" next series, set in the same world, has made several people very unhappy. *The Nine Twisted Paths* trilogy involves a mystic realm called Horizon and the attempts by the sorcerers who create it to cleanse the land of Mistridge from the growing blight of the Mechanimagi. Not even Baron's closest friends know that he's a writer, and for good reason. He maintains a heavy network of false names, corporations and mystick wards to ensure that his identity remains a secret. To date, no one has discovered the truth.

Baron remains friendly and open to most of the people he meets, but his passionate hatred of the Technocracy is pretty obvious, especially to anyone foolish enough to mention Technocrats favorably in his presence. While Baron prefers not to get involved in physical conflicts, he's never hesitated to use his mouth as a weapon. A few people have even accused him of verbal assault and battery, as he's been known to reduce his opponents to nervous breakdowns on several occasions. Baron makes no apologies for his reactions, pointing out that the New World Order murdered his friends, and would likely do so again if given the chance.



Sascha Winters

What She Says: *This morbid image of Death as some cloaked Reaper is kinda tired, but it is still an improvement over the worm-riddled corpses we see in biology class. Oh, yeah, I agree that the whole "dark angel of my mortality" thing is a pile of shit, but if you've got the choice between a fearsome Reaper or a Uriel, and some box in the ground with a shell inside, then I say embrace the past fears and leave the modern fears under the dirt instead.*

There are no great secrets to life. Death, on the other hand is a mystery well worth exploring. The Dead continue on, and the things they have to say about the afterlife are enough to give you nightmares for the next few centuries. I intend to understand everything there is to know about what lies beyond the grave. Then I intend to make it right. I ask you, is that a bad thing?

What You Know: Sascha Winters has flowered over the last few years. In her early days as a Brooklyn nightbabe, she leaned heavily toward the "sheep" end of the scale. She dressed as everyone else around her did, in a style she now refers to as "black, funerary, gothic, pretentious"; her red hair was dyed black, and her already fair skin was covered in heavy white foundation, then decorated in even heavier black with a thick layer of kohl around her eyes.

From the very beginning of her time as an Awakened being, Sascha has been fascinated in death and the afterlife. A few months ago, she experienced an epiphany that has

changed that fascination, increased it and refocused her studies in ways that few people could have expected.

These days, Sascha dresses in clothes styled out of the late '30s and early '40s. Along with the change in fashion direction, she no longer dyes her hair and her makeup is far subtler. She's also often seen in the company of her new entourage, a group of men who dress in similar fashion and who remain calmly, quietly at her side. These men do not speak, but they're quick to light her cigarettes, carry her drinks and follow her every command. They are not vampires, but a few people have noticed these men do not seem to breathe, and never sweat, even in the hottest weather. A few of Sascha's closer friends have started wondering about her new "associates," and one or two have made comments about how similar a few of these silent gentlemen appear to the faces of dead men showing up in the obituaries.

Although she used to be a dedicated member of the Waydown Vitkae, Sascha doesn't spend very much time with the rest of them anymore. Considering the company she's currently keeping, very few Waydowners seem bothered by the notion. Sascha has made the dead her prime study subject for a long time. Now it's pretty obvious that her "academic" interests in necromancy have grown to full-blown obsession. From resurrecting the bodies of the recently deceased to speaking with the dead, Sascha's rituals have taken a ghoulish turn. Rumor has it she regularly wanders the Shadowlands, arm in arm with ghostly tutors.

Something dark is happening to the girl who was once the quietest member of the Waydown group. She claims to see things occurring in the Lands of the Dead that have “dire ramifications.” Only time will prove her right or wrong. At least one member of Sacha’s cabal, commonly called “Spooky Pete” because of his inability to escape the interference of the Restless Dead, is bitterly opposed to the changes she’s made. Sascha doesn’t care. If she was, at one time, a sheep, this red-haired orphan has now become a wolf.

Penny Dreadful (a.k.a. Penny D, Penelope Anne Drizkowski)

What She Says: *Me? Important? Spare me. I might have the biggest collection of fairy tales (the real stuff, not that Bowdlerized crap!) in San Francisco, a talking cat on my shoulder, a box full of wonders, and a major Witchie-Poo on my back, but none of those things make me important!*

Of course, if you want to know the ancient mysteries buried in “The Owl and the Pussycat” or the seven keys to fortune embedded in “Bluebeard,” I suppose I am the girl to ask. Just ask nicely, and have your credit card ready.

What You Know: Penny Dreadful is a witch. Not in the modern sense, nor the ancient sense — she’s never been known to worship any goddess, at least not the ones with the clothing-optional ceremonies — but in the popular literary sense. She wears a black dress, owns several black hats, casts charms and spells, and accessorizes the whole ensemble with a talking black cat who answers to “Mister Mistoffelees.” Along with Spooky Pete, Brent, Sasha, Baron, Blackrose, and the infamous Neville Sinclair, Penny makes up the Waydown Vitkae, San Francisco’s reigning chapter of the Hollow Ones. Although Neville is ostensibly the clique’s “leader,” Penny’s the one with the appointment calendar, making her “She Who Gets Things Done.”

Like many Hollowers, Penny never had a proper Awakening. For years, she “sleepwalked,” believing in minor charms and little prayers, not the Booga-Booga-in-your-face-Virgin-Mary-shows-up-in-your-living-room variety of magick. She practiced a lesser variation of the Art (often called “hedge magic”) until her familiar — a black cat working, at the time, for Jodi Blake — spoke to her. *Splash!* Penny jumped into fairytale magick fully clothed, with only a few looks back.

Penny’s major claim to fame — aside from looting Jodi Blake’s ritual room, stealing her familiar, and finally besting her in a magician’s duel — is a spell she “created” to impress visitors. “Penny Dreadful’s Bright New Penny” debuted the evening her friend Bryce Grimm had a number of Tradition wizards over for a visit. Penny was challenged to “do something entertaining” before she fetched dinner; she did both, using an 18th-century tablecloth to conjure a feast fit for a king (George III, to be specific). When the guests asked

Penny where she got the spell, she replied, “I call it my ‘Bright New Penny.’” The name stuck, and Penny conveniently forgot to mention that she’d simply cribbed the magick tablecloth spell from the *Deutsche Volksmärchen*. (Doesn’t anyone read anymore?)

As her fame spread (almost making up for the thousands of dirty dishes that Paradox gifted her with in exchange for the spell), Penny found herself the object of celebrity in the oddest circles. Having Mister Mistoffelees (formerly Jodilyn Blake’s “Grimalkin”) perched on her shoulder helps her stand out. Fun as it is, the fame is fairly troublesome, seeing as how Penny has been trying to stay out of Jodi Blake’s sight. The young orphan knows she got lucky, and while she trusts in providence, she also puts stock in simple caution... and outright avoidance. Basic hard work is good too; along those lines, she’s been studying Jodi’s Books of Shadows, though more than half of the spells in them are either antiquated or horrifically immoral.

Disarmingly friendly, Penny is a pretty young woman of middling height, with brown hair dyed black (bobbed bangs, longer in the back), fair skin and green eyes. She dresses mostly in black — everything from vintage Victorian widow’s weeds to Beatnik turtlenecks and black berets. About the only constants to her wardrobe are the color, the attention to detail, her lunchbox of the hour and, of course, her familiar. Mister Mistoffelees, an impatient talking cat, usually takes the place of a fur stole.

To people she meets, Penny is kind, sweet, and almost painfully polite and helpful — unless they dis her, her friends or the Hollow Ones, at which point she’ll slip into acidic double entendres. She’s also almost excruciatingly lucky at “finding pretties” (Penny-speak for fetishes and Talismans), and keeps an impressive collection of them at home. If she doesn’t have one of “whatever” stashed in her hope chest, she can probably locate it without much trouble... *if the price is right.*

After all, last time she accepted a commission, she came out of it with a 400-year old familiar and a vendetta from a Satanic witch.

Neville Sinclair

What He Says: *You have questions and I have answers. The point is, I don’t necessarily care to give you those answers. They might be trifles, true, but everyone knows that knowledge is power. I hardly know you; why then would I risk revealing more of myself than is wise? What possible advantage could there be for me in such folly? I suppose if I had a rank and a serial number to go with my name, you’d like those as well...*

What You Know: There are mages who claim they’ve found references to Neville Sinclair dating back to the 1400s. Some even claim they’ve met the mage in some distant past-time. While most of the latter group agree that the man carrying the name at present looks nothing like the

mage they knew many years in the past, his knowledge of old meetings with them is always flawless.

Among the Hollow Ones in San Francisco, Sinclair is considered the *de facto* leader, especially when it comes to dealing with the actual Traditions. He understands the Protocols established by the Council of Nine, and he knows every legal loophole written into them. Neville Sinclair is the closest thing to a lawyer among the Hollowers, and has been instrumental in stopping the Traditions from enforcing their rules on the non-Tradition on numerous occasions. When legal niceties aren't enough, a bewildering propensity for obfuscation and misdirection have concealed the Darklings from their more-powerful kin.

There are mages aplenty who claim Sinclair has pulled off some spectacularly vulgar stunts with no repercussions. Despite these rumors, few people can honestly say they've witnessed him in action. Sinclair remains an enigma, even among his friends. He has traveled extensively, often going back to places where he was known in the past and wearing new (or very old) forms and faces. Among the many rumors spread about the man who coined the phrase "Hollow Ones" is the speculation that he has somehow managed to trick Paradox spirits into believing he doesn't exist. If that's true, he's made it a point not to share the trick with anyone.

One of Sinclair's best-known tricks is his alleged ability to remove his soul and Avatar from one body and place them in another — a power he seldom uses, but which has saved

his life on numerous occasions. The ability would certainly explain his shifting looks throughout the years. Neville's current form is tall and gaunt, with dyed-black hair and a penchant for formalwear. Though he seldom wears much by way of jewelry, he's never seen without an ornate ring with a black stone of unknown origin on his right ring finger.

In the absence of facts, rumors breed. Some of those rumors include a contention that he was once a member of the British House of Lords, he taught Aleister Crowley all about magick, and that he was once a member of the Nephandi. Neville manages to never answer any questions about his life. If asked, he simply gets abrupt or walks away.

Sinclair has spent an inordinate amount of time in San Francisco, especially for a sorcerer who prefers to travel constantly. Many of the orphans he associates with believe that he's looking for something — an item or perhaps even a person — and is merely biding his time, content that his quarry will show up eventually. Gossips insist that Neville is preparing for an event that will have serious ramifications, not only for the mages, but for supernatural beings the world over. Interestingly, he's one of the few members of the Waydown group who does not seem to disapprove of Sascha Winters' sudden fascination with the dead. Whether or not his desire to remain in San Francisco is connected to the strange events Sascha claims to sense, is merely one more of the mysteries that surround Neville Sinclair. Whatever the truth of the matter, he isn't talking.



James Daniel Conolly (formerly Agent X234512)

What He Says: *Hi, I'm James Daniel Conolly. Daniel is not important. Master chef. I am not an island. Who are you? Are you hungry? Do you like steak? I like steak, and coffee. Yahweh gave me coffee once. I just asked for it, and suddenly there it was. Is that your real hair? My girlfriend has hair that color....*

What You Know: James used to be a Man In Black, specifically designed for sharpshooting and tactical expertise. While on assignment in the Deep Universe, James found himself on the receiving end of a Void Engineer project gone wrong. This strange encounter granted him an Awakened soul. Quite distressing for a MIB. Fortunately for James, a former Man in Gray — deceased and residing in the spirit realms — found him and managed to extract him from the New World Order before they could reprogram him. Since then, James has been working as a freelance gun for hire. The more the job goes against his former employers, the more willing he is to take it.

A tall, powerfully built man with broad shoulders, James appears unapproachable. His extroverted and friendly nature often cancels out this initial intimidation factor, however. James is extremely inquisitive, too. Although he has the build of a man, he's mentally only four years old and tends to approach the world with a childlike naiveté. If something attracts his attention, he has no inhibitions about touching it, grabbing it, using it, or asking pointed questions about it. (This goes for people as well as objects.)

But the man known as James Daniel Conolly has another, darker side. In combat intensive situations, James becomes completely unemotional and directive oriented — much like he would have done as an NWO Operative. Regardless of his rank, he barks orders and expects them to be obeyed. And while James is an expert tactician, his ethics leave much to be desired; the sacrifice of innocents is perfectly acceptable if it helps to achieve the greater goal.

Despite his potential for destruction, James lives his life with a sort of comic-book whimsy. His apartment, for example, is infested with wayward and often chaotic spirits. The TV flips channels by itself, the dishwasher does the laundry and the washer does the dishes. James says it's because they're happier that way. He often speaks to the spirit in the coffee maker just to make sure it's content, and he pours spare change into the couch just to make it feel better. For whatever reason, the Gauntlet is extremely thin in his living space. This doesn't seem to matter much to James — he simply accepts it as another strange part of his newly discovered life.

A tall, muscular man, James usually dresses in a black Armani suit, matching trenchcoat and a pair of highly glossed Doc Martens. Due to an bad Paradox backlash,

James is totally hairless and has completely black eyes (no whites) accented with gold flecks that float around like bits in a snow globe when he moves his head. Hence, he almost never leaves his apartment without his fedora and sunglasses. A falsified FBI badge focuses his mental talents; a simple "James Smith — FBI" makes almost everyone follow his instructions. At any given time, James carries several explosives on his person, a Glock in a shoulder holster, a mid-sized gun at the small of his back, another in an ankle holster, and two more guns in the trenchcoat for good measure. In short, don't fuck with this man — he's a walking arsenal.

Jennifer Rollins

What She Says: *Of course, I quit. I didn't want any part of their grief, and still don't. Why can't I just be left to myself? Christ, all I want is my solitude, my art, and a chance to figure out where my head is at. Why can't you all just leave me alone?!*

What You Know: Unlike many orphans, Jennifer didn't Awaken in a blast of insight and power. Instead, the experience came slowly, softly, wrapped in swirls of paint, and curls of whittled wood. A struggling young artist in SoHo, New York, Rollins had literally carved a name for herself among the local connoisseurs. Cash, however, was not as forthcoming as praise.

Like most struggling artists, Jennifer waited tables to pay the bills. There, she met Bethany Raimer, a Verbena Adept of the Bitter Rose Coven, a noted SoHo cabal. Spotting the shine of a powerful Avatar in Jennifer's aura, Bethany struck up conversations that frankly scared the shit out of Rollins. Well, yes, she *had* been having strange dreams. Well, of *course* the masterworks she crafted in her studio apartment just seemed to flow up from some hidden spring. Wasn't that the way it always was with art? Jennifer, a lapsed Christian with a severe Methodist upbringing, was having a hard enough time coping with her rebellious vocation; Beth's talk of guiding spirits and blossoming magick summoned up all the devils of her father's Hell. Too intrigued to flee but too frightened to devote herself, Jennifer sleepwalked through her initial Awakening. Not even her aggressive Avatar, an eerie spectre called Mask, could prod the artist toward her potential.

Until Bethany was murdered.

They broke into Jennifer's loft in the middle of a lesson. The magickal duel between Beth and the invaders was Jennifer's first taste of magick's power, and it petrified her. Fighting alone, Bethany was slaughtered. Her blood showered Rollins, and the young artist broke... but only briefly. Taken to the sanctum of a charming but ruthless Nephandus, she rallied her Arts. No one knew exactly how she killed the sorcerer and destroyed his manor, but Bethany's cabal mates confirm that Jennifer avenged her mentor in blood.



Despite their entreaties, Jennifer refused to join the Verbena, and soon fled New York for a nomadic existence. During her flight, she shackled up with an Ecstatic named Wolf; courted by the Cult, she ran again. In one way or the other, she's been running ever since. Not even Mask can make her stand and fight for long.

Many corpses, however, can attest that when she *does* stand and fight, Jennifer Rollins is a sorcerer of considerable talent. Years after her initial "debut," tales of her mystick power circulate among the courts of the Awakened: *Is it true she cussed out the Council elders in their own chambers? Does she really count Marianna of Balador as a friend? Did you hear about the faerie queen who wept at the beauty of Jennifer's gifts? You know vampires have a blood-price on her head?* It seems the harder she runs, the closer her undeniable destiny becomes. For an orphan with a talent for disappearing, Jennifer Rollins keeps surfacing under the strangest circumstances....

Is she an Errant? Not really. An orphan? By whose definition? Trained by Verbena, Ecstatics and perhaps

even a Nephandus, Jennifer opted for "none of the above." Although many people call her "friend," Jennifer remains a loner. Restless, shy and a bit reckless, she makes her barefooted way across the States, submerged in arcane mystery until loneliness, poverty or fortune bring her up for air. "Ambivalence" appears to be this mage's middle name; at peace, her Arts shape breathtaking jewelry and paintings (which have become quite valuable among the Awakened); when aggressive magick is called for, Rollins strips herself bare, carves runes in her flesh, and brews concoctions with her own blood. Perhaps her painful rites reflect guilt — guilt for Bethany, guilt for running, or guilt for turning her back on Father's vengeful God in favor of a wilder, primordial master: magick.

Victoria "Phoenix" Attakai

What She Says: *Oh, you don't want to know about me. Really, you don't. Besides, what's there to tell? I'm a Navajo, my Papa is rich, and the two don't go together very often. Tell you what — I don't really have much to say. You're probably bored, and I don't want to burden you with my problems. Want a drink?*

What You Know: Born into an influential Navajo family, Tori had every advantage one would expect a bright, attractive young girl to have. Because her father managed a casino on the reservation, Tori's early life was relatively comfortable. Despite the family's involvement in politics around the rez, she felt distanced from her neighbors... with good reason: Michael "Rolling Gold" Attakai was not exactly the most popular man in town.

When Victoria was 16, she took a vacation to Monument Valley to visit her grandmother. A hard look (courtesy of Grandmama) at daily life on the rez hit Tori like a brick. Poverty was everywhere. Women worked long, hard days for a pittance, and that they gave to their husbands — depressed and defeated men who would travel across three counties to drink and gamble in a casino much like her father's. These people, *her* people, lived from day to day with very little money and very little hope. The shock cracked her privileged shell. The Awakening that followed was not sudden, but it was undeniable.

