

MAGE™

STORYTELLERS HANDBOOK



A SOURCEBOOK FOR MAGE: THE ASCENSION®

MAGE™

STORYTELLERS HANDBOOK

INITIATION INTO THE MYSTERIES

Confused by Paradox and paradigm? Not sure just what conflicts and struggles face modern mages? Want to run your players through Seekings but not sure where to start? These questions and more are answered here, along with tips for making **Mage** anything you want it to be — here are the tools to do it. By your will, it is done.

DRAWING BACK THE CURTAIN

More than just Storytelling advice and rules clarifications, the **Mage Storytellers Handbook** covers many and varied angles of approach for the game. Examine ways to run a game in a totally different timeline. Rebuild the Traditions and setting to fit your desires. Run crossovers with other World of Darkness games. Open the floodgates of creativity and make **Mage** the game you've always wanted to play. Anything's possible!



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P. David Gill, in addition to being a cool roleplayer and all-around nice guy, wrote an entire chapter of the **Guide to the Traditions**—for which he wasn't properly credited. Whoops! Consider this our make-up call.



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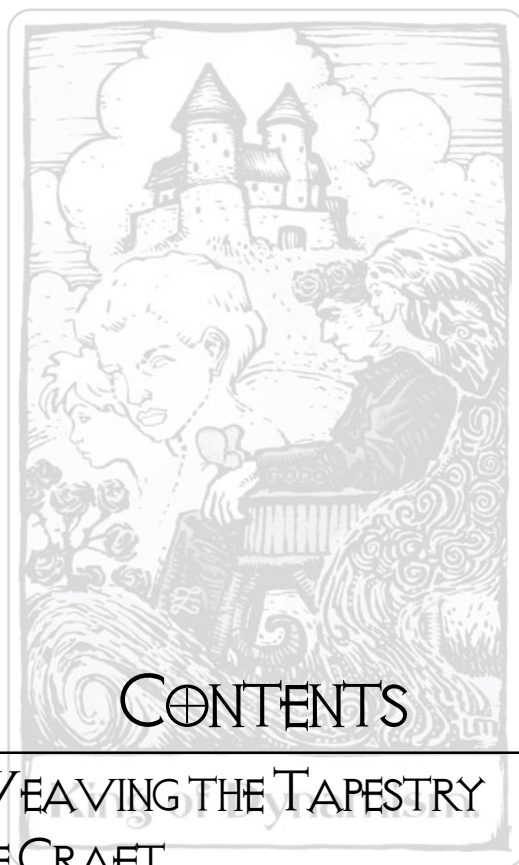
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INTRODUCTION: WEAVING THE TAPESTRY



This is *your* book.

This is the book that results from a decade of **Mage** players and fans, from all of their feedback and ideas, from lots of late brainstorming nights, change-overs and revisions.

Usually, a **Mage** game book advances the storyline, introduces some additional character ideas, and maybe gives you some settings or tools for developing your own stuff. It fits neatly into the core framework of the game, expands current rules or tweaks a few things to fix them.

Now this book, in conjunction with you, will break them all again.

Mage posits a framework — a modeling set, if you will — of rules and setting to play a particular form of game. Sure, you might bend it a little to play a more violence-and-betrayal chronicle, or you could tweak it

and play up a romantic game, but you still have Spheres, Arete, the quest for Ascension, and all that, right? So what do you do if you want to play a game where everyone in the world is a mage? Or if you don't like the way the Spheres are defined but you like their implementation mechanic? Or you want to play high-concept but can't wrap your brain around philosophy? It's the Storyteller's prerogative to spin a game around and change it into something more enjoyable for the troupe. That's what this book is about: twisting and turning to make **Mage** your own thing.

To that end, this book has clarifications and updates on rules, sure. It *also* presents alternatives to the usual **Mage** game — different ways of looking at chronicle design and magical systems. More than just presenting options, it presents these as inspirations. These are examples of things you can do, in ways that show you what you'll need in order to implement them.

THE GOLDEN RULE



The pages you hold in your hands are full of rules, clarifications, suggestions and advice. Indeed, there are hundreds of pages of them. Ultimately, however, they are here for one reason — to remind you of that supreme guide known as the Golden Rule. Even the authors and developers at White Wolf bend the rules, make our own house rules, and wholeheartedly ignore rules al-

together in our efforts to tell stories for our own tabletop groups. We are constantly adjusting, often on the fly, to make the game fit the needs of the story instead of letting the rules of the game dictate the story. As you read these pages, remember that nothing herein is gospel; nothing in here is the “right way” to do it. This book is just a grand collection of ideas, each presented in all its raw glory, ripe for you to pluck out and test in your own games as you strive to tell the best stories you can possibly give to your troupe. Dive in, harvest the pearls you know will enrich your Storyteller’s chest of tricks and shuck the shells that strike you as empty into the discard pile. You will hear a lot of people say that roleplaying games are not about winning or losing, but those groups of players and Storytellers that have the most fun really are “winning the game,” and don’t let anybody tell you otherwise. We hope that our ideas will help you and your troupe win in your efforts to tell stories that are fun and entertaining for all of you.

Ultimately, the Storyteller should use the rules as tools to enhance the fun of the game for herself and the players. This does not necessarily mean wantonly abandoning any rule just because a single player disagrees with it; after all, the rules are intended to settle arguments rather than encourage them. Storytellers who completely disregard all of the rules will find themselves struggling to keep any sense of order, as players will grow confused and frustrated with no idea of what to expect from the game. On the other hand, Storytellers who never bend on any rule are likely to find the game has become a cage, with the Storyteller and players alike trapped by the dictates of someone else’s idea of what makes a game fun. The decision to ignore or change or bend a rule is an ever-present one, but a good Storyteller will gradually learn when she should stand by the rules as a method of necessary order and when she should overturn them in favor of story progress. We hope this book will help teach Storytellers to make these decisions on their own as often as it offers specific decisions.

FOLD, SPINDLE AND MUTILATE!

All right, we’ve tossed the Golden Rule out there and told you to mess around with rules that make the game fun. “So why,” you ask, “am I paying for a book that just tells me to make up my own rules?”

Because rule books are like prefab kits. They contain parts that are tested, that generally fit together, and that usually offer a coherent and internally consistent framework. Instead of having to make up a whole bunch of stuff yourself and test it by trial and error, you gain the benefit of premade parts. Mind you, you still have to put them together and you have to make sure you pick the parts that you want to use. Instead of forcing a fit, you want to put pieces together into a seamless chronicle — and the published materials help to do that.

When you want to diverge markedly from the direction of publications, though, you may find yourself in empty terrain. Sure, you might have some stuff in mind from a recent movie, or perhaps you want to hybridize some rules. That’s where this book comes in: You can take a look at ways to try out things you’ve wanted to do but haven’t put down on paper.

PREPARE FOR IT...

The Storytellers Handbook is about preparedness. You can run great games on the fly, but when you want to distance yourself from the basic model, you need to put your ideas down in concrete form. This book offers the inspiration that helps you set down your own chronicle directions.

In **Mage** more so than in other games, preparation is key. It’s a big universe with many complex rules — you’ll need a bit more than Cliff Notes to make this fly! As you read through this book, *interact* with it. Ask yourself how it might apply to your game. Put sticky notes on the pages with your own ideas and comments. When you don’t just read about an idea, but you turn it over in your mind and see what you can do with it, you’ll not only give it your own personal spin but you’ll garner a more comprehensive understanding of it.

So take notes. Class is in session and this is your textbook...but it’s a ride through wondrous realms and the graduates are all Storytellers with the right stuff.

WHAT’S IN IT FOR ME?

So how can this book help you make up your own stuff? Sounds like a contradiction in terms. Yes and no — while this book can’t be a comprehensive guide to

everything, it can help point you in the direction of many different and interesting ideas, and it can give examples of ways to implement those ideas. Among these pages you'll find...

Chapter One: The Craft. Errata, addenda and answers to those burning questions and errant loopholes you've always wondered about. Sure, some rules have had minor corrections over time. (Nobody's perfect.) You'll find answers to your questions here as well as some ideas on *why* things were done the way they were.

Additionally, this section includes a boatload of optional rules and rules to change around the game. If it's a rule that would totally alter Paradox, or change Abilities or alter the Spheres, it's in here.

Chapter Two: The Awakened Struggle. Unlike many roleplaying games, **Mage** can often seem overly subtle and abstract. The villain is obscured and may not be a villain at all when viewed from his own perspective. The various sources of dramatic conflict and the possible antagonists central to **Mage's** metaplot are introduced here, along with ideas for using them to drive stories and plots.

Chapter Three: Awakening the Storyteller. Advanced advice for Storytellers who want to spruce up the game or who keep having problems running it. Setting up in advance, advice for quick game solutions, ways to simplify your systems and paperwork. Motives, themes, and methods. Plus a dissertation on the basics of philosophy and how you can apply that cerebral angle to **Mage**.

Obviously, if you're running **Mage** you're probably a pretty advanced Storyteller already. Chapter Three's advice covers unusual situations, offers a little back-up when players get out of hand and shows you how you can bring your game up to speed by combining advance

planning with some quick time-saving templates or pared-down records.

Chapter Four: Avatars and Seekings. Vital to a mage's magical development is the Seeking, a sort of magical mystery tour initiated by a willworker's own Avatar to goad him toward enlightenment. But how in the world do you devise and execute one of these strange trips in a story? This chapter tells you how and produces myriad ideas for Avatars of all Essences.

Chapter Five: Alternative Settings. From fanciful worlds of magic to spins on the outcome of the Ascension War, this chapter covers several samples of chronicles that veer far afield from the usual **Mage** fare. Plus a checklist for making your own chronicles, ideas on things you can tweak or change, and a bunch of material to enhance your specific themes for otherwise usual chronicles.

If you've been itching to run a **Mage** game that's a space opera, or you want to play around with mages in a fantastic setting out of comic books or movies, this is the place to look. Before the World of Darkness becomes passé or repetitive, browse through these ideas. Some of them might spark a new direction for your chronicle or spawn a completely new one.

Chapter Six: A World of Magic. A long, hard look at crossovers and where mages fit in a unified World of Darkness — and what you want to watch out for! Ways to integrate other game themes and characters. Expanding the World of Darkness to encompass other ideas beyond the core of **Mage**.

More than just giving you some crossover rules, though, Chapter Six is also a toolkit — it examines where you're likely to run into problems with mixed venues and how to address those issues. In some cases they may not even *be* problems or may spark new ideas.



CHAPTER ONE: THE CRAFT



Running a compelling, engaging **Mage** game is hard work! The Storyteller — you — must put a lot of thought into what the game's about, how to execute it, and which areas of the theme and mood to focus upon. It may not seem like much at first, but it's a lot to juggle. Do your Storyteller characters have the right

mindset to capture the game's mood? Does *Resonance* really work the way your players all claim that it does? What the heck was the development and writing team *thinking*, anyway?

Let's start small, with the niggling rules, and then move up to the big time: the assumptions behind why **Mage** not only works the way that it does, but has produced the many books it has.



Visitors to the White Wolf website will recognize questions from the **Mage** game's Frequently Asked Questions herein. In some cases they've been expanded upon, as necessary. You'll also find answers to several other questions that may have come up in the course of a long-term chronicle.

What happened to the numbers on the book spines?

The numbers on the spines of various **Mage: The Ascension** books, sort of reminiscent of the Halo numbers from various Nine Inch Nails CDs and videos, provide a method of keeping track of which **Mage** books you do and don't have. The numbers existed in the waaaaaay back very beginning on the first books, but they're not used any more.

In too many cases a spine number wound up being more trouble than it was worth. They never had much use ("I need **Mage** book #21!") and they caused some confusion when weird events transpired — anything from books coming out of order due to changing release dates, to books with the wrong numbers!

By the time of the Revised edition, it was clear that the spine numbers, while perhaps whimsically flavorful, didn't serve much purpose yet conversely could cause problems. (Yes, people actually *complained* when a typo led to a duplicated spine number on one printing.)

Perhaps more noteworthy, some **Mage** books — the Tradition books — never had a spine number, so there was no way to fit them into any sort of comprehensive list.

This list includes all of them, including editions that are no longer in print:

- 01 Mage (first edition)
- 02 Mage Storytellers Screen (first edition)
- 03 Book of Chantries
- 04 Loom of Fate
- 05 Progenitors
- 06 Digital Web
- 07 Book of Shadows
- 08 Chaos Factor
- 09 Iteration X
- 10 Book of Madness
- 11 New World Order

- 12 Ascension's Right Hand
- 13 Mage (second edition)
- 14 Mage Storytellers Screen and Companion (second edition)
- 15 Void Engineers
- 16 Horizon: Stronghold of Hope
- 17 Book of Crafts
- 18 Book of Worlds
- 19 Book of Mirrors
- 20 Syndicate
- 21 Technomancer's Toolbox
- 22 Digital Web 2.0 (misnumbered as 21)
- 23 Orphan's Survival Guide
- 24 Tales of Magick: Dark Adventure
- 25 Guide to the Technocracy
- 26 Initiates of the Art
- 27 Spirit Ways
- 28 Masters of the Art

What happened to (my favorite stuff that wasn't in any book)?

Victims of word counts. **Mage** revised, for example clocked in with 90,000 words *over* what we could print. For reference's sake, that's about equal to an extra 160 pages of material that just couldn't fit in the main book. It's unfortunate but it's also a law of publishing. It's up to the developer to decide what's essential and what can be held until later. So if you thought something was at the heart of **Mage** but you didn't see it in the book, chances are that it was held for a later release.

Of course, with the release of revised books and updated Guides, a lot of material has finally made it to press. Still, every once in a while something doesn't fit because of space (like Merits and Flaws in **Laws of Ascension**) or manages to slip through the cracks into obscurity (like Lions of Zion, who never appeared in the revised **Storytellers Companion**).

I'm confused by the new Paradox system. Does Paradox always backlash? Does it always release the entire amount? The descriptions seem contradictory.

Paradox is a fickle force. Sometimes it backlashes; sometimes it waits. Sometimes it's a hammer and sometimes it's like sandpaper against your skin.

Paradox *usually* ignites as it's garnered but not always. Figure about a one-in-ten chance that Paradox will hang on a mage instead of backlashing immediately. Of course, the player can always spend

Willpower to prevent the Paradox from going off all at once. Ultimately it's up to the Storyteller to decide whether the Paradox explodes as gathered or whether it hangs in the balance.

When Paradox backlashes, it's usually easiest to simply fire off all of the Paradox accumulated at once and look up the results in the appropriate damage and flaw tables. If you want to run with more uncertainty in your Paradox, you can roll a die pool equal to the Paradox rating of the mage; each success (6 or more) causes one point of Paradox to discharge from the pool in a backlash. (Permanent Paradox can still discharge in this case, but it doesn't go away.) Take the results for the amount of total Paradox that backlashes; the mage stores up the rest.

In the event that a mage has some hanging Paradox left in his pool, it still disperses at a rate of one point per week, as stated in the rules.

What are the differences between vulgar and coincidental magic? What happens when a mage casts coincidental magic, and how much does the player have to describe? The rules seem kinda sketchy.

Vulgar and coincidental magic are described in **Mage** on pp. 137–138, but the descriptions leave a lot of leeway. Ultimately, the full limits on what counts as “vulgar” versus “coincidental” are up to the game that the Storyteller wants to run.

In brief, coincidental magic is anything that *could* reasonably have happened without the intervention of magic. If a mage does some mojo and a couple of cars crash, well, they *could've* crashed anyway; it's a coincidence. Likewise, if the mage prays for intervention while an enemy is chasing him and suddenly the enemy's elevator gets stuck, it's a coincidence — not because all miracles are coincidental but because an elevator could conceivably just *happen* to become stuck.

Vulgar magic is anything outside the bounds of coincidence. The mage hurls lightning from his fingers — that couldn't plausibly happen in the real world, so it's obviously magic! Similarly, if a mage steps into a bathroom in one city and steps out of one in another city, it's clearly something that couldn't have “just happened,” and it's vulgar magic.

The boundaries of coincidence and vulgarity aren't set, though. The Consensus has some effect: What people *believe* is possible shapes what *is* possible. Thus, if a mage manages to convince people that he has some incredible gizmo that really works and lets him appear to hurl lightning, the effect may

well be coincidence — the mage does his magic and waves his hands, but the device is doing the work, right? As far as people can tell, anyway. Similarly, a mage may have special knowledge about some little-known “fact” of science that he leans on, but if it's not widely spread and believed, it won't appear to be a natural part of what could have happened, so it'll be vulgar magic or science.

When a mage does vulgar magic, he cuts loose with an effect and fires off something that clearly violates the natural order. Simple. A coincidental effect is usually much more subtle, though. The mage sets magic in motion but then weaves that magic into the Tapestry. The magic nudges events into a certain direction; those without magic can't even tell that anything unusual happened. The mage might not even know what is going to happen! The *player* should describe a plausible coincidence, but the *mage* merely sets up events and probably doesn't even know if the end result came from chance or from magic. For instance, a Hermetic mage could invoke the power of Forces to strike an enemy down coincidentally. The mage weaves the magic into the Tapestry and hopes that it works. Lo and behold, a severed power line hits the foe and shocks him. Unusual, but it could happen, so it's a coincidence, and nobody can really tell if it was magic or not. The *player* knew by rolling dice, and the *player* described the plausible coincidence (subject to the Storyteller's approval), but the mage only knows that he relied on magic, he believed, and lo, his enemy was struck down.

Individual Storytellers should play with the boundaries of coincidence as it suits the nature of the game. Coincidence and vulgarity will shift from time to time, place to place and person to person, too.

What's permanent Paradox, how do you get it, what does it do and is it the same as a permanent Paradox Flaw?

Permanent Paradox results when a character has some sort of massively unusual alteration that consistently and constantly violates the “rules” of reality.

For instance, a mage can, using Life magic, give himself better muscles. Usually this use is short term to give a temporary boost; the mage garners a small amount of Paradox and suffers Pattern bleeding because of the stress of altering his personal Pattern. On the other hand, a Master of Life might use magic to preserve himself beyond normal human lifespan, retaining youth and vigor for a century. This usage

clearly violates the “laws” of conventional human existence. Why doesn’t the Master suffer Pattern bleeding? Because instead of temporarily stretching his Pattern, he permanently rewrites it. The problem is that he rewrites it in a way that reality doesn’t accept, so he constantly has the looming threat of Paradox hovering over him. In game terms, he has permanent Paradox.

If your mage garners permanent Paradox, mark it by filling in (not just X’ing) the Paradox box(es). That Paradox always counts for the character’s Paradox backlashes — it means worse backlashes and more damage — but it never goes away. It can’t be removed with Prime magic. It only goes away if the mage undoes the thing that caused it (such as removing a cybernetic enhancement) or if the Consensus changes to permit it (such as if the Consensus comes to accept that cybernetic enhancement as “normal”). Once that happens it converts to normal Paradox and can be discharged.

Permanent Paradox is not the same as a permanent Paradox Flaw. The latter results from a nasty backlash giving the mage some hindrance that permanently hampers him: a withered hand, dead-white hair, a Derangement or some similar problem.

Okay, smarty pants, so if the Consensus says “reality is what people believe,” then how come the Consensus works? Most people don’t believe that reality is whatever they want to believe, so it shouldn’t be, right?

The Consensus is an aftereffect of the creation of the Tellurian. Like the existence of Prime energy, it’s not really subject to interpretation. Prime energy (Quintessence) exists in spite of the fact that most normal people don’t believe in it. In some cases there are things that just “seem to be,” whether due to historical inertia or cosmological constants.

In **Mage**, belief, channeled through will, creates reality. Mages can do this consciously because they are Awakened. Sleepers do so only on the deepest most unconscious levels, such that individual belief amounts for little, but the collective mix of such unconscious convictions is strong enough to bind reality to a particular mode of being — to make it follow certain rules of what is acceptable and what is not. Since it is an unconscious process, people can’t simply wish things weren’t different (unless they’re Awakened). In addition, many neurotic contents of this collective unconscious of sorts might well make their way into consensual reality, even though nobody in his right mind would consciously let such

things exist. Hence, vampires and other night beasties lurk in the real world.

The “real world” is the material world. Anything can exist in the Umbra, regardless of consensual belief (although even here there are certain laws, and hence Paradox). It seems that the reality filters only really kick in for the material world, much as an individual’s own ego will not allow certain thoughts to become conscious, relegating them to the unconscious to reappear later as dreams or Freudian slips.

Of course, you can play around with the idea of *who* exactly makes up the Consensus. It’s not necessarily only humans. Maybe spirits, animals or even unknown *others* participate in this masterful tapestry called the Consensus. While belief *affects* the Consensus, it doesn’t necessarily *create* it. Some “laws” of nature may exist independent of belief, and others might change with varying degrees of ease and speed.

When stepping sideways, does the Avatar Storm cause damage from failed Spirit dice, or from a separate roll of Arete + Paradox? And does the Storm affect anything other than mages?

It’s Arete + permanent Paradox. The Storm affects only enlightened individuals and creations — that is, mages and Talismans.

So how come the Avatar Storm doesn’t affect shapeshifters, spirits, what-have-you?

The Avatar Storm is attracted to strong, powerful Avatars. It’s like lightning striking a magnet. Shapeshifters aren’t exactly human and certainly don’t have Avatars in the **Mage** sense (they have spirits, but they *are* part spirit). Spirit entities, by the same token, are not necessarily Avatars.

Why did the Avatar Storm happen the way that it did? It seems like a cop-out to take Masters and the Umbra out of the game.

Some people think the Avatar Storm is just a plot device that came out of nowhere. Well, multiple nuclear devices went off in the Underworld. The Sixth Maelstrom arrived. Doissetep collapsed in the largest display of Forces in memory. The Digital Web crashed and reset. The Tradition stronghold of Concordia/Horizon was invaded and fell! And people think that the logical result of these events upon the spirit world should be *nothing happening*?

In a game-world sense, the Avatar Storm is a gross consequence: It’s a reminder of the impending Sixth Age/Armageddon and a slap in the face to arrogant mages (and others) who thought that

they could meddle around with cosmically destructive forces.

In a theme/ mood sense, the Avatar Storm helps to make the Umbra more isolated and mysterious. It also cuts the Masters off from Earth, thereby changing the power dynamic of the game.

See also the metaplot wrap-up on pp. 33-35.

It seems really hard to build a fast Effect. With penalties for fast-casting, required successes and the like, most mages will have trouble getting more than one or two successes in a turn.

This rule is deliberate; mages should take time to prepare, cast their Effects wisely and use brains, not brute force. Magic turns the universe on its head — it is not something done quickly or lightly! Magic is not an instant cure-all for everything. A mage can't rely solely on magic to fix every problem.

A mage under stress is probably better suited using some subtle magic to nudge events into her favor or splitting dice pools to get a simple personal Effect backing up a normal action. Real titanic workings will take time and effort. If a mage just *has* to do something phenomenal in one turn, that's what Willpower and Quintessence expenditures are for. Remember, too, that if all that your mage wants to do is kill someone with vulgar magic that successes on the attack roll do add to damage as with any other sort of attack, so even a one-success fire blast can inflict some hefty damage with a good shot.

If a Storyteller wants to let mages build faster Effects, it's easiest to get rid of the fast-casting difficulty penalty and to loosen up the success chart so that one or two successes can still score useful results.

Now you know what was intended — that magic be a demanding but rewarding craft. If you want to change it, you can.

Um, what are the Technocracy's Conventions, anyway?

Blast, that sidebar just didn't make it into **Mage Revised**. In brief, the Technocracy has five Conventions: Iteration X, concerned with computer and material sciences; New World Order, which works with social engineering and information distribution; Progenitors, who practice medicine; the Syndicate, which works with money and economics; and the Void Engineers, who explore and chart unknown places and dimensions. Together they uphold the Precepts of Damian, a set of guidelines that exhort them to protect humanity and explore the cosmos.

What level of Life magic is required to heal other people?

As implied in Life 3, "To more complex creatures, she can exert change, causing the entity to grow or change as she desires," a mage can heal or injure other people (and complex animals) with Life 3. Transforming the Pattern into something else requires Life 4.

What's the deal with the metaplot?

See pp. 32-35 for a discussion of all things metaplot.

How are Geasa (Mage Rev pp. 298–299) supposed to work?

A *geas* Flaw reduces the value of a corresponding Merit or Flaw. The point table, unfortunately, is backward (oops). So if you have a very simple *geas*, it's worth 1 point — it reduces the cost of a Merit or Flaw only slightly, because you're unlikely to break it and thus unlikely to lose the Merit or suffer the Flaw. If you have a very nasty *geas*, it can be worth up to 5 points — it will mitigate a Merit because you're almost certain to lose it. Of course, a *geas*' value can never be more than *one less* than the value of its corresponding Merit or Flaw.

A straightforward example: Say that your mage has Sphere Natural: Spirit (a 5-point Merit). Then say the character has a *geas* to always leave a small sacrifice of food for the spirits when eating — a minor *geas*, worth about 2 points. The cost of the Sphere Natural Merit is now only 3 points, but if the mage ever fails to fulfill the *geas*, he loses the Merit.

As a Flaw, consider a mage with the Crucial Component: sunlight Flaw. This Flaw is 2 points. The mage also takes a *geas*: always eat your vegetables, a 1-point *geas*. The mage gains one freebie point for the Flaw, but if he ever fails to eat his veggies, he suffers from the Flaw in the future. (In this case, you're getting points for a Flaw you *don't even suffer* unless you break the *geas*. Pretty sweet.)

Can a mage change Traditions?

Conditionally, yes. A mage who switches through different Traditions during early training gains the *Dual Traditions* Merit (see p. 298 of **Mage**). Similarly, a mage might gain this Merit during the course of play at a cost of 14 experience points and lots of role-playing. The mage gains the indoctrination and skills of *both* Traditions at once, which is why it's such an expensive Merit.

A mage *might* change to a wholly different Tradition and abandon a former one at some point. The mage probably gains the *Probationary Sect Member* Flaw or a similar social penalty. Making such a



change is akin to a life-changing experience like “getting religion” or suffering a personality shift. The mage isn’t just learning a different way of magic; the character’s tearing apart what he *knew* to be true about the universe and trying to put something else in its place.

A mage’s *Arete* doesn’t go down as a result, but it’s quite likely that the mage’s *Sphere* knowledge might suffer. After all, a trained *Hermetic* mage *knows* that by opening the appropriate gates and calling the right binding spells on angelic powers he can conjure fire, but if that *Hermetic* mage discards that information as useless rubbish and instead tries to learn to use intuitive technology like a *Son of Ether*, he must essentially relearn, from scratch, his *Spheres*.

The best way to handle this situation is to use the rules for a mage who loses a unique focus (see **Mage** p. 203) or wants to learn to use other foci in addition to a unique focus. The mage has a couple of choices: he can cast spells by “surpassing foci” and just forcing the magic to work, or he can start learning a new focus — the new *Tradition*’s focus set — for a *Sphere* by rebuying his existing dots at half cost. Yes, it is a *very* expensive proposition,

which represents how much work it takes to change worldviews so drastically and shows why mages so rarely try to switch over.

The mage retains rote knowledge, mundane abilities and mystical backgrounds. *Resonance* almost certainly increases or changes as a result of such a shift.

What happens when a *Tradition* mage is *Conditioned* into the *Technocracy* (or vice versa)?

See the rules for changing *Traditions*, above: The mage essentially learns a new way to do things, but old *Sphere* knowledge is inaccessible until the mage can figure out how to apply the new tools. The mage’s experience isn’t wholly lost — the mage is only paying half cost to regain the *Spheres*, after all — but it’s still a long road.

Of course, such a character also gains the *Probationary Sect Member* Flaw. Mages jumped into the *Technocracy* almost certainly suffer a high level of *Conditioning* (see **Guide to the Technocracy**).

That is still better than trying to *Awaken* someone from scratch, and it’s easier for a former *Traditionalist* to relearn old *Spheres* than for a newly *Enlightened* operative to learn them, which

explains why the Technocracy places a premium on capturing and reconditioning Tradition mages instead of always killing them. (This custom also gives you great plot hooks for “rescue our friend before he’s Conditioned.”)

Say, could I use those rules above for changing my mage’s foci?

You bet. You can overcome the need for a unique focus and replace it with the normal focus limits of the Tradition by paying an extra 50% for the cost of each Sphere level in that Sphere. That strips the penalties for the unique focus and allows the character to use the normal Tradition set. Why would you ever do this? Because you still garner all the bonuses for using the original unique focus, if you keep it.

What does Resonance do? Why’d you bother putting it in if it’s so vague?

Resonance is expanded upon in **Guide to the Traditions**. It’s listed as a statistic primarily to draw attention: While Resonance existed in prior editions of **Mage**, there were literally dozens of people crawling out of the woodwork thinking that it was a great new rule unique to the revised edition.

The basic idea behind Resonance is that a mage’s drives, emotions, and personality all affect her magic. Resonance statistics help to show what those emotions *are* and how strong they may be. A very, very angry mage has a lot of *anger* Resonance — and her magic spells show this!

Similarly, Resonance is a magical “scent” or “flavor.” A mage’s spells have that sort of Resonance and it’s almost always unique. Remember when Darth Vader sensed Obi-Wan’s presence on the Death Star in *Star Wars*? Resonance is like that — your mage casts a spell and suddenly her old enemy recognizes her due to the Resonance.

Because Resonance represents emotion and desire channeled through magic, it changes in response to them. Mages who go through a lot of magical stress or who have lots of power tend to have lots of Resonance, so mages often gain Resonance from Quiet or from Seekings. Mages who have profound traumatic emotional episodes or who have personality shifts might gain new types of Resonance.

Can you have multiple different types of Resonance in the same category (like Entropic)?

Yes; see the optional rules, below.

Why did mages do (random stupid thing)?

Because mages are human, too. They make mistakes. Sometimes they do things because “it

seemed like a good idea at the time.” Mages do have special abilities, but they are neither omnipotent nor infallible.

Why aren’t Technocrats and the Umbra in the core book any more? How do you play the game without the spirit world or the main antagonists?!!

Technocrats aren’t supposed to be the main antagonists any more. In early editions they had a very one-dimensional “black hat” caricature, painting them as lurid villains against the Traditions. With the release of books like **Guide to the Technocracy**, they’re now playable as misguided humans with their own agendas. Since they’re not “the enemy,” they don’t really belong in the adversarial position of the core rules, and putting them there would’ve only propagated the idea that they were still “the enemy.” Instead, “the enemy” for mages is much more pervasive and subtle — it can be anything from personal issues that the mage must face in the real world to the attempt to win back Sleeper hearts away from the Consensus of apathy. See Chapter Two: The Awakened Struggle for ideas on the many conflicts facing mages.

The Umbra is indeed a large and vibrant realm, a place that’s far away from most of the tragedies happening on Earth. For better or worse, modern mages have to deal with their problems at home. Fighting in the spirit world won’t accomplish the things that the Traditions need to do. For this reason, the Umbra presents a great vista to play in, but it’s not the stomping ground for newly Awakened mages, who still have all of their old life problems but now have new ways to deal with them. Similarly, the sheer scope and complexity of the Umbra aren’t really done justice by leaving it in two pages of text. The Umbra will have its own sourcebook, **The Infinite Tapestry** (forthcoming).

The **Mage** core book is, essentially, a primer for someone playing a new mage. Newly Awakened mages rarely have a history of run-ins with the Technocracy (you usually aren’t hunted down until *after* you start doing magic), nor do they have the experience to go traipsing about the spirit world.

The experience rules say “new rating x” for Mage, but they’re “current rating” in the other games. This is a mistake, right?

No. As Justin Achilli explained during development of **Vampire Revised**, he’d always understood “current rating” to mean “rating you’re currently buying.” It makes more sense to some people that learning more of a skill (the second dot) is harder

than learning the rudimentary basics (the first dot) instead of the other way around, which was a strange artifact of the old system. It also seemed appropriate for **Mage**, but the new wording was adopted to make it clearer.

Of course, you're always free to use whatever experience system floats your boat, so you can use "current" if you like. You should probably use the same "current" or "new" definition for all characters in your game, just so your players don't beat you up. Ethan Skemp preferred the "current rating" system and left it intact in **Werewolf Revised**.

What's the relationship of Ars Magica to Mage?

The old **Ars Magica** game was originally done by some of the people who later went on to become **White Wolf** and was published for a while by **White Wolf**. While it certainly influenced **Mage** early on, **ArM** has since parted ways. The two games have diverged, and while they have some similar elements it isn't really correct to assume that **ArM** is the "history" of **Mage** at this point.

The **Dark Ages: Mage** rulebook delves into this history, illustrating the struggles mages go through in the early 13th century — before there were the Traditions as we know them or even the concept of the magical Spheres.

How does Mage reality fit in with the other games?

Not really well. The idea of laws of the world influenced by the consensus of human belief isn't necessarily the same as a world that's overrun with the machinations of vampires, or one where animals (at least wolves) have as much say in the "truth" of things as humans.

Mage posits a world where humans take central importance but don't know it except in a few rare cases. In **Vampire** humans are victims; they unknowingly have predatory monsters in their midst. In **Werewolf** there's a very specific way that the cosmos works, with delineated good and evil.

Nonetheless, these games could conceivably take place in the same world, but one where not everybody is always right. Even a werewolf's die-hard beliefs in the supremacy of the natural world aren't necessarily correct in such a postmodern, subjective world. On the flip side, mages may find that not only humans decide what's real and what's not — unknown spirits may have just as much (if not more) say in the matter.

Mixing the worlds properly, without favoring one over another, requires a bold sense of diversity and a willingness to suspend questions about ultimate reality. Themes concerning the conflicts between these worldviews (and the possible resolution of them) might become prominent.

Of course, you could just decide that **Mage** is the only "right" game and that the others must somehow fit into its truths above all.

Why are the rules on ghoul mages so harsh?

Ghouldom is a form of parasitic servitude. A ghoul essentially is dependent upon the whims of the vampire master for survival and power — it's a curse handed down. Mages, on the other hand, are mortals who are empowered to change reality by their will. The two states are incompatible — one is a state of slavery, the other a state of total liberation.

How come hunters have the role as humanity's guardians when that's what mages do?

Technically, mages *aren't* humanity's guardians. They're a next step in human potential, true — but nothing says that mages are required to use that for the good of all mankind. Some mages take it upon themselves to help and advance humanity. Others believe that they must use their powers for their own personal development.

Hunters, on the other hand, were given their gifts by entities with very specific goals in mind (see the **Hunter Storytellers Handbook**). These agendas don't necessarily always mean protecting humanity...but they are more focused than mages, who can use their powers for just about any reason at all.

Remember that even if players' mage characters are heroic, the same isn't necessarily true of the mage community as a whole. The existence of mages like Voormass and Jodi Blake should underscore this point.

You could think of hunters as ordinary people given extraordinary powers, while mages are extraordinary people (they're Awakened) with extraordinary powers (magic).

Is the Umbra the same as outer space?

No. The Gauntlet is extremely thin in space, though, so much so that it's easy to slip between the two places. Mages beyond Mars can often slip through into the Umbra as if it's a shallowing. Still, places in the Umbra aren't visible from Earthly space — otherwise planet-bound amateur astrologers would've spotted the Tradition-Technocracy wars over Jupiter back in the early '90s!

How come mages with fae blood or shapeshifter kin Merits can't use Gifts or cantrips?

Because their supernatural powers don't work that way. An Awakened mage doesn't have the same tie to the Gaia-cosm as a werewolf, or to the Dreaming as a changeling. She's become something else — something humanlike, yet on the pinnacle of what it is to *be* human. Such a being is in touch with inner powers, not with gifts from some other heritage.

Still, a mage can use Spheres to simulate Gifts or cantrips that she's seen. Under the right conditions, this usage might even be coincidental ("Other kin-folk can do this, so can I!").

My friend says that Virtual Adepts are technomancers. I say they're Traditionalists, obviously. Who's right?

You both are. A technomancer (lower case t) is just a mage who uses technology to mystical ends. Such a mage might be a Virtual Adept, a Dreamspeaker techno-shaman, or a Euthanatos from the Lakshmists. Conversely, some Virtual Adepts eschew mysticism entirely and more properly use Enlightened Science.

Adding to the confusion is the fact that early editions sometimes referred to Technocracy characters as "technomancers." This terminology has since been overturned — technomancers use technology for mystic ends; technocrats use technology for nonmystical ends.

Can my mage become a vampire or werewolf and keep his magic?

No; a mage who becomes a vampire dies and loses his Avatar. Werewolves are born with their predisposition and someone destined to become a werewolf will never Awaken as a mage because his soul is already part of the Gaia cosmology.

Also, Samuel Haight was never a mage, technically. He simply had a magical item with some phenomenal mage powers crammed into it.

When is White Wolf going to publish a big book of crossover rules?

It isn't likely to happen, for several reasons.

First and foremost is the complexity issue. Addressing every single combination of powers and weaknesses is a nigh-impossible task. Consider the

difficulty in just addressing the possible combinations of existing powers, Merits and other attributes within a game line itself. A "complete crossover compendium" would be encyclopedic.

Secondly, the games have different thematic elements and assumptions. **Mage** typically revolves around humans striving to empower and improve themselves. **Vampire**, by contrast, focuses on the monstrous nature of the now-undead central characters. While the two aren't always mutually exclusive, they do clash — having vampires who suffer under the burden of downward-spiraling Humanity while their magely allies brazenly kill opponents due to a difference of opinion is not only unfair but really not much fun. In terms of backstories there's a similar problem — if you use the **Mage** setting, then you assume the existence of the Consensus, the Tellurian and all the trappings thereof. If you use the **Vampire** setting, you assume the existence of Antediluvians, clans and quite possibly the Biblical notion of Caine and an interpretation of the Judeo-Christian deity. The two don't mix well or easily. If there is a God, then some mages are wrong about fundamental axioms of the cosmos. If there isn't, then where did vampires come from and what's the real story behind them? These questions require answers that force a retooling of the setting.

That leads to the third problem: meshing materials. Each setting has certain principles that would require a lot of effort to strip out and rework for compatibility. Each one is a complete world unto itself and appropriately has an individual game developer to oversee its complexities. Having full crossover books would mean stripping out setting-specific elements and turning them into generic versions, often without the "feel" already in place. Furthermore, it would mean that each game developer would have to be fully fluent with every rule, convention and historical foible of each game line, instead of just paying attention to and mastering one. That's a bit much to ask of a single human being!

If you, as a Storyteller, want to tackle these burdens, you're welcome to do so...just be aware of the scale of difficulty you potentially confront.

OPTIONAL RULES



Every good Storyteller who runs games for any length of time is likely to develop her own house rules. This is not to say that if you do not make up some special rules of your own that you are somehow not a good Storyteller. It is more an observation that few groups are entirely 100% happy with every single rule exactly as we have written them. The Golden Rule is there in the game to actively encourage Storytellers to change rules they don't like instead of steadfastly following every term in the book without question and without regard for consequence to their stories. You should feel free to make changes that improve things as you personally see them and that make the game more fun for your players. Everyone plays differently, so it is impossible to provide rules suggestions for every single occasion, but this section offers some alternatives to the standard rules that you may find useful in your games.

A couple of points deserve special note. Attempting to answer numerous letters involving disputes between Storytellers and players has taught us some lessons. First of all, folks, if you and your players cannot get along, it is probably time to find some new players. Before you abandon your fellow players, however, check out some of the suggestions and advice found within this book to see if any of it might prove useful in settling your issues satisfactorily. You may discover that the road you walk has already been trod by someone else and that perhaps they have some answers to the questions that perplex you most. Secondly, we have seen too many players try to twist the wording of the Golden Rule. The Golden Rule is a tool for Storytellers to apply to improve the game. It does not apply to players who are trying to overturn their Storyteller's rulings. Frankly, if you cannot abide by your Storyteller's rulings, you are probably not being honest with yourself or your fellow players. If you really respected your Storyteller and your fellow players you wouldn't try to pull some trump card out of a book to throw in her face. Find a Storyteller whose game you enjoy and stop subjecting yourself and others to the negativity you are creating.

REDEFINING MAGIC

Magic is a rather indefinable thing in many ways. It is almost as though any real attempt to define it beyond certain loose boundaries of tradition somehow detracts from the mystery and fantastic nature of its supernatural feel. Nevertheless, games must by necessity have rules, if only to prevent arguments and provide groundwork for settling any disputes which might arise among players. **Mage** presents one of the most successful examples of blending an open-ended, infinite-possibility, story-oriented magic with a solid, balanced rules system that has ever been introduced into the roleplaying game industry. Even so, it is a system that by its very nature encourages every single Storyteller to adjust it here and there as she seeks to transform her vision of the rules into a mirror image of her personal World of Darkness paradigm. Most of us were drawn to the idea of magic at some point in our childhood and it is important never to lose totally the wonder of the child in the face of the wisdom of age.

PRIME DIRECTING

Quintessence points are a direct way to reduce the difficulty of magic. According to the normal **Mage** rules, you may spend one Quintessence point to lower the target number by one or to reduce the number of threshold successes needed. A magician is limited to spending no more than her Avatar rating in Quintessence. Logically it makes sense that someone with a soul weak in the flow of Prime energy would have difficulty manipulating that flow. It seems insufficient that even a Master of Prime should be similarly limited.

Therefore, a Storyteller may wish to adopt the following subtle adjustment to the use of Quintessence in her chronicles. When expending Quintessence points to reduce magical difficulties, the limit should be the highest of the mage's Avatar rating or Prime Sphere rating. Thus if a Master Prime mage was never gifted with an epic soul but gained incredible influence over primal energies anyway, she would be able to exercise this power suitably. A mage with level 3 Prime and an Avatar rating of 1 would be able to spend up to 3 Quintessence points at a time. A mage with level 1 Prime

and an Avatar rating of 4 would retain the ability to expend 4 Quintessence. The reduction of target numbers would still be limited to -3 from the original base difficulty.

AVATAR STORM PARADOX

One of the common complaints that Storytellers familiar with previous editions of **Mage** put forth is the perceived limitation of the Avatar Storm upon users of Spirit magic. Often such individuals too hastily ignore the powerful setting change that brought this alteration. Some Storytellers may legitimately feel that they do not like the harsh ways that this change discourages the more spiritual sides of their **Mage** game. Others might thoughtfully note that it seems ridiculous to them that any starting werewolf character can more easily “step sideways” than even the most potent Master of Spirit magic.

Any Storyteller could simply invoke the Golden Rule and do away with the Avatar Storm entirely, but this optional rule is presented for those who wish to preserve the general feel of the canon setting. The normal **Mage** rules state that any attempt on the part of a mage character to pierce the Gauntlet causes *aggravated* damage to the mage and that this damage increases the higher his Arete rises. The Avatar Storm Paradox option removes that clause — so that characters can step into the Umbra freely — and instead declares that all botch damage incurred by magic rolls or Paradox related to the Spirit Sphere is automatically aggravated. The use of Spirit magic is still more dangerous than it was prior to the Avatar Storm, but successful casting rolls for Spirit effects, and failed rolls that do not botch, do not cause damage to the mage. The Avatar Storm still retains its potent story reason for existing yet is not so hindering to practitioners of the Spirit Sphere.

Another option is to play out the new metaplot elements that will unfold over the next series of **Mage** releases, some of them dealing specifically with new ways mages discover to skirt the Storm damage and enter the Umbra without harm — but not without consequence or cost.

COMBAT CHANGES

One of the areas of the game which can prove most confusing is that of combat. Once several characters enter a violent confrontation, the sheer number of factors suddenly thrown at a Storyteller can prove mind-boggling. Some Storytellers prefer

very quick, easy systems to run combat as smoothly as possible in order to avoid any disturbance to the story. Other Storytellers find extremely streamlined systems a bit unsatisfying, as they often sacrifice some degree of realism or restrict the options of players significantly.

Even the core **Mage** book presents a few alternatives, such as the cinematic damage option that allows people a small chance to soak even lethal damage forms. This option may not appeal to Storytellers who think that guns should be deadly. It may, however, strike the fancy of Storytellers who worry that the normal system does not differentiate in any way between the Spartan sturdiness of Stamina 5 and the anemic sickliness of Stamina 1 when faced with any source of “lethal” damage. These are the sorts of decisions a Storyteller must make when determining what sort of game she wants to run.

MINIMUM DAMAGE ROLLS

Under the base **Mage** rules as presented in the core book, a character can score a successful blow and, due to failure to get any successes on the damage roll, not pose a threat to an opponent whatsoever. One option is to assume that any successful blow always causes at least one level of damage before soak, regardless of how poorly the damage dice may roll. Thus every successful strike presents at least a small danger that must be soaked to prevent damage.

GRADES OF MINIMUM DAMAGE

Another option beyond the basic “minimum damage” rule is to cause characters to have an automatic minimum damage based on the hit scored. A character who scores a whopping seven successes on an attack roll probably hit very solidly — the player gains extra damage dice, but these dice might still roll very poorly and do no damage. You might want to give a minimum damage rating automatically.

A minimum damage grade of one level of damage per three full successes works well for the basic Storyteller system. Thus, a character who’s a master with knife-fighting can almost guarantee scoring telling blows with every good hit. You might play with the multiplier, too, making it one for two or one for four.

(Thanks to Sean Patrick Fannon, who came up with this perfectly sensible rule long ago and yet has had to wait so long for it to see the light of print.)

NO “IS” DAMAGE

The core **Mage** rules already state that one cannot botch damage rolls, but they do not exempt such rolls from the Rule of One. Normally, therefore, “1s” rolled as part of a damage dice pool actively reduce the number of successes of the damage result. Another way to tweak the damage system is to assume that “1s” do not cancel out damage successes. Thus the odds of a damage pool causing at least one level of damage are increased, albeit only slightly.

DANGEROUS DAMAGE

Strictly speaking, the core **Mage** rules present no chance whatsoever of a normal person with no skill in firearms killing another person with a revolver. Even the luckiest person with 2 Dexterity could score only two successes on the attack roll, granting five dice of damage. Even the best damage roll could cause only five levels of damage. It seems somewhat ridiculous to think that a normal person with a pistol cannot ever kill somebody with one shot, even with incredible luck.

The Dangerous Damage option treats all damage rolls as “Specialization” rolls (see **Mage** p. 117); after all, isn’t a damage roll specialized in, well, causing damage? Thus all damage rolls under this option reroll all “10s,” keeping the original 10 as a damage success. If another 10 is rolled on the new roll, keep it and roll again and so on. This option provides the chance that any blow by any weapon *might* kill without arbitrarily raising all damage levels in the game. This rule could be used on its own or combined with other optional damage rules. Combined with other damage options, combat becomes a lot more deadly, which can instill more of the horror that is part and parcel of the World of Darkness.

Warning: Storytellers using increased damage options should make sure they understand that they are inviting a higher incidence of character death and be prepared to deal with the consequences both in-story and with the real-life players who play the threatened characters. Certainly, every player should always know about any use of optional or house rules that increase the danger to his character before such rules are invoked.

MOOKS

In high-action games, you always have them: the hordes of knife-wielding cultists/ robed mystics/ trained baboons/ gun-toting thugs. They have no

names; they exist only to stand between the characters and the objective, to provide a moment of tension and a chance for the players to show off their characters’ tricks. They’re mooks.

For cinematic combat games, assume that any character with no name has only four health levels (healthy, hurt –1, wounded –2, crippled –5). Your players will mow through the mooks much more rapidly.

SYNCHRONOUS ABILITIES

The normal rules for **Mage: The Ascension** provide for the use of Talents, Skills and Knowledges to aid one’s use of magic, as well as for magic to aid in the reverse. Some Storytellers may find it advantageous to adopt a similar rule allowing characters to use one Talent, Skill or Knowledge to benefit the use of another Ability.

As an example, assume that Herman is a talented car mechanic and has used his Crafts (mechanics) skill to boost the performance of his car. The Storyteller might allow him to put his intimate knowledge of the vehicle and its perks to use for Drive rolls made during a high-speed attempt to escape the police. In another case, Gail might be an expert survivalist with a bit of first aid. While she is no doctor, her experience in the wilderness could help her with Medicine rolls when she is attempting to treat hypothermia.

The rules to represent these synchronous uses of skills are very simple. First, the Storyteller determines which Ability is the active one. In Herman’s case, as he races to evade the police chase, his active Ability is clearly Drive. For Gail, who is attempting to keep her friend from dying of frostbite, the active Knowledge is Medicine.

Secondly, the Storyteller decides if another Ability might be used as an assisting Ability. The Storyteller determines that Herman’s Crafts (mechanics) skill applies as he has been tinkering with his car, and that Gail’s Survival skill applies as she has seen this situation before.

The player rolls the assistant Ability first, and each success may be applied to the active Ability roll as a –1 to the difficulty. Remember that the difficulty cannot be reduced by more than 3. In the first case, Herman has six dice for his Crafts roll (Intelligence 2 + Crafts 4); after rolling he scores two successes. Gail has seven dice (Intelligence 3 + Survival 4) and receives a miraculous five successes.



Finally, the player rolls the active Ability, modifying the target number appropriately. Herman is a good driver, with a Dexterity of 3 and a Drive of 3, so he rolls six dice. With the slippery streets and narrow roads, the Storyteller rules that he would normally have a +1 penalty to his difficulty. Luckily the car is built for just that sort of mistreatment, and his two successes from his Crafts roll offset this penalty, giving him a net target number of 5 (standard 6 – 1 = 5). With a screeching left turn onto a one-way street going the wrong way, Herman loses the police in traffic.

Gail's friend is in bad shape. He is bleeding, his clothes are wet, and the wind is blowing fiercely. Not only that, she knows only the basics of first aid and treatment with Medicine 1. The Storyteller rules that normally Gail would suffer a +3 penalty to her difficulty. Luckily she received five successes on her Survival roll, and though the total modifier cannot be less than –3 or more than +3, the five successes still count. The +3 penalty is overcome and the difficulty is reduced further by a net –2. She rolls four dice (Intelligence 3 + Medicine 1) and scores all successes. Her experience as an explorer

helps to bring her friend through despite her deficient medical knowledge.

CINEMATIC MAGIC

Core **Mage** assumes that magic is a carefully crafted, slowly built power that requires precise control and a lot of concentration and time. This concept makes magic philosophically interesting and plays up the fact that it's a useful *aid* to everyday life skills (or extraordinary circumstances), but it hardly makes such magic effective in the heat of battle. If you want your magic to have lots of whiz-bang-pow-sock action, or you just think that mages should have an easier time doing things, you'll want to explore some or all of these options.

WHY MAGIC IS HARD OR EASY TO CAST

Before you tweak with the rules for casting magic, it helps to figure out *why* the rules make certain elements of magic hard or easy to do. They break down into several factors:

Arete Limits: While many normal skills have fairly large dice pools — an average person with decent professional skills has four dice — most

magicians have a very hefty limit on their Arete rating. That one-to-three dice limit for a starting character means very few dice, so most propositions are all-or-nothing: Either the mage scores the necessary success or fails outright. There's not a whole lot of room for variety.

Foci and Paradigms: Use of foci and paradigms helps to limit magicians by forcing them to use specific techniques. If you say, "You can't do that if you can't figure out a way that your character would," you automatically put restrictions on magicians according to their styles. This restriction isn't a *mechanical* limit per se. It does force players to play characters they can understand and do research about. A player will be very unhappy if saddled with a paradigm he can't understand and thus can't use.

Difficulty: Magical difficulty ratings ramp up as Sphere levels increase. Higher-level spells are naturally harder to cast. If you tinker with this system, you make it easier or harder for basic spells to fire off, but you also place higher-level Sphere effects into the "basic spell" category. Consider, for instance, that a vulgar Sphere 3 effect has a base difficulty of 8 — if the caster has three dice of Arete, that's going to be pretty hard to pull off. If the difficulty drops to, say, 6, then a 3 Arete character is practically guaranteed to score it but may not have extra successes to spend (because Arete dice are so scarce).

Spending Successes: Because it costs successes to affect other people, cause extra damage, etc., it's hard to make effects beyond simple ones that affect only the mage. By lowering or removing these limits you make it easier to cast group spells, long-range spells, and spells that cause lasting damage over an area.

NO FOCI

"It's supermage!" Foci help to add a lot of flavor to magicians — they're tools that magicians use because their belief structures rely upon said tools. A mage uses those foci as part and parcel of how she works magic. If you remove foci from the game, you make magic a lot easier, but you also remove any real need for Traditions. (Why would Hermetics and Dreamspeakers argue over technique when neither of them *has* a technique?)

NO SUCCESS COST

One very subtle way to increase magical power is to rule that a spell with any successes on the effect roll works at no cost in successes. In a normal effect,

one success counts just as "this makes the spell go." In this variant, the spell works at no extra cost if it has any successes; the successes can instead be applied toward the various pieces like duration, range, damage, etc.

DOUBLE SUCCESSES!

A recent cinematic game here had the players running heroic magicians doing a hunt-and-destroy against various supernatural critters who threatened Tradition interests — a sort of magically hit squad. Since it wouldn't really be appropriate to have the characters stuck using very minor effects that don't score much damage or help empower their skills, the solution was simple: make the magic more effective. All successes were counted as two, so base spells had twice the range, twice the damage, and so on. The mage still had to score successes against the same difficulty, so spells weren't *easier* to cast, but with even the base 3 Arete a mage could still pull off a powerful effect without using a ritual.

ARETE + SPHERE

If you want the magical success rolls to work more like Skills, you can use Arete + highest (or lowest) Sphere rating for magical dice pools. Of course, unless you cut Arete ratings in half, pools might go up to 15 dice (or more).

If you make magical rolls revert from highest Sphere used, players will always try to find ways to work their best Spheres into any effects, regardless of how appropriate it may be. Still, this method also helps establish that certain characters have their own signature "tricks." If you make it work off lowest Sphere, magicians will tend to rely on effects from their best areas and do conjunctive magic only in desperation (which is pretty much par for the course).

ECHOES:

AN ALTERNATIVE SYSTEM OF PARADOX AND RESONANCE

The following system offers a way to handle Paradox and Resonance differently from the usual game system. In this form, Resonance isn't necessarily a "punishment." Rather, it's more a reflection of the character of the mage and her deeds. This example is one way to tweak a core rule into something completely different.

More than any other creatures, magicians affect and are affected by the reality they live in. Their Ava-

tars echo with the records of their deeds and the nature of their characters, existence shaping and shaped by them in turn.

There are six different varieties of echoes, reflecting the different spiritual paths down which a mage can walk, ranging from the chill depths of Winter to the carnal heights of Summer, the fanciful dreams of Spring to the banal reality of Autumn, the black depths of Night to the bright reaches of Day. The further one strays from the center, the more existence bends and is bent by the mage. Indeed, mages who pass beyond the boundaries of each path leave this existence for a higher or lower plane, transcending or descending from existence as most mages know it.

Echoes range on a scale from 0 to 10. Mages with Echoes beyond 10 points are removed from the game.

ECHOES OF AUTUMN AND SPRING

Autumn: Autumn is another word for the everyday world, the banal reality despised by changelings and embraced by Sleepers, the dull, safe, sane and rational world of everyday care. It's the world that, for the most part, does not believe in magic or dreams.

All mages save the most crazy Marauders have some degree of Echoes of Autumn, which comes with living in the modern World of Darkness and its bleak setting. Since most mages live day to day in the sane, rational world of Autumn, these echoes do not have any visible effects (though they will in the land of dreams).

Technocrats are the furthest up the scale, having on average an Autumn Echo rating of 8–10, making one count as an “Autumn Person” in the lexicon of changelings. Autumn Folk are creatures of order, generally obsessed with minutiae and cold facts, humorless and no-nonsense with no time or patience for silly things like dreams or dragons or fairytales. In fact, most believe that such things should be exterminated, especially if they're real. Not all Technocrats hold this ideal, but those who are more tolerant of dragons and more fanciful things generally have a rating of less than 8.

In the 6–8 range are the Modern Cynics — Sons of Ether, Hollow Ones, Virtual Adepts and many Orphans. They believe quite strongly in the mundane world and consequently are most at home in it, it being neither too crazy nor too boring for their tastes.

In the 4–6 range are the True Believers, including some members of the Celestial Chorus, Akashic Brotherhood, Euthanatos and many Nephandi — at least, the more devout ones.

In the 2–4 range are the Mystic Traditions — the Verbena, Cult of Ecstasy, Order of Hermes and Dreamspeakers. Their belief in modern reality is substantially different from that of most of humanity, and consequently their Autumn Echo is much lower.

Finally, in the 0–2 range are the more well-wrapped Marauders. They're not *completely* mad, but they make forays into madness on a regular basis, madness being another name for the Echoes of Springtime, also known as the Land of Dreams.

Spring: This way lies madness, and wonder and dreams. A mage whose Autumn Echo drops below 0 begins progressing along the path of madness, also known as Bedlam, or Quiet or the Echoes of Springtime. Or, as the Hollowers put it, they start “living in their own private Idaho.”

At 1–3 points of Spring, the mage is just a little bit “out there.” Minor hallucinations of his own fancy fill his reality, mixing with what he still perceives of the “real” world. These changes are generally small and subtle — odd music plays, little voices speak to him, little tricks of the imagination and the like.

At 4–6 points delusions become common. The mage sees, hears and touches things that others cannot see and may ignore things that sane mages know to exist. Mages in this state have been seen to walk through walls as if they weren't there and climb invisible flights of stairs.

At 7–10 points the mage interacts with his own fantasy world, which may have little to do with anything left in subjective reality. He may call people by different names, ride invisible horses and tilt at windmills.

At 11 points and beyond, the mage departs this reality, the spirits of Paradox taking him off to his own private fantasy world.

The more Paradox a mage acquires, the closer he comes to the brink of madness. Technocrats are saner than most and thus have a greater buffer zone before they fall over the edge. In exchange for this increased capacity, they also have an increased capacity for Paradox backlash. Mages of more mystical Traditions don't have as far to slide but also don't run the risk of having that slack snap back to hit them.

System: Mark your character's spot on the Echoes of Autumn/Spring scale as dictated by Tradition and character concept. The Autumn/ Spring axis runs horizontally, with Autumn to the right and Spring to the left. When you acquire a point of Paradox, mark it under the character's spot on the track, marking additional Paradox to the left. When your Paradox pool reaches 1 on the Echoes of Spring-time side of the scale, your character enters Quiet.

If your mage has any points of permanent Paradox, mark them from right to left, starting at the far right. When the Permanent Paradox reaches the "Autumn Echo" marker, lower the character's Autumn Echo one notch. For example, a character with 5 points of Permanent Paradox cannot have an Autumn Echo rating of higher than 5 — he's just too weird for standard reality — while a character with 11 or more points of permanent Paradox is an incurable Marauder.

Permanent changes to the Spring/ Autumn axis occur when the mage undergoes major shifts in his way of thought about the world. Just as permanent Paradox can lower the Autumn rating, so too can Technocratic Conditioning raise it.

ECHOES OF WINTER AND SUMMITER

Winter: In the words of the Euthanatos, those who stray down this path are touched with Jhor, the death-taint. In the philosophy of the Akashic Brotherhood, these mages have an imbalance of the Yin principle. In practical application, their touch brings Death.

A character falls into the grip of Winter when obsessed with death, destruction and the freezing halt of existence. Obviously, the Nephandi have a great deal of this sort of Echo. Some Euthanatos evidence it, but they also recognize it quickly and move to cure it.

Mages who Echo with Winter's power often have a very traumatizing presence — they bring reminders of death and finality with them. Such mages can even leave a sort of psychic stain on an area, causing ghosts and hauntings to follow along. The walls to the world of the dead often seem to shimmer and thin around the minions of Winter.

With 1–3 points of Winter, the mage might seem a little uncanny to people. Perhaps he has an unusually penetrating gaze or seems to have a cold wind following in his wake.

4–6 points of Winter cause pronounced changes — plants shrivel and die at the mage's touch, milk sours, and his voice seems slow and gravelly. His presence is a constant, disquieting reminder of mortality.

At 7–10 points of Winter, the mage is so absorbed in the necrosis of the Tellurian that his presence is like a sore that brings swift death. Not only does his body become cadaverous and pallid, his presence is enough to cause headaches and panic attacks. Even the hardest soul recognizes the cold gaze of death in the mage's eyes. Miscarriages and sudden illnesses follow in the wake of such a harbinger.

At 11 or more points of Winter the character has become a walking scourge, so potent that his presence damages the Tellurian itself. Such a being becomes a shade — sucked into the Underworld to continue existence as a cursed wraith bent on destruction.

Summer: In the beliefs of the Akashic brothers, your mage is imbalanced toward Yang and her body bristles with the scarlet chi. In reality, flowers spring up in her footsteps and trees burst into bloom in her presence. She is a messenger of growth and life.

Most mages, being creative forces by nature, have a strong rating in Summer. It's the inverse of Winter, bringing a blossoming newness instead of stifling or crushing creativity.

At 1–3 points the Summer Echoes are pleasant to be around: the mage is fairly creative, ebullient and well-adjusted. Much like a happy, satisfied human being, the mage radiates good cheer.

At 4–6 points, the mage has such a strong tie to living, growing energies that her body seems to radiate warmth and compassion. Animals flock to her and plants grow healthy under her ministrations; people find her presence comforting and cheerful. The wounded heal more easily and suffer less pain.

At 7–10 points, the power of Summer is nearly overwhelming. People in the mage's presence become almost drugged — aroused, excitable, desirous. Even the simplest contact becomes like a dance of joy or sexuality. Fertility manifests as plants, animals and people all become filled with life energy and as a result tend to foster new children.

At 11 or more points the mage's living energies become so vibrant that mere flesh cannot contain

them. The mage dissolves into the Tapestry, probably giving birth to a new Node in the area.

System: Your Summer/ Winter axis runs as a line, much like the Spring/ Autumn axis; Summer is on the right and Winter is on the left. Assign your mage's rating according to Tradition and personal predilection. Most mages will have a Summer rating of 1–3 at the start; some Verbena and cheerful Lifestudying sorts with upbeat natures may range in the 4 or 5 area. Killer Euthanatos, emotion-deadened Akashics and Technocracy hit men will tend to start with a Winter echo of 1–3.

When a character destroys something — a person, an idea, a belief, a movement, a creation — assign one point of Jhor by marking it under the character's spot on the Summer/ Winter axis. Add an extra point if the character did the killing with magic. Additional points go left, toward the dead of Winter. If the character's Jhor reaches to or beyond 1 point of Winter, the character may suffer from Jhor-tainted Quiet (roll dice equal to the current Winter rating, just like a Paradox backlash, and treat "6s" as successes toward the severity of the Quiet). This result manifests as dangerously amoral behavior and unwholesome changes to appearance and personality. These points go away at a rate of one dot per day as long as the character refrains from killing or destroying anything else.

Summer/ Winter axis changes permanently only when a character shows deliberate and consistent behavior in keeping with the altered state.

ECHOES OF NIGHT AND DAY

The Echoes of Night and Day reflect the alternative and opposite paths of the soul — the push to strive for the divine and the temptation of the profane. All humans have a choice to embrace the darkness of Night or to resist its lure and tread the difficult path that leads into the light of Day. Those who consistently uphold high moral standards and search for a spiritual meaning to existence exemplify the spirit of Day. People who betray their own kind and seek solace only in the arms of material comforts, who squander their self-awareness and life for a brief period of mortal pleasures, fall to the wiles of Night.

Night: This dark path is that of the Nephandi, the path of temptation and corruption, ranging from casual cruelty to the vilest depravity.

1 point

You're a bit distant from the rest of humanity. You're not an unfeeling monster, but it's hard for anything to really touch you. Your darkness affects the reality around you. Milk sours in your presence, candles burn blue, bread fails to rise and cream to churn, and television goes on the fritz. You also look sort of creepy, causing a -1 reaction modifier.

2 points

You really don't give a damn about anyone except yourself. People die and you don't care. Animals can sense this, and dogs growl, cats hiss, and horses break into a sweat when you're around. You can't enter a house without permission and you start looking seriously creepy, causing a -2 reaction modifier.

3 points

You are completely heartless, except that religious symbols from the more pious faiths put you off. You can't cross a line of salt sprinkled in your path and your shadow does stuff when you're not paying attention to it. You start looking like the classic Halloween witch or psycho killer, getting warts and a serious case of the uglies for a -3 reaction modifier.

4 points

You are an absolute beast. Pious or superstitious folk can counter your magic by just making an attempt at the right gestures. You can't set foot on holy ground or touch a properly baptized infant or anyone who's just been shriven, though anyone with the slightest touch of sin on him is fair game. Very few people mistake you for human and you now have a -4 reaction modifier unless you cover it up with some sort of magic.

5 points

You are a nightmare. You float on the surface of the water and children and other sensitives go into convulsions in your presence. Animals give birth to monstrosities and Shakespearean signs and portents abound. You also look like the fiend you are, for a -5 reaction modifier.

6–10 points

You are a devil in human form and completely unplayable as a player character. But Storytellers may have you be as twisted as they want.

11+

You have descended to join the Dark Masters in their Labyrinths and Nephandi sing songs of your depravity.

Day: This bright path is that of the Celestial Chorus as well as most of humanity. Player characters will generally start at 2-3 points of the Echoes of Day.

1 point	You're not a nice person, but you're not a truly bad person either. You probably have just had a hard life and need to smile a little more often.
2 points	You're an average Joe. You like some people, love others and feel bad about hating the few you do.
3 points	You're a truly kind and caring individual. Animals can sense this and come up to you. Dogs wag their tails, cats purr, and horses hit you up for carrots. You exude good cheer and as such get a +1 reaction modifier.
4 points	Compassion is your middle name. You give till it hurts, not that you mind. Wild animals become tame in your presence, and even modern children become polite and mindful when you're around. You also have a +2 reaction modifier.
5 points	You are a living saint. A holy and beatific light seems to follow you, even the darkest corners seem bright in your presence, and those who look upon you are filled with hope — unless they're Nephandi or similar creatures, in which case they just hiss and scuttle away. If you're of the right faith, you may even develop stigmata or some other reflection of the powers of good. You also have a +3 reaction modifier as a result. At this point you may purchase the <i>True Faith</i> Merit.
6–10 points	You are too good and holy for belief, or at least to be run as a player character.
11+	You ascend bodily into Heaven to be one of the angels or whatever other higher powers you believe in.

System: Most mages, being students of enlightenment, start on the path of Day by nature. Assign a Day/ Night axis, with Day on the right and Night on the left. Characters with a highly spiritual and morally developed nature will tend to hover around a Day rating of 3 or 4, while most mages on the quest for Ascension start at about a 2. Characters with severe personality Flaws or abusive Natures may well start at a rating of 1 or 0.

As a character strives for enlightenment and greater connection to the love and beauty of life, the character embraces Day further. Slipping from enlightenment by accepting brutality, cruelty and compromise causes the character to tread the ways of Night. You don't need to track temporary changes along this scale. Rather, it's much like a fundamental change of personality when a mage rises or falls along it. If you're familiar with **Vampire**, this axis is similar to Humanity. A mage who performs humane acts, agonizes over his decisions and consistently upholds compassion, generosity and peace will slowly rise into Day. Mages who brazenly lie, cheat and steal, who kill without remorse, who deal with demons and rely on cynicism and trickery will slowly spiral into Night.

THE MUSIC OF THE SPHERES



The sheer breadth of **Mage's** magic system can be a daunting thing. The Spheres are broad, the effects are loosely described, and the difficulty adjustments can sometimes be a little overwhelming.

How do you simplify it for your players? The easiest answer lies before you in your **Mage: The Ascension** core book — to which you probably say, "I've read the whole thing!" Give the magic systems a fresh look; see them as a toolkit under your control instead of a daunting collection of tables, modifiers and off-the-cuff judgments.

CONTAINING THE POWER

The magic system isn't meant to be the final arbiter of what a character can and cannot do. It exists to direct character growth. Most games prefer characters who can each claim a specialty of their

own, and most Storytellers are more comfortable with predefined limits on character power.

What makes **Mage** a little different is that these rules don't necessarily limit the breadth of effects a character is able to perform. Used creatively, a single Sphere can justify a staggering array of effects. The two primary limits are the character's paradigm and the mood of the chronicle.

PARADIGM

Some effects will be flat-out impossible for a mage to perform if they lie outside the character's paradigm. As Storyteller, you have to be careful to recognize when an effect isn't appropriate for the character's stated paradigm — but don't be too restrictive. The game is about dynamic beliefs; a Hermetic mage is perfectly capable of incorporating his understanding of modern physics into his spells. Characters will usually have a contemporary upbringing and can use that kind of common sense along with their magical insight.

Still, some effects just don't suit a particular paradigm. Generally, you can question a player about an effect if he doesn't provide an explanation (even a very loose one) for why the effect works, if the character lacks the appropriate Abilities, or if it presupposes some sort of truth that isn't accepted by the character's paradigm. For example, an Akashic Brother can't bind a spirit by its Enochian True Name. Akashic Brothers don't usually believe names have power (except to foster a false sense of identity) and don't have a deep understanding of Enochian. Similarly, a Hermetic can't resist mental intrusion by letting go of his self-image. Hermetics work hard to foster a mystical identity and anchor it with True Will.

This limit usually applies to fast-cast magic, since the character wouldn't have time to direct his will properly if he couldn't understand the effect in terms of his paradigm. Ritual magic is less restrictive, since the character can spend the time to adapt a magical technique. Some groups simply don't teach certain skills, however. Do is never going to be a pure Hermetic focus any more than Enochian will completely replace Akashic asceticism. A character with the appropriate Merit or a lot of dedication may bridge the gap, but that should be played out in the story. A well-played character might create a new Tradition from a mixture of methods. Leave it to the player to decide.

MOOD

There are some magical effects that can destroy the mood of the game. Turning a vampire into a lawn chair (assuming that it can be justified by a character's paradigm) may be amusing, but it turns magic into a sight gag and destroys the credibility of a dramatic storyline. If you want to run a light-hearted game, allow these kinds of effects, but don't count on the laughter lasting. Silly games make for good interludes but don't have the staying power of a more serious story. If one player is constantly trying to pull off bizarre effects, he may destroy the mood for the other players.

Limiting magical effects based on their moods is well within your rights. If you don't want pop culture references or silly spells, disallow them. Let your players know ahead of time. Occasionally, you can bend the rules and let some slapstick into the mix. Comedic sessions can add to the strength of a serious game as long as they aren't overused.

OPTION: MINOR SPHERES

You can decide that mages are capable of developing focused areas of specialty as a kind of midpoint between linear Sorcery and the nine major Spheres.

A Minor Sphere is based upon a set quality: Fire, Terror, Domination and Stealth would be examples of such Spheres. Effects cast with the Sphere must utilize the Sphere's theme. To create one, take two properties from an established Sphere and assign them to each level of the new Sphere. Minor Spheres are limited in their manifestation but have more permutations than a greater Sphere. They have the same experience cost as their more standardized counterpart.

Take the Minor Sphere of Fire, for instance:

- Sense Forces (Fire), Heart's Blood ("Blood to Flame"; can power only fire-based effects)
- Control Minor Forces (Fire), Call Spirit (fire spirits only)
- Transmute Forces (one of the elements must be fire), Enchant Flame (can create Wonders made from flames)
- Control Major Forces (Fire), Bind Spirits (fire spirits only)
- Transmute Major Forces (nuclear heat, major conflagrations), Font of Paradise (limited to fires; can only power fires)



A suitable Sphere for a devoted Hermetic, the Minor Sphere of Fire has more influence over its domain than just Forces but lacks the inherent flexibility of the greater Sphere. Again, you should use discretion when designing Minor Spheres. These rules are designed to enhance play, not give players a magical tool to undermine your game.

You could make this option the default for all mages and use the original nine Spheres to determine conjunctional effects, countermagic, and other book-keeping issues. This way, Void Engineers study the Sphere of Space-time, a Voudoun priest might invite the Sphere of Ghede to enter her, and Wu Lung could entrench his power with the Sphere of Guanxi.

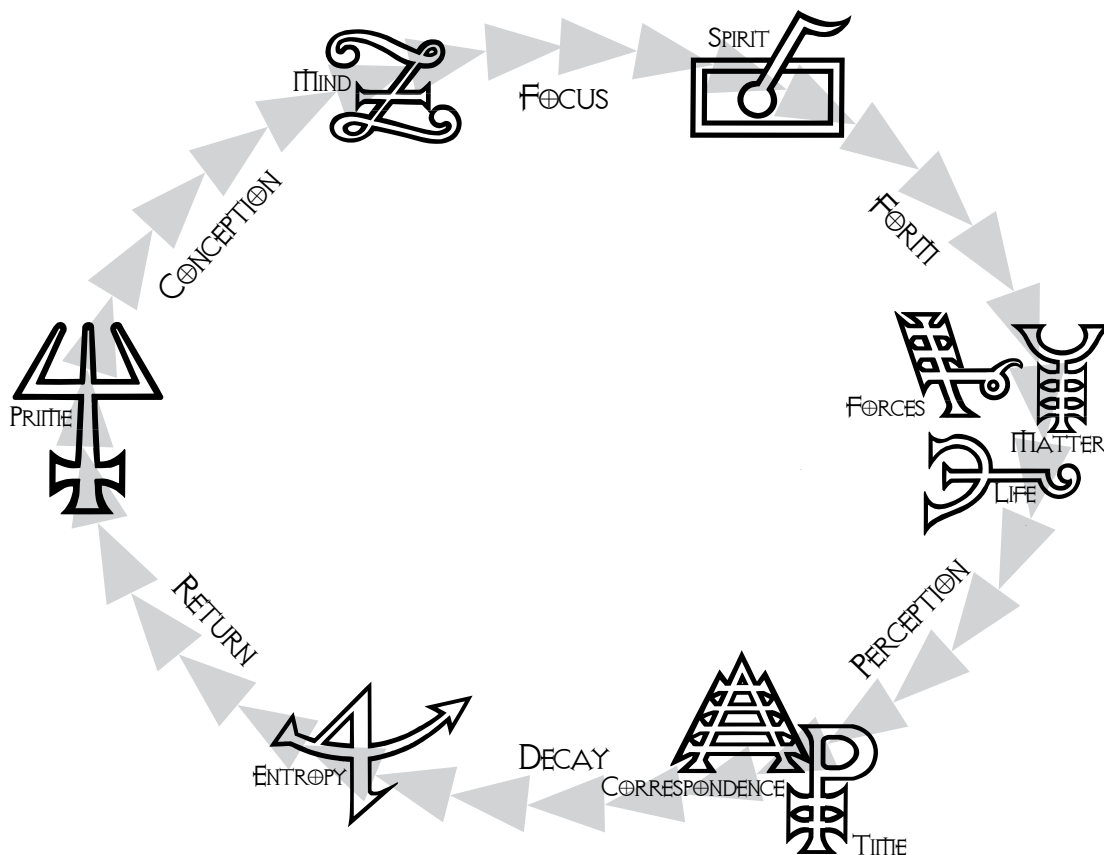
OPTION: TRANSITIONIFICATION

All Spheres are related to one another in one way or another. They all do something vital and important in order to keep the universe moving in the fashion we know. They are interconnected somehow. Each leads to another to another to another in a chain that creates our universe and our world. By this reasoning, you are going to get some bleedover as far as Spheres go. Nothing in our world is completely pure, and the Spheres are human classifications.

They are not perfect. You can use this logic as justification for making Spheres easier to use.

In the chart you can see that all the Spheres lead to another and can be used easily to bleed over to another. The entire universe is interconnected. Nothing is separate; nothing is alone. The Spheres are a rough translation of what magic really is, set into force by the combined discipline of mages from the Middle Ages (and, some say, earlier) onward. For Storytellers and players, it's a guideline used to make your magic something coherent enough to be expressed in game terms or as a mystical compromise for a diverse group of mages trying to work together.

Look at the interconnections; see how they flow together and aim to cover all of existence. Forces lead to Matter, as all matter is an accumulation of atoms being held together by a force. Matter leads to Life; all life is a form of matter that can generate its own forces. They are that closely interconnected. Some paradigms (scientific reductionism, idealistic beliefs that reduce everything to mental phenomena) bind them even more closely together. A similar relationship exists be-



tween Correspondence and Time. The only way to measure space is through time; time is nothing but an accumulation of space in motion. So if they are so interconnected, can they act as one another? Yes, they can. That's one of the reasons that many effects have some small amount of another Sphere in them.

With this knowledge, those with upper-level Spheres, in say Prime, should be able to do minor effects in Entropy and Mind. **Masters of the Art** lists one such system, allowing powerful mages to use effects belonging to other Spheres aligned with the same part of the Metaphysic Trinity as the character's specialty.

Here are some of the ways you can incorporate the flow of the Spheres into your game:

- **Force of Will:** With this option, a character may use a Sphere that follows from his own by expending a Willpower point and taking a +3 difficulty adjustment on his Arete roll, as if he were surpassing a needed focus. In this case he does require his normal foci for the Sphere that allows him to do this.

- **Conjunctions:** You could decide that a Sphere can be used for conjunctural purposes even if the character doesn't know it. You could decide it is limited to Spheres that are next to each other or that the character can add Spheres along the track (in either direction) at the same rate she drops foci. To reduce the bookkeeping, you could decide that a mage has a mystic "reach" of one other Sphere in each direction for every three or four Arete Traits she possesses.

Thus, those with upper levels of Forces might be able to do some minor things in Spirit and Matter as well. The point is to realize that a Sphere doesn't exist in isolation. It is interconnected to all the others in a continuum. Like a rainbow, one color reaching into another, the Spheres reach in and form one another. As far as game mechanics go, you can at least lessen the number of Spheres needed to do some of those upper-level rites. Your game becomes a little easier with the mechanics and rules and a little more concentrated on what the story means to the players.

A WORLD WITHOUT SPHERES

Looking over **Mage** you may realize that Spheres are not always needed. Heck, you may decide that none of the magical systems in the game really works for you or suits you as a Storyteller. That's perfectly fine, because the game is what you want to make it. But maybe you're lost as to ideas on how else you can do it. There are several ways to do it if you look at it as just another stat. Let's look at some of them.

One idea is that of completely cinematic magic. You don't need Spheres or Arete. Watch what your players want to do and ask what makes them think they can do it. Have them reason through it for you. Give them the chance to shine for you. It's hard, but the fun is in the challenge.

Another idea is to base everything on Abilities. You could say that in order to cast a fireball a mage has to have demolitions and science Abilities, or in order to charm someone he has to have Seduction or Subterfuge. Magic is just a twinge that gives you extra dice to do something or a way to utilize the skills that a character already has in a creative way. Doing it this way allows you some control over what a character can and can't do, while at the same time basing it on a stat for players to use.

A Storyteller could base all magic on a mage's Arete. Specified meanings of magic don't matter. Everyone can do anything. How knowledgeable they are in it is what counts. This way a mage can do anything within his knowledge. You could say that if a mage has an Arete of 2, he can do all the Sphere level examples at 2 and so on. It makes an easier game for the Storyteller and loosens the players' limitations.

As far as Arete goes...you don't have to use it either. It's possible to use only Spheres as the basis for magical effects. Instead of letting Spheres determine what level of magic you can do, let them determine how many dice you get as well. Instead of using the Arete level of dice to determine success or failure, roll your Sphere level. Variations include Sphere + Ability, Sphere + Attribute and even Sphere + Background. If you use this method, remember to adjust the value of each success accordingly.

Any form you use is up to you as a Storyteller. You can base magic on anything you want. It's formless, free-flowing. Nobody said that it has to be based on the Spheres; no one said that you had to have Arete to do it. If you feel like it, mages don't even have to have Avatars. Anything is possible when dealing with this section of the game — just like anything else.

PARADOX

Paradox is the law of the Consensus. Is it needed? Is there a way to do it differently? These questions are common (often uttered by players when their characters are at the wrong end of Reality's Boot) and really deserve a thoughtful answer. If Paradox doesn't suit your style of play, drop it. In **Mage** it represents the Tapestry rejecting what a mage does because it isn't supposed to happen in nature — at least, not anymore. The world has a voice and it is Paradox.

Does the world really need that voice? In your game it might not. Paradox prevents characters from using their magic for everything. It's also in place to give players a challenge and add unanswered questions. After all, mages know relatively little about how, exactly, reality polices its borders. Wise mages know that human belief plays a key, but how that translates into beings like Wrinkle and Fleckman's Folly is something worth investigating. Without Paradox, what's to stop a character from snapping his fingers and starting a fire instead of using a lighter? But that doesn't mean you need it. Maybe you want a world where Paradox doesn't exist and a mage *can* snap his fingers to light a cigarette. But where's the challenge in it? It's the challenge that makes the game fun. If you do choose to run a game without Paradox you are going to have to be ready to give your players a new challenge.

One possible solution is to make magic very, very hard to learn. Spheres don't just learn themselves, after all; a mage has to study and practice. Experimentation is possible, but have you ever really thought of the results of playing with the raw forces of the universe without anything to hold you back? You decide that you want to learn how to make time slow down, so you practice and think you have it worked out. You try it. Suddenly you are moving at a completely different speed from everyone else. Or you try to learn how to snap your fingers and start a fire. You snap them...and BLAM! You just blew up an entire city block.

This way of playing could be fun, as it retains the same challenge of Paradox but shifts it to a different source: in resolution, if not practice. The downside is that players often want quick gratification; stretching out the Mastery time for Spheres can make an already slow process *very* frustrating. It can have some memorable moments as characters botch up their effects....

Another way of running Paradox free while keeping the game challenging is to make it all run off

⊕ OPTIONS:
READING THE WEAVE
AND USING THE VEIL

Instead of limiting vulgar magic by applying Paradox, you can make magic use *very* noticeable to mages and/ or supernatural beings. One possible system is to make any use of vulgar magic noticeable to supernatural beings. Even without Awareness, they feel the Resonance and approximate direction of a magical effect a number of steps on the Correspondence Range Chart equal to the effect's Sphere level, +1 for witnesses. Why? You can decide that the Consensus suffers psychic shock — more so when people actually experience the magic — and beings sensitive to psychic forces can detect what's happening. Botching adds an additional point to the range at which the magic can be detected.

If your primary concern is to maintain the integrity of the setting, you might want to adapt the Delirium from **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** instead of inflicting Paradox. Whenever a vulgar magical effect is used in front of Sleepers it triggers fear and denial; use the effects listed in **Werewolf** to determine how normal people react to the presence of a cyborg or a sheet of free-standing flame in their midst.

Quintessence. Magic is a rare thing in the world; the thing that fuels it is even rarer. You could rule that every level of Sphere used costs a point of Quintessence. Instead of constantly casting spells, characters will have to hunt down the raw stuff of magic. Mages with Nodes will be *very* powerful and increase the antagonism between mages and other supernatural beings, since spirits and other creatures can serve as "juice." Human sacrifice might be horrifyingly common; **Blood Treachery** could turn into a major conflagration that rocks the Traditions.

What if you like Paradox but just don't like the way it is written up? You like the idea that doing magic slaps you back in the head, but you want it to be more flexible. That's up to you. You could, for instance, decide that Paradox backlashes always cause Quiet. Or you could rule that Paradox always manifests the same way: physical damage that looks like striated whip marks. Perhaps Paradox always blows off in the form of malevolent beings out to hurt or annoy the offending mage.

⊕ OPTION: PLAYING WITH FIRE

A particularly perverse way to control magic is to make it *too* powerful. For every Sphere rank past the first, add one additional die to an effect's pool. Each success rolled with *these* dice enhances the effect but in a way the mage never intended. You could roll these bonus dice and add them together for each roll a mage makes when performing an extended effect or rule that a ritual's steady, directed nature overcomes this danger. Botching *doubles* the number of dice and creates an effect completely out of the mage's grasp. Use Resonance as a guide when you determine how the spell spreads beyond the mage's intentions. You could limit these effects to what would normally be vulgar or make it another mystical law, applicable to all magic.

