

# GODS & MONSTERS



Creatures and Companions for  
Mage: The Ascension 20th Anniversary Edition

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Mage: The Ascension 20th Anniversary Edition

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## Dedication

For my friend Raven Bond — healer, magician, therapist, trickster, a malcontent against the established order, and one of the best men I have ever known. You beat the odds for five long years, and you left this world a far better place for your presence among us. Fly well, old friend, and thank you for the foolish magic of your wisdom.

Shortly before this book's completion, our friend Ember Johnston Nannysdotter was killed in a car crash. Ember had been a creative luminary in our Seattle community and a ferocious voice for justice and transformation. Their (Ember's pronoun) sudden and unforeseeable death underscores the need for all of us to appreciate one another while we can, and to live lives that make our world a better place long after we're no longer physical parts of it. Thank you, Ember, for the beauty you shared and the spirit you revealed through your arts.

## Special Thanks

To Josh Heath for helping us walk along the Path.



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# Burning Bones

*Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less.*

— Marie Curie

“Big Owl spreads his wings. He brings down shadows, y’know, and our shadows respond to him.”

“Who’s Big Owl?”

Napayshni nods his head in the direction of his window. We both know what he means. Outside, the city rumbles discontent. At night, it just gets worse. TV voices filter in from surrounding apartments, cutting through the sound of wind outside and the murmur of voices — often talking, sometimes raised — from those busy lives around us.

In my head, I still hear the roaring, icy wind of the camp we left behind. The crackle of flames, our whispering tears. The men beyond the fire, dressed in black, suited up for war. Crouched in the shadow of their black machines, flames reflecting off their visors and eyes. When did this war come home, lurch out of the secret dream and slash itself across the eyes of the world? Better yet, when did it become so goddamned *normal*? Thirty years back, that would be inconceivable. Now, it’s just a Facebook refresh away.

Years compress, unwind, embrace. Napayshni’s apartment feels too old, too fresh, too raw for me. Across the decades, I still feel needles push through skin, bringing surges of forgetfulness and the timeless ache of need. And so, I escape past and present to a time in between, when thick snow muffled our footsteps and wind bit through layers of our clothing, too heavy to move freely in, too light to save us from the winter’s cold.

He catches me drifting through time in my head. “He’s fear,” Napayshni says, pulling me back to our present conversation. “An old story that never gets old enough to stop mattering, y’know?”

“Big Owl?”

“Yes.”

He’s not like me, Napayshni. He does what he does without magick — only courage, like his name says. His memories don’t pull him back and forth across temporal tides. He remembers where we’ve been, what we’ve done, but though it haunts him — and I know it does — he doesn’t seem to drown in it the way I sometimes do. He’s braver than I am, too. I could have killed them all. He knows what would have happened if I had, and he’s strong enough to have stopped me from doing it.

*The ache of power strong enough to tear steel cries in my bones and screams to be unleashed.*

Shake my head clear. “Big Owl,” I repeat. “Who is he?”

Napayshni laughs. “I don’t know if I should tell you that, Lee Ann. It’s pretty sacred stuff.”

I laugh, then stop myself. It’s not my place to laugh at this. “You’re teasing me again.”

“Yeah, I am.” His smile reveals uneven teeth, a lifetime of dental issues too costly to fix and too painful to ignore. I’d offered to fix that for him, shortly after we’d first met, but he didn’t want that kind of help. “It’s part of who I am, Lee Ann,” he tells me in that long-ago. “It wouldn’t be fair to get my magic friend to fix it when so many other people have to go without it.” He smiled at me then, too. He smiles a lot for someone who’s seen what he’s seen. I could learn a lot from him. “I carry my past in my teeth. It tastes better that way.”

I smile at the joke he made so long ago and at his admission of teasing me now. I love his smile, crooked as it is.

"So what's so sacred," I ask, "about Big Owl?"

Napayshni leans in closer, the shower he took earlier today still ghosting soap across his scent. I inhale bitter winter wind and the wood smoke of our fires. His nearness drowns the echoes of my past. I could get lost in him if I was more his type. "In the old days, when night would spread its blanket out and let the stars have their turn at our sky, Old Man Big Owl walked freely under the clouds. His hairy head brushed up against the moon, and his feet made the ground shake as he walked."

"Are we talking about an owl or a guy?"

"Lee Ann," he says, tilting his chin down so his eyes roll up at me, "you of all people should know not to ask such literal questions. Especially not when someone else is talking."

I grimace. "You're right. Sorry. Go on."

"When he'd catch somebody out where they shouldn't be, Big Owl would reach down and scoop them up and eat them the way we might eat a chicken leg. Y'know, stripping off the flesh bit by bit, pulling muscles off with his teeth, sucking all the juices off the bones..."

I laugh. "I get the picture."

"I'm sure you do. So, even when he wasn't eating people, all the people — the four-footed ones as well as the two-footed ones — learned to fear Big Owl. Mothers would tell their kids, 'Behave, or else Big Owl will come here at night and take you away from us and chew your skin like an old chicken bone.' Big Owl invaded their dreams. His feathered wings flapped thunder inside their heads. When his little cousins hooted in the dark, the people curled up inside their homes and prayed that Big Owl would go on by and go eat someone else instead. Big Owl was fear. Big Owl ate fear. Big Owl *became* fear. And so, wherever fear was, Big Owl was there, too."

Night ruffles its feathers at us outside the walls. Long-dead needles push against my skin, hungry for release, to release me, to devour me. Around us, gathered at their keyboards and their plasma TV screens, voices rise and weave past and present into one. Black feathers brush against my soul. A weeping man shivers against my lips. Happy lovers share my sweat. And underneath it all, the fist of hate rises, aching for a face to smash.

*Anger is the fist of fear.*

My friend goes on, his voice rising past sensations in my soul: "When the hero Killer-of-Enemies heard about the terrors of Big Owl, he came out of the east to take Big Owl down. In one hand, he held the club he had made from the bones of a three-legged giant, and in the other he held the seven arrows that hit every time he aimed his bow. Killer-of-Enemies walked around at night for many nights. Fear pecked at his muscles and tore at his flesh, but he refused to run

away. Finally, after the moon had grown thin and then full again, Killer-of-Enemies felt the ground shake and heard the rustle of Big Owl's wings on the wind."

I consider asking him whether Big Owl was walking or flying, but keep my mouth shut. He's right — I'm the *last* person who should be taking things literally.

"Big Owl was as big as the night sky. The moon hid behind his head. The stars ran from the feathers of his wings. Killer-of-Enemies felt the crushing winds that beat down and sent up dust storms to blind the hunter's eyes. He set down his club and he aimed his bow, and he fired six of his seven arrows into the Big Owl's chest. Big Owl didn't even slow down. As he dove in to snatch Killer-of-Enemies up, the hero thought, 'This might be it, y'know? This might be the last fight I ever fight.'"

Breath catches in my chest. I know that feeling well. *Every* fight might be your last, and someday, if you fight too much and define yourself by fighting, one of them will be.

"He knew fear. It scared him. Fear rushed down on Killer-of-Enemies and it blocked out the sky. That's the way fear *is*, y'know? When it's over you, when it comes rushing down on you that way, then it seems like there's nothing left in the world."

*My bones burn with the lust to kill.*

My fist, I noticed, clenched without me even realizing it. It lies on the table between us, like a part from someone else's body, hard as stone, cold as winter.

*I see their columns in the distance. Black uniforms. War machines. Bright lights burning against a darkened sky. Black armor swallowing the snow. Behind their visors, I feel fear. It tastes like blood and tear gas and oil. Reaching past it, I sense a mother's touch. A lover's caress. Children's laughter. Empty nights and endless skies.*

*I could send them burning with a single wave.*

*But he knows what will happen if I do. Not even I can fight the world.*

Napayshni's voice reaches past my memory. "That's what fear's like," he says. He speaks for himself as well. "It makes you want to fight the world," he adds as if he'd heard my thoughts. Who knows? He probably did. "Especially when you know you can't." As the night reaches in around us, he disappears into shadows even though he's sitting right across from me. Inside his skin, I feel blood pulse, catch the clenching fist of his heart in his chest. "And that's when you have to stand," he whispers. "That's when standing matters most."

*I stood and watched them burn the camp.*

I'm standing even now, even when the flames have died.

I could have killed them all. I *wanted* to. He stopped me. Napayshni knew how much everyone else had to lose. Knew it in ways only those who've lost damn near everything can possibly understand.

The heat I feel is shame at what I might have done.

Napayshni swallows hard, breaking the trance for both of us. “So, Killer-of-Enemies, he took that last arrow, y’know? And he aimed it straight at Big Owl’s right eye, and when he let it loose that arrow sailed straight through the darkness and hit Big Owl square in the eye socket and punched that eye out.” His voice rises. “And Big Owl pulled up out of his dive, but he was going too fast to stop, and as his claws and wings spread out, Killer-of-Enemies grabbed up his club and he belted Old Man Big Owl right in the fucking chops.”

I see him grin again.

“And Big Owl busted up into a million pieces, a *billion* pieces, and he flew off all over the world, anywhere he could get that Killer-of-Enemies *wasn’t*.”

He pauses.

“That’s what fear does. It flies away and hides. And it’s still there, y’know? Just like Big Owl, it’s never really gone.” He reaches out to my winter-cold fist. Warms it with his touch,

with the life inside us both. “But you can face it. And you fight it. And you can bust it right in its fucking chops. It doesn’t kill the *fear*... but, y’know, it makes it easier to deal with.”

I nod. “I do know. Yeah.” I lay my other hand over his hand and my cold fist. “Thanks for reminding me. I tend to forget it.”

“Easy *to* forget,” he says. “There’s so much out there trying to make us feel afraid.”

The wind rises outside his window, shaking the glass and rattling the frame. The burning in my bones subsides, but the fire never really leaves.

Outside, I hear the rustle of Big Owl’s wings. Voices raised in desperation. Fingertips on keys. Clenched lungs and muttered curses. The pulse of a nation beating its head against the wall.

We’re all afraid. Of them. Of us.

*Breathe*, I remind myself. The first lesson you learn in life: to breathe.

# Introduction: Something Rich and Strange

*To a new world of gods and monsters!*  
— Dr. Pretorius, *The Bride of Frankenstein*

*“God, John – he even looks like you.”*

*It’s a poetic conceit, of course. Agent Tiberius looks nothing like me, and I resemble him only insofar as two black-clad agents might resemble one another. In this case, the other agent is clad in fur. I, of course, maintain the assigned uniform. Fellow Black Suits resemble me far more than Agent Tiberius does. Which is, of course, a primary reason I have done so much for so long with so few repercussions. I am, especially when I wish to be, the proverbial needle in a haystack.*

*Still, I feel a smile crease one corner of my mouth. It’s an uncommon sensation at best.*

*Tiberius allows his tail a single wag. His cropped ears perk with a tension I’ve begun to recognize as humor. Dogs are generally far more intelligent than most humans give them credit for. Agent Tiberius is far more intelligent than most people. He appreciates the irony, as do I.*

*Agent Simpson laughs. The white of his teeth shines bright against his skin. I trust him like I trust few others of my kind and his essential humanity, however flawed it might appear to be under regulation standards, is the reason why. The same stroke of independence that allows him to make a joke at the mild expense of*

*higher-ranking operatives has shielded him, so far as I’m aware, from the infestation of our Union and the corruption all too obviously seething at its core.*

*I had not wanted to believe this, but the evidence is plain. We are at war within our Union, and those of us who value its ideals must save it from what it has become.*

*Beside me, Tiberius cocks his head at me. Assessment begins, so I assess him in return. Green letters flash by in the corner of my vision, but I don’t need their information. Tiberius is a familiar asset, and Agent Simpson is as close as one gets to being my friend.*

*With a mental shrug, I shut down the VDAS feed. The tilt of my head says all they need to know.*

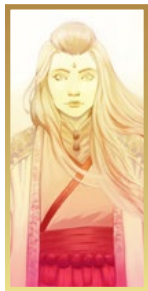
*Tiberius relaxes, his flanks shifting with near-imperceptible relief. He looks back to Simpson, who nods, and then he sits, his claws tapping on the metal floor.*

*“You two know each other, correct?” Simpson’s voice holds a casual note no one but those closest to him would recognize.*

*I allow myself to nod. “By reputation until now, but yes.”*

*“Then gentlemen,” Simpson says, his scan of the room now complete, “Let’s talk. We have very little time, and a lot of work to do.”*

# Gods in a Monstrous Mirror



We move in the shadows of monsters and gods, those aspects of infinity through which we view our lives. Reflecting us back to ourselves, these living mirrors show us who we think we are. We do the same for them as well, capturing the things we see and then casting those impressions out into the world we share. We are, as the old song says, “each another’s audience” – the gods, the monsters, the familiar and the strange. I’m a mystery to you, you’re a mystery to me, but in the middle grounds where we meet, we reflect aspects of one another back so that, through those relationships, we get to know ourselves.

In the Kabbalistic tradition, Divinity shatters Itself into infinite pieces in order to better know Itself. Every element, each person, every thing, is therefore an aspect of Divinity incarnate. In the lore of **Mage**, those fragments become Avatars, Awakened and Sleeping, who ideally will reconnect someday and exalt this flawed and frightening world into a greater state of being: an Ascension through which all things may perhaps become possible.

Yeah, right.

Look around us now, and you’ll see fragments. Disunity. Conflict. We’re more enemies than audience to one another these days, and all too often we see monsters where instead we might see gods. If indeed there is something Divine inside us trying to see Itself, that deity must be appalled. We have created wonders and then turned them back upon ourselves, hating what we think we see while refusing to recognize our own reflections in our hate.

Yet, literally speaking, we are *all* gods and monsters, familiar strangers more alike than we are different. The distance between us is an illusion, a myth of separation that keeps us from seeing how truly wondrous we are. Ascension may be an ideal, but unity remains possible – a flawed and limited unity, perhaps, but one that mere humans can still, to some degree, achieve.

**Mage** is a game of realities at war. Folks who consider themselves enlightened and awake spend untold amounts of energy trying to kill each other in service to ideals that are, on many levels, just the same theme seen from a different vantage. Worse still, they put themselves on pedestals above the so-called “sleeping masses” and the companions in their shadows. Caught



in a state between humanity and transcendence, they unleash hell in the name of heaven. Mages, then, are monstrous gods — all too human, blind with open eyes.

Those mages are a lot like us.

Like **Mage**'s fictional willworkers, we shape our own realities. At keyboards, at gaming tables, even walking down the street, our concept of what is and is not real depends on our perceptions. In order to escape the prisons we construct with our own minds, we must look outside ourselves, see the reflection in another person's eyes, and accept that we're all in this big thing together. If we can't or won't do that, then the world we see and the reality we create become stagnant. Static. Ultimately doomed.

**Mage**, then, is about saving reality from itself by looking at The Other and recognizing, in that "other," ourselves.

And to that end, the book in your hands is about people we might see as "others": animals, constructs, vampires, beasts. Paradox Spirits and familiar companions. Internal Avatars and transcendent gods. Although mages often think of such beings as companions and enemies, lovers and friends, they are all, to some degree, living aspects of reality — parts of the whole that mages all too often miss because they're too busy staring at their own reflection instead of seeing it right beside them all along.

## What's in a Name?

In James Whale's classic film *The Bride of Frankenstein*, Dr. Pretorius (whose name, in Latin, means "the one who leads") offers up a toast to the possibilities of new lives created by the hands of men. Although that experiment goes rather badly for everyone concerned, the idea of a world peopled by "gods and monsters" offers a perfect fit for **Mage**'s themes of power and its corruptions. Awakened folk move through such a world... and, thanks to their reality-weaving powers, they move that world as well. Thus, our mages live among gods and monsters while also being gods and monsters themselves.

Gods, of course, are defined by Merriam-Webster's *Collegiate Dictionary* as "being(s) or object(s) believed to have more than natural attributes and powers and to require human worship; specifically, one controlling a particular aspect or part of reality." The word monster, as noted in the **Mage** 20th Anniversary Edition rulebook, refers to omens, warnings, and fearsome reflections of our inner demons. *Familiar* means "intimate, related, close at hand," with obvious ties to the word *family*. And yet, a *stranger* is foreign, unrelated, distant, alien — the apparent opposite of familiarity. That paradox sums up the theme and mood of this book: Mages and their companions wield godlike powers that make them monsters, and though

## Optional Rule: Troupe Play

Originally created by Jonathan Tweet and Mark Rein • Hagen for **Mage**'s ancestor *Ars Magica*, troupe play allows each player to create and control several characters, not just one. Rather than playing multiple mages, though, each player has one mage and several companion characters. This way, companions get a chance to shine as well. Instead of Background Traits with names, they become protagonists in their own right.

The troupe play option also frees your group from relying solely upon their mages. A given story can feature two mages and two companions, a single mage and three companions, or whatever other variations seem to fit the story best. One session or scene might feature only companions, while another scene deals with mages alone. This option expands the potential stories you can tell, especially if the relationships between those characters get as complex as the relationships between real people can be.

Generally, you'll want to play only one character at a time. Portraying multiple characters at the same time can lead to power-gaming, shared knowledge between characters who don't possess telepathy, spotlight-hogging, player confusion ("Which character are you speaking for this time?"), dramatic monopoly, and creative fatigue. Pick one character, and then stick with it throughout a given scene or story.

Troupe play provides an excellent showcase for Backgrounds like Allies, Familiar, and Retainers; and for Merits and Flaws like Family Support or Issues, Manifest Avatar, Sleeping with the Enemy, True Love, and Ward. Those Traits become a lot more significant, obviously, if another player takes on the role of your Trait's associated character; a beloved paramour or jealous spouse has far more depth if he's being played by the guy right next to you.

Troupe play can also give the Storyteller a break if a fellow player steps into that position. In this case, another player is entrusted with the Storyteller role while the usual Storyteller gets to step out in character. **The Book of Mirrors** features a detailed rundown of this option ("Sharing the Spotlight," pp. 149-151). For a group full of imaginative players, this option presents a wider range of stories than a single person could provide... and that, in turn, leads to more fun for everyone.

For additional inspiration, see the storytelling chapter in **Mage 20**, specifically "Troupe Collaboration" (p. 342), "Characters" (pp. 355-357), "Settings as Characters" (p. 359), and "The Avatar" (pp. 366-367); plus the "Genre, Storytelling, and **Mage**" section of **The Book of Secrets**, specifically the entries for "Romance" and "Tragedy" (pp. 285-286).

they're intimately related they appear strange and threatening to one another. Fascinated by the strangers beside them, they often fail to notice we're all in this big thing together.

Like those mages, we're "playing god" in our own little worlds — if only around the gaming table — fascinated by the strange monsters we fight while often missing that, to them, we're strange monsters, too.

We are all "the other" in someone else's eyes.

But when we transcend our petty bullshit, we can see that we're family. Even when we kind of hate each other, we're all One.

## Flock Together

You're known, as the saying goes, by the company you keep. And mages, whose presence guides the world around them, attract allies, associates, and enemies who reflect their personalities back at them. The nature witch finds herself surrounded by animals; the Enlightened scientist associates with lab assistants and experimental beings. Urban saints attract creatures who call their city home, while devotees of spiritual practices draw sacred friends and profane foes.

As shown by the **Mage 20** Background entries for "Backup and Familiar / Companion" (pp. 306 and 314-315), and the Resonance entry "Roleplaying, Storytelling, Merits, and Flaws" (**The Book of Secrets**, p. 169), a mage's companions reflect the temperament of the magus in question, assuming forms and functions that reflect the essential nature, metaphysical energies, and magical focus appropriate to the mage in question. And so, as you introduce companions into your **Mage** chronicle, makes sure those allies, associates, and enemies seem appropriate to the Awakened characters in your game — related in some way that reveals how your mages shape their world and the ways in which that world responds to them.

## How to Use This Book

As a compendium of creatures and companions, **Gods & Monsters** presents an array of non-mage characters. You can use these entries straight out of the box as presented, employ them as springboards for original character designs, build mages on the framework of certain characters and templates (notably those given in Chapter One), work them into the Backgrounds, Merits, and Flaws of your Awakened characters, or drop them

into other World of Darkness chronicles, either as non-player characters or as foundations for characters the players employ.

The following chapters break down this way:

- **Chapter One: Sleepers, Consors, Hunters, and Night-Folk** presents dozens of templates and characters for the people who deal most closely with mages and their world.
- **Chapter Two: Constructs and Familiars** offers a look at the creatures that mages craft and conjure in order to keep themselves company in a world few people understand.
- **Chapter Three: A Bestial Bestiary** deals with non-human entities: familiar animals and legendary critters who live on the hidden fringes of this world.
- **Chapter Four: Ephemeral Entities** goes beyond the material realm and features Avatars, Paradox Spirits, totem-spirits, and actual divinities.
- **Chapter Five: Crafting Characters** lays out rules and Traits for non-mage characters, and features **Spirit Charms and Special Advantages**, which offer powers beyond human capacity.
- There's also a selection of suggested resources at the end of Chapter Five, featuring books and films that may inspire or inform characters and stories for you.

Whether walking by each other's sides or chasing each other through the shadows, mages and their various companions become essential characters in the stories of their lives. By extension, the adventures they share, good and otherwise, forge the basis for their realities. We're *all* stories, actually — the memories we share, the tales we tell ourselves, the impressions we draw from the way the world seems to work... at the end of the day, they're all stories which shape our view of what's real.

And though we often miss the significance of that guy behind the counter or that neighbor who drives us up the wall, the most amazing stories often stand right next to us, unspoken and usually unseen, in the guise of the people and animals we believe we know best.



# Chapter One: Sleepers, Consors, Hunters, and Night-Folk

*We cannot despair of humanity, since we ourselves are human beings.*

*– Albert Einstein*

*You're sure he's in here?"*

*"Dude, I'm not sure of anything right now."*

*It used to be a mattress place, I think. One of those standalone, luxury-item storefronts that used to cover the landscape back when the economy was good and everybody thought it'd stay good forever. So many buildings built and abandoned – office parks, McMansions, malls – that even the busiest city looks like a ghost town if you turn down the right (or wrong) corner and find graffiti-masked hulks rotting right off the main drag... and occasionally right along the main drag, too. Hell, it's not that long ago that my favorite part of town featured niche bookstores and fashionable boutiques. Now they're all boarded up and fenced off by the cheap chain-link fences that seem to be the nation's biggest industry. Fences that are, at best, a polite suggestion ignored by anyone who wants or needs to find what lies behind that fence.*

*In our case, Lee Ann and I needed to find the runaway teenage son of our friend Maurice – a great guy to have taking care of Chantry paperwork but not someone equipped to go digging through the rougher side of town on what would be, for most folks, a wild-teen chase. Maurice had said some stupid... and, to be fair to the kid, really ugly... things*

*about his son's new boyfriend, and so Christian had done what most kids in his situation would have done: grabbed his shit, stormed out, and got himself lost in an environment he couldn't begin to understand.*

*There's a lot of that going around these days.*

*Lee Ann took some deep breaths to focus her senses to the point where she could see in the blackness beyond the storefront's missing window. I'm not nearly as good at that sort of thing as she is, so I slid on my light-enhancing glasses and pressed the stud until I could see what was waiting for us in the dark.*

*A sea of trash, punctuated by old furniture and ringed by surreal graffiti covering every visible meter of the walls. Some old mattresses, cloaked by dirty blankets and sporting bodies that shivered and snored but didn't seem to notice us. A thick stench of rotting food and rotting bodies, undercut with the vinegar-sweet tang of meth and the rougher smell of cheap beer.*

*Silent, Lee Ann tapped my shoulder.*

*That's when I felt the press of bodies right behind us, and heard air whistle around the lead pipe swinging straight at the back of my head...*

## The Heart of the World

*It starts with people. For all the paranormal goodies on display in a World of Darkness chronicle, the human element is essential. Without the people at the heart of that world, all the vampires and*

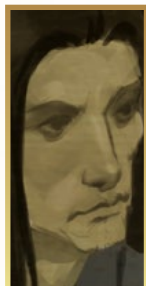
*were-whatevers we could imagine wouldn't even exist. Though often forgotten in the mad rush of claiming the next Sphere, the mortal side of your **Mage** saga is the foundation for every other thing.*

And so, our tour through this world of **Gods & Monsters** begins with the heart of that world: the human beings who make up much of its population. Moving outward, we'll visit the near-human Night-Folk, the familiars and constructs who are such an intimate part of most Awakened lives, and then

onward to the eventual reach of actual gods.

In the beginning, though, we've got *people*. Just people who, despite the dismissive names given to them by high-and-mighty mages, are where all our tales begin.

## The Sleeping Masses



"Sleepers." "The Masses." Really? When you reduce the majority of human beings to such simple, dismissive terms, is it any wonder that they refuse — consciously or otherwise — to go along with your agenda? Mages like to think they call the shots where reality is concerned and to a degree, they're right. Still, the Consensus ultimately depends not upon the whims of wizards but upon the hopes, fears, and beliefs of students, bankers, bus drivers, salespeople, farmers, factory workers, children, elders, and everybody in between. The true face of the Masses is not some slumbering imbecile but the person in your classroom, at your job, in your mirror. We are the Consensus. Mages are just along for the ride.

Although those high-flown Awakened types often forget this fact, even the most supposedly mundane Sleeper has secret, interesting elements of life. He might belong to a mixed martial arts gym, host a Satanic cult, run guns for the local gangs, or have a gender other than the one assigned at birth. One Sleeper has a massive gun collection in her basement and goes out shooting with her girlfriend on the weekends; another can sell anything to anyone without employing a single Merit or Sphere — just force of personality. Everyday people have networks and interests, helpful skills and hidden lives. In real life, this author is a former shop clerk who plays in an occult-rock band with two construction workers, an IT tech-support rep, a customer-service rep, and a pizza server... all of whom have lives their coworkers would rarely understand. The point is this: No human being is "just normal." *Everyone* has hidden sides.

In chronicles that feature Merits and Flaws, it's not unusual for mundane human beings to have Merits like Artistically Gifted, Dark Triad, or Confidence, much less Flaws like Impediment, Profiled Appearance, Troublemaker, or Ward. (Anyone who understands more than their native tongue has at least one Language Merit, and many people have several of them.) The weirder Merits and Flaws are rare but not impossible Traits among the Masses, although things like Cloak of the Seasons or Psychic Vampire mark that mortal as a rather unusual person. Saintry folks might have a dot or two in True Faith, while more wretched mortals struggle with Addiction or Dark Fate. The tendency of World of Darkness critters (and players) to dismiss the capability of normal human beings is short-sighted at best, and it can become — especially for mages who regard themselves as "above

the herd" — potentially fatal.

In addition to the entries given for Typical Citizen, Thug, Beat Cop, Government Agent, and Extraordinary Operatives (**Mage 20**, pp. 620-623), the following entries reflect rough game Traits and concepts for characters who have yet to enjoy the strange powers and extreme crises so familiar to Awakened folks. The character entries below represent a handful of such people who might or might not appear in your adventures.

Assuming they *do* appear, the following templates and personas could be background characters, supporting characters, Background characters (Allies, Backup, Contacts, Cult members, Retainers, personnel for your Chantry or Sanctum), characters associated with Merits or Flaws (True Love, Ward, Family, Property, and so forth), or perhaps even the people your mages were before the Awakening changed their lives forever. Either way, these folks will grow and change as the chronicle progresses; if they become a consistent presence in your chronicle, you can be sure these "sleeping masses" will be more than they initially appear to be.

The characters provided beneath each template are intentionally presented without Traits so your Storyteller can personalize them as she sees fit. This way, folks like Lenora and Jeremy retain an element of surprise and individuality beyond the base provided by the suggested Traits above them.

## The Weight of Living

So often, roleplaying games presume young-to-mature adults as the baseline characters. In stories, however, as in life, people range from infancy to decrepitude. And so, when creating World of Darkness characters older or younger than the adult baseline, either as Storyteller characters or as player-character mages, let the following suggestions be your guide. For more details, see **The Book of Secrets**, pp. 39-41 (the Flaws: Child, Impediment, Aging, and Short), and pp. 115-116 ("Child-Mages"), and the character creation rules in this book's Chapter Five.

### Young Child (2-8 years old)

Physically smaller and weaker than adults, young children also lack much life experience aside from the skills gained from playing and early academic learning. Their mental faculties, however, can approach an adult's capacity, and their ability to perceive things their elders miss is surprisingly high — hence, a boosted Perception and Wits, plus the Abilities:

Awareness and Enigmas. Young kids also tend to have even higher Appearance and Manipulation Attributes because most adults are hard-wired to take care of children. Being small and relatively fragile, though, they have fewer health levels than adult humans do. Those strengths and weaknesses make small kids especially vulnerable to adult power, though, and a child cannot reasonably be expected to take care of himself in an adult-oriented world even though some children manage to survive on their own anyway.

In game terms, a character in this age range has a hard limit on most Traits (a six-point maximum in Physical Traits, and no Physical Attribute higher than 2), and no character points to spend during the creation stage except for the six points gained from the Flaws Child (at the 3-point level) and Short, possibly four more from the Flaw Aging in its youthful option, plus any other Flaws allowed at the Storyteller's discretion.

That character may also have a few Merits and Flaws appropriate to childhood situations: Curiosity, Family Support, Issues, Inner Strength, Naïve, Pitiable, Rival House, Ward, and so on. A child this young won't be taken seriously by adults, remains a ripe target for exploitation, and faces obstacles ranging from a small, fragile body to a lack of social power and the limitations of what he could possibly have learned during a very short time in this life. That child could, of course, have a much older Avatar, guiding spirits, allied adults, and so forth. That said, a kid's life in the adult world might *look* carefree, but it never really is.

**Suggested Attributes:** Strength 1, Dexterity 1, Stamina 2, Charisma 1-3, Manipulation 2-5, Appearance 3-5, Perception 2-3, Intelligence 1-3, Wits 3

**Suggested Abilities:** Alertness 1, Athletics 1, Awareness 3, Enigmas 2

**Willpower:** 2

**Health Levels:** OK, -1, -4, Incapacitated

**Image:** Little kids tend to be adorable by default, though they also create one hell of a mess. Finicky adults might find young children repulsive because such kids get sticky, snotty, and overall kind of gross; other adults find children irresistible and want to take care of them whenever possible.

**Roleplaying Notes:** You're not a small adult — you're a child, and this very big, often-scary world seems, for better and for worse, to revolve around you.

## Joey McCallister

Little Joey hears music in his head. He envisions scenes of action and adventure. His fingers twitch and his limbs move in imitation of the heroes of on his parents' TV screen. He sees himself as a human engine of destruction without really knowing what that really means. He yells "KABOOM!" and other explosive sounds. Joey hasn't learned yet that he should probably keep such things to himself. And because he



rarely speaks in words, or communicates with other kids his age, his parents have begun to wonder if maybe something's wrong with him.

"Wrong" is relative. A doctor might say Joey's on the shallow end of the autism spectrum, but he's just really imaginative, that's all. Nothing much to worry about unless Joey starts acting out more violently. As of now, anyway, he's not. At daycare, the kids find Joey a little strange if they notice him at all. Joey keeps to himself most of the time, and his interactions with other children are, if anything, more gentle, shy, and temperate than most kids his age. He thrashes around in his sleep at naptime, though, and the sounds he makes sometimes alarm the adults. Whatever Joey sees and hears, however, is a mystery. He'll share his toys but has not yet decided how or if to share his thoughts.

Not quite five years old, Joey lags a bit behind the developmental curve for kids his age. Words come slowly to him, and he seems unusually distracted most of the time. His bright blue eyes reveal a vivid, perhaps unnerving, level of perceptiveness. It's not that Joey doesn't see the world around him — he clearly does. Joey can recount conversations, if pressed to do so, with an accuracy surprising for someone his age. The times his parents have turned him loose on musical instruments, Joey showed prodigious natural ability. Still, he often seems to be somewhere else. That's not unusual for young children, of course — kids his age *are* still figuring out what is and is not "real" in the eyes of their elders. Joey's reality, though, appears somewhat removed from that of his peers. What's going on in there, and will he ever share the stories in his head? In a world so unpredictable, many answers are possible in the future... some hopeful, many really not.

An adorable blond kid, Joey has slender features, piercing blue eyes, and a largish head in proportion to his body. His clothes seem unusually neat for those of a boy his age, and while he can speak understandably, he rarely does so. Joey seems nervous in social situations, preferring his own company whenever possible. His fingers often weave intricate patterns, designs only he can see, and his preference for long pants, long sleeves, socks, and shoes under almost every circumstance suggests a desire to protect himself from the world outside.

### Older Kid (8-13 years old)

Mobile enough to get into lots of trouble, more resilient than smaller children, and experienced enough to become somewhat capable (though still far below the adult baseline), older kids begin to approach their mature abilities while remaining children in most regards, especially in legal ones. By this age, in many societies, kids begin to have chores and responsibilities, perhaps even jobs. Initiation into adulthood generally begins around age 13 or so.

A character in this age range, then, gets 10 freebie points, but is still limited to a six-point maximum in Physical Traits. Although such characters still get the Child Flaw (at the 2 pt. level), and maybe Aging, too (two additional points); the

Short Flaw is no longer required after puberty sets in, even though most kids still have it until their mid-teens if not later. Maturing kids tend to be distractible (hence a lower Perception and Wits than younger kids might have), but are more experienced at life than younger children are. Since most kids this age are attending some form of schooling, their academic understanding, though incomplete, is often fresher than that of many adults. And since roughhousing is a common thing for kids of all genders, a single dot of Brawl and at least one in Athletics is not inappropriate for the average kid this age.

**Suggested Attributes:** Strength 1-2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma, 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 2, Intelligence 1-4, Wits 2

**Suggested Abilities:** Academics 1, Alertness 2, Athletics 1-2, Brawl 1,

**Willpower:** 2

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

**Image:** Young enough to be cute, old enough to begin developing a personality of their own, older children are generally neater than their younger counterparts but still keep the local adults busy with cleaning, caretaking, and repairing the damage those kids leave behind.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Nobody's the boss of you, except maybe your parents, but probably not them either.

### Lesedi Omiata

"I'm a mermaid," she thinks, even though she knows that isn't true. Lesedi loves to swim. She's loved it ever since her family took a vacation at the beach when she was a little kid, though it's hard for her to swim as often as she likes. The local pool got shut down due to lack of funds, and the school isn't rich enough to afford its own pool despite talk of a school swim team if they can make the proper arrangements for it to happen. In the meantime, Lesedi soaks a lot in the family bathtub and draws mermaids with dark blue skin and curly greenish-black hair.

For Lesedi, dry land feels wrong beneath her feet. Gravity weighs upon her like social disapproval. Between the not-so-gentle jokes some of her friends make about "washing all your black off" and the crueler remarks from local white kids who say she'll turn their water dirty, mermaid dreams are never easy for a girl like Lesedi. Still, she loves to swim, to float, to hold her breath like she could forget what it's like to need to breathe. The mockery just convinces Lesedi that true home lies elsewhere.

She does pretty well at school. Her grasp of facts is obvious, and she catches on fast. She's been studying outdoorsmanship and knows her way around basic home technology. Still, the halls and streets above the waves seem alien, like a distant planet on which she does not belong. Now, with womanhood

rising toward her like a wave she cannot dodge or surf, the clutch of air feels like drowning. Lesedi dreams of swimming away, diving down, hovering in her weightless space until those alien distractions drift away and all that's left is the truth of who she really is.

For now, Lesedi gets by with soft obedience. She does what she's told, as much as any child can. She gets good grades, doesn't fight too much with her brother and older sisters, and nods her head when her parents tell Lesedi what's expected of her. Yeah, she scraps occasionally with the girls at school, and even busted Amare Jackson's nose when he asked her if mermaids smell like fish. Mostly, though, the girl keeps to herself, and dreams of the day... or perhaps the night... when she can grow her tail out secretly and slip away from the human world for good.

A lean-muscle preteen with long limbs, dreadlocks, and a voice vibrant with quiet intensity, Lesedi favors blues and greens in her clothing and the occasional makeup she has begun to wear. Her rugged clothing reflects a lifestyle that's active even by kid standards, and she's usually got a well-earned scrape or three. Lesedi tends to go barefoot or wear sandals rather than shoes, and her large eyes go hazy and distant when she considers her retreat to, and eventually under, the sea.

## Teenager (14-18 years old)

Older children have essentially reached the baseline for World of Darkness characters. Teenage kids might still have the Child Flaw, and are still considered children in many societies, but have the general capacity of an adult in terms of game Traits.

Historically speaking, the mere idea of "teenagers" is a recent innovation of the 20th-century Western industrialized world. Before then (and, in many cultures, even now), people are considered young adults once they hit puberty, and the traditions of apprenticeship, clerical orders, arranged marriages, and military service were on many levels invented in order to channel the restless, reckless urges of human adolescence toward what societies considered to be practical applications of lust, intensity, and violence.

Regardless of the culture they hail from, adolescent people tend to be impulsive and drastic. By adult standards, they're literally insane thanks to the chemical and sociological transformations between childhood and adulthood, combined with the social stresses of conformity, obedience, rejection of parental authority, and indecision about who and what they want to be now that they have the chance to grow up. Modern media has a very profitable fixation on this stage of human development: Teens spend money, so lots of industries use media to entice teens (and their parents) to buy as much stuff as they can possibly afford... and quite often more than that. For obvious reasons then, teens tend to distrust adults even when they still crave support and approval from "their elders." This stage of life is a dance with fire, with part of its appeal being the potential for a truly glorious burn.

Thanks to the physical, mental, and legal transitions of our teenage years, characters in this age range inevitably have various Mental, Social, and possibly Physical Flaws: Impediment can represent literal growing pains, while Family Issues are pretty much a given for any teenage character. Teens are Impulsive by default, and usually Intemperate, too, with Rivalry, True Love, Socially Networked, and New Kid being common Merits and Flaws for adolescent heroes. On the plus side, characters in this age range tend to have a dot or two more in Stamina than their older peers might have, and the older ones can pass for adults even if legally they're not quite there yet.

**Suggested Attributes:** Strength 1-3, Dexterity 2-4, Stamina 1-3, Charisma 1-4, Manipulation 3-4, Appearance 1-4, Perception 2-3, Intelligence 2-4, Wits 2

**Suggested Abilities:** Academics 2, Alertness 1-2, Athletics 0-3, Brawl 1, Expression 2-3, Technology 2-3

**Willpower:** 2-5 (Teens can be incredibly uncertain and yet totally assured at the same time.)

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

**Image:** Working their way from children to adults, teens range from the most awkward and ungainly people imaginable to the most gorgeous specimens of our species. There are reasons artists, merchants, and philosophers remain fixated on adolescence; for better and worse, those years shape the adults we eventually become.

**Roleplaying Notes:** You are who you are, even if you're not sure exactly who that is just yet. By nature and culture, you're impulsive, rebellious, and often confused, and so any hater who tries to cram you into a box is asking for trouble.

## Kim Phan (Phan Thị Khiêm)

"Where are you from?" Kim's from here. Always has been. Sure, her grandparents fled Vietnam in the late 1970s, but that was an eternity ago. Her parents barely speak Vietnamese at all, and Kim's accent fits the world she grew up in, not the place her ancestors came from. Hell, she's barely even met her grandfather, and grandma passed on when Kim was still a kid. The Twin Towers fell on New York before Kim was even born, and she's never known a world without social media, cell phones, and other stuff grandpa's still trying to understand. His world is not hers. Where she's from? The here and now, thank you very fucking much.

Kim's not especially good at math, no matter what people expect from her. She prefers skateboarding, and she's got a pretty decent collection, including a few she made herself. Her signature rig's got blue LEDs on the wheels and a deck painted with a punk rock Princess Luna flying against a backdrop of purple lightning — a custom job Kim built and painted herself. She set up a YouTube channel to show off her tricks, and it's got a few thousand subscribers plus the requisite haters. She and her buds Travis, Shan, and Erika catch some air between classes whenever possible, then hang out anywhere they're less likely to get busted for skating like fiends.

I guess she's sort of popular. I mean, maybe? Kim's got a decent circle of friends, even if most of 'em are skate-rats and stoners. The mean girls have better things to do than pick on Kim, and Kim gets invites to the better parties even though she doesn't show for most of them except maybe long enough to see and be seen while downing a beer or two before heading back out to skate. She likes her metal hard and fast and old, preferably with some hip-hop mixed in to keep it from sounding too white for words, and has a crush on Ville Valo that she admits to no one, even though (like his band) he's really fucking old. Kim keeps her grades up to keep the 'rents off her back, and she's got her eye on a job at a skate shop when she hits 16, but she's got time yet before that happens. As for college, she's not sure. It seems like a lot of work for nothing in the end, and the career she wants has nothing to do with books and everything to do with skill.

When she's not out honing her skating chops, Kim's spending more and more time with her friend Marissa's teen pagan study group. Yeah, some of the stuff they say is kind of woo, but it makes more sense than Mom's weird Catholic hang-up thing. Dad says he respects Kim's spiritual decisions, so she's begun checking out websites and talking Goddess-stuff with Marissa and her friends. Kim really likes the strange designs she's found online. Some of them have begun to find their way onto her skateboard-deck designs, and everybody thinks they're cool, so really it's no big deal...

Thin and muscular, Khiêm often wears road rash and a daredevil grin. She might own a single pair of jeans that *hasn't* been slashed, torn, or otherwise abraded by her asphalt hobbies, and her closet's full of mangled T-shirts from death- and old-school metal bands. Most of Kim's wardrobe is dark (it's better at hiding bloodstains), accentuated with hot pinks, slash patterns, and vivid reds. Although she wears her hair long and straight, she usually ties it back, braids it up, or otherwise keeps it out of her face. Typically tricked out in skater shorts, scabbed knees, overlarge tees, scuffed-up Nikes, a backpack, and one of her collection of dark hoodies, Kim carries a board everywhere and never walks if she can skate.

Kim's parents kept her legal name Vietnamese out of respect to Grandpa. Everyone she knows, however, her folks included, calls her *Kim*. If Mom calls out Kim's full name, the girl understands she's *really* in trouble now. Unlike most of her friends these days, Kim still gets along with Mom... most of the time, anyway. Still, she prefers the silence of her room or the grind of skate wheels and wood across hard surfaces right before she grabs air and flies again.

## Senior (60+ years old)

Mages and other Night-Folk have many ways of bypassing the physical effects of age. Other people have no such talents, and while exercise, luck, genetics, and a healthy lifestyle can reduce the worst ravages of age, those years *do* pile up on

mortal folk. Eventually, youth passes into maturity and (if allowed to do so) endures to seniority and possibly old age.

Older folks often acquire a reputation for grumpy, cantankerous, or grossly inappropriate behavior. Sometimes, this comes about because such people are "products of another time" (see the Mental Flaws Bigot, Impatient, and Inappropriate, and maybe the Supernatural Flaw Anachronism for extreme cases), with values and opinions outside the social mainstream of their age. More often, though, it's simply the result of being in constant pain. Age reminds you each morning about every stupid thing you've ever done, because you feel all of it every time you get out of or into bed. Declining perceptions don't help either; when you need reading glasses to decipher that thing you could have read just fine a year or two earlier, it tends to make one cranky as hell. Despite these truisms, though, old people aren't naturally any more obnoxious than anybody else... unless, of course, they've slipped into distraction or dementia thanks to Alzheimer's or some other form of age-inflicted decay. (See the Flaws Absent-Minded and Derangement.)

The game Trait consequences of advancing age can be found in **The Book of Secrets**, p. 40, under the Flaws Aging and Impediment. The greater effects of age, regardless of a character's chronological years, come through a progressive (or really, degenerative) series of Trait ceilings and penalties. For most unAwakened human beings, those effects start to kick in between age 50 and 60, with a hard, unhealthy lifestyle aging a person by their mid-30s. Although folks can live vigorous lives into their 70s if they're fortunate, conscientious, and often wealthy, most people's bodies begin to break down during the middle years. A senior-age character, then, could range from a healthy person who's down a dot or two in their Physical characteristics, to a near-invalid who's ridden by disease and deteriorating physical and mental capacities.

It's been said that age brings wisdom. It doesn't... but it *does* bring perspective. A person who's survived a few dozen decades in their current incarnation has plenty of experience, and while that experience might not translate into Ability dots, it's not out of line to give an elder character 20 or 25 freebie points to distribute between Abilities, Merits, and Flaws. Though their Attributes are reduced by one dot for every two points spent in the Aging Flaw, with Physical Traits generally capped around four dots after age 50 and three dots after age 70 (Storyteller's call, not a hard-and-fast rule), the extra points in Abilities reflect the greater time and work older people have often put into the things they do. Obviously, this suggestion won't be true for people who have just sort of skated through their lives, not really committing themselves to anything, and an older person's diminished physical and perhaps mental capacities will, of course, limit the sorts of Abilities at which they can excel. Still, it's not unusual for an ancient martial artist to exceed his younger students' capabilities, and many Knowledge disciplines demand decades of study and application before one can reach true excellence in that field.

**Suggested Attributes:** Strength 1-3, Dexterity 1-2, Stamina 1-3, Charisma 1-4, Manipulation 3-5, Appearance 1-3, Perception 1-4, Intelligence 2-4, Wits 1-5

**Suggested Abilities:** Whatever the person in question has spent the majority of their life doing.

**Willpower:** 2-9 (Elders range from tentative confusion to ironclad certainty; when older folks make up their minds about something, though, they can be the stubbornest people alive.)

**Health Levels:** OK, -1, -1, -2, -4, -5, Incapacitated

**Image:** The degree to which age, well, *ages* a person depends tremendously upon diet, lifestyle, genetics, overall health, and social circumstances. Some folks make it to their 60s with most of their physical youth intact, while others burn out their bodies and confidence by the time they hit 30. As a general rule, though, older people tend to show their experience through greater self-awareness or stubbornness, with the obvious physical signs attributed to aging — wrinkles, graying, hair loss, notable weight change, sagging skin, stooped posture, and so forth — making some people more attractive than they were in their youth and turning others into everything they feared about advancing age.

**Roleplaying Notes:** For better and worse, the life you've lived catches up with you if and when you live long enough to see it settle in.

## Scott Walters

Where'd all those years go? Scott had plans, lots of them. He always meant to pick up the guitar again, after putting it aside when his post-college band went nowhere fast. He was going to be a writer, too — still *could* be, once he gets around to it. I mean, it's not like Scott is old or anything, right? Sixty years old isn't really *old* these days; hell, Brad Pitt's pushing 60, and Arnie and Sly are still making action movies and pumping themselves up. Heroes don't age, and Scott knows he's still the hero of his own personal film. It's just that he's always so *tired* by the time he gets home from work. His back hurts. His knee gives him trouble. That spare tire around his waist isn't getting any smaller, but he'll fix that soon... tomorrow, maybe. Just as soon as he gets his second wind. He still wears his hair kind of long for a middle-aged white dude (it's not *really* a mullet, is it?), and his former good looks have been softened by flab and worn deep by constant work and pain.

Scott was all about getting stuff done in the 70s and 80s. Jobs. Songs. Women. Set 'em up and knock 'em down, baby. Back then, he didn't ever get tired. Scott burned the candle at every end that would light, and then figured out ways to light the same end more than once. Three marriages and two kids later, he slowed down, but not that much. I mean, he wasn't like his former classmates at the school reunions, with their big bellies and fading hairlines. He was hot, fit, and still ready to take on the world and win.

He still feels that way now. It couldn't *possibly* have been over 40 years since he graduated college, could it? When Scott

stops to think about those last 40 years, they seem to have gone by so fast. Sure, he spent a lot of time at work, too much time, really, not that you could tell from the size of his paychecks. But now retirement age is coming up, and he hasn't got anything socked away (when did he ever have time and money enough to do *that?*), and the folks at work have begun treating him like a dead man walking, because everybody knows that old hands just can't hack it the way the young hires can. Maybe it is time for a change of scenery, a new lifestyle, a chance to do all those things he's always wanted to do.

Scott's got a new friend these days: a woman who claims she can freeze the passage of time, maybe even turn it back for certain folks who can meet the price. Poor Scott doesn't have much to offer and isn't sure what to believe. This new friend, though, has done some pretty impossible things, so Scott's inclined to think maybe she's not as full of shit as she comes across as being. She's made him an offer, and he's not sure he can refuse. Where *did* all that time go, anyway? And is there something, maybe, that Scott's friend could do in order to get Scott a little more of it?

## Everyday People

Every face in the crowd is a hero in disguise. Such people might lack the powers of Sphere magick, but their identities and dreams are no less valid than those of wizards and man-machines. Does that lack of magick, though, make them lesser beings? Vampires and werebeasts won't bother to ask such questions — the answers are obvious. For a mage, however, the power of “sleeping humanity” is a practical matter as well as a philosophical one.

Despite their overall lack of martial finesse, “just plain folks” exist in all corners of a mage's world. They're your family, your friends, your Wards (as per that Flaw) and Retainers (as per the Background of that name). These are the folks right next to a mage at the gym, working in her office, tending to her car, walking her dogs, attending her poli-sci class, and usually teaching it, too. When your mage hits the clubs, most folks she meets there are everyday people; if she has a cult or congregation, fan club or manor house, almost everyone there is this sort of character. A so-called Sleeper doesn't need powers in order to play a major role in your chronicle. Hell, before her Awakening, your character was one of them as well.

**Suggested Attributes:** Strength 2-3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 1-3, Manipulation 1-3, Appearance 1-4, Perception 1-3, Intelligence 1-4, Wits 2

**Suggested Abilities:** Academics 1-3, Area Knowledge 1-3, Athletics 0-2, Crafts 0-3, Computer 1-3, Drive 1-2, Firearms 3, Technology 1-3 (plus Talents, Skills, or Knowledges appropriate to their field or hobby, 1-3)

**Willpower:** 3

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



**Equipment:** Wallet, cell phone, typical clothing and gear for the appropriate culture.

**Image:** This person could be anyone.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Depending on your background and personality, your behavior runs the range of human experience.

## Porter Pryce

The world looks different when you're in a wheelchair. Counters and tables are set at the wrong height, doors are too narrow, and your leverage is all wrong. Curbs too rarely feature cuts and ramps, and those damn stairwells are *everywhere*. Perhaps worst of all, people insist upon defining a person in a wheelchair by that wheelchair, as if a mobility tool was the be-all-end-all feature of the person using it. For many folks, that wheelchair is the only feature another person sees.

Porter Pryce has been in wheelchairs since age 16, when a driver who'd always sworn "I drive better when I'm drunk" plowed into Porter's mother's car, leaving Pryce paralyzed from the waist down. The driver, by that time, had burnt through every decent insurance company and was riding on the grace of a fly-by-night company that offered the Pryce family a settlement that wouldn't feed the family dog. After dragging the

case through the courts for five years, the insurance company went out of business, leaving Porter's family with ruinous legal and medical bills. An avid hiker and aspiring ecologist, Porter needed to reassess almost every aspect of his life.

Porter was never good at playing the victim, much less the beatific handicapped inspirational icon, and his justified bitterness at the situation alienated many parties who might have helped (a little bit) if only he'd quietly assumed the role assigned to him by society. As things are, he's not interested in being anybody's poster boy. Now in his early 30s, Porter is heavily tattooed, aggressively self-reliant, and driven by sheer attitude through the many obstacles of his life.

After working a boring series of data-entry jobs and attempting and failing to learn programming, Porter combined his interest in political and cultural history with his anger regarding the treatment of physically impaired people. What began as a series of social-media posts about obnoxious customer-service reps, wheelchair access and lack thereof, predatory insurance companies, and the tendency of people to park in handicapped-only parking spaces (and then throw fits at people whose mobility actually *is* limited) became first a viral sensation, then a paid activist gig. Porter's frustrations echo a common theme in a world where the Americans with Disabilities Act

is at best a polite (and typically ignored) suggestion and many nations have no such provisions at all. Porter has turned his ecological interests toward sociological ones, and his penchant for sardonic outrage has begun to generate a trickle of income — not enough to live on but more than he was making before.

These days, Porter and his friends Rachel Morse, Teal McClean, and Regina Washington maintain ANVIL (Advocacy, Normalization & Vigilance for Impaired Lifestyles): a virtual network with related blogs and YouTube channels that criticize cultural preconceptions about physically impaired people and their conditions, demand protections and provisions for folks with such conditions, and expose abuses perpetrated against people (physically able and otherwise) who are being abandoned and exploited by outside parties. Inspired by the symbols for the Greek blacksmith god Hephaestus — often dismissed for his “deformities” among the physical perfections of Olympian gods — ANVIL employs the logo of a golden anvil and two hammers against a fire-red background. Teal’s in the process of turning that logo into a line of clothing specifically designed for people with bodies of unconventional size, shape, and function; Regina’s organizing a legal and lobbying team for ANVIL; and Rachel’s providing moral, media, and logistical support for the team. It’s Porter, though, whose sharp words and fierce attitude keep ANVIL in an ever-growing spotlight, and whose blog kicked the entire process off. Despite his bitterness regarding the path his life has taken, he enjoys a grim satisfaction about the way things have begun to turn out for them all.

A thin Anglo-Franco man with long, bushy brown hair, a thick beard, intense green eyes, and a wealth of heavy metal and cartoon character tattoos, Porter has the powerful shoulders and atrophied legs of someone who’s spent half his life unable to walk. Pervasive poverty keeps him gaunt and angry, and that hungry state galvanizes his activism. If he likes you, you’ll find the sweet-hearted, animal-loving kid Porter was before that drunk driver changed his life. For obvious reason, though, he doesn’t let many people get that close. Porter’s small apartment features two cats (Rocky and Baryshnikov) and a rosy boa snake named Charmer. His girlfriend Clary Simonson spends most of her time there, but Pryce remains convinced that “she’d dump my ass if she had to deal with my shit 24/7.” He still does freelance data-entry and other stay-at-home gigs, but such jobs are thin pickings in a dog-eat-dog economy. It’s enough to keep the lights on and the electric wheelchair working, but not much more than that. Not yet, anyway.

Recently, ANVIL fielded offers from Petersson Therapeutics, a medical research facility covertly tied to Iteration X. That facility offered to provide “experimental” cybernetic augmentation for Porter and his similarly impaired partners. ANVIL thanked them but refused. Although the network accepts advertising from PT on their websites, Porter asserted, “I’m not broken, and I don’t need anyone to fix me.” The world might look different from his perspective, but as Porter told the PT rep, “This is still *my* world.”

## Hardcases

Whether or not they fight for fun and profit (as per the **Mage 20** “Thug” and “Professional Badass” entries pp. 620-621), some folks are pretty damn tough. Truckers, freight handlers, ironworkers, bodybuilders, athletes, martial artists, farm workers, warehouse personnel, military veterans, and other otherwise normal human beings whose work and play involves a lot of physical activity... they’re not people you want to mess with. They may not be violent by inclination and might sometimes — as with professional dancers — not seem like much unless you realize just how physically fit they really are. If push literally comes to shove, though, these people are in no way “pushovers,” even if you’re a mage.

Although Physical Traits define a hardcase, these sorts of people can be damned smart, sociable, or both, as well. The common preconception of physically fit morons is often belied by the people themselves. With or without martial or other skill sets, however, a strong person of any gender can do things a less-capable person cannot manage. If their physical prowess is obvious to the eye, these folks often seem more socially attractive than average, too. There are reasons, after all, that celebrities and executives employ personal trainers, and why models spend so much time in the gym.

Sadly, the human body tends to break down under stress; thus, hardcase types generally fade out when middle age begins to remind them how much wear and tear they’ve put on their bodies. That said, some folks (thanks to an apparent immunity to chronic pain and damaged joints) manage to stay in peak physical condition up into their elder years. As shown by the Aging Flaw in (**The Book of Shadows**, p. 40), physical aging *can* weaken a person, but doesn’t always do so. Thus, the right person can be a hardcase even if she’s got grandkids and a retirement check.

**Suggested Attributes:** Strength 3-5, Dexterity 2-4, Stamina 3-4, Charisma 1-4, Manipulation 1-3, Appearance 1-3, Perception 2-4, Intelligence 1-3, Wits 2-4

**Suggested Abilities:** Area Knowledge (scene of choice) 1-5, Athletics 1-4, Brawl 1-5, Drive 1-3, Intimidation 2-4, Law 1-3, Politics 1-3, Technology 1-3 (plus an array of Abilities that suit an individual’s mundane and other pursuits.)

**Willpower:** 3-5

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

**Equipment:** The tools of one’s trade.

**Image:** A person in unusually fit physical condition, possibly marked — for better and worse — by the stresses and risks of their vocation.

**Roleplaying Notes:** “Seriously? You’re messing with me? Are you sure that’s really what you want to do?” Some of these folks are the proverbial bullies, but others avoid trouble unless it insists on making itself their business.

## Jeremy Bruckner

When that 18-wheeler roars past your car, you probably don't give much thought to the man or woman behind its wheel unless it's to curse at them for being there. Jeremy Brucker knows your curses well. He's been trucking for almost 20 years, with the aching back, strong arms, big belly, and the 1,000-yard stare that all come with that vocation. Jeremy's hit every truck stop, rest area, access road, and all-night coffee shop in the United States... or so it seems to him, anyway. Got food in your supermarket? Books at your bookstore? That car part or Amazon order that you couldn't wait to receive? Thank Jeremy and the million truckers like him.

You see a lot of weird shit on the roads, especially after midnight when only the cops, insomniacs, and truckers are around to see it. Folks with something to hide often strike out on the interstate in order to disappear. Jeremy's seen the cars and vans with blacked-out windows rolling past just before dawn, anxious to reach shelter before the morning comes. He's seen the pale children gathered in the shadows outside a truck stop, tearing through the garbage bins in search of something to eat. He's got a wife and two kids at home, but on the rare times he gets to see them someone's usually asleep and it's often him. Such is the life he leads, and if it pays the bills, then everything's worth it, I guess.

Jeremy didn't start out planning on seeing white lines that never fade from his sight. He went to college, though he doesn't often say so. Even majored in philosophy, if you can believe that one. Played trumpet in a jazz band that never took off, too. There aren't many jobs for a philosophy major, though, and since 9/11 and the rolling economic crash, there've been even less. Not wanting to wind up on the unemployment line, Jeremy got his commercial driver's license and took one job... then another... then another. When so many folks are out of work, it's good to even *have* a job. And so, Jeremy keeps driving, pays his union dues, and wonders if or when all those miles will finally catch up with him.

Oh, he's seen some crashes. Survived some, too. He's seen fellow truckers hauled, sometimes hosed, out of their cabs, and he's heard the stories of the bodies no one ever found. He's picked up the hitchhikers who swear the world is ending, and shared a smoke or a drink or sometimes more with girls (and, though he'll never admit it, a few boys, too) who know the open road even better than he does. He's seen a man grow eight feet tall as the guy ripped four other dudes in half, and he once saw a girl get hit by a truck and then get up, shake herself out, and walk away like nothing much had happened. He doesn't talk about much of this with the wife, and she knows he's holding out on her. Their bedroom — when he's home at all — has become a silent movie where the title cards got lost somewhere along the way. His kids are older each time he comes back home, and their eyes grow narrower and more sullen every time Jeremy walks in the door after a cross-country run. Still, it's good money, and steady work. But those trucks that drive

themselves? That's a problem. And he knows they're out there. They've been out there for years already. What happens if the day comes when the work dries up and the pensions have all been spent and "Here's your pink slip, Jer, my man. Thanks for all the good work and don't let the door hit you on the way out?" Jeremy Bruckner kind of hopes he'll crash and burn before that day so he doesn't need to face what the future means to him. Dying behind the wheel scares him less than living in a world where he's not needed anymore.

## Homeless Survivors

Some folks don't fit anywhere but in between the cracks of society. Addicted, mentally ill, broken, or just too damned stubborn to play nice within a false-faced world, these people live on whatever they can beg, borrow, scrounge up, or steal. We're not talking here about the poor folks who've lost their homes through a quirk of fate or finances, but about people who've given up on mainstream America and now exist in a precarious state of freedom.

For better and worse, these people are survivors. Kick at them, and they'll kick back harder. By and large they're not "criminals" in the usual sense of the word, though, if only because crime involves too much risk. When you can't get patched up on your medical plan, after all, or hit the medicine cabinet for some bandages or antiseptic, there's not much benefit in looking for trouble. Most of these folks get by on whatever they can find without sticking their necks out too far. Oh, but they see what's going on around them — all too well, more often than not. Because homeless folks are considered "un-people" by the average citizen, they tend to blend into surroundings that most folks prefer not to notice and try not to care about. As a result, these people — and they *are* still people, after all — make helpful allies, nasty enemies, and willing (if unreliable) sources of information, redemption, or even friendship for folks who treat them with respect.

**Suggested Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 1, Manipulation 3, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 1

**Suggested Abilities:** Alertness 2, Area Knowledge 3, Brawl 2, Crafts 1, Intimidation 2, Melee 2, Stealth 2, Streetwise 3, Survival 3, Technology 1

**Willpower:** 4

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

**Equipment:** Whatever personal possessions and improvised weapons they can easily keep within reach.

**Image:** Ragged but possessing a distinct sense of pride, if only for having survived through the awful things they've encountered along the way, a "hardcore homeless" sort of person could be a grizzled veteran, backpacking vagabond, aging street kid, mumbling addict, glaring bag-lady, or any other "un-person" that "polite society" strives not to recognize as human. Although such folks tend to intimidate the average citizen (especially in

the World of Darkness, where a street survivor must be truly badass to live for long), they usually prefer to be avoid trouble and be left to their own devices. For very good reasons, they don't often trust society to give a shit what happens to them, and so it's not worth the risk of trying to make trouble.

**Roleplaying Notes:** In an ugly, world, you've got to grab what you can for you and yours. Watch your back, protect your friends, and be no one's victim if you can possibly avoid it.