The visions began soon after she moved to New Mexico for good. Ghosts rose up from the earth itself and howled into the sky. They passed into people walking down the street, and those people began to glow like candle-lamps. Some passerby burst into colored smoke, while others melted into sludge or fell into ashes. The dreams jolted Tori from sleep night after night, and she began talking to somebody, everybody, *anybody*, about what she saw in her sleep. Seized by an apocalyptic fervor, she listened to the old Navajo prophecies of the Fourth World, and of the great disaster to come. Like any prophet, she had her believers and her detractors. And like most prophets, she broke under the weight of the visions.

Tori hit the bottle hard, and often stumbled around the rez in a stupor. Jason Blake, a.k.a. the shaman Jason Wind-Dancer, listened to her ravings and took her aside. With patience, sweats, love and a lot of late nights, he hauled Tori on the wagon and kept her there. Sober, she could only tolerate the dreams with his help. Disturbed, Wind-Dancer made some inquiries... inquiries of elders, inquiries of spirits, even inquiries with the beast-men on the fringes of his society, and the great medicine folk in the desert.

Those inquiries got Jason killed. On the night before his marriage to Tori (now rechristened "Phoenix" for her sobriety), the young shaman was shot and killed by parties unknown. Tori went wild with grief; when several medicine people came out of the night to comfort her, she called up a dust storm, slammed her car into gear, and fled the rez for good.

Now nestled in Manhattan, Phoenix is a haunted woman — haunted by spirits, haunted by memories, and haunted by suspicions. She's also a hardcore alcoholic, living on cash sent by her father. Her Arts — a weird, unsettling combination of Navajo rites, voodoo and Victorian spiritualism — have reached across the Shroud and touched Jason Wind-Dancer... or at least a ghost who *claims* he's Jason Wind-Dancer. Convinced that his fiancée foresees a great spiritual cataclysm, the ghost-shaman (or its pretender) encourages Phoenix to spread the word before it's too late.

And she does. Most nights, Phoenix Attakai can be found going from bar to bar in downtown Manhattan. She begins quiet and demure, but as the night wears on, the alcohol fuels apocalyptic rants that continue until dawn. No mortal should be able to consume the booze she drinks; people of talent suspect she's ghost-driven. Although doomsday lunatics are common enough these days, Tori's visions have a ring of truth. Mysticks — especially self-Awakened ones — are beginning to listen.

Despite her binges, Phoenix has frequent moments of clarity and stability. In these moments, she shows her true potential as a willworker. Her natural talent for Spirit Arts makes Tori a popular guide and teacher amongst the local orphans. As long as the sun is shining, Tori can make it through the day with little more than a hangover; at night, however, she plunges herself back into the booze before the ghosts and visions grow too strong.

Tori is a statuesque woman in her mid-20s, with long, curly auburn hair, coppery skin and brown eyes. Once, she was beautiful; these days, she's striking in a "man-she'd-be-cute-if-she-wasn't-a-drunk" sort of way. For all her Papa's wealth, Phoenix dresses like a rez girl: jeans, white T-shirt, moccasins and a leather jacket. Around her neck, she wears a small medicine bag on a leather thong; with her at all times is a backpack holding more herbs and ritual face paints. Some of her tools favor voodoo motifs; sensitive



sorcerers have noticed that one or two have an especially dark Resonance about them... not unlike the haunted prophet herself.

Swarna Jayani

What She Says: *Not all independents are poor or desperate. My friends and I, for example, were highly successful... for a time. To understand who I am now, you've got to understand who I was then... back when the Associates meant something. I was wealthy, fearless, and out for revenge. People always commented on how sophisticated I was, how completely tasteful yet avant garde. Selfishness, as well as ruthlessness, were characteristics I could afford to develop.*

Outside our little group, I was sleek, mean and unapproachable. I hear the Technocracy used to "create" women like me to intimidate the mundanes. Well, I'm not very proud of many of the things I did then, and I suppose the hard ride I had with karma was the debt I had to pay for all that. But I'm a different person now. I see things even more clearly now than when I first Awakened. That's why I stay on the streets when I could just as easily sequester myself in some upper West-Side retreat. I want to help people like you — teach you, so that hopefully, by the time I'm ready to do battle again, I'll have some allies who know what their doing.

What You Know: Swarna has been humbled by her experiences. Some would say she's burnt out, but closer inspection reveals that she's simply keeping a low profile, licking her wounds, and taking time to learn from her mistakes. Technically, Swarna is supposed to be dead, so staying out of the spotlight is a good thing. In penitence for the crimes she committed, this Errant places herself in the path of the newly Awakened, hoping that her short lessons and stories will serve as guideposts... or at least lights in a darkened world.

At first glance, it might seem impossible that this small, slight, yet beautiful woman could be capable of leading one of the most notorious crime syndicates in the world. But looks are deceiving. Hers was the mind behind the April Fool's Day stock market crash, which bankrupted thousands of investors and severely crippled several corporations. She and the Associates were also responsible for the Halloween burglaries and bombings in New York, San Francisco, and Atlanta — terrorist strikes that caused millions of dollars in losses and damage to the Chase Manhattan and Nations Banks. What Swarna has a mind to do, she *does*, either with haunting beauty or horrifying malice.

The attacks Swarna led against the Technocrats garnered her a lot of fame and notoriety... and plenty of enemies. The London Euthanatos have vowed to bring their beautiful renunciate before the Council should she decide to return to the city, and Tradition mages stateside keep a watchful eye out for the wayward sorcerer. Now hidden in the underground, Swarna strives for a redemption

she's hard-pressed to accept. Although she claims that her contribution to Vannoy's *Survival Guide* is the least she could do, Swarna's recent activities have the air of a martyr preparing for a showdown.

East Indian by descent, English by education, Swarna's a stunning, petite woman in her late 20's with long thick black hair and a clipped Oxford accent. In her days with the Associates, she was a clothes horse — never seen in anything but the most stylish and tasteful fashions. Now it's hard to distinguish her from any other person on the street. Swarna wears her hair up in a long ponytail, and favors jeans and large, bulky sweaters in the winter months. No amount of off-the-rack clothing, however, can disguise the knowing, intelligent spark in her hazel eyes... a glitter that draws in young orphans like an intoxicating perfume.

Bryce Grimm

What He Says: *I've looked for enlightenment everywhere. I've just come to the conclusion that the only Ascension is personal, at least for me. What else do you want to know? I'm a dealer in antiquities, special items that are hard to find and of particular interest to the Awakened. Other than that, I'm generally uninteresting.*

Actually, I'm a Technocracy double-agent. I think that's my favorite one. People seem to believe that because I know more about the Traditions and Conventions than some of their members do. I, on the other hand, think that any infiltrator who infiltrates the same society over and over is too stupid to keep from getting caught, and I am by no means a stupid man. I've been Awakened for almost 40 years now, and I know you don't last that long if you're stupid.

What You Know: When it comes to oddities, rare and even mythological treasures and general information, Bryce Grimm is one of the best-educated non-Tradition mages around. While he's officially a rogue Tradition magus, the proprietor of Grimm's Occult Specialty Shoppe has managed to remain in good graces with all of the Traditions he tried on for size before deciding to go his own way; since he Awakened almost 40 years ago, he's been with seven of the nine.

Despite Bryce Grimm's penchant for easy conversation, he does not speak much about himself. What "common knowledge" information exists about him comes in the form of exaggerated word of mouth, rumor and hearsay. The information that people agree about is sketchy at best.

Perhaps, the most puzzling aspect of this mage's long career is his ability to run shops throughout the world without gathering crippling amounts of Paradox. Grimm's Occult Specialty Shoppe has branches in Atlanta, Berlin, Hong Kong, New York, Providence, London, San Francisco, New Orleans and Miami, as well as Chicago and Philadelphia. True, none of them are ever open at the same time, but he has been spotted on the same day in



different locations by people who know him well enough to spot a fraud.

Although magi disagree about many aspects of Grimm's life and career, no one will disagree with the fact that Bryce's shop (or shops) house the finest collection of magickal items to be found. Divided into two sections, the stores offer both mundane and extraordinary occult wares to those who are interested. Once a customer (normally a mage, though some other supernatural beings have managed to do the same) gains Bryce's trust, he'll show that customer into the back room, past the moon crystals and Tarot decks on display out front. No customer who knows Bryce's true reputation has ever left one of his stores unsatisfied.

There's little Grimm loves more than the fine art of bartering. The shopkeeper is a collector of rare antiquities and Talismans. From tomes written by ancient masters, to mythic lost weapons, Grimm has managed to locate, keep and sell an amazing collection of items from around the world. His customers are carefully screened before he allows them access to his collection, and while he deals primarily with mages, he's been known to sell a few items of power to other supernatural forces. Nothing in any of his stores has a price tag, not even the precious Talismans and books of eldritch lore he has available for his special clientele. For Grimm, the pleasure of the transactions seems to come

mostly from haggling for a price and divining what he can from the purchaser's interest.

If Grimm can be accused of having a weakness, it is his self-confessed loathing for the Technocracy. Although he seldom speaks of the events, it's known by a few and rumored by many that he has been captured by the Conventions on at least three occasions. He managed to escape each time, but the experiences have left him scarred and bitter.

When it comes to the politics of the Ascension War, Bryce is the first to say he no longer cares. He does what he can from the safety of his stores; aside from that, he has no interest in the matter. The only rules he follows are his own, and the only ones he enforces involve proper conduct in his shops. Despite this philosophy, he tends to get involved in unusual situations more often than not. There are some among the Traditions who point to Bryce Grimm as an example of what can happen if a mage chooses to ignore his destiny. Grimm chooses not to notice their words, or at least to pretend they don't matter.

Bryce shies away from ostentatious or formal clothes, preferring jeans and a dress shirt when he's conducting business. One good-natured jibe, popular among the younger patrons of Grimm's Occult Specialty Shoppe, is that Bryce would have made a perfect hippie. Bryce's favorite response to such ribbing is to run a hand casually

through his long brown hair and say, "As a matter of fact, I was a perfect hippie."

The Rev DayJah Voo

What He Says: *The 2K /is tolling like a cracked bell/ I hear a death knell/ To the White Man's Hell/ Chango at my side/ Eyes wide and fire/ Bright/ I got a ringside/ At the landslide/ Trade my chains for gold/ That's what I'm told/ But the situation's too cold/ For me/ You see my enemy/ Is you.*

— Rev. DayJah Voo, "Procession"

What You Know: Check it out: The Rev is not dead. They say he is, but they like to make ghosts of the living to start with. Like Lazerus from the grave, the righteous Rev. DayJah Voo still speaks, still walks, still calls down quiet thunder for the coming apocalypse.

Another casualty of the East-West War, they said. No one really listened to the power of his rhymes or the true text of his message. All we ever saw, according to The Man, was a gangsta with a voodoo edge and a drastic head for rage. That's why his records sold like ice in August. That's why his Word pumped from speakers all over AmeriKKKa. That's why he got slammed by the Serve & Protect crew. They tossed his ass backward into the bowels of the Devil, but he came back stronger, badder, saved by the Word from on high.

That Word is "Loa," as in the gods of night, and that Word saved the Rev from lame-ass dubs of guns and pussy and turned him into the right righteous prophet of the 2K Thunderflu. Tossed in a cell with this Rasta from Alphabet City, the Rev was ready to backdoor the motherfucker when Mr. Macumba starts unloading his gospel of Chango. God of Gunpowder, Flame and Blood, Chango is the Master of the Elements, and he's cooler than Jesus to this cellblock John the Baptist. At first, the Rev was skeptical — hey, there's lots of crackheads who'll tell you they're down with the forces of the universe. But Mr. Macumba was no crackhead, and he wasn't rambling. Sure, he told good stories, but inside those stories, there was Truth. He *knew* things, too, and could do stuff that made a motherfucker's hair turn white. In the beginning, the Rev listened because he wanted a new trick for his rapping. In time, he became a believer.

Rev chilled for about a year, then got sprung by his label's lawyers. By that time, the prophet burned with a mission: to get the Word of Chango out, to break down the walls of the White Man's Babylon. He took up with houngan named Michael Ashé and dove into macumba headfirst. One night, he was dancing up a fury when Chango himself came to the feast. He rode the Rev like a lover on fire, all whiplashes and sweet pain, and promised the star he'd be the loud prophet of the 2K.

Chango took the Rev on a ride in the spirit world; there, the Rev saw the fall of the White Man's paradise, the riots, crackdowns and eventual revolution that would come when the computers crashed on Y2K. If the True Children

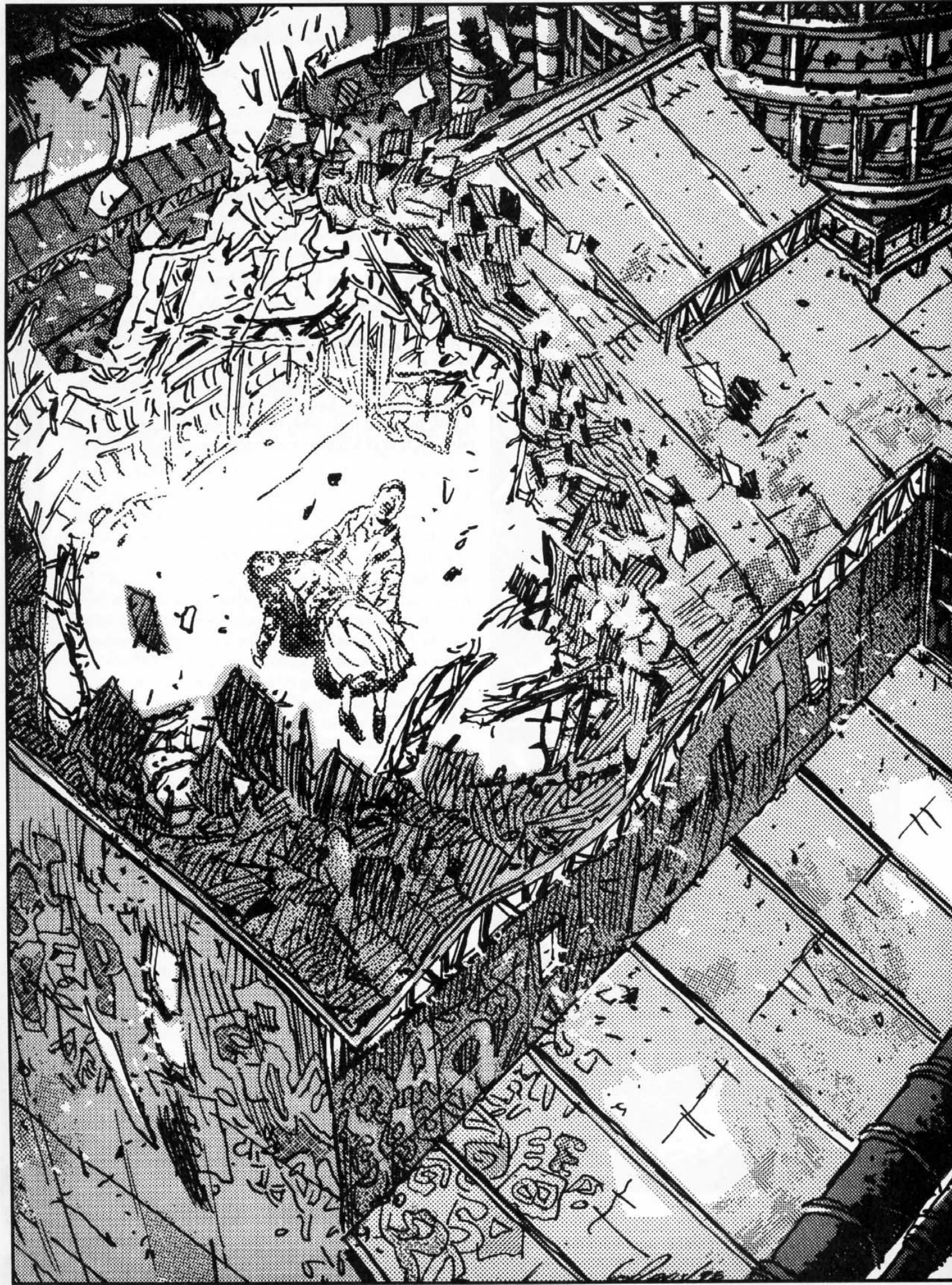


of the Thunderflu understood the Gospel of Fire, Chango said, they would take up the keys to a new kingdom, one in which all slaves would be free and all masters would be slaves. When the Rev came down, his eyes literally blazed with small fires. Those flames soon burned out, but the ones in his soul never did. Like the dude in prison, DayJah could *do* things — see ghosts, share thoughts, and scare the living shit out of anyone he wanted without lifting a finger. His prophet's gaze was enough.

Possessed, he locked himself in his studio for five days and banged out the meanest jams he had ever set. *Gospel of Fire* cracked the Top 10 two weeks out, and stayed there for a month. Politicians and preachers screamed about the "satanic" grooves and race-war lyrics, but whites and blacks alike jammed on the sound. Instead of blow, gold and pussy, the Rev threw his cash into help projects and offerings to Chango. In Alphabet and Harlem, he opened chapels of the New Way. The Church of the True Children drew a lot of flack, but the Rev and his boys got the thing settled square. That's when The Man came down.

They say it was a drive-by from some East Coast bangers. Bullshit. When Chango's True Children caught one of the blasters, he told (after a little Colombian tenderness) that he'd been paid by white dudes. There was no funeral. There was no body. The riots lasted for days. As the fires burned, True Children swore they heard Chango laughing. Three days after the announcement of his death, the Rev DayJah Voo returned. He showed the True Children his scars, held their hands, and led prayers to Erzulie and Damballah for his deliverance.

Since then, the Rev's label has released two more albums, *Vévés* and *Congo Square*. Both have poured gold from Babylon to the True Children. The Man says those albums are posthumous, but those who *know*, know that the Rev is alive. His fires burn low, but they still burn, and his voice is like lava on a cold night. In his hands, the gris-gris dances like a ghost. Each day, Y2K gets ever closer. When it hits, not long from now, the Rev and his Children will raise the fires of Chango and breach the walls of Babylon.