⊕ OPTION: FREEFORIT! PARADOX

If you want to use a more freewheeling approach to Paradox but would like some kind of systematic guide, the game already has rules in place to allow it: the magic system.

You could decide that when a character accrues five or more points of Paradox they create a magical effect that's deleterious to the character. Assume that Paradox has any Spheres it needs. Failed dice on the roll are retained; botches cause the entire pool to bleed off without any detriment to the character. In some cases, Paradox might consume the character's own personal Quintessence to increase the severity of a backlash.

To keep the characters from being overwhelmed, assume that each success in a backlash is worth roughly half of a standard magical success (one success causes one health level of injury, two affect a single target, etc.). You can also rule that each level of lethal damage requires two successes and each level of aggravated damage requires three successes to inflict. In this system Quiet is simply a Mind effect (with other Spheres thrown in for hobgoblins), spirits are called using the standard rules, and Realms are mighty Paradox-driven Spirit effects.

⌘ETAPLOT⌘



It's the driving force behind the game's world, and, depending upon your stance on Usenet, it may be the most reviled part of the game or the most beloved. Metaplot is the term for story material that drives the entire game universe of **Mage** — the massive, cosmic events that cause certain things to happen or affect the whole game. The birth of the Avatar

Storm is an example of a metaplot event: It's not an event caused by one cabal or one lone character, and its repercussions aren't felt in only one story; it affects all **Mage** stories in the current canon.

WHY HAVE ⌘ETAPLOT⌘?

Some people question *why* metaplot should even exist. A couple of good reasons exist, but as always a clever Storyteller might find reasons *not* to use it.

For starters, metaplot shows that the world turns under the feet of the characters. It demonstrates that realistic, world-shaking events happen outside of things in the characters' stories. In your game, for instance, your characters may be fighting Technocratic foes or discovering lost lore, but they're unlikely to be making decisions that have long-term ramifications for all mages everywhere (well, maybe, maybe not). Things happen in the background independent of your cabal, and that's the world working its way through history — that's metaplot. Metaplot makes the world feel more "real": It shows that the characters aren't in a little vacuum like *Dark City*; rather, they're in a cosmos that has other things going on, on many levels, beyond where they live and what they do.

Metaplots also help shake things up. Without metaplot, you wouldn't see the emergence of new factions, the splintering of Tradition or Convention relations, changes in mage powers, and whatnot. Sure, we could *publish* new rules for, say, a new Disparate group — but where'd they come from? Why did they just emerge? What drove them to work with or against the other mage societies? Metaplots show reasons that groups do things.

A metaplot can also help explain large changes or overturn old materials. For instance, the original magical systems in first edition **Mage** were much more powerful — with five successes a mage could affect pretty much anything in sight with an Effect, forever, regardless of size. As **Mage** has undergone

revisions the system has changed. In the context of the game, magic's power shrinks with the coming Armageddon and the Consensus of apathy brought on by disbelieving Sleepers.

⌘VERTURNING ⌘ETAPLOT⌘

Chances are, you've already done this at least once. Any time you decide to creatively edit out a part of **Mage** history, you alter metaplot. This isn't a bad thing. Rather, it's a matter of placing your own world history on top, which is as it should be.

When you set up a game, it's up to you to decide upon the secret history of the world's magical masters. This can be as easy as using the prepackaged plot that comes with **Mage** supplemental history or as complex as deciding to rewrite all mages' interactions with mortal history.

For instance, in canonical metaplot mages rode on the coattails of various nations during World War II, but no mage group was directly responsible. Hitler was a Sleeper (though not necessarily "normal"), and the Third Reich was primarily a human political organization. Even the occult overtones of the Reich merely reflected the ambitions of its members, rather than showing some hidden conspiracy of mages behind the scenes. You might, however, want to change this history in your game. You could decide that mages *did* influence Hitler. You might make him a Nephandus. What does this say about your game? It says that one of the pre-eminent world-shaking events of history was driven by mages, regardless of what Sleepers believe. It establishes that mages are responsible for tremendous world-shaking events instead of working subtly in the background. If your players learn this "alternative history" they may start to question other historical events — was Joan of Arc a mage? Did mages invent the automobile? Suddenly, Sleeper society seems much more mundane and static — perhaps all noteworthy historical events rely on mages. Or maybe they don't; maybe this one case was a special circumstance, and you leave the rest of Sleeper history to the Sleepers.

When you overturn metaplot, you should remain aware of one very important factor: Metaplot offers an explanation for why things happened the way they did. If, in your metaplot, the Avatar Storm never happened, you need another explanation for why the Masters have gone away (if you decide you



want to keep that element). If you remove the fall of Doissetep, you have to decide how much influence that chantry still has on magely politics and what it's doing now, especially if you also don't have the Avatar Storm.

Here is a quick checklist of three things to look over when you alter metaplots:

Changing Rules: Sometimes when you change metaplot, you change rules, too. Metaplot gives a reason for certain rules. The most visible, of course, is the Avatar Storm — if you take away that metaplot element, you also probably remove the Storm damage effect of dealing with the Umbra.

Changing History: A change to metaplot might alter the World of Darkness history for your game. If you alter New World Order priorities in the '50s, they may never leverage influence to help build Disneyland as an experimental mini-utopia.

Changing Game Elements: Certain metaplot elements led to the formation or destruction of various groups. For instance, if you decide that the Ahl-i-Batin never finished the Web of Faith, then there was no Web to leave vast stores of Quintessence around the Middle East, which means no reason for Technocratic invasion, which in turn removes the impetus for the Batini to leave the Tradition Council. The Batini need another reason to have gone back underground, or else they should still be a viable Tradition in such a game.

CURRENT METAPLOT WRAP-UP

To help Storytellers who might've missed a boat or two, here's a short wrap-up of some important points in recent **Mage** metaplot, what they did, and *why* they happened.

Sixth Maelstrom hits: Xerxes Jones, a Void Engineer on the outs, dives into the Underworld with a nuclear device, hoping to detonate it later and watch the results from a distance. (As far as he's concerned, it's just an experiment in another dimension.) While he's down there, the ghostly realms light up in war and the relic of the Trinity nuke drops on Enoch. Enoch implodes in a giant nihil and the powerful energies suck down into the Tempest, detonating Xerxes' bomb as well. This explosion, combined with various other catastrophes in the mortal world, causes so much destruction that a terrible storm rises in the lands of the dead, mirrored now by a storm across the Gauntlet (the Avatar Storm).

Why it happened: Part of the transition toward the Sixth Age. Metaplot reason to push forward the

Avatar Storm and also the end(?) of the **Wraith** game line.

Doissetep falls: The ancient Hermetic chantry of Doissetep, located in the Umbral reflection of Mars (in the Shard Realm of Forces), explodes in a massive magical burst of energy when it falls to attackers. Archmaster Porthos Fitz-Empress bani Flambeau manages to contain the worst of the damage but dies as a result.

Why it happened: An exploration of hubris: The worst politicians of magically society finally suffer the results of their snide backbiting, lack of cooperation and inability to work together. Also a way to clear the way for new leadership in **Mage** games.

Digital Web crashes: After Doissetep falls, the Digital Web suffers a brief White Out. Many sectors are dumped; web surfers crash hard. The Web is reset, but the Great Race is over: The Sleepers had caught up to the Adepts and Iterators, and Webspace is no longer a virgin paradise but rather a haunted place of shattered hopes.

Why it happened: A good excuse to reset certain places that were outdated. A way to shake up the Virtual Adepts and remove the image of Webspace as an unassailable haven. Plus, a reasonable after-effect of the massive Umbral damage going around.

Avatar Storm: The Gauntlet gains a wind of razor-shards from shattered Avatars. Mages have problems crossing into the Umbra or out again.

Why it happened: First, it was a logical result of nuclear weapons going off in the Underworld and Doissetep exploding in the Umbra. Second, it helps separate out Masters, making more down-to-Earth mages more effective — while some Masters are still around, players' mages are much more important now. Third, it removes the idea of the Umbra as an easy refuge: no more stepping sideways to escape Technocracy agents easily; the Umbra is a dangerous place and it requires effort and balls to travel the spirit realms.

Crafts marginalized: The various Crafts, magically groups without a major stake in the Ascension War or global reach, find themselves increasingly marginalized. Some sign on to the Traditions as factions, while others simply fall into disarray and subsequently disappear.

Why it happened: Having too many Crafts, while giving the game diversity, made it harder for novices to become focused on easily identifiable archetypes. In some cases the Crafts clearly overlapped other

Tradition agendas. Plus, the Crafts themselves were not in much of a position to survive as the Technocracy's last surge of Pogrom activity overcame mystical mages who eschewed the unified support and backing of the Traditions. With backs to the wall and nowhere to turn, the Crafts needed to join up with allies or died out.

Concordia captured: Sick of constantly being ignored and abused, the Hollow One ambassador to Concordia, the Tradition headquarters in Horizon, lets the Technocracy in through his diplomatic backdoor. They ransack the place but don't have a chance to establish a firm presence in Horizon itself. With the Horizon Realms mostly cut off from Earth, the whole place begins a slow process of disintegration.

Why it happened: Much like the fall of Doissetep, it cleared the way for other mages to step up to bat. It also removed the "security blanket" of having a safe retreat where any mage could go and just hang out without risk of the Technocracy. Plus, it gives story hooks for characters to go visit and find out what happened to things there or to look for the remnants of the missing Primi and archmages.

Pogrom refocused: Iteration X, realizing that Union resources are already stretched thin, votes to scale back the Technocratic Pogrom. The Union turns its attention to repairing internal affairs instead of chasing down "reality deviants."

Why it happened: Pull away from the focus of Technocrats as "bad guys" and "villains" to the Traditions. Instead, Traditionalists can focus on more personal problems in stories.

Blood Treachery: The Order of Hermes begins a quest to retake its lost chantries and knowledge from the treacherous House Tremere, which became vampires in the Middle Ages. The war bogs down quickly, though, and finally stalemates as both sides realize that neither will give ground easily or painlessly. At the end, House Tytalus (of the Order) is revealed as corrupted by the lure of quick power from vampire blood, while powerful elements of the Tremere vampires cryptically note that the Order of Hermes has better things to do with its time than prop up straw villains.

Why it happened: Because Hermetics are human. Looking for easy answers to hard problems, the Hermetics hit on the idea of going after a hidden, villainous enemy. Beat up the enemy and take his stuff (which is justified as stolen from the Order in



the first place) and everything will be all right. Sadly, things don't work so easily, and the Order learns first-hand the futility of protracted conflict in a Vietnam-like scenario. The Hermetics want easy, black-and-white solutions, and what starts as oversimplification and a little too much energy from the youth turns into a crusade that's politically hot among the old-timers.

New Convocation: The remaining Earthly Tradition mages — those who care about mage politics, anyway — meet at a convocation in Los Angeles. They decide upon a new Council to replace the old, and they settle on their new goals for the upcoming millennium.

Why it happened: The Traditions lost their old leaders, so they needed new ones. Running this as a game/ story event gives a chance for your players to influence magely society on a large scale or even to take positions of power and leadership.

Euthanatos split: Senex, the “Old Man” and archmage of the Euthanatos, hits upon a plan to engage the entire Tradition in cleansing the corrupted Nodes of Earth. With a great convocation of Wheel-Turners at Cerberus Chantry near Pluto and the Shard Realm of Entropy, he thinks that the Euthanatos can purify the world's chakras and send healing energy across the planet, thereby overturning the corruption of the current Age and keeping the Wheel from dislodging early and bringing an end to all creation. (Whew!) He calls for all Euthanatos to return to Cerberus to help in the holy work. Some agree; some don't.

Why it happened: This event highlights, through the Euthanatos, the quintessential dilemma of modern mages: stay and fight small battles in hopes of making a grassroots change for things with a personal stake, or sacrifice personal dreams and desires in order to try to change the whole world for the better.

Destruction of the World: Just kidding.

STORYTELLER CHARACTER GROUPS



While it may seem nonsensical to have groups and character types that are “Storyteller only” (and really, there’s no such thing), sometimes a group has such a narrow focus that it’s hard to justify it for players. The groups presented in **The Storytellers Companion** (which comes with the screen) are examples of such groups; these Crafts

have limited influence and often have little desire to work their will on the outside world or take in new recruits. It’s hard for a player’s character to mesh with the game if the character’s group doesn’t motivate his participation!

One other group that survived from the Renaissance (and before) is presented here. Even more so than the Crafts in the **Companion**, this group is insular and unlikely in the extreme to participate in magely politicking. Thus, they’re best used by Storytellers as flavor, to provide a sense that the Traditions aren’t always the only game around.

THE LIONS OF ZION

The Lions of Zion have a very long and rich tradition, one largely separate from the formal nine Traditions. Technically speaking, they would be considered Disparates — if anyone knew about them. Even more so than the insular Sisters of Hippolyta, the Lions of Zion are secretive, internally based and unlikely to involve themselves in outside causes. They are little more than a myth to even Tradition mages.

The Lions of Zion are practitioners of the ancient magics and formulae known as the Kabbalah. They chart their history back to the time of Moses, as protectors of the Children of Israel; their predecessors left Egypt following Moses. When the Israelites settled and began building temples, the Lions took positions initially as guardians of the temples. As the Israelites became a static culture, the Lions soon became priests and prophets, moving among and mixing with the mundane servants of God of the time.

The Lions have two primary duties to their people. They act to preserve their history and to protect their communities. In every era that the Jews faced persecution and the sword, the Lions were the first to die and the last to be captured of their people. When the

people returned to God, the Lions would return to gather together what they could find and record the rest from the elderly who still lived.

ORGANIZATION

The Lions of Zion have structure and tradition that make the Order of Hermes look flexible by comparison. In keeping with the Kabbalistic tradition, only men may be Lions. They must be Orthodox Jews, and they can become Lions once they have achieved the full wisdom of adulthood, generally around age 40. A prospective Lion of Zion must be Awakened, a settled member of the community and preferably married. These protections ensure that only those with a strong incentive to help the community and avoid dabbling in best-left-unused areas don’t wind up abusing the knowledge of the order.

This is not to say that they do not prepare younger generations for becoming Lions. Such would be foolish, especially since Awakenings generally do not wait on tradition. Newly Awakened often are taught to reign in their powers and gain minor teaching while serving in other roles for the Lions. When a man reaches age 40, he is taken on as a disciple by another Lion and taught all that Lion knows. He also begins broader training in the ways of Kabbalah (assuming he has not already learned some on his own, which does happen, even among the Orthodox).

FACTIONS

The Lions of Zion, being a very small and rare group, barely have room for factions. Rather, a Lion’s “faction” rests more upon his description of duties — what he is assigned to do, or chooses to do, based on his position among the protectors.

The **Watchers of the Temple** are young men, already Awakened, who are taught first to control their power, then given the task of guarding the Temple. They are, over time, taught very minor magics, but for the most part their induction into the order and formal training must wait. Essentially, the Watchers are those members of the community who have the gift but aren’t yet regarded as mature and ready enough to take up the full mantle of responsibility as a Lion. Some Watchers leave to learn magical arts from other Traditions — such a rash decision guarantees that the student will never become a full Lion of Zion, even if he returns to the community. A

student who's too impatient to wait and master the most important responsibilities can't be trusted with the secrets that defend the community.

Among the Lions themselves are the **Protectors**, whose job it is to do exactly that, keep their community safe, and the **Prophets**, who teach, guide and provide occasional insight into possible futures. The former mages are the most militant of the Lions — mages who use complex sigils and numerological formulae to build protective wards and bring good fortune to their charges, and who are the first to stand in harm's way when something threatens the community. The latter rely upon prediction, often fostered by deciphering codes in the Torah, to avoid dangers and foresee important events that impact on the community. These very adept mages would be anything from spokesmen of their God to messengers for their temple or king. They were also teachers, even if their teachings weren't always welcomed by the ears that received them.

The last main classification among the Lions is the **Keepers**. These elders have the distinction of being Protectors and Prophets who lived through their duties. They retired, often to help keep up the day-to-day running of the temple. They also see to the day-to-day activities of the community, freeing the younger Protectors to deal with larger matters.

It is the rare mage who sees a true Lion of Zion in action, because they are taught subtlety first and foremost in order to protect their communities (most especially after the Holocaust). In fact, it is almost impossible to distinguish a Lion of Zion from any other member of a Jewish community. The idea that they all live and work within the temple is antiquated and has never really been true. While most Lions do serve a time guarding (or these days simply helping out) at the temple, few of them are that closely associated with it unless they are Prophets. Most of them have normal jobs. They promote community and work to ensure that they have and keep their rights. Some of them have even fought to regain some of what was lost in World War II in Germany.

Of course, in the modern age, the idea of a "Jewish community" is a bit antiquated also. No longer are all cities divided up with a "Jewish quarter" to separate out one group. Nonetheless, the Lions of Zion take their roles seriously and intercede for what they see as their extended family. After all, if God has gifted them with power, it is their responsibility to use His gift in a manner that serves His will and His people.

PHILOSOPHY

To the Lions of Zion, magic comes from God. There are no neat little splinterings of Avatars, no subjective moralities. Many Lions do not even call it "magic" per se, depending on the temple that the Lions train from. It is a spiritual undertaking. Lions of Zion deal little to none with the Umbra and visit there only if they have been taken into a vision. Rather, it is the philosophy of the Lions that God has already made his plan known and manifest, through the sacred writings handed down to the people who best worship Him and follow His rules. By careful attention to those rules and writings, the Lions believe, they can discern God's wishes for their people. Then it is merely a matter of acting in accord with the Creator's plan. He only wants His people to prosper and be happy; it is their job to make sure they do so according to His rules. Since the mind of God is vast and unknowable, the Lions are the intercessors who interpret tiny pieces of the plan into forms that men can implement. This implementation doesn't require going out and fighting an "Ascension War" or trying to convince people of the "correctness" of this form of magic. It just means living well, by the rules handed down millennia ago.

THEORIES AND PRACTICES

Much of the magic that the Lions of Zion use is preprepared in ritual. It takes little, then, for the Lions of Zion to use their magic. Their foci tend to be practical, easily concealed and fairly mundane in appearance. Their rites are most often coincidental in effect. If the Lions of Zion call upon vulgar magics it is a very dark day indeed.

Kabbalah is, of course, the hallmark of the Lions. Whether the Lions created Kabbalah or vice-versa is debatable, but the centerpiece of study remains the mystical decryption of divine writings. Since divinely inspired writings are, to the Lions, essentially a piece of God's plan laid out in writing, they contain clues to the form of the whole plan — especially if one knows how to look. Combined with a complex web of relations that shows how various items and people come from different "layers" of creation and thus have different energies or levels of purity, the Lions can make startlingly accurate predictions and determine what items naturally have important properties.

The Lions of Zion do not look at magic as separate Spheres. Their system of magic is far more

complicated. For game purposes, of course, they use the Sphere system, but they tend to see magic as a complex set of correspondences between divinely inspired writings and elements of the underlying “creation energy” of the cosmos, as formed by God’s plan. They do recognize, however, certain affinities that must be cultivated depending upon the Lion’s calling, whether he is a Protector or a Prophet. Every other affinity builds off this one, much as branches grow from the Tree of Life, to make up the very complex magic of the Kabbalah.

Specialty Sphere: Prophets — Time; Protectors — Mind. Watchers don’t gain a specialty Sphere until they become full Lions and generally won’t learn more than one level of any Sphere until that time.

Common Foci: Anything that can be imbued through ritual, be it powder, incense, a gun. Their magics rarely originate on the fly and are rather delayed effects, especially among the Prophets. Protectors will generate magic on the go if necessary and then only rarely, and therefore usually have some form of Foci on hand, usually something convenient and inconsequential to a casual (or even Awakened) observer. Calculator, pens or even ties have been used as Foci. The various holy

writings such as the Torah are central to the Lions’ magic, though, and many focus on gematria and numerology to predict the future, figure out what items or actions will please God and thus be most likely to succeed, and offer insightful patterns into existing problems.

Concepts: Businessman, CPA, Financial Advisor, Politician, Rabbi, Revered Elder, Social Activist

STEREOTYPES

Many Lions don’t separate the Traditions into stereotypes. They see them as all working toward the same thing, but fractionalized. They also see them as a brewing pot for trouble, as they have often been left, like many orphans, picking up the pieces of won and lost battles. Of all the Traditions, they typically look most favorably upon the Euthanatos and Order of Hermes. While one would think that the Celestial Chorus would be looked upon favorably, this is actually not the case. The most Orthodox of the Lions will not even acknowledge the Chorus’ presence except to remove them from whatever area they are trespassing that the Lions protect. Other Lions are not quite so fanatical, but all of them, to some degree, see the Chorus as heretics and cultists.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING MAGE



With the metaplot explained and the pressing questions answered, one must ask: What defines **Mage**? Why are its books done the way they are? What determines why some supplements come out while other ones languish by the wayside?

This section is essentially a sneak peek into the development process and the management of **Mage**. We hope it will answer questions about the decisions that lead to specific **Mage** supplements.

MODERN WORLD OF DARKNESS THEME

A big part of the revised **Mage** line hinges on keeping current with the World of Darkness. By focusing upon personal themes, by using the drama inherent in human conflict and by making sure that there’s no easy escape, the setting becomes more one of personal horror — a key element of the World of Darkness. How scary is it to be hunted

down by Technocrats when you can just step into the spirit world and whisk yourself away to a private paradise where they can’t follow? The game focuses on mages in a world of human beings and all the conflict therein. The matter is personal and in your face. It’s not a case of dealing with large, anonymous organizations or ambiguous conspiracies — it’s face to face, so you can identify with the characters involved.

MAGIC IS A TOOL, NOT A SUPERPOWER

The revised **Mage** game assumes that magic is best used as a subtle force and a supplement to the mage’s normal skills. A spell might make it easier to gain money or foist bad luck onto a foe, but it’s best to take an active hand in doing things instead of just relying on magic to fix every problem. Mages are potent but still not infallible: They must get their hands dirty; they can’t sit high and mighty in secret fortresses or spiritual realms and guide the Earth from above.



Since magic can't solve all problems, mages have to deal with each other as people, too. They can make mistakes. They don't have perfect or immaculate views of what's right or wrong. Therefore, mages can and do find themselves in moral dilemmas and gray areas. Sometimes what looked like a good idea turns out to be the wrong way to approach things. Plus, mages are susceptible to injury, illness, madness and all the infirmities of the human condition. While magic can help avoid or lessen the impact of some of these things, only mighty effects can completely overcome these weaknesses. It's entirely possible for mages to suffer from any number of human weaknesses — which makes them easier characters to identify with.

Furthermore, when mages need to work powerful spells, they must work in concert or pursue legendary means. Both these methods help create stories: the former because it encourages teamwork and group play, the latter because it offers story hooks as mages look for ways to make their magic work more effectively.

HUMAN SCALE

Mages can't just ignore people. Not only do the Masses form the Consensus, but individual people can have a profound effect on a mage's life. Unlike vampires, who will outlive their friends and family, and werewolves, who often become alienated from their relatives as they find a special place in society, mages can still interact with humanity — and they do so. Mages still have companions, loved ones and hated foes. The nasty apartment complex owner can be just as complex and important a villain as an Umbral spirit or a Technocratic agent.

Among other things, **Mage** game materials assume that mages might have jobs, families and all the niceties of everyday life to deal with. This adds several story elements; don't think of it as limiting, but rather as a way to explore angles that television and books have had all along. A mage with relations to human beings is a more fleshed-out, believable character — and a believable, fully realized character is more fun to play.

EARTHLY PROBLEMS

Mage assumes that characters take a hand in actual, Earthly events. While there are myriad spirit realms to which mages can flee, doing so doesn't forward the cause of mages on Earth. Hanging out in the Umbra won't stop hunger, end poverty or cause more Sleepers to believe in magic. Mages have to do

things on Earth — and many supplements or plot elements help show the importance of this.

A SECRET SOCIETY

The history of the World of Darkness assumes that mages can do important and useful things, but that Sleepers can do so as well. Perhaps

more importantly, Sleepers don't have supernatural issues or problems keeping them from doing great things. Mages may often be innovators, but Sleepers are usually the leaders of men who cause important things to happen.

For example, Technocrats may have invented the computer, but until Sleeper companies latched on to them, such devices didn't become household commonplaces. Similarly, Technocratic inspiration gave the tools to make the atomic bomb, but it wasn't until a Sleeper-run government and research program had a need to put those elements together that the bomb was built and dropped.

The lesson here is that, while mages can and do perform important things, the vast majority of the world is run by Sleepers, and they shape the course of history. Even the most subtle and clever attempt to manipulate the course of human destiny must still bow to the inevitable tide that is Sleeper society.

CONSISTENCY: HOBGOBLIN OF LITTLE MINDS, OR...?

Most **Mage** supplements strive for consistency within the established game continuum. Where rules or setting break with this consistency, 95% of the time it's for a specific reason or to make a special demonstration case.

Among other things, this policy explains why you don't see a lot of time devoted to alternative setting styles or breaking away from the other assumptions of **Mage** listed here. There's one core setting for **Mage** and the books have just enough room to support it without trying to shoehorn in an infinite number of other variations. Sad but true: We can't publish a different copy of **Mage** for each player, so we must get by with producing a version that enough people like and are willing to tinker with.



Why bother with consistency? Because it adds verisimilitude. In the real world, things happen for reasons (usually) — there are a cause and an effect. The cause may not be immediately apparent and the effect may be reprehensible, but someone, somewhere, had a reason, or else some law of nature intervened. In a game world, this rigidity of effect isn't always as necessary, but people are *accustomed* to looking for interlocking patterns in events. If you see a game world where the elements remain fairly consistent from session to session, you don't have to suspend your disbelief for the setting itself. It is then easier to slide into the game and character role, because you can more readily imagine and identify with them.

THE “HAVE FUN” RULE

Most important of all is the provision that things need to have some fun game angle. While it's all well and good to explore the niceties of Mayan currency speculation in 500 B.C., this sort of essay has limited utility to the vast majority of games and players. More effective is a brief overview followed by a plot hook based on old Mayan currency dug up in a ruin, or on a reincarnated soul that has old Mayan memories and accidentally tries to use that kind of money. The idea is to provide hooks on which to hang unique story ideas. Thus, materials need to have

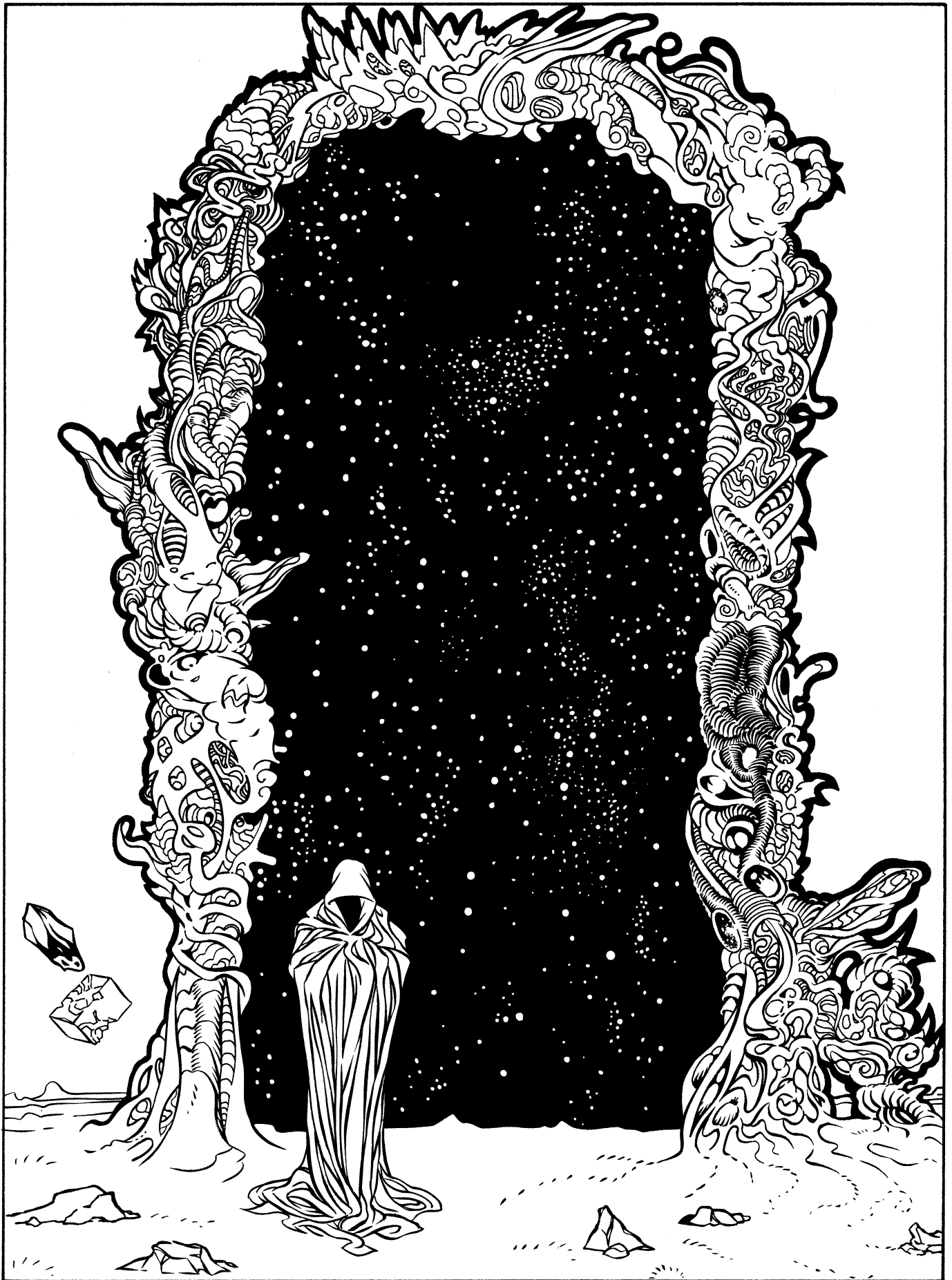
color and flavor that can add to a game instead of just being dry lists of facts.

HOW TO APPLY ALL OF THIS

Of course, this doesn't just affect **Mage** supplements — it affects how you create your own **Mage** materials. If you pay attention to these guides, you'll find a box that nicely defines the current **Mage** setting; as long as you color within that box, your material should easily fit into the existing material.

Conversely, you could throw out one of the assumptions and make your own chronicle with a different spin. For instance, you might decide to get rid of magic as a subtle, slow force and instead posit that your mages can perform superhuman feats with little prep work. You'll have gunslinging heroes and flying witches. All you need to do is apply this same rule to materials that you buy or write and see what logical extensions result. In such a world the Akashic Brotherhood isn't relegated to monasteries — its warrior-monks are like kung fu action heroes wandering the earth and doing good deeds. This is just a minor change to their Tradition book, but keeping it in mind lets you use all of the book's material while only tweaking things a little to fit your own game.

And that's the important part: making it your game.



CHAPTER TWO: THE AWAKENED STRUGGLE

“Why should I burn?” he asked. “My memories of earlier Incarnations were incomplete, but I knew that I had never known such force before. There was something in me that was not balanced. That was made for the Short Path. Perhaps Enlightenment could be reached by leaping into the fire.”

— Walter Jon Williams, “Prayers on the Wind.”



It’s a big game. Where do you start?

In each of its incarnations, **Mage: The Ascension** has challenged players and Storytellers. The game’s themes embrace the nature of reality and individual enlightenment. Between the poles of the vast and the personal, games have done their best to live up to the challenge while trying to tell good, entertaining stories.

You have to start somewhere. Your games can’t embrace it all right away. It’s much better to warm up to it with a good story. Don’t be afraid that it isn’t serious or ambitious enough. The goal of the game is for everyone to enjoy themselves; it’s the only way you can really win a roleplaying game.

In the general category of “fun” are a lot of qualitative variations. Some stories are thrilling. Others are moving. Despite these weighted words, don’t be fooled into thinking that you should try to aim for deadly serious Storytelling at the expense of having a good time. At the same time, a good Storyteller doesn’t limit her horizons. Deep, moving Storytelling is always possible, but if it’s forced it’s a dreadful bore, a game nobody wants to play twice. A game works if it can accommodate the mood and tastes of the group even though they change from session to session.

The task of running a **Mage** game might seem even more daunting than before, but if you relax your grip on an expected tone, it’s actually simpler. It gives a Storyteller a chance to concentrate on her story: the

bedrock of the game. A game's narrative is what supports its players, including the Storyteller. It keeps the game moving along and provides a frame of reference whenever anybody needs fresh inspiration or a quick storyline for her chronicle.

The World of Darkness provides a ready metanarrative in which you can put your stories. Like any reference, you can take as little or as much as you want out of it, but it provides a sense of perspective and narrative coherence. In **Mage**, the setting provides you with the tools you need to construct a story, as well as hooks that are ready for you to use. You have an unsettled world to work with, one that player characters can shape the moment they enter the scene.

Mage's setting spins the game's themes into a conflict-rich setting for you to use however you wish. Conflict is the lifeblood of a story — not just violent stories, but all stories. Awakened life can be dangerous and horrific, or it can be intensely introspective and cerebral. It can be all of these things at the same time. We're going to talk about the setting, how it generates conflict and what the underlying themes and purpose of

the metaplot is — and where it's going. Specifically, we'll talk about the major factions of the game, other supernatural creatures and the metaphysical conflict that inundates all of them and serves as a story element in its own right.

THE MIGHTY META

The following section refers extensively to **Mage: The Ascension's** story arc. You're not obligated to use all or even part of it, but even if you don't, it still serves as a useful model for how to generate conflict-rich stories. It's always better to show something rather than just talk about it.

In this case, the story arc is used to showcase how the game's themes are expressed through the plot and setting of the game. To run a good, serious, dramatic game, you need good stories. The metaplot provides an initial source of inspiration but shouldn't limit your options. It's just another piece of the Storytelling arsenal.

FAST ASLEEP IN THE FINAL DAYS



Sleepers: the greatest power in any **Mage** chronicle. They determine the Consensus. In the battle for reality, they're the infantry. They toss themselves at the walls of the possible and, more often than not, are cut down. Their defeats aren't always the stuff of high adventure, but defeat rarely is. They back down from their dreams.

Memories of their greatest achievements fade even in their own minds. They die — sometimes in pain and sometimes in surprise, but rarely after a lifetime of fulfilled aspirations or without fear.

In other words, they're mages — or, at the very least, they could be. The Awakened aren't cursed with the Spheres, born into them or driven to them by a higher power with a strict agenda. Mages are people who, unconsciously or not, make a choice to discover the real meaning of things. Awakening comes in a flash or a slow, steady stream, but it never removes the mage's essential humanity. Awakening and Ascension mean something because they are human achievements.

Why don't more Sleepers make that choice? It isn't as easy as it sounds. A Sleeper can't just decide that reality is subjective or that it works according to a set of alternative laws, then co-locate along his

merry way. Awakening requires an irrevocable commitment to new beliefs coupled with a mind willing to investigate the unusual and sometimes, perhaps, just a little destiny.

THE KINGDOM OF THE BLIND

When someone Awakens, he often looks back at his old life and his friends with a combination of pity, amusement and disgust. He sees how flavorless his life was and how empty the world is without an awareness of what's possible. It's too easy for mages to treat Sleepers with contempt and in doing so lose track of their mundane ties. Sometimes a new mage forgets that she needs to pay the bills like anybody else. After quitting a meaningless job and leaving to join her mentor, she discovers that she's broke and homeless and that she needs to use her magic to find a warm bed and a meal before she plumbs the depths of the universe.

The Sleepers in her life have moved on; they don't really think about the mage anymore. When she returns, they grow uneasy. Her eccentric behavior and the subtle Resonance she exudes make it hard to keep her friends. Besides that, chances are that she's been inducted into a centuries-old conspiracy that has lots of dangerous work for her to do.

Many mages manage to recover from a temporary sense of dislocation long enough to keep their homes, jobs and immediate families, but creeping Resonance and the mage's new perspective mean that she's rarely satisfied with the way things used to be. Family members grow angry with her for ignoring or even mocking their feelings. The eccentrics in the rest of her cabal show up for meetings. If the mage tells anyone, it can only get worse. After all, nobody believes in *magic* any more, do they? Still, many mages do tell their immediate families about their lives — but just as many drop out of sight and keep their new lives a secret. Aside from a fear of public persecution, mages also risk their closest companions' safety. Nephandi, Technocrats and angry sprits may attack the mage's friends and family and stand a good chance of finding out who the mage's relatives are if she's already talking about it herself.

Sleepers' nervousness and subtle disapproval may alienate the mage, driving her to society's fringes, where she's less likely to make any close contacts. In response she might drop out of civilized society altogether and become a hermit or wanderer. Finding a balance between Awakened and mundane life is the conflict here. Mages who value their freedom and don't want to return to their old, regimented lives have to find a lifestyle that can support both their Sleeping friends and the new demands of Awakened life.

SPECIAL SLEEPERS

In addition to the problems of everyday life, mages have to confront nosy investigators and witch hunters. These Sleepers are persistent and competent; many of them belong to ancient conspiracies or modern governments. A few act as the eyes and ears of greater powers.

Encounters with competent Sleepers can help keep players from ignoring or underestimating them. A lone Arcanum scholar can learn many, many things with a parabolic microphone and a handheld camera. Inquisitors have Church funding and righteous zeal to back them up. Fortunately, most secret societies are reluctant to be noticed by the authorities, since they frequently skirt the law in pursuit of the supernatural. The mage can't tell them to go away, either; the Inquisition tracks mages so that they can kill (or, rarely, "save") them. The Arcanum makes its business the pursuit of occult knowledge; their subjects' consent is immaterial.

Government agents (such as the FBI's Special Affairs Division) are more troublesome. They are legally sanctioned and often extremely idealistic (or tenacious: SAD is known as a punishment assignment). Worse yet, they're investigating the mage as a threat to domestic security. Much of the time, they're perfectly justified. After all, the Awakened do cause their fair share of deaths. Agents tend to put what they witness into the framework provided by their law enforcement training; such a perspective doesn't present flattering images of either Technocrats ("corrupt officials") or Traditionalists ("cult leaders").

Aside from being challenging adversaries, specially trained Sleepers provide a useful alternative perspective. In a sense, they're a refined version of everyday attitudes — the ones that contribute to Sleepers rejecting a more diverse Consensus. Can a mage really be sure that he isn't offending God by using his powers? Does he behave like a corrupt official or a cult leader? At what point does a lifestyle tied to magical society become too corrupt or too strange to reconcile with Sleeping life?

MYSTIC ENEMIES



The chief antagonists of **Mage** are the Awakened themselves. Other antagonists threaten mages for a variety of reasons, including self-interest and a misunderstanding of the mage's nature. Mages know what the stakes are. They know about the possibility of Ascension. Despite (or even because of) that insight, they've decided to oppose the characters. As antagonists, mages resonate with the characters' own aspirations and flaws. A mystic with a rigid paradigm struggles with Technocrats who, but

for her methods, would agree with her bigotry. Technocrats liberating a mage's personal cult may discover, to their chagrin, that the mind-control techniques and punishments used by the sect's master eerily resemble the practices of their own Union.

Caring little for the Sleepers, a mage devoted to the study of supernatural forces finds her dark counterpart in a Marauder, who has abandoned the Consensus to pursue his mad vision. Finally, Nephandi reject Ascension completely. Their Descent reminds characters that awareness of the truth still requires them to make a choice: to devote themselves to their path or surrender and Fall.

Storytellers who want to use mages as antagonists should remember that every Awakened antagonist the cabal meets is a human being who Awakened to the truth about reality. Each, in his own way, has an urge to become something greater than he is; the force of his passion is his Resonance.

To understand the relationship between the player characters' cabal and the other mages of the World of Darkness, some context is required: a little straight talk about what mages were doing, what they are doing now — and what the future may hold.

THE WAR THAT WAS

The Traditions had a dream of unity in the face of the Technocracy, where they would gather the strength to return their own paradigms to preeminence. This was the old Ascension War, predicated on a vivid, personal approach to reality that would eventually cleanse the modern world of hollow, mechanistic routine. Sleepers would Awaken — even Ascend when they were offered the chance at an exhilarating life that was beholden only to their own discipline. Of course, the mages of the Traditions would be there, ready to teach the newly Awakened how to discipline themselves. That wasn't questioned, at least in the presence of the Ascension War's generals and propagandists. They were busy attempting to forge the Council into a single faction, untroubled by internal schisms, bound by a common metaphysic and mighty enough to challenge the Union on its own terms. Unity was the ideal, though the conditions under which it might be achieved were, in the end, never determined.

This is the war that failed.

The Technocracy drifted far from its original ideals, but its methods remained the most effective. They shared their tools. They didn't ask for discipline from the Masses. They offered humanity health, peace, wealth and entertainment and asked for nothing but the privilege to continue to do so. They certainly never asked the Sleepers to fend for themselves, to discipline themselves or to think for themselves. In fact, by the end of the 19th century, they counted on it. As long as the technology, economy and governments that Sleepers produced cleaved closely to their Technocratic antecedents (or at least paid a crippling tribute), Ascension would gradually manifest in the elimination of human need and pain — a palpable transcendence, no longer coupled to subjectivity and mysticism.

Aside from a few indoctrinated experts, humanity would have no need to do anything at all.

Marauders and Nephandi skirted the boundaries of the struggle. The Mad Ones exemplified freedom without responsibility, circumventing Paradox to bring waking dreams into the field of the Ascension War. The Nephandi released occult terror onto the world, took their bounty of souls and Avatars and waited. Standing outside the war for reality, they could see that the center could not hold. It didn't.

This was the Reckoning.

WHAT WAS THE ASCENSION WAR?

When the Council of Nine united to stand against the Order of Reason, they developed a strategy designed to deny their enemies resources on all fronts. Despite a growing knowledge of the importance of the Consensus, the old Council never matched the Order of Reason's appeal with Sleepers — not could they. Early Technocrats spread their ideology with their gifts. By contrast, mystic mages had little to offer except for abstractions such as "righteousness," "inner peace" or, rarely, "freedom."

Hamstrung by this failure, the Nine Traditions concentrated on the areas where they could make a difference. The Traditions could decisively liberate Nodes and Umbral strongholds because the Umbra represented ground upon which they had an equal advantage. They could destroy advanced Technocracy projects because they could be isolated from the pervasive presence of the Union.

This doesn't mean that the Traditions never attempted to directly speak to the Sleepers or that the Masters were entirely unaware of the problem. The Union's grip on modern life was so tight that the Council was loath to devote resources to propaganda or educational initiatives without demonstrable results. Military victories had an unambiguous quality: Technocrats were dead or denied resources. Hearts-and-minds campaigns were more nebulous and harder to justify.

Finally, the Technocracy wasn't just an ideological foe. All mages suffered at the hands of the Union. The Technocracy that benignly researched cures for cancer today tortured, murdered and brainwashed mages throughout its entire history. Revenge, or at least a passion for justice, figured much higher in the Ascension War than many modern mages care to admit.

THE PHOENIX AND THE SPHINX

Demons rose from an ancient slumber. The Technocracy responded against the most obvious of these with their full might: weapons designed to obliterate their targets in every dimension. The energies released by the conflict combined with the power that lashed from faltering Horizon and Doissetep's remnants, as well as the subtler magic of ancient prophecies and cosmic imbalance. The result was the Avatar Storm, the flight of many Masters into hermitage and the end of the old Ascension War.

Mages on all sides of the conflict found these events disturbing but also fascinating. The mysteries of reality were always something that existed outside of reality, such as the bizarre natives of the Deep Umbra. The Avatar Storm brought the mystery home. Mages who were set in their ways rejected solipsism in the face of a universe that, despite the power of the Spheres, didn't behave according to their expectations.

Long practiced by all Traditions, technomagic rose from being a marginal discipline to taking its place beside the ancient, archetypal occult methods that the Traditions had favored for centuries. In the Technocracy, field operatives and scientists began to doubt a mission that supported science but opposed the freedom to choose one's beliefs. After all, if science is the best path, couldn't the Masses be relied upon to choose it without being coerced? If not, didn't that make the Technocracy's goal of liberating the Sleepers a lie?

What appeared to be a disaster has actually been a rebirth for many mages, but it hasn't resolved the old problems that led to the Ascension War. The Sleepers refuse to take hold of their own destinies. Magic has been reduced to the comforting lies of popular horoscopes and self-aggrandizing amateur occultists. Faith is suborned into a weapon for greed and discrimination. Finally, even Reason falters, as scientific efforts abandon pure discovery to search for the next marketable luxury, novelty or managerial tool.

Some Awakened embrace the trend as the safest path for humanity. A few assert that Sleepers never *deserved* Ascension — or that those who did Awakened. The dangerous secrets of magic and science aren't for those unable to reach out and claim them. Far better then to seek one's own Ascension than to fight for those who are so obviously unwilling to seek their own enlightenment.

New idealists won't stand for it. They've risen from the ashes of the Ascension War refreshed, ready to take on the enemies of Ascension. In some cases, they've



rebelled against their former Masters. In others, the Masters themselves have taken up the reigns of the new struggle, free at last to promote Ascension as they see fit. Instead of striving for unity in the face of an enemy, they strive for liberty: the freedom to believe what you wish, to do as you wish and to hound your dreams to the gates of Ascension.

THE TECHNOCRACY

The new order promoted by the Technocratic Union has to come to pass, but at a terrible price. The world has been pacified, but its spirit lies on the brink of destruction. The flaw in the Technocracy's concept of Ascension has always been that it could be something delivered to a passive audience instead of taught to an active mind. Once this was a minority opinion among the Order of Reason, often criticized for being so obviously self-serving. Nonetheless, the Order of Reason could always reassure itself that it was providing humanity with the best tools possible to ensure its safety and that it was doing the right thing in punishing mages who had, for generations, turned their back on humanity's suffering. Providing comfort and security is still at the core of the Technocracy's beliefs, but the desire to control reality has long since overshadowed the desire to inspire wonder and spur Enlightenment.

Since the Reckoning (and, in truth, throughout **Mage: The Ascension's** in-game history), it's important to distinguish the Technocracy from individual Technocrats — but not to discount the responsibility the latter have for the actions of the former. Otherwise, Storytellers run the risk of simplifying the role of the Union in the game. To make a conflict with the Technocracy memorable, it's important to create antagonists with coherent ideals, especially since this underscores the questionable morality of the Technocracy's actions.

FRONT-LINE OPERATIVES

Low-level Technocrats (including the majority of player characters) generally believe that the Union has helped guide humanity to safety despite the encroaching threat of the supernatural. They work to keep the Time Table running by researching new ways to preserve human health and safety, pushing to make these innovations acceptable to the Masses and disrupting any mystic competition or threat to security.

Tradition mages are either pitied because they rely on dead-end, dangerous methods to express their inner Genius, or despised because they use obscure psionic powers, luck and deception to lead Sleepers away from material progress. Technocrats are highly motivated

when it comes to disrupting the Traditions' attempts to influence the Consensus, since unpredictability is a threat to the perfection they believe lies at the Time Table's conclusion.

Agents also understand that they belong to a global conspiracy that must sometimes use underhanded means to ensure the safety of the Masses. Technocrats perform these duties with secret pride — to a point.

A time comes to many agents when they must decide whether or not the measures needed to keep the Technocracy functioning are consistent with their individual ethics and hopes for humanity. It might occur when they send a superstitionist to Room 101 for conditioning or when they are ordered to perform dangerous experiments on human subjects. It might occur when they are ordered to destroy Enlightened Science that develops outside of the Union's aegis or silence a Sleeper with popular antiscientific ideas. Since the Reckoning, many Technocrats have used their new freedom to reform the Technocracy, but they must make other moral compromises along the way, diluting their idealism into just another recommendation to be filed along with the rest.

Inevitably, they face Control.

AGAINST CONTROL

Control refers to three things. First, it refers to the true ideology of the Technocracy. The Union may be committed to humanity's security, but it is just as devoted to perpetuating its own power structure. Indeed, they are rarely counted as separate objectives. The Technocracy's interests are humanity's interests. Were it to lose its position of preeminence, the Masses might blunder into devastation.

Control is also the psychic Construct of Technocratic authority. All agents feel it to an extent. When they file a report, when they receive an order from above or when they doubt that their superiors would approve of their actions, they sense it at their backs: the knowledge that they could be observed, noted and punished. When Control manifests, agents disappear in internal purges or are commanded to perform obscure assassinations or pursue strange lines of research. Inscrutable orders appear at Constructs around the world.

Finally, Control consists of senior Technocrats who have graduated to the top of the pyramid of authority. They are permitted to see large portions of the Time Table, command vast resources and, importantly, are rewarded with more freedom than the front line. Graduation to Control usually comes with the realization that reality is mutable, that their ruling

TECHNOCRATS AS ANTAGONISTS

Despite the end of the old Ascension War, Tradition mages have plenty of chances to fight Technocratic amalgams.

First of all, many amalgams do, regardless of their own beliefs, capture, spy upon and kill mages under orders from Control. They also perform unethical experiments, silence social dissidents and tamper with the freedom of the media. The irony is that the agents' own convictions are being twisted as they do what they do for the "greater good" that Control is assumed to represent. Furthermore, not all amalgams silently disapprove of what they must do. For every amalgam that is in conflict over its assignments, at least one thinks nothing of doing what it's told.

The **Guide to the Technocracy** discusses how Technocrats deal with other mages. Usually, the severity of the response is directly linked to the mage's potential threat and her potential influence on the Masses. The mage need not have opposed the Technocracy previously to be the subject of scrutiny, capture or assassination, though doing so makes it much more likely. Because the Pogrom has been relaxed, these missions are resolved on a case-by-case basis and not as a way to uncover and destroy as many Reality Deviants as possible.

Technocrats are also often at odds with Control. They may have moral qualms or may simply wish to unseat their masters. Playing renegade Technocrats can be a refreshing change of pace, since it allows the players to assert more control over their characters' decisions while maintaining the science and espionage that makes Technocrats fun to play. Reforming the Technocracy from within is also a worthwhile goal for a player character amalgam, but such characters walk a razor's edge. Will they be considered traitors? Will they follow an immoral order to prove their loyalty? Stymied from within, reform-minded Technocrats may look to mages outside the Union to do their work for them.

paradigm gives their methods efficacy. Ruling Technocrats realize how precarious their positions are, so act ruthlessly to maintain them.

By and large, Control does *not* value individual freedom. It does not believe that humanity has the right to choose its own destiny.

That is where the Technocracy fails.

TECHNOCRACY OVER SCIENCE

The Technocracy maintains its image among its agents by presenting itself as science's advocate. Internally, Technocrats describe themselves as beleaguered scientists who must, regrettably, use underhanded methods to promote the cause of reason in the world.

In fact, the Technocracy exists to promote its own vision of progress over any abstract search for knowledge, thus maintaining its influence over the Masses. This is why Control suppresses the truth about the Consensus among its own agents. Submitting magic to objective study would both degrade the authority of Enlightened Science and threaten the monopoly that Control holds over the Order of Reason's old occult techniques.

Rather than allowing Sleepers to choose for themselves, it crushes competing paradigms that grow too influential, including independent scientific discoveries, alternative methods of government and radical economic theories. Many of its social and economic technologies aren't based on scientific principles at all but on premises it itself created to propagate its methods of control.

It's important for Storytellers to distinguish between the scientific outlook and Technocracy ideology, even if actual Technocrats consider them to be one and the same. Science holds itself up for scrutiny and criticism. The Technocracy does not.

AGAINST THE TECHNOCRACY

Not every Tradition mage has abandoned the fight against the Technocracy. Your players' cabal doesn't have to, either.

The one major change that has come about because of the Reckoning is that the Traditions no longer define themselves as the inheritors of ancient or marginal beliefs, united in defense of the Technocracy. After all, they never were able to unite; the mythic Tenth Seat of Concordia may well have been a curse, as it drove mages to fight all the harder for a single, monolithic magical society, despite the distinctive qualities every Tradition — and every mage — had to offer.

By defining themselves as the Technocracy's opposition, the Council of Nine also fell into an anachronistic position that mistakenly set them "against science" in the minds of both younger mages (who hated them for it) and many of the older Masters (who supported it). The introduction of the Virtual Adepts and the Sons of

Ether gradually eroded this concept, as did the rise of technomagic among the mystic Traditions. Ironically, many mages believed this position because they unwittingly accepted Technocracy propaganda. The Union is the defender of science and the Traditions stand against them, ergo the Council opposes science.

The fall of Concordia removed the antiscientific influence of certain Masters and gave younger mages the freedom to bring technomagic into the foreground — and to question the assumption that the Technocracy is the sole heir of the scientific method.

Now that the science-versus-magic fallacy has finally been put to rest, mages see themselves as proponents of ideas that can exist alongside science and complement it, by giving the lives of Sleepers meaning outside of Technocratic regimentation. The typical modern Traditionalist believes that humanity can live with tools *and* occult discipline — but her Technocrat counterpart doesn't.

This is what drives conflict between the Traditions and the Technocracy — not the false struggle between science and magic, but something more fundamental: liberty versus control. Instead of an unlikely mystical unity, new Tradition mages celebrate the right diversity. Some mages are satisfied with the freedom they already have and pursue their own studies in secret. Others renew the fight with the Technocracy, hoping to wrest humanity from apathy by providing a mystical option to the Sleepers.

THE NEPHANDI

Servants of the Outer Darkness, sages of Descent — the Nephandi have earned these titles and more. While the Technocracy represents the way in which the drive to Ascension can be subverted, the Nephandi represent the choice to reject Ascension — and worse, oppose it. This is one of the reasons the Nephandi are constant enemies of the Awakened. Other Infernalists may go into corruption believing that they've found a shortcut to enlightenment, but once a Nephandus-to-be enters the Caul, she makes a conscious choice to serve a degrading lie rather than the transcendent truth. Unless she was born Widderslaite, the mage likely rejects the pleading of her own Avatar as well.

It seems like a ridiculous, *stupid* choice to Fall. By itself, the transformation of the Caul offers no additional power. Nephandi usually leave Investments and infernal sorcery to other Infernalists. They refuse to wear such obvious chains; they don't become what they are due to treachery and elaborate contracts. Instead

WAR AND PARADIGM

The struggle to liberate reality isn't a formal one. The Technocracy hasn't restarted the Pogrom; no Masters direct the vast mystical resources of a global occult conspiracy to back Awakened freedom fighters. Instead, mages act on their own initiatives. Allied cabals share techniques and success stories in meetings that owe as much to chance as premeditation.

In early 2002, this begins to change. Mysterious communiqués spread to mages around the globe. Carrying the mark of the Sphinx, these transmissions praise fighting cabals for their actions, warn readers about Technocracy plots — and criticize mages who refuse to take part. The authors are unknown, though they go by the *nom de plume* of *The Rogue Council*.

As described in the transmissions, these skirmishes take several forms, including:

Propaganda: A cabal and a Technocracy amalgam fight for the attention of local Sleepers over a political or scientific issue. Examples include laws restricting religious freedom, how the work of a local faith healer is reported, and the undue influence a Technocracy-influenced think tank has on society. The Technocracy uses its media influence to try to suppress dissent; the cabal responds by organizing protests, finding evidence too decisive to ignore or using alternative media to disseminate the truth.

Surveillance: Cabals may turn the tables on the Technocracy by spying on them, hoping to learn about their plans and operations. If the Union finds out, it may respond with disinformation, countersurveillance or even violence.

Violence: When a cabal discovers a threat to Ascension or the survival of the Traditions, or even a notorious Technocracy killer or mindbender, it takes direct action. Sleepers in the line of fire stand an excellent chance of being killed, but the cabal may feel it's warranted or might not care, reasoning that the proles are willing tools of the enemy. Aside from the risks of a sabotage or assassination mission, the cabal has to find a way to hide from the Technocracy's formidable intelligence network.

they adopt the Nephandic philosophy: a lie that, in the end, they must use the Cauls to justify.

INFERNALISTS, NEPHANDI, DEITIONOLOGISTS AND EVIL MAGES

Evil comes in many varieties. Not all evil mages are Nephandi or even Infernalists, though apart from these two types the definition of “evil” becomes more subjective. Other mages study and command dark forces as tools for self-discipline or even to counter Infernalists.

Infernalists are mages (as well as Sleepers and other supernatural creatures) who serve an evil supernatural power. Infernalists serve their masters according to a pact that almost always involves bartering part or all of their souls. In return they receive mundane and supernatural gifts. Most contracts with a dark power end very badly for the Infernalists. The Wu-Keng (see **Dragons of the East**) are Infernalists.

Nephandi also serve malevolent masters but prove themselves by entering the Cauls: chambers that tear apart the mage’s mind, body and Avatar, then reassemble them. The Avatar is “inverted” by the process; it seek Descent, not Ascension, and draws power from the Mythic Threads of Qlippothic antireality. If killed, the Nephandus’ Avatar reincarnates with a Widderslaite, a mage who has been corrupted from birth by the Avatar’s influence.

Demonologists are mages who study, summon, bind and command evil supernatural creatures. These demons are usually corrupt Primordial spirits, Astral archetypes of human sin or ghosts that have turned themselves into evil spirits. The Order of Hermes and the Akashic Wu Lung are notable demonologists. A few of these experts claim that such spirits are but reflections of “true” demons, but that as shadows of a primal principle they merit study. Many demonologists have a certain moral flexibility, but few of them actively seek to harm humanity. Nevertheless, demonologists inevitably risk summoning a spirit they can’t banish or making a deal that risks themselves or others.

Other mages may commit grave sins against every moral code imaginable without ever going to the Cauls or serving supernatural evil. Such mages might be deranged, consumed with Quiet or simply too ambitious to let moral choices stand in their way. Voormas, Master of Helekar is guilty of horrific crimes but has never met an Infernal power on anything but equal terms.

For more information, see **The Book of Madness**.

DAITINED LIES

As a group, the Nephandi are likely to give new prospects a “push.” Elaborate promises of power and complicated Faustian legalese are saved for the unAwakened rubes who actually fall for that kind of thing. Instead, the Fallen simply inflict misery upon a target. They torture him, ruin his social life, hurt the people he loves — whatever will cause the deepest wound, the most terror or the fiercest anger. In some cases, this is all it takes to gain a convert; the victim simply surrenders to the Cauls. Nephandi use the slang term *TorK* (“Turn or Kill”) to describe these relatively simple conversions.

If the quarry is more talented, they provide comfort after the agony. They introduce the philosophy of Descent to the target as a way to deal with the trauma he’s just experienced. Sometimes the Nephandi create elaborate scenarios where the mark can use his new, dark knowledge to prevail. Ensorcelled books (such as the *Malleus Neffandorum*), seduction and material rewards reinforce his commitment to Nephandi ideals.

The Nephandi philosophy has a simple premise: “Glorify the Strong. Devour the Weak.” This is subtly expressed at first; texts exalt selfishness and declare that moral qualms are actually what bar the mage from further mastery of his Arts. Compassion is conditioning imposed by Sleepers and fearful mages who would erect psychic barriers between the mage and his Avatar. The mage learns magical techniques that teach him to destroy his own moral limitations through Mind effects or vile foci.

MAGICAL LURES

Nephandi literature includes remarkably effective magic techniques that “prove” to a dabbler that Nephandic magic is superior. Spirit magic is especially powerful, because the rotes notify the attending entity that the summoner is being duped. The evil spirit does its part, executing the summoner’s commands swiftly and efficiently and covering for mistakes that would normally entitle the entity to torture him. Mind/Prime effects temporarily grant (and conceal) Qlippothic Resonance to the caster, making Nephandic magic easier to cast.

Of course, Nephandi can mark failed prospects in such a way that their magic stops working properly. In this case, summoned demons tear through the fake wards and other magic fails, so that the caster meets a very unfortunate end.

When the mage strays from his explorations of Descent he is punished, though the Nephandi ensure that this is never linked to them. Over time, he is introduced to initiated Fallen, who instruct him in the final secrets — including the “fact” that the structure of his Avatar will ultimately limit his potential in the dark Arts. Fortunately, his benefactors can solve this problem with the Cauls. By this point, the mage is consumed with a desire to learn the final secrets of black magic. The Nephandi’s masters are described as fellow travelers along the dark path. Deformed, Investment-ridden Infernalists may even be trotted out as examples of a path the mage was wise enough to avoid. After all, he hasn’t sold his soul!

THE TRUTH

In fact, the Nephandi “philosophy” means nothing compared to the Cauls. After the excruciating rite, Nephandi often retain the intellectual trappings that

brought them into darkness, but they know that their real purpose is to serve their masters. Abandoning compassion and empathy only served to prepare them for the Dark Lords. It granted no power except through them. Still, initiated Nephandi have mastered the doctrine; they are all too willing to use it on the next batch of converts.

Aside from the business of damning souls and Avatars, Nephandi serve their masters with every iota of their being. Their Avatars seek Descent, so they have no inner guide to appeal to. One part of their duties involves attending to their master’s ritual needs. These consist of all types of sacrifice and just about any humiliating, tortuous psychopathic act that exists, adjusted to the tastes of the ruling entity and the Fallen One’s personal preferences.

The rest of a Nephandus’ life involves seeking Descent: Ascension’s dark twin. Unlike other mages, Nephandi don’t have to struggle between their thirst for

ROLEPLAYING CORRUPTION

Temptation is one of the hardest things to roleplay. Out-of-game knowledge may creep in, forcing the player either to resist the lure with fatuous ease or to fall for it in a forced fashion to keep up the facade of “good roleplaying.” Infernal or Nephandic temptation is especially difficult, since Judeo-Christian culture and countless horror films and short stories have taught us that absolutely no good can come of dealing with the devil, ever (which is probably, all things considered, pretty fortunate). Players can never suffer the iniquities that their characters do, so aren’t as physically and emotionally exhausted (or as viscerally tempted) as a Nephandi mark. As a side effect of this, Storyteller characters who Fall aren’t very compelling either, since the player knows, in his heart of hearts, that it would never happen to *his* character.

Without an effective portrayal of corruption, the Nephandi are just a bunch of cultists with wacky spells. They aren’t worth using in a chronicle unless you, the Storyteller, can get maximum impact out of them. Here are some tips on using the Nephandi as tempters:

Offer real power, when it’s needed. If your player needs prompting, reward the character with meaningful power in the form of Traits, Backgrounds, Spheres — even bonus Arete, for a time — on every occasion he responds positively to temptation. This represents the fleeting benefits of corruption while

providing a palpable motivation to do it again. Make the offer when the character is in a real fix to encourage an impulsive decision.

Use demons sparingly. We all know that horned, pitchfork-bearing devils (and variations, such as tentacled, techno-organic horrors) are representatives of evil and so do the characters. Avoid using traditionally evil imagery until the character is about to enter the Cauls (by which point he won’t likely care). This keeps your player from instinctively recoiling from the offer.

Approach the player. If your group’s play style supports it, approach a player, explain that you want to use Nephandi in the game and ask her if she wouldn’t mind having her character Fall or skirt damnation. In this case, the player is giving up some spontaneous character portrayal to enliven the group’s game, but playing an assigned part can have its own rewards.

Systems. You can always resort to game systems to guide character portrayal. You might require a Willpower roll at dramatic points in the story. For cases of mundane seduction and intimidation you can use the systems for Social interaction listed in **Mage: The Ascension** pp. 226–228. Note that these systems should guide roleplaying, not reduce it to a set of robotic responses. Storyteller narration like, “So you say yes to his offer, go home with him and read about demons,” is the wrong way to do it.

THE ONYX MIRROR

The Nephandi don't serve a **Mage** game by being generic cultists or even conventional Infernalists. What makes them horrific is the way they twist all of the themes of the game to their opposites. A Nephandus is on a quest for enlightenment just as serious as any mage's. Nephandi curse themselves for their weaknesses, worry about key omens and symbols in their Seekings and struggle with the urges of their Avatars. Most Nephandi became what they are because they were looking for a higher truth. They never stop looking, either.

Storytellers should play up these parallels. Nephandi have to be twice as cautious about promoting their own paradigms, so their own revolt against the Consensus is often so subtle that, on the surface, it may appear to be a common cause with a Traditionalist. A Nephandus and Tradition mage may both want to free the media from Tech-

nocratic influence. The difference is that the Nephandus will use this freedom to spread hatred, either for its own sake or to provoke a repressive response that breeds oppression. Like the Technocracy, the Nephandi make a habit of surrounding themselves with Sleepers who are unaware of their own allegiance. Only a minority of these may be actual cultists. They may be managed by a bumpkin Infernalist who's satisfied with his static place in the Path of Descent rather than by the Nephandus himself.

One technique you can use to portray Nephandi effectively is to model their behavior on players' characters. Make their tactics for avoiding danger and seeking enlightenment into the antagonist's own, modifying them to include the drive to Descent. If the players realize what you've been doing it can force them to take a long, hard look at their own characters' actions.



power and spiritual enlightenment. In Descent, the two go hand in hand. They pursue their inner visions with zeal; their twisted Avatars take them on hellish Seekings. As the dark mirror of the Awakened, they hold ideals of individual and mass Descent. Individual Descent is achieved by serving the Nephandi's masters, gradually destroying one's sense of self to achieve a more perfect union with Oblivion.

Mass Descent is nothing less than the desecration and destruction of the Tellurian, but such an ambitious goal is pursued slowly. Following the path of least resistance, Nephandi take advantage of nihilistic trends in culture, politics and technology. Dramatic plans are symptoms of egotism, the one vice the Nephandi rebuke. It's far better to let Sleeper and supernatural dupes guide the way to their own end. The Fallen engineer the Consensus using the same careful techniques as the Technocracy and the Traditions, but toward a nihilistic paradigm.

THE MARAUDERS

Marauders are the Dynamic ideal taken to excess. The Mad Ones indulge their own paradigms to the point of denying the rest of reality.

They embody an important lesson for all Awakened: Lose touch with the Consensus and lose the chance at Ascension. Although the Marauders are impressive wizards or mad scientists, they can never learn or grow because their solipsism prevents them from ever understanding anything outside of their own deranged paradigms.

In some ways, Marauders are caricatures of mages who have very rigid paradigms, especially those who refuse to acknowledge any similarities between their beliefs and those of their colleagues. **Mage** games often suffer from dogmatic approaches to paradigm. Although there are valid reasons to play a magical chauvinist, players often make the mistake of assuming that this is the most authentic way to play an Awakened character.

It is true that most mages believe that their personal paradigms are the most valid way for them to understand and change the Tapestry, but they're perceptive, inquisitive people as well. They can understand that certain mystical principles seem to be true for many different Traditions, Crafts and Conventions. If this wasn't true, the Nine Spheres never would have come into being; mages would have no way to cooperate. The Marauders have lost the ability to learn from other mages, from the Consensus and from the mysteries of the world.

THE QUIET FORTRESS

Instead of directing their creativity outward to encompass as much of reality as they can, Marauders look inward. Their beliefs become more and more convoluted. As their Quiet intensifies they pull Mythic Threads into themselves, creating a chaotic mélange of occult theory, esoteric science, personal prejudice and sheer delusion. Like any willfully blind mage, they lose the ability to learn and grow; things that inspire Seekings in other mages are recreated in the Mad One's image and shorn of their unique qualities.

How is it, then, that Marauders can cooperate? Why do they attack Stasis with such fervor? Paradoxically, the reason is that they're wrong about reality. There is a common ground of existence outside of their own Quiet, which includes the Consensus and the Metaphysic Trinity. Marauders drift toward the Dynamic aspect of the threefold cycle as their madness intensifies. Some mages believe that Dynamism (or its Earthly aspect) is sentient and pulls Marauders in to further its own bizarre agendas, but this has never been proven.

Dynamism is the part of the Metaphysic Trinity that governs creative change. It is possibility without structure or end. By retreating into Quiet, Marauders generate a sympathetic bond with its cosmic Resonance. Psychologically, this manifests as a phobia or hatred for the signs of exterior reality that manage to intrude into one's personal universe. Marauders act upon the Dynamic urge by attacking the underpinnings of the Consensus with whatever tools their warped psyches allow.

Multiple Marauders can cooperate to further the Dynamic cause, as each of them instinctively tries to erode reality's consensual and objective laws. Ironically, Quiet casts a Marauder's comrades as fellow players in its own mad scheme; the medium of chaos translates one Mad One's communication with another. Each Marauder in the gang (sometimes called a *Conflux*) perceives her mission differently, but each plots against the same exterior targets.

PLAYING WITH MADNESS

As antagonists, Marauders have the advantage of unpredictability, which allows Storytellers to use them with more regard for the chronicle's needs than for consistency. Marauder magic and motivations can change several times per story or even per scene.

This is easy to abuse. First of all, Marauders aren't given resistance to Paradox and rule-bending Spheres so that the Storyteller can dominate the players. Use

MAD, NOT WACKY

It's easy to cast Marauders as comic relief, but to limit them to that role would be to underplay their usefulness in a **Mage** chronicle. There's nothing wrong with humor, but don't overuse it unless you want to change the game's core themes significantly.

The first step to creating a memorable Marauder is to create a Quiet that has its own internal logic and dramatic importance. One way is to take a common mystical or scientific paradigm and twist it to the point where it represents a psychotic break from reality. This allows player characters to reason out the Mad One's delusions and provides pathos by showing what happens when a mage *really* gets into his paradigm. Don't detail every single facet of the Quiet; leave yourself room to let the Marauder do something totally enigmatic if the story demands it.

For example, Hermetic mages often believe that cosmic forces are the manifestations of angels or gods; each celestial power must be called upon by its own esoteric names and symbols. To turn this belief into a Marauder Quiet, take it to its extremes. To your Marauder, angels and gods physically manifest everywhere, barely contained by omnipresent sigils and True Names that are eternally whispered by the world's winds. To alter reality (from its already Quiet-wracked state!) the Mad One doesn't create symbols but erases them, freeing supernatural powers from their wards. Of course, the Marauder may decide that a train full of Sleepers is a demon bound to the tracks or that the Tokyo Stock Exchange's activity is a magical chant that binds Angels of Justice that he's out to free....

a Mad One as a *deus ex machina* only when you absolutely have no other alternative. If the Marauder is the characters' enemy, don't make her totally baffling and unbeatable. Otherwise, you aren't so much sharing a story as telling it, which undermines the entire point of roleplaying. Generally, unbeatable or unfathomable Marauders should be encountered only as a consequence of the characters' choices. Any danger should be foreshadowed, and other options should exist.

In recurring roles, Marauders make excellent "wild cards": characters who alternately assist and endanger

the player cabal. In such cases, you should make the Mad One somewhat consistent so that the players can actually care about the interloper. Otherwise, it becomes too obvious that *you* are messing with the characters' lives as a Storyteller rather than through your nonplayer character.

For powerful Marauders, you can deflect player frustrations over an "unbeatable" antagonist by shifting attention to the environment the Mad One brings with her. When the Howling Bearwalker strides into the characters' city, they don't have to worry about her as much as the howling arctic blizzard and intelligent, vicious cave bears that surround her. The players feel a real sense of reward by defeating the Marauder's Quiet realm, while you smartly emphasize the Mad One's power and role — as a force of nature, not a magical sparring partner.

THE TRADITIONS

The Traditions are on the verge of renewal. The last decade has been a difficult one, marked by death and loss, but the survivors are stronger for it. This is a vital thing to remember about the Council's heirs. They are competent and driven and have more freedom to pursue their own goals than they have in decades — perhaps centuries.

Still, the new era presents its own challenges. In the shadowed corners of Earth and the Umbra, many (though not all) Masters live in exile. Sometimes they do so because of the risk of the Avatar Storm. Others choose solitude because they feel that the younger generation can't safely use the dangerous knowledge that they preserve. This isn't limited to mystic Traditions, either. Virtual Adepts must deal with a crop of apprentices that are split between reckless "l33t h@x0rs" and corporate information specialists, neither of whom conform to the original ideals of the Tradition. Sons of Ether face similar problems relating to the radical physicists, technomystics and postmodern social scientists who contribute radical new ideas without necessarily conforming to the Tradition's ethos.

Younger mages have stepped up to lead the Traditions and have done a remarkably competent job. The new generation espouses a straightforward approach, acknowledging differences among their ranks that the Council had largely downplayed in the quest for unity. Technomagic is no longer relegated to the backwater of magical theory. Even though there have always been technomagical Traditionalists, the general acceptance

of mystical technomagic (as opposed to Etherite and Virtual Adept “mystical science”) has occurred only in the last few years.

Individual factions, cabals and sects were once ignored for the Council’s sake. Senior mages feared that the rich mélange of cultural fraternities, occult specialties and prestigious cabals would undermine the Traditions’ efforts to bring Mass Ascension. Instead, the unacknowledged sects became entangled in secret politicking and infighting as each competed to become the sole “face” of its Tradition on the Council of Nine.

Touched off by the rumored resurrection of Heyl Teonim, infighting between the Primi of Houses Janissary and Flambeau led to the Destruction of Doissetep. To keep their secrets, the Euthanatos allowed the Jhor-mad Consanguinity of Eternal Joy to savage the Sleeping and Awakened world. These were severe object lessons — the diversity of the Traditions could not be denied.

DIVERSITY IS STRENGTH

After the Reckoning, individual cabals began to do things differently. Faction affiliations gained new importance; mages studied the diverse secrets of their own pasts with renewed enthusiasm. Grounded by this, they reached for new magic more readily, as ancient metaphysics merged with cutting-edge technology and the aggregate philosophies of the large Traditions.

In the process, old conflicts were brought to a swift resolution. The Akashic Brotherhood and Euthanatos acknowledged the common destiny that led them to fight and in so doing found some rough reconciliation. The Death Mages began an internal purge of the Order of Hermes. Even though they’d done this before, the assault on House Janissary represented a bold experiment. For the first time, the Euthanatos revealed what they had done and the reasons for doing so. Despite the understandable anger felt by the Hermetics, other mages applaud

A NEW FIRE

Let’s face it: The Traditions have had a rough time. The fall of Concordia and Doissetep, the Avatar Storm and various internecine struggles have taken their toll on the Traditions’ collective morale. Many mages (and **Mage** players) believe that the era of the mystic has passed and that the world would be better off under the guidance of the Technocracy while each cabal carved out its own furtive niche of safety. It isn’t true.

Despite its mighty Realms and the stewardship of some of the most powerful mages ever to have lived, the Council of Nine was rotting from the inside. The Compact of Callias (a document officially sanctioning multi-Tradition cabals) was repudiated by the Council even though younger mages continued to gather across Traditional boundaries. Established chantries closed their doors to newcomers. Council attendance was spottier with each nine-year cycle. What was the use of a billion-volume occult library, Realms within Realms and peerless mentors when each Tradition, preoccupied with internal concerns, refused to take advantage of them?

It’s easy to scapegoat the Masters and Archmasters of the Council of Nine for this. The truth is that, to promote the Councils’ original mandate of unity, they were forced to tolerate circumstances that many

of them personally abhorred. They were a varied lot; incoherent idealists, scheming scholars and reluctant sages were all forced into stilted roles by the selfish ambitions of a few and the ancient mandate of the original Primi.

Now the dream of unity is gone, but so are all the baggage and shady dealing that were required to maintain its facade. The remaining Masters are, in their own way, just as liberated by the loss as younger mages. Now every Tradition is founded on the individual mage. The Awakened follow their own dreams and make the Traditions extensions of their own passions and ideals.

These are the mystics, eccentric scientists and occultists that the world needs. Not content to let their own affairs be managed by others, mages support their Traditions and the dream of the Council by choice, not inheritance. Some want to revise the Council’s mission to emphasize the search for individual Ascension. Others want to throw off Technocratic hegemony, study the wider supernatural world or explore the benefits mystic magic holds for Sleepers. In most cases, they know that survival isn’t good enough any more. It’s time to act, before the last spark of free will — of magic — is excised from the world by its too-cautious stewards.

their motives and honesty. It's a brutal first step to a new culture of Tradition mages, but perhaps a necessary one.

Paradoxically, the end result has not been to fragment the Traditions but to strengthen them. Before, each Tradition was the political face assumed by a collection of distinct factions and personalities, many of whom were ignored for the sake of the Nine. Now, Traditionalists are more apt to think that their association is a voluntary one, that they have a say in the highest levels of Tradition politics and justice.

Still, it's a raucous loyalty; factions and cabals compete for the shared resources of their Tradition, promoting initiatives from the ground up to justify their places or give their Tradition a new passion. A young mage is a powerful advocate for change, loyal to her Tradition but insistent that her own, distinct voice rise to the chorus of influence.

A THOUSAND RIVAL PASSIONS

Choosing diversity, Traditionalists must suffer local rivalries, conflicting paradigms and even internal warfare. The Protocols, ad-hoc Tribunals and Traditional custom sometimes regulate these affairs. When tempers flare, these considerations can be thrown out. Certain challenges give way to sneak attacks and mages betray each other to Technocrats, witch hunters and others.

These conflicts can start any number of ways. Disputes over resources are one of the most common reasons for strained relations. Unclaimed Nodes are rare; many places of power have either been claimed by the Technocracy or already host a cabal or chantry that's loath to share. A few seemingly deserted Nodes were once used to fuel Horizon Realms. Even though the Realms are gone, the guardians, wards and safeguards remain. The most prized Nodes contain shallows that allow easy passage into the Umbra or possess unique Resonances.

Wonders, unattached familiars, books of spells and the like are often in short supply and of uncertain ownership. The Order of Hermes was willing to attack an entire sect of vampires to feed its library. Other mages are satisfied with snagging Talismans and manuals that belong to another mage, through trade, legal wrangling or outright theft.

Orphans can set off a brushfire of rivalry. The Awakened are rare; every mage inducted into a Tradition is a vital asset, future leader and prodigal son, all rolled into one. A magical prospect is usually allowed to pick her tutor if more than one is

available, but ambitious teachers are notorious for failing to mention that other mentors are available. If the Orphan does have a choice, prospective tutors try to outbid each other, offering material incentives, swaying the results with Mind magic and so on. Some mentors opt for a more low-key approach, emphasizing their humility and attention to the pupil's needs. Sometimes they're even being sincere about it.

Paradigmatic conflict also set mages against each other. When an Akashic Brother casually mentions a Hermetic companion's true name, it may touch off an argument or duel. The Akashic thinks the true name is an amusing affectation that enshrines the false self; the Hermetic is angered and frightened that someone would reveal the mystical signature of his True Will. Some mages sabotage collective magic by insisting on elaborate rituals meant to support their rigid paradigms. Others simply lack the imagination to extend their beliefs into a greater metaphor that encompasses something outside of their practices.

Finally, will and passion go hand and hand, so it's entirely likely that some mages may just not like each other very much. Romantic rivalry has caused almost as many duels as metaphysical disputes. Different cabals may have wildly clashing political and moral ideals. Authoritarian Verbena may run afoul of a gang of anarchic Hollow Ones. Mages who deal with the Technocracy on friendly terms may be ostracized, as might cabals which rage on despite the end of the old Ascension War.

A THOUSAND DOORS TO ASCENSION

Still, diversity has proven to be the Traditions' strength. Running the gauntlet of Ascension is no mean feat; mages respect each other for the simple fact that they *earn* their gifts. They don't suffer the beneficial side effects of an ancient curse, draw upon a supernatural heritage or share in power granted from above. (Well, *most* of them don't, anyway.) They have to work for every iota of their power, from their very first Epiphany to studying the Spheres, contemplating the mysteries of their Seekings and, through it all, surviving in a world that seems to have turned its back on this selfsame discipline.

Based on that respect, Tradition mages are willing to tolerate each other. Now that so many of the old political boundaries have been smashed, they can more honestly assess one another's customs. Often, they find they have something to learn from their comrades. New theories spring up, compete and

merge. In embracing their differences, they've found that they have new magic to teach and learn.

The Traditions must deal with a certain amount of infighting to defend diversity and individual liberty, but the rewards seem to be outweighing the problems. The only question now is, what to do?

Mages happily pursue obscure magical projects, work on bettering their own corners of the world or study the Avatar Storm and the evolving Umbra. Some Traditionalists have taken the role of "living museums" and preserve the most ancient forms of their magic. This way, the fundamentals of the Arts won't be lost in an ocean of popular trends.

In the corridors of chantries around the world, Disciples debate the ultimate ethos of the Tradi-

tions. The world's becoming a more stale place. Freethinkers are pacified with stale entertainment and rebellion is mocked, defanged, repackaged and sold back to would-be dissenters. The Technocracy plies Sleepers with some material wealth and security but has effectively demonized and crushed alternatives. The world may be safer for it, but real social change and Awakening appear to be waning. Concerned mages want to remove the grip of Stasis but don't want to make the same mistakes their forebears did. Using agitprop, sabotage and occasionally outright terrorism, they band together under the sign of the Sphinx.

DARK WONDERS: THE SUPERNATURAL



Despite the intrigue and violence that course through Awakened life, a larger supernatural world beckons the curious, vengeful and desperate alike. The World of Darkness crawls with strange magic and metaphysical disharmony. Some mages are bitterly familiar with other supernatural beings. Others have no

truck with them, considering them to be unclean or beneath contempt because of the way they treat the Sleeping world.

The vast majority of mages rarely encounter other supernatural creatures unless they take it upon themselves to summon or visit them. A very few are unwitting pawns of the undead, powerful Umbrood or other more obscure beings. When mages detect the marks of servitude they give these quislings a wide berth. More cautious factions quietly arrange for the slave's death; inquisitive cabals try to draw out as much information as they can, then subtly ensure that the threat is contained. Of course, the Technocracy has its own methods for dealing with compromised agents, such as chemical lobotomy and gene therapy. In the end, the irredeemable are released from living bondage and their bodies are marked for dissection.

A minority of mages takes a more liberal view. They usually have some sort of historical bond with the supernatural world. Meritina Hermetics preserve fae magic. Rumor has it that the Dreamspeakers encounter shapeshifters more often than other mages, but the meetings have the same air of mis-

trust and hostility as they would for other Traditions. A small fraction of Awakened magi share in the heritage or gifts of other supernaturals and can use a small array of supernatural powers without the interference of Paradox. Some, like certain fae-touched magi, benefit from these powers after intense study. Others, such as the blood-drinking degenerates of House Tytalus, are more trapped than blessed by the connection.

THE OTHERS

Mage games tend to have more crossovers than many others. Some Storytellers want antagonists with well-developed backstories. Others simply want a more "rooted" conflict than **Mage's** setting appears to offer. One of the purposes of this book is to provide you with the options to customize your own games, but also with a default setting you can rely on to create and maintain stories that are about *mages* first.

SHADOW BATTLES

The supernatural protagonists of the other World of Darkness games can provide ground for conflict without letting their central themes dominate your chronicle. The easiest way is to limit conflict to materialistic struggle. Local werewolves claim a Node, perform some bizarre ritual on it and turn into its bloodthirsty guardians. Vampires are interfering with a clever Syndicate scheme to hook more people up with credit. In these cases, you don't even need to use direct conflict. Espionage, influence games and high-stakes negotiation can take up the bulk of the storyline. You can include a cathartic burst of

SUPERNATURAL TIES AND PARADOX

Various Merits (such as *Ghoul*, *Shapechanger Kin* or *Nephilim* from **Blood Treachery**, among others) represent a special tie to a class of supernatural creature. In **Mage's** cosmology, characters with these Merits represent a link between the self-contained metaphysical natures of these beings and the larger Mythic Threads that their presence weaves into the Tapestry. The gifted mage acts as an intermediary between the supernatural and its larger Resonance in the Consensus.