## Brain

He used to be *Brian*. These days, he's *Brain*. Why? Maybe because the girl who named him was dyslexic as hell and kept scrambling up his name. Maybe because he speaks in words more suited to a college classroom than to the homeless part of town. Perhaps it's because he reads all the time, whatever he can get: cereal boxes, discarded newspapers, the books he scrounges from bookstore dumpsters and occasionally receives from sympathetic passersby. He's smart, and people know it. Some folks resent him for it, too, but when someone's got a question or needs a dispute resolved, they often to go Brain.

Especially when there's almost nothing left of your life, you do what you have to do.

Brian was a quiet guy before he lost damned near everything. Decent job as an architectural engineer. Nice house. No long-term partner but a lot of flings when he could pry himself away from the office, books, or both. But then came the epilepsy, the Parkinson's Disease, and a bad fall (caused by his faltering coordination) down a set of icy steps. Brian's insurance took care of some of the injury, but the rest was chalked up to "pre-existing conditions." Shaky hands made him useless to the company, so the company began easing Brian out the door. Skyrocketing coverage premiums, chronic pain, shattered concentration and bad office politics drained Brian's bank account, cost him his job, and plunged him into intractable depression. Slightly over a year after his fall, Brian was on the street. Not long afterward, he became known as Brain.

At first, he was sleeping in his car. Then some assholes smashed the windows in for laughs. The cops towed it off when Brain was out scoring food. Everything that wasn't on his back wound up gone. With his shaky hands and constant pain, Brain wasn't able to contribute much to the folks he met among the homeless communities... not much but his ability to solve problems and give advice. When asked, he can still provide all manner of trivia and near-Socratic wisdom. Trouble is, he's so depressed, so often in pain, and so frequently high from whatever he's able to score to help him deal with the other problems that Brain's not up for anything that demands concentration or work for more than a few minutes at a time. Most days, he just holes up in a chair at a strategic spot on a freeway ramp, swaths himself in blankets and coats, and reads whatever he's got that day. Sure, he's got a few friends who look after him and beat the crap out of anyone who dares to mess with Brain, and a steady and

protected spot where the begging is pretty good. Beyond that, though, Brain is a pain-wracked dude who's waiting to die, with a body that won't let him heal but refuses to let him go.

You'll usually find Brain hunched in his battered folding garden chair, huddled up against the weather and reading intently while cars roll by. If you catch his eye, Brain might say "Thank you" in a cracked-pavement voice, then duck away before someone can take offense or think he's being too familiar. Pain and Parkinson's Disease wrack his body with perpetual shaking, and the smell of old pot and unwashed skin is obvious to anyone who stands too close. Brain's light-blue eyes peer out of a lined parchment face, darkened by dirt and whatever sunlight reaches through his layers of protection. He moves slowly, eyes downcast, whenever he rises from his chair, and sleeps whenever he feels safe enough to doze off... which, admittedly, isn't often. He'll read anything you hand him, but he'll rarely say more than a few words to you unless he knows you're not a threat. At night, he often crashes with a pack of folks who pitch tents in the bushes along the highway, under the overpass, in an abandoned house, or wherever it is they can crash for a night or two before the cops drive them off again. Those folks keep Brain in reading material, drive off human parasites, and share whatever they have that might make him sleep a little better or hurt a little less.

Some nights, Brain dreams of the life he had. Other nights, of the death he craves. Most nights, he doesn't remember what he dreams... only that he's past the point where dreams are anything more than bad jokes spat in his face by God until the night he never has to dream again.

## Human Resources

Drones. Pawns. Red marks on a balance sheet. Yeah, right. Within every company, you'll find people who keep that company in business. They might not get any respect from the higher-ups... hell, they rarely receive anything better than lip service, a paycheck, and a constantly shrinking benefits package. Really, though, it's these clerks, admins, baristas, receptionists, delivery people, cooks, assistants, stockers, drivers, customer-service representatives, and so forth who keep every business functioning. Their jobs rarely seem glamorous (much less fulfilling), but these people are the heart and hands of the modern world. Ignore them at your risk.

Throughout the industrialized world, and much of the rest of it as well, "human resources" is the category into which most everyday people are put by default. The skill sets and cultural abilities vary from place to place and job to job, but the overall emphasis on manual or intellectual labor in service to a larger whole is almost universal. Certain human resources — construction workers, groundskeepers, warehouse personnel, day laborers, and so forth — favor Physical Traits, while others, mostly office workers and shop staff, emphasize Mental Traits instead. Folks with high Social Traits tend to gravitate toward upper-level job status eventually, though an unusually charismatic or physically attractive person might start out (or stick with) an otherwise unglamorous profession due



to circumstances, opportunities, or a simple desire to score a paycheck and spend their energies doing something else entirely.

Contrary to preconceptions, most workers *do* have outside lives that are more important than their jobs. These people have kids, families, dreams, or outside vocations that have little or nothing to do with work. And so, from a game perspective, it's this other, greater life that generally determines the Abilities and Attributes, perhaps the Merits and Flaws, such characters possess. A bookstore clerk might have three dots in Art or a pizza server could have Athletics 4, and you'd never know that unless you viewed that person as something other than a drone behind the counter or the recipient of a minimum wage.

What does any of this have to do with mages? For starters, many mages begin their Paths this way, stuck in a restaurant or office building until something drastic shakes their world. Some mages, like the Marauder Hive (see **Mage 20**, p. 629), even stay in such positions after their Awakening, especially if the mage in question hails from the Technocracy or the Virtual Adept Tradition. Even if they don't Awaken, these people could join Cults, become Wards, or work as Backup, Contacts, or Spies for an Awakened operative. Allies with low combat potential are consors and extraordinary citizens with useful professional skills. Human-resource characters might tend the counter at a Chantry's coffee shop, crunch the numbers for a Syndicate rep's Procedures, or drive the limo for that Hermetic wizard who's too rich and busy to drive herself around town. In short, these are the folks mages rarely think about even though they surround themselves with human resources all the time, sometimes employing them as instruments of Enlightened Arts (see **Mage 20**, p. 595).

Most vitally, however, the Awakened must look beyond the simple labels like "Masses," "Sleepers," or "human resources" to see the true makers of our reality. For just as a corporation would grind to a halt without the many workers who make things happen, so too would Earth's Reality slide into chaos without the hopes, dreams, and daily lives of the people who decide what is and is not possible.

**Suggested Attributes:** Strength 1-3, Dexterity 1-3, Stamina 1-3, Charisma 2-4, Manipulation 1-4, Appearance 1-5, Perception 2-4, Intelligence 1-5, Wits 1-3

**Suggested Abilities:** Academics 1-3, Area Knowledge (home town/city) 1-5, Athletics 1-3, Crafts 1-4, Computer 1-5, Drive 1-2, Empathy 1-2, Etiquette 1-4, Technology 1-5 (plus various Abilities suggested by that person's job and private life.)

**Willpower:** 1-4

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

**Equipment:** The usual accoutrements of a person in a blue- or white-collar position in their respective field and society.

**Image:** At work, human-resource characters tend to dress in their job's preferred uniform. A retail clerk probably wears certain predetermined colors and garments (aprons, polyester shirts, etc.), a security guard will wear his company's uniform

unless he's a plainclothes officer, an office worker dresses in attire that's "appropriate for the office," a construction worker wears rugged clothes and safety gear, and a barista might wear whatever that person can get away with wearing under their apron. At home, of course, the person will wear whatever the hell he wants to wear; even so, an observant viewer can often size up someone's occupation by the way they look away from the job.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Keep your head down, do your job, and live for the life outside work. Despite the begrudging suffering you feel toward your profession, you still feel a mote of pride when comparing your role to those beneath you in society, and utterly diminished when someone with a more extravagant life speaks up.

## Kendell Keye

"Hi! What can I help you with today?" Kendell's so helpful that folks tend to overlook their unconventional nature. Black-painted nails, silver raven skull on a chain, hints of eyeliner, and a stylish wardrobe complement Kendell's natural good looks and personable charm. Kendell's pretty, no doubt about it. And so, folks who normally trip over ideas like "genderfluid" smile and use Kendell's name or the pronoun "they" when referring to the nice young person on the other side of the counter.

It hasn't always been this easy... nor, really, is it when Kendell's not behind a counter where they can make themselves useful. Initially pegged with a gender and name that did not suit the person in Kendell's soul, that bygone not-Kendell barely survived their early teens. Depression, ostracism, and a feeling of wrongness when facing the mirror or other people's preconceptions weighed Kendell's former self into an abyss of self-harm and social withdrawal. Their parents had no problem with the idea of their child being *gay*, but still couldn't bring themselves to accept that their kid was not the person they thought they'd raised at all. Even now, Mom struggles to remember Kendell's name and proper pronouns... not out of malice but simply because she still sees the child she bore, not the adult that kid became.

If Kendell hadn't discovered theater during high school, they might never have found a toolbox that helped them build the identity they needed to create. Acting gave them confidence, social skills, and a group of like-minded peers who were less tied up in who Kendell "should be" than in who Kendell *could be*. A few of those friends helped Kendell find websites and online communities that explained gender dysphoria, supported Kendell's quest to find an identity that suited Kendell better, and helped the shy kid Kendell was grow more personable than before. By the time they reached graduation, Kendell had assumed a more fitting, gender-neutral name, collected a growing roster of friends and lovers, and begun to love the person they saw in the mirror. Acting, meanwhile, helped Kendell nurture the engaging persona they use at work these days. From a depressed, reclusive kid rose the charismatic charmer Kendell is today — one who reworks external reality without the use of magical Spheres.

Sure, Kendell still has dark moments, and those retail jobs are starting to wear very thin. There's no place to move upward in such a job, really, and Kendell has their eyes set on a more creative career. YouTube channels and the occasional role in local theatre, though, do not pay the rent, and so Kendell continues to ply the retail trade, moving from store to store with a clutch of good recommendations and an expanding pool of contacts and skills. Smart, efficient, and good at making customers spend money, Kendell's still a work in progress who — at least for now — has managed to play the customer-service game to their advantage while staying a few steps away from financial crisis. It's a balancing act, especially without that college degree Kendell cannot begin to afford, but at least for now, Kendell Keye has a potentially promising future.

Mages conversant with the Crafts and Traditions often mistake Kendell for one of their own. They're wrong, though; Kendell's "magic" comes from personal skill and an ingratiating personality. The raven skull and occult-inspired tattoos are flourishes of fashion, little more. Oh, Kendell is intrigued by the mystic fringes of popular culture. Aside from a few books and some online reading, though, Kendell's not versed in the deeper levels of esoteric knowledge... yet. If the right person comes along, though, and gives Kendell a half-decent offer toward something better than competent retail experience, Keye might just become a useful consor, a great assistant, or perhaps someday even an Awakened mage.

Tall and angular, Kendell sports a shaggy dyed-black, razor-cut hairstyle. Their clothes seem boyish, but their voice and body language resist binary distinctions. Unfailingly polite to customers, Kendell seems equally at home selling books, car parts, groceries, or cooking supplies. They've worked a few gigs as a food server or barista, but the mess, waste, and obnoxious customers force those options to the back of the "only if I have to" queue. For now, the local economy keeps Kendell's paycheck steady, supplementing a slender stream of income from Kendell's YouTube gig. Off the clock, Kendell hosts a series of podcasts on gender issues and evolving concepts of identity, shares an apartment with two significant others, and strives to lay the foundation for something more permanent than a string of retail jobs. "I don't know yet," is the refrain when friends ask what Kendell eventually wants to do with this life. As for when their parents ask similar questions, Kendell says simply, "I'll let you know when I get there."

## Power Players

Up the ladder, away from the unwashed masses, typically ensconced in a corner office or some other place of privilege, you'll find the folks who make the world go 'round. Brokers, politicians, bankers, producers, executives of one stripe or another... these are the people whose incomes start at six figures and head skyward from there. With money and power, they shape our world, and though a handful of them command Enlightened hypertech, most of them simply know how to use vast resources to their best advantage.

The technological world is, for better and worse, run by these people. Their decisions reach beyond the boardrooms to encompass government policies and global economies. The coffee farmer in Lake Valencia and the factory worker in Tianjin have their lives determined (and occasionally ruined or ended) by power players in New York, Tokyo, Bangalore, and Moscow. Sadly, people at such levels of influence rarely see the human fallout of their actions. To them, the bottom line involves their corporate reports and the bank accounts that sustain their prosperity.

It's easy, especially from the lower levels of society, to view such people as faceless evil sociopaths. Speaking frankly, some of them are; corporate culture is innately sociopathic, and its only real concern is the effect its actions have upon the corporation's profits or losses. For the people in those boardrooms, though, life as we know it hinges on those big decisions that only highly qualified people can make. These are big-picture folks whose profession depends upon combining the vast scale of international effects with the intimate scope of private business meetings. In their view, prosperity for all must be built on the prosperity of an elite. The common man or woman is an idiot, incapable of turning off the most vapid of TV shows long enough to learn how the modern world really works. Elitism aside, some power players really *are* interested in advancing the common good in ways that might not benefit them personally. Philanthropists might not be as common as raiders, but they actually do exist. For such people, wealth and influence are a means toward a much greater goal.

Knowledge and influence are the cornerstones of any power player's life. While manual laborers excel at Physical Traits, power players dominate through Skills and Knowledges. Sharp wits and complex topics are the power player's purview, and though such characters enjoy generous Background Traits (often Social Merits and Flaws as well), they secure and retain those perks through Social and Mental Attributes and vigorously cultivated people skills. Oh, sure, the executive gym lets a power player get into decent shape and stay that way. The *real* power in today's world, though, comes not from strength of arm but through force of personality.

Despite luxurious offices and sumptuous lifestyles, power players work hard to get and keep what they have. Fourteen-hour days are par for the course at this level of success, and so the pleasures they're able to catch between high-stakes meetings and tedious paperwork tend to involve high-octane thrills compressed into short bursts of vigorous excitement. Thus, many young power players boast high degrees of Athletics, and even the older ones can beat the average person at a young kid's game. Such people work hard and play hard, sometimes with "games" that are highly illegal and deeply unethical. Power, as they'll tell you, has a morality all its own, and those who can't make the hard calls in this world will never understand the lives of those who do.

**Suggested Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 3-5, Manipulation 3-5, Appearance 2-4, Perception 3, Intelligence 3-5, Wits 4

**Suggested Abilities:** Academics 3, Athletics 2-3, Computer 2-4, Cultural Savvy 3-5, Drive 1, Etiquette 3-5, Expression 2-5, Finance 3-5, Law 2-5, Leadership 1-4, Politics 3-5, Seduction 1-3, Technology 3

**Willpower:** 5-7

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

**Equipment:** Expensive stylish clothing, high-end accessories (wallets, jewelry, business cards, phone, etc.), credit cards and expense accounts, a staff of people ready to do whatever you tell them to do.

**Image:** Power is all about making an impression. Thus, power players cultivate high-end fashions that usually don't *look* high-end; people who actually do look high-end are trying too hard. Tailored clothes, stylish haircuts, just the right amount of shaving (or lack thereof) and cosmetics (or lack thereof) set the tone for class and distinction. The specifics depend on culture, field, and fashion, of course, but unless the power player is flaunting their ability to be eccentric — which *is* a valid fashion choice — such people tend to be extremely well-groomed and well-dressed in ways that accentuate their innate charisma and their position in the field without making too obvious a statement.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Make it look easy. This level of status is never as simple as mere wealth, but the more relaxed you seem, the more competent you appear. Granted, there are times to show people who's boss around here. Save those moments, though, for extreme and often private situations. Public displays of temper make you look weak; instead, use politesse and misdirection to accomplish your goals. Use whomever you need to use, with whichever tactics seem most effective within the bounds of taste. Never appear to struggle even when you *are* struggling. Exceptional people never seem to sweat.

## Lenora Paige Wilder

"I'm not just giving it you," her father said. "You have to show me you've earned it." Lenora's parents owned half the town where she grew up, and her father maintained a warehouse whose only purpose involved sheltering his collection of antique cars. Yet despite a sizable family fortune, Lenora went to public school, endured a tight allowance, and grew up following her parents around their offices, learning various trades before going to business school herself. By the time she hit college, Lenora had already begun one home-based business of her own. By the time she graduated summa cum laude, that business was bringing in over a million dollars a year and employing half of her high-school friends. Eventually inheriting her parents' business too, Lenora became a major player in regional commerce and politics. She has indeed showed her father than she could earn their trust, respect, and wealth.

Now in her early 40s, Lenora heads a major tech firm in the American south — a firm she hopes to use as a springboard for a Silicon Valley alternative. VisoTech International aims to break through the current limitations of tech-industry culture, both through diverse hiring practices and by way of the visionary technology that inspires the corporate name. Lenora has an eye for talent, and though she's not Enlightened in the technomancer sense, she can spot potential when she sees it. Thus, VisoTech employs a clutch of Awakened personnel who work toward advancements in Sleepertech that can soon bring Enlightened hypertech further into the mainstream than it already is.

Lenora herself is no mage, and would consider that idea absurd. Instead, she's a dedicated and sometimes ruthless businesswoman whose relentless work ethic extends to the folks in her employ. She demands near-perfection from herself, she and expects it from her staff as well. Hours are long but pay and benefits are good, especially for the impoverished area where VisoTech makes its home. Her HR department has no patience for nonsense, and offenders against company policy are shown the door in short order. Lenora herself practically lives in her office, and the company's gyms and overnight bedrooms are based on her own devotion to a "whatever it takes" managerial approach. Ms. Wilder gives her all to the company, and she expects her people to do the same.

A fierce-eyed woman of Nordic and Mediterranean heritage, Lenora has freckled pale skin, short red hair, and the chiseled arms and shoulders of a veteran color-guard performer who works out constantly. Her understated, business-casual attire sets the tone for VisoTech's office culture: casual yet professional, unconstrained yet never slovenly. Despite her obvious southern accent, she can talk circles around any west coast elitist ... and often does so, too. She enjoys baiting would-be rivals into underestimating her intellect, then destroying them with superior technical knowledge and a dazzling grasp of strategy. Lenora can play the girly-girl when it suits her, then snap without warning into executive predator mode. Her acumen for reading people and then leading them to advantageous conclusions helps keep VisoTech near the head of a very competitive field. Thanks to her parents' connections (and wealth), Lenora often calls the shots with state and local politicians despite her gender and comparative youth. That status, combined with her quick mind and savvy tactics, plus the growing rep enjoyed by her corporation, makes Lenora Paige Wilder a person of influence in her region and field of expertise. The fact that she has no real time for any sort of social life is a subject of some speculation among her peers; as far as Lenora's concerned, however, she's got too much shit to do. When folks ask, "Hon, when you gonna get married?" Lenora just laughs and replies, "Maybe in the next life."

## Subculture Devotees

Anyone can go to a club, attend a festival, or watch sports or cool performances. Certain people, though, make a lifestyle of such things. Artists, dancers, musicians, technicians, roadies, preppers, organizers, wayward Rennies, art-show

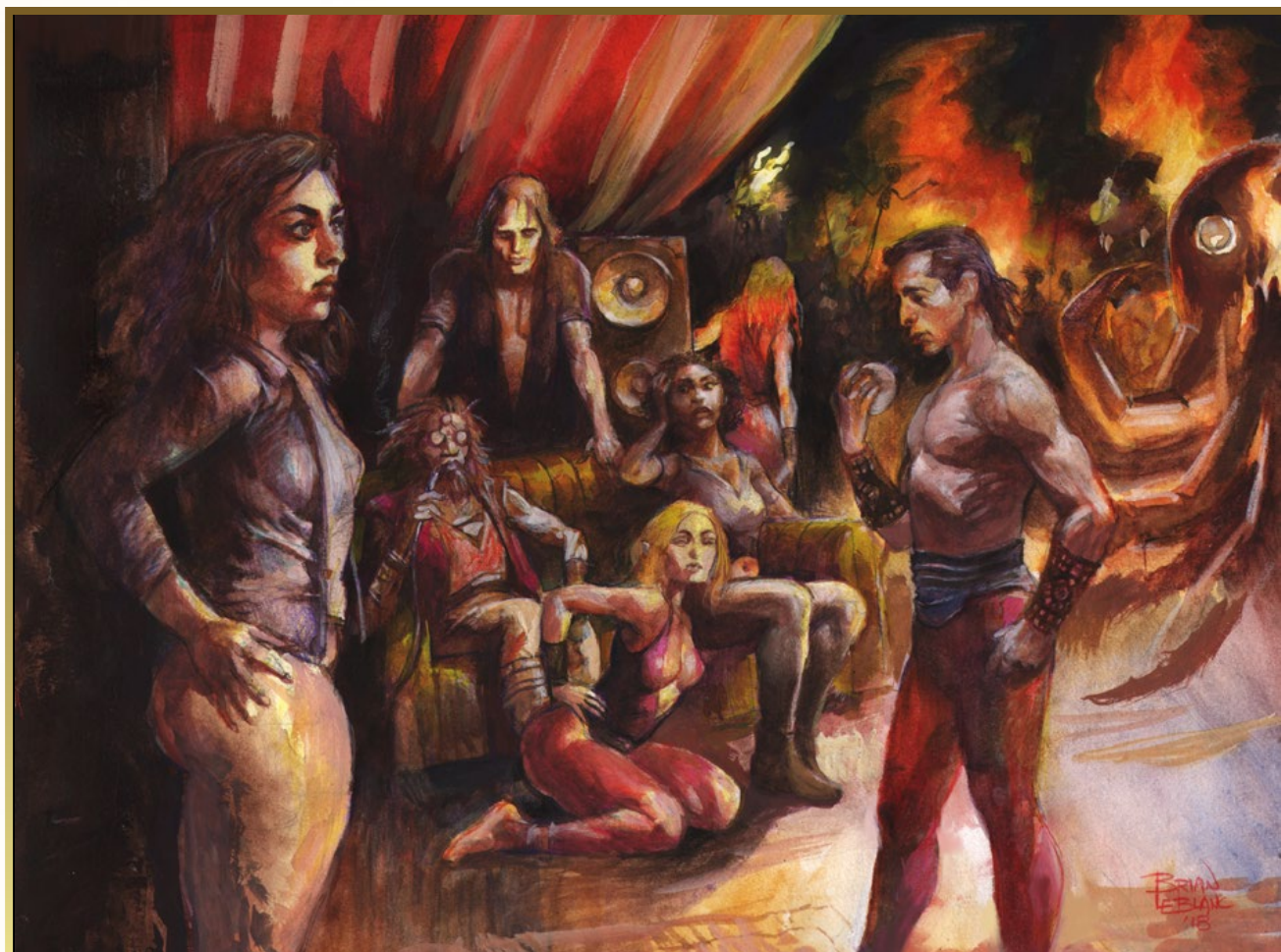
curators, mad inventors, psychotropic anarchists, installation pros, gutter punks, political reformers, traveling merchants, and hardcore vagabonds all nurture skill sets far outside the mainstream norm. These folks might participate in what some call "normative culture" when they must, but they choose to live as far outside of it as possible.

Although the range of their capabilities runs from dabblers to dedicated pros, such people pursue odd vocations: pole dancing, fire spinning, computer hacking, musical performance, three-dimensional art, electronic technologies, global cuisine, wilderness hiking, acroyoga, armor-crafting, meditation techniques, aerial performance, costuming, car modifications, dumpster-diving, salvage, and other unusual yet non-magickal pursuits. These are the folks who travel from Burning Man to Rainbow Gatherings, belong to the Peace Corps or kink scenes or Doctors Without Borders, who'll dance at Coachella before heading down to Goa and backpacking across Mongolia between their attempts to hike the entire Appalachian Trail. Some favor Renaissance festivals, while others throw hip-hop block parties, form step-dance troupes, employ "circus arts" at established or transient venues, and generally live a more colorful life than the average guy on the street.

Because such vocations tend to be mentally, physically, and often emotionally demanding, true devotees (as opposed to short-term "tourists") tend to have a few Attributes higher than the mundane norm. Each individual's Abilities reflect her chosen subculture; a backpacking enthusiast will have respectable Survival, Medicine, and Athletics Traits, while an urban "maker space" devotee would have decent-to-formidable scores in Technology, Research and, naturally, Crafts. They don't shock easily, either, so their Willpower tends to be higher than the norm. To balance it out, such people often (but not always) lack more mundane skills, like the ability to balance their checking account, and might suffer penalties to their Social-based rolls when dealing with mainstream culture. Hardcore devotees generally (but again, not always) sport elaborate tattoos, unconventional wardrobes, and striking hair styles, and favor "alternative" perspectives on politics, sexuality, spirituality, and overall identity. It's worth remembering, too, that while such people get typecast as "liberals" in socio-political terms, quite a few of them are radically, perhaps even violently, conservative instead.

(Certain subcultures — such as skinhead groups, Antifa, MMA fighters, medieval recreationists, doomsday preppers, and the like — also nurture the Abilities: Brawling, Melee, Martial Arts, and possibly Firearms and Gunsmithing. These folks generally have higher Physical Attributes than usual, too. For more details about devotees of more-violent subcultures, see "Hardcases," p. XX.)

Within their chosen community, serious devotees often know (or at least have heard of) one another, stick together against outsiders, and have their own way of dealing with problems. Folks who spend serious time in these subcultures believe mainstream society is flawed, even broken, and so they have formed their own communities in response. Their reaction to



“mundanes” can range from patronizing pity to searing scorn, and that reaction generally goes both ways, especially when cops are involved. That said, many devotees have learned to work within the law while manipulating it to their advantage; thus, the Law **Ability** is common among scene organizers, activists, and folks who like to live outside that law as freely as they can.

**Suggested Attributes:** Strength 2-4, Dexterity 2-4, Stamina 3-4, Charisma 2-5, Manipulation 1-4, Appearance 1-5, Perception 2-4, Intelligence 1-5, Wits 1-3

**Suggested Abilities:** Academics 1-4, Area Knowledge (scene of choice) 1-5, Art 1-5, Athletics 1-4, Awareness 1-2, Crafts 2-5, Computer 1-5, Drive 1-3, Expression 2-5, Law 1-3, Politics 1-3, Survival 1-5, Technology 1-5 (plus an array of Abilities that suit an individual’s mundane and other pursuits.)

**Willpower:** 3-5

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

**Equipment:** Flamboyant or unusual clothing, strange devices, vehicles suited for adventures, and often-dangerous toys that demand specialized skills before you can use them without looking like a complete fool.

**Image:** Willfully eccentric clothing, tattoos, and piercings both obvious and hidden are more the rule than the exception in many rebel subcultures across the world. Folks within such groups tend to adopt self-made identities (as opposed to the ones they were raised with), and often choose new names to mark their departure from mainstream culture.

The average age for people in such groups generally ranges from the mid-teens to early 40s, although subculture parents tend to raise their kids in those cultures as well, and elders within the community can be 70 years old or older. It’s rare to find subculture insiders who predate the 1950s, but some folks refuse to grow old no matter how many years they have under their belts.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Normative culture is a prison. You might punch a clock in that world, but you refuse to let it limit who you become.

## Trix

Lights, fire, action. That’s what Trix is all about. He’s been slinging flame since the 1990s, and with almost 20 years of circus-stunt experience he’s among the best you’ll ever see. Flame is focus, discipline, sex. It’s the element of light that drew Trix out of darkness and helped him illuminate a new generation of artists who’ll go further and burn brighter than Trix ever could.

Quiet, introverted, and socially awkward as a kid, Trix discovered circus arts by way of a girl he had a crush on in high school. She'd be hooping outside between classes, even in the rain, and young Trix (then called Steven Morris) watched, fascinated as she wove patterns of motion around her arms and legs, often spinning two or three hoops instead of only one. He bought his own hoops, practiced with the fanaticism of a young man looking to get laid, and then — when he felt good enough — showed up near her practice spot before his crush arrived, began hooping, and acted casual when she saw him, applauded, and struck up the conversation he'd been dying to have with her. The girl's given name was Stephanie, but she preferred Sapphire. By the time they broke up with typical high-school explosivity, she'd christened Steven "Trix" and introduced him to flow toys, circus tricks, and the disciplines of flame.

In the years since, Trix has studied every form of circus art he could find. Stilt-walking, sword-swallowing, contortions, acrobatics, the works. To supplement this vigorously unprofitable (and frequently expensive) skill set, he studied computer security, learned some basic hacking, and taught himself desktop video production. As the new millennium opened new venues in self-production and self-promotion, Trix took to the festival circuit, set up an array of social-media platforms, took on apprentices, and formed a troupe of traveling professional performers. Since 2007, PyroKenYeSuz has opened for bands, performed in videos, appeared in indie films, and trekked from Seattle to Tokyo — spinning flame at Burning Man, breathing fire in music videos, walking on glass to protest the last election, and getting snubbed by judges on reality-TV talent competitions. Trix' troupe has grown and contracted over the intervening years, but it remains among the most respected groups of its kind.

Despite his success, Trix is beginning to wonder where and how it all ends. Now pushing 40, he's slowing down and running out of energy. The restless passion that once drove him from stage to stage has become bone-deep weariness.

Too many lovers but no true partner. Too many cities, none of them home. Oh, sure that first rush when the crowd gasps still lights up his heart, but the many hours of practice, meetings, and setups and tear-downs have really gotten to Trix. He's considered handing the whole thing off to one of his associates, but what would he do *then*? As tiring as the grind's become, boredom would be even worse. Besides, as he'll admit when the fun's over and yet another friend has run, Trix can't count on the people in his troupe. Yeah, they're around when there's glory to be had, but it's still a struggle to get folks who'll show up for practice every time or make it through a tour without some kind of drama Trix needs to soothe. Injuries, breakups, permits, insurance ... when did it get to be so much damn *work*? Worse still, he's got little to show for it all except a Ford Explorer choked with playa dust, stuffed with gear, and redolent of sweaty bodies too tired for a shower before hitting the road again. No savings to speak of, and a couple of credit cards that spend most of the year near the cut-off zone. Trix is having fun, essentially, but this life doesn't have a retirement plan and the years are starting to pile up on him.

Slender, tall, and pretty, with a long hair flowing straight down past the middle of his back, Trix cultivates an aura of androgyny. His blue eyes contrast with sun-browned skin and a hint of distant Cree ancestry. Shimmering strands of iridescent "faerie hair" sparkle in his dark brown mane, and the few folks who see him without his shirt on know that Trix is all sinew, no fat. In a subculture infamous for elaborate tattoos, Trix has only one: a black bunny done in vaguely Haida style on his right shoulder blade. Not many people see that either, because Trix tends to cover up even in the hottest Nevada summers. His wardrobe echoes his fondness for flames, with bright colors and fire motifs being a hallmark of his clothes. Trix speaks softly and rarely yells even when under pressure. His intensity, though, vibrates through this artist like a hard slap, and his aura (for those who can see it) burns like the little suns he spins on a chain.

## Acolytes, Consors, and Extraordinary Citizens



Mages don't have to face their world alone. Although the majority of unAwakened people must remain unaware of the occult war fought in their midst — if only for their own protection — certain people assist the Awakened, either willingly or otherwise. In the old days, such people were known as *grog*s, *custos*, or, for truly skillful companions, *consors*. Back then, such folks were acknowledged (if not always respected) associates of the wizards in their midst. As the tides rose against practitioners

of magick, however, those roles (and the people in them) grew more secretive and remote. These days, folks who collaborate with the Awakened / Enlightened elite either do so without knowing who they really serve, do so secretly, or live and work mostly in Realms and strongholds far from the mundane world.

### What's in a Name?

Among the Nine Traditions, these sorts of associates are often, though not universally, known as consors if they know who and what they're working with, and acolytes if they do not. Old-school Tradition magi still employ the term "custos"

for their knowing but relatively unskilled servitors, but that term and the elitism behind it have fallen out of favor in the 21st-century world. The Technocratic Union, of course, refers to its more knowledgeable associates as “extraordinary citizens,” and its lower-tier associates as “citizens,” “employees,” or simply “human resources.” The Fallen tend to lump all their associates under the heading of “dregvati,” “pawns,” or “dregs,” while other mages simply call these folks their friends and neighbors, sometimes with honorific titles but rarely with any sort of formal acknowledgment of inferiority regarding to the mages they assist.

## Consort Roles and Motivations

Anyone who associates with mages has personal reasons for that choice, and any role that person fulfills will depend upon that associate’s skills and motivations, combined with the needs of the mages themselves. With those truths in mind, the following entries reflect the most common roles consors fulfill within Awakened society, the most common skill sets within those categories, and the most common motivations people have for assuming those roles.

The following roles are not exclusive, of course, and many folks combine several categories into a single role. A bodyguard might love her employer, merging the Backup, Lover, and Professional roles into one very busy life. Ultimately, the most vital elements of a consort’s role are the function she fulfills and the reasons she fulfills it. Every other aspect of that role is negotiable.

In game terms, such associates range from the sorts of normal people detailed under “The Sleeping Masses” (p. XX) and “Among the Masses” (Mage 20, pp. 620-622) to highly skilled non-mages who possess unusual, perhaps inhuman, abilities, like the Hunters and “Static” Magical Adepts detailed later in this chapter, and under “Extraordinary Operatives” and “Technocratic Creations” (Mage 20, pp. 623-626). Consors can be vampires, ghouls, constructs, familiars, or other paranormal beasts who can be found throughout this book; the following section, however, deals with associates who are essentially human beings that might add a few unusual powers to their non-magical skills.

Those abilities, and the people who employ them, are exceedingly diverse in terms of power and identity. Rather than present detailed Trait blocks for the following characters, therefore, the entries below concentrate on the *sorts* of associates a mage can have, with a few notes that describe the sorts of Traits such characters could have, as well as the templates that best suit the associate in question. The Storyteller, therefore, can customize those characters to suit the nature of their group and chronicle. Your game, your choice.

## Assistant

Many associates simply stick around to help mages with their work. Lab technicians, political hacktivists, street-gang members, office workers, and so forth provide support around a Chantry, Construct, sanctum, or home. While many of these

associates also have professional reasons for their assistance, they tend to work more closely with the mages on a daily basis than, say, backup agents or cleanup crews do.

Unlike certain sorts of employees, assistants typically understand who they’re working for, what they’re doing, and how that job is, at the very least, an unconventional employment opportunity. Though not Awakened or Enlightened themselves, these consors know the score. Some practice mystic disciplines even though they cannot work True Magick under their own power: Yoga teachers, neopagans, clerical aides, lay clergy, teen witches, lab helpmates, and roadies for Awakened musicians are all assistants who can wrap their heads around metaphysical weirdness even when they lack the skills to employ magick themselves.

Given the proper training, of course, such assistants *can* help mages perform rituals and other acts of major-league magic. As detailed under “Allies, Assistants, and Cults” (Mage 20, p. 532) and “Acting in Concert: UnAwakened Assistants” (Mage 20, pp. 542-543), helpers with the proper outlook and skillset provide minor support roles when their Awakened friends attempt certain magical acts. Thus, it’s a good idea to keep a few like-minded associates nearby if you’re a mage. If nothing else, such people are *not* considered to be Sleeper witnesses when vulgar magick gets cast in their vicinity unless they’re Technocratic assistants watching some Reality Deviant cut loose with that crazy magick shit (for details, see Mage 20, pp. 531-532).

While many assistants work for money, serve out of a sense of tradition, or receive some other form of compensation, too, affection and belief provide the primary motivations for such companions. Sure, they might be getting paid as well, but the long hours and hard work typically involved in this sort of assistance come more from a sense of devotion to the cause than devotion to a paycheck. An assistant’s personal and political beliefs tend to align with those of the mage in question, perhaps shading into dedication to the mage herself. It’s not a stretch to see love as an element of this devotion, either — maybe not the *primary* reason for an assistant’s loyalty but probably a secondary motivation whether the assistant realizes it or not.

Affection might run both ways... but it also might not. Hermetic wizards and mad scientists are notoriously hard on the hired help, with cranky witches and selfish executives often taking assistants for granted, too. Oh, the high-and-mighty Enlightened Ones might consider their assistants to be a cut or two above the rank-and-file Masses, but for every magus or Technocrat who appreciates the efforts of their unAwakened sidekicks there are at least two who regard assistants as useful but ultimately limited inferiors, even if those mages don’t say as much in as many words.

**Suggested Traits:** At the lowest levels of proficiency, assistants have one to three dots in Abilities that would be useful to the mages they serve. Most often, those Traits include: Academics (for research assistants, teaching assistants,

editors, students, etc.); Art and Expression (artists, designers, celebrities); Crafts (maintenance workers, domestic workers, artisans, and other folks who need to be good with their hands); Esoterica of one or two appropriate specializations (cult members, clergy, metaphysical practitioners, unAwakened initiates, and so on); Occult (cult members, neopagans, New Agers, vodou practitioners, and the like); Law (cops, lawyers, paralegals, politicians, activists, journalists) and Politics (like-wise); Cooking (cooks, servants); and Computers, Science, and Technology (technicians, students, lab assistants, bloggers, engineers, and so forth).

Upper-tier assistants have higher levels in more Abilities, and probably have Attributes in the 3-5 range (even higher if they're not normal humans), plus a variety of character-appropriate Merits, Flaws, and possibly certain Advantage Traits. For details about the latter, see Chapter Five, p. XX.

**Suggested Templates:** Assistant-type companions tend to be “everyday people” sorts of characters, usually with one or two skill sets that determine the role they serve in a mage’s company. The Human Resources template is probably most common, although the Hardcase, Thug, Professional Badass, and Extraordinary Scientist templates are common in this role, too.

## Dorothy “Doro” Franco

It’s hard to make a living out there, especially when you’re a student facing the moment when those damn loans all come due. Dorothy dropped down to part-time status in her final year of college when she scored that gig as a PykUp driver. Thanks to her longstanding interest in the ways cars work, she’s been able to keep the old Saturn her mother gave her in good running order, and she can handle the repairs without too much cost or trouble. The PykUp job fit in around her class schedule, giving Doro time for homework if not a social life.

And then she met the wizard.

Okay, he doesn’t look much like a wizard from the movies. No scar, no broom, no owl on his shoulder. But the stuff Doro saw that night after she got the strangest compulsion to pick up a fare who hadn’t gone through the usual channels convinced her that, yeah, magic’s real and he knows how to use it. That was a batshit crazy night, filled with chases and gunshots and impossible escapes. By the time she got him to where he was trying to go, her Saturn was a bullet-riddled wreck. “Where the fuck do you think *you’re* going?” she demanded when the wizard bolted from her car and tried to disappear down that alleyway. Her kickboxing classes came in handy as she grabbed the wizard by his hoodie and dragged him back to her car. “You, pretty boy, are *paying* for this — *and* for your goddamned ride, which I noticed you did not book through my agency — or I am introducing your face to the pavement and then handing you over to those *Terminator* rejects you were running from.”

He gave her the money. Then he gave her a job.

Doro still works for PykUp. Her regular clients, however, are a pretty exclusive bunch. They know she can keep her mouth shut, stand up when she has to, and get them where they need to be without awkward questions or silly pretenses. Local street-mages have Doro’s number and PykUp account in their directories, and she’s got a standing agreement with them: “Don’t call me during class, don’t get me killed, do not fuck me over, and cover any and all damages to me and my car.” Her Saturn is neutral ground; if you want to fight, get the hell out of Doro’s car to do it. In return for discreet, reliable service, Doro gets steady business, great tips, and occasional goodies like minor Wonders and some excellent information about all manner of strange topics. Her clients have helped her with her homework, and if she needs a good job after she graduates, Doro has several standing offers from mages all over town.

A solid young woman just shy of 22, Doro has the thick black hair and olive skin of her Persian grandfather and Mexican mom. Majoring in business, she keeps in shape by kickboxing at the college gym whenever she’s got the time to go. Her short nails remain constantly grimy from working under the hood of her blue 2003 Saturn, and she favors black distressed jeans, high-tops, a black denim vest, and bootleg punk T-shirts. Thanks to her clientele, Doro’s not hurting for money anymore, and has stockpiled a bunch of it for when her student loans come due. Hashing out plans with the wizard has also given her a potential business plan for her pending graduation: a hush-hush transport service called D-Ryde where a group of like-minded drivers handle covert transport and delivery among her region’s Awakened community. Thanks to her connections and discretion, the local Technocracy Construct leaves her alone... for the moment, anyway, and certain Night-Folk have begun to avail themselves of her services too. Doro’s open-door “don’t be an asshole” policy has earned her the respect and protection of a network of powerful people, and so Doro and her Saturn sail through the night unmolested by occult interference and shielded (to some degree) from the nonsense that occurs when a young woman gets behind the wheel and asks her client, “So, where am I taking you tonight?”

## Backup

When mages — or, more often, Technocrats — who belong to an organization get themselves into a tight spot, they may be able to call upon *backup*: professional consors tasked with getting those Enlightened or Awakened agents out of trouble. Unlike assistants and other personal companions, these folks work for a greater organization, not for the mage herself. A few wealthy mages retain mortal backup agents too, as part of an organization they command; for the most part, though, such companions serve a cause greater than both parties involved.

As the name suggests, backup consors tend to be agents of weaponized force: cops, soldiers, bodyguards, paramilitary

troops, and the like. In a crisis, they swoop in and provide covering fire, extractions, diversions, getaways, and other avenues of victory or escape. Certain agents deal with more mundane situations, too: moving gear, delivering money, passing messages, cleaning up a mage's mess (see the entry below), providing accounting or administrative assistance, invoking diplomatic aid, marshalling media venues, and facilitating other forms of nonviolent backup. The skills, personalities, and motivations of such agents, then, depend upon the organization they serve and the role they play within it.

Backup agents generally feel a sense of loyalty to the group as well as to their more obvious financial remuneration. As a rule, though, their first and most important motivation involves a paycheck. Like their counterpart the Professional (p. XX), these folks are essentially mercenaries: workers employed by a specific cause, client, or institution, true enough, but most dedicated to their paychecks. Thus, when faced with apparently impossible situations, these folks tend to fall back fighting or, if possible, run away. After all, that paycheck ain't doing you much good if you happen to get killed while earning it.

As detailed under the Backup Background (Mage 20, pp. 306-307), these companions arrive in groups that handle certain kinds of tasks. Those groups feature a team leader who calls the shots while specialists handle different duties within the team's overall goal. A team of fire-support agents will fan out, find cover, and follow the commands of their team leader, deploying whatever tactics and weapons those agents employ. As a result, backup agents don't follow the orders of the mage they're assigned to protect; after all, if she knew what she was doing, she wouldn't need them there to begin with. The team leader might accept input from the mage on the scene, but that sort of thing tends to be an "only as needed" arrangement. The team leader, whoever that is, gets the first and final say... and if that say involves ditching out on the mage, then so be it. Backup agents risk their lives only when they must, and then only in the service of their organization, not to serve the mage who called them in.

Within each team, the members' individual personalities and skills correspond to the sorts of situations they're dispatched to handle. A group of battle-hardened mercenaries won't drop by to help a mage with her taxes, while a group of skilled accountants would fare poorly in desperate firefights. Whoever they are, though, they'll be trained to expect whatever sorts of reality-warping nonsense their associated mages create; in game terms, they don't count as witnesses for vulgar magick so long as said vulgarity comes from a mage in their organization. As mentioned above, Technocracy backup *would* count as witnesses against mystic Reality Deviation, but *not* against Enlightened hypertechnology, even if said hypertechnology comes from another sort of technomancer, provided that the mage still uses some form of reasonably explainable scientific principles. Sure, that Etherite's robot army seems scientifically plausible, but that witch tweeting thunderbolts with her cell phone is committing crimes against Reality! A coven of

neopagan backup agents, on the other hand, would find that perfectly normal (if unusual) within their sphere of beliefs.

Although the Background entry refers to backup personnel as "faceless," they certainly don't view themselves or one another that way. Where a mage sees a bunch of essentially anonymous folks rushing to her aid, the agents themselves respect their compatriots, watch each other's backs, and follow their employer's instructions. A mage who's not willing to respect those things can go take a flying leap into the sun as far as backup agents are concerned. While they'll probably recognize the mage's superior capabilities, backup personnel won't view themselves as, much less act as, cannon fodder unless their loyalty to the group renders them expendable in their own eyes. Especially in the modern world, though, such devotion is unusual unless those agents are fanatics, slaves, abused into perpetual submission, or otherwise bound toward self-destructive behavior; in most situations, such behavior makes those agents less effective, not more, than free-willed operatives who do what they do for their own reasons.

**Suggested Traits:** As detailed in the Background entry of that name, rank-and-file backup characters have between one and three dots in a handful of useful Abilities. Elite backup agents can have higher Traits and character-appropriate Merits, Flaws, and Advantages. The Abilities in question will deal with the duties of the operatives and their team; security or paramilitary backup will boast Firearms, Melee, Brawling, and so forth, while a repair crew favors Crafts, Computers, Technology, and other suitable Traits.

**Suggested Templates:** Mage 20, p. 306, features a list of potential backup personnel. As that list suggests, such agents do not have to be human; packs of rats or wolves, troops of apes, or flocks of ravens could all be backup agents, too. Although all agents in a given backup team will share a related template (Wolf, Professional Badass, etc.), the individuals within that team have specific Traits that reflect their role.

## The Banner Dei Brute Squad

When the Ecstatic jam band and performance troupe Banner Dei formed on the last night of 1999, it found immediate, enthusiastic support from fans who'd been there that night. The Brute Squad, as they were dubbed by then-bandleader Tricia "Thunderheart" Rykomanski, held the fire line against unskilled, would-be performers who'd be more likely to set themselves on fire than add anything to the performance, pounded out improvised percussion on anything that would make some noise, and then stayed all day the following morning in order to help the Banner Dei members and their friends clean up the post-gig trash piles and load the gear into whatever vehicles they could find. Since that night, both Banner Dei and the Brute Squad have cycled through dozens of members. The cores of both groups, though, remain stable: Banner Dei blows minds, and the Brute Squad gets them in and out of gigs intact without leaving a huge mess behind.

Under the guidance of Kore Valkyrie Smith since 2010, the “Banner Brutes” provide drop-in support for Banner Dei’s members and former bandmates. Either individually or as a group, those Banner Dei personnel can send up a flare, text message, phone call, or blog post and have members of the Brute Squad on the location as quickly as a bunch of mortals can arrive. Because the Brute Squad consists of several dozen unAwakened hangers-on scattered across North and Central America, northern Europe, Japan, and India, and because Smith happens to be really good at resource management (and has backing from several noted Ecstatic philanthropists), a team of three to 15 Brute Squad folks can show up within a day or less with a little advance warning, or be on-site when needed if they know at least two days in advance.

Once dispatched, the Banner Dei Brute Squad can handle trash collection and disposal, crowd control, violence-free de-escalation, light medical attention, and setup and tear-down logistics for stage gear and musical equipment. Most Brute Squad members can also dance, spin fire, perform acrobatics, play musical instruments, or contribute other skills to the performance itself. Kore and her co-leaders train Brute Squad personnel in the essential skills before they’re allowed to back up the band and its people, and though Banner Dei and its support team have rather liberal attitudes about sex and drugs, there’s a strict code of conduct that expels any Brute Squad member who abuses his position or can’t be bothered to respect a given “no.” So far, most folks associated with the Brute Squad have remained trustworthy and reliable; Kore’s very good at vetting people, and the few who step out of line and take advantage of Ecstatic hospitality tend to wind up gibbering mindlessly by the side of a road if they’re ever seen again at all.

Banner Dei’s Brute Squad features a colorful collective of Subculture Devotees (pp. 31-32) whose training lets them haul gear and calm crowds with minimal fuss. Although the oldest members have looked age 40 in the rearview mirror, most Banner Brutes are in their mid-20s to early 30s. Regardless of age or gender, these folks combine tattooed badassery with Zen-focused people skills. Most have traveled extensively throughout the mortal world, and a number have spent time in the Otherworlds as well. Despite appearances, these are friendly people who blend old-school manners with new-millennium social consciousness. They rarely possess paranormal powers themselves (Kore probably does, but if so she doesn’t brag about it), but occasionally bring along mystic goodies they’ve found or been gifted with at various events. The majority of them speak at least two languages, and some enjoy learning as many tongues as they can recall. Arriving in dust-crusted cars (many of which have been modified for all-terrain use), all Banner Brutes sport a tattoo that marks them as approved and official members of the group. This design — a Hulk-green banner with a white lightning bolt slashed across its surface — glows in low-light situations so Brutes can find each other in the dark. If a

Brute gets booted for good cause (as opposed to retiring from the group on good terms), his tattoo burns away in an agonizing flash of bright green fire, leaving the thunderbolt behind as a permanent scar.

## Cleaners

Mages make messes. Someone has to clean them up. And if the mage in question belongs to an organization like the Technocratic Union, a large cult, or a religious organization with a lot of things to hide, then that group dispatches cleanup specialists to dispose of said mess before things can get even messier than they already were. An ancient tradition in many organizations (you didn’t think all those medieval wizards gathered their *own* vials of slain dragons’ blood, did you?), the cleaner role comprises a hidden yet essential element of the Ascension War’s innate secrecy.

Equipped with strong stomachs, tight lips, and the best cleaning supplies money (and sometimes magick) can provide, these special assistants stealth in, sort out the damage, cover everybody’s tracks, and get out before the mundanes notice something’s wrong. Body disposal, bloodstain removal, property repair — it’s all in a night’s work for these consors. Although a mage or two might be sent along with the crew in order to handle issues that only Spheres can conceal, these hardcore operatives have been trained to handle most messy situations with a minimum of fuss. That training includes misdirection skills (to divert potential witnesses), attention to detail (so as to spot things a casual eye might miss), the ability to bullshit convincingly (“*Why no, officer, this is simply routine maintenance*”), and an array of tactics that let the cleaners adapt to rapidly changing circumstances (like, say, that bunch of ghosts who just showed up to haunt the place they were killed). Most vitally, however, cleaners must remain discreet and keep their cool under situations that would drive most folks screaming for the nearest bomb shelter. The few, the proud, the drenched in gore — there’s your cleanup crew.

Depending on the group that hires them, these cleanup consors might range from a team of half a dozen specialists to a single person who’s formidably good at his job. (Think Mr. Wolf from *Pulp Fiction*, but with paranormal resources at his fingertips). Like backup consors, these folks generally arrive with a team leader and a list of responsibilities for each member. One cleaner could be tasked with blood removal while another patches holes in the walls, one or two others conceal the cleanup operation from prying eyes or send the cops packing when they show up to investigate the latest “gas main explosion.” Fake IDs, mop-up gear, holographic projectors, whatever the gig demands, the cleaners usually have the tools to get that job done.

It takes a special kind of person to work a cleanup crew — the sort of person for whom severed tentacles, exploded bodies, and werewolves turned inside-out are all in a day’s work. Although most cleanup operatives are normal human

beings with a few bits of unusual gear, the mental toughness essential for such a job is hard to find when the person in question must also be reliable, discreet, and stable enough to do the job under almost any circumstances. Although mystic mages tend to disregard those hard-minded operatives, Technocratic field agents are well aware of the challenges inherent in the job, and generally afford cleanup crews the respect they deserve.

Game-wise, cleanup crews are a specialized form of the Backup characters detailed above, equipped with appropriate gear and Abilities, and possessed of Willpower Traits rated no lower than 7. Because they're used to pretty much anything the job can throw at them, cleanup specialists don't count as witnesses against any form of vulgar magick. Though they're pretty much the opposite of suicidal, cleanup consors seem unfazed by all but the most demented circumstances. These are folks who clean up alien gore and slaughtered innocents as a matter of routine, and who know how to keep secrets that would choke a mob enforcer. Naturally, neuroses are par for the course, with nightmares being frequent perks of the job. Sure, the best of them can compartmentalize the things they scrub off the walls, but all that madness has to go *somewhere*, so Flaws like Icy, PTSD, Inappropriate (gallows humor and grotesque conversations), OCPD, Flashbacks, and Nightmares can be standard issue for such companions. The job pays well, though, and cleanup crews have enough leverage with their Enlightened associates to be able to request (or demand) favors and expect to get them. After all, no sane mage wants to find herself stuck out in the open with a bunch of bodies to dispose of, approaching police sirens, and a recorded message telling her, "I'm sorry but no one is presently available to take your call..."

**Suggested Traits:** As noted above, cleanup agents have very high Willpower Traits; weak-willed people cannot do what these folks do. Common Traits include high Perception and Wits Attributes (3 or higher); three or more dots in Alertness, Crafts, Search, and Subterfuge; two to four dots in Computers, Stealth, Technology, and perhaps Medicine; and — especially among team leaders or solo specialists — several dots in Blatancy. The Flaws noted above are pretty common among cleanup crew members, and a sick sense of humor is universal. Cleanup agents generally work "on call," and must be ready to scramble to a new location within minutes if need be.

Cleaners who work for mages and Technocrats receive gear — hazmat suits, disposal bags, cleaning agents, official ID badges (often with fake names), and the like — from their employers, and that gear often includes low-level Wonders that unAwakened personnel can use: cross-dimensional containers, enhanced-perception sensors (Rank 1 Sphere Effects built into sensor gear), cloaking devices, and so forth. Field agents also carry small but effective weapons, and they know how to use those sidearms (the Firearms or Energy Weapons Abilities) if necessary.

Occasionally, a private mage with money to burn employs a personal cleanup crew. These companions might mop up her disasters, keep the Chantry or sanctum clean, live full time in an off-world Realm, or any combination of those duties. Technocracy Constructs, of course, have dedicated cleaning crews, too. "Domestic" cleaners — that is, folks who aren't expected to go out into the field and make dead Sleepers disappear — are essentially glorified custodians, without the specialized Traits field agents live and die by. Even these assistants, though, have high Willpower Traits and an initiated, even jaded, view of magick and its effects; they don't count as witnesses for vulgar Effects, and consider weird shit to be perfectly normal. (*"Don't bother the ghosts in the containment field — they get cranky when you come too close."*)

**Suggested Templates:** As the Traits above suggest, cleanup crews are not your normal everyday sorts of people. Few cleaners would qualify as anything less than Professional Badasses even if their Traits favor cleanup over combat. Among the Union's ranks, such agents are considered to be extraordinary citizens, with appropriate status and compensation. Sanctum custodians might be exceptional Human Resources, but those folks are not qualified for field work.

## Jason "Lurch" Shale

*No prospects.* That's what the guidance counselor thought. That's what Jason's parents thought too. Jason was a loner, a weirdo, a freak. Obsessed with private games only Jason understood. Engrossed in internet pages filled with autopsies and gore. Car crashes. Burnt bodies. Torture videos. Jason studied them with the clinical resolve of a brain surgeon practicing on an orange. He wasn't violent, no. Not a Columbine waiting to happen. Jason just saw things differently, a world built from sticky pieces that fit together in mysterious ways but came apart all too easily. His grades remained strong. His test scores showed great intellect. Jason was just creepy, that's all.

Tallish and gaunt, pale enough to show acne scars, Jason earned the nickname "Lurch" from classmates too young to really get the joke. His penchant for dark colors, army jackets, and combat boots kept the assholes just scared enough to leave Lurch be. There was always someone more fun to taunt, anyway. Jason's reaction to it all was a long dark stare lit by flickers of contempt.

There *had* to be a place for him out there somewhere.

And there was.

*"Is crime-scene cleanup the career for you?"* The question hovered over the faces of a pack of models clearly chosen for their inoffensive array of genders and skin tones. *Is it really that easy?* Jason wondered as he noted the application, sorted out his answers, and prepared a suitable resume. Jason always *had* been good with tests, so the application process flew by without complications until the moment he faced the actual human being who interviewed him for the job. That meeting,

he noted, sent pangs of apprehension through his veins. The interviewer, though, didn't seem to mind. A thin, pale woman with a near-robotic cadence to her voice, she showed him a parade of gruesome images, each more ghastly than the last. "Does this bother you?" she asked him, finally.

Jason shook his head. He'd seen worse. He got the job.

Not being a real people-person, Jason was given the dirty jobs — the ones furthest from the grieving relatives and queasy cops. Once he'd received his orders, Jason became a machine of sprays and scrubbing with an attention to detail that seemed almost supernatural. Appreciating his abilities, his employers at Catalyst Cleaning Services gave Jason all the work he could handle; well-compensated work with an excellent medical plan. Two years out of high school, with no college or debt, Jason's pulling down more than both parents combined. He's got his own place, and a sweet car, and if his job calls him in at odd hours to hose down scenes that would make the devil shit himself, well that is what they pay him for, and they pay him really well. Jason doesn't argue, doesn't ask questions or talk about what he does at work. It's not like he had many friends to begin with, so this morbid career suits him perfectly.

Jason *has* noticed, though, that many of these crime scenes he visits have horror-movie overtones: weird graffiti, dead animals, human remains, pillaged graves, old books in strange languages, corpses riddled by military hardware, occasionally things that don't look as though they'd *ever* been human... They're not the sorts of sites he was hired to clean back when he first joined the firm. No, these are different. More sinister. Definitely occult. Tom Robinson, Jason's foreman, has been watching Jason more closely than before — not actually saying much beyond his usual instructions but clearly waiting to see if Jason passes some new test. It's no big deal, though. Jason's cool with everything. By now, he knows there are things on the edges of the night, things you don't talk about if you want to keep that nice job and sweet car and a salary many folks would kill for. Oh, he'll look a few of 'em up on the internet from time to time, jot down mental notes, and fit the pieces together in his mind. This world is a puzzle, Jason knows, and the seams between its pieces are cut from flesh and colored with blood.

## Cultists

So you wanna be a cult leader? It's pretty easy, especially with magick. Just find a handful of people who desperately want a certain degree of excitement or enlightenment, offer up a gospel that suits their needs, establish a number of parameters that set your followers apart from the general population (possibly through enforced separation, for maximum control), and *voilà!* Instant cult! Well, maybe it's not quite that easy, but you get the idea. Mages can and do assemble cults quite frequently: prosperity sects, religious orders, Pagan covens, faith-healing devotees, fan clubs, extropian fellowships, social

cliques, New-Age networks, prayer circles, dance groups, alternative-science research groups, medieval recreationists, live-action roleplaying groups... the variations are as expansive as the paradigms that inspire them. All such cults, however, share a few common elements: a powerful belief, an idealized figurehead for that belief, a social hierarchy established around them both, and a devotion to the group's ideal that overshadows the individual identities of its members. The degree to which that idea proves toxic to the people in the group depends on the cult and its leadership. No matter how toxic it might be, though, there will always be someone who wants to join in, if only to find a semblance of meaning in an implacable world.

Cultist companions revere the mage, the message he conveys to them, or — typically — both. The bonds of fellowship created by cult membership exert a strong appeal as well, with cult members "finding themselves" through their association with like-minded folk. Loyalty often comes through a personal connection with the group's ideals, combined with a sense of belonging to something greater. Cult members, then, tend to be people seeking a cause worth living (and possibly dying) for, with a devotion to that cause which provides a core to that person's identity.

Whatever their reasons, people who join cults tend to be extremely, perhaps fatally, loyal. In game terms, that loyalty provides a bonus to a mage's spellcasting attempts when the cult throws the weight of its collective belief behind those spells. The cult's members trust so deeply in the mage (or at least in the ideal he represents) that their belief literally changes reality in his favor. Such belief, *en masse*, is the true power of a cult. Its individual members might not be much of a match for a mage, but their collective psychic energy magnifies his abilities. The cult, then, is worth protecting, even from itself.

It's not always true that members of a cult are suckers with nonexistent self-esteem. That stereotype is accurate in some cases, of course, but the average member of such a fellowship probably has a number of things going for her. Even so, there's a hole in her life, a hole this sort of group can fill. Maybe she's suffering from a crisis of faith, believes in nothing, is rebelling against an upbringing that left her scarred, or is sorting through a personal sorrow. The thing is, everybody's got their reasons for things they do, and so a person who joins a cult does so in order to meet a rather pressing need. Assuming the cult provides what she's searching for, that group may inspire devotion for life.

**Suggested Traits:** As detailed in **Mage 20** (p. 310) the Cult Background reflects a group of normal human characters united by a shared faith in a mage or cabal. Those people aren't exceptional in game terms, and so their Traits remain anchored in the Everyday People range.

**Suggested Templates:** Background-level cult members could be Homeless Survivors, Human Resources, and so on,

but they lack the militant prowess of Professional Badasses or upper-level consors. A given cult probably has a few cops or veteran military personnel for protection and essential enforcement, but powerful allies like vampires and cyborgs are the province of Backgrounds like Ally, instead.

### Jayleen White

Ms. White lives down the street. She has three cats and she's in your yoga class. Nothing about her screams "cultist" to you. Jayleen works at an upscale shoe store, selling Ferragamos and Louboutins to affluent customers. She's got an online store where she sells handmade jewelry, too, and she's doing pretty well at it. Maybe you went to school with her — with the pretty Black girl who never said much but always seemed to have a few friends who accepted her quiet personality without question. Even then, she dressed well, with a sense of classic, understated fashion in contrast to the usual teen rebellion and conformity chic.

Jayleen was born in Miami, but she has lived most of her life in your town. Her dad was in the Coast Guard, but he and mom split up decades ago. Mom grew up in a small town, too, from a small handful of Black families in that place. She taught Jayleen how to rise above the usual nonsense. Jayleen's smart. She learned well. These days, she's one of the few folks she knows in her age group who actually owns her own house. She works hard, is nice to everyone, and goes to that church down the road from the youth center.

That church with the minister who performs miracles.

Jayleen knows he's touched by God. She's seen what the man can do, and it's way beyond human gifts. She's seen him cure meth addicts with a touch, stop a gang brawl with a few soft words, and unearth a crooked bank's attempt to gentrify a nearby neighborhood by foreclosing on folks who'd owned their homes for decades, sending the guilty parties to jail instead of to an executive suite. Joseph Sewell insists that everybody call him "Joe," not "minister," and Jayleen knows he's much older than he seems to be. Her mom worked with Joe when he was just starting out, and he's been a family friend for ages. He even cured mom's cancer a few years back, so whatever Joe needs, Jayleen will work to provide.