Chapter V: When the Fire Starts

*Here's to lurid tales of romance,
Coke whores & closet queens & assorted
Creatures of the night.
4 a.m. leather boys with swollen glands
& a stinky middle finger.
The snap, crackle, & fuck of
Cherry poppin', strung-out DJ's...
— Ray Velasquez*



She started screaming shortly after we got home. Real horror-movie stuff, not the angry slurs of routine domestic abuse, but real “oh-fuck-he’s eviscerating-me” kind of screams. Not surprisingly, she was upstairs in Charlie’s place. Not bad enough the old redneck had beat on his bitch like a drum, now that she’d left him, he’d found a substitute.

I was out the door and heading up the stairs, Catherine’s voice shrill behind me. “What the fuck are you doing? I’m calling the cops! Get back here!”

I ignored Catherine. At their normal speed, the cops might show up in an hour. By then, whatever was being done would be long over. Besides, I wanted an excuse to hit someone.

I warmed up on the door. Fistfalls boomed through the shitty halls like thunderbolts. Behind my eyes, things were flat and red-hot.

Sparks sizzled through my vision. I didn’t recognize my own voice: “Alright you fucking bastard!! Open this fucking door!!”

Charlie complied, pulling it open like a boxer at Round One. His pants were gone. His dick was rigid. His apartment stank like booze and monkey cum. God knows how he got a woman there in the first place.

The old bastard shouted something drunk and incoherent. I understood “...my bizness...,” but the rest was lost in a fog of rage. Behind him, his latest conquest kept screaming.

And then, Charlie was like wallpaper, dripping. A blissful silence settled down. Even the screamer went quiet. There was something on my fingers, something wet.

Oh shit.

Charlie had gone from man to mural without finishing his sentence. In the distance, sirens picked up where the beaten chick left off. The cops had picked a lousy time to make a liar out of me.

It was shaping up to be a wonderful afternoon.

What's the Deal?

So as it turns out, you're a mage.

You can change the world by simply willing it so. You can travel into the spirit world or call forth the immense powers of kinetic energy. Maybe you can slow time around you to a crawl. Perhaps you can even control destiny itself, always rolling a seven or 11 on your first cast of the dice, or perhaps winning the lottery every week.

Why, then, are you spending your third straight day — no sleep — fucked up on trucker speed, stalking around your rat-trap apartment and using your bare feet to crunch the light bulbs you've used to smoke your crank while your starving child has cried herself into hoarse exhaustion one room over? Why are you sucking dick for 20-dollar bills in alleys where only half of the people who enter them make it out alive? Why do you put yourself through yet another vapid, empty night in a trashy dive bar, listening to the same old :Wumpscut: and Switchblade Symphony songs, hoping to nick enough sympathy booze from the barflies and slumming hipsters to drink yourself into oblivion? Why the fuck are you living off the garbage rooted out of McDonalds'

dumpsters, wearing the same filthy T-shirt you stole from a thrift store two weeks ago and spending your nights all but face down in the alcove of a church, wrapped up in a rancid blanket like a drunk heroin burrito?

Because you're desperate, that's why.

Being a mage doesn't mean you're Superman. There's no guarantee of power or comfort with your newfound abilities. In fact, if you're an orphan, you've probably got no guarantees of anything at all. No slick Tradition-toady extending you a chance at the holy war. No Technocracy brute making you an offer you can't refuse. You've probably never even heard of the Ascension War, and you're just as likely to have never heard of Ascension. You may not even have a word for what you are — and you may have no idea that there are others like you. In realizing the power you possess, you may have seared someone's head off with a bolt of electricity, or blown all the doors and windows out of an entire subway train, shrieking, bloody-eyed, as the magick boiled through you and everyone surrounding you looked on in slack-jawed terror.

Welcome to the streets. Welcome to being an orphan.

Setting



*Do you think that you can hold on
When the beat gets too strong
And you feel that you need help to move along?
Do you think that you can hang tough when
the rhythm gets rough
And the DJ says, "I think you've had enough?"
— Roni Size w/ Reprezent, "Railing"*

So, as an orphan, life sucks and you're a total freak. You're desperate. You're barely in control of a magick that threatens to consume you. Shit, it's more of a curse than a blessing. Why the hell would anyone want to Storytell or roleplay something like this?

Because it's damn cool. It's cathartic. It's thrilling. How does the lowlife live when the lowlife can turn the world on its ear? Storytelling that desperation — which just might lead to salvation — is profoundly satisfying. Hereafter is some advice on how to do just that.

Who's Down Here?

One of the most important aspects of the setting is the people. If your orphans chronicle takes place among genteel society, either you're going for irony or you're doing something wrong.

In a word, the streets are rough. As such, some pretty-rough types are going to be stalking your chronicle, and none of 'em give a fuck about political correctness. The streets of the World of Darkness are crawling with fags, niggaz, spics, pigs, dykes, chinks, pervs, smackheads, hos, pimps, playaz and, of course, whitey (whom you may choose to call The Man).

Knowing this fact — and using this terminology — doesn't make you a racist. People say shit like that all the time. If you say it *and mean it*, there's probably a bit of bigotry in you, though, and if you're afraid of taking street talk into account, you're probably playing the wrong kind of game.

Not everyone on the streets is a hard-ass, hardcore hardcase, though. Most folks on the streets are decent, honest people who got screwed by fate and found themselves in bad situations. Any urban center is packed with the working poor, transplanted immigrants (Chinatown? Little Italy? Haitian ghettos, anyone?), old or entrenched die-hards who refuse to give up, and other folks who just want to make it through life without getting into trouble. Ironically, these people are the reason the streets exist — if *everyone* was an incorrigible villain, life wouldn't be worth living. Of course, good people are more rare in the World of Darkness than in our own, but that just makes them all the more valuable.

The bottom line is that the streets are a melting pot — mix a mess of good people with a really rotten handful of bad people, stir in drugs, porn, violence, cramped living conditions, insensitive laws, bad education, more violence, more drugs and a faint hope of redemption and you've got the World of Darkness. Now introduce your players' mages into the mix and see what happens.

Speaking of which: What kinds of mages end up in the streets? Well, there are those who join the Technocracy and Traditions. This isn't a book about *them*, though, so they can kiss my ass. With very few exceptions (see *Destiny's*

Price, Chapter Three), the streetside dudes woke up on the wrong side of their Avatars and never really got over the experience, or never *wanted* to.

Any street mage is going to have something that keeps her where she is. (Otherwise she'd just change her reality to something less hellish.) Some sorcerers are street priests or shamans, working their miracles through divine intervention or the wills of the spirits. Others — voodoo *oungans*, community holy men, dedicated sons and daughters, and the like — have cultural ties to the streets, like a family residence, an ethnic neighborhood or a simple connection to the people in a given area of town. Some mages have simply gone insane with the power they possess, and live on the streets because their skewed perceptions make it... difficult... for them to get on elsewhere. Willworkers may have some cultural or social ties to the urban underbelly, such as the charming Bitch Queen Vannoy and her crew of black-lipsticked gothabouts. Some mages may belong to cults or social movements — there's more than one magus among the homeless hippie crowd and Satanic underground alike. And in the end, most mages end up in the streets for the same reason the Sleepers are there — they just *can't* get out, no matter how hard they try.

In short, then, almost anyone who's got nothing more to lose ends up in the streets. This distinction is important to convey to your players — they've got to make characters who won't be stabbed or conned right off the bat — but also to keep in mind for your own Storyteller characters. Maybe

the head of the drug ring that's kidnapping children from the local state hospital is a Cultist of Ecstasy, but why the hell would he need to run such a racket? It's more likely some "self-Awakened" son of a bitch using his talents for his own benefit, Tradition or Convention be damned.

Where the Hell are We?

As important as color characters are to a setting, it's pointless to have them milling around in a featureless environment. Despite crappy movies', books' and comics' (and roleplaying games'...) presentations to the contrary, most of the city is pretty damn boring. Not every corner has a nightclub for gathering with your street-thug homiez, a liquor store to rob when you need cash, a pawn shop for hocking the loot you just heisted off the tourists, and a crackhouse so you can score some rock. In fact, most downtowns are laid out sensibly, with different districts of commerce or residence. Clubs tend to be within a few streets of each other (though there may be multiple club districts — and that applies to other districts, too, so don't give me any lip), as do apartment buildings, office skyscrapers and other crows-of-the-same-feather. The only places that really get scattered around the urban landscape are churches, convenience stores and fast-food joints.

As a Storyteller, you don't have to concern yourself with the intent or business of every building in your city blocks. Heck, most people who live downtown don't have any idea what goes on in their immediate environment...





and don't *want* to know! So you only have to cover locations that are important (which is actually pretty easy if you're basing your chronicle in a real city — just drive by and make a note of what looks cool, what sparks a story idea, and what would be necessary for logistics). Everything else can be made up on the fly, or simply subsumed by the feel of the city. Too much detail bogs down the story anyway.

(**Note to Storytellers:** Every now and then, you'll run afoul of some loudmouth know-it-all (like me) who makes a big show of knowing what's up and throws a big production about the petty details your unhip ass gets wrong. If this occurs, ask these players if it's really *that* important, or if they're just being assholes. You, of course, know that it's really not important to the story, which is what you're all gathered to tell. If the player makes an issue, simply state, "Why, yes, you're right, and isn't the story so much better for that critical detail?" If the player is a consistent pain, don't invite him to future gaming sessions.)

Now Don't Wreck It

Playing a Storytelling game is hard, and being the Storyteller is even more difficult. Too often, flippant remarks or unbelievable details can break the mood. Imagine an intense tale of child abuse punctuated by a player singing, "Beat on the brat/With a baseball bat/Oh, yeah!" as you refrain from going for the Louisville Slugger yourself. Here's how to avoid stuff like that.

• Know Your Characters

Don't worry about the players' characters — worry about yours. If every gangbanging muthafuckin' hoodie the characters meet is an Ice-T clone, and every drug-peddling cokehead is a nose-thumbing paranoid, your setting's gonna wear thin real quick. Give your characters enough detail and motivation to make 'em unique, and spend some time making 'em individual people — *personalities* rather than simple lists of Traits. (See **The Book of Mirrors: The Mage Storytellers Guide**, Chapter Four for details and suggestions.)

• Avoid White-Boy Syndrome

On the other hand, don't make yourself look stupid. If you ain't jiggy wit da homeboyz (an' I bet you ain't), don't try to talk da talk. Accents and voices are hard for players to handle when they're used to your normal voice. If you're good with voices and accents, cool, use 'em; if not, you're better off with sticking to turns of phrase, and simple "in-character" gestures and manners of speech. Some of us can handle Ebonics, but most others of us can't, an' dat's just da way it is, homeboy! (Insert pained expression here.) Speaking of...

• Don't do the PC Thing

Yeah, we all know how sensitive and progressive you are, otherwise you'd be playing AD&D, right? Well, fuck that P.C. bullshit. The world is a big-ass place, and every detail you

throw in helps players suspend disbelief. Is your crack peddler Puerto Rican? Then it's okay to mention something about his "Latin appearance." Is the murder victim black? Same thing; mention that fact if it's important. If your players get wiggled, remind 'em it's just a fucking game. If it really tweaks some meat (yours or theirs), then keep it above the belt, but *please* don't throw whitewash across the dirty streets then expect 'em to shine. A chronicle set in the streets should be uncomfortable. If people grimace (at something other than your Ebonics), you're probably doing it right.

• The Point

This book assumes you're an experienced Storyteller, and that you know how to create a plot, maintain pace, and other fruity pedantry. It all still applies, though — your chronicle needs to have something for players to do. High stakes and big price tags, y'know? Hey, if you could change the world, if you were on the brink of suicide and had no one to turn to, would you *really* posse up with a bunch of other mages just to hang out at the Skull Barn or wherever, and look tragically hip? Probably not. Player or Storyteller, you need meat, juice and hunger to play in the streets.

Technique



Watch you fall away from me

Sinking into misery

— Lush, "Undertow"

It's easy to *want* to set your **Mage** game in the streets — we've all seen enough movies, been to enough nightclubs, or pulled down enough "just one more" drinks at dawn to know how exciting the outlaw side of life can be. *Playing* an outlaw *well*, especially when your straight, white, suburban ass doesn't have enough frame of reference to make it believable, is a lot harder. To that end, here are a few tips on making your story gritty, vibrant and real (as opposed to a patchwork of post-Tarantino clichés):

Evoking Mood

Creating the proper atmosphere is probably the single most important element in a believable street-level chronicle. Remember the movie *The Crow*? Did it matter how flimsy the plot was, how goofy the characters were, or how preposterous Top Dollar's crime syndicate was? Fuck no, because the movie just felt *cool*. (In defense of *The Crow*, the original movie maintained internal consistency, and gave its characters logical motivations — and quirks! — that grounded the movie's sillier aspects. *Crow II*, in contrast, was a collection of bits that looked cool on their own, but bit leper dick in the story and character departments. Mood isn't *everything*, kids!)

Mood is that underlying feel — the look, style, sound and ambiance — that gives the setting its power. Relaying those kind of details without stumbling into the Bad Gothic Poetry Corner is a bit of a trick, but even Bad Gothic Poetry is preferable to a bunch of lines on graph paper. You want to go for a balance — a mix between archness, menace and brevity — when you set the scene, but for Christ's sake, set a *scene*.

Ultimately, though, the setting is only that: a place where your characters (who are vital to the story) are. Pay too much attention to detail and you grind the story to a halt. Pay too little, and you may as well have your characters interacting in featureless white rooms.

While building up a mood, remember a few things:

Stress the Human Level

Street-level chronicles are not about Umbraships, Horizon Realms or Battles for Reality Itself. Oh, sure, that Bane spirit might make an appearance toward the end of the story, or that strange rift might appear in the wall of an otherwise-normal tenement (see Kathe Kojas's *Cipher*), but for the most part, things remain grounded in the human world. Conflicts revolve around addiction, broken hearts, gutter wars and urban predators, not around dueling paradigms, hypertechnology and fire-throwing wizards.

In urban survival games, the characters live alongside their "sleeping" counterparts, not like shepherds among sheep, but like alpha wolves in a pack. The lines between Sleeper and Awakened are rarely drawn at all, and remain blurry at best. Orphans have strong ties to their "mortal" lovers, rivals and enemies, and deal with normal people and animals far more often than with cyborgs or dragons. When obviously magical elements do appear, they're wild, mysterious and often terrifying. Street orphans should rarely take the "supernatural" for granted, and know little about the Big Picture. When you're crafting stories for them, concentrate on human emotions, conflicts and relationships, and leave supernatural elements in the shadows where they belong.

Ditch Pretense

Look, be real. You're not a badass, and that's probably just as well. If you're running a street-level game to name-drop bands, catalogue drugs and impress your friends, the game's gonna look cheesy, and you're gonna look like an obnoxious dork. A street-level game is not about your "cred" — it's an opportunity to play dirty without getting knifed and left in a dumpster downtown. If you're really as hardcore as you're pretending to be, why are you playing a Storytelling game in your parents' basement instead of getting hopped on PCP and killing cops down in the 'hood, poseur?

(Don't answer that by example. I was making a point.)

There's nothing wrong with being a goob (trust me, I know), and there's nothing wrong with being clueful enough to get through a conversation without saying the word "Anti-paladin." Just remember: Playing a badass does not

make you a badass, and running a street game is preferable to living in a crack house. (Again, trust us on this one.) Don't confuse the two, and you'll be fine.

Mood, Not Maps

It's not worth the effort to detail every minor aspect of the setting—just hit the important stuff and let the players' imaginations fill out the rest. F. Scott Fitzgerald developed his characters' personalities by revealing their actions and quirks; use this technique to set the scene.

You can inject life into your scenery by illuminating its personality, too. Check this out:

Drone: *The street is roughly 40 feet wide, with a pawn shop and hourly motel on one side, and a liquor store on the other. A uniformed police officer waits under a streetlight.*

Mood: *The street is slick and littered with crack vials... and it's probably wider than you could sprint in a few seconds if you needed to scatter. A few shady all-night establishments have their doors open: a liquor store with fluorescent lights and flickering beer signs, and the Palladium Arms, a slumbering mess of a hotel offering refuge to a crack whore and this hour's "boyfriend." Across the tarmac, a pawnshop stands, fenced behind a security grate and glowing with some hidden business. Beneath a buzzing streetlight, a beat cop paces back and forth, swinging a nightstick....*

Sure, the later example takes more time and effort to relay, but look at the difference. The first is a recitation of factoids. The second is a snapshot of the night. Which one do you find more effective (and more conducive to paranoid speculations)?

Sensory Detail

The streets are visceral, not intellectual, and the people who survive there hone their animal instincts. The "urban jungle" thing is a cliché, but there's truth behind it. When you're living in a desperate environment, especially one where death crouches just out of sight, you take the world in through *all* senses. When something goes wrong, that sense of danger galvanizes you in ways that intellectual comprehension never could.

An example: Let's say you lived in an apartment complex where people beat each other behind closed doors. Those doors don't do shit about the thinness of the walls and floors, though, so everyone in the building hears every blow and every scream. Now imagine that you hear thuds, breaking glass and cries for help at 3:00 in the morning. Upstairs. It sounds loud enough to come through the floor—loud enough to feel as you lie safely in bed. The blows fall so hard that things in your room rattle. As you pull up out of your sleepy haze, you smell the spilled beer creeping through the upstairs floorboards, pooling in a skanky film right above your head. In the darkness, you can hear and smell every detail. Each sob, each curse, each... slamming door? Now imagine you feel footfalls

thundering down the stairs... voices raised and getting closer... the animal sense of proximity just outside your door... and then the shouted obscenities, booming shakes and cries for help... and imagine the gut-trembling certainty that the violence has just come to *your* door, too....

Multiply that animal sense by the expanded awareness of a mage, and you've got some idea of the power sensory description can have. When you tell a story or play a part, focus on the things a character in that situation might feel. Use those impressions, and make your story come alive.

Using Music

After checking out the source material in the Appendix and looking over your own collection of CDs and tapes, you've probably got the urge to use some of that music in your game. Cool. Here's some advice on that. (Damn, there's advice on *everything* in this book, isn't there?)