If the Storyteller approves, such characters can simulate the supernatural powers of these creatures with Sphere magic as if they were coincidental magic, *as long as these powers also exist in human myths and legends*. The Storyteller is the final arbiter of whether a given supernatural power is a part of the Consensus' mythology. On a botch, Paradox backlashes usually manifest as the traditional banes of these creatures and affect the mage as if she were the appropriate mythological being — regardless of whether the actual supernatural being is normally affected by them. Such powers can require Mastery of a Sphere or better; they are reserved for the highest human scientific and occult achievements.

For example, the Tytalus renegade Seth Corazon can grow fangs and claws because of his command of Life magic. He's a ghoul, and the Effect is coincidental. Botching may cause sunlight to injure him for a time or prevent him from crossing running water, however.

In addition to this optional advantage, different supernatural ties may have their own benefits and drawbacks, or the Storyteller may simply use the above system in all cases. Mix the suggestions in **Mage** with whatever you wish to use from other sourcebooks to come up with a solution that works for your game.

violence when the characters test their abilities versus the bizarre powers of their enemies without dwelling on the nature of those creatures in **Mage's** cosmology.

Taking it up a notch, you can place an artifact or event from **Mage** in the possession of other supernatural beings. It can move invisibly through their population or it can affect them in a way that's totally alien to their experience. If it has an effect, it can link the supernatu-

ral being's nature to the game's larger cosmology. A Jhor-tainted Wonder may erode its undead custodian's Humanity over time. Freely contradict canon if it suits you. If you want the shards of the Avatar Storm to embed themselves painlessly in Garou who "step sideways" regularly, do so. The shards can cause madness, transform the werewolf into a savage Sending or even contain part of an Awakened Avatar that belongs to a mage with the *Shattered Avatar* Merit. In these cases, you're using the resources of both **Mage** and the other game to enhance your story. Naturally, other supernatural creatures distrust mages and won't have the same perspective on the situation, so the cabal will have to use the right mix of diplomacy, intelligence gathering and violence to solve the mystery or claim their prize.

SECRETS OF THE SUPERNATURAL

You can let the discontinuities in the lines work for you. It's very easy to come up with solipsistic explanations for every supernatural phenomenon. On the surface, the game's metaphysics seem even to support it. There are aspects of the supernatural world that don't tidily fit into **Mage's** premises, however. Let those be mysteries that the cabal can solve, often with an eye toward defeating a supernatural menace or broadening understanding of the Tellurian.

For example, nobody really knows why vampires can use powers that neither conform to the world's vampire myths nor garner Paradox. In **Vampire**, the answer is (probably) that it's a divine curse, but in **Mage**, that isn't necessarily true. It's possible that the Curse of Caine is its own punishment or that the Resonance of vitae courses along a Mythic Thread, allowing its Quintessence (the stuff of fundamental reality) to support a wider array of effects.

You can decide on an ultimate answer for yourself. The player characters can gradually discover the truth through dedicated research and happenstance. This can result in either a radical shift in the setting ("This spell ties into the sympathetic Resonance of all vampires, everywhere. It's time to stop this plague."), an advantage in a local conflict ("With a drop of its offspring's blood, I can destroy the master vampire that's been hounding us!") or simply an answer to a nagging question, garnering social rewards ("You've proven that all undead link to a central demonic oversoul, Adeptus. A discovery like that will earn you the Master tutelage you've been looking for.").

Don't overlook the fact that you can simply change the "facts" about other supernatural creatures. Maybe werewolves really do transmit their powers through their

bite. Changelings might be fallen pagan demigods who possess the bodies of their few remaining worshipers. For a twist, supernatural beings could believe the canonical “facts” about themselves but actually have another, hidden nature that only the Awakened can really discover.

THE CONTINUUM

Beyond any inspiration to be found in the other games, **Mage** itself has a rich cosmology that isn’t always explored to its full potential. Educated mages call the mystic chain of being the *Continuum*. Mages study its patterns for insights into the nature of the Tellurian.

The inhabitants of the Continuum are uncountable. Every god, demon, nature spirit and Sending is a part of it. It appears to have an underlying structure, but every time a mage discovers an “unbreakable” rule, a new entity promptly breaks it. The Tapestry is always changing, so it’s sometimes more important to consider it in terms of its flow rather than any laws it may appear to have. In studying it, mages encounter the limits of their knowledge. When they fight a part of the Continuum, their victory rests on how well they can decipher its mysteries as well as the entity’s obvious powers.

NEVER DO THIS

Unless you have a specific reason for doing otherwise, if there’s a conflict between **Mage**’s themes and cosmology and another game’s and you run a **Mage** game, **Mage** wins. Why? Because it’s a **Mage: The Ascension** game. Favor the other game if you plan to run that game (or a crossover game where that game is preeminent) or specifically customize the setting in such a way that it won’t be a problem. If you want Paradox to be a manifestation of **Werewolf**’s Weaver, go ahead, but you’re undercutting the importance of the Consensus’ effect on Paradox.

These issues should never be resolved by looking at the books and picking at random, or by deciding to screw the players because you want to dominate their characters or you prefer the other game. If the case is the former, look at your Storytelling style and see what needs changing. If it’s the latter, run that game instead or be honest and tweak the setting so that you’re really playing “**Werewolf** with Namebreakers.” There are few things as annoying as a Storyteller using worst-case crossover rules for the sake of punishing the players. Trust us on this.

THE FIRST MYSTERY: UMBROOD AND BYGONES

Umbrood are the Tellurian’s spirits. Typically, a single spirit has many faces. Messenger Umbrood may take on the guise of Odin’s ravens when they visit a Verbena runecrafter. To a Hermetic of Chorister, the same entity is an emanation of the Ophanim, the One’s angel-chariots. The fluid appearance of Umbrood makes them hard to catalog, much less understand, though many have a “tell” that shows itself in every manifestation. Sometimes this is as subtle as its speech patterns or the demands it makes of a summoner. A few Umbrood maintain one form all the time; others can look radically different to each member of a group that meets it. Every spirit represents a particular metaphysical concept.

As antagonists, Umbrood can be extremely dangerous in their own spheres of influence, but they are limited by the very offices they hold domain over. Magical texts such as *The Solomonian Code* (see **Lost Paths: Ahl-i-Batin and Taftani**) state that no spirit can contradict its own nature. Thus, they can be thwarted or bound by manipulating the limits of what they can do or think. This means, however, that spirits are extremely cautious about sharing their secrets with mages. Some scholars believe that this is the reason they change their appearance. By appearing according to the witness’ expectations, the spirit hides its ultimate nature as best it can. Other mages believe that spirits are the remnants of the Pure Ones’ first experience of reality: the primal Consensus that all other witnesses modify. According to this theory, the Pure Ones’ initial experiences created both the Umbrood and Cosmological Constants.

No mage can reliably bargain with or bind a spirit without understanding its nature. If “killed,” a hostile Umbrood simply reforms elsewhere in the Umbra. Some spirits (typically those related to war, honor, consequences and the like) are bound not to attack the ones who defeat them, but most are not. Mages who crudely smite spirits may only delay their enemies.

Aside from the danger of the spirit returning for revenge, the chance exists that it will appeal to its superior. All known Umbrood exist in a hierarchy. In the Middle Umbra, spirits representing the Metaphysic Trinity cooperate to promote the strength of their cosmological force. Other Umbrood belong to the Court, a hierarchy that has as many faces as the spirits themselves. Mages sometimes classify these



ANGELICS, DEITONICS, CELESTINES AND GODS

At the top of the spirit hierarchy are the gods and angels — or at least, beings that look like them, act like them and are as all-powerful as one might expect. None of them can be summoned or bound by mages (though aspects of them, as powerful Umbrood in their own right, often are), but they may be called as usual. Their powers are capable of humbling any mage. Some archaic gods are, in fact, Umbrood Lords and a little more reasonable to deal with, but a mage had better do her research to find out if this is true.

Even here is an apparent hierarchy. Beings whose direct influence are largely limited to the spirit worlds are somewhat less powerful than those who represent Earthly phenomena or belief systems. Still, such shades of difference matter only to Archmasters (who might *just* stand a chance of exploiting them), philosophers and theologians.

Angelics and Demonics exist in all three of the known Umbrae. Most of the time they reside in reflections of Heaven or Hell and are evasive about the relationship between their Realms and the genuine items. They rarely speak to mortals, except to say something *extremely* important. They also receive penance and offers of service from a very few beings.

Celestines and gods represent the epitome of their spheres in influence. Hyperion is the Sun. None of them is inclined to talk to humans except through an intermediary, though some creatures (notably shapeshifters) have more personal relationships with them. A few gods were once Awakened magi. They sometimes solicit mages to follow their path. Whether they do this to absorb them into their own divinity or to groom replacements is unknown.

Storytellers should use these beings sparingly. One statement from them should be enough to influence the course of an entire chronicle. Otherwise, players are likely to become a bit blasé about their encounters with the divine — and you don't want that.

aspects of the Court as separate courts (such as the Eastern Court and the Babylonian Court).

In practical terms, this means that if a mage unduly interferes with a spirit's purpose, it can petition its superior to deal with the offender. The division between a lesser spirit and its superior is vaguely defined. An Umbrood Lord may be the aggregate of several Preceptors' metaphysical domains; a Preceptor may be the conceptual "offspring" or aspect of its Lord. Thus, powerful Umbrood often take any offense against their servants as a personal attack.

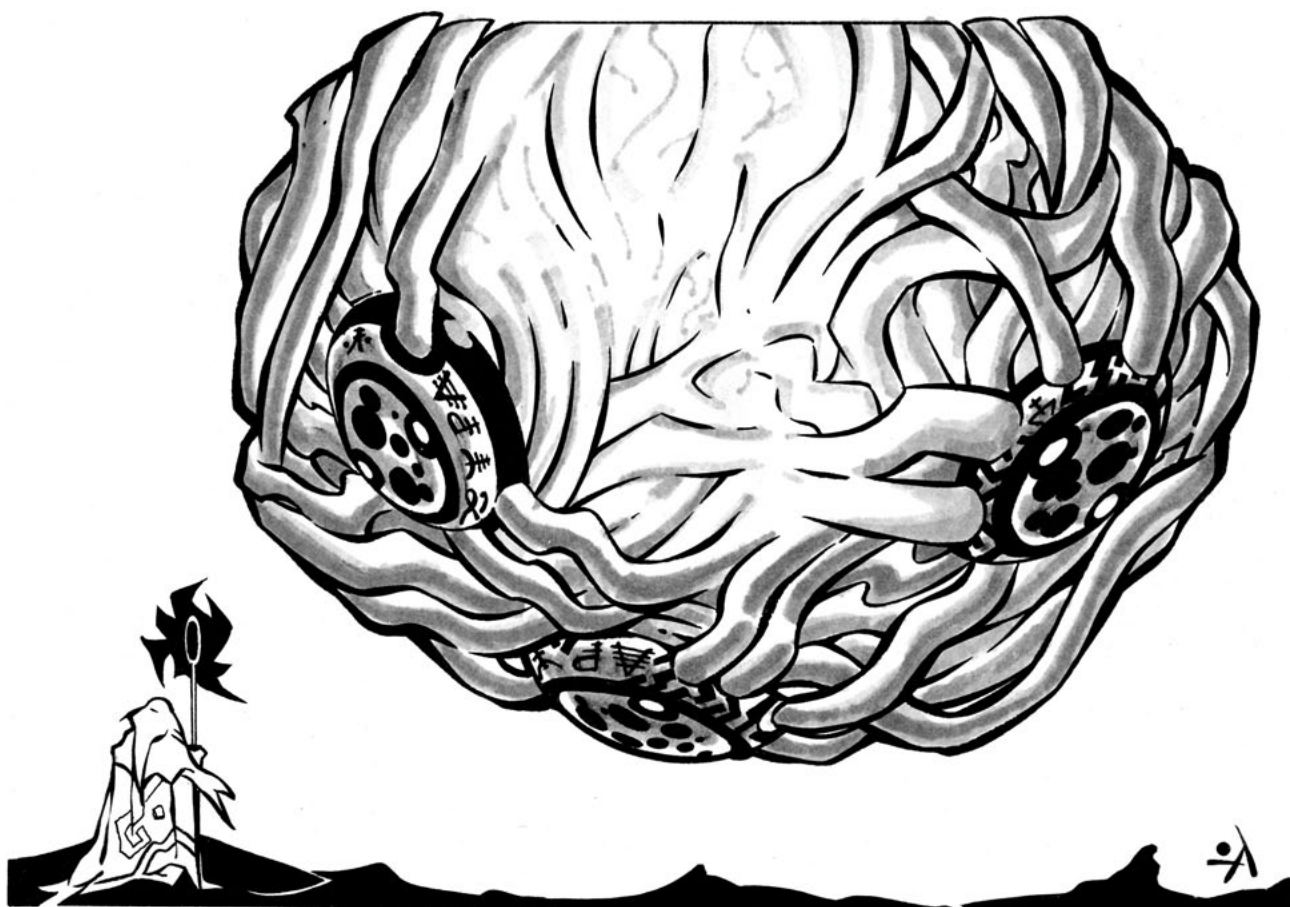
Bygones are creatures that have drifted into the conceptual realm as the Consensus rejects them. Dragons, yeti and others sometimes have more material connections with favorable local paradigms. Bygones are able to return to Earth for brief periods if they are helped across the Gauntlet and can maintain their material presence if they are regularly supplied with Quintessence. Without it, they return to the spirit world. Many Bygones are allies or members of the Court, especially if they complement an Umbrood's favored guise.

THE SECOND MYSTERY: ⊕ OUTSIDERS

In the Deep Umbra, outcasts and aliens make their homes. Even though it's hard to break the Dreamshell separating Earth's spiritual realms from the rest of the cosmos, many of these entities make the attempt. Fortunately, the most successful intruders seem to pose little threat to the world.

The *Ka Luon* or *Grays* are the best-known aliens — even Sleepers recognize them. Debate rages as to whether or not they are forced into these shapes in deference to Sleeper folklore, choose them to do so or are the inspirations for them. Adding to the confusion, Umbrood have taken Gray manifestations regularly since the 1950s. Many of these spirits perform horrible experiments on Sleepers while they slumber, visit them with messages of cosmic peace — or do both at the same time. Void Engineers use special operatives called LERMUs who look like them (and are rumored to be engineered using Gray genetic material), and Nephandi and Marauders have also taken alien form for various reasons.

The *Ka Luon* themselves don't pursue such a coherent agenda. They do occasionally kidnap



Sleepers; some of them return from the abductions with an Awakened Avatar and describe the experience as endlessly euphoric, a series of bizarre tortures or a hundred things in between. Aside from their familiar saucer-shaped craft and general appearance, no account can agree on anything consistent. Technocrats are baffled by their technology and Traditionalists have no idea whether they use technomagic or alien mysticism. Some humans seem to be able to use their devices by taking a “black box” approach, noting what works, what doesn’t and what’s dangerous.

If the Grays do use Awakened magic, they’ve never been seen to suffer Paradox. The Sons of Ether theorize that the Ka Luon’s craft generate their own paradigms. This is certainly consistent with reports of stranded Grays quickly becoming helpless, to the point of dying and dissolving.

Aside from the Ka Luon, dozens of other alien species have been recorded by the Technocracy and the Traditions. All appear to avoid the Horizon by traveling through physical space. Not all of them conform to the scientific paradigm; aliens who travel through space on the backs of weird beasts or are propelled by the power of indecipherable sigils are as often reported as those who use spacecraft.

Aside from true aliens, there are Outsiders who are exiles. Among them are the Nephandi Aswadim Archmages and the powerful demons that mages locked away with them. Some servants of Primordial Entropy also have dominions on the other side of the barrier, but a part of their Realm seeps through into Earth’s Umbrae. Fortunately, all of these beings are unable to cross the Horizon without powerful, complex sacrifices or other, as yet unknown means. Both the Traditions and the Technocracy study the Horizon for possible weaknesses and pursue cults that are devoted to bringing the Outsiders in.

THE THIRD MYSTERY: SENDINGS

Sendings (see **Mage: The Ascension**, p. 279) are the most recent Awakened entities to appear. Most began as simple Umbrood, compelled by Masters for a number of purposes. As they passed through the Avatar Storm, they merged with human Avatars. These aggregate souls form around a single archetype, then manifest according to their new identity. Sendings have appeared as Egyptian gods, demons and dead Masters; they show no signs of running out of possible identities. Some Sendings may have other origins; one that manifests as a variety of thunder gods is said to have collected around the Avatar of a

USING SENDINGS

To create a Sending, use the standard character creation rules, then adjust them for the power level you wish. A Sending always has a minimum “Arete” and Avatar of 3 and 3 ranks in the Spirit Sphere. They have no Backgrounds aside from *Avatar*, *Dream*, *Past Lives* and *Arcane*. Do not assign Merits and Flaws. Add five Traits of (Dynamic) *Storm-Tainted Resonance*.

The bodies of Sendings are Materialized constructions; they don’t take any wound penalties. All Sendings have the innate (and Paradox-free) ability to shapeshift at will, but the process takes a full turn. Sendings regenerate health levels by passing through the Avatar Storm. Roll the Sending’s “Arete” (difficulty 6) when it passes through; each success regenerates a single level of lethal or bashing damage. Sendings are ephemeral beings, so use the Spirit Sphere for Life Effects. They are, of course, never injured by the Avatar Storm.

The effects of Paradox upon a Sending are up to the Storyteller to decide, but erosion of the Sending’s Avatar and permanent health level loss are recommended penalties. They are not recommended for use as player characters.

dead Archmage. Others are recognizable as descendants of Hobgoblins that sprang from the famous Quiets of a few mages.

Sendings possess a strong sense of purpose that comes from their original function, their new Avatars and their archetype. They can use Sphere magic but don’t seem to suffer from Paradox in any fashion that mages can perceive (like Marauders, they may just experience it differently). A Sending is perfectly capable of passing for a human being if its temperament allows it to. It needs no foci, but most Sendings have an intuitive knowledge of the way Sphere magic is supposed to work. Infiltrators can be spotted for their strange personalities and the *Storm-Tainted Resonance* that surrounds them.

Sendings are relentless in pursuit of their goals. Usually, they wish to fulfill their original missions, then act according to the drives of their Avatar shards. Sendings have been known to weaken as they accomplish a goal, leading mages to speculate that the shard compelling them to act disperses. To maintain themselves, Sendings cross the Gauntlet,



collecting new shards. Sendings use Awakened magic to cross the Gauntlet (all have the equivalent of the third rank of Spirit) and can be prevented from doing so to regenerate, but only a handful of mages know enough about them to use this tactic.

Sendings are excellent repositories of occult knowledge because of the power they draw upon but also make implacable foes when thwarted. Understanding a Sending's motives is crucial if one hopes to defeat it, parley or at least stay out of its way.

THE FINAL MYSTERY: ASCENSION AND THE NATURE OF REALITY

Mages are apt to think of themselves as a fractious bunch, unable to agree among themselves about the simplest things, much less the ultimate nature of reality. Yet the Awakened do have some special knowledge of the ultimate secrets, even if they're often limited by the inadequacy of their own metaphors to express them.

The quest for truth is more than just meditation and research. It's a struggle against nature, which doesn't give up secrets easily.

The quest starts with Awakening, then the mage's first encounter with Paradox. The Consensus' punishment is a painful thing to bear. It feels like the disapproval of billions, and perhaps the disapproval of the Tellurian itself. Paradox is a difficult antagonist. It's an intensely personal and occasionally ironic backlash from a universe that uses the Consensus' remote and impersonal criteria to judge him.

For centuries, mages have searched for an answer to bridge the gap between Paradox's impersonal standards and its very intimate manifestations. Many are wont to personalize the phenomenon totally and blame themselves for every backlash. They see hubris in every magical act. Others (such as the Technocracy) treat Paradox as a mechanistic physical quirk. In both cases, the backlash tends to conform to the each mage's expectations.

Between Paradox and the nature of magical paradigms, it becomes very difficult to break out of the trap of solipsism. The mage begins to think that the only truth exists in her own theories and inventions. Nothing outside herself is truly important. Sometimes Quiet strikes, or the despondent mage Falls.

In fact, Paradox is a link between the mage and the larger world. It's a constant reminder that the Consensus — the beliefs and perhaps the spiritual condition of billions — is at the very center of her struggle. As it tightens, so does humanity's taste for wonder, innovation and diversity.

Striking a balance between magical will and the demands of the global paradigm is one of central problems a mage will encounter. She could cower and refuse to perform all but the most innocuous miracles, but in doing so she would abandon the things that make her a force for dynamic change. She could perform wild magical feats but might die or suffer in the attempt.

Essentially, she faces the same problem as billions of Sleepers who are forced to choose between painful independence and a world without aspirations, where they shuffle from day to day along the dull path of least resistance. In short, a world without magic is a world without hope.

Resolving that conflict is one of the core themes of **Mage**. It's about changing the self to change the world but always finding a balance. While immoderate magic is a sign of hubris (especially if used in a situation where a mage's ordinary talents would do the job), no magic is a sign of cowardice, unbecoming of a woman who's daring enough to create a metaphysical system out of belief, will and insight.

As a mage passes through her Seekings, her Avatar forges her into someone who can find that balance. Sometimes the solution is to push the boundaries of one facet or reality until she becomes terrible and godlike, but her vision narrows. Sometimes she rejects the path completely, dies, falls or goes mad. Sometimes she learns to sense the times when the world *needs* miracles by trusting to her intuition or an evolving moral code.

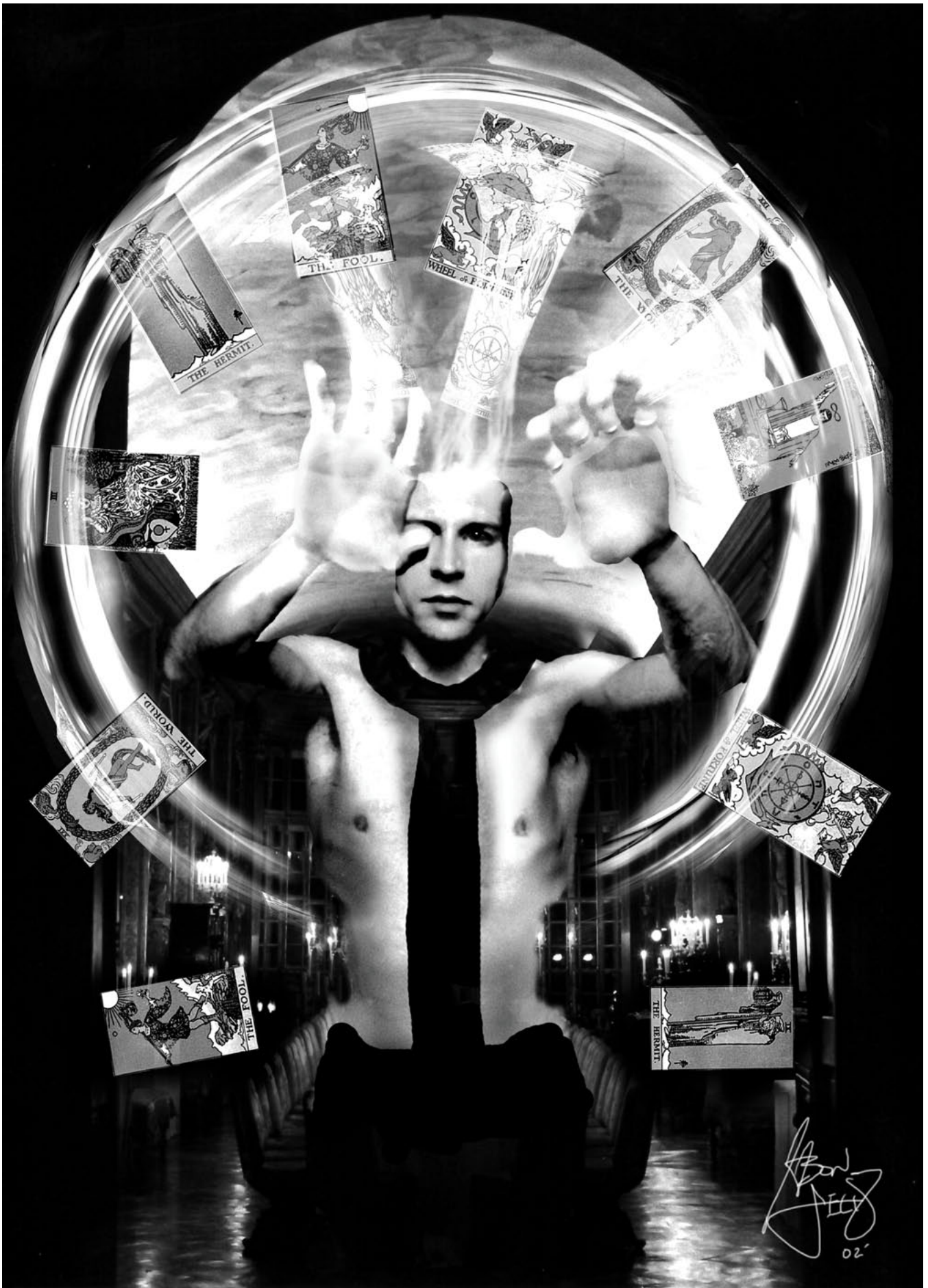
And sometimes, in those moments of balance, as reality hangs on the brink, she Ascends.

PARADOX, NOT PUNISHMENT

Paradox strikes when the mage violates the Consensus or certain other established cosmological forces. If you use it in an excessively punitive fashion you'll give players the impression that you're punishing them for using magic instead of enforcing the game's core themes. These themes don't include "If a mage gets uppity he gets smacked around." That's an in-character perspective. Do not punish the players for using their characters' special Traits!

Paradox does strike the prideful, but that's because they tend to use more elaborate and vulgar magic than more modest mages. Paradox doesn't care about your attitude except in the way it manifests. What actually brings it is a largely impersonal force.

Players will, on occasion, try to use magical actions to replace common sense or respect for the story. In those cases, remember that the criteria for vulgar Effects as well as a backlash's manifestations are up to you. If you need to, tighten the rules a bit — and talk to your player about what both of you are trying to accomplish with this game.



02

CHAPTER THREE: AWAKENING THE STORYTELLER

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF MAGE



(OR, “SELLING YOUR PLAYERS
ON YOUR VERSION”)

Bob: “So, guys, I’ve got this great idea for a game. You see, your characters were all friends when you were kids, and you haven’t seen each other for a long time. In the meanwhile, you’ve all become powerful mages.

“Only, and here’s the cool thing (tee-hee), one of your former pals is missing and now, you’re all called back together (get this) to figure out this mystery. And hey, you know, it revives a love triangle that’s been in the background of your characters’ lives for years.

“Anyway, of course, tracking down your missing pal (who has, of course become a powerful mage herself) leads you into magical intrigue and outright warfare of the highest order!

“Oh, and did I mention that all of this takes place in my favorite historical decade, the 1740s? Cool, huh? Wanna play Friday night?”

Tom: “Uh, yeah, Bob. Whatever....”

One of the most difficult things about running a Storytelling game is maturely approaching and arbitrating the conflict between telling the story you want to tell and satisfying players. As a Storyteller, you have in mind a plot that you’d like to see come to fruition. You’ve probably laid down a few fundamental points that need to be established in order to accomplish your plot — all the hooks that draw players into the conflict, the villains, the stakes of the game and the final confrontation. Meanwhile, the characters have their own agendas, not to mention those of the players.

The section that follows explores how to tell the story you want to while engaging players and keeping them coming back for more.

Okay, that sounds entirely selfish, doesn’t it? Actually, it’s not. The point of this whole Storytelling experience, while it may have pretensions of some-

thing grander, is to have fun. (Go back and see the Introduction if you missed it the first time.) If the Storyteller is having fun but the players aren't, the chronicle is a failure. Likewise, if the players are running amok, having the time of their lives, while the Storyteller sits back wondering whether or not they're ever going to get back to the plot, the chronicle isn't going to go too far. While striking a balance is a noble idea, the truth is that you have to start somewhere. If the Storyteller has been bouncing off the wall with excitement throughout *History of the Roman Empire* for the past semester, chances are he's going to want to do something with that knowledge. Since he's the Storyteller, the players are obliged to indulge him a bit until he's worked out his obsession with Latin and seven-braided brides. Likewise, no matter how caught up the Storyteller may become with the elegance of her story, she must make compromises and be flexible in order to keep the players entertained week after week. Both sides must be willing to sacrifice in order that they may indulge in a great story or chronicle.

THE SUBJECT/OBJECT PROBLEM

Your natural tendency is to treat everything around you as an object.

Maybe that makes every bit of sense in the world, maybe it doesn't. It all depends on your perspective — your perception. It's terribly appropriate in a **Mage** supplement to discuss this problem as it relates to Storytelling.

You're trying to tell your story. In the meanwhile, you have *these upstart players*. They have their baggage. From a practical standpoint, you have to be concerned with baggage from other games, first and foremost. Practically every player has baggage from other games because many roleplayers start out with non-Storyteller games. That's one of the disadvantages of the Storyteller series — they're generally not entry-level games. They're graduate level, especially **Mage**.

As the Storyteller, you have to carefully balance the power given you through both your role and the various powers vested within. In other words, with great power comes great responsibility.

Contrary to what most roleplayers think, a well-managed chronicle can go on for years without making a single die roll. That is, assuming the Storyteller is worth her title. On the other hand, a Storyteller that lacks confidence in his ability or authority can lose an entire chronicle to a single die roll. This is not to say that die rolling is a bad thing. Most good games contain an equal part of chance and choice. Too

much dictation, though, and the Storyteller becomes a tyrant. Too much left to chance, and the Storyteller becomes a doormat.

ENGAGING PLAYERS

A good Storyteller can have players involved and keep them involved in a chronicle for the long run, even if it's **Mage: The Ascension** in Never-Never Land. The first key to doing so lies in crafting chronicles that play to the themes with which all people are familiar while at the same time indulging the player's appetite for power fantasy. The second is to tell stories that are well-conceived from the technical, plot standpoint best recognized by the man on the street.

STORY FLOW

Every good story has a beginning, a middle and an end.

If you've ever had a creative writing class, chances are that you've heard that phrase before. It's a fundamental plot formula present in practically all stories. As a writer, it may be your natural tendency to fight against formula, to try to create a more organic story that better represents reality, but in truth, formula is what people are conditioned to accept as the norm. Amid great opportunity a threat appears, and a hero rises to meet that threat. Once a pitched battle is under way, elements of the hero's very existence are threatened. Finally, the hero defeats the threat, reclaiming what is his, and achieves, to some degree, the opportunity presented in the face of that threat. For any Storyteller telling stories in any genre, this heroic cycle must be present. Because people understand this beginning, middle and end maxim as the norm, whether on a conscious or subconscious level, the story you tell will always be judged based upon it.

Great Storytellers, whether in Storytelling games, novels or film, play upon this basic plot formula just as they do with the conventions of the genre in which they tell stories. It's been said that exploring the limitations and upending the conventions of formula and genre are not things that limit a Storyteller, but free her to access a world of infinite yet recognizable possibilities. Exploiting the conventions of form and genre are what great storytelling it all about, insofar as it is perceived as a popular form of entertainment.

In the following paragraphs, we'll talk a bit about your role in each stage of executing the formula to the benefit of your story and your players.

THE JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND MILES BEGINS WITH A SINGLE STEP

A lot of Storytellers will tell you that you have little or no responsibility in assisting your players in creating their characters — that you should let them create whatever types of characters they want and then force the lot into the confines of your story. That is a terrible way to begin what everybody hopes will be a mutually satisfying storytelling experience. After all, Storytelling games are supposed to be about interactive entertainment, not everybody doing his own thing.

One method for simplifying this process is playing the chorus. In Greek theater, plays began with a chorus, a gathered body of thespians, who would chant a sort of comprehensive introduction to familiarize the audience with the events of the production. This is also called an expository scene — a little snippet of the full production. This sort of thing was used in a lot of arts, from theater to opera and even symphonies. Today we might call it a trailer. These introductions to your story should include information important to game play, such as the historical period or setting, identifying the faction or factions which will generally be treated as the protagonists and antagonists and teasing the players with hooks to get them into the story.

Unlike the Greek chorus, you may not want to give out the ending or crucial plot points. In many cases, Greek playwrights were working with stories the audience already knew. Give the players just enough information to pique their interest.

Playing the chorus, or giving players a trailer of your story or chronicle, can help players gear their characters toward the types of things they'll be seeing and doing in the game. This way, if your story is all about eliminating a nest of Marauders, you won't end up with a pack of pretentious artists and academics (or maybe you will; after all, it's **Mage**).

If your story is about discovering the true nature of the new hunters, you aren't going to want a bunch of gung-ho ass-beaters as your players' characters. You owe it to yourself and to your players to give them a peek into what your game is going to be like. That way, whether you're the best Storyteller in the world or the worst, games won't unravel in the first five minutes.

If you have a group of players who are really into the roleplaying aspect of the story, or if your chronicle isn't intended to be years long, you might consider

pregenerating characters from which the players may pick. Frequently, this is a problem. Practically every player wants to create his own character, since his character is the largest single contribution he makes to the story as a whole and is the way that he affects the story. Be aware of this and be sensitive to it. If you do decide to create pregenerated characters, make a bunch. Give your players a wide variety from which to pick. Also, leave some of the characters' qualities open ended. Let the players determine things like sex, physical appearance and personality. Another option you might leave open is Freebie Points. Small customizations in characters will go a long way toward the players taking ownership of their characters.

ANTAGONISTS AND CONFLICTS

Following the basic plot format, the antagonists and conflict in the story are the elements over which the Storyteller has the greatest control. Thus, these are the places where the Storyteller has the greatest opportunity to shine and, more importantly, engage the players. In other words, rounding up a roster of complex and believable villains who motivate the players to act is your biggest and at times most difficult task.

In the age of the silent screen and for some time before, all it took to be a villain or a tragic figure was deformity. Give a character an eye patch, a scar, an amputation or anything political correctness describes as a "difference" and you immediately had an antagonist. This is principally because heroes were classically idealized, making anyone with a foible, especially a visible one, a suspicious character.

Today, people like their heroes to be a bit more human, and thus so too have we humanized evil. Although popular films and fiction still play on the concept of youth and beauty as good with age and ugliness as evil, we've become a bit more forgiving of our villains, although they can certainly be despicable.

The key to creating a good villain, then, may be in a balance between humanizing and dehumanizing the enemy. A perfect example can be found in Tim Roth's portrayal of Archibald Cunningham in the film *Rob Roy*. Much overlooked because of its outward similarity to *Braveheart* and a lack of a bloodthirsty, nationalistic message, *Rob Roy* is a much more personal story where the battlefield, despite some pulse-pounding action scenes, is ethical.

The hero is a simple sheriff, Rob Roy McGregor, who holds the glamorous job of protecting his lord's livestock from poachers. The villain, Cunningham, is a rake and duelist set on gaining influence through political maneuvering and terror. You will never hate someone on screen as much as you will hate Roth as the villain as he lies, rapes and steals his way into power. At the same time, you fully understand him when his tragic past and motivations are revealed. Tim Roth overpowers some of the best actors in *Rob Roy*, even when getting his just desserts.

Use this as an example when you construct villains. If you want the climax of your story to be meaningful, don't expect a roomful of Men in Black and cyborgs or faceless Marauders to do it. This isn't *Quake*.

The conflict in your story is also at the heart of how it engages players. Any freshman-level composition course can tell you about the types of conflict. In **Mage**, most often the conflict is a very fundamental one, since philosophy is at the heart of the game. Thus, it's pretty easy to find conflicts that any player can understand and in which any character can become involved personally. Additionally, since **Mage** is a game about people's views of reality, it's very easy to turn internal conflicts into external ones. Even a character's worldview becomes a potential source of conflict as factions vie for control of a reality ruled by consensus. Chapter Two summarized many of the potential conflicts for **Mage**.

Keep at least one external and one internal conflict going at any time in your chronicle. Your story can be anything from mages fighting a Progenitor's plot to harvest research tissue from unknowing subjects to securing and defending an important meeting of archmages from an attack by an elder vampire's minions. Your external conflict in the first might seem as simple as mages versus Technocracy, but what if the experimentation the Technocrats are doing will save lives? What if characters within the group disagree on shutting down the operation? Naturally, the characters would want to protect the meeting of the archmages, but why are the vampires attacking? Might they be working for the greater good? Is it better to side with the mage they seek to destroy or to oppose her potentially diabolical plots?

THE PAYOFF

No, we're not talking about the part where you buy the group pizza for playing in your game. Although everybody should do that at least once.

Ultimately, players are looking to do one of three things in a Storytelling game. Some want to build their characters up to ungodly (or godly, as the case may be) levels of power so they can brag when they get to GenCon, some are looking for an intense story session that they can brood about afterward at the coffee house, and some are just looking for a good time. For those of you whose players are in the latter category — you are the envy of Storytellers everywhere.

Regardless of what types your players are, some fundamental things exist that you can do to make all three happy.

First and foremost, though the cost is high at times, give the characters goals they can reasonably achieve. If they fail, give them a way to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. A lot of Storytellers run games only because they are on ego trips. Either they firmly believe that they have the best stories in the world (in which case, write a novel) or their real lives are so far outside their control that they do storytelling in an effort to control *something*. If you are one of these Storytellers, please take this book to your local hobby store and trade it in for some dice. Roll them a lot. When you've come to understand that the only thing you can control is yourself, put the dice down, go back to your local hobby store, buy this book again and run **Mage**. In order to have a cohesive and enjoyable game, the characters must be able to win.

Second, reward your players for thinking outside the box — even if they break your story in the process. There is nothing more frustrating or rewarding than watching a simple decision by players steer your entire chronicle off the route you planned and into the great unknown. When they do this, your first impulse is going to be either choking them to death on their handful of d10s or turning your game room into a table match. The beautiful thing about times when players think their way right past your plot is that it's the perfect time to re-evaluate what you were doing to begin with. Have the players come up with a story that is even more interesting than the one you originally imagined? If you're not

too wrapped up in your own self-importance, you can use these unseen twists to make the story more enjoyable for the players. They feel great about their accomplishment and credit you with a great story, and you get to tell them about the contribution they made later — that is, if you decide to let them share the glory. You might decide to chalk it up to experience and use what you've learned to cook up a story that'll really knock their socks off the next session instead.

PLAYING TO THE CROWD

If your storytelling is rigid and inflexible, or if you are so enamored of your own story as to make a habit of alienating players for the sake of preserving your own plot, the following section is going to grate on you like sandpaper.

Storytellers have a variety of ways in which they develop their stories. Some work from a published-adventure sort of format, writing down every detail to the nines. Some prefer a pick-a-path-to-adventure approach, creating modular scenes that characters can wander through like the halls of a vast cathedral. Others have no set stories whatsoever — they detail their world and let the players determine what their characters want to do.

Any of these styles can be flexible and accommodating to players, depending largely on the humility and sense of humor possessed by the Storyteller.

Ultimately, you should do whatever you can to cast the player characters in the starring roles of your unlimited-budget blockbuster. No, we're not talking about giving them all Rings of Unlimited Wishes and +69 Swords and boosting their stats to such high levels that the laws of physics no longer apply to them.

Creating tailored subplots for their characters. Look into the characters' histories — your players *did* make character histories, right? It's usually not too difficult to grab one specific Flaw or outstanding event and turn it into part of the story. For instance, matters suddenly seem more personal if the auditor who's checking over the mage's finances is actually an old high-school adversary. Players love talking about their characters and they love being the center of attention, so give each player a chance to know that you paid attention to that backstory and looked for a specific way to implement it.

STORYTELLER/PLAYER CONFLICTS

It happens all of the time. For weeks, maybe months, you've worked on crafting the perfect story.

You're a good Storyteller, and you've worked with the players to develop stories that engage them. You've established the central premise of your game. Maybe it's an epic confrontation between mages and Technocrats. Maybe it's a power struggle at the highest levels of the Traditions. Maybe it's a conflict within a single chantry. You've fleshed out your nonplayer characters. You've worked to involve each character in an interesting subplot. You've made sure that the characters have an achievable goal and the tools within themselves to accomplish that goal.

Then, within 10 minutes of the start of play, everything goes south. It starts when you temporarily blind one of the characters with the flash from a white phosphorous grenade — completely within the parameters of the plot and your rights as a Storyteller. Another player jumps in to say that it's not fair, and within a few seconds everybody goes from enjoying a cookout and a cool chronicle to complete chaos. Everybody takes sides and basically, it's game over, man.

What happened? You've done everything in your power to make the experience enjoyable. Suddenly you're the bad guy.

Frequently, this problem occurs when players and Storytellers are of mixed "play styles." Saying players have differing play styles is a euphemism, of course, for all of the names we might call our fellow players. Rules lawyer, Monte Haller, soft roleplayer — these are the things that other roleplayers generally call other people in their player group with whom they don't get along.

The key to understanding this problem and approaching it with a bit of style is in understanding a little more about the history and sociology of pen-and-paper roleplaying.

Pen-and-paper roleplaying games evolved out of tactical wargames. When you look at any old movie where generals stand moving miniature battleships across a table, you're looking at an ancestor of roleplaying. The earliest acknowledged forerunners to what we think of as roleplaying games weren't these global-scale combat simulations, however, but rather man-to-man, medieval combat simulations. History buffs had been reenacting the great battles of ancient civilizations using similar rules, but something in the medieval aspect struck people. Soon games using rules similar to the combat mechanics of wargaming for a wide variety of actions were cropping up everywhere. It was the late 1970s, and pen-and-paper roleplaying had taken off.

The lesson that's important to get here is that roleplaying games evolved from combat simulations — not improvisational theater. Statistics and dice-rolling were ingrained in wargames; in fact, some of those games had you rolling dice for practically every decision you might make. A lot of these methods for calculating chances of success remained when attempting to speak in Old English and drawing imagined family crests were added to them.

From that point on, it's pretty accurate to say a lot of derivation occurred. **Vampire: The Masquerade**, White Wolf's first Storytelling-based roleplaying game, took the focus off the mechanical aspects of roleplaying in favor of placing emphasis on interactive storytelling. **Vampire** became an entry point for a new breed of roleplayers, but with roleplaying games being limited in audience, plenty of those "old school" roleplayers adopted it as well. Thus were the first shots fired.

All of this is said for Storytelling purists — the people who go game sessions without unpacking

their dice. When you have that player who opens his Crown Royal bag or, in some cases, tackle box wherein his dice are carefully organized by type, color, hue and special qualities, your job is to smile and look on admiringly. It is not your job to crack sarcastic. If you do, you just end up looking like some pretentious college thespian waving the banner of Sir Francis Bacon.

Storytellers should understand that a lot of players have a threshold for mechanics. For these folks, if they don't roll dice two or three times per hour, they are not roleplaying. *That's OK.* There's a reason that Hollywood action flicks always start with high action before moving to character development. This gives people an easy "hook" to start their characters and form relations in the heat of battle. *Then* it's a simple matter to move on to some character play. Someone almost always wants a little action...so give it to him. Your job is *not* to "teach" people the "right" way to play — it's to offer them a forum for the game elements they enjoy.

ELEMENTS OF STORYTELLING



As a Storyteller you are asked to deal with an ever-growing amount of information and responsibilities. From the mundane questions of what days and times you and your troupe can game to the esoteric of what Spheres are needed to create a block of cheese, it is your job as the Storyteller to answer all of these questions and still have fun.

Fun.

If you stopped and chuckled at the word "fun" then this section is for you. It is designed to give some examples of how to simplify, deconstruct and make Mage "fun" for everyone. Yes, this includes you.

In this section the questions of how to start a story and how to continue on with it will be covered, as well as how to make the game simpler for you the Storyteller: cheats, combinations and organization for you to make your game the best you can and still have time to live your life. After all, it's a game; it's supposed to be fun for everyone.

THREADS ON A LOOM

The basis of every game is the story. From the grandiose lines of Shakespeare to the simplicity of See Spot Run, all of these have humble beginnings.

The Storyteller's job starts with planning a framework for players to enjoy. This is not to say that the Storyteller should completely flesh out the story — something needs to be left for the players to determine with their actions and choices. Still, the framework should have some direction, some motive and some interest. For some Storytellers this is the hardest part of any chronicle: finding the balance, getting a start, starting an epic.

The first part of any story is an idea. This idea could come from anywhere, from watching the nightly news on TV to getting junk mail to seeing someone interesting on the street. Anything that gives you as a person inspiration could be the start of a story. It's not the source that matters, so much as the effect it has on you. Did it stop and make you wonder? Did it scare you? All of these things are questions that you ask yourself when something inspires you, and they give you a start to the next step. Always carry a pen and paper; you never know when something will strike you. Remember, nothing is so small as to be unimportant. Just because seeing Mrs. Johnson walking her dog down the street is what did it for you does not mean you had a dumb idea. There is no such thing as a dumb idea; for all you know, Mrs. Johnson

HOW TO ENJOY YOURSELF

One of the frustrations of running and playing **Mage** is that a game's tone can run the gamut from freewheeling adventure to deep metaphysic, or embrace both simultaneously. It's really up to you and your group how you want your game to feel; **Mage** is designed to accommodate both styles.

One problem that crops up is when one participant wants seriousness and depth and another wants backflips, bolts of fire and swashbuckling wit. Contrary to what you might think, you can embrace both playing styles simultaneously. The trick is to load your game with potential depth but not to make it a required element. The players can uncover the earth-shattering metaphysics of it themselves or just use it as character-building magic-babble or a jumping-off point for adventure.

For example, let's say you've set a story around nine artifacts that hold the essence of the Spheres. You read some Kabbalistic literature and you've decided that they actually represent the Qlippoth: the dominion of natural law without God's tempering mercy. Using them opens the door to the unjust, corrupt world. They enhance Sphere magic to boot. The Nephandi want them, the Technocrats want them, and some Masters the characters don't trust want them too.

Players can choose to delve into the secrets of these items, or they can just run with a globetrotting quest to find them and keep them out of the hands of the bad guys. You've left the deep Easter Egg for them to find if they want, but not in such a way as to force them to wax mystical about every bit of the plot. Even if none of them go for it, a Storyteller learns that the things that don't get uncovered can entertain her as much as the things that do.

is a Nephandus who sacrifices small children on certain nights and that dog is her familiar. (You never know — it *could* happen!)

The idea that you gleaned from the inspiration leads to the six all-important questions: What? Who? Where? When? Why? and How? Some of these might already have answers, some may not, but it is important that all of them be answered to make a realistic story. What does Mrs. Johnson do with those kids before the sacrifice? Whom is she doing it for? Where does she keep all the equipment

to maintain her normal appearance? When does she do the sacrifice? How does she cover her tracks? The six important questions can be applied to every part of the idea you came up with, from motives to practice. They are one of your greatest tools in fleshing out your idea to make it stable. After all, what will the players say if you don't know when she does the rituals or where she does them? Remember to fill all your holes. Anything could provide a place for a player to take your story and rip it apart, ruining the magic. Try to think of every angle and be prepared to handle it. If you're prepared beforehand then you can run the game with ease, less stress and a cool that makes ice seem hot.

Which leads to the next part: organization.

Once you have your important facts in order, the next step is to put them into some sort of order. Step one is to make a fact sheet, a basic Who, What, Where, When, Why and How of your story. Who is this about? What is he doing there? Where is the game set? When is the game taking place? Why is it happening? How are the players involved? These are the basic facts of your story, your set-up of things to come. It's always there for you to remember; no matter how much your story may twist and turn, you always have an original plan to fall back on.

Next comes the story and where you intend to go with it. The easiest route is an outline, a simple breakdown of how a story is going to flow, based on some key points. Via this medium a Storyteller can break down each major part of the story into headers, then break these headers into subheads, each one being a game session. Start with your chronicle title as the title of your overall outline. From that, detail your first chapter, Roman numeral I. Under that are your section titles: A, B, C and so on. Under that you have your Arabic numerals: 1, 2, 3, each one being a game session.

In the end, though, the story itself is going to be the work of both you and your troupe. They will be the threads that you weave into the tapestry that is the story. Fair warning: Most plans of attack go right out the window within five minutes of starting a battle (or a game in this instance). Don't let this discourage you; with the outline you can take divergences and still manage to come back to the story you originally intended. Don't become frustrated at the fact that the players are not following "your game"; as a storyteller you are there to make the game for the players. When your troupe is done with its part, subtly move them back to where things diverged from the outline and then continue. Nothing is ever lost if you have notes on it.



MEDDLING WIZARDS

There are times when the players will devise a much more interesting solution to a problem you present than you anticipated. You should usually let it work unless you have an overriding plot-driven reason to do otherwise. This rewards players for inventiveness and gives them the sort of memories good chronicles foster. What's better: having them twiddle their thumbs until one of them stumbles on the correct spelling of an Umbrood's name because of your clues, or having them use a bizarre mix of spirit interrogation, lot-drawing and supercomputing to rationalize their answer? Going for the latter reduces tedium and gives the players a sense of control over their characters' actions.

Sometimes the players will come up with better plots than you do! A good Storyteller knows when to bow to this and when to adhere to her concept of the plot. If a completely inaccurate but highly entertaining interpretation of the prophecy you added to the game works, let it have some validity. Just don't take it to the point where the players' characters are *always* right. Your job is to get the characters out into the wider world where they *don't* have total control, where they can grow and learn.

In short, steal your players' ideas, but always keep a hand in running things. Entertain them while maintaining your vision of what **Mage** is.

CHANGING THE SCHEME

Not all **Mage** games have to be based in a World of Darkness. This is your world. Try to come up with ideas that are different or quirky from what your players would think of. The world doesn't have to be a horribly bad place all the time. This is the world presented by the **Mage** book, but it does not have to be the world you play in. Your setting could be a space station on the edge of the universe, for example. What role does magic play in that future? What about a world where magic is just as accepted as science? One where dinosaurs still roam the planet? Heck, how about a world where the dead are overwhelming the world and your players are the last saviors? Any and all of these could be used to define your world. Make it fun for everyone. The key is that it is *Your World*. No one can tell you what is right or wrong, because you make it. It all comes directly

from your imagination and is what you want. Your job is to make this world that you create — this space in time that you plan — fun. Let your imagination run wild; you never know where it will take you.

TANGLES IN THE WORK

A big problem Storytellers run into is how to come up with Storyteller characters and how to keep their interrelations with the players straight. It's hard when you are trying to juggle four to five players and a whole host of Storyteller characters. But all of this can be solved with a little organization. Step one is to look at the Storyteller characters you intend to incorporate into your Story, from the lowly desk clerk at the hotel in which your players are staying to the archenemies of your troupe. They can all be categorized as Class One, Class Two or Class Three.

CLASS ONE

These are your big guys, the continuing characters in your chronicle. These are the characters that need full character sheets and full histories. It wouldn't do for you to have this great archenemy and not remember when exactly he built that world-destroying device or never quite remember his hair or eye color. But not just enemies need worrying about. These characters will be a constant part of your chronicle. They are your motivating characters. These are real people to you as a Storyteller and one of your greatest chances to have fun.

You do have to be careful not to let Class One characters dominate your game. The players' characters should be at the center of things; this is more true of **Mage** now than it has ever been.

Let's say you want to run a game where Voormas is the primary antagonist. You leave behind traces of his grim presence. Occasionally he shows up to perform some awe-inspiring feat of necromancy. At each turn he foils the characters' attempts to keep him from corrupting the Tellurian; though they find ample traces of his plans, they can't change things. He keeps the characters from even touching his minions. You cackle to yourself about how he'll frustrate the characters' next attempt to stop him.

Let's face it: This sucks.

After a while, this game turns into the Voormas Fan Club; they know everything about him and how cool he is and they can't do a damn thing about it. It's no fun at all. There's nothing wrong with a power fantasy, but as the Storyteller, your needs are trumped by the players' needs. Period.

This doesn't mean you should serve up the Master of Helekar to the cabal with a nice side of fava beans, but they should at least be able to thwart or redirect his plans. One exception would be when the plot is meant to go in a different direction and Voormas is supposed to keep the characters focused. In any event, the characters' actions should be just as cool and meaningful as his, if not more so.

CLASS TWO

These are your minor Storyteller characters, or plot devices — the desk clerk, the doctor, the cabbie, the soccer mom. They play bit parts in your story and give your players a careful nudge back where they were going. These Storyteller characters don't usually need stats at all. A helpful little note on them is usually all one needs to remember them. They are another great source of fun, as they can be easily based on what is going on in your life. Do you need a convincing store clerk and think Old Man Roberts would be perfect for the role? Use him. There is no limit to what you can do with these characters in your story. They are as flexible as you make them.

When you create one of these characters, remember to make a note of any information you come up with. Players will often need a fix of mundane life, away from the tedium of magical studies. Class Two characters are there to provide it. There are times when the players will convince themselves that a Class Two character is more than he seems. Sometimes you should let them be right. Don't overdo it, though — not *every* postal worker is a Nephandic dupe.

Even if you have no particular roles for them, recurring Class Two characters make a story more interesting by giving characters a real community to interact with. Eventually they get to know the priest, the grocer and the beat cop by name. This is where your characters can meet new contacts, allies or petty antagonists — who might graduate to Class Three.

CLASS THREE

These are the mentors, contacts and allies. These are the characters that your troupe already knows at the beginning of the story. They can play the same roles as Class Two characters or be something more. That depends on you as a Storyteller. They could have full-blown character sheets, minor ones, or just notes. Once again, this depends on you as a Storyteller. Not everyone wants his archmage mentor running around, and it could seriously screw up your

game. Keep this in mind when you decide the levels of involvement these Storyteller characters will have.

Negotiating the roles of Class Three characters can be a delicate part of character generation. While you always have the final say, you should respect your players' ideas to the extent that it won't disrupt the game. One way is to negotiate a loose concept and fill in the required Traits as the need arises. When the players asks you if Magister Alexander can teach them the basics of the Life Sphere, you can agree and make a note of it. When you need Alexander to be able to teleport to the character's side (or curse him for being "a fool of an Apprentice!"), add the relevant details until the character is fully fleshed out.

Supernatural characters need a special mention because they raise basic questions about your game's setting. If a Dreamspeaker has Thunder as a spirit mentor, you have to ask yourself where Thunder goes when he isn't dispensing secrets and what his relationship with other spirits is. Vampire contacts beg the question of the role of vampires in your game. By default, players will assume the canonical material used in other Storyteller games is in force — but your Cainites might not have clans or anything to do with Caine at all, and Thunder might live in an Umbra totally divorced from the **Werewolf** cosmology.

If you do leave the balance of developing these characters to the players, make sure something is always left out. That way you have room later to fill in details vital to your plots.

GATHERING THE MASKS

So what does this mean? Once you have a category you can then start planning on how and what you want. Simple Storyteller characters are easy to make; you most likely already know what you want from your story development. It is hard to get the hang of developing character power. **Initiates of the Art, Masters of the Art, Guide to the Traditions, Guide to the Technocracy** and the Tradition and Convention books provide guidelines for different character types.

If you don't want a character to be defeated by the ordinary resources player characters can muster, don't bother with game statistics. Player characters will either find a way to nuke your unfortunate Master or you'll end up so grossly inflating that character's capabilities as to prevent and ruin the suspension of disbelief.

Other than that, there aren't many hard and fast guidelines except for the following advice:

When all else is equal, the player characters are better. This isn't a rule, but a simple observation of how games work. Storyteller characters are ultimately tools to further the course of the game and will almost always lack the vitality of player-run counterparts. Dot for dot, player characters will be tougher and smarter than your creations will ever be. Don't feel bad about this; it actually gives you the freedom to exaggerate an antagonist's powers a bit without overwhelming the players. Done right, this increases the drama of an action scene without risking the characters' lives (or sanity, or whatever) any more than necessary for the story.

With great power comes necessary flaws. If you don't give the Storyteller character a meaningful dramatic flaw he'll develop one anyway, derived from your personality traits. Part of acting out the role is to create positive and negative *differences* from yourself. Codifying these keeps you from growing too attached to the character and gives the players something to chew on. You don't need the deficiency to be all about Spheres and such — what about the brilliant Gray man who won't admit anyone can see through his cover? Think over any hubris the Storyteller character might be nurturing and how this might have led to certain underdeveloped Traits.

Four ounces of pressure turns aside a thousand pounds of force. This Tai Chi adage promotes efficiency in character creation instead of overkill. Instead of designing an all-around badass, think about what you want the character to do and give her the most efficient tools to do it with. A crime boss doesn't need outrageous combat skills if all you want him to do is pump up the drug trade. Influence Traits and Resources will do the job. Aside from making the character more sensible, it leaves an opening for another Storyteller or player character to fill in — or exploit — his weaknesses.

Class Two Storyteller characters are usually devised off the top of a Storyteller's head. They are simple and usually unstated. But what do you do if you're having an off-night and don't feel like pulling out Habeb the convenience store guy again? Remember to always carry around a notebook with you. You don't have to keep just story notes in it. If someone catches your eye who you think would make a good Storyteller character in your game, write some short notes on him. To make it more interesting, you can put these notes on index cards.

When it comes time to pull a random Storyteller character, draw a card and see who you come up with. You'll always have a fresh character at your fingertips, an arena of surprise for your players. If the players choose to interact more with these Storyteller characters, you can make notes on the index cards, adding more depth for the next time they encounter that character.

Class Three Storyteller characters are probably the hardest for any Storyteller to use, because you have to give up your vision to incorporate them as part of a player concept. You have a very important job: Make them yours. This is not to say that you should completely take them away from the players, but it's your job to remind them that their allies have families, the contacts have real jobs, and the mentor is not always there for the pupil. These Storyteller characters can be done to any level that you want them to be. If you just want them to be hole-in-the-wall nothings, that is your choice. If you want them to be just as complex as your Class Ones, you can do that too. But remember to keep notes on them no matter what. If one of your players starts to depend just a little too much on that police ally he has, show that the ally can't get him out of everything. He can't cover all the problems. These Backgrounds are advantages; don't let them become crutches for your players.

INTERPERSONAL AFFAIRS

How do you keep track of those pesky intercharacter relationships? How are you going to remember that Dave the Verbena is dating the convenience store chick, Sarah the Virtual Adept has a thing for Doctor Strangelove over in Australia, and that Spyder the Hollow One absolutely hates the straight-laced Mrs. Johnson? A simple solution to this is a flowchart. It's extremely simple to make and manipulate and takes little to no time to maintain. Examples can be found in *Mage Chronicles I* and in *Chicago by Night for Vampire: The Masquerade*.

Start with the name of one of your main characters somewhere on a blank piece of paper. Don't make it so large that you can't write around it — the smaller the better, so that you have more space. Then write another one somewhere on the page, someone who is connected to that first main character. Draw an arrow between the two, pointing toward either of the characters. If it points only one way, only one of the characters knows the other. If it points both

ways, they each know the other. Now write a small note under, above, or around that arrow about how they know one another and what they have done together. Now write another character on the page somewhere and repeat the above steps. Keep doing this, interconnecting the characters to one another with arrows. If it looks like it is getting too tangled, don't be afraid to do it over again in a more organized fashion. This is your reference; no one is going to tell you how to do it better than you.

EXAMINING THE WEAVE

It's been stated before, but it bears repeating. Your plan of action as a Storyteller will change five minutes within stepping into the room with your players. Do not let this discourage you from planning. It's an important balance that you walk as a Storyteller, trying to keep your vision and giving the players what they want. It is the hardest part of being a Storyteller. What can your players get away with? What do you allow them to do? If you completely cut them off from developing and making this their world, they will become bored and unhappy. If you don't give any direction or plan anything, you are unhappy.

This is never an easy process for any Storyteller, and there isn't exactly any advice to give. The best you can do is to be attentive and watch your players. If they start to seem listless and unhappy, give them some direction, something to get behind. If they are pushing too hard, put some major problems in their path. Make them think of a solution; don't just give it to them. Part of the fun of the game is the fact that players should have to work for solutions. The greatest rewards are those won after the greatest hardships. Remember, a player cannot play without a Storyteller, and a Storyteller cannot tell stories without players. Each is part of a complete whole.

HOW TO USE THE TAPESTRY

So you have everything together. You have a story, you have characters, and you have players. All things are in working order, everything is functioning, and all the chairs and seat backs are in their original, upright positions. This section is a precursor to how a game usually runs and the problems herein. Not all problems can be covered. That's impossible, but there are some major ones that will be discussed. Starting from the beginning and going to the end, a game for review.

It's Saturday night and everyone has gathered at Johnny's house for a game of **Mage**. Everyone came armed with pencils, paper and dice. Well, not everyone. One or two players always forget to bring the proper equipment. Always have extra paper, pencils, dice on hand — and more than one core book is nice as well!

Everyone sits down at the table and pulls out premade characters. The players all prepare to get into character and look to Johnny, their chosen Storyteller, for the game to begin.

This is the hardest part of any game: starting. Preludes, if you choose to run them, can help. There is always the question of who to start with. Look at all your players and choose the one who has the easiest character to integrate with everyone else's, a coffee shop barista or a gas station attendant, whoever will best get them all connected.

Johnny looks to Maria, who is playing Beth, a Hollow One who works at a bookstore. He describes the bookstore she works in: tacky, cheesy, family oriented, with a coffee shop in the back. He then proceeds to ask what she is doing today. She tells him she is working the register, bored off her butt, in the little green smock that makes her want to puke. Johnny then turns to Chris.

The second hardest part of getting started: what to do once you've begun. By preference, you should try to get your hardest character to connect first. If you can do this you have an easier trip coasting through the first session.

Chris plays Luthor, an eccentric Son of Ether in short pants and rainbow-colored suspenders. Luthor walks into the store, goggling the place through his duct-taped, plastic-framed glasses. Looking for a book on astrophysics, he walks up to the cash register to ask the attending cashier.

Don't feel uncomfortable using out-of-character information to smooth matters over. Due to the difficulty of gathering characters together with no past, this may be necessary to help avoid the tedium of small talk and first impressions. If you wish to take the burden off the player and declare such an action for him, it is completely fine and says nothing less of you as a Storyteller.

"Ma'am, I'm looking for a copy of Steven Hawking's theories on space-time. Can you help me?" Chris says in character, with a nasal voice and a few snorts between syllables.

Playing Beth, Maria polishes her nails and coolly looks the nerd over. "Why would I help a

loser like you?" says Maria, who's come to the game from a lousy day at work. Chris was picked over her for a job she recently applied for. She doesn't like where she works now and there's been a bit of tension ever since.

Turning bright red, Chris stands up and snipes, "You did that because I got the job and you didn't. Nice to see we're gonna get petty over the game, too, Mar."

"What? I did not!" says Maria, but as a Storyteller, Johnny's not so sure.

Hold it right there. The whole impartiality issue is raised and you all are just trying to play a game. Even if you think that Maria might have overstepped, you should not call her out on it in front of everyone else. Frustration is caused by hurt, and hurt causes more frustration. You have three choices at this point. One is to tell them to cool it and move on with the story, and then privately talk to each of them at the end of the session. Two is to call the session right there and then because you do not feel that they can get along. Finally, you can ignore their bickering and move on to the next character. Most of these squabbles are calls for attention; when people realize they aren't getting it, they usually stop.

Still, there are some occasions where you want to intervene right away. Anything that makes the player (not the character) uncomfortable represents an area where you need to step in. These generally consist of:

- **Serious or Persistent Arguments:** Two players may have differences that are serious enough to disrupt the game every time, all the time. They may have a massive argument that results in one player leaving. The subject of the argument may be none of your business, but the effect on your player cast most definitely is.

In this case, lay it on the line for the people involved. Let them know that whatever their disagreement is, it ends at the gaming table. You might have to ask one or both of them to take a break. If you can afford to lose two people, it might be best to give them both time off, but if you can't...you have a difficult choice to make. Before you decide to ask one of the players to take a hiatus, let them *both* know that you'll have to let one of them go until things are settled, then give them some time to figure it out for themselves.

- **Hogging the Spotlight:** Sometimes you'll have a player who talks out of turn and takes up considerably more time than the rest of your group. In this

situation, switch focus to another player, preferably one who generally isn't as vocal as the rest. If the problem persists, tell the whole group that you want every player to have an equal voice. Ask them to help each other into the spotlight. If that doesn't work, discuss it with the player. If he doesn't get it by then, you might not want him in the game.

- **Boundary Violations:** While the previous situations are normal social gaffes, there are some incidents that cross the line, such as out-of-character sexual harassment and bullying, or situations in-game that one of the participant isn't comfortable with. You should *always* emphasize that the players have the right not to participate in any in-game activity that they don't feel comfortable with. Discuss these boundaries ahead of time. Tell players to ask the group if they're not sure.

In cases of blatantly abusive behavior, show the player the door and talk to the person she was harassing about whether or not she should be allowed back. You may want to do this privately in case he feels pressured one way or the other by the rest of the group. Of course, if *you* can't tolerate it at all, then she doesn't get to come back, no matter the wishes of the other players.

In case of an in-character boundary violation, stop the scene and explain your game's policy about subject matter. If the player doesn't get it or the incident was bad enough to upset (rather than merely annoy) another player, proceed with the steps above.

- **Cheating:** One warning, then one discussion. If that doesn't cut it, out the door she goes. If the player doesn't trust you, then what are you doing playing with her? It's not as if there's money riding on this.

ADVENTURE IN EVERY TUG

Johnny turns to Marc, who is playing Randall, a Dreamspeaker who happens to work in the coffee shop in the back of the bookstore. Coincidence? Yeah, but this is **Mage**, remember?

"So, what are you doing, Marc?"

Marc goes on to describe the making of a vanilla latte and serves it to the yuppie couple he was waiting on it. Johnny turns to Conrad, the caffeine-addicted Euthanatos, and asks if he wants a cup. Conrad looks around confused and doesn't seem to know what to do. He looks at the now-steaming pair of Maria and Chris and the expectant Marc and breaks into a cold sweat.

OPTION: THE RUNNER

If you anticipate using a complex antagonist or a Storyteller character who will be around most of the time, you might want to ask a player if she wants to take the job over for you. The Runner (also called the Devil's Advocate) plays a major Storyteller character after being given some coaching about the character's role and behavior. Set a few definite limits as to what the Runner can and can't do with the character.

You'll be giving away some secrets to the Runner; make sure you trust her to keep them to herself. You should also trust her to see that she, like you, is there to help entertain the other players. The advantage to having a Runner is that she can give a Storyteller character her full attention. Your Class One character will really come to life if it's under the control of a good Runner.

Using a Runner alters play balance. As we've stated, if all things are equal, player characters are more powerful than Storyteller characters. Since a Runner can pay full attention to the character she's running, she can make full use of its capabilities. This makes an antagonist much more frightening. Remember to adjust character power accordingly.

New roleplayers and wallflower players are always hard to deal with. They usually just need some kind of support and to be informed that they are free to do what they want to do. Spend a little time helping them; they usually develop on their own with just a little push.

Conrad makes a little squeak and finally speaks. "I'm going to order a cup of coffee?"

Johnny chuckles and smiles at Conrad. "What kind of coffee you want? And don't you think you should ask Randall in character?"

Conrad (playing a Euthanatos mage named Bruce) blushes and plays with his paper a little. He looks up, and then back down, speaking to his paper. He does his best to hold his voice in a fast, jittery tone. "CanIhaveatriplemoccaexpresso?"

Marc and Johnny both smile at Conrad.

Marc says, "Would you like whipped cream on that sir?" in a drab and obviously bored tone.

"Yesplease!" as more of Bruce's speedy jitteriness comes out, thanks to encouragement.

Johnny explains to Conrad how Bruce gets his coffee and sits down. He then turns back to Maria and Chris, who, although stewing, seem to have calmed down.

"Okay then, when we left — you were being a snotty cashier," looking at Maria and turning to Chris, "and you were trying to find a copy of a book by Steven Hawking."

When a Storyteller switches between two parties or more, it's a good idea to remind folks where they were when they left, as a reminder to both himself and to them so there is no question as to what happened. It helps keep favoritism to a minimum.

Both Chris and Maria nod their agreement and continue to glare at one another. Neither one of them is talking and both look angry.

As a Storyteller, most uncomfortable silences you come across are bad. It usually means that the players are either unhappy or confused. If they are unhappy, figure out a way around it and carry on with the roleplaying. If they are confused, take the time to explain what happened again. Once again, don't get upset if they are confused. It's not your fault. It made sense to you. Just take the time to explain without belittling them.

Johnny decides that this is the time for an NPC to come in and interrupt the little tiff. He pulls out his index cards, looking for something random. He draws a card that says "Short, Fat, Angry, Badly Dressed." This sounds like the perfect manager for Maria's character. It explains why she hates her job so much. Looking at the group, he says: "BETH!! Are we having a problem here?!" says a short fat man in a badly fitted, grease-stained, cornflower-blue suit. Maria, your character recognizes this as your manager."

Maria blinks a couple of times and gulps as she is suddenly sucked back into character.

"No, sir, I was just helping this very nice man find a book on by Steven Hawking," she says in a muffled, complacent voice, turning to Chris. Playing Beth, Maria points and says, "Sir? I think you can find it in our science section, over there."

Chris smiles out of character and in character turns to Maria's character, Beth. "Thank you ma'am," he says and walks off to find his book.

Storyteller characters can help drag your players back to the land of play. It also gives you a chance to have some fun.

Johnny then describes the passage of time: Randall looking bored behind the counter, just trying to get the day over with; Bruce coming up to the counter every five minutes for a refill; and Luthor searching through the science section and not really finding what he is looking for — but getting enraptured by the pure knowledge around him. Meanwhile, Maria is doing her best to be polite and enjoy herself under the watchful eye of her boss.

Johnny then decides it is time to bring a little magic into the game. Having outlined this game before, he knows the next step is to introduce the centerpiece of this chronicle. A man comes stumbling into the shop clutching his chest and bleeding all over the place. No one seems to notice but the players.

Maria's character drops the book sale she was just ringing up, staring at the bleeding man on the carpet. Chris decides that his character is too enraptured in his book to have noticed yet. Conrad's character jumps up and runs over to the man.

"Does anyone notice the man as I run to him?" asks Conrad excitedly, getting into this roleplaying thing.

"No, they look at you funny. It's almost like the man on the floor doesn't exist to the rest of the people in here," says Johnny.

Conrad looks confused and turns to the rest of the group to see what they are doing. Beth is standing there in shock, while Randall is jumping the counter. Chris decides that in one of the rare instances when he was looking up, Luthor notices Randall jump the counter.

Once again, Johnny allows use of out-of-character information in an in-character interaction. Although only a mild violation, it might be something to keep a watch on as a Storyteller. Make sure that when you allow out-of-character information to be used in game, it doesn't reveal secrets you or the players want to keep. Let him by with it in this instance, though. He just wants to get in on the action. Who can blame him?

Johnny then goes on to describe to the players that the wounds look like knife cuts and that the victim is bleeding to death on the carpet. Johnny looks around to see what folks are going to do.

Timing is always hard in a game session. It's not easy to create a sense of urgency about something that is nothing more than a figment of your imagination. One way to do this is to add a stop-

watch to your Storytelling equipment. When something requires speed, set it on the table and start it. Tell your players they have a certain amount of time to do something. Other things that can help are increasing the speed of your speech and increasing your tone to make it sound urgent. Little touches like this add life to an NPC. One thing to watch for is everyone trying to talk at once and getting confused. When you start hurried scenes like this, turn to a player and ask him what he is doing. Do this by working around the table; establish a rotation to keep order.

Johnny turns to Maria and asks what she is doing. She states that she is still just staring in shock. Next he goes to Chris, who says he is rushing over to help. Marc states that he has arrived and is looking at the wounds. Conrad says he is trying to staunch the bleeding. Johnny asks for a Medicine roll to see how well Conrad is doing.

Conrad gets three successes. Johnny explains that he is slowing the blood flow but he can't quite cover all the wounds at once — they are everywhere, even beneath his jeans, bleeding all over the place. Chris asks if anyone has noticed the guy yet. Johnny says no. Chris has Luthor reach in his pocket for the Hyperbiotic Spray his character just invented: his Life focus.

"I bet we'll all pick up Paradox for this eventually," Chris says out of character.

Out-of-character comments are going to happen. You get a group of people together, they want to talk. It's human nature. But you as a Storyteller came here to do a job, to tell a story. Comments like that can hinder a well-run story. Small talk is all good, but don't let it overwhelm your game. The best way to do this is ignore it. Don't encourage it by giving even a look. You are on a mission here. Stick to it.

Johnny tells the group that the guy has stopped breathing. Conrad looks worried and asks if he can do CPR. Johnny tells him he can, but it probably won't do any good, as the guy has lost too much blood. Conrad, looking slightly disappointed, says OK. Maria decides that her character is going to leap the counter and run out and help. Johnny says her manager looks on in shock as Maria leaps the counter to join the group on the floor, who are now all gathered around a badly wounded man. The manager pulls out his cell phone and dials 911.

Conrad decides he is going to try CPR anyway — it's what his character would do. Johnny tells them as

they roll him over that he is clutching a paper-wrapped package. Johnny then turns to the players and tells them he has to get up for work in the morning and he is calling it a night. They look disappointed but agree that it's late and start packing up their stuff. Johnny pulls Maria and Chris aside and confirms that they will be okay with one another, and then sends everyone home.

Leave your players hanging at the end of the night. If you do, they'll be back for more and be more excited because of it. Teasing is a way to increase the fun of the game for everyone and increase the excitement about it.

This game could have gone much worse for all parties involved. Because of some quick thinking on the Storyteller's part, it held together and everyone had fun. But what happens if the game goes wrong? What would have happened if Chris and Maria hadn't stopped fighting? Remember that as a Storyteller you have the right to call the game at any time for any reason. If you just don't see it working out, if you don't feel like Storytelling, or if you think the game is going nowhere, feel free to give it a rest. You don't owe the Big Purple Book anything but the cover price you've already paid. Call the game off for any reason you feel like, but always tell your players why you're doing it. Keep in mind that this project is half theirs.

THE GREATEST CHRONICLE IN THE ENTIRE WORLD

So your players have killed the evil boss, saved the princess and are now the rulers of the world. What happens next? What can you give them now that they are god-level characters who have Ascended? Realistically, nothing. If you think the story has ended, it is over. It's been a great ride. The characters were wonderful. It's time to do something else now.

Is it hard? Yes. It might be the hardest thing that you and your players will ever do together. It's hard to get past the memorable parts of your lives where you had fun playing so and so. It's harder to put down a good story when it is at its end. You want to stay in your world of wonder. But it has to be done eventually. Every story has an end; without that end, you'll see what was once great deteriorate into nothing. No one wants to watch his creation go down the tubes in the hope of making it great again. It's best just to end it than watch it suffer through a rehash of a rehash of a rehash.

As the horde of trashy movie sequels proves, it's hard to determine when you should put the characters to rest. Do you find yourself recycling plots? Are you moving the game along by appealing to the players' nostalgia? If most things are retreads and you spend half the game living in the past, it's time to give it a rest.

That doesn't mean that the characters have been wiped from the face of the Earth. You can have them make occasional cameos in other games as Storyteller characters. The players can continue through email or blue-booking (see below). Even after the chronicle is over, the characters are a precious resource, fully developed and ready to be used — but not as player characters.

DUSTY TOTTIES OF FORGOTTEN LORE

For six days of the week (assuming you game only once per week), your players' character are just pieces of paper. Do they really have to be? Why can't your troupe continue with its imagination after the game? There is another way: blue-booking.

Blue-booking takes character development beyond the gaming table. Tell your players that you'd like them to write down what their characters do between sessions or during a cut-scene. You want to see how the character develops in his day-to-day life. Blue-booking can be extremely specific, answering questions like, did he have a fun day at work? What did she eat today? Who did he see? These developments can help you make the game better for them by giving more depth to the character and providing you with material to include in the game's plot. You can make the plot character-centered and give the players a feeling that they make concrete contributions to the storyline. As you give them more support as characters, the characters develop more.

Using Web sites, online forums, Web logs and journals, players can create an electronic blue book, allowing easy access for a Storyteller and, if a player wants, the rest of the group. Many of these services allow for password protection and user groups. See what options you can use to enhance play, but don't allow the lion's share of the story to take place online unless everyone has an equal amount of Internet access. You don't want to leave someone out just because he doesn't have time to follow entries.

In **Mage**, blue-booking is extremely useful for Seekings. With your input, the player can write up an

interesting Seeking. Magical study and other solitary pursuits also lend themselves to the form. Make sure that the player knows that his chances of success are the same as if he had pursued his project at the gaming table. In this case you act as an editor, telling the player what you want to see in the entry and what will convince you that the Seeking or study will be successful. This requires some maturity from all of the parties involved.

Finally, you should never make blue-booking mandatory unless the players have a chance to agree to it collectively from the start. Respect players who want to leave the game behind at the table. In the end, gaming is a recreation — letting it go is a sign that your player has his priorities straight.

⊕ OPTIONS: BLUE-BOOKING

Here are two variations you can use to make blue-booking more interesting:

The Red Book: As Storyteller, start a "master journal" that your players have regular access to. Fill it with in-game documents, lengthy descriptions of the setting and anything else that could slow the pace of play if you were to describe it at the table. You can include cut-scenes: things the characters didn't see but that you *want* them to see, to add drama or give the game a cinematic quality.

You can even add story material for the players' blue books — events that would get their characters' attention. Note the entry's purpose and date it so that the players can respond accordingly.

Book Status: If the players decide to let their books cross over with each other or write collectively, they can occasionally be at odds over what another player adds. To avoid this, simply use a "status mark." Players can designate entries or portions of entries as open or closed. An open section is something that another player can make use of without stepping on the writer's toes, while a closed section indicates a section with elements that can't be added to without the other player's permission.

For example, Marc writes a blue-book entry featuring two things: an encounter with a mysterious being in the woods and a budding love affair with a woman who despises the occult. Marc marks the spirit encounter as open material; he wants the other players to run with it. He marks the love affair as closed, since he doesn't want the story to be undermined by a vampire attack or something similarly tacky.

MECHANICS VS. STORY

In roleplaying you often see two modes of thought. One is that game mechanics — the dice-rolling, rules-loving part of the game — is the most important thing. Others prefer story development, total immersion in their character and action that's more dramatically appropriate than internally consistent. As with anything else in the hobby, it all comes down to what the players and Storyteller want in their game.

THE MACHINE

Mechanics are the rules of any system. Sometimes they're what make things fair, or at least interesting. Dice and charts are almost like emblems of an office; a Storyteller can easily point at them and say, "Those're the rules." But mechanics serve another purpose. They bring the characters' exploits to the table. Most people can't coolly snipe targets at 500 yards or do backflips, and nobody turns stone to flesh. **Mage** gives you the guidelines to do this and a thousand other things. Properly presented, game mechanics spark the imagination. Used correctly, the rules aren't a crushing structure preventing players from acting, but a selection of options that they can use to help their characters act. Rules can let

their imaginations run free. This is a huge advantage for any game, the reason many Storytellers stick to the rules. Creativity requires bravery. Collective Storytelling requires respect for the group. Rules engender bravery by giving a player a clear structure and reasonable expectations of his chances of success. They promote respect by presenting all players with the same structure. Even when the rules lead to some idiotic conclusion, the players know that *they* could have been screwed too!

There are disadvantages. Mechanics can also halt the flow of creativity. When a player realizes he can do a particular thing he might be reluctant to think outside of that little box. He might view that Trait as all he can do. After this comes frustration because he wanted to do something else but felt he couldn't because of the rules. There is also the issue of rules lawyers: players who will argue over the supposed phrasing and intent of a particular rule.

The Storyteller system has a fairly simple core mechanic. When you're trying to involve new players in the game, teach them this first. The core mechanic (roll dice pool versus a difficulty number) is easy for a player to understand, giving him more time to develop a character and contribute to the story. If you have a certain amount of trust in your



players, you can even let them take the initiative to roll for an action before discussing it with you. This requires a level of trust; it's up to you whether or not to allow it.

When you get in a dispute with the player over a rule, think it over and give the best answer you can without significantly slowing play. This might involve changing your mind or even (briefly) redoing the action that caused the spat. As long as you don't take too much time, this isn't the end of the world. Good players are usually trying to keep the game consistent rather than undermine your position, so give them a fair shake. Once you do decide, stick with it for the rest of the session. If you want to change your mind later, make note of it and apply the new ruling to similar situations that crop up later in the story.

The Golden Rule is there to assure you that you can modify or ignore any aspect of the game that you like. It's also there for the players to read; they should understand that you aren't bound by the rulebook. As long as you're forthright with the players about how your game differs and you do your best to be consistent, that should be enough for any reasonable group.

STORY: WHERE THE ANGST IS

Story is the other half of the equation. It's the creative explosion that takes place when you have a group of players and a Storyteller all doing their thing. The advantage of focusing on the story is that everything can be clearly visualized; character motivations urge players to involve themselves actively in the world around them. The players can better picture what their characters are doing, adding to the depth of a scene. This is suspension of disbelief, part of the true heart of roleplaying. It allows you to weave with the speed of a spider spinning a web, making a creation that is fragile but beautiful to watch.

The disadvantages to this viewpoint, though, are almost staggering. Just like the spider web, the fantasy environment is fragile when you hit it with enough force or from the wrong angle. Disbelief falls through the gaps in the thread, ruining the mood and the attention of the players for the rest of the evening. If you have a good relationship with your players, they'll take up some of the slack while you compose yourself. Otherwise, you always have the rules to fall back on. The story-based structure plays fast and

loose with game mechanics, but the mechanics are still there to use. It's also extremely hard on a Storyteller to run a game this way. He must pay constant attention to the players and watch for any signs of discontent or maliciousness. The story gives the players free reign to do what they want. And it is exactly that: whatever they want.

So which is better? Neither and both. A combination of the two seems to work the best in most games. Use the rules to hold the story together; don't bother with rules until you or the players deem it necessary. Use your imagination and let the players run a little free.

Whenever things look like they might boil down to some sort of competition, be it player against player, player against Storyteller, or player against fate, you have a number of options.

LAYING IT ON THE TABLE

You can pull out the dice and book. You may know for a fact that the players can or can't do something, but they doesn't mean that they realize this. Make it fair for them. There may be times when you don't even know what might happen, but the players deserve a shot. Use the dice. Rules can be used to emphasize an inflexible aspect of your setting. For example, in the core setting a mage can't perform vulgar magic without accruing Paradox. If this is one of your rules, make sure the players know it. When the rules aren't needed, don't use them, but keep in mind that they're a very effective tool — otherwise, roleplaying games would have dropped them a long time ago. Furthermore, when you put the dice in the middle of the table and roll it all in the open, this can often add drama to the proceedings. The players know you're leaving it up to chance and whatever tricks they might come up with. Sometimes rules get in the way of drama, but in some cases the palpable tension a critical roll generates can heighten the experience of play.

CONQUERING FATE

You can also decide what happened based on what's best for the story. Perhaps a player tells you that she wants to start fresh with a new character; this can be the time you introduce character death without flinching. Maybe this is the time to have a new Storyteller character arrive and provide the critical clue that half an hour of Perception + Enigmas rolls couldn't acquire.

If you decide to let the story dominate, the players will be aware of it and will know that what happens to the characters is *your* choice, not an arbitrary result of a dice roll. When you take this approach, ask your players about the direction they want to take their characters in. Respect this in your rulings; if a stray bullet kills a character who was just short of his dramatic peak and you make story-based rulings, the player will blame you for interrupting his character arc — and he'll be right.

Finally, if you do adjust or ignore the rules (even *your* rules) for the sake of the story, decide whether or not you're going to do it secretly. The players will generally know that you fudged some rolls in a given session; the drama comes because they don't know which ones you changed! With some groups, you can openly discuss story needs and resolve things with the players. If you like, you can mix different approaches as well, using freeform discussion for most of the action and saving impartial dice rolls for critical scenes.