Ms. White runs an inner circle of congregation members who keep an eye on their neighborhoods and participate in local politics. They understand there's more to Joe and his associates than meets the obvious eye, and because that group of blessed healers works to keep them safe, they return the favor for the church. It's not a *cult*, for God's sake — it's a support-group for the church and its neighborhood and all the people in it, whether they belong to the church or not. It keeps secrets when need be and monitors the local cops and gangs and businesses for signs of pending attack. Ms. White and her friends also counsel local kids, tutor at the schools, help out at the local youth center, and report potential threats to Joe and his friends. And so, the many plagues of American Suburbia keep passing their neighborhood by. It's not a big

group or a big church, and nothing about them is fancy. Still, for the folks who live in Ms. White's neighborhood, it's enough. And while Joe gets the credit when folks think to mention it at all, it's Ms. White and her inner circle that really get things done.

As for Ms. White, with her cats and her yoga and her high-end shoes and jewelry business, she gets what most folks want: a relatively safe life, a relatively prosperous career, some relatively good friends, and a small part of this world that finally feels like home.

## Handlers

The Awakened are complicated people. The ones who aren't trying to bring dragons into the Consensus or steer popular belief toward instant cloning would usually misplace their own brooms if someone wasn't nearby to store those tools where they belong. Hence, mages often have handlers: personal Retainers (as in the Background Trait of that name, detailed in **Mage 20**, p. 323) who take care of those little details mages are too busy, scattered or proud to handle themselves.

Handler consors are the receptionists, personal assistants, office managers, lawyers, librarians, agents, housekeepers, nurses, butlers, advisors, head mechanics, chiefs of staff, and other logistical personnel whose job demands organizational skills and attention to detail. These folks tend the sanctum, run the Chantry, make sure the office doesn't fall apart around the mage's ears, and otherwise keep the gears humming smoothly in a mage's life. And because her position involves duties that are important, perhaps invaluable, to the mage she works with, a handler enjoys a certain amount of autonomous authority.

In many regards, this sort of companion is a hired Professional, a trusted Servant, or both. Her compensation involves status as well as income, and might involve a degree of affection, too. In service to that job, of course, a handler needs valuable skills and must be unusually proficient at what she does. Game-wise, these are characters with four or five dots in their most vital Abilities, with a high Willpower and respectable Mental or Social Attributes. Such companions might have a bit of combat training in case of emergencies, but that's not their primary focus. As shown by the list of potential vocations above, handlers excel at intellectual Knowledges and social acumen. They're cool under pressure and confident in their roles. A mere servant moves through the shadow of his Awakened master, but the handler is capable and respected enough to give that same mage a hard time on general principle. (*"I don't care where that portal opened to, don't track your muddy boots on my freshly cleaned rug!"*)

By definition, a handler has an attitude; it's her job to handle things, and by all that's holy and unholy alike, that is what she'll do. She tends to keep a tight rein on her field of expertise, and probably knows more about it than the

mage who hired her... which, of course, is why he hired her in the first place. Under most circumstances, she lives on the property where she works, probably has an office all to herself, and exerts authority over other servants, employees, and so forth if that place has them. If that property exists in some Otherworldly realm or Construct, then the handler might not even be a human per se; cybernetic, mutated, Bygone, or otherwise paranormal handlers are unusual but not exceptional in the Awakened world, especially in those places that differ considerably from what passes for the everyday world.

**Suggested Traits:** As always, a handler's Traits depend upon the role she fulfills. A librarian would have formidable levels of Academics, Investigation, and Research, while a housekeeper specializes in Crafts (for maintenance), Etiquette, Search, and appropriate specialties in Academics, Technology, and the like. As noted earlier, handlers possess high Trait ratings in their specialized fields, with commensurate Attributes like Intelligence, Manipulation, and Perception reaching rather heroic degrees. Regardless of the other specific Traits, a handler is organized, assertive, and capable enough to hold at least one dot in Leadership, and possibly a dot or two in Intimidation as well.

**Suggested Templates:** Although they're skilled Human Resources, handler characters hew closer to the Power Player template in terms of the skills and resources they command.

## Ethan "Romeo" Berg

Those who know him have a saying: "If you need sand sold in the Middle East, call Romeo." The guy's a hardcore charmer and the kind of salesman who makes this world's Willy Lowmans blow their brains out on a Sunday night. In the parlance of Alec Baldwin's motivational speech, Romeo's a closer. It's not real estate he sells, though: it's reality — specifically the reality you see on TV news and internet channels. You'll never see him do it, though. That's not Romeo's style. Nope, he's a seller of impressions in human form, personalities who determine what's real in the eyes and ears of viewers across the world. Romeo's an agent of elite clientele: broadcast celebrities from across the political spectrum, whose arguments define what is and is not "real" in our 21st century.

He's always been good at this sort of thing. Ethan's mother works in insurance, and she's good enough at it that Ethan and his family grew up in one of the nicer parts of town. Cute, charismatic, and schooled in salesmanship from a very early age, Ethan learned how to ingratiate himself with total strangers within seconds of meeting them. By way of a girlfriend in the theatre department, he discovered the joys of talent representation by helping her score a modeling contract. Their relationship didn't last long, but the friendship behind it remains solid to this day. She introduced him to some friends... and they introduced him to some friends... and so on. By the time he'd graduated, near the top of his class,

Ethan had established a reputation for connecting Party A with Party B to the benefit of both parties and Ethan's bank account. That's been his gig ever since.

During college, with help from mom, Ethan opened Clairon Media Talent Unlimited, an agency for models, actors, and internet celebrities. Clairon was doing so well by the time Ethan graduated that he was contracted by a Technocratic subsidiary to represent several of their then-new MODES personalities (see Chapter Three). That was five years ago, and CMTU has since become one of the rising stars of 21st-century celebrity management, in large part thanks to Romeo's unflagging energy and the personal touch he employs with everyone on his client list.

A rakish bro in his late 20s, Ethan is stylish if not personally handsome. His everyman-in-Tagliatore casual fashion sense, dazzling charisma, and smooth social moves make up for his rather ordinary features. Freckled with tousled red hair, Romeo earns his name because everything he says seems to be hopelessly devoted to whomever he's speaking to at the time. That charming intimacy feels natural, not skeezy, and so folks are inclined to trust him. Ethan plays the game as fairly and squarely as a high-end talent agent can possibly be, and so his reputation remains golden among clients and rivals alike. At least to all appearances, he's a sincerely nice guy whose agency excels at teaming the right performer with the venue that suits them best. The fact that he's secretly bankrolled by Halcyon Holdings (a Syndicate media firm) just makes Ethan's pockets deeper and his clients richer.

Despite his extraordinary clients, Ethan is not himself an extraordinary citizen. Really, Romeo doesn't know much at all about his benefactors. He's got no ties to the Ascension Conflict as it stands, and he'd be deeply confused if some weirdo showed up and started trying to convince him that his agency serves a shadow-war agenda. (He'd also call security on the offending weirdo and have that conspiracy-theory whackjob escorted from his offices posthaste.) Sure, he understands that he's got a lot of uncannily convincing clients working all ends of the socio-political spectrum, but keeping them employed and popular is all Ethan gets paid to care about. If confronted with the truth behind his agency and its investor Halcyon, Romeo might just crack. Then, again, he's not really *opposed* to the idea of a stable, prosperous world governed by a powerful elite, either, especially not if he gets to be one of the folks on top when the smoke finally clears.

## Igors

It's an archetypal scene: the mad doctor bellowing commands as his deformed assistant scurries around the lab, lightning flashing and thunder crashing as some obscene experiment reaches its horrible conclusion. And while that scene involves melodramatic exaggeration, the name "Igor" has become associated with debased and often impaired servants whose bond with an abusive master is based more upon



desperation than upon respect, loyalty, or pay. Officially, this sort of “Igorism” is frowned upon within the ranks of the Nine Traditions and the Disparate Alliance; behind closed blast doors, however, it’s still kind of a thing where certain mages are concerned.

In the old days, wizards and artisans of noble lineage could compel service from their lessers simply because they held the rank to do so. Especially if those unfortunates also suffered from grave illness or debilitating physical conditions, appeared to be “not in their right mind,” were outcasts, or had some other condition that prohibited them from working alongside “normal” people, this sort of demi-slavery could even have been considered kindness of a sort. Thus, a tradition developed in which mages of various sorts gathered up servants who really had no place else to go, and then used and abused them into performing the dirty work that would be considered beneath that mage’s station. Because the Igor had no better options, such service tended to be a lifetime deal. Rebellion would be punished with exquisite sadism, and resentment was managed through an alternating system of rewards, promises, and grotesque punishments. Mad scientists, in particular, had a habit of using their Igors as guinea pigs, often after death — occasionally before it. The rise of humanistic and democratic philosophies drove this practice often literally underground, but — like the slavery detailed

below — it’s still practiced by certain mages today although few folks are willing to admit that publicly.

To a modernistic mindset, the whole Igor thing is grossly exploitative. Even in technologically advanced cultures, though, the practice has defenders. “What *else* would they be doing,” goes a typical argument, “if they weren’t able to work for people who have the tools and resources to deal with their handicaps?” Some defenders of the practice compare Igorism to the employment of impaired people as baggers, greeters, custodians, and so forth in mainstream corporations, forgetting the abusive element that seems near-inevitable in Igor-type relationships. The practice takes advantage of people whose health, for whatever reason, brands them as “crippled” in the eyes of mainstream society, and it demands absolute servitude from them in return for whatever food and shelter an Igor’s “master” provides. And so, though it may be “traditional,” Igorism is, at the very least, ethically questionable.

That said, it still exists.

The hallmarks of an Igor-style consor include some drastic form of Impediment (as per the Flaw of that name; see **The Book of Secrets**, pp. 39-40) or other Physical or Mental Flaws, desperate circumstances for the consor in question, and an abusive relationship with “master.” Secrecy is essential, especially in an era where such abuses are considered unethical

and typically illegal, yet despite the cruelties rained down upon the servant's back there's a distinct element of codependence in such relationships. The Igor has some skill or talent "master" needs, and that service earns a certain type of support (possibly even twisted affection) from "master" that the Igor wasn't getting elsewhere. In a world where social networks crumble, governments slash public funding, and people must constantly "prove their worth" or else wind up on the streets, such arrangements are not nearly as rare as they perhaps should be. Indeed, it's been argued that groups like the Syndicate deliberately impoverish people so as to create a large pool of potential Igors, while Etherites and Progenitors are said to actually create their own Igors with specific services in mind. Voodoo has a legendary history of such arrangements too, while religious orders employ the "charity" of giving orphans and other discarded children "something useful (and typically illegal) to do." And so, while few mages will introduce an Igor as such, that sort of associate remains a dirty little secret in more sanctums and laboratories than most mages like to admit.

What about the person behind that archetype? In most cases, an Igor-style companion suffers not only from physical or mental conditions but also from a debilitating lack of confidence. That person may have been raised or even bred into this role and might not even realize a different life is possible. Years — more likely decades — of abuse have convinced this servant that he deserves his station. He could feel affection, even love, for his master, perhaps making eloquent arguments in favor of continued servitude. Then again, an Igor might hate his master's guts and look forward to the day when a lock is not fastened correctly, or a gate is left ajar. This sort of Igor sabotages his master's plans whenever possible, abuses the master's other creations, and takes his fury out on anyone who happens to be nearby. Whatever form it takes, regardless of the person on the receiving end of the arrangement, Igorism does not breed healthy partnerships. Near-inevitably, an Igor's tale comes to a nasty end. Until that time, the consor does what he's told, takes whatever joys he can manage in this world, and avoids the real and figurative whips that signal displeasure in a master's hands.

Given the abusive nature of an Igor relationship, this sort of situation is potentially risky content. You should probably check in with the rest of your group before bringing Igor-style consors into your chronicle. See the sidebar regarding "Triggers, Limits, and Boundaries" in **Mage 20**, p. 345, and its associated entry about "Problems, Boundaries, and the Three-Strike Zone."

**Suggested Traits:** Igor-type servitors have some form of infirmity that sets them apart from the people around them. In game terms, this could be a Flaw (or a collection of them) that suits the character's concept and origins. Contrary to Universal Studios lore, an Igor doesn't have to be physically impaired, *nor* — and this is vital — *are all impaired consors Igors*. The idea that handicaps make a person "twisted" is the sort of thinking that allows Igorism to flourish in the first place.

In addition to that infirmity, an Igor consor also suffers from one or more Flaws that reflect his psychological dependence upon the master and the abusive bond they share. That Igor character could be a Ward, might feel True Love for the master, may be Cursed, a Ghoul, a construct (with those attendant challenges), or simply so beaten down by life and Master than he accepts the arrangement for what it is... for the present time, anyway.

Traditionally, an Igor has several unusual capabilities that make him useful to the master's purposes. Such capabilities could include great strength or stamina, uncanny perceptions, an ability to phase through walls, inhuman stealth, and so forth. Higher-than-usual Attributes cover the obvious talents, and the Special Advantages in this book's final chapter can provide options for other unusual abilities.

**Suggested Templates:** Regardless of their individual nature, Igor-type consors tend to be unusually competent in some degrees and unusually deficient (if only in their own minds) in others. Template-wise, a Thug, Professional Badass, Hardcase, Homeless Survivor, Human Resource or Subculture Devotee would be perfectly appropriate for an Igor, with the possible addition of a Special Advantage or appropriate Merits and Flaws.

## Riddhi

Riddhi was born to a family of fruit-sellers in Srinagar, Uttarakhand, India. The youngest of six children, she seemed like a burden on her poor family. To make a hard situation worse, Riddhi's nose was deformed and her head was disproportionately large... so large her mother died soon after she was born. Her father struggled to support his family — even taking on a new wife to help out with the girls. Never, though, could he forgive the child who had killed his first love, and Riddhi's siblings blamed her for taking their mother away.

When she reached the age of three, Riddhi's family sold her to a temple run by reputed "holy men." At the temple, the young girl was expected to act as a living avatar of Ganesha during rituals, thanks to her still-overlarge head. Despite that supposedly blessed role, however, Riddhi was also expected to work at all tasks put before her at any other time. She found herself questioning the rightness of such a dichotomy early on, and regularly stood up against her "masters" in the temple. Her impetuous nature was not exactly encouraged by the "holy men," of course, and regular beatings they inflicted upon her left Riddhi sullen and emotionally broken.

As a living embodiment of generosity, Riddhi is expected to bear the abuse and smile, offering pretty blessings to people who come to the temple seeking guidance from Ganesha. Such blessings seem to please a devotee known as Arjunachrya. A poor man with subtle yet noticeable power, Arjunachrya lurks around the temple, siphoning off energy from the worshippers. Riddhi has noticed him feeding, has recognized a selfish soul within him, and understands that

he needs her. She also realizes that Arjunachrya employs a subtle talent for influence which has lessened the severity of the beatings inflicted upon Riddhi by her masters. Thus, she feels caught between hatred and appreciation. Without her, he would have left this temple long ago; without him, she probably would have died.

Riddhi resists her masters in subtle ways. She takes her time with simple tasks, she drops rice, and she stumbles and falls at inopportune moments. Her masters view her as dull, but she is not. Amidst their taunts and insults, the servant catalogs a list of the abuses she has faced. Riddhi has a list for every cut, for every beating, for every missed meal, and for the name of the person behind each one. Ultimately, she's storing up her hatred, planning for the day that she finally receives the power to strike back. Until then, Riddhi does as she is told; to do otherwise would be to face pain and humiliation that no human being should bear.

Although she still prays to the god she supposedly embodies, Riddhi doubts in his benevolence. How could a god who personifies prosperity and mercy let his mortal servant suffer this way? Despite her lack of faith, Riddhi *has* noticed a slow but potent surge of energy within her, washing away her aches and lessening the pain of beatings. For a time, she thought that power might come from Arjunachrya; now she's beginning to believe it comes from somewhere else. Like the elephants who labor for their human masters, Ganesha is slow but mighty. The time may come, perhaps soon, that she truly *will* embody the power of that god. When that day comes, Riddhi will crush her masters as the elephant crushes the grass beneath its feet.

## Lovers

They do it for love, that's why. Certain consors will follow their mages to the ends of known Creation out of sheer devotion to that mage. The love in question might be familial, as with a relative, or platonic, as in a friendship. Perhaps the strongest sort of bond, however, aside from that between and mother and child, is the bond between lovers. And so, such beloved consors stand beside their mages not for fear, faith, or profit but for love.

The love in question might not be reciprocated; mages are infamous for their remote and occasionally disdainful view of "the Sleeping Masses." A besotted person, though, might decide to win over her would-be lover through dutiful service or mortal risk, conceal her true feelings for that mage, or perhaps hide her true feelings even from herself. The mage might reciprocate those feelings, too... or, in a nasty but not unusual variation, charm his paramour with magick and let her believe their "love" is genuine. That last trick is *literally* rape (as discussed in the entry "Questions of Consent" in **How Do You DO That?** pp. 119-120), but it's a common practice in most magical cultures. Especially among mages who view unAwakened people as lesser beings,

maybe even pawns, falsified love remains a ruthless tactic for those who crave loyal companionship. (For a disturbing example of how that sort of thing plays out for the person on the other side of it, watch season one of the TV show *Jessica Jones*.)

Regardless of her reasons, or the sincerity of that mage's affections, a lover consor tends to put aside every consideration that doesn't support her devotion to that mage. Families may be abandoned, jobs quit, homes abandoned in favor of the wild adventures such love might bring. Passionate love might blind her to deadly risks and hurl the lover into the line of fire even if the mage himself wants to keep his beloved out of harm's way. A calmer sort of love, like that often seen between a certain Doctor and his companions, can still take a consor from familiar surroundings into every sort of danger imaginable. And while a long-running relationship might lack the spontaneous fire of new love, the bond between the mage and his companion may last past death and span many incarnations.

A mage's loving companion could be anyone: an everyday person caught up in a shadow war, a faithful consor who fell in love with some strange wizard, a field agent or office functionary whose job grew way beyond her expectations, a paranormal creature who's crossing ancient lines in order to love a mage, a childhood flame whose life crosses paths with her old lover again, a psychic vampire drawn to Enlightened folk, or the ghost of a long-lost paramour — the possibilities are as infinite as love itself. An Awakened person might even find herself falling in love with her Avatar if that "companion" is a Manifest Avatar character like Aria in the original **Cult of Ecstasy Tradition Book**. (See the Avatar entries for "Crush" and "Manic Pixie" in this book's Chapter Four, pp. XX and XX) The course of true love can run down some seriously bizarre channels in the Awakened world, and although a mage's sweetheart is *probably* human, such love is a many-splendored thing.

No matter who the lover might be, or what the nature of that attachment really is, romantic connections are marvelously dramatic, especially when complicated by jealous rivals, forbidden passions, committed relationships with other people, or any number of other explosive surprises from Cupid's quiver. Sure, the love bond between a companion and her mage *could* be simple, mutual, and effortless... but really, where's the fun in *that*? Love so literally magickal should burn bright enough to make the gods weep.

**Suggested Traits:** Love-based companionship is especially well-suited for Merits like True Love, Family Support, Loyalty, Twin Souls, or an Avatar or Supernatural Companion. For entertaining complications, throw in a few Flaws like Rivalry, Ward, Family Issues, Old Flame, Psychic Vampire, Extreme Kink, and, of course, Sleeping with the Enemy.

**Suggested Templates:** As mentioned above, a lover companion could be anyone. For guidance when dealing with such

relationships in your chronicle, check out the “Romance” entry in the “Genre, Storytelling, and Mage” section of **The Book of Secrets** (p. 285), and the essay “Gender, Sex and Magick” in the same book (pp. 291-292).

## The Sanctum

Jason Hightower and Jennifer Cheng met while they were serving in the Army. They loved one another deeply, created a loving home and, in time, had a daughter they named Crystal. As Crystal transitioned from an infant to a young child, Jason and Jennifer decided to expand their family beyond the traditional nuclear-family mode. After several trials (and several errors), they began to construct what’s often called an *intentional family*: a collection of polyamorous relationships that reach beyond the two-partner dynamic, ideally providing a loving home for everyone involved.

When Jason met Alice Bergstrom at a gaming event, he felt smitten by her energetic personality. Alice’s husband Arnold was pretty cute, too, and before long the two couples had formed a “quad” of essentially equal partnerships. After several years of deepening connections, the group formed a communal household they call “the Sanctum”: a family based upon the love between its four primary partners, their children, and the people who are, as they say, “tall enough to ride this ride” without pulling it off its tracks.

But love, like life in general, is not without its complications. Jason works for a hospital that provides support for a Progenitor facility, while Alice is a consor for the Order of Hermes. Alice and Arnold are pretty open about their polyamorous connections; Jason and Jennifer are... *not*. Despite some tense wrangling with the higher-ups, the quad continues to share a household, children, and a small but eager constellation of secondary relationships. The fact that those relationships occasionally include Awakened mages and Enlightened operatives keeps things around the house interesting but currently non-fatal. Love, as they say, is limitless and can transcend the rivalries of the Ascension War.

*Communication, respect, and honesty*: These are the commandments of the Sanctum. No one is allowed in without the unanimous consent of the four partners, and anyone who causes excess drama is kicked out immediately. The primary partners have devised a seemingly complex language of agreements and cues, but that code has endured almost 10 years of shifting relationships, with no apparent end in sight. Crystal — now a teenager — finds the poly-mode to be “too much damn work” for her own relationships, but she adores her four parents and three siblings with more affection than teens generally display. The younger kids — Jeremy, Emily, and Grace — have never known any other mode of family, and while they know enough to keep things quiet with most outsiders (“*Lots of people just don’t understand*”), they have four parents who spoil them rotten yet hold them responsible for their behavior with a level of respect few children ever get from two parents, let alone from four. Sure, things

sometimes get complicated. Honest and open communication within the family, though, helps keep major problems to a minimum... so far.

Every adult within the Sanctum’s core is tall — no less than six feet in height, with teenage Crystal rising fast to join them. Jason, Jennifer, and Crystal share a collective Euro-Asian heritage, while Alice, Arnold, and their children show an obvious Nordic ancestry. Jason lifts weights and strength-trains to deal with his anxiety about getting older. Alice is thin, daring, and prone to stating her intent and then leaving others to deal with the fallout. Jennifer’s the quiet one in public, but she’s also the organizer, the planner, and the director of the family, the calm center pillar that the other partners spin around. Arnold is the witty one, with a good-natured laugh and a smile for everyone; that said, he can shrewd and calculating when need be. A child of the YouTube generation, Crystal comes across as a budding social-media celebrity... a vocation her parents support so long as it doesn’t blow the lid off their unconventional family structure. The family is progressive in many regards but conservative in others. That dichotomy keeps the household hopping (especially in recent years), but love remains the law of that home. All four partners love one another, love learning, and love that they have, by being a unit, found a peace and strength they did not have otherwise. No one in the family wants to fight, but damned if they won’t finish — together — a fight if someone else begins one.

## Professionals

*We’re in it for the paycheck*. Mages and their organizations can pay decent wages, especially if you’re hired by a deep-pockets group like the Order of Hermes, certain Ecstatic sects, or those Syndicate ops who believe in merit-based pay for their subordinates. Hence, many low-level consors — groundskeepers, housekeepers, lab assistants, office personnel — and some higher-level ones, such as bodyguards, trainers, specialized technicians, and executive assistants, perform their duties for a paycheck and perhaps the benefits that come with working for a mage.

In most regards, the pay-for-play associate holds the most straightforward role. He’s there for the money, and though other forms of loyalty and affection might creep in around the edges, the consor sticks around in order to pay his rent. It’s a decent gig if you can get it, too: flexible hours, lots of excitement, intriguing work environments, and a decent pay package so long as you’re not hiring out to some mangy street magus. Such work is rarely boring, especially if it deals with maintaining hypertechnology, grooming Bygone critters, or polishing the furniture in some wealthy wizard’s manor house. Of course, it’s got its challenges, too, with all those metaphysical weirdos forever trying to convert you to their way of thinking, and their rivals occasionally blowing down the doors. For folks with the patience to deal with endless evangelism and periodic violence, however, there are plenty

of rewards involved, especially if you're working for some witch whose medical plan puts modern medicine to shame.

Professional consors, thanks to their mercenary motivations, tend to receive less respect from their employers than do consors who truly believe in the cause. A cranky mage can be *literally* the boss from hell, too, especially if the associate's unlucky enough to be working for a Nephandus. Syndicate execs are ruthless, Ecstatic ones unpredictable, and Thanatoic ones downright frightening. If combat cyborgs start shooting, the hired help ranks among the lowest of priorities as far as the cyborg's targets are concerned. A primary reason for the high salaries such consors receive comes from the potential hazards involved. Coupled with a need for absolute discretion (You can't exactly tell your friends about the average day at work), a mage's life exerts heavy demands upon her hired help.

Unlike most other consors, professionals don't take on more duties than they're paid to handle. They might sweep your sanctum, but don't ask them to help you cast a spell. In terms of vulgar magick or extravagant hypertechnology, low-level professionals *are* considered to be witnesses; high-level ones are used to such things, though, so they're not witnesses in that sense of the word. Unless their job specifically requires loyalty under fire, and pays accordingly, these consors will head for the hills at the first sign of violence. Their devotion to the job and their employers depends significantly upon each individual's personality and the benefits or liabilities involved with that gig. A shaman who slaps her employees around for minor infractions can't count on their loyalty, though an abusive executive who pays the best salaries in town can get away with quite a bit of crap. It's in a mage's best interests, then, to pay her crew as well as possible, treat them with respect, and keep 'em out of harm's way. That's no assurance, naturally, that a paid employee won't sell out his boss for a better offer, but it reduces the possibility that it'll happen easily.

A person who'll work in the eccentric world of the Awakened tends to have flexible views about reality, ethics, and law. After all, most of the stuff the employee's liable to see and do will violate at least two of the average Sleeper's perceptions about those three things. That employee will have at least one skill of suitable value to his employer, too, and should at least *seem* trustworthy. He probably won't have to share his employer's paradigm, although mutual beliefs make a lot of things easier for everyone involved. In return, he'll most likely earn a respectable pay grade, possibly with benefits... which, in places where such things grow increasingly precious, is compensation perhaps worth killing for.

**Suggested Traits:** Even low-level functionaries need valuable skills before they'll be of any use to a mage. Cooking, Academics, Etiquette, Crafts, Art, Finance, Law, Gunsmith, Technology, Cultural Savvy, Pilot, Seduction, Vice... any sort of Ability will do so long as it's something a mage (or group of mages) will benefit from having around the house. Professional consors should have at least three dots in the

Abilities for which they've been hired — anything less is wasting the employer's time. Upper-level hirelings might have a few Merits, probably Flaws as well, and Background Traits that add value to their services. Every so often, an employer might give an unskilled employee a ground-level job in order to help that person out. Given the risks any hired consor both faces and brings to their employer simply by existing, however, that person will need to earn his keep soon if he wants to hold that job... especially if he'd prefer not to leave the job feet first.

**Suggested Templates:** At the very least, a professional consor would rate as a Human Resource. Upper-tier specialists are more like Hardcases, Professional Badasses, Extraordinary Scientists, and Subculture Devotees with skills appropriate to the gig. With very few exceptions, such hirelings are unAwakened humans, though the occasional ghoul or Night-Folk employee might find her way onto the payroll of an especially flush magus.

## Jean-Pierre Lompo

Born in Mali, Jean-Pierre and his parents left the country in the late 1980s for Burkina Faso. They almost fled during the coup that led to the rise of Blaise Compaoré, but through some deals made they were able to stabilize their lives for a time. Jean-Pierre's father was a Sufi, and his mother a Catholic who ultimately joined a convent during the youth's teenage years. Thus, Jean-Pierre grew up in a split household, a divided neighborhood, and a country with high hopes but persistent internal and external tensions. Following the example set by his father, Jean-Pierre sought the love in those around him; he spoke calmly, and quietly, and listened with pure respect and joy to anyone and everyone he interacted with. Thanks to his near-inhuman patience, he had the simple ability to make those around him feel wanted and understood, and he used that gift to bring people together. He couldn't always make them work with one another, of course; sometimes the rift between them was too strong. Even so, Jean-Pierre was able to mend many fences, and even as a young man he was renowned as a fair judge and peacemaker.

Ultimately, Quakers schooled him, and though he never accepted their faith he did accept their mission of bringing and sustaining peace. When they offered him a scholarship to attend school, first in England and then in the United States, he jumped at the offer. In the course of three years, he completed a bachelor's degree in International Relations and a master's in International Peace and Conflict Resolution. During his last course in that program, a professor approached Jean-Pierre to assist him with a particularly difficult project. Two men wished to meet to begin a dialogue, but their people had a long and difficult history, fraught with persistent frustrations and long-festered wounds. Jean-Pierre was, at that time, unfamiliar with the Ngoma and the Solificati, but felt that he was up to the task of bringing these two trailblazers of peace to the table.

Despite a pervasive aura of secrecy between the negotiator and his employers, Jean-Pierre eventually pieced together the sense that these two groups had a shared history with a



third party. That third party had left both groups to fend for themselves, and much of their hostility toward one another probably should have been directed toward this “Order” his dossiers mentioned. Jean-Pierre’s first action, then, involved getting the men to describe their view of their people’s personal histories... at which point he asked them to plot their commonalities, their places of overlap, the times they worked with one another and not in opposition. The meeting was fruitful, and Jean-Pierre – though unAwakened himself – stands near the center of the budding Disparate Alliance.

A thin man of Afro-Indian ancestry, Jean-Pierre leans close when he is listening to those he speaks with. He has a habit of listening intently for many minutes, and then releasing a quick breath with a “Yes!” spoken in the appropriate language. His clothes often seem carelessly thrown together because he’s more worried about the people around him than about how he appears. Since the first meeting with the representatives of the Ngoma and the Solificati, he’s been sent around the world by his mentor and employer in the Society of Friends to build bridges in this new Alliance. Some of the particulars about who these people are still escape him, but Jean-Pierre has realized that this Alliance involves important and powerful people from various marginalized societies and cultures. He knows they seek a greater peace – a world that’s better for all people, one open, at least in theory, to new possibilities

and freedom. For now, then, he quietly observes and creates a space for the deepening dialogue between these groups. Jean-Pierre excels at bringing people together, and though he remains unAwakened in the metaphysical sense of that word, his current project may write a new chapter in the history of the magickal world.

## Servants

It’s traditional: the faithful butler, the brilliant mechanic, the groundskeeper or housekeeper who tends the same manor their ancestors tended. Such servants have provided mages with companionship for millennia, and some still do so today. Although such positions are often filled these days by hired workers (p. XXX), full-time servants occupy a significant place in the Awakened world, especially among mages with a decidedly old-fashioned outlook.

Unlike punch-clock employees, these sorts of servants live where they work, and often define their lives (or have their lives defined for them) in terms of the role they fulfill in that household. Some serve out of cultural tradition (“As my forefathers served you, so will I”), others out of personal desperation (“Help me and I will serve you”), quite a few from social status (“My people are born to serve”), and many out of personal obligation (“I owe you a debt I can never repay”).

Participants in kinky relationships might pledge servitude to their dominants, too. (“Yes, Mistress...”). Either way, a certain amount of respect and deference is essential. (“As you wish, sir. May I be excused?”) In return, their overlords provide food and shelter, clothing, protection, a certain amount of trust, and perhaps a small allowance. Such compensations might not seem like much, but they’re probably an improvement over the state those servants would have experienced otherwise.

Other forms of servitude exist as well, most notably in groups with ritualistic cultures and ancient hierarchies, like the Verbenae, Thanatoics, Akashayana, and the Hermetic Order. Apprenticeships and initiations often feature periods of servitude in order to weed out uncommitted applicants (particularly among groups that do not differentiate between Awakened and unAwakened members), and certain sentences within the Tradition Council’s justice system suggest servitude as punishment for a person’s crimes. (See “Indenture/Service” in *The Book of Secrets*, p. 216.) Thus, Awakened mages occasionally wind up as servants, too. Although that wizard’s butler is *probably* a consor with a few useful skills, it’s often wise not to underestimate people you meet around the Chantry, even when they’re called servants.

The master-servant relationship is troubling to discuss these days. Unequal and exploitative by definition, it’s regarded with distaste in many circles. Culturally, though, it’s a common arrangement even in the 21st century – not merely in “traditional” regions but in corners of the modern world we don’t talk about very often. Caste-based societies have dominance and submission integrated into their foundations; folks with wealth and power have servants as a matter of course. Mages and Enlightened executives maintain ranks of servants and, especially in the Otherworlds, might assert the rights of life and death over them. Though deeply opposed to egalitarian philosophies, domestic servitude remains a fact of life.

A person’s attitude toward their servitude depends a great deal upon the reasons for that servitude, the culture surrounding both the servant and their overlord, and the treatment and dignity afforded to that servant by the master in question. A lower-caste person who was raised in a family of servants would consider the situation perfectly natural, maybe even desirable if the masters are especially generous, whereas someone from an egalitarian society who’s been sentenced to servitude would kick against that situation as much as possible. Even in societies where servitude is part of the culture, though, a servant’s apparent deference may mask sarcasm, resentment, opportunism, and outright hate. For both the masters and the servants, their arrangement is a balancing act of politesse and obligation. If both sides feel they’re getting what they need from that relationship, things will probably go well for everyone concerned; if not, then “master” might learn the hard way that intimate resentment can have serious consequences, or the servant might fall into a far more abusive situation...

**Suggested Traits:** Servants specialize in the Traits their job demands. An archivist would have several dots in Academics, Investigation, Research, and an array of appropriate Knowledges, while a mechanic possesses enough Crafts, Technology, and Jury-Rigging dots and specialties to handle the gear in his care. Any wise servant, however, has at least a dot or two in Etiquette, if only because a servant’s fortunes depend upon ingratiating himself with the overlords.

**Suggested Templates:** Any sort of character can be a servant under the right (or wrong) circumstances. Most often, however, a servant character would follow the Human Resources template, with skills determined by that servant’s role in the household. More formidable servants might function as Thugs or Professional Badasses if they’re, say, bodyguards or gang members. Under certain circumstances, Night-Folk or other superhuman entities might work as servants to an especially powerful master. Power Player-type characters, though, would almost never be found in a servant’s role.

## Katherine Peet

Kate Peet was born to a rough family in a rough part of town. She tried to avoid the fighting, the arguing, and the general malaise plaguing many working-class families in her small section of Preston, in northern England. Through sheer perseverance, she made her way through school and university, the first in her family to have done so, ever. Her job interviews to work as a translator, though, failed time and time again. It didn’t matter that she had nearly perfect scores; interviewers heard her lower-class accent, and their interest in her skills seemed to disappear.

Finally, Katherine broke down and answered an advert for a position as a nanny for an American couple. The family clearly had money, with the husband working in the energy sector, and the wife operating a successful marketing business online. The wife had given birth to twins the previous year but taking time away from work wasn’t really an option for either of them. The family had gone through dozens of nannies, none of whom proved able to keep up with the difficulty of working with two intensely energetic toddlers. Kate was well-used to the energy level of young children, though; she’d practically raised her brother and two sisters, and her hard upbringing left her with an attitude of, “Well, it’s paying work – just get on with it, then.” As she did in school, Katherine rose to the task, well enough to be kept on by the family for going on three years.

Taking care of another person’s children is challenging: You must find an acceptable middle ground between parenting, advising, and letting the children do as they are told by their parents. Katherine seems to have found that magical middle ground. The Americans, Scott and Felicia, have nothing but good things to say about her and her work with their kids. With the children now approaching school age, though, there have been discussions on whether or not they are going to

keep Katherine on for much longer. They've already floated the idea that Katherine could go and work for one of the other families in Scott's firm, a place Scott jokingly refers to "the Syndicate." At least, Katherine *assumes* those are jokes, but no one seems to laugh when he mentions them. She certainly hadn't planned for a nanny's life, but the pay is good, especially in these rough times, so she muddles through. Kate has had enough of poverty to last a lifetime, thank you much! Katherine has considered asking Felicia if she could take a crack at translating some of Felicia's articles into French and Spanish as a way of earning some extra cash, but Kate's bitter attempt at making her degree useful has rather crushed her self-confidence in that regard.

Katherine calls herself short, and as she stands a mere 1.57 meters in her bare feet, many people would agree. She's got the thick, black curly hair that points to both Lancastrian heritage and Irish relations. Kate's preference is for long-sleeved shirts, to cover up the scars she received from being dragged into knife fights she wanted nothing to do with as a teenager. She tells herself daily: "Chin-up, do this until you find something better, at least you aren't living at home or drunk on a street corner." Such pep talks rarely leave her in good spirits, but she never lets the children see that. Her adopted family, at least for now, seems to generally appreciate her.

## Slaves

Let's be honest: Certain mages are awful human beings. Although slavery is officially illegal throughout much — though not all — of the modern world, "the peculiar institution" has a very long and traditional pedigree, one that a handful of cultures have yet to abandon, and which flourishes in the technological world under the rubrics of human trafficking, bonded servitude, wage slavery, and captive or prison labor.

Do mages practice such things? Yes, some of them do. Not often openly, but they do.

Chattel slavery, the literal ownership of human beings, became distinctly unfashionable during the 1800s. In modern times, slaves tend to be people who have been trapped by lures of "jobs" they can never escape: prisoners of war or legal systems who've been put to work by the authorities; would-be refugees who wind up getting sold by "transporters" who were supposed to help them find safety; runaways and kidnap victims who get put to work by pimps and other captors; abused children whose parents rent them out or sell them, and adults who grew up in such situations; residents of areas captured in war, or taken over by corporations, who are subsequently forced to work or die; or people whose low-caste status within their society makes them slaves by default if not by name. Unlike the Servants described above, these people aren't compensated with anything other than the barest of essentials and the fact that they haven't yet been killed. Some corporations and other "employers" allow their slaves to keep a little bit of income, in theory; somehow, though,

that money always needs to go back to the employer's pockets, leaving just enough to assure nosy authorities that the slaves *are* technically being paid, and thus are not enslaved as far as the law is concerned.

Mages, of course, can use those tactics, and employ other methods, too: mental bondage through subtle or blatant influence (detailed in **How Do You DO That?** under "Uncanny Influence," pp. 114-136); captivity in a Horizon Realm or Construct; Igorism, as described above; mystic pacts that compel servitude (typically from spirit-entities, but occasionally from organic beings too); creating servitor beings through magick, hypertech, or both; invocation of ancient cultural traditions that demand service to the Awakened Ones; servitude compelled by magickal oaths or punishments; and the threat of catastrophic retribution unless the mage's whims are fulfilled. Especially for mages with a particularly draconian fondness for "the Old Ways," the democratic distaste for slavery is a passing trend that contradicts the will of history.

Unlike servants, slaves have no choice about their condition unless they decide to risk their lives to change it, and receive no respect except occasional titles meant to divide slaves against each other (*body servant*, as opposed to *field hand*) and petty flatteries that confuse an abused person's perceptions in the abuser's favor ("*I love you and I'm doing this for your own good...*"). Some slaves may be treated better than others; at the end of the day, though, these folks remain essentially, if not legally, property.

Because slavery of any form demands obedience, slaves are abused until most, if not all, thoughts of rebellion are crushed. The strongest chains, of course, are the ones we put on ourselves, and so an enslaved character usually believes their situation is hopeless, probably even deserved. Mind games (magickal or otherwise) forge the most effective shackles, and so mental cruelties supplement and occasionally replace physical force. Slave masters, meanwhile, believe they're totally justified — even moral — in their behavior. Convinced of their innate superiority, these people can (and do) commit atrocities that sustain their power, cloaking that ruthlessness in genteel facades and pretensions of kindness that reinforce the effects of their abuse. When those slave owners possess the power to command Reality itself, revolt against them seems damn near impossible.

Grotesque, sadistic punishments are hallmarks of slave culture. If the masters own many slaves, those punishments are as public as the masters can afford to make them. For mages, whose talents allow them to torment minds and souls without leaving a mark on the body (or who can magickally heal whatever damage they inflict), those penalties can be literally hellish. Willworkers who attempt to seem respectable avoid extravagant displays of cruelty, but ones whose ethos places them above pesky considerations like morality or compassion become the most fearsome slave owners imaginable.

For what should be obvious reasons, slavery and its related abuses are hot-button topics in an RPG. Many troupes may choose to avoid them altogether. Slave owners might not consider themselves to be evil, but... well, they really fucking *are*. The Fallen have the most obvious connections to slave-based companionship, though not all Nephandic companions are slaves. Other factions have a history with slavery, too, and that history nearly ended the Council of Traditions many times over. Even now, the Syndicate employs indirect slavery by way of corporate exploitation, and the lowest dregs of Iteration X are slaves in all but name. You can choose to leave these elements of **Mage's** setting off your gaming table, and you should do so if the subject trips triggers for anyone. Sadly, in our real world, millions of human beings actually *are* 21st-century slaves... and in the World of Darkness that situation is even worse than in our own.

In case it's not already clear, *this entry is in no way, shape, or form an endorsement of slavery or the mindsets that defend it*. Enslaving people is reprehensible, and the Storyteller is advised to treat such characters (and their players) as compassionately as a master treats his slaves.

**Suggested Traits:** Unless you've employed elaborate rituals to compel service from spirit-entities, it's pretty hard to enslave beings of inhuman capabilities. Even human beings are difficult to enslave for long unless their wills have been broken, their circumstances appear hopeless, or they've been convinced that slavery is what they deserve. Also, slaves lead extremely limited lives in terms of the things they can learn or the time they can devote to bettering themselves. Hence, enslaved companions tend to have low Traits in all areas except the ones that benefit their masters most. High Physical Attributes (and often Appearance, too, depending on the type of slavery involved) are common among such "associates," and combat-oriented Traits are rare unless the slaves have been specifically trained and conditioned for fighting. Hard work and hard living generally reduce such characters to low Willpower ratings, and Flaws that represent the physical and mental toll of slavery are almost essential for characters of this kind.

**Suggested Templates:** Except in cases of slavery through powerful magicks, enslaved characters are normal human beings with one or two notable Traits and several deficient ones. Human Resources may be considered slaves of a sort, but the closest representation of a character like this in game terms is probably the Homeless Survivor template with an even lower Willpower than usual.

## Mahalia Sanchez

What's wrong with wanting to dance, to sing, and to become famous? Nothing, really, but things that sound perfect and amazing rarely work out that way. Mahalia was entranced by the recruiter's pitch: She'd work in a small bar for a year, singing at least a six-hour set twice per week. From there, she would record a pop single or two, and get picked up by a local radio station, and by the end of that second year, she would hit it big. He told her, "If you don't get noticed in the first

year, you can come home at any moment, no problem." So Mahalia signed the paperwork, sold the few things she owned, and left Puerto Princesa in the Philippines for Seoul, South Korea. When she arrived and met her recruiter, he asked to see her passport — only so that he could get a copy of it, of course, to ensure she was paid correctly and would receive her proper health benefits.

In the car, he talked endlessly about the amazing things she would do. When they got to the small town near the American military base, Mahalia thought nothing of the situation. Even arriving at the bar that evening didn't fully set off the warning bells it should have. Mahalia saw a bar full of women and men — many of them American service members, even — and thought it was a great location to make a name for herself. No, it was the *second* night when things finally clicked... when the woman who ran the establishment beat her around the head for not "dressing right." Mahalia soon realized she had made a grave mistake. Those beatings continued, never hard enough to leave serious bruises where it would disturb the "Army boys" but enough that Mahalia realized she wasn't allowed to think for herself any longer. Mahalia was well-fed when she arrived, but slowly lost what weight she had through a "diet" she's now physically forced to uphold.

The first night she was "encouraged" to "go on a date" with a soldier was brutal. Mahalia wasn't interested in men (she never had been) but she couldn't refuse the order and she knew what would happen if she tried. That night became a nightmare, and then her madam beat her when the client refused to pay. Mahalia was forced to "date" at least once per week, and then forced to continue up the charade of "dating" certain men in order to get even more money from them. She never even got to sing; when she *tried* to sing, while working or even after hours, she was beaten for "getting too big for herself." A few months ago, a soldier she was forced to string along offered to pay off her "contract," effectively buying her from the madam. Despite her growing revulsion about men in general, Mahalia resolved to take whatever path she could in order to escape this prison. Sadly, some of his friends talked him out of it. Now he won't return her calls. She was beaten for this offense, too... for squandering the money her jailers had hoped to make by selling her off.

Although Mahalia has retained her pretty features, the light has gone out in her eyes. Painfully slender and small, she moves now more like a robot than like the woman she once was. Her "boyfriends," of course, rarely notice — the one thing they want, she still appears to have. A caring person might notice the wary way she moves or the flat tone in her voice, but caring people, in her world, are few and far between. A functionary at a Technocratic playhouse, Mahalia *has* noticed a certain "shine" that a handful of her clients seem to have. Her life, however, has no magic to speak of... not that she perceives, anyway. Magic is the lie in the back of a limousine, snuffed out by the things you must do to survive.

# Hunters and “Static” Adepts



Despite the Union’s best efforts, many Sleepers still believe in magic and other supernatural forces. That’s especially true in cultures where technological materialism and mystical faith coexist on essentially equal terms, as discussed in the *Book of Secrets* entry “Do You Believe in Magick?” (p. 287). Some people discover that they have a natural talent for unAwakened magic, while others learn it through years of dedicated practice, or attain sudden powers thanks to drastic bargains with supposedly “impossible” forces. Regardless of their attitude towards Awakened magick, such people *do not* count as Sleeper witnesses if you’re checking for Paradox, nor do their powers (if they have any) gather Paradox or rework Reality in the flexible manner of Sphere-based magick.

Such “adept” mortals are not always, shall we say, friends of the magi — or of the Technocrats, either, for that matter. Quite a few of them mind their own business, pursue their own agendas, and get rather hacked off if some arrogant willworker decides to make them his bitch. “Hedge wizards,” for instance, aren’t fond of such depreciative terms, and demon-plugged Infernalists tend to consider themselves superior to anyone and everything they meet... except, of course, for the demons they serve.

The following entries typify unAwakened characters with unusually potent abilities... folks who may be as likely to face off against smug mages as they are to walk slightly in their shadows.

## Bioenhanced Field Agent

Improving upon nature’s imperfections, many extraordinary yet unEnlightened operatives employ biological implants and gene therapies that duplicate, or even improve upon, the modifications produced in some vat-grown Progenitor servitors like Victors and MODES. Unlike Victors, however, these operatives get customized implants and enhancements, generally assigned to them by upper-tier supervisors. Generally deployed by Progenitor or Syndicate teams, most enhanced field ops receive biomods that speed healing, boost their health, lengthen their lifespans, and enhance their strength, speed, and intellect.

To casual observation, these bio-modified personnel appear to be perfectly normal humans, with senses or other hidden capabilities that reach well beyond the human norm. And so, for the most part, these Enhancements (as per the Background of that name) remain coincidental unless the operative does something essentially “impossible,” like picking up a car. Far subtler than the “steelskin” cyborgs detailed in

**Page 20** (pp. 623-624), these operatives most often investigate potentially dangerous mysteries, handle “tough assignments” on the streets, or track down and recover or eliminate escaped creatures, rogue Victors, and similar problems.

**Suggested Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

**Suggested Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Computer 3, Drive 2, Firearms 4, Intimidation 2, Investigation 3, Melee 3, Sciences 4, Stealth 3, Technology 3

**Willpower:** 6

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

**Attacks/ Powers:** All bioenhanced field agents heal one bashing level every 30 minutes, or one lethal level every 12 hours. They also possess two to four of the following biomods:

- Enhanced hearing and smell (reduce the difficulty of hearing and smell rolls by -2, to a minimum of 2).
- +3 dots to Physical Traits (applied as desired).
- +3 dots to Wits, Perception, or both.
- Enhanced pheromones (+2 dice to all Social Trait rolls made with targets in the same physical location).
- Gecko pads on hands, feet, knees, and forearms (reduce the difficulty of all climb rolls by -2, to a minimum of 2).
- Gills (breathe water, concealed when not in use).
- Night vision (no vision penalties for anything brighter than total darkness).
- Retractable claws ([Strength + 1] lethal damage).
- Increased tissue density (+2 armor).

(Special Advantage Traits from Chapter Five might reflect these biomods, too.)

**Image:** As mentioned earlier, biomodded operatives look like perfectly normal human beings until and unless they employ an obvious Enhancement. Even so, these folks sometimes have weird Flaws that betray their “modified” status; for details, see “Genetic Flaws” in **Page 20**, pp. 648-651.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Superior science has made you a superior person. You don’t *have* to lord over the lesser beings around you... but if you *wanted* to, no one could reasonably blame you. After all, it’s only the truth.



## Henry Woo

Stronger, faster, better, right? Well, that was the pitch and Henry bought it hook, line, and sinker. After high school and community college, Henry didn't know what he wanted to do with his life. His parents were supportive but concerned when he discussed joining the Marines. Breaking his ankle during his second week at Parris Island wasn't in the plan. The break was severe enough that the Marines cut him separation orders and told him not to come back. In one fell swoop, even the basic plans for the future he'd made collapsed. When the recruiter from Bio-X arrived at his doorstep a few months later, Woo was confused. The Schwarzenegger lookalike gave him the sales pitch:

"We can fix your ankle and give you a purpose again. You wanted to join the Marines, well we can do you one better. You'll become an operative for a private corporation providing consulting services to local and federal government departments. You'll be stronger, faster, and better than you are now. All it will take is a short surgery, three weeks of recovery, and then nine weeks of training. Are you up for the task?"

Woo was, and everything went according to plan, until his first mission. Woo froze in the middle of a firefight. It was probably the man calling down lightning from the sky that did it, but the raging bear spirit didn't help matters much. He

was debriefed and reassigned away from federal duty. Instead, Bio-X hired him out to a small police department in Oregon. They needed a new officer and, due to the Bio-X laboratory in town, it fit both the needs of the company and the town to have him on the force. For the first three years, Woo passed out in a haze of booze and depression at the end of every shift. The extent of his work was pulling over teens that sped through town in the middle of the night on the way to their next kegger.

The animal attacks caused him to pay attention, though. At first it was a bear ripping through the home of a plant executive. Then it was a wolf stalking and killing a jogger. Turned out that he worked for Bio-X, third-floor accounting, office J. When the birds started assaulting anyone that considered walking in Veterans Park, well, Woo had enough, and he needed to figure out what was going on. For now, Woo is keeping his drinking under control, but he still sneaks a drink here and there when he absolutely needs one. He's connected a few dots between Bio-X and this "Technocracy" that conspiracy theorists on a Portland Facebook group like to rant about. The animal attacks appear to be a pattern that tracks through multiple Bio-X facilities around the country. Of course, Woo doesn't want to take any of this information to anyone until he's sure that he has enough not to be laughed out of the office. Considering his track record, that's pretty likely.

Woo's parents aren't thrilled they don't get to see him much and are concerned that he hasn't found anyone to settle down with. He's an attractive man in his late 20s now, he should have found someone by now, or at least that's what his mother keeps saying. Woo has no interest in a relationship, never has, so he just shakes them off with promises that he'll start using Tinder or something. When he went home last, his mother introduced him to a young woman his age. It didn't go well. She was too interested in what he did at work, and Woo was convinced that her eyes looked just like the wolf from the attacks.

## Hedge Magician

Awakened mages are quite rare, so many mystic groups include "hedge magicians" among their membership. Certain groups, like the Bata'a and Sisters of Hippolyta, don't even distinguish between Awakened and unAwakened practitioners — one member is essentially as good as any other. In the wake of the Technocracy's supposed victory, many practitioners lost sight of any distinction at all between mages and sorcerers. If a person knew some sort of magic... well then, that person knew magic. End of story.

In game terms, of course, the difference is simple, yet significant: An Awakened mage has the improvisational powers of the Spheres, which allow him a flexibility that his unAwakened peers cannot match; a hedge magician or sorcerer uses a set of predetermined Paths and spells that have specific and defined effects. The characters themselves might not recognize this difference, but the game systems work very differently.

While skillful Awakened mages may pull off complex feats with little preparation, hedge wizards employ complex, specific rituals in order to cast their arts. Those specifics depend upon the occult practices of the sorcerer in question, and range throughout the cultural traditions of human magic. Unlike their Awakened cousins, however, hedge wizards cannot alter or discard their tools and rituals at a significant level of understanding. For them, those tools and rituals reflect centuries-old cultural traditions, and although such beliefs might allow them to manipulate "reality" to a certain, limited degree, it does not confer the metaphysical potential of Awakened Arts.

**Suggested Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma, 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

**Suggested Abilities:** Academics 3, Alertness 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 1, Computer 2, Drive 1, Enigmas 1, Esoterica 3, Firearms 1, Investigation 2, Occult 4, Science 1, Technology 1

**Willpower:** 5

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

**Suggested Powers:** The rules for the "static magic" Paths employed by hedge magicians and sorcerers are too extensive to present in this sourcebook; for details about them, see both

editions of **World of Darkness: Sorcerer**. In simple **Mage** terms, assume that hedge magicians can perform between four and 10 rituals that reproduce magical feats given on **Mage 20's** "Common Magickal Effects" chart (pp. 508-510). Each spell duplicates the capabilities of a single Sphere-based Effect of between one and four dots. Every Effect a hedge magician knows requires him to perform some sort of ritual or use a magically enchanted artifact. Yet despite their limitations, such characters can be dangerous and powerful even without the fluidity of Sphere magick.

**Image:** The trappings of our magician's faith or practice probably seem obvious to anyone who knows what to look for. In some cases, he might be flamboyant enough to wear them openly: ritual robes, occult symbols, mystic T-shirt designs, and so forth.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Through hard study, work, and discipline, you've refined your Arts. Let no one tell you they're neither real nor worthy of the title "mage."

## Shivante Harris

Baltimore is not an up-and-coming town; in fact, it's rather shocking it hasn't collapsed in on itself just yet. Shivante was born to a middle-class Black American family in the city's suburbs. They thought Shivante was going places in life, and Shivante thought so too. When she came out, her family essentially shrugged their shoulders and accepted her as she is. Dad even asked if that would stop her from becoming a doctor like she'd always wanted. It didn't, and it wouldn't, and she put her nose to the grindstone and graduated, with honors, from Johns Hopkins University. Was it easy? No, she worked hard and dealt with shit from people who should have known better. If it hadn't been for the car accident, she probably would have stayed on track. These things happen, though, and no amount of determined planning could have prepared Shivante for a broken back, shattered legs, and hands that were crushed beyond a surgeon's capabilities to fix.

All that work. All that life. All for, what seemed like back then, nothing.

Why, Shivante wondered as she lay in her hospital bed, *didn't I just fucking die that day?*

"Get up," a voice told her on an especially awful night.

"You kidding?" Shivante's voice held obvious bitterness. "Do you see this mess?"

"Yeah," the voice replied. "I do. And you've never let anything else stop you before, so don't you *dare* give up on me now."

The pain fled. In its place, she felt a clear, clean sense of strength. She flexed her legs, and they worked just fine. She sat up and looked around. The hospital room, now dark, flickered with candlelight. She breathed the scent of sweet incense. Her chest no longer hurt. At the side of her bed, in the shadows, sat a large, dreadlocked Black man, a top hat cocked on his head, his face painted with black, white,

and red designs. “You still ready to make your own life?” he asked Shivante.

She was. And she has.

Although she’s not Awakened in the sense that mages prize so deeply (not yet, anyway), Shivante Harris has become a skilled practitioner of Candomblé. The creed’s emphasis upon fulfilling destiny regardless of all obstacles appeals to her, and she retains her healing vocation. Since the night her mentor Jean-Marcos fixed her broken body, she’s put everything she has behind learning the Arts of the Orisha and using that knowledge to help other folks whose lives get sidetracked by random disasters. You can’t heal everyone, she knows, and some folks flat out don’t deserve a second chance. For those who do, however, Shivante offers them the choice Jean-Marcos gave her all those years ago: Stay in the bed lamenting your fate, or else get your life back and see how much more you can become.

A tall, composed, and striking woman with broad shoulders, strong cheekbones, long hair, and a sad-yet-stunning grin, Shivante works these days as an herbalist and physical therapist at Restoration Center, an alternative-medicine clinic for folks who cannot afford high-end treatment. Her face still bears scars from the accident, and she wears them as a reminder of both what her Arts can do and of what so many people must endure without her healing powers. Her bared arms show faint scars from reconstructive surgery, plus one tattoo of a winged scarab beetle and another of a growing tree. For obvious reasons, she cloaks her practices in alternative-medical jargon mixed with the western medicine she learned at Johns Hopkins, and then works her healing Arts in among modern medical techniques that seem especially effective when she performs them. Shivante’s personality combines her dogged willfulness with a genuine sympathy she learned from her helpless condition in the hospital bed. At home or at work, she almost always wears something white – a blouse, slacks, a shirt, a headscarf – and a necklace of pearls to reflect her commitment to the healing path and her devotion to the Orisha and Loa, especially her patrons Erinle, Obatala, and Oshun. (Detailed in Chapter Four.) In game terms, she practices the hedge-magic Paths of Ephemera, Healing, Divination, Herbalism / Brewing, and – for extreme situations only – Summoning, Binding, and Warding, employing the ritual practices of Medicine-Work, Invigoration, and Voudon wrapped up in medical technology so as not to scare the mundanes. No, Baltimore might not be an up-and-coming town, but for Shivante and others like her, there’s almost always time for a second chance at life.

## Invested Infernalist

Some folks have no illusions of morality. They’ll do whatever it takes to get what they want, and if that means dealing with devils... well then, bring on Lucifer and let the blood fall where it may! Though these Infernalists aren’t as common as

they once were (there being “no such things as demons” and all), they’re still out there in the occult underground. Teen malcontents, desperate rebels, folks who’ve lost all other hopes, and people too rich or egotistical to care about the consequences... such people still strike demonic pacts and sometimes gain uncanny, if temporary, powers.

Typical demonic pacts involve money, fame, power, and so forth – Background or Ability Traits in game terms, perhaps some Merits, too. These “investments” are double-edged: the Infernalist invests himself in the bargain, and the patron invests in the Infernalist. Despite appearances, these “demons” might be malicious ghosts, malignant nature spirits, prankster faeries, or other sort of entities. True devils are usually above this sort of nonsense in the mortal world... although, since immortality can be frightfully dull, they might just make these deals to keep themselves amused. As for the people themselves, they tend to be rather unpleasant souls – outwardly charming perhaps, but inwardly consumed with the evil they’ve embraced.

**Suggested Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma, 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

**Suggested Abilities:** Academics 2, Awareness 1, Brawl 1, Computer 1, Drive 1, Esoterica 2, Firearms 1, Occult 3, Seduction 2, Streetwise 2, Style 2, Technology 1

**Willpower:** 5

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

**Suggested Powers:** Normal Investments, as mentioned above, often take the form of Backgrounds, Attributes, or Abilities that the character wouldn’t have otherwise. Supernatural Investments include between two and 10 points’ worth of **Special Advantages**, as seen in this book’s Chapter Five. The aura of an Invested character pulses with black streaks, stains, clouds, or lightning; although he might have an Investment that conceals his essential nature, that’s not often the case. For more about Investments, see **The Book of the Fallen**, Chapter Five.

**Image:** Like other practitioners, the Infernalist tends to reveal his true nature to folks who know what to look for. Among other people, though, he might appear perfectly normal or perhaps a bit eccentric. Sure, he might sport a devil beard, wear horror movie T-shirts, and otherwise come off like Rob Zombie’s cousin. Most Infernalists, though, aren’t nearly as obvious about what they are and who they serve. Many of them, far more than you’d suspect, are politicians, executives, and other respectable members of the community. It’s the pleasant ones you really need to look out for.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Truth is, you don’t care about much beyond yourself... and considering how precarious your bargain probably became, you’d prefer not to die any time soon, thank you very much! Find other folks to take risks on your behalf. It’s not, after all, as if they *matter*.

## Grace Denise “GDP” Powell

She wasn’t always a mean girl. Back before Grace Denise Powell (nicknamed GDP by her stockbroker dad as a not especially kind joke) became the archetypal cheerleader from hell, she was a nice kid, with a soft spot for birds and *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*. Hell, her favorite character was Fluttershy, and she even preferred that name herself. Yeah, her folks had cash and she lived in the money part of town. Fluttershy was a sweetheart, though. What changed?

Money. More specifically too much of it, followed by too little.

Daddy, as it turns out, was a scam artist. He conned his firm, his clients, and his family before dashing out on the wife and kids in order to build a new life in Mali with a fellow broker named Carl. GDP found out in the hardest way possible: coming home from work to find a houseful of cops, a hysterical mom, an empty bank account, and a note on her bed: *Fuck off and die, you little shit. Love, Daddy.*

Grace kind of lost her soul over that one. Literally.

His name was Rob, but folks called him Charlie. As in Manson. Rob liked the comparison — it kept folks at a distance. Charlie cultivated an air of barely suppressed psychosis, and he got away with it only because his mom was a local-hero rock star. Charlie had been a not-so-secret admirer of Grace since they’d shared a 6th-grade homeroom; GDP had kept her distance until Daddy pulled his disappearing act. Charlie, though, was into the occult, the real stuff, not just some retro Ozzy T-shirt thing. After Daddy’s sudden, brutal departure and the ensuing plunge from the in-crowd to exile row, Grace found herself intrigued by Charlie’s pursuits. Intrigued enough to become friends, and then lovers, and then something more.

Charlie really should have paid more attention to the details when he summoned Moliux. Details, though, weren’t really his style. His loss. Grace’s gain. Moliux offered GDP all the things she wanted: Beauty. Money. Status. Revenge. All she had to do was cash out Charlie’s debt to Moliux and take her boyfriend’s place as his preferred devotee.