The easiest way to use music is to simply play the album in the background while your game is going. Movie scores and songs with no lyrics work best—when players strain to hear the words or sing along, it's distracting as all hell. Enterprising Storytellers may wish to key certain game events to certain pieces of music for dramatic effect—the big fight with the gangstaz may need a hardcore drum 'n' bass score, while the descent into the condemned apartment building's basement may warrant a creepy goth song. Getting your hands on a CD-ROM burner or recordable CD-R player may be just the thing for a Storyteller who wishes to score her chronicle, though a music carousel or mix tape works just as well. As long as you're not getting up every four minutes to change the song, you won't break the mood.

Music sets the scene in ways no amount of description can match. If the characters walk into a nightclub, play the music the club plays. If a car full of homiez pulls up to the curb, crank some bad noise and get the blood pumpin'. You don't have to play the whole song to set a mood—just use enough to give the players a sense of what their characters hear. Think of it as a soundtrack to your chronicle, just like in the movies.

Got a favorite song, one that inspires you to flights of devilishness? By all means, use it. (We do—shit, you should hear some of the stuff we listen to as we write these books.... For a short list, see the Appendix.) Characters, events, settings, even entire stories and themes can all come from a well-written lyric or a moving piece of music. It's also a lot more fun to plan a chronicle when you've got music jamming in the background. So turn up some upbeat techno or put in some hardcore rap; heck, throw in some goth rock and you'll be good to go. Good music stimulates creativity. Since what you're working on here is a labor of creativity, music can only help.

Push It Over the Top

In the hostile nocturnal streets of the real world, people die, rape, steal, shoot up, kidnap, grift, and otherwise screw over their fellow man for their own gain. In the World of Darkness, this happens even more often than it does in ours — that's part of what makes the world so inhospitable. To drive the point home, show the violence of the night to your players' characters. Have them step over dead whores to get to their destinations. Confront them with a cop looking for someone to grease his palm. Sell the characters (*not the players!*) bad drugs, or give one AIDS from a dirty needle. Hit them with every bit of disgusting or horrid a trip as the World of Darkness can muster — because the street is where all the ill shit goes down, baby.

In the end, your *players* should be a bit (or a good deal, depending on your intent, Miss Storyteller) uncomfortable with the game's events. That's good; let them leave the table thinking, "Jesus, thank God this is only a game. I guess I don't have it as bad as I thought I did." It's like a good cry at a movie or the final nail in the coffin of a particularly sour relationship. It's heavy when you're dealing with it, but I'll be damned if you don't feel better afterward. Just make sure your group can handle it. Not everyone is ready to deal with hardcore subjects. Your call.

Be a Total Freak

Indulge whatever weirdness hides in that black little abscess you call your soul. This sentiment is part of the "push it over the top" element, but deserves mention on its own merits. You're storytelling here; as long as nobody's a jackass, no one's going to get hurt. If your troupe can handle it, indulge in your darkest and most twisted daydreams and nightmares. Got a sexual hang-up? Work it out. Ever been out-of-your-mind drunk or so ruinously hopped up on drugs you couldn't stand? Bring that experience to the table. You want to smash a cop in the face? Do it vicariously through the characters. Every little deviant whim, every little malicious thought and monstrous urge that festers inside you is fodder for the game. Just make sure you don't take any of it with you when the game's over. If you kill your parents to get on the news, then tell people you've "Awakened," you're a loser.

If Can't Rain All the Time

Know when to let the sun break through the clouds. Sure, an orphan's lot is supposed to be brutal, desperate and alienated, but if that's *all there is*, why bother? *Mage* is about hope, after all; that hope is hard-won, often purchased with blood sacrifice, but it is *there*. If the chronicle becomes an endless parade of miserable clichés, if the characters cannot *ever* get a break, the game — and it is a game! — grinds down and dies. Most down-and-outers have lost hope because they cannot change their world. Mages, even orphans, can. That fact offers the key to the urban cage. Don't throw it away.

Themes

Yeah, we know. The World of Darkness™ reverberates with the words "Gothic-Punk™"; there's more to that trademarked hyphenate, however, than Sisters of Mercy CDs and Dead Kennedys T-shirts. The brooding richness of the setting includes creepy, be-gargoyled office buildings and crumbling downtown cathedrals; busted-down clubs and piss-washed alleyways; "old-money" condominiums soaring above filthy streets; anachronistic mansions and spraypainted convenience stores. But those backdrops, evocative as they are, are just a whisper of the street story. The setting calls out for more.

Gothic

*Morning has broken and what do I see
Those same bloody fingerprints following me. So it's
Backward and forward and back again twice it don't
Pay to be thankful don't pay to be nice*
— Rasputina, "Endomorph"

Moving beyond the architectural idiom and looking into the literary tradition of the gothic aesthetic opens even more vistas for a *Mage* chronicle. While *Vampire* seems like the obvious choice for gothic subject matter, the deeper themes of the midnight soul are pretty appropriate to *Mage* chronicles... especially ones that feature orphans.

First point: Not everyone in the streets wears black wardrobes, eyeliner and an overabundance of silver jewelry. In fact, very few folks do. Goths tend to be insular people who prefer each other's company to that of outsiders (except for those who enjoy freaking the mundanes, which has its merits), and are not commonly found among multiple tiers of street culture.

Second point: "Gothic" sensibility is not about white facepaint, black lace and Bauhaus records. Sure, those props are *aspects* of the gothic subculture, but they're simply part of the scenery. The true heart of the "goth" aesthetic lies in passion and mortality, not in fashion and consumerism.

To the gothic sensibility, everything is larger-than-life: passion, sex, death and insanity take on godlike forms and mythic overtones. Symbolism, particularly morbid symbolism, is everywhere. Animals, weather, jewelry, music — everything is significant. Magick (especially the pagan or Satanic varieties) weaves through the night like a dream of a mad god, and each word, each flash of lightning, each caress is a communion with arcane forces. When you're emphasizing gothic themes, make everything count — foreshadowing, background music, dreams, and heavy symbolism are intrinsic parts of the midnight vision.

Gothic tales also emphasize the decadence, if not the outright decay, of outdated aristocracies. (Remember "The Fall of the House of Usher"?) Although such ideas may seem

out of place in a "mean streets," chronicle, they work well once you adapt them a bit. Perhaps your street sorcerers come into conflict with a Fallen or disgraced member of the Order of Hermes who desperately maintains a crumbling estate in town. Or maybe the "aristocrat" is "just" a mortal, but a powerful and influential one — a corrupt banker, washed-up gang kingpin or police captain on the ropes. Illustrating the character's fall from grace makes for a good sense of ideals cast aside and goals long abandoned.

Passion — most often of the doomed or impossible-to-realize variety — plays an important role in the gothic tradition, too. This aspect is particularly poignant in the streets — the characters' dreams may prove unattainable simply because of who and where they are. Consider the wasted old man in the crumbling tenement; once, he was an aspiring wizard, but power-lust and fear stood in the way of true awareness, and now his life is nearly spent. Or the teenage orphan whose lover was Embraced by a vampire; now he tries to recapture what they had, but she has literally passed on beyond that point, and finds her new (un)life far more interesting than her old one. Such passions, neatly stoked but kept a hand's-breadth from satisfaction, can fuel endless storylines. Naturally, such exquisite pain shouldn't become a license for endless player buggerey, but it is a key concept in gothic (and punk, and mean-street) fiction that Fate is a nasty bitch when passion is involved. Feel free to be one, too.

The line between sanity and the lack of it remains a popular gothic mainstay, too. Whether such madness trickles out of a decadent, inbred aristocracy, howls down from a terrible insight, or simply bubbles up from the crevices of the mind, dementia plagues the characters of gothic literature. This concept adapts easily to the streets — living in the city is maddening enough without having to deal with drugs, poverty, moral bankruptcy and magick. Under those circumstances, *anyone* would crack sooner or later.

Insanity in an urban chronicle takes many forms: the hopelessly addled junkie; the demented Marauder on the street corner; the mindless sewer-folk sleeping in the foulest passages of the undercity; the mad mentor with a deadly legacy; the corrupt elder magi secluded in dark corners of the sprawl; even the unraveling sanity of the newly Awakened orphan, lost in a tempest without a life vest, and sinking more quickly than he realizes....

Romance — preferably the unattainable kind — also plays an important role in gothic drama. In this case, doomed passions rise between two people who really would be better off far away from each other. Jagged obstacles — disapproving family, social rivalries, insanity, pride, etc. — turn the "course of true love" (or at least pure lust) into Hell's own mile; in their yearning, the lovers tear themselves to pieces on those obstacles. Perhaps a willworker and her lover belong to rival factions (the Order of Hermes and the Hollow Ones) who will never accept such a sordid match. Maybe one lover is Awakened and the other is not, and neither one can share in the pains and wonders of Awakening. A budding love interest may

die, sparking the heartbroken paramour into an investigation of the forces behind the death. And, in a pinch, the old "kidnapped girlfriend" shtick still works, too.

In the end, the gothic tradition may be considered "Romantic," but it certainly doesn't romanticize. It emphasizes the barbaric, the unattainable, and the doomed. While such courtships may summon up images of medieval conceits — castles, nobles, physical conflict — they do so in a brutal, horrific, torchlit way. This filter of the grotesque works exceedingly well among the trash-strewn alleys and tenements of the city streets.

Finally, there's humor — *morbid* humor, but humor nonetheless. To the gothic view, life is the biggest joke of all. You can weep all you want, but the Reaper's still laughing, so you might as well, too. Calling gothic comedy "gallows humor" is an understatement, but when you consider the roots of the term "humor" — that is, a bodily fluid, often unbalanced — you start to get the picture. Elaborate, self-mocking and often played out at other peoples' expense, gothic humor can make for surprising tales, characters and settings — the arcane ritual that happens to be a prank by Lord Byron, the demon who snares souls in his cheesy gargoyle collection, or the gothic roller-skating night at the local club — especially for players and/or characters who think "gothic" means weepy and miserable.

Talk about heresy....

Punk

*We're fighting for a different cause
Succeeding where the hippies failed
And it's sure that you can bet
We'll be more than a drugged-out threat
— 7 Seconds, "Clenched Fists, Black Eyes"*

Oh, yeah, we're all *down* with punk — y'know, the Offspring kick ass, and Gwen Stefani's really rad, and Hot Topic has 10 different Black Flag T-shirts, and... you get the point. Punk is not a new thing, nor is it much of a fashion statement. All right, informal poll: Were you even *alive* the year Sid Vicious died? If not, kindly junk the idea that your Sex Pistols shirt is cutting edge, then come out and look at the real core of "hardcore."

First of all, punk is about defiance. If goth twists in the winds of Fate, punk pisses in them. Sure, the punker gets splattered with his own piss, but fuck that, it's better than laying down and dying — or worse, walking around in the living death of conformity. Although constantly mistaken for raw rage (which has led to the '90s scene being overrun with the kind of macho assholes that the original punks hated), this defiance runs through the music and lifestyle of hardcore punks. Considering the high cost of that defiance — physical breakdown, financial ruin, legal hassles and emotional burn-out — it's no wonder that punk is a young person's game. Living in a constant state of "FUCK YOU!!!!!" is exhausting on all levels. Old punks tend to mellow out (Patti Smith), burn out (Wendy O. Williams), sell out (John Lydon) or die out (g.g. allin). Very few get out alive.



By definition, any mage defies the order he was raised in. *Magick doesn't exist* — that “truth” is drilled into the head of every child in the civilized world — and so to practice magick, even for the Technocracy or Traditions, is defiance. To the self-Awakened, who throw their previous lives out the window, defiance is often all they have left. A mage who gravitates toward the punker lifestyle understands it on a far deeper level than any of her mates do. You can take a safety pin out of your cheek, but you can't remove magick without destroying your soul.

In the name of defiance, too many people cop to the idea that two chords, some beer and a spine-wrenching mosh make the perfect punk brew. The missing ingredient, which seems all but gone by the late '90s, is imagination. The original tenets of punk favored anti-conformity, individuality and originality (hell, the goth-rock movement *began* as punk). Sadly, by the time the Sex Pistols were invented (that's right *invented*), the imagination thing was already on its way out the door. Even so, a person who really embraces the punk ideal does things *his* way — kinda like a self-Awakened mage.

Most orphans cook up their own magicks out of bits and pieces of stuff that's important to 'em. When no one is handing you *The Secrets of the Universe as We Know Them*, imagination becomes a survival trait. It's this imagination, this punkish element of anti-conformity, that makes the Hollow Ones and their kind the wild cards of the Ascension War... and possibly the keys to the existence or damnation of humanity, as well. Other, older groups are too mired in their ways to understand the pulse within their Arts the way the self-Awakened do.

Oh, yeah: Don't forget *disgust*. Disgust with normalcy, with materialism, with the status quo in any form. Punk pulls down its pants and shits all over anything “conventional” society holds dear. Possessions? Trash 'em! Health? Fuck it! Manners? What planet are *you* from? While certain segments of the “punk underground” (whatever the fuck *that* is!) strive for social reform, political activism and straight-edge bodily health, the punk ethos (such as it is) disdains comfort, acceptance and wealth. The ultimate expression of the “ideal” is to run away from home and live in communal ruins — junkyards, abandoned buildings, handmade shacks, etc. — existing on the fringe like a tribe that has forsaken the rest of the world. While most punks stop far short of that lifestyle, many orphans find they've got no choice but to accept it... at least until their Arts become strong enough to turn things around.

In Case I Haven't Insulted You Yet

Here's a list of quick-and-dirty observations collected from having spent too many nights in dubious locations and conditions. Yeah, so I sound arrogant saying this. So what? It needs to be said, at least to those folks who don't know. I've encountered enough dim shits who think you can "dodge" a point-blank bullet to make me want to stress a few things while we're on the subject. So take this in the spirit in which it's intended. Pretty please. Thank you.

- Only vice cops, professionals and dorks wear trenchcoats. If you're playing a character in a street-level game, you're probably not playing a professional, though you may be a cop. And nobody without some serious Correspondence can fit a katana into a trenchcoat, for God's sake, so don't try. Speaking of...

- Only psychotics, witch-hunters and the terminally fucked-up carry swords. Street weapons are easily hidden, often homemade and effective rather than showy. Get caught with a sword and you're going to jail, weirdo. At least you can get a permit for a gun. (Developer's Note: I got caught walking down the street with an edgeless fake sword one Halloween Eve; before the cops let me go, they had called in 12 cars worth of backup, and questioned me for half an hour.)

- Don't drink, smoke or snort anything without learning what it is first. Drugs and other substances passed around in casual environments often have other "additives," and you may find yourself smoking angel dust-laced pot or drinking vodka with acid in it. Snorting anything that's intended to be cooked up will probably kill you.

- Shooting up is fucked up. If you do, you have a problem. You've moved from the realm of "casual abuser" to "probable casualty in the short-term future," or at least "bound for the gutter." It's not romantic; it's just dumb.

- Homelessness sucks. If you doubt that, go two or three days trying to scratch up shelter in the summer or winter, forsaking electricity, entertainment, food, clean clothes and hygiene (which some folks do, homeless or not). (Another Developer's Note: A friend of mine once ran away from home with her boyfriend and spent three cold nights sleeping in a porta-potty. Imagine doing *that* for any length of time!) Soon, you won't have to suspect that other people consider you a freak. You *will* be one, even by your own standards.

- Getting arrested or going to jail doesn't make you cool or give you cred. It's just proof that you were dumb enough to get caught doing something illegal, and it will make other aspects of your life — like getting a decent job — pretty difficult.

- Getting shot hurts, *bad* (especially after the initial "trauma-so-massive-your-body-shuts-it-out-so-you-don't-die-of-shock" response wears off), and isn't something anyone without a death wish is willing to risk. Getting shot *at* is scary as hell... people often find it more effective than shooting someone directly.

- Fighting is a good way to die, or at least get laid up for a long time. Most fistfights last about 10 seconds; by the time the third punch lands, the guy getting hit is usually out of the picture. Street melees involving tire jacks, broken bottles, and metal telephone cords boosted from pay phones don't just happen spontaneously — you've got to be really drunk, high or angry to whale on someone with an implement, because using a weapon means you intend to do serious damage. (Try "soaking" a baseball bat sometime if this isn't obvious enough already.)

- Likewise, gang beatings are serious business — six skinheads or security guards pounding on you will inflict six times the bruises, hemorrhages, broken bones and other anguish that just one of them pounding on you will. (Yet Another Developer's Note: A guy I knew was gang-jumped and beaten with a crowbar. He was in the hospital for three months and suffered a permanent limp, brain damage and lots and lots of pain.) Bottom line: Getting beat on sucks. Don't pick a fight unless you're willing to get fucked up and suffer accordingly. And remember that suffering doesn't erase like check marks on a chart.

Anarchy, that much-slapped bitch of the punk subculture, is the idea that government is essentially corrupt — that the best form of rule is self-rule, and fuck anyone who tries to lock you down. Ideally, all people should be self-reliant and self-responsible enough to make police and religion obsolete. In essence, this ideal goes to the heart of the modern magician's creed — “as ye harm none, do what thou wilt” — a creed that, like anarchy, is practiced more in words and violation than in observance and understanding. Still, every mage who throws shit at the Traditions, Technocracy and Nephandi is a true anarchist. *Fuck laws, she says, I can take care of myself just fine!*

It doesn't take Chris Carter to come up with plots for an anarchist mage. Between the Traditions, the Technocracy, the mortals, cops and creatures of the night, the shadow world is full of big people trying to bust your ass. Maybe our Hollower clique is resisting a “recruitment” effort from the local Tradition cabal. Or hiding from the Men in Black. Let's say a gang war between a vampire lord and a pack of werewolves has erupted right through the middle of the orphans' neighborhood; or imagine the cops are cracking down on the “Satan worship” the city council's been complaining about lately....

Yeah, punk is violent — intellectually, physically, emotionally brutal. It accepts no whining and takes no prisoners. Slam dancing, brawls, spiked leather and pierced flesh come with the territory, and other brutalities — pissed-off cops, urban predators, gang rivalries and the racist/anti-racist punk fringes — are close behind. To surf through a mosh pit, live in a basement and shrug off alienation, you've gotta be tough. The self-Awakened understand that fact like no one else. Bitch Queen Vannoy's put her share of this book together for a reason. Between the inner fires, outer parasites and oppressing forces all around you, a self-Awakened kid is either hardcore, or she's meat.