KEEPING THE GAME MOVING: USING A CATTLE PROD ON YOUR PLAYERS

Every Storyteller faces it, dreads it and hopes it doesn't come up. But no matter how hard you try, the players keep missing the obvious clue that is fluttering in front of their face. It's enough to make a good Storyteller scream and question himself. The uncomfortable silence is there and waiting in the darkness for us all. The question is, how do you avoid it?

The best way is truly the hardest and longest to do: trial and error. Go through several game sessions and watch and learn what your players get and what they don't. It may not sound like a lot of help, but it's better than just repeating the problem over and over. This has the benefit of you being more confident when Storytelling for your group. You

will know them, which is a big bonus. The big disadvantage is the fact that it takes so long. You are going to make a lot of mistakes in that time period and they are going to be uncomfortable and embarrassing. But it's okay, because you come out a better Storyteller in the end.

What if you don't have months or years to teach your players the finer points? What if you need to make it down and dirty and it's gotta be here and now? The second way is to make clues extremely simple. Most players can't miss clues when they are being slammed against their heads. This is the equivalent of turning your great novel into a game of Twister. You won't like doing it, and doing it for long periods of time is almost guaranteed to make you not want to be Storyteller for your group anymore. If you are forced to do this for long, and your group is showing no hope of improving, you may want to do one of two things: find a new group, or step down from Storytelling. It's harsh, but if they don't seem to improve, there isn't much you can do. You signed up as Storyteller for these folks, not to give yourself a massive coronary from the stress of trying to get them to do something right. Always keep in mind that if you aren't having fun, even as a Storyteller, then what is the point of doing it?

As a final note, be careful not to insult anyone. It won't do you any good to insult the players you are trying to entertain. Push their limits and have some faith in their ability. Storytellers insult their players by assuming they are stupid. Your players are real people. Keep it simple but not simplistic. Push your players with some carefully placed "big words." They'll learn and Storytelling for them in the future will become easier. At the same time, don't treat them as though they are stupid for not knowing something. We are not all equal in education. Keep that in mind the next time one of your players stumbles over something.

WINE AND FINE DINING WITH YOUR GAME



The Storyteller is looking for a way to spruce up his game. He's exhausted his verbal descriptions of the environment but still wants to add a little something extra.

Why not think of atmosphere? Too often, players just sit at a table in a badly lit room, straining to read what a piece

of paper says, trying to talk over a noisy air conditioner and eating pizza and drinking Mountain Dew. Why?! I mean, Mountain Dew is as fine a soft drink as any and pizza, while a common point of contention (some players never learn that pineapple doesn't belong on a baked good!), tastes all right. But doesn't this get old? Why not take the story to all five senses and stimulate the mind?

ELABORATION

One of the most difficult things for a Storyteller is describing something. You can see it in your mind's eye. How can you convey it to your players? How can you give them your vision without destroying or confusing them? They say a picture is worth a thousand words, and never is this truer than when you are trying to tell your players how something looks.

The key is to keep it simple. Though you believe your something is worth all thousand of those words, it would bore your players to tears to do nothing but sit there while you ramble on about the perfect color of green on the walls. Beyond that, keep the wording simple. Although 10-dollar words are pretty, they are most likely going to confuse your players. Use terms you think even the most nonverbal of your players will understand. Instead of saying *chartreuse*, say bright neon green. The smaller the word the more likely it will be understood.

Another key is using things that are common to your players. This can be different depending on where you are from. If you live in England, you are more likely to understand what exactly bangers and mash are as compared to your average American, who has never heard of the dish. Keep it relevant to your players. If they don't understand, it's lost on them.

A final piece of advice: Only you can judge these things. Watch your players for their reactions. If you are not getting what you desire, change it. Don't ever mistake stupidity for a small vocabulary. They are not one and the same. It just means that they haven't read the dictionary cover to cover. Give them a chance to understand and work through this. It could even become a positive influence for them as players.

SOUND

Listening is already one of the most commonly used senses in roleplaying. All of the Storyteller's thoughts and ideas and story come out in words. All of the player interactions come out in words. So what more do you need? Music is a great way to start. Take the time to think of what's planned for your game that evening and choose a suitable piece to play in the background. If you're feeling really creative, go through your CDs or MP3s and put on music timed to play through specific story events. Sound effects can make play a little more intense — a gunshot coming out of nowhere can shock players into realizing that

OCULT RØCK:

PLAYING THE RECORD BACKWARD

Back in The Day, White Wolf games often listed their writers' musical inspirations: a solid collection of Goth and Industrial music most often suited their tastes. This led to an unfortunate assumption: The World of Darkness was a place with a gargoyle on every roof and the Sisters of Mercy on every stereo.

The setting is more diverse than that; ravers, rude boys and jazz musicians walk down the World of Darkness' broken streets in about the same proportions as they do in our world. Ultimately, the musical composition of the setting is in your hands. Use the music you and your players like and don't inflict any sounds that anyone absolutely despises.

Here are a few common ways to bring sound into the game:

- The theme song: Pick something that represents the mood of the game as a whole and play it at the beginning of each session. This can help focus the group on the game, but don't listen to it in silence or play it too loudly — you'll get bored with it.
- Character themes (motifs): You can associate certain pieces with certain characters. The dread Voormas is accompanied by the opening of Mozart's *Requiem*. Manga soundtracks play while an Otaku Virtual Adept codes reality.
- Location themes: Similarly, you can associate certain songs and mixes with particular places. Nightclubs are the easiest, but empty streets and the wilderness have their own sounds. Make sure you vary this for regular locations, otherwise you'll get a smarmy player saying, "Slipknot again? Hand me the silver bullets, Disciple."
- General mood music: Remember that the players can always take things in a new direction. Keep some music handy for unanticipated action scenes, journeys and romantic interludes.

their characters are mortal. Most large record chains sell sound-effects CDs; you can find other samples using file-sharing services.

VISION

Sight is another good way to add atmosphere to your game. Instead of sitting under a ceiling fixture staring at character sheets, give them something more. If you are in a tense and frightening part of your game, why not dim the lights? If there is a storm going on, flicker the lights on and off. Cover the table in a colored tablecloth that you think suits the mood of the game for that evening. If the players are at a fancy dinner, set out some candles. You can also wear clothes and accessories that fit the mood or represent a Class One character. Give the players something to look at instead of condemning them to stare at their dice and character sheets.

This last point is absolutely vital. Without eye contact and facial expressions, the players will never really learn to assume a natural in-character voice or bond with the group. Even online games usually have some sort of visual support, such as character icons or web pages. Don't sell your group short; even wearing a hat can help direct the players' attention up to you. From there, you can guide them to each other.

Even a single prop, used as a centerpiece, can transform a kitchen table into a part of the game. When you set it up, it creates a break from the everyday and suggests the tone of the setting. A simple earthenware goblet can get the players thinking about your A.D. 1200 game.

SMELL

Smell is a sense that roleplayers often overlook, despite the fact that aromatherapy went through a huge revival and you can obtain almost any smell in any form. Why not give your players something that will tickle their noses? If they walk into a room where a dead body has rested for months, it's going to stink. So whip up something that can be closed quickly but will give players an honest idea of what it smells like. A plastic bag with some moldy bread, a little dirt, and some water mixed together might do the trick. Blood usually smells like iron. If you have the time, find some rusty nails and have your players smell them. It's not something you're going to want to do every time you come across something dead, but smell is strongly linked to memory. Once you expose the players to it, they will come back to the sensation when the event pops up again.

Make sure that whatever you decide on is sanitary, not *too* strong and doesn't provoke any allergies. Get the group's permission as well. Many people react strongly to scents — or just feel silly taking a whiff from a plastic bag.

TOUCH

Touch is another oft-ignored idea that Storytellers can use to make their games interesting. The same tablecloth that you used to stimulate the players' vision can be exploited for the texture of its fabric: something coarse for the hem of an ascetic's robe, or something smooth and soft for the dress of that society deb the dapper Etherite is wooing. If you can, adjust heat and humidity where you play. If it is the middle of summer in your game and nobody minds, turn off the air conditioner. Let the house get hot; let your troupe feel what it is like outside in this weather. Let's say they are trekking around the bayou. There are few things nastier than feeling hot and sticky all the time; a hint of the temperature or humidity the characters experience can bring it to life. You should provide only a *tiny* hint; don't bake or freeze the players, and stay mindful of any physical conditions (like asthma) that might be aggravated by the change.

Another good way to implement touch is to make up dummies of the objects (such as weapons and foci) that they carry. If they have pistols, give them toy guns. If they have swords, give them plastic or wooden swords. *Never* take these props outside a private play area and *never* do anything physically vigorous with them. But if a player has a real-life representation of what her character has, it can make a world of difference. You'll note players gesturing and fidgeting with their props — and you can even take those as character actions in play.

TASTE

Although not the most important aspect of most games, it can be an influential way for the Storyteller to give her players an interesting game. Using taste doesn't require you to be a chef, but a bit of cooking skill can help. Make foods that suit the mood — if your players are going to a fancy dinner, there is nothing stopping you from making nice food, and it doesn't have to be a large amount. If you and your troupe don't have a ton of cash, just make hors d'oeuvres. If you want to go all out, order catering, make a formal meal. Tell them to stay in character the entire dinner and they and you will be amazed at what happens while they are eating. It makes a nice change from pizza and chips, too. Gaming is a social experience and so is eating. Even if you abandon the game for the food, you're at least doing something enjoyable. Again, make sure that what you serve won't conflict with the players' tastes or cause any food allergies.

NUTRITION

No, we aren't going to tell you to go on a diet or eat your broccoli, but the food you choose does make a difference in the type of game you're going to end up with.

You know those times at the end of the game when you feel you're carrying a sack full of bricks on your shoulders? When your eyes start fluttering? When the players start getting bitchy when you ask for that Dodge roll? Nutrition is often a factor.

The kind of junk food people tend to eat during a game is heavy on starchy carbohydrates and sugar. The body metabolizes this as blood sugar relatively rapidly, causing a boost in your energy level. Unfortunately, this rapid process also allows that energy to leave as quickly as it arrived, leaving the burning byproduct of lactic acid in its wake. Your head throbs, you feel tired and sore — and you'll be *damned* if you have to describe your magical effect in detail to the bastard across the table!

Try adding whole grains, nuts and vegetables to temper the effect. They provide a more consistent energy level over time. You don't have to give up the junk completely — just remember that too much is going to affect your performance at the table.

At this point you ask, "How can I afford this wonderful world of immersive roleplaying?"

Make the players pay.

You can either do it potluck style, paying into a food (or props) fund, or rotate responsibility to a different person each game. In the case of props, make sure that the final ownership of these items is established beforehand. You don't have the right to demand that the players contribute financially to these extras, but if everyone enjoys them, you can simply explain that you won't be able to keep it up out of your own pocket.

Good players will take the initiative. If they know what you regularly use to enhance play, they might bring their own props or take the initiative and plan a meal for the group. Make sure that this is done freely; too many groups have players or Storytellers who always bring the snacks or the decorations.

In the end, these occasional extras shouldn't be emphasized at the expense of conventional game

play. If any of the above is too much of a pain, drop it. A player could feel stupid handling a prop or might prefer to keep objects from compromising his vision of the setting.

THE ONE-NIGHT CHRONICLE

So you have a bunch of your friends coming down for the weekend, and you thought it might be fun to run a game or two. But you know for a fact that they are not going to have time for an entire chronicle. What do you do?

You're thinking to yourself, "It's impossible to tell a great story in one night!" It's done all the time. A movie compresses a story into two or three hours. A television show might chop a story down into an hour or even a half hour. Even among these forms of modern media there stand out several experiences that, even in so short a time, still convey gripping tales. In this section we'll discuss a few of these and how they can be used in your one-night chronicle, as well as a few common problems you are likely to run into while executing this new experience.

The first thing for you determine is the direction in which you want the game to go. There are many options for this: a comedic feeling, possibly horror, or maybe even something more traditional. Before you take another step you need to decide what you want your players to take home from this. The mood is important. It's like planning a party; it's not much fun if your players are bored out of their minds at a birthday party. So doing the same ol' same ol' in this situation is a bad idea. Decide what suits your group and the mood you are going for best and go with it.

Once you have this down you need to decide which technique you are going to use to get the story full circle in a limited amount of time. Two options are to condense time or set small goals.

Condensed time is where you take a large chronicle, something that would take months to do, and make it span one game session. You first must dumb down the story a little. You can't get all the subtleties you want. Description takes time, and time is something you won't have; cut the unnecessary bits.

Next cut out time players spend traveling unless it plays an important part in the story. Instead of describing how long it takes to get somewhere, or what players had to do to get somewhere, just tell them they got to where they were going.

Then remove all the unnecessary clutter. One way is premade characters. You don't have to spend



half the night making a character — just get to the playing. Another method is to give a little extra leeway on what works or not; avoiding the argument over what Sphere it takes to do what thing will save tons of time. Overall, this method has the advantage of giving players a fun game with lots of kicks, allowing everyone to branch out of their normal mode of doing things. It's like a whirlwind world tour.

The other way is to set small goals. Use established characters and pick up the action in the middle of something. Establish a simple goal for the party to complete, as in a standard murder mystery. Your group's personal goal is to figure it all out. This sounds simple because it is. For a one-night game it's all you really need.

HARDCORE AND DICELESS?

One of the most beautiful parts of the Storyteller system is that it is centered on the story — not charts, not dice, not rules, but on the story. What does this mean to you as a Storyteller? It means you can run a game with no dice or rules. At this point you are probably saying "But I love my dice!" and hugging them close to your chest like a newborn baby. The

simple fact is, they are not needed all the time, or even at all. Dice are there to add an air of probability to the game and make things fair.

With dice, the Storyteller doesn't have to make a call on whether a player can or cannot do something. It allows all players to feel they are getting a fair shot at doing whatever they want. But there are cases in almost every chronicle where dice are not a necessary part of the game. If a player wants his character to break a stick from a branch and he has Strength 4, does he really need to roll to break the stick off? No. Dice often degrade the imagery and cinematography of an act. That heart-breaking instant where a mage pulls back his mighty arms, ripping the stick free from the branch, would have been completely lost with the dull thud of dice in the background.

Can this be done and still be fair? Sure, but the Storyteller has to be careful about it. Storytellers need to set firm thoughts in their minds about what can and cannot be done with certain stats. What can a player do with Strength 4? If a mage has Time 3, can she see what happened five minutes ago? Once you have these standards set, you have to stick to them.

Consistency is your watchword here. Make sure that whatever parameters you set for a given rating — say, Strength 4 — remain consistent from game to game.

A good estimator already exists: The core rules note that any time your dice pool exceeds the difficulty, you can take one success and leave it at that. This is a quick-and-dirty entry point into a diceless game.

BOOK? WE DON'T NEED NO STINKIN' BOOK

You've looked at the LARP books; you've looked at your players. You have decided that you would rather not see Jimmy the corn-fed farm boy dressed up like his character Deverox the Dominatrix Verbena. At the same time you would like to bring the feeling of live-action sensation to your tabletop. The idea of the freedom really attracts you and you think your players would enjoy it to. What do you do?

Freeform.

Freeform is a way of playing a game without the book's rules, and usually without dice. In order to do this a Storyteller must be completely confident in his rulings. He cannot be wavering on what one rule says or not. If so, chaos will ensue. Freeform provides some huge advantages to normal roleplaying, one of which is cinematography. To be honest, rolling dice to see if you punch someone kills the imagery in a player's head. With freeform it is perfectly acceptable just to say your character did a roundhouse kick that spun the guy's head around on his shoulders.

The big downside to freeform is that it puts all the responsibility for the game on the Storyteller's shoulders. The Storyteller has to decide if an act will work. There are no dice to decide for him. The Storyteller has to keep everything in proportion to the stats of the characters. If not, the fairness is lost. All of this is the Storyteller's responsibility. It's hard, but the reward is great for those who attempt it.

STICKING TO YOUR WORD, A.K.A. PLAYING FAIR

Being a Storyteller means being judge, jury and executioner for the players. It means being the law where there is none. It also means catching a lot of crap because people don't see it your way. It means you are going to have to deal with every problem, every idea and every thought that the players bring

to your doorstep and preferably do it all with a smile. Is it hard? Yes, it is one of the hardest things to do. But it has to be done to keep the game going. One of the reasons you will hear veteran Storytellers going on and on about how the game must go on is because they cling to the concept. No matter how hard things get they cling to the fact that they are doing the best they can in a job that is usually thankless but for personal gratification.

How do you do it? There are six million things on your mind and all you want to do is run your story and have fun. Why does all this crap have to keep piling up on you? Part of a Storyteller's job is to be the duct tape of the world. You hold the story, the players, the rules and everything else together. But this doesn't answer how to do it. There are some rules you can stick to that will pay off greatly in the long run for your players' happiness and your sanity.

Once you've established that you're all having fun, you should stick to the most basic rules. You might even tape a copy of them to your Storyteller's screen.

Rule Number One is and always should be: The Storyteller is always right. This is the golden rule of all roleplay. You as a Storyteller are always right. Make sure your players know that. It will save you a lot of heartache and grief in the end.

Rule Two: Treat everyone equally. That means that if you give someone grief for doing something, make sure that if someone else does it she catches grief too. Don't show your friends favoritism, even if you happen to like someone better than someone else. Don't let it show. When you are the Storyteller you are impartial.

Rule Three: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Take a look at your actions. Would you really want your character killed for no reason? Would you want to be told over and over and over that you are wrong?

Rule Four: Players are human, too. Don't let yourself be confused by thinking that just because a player is playing an evil person in game that she is evil in real life. A character is just a sheet of paper and a figment of imagination in the end. A person is real and has thoughts and feelings of her own.

Rule Five: A game is a game. Don't let the feelings and heat of the game leave the table. If someone is angry, take the time to ask him why while everyone is at the table. Don't let grudges about the game get carried beyond the door. It only causes more problems.

Rule Six: No one is bound to play here. If a player decides he doesn't want to play anymore, don't begrudge him. Maybe he isn't having fun, maybe the group just isn't working out, and maybe he has other things to do. Any way you look at, it's his right.

Rule Seven: Real life comes first, no matter what. The game is just a game; don't let it stop you from paying bills, don't let it break up romances, and don't let it get in your way. Your life is far more important than the game will ever be. Real life is permanent; a game is transitory.

Rule Eight: You signed up to do the job, so do it. You signed up to entertain these folks. That means it's your job to provide the best fun you can for them for as long as you think you can. Give them your best and they will do the same for you.

Rule Nine: Listening is the key to any job. Listen to what your players want, listen to yourself when you talk to them, listen to everything. Listening can

save you tons of problems in the end. Being attentive to yourself and players is the key to being a really good Storyteller.

Rule Ten: If it isn't fun, don't do it. If you're not enjoying yourself, if it is not fun for you, don't do it. Fun is the name of the game. When it stops being so, stop doing it. Yes, your players depend on you, but you are not supposed to be miserable for their sakes. Tell them how you feel and how you think it might be better for someone else to be Storyteller this time around.

Keep in mind in the end that this all comes down to you. You are a person; you do what you want. No one can tell you differently. If you want this all to end now, that is your right. No one is perfect, not even you — if this is what you're aiming for, you're aiming too high. Aim for fun if nothing else — fun is what games are all about.

MAGE AND PHILOSOPHY



Mage is sometimes referred to as “the gaming philosopher’s game.” But how many people actually add a little philosophy to their chronicles? While a full examination of philosophy is beyond the scope of this book, it’s not impossible to add a primer for Storytellers.

Creating a compelling chronicle is a terrific challenge: Devising robust and intricate plots, creating multifaceted characters, developing an interesting setting, establishing mood and theme — these are concerns for any troupe that wants to enjoy a vivid chronicle. There are many sources of inspiration in literature, film, music and the fine arts, but few Storytellers fully explore the possibilities in the classical world of ideas, the study of philosophy.

Many people presume that the concepts and beliefs developed in a **Mage** chronicle are incompatible with contemporary or ancient philosophy when in fact most conceptions of magic are historically grounded in particular philosophies or metaphysics. It can be surprising to learn how deeply intertwined the magical, the mystic and the philosophical have been throughout history. The debates of contemporary philosophy can also be a lively source of inspiration for a chronicle — what are the conflicts between mages if not con-

flicts between ways of thinking and perceiving the world? Such conflicts in the realm of ideas provide thematic backdrops for the conflicts between characters, or perhaps the realm of ideas might prove to be susceptible to the direct manipulation of a skillful mage?

Storytellers may also be reluctant to constrain themselves within a single philosophy, feeling that a “rational” interpretation restricts creativity. On the contrary, philosophy is in many ways the practice of questioning, from the Socratic method to the radical doubt of Descartes, to today’s postmodernism. The depth and scope of such ideas can greatly enrich a chronicle and we hope will spark new ideas and raise new questions for your troupe and your chronicle.

SOCRATES, PLATO AND ARISTOTLE — THE PHILOSOPHER, FORITIS AND ARISTOTLE’S SCIENCE

Philosophy as a practice originated in ancient Greece (philosophy means “love of wisdom” in ancient Greek). A class of professional advisors and thinkers, known as the sophists, made their living providing counsel to the ruling class and teaching the children of the wealthy. While varied, the dominant themes in the thoughts of the sophists were pragmatism and politics. Ironically, the sophists are

best known not for their own thoughts but in the works of the thinkers who most opposed them, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.

Socrates is often thought of as the “father of philosophy,” even though he left no written works of his own behind. He is known only through the works of Plato, his student. The “Socratic” method is a technique of reasoning that uses repetitive questioning of terms to uncover hidden contradictions and differences in shades of meaning. The most famous example of the Socratic method is in Book I of Plato’s *Republic*, in which Plato depicted Socrates using the method to answer the question “What is Justice?” The Socratic method is well-suited to more mystical characters. Who should be more concerned with shades of meaning than a mage, whose very words can shape reality?

Plato is also known for his theory of forms. In Plato’s understanding, a form is the unchanging, archetypical essence of a given thing. Everything has a corresponding form, which is the perfect nature of the thing. For example, Plato talked about the form of Man (Humanity), the essence of which distinguished man from animals. Even humble objects have forms, such as the form of a Chair. He used the allegory of the cave to explain metaphorically the relationship of the form to the objects in the everyday world. He likened the changeable objects of ordinary experiences to shadows on the wall of a cave cast by the real objects, the forms. The forms could not be seen with the senses or manipulated physically but were pure and unchanging, accessible only by the intellect. Knowledge of the forms can be gained by reflection and use of intellect — it does not require direct experience. Some contemporary philosophers contend that all subsequent philosophy is an extended argument with Plato. The theory of forms can (and historically did!) inform and inspire mages of all backgrounds. Most western ideas of changeless perfection arise from interpretations of the Platonic forms, which are themselves usually attributed to Plato’s contact with Persian mysticism. (You’ll note that forms themselves show up in core **Mage** as Patterns, the underlying shapes of all Forces, Matter and Life.)

Aristotle disagreed with his tutor, Plato, on a great many things. Aristotle is widely regarded as the father of science and logic. As such, it may seem that Aristotle’s ideas would be adversarial to theories of magic. In actual history, Aristotle’s science informed the “science” of magic, and it can easily provide a wealth of ideas to add to your chronicle.

Aristotle did not agree that the forms are apprehended directly by the intellect through contemplation. He argued that the forms are learned by experience — that by observation the intellect can come to understand general principles behind specific circumstances and that the true nature of any given thing could be ascertained. The Greek word for this “true” nature is *telos*. Unlike modern physics, Aristotle understood motion not as a mathematical abstraction but rather as fulfillment of *telos*, or nature. Things, especially living things, seek to fulfill their *telos*. In this way of speaking, the *telos* of an acorn is to produce an oak. The rock falls because its *telos* would have it in a lower, heavier place than water or air, which seek to rise. Aristotle wrote extensively of the ancient elements of Earth, Water, Air and Fire. Aristotle’s science became the basis for all scientific categorization for more than a thousand years, and his teleological theories became the basis of the “sciences” of alchemy, astrology and other magical practices. Integrating these ideas into your chronicle can provide historical richness and a diversity of ideas — your troupe could attempt to revive Aristotle’s science, which had a place for magic!

TRADITIONS AND PRACTITIONERS THROUGH THE MIDDLE AGES — THE AGE OF THE PHILOSOPHER

Aristotle’s thought so influenced the thinkers of the Roman Empire and the Medieval, or “Classical,” period, that he came to be known simply as “The Philosopher.” The Catholic Church officially endorsed Aristotle’s science and his practice of logic. The Medieval period is the origin of many of our ideas of magic in theory and in practice — the classical mages of antiquity were all born of this period. The practices of alchemy and astrology were termed sciences and accorded as much respect as the practice of medicine. Such magical concepts as the law of sympathy and the power of names owe their inspiration to the concept of *telos*. These diverse practices and ideas all shared in the richness of Aristotle’s teleological science, which readily embraced them. Imagine the possibilities of a chronicle in which science and magic are in harmony with one another. Perhaps members of your troupe will attempt to raise competing notions of science to oppose modernity!

RENAISSANCE PHILOSOPHY

The Renaissance was a period rich in ideas and philosophy. Most learned men were steeped in the Classical tradition, and hints of modern thinking and science were emerging. Once again, it is not often

realized how much the philosophy of the Renaissance was involved with the mystical or the magical, nor is it often understood how many of these concepts still apply today. Sir Isaac Newton, the father of physics, practiced astrology and alchemy.

The “Renaissance Man” — the ideal blending of scholarship, martial prowess, mercantile success and courtly manners in a person — is certainly just as interested in the mystical and the mechanical. A mage is in many ways an attempt to mirror this — the mage must perform live in a scientific world, while at the same time having a firm belief and education in mystical practices.

The key to integrating Renaissance thinking into your chronicle is to stress themes of interconnection and metaphor. Renaissance thinking did not make as many distinctions between sciences — physics and chemistry were often interrelated, for example. Out of this exciting blend of new and old ideas arose Modern thinking, embodied in the works of such thinkers as Machiavelli and Descartes.

Renaissance thinking is covered in much greater detail in **Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade**.

MODERNISIM — STARTING AT DESCARTES

René Descartes is thought of as the founder of the modern tradition of philosophy, with its emphasis on mathematics and the scientific method. In *A Discourse on Method*, Descartes offers the most famous proof of existence, *Cogito ergo est*, “I think, therefore I am.”

Modern philosophy is the name applied to the kinds of thinking that emerged from the notions of radical doubt, mathematical law and universal principles. To create a “modern” (the 18th century was the heyday) theme for your chronicle, emphasize laws, regularity and system. The modern philosophers were always in search of “first principles,” such as the *cogito*, from which they could logically deduce the entirety of the world in a body of laws. Modern philosophy is mathematically precise and stresses observation and science, but that does not mean it cannot be integrated into a **Mage** chronicle. Perhaps there are mathematically precise “laws” of magic awaiting discovery. Perhaps all of mathematics is merely a way of naming the universe that then binds it to obey the laws that are so “discovered.”

First principles were anything that could be known for certain, that was beyond doubt. The senses could not provide us with any assistance, because senses are fallible, yet the new science was based on observation, repetition and experiment. How can these tensions be reconciled?

MYSTICISM, THE *A PRIORI* AND METAPHYSICS

Philosophers, scientists and the newly-emerging group of psychologists attempted to construct systems which answered the problems of modern philosophy — to create first principles and rational systems.

One of the great debates in philosophy is over the possibility of *a priori* ideas. This means “prior to experience”; such ideas would be those that a person has prior to any experience or language or teaching. Learning about the *a priori* is more akin to awakening, or remembering, and can be accomplished by reflection with the intellect; it requires no experience (similar to Plato’s forms).

Immanuel Kant believed that ethics and perception were rooted in *a priori* categories. He divided all thought into various kinds and posited that while any specific thought may arise from experience, the categories of thought and perception which are used to make sense of experience are *a priori* (time and truth being examples). This resulted in an ethic based upon a universalized, *a priori*, categorical imperative — “Act only such that your action could be willed to become a universal law, without contradiction.” From this basis, Kant then deduced many principles of ethic, such as “Tell the truth” — that principle can easily be willed to be universal law.

Correspondingly “Tell a lie,” if made a universal law, undermines all speech. (If everything is lies, and known to be lies, then no one truly says anything, per Kant.)

Carl Jung, a pioneer in psychology and psychoanalysis along with Sigmund Freud, also posited the *a priori* — the archetype. He maintained that the human psyche repeatedly produces similar images, themes and ideas. Using examples from primitive cultures, myth and legend and folk art from around the globe, Jung created a list of ideas, images and stories which recur so often in the human psyche as to be permanent fixtures of it — part of a “collective unconscious” — which exists outside each individual but which forms and guides his experience.

Integrating such heady concepts into your chronicle can be a challenge but is often very rewarding. Using psychological archetypes to inform and flesh out characters is common in fiction and film and shows up already on the character sheet.

The tensions between science, which stressed observation and experiment, and notions of the *a priori* become even more pronounced when the techniques of analytic philosophy are turned on philosophy itself. In the end, the concept of radical doubt (“Question everything!”) came to dominate, and the dream of the modern

age of philosophy — to identify and explain the first principles of the universe from which all else can be derived — was never achieved.

Following the Universe

A mage who seeks first principles is a seeker, a quester, one who follows the most oft-cited path to Ascension: one who questions existence, struggles to define morality and seeks an understanding of why the cosmos works the way that it does. Such a mage tries to determine fundamental principles that underlie existence but assigns them a moral weight. In this fashion the mage isn't only an explorer but also a spiritualist and a seeker of human ideals.

Are there really *a priori*? Can a mage, with his mystical insight, show what science could not — the existence of first and final principles?

NIETZSCHE AND POSTMODERNITY

The postmodern era in philosophy arose from the application of ruthless criticism to the projects and systems of modern philosophy. In postmodern philosophy, the structures of grammar and thought that informed all previous philosophy are called into sharper question. The practice of philosophy itself is taken to task and found wanting.

For example, a postmodern response to the famous “I think therefore I am” would be to ask questions such as, how do you know that you think? How is the act of thinking perceived? Why does thinking require a thinker? Could thinking just “happen” without any person thinking? When thoughts are apparently your own, could they just be something imposed from the outside, received as though they were radio waves from some other source?

In a general sense, postmodern philosophy can be thought of as an era of questions with few answers. The construction of systems is no longer the philosopher's pastime, but rather the destruction of systems. Nietzsche called it “philosophizing with a hammer” in *Twilight of the Idols*. In other places, Nietzsche calls upon the philosophers of the future, who would follow him, to “revalue all values” and “overcome themselves.” The philosopher of the future would be free of all system and error from the past, would have escaped these traditions and limitations and could create his own interpretations. This freedom is not always felt as liberation, he thought. It can be a terrible, oppressive freedom according to Nietzsche — he considers a measure of a person's strength to be the “number of lies one requires in order to live.”



A Terrible Burden of Magic

Mages see themselves as empowered, given the choice to change the world in their images. Yet to Nietzsche, even mages might not be supermen. A mage who finds himself constrained to former systems — Traditions — has failed to overcome predetermined thought. Nietzsche exhorts his readers to think for themselves, to overthrow the dogma of Church and science and instead smash down all that is held unassailably true and correct. Certainly mages engage in this search for personal levels of truth. Indeed, a mage learns early that the multiverse is far from what he's always thought it to be.

The question then becomes, how does the mage use this knowledge? Does he seek to place it in the context of “what has come before”? Many modern mages still cling to the trappings of their mundane lives. Conversely, the mages who most eschewed the material world in pursuit of ephemeral truths are now gone, lost to the reaches of the Umbra. *Should* mages seek truth beyond the evidence of the mundane world, or should they look for their truths among the rubble of the material world when they have thrown down the pre-conceptions of the Awakened community?

PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE — PARADIGMS AND PRACTITIONERS

Postmodern thinking collided with the sciences and resulted in the philosophy of science emerging as a distinct school of thought. The philosophy of science attempts to analyze the scientific method itself and evaluate the “truth” of scientific propositions and principles. David Hume expressed a skepticism for the laws of science, in particular the laws of cause and effect and the presumption of regularity.

In his view, just because the sun rose yesterday morning and the morning before, and so on, that provides no cause for it to do so again — no understanding of why it happens nor a guarantee of continuation. To contrast a counterexample, each morning, after sunrise, Hume feeds his dog. From the dog's point of view, this has happened each morning and is just as regular as the sunrise, but there can be no presumption of regularity nor understanding of the cause. In this view, prior observation does not provide any guarantee of future behavior. But what about science, which is based on observation and experiment? What about scientific laws?

The philosophy of science attempts to resolve these questions and provide better explanations. True to postmodern tradition, it may raise more questions than it answers. Thomas Kuhn examined changes in science

in history and challenged the notion of progress that pervades scientific development. In his view, science does not make steady progress over time as more research is done, but rather progresses over time in sudden bursts — shifting from one interrelated set of ideas and explanations to a successor set of ideas and explanations suddenly and sometimes with great controversy. He calls these interrelated sets of ideas and principles “paradigms” and refers to the succession of one paradigm after another as “paradigm shift.”

For example, in the Renaissance and early modern era, before the isolation of all the elements, a substance known as phlogiston was theorized to account for the properties of air necessary to support a fire (oxygen was unknown). Phlogiston was a property of air, which was not yet understood to be a mixture of gases. When a candle would not light, the air around it was said to be “de-phlogisticated.” This theory was dominant for many years and was quite sophisticated — there were schemes for measuring phlogiston, and it was able to predict a great many behaviors.

When later thinkers began to conceive of air as a mixture of gases, with oxygen as a component among them responsible for burning, and to conceive of burning as a chemical reaction (oxidation) instead of a fundamental elemental property of the element of fire, these theories were immediately rejected by the majority of the scientists of the day. Even after Priestley established a series of experiments that “proved” that his interpretation was valid, the phlogiston theorists sought to modify their notion of phlogiston to accommodate the new experiment.

In this case the paradigms were as follows: Under phlogiston theory, air was thought of as unified and having many changeable properties. Under oxygen theory, air is conceived as a mixture of gases with individual properties that do not change but can seem to change as the mixture changes (candles will not burn if there is not enough oxygen present).

The succession of paradigms always seems like progress once it occurs, but the fact is that there is no single, unified progress from phlogiston to oxygen. The phlogiston scientists had been progressing — they were devising experiments to further their understanding and had been able to make very accurate predictions about the ability of air to support flame. To arrive at oxygen theory required that all their previous ideas be discarded and reworked. This is not the traditional notion of progress that the sciences have portrayed over the ages.

A Mage chronicle can easily find inspiration in paradigm shift. In many ways, mages operate in a



different paradigm than those around them — they literally have a different reality. The conflict of the paradigms which admit of magic and those that do not can be an overarching theme of your chronicle, as with the Ascension War, or it can be more personal — perhaps a single character undergoes a paradigm shift. It could be as simple as an Awakening or as complex as changing Tradition affiliations.

Cheating Consequence

Mages have a built-in interest in the philosophy of science. Sons of Ether, in particular, want to show that science is more than rote, but all mages want people to break out of the assumption that one thing automatically causes another set thing. Indeed, by their very magical powers, mages can do things that *don't* work for other people. Perform a rite, it creates some magical effect — but if someone else does it, it doesn't work. Create a magical potion, it has some effect — but if someone else mixes it, it doesn't work. In the absence of any other factor, one can only assume that the causes are different if the effects are different! Mages wonder what *causes* them to be so different that they can do dynamic magic when other people can't.

By the same token, mages have an interest in showing that *possibility exists*. You can't *prove* that the sun will come up tomorrow; you can only show by induction that it's likely to follow the same pattern that has been observed for your life. Similarly, you can't *prove* that you can't do magic; you can only show that it's unlikely to work, since it never worked before — right up until a mage blows that away by doing something spectacular.

CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY — LANGUAGE, NARRATIVE, RELATIVISM, PHYSICS, ETC.

Contemporary philosophy is very diverse. Some refer to it as the post-postmodern era; others such as Richard Rorty have announced that philosophy is dead. In this view, the traditional questions of philosophy — “What is truth?”, “What is Good?” — are not only unanswerable, they turn out to have been mistaken questions. Philosophy is no longer concerned with the truth — the concept is irrelevant, and not very interesting. Rorty says “in this environment, there is no Philosophy with a capital P — there is only little p philosophy.” “philosophy” is now conceived of as seeing how “things, in the broadest

possible sense of the term, hang together, in the broadest possible sense of the term.”

Other philosophers have responded to the challenge by attempting to ground philosophy in the study of narrative structure, to make the logic of narrative the basis for rationality as a whole. Still more have turned to physics to provide a basis for understanding. Our age is a very dynamic time in philosophy, which can readily be reflected in a **Mage** chronicle.

The Philosophy of philosophy

Since Rorty’s philosophy is reductionist in the extreme, it’s suited for characters who want to challenge the notion of existence at its most fundamental level. Everything that a mage senses — even with the Spheres — could be nothing more than an illusion, an hallucination or a picture superimposed from some outside force. If people are nothing more than shells with beamed-in signals, what does it matter what our senses tell us? It could be all wrong or irrelevant. Or maybe people are just things that are made to *believe* that they’re people, in a giant fake cosmos or computer simulation.

For mages interacting with this sort of philosophy, the struggle then becomes one of motivation. If there’s no real way to discern “existence” or “self,” why bother doing anything? Following Rorty’s train of thought, mages may decide that since it’s functionally impossible to trust the senses (and thus to arrive at the “truths” of existence), they should instead concern themselves with how things work in

what they perceive. Rather than waste their time arguing the metaphysical consequences of people not really being people, they might as well assume that people think and exist and go from there. By assuming that the world works in one concrete, sensible way, the mage overcomes the paralysis of not having identity or meaning and can then develop a system of working within that hallucination — even if it’s nothing more than an elaborate program that the individual’s deluded into thinking. Philosophy comes full circle.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTED READING

Mage is a unique storytelling experience — by its very nature, a **Mage** chronicle explores ideas and breaks boundaries. Adding ideas from the world of scholarly philosophy can give real depth and diversity to this background and can inspire your troupe to development and even debate. Storytellers should not shy away from difficult ideas; **Mage** can embrace them and benefit by their inclusion.

Suggested reading for philosophers:

The Story of Philosophy, Will Durant

Republic, Plato

Ethics, Aristotle

Beyond Good and Evil, Friedrich Nietzsche

After Virtue, Alasdair Macintyre

The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Thomas Kuhn

After Philosophy, compilation of essays



CHAPTER FOUR: AVATARS AND SEEKINGS

“The dance was over. The veils were all dropped. The cascade of epiphanies had ceased. The inner voice was mute, and that was fine, it had given her more than enough to figure out for herself.”

— Tom Robbins, *Skinny Legs and All*



One of the most important facets of any **Mage** chronicle is the development of a character’s mystical understanding, represented in the game through the Arete Trait. A character’s Avatar acts as guide, motivator and taskmaster on this quest, which requires the Avatar to have a personality and agenda all its own. Since the Storyteller is ultimately responsible for structuring a character’s Seekings and tailoring them to both the player’s expectations and the Avatar’s goals,

both of these facets of the game require greater attention than was given them in **Mage: The Ascension**. This chapter contains information on how to build a character’s Avatar, how to portray the Avatar in a chronicle, some possibilities on what the Avatar truly is and what goals an Avatar might pursue. The latter half of the chapter discusses Seekings in great detail: how to run them, when to run them, their effect on Resonance and what a successful (or failed) Seeking translates to for the player and her character.

THE HIGHER SELF



All mages have Awakened Avatars. It's what allows them to perform magic. It says as much on page 138 of **Mage**. But to a new (or even an experienced Storyteller), that's a little like saying that flipping a switch turns on a light — true in a sense, but not very informative.

The question, then, is “what is an Avatar?” The Avatar is a part of the mage, perhaps a facet of her soul or her mind (if indeed those two things are separate). The Avatar has its own consciousness and its own agendas, and those goals may or may not coincide neatly with the mage's own plans for her life. The Avatar can affect the mage in a number of ways — giving her advice either directly or in the form of subtle hints, helping her in times of great stress and guiding her on journeys of self-discovery called Seekings. Avatars also seem to retain memories from one incarnation to another, and these incarnations don't necessarily follow any sort of logical progression. An American-born Akashic Brother might see visions of life as a monk in Imperial China, while a Progenitor might find herself dreaming of treating eye disorders in the Middle East, even though she herself has no Arabic ancestry.

The origins of the Avatar are unknown to modern mages. The end of the Ascension War and the destruction of many of the Hermetic chantries where theories on the matter were stored meant that younger mages don't get the same answers about the Avatar's role and function that their predecessors did. Even in other Traditions, speculation on the true nature of the Avatar seems to have fallen by the wayside for the time being as mages concentrate more on survival and coping with the modern world.

Historical records, in the form of written archives or oral traditions, don't seem to speak of Avatars as direct presences in the lives of the Awakened until the Middle Ages. Certainly, Romans had a similar idea of the *genius*, the Greeks the *daimon* and the Neoplatonists the *ochema*, but mages of the time did not seem to interact with them in the same way as did their later Medieval counterparts. Before the Middle Ages, mages seemed to master their arts by pure will and by learning from masters rather than by receiving guidance from spiritual sources. One theory holds that as new ideas about the soul took hold and

mages began questioning the workings of their own minds, their Avatars gained (or asserted) more direct consciousness. Mystical histories in the Far East, for what it's worth, seem to indicate more “modern” Avatars long before such were discovered in Western Europe. It seems as though as history progresses, Avatars seemed more able — or willing — to take direct and noticeable action in their charges' lives, even to the point of manifesting physically at times. In the wake of the Reckoning, this has (as mentioned on page 139 of **Mage**) become increasingly unusual — perhaps the same forces that keep mages on this side of the Gauntlet prevent their Avatars from assuming corporeal form? When Avatars *do* manifest physically, they do not seem affected by Paradox or Unbelief. Is this because Avatars, as a part of a mage, are “rooted” in consensual reality, or because Avatars are far enough removed from that reality so as not to be hurt by it? That question is simply another way of phrasing the original one: What is the Avatar?

Some mages speak of the Prime, or the “Pure Ones,” and claim that each Avatar is a shard of this primal energy of the universe. The details vary, of course, and have throughout history. In the 15th century, magi spoke of the “Daemon,” and their counterparts in the Order of Reason saw ancient philosophers or guardian angels. This discrepancy continues today — a Chorister might speak of the Avatar being an angel or perhaps even a spark of the Divine itself, while a Verbena might talk of the Wyck. At its heart, though, the only one undeniable truth about Avatars is that they exist — even the Technocracy, try as it might, cannot deny the urgings and visions that drive its members to greater heights of inspiration.

What is the Avatar? No one knows, and the game would be greatly lessened were we to provide a definitive answer on the subject. Perhaps an Avatar is an aggregate of a given mage's past life experience — this would explain why Avatars in general have grown more powerful over the past centuries. Perhaps the Avatar is indeed a shard of a greater whole, a literal piece of the divine entrusted to a mage, as evidenced by the fact that while mages' souls can linger as ghosts after death, their Avatars do not seem to do so. Whatever the truth of the matter, mages have been struggling for

centuries to learn the truth of the Avatar, and neither ancient mysticism nor cutting-edge scientific theory has decided the matter. Perhaps it isn't the answer that is important, so much as asking the question....

PORTRAYING THE AVATAR

All mages, regardless of whether or not they possess the Avatar Background, do possess an Awakened Avatar. The possibilities for how any given Avatar might manifest are literally endless. Detailing a character's Avatar requires input from the player, interpretation from the Storyteller and constant communication and feedback from both.

BUILDING THE AVATAR

Before play even begins (although it's never too late!), the player and the Storyteller should consider the following questions:

- **What is the character's Essence?** While Avatars can take nearly any form and pursue limitless agendas, the first step toward determining anything about an Avatar is to decide on its Essence. The importance of Essence in portraying the Avatar is discussed below. In the early stages of character creation, the player should decide upon his character's Essence and then work with the Storyteller to determine what this choice means in terms of the mage's development. Dynamic Avatars, for example, are forces of change, but "change" is a vague term. It can refer to unchecked (or even controlled) growth or rampant destruction. Perhaps a mage with a Dynamic Avatar has been a rigidly controlled person all his life — will the Awakening of his Avatar drive her insane? Essence is a very important decision — don't let the player make this choice lightly.

Storytellers may notice upon reading the descriptions of the four Essences, below, that the goals of Avatars of different Essences might overlap somewhat. For example, consider an Avatar that wishes her Akashic mage to restructure her Tradition in the wake of the Reckoning. That Avatar might be Dynamic, trying to change the current chaos. It might be Pattern, in that it is trying to repair something already extant. It might be Questing, seeing the Tradition as one step in a larger goal of unifying all mages. The Avatar might even be Primordial, acting as a kind of representative for the Akashic Record. If the Tradition isn't rebuilt, the Record will likewise fade.

AVATAR AND OTHER BACKGROUNDS

As written, the Avatar Background determines only how much Quintessence a mage can harness and channel. The strength of one's Avatar might also determine how much past life experience it has to draw on, how much contact it is willing (or able) to have with the mage and how direct that contact is, how flexible the mage's paradigm is (if the mage is drawing on centuries of magical experience, it only makes sense that his worldview is a little less rigid) and perhaps even whether or not a given effect is vulgar or coincidental.

Guide to the Traditions includes several other Backgrounds that might tie in to a character's Avatar. Past Lives is probably the most obvious, since a mage with this Background is simply accessing information from his Avatar. Likewise, an Avatar might show up in a mage's Demesne a great deal more easily than in her "real life." A mage with access to a Node or a Sanctum might find that her Avatar contacts her more frequently in her place of power, and more than one mage's Familiar has delivered "messages" from the higher self. A Blessing, too, might be a gift conferred from the Avatar itself. A mage who fits into a Legend might find that her Avatar takes up a role in the story — or helps her cement her own.

When taking any of these Backgrounds, the player should consider how they play into the character's mystic path and how they will interact with her Avatar. The Storyteller, then, is responsible for making sure that these little details remain consistent and that the Avatar notices any changes in these other Backgrounds. One of the biggest hurdles to clear in running or playing **Mage** is the inherent strangeness of the Avatar — is it part of the soul, or a separate entity? By tying it in to other facets of the character, the Storyteller can make the Avatar seem less abstract and more an integral part of the character's magic.

This kind of overlap simply means that the player should clearly define how the Avatar and its goals interact to form the mage's mystic path. If the player wishes to let *you* decide how this all fits together, that's fine. The Avatar can easily remain entirely in

the hands of the Storyteller; this allows the player and the character to undergo the quest for mystic understanding together.

- **How much contact has the mage already had with her Avatar?** This question might be best resolved after playing through the character's Prelude, since the Awakening almost always includes some contact with the Avatar. Has the Avatar spoken with the character? If so, how? Verbally, in the form of an anonymous caller? A voice in the mage's head? An unsigned letter? A conversation in an Internet chat room? Or has the mage actually seen her Avatar, perhaps in a dream or even a vivid, terrifying visitation? Some Avatars even take physical form and might enter a mage's life in any role in which they can challenge and teach her — a friend, a lover, even a rival or an enemy. As a general rule, mages with low or no Avatar ratings (as in the Background) don't get very clear messages from their Avatars; perhaps their higher selves are young or they are not devoting much attention to the mages for whatever reason. Higher ratings in the Background indicate an Avatar that is able and willing to make direct contact with the mage. Whether the Avatar chooses to do so is another matter. As Storyteller, you should gauge how appropriate it is to the character for the Avatar to make and maintain contact and, more importantly, how appropriate it is to the player. For an inexperienced player, a talkative or helpful Avatar can be a godsend (see below for more suggestions on using the Avatar in play).

- **What form does the Avatar take?** This topic is discussed in more detail below, but an Avatar's form is determined by its Essence and by what would motivate the character. That means that not *all* Dreamspeakers are guided by animal totems and not *all* Technocrats see their Avatars in terms of mathematical formulae. What about a techno shaman Dreamspeaker who hears voices guiding him in the murmur of the crowds on the subway, or a Void Engineer exploring the seas to whom enlightenment is a monstrous sea creature that he must catch and identify?

- **How does the mage see the Avatar?** That is, what does the character think those voices in her head really represent? As with most jargon in *Mage*, "Avatar" is hardly a universally used term. A Christian mage might not believe for one moment that what she does is "magic" — she accomplishes what she does by the love of God, not her own will. What then is the "Avatar?" She might see it in terms of an

angel, the Holy Spirit, divine visions and so forth. Mages with truly subtle Avatars might not notice them at all — they get urgings and ideas, yes, but those come from the mage's own mind, not some "guiding spirit."

- **How does the mage feel about her Avatar?** Not all Avatars are benign. Not all are comforting. Some have direct, demanding agendas and don't have time to coddle their mages. Some are so potent that their hosts can't handle the raw power they command and go mad or shut them out completely. Some Avatars choose forms of contact that are horrifying to their mages. On the other hand, many Avatars know the value of subtlety and also know that the curiosity and will it takes to Awaken provides a key to motivating the mage. The player and the Storyteller should decide how the mage feels about her higher self — is it a cherished teacher? A close friend? A supernatural being or some unexplainable phenomenon? A nightmare incarnate? Or does the mage have no reason to suspect she even *has* an Avatar?

- **Has the character experienced a Seeking?** The Awakening usually confers one to three points of Arete. This typically means that a **Mage** character begins with her Arete score as determined by normal character creation and is assumed not to have undergone her first Seeking. This isn't necessarily the case. Especially if the Avatar is particularly potent, the mage may already have been taken on such a journey. If so, decide upon the result together with the player. You should detail what happened during the Seeking so that elements of this first expedition into enlightenment can show up during future lessons. Additionally, this will certainly color how a mage views her Avatar. If the first Seeking was a dismal failure, the mage might feel inadequate and weak, and fear or even resent her Avatar's lessons. If the Seeking was successful, she might be thankful and eager to learn — or she might be haughty and proud, feeling that she needs no further instruction. See Seekings, below, for more information.

- **What does the Avatar wish to teach the mage?** This is really more for the Storyteller than the player, although if the player has input regarding her character's mystic path, the Storyteller should by all means listen. All Avatars have a lesson (or many lessons) to teach. What waits at the end of an Avatar's final riddle, few mages are qualified to say. Power is one possibility, but as even the youngest mage has power beyond the ken of Sleep-

ers, this seems somewhat trite. Perhaps the mage, upon learning the lesson of the Avatar, is allowed to join with the Prime (whatever that means), thus Ascending. Whatever the ultimate truth, speculating on it before learning an Avatar's more immediate lessons is getting ahead of the problem. All mages have flaws (often tied to the character's Nature; see pages 96–101 of **Mage: The Ascension** for examples). The Avatar might wish to rectify this kind of deep-seated flaw, thus making the mage a more complete person (and opening her up to greatest heights of enlightenment). On the other hand, the Avatar might not even recognize the mage's personality flaws as something it has any business trying to fix. Some examples of what a given Avatar might try to teach a mage are detailed below.

- **What past incarnations does the Avatar have to share?** Not all Avatars have such memories, or at least not all choose to acknowledge them. But an Avatar that spent a lifetime with a Hermetic mage who eventually became a chantry leader is going to have very different views of magic than one that spent a few short years with a Cultist who burned himself out. The player *might* have some ideas on what kind of information or attitudes an Avatar brings with it from previous incarnations, but the final decision is best left to the Storyteller for two reasons. First, since past-life memories are often sketchy, the player can more easily roleplay not knowing the truth if she truly doesn't. Second, past-life memories can provide countless, easily manipulated plot hooks for the Storyteller. See the sidebar entitled "Avatar and Other Backgrounds" for more information.

DESCRIBING THE AVATAR

Each of the four Essences has certain elements and descriptors common to it. The Storyteller should look at this advice as exactly that. Players can (and often do) come up with descriptions of their characters' Avatars that put an entirely new spin on the Essence and the entire mage-Avatar relationship. That kind of creativity is to be encouraged; it's critical to playing **Mage**. A player who spends time and energy detailing her character's Avatar doesn't wish to hear that the Storyteller has done the work for her — and perhaps developed something completely out of tune with the player's character concept.

Below are suggestions for the appearances and manners of Avatars from each of the four Essences. The Storyteller will also find suggestions on what

an Avatar of a given Essence might be trying to teach a mage and toward which Spheres this might push the mage.

- **Dynamic Avatars:** These Avatars attempt to enact change. To what degree they wish to see things made different varies widely. Some Dynamic Avatars actually focus on one goal at a time, seeking to "make the world a better place" and change things by improving them. Once a particular goal has been completed (or nears completion), they set their mages onto other tasks. This is most common of low- to mid-powered Avatars; the mage has control in such cases, and all the Avatar can do is grant hints.

More powerful Dynamic Avatars, however, are often not so benevolent. Their goals change almost daily, and if the mage wishes to keep up, she had best learn to stir several pots at once. Such mages often take on a sort of "eye of the storm" mentality; as their chaotic Avatars push them in several directions at once, they learn to keep pace by not falling into the swirl of energy and ideas that roils in the higher self (represented by proficiency in several different Spheres). Others learn to direct their Avatars somewhat, applying all of their considerable magical prowess to one problem at a time. In short, they learn to wreak change quickly, surely and effectively (therefore becoming Masters in one or two Spheres).

What is a Dynamic Avatar trying to teach the mage? Again, some Avatars are more extreme than others. The Avatar might wish to see a particular institution torn down or changed from within. It might focus on changing the mage, teaching her to break her routines, to learn new skills and practices, to free herself from material possessions, or merely that change is good. Most Dynamic Avatars do not stand for excessive planning. They seem to understand all too well that one can never take all the variables into account and that sometimes the only way to learn is to *do*. A mage who is too cautious or only wants to sit around and study or discuss might find his Dynamic Avatar pushing him in more and more direct manners, until finally the mage is forced to react.

When designing and portraying a Dynamic Avatar, the Storyteller should remember that these Avatars shun consistency. They rarely appear in the same form twice, although they might keep a consistent theme (so that the mages recognize them). Depending on how enlightened the mage is, these forms might be recognizable (an Avatar might take

the form of the mage's friends or family, but never the same person twice) or more abstract (the Avatar communicates through sound, but not always speech, and certainly never in the same voice). Of all of the Essences, Dynamics are the most likely to guide their mages through hints and urges rather than direct conversation. Whether that's because they'd rather a mage make her own way or because they just can't focus enough to provide concrete aid is a question no one has quite answered yet. (For Storytellers who don't mind a little "cross-training," the **Book of the Wyld for Werewolf: The Apocalypse** has some good suggestions for incorporating the kind of chaos that Dynamic Avatars represent into your games. Just remember, it's not a **Mage** book, so be prepared for some cosmology that doesn't quite fit.)

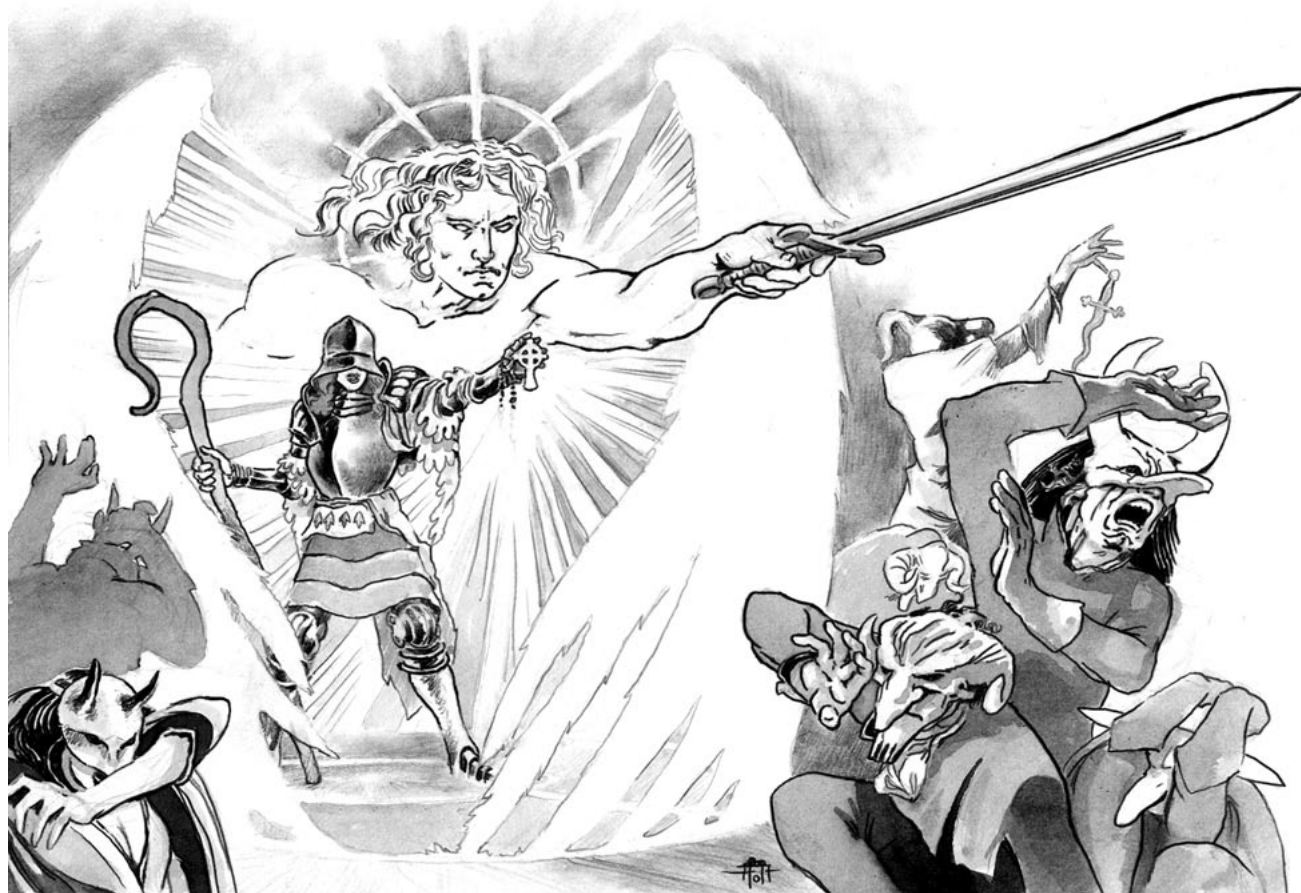
Some possibilities for a Dynamic Avatar include:

- A song, image, equation or some other idea that just *won't* leave the character's head until she acts on it somehow.
- The spirit or image of a revolutionary; this can be anyone who challenged the established order — Charles Darwin, Pablo Picasso, Susan B.

Anthony, Rosa Parks, Louis Pasteur, Karl Marx, Billie Holiday, etc. It doesn't even have to be someone especially famous. If the character had a favorite teacher or relative who was a sort of "black sheep," her Avatar might take on that person's form for recognition's sake.

- A sudden change of weather or other condition outside the mage's control. Maybe everyone starts speaking backward when her Avatar wants her to take notice of something (yes, this *can* be difficult to tell from a Paradox flaw).

- **Pattern Avatars:** Not just for Technocrats anymore, the Pattern Essence either embraces the status quo or wishes to build something new. Whereas a Dynamic Avatar often doesn't care so much *what* changes, as long as something is different, a Pattern Avatar doesn't necessarily have anything against change as long as it knows what it's getting. Therefore, Pattern Avatars tend to encourage their mages to plan, continually, acting only when all necessary factors are in place and the margin for error is negligible. Of course, if the mages waited for their Avatars' approval, they would *never* get anything done.



DYNAMIC EXAMPLE — GAGE CRESSNER

Gage is a Son of Ether who specializes in physics. His style of magic, unlike many of his Tradition, is comprised largely of theory and mathematics rather than gadgetry. He doesn't have the patience to put things together, but he does enjoy the challenge of figuring out how they'll work in the field.

Gage's Avatar never visits him directly. Since Gage tries to be so "no-nonsense," he'd probably either get annoyed by or scared of a flaming pillar or some such manifestation. Because Gage is so interested in harmonics and the physics of sound, his Avatar visits him in the form of vibration and an odd humming sound which gets louder if Gage is "supposed" to learn something from a given situation. If Gage ever keys in to the fact that everything has a spiritual resonance as well as a physical one (*i.e.*, his player decides that he'll learn the Spirit Sphere), Gage's Avatar will take a more direct hand in his development.

Pattern Avatars, despite their somewhat over-cautious natures, can be the easiest to live with. They won't often surprise their hosts and in many ways are the most predictable of Avatars. Their goals change, for the most part, only when one goal has been completed. Some Pattern Avatars focus on goals in smaller pieces (improve the neighborhood, then oust the baneful spirits, *then* build the new community center) while others choose one particular objective that requires constant work (defend the neighborhood and make sure it doesn't fall into disrepair). Pattern Avatars aren't agents of stagnation, however. They wish to see the world perfected. If something is damaged, corrupted or even not working at peak efficiency, they'll attempt to improve it. That includes the mage.

Pattern Avatars want perfection of mind, body and soul for their charges. Their lessons and Seekings target the most obvious damaging flaws in a character's makeup first and work down to the more subtle stuff. Of course, the definition of "flaw" might not be something that the mage sees as detrimental. Even if the mage is aware of a problem, he might not be able or willing to fix it. His Avatar benefits from lifetimes of experience and greater perspective, of course, but part of being human is being flawed. That conflict — perfection versus humanity — is central to the Pattern Avatar. Mages at the center of this conflict

often learn Spheres that they feel would aid them in pursuit of this perfection. Exactly what the Avatar wishes to perfect indicates toward which Spheres a given mage might feel drawn; an Avatar that wishes to fix existing flaws might guide its mage toward Entropy and Time, while one that wishes to build new, flawless creations would naturally focus on the Pattern Spheres (Forces, Life and Matter).

For the most part, these Avatars keep the same form from manifestation to manifestation. They are probably the most likely to appear physically to their mage, just to give him something concrete to latch onto. Pattern Avatars might enter into any number of relationships with their mages; they might appear as teachers, students, parents, bosses, or underlings — anything to push the mage toward perfecting himself.

Some possibilities for Pattern Avatars include:

- The image of a great architect or leader, or simply a person with whom the mage associates stability or protection.
- An idealized version of the mage herself, perhaps overtly supernatural (golden-skinned, luminous, angelic) or merely a physically perfect human form.

PATTERN EXAMPLE — MARNE WELLS

Marne is a Verbena witch whose Awakening showed her life as an ongoing, interconnected thing, rather than a hodge-podge of independent beings. Since then, she has strived to recapture the clarity of thought that she felt in that moment, knowing that if she can, she'll be able to repair or rebuild anything, curing disease or injury, recreating extinct species — the possibilities are limitless.

Her Avatar showed her the base simplicity of all life during her Awakening in hopes of giving Marne a foundation upon which to build. That simplicity proved too much to grasp, so her Avatar is now trying to push her toward that epiphany again, in smaller stages. Her Avatar takes the form of a tree (opting for a simple, sturdy form) and always appears by growing from a seed to a sapling to a full-grown plant in seconds. It plans to help Marne gain a broad base of knowledge so that she'll see that each "Sphere" is merely a different lens through which to see the world.

- Written (or emailed) contact, never signed, but with recognizable choice of phrase and agenda.

- A nonhuman but still concrete and recognizable icon or totem — perhaps a hypercube might appear to a Virtual Adept, or a Dreamspeaker might see her Avatar as a bee or another highly organized animal.

- **Primordial Avatars:** Each of the Essences has its problems. Dynamic Avatars are often flighty and unfocused. Patterns are rigidly controlled and slow to act, and Questing Avatars are often so focused on their goal that they miss what's in front of them. But Primordial Avatars are just *scary*.

The Primordial Avatar is old and has past life experience dating back to the dawn of time but rarely chooses to share this with its mage. Primordials often have a specific lesson or goal in mind for a given lifetime and don't mind breaking many of the laws of reality to achieve it. After all, they've been around long enough to know that those laws are fleeting. They need their mages to understand enough to learn the lesson or achieve the end they have in mind, but after that they often grow aloof, waiting for the mage to die so that they can return to whatever awaits them beyond this world.

For the all-too-mortal mage with the ancient, unknowable Avatar in his head, enlightenment can be a terrifying prospect.

When portraying or designing a Primordial Avatar, the Storyteller is encouraged to be as mysterious as possible. Avatars of this Essence rarely take on forms recognizable to their mages. Their forms might be recognizable in an iconic sort of way (totem animals, the Grim Reaper and so forth) but few Primordial Avatars bother with historical figures or specific humans for their guises. Further, these Avatars exude *power*. If every Avatar is a shard of the Prime or some similar power, Primordials are the purest of these shards. Even a mage with a "weaker" Avatar (that is, a low rating in the Background) should get the sense that his Avatar isn't actually weak; it merely isn't giving him its full attention.

What do Primordial Avatars want? Not enough of them are incarnate at any given time to form such generalities. Every Primordial Avatar is attached to an archetypal concept. This can be a spiritual ideal (sin vs. virtue) or a physical occurrence (death and decay). The Avatar's goal in its incarnation might be to make the mage gain some perspective on what it represents, or it may be simply on an errand for a greater power (isn't that a frightening thought?). All

of this means that in order to portray a Primordial Avatar well, the Storyteller must decide what that Avatar represents, how the mage sees that concept (which of course requires some input from the player), how the mage plays into that concept in this incarnation and what the Avatar is willing to do to "enlighten" the mage.

This may seem fairly complex in comparison to the other three Essences. That is indeed the case. Primordial Avatars are far and away the most powerful and complicated of the Essences and therefore the rarest. A player who chooses this Essence for her character had best be prepared for some trying times ahead.

A Primordial Avatar might take on one of the following forms:

- A mythical beast, either something recognizable such as a dragon or a djinn, or some creature from nightmares.

- A voice from a shadow or a deep pool. Unlike a Questing Avatar, which might taunt the mage from just beyond her reach, the voice does not beckon. It merely grants advice or suggestions.

PRIMORDIAL EXAMPLE — DR. MARCUS JACKSON

Dr. Jackson is a Euthanatos mage who Awakened during a near-death experience. As he felt his soul falling into the black nothingness of Oblivion, something swooped up from that abyss, seized his soul and returned it to his body. He remembers little of the experience except for the feeling of being snatched from the jaws of death and the sensation of flying back toward the light, but not under his own power.

Marcus' Avatar is a sort of angel of death. It appears to him in mirrors and other reflective surfaces as a tall, hooded man standing behind him, rather similar to the mythical ferryman of the dead. It never shows a face and rarely gives him direct advice, but it does not let him forget that had it not chosen to intervene, Marcus would be dead. It wishes to quell the spiritual turbulence in the lands of the dead and reasons that if Marcus becomes a powerful enough mage, he might hit on a way to enact those changes. If Marcus proves himself unworthy, the hooded man might simply give up.

- An image of wisdom or Fate: the Grim Reaper, the Norns, the head of Bran Boru or simply an old man or woman who exudes knowledge.

- **Questing Avatars:** In a sense, all Avatars are Questing. Each has a goal for its mage and pushes the mage toward the realization of that goal. In the case of Dynamic, Pattern and Primordial Avatars, the goal is usually attainable (even if reaching the goal takes the rest of the mage's life). Questing Avatars choose goals that the mage couldn't reach in a hundred lifetimes.

For Questing Avatars, the quest itself is the important thing. After all, a mage who is constantly striving toward an end is constantly changing, always improving himself (at least in theory). A challenging goal forces the mage to adapt as his circumstances change. An "impossible" quest — one that the mage recognizes as such — allows the mage to become involved in adventures that relate only peripherally to his Avatar's ongoing journey.

The Storyteller and the player should work together to determine the Avatar's quest and the mage's view of it. Perhaps the mage believes that the Avatar is driving him to seek the Holy Grail (or some other lofty, but material, goal). In truth, the Avatar wants him to ascend to the state of grace and holiness that finding the Grail would require. This kind of spiritual perfection might never be attainable, but the Grail itself is — after all, it's happened before! Therefore, the quest is put in terms that the mage can understand.

The Questing Avatar might appear as a companion on the quest — a sidekick, a fellow traveler or even a rival looking for the same thing. It might appear as the goal itself, the White Rabbit leading the mage deeper and deeper into Wonderland. The Avatar might just goad the mage from the sidelines, urging him on toward his goal without ever coming forward, or it might appear as the instigator of the entire quest. These Avatars often take on multiple forms or change form over time as the quest evolves — if the mage begins to resent seeing his Avatar as a Voice From On High shoving him down a path, perhaps a beautiful, half-seen woman at the end of that path might be a more tempting lure.

The quest might change over time, for the mage, at least. Especially if the mage is growing frustrated with his apparent lack of progress toward the goal, the Avatar might urge him to take on a task that he can complete, something that he can look back on as

a success when times are harder and the road grows rough. (Storytellers: That's actually good advice regarding the players, too.)

Questing mages almost always learn the Correspondence Sphere, and many also lean toward Time. It can be tempting, after all, to look ahead and see if the quest is ever brought to a successful conclusion. The quest evolves over time, though, and so looking ahead might merely confuse the mage, sending him off down another road to his goal — which suits the Questing Avatar just fine.

Some examples of Questing Avatars include:

- Sir Lancelot, Ponce de Léon, Freud or any other historical or mythical figure who embarked on an impossible quest to find some elusive but irresistible beast.

- A bridge, road, vehicle or other means of travel that appears just over the horizon.

- A terrifying monster that chases the mage — if she could just find a place to rest where she would be safe from the beast, or perhaps find its home, then she could confront it.

- A "dingus," be it human, object, idea or place, that appears occasionally, just out of reach.

QUESTING EXAMPLE — TY WILLIAMS

Tyrone Williams Awakened young — so young, even he doesn't remember a time that he couldn't do magic. He's a street kid and over the years has hacked out a moderately comfortable existence. He even has his own little hidey-hole, in the basement of a downtown building, where he can be safe and warm. He doesn't feel complete there, though, because he knows his parents are out there somewhere.

Ty's Avatar has to change forms pretty often to keep up with a ten-year-old mind. Sometimes cartoon characters work all right; other times it has to look like a cop or a truant officer to get Ty to keep moving. Even though it knows that Ty's parents are dead, it hasn't let him figure that out — it doesn't want him to stop searching for a true home. Meanwhile, Ty learns more and more about his city and about life on the streets. There are worlds to explore, and his Avatar is afraid that if he ever discovers the truth about his parents, he'll be too distraught to care anymore.

THE AVATAR IN PLAY

Once the Storyteller and the player have come to terms on what the Avatar looks like, how it behaves and what its goals for the mage are (even if this coming to terms consists of the player saying “I trust you to handle it”), the Storyteller still has the task of playing the Avatar during the game. This is a more trying task than it might immediately seem. Too much Avatar interaction can feel invasive — the Avatar is not meant to be a constant voice in the mage’s head (unless the mage’s concept and Traits reflect that). Likewise, it shouldn’t be a guardian angel, pulling the mage out of trouble every session or warning her of danger. If nothing else, the mage won’t learn anything unless she’s allowed to walk her own path.

Some interaction with the Avatar, however, is necessary to remind the character (and the player) that she is a mage. Like it or not, the Awakening brings with it responsibility, and mages who retreat into mundane existence tend to lose their powers as their Avatars become dormant — perhaps next time they will incarnate in someone worthy of their attention. Striking this balance between smothering the player in hints and leaving the player wondering, “Does my character *have* an Avatar?” is one of the Storyteller’s many duties.

When running Avatars, keep the following in mind:

- **The Avatar is a facet of the character.** That means that the player should have as much say as she desires in the Avatar’s presentation. Of course, as Storyteller, you may feel free to decide that the character simply misinterpreted what the Avatar truly wanted — but *beware* of stealing such an integral part of the player’s character out from under her. If the player decides that her Pattern-Essence Avatar always appears in the form of Da Vinci’s drawing of the idealized *Vetruvian Man*, it’s perfectly acceptable for that Avatar to change form after the mage completes a Seeking and learns whatever great truth the Avatar was trying to teach her by taking that form. It is not acceptable, however, for the Avatar to change forms suddenly just because the Storyteller has some dislike for Da Vinci. Respect the player’s vision of the character and the Avatar.

- **Don’t be heavy-handed.** With rare exceptions, Avatars do not lead their mages around by the noses and rarely tell them what to do directly. The Avatar can use any number of motivational methods on the mage (see below), but simply showing up

and saying, “Do this,” is probably not the best choice. Subtlety is the key, if for no other reason than it can let the players drive the story. Consider: An Avatar grants her mage a symbolic dream. You, as Storyteller, know what the symbolism means; the burning skull is supposed to represent another mage the cabal recently met and the fact that it’s laughing maniacally means that this mage is tripping down the primrose path toward becoming a Marauder. The player interprets this symbolism differently — she sees the burning skull and thinks of one of the other members of her own cabal. Now the mage wonders what the Avatar was trying to tell her about her teammate — is he going crazy? Selling out to the Nephandi? Falling into Quiet? The Storyteller is then faced with the choice of “straightening the player out,” which probably involves the Avatar showing up and saying, “No, that’s not what I meant” (which makes both Storyteller and player seem a little foolish), or taking this new plotline and running with it. Being willing to adapt one’s plotlines is important for Storytelling in general, but especially so when dealing with beings as subtle and mysterious as Avatars.

- **Know the characters’ Avatars.** That is, know what they want, what they look like and what they can do. No two Avatars are exactly alike, and having a handle on each one’s attitude and capabilities aids immensely in playing them consistently. Why is consistency a good thing? Because you don’t want the players to feel like they have a little version of the Storyteller riding around with them all the time. The Avatar should have its own distinct “voice,” even if it never literally speaks. If during one session the Avatars are dispensing advice right and left and in the next they’re all silent but suddenly grant Quintessence as needed, the entire notion of the Avatar seems random and weak.

On that subject, remember that the exact nature and function of the Avatar isn’t something that any mage can nail down precisely. We’ve left many things about the Avatar unexplained. That’s deliberate. As Storyteller, you don’t necessarily have to come up with a grand explanation for what the Avatar is and what its ultimate goal might be, but having a general idea is a good start. Is that Avatar simply a construct of the mage’s own consciousness? Many Technocrats seem to think so. Is it a guide or a totem that in effect “possesses” the mage for the duration of her life? Is it a “shard of the Prime” that reincarnates separately from the mage’s soul? Is it a guardian angel or some other spirit

entity that exists apart from the mage? **Mage** supports all of these theories to varying degrees, but the truth is that it's *your* game.

- **Keep the Avatar mysterious.** The moment the players feel like the Avatar is just one more power their characters can call on, one more resource to be exhausted during the game, the potential impact of the Avatar as a guiding force is gone. The above advice mentions to keep the Avatar *consistent*, but that's not the same thing as making it *predictable*. The advice the Avatar gives can be maddeningly vague, or misleading, or quite helpful. The Avatar might be unavailable for comment for long periods of time, or it might never make itself seen directly. The Avatar might take the role of a character's lover or friend, or it might motivate the mage by scaring the hell out of her. If the Storyteller knows what the Avatar wants, she will find it easier to play those goals more subtly.

BENEFITS OF THE AVATAR

With all of this in mind, what can the Avatar *do* for the mage during a story? After all, in game terms, the only benefit of having the Avatar Background is that it allows the mage a greater potential pool of Quintessence, and even this benefit fades if the mage learns the Prime Sphere. The Avatar Background does also serve as a yardstick to determine how involved in the mage's life the Avatar is. This level of involvement does not, by itself, indicate the Avatar's power level; just as a two-dot Mentor might be an extremely learned mage who either doesn't have the time or the inclination to devote much of his energy to a student, a low-level Avatar might be an extremely powerful being that simply has other priorities than enlightening the character.

(The Storyteller may ask, "Does that mean it's possible to raise the Avatar Background rating if said Avatar takes more of an interest for whatever reason?" The answer: Sure. As with raising any Trait, the Storyteller needs to approve the increase, and the impetus for the increase needs to be explained in the chronicle.)

As mentioned on page 119 of **Mage: The Ascension**, the Avatar Background's game benefits may change based on the "slant" the Avatar takes in a given game (that is, what the Storyteller needs the Avatar to be). Below are some suggestions for what the Avatar can do for a mage. These are optional; a player can't demand that his Avatar drive off Paradox spirits for him just because such is mentioned here.

- **Advice.** Probably the most universal benefit an Avatar can grant, and arguably its true purpose, advice can take any number of forms. A few have already been mentioned — prophetic dreams, subtle hints and so forth. The Storyteller should keep in mind that Avatars are not omniscient, however. They can't offer infallible advice on every topic (yet another reason why it's so important to know what a character's Avatar wants and is capable of doing). Avatars, in general, can offer advice about magic, usually in hopes of allowing the mage to expand his paradigm and think outside the proverbial box. If a mage always uses a deck of cards to focus his Entropy magic, for example, perhaps the Avatar might guide him toward using another randomizing device — dice, a coin or even just randomly drawing something from his pocket. This kind of challenge to a mage's way of thinking might eventually lead to a Seeking (or it might goad the mage into attempting something too far outside his paradigm and gaining Paradox).

Keep in mind, too, what previous incarnations the Avatar has experienced, as it can give the mage information based on these events, too. The Past Lives Background provides a system for this, but for Storytellers who wish to keep things simple (or for those who don't have access to **Guide to the Traditions**), assume that an Avatar can grant its mage access to any Ability it might have come across in any previous incarnation. Of course, it won't necessarily allow the mage to keep this knowledge very long — perhaps only a split second, enough to induce inspiration — but this might be enough.

- **Warnings.** Occasionally, the Avatar might warn a mage who faces direct danger. If another will-worker is targeting the character from afar via a Correspondence effect, for instance, the mage's Avatar might grant the character a warning, either in the form of a portent or more directly. Likewise, if the mage encounters someone dangerous — another mage, perhaps, or some other supernatural being — the Avatar might find a way to put the mage "on alert." Again, remember that Avatars aren't infallible and can only warn mages of dangers they themselves can perceive. If the mage becomes reliant on the Avatar's warnings, the Avatar will almost certainly cease to give them — the Avatar's function is to guide the mage, not act as nursemaid.

- **Affect spirits.** If the Avatar is a sort of spiritual guide, it only makes sense that it can affect other spirits in various ways. At the Storyteller's discre-

tion, a player might add the character's Avatar rating to attempts to interact with spirits (not including Arete rolls to affect them directly, of course). In really dire circumstances, a powerful Avatar might be able to drive away certain kinds of spirits. While it is possible for an Avatar to affect a Paradox spirit, Avatars usually won't, as it detracts from a mage's accountability for her actions.

- **Use magical effects.** The Avatar knows what the mage knows, and that means it has access to the mage's Spheres. However, taking control of a mage's mystical workings is often extremely damaging to the mage, and the mage can learn nothing if something else is controlling her magic. Sometimes, though, an Avatar might subtly use effects such as **Ring of Truth**, **Watch the Weaving** or **Divinations** if it feels that the mage needs to know the information thus imparted and hasn't thought to activate the effects herself. (This allows for spontaneous flashes of insight to set players on the right track.) If Avatars are capable of using the more ostentatious manifestations of magic, they don't seem willing to do so. Indeed, why would an Avatar seek to bring down Paradox on the mage?

- **Manifestation.** As mentioned above, Avatars seem much less willing to manifest in the flesh in modern times than in centuries past. The Avatar Storm seems to block such attempts much of the time. Powerful Avatars can and do manifest, though (and, of course, if the Storyteller wishes to state that Avatars may appear physically at will, Avatar Storm or no, she is free to do so). An Avatar's reasons for manifesting vary greatly. Sometimes one appears to have a face-to-face conversation with the mage, for the purpose of setting her straight on a particular topic or posing a direct question (the most common reason for Pattern Avatars). A Dynamic Avatar might appear to challenge a mage's status quo, shake up her life, and get her out of whatever rut she might have fallen into. A Questing Avatar appears to lead a mage on a new path, either by luring her or driving her. And the mysterious Primordial Avatars, when they do appear, strike fear and wonder into the hearts of their charges.

MOTIVATING THE MAGES

The stated goal of the Avatar is to guide the mage to enlightenment. The Avatar can't simply present the secrets of the universe as a gift, however — it doesn't work that way. The mage has to *earn* her right to Ascension. That means the Avatar must find ways

to teach the mage to teach herself. This can be frustrating to the Storyteller trying to portray this kind of instruction in a game.

The principle thing to remember when trying to figure out how to push a mage toward enlightenment has already been stated and restated throughout this chapter: Know the character. That includes the Avatar. This does not mean that the player has to have every step of her character's mystical path planned out ahead of time; it only means that the player should go into as much detail about her character and her character's relationship with her Avatar as possible. The better you know the character — what actions she takes in given situations, what her “knee-jerk” responses are and so forth — the more easily you can lead her into realization. This means, of course, you must know the player as well. Consider the example above, concerning the dream about the burning skull. The Storyteller might feel that the “burning skull” is obviously an image for a given character; the player (and therefore her mage) doesn't see it that way. Symbolism is great, but remember that symbolism has to be interpreted. Be flexible, and don't be afraid to give more concrete hints if the player just isn't getting it (you might call for an Intelligence + Enigmas roll or something similar, of course).

Remember, too, that most mages carry baggage from their societies. Each of the Traditions has its own take on why magic works, what the Avatar truly is, what Ascension means and so forth. The Storyteller must decide if the Avatar feels that a given mage's ideas about these metaphysical phenomena are compatible with what the Avatar wants to teach. Remember, Avatars don't necessarily reincarnate along Traditional lines. It's entirely possible for a Verbena to have an Avatar that once graced a member of the Order of Reason. Part of the process of enlightenment might well be unlearning some harmful or myopic ideas that the mage learned during her training.

Does that mean that every Avatar pushes its mage against her Tradition? Not at all. The Traditions have long histories of learning and theory, and much of that can be helpful in the quest for enlightenment. An Avatar might very well push a mage to grow *more* involved with her Tradition, if the Avatar feels it would be beneficial.

So how do you, as Storyteller, filter the lessons through the lens of the Avatar? Ask yourself the following questions:

- **What does the Avatar wish the mage to learn?**

Probably the most important question. Perhaps a Verbena mage with a Dynamic Avatar is so afraid of death that she retreats from any conflict. The Avatar feels that she needs to learn that all life is eternally in chaos and that the only true way to live is to become part of that. That Avatar will take very different steps toward teaching the character that lesson than, say, a Primordial Avatar would. Try to state the lesson that the mage needs to learn in a couple of simple sentences, but don't lose the spirit of the lesson for the letter.

- **How challenging is the lesson?** That is, how obtuse or abstract a concept is the Avatar trying to teach the mage? Sometimes the Avatar merely wants a mage to learn something factual — the history of a particular place or person, for instance. Other times, the Avatar wishes the mage to come to a kind of conceptual breakthrough — Prime magic is not a simple function of Mind magic but has its own rules and realities. Use the player's past actions in the game to determine how much time and energy needs to be devoted to this lesson. If it's particularly difficult, approach it in stages rather than trying to push the mage (and her player) into a morass of cerebral function all at once. As a general rule, if the lesson is complex enough that you have trouble describing it in one or two sentences, it probably needs to be broken down into two or more lessons.