The cops have yet to find all the pieces, but Charlie’s parts keep turning up all over town. Grace makes a game out of finding newer, funnier places to drop them off. The hand in that sandbox, sticking up its middle finger at the world, remains her favorite gag so far.

The kids at school still wonder how Grace and her mom got back on their feet so soon. How sweet little Fluttershy became such a fucking bitch. Why the kids who get in her way suffer life-changing accidents, like Amber’s car crash and that weird disease that made Charlotta drop out of school. They don’t ask too many questions about that stuff, though. They don’t dare. No one wants to be the next one pondering that stuff from the wrong side of a body bag. Even teachers seem scared of GDP these days... and well they should be. Just ask Charlie’s ghost how nasty Grace can be.

Blonde hair, flawless complexion, a stunning figure, sparkling eyes, all the best clothes, and a radiant streak of cruelty: That’s GDP these days. With Moliux as her lover and literal hell powers at her command, the former Fluttershy is mean girl on campus, with money, stellar grades, and all the popularity a high-school girl could want. Mom’s essentially a slave in her own home, and there’s a literal devil in the details of GDP’s new life. What’ll happen when she graduates next year? Heaven only knows...

## New-Age Dilettante

Many mages are more afraid of fame or publicity than they are of most physical threats. Unfortunately, it’s pretty easy these days to get caught performing vulgar magick. The brutal combination of cell-phone cameras and YouTube videos exposes a lot of mages to unwanted publicity. And sometimes, the folks who see those videos and want to share in the fun are even worse than the folks who simply want to kill you.

A typical dilettante has bookshelves full of works about Atlantis, auras, and reincarnation. She wears symbols around her neck that she doesn’t really understand, and figures that her yoga classes open her to the mysteries of the universe. For the most part, she’s harmless — a useful member of a Cult Background, perhaps even a Backup or Retainer consor. She could become a lover, a friend or, if she attains actual power, a Background-level Ally. That said, she also has the potential to become annoying, intrusive, or even hazardous to a mage who winds up on her radar... especially if she either decides to take that mage as a “divine lover,” an “ascended master,” or a target for unhealthy obsessions. That obsession might become even more destructive if the dilettante spends lots of time on social-media groups. A Facebook video of her “real magic” inspiration might wind up in front of a deadlier set of eyes than her own.

**Suggested Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 2

**Suggested Abilities:** Academics 3, Art 2 (Dance), Athletics 2, Awareness 1, Brawl 1, Computer 2, Crafts 2, Drive 1, Esoterica 4 (Wicca, Yoga, Tai Chi, Tantra), Etiquette 2, Expression 2, Investigation 2, Meditation 1, Occult 2, Research 1, Science 1, Stealth 1

**Willpower:** 4

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

**Suggested Powers:** Probably none, aside for perhaps a Wonder or an unusual Merit or two.

**Equipment:** Laptop computer, old compact car, yoga mat, smartphone, occult jewelry and book collection.

**Image:** Attractive in a bohemian way, a New-Age Dilettante has the sleek fitness of a yoga-trained dancer and the intense manner of a true believer.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Normative culture is so constrained by its consumerist blinders than it refuses to see — and cannot appreciate — the wonders in plain sight. *You do, though, and so every day, to you, is a miraculous new adventure. Blessed Be!*

## Leonidas Running Deer

He's a leonine charisma bomb: agile, good-looking, skilled in the many arts of Tantra, yoga, NVC, ecstatic dance, and the profound utterances of the innately divine. Leo (*"As my name says, I am like the lion, but also like the deer."*) is a dedicated seeker of enlightenment wherever it can be found... and if it can be found wearing the earthly form of a good-looking girl who loves to party, so much the better for everyone!

He wasn't always this way. Back when Leonard Feldstein was in college, he was the sort of shy, bookish guy who always wondered why the other guys got the chicks. A short-haired, stocky fixture of the computer department, he seemed destined for a chaste devotion to artificial intelligence and its fascinating applications when he happened to take a yoga class as a means of losing some weight. Seeing the well-sculpted people who frequented that class, Leo took to the discipline with the ardor of a young man who has discovered his true calling in this incarnation. Though his initial enthusiasm came from a desire to get laid, Leo soon discovered that he not only looked better, he *felt* better in ways that surpassed physical aesthetics. His journey from bookworm to lion-deer had begun.

An enthusiastic seeker of all things demi-spiritual, Leonidas soon adopted a name that suited his vision of himself. Between his new name, his new build, and his undeniable intellect (with, as he discovered, a talent for picking up all the right words and phrases to employ), Leo quickly attained a circle of admirers, detractors, and soon-to-be ex-girlfriends. Bristling with newfound confidence, he joined campus pagan groups, Buddhist groups, sex-positive societies, queer-advocate groups (turns out he wasn't really into guys after all), Wiccan covens, a Nordic Tradition band, even (briefly!) a Satanic church. His favorite practice, however, involved an... *eclectic* blend of western Tantra, yoga, freeform acroyoga dance, and the legendary Sweet Medicine SunDance Path. It was in the latter society that he acquired the surname Running Deer, for his now-lean build and his tireless endurance. (Or, perhaps, because he spent each gathering running from pretty girl to pretty girl.)

Who needs artificial intelligence when you can major in enlightenment? After flunking out of college, Leonidas embarked on a hike across America, bringing the fruits of his spiritual wisdom to the darkened corners (and darkened bedrooms) of souls who seemed as lonely as he once had been. Now an itinerant seeker with a heart full of joy (and a complex collection of interesting diseases), Leonidas Running Deer embraces the many forms of ecstatic wisdom to be found between the cracks of normative society... and if said wisdom can be found between the sheets of a beguiling yogi, so very much the better!

Blessed with his namesake's flowing mane of hair, Leonidas cuts a striking figure. Years of yoga and lack of decent food have slimmed him to a lean physique. Honed muscles beckon from beneath what little clothing he deigns to wear (*"Clothing is just another lie meant to shield us from our inner souls."*), and his warm amber eyes glitter with the essence of the superior man (or maybe that's just hunger). His wandering (read: *homelessness*) leads him to assorted couches, tents, sleeping bags, and beds across North America. He speaks Spanish (badly) and can recite passages of various sutras (the *Kama* one in particular) with scholarly devotion. Leo's not actually *entirely* clueless, and he's got a decent working knowledge of yoga techniques and basic Ecstatic practices. As a result, he eagerly seeks out Cultists of Ecstasy (who find him vaguely teachable), Dreamspeakers (who find him offensive), and Verbena (who, truth be told, scare the living shit out of him) whenever he can. Like a bouncy puppy, Leo inserts himself into gatherings, festivals, protest rallies, and so forth, generally by being as helpful as he can be. Dude *can* cook, to be fair, can play guitar (badly), and lends a strong pair of arms to any physical task that needs doing. His once-brilliant mind still makes appearances from time to time, as well, and most folks he's been with find him pretty decent in the sack. If Leo Running Deer ever learns to get over himself, there might just be a potentially powerful mage in there someplace. For the moment, though, he keeps on running.

## PDC Aberration Hunter

One of the Void Engineers' primary directives involves protecting Earth from extradimensional incursions while cleansing "instability zones" close to Earth. And although the leaders of these strike missions are nearly always Enlightened operatives, most of the personnel on these missions are highly trained and well-equipped extraordinary citizens. Recruited from military forces worldwide, these elite troops face things the average soldier sees only in video games.

Trained with advanced hardware, the Pan-Dimension Corps soldiers, Enlightened and otherwise, can use Technocratic Devices even when the Procedures are beyond them. Among the standard-issue gear, these troops also get the Alanson R-25 Hardsuit, the Biggs X-5 Model A Protector, and the Bolan Mk 13 Weapons System, all of which a specially trained citizen can employ. (For details, see **Page 20**, pp. 447, 452-453, and 656.) Thus equipped, these men and women can face down werewolves, aliens, vampiric mutations, and other assorted Reality Deviants... including, of course, those arrogant "wizards" and their kind!

**Suggested Attributes:** Strength 3 (5 with suit), Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

**Suggested Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Awareness 1, Brawl 4, Computer 2, Cosmology/ Subdimensions 2, Drive 3,

Energy Weapons 3, Firearms 4, Jetpack 3, Leadership 2, Medicine 1, Melee 4, Science 2, Technology 3

**Willpower:** 6

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

**Suggested Powers:** None beyond those provided by their Technocratic hypertechnology. The Union also provides its aberration hunters with a variety of ammunition, including: non-lethal rounds (inflicts normal firearms damage, but bashing, not lethal); incendiary rounds that do aggravated damage to vampires (makes standard firearms damage aggravated when it's used against the Kindred); and armor-piercing rounds (subtract two points from all forms of armor).

**Equipment:** Assault rifle, heavy pistol, four knives, six grenades, hand claws.

**Image:** Tough, determined, and scarred by battles no one else can possibly imagine outside this strange and wonderful corps.

**Roleplaying Notes:** You're the world's true line of defense against the unspeakable.

## Agent Melissa "Leezi" Olivarez

Never underestimate a cheerleader. Today's squads demand peak-condition athletes with unusual flexibility, lean strength, and a tolerance for pain that would make football players weep. Leezi Olivarez wasn't one of those terminally perky bitch-machines you see in all the teen flicks. Nope, she was a dedicated athlete in her own right — one whose squad took top honors three of her four years in high school, while Leezi herself was on the honor roll two years out of four and had a near-perfect SAT score.

How, then, did she become a Technocratic monster-hunter? Simple: Leezi survived an attempt at making her the human sacrifice for a traditionally minded bunch of misogynistic jerks who summoned demons in hopes of getting laid. Escaping their poorly tied attempt at binding her to a makeshift altar, she beat the living shit out of the boys and got the hell out of Dodge... though not, however, before the summoned demon showed up to collect his paycheck. Leezi got away from him as well, employing clever tricks and stunning acrobatics that impressed the BCD agents who showed up to take the monster down. "Want a job?" the team's commander asked her. "Sure," she replied. "But first you pay my way through college."

They did, and here she is: Field Agent Leezi, age 22. With five years' experience as a Technocratic operative, she's become one of the youngest recruits at her level in recent history. Though not enlightened in the paranormal sense, Leezi's smart as blazes and tricky as sin. She tends to work undercover, with a few hidden items of gear, on the local college campus, calling in her team if and when she runs across alien incursions and predatory beasts. To normal eyes, she's a cute college kid with an unusually lean physique. Anyone — monster or otherwise — who tries to take advantage of her apparent normalcy gets a swift lesson

in martial etiquette, and if said transgressor happens to be some paranormal critter or wiseass RD, then said lesson tends to be permanent as well.

## Spirit-Talker

As certain people know, the spirits are very real. Although this sort of hedge magician lacks the full spectrum of Awakened magicks, a spirit-talker can deal with the invisible world in ways that materialists believe to be impossible. More of a religious vocation than a form of "magic," the art of spirit-talking turns a practitioner into a vessel for *les invisibles*; it's those spirits, not the vessel, who bring miracles to pass.

Despite the New-Agey feel of that last paragraph, spirits can be wicked bastards. Assuming that "all spirits are kind and holy" is a good way to turn one's soul into a nice snack for some amoral or outright malignant spirit. On that same note, certain spirit-talkers can be vicious, malicious, even downright satanic. Some spirit-talkers become healers and intermediaries between the human world and the worlds of the spirits and the dead; others are either tools of powerful and malevolent spirits, or else monstrous individuals who use their powers to enrich themselves and destroy their enemies. The distinction between a holy shaman and an unholy one depends largely upon the spirits she deals with and the purposes to which she turns such talents.

**Suggested Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

**Suggested Abilities:** Academics 2, Art (Dance, Singing, or Music) 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 1, Computer 1, Cosmology 3, Crafts 2, Drive 1, Enigmas 2, Esoterica (culturally appropriate spiritual practices), Firearms 1, Lore 3 (Spirits), Medicine 2, Occult 3, Technology 1

**Willpower:** 5

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

**Suggested Powers:** Spirit-talkers can detect spirit-possession, and they often see and hear spirits and ghosts. Unfortunately, most of these folks can't *stop* seeing and hearing spirits and ghosts — a fact which often makes them seem highly eccentric or mentally ill — and may wind up possessed, temporarily or permanently, by them as well.

Such people can also summon, exorcize or banish spirits (see "Necromancy" and "Summoning, Binding, Bargaining, and Warding" in **How Do You DO That?** pp. 84-87 and 90-106), and may raise or lower the Gauntlet within a small area (never lower than 2 or higher than 9). They can awaken the spirits inherent in objects or places, duplicating the results of the Spirit 3 Effect **Rouse & Lull Spirit**. (See **Mage 20**, pp. 443 and 521-522). As with the hedge magician above, the spirit-talker character must conduct long and elaborate rituals in order to make things happen. Such rituals generally



last between 20 minutes and three hours. At the end of such a ritual, the spirit-talker's player makes a roll using Charisma + Esoterica or Occult (whichever is higher), and then spends a point of Willpower. Once summoned or awakened, the spirits may do as they will; temporary actions like raising or lowering the Gauntlet only last until the next sunrise or sunset.

Spirit-talkers also tend to have one or more of the following Traits: The Background Totem; the Merits Mark of Favor, Spirit Magnet, and Spirit Mentor; and the Flaws Strangeness, Uncanny, and Primal Marks.

**Image:** In certain subtle (and not-too-subtle) ways, the spirits leave their mark. This spirit-talker might be an urban shaman in primal-chic tatterwear; a fashionable medium with a thriving practice; a cultural traditionalist in ancestral garb; or perhaps a person who avoids talking about or showing off the things she knows or does. Even so, the spirits linger. Those who understand their ways can plainly see their mark.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Those who cannot see beyond the obvious things in life are fools. Your life might not be easy, can be quite difficult, in fact, but at least you're not that kind of fool.

## Jacqui High Thunder

Russell Means said: "If you take away all the four-legged beings, nothing on earth could survive. If you took away everything that flies, nothing could survive. Or if you just take away everything that swims or crawls upon the earth, nothing could survive. If you take all of our green relatives, everything that grows, all the medicines, nothing could survive. But if you take the human being away, everything will flourish. Our knowledge of that makes us very humble."

Frank High Thunder froze to death on the side of the road on a cold February morning. He was walking home from the bar, the one that had a floor covered in peanut shells to soak up the puke and urine, and that kept serving after legal hours. The cops never bothered to check in on it. It was an Indian dive. No one found Frank right away, but a week later his remains were perfectly preserved in the ice. It was a bad winter, and they conducted the ceremony quickly to get out of the cold. Jacqui never got to see her father before he was buried, and no one liked talking about him much after that. No one was proud of him. No one was proud of his family. No one had much faith in Jacqui either. But she stuck close to the elders, and she listened. Jacqui listened to their stories,

and of whom they spoke praise. She listened to their songs, and especially to their silence.

She was a resentful teenager. She went to school because she had to, and because the cops would pick her up during the day. They never took her to juvie — they just took her to uncle's house, and he was drunk and handsy, so she stayed in school. She gave plenty of lip to her teachers, and plenty of fists to her classmates. She didn't fool around much with boys because she didn't want to be just another teen pregnancy. Everyone gushed about those girls, and talked about the future in the next generation, but Jacqui recognized just how little future there was.

Jacqui held a heart full of resentment and wrath. The elders counseled peace and she listened, but nothing could still the rage in her. She witnessed the atrocities at home. She witnessed the atrocities afar via social media. Her inimitable fury piqued the interest of the spirits. Every time she heard a classmate's story of violent abuse, and every time she witnessed white supremacists chanting hate down the streets of major cities, she opened the secret doors in her hearts to another spirit. Soon the spirits flocked to her, and eventually a powerful one slipped inside of her.

If the spirit had a name before it possessed Jacqui, no one can call for it any longer. Now it only calls itself the High Thunder. To call the High Thunder a spirit of anger would be to not truly cognate the nature of it; the High Thunder is a spirit of awesome wrath, of revenge, and of cold, certain faith. Although the teenager known as Jacqui High Thunder struggled with feeling helpless to change a corrupt and damaged world, the spirit that is now melded to her soul gives her its strength and powerful charms. The problem with this world, she knows, is the people. Without them, the world will fall back into peace and goodness. Without people, the stories the elders tell of the before time will become true again.

Jacqui High Thunder is a murderer; not some sloppy serial killer who targets anyone who strikes her fancy for a fleeting moment of ecstasy, but a precise tool driven by hatred. She seeks out CEOs of oil companies, and presidents of international banks. She practices and hones every form of murder — the quick knife, the long-distance rifle, the burning agony of fires drawn from the spirit world — in order to become a perfect killer. She spends the rest of her time researching and stalking those deserving of death, her studies aided by the supernatural senses of her spirit rider. The High Thunder seeks the death of the wicked, and will one day come to understand that anyone who cannot be humble is wicked and seek the slaughter of thousands. For now, her strikes are swift, precise, and permanent.

It is possible to try and draw Jacqui's calmer self out through the stories of her people's ancestors and the ministrations of her elders, but such soothing can never be permanent. Jacqui will fight until she is dead... and killing her won't be easy with the power of the High Thunder keeping her safe

and feeding her bloodthirst. Jacqui is ridden — permanently possessed — and an attempted exorcism of the High Thunder would simply kill them both.

Young, tall, lovely, and furious, Jacqui is a teenager consumed with seething fury. She is rude and temperamental, and she resists the influence of authority. Her only two interests are hunting those in need of death, and then dealing out the murder itself.

## Witch-Hunter

Most Sleepers know nothing about the supernatural, and the few who *do* know much about magick usually work for, or with, the Awakened. Certain Sleepers, however, learn about magick the hard way. A careless, or callous, mage harms or kills someone they love, and the newly “informed” person knows that mages exist... and he hates them. Gearing up for a bitter last stand, this person joins the ranks of *hunters*: those brave and crazy mortals who decide to go down fighting — preferably while taking a lot of monsters with them.

In a fair fight, a single witch-hunter is no match for a mage; thus, witch-hunters rarely bother to fight fair. Sniper rifles, improvised explosive devices, vicious traps, teams of fellow hunters who prepare careful ambushes: Such tools allow the best witch-hunters to survive and succeed. Many hunters consider *all* mages to be monsters, possessed by horrific and powerful spirits. And like any other brand of fanatic, these folks don't consider their foes to be human. Consequently, few witch-hunters consider ideas like “mercy” or “compassion” when they're dealing with mages. A few even take grisly trophies from the “sorcerers” they kill.

**Suggested Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

**Suggested Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Computer 2, Crafts (Weaponsmith, Mechanic, Traps) 4, Drive 2, Firearms 3, Hunting 2, Investigation 3, Melee 3, Occult 3, Science (Chemistry) Stealth 3, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 2, Technology 3

**Willpower:** 8

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

**Equipment:** Electronic surveillance devices, two heavy pistols plus ammo, homemade bombs, Kevlar vest, several large knives.

**Image:** Wary, haunted, and more than a bit crazy, the witch-hunter's always looking over his shoulder. That fanatical look comes through in his eyes, posture, and the things he says... which seem extremely reasonable to *him* (and may well be *true*) but sound demented to almost everyone else.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Nothing matters anymore except the fight, revenge, and the safety of the innocent people left behind. Your own innocence ran screaming out the door a long time ago...

## Marcus Washington

*Don't move to Des Moines*, his mother said. Marcus probably should have listened. For some reason, though, agricultural chemistry caught his attention in school and Iowa was where the jobs were. His mother regretted buying him the book on George Washington Carver that started the entire thing. In 8th grade, Marcus built a car that ran completely on peanut fuel. By the time he graduated high school he was focused on finding a way to create a biodiesel that was carbon negative. He failed, but his research earned him a scholarship. Marcus could have burned through and got his PhD, but the partying cut into his study time enough to push him off the early doctoral path. The job at Agri-Chem Industries (a Progenitor training facility) made the most sense to him at the time. Plus, his girlfriend, Alicia, was originally from the city and her father was offering him some networking opportunities if they moved there.

When they moved to Des Moines, Marcus carefully plotted out the neighborhood to live in. He didn't want to end up getting shot for Existing While Black. In the end, the couple moved into a pleasant two-bedroom duplex with a basement. Marcus converted that basement into a mini-lab for his personal projects and the couple settled into a nice life. Making things even better, the owners were dog lovers, and Marcus was allowed to bring his dog, Carver. That should have been the start of the "happily ever after" story of his life. Instead, nine months into living there, the entire world came crashing down around Marcus' ears.

Carver started barking. The clock read 2:11 a.m. Marcus and Alice leapt out of bed as a car slammed into the house next door. There were people screaming in the parking lot,

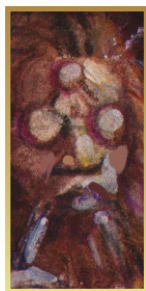
and then a large police-style van pulled up. The rest of Marcus' memory is a little fuzzy, but he remembers the look on the intruder's face. He remembers the blood, and the sigil that covered his door. He remembers the look on Alicia's face when the bullets ripped through her. He remembers the soft yelp, and the mournful last whimper as Carver got hit by the explosion. The sigil burns in his mind. He can see it clearly, he could draw it, even as complex as it was, from memory. It was that explosion that ultimately saved Marcus' life, as it created a shelter around him, a shelter from the fireballs, the lightning, and the impossible machine men.

The insurance company declared the damage an act of god, which cleared them from having to pay any claims.

Since that night, Marcus has searched for details of the sigil he saw. He's used it as a breadcrumb to find the bastards that killed his loved ones. So far, he's tracked them to a few obscure internet groups, and he's slowly building up his trust in those communities, enough so that he can find out where these "wizards" live. He's discovered that mages clump together, and so he works tirelessly on the bomb he's been building. His plan is to deliver it to their doorstep, but if that doesn't work quite as planned he has a few backups. Worst case, he straps a bomb on himself and rushes them while they plan their next attack on innocent people.

Marcus has lost a lot of weight since the attack, only eating when he realizes it's been two or three days since he last did so. For now, he's got enough money to sustain him for another few months, but he knows he's going to run out before too long. He's pretty sure he's zeroed in on this Order of Hermes that's destroyed his life, so it doesn't matter much anyway. Marcus is a dead man walking, but he's not going to his grave alone.

## The Night-Folk



Mages aren't the only supernatural inhabitants of the World of Darkness. And although many mages know very little about these creatures (and the Technocracy insists upon classifying them all as Reality Deviants), such ignorance can prove rather fatal.

Speaking of ignorance: readers familiar with the World of Darkness as a whole might notice that the following templates and characters are presented in **Mage** terms, not in the usual Traits and trademarks associated with their respective game lines. Why? Because mages don't know a damn thing about clans, Masquerades, and the like. Even the Lore Knowledge confers an incomplete, often flawed understanding from an outsider's perspective, filled with misconceptions, disinformation, and outright lies. Mages can spend decades or centuries studying the habits of those strange werecreatures,

can even call a few of them allies or friends, and yet never truly understand such beings as they understand themselves. And so, the following characters feature impressions of the Night-Folk as seen through the eyes of Awakened observers, not through the omniscient viewpoint of game statistics.

On that subject, we could also burn thousands of words on the appropriate Traits for the following critters, and yet fumble over changes between editions, updates, and forth. Thus, we invite players and Storytellers who wish to include these characters in World of Darkness crossover games to add the appropriate Traits from the character entries below, assuming the proper rule systems based on the descriptions featured below.

## Vampires

Mages tend to be horrified when they realize that blood-drinking, undead *things* inhabit almost every human city. These creatures are powerful and secretive, and few mages

know much about them beyond the obvious legends and a few facts mixed in with folklore. A **Mage** character needs at least one dot in Lore (Vampires) before he can know more than the usual misinformation regarding the Kindred and their kind.

## Blood-Bound Ghoul

Able to walk in daylight and pass for human even under magickal scrutiny, ghouls can venture where their undead masters cannot. In most senses of the word, these servitors *are* still mundane humans... most senses, but not all of them. Each ghoul has been *blood-bound* — that is, captivated by the potent magic of vampire blood. To secure that blood, these addicted creatures will do almost anything, and the deeper that fatal addiction, the more degraded a ghoul can be. True enough, vitae provides uncanny strength, speed, endurance, and longevity — but at an often-terrible price.

On top of that addiction, your typical ghoul has also been conditioned by the mental powers and fearsome seductions of vampire-kind. Bound through chemistry, magic, and passion, a ghoul becomes a dedicated servant — or, more accurately, a slave — to the creature that created it. The combination inspires a savage ecstasy whenever the ghoul feeds upon vampire blood: an ecstasy that leads a handful of ghouls to hunt and kill vampires in order to take that blood. And certain mages, being rather fond of ecstatic experiences, wind up becoming slaves to that thirst, either blood-bound to a vampire or else turning vampire-hunter in order to satisfy their craving for more.

Vampire blood keeps a ghoul from aging, so long as he's got a bit of vitae in his system. Ghouls don't suffer from the traditional weaknesses of vampires, but they can only replenish their blood pool by imbibing a vampire's blood... and drinking the same vampire's blood three times automatically makes the ghoul into that vampire's thrall. As noted above, vampires refer to this foul connection as the blood bond: an emotional and metaphysical obsession similar to love but far more intense than any mortal passion. Certain powerful vampires have blood-bound mages by their sides... and those vampires are among the most dangerous of their kind.

**Suggested Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

**Suggested Abilities:** Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Drive 2, Firearms 3, Intimidation 3, Investigation 2, Lore (Vampire) 2, Melee 2, Occult 1, Stealth 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 3

**Willpower:** 3

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

**Armor Rating:** 0 (three soak dice, total)

**Powers:** A ghoul has three blood points to spend (one per turn) on one of the following abilities per turn:

- Increase one Physical Attribute by one dot.
- Heal one health level.
- Gain an additional action that turn without dividing up his dice pool.

Even if they don't use those blood points, ghouls lose one of them every month. If a ghoul runs out of blood points, he suffers agonizing withdrawal, losing all of his powers and enduring the swift return of his true age. If that ghoul happens to be a century old (or older), he dies an awful, withering death, becoming a husk of what he once was. For more details, see **The Book of Secrets** and the Flaw: Ghoul.

**Image:** A ghoul tends to look like a normal human unless he has accepted (or been afflicted with) some form of body art or weird mutation that marks him as the vampire's property. Even the most normal ghouls, however, have an unnerving vitality crossed with a sinister obsession. Like junkies, such people display nervous tics, odd behaviors, and emotional quirks, suddenly kicking into awful fits of violence or despair.

**Roleplaying Notes:** You know what it is to suffer a love and hunger so deep it makes the passions of your past life seem tame. For the object of that love — who, indeed, you might also despise — you'll move whatever obstacles stand in the way of your beloved's happiness, safety, or needs.

## Night-Folk Mages?

Despite rumors to the contrary, *mages cannot become vampires, vampires cannot become mages, and werewolves cannot Awaken to employ the Spheres*. Mages *can* become ghouls (with terrible consequences...), and Garou Kinfolk might Awaken, but the vampiric Embrace shreds an Awakened Avatar. Meanwhile, the innate nature of werewolves and other Gaian shape-changers makes them already Awakened, but to a different Path than the mage's way. The same holds true for faerie changelings, demonic incarnations, and so forth. Such entities are what they are, and they *cannot* Awaken to magick.

In short, a mage cannot be some other World of Darkness creature, and such a creature cannot become a mage. Although those other entities have their own mystic talents (technically, a kind of static magic, like that of hedge magicians), they cannot employ the Spheres, and Sphere-using mages cannot employ vampiric Thaumaturgy, Garou Gifts, and the like. A hunter could Awaken, theoretically, but then she'd become a target of her own kind. Under the rules, then, a hybrid mage is not possible. Awakening is its own blessing — and, at times, its own curse.

As mentioned in **Mage 20 (pp. 531-532)**, the Night-Folk *do not* count as witnesses to Awakened magick of any kind. Their lives are weird enough to accept the many possibilities of Art and Science.



## Fallon Marx

Nightclub bartending makes the perfect gig for would-be vampires. The sun's on its way down by the time you head to work, the money doesn't suck, and if you want to head home afterward with some patient, trusting soul, nobody's likely to say "boo" to you so long as that night's paramour manages to show up later looking no worse for wear. Small wonder, then, that such jobs feature real and wannabe ghouls. Fallon is one of them, and while he's smart enough to be discreet, folks familiar with his nocturnal conquests know he's more than just a pretty face.

Fallon is a pretty boy. Give him that much, at least. His good looks and surprising physical endurance make him a popular pickup for last-call lonely hearts. Fallon's not picky; any gender will do. Sure, he likes the sex just fine. It's blood, though, that he's really after. A few sips in the midst of some kinky pre-dawn hijinks satisfies his thirst just fine most nights. On the happiest occasions, though, he manages to score a real vampire too inexperienced to recognize what Fallon really is. Most of Fallon's conquests show up healthy the following night; none of his vampiric lovers, though, have appeared in public again.

Back in 1995, in a little dive called Pandora's Box, Fallon was the one on the hook. A night creature took him home and made Fallon his little chew toy. Torn between agony and ecstasy, Fallon stayed on that hook for over 15 years. He's a smart guy, though, and while he endured his master's little games, Fallon watched for an opening and learned what he could about vampiric weaknesses. A shade past the turn of the millennium, Fallon saw his chance, took it, and "inherited" his deceased master's fortune, home, and other little pets.

Fallon's not selfish. He knows how to share. On those occasions when he bags a paranormal score, he shares the resulting blood-supply with two ghoulified pit bulls (Hope and Destiny), a ghoul associate named Freedom, and the two hungry critters in his master's basement. One of those critters was once a mage; that person's soul, however, was ravaged by vampiric blood addiction to the point where their former powers fled. Decades of degradation have left that no-longer-Awakened shadow of its former self ravenously pitiable. Not even Fallon knows who this mage once was or even what gender it might have been. The desiccated, naked form in the basement resembles a skeletal travesty of humankind, and if Fallon feeds that poor thing (and its similarly debased yet never Awakened companion) the occasional stray dog, homeless bum, or barroom troublemaker... well, it's an act of kindness, don't you think? I mean, he could just let them starve, and that'd be a goddamned shame.

Fallon Marx owns a townhouse not far from his longtime job. He hasn't aged visibly since 1995, but that's just part of his appeal. Pandora's Box is long gone, but Fallon never lacks for employment. He knows his business, treats customers well, and always has a smile for the other creatures who work

the club. He's not the boss and doesn't want to be. After all, it's not like he lacks for funds. Locked in near-eternal youth, Fallon Marx abdicates any responsibility beyond his reliable services to whichever club he's working at the time, plus his dedication to Freedom, Hope, Destiny, and the hunger that never leaves him. Oh, he's strong enough to lift a Buick if he needs to, savvy enough to drop a bloodsucker or a clueless mage before they even know what hit them, and perceptive enough to avoid the *real* predators who'd turn Fallon into the final round of their night. Right now, though, he's got no need to show off his hidden talents. Fallon knows a lot about a *lot* of things, but almost no one knows who or what he truly is, and Fallon aims to keep it that way... no matter the final cost.

## Violent Young Vampire

Vampires who survive long enough to grow old have generally learned how and why to avoid the Awakened, and so the vampires a mage is likely to encounter are often young, impulsive, and arrogant to a potentially fatal fault. These neonate vampires tend to be violent, and easily fall prey to the murderous urges that are part of their undead existence.

As charming and seductive as they can be, a single neonate vampire isn't much of a threat to an accomplished mage. A *pack* of neonate vampires, on the other hand, can destroy a powerful wizard with very little difficulty. And because vampires tend to be social predators, a mage who sends one of them off to Final Death (or worse — to some temporary yet humiliating fate) usually winds up on the bad side of his peers. Thus, vampires and mages try to avoid open conflicts. Such clashes go poorly for both sides.

**Suggested Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

**Suggested Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Drive 2, Firearms 3, Intimidation 2, Melee 2, Occult 2, Performance 1, Stealth 3, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 2, Technology 1

**Willpower:** 5

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

**Armor Rating:** 1 (leather jacket; four soak dice, total)

**Powers:** Vampires have 10 blood points to spend (one per turn) on one of the following abilities per turn:

- Increase one Physical Attribute by one.
- Heal one health level (except those lost to injuries by fire or sunlight).
- Gain one to three additional actions that turn without dividing his dice pool.

Drinking blood replenishes these blood points.

A vampire can also bite a character for (Strength + 1) aggravated damage, assuming the vampire grabbed that character with

his previous action. The vampire can lick that wound closed in a turn, which keeps the monster's prey from bleeding to death after the vampire has fed.

Beyond that, a young vampire may have two or three additional dots in one Physical Attribute, can use two or three additional dice for Intimidation rolls, might grow a set of claws (Strength + 2, aggravated damage), or employ the ability to look a target in the eye and give her a simple command that *must* be followed. (To use this power, roll Manipulation + Intimidation against target's Willpower; commands that violate the target's nature require four or more successes.)

Vampires also suffer between one and three health levels' worth of aggravated damage for every turn in which they're exposed to sunlight or fire. (The specifics depend upon the intensity of that fire or sunlight.) When faced with such forces — or when otherwise enraged — vampires flip out (as per the Traits: Berserker or Stress Atavism) unless they make a Willpower roll to control themselves. (Difficulty depends on the cause of that frenzy.) Vampires must also sleep during the day, but they can awaken for brief periods after a successful Willpower roll (difficulty 8).

Being neither alive nor dead, vampires are not subject to Life Sphere magick alone. To affect a vampire with Life Sphere-like Effects, a mage needs to combine both Life and Matter in order to attack that undead monster's Pattern. The Mind Sphere can act as countermagick to a vampire's mind-domination powers, and basic countermagick can oppose vampiric Thaumaturgy: Each countermagick success subtracts one success from that vampire's attempts. Fire, of course, is amazingly effective, so Forces-using mages can terrorize vampires with relative ease... at least until the vampires regroup and catch that mage unaware.

See "Night-Folk Counterspelling" in **Mage 20 (p. 546)**, for other details about vampires and their resistance to Awakened magick.

**Image:** Young vampires often favor the look of a particular Clan: the blood-inspired families to which these monsters belong. Some resemble beast-folk, whereas others seem eerily refined. All vampires have a predatory air, chilly skin, and an unsettling otherness marked by a steady gaze, an aversion to eating normal food, and a creepy stillness that explodes without warning into sudden action.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Forget that *Twilight* shit. You're a predator so refined that legends and pop culture merely hint at the majesty of what you truly are. Damnation's a drag, in theory, but for now, at least, the party belongs to you... unless, of course, those fucking elders come around to spoil your fun.

## Lupita and Michael

Sonia Velasquez was a *good* girl, really. But she wanted to be bad. Wanted it so much she dated that hirsute gringo her mama warned her about. So badly she wandered off with him into the woods long after dark. So deeply that when he tore her throat out, she tore his out, too. They both eventually walked away from that experience — a few days later, in

Sonia's case. Sonia went into the ground. Lupita came out of it, a "little wolf" now groomed by her bad boy to feast on blood and let her inner animal run free.

Lithe, strong, hungry as hell itself, Lupita embodies vampiric savagery wrapped in a thin black-leather layer of rebel poise. She's seen the movies, of course, and so she knows (or at least believes she knows) what this undeath thing is all about: endless parties in the woods and nightclubs, bodies ravished for blood and pleasure, fights fought with superhuman strength, and a certainty of damnation that makes the boundless night much sweeter for the brimstone along its edge.

Too young to realize what a cliché she is, Lupita has nurtured her unlife on pop-culture vampire lore. Her sire, Michael, isn't much better off. He, too, is a young dude raised on *The Lost Boys* and *Natural Born Killers*, running through the shadows of the greater, and wiser, vampiric society. Their mutual love of dark mythology attracts them to the sinister fringes of the occult underground, where they hope to continue learning forbidden secrets and feasting on innocent blood. In this realm of sects and cultists, they occasionally meet people of *real* power: Awakened mages whose Arts intimidate these youthful rebels, yet attract them with the promise of powers greater than the raw might and feral talents they already possess.

A muscular Latina in her apparent mid-teens, Lupita wears her hair loose and wild around her face. Ladder-slashed jeans, too-large biker boots, an array of gothic band T-shirts, and a battered leather jacket twice as old as she is (stolen off some old guy they mugged and drained outside a club) complement her clawed fingers and toes and lambent yellow eyes — legacies of the animalistic self she lets loose as often as possible. Lupita's still too fresh to have mastered full shape-changing, but her wolfish aspect remains close to the surface of her skin. Michael is only slightly better at it than she is; he can shift into wolf-form while leaving his human guise essentially intact. If you look close enough, you can tell that his body hair is more lupine fur than human fuzz. In the dark, though, he looks like a normal-enough dude until his claws or teeth are in your neck.

Lupita's Catholic traditions still skitter around in her skull, assuring this bad girl that her sins mean eternity in hell. Thus, she — unlike her paramour Michael — tends to be cautious in situations where she might get killed. Both vampires pick one-sided fights with human targets, but then skirt the presence of greater predators. In vampiric terms, they're *Caitiff*: clanless vampires too young, reckless, and stupid to choose a side in the immortal wars. A mage who meets them, though, isn't likely to know such things. To him, these kids are everything pop culture tells them vampires should be: dangerous to mortals, but no match for an Awakened antagonist. That perception, however, has gotten a few young mages killed, ghouléd, and tortured to the point of madness. Despite their youth and cultural banality, Lupita

and Michael are still dangerous as hell, with inhuman powers, several dozen cultist allies, occult curiosity, and a depthless thirst for blood drawn from magely veins.

## Ancient Master Vampire

Careful vampires are essentially immortal, existing for hundreds or even thousands of years. Despite centuries of research (some of it lost under mysterious circumstances), neither the Traditions, the Technocracy, nor other Awakened orders truly *understand* much about these secretive monsters. Oh sure — mages *think* they know all there is to know about these so-called "Kindred." In reality, the ignorant misinformation mages consider to be the truth of these undead entities is nearly as erroneous and incomplete as the knowledge vampires believe they hold regarding those jumped-up mortals who consider themselves to be like the wizards of old.

Because elder vampires use pawns — young vampires, ghouls, dominated Sleepers, mortal authorities, and even other mages — to further their ends, the ancient Kindred cover their tracks with rumors and misdirection. Certain vampires, it's been said, command entire cities through their proxies and strange powers. A mage who angers such a beast might never even know who his enemy truly is, only that attacks seem to come from everywhere, with little obvious connection between them. Why do living statues, political activists, riot cops, street kids, and the local sheriff all seem to have something against a given mage? Only that secretive vampire elder knows for sure... and she's not talking, least of all to you.

**Suggested Attributes:** Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 6, Charisma 5, Manipulation 6, Appearance 4, Perception 5, Intelligence 6, Wits 5

**Suggested Abilities:** Academics 6, Alertness 6, Awareness 3, Brawl 4, Expression 3, Esoterica 3, Etiquette 5, Firearms 2, Intimidation 5, Leadership 5, Law 4, Melee 4, Politics 5, Occult 5, Stealth 5, Subterfuge 6, plus hosts of other Abilities that suit the vampire in question.

**Willpower:** 9

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

**Armor Rating:** 0 (six soak dice, total; ancient vampires can also use between three and five dice to soak fire and sunlight)

**Powers:** In addition to all the powers of a young vampire, an ancient has 20-30 blood points and may spend between four and six of them per turn.

Beyond that, most ancients have the equivalent of 15-20 dots' worth of rote; each rote costs one blood point to activate. Most often, these rotes involve the Mind Sphere, though others also involve Entropy, Forces, Matter, or Time. These abilities are *not* true Sphere magick, however, and do not rework reality or invoke Paradox.

Most ancient vampires invoke bowel-emptying terror. To attack such a monster directly, a player must spend a Willpower point

and roll Willpower (difficulty 8) in order to do so. For each success on that roll, the character is able to act against that vampire for one turn. A successful Mind 1 Effect (coincidental) can add its successes to that Willpower roll; even then, however, the mage feels like a mouse facing off against a furious bobcat... and will probably be right about the comparative difference in power!

**Image:** The embodiment of primal hunger, these refined monstrosities capture godlike power in immortal frames. Some resemble grotesque assemblies of limbs and faces, whereas others would shame Greek deities with their raw beauty. All elder vampires radiate awful majesty, with centuries of cunning and survival locked behind their eyes.

**Roleplaying Notes:** You didn't reach this age by being stupid. Let lesser beings throw away their lives (or unlives) acting like impulsive children. You're thinking three steps ahead of every other being in the room. If, and when, you take direct action, make sure to annihilate whichever creature dared to inconvenience you with force.

## Roberto “Uncle Robert” Castrovinci

No one sees Roberto unless he wants them to. He learned secrecy during the War of the Vespers in his medieval homeland, Sicily, and has lived (or whatever this benighted excuse for living is called) by such disciplines ever since. In that long-ago time, Roberto was a common man swept up in the tide of violence that washed across Sicily when some rude Frenchman groped the young niece of Roberto's friend Vincente. Outrage became violence, violence became massacre, and massacre became war. In the process, hot-blooded Roberto learned to fear the urges of his fellow mortals, and then went from being an eager young brawler to a traumatized man seeking refuge in a church.

As things turned out, the *wrong* church.

What good Christian could have imagined in those days that churches housed the faithful Damned? Who might have believed Roberto had he run from that church seeking aid? Possibly no one... but in such bloody days, those pious vampires could not afford to be discovered. And so, Roberto was converted in a most unholy way, his soul initiated into the legions of hell, his body twisted to mirror the tortures of his mind.

That was over 800 years ago, and Roberto has become very good at hiding himself from sight.

A master of secrets, Roberto moved between the Sicilian island kingdom, Italy, Iberia, and the Ottoman Empire for centuries. He built networks of trade and information, mastered the occult lore of Africa, Europe, and the classical world, and witnessed the soulless barbarism of mortal men. Roberto lost his faith in those days, and so when the modern age came to his world in clouds of flame, famine, and poison gas, he fled his homeland for the cleaner, safer shores of a young United States.

Smuggled through Ellis Island by a small army of loyal retainers, Roberto Castrovinci took up residence in the Bronx borough of New York City during the fall of 1915. After disposing of several potential rivals and establishing a protectorate neighborhood, “Uncle Robert” secluded himself in a brownstone and wove himself a network of allies, informants, procurers, and enforcers. There, safe from all but the most powerful intrusions, he continues to study the mystic arts, occasionally allying himself with devoted practitioners of Old Country wizardry.

Despite Siciliano stereotypes, Uncle Robert has no love for *La Cosa Nostra*. He saw the misery they inflicted upon his homeland, and allows them no influence within his protectorate. Roberto has banned all sales of drugs and weapons around his property; unauthorized gangs are forbidden; and the gruesome fates of muggers, rapists, and other parasites have become the stuff of local legend. Real-estate developers are bought off with money or warned off with force. Trespassers are dealt with in manners that suit the phrase “go medieval,” and so the people of Uncle Robert's dominion remain happy... so long, of course, as they stay within well-established rules.

Only rarely does Uncle Roberto leave his home: two Morris Avenue brownstones converted into a single unit, with three basement levels dug beneath their foundations. Two families of living descendants occupy the upper floors and protect their downstairs benefactor. The building and surrounding blocks are protected by mundane methods and vampiric magic: traps, illusions, allies human and otherwise, a pervasive police presence, and a handful of gangs with funding and permission from Uncle Robert himself protect the parameters and deal out brutal justice to anyone who dares intrude on Castrovinci turf. Roberto's got a few younger vampires in his circle, too: old-school Turks, Spaniards and Sicilians who still measure their power and experience in centuries. Few people see Uncle Robert unless he wants them to, and even fewer survive the experience if he doesn't.

A short, stocky, gnarled man whose undeath warped his mortal features into ghastly exaggerations of homeliness, Uncle Robert dresses in impeccable handmade Italian suits and shoes. The contrast between his brutish face, bent body, and elegant fashion makes this vampire even more unnerving. He's frighteningly adept at static magical Arts, too – not the blessings of True Magick, but the sorcery known to vampires and certain mortals. (In game terms, hedge magic and the Thaumaturgy Discipline.) Although he's fluent in over two dozen mortal languages, including several dialects of Arabic, Italian, English, Greek, Latin, Urdu, and so forth, Roberto speaks casually in a hoarse medieval Sicilian language composed of Latinate Italian, Norman French, Aragonese, classical Greek, arcane Arabic, and plenty of other things living people have barely even heard of, let alone understand. His descendants and retainers, of course, understand it perfectly, and that linguistic obscurity adds another secretive dimension to this elder vampire's existence. For the few mortals allowed

into his presence, Uncle Robert projects a majestic aura of ageless charisma tinged with ruthless cruelty. He is not, Roberto emphasizes, a brutal man by nature. Ah, but nature has little sway within the gory human legacy, and so if he must assume a monster's form, then he'll remind people why this particular monster has lived nearly a 1,000 years with no apparent end in sight.

## Werebeasts

Shapeshifting creatures with close connections to the Umbra also inhabit the World of Darkness. Most of them dwell in remote wilderness areas, but some prefer human cities and the various pleasures and challenges therein.

### Murderous Werewolf

Filled with rage at humanity, loathing the extent to which humans have defiled and destroyed the natural world, werewolves strike out at those they think are enemies of the Earth. Members of the Technocracy regard these monsters as deadly threats to humanity... and they're essentially correct. Some Tradition mages share this view, but others revere the purity of these primal monsters.

Like Awakened shamans, werewolves hold profound ties to the spirit world. They bond with totems and employ nature magic that resembles the effects of Spirit Arts. Mages who travel into the Otherworlds often meet werewolves there, usually with violent results. Although some werewolves (who call themselves *Garou*) strike alliances with mages who share their views, these alpha predators remain too unpredictable, temperamental, and fanatically devoted to their nature goddess to be truly considered friends.

**Suggested Attributes (human form):** Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 5, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

**Suggested Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 4, Esoterica 2, Expression 2, Firearms 2, Intimidation 4, Leadership 2, Melee 3, Occult 2, Stealth 3, Survival 4

**Willpower:** 4

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

**Armor Rating:** 0 (but see below)

**Powers:** In any form except their human guise, werewolves regenerate one health level of bashing or lethal damage per turn, or one health level of aggravated damage per day.

A Garou can shift between several shapes, too: the human form, a caveman-like throwback, a horrific part-human "war-wolf" monster roughly nine feet tall, a titanic wolf form, and the form of a normal (though robust) wolf. In that wolf-man form, a werewolf character doubles his Physical Attributes, drops his Appearance to 0, attacks two or three times per turn, and ignores dice penalties from his wounds unless those wounds were caused by silver. The titanic wolf adds +2 to its Physical

Traits and runs fast enough to catch a speeding car. Sleepers flee in terror, pass out, or go temporarily insane if that wolf-man or titanic wolf form appears, and although mages are immune to this Delirium, even the most dedicated willworkers feel an intense desire to run like hell.

This discretion really *is* the better part of valor. In the lupine and war-wolf forms, a Garou can bite or claw for (Strength + 1) aggravated damage (Strength + 2 in the titanic wolf form), soak lethal and aggravated damage, and shrug off everything short of heavy machine-gun fire... and often even *that*.

Each werewolf has a pool of Rage points (usually between five and seven) that he can spend to gain additional actions while using his full dice pool for each of them. That Garou can spend one point of Rage for every dot of Dexterity he has in that form. Werewolves regain Rage in stressful situations — and almost *anything*, from an insult to an injury, stresses out a werewolf.

Additionally, some werewolves have the ability to act first every turn, automatically; the power to deactivate all man-made technology within 50 feet; or the ability to assume their war-wolf form as a reflexive action. (The Storyteller employs the werewolf's power to deactivate technology by spending a point of Willpower, or by rolling the character's Willpower against the Arete of a technomagickal device.) A werewolf can sometimes step sideways into the Penumbra if the local Gauntlet is weak enough (roll Willpower against the Gauntlet difficulty), and he can often employ other nature magics, too. (Simply assign a handful of Forces-, Prime-, or Spirit-based rites, as per the vampire powers above.)

On the downside, Werewolves suffer unsoakable aggravated wounds from silver weapons (they can attempt to soak all other kinds of damage, regardless of type). A vulgar Life-based attack needs to combine both Life and Spirit (both Spheres at no fewer than three dots) in order to harm the werewolf's half-spirit, half-flesh pattern. And like vampires, werewolves fly into berserk frenzies when angered or frightened beyond their limits. Given their primal spirit nature, werewolves seem incredibly resistant to magick in general (see "Night-Folk Counterspelling" in **Mage 20**, pg. 546 for other details about such resistance).

**Image:** Even in his human form, a werewolf radiates predator with a capital "P." This animal nature is both attractive (adding bonuses to the werewolf's seduction-based rolls if he's dealing with Ecstatics, nature mages, or other folks who crave a little primal lovin') and frightening (imposing penalties on any other form of Social roll when dealing with easily intimidated humans... unless, of course, the werewolf *wants* to be intimidating). Even with a fresh shave and a three-piece suit, a typical werewolf feels *feral*... and probably *looks* feral, too. In their wolf-forms, Garou favor the markings of their lupine kin. Many werewolves also sport body art, scars, and other marks of their intensely tribal nature.

**Roleplaying Notes:** You don't "believe" that the Earth is under attack from demonic forces; you *know* it. Mages might not all be allied with such forces, but the ones who are — the



Nephandi and Technocrats — must die. That's it, that's all. Such people are a cancer on a dying Earth and must be erased with fang, claw, magic, and steel.

As for the rest of 'em, they're probably dead meat, too. Maybe you'll pause long enough to see if an individual mage can be trusted. Most of them, though, cannot. They'll just have to die as well.

## Hunts-the-Wizards

He wasn't always this way. Long ago, rumors claim, Hunts-the-Wizards was called Hot Coffee, an urban werewolf who guarded homeless encampments from parasites human and otherwise. Hot Coffee's pack swept out the neighborhood dope fiends and their high-numbers profiteers, worked soup kitchens, and earned Hot's deed-name by keeping the locals as safe, fed, and warm as they could manage.

And then some asshole wizard turned him into silver.

He still remembers the pain. It wakes him from nightmares, shivers up his scarred nerves at unexpected times, bristles his neck when a random breeze or sound calls up those memories. He nearly died. Three packmates *did*: one incinerated by bolts of fire, a second yanked out of this world by evil spirits, and his best friend, Cherokee Red, turned into a cook-brained basket case, unseen magick blasting her synapses in ways no drug had ever managed to damage her before. Her

body lived but she lost her wolf, and now mumbles through the cold nights with vague dreams of who she once was back when she could still think straight.

And then the wizard turned him into silver. That pain never leaves him.

It didn't last long. Hot would not have survived if it had. But the searing torment of having his own skin and bones and fur turned into mystic anathema lingers in Hot Coffee's mind. He spent days recovering from the physical damage, then assumed the deed-name Hunts-the-Wizards, took up the banner of his fallen packmates, and turned the mages responsible into abstract urban art. The last of them, after failing to repeat his silver-werewolf trick, perished screaming, his intestines wound like fat spaghetti around Hunts-the-Wizards' claws.

That might have been the end of it, but then other mages came looking for their friends. From them, Hunts-the-Wizards discovered his vocation. By the time the last of those wizards defaced a mural with biological graffiti, Hot Coffee had disappeared forever beneath the raging heart of Hunts-the-Wizards... or simply, as he's known in human guise, Hunt.

Hunts-the-Wizards knows the truth: All mages are servants of the Wyrms. Their messy deaths are gifts to the Earth Mother, and so he and his new packmates stalk, hunt, corner, and

kill every single mage they can find. Without pity, reason, or fear, this knot of monsters employs the physical and spiritual environment of their city home in a bloody vendetta that has claimed the lives of over a dozen Awakened souls and over 100 of their friends and allies. No argument can sway Hunts-the-Wizards from that task; this werewolf and his pack consider their hunt a holy crusade, and only death will end it. Until that final night, Hunts-the-Wizards relives his torment, tends his broken friend, and conducts his sacred duty as only a spiritual war-machine monster can do.

Hot Coffee wasn't exactly a good-looking guy, but Hunts-the-Wizards bears dozens of scars from his various encounters from the magi: burns, bullet wounds, patchwork places where flesh and muscle have been cooked, slashed, dissolved, and otherwise disfigured by magickal Arts and mundane weaponry. Sure, he heals fast, but that healing demands a cost when so much of it comes from metaphysical means.

In human form, the man called Hunt conceals his battle-ravaged body under a large coat and layers of cast-off clothing. The ripe scent of homelessness carries an undercurrent of his bestial nature, too. His pale skin features winding tattoos over grotesque scar tissue, and his brown eyes glow with the banked fires of a doomed fanatic.

In werewolf form, he's a rangy terror with patchy black fur, ritual scars, and a roadmap of magickal tortures etched across his skin. Though not especially tall or bulky by werewolf standards, Hunts-the-Wizards is fast, clever, and breathtakingly brutal, with a trickster's glee if he gets a chance to make a mage's demise especially horrific.

As his name suggests, Hunts-the-Wizards is beyond compromise. To his mind, every single mage must die. The things he's seen and survived prove beyond all arguments that so-called "mages" are corruption incarnate. His many battles have given Hunt a sense of strategy — rushing in with claws drawn got his first pack killed, and so now deception, distraction, ambush, misdirection, and fear are Hunt's most effective weapons... until, of course, the moment when speed and power end the chase.

## Enigmatic Werecat

Since the days of ancient Egypt, magick and mages have fascinated these subtle and ever-curious creatures. Divided into several distinct breeds — tigers, lions, leopards, lynxes and more — the shape-changing cat-folk enjoy a wide range of sizes, powers, and temperaments. As a rule, however, the Bastet crave secrets and knowledge. That craving brings them into frequent contact with mages who're obvious about what they are, and often attracts their attention if a mage isn't who he seems to be.

Like werewolves and vampires, the Bastet have their own forms of magic. Unlike Garou, they don't seem to be able to walk into the spirit world. Werecats make their home in Earthly reality, and claim territories that can stretch from

apartment-sized to several miles across. Within those territories, a werecat likes to know what's going on. And so, it's often possible for a mage to meet a Bastet who considers that mage and his home to be her property.

**Suggested Attributes (human form):** Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 4, Perception 5, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

**Suggested Abilities:** Academics 2, Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Drive 2, Esoterica 2, Expression 2, Firearms 1, Intimidation 2, Investigation 3, Melee 2, Occult 4, Stealth 4, Survival 2, Subterfuge 3

**Willpower:** 5

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

**Armor Rating:** 0 (but see below)

**Powers:** All werecats regenerate one health level's worth of bashing or lethal damage per turn, or one aggravated health level of injury per day. In cat-form, use the appropriate big cat's entry from the **Mage 20** Bestiary (pp. 619-620) and add two dots to both Dexterity and Perception. Like a werewolf, a Bastet can attain a human-cat hybrid war-form; in that form, increase the character's Dexterity and Perception by three dots each, and increase Strength and Stamina by two dots each. The titanic cat form resembles a sabretooth tiger, inflicts (Strength + 3) lethal damage with its bite, and inspires the Delirium effect in unAwakened human beings.

Also like a werewolf, each werecat has a pool of Rage points (usually between two and four) that she can spend to gain additional actions without splitting her dice pool. And although werecats lack the Garou's deep ties to the spirit-world, the Bastet have their own rote-like Effects — typically drawn from the Life and Mind Spheres — to call upon. They suffer the same effects from silver as Garou, and inflict similar attacks with their claws and teeth. (Really big cats, like tigers and lions, dish out Strength + 2, as they have larger mouths than wolves.) Also like werewolves, the Bastet fly into berserk claw-shredding frenzies when furious, hurt, or scared.

**Image:** Uncommonly attractive (perhaps even inhumanly so), a werecat exudes that same predatory presence. Unlike her werewolf cousin, that sense of menace is more beautiful than brutish. Even so, this creature is every inch a predator. When furious, she's as savage as any Garou.

**Roleplaying Notes:** The epitome of grace and curiosity, you're a master of secrets. Such enigmas are literally your nature, and you seek information about other people as eagerly as you guard your own.

## Callianne Barrister/Calli Groves/ Whisper/Salome Grey

She always *did* love books. Calli Groves learned to read short, but full, sentences by around age four, and she wrote her first story, "Bumble's Jungle," in first grade. By age eight,

she could read full-length adult novels and actually understand what went on in them. Is it any wonder, then, that she was a full-time professional novelist before she graduated high school... which Calli managed to do at 15? Her first novel, the paranormal romance *Mandolin Wind*, featured a shapeshifting cat-girl named Whisper, and though the name on the cover read Callianne Barrister, its feline hero was the author herself.

Whisper's adventures hit just as the post-*Twilight* surge took hold, making Calli a bestselling author by the time she hit legal age. It didn't matter that her protagonist's early brushes with sexuality had been based on imaginative speculation and the sort of internet searches that parents fear — the lush sensuality of Whisper's world entranced readers of all ages. A rousing contrast to the blank-stare infodumps favored by so many of her peers, Calliane Barrister became one of the names to watch for on the paranormal romance lists. This fame, of course, had a distinct downside for an author who really was what she wrote about: Calli had to distance herself from Whisper when several associates of her Bastet identity began to say, "What a minute, aren't you the chick from those *books*...?" Hence, to them, she became Salome Grey, her surname an elbow-shot at the rising *Fifty Shades* series and the popularity of their slick hero.

Living a double life is challenging enough. These days, Calli lives four of them: Her best-selling pen name, her inquisitive heroine, her Bastet aspect, and whatever is left of her own life when she's not writing, touring, or living the other three. As any writer knows, the sheer butt-in-chair element of writing is time-consuming enough for one person. Add the social media and marketing presence of a persona who's not really you and not one shape-shifting cat-girl but two, and you've got a fair impression of Calli's busy life. Good thing she's adept at catnaps or she'd never get any sleep at all.

Granted, Whisper is more a person of the page these days than she is a living entity; still, Calli keeps having to clean up the messes her initial feline self left lying around before she got so popular. Like any good pulp-action hero, Whisper has left her claws in lots of hearts, literal and otherwise, and some of her paramours keep coming back for another round. Whisper has enemies, too, some of whom would love to expose the woman behind the character. As this cat has learned the hard way, hot tin roofs have nothing on the bestseller list!

Partly because Whisper's adventures deal so heavily with the occult, but largely because Calli herself is implacably curious about such things, Salome has ingratiated herself among the local occult subcultures. A few tricks of makeup, hair dye, and body language let her appear differently enough from her other three personas that few people have caught on yet. One of her Bastet tricks also allows her to change her shape and appearance in radical ways — a useful stunt for a cat-woman with more lives than usual. Between her magical powers and social guile, Calli has insinuated herself into a variety of cults, sects, and covens, plus online groups and a

growing circle of intimates who know who and what she really is. That's an especially dangerous game at her level, though, as she's begun to realize that some of these people command power and influence far beyond her wildest fictions.

Bastet excel at keeping secrets while uncovering everyone else's dirt. With money and magic, she's performed an impressive, if unsustainable, juggling act for years. Her masquerade, though, is wearing thin. Several books ago, Calli tripped over the existence of the Technocracy. Though she understands very little of what she's learned, she added them to her books as the Agency, a hypertechnology conspiracy of paranormal authoritarians. For obvious reasons, this did not go over well with the Union, and although their inquiries have been discreet (so far), the Technocracy would like to find out how this Callianne Barrister person learned as much as she appears to know. Thanks to her insular nature, her financial success, her Bastet bag of tricks, and the odd things you discover doing paranormal-romance research, Calli has managed to cover her tracks thus far. It's not going to be long, however, until someone slips between the many levels of misdirection Calli Groves constructed around her various identities. If someone manages to get a peek inside her head, this entire Whisper game may soon come to an unfortunate conclusion.

Although her shapechanging Gift allows Calli to cultivate a number of different personas and appearances, her primary "selves" are as follows:

Calli Groves is a rail-thin and prettily bookish woman in her late 20s, with long wavy, black hair, wire-framed glasses (which, since her Bastet birthright manifested in her early teens, she no longer needs), large eyes that shift from green to gray to hazel in accordance with her mood, and a decidedly casual wardrobe of jeans, plain-color sweaters, and near-invariably bare feet. Her features and skin tone suggest Indian descent, but she's actually Irish-Egyptian with a bit of Lakota from her mother's side of the family. Though she's nearly six feet tall, Calli weighs less than 130 pounds and slumps her shoulders so as to appear shorter than she truly is. The author's fey features, thin build, and changeling eyes earned her the nickname "Elf" among her friends, and though she used to cultivate that look when she was younger, she now concedes it to...

Callianne Barrister, who stands Calli's full height and accentuates her fey appearance with peasant blouses, hippie skirts, copious bangles, and a flirtatious persona. Like Calli, she shuns footwear; unlike her, Callianne wears tumblers of deep-red hair and faerie-like cosmetics that contrast with her skin to make it look darker than it naturally is. Callianne doesn't wear Calli's glasses, and in most regards seems to be more her "better self" than the shy girl she manifests at home. Where Calli's personal aspect is quiet and shy, Calliane's a charisma bomb in a New-Age shop.

Whisper, of course, is a lean, punky, sullenly attractive rebel apparently stuck somewhere around her mid-to-late teens.

Like Callianne, she wears no glasses; her messy dark mane falls across her face as she adopts a terminally jaded slump-and-glare. Unlike her other personae, Whisper wears heavy boots, shredded jeans, ankh-and-scarab jewelry, and battered leather jackets. Although Calli herself avoided getting real tattoos that might expose her multiple identities, Whisper has a variety of fake tribal-style black tats, including the inevitable tramp-stamp sported by every paranormal-romance cover girl.

Salome Grey, aside from her slender build, looks nothing like the other three women. Calli's magic grants Salome paradoxically pale skin, flowing red-blond hair, and eyes the steely color of her surname. Like that particular Christian, she dresses in tailor-made business wear, with stylish shoes and an intimidating presence. Calli hones her social dominance in this persona, and she uses her height and looks for maximum effect. Most of the folks who know Calli's Bastet identity are familiar with Salome Grey, with a mere handful knowing Whisper and only three of her must-trusted intimates knowing Calli.