Story Ideas

Enough pontificating. Here are a few story ideas to get you going. Use all, part, or none of these suggestions — but be sure to make the story your own.

• Now On Tour

The player characters' cabal is a touring band, or part of one's road crew. This provides the Storyteller with a variety of backdrops, all of which are very social settings, by which to involve characters in any number of subplots. The tour can even move from city to city rather than club to club, allowing the characters to see just how widespread the hellishness of urban life is.

• The Sweetest Pie

The characters gather on the turf of a prominent gang. Rather than pay extortion for “protection,” the characters band together and kick the gang's collective ass. Now *they're* the reigning gang... and there's money to be made in the protection racket. If the characters become involved in that, open the door to new criminal activity — kidnapping, drug traffic, prostitution, etc. The characters' unique powers give

them an edge, but how far will survivors of the original gang (or others) go to take back what was originally “theirs”?

• Skin Trade

Kidnapping and bodysnatching are on the rise, and someone close to the characters disappears. After a bit of contact-flogging and rumor-seeking, the characters learn that a slave, snuff or “spare parts” ring is behind the matter. They could choose to shut it down, report it, attack it, etc. — or they may choose to get in on it themselves and reap the illicit benefits. Best of all, the decision may split the cabal down the center, which should make for some intense roleplaying.

• Kick the Habit

One of the players' characters gets hooked on drugs. (Make it a responsible player who's a good roleplayer, or this loses its impact.) Secretly tell the player to roleplay the effects of the addiction — the broken promises, ill behavior, binges and purges, wild mood swings — and let her drive the rest of the group up the wall. Then, just as the other characters are about to write her off, reveal the drug habit and explore the aftermath: Do they get help for her? Lock her up to kick it cold turkey? Does another character (a dealer, a cop, a fellow addict) get dragged in? This scenario makes for some intense and very personal roleplaying — once the wheels are spinning, the Storyteller can kick back and let the players take over, adding some NPC roleplaying when the need arises.

• Night War

Two groups of supernaturals — vampires, werewolves, ghosts, other magi — have gone to war, and the player characters are in the middle. This is an ideal opportunity to stress the totally alien nature of the other night-creatures, to pitch the old “it's a 7th Generation Tremere with five ghouls” thing out the window and return mystery to the darkness. Vampires become bloody-handed immortals with inhuman powers; lycanthropes become hulking shadows with huge claws and cannibalistic hungers; ghosts and spirits become howling chaos, and the fae twist the uncertain realm of night into the even-less-certain realm of nightmare. I'm not taking about a “crossover game,” but a fearsome clash of half-hidden monsters in the characters' backyard. Throw everything you know about other WoD games out the window, and emphasize mood and uncertainty over chumminess and familiarity. (See the descriptions in *Mage*, pp. 232-237, and Cassie's impressions in *Cult of Ecstasy*, pp. 41-44, and forget you ever heard the word “Camarilla.”)

In Closing

Yeah, this is a great deal of information to choke down in one sitting. Ultimately, though, the guidelines for creating a believable, dramatic street-level chronicle are simple: Have it make sense, use good characters, plan ahead, and build up on mood, mood, mood! So crank up *Fat of the Land*, dim the lights, watch a few vids from the Appendix, and get ready to dump your players into postmodern hell, *Mage*-style.

The night is waiting.



Appendix: The Stash

*You can't keep me down
Put me in my place
I will never wear your 20th-century pacemaker face
You will never bleed
The spirit out of me
I'm flesh and blood and real
I'm not your factory fantasy
No, not me!
— Concrete Blonde, "Free"*



I used to think I was helpless. Until the angel came.

She rode the storm on dirty white wings and whispered to me in words I could never understand. The first time I saw her, I had a razor to my wrist. I meant to do it, too — lengthwise. Serious, y'know? It was a bout half-past three and the drugs no longer worked and all I could feel was pain. When I saw the light outside my window, I thought it was just a flash of lightning. I was wrong — about so many things.

I'm no goody-goody. I left the Path of Righteousness a long time ago and never looked back. But the angel didn't care. She

has never asked for devotions or Bible studies or anything like that. The angel simply guides me, and I know I'm not alone, and I'm damned sure not helpless.

Since the night of the razor and the storm, I've learned so many things. How to see again, really see, to get past the illusions we're all bound by. I've learned to make the wind rise and the candle flames flicker when there's no breeze to stir them. I've learned to find forgotten truths, to speak to the Lost Souls and to disappear into the shadows. But most of all, I've learned I'm not alone.

I will never take that truth for granted. Some nights, it's all that gets me by.

Creating an Orphan Character



*i am that little bitch
you fear cuz i am not afraid
i'm everything that's real
and no, i will not break*
— Manhole, "Sickness"

As you may have noticed by now, the average orphan (especially a young urban one) doesn't see things in quite the same light as your average Tradition dude. Chances are, she won't understand two-thirds of the terminology that other mages toss around (para-dig-um? What the fuck is that?) and really couldn't give a rat's ass for the Future of Reality as We Know It. Reality as *she* knows it flat-out sucks.

For the most part, an urban orphan is just out for herself. That doesn't mean she can't or won't have a greater vision than "What can I boost tonight?" It just means her priorities and perspectives are different. If you choose to play an orphan, the real challenge will come from roleplaying someone who knows things you probably don't (like scoring crashspace and dope) and doesn't know things you undoubtedly do (like the details of the World of Darkness). Once you begin to realize what is important to that character, the new vision will come on its own.

As the sidebar in the Introduction shows, a self-Awakened character uses the same systems as any other mage. A few slight differences have been noted below, but for the most part, the real departure comes from what you put into the character, not in any "new rules" we could devise.

Traits

Depending on the kind of story you want to run, the Storyteller might decide to start each character as an un-Awakened person with mortal Traits (Attributes 6/4/3, Abilities 11/7/4, 5 freebies, normal Backgrounds and Willpower). The Spheres, Arete and additional Attributes and Abilities would be kept "on hold" until after the character Awakens and finds her way around her new world. At this point — and this point *only*! — the remaining points may be spent as usual; the normal points would be spent over a short period of time rather than all at once. This option would reflect a "growth spurt" as the new mage dives headfirst into the shadows.

"Street scene" characters tend to favor certain Abilities; a homeless orphan would probably count Alertness, Scrounging, and Survival (Urban) among his talents. For the most part, use common sense and keep an eye out for Abilities that would prove useful in urban hellholes. Orphan characters begin with the usual amount of Background dots; certain Backgrounds, however, are more appropriate than others. It makes sense that a self-Awakened mage would have very high Allies, Arcane, Avatar, Destiny or Dream Traits, but few orphans would

possess Chantry, Library, Node or Resources. (Although there can be exceptions; see the Wall Street Wizard template.) Magickal Talismans and Devices are in pretty short supply among those who don't have much to begin with. Even so, the occasional item of power manages to show up, usually as an inherited treasure or as plunder from a good snatch-n-grab. Familiar, Influence, Mentor and Sanctum could go either way — there isn't any reason to deny a street-based character a powerful familiar or a handle in back-alley "politics," but power and security in the conventional sense should be rare.

The "General Ability Templates" in *Destiny's Price* (pp. 96-98) offer a variety of sample character-types to draw upon. Chapter Three of that same book offers a variety of options and extrapolations for "urban" versions of many Traits, as well as motivations and methods for street mages, and some information about magick, the Law and your character.

Street Magick

*Wrap yourself in psychotronic ecstasy
Surrealistic visions of electricity
Change the meaning of the word "reality"
Surrender to your soul, now tell me what you see*
— Electric Hellfire Club, "The Electric Hellfire Acid Test"

Self-Awakened mages occasionally begin their new lives with a bit of occult knowledge — usually just enough to be dangerous! More often than not, though, they start from Ground Zero with nothing more magickal than intuition and blind luck. To progress, they need instruction and experience. Without that, the asylum, the Paradox Realm, the Caul and the grave are never far away.

Child Orphans

Some orphans are literally that: children who have Awakened, usually after losing *everything*. Such children have powerful spirits and greater wills than many adults. To them, magick is possible because they will not accept the idea that is not. In a world gone crazy, these children understand the truth few grownups can grasp.

From a systems standpoint, a self-Awakened child begins with the Flaws: Short and Child, 10 freebie points instead of 15, a maximum of six dots to spend on Physical Attributes, and a maximum Strength of 2. In return, the child mage starts with a base Arete of 2 rather than 1, and often has a strong Avatar, Dream or Destiny Background. For more details, see "Child Mages" in *The Book of Shadows*, pp. 120-121, and "Wishcraft," below.

Wild Talent and Magickal Training

In the early days of her magickal career, an orphan may begin with a surge of wild talent (see *Mage*, pp. 226-227), especially if she's suffered some traumatic event. While the average mage has enough "sponsorship" to receive help during her Awakening, an orphan (often alone and fearing for her sanity) might be haunted by hallucinations, nightmares, and flashes of wild magick. Her mind, trying to balance new understanding and perceptions with pain or passion, careens wildly back and forth, triggering bizarre coincidences or collateral damage. In the process, she often alienates everyone she knows. Until she finds some new stability, she wanders in a half-mad daze, bleeding from emotional and metaphysical wounds.

This isn't the case with all orphans, of course; some Awaken during a moment of great peace or comprehension; even these characters, however, experience a bit of... um, *stress* as the reality they thought they knew gives way into one in which anything is possible. This stress might trigger wild talent or other odd "coincidences" nearby: lights flicker, dogs growl, windows crack and perceptions skew. Until the new mage gets her bearings, things will be distinctly weird in her presence.

In game terms, your Storyteller is going to make your character's life hell. While some people do Awaken in calm, subtle fashions, really traumatic experiences are more dramatic. Depending on what the Storyteller wants to do, the wild talent might last for one event, a few days, or even a few weeks... assuming it appears at all. During this time, the mage cannot control what happens — the magick controls *her*, although she might be able to direct it indirectly. ("I wish that guy would go away... No! Not like that!!")

Mentors, Familiars and the Avatar

During this dark night of the soul, helpmates often come to the new mage; she might not understand what they are — and will probably fear them — but they often understand her situation better than she does. Most helpmates appear in some "down and out" fashion — as bums, kindly old folk, fellow scenesters, or street beasts. It's essential that the new mage trust her helpmate, and few orphans will trust The Man as far as they could throw him.

Other magi — often orphans or Errants themselves — might recognize what's going on. With a bit of compassion and a lot of tough love, an elder could introduce his new "apprentice" to the magickal world. Naturally, the mentor will have his own agenda; his services will not be free, and his intentions might not be, shall we say, honorable. (Imagine Denise or Jodi Blake in the mentor role....)

Animal familiars are pretty common in the backstreets world; intelligent cats (like Mister Mistoffelees), ravens, hounds, rats, possums, even sewer gators (ew!) might present themselves to a mage in trouble. For a little extra



consideration, a familiar could guide its “pet” away from chaos and down the Path of higher learning.

The inner Avatar, however, is the orphan’s most obvious helpmate. Forsaken by all others, an orphan still has herself... and the guiding spirit within. Not that the average Wintershiner can tell the difference between an Avatar who looks like a wino and a mentor who looks like one, too; still, most Avatars appear in fairly unearthly forms: the mysterious cloaked figure, the death-angel, the blazing clown or the nagging tug of madness. Some orphan groups share a particular view of the Avatar: the Hollow Ones, for example, see spirits with wings; while Awakening True Children receive visions of Chango or other Loa. Very few orphans, however, define what they see as an “avatar”; indeed, many of them choose not to speak of it at all. To speak the name of madness aloud is to admit you’re insane, and most orphans are afraid that’s exactly what the Avatar is: proof of their insanity.

Whatever form it takes, the helpmate will have its work cut out for it. Calming the mage and assuring her that she is sane (to some degree, anyway) is only the beginning. Still, everyone needs a family, and the teacher is, for better and worse, the core of that family. The love or hatred this teacher inspires will be extremely important to the new mage, and might guide her Path forever after.

Learning New Magicks

In story terms, self-Awakened mages learn their Arts through practice and instruction, just as other sorcerers do. This “instruction” is a lot less formal, though — it’s pretty hard to study your Tradition’s theories in the Chantry library when you have neither a Tradition, a Chantry or a library. Most orphans hone their magicks with small, subtle tricks — not flying carpets or fireballs, but clever “coincidences” and social influence. Many self-Awakened folks wind up studying occult lore (fairy tales, magician’s texts, New Age books, group apprenticeship, etc.), if only to figure out what they’ve become. In between the lines, they often learn what they need to know.

In game terms, orphans lack a “Tradition Sphere”; raising Spheres with experience costs the current Sphere rating x 8. As an option, the Storyteller might allow the character one “affinity Sphere” (see *Mage*, p. 226) that she can improve at current rating x 7. The player must describe what her character is doing to learn her new tricks, but the process for improving Sphere ratings is the same as it would be for any other mage. Orphans suffer from a lack of “official” training, not from any mystick deficiency.

Using Magick

How do orphans define the Spheres? Simple: They don’t. Oh, yeah, they still use the same game systems other mages employ, but the concepts of “Life Spheres,”



J. Cobb

"conjunctional Effects" and "rotes" are totally foreign to the self-Awakened. As orphans see it, magick is a talent honed by practice and skill, a gift from the gods or demons, or an occult Art achieved through hard work and sacrifice. Even so, the self-Awakened still have their tricks and talents. They just don't define them in any special way.

Those talents are a double-edged blade. The ability to change reality to spec is pretty significant, especially in a "hungry" setting like the streets. Being able to cause miracles is a good way to become popular, and being popular is a good way to get dead. Thus, the urban magus needs to be *subtle*; people who "get lucky" every week in the numbers racket or "just happen" to find briefcases full of money may attract attention — *bad* attention. Likewise, hurling fireballs and sprouting wings ensures that everyone in the urban hell learns your name quickly. This ain't *Batman*, and if you get involved with some inexplicable shit, it's going to come back to haunt you in a big way. (Even so, weird shit *happens* in the inner city, and locals understand that; see "Urban Sprawls" in *Mage*, p. 185.)

In these dangerous surroundings, sorcerers are advised to come up with alibis for the crazy shit that seems to follow them around. Be advised, however — it takes a certain degree of cunning to make it on the streets, and the "oh, it's a movie" line works only so many times before the G's start to add things up. In the interest of long-term survival, we present a helpful street few uses for the ever-popular Arts of Magick:

- **Correspondence:** Word travels fast on the street, as does the mage commanding the Sphere of Correspondence. This is the stuff (urban?) legends are made of — people who always seem to be in the right or wrong place at the right or wrong time, who seem to have "eyes in the back of their heads," or who can duck into blind alleys and vanish. Abusing this Sphere can have detrimental side effects, however, when the Sleepers start looking into just *how* you managed to get from that incriminating crackhouse to the all-night diner so damn quickly.

- **Entropy:** Many orphans build their reps from an understanding of Entropy — and from stories about folks who can "guess the odds" in a curbside craps game, or who never seem to get hit even though a grade-A killa's firing his gun at them. Unfortunately for many of these dudes, Wild-West syndrome often sets in, and every punk-ass with heat thinks he can take down the king of the streets.

- **Forces:** Unless it's used subtly, Forces is like wearing a badge that says "kill me." Anyone who can muster the power to electrocute his foes, stall a cop-cruiser's engine, burst the streetlights in a 10-block radius, or disable a high-tech security system is a commodity — and commodities fetch high prices in the streets, or get erased from the picture entirely.

- **Life:** Despite the concrete and steel, the streets are very much alive, and so is an orphan who knows how to heal himself and others; spot hidden enemies, befriend the neighborhood critters, party all night, or "hulk out" from a sudden adrenaline surge. So long as he watches his step and refrains from healing bullet wounds in front of witnesses or shapeshifting into cat form, an orphan can use Life like crazy and still keep his cover.

- **Mind:** Subtle and damned-near invisible, Mind Arts are an orphan's prize. Here, influence is everything: Pigs let you off with warnings; psychotic hardcases let eyewitnesses go free; nightclubs and drugs blur the lines of "reality," and most folks get so fucked up that they have no idea what's going on. In addition, Mind magick can be used quietly to get good deals, skip a month of rent, and release oneself on one's own recognizance.

- **Matter:** Both the best and the worst Sphere for urban activities, Matter lets you make "secret drawers" and "hidden pockets" for contraband. It lets you craft "bulletproof" vests, windows and reinforced clothing; fix broken machines (or break working ones); hit "just the right spot" to make walls crack and furniture shatter; or pick up "harder than average" manhole covers, brew mugs and pool cues. At the same time, a dude who turns pistols into VCR parts is going to catch some attention, and a grease monkey who's *too* good at his job may soon get offers he doesn't *dare* refuse....

- **Prime:** The streets are full of passions, and passions often well up into Nodes, or leave areas dripping with Resonance. Orphans rarely describe these areas so bluntly — they're "cold spots," "creepy places," "filled with good vibes," or "fucking poisonous." With a bit of Prime, a Self-Awakened mage can spot an area of intense life-force, define what that force might be, and use it, even if she doesn't know what the fuck the word "Node" is supposed to mean. As for the Sleepers, they're often clueless; they'll be able to sense really radical changes in the environment, but the effects of most Prime-based spells are invisible to them.

- **Spirit:** Given the number of murders and traumatic deaths in the inner cities, urban areas teem with ghosts. Elemental spirits of glass, electricity, metal and pollution are everywhere, too, as are the Banes that dog human vices. Ethnic ghettos house Loa, ancestor spirits, and even ancient cultural guardian spirits. And, as any shaman knows, seemingly inanimate objects contain slumbering spirits that can be called upon — or exorcised — if the need arises. Many urban mortals believe in spirits, even if they don't acknowledge that belief; get some city kid talking, and he'll spill the story about the haunted crackhouse or the dead junkie who never seems to go away.... Thus, invoking the spirits is often easy, assuming you can get past the Gauntlet to do it.