- **Is there a game mechanic associated with the lesson?** Avatars prod mages toward realizations that change their entire worldviews. A mage who experiences an epiphany might use it as an impetus to learn or raise an Ability or even a Sphere. The Verbena in the example above, when she comes to realize that the chaos of life will claim her eventually, might well decide that only by perceiving that chaos can she stay one step ahead of it. The player might decide that translates into a desire to buy dots in Medicine, Empathy, Alertness, Perception, Entropy, Time or Life. From the very beginning, the Storyteller should consider what Traits, if any, the player may raise upon successful understanding of an Avatar's lesson.

This works in reverse, too — if a player often states that she wants her player to learn the third dot of Life, consider what the character needs to learn before that particular level of expertise can be achieved. Try to present challenges from the Avatar that would lead to the character coming to that level of skill. This makes the progression down the mystic



path much more real and concrete than simply amassing the experience points and trading them in.

Once you've figured out what the Avatar is trying to teach the mage, you need to decide how it will go about the task. Every Avatar has different methods of contact and guidance, and many of these have been discussed in the text already (the most common methods are summarized in the handy sidebar entitled "Helping Hands"). Remember to be patient during this process — the instruction will likely take place concurrently with other plotlines in the chronicle, and you shouldn't devote too much time to one character during normal play. An especially challenging or involved lesson from

the Avatar might well involve a solo game or "bluebooking" session.

A lesson might come to an end abruptly when a mage figures it out — the Avatar might reward the mage with a flush of achievement and moment of clarity (and probably restore a point of temporary Willpower, to boot). On the other hand, Questing and Primordial Avatars don't like to convey the feeling of finality or completion. No matter how much one learns, still more mysteries await. In some cases, learning one lesson only reveals more potential challenges. In the context of the game, however, there should always be some reward for figuring out an Avatar's challenge, be it an extra experience

HELPING HANDS

Below are some of the most common methods an Avatar uses to contact and guide a mage:

- **Conversation.** The Avatar enters into direct discussion with the mage. Usually this is done in a Socratic fashion: The Avatar asks questions and responds to the mage's answers with more questions. Sometimes the conversation is terse and to the point: The aloof, brusque Primordial Avatars usually do not wish to waste time with pleasantries. Other Avatars treat their mages as friends or valued students, giving suggestions and concrete hints rather than riddles. Any type of Avatar might use this method, but Pattern and Primordial Essence Avatars are the most likely to speak directly with their charges.

- **Dreams.** Dream sequences are useful because they allow you to present information in the form of allegories and symbols, which means that you aren't tying yourself down to specific interpretations. If a character has the Demesne Background or a high enough Mind Sphere to alter facets of his dreams, this method allows for a great deal of self-discovery in the form of an allegorical dialogue between mage and Avatar (remember not to spend too much time with one character, or else the rest of the troupe may grow bored). Avatars of all Essences often use dreams to instruct their mages.

- **Signals.** In a situation in which there's a lesson to be learned, an Avatar may tap the mage on the shoulder, so to speak. This tactic is most common among Dynamic Avatars, who prefer to let mages find their own paths but want to make sure that they remain alert when something important is about to happen. A strange buzzing sound,

the feel of vibrations under the mage's feet or colors dancing at the edge of the mage's vision may quickly become a signal for the mage — *something important is happening here.*

- **Visions.** Some Avatars grant their mages visions and portents while the mage is awake, possibly because they are harder to dismiss as "just dreams." These visions might be very subtle — colors may brighten in a place that the Avatar wants the mage to investigate, or an enemy's voice might grow slightly more sibilant when she speaks to the mage. Some Avatars are more overt, especially if the character possesses Backgrounds like Legend or Past Lives. In such cases the visions often play into these Traits — a mage who embodies Saint George might see a dragon's tail disappear into a building that her Avatar knows houses great evil (and the potential for great deeds). Questing Avatars make frequent use of these sorts of visions.

- **Adversity.** Avatars don't have to play nice. At times they can be downright hostile to their mages, especially if they feel that the mage just isn't *getting it*. The Avatar might use any of the above methods of contact but take on an adversarial role. In the dream, the mage is assailed by a terrifying windstorm and must fight her way out. The buzzing sound in her head grows so loud that she must scream to deaden it. The Avatar pushes the mage to desperation, and in that moment of fear and anger comes enlightenment (at least, that's the plan). Any Avatar might use this tactic if pushed too far, but Primordials often resort to it first.

point or the chance to raise a heretofore forbidden Trait. The road to enlightenment may be endless and confusing, but the story should be understandable, and figuring out a challenge should always have its perks.

AVATAR COMPLICATIONS

The Avatar is not omnipotent. It is not omniscient. It has a great deal of control over the mage, but that control is not absolute. The Avatar can be corrupted, scrambled or even destroyed. Tradition and Technocratic mages might fear the Nephandi, the Marauders and those criminals subject to the dread Gilgul rite, but such things terrify Avatars beyond belief.

NEPHANDIC AVATARS

Not all Nephandi have corrupted Avatars. Only the widderslainte carry their taint from one life to the next. Those hideous souls are frightening because they are completely irredeemable, but the truly horrifying Nephandi are those that chose their paths and still have untainted Avatars beneath the veneer of evil.

So is the Avatar of a Barabbus truly untainted? The trip through the Caul, during which the mage's soul is inverted and her magical understanding changed to represent the Qliphothic Spheres, surely must affect the Avatar in some way. Why does the Avatar stay around, instead of simply abandoning the mage to his fate?

Simple — it hasn't any choice in the matter. An Avatar is stuck with a given host until that host dies (this is why mages lose their powers if they ever become vampires — the death of the body frees the Avatar, which has better things to do than be subjected to the eternity of bloody damnation that is vampirism). Inversion in a Labyrinth doesn't kill the mage. The Avatar is still there, locked onto the mage and still subject to his will.

An Avatar can indeed become tainted if it remains incarnate within a Barabbus for too long. In general, assume that for every dot of Avatar the mage possesses, she can exist as a Nephandus for one year. After that time has elapsed, the Avatar becomes corrupted and will incarnate as a widderslainte the next time around. Some Avatars do their best to make sure their hosts die before that time, but many Avatars become confused by the

inversion of the soul that takes place in the Caul and aren't able to figure out what has happened until it's too late. If the Barabbus dies before the Avatar is fully corrupted, the Avatar "escapes" (which is one reason why the Euthanatos are so careful not to let Nephandi get away).

MARAUDERS

What exactly causes mages to go from "simple" insanity to the reality-skewing chaos common to the Marauders isn't really confirmed. Since about the only way to identify with a Marauder is to become one, no one's really sure what happens to their Avatars when Quiet sets in for good. Some assumptions are possible, however.

Dynamic Avatars gone Marauder are most likely happy as pigs in slop. They now have the ability to wreak change on a much greater level than ever before. While most mages don't know it, Dynamic Marauders are typically somewhat more lucid than those of other Essences, simply because what they've become, magically speaking, isn't *too* far off from what they were.

Pattern Avatars, on the other hand, don't make very good Marauders. A Pattern mage's Quiet is usually very deep and very involved, with a strict set of rules and very little room for fluctuation. Such Marauders are often consistent within their madness — but that doesn't mean that madness will make sense to anyone else.

Primordial Avatars don't go Marauder very often. When they do, though, the results are horrifying. Primordial Avatars are holdovers from the oldest forces in the world, and translating those forces into the direct agents of Dynamism is, in a word, problematic. Such Marauders often have delusions of grandeur and see themselves as kings of otherworldly realms or hells-on-Earth. Unfortunately, they often have the power to back up such claims....

Finally, Questing Marauders are the most mercurial loons in the nest. They are obsessive-compulsive and often manic, and their Quiets typically focus around their obsessions. A Questing Marauder often focuses on finding a long-lost wife/lover/daughter/pet, or some other ongoing task that his Quiet never lets him complete. Anyone in the area, of course, becomes entrenched in this search or struggle.

More information about Marauders and Nephandi can be found in **The Book of Madness**.

GILGUL

Killing a mage is one thing. Yes, the mage dies, and his soul goes on to whatever reward or punishment might await. But the Avatar flies free, back to whatever astral realm might house it until it again incarnates in a human being and, possibly, Awakens.

Unless, of course, some very powerful mage tears the Avatar out by the roots and shreds it.

Gilgul is used as a punishment in the Traditions (or it was in the past; most of the mages capable of doing it have disappeared). It is widely and correctly regarded as a fate worse than death, for it leaves the mage alive but without his Avatar. That indispensable part of the mage is gone forever, leaving the mage an empty, bitter, shell. Most victims of Gilgul commit suicide. Those who don't live out the rest of their days in a hopeless depression.

The only situation in which Gilgul is almost universally considered acceptable is when dealing with a widderslainte. The Avatar in such cases is irredeemably tainted, and such Avatars seem to grow more powerful with each successive incarnation. Killing a widderslainte only frees the Avatar to ruin another life. The fact that widderslainte are hopelessly corrupted is hardly common knowledge, however. As mentioned in *The Book of Madness*,

there's always some kind-hearted mage who wants to try to rehabilitate them. That in mind, even when Gilgul is a possibility, proponents face opposition.

In the past, traitors to the Council of Nine have been subjected to the Gilgul rite. The decision is almost always met with strident opposition, so it doesn't happen often. Masters of Spirit from any Tradition are often looked at askance. After all, a Master of Forces might be able to disintegrate the body, and a Master of Mind can drive a mage hopelessly insane. But a master of Spirit can tear his soul out by the roots.

In game terms, Gilgul can be performed only by a Master of Spirit. The ritual's form varies, of course, by who performs it. Ordinarily, it requires a number of successes equal to five times the victim's Avatar rating. The victim must be physically present for the effect to work (which requires restraining a powerful mage for as long as it takes for her soul to be torn out — not an easy feat, considering most mages would sooner die than undergo this rite).

Performing the rite changes the mage forever. Her own Avatar is likely horrified by what she has done and probably demands some answers. At the very least, performing Gilgul probably changes a mage's Resonance.

SEEKINGS



Avatars may test their mages in any number of ways, urging them on to goals concrete and abstract. The ultimate test is the Seeking, for it determines whether a mage is ready to ascend to the next level of consciousness. Any number of tests may await a mage on a Seeking, but eventually it comes down to one question — is the mage ready?

Seekings are one of the most difficult facets of **Mage** to run, because they are of necessity highly subjective. How can a Storyteller present symbolically what a mage must learn, but in an understandable enough fashion that the player comprehends and can respond as the character? Yet Seekings are absolutely integral to a character's development and progress down her own mystic path. This section provides suggestions, guidelines and hints for running Seekings.

THE FIRST STEP

When does a Seeking occur? In game terms, it occurs when the player has accumulated enough experience to raise the character's Arete (provided you aren't using the heretical rule; see the sidebar). In terms of the story, however, it's a little more involved than that.

A Seeking does not occur if the Avatar feels the mage is not ready. Does that mean a mage can't initiate a Seeking? Not at all. Mages of many Traditions go on vision-quests, whether by drugs, meditation, ordeal or intense study, and any of these experiences can become a Seeking. Some Avatars have no qualms about aiding a mage on a vision-quest that doesn't have the possibility of enlightening the mage (at least, not to a degree that she gains Arete); others are somewhat less strict and will allow an "informal" vision-quest to become a true Seeking. All Avatars can initiate Seekings of their own ac-

A HERETICAL SUGGESTION

Seekings are supposed to be tests, and you can fail tests. But Seekings happen only when the player manages to accrue the high (some would say exorbitant) amount of experience it takes to raise the character's Arete rating. So once the player has that much experience on hand, is the Storyteller meant to structure a Seeking challenging enough that the character might conceivably fail? What happens to the experience, then? Does it buy a *chance* to raise Arete, or is it "refunded" if the Seeking doesn't happen?

Of course, the answers to these questions are, in the end, up to the Storyteller. As an optional rule, we suggest this:

Waive the experience cost.

Yes, you read that right. Don't charge the player a thing to go on a Seeking. Let the player (not the character) initiate a vision-quest whenever she likes.

"But," you might exclaim, "that would allow the characters to rise in power too quickly!" Not at all. You're still the Storyteller. Feel free to veto any request for a Seeking if the character isn't ready in your judgment. Better yet, have the *Avatar* veto the request. If you feel the character could conceivably be ready for the next level of enlightenment, let her go on the Seeking. But since the Seeking costs no experience, you don't have to feel obligated to make it easy. Put the character through the ringer. Don't allow dice — make the player figure out the riddles on her own. Levy stiff penalties for failure (see p. 123). Make sure the player understands that she's not getting any breaks — *Seekings* are free of charge, but successfully completing the Seeking (and therefore gaining Arete) is still the player's problem.

This option might seem unbalancing at first. Trust us — after one Seeking in which the Storyteller has the freedom to be truly pitiless because the player can't say, "I paid 32 experience points for *this*?", she won't be in any hurry to go on another unless she's really ready for it.

cord. The lower a mage's Avatar rating, though, the more likely it is that she'll have to take matters into her own hands to become enlightened.

TRIGGERS FOR SEEKINGS

Certain events can act as catalysts for Seekings. Intense trauma of the body, mind or soul is one example. A mage who has been grievously wounded might well slip into a coma as her soul struggles with the possibility of death. This kind of struggle might become a Seeking as the Avatar sees the possibility of coming through the ordeal stronger. Likewise, a mage who sees a comrade fall to the Nephandi or into the madness of permanent Quiet might question her own sanity and values — what would it take to drive her over the edge? That sort of spiritual self-examination makes a superb trigger for a Seeking.

Exposure to metaphysical or magical forces far beyond the mage's ken can also catapult her into a voyage of discovery. If the mage has never seen the Umbra before, being suddenly transported there (deliberately or accidentally) might shake her magical moorings loose enough to necessitate a Seeking. Seeing something new in the World of Darkness, such as a supernatural "race" that the mage has never come across before, might also be enough. Consider that it's easy enough for the *player* to accept that vampires exist in the World of Darkness. But the character has never read any of the sourcebooks. The notion of magic, as she understands it, might not include the idea of immortal, bloodsucking demons — and yet here they are. Her paradigm has been roughly shaken, and that means that the paradigm must change. A Seeking is a chance to make that change smoothly.

Seekings can also be rewards for lessons well learned. An Avatar that presents a series of "simple" tests might be leading up to a Seeking. If that's the case, take note of what troubled the character (and the player) the most during the learning process and revisit those lessons during the Seeking. This shows that the Avatar (and the Storyteller) is paying attention to what the character learned and allowing her to use that knowledge in her ongoing development.

LOGISTICS

Seekings can happen in any number of ways. The character might fall asleep or sink into meditation,



only to awaken in the “otherworld” of the Seeking. Or the character might not notice the transition from normal life to the Seeking — indeed, the Seeking seems to take place entirely in ordinary, physical reality. Anything symbolic is highly subtle, and any actions the mage takes have their normal consequences on the world.

A number of possibilities exist for the logistics of the Seeking. They are in large part dependent on the mage’s Essence, but as usual these possibilities are exactly that — possibilities.

- **Dynamic** Seekings usually result in the mage’s body vanishing into the Seeking. The mage knows that she is on an otherworldly quest right from the start (even if she doesn’t know exactly what the goal of the quest is). Dynamic Avatars are usually too flamboyant to conceal Seekings in everyday life and would rather retreat into the odd “pocket realm” of the Seeking so as to avoid damaging the mage or the world.

- **Pattern** Avatars, on the other hand, want the mage to be able to apply what she learns in the Seeking directly to her life. Therefore, their Seekings, while still heavy in symbolism, tend to be almost indistinguishable from “real life.” Pattern Avatars aren’t above presenting a mage with a Seeking while she is still awake and going about her normal routines, just to show that her actions and epiphanies have an effect on everything she does.

- **Primordial** Seekings tend toward the archetypal — the passage through chambers, facing Guardians, the Hero’s Journey and so forth. Primordial Avatars favor mindscapes and vision-quests but usually don’t bother moving or transforming the mage’s body; they realize that the flesh is fleeting. A Primordial Seeking is often terrifying and larger than life, and there’s no mistaking it for anything other than what it is.

- **Questing** Avatars are unpredictable in their tests, and Seekings are no exception. A Questing Avatar might “stop time” (from the mage’s perspective) so that the Seeking takes place in the blink of an eye. It might lure the mage down a dark alley, into a strange new city that spirals off into the Seeking, or it might adopt a more traditional, archetypal method of vision-quest. Whatever the method, the Questing Avatar makes sure the mage knows that the journey does not end with the Seeking — it simply changes a bit.

Once begun, a Seeking cannot usually be interrupted. Even if the Seeking takes place in the normal,

physical world as opposed to a mindscape, the Avatar incorporates anything that happens to the mage into the framework of the journey. Affecting a mage while on a Seeking would almost assuredly require mastery of the Spirit Sphere, and probably high levels of Mind and Prime as well.

THE REALITY OF THE SEEKING

In running a Seeking, it is important to establish the “setting” early on. If the Seeking takes place in the material world, this is simple enough. If, however, the character’s Avatar pulls her from an otherwise normal dream into a strange and terrifying cavern, it’s crucial to establish any salient details right off the bat.

Anything that you mention should be important. As in a dream, any detail is significant. When a character enters a new “room” (whatever form that room takes), instead of describing what the character perceives, describe what is important to the Seeking. If the player asks for descriptions of other objects in the room, give her that description, but on a Seeking an Avatar normally doesn’t distract the mage. The actual challenge of the Seeking should be enough (unless, of course, that challenge is to pluck the significant from a bevy of distractions).

Also like a dream, a Seeking should have a set of “rules” that remain in force during the quest (note that Dynamic Avatars like to change the rules without notice). If the character can fly or breathe water while in the Seeking, give the player an opportunity to figure that out early on. Cause and effect should be fairly clear within the Seeking. After all, a Seeking is a concrete representation of a journey toward enlightenment. If it grows too cerebral, the player will become lost and won’t have any real chance of success.

A mage who has been on Seekings before might recognize elements and facets of the quest. Dynamic and Questing Avatars often create Seekings that bear no resemblance to previous ones, and any Avatar that feels its mage is stagnating might change things around a bit. A mage who acts only on assumption during a Seeking is likely to be confounded in fairly short order — a major part of any Seeking is questioning what the mage thinks she knows. As Storyteller, you should decide what symbolic elements represent what concepts, characters or tests and keep them consistent within the Seeking. If a character is in danger of failing the Seeking because the player misinterpreted a symbol and

didn’t bother trying to clarify it, you might consider granting her an Intelligence roll (probably paired with Enigmas) to figure it out — unless, of course, you are using the heretical rule, in which case all bets are off.

Many Seekings feature Guardians, either as representations of the mage’s own fears or inequities, or as manifestations of the lessons the Avatar wishes the mage to learn. The next section, “The Long Path,” discusses Guardians and challenges in more detail, but in setting up the initial framework of the Seeking, it’s often effective to give the character (and the player) some hint of what’s to come. A mage with a Pattern Essence, for instance, whose Avatar wishes her to overcome her overdependence on her mentor might begin a Seeking by showing the mage a funeral procession. She knows *someone* is dead but won’t find out it’s her mentor until she’s asked to give the eulogy. A Dynamic Avatar trying to accomplish the same thing will likely begin the Seeking with the mentor still alive, just so it can show the mage how quickly the mentor might be taken from her.

THE LONG PATH

Once the Seeking has begun and the mage has taken her first steps into the cavern, or down the road, or into the water or whatever the imagery of the Seeking demands...what then? The Storyteller is then responsible for showing the player a challenge symbolic of a quest for enlightenment, one which the player *can* resolve, but not easily, and which leads the character to an Epiphany.

Not an easy task, that.

CHALLENGES

The “meat” of the Seeking is the challenge. Before we begin discussion of archetypes and chambers and guardians and symbolism, let’s look at what kinds of challenges are appropriate to Seekings.

A Seeking can incorporate more than one challenge, of course, especially if the mage is attempting to attain a high level of Arete. If you do choose to design a Seeking with multiple obstacles, they should probably build upon each other rather than all be on a different topic (of course, if the mage has a Dynamic Essence, all bets are off).

Where to find inspiration for the challenge? Start with the character, naturally. If the character has had Seekings before, what did she have the most

trouble with? What lessons has her Avatar been unable to teach her successfully? What personal problems are holding her back? (Hint to the Storyteller: Good players will tell you this sort of thing when you ask about Learning Curve [see page 131 of **Mage**]. If your players don't, ask.) All of this is fodder for Seekings.

Remember that the Avatar wants the mage to grow stronger, but it wants her to earn it. Therefore, the Avatar chooses flaws in the mage's makeup that are (a) detrimental to her magical path and (b) in opposition to her Essence. A mage might be flighty and unfocused, but a Dynamic Avatar will focus on his obsession with a girlfriend before addressing his attention-span problems.

Since Seekings usually come at the end of a story, look back over the events of that story for pivotal moments in the character's life (this is why taking notes is so important). If the character defeated (or was defeated by) an adversary, she might meet him again in the Seeking. But a Seeking cannot grant victory over a literal enemy. It grants insight, and it might grant the mage the power over her own fears and doubts that she needs to overcome her enemy. Many Avatars are wary of structuring challenges around existing foes, however, simply because they don't wish their mages to look at a Seeking as a blueprint for how to best their enemies.

Look to the character's past as well. If the character has Flaws or Adversarial Backgrounds that cause him trouble, symbolic elements of these hindrances might show up as challenges. For example, a character with the Sleepwalker Flaw (page 292 of **Mage**) might find himself trapped behind thick glass or chained to a wall in his Seeking — symbolic of the way his blindness to magic is holding him back. Likewise, Merits and other beneficial Traits might factor into a Seeking as well; a character with the Legend Background will almost certainly see facets of his mythical heritage in a Seeking.

Remember, too, that the challenge you devise can't be insurmountable (unless the Avatar is truly sadistic or feels the need to put the mage in her place). Think of at least three ways that the character could overcome the challenge. Ideally, the character should be able to use magic, mundane knowledge (that is, Abilities) or simple logic to beat the challenge, unless, of course, the point of the challenge is to use one method to the exclusion of others. The sleepwalker in the example above, for instance, probably isn't going to succeed except by using magic.

Avatars of the same Essences might choose similar challenge for their mages, but the challenge is determined first and foremost by *what the mage needs to learn*. Therefore, including a list of potential challenges is really an exercise in futility, as every challenge in every Seeking should be highly personalized to the mage in question (see the end of this chapter for four example Seekings, one for a mage of each Essence).

SYMBOLS

The most important thing to remember when designing a Seeking is to make the challenges concrete, at least initially. Some players might be able to handle philosophical discourses and more cerebral pursuits in Seekings, but most are going to be bored and frustrated by such things. That doesn't mean you have to make a Seeking into a battle — enlightenment shouldn't necessarily come in the form of "slay the dragon, collect the Arete" — but the challenge should have concrete elements that the player and the character can latch onto.

That's where symbolism comes into play. Any good dream interpretation book can spark many ideas for Seekings. Decide what the mage needs to learn, page through such a book (or search the Web for sites on symbolism or dream interpretation) and find some images and symbols that appeal to you and are appropriate to the character and her Avatar's Essence (see the sidebar for symbols especially appropriate to the four Essences).

Translating the challenge into symbolic terms is the next step. It's all very well to say that a mage needs to learn that his focus for Time magic — his grandfather's watch — is ultimately holding him back because he doesn't feel he can do anything other than perceive time with it. It's another thing entirely to put that notion into terms that the player can understand and overcome without being too obtuse or too simplistic. The nature of the symbols and the challenge depends on the Avatar. In this instance, we'll say the mage in question has a Questing Essence. How will the mage's Avatar present a challenge to make the mage realize that he is holding onto the past at the expense of his own prowess?

Looking to the sidebar, we find that one of the listed symbols for the Questing Avatar is "lost objects." What if the challenge involves finding the watch? The mage could try to remember where he left it, but if part of the Seeking's "ground rules" is

SYMBOLISM, ESSENCE, AND TRADITIONS

Below are some examples of symbols that fit especially well with the four Essences and the nine Traditions. Don't feel constrained by this list; just because fire is listed under Dynamic doesn't mean a Pattern Avatar won't use it (although it might mean something different).

ESSENCES

- **Dynamic:** Fire, wind, jungles and forests, swarms or flocks of animals, broken or smashed buildings, construction
- **Pattern:** Spiders, ice, geometric shapes, technology, music, books
- **Primordial:** Mythic beasts, caverns, deep water, wells, smoke
- **Questing:** Lanterns, paths and roads, vehicles, birds, ghosts, lost objects

TRADITIONS

- **Akashic Brotherhood:** Water, wind, silence, weapons
- **Celestial Chorus:** Church, fire, song, light
- **Cult of Ecstasy:** Needles, the human body, dance, butterflies
- **Dreamspeakers:** Drums, smoke, faraway voices, thunder
- **Euthanatos:** Death (duh), guns, pathways leading down, ghosts
- **Hollow Ones:** Angels, birds, anything black, gravestones
- **Order of Hermes:** Towers, fire, books/language, items of power (wands, scepters)
- **Sons of Ether:** Lightning, technology, locks and keys, tools
- **Verbena:** Plants, predators, the Moon, blood
- **Virtual Adepts:** Computers, grid patterns, illusions, cables and rope

that he can't, all the mnemonics in the world won't help him. He could try scouring the room, but perhaps the Seeking takes place in a vast mansion — he can't possibly search it all. If he uses Time magic to literally see where he left the watch, he could find it...but that involves realizing that he doesn't *need* the watch to perform such magic. This is a fairly simple example of the sort of challenge an Avatar might present its mage on a Seeking, but it illustrates

the point — the mage symbolically comes to realize something about himself and should apply that to his mystical development.

In the above example, we chose to break the guideline about having three methods around a challenge, because part of the point of the exercise is to solve the problem through the use of magic. If the player came up with a method of finding the watch that didn't involve magic yet still helped him reach the desired conclusion (the watch is a limiting focus for such magical workings), the character would still succeed in the Seeking.

Symbolism in Seekings might remain consistent between quests; a mage might very easily "pick up where she left off" when entering a new Seeking. On the other hand, the Avatar might very easily decide not to make things so consistent and present an entirely new set-up for each Seeking, complete with new symbolism and new goals.

CHAMBERS AND GUARDIANS

Past **Mage** supplements have spoken of Seekings in terms of chambers — that is, each Seeking represents a new chamber to pass through, until the mage has encountered all ten challenges and become fully enlightened. That's all very well and makes for a nice structural base for Seekings, but it isn't necessary for vision-quests to have a format so rigid. Seekings can and should vary in their imagery, and it isn't necessary for a character to pass through all of the previous "chambers" before encountering the next challenge (although some reminder of what has gone before is often a good idea, if for no other reason than it reminds the player what the character learned).

The "chambers" structure isn't necessarily bad or inappropriate. Primordial Avatars seem to favor this system, in fact. The traditional structure is that the mage enters the Seeking and must pass through the chambers housing the challenges she has already faced. She does not have to overcome these challenges again, but merely sees them as reminders of her success or failure. Eventually she comes to a chamber she has not yet seen, and therein lies her challenge.

This approach is rather simplistic from the player's perspective, yes, but it makes some assumptions on the part of the character. Not all mages view the Avatar and Seekings the same way. In fact, the progressive realization of enlightenment is a fairly new way to understand mystic prowess — until the 15th century, magic was often assumed to take place

through the sheer will of the spellcaster, not his degree of illumination. Some mages need to see Seekings, especially the earlier ones, in terms they can understand, and progressing through tunnels and chambers might distract or frighten them to the point that they won't learn whatever the Avatar is trying to teach them. Mages that are more steeped in mystic tradition (most Tradition mages, especially Hermetics) or that are familiar with the concept of vision-quests (Dreamspeakers, Cultists and most Akashics) might actually feel more comfortable in the "traditional" chamber-style Seeking, simply because it allows them to know when something mystical is happening. Of course, an Avatar might decide to throw such a mage into a different style of Seeking for exactly that reason.

The *Guardian* is a gatekeeper of sorts, keeping an ambitious mage from grasping the secrets of Ascension too soon. In actuality, of course, the Guardian is a facet of the mage's Avatar. Written treatises on the subject of Seeking and enlightenment speak of the Guardian as a beast, a soldier, a shadowy replica of the mage herself — in truth, it varies in appearance as much as the Avatar. Not all mages even have need of a Guardian in a Seeking; a mage must be aware of the nature of a Seeking before she can attempt to ascend too quickly.

Guardians cannot actually hurt mages but can certainly restrain them. They often act as facilitators for the challenges or guides during a Seeking; in the example above, the mage searching for his grandfather's watch in a mansion might see the Guardian in the form of a butler. A mage in a more traditional Seeking — climbing into a cavern and passing through the chambers — might see the Guardian in the same form her Avatar takes, or might see a figure that she associates with authority or command.

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGE

In designing a Seeking, the Storyteller must decide not only *how* a mage might overcome a challenge, but what the point of the challenge is (which is actually more important). The player might, and probably will, devise a means of besting the challenge that the Storyteller never considered. If that means of getting around the challenge completely contradicts the point of the exercise, the mage still might fail the Seeking.

Take, for instance, the example above with the mage searching for his grandfather's watch. The point of the challenge is for the mage to realize that

his view of Time is limited and ultimately not conducive to further learning. It is *not* necessarily meant to make him realize that he doesn't need a focus (if the mage figures that out, terrific, but that's a fairly important lesson and his Avatar wants to take enlightenment in slower stages). So using magic without his focus to find his focus is the ideal method of completing the Seeking — it will be difficult, but not impossible, and should help him realize how limited his magical purview is.

Suppose the player decides that the character will use Correspondence or Matter magic to find the watch? Both would work well in the situation. What should the Storyteller do?

The question then is, does using a different Sphere to find the Time focus convey the lesson the Avatar wants the mage to learn? The answer, as with so many other things in **Mage**, is, "It depends." What focus does the mage use for Matter? If that focus is something like a series of gestures, then using Matter (a Sphere for which the mage has a very general, widely useful focus) to find the watch should very handily teach the mage that his narrow Time focus has to go. If, however, the mage must walk around knocking on walls to focus his Matter magic, the Avatar probably isn't pleased — the mage is using a time-consuming, narrow focus to find a delicate, narrow focus. When deciding whether or not a novel method of solving the challenge actually resolves the Seeking, look at the spirit of the challenge over the letter. (Incidentally, explain that this is the case to the player, so that he will not feel cheated if after succeeding in a challenge he fails the Seeking.)

JOURNEY'S END

Seekings have two possible endings: success or failure. Within those two possibilities are many permutations. Success carries rewards both obvious and subtle, and failure can scar a mage for weeks. Either leaves the mage changed.

SUCCESS

If the mage resolves the challenge and learns what the Avatar wishes her to learn (determining this will probably require some in-character discussion with the Avatar), the mage's Arete score increases by one. Her command over *reality itself* has just increased by 10% (just in case you forgot how momentous Seekings really are). This brings with it an Epiphany, a realization about the nature of the universe, usually tied to the challenge set forth by

DICE VS. ROLEPLAYING IN SEEKINGS

The challenge involves jumping across a gorge. The mage, believing that magic is *verboten* in Seekings (which happens with a great deal of regularity, for some reason) decides to jump it. The player rolls Dexterity + Athletics and botches. The Seeking ends unsuccessfully. The end.

Or consider this: The challenge sees the mage, in a gladiatorial arena, fighting against a monster of a man in black armor. The player describes in great, vivid detail how her character, armed only with a tiny knife, darts under the brute's sword and slashes his exposed throat, killing him. She goes on to describe the roar of the crowd and the emperor giving her the thumbs up, and then looks at the Storyteller as though daring her to contradict such dramatic, exciting roleplaying. The Seeking ends successfully. The end.

Both of these scenarios are unrewarding. In the former case, the character failed through no fault of her own. In the latter, the character succeeded simply because the player is a good talker. Neither makes any particular sense.

When running Seekings, decide ahead of time what challenges can be resolved through dice and which cannot. Understand, though, that anything that you decide to let fate adjudicate might end horribly. Seekings are a good time to make use of the Automatic Success rule (page 216 of **Mage**); assume that one success is enough to perform most feats, unless they have some especial significance to the Seeking.

If an action is to be resolved by roleplaying, make sure to tailor it to the character and the player. A player may be socially inept, but his character might have Charisma 5 and Expression 4. Likewise, a player might have an extraordinary gift of gab, but if her character has Dexterity 1 and no Melee, that scenario with the gladiator probably isn't going to happen, no matter how well the player describes it.

In any case, avoid having the main challenge of a Seeking hinge solely on a die roll. Not only does it run the risk of terrible anticlimax, it isn't fair to the player. Seekings are about choice, and reducing them to a series of die rolls removes any choice from the matter.

the Avatar. This Epiphany isn't necessarily something the mage could explain (and so neither you nor the player should feel compelled to try, either), but the effects of an Epiphany are obvious.

Any close friend of the mage will notice a change in attitude after an Epiphany (actually, friends will notice a failure, too — see below). The mage's demeanor lifts considerably. Even if she isn't *happy* per se, she is confident and ready to face the challenges of the mundane world. Since most Seeking challenges involve overcoming flaws intrinsic to the character, in all likelihood the mage strides forth from a successful Seeking having overcome such a flaw. This will (or at least should) drastically change her outlook. If the player so desires, a Seeking is a good reason to change the character's Demeanor or even Nature. Likewise, the insight gained in an Epiphany may aid the character in improving Sphere ratings (although the usual time requirements should probably still apply).

The rapture brought on by Epiphany can last for days; the player can decide when it starts to wear off. During this time, at the Storyteller's discretion, certain types of magic might become intuitive (that is, the difficulty drops by one) and Willpower easier to regain. The mage has, after all, faced herself and come through the experience stronger and more whole. Her mystic path continues.

FAILURE

Of course, things are seldom so easy, especially if the Storyteller chooses to use the Heretical Suggestion, Seekings are not easy. The character must come face to face with some fairly ingrained ideas about himself, things that he wasn't aware *could* be different. The player is likely faced with some fairly uncomfortable choices regarding the character and his concept. All growth causes pain, after all, and many mages shy away from the suffering involved in development.

A mage who makes the wrong decision in a Seeking *may* be granted a second chance. This depends on the reasons for the choice — if the Avatar can understand why the mage made a decision and agrees with the logic, if not the choice, it might present the challenge in a different way. If the mage made a snap decision, however, even Dynamic Avatars aren't likely to be too forgiving. Likewise, the three sure means of failing a Seeking are *apathy*, *complacency* and *hubris*.

If a mage is *apathetic* — she just doesn't care about enlightenment — she probably shouldn't have been on the Seeking in the first place. The Avatar might have pulled her into a vision-quest to snap her out of her apathy, but if the mage refuses to undergo the challenges or makes a lackluster go of it, the Avatar sadly gives up. The Avatar might rescind the mage's ability to perform magic until she whips herself into shape, or it might allow to keep her magical knowledge and power but make her unable to regain Willpower without serious effort (in game terms, any time the character would normally regain Willpower, the player rolls the character's permanent Willpower rating [difficulty 9]. If the roll succeeds, the character regains Willpower as usual. On a failure or a botch, she does not). Some mages never recover from this apathy and simply go through life as quasi-Sleepers, never able to muster the will to touch the power they once held.

Complacency is a much more common problem. A mage grows complacent when she relies too heavily on a given effect, rote or focus (yes, the example of the mage searching for his watch applies). Avatars who wish to shake their charges out of complacency will usually craft Seekings that deny them whatever they've grown overreliant on. A mage that tests *everything* said to her with the **Ring of Truth** effect might find that everything said to her rings true — literally. The sound of bells grows deafening whenever anyone speaks. Complacent mages often become frightened in such Seekings and occasionally “freeze up,” feeling unable to take any action without the usual bag of tricks. If a mage goes too long without acting (and what “too long” means varies from Avatar to Avatar), her Avatar might manifest and give her some suggestions and then return her to her normal life and let the matter sit for some time (as little as a day, as much as a year — again, it depends on the Avatar).

Hubris afflicts most mages occasionally. This kind of overweening pride — the belief that the mage can do *anything* and is accountable to no one — is unacceptable to the mage's Avatar (who knows the mage's limits all too well). Seekings structured around hubris are often designed to take the mage down a peg and might feature foes that are tough, smart and fast enough to avoid the mage's best attacks or tactics. The solution might be to admit defeat — and that's something hubristic mages would rather die than do. Hubris gets in the way of enlightenment whenever the mage can see the correct answer to a

challenge but refuses it because of pride, vanity or some other damaging idea. When a mage fails a Seeking through hubris, the Avatar often turns away in disgust. It might restrict the mage's power in the same ways as described under apathy but will be quite willing to talk with the mage on the subject.

Regardless of why the mages fails a Seeking, she is usually downtrodden and depressed afterward. Even if the mage realizes what the Avatar was trying to tell her after the fact, she has still failed the test. How long before she has another chance depends on the Avatar in question and how she failed the test. If she failed by one of the three classic mistakes above, the Avatar probably responds as noted and waits for the mage to try actively to rectify her faults. If she failed by making the wrong choice or failing to learn what the Avatar wished to learn, the Avatar probably grants her hints and visions in everyday life, trying to teach her what she needs to know without subjecting her to the rigors of a Seeking. When the Avatar feels the mage is making progress, it takes her back into the vision-quest and either presents the same challenge again or the same lesson in a different test.

DISAPPOINTMENT

Failing a Seeking is, in a word, a bummer. Not only does the character not advance, but the player often feels inadequate, too. When a character fails a Seeking, ask yourself why. Did you make the challenge too obtuse? Did the player try to follow up on clues that weren't important? Why didn't the player “get it?”

Players never have access to all the information that characters do, of course, because players are not Awakened mages with the power to affect reality on a direct level (see the disclaimers in any number of our books if you're confused on that point). That in mind, you might occasionally need to remind the player of something that her character would know but that might have slipped her mind. It's perfectly acceptable to give hints on Seekings, or at any other time in the game, for two reasons. One is that it's just good sport: Nobody's perfect, and it's not fair to penalize a character because a player forgot to take a detail into account. The other is that, in case anyone forgot, this is a game, and games are supposed to be fun.

AFTERMATH

What happens when a Seeking ends? If the Seeking ends successfully, the character experiences Epiphany, as described above. If she fails, the character probably becomes depressed for some time, perhaps even losing a few points of temporary Willpower. Either way, no one comes through a Seeking unchanged.

The most common change in a mage after a Seeking, successful or not, is in Resonance. As mentioned in Chapter One, Resonance changes in response to strong emotion associated with magic and the way the character employs it. The success or failure of a Seeking almost always changes Resonance. In what way the change takes effect is largely dependent on the specifics of the Seeking.

If the Seeking was successful, the character probably gains Resonance. This isn't necessarily the same type of Resonance the character already has; a mage with the Dynamic Resonance *Wrathful* who undergoes a Seeking in which he visualizes his anger as a wild beast to be tamed might very well gain a dot of Static Resonance (possibly with the *Focused* Resonance Trait).

If the mage failed the Seeking, he might well lose Resonance. If the mage in the above example killed his anger-beast rather than trying to control it, his Dynamic Resonance might fade. It's more common for Resonance to change in the wake of a failed Seeking, however; perhaps the *Wrathful* Resonance changes to *Frustrated* or something similar.

No game system is included for the gain, loss or transition of Resonance Traits because this change is entirely up to the Storyteller and player. If both parties think it appropriate that the mage's Resonance remains at its pre-Seeking levels, that's fine. Keep in mind, however, that as mages grow in power, their Resonance grows as well. The most powerful mages have Resonance Traits of all three types, meaning that the mystical "fingerprints" they leave behind are complex and layered, making them even more distinct. After all, any mage might have a Burning (Dynamic) Resonance, but if that Burning is also tinged with Death (Entropic) and is Intense (Static), the mage is much easier to track down.



SAMPLE SEEKINGS

Below are four sample Seekings, one for each Essence, using the example characters from the discussion of Essences and Avatars, above. These are included for inspiration purposes and to show how diverse the four different Essences can be. As has been stated before, Seekings are intensely personal affairs. These examples work for these characters and can provide some direction for Storytellers in need of ideas for Seekings, but providing generic “template Seekings” is an exercise in futility — there are simply too many variables.

A DYNAMIC EXAMPLE — THE COLLAPSING BRIDGE

Gage Cressner, the Son of Ether character mentioned on page 105, undergoes his first Seeking. If successful, it will raise his Arete from 3 to 4 — a rather critical juncture, as this enlightenment would allow him to be an Adept of a Sphere. The Storyteller looks over the notes for the past few stories and decides that Gage’s Dynamic Avatar is frustrated by the fact that while Gage is an expert in harmonics and is theoretically capable of directing the forces of vibration and sound to great effect, he regiments himself so carefully that he isn’t living up to his potential. His Avatar wants him to learn to appreciate the power of spontaneity but knows that his scientific outlook might hinder that. Therefore, the Storyteller decides that on this Seeking, the Avatar will put him in a do-or-die situation — he can either break free of his rigid theories, or people will suffer.

The Seeking begins as Gage drives over a bridge. As he does so, the vibrations he feels grow more intense. Gage slows his car; while he doesn’t recognize the vibrations as his “Avatar,” he does know that when they intensify he is often on the verge of a breakthrough. As he looks around, he sees the concrete of the bridge begin to crack.

Gage stops the car and gets out, looking at the damage and analyzing it with both his mundane knowledge of physics and his magical understanding of Forces and Matter. He realizes that the bridge is tearing itself in half due to faulty engineering — the wind hit it in a certain way and the bridge simply buckled. Gage’s Avatar doesn’t let him spend too much time thinking. The bridge lurches and Gage is nearly thrown over the side. Other cars on the bridge skid and people begin to scream. Gage looks about

helplessly and realizes that his only chance for survival is to stop the bridge from collapsing.

Gage jumps in his car and guns the engine, all the while focusing directly on the vibration tearing the bridge apart. He realizes that the vibrations come in stages and reasons that if he can create force of the same strength but opposite amplitude, it will cancel out the force wrecking the bridge (yes, this is a somewhat loose interpretation of physics, but it’s also a game. Deal with it). Glancing up at the cables supporting this bridge, he shakes his head and slams his car into the side of the bridge. Several of the cables snap with a resounding *twang*, and the bridge stabilizes for a moment. The other motorists race for the end of the bridge, one of them stopping to give Gage a ride.

Gage wakes up to the sound of a horn behind him. He’s nearly over the bridge, but driving very slowly. He looks around and realizes the vibrations have subsided, but also that he can affect them on a direct and rapid level by using his environment. He steps on the gas and heads to his lab — he has much work to do.

Storyteller notes: In the above example, the player originally tried to use Gage’s usual methods — analysis — to determine what was happening. The Avatar responded by upping the ante; innocent people would die if he hesitated too much. This essentially amounted to a second chance, a signal that Gage would fail the Seeking if he kept to his usual tactics. Gage’s player, fortunately, took the hint and did something pretty crazy by scientific standards, but used his scientific knowledge as a focus for a rather severe effect (namely, snapping the cables to create a counter to the vibration wrecking the bridge; roughly a Forces 3 effect). That’s exactly what his Avatar was looking for, so Gage succeeds in the Seeking and gains a fourth dot of Arete. His player might justifiably raise Gage’s Forces rating after this, or purchase a dot of Entropy, since pinpointing the exact location to cause the vibration was part of the Seeking. In any case, Gage gains a dot of Dynamic Resonance (with the *Spontaneous Resonance Trait*). The entire Seeking is resolved with no dice at all (the only action where dice might have been involved was the Forces effect to save the bridge, and the Storyteller wisely decided not to risk a failure on such an important task).

A PATTERN EXAMPLE — THE STORM

Verbena mages learn the Life Sphere as a matter of course, and Marne Wells, the character mentioned on page 105, is no exception. Her Awakening showed her that Life is everywhere and inherently simple, but since then she's fallen into the trap of viewing Life as the only Sphere worth knowing. In particular, she spurns the other Pattern Spheres as worthless (in large part because she's had bad experiences with the Order of Hermes and the Sons of Ether, the two Traditions that commonly espouse these Spheres). Her Avatar finds this unacceptable — every living thing is made up of Matter (mostly water) and is dependent on Forces for survival. Before Marne can understand the true simplicity of reality, she must see the link between the Pattern Spheres. Therefore, her Avatar pulls her into a Seeking to teach her this lesson. If successful, Marne will gain her third dot of Arete.

Marne's Avatar waits until her coven holds an outdoor ritual. As Marne and the other witches dance under the Moon, the sky clouds over and thunder rumbles in the distance. The other members of her coven continue dancing, but Marne stops and looks up at the storm as lightning dances across the sky. Nearby, she sees a tree spring up from the ground in seconds — her Avatar is near.

As Marne watches, lightning lances down and strikes the ground next to her. The earth is scorched, but the rain quenches the fire. Marne realizes that she is standing in the middle of an open space in a lightning storm, carrying an iron dagger (her athame, which she uses to focus Prime), and begins to grow nervous. She looks wistfully toward the house, to which her covenmates have already retreated, the ritual complete.

Lightning strikes again, this time splitting a tree (not her Avatar-tree) in two. Marne grows angry and runs to the burning tree, slices her palm with her athame and tries to rectify the damage done. She drips her blood (her focus for Life) onto the burning trunk and calls upon her Life magic to heal it. Again lightning lances down, but she raises her athame up and tries to ground the lightning so it can't do any damage. The lightning bolt strikes her dagger and she feels unimaginable heat and pain. She falls to her knees but stays conscious and focuses her will through the athame at the energy coming from the lightning. In that moment, she is struck with the similarity of the energy of the lightning, that of the fire consum-

ing the tree, the tree itself and even the dagger. She realizes in one moment of clarity that all of the energy is the same but must be handled differently (as evidenced by the burn on her hand). She lets the tree burn and limps her way into the house to tend to her wound.

Storyteller notes: As the point here is to recognize the value and power of all of the Pattern Spheres, the Seeking is largely in the player's hands. The Storyteller sets up the thunderstorm to have clear symbols for Forces — the lightning and the fire it creates. Marne's player, playing nicely into the character's view of the Forces Sphere, tries to "fix" what the lightning does (using Life 2). The Storyteller allows her a roll, which fails. The player then decides she will focus on the lightning and try to ward it off using Prime magic only (the player knows quite well that Marne doesn't have the expertise to do this but reasons that Marne hasn't figured that out yet). This time, the Storyteller doesn't bother with the magic roll, but does ask the player to roll Stamina so that Marne can remain standing as the lightning hits her.

Impressed and cowed by the pain the lightning causes, Marne's player hits on a question. Since Marne has used Life and Prime to read a living being's "aura" before, perhaps the lightning and the fire have similar signatures of power? She focuses on these forces using Prime and discovers that they do indeed give off energy, even in a magical sense. This leads Marne to her Epiphany — much like what she saw during her Awakening, she realizes that everything, Forces, Matter and Life included, are the same at heart (that is, they are all composed of Quintessence).

The Storyteller decides that this is very similar to what the Avatar wanted Marne to realize; the witch just went about it in an unexpected way (using Prime as a kind of "bridge" between Life and Forces). Marne succeeds and gains a dot of Arete, but also a dot of Dynamic Resonance (*Burning*) as a reminder of the power of Forces. The player might choose to raise Marne's Prime rating, buy a dot of Forces or possibly even raise the character's Stamina (since she was "tested" by the lightning).

A PRIMITIVE EXAMPLE — THE CONFESSION

Dr. Marcus Jackson's terrifying Avatar, the hooded, ferrymanlike figure, decides that the time has come for Marcus to realize his destiny and quiet the storm in the lands of the dead. For this to happen



he needs to master the Spirit Sphere. The powerful Avatar waits until Marcus sleeps and then pulls him into a Seeking. If successful, Marcus will gain a fifth dot of Arete. The Avatar has no intention of making this easy, however. Marcus still suffers from nightmares and horrible feelings of guilt regarding his sister's death (he and his sister were both shot, but he survived the experience because his Avatar saved him. He feels as though he should have protected his sister). His Avatar recognizes that until Marcus quells his own spiritual problems, he cannot bring peace to the lands of the dead.

Marcus finds himself walking on a road and comes to a crossroads. He could go forward, take a path to either the left or right, or go back. Marcus has learned in his time as a mage never to take for granted what he sees and looks around more carefully. Off the path a ways, he discovers a church with a graveyard. He leaves the road and wanders into the churchyard.

Once there, he discovers an open grave with a coffin in it. A pile of earth with a shovel stuck in it sits nearby. Marcus grabs the shovel, but something feels wrong — he realizes that the ghost of the deceased lingers, probably because the body hasn't received the proper burial. Marcus is learned enough to perform this kind of rite (he is a professor of thanatology), but something feels wrong. The church doors are wide open, but no one seems in attendance. Marcus sets the shovel down and enters the church.

Inside, he crosses himself and sits down to pray. He remains there, in prayer, and the sun begins to set. Moments before sunset, realization strikes and he hurriedly enters the confessional. The priest there is shrouded in shadow, but Marcus recognizes his mysterious Avatar. Marcus receives the sacrament of confession, where he admits his doubt in his own abilities and his guilt over not being able to save his sister. The "priest" absolves him and assigns him his penance — "Help the dead rest."

Marcus leaves the church and performs the burial rite, laying the ghost to rest. He then climbs back up the hill and continues down the path, straight ahead. In the distance he sees storm clouds gathering and knows his true destiny awaits.

Storyteller notes: This is a more "classical" Seeking, rife with symbolism, the "chamber" structure common to Primordial Avatars. As it begins,

Marcus approaches a crossroads — a fairly obvious symbol of choice. Marcus' player is smart enough to look around and sees the church. The Storyteller has used religious motifs often with Marcus before, so the player decides Marcus had better investigate. He therefore passes the first chamber — not going forward until he is sure of what's behind him.

The open grave is a symbol of unfinished business, representing Marcus' obsession and guilt over his sister. He can't put it to rest without working through it first, which is why he must enter the church (a symbol for admitting that he needs help to overcome his past). Leaving the grave is the second chamber.

Inside the church, Marcus' player falters a bit; the idea of going to confession doesn't occur to him. Marcus sits down to pray, and the Storyteller decides that he needs to show the player that time is a factor (hence the setting sun). Finally, the player hits on the notion of confession and enters the booth. The player and the Storyteller roleplay Marcus' confession and his Avatar's advice; this is the third chamber (and the most important challenge in the Seeking).

Marcus leaves and puts the ghost to rest, again symbolic of coming to terms with his guilt over his sister. The fourth chamber complete, Marcus ascends the hill (symbolic of his own return to life from the jaws of death) and continues down the path (the fifth chamber). Marcus gains a dot of Arete and a dot of Static Resonance (with the *Trait Centered*).

A QUESTING EXAMPLE — THE END OF THE ROAD

The young Orphan, Ty Williams (first mentioned on page 107), undergoes his first Seeking after several months of game play. The Storyteller has noticed that as the chronicle has progressed, Ty has made friends with the other characters and has not been actively searching for his parents; this makes his Avatar very nervous. The Storyteller decides that on the Seeking (which, if successful, will grant Ty a

fourth dot of Arete), Ty's Avatar is going to present him with a number of temptations that he must avoid in favor of reaching for a goal.

The Seeking begins as Ty walks down the city street. A car passes him; the people it carries look oddly familiar. The car gets to the end of the block before Ty realizes that they could be his parents. He begins to follow, using Correspondence magic to weave in and out of the crowds on the sidewalk, but can't seem to catch up.

As Ty passes a deli, he sees Doc, his friend and former mentor, standing outside eating a sandwich. He waves Ty over to him. Ty looks wistfully at the car disappearing in the distance but decides that he wants to see Doc more and crosses the street to share the sandwich and chat. The car carrying his parents disappears over the horizon, and when Ty reaches the deli, he does not see Doc. He finds only a bag with a sandwich, and a note — "Maybe next time."

Crying, Ty sits down to eat the sandwich. He discovers that the sandwich tastes the same as usual, that Doc (who disappeared into the Umbra some months ago) is still gone, and everything is pretty much the same as always.

Storyteller notes: The lesson that Ty's Avatar wants him to learn is that everything changes and eventually decays, but continually following his goal keeps his perspective fresh and his spirit invigorated. Since his Avatar usually uses his parents as a "carrot" to convince Ty to pursue enlightenment, the Storyteller decides that giving Ty a clear look at them will induce the player to follow no matter what.

When Ty sees his former mentor, however, the player states that Ty will run over to join him. The Storyteller makes sure to describe the car getting farther away, but the player is resolute. This is an example of *complacency* — Ty has chosen the familiar over his quest. He fails the Seeking and gains a dot of Static Resonance (with the *Comfortable Trait*) as a result.



CHAPTER FIVE ALTERNATIVE SETTINGS



They tell you not to believe what you read in the papers. They tell you that you can dream things into reality — that you can enforce what you think over the will of others. If you ask me, it's a load of crap. You might as well imagine that the dot coms didn't go belly-up. That Milosevich is still out there gleefully knifing pregnant Croatian women to death. That we don't have cloning.

You see, these dreamers missed the point. Perception doesn't shape reality. That's not what Pirsig was saying at all. He was saying that our perception of reality taints our understanding of it. So go ahead. Jump off the roof of this building. See what I care. You're only going to end up with your belly burst on the pavement below with the rest of those Traditionalists we put to bed every day.

I know what your problem is. You've spent too long with your head in the clouds. This is no way to get your keys to the executive wash room. Don't you have a house payment to make? Child support to pay?

Now, if you'll just see your way out of my office, I've got a conference call with Sydney and Moscow in 10 minutes. I'm catching a plane to Kyoto tonight, and I don't want to get there too late to take in some kabuki. Scurry along back to your cubicle.

Oh, and don't forget to have that report on the sample extractor for the Mars lander on my desk by noon.

No, that doesn't sound like science fiction. Why do you ask?

⊕ OF CAUSE AND REALITIES

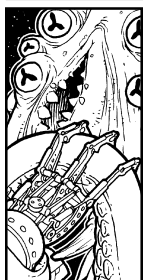
The Ascension War is over. There's no chance to restore wonder in this age. The Sleepers have settled down for a long, long winter's nap. The Technocracy has crushed the leadership of the Traditions beneath its heel. The Avatar Storm rages in the Umbra.

Icarus' wings have melted. The wisdom of Daedalus has shown true. And that's the way it has to be.

Or does it?

The following chapter explores options for Storytelling and play both within and outside the context of the existing **Mage: The Ascension** metaplot. In this chapter we'll explore how to tell stories that make artful use of the metaplot as a global context. We'll also look at some completely alternative settings for **Mage**. Finally, we'll discuss how you as a Storyteller can use some simple themes to engage players, encouraging them to buy into the story you want to tell, even if it's something they initially resist.

SO, THE WORLD'S GONE TO HELL...



(OR, WHY TO PLAY **MAGE** AS A
MEAN STREETS
GUTTER PUNK GATIE)

The Ascension War is at an end, and the Traditions, last bastion of hope for a better world, have been vanquished. The Umbra, physical reflection of humanity's spiritual beliefs, is now essentially severed from all but those spiritual beings in whole or in part native to it. All but a handful of Masters are dead, missing or unreachable. Even the most optimistic of Traditionalists now concedes that any kind of Great Ascension is beyond reach. Everywhere one looks is apathy. The bland faces of a human race whose time is up and whose chances have passed stare back at the Awakened, the tangible reminder of their failure. The Reckoning has come and the Technocracy stands triumphant atop a world in ashes.

Bullshit.

Anyone who buys into that is unworthy of the unique and amazing gifts of the Awakening. The Traditions have been fighting a losing battle for five centuries. It's nothing new to them. Suddenly the enemy decrees that the struggle is at an end, and the Traditions are relieved of all responsibility? Suddenly it's "too late" to do anything about it? Ages have ended before. Chanttries have been lost before. Setbacks have been suffered before. Yet none of these has ever before been the Sole Deciding Factor of whether or not the Traditions should continue to bother. Yes, perhaps the events of recent years have been among the greatest blows ever inflicted upon the Traditions. One would have to be a fool not to see that the destruction of Doissetep, for example, was a wound at least as grievous as anything since the betrayal of Heylel Teonim. But, as with the fall of the First Cabal, there is a powerful, important and, ultimately, necessary lesson to be learned here.

For too long the Traditions have looked on the Technocracy as their Great Enemy. While the Technocratic Union is a potent threat to all the Traditions hold dear, it is no more responsible for the Reckoning than the Traditions themselves. The greatest foe of the Traditions is not, and never has been, anyone but the people the Traditions have spent the past five hundred years trying to help. No one made the Sleepers stop believing in the existence of anything more important than their two weeks of

vacation, their Monday night football and their unrewarding lives of debt slavery. No one offered them any concrete proof that faith in something greater than oneself is a lie. These things were simply easier "truths" to live than the struggle to find meaning, the search for hope and the assertion that the individual is not powerless and inconsequential. Although the Technocracy may have exploited this weakness and helped wrench humanity's birthright out of its hands, it was humanity itself that cast that birthright aside for the ultimately empty vision that the Technocracy offered. The Consensus chose mediocrity.

That said, however, the only choice the Traditions have, the only choice they have ever had, is to keep fighting and keep trying to aid those people who have denied the Traditions' vision and, in many ways, sentenced those mystics to the nearly insurmountable odds they now face. Why? Because **Mage** is not a game about taking the easy road. It is not a game about the "hipness" of nihilism. **Mage** is a game about hope and about helping oneself and others to realize a fantastic potential that lies dormant within all of us. Mages aren't some kind of dying breed, living out their final days in desperation and fear; they are humanity's line in the sand, the courageous few who are willing to bleed in order to undo the damage wrought by the self-destructive disbelief of their fellows. They are the ones struggling, even now, in these "final hours," to give sight to the blind. In a world where belief defines reality, anything else would be a gross violation of the sacred responsibilities conferred by the Awakening.

This is a time filled with great potential for the Traditions. The Technocracy finds its powers growing increasingly static, castrated by its own success and beginning to realize the terrible consequences of getting what you wish for. It has fallen prey to the titanic hubris that laid the Order of Hermes low in the wake of Mistridge. Like the nascent Order of Reason, *someone* has to be there to pick up the pieces when the dominant paradigm crumbles under its own ponderous weight. While it would be simple for the Traditions to throw in the towel and buy into the "end is nigh" folderol that is being bandied about by everyone who thinks he knows anything about the Reckoning, the truth is that the War for Reality is a never-ending conflict with its own ebb and flow. For too long the Traditions have

felt and acted as though they missed their One Big Chance, and the time has come to put such foolish and self-defeating attitudes away. The Technocracy's lie is coming apart at the seams, and if someone isn't there to put a better vision before the Sleepers, it will be the Nephandi who ultimately triumph. But people have to choose Oblivion and, given virtually any other choice, they won't. While it is true that the Order will never get back its dragons and high towers, nor the Verbena their broad and trackless woods of old, there are newer, different dreams to offer, the dreams of wiser Traditions that have been through hell and wear their scars as proof of what they have endured in the name of principles and ideals.

Where to begin in this uphill battle to win the hearts and minds of the Sleepers? How does one counteract centuries of conditioning that have beaten the individual into submission and compliance? The first thing to remember is that the Awakening is not a license to dominion. More than once, the Awakened have come to view their abilities as an entitlement to control their fellow men and women, and, every time, such attitudes have been the downfall of empires. The Traditions should not be seeking to *replace* the Technocracy but should instead endeavor to excise humanity's need to be controlled. A liberated human spirit is worth infinitely more than one obedient out of fear, rote or ignorance. The Technocracy is now learning this lesson the hard way.

The hardest part will not be putting away thoughts of rule. Indeed, encouraging people to open their eyes to the spark of divinity within themselves and to accept the privileges and duties inherent in freedom is probably the most difficult task of all. Since time out of mind, Sleepers have been conditioned to believe that only a rare few people have what it takes to make a difference and to be someone important. Most generally assume that they are not numbered among those few and, by their belief, make it so. The persistence of this idea has made the mass Ascension of humanity nigh an impossibility and is what has brought the world to the brink of disaster. Most mages assume there is not enough time left to return to the tried-and-true method of winning back one believer at a time. It becomes a catch-22 that fosters a sense of despair and futility. After all, if there's no hope of Awakening the world all at once and too few grains of sand left in the hourglass to make a dent in the paradigm of apathy by revealing the truth to people as indi-

viduals, what's the point? The flaw in this argument is to be found in the provincial and essentially Medieval view that the world is going to end within a generation.

Yes, the fundamental metaphysic of the world has changed. No one disputes that much. Undoubtedly, magic is not quite what it was a millennium ago. It is likely that most of the Awakened of today wouldn't even recognize the magic of 10 millennia before that. The point is that the nature of magic is a protean thing. It moves in time to the prevailing attitudes of ages and places. Even today, in this age of interconnection, what is considered coincidence in Grand Central Station is decidedly different than what you can get away with in Bangkok or the Australian outback, as it has always been. So if magic is not failing everywhere in the exact same way, why do even the Awakened staunchly maintain that the sky is falling? The easy answer to that is that the Awakened are people, too, and as subject to hysteria, paranoia and apocalyptic sensationalism as anyone else. Whenever a century draws to a close, end-of-the-world propaganda becomes prevalent. Whenever some great earthquake or other natural disaster strikes, doomsayers are always on the scene, encouraging others to prepare for the Rapture. All mages everywhere have just felt, deep within their very souls, the death throes of an era. As always, the carrion crows have come down from their perches to let everyone know that this is the way the world ends. How very unenlightened.

The dangers mages need to be looking to now are not supernatural in origin. Rather, perhaps it is more accurate to say that they are not *directly* supernatural. While the growing power of the Nephandi and the terrible perils of the Avatar Storm, for example, are threats to all Awakened everywhere, they are just symptoms. Confronted with the growing realization that feeling anything simply leads to pain, fear and disappointment, people draw back inside themselves and dare to feel nothing at all. The average person today has little more in the way of free time than most ancient hunter-gatherers did but considerably more stress and far less in the way of any kind of spirituality. The materialism of the modern world has not resulted in a more rewarding life but instead in one that is more comfortable and bereft of difficult or important questions, a life in which it is far easier simply to go through the motions. Most people toil for causes of dubious value to feed and perpetuate a cycle of ever-growing complexity in which human beings become

ever more distant from themselves and one another. *That* is the World of Darkness. It isn't the casual brutality of disaffected street toughs. It's not rain-slicked avenues and the prostitutes, addicts and runaways who gather beneath the empty light of neon signs and flickering lampposts. The World of Darkness is to be found in the steady bloodletting of the human desire to be free and happy. The World of Darkness hides in the fast food, designer clothing lines and miracle stain removers that people produce, consume and long for without really understanding why. It is in the desire for meaningless things and the ache left by the absence of those things that have true value. While it is elementary to say these things, remember that no one's life has ever been directly saved by paperwork and yet people have died because of it. How skewed are the priorities that allow things like that to happen? The world is what it is primarily because human beings have come to deny so much of what it means to be human in the face of morals, beliefs and values they have been told they have, or should have in order to fit in and be part of this brave new world.

It falls to the Awakened in general, then, and to the Traditions in particular, to be the promise of a better way for the world. Not via the Traditions' way: That would be selfish and the Traditions have now had ample opportunity to witness what befalls those who would seek to remake all things in their own image. The Sleepers, whose world this is, must be given the chance to realize a brighter future for themselves, guided along their journey by those more fortunate and enlightened. How to give this World of Darkness back to the people, so that they might build it anew? The Traditions have displayed quite a penchant for casting aside, one way or another, those who have touted Unity as the cornerstone of their struggles, but now there can be no doubt of it. First and foremost, the Nine Mystic Traditions must stand as one or be forever doomed to failure. Petty inter-Tradition conflicts erode the strong base on which to set the pillar of an emancipated humanity. How can the human race be shown anything of value by those who cannot even put their own differences aside? Mistrust and arrogance have served only to drive wedges between the Traditions that have ultimately tied the hands of the Awakened as the High Mythic Age crumbled around them.

Mages of various Traditions will tell you about the painstaking efforts they've expended in the pursuit of freeing spirits and elevating minds, but it obviously hasn't been enough. Inspiring just one

person to open his eyes is a Herculean task, and more than six billion people in the world have their eyes firmly closed. Mages can't afford to bring the truth only to those on the brink of Awakening. They need to become teachers to those who don't really wish to learn. They need to overcome the inertia of centuries of inactivity and a mindset that says a person has limits he can never supercede. As difficult as it may be, the future of the Traditions, magic and, perhaps, the world itself depends upon teaching the basest of souls how to fly. But hope is by no means lost.

The Traditions have more friends than they realize, more than they've ever really taken the time to look for. Everywhere one cares to look is someone who is willing to leave behind the mundane and step into the fantastic. In an office bleached bone-white with fluorescent lighting, a woman is looking out the window, wondering where the past 10 years have gone and why she's doing all the legwork she is to make someone else rich. In a decrepit high school, a young man is filled with despair at the thought of living out the same bland and unfeeling path his father took and is on the verge of ceasing to care. In a veteran's home, an old man holds a cane in a hand made numb by bad circulation and poor heating and wonders how things might have been different had he chosen to live the life he had wanted, rather than taking the safe road. These people, so far from freedom that it seems to them a long-ago dream, are the very ones who, know it or not, are crying out for the Awakened to show them that something amazing, something they have never had the courage to imagine, is real. Though they may fight the revelations, they are the people who can go the furthest when they finally summon the strength to see the truth for what it is. They are the ones the Traditions stand the most to gain by liberating from their ideological slavery. But, every day, more and more of these people who might have been saved are lost instead. The Traditions are so used to losing that they now see enemies in every shadow who must be hidden from; stepping into the light to offer a hand to one downtrodden spirit is "too much of a risk." After all, reaching out to a Sleeper so firmly entrenched in the current paradigm invites the attentions of the Technocracy, does it not? The Technocracy is everywhere, waiting and watching for just one Disciple to screw up and tip her hand, so that it can fall on her like a pack of wolves and tear her to shreds. If you believe that, I have a bridge in Brooklyn to sell you.

The Technocracy is made up of *people*: real, flawed people who happen to be Awakened just like, well, just like any other Awakened being. They don't actually have spies in your closet and they aren't monitoring you through the hot dogs you just picked up at the supermarket. Why would they? Their propaganda is so well developed that everyone believes it. Far better to have your enemies think that you are everywhere than to actually have to expend the effort to do so, for they will be timid when they should act boldly and will flinch at the merest suggestion of your presence. An enemy cowed into submission and inactivity is of much more use to the Technocracy than an enemy defeated. When a foe still exists, he can be used to scare your own ranks back into line. When the Traditions play this cloak-and-dagger game, they are simply playing right into the Technocracy's hands and taking on the desired role of bogeyman and a threat just this side of impotent. Now is not the time for half measures and hesitation. While some Traditionalists are claiming that one must play it smart in these end times and not make of oneself a target, such cowardly sentiments are unlikely to achieve anything, save produce an opportunity later to regret having done nothing while there was still a chance. After all, the Technocracy's propaganda is so good at this point that even its members believe it. Arrogance is a deadly weakness. The Technocracy should know that; it exploited that fact once to great effect. To the Technocracy, nothing is as confounding as a variable that fails to meet expectations. A courageous, undaunted and strong-willed Nine Mystic Traditions is about the last thing the Technocratic Union expects while the world is falling apart and none of its vaunted statistics, axioms or theoretical models can make the Reckoning conform to their desired conclusions. This is can be the Traditions' finest hour. There are worse things to be than the wild card with nothing left to lose. *That* is precisely the sort of enemy the Technocracy is not ready to fight right now.

Provided the mages of the Traditions get it in their minds to come this far, what next? Once one has left behind pride and abandoned fear, one can see clearly just how much remains to be done. Horizon was a grand experiment in what could have been, but it was, in many ways, a narcissistic vision of the Traditions' perfect world. There is no easy way to admit it, but that will never be the world the Sleepers want. If it were, there would be

no World of Darkness to begin with. Magic has changed. The world has changed. Perhaps it is time for the Traditions to evolve as well. Bear in mind, this is not an endorsement to leave the Old Ways behind and to trick out one's selection of foci with laptops, vinyl clothing and the like. It is instead an invitation for members of *all* Traditions (Virtual Adepts and other progressively minded sorts included) to develop a perspective that is perhaps slightly more Sleeper-friendly. Nobody wants to have his life bled out at the base of the World Tree to provide a bountiful harvest, nor does anyone want grim-faced wizards in high towers commanding him like a feudal serf. This sort of thing soured people on traditional mysticism centuries ago. Sleepers are not grease for the gears.

How does one begin to foster belief in Sleepers? As with all grand journeys, the first step is the most crucial. One does not simply approach the average man on the street and declare, "There is a world of magic sleeping beneath the one you know, waiting for you to see it with unclouded eyes." That sort of talk gets people thrown in the county lock-up or the local asylum. Almost every mage knows at least a dozen ordinary people who are in no way Consors, semi-Awakened mystics or mages-in-training. Mages, like everyone else, have friends and family. While almost anyone who's tried to express a divergent viewpoint to a family member (especially an older one) can attest to the futility of that course of action, small ways can begin to broaden the perspective of one's nearest and dearest. Sometimes all it takes is the suggestion of ideas the individual has never pondered before. Sometimes even a supposedly "enlightened" mage will be surprised to hear the very un-Sleeper attitudes held by people she has known her whole life and considers to be very grounded and mundane. Everyone desires to be free; some just have the benefit of seeing the path to that freedom much more clearly. The Awakened need to demonstrate to these people who trust them that the way they offer is not just different, but *better*. Most people are so thoroughly wound up in the idea that everyone's life follows (or should follow) One True Set Pattern that they are, at least initially, opposed to any ideology that rocks the boat. Try convincing a third-generation steel worker with 20 years of experience under his belt that he is imprisoned by a system that made a slave of not only himself but of his father and his grandfather, and you are likely to create nothing more than bitterness and confusion. Caution and decorum are

required in this most delicate process. Fear of the unknown and the dangers inherent in a leap of faith are what keep most Sleepers asleep. Engendering more fear is only apt to drive an un-Awakened mind deeper under.

Those of the younger generation, already jaded by the crushing weight of the World of Darkness, are often more receptive to the astounding promise of the Awakening. Traditionalists who have an opportunity to interact with youth have a great opportunity to carry a light into the darkness. A youthful mind is nearly always readier to accept radical or unconventional ideas than one set in its ways. It is certainly not uncommon for young people in the World of Darkness to delve into mysticism, whether that means picking up a book on witchcraft or playing around with a Ouija board with a few friends. For many it is a lark, and those sorts “grow out” of that “phase,” but how many might be encouraged to remain and, indeed, expand their understanding, given a tutor or even just an older friend who has been where these youths might one day go? Certain mystic practices are best kept from children and young adults, but nothing contributes to altering the perceptions of the world quite like broadening the perspective of the generation that will be running it in 20 years. Naturally, this philosophy stretches beyond bell, book and candle and has value for members of all Traditions. Any talented young hacker, instead of pulling out her piercing at age 22 and hiding her tattoos beneath a long-sleeved blouse, could, with the proper encouragement, be a valued friend to the Traditions and their cause, even if she never truly Awakens. The trick is in demonstrating that the Traditions’ lifestyle of nonconformity not only works but also comes with a sense of adventure and fulfillment absent from a lifetime of “playing it straight” and buying into the very system that is eating the human spirit alive. In the end, no life of corporate servitude or meeting the expectations of others can compare to being one pair of hands laying the foundation of a more worthwhile world. Fortunately for the Traditions, enough youth question the “way things are,” seeking out newer or older ways of thinking and living, that every Traditionalist could have his hands full with freeing those young spirits crying out for freedom.

No amount of covert or overt proselytizing will twist the world back into shape overnight, and it may never work, but it’s better than hiding in fear from the Sleepers, the Technocracy and anyone

else worth mentioning. It’s far better to bring the truth to one mind at a time than to let one’s light die unnoticed in the shadows. The nobility of a struggle is not in victory but in the struggle itself. In the end, it’s the fight that matters. **Mage** is not a Storytelling Game of Survivalist Desperation. It is the story of a number of courageous men and women who are fighting against what the rest of us consider to be true and immutable because they know there is a worthier life, waiting for those with the strength, the resourcefulness and the will to reach out and make it a reality.

While you can play **Mage** for that aura of inevitable doom, it really goes against the sense of hope in which the game was created. Yes, the Traditions have been backed into the corner and perhaps most of what has been said here is a trifle *too* optimistic, but what’s the alternative? Hide and cower while the planet crumbles around you? Once you have seen, it’s too late to wish yourself sightless once more. Once your heart has been opened to how much is wrong with the world, what can you do, other than to try to make it right? Few actually imagine themselves in the role of protecting and saving others, but being a mage is a destiny that, in many ways, chooses you, rather than the other way around. When the moment comes to accept destiny and make a stand for the salvation of all, mages are precisely the sort of people who don’t turn away and pretend it’s not their problem. That’s why they’re Awakened.

The falls of Doissetep and Horizon, the deaths of Porthos and the other Masters, even the Reckoning itself — you can take these as an admonishment against pride and evidence of the terrible cost of trying. Or you can look to the examples set forth, the mistakes that have been made and the prices that some have been willing to pay and see them as a source of inspiration and resolve. More than 500 years ago, disparate practitioners of a thousand mystic arts came to together in the mutual pursuit of survival. The mission of that First Cabal was a crucible, a testament to their ability to think, act and be heroes as one. While the mission failed and the promise died in the womb, Heylrel sent a powerful message that has, for too long, gone unheeded. As he brought Doissetep down around himself in flames, Master Porthos echoed that message; we stand as one and fall as one and owe the world more than we have given it, and everything we take from it shall be accounted for in time. The Traditions have paid what they owe and paid for it in blood.

Now they stand at a crossroads and have the opportunity to hear the voices that counsel them across time and tragedy, from beyond death itself, to choose Unity and to meet whatever comes in the wake of the Reckoning together, with bravery and compassion. If they do not, if they choose to skulk in shadows and await the end, then they are deserving of whatever terrible fate comes for them, for they have proven that they were never really Awakened at all. Awakening is about asserting control over one's own life and taking responsibility for one's own actions. Better to die on your feet than to live on your knees.

And so we come full circle, back to the grim reality that is the World of Darkness. Sacrifices must be made and good people will fall beneath the terrible jaws of the Reckoning before all is said and done. It was called the *Ascension War* for a reason. While that epic conflict is not truly over, not by any stretch of the imagination, there is now a lull in this tide of bloodshed and a settling of the dust during which *all* Awakened, Traditionalist, Technocrat and otherwise, have a chance to look at what has been done in the name of humanity and to wonder if there is a better solution. Can the world be saved at this point? Who knows? But there is no excuse not to at least make the attempt. This is the time to forge new legends and to rouse the dormant seed of wonder that rests, slumbering, in every soul. Horizon was a pleasant dream, one from which the Traditions have now woken, a game of make-pretend. The real world is gray with disbelief and sags beneath the weight of its own sorrow. Doissetep was a poisoned nest of intrigue and politicking of the worst sort. It was a house of treachery that had turned its back on the woes of others and existed only to indulge the self-serving fantasies of a few Masters and their toadies. While the loss of life from those two chantries was catastrophic and the loss of what they represented was a vicious blow to the Traditions, maybe they are ultimately better off for it. With few strongholds left off-world and no safe or reliable way of accessing them, the Traditions must turn their attentions to what goes on around them instead of fleeing to find comfort in a reality more to their liking. Perhaps the Avatar Storm isn't a punishment but a warning — deal with what is on your side and heal the wounds in the spirits of your own people; only then will their hopes and dreams be open to you again.

Yes, the world has gone to hell. But heroism truly thrives only in the most trying of times, and

hope's flame burns brightest when despair threatens to consume the light. Mages are human and feel pain and fear as anybody else, but it's precisely because they are human that they have the capacity to give of themselves and to suffer for the redemption of all. The world is out there, waiting for someone to stand before the tempest and say, "No more."

In **Mage**, that someone could be you.

BEYOND MAGE REVISED

A lot of debate has occurred about the changes to the metaplot established in **Mage Revised**. People questioned a lot of things. A couple of things some people outright hated.

The objective of this first section is not to act as an apology for the things you didn't like about **Mage Revised**. It's been standard since the beginning of the Storyteller games that if you saw something you didn't like, you didn't have to use it. We hope that's a responsibility that you as a Storyteller can use wisely. This chapter trusts that it is.

Mage Revised represented a significant departure from the metaplot as it was moved forward in both **Mage First** and **Second Edition**. Before, the focus of **Mage** was on the struggle, both literal and metaphorical, of Ascended people against an unenlightened age. It was a work of philosophy, bent on scoring points in abstract against a foe whose defense was all literal. In a very real way, it was poetry versus science, subjective against objective. At the heart of it was the *Ascension War*, the ultimate abstract.

Throughout history, such abstract concepts have been put to task in the face of harsh reality. Before their decimation by the Spartans, the Greeks insisted on the superiority of their culture. We know through hindsight, however, that had it not been for the defeat of the ancient Greeks and challenge to the sophistry prevalent in their culture, the West's first great thinkers might have never had anything to say and the whole of Western history as we know it would have never happened. So too was it with George Orwell's experience in the Spanish Revolution. Had it not been for Orwell's bitter times there, he might not have spun the greatest cautionary tale against the possible ends of even the best-intentioned Socialist movement. Had it not been for the courageous contribution of black Americans during World War II, there would have been no civil rights movement to challenge and refine

America's commitment to its high ideals of social justice and legal equality.

The greatest of ideas were forged in the fire of such realities. All of this took place outside the context of a Storytelling game, however. In **Mage**, you're supposed to have bigger brains than even these. So why didn't the mighty mages see the castle crumbling?

THE HUBRIS OF WONDER

The Archmages should have seen it coming.

Out in their pocket dimensions, bending patches of raw creation to their will, the Archmages should have realized that it was only a matter of time before jean commercials and pure credit transactions and the unimaginative sound bites and unoriginal fiction lay down a boundary between them and the Sleepers. But they didn't — because they'd long detached themselves from the plight of the average person they claimed they intended to Ascend.

The Masters should have figured it out as well. Their politicking and their jealous pursuit of the lately Awakened, their conflicting visions of magical theory and practice blinded them to the fact that reality's doors were closing to the fantastic. They allowed themselves to be distracted from the greater of two evils. Instead of recognizing the philosophical train wreck to come, they concentrated on the physical conflict between themselves and their immediate foes — not to mention their habitual prejudice toward their ideological brethren in sorcerous circles, a faction that could have been their greatest ally against the coming disaster. It left them numb to the coming of Armageddon.

Yes, the Technocracy was powerful. The consensus it built over hundreds of years represented the single most unified mindset in the annals of human history. Yes, the Sleepers were the guardians of the status quo. They laid the tracks for a Technocratic conquest and acted as the silent guardians of a meta-physical atrocity. In the end, however, it may very well have been the hubris of mages that seemingly ended any hopes of restoring an age of wonder.

So Armageddon's here. The only question now is, what are you going to do about it? Will you stutter and utter the same *magical* catch phrases that worked for decades before? Will you hide your head under a rock and pretend you can still dream atomic shapecharges into existence for your defense while an NWO goon tears you to ribbons with machine gun fire? Or will you think like Socrates and find

ways to punch holes through the technocratic sophistry of this brave new world of theirs?

Mage Revised picks up at a significantly different point than where previous **Mage** books left off, a phenomenon that jarred a lot of players. Think of it as your dad slamming the cover on your record player, the needle jumping from one verse of that objectionable song to the next chorus (for those of us old enough to have had record players....). The point is that the song's not over. In fact, from one point of view, it's hardly begun. As mages, the players' characters are perfectly capable of spinning that record backward and revealing the hidden message in time to pick up where they left off. Sure, it might take a couple hundred years to find the right line again, but it's a risk that mages are willing to take. They have to.

SURVIVING ARITAGEDDON

Nobody said that the end of the world as you know it was going to be easy. Nobody said that there wouldn't be growing pains. Nobody said the road wouldn't be bumpy. The end is just the beginning.

Unlike its predecessors, **Mage Revised** starts off in the first-person singular, and that's where most of its battles are fought. Not in ivory towers where ancient sages contemplate the nature of the Tellurian and rewrite the ending to World War I before tea. Mages might be forced to face the Technocracy on its own terms now, but that does not mean mages are impotent. Vulgar magic is harder to perform. That doesn't mean the battle is lost.

Coincidental magic, while considered "selling out" by many wanna-be Oracles, is a very potent ally. In fact, it may be the last, best hope mages have to push the envelope of reality and awaken the Sleepers. It may not be flashy or make mages into superheroes, but it's certainly a cost-effective way to get your job done. It's a great way to stick it to the man without having Paradox come back to bite you on the ass.

Moreover, coincidental magic is a great selling tool for Sleepers. It plants within their minds the notion that reality is not exactly what it seems. This may be the very method successful mages use to indoctrinate new acolytes, eventually building a base of belief that permits them to work their wonders again and do larger battle against a reality that is increasingly static.

Not only that, but coincidental magic is just plain wicked. Any two-bit stage magician can pull off flash with smoke and mirrors. It's important to re-



member that everything a mage does, no matter how miniscule, undermines reality itself. The key for mages in the post-wonder period is to understand that the Ascension War is not over. In a very real way, it's beginning all over again. The Technocracy has won a very important battle, lulling the masses into the belief that science is the way of the future. But even as the Union attempts to adapt all the wonders of which mages are capable to technology in the 21st century, they're beginning to hit the first bumps. The first evidence that man is rejecting the technocratic paradigm may be that some elderly people are no longer able to adapt to the speed at which technology is advancing. Sure, kids born into the world today and technophiles can easily run any kind of electronic device, plugging in cables and finding functions on unfamiliar programs that look and work similarly to what they already understand. But jump a generation back, and people who were completely competent when the first television remote controls surfaced are having trouble running VCRs, standing around cursing at ATMs and finding that it is more difficult on an almost hourly basis to

understand a culture that speaks almost entirely in computer jargon.

Now more than ever coincidental magic takes the Technocrat's gun, places it to her head and pulls the trigger. Mages are uniquely enabled to use the enemy's tools — the natural sciences, the philosophy of causation, even the Internet — to speak more clearly than the Union itself through these tools.

BISITARCK'S NIGHTMARE?

Mages of the post-wonder period fight a war for Ascension on two fronts.

First and foremost, though it may not be sexy, mages must indoctrinate the masses if the Ascension War is ever to get back into gear. This means going grass-roots — thinking outside the box. Isn't that supposed to be where mages are at their best?

The saying goes that a good book can start a movement. It certainly worked for Thomas Paine, Marx and Engels and L. Ron Hubbard. One simple, unglamorous way in which mages can indoctrinate new believers to their paradigm is through the use of a little can of worms called the World Wide Web.

Ever since developing the first difference engines in the mid-1800s, the Technocracy has struggled to keep this technology under its control. As computers became more prevalent a century later, this dream turned into a nightmare for the Union. Mages seized control of the Digital Web as an expanding reality, and Virtual Adepts transformed it into a chaotic electronic playground for their whims. So much for perfect order. In the post-wonder period, the Technocrats managed to seal the Digital Web through the façade of the Internet, the technological equivalent of the Gauntlet. A consumer-friendly marketplace for the Syndicate's whitewashing of globalization, the Internet is largely believed harmless by the Union, particularly after it succeeded in trapping some of the Digital Web's more conspicuous citizens from returning to this reality.

Nonetheless, even the "harmless" Internet can be used as a tool to loosen the grip of the mages' foe. While the unsophisticated mage might succeed only in drawing all the wrong kind of attention to himself or, worse, do more damage to the credibility of the Traditions, savvy mystics, particularly forward-thinking Adepts, will find it easy to adapt all manner of electronic media to their bidding. On the other hand, a well-designed computer bug or well-executed hack can shake the average person's faith in the infallible light of the monitor and any system that is dependent on sophisticated networks. "Good-bye!"