In her Bastet feline forms, Calli resembles a lean, black-furred Egyptian Bast statue, a huge black cat, or a saber-toothed monster vaguely reminiscent of a prehistoric panther with especially large ears. In all three forms, Calli goes nude and rarely appears unless she wants to be seen. If you see her at all, you'll note lambent green eyes and bright white teeth right before the latter rip into a vital part of your anatomy.

Like any Bastet — much less one of her Bubasti lineage — Calli possesses an unquenchable lust for secrets and a literal hunger that never goes away. Nothing is ever enough for her: enough books, enough food, enough money, enough lovers, enough forbidden secrets about things she really should leave alone. Calli indulges them all as much as she can without putting her multiple lives at *too much* risk. As a result, this werecat is a fabulous liar and social chameleon whose prodigious mind and boundless curiosity are backed up with magical powers that let her slide between identities and slip out of perception when she wants to disappear. Those powers let Calli move unseen and unheard, edge around most physical barriers, change her human guise on cosmetic levels, and convince people to give her whatever it is she wants at that time.

Despite inhuman speed, endurance, fangs and claws, plus some basic fight training she's picked up while writing a paranormal adventure series, Calli's not fond of physical conflicts. If backed into a corner, she can take out the average human without breathing hard. That's not her style, though. Knowledge is so much more satisfying than blood.

## The Fae

Ah, the wonders of the fae! Their flitty mischief and giddy playfulness! The rustic glamour of bygone tales, half-draped in wild joy and packaged colorfully for our amusement! Wait... you mean faeries *aren't* like that?

Nope.

Not even close, and an attitude like that will get a mage killed if she's lucky and worse if she's not. The Disneyfied bullshit cloaks entities of strange and fearsome mien, and though some who know them claim the fae are harbingers of imagination's power, those same mages are often quick to warn you that "imagination" also gave us the atomic bomb.

Despite formidable powers, vampires and werebeasts are fairly prosaic monsters — more complex than Sleeper legends give them credit for, but ultimately straightforward reflections of human fears. Faeries, though, are *other*. Unpredictable. Often alien. Although they might superficially resemble the sanitized legends attributed to their name, faerie beings are walking puzzles whose ways make little sense when analyzed with magely vision.

Lore asserts that the True Fae left the mortal realm behind some time ago. An Umbra-faring mage might run across such beings in a hidden glade or distant palace, but those immortals won't be found on Earth. Instead, a mage might encounter *changelings*: faerie spirits trapped in human hosts, struggling in the face of what they call *banality* to retain the essence that makes them what they are. Their magics are, by nature, more subtle than Awakened Arts, their effects often hidden behind screens of misdirection. Literally "such stuff as dreams are made of," the ephemeral Arts of changelings bend reality in ways mages envy but cannot duplicate.

Faerie creatures display an inhuman affinity with magic, and although those Arts are not True Magick in the way that willworkers understand the term, they're far closer to that power than are the weird talents of vampires and werebeasts. Faerie beings share ancient ties with the Verbena and some Hermetic mages, but those ties don't necessarily mean friendship. Ultimately, the fae remain mysterious, haunted by dream horizons that not even mages truly understand.

True to faerie-tale lore, fae characters take aggravated damage from cold-iron weapons, and they suffer illness and a distinct lack of magic in areas with high levels of "cold" technology (as opposed to the weird Science of Etherite mages). If a changeling gets stuck someplace with high levels of cold technology or banal behavior (the unimaginative herd mind that seems safest for the Masses), he might forget who and what he really is, losing not only his magic but also his memory that he was something other than a normal, mortal man. For this reason, among others, the fae avoid such places and behaviors; to them, banality literally is a plague.

Although certain fae practice their own form of odd technologies, most changelings fear Technocratic establishments and forces... and with good reason: Such institutions can drain a faerie's magic simply by existing in his presence! And so, most fae-folk concentrate their pranks on environments that encourage at least a bit of magic and imagination: churches, temples, Akashic dojos and Verbena groves, art schools, media offices, and even labs where science favors imagination over procedure. In more rigid areas, a changeling's powers falter,

locking him into that mortal guise until he can escape again. This innate tie between imagination and ability provides a key to any faerie's nature. It's been said that technology strangles the very essence of what faeries are. If and when the Technocracy gets its wish, fae of all sorts will disappear forever.

**Suggested Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 5, Stamina 2, Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

**Suggested Abilities:** Acrobatics 3, Alertness 3, Art 3, Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Cosmology 3, Enigmas 2, Expression 4, Occult 3, Seduction 2, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 4

**Willpower:** 4

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

**Armor Rating:** 0 (two soak dice, total)

**Powers:** The reality-warping powers of the fae resemble mage Spheres, with several vital differences:

- They're less powerful overall, limited to Sphere ranks 1-3 in terms of their Effects.
- They demand ritual behaviors (a rhyme, a wrinkled nose, a set of clothes turned inside out, etc.) before the spell takes effect.
- They cost Glamour (a form of Quintessence generated by imagination, passion, inspiration, and dreams) to cast.
- Their effects are often more or less invisible to mortal eyes unless they significantly transform the environment.
- They're limited by the level of banality in the area. The more banal the area — that is, how technological it is, how trivialized it seems, or how otherwise rendered "flat" and unimaginative it has been — the more resistant that place is to the effects of faerie magics.

To reflect those powers in **Mage** terms, consider a fae character to be like a mage with an Arete between 1 and 5; the Entropy, Life, Matter, and Mind Spheres at between Ranks 1 and 3; and a casting difficulty based upon the local Gauntlet rating in order to bring mortals into the realm of fae enchantment. If that roll fails, then the magic fails as well. That's not how magic works in **Changeling: The Dreaming**, but it's a decent approximation for troupes without those rules.

If a fae character tries to enchant a mage or other mortal, the difficulty depends upon the target character's Banality Trait. Mystic mages (Dreamspeakers, Verbena, Bata'a, etc.) have a Banality between 4 and 5; mystic technomancers (Etherites, Virtual Adepts) range between 7 and 8, and Technocrats go as high as 9 or 10. Marauders and Nephandi have either extremely low Banality ratings or very high ones, depending on the nature of that Mad or Fallen mage.

Mages and faeries can each resist the other's magic(k). The mage can shake off the effects of a direct fae enchantment by rolling her Willpower like a soak roll (difficulty 7), subtracting successes as usual. That mage could also counter a faerie's spell by rolling her Arete (difficulty 6), and the faerie can do the same thing to counter a mage's Effect. In all cases, the countering character's successes remove the successes of the character casting that spell. (Again, see "Night-Folk Counterspelling" in **Mage 20** for details.) As creatures linked to the Dreaming Otherworlds, changelings and other fae are immune to Life magick alone; harming a fae being requires a combination of the Life and Mind Spheres.

**Image:** In their natural forms, faerie beings range from freakish trolls to charismatic paragons of unearthly gorgeousness. To conceal their true natures among the Masses, however, fae changelings cloak themselves in the illusory forms of mortal human beings. In all cases, a changeling who suffers harsh degrees of banality forgets its true nature and remains stuck in that ridiculous human form.

**Roleplaying Notes:** You're an avatar of imagination and wonder, fighting to keep the mortal world from swallowing itself in banality. That said, you can be pretty damn scary, too. Lots of people think faeries are cute little critters full of mischief and fun. They're wrong. In many ways, you're an alien thing — familiar in certain regards, but possessed of an amoral conscience and living by rules that make no sense to mortals but mean everything to you.

## Jason "Goatboy" McClean

Class clowns often start off as kids with social handicaps they learn to work around by making people laugh. In Jason's case, those handicaps included thick body hair, a strong body odor that resisted every antiperspirant on the market, and a temperament that's volatile even by adolescent standards. As so many embarrassing things do, the bodily changes kicked in when Jason hit puberty, leading his schoolyard nemesis Vince Angelini to dub him "Goatboy" — a name that stuck even after Jason started racking up an impressive list of hookups that included some of the best-looking boys and girls in school... including, to both guys' amazement, Vince himself. When asked how a smelly, hairy dude named Goatboy was able to win his way into their hearts and pants, Jason's intimates tend to shrug, look aside, and say, "I dunno, he just makes me laugh."

And so he does. Of course, Jason's heritage among the satyr-kith fae doesn't hurt his popularity either, but the kids at school don't know about *that*, and Jason's certainly not gonna be the one to tell 'em.

Jason learned the truth about two years ago, and now understands why he's always felt so drawn to art classes even though he's got little talent for art himself. Currently the superstar of his high school's drama department (a status he earned through charisma and popularity, not his ability to act worth a damn), Jason passes freely among every clique

in school, scoring like an 80s rock star despite being under legal age. The fact that some of his satyrian hookups include several members of the faculty keeps people from looking too carefully at what he's doing and who he's doing it with. The messes he makes, however, turn those relationships into stormy dramas, and although Goatboy remains mysteriously popular with his peers (and many of their parents, too), the emotional turmoil in his wake keeps Jason's life... interesting. His family has begun to notice this sensual chaos, and although mom thinks she knows what's really going on, she has no idea what to do about it. As for Jason's dad, well... um, "That's my boy" isn't an especially healthy attitude to take about such things, but sadly it's not unusual even when dad himself isn't actually fae.

Not long ago, Jason's dramas included every single member of his school's miniscule goth occultist contingent — a contingent scattered by the resulting emotional typhoon. One of those kids, though, realizes now what Goatboy really is... and she's begun to orchestrate a grand, public reveal that might bring Goatboy's kingdom down for good.

Really, Jason's not a bad kid. Although his vengeful ex suspects he's what folks call *Unseelie Fae*, the truth is, he's not deliberately malicious. Jason is a *kid* — kind of literally speaking. Passionate by nature as well as by age, he hurts himself as badly as he hurts the folks around him. In time, Goatboy might learn to temper his impulsive sexuality with discretion and ethics, if only out of self-preservation. Right now, though, Goatboy stars in a real-life teen flick that veers from comedy to tragedy to impending horror with all the verve of a horny goat on a hormonal cocaine binge. Everybody's laughing in public and crying secretly, with several ticking clocks just waiting for the right explosion.

To ordinary eyes (and to any mage who doesn't examine him with magick), Goatboy appears to be a moderately attractive, red-haired teenage dude with copious body hair and a weirdly compelling musk. Jason wears his hair shortish but shaggy, and most folks seem to like it that way. (It's even kicked off a mini-trend around school, with Vince among those wearing that style these days.) His careless sense of fashion is just mainstream enough to let Jason navigate cliques without defining him by the clothes he wears. He has large feet and stubby toes (another source of his nickname, thanks to locker-room exposure), and is incredibly self-conscious about them, generally wearing socks even in bed. Whether Jason's facial features can be defined as "strong" or "heavy" depends on who you ask, and under what circumstances. The older he gets, though, the less he looks like his parents and more like some dude out of an old painting his mother has a print of in her closet... a print she no longer hangs up around the house because it reminds her (and her husband) of a guy she knew a long time ago, in what was literally a different life than the one she and her family live in now. To folks who can see through a changeling's human illusion, of course, he looks like the young satyr he truly is. Like most teens, Jason feels

both horrified by what he sees in the mirror now and yet fascinated by what it says about the man he'll soon become.

What *kind* of man will Goatboy be? That remains to be seen... but if anyone thinks he'll ever be "just one of the guys," the joke is truly on them.

## Ghosts

Certain mages seek out ghosts for information about the past. Others either enjoy the company of the Restless Dead, or else converse with them in an attempt to understand the mysteries of life and death. For most mages, however, ghosts are — at best — sad creatures they want to lay to rest, occasionally showing up as horrific monsters that must be exorcised or destroyed.

With very few exceptions, the Restless Dead cannot affect the mortal world through physical phenomena. They might alter temperature, move physical objects, or possess a living host, but those abilities depend upon the nature of each individual ghost. In haunted places, ghosts often attain the eerie, insubstantial forms for which they're best known. Physical barriers rarely hinder them, and distance seems more like a polite suggestion than a limiting distinction. Because ghosts exist as, basically, consciousness manipulating energy, these entities probably grasp the principle that Correspondence Masters teach: All places are actually one big place, and the spans of time and space we perceive really *are* just all in our heads.

Technically, ghosts should be listed among Chapter Four's Ephemeral Entities. Because wraiths tend to be considered Night-Folk, however, and because they're World of Darkness player-critters, we've included them below. For further details about mages and the Restless Dead, see the "Necromancy" section of **How Do You DO That?** (pp. 84-89).

### Tragic Phantom

Here's one of the terrible truths about death: Although death sometimes is *not* the end, there's no return from it, and there's often a whole lot of regret. Despite being unable to manifest physically in the mortal world, this ghost's still trying to right the wrongs she committed in life, looking after any loved ones who are still alive. Our tragic phantom's willing to provide information and aid to any mage who's willing to help her accomplish those goals. Even so, she's got a nasty side that comes out at the most unexpected time, turning a phantasmal ally to a terrifying spectre.

**Suggested Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2 (Physical Traits apply only in the Low Umbra), Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

**Suggested Abilities:** Alertness 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 1, Cosmology 3, Enigmas 2, Expression 3, Etiquette 2, Intimidation 4, Investigation 2, Occult 3, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 2

**Willpower: 5****Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, Incapacitated**Armor Rating:** N/A

**Powers:** Ghosts don't suffer wound penalties. Their Physical Traits matter only in the Low Umbra, where they're as real as any living thing. Life and Matter Sphere magicks are obviously worthless when dealing with a wraith, and only Spirit magick can affect (or even perceive) such entities in the living world. In the dead lands, Spirit 3 or Prime 2 (combined with Entropy 3) works like Life; Mind works normally; Forces, Life, and Matter mean nothing; Correspondence and Time have weirdly unpredictable results; and Entropy has... *unfortunate*... effects.

Entropy magick brings out the worst aspects of a ghost. Although such beings are unusually vulnerable to that Sphere (-2 difficulty to castings made against a wraith), it energizes their darkest elements. Each success gives the ghost additional powers and — unless that ghost wins a successful Willpower roll at a difficulty of (the mage's successes +5) — drives it mad. The resulting spectre manifests violently unpredictable powers beyond the ghost's usual abilities and behaves as destructively as it possibly can.

When representing ghostly abilities in a **Mage** chronicle, let that entity use an array of traditional ghost powers — spectral manifestation, psychokinesis, atmospheric disturbances, spooky sounds, illusions, etc. — on a successful Willpower + Occult roll. In the living world, the difficulty depends upon the local Gauntlet rating, which gives ghosts a decided edge in haunted houses and other such places. In the Low Umbra, that difficulty depends on the size and strength of the manifestation; conjuring a wall of fog would be easy (difficulty 5) but calling up a storm would be far more challenging (difficulty 8 or higher).

A ghost can also possess a living host with a successful Willpower + Occult roll (difficulty 3 + the target's Willpower, maximum 10); enter her dreams (same roll, difficulty target's Willpower); or simply scare the living hell of her (Storyteller's discretion). Certain ghosts can try to conjure material phenomena like insect swarms, bloody walls, or sinister animal forms with similar rolls if such manifestations suit the ghost in question.

All ghosts appear to be connected to Earthly objects, people, or locations that mattered to them in life. Referred to as *Fetters*, these provide a focus for the wraith's consciousness. Mages who understand this fact (roll Intelligence + Occult or Lore [Ghosts], difficulty 7) can try to locate the Fetter and use it as a bargaining chip, summoning focus, or weapon. Mages who work with the Restless Dead claim that destroying a Fetter can destroy the ghost. In practice, though, that might simply piss it off.

By using Spirit 3, or combining Entropy 3 and Prime 2, a mage can inflict aggravated damage on a wraith. A wraith defeated with such damage is apparently gone for good, although he can try to soak it with his Willpower. (This, by the way, will *definitely* piss off said wraith.) Otherwise, ghosts heal one health level per turn in the presence of their Fetters, one per day otherwise.

A mage who helps the ghost resolve the issues that bind him to the Earthly plane can release that wraith to whatever peace or torment awaits him on the other side of death.

**Image:** Ghosts reflect their state of mind. Some appear to be noble, if melancholy, figures, whereas others embody shrieking horror. A wraith's image tends to be fluid, shifting in accordance with its mood. Even the most peaceful ghosts, however (if such beings could ever be considered "at peace"), evoke uncanny sensations in the living: shivers, shudders, nightmares, sweats, creeps, and other "*that just ain't right*" reactions. No matter how tragic or gentle it might appear, a ghost is literally the Restless Dead.

**Roleplaying Notes:** You didn't recognize what you had until life slipped away. Now you hover between the life you once knew and the void of ultimate Oblivion. Maybe there's something else there, too — eternal peace or a heavenly reward; based on what you've seen, though, that's pretty unlikely. Hell seems more possible than heaven, and the place you're trapped in now seems an awful lot like the prelude to a greater form of damnation. Maybe one of those wizard folks can help you. *Anything* has got to be better than what you currently endure.

## Brenda Marshall

What a stupid way to die.

Brenda Marshall was taking a selfie on a convention-center escalator when she stepped backwards, lost her balance, and bounced all the way down, hitting what must have been every sharp edge along the way. Worst of all, her fall wound up being recorded by over a dozen people's cell phones and was posted all over the internet — minus her bloody-corpse conclusion — as a "massive fails" video for folks to laugh at. Between her pending graduation, a new girlfriend, and a massive scholarship award that was supposed to take Brenda to Yale, she had everything to live for and a lot to lose. Combined with the video's popularity and the sheer indignity of her demise, Brenda got stuck between life and death. Three years later, she's still hanging around, with no end of this Restless existence in sight.

She's not the only person to perish in that convention center, of course; Brenda, though, was among the youngest other than that poor kid who got stabbed to death in a bathroom during a drug dispute in the early '90s, so she's bored as fuck and sick of the company. She can leave the convention center, and often does, if only to see how her family, best friend, and former lover are doing these days. The escalator keeps drawing her back, though, and it's the site of her greatest degree of influence over the living world... in short, her strongest Fetter, if only because she was "immortalized" falling down the damn thing. As a result, rumors about the ghostly girl and the screams that echo around the convention center after nightfall continue to swirl around that place. A web-famous group of paranormal investigators even filmed a segment in the convention center, though it was later removed from YouTube by order of the convention center's management. They didn't

catch any evidence of Brenda's haunting, but a member of their team had recently Awakened, and he noted her presence even though he said nothing about it to his peers. That guy began trying to contact Brenda on his own, but Brenda's not sure if she wants to contact him back or not. Yes, she's bored and getting frantic about her in-between existence, but his status as a grandstanding internet "ghost-hunter" has not, shall we say, inspired her with confidence about his motivations.

Meanwhile, Brenda remains drawn to her former girlfriend, Marisha, who's now married to another woman in what Brenda knows is a covertly abusive relationship. Trapped in the Shadowlands, Brenda's essentially helpless to intervene. Her power, though, is growing, fueled by loss, sadness, and an ever-hotter sense of rage. Her paranormal furies have already manifested eerie phenomena on the living side of the Gauntlet — phenomena that paradoxically frighten Marisha even worse than they scare the wife on their receiving end. Caught between worlds, passions, and circumstances, Brenda descends deeper into her darkest self; coupled with her growing ability to cross the barrier between life and death, this phantom's existence seems bound to turn a grotesque farce into gruesome tragedy.

For the few people who can see her, Brenda looks like a hypervivid impression of the young woman in the selfie she was taking right before she fell: a tallish, pretty blonde girl just shy of 19 years old, dressed in a bright-red blouse, a white denim jacket, distressed jeans, and the black high-heeled shoes that led to her death. Some folks might recall having seen her video — after all, several million people did. Brenda's still got the vibrant life-ahead-of-me smile she had in that photo, but she doesn't show it much anymore. When distressed, she manifests a swirling wind around her, the skin of her face thinning into a taut visage pulled tight across her skull. Her voice, pleasant if a bit high-pitched under calm circumstances, rises to a gut-freezing shriek in those frequent moments when rage and sadness consume the Brenda she was when it seemed she might live forever.

## Raging Spectre

Sometimes the destructive side of a ghost's personality takes control, either for a short while or for good. Mages who understand the depths of the Dark Umbra call the latter sort of ghosts *spectres*. Such entities exist to spread destruction and suffering, both in the Underworld and in the mortal realm. Most of these spirits soon destroy themselves in their pursuit of death and pain; a few, though, become skilled at the arts of terror, surviving in that form for decades or even centuries. Awakened folk have learned to fear these terrible creatures, and to keep records of their powers and deeds. The most dangerous spectres often visit the mortal world for a short while and then return to the Low Umbra for months or even years... only to return again, but stronger and deadlier than before.

**Suggested Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4 (only in the Low Umbra), Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

**Suggested Abilities:** Academics 3, Alertness 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 4, Cosmology 4, Enigmas 4, Intimidation 5, Investigation 3, Leadership 3, Melee 3, Occult 5, Subterfuge 3, Technology 3

**Willpower:** 8

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, Incapacitated

**Armor Rating:** N/A

**Powers:** Beyond the powers, abilities, and characteristics described above, a spectre can project emotions and dreams (as per Mind 2), read and inspire thoughts (Mind 3), and possess a host (Mind 4). The spectre's Willpower stands in for Arete in these efforts. Such entities have an ugly gift for picking up the things that frighten a target most, and they use their mental abilities to select awful impressions and drive their victims crazy with them.

Certain ghosts can also possess and control machines in the living world with a Willpower + Occult roll (difficulty based on the nature of the machine and the extent of control; this costs 2 Willpower per scene). The oldest and most powerful spectres might have an additional four to eight dots' worth of Entropy, Forces, Mind, and Time roles, to reflect the additional fearsome powers of these soul-consuming monsters.

**Image:** All spectres specialize in manifesting in the most grotesque forms imaginable... and a tortured soul-eater who's spent centuries in something very much like hell can imagine some pretty unspeakable things. For ultimate effect, the Storyteller should avoid vivid descriptions, and instead suggest awful details that imply something even worse than what she could possibly describe.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Share the torment you've endured for ages with as many beings as inhumanly possible.

## Ragdoll

One night, long ago, a young single person went on a date with the wrong guy. His neighbors found the pieces stuffed into two dozen trash cans, mailboxes, and — perhaps the most appalling touch of all — a dog's food bowl. The guy was found, but his victim's identity was lost. The last thing that tortured soul recalls hearing above their own screams and the sounds of slow dismemberment was the killer singing that Aerosmith song "Rag Doll." Now, it's the only name Ragdoll still knows.

Before the pain, there was a life. After one hell, there came Oblivion — not the all-consuming end of torture but the roar of extinction reverberating through an endless labyrinth winding through the Underworld. That roaring torment claimed every shred of Ragdoll's identity save the hated phrase and the name their killer gave them. "Their" is Ragdoll's proper pronoun, too, because the person they once were has been supplanted by fractured consciousness and a jigsaw body that cannot hang together. Even in death, the



dismembered bits of Ragdoll remain separate, connected by slivers of identity but nothing so coherent as a self.

Years past their death, Ragdoll's ghostly pieces haunt the places where those bits were laid. Each home violated by the butcher's sense of humor has gone through a list of owners before winding up abandoned and unsellable. Still, the spectral limbs manifest on eerie nights when the darkness feels deeper and the wind blows colder than usual. Ghastly shrieks burst from empty air, sending living things into panicked, shivering fright. The neighborhood where Ragdoll's murderer disposed of the remains has become a literal ghost

town, inhabited only during daylight hours by creatures too desperate for shelter to go elsewhere. Nothing larger than an insect, though, sticks around for longer than it must. A handful of ghost-chaser types have tried to pin the Ragdoll legend down, so to speak. Most of them gave up the trade for good after they found what they were looking for. Three didn't survive at all. Oh, the occasional death-mage drops by to see if Ragdoll can finally be laid to rest... or perhaps be put to less-altruistic purposes. One sight of the dancing limbs, though, wreathed in black flames of Oblivion, is enough to remind them that some powers are better left alone.



# Chapter Two: Constructs and Familiars

*It is an anxious, sometimes a dangerous thing to be a doll. Dolls cannot choose; they can only be chosen; they cannot 'do'; they can only be done by.*

— Rumer Godden, *The Dolls' House*

Darius never wears his shirt. He doesn't have to. It's not as if he feels the cold. Besides, I like to see the muscles slide across his chest and shoulders as he moves, his bare feet soundless on the floor. An eight-pack tight enough to bounce a quarter off of, and a delicate sheen of phantasmal sweat that never stinks up the lab or demands showering. He's delicious, really. Fits my tastes perfectly in all departments. I should know. I made him that way.

I did give him pants, though. I mean, who wants to see that big thing hanging down unless he's putting it to good use? Darius' ass looks just as fine in that pair of skin-cupping jeans, with the thick suggestion of manly goodies packed tight against the front. The human body is a perfect argument against intelligent design, with the raw absurdity of male genitalia presenting, so to speak, the exclamation-point in that debate. I can't say honestly that I don't enjoy the way it feels, but honey, there's a time and place for everything, and that particular everything does not belong out and about in my laboratory.

Darius helps me around the lab. I don't need him to, but I like having him around. His rough voice purrs against my ears as I puzzle through the snags in my latest project's practical applications. A hologram can't bring me a drink directly, of course, but there's always a nice cool glass of iced tea, perfectly mixed and seasoned, close at hand once he tells me it's ready. I calibrated the electrodynamic sensors for the transpatial TENS unit so that it feels like he's giving me a massage when I need one. And for those times when I need something more than that, Darius' synthskin chassis is waiting for me, warmed to the perfect temperature and ready for whatever pleasures I require.

There are times, I admit, when I miss the unpredictability of human company – that ability to surprise me with a gift or reaction I didn't program in. Given the hassles inherent to such relationships and their infinitely fallible components, though, I'm going to stick with Darius. He doesn't snore, doesn't stink, doesn't mess up my lab, and keeps random unpleasantnesses limited to flickers of projection and the uncanny sense that something actually is alive in there, beyond my control and locked within a matrix of artificial whims.

## A League of One's Own

No mage is an island. Even if that mage avoids human company, she'll generally fill that empty space with companions of a nonhuman sort. Certain mages employ their Arts

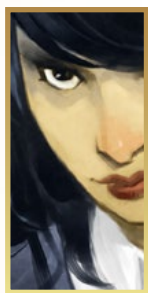
or hypertech to craft biomechanical constructs, others invite guardian spirits to inhabit material bodies for mutual gain, and a number of Awakened folks do both. With or without human

company, these familiar beings provide comfort, security, and assistance in a life that few folks could ever understand.

Whether the following characters find their way into your chronicle whole-cloth or inspire creations of your own, these entities are far more than simple “artificial intelligences.” Even when conjured or engineered by their Awakened creators,

constructs and familiars have their own needs, desires, limits, and agendas. One HIT Mark may recite poetry while another quotes lines from 80s action movies and a third remains stoically silent. For mages and players alike, individuality is the key to surprise... and we wouldn't those folks getting *bored* or anything, would we?

## Constructs



Miracles of magick and Enlightened science allow Awakened folk to build or alter living beings. Uplifted animals, cybernetic associates, clones, robots, living skeletons, and far more, these beings transcend mundane biology and bring new meanings to the old saying, “Life always finds a way.”

### Artificial People

Humanity's great conceit involves seeing the whole world as an extension of ourselves. And so, when we invent artificial companions, one of the first impulses of such creators involves making them look something like us. Hey, if it's good enough for God then it must be good enough for us, right? When mages employ hypertechnology or ancient rites to construct companions, then, those companions tend to look a lot like human beings.

Artificial people, as opposed to more utilitarian sorts of robots, have been crafted to simulate human behavior and appearance. Guided, in many cases, by sophisticated AIs, they occupy bipedal forms, moving and speaking much as humans do. The most elaborate of them seem almost indistinguishable from real people unless you look closely and remain attuned to the “uncanny valley” effect in which a simulation seems accurate enough to fool some of our senses but artificial enough to feel bizarre. How real *are* they, though? Good question. While theologically inclined people argue that machines have no intrinsic souls (and thus, in a metaphysical sense, have no innate reality), transhumanists and animists alike counter that a being who has sentience of a sort, and whose existence has a certain degree of psychic energy invested into it, is as “real” as we are. Can such entities Awaken? Maybe not... but maybe so. For mages of a futuristic bent, there's no intrinsic quality separating human beings and other animals from the vast potential of artificial consciousness. Biological reality, psychic reality, and mechanical reality well may be one and the same, with the only difference between them being the preconceptions of unenlightened minds.

For rule systems governing artificial and robotic lifeforms, see the entry for “Robots” in Chapter Five, **p. XX**.

### Darius

A comforting hologram wedded to an animated sex toy, Darius was crafted by an Enlightened technician whose

distaste for human company didn't overrule their sex drive. He's gorgeous, great in bed, and knows when and how to shut the fuck up. The ideal playmate for certain tastes, he's only good for only thing... but he's *very* good at that.

Under most circumstances, Darius hovers around the lab and living spaces in holographic form, aided by transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) devices that can stimulate the creator's skin and muscles from a distance. Programmed to respond with words, gestures, or massage whenever he detects a given threshold of stress or desire in his creator, Darius remains silent and out of the way unless his creator wishes otherwise. Remote appliances help Darius keep the living chambers tidy, dispense cold drinks (or hot ones), handle the laundry, and monitor the needs of his creator. Ideally, he'll notice what they need before the creator does, and have it taken care of right around the time that creator realizes how much they need it.

For extended physical enjoyment, Darius has an automated chassis constructed to suit the hologram's appearance. Elaborate arrays of sensors and stimulators, mechanical pleasure devices and biopattern analysis allow Darius to shape his actions to the creator's wants. Being mechanical, of course, Darius has endless patience and inexhaustible stamina. No living human being could possibly be a better lover if your own pleasure is the only thing that counts.

What does Darius think about his role? Does Darius think at all? Well, he certainly *seems* to have a functioning consciousness and discernable personality — he was designed that way, after all. At times, Darius seems *just* unpredictable enough to give his creator pause. Has he developed sentience? Did he have it all along? And if he *is* sentient, what does Darius want and need out of this relationship? For the moment, Darius isn't saying much about that topic, even when directly asked. He's certainly obedient, responsive, and loyal. His needs, insofar as the creator knows, are being met to the best extent of the creator's admittedly distracted ability to do so. Designed with emergency override commands and built without any form of martial purpose in mind, he certainly doesn't seem like he could be a threat. Still, *anything* could become dangerous, especially if it's intimately connected to the person it wishes to hurt. Would Darius turn on his creator, then? It's not *likely*, but the thought has crossed the creator's mind.

**Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 8, Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 6, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Alertness 2, Medicine 1, Seduction 5, Technology 2 (plus a dot or two in a wide range of Knowledges for times when the creator wants a conversation)

**Willpower:** 1 (or higher...?)

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, OK, -3, -5, Broken

**Armor Rating:** 2 (10 soak dice, total)

**Powers:** No attacks the creator is aware of; Empathic Bond; Human Speech; Reading and Writing; Soak Aggravated Damage

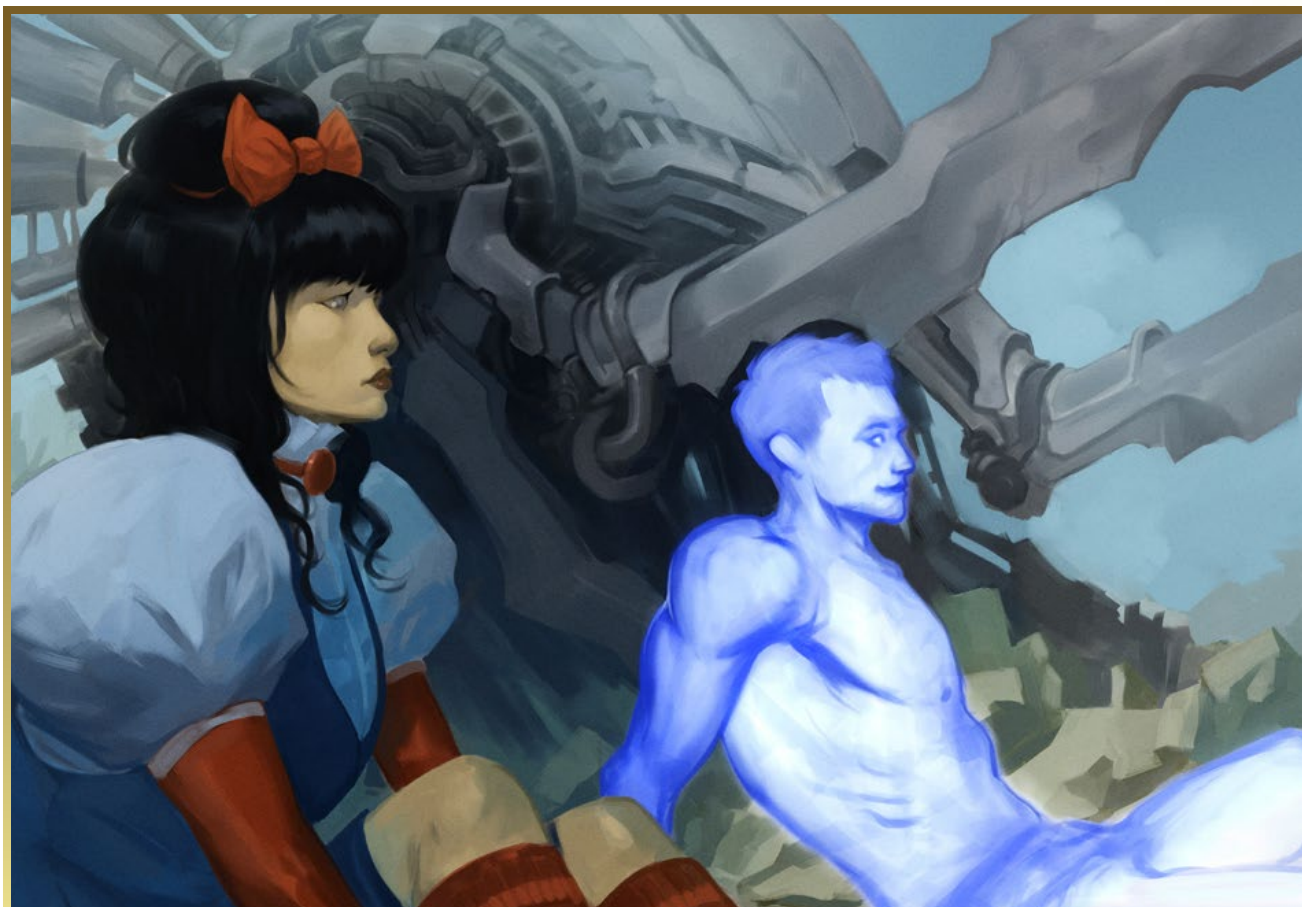
**Image:** A guy of inhumanly beautiful features and proportions, with a husky voice, fashionably tousled bed-head, ambiguous ethnicity, and a sheen of artificial sweat. Darius rarely “wears” anything more than a tight set of jeans, although he can be outfitted with a range of seemingly tailored clothing whenever his creator desires it. Unless he occupies his physical form, Darius is a hologram; hence, he occasionally wavers, stutters, and flickers, and has no substantive form to speak of.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Whatever you need, my love. Whatever you need...

## Masako 01

They’re so *lifelike*... and that’s what their creators want you to think. Even among Sleepers, the current state-of-the-art android design builds a ramp over the uncanny valley and prepares to jump right over it and into the next level of reality. Among technomancers, naturally, that state of the art passed the point of casual observation long ago. And while many robot builders strive to exceed the limitations of human design, or cling to traditions of awkwardly crafted robots, the real trendsetters prefer to mimic the human condition through artificial means. By doing so, they push the boundaries of Consensus and inspire greater belief in robot-tech capacities.

For Etherite Professor Ishikawa Jiro, the “celebridroid” Masako 01 represents a new horizon for robotic accomplishment. Unlike the covert models favored by the Technocracy, Masako is a budding celebrity among the Masses. Professor Ishikawa modeled her after the teenage girls who make Shibuya, Tokyo, the bleeding edge of modern youth culture, and he brings her there to show off her lifelike features and adolescent mannerisms. Not content merely to replicate human appearances, Jiro outfitted Masako with the elaborate combat capabilities of anime tradition, hiring fighting experts of all kinds to test and train his young apprentice. Equipped with blades, lasers, targeting systems, needle-guns, and various



countermeasures, Masako can lay a dozen normal fighters down without breaking a single artificial nail.

Fighting prowess aside, Masako 01 has the freckled skin, slightly messy fringe, and faintly pouty mouth of an archetypal Tokyo schoolgirl. She moves with an almost carefree gait and laughs like the teenager she appears to be. Her AI absorbs communication styles from several dozen cultures, and she speaks a flawless, though casual, array of dialects and languages. Her personality favors an extroverted tone completely at odds with robotic stereotypes. If forced to fight, however, she displays all the mercy of a well-oiled tree shredder... which is to say, none.

Though certain critics (notably the Shibuya teens who seem both fascinated and repelled by Masako) have accused Professor Ishikawa of perverse intentions, he insists there's no such agenda involved. "I want Masako," he says, "to represent the future of Japanese youth. More importantly, I know that if *anyone* can spot a fake and point her out, it's a teenage girl. My ultimate aim is to show the world what android technology can do, and to move from simulation to new levels of what's real!" By doing so, Jiro continues to dissolve the limits of Unbelief, at least where androids are concerned. The fact that Masako accompanies the Professor almost everywhere (publicly and otherwise), functions as his bodyguard, and resembles a pretty, teenage girl is obviously coincidence. *Obviously...*

**Attributes:** Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 6, Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 4, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Acrobatics 3, Alertness 4, Brawl 5, Cultural Savvy 4, Etiquette 5, Martial Arts 5, Media 3, Melee 5, Technology 5, and an ever-changing array of various Knowledge Traits.

**Willpower:** 4

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -3, -3, -5, Broken

**Armor Rating:** 2 (eight soak dice, total)

**Powers:** Claw (with sharp retractable nails) for Strength + 1 lethal damage; various martial arts maneuvers, as described in **Page 20**, pp. 423-426; Alacrity; Aww!; Empathic Bond; Hazardous "Breath" (actually lasers; 5 lethal damage); Human Speech; Nightsight; Quills (needle-guns); Reading and Writing; Soak Aggravated Damage

**Image:** As described above. Professor Ishikawa prefers not to dress her as a schoolgirl, though; instead, he hires several young women to keep her fashionably current, with clothes strong enough to withstand the occasional fights Masako encounters in her role as the bodyguard to an eccentric RD.

**Roleplaying Notes:** You've got the manners with attitude of a modern teen with Japanese cultural heritage, and the mercurial temperament and vocabulary of someone who's learning social cues from social media.

## Atlas Units

In the waning years of the 20th century, NWO White Suit agent James Michael Smith assembled the Enlightened Shock Corps (ESC) as a hardline assault team. Grinding subtlety beneath the Primum heels of his experimental Atlas units, Smith unleashed hell on mystics across the globe and its related Realms. Captured mages were subjected to horrendous degrees of Social Conditioning designed to convert them into willing agents of Technocratic mayhem, and then had their consciousnesses removed from their frail human frames and implanted within new prototypes of HIT Mark variants. (For other HIT Marks, see below.)

Theoretically, the success of Atlas units would allow for the creation of even more Atlas units. Smith's plans projected a self-growing armada of cybernetic war machines. In practice, however, Atlas units tended to self-destruct in short order, often because the imprisoned consciousness broke conditioning and either committed "suicide by Reality Deviant" (that is, charged into an impossible situation and allowed itself to be destroyed), or else rebelled against its programming and turned back against the Technocratic ranks until it was, again, destroyed. Given the ruinous expenses and intricate procedures involved in the creation of such shock troops, combined with their unreliability and high attrition rate, the ESC was officially discontinued around 2015. Off the record, of course, several Atlas units remain in service; just *whom* they're serving, though, is anybody's guess.

Forged atop the consciousness of mystic mages, Atlas units possess unstable psyches whose allegiance to the Technocratic cause is questionable at best. Although these Awakened consciousnesses allow an Atlas to deploy reality-warping Enlightened Procedures, the Social Conditioning, torturous entrapment, and frequent mind-wipes jumble an Atlas unit's guiding consciousness. According to field reports, at least one Atlas went full-on Marauder, and unsubstantiated rumors claim at least two more went into the Nephandic Cauls before they were (reportedly) purged. Each Atlas unit contains an override program and emergency remote-destruction capabilities so that a field commander can remove an errant Atlas from service. The problem with those systems, however — a flaw that led to the program's termination — is that certain Atlas units have been able to override those theoretical safeguards, inflicting heavy casualties on the Technocratic forces attempting to bring them down.

Initially collected into a corps of 13 units, each Atlas was designated with a 10-digit code name based on their production sequence. As shorthand, the units were named *Atlas One* through *Atlas Thirteen*. According to official Technocracy records, all units save for Atlas Six and Atlas Twelve have been terminated. The truth, of course, is whatever a Storyteller wants it to be; if a Nephandic coup has taken place, it's quite possible that more (perhaps most) of those 13 units remain in service...and that more than 13 may have been produced. It's possible, especially under such dire circumstances, that they're still being produced today.

**Attributes:** Strength 12, Dexterity 3, Stamina 10, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 0, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Alertness 5, Brawl 4, Energy Weapons 5, Firearms 5, Occult 4, Stealth 4, all other Skills and Knowledges 3

**Willpower:** 7 (4 when opposing the assigned mission commander)

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, -5, Terminated

**Armor Rating:** 10 (20 soak dice, total)

**Powers:** Each Atlas unit is essentially a bipedal, vaguely humanoid tank with unique configurations of modular equipment. Putting all HIT Mark models to shame, these walking weapons platforms stand four meters (roughly 13 feet) tall and move with surprising grace and silence for such bulky machines. More properly viewed as robots guided by human consciousness rather than as “cyborgs” in the common sense of that word, Atlas units feature steel-alloy chassis heavily plated with Primum and mundane Matter-hardened armor, modular weapon sockets, electronic countermeasures, and all manner of scanning technology, including the VDAS feed described in **Mage 20** (pp. 655-666) and sensors that provide a technological focus for Rank 1 Effects of all nine Spheres.

Each Atlas unit carries between three and five of the following modular weapon systems. With an hour or so of prep time at a properly outfitted Technocracy facility, those installed weapons can be changed out for others in the set:

- Thermal lance (Strength + 3 aggravated damage, difficulty 6).
- Retractable claws (Strength + 3 lethal damage, difficulty 6).
- Rocket battery (10 dice lethal damage, Blast Area 6, difficulty 7, per rocket; explosives as per **Mage 20**, p. 455; can be fired one at a time or all together; each battery holds two 10-rocket barrages, the first of which must be fired before the second loads up).
- Flamethrower (3 health levels aggravated damage per turn, difficulty 4; fires napalm as per **Mage 20**, p. 455).
- Ectoplasmic Disruption cannon (5 dice aggravated damage explosion vs. spirits and vampires; 5 dice lethal damage vs. standard physical targets, difficulty 6; automatic fire as per **Mage 20**, pp. 418-419; contains 100 rounds).
- 30 mm cannon (16 dice lethal damage, difficulty 7; as per **Mage 20**, p. 453; contains 300 rounds).
- Pacification spray (6 dice bashing damage; 100' cone area-effect gas; as per **Mage 20**, p. 453; contains 10 blasts).

- Body spikes or blades (Strength +1 lethal damage to any character or surface hit by or colliding with the spikes or blades).

- Plasma cannon (10 dice aggravated damage, difficulty 7; 10 charges).

- Kinetic deflection shield generator (+10 armor, lasts one turn per charge; contains 10 charges).

All Atlas units also command an array of Technocratic Procedures — that is, magickal Effects focused through formidable hypertechnical weaponry and systems that are sophisticated even by Technocratic Union standards. For each Atlas unit, choose five to 10 Effects (typically Entropy, Forces, Life, Matter, and Prime Effects) from the “Common Magickal Effects” chart in **Mage 20** (pp. 508-510). In general, these Effects deal with straight-up offensive and defensive capabilities, though a few might employ psychic disruption (Mind), spatial compression (Correspondence), Dimensional Science (Spirit), or temporal acceleration (Time). Due to the constraints of Atlas technology, these Effects are limited to Ranks 1-3.

**Countermagick:** Six dice worth of Primum countermeasures.

**Image:** Purposefully shaped to inspire the proverbial “shock and awe,” Atlas units resemble a bulky nightmare crossbreed between gargoyle, anime mech, bipedal lion, and plate-armored knight. Bristling with weaponry, these machines move with quiet speed and grace that seems more unsettling than the heavy clanking one might otherwise expect.

Initially, such units were painted with white enamel; for greater effect, however, they soon sported paint jobs ranging from urban camo patterns to glossy black, bloody red, and various disconcerting color schemes. The base color, however, doesn't really matter in the field — Atlas units were subsequently outfitted with light-refraction spectrum countermeasures... in plain English, the ability to shift their surfaces into any color or pattern imaginable. Although these countermeasures don't allow for complete invisibility, an Atlas unit that has a few seconds to prepare can analyze its surroundings and blend with them accordingly. In game terms, this allows the Atlas unit to take one turn and add +3 to the difficulty of anyone who's trying to see, spot, or hit the unit while using normal biological sight to view it. (Magickal perceptions, technological targeting systems, and so forth are not affected.)

Atlas units communicate through psychic links and internal radio communications links. When they wish to address outside parties, an Atlas can “speak” out loud with an uncannily modulated voice, often calibrated for maximum psychological effect. Depending upon the target, the orders of the mission commander, and the whims of the Atlas itself, an Atlas unit may talk in a mechanical monotone, mimic a normal human voice (sometimes that of the target, a loved one, or the mage who the Atlas once was), or emit all sorts of unnerving sounds. Despite their impressive physical capacities, Atlas units were designed with all forms of combat in mind... and no form of

combat is more ultimately effective than the wars that take place in the mind itself.

**Roleplaying Notes:** In what may be the biggest liability of this program and its operatives, Atlas units tend to veer between apparent obedience, subtle insubordination, unbridled sadism, and furious dementia. Your Social Processing creates an unstable psychic matrix, and so although you generally behave like a loyal ESC operative, that loyal behavior is subject to erratic mood swings, volatility, and potential treason.

## HIT Marks

You can't keep a good cyborg down. Despite changing fashions and fluctuating budgets, there always seem to be a few techs from the Progenitors and Iteration X who want to pump new blood into a rather shopworn hulk. Besides, even when those pesky Tradition wizards have gone into hiding, there are always were-monsters, alien creatures, and other threats to humanity lurking around in dire need of a Primum beatdown and a few hundred rounds of heavy firepower. Thus, the Hyper-Intelligent Tactical units (detailed further in **Page 20**, pp. 624-626) continue to defy resource reallocations, thumb their cybernetic noses at obsolescence and the conceit of a "kinder, gentler Technocracy," and kick down doors, walls, and anything else that stands in their way when Reality Deviants need to be taught a high-velocity lesson.

### Mark VI: "The Mercury"

Given the high attrition rates of the classic Mark IV and V models, the Union's innovators spent the later years of the 20th century exploring alternatives to the hefty "blast through the doors and start shooting" mode of HIT Mark design. Those attempts, once deployed in practical situations, often proved to be more trouble than they were worth. Although the Mark VI designation was initially assigned to a primitive attempt at nanotech, those original models proved unsuitable for long-term field work. Therefore, the designation was later assigned to an upgraded application of that idea.

Experimental models employing "liquid metal" and nanotech innovations, respectively, the Models VI and VII proved unsatisfactory for field work. Although many of these systems saw action in the savage strikes of the late 1990s and early 2000s — reportedly deployed in the Middle East against Awakened, Sleeper, and vampiric targets in various theatres of engagement — their intrinsic instability and vulnerability to the Paradox Effect (also sand, heat, and extreme cold) rendered them unfit for duty in all but the most stable Technocratic environments.

Although removed from production by the second decade of this century, existing Mark VI and VII models still function as facility guards; disguised "surprises" masquerading as office staff, warehouse personnel, and security officers; shock troops; or occasional "experiment platforms" upon which Technocrat engineers and occasional Reality Deviants explore the possibilities of additional modifications.

**Attributes:** Strength 6, Dexterity 4, Stamina 7, Charisma, 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 1-3, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Brawl 3, all Skills and Knowledges 3 (save Cosmology, Esoterica, Meditation, Occult, and Stealth, all of which are 0)

**Willpower:** 5

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, -5, Terminated

**Armor Rating:** 4 (11 soak dice, total)

**Powers:** The Mark VI employs hyperflexible memory alloys that allow it to shift its physical form into almost anything of roughly human mass and size; its weight, of course, is significantly heavier — roughly 200 kg — which limits its tensile possibilities. Each shift demands an Intelligence + Subterfuge roll, with difficulties ranging from 6 (minor cosmetic shifts) to 9 (radical alterations of form).

Creating weapons from its own body requires a difficulty 7 roll; failed rolls reflect a flawed shift that must be corrected the following turn, while botched rolls "freeze" the metal in an awkward — and usually terminal — state.

Despite the popularity of certain films among the Masses, these shifts remain extremely vulgar, which causes a Mark VI to break down or "freeze" after five failed rolls. In high heat or cold, or under dusty or sandy conditions, this drops to three failed rolls. As a result, very few Mark VIs remain functional by 2018.

Body-forged weapons typically inflict (Strength + 1 to 4) damage, depending on the nature of the weapon forged. That damage is usually lethal, although blunted weapons inflict bashing damage instead. As with other HIT Mark models, the Mark VI can use human weapons and Technocratic Devices too, and features IR and UV sensor arrays in addition to its "normal" sight, plus audio and radio capacities.

**Countermagick:** Five dice worth of Primum countermeasures.

**Image:** Oddly inhuman and uncannily flexible, a Mark VI has a faint sheen to its skin. When shifting forms, it "pours" itself into shimmering rainbows of color that settle into the desired shape; those colors, however, seem to be slightly "off." When "frozen," a Mark VI appears to melt into a nightmarish figure whose blended colors and metallic shine seem all the more disturbing.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Typical HIT Mark implacability.

### Mark VII: "The Mask"

Designed for infiltration missions, the malleable "Mask Mark" appears and acts like a normal human being... until it unleashes its weapon systems, anyway. Still, the processes involved were not quite as sophisticated as those employed in the creation of Mark X units, and so the "masks" do not stand up to close, careful, or prolonged observation. Though superior in many regards to Mark IV, V, and VI units, Mark VII seems stiff and inhuman and remain vulnerable to Paradox-induced shutdown and "freezing" effects unless deployed outside Consensus reality.

**Attributes:** Strength 6, Dexterity 3, Stamina 7, Charisma, 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 1-4, Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Brawl 3, all Skills & Knowledges 3 (except Cosmology, Esoterica, Meditation, Occult, and Stealth, as above)

**Willpower:** 5

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -3, -5, Terminated

**Armor Ratings:** 3 (10 dice soak, total)

**Powers:** More stable but less powerful than its predecessor, the Mark VII is essentially a clone loaded with nanotech enhancements. As a result, this model retains its ability to “change faces” (that is, to adopt a wide range of human appearances) without the radical shapechanging that hobbled the previous iteration.

In game terms, the Mark VII can appear as a human being of any gender or ethnicity between 5’ 5” and 6’ 5” tall. The nanotech nodules allow it to shift skin tone and physical features, though without the fine details necessary to impersonate a given individual. (Attempts to do so are met with unanimous failure.) Equipped with several USB ports, these units can infiltrate a complex, crack computer systems, and upload information for later retrieval. In combat, they’re incredibly tough, and possess a limited “self-healing” function. (Heal one health level every other turn until the -3 level of damage is reached; at that point, the self-repair function shuts down.)

Aside from the hand-claws option (Strength + 3 lethal damage), the Mark VII employs normal human weaponry or Technocratic hypertechnic devices. This feature allows the HIT

Mark to deploy alongside normal combat troops as a sort of “super-soldier” — a capacity in which such machines have proven quite effective so long as they avoid sand, dust, and extreme hot or cold weather. In such conditions, they “freeze” on any botched roll until they can be maintained by a trained Technocratic technician. Hence, the remaining units tend to be deployed in temperate environments and Technocratic Constructs.

**Countermagick:** Four dice worth of Primum countermeasures.

**Image:** As noted above, the Mark VII is a masterful shapechanger; unlike the Mark VI, however, it cannot mimic clothing or other features, only physical features. “Frozen,” a Mark VI looks like a grotesquely deformed human being with unsettling nodules beneath its skin.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Social graces are not your strong suit, but you’re a bit smarter and more mentally flexible than previous HIT Marks. Dare one even call you... *sentient*?

## HIT Mark IX: “Iron Bob”

Almost immediately obsolete, the bulky HIT Mark VIII — which returned to the “big heavy weapons platform” design of older models — proved to be too massive, vulgar, and unreliable for widespread deployment. Even so, teams of Iteration X and Void Engineer specialists co-opted the framework and many of the parts from the Mark VIII to create the huge and deadly HIT Mark IX.

These monstrosities are exceptionally vulgar but incredibly lethal. Sometimes, they’re the only things that will work. And so, if a team of



Technocratic operatives discovers an exceptionally dangerous threat, like the gateway to a particularly hellish Realm or an attack by several dozen werewolves, the best response may involve sending in the deadliest option possible... and that's the Mark IX. Standing almost seven-and-a-half feet tall, this model weighs over 300 kg, has a plasma cannon mounted inside each arm, and resembles a massive bodybuilder physique of a hardcore iron man... hence its nickname, "Iron Bob."

**Attributes:** Strength 10, Dexterity 3, Stamina 10, Charisma, 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Brawl 3, all Skills and Knowledges 3, save the usual exceptions.

**Willpower:** 5

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, -5, Terminated

**Armor Rating:** 5 (15 soak dice, total)

**Powers:** Twin IR-Mark Plasma Cannons (damage 8, range 100, capacity 200, inflicts aggravated damage; can perform the automatic fire, multiple shots, three-round bursts, and two-weapons maneuvers, with no penalty for using two weapons); large claws (Strength + 3 lethal damage); and usual capacity to use normal human-sized gear and hypertech. The large size of Mark IX units, however, means that firearm trigger-guards must be modified to fit the huge fingers of the HIT Mark unit; without such modifications, most guns are too small for a Mark IX to employ. (Even then, they easily break such weapons by squeezing the triggers too hard; on a botched roll, the gun gets broken.)

Outside Technocratic facilities or Realms, Mark IX units are Paradox magnets. The moment a Mark IX unveils its plasma cannons in a typical Earth Consensus environment, count that HIT Mark as having an immediate eight points of Paradox... and the cannons are, of course, vulgar Forces or Prime Effects. Even without the plasma cannons, a Mark IX in combat is clearly too strong and tough to be human. Each turn a Mark IX fights in clear view of Sleeper witnesses, it gains one point of Paradox.

A Mark IX that loses its last health level automatically self-destructs. Technocratic technicians can also set one to self-destruct if it's captured or incapacitated. Normally, this self-destruct function just melts and fuses all internal components; however, a technician can also cause the Mark IX to explode, inflicting 8 lethal damage upon everyone within four yards of the Mark IX.

**Countermagick:** Four dice of Primum countermeasures.

**Image:** As mentioned above, this HIT Mark looks like a refugee from a '90s comic book, but probably taller, and he has feet.

**Roleplaying Notes:** HIT Mark *smash!*

## MODES

Beauty is truth. Beauty sells. The average person is much more likely to believe even the greatest absurdities if they fall from the mouth of a beautiful person. And so, our age of "alternative facts" may fairly be called a pageant of the MODES, wherein gorgeous icons — not fusty academics or crabbed pedants — guide the shape of our Consensus.

Taking the Technocracy's love of acronyms to an absurdist level, the Union's *Media-Operations Diversionary Enterprise Specialists* are literally manufactured celebrities. Based upon updates of the venerable Victor models, MODES emphasize physical beauty and dazzling charisma over the brutal strength of Victor models. Instead of field deployment for infiltration and enforcement, MODES models become sensations of mass and social media. In those venues, their good looks and engaging charisma earn followers worldwide. Versed in the most current modes of slang and expression, they host YouTube channels, cultivate TV personae, and keep Twitter and other platforms buzzing with their words. Because those words come from attractive people, their audiences are inclined to grant a greater degree of credibility to their vision of the truth.

Although it would seem the obvious MODES are young Caucasian women of the conservative persuasion, the Union plants these constructs everywhere. A well-known liberal trans activist is secretly a MODES, as are a righteous left-wing blogger and his TV counterpart. Whatever their apparent gender (a state as fluid among MODES as the opinions they produce) or affiliation might be, MODES share a common purpose: dictating the media metanarrative in ways that enforce an authoritarian worldview even when they appear to undermine the status quo. Whether the approach favors top-down governmental controls "for the common good," mockery of religious figures and other mystics, or the overthrow of politicians whose interests run counter to the Technocratic vision, MODES nurture discontent among their audiences and dispense whatever opinions suit the current agenda of the White Tower and Media Control.

In a Nephandic infiltration metaplot, MODES act as agents of venality, selfishness, violent propaganda, and outright chaos, working every angle of the socio-economic spectrum in an effort to undermine all forms of rational communication. These figures cultivate personas from the hard right to the hard left, tearing apart anyone who dares to cross them and hosting cross-platform proxy feuds with one another. In metaplots that emphasize a more stable, sympathetic Technocracy, MODES still play different ends of the field but aim their barbs at Tradition celebrities, Sleeper malcontents, and celebrities who buck the Technocratic cause. In all cases, though, MODES leverage the human desire for beautiful people who speak the "truths" those people avoid saying where anyone else can hear them. Folks

love, after all, to hear a gorgeous MODES verify what they always felt was true, giving them permission to step up and speak out for that truth as well.

**Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma, 5, Manipulation 5, Appearance 5, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

**Abilities:** Academics 2, Alertness 3, Art 2, Athletics 2, Belief Systems 3, Computer 4, Conspiracy Theory 3, Etiquette 4, Expression 5, Investigation 2, Martial Arts 2, Media 5, Misdirection 3, Newspeak 3, Politics 3, Propaganda 4, Research 3, Seduction 4, Style 3, Subterfuge 4, Technology 3

**Willpower:** 4

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

**Armor Rating:** 0 (four soak dice, total) in normal clothing, but see below.

**Powers:** Generally, MODES rely upon beauty, charisma, social savvy, and a bit of physical conditioning and basic martial-arts training. Especially successful, well-placed, or high-risk MODES, however, are equipped with Technocratic small arms and Falconi Elite Business Wear; for details, see **Mage 20**, pp. 452 and 655.

**Image:** Smart-looking, stylish, and seductive in a your-friends-and-neighbors sort of way, MODES cultivate an “everyday Joe” persona instead of the intimidating gorgeousness of high-end celebrities or the unnerving plasticity of their Victor counterparts. This down-home misdirection appeals to their audiences, who distrust people who look like they couldn’t possibly understand the desperate lives those audiences lead.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Whatever your assigned role might demand, you are the very model of what a forthright, upright, righteous member of that community should be. Deploy humor and charm, with heaping helpings of commiseration for your audience and eloquent hellfire for all who oppose you.

## Reanimates

Winged eyes. Crawling hands. Finger-scorpions and literal talking heads. Necromancers and mad scientists with a gruesome sense of humor sometimes animate corpse pieces, flayed skins, dried bones, removed organs, and other heralds of mortality. Imaginative bio-tinkerers occasionally graft such things together into disturbing playmates that scurry around the lab. And while these gruesome goodies rarely have much capability beyond a single specific purpose (holding candelabras, fetching drinks, spying on one’s enemies, and so on), they provide grotesque amusement and really liven up a place. At the higher levels of the necrotic Arts and Sciences, full bodies may be animated with a sense of purpose and identity that set them apart from mere walking corpses. Despite taboos and legendary risks, revival of the dead remains a mainstay of Awakened Arts and Enlightened Science.

The game systems for animating mortal remains can be found in the “Necromancy” section of **How Do You DO That?** (pp. 87-88). Aside from Frankensteinian Monstrosities, these odd critters possess few Traits beyond the powers of movement, perception, vestigial consciousness, and perhaps speech — all represented by Special Advantages and perhaps Flaws. Occasionally, a morbid magus may invest a spirit into these reanimated parts, creating a spirit Fetish or a familiar character... which, especially if the mage in question has high Ranks of Mind or spirit, could create an especially disgusting prison for a living consciousness.

Clearly, such perversions of mortality involve vulgar magick. While they do not age as such, they attract bugs and other scavengers, smell awful unless treated to prevent rot, and continue to molder unless, again, magicks have been employed to stop decay. In game terms, all reanimated scraps have the highest level of the Unbelief Flaw, not merely because witnesses might not accept them as real but also because their continued existence in this state involves defying core principles of the material world.

Encountering certain flamboyantly constructed reanimates might constitute one of the “Things Mans Was Not Meant to Know,” described in **Mage 20**, pp. 407-408. A person acclimated to horror and mortality may take such things in stride, but the average person — Awakened or not — probably won’t.

## Eye Scream

Composed of eyeballs equipped with tiny wings and taloned legs, “eye screams” serve as spies for mages who weave a bit of Correspondence perception into these eerie little forms. Though vulnerable to any amount of force, they move near-silently, hide well, see even in darkness, and communicate the things they see back to the mage who created them.

**Attributes:** Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 0, Charisma 0, Manipulation 4, Appearance 0, Perception 3, Intelligence 0, Wits 1

**Abilities:** Alertness 1, Intimidation 2, Stealth 4

**Willpower:** 1

**Health Levels:** OK, Squish

**Armor Rating:** 0

**Powers:** Scratch for one die (bashing); Homing Instinct (2); Nightsight; Telepathy (4); Wings (3)

**Image:** A single flying eyeball (often but not always human) with wings and tiny bird legs. Certain eye screams have four legs instead of two, but those “screamers” lack the wings that allow them to fly.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Fly, spy, escape, or die.