• **Time:** The amount of attention you get using Time-based spells depends on the amount of attention you stir up using them. People accept the adrenaline surge that lets you run like a motherfucker, or the Tarot cards that let you “guess” what may be in the near future, but *nobody’s* good enough to hit a guy in the face six times before he can even throw a punch in return. Time-based impressions are often muddled, too; when 10,000 things happen in one place in a single day, you’re gonna have a bitch of a time trying to figure out what happened in that spot a week ago.

Common Styles

Contrary to popular misconception, self-Awakened characters *do* require foci and magick styles. They’re just not bound to any “official” toolkit. Orphan magick depends more upon the person and his beliefs and circumstances than upon some organized mystical practice. Although some self-Awakened mages learn established occult lore, they use whatever style suits them best. Thus, the things they do, the rituals they perform and the tools they employ vary wildly from mage to mage.

The following magick styles are pretty common among self-Awakened urban sorcerers. The details of a character’s beliefs will depend on where he came from, who taught him, where he hangs out, and what he does there. Most of the “Tools” described below can be found in the **Mage** rulebook, pp. 183-184; new tools are detailed under the listing.

Back-room Tech

Not all orphans gravitate toward the “Old Ways” or their modern reflections. Some hunker down at kitbashed computer systems, jury-rigged contraptions and Frankensteinian laboratories, exploring cold fusion, VR, cloning and mathematical esoterica. Sensing the links between science, magick and Creation itself, the orphan technomancer paves a middle path between the Traditions and Technocracy. Close cousin to VA anarchists and Etherite Scientists, he tosses aside the political baggage of those groups and throws himself into his own studies. The results can be miraculous.

An obsessive futurist at heart, the orphan technomancer has no use for ideology. His experiments are often small and self-contained — cybernetics, computer systems, small life-forms, unique weaponry, designer drugs, and a thousand other technological miracles — and self-motivated. Profit and progress mean more to him than worldwide paradigm shifts. Unlike the assembly-line Technocrats or their Tradition counterparts, the orphan technomancer works for himself. He’s got no allegiance, few resources and no cosmic goals, but his insight, talent and mind-bending science-craft make him a wild card in the mystick deck.

Tools: Books (notebooks and science texts), computers (usually modified with esoteric devices and home-brewed software), devices (custom-built inventions), drugs (hypercaffinated drinks, designer drugs, strange potions, smart drugs), formulae (often based on personal theories or advanced esoterica; see *π* or *Good Will Hunting*), networks, meters and probes, treatments, vehicles, weapons (often odd guns or electrical devices).

Black Magick

Sometimes it just doesn’t pay to be good. Malice, greed, desperation and revenge can be powerful motivations, especially if you’re too wrecked to care what happens later. On the streets, black magick — the kind that bubbles up from the hidden parts of the soul — is everywhere. If you have nothing to lose, who gives a shit about being nice?

Black magick isn’t a matter of tools or rituals — many primal styles use rites that make “civilized” people blanch. Black magick comes from motivation, from spite, hatred, rage, lust. It twists, burns, compels, commands. It’s a mystickal shotgun aimed at the head of your enemies, a knife in the heart of everyone you despise. More often than not, a maleficent magician strikes bargains with Infernal entities — the devils and demons her parents warned her about — appeasing them with sacrifices, blasphemies, vandalism and terrorism. The ultimate power, however, comes from the hatred within the mage, not from demonic pacts. Although some lesser powers (demonic Investments; see **The Book of Madness**, Chapter Four and Appendix) flow from demonic hands, the true black magician holds the keys to her own damnation... gladly.

The Arts of Malice grow from rebellion; the black magician gleefully inverts what is “good.” She might be a Luciferian, following the Fallen Angel who defied that tightass God in favor of personal freedom; or a desperate soul who sees no other options. She could be a raging kid pissing on her upbringing, or a fearless occultist who understands that the Road to Enlightenment leads through the Valley of Excess. Sometimes anguish or jealousy leads a once-righteous person into the night; perhaps defiance, hedonism or sheer perversity open the door to the Impure. Either way, a black magician chooses the left-hand Path, and her powers spring from that choice.

Malignant magick tends to be brutal, direct, vulgar, and often painful to both the magician and her victim. Excess, suffering, cruelty and sacrifice figure prominently in black magick rituals, and symbols of “goodness” — prayers, holy symbols, scriptures, etc. — are happily desecrated. Wealth-spells, curses, conjurations, summonings and transformations make up the black magician’s repertoire, although she’ll usually keep a few “good” spells — healings, love charms and such — on hand, if only for her own use.

Tools: Art (occult graffiti), blood, books (esoteric texts, Satanic poetry, forbidden lore), bones, chalices, circles, computers (often with custom software and translation programs), dancing, drugs, fire, herbs, holy symbols (often desecrated; also occult or Satanic emblems), incense, languages (praying backwards), music (often black metal or industrial devilcore), ordeals (self-mutilation and body art), ritual sacrifice (often torturous), runes, sex (as perverse as possible), Tarot cards and Ouija boards, wands, weapons (spiked jewelry, cruel-looking blades).

Brujería

Magick is not exclusively a white person's game; the inner cites are filled with other cultures, too, and the orphans who come from those cultures often favor their ancestral mysticism over "white-man's magick."

Steeped in Catholic mysticism and ancient Latin American belief, Hispanic *brujería* uses prayers, rosaries and corn meal to get the attention of rain gods and healing saints. On the surface, *brujas* appear to be devout Catholics, praying to saints and begging the Blessed Virgin for miracles. When you break through the Christian facade, the saints are a thin veneer for the old gods: Tlaloc still brings the rain — even if the *bruja* calls him "St. John," she has to give the rain god his proper gifts and prayers. Unlike "will-driven" Arts, *brujería* relies heavily on miracles from above. When a car crash is barely averted, it's because of the statue of the saint on the dashboard; when bullets barely graze the *bruja*'s chest or her friend is cured of pneumonia, the Virgin has stepped in.

Surrounded by bundles of dried herbs and pillar candles with saints' icons on them, many *brujas* (or *brujos*) work out of their homes — or shopping carts, if that's all there is. The *bruja*'s tools are generally found in a kitchen or in a church: powders and pastes made of chile peppers and yellow clay, bowls of holy water, a well-worn rosary, and maybe an onion. Spells frequently take the form of prayers offered up with a few accessories or gifts for the saint — or god — of choice. When the object of the spell is material, the *bruja* can use her poultices and charms to help her along. Even the clothes a *bruja* wears can be a powerful prayer. (You didn't think the designs in that Guatemalan poncho were just for *decoration*, did you?)

Tools: Art (rosaries, colored beads, folk art, dolls, statues and icons), books (Bible), fire (candles), food (chile peppers, bread, meal, corn), herbs, incense, pure (holy) water, music (hymns).

ClubKraft

Change the massmind and you change Reality — that's the concept behind a new and vital urban style of magick. Based on altered consciousness through hyperstimulation, "clubkraft" mind-fucks Sleepers on a large scale. While clubbers writhe across the floor in a sea of





hormones, drugs, music and adrenaline, the deejay tears songs into new and distracting patterns. Layered between the lights, the drugs and the music, magick reweaves the lines between "possible" and "impossible." Even after the Sleepers leave the club, their concepts of Reality are altered on a subconscious level. They will never see things the same way again.

Some "vizards" (a half-serious play on "visual" or "visionary" wizards) map their beats by ancient theories, striving to reweave the fabric between the material world and the spirit realm. Others shuck mysticism in favor of an Uncertainty Principle approach: If Reality is formed by consensus, what happens if you change the consensus? Either way, the vizard turns the expected inside-out, remixing familiar songs into new compositions, wrenching senses with disorienting lights and fog, stimulating his audience with subliminals and sensory overload, and often tossing hallucinogens into the mix. ("Hey, wanna try some good shit?") Once consensual reality has gone out the window, the vizard turns on the charm: Spirits appear, gateways open, minds are altered and flesh turns to putty. Under the right circumstances, a good vizard can pull off incredibly vulgar Effects coincidentally. (See *Delirium* on p. 128.) While this style leaves traditional wizards scratching their heads — surely *this* can't be magick! — it seems to work frighteningly well.

Outside the club, the vizard is limited; his Arts rely on establishing the proper mood with the right equipment. In game terms, he's a technomancer, a mage bound to his foci. Still, this is a new form of magick. Who knows what happens when vizards begin to evolve beyond parlor tricks and postmodern theories?

Tools: Art (graffiti, CGI, lightshows), dancing, devices (mixing boards, fog machines, light rigs, synthesizers, turntables), drugs (ex, speed, acid and home-brews), music (scratch, techno, jungle, industrial), ordeals/ treatments (body modification), showmanship (a good vizard uses Social rolls to influence his audience; the better he is, the more "his" Sleepers will accept).

Pagan Witchcraft

Going back to their roots (or at least the roots they would like to have), many orphans take up the Old Ways — the nature-based faiths of living divinity. Drawing from modern refinements (or corruptions, depending on who you ask) of the Celtic, Norse, Greek or, occasionally, Egyptian religions, these mages invoke the four corners, the elements, ancestral gods and goddesses, and the spirits within all things. Runes, circles, songs and dances (with occasional nudity, sacrifice, sex and blood magick), direct the intentions of pagan orphans. "An ye harm none, do as ye will" is their creed. Animals and lovers are their companions, and archaic clothing, heated passion and the ever-present pentacle necklace are their emblems.

The pagan style is bound up in faith — faith of the divinity incarnated in Creation. By nurturing and appealing to that

divinity, the magus works her Arts. Her spells involve lyrical charms, invocations, household items, and prayers to patron goddesses or gods. While some "urban pagans" take their faith seriously — acting with respect and responsibility toward all — many are just rebelling against their parents by taking up the dark and sensual pagan banner. Is the pentacle faith or fashion? That depends on the mage, her vision, and her commitment to it.

Tools: Blood, bones, cauldrons/chalices, circles, dancing, elements (all four), herbs, music, purification, ritual sacrifice (often goods, occasionally live animals or people), runes, sex, song, Tarot cards, wands, weapons (usually consecrated blades).

Self-Help Witchcraft

A bastard child of the Information Age, this DIY style draws inspiration from a thousand diverse magical practices, all gathered between two covers and sold at your local Mediaplay. Celtic witchcraft, Kabbalism, Jungian psychology, Taoist imagery and Hindu meditation combine into a modern form that is then mass-produced as the "Old Ways." There's really nothing "old" about this scattershot Art, but that doesn't make it powerless. Placed in the context of post-Christian society, "self-help mysticism" makes up in accessibility what it lacks in tradition.

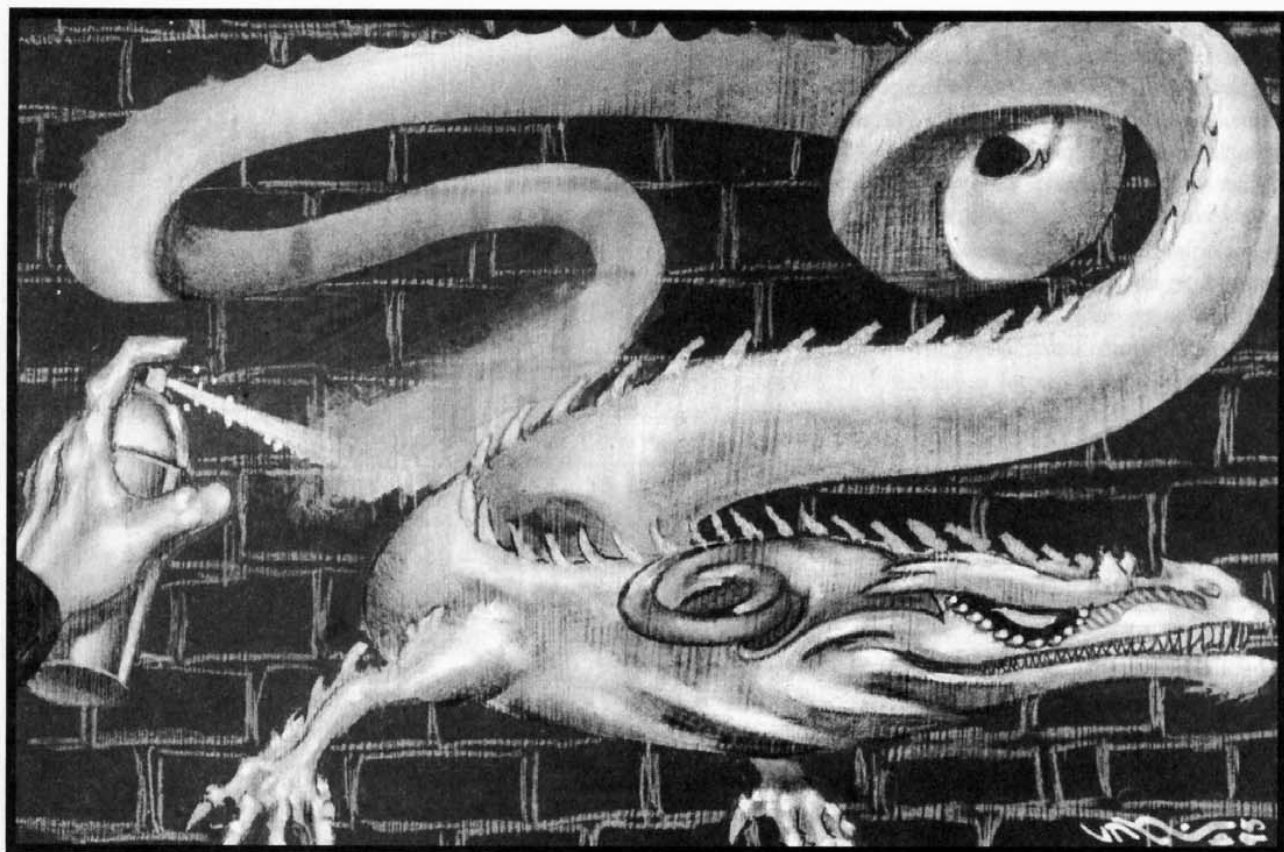
Easily the most popular orphan magick style, "self-help witchcraft" emphasizes results over reflection. Want money? Cast the spell on p. 72 and don't worry about other stuff. By occult principles, this "hollow" approach shouldn't work, but it often does; to a child of information overload, "Chinese menu magick" is more valid than the rituals of alien cultures. The "self-help" witch combines a bit of everything — Nordic runes, fairy-tale charms, Egyptian ankhs, alchemical correspondences, Christian (or anti-Christian) prayers — hey, if it appeals to you, use it! (Some urban practitioners even employ rituals based on fantasy novels and roleplaying games.) His spells, when they work, tend to be rather vulgar, drawing upon their high fantasy inspirations. Much to the chagrin of "serious mages," the "self-help" witch manages to get the same results — if not better ones! — than his more-traditional counterparts. Could this be the wave of the future?

Tools: Art (jewelry, posters, charts, graffiti), books (occult texts, New Age manuals), circles, crystals (of course), dancing, elements, herbs, holy symbols (often store-bought ankhs or pentacles), incense, music (Celtic, Native American or New Age varieties), runes, song, Tarot cards, Ouija boards, wands (often crystal or silver).

Victorian Occultism

The heyday of Western occultism mingled high ritual magick, spiritualism, pagan witchcraft, Hindu esoterica, Victorian manners and a touch of scientific psychology and anthropology into a graceful, ornate practice. Heavy on ritual and preparation, the Victorian approach spawned parapsychology, Gardnerian and Alexandrian witchcraft, drawing-room





seances, and Crowleyian excess. Although its insistence on study and intricate rites makes the Victorian approach unfashionable these days, many Hollow Ones swear by it.

A magician schooled in the Victorian style (actually a combination of several practices) usually studies with an occult order. An outsider could easily mistake him for a Hermetic magus — in fact, he probably refers to himself as such, even if he's self-taught and independent. True members of the Order of Hermes tend to be either amused or insulted, but even the most irritable of them admits that a Victorian-style orphan knows his stuff. Unlike gutter witches, the Victorian magus is well-read, introspective, articulate and formal. Even so, he often possesses great vitality and energy, too. This magician knows how important it is to align all the elements *just so*; he understands the harnessed power of Creation, and prefers a steady hand and ready mind to a careless grope in the dark.

This style begins with *lots* of books, and months or years of esoteric research, initiation, practice and refinement. Although the particulars of the craft vary from order to order, some elements remain consistent: Kabbalistic cosmology, alchemical correspondences, pagan charms and elements of Hebrew, Arabic and Egyptian rituals; elaborate ceremonies, prefaced with meditation and purification; complex charts, glyphs, designs and incantations; archaic languages like Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Enochian; invocations to angels, demons and ghosts; trances and hypnotism; theatrical showmanship;

and occasional indulgences — orgies, drunken revels, fits of madness — to keep the spirit free. Through these rites and symbols, the magus unlocks the doors that divide the Natural World and the Invisible World, allowing his will to travel between them. When the spell is done, the wizard relocks the doors and requests the spirits to depart in peace.

Victorian magick's baroque trappings and flashy results — levitations, conjurations, spontaneous bursts of fire or wind, etc. — lend it a romantic mystique. The magus becomes a master of elements, a dapper high priest of the mysterious. It's neither quick nor easy, but what it lacks in speed, this craft makes up for with style. Orphans with the patience and resources to pursue Victorian occultism are the most impressive of their kind.

Tools: Art (ornate occult designs), books, bones (especially skulls), chalices, circles, drugs (absinthe, wine, snuff), elements (especially fire and air), incense, invocations, languages, music (occasionally played by ghostly musicians), purification, sex, Tarot cards and Ouija boards, theatrical props (masks, canes, boxes, etc.), showmanship, toys (especially games like chess), wands, weapons (almost always swords).

Voodoo

Orphans Awakening in an African-American neighborhood don't have to go far to find a hospitable outlet for their talents. Voodoo, a melange of Catholicism, African spirit faiths, European witchcraft and Indian religions,

takes several different forms, but the heart of it relies on goodwill between the Loa spirits and their human devotees.