Recent political attacks and attempts to place further restriction on Internet content are evidence that some in the Technocracy see the global computer network for what it could become — if not a new reality for deviants like the Virtual Adepts, at the very least a hotbed for the proliferation of unsafe thought. For the most part, however, the threat of this medium for such expression has either slipped below Technocratic radar or is considered inconsequential.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is the appropriate application of coincidental magic — a more direct way to indoctrinate new believers, even if not a vulgar one. While few people believe anybody can leap tall buildings in a single bound, coincidental magic is a considerably harder target for the Technocracy to eliminate. This is so largely because of the existential movement of philosophy and its all-too-important partner, subjectivism.

Existentialism teaches us that we cannot know for certain those things that lie beyond our perception. At the same time, however, it's been shown that no two people perceive any given event in precisely the same way. This has given rise to the notion that much of our experience is subjective, and that since no one person's perception can be proven any more real than another, all experiences must be relatively true.

Relativism and subjectivity as expressed in popular culture have wreaked havoc on both conventional wisdom and the memes of society over the past hundred years, even calling into question the circumstances to which people attribute a causal relationship. In simple terms, many of the world's oldest and most respectable institutions (religion, science, etc.) purport, "If 'A' is true and 'B' is true then 'C' must follow." Existentialism calls into question whether there ever was an "A" to begin with and, if so, asks whether any of us can ever understand it.

Existentialism helped to break down many of the traditional views of the cosmos. For good or for ill, began humans down a long road toward either Ascension or Armageddon, depending on whom you ask. It was a stumbling block for the scientific method, a stepping stone for theoretical physics and, most important to mages, the first point of discovery since the institutionalization of rational thought that indicated humans might have influence over events they thought they were only observing.

That is why mages can still do magic in an environment that is increasingly hostile to their art and why coincidental magic is so very important in achieving the goals of the Ascension War. So while there are not as many mages leaping unfettered from one skyscraper to another, there are still Unawakened people climbing tall buildings with their bare hands.

If mages wish to restore wonder to the world at any point in the future, it is through the education of the masses and the skillful use of coincidental magic that they must lay the foundation of belief. While still capable of vulgar effects, mages must learn to live by their wits before their will and, when the time comes, draw Paradox only under the threat of certain death.

Though their numbers may be limited, mages still have the potential to be the ultimate power in the World of Darkness. If they use it wisely.

ALTERNATIVE GAME STYLES

Perhaps the easiest way to alter the **Mage** setting is to adjust the genre of your setting. As simple as this sounds, it can go a long way to coloring the moods and plots of your chronicle. As presented, **Mage** lies somewhere between “realistic” and “cinematic,” occasionally hitting the “high fantasy” area. The following are ideas on how to shift the emphasis toward one pole or the other.

REALISTIC

In a Realistic setting (as realistic as one can get with magic and vampires, anyway), characters are normal people. This does not mean they aren’t mages; “normal” means that the characters are like the people you’ve known all your life. Besides being a mage, characters have to worry about things like jobs, rent and other real-world responsibilities. The ability to work magic is just one more responsibility in life. Like all mages, Realistic characters are among the people who guide, influence and protect humanity. Here the focus is on local and personal stories. Realistic mages guide and influence their families, their neighborhoods, their work places and their schools. Even Realistic mages who work in fields like law enforcement are still bound by the same rules and regulations as police in the real world and will focus their attentions on the towns or cities they patrol. Whether as a police detective, a school teacher or a shop owner, magic is a tool to help the character do the things anyone else in his profession does.

For Realistic games, characters cannot soak lethal or aggravated damage without the use of Life magic. Magic should focus heavily on extended rituals (usually performed in a character’s sanctum) and carefully memorized coincidental rites, with Fast Casting being much harder (+2 or higher to difficulty), if not impossible. Any character who plans to carry a firearm around should probably be required to have the Certification background (see **The Bitter Road**). Storytellers who use Merits and Flaws may also wish to limit which Merits and Flaws are considered acceptable.

CINEMATIC

In a Cinematic setting, the characters are action heroes. They are somewhat larger-than life-individuals who live lives of excitement and daring. Whether they travel the world looking for adventure or that adventure comes to them, such characters battle vampires, infernal cults, international conspiracies, crime lords and terrorists as a matter of

routine. Cinematic mages change the world and do so in grand heroic (or antiheroic) fashion. High-society parties with A-list celebrities, exotic locations and exciting combat will probably be commonplace as the PCs work to avert Armageddon just in the nick of time. Cinematic games are BIG. They’re the kind of adventures you’d expect to see Hollywood put up on the big screen (only better).

In Cinematic games, characters can soak lethal damage using Stamina at a difficulty of 8. Magic should probably focus on the use of rites, with Fast Casting used as needed (perhaps even with no difficulty modifiers). Characters can accomplish the sort of stunts action-movie characters can pull off as coincidental magic. Extended rituals should be saved for when such things are cinematically appropriate (as part of the big climax in which the characters save the world by casting a counterspell to banish the evil cult’s demonic master back to Hell, for example). Characters shouldn’t have too much trouble getting their hands on all sorts of cool toys and equipment. Storytellers may find it useful to give players extra Background points for the purchase of cinematically appropriate backgrounds such as Arcane, Blessing, Destiny, Fame, Influence, Resources, Spies and Wonder. Storytellers familiar with some of White Wolf’s other games may find backgrounds such as Arsenal, Berserk, Military Force and Steel Nerves suitable for use. Storytellers who use Merits and Flaws might consider allowing each character to select a single cinematically appropriate Merit for free.

HIGH FANTASY

In a High Fantasy game, limits pretty much go out the window. Players travel to Hell and back, frequently stopping off at alien worlds and fantastic realms on the way. In the process, they slay dragons, parlay with gods and do the stuff of immortal epics. These are the sorts of games in which the player characters lead armies of mages against Autochthonia, battle the Prince of Nightmares face to face (assuming it has a face) or alter the very course of human history. The sky is the limit here. Anything from World War III to an epic cosmic battle to prevent the destruction of the multiverse is fair game.

In High Fantasy games, characters may or may not be able to soak lethal damage. Likewise, Fast Casting may or may not be encouraged. Vulgar magic should probably be largely ignored. Unless the characters perform feats in front of a large number of witnesses, treat all effects as coincidental. Storytell-

OPTIONAL RULE: EXTRAS

When using Cinematic or High Fantasy games, Storytellers may find it useful for the tone and mood if characters don't get bogged down in gritty, life-or-death struggles every time they have to fight someone, especially nameless, expendable antagonists whose sole purpose is to lose a fight and make the heroes look good. Tense, drawn-out fights are best saved for the really important antagonists. Inigo Montoya can cut down palace guards 'til the cows come home and not break a sweat. It's not until he faces Count Rugen that his life is really in danger.

In Cinematic games, these characters are called Extras (or "Mooks" — see also Chapter Three). The rules for these characters are designed to allow rapid, exciting combat between the player characters and any number of Extras.

- **Extras Have Only Four Health Levels:** Extras have four health levels (healthy, hurt -1, wounded -2, crippled -5). If knocked below Incapacitated by bashing damage, the Extra is unconscious; if knocked below Incapacitated by lethal or aggravated damage, the Extra is instantly killed.

- **Extras Don't Have Specialties:** Extras lack the dedication necessary to specialize in a chosen field the way player characters can.

- **Extras Roll Initiative as a Group:** Rather than roll Initiative for each Extra, the Storyteller rolls a single Initiative die for the entire group and adds it to the group's Base Initiative. At the Storyteller's discretion, large groups of Extras (six or more) may be broken up into smaller groups (of three or four), each with its own Initiative die.

- **Extras Don't Need Full Stats:** Extras are there to fight and don't need a complete character sheet to do it. The following can give you a rough idea of the stats different opponents might possess.

Weak Opponents

Hired Thugs, Street Toughs, Angry Mob

Base Initiative: 4, four dice in any relevant combat pools, Willpower 3

Competent Opponents

Professional Legbreakers, Trained Bodyguards, Men in Black

Base Initiative: 5, five dice in any relevant combat pools, Willpower 4

Elite Opponents

Professional Assassins, SWAT Teams, Trained Mercenaries

Base Initiative: 6, six dice in any relevant combat pools, Willpower 6

ers may desire to give characters additional dots to spend on Spheres, as well as on suitable Backgrounds such as Avatar, Blessing, Destiny and Wonder. Another option is to lower the freebie point cost for

things like Arete, Spheres and even Willpower. Storytellers who use Merits and Flaws may wish to provide characters with additional freebie points to spend on Supernatural Merits.

HISTORICAL SETTINGS



Magic has been around for as long as human beings have had the ability to imagine and reason. Although most of the Traditions are less than a millenium old, their roots go back several thousand years. Every age has its alliances of willworkers, and a reason always exists for a group of mages to work together. The following represent only

a sampling of possible historical settings for a **Mage** chronicle. It is by no means meant to be exhaustive, nor is it the final word on what a **Mage** chronicle set during these periods might be like. If you have your own vision of what the willworkers of Ancient

Rome or the Wild West should be like, then by all means use it. This chapter is meant to provide ideas, not limitations.

PREHISTORY

Magic and willworking is far, far older than ritualized magic systems. Mystics and warriors have always been around to deal with the hidden world of spirits and monsters. The Stone Age undoubtedly saw the first willworkers. The lack of such things as written language, metalworking and advanced science naturally limit possible paradigms, but there's still a wide variety of potential magical styles in such a setting. Shamanism and spirit magic are, of

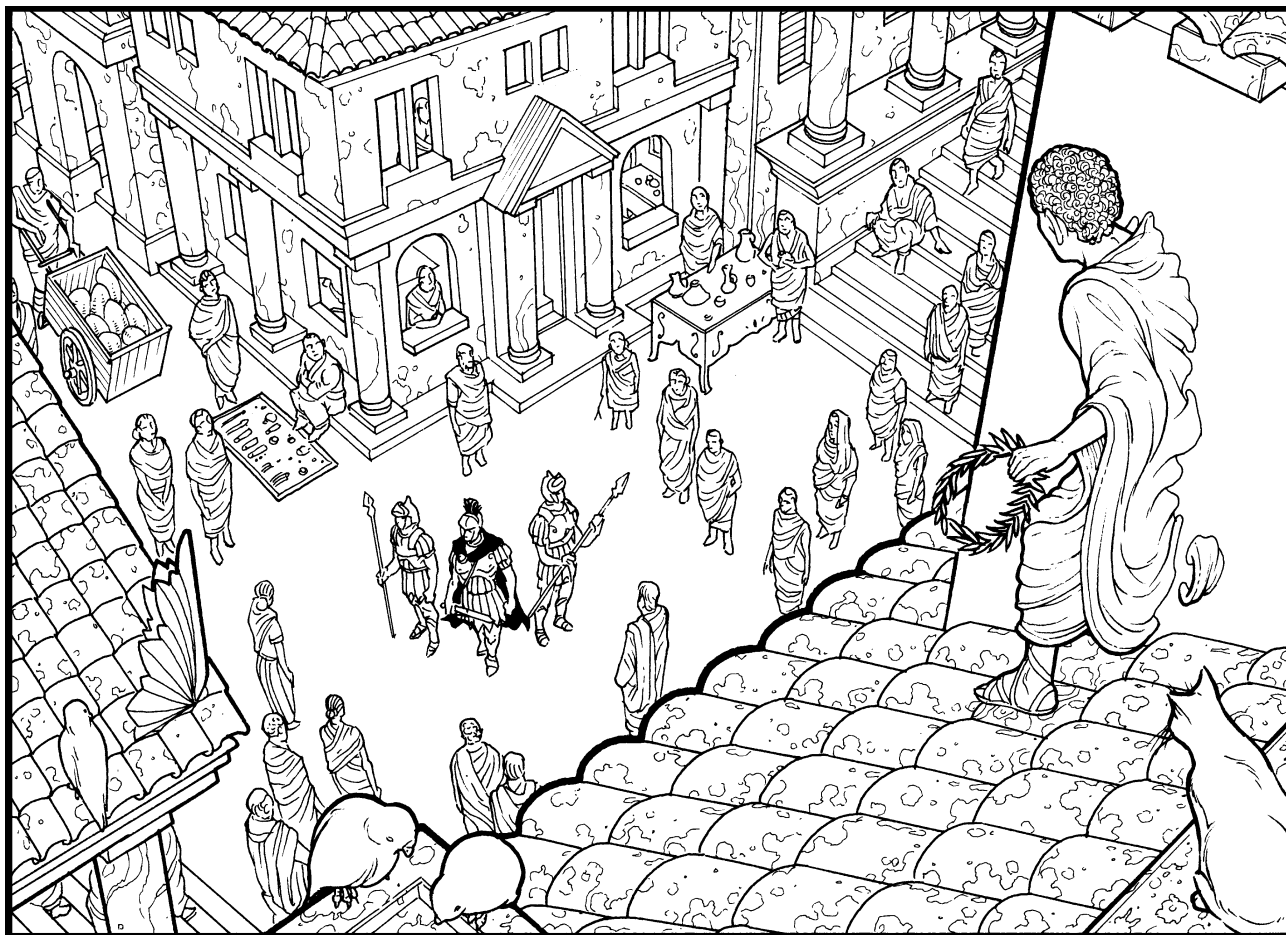
course, highly prevalent. Tribal priests appease the spirits of the hunt and of the storms, ensuring food and prosperity for their people. Warriors channel the spirits of bears, boars and other great beasts who serve as tribal or personal totems, taking on the animal's strengths and abilities in exchange for the proper sacrifices. Some even learn to take on the form of the spirit animals they channel. Herbalists, healers and seers learn how to create powerful concoctions out of roots, herbs and other sacred materials. The first artificers learn the secrets of shaping stone tools and weapons that are sharper and longer lasting, crafting leather clothing that is more durable, while early astronomers develop powerful rituals based around the changing of the seasons and the shifting of the moon.

Storytellers have several options on how prehistoric magic might work. Stone Age willworkers probably do not use the Spheres as modern mages do. The concept of Spheres was developed by the Order of Hermes and other Traditions much later in history. Instead, perhaps Sorcery Paths are used, or the Foundation and Pillar magics of the Dark Ages (see **Dark Ages: Mage**). All of the above examples of

Stone Age magic can be accomplished with Sorcery Paths such as Summoning, Binding & Warding, Fortune, Weather Control, Alchemy, Divination and Enchantment, or with Psychic Powers such as Channeling. Storytellers who are familiar with **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** may wish to adapt the system of Gifts for use as a magic system, with each mystical effect having to be learned individually from the spirits.

THE GLORY OF ROME

Stretching at its height from the Irish Sea to the Persian Gulf and from the Caucasus to the Atlas Mountains, Rome was arguably the greatest empire in the Western world. Culturally eclectic, the Romans gladly borrowed faiths and customs from all over their empire. From these diverse belief systems came their magic. Rome may be one of the most cosmopolitan **Mage** settings to exist until the Renaissance. Animism and necromancy exist side by side with high magicians and enlightened philosophers. The following are only a sampling of the magical styles that may be found in a Roman chronicle.



• **Animism:** Original Roman beliefs were very animist in nature, and this outlook continues to influence parts of the culture well into the Imperial period. All things, living and dead, are inhabited by *numina*, or spirits. Every building, every grove, every weapon, every aspect of nature has its *numen*. Household shrines honor those *numina* who guard the family lands and inhabit areas of the home. Each family has its own *numen*, called a *genius*, which resides in the eldest male of the household. The honoring of one's ancestors is an act of respect to the family *genius*. Even the Roman gods are simply great and powerful *numina*. Jupiter is the *numen* of the heavens and the storms, Juno of the night sky and of women, Vulcan of fire and volcanoes. Certain ephemeral qualities also have their own *numina*, such as Fortuna (luck) and Veritas (truth). A Roman animist mage can work powerful effects by calling upon the *numen* associated with what he wishes to effect.

• **The Etruscan Arts:** The original rulers of Rome (until the Latins revolted and in turn conquered them), the Etruscans had a rather strong fascination with the afterlife. They devoted a great deal of time and effort toward appeasing the spirits of the dead (who if displeased would haunt the living or even crawl out of their graves), resulting in a thorough knowledge of spiritualism and necromantic rituals. In addition, the arts of divination were also ascribed to the Etruscans. Roman divination typically focuses on the interpreting of omens (the activities of birds and other animals, as well as the actions and activities of individual people), astrology and the examination of entrails from ritually slaughtered animals. Roman diviners range from common street magicians to Imperial advisors and are capable of wielding a powerful influence over local society. The Etruscan Arts focus primarily on Entropy, Spirit and Time magic.

• **Street Magicians:** Eking out a living throughout the cities and towns of the Empire are an eclectic collection of folk wizards, wise women and sorcerers-for-hire who sell their craft to anyone meeting their prices. These street magicians practice a variety of mystic arts, including divination, weather magic, *numina* appeasement and herbalism. Street magicians also trade in curses and good-luck charms, offering to twist and tweak the attentions of Fortuna for their clients. Some even borrow the trappings of assorted mystery cults. Storytellers may, if they wish, restrict street magicians to the powers of Sorcery, leaving the art of the Spheres to those who deal with

more refined mysteries. On the other hand, their magic may be just as potent as anyone else's (perhaps more so, given that there's little chance of it ever being vulgar).

• **Eastern Mystery Cults:** As Roman power expands and trade brings different cultures into contact with each other, several religions and cults from Greece, Egypt and Asia are exported throughout the empire. The Romans eagerly adapt Greek customs in an effort to become more civilized (the Greeks never seem to get past viewing the Romans as upstart wannabes, which is partially responsible for the empire splitting in two at several points). This leads to several Greek cults spreading into Italy, Gaul and elsewhere. Among them are the Bacchantes, worshippers of Dionysus, god of wine, fertility and madness, whose rituals range from drunken orgies to elaborate ceremonies incorporating Greek-style plays. Female Dionysian cults, called Maenads, even engage in ritualized murder. Orphic cults, such as the Eleusinian Mysteries, also find their way across the empire. Dionysian mages typically favor Life, Mind and Time effects, while Orphic mages tend to focus on Entropy and Spirit magics.

Another mystery religion imported from the Greeks was that of Hermes-Trismegistus, a syncretic deity created by merging Hermes with the Egyptian god Thoth (both were gods of magic and learning). The Romans simply merged Hermes with their god of travelers and merchants, Mercury. By the start of the Roman empire, the Thrice-Great Hermes' followers have formed a community of intellectuals and mystical philosophers devoted to the study of ritualized magic. Cult members sometime vary in their approach to the magic arts. Some delve into the ancient magics of Egypt and Babylon, while others focus on more temporal power. Several merchant guilds are also Mercury cults, often focusing their magical rituals on the areas of finance, travel and political influence.

Egyptian cults also prove popular, with some even finding their way into the Roman Republic. The most famous is the cult of Isis. Originally worshipped by the Egyptians as a goddess of magic and the mother of Egyptian civilization, the Greeks co-opted Isis (her Egyptian name is Eset) and began associating her with Hera, Demeter and Aphrodite. Here the cult diverges into several branches. Some emphasize Isis as a fertility goddess, focusing on Life magics. Other sects incorporate the god Osiris into their teachings, becoming underworld cults who fo-

cus on Spirit magic. Others orient on political influence or even become prostitution cults (both focusing on Mind magic). A few may even hold true to Isis' origins as a goddess of magic and quietly focus on preserving ancient secrets and developing a deeper understanding of magical metaphysics. These sects may or may not merge with Hermetic cults.

Mystery cults are even imported from Southwest Asia. The cult of Cybele, an Asian fertility goddess, is quite popular with its celebratory orgies. As a sign of devotion, Cybele's priests often castrate themselves in order to emulate the goddess's lost consort, Attis. The worship of Mithras, an ancient Middle Eastern god of war, fire and the morning sun, was spread into Asia Minor and the Middle East by the Hittites. The majority of his early Roman worshippers are legionnaires attracted to the ideals of martial brotherhood (no women allowed). Mithras' ability to protect his followers from evil sorcery and magic is also appealing. Awakened followers of Mithras frequently focus on Forces and Prime, and are often quite skilled at countermagic.

- **Christianity:** Originally a faction of Judaism, the work of St. Paul and others has spread Christianity throughout the empire. Because of its refusal to recognize the divinity of the Emperor, the Christian religion has been outlawed and followers must meet in secret. Every so often, the current Emperor will use the Christians as scapegoats for some problem within the empire, resulting in followers being hunted down and executed. This is an era when Christians are willing to die for their faith. Christian willworkers believe themselves to have been touched by the Holy Spirit, just as the original Apostles were during Pentecost.

- **Enlightened Philosophy:** In addition to being skilled engineers and philosophers in their own right, Rome has also inherited the great learning traditions of Greece and Egypt. Enlightened healers practice the arts handed down from Hippocrates himself. Artificers, mathematicians and architects seek to master the secrets of Archimedes, Pythagoras and Imhotep. Several secretive academies exist to teach these secrets to those considered worthy. The greatest of these is the Collegium Præcepti, located in Rome itself. Similar academies exist in Greece, Egypt and Gaul. These sacred arts — called *Ars Præclarus* by the

Collegium — tend toward the vulgar, although more subtle applications of enlightened medicine, engineering and reasoning are coincidental.

- **Infernalism:** Black magic is eternal, and Rome has no shortage of potential Infernalists. A demon replacing a family's genius may result in an entire corrupted bloodline, complete with an ancient undying patriarch, demonic investments passed down through the generations and dozens of devil-eaten slaves. Storytellers familiar with **Vampire: The Masquerade** may know of the dark legacy attributed to Carthage. This legacy may or may not be true in your game (this is **Mage**, after all, not **Vampire**). If it is true, Infernalists who survived the city's fall may have set up new cults in Iberia, Greece or Rome. Such Infernalists may practice dark and bloody forms of magic, requiring numerous human sacrifices. The writer H. P. Lovecraft connected the goddess Cybele with his elder god Shub-Niggurath. Perhaps her cult is really a front for one of the earlier Nephandi sects. See **The Book of Madness** for more ideas on infernalism.

Readers may note that, outside of the Collegium Præcepti, nothing much has been said about existing **Mage** factions. This is intentional. Willworkers found among the above groups may not be part of any known group or faction. Many of the mystery cults are essentially Crafts in and of themselves and Storytellers may decide to run a Roman-era game with no real organized factions (in essence, making the characters Orphans). On the other hand, it can be fun to play up the historical connections between these magical styles and their spiritual or historical descendants. Groups such as the Order of Hermes, Iteration X and the Cult of Ecstasy can trace their roots back to this period, as can factions within other Traditions. The Fellowship of Pan, the Messianic Voices and the Pomegranate Deme are just a few of the small sects active during this time period. See **Guide to the Traditions**, **Guide to the Technocracy**, **Sorcerer** and the various Tradition and Convention books for more information on modern factions that trace their roots to this period. In addition, **Dead Magic** includes information on ancient Roman and Greek practices, while **Dead Magic 2** includes material on the Etruscans.

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN: PAX ROMANA

The madness of Emperors like Caligula and Nero nearly drove the empire into ruin. It was after Nero's death that a group of enlightened sages put into motion a plan to stabilize the throne and see to it that the empire would always prosper. By the year 852 Ab Urbe Condita (After the Foundation of the City; AD 98), they were ready. The new emperor, Trajan, was their hand-picked candidate, groomed for his new role. Thanks to Hippocratic medicine, Trajan lived a long and healthy life, and under his leadership the empire was strengthened and transformed. The Collegium Præcepti grew and prospered. The worship of Mithras was encouraged among the legions. Trade flourished and the empire grew. Each Emperor following Trajan was also selected and trained, allowing the empire to continue its stable growth.

The year is now 1493 AUC (about AD 740). The Germans and Celts are long conquered and Romanized. The Persians have been absorbed, as has the Gupta Empire in India. Few armies can stand against Roman cannons, pneumatic ballistae and muskets. Once conquered, new subjects are offered citizenship provided they adopt Roman language and customs. Steamwagons carry goods throughout the empire, traveling concrete roads that stretch to the corners of the civilized world. Roman steamships circle Africa and cross the Atlantic, traveling to India and the colonies in Atlantis (the Americas). Roma, with her pneumatic subways, towering concrete buildings and culturally diverse population, is the city by which all others are judged. This is a civilized and orderly empire. The elite are well educated; the common people know their place.

Behind all of this stands the secret society known as the Pax Romana. Enlightened willworkers devoted to the preservation of the peace and stability of Rome, they have spent hundreds of years shepherding the empire. It is under their guidance that philosophy and learning have prospered. The Collegium Præcepti oversees the advancement of engineering and Ars Præcepti. Its members design and forge the weapons and tools that allow the empire to grow, and design the wonders that make its cities the envy of the known world. The *Circle of Hippocrates* sees to the health of the empire's citizens. Alchemical potions balance the body's humors, leading to

long life and good health. Similar potions see to the health of animals and crops, making it possible to feed Rome's population. The *Mithraic Guard* is the Pax Romana's military arm. Through the cult of Mithras, it influences the empire's legions and helps keep it safe from witchcraft and other devilry. The *Ulyssian Guild* travels the oceans in mighty steamships, seeking new lands for conquest and colonization. The merchant houses of the *Cult of Mercury* see to the empire's financial well being. Massive rituals, focused through the system of roads, help bind the empire together. The *Watchers of Fortune* practice the Etruscan Arts at the behest of the Pax Romana and the Empire. They watch and interpret omens and read the fate of the Empire in the stars and in entrails, spotting both dangers and opportunities that lie on the horizon. Born out of the cult of Vesta, the *Keepers of the Sacred Flame* are Rome's spiritual guardians. As part of their duties to ensure that the numina are appeased, they act as Imperial spies, secret police and assassins. After all, what are corruption and rebellion if not acts of disrespect toward the Imperial Genius.

The Pax Romana has created a Web of Law, binding the empire and its brotherhood tightly together. The Web ties its sacred temples together, allowing them to share both mystical energy and communications. At the center of this great web sit the subtle members of the Pax Romana's Inner Circle. Membership in the Inner Circle is by invitation only and requires initiation into the secret mysteries of Khwaja al-Akbar.

As Roman hegemony threatens to engulf the world, several mystical societies attempt to fight back. They realize that their magical styles and philosophies will die out if the Roman juggernaut is left unchecked. Slowly, and with great effort, an alliance of willworkers known as the Council of Nine Mystic Traditions is formed. The Celtic *Aided*, last heirs to wisdom of the druids. The *Valdaermen*, Norse and Germanic runecrafters. The *Chakravanti*, Hindu healers and holy warriors. The *Taftâni*, the Persian masters of the djinn. The *Messianic Voices*, members of the outlawed and underground Church of Christ. Greece produces both the mystic philosophers and seers of the *Cult of Bacchus* and the necromantic mystics of the *Pomegranate Deme*. Leading this alliance are the *Order of Hermes*.



Trismegistus and the *Children of Isis*, twin heirs to the mystical lore of Egypt and Greece.

This setting takes the beginning of the *Ascension War* and moves it forward to the Roman Empire. The *Pax Romana* replaces the *Order of Reason*, and the *Council of Nine* includes a very different roster. Beyond this, concepts remain the same. Storytellers interested in this setting should find **Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade** to be very useful. How this *Ascension War* plays out should depend largely on the player characters' actions. Chronicles in this setting can take many forms. Characters can be members of the *Council of Nine* working to preserve their cultures and beliefs or they can be agents of the *Pax Romana* dedicated to preserving the safety and security of the Roman Empire. Alternatively, the characters may be from some third party, such as an alliance of North American medicine workers, a group of Incan priests or a collection of Russian mystics trying to prevent their home nations from being conquered.

The Other Side of the Coin

Affairs in China are deliberately left vague in this setting so that Storytellers may customize things to their liking. Chinese history may have been left unaltered by events in the west. If so, then the T'sang Dynasty is growing corrupt and will soon be in a period of rebellion and war. On the other hand, the Wu Lung may have mimicked the *Pax Romana*'s success. Perhaps during the Three Kingdoms period the Dragon Wizards groomed their own candidate for the throne. Under this new dynasty, various Chinese artificer sects have been absorbed into the Wu Lung and Legalism has come back into fashion. Under a strict legalist meritocracy, Korea, Vietnam, Tibet and Mongolia have been subjugated and the Lung Dynasty works to build a war machine to rival or surpass that of the Roman barbarians. In such a setting, the *Akashic Brotherhood* may be forced to form its own *Council* with other Middle Kingdom factions.

THE THREE KINGDOMS

With the collapse of the Han Dynasty, China enters the Three Kingdoms period. This is a time of romance and heroism, in which struggles to reunite the empire play out beside stories of family drama. Whether the characters engage in legendary battles, dive headfirst into the realms of political treachery or simply struggle to guide and protect their families during these interesting times, what they do is the stuff of epic storytelling. They are exemplars of Chinese virtues. Martial and civic skill. Personal fidelity and filial piety. Even political ruthlessness.

Even Awakened society is not immune to these interesting times. For the first time since Qin Shihuang united them in 221 BC, the Wu Lung do not have a single emperor under which to serve. The Dragon Wizards fall into disarray, with members attempting to reestablish separate Ministries of Works under the Wei, Wu and Shu Kingdoms. Each faction believes its chosen kingdom should found China's next dynasty, and what begins as a war of words rapidly escalates into cutthroat political, martial and magical battles. As the Dragon Wizards squabble and fight, other mages attempt to use the situation to their own advantage. The Akashic Shi Ren try to play the Wu Lung factions against each other in the hope of regaining the influence their ancestors lost during the Warring States era. Taoist swordsmen wander the land, seeking spiritual and mystical refinement through the challenge of combat, while animist priests and shamans battle against the rogue spirits and demons who seek dark amusements during this chaotic time. Even the Taoist sorcerers who lead the remains of the Yellow Turbans wait for the opportunity to try to reestablish their Taoist utopias.

With the Ministry of Works in confusion, the laws of magic are up in the air. Normally, any mage who registers with the Ministry finds his willworking consensual, regardless of his paradigm, and those who refuse to register find their magics always to be vulgar. But the Storyteller has several options. One is that any character who registers with any of the three rival Ministries has fulfilled his obligations to Heaven and finds his magic coincidental. Or perhaps a character finds his magic coincidental only within the kingdom whose Ministry he has submitted to. Alternatively, Heaven may recognize none of the Ministries, resulting in all magic being vulgar. A fourth option is that, in this time of chaos, no magic is vulgar, regardless of whether the mage has submit-

ted to the Ministry or not. Finally, Storytellers may decide to use the Scourge system from **Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade**, with Heaven rewarding those mages who uphold the traditional Chinese virtues and punishing those who are unrighteous.

CAMELOT

The story of King Arthur and his ancient kingdom is more myth than fact, but that in no way detracts from its ability to play host to a **Mage** chronicle. Countless books have been written about Camelot and its legend (Green Knight Publishing even makes a complete roleplaying game about it called *King Arthur Pendragon*), and those who know the material forward and backward should have no trouble adapting it to **Mage**. On the other hand, one can easily adapt Camelot to fit with **Mage** rather than vice versa. The following presents six possible versions of Camelot, each based on a different faction's paradigm. The first three are based on the three predominant European Traditions and resonate with some of the more mainstream theories and interpretations of the Camelot legend. The fourth is a change of pace built around the Technocracy's predecessor. The final two are the product of the writer's own warped mind.

- **Celestial Chorus:** Here Camelot is a Celtic Christian kingdom. Arthur and his knights are devoted servants of God, with their legendary strength and skill of arms flowing from their faith. The King's advisor, Merlin, is a priest and holy man. If he seems odd, perhaps it is because he hails from the lands of the dying Roman Empire (Byzantium or Egypt). Characters in this setting are miracle workers, and whether they be knights, priests, noblewomen or even virtuous peasants, their supernatural powers are the result of their having been touched by God (Awakened). The power of their faith enables them to defend Camelot from the savage Picts, the heathen Saxons and even the demonic forces of the infernal witch Morgana.

- **Order of Hermes:** For the Hermetics, Artorius is a Romanized Briton and an initiate of the Cult of Mercury. He surrounds himself with fellow cultists, all veterans of the legions or descended from the families of former officers and noblemen. Merlin is a powerful Hermetic magus, responsible for initiating Artorius (as well as his father before him) into the mysteries of Thoth, Hermes and Mercury (Storytellers may even have "Merlin" be Merinita, future

cofounder of the Order of Hermes, either using faerie glamours to disguise herself as a man or appearing as herself). The great chantry of Camelot is meant to serve as the heart of a reborn and rejuvenated Cult of Mercury and, through it, a rebirth of the glory of the Roman Empire. Rival magical styles — including those of Morgan le Fay, the sorceress whose blend of Hermetic magic and Druid lore will one day give rise to House Deidne — must be countered at every turn, as they are seen as a threat to Merlin and Artorius' grand plans to unify both Briton and the former Roman Empire magically and politically.

- **Verbena:** In this setting, Arthur is a Celtic chieftain and his “knights” are those heroic warriors pledged to his service (among them his wife Guenhumara). Merlin is a Druid, the offspring of mortal woman and one of the Fair Folk. Characters in this setting should be from the Celtic Filid class (noblemen warriors and men of learning such as druids and bards). Their magic comes from the wealth of Druid lore — divination, herbalism, shapeshifting and entering the Otherworld — as well as from *Geases*, blessings of the gods or Fair Folk, and even from just being destined to be a great hero. Arthur's warriors and advisors go on grand quests and adventures in the Celtic style, and in between battle Saxon spae-crafters and Unseelie Fair Folk (including the changeling woman Morgaine). This Arthur might even decide to mount a campaign to reclaim those Celtic lands long lost to the Romans and invade mainland Europe.

- **Order of Reason:** This setting plays on the idea of Camelot as a bastion of civilization during the Dark Ages. Here Merlin is a member of the Collegium Præcepti. With him is the Cosian alchemist and healer Icilia and the aging Gabrielite Centurion Caius. Having fled the fall of Rome, the aging artificer and his companions hope to use Britain as the heart of a new world-spanning empire. Camelot is a center of lost Roman learning, training a new generation of artificers, alchemists and craftsmen. Many of these enlightened philosophers are willing to venture forth into the savage lands beyond Camelot, bringing order to this Dark Age with the help of clockwork-powered armor, alchemically enhanced strength and other advanced weapons.

- **Wu Lung:** And now for something completely different. Banished from the Kingdom of Wei, the Dragon Wizard Meng Lei has traveled

west, arriving in the dying kingdom of the Roman barbarians. On the island of Britain, Meng Lei seeks to restore order to this forgotten edge of the Middle Kingdom. His course is clear: Meng Lei will create a new dynasty patterned after the auspicious designs of the Magical Bureaucracy. The son of a local Romanized chieftain is carefully trained and groomed to become Camelot's Dragon Emperor, while the daughter of another local chieftain becomes his Phoenix Empress. Finally, a Gaulish warrior given to berserk frenzies becomes his Tiger General. In Camelot, the Dragon Emperor Arthur holds the Mandate of Heaven and his Tiger Warriors use their skills with the magical and martial arts to help bring the world into harmony with the Will of Heaven. Yes, it's Arthurian Wuxia. Whether this Camelot falls because Arthur loses the Mandate of Heaven or because Meng Lei's plan ultimately draws enormous amounts of Paradox down on the kingdom (the two need not be mutually exclusive) is entirely up to the Storyteller to decide.

- **The Infernal:** For every heroic legend there must exist a dark reflection. In this setting, Merlin really is the bastard son of a demon, and he's gladly given in to his infernal heritage. From across Britain and Gaul, men and women have come to Camelot seeking to sell their souls in the name of greed, pride and lust. Arthur is a brutal despot, and his kingdom is a pit of sin and depravity. This rule of darkness is enforced by brutal warlords and lecherous assassins, many of whom have made demonic pacts in exchange for power (see **The Book of Madness** for rules on Infernal Investments). Left unopposed, this foul kingdom will spread across Europe, creating Hell's Empire on Earth. This is where the player characters come in. As part of an alliance of willworkers — Celtic Christian miracle workers, Welsh and Britannic druids, Mercury cultists, Saxon spae-crafters, Pictish shamans, even Byzantine assassins, Roman artificers and Egyptian Isis cultists — they are all that stands against an evil that threatens to engulf the known world.

These represent only a handful of possible interpretations of the Camelot mythos for **Mage**. One could just as easily create a Thanatoic Camelot in which the characters are part of a secretive cabal of Fate mages (led by Merlin, perhaps) trying to ensure that Arthur's reign begins, thrives and

ends as Fate has decreed so that Arthur's destined successor can take his rightful place in history. Alternatively, this group might be trying to prevent the mistakes that lead to Camelot's fall. In addition to serving as its own campaign, the former might appear in any of the above settings as antagonists, while the latter might be secret allies. Alternatively, one could make Merlin an unAwakened time traveler from the modern day (whether he's a mundane guy with exceptional

Science, Technology and/or Medicine skills or actually knows Advanced Science/Sorcery paths like Enchantment is up to you). Now that this self-styled Merlin has modernized this small Roman town, turning it into a powerful military force and growing political power, local mages — druids, miracle workers and Hermetics alike — view him as a possible threat to their way of life. The possibilities are limited only by your imagination.

THE MODERN CAMELOT

Camelot need not be limited to ancient days long gone by. Characters questing through the spirit worlds might stumble upon an Umbral Realm containing Camelot (either the classic myth or one of the variations presented here). Maybe they find only the bleached bones of a dead kingdom. Perhaps the kingdom is still dying, and the characters are the only ones who can save it. The Camelot the characters find might be an alternate world in which Camelot never fell. Such a Camelot might be a world-spanning empire reminiscent of Romantic era faerie tales, in which dashing swashbucklers have replaced the classic knights. Or it might be a completely modern nation in the urban fantasy vein.

Another alternative is the spirit of Camelot reborn in the modern day. In such a game, the player characters are the reincarnations of the characters of Arthurian legend. Galahad becomes the idealistic Chorister seeking the Grail of mystical enlightenment, while Lancelot is the unbeatable Akashic warrior. Guinevere is reborn as an outgoing and intelligent Hermetic politico, Morgana as a fae-blooded Verbena businesswoman and Isolde as an Etherite medical genius. The characters' chantry becomes the new Camelot, and an aging Master serves as the group's Mentor. Backgrounds such as Legend and Past Life (both from **Guide to the Traditions**) will be useful here as well.

This concept can also be used with the Technocracy (no, really). Many modern Technocrats are quite enamored with the idea of Arthur bringing order out of chaos and uniting the petty

kingdoms of Dark Ages Britain into something truly great. The Harbingers of Avalon, a secret society of British Technocrats who strive to uphold the ideals of Camelot (their interpretation of those ideals as seen through the lens of British nationalism, at least) is just one example of the legend's influence on the Union. With the recent shake-up of the Union's leadership, many of the Harbingers' small membership may be lost. This leaves the player characters to take their place, likely becoming the leaders of the British Technocracy in the process. Beyond secret fellowships, more than a few Technocracy agents see themselves as modern-day knights, going forth to slay dragons. Whether those dragons are literal (the Iteration X cyborg who hunts monsters) or figurative (the NWO teacher who combats ignorance) doesn't matter. What's important is the spirit of the thing. The possibilities are quite diverse. Consider the idea of Arthur as a Syndicate CEO, with Guinevere, Kay and the others as his Board of Directors and Merlin as the advanced AI that runs the company's computer systems. They may simply be inspired by the idea of Camelot, or may be the real reincarnations of the Camelot envisioned by the Order of Reason. If the former, the characters simply embody many of the better aspects of the Technocratic Union: responsibility to the public welfare and the courage to stand against the monsters dwelling in the darkness. If the latter, then all of the characters should possess the Inner Knight merit.

For more on the Harbingers of Avalon, the Technocratic view of Camelot and the Inner Knight merit, see **Guide to the Technocracy**.

A DARK AND MYTHIC AGE

The Dark Ages provide one of the most vibrant periods for a **Mage** chronicle, set at the dimming of the Mythic Age, when magic still spoke of raw might and power but was increasingly being pushed to the margins of the world by the Church. Rather than provide you with a short list of ideas for such a rich period, we've produced a whole book for it. **Dark Ages: Mage** presents a complete setting for playing early 13th-century willworkers, each with his own unique (non-Sphere) magics.

In this time, ancient, fragmented traditions begin to coalesce, to stand together against the waning of the Old Ways. These Mystic Fellowships hint at the Nine Mystic Traditions to come. From the Order of Hermes, the Messianic Voices and Ahl-i-Batin to the Old Faith, the Spirit-Talkers and Valdaermen, these wizards search the forgotten corners of the world for lost secrets that may empower them to push back the weight of a monolithic worldview with no room for supernatural wonders.

THE ASCENSION WAR BEGINS (1325-1470)

The chaos and destruction resulting from the Order of Hermes' Massassa War against the vampiric House Tremere, the beginning of the Inquisition and the Black Death eventually inspires one group of mages to take action. For every action, there is an inevitable reaction. Thus begins the Ascension War.

Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade covers this time period in great detail. The history sections of **Guide to the Technocracy** and **Guide to the Traditions** also discuss this era. For those who do not possess **Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade**, consider the following to be a brief primer.

In 1325 the Craftmasons, inspired by their early victories against the Order of Hermes, form an alliance of artificers and enlightened philosophers from across Europe (as well as small factions representing the Middle East, China and Mali). Included among this alliance are the Artificers (engineers, mathematicians and alchemists), the Cabal of Pure Thought (Catholic holy warriors and priests), the Celestial Masters (astronomers, astrologers and map makers), the Cosians (doctors, surgeons, and herbalists), the Craftmasons (architects, teachers and

political reformers), the Explorators (sailors, traders and missionaries) and the High Guild (merchants, politicians and patrons of the sciences). This Order of Reason begins a crusade against magicians throughout Europe.

In response to these attacks, mystical factions from around the world unite to form the Council of Nine Mystical Traditions. The Council's early successes inspire hope, but it is only fleeting. A member of the Council's First Cabal betrays the other members to the Order of Reason (these events are fully detailed in **The Fragile Path: Testaments of the First Cabal**). The Traitor's own Tradition, the Solificati alchemists guild, quickly collapses in on itself. The Council will not be whole again for another four hundred years.

Mage chronicles set during this period offer both players and Storytellers opportunities to shape the face of the Ascension War. While **Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade** deals primarily with the period after the Conventions and Traditions have been formed, your own chronicle need not be so limited. Players can take the roles of faction founders, either as the likes of Nightshade, Shzar and Star-of-Eagles (or their Order of Reason counterparts) or as members of the delegations who attend the Convention of the White Tower, the first and second MistrIDGE Conventions, and the Grand Convocation at Horizon. Players and Storytellers may even enjoy the idea of their own characters taking the places of the historical founders. One could easily build an entire Tradition chronicle around the characters' first meeting at MistrIDGE, traveling the world to bring representatives to the second Convocation, battling the Order of Reason at MistrIDGE, helping to build Horizon and the political maneuverings of the Grand Convocation. Once that is done, the characters can become one of the first Tradition cabals. If the characters actually are the Tradition founders and leaders, they may wish to create new characters for their cabal (each taking his previous character as a Mentor). Alternatively, if the players portray members of the founders' delegations, perhaps the characters have so distinguished themselves that it is they, and not the individuals detailed in **The Fragile Path**, who become the First Cabal. If so, they may be able to succeed where the historical First Cabal failed.

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN: ALTERNATIVE TRADITIONS

When the Council is formed, numerous proposals on the makeup of the Traditions are put forth. One of these is the organization of the Nine Traditions along geographic and cultural lines. Grudgingly accepted, this Council remains stable for the next five hundred years, surviving even the fall of one Tradition.

From Europe comes the *Order of the Three Circles*. The Tradition bases much of its willworking on the common ground of ritual magic, including Hermetic high magic, Christian Kabbalism and Pagan-based mystic rites. Organized much like an ancient mystery cult, many of the Order's chantries have a religious focus and often use fronts such as Wiccan covens, Masonic lodges and monastic retreats to recruit new initiates. The greater the levels of the Sacred Mysteries that are revealed to an Order member, the greater the mystical power she learns to control. The Order has clashed with several of the other Traditions over the centuries, especially during the periods of European colonialism. Claiming that their jurisdiction over European affairs gave them the mandate to move into any area Europeans had settled, members of the Orders created chantries all over the world.

The *Web of Faith* represents the Middle East. Built around the Ahl-i-Batin, the Web of Faith avoids much of the worst of the Ascension War until the aftermath of the Great War. The Web is almost torn asunder as the Ahl-i-Batin move to leave the Council. Others within the Tradition convince the Batini that their fate lies with the Council and not apart from it. Members of the Web believe that mystical knowledge comes from a greater understanding of both the Word of Allah, as dictated in the Qur'an, and of the world Allah has created, including the spiritual world of the Umbra. Correspondence and Prime magics are very common, and the Tradition has even shared its secrets of tying widespread chantries together, allowing them to share the mystical power drawn from nodes.

Representing India is the *Asthika*. Created to preserve India's mystical heritage from outside invasion, the Believers are an alliance of holy men, warriors, healers and mystics. Asthika magic focuses on the attainment of a divine state. How this is accomplished varies within the Tradition.

Some sects strive to embody the virtues of Hinduism, becoming divine champions of their faith. Others focus on living in harmony with the dharma of the universe (sometimes referred to as the Great Wheel) or on complete withdrawal from the material world. Many master the secrets of Life and Mind magic, harnessing the Spheres for use in war, healing and self-control.

Expanded by the Wu Lung to bring all mages of Asia under their enlightened influence, the *Ministry of Works* strives to preserve the order of All Things Under Heaven. Its magical paradigm focuses on the concepts of celestial order and the understanding of one's place within the Ten Thousand Things. By mastering those skills necessary to advance within the Magic Bureaucracy, one gains a greater understanding of both his place and the place of others within the Celestial Hierarchy. From this understanding comes the power (and responsibility) of being able to command and organize the Ten Thousand Things. Events of the past century have not been kind to the Ministry of Works, and some within the Council fear that the Tradition may be in danger of collapse.

Originally centered in the Inca Empire, members of the *Cathedral of the Sun* see themselves as the spiritual guides and guardians of the South American people. Originally known as the Temple of the Sun, the Tradition has taken on strong Catholic overtones during the past few centuries. Their willworking is seen as a holy calling and a direct outgrowth of their faith. Spirit magic is often a primary focus, including exorcism, spiritualism and the summoning of angels.

Replacing the fallen Brotherhood of the Jaguar, the *Bata'a* is the youngest Tradition. Its magic draws upon Voudoun and other syncretistic faiths found in the Caribbean and surrounding areas. Each member of the Tradition has a patron Loa (her Avatar) who possesses the mage and grants her a portion of its power. Bata'a frequently become deeply ingrained in their communities, either as spiritual advisors or secret masters, and many have established chantries in North America cities.

The *Lodge of the Gray Squirrel*, an alliance of medicine workers, once represented the Awakened of North America. Whittled down by disease

and war, they have seen their territory swallowed up by other Traditions. Today the Lodge focuses on the continent's American Indian population, both on government reservations and in urban areas. Lodge members believe themselves to have been called by the spirits, performing their willworking by calling upon and commanding or bargaining with the spirits that reside within all things. Some within the Lodge advocate leaving the Council, seeing many of the other Traditions as little better than evil sorcerers.

The *Sons of Zimbabwe* trace their roots to the African city of Great Zimbabwe. The Tradition is divided between urban and rural members, with the former focusing on politics, scholarship and ritual magic and the latter focusing on healing, local history and spiritualism. Both factions see themselves as having a duty to learn as much as possible in order to develop a greater understanding of the world's mysteries and secrets. These secrets grant power to those who know them and should never be allowed to fade from memory. A Son's (or Daughter's) first and greatest teacher is the ancestor spirit (his Avatar) who calls him to service and teaches him the first mysteries.

The Australian *Dreamsingers* believe themselves to be the guardians of the Dreamtime and its creatures, as well as the keepers of the world's future. When their ancestors sang of the Dreamtime, these songs were passed from father to son as songlines (sacred songs tied to holy sites). Using the knowledge of these sacred songs, the Dreamsingers are able to subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) alter reality and traverse the conti-

nent with unfailing accuracy. Like the Lodge of the Gray Squirrel, the Dreamsingers were battered and almost broken by European colonialism. They work to protect and revitalize their culture and to keep the sacred songs from passing into oblivion so that the world will not come to an end.

Storytellers who wish to use this set of alternative Traditions in their chronicle will find books such as **Guide to the Traditions, Dragons of the East, Dead Magic, Dead Magic 2** and **Sorcerer** to be useful.

This represents only one of hundreds of possible alternative Traditions. Storytellers could change only a single Tradition, such as replacing the Akashic Brotherhood with the Wu Lung, or having the Ngoma or Taftâni take the place of the Solificati. Another possibility is that there never was an Order of Reason. By the time the Technocratic Union forms in the 19th century, many of the groups who would have founded the Traditions may have faded into history. If so, then perhaps it falls to groups like the Knights Templar, the Wu Lung, the Bata'a, the Lions of Zion, the Cult of Osiris and others to form the Council of Nine. Finally, maybe there are no Traditions at all. Perhaps instead of a Council the Grand Convocation creates an assembly or parliament, with representatives sent from every faction, large and small. In place of Traditions are dozens of Crafts, with the various subgroups within each Tradition (House Tytalus, The Fifth World Tribe, the Balamob, the Golden Dragons, etc.) existing as independent factions alongside groups like the Ngoma and Wu Lung.

THE AGE OF REASON (17TH AND 18TH CENTURIES)

The Age of Reason is often looked upon as an age of scientific progress, laying the groundwork for the industrial and political revolutions that followed. This is only part of the picture. The Enlightenment is an age of contradictions, and the lines between what advances the ideals of the Order of Reason versus what advances the ideals of the Council of Nine are not always so clear-cut. The first modern totalitarian regimes exist side by side with logical philosophers espousing the rights of the individual. Some of the biggest scientific advances are made by men with extremely devout

religious beliefs. Indeed, logic and reason are seen as divine gifts, given by God so that man might use them to improve the world around him.

The line between science and ritual magic is sometimes fuzzy in this era. Natural philosophers such as Sir Isaac Newton study alchemy and Kabbalism in addition to physics and astronomy. Mathematics is a tool toward greater understanding of the universe, including the realms of magic and the Umbra. Classic hermeticism thrives, influencing the development of Wicca. The Order of Hermes and the Celestial Chorus thrive in this

period. The ranks of the Chorus' Alexandrian Society swell, and many European and American Singers attempt to nurture what Locke calls "the candle of the Lord set up by Himself in men's minds." Those Hermetics who practice *Ars Cupiditæ* (social magic) delve into the courts and salons of the Sun King and other monarchs, debating the philosophies of government and necessary truths with philosophers while trying to turn the totalitarian concept of the divine right of kings to their advantage. Both the Hermetics and the Chorus find themselves competing heavily with members of the Order of Reason for new initiates, as many who possess the potential to Awaken hold worldviews which might find a home within either faction of the Ascension War.

Although the Enlightenment provides a great deal of advancement for the Order of Reason, it also lays the groundwork for their undoing. The idea of the divine right of kings versus that of the rights of man proves to be source of conflict within the order. One side favors the idea of the state and its rights and powers taking precedence over those of the people who comprise the state. Under such a system, this faction believes, society can be brought under control, allowing science and reason to prosper. The other faction believes that such a government undermines the natural dignity of man, depriving its citizens of the ability to improve their own lives and the world around them by developing their own ability to reason. Although this conflict never reaches the point of violence, it does lay the foundation for the future conflict between the ideals of Social Order and Scientific Utopia within the Technocratic Union.

The philosophy of deism also has a strong impact upon members of the Order. The tenets of deism hold that God does exist, that He created the universe and then left it alone. Nature functions as He intended it to, just as a clock continues to run after its maker has left it. The idea of the world as a clock crafted by a master clockmaker inspires the belief that future events can be predicted by observing and analyzing past occurrences and forms the basis behind much of the Union's original Advanced and Enlightened Probability Analysis (the Path of Divination and the Time Sphere, respectively). Although deism never becomes a "state religion" for the Order or the Union,

it does influence many members' personal religious beliefs. Because God takes no action within the world, there are no miracles, and He created the universe so that man might use the power of reason to greater understand it. Ultimately, this philosophy proves incompatible with the ideals of the Cabal of Pure Thought, who believe that they act as God's instruments on Earth, channeling His power through themselves.

Finally, the Enlightenment sees the Order of Reason cut out its own heart, if not its soul. From the beginning, the Craftmasters have been the driving force behind the Order. They are the ones who began the crusade for Order. They are the ones who called the Convention of the White Tower. And they are the ones who are betrayed by their own allies. By the 17th century, the High Guild has begun to see the socially minded Craftmasters as an impediment to its own goals of social control and personal advancement via wealth and finance. Disagreement soon boils over into armed conflict, and the Order of Reason erupts into a civil war. By and large, however, many outside of the Craftmasters and the High Guild decide not to get involved. Unfortunately, many of those who do are Gabrielite and Artificer mercenaries hired by the Guild. Over the next century, the Craftmasters are slowly crushed. By the middle of the 18th century, the Craftmasters are believed to be exterminated.

Ironically, the Enlightenment also sees the golden age of piracy. Buccaneers sail ships throughout the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, seizing transport ships and raiding towns along the Atlantic seaboard. The lifestyle attracts a sizable number of mages. The Traditions see pirates hailing from the *Ahl-i-Batin*, the Cult of Ecstasy, the Dreamspeakers, the Euthanatos, the Verbena and even the Order of Hermes and the Celestial Chorus, while the Order of Reason produces several Craftmaster and Explorator pirates. It is not uncommon to see ships crewed by multi-Tradition cabals, and perhaps even those with mixed Tradition and Daedalian crews who are more concerned with money and personal freedom than with faction politics. The paradigms practiced by pirate-mages are eclectic to say the least. European hermeticism, Christian miracle working, Caribbean Voudoun and Central American shamanism are just some of the more common ones.

SO WHAT DID HAPPEN TO THE CRAFTMASONS, ANYWAY?

Although most Awakened historians believe that the Craftmasons were destroyed, many aren't so sure. More than a few Technocratic conspiracy theorists have put forth the idea that the Convention faked its destruction, either to abandon the Ascension War or to go into the shadows and become the Order's secret masters. Conspiracy theories aside, there are several loose ends left unaccounted. For one thing, it's pretty hard to destroy an Awakened secret society completely. The continuing survival of the Knights Templar, the Solificati and other groups attests to that. It is possible that members simply went into hiding and remained there for centuries. Russia, for example, might make a suitable hiding place, or even the American colonies. On the other hand, the group may have hidden in plain sight. Even though they have no official support from other Conventions, this is not to say that the Craftmasons were without allies. As is fitting for the Convention that founded the Order of Reason, the Craftmasons hold within them subfactions dedicated to many of the aspects other Conventions specialize in. Therefore, it is not inconceivable that sympathetic members of the Cosians might offer shelter to old friends and fellow healers within the Craftmasons' Chalice Guild, or for Artificers to take in hunted brothers of the Chisel Guild.

If the Craftmasons did survive, it then raises the question of where they are now. Perhaps they're still out there, operating as an independent Craft, practicing Enlightened Science independent of the Technocratic Union. Such a Craft might remain committed to the Craftmasons' populist ideals, working to create a

Socialist scientific utopia. They might be fanatical terrorists, devoted to bringing ruin upon the heirs of the Order that betrayed them. Such a group might not restrict its targets to the Technocracy; the Sons of Ether and the Virtual Adepts might be fair game as well. Then again, if the surviving Craftmasons took shelter within other Conventions, perhaps they simply reinserted themselves into the new Conventions of the Technocratic Union. The New World Order's Ivory Tower has inherited the Craftmasons' role as the Convention of teachers and educators. One wonders how many Ivory Tower founders might have studied under Craftmason masters. Then there are the Electrodynic Engineers and the Analytical Reckoners, who left the Union and formed the Sons of Ether and the Virtual Adepts when they felt that the Technocracy had lost sight of its original goals and ideals. Could those Conventions-turned-Traditions be the secret heirs of the Craftmasons? If so, could some among those Traditions be aware of their history? Could they be in contact with fellow Craftmasons still within the Technocracy? Are they the ones behind the Utopia Conspiracy (see **Guide to the Traditions**, p. 147)?

Ultimately, these questions are left to individual Storytellers to answer. They are mentioned here simply to provide ideas, either as possible outcomes for chronicles focusing on the Order of Reason civil war, as inspirations for new Crafts or as added levels of intrigue in chronicles featuring the Technocracy or the two renegade Conventions.

THE ROMANTIC ERA (1800-1850)

The Industrial Revolution brings about a great deal of change and upheaval in European and American society. Business begins to challenge the supremacy of the aristocracy, just as science challenges religion. In spite of the early benefits, many fear that industrialization may lead both to prosperity for a few built on the misery of many and to the alienation of man from nature. Such apprehension is fertile ground for art and revolution. Romanticism emphasizes emotion and passion over logic and rea-

son. Spontaneity, unrestrained imagination and personal freedom are the fashions for a generation of artists and writers. People like Lord Byron, Shelly, Goethe and Blake continuously challenge the status quo, not only with their poetry and prose but in other ways as well. Johann von Goethe, perhaps one of the most intelligent men ever to live, is a skilled scientist who ironically rejects many of the scientific discoveries of the era. Percy Shelley champions Irish revolution and independence while his wife Mary is

an advocate of women's suffrage. Lord Byron is active in Italian revolutionary politics and eventually gives his life in the cause of Greek independence. These and other artists provide inspiration for countless mages throughout the century. The movement revitalizes an entire European branch of a Tradition (the Cult of Ecstasy) and gives birth to one of the larger Crafts (the Hollow Ones, although they will not be known as such until the 1920s). The population of European Dreamspeakers also shows a spike during this period, with Spirit-Talkers who deal with ghosts, faeries and nature spirits. Even a handful of Akashic

KING LUDD

Reaction to growing industrialization also brings about the British Luddite movement. Upset with both lower factory wages and what they see as the much shoddier quality of goods produced by factories, traditional craftsmen form gangs of masked vigilantes in order to get redress for their grievances. Originally content with simply smashing factory machinery at night, the movement quickly turns violent. Several British mages hope to use the movement to their advantage, slowing the Industrial Revolution or even stopping it all together. Members of the Hermetic House Verditius, all of them master craftsmen, are especially sympathetic to the Luddites, as are many Verbena.

One of the mysteries of the Luddites is how they got their name. Popular legend of the time had the Luddites following a man known as Ned Ludd, given the title of General or King. Little if any evidence supports the existence of such a person, in the real world, at least. Storytellers wishing to run chronicles in pre-Victorian England may wish for their players to meet the legendary King Ludd. Ludd might be a Hermetic magus of House Verditius, or perhaps a member of the Cult of Ecstasy hoping to start his own faction within the Tradition. Maybe he's a Verbena trying to destroy the factories because they are killing the Fair Folk. Maybe Ludd is one of the Fair Folk (or some other sort of spirit — the ghost of a factory worker killed on the job, perhaps). How about one of the surviving Craftsmasons seeking revenge against the Order of Reason? Or a Marauder? For a real twist, how about an Akashic trying to tear down the illusion of industrial progress?

Li-Hai tap into the movement, using such things as poetry, Romantic philosophy, fencing and social revolution as Gateway Arts for Do.

THE PROMETHEAN PLAGUE

Remember that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel.

— Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (*The Modern Prometheus*)

The start of the 19th century sees the Order of Reason in complete disarray. It exists in but name only, with enlightened scientists across Europe and the Americas seeing to their own works and experiments, largely ignoring the projects of other Daedaleans whose work does not connect or compete with their own. In this atmosphere, few stop to wonder if, just because they can do something, it means they should. It is unclear whether the first creations are inspired by Mary Shelley's novel of gothic horror or by the experiments of Galvani and Volta (meaning it's something we leave for Storytellers to decide in their own games), but as the years go by, a growing number of humanoid constructs make themselves known among supernatural circles.

Born from vain enlightened science, these creatures come to be known as Prometheans, or the Children of Prometheus, named not for the Greek God but for Mary Shelley's "modern Prometheus," *Frankenstein* (the scientist, not the monster). The two most common types of Prometheans are resurrectionists, constructed out of body parts taken from recently deceased cadavers, and alchemical homunculi, grown in vats from chemicals and proteins. While many of these beings are the creations of Cosians, others are the work of Artificer Body-Forgers (precursors to the modern Iteration X BioMechanics method) and even medically and alchemically minded Hermetics. Not every construct of the period is biological, either. Artificers continue to build clockwork servants and companions, some of whom can pass for human.

Many of these Promethean constructs turn against their creators. Some creators reject their creations, finding them too flawed in appearance, mind or spirit. Others abuse their new creations, never considering that the offspring of their genius might object to being a slave. Paradox strikes down many a would-be modern Prometheus, either in the form of fatal laboratory accidents or



newborn constructs flying into berserk, murderous rages. A few scientists and wizards even repent, only realizing the hubris of attempting to create life from nothing after looking upon their artificial children, who could never exist in nature. Regardless of the cause, the effect is a plague of man-made monsters roaming the dark corners of Europe and America. Many within what remains of the Order of Reason work to destroy these creatures, seeing them as perversions of science and a dangerous threat to public safety (several Prometheans are murderers, after all). Members of the Celestial Chorus, the Verbena and the Euthanatos also hunt the Prometheans, viewing them as abominations against God and nature.

Not all meetings with the Prometheans are antagonistic, however. Some Prometheans do not rebel against their creators, continuing to serve them as servants and even apprentices. A few may even develop bonds similar to those of a real parent and child. Among the renegades, some become friends and allies of Tradition mages, even going as far as to study the mystical arts. The Order

of Hermes, Celestial Chorus and Cult of Ecstasy most frequently offer sanctuary to those Prometheans who seek it. A Promethean who studies the Hermetic Art often does so with the intent of tapping into the same strength of will that enabled her own creation, improving and refining herself as she refines her will and her soul. A Promethean among the Celestial Chorus is often drawn there by the Christian kindness of a Chorister who ministers to him, finding a deeper purpose in the calling of his newfound faith. They often become skilled theologians pondering the nature of life and the soul or devoted monster hunters, believing that God has placed them on this earth to do battle with creatures no mortal man should have to face. An Ecstatic Promethean typically tries to experience as much of life as possible, gaining a greater understanding of humanity and himself through sensation and consciousness expansion. A few are even called to the Dreamspeakers, learning to speak with the spirits of modern science and artificial creations.

PROMETHEAN CHARACTERS

Storytellers who allow players to create Promethean characters may wish to consider the following guidelines.

- **Attributes:** Promethean characters get a pool of 16 points to spend on Attributes. Each Attribute rating starts at 1. This is higher than average, as Prometheans are often constructed to be in some way superior to mundane humans.

- **Abilities:** Promethean characters have a pool of 18 points to spend on Abilities. Each Ability rating starts at zero. Abilities may not be raised above 3 without the use of freebie points. This is lower than average, as Prometheans often lack much of the life experience mundane humans possess.

- **Backgrounds:** Promethean characters start with only 5 dots' worth of Backgrounds. As with Abilities, this is to represent the lower level of experience with human society.

- **Willpower:** Promethean characters begin with a Willpower rating of 3, the same as average humans (yes, mages are unusually willful individuals).

- **Freebies:** Promethean characters have a total of 21 freebie points to spend on raising Traits and purchasing suitable Merits and Flaws (including several of the more outrageous ones), and on the purchase of Sorcery Paths or Psychic Powers.

These guidelines deal with “mundane” Prometheans. If the Storyteller wishes, Promethean characters who have been apprenticed to mages or enlightened scientists may instead be full-fledged Sorcerers (or Advanced Scientists). Promethean Sorcerers have a starting Willpower of 5 and possess 5 dots to spend on Sorcery Paths or Psychic Powers. (Prometheans cannot be Awakened, for they have no Avatars.)

THE VICTORIAN AGE (1831-1901)

The Victorian Age is a contradiction. Progress and wonder go side by side with war and imperialism. Science truly comes into its own, while mysticism still flourishes. Public morality hides private sexuality. And the end of the Order of Reason signals the ultimate defeat of the Traditions.

Europe becomes two radically different worlds in this era. On one side is the West. Great Britain is the greatest nation on Earth. She sits at the head of a world-spanning empire and is a center of science, technology and learning. France rivals Britain as a regional power, and Paris is considered the pinnacle of culture, fashion and art. The newly formed Germany eagerly supports science and education, hoping to harness the power of technology for political and military strength. On the other side lies the Near East. Although Russia is a world power and a rival of Britain, the nation is an anachronism. In an age of constitutional monarchies and republics, Russia is an absolute monarchy in the same vein as Louis XIV's 17th-century France. Outside of a minority of educated aristocrats and city dwellers, the Tsar rules over an empire of illiterate peasants and horse nomads. The Balkans, including Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria, are a powder keg of simmering racial and political hatreds; these regions' populations are much like those of Russia in education and literacy.

In America, the concept of Manifest Destiny has led to the conquest of much of the continent while European immigrants — first Irish and Germans fleeing famine and failed revolutions, followed by countless Eastern and Southern European ethnic groups fleeing tyranny and poverty — swell eastern cities. The Civil War ends slavery, leading to a minor diaspora of black Americans out of the southern states and into the west. Major cities look to Europe, especially London and Paris, for their cultural cues. To the north, the modern state of Canada begins to take shape, although not without difficulties (including armed rebellion in Manitoba). France makes a failed attempt to turn México into a puppet state, leaving the reformer Benito Juárez in power. The nation ends the century as a dictatorship under General Díaz. South America sees its share of pain and prosperity. The empire of Brazil is the last nation to abolish slavery, even becoming the temporary home of Confederate planters seeking to hold on to their dead lifestyle in the wake of America's civil war. Argentina, Brazil and Chile prosper economically, but at the same time the Paraguayan War and the War of the Pacific bring violence and death.

Japan begins a rabid modernization, quickly adopting military, financial, industrial and education systems patterned after those of Europe. China, humiliated by the Opium War, suffers one of the bloodiest civil wars on Earth as the T'ai P'ing

Rebellion causes the death of 20 million people. The French establish colonies in Indochina as the British establish their own in Malaysia. In the wake of the Sepoy Rebellion, India becomes a colony of the British Crown (it was formerly run by the British East India Company). Although much of the nation is run by a British viceroy, several kingdoms remain under the control of their own royal families.

The Ottoman Empire is a dying power, propped up by the British, who hope to use it as a check against Russian expansion into the Middle East. Although officially part of the Ottoman Empire, Egypt is a British possession in all but name. Russia, rather than attempt to claim colonies in Africa or the Pacific, simply conquers many of her Central Asian neighbors. Both Persia and Afghanistan become targets of British and Russian interference. In South Africa, Cecil Rhodes attempts to bring all of southern Africa under British control, setting up his own personal fiefdom in Rhodesia and trying to engineer wars with the Dutch Afrikaners. The Muhdi leads an army of Muslim warriors in revolt against the British in the Sudan, and the Congo becomes a site of unimaginable butchery as the Belgian king's mercenaries and overseers stoop to any level, no matter how brutal, to strip as much wealth as possible out of the colony. Australia, ironically, is rather similar to the United States in this period, having a Wild West atmosphere, complete with wealthy ranchers and natives being driven from their land at gunpoint.

Science and mysticism exist side by side during the Victorian Era. Science brings steam ships, electromagnetic turbines, telephones and revolvers. Mysticism brings spirit mediums, the Order of the Golden Dawn and the Voodoo Queen of New Orleans. To the Victorian mindset, "magic" and psychic powers are just things science hasn't found a way to explain yet. Not to say that they aren't real. After all, some primitive man seeing a rifle for the first time might think it was magic, too. Still, there are frauds, conmen and other unsavory types who try to pass themselves off as possessors of great mysteries, so one must be wary.

The Traditions have their ups and downs during this period, and the dividing line between European Traditionalists and other mages around the globe becomes more and more pronounced. For the Akashic Brotherhood, it is most certainly a bad time. European Imperialism has finally brought the Ascension War to their doorstep. Members of the Brotherhood

travel the globe, following Chinese immigrants to foreign shores. By the end of the century they back the Boxer Uprising, hoping to drive the Europeans out of China. The plan fails miserably, leaving many Akashics bitter and discouraged. There are signs of hope. The Li-Hai take on some American students, hoping to use the philosophy of transcendentalism as a gateway to Do.

For the Celestial Chorus it is a time of division. On one side are Western Choristers, hoping to use Imperialism to bring Christian civilization to the heathens of Africa and Asia. On the other are those Choristers native to areas in Africa and Asia who are understandably not thrilled with the idea of seeing their nations and cultures swallowed up and destroyed. The Victorian Era is a time of deeply held faith, giving its members renewed conviction through the uncertainty and strife.

European Ecstasies are still heady from the Romantic period and continue to seek ways to thrive in this new era. Many delve into mystery cults and secret societies, and some even form their own small groups, promising the secrets of Indian, Persian or Chinese mysticism. Meanwhile, American Indian, Chinese and Indian members of the Cult of Ecstasy, like their countrymen from other Traditions, take part in the struggle against European Imperialism. The Dreamspeakers are similarly divided. Those members drawn from European and American society (rapidly finding themselves a disliked minority within the Tradition) find places as spiritualists and mediums. The remainder of the Tradition struggles to maintain its way of life in a changing world. From the Sioux Nation to the Congo and from Haiti to Afghanistan, they struggle alongside their people.

After the Sepoy Rebellion, the Chakravanti faction of the Euthanatos is ready to withdraw from the Council of Nine. The decimation of the thuggee sect in India only further weakens the Tradition. Members of the Tradition find ways to carry on. Many become involved in politics and medicine. Others become traveling gamblers. The Order of Hermes makes few friends during this period. Some mages even whisper that Jack the Ripper is one of the Hermetics' own and that the Order protects him. The Order finds groups such as the Freemasons and the Order of the Golden Dawn to be fertile recruiting grounds.

The Verbena find themselves in the midst of several internal struggles in this period. The Victorian Era sees the first significant numbers of urban Verbena, much to the displeasure of the traditionally

rural leadership. The American Civil War finds Verbena on both sides, and westward expansion brings the Tradition's farmers, ranchers and other "people of the land" into conflict with regional Dreamspeakers. Australia sees similar conflict. The Ahl-i-Batin face their own problems, dealing with the Collectors of Light in the Ottoman Empire as well as Technocracy agents in Persia and Egypt. The Batini must play the role of diplomat and peacemaker, struggling to hold the Council of Nine together during this time of conflict.

THE TECHNOCRATIC UNION

It was our hope to bring our minds to bear upon the problems of human society and construct a brave new world from the remnants of the old. It soon became clear that certain of our notions were safe for discussion in the newspapers but far too radical for reality.

— Warren Ellis, *Planetary*

The Order of Reason is dead; long live the Technocratic Union. In 1851, the Enlightened Scientists of the western world gather at the Grand Exposition in London. Within the Crystal Palace, under the patronage of Prince Albert, consort to Queen Victoria, the Technocratic Union is born. They are formed with high ideals: Bring peace and stability to Europe and then the world. Use science and technology to create paradise on Earth. Truly, the road to hell is paved with the best of intentions.

In order to adapt to the new and changing world, the Union has abandoned the outdated Conventions of the Order of Reason. New Conventions are formed from the ashes of the old. Each Convention contains

guilds focused on different aspects of their work (the term methodology will not be officially adopted until the early 20th century).

The Æsculpien Order is dedicated to the improvement of human life through medical science. It deals with surgery, medicinal compounds, public health and eugenics. The Analytical Reckoners devote themselves to the collection, analysis and communication of information. Inspired by the works of Charles Babbage and Ada Byron, the Reckoners construct advanced analytical engines and connect them using wireless telegraphy. The Electrodynic Engineers focus on the transmission of energy in all of its forms, including the science of electrodynamics and the use of luminiferous ether to transmit light. The Explorators seek to map the unknown corners of the world, as well as begin the modern scientific exploration of the planets. The International Brotherhood of Mechanicians believes the universe and everything in it to be a machine, which can therefore be improved with the proper engineering. They are engineers and mathematicians, as well as surgeons and social scientists. Invisible Exchequer funds the Union, knowing that money is what drives not only progress and invention but all of human society as well. Finally, the Lightkeepers are the lighthouse that shines a beacon of light into a world of ignorance, the lantern which uncovers the secrets hidden in the darkness, and the torch which burns the monsters lurking in the night.

For more on the Victorian Era, see **Guide to the Traditions** and **Guide to the Technocracy**.

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN: THE MINISTRY OF SWORDS

"Lord Dashwood be damned!" cried the smiling man in the top hat, stepping out of a horse-drawn carriage as it shuddered to a halt on the cobbled street.

"Good to see you as well, old chum," said the monk.

The street beside the tall gray building was full of coal soot and beggars. Both men stood out like moths in the gaslight. This was not the best side of town, and the men were clearly slumming.

"Had I known I'd see you on this tour I'd certainly have brought my sister from the country. She has recently been converted from her heathen path and is in need of the guidance of an honest man of the cloth," continued the well-dressed man, smiling wickedly. He

flipped a penny to the driver, who lashed the horses and away they went.

"Lord Henstridge, you are the devil," said the monk.

"Or are you?" Henstridge replied without blinking.

"Or are we all indeed? What think you She has in store for us at this late hour?" asked the monk. "Perhaps another tour to protect the foul sport of tennis?"

Henstridge almost cursed but held himself back. It had been two years since he'd seen a decent assignment, and not some petty banishing of motley apparitions or a chase after a duchess' cat. This man of 60 with the looks of 30 had seen wars, fought demons and played cards with them afterward and

repelled an invasion from Atlantis. What was worse was that he was not tired of it. Of late, though, it seemed to have tired of him.

"I hear this is about the murders. About the Spring-heeled Jack and arcane scribblings and what not," Henstridge replied without raising his eyes.

"Perhaps they'll bring in the Detective, then," replied the monk.

"Doubtful. I hear his health is only moderately improved since the fall." Henstridge's glee was well-contained. He'd never wish harm on his fellows, but the "Detective," as they all called him, was a bore. Had it not been for snuff, the lord would have written him off completely. A man without vices is no man at all.

They entered the building and walked down a long vaulted corridor at the end of which stood a tall, broad wooden door. For a moment Henstridge paused. The etching on the door read "Ministry of Swords."

"Shall we go in, then?" asked the monk.

"The Ministry of Swords" takes **Mage** out of its postmodern context and places it in the imagined Victorian England of scientific romance, a precursor to science fiction and revisionist pulp. In Ministry, players take on the roles of agents of an occult bureau within the British government that is dedicated to the protection of the Empire against all supernatural threats.

Unlike Rathbone's Skeleton Keys or the technocratic Ivory Tower that followed (see **Guide to the Technocracy**), the Ministry has existed long enough to understand its place in the natural order. Moreover, the secrecy surrounding the Ministry of Swords and its covert nature freed it from much of the Continental influence in philosophical thinking that made the structure of England's own government such a breeding ground for Unionist thought.

The Ministry of Swords, in one form or another, has existed since the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, apparently beginning with a sea captain thought to be one of the Queen's paramours. England, a hotbed of supernatural activity since before the time of Christ, has always been aware of the inherent benefits of its nature and also of the dangers therein, but has

been ever optimistic about the potential of its varied assets. It's the curious marriage of paganism and progress in England that help to make the Ministry what it is.

Based out of a plain-looking building on Drury Lane, east from the long shadows of Buckingham Palace and north of Parliament and Westminster Abbey, the Ministry of Swords is hidden by wards that allow only those looking for it to find it. It is said that once past the door to the Ministry, reality becomes thin, and space ceases to be relevant.

What lies within is divided not into floor and room, but into chapter and verse, after the King James Bible. The Pentateuch, or first five floors, are administrative. Agents here are responsible for maintaining information on the United Kingdom's weird geography and natural phenomena (Genesis) and the world abroad (Exodus), the affairs of the Ministry's agents (Leviticus), facts and fables about the people of the United Kingdom (Numbers) and the Ministry's budget office (Deuteronomy). Each department of the Ministry of Swords is divided similarly, with its most notable chapter being Judges, or its field agents. Other chapters worth mentioning are Kings, those who protect the royal family, Acts, who work as covert operatives, Romans, an auxiliary force of British military prepared in case of national emergency, and Revelation, tasked with divination and risk assessment.

At the top of the chain of command is the rarely seen Mr. Baker. Baker is believed to be the pseudonym of a member of the British aristocracy, perhaps even a member of the royal family itself. The Ministry's daily affairs are managed by Baker's liaisons, Charles Mann from Deuteronomy and Virginia Wife from Numbers. These names are also believed to be pseudonyms, but, unlike Baker, Mann and Wife are regularly about business in the light of day.

The Ministry of Swords isn't intended to be the last word on the Victorian Era for your chronicle. For much more information on the World of Darkness during this period, see **Victorian Age: Vampire**.

ALTERNATIVE SETTINGS



With all that said, Storytellers may wish to run their **Mage: The Ascension** chronicles in a completely different direction. What if mages existed in a world that accepted their paradigm and treated them as superheroes? Could there be an alternate Earth where the Order of Reason failed and magic became a prevalent pseudotechnology? How might things have been different if the Traditions were never established?

As a Storyteller, yours is the power cosmic. You make the rules. In the next section you'll find some alternative settings for incorporation as past or future timelines, along with parallel worlds your mages might visit. You might try one of the alterations of history, above, or one of the completely different settings, below.

WILLWORLDS

Kavn ran. He ran through the back allies between the colonial hovels, dazed by a mish-mash of electric lights and the otherworldly glow of an enormous willship overhead, powered solely by those he sought to escape. It was like a giant eye looming above him, detailing every move until his inevitable demise. In some places he pushed through a crowd of people in long robes or skintight bodysuits, in others he staggered past the crowd and charged past a blur of white. Sweat poured from his forehead, stinging his tired, red eyes. His legs, back and arms surged and everywhere he went pain followed. His head pounded, but still he ran. Kavn ran for his life.

Kavn had been six when he saw the bright beacon, a holographic Atlas beaming through Titan's thin atmosphere. He never knew who the man was, but he remembered what the man had said. Everybody did. It was broadcast through every voxcom and projector in human space. "Leave this dead world and its dead ideas behind, and join me in a new age of wonder," the black man in the green robe had said, a lattice work of chrome and light poised around one eye like an eerie halo.

Kavn hadn't fully understood the words, but the seed grew in his mind until the day that Kavn's pressure suit ruptured. He was cleaning the vector thrusters on the stern of his brother's light freighter when his atomizer malfunctioned and ate the pressure dressing between his wrist and armpit with an ominous hiss. Kavn gasped for breath and issued a hushed prayer, and as quickly as the

tear had come, it was gone again, resealing itself. It was his first taste of magic.

From then on, Kavn grew, not just in body. He learned conventional things, of course, but more than those, his consciousness bloomed. It sprang beyond its boundaries and spread like wildfire. Every day, Kavn grew closer to magic.

Then they came. The one with the sash across her chest and the man with "the gun." And they weren't fooling around. In one fell swoop, they smashed the whole docks while looking for him. They weren't interested in the squatters with their small aptitude for repair. They weren't interested in those who navigated by the sight. They were interested in Kavn. And it seemed he would join them, or die.

Kavn was just about to collapse into an alley when he turned for a second to look behind him. In an instant, he hit what he thought must be a brick wall. Kavn turned to see a tall man adorned in white.

"Hah-hah," Kavn gasped. "You're one of them. One of those goddamn mage freaks. Kill me. Do you hear? Kill me! I'm tired of running."

"Oh, on the contrary, my friend," said the man, "I'm here to get you away from all of this."

Kavn could see that the man was telling the truth. The man in white went to toss his hair but found only a few, scant, unkempt locks drawn narrowly from the back of his head. He let out a sublime sigh.

"A hundred years ago, son, I'd have argued with your manners. But not now. The Nine's goose-stepping stormtroopers will have found us in moments. No, it's time to get you underground. But before we go, I need to give you something."

Kavn tensed up. Here it comes, he thought. The pitch. The sell. Or worse yet, the knife.

The old man extended his closed hand and opened it palm up. Within was a small, oblong stone with delicate carvings across its surface and a hole in one end out of which proceeded two short lengths of leather cord. Without thinking, Kavn withdrew the charm from the man's hand and gripped the stone in his palm, wrapping the cords around the hand with his other hand. Then he brushed his hand at the back of his head as if to toss away a length of hair that wasn't present.

The old man smiled.

"If I hadn't seen it, I wouldn't have believed it myself...." he trailed off.



The man in white made a humming noise that turned into something entirely different. With that the earth opened up without fanfare, and the two of them climbed down a solid marble staircase.

"Where are we going? How can I be sure I'll be safe?" Kavn asked.

"Oh, don't worry, my boy. We'll all be safe," said the man in the white suit as the earth began to close behind them.

"Welcome to New Horizon."

In a nutshell, "Willworlds" is a speculative-fiction setting for **Mage**. Willworlds explores the oft-asked but seldom-answered question, "What would happen if mages won the Ascension War?" Would they benefit from the universal emancipation of humanity's minds, or would there be other, unforeseen consequences?

A thousand years in the future, the mechanism of Technocracy-dominated reality ground to an absolute halt. Humanity entered a new dark age in which even the everyday wonders of the modern world, space travel and the like, became impossible. Science had mapped as much of reality as it could,

ending with the conquest of the solar system, and found further progression impossible. In short, it lacked the creativity and imagination to power the next generation of space exploration. Just beyond the grasp of Earth, in the Local Cluster, lay untold resources. The dreamers who might carry humanity to the next level through some invention of theoretical physics had either been slain, compromised or exiled by the dictators of this time, our old friends on the side of reason. The Technocracy had finally achieved its goal of making reality safe for mankind. In the process, though, they built a safety zone for their unknowing charges, and the number of their charges then grew out of proportion to the resources within the zone.

The Earth died from its population's cancerous habit of consumption. From there, the lines of supply began to collapse, along with the lines of communication, until all that was left were a few isolated colonies struggling through a terrible dark age. Diseases long thought dead returned and hope was lost. It seemed that the rule of humanity would end not with a scream, but with a whimper.

Then Dante stepped out of the Virtual Web.

Dante projected himself across the communication channels of every colony in human space. On the dead networks of Earth, blue-green monitors glowed with his image. On Titan, a two-hundred-meter-tall holographic image of the mage, arms folded, proclaimed a new age. Science had failed, he told humanity. It was time to give magic a chance.

Mages came out of the woodwork. For a time, it was difficult to tell those who had preserved their arts throughout the centuries from those who had only recently Awakened. Mages, sorcerers and newly Awakened ex-Sleepers walked hand in hand into a new age, one where the next step in human history was Ascension. And Ascend man did. From one corner of the solar system to another, humans were using their magical aptitude to the best advantage. It was as though the world had never seen the light before and was only now digging out of the cave to find it.

Into this time marched what was left of the Nine Traditions. Dante had envisioned a brave new world of universal emancipation and Awakening, one in which humans embraced both technology and the esoteric as means of manipulating Quintessence, but the Traditions were uninterested. At least, that's how the story is told now. In truth, the Traditions were fascinated by the notion of enlightening humans then and forever more. They quickly discovered two significant obstacles to achieving Dante's vision. For one thing, the psychic bureaucracy of the Conventions was still in place. While many people learned to use very simple, coincidental magical effects, they still relied on technology as the focus of wonder. Humans weren't ready to embrace Awakening on the same level as the mages.