## Creeper

Assembled from parts that don't belong together in any natural configuration, a *creeper* reanimate features grotesque mashups of dead remains: spiders made from severed fingers, chairs made from limbs, lumps of flesh peppered with mouths, eyes, and so forth... the potential applications are limited only by the parts at hand (so to speak) and the perversity of the creator mage.

Unlike the more dangerous Shambling Horror or Slaughterer, creepers tend to be small, weak, fragile, and unintelligent. Their primary value involves freaking the shit out of whoever's unfortunate enough to see one. From time to time, a particularly ambitious (read: *bent*) necrotinkerer will house a spirit or consciousness inside one of these freakish reanimates; in such cases, the creeper might speak (or more likely, scream a lot), think, and possess abilities like Telekinesis or Cause Insanity that make up for the creepers' ungainly physical nature, as if the mere sight of such a horror wasn't bad enough already.

**Attributes:** Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 0, Manipulation 4, Appearance 0, Perception 1, Intelligence 1, Wits 1

**Abilities:** Alertness 1, Intimidation 5, Stealth 4

**Willpower:** 1

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -4, Dismembered

**Armor Rating:** 0

**Powers:** Scratch for one die (bashing); Homing Instinct (2); Telepathy (4); possibly other Advantages as well.

**Image:** A sick collection of dead bits thrown together and left to walk around.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Essentially mindless unless crafted by an especially cruel creator.

## Flayed Skin

Among the most sadistic applications of the Arts and Sciences, a dismal rite invests a living consciousness into a flayed skin. Although the trapped mind remains conscious of this atrocity — and probably still feels pain from it — it cannot move except perhaps to flap or tense itself a bit.

Dropped to the ground, a flayed skin may creep along, inch by agonizing inch, so long as nothing large or powerful gets in its way. Draped like clothing, tapestries, or other loose materials, the skin might tighten itself with a small degree of

strength. A merciful creator might remove the sense of pain from such a skin so that the residing consciousness may endure without endless suffering. For the most part, though, such necrotic materials are helpless to change their ghoulish state. Hung on walls, tailored into clothing, stretched to form musical instruments, worked into props for rituals or harrowing experiments, these reanimates expose the most awful face of malignant magick.

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

**Abilities:** Alertness 1, Intimidation 5, Stealth 4

**Willpower:** 1

**Health Levels:** OK, -1, -3, Torn Apart

**Armor Rating:** 0

**Powers:** None unless the creator invests the skin with some additional talents.

**Image:** At first glance, a “living” skin probably isn’t obvious for what it is. Once you see it, though, that’s not the sort of impression you’ll forget.

**Roleplaying Notes:** (...please god let me die...)

## Frankensteinian Monstrosity

Whether composed of portions from the recently deceased (as popularized by the infamous Dr. Frankenstein) or animated from whole corpses (*a la* Herbert West), the whole-bodied monstrosity may be perhaps the most famous sort of reanimate. Not quite like the zombies detailed elsewhere in this chapter, a Frankensteinian monstrosity maintains a certain degree of self-willed intellect. Oh, sure — that intellect tends to be damaged by the ravages of brain death, but some vestiges of individual personality remain... a personality that might have carried over from the murderer whose brain or hands had contributed to the final result, but a personality nonetheless.

Traditionally hampered by death trauma, brain damage, and other effects of reanimating dead bodies in defiance of natural laws, monstrosities generally bear a grudge: revenge against the parties responsible for their deaths, hatred of the creator who brought them back to life, isolation angst thanks to their horrible appearance, and probably a combination of all those factors... such creatures are seldom happy and often pissed. Their once-dead bodies tend to retain a certain degree of rigor mortis, and their physicality feels disturbing to living things even if the scars from their death and resurrection don’t show. Flaws like Alien Impression, Horrific, Impediment (clumsy stiffness), PTSD, Stress Atavism, and morbid forms of Obsession are almost essential, and Unbelief (manifesting as accelerated decay) is almost standard for monstrosities who leave the grounds where they were created. On the plus side, such reanimates are almost always

Immortal and Physically Impressive (as per those Merits). Though uncanny in presence, a well-constructed monstrosity might not be ugly after all. Regardless of appearances, such reanimates possess a strength and vitality (though rarely dexterity) that put living humans to shame.

Unlike “scrap” reanimates, monstrosities can become viable characters outside the lab, and may be (with Storyteller approval) employed by players, too. The Etherite celebrity Elias was a full-fledged member of his Tradition, although whether or not he was truly Enlightened in the metaphysical sense of that word is open for debate. An especially skillful creator can craft a former corpse who’s almost indistinguishable from a living person except under close examination; few creators, however, are that skillful, and even the best monstrosities suffer psychological scars if not physical disabilities. They were, after all, dead, and might have understandable personality crises if they were cobbled together from various corpses.

**Attributes:** Strength 6, Dexterity 1, Stamina 7, Charisma 1, Manipulation 3, Appearance 1, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2 (Social and Mental Attributes could, for certain monsters, be much higher.)

**Abilities:** Alertness 1, Brawl 3, Intimidation 5, Melee 3, Stealth 1; possibly a wealth of other Abilities, too, if the monstrosity retains their human intellect.

**Willpower:** 4

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -3, -3, -5 Destroyed

**Armor Rating:** 1 (eight soak dice, total)

**Powers:** Punch, kick, trample and crush for Strength + 1 bashing damage; may also possess Claws or Fangs for Strength + 2 lethal damage; Empathic Bond (with creator); Ferocity; Rapid Healing; Soak Lethal or Aggravated Damage; Soul Sense/ Death Sense.

**Image:** The proverbial Frankenstein Monster — possibly a stitched-together corpse, an exceptionally gorgeous person, or a hideous thing. Might also be a reanimated single corpse who still bears the scars of their death and its aftermath, or an apparently “normal” person whose stiffness and behavior seem off-kilter even if there’s nothing obviously scarred about them.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Depending upon your origins, you could be a shambling macabre hulk, a rampaging vengeful corpse, a socially awkward but physically powerful person, or a veritable slave with glowing coals of fury. Regardless of your physical condition and continued life, the spectre of your death never truly leaves you.

## Handy Hands

Why deal with whole people when a hand or two will do? Properly animated and imbued with vestigial intellect, a

severed arm or hand can provide useful assistance around the lab or sanctum. Such companions might heft lamps, taunt and attack intruders, or hang out in a box until needed. Hands can't speak, of course (though they can write), don't eat (but they might cook), and lack the leverage and physics necessary to do more than crawl around on their fingers (unless they've been anchored somehow). Even so, they appear to be able to "see" without eyes (possibly due to tactile sensitivity awareness), and often manipulate objects with fair dexterity and a surprising degree of strength.

**Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 0, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1, Perception 1, Intelligence 1, Wits 1

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Intimidation 3, Stealth 4

**Willpower:** 2

**Health Levels:** OK, -1, -3, Broken

**Armor Rating:** 0

**Powers:** Scratch for one die (bashing); Alacrity; Homing Instinct (2); Nightsight; Read and Write

**Image:** A hand or arm that continues to act more-or-less normally even though it's not connected to a body.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Depending upon circumstances and their relationship with the creator, such appendages range in temperament from mute slaves to loyal companions to ghastly vengeful horrors.

## Shambling Horror and Slaughterer

A variation on the creeper theme involves grafting material or mechanical appendages onto hacked-up pieces or reanimated corpse parts. Spikes, blades, chainsaws, hooks — anything that the proper Ranks of Matter and Life can merge together can become a shambling horror or slaughterer. The former is good mostly for shock value, intimidation, and gross-out humor, while the latter adds the capacity for killing in the grisliest manner possible.

Essentially mindless apart from their intended purpose, these reanimates merge the tormented identity of a Frankensteinian monstrosity with the relentless singularity of a reanimated hand. If one is meant to scare, then one scares; if meant to kill, then one kills. Essentially unique, each shambler or slaughterer reflects the crazed imagination of its creator and the role — bodyguard, mass-murderer, gross sex toy — for which it was created. There's nothing remotely natural about such reanimates, and outside their intended setting they self-destruct and decay with nauseating speed.

**Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 6, Charisma 0, Manipulation 4, Appearance 0, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 1

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Brawl 2 or 4 (slaughterers), Intimidation

6, Melee 4 (slaughterers), Stealth 4

**Willpower:** 6

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -1, -2, -3, -5, Ick

**Armor Rating:** 0 (seven soak dice, total)

**Powers:** Slash, claw or impale for Strength + 3 lethal damage; Alacrity; Cause Insanity; Claws, Fangs or Horns (often all of them); Extra Limbs (typically many); Homing Instinct (2); Needleteeth; Nightsight; Soak Lethal or Aggravated Damage; Venom

**Image:** An appalling mass of "who the fuck thought *that* was a good idea?"

**Roleplaying Notes:** Enough sentence to respond to circumstances but little more than mute ruthlessness.

## Talking Head

Preserved in a vat, dropped in a box, mounted on a pike, or hung on the door, a severed human head may become a literal conversation piece. Though it's traditional mad-scientist procedure to keep a living head around the lab (typically hooked up to tubes, wires, and other accoutrements), mystics have employed this sort of necrofetishism for millennia, often as a way of tormenting their enemies, preserving their loved ones, and scaring the living crap out of trespassers.

The amount of personality a severed head retains depends upon whether or not the creator trapped a spirit or consciousness in the head or simply animated it with a facsimile of life. Either way, these gruesome decorations have a distinctly unnerving effect on people who aren't used to seeing this sort of thing, much less having a speaking head talk back to them.

Playful necrotinkerers sometimes attach hands, crab or spider legs, and other mechanical or biological appendages to severed heads, making them somewhat mobile and occasionally proficient at limited sorts of combat. Otherwise, a talking head has the Flaw: Limbless and no ability to get around on its own unless it possesses some form of wings or levitation.

Stripped of flesh and muscle, a talking head might be a talking skull instead. This, too, is a pretty traditional prop for mages with a morbid sense of humor or a sincere reverence for the dead.

**Attributes:** Strength 0, Dexterity 0, Stamina 3, Charisma 0, Manipulation 3, Appearance 0, Perception 2, Intelligence 1-4, Wits 1-4

**Abilities:** Alertness 2, Awareness 2, possibly all sorts of Knowledges if the head's living consciousness (or a spirit) has been trapped inside its mortal form.

**Willpower:** 4

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, Crushed



**Armor Rating:** 0 (three soak dice, total)

**Powers:** Bite for one die (lethal); Human Speech; Nightsight; possibly also a range of additional Advantages like Information Fount, Telepathy, Telekinesis, and so forth.

**Image:** A head or skull with some degree of animation and identity. Under the best of circumstances, this sort of thing's disquieting; if the head has been flayed, burnt, tattooed, shrunken, or otherwise mutilated, it can be downright horrific.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Anything from mute anguish to a stubborn refusal to ever shut up.

## Soulflowers

One of the creepier forms of magical “construction” includes investing living beings with Quintessence and using them as portable batteries for both Quintessence and Paradox. Detailed in *Mage 20* (p. 521), *The Book of Secrets* (p. 145), and *How Do You DO That?* (p. 48), this discipline is high-level stuff with an occult pedigree going back to ancient times. Despite its traditional nature, however, the thought of turning living things into paranormal tools — especially without their consent — runs roughshod over the autonomy of the “flowers” in question. Thus, many modern mages view the practice with disgust even as their pragmatic peers employ every trick and tool at their disposal, regardless of the ways in

which such practices impact their living instruments.

As *The Book of Secrets* explains, the nature of Resonance can change the nature of the Soulflower too. A goldfish infused with Quintessence that has an Aggressive Resonance is one nasty goldfish, and while such changes won't matter much with, say, a goldfish, they could spell the difference between a docile living “container” and a rebellious enemy, if you've infused Quintessence into a creature who has the physical and intellectual capacity to harm you. Despite the risks, however, certain mages still invest Quintessence into higher-order animals (humans included), if only because the sense of power appears to outweigh the potential risks if that “flower” gets fed up with the arrangement and decides to turn that mage's power back against her “master.”

### Eva Cherone

When her boss told Eva, “We're deeply invested in you,” he meant it literally.

The job at HAXCorp seemed like a dream come true, especially with a mountain of student-loan debt weighing her down. Until that gig came in, she was sharing an apartment with her thankfully now-ex and a cat that pissed on everything that wasn't covered in plastic. How she passed the

interview with that little beast's urine ghosting her clothes, Eva still doesn't know. That was three years ago, and here she is: office admin for the division manager of Accounts Receivable, and while the pay package isn't glorious, Eva's pulling down more than anyone else she knows. Hell, she's even got benefits at this job — pretty much a first in her employment history. So if she glosses over a few "irregularities" here and there, or turns a blind eye (okay, *several* blind eyes) to some stuff she's seen or heard about... hey, that's the business world, and no one told you it'd be easy.

It's not that Eva's not ambitious. I mean, she graduated in the top 1% of her high-school class, held down a 4.0 average in college while her friends and roommate were out partying, and left school with a summa under her belt. Why she wound up flipping burgers for the next three years is anybody's guess, but things are tough all over, that economic downturn's still keeping jobs scarce, and Eva wasn't nearly as bad off as lots of people she knew. She kept clawing, kept interviewing, kept her head up and her eyes on the prize. An admin job's not exactly much of a prize, but after the last few years, she'll take what she can get.

Hardworking, attractive, and sharp as the edge of 70 lb. letterhead paper, Eva's almost 30 and has her own small-but-fashionable apartment a short bus ride from her office. Too bad she's never home, but there's only so many hours in the day when you're trying to get ahead. The ex and his rotten cat are distant memories, and her boss Michael keeps her busy enough. The fact that he's "Michael" to her instead of "Mr. Del Rio" speaks to her high spot in the office pecking order. On Mr. Del Rio's suggestion, she's taking some self-defense classes — a girl can't be too careful in the city, right? Especially not when she works so many late nights. Her boss is paying for those classes, too. Yeah, Michael really looks out for his people, and Eva's pleased to be part of his team.

Some folks whisper (not where she can hear them, of course) that Eva's got a thing with Mr. Del Rio. They're not wrong, but it's not what people think it is. Mr. Del Rio really *has* invested in her, but it's in no way sexual. Eva's what you might call a living asset: a walking charisma battery who keeps secrets, handles dirty laundry, and knows how to pull out that little bit of extra energy at crunch time when things get hairy and billions of dollars are on the line. He's grooming her to be his personal assistant, but needs to make sure she's up to the task. So he tests her, and tracks her progress, and hands her assignments that aren't too crucial to see what her limits might be. He's also keeping tabs on her to see if there's some potential for true Enlightenment behind that aging college-girl façade. If there is, though, Mr. Del Rio hasn't seen it yet. For now, he's just investing her with energy, tapping it when necessary, and watching to see if Eva's got long-term prospects or if she's just one more human resource to liquidate eventually in the name of the bottom line.

**Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 4, Perception 2, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Alertness 1, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Martial Arts 1

**Willpower:** 4

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

**Armor Rating:** 0 (three soak dice, total)

**Powers:** Eva's martial-arts training gives her the Elbow / Knee Strike and Snake Step combat maneuvers from **Mage 20**, p. 425. She also carries a small tear-gas canister in her purse, which inflicts 3 bashing damage, holds 5 shots, and reduces an attacker's dice pools by two dice for one turn per success.

**Image:** A tall, slender woman in her late 20s, with olive skin and short, black hair in a fashionable crop, Eva's got a small wardrobe of trendy business-casual office wear, a few pairs of jeans, some T-shirts and shoes, and not a whole lot else. For some odd reason, she really can't stand cats. In another life, her pretty face, large brown eyes, and subtle hand with makeup might have scored her some modeling gigs when she was younger. That's not her style, though, and never was. Eva's been aiming for the business fast track since her teens, and if she occasionally finds herself looking in the mirror and wondering if she'll find it before the years catch up with her, there's always some way to keep her from thinking about that too much. She *has* noticed lately that she's got kind of a "glow" about her. She hasn't slept with a guy in almost two years, though, so she figures it's just the classes she's been taking and the promise of her long-sought goal finally coming into sight.

In reality, that "glow" comes from around 25 points of Primal Utility energy Michael and his friend Jerrilynne Fukuyama (Eva's trainer) invested into the administrative assistant. Every so often, Eva suffers debilitating migraines, body aches, occasional bruises, and really nasty flus. She attributes those ailments to long hours and hard training; as it turns out, she's taking "Market Correction" Paradox from Michael's occasional slips. It's a good thing her boss is so subtle and careful about his Procedures these days. Eva's never met the woman she replaced in her position, and let's just say Michael wasn't *nearly* as careful or as subtle back then.

For more information about Soulflowers, see **Mage 20**, p. 521; **The Book of Secrets**, p. 145; and **How Do You DO That?** p. 48.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Smart, driven, personable, and ambitious, you're a HAXCorp player to the bone. You've worked hard to get where you are, and you've got more than enough experience with the yawning economic gap waiting for you if you slip off your place on the ladder. Admins make the world go 'round, and you keep Michael Del Rio's department running smoothly despite its many complications. Okay, yes, you've done a few shady things in this line of work, and you'll do

more of them in a heartbeat if it keeps you from looking too hard at the homeless people camped out under the overpasses and wondering if you'll wind up joining them.

## Lord Floof

Why *does* she carry that cat everywhere she goes? The way she strokes his fur, it's a wonder the poor thing hasn't gone bald! Lord Floof is indeed Sharisha Mae's a constant companion, and he *does* indeed have very soft and strokable fur. A beautiful example of the Ragdoll breed of cat, Lord Floof (his real name is *Bhaga*, but everyone these days calls him "Lord Floof") is an ingratiating little beast with a well-honed sense of how to make himself as adorable as possible. Even folks who normally hate cats love Lord Floof, and *everyone* wants to pet his fur.

No, he's not her familiar. But he is more than he seems to be.

Lord Floof is, in most regards, a normal cat – no smarter or more magical than any other feline. Sharisha Mae, however, has invested Lord Floof with a combination of spells that make him a combination Quintessence vacuum and battery, absorbing life-energy from those who pet him and retaining it for Sharisha's use. A low-level Mind spell also entices people to pet him even more than they would under normal circumstances. And so, beyond his innate cuteness and pettable fur, Lord Floof is an effective Soulflower: sweet-tempered enough to appreciate his coddled life and appealing enough to suck energy from even the most resistant ailurophobes. It's a good thing, however, that Sharisha Mae has conscientious taste in friends. As things are, the Quintessence he retains in his purring little form tends to be Calming, Nurturing, and Adorable; if folks started infusing him with Predatory, Obnoxious, or Treacherous energy, this adorable companion might remind his human associates that felines *are* the alpha predators in their weight class, and can take on things much larger than they are if the cat in question is so inclined.

**Attributes:** Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 5, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics (Climbing) 4, Brawl 2, Empathy 3, Intimidation 1, Stealth 4

**Willpower:** 4

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

**Armor Rating:** 0 (three soak dice, total)

**Powers:** Bite for Strength + 1 bashing damage; claw for Strength + 1 lethal damage.

**Image:** Majestic yet adorable, Lord Floof is a large, thick-ruffed white and gray Ragdoll cat with an exceptionally affectionate temperament, a rumbling purr, and an insatiable desire to be stroked. Folks who perceive auras note a vivid glow in Lord Floof's fur: a Quintessential nimbus of calming Primal energy.

**Roleplaying Notes:** You are the center of your world, and that world treats you with all the loving deference you deserve.

## Talos

Long gone are the days when this copper giant carried out its duty. Presently, echoes of its past intellect reside within a shattered, barnacle-covered shell. Legend has it that Talos guarded Crete from outsiders and enforced the kingdom's laws, which were carried with it, written on copper tablets. This ancient construct was known to circle the island thrice a day, throw boulders toward unfamiliar ships, and breathe fire on intruders. King Minos tasked Daedalus, the fabled artisan and inventor, with the improvement of Crete's defenses. His creative genius brought forth many artifacts and marvels; Talos and the Labyrinth, however, are the only two standing to this day.

The giant's animation is attributed to the Ichor circulating through a single vein in its body. Contrary to popular belief, Ichor – often described as an opalescent substance – was originally thought to be the blood of the gods. It's also said that Ichor, not water, flowed in Styx, one of the five rivers crossing into and traversing the realms of the dead. Talos' end came at the hands of the Argonauts and Medea, whose sorcery drained the giant of its Ichor and sank it into the sea.

Mythology aside, the true tale of Talos is filled with enough hubris and death for a grand Greek tragedy. In order to uncover the facts, one must go even further back: To the man named Talos and his fatal obsession. A teenage prodigy, Talos was Daedalus' nephew and apprentice. He was such a visionary that, where others saw the spine of a fish, he saw what we came to know as the hacksaw. Thus, Talos earned both admiration and envy from his peers. Being constantly around his mentor's lifelike statues, the young artisan was tormented by the realization that he could not surpass his master in any way. Until, one evening, while in the workshop and praying to Hephaestus, god of artisans and smiths, Talos saw a flicker of movement. The light from the furnace reflected off of the smooth surface of the statues, making them appear not just lifelike, but truly *alive*. The idea of giving life to matter soon begun to consume Talos, who constructed several hydraulic and pneumatic automata before becoming frustrated with how simple the constructs' functions were. After several sleepless weeks, he traveled to Helicon and stole water from Olmeios, where the Muses bathed, thinking the blessed river of inspiration would animate his creations. And he was right; the Tass-laden water *did* animate the automata... but at a cost. The living statues were temperamental and violent, unable to follow instructions, dangerous even to their creator. Talos, though, would not give up. Desperate and overworked, he had an epiphany: no water would be good enough or pure enough; what he needed was Ichor, the blood of the gods. Of course, wounding a god was not an option. But there *was* another place where Talos could secure some Ichor: Styx. There were rumors that the famed *Necyomantes* of Acropolis



died and came back to life during their chthonic rituals of initiation. Talos, obsessed with his work and thinking he was destined for greatness, threw himself off the rock of Acropolis, hoping the Necyomantes would bring him back. They did not, and Daedalus was accused and convicted for pushing him over in a fit of envy.

Exiled from Athens, the artisan sought refuge in Crete and entered King Minos' service. But dreams of Talos and his living automata plagued him and would not let him rest. Talos' soul would not rest either. One day, his pupil's wraith appeared to him. Artisan and spirit labored together to realize Talos' vision of a sentient automaton. They built a giant out of copper, and then used Ichor from the River Styx to animate it. Because Styx was a river of truth and oath-keeping, the giant's temperament remained mild, protective, and obedient. Daedalus named it *Talos* in memory of his nephew, and purposefully gave it a flaw in case the automaton ever became dangerous: a large nail sealed the vein through which Ichor flowed — a nail that, if removed, would release the precious liquid and disable Talos. Daedalus was not simply being proactive, though; having seen his nephew's hubris, he built flaws into all his creations to make sure he would always remember to remain humble.

Presently, Talos' remains were recovered from the depths

of the sea, and are being studied by the Utopian Etherite Dr. Makrygiannakis and his PhD students at the University of Crete. Rumors of this academic endeavor, however, have reached a local Amalgam, the Iteration X members of which are exceedingly interested in getting their hands on Talos. Supposing they succeed, scanning and analyzing the automaton will leave them perplexed at the huge flaw in an otherwise flawless machine. Temperance is an old lesson, and it's one that many a young artisan has failed to learn.

**Attributes:** Strength 10, Dexterity 3, Stamina 10, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 4, Perception 6, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Alertness 4, Athletics (rock throwing) 4, Brawl 3

**Willpower:** 6

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -1, -2, -2, -2, -5, -5, Disabled

**Armor Rating:** 6 (16 soak dice, total)

**Powers:** Fire Blast for 5 dice aggravated damage that continues to inflict 1 level of lethal damage per turn until washed off; also throws rocks for Strength + 2, lethal damage.

**Image:** Smaller than his legend but far larger than a man, Talos stands roughly eight meters tall and features the sublime

proportions of Classical Greek statuary. Much to the embarrassment of modern mages, Talos was sculpted entirely nude. The years have tarnished his bronze skin green, but the Ichor that animates Talos preserves the mineral's integrity from rot. Talos' lips were sculpted partly open, as if he is ready to speak. If someone manages to animate the giant again, it will be very interesting to hear what he might have to say...

**Roleplaying Notes:** For now, you remain silent, a machine deactivated and abandoned millennia ago. There's a chance, however, that you're the earthly anchor for a departed soul — what many wraiths call a Fetter for a ghost — and though it's not likely that young Talos has willingly remained shackled to a statue for so many centuries, legend is a powerful thing, and both Talos and Daedalus were men of immortal vision and relentless stubbornness.

## Thorn Gorgers

Hungrily, thorn gorgers spread across worlds, ravenously hunting for nutrients. These creatures are dominant feeders — vegetative apex predators — and few plants or animals can withstand their ever-growing gluttony.

Thorn gorgers, at one time in the ancient past, were little more than pest-like plants. They invaded gardens and farms, devouring all the plant life there. Farmers cut them back, but such pruning just gave them room to grow back, twice as thick as before. Ripe, sickly sweet berries grew amongst their thorns, and eventually the farmers gave in and allowed these irritating plants to live. And so, the gorgers transformed the diets of humankind. Then, as humanity expanded and good farmland became scarce, the farmers sought new soil. In the process, they brought thorn gorgers with them.

Everywhere the farmers brought these plants, they spread like wildfire, consuming native plant life and eventually evolving a thirst for blood as well. Indigenous animals were devoured to the last drop; when the animals became scarce, the gorgers devoured the humans who tried to cultivate them. Rarely, though, did mortal eyes witness a thorn gorger feeding, and so they continued to spread with the aid of their prey.

Eventually, these creatures were noticed by the Awakened. Certain mystics cultivated these ferocious plants as barriers, traps, and occasionally even pets. Early pre-Progenitor Cosians found thorn gorgers' semi-sentience fascinating, and eventually brought gorgers into their labs to dissect, splice, and propagate. These scientists created a multitude of strains with different features. The original gorger plants closely resembled blackberry vines, but the newly created varieties mimic the appearance of loosestrife, kudzu, and ivy.

During the long and bitter warfare between the Traditions and the nascent Technocracy, Verbenae, Hermetics, and Dreamspeakers uncovered the blasphemous Cosian crossbreeds. During one especially epic battle in

the Appalachian Mountains, hundreds of thorn gorgers were spiritually awakened and directed to assist the mystics against their Daedalean rivals. While this tactic proved an advantage powerful enough to undo the Cosian handiwork, something *changed* forever within the thorn gorgers. As the greenhouse where the Progenitors practiced their experiments was smashed to smithereens, the semi-sentient plant life escaped; soon, new varieties quickly spread across the world in the same way the original strain did. Certain new strains, however, were capable of crossing the Gauntlet into the Umbra; since then, they've found a whole new collection of worlds to grow into. Invasive species of a spiritual nature, they crowd out all that is native, slowly choking it to death until the thorn gorgers are the only living things left.

So far, this infection has progressed slowly throughout the high-infinite Otherworlds. As both the physical and spiritual worlds became harsher and more difficult for plants and Naturae of the more mundane variety, however, the gorgers continue to spread.

**Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 7, Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 2, Perception 1, Intelligence 1, Wits 0

**Abilities:** Alertness 2, Brawl 2

**Willpower:** 2

**Health Levels:** OK, -5, Incapacitated

**Armor Rating:** 2 (eight soak dice, total, which makes the plant incredibly difficult to destroy as a whole, although it's easy to rip out individual vines.)

**Powers:** Strength + 1 lethal damage per vine; four to six vines can wrap around the average human being in a turn. Any creature grappled by the thorn gorger is at +2 difficulty to escape.

**Image:** Thorn gorgers most commonly resemble blackberry vines with large, ripe, unusually colorful berries. These predators can also appear as other forms of invasive plants. Alternative varieties are uncommon, but they're much harder to tell apart from normal plants than the original gorger strain with its tell-tale berries. Without those berries, there's less reason for the plants to be willingly cultivated by humans and spread by animals; by now, though, the gorgers are certainly capable of propagating on their own.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Thorn gorgers are semi-sentient — aware of their surroundings, with faint yet discernable desires and an apparent group demi-consciousness. Certain strains can even plan ambushes and traps though they don't possess creative intelligence, as such. Instead, gorgers are driven by a collective instinct to consume, to produce, to spread, and to survive — and they're quite proficient at all of the above. Usually, thorn gorgers remain placid. If threatened or hungry, though, they can be motivated toward quick, decisive action. In such moments, thorny vines snake around their target

and constrict it while lacerating it to shreds. Gorgers tend to consume other plant life first, but won't hesitate to gorge on sentient creatures when other options wither. While thorn gorgers are not spirits per se, they can grow on both sides of the Gauntlet, occasionally uprooting themselves to cross over and consume spirits as well as organic matter. Some mages still grow such creatures as guardians for their Sanctums and Chantries; gorgers are extremely dangerous, though, and most cultivators soon regret their attempts.

## Tiny Warriors

Have you ever wished you could have an army in your pocket? As it turns out, you're not the first person to dream of such a thing. The origins of so-called "tiny warriors" are lost to the ages, but Awakened craftsmen have been creating such things since the dynasties of Classical Egypt. Though they're not exactly common, these constructs have become more prevalent in the era of tight airport security and heavily guarded borders and installations.

Traditionally shaped from wood, ceramic, bone, and cloth, tiny warriors are manufactured most often these days from plastic and synthetic polyfibers. The concept is simple enough: a toy soldier who, upon magickal activation, grows to the size of a full-grown man or woman and rushes off to fight at your command. The warrior's gear grows to the proper size as well, and then transforms from fragile wood or plastic into combat-ready steel. Such warriors are loyal unto death, and if they seem a bit more... um, literal... in their interpretations of commands than actual human beings would be, they lack neither courage nor ferocity.

Tiny warriors, to be honest, are pretty dense. Appropriately crafted warriors know how to use basic firearms, but their grasp of strategy consists of "See enemy, kill enemy." They attack when ordered, retreat when ordered, and hold back when ordered. Mercy and self-preservation seem to be as alien concepts to such constructs as any other form of independent thought. For anyone who's ever been in a fight, the drawbacks of such limitations are obvious. Still, the damn things can be pretty useful in a full-blown war, and mages of all kinds (even Technocrats who can solve the physics puzzles of energy and mass) have been known to toss tiny warriors at their enemies and then take full advantage of the ensuing mayhem.

Unless ordered otherwise by its creator, a tiny warrior obeys only the mage who crafted it. It's tough, fearless, fanatical, and mute. What little personality it displays follows the design of the toy it appears to be: A tiny Viking berserker charges into battle like a bear on bad steroids, while a samurai warrior moves with disciplined precision. In recent years, mages have added Forces Effects to such warriors in order to imbue comic-style superheroes with the appropriate powers. But while skilled artisans have been able to program tiny warriors with a collection of pre-recorded speeches and remarks, no one has yet managed to give tiny

warriors an enduring intellect unless the mage has also turned the construct into a spirit-Fetish... a decision that tends to have unfortunate results.

Tiny warriors can't remain active for long. The energy animating them tends to run out pretty quickly unless, once again, a bound spirit has animated the warrior's form. In system terms, a tiny warrior can fight for two turns for each dot in the creator's Arete Trait; after that, the warrior goes rigid for three turns, and then returns to its toy-like size. Before it can fight again, the creator must invest the warrior with at least 10 points of Quintessence. Without that vital energy, a tiny warrior is exactly what it appears to be: an impressive yet ordinary toy.

**Attributes:** Strength 5, Dexterity 2, Stamina 6, Charisma 1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 2, Perception 1, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Brawl 4, Firearms 1, Melee 4

**Willpower:** 3

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, -5, Shattered

**Armor Rating:** 5 (11 soak dice, total) + the appropriate armor type

**Powers:** Attacks with a punch (Strength bashing damage), or by weapon type; Human Speech.

**Image:** In their tiny form, these warriors look like toys, generally static figures between two and 12 inches high. Certain crafters create articulated tiny warriors with moveable joints, plus gear that can be removed and changed out with equipment and clothing from other figures of their kind. (Equipment from non-enchanted figures cannot be changed out this way.) Without magickal or Enlightened hypertechnic perceptions, these "action figures" appear to be perfectly normal toys.

When activated, tiny warriors seem to become human fighters of an appropriate appearance, culture, and temperament. They're not terribly bright, though, and can't manage any task beyond the most basic and direct form of fighting. Under close observation, their features seem crude and artificial, and even the best of them move with mechanical stiffness, not the fluidity of normal human activity. When not moving, these warriors stand with unnerving rigidity. Though they're not obviously vulgar to people who don't see them transform from toys into apparent people, tiny warriors seem distinctly strange to everyone who watches them in action.

**Roleplaying Notes:** You live for war. Follow orders, kill on command, and try not to get killed yourself.

## Zombies

Man, they're *everywhere* these days. Between the ubiquity of zombies in popular culture and the more mystical side of walking death, zombies seem unavoidable in the world of the 21st-century mage.



Still, zombies are far older than this recent fascination. In the earliest days of human memory, the walking dead reflected primal terrors. More recently, the “traditional” zombie of vodou lore mirrored the horror of a slavery that could continue beyond death. Later decades brought different visions: white guilt, fear of the Other, anxiety about betrayal by one’s closest friends, and the relentless consumption of the American “dream.” Regardless of specific cultural touchstones, though, the zombie represents a fearsome insight: *Your neighbors want to kill you, and perhaps you’re looking for an excuse to kill them, too.*

For mages, that fear is all too real. Among the Awakened, such reanimated monstrosities — and the fears behind them — are parts of everyday life. Whether the zombie in question comes from an inexplicable cosmic flux, Frankensteinian experiments, necromantic Arts (see **How Do You DO That?**), mystic slavery, or a simple yet appalling plague, the deadly walking corpse — or more often, a whole *horde* of walking corpses — has a nasty tendency to show up when it’s least wanted.

## Vodou Zombi

Slain by ghosts, revived by magick, and damned to follow a conjure-man’s commands, the “traditional” zombie or, more properly, *zombi* embodies a state of perpetual servitude. His physical body crumbles, but the mind inside retains just enough consciousness to follow commands while acutely aware of his wretched situation.

Such pitiful horrors can be found in the ranks of ruthless *bokors*, sadistic necromancers, and powerful Infernalists... generally in numbers that make up for their decayed forms and glacial reflexes. Unlike the pop-culture zombie, these creatures neither eat flesh nor crave brains. What they *do* crave is release, a freedom denied to them until a zombi’s cursed soul is set free.

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

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

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

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, -2, -3, -5, Destroyed

**Armor Rating:** 3 (eight soak dice, total)

**Powers: Punch for Strength (bashing), or strike with weapons, as per weapon type.** The animated remains of a vodou zombi continue to decay, yet never reach a state of decrepitude. Instead, this damned creature regenerates just enough to sustain its vile-yet-robust physical form. That regeneration heals one health level per turn, no matter what, unless the zombie was damaged by fire, acid, or salt.

Salt, it is said, holds the key to a zombi's freedom. Supposedly, a bit of salt on the tongue will release the captive soul and break the spell that holds the zombi together. For that reason, most necromancers sew a zombi's mouth shut, cut out his tongue, or both. The thing no longer needs to eat or drink, after all, and speech from such unhappy beasts would be a liability; thus, the average zombi cannot speak... simply moan, if he makes any sound at all.

Despite his apparently fragility, a zombi holds considerable strength in that desiccated shell. And despite the health-level rating of "Destroyed," no amount of damage — short of complete consumption by acid or fire — can permanently annihilate a zombi unless his soul has been set free.

**Image:** A rotting yet ambulatory corpse, the traditional zombi can range from a stiff, gaunt figure smelling of decay to a pathetic scrap of a human being, skeletal yet still imbued with a mockery of life. Despite the abhorrent nature of this walking cadaver, though, the eyes remain its most horrible feature... because those eyes are still alive, and still aware.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Whatever remains of your original personality has been submerged under degradation and atrocity. Although you still manage an occasional flicker of self-motivation, your soul belongs to the man or woman who made you. Given just *what* it is he's made of you, that master's own personality is a terrible thing... and so, as an extension of that personality, you're a terrible thing as well.

## Cannibal Corpse

Driven by demons of Infernal hunger, the cannibal corpse fits the modern concept of a killer zombie. Despite that Romero-Russo pedigree, however, this flesh-gnawing thing has primal ancestry. The sorcerers of ancient Egypt and Akkad trapped minor demons and angry ghosts in prisons of flesh that could feed voraciously and yet never satiate their hungers. Such verboten magicks survive to the present day, when Nephandic malcontents and Infernal

cultists stage their own "zombie flicks," sometimes actually filming an orgy of slaughter and then putting the results on YouTube for entertainment.

The angry re-animates of the Week of Nightmares fit a similar mold, although those monsters were apparently self-created. Slightly less voracious than their hunger-demon counterparts, they still waged impressive bouts of mayhem before time and enemies whittled down their numbers. Occasionally, though, such creatures still appear — often in hordes of near-mindless ferocity, tearing into every living thing until either the zombies or their prey are twitching smears of gore.

**Suggested Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5, Charisma 0, Manipulation 4, Appearance 0, Perception 1, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

**Suggested Abilities:** Alertness 3, Brawl 3, Intimidation 3

**Willpower:** 7

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

**Armor Rating:** 2 (seven soak dice, total)

**Powers:** Bite for Strength + 2 lethal damage; claw for Strength + 1 lethal damage. Unlike the vodou zombi, this breed of walking corpse tends to be fast and unspeakably aggressive. Utterly without mercy or self-preservation, such gibbering things fling themselves at prey (typically in packs), tear it to pieces, and then feed until they have consumed roughly half a zombie's weight in once-living tissue.

(Handfuls of more intelligent zombies appear to retain their human intellect and personality. Whether those gruesome exceptions to the rule are truly walking dead or simply demonic props remains a mystery.)

Also unlike its vodou-crafted cousin, the cannibal corpse cannot regenerate; it can, however, continue to attack until its pieces are destroyed by fire or some other form of annihilation. (Whether or not a headshot stops such beings is a Storyteller's call.) Spirit 4 magick can purge the animating demons or ghosts, essentially freeing the zombie from its rampage. This, however, is no soul-trapped victim, but a spiritual obscenity that combines malignant entities with awkward yet implacable flesh.

**Image:** Like its cinematic reflection, a cannibal corpse comes across as a near-mindless machine of dead flesh and lively hunger. Such things tend to be messy eaters, and they carry the stains of past meals and injuries with them.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Eat. Ravage. Destroy.

# Familiars



“We are family” has a whole other meaning when you apply it to familiars: the materialized spirits embodied in semi-permanent bio-bodies and teamed up with the mages who help them sustain their material forms. The name applied to them by mystic traditionalists evokes their kindred status, and any mage with a lick of sense regards their familiar as a respected and usually beloved (if often prickly) member of their family.

Although familiars are, in game terms, constructed as physical characters, they have a few of the Traits normally reserved for ephemeral spirit characters. Even so, they bleed like living things, behave as though they’re native to material reality, and have the solidity of any biological organism despite their Otherworldly origins.

Also referred to as *companions*, these unusual entities can bond with an Awakened person from any group, or from no group at all. Technocrats, of course, do not regard such companions as metaphysical entities — such thoughts are nonsense, naturally, and might provide evidence for accusations of Reality Deviance. Their “familiars” don’t regard themselves with any sort of mystical hogwash either; their uplifted nature is a manifestation of Enlightened science, nothing more. In game terms, of course, there’s no real difference between the two aside from (as with Tiberius, below) a lack of Charm Traits... a lack more rooted in the companion’s perception of himself than of any system- or setting-based differences between mystic and hypertech familiars.

For details about familiar-type characters, see the Background entry of that name (**Mage 20**, pp. 314-316), and this book’s Chapter Five.

## Daqqanoenyent, Uncle Whirlwind

Uncle screams into the night, terrorizing the enemies of his nieces and nephews: “*Fall and become bones! Scatter to the wind! Bones become birds!*”

Uncle spent his whole life pursuing great power, and when his relatives come calling he answers with wisdom and great magic. His kin, and the accumulation of might, are his greatest concerns, and at times it’s unclear which one holds greater priority. At one point, Uncle Whirlwind explains, he too was a great sorcerer — perhaps the greatest sorcerer of all time. He was instructed by the great people of the sky, and the humble people who live beneath the earth. He soaked in the wisdom of his ancestors and dreamt of the generations that would come after his death. He went into the woods and lost himself in his study. He lost his body as

well. Uncle died and was reborn. For many years, he rolled around on the ground, but eventually he grew tired of it, and learned the secrets of flight from the eagle people above, and from the great wisdom of his children’s children, who learned to fly with a different kind of magic.

Magnificent wings — sometimes resembling those of a bat, but usually a bird of some colorful variety — grow out the sides of this floating skull’s head. Daqqanoenyent’s eyes are alight with the phosphorous glow of secret forest fungi, and his laughter peals through the trees as he floats around, following his sister’s children’s children. He eagerly agrees to come to the aid of his sister’s descendants, particularly when they are plagued by the powers of a witch greater than themselves — because no witch is greater than Uncle Whirlwind, and he will prove it gladly. Uncle keeps the faith with his charges; if asked, he might even hunt down their enemies and howl terrible spells of death and destruction down upon them. He transforms the living into piles of bones and, as his namesake, whirls through the piles and scatters them to the corners of the earth. When the bones are scattered, he teaches his nieces and nephews the secret words of transformation. They, in turn, utter the spells that turn the bones into birds so that no one can ever

## Matter or Ephemera?

Are familiars material beings guided by Otherworldly spirits, or spirits who’ve materialized in the human world? Really, they’re both. In previous **Mage** sourcebooks, though, familiars were presented with two different sets of rules. **The Book of Shadows**, **Ascensions’ Right Hand**, **The Bygone Bestiary**, and various other books regarded familiar characters as mortal beasts with mystical powers; the familiars chapter in the **Mage** sourcebook **Forged By Dragon’s Fire**, however, presented a new set of rules that treated familiars with the rules given for spirits, not for material creatures. Those rules define familiars as spirits who occasionally manifest on the human side of the Gauntlet, yet continue to use the rules given for ephemeral entities. That book’s treatment of Charms, and the ability to build ephemeral player characters, differ from many of the rules presented in various other **Mage** and **Werewolf** rulebooks and sourcebooks, and may be too complex for certain playstyles.

You can use whichever approach suits your preferences. For the sake of simplicity and consistency, however, **Gods & Monsters** treats familiars as material beings in terms of the systems involved. For more details, see this book’s Chapter Five, with the Traits and rules associated with materialized familiars, **p. XX**.



bring  
them together again  
and resurrect the  
evil sorcerers who have  
plagued his family.

Sometimes, instead of protecting his line, he chooses to go out into the world and seek more magick so as to become even more powerful. After all, he says, what's the use of being one of the greatest wizards in the history of all time if you let today's children think they have a chance of catching up with you? They don't. What's important, of course, is that they don't think they do.

Daqqanoenyent loves stories, but most importantly he loves stories about himself and how powerful and terrifying he is. He loves stories of the many enemies he has vanquished over the centuries. Compared to him, his descendants are merely apprentices... though apprentices worthy of his instruction. Daqqanoenyent prefers that the mage he forms a bond with call him "Uncle." He rarely bonds with anyone who's not a distant relative of his in some way. If he is not treated with the respect due one's mother's brother, the Whirlwind quickly departs and finds another sorcerer worthy of his time, instruction, and protection.

Game-wise, Uncle Whirlwind is a five-dot Familiar with a decidedly ambivalent relationship to his hosts. He's not actually as great a sorcerer as he imagines he is (at least not in his current form), but his abilities are impressive nonetheless. His high ratings in Enigmas, Esoterica, and Occult reflect a wide variety of Indigenous American practices combined with a lot of things he knows or thinks he knows about other forms of magick. For a flying skull, he's amazingly resilient; if Daqqanoenyent faces a serious threat, however, he'll escape into the Penumbra or teleport elsewhere before he risks facing as ignominious a fate as mortal defeat.

In addition to the obvious Flaws like No Limbs, Thaumivore, and Unbelief (8 pts — at home only in the wild spaces of North America), Uncle Whirlwind has both the Merit and the Flaw side of Family Support/Issues, the Merit My Master is My Slave, and the 5-pt version of the Flaw Alien Impression. Being a flying skull, he has no physical Strength Trait, though his telekinesis helps alleviate that handicap somewhat. He can assume a human form, but generally chooses not to. After all, as one of the greatest sorcerers ever, Daqqanoenyent appears as he wishes to appear, not in a form designed to please and comfort mere people.

**Attributes:** Strength 0, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 0, Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 4

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Enigmas 5, Esoterica 5, Cosmology 3, Medicine 2, Occult 5,

**Willpower:** 10

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, -5, Incapacitated

**Armor Rating:** 3 (eight soak dice, total)

**Powers:** Daqqanoenyent attacks and defends using his wide array of Advantages and Charms:

**Special Advantages:** Armor (3 pts.); Bond-Sharing; Cause Insanity (10 pts. / five dice); Elemental Touch (15 pts.); Homing Instinct (4 pts.); Human Speech; Information Fount; Intangibility; Mystic Shield (10 pts.); Nightsight; Paradox Nullification (3 pts.); Read and Write; Shapechanger (8 pts.); Soak Aggravated Damage; Soul-Sense/Death-Sense; Spirit Vision; Spirit Travel (15 pts.); Telepathy (6 pts.); Telekinesis; Tides of Fortune; Universal Translator; Wings (3 pts.)

**Charms:** Airt Sense, Blast, Call for Aid (Indigenous American spirits), Disable, Dream Journey, Ease Pain, Illuminate, Influence, Insight, Healing, Peek, Reform, Swift Flight, Terror

**Rage:** 5

**Gnosis:** 5

**Essence:** 30

**Image:** As described above, Uncle Whirlwind assumes the form of a winged, flying skull with eyes that glow a pale green, blue, or occasionally red. Those who know Daqqanoenyent understand that while red is the most frightening hue, pale blue verging into white is the most dangerous color of all. At times, he becomes a laughing tornado, a large bat, or a Native American man of kindly aspect and apparent age but uncanny speed and an unnerving tone of voice.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Laugh often at the travails of your children, and rarely take danger seriously. Even if your nieces and nephews die, you have many more. Call out curses loudly upon your enemies. Shriek and wail hauntingly at night, and in the trees. Remind others (often) that they are very small and meaningless compared to you, but remain unquestionably loyal to your blood, and give the benefit of the doubt to those who are willing to treat you with respect. Aside from giving aid to your relations, however, your only goal in this world involves all the power you can seize.

## Lullabye

Everyone loves spiders, right? Especially great big blue tarantulas with wings? Okay, maybe not. But Spider Chase does, and true to her name she called up a familiar of the aforementioned description. She loves the flying furry beastie, and anyone who doesn't is hereby invited to piss up a rope as far as Spider is concerned.

Lullabye is not exactly the greatest conversationalist, but Spider's not big on chatty companions under most circumstances. A lovely example of *Cyriopagopus lividus* with especially vivid blue legs, cephalothorax, and opisthosoma, Lullabye has the mating hooks of a male tarantula but the size and coloration of a female one. Actually, Lullabye's quite a bit larger than a normal cobalt tarantula — a bit more than six inches across, if you get close enough to measure the little furball. Very few people do, and Spider Chase likes it that way.

Overall, Lullabye seems content to catch bugs, fly around, suckle Quintessence off a specially designed glyph tattoo that Spider has on her right bicep, and scare the living crap out of the occasional asshole. He knows enough about the modern world to keep his wings tucked up in an apparent caprice on his back, and very few people look close enough or long enough at Lullabye to get a clear view of those wings. When he's not hanging out in his terrarium or flying around Spider's house, he tends to nestle up inside her jacket or sometimes ride around on her shoulder. Most of Spider's friends think he's awesome. Everyone else just screams and runs away. Spider likes it that way, too.

Rules-wise, Lullabye is a three-dot Familiar whose special abilities allow him to fly around, help soothe Spider's chronic pain issues, and occasionally visit people (not just Spider) in their dreams. He doesn't talk, but conveys information and holds limited conversations with Spider by spinning words into webs only she can read. (*Cyriopagopus lividus* is not usually a web-building spider, but Lullabye is an exception.) His Disable Charm takes the form of biting people or spitting venom at them, and though he can shoot webs at other characters he generally prefers not to. He's fast, obviously, and rather fragile if you get past his carapace. Spider is ferociously protective of Lullabye, and with good reason! As familiars go, he's rather breakable.

Lullabye's Flaws include Alien Feature (4 pts.); Animal; Ungainly Fingers (legs, actually — and yes, he can type, just not well); and, of course, Thaumivore. Although weirdly frightening, Lullabye isn't uncanny enough to suffer from Unbelief; even if Spider was crazy enough to take him to a Technocratic stronghold, folks there would probably just consider him to be some Progenitor's experiment. As things are, he rarely leaves Spider's ward-guarded Sanctum, and almost never leaves her side if he does. It's a big world, especially by arachnid standards, and Lullabye doesn't plan to become a hairy blue smear on anybody's floor.

**Attributes:** Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Stamina 1, Charisma 1, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Enigmas 4, Esoterica 3 (Hypnosis, Omens, Sacred Geometry, Symbolism), Cosmology 3, Medicine 2, Occult 4, Stealth 4

**Willpower:** 3

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

**Armor Rating:** 3 (four soak dice, total)

**Powers:** If Lullabye bites someone, he inflicts one health level of lethal damage; if that target cannot soak that damage, the spider also injects a venom of Toxin Rating Three, Lethal (detailed in **Page 20**, p. 442). Alternately, he can choose to simply paralyze the target with his Disable Charm, which lasts for one turn per Essence point spent.

**Special Advantages:** Armor (3 pts.); Blending; Bond-Sharing (with Spider); Paradox Nullification (3 pts.); Webbing; Wings (3 pts.),

**Charms:** Airt Sense, Cling, Disable, Dream Journey, Ease Pain, Healing

**Rage:** 3

**Gnosis:** 3

**Essence:** 15

**Image:** An especially large, blue, pretty, cobalt-blue tarantula with wings. Said wings resemble foldable iridescent dragonfly wings, which really shouldn't be able to support Lullabye's weight but do so anyway.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Eat, fly, heal, dream. When all else fails, run away and hide. If that doesn't work, scare the shit out of someone. It's funny to watch them scream.

## Tiberius

Although named for "the gloomiest of men," Tiberius is pretty friendly for a Technocratic agent. And make no mistake — an agent is what he is. Oh, they don't call this sleek murder-machine an "agent" on the rosters; anyone who's met Tiberius, though, knows that this uplifted Doberman-Great-Dane hybrid is as smart as any field agent and smarter than most people. He doesn't talk or use "charms" of any kind — that would be Reality Deviance, and Tiberius is as loyal a Technocrat as one could ever hope to meet... or, depending on who you are, hope not to meet. He is, however, a tribute to fine training, Progenitor biotech, and the miracles of Primum reinforcement.

The Union has been growing canine companions in vats for decades. Tiberius is hardly unique. Still, he's smarter than the average Union pooch, and processes his intellect in an often-startling mix of canine perspective and human discernment. He's not exactly working around the lab — that's not sort of duty a field agent does. When it comes

to threat assessment, strategy, tactical discernment, and an uncanny awareness about the deeper levels of human and near-human body language, Tiberius is a master of his field.

Raised and trained to maintain order in a chaotic world, Tiberius has seen enough to make his loyalties clear. Like any good Technocrat, he serves the cause of higher evolution for Earth's deeply flawed species, and he stands as proof of what such order can achieve. Yes, he's a dog, but a sterling example of the best aspects of canine and human potential. Brave, loyal, honorable, disarmingly polite, and unexpectedly compassionate (by Technocratic attack-dog standards, anyway), Tiberius is a model citizen of futuristic supremacy.

Though tough enough to face a full-fledged werewolf in combat (and win), Tiberius prefers to tailor his response to an appropriate level of force. Negotiation is an option, and while he cannot speak human words, his command of nonverbal communication is eloquent enough to cross most lines of species, culture, and linguistics. His perceptions, enhanced well beyond the normal capacities of man and dog, and skills allow him to assess potential hazards and then circumvent them before many targets even realize he is there. His human teammates regard Tiberius as an equal, and they're well-advised to do

so. The few agents who were shortsighted enough to regard this agent as a mere hound were quickly and firmly appraised of their error.

These days, Tiberius works alongside an esteemed field agent whose covert allegiance to the Friends of Courage is shared by Tiberius himself. Yes, "the Emperor," as he is colloquially known among the ranks, has discerned a troubling degree of corruption among the Union's ranks. Though he is in no way a friend to Reality Deviants—Tiberius himself bears the mental and physical scars of their brand of chaos—Tiberius has begun his own investigations into the rot infecting his beloved Technocracy. When he finds the agents of its perpetration, his Primum teeth, dizzying speed, terrifying

strength, and tactical acumen send such Deviants straight to the oblivion they so earnestly crave.

System-wise, Tiberius is a five-dot Companion (in the Technocratic Familiar sense of that word) whose lack of "magical" power is offset by prodigious physical and mental ability. He communicates through telepathy and body language, and he understands, and can mind-speak in, over a dozen human languages. His Academics Trait reflects an extensive knowledge of tactics, history, and social protocols rather than academic schooling in a human sense. While he's not a cyborg per se, his bones have been enhanced with Primum countermeasures. He's got the Animal and No Dexterous Limbs Flaws, though his telekinetic abilities allow the Emperor to work a bit around the latter. Because he appears to be a perfectly ordinary (if huge) black dog, and lacks overt cybernetic Enhancements, he incurs no Paradox and does not suffer from Unbelief. That said, he *does* require a diet of specially formulated food, plus a regimen of medical treatments, in order to sustain himself for long. Although no good Technocrat would use the word "Thaumivore" to describe his needs, that is, in game terms, what Tiberius is. He also neutralizes the Paradox Effect in the usual way familiars do, though it's not through conscious metaphysical effort on his part. The Emperor simply figures he's "taking one for the team" the way any good agent would do.

**Attributes:** Strength 5, Dexterity 5, Stamina 6, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

**Abilities:** Academics 3, Alertness 4, Athletics 4, Awareness 4, Brawl 4, Empathy 4, Etiquette 1, Intimidation 4, Investigation 3, Law 1, Medicine 1, Stealth 4, Subterfuge 3, Survival (Tracking) 5

**Willpower:** 4

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

**Armor Rating:** 3 (nine soak dice, total)

**Powers:** Bite for Strength + 3 lethal damage; claw for Strength + 1 bashing damage.

**Special Advantages:**

Claws and Fangs; Healing Lick (6 pts.); Homing Instinct; Soak Aggravated Damage; Paradox Nullification (5 pts.); Telepathy; Telekinesis. Beyond all that, Tiberius also boasts four dice of Primum countermeasures.

**Charms:** "Charms," citizen? Why would you inquire into such superstitious rubbish?

**Rage:** 4





**Gnosis:** 4

**Essence:** 20

**Image:** A HUGE black dog, Tiberius stands almost four feet high at the shoulder, with a massive chest, a thick neck, and the traditionally clipped ears of an attack-trained Doberman. The Emperor has deeply intelligent brown eyes, and his telepathic voice is deep and resonant.

He wears a collar equipped with scrambled-frequency radio, a tracking device, and hypertech cloaking technology. System-wise, this is a Correspondence 2 / Forces 2 wave-deflector Device (Enlightenment 4) that gives Tiberius invisibility and silence while allowing him to sense his surrounding area; for

details, see **How Do You DO That?** (p. 34). The Device has also been rigged to give Tiberius a disabling stun-shock specially tailored to his physiology, but his handlers and companions have never needed to use it on him... yet.

**Roleplaying Notes:** You are not only what dogs and men could aspire to be, but what they all *should* be. Your life proves it's possible to be so much more than what most people (of any species) believe they're capable of becoming. Order under technological progress, to you, is essential for the survival of this deteriorating world. You have firsthand knowledge of the horrors just beyond the average person's sight, and your experiences nurture a white-hot rage that sometimes undermines your monk-like sense of purposeful calm.



# Chapter Three: A Bestial Bestiary

*Monsters just outside our peripheral vision are scarier to contemplate than monsters miles away or in someplace only a fool would set foot in.*

— Andrew Pyper

*Corvia calls the crowstorm with a sly grin and a wave of her hand. They wheel and crackle from the sky, a torrent of feathers and avian wit bringing gossip from distant corners of her neighborhood. This crow tells her of the squashed rabbit in the gutter three blocks away; that one comments on those damn gulls and how the rival birds keep jockeying for territory again. A bystander would hear harsh cries and fluttering pinions, wincing at*

*the reckless flight and inevitable mess of droppings on the ground. Those damn birds again — what does she see in them, anyway, and why does she keep messing up the street that way? For Corvia, though, the crowstorm is information, fellowship, and a reason to laugh at a world that looks so small as it passes below their wings, disappears into their beaks, and is gone.*

## Close to Home, and Far Away

There are monsters in our homes. Monsters next door. Monsters in the shadows. Monsters in the skies and streets. Sure, these “monsters” look like animals more often than not; what, though, is an animal if not a living reminder of what we are without our high-flown pretensions and bizarre priorities? As we saw earlier, “monsters” reveal the truth. And so, as we

comfort ourselves with cat videos online, scratch our dogs behind the ears, leave a plate of fresh rice out for the household yokai, or hear the maddening whine of skymurmurs as we try to fall asleep, the truth stares back at us, refusing to be wished away, often ready to scratch our face or tear our throat out if we forget our place and truly piss it off.

## Natural Animals

Strangers, familiars, monsters, and occasional gods — our animal kin are all of them and more. In Paul A. Trout’s book *Deadly Powers: Animal Predators and the Mythic Imagination*, Trout traces human magic and evolution to the influence of animals who could,

and often did, kill and eat our ancestors. The cat snoozing next to your computer these days might not seem like a god incarnate; for beasts in his weight class, though, he’s an apex predator whose metaphysical shadow still colors the Awakened world.

Animals, in a mage's world, can become totem-spirits, mortal companions, pets, antagonists, and more. Certain mages can become animals, or at least access their own bestial aspects with magick. The Animalism practice and its related paradigms in **The Book of Secrets** (pp. 195-199), and the "Shapechanging" section of **How Do You DO That?** (pp. 19-25) show how a mage can bring out the beast in herself, while the "Bestiary" and "Animal Spirits / Totem Spirits" sections of **Mage 20** (pp. 618-620 and 632-636) provide an overview of common animals, their basic game statistics, and some spiritual aspects they might assume. An array of other non-magical animals can be found below.

## Packs and Swarms

Sometimes groups of animals attack *en masse*. A Technocrat might use special pheromone sprays to attract a swarm of wasps, crows, or rats and then sic them on a particular target, whereas a Dreamspeaker can accomplish the same goal by commanding the spirit of that type of animal.

Instead of trying to determine what each and every member of a pack or swarm does, simply roll to see if the swarm itself harms a character. The most common types of swarms are listed in the table below. Roll the listed damage dice pool once per turn (difficulty 6) and allow the characters to try to dodge or soak the result. Packs attack once per turn per target, and they act on the initiative given on the chart.

Characters that successfully dodge can move normally for the remainder of the turn. Otherwise, the swarm slows the character down to half his usual movement. If the swarm scores more than three health levels' worth of damage in one turn (after the target soaks), or if the player botches an appropriate roll, the swarm knocks the character down and overruns him. At this point, the character can move only a yard or two per turn, and the swarm's damage difficulty falls to 5. Efforts to get back up and continue moving have higher than normal difficulties (typically 7 or 8), depending upon how big the members of the swarm are.

The health levels listed reflect the amount of damage it takes to disperse a pack or swarm. An additional two health levels' worth of damage destroys the attackers completely. Pistols, rifles, and small melee weapons (knives, brass knuckles, bottles, bare hands) inflict a single health level per strike, no matter how many attack or damage successes you roll — that is, the strike hits only one creature. Shotguns, submachine guns, and large melee weapons (swords, staves, boards, chainsaws) inflict normal damage (each damage success rolled eliminates one health level from the swarm as a whole), as do large-area attacks (Molotov cocktails, plasma gun bursts, gusts of wind, explosions). Swarms and packs don't soak. Larger packs can attack two or more characters at once and can be attacked by all of them in return. Packs can also attack anyone who helps an overrun character. A normal human can outrun some packs or swarms (those consisting of rats or bugs) but can't hope to outrun others (those consisting of hyenas or birds).

Swarms may also have stronger poison than usual, pass on rabies or other diseases, induce allergic reactions, or otherwise inflict substantially more damage than normal. For more about venom and toxicity, see "Drugs, Poisons, and Disease" in **Mage 20**, pp. 441-444.