For its followers, voodoo serves as a community and social network as well as a faith. The orphan becomes part of a family, and she can often go to the mambo for crashspace, food or comfort. The faith is simple, and nowhere near as sinister as the popular media might claim. The loa are fairly generous spirits, willing to do things for humans... but never for nothing. There is always a price. The price may take several different forms, but it always includes devotion to the Loa and belief in their powers.

Voodoo somehow manages to be a lush, opulent style, even though it flourishes in poor urban districts and poverty-stricken nations. Sacrifices, whether of time, energy, money, or something more tangible, are essential to show the spirits their favors are appreciated and reciprocated. Physically, rituals focus on huge tables full of food, bottles of the spirits' favorite liquor, and sweets. Once the feast is laid out, wild, sensual dances, drumming, and chanting invite the spirits to come ride in the mortal world for a while and maybe bring some gifts with them. Of course, if the orphan throws in a bit of *real* mojo to sweeten the pot — some Quintessence in that bottle of Papa Ougou's rum, for instance — all the better. A mambo or houngan is a person of status, a mediator between the Loa and humanity; that person might be a fearsome *bokor*, a tender healer, a wise woman or a conjure-man; either way, that person is respected... and often obeyed.

Tools: Art (*vévés* — chalk drawings), blood, bones, cauldrons and chalices, circles, clothing (colorful scarves, white or black robes), dancing, drugs (rum or tobacco), elements (especially fire and water), food (cassava bread,

candy, fresh meat), herbs, holy symbols (crucifixes, images of saints), purification, ritual sacrifice (usually chickens and goats), songs, Tarot cards, weapons (whips, blades).

“Wishcraft”

“Wishing makes it so”; to the down-and-out magus, this is occasionally true. (See the Street Kid template in Chapter IV.) With little more than concentration, a short charm and something to wish upon, magick can make dreams come true.

“Wishcraft” works best for kids; grownups are far too “realistic” or cynical for such nonsense. With a little help from friendly fortune (a birthday candle, a shooting star, or some other traditional act of Providence) and a talent for “wishing real hard,” a lucky kid can turn broken junk or worthless items into useful things. Such “wishcraft” doesn’t spring from nothing; some item must provide a focus for the wish, and that wish must be spoken aloud. Depending on the child’s talents, this Art can transform ordinary things into extraordinary things (Matter or Life); heal hurts or sickness (Life); create marvelous items from virtually nothing (Matter + Prime); or change one thing to another (Pattern Arts + Prime). Such wishes are often vulgar magick, but what child knows — or cares — about what grownups consider “impossible”?

Tools: Concentration (“wishing real hard” for a turn or two), incantation (“*Star light, star bright...*” or some similar folk charm), an object to transform or an event to trigger the wish; an adult might use a desperate prayer (“*Oh, God, take mercy on this poor sinner...*”) to some higher or lower power, or a soul pact with some Infernal entity.

Survivors' Tricks



Winter turns to summer

sadness turns to fun

keep the faith, baby

you broke the rules and won

— The Ramones, “Sha La La La
(Howling at the Moon)”

To call the following tricks of the trade “*rotes*” would be misleading; although many orphans (especially Hollow Ones) pass good tricks on to their friends, most of the following survival magicks are simply created as need presents itself. There are no “libraries of spells,” although some sorcerers keep detailed notes about the rituals that work for them. Some of these weaveries mimic the workings of the “greater magi,” but many have more-humble beginnings. Few Hermetics, for example, have ever had to purify food scrounged from a garbage can, or would think to darken their skin to blend into an ethnic neighborhood. Necessity is the mother of orphan magick.

The Gutter View

(• any Sphere)

As Edge points out in Chapter I, a street-dweller relies on his senses in ways few suburbanites can grasp. If nothing else, a man who can see in the dark has little to fear from midnight alleyways. Knowing this, urban orphans hone their senses and mystick expertise with this simple trick: Closing his eyes and concentrating, a Darkling shifts his awareness from normal sight to a deeper, more comprehensive perception. When he opens his eyes, he can see his surroundings on a different level. Depending on his expertise, he might sense things in his general vicinity (Correspondence); see in the dark or hear like a bloodhound (Forces); notice weak points (Entropy or Matter) and hidden structures (Matter); sense other living things nearby (Life); empathize with other peoples’ emotions (Mind) or read auras (Mind or Spirit); spot areas of mystick significance (Prime); see ghosts or other entities (Spirit); or maintain a dead-accurate sense of timing (Time).

As useful as these perceptions are, it's dangerous to be too attuned to your surroundings; a Darkling who's seeing things on three of four different levels at once will have three or four times as much trouble keeping track of the sensory input... or dealing with the overload that comes with clubbing, fighting, gunplay and other events. The city is loud, wild and unpredictable, and oversensitivity can be as deadly as no sensitivity at all.

[Sensory magick is coincidental, and rarely requires an Arete roll (although the Storyteller may require a Perception + Alertness or Awareness roll to notice certain things). Mystick senses must be "turned on" — they do not function 24-7.

[Overload, either from sudden harsh stimuli or an overdose of magickal perceptions, can be distracting or even hazardous: For every Rank One sense "turned on," the character suffers +1 to all difficulties on his Perception-based rolls. (Two would be +2, three would be +3, etc.) Also, powerful stimuli — loud music, bright lights, gunshots, etc. — have twice their normal effect, and may overwhelm the character unless he makes a Willpower roll (difficulty 6) to keep his wits intact.

[Prolonged sensations — clubs, torture, etc. — can become excruciating ordeals to a mage hopped up on extrasensory perception... which is occasionally the idea. A variant of this spell shares the sensations with someone else (see "Extending Perception" in *Mage*, p. 172), which can be great during sex, but horrible under torture.]

Fuck Off/Fuck Off and Die

(•• Mind; or ••• Mind, ••• Life)

Some people just want to be left the fuck *alone*! By projecting an invisible cloud of hatred and bitterness, an orphan can keep most people at a distance; with a glare, he can drive assholes from his sight. If he gets *really* pissed, he can actually dish out physical harm with nothing more deadly than a hard look and some trash talk. An ideal spell for Those Who Have Risen Above It All.

[Nasty looks and creative insults focus this magick. The basic **Fuck Off** sends out a disconcerting, intimidating halo around the mage. Everyone nearby will want to be as far away from him as possible, and anyone who cares to read his aura will see a maelstrom of crimson-strobed black. A character who still wants to approach him might have to make a Willpower roll to do so (difficulty is the spellcaster's Willpower rating). If the player wants to follow up this Effect with an Intimidation-based Social roll, he may add the successes from the Arete roll to the successes of his Social Dice Pool.

[The **Fuck Off Stare** concentrates all that hatred into one intense look. Anyone spared by that stare must either make a Willpower roll or back away, break down crying, or otherwise fold. A character with mental powers (the Mind Sphere, vampiric Presence or Dominate) or extraordinary courage (Courage or Rage 5+, the Iron Will Merit, a strong

fae Birthright, etc.) might back down if her Willpower rating is lower than the orphan's, but is not compelled to flee. Ghosts and other spirits are totally unaffected (hey, they've seen *hell*, for Christ's sake!), although they might be impressed by the orphan's venom.

[**Fuck Off and Die** has all of the **Stare**'s effects, and deals out a "strike" of Life-based aggravated damage, too. The victim must either "soak" the attack with her Willpower (see "Dodging and Resistance" in *Mage*, p. 167), or suffer immediate heart failure or brain hemorrhage.

[All variations of **Fuck Off** are coincidental, and none are likely to inspire loyalty or goodwill from the orphan's peers. Paradox backlashes often manifest as complete alienation or even exile in an empty Paradox Realm.]

Good Eatin'/Cleanse the Clown

(•• Life, •• Matter, or both)

When you're scrounging, the food you find may not, shall we say, be high-quality. This little trick, a specialty of the down-and-out, purges impurities from "found food," kills any bugs or parasites that might be digging around in it, and turns drinking water crystal-clear. The orphan simply says a prayer or blessing over the meal, or injects it with some home-brewed concoction. Result? Fine-tasting chow with none of the bitter aftertaste (or prolonged diarrhea) normally associated with dumpster-diving.

A similar spell, **Cleanse the Clown**, cleans up stinky people, kills off their lice and fleas, and generally makes them more presentable for those moments when respectability is vital.

[Both Effects are simple: Matter purifies the food or drink, and makes it taste pretty fine, too; Life kills any parasites in the intended meal. **Cleanse the Clown** does the same for people or animals, ridding them of skank and crawlies. This spell is coincidental, although people may look at you funny if you're eating something from an especially foul source... like Zestos.]

Pass the Key

(•• Entropy, •• Matter; sometimes with •• Forces)

CLICK. This "open sesame" spell opens doors, springs locks, disengages deadbolts and diffuses security systems. A larcenous orphan merely treats the lock or system with some enchantment (often a powder, a design, a bit of blood, or a prayer to light-fingered spirits), steps away and lets the magick (hopefully) open the lock. Simple, yet oh so useful!

[The basic version of the **Key** springs simple mechanical locks — doors, gates, safes, chains, etc. — while the Forces 2 variant fouls electrical locks and security systems. Naturally, really advanced systems require a lot more successes — five or more — than simple car doors or chained gates. Computer-guided systems may also demand a bit of Computer or Computer Hacking (see "Computers" in *Mage*,

pp. 244-245) — a simple spell will not crack a high-tech lock, and will probably set off an alarm instead. Botching this spell often wrecks the lock, fusing its parts together, and sets off an alarm if one happens to be attached to the target.

[Depending on the lock and the method our mage employs, **Pass the Key** may be coincidental (“Man, that credit card trick works wonders!”) or vulgar (“No way you could pick a bank vault with a hairpin!”). It does not open doors or cause chains to fall away, but merely snaps the locking mechanisms. Once sprung, the lock can usually be reset, so long as it hasn’t been damaged in the meantime.]

Purge

(•• or ••• Life)

“Morphine is bad for you”; nonetheless, many street folk indulge whenever they can. If an orphan wants to clean out her system (or someone else’s), she performs a short ritual (often a prayer, a meditation or a more... um, physical form of purging). The drugs in her system flush themselves out, sobering the mage (or her “patient”) immediately. The after-effects — which usually include cramps, pain, dizziness and nausea — aren’t pleasant, but they’re better than being fucked up when you need to be straight.

[This simple all-or-nothing Effect cleans out any impurities or illnesses in the character’s system. Life 2 sobers up the mage; Life 3 sobers up her “client.” Most drugs or minor illnesses can be **Purged** with a success or two; major illnesses and addictions may demand five successes or more, though. Under most circumstances, this spell is coincidental, although an Eric-Draven/Darla-style cleanup may seem impossibly vulgar to most folks.]

Ratstorm

(•• Correspondence, •• Life, •• Mind)

If you know where to look and how to ask, there are allies all around. An orphan who’s got an “understanding” with the local wildlife can call for help and expect to get it. Naturally, he’ll have to spend lots of downtime with his little friends; assuming he knows a number of rats, cats, dogs, crows, or whatever, the mage can beg them to come to his aid. With a chittering, a distress cry, an incantation, or some other call, the orphan summons a swarm of his little friends. Thus defended, he can fight or flee as the situation demands. These friends are not going to kill themselves for nothing, though; a mage who wants a **Ratstorm** at his disposal will have to take care of his little buddies, too... and should keep his human friends clear when the ‘storm breaks.

[To call up a swarm of critters, the character must roll his Arete and cry for help in an area populated by the beasts in question; you can’t summon rats in a penthouse apartment, or call dogs in a desert. Depending on the area and the number of successes rolled, the orphan might get a few scrappy helpers, a pack, or a swarm. If the creatures are close at hand, they’ll generally take two to five turns to reach the





mage; at that point, all hell breaks loose. For animal Traits and rules for packs and swarms, see **The Book of Shadows: The Mage Storytellers Guide** (pp. 108-112) or **Destiny's Price** (pp. 108-111). This spell is coincidental.]

Ravensong

(•• Life, •• Mind)

When the Hollow Ones say they can hear gossip on the cries of the crows, they're not exaggerating. Spotting a bird or small, smart animal (a rat, ferret, cat, etc.), a Darkling can call it over, enter a mild trance, and commune with it. In very basic terms, she can see what the bird has seen and hear what it has heard, or pass along very simple messages to other Hollowers — messages literally sent on raven's wings.

[In game terms, the mage takes a few turns to commune with the bird or animal; the player rolls his Arete against difficulty 5. Unless the message or impressions are particularly complex, the Storyteller may simply decide to let the player know what the "messenger" has noticed. This spell is coincidental unless the orphan blabs "Hey! Guess what I just read from this raven's brain!" — in which case he'll probably be considered a lunatic anyway.]

Shadow Project

(•• Forces; or •• Forces, •• Life)

When you need to hide (or just make a mysterious entrance or exit), nothing beats this cloak of shadows. Often cast with a gesture or a simple action (blowing out a candle, drawing a curtain, etc.), this spell makes concealment easy. Drawing all the darkness in the area to him (or banishing the light), an orphan can seemingly appear or disappear at will. While an advanced version of the spell can render the sorcerer truly invisible, most orphans spend so much time in dim light that the simple spell is often easier and just as effective.

[The simple version of the **Project** allows a mage to hide in darkness and muffle the sound of her footfalls, too. In game terms, simply use the Arete roll's successes as dots in the Arcane Background, subtracting them from any viewer's attempts to see the mage. If the character already has Arcane, or has also used Stealth, add the player's successes to the total. Naturally, this version only works in dim light, but it is coincidental... and very unsettling.

[Advanced invisibility works in all forms of light, but can become vulgar if the mage clearly disappears from sight, or if she later moves things around in plain view of witnesses.]

Thick Skin

(•• or ••• Life)

Ya gotta be tough to live on the streets. This spell, often cast with prayers, concentration, simple charms, heavy booze or drugs, hardens an orphan to her environment. Extreme heat, bitter cold, ice, broken glass... nothing can

do her much harm. A slightly more-powerful enchantment allows her to shrug aside the worst effects of knives, bullets, teeth... and the fangs and claws of supernatural creatures. Naturally, this protection is *not* eternal; the orphan has to renew her spell each time danger is near. If she's caught without her enchantment... well, maybe she ain't so tough after all.

[The Life 2 variant protects the sorcerer from extreme environments, and heals minor damage from gravel, glass shards, frostbite, etc. The Life 3 version actually helps her soak aggravated damage — *which mages cannot soak without magick* (see **The Book of Mirrors**, pp. 47-48) — or lets her temporarily raise her Stamina rating. (See **Better Body in Mage**, pp. 202-203.) For simplicity, the Storyteller may simply require the player to have her character cast the spell twice per day, or once just before a heavy beating. Although a person wandering around a dangerous environment unprotected looks kinda weird, this trick is coincidental.]

All Tomorrow's Parties

(••• Mind, •• Time)

The best parties are the most exclusive ones; if you can clue to them, you're in the elite. If you can clue to them before they even happen, you're a god. Naturally, the Hollow Ones and other club-crawling orphans revel in such secrets.

By asking *just* the right questions from *just* the right people, an astute mage can scan the minds of her companions, searching for clues about upcoming events. Before the Q&A, our intrepid party-seeker must concentrate (often with a little chemical help), then reach out from her own limited consciousness to embrace the minds and plans of others. Once she's ready, the Darkling can circulate, knowing more or less whom to ask about what. With a little charm, invitations are sure to be forthcoming, too... and if not, well, what's a party without a few crashers?

[Before the mage goes searching, she "sets" herself to uncover certain thoughts and emotions. Once the spell is in motion, Mind scans the "surroundings" for excitement or barely kept secrets, while Time sets the mental clock ahead just a bit, searching for glimpses of the party-to-be, its location, and its attendees.

[The Arete roll determines the success of the search; one success gives her a general clue about who to ask; two provide some general gossip; three offer her some hard information; four tell her the whos, wheres and whens; and five successes show her actual images of the party to come. Unless the orphan happens to be standing in the place where the party will be held, she must have contacts who know about the event before she can find out the details of it. If nobody has any information, the mage is SOL. Once the Darkling has the clues she needs, it's pretty easy to weasel a few invites, courtesy of Mind influence and a bit of flirtation.

[Naturally, **All Tomorrow's Parties** can provide information about any upcoming planned event. Since this spell is subtle, relying on fast talk and hunches, its effects are coincidental. A Darkling who simply grabs a passer-by and mind-rapes him for the information will have a fight on her hands — fought with Willpower, if nothing else — and a vulgar casting instead of a coincidental one.]

Back Door Parole

(••• Life, • Prime; often with •• Mind)

Sometimes being dead (or looking that way) can be more helpful than being alive. In a vampire party, a breathing guest gets noticed; in a rumble, folks don't usually shake down corpses; in prison, dead inmates tend to get an early parole (hence the name). For most people, "there ain't no comin' back"; some mages, however, can make life look pretty much like death.

By entering a deep trance, a Darkling with the skill and the guts to pull this trick off can stop her own bodily functions. Clinically, she dies. Magically, she actually just suspends the process of living, slowing it to an infinitesimal rate. Once "deceased," she can walk around, essentially undead, for a short period; or she can imitate a stiff. When the coast is clear, she jump-starts her system and returns to "life."

[Life suspends the bodily functions while keeping the mage alive; Prime ties the life-force to the body, and Mind keeps the "corpse" aware of her surroundings. Although a mage with Prime senses can tell whether or not the Darkling has actually died, most people (including many vampires) will be fooled. Once "dead," the orphan can stay that way for up to one day for every point of Quintessence in her Pool. After that, she must either awaken or die. In the meantime, her spell is coincidental... although she'd better hope she doesn't awaken on an autopsy table. A botched spell traps the mage's consciousness in her dying body, locking her in a mindscape (see "Quiet" in **Mage**, p. 179) until she either wakes up or perishes for real.]

Death Wish

(•• Correspondence, •• Life, plus either ••• Entropy, ••• Life, or both; sometimes ••• Forces, •• Correspondence, •• Prime)

"*I wish you were dead!*" With this incantation (or something similar), a furious mystick weaves a malediction against a distant person. Connecting the source of her ire to some small personal item in her possession (a doll, a photograph, a piece of hair, etc.), the mage sends a potent backblast of bad fortune or deadly force back along the channel. The result can either take indirect form as twisted luck (accidents beyond the caster's control), or assume a more direct attack of intense pain, paralysis, heart failure or even spontaneous combustion. Either way, justice is served.