More significantly, though, the new Council of Nine made a startling discovery. As more people became empowered with the ability to do simple magic, it became more difficult for Tradition mages to work magic flexibly by force of their will. It was first apparent when Resonance became less personal, tying the magic more to the Tradition than to the individual mage. Then the further a mage tried to work outside her paradigm, the less effect her magic had, and when mages of different Traditions tried to work together they noticed their magics either in flux or diminished. It was almost as though they were competing for Quintessence.

A serious debate began brewing among the Council. If Quintessence was indeed limited, just as other natural resources, what was to be done?

Two camps quickly developed. One, led by members of the Order of Hermes and the Cult of Ecstasy, said that these were merely the growing pains of humanity and that, in time, enough of the damage done by the Technocracy could be reversed. The other, led by the Euthanatos and the Akashics, was utilitarian. They saw that humanity's resources were so limited that humans would run out of consumable resources before breaking through to the Local Cluster.

A great gathering of mages was called to determine the fate of millions. It was all in the swing vote. The Euthanatos and Akashics knew they could count on the Verbena and the Hollow Ones to side with them, but they still needed another partner to hold a simple majority. The surprise came when a number of Order members hailed their cause.

So arose the new bureaucracy of the Tradition Council. Convinced of the desperate problems of the limited supply of Quintessence, the various magical orders — always elitist since their inception — took charge of the situation. They regulated magic and set up their own policing operations to carry humanity safely and carefully into a Brave New World.

The detritus of the Conventions had been left behind, but not the moral quandaries or human failings. As humanity joined simple magics to the remnants of science to reach out across the stars, the Traditions took the same stance as the dictators before them had: Only by controlling human destiny and carefully ordering their limited resources could the Traditions survive — and make sure that their own Masters stayed on top.

Now, out among the stars, all humans have a little bit of that potential. Everyone knows a trick or two about magic. But those who really Awaken are competition. They suck up the powerful but limited forces of Quintessence and threaten the careful stability of the future. Magic's not just dying...it's limited, and it's going to run out if it's not used carefully.

Willworld Rules: If you want to run a Willworld chronicle, you should reflect the paucity of magic and the change in human powers through rules, of course. For starters, Quintessence is a rare and valuable commodity. Nodes just don't exist anymore, except in the rarest of places, tightly controlled by the Tradition Council. Tass is the most valuable trading chip in the cosmos.

Any mage can still do Awakened magic, of course, but can only work effects strictly within his

own paradigm. Trying to “stretch” beyond that or learn other methods guarantees failure — there’s just not enough magical strength left to power such already sketchy effects. Mages don’t suffer Paradox any more, but they do become fatigued as they work magic. Each effect causes one level of unsoakable bashing damage.

All humans are sorcerers. Build them with the **Sorcerer** rules; anyone can learn little static tricks, from seeing glimpses of the future to tinkering with spaceship engines to make them go faster.

MAGIC AT HIGH NOON

Abigail let out a shriek as the man in black walked through the swinging doors. The bar was packed, and when the man walked in, the player piano stopped playing and five tables full of grizzled gamblers turned to meet his gaze.

“Ya’ll may know who I am but for those of ya who don’t, I’m Dutch Singleton. Most people call me ‘Bully.’ If you’d like to walk out of here alive, you’ll give up the man I’m looking for. He’s Artis Cotton, an’ the Injuns call him ‘White Buffalo.’”

The room was silent. Then a man in a long coat stood up adjusting his spectacles.

“Look here, Singleton,” the man said, showing off a shining silver badge pinned on the breast of his jacket, neatly concealed under the edge of his coat. “This town don’ know nothin’ about no white buffalo nor no Artis Cotton, so why don’t you take your trail-stinking carcass back out and freshen up before you come into a fine establish—”

A sudden spout of blood erupted from the sheriff’s mouth and nose as Bully put his six-guns back into their holsters. There had been no sound, but the sheriff fell clean in half.

“There was no need to kill that man,” said a character from the top of a rickety set of stairs. He was lean and clean-shaven and wore a poncho over his traveling clothes. “You didn’t even have a fight with him.”

“Cotton! Too bad you showed up so soon. I was lookin’ forward to havin’ my fill of the locals. Oh, fine citizens ahm sure, but what with their getting’ in the way of the railroad—”

Everything went a little sideways and Singleton and Cotton were outside the view of normal folks. The spirit tore off Singleton’s left arm first and then ripped out his tongue.

“You shouldn’t talk so much,” Cotton said, a freshly lit cigarette in his mouth. “You’re on my range now.”

“Hoo arrrgh yough?” was all “Bully” Singleton could manage. They were the last words he would speak.

“Try to figure that out in the next life, kemosabe,” Cotton replied.

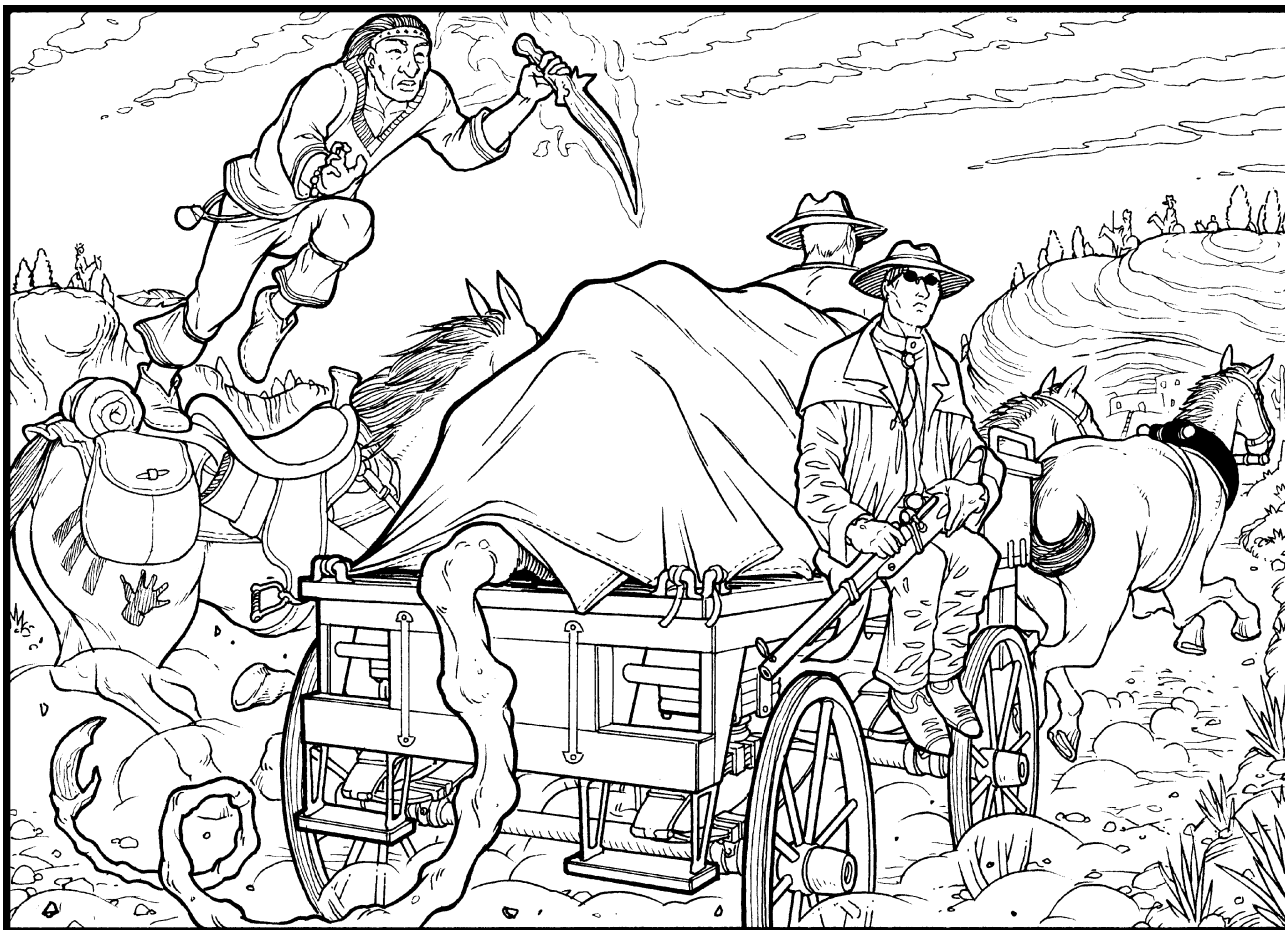
He drew a long pistol from his side, its barrel scored with markings too ancient to be remembered. He pointed it at the dismembered Singleton and pulled the trigger and hell came out. There wasn’t much “Bully” left to speak of.

The Old West. The setting of many epic tales of good vs. evil. If there’s one American film and literary genre that is most likely to be remembered in 300 years, it’s the Western. So what would it mean to take mages into the last frontier?

The American West during the mid to late 1800s is the literal staging ground for the metaphorical conflict that mages would encounter in the 20th century. The territory is a vast and unexplored country filled with “savages” and the things that others would strive to take from them. On the morning after the Industrial Revolution in the United States, settlers are pushing into this territory with all their might, endangering the natives and their precious ways of life. The stage is set for a full-on conflict between the indigenous paradigms and, who else, the Conventions — but that’s only a small part of the story. If the next century is one in which the Technocracy is to conquer, faith in the unseen must be squelched not merely from the savages — who can just as easily be put to their end on the wrong side of a rifle — but from the beliefs of North America’s new resident aliens. If the Technocrats wish the United States to be their bully pulpit, they’re going to have to strike the golden spike right through the mages.

Mages and Unionists alike knew that America was going to be someplace great. They flocked to the Colonies. Ambitious predecessors of the modern Syndicate came because of the *laissez-faire* capitalism, while idealistic Hermetics took the risk because of the climate of ideas. In some cases they fought side by side completely unaware of one another, single-mindedly pursuing dreams that could not have been more different from one another.

The American West has evolved beyond a simple historical setting. It has become its own mythos, its own religion. Wild Bill Hickock, Doc Holliday, Annie Oakley and Crazy Horse are its heroes. The OK Corral and the Alamo are its hallowed ground. The dime novel writers of the 19th century were its first apostles. Movies like



The Magnificent Seven, *Unforgiven* and *Blazing Saddles* keep the faith alive. This larger-than-life setting is the perfect home for **Mage**.

The Wild West is, at its heart, a series of culture clashes. Native nations struggle to maintain their independence. Ranchers battle with farmers over land rights, and then sheep and cattle ranchers battle each other over the same soil. At the start of the century the land is largely unspoiled and sparsely inhabited. After the Civil War, floods of new immigrants arrive, with the railroad and telegraph following behind them. It's extremely easy to transpose one more set of culture clashes — the Ascension War — upon this setting. The Dreamspeakers watch as their way of life comes to an end. Their nations are conquered, their families herded onto reservations. While members of the other Traditions suffer less — indeed, such things as faith and folk beliefs remain strong, and encroaching “civilization” brings with it belief systems that mages from Europe and back East are already adapting to — most recognize the taming of the West for what it is: the steady erosion of long-

standing local paradigms in favor of Euro-American hegemony.

The most prevalent Traditions within the Wild West setting are the Celestial Chorus, Cult of Ecstasy, Dreamspeakers, Euthanatos, Order of Hermes and Verbena. Although the Chorus stereotype of the fire and brimstone preacher holds true here, it is not the only one within the setting. More than one Chorister has found his calling as a traveling gunfighter, roaming the West along whichever path God takes him, righting wrongs and protecting the innocent. The Cult of Ecstasy produces not only native shamans but also traveling poets and writers (even Oscar Wilde toured the West), and even gunfighters who seek mystical enlightenment through the adrenaline rush that comes from putting your life on the line. The majority of Dreamspeakers are traditional shamans, but others are warriors chosen and protected by the spirits, or even technoshamans who transform guns and rifles into powerful fetishes. Those who doubt the possibility of Dreamspeaker gunslingers need only look at Sam Raimi's *The Quick and the Dead*.

Western Euthanatos are a mixed bunch. Doctors and surgeons travel the region alongside dark-clad gunslingers who have no fear of death and gamblers who trust in Fortune to see them though. Many Hermetics find the sparsely inhabited West to be the perfect place to escape the turmoil of Eastern industrialization. Others arrive with the ever-increasing civilization, bringing with them mystery cults such as the Order of the Golden Dawn and the Enlightened Society of the Weeping Moon. The Verbena are largely farmers and ranchers, coming west with Irish and German settlers. Isolated homesteads provide excellent locations for chantries, and many of their traditional remedies work just as well as “modern” medicine.

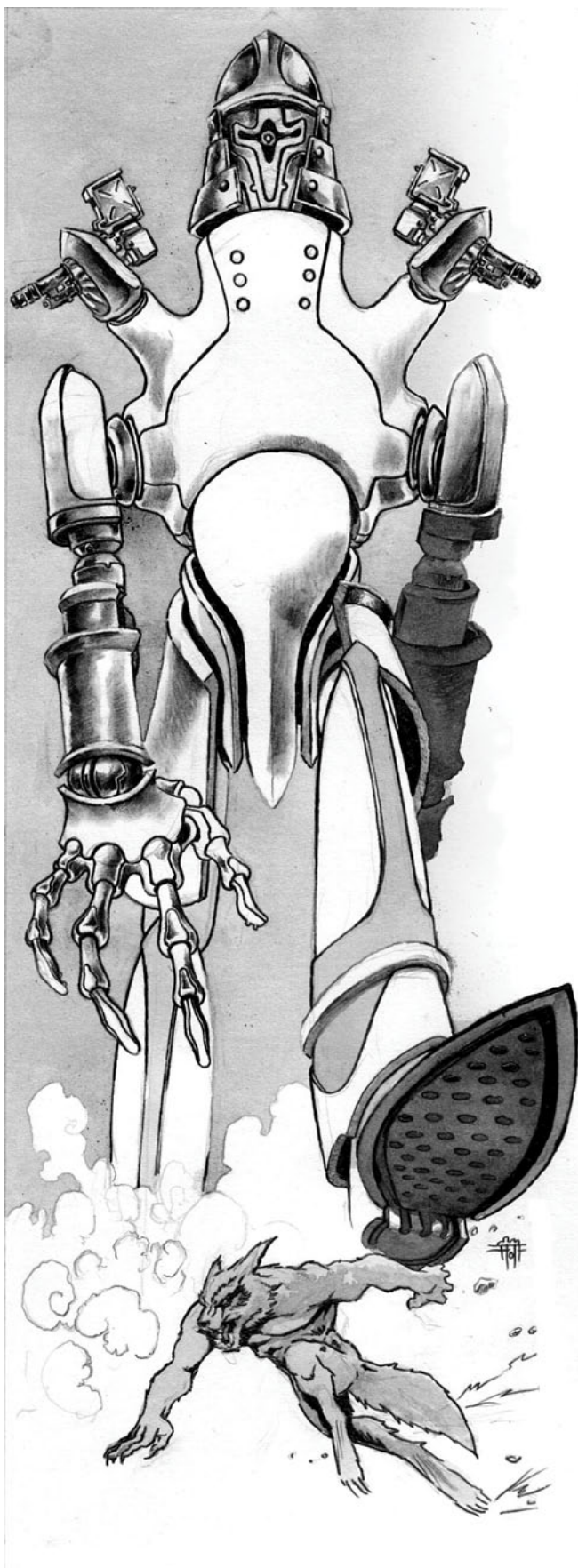
For any of these groups, magic should be largely coincidental, unless it’s completely over the top. Dreamspeaker and Ecstatic shaman magic will be more coincidental among their own people than among settlers, while Hermetic magic will work best among fellow initiates to the secret mysteries. Although the Akashics aren’t commonplace in the West, they are there. Many Li-Hai come with the Chinese miners and railroad workers, acting as folk heroes for the wandering sons of the Middle Kingdom. A few might even adapt gunfighting to the principles of Do. Akashic players can draw inspiration from the classic television show *Kung Fu* as well as from more recent movies like *Shanghai Noon* (which works just as well for the Wu Lung). Although the Ahl-i-Batin are all but unknown in this area, this period marks one of the times when the Batini must act as peacemakers and diplomats among the Traditions. This includes such things as traveling the Wild West and attempting to unite conflicting factions into common causes, against either Infernalists, Marauders or the Technocracy.

Members of the Union have their own reasons for being in the setting. The Black Coats (sometimes referred to as Black Hats) of the Lightkeepers roam the West, slaying monsters and having gunfights with Tradition mages. Other Lightkeepers come as newspapermen or school teachers, hoping to help tame the land with words rather than bullets. Explorators come as surveyors and mapmakers, furthering the taming of the West by discovering every hidden nook and cranny. The Invisible Exchequers finance the railroads and mines, build banks and ensure that all the fineries of civilization are available upon the frontier. Mechanician engineers oversee the construction of railroads and test their latest firearm designs. Some Body-Forgers even take

up the sport of gunfighting, enhancing their speed and reflexes with clockwork bionics. Æsculpians bring modern medicine to the frontier, as well as capture and study native animals (including the legendary Texas pterodactyl and the dreaded jackalope). Analytical Reckoners see to the installment of telegraph lines, bringing with them portable analytical engines so they can send detailed reports to Reckoners back East. Electrodyne Engineers bring their electrically powered tools and inventions with them, hoping to demonstrate the power of electricity in the subjugation of nature. The vast expanses of land also provide excellent testing grounds for some of the Union’s more dangerous inventions.

The rules for the Wild West are fairly simple. Characters are just as they are in modern **Mage**. The Paradox for vulgar effects is one less. Christian miracle working, folk magic, shamanism and Infernalism are considered coincidental almost everywhere, as are suitably subtle effects or the kind of things one might see happen in a dime novel (which means that, yes, you can get away with cool gun effects). Hermetic ritual magic as well as Akashic and other Asian arts require sanctums or the presence of people who believe in the paradigm (such as the meeting place of a secret society or within San Francisco’s Chinatown). Storytellers may decide to allow the more believable martial arts effects to be coincidental, however. The Gauntlet is thinner in the West. The rating is 7 within large cities (Chicago, San Francisco), 6 within most settlements, 5 along most frontier trails, 4 in the wilderness and 2 in and around powerful nodes. Shallowings are also present, often in deserts, deep mine shafts or lonely mountain passes. But beware. The West’s Umbra is given to violent and nightmarish storms in which the spirit landscape bends and twists, mixing the Shadowlands, the Penumbra, the Astral Plane and worse regions together into a single chaotic labyrinth. Sometimes these storms even bleed over into the real world, sucking up people, animals and other items. Some of these are never seen again. Others are found miles from where they started. Some even come out of them no longer human.

By now the Technocracy’s already winning, but the Ascension War is really heating up. Tradition mages ensconce themselves in the new colleges and territories out west — Euthanatos deal out six-shootin’ justice, Verbena are schoolteachers who secretly teach old herbology and rites to the new generation, and Order of Hermes mages infiltrate similar groups like the Masons and thus influence courts and doctors.



Build your characters for this setting as you would normal **Mage** characters, but obviously the Virtual Adepts don't yet exist. Ahl-i-Batin might still show up but the setting is pretty far afield for them. On the other hand, you can easily fit all kinds of **Mage** stereotypes into the setting: Akashic Brothers taking inspiration from the old *Kung Fu* show, Dreamspeaker shamans and Celestial Chorus parishioners building new churches and bringing the Word out west.

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN: ALTERNATE TECHNOCRACIES

In **Mage**, the battle between the Traditions and the Technocracy is supposed to be one of moral grayness. Neither side is 100% right nor 100% wrong. Instead they represent the eternal debate between Personal Freedom (the Traditions) and Public Responsibility (the Union). Each side has its pros and its cons, and both tend to work best when balanced with the other. Without responsibility, freedom becomes selfishness and the world goes to hell as people care only about themselves. Without freedom, responsibility becomes paternalism, locking the world in a prison "for its own good." Both sides in the Ascension War have drifted dangerously close to their bad sides. The Technocracy especially became increasingly paternalistic over the last half of the 20th century. Now, in the wake of the Reckoning, the Union has been given one last chance to set things right.

What if they'd never needed that chance in the first place? What if the Union had managed to find the right balance between personal freedom and public responsibility? Consider the following possibilities.

First, there have been two periods in the Union's history when a faction devoted to upholding the group's higher ideals was forced out. It doesn't have to be that way. What if the Craftsmasons had won their war with the High Guild? Could they have reformed the Order of Reason into a force devoted to improving the lives of the poor and downtrodden? If so, could this new Order have created successful democratic revolutions in France and the rest of Europe? And could they resist the temptation of creating a worldwide dictatorship of the proletariat, becoming just as paternalistic as the Technocratic Union was?

What if the Utopians within the Electrodynic Engineers, the Analytical Reckoners and other Conventions had managed to seize control of the Union? Could they have created a scientific utopia right out of the pulp science stories of the '20s and '40s? Flying cars and Moon colonies, broadcast power systems and robot servants. Could the Traditions survive in such a world? Could the Utopian Union survive the same trap that claimed the real Technocracy, or would it turn into a dystopia?

Finally, what if the Technocracy really and truly are the good guys? No Autochthon machine cult, no NWO brainwashing, no ham-handed evil plots for world domination that even Dr. Doom would turn down. This Union is the only thing standing between the human race and the ultimate darkness. It works to improve human life while secretly protecting the world from murderous vampires, man-eating werebeasts, alien psychic parasites and Infernalist mages who really do want to turn the world into a living hell.

These are just a few examples of possible variations within the Union. They don't even go into things like different Conventions defecting to the Traditions (try to imagine the Syndicate and Iteration X sitting on the Council of Nine), completely different Conventions, a single Convention making up the entire Union or no Technocratic Union at all.

THE BISCOCCHIAN CÖPRÖSPERITY SPHERE

Hammering on the fluid inputs of the etheric resonance drive, Andrew grimaced at the sound of bending metal. No big deal, but a small hassle. He'd have to pull out the clamps and the heater, reshape the duct and then try to hammer it into place once more. Oh, for a better design...but he wasn't one of the high-and-mighty Engineers, to come up with a new and more reliable space engine.

Suddenly the entire hull shuddered. Pushing away from the engine, Andrew made his way to the small cockpit. Pirates? This close to Alpha Centauri? Nobody would pirate in the middle of the Sphere — unless they weren't pirates at all, but were after something else.

Andrew turned his head slightly toward the passenger compartments, but his mysterious passenger, who'd paid in advance, didn't emerge.

With a curse under his breath, Andrew decided he'd just have to make do with one engine valve and try to get to somewhere safer. But where? He'd have to head outside the Sphere — and who knew what was out there?

By 1460, Gutenberg has finished his movable type printing press and has printed his Gutenberg

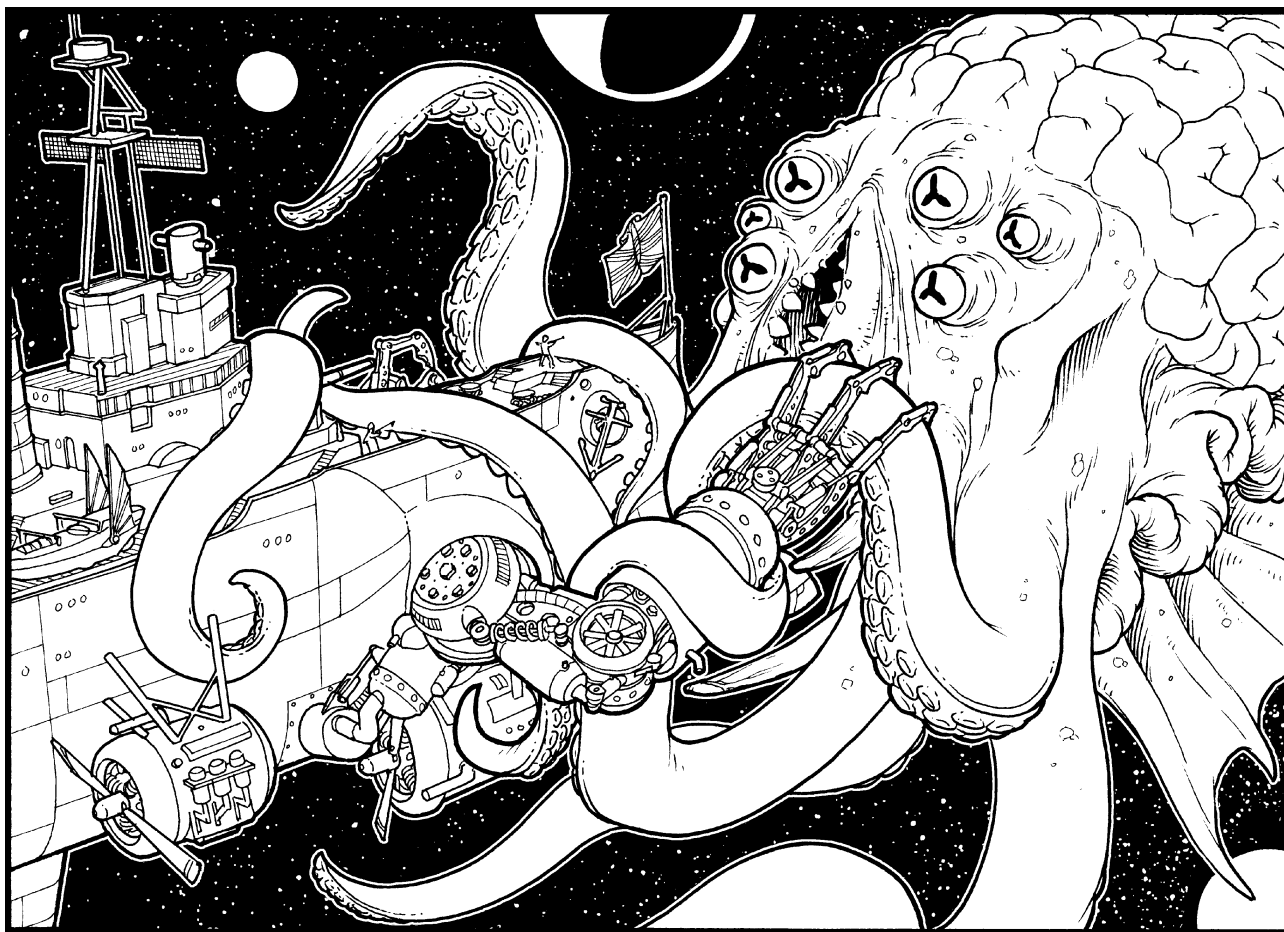
Bible. While most of his money goes to pay off various creditors, he has one creditor who lets him keep a tidy profit in exchange for printing another manuscript with his second run. Gutenberg complies and by 1462 mass distribution has begun; the emerging literati, eager to lap up voraciously whatever new-fangled published books are out there, eagerly latch on to this mysterious *Kitab al-Alacir*.

By 1500 the Order of Reason's dream has been suborned. Instead of developing an orderly society based on the spread of rational science following the Order's lead, the early, easy spread of a *mystical* system of science sparks the imagination of humanity. Everybody who's anybody wants to be a scientist in the exciting Renaissance, and no topic is barred — but instead of forming clubs, cliques and organizations that shut down "shoddy science" or shut out experimenters with fringe theories, the public goes wild for mad science. The crazier the idea, the better.

By 1650 the Order of Reason exists only as a small movement of hyperconservative scientists who believe that only rational examination of directly observed phenomena can be taken as truth. The rest of the world, meanwhile, happily accepts intuition, induction and the idea of mutable science.

The Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution spark some of humanity's strangest creations. While mass production and factories take off, they produce not only cars but *kits* for people to make their own transports — hybrid car-boats, car-helicopters and stranger contraptions. In Asia, twelve-foot-tall robots serve as vehicles. Crusading journalists and adventurers bring the secrets of Tibetan mysticism and South American shamanism to the world and integrate these into publications of mental health and psychology. Contrary to the idea of *only observable and deducible phenomena* having merit, the Enlightened among humanity manage to foster the idea that morality and ethics, social programming and responsibility are *also scientifically based*. Humanity, while far from perfect, has far less tolerance for the excesses of squalid industrial working-class conditions.

In 1870, Christopher Biscocchi completes the first prototype Etherical Engine. In the tradition of the best historical men of science, he immediately applies it to a vehicle body and, for the first time since the doomed expeditions of the Celestial Masters in the early Renaissance, he penetrates the upper atmosphere and makes his way into space. His launch point, at Cape Canaveral, Florida, becomes some-



thing of a Mecca of science. Inspired young men and women flock to the area, where they establish a new “ether administration” to study these developments and begin mankind’s missions to the stars. These Etherical Engineers become the heroes of humanity, gloriously rising up to space.

It is now 1920. Clockworks have given way to voltaic relays, and the new Tesla Junction allows the construction of automata that run not on steam or clockwork tension but on electricity, etherical vibrations and broadcast power! Christopher Biscocchi, the brilliant inventor and leader, has recently died, but his dream of a great empire of man stretching across the stars has just begun. The so-called “Biscocchian Coprosperity Sphere” is a union of the colonies on many widespread planets throughout near space.

But space isn’t peaceful. Besides the elaborate brass and steel ships that cruise the spacelanes, there are alien creatures, traitors to humanity and Things that have come from other dimensions. Having left the safety of Earth’s cradle, humans must now grow

up as a species and contend with the dangers of a hostile universe. With Science as a beacon in one hand and Hope in the other, they will prevail!

If you use the Biscocchian Coprosperity Sphere setting, you’re playing a game of glamorous electropunk space opera with **Mage** . Sure, it’s far afield from the original setting, but it’s not impossible and it’s a lot of fun. Here’s what you need to do....

- Your main characters are mages — probably Etherical Engineers (Matter) who include such diverse groups as Void Riders (Dimensional Science), Virtual Pioneers (Correspondence) and Tesla Designers (Forces). In essence, the Etherical Engineers *are* the Tradition council, and the subgroups are like the Traditions, each with a specialty. Since they all agree on the idea of mystically enlightened science as a paradigm, though, they get along about as well as the Technocratic Conventions in the core setting. The Etherical Engineer groups have the advantage that their science is largely coincidental — everyone uses it. If an Etherical Engineer modifies a space ship,

for instance, most people accept that he's just a scientist doing what he does well.

- Mystically oriented magicians are rare but not unheard of. As a modern mage in the core game might use cell phones and cars while also using his Spheres, a mystic in this setting will use the oddball electropunk science of the setting in addition to Sphere magic. The Order of Hermes would still have a minor presence. Euthanatos have vanished and become an underground organization in conjunction with the Ahl-i-Batin; they believe that their position is morally superior to the "ethical calculus" of the Etherical Engineers, and they work as secret agents in society, eliminating dangerous people or ideas and carefully pruning the branches of humanity that become excessive. Akashic Brothers are yogis and martial artists who still hold the original secrets of Asiatic mysticism and study those arts to hone their bodies instead of attending the schools and colleges of the formal world; while they are considered odd, they're still respected. Dreamspeakers are all but gone, with only technoshamans remaining, who are seen as odd throwbacks and divergents who try to speak to the supposed intelligence of all devices.

- Technocrats are very banal scientists who ploddingly and methodically believe only in rational science. They are public, but they are considered a reactionary fringe group — people who are "deluded" into believing that the universe has only what they can see. Their science lacks luster and flash, and thus it's often Paradoxical; without true inspiration, science can't possibly work, as everyone knows!

- Instead of spirits, the setting has extradimensional entities and alien creatures. You build them like spirits or bygones, though. Etherical Engineers might use ether shockwave cannons or Tesla arc guns to fight such menaces.

- On the outskirts of inhabited space, outside the Sphere, are those humans who've rejected the ethical calculus of the Engineers — the dangerously insane and deranged, Nephandi, Marauders, Cultists of Ecstasy who live only for pleasure, Verbena who believe that technology is an abomination. These colonies occasionally raid other ships in pirate attacks, and rebel insurgencies sometimes happen. Heroes might try to convince them of the error of their ways or go with their alien allies to stop a terrorist plot.

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN: ALTERNATIVE RECKONINGS

Without a doubt, the Reckoning shook up the **Mage** setting. What happens if the Reckoning happened differently? What if this cataclysmic event happened in some other time period? Or if its impact was different?

Consider what might have happened if the monster that rampaged across India had awakened much earlier. What if it had awakened in 10th-century Europe? Without nuclear weapons, the Order of Hermes may be forced to resort to extremely dangerous and destructive magics to stop it. The easiest way may be to try dropping a comet on it. This may take a while, allowing the monster to destroy European civilization before being destroyed itself. If the comet is big enough, its impact might send enough dirt into the atmosphere to start a new Ice Age. Consider the possibilities of **Mage** games set in the ruin of Europe's new Dark Age, in the wake of a Muslim conquest of shattered Europe or in a world where the majority of human civilization survives in the now much cooler tropical regions.

Speaking of Ice Ages, the Aztecs believed that their human sacrifices kept the sun from going out. What if they were right? Imagine the sun starting to dim in the 16th century, beginning a new Ice Age right in the middle of the Renaissance. What would characters in such a setting do if they discovered a faction of mages trying to bring back the sun with mass human sacrifices?

The wake of the Reckoning has seen the dead rise from their graves. What if there were a lot more bodies to go around? The worldwide influenza epidemic after WWI killed millions. What if all those bodies dead from war and plague rose up to take revenge upon the living? If your players are fans of *Night of the Living Dead* and other zombie movies, they might enjoy such a setting, either as mysterious horror or as splatterpunk.

What if the Reckoning gave rise to superhumans? The trigger event for **Aberrant**'s Nova Age is very close to the same time as the Reckoning. How would the Technocracy react to Novas? Would mages be able to pass themselves off as superhumans?

What if, instead of the Avatar Storm, much of the Tradition leadership fell to Infernalism? Perhaps the desperation of fighting a losing battle for so long

finally caught up to them and they sold their souls in the name of revenge. If so, then perhaps after they killed much of the Union's leadership, the damned Masters and Archmages were dragged off to Hell by their demonic masters, leaving younger mages to pick up the pieces.

How about an alien invasion? Can the Traditions and the Technocracy work together to save Earth from attack? What if it isn't aliens? What if the invaders are demons, or armies of Fair Folk intent on enslaving mankind? What if the machine cult of Autochthon has build a robotic army intent on wiping out all organic life?

Finally, what if the Reckoning destroyed Earth altogether? Can mages survive in the Umbra, with no Earth to return to?

SPIRIT WORLD REALTIS

The Umbra can provide a ready source of potentially infinite locations with wildly divergent settings and rules from the standard World of Darkness **Mage** game. **Mage** players might leave the Middle Umbra to dive into the depths of the Abyss, where the spiritual threat of universal entropy is omnipresent. They might find completely ridiculous realms in the High Umbra representing the ideal of the perfect French fry. They might visit the dead trapped in the Low Umbra. Each of these divisions within the spirit realms harbors gateways to realms beyond human count, containing some representation of every idea ever conceived, often repeated numerous times in slight variation. Uncounted versions of Asgard await, each ruled by a somewhat different mirror of Odin, while other realms stand like infinite reflections of human desires. Mages using the Spirit Sphere can enter such realms, possibly bringing their friends along, but doing so subjects them to the sometimes drastically different laws that govern the realities of these Other Places.

NEW BREITEN

The Digital Web presents numerous realms which merge the mystery of the spirit world with the technology of various scientific mages. As such they contain realms formatted from the raw technospirit stuff of the Web into the various pipe dreams and fantasies of programmer mages and holographic artists. Storytellers familiar with White Wolf's online chats might even decide that online environments such as New Bremen (found at <http://www.white-wolf.com>) are real within the Digital Web. White Wolf has too much respect for the independent

creativity of its fans to desire to print the thousands of stories the fans enact every day on the chats. Nonetheless, there is nothing to prevent Storytellers hungry for inspiration and ideas from logging into the New Bremen chat and adopting ideas they discover there for their own personal games and storylines only. You might decide that you could immerse mage players who travel the Digital Web into a cybernetic realm reflecting the online world of New Bremen. Your mage characters might wander the dangerous city streets, step into the posh Faust nightclub or investigate the ruins of the burnt-out Ten-do Dojo. Perhaps they could dare the werewolf-held Blue Caverns or share a quiet dinner atop Moribund & Smirch towers in the penthouse restaurant known as The View as they enjoy a magnificent vista of the city beneath. Whatever the Storyteller decides, a potentially never-ending source of inspiration can be gained simply by visiting the chat and participating from time to time.

REGIONAL PARADIGMIS

Not every alternative setting has to be a different reality, another world or a spiritual realm. The earthly boundaries of the World of Darkness are immense and varied. Within our world are more diversity and wonder to be explored than anyone could ever accomplish in a lifetime. From the painted boats of the harbor people of Hong Kong to the depths of the Amazon jungle to the shadows of the ancient pyramids, there are mysteries waiting to be explored. In **Mage** these differences do not have to be considered merely a matter of geography. A different locale may contain its own magical histories, superstitions and believers. Not every culture has sanitized its sense of myth to the point that its citizens discuss the divine with a blasé tone on cold computer screens between bites of delivered pizza. Even within the more "civilized" nations, various groups preserve the old ways through devotion and care. Magic is like a living thing, thriving on the beliefs and dreams of sentience.

Anywhere that the conscience of the people is sufficiently powerful to sway the world's supposedly objective reality toward their subjective desires is a place where the laws of physics or magic may change. In **Mage** terms such an area can be considered a local paradigm. The core **Mage** rules already state that the presence of more than 100 people who believe in the same paradigm as the mage may allow some vulgar effects to be considered coincidental if no other witnesses are around to contradict them. Having

that many people agree about anything can be difficult, but when a group has a large degree of commonality it becomes far easier. Everyone growing up in the same town, for example, is likely to share many of the same stories, legends, knowledge of street names and possibly such things as religious beliefs. On a larger scale, many towns in the same area of the world may share a cultural bond that unites all of their citizenry in religious dogma, moral consequence, educational differences or perhaps fearful superstitions. An area of large size sharing many people with a specific focus on the workings of the universe might form a regional paradigm.

What precisely this means for a mage is up to the individual Storyteller. Some Storytellers may feel that the reality imposed by the mass of Sleepers who have come to believe instinctively in the scientific principles put forth by the Technocracy is so firmly entrenched that real-life physics are indeed standard factors throughout their individual World of Darkness games. In such a game, anywhere in the world that a mage works magic, whether in downtown New York or in the Outback of Australia, the effect will be limited only by her power and the presence or absence of Sleepers. The universal natural order taught by Western science becomes the true face of reality, with magic relegated to being either an artifact of the past or an alternative reality invasive to ours. This choice is not necessarily bad, as it accentuates the victory of the Technocracy over the more mystical Traditions by hard-coding it into the rules.

The example from the core rulebook and its loosening of the bonds of physical reality for mages with large groups of like-minded acolytes may inspire other Storytellers to explore the idea of regional paradigms for their games. It makes sense that the various Traditions of magic have held to their geographical areas for reasons beyond mere creature comfort. Each Tradition sprang from a certain culture and might feel a bond with its origins, but it is easy to guess that there is more to it than this alone. The very culture that serves as the wellspring of a Tradition also offers the will of its people toward strengthening the paradigm practiced by that Tradition. Within eastern Asia, for example, the Akashic Brotherhood finds ready succor in the ease with which people accept and understand philosophies the brothers must spend years explaining to Western counterparts. Is it so hard to believe that the sheer volume of beliefs that resonate with the Akashic paradigm would empower their practice of magic?

This resonance with locales can go beyond the mortals who inhabit them. The world is composed of patterns stemming from ancient Mythic Threads that stretch back into the mists of time. Spirits in every rock and piece of wood have existed for centuries. The very land absorbs the beliefs of its people. Even an atheist might feel the holy aura which radiates from an old church, once carved from pagan rock but now endowed with centuries of faithful Christian reverence. A practitioner from the Celestial Chorus certainly could draw more easily upon the divine from within the walls of a place that has become sanctified beyond mere scriptural declaration. For the Ahl-i-Batin such places have even become singular points upon a much larger lattice-work of power known as the Web of Faith. Within the Web's confines the Subtle Ones are more potent if only due to their ties to the faith that flows through the mystic traces between the holy sites anchoring it.

Do not suppose that choosing to use regional paradigm rules invalidates the Technocracy, however. It is no coincidence that things like labor camps, factory towns, business districts, medical "research triangles" and demilitarized zones exist. Some citizens of the World of Darkness live their entire lives in a few blocks, traveling only from their condominium to their work cubicle to the overpriced supermarket they pass on the first floor on the way to the elevator. Entire cities have sprung up around single industries or their related businesses, from high-tech Silicon Valley to the Syndicate wet dream of Las Vegas. For an example of how thoroughly these places can become controlled by a single way of life, one need only look to the failed steel plants of Pittsburgh and Allentown or the tapped-out mines of West Virginia. The lore of technology can still seep into humanity and become its blood, such that it alters nearly every thought and if removed leaves a barren husk.

In places where things have gone terribly wrong the Nephandi are most powerful. The rotting corpse of a mining town might inspire in Nephandi the same twisted glee at the torment of Creation they find in the tribal killings in Rwanda, the rampant AIDS-filled sex pits of Thailand and the transition of zealotry into the Crusades. Visitors to Holocaust sites in Europe often report a deep sense of haunting felt to the very bone when they stepped into the places where once the Nazis fired up ovens or gassed victims by the hundreds. It is ironic that such places are nil-spots to the liars who claim the Holocaust

never occurred, for what true power do the Nephandi serve but that of Oblivion?

RULES FOR REGIONS

In game terms the general effect of a local or regional paradigm is to alter the way that magic works. A Storyteller should decide how drastically she wants these changes to affect her game and should be sure that she is prepared to incorporate those changes in a way that makes her stories stronger rather than compromising the players' suspension of belief. On the lowest end of the scale is limiting the effects of regional paradigm to changes in difficulty numbers. At the other end of the spectrum, a Storyteller may wish to allow minor physical alterations of reality without proper magic use, such as allowing martial artists in the East to leap further than they might in the West. This section offers some guidelines for changes in the rules that one might wish to include in a regional paradigm.

Acolytes: A large proportion of the inhabitants of a town or nation whose culture is strongly supportive of the paradigm of a mage's Tradition might automatically be treated as acolytes for magical purposes. This would mean that they did not count as Sleeper witnesses and that having more than 100 of them present would potentially allow vulgar effects that fit within their beliefs to be considered coincidental. Better yet, if properly taught what to do, they might even be able to help perform magic by "acting in concert" or rendering aid in rituals. Additionally, a mage might discover that people possess the mundane knowledge she requires to be able to enact magic that demands information or skills she does not possess. Perhaps one of the best benefits is the fact that citizens of a region that supports a mage's paradigm may not be of any help to his enemies. Technocrats chasing Euthanatos mages into Calcutta may be rudely surprised at the sheer power of cults they consider archaic and backward in thinking. Storytellers should be careful to consider that some regions might not specifically help any of the main Traditions, or might even surprise mages who expect their aid. A Celestial Chorister driving into Amish country with his gun, radio, cell phone and electronic copy of the Bible may discover that the beliefs of those around him are different enough from his that they are of little help beyond their mundane friendliness. On the other hand, the Amish spirituality might prove beneficial to a Dreamspeaker with a fairly strong belief in the ultimate dominion of Gaia.

Resonance: Regions are as filled with Resonance as particular events or objects are; one might consider them even more so. Magic meshing with the Resonance of a place may gain a -1 bonus to the difficulty number for success, while that which defies the natural order of the area may gain a +1 penalty to the roll necessary. When using regional paradigm rules in her game, a Storyteller should consider the Resonance of the place separately from that of the mage and have both of them modify the difficulty of Arete rolls. Thus it is possible that an area may aid a mage who is of like Resonance and hinder a mage who is not. Holy miracles performed by Chorister magic in Rome that fit with its Catholic heritage are more likely to succeed. Rites held in the imperial city tapping into the sacrificial magic of Mithraism are probably going to be more powerful as well. A Nephandus defiler trying to destroy a devout soul within St. Peter's Basilica isn't likely to have much luck, however, while a thuggee assassin of the Euthanatos might be walking death in the streets of Calcutta.

The proposed changes up to this point have been very subtle and unlikely to change a game severely but do add a strong regional flavor to the mix. Some Storytellers might wish to stop there. Others may wish to venture further and truly explore the idea that other cultures aren't just different in thought — in a dynamic world, they could alter the very fabric of reality around them, seeming extraordinary to outsiders. Even Storytellers who do not wish to adopt the following rules as part of their regional paradigms may include them in their games as examples of things that could be achieved with magic rather than natural results of a localized reality.

Gauntlet: The Gauntlet stands as the divider of the spirit realm from the physical world. Its presence predates the Technocracy by far, but certainly the Union has seen to it that the Gauntlet has grown thicker than ever. The connections of mankind to the spiritual grow tenuously weak in modern times, to the point that we often fear those who still maintain them or are jarred with terror at accidentally rediscovering them for ourselves. True believers are often seen as madmen and zealots by Western society, sometimes even by organizations that purport to represent the divine. Tools that might open the pathways to the spiritual are tainted by propaganda so thick that their real dangers become obscured by the lies and their value lost in the rhetoric. Visionaries who might once have briefly touched heaven

instead are consumed with angst so strong it turns the fanciful utopia of hallucinogens into therapy sessions in hell, while DEA agents hammer down doors and harass the innocent with increasing impunity as they wage a war for our souls. Nevertheless, the spirit world in **Mage** is there, it is real and it is powerful. Spirits beyond count slumber fitfully in everything around us, and it takes only the whiff of the proper magic to at least cause them to turn in their sleep.

The Gauntlet can be affected two different ways by regional paradigm rules. The simplest and most common way is for it to be raised or lowered by the inherent belief or disbelief in the spiritual by the populace. Downtown New York City may have a Gauntlet of 8 or 9, while downtown Port-au-Prince, Haiti is likely to have a Gauntlet rating of 6 or 7. In nations like Japan it is possible that the continuing religious beliefs are balanced enough with the intense industrialization that the Gauntlet ratings remain those normally stated on page 209 of **Mage: The Ascension**. If a region has a stronger degree of belief in spirituality, the Storyteller might universally decide that all Gauntlet ratings within that region are one point lower, while a heavily technological area might cause all Gauntlet ratings to be one point higher. Given that the chart already takes the relative population density and wilderness of an area into account, and is probably already slanted toward an American point of view, a Storyteller might choose to consider the chart the United States standard. This might mean comparing the relative spiritual beliefs of other regions to that standard. Beware making judgment calls like this without considering the feelings of your players and the biases you may bring to the table. Such rules considerations should not be turned into excuses to practice racism or nationalism and should only be used to improve the unique flavor of an area as befits its role in your stories.

Another, somewhat more complicated, way to handle the Gauntlet with respect to regional paradigm is to have it fluctuate according to certain variables. If a paradigm is very established as dominant within an area, it might influence the Gauntlet beyond simply being thick or thin. Perhaps spirits who are supportive of the reality of the paradigm are given easier access while those who are disruptive are further dissuaded from participation in the physical realm. It might seem that this is already covered by Resonance, but it goes beyond that. A Hermetic

mage trying to summon a lightning spirit in China might find the Gauntlet is thinner overall. Imagine, however, if that mage attempted to summon the ghost of a dead person. He is surrounded by a culture with a long history of belief in ancestor spirits. While it might still be easier to summon a lightning spirit in the more mythic realm of the East, summoning ancestor spirits could be almost trivially easy for those who have the skill. In order to put this rule to work, a Storyteller should apply an increase or deduction to the Gauntlet rating of either one or two points based upon whether the Gauntlet of that area would commonly be tested in that manner. In a sense the Gauntlet has weakened due to the repetitive moving of certain types of ephemera through its veil; it is likely to remain stronger in areas in which it is rarely tested.

Time: While perhaps more confusing to consider it is also possible that a regional paradigm could affect the way that time flows or is viewed. In the timeless tracks of the deserts of the Middle East one might more easily peer beneath the sands into the past. Perhaps this was an inspiration to early Ecstatics, or maybe their long presence encouraged the desert's memory. In the humid forests of India a mage might discover that the frenetic pursuit of life is quick and his spells fade away faster as they are soaked into the living landscape. The lesson of the cycle is laid so bare here that one can imagine Euthanatos Masters bringing their students to immerse themselves in it. Standing upon the newest piece of rock in the world, just cast out of the volcanoes of Hawaii and cooled by the sea, a mage might find his spells more enduring, filled with the energies of creation. What Dreamspeaker could not watch the spirits of fire and water dance forever? The Storyteller can easily represent these sorts of regional paradigm changes by requiring one or two fewer or more successes for duration or by moving up or down one time span on the Time Lines chart.

Correspondence: A strong paradigm might alter the way that connections and distances work for magic. In India, even the shadow of an Untouchable is said to carry uncleanness, and it is not hard to imagine Euthanatos extending their touch to include their shadows. In the mountains of Asia, each valley can seem like its own little world of peace. Akashics find it easy to strengthen the natural barriers against intrusion, perhaps even coincidentally differentiating between the raucous who stir avalanches into motion and the meek who may safely

pass into their secluded realms. In game terms, a Storyteller may alter the range, difficulty or connections of Correspondence effects to represent the physical and cultural aspects of a regional paradigm. It might be easier or more difficult to establish connections with subjects who are assumed to have certain properties or defenses. In Haiti, dolls might server as stronger connections than elsewhere, while Mecca might radiate a holy centrifuge so powerful that the devout can sense its direction from anywhere in the world. Some Middle Eastern areas might naturally associate a picture of a person with his soul, providing a stronger connection than normal, while a photograph found in the camera-filled city of Los Angeles could contain nary a bit of essence of the vacuous face of the shining starlet it shows. Transporting from one valley in the Himalayas to another may prove far more difficult than teleportation between Manhattan high-rises equally distant apart. In general Storytellers should alter the number of successes required, range rank or connection category by only one or two lines on the Correspondence Ranges chart on page 209 of the **Mage** rulebook.

Paradox: Possibly no part of **Mage** is more open to customization than the forces of Paradox. By its very nature it is both ironclad in its perpetual vigilance and seemingly somewhat fickle in its specific manifestation. Certainly it is easy to imagine any Paradox that is enforced by a spirit being shaped by the nature of the punishing creature, but even nonsentient forces have a special feel or taste to them. Additionally, some regions may accept certain actions as coincidental while others treat them as vulgar in the extreme. Storytellers should not hesitate to personify the regions they are trying to portray through the manners in which Paradox is displayed.

The first thing a Storyteller should probably consider is whether a regional paradigm might be more forgiving of a magical action than the theoretical standard reality might be. If the people of Mecca expect to be blessed by traversing the distance around the Dome of the Rock, then a Chorister spontaneously healing a tragic, but genetic, defect will be coincidental. In the streets of Asia, shattering even a very thick brick wall with a punch could be ignored as an example of incredible martial arts skill. Dancers of certain tribal areas are routinely expected to walk across hot coals without damage. Causing an entire ship to vanish in the Bermuda Triangle would only add to the reputation of the place.

Storytellers wishing to put this rule to full use should feel free to research the traditions and superstitions of the areas they are trying to define. Thousands of beliefs, some strong and still supported, others vague and barely remembered, will come bubbling to the surface and empower innumerable mysterious events without invoking the attention of the forces of Paradox. Obviously this favors a mage whose Tradition normally resides in the area of focus. His entire paradigm will have evolved within a society which shares the same, or at least similar, beliefs as his own. Outsiders may not understand why his magic does not call down retribution; even if they understand, they may not be able to duplicate his results. This is not limited merely to supernatural beliefs. Cars in real life do not commonly explode in gigantic fireballs with every impact, but a mage surrounded by Americans fed on years of television depicting that very "fact" will likely find even the most ridiculous conflagration possible to create without raising the ire of Paradox.

Alternatively, Paradox may be less forgiving of magical actions that defy its regional paradigm. Invoking magic to find one's way during a storm in the Bermuda Triangle might be considered paradoxical in those mysterious waters. Trying to bring good luck through Entropy while wearing a color that locals consider decidedly unlucky may bring even worse misfortune to the mage trying to flaunt what they see as natural law. Failure to apologize to the spirit of a bison caught coincidentally using magic to hunt might bring retribution from a tribal land that still respects the ancient ways.

In addition to making Paradox more or less forgiving in its idea of what is coincidental and what is vulgar, a Storyteller can have the form taken by the Paradox resonate with the regional paradigm. Sometimes this can be as simple as giving an almost coincidental feel to the appearance of Paradox. Botched efforts to use Forces to get more power out of the engine of a Jeep fleeing across the Sahara Desert could manifest as sand in the gas tank, intake valves and sensitive joints and bearings. Dangerous botches with Life effects in Calcutta might cause the mage to become terribly ill with one of the diseases that rage through the overcrowded city. The Himalayas might punish a mage whose hubris causes him to launch fireballs at the nearby villagers by raining an avalanche upon his head. These sorts of Paradox manifestations add to the feel of a locale

without solidly assuming the air of the impossible that some other Paradox creates.

Sometimes Paradox strikes a mage in ways that are unmistakably wrong to the eyes of the typical modern Westerner. In the default game this can be devastating but perhaps a bit nonsensical and non sequitur. Given the flavor of a region, it is easy to turn these tragic and overbearing events into epic demonstrations of the myths that form the origins of the Traditions. If a Hermetic mage botches horribly in the Lands of Faith, have a rain of boiling blood fall upon him, causing those unsoakable aggravated points of damage the rules say he is supposed to take. If your Dreamspeaker loses control over her Spirit effect while visiting Haiti, have her soul wrenched out of her body into the trap of an enemy boccòr or have her Paradox spirit ride her like the most nightmarish of loa. The Traditions which naturally inhabit a region are more likely to expect such disasters and may be better prepared. Outsiders are probably going to be horribly surprised and stunned by indecision and confusion in the face of the worst that their hubris can bring upon them in a new place.

Worse Yet: Bold and adventurous Storytellers may wish to try even bigger changes to the game. It is possible to assume that even the most supernatural or high-science ideas of a region are reasonable accomplishments within its boundaries. Storytellers might assume that minor cures of a miraculous nature are possible simply by gaining enough successes on a Charisma + Expression roll and fervent prayer within the Holy City. A high Strength + Athletics roll might be sufficient to leap onto buildings or into trees in a village in China. Perhaps negative effects might become commonplace as well. In Asia speaking ill of an ancestor might cause some curse to befall the bad-mouthing mage. It might actually *require* magic to be able to leave Las Vegas with more money than you had when you came. There may be places in the Empty Quarter where a technological device's mere presence is paradoxical, as the *djinn* are offended by mankind's pride.

Storytellers should be careful if they decide to introduce such grand changes as these. Widespread and common events of a mystical or normally unexplained nature can reduce the sense of wonder that normally attends magic. Further, it may cause players to feel as though their abilities are entirely undependable and they may wonder why they worked so hard to make sure they were capable of certain

actions that apparently any farmer from Utah can do in his sleep. If something this fantastic appeals to the Storyteller and would add to the feel of the region's paradigm, it is probably best to introduce it in a very small area with a special explanation. Perhaps a tiny village in Asia is a training ground for Akashic Brothers; they have woven magic into the air that allows magnificent leaps only within their temple's walls. Maybe the curing prayers must occur while touching a specific saint's relics. Certainly there is nothing wrong with introducing powerful magic into the game — it is **Mage**, after all — but making sure that effects do not seem senseless or overly common helps preserve the majesty of the game.

SLEEPYTOWN:

SAMPLE REGIONAL/LOCAL PARADIGM

There is a small town in Idaho, or Illinois, or one of those “I-states,” which does not appear on any normal map. Toward the end of World War II, Department X of the newly forming National Military Establishment gained permission from the State Department's Assistant Secretary of European and Canadian Affairs to secretly relocate suspicious citizens of German descent. The United States had formed camps for Asians who were deemed potentially threatening to national security during fighting with Japan but had stopped short of actually detaining masses of European immigrants. Nevertheless, Department X successfully argued for access to those deemed dangerous by military intelligence. Within a month relatively unknown Germanic people throughout the US disappeared. They were relocated to Sleepytown.

At first prisoners faced metal fences and heavy security and were subject to long interrogations and propaganda sessions. They were also put to work changing the camp into something different. By 1947 the camp was ready to reveal its new face. The metal fences came down to be replaced by white picket fences. The military vehicles disappeared to be replaced with sleek new Fords and Chevrolets. The barracks were torn down and exchanged for friendly, whitewashed houses. A school replaced the mess hall and the town courthouse covered the ground where the commander's barracks once had stood. A person randomly driving down Highway 832 would find what seemed to be a typical all-American small Midwestern town. Except that Highway 832 didn't go anywhere.

None of the citizens of Sleepytown has left its cozy streets or returned to tell about it since 1947. Signs leading out of town always seem to promise nothing but the misery of missing their perfect homes, and every child born since the town's beginning has lived its entire life here. The tall corn is cut every year and sold to a manufacturer who sends trucks as regularly as clockwork. The hay is never in short supply and the cows are fat and profitable when the trucks come for them as well. The local supermarket is always well-stocked with everything a growing boy might want to eat and everything a busy housewife could possibly desire to aid in her domestic chores. Any man who doesn't work on his own farm works in the town factory, helping produce asphalt and high reflective paints, which ship out presumably to repair roads around the country. (Come on, you know you've always wanted to know where asphalt comes from.)

The people of Sleepytown might seem almost normal to a visitor. Except they don't get visitors, other than the men who drive the trucks that pick up and deliver the town's needs and production. Except that children have never seen the Smurfs or talking Care Bears or heard about Puff the Magic Dragon. Except that no one from Sleepytown ever heard about the Korean War, much less fought in it, nor the Vietnamese Conflict, nor the Cuban Missile Crisis. Instead children learn about the Internet, though their content is tightly controlled by a special filtering system. Their newspapers reported the election of Richard Nixon to replace a young Kennedy, who retired to be with his family. Their local TV station broadcasts *Star Trek*, *ER*, *Dark Angel*, the world news (sanitized for safety), technical learning programs and network television premieres of movies like *Gattaca* and *12 Monkeys*. The school library doesn't have a single book on mythology but contains the biography of Alfred Nobel, the complete *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* trilogy, *Babylon 5* episode videos and the works of Louis L'Amour.

Sleepytown is the place that magic and mysticism forgot. For almost 60 years its citizens have eaten, breathed and lived nothing but small-town America. This was the experiment the Technocracy had in mind. Department X set out to create the Supersleeper, a normal person without even the memory of the mythic garbage the Union has spent so long trying to stamp out of reality. Here are found people of such plainly logical bent that the very idea

of magic is foreign to their mind in the extreme. Mages and magical creatures venturing into such an area are likely to be in dire trouble.

Unfortunately for the Technocracy, their experiment is not perfect. They have managed perhaps to cause the common citizen of Sleepytown to view the divine as a human invention, but the town does still have a single church built at its conception by its original inhabitants. The aged reverend died a few years ago of a sudden heart attack, and certainly the sermons of his replacement seem less heartfelt and more formulaic in their rhythm than the inspiring speeches of the old preacher. Nevertheless, the town's elders still taught their children to say prayers before bedtime and ask grace at dinnertime, and such habits have been hard for the Technocracy to remove subtly without destroying the precious free will they feel their experiment must retain. Furthermore, even such technologically marvelous works as science fiction still occasionally inspire a wanderlust that Department X cannot quell. In those who do leave, the New World Order operatives assigned to the project replace their memories of Sleepytown with those of some other small town, ensuring their test subjects do not return to pollute the experiment.

In game terms, Sleepytown is a regional paradigm. Within the town, every single person counts as a Sleeper for the purposes of any remotely mystical event. Even normally coincidental events are likely to become vulgar without warning, whether there are witnesses to the event or not. Trying to disguise Time magic as fortune telling, for example, will backfire in the face of a populace which doesn't contain even the slightest superstition suggesting that such might be possible. Martial arts feats just won't seem plausible, nor will anything — not even black cats — cause bad luck. Mystic events are generally treated as vulgar, or vulgar with witnesses if any of the town's citizens are present.

Furthermore, the town's Gauntlet rating rivals that of a secure Technocratic Lab, giving a difficulty 9 to Spirit effects and requiring at least five successes in order to pull them off. Every Correspondence effect that reaches beyond the boundaries of the town in any way requires two additional successes to enact, unless it uses a technological communication system in its operation. Even then it is subject to tapping or tracing at the hands of Department X. Paradox might appear as odd interference in the line, or possibly as powerful weather disturbances such as



tornadoes. Time effects are extremely difficult when used in any effort to pierce backward beyond 1947. Treat any effort that involves target dates prior to 1947 as two categories more difficult.

Worse yet, Bygones and other supernatural beings are completely beyond the ken of the Sleepytown citizens. Even a werewolf or a vampire will suffer Paradox as though he were a mage should he exhibit any magical capabilities in front of a Sleepytown resident. It is possible that even the representation of a mythic creature would suffer — T-shirts bearing pictures of dragons might inexplicably begin to fade, while pentagrams slowly transform into World War II war medals. Whether this last defense is part of the paradigm or an effect engineered by powerful technomagic is up to the individual Storyteller.

The Technocrats of Department X have high hopes for the project, expectantly awaiting the slow death of the first generation of citizens and contin-

ued mental evolution of their subjects. The mishaps that confronted the single Virtual Adept-led Tradition attack that discovered and attempted to breach the town's outer security seemed to satisfy superiors who read the reports. Nevertheless, operators of the experiment are concerned that future difficulties to face the project may prove insurmountable. Should the world population continue to grow at too rapid a pace they may lose the ability to isolate the town and have to end the project prematurely. Even should the project last until completion, psychological technicians are unsure how they will preserve their work when the citizens of Sleepytown are faced with a world that defies the history they have been spoon-fed. So far the only proposed solution is the resident Void Engineer's suggestion that perhaps Sleepytown citizens could be transplanted to new colonies when the space program advances to that stage, thus left disconnected with any evidence of their duping.

SUSPENSION ⊕ OF DISBELIEF:



HOW TO USE FILMS TO ENHANCE YOUR GAITIE

Movies trust the audience to put some of their assumptions of reality aside so that they can tell their story, pretty much in the way a Storyteller expects her players to get into the concepts behind **Mage**, a game where “suspension of disbelief” can take more than one meaning, for players and their characters alike. In a game where belief shapes reality, suspension of disbelief can have tangible results and, in response, reality can come up with the most amazing surprises. (Note: The usual term is “suspension of belief,” but we prefer “suspension of disbelief,” since what you’re really trying to do is turn off the internal critic that’s always saying, “No, it can’t happen that way. I don’t believe it.”)

A Storyteller and a movie have a lot in common in that respect. They are each telling a lie, and know that their audience knows in return that it is a lie. All participants accept this in order to get to the meat of the story, taking in the new ways things work — in short, accepting a new paradigm.

Films are great as references in a game session; whether you are ripping off plots (a long and honored tradition in roleplaying) or simply borrowing elements from a favorite movie, they can be tools for creating or enriching your chronicles. Even if you’re only quoting a cool line or describing a Hermetic NPC as “just like Christopher Walken in that evil angel flick,” the presence of movies at the gaming table is undeniable.

You can milk your movie experiences for more than quotes and comparisons. You can model NPCs around movie characters, presenting a delusional Virtual Adept based on Neo from *The Matrix*, or make a young Hermetic prodigy look and act like Harry Potter. You can also play a chronicle in the movie’s world, throwing the player characters into a bizarre Horizon Realm modeled after *Dark City*. There are several things you can take from the movies, and not all of them have to do with the story itself.

CASTING CALL

As mentioned above, movies are very useful for coming up with nonplayer characters in any chronicle, either if you plan it beforehand or must come up with material on the fly. The bigger advantage of using

movie characters as the base for your supporting cast is that you don’t have to go to great lengths to evoke the image in the minds of the players. Indeed, if you describe the Hermetic contact the characters must get in touch with as the Archangel Gabriel as chillingly portrayed by Christopher Walken in *The Prophecy*, the players will know that the guy is creepy.

The disadvantage is that, for this evocation to work, everyone must have seen the movie you’re talking about. It doesn’t matter that Tony Leung’s troubled cop fits the New World Order defector you want to introduce to the story, the players will not be able to recognize him if they haven’t watched *Hard Boiled* (a grave mistake you should correct as soon as possible).

You need a common frame of reference with your players to pull off the recognition trick, but it doesn’t mean that you can’t use movie characters to populate your chronicles. You may not want to reveal your source of inspiration, but by having the character clearly depicted in your mind, it will be much easier describing her yourself. Don’t abuse this; there are only so many mages who look like Sean Connery in the world.

The best you can get from characters in film is mannerisms. You may be far from looking like Franka Potente in *Run, Lola, Run*, but if you try to mimic her frantic gestures you can act convincingly like the street junkie the characters decided to question out of the blue and for whom you had not planned anything.

Looking at the better half of world film, you can also fish for motivations for the antagonists. As has been stressed in many Storyteller games, the bad guys need a reason for opposing the characters beyond being evil evildoers of evil. A Nephandus who was pushed into the Caul by his wife’s suicide is a plot waiting to happen, like Sam Neill’s character in *Event Horizon*. Don’t be afraid to take from characters that don’t seem to have anything to do with your chronicle, or even with **Mage**; fashioning a villain from an unlikely source gives him a greater depth that will keep your players guessing. Push the main characters of *Eyes Wide Shut* a little further into the spiral, and you can have two very real and disturbing Barabbi Cultists of Ecstasy. Since you can always refer to the movie, it’s easier to keep track of the little details.

PLAYING PROTAGONISTS

Movies, as well as roleplaying games, are about characters struggling against something happening to them. It can range from a couple trying to keep a relationship working to a group of soldiers in search of fellow soldier lost behind enemy lines, or an unsuspecting woman saving humanity from the threat of robots from the future. In movies, characters are always *doing* something, and so should the characters in your game.

The problem in giving characters things to do, using cinema's example, is that there are very few movies about a group of characters like a **Mage** cabal; most of them focus on two or three protagonists who carry most of the plot on their shoulders. *Aliens* is not about a team of space marines on a bug hunt, it's about Ripley confronting the aliens for the second time; *Reservoir Dogs* and *Ronin* come close to being ensemble movies, but sooner or later the focus shifts to two or three characters.

Choosing a character in your game as a protagonist is unfair to the other players, but it's not unthinkable if you plan a series of short chronicles, each based around one or two characters with the rest as supporting cast. All in the group must agree to this and respect each other's turn in the spotlight.

This approach doesn't require as much planning as it needs cooperation. A normal chronicle shifts focus from character to character, following the model of a TV series instead of a movie, which flows around a single character's growth. After all, there is a limit to what can be explored in a two-hour movie, as opposed to a whole season on TV.

Playing a protagonist chronicle means that the main character will get most of the game time and the best hooks while the others hang in the background, providing support for the story and waiting for their chances at center stage. This gives you a chance to focus on the Backgrounds, Merits and Flaws the player bought at character creation and thought would seldom come into play.

THE PLOT THICKENS

Unlike many films, the story in a roleplaying game is character-driven, not as much carried forward by the necessities of the plot. You also don't have the same control over the protagonists' actions as a scriptwriter has. The characters are not your creations, they are the players', and what you thought could be an excellent plot hook for a character could be totally overlooked by the player in question.

This doesn't mean that you can't use movies to plan the flow of a **Mage** chronicle. In the case of particularly cinematic stories, the basic film structure fits like a glove, because that is more or less what everyone is expecting.

THE THEME

One of the techniques of scriptwriting is to start from the core and go outward. You must first decide what your chronicle is about, not so much in terms of plot but of a *central theme*. Some examples are the fulfillment of a prophecy (*Dune*), love triumphs above all (*Ladyhawke*), friendship and sacrifice (*Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring*), etc. The central theme is the point that you, as a Storyteller, want to get across; it shows up in the characters' goals, in the actions of the supporting cast and in the symbolism you throw around. When you have a core concept firmly in mind, you can come up with plot elements in the middle of a session and still have it look like you planned for them beforehand.

In *The Insider's Guide to Writing for Screen and Television*, author Ron Tobias proposes the following themes as the most common in film and television:

1. Quest or Search
2. Adventure
3. Chase or Persecution
4. Rescue
5. Escape
6. Revenge
7. Riddle or Enigma
8. Rivalry
9. The Disdained
10. Temptation
11. Metamorphosis
12. Transformation
13. Maturity
14. Love
15. Forbidden Love
16. Sacrifice
17. Discovery
18. Excess
19. Ascension
20. A Fall

THE PLOT

Of course, you may not want to sound preachy to your players and may prefer to run a more event-driven story, in which case you skip the theme and go directly to the next phase: the *plot*. If the theme is

what the story is about, the plot is what happens in the story. Check the synopsis in a cable guide or the back of a DVD box; you can find good examples of what coming up with a plot looks like, except that the copy writers for TV guides and video boxes have an eye toward baiting people to watch or buy the movie. You only have to write in a short sentence or paragraph what you want to happen in your chronicle in broad strokes.

“Drama” is a word that is mistakenly used to describe psychologically charged stories, where the affairs of the heart are the stars of the movie. Men often refer to these as “chick flicks.” “Drama” means *conflict*, and it is the basis of any story worth telling: Conflict and struggle are the fuel for any narration, whether it is a struggle with outside or internal forces. In 1868, Georges Polti came up with a list of 36 basic dramatic situations that repeated themselves in the literary works of his time. Ironically, there have been little to no changes to his list in the present, when other media have joined literature in the business of telling stories:

1. Supplication
2. Deliverance
3. Vengeance of a crime
4. Vengeance taken for kindred upon kindred (and we’re not talking vampires here)
5. Pursuit
6. Disaster
7. Falling prey to cruelty or misfortune
8. Revolt
9. Daring enterprise
10. Abduction
11. The Enigma
12. Obtaining
13. Enmity of kinsmen
14. Rivalry of kinsmen
15. Murderous adultery
16. Madness
17. Fatal imprudence
18. Involuntary crimes of love
19. Slaying of a kinsman unrecognized
20. Self-sacrifice for an ideal
21. Self-sacrifice for kindred
22. All sacrificed for a passion
23. Necessity of sacrificing loved ones
24. Rivalry of superior and inferior
25. Adultery
26. Crimes of love

27. Discovery of the dishonor of a loved one
28. Obstacles to love
29. An enemy loved
30. Ambition
31. Conflict with a god
32. Mistaken jealousy
33. Erroneous judgment
34. Remorse
35. Recovery of a lost one
36. Loss of loved ones

Polti came up with several complications for each of these basic plotlines, but it would take its own essay to talk about each one in detail, so use this list as a basic guide when you’re stumped for ideas.

FLESHING IT OUT

The next step in writing a script is the *treatment* or *proposal*, which may or may not be useful to charting out the story for a roleplaying chronicle. The treatment is a more fleshed-out account of the events in the story, usually around one page of text so that a reader has a better idea of what is going to happen in the story. Since the sequence of events in a **Mage** chronicle tends to be a rather chaotic affair, it’s hard to foresee what will happen in the course of a single game session, especially if you are the kind of Storyteller who likes to use the characters’ actions in later plot twists.

Whatever the case may be, writing a treatment for your chronicle can be helpful in keeping track of a story.

A tool that’s equally useful in writing for film and planning a chronicle is the *plot point*, a single event that is supposed to happen and pushes the story forward, or even in another direction. In *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the discovery of the monolith on the Moon is a plot point, as it gives the story a reason to send people to Jupiter. Plot points are signposts in the story, and they can come from any level in the narration: A character may reveal a secret from his past that gives new direction to the cabal’s actions, an ancient book reveals that all the characters’ assumptions were wrong, the antagonist does something that forces the heroes to change their plans, etc.

Anything can happen between plot points, so you can write a number of them and trust that, whatever the direction the characters take, the points will remain the same. Plot points are your friends, since you can drop them on the cabal when it looks like they are taking the wrong way for the story to flow as you had planned, and it won’t feel like you are

railroading them into a preset path. Do plan for alternative plot points, in case the mages accidentally kill the contact who would have revealed the little secret they needed.

THE LANGUAGE OF FILM (AND GAMES)

Film, as all media, has a language all its own that has nothing to do with words; the pacing of the action has its own meaning, as well as how the camera is placed and what the lighting suggests. A **Mage** chronicle and a movie have the same canvas on which they tell their story: time. Audience and players sit back and watch as the story unfolds before them; the difference is that roleplayers have a say in what happens, and they use their imagination actively instead of just being witness to the doings of the protagonists.

You can run a game by adapting film language; it takes some ingenuity to adapt some of the more visual elements, but it is entirely possible and can tighten your narrative skills and help the players immerse themselves in the story both as spectators and participants.

PACING THE ACTION

Storyteller games have the scene as a narrative unit, and they share this with movies as well as with theatrical plays and television dramas. Narrative units are then edited into a coherent whole. Films like Oliver Stone's *JFK* are perfect examples of the power of a good editor over film: the ability to put assorted imagery in a linear narrative to convey a message. Storytellers are both directors and editors of their chronicles, and they don't have the advantage of having all the pieces of the story strewn along the editing table, already finished and ready to assemble. As a Storyteller, you must pace your chronicle as it happens, but this doesn't mean that you can't use the concepts of film pacing to your advantage. In terms of film language, action can be broken into the basic units of shot, scenes and sequences.

Shot: In a film, the take is the smallest unit of narration; it is the time in which the camera focuses on a subject before it changes to another point of view. In game terms, you can use the concept of the shot as the time a Storyteller spends interacting with a single player, before another player takes her attention. You can pace these game shots as you will to create different effects. If you want to inject urgency, switch between players fast and don't give them any

time to think about what they characters do or say. You can interrupt your interaction with a player and leave him hanging, waiting for his turn under the "camera." During combat situations the shot is the same as the turn, and you can pace them with equal ease. You can pace the action more slowly, even if in the middle of a shoot-out, by spending a couple of minutes with a single character's actions, creating a slow-flowing rhythm. This is the way to create the John Woo effect: The hero sails through the air in slow motion, showering the bad guys in a rain of lead-riddled death.

Use description when you want to lengthen a game shot. By giving detailed description of a given location, you simulate a slow panning shot of the camera around the stage. Equally, giving short descriptions of objects and actions is the same as the camera spending only a couple of seconds focused on those subjects.

Scene: As mentioned above, Storyteller games already consider the scene as a unit in the building of a chronicle. In *Understanding Movies*, Louis Gianetti defines the scene as "an imprecise unit of film, composed of a number of interrelated shots, unified usually by a central concern — a location, an incident or a minor dramatic climax." The **Mage** rulebook already gives guidelines to the use of scenes, since it's a fairly simple concept, so we will focus on the pacing of scenes in a game session. As with managing a game shot, you can shorten or lengthen the duration of a scene to create mood and rhythm. A film editor can arrange scenes around with complete liberty, since they've been already shot, but a Storyteller must plan them more carefully and improvise. The point in the story in which scenes unfold is as important as the time it takes them to finish: The death scene of a nonplayer character doesn't have the same power if it happens early in the session or the story, but it can have tremendous impact if there are previous scenes with her interacting with the protagonists, especially if there is emotional involvement. There are no set rules about pacing scenes; it's an art that editors and Storytellers develop with experience.

Using the treatment method described earlier, you can make a run-down of the scenes you want to include in the chronicle. The plot-point approach is particularly useful in this, since it allows you to plan their introduction as scenes, and you can start setting them up once you know what they will be about.

Sequence: In their Mexican-published book *Práxis Cinematográfica*, Raúl Martínez Merling and

Francisco A. Gomezjara define the sequence as “a collection of various scenes bound together by a common dramatic link.” A single game session can be composed of one or more sequences, depending on their complexity. While a movie can be composed of a short number of sequences, a game’s story can have as many as needed. Using again the examples in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, you can make out four distinct sequences, some of them even pointed out by the director himself: The Dawn of Man, the Moon Finding, Jupiter Mission and Jupiter and Beyond Infinity. Each of them is a small story in and of itself, and they link together to form the larger epic.

You can use the plot-planning techniques described earlier to delineate a sequence, applying them on a smaller scale. Decide what a sequence will be about, what will happen in it and the scenes you need to pull it all off.

Looking at the big picture, a simpler structure is the classic beginning-middle-end model. According to Woody Allen, the only thing lacking a beginning, middle and end is the circle, but as he mentions later, circles are not quite as interesting. Syd Field gave scriptwriting one of its first theories: the three-act structure. This model can be applied to games as well, whether you’re planning your whole chronicle or just tonight’s game session.

First Act: In this phase, you begin the story and set up all its elements and themes; you present important NPCs and, as the characters begin to get comfortable, introduce the first plot point that will propel their actions forward. Use an appropriately placed action scene to spice things up and lead to the following part.

Second Act: In the midpoint, you have the confrontation: The characters realize who their enemy is or what they have to do to solve the story’s problem. This is the longer phase, as the characters work out the problem and gather the clues and elements to solve it. You can use another action scene, but you can vary it with more personal kinds of conflict. Use this phase for character development by introducing conflict with a secondary character or among the player characters themselves, though you need the players’ cooperation with this.

Third Act: Launch the last phase with another plot point. This one should provide the final clue to the story’s resolution or mark the beginning of the final confrontation. Kidnapping an important NPC is a tried-and-true method to get the heroes to the villain’s headquarters, having already figured out

where it is during the Second Act. The climax plays out in this part of the story, as does the resolution; the characters go home, having saved the world (or doomed it, depending on the results).

As you can see, planning the pacing of a chronicle is like drafting a series of movies that link together. You only need to go down the scale of Chronicle, Story, Chapter/Game session, Sequence, Scene and Shot, planning and improvising as necessary.

ROLL CAMERAS!

Film is primarily a visual medium, depending on the subtle manipulation of what the eye can see. A cinematographer aptly described his craft as “painting with light,” for the subtle changes in illumination are among the thesaurus of film language.

A roleplaying game is anything *but* a visual medium. A Storyteller can’t paint with light, but he has a more powerful canvas than film: the players’ imaginations. No special effects crew will ever be able to match what happens inside a person’s mind, and this is the tool that you can learn to use.

The secret for doing this lies in one of the oldest adages of traditional storytelling: Show me, don’t tell me. In this case, “tell” is like saying, “The Nephandus uses an Entropy rote, he rolls...four successes! Your weapon rots.” Description is the way to use cinematic imagery in a game. Instead of the dry description above, say instead, “The Nephandus utters an incantation in an obscene and forgotten language; you feel fate twist and scream and the fabric of your weapon begins to unravel under the assault of his unholy spell.”

LIGHTING

Try for visuals, too. Description is not limited to adjectives and flowery language: “A black mist rises from the Nephandus’ hands and swells like boiled tar as it surrounds him; you see the barrel of your shotgun start to boil in unison.”

If the room you play allows you to change the lightning, like having some table lamps plus a main light bulb in the ceiling, do it. Check out the room beforehand and decide how and when to switch the different sources of light on and off. A table lamp behind you will underscore anything you do or say with an added sense of menace; a light that only illuminates the table but little else it will make the players worry about the unknown that lies outside their control. The reverse effect, with lights around but not on the table, will give a sense that the



characters don't know the implications of what they have in their hands. In general terms, light is the focus of what the characters can control, and darkness is all that they don't know.

MISE EN SCÈNE

This term refers to the way elements are arranged inside the camera's frame; it encompasses composition of the scenery and characters as well as the camera's position. This part of film language is virtually untranslatable to a gaming situation, so the best you can do is adapt it. Again consider yourself as the camera, as in the example of shots and sequences. You are the filter through which your players interpret the story, and you can use that to your advantage. Stand up when narrating a menacing scene or portraying a regal and powerful character, crouch on the table to appear sneaky. Use your game books to frame your actions: If you pile up enough at each side of your place in the table, you can give the sense of closed space to the description that comes from your mouth.

SOUND AND MUSIC

Several Storyteller books recommend the use of music, and this cannot be stressed enough. Most people pay little attention to what their ears tell them, provided their eyes are distracted. Soundtracks are the obvious choice for cinematic storytelling; after all, the music was specifically composed to complement a narration. Other composers may churn a song that fits just right into your story, however. You're the best judge as to what kind of music will fit your style of storytelling, but a good trick is to keep an open ear for the song you want for a specific scene in the CD you're playing and quickly press "back" in the player until you reach it, then use "repeat" to cycle the track until you're done with it.

If you have access to a CD burner, you can make your own collection of music for each story or you can use any of the alternatives that the entertainment industry offers you to customize your music: from mp3 handheld players, programmable multi-CD racks and even sound files from a laptop and a couple of good speakers. Background music at the click of a mouse.

FROM SCREEN TO GAMING TABLE

If you can't think of anything for a gaming session, movies provide you with enough plot twists, characters, concepts and situations to help you. The fantastic genre is particularly well-tailored for this, with horror and science fiction taking the fore, but you can get ideas from anywhere, and these are but a few examples of how to twist existing movies to your needs. This is by no means a complete list; the history of cinema is huge, especially taking foreign productions into account, but these titles lend themselves easily to adaptation into **Mage** chronicles. Visit your video rental store for inspiration.

GENERAL THEMES

BRAZIL

Synopsis: In a dystopian future, a bureaucrat dreams of a better life and defies the system with the power of his dreams.

Mood and Theme: Hope, the absurdity of modern life.

Mage Chronicle: A Technocrat decides to defect after suffering an episode of Quiet; the cabal must help him, but they become trapped in the Technocrat's delusions.

DARK CITY

Synopsis: A man discovers that he lives in a simulated world where strange aliens toy with reality to learn from humanity. With this knowledge he learns to manipulate the false reality with the power of his will.

Mood and Theme: Enigma, entrapment, liberation and ascension.

Mage Chronicle: Characters are trapped in a Horizon realm where Umbrood change the parameters of reality.

EXISTENZ

Synopsis: A virtual reality game's programming becomes corrupted and immerses the players in a new level of reality.

Mood and Theme: Confusion.

Mage Chronicle: While on a mission in the Digital Web, the characters are unsuspectingly dumped into reality, and they are not sure what is real and what is part of the game anymore.

HIGHLANDER

Synopsis: A group of immortals fights through the ages, and the final battle is now.

Mood and Theme: Persecution, trusting normal people.

Mage Chronicle: The cabal discovers that certain Avatars are destined to fight each other, with the winner absorbing the loser and thus giving its mage greater power. One of the characters could possess such an Avatar.

IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS

Synopsis: The works of a writer look as though they affect reality, and they intend to summon horrors from outside human reckoning.

Mood and Theme: Paranoia, horror.

Mage Chronicle: A person known to one of the characters is committed to an asylum after reading a horror novel from a successful novelist, who turns out to be a Nephandus. The novel, when read by enough people, will open a way for the Malfeans to enter the world.

LOST HIGHWAY

Synopsis: A musician's wife is murdered and he is the prime suspect. He embarks on a journey where he turns into someone else and uncovers some mysteries about the murder. Or something like that....

Mood and Theme: Persecution, questions of identity, all-around weirdness.

Mage Chronicle: The characters are waylaid while using a magical means of travel, and they end a few days in the past, though they don't realize it and become the cause of the reason why they had to travel in the first place.

VIDEODROTIE

Synopsis: A porn-video distributor discovers a disturbing cable channel that slowly warps his mind.

Mood and Theme: Conspiracy, corruption.

Mage Chronicle: A New World Order operative is corrupted by the Nephandi and distributes pornographic videos that turn people mad, enforcing the Nephandic paradigm.

AKASHIC BROTHERHOOD CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON

Synopsis: A talented girl steals a legendary warrior's sword, stirring up a conflict of emotion and duty among some martial artists.

Mood and Theme: Love, duty, sacrifice.