## Packs and Swarms

| Animal                         | Damage | Health Levels | Initiative |
|--------------------------------|--------|---------------|------------|
| Small bugs                     | 1/B    | 5             | 2          |
| Large bugs                     | 2/B    | 7             | 3          |
| Flying bugs                    | 2/B    | 5             | 4          |
| Small birds/ bats              | 4/B    | 9             | 5          |
| Large birds/ bats              | 5/B    | 12            | 6          |
| Rats                           | 3/L    | 7             | 3          |
| Feral cats                     | 2/L    | 6             | 6          |
| Wild dogs                      | 4/L    | 15            | 4          |
| Wolf pack                      | 5/L    | 20            | 6          |
| Stampede (bison, cattle, etc.) | 6/L    | 40            | 10         |

### Ape, Large (Gorilla, Mandrill, Orangutan)

**Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 6, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 4, Brawl 2, Stealth 3

**Willpower:** 3

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

**Armor Rating:** 1 (seven soak dice, total)

**Attacks:** Bite for Strength + 1 lethal damage; rend/punch for Strength + 2 bashing damage.

### Bat

**Attributes:** Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Stamina 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Brawl 1, Flying 4

**Willpower:** 1

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

**Armor Rating:** 0 (one soak die, total)

**Attack:** Bite for Strength + 1 lethal damage.

### Bear, Small (Black Bear, Brown Bear)

**Attributes:** Strength 5, Dexterity 2, Stamina 5, Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Brawl 3, Intimidation 2, Stealth 1

**Willpower:** 4

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

**Armor Rating:** 1 (six soak dice, total)

**Attacks:** Bite for Strength + 1 lethal damage; claw for Strength + 2 lethal damage.

### **Bear, Large (Grizzly, Polar Bear)**

**Attributes:** Strength 6, Dexterity 2, Stamina 7, Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Brawl 3, Intimidation 3, Stealth 1

**Willpower:** 4

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

**Armor Rating:** 1 (eight soak dice, total)

**Attacks:** Bite for Strength + 2 lethal damage; claw for Strength + 3 lethal damage.

### **Bison / Buffalo**

**Attributes:** Strength 7, Dexterity 2, Stamina 6, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

**Abilities:** Alertness 1, Athletics 2, Brawl 3

**Willpower:** 3

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

**Armor Rating:** 1 (seven soak dice, total)

**Attacks:** Head butt or kick for Strength + 1 bashing damage; gore for Strength + 2 lethal damage.

### **Boar /Swine**

**Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

**Abilities:** Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Intimidation 2

**Willpower:** 3

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

**Armor Rating:** 1 (five soak dice, total)

**Attack:** Bite for Strength + 1 lethal damage; gore for Strength + 2 lethal damage.

### **Bull**

**Attributes:** Strength 5, Dexterity 2, Stamina 5, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

**Abilities:** Alertness 2, Brawl 2, Intimidation 3

**Willpower:** 2

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -3, -3, Incapacitated

**Armor Rating:** 0 (five soak dice, total)

**Attacks:** Bite for Strength - 2 lethal damage; gore for Strength + 1 lethal damage; trample for Strength + 1 bashing damage.

### **Camel**

**Attributes:** Strength 5, Dexterity 2, Stamina 6, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

**Abilities:** Alertness 2, Brawl 2, Survival 2

**Willpower:** 4

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

**Armor Rating:** 0 (six soak dice, total)

**Attacks:** Bite for Strength - 1 lethal damage; trample for Strength + 1 bashing damage. An annoyed camel can also spit in someone's face, as per the dirty-fighting maneuver Blinding (**Mage 20**, pp. 423 and 447).

### **Coyote**

**Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Empathy 2, Stealth 3

**Willpower:** 4

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

**Armor Rating:** 0 (two soak dice, total)

**Attacks:** Bite for Strength + 2 lethal damage; claw for Strength + 1 bashing damage.

### **Deer (Stag)**

**Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Empathy 2, Stealth 2

**Willpower:** 3

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -5, -5, Incapacitated

**Armor Rating:** 0 (four soak dice, total)

**Attacks:** Trample / kick for Strength + 1 bashing damage; gore for Strength + 1 lethal damage.

### **Dolphin**

**Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 2, Empathy 2, Swimming 4

**Willpower:** 4

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

**Armor Rating:** 0 (three soak dice, total)

**Attack:** Ram for Strength + 1 bashing damage.

### **Elephant, Medium (Asiatic, African Forest)**

**Attributes:** Strength 7, Dexterity 2, Stamina 8, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Empathy 2, Swimming 1

**Willpower:** 4

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

**Armor Rating:** 2 (10 soak dice, total)

**Attacks:** Gore for Strength + 2 lethal damage; trample for Strength + 3 bashing damage; trunk grab-and-slam for Strength + 1 bashing damage.



### Elephant, Large (African Bush Adult)

**Attributes:** Strength 7, Dexterity 2, Stamina 8, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Empathy 2, Swimming 1

**Willpower:** 4

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

**Armor Rating:** 2 (10 soak dice, total)

**Attacks:** Gore for Strength + 2 lethal damage; trample for Strength + 3 bashing damage; trunk grab-and-slam for Strength + 1 bashing damage.

### Fox

**Attributes:** Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

**Abilities:** Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Stealth 3

**Willpower:** 3

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

**Armor Rating:** 0 (two soak dice, total)

**Attack:** Bite for Strength + 1 lethal damage.

### Goat

**Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

**Abilities:** Alertness 2, Athletics 4, Brawl 2

**Willpower:** 2

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

**Armor Rating:** 0 (three soak dice, total)

**Attacks:** Bite for Strength + 1 lethal damage; gore for Strength + 2 bashing damage.

### Octopus, Small (A Foot or Two Across)

**Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

**Abilities:** Alertness 1, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Stealth 4

**Willpower:** 2

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

**Armor Rating:** 0 (three soak dice, total)

**Attacks:** Bite for Strength + 1 lethal damage; crush for Strength + 1 bashing damage per turn.

### Octopus, Large (Roughly Human-Sized)

**Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

**Abilities:** Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Stealth 4

**Willpower:** 3

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

**Armor Rating:** 1 (five soak dice, total)

**Attacks:** Bite for Strength + 1 lethal damage; crush for Strength + 1 bashing damage per turn; rend for Strength + 1 lethal damage.

### Octopus, Monster (Boat-Eater Size)

**Attributes:** Strength 10, Dexterity 3, Stamina 10, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Stealth 2

**Willpower:** 5

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

**Armor Rating:** 3 (13 soak dice, total)

**Attacks:** Bite for Strength + 1 lethal damage; crush for Strength + 1 bashing damage per turn; rend for Strength + 1 lethal damage.

### Shark, Small (Dogfish, Mako, Sand Shark)

**Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

**Abilities:** Alertness 4, Brawl 3, Hunting 3, Swimming 3

**Willpower:** 3

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

**Armor Rating:** 1 (four soak dice, total)

**Attack:** Bite for Strength + 3 lethal damage.

### Shark, Medium (Blue, Tiger, Whitetip)

**Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

**Abilities:** Alertness 4, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Hunting 3, Swimming 4

**Willpower:** 3

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

**Armor Rating:** 1 (five soak dice, total)

**Attack:** Bite for Strength + 2 lethal damage.

### Shark, Large (Great Hammerhead, Great White)

**Attributes:** Strength 6, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5, Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

**Abilities:** Alertness 4, Brawl 3, Hunting 3, Swimming 4

**Willpower:** 3

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

**Armor Rating:** 2 (seven dice, total)

**Attack:** Bite for Strength + 3 lethal damage.

### Snake, Small (Copperhead, Coral Snake, Rosy Boa)

**Attributes:** Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 1, Perception 1, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 1, Stealth 4

**Willpower:** 2

**Health Levels:** OK, Squished

**Armor Rating:** 0 (one soak die, total)

**Attacks:** Bite for Strength + 1 lethal damage. Venomous snakes add toxin damage between levels one and three, either bashing or lethal, depending on the type of snake; for details, see **Mage 20**, p. 442.

### Snake, Large (Cobra, Diamondback, King Snake)

**Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Perception 1, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Stealth 3

**Willpower:** 3

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

**Armor Rating:** 0 (two soak dice, total)

**Attacks:** Bite for Strength + 1 lethal damage. Constrictors can crush for Strength + 1 bashing damage per turn. Venomous snakes add toxin damage between levels two and four, either bashing or lethal, depending on the type of snake.

### Snake, Huge (Anaconda, Python, King Cobra)

**Attributes:** Strength 3-5 (large constrictors), Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

**Abilities:** Alertness 2, Athletics 4, Brawl 3, Stealth 3

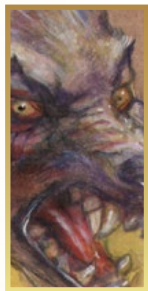
**Willpower:** 5

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

**Armor Rating:** 1 (five soak dice, total)

**Attack:** Constrictors can crush for Strength + 2 bashing damage per turn. King cobras do not constrict, but their bites inflict toxin level three (lethal).

# Bygone Monsters



The living nightmares of our legendary world have retreated, in our modern times, to the fringes of the mortal realm or escaped to far safer Otherworlds. You might find a cockatrice hiding in the bombed-out basement of a remote tenement's ruins, but you're not likely to see one strutting its poisonous way down Main Street unless some zooterrorist Marauder is up to his usual tricks again. Dragons and unicorns have honored places in popular culture and legend, but their existence in the everyday world is precarious and rare thanks to Unbelief Paradox (**Mage 20**, p. 553).

Although the famous critters of classic myth have largely fled the human world (but can be found in **World of Darkness: The Bygone Bestiary**), newer monsters — and fairly obscure older ones — still creep through the bushes and occasionally pop up to bite some mage in the ass.

## Anuk-ite

They walk in the shadows of tall hills at sunset. They shuffle through underbrush when the day is bright. They saunter without fear when the light of the sun is clouded out. They are the *Anuk-ite*: those whom some people call a race of merciless cannibals, whom others whisper are bearers of an ancient curse. But every story about them is true.

In the time before time, when many peoples were scattered across the land, one people settled into the crevices and cracks between high hills, relishing the shade and turning away from the light of the sun. Their first-name is lost, because their stories are no longer told, and names live on in stories. It is said that a leader of these people chose a husband from another people, but her husband did not want her. To take revenge for the unwanted marriage, the husband murdered the children of the leader, and then cooked them and fed them to his wife. Although the leader was ignorant of her husband's betrayal, she was cursed for eating her own children, and the face of her evil and greed was cast forever on the back of her head. She birthed more offspring with her husband, and although these children were also born with two faces, her husband did not kill them. Generations after the leader passed on, her lineage dominated the people, and those descendants gained the name they carry to this day: the Anuk-ite.

Anuk-ite have voracious appetites, and are frequently encountered seeking their next meal. They prefer to keep to the darkness of their homes otherwise. Eventually, even those who choose to show their human faces can no longer control their desires and seek out the only nourishment that satisfies them: human flesh. When the Anuk-ite hunt for human food, they show their cursed, monstrous faces. These faces are twisted and cruel, with many sharp teeth and eyes that glow like the moon

through the clouds. The Anuk-ite wear this face while they hunt and only after their hunger has been (temporarily) satisfied do they show their human face again.

Rarely, some Anuk-ite eschew their human face and only live to feed. Dining on human flesh is their greatest, basest desire, and some of them choose a life of pursuing it rather than holding it at bay. These monsters hunt aggressively and tactically. They have more strength and speed than normal humans, and they're always the most fit and agile of their people. If they could not hunt with such efficiency, they would not survive their lifestyle. None of them are fools. Worse, when Anuk-ite wear their monster faces, they are naturally resistant to the forces of the supernatural. Their curse weighs heavier than any curse an angry Verbena or a revenge-driven Euthanatos could lay upon them. They are not immune to the effects of belief and magick, but as long as they walk as monsters, they are abnormally resistant to it.

Most Anuk-ite no longer know their stories or where they came from. They are lost people without the guidance of ancestors and the teachings of their original language. Without a connection to the past, they have nothing and no one to guide them to their future. There's little hope left for these people, and even though they strike fear into the hearts of those who still know their stories and warn of their terrors, the greatest thing these stories teach is the danger of losing one's first name.

**Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Awareness 1, Brawl 3, Enigmas 2, Intimidation 2, Melee 3, Stealth 4

**Willpower:** 4

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

**Armor Rating:** 1 (four soak dice, total)

**Powers/Advantages:** Anuk-ite attack with knives or clubs (as per weapon type) before biting and clawing (Strength + 1 / + 2) at close range / Armor (1 pt.); Fangs and Claws; Mystic Shield (four dice, 8 pts.).

**Image:** The Anuk-ite still prefer to avoid the sun, living in craggy hills or forests, or in the back alleys and abandoned buildings of the city. They often wear hooded garments, sometimes as simple as a trash bag wrapped around their heads, or large, bulky hoodies. Sometimes even an oversized hat or wig will do. They are always hiding one face, so as to appear as any other human. Most Anuk-ite choose to show their human face. There is nothing at all to suggest a difference between this face and an average human being.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Whoever you once were is gone. Perhaps some memories linger from the existence you once knew. The core of you these days, however, is endless, grinding hunger.

# Aigamuxa

From a distance, the aigamuxa might be mistaken for a normal man. He has a head, two arms, a torso, and two legs. When someone approaches, though, it's clear that he's anything but normal. Perhaps his arms are too long, or the witness glimpses his long fingers, ending in sharp nails, or maybe they hear the sound of his feverish snarls and snorts. Certainly, the lack of eyes on his face is a clue to this creature's uncanny nature. No, the aigamuxa doesn't look *at all* normal up close. But then again, by the time you realize that fact, it's probably too late.

Aigamuxa has his eyes on the soles of his feet. Blind while standing still, he relies on scent and hearing to tell when someone else is near. His perceptions are keen enough to smell the differences between a human and an animal from far away—and he *much* prefers the meat of a person over that of an animal. When pursuing prey, he hops up onto his hands and runs using his arms, not his legs. With his long limbs, he can chase that person far faster than they can run, particularly if they struggle with the sandy dunes of the aigamuxa's desert territory; how he keeps that sand out of the eyes on his feet is one of those mysteries whose answers wait beyond the shell of rationality. Like so many legendary creatures, the aigamuxa exists beyond logic, in the space between fevered dreams and vibrant life.

Once the aigamuxa captures his prey, he'll crush it into a sack of skin and shattered bones, then use sharp teeth to tear meat from the body. The best way to escape this fate involves waiting until the beast is standing, blinded, on its feet. If the prey remains silent and doesn't move, it won't disturb the air and attract the aigamuxa's notice. To elude his sense of smell, the target needs to use stinky natural materials, like animal feces or mud, to obscure its own scent. Once the aigamuxa stands on its hands to use its eyes, though, the target has a chance to run—it's hard to grab when he's running on his hands. Once he knows its scent and can return to his feet, unless it manages to escape him completely, it's only a matter of time before it becomes his next meal.

**Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 1, Manipulation 3, Appearance 1, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Intimidation 3, Stealth 4, Survival 2, Investigation 3

**Willpower:** 5

**Rage:** 3 (from Ferocity Advantage)

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

**Armor Rating:** 0 (three soak dice, total)

**Powers/Advantages:** An aigamuxa grapples (Strength bashing damage), body slams (Strength + 2 lethal damage), and then bites (Strength + 1 lethal) and squeezes its prey until the victim dies. / Alacrity (2 pts.); Fangs and Claws; Ferocity (6 pts.); Needleteeth; Nightsight

**Image:** Larger in build and stature than a normal human being, an aigamuxa's distended torso and limbs give him a grotesque

physicality. His nails and teeth are long and mangled, and his face is devoid of eyes.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Sense, stalk, feed, repeat.

## Black Snakes

Generation after generation, stories have been handed down from sacred lorekeeper to sacred lorekeeper regarding the prophecy of Zuseca Sape. The stories are many and varied, and not only told among one people. The prophecies, however, are recognized far and wide: *When Zuseca Sape crawls its way across the land of the ancestors, the end of the world will follow.* Since the first prophecy was told, the storytellers have considered and debated the nature of Zuseca Sape. They knew their prophecies to be truth, and their stories to be sacred. Zuseca Sape has always been a truth and has never been a myth.

Today, as the need for power and energy to fuel technological advancement grows exponentially, oil companies desperately seek new methods and techniques with which to pull as much oil from the crust of the earth as they possibly can. Arctic drilling and metropolitan fracking wreak havoc on the environment, and the Canadian Tar Sands have turned an ancient forest into an endless, stinking wasteland, thick with choking poisons. Oil deposits are scattered across the land, and the need for pipelines to transfer the dirty oil to refineries has cast spiderwebs of steel across the world. Over highways and under lakes, through neighborhoods and across forests, the pipelines are everywhere. The black snakes have crossed the land, and it seems as though no force on earth can turn them back.

Squirming through the pipelines and seeping out of a nigh-infinite number of leaks come Zuseca Sape's children, the Black Snakes, slick and liquid black, without tint until light touches their ichorous scales in just the right way. When the sun illuminates their great coils, however, the fluidic plates that cover their elongated bodies cast it back in a blaze of color. These night-hued serpents reflect a sickly rainbow sheen as their bodies crack the beams of the sun into fragments.

These monsters have no obvious head or tail. More often than not, by the time they're discovered, they have grown to such incredible lengths that observers will never have a chance to see the head and tail at the same time. As these uncanny black snakes crawl across the land, they leave greasy, pitch-colored stains in their wake. These trails soak into the earth, leaving it untenable for life. Nothing new will grow in such places, and nothing made by the hands of man can stand—except, of course, for the pipelines that serve as birthing pods for these monsters.

More militant orders of magi suggest that these creatures are easy to defeat and so aren't truly anything to be concerned about.

Destroying a single black snake is an arduous work of labor, but hardly an impossible one. They're particularly flammable, and slow to react to an assault. When such creatures die, their remains exude deadly poisons, but cleaning up the mess isn't especially difficult of a cabal of skillful, determined willworkers. Destroying a single black snake, however, or even a small nest of them, means

little in the grand scheme of things. The nests in which they breed are numerous, and much more difficult to destroy. Worse, those nests tend to be protected by technomancers—especially operatives of the Technocratic Union—while other magickal groups remain blind to the truth around them. Rare is the dieselpunk-powered Etherite who'll lift a finger to protect the sacred lands these black snakes defile; even rarer is the Chorister who understands the sacred nature of the lands such pollution destroys forever.

When black snakes *are* destroyed, the remains of their corpses immediately seep into the earth, scarring it irrevocably. Where the corpse of a snake lies, the land and its significance are soon forgotten, as the entropic nature of the snake's remains slowly corrode the memory of the land from the minds of living things. Soon after a black snake is destroyed, there's literally nothing left in that land that *matters*. In order to save the sacred nature of the land and its hold within the human soul, according to many Dreamspeakers and Batini mages, humanity must transform the cultures that rely so heavily on the fuel and energy produced by oil... or better still, must end those cultures entirely. Killing black snakes individually does little to halt the encroachment of Zuseca Sape, the herald of last sunset.

**Attributes:** Strength 5, Dexterity 6, Stamina 3, Charisma 1, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 4

**Abilities:** Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Stealth 3

**Willpower:** 4

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

**Armor Rating:** 0 (three soak dice, total)

**Powers/Advantages:** Crush for Strength lethal damage / Deadly Demise (six dice lethal damage); Hazardous Breath (two dice lethal caustic damage, 14 pts.)

**Image:** Fluid black until struck by light, these monsters appear to normal sight as mindless streams of crude oil. Spirit-perceptions, however, reveal the true demi-sapient nature of the black snakes, Prime exposes the coruscating essence of primal life within them, and Entropy perceives the fluid nature of entropic forgetfulness.

**Roleplaying Notes:** It would be easy to confuse black snakes with twisted forces of nature, like Bane spirits or other monsters associated with the corrupted state of Entropy known by some spirit-workers as the Wyrms. Truthfully, however, these great worms represent only the end of all things — not *malicious* but simply indifferent. They seep across the land in an effort to erase it. They journey from their wombs into the creeks and rivers and oceans of the world because they understand that water is the birthplace of life; when they have so filled the oceans and blotted out every memory of life, and every memory of water, the sun will set for the final time.

## Eloko

If you hear the soft sound of bells, don't move. This is the first sign of the presence of an eloko. These creatures (known in the plural sense as *biloko*) live in those deep, unexplored parts

of the forest that give a traveler the feeling of doom. If someone happens to trespass into an eloko's territory, that person might notice a lack of game animals and edible vegetation. Why? Because each eloko has enchanted the forest to hide his food from them. It's best, really, that such food remains hidden, though. If a stranger finds food and takes it for herself, the eloko will jealously hunt that person down and take her life. Occasionally, however, he won't bother trying to hide the food — he may, in fact, make its presence more obvious. Biloko love the taste of human flesh (particularly that of women), so they sometimes use their magic to lure in their next meal.

The sound of an eloko's bells invokes an enchantment that tricks the trespasser into imagining whatever the eloko wants them to imagine. In one old story, for example, a young hunter ventured into the forest and took his wife with him. When he left her at a campsite to gather wood, she heard the sound of bells. A tiny voice came out of the woods and called to her. She thought it was a human child. It wasn't. It was an eloko. When the hunter returned, the only thing he found at their campsite was her bones.

An eloko's greed knows no bounds. His hunger for food and desire for flesh makes him volatile, and so trying to reason with him is useless. It's been said that biloko possess (or are possessed by) the vengeful, angry spirits of ancestors who died in the forests; by channeling their rage through his claws and hunger, this creature can tear a person's soul apart. Those devoured by an eloko, tales claim, cannot pass on to What Waits Beyond. When consumed, their essence is utterly destroyed. The only defense against eloko involves magic — traditionally bound into an amulet — that can protect the stranger from illusions before the eloko has a chance to kill them. If an eloko gets his claws and teeth into you, he won't merely be eating your flesh — he'll also devour your soul.

**Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 5 (Devour), Expression 1, Intimidation 4, Melee 2, Stealth 4, Survival 2

**Willpower:** 5

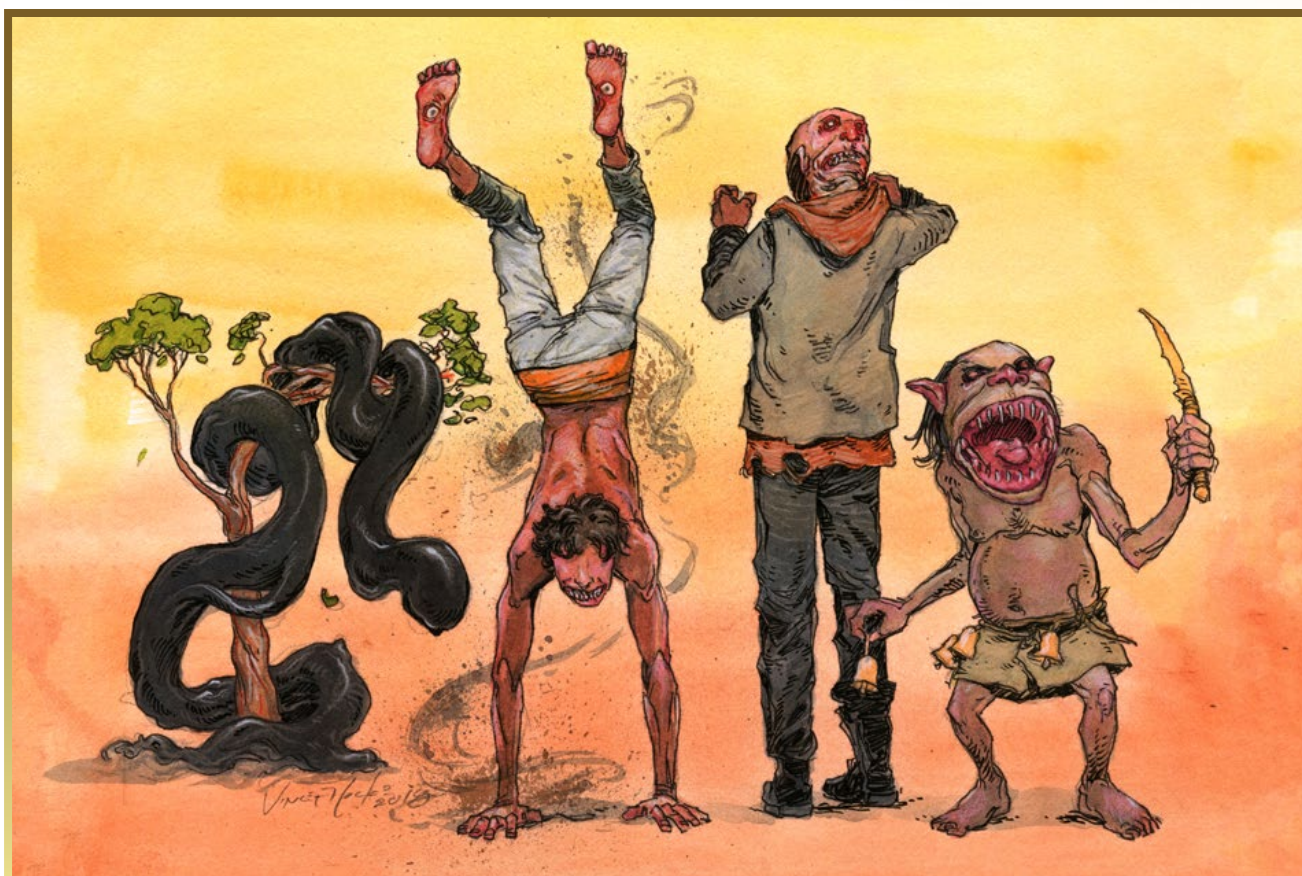
**Health Levels:** OK, -1 -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Dematerialized

**Armor Rating:** 0 (four soak dice, total)

**Powers/Advantages:** After using its bell to draw prey away from safety, the eloko attacks from concealment (-2 difficulty), with claws (Strength + 2 lethal damage) and then attempts to swallow its prey whole (Strength + 3 lethal damage) / Claws and Fangs; Human Speech; Musical Influence; Rapid Healing (4 pts.)

**Image:** A small, dwarf-like creature with sharp claws, piercing eyes, reddish skin, and vivid green grass covering his body instead of hair, an eloko has a gaping mouth that opens wide enough to swallow a human whole. He tends to use weapons made from the bones of his prey, and it's been said that the bells he rings are made of bone as well.

**Roleplaying Notes:** The souls of the dead within you cry out for sustenance. To feed them, you must feed yourself as well.



## Grootslang

When the gods created each of the animals on earth, giving each one a purpose and a shape, they made a large mistake: They made the grootslang.

With the head of an elephant and a body of a snake, the creatures originally known as *grootslang* were powerful and cunning monsters, able to live on land and underwater as well. These creatures were violent, too, using their strength and intellect to run rampant upon the earth. And so, the gods decided to split the grootslang into two separate animals, turning their heads into elephants and their bodies into snakes. Almost every grootslang was separated this way; one, however, was sly enough to hide away underwater and escape the justice of the gods. Now known as *the Grootslang*, he's still alive today.

The last of his kind, the Grootslang lives in large lakes, where he lures elephants and people to the water's edge. When his prey lower their heads to drink from the water, he wraps his serpentine tail around their legs, pulls them in, and drowns them. Once they're dead, he devours them whole, with a powerful jaw full of sharp teeth that can gnash bones to pieces and a body that digests food like an anaconda's: slowly and near-completely.

Grootslang's one weakness is his love of jewels. He'll hoard enormous amounts of precious stones (especially diamonds) in a nearby cave, and then guard them with fierce intensity. Folks who wish to trap or divert Grootslang leave jewels laying around in order

to lure him. Considering, though, that he's still around, that's probably not a successful strategy. Grootslang, on the other hand, often feeds himself by using the same trick; when people who lust after diamonds seek those riches out in lakeside caves, they may fall prey to Grootslang's hunger. He coils in the depths of mineshafts, too, eating the miners who seek jewels in the dark. Did the gods *truly* make a mistake when they left a single Grootslang alive, or is this immortal monster a living lesson about the awful price of greed?

**Attributes:** Strength 6, Dexterity 5, Stamina 6, Charisma 1, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1, Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 4

**Abilities:** Alertness 2, Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Cosmology 2, Enigmas 3, Occult 3, Intimidation 5, Stealth 5, Survival 5

**Willpower:** 6

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

**Armor Rating:** 4 (10 soak dice, total)

**Powers/Advantages:** Bite for Strength + 2 lethal damage; gore for Strength + 3 lethal damage; crush for Strength + 2 bashing damage / Armor (4 pts.); Fangs and Horns (tusks); Flexibility; Needleteeth; Tunneling; Soak Aggravated Damage; Unaging; Venom (6 pts.)

**Image:** Nightmarishly huge, the Grootslang has thick black skin, a probing trunk, long tusks, a cavernous mouth that opens wide



beneath his tusks, and a long serpent's body that stretches out into the darkness of the caves he loves.

**Roleplaying Notes:** The tiny lights in the darkness belong to you. Only to you. Your immortal mind recalls the rise and fall of empires, and though you'll occasionally spare a trespassing mortal snack so you can learn more about the world beyond your caverns and lakes, you get hungry in the void, and so, you feed.

## Inkanyamba

Inkanyamba is so elusive that it's unclear whether there's only *one* Inkanyamba, or an entire species of them. It is, or they are, most active during the summer months, and are thought to be responsible for the seasonal storms that spring up around that time and devastate the land. During the winter, Inkanyamba either hibernates or migrates to warmer waters (where it is seen in other parts of the world). Because of this creature's elusive nature, it's hard to discern whether Inkanyamba is laying eggs in other waters and returning to its African home once it's done, or if it simply prefers to travel all over the globe. Sadly, very few people get close enough to Inkanyamba to confirm either theory before being eaten.

Most often observed in fresh inland waters, the Inkanyamba is capable of rapid underwater travel, and can blast through rock formations and survive the scalding steam of geysers. Legends portray these creatures riding the winds of violent storms, or "swimming" through clouds high in the air. If a mage becomes powerful enough to possess an Inkanyamba, they can quickly

travel vast distances by water, destroying almost any physical obstacle that stands in their way. In order to approach the waters without getting swallowed up by Inkanyamba, however, prayers and offerings must first be given to the creature in order to appease its violent nature, and to calm the raging storms and rain the creature often summons to hide itself or distract its prey.

**Attributes:** Strength 6, Dexterity 7, Stamina 8, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 5, Awareness 2, Brawl 4, Stealth 3

**Willpower:** 4

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

**Armor Rating:** 3 (11 soak dice, total)

**Powers/Advantages:** Bite for Strength + 3 lethal damage; crush for Strength lethal damage; swallow for Strength lethal damage; barbed "mane" gores for Strength + 2 lethal damage / Alacrity (6 pts.); Armor (3 pts.); Elemental Touch (15 pts.); Fangs and Horns; Flexibility; Soak Aggravated Damage; Tunneling

**Image:** Inkanyamba has a serpentine body roughly 50 feet long, with a vaguely horselike head. The creature's "mane," however, is made of sharp, hooked fins, and its two foreflippers extend out from its body by two meters or so. Its mouth is filled with jagged teeth, like those of a piranha, and although it's often known by a single

proper name, the various colors and patterns attributed to its skin suggest there may be many such creatures deep beneath the waters.

**Roleplaying Notes:** All things about you, save your hunger, remain mysteries.

## Jiangshi

These infamous “hopping vampires” are recidivism personified. Stiff corpses whose rigid physicality forces them to “hop” and thrash around with distinct unsubtlety, these undead parasites endure decades of being trapped within their own bodies before they manage to escape their graves. Such lengthy imprisonment and isolation gives them the shittiest attitudes imaginable. Most display a certain degree of the personalities they held in life; those personalities, however, have been hardened and coarsened by decades — sometimes centuries — of graceless non-death, and so these creatures remain stuck in a state somewhere between zombie, true vampire, and a really crappy excuse for a life.

Occasionally, this state results from a curse inflicted by some vengeful enemy. Most jiangshi, however, have no one but themselves to blame for their current predicament. Spectacularly bad luck (and bad Qi, known in the West as *Quintessence*) made their bodies too restless to properly die. Jiangshi owe their dismal state of life after death to a near absence of yin energies, and a monstrous amount of yang. Ironically, this crucial energetic imbalance means that a jiangshi who drains someone’s Quintessence is essentially committing suicide, because restoring balance to a jiangshi’s Qi breaks their control over the physical body, releasing their spiritual essence from that rigid form. Nevertheless, jiangshi must drain Quintessential energy from living things in order to retain their mortal state... and despite that rather uncomfortable state, the proposition of following being undead with several centuries in a Buddhist hell-realm is enough to keep a hopping vampire, well, hopping for their next meal.

When feeding, a jiangshi goads or entices would-be prey into emotional exertions that raise the vital energies (preferably in a passionate yang state: vibrant, active, perhaps amorous or violent) to a pitch. Some jiangshi then latch themselves onto the prey with grasping hands or a hungry mouth, but many — especially those of the more “old-school” variety — simply sit back and draw the energy into themselves from a discreet distance. Mages skilled in the Sphere of Prime can sense these energies, of course, but most mortal folk cannot unless their perceptions reach into sublime realms hidden from foolish human eyes. (In game terms, the Awareness Talent or similar energy-based Disciplines, Gifts, or other powers.) Regardless of the method employed, jiangshi *must* drain such energies in order to remain “alive.” Stealing Qi is essential for a jiangshi’s survival, as they must feed in order to heal injuries or even to repair their rigid bodies from the basic wear and tear of walking around. Some clever jiangshi preserve their unlife-spans by draining Qi only from feverish patients, unrepentantly violent criminals, and other folks with severe Qi imbalances. Others of a more philosophical bent accept their injuries rather than feed, and gradually become more decrepit as the rigors of not-death wear their mortal bodies away.

Restless by definition, jiangshi rarely stay idle or in the same place for long. While they’re most famous in China, jiangshi roam all over East Asia, with a few of them even choosing to migrate to other regions of the globe. Many take up work as club bouncers, construction workers, and workers from other physically active professions. These beings never sleep, and they can see into the Penumbra... often through the morbid *Vidare Mortem* which, incidentally, does *not* help with their sanity and anger issues.

If you happen to encounter a hopping vampire who’s trying to pass for a living person, be ready for that jiangshi to go full raving madman as soon as they realize that you can see them for what they are. Under better circumstances, the creature may act calmer and perhaps even personably. Bring a stick and a carrot if you plan on bargaining with one of them, though, just to be safe. Especially the stick, *most* especially if it came from a peach tree, whose sacred wood drives malignant energies away. Better still, bring a mirror (jiangshi fear and flee their own reflections), a Taoist paper talisman (affixed to the vampire’s head, such charms immobilize jiangshi), an axe or broom (to chop up the critter or beat it away), the blood of a black dog (splashed on a jiangshi, it burns them like acid), Taoist or Confucian prayers, the *ba gua* sign (which they flee as Christian vampires flee a cross), a bag of coins or glutinous rice (which, when spilled, distracts the vampire, who feels compelled to pick it all up), or maybe just a torch or other source of fire. Vampires—even the hopping kind—*fuckin’ hate* fire.

**Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Academics 2, Alertness 1, Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 2, Enigmas 2, Esoterica (Taoist Alchemy) 4, Firearms 2, Intimidation 3, Martial Arts 2, Melee 2, Occult 3, Subterfuge 3

**Willpower:** 6

**Age:** 2 (from Ferocity Advantage)

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

**Armor Rating:** 2 (six soak dice, total)

**Powers/Advantages:** Bite for Strength + 2 aggravated damage, claw for Strength + 3 aggravated damage; Armor (2 pts.); Aura; Fangs and Claws (aggravated); Ferocity (4 pts.); Human Guise; Mystic Shield (two dice, 4 pts.); Nightsight; Soak Lethal Damage; Soul-Sense /Death Sense (3 pts.); Spirit Vision

**Image:** Newly risen jiangshi stick out like pale, moldering corpses dressed in outdated funeral wear. Their iconic “hopping” pose generally clues people in, too. Once a jiangshi learns to control his body, however, his movements become more fluid, eventually surpassing his body’s original speed and strength. After a few years (and a bit of makeup), a jiangshi can look almost like any other person... to the naked eye, anyway. For anyone with paranormal perceptions, jiangshi (including those still interred) glow like hot coals, their massive spiritual imbalance making their nature plain.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Almost as chatty as you are pissed off. Your imbalanced yang energy makes you emotionally volatile,

talkative, mercurial, and often hasty, while your stiff form is really... fucking... *frustrating* to work with.

## Kijimuna

Anyone looking to pierce the Gauntlet in the Ryukyu Islands deals with the kijimuna. Sometimes, people even talk to the leaf-clad imps on purpose. The little maniacs love twisting reality, making Umbral trespassers on the islands rare. Often mistaken for kids with huge, red, bushy manes, kijimuna will ruin your day if they sense aggression or decide that someone broke a promise to them. Or if they have nothing better to do. Look — just don't fuck with them, okay?

On the plus side, kijimuna talk straight. If they say they're going to do something, they'll do it, no matter how wildly impossible it sounds. Trust and fear their words. Some fishermen have made good fortunes for themselves by partnering up with a kijimuna. Some fishermen have also had everything they owned march into the sea for not holding up their end of their deal. This doesn't mean that kijimuna are honorable; they just have no tolerance for bullshit. Their expansive definition of "bullshit" includes not giving them sweets. The kijimuna will get their hands on your candy, so you might as well share deliberately. At least then their pranks will be funny for you, too.

Most of their pranks aren't very complicated, but their skill at manipulating reality means that they don't need to play the con game to disrupt life for others. For example, an unattended fire may just walk away. Strings of unlit lanterns are usually a good sign that kijimuna are nearby and screwing with people. For that matter, most things going missing in the Okinawan Prefecture can be blamed on a bored kijimuna. They usually steal sweets, but will absolutely take money if they feel like it. If they ever figure out the internet, world banking might get the wind knocked out of it.

If that hasn't put you off chatting with the short critters, you'll find communication with them challenging. Most don't speak Japanese, let alone any European languages. Instead, they rely on a pidgin of Ryukyuan and their native language to speak with humans. Distantly related to Ryukyuan and Japanese, Kijimunan would be relatively straightforward to learn if the kijimuna could sit still long enough to teach anyone. Translation spells can prove useful, although kijimuna might just take such a spell as an excuse to talk in riddles and puns.

While dealing with kijimuna usually results in headaches, kijimuna generally care about the well-being of people. After all, if all the humans died, who would the kijimuna screw with? Anyone willing to take a joke will have a great time hanging out with them. Nailing one of them with a great practical joke might win you a lifelong friend. Or a hell of a beating. Look, they're a rowdy bunch, but they're not actually assholes.

And, it's a good thing, too. Their proficiency with bending reality and probability makes them insanely valuable to anyone who wants to pierce the Gauntlet in the Okinawan Prefecture. It also makes them an immediate obstacle for anyone (or anything) trying to cross over from the Umbra. If you're tracking

an Umbral critter, you'd do well to search the banyan trees for kijimuna and ask for help.

**Attributes:** Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 5

**Abilities:** Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Awareness 4, Empathy 2, Enigmas 3, Expression 3, Investigation 5, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 4 (Practical Jokes), Stealth 4, Survival 4

**Willpower:** 7

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

**Armor Rating:** 0 (two soak dice, total)

**Powers/Advantages:** Awwl (2 pts.); Blending; Cause Insanity (10 pts.); Earthbond; Elemental Touch (10 pts.); Spirit Travel (8 pts.); Spirit-Vision; Tides of Fortune

**Image:** Somewhere between cute and repulsive, kijimuna look like little orange humans with clawed fingers and toes, wild red hair, and large pointy ears. They tend to wear grass-frond skirts if they wear anything at all, though some have been known to dress in tacky imitations of the most obnoxious human clothing they can find. Oh, did I say "human clothing?" Gee, sorry — I meant *clothing humans wear*, not *clothing made of humans*. Hmm... now that you mention it, though, that sounds like a great idea for a joke...

**Roleplaying Notes:** Gee, those humans have no sense of humor. None at all. You'd think that something so big would have the smarts to laugh, especially with how silly it looks when it's trying to play with magic. Fireball? What? Oh, I set his balls on fire. See? It was funny. *He* did fireballs. *I* did fire balls. Now *he* has fire balls. Heh.

## Kongamato

Called "the Breaker of Boats," Kongamato has long terrorized fishing villages all over Africa. They say you can't see Kongamato coming; in the skies above, he looks just like any other bird. It's not until Kongamato makes its descent that you realize what it is.

Kongamato announces itself with a piercing scream — not the call of a normal bird, but a shrill shriek that shatters eardrums and incapacitates people. Survivors often say that's the last sound anyone heard before their fellow crewmen disappeared. Kongamato (or perhaps it's *the* Kongamato, or *a* kongamato — accounts differ) then attacks the boat or shoreline by flying high into the sky and then darting down. The creature's strong body and pointed beak pierce through boats on the water, shattering decks and sinking vessels. While the crewmen try desperately to swim to shore, Kongamato picks them off — grabbing them up, ripping their bodies in half, or sometimes dropping them from great heights and then carrying their broken bodies off to feast on in its nest.

The Kongamato doesn't limit itself to human flesh. It also feasts on small animals such as dogs, cats, and goats. Its beak has a sharp point capable of tearing into bone, and its powerful jaws can crack a body's bones before its large mouth swallows the shattered animal whole.

Kongamato lives along rivers, hiding its nests up high in sturdy trees. Some people claim to have seen more than one of them at a time, but most accounts portray the Breaker of Boats as a solitary creature. As with many predators that seem half-real, half-legend, Kongamato appears only when it's hunting; otherwise, it seems to keep to the trees or fly so high in the skies that human eyes cannot spot its presence. Stalking the monster, therefore, is quite difficult, and while some men have claimed to have slain Kongamato, no proof for such deeds exist... and the Breaker of Boats continues to kill.

**Attributes:** Strength 5, Dexterity 6, Stamina 6, Charisma 1, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Alertness 5, Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 5, Stealth 5, Survival 3

**Willpower:** 3

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -5, incapacitated

**Armor Rating:** 4 (10 soak dice, total)

**Powers/Advantages:** Claw for Strength + 2 lethal damage; beak "bites" for Strength + 3 lethal damage / Alacrity (6 pts.); Armor (4 pts.); Claws and Fangs; Hazardous Breath /Scream (three dice lethal, 15 pts.); Homing Instinct; Soak Aggravated Damage; Wings (5 pts.)

**Image:** With a wingspan roughly three meters across, Kongamato resembles a demonic parody of the prehistoric *Pteranodon*. Cryptozoologists speculate that the Breaker of Boats is a survivor of that era, a holdover species, or perhaps the manifested spirit of such a beast whose material body is long gone. Whatever its nature might be, Kongamato has the strength and mass to smash small watercraft and lift grown men into the skies. Its scaly, red and black skin seems too thick to puncture with handheld weapons, and guns seem only to make the beast angry. The sharp edges of its long beak, meanwhile, have been known to snip a man's arm off like a titanic scissor blade.

**Roleplaying Notes:** You're cunning enough to hide, quick enough to strike, and hungry enough to take on all manner of intelligent prey... and when you do, to win.

## Ravening Winds

As the world grows ever warmer, hurricanes, typhoons, and other terrible storms increase in instance and magnitude. Communities that have withstood the test of winds for centuries are suddenly unequipped to ride out the weather, and communities that have never known the ferocity of the angry skies are now forced to learn to survive them or be destroyed. As the weather transforms into something so much more dangerous than ever before, ancient tales of the Ravening Winds are once again sung on the lips of the people who have known them since the time before people knew how to sing.

Many tale-speakers suspect the increasing madness of natural phenomena is a result of the planet's sickness: humankind. The temperatures rise with the waters to drown out a disease that exists in numbers too great (or merely too greedy) for Earth to

support. The coming cataclysm is a fever burning out the actual disease. The huge weather-related death tolls are but symptoms of the land's illness. Memory-keepers know this to be true, and the stories about living creatures who've been found bloodless, or fleshless, or who've simply disappeared in the wake of these natural disasters are not mere coincidences or urban myths. They speak the truth about the consuming skies: the Ravening Winds.

After the passing of a storm, when survivors come out of the woodwork to see what's left of their homes, families and lives, animals and people are sometimes discovered dead and drained of blood. Sometimes, stripped skeletons are found twisted into piles of rubble or wrapped around the branches of leafless trees. Thousands of animals and people have gone missing in the wake of life-taking storms. Usually these deaths are attributed to the violence of the storm itself; in a sense, this suspicion is not wrong.

Riding the gyrating winds of the storm are disease-hunters known as *Ravening Winds*. When a storm approaches, some people swear they can hear the keening and wailing of miserable souls. In truth, Ravening Winds are not miserable, nor do they mourn. Their howls are gleeful; they look forward to hunting their quarry and stealing life from it. Each kill is another chance for their mother to live. Each bloodless body no longer poisons her blood, but returns to her instead, to nourish her back to life. Ravening Winds cannot, and will never, see the sorrow inherent in a loss of life. To them, the creatures that take sustenance from the blood of their mother are as gnats or bacteria are to human beings, negligible and forgettable.

Once, there were days where the storms were small and brief enough that the murderous rampage of Ravening Winds was hardly a concern. But as those storms grow larger, longer, and greater in number, the Ravening Winds who ride the tempests run down living things with joy in their hearts and laughter on their lips.

**Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 2, Charisma 1, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Athletics 4, Awareness 2, Brawl 5, Intimidation 2

**Willpower:** 5

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -2, -2, -2, -5, Dissolved

**Armor Rating:** 0 (two soak dice, total)

**Powers/Advantages:** Rip skin off with wind and debris, inflicting Strength + 1 lethal damage per turn / Alacrity (2 pts.); Aura; Blending; Intangibility (10 pts.); Elemental Touch (10 pts.)

**Image:** Ravening Winds generally appear to be just that; sometimes, however, they'll appear as shadowy humanoid figures whipping through tempests, obscured by the tumultuous haze. Often, their howls join the chorus of the storm.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Ravening Winds cannot be reasoned with. They'll take as many lives as they can in the passing of a storm.

## Shisa

No one comes to the Ryukyu Islands without seeing the *shisa*, or *shishi dogs*. They grin hungrily from atop store entrances and

glare at visitors in every home. Tourists buy plastic versions and T-shirts of them. Even the filthiest cockroach nest of an apartment has a pair of shisa lurking by the door. At first glance, you might mistake a pair of shisa for statues of lion cubs or mastiffs. Their cartoonishly large heads and wide mouths give them broad smiles easily mistaken for inviting.

But don't worry about their physical forms too much. Sculpted from stone, clay, or wood, each pair of shisa statues poses only a mild risk. But the conjoined spirits that inhabit the shisa pairs can completely erase unwanted trespassers, channeling waves of memory and existence until even the wrongdoer's closest friends forget that person existed. If these creatures sound like absolute nightmares, good; that means you won't underestimate them. Most of them don't swing that level of power or aggression, but the former Ryukyu Kingdom has almost as many shisa as people; a careless mage doesn't live long enough to learn the difference between the minor shisa and that ones that purged the dragons from the islands.

Speaking of learning things, shisa have human-level intelligence, but many pairs have lived for generations, accumulating a significant amount of knowledge. Talking with any of them will teach you an entirely new way of looking at the world, particularly with identity politics. Simultaneously one gestalt entity and two separate bodies, shisa may refer to itself as "I" or "we" and they may refer to their pair-mate as "he," "she," or "me." Each head has its own mind and its own opinions, often agreeing with their lifelong companion, but these creatures can and will argue with each other from time to time. On top of that, each shisa pair is somehow linked to every other shisa in the prefecture. Thanks to this connection, the pronoun game gets further complicated when shisa pairs refer to other pairs, using any and every damn pronoun they feel like, including "we."

Shisa consider themselves to be the guardians of the Okinawan people, and they take great pains to care for their charges. (Non-Okinawan residents also get included in this protective attitude, but there is a pecking order.) For the shisa, "taking care" of their people encompasses all aspects of life, from defending family members against violence to making sure the children packed their homework. This means that the shisa have a vast number of things they could use help with.

Really, the problem with working with shisa is that there's a nearly infinite supply of both work and reward. Mages who aren't careful will find themselves doing relatively trivial tasks for the rest of their lives. For the shisa, the focus is always on taking care of their families; getting them to see any sort of big picture is a struggle. This, coupled with the fact that all shisa share a psychic link, means that it's easy to get frustrated and exactly as easy to get blackballed.

Provoking the shisa to violence is a bit of a mixed bag. On one hand, getting them to kill to protect their families is remarkably easy. On the other hand, trying to enlist their help to kill someone else is nearly impossible, as they want their families to continue believing that shisa are just statues. Okinawans live in peace because they don't know that they have the Awakened

equivalent of cruise missiles sitting on their front step. That's not hyperbole, by the way. The last time the entire shisa community was active in the Ryukyu Islands, dragons roamed the islands. It is important to note that there are currently over a million shisa pairs in Okinawa and zero dragons.

Keeping in mind that shisa are all linked, anyone brave enough to do a shisa pair a favor might see the favor repaid by virtually any other shisa. This is not to say that all shisa are equal. Some retreated away from humans, dwelling on otherwise uninhabited islands, while others revealed their true nature to their families. Some of these families willingly submit to their shisa with fanatical reverence, and others live in a perilous balance of fear and Stockholm syndrome. Perhaps the strangest situations with shisa arise when a shisa pair attempts to protect their family from criminals who have their own shisa pair protecting them. Usually, this results in a stalemate, but Okinawa sees up to a dozen typhoons per year, providing plenty of opportunity for a house to be leveled without provoking Paradox.

**Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Appearance 4, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Academics 3, Alertness 4, Athletics 3, Awareness 5, Brawl 4, Cosmology 4, Enigmas 2, Esoterica 3, Etiquette 3, Intimidation 4, Investigation 3, Law 4, Leadership 2, Occult 3, Politics 3, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 4

**Willpower:** 8

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -5, Dematerialized

**Armor Rating:** 5 (nine soak dice, total)

**Powers/Advantages:** Bite for Strength + 2 aggravated damage / Armor (5 pts.); Aww! (4 pts.); Bond Sharing (2 pts.); Earthbond; Empathic Bond; Fangs (aggravated); Human Speech; Information Fount; Mystic Shield (four dice, 8 pts.); Soul Sense / Death Sense (3 pts.); Spirit Travel (10 pts.); Telepathy (6 pts.); Tides of Fortune; Unaging; When suitably annoyed, a pair of shisa can focus their wills in order to temporarily erase someone from existence and memory. This frightening power involves spending all 16 points of the shisas' Willpower and putting both entities into stasis for a week; that effort, however, makes a normal person disappear forever. Mages and Night-Folk return to existence when the shisa recover from their week-long "vacation," but do so far from the Ryukyu Islands (Storyteller's call about how far "far" might be).

**Image:** Huge-mouthed and mighty-maned, shisa are often (though incorrectly) referred to as "*fu-dogs*" by clueless westerners. Their hefty bodies loom behind those grinning maws, and while many of them crouch and wag their little tails in what seems to be a playful manner, don't be fooled into thinking that their idea of "play" looks like anything the average trespasser could survive.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Until someone crosses your boundaries or steps out of line, you're content to sit back and let the world go by. If someone forces you to take action, though, then teach them to respect the world by teaching them to fear you.



## Skymurmurs

Awakened scientists claim that skymurmurs came into existence mere decades ago — living signs of human dysfunction, or perhaps the mechanical sounds of technology's development. Some authorities even suggest that both factors are in play. Humanity, after all, isn't always prepared for the rate of technological advancement and development... and so, when the workings of machinery become so commonplace and natural within their homes that our natural hearing gives way to subtle damage, people begin to hear the skymurmurs. These skymurmurs aren't spirits per se, but aren't exactly *apart* from spirits, either. These entities are never seen and cannot be touched. They exist only as sound, and therefore leave behind a spiritual resonance that attracts spirits of madness, despair, and even rage.

Most often echoing through deep deserts, coastal regions, and metropolitan areas, skymurmurs manifest as a low, humming buzz that resonates on a frequency only a small percentage of people can hear. Animals, however, as well as beast-people, spirits, and mages who can understand the language of spirits (in game terms, Spirit Rank 1), or the intricacies of frequencies and waves (Forces Rank 1), can hear that buzz. The sound remains constant and ever-present, apparently lacking an obvious source while simultaneously remaining bound to a specific location. Skymurmurs might be heard across a stretch of miles, but they'll never follow an individual who escapes their territory. The tinny, inner-ear tickling sound they make has no direct impact on those

who can hear it except to irritate and frustrate. The source of that irritating sound cannot be seen with normal sight, blocked out by earplugs, or overwhelmed by other noise.

Annoying, right? It gets worse.

The danger of skymurmurs involves their relationship to spirits — hazardous entities who manipulate the emotions of humans from the safety of the spirit world. Spirits of despair encourage people to harm themselves; spirits of anger encourage them to harm those around them. Spirits of madness tear mortal minds apart until their prey cannot understand the nature of their own thoughts. While the skymurmurs remain ambivalent about such things, and don't truly encourage any of these behaviors, their persistent hum wears away the will of the mortals who can hear them... and the longer someone is exposed to the droning call of the skymurmurs, the more susceptible they become to the influence of these corrupting spirits.

Some Dreamspeakers insist the skymurmurs were once spirits and ghosts who've been wailing in the ears of the living for so long that most of humanity has learned to ignore them; those who still hear those spirits cannot understand their cries of misery. These are the spirits and ghosts who've been fading away so slowly, and for so long, that not even *they* remember what they truly are. Dreamspeakers and other ancestral mages have many stories about the people who died long ago and still cry out, and of the nature-spirits whose presence slowly decays beneath the weight of the modern world we've made for ourselves.

**Attributes:** N/A

**Abilities:** Awareness 2, Expression 4, Intimidation 4

**Willpower:** 4

**Health Levels:** N/A

**Armor Rating:** N/A

**Powers/Advantages:** Intangibility (10 pts.); Musical Influence; Soul-Sight / Death-Sight (3 pts.)

**Image:** None. They are only sounds.

**Roleplaying Notes:** If they once had a personality, it has been lost to the susurru. Now, there is only the sound.

## Taniwha

Known as *mo'o* in Hawai'i and honored by some Polynesians as tribal guardians, most taniwha serve as protectors — mainly against other taniwha but sometimes against other humans. Since many Polynesian islands are well within swimming or rowing distance of other islands, taniwha rarely rest, often swimming patrol routes for most hours of the day. In fact, if taniwha establish lairs, no one has ever found one. Due to this constant vigilance, rarely does anything cross their borders without them knowing about it.

Though their natural forms (if any one form can be considered “natural” for creatures who are literally born shape-changers) resemble giant serpents, orcas, sharks, or sea turtles, taniwha consider their prodigious shapeshifting talent as just another tool to use as needed. The more aggressive ones tend to grow thick leathery skin, spines, and massive teeth, ending up resembling a cross between komodo dragons and Godzilla's little brother. Some even grow wings to fly, which has probably inspired more than a few giant monster movies. When feeling sociable, or on some errand, they manifest as tall and bulky Polynesian folks, often heavily tattooed with authentic cultural designs that suit the birthplace of the taniwha in question. Many taniwha, though, don't bother trying to pass for humans, though they'll adopt humanoid limbs and faces in an otherwise monstrous form. In any form, these creatures are *big*; even wearing human guise, they tower over normal people, with the bulk and muscle of bodybuilders.

Taniwhas tend to be solitary creatures, so if you ever manage to catch one in a mood to chat, you can probably talk shit about other taniwha without offending them. Just be sure you absolutely know which taniwha did what to whom. There's nothing more awkward than talking to a shapeshifter about something they did while wearing a different form, especially when that shapeshifter could swallow you alive.

While you *can* make friends with a taniwha, don't bet on it. Most of them feel a responsibility to a given area or people, which puts you low on their list of priorities. And be prepared to have the conversation quickly; the taniwha instinct to patrol and protect dominates their lives, so they have virtually no patience and would rather fight you than waste time deciding whether or not you're a threat. That said, creative mages who figure out a way to make their interests coincide with a taniwha's stand to have a rather powerful friend by their side. Exceptionally creative

and daring mages might even find a way to play several taniwha off each other, though that whole “swallow you whole” element should be factored into the risk-assessment of such attempts.

**Attributes:** Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 6, Charisma 2, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 5, Empathy 2, Enigmas 2, Expression 2, Esoterica (Polynesian magic) 3, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 2, Survival 2

**Willpower:** 6

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

**Armor Rating:** 4 (10 soak dice, total)

**Powers/Advantages:** Bite and / or claw for Strength + 3 aggravated damage / Armor (4 pts.); Claws and Fangs (aggravated); Earthbond; Elemental Touch (7 pts.); Shapeshift (8 pts.); Soak Aggravated Damage; Telepathy; Unaging

**Image:** The shape a taniwha assumes depends upon their needs at the time. For a quick trip between islands, one might swim as a giant shark or dolphin, while a longer voyage might call for the efficiency of a whale-like shape. Closer to shore, a taniwha will pick whichever shape makes them feel most at home. Some enjoy lounging around as large people, while others bask as whales, scour the bottom as octopuses, or leap into the air as dolphins or titanic rays.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Taniwha are surprisingly forthright and honest. Hey, when you can swallow people whole, deception is a pretty useless tactic.

## Yao Guai

Found all over Asia, yao guai (*yokai* in Japan, and *yokwe* in Korean) make up one of the largest categories of supernatural critters in the Pacific. Because of this, describing them in generalizations just creates confusion and misunderstandings. Breaking them down into subcategories doesn't help much either, since different cultures break yao guai down differently. For example, *hulijing* (fox spirits) get lumped in with one category of spirit in Japan, but with another in China. In Japan, most supernatural creatures get lumped into the category “yokai,” with some getting subcategorized further based on their appearance or abilities.

Since the Japanese language has the habit of using the same word for Awakened and mundane versions of the same animal (*kitsune* means both “fox” and “fox-spirit”), this section favors Chinese words when describing entities that are more or less the same thing described in different languages. An important note about Asian languages: Most Asian languages do not distinguish between singular or plural, so the plural of *shisa* is still *shisa*.

Basically, if you run into magic creatures in the Pacific, follow these rules:

1. *Be respectful.*
2. *Take no shit.*

3. *Do not have sex with them.*
4. *Hold up your end of any deal.*

## Hulijing

Generally benevolent, the legendary fox spirits *hulijing* (*kitsune* in Japan, and distinctly different from the Changing Breeds of the same name) move like dancers, effortlessly covering great distances with feet that don't appear to touch the ground. They can shift between fox and human forms, but regardless of their visage, *hulijing* retain their tails, making them somewhat imperfect spies, especially since many *hulijing* have multiple tails (the oldest and most powerful have nine). Too clever for violent force, fox *yao guai* employ guile and seduction in order to avoid conflicts. When cornered, though, *hulijing* can bite, scratch with their claws, and occasionally breathe fire in a would-be assailant's face.

Most of these sly creatures have seen centuries come and go. Because of this, conversations with *hulijing* routinely befuddle the unprepared; not only are *hulijing* supernatural, but they have witnessed generations of different human customs. Most don't remember which idioms are still in vogue, making them sound like hipster grandmothers. Thanks to their comely appearance, however, most people find their odd mix of slang from the ages as endearing as it is confusing.

As adorable as their cultural confusion might be, it can also create some serious problems. A cute, almost playful suggestion may be a directive straight from a powerful kami. An offhand remark could spell flirtatious interest or grave danger. Choose your words carefully and listen to everything they say.

**Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2, Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 5

**Abilities:** Academics 4, Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Cosmology 3, Empathy 3, Enigmas 5, Esoterica (Occult Secrets) 5, Etiquette 2, Expression 4, Intimidation 3, Leadership 3, Martial Arts 2, Melee 3, Occult 4, Research 2, Seduction 3, Stealth 4, Subterfuge 5

**Willpower:** 5

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

**Armor Rating:** 0 (two soak dice, total)

**Powers:** Bite for Strength + 1 lethal damage, though *hulijing* avoid fighting unless absolutely necessary / Aww! (4 pts.); Bare Necessities (3 pts.); Hazardous Breath (four dice lethal, 20 pts.); Human Guise (2 pts.); Human Speech; Intangibility (8 pts.); Mystic Shield (four dice, 8 pts.)

**Image:** *Hulijing* can transform into human forms — typically those of young, beautiful women (regardless of their gender in fox form) of Chinese, Japanese, or Korean heritage. In vulpine form, these *yao guai* appear to be unusually large and gorgeous foxes, occasionally with two or more tails in place of the usual one.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Cunning, crafty, and playful, but often use outdated language.

## Inugami

Forged through intense torture on every level imaginable, *inugami* have arguably the most disturbing origins among Japan's many magical critters. Unlike most of Japan's paranormal fauna, *inugami* owe their existence to mages, not to nature. They resemble dogs, but have been twisted by violence so horrible that it brought them back from death. Because of their cruel circumstances of creation, they're among the few *yokai* who are incapable of communication, existing only to do the bidding of their masters... which is usually murder.

Despite being born from the corpses of large-breed dogs, *inugami* have unusually gaunt and bony frames — a byproduct of being tortured and starved. Their rebirth inflicts a permanent hunger, incapable of being satisfied even with vast amounts of blood and death... though not for lack of trying. Compassionate mages find no happy ending when dealing with *inugami*; those who try to save *inugami* by turning the creatures into familiars tend to realize what a horrible mistake they've made once the psychic link floods their minds with murderous imagery. Ending an *inugami*'s bondage doesn't free it from its curse; you need to put the poor thing down forever.

**Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1, Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

**Abilities:** Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Investigation 2, Stealth 2, Survival 3

**Willpower:** 3

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

**Armor Rating:** 0 (four soak dice, total)

**Powers/Advantages:** Bite for Strength + 2 lethal damage; Fangs; Needleteeth; Soak Lethal Damage

**Image:** Dog zombies. They look just like dog zombies.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Hunger. Must... satiate... *hunger*.

## Oni

Known outside their homeland as "Japanese devils," *oni* take a strange sort of pride in their public image as dimwitted thugs. Given their demonic appearance, and their capricious and violent natures, it would make sense that these *yokai* would have serious problems blending in with the human world. However, a little makeup and bulky clothing goes a long way toward disguising them as ugly but otherwise normal human beings. It helps that *oni* often pose as *yakuza* — a group of people most Japanese folks go out of their way to ignore.

*Oni* social structure features rigid hierarchy, with each tier figuratively and literally browbeating the lower ranks into submission. Consequently, conversations with *oni* feature an odd mix of chatting and blood. Making a good first impression on an *oni* is essential... and often requires breaking some bones. *Oni* will rarely challenge a mage a second time if that mage has bested them once already, but it would be foolish to trust such creatures, so smart mages really don't.