[This curse has several variants: The basic Entropy 3/ Correspondence 2/ Life 2 version simply makes things go wrong for a person. The Storyteller checks the successes and decides what will go wrong, how badly, and for how long. This coincidental **Death Wish** simply becomes a plot device from that point onward.

[The deadly Life 3/ Correspondence 2 version sends a bolt of malefic energy into the target, inflicting aggravated Life-based damage in whatever form seems most appropriate to the caster; a subtle manipulator may want her victim to keel over from a heart attack, while an extravagant witch might send a message by suddenly twisting her victim into agonized knots. Depending on the form it takes, this spell could be either coincidental or very, very vulgar.

[A really nasty variant (Entropy 3/ Life 3/ Correspondence 2) combines both effects, poisoning the victim and inflicting a run of bitter luck as well. This could be as coincidental as having him break his leg on the same day his dog dies and his insurance is canceled, or as vulgar as having him collapse into a mass of broken bones.

[If you're homicidally pissed, nothing beats a Forces, Prime, Life and Correspondence curse. Should this **Death Wish** succeed, the victim literally bursts into flames. While a coincidence (possibly arraigned with Entropy 3) might make this look like an accident (*"Damn! He shouldn't have been smoking next to that gas pump!"*), most orphans prefer to display this kind of power openly. It's risky, but it gets the point across.

[Paradox backlashes tend to make the malediction rebound on the caster; an orphan who makes a habit of cursing her enemies from afar usually winds up with a huge karmic overdraft, even if the curses she sends take coincidental forms. When a backlash comes, it often manifests as devastatingly bad luck, even if the spell that brought it about had nothing to do with a **Death Wish** spell.]

Delirium

(... Mind; sometimes with .. Forces)

You see a lotta strange shit in the midnight world, especially if you're hyped on crank, tripping on ex, raving on the dance floor, or a combination of the above. Sometimes you can make other people see strange shit, too. Hey, if you're *really* good at it, they might not be able to tell where the hallucinations end and the real stuff begins....

From a magickal standpoint, the orphan simply takes what he sees in his head and sends it on its pretty little way into other peoples' heads, too. Essentially, he whips himself into a hallucinating frenzy, then spins his visions off across the room. If he's skillfully functional, he might be able to appear stone sober while convincing his subjects that *they're* the ones who've gone tripping....

[In story terms, the character employs his favorite poison, getting well and truly baked. In game terms, the

player rolls up an extended roll (difficulty 6). As the successes pile up, the **Delirium** expands, touching more and more minds. Throughout the room, perceptions waver, hallucinations rise and even the soberest attendees start seeing things.

Successes	People Affected
1-3	One or two people nearby
4-6	10 people nearby
7-10	Everyone nearby
10-15	Everyone in a small club
15+	Everyone in a large club

[The resulting chaos is in the Storyteller's hands; depending on the mage, the setting and the mood of the crowd, the hallucinations could be soothing, invigorating, arousing or infuriating. Strong-willed folks (Willpower 5+) might notice that things are getting too weird for words, but most will simply be swept up in the frenzy and won't bother asking questions until afterward.

[For an additional kick, the light-show may be bent to the orphan's wishes, making the **Delirium** that much more intense. Anyone who's ever dropped acid in a club can attest that even the strongest sense of reality goes out the window under those circumstances. In game terms, adding Forces 2 to the enchantment allows the player to add one success to the ones she has already rolled.

[If everyone in the area is seeing things to begin with, any additional magick cast in the club can be considered coincidental. The bounds of reality have temporarily been snapped. (See "Urban Sprawls" in **Mage**, p. 185.) If, however, the club starts coming down around the clubbers' ears, the **Delirium** cracks and raw panic takes over.]

[Casting a **Delirium** is coincidental; even so, a botch can still foul the attempt. Paradox backlashes tend to drive the mage totally insane. Perhaps a Marauder or two began his demented career trying to take clubgoers to the next level....]

Passing

(... Life)

Let's face it; there are places, especially in the urban wasteland, where it just isn't healthy to be the wrong color. A white boy in Cabrini Green is asking for trouble, as is a black man in a skinhead bar. Although many people would rather die than change their skin color, some pragmatic mages find it easier to shift with the surroundings. If you've got lots of different people to deal with, this can be a very helpful talent....

Not that body alteration stops there. As many Darklings can attest, it can be very useful to change your features, your shape, even your sex, either to fit in, to escape notice, or just to get some kicks. A shapechanging ritual (often involving veils, make-up, special concoctions, or brutal body modification) allows an orphan to alter himself in whatever way he pleases. The changes are temporary, but the benefits can save his ass.

[A basic Life 3 Effect changes the character's basic appearance. From that point, it's up to him to act the part he has chosen. The magick's effects last for the normal duration... a fact to consider if the mage is planning some deep-cover work. Radical shape-changing is vulgar, but small alterations (eye color, skin color) can be passed off as good make-up.]

Pop Goes the Weasel

(••• Life, •• Forces, •• Prime)

An unpleasant way of dealing with traitors: A Hollow One repeats the tune over and over again, staring deeply into her victim's eyes. If he cannot look away (say he's tied to a chair or something), his skin slowly begins to heat. Sweat bursts from his pores. His body temperature rises. His eyes bulge. His bladder boils. Clear out! After an agonizing minute or so, the Darkling claps her hands and the "weasel" pops. Icky-poo.

[The victim must be immobilized for the duration of the spellcasting; as the orphan's player makes an extended roll (difficulty 7, or 8 if they're in public), her target suffers indescribable pain, but little physical harm. The actual damage "stacks" — each turn, the mage's player records her successes. At the end of the casting time (which can be as long as the Darkling wants it to be), the successes are added together and applied as aggravated damage. The result will kill most human characters instantly. Each roll reflects about 30 seconds of repeating "pop goes the weasel"; this in itself could drive most victims crazy.

[If the victim can break free before the mage finishes her torture, he sustains only one Health Level per turn; if he can soak aggravated damage (as a werebeast can), he could try to "absorb" that one Health Level, and come out really mad, but none the worse for wear. Each turn the Hollow One chants her spell, however, the victim loses one die from his Dice Pools — the pain becomes too much to bear.

[As the spell continues, the victim's body boils from the inside out. At the climax, it bursts like... well, you figure it out. Yes, this is vulgar as hell. This spell does not work on spirits or the undead, who have no intrinsic body heat to raise.]

Safe Little World

(••• Correspondence, ••• Life; or ••• Spirit; or, •• Mind, • Life; sometimes with ••• Spirit and/or •• Mind)

"By the power of three times three, I ward thee and sanctify thee from harm." This standard but important charm protects an apartment, car, box-home, etc. from invasion. While the ritual is usually a bit more complicated than simply reciting a charm, it keeps most trespassers from fucking with your shit.

To set the ward, an orphan paces around the area he wants to protect, chanting the charm and sealing it with some sort of ritual (often involving salt, wax, prayers,





esoteric designs and sometimes a sacrifice). With a final blessing, he leaves the area, assured that nothing unusual will enter the area without his knowledge.

[There are many ways to set a safeguard: The basic Correspondence 3/Life 3 variation keeps human trespassers out of the area. (See **Ward** in **Mage**, p. 189, for details.) Ghosts and other spirits can be banned by adding Spirit 3 to the spell. Mind 2, meanwhile, alerts the mage if a trespasser *does* manage to enter the protected area — giving him a “hunch” that something’s wrong back home.

[A simple, spirit-based variation favored by Darklings uses Spirit 3/Mind 2 to post Otherworldly guards around the area; if a trespasser tries to enter, the spirits kick her ass (see **Awaken the Inanimate** or **Free the Mad Howlers** in **Mage**, page 218) while notifying the mage that his sanctuary is under attack. Naturally, a Darkling had better treat his “employees” well; disgruntled guards have a way of snoozing on duty....

[An orphan without much magickal skill can settle for a simple Mind 3/Life 1 “alarm system”; it won’t keep anyone out, but it will let the mage know if someone comes in.

[Since most mortals consider solid walls of air to be impossible, **Safe Little World** is vulgar; the caster rolls against difficulty 7 and takes one point of Paradox each time he sets up a ward. The Mind 2/ Life 1 version is coincidental, however — only the mage knows it exists.]

Secondary Sources



If you can't (or don't want to) crawl through the crotch of humanity to do research for your chronicle, you can at least enjoy their sights and sounds in the comfort of your own home. Of course, given the lead time on sourcebooks such as this one, by the time this makes it into your hands, newer material will be available, but, hey, that's publishing. (The Appendix of **Destiny's Price** has a pile of other “urban chronicle” sources. Rather than reprint the whole thing, we'll simply refer you to that book.)

Music

Music is an integral facet of the *World of Darkness*. Nothing adds atmosphere like a *Manhole* or *Christian Death* CD chugging along in the background. The following list is skewed toward the gothic and urban, because punk's kinda stagnating among all the *Green Days* and third-wave ska-cheesers of the world as of this book's writing. Give the following artists a try; if nothing else, they've got more balls than the latest whine-wave radio band.

Björk, *Homogenic*

cEVIN KEY, *Music for Cats*

Christian Death, *Only Theatre of Pain; Catastrophe Ballet; Ashes; The Iron Mask; Death Mix; First, Last, and Forever and The Rage of Angels*

Cleopatra Records compilations, *Gothic Rock 1 and 2; Enchantments, The Goth Box; GothiK; In Goth Daze; Gothspotting; Industrial Revolution 1, 2 and 3; Elektro Industrial Sounds; Agitprop: The Politics of Punk*, and lotsa other stuff

Dead Kennedys, *Fresh Fruit for Rotting Vegetables; In God We Trust, Inc.; Frankenchrist and Give Me Convenience or Give Me Death*

Deathride 69, *Screaming Down the Gravity Well*

Die Form, *Vicious Circles; Suspiria de Profundis; Mysteries on the Mirror; Museum of Ecstasy; Confessions; Tears of Eros* and many others

The Doctors of Madness — An obscure band from the 1970s, only available in the “used” section of record collectors’ stores. But if you should happen to find them, buy the album without hesitation! More than almost any other band, the Doctors’ music captures the desolation/isolation/introspection that defines the Hollow Ones.

Gearwhore, *Drive*

Goldie, *Saturnzreturn*

L7, *Bricks are Heavy; Hungry for Stink*

Manhole, *All is Not Well*

Massive Attack, *Mezzanine*

Method Man, *Tical*

Portishead, *Dummy and Portishead*

Pulp, *This is Hardcore*

Qntal, *Qntal and Qntal II*

Radiohead, *OK Computer*

Roni Size w/Reprazent, *New Forms*

Tricky, *Maxinquaye; Pre-Millennium Tension and Angels with Dirty Faces*

Wink, *HereHear*

:Wumpscutt:, *Bunker Gate Seven*

...and any local stuff that catches your ear — local music means as much to people as national music does, sometimes even more so due to the hometown connection and the lack of dipshit big-label politics.

Books, Comics and Magazines

Mark Dion and Alexis Rockman, *Concrete Jungle* — Stomach-churning look at urban ecosystems. Parasites, rats, roadkill, cats and dogs... it’s all here if you can handle it.

J. Goldberg, *Raised by Wolves* — If running away ever seemed romantic to you, check out this gritty mess. A photojournalistic “essay” of homeless kids, *Wolves* is an acid bath to cool clichés. Despite the squalor, author Goldberg befriends the people living in this cold hell... which makes their true stories all the more heartbreaking.

Elmore Leonard, *Rum Punch, Get Shorty, The Usual Suspects, Wild Things* — If you need to know why these are on the list, read them all.

Magazines — *Big, Contraband, Anarchy, Sweater, The Source*, and of course *Carpe Noctem* (a personal favorite). Also worth noting: the cheapass ‘zines published locally and available at alternative music, video and book stores. You can’t get any closer to the ragged cutting edge than these free-or-nearly-so subculture rags, most of which come and go too quickly to note by name.

Marilyn Manson with Neil Strauss, *The Long Hard Road Out of Hell* — What happens when Midwestern kids go from bad to worse.

Grant Morrison, *The Invisibles* (comic) — Great stuff, featuring characters involved in a mystic/multi-dimensional conspiracy, a transvestite shaman, a gorgeous psycho (or psychic, who knows?) redhead, and King Mob!

Poetry — Byron, Shelley, Keats, Baudelaire, Dickinson, and other Romantic-era writers. Also the musings of de Sade, Dante, the Bronte Sisters, Gogol, Goethe, Miller, T.S. Eliot, Nin, Poe, and other darkly evocative authors.

Randy Queen, *Darkchylid* (comic) — Yes, it’s cheesy. Yes, Queen has spent more time marketing this character than writing/drawing her adventures. Doesn’t matter. This tale of a self-Awakened teen with more problems than a Whitewater attorney has bite, wit and mood to spare.

Andrew Vachss, *Flood; Strega; Blue Belle; Hard Candy; Sacrifice; The Hour of the Hawk* (novels); *Hard Looks* (comic) — Hell, just buy anything with his name on it. Besides writing like a buzzsaw wrapped in barbed wire, the man supports kids’ causes and battles real-life child abusers. His is a fight worth supporting.

V. Vale and Andrea Juno, *Re/Search: Industrial Culture Handbook; Angry Women; Angry Women of Rock; Modern Primitives*; and *Search & Destroy Reprints* — Fun, accessible and loaded with interviews and photos, these handbooks to alternative subcultures should be required reading.

White Wolf, *Destiny’s Price* — The handbook for backstreet magi, filled with more subcultures, gutter magick and attitude than we could include here. A bit dated, but an invaluable resource for orphan chronicles. Other helpful urban chronicle sourcebooks include *The Anarch’s Cookbook, Chicago By Night, Cult of Ecstasy, Succubus Club, Love Beyond Death, Rage Across New York and The Book of Mirrors: The Mage Storytellers Guide*.

Colin Wilson, *The Misfits* — A marvelous study of deviant artists and the forces that drove them.

Elizabeth Wurtzel, *Prozac Nation and Bitch: In Praise of Difficult Women* — Obnoxious. Pretentious. Shallow. Self-absorbed. True. What’s your point? Read.



Movies

More digestible — and disposable — than most other media, movies offer unmatched visual reference. With noted exceptions, all are good flicks.

City of Lost Children — This masterpiece has little to do with reality as we know it, but everything to do with orphans. One of the best fantasy films ever made.

A Clockwork Orange — Sometimes the most frightening prophecies are the self-fulfilling kind.

The Craft — An essential look at what happens when angry kids Awaken without knowing what they're doing. Highly recommended.

The Crow; *Crow II: City of Angels* — The sequel blows screaming chunks at the moon, but it *looks fuckin' cool*. The original, on the other hand, is as classic as pulp goth cinema gets. True, Eric Draven is a ghost (or, more properly, a Risen), but the world he and his companions inhabit is the epitome of an orphan's lot.

Dark City — An orphan Awakens in a world run by mysterious entities. Too derivative to be truly classic, but damned fine nonetheless.

The Doom Generation — Crappy no-budget hip-flick that nevertheless conveys the orphan mentality better than almost any other flim on this list.

Ken Russel's *Gothic* — A must for early Hollow One chronicles.

Pulp Fiction — Low life, drugs and violence. (How *did* those bullets miss Vincent and Jules, anyway?)

π — Not all orphans favor the leather-and-witchcraft thing. This brilliant (and very **Mage**) mind-fuck offers a worm's-eye view of Awakening and all the hassles that go with it.

Trainspotting, *Kids*, *Sid & Nancy* and *Gummo* — For when you *really* want to scare yourself about the insidious nature of life in the city.

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature:
Essence:
Demeanor:

Concept:
Mentor:
Affiliation:

Physical
Social
Mental

Strength
Dexterity
Stamina

Charisma
Manipulation
Appearance

Perception
Intelligence
Wits

Talents
Skills
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Advantages

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Other Traits

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Willpower
Quintessence
Paradox

Health
Experience



THE Orphans

SURVIVAL GUIDE

MAGE: The Ascension™



Merits & Flaws

Merit	Type	Cost	Flaw	Type	Bonus

Magick

Affinity Sphere _____ Magick Style _____

Favorite Tricks

Talismans

Name	Level	Arete	Quintessence	Appearance

Combat

Weapon	Difficulty	Damage	Range	Rate	Clip	Conceal

Brawling Table

Maneuver	Difficulty	Damage
Punch	6	Strength
Grapple	6	Strength
Kick	7	Strength+1
Body Slam	7	Special

Armor: _____



THE Orphans

SURVIVAL GUIDE

MAGE: The Ascension™



Expanded Background

Mundane Contacts

"Talented" Contacts

Mundane Influences

"Talented" Allies

Resources

Mentor

Familiar

Crashspace

Close Friends

"Special Places"

Vital Stuff

Gear (Carried)

Equipment (Owned)

Tools and Rituals



THE ORPHANS

SURVIVAL GUIDE

MAGE: The Ascension™



History

Awakening

Goals/Destiny

Seekings

Quiets

Description:

Age

Apparent Age

Date of Birth

Age of Awakening

Hair

Eyes

Race

Nationality_

Height

Weight

Sex

Appearance/Nature of Avatar

Visuals

Circle of Friends

Character Sketch

THE Orphans

SURVIVAL GUIDE™

Born in a Firestorm

One moment, you're halfway normal. The next moment, everything goes to hell. Reality becomes a sham and you're the only one who understands the truth. Bend over, baby — you're screwed!

Raised on the Streets

Surrounded by enemies, haunted by visions, wrapped up in forces you can't understand... no wonder you've gone crazy! But help is here — help from the only people on Earth who understand. People like you. The Orphaned Ones. The Survivors.

I Will Never Submit.

From the Waydown to the Heights, the self-Awakened gather. Defiant. Demented. Too rebellious for "traditions" and too cool to care. This is the New Way. They are the Hope of Tomorrow.

So EAT ME!!!

You know the drill:

- The Hollow Ones "tradition book..." as if!!
- Storyteller advice for hardass chronicles;
- Gutter magick, templates, living legends, a ready-to-run club, and more!



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