Mage Chronicle: An upstart apprentice steals a Wonder, and it falls to the cabal to recover it even when the apprentice is, in some personal and close way, related to them.

SILK AND STEEL

Synopsis: An American travels to China to learn, at all costs, the secrets of a martial arts master, learning to appreciate Chinese culture in the process.

Mood and Theme: Discovery, wonder, clash of cultures.

Mage Chronicle: A young mage wants to study with the Akashic characters, and they must learn to accept each other.

CELESTIAL CHORUS

LOST SOULS

Synopsis: A young woman tries to save the world by convincing a skeptic that he is indeed the Antichrist and that he must kill himself before fulfilling his destiny.

Mood and Theme: Conspiracy, madness.

Mage Chronicle: A young Chorister known to have suffered Quiet has received a vision and tries to convince the cabal that a Sleeper is a powerful Widderslahte who can open the way for the Malfeans.

THE PROPHECY

Synopsis: A child holds the soul of a mortal general that an archangel needs to win the third war in Heaven.

Mood and Theme: Persecution, menace, battle against an overwhelming power.

Mage Chronicle: A group of powerful Umbrood cross the Avatar Storm to take the soul of a mortal that will lead them to victory. The cabal must keep them from achieving this.

STIGTIATA

Synopsis: A young woman (there are a lot of young women in here, right?) suffers from stigmata and spouts prophecy, urging the Church to investigate and uncover a dark secret.

Mood and Theme: Enigma, conspiracy, revelations.

Mage Chronicle: A Sleeper channels the Avatar of an old Chorister, manifesting in miracles.

CULT OF ECSTASY

THE ADVENTURES OF BARON MUNCHHAUSEN

Synopsis: An aging baronet saves a city from siege with tales of his extraordinary adventures, which keep him forever young.

Mood and Theme: Wonder, madness, creativity.

Mage Chronicle: A mage must go through a Seeking to try to find the common elements of his past that strengthen his personality.

DANGEROUS LIAISONS

Synopsis: Carefully planned snubs, social encounters and sex determine the state of grace — or fall therefrom — for the cream of society of the Renaissance.

Mood and Theme: Conspiracy, sensuality, lust.

Mage Chronicle: The cabal must unweave a web of personal deceptions, private letters and hidden agendas to expose an influential mage who abuses her position and charm to manipulate enemies into disgrace.

LORD OF ILLUSIONS

Synopsis: A private eye uncovers the reality behind a cult's leader.

Mood and Theme: Investigation, mystery, fighting against overwhelming odds.

Mage Chronicle: A cabal tracks down the survivor of a Nephandic cult and helps him fight the evil leader about to resurrect.

DREAMSPEAKERS

ALTERED STATES

Synopsis: A scientist uses drugs and sensory deprivation to reach back into humanity's primal past.

Mood and Theme: Discovery, degradation.

Mage Chronicle: The characters must discover a way to save a mentor who has fallen prey to ancestor spirits.

FINAL FANTASY: THE SPIRITS WITHIN

Synopsis: A woman gathers Earth's spirit wavelength to fight off an invasion of alien ghosts.

Mood and Theme: Discovery, hope, the power of life.

Mage Chronicle: Dreamspeakers and Void Engineers join forces to combat invading Umbrood from

the Dark Umbra, but they must find the way to summon the spirit of Gaia.

THUNDERHEART

Synopsis: A half-American Indian FBI agent finds himself embroiled in a government plot to overtake valuable land on a reservation and must embrace his heritage to understand the truth.

Mood and Theme: Confusion, self-discovery, conspiracy.

Mage Chronicle: A Technocratic operation suborns a Tradition mage into helping steal a valuable hidden Node. The cabal — some of whom have relatives or friends among the Technocracy enemies — must find a way to stop it but balance it with their duties to Traditions and family.

EUTHANATOS

THE CROW

Synopsis: A musician returns from the grave to avenge his murder and that of his wife.

Mood and Theme: Revenge.

Mage Chronicle: The mages must track down a recently Awakened mage and stop his murder spree.

THE PROFESSIONAL / LEON

Synopsis: An assassin takes a young girl whose family has been murdered under his wing.

Mood and Theme: Mercy, conspiracy.

Mage Chronicle: The mages save a promising young Euthanatos but must learn to kill for the right reasons.

THE SIXTH SENSE

Synopsis: A psychologist tries to help a child who sees ghosts. Beware plot twist.

Mood and Theme: Fear, helplessness, mercy.

Mage Chronicle: The cabal must help a Sleeper child able to look into the Shadowlands and put to rest the wraiths that plague him. Beware plot twist.

ORDER OF HERMITES

π : FAITH IN CHAOS

Synopsis: A mathematician discovers the key to the universe within the number π .

Mood and Theme: Discovery, persecution, madness.

Mage Chronicle: Hermetics and the Syndicate lock in battle to win the alliance of a man who has discovered the secret of the Tenth Sphere.

HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE

Synopsis: A child is destined to become a powerful wizard and is sent to study in a prestigious wizarding school.

Mood and Theme: Wonder, conspiracy.

Mage Chronicle: The characters search for a child hosting a powerful Hermetic Avatar and must teach him the ways of magic in order to fight off a powerful enemy.

SONS OF ETHER

ATLANTIS: THE LOST EMPIRE

Synopsis: A young man discovers the location of legendary Atlantis but must defend it from the group of mercenaries he traveled with.

Mood and Theme: Adventure, discovery, duty.

Mage Chronicle: Etherites discover a safe way to an ancient Horizon realm, and the characters must protect its ancient technology from being plundered.

THE ROCKETEER

Synopsis: A young pilot discovers a wonderful invention that allows him to fly and must protect its secret from Nazi spies.

Mood and Theme: Wonder, adventure.

Mage Chronicle: The characters must protect a powerful Etheric Wonder from falling into the wrong hands while learning how it works.

VERBENA

PRACTICAL MAGIC

Synopsis: Two sisters from a line of witches must break the curse over their family while overcoming their community's prejudice.

Mood and Theme: Love, hope, fight against prejudice, tradition.

Mage Chronicle: A Verbena cabal must break the curse over their chantry and protect it from the eyes of the Sleepers.

THE WITCHES OF EASTWICK

Synopsis: Three women are tempted by a demon into a life of magic and debauchery, but they find the strength to free themselves.

Mood and Theme: Fall and ascension.

Mage Chronicle: A mage cabal must track down the source of magical phenomena in a little town and save the mages responsible from Nephandic influence.

VIRTUAL ADEPTS

GHOST IN THE SHELL

Synopsis: A cyborg policewoman unravels the mystery behind a hacker AI that roams the network.

Mood and Theme: Conspiracy, discovery.

Mage Chronicle: The characters must track down an entity in the Digital Web that alters the memories of Sleepers using the Internet.

THE MATRIX

Synopsis: A resistance group fights machines in a simulated world, recruiting a man it believes to be the key to victory.

Mood and Theme: Ascension, rebellion.

Mage Chronicle: The cabal must search within a realm in the Digital Web for a lost Avatar.

ITERATION X

BLADE RUNNER

Synopsis: A bounty hunter must track down and destroy a group of rogue cyborgs while fighting his feelings for one of these cyborgs, who didn't know she is one.

Mood and Theme: Persecution, questioning.

Mage Chronicle: The amalgam must track and destroy rogue agents, with hints that they might be next.

THE TERMINATOR

Synopsis: A cyborg and a future resistance fighter travel to the present to fight over the future of a great human warrior.

Mood and Theme: Persecution.

Mage Chronicle: A team of HITMarks travels to the past to destroy a powerful Tradition mage before he Awakens.

NEW WORLD ORDER

ART OF WAR

Synopsis: A special-agent trainer for the UN goes rogue when he discovers that his superiors are using his organization to hit world leaders who don't fall in line with policy.

Mood and Theme: Paranoia, dawning realization, tension, action.



Mage Chronicle: An agent wants to defect from the Technocracy after he discovers too much evidence of corruption. The cabal members must help him defeat its special tracking devices, counteragents and contingency plans so that he can make a new identity.

LA FETTERIE NIKITA

Synopsis: A young woman is trained as an assassin but frees herself to enjoy the normal life she never had.

Mood and Theme: Liberation, innocence, corruption.

Mage Chronicle: An extremely capable Woman in Black is gone and it falls to the amalgam to track her down and bring her back for reprogramming.

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE

Synopsis: A group of special ops is framed and must clear their names and capture the real culprit.

Mood and Theme: Paranoia, revenge.

Mage Chronicle: The amalgam has been sold out and must prove its innocence before the Ivory Tower.

THE TRUTHIAN SHOW

Synopsis: A man discovers that his life is just a TV show and that everything in his world is fabricated.

Mood and Theme: Paranoia, discovery, liberation.

Mage Chronicle: A group of Men in Black try to escape their programming.

PROGENITORS

ALIEN: RESURRECTION

Synopsis: A woman must fight the alien menace loose in a ship bound for Earth while fighting her own genetic legacy.

Mood and Theme: Persecution, salvation.

Mage Chronicle: A group of clones is trapped in a research facility with dangerous Progenitor-created beasts.

GATTACA

Synopsis: A man tries to find a better life in a society where genetics determine career and social position.

Mood and Theme: Rebellion.

Mage Chronicle: Young Progenitor agents must prove their worth in a rigid Construct.

SYNDICATE

JACKIE BROWN

Synopsis: A woman commits a clever heist by playing parties against each other.

Mood and Theme: Cleverness, trickery.

Mage Chronicle: The characters must hunt down and capture a rogue Syndicate known to steal Quintessence with help from her victims.

THE BOILER ROOM

Synopsis: A young professional uncovers a fraud in the stockbroker firm he works with.

Mood and Theme: Conspiracy, fighting against overwhelming odds.

Mage Chronicle: The amalgam members discover that their superiors are corrupted and must find a way to report it.

VOID ENGINEERS

2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY

Synopsis: A mysterious monolith sends a signal from the Moon to Jupiter and a team is assembled to find out what lies beyond.

Mood and Theme: Wonder, discovery, paranoia.

Mage Chronicle: A lone Void exploration ship discovers a Wonder in the Deep Umbra that might have had an effect on humanity.

EVENT HORIZON

Synopsis: A rescue team discovers the terrible secret behind the disappearance of a prototype hyperspace ship.

Mood and Theme: Horror, survival.

Mage Chronicle: A group of Void Engineers finds that one of its ships traveled through Malfeas and it is now possessed by an evil entity.

THE WINGS OF HONNEATTISE: ROYAL SPACE FORCE

Synopsis: In a parallel world, a young man discovers his purpose and becomes the first astronaut.

Mood and Theme: Wonder, ascension.

Mage Chronicle: In an alternate setting, the characters must lobby the Technocratic Union for support in space exploration and launch the first manned mission to orbit.

DIRECTORS TO WATCH OUT FOR

The works of the following directors sometimes belong to the fantastic genre, sometimes they don't, but their mindsets reflect the concepts behind **Mage** pretty well — questioning reality and breaking barriers — or their imagery fits the game perfectly. Like the previous listing of movies, this is not a comprehensive list, and you may find directors whose work you like better or that the ones mentioned below just don't belong here.

David Cronenberg: A master of the strange, he often touches themes relevant to **Mage**, and his imagery is as disturbing as it is innovative. *eXistenZ* (1999), *Naked Lunch* (1991), *The Fly* (1986), *The Dead Zone* (1983), *Videodrome* (1983), *Scanners* (1981).

David Lynch: This man is just plain weird, with a lot of reality plays and brain candy. Recommended filmography: *Lost Highway* (1997), *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992), *Wild at Heart* (1990), *Dune* (1984).

Darren Aronofsky: Intelligent scripts and likewise intelligent editing and imagery. Watch for the pacing of his narrative. *Requiem for a Dream* (2000), *Faith in Chaos* (1998), *Protozoa* (1993).

Jean-Pierre Jeunet: Another director with haunting and beautiful imagery, you can keep his images in mind for bizarre locales, as well as rip off characters

and themes. *Alien: Resurrection* (1997), *La Cité des enfants perdus* (AKA *The City of Lost Children*, 1995), *Delicatessen* (1991).

John Woo: The master of action movies, he brings a refreshing perspective to scenes with lots of guns, with beautiful imagery and choreography in an otherwise dull and standardized genre. *Mission: Impossible II* (2000), *Face/Off* (1997), *Lashou shentan* (AKA *Hard-Boiled*, 1992), *Die xue shuang xiong* (AKA *The Killer*, 1989), *Ying huang boon sik* (AKA *A Better Tomorrow*, 1986).

Ridley Scott: An underappreciated director, his genre works are classics. *Gladiator* (2000), *1492: Conquest of Paradise* (1992), *Legend* (1985), *Blade Runner* (1982), *Alien* (1979).

Stanley Kubrick: There is no film this director has touched that is not a masterpiece. Watch for his sense of timing as well. *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), *The Shining* (1980), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *Dr. Strangelove, or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964).

Wim Wenders: His composition as well as reflective pacing make his movies, even the more commercial ones, little jewels in cinematic narrative. *The End of Violence* (1997), *In weiter Ferne, so nah!* (AKA *Faraway, So Close!*, 1993), *Arisha, der Bär und der steinerne Ring* (AKA *Arisha, the Bear and the Stone Ring*, 1992), *Der Himmel über Berlin* (AKA *Wings of Desire*, 1988).



CHAPTER SIX: A WORLD OF MAGIC



Brother Michael watched as Master Joreau drew a crimson circle that carefully intersected the four corners of the ceremonial cloth upon which he lay. The stories of demonic sacrifice began to swirl through his head again, and he grew afraid. Perhaps Joreau meant to render him up to the darker forces in exchange for some dark payment Michael could not even comprehend, though the price seemed eerily obvious.

The Master intoned the phrases that called for the Lords of the Four Quarters to take their positions of protection, yet Brother Michael's thin grasp of the lore at least let him hear the subtle differences: The patrons of the four directions in this ritual did not respond from any sense of duty, and they hungered for payment. He paused for a moment when he saw them take sudden shape from out of the heavy incense smoke before he realized that they were but cultist thugs, likely complete buffoons, taking symbolic part in the ritual.

Each of them grasped a corner of the black shroud of sackcloth upon which he rested. The smoke swirled and gnarled hands cast strange glistening globs in his direction. Great slimy pieces of some sort of fleshy substance began to gather around him in the bowl-like depression formed by the protectors of the compass points holding up the shroud upon which he rested. Cold gelatinous fluid began to cling to

Michael's naked flesh, and as he realized was being buried in dead afterbirth, he screamed.

The four corners swept across the sky and he was engulfed in wet, meaty darkness. The cold afterbirth stifled his breathing and he began to drown. Vague chanting still pierced his consciousness. Then a thick white explosion of pain racked his entire frame as a blow akin to some vicious kick struck him. Brother Michael was roused from the oddly comforting complacency that had begun to creep into his being as he swallowed plasmic fluid. He struggled for freedom. Time seemed to extend forever, and he thought for a moment that his life passed before his eyes. Just before he tore through the shroud he realized that something dark and sinister fought for freedom even as he did. Something powerful seemed to be tearing its way out of the shroud even as he fought to do so. As the flickering light of the torches set around the smoky circle broke through his vision, Michael saw for a brief moment that his rebirth from a dead womb created by dark magic had born more than a newfound cultist like himself. Indeed, something had come out with him, within him, and was a part of him.

"Greetings, Brother," he heard. But the voice intoned only deep in his skull. "I am the guardian spirit about whom your brethren spoke to you. Trust in me, for I am of you, and

we shall ascend to the heights of power. The world is your oyster now, and I am your hammer."

I suppose this is the second ascension I have heard so much about, thought Michael. I guess this is lucky; nobody else gets two guides down the road. I really was beginning to think this was all bullshit and that the Master was just personifying my essence in a different way. But, no, there really are two of them.

"Who you going to listen to, Michael, some strange figment of your imagination or your good old survival instinct? Remember me, remember when I told you to run that time in Paris? Remember that other time I told you it would be better if you brought the knife, just in case? Came in handy, didn't it?"

BREAKING BARRIERS



The World of Darkness is home to entirely too many strange and supernatural beings to allow humanity to exist in peace. Storytellers and players alike may be fascinated by the idea of blood-sucking predators treating the dark, smoggy cities as their own feeding grounds and mankind as a hapless herd. Others may be drawn to the savage glory of a dying breed of shape changing warrior-shamans struggling to save the world from a grim death in a desperate conflict fought with their own bestial rage. Some may instead prefer to explore the gritty condition of mortals trapped in a world filled with such deadly horrors. Mages are more human than any other supernatural in the World of Darkness, excepting perhaps the new hunters who arise among mankind, yet ironically they are perhaps the most likely to encounter other beings for long enough to form any lasting relation. It is a rare mage indeed who is not possessed of a mystical awareness that allows her to discover other magical beings hidden among the teeming masses, along with the curiosity to try to learn more about them. Most chronicles involving extensive contact between differing supernaturals are known as "crossover chronicles." It is worth noting that the information here is also useful to those who do not wish to run true crossover games but desire to bring as much clarity and detail as possible to those rare interactions between supernatural forces.

Storytellers and players who wish to explore chronicles wherein mages interact regularly with other supernatural creatures should seriously consider what might be gained and lost through mixing the genres. This is not to imply that anything is wrong with crossover, only that Storytellers and players alike should understand what they are doing before making the plunge. It is best to adopt the motto of the Boy Scouts and try to "be prepared."

The first issue likely to present itself is one of personal preferences. Each of the White Wolf core games is presented as a complete setting, with its own internal villains and its own themes. Players who naturally prefer

one game to another have their reasons, and no amount of preaching is going to change their minds. Introducing mages into a **Vampire: The Masquerade** game may seem to such players to pollute the setting to the point it no longer resembles whatever it is they like about it so much. Bringing werewolves into a **Mage** game may change the tone of the stories to something other than what your **Mage** players want. Extreme cases of mixing everything together may reduce the entire set of themes to a strange gruel that ultimately satisfies no one.

If all of you agree that crossover would be fun to try, then this phase of discussion is not a problem for your group. On the other hand, if you or some of your players want crossover but not everyone does, it is an issue and it is time to find out more. As Storyteller, it is your job to make the game fun for your players, as long as in doing so you can also enjoy it yourself. Ask what your players want in a game. Remember that there's nothing wrong with preferring one game to another. It is human nature to have favorites. If more of your players than not would prefer not to try crossover it is probably better that you wait until another time. Subjecting the entire group to an unwanted crossover game at the behest of one or two players, or perhaps even just your own desires, is not likely to be a successful and fun venture. If, however, the majority of players are excited by the idea but one or two are obviously not happy with it, you should probably focus on finding a compromise that satisfies the majority without unduly disturbing the fun of those who object. You might start by trying to find the source of their objections.

Some players and Storytellers will be absolutely horrified by the idea of crossover for a different reason — bad experiences. Perhaps one of them, or maybe even all of them, participated in a previous crossover game which failed horribly and ended disastrously, leaving everyone who left the game bitter toward the whole idea. Maybe the Storyteller carefully built an adventure meant to challenge a party of mages, only to have the HITMark completely shredded in three seconds by the werewolf character he let into the game on short notice. Players may recall the vampire who spiked their com-

munal chantry well and bound them all to his service and gleefully cackled about how they were all his slaves now. If you have never been in a bad game, congratulations, but most of us have not been so lucky. Consider the worst game you remember and keep in mind that others will have similar experiences that color their views of various game elements. If crossover was a tremendous source of disappointment to their previous gaming, you have to accept that their views will color their judgment of your game.

Getting past hard feelings toward a game is not so easy. One solution is to avoid whichever game elements led to negative experiences. If your friend Brent played with a guy who ruined the very concept of werewolves for him, then don't allow werewolves in crossover. If you are determined to choose **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** as a crossover opportunity, at least consider what Brent experienced while planning your game. If he had the most trouble because this other person played a bloodthirsty Red Talon werewolf who killed everybody who used technology, don't let anybody play a Red Talon werewolf. If one of your players was the victim of the vampire well-spiking story, warn vampire characters that selfish acts like this will not be tolerated, or perhaps ensure that the chantry has defenses against such duplicities.

Some players or Storytellers will simply avoid crossover with some games due to lack of knowledge about them. Such individuals haven't necessarily had a negative experience, they just don't know anything about the other game or games. People can act pretty funny when they don't understand something; some will react with fear, while others will belittle and deride that which they do not know. Anyone who has spent any time in online gaming forums can readily see this behavior. People who don't even know what a "Hunter" really is will launch into tirades completely bashing the **Hunter: The Reckoning** game as "twinky" because it threatens their character in another game. Others will subject **Changeling: The Dreaming** players to sexually derogative or mentally insulting comments, inferring it is somehow a game for children or people with alternative lifestyles. "Fear is the mind killer," as Paul says in *Dune*.

This one can be tough to solve as well. People who are mindlessly prejudiced against something are difficult to reach. Your best option is to try to teach them about the game they don't understand. Perhaps rather than crossing **Mage** with **Werewolf: The Apocalypse**, you should run a few sessions of **Werewolf** to let your players get the feel for the game by itself. After seeing the game in action players who thoughtlessly feared werewolves in concept might feel more comfortable with the idea. Those who belittled the game out of lack

of knowledge will suddenly find that they now have an attachment to the game and that few, if any, of their insults toward the game were true. If you cannot get anyone even to try the game, it is probably best to exclude it from crossover, but it is worth trying to introduce players to a new game. You never know — the introductory chronicle may prove to be as much fun as whatever you had planned.

Assuming that a group gets past any barriers of objections raised by its members, the Storyteller should still carefully consider what he and the group hope to gain from the exploration. Some focus is still good, and limiting crossover to **Mage** and one other game is the best idea. The supplement **Blood Treachery** is a good example of this, as it focuses upon struggles between vampires and mages. Introducing more than one type of supernatural into a **Mage** chronicle at the same time only multiplies the potential problems. Suddenly a Storyteller must not only focus upon any potential problems created by including vampires alongside mages, but he must consider the problems created by including werewolves alongside mages, and worse still that of werewolves alongside vampires. Chronicles that happily include any supernatural that strikes a player's fancy are in danger of becoming a World of Darkness version of the Superfriends. This may be precisely the effect desired by some groups, and if that is what you enjoy then have at it. We suspect that most groups are not aiming for that type of game, however, even if they wish to explore a crossover storyline.

It is with this assumption in mind that most of these crossover rules and suggestions are presented. Storytellers wishing to cross over multiple elements of the World of Darkness on a regular basis should consult the crossover suggestions of the respective games they intend to mix as well as those included here. It is not within the scope of **Mage** to define the entirety of the World of Darkness universe and its interactions. To attempt to do so would surely be an act of great hubris, bringing its own paradoxical forces to bear and resulting ultimately in failure.

One more important point to consider is the fact that each White Wolf core game is presented as an independent entity. The core books present their chief figures of the game as the dominant forces in their sphere of storytelling. When one reads **Werewolf: The Apocalypse**, the tribes that compose werewolf society are delineated, but vampires are presented primarily as lone villains without allegiance to anything other than the evil force that werewolves call the Wyrms. In **Vampire: The Masquerade**, we are given the idea that werewolves are rampaging beasts of the forest without mention of their intricate culture. In part this is an effort

by game designers to keep the themes of each game line relatively pure. From an in-character perspective, however, it makes a lot of sense. Werewolves are not great students of vampire society and generally will try to kill a vampire without bothering to learn to understand it. Vampires are too busy with their nightly affairs in the cities of the world to go tromping off into the forest. These are gross generalizations, but there is truth in them nonetheless. **Mage: The Ascension** tells stories about humans who aspire to ascend above their normal human state through the mastery of magic. It is not a game about sucking blood to live or about channeling bestial rage into territorial defense of the earth.

Because it can be as much of a struggle to mix themes successfully as it can be to mix rules smoothly, good Storytellers will look for common features to tie their choices of crossover games together. Using the example of **Blood Treachery**, the writers of that supplement tapped into the rich history of the Tremere, a clan of vampires who were once mages of the Order of Hermes. According to the history presented in **Vampire**, the magi of House Tremere abandoned their mortal magic in order to gain immortality. The Order of Hermes fought an extended battle called the Massassa War to purge itself of the vampires hidden within its ranks. **Blood Treachery** picks up the story centuries later, when memories have faded and passions died down. It demonstrates some very important ideas, however. It is absolutely imperative for successful crossover games to find some point of commonality between the disparate elements that the Storyteller and players hope to throw together.

This link does not have to bear the weight of ages, as the feud between the Tremere and their mortal antagonists does, but it does need some strength of purpose. A Storyteller desiring to blend the themes of **Mummy: The Resurrection** with those of **Mage** might take any of a number of routes. **Mummy** explores some strongly religious aspects, and players creating mages for crossover might play Celestial Chorus or Ahl-i-Batin characters with an interest in the moral aspects of the mummies who are to act as their coconspirators in search of good gaming fun. Alternatively, a Storyteller wishing to combine vampiric characters with mages might ask that players contrast the deathless existences of **Vampire** characters with the reverent respect that the Euthanatos bear for the cycle of life and death. Both of these ideas present a sort of unified theme and can serve as a starting point for any player who is trying to create characters for one game or the other with plans to participate in the crossover chronicle. Experienced Storytellers will already understand the value of having every player on the same page thematically during

character creation. Inexperienced Storytellers should take our advice to that effect found in previous chapters to heart until they learn for themselves.

Once the decision to combine two or more games has been reached, and suitable themes have blended to create a strong unity between the potential characters, the game may begin with suitable preludes and the opening of the main story. At this point Storytellers are likely to confront the final, and perhaps most confusing, potential problem with crossover — the rules. Even experienced Storytellers are often frustrated trying to combine games focusing on entirely divergent character types.

It is worth noting that each game's setting generally takes precedence when it is the primary game being run; crossover rules in a **Vampire** sourcebook will generally favor vampires, those in a **Changeling** book will favor changelings and so forth. This is a natural extension of the Storyteller system's treatment of players as the main protagonists (or antiheroes sometimes) in a fascinating story. While they may not be the mightiest, wisest or most influential beings in the world, it is vital that they be the most important characters in the stories that you, as a troupe, are playing. This is not to say that Brent's character Olof should be more powerful than the Russian crime boss Nikolai, but our game "camera" should certainly be more fascinated by the exploits of Olof than the background actions of Nikolai.

The following sections provide general discussions of some of the issues that might arise with crossover between the game at hand and **Mage: The Ascension**, followed by rules to reflect the interaction between the two games. Sometimes alternatives are presented, allowing Storytellers to tweak the contact between supernatural creatures in their games to fit their own personal visions more closely. As always, Storytellers are encouraged to adopt those suggestions they find helpful and ignore those that seem useless for their purposes.

⊕ QUICK AND DIRTY CROSSOVER

Some crossover issues are common to any attempt to mix two games. Immediate questions arise, such as what happens when Power X is used against Power Y. What do I do if Power X requires a Trait not included in the other game?

Storytellers who want a quick and dirty answer for what happens when one character uses a supernatural power against another and the two powers contest can use the following guideline. In such a case, compare the vampire's Discipline level, werewolf's Gift rank, mage's Sphere level, wraith's Arcanos rating, changeling's Art

level or hunter's Edge level. The supernatural with the highest score wins; ties are resolved with a resisted roll, and ties on this roll go to the defender. This method uses the highest level of power the character has achieved with the power in question. For example, if a mage is using a Forces 1 effect but has Forces 3, then he would compare his Sphere rating of 3 against the level 2 Obtenebration his opponent is trying to use to block his sight. Note that both parties must still succeed with the power in question. Thus, the mage would still have to score at least one success with his Forces effect to overcome the Obtenebration and the vampire in question would have to score at least one success with Obtenebration for it to have any effect.

If the rating levels of the powers in question are tied, a straightforward comparison of successes determines the winner. This is where an important difference between **Mage** and other systems becomes extremely evident. Mages on average will be rolling half or less dice, because their Arete rating will almost never equal the combined Attribute + Ability roll that most other supernaturals gain when performing checks to see if their powers work. To balance this, it is recommended that mage successes each count as two for the purposes of comparison.

DIFFICULTIES

A lot of game rules, especially those from other White Wolf games that are likely to cross over with **Mage**, focus on using specific Traits as difficulty numbers or resistance values. For example, some vampire Disciplines use Humanity as a difficulty number. What happens when one game doesn't use a Trait that another requires for rules purposes? You have a few options as Storyteller. If nothing else looks like a good answer, you should probably assume that the default difficulty is always 6. If the target is actively resisting the power, you might instead choose Willpower, as it is a Trait common to all White Wolf games. For some powers you might decide to focus on an Attribute + Ability roll the same as that being used, or one which makes sense to oppose it. Try to pick a difficulty number that makes sense at the time without bringing the entire game to a halt. You can always revisit the ruling at a later date and make a more permanent decision.

SUCCESS-BASED CROSSOVER

Mage isn't really like other games because its protagonists' powers owe as much to creativity as to magical potency. Storytellers who wish to dabble in crossover may choose to focus on easy, universal answers that compare the maximum power level of the characters involved, such as noted above. Alternatively, some Storytellers may wish to bring the dynamic spirit of **Mage** more fully into their games. Doing so may require a bit

more work, but is likely to pay off with a stronger sense of the real differences between the games being mixed.

Using this method means that Storytellers and players must directly consider whether a mage might be able to oppose an enemy's effect or not, even with much lower Spheres. For example, many practitioners of Mind 1 can create an effect that shields their minds from outside interference. Since most Obfuscate powers rely upon tricking the mind of a victim, a mage with even a single dot in the Mind Sphere might avoid or at least reduce the effectiveness of that vampire Discipline.

If a mage is defending against an opposing power, her successes reduce her opponent's successes. In the example given above, the successes obtained by the Mind mage are compared with those of the vampire using Obfuscate. If the vampire's Obfuscate roll is reduced to less than one success, her power fails to trick the mage. In cases where a power does not require a roll, and therefore gives no point of comparison, assume that the user gained one automatic success per rating of the power. Thus a vampire possessing only the first level of Obfuscate would gain a single automatic success against mages trying to resist her power. It is important to remember that in many cases a mage may have defenses applied to her person far ahead of the actual encounter, and even when such safeguards are general in nature they may apply to very specific events.

If the mage is the aggressor, trying to force her will upon another supernatural, subtract the successes achieved by the opposing power's roll from the mage's Arete roll. Remember that an opponent can invoke supernatural powers to oppose a mage's effects only if he can actually sense the incoming attack. A Tremere might be able to block a bolt of fire using Thaumaturgical Countermagic, but a Forces effect creating an invisible laser would wound the Tremere before he could react. It is worth noting that mages may have dangerous assault spells set to trigger automatically upon certain events should they possess appropriate Spheres, potentially unleashing terrible punishment defensively against an attacker.

When using the "success-based crossover" options, do not double the successes of a mage for purposes of comparison in the manner that you should when using the quick and dirty method. The lower dice pool in this case is balanced by the fact that a mage can succeed with effects even when terribly outmatched in power. While it might be difficult for a mage with Mind 1 to defend against Presence 5, Storytellers and players should never forget that the mage might spend hours reinforcing an extended ritual casting, backed by acolyte helpers, expending Quintessence and operating from within a mystic sanctum. She might come to face her vampire opponent with 10 or 20

Sphere

Mind
Mind, Time
Correspondence, Forces
Time, Entropy
Mind, Forces, Correspondence, etc.
Forces, Matter
Entropy
Time, Entropy, Life
Life, Prime
Spirit, possibly Mind
Life
Prime (plus Quintessence)

Power

Mind-control powers (Dominate, Fuddle, Presence, Puppetry)
Mind erasing (such as Thieving Talons of the Magpie or Dominate 3)
Scrying, detections
Prediction, prophecy
Invisibility
Physical magical attack (Lure of Flames, Wasp Talons)
Curses, Bad Luck
Aging
Aggravated damage
Soul attacks (such as possession)
Body warping, life draining (Usury, Vicissitude)
Other magical attack

Mind protection successes valid for days on end. Even elder vampires and werewolves can have trouble contesting with a well-prepared mage on magical grounds, though certainly a few lightning-quick sword or klaive blows with supernatural strength may suddenly turn the scales.

When considering possible counters to various powers, the possibilities are nearly infinite. Mages have, after all, managed to encompass nearly every idea that might have occurred to anyone for centuries into Nine Spheres. The chart above presents some possible Sphere counters for effects created by other supernaturals, but they should by no means be considered comprehensive nor should every sample Sphere necessarily apply to every attack that falls into an example category.

ABLATIVE SUCCESSES

Many magical effects create barriers that provide defense against attack. A Mind effect might build a wall against telepathic or mental control attacks, while a Forces shield might produce a sphere that keeps kinetic attacks at bay. Such effects will generally initially be quite effective but will reduce in value as they are battered away by a determined attacker. Typically such defenses will pile up a number of successes equal to the mage's Arete roll, potentially significantly boosted by extended rituals or aid from acolytes. As attackers hammer away at the defenses, however, they will gradually erode and finally disappear, leaving the mage without protection. It is up to the Storyteller to determine which effects she feels should fall under this category, but regardless of the exact magical effect the general rules for ablative defenses are the same. Record the successes obtained by the mage during her defensive casting. Each attack will subtract its individual successes from the total remaining defensive successes in the mage's protective effect. If the attack exceeds the defensive successes at any point, it brings

down the defense and affects the targeted mage. Until that time, each attack removes defensive successes equal to the attack's results and fails to affect the mage.

STATIC SUCCESSES

Not all magical effects wear off due to attacks. Especially in the case of sensory magic, certain effects operate at a set level until the duration expires. In cases where the Storyteller feels the effect should operate at a static level of success, resistances or attacks by an opponent do not reduce the overall effectiveness of the mage's effect. A mage may garner four successes to a Forces roll, granting her infrared vision. The fact that a vampire rolls seven successes on an Obfuscate roll will allow the vampire to hide from the mage but will not cancel out the magical sight she has generated with her spells. It is up to Storytellers to determine whether individual magical effects should operate via the ablative or static success rules.

IN CASE IT NEED BE SAID...

Some players will happily try to combine mage Spheres with their vampiric Abomination nagah fae who, oh yeah, died and became mummy-wraiths. Storytellers who wish to run uber-powerful games exploring such themes are welcome to do so, of course; it is after all your game. Storytellers who are not so thrilled about the idea should not be afraid to squash the idea before it even occurs to their players, however. As years of antidrug commercials have preached, "Just say no." If you give in to player pressure against your better judgment you will probably never be satisfied with the results and the game will suffer. If you aren't happy running your stories, your players aren't likely to be happy either.

VAMPIRE: BLOOD AND MAGIC



Vampire: The Masquerade is one of White Wolf's most popular games ever and thus it is not surprising that players and Storytellers often are drawn to the idea of combining it with other games. One of its great strengths is the compelling nature of its antiheroes, at once incredibly powerful yet damned by one of the most terrible curses imaginable. Unfortunately, the singular nature of this curse

does not always match well with the dynamic nature of mages. Storytellers may have to work very hard to keep the game flowing well if they don't attempt to prepare players to work together before the game even starts.

Probably the first problem encountered by players in a hurry to throw their vampire and mage characters together and begin immediately is ignoring the lack of common knowledge that the two share. Mages are not privy to the secrets of the various vampire clans and the inner workings of vampire sects such as the Camarilla and Sabbat. Neither do most mages have any real idea what vampires can do beyond the often-inaccurate words of occult fable. Similarly, most vampires are clueless with regard to Awakened magic and mage Traditions.

Storytellers with no time or inclination to encourage any realistic examination of crossover interaction may simply dispense with all consideration of this factor and allow players to assume that their characters know whatever crossover information the players possess. Those who are interested in roleplaying characters with more traditional limited or nonexistent knowledge of other supernatural creatures should consider the following two Knowledge Ability rules offerings:

VAMPIRE LORE

- Student: You know for sure that vampires exist and are just beginning to learn the basic fallacies of normal occult lore regarding vampires. Crosses and garlic often don't work, for example.
- College: You know that many vampires call themselves "Kindred," and that they have societies of the undead known as the Camarilla and the Sabbat. You may even know the names of some of the clans.
- Masters: You are well-versed in vampire lore, including understanding the stereotypes associated with all of the clans, possibly even minor knowledge of their different common powers.

- Doctorate: You know as much as most of your subjects. Your knowledge of vampires is comparable to that of an ancilla.
- Scholar: You know your subjects better than many of them know themselves. Your knowledge of vampires is comparable to that of an elder. Should this come to the attention of certain elders, your life might be in danger.

Possessed by: Blood Dolls, Ghouls, Massassa War Fanatics, Paranormal Scholars, Vampires, Witch-hunters

Specialties: the Camarilla, the Sabbat, Vampire Magic, Vampire Weaknesses, a particular clan

Special Note: Vampires will often possess an alternate Knowledge called Kindred Lore. Assume that Kindred Lore is a somewhat superior form of Vampire Lore, bolstered by the fact that the scholar is seeking to understand his own kind rather than learn the secrets of outsiders. Storytellers can represent this by offering lower difficulty numbers to recall the same facts or by treating a level of skill as one rank higher.

MAGE LORE

- Student: You know for sure that mages exist and are just beginning to separate the truth from basic fallacies found in normal occult lore about mages. Not all mages cast spells from books, for example.
- College: You know that mages divide themselves according to types of magical skill. You may even know the names of the Traditions, or of the Conventions of the Technocracy.
- Masters: You are well versed in mage lore, including understanding that science and mystic powers can both be magical in nature. You may even understand the difference between static and dynamic magic.
- Doctorate: You know as much as most of your subjects. Your knowledge of mages is comparable to that of a powerful long-term chantry member.
- Scholar: You know your subjects better than many of them know themselves. Your knowledge of mages is comparable to that of the lost Masters. Should one of the Masters who remains on Earth discover this, your life might be in danger.

Possessed by: Kolduns, Mages, Thaumaturges, Tremere, Witch-hunters

Specialties: Sorcerers, the Technocracy, the Traditions, specific Convention, a particular Tradition

Special Note: Mages will often possess an alternate Knowledge called True Mage Lore. Assume that True Mage Lore is a somewhat superior form of Mage Lore, bolstered by the fact that the scholar is seeking to understand his own kind rather than learn the secrets of outsiders. Storytellers can represent this by offering lower difficulty numbers to recall the same facts or by treating a level of skill as one rank higher.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

Lack of knowledge about one's counterparts in the World of Darkness is not limited to understanding the generalities of other Awakened creatures. It is all well and good to know what a vampire is and what she can do, if you don't see them beyond the one or two who taught you their secrets. Storytellers desiring to create a logical crossover will likely want to consider what contact points between vampires and mages are likely to create a larger-scale meeting or conflict, in order that the players not be the only factors in the story. As mentioned before, **Blood Treachery** does a good job of this by tapping into the ancient rivalry between the Order of Hermes and the lost House of Tremere. With a conflict of such epic size and long-running hatred it is simple to craft stories from the easily imaginable feud, conflict and forbidden tome to a reconnaissance-style quest for information on the enemy. Some Storytellers may wish to explore lesser-known links between vampire and mage society, however, or perhaps even create a new one.

Older **Vampire** supplements vaguely mentioned a mage order called the Circle of Red, for example. Hints suggested that the Circle might be somehow related to House Tytalus of the Order, and other phrases suggested that the Tzimisce vampires had unholy connections with certain Tytalus mages. Clever Storytellers might see the shared interests of Koldunic sorcerers and Circle mages. Slowly a plot involving mystic elements within the fiendish Sabbat and renegade mages from the Hermetic order might take shape. What terrible tasks they have set for themselves might be the mission of a band of Tremere and Hermetic mages to discover, or their horrible rites might be the acts of the player characters, who wish to keep their activities hidden from their respective sects.

Other Storytellers might wish to combine idealistic Brujah with rebellious Virtual Adepts, deadly Euthanatos killers with Assamite assassins or greedy Ventrue with money-grubbing Syndicate financiers. Look for some aspect which one faction or subgroup of vampire society shares with some subgroup of mage society and encourage players to create characters who are at least related to one of those parties. The fit may not be perfect; indeed it is likely to be far from it. Nevertheless, some unified theme that ties the characters together will strengthen the game before it even begins. To encourage interaction give the characters reasonable cause to be aware of each other's existence and something in common.

More than just a lack of knowledge separates the supernatural beings of the World of Darkness. One of the most obvious problems, yet for some reason often overlooked in haste, is the fact that vampires cannot be active in the daytime and must feed. Too many chronicles fall prey to the limited routines of vampire existence not meshing with the freedom of mortal mages. This goes beyond merely keeping different schedules than their mage counterparts, as a vampire also invests a great deal of its time hunting for food while trying not to draw the attention of the sentient herd upon which it feeds. Many **Mage** characters will grow anxious or bored if forced day after day to wait for their partners first to wake and then to spend hours hunting for blood.

Unfortunately, this is one case where the vampiric side of the equation is not subject to much compromise. Certainly a Storyteller can adopt the quick hunting system from **Vampire**, but vampires cannot simply ignore daylight without severely changing their natural themes. Realistically, even adhering to the quick and simple hunting dice roll proposed for use in **Vampire** when a Storyteller wants to keep the game's pace moving quickly detracts strongly from the themes of the game. If a vampire's thirst for fresh blood and nightly contests to obtain it are constantly reduced to mere dice rolls, all sense of the theme is reduced to numbers on a plastic polyhedron. On the other hand, spending too much time focused upon vampire characters' nightly hunts will bury the magic and wonder which makes **Mage** what it is.

The impact of the fact that vampires cannot be active during the day may be somewhat alleviated by encouraging mages to adopt nocturnal lifestyles. It is not particularly unreasonable for mortals who inhabit the World of Darkness to be stuck working

dreary night shifts for faceless corporations that barely recognize them beyond their employee IDs and Social Security numbers. This is not a perfect solution, of course, as the nightly labors of mage characters who might continue to work will still draw them away from their vampire partners. If mage characters choose professions tying them to places vampires might more commonly congregate this can ease the situation somewhat. Mages who work at nightclubs where vampires find ready prey can help their partners find quick meals for the evening or simply take advantage of the opportunity to meet regularly. Physicians or coroners might have access to resources that especially interest vampires, and certainly are renowned for keeping odd hours.

Once a Storyteller and her players have settled any issues involving the mage and vampire characters knowing of each other, meeting and choosing to work together, she may still find a few difficulties in integrating the two. The general Quick and Dirty Crossover or Success-based Crossover options may be used to settle general problems integrating opposing supernatural powers, and alternate difficulties for difficulty numbers have also been discussed.

MAGIC VERSUS VAMPIRES

The power that can be brought to bear by a potent mage is far more versatile than that wielded by vampires. With this in mind, many of the rules included here focus on mages who use magic to affect vampires somehow. Cocky mages should not forget the bloody empowered brute force that a vampire can tap at a moment's notice, however, and therefore some discussion of vampire attacks against mages is also warranted.

Sensory Effects

Mages commonly invoke mystical senses to detect foes, hoping to be in time to avoid them or prepare a defense appropriately. Vampires are often possessed of innate supernatural senses in the form of special Disciplines. In cases where the sensory powers of one supernatural conflict with some magical means of escaping detection, the Storyteller should rely upon her choice of the Quick and Dirty Crossover or the Success-based Crossover systems described previously in this chapter. Generally, such contests will involve Auspex versus illusion or invisibility rites, or Obfuscate or Chimerstry versus sensory effects.

A few special notes bear mention regarding special interactions between vampire and mage

powers. Vampire Auspex at level two offers the power known as Aura Perception, and many players misuse this power. Aura Perception can detect magic as myriad sparkles within the aura of the mage in question, but it can only do so *while* that magic is in use. Thus a vampire sensing a mage who is currently not doing anything magical will register nothing out of the ordinary, while a mage who is currently using her own magical senses will shimmer with mystical glints in her aura. This is not a foolproof system, as even a normal mortal protected by a mage's effects may be surrounded by glittering sparkles, causing a vampire to mistake her for a mage. Storytellers may wish to allow vampires who roll five or more successes to differentiate between someone enacting magic and someone who benefits from another's spells.

Vampires, on the other hand, show up very differently from normal mortals under many different kinds of scans. A mage who is not familiar with Kindred may not understand what she is seeing, but she will not mistake the fact that whatever she is detecting is not normal. Vampires subject to Time perceptions will seem out of sync with the time that flows around them due to the fact that they are ageless, and use of Celerity may further show itself as sudden time distortions. Unless he is an elder with the Soul Mask power, a vampire will show up as mysteriously pale to a Spirit or Mind scan that examines his aura. Properly defined Forces senses may note that the vampire is the same temperature as his surroundings, which should capture the attention of a suspicious-minded mage. Even Entropy effects might detect the curse that causes vampirism or the walking drain upon the world that a vampire represents. Matter or Life scans can both possibly indicate that a vampire is just not what one should expect to see if he were mortal. Similarly, a mage who understands what she seeks may detect the mystical properties of a vampire using a Prime sensory effect. It is worth noting that certain vampire merits such as Blush of Health may raise the difficulty number for a mage attempting to detect the vampire in question. Furthermore, certain advanced elder Disciplines or powerful Thaumaturgy rituals may provide nasty surprises for mages who expect common sensory scans to discover nearby vampire foes.

Countermagic

Disciplines such as Animalism, Dominate, Presence and Thaumaturgy may generally be countered



directly by mages through use of their Spheres. In order to do so a mage must usually have at least one dot in the Mind Sphere. Other Disciplines, or their specific effects, may be countered at the Storyteller's option. For example, a mage might use Time 3 to counter Celerity. The mage rolls her normal Arete roll, usually at coincidental magic difficulty numbers since it is preventing a supernatural effect, though some Storytellers may prefer to use a standard difficulty number of 8. Each success cancels one of the vampire's successes.

Vampires may attempt to use Thaumaturgy to counter a mage's effects. The difficulty of such rolls is the mage's Willpower, and every two successes cancel one of the mage's successes. If a vampire has Thaumaturgical Countermagic, each dot adds one die to the character's Thaumaturgy roll for the purposes of this roll.

It is important to remember that effects cannot be countered at all unless they have been specifically prepared defensively ahead of time or can somehow be detected as they occur. A vampire may invoke Thaumaturgy against a bolt of lightning being cast at her by an opposing mage but cannot instantly protect

herself against a subtle Mind trick the mage might play. Similarly, a mage who is unfamiliar with Dominate cannot stop a vampire from controlling his mind unless he has erected mental defenses previously or knows to do so immediately when faced with a vampire trying to stare him in the eye.

Vampires, Life and Matter

Vampires are undead creatures. As such, they are neither fully alive nor entirely dead matter. Some Storytellers may wish to adopt the rules from the **Vampire Storytellers Handbook** that state that vampires may be affected by Matter effects as though they were Life effects. Other Storytellers may prefer the brief vampire rules from the core **Mage** book that declare that mages must use Life and Matter conjunctionally to affect a vampire. This section offers a third, and we hope more useful, option to Storytellers who wish to represent better the fact that at any moment various parts of a vampire are probably subject to one Sphere or the other.

Mages targeting vampires with conjunctional Matter/ Life effects cause changes or damage as normal. Healing a vampire, however, requires Prime magic, while healing aggravated wounds is *vulgar* as

normal. Mages who target a vampire with only Life or only Matter magic still can achieve limited results. Parts of a vampire may be close enough to inanimate matter that mere Matter magic is sufficient, while parts may be flush with life-giving blood. To represent this, any effect that uses only Matter or Life Spheres, and not both, automatically gains only half the total successes the mage rolls. Thus a mage attempting to rot a vampire's flesh away with Matter magic who gains four successes on his Arete roll will ultimately only manage to turn two successes against his foe.

Aggravated Damage

As a general rule of thumb, any damaging effect powered by Prime inflicts aggravated damage on a vampire. Similarly, any effect using Prime 4 or fire- or sunlight-based Forces attacks is aggravated. Creating true sunlight requires Prime 2 in addition to Forces 3 (or alternatively Correspondence 5), however, and summoning it at night is always vulgar.

Blood and Wizards

Vampires drink blood to sustain their existence. For most purposes a mage's blood is the same as that of any other mortal. Mages who are filled with the energies of Quintessence, however, provide additional sustenance to Kindred. Count the number of blood points drained from the mage and apply it as a fraction of the total 10 that mortals possess. A vampire will steal a number of points of Quintessence from a mage equal to her total multiplied by the fraction of blood which the vampire took. This Quintessence does not actually occupy any space in the vampire's blood pool but can be spent as blood points. Indeed it is spent first in all cases, as the vampire's magical nature draws upon the pure Quintessence before it burns the physical blood it has consumed. For example, if a hungry vampire drains five points of blood from a mage with 10 Quintessence points, he gains five normal blood points and five Quintessential blood points, while the mage being drained loses five blood points and half of her Quintessence. Of course she is in bad shape due to the physical damage caused by blood loss, but she is also likely to be frightened by the sudden loss of mystical energy as well.

Unfortunately for vampires, the blood of mages is as much a part of the Awakened existence that allows them to perform magic as any other portion of their being. Vampires burning the blood of mages will often discover that strange effects accompany their use of the mystical vitae. To

represent the uncontrolled energies that vampires release while burning the potent blood of mages, give a vampire one Paradox point per blood point or Quintessential blood point which he spends. Barring perhaps some very potent Prime effect, a realm with different mystical laws or strange Marauder Talisman, there is not likely to be any other way that a vampire could gain Paradox, since normal physical reality has mostly accepted their existence, if only secretly. Vampires gaining Paradox points are subject to all normal Paradox rules from **Mage: The Ascension**, including odd effects and potential damage. Storytellers inflicting Paradox upon vampires for drinking the blood of a mage should do their best to make sure the Paradox reflects the Spheres normally possessed by the mage at the time the blood was drawn. Daring Storytellers may wish to use these rules when vampires feed upon sorcerers who use static magic as well, or they may decide that vampires are used to dealing with static mystical energies.

Vampire blood can be put to use by mages, too. Each point of vampire blood is equivalent to one point of Tass (yes, that's one full point despite what the **Vampire Storytellers Handbook** says to the contrary). Mages who understand the risks of vampire blood will usually keep it safe within a suitable container until they use it for their magic, but it is possible to consume it instead. Those who consume vampire blood become ghouls with all of the normal bonuses and penalties for doing so, including gaining a temporary point of the Potence Discipline and a step toward the blood bond. The dangers inherent in this should discourage mages, but many of them are not aware of the risk, and most vampires are all too happy to make sure it stays that way. After all, what vampire doesn't desire a potent magical slave?

The Embrace

Mages can be Embraced as any other mortal. Unfortunately, the Embrace severs the mage's Avatar (as normal death does), making him a normal vampire. Some mages who undergo this horror manage to commit suicide within a short time.

Storytellers faced with a mage who is Embraced may choose to completely ignore previous Spheres learned by the mage in question, or they might choose to somehow reflect them in the Disciplines gained by a new vampire. Every new vampire relatively quickly develops three points of Disciplines, which of course almost always consist of those which are natural to the blood of the vampire sire's clan. Storytellers may choose to allow mages who are

Embraced to choose one or more points of Thaumaturgy with a suitable path that closely resembles those Spheres they knew in life in place of normal Discipline choices. Alternatively, some might even be allowed to take other Disciplines that closely resemble their Spheres, such as Temporis for a powerful Time mage.

Similarly, some Storytellers will be frustrated by the fact that the **Mage** game does not use Humanity and Virtues. One optional system is to assume that the typical mage has Courage 5 and five points to divide between Self-Control and Conscience, according to her personality. This system takes into account the general aloofness many mages exhibit in conjunction with their prodigious standard Willpower rating. Storytellers might wish to adjust these ratings, raising Conscience to better reflect mages who are more humane, lowering Courage for mages who have generally shown cowardice or even significantly dropping Humanity for Euthanatos who have made a career of killing.

Screw This, I Want to be Mortal Again

Enterprising or desperate mages may decide to experiment with putting their magic to work overturning blood bonds or even the curse of vampirism itself. This is not a task to be taken lightly — the Curse of Caine is said to have come from God, and it should come as no surprise that even those who do not believe this still face great resistance in their efforts.

Before describing the actual magic necessary to perform such feats, it is important to note that most mages are utterly clueless when faced with the idea of having even to try such magic. Attempting to remove the blood bond requires at least Vampire Lore 3 or Occult 4, while knowing how one might begin to remove the Embrace demands at least Vampire Lore 4 or Occult 5. Mages searching for

those who might teach them are in for a long search. Even the Euthanatos have learned only so much about vampires, and the Progenitors, Sons of Ether and Verbena who have studied the undead are even rarer. Those seeking Nephandi who understand the creatures of the night are begging to fall prey to all sorts of sinister lies.

Removing the Embrace (*i.e.*, returning a vampire to mortal state) is a Holy Grail of sorts, something vampires themselves have sought for millennia. It should not come as a mere matter of mixing Spheres; without understanding the secret behind the Curse, it cannot be overturned. And who but the legendary Antediluvians know the true origins of the Curse? Even if such a powerful cure were discovered, certain centuries-old Cainites would not want such knowledge in the world and might not rest until all who knew it were dead. Finally, should such a wondrous miracle be achieved, there is no guarantee that a cured vampire's Avatar will return (if it was Awake before the Embrace) — or that the "cure" doesn't entail a final release from the body (*i.e.*, final death).

Removing the blood bond is possible, but extremely difficult and time consuming. For details, see pp. 78-79 of **Blood Treachery**.

Working Together

Many crossover rules are presented with the idea that mages and vampires will be contesting. It is possible that some groups of players may wish to have their vampires and mages work closely in conjunction with each other. In most cases this will have no effect beyond that normally gained for ganging up on the competition. If a practitioner of Thaumaturgy and a mage work together they may use the rules from **Mage** for Acting in Concert. Thus a mage might help a thaumaturge gain more successes or vice versa.

WEREWOLF: CLAWS AND SHANTIAN



Many of the same problems confronting players trying to combine werewolves with mages face those combining vampires with mages, and Storytellers should consult the previous sections for general advice that can easily apply to both genres. Naturally, werewolves present their own unique challenges for crossover as well. Many of these revolve

around the immense collection of standard abilities werewolves bring to the game, though others have to do with lack of common goals and even downright prejudiced behavior.

As in the case of vampires, the first barrier in mage/ werewolf relations is likely to be a lack of knowledge. Storytellers may wish to bring a bit of order to the amount of knowledge characters possess about their counterparts by using the Lore Abilities.

WEREWOLF LORE

- Student: You know for sure that werewolves exist and are just beginning to learn the basic fallacies of normal occult lore regarding them. Werewolves don't only change shape during the full moon, for example.
- College: You know that many werewolves call themselves "Garou" and that they fight an entropic force they call the Wyrn. You may even know the names of all 13 tribes.
- Masters: You are well versed in Garou lore, including understanding the stereotypes associated with all of the tribes, possibly even minor knowledge of their different common Gifts.
- Doctorate: You know as much as most of your subjects. Your knowledge of Garou is comparable to that of an Adren. Wow, you even know what an Adren is.
- Scholar: You know your subjects better than many of them know themselves. Your knowledge of Garou is comparable to that of an elder. Should this come to the attention of certain elders, your life might be in danger.

Possessed by: Eco-terrorists, Kinfolk, Werewolves, Witch-hunters

Specialties: Werewolf Gifts, Werewolf Weaknesses, the Wyrn-tainted, a particular Tribe

Special Note: Werewolves will often possess an alternate Knowledge called Garou Lore. Assume that Garou Lore is a somewhat superior form of Werewolf Lore, bolstered by the fact that the scholar is seeking to understand his own kind rather than learn the secrets of outsiders. Storytellers can represent this by offering lower difficulty numbers to recall the same facts or by treating a level of skill as one rank higher.

MAGE LORE

Werewolves might also learn appropriate knowledge about mages with whom they interact or with whom they anticipate conflict. See "Mage Lore," pp 197-198.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

Werewolves who are familiar with mages often have a very dim view of them. For one thing, they have a reputation for stealing the magical energies



the Garou hold holy. Among Garou who are aware of mages, common epithets for them include “caern-reaver” and “weaver-spawn.” Not too many mages who have met werewolves are very pleased by the experience either. The terror inspired by nine-foot swirling masses of fur and claws generally results in negative feelings and possibly even deadly hatred. Threatened mages may further increase the distrust werewolves already feel for them by arming themselves with silver weapons, “just in case.” Creatures who commonly feel a bit of resentment should their own packmates carry silver armaments are certainly not likely to embrace potentially hostile human beings who do so.

Worse yet, Garou may be offended by the very audacity of mages who dare to bend the will of Gaia as though she were a toy for their amusement. Mages may resent the apparent ability of werewolves to slip through the Gauntlet unscathed by the Avatar Storm. Garou may take mages’ inability to do so as a further sign of Gaia’s displeasure with her lost children. So the misunderstandings and negative views weave back and forth, winding ever more dangerously close to conflict.

Yet some mages and Garou may share common goals. Dreamspeakers and other mages of shamanic bent are likely at least to understand a bit of the tribal culture that pervades Garou society. Mages who fight against Nephandi may recognize a certain similarity between their foe and the entropic forces the werewolves call “the Wyrms.” Storytellers may build chronicles around joint efforts to combat Bane-infested areas or creatures. They might also encourage quests with Garou serving as guides to mages with specific goals in the Umbra. Storytellers might wish to explore more likely combinations such as might be found when Uktena Garou meet with open-minded Dreamspeakers, or they may wish to allow less probable joint ventures between Glass Walker mafiosos and their Syndicate counterparts. Whatever the characters have in common, the Storyteller should make sure to capitalize upon their mutual characteristics and enemies when crafting stories.

One of the biggest problems running werewolf/mage crossovers is the completely different combat capabilities of the two. Not even your most cybernetically enhanced mage is likely to survive even two rounds against an enraged werewolf if he goes toe to toe. Mages are used to acting more subtly, preparing defenses ahead of time and enacting attacks from a distance or with the aid of rituals. Werewolves can

easily tear a man in half with a single inhumanly powerful swipe of their claws. Storytellers will have to keep in mind the relative fragility of mages when finding foes that can physically challenge a werewolf. Storytellers crossing **Mage** and **Werewolf** should strongly consider allowing mages to soak aggravated damage at difficulty 8 as suggested under the cinematic damage rules in **Mage**.

Another common problem is the fact that any Garou worth his salt can leap into the Umbra with a simple roll of the dice. This can completely divide parties who are not prepared to deal with it, leaving mages stranded in the physical realm while werewolves spend weeks questing in the spirit realms. The Storyteller should probably encourage mages to invest in the Spirit Sphere and possibly even Merits such as Stormwarden. If she is planning to run extensive Umbra adventures, the Storyteller might even wish to do away with the Avatar Storm entirely or provide the mages with a Talisman or fetish that allows all of them to follow the Garou into the Umbra. Another way to accomplish this might be to allow mage characters to put Ally Background points into the Garou’s totem and give the totem the ability to bring people with whom it is allied into the spirit world. (See **The Infinite Tapestry** for new methods of Umbral travel for mages.)

MAGIC AND WEREWOLVES

Garou are creatures of equal part spirit and flesh, gifted with incredible powers by Gaia. They wield magical Gifts learned directly from spirits. As such, mages and werewolves may face special difficulties in dealing with each other in conflict. Werewolves may find themselves seriously outmatched in a mystical sense, while mages may suffer from inexplicable failures when attempting to affect their foes.

In game terms, werewolves take unsoakable aggravated damage from silver weapons but are allowed to attempt to soak all other damage, regardless of type. Direct Life attacks against Garou must normally incorporate both Spirit and Life conjunctionally to have full effect. A mage who attacks a werewolf in the physical world with only Life or only Spirit has all successes rolled reduced by half. Werewolves who enter the Umbra, however, are temporarily considered entirely spiritual, and a Garou staying in the spirit world for too long can become trapped there. Mages who target a Garou in the Umbra may employ the Spirit Sphere against their foe as though the Garou were a spirit.



Werewolves should beware of being commanded or entrapped by very powerful mages should they encounter them within the Umbra. Of course, mages resorting to such tactics should be prepared for a sudden and violent return to the physical realm by very angry Garou should their mystical assault fail to stop their enemies.

It bears special mention that an attack combining Spirit and/ or Life with Matter magic and turning portions of a werewolf into silver is treated as an unsoakable aggravated attack once the final damage dice are determined. Werewolves struck with such an attack are also likely to suffer the loss of one or more Gnosis points. Mages with sufficient Werewolf Lore may even recognize Gnosis as a source of energy and attempt to affect it using conjunctional Spirit and Prime effects, or in cases where it flows freely through a caern may employ Prime by itself. Extra actions gained through spending Rage might be countered using Time 3 to slow a Garou down. Spirit Sphere effects commonly can be used to strengthen or weaken the Gauntlet as well, which may benefit or harm Garou who seek to Step Sideways.

Garou and mages may attempt to counter each other's powers as per normal Quick and Dirty Crossover or Success-based Crossover rules. As always, the ability to counter requires being able to sense the attack or power being used or having defenses that automatically oppose the forces in question. Typically, Gifts that provide for invisibility or protection against detection may be countered with Forces or Mind effects, while enhanced-senses Gifts may pierce mage illusions. Most effects may be countered with any Sphere that can generate suitable protection or an opposite effect, and similarly most mage rites can be countered with a Gift of suitable defensive or opposite effect. As normal, a mage may choose to try to countermagic any supernatural Gift using the Prime Sphere, strengthening reality against the effect via antimagic. Alternatively, mages may attempt to counter nearly any werewolf Gift with the Spirit Sphere alone due to the spiritual origins of all Gifts. Doing so can be draining, as this method works according to the same rules normally reserved for Prime Sphere antimagic unless the Gift being coun-

tered is directly related to Spirit effects, such as summoning, crossing the Gauntlet, etc.

A number of ideas may deserve special consideration. One of the first concerns that will occur to many mages is that of detection. Werewolves generally may detect mages only with Gifts that detect the use of magic in action while it is occurring. Mages who resonate with the forces of Quiet are a different story. The Sense Wurm gift will register positive for mages with levels of Jhor, the Sense Weaver gift will read true for mages with levels of Clarity Quiet, and the Sense Wyld gift will react to mages with Madness Quiet. These resonance traits are so strong that most werewolves will not be able to differentiate the Quiet from the Trait taint they are attempting to detect. Especially in the case of Jhor-touched mages, this can prove very dangerous indeed.

Mages on the other hand will usually find it easy to sense that a werewolf is not normal, though just what a specific mage has discovered may evade her understanding without appropriate Lore Knowledge to determine that it is a Garou she faces. Life and

Spirit scans both indicate differences between Garou and typical mortals. Life scans, depending upon the paradigm of the mage, may find an incredibly vibrant life force capable of high levels of regenerative healing, coupled with strange genetics which bear resemblance to that of both human and wolf yet not quite either. Spirit scans will usually show some sort of animal ephemera evidence where a mage expects to see only a human soul. Prime scans may show a source of supernatural energy within Garou who currently possess Gnosis points. Unlike vampires, who are walking violations of reality, most other scans will not discover anything out of the ordinary for a Garou in human form. A Mind effect might raise suspicion should a Garou in normal wolf form be noticed as a sentient creature, but the emotional auras of werewolves will usually appear normal unless they are currently consumed with Rage. Wurm-tainted creatures, such as Fomori and Black Spiral Dancers, may appear odd to Entropy scans, while it is possible that fetishes with supernatural abilities might appear unnatural to Matter detections.

HUNTER



Hunter: The Reckoning is potentially the most problematic of all crossover games. While some hunters seek to redeem or understand the creatures they see as foes, many are driven almost mad with a desire to cleanse the world of the horrors they find hiding among humanity. Storytellers seeking to combine **Hunter** with **Mage**

should be prepared to encourage players to explore Redeemer, Innocent and Visionary concepts while saving Avengers, Waywards and Defenders for use as storyline antagonists. Martyrs, Hermits and Judges might fall on either side of being useful for crossover or destructive to it. In the end, every reason must be found to overcome a hunter's normal reactions — hatred and fear — to supernatural forces he cannot understand.

The themes of **Hunter** can be extremely difficult to preserve when mixed with other games. It is all too easy to look across the table at your gaming buddies with a normal feeling of comfort and friendship and forget that the Messengers are filtering every Conviction-laden glance you take at the characters these people play through a lens of harsh judgment and monstrous appearance. Even the mortals who become mages are seen by the Messengers as sores upon the face of reality, filled with unquenchable selfishness and

hubris. Mages with less popular paths, such as Euthanatos, may appear even more predatory when viewed by a hunter using the Second Sight.

With the very appearance of evil, or at least grave impurity, cast upon mages of every type, what purpose might hunters find to work together with their potential foes? Storytellers should look to Redeemers and Visionaries for special usefulness, given those creeds' predilection for seeking out the enemy and trying to understand him. A hunter of one of these creeds, or who trusts a member of one of these creeds, may treat supernatural creatures, especially comparatively benign ones such as mages, as potential insights into the world of monsters that threaten mankind. Visionaries seek understanding before all else, while Redeemers hope to turn the forces of darkness from their fateful path. Other hunters may discover the usefulness of having an inside connection with the societies they feel must certainly be feeding upon the innocent.

On the other side of the fence, one might wonder what possible reason a mage could have to consort with beings whose vision of her is that of a vile, caricature witch or blasphemous defiler from the darkest legends of another time. Mages of a historical bent might fear a return of the Burning Times and seek to understand those who rise to hunt them, perhaps hoping to con-

vince those who suddenly threaten them that the Traditions do not represent any force of evil that demands a new-age Inquisition. Celestial Choristers and other crusading mages might try to ally with the new breed of hunters, joining together against the true enemies of mankind, including the dangerous Marauders and the sinister Nephandi. Other mystics with an attachment to the Mythic Ages, whether that of the Akashic Record or through the universal consciousness of Dream, may recognize the hunters as an artifact of past times returned at the behest of the gods. Such individuals may hope to find a lightning rod for the divine or a sign of the mandate of heaven within their new allies.

Whatever the reasons that mages and hunters turn to aiding each other, a Storyteller will have to be vigilant in her efforts to make sure they don't rapidly fall into internal squabbles that destroy the game. Certainly this is the World of Darkness, and the Storyteller should not encourage a sickening cotton-candy sweet vision of unity, but neither should she allow the entire game to plunge into ongoing and open warfare between characters. Permanent conflicts between characters can easily turn the game into an ongoing pressure toward real-life argument. Few players show up to a game with eager anticipation of every single session spent fighting against the friends with whom they gather to play, and indeed it is generally the role of the Storyteller to assume most of the burden of playing antagonists. This is a natural evolution based upon real psychological factors, and indeed it is the fact that online chats often sidestep this model that leads to the prevalence of player feuds far in excess of those which occur in tabletop games.

Regardless, Storytellers who keep hunter and mage players together will find group unity hard to maintain, but should discover that common foes are not so hard to create. Black-hearted Nephandi, twisted spirits determined to abuse mankind and mad Marauders wreaking havoc upon the bounds of reality without regard for the innocent all may serve as enemies who draw hunters and mages together to share resources. Any danger to humanity that draws the ire of both factions can serve as a springboard for storylines which prompt hunter and mage players to join forces against the unified threat, as befits the saying, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend."

Of course, as with all crossovers, one of the first barriers will be lack of understanding those with whom one interacts. Hunters are a recent phenomenon, not counting their appearance millennia ago, and therefore are not very well-known even to the most scholarly of mages. Similarly, most hunters are recently plunged into the knowledge that there is such a thing as a

supernatural world and therefore are not well versed in the habits, society or secrets of mages. The following Lore Knowledge rules may be instituted by Storytellers looking for a formalized way of gauging the information each character might possess about her counterparts.

Note specifically that Hunters don't even know much about themselves; other creatures know even less. While the guideline here may offer a sort of table about Hunter knowledge, the denizens of the World of Darkness wouldn't have access to most of this information. Consider this, rather, a sort of guideline to what's relatively simple to learn and what's very unusual knowledge. Characters probably shouldn't manage to develop enough information with certainty to be able to learn actual "Hunter Lore" as an Ability. Vampires show up in books and movies, werewolves have been around for centuries, but there are no authorities on Hunters and thus no way for mages to "check up on" them. Any of this discovery of and interaction with Hunters could happen in your **Mage** game, but it is not part of the **Hunter** canon. In that game, the Imbued simply do not register to many supernatural beings enough to become "discovered."

HUNTER LORE

- Student: You know for sure that Hunters exist and are just beginning to learn that they have their own special powers. Some Hunters can resist magic, for example.
- College: You know that some Hunters speak to something they call the Messengers. You might even believe there really is such a thing.
- Masters: You are well versed in Hunter lore, including understanding that there are actually different kinds of Hunters.
- Doctorate: You know as much as most of your subjects. Your knowledge of Hunters is comparable to that of an Imbued who has been aware of "monsters" for a few years.
- Scholar: You know your subjects better than many of them know themselves. You have a good idea just what the Messengers really are.

Possessed by: Bystanders, Hunters, Madmen, Survivors of Hunter Attacks, Witch-hunters

Specialties: Edges, the Hunt, the Messengers, a particular creed

MAGE LORE

A few Hunters have encountered witches or sorcerers enough to learn a few details about them. Most Hunters are very unlikely to have more than a point or two of any kind of Lore. For the details of Mage Lore, see pp. 197-198.



HUNTERS AND MAGIC

Hunters are protected in part by supernatural Edges which are given to them by the Messengers. In theory, the Messengers are subject to the same rules as any other spiritual beings, but their power is such that most mages will find it difficult to overcome the miracles they enable hunters to achieve. Interaction between hunter Edges and mage Sphere effects varies from brutal immunities to virtual defenselessness. Both sides suffer intensely from the unpredictable nature of their opponents, not knowing what to expect to have to face.

A lot of hunter/ mage interactions will be sharply delineated by the use or failure to use Conviction on the part of a hunter character. Any illusion, mind trick or mind-control effect can be shut down by the expenditure of a single point of Conviction as per normal **Hunter** rules. Immunity granted by use of hunter Conviction lasts only for the duration of the current scene, and the effect therefore may resume should a mage score successes allowing for a longer duration. On the other

hand, a hunter who does not expend Conviction will normally have no defense against mental effects outside of her own Willpower. It is worth noting that a hunter expending Conviction points will even nullify mind effects of which she is not aware. Second Sight also may be used to pierce automatically any false appearance a mage might present, whether a Life-based change of form, a hologram of Forces or a mental illusion.

All cases which result in an opposing Edge applied against a mage effect should be settled using either the Quick and Dirty Crossover or Success-based Crossover rules from earlier in this chapter. This involves comparing the Sphere total against the Creed Path rating or the successes garnered against each other. In any case the aggressor's effects are reduced by the defenses of his target and the final results are determined at that point. It should be remembered that no one can try to counter an attack unless she can somehow sense it as it occurs or unless her defenses were already in place before the attack occurred.

The specific Edges hunters may bring to bear already grant specific penalties against their targets. It is even possible that a hunter with certain Edges might render a mage entirely unable to use her magic for a period of time. The ability to use magic is a supernatural ability, and any Edge whose description states that it prevents the use of supernatural abilities will block the use of a mage's powers. Such Edges will not usually eliminate lesser abilities such as those provided by the Backgrounds of Arcane, Avatar, Destiny or Dream, but it is possible that even innate Traits of this sort may be rendered useless. This is part of why mages who understand hunters at all fear the danger they represent. No mage likes to discover that she is without the magical powers that make her what she is.

Mages with the appropriate Lore to know their foes, or even just an understanding of the human condition, may try one particularly dirty trick. A Mind 2 effect can cause a hunter to expend one Conviction point immediately per success, though of course the effects of this Conviction will still override any other mental effects the hunter suffers for the current scene and likely trigger the hunter's Second Sight. Unfortunately, hunters subject to this effect are usually freed of mental influences, aware of the supernatural creatures around them and frightened or angry that they are nearly devoid of further Conviction. Even if a hunter does not understand how this occurred, which is likely, he is likely to be hypersensitive to the presence of supernatural creatures, as surely any one of them could have caused his current and sudden state.

Hunter Tongues

Hunters possess a mystic ability to communicate with each other in a written script which each of them inherently understands and yet which cannot be deciphered by anyone else. At least that is the theory behind it. In truth, of course, this state of affairs is a rather vulgar magical effect enacted upon a large scale by the Messengers. Storytellers may be faced with mages who rightfully assume that it is possible for them to break the Messenger's code, even if it proves nearly impossible to do so. Mages perform the impossible before and after breakfast every day after all, so what is to stop them from cracking the mystical symbols every hunter instinctively learns?

As far as Spheres go, this is not a particularly difficult feat. All that is required is Mind 3 to tap into the universal meaning of the symbols. Alternatively, the Mage may use Mind 2, Spirit 2 to plumb the depths of the spirit realms and link to the universal unconsciousness. Unfortunately for a mage clever enough to try this, she is facing an incredible wall of countermagic against her prying efforts. Depending upon the wishes of the Storyteller this may represent a necessity of gaining 30 or more successes simply to pierce the Babel-like defenses of the Messengers. Thirty is a fairly

benevolent range — Storytellers who wish to represent the divine wrath of the Messengers may raise the requirements to 50, 75, 100 or more, and possibly have vengeful spirits attack mages who attempt the feat. Experienced mages may sense a distinct similarity between the forces of Paradox and those that array against them when they stand against the power of the Messengers.

Voices in My Head

Devious mages may consider a few other opportunities when faced with the presence of hunters. Those who understand that their foes hear voices speaking to them may seek to deceive their enemies. Speaking to a hunter via telepathy is of course merely a Mind 3 effect, but this is not enough to duplicate the distinct sense of the Messengers. Posing as the mental messages of one of the Messengers requires Mind 3, Spirit 2 in order to combine mental communication with spirit speech. Whether a hunter believes the words he hears in his head is a matter controlled by the normal roleplay of that hunter and the successes the mage garners while trying to fool him. The mage must make a Manipulation + Cosmology or Hunter Lore roll with a difficulty equal to 6 plus any Patron Background rating the hunter possesses. Obviously it is harder to trick someone who hears the real thing on a regular basis. Unfortunately for most hunters the idea of listening to odd voices in their heads has become almost normal, and should the mage succeed, her demands are not likely to be ignored, though they may be treated with whatever normal lack of cooperation a hunter throws at his real Messenger patrons.

Some mages try a different tack and wish to understand the Messengers themselves. Such individuals are likely to try Spirit or Mind effects to communicate with the Messengers through the hunters who act as their mouthpieces and champions. This might be accomplished through Mind 3 or Spirit 2 effects, but mages who succeed are not likely to appreciate their efforts. Successfully contacting a Messenger only brings the mage to its attention directly. If the true goals of the mage happen to fall within those of the Messenger, it may leave the mage alone to pursue her plans, but this is not probable. Messengers will generally resent the intrusion and communicate the presence of the mage to other hunters in the area with whom they have contact. It is possible, however, that very spiritual mages who are in tune with the natural desires of the divine might find new allies in the Messengers. Spirits of divine justice gone wrong can be demanding and may force mages who reach them to serve alongside the hunters they have turned to their purposes. This might form precisely the sort of excuse a Storyteller requires to put **Hunter** and **Mage** characters together.

Mummies



The Sixth Maelstrom, known as the Dja-akh or Spirit Storm, tore through the shadowlands, destroying the Egyptian city of the dead and spurring the god Osiris to unprecedented activity. Most mages remain completely unaware of the events leading to the rise of new mummies, and even those who have encountered the newest mummies are

sometimes not sure what exactly they are. Ahl-i-Batin as well as certain Chorister and Hermetic groups tend to be the most common mage groups to encounter and understand the Reborn.

To a great degree there is a strong dichotomy between the lack of knowledge most mages display toward mummies and the almost intimate lore which other mage groups possess. Sorcerer groups that have not been involved in the Egyptian historical paradigm or the creation rites that brought mummies into existence generally have little to no information about them whatsoever. On the other hand, some mystic groups were important factors in the Resurrection ritual that brought the fragmented souls of Amenti to life once again. These societies benefit from direct experience and prophetic revelations of the Reborn and their god Osiris.

Rules for the degree of knowledge a cult may possess about mummies, or said mummies might possess about mage society, may be represented by the following Lore Knowledge abilities.

Mummy Lore

- Student: You know for sure that mummies exist and are just beginning to learn the basic fallacies of normal occult lore regarding their kind. Mummies do not shamle around in bandages, for example.
- College: You know that mummies are created by a powerful ritual that grants serial immortality. You may even know of the existence of the Cult of Isis, Children of Osiris and Ashukhi Corporation.
- Masters: You are well-versed in mummy lore and probably even know of the existence of the Eset-a and the Shemsu-heru. You may know that Horus is a real being, though it is doubtful you would know where to find him.

- Doctorate: You know as much as most of your subjects. Your knowledge of mummies is comparable to that of some of the wiser cults, including some awareness that the Amenti are not the only mummies.

- Scholar: You know your subjects better than many of them know themselves. Your knowledge of mummies is comparable to that of the Shemsu-heru. Should this come to the attention of certain Imkhu, your entire existence might be in danger.

Possessed by: Eastern Avatars, House Shaea, Mummies, Resurrection Cults, Supernatural Egyptophiles

Specialties: Mummy Magic, Mummy Weaknesses, a particular cult

Special Note: Mummies will often possess an alternate Knowledge called Amenti Lore. Assume that Amenti Lore is a somewhat superior form of Mummy Lore, bolstered by the fact that the scholar is seeking to understand his own kind rather than learn the secrets of outsiders. Storytellers can represent this by offering lower difficulty numbers to recall the same facts or by treating a level of skill as one rank higher.

MAGE LORE

Mummies are actually more likely to explore crossover Knowledges than many inhabitants of the World of Darkness are. Most mummies owe their very existence to a Resurrection cult that performed the magical rituals taught to them by Osiris and potentially even taught them part of their personal collection of mystic charms. For rules regarding this knowledge, see Mage Lore, pp. 197-198.

MAGIC AND Mummies

Relations between mummies and mages are usually extremely antagonistic or deeply mutually beneficial. Certainly the vast majority of mages have no interaction with mummies, but those who do are generally busy actively trying to bring about their destruction or actively seeking to aid their goals. The Resurrection cults oftentimes contain mage members who seek to improve the position of mummies and help defeat the forces of Apophis. On the other hand, sinister Apophis cultists, including the Amkhat

and certain Egyptian Nephendi, seek nothing short of the destruction of all of the servants of Osiris and the end of Ma'at.

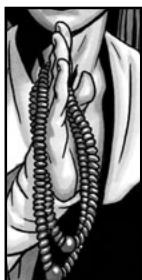
Mummy and mage spells and effects which result in opposite effects are subject to the countering rules given under the Quick and Dirty Crossover or Success-based Crossover rules provided earlier in this chapter. Of course mummies and mages must still sense incoming attacks in order to be able to counter them, or possess outstanding defenses against magical assault. Ironically, this is one time that even mages may be outmatched. Mummy hekau is one of the most defensive types of magic in the World of Darkness, and the Reborn are likely to bring protective amulets and effigy creations to bear anytime they are attacked. Regardless, mages still have access to dynamic effects granting them flexibility far beyond the capability of even the most advanced practitioner of hekau.

A couple of important points should be made regarding crossover. Mages are one of the few super-

natural forces that might bring the knowledge and power necessary to destroy a mummy to the table. Destroying a mummy permanently can be accomplished with a conjunctional Spirit 5, Prime 5 effect by a mage who has at least some understanding of what she is doing. Some older mummies, especially from the Ishmaelite faction, may even purposefully seek out mages for the opportunity to gain final release from their eternal existences.

Another observance is the common occurrence of mummy and mage rituals that actually seek to aid rather than contest one another in their efforts. Storytellers should allow mage and mummy characters to work together according to the Acting in Concert rules from the **Mage** rulebook. Even the most talented mummy will appreciate the aid of a mage in performing her hekau spells, and even the mightiest mage may benefit from the mystical knowledge of a talented hekau practitioner.

KINDRED ⊕ THE EAST



Storytellers who wish to incorporate Eastern kindred and mages into the same stories have the advantage of the numerous similarities between this type of crossover and that of normal vampires. Issues regarding special immunities and opposition between Eastern Disciplines and mage Spheres follow the same rules as those provided in the **Vampire: The Masquerade** portion of this chapter, with some exceptions which will be noted here.

The cultural differences between Eastern Kindred and Western vampires cannot be ignored. Mages who possess knowledge of Western vampires and decide to apply it equally to Eastern Kindred will likely face many unexpected and deadly surprises. Many of these will come from the fact that the kuei-jin are essentially demonic beings who have regained control over their fallen corpses, while vampires from the West are bloodthirsty but rather physical creatures. The differences inherent in these changes go far beyond cultural reference.

Storytellers should keep in mind at all times that the various chi energies of kuei-jin spring from different sources and therefore usually fall under different Spheres. Most occurrences of yin and yang energy fall under the Prime Sphere. P'oh energies are raw expressions of the demonic spirit and therefore are

affected by the Spirit Sphere. Hun energies, on the other hand, are an expression of the inner strength that can be reached only by the Mind Sphere. All effects seeking to influence the flow of these energies must use the suitable Spheres.

KINDRED ⊕ THE EAST ⊗ LORE

- Student: You know for sure that Eastern Kindred exist and are just beginning to learn the basic fallacies of normal occult lore regarding these exotic vampires. Not all Eastern Kindred must stop to count rice, for example.
- College: You know that Eastern Kindred call themselves kuei-jin and that they have societies of the undead based around ancient courts.
- Masters: You are well versed in Eastern Kindred lore, including understanding the stereotypes associated with all of the Dharmas, possibly even minor knowledge of their different common powers.
- Doctorate: You know as much as most of your subjects. Your knowledge of Eastern Kindred is comparable to that of those who have gained a fairly high understanding of their Dharma path.

- Scholar: You know your subjects better than many of them know themselves. Your knowledge of Eastern Kindred is comparable to that of a mandarin. Should this come to the attention of certain courts, you may find yourself living in interesting times.

Possessed by: Eastern Demon Hunters, Eastern Kindred, San Francisco Vampires, Tremere spies

Specialties: Eastern Kindred Shintai, a particular Dharma, a specific court

Special Note: Kindred of the East will often possess an alternate Knowledge called Kuei-jin Lore. Assume that Kuei-jin Lore is a somewhat superior form of Kindred of the East Lore, bolstered by the fact

that the scholar is seeking to understand his own kind rather than learn the secrets of outsiders. Storytellers can represent this by offering lower difficulty numbers to recall the same facts or by treating a level of skill as one rank higher.

MAGE LORE

Eastern Kindred are more in tune with the supernatural creatures around them than most Western Kindred. Of Western Kindred, possibly only the Tremere tend to possess the same level of occult knowledge. Most kuei-jin who know of mages specialize in knowledge of Wu Lung and Akashic Brothers. For further details, see Mage Lore, pp. 197-198.

⊕ OTHER GAMES



Using the above examples, it shouldn't be hard to devise rules for dealing with any of the other game settings produced by White Wolf, such as **Wraith**, **Change-**

ling, or even **Trinity** and **Aberrant**. Bold Storytellers may even want to use **Adventure!**, sending their mages to an alternate Earth history more in line with a Sons of Ether utopia.

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WHAT IS THE ONYX PATH?

WINTER 2011-2012: (VTM) V20 COMPANION

SPRING 2012: (VTM) CHILDREN OF THE REVOLUTION

SUMMER 2012: (VTM) HUNTERS HUNTED 2

FALL 2012: (WTA) WEREWOLF: THE APOCALYPSE – 20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

WINTER 2012-2013: (MTA) MAGE CONVENTION BOOK



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