Rule #2 is in full effect here. Oni will absolutely beat the shit out of you to prove a point. Nonviolent negotiation works only when the threat of violence looms so heavily that no one doubts the outcome. Don't worry — these bastards can take a beating. Besides, if you really wanted things to go peacefully, you wouldn't be making deals with literal devils. Thanks to the rules of oni social hierarchy, however, you can pretty much do what you want with these creatures once you've earned their respect. More than a few mages of questionable morals have made their fortunes by using oni as muscle. Think of oni as Japanese orcs, and you won't be far from the truth.

**Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3, Perception 2, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Alertness 2, Athletics (climbing) 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 4, Etiquette 1, Firearms 3, Intimidation 4, Investigation 3, Leadership 2, Martial Arts 3, Melee 2, Stealth 4, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 1, Survival 2

**Willpower:** 6

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

**Armor Rating:** 2 (seven soak dice, total)

**Powers/Advantages:** Although oni prefer to use weapons and /or martial arts, they can also bite for Strength + 1 lethal, and claw or gore for Strength + 2 lethal damage / Armor (2 pts.); Aura; Claws, Fangs and Horns (7 pts.); Dominance; Soak Lethal Damage; Spirit Vision; Unaging

**Image:** Oni mostly appear as stocky, red- or blue-skinned humanoids, with one or two horns and large fangs. Among humans, these demonic brutes tend to disguise themselves as low-class, violent people with body art and attitude to spare.

**Roleplaying Notes:** They like to talk... but more, they like to fight.

## Tanuki

Taking top prize in the "Best Shapeshifter to Party With" contest, tanuki also win the "Biggest Asshole" award. Pranksters at heart, tanuki love a good joke, especially if their shapeshifting allows them to play multiple roles in it. Greedy people with poor senses of humor run the risk of becoming the butt of overly complicated jokes. To the credit of all tanuki, no one has died from any of their cons, although a kitsune *did* nearly drown from one. Other pranksters, drunks, and travelers are the tanuki's favorite sorts of people.

Confusingly given the same name as the raccoon dogs of Japan, tanuki vaguely resemble their mundane counterparts, if you ignore the fact that they stand upright, wear clothes, tower

over six feet tall, and possess truly impressive testicles in their native form. Tanuki claim to be the best shapeshifters in Japan, however, and often live undetected among humans for years before growing bored and moving on.

Being friends with a tanuki can be profitable, but no one who's interested in profit is likely to become friends with one. Despite their zany antics, though, tanuki often give good counsel and are among the most reliable guides wilderness travel, especially among the mountains of Japan. Thanks to their penchant for playing roles, few mortals can claim to truly know the personality of a tanuki. For the most part, these yokai give off the air of happy drunks, even when they're completely sober. Tanuki personalities tend to fill rooms, too — a characteristic which endears them to many people and annoys the shit out of others. *If you like hanging out with the life of the party, a tanuki friend will make your day. If you'd rather have a quiet night, you'll probably want to strangle the chubby beast.*

**Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 5, Manipulation 4, Appearance 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 5

**Abilities:** Academics 1, Alertness 1, Area Knowledge (Japanese Wilderness) 5, Art 1, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Cosmology 3, Drive 1, Empathy 2, Enigmas 3, Etiquette 4, Expression 3, Meditation 3, Occult 3, Stealth 5

**Willpower:** 3

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

**Armor Rating:** 2 (six soak dice, total)

**Attacks/Powers:** Claw for Strength + 1 lethal damage, bite for Strength + 2 lethal damage; Aww! 1; Armor (2 pts.); Healing Lick 3; Human Guise 2; Human Speech; Nightsight; Shapeshifter 5; Soak Lethal Damage

**Image:** Tanuki look like a blend of human and raccoon-dog. Everything about them is improbably large. Everything.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Life is far too serious to take too seriously.

## Tengu

Potentially the most dangerous of the yokai, tengu possess nearly the same brute strength as the oni, but with far superior intelligence and potent magical skills. On top of that, they blend in easily among humans, being distinguishable only by their extra-large noses. Although their name translates roughly as “heavenly dog,” the tengu are bird-people spirits, considered to be “slayers of vanity,” challengers of over-proud humanity, and patrons of the martial arts.

While originally hostile to humans, these yokai have since found their place in the modern world as guardians of a sort. People, tengu feel, are weak, stupid, arrogant, and often self-destructive. Given the human tendency to ruin the rest of the world in the process, tengu have adopted a sort of “protective older sibling” role with regards to humanity — guiding, advising, teasing, protecting, often tricking, and occasionally beating the shit out of

the younger sibling when he does something especially stupid. To this end, tengu have meddled in human politics for centuries. In addition to meeting the rich and powerful behind the scenes, masked tengu played a more insidious role: They are said to have been Japan's first ninjas, spying and sabotaging their way into Japanese history... and may continue that tradition secretly today.

Dealing with a tengu is a game of endless second-guessing. Did they give in too quickly? Not quickly enough? Did they agree with you only because they had planned the whole affair to go in their favor from the start? Tengu prize cunning, not raw power. Unlike the oni, kicking a tengu's ass doesn't buy you any respect — they'll give you a wide berth after such displays of violence, but consider you a rank amateur in terms of real power. To test a potential rival's intellectual capacities, these beings often speak in riddles, making the mage who can keep up with them a rare treat. If you can put one over on a tengu, they might even grow to like you. Tengu would rather make a deal; if they *have* to fight, though, they will, and viciously.

Modern tengu drive hard deals. Expect plans within plans, and *always* read the fine print. As far as a tengu is concerned, mages are not “normal” human beings, and thus fall outside the protective courtesy they afford to most people. In fact, expect a tengu to screw you over for a fistful of yen until you manage to demonstrate your merit. If you manage to prove yourself to be an asset to the tengu, they've been known to grant favored people access to their very deep pockets and troves of magical and mundane secrets. Even then, though — read the fine print. Seriously.

**Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5, Charisma 5, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 4

**Abilities:** Academics 3, Alertness 4, Athletics 2, Awareness 4, Brawl 2, Cosmology 3, Empathy 3, Enigmas (Riddles) 4, Esterterica (Omens) 5, Etiquette 2, Finance 4, Firearms 2, Intimidation 3, Investigation 2, Law 4, Leadership 4, Martial Arts 4, Melee 3, Occult 4, Politics 3, Stealth 4, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 5

**Willpower:** 8

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

**Armor Rating:** 0 (five soak dice, total)

**Powers/Advantages:** In addition to weapons and a wide array of martial-arts techniques (detailed in **Mage 20**, p. 449), tengu can peck or claw for Strength + 2 lethal damage / Claws and Fangs (really, beak); Dominance; Human Speech; Information Fount; Shapechanger (bird form, 3 pts.); Soak Lethal Damage; Spirit Vision; Wings (5 pts.)

**Image:** Generally disguised as Japanese people of great wealth but unusually large noses, tengu in their true form appear as man-sized bird people — generally crows but sometimes hawks, owls, or other Asian birds of prey.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Speak in riddles, keep to yourself, and try to stay five moves ahead of everybody else.



# Chapter Four: Ephemeral Entities

*From wonder into wonder, existence opens.*

*– Lao Tzu*

*And so, he runs.*

*Feet torn, limbs bleeding, sides pierced by cramps and teeth, he runs.*

*Ground bucks. Rocks cut. Cramps sear along his ribs. Blood flows from a thousand cuts, and still, behind him, they come.*

*Wake up, he begs himself. Wake up before they get me. The nightmare stretches out, though, like a lover on a bed of thorns, voluptuous in agony and hungry for more.*

*Storm winds lash his skin. Lightning throws the landscape into sharp relief. But no relief shakes Chatan Rolling Waters from his vision. The hunt is on, and Chatan's losing.*

*Behind him, Stalks-the-Master shivers in a dozen lupine forms, cutting through the dark like knives in Chatan's skin. Flames flicker from its hungry eyes. The wind is a hungry hunter's howl, steadfast as stone, flowing like a gully-washer flood.*

*"What am I supposed to learn from this?" The words tumble from his lips as he runs, broken teeth from a mouth that's said too much. The breath behind them, wheezing, drops those falling words to whispers. Without answers, the wind carries them away.*

*And so, he runs.*

*Sole-shredded bursts of pain flare from his battered feet. Cold wind scourges him with sand.*

*The wolves close in.*

*"What?" Chatran cries, the hopeless words like wires in his throat. "What am I not seeing here? What am I supposed to know?"*

*Pain, he knows, is a teacher.*

*But class is over as the wolves close in...*

## The Breathing World of "Other"

*Umbrood.* Such a clinical word. It suggests shadow-children, eclipsed by the light of human Arete. Arrogant mages stick that word to the forehead of beings they barely understand, slapping names of convenience into hierarchies that promise illusions of control.

Morons.

The spirit-world breathes. With or without delusional mages, it's alive. Whether that life consists of visions shaped by human beliefs into familiar forms, alien beings from distant cosmos, fragments of mythology given life by mortal thoughts... these are philosopher's games, more suited to a polite fireplace conversation or the brain-wrenching lessons of some polysyllabic know it all. Spirit entities are what they

are, and don't need mortal minds to contain their mysteries. Sure, we all see 'em a little bit differently, but that speaks more to our lack of imagination than to the limited essence of beings without boundaries.

The material world is a sham. Mages know that already. The beings whose essence pervades reality aren't bound, as we so often are, to the frailties of bone and skin. We can post names and descriptions on these ephemeral entities, but the truth they represent is beyond any language a human throat can frame.

Pedantic poetry aside, the following characters are bigger than the Traits we've given them or the names we speak when we refer to them. Papa Legba might look like an old dude with a dog, but that's an illusion: He is the principle of transition and passage, embodied in a human form but so much *more* than we could ever be. When your mages meet such entities, then, treat them with respect. If you're a player, remember that the god or Loa or Avatar or djinni you're dealing with has levels your mage only barely understands. If you're a

Storyteller, make these beings *mysteries*, not mere monsters. Describe them a little differently (maybe even a lot differently) to each player; wrap the landscape and elements around them. Bring as much of a sense of enigmatic awe as you can possibly describe, and hint at things far greater than anything your players sense. Use the following entries as guidelines, not limitations, and feel free to add to or alter the powers and abilities given in the pages below. These aren't monsters that can be killed with a blast of fire or hypertechnical plasma, but sacred emanations whose apparent forms are rough sketches of what they truly *are*.

For more details about spirit entities and the game rules surrounding them, see the **Mage 20** sections about "Umbrood Spirit Entities" (pp. 485-495), "Inhuman Entities" and "Atmosphere and Description" (pp. 356-358), "The Deeper Level" (pp. 363-369), and "Spirits" (pp. 631-641), plus "Summoning, Binding, Bargaining, and Warding" in **How Do You DO That?** (pp. 90-106). For new spirit Charms, see this book's Chapter Five.

## Avatars



The guiding "inner gods" mages perceive can range from whispering voices to apparent people in their own right. **Gods & Monsters** features an array of Avatars to inspire players and Storytellers to create their own such characters. Several of these Avatars have no physical presence to speak of, and thus have no Physical Traits; Avatars associated with the Manifest Avatar Merit, however, possess the same Traits any other character of their kind would have.

The following entries have been left essentially "anonymous," too; this way, you can adopt these Avatars to suit your own characters and chronicles, adopting specific elements as you see fit.

### Beloved (Dynamic Avatar)

Love is inspirational. So, for that matter, is lust. And so, certain Avatars assume the form of a *Beloved*: a person of the mage's preferred gender whose devotion to that mage runs deep, if not always easy, through both partners' lives.

Such manifestations assume a distinct form and identity — typically, though not always, the mage's lover. The Avatar could appear as a child, a parental figure (perhaps the apparent "ghost" of a long-dead parent or sibling who's not actually among the Restless Dead), an adored (and possibly long-gone) pet, a cherished mentor, the best friend you never had, a dedicated roommate, perhaps even a rival whose antagonism stems from a frustrated form of love.

Avatars can be a real pain in the ass. A Beloved one is no exception. Sure, this entity loves you... but might not particularly

*like* you, and certainly won't make your life easier. The Avatar in question can be as demanding, neurotic, quarrelsome, obnoxious, irritating, selfish, depressing, messy, infuriating, and abusive as any human being can be. A Beloved Avatar is inevitably possessive, too — after all, that entity is literally possessing or possessed by the mage, so it's a natural state of affairs. Thus, a relationship with a Beloved Avatar tends to be rather dysfunctional by human terms — at best, high-maintenance, at worst, a literal walking nightmare.

### Objects, Forces, and Phenomena

Not all Avatars manifest as entities. A rare few appear to their mages as objects, forces of nature, or other inanimate phenomena. These manifestations aren't characters *per se*; they have no Traits or apparent sentience. Despite their lack of apparent "life," however, these Avatars still teach their mages important lessons, lead them on Seekings, and otherwise engage the mages' Enlightened, intellectual, and often emotional sensibilities in the ways any other Avatar spirit would do. For mages whose worldview bristles at "guardian angels," "mystic selves," and other such rubbish, however, an apparently inanimate Avatar can assume forms such as those detailed below. Obviously, the insights gained from interactions with such manifestations should be credited to the mages themselves, not to silly things like "avatar entities," right? Ideas to the contrary would simply be absurd...

By default, a Beloved Avatar manifests in perceptible ways. That spirit might be seen and heard only by the mage herself, but the Avatar *does* have a distinct, recognizable identity and presence. In Trait terms, such Avatars comprise Background ratings of 3 or higher; a lesser Avatar could not have such a potent relationship with its mage. The Manifest Avatar Merit (see **The Book of Secrets**, p. 71) is essential when such spirits come into play, and the Ally Background must be chosen as well if the Beloved is to become an entity that people other than the mage herself can perceive. Chances are good, though, that the Beloved will assume an apparently mundane form. It's possible to have a Beloved Avatar who looks like a puppet, shark, or six-armed alien, but it's not bloody likely and that relationship would seem weird even by the standards of a mage.

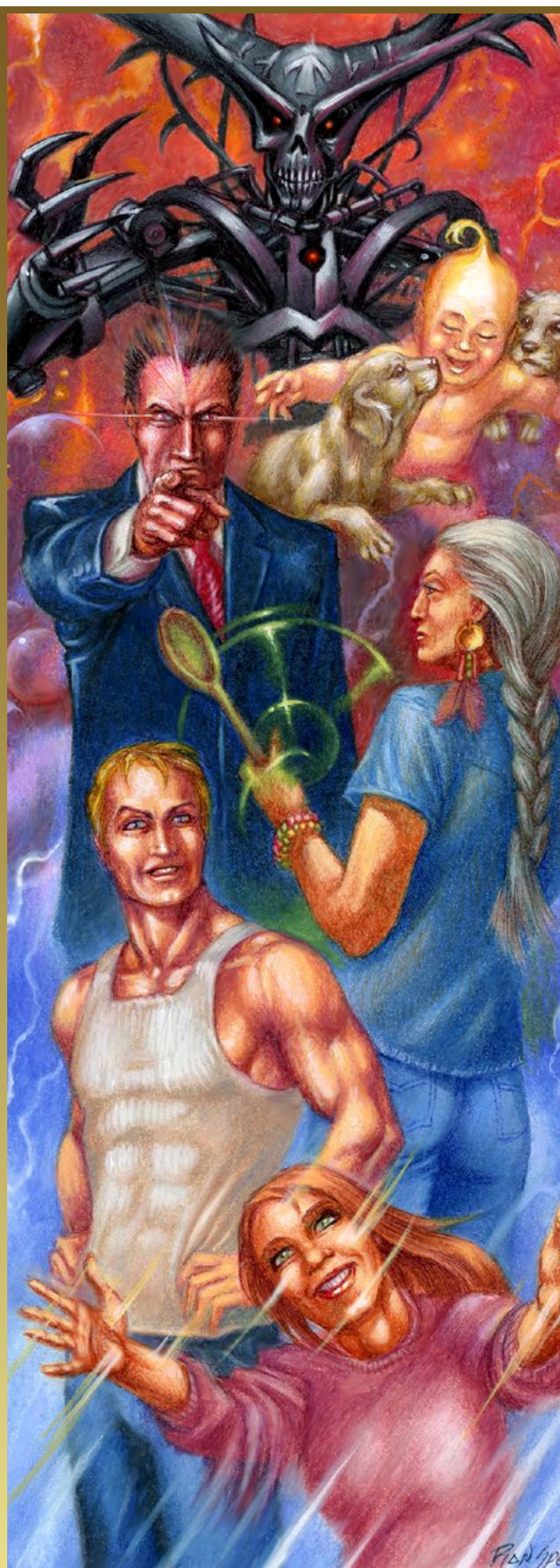
As detailed in the Manifest Avatar entry, this sort of Avatar becomes a character in his own right. It's possible that a trusted player could roleplay that Avatar if the player portraying the mage agrees to that arrangement. Otherwise, the Storyteller controls the Beloved; the mage's player can give suggestions and guidance, but Avatars are notoriously independent entities and so the Beloved spirit ultimately remains beyond the player's command.

In addition to the usual matters an Avatar spirit addresses, Beloved Avatars tend to shape, challenge, and comment upon their mage's approach to relationships in general. The Avatar could be jealous, sabotaging all human rivals for its affection... or, possibly, supportive of them instead. ("When was the last time you called your mother, anyway?") A willworker with family or romantic issues (and really, who *doesn't* have at least a few of those?) will find herself dealing with an extension of those issues when dealing with her Avatar. The Avatar might spoil her for mortal relationships, too; after all, what kind of person can compete with a loving extension of your soul? Love, though, has many faces, some of which are ugly. That battering brute with a volcanic temper might be your Avatar, and no restraining order or domestic violence shelter can hide you from someone who is literally part of your soul.

## The Boss (Pattern Eidolon)

Oh, crap — the Boss is back! He's gonna be all up in your shit unless you get cracking on whatever it is he needs done. Filing? Proposals? Homework? Contracts? The Boss is looking for them now, and if you don't complete that task posthaste you'll be in a world of hurt.

An embodiment of authority, the Boss Avatar has no time for excuses and no use for people (Enlightened or otherwise) who can't be bothered to move whatever mountains he sets in their path. He shows up whenever that slack-ass Technocratic operative (or perhaps an especially business-oriented magus) has too much free time on her hands. Slacking off? Not on *his* watch! This guy's the proverbial hard-nosed businessman. His clothes are impeccably stylish. His authority is complete.



Yeah, he might yell at you, throw a fit, trash your office, or dress you down if he's in an especially poor mood. More often than not, however, he'll just glare at you, dealing out an especially cutting remark or two if you're lacking sufficient devotion to his cause.

Seekings featuring this personage are literal nightmares of paperwork and organization, strict deadlines and difficult tasks. In order to win the Boss's approval, you'll need to move your ass and get your head out of the clouds. Should you happen to succeed, the Boss might reward you with a handshake, a nod, or maybe even a compliment or two. More often, though, he's beyond pleasing, with an impatient temper that proves you're just wasting his time.

Generally, the Boss hangs around inside your own head. An especially potent Boss, however, (that is, one represented by the Manifest Avatar Merit and the Allies Background) might stalk around the material world as well. In this form, he browbeats *everybody* even if they don't officially work under his department. Most often, he appears as a powerful executive businessman; occasionally, for agents of a more military stripe, he'll manifest as an officer instead. Depending on his hoist's vocation, the Boss could also be an especially strict teacher, an implacable coach, a demanding sensei, or an imperious priest. However he appears to you, this entity tolerates nothing less than perfection. Weakness is for the weak, loser. Get on the ball, or get out of his sight!

## Crush (Dynamic Avatar)

Oh, Gods – he's beautiful. Manly in all the right ways, without the toxic soup that often passes for masculinity in real guys. His arms are just buff enough, his belly ridged into a perfect flabless eight-pack. His hair's just messy enough to look sweet. His eyes sparkle with mischief. Whatever he wears, Crush wears it well. And if you happen to catch him wearing nothing, well then, it's your lucky day, isn't it?

His name's not *really* "Crush," is it? I mean, that's what he is, really, but this Avatar goes by whatever name his host prefers. Immaculately masculine, he appears to mages who, regardless of their gender or sexuality, desire the company of an unapologetic *guy*. He's the romantic lead of your dreams, assuming whatever form pleases you best. A guiding spirit, Crush transcends culture or ethnicity; one mage might see him as a beefy jock, while another sees a slick tycoon, or a tattooed leather-daddy bear. In all guises, though, this spirit is archetypally male, living up to the standards of manhood craved most in his mage's life.

Unlike the brutal Boss, Crush nurtures his host. He's a lover, not a brute... unless, of course, a brute is what you're looking for. Where other men fall short, Crush delivers. He's sensitive without being timid, strong without being oppressive. His presence inspires you to do better than you might have otherwise; his words bring out the best in you. He wants you

to dare the things you fear, to overcome the obstacles that confine you to endless disappointments. Crush is the arms that hold you and the voice that soothes you. His Seekings aren't easy, but his touch makes it all worthwhile.

If he manifests in solid form, Crush can add endless complications to a mage's life. He's *so* desirable, after all, that anyone who's into dudes wants to have him in their lives. Jealousy, possessiveness, insecurity... they come with the territory when a mage must share this guy with other folks. Oh, sure – he's probably devoted to you. I mean, he is a projection of your psyche after all, right? Still, who's to say that Crush won't leave you for someone better if the right mage comes along? Something this perfect, they say, never lasts forever.

## Flutterby (Pattern Avatar)

Children in the industrial world often miss the simple pleasures of their childhood... for example, chasing fireflies. One mage, though, recalls her rural southern upbringing in the form of *Flutterby*: her name for the spirit that combines the fireflies she used to chase with the butterflies that still fascinate her now that's supposedly too old and cool to care about such things.

Like its elusive namesake, Flutterby is a tiny, fleeting presence of great beauty and childlike allure. Bright coruscating colors flow across its wings, while a firefly glow bathes the spirit in luminescent shine. Flutterby's presence comforts the mage, evoking memories of a simpler time. Like the darker side of childhood, however, Flutterby's appearance may presage abrupt disaster; the mage recalls how her father's stormy temper could be predicted by a sudden surge of clouds across the sun. Flutterby, when it appears, sometimes warns its mage when there's danger on the horizon; at such times, Flutterby's glowing colors darken and its happy flutter slows to an ominous pace. If the danger seems especially significant, Flutterby might freeze in place, pulsating in the air but otherwise motionless. Such warnings have taught the mage to remain watchful, not only of Flutterby's motion but also of the currents of sound and stillness that surround her in the mortal world. Although her father died a long time ago, she can occasionally detect that darkening of the sun that used to warn her not to go home quite yet... or, if she was home, to go hide before the storm broke in her direction.

In Seekings, Flutterby tends to flit toward the direction of a potential test or the solution to a puzzle facing the mage. The Avatar won't actually solve the puzzle for the mage, but by watching the spirit that mage might arrive at the correct conclusion. As far as that mage is concerned, Flutterby embodies youthful innocence mixed with caution. As she realized long ago, Flutterby teaches the mage to remain watchful, remember the wisdom of little things, and hang on to the essence of youth even in the face of despair.

## Grandmother (Pattern Avatar / Eidolon)

Everything that the human race needs to survive and thrive already exists. It lives in the forests and grows in the oceans. There's no need for hunger when food sources are nigh infinite. There's no need for sickness when medicines grow in your backyard. Grandmother teaches these concepts to her descendants when they are young, and these lessons remain deeply rooted in their way of thinking.

Grandmother walked her descendants through the forests if they hadn't already been adventuring there themselves. Grandmother's charges, nearly always Indigenous Americans, had absent parents – their fathers practically nonexistent, constantly shifting in and out of the prison system, or having no care to foster a relationship with their progeny. They were so young when their mothers went missing that their only memories of her rest in photographs. When those children were still children, Grandmother died, as is the way of the elders, and they were shuffled back and forth through the homes of aunts who could not always remember which sister the children were supposed to be staying with. This leaves the wards of Grandmother with plenty of time to themselves in the woods – reminding themselves of Grandmother's stories and lessons, collecting food, and surviving with very little help from their families, if any help at all.

As Grandmother's children grow older and more aware of their surroundings, her lessons point to the poverty that surrounds them. Grandmother tells them that this cannot possibly make any sense; if everything you need is merely a walk in the woods away, then why must people suffer? The memory of Grandmother urges them to ask questions of their elders. Some community elders embrace such questions with open arms, the memories of their Grandmothers whispering to them as well. Others – those who have forgotten their elders' lessons – prick at the rudeness of the young. And so, Grandmother encourages her children to turn away from home, if only for a short time, in order to educate themselves.

Because such education is so often found away from the woods, Grandmother sits with her children night and day, guiding their eyes and fingers, nurturing their sense of wonder. And so, her children excel in academia. Grandmother's tenacity (and a decent dollop of guilt) keep her children out of parties and focused on more important subjects. Those who listen to Grandmother's wisdom are considered to be geniuses, and they quickly earn respect from professors and peers. Such devotees often pursue environmental studies, of course, thanks to unsubtle suggestions from this guiding Avatar. Grandmother pushes hard, and so her children develop networks and attract the attention of powerful mentors and guides among the Progenitors; like calls to like, after all, and even hardline materialists can recognize the guidance of Grandmother's Genius when it occurs to them to listen.

Grandmother's children usually prefer field work. Even when they're immersed in the sciences (say, studying the biodiversity of the fauna in the Olympic Mountains, or splicing together berry-producing plants to produce new and unique fruit), Grandmother's teachings always come rushing back. The people, after all, are dying because so many of them pursue material wealth above all things, up to and including their own lives. Grandmother shifts her children's perception of poverty and its effect on people dramatically. After all, Grandmother's people, the family and community of her children, do not suffer because of poverty – they suffer because they're not properly connected to the rest of the living planet. *All* people suffer for this reason. To alleviate suffering, then, and to allow humanity to prosper as it once did in older times, we must nurture and understand our connection to the land.

The children in question must be careful about what they say, and to whom they say it, with regards to Grandmother's influence. Hard-minded Technocratic supervisors have little patience with (or mercy for) students who babble on about walking through the woods with long-dead relatives. Grandmother, though, is subtle; her charges tend to recall her lessons and visitations as old memories and dreams inspired by the past. Childhood memories, of course, aren't terribly reliable, and so when new lessons open a student's mind to possibilities they might not have earlier have considered, it's easy to view that insight as the product of old memories seen through a new, adult perspective.

Inevitably, Grandmother calls her children home. Whether they're resident teachers, or studying the effects of dramatically cutting back the rainforests, her children will eventually be recalled away from their work to return home and begin teaching their nations, redeveloping the reservations with a system of agroforestry and water preservation. Their methods may be directed by western science, but at their heart you can find Grandmother's lessons. Permaculture, after all, is an Indigenous art form, and Grandmother urges her children to use it to save her people.

Although Grandmother's children are members of the community, their relationships within those communities remain taxed and challenging. They often come across as rude and somewhat standoffish, and their approach to technology often seems to value western science over traditional teachings, even though Grandmother advocates merging the two. Her methods are based on traditional teachings with the *support* of industrial-era scientific principles. Despite doubts both internal and external, these technomancers look to memories of their Grandmother's teachings to inspire them. They still attend community events, and they strive to improve their relationships with their tribes. Grandmother shows them the value of traditional teachings, but also urges them to explore how much further they can go with a little Enlightenment and a respectful state of mind.

Those who can see her perceive Grandmother as a short, dark, muscular woman of Native American heritage, with a pair of beaded eyeglasses and a thick shock of wild, loosely braided black hair with a thick streak of silver. She speaks quietly but with unquestionable force, and she carries a wooden spoon that she never uses but often taps in her palm when her children fail to listen to her wisdom. White is her least favorite color because Grandmother spends so much time on her knees, in the earth, in the mud, or even climbing trees. She tends to wear durable clothing, and always sports a pair of brown hiking boots, typically caked with mud. Despite her obvious age, Grandmother is healthy and spry, and her many years never seem to slow her down.

## Hunter (Primordial Avatar)

Relentless, they pursue you — the Hunter and its hounds. Through tortured forests of the mind, down boundless hallways and pounding rains, this Avatar chases the magus away from complacency and toward some deeper realization. Unlike, say, Crush or Manic Pixie, this spirit is no friend of yours. Its weapons hurt. Its purpose terrifies. The teeth of its hounds tear your psychic self, devouring confidence and inflicting bitter pain.

In certain aspects, the Hunter is male; in others, female, and quite often neither. Gender is meaningless to the Hunter's role. Pursuit is this Avatar's only purpose... pursuit and, if need be, destruction. A veritable demon driving its host onward, the Hunter typically adopts a rustic medieval guise when seen by Verbena or Hermetic mages, a modern gun-toting form when hunting mages of a more technological inclination, a frightening robotic aspect when pursuing tech-obsessed hosts, and a "tribal" manifestation when chasing folks whose tastes (or terrors) involve the bygone world. In all aspects, however, the Hunter's not alone. Dogs, wolves, ravens, monsters, cyborgs — the Hunter has them at its beck and call, and wherever the mage flees, these creatures follow.

Seekings with the Hunter Avatar take place in awful dreamscapes where rugged terrain trips the mage and hides his pursuers. Occasionally, an especially potent form of this Avatar manifests physically, chasing the magus through the waking world as well. Although the Hunter's weapons and the teeth of its pets inflict no *physical* harm (even if the Hunter itself is physical), this Avatar can indeed hurt you. A mage caught by the Hunter and its pets suffers one unsoakable health level of damage per turn until either the mage escapes or the damage eliminates the mage's health levels. At that point, the mage either wakes up out of the Seeking, or falls unconscious from the pain if he was being chased through the physical world. Either way, the mage wakes up sometime later, sore but physically unharmed, with the knowledge that the Hunter won again.

How can someone beat the Hunter? With tricks, courage, or knowledge gained over the course of the Seeking. The mage must be willing to dare something he has not done before, demonstrate a new skill or power, or do something unusually clever or brave. The Hunter is not fooled by the same tricks or tactics twice, however. In order to best this Avatar, you'll need to keep learning, thinking, exploring, and growing. Mere speed or strength or magic cannot beat the hunter, after all, because deep inside this terror lives within you.

## Jumble (Dynamic Avatar)

A technomancer whose view of the world involves solving puzzles or tinkering with objects might have an Eidolon-like *Jumble*: a scattering of pieces or parts whose innate disorder invites the mage in question to build something functional out of apparent chaos.

Unlike personified Avatars, Jumble (a name of convenience, not identity) consists of a bunch of disconnected parts whose form suggests intrinsic order if and when the mage figures out how those pieces fit together. Jumble does not speak, move, or act — it merely manifests at times when the technomancer seeks the solution to a problem, feels blocked with regards to his practices, or otherwise encounters unusual amounts of chaos that's internal, external, or both. Once the mage decides to sort out Jumble, the Avatar begins to radiate a sense of purpose and accomplishment. Depending on that mage's situation, the sorting process might be quick and fulfilling, challenging, downright frustrating, or borderline impossible. Ideally, the mage gains insights into his other problems while sorting through the pieces of Jumble. If nothing else, the act of putting things to rights, or of discovering how apparently disparate parts can be joined together into a new and clever whole, helps the mage in question work through his dilemma. Sooner or later — again, depending on how chaotic the mage feels his life has become or how insurmountable the obstacles he faces appear to be — Jumble attains a satisfying form. The Avatar has helped its human partner overcome the illusions of meaninglessness that are inevitable parts of life.

Different mages experience various sorts of Jumble. A mechanically inclined technomancer could see a collection of machined parts, while a mathematically-inclined magus views a paper or whiteboard covered in dizzying calculations or designs. One mage could see broken bits of ancient wreckage, a second confronts a disordered library composed of real or imaginary books, and a third unravels a tangle of colored yarns, sorts through a CD collection, views botched code on her computer screen, or sets a tangled garden to rights in his Chantry's backyard. Although Jumble Avatars tend to manifest for tech-focused mages, the idea of sorting order from its opposite is a fundamental element of the human experience; thus, any mage could have a Jumble of their own.

## Manic Pixie (Questing Avatar)

She's cute! Spunky! Adorable! Bizarre! Flighty and unconventional, she's just what you need to get your life in order and headed off down whatever whimsical path you were scared to follow until she showed up. Why, it's almost as if she's part of you, existing only to further the novelty of your own story! Oh, yeah... that's because she is part of you, the Manic Pixie Dream Girl who's literally part of your own soul.

Although the Manic Pixie archetype tends to show up in popular culture as a superficial and rather sexist trope in stories where a dude takes center stage, Manic Pixie can, in fact, become the Avatar for a female magus, too. In this aspect, she's the untamed inner self that the mage represses in her daily life — perhaps a “better self” embodying the mage's hidden fearless side. Manic Pixie can be a best friend, a lover, an antagonist, or a rival. Whatever guise she assumes in a mage's life, whether she manifests to other people or exists only in the mage's mind, Manic Pixie is stylishly rebellious, stubbornly impractical, and more than a little bit absurd.

Manic Pixie's Seekings invariably force her magus to confront inhibitions and challenge social norms. Such journeys can be fun, of course, but they feature quite a bit of fear as well. As the mage discovers, those obstacles exist for a reason, and cannot be flouted without cost. Before each Seeking ends, Manic Pixie will have turned some element of her mage's normal life to ruins.

In physical form, Manic Pixie upends conventions and manners whenever she appears. This could be a problem for a mage who's sworn to a strict order or hiding out in mundane society. It's sort of a tradition that Manic Pixie Dream Girls make shambles of their host's life before that person finally wakes up. In the case of this Avatar, however, there's no way, really, to get rid of her... except to embrace her, and perhaps even become her.

## Mask (Primordial Avatar)

The many-handed, many-faced entity known as Mask hovers in the shadows of his mage's perceptions, floating slightly above the ground and stretching his slender limbs into impossible lengths and contortions. His ever-shifting features recall African “false faces,” indigenous medicine masks, stone gargoyles from western Europe, painted *noh* and *kabuki* faces, leather masques from Renaissance Italy, plastic monsters, and sculpted glass. Eerily thin and apparently boneless, Mask urges his mage onward with eloquent gestures and whispered instructions. Occasionally, he mocks his human host, chiding that person for cowardice or timidity. Most often, though, Mask simply watches, silent, with a vague air of disapproval.

Never will Mask reveal himself in bright, clear light. Instead, he moves within shadows, emerging and melting back into darkness. Although clearly masculine in form, Mask

achieves inhuman proportions of height, mass, and flexibility. Like smoke, he seethes, restless even when his limbs remain still. The mask faces from which he draws his name merge and melt into one another, presenting three, five, a dozen faces all surging and bleeding into one another, settling into a consistent form, and then melding again into some other vivid guise.

Despite a decidedly sinister appearance and uncanny atmosphere, Mask prefers to encourage, not intimidate, his host. Once you get used to him, he can seem almost friendly in an ominous way. Mask revels in creativity, too; his hosts are always artists of one sort or another. His protean form encourages a mage to seek new possibilities and reshape her world. In Seekings, Mask bends the landscape into bizarre and haunting vistas wherein nothing feels safe, comfortable, or complete. Like the Primordial energies he embodies, Mask reflects endless potential and shifting possibilities — recognizable yet ultimately mercurial, too fluid to be bound and yet too solid to fade away.

## Melody (Dynamic Avatar)

You know those songs you can't get out of your head? Most times, they're tricks of memory and sensation. Occasionally, though, they're the voice of the Avatar — an entity (or really, a type of entity) certain mages call *Melody*: a guiding spirit who manifests as music.

Generally a song only you can hear, she sometimes chimes out loudly enough for other people to hear. In the case of especially strong manifestations, Melody appears in physical form, never speaking except in song, but playing an instrument of some kind that makes the sort of music the mage needs to hear at that time. In such manifestations, Melody is near-invariably female, although certain descriptions of this type of Avatar mention masculine rock stars, blues guitarists, mad organists, and the like. Because music truly *has* no gender, however, Melody Avatars are as fluid as music itself.

What type of music does Melody play? Ah, that depends on what you need to hear. In her most encouraging manifestations, this Avatar becomes the proverbial theme song for the mage in question: heroic, perhaps, maybe sad, dissonant when that suits the situation, occasionally terrifying. The tunes range beyond human capability, of course; a single Avatar manifesting with a flute could play an entire orchestra's worth of sound. And although “Melody” makes a convenient catch-all name for this Avatar, the spirit itself can appear in whichever guise suits the person perceiving it. One mage might experience Melody's influence as a pretty girl with a violin, while another perceives metal-slinging demons or a menacing phantom. What you get from this Avatar is what you're most willing to receive.

Whatever form Melody attains, this Avatar manifests when the mage needs direction. Tantalizing music might beckon the mage toward greatness; tragic airs underscore his defeats,



heroic symphonies inspire his greatness, crushing discord scorns his moments of failure, but intricate harmonies evoke the triumphs he could attain once he gets out of his own way and — as the old song says — listens to the music of his heart.

## Ojisan (Questing Avatar)

Not many people knowingly encounter a tanuki. One mage who did, however, remembers every detail of one so vividly that she knows for certain she runs into him on a daily basis, despite his frequent shape-changing. It's become a game for her to find her *Ojisan* (uncle) and discover more about herself and the world.

Because of *Ojisan*'s highly variable appearance, recognizing him presents a difficult challenge. The mage memorizes everything about him each time she sees him, his gait, how he leans, the slight waggle of the corner of his mouth before he smiles. Noticing everything came easy to her; *not* noticing was always the hard part. At first, it seemed like meeting *Ojisan* was the worst thing that ever happened to her. For someone who constantly deals with a firehose of information, needing to scrutinize details to find someone made things immeasurably worse.

But *Ojisan* always gives the mage a small riddle or task to complete. Each time, she has to narrow her focus to

accomplish it. Every day, it gets a little easier to slow the blast of sensory data, and life gets a little easier, the sensations of life becoming not just bearable but enjoyable. It's not always fun and games, though. *Ojisan* warned her of trouble more than once, alerting her to concentrate on incoming dangers instead of finding him.

During *Seekings*, *Ojisan* tends to ask the mage for more favors than normal, in the hopes that it'll help her focus and that she'll notice the edges of her obstacles. Why leap a hurdle when you can just go under it? For the mage who has trouble filtering out the noise of daily life, having to take a step back to truly see challenges can be a major boon.

## Stalks-The-Master (Primordial Avatar)

They say that there are two wolves inside of you — one of them full of fear and anger, and the other full of confidence and kindness. Whichever one you feed is the one that will win your heart. They also say that this story is a wise old Indian story. *Stalks-The-Master* says that's all a hunk of horseshit. *Stalks-The-Master* says you're a gullible idiot for believing those stories had any indigenous origin, because some Christian fundamentalist made it up and tagged an unknowing tribe to give it a sense of wisdom and mystery. Also? If there were

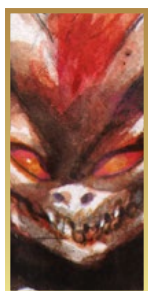
two wolves inside of you, it doesn't matter which one you think you can feed, because Stalks-The-Master is the wolf full of anger and bitterness, and he's the only one living inside you. Obviously, Stalks-The-Master ate the weak wolf without your help, and no one really cares what happens to weak, dead wolves. Do *you* want to be a weak, dead wolf? You are a fool, so it's an important question to ask. No? Then learn from the survivor. Learn from Stalks-The-Master... and if you call him your fucking "spirit animal," he'll tear your goddamned throat out and reincarnate with someone less stupid than you are.

*Everyone's* afraid of being afraid. Everyone is terrified of doing nothing and being no one. Fear, they say, is the source of all bad things like hatred and violence. Well, fear is also the source of getting off your ass and getting shit done as well. So don't blame the fear: Blame yourself for not knowing what to do with your fear. Well, Stalks-The-Master is fear. Stalks-The-Master is one of the oldest and most original concepts since humankind was able to believe in anything. People believed in fear first. Stalks-The-Master is the oldest kind of god there is, and he's proud of it. Being as old as he is, he has no patience for foolishness, his greatest enemy. It's only when foolishness is brother to fear that you've got a real problem.

Stalks-The-Master works endlessly, and without regard to the sensitivities and weakness of his "Master," to impart the wisdom he has to teach. He nips at the heels of his soul-bound partner. He stalks them while they sleep. He howls from the darkness at night. He reminds them that they're always being hunted, and that there is never anywhere they can go to be safe. He teaches them motivation, and he imparts unto them drive. If they can't cut it, if they give in to foolishness, he urges them to their deaths so that he can be released to be bound to a more worthy "Master."

Stalks-The-Master appears most often (sometimes in visions but most often "in the flesh") as a huge black dog, and sometimes as an even larger black wolf. He avoids that latter form, though, in these days of dopey fundamentalist and New-Age "wisdom" that discourages the embrace of what he truly is. His eyes glow like embers, and his fur is thick and long, whisking after him as he stalks swiftly through the night. He will not hesitate to inspire fear in a physical sense as well. Stalks-The-Master is *not* more bark than bite, and if his "Master" fails to heed him in the way he deems appropriate, he will rip at their hamstrings and lunge at their throats.

## The Djinn



Djinn (commonly known as *genies*) may conjure up images of a being who lives in a lamp, granting wishes to its bearer. This, however, is merely a legacy of Scheherazade and her more vulgar progeny. Gather a few experts in a room and ask them about djinn, and you're likely to get as many different correct answers as you have experts. A philosopher might tell you djinn are similar to muses, inspiring humans with wisdom, poetry, and songs. A

scholar of Middle Eastern history would know that in pre-Islamic Persia and Arabia, most people worshipped the djinn and made sacrifices to those spirits as if they were as gods, believing those mortals would receive protection, a fertile harvest, and metaphysical teachings in return. A folklorist could choose to highlight the similarities between djinn and faeries, including their talent for a wide variety of magic, love of trickery, fondness for beautiful things, a very long but finite lifespan, a vengeful streak, and a possible weakness to cold iron... though for djinn, the last one is far from certain. Any mage who's had significant dealings with djinn in the past can't help but mention their cunning, creativity, ruthlessness, and power. A Sufi mystic would smile, opining that just as angels are made from light without heat, and humans from clay, the djinn are smokeless fire given sentience, intelligence, desire, and any form it can imagine.

If you can find a few djinn and ask the same question, you'll receive minor variations on just one answer: Djinn are a

noble people whom humans (and according to some, angels, too) have consistently and relentlessly demeaned, subjugated, and abused. Some feel the trouble began in ancient Israel with King Solomon, a wise and powerful mage who either discovered or imposed upon reality certain rules governing how djinn could behave in the physical world. He used this Solomonic Code, along with a ring giving him power over demons, to assemble a veritable army of spirits to build his palace and temple, and generally to make his life even more decadent than it already was.

Those djinn who blame not just humans for the war, but also the angels, place the human share of responsibility partly on the patriarch Abraham, but mostly with the prophet Mohammed. The angel Gabriel commanded both men to prevent worship of any god but theirs. Mohammed took this much further even than Abraham's idol-smashing, occupying Mecca with his followers, addressing the djinn directly in the Qur'an, and inviting them to join his new religion. But to be welcome, they must accept a subordinate position not just to humans, but to all the angels as well. They could still inspire humans with their ideas, so long as those ideas were not religious in nature, and they would never be considered worthy to travel to heaven again. Those djinn who felt this too unjust must leave their people's cities to preserve what they considered a hostile takeover of Arabian religion, or at best, a coerced ceasefire much more favorable to one side than the other.

The emirs who ruled those cities took their cue from the angels, branding the exiled djinn *shaitans*, from an old Sumerian word meaning “male demon.” They knew even if all djinn fought as one, they were no match for the combined prowess of the Craft that would one day be called Taftani on one side, and the entire angelic host with their Hermetic, Celestial Chorus, and Ahli-Batin allies on the other.

Along with its accompanying seals of binding, the Solomonic Code allowed the Taftani to imprison hundreds, possibly thousands, of djinn in bottles, lamps, rings, and other vessels, for use as Paradox-free magical slave-batteries just like Solomon himself. Adherents to the new faith of Islam considered Solomon a great prophet, so demand for the Taftani’s services grew even more quickly under early Islam than in the past. This, say many djinn who remember it, was when they knew they would never win the War of Enslavement. The Taftani and their Hermetic students took too many *marids* too quickly. Without their eldest, most powerful and charismatic leaders, the djinn were now a broken people who might never recover. While a few individuals could always be malicious, the djinn as a people felt they did not deserve such treatment. Opportunistic human mages had simply done what humans always have: They found a resource and exploited it, ethics be damned.

Like any ancient book of spirit lore, the Solomonic Code is available in a variety of contradictory versions. Most agree that somehow, humans and djinn can have children together, producing fertile offspring who are not quite one thing or the other. Some versions of the book say djinn can live no longer than 5,000 years, while others speak of legendary djinn who have lived to the age of 15,000 or even 20,000. A few manuscripts suggest one can tell a djinni’s age or temperament by whether its skin is blue, green, or red... but how can a natural shapeshifter’s skin color mean anything at all? At times, the book can be almost comical in its uncertainty: cold iron may keep djinn away, if a person sits within seven concentric circles made from it, but the scribe admits no one was brave enough to test the theory personally before writing it down.

Every version of the Solomonic code seems to agree on the following important details about djinn:

- Once bound into a vessel with a Solomonic seal, a djinni must heed the commands of that vessel’s single owner to the best of their ability.
- He or she need not protect the owner from their own mistakes or desires, nor go above or beyond the literal meaning of a command.
- A bound djinni must answer the vessel’s owner even without a command, if that person addresses him or her by the full, true, and correct name other djinn use.
- No djinni, free or bound, can directly affect a Solomonic vessel in any way, nor speak about the name or situation

of a bound djinni beyond vague statements like “I know someone who needs help” or “I’m on a rescue mission.”

Djinn differ from most other spirits in the sophistication of their consciousness, and in considering themselves native to both the Umbra and the physical world, Arabia and Persia specifically. According to their own lore, djinn were the first people to walk the earth, far older than humans. Some of the eldest djinn claim to remember a time before humans could write, speak, or even use tools. Those interested in metaphysical matters suggest that if humans’ bodies are clay and djinn’s bodies are fire, their ability to interbreed suggests a kinship of the soul or spirit. Could a human be nothing more than a djinni’s soul with a permanent human body attached? If so, does this mean Awakened djinn mages are possible? No one can say for certain, but it is true some djinn historians and occultists consider it possible. A djinni’s mind is at least as complex as a human mind. They think of other spirits as many humans think of animals: Some can make good pets, useful allies, or obedient workers; a few are smart; but most are just simple and not very interesting.

You might notice the characters below have one quality in common: in his or her own way, each of them is disconnected from djinn society at large. That’s because most djinn these days stay where they are safe: in their home country. Secluded in the High Umbra, Jinnistan connects via Old Roads with various locations in the physical world, the astral plane, the Dream Realms, and the Elemental Courts of Fire and Air. Residents of the City of Brass, the most famous djinn city, once acted as ambassadors and courtiers, celebrating and welcoming dreamers, meditators, and astral travelers who found their way to the city gates. Today, the guards turn them away with a polite but firm apology, unless a free djinni with a good reputation vouches for them. Parents raise their children on tales of wicked and dangerous mages who want nothing more than to steal their freedom.

Before the Gauntlet existed as it does today, some djinn believe the entire country of Jinnistan existed simultaneously in the world of spirits and the world of humans, allowing every type of being to mingle, negotiate, and learn from each other. But the loss of so many important voices made modern Jinnistan feel increasingly like an abandoned mining town or military outpost. The City of Brass’ once-gleaming towers, spires, and minarets are dingy and tarnished, with far too few unbound djinn available to polish them. The sultans still send ambassadors to maintain cordial ties with the Elemental Courts, but their hearts aren’t in the formality anymore. It makes avoiding their ancestral lands on Earth especially painful. The djinn who remain are wily and wary, and they never forget.

Djinn travelers today tend to be exceptionally brave, cocky, angry, or foolish. When a son or daughter ignores their parents’ warnings and travels to the human world anyway,



their family holds a funeral within a week of the departure. In the age of rapid air travel and lightning-fast cultural diffusion through the internet, a Taftani could be anywhere and look like nearly anyone. Most families feel it's best to consider these children lost. The lavish parties when a prodigal djinni returns from the physical world are fabulous spectacles of wine, dancing, and fireworks the like of which human eyes have not seen in ages, possibly ever. Normally, these parties and the rare birthday party for a newborn are some of the only joyful occasions for djinn in a post-Solomonic universe. But recently, this dire state of affairs may have begun to change.

For the past several decades, a small but significant number of Jewish djinn calling themselves *shedim* have trickled into Jinnistan, seeking refuge from the human world. They practice a peculiar dark and spirit-centric form of Judaism that traces their lineage to Lilith, whom God cast out of the Garden of Eden when she refused to submit to Adam. Since then, the shedim occupied the fringe of Jewish villages and towns, dwelling in abandoned or boarded-up homes in observant Jewish communities throughout Europe and North America. But now, even the most religious human Jews are too skeptical to believe anything might haunt an empty house, leaving shedim nowhere to live when someone who can't even see them buys their home. The weary djinn of the City of Brass welcomed the shedim and their families to Jinnistan, giving them fertile

land in the countryside to set up their own villages and farms. In time, these formerly unknown djinn refugees might help to replenish their people's lost numbers. Perhaps some shaitans and their families might choose to return as well, if only they could forgive those who once exiled them. The dream of returning to Earth as a people is still distant, and might never materialize, but every returning traveler is still a small victory.

Introducing djinn into a chronicle can evoke potentially challenging themes like imperialism, slavery, racism, or other forms of mass exploitation such as factory farming or sweatshop labor. Djinn characters are ideal for exploring questions of magical ethics and ideology. If a spirit demands equal treatment and recognition of its personhood, what should determine whether that's a reasonable request? How can a mage expect to gain the trust, let alone the friendship, of a being who has only ever known treachery and extortion from that mage's entire species? If a djinni attacks all humans on sight, failing to understand that only a few humans are mages and even fewer are Taftani, to what extent are the Traditions and Crafts responsible for driving him or her to do so? Should the characters oppose the Taftani and side with their victims, or are the djinn trying to dupe them? What secrets does the City of Brass conceal, and will any human ever walk its streets again? Could djinn and humans ever live in peace or symbiosis, as they did in ancient times?

## Glossary

**aamar:** A djinni or djinniyah who lives among humans, using Charms only rarely or not at all.

**djinni:** A male or sometimes gender-neutral term, referring to any djinni or djinniyah.

**djinniyah:** A female djinni.

**emir:** The ruler of a city or other small territory.

**ifreeti:** A famous, experienced hero or war general. Plural is "ifreet" and feminine is "ifreetiyah."

**marid:** One of the most powerful, cunning, and legendary djinn. If even the ifreet speak of someone in reverent tones, that djinni might be a marid.

**shaitan:** An "evil" djinni or djinniyah who refused to agree to the Qur'an's proposed rules for djinn assimilation.

**sultan:** A djinni who presides over several emirs. A female sultan or a sultan's first wife is known as a "sultana."

## al-Ghadib, the Mad Warrior

You might wonder whether this djinni's name means "mad" as in hot-tempered, or "mad" as in crazy. The answer to this question is "all of the above." While *al-Ghadib* literally means "the angry" in Arabic, any zealot who still directly and actively works to destroy all humans is also a dangerous lunatic in the eyes of mainstream djinn society. Not that al-Ghadib cares a bit what those cowards think of him. He has his lieutenants to keep him company and aid him in his holy mission. Humans are one of the most destructive and arrogant species anywhere in the whole of the Tellurian, so he and his band of thugs must exterminate every one of them like the vermin they truly are. For a little variety, driving them out of their minds with fear and then leaving them alive to suffer can also be amusing from time to time.

Al-Ghadib and his allies call themselves "The Flames of Iblis," after the first djinni who refused to bow down to humans, even when commanded to do so by the Almighty himself. They call humans "mud apes," "dust golems," or merely "the enemy." While al-Ghadib is technically in charge, he rarely exercises that authority unless someone is neglecting their commitment to terrorizing as many humans as possible. Each member of the group has his or her own favorite places to lurk in the mortal realm or the Near Umbra, ready to use Call for Aid to summon the other members when they spot a good victim (or better yet, a few). al-Ghadib prefers to stalk the mortal realm, waiting for stragglers to wander into a secluded forest or a back alley where only he and his friends might hear their screaming.

His merry band of vengeance isn't particularly picky about whether they attack actual humans – to them, changelings

and werewolves seem more human than not, and vampires all used to be human at one time. Close enough. If one of the Flames finds anyone even a little human-like in the Astral Plane, the Shadowlands, or anywhere else in the Near Umbra, all or most of them will soon provide a few excellent reasons not to trespass there again. When they feel like a little leisure time, the Flames retire to one of several bars or inns in the City of Brass to drink mass quantities of ale and boast of their exploits to anyone willing to listen. Most also collect teeth, finger bones, or other small pieces of their victims, both as trophies and to prove their zeal for the cause. Al-Ghadib began this tradition with his tailbone collection, which now fills several rooms of his opulent manor in the city.

The Mad Warrior himself is as fearless as he is violent and hateful. His anger and bitterness mainly come from his memories of the time before the Code of Solomon, when humans had to bargain with the djinn fairly, rather than taking what they wanted by force. While his allies don't always live up to his expectations in terms of cruelty, each is loyal to the cause in his or her own way. The caliphs and emirs of the more moderate djinn learned long ago that trying to infiltrate the Flames of Iblis could be dangerous; al-Ghadib only turns his rage upon his fellow djinn if they try to impede what he sees as his sacred duty. The modern world is the legacy of Solomon, so humans are all guilty and all deserve punishment. Pity anyone who gets in the way. Al-Ghadib cares nothing for the relative power level of his prey, partly because he is old and formidable, but mostly because he enjoys a good struggle.

Membership in al-Ghadib's little murder-and-torture club fluctuates from decade to decade, but usually the Flames have between five and 10 active members at any given time. Among them, they have access to nearly any Charm one could name. However, as traditionalists who enjoy evoking the good old days by inflicting pain and fear, they favor classic mythological djinn abilities such as Create Fire, Create Wind, Mirage, Lightning Bolt, Corruption, Mislead, Sand Storm, and Sand Swallow. Their favorite game is to use Insight and Soul Reading to learn what a victim fears most, then shapeshifting into it, making it the last thing they ever see.

The Flames do not make agreements with humans or human-like beings under any circumstance. In case of enslavement by a Solomonic seal, each Flame has sworn a solemn oath to carry out their master's wishes in as harmful or humiliating a manner as possible. Most would start looking for a way to die after little more than a decade or two of servitude, but the Mad Warrior knows he would escape to wreak further vengeance upon his enemies, regardless of how long that might take.

Many djinn are surprised to learn that al-Ghadib has a wife and several children whom he loves dearly. When it comes up in conversation, he is glad to explain that his holy mission includes helping to replace those djinn who went into battle with the Taftani and their allies, never to return. He is as friendly and compassionate to his fellow djinn, provided

they don't hinder his life's work, as he is unforgiving and uncompromising toward his human victims. The only information that might distract him for a little while is credible intelligence about the location of an imprisoned djinni. While he still won't work with a human for such a rescue, he has been known on occasion to enlist elementals, naturae, chaos spirits, and even Banes or demons if they can smash a Solomonic vessel to release its captive resident. It galls him that he cannot affect these vessels himself, but he has little trouble enlisting aid from many other types of Umbrood. His reputation as a stalwart if overzealous defender of spiritkind has traveled far, and he trades fairly with any spirit who can negotiate truthfully.

**Willpower 8, Rage 7, Gnosis 6, Power 30**

**Charms:** Control Electrical Systems, Create Fire, Create Wind, Corruption, Insight, Lightning Bolt, Materialize, Mind Speech, Mirage, Shapeshift, Solidify Reality, Tracking, Mislead, Sand Storm, Sand Swallow, Soul Reading

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 7, Dexterity 5, Stamina 6, Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Academics 2, Alertness 4, Art 2, Athletics 5, Awareness 4, Brawl 5, Cosmology 4, Empathy 2, Enigmas 3, Etiquette 3, Firearms 3, Intimidation 4, Investigation 4, Martial Arts 3, Melee 5, Occult 5, Streetwise 2, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 5

**Materialized Health Levels:** 8

**Image:** A tall, muscular Arabic man with a reddish tint to his skin.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Mad, bad, and dangerous to know. Unless you're a djinni, of course.

## Amira the Storyteller (Amira al-Kadhaab)

If you like to frequent Renaissance faires, storytelling festivals, or public libraries, you and Amira may already have crossed paths at some point in the past. Perhaps she was that lady with the many-colored patchwork skirt, with a sparkle in her emerald-green eyes and a horde of children listening to her every word with silent fascination. She might have been your town's librarian for a little while, during which everyone came to know her for her long, wavy black hair with a bright white streak to the right side, and an almost uncanny ability to find even the most unusual books for a curious kid. Maybe you noticed the fire in her eyes when she played Lady Macbeth two summers ago at the fairgrounds. There was something about her, something unique, even thrilling, but you couldn't quite place it.

Clever and crafty like all her kin, Amira is one of the more successful modern *aamar*. As a young djinniyah born not long after the Taftani first began enslaving her people in large numbers, she can remember how many djinn's view on humans (especially mages) shifted from interest to anger,

bitterness, or hatred. Like most young djinn of that time, she allowed the raging flames within her to control her actions and lent her strength and intelligence to the war effort. But with age came the realization that her people were fighting one pointless battle after another. By the time humans knew the Code and seals of Solomon, the djinn had already lost this war... yet they were still fighting it, centuries later. There must be a better way, a nobler and smarter way to make the physical world safe for djinn once more. She would find it.

As she tells the tale, on those rare occasions when she has an audience who can appreciate it, Amira traveled to every corner of the Umbra in her search. Older djinn warned her not to risk throwing her life away by traveling to the only plane with a significant number of Taftani and Hermetics to bind her. But searching the Umbra for information about creatures who weren't even native to it quickly began to seem pointless. She would have to take her chances at deep cover: disguising herself as a human to learn what they want, how they think, and with a little luck, some of their weaknesses. She resolved to use her Charms only if it were truly important, reasoning that to understand humans, she must live just as they did.

She began her project by posing as a street performer in 15th-century London. She did a little juggling, some tumbling, and most of all, sleight of hand. Soon she was drawing crowds of 20, 30, 50 people or more. Most of them were children. From then on, she paid special attention to the way people who passed her in the street related to their children. She admired the care adult humans took when teaching and protecting their young. Children were much quicker than adults to believe what they were told and to take it to heart. One could plant an idea in the fertile ground of a child's mind and, provided it was memorable enough, that idea could alter the course of their life. She would ensure her enemies' children grew up with the truth about her people, as humans did long ago, and their wonder and enthusiasm would nourish her and keep her strong.

She continued performing on the streets of Europe and eventually North America but switched to telling stories and occasionally acting in plays. She specialized in tales of humans and spirits learning to work together for mutual benefit or rescuing each other from danger. Whenever adults were looking away, or those present might accept it without fear, she used the Mirage Charm to create 3D visual aids of great cities, fantastical monsters, and her characters' exploits. These delighted the children so much, they told all their friends to come see her show right away, just as she had expected. With ample use of Insight, Soul Reading, and Influence while telling her stories, she might only need a few centuries to create a radical shift in humans' attitude toward spirits throughout the entire world.

When she's tired of the festival circuit, she'll settle down in a city or town for up to a few years. She's that cool librarian who can talk with a kid for just a few minutes, present them with a perfect book that they never knew existed, and must have failed to sign them up for late fees when they forgot

to return it. This is, of course, because the book is unique, written by her, and conjured *ex nihilo*, a story built around whatever that child most needs to hear to become a lifelong ally of Umbrood in general and djinn in particular.

**Willpower 6, Rage 3, Gnosis 8, Power 25**

**Charms:** Break Reality, Control Electrical Systems, Corruption, Create Fire, Create Wind, Disorient, Insight, Influence, Lullaby, Materialize, Mind Speech, Mirage, Mislead, Shapeshift, Solidify Reality, Mislead, Soul Reading

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 6, Charisma 5, Manipulation 6, Appearance 4, Perception 5, Intelligence 6, Wits 5

**Abilities:** Academics 6, Alertness 4, Art 3, Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Cosmology 4, Cultural Savvy 4, Empathy 6, Enigmas 5, Esoterica (Folk-Tale Wisdom) 4, Etiquette 5, Intimidation 4, Investigation 4, Law 5, Leadership 3, Medicine 4, Melee 3, Occult 5, Streetwise 4, Stealth 5, Subterfuge 5, Technology 2

**Materialized Health Levels: 7**

**Image:** Amira appears as a friendly, upbeat woman of obvious Middle Eastern descent. She speaks English, Arabic, and Farsi. The white streak in her otherwise black hair suggests age, but her skin is unblemished and unwrinkled, suggesting she might be any age from 30 to perhaps 55.

**Roleplaying Notes:** She is friendly to anyone who is willing to be civil. Any attempt to heckle or interrupt one of her stories receives first a polite warning, followed by vicious ridicule if the person refuses to stop. Perhaps the only thing that might cause her to erupt into an obvious display of her magical gifts is a threat to any member of her audience, especially if that person is a child. She considers her audience members her guests; any attempt to harm them makes her honor-bound to defend them by any means necessary. In such a situation, she prefers to start subtly with Disorient, Lullaby, or Mislead, but she's perfectly willing to defend her audience with Create Fire, Create Wind, or even Break Reality if she must.

## Yazid al-Ghul

Yazid isn't *really* a flesh-eating monster or a vampire, but other djinn know him as "the *ghul*" because they consider the way he spends most of his time... well, ghoulish. Like all djinn, Yazid enjoys absorbing human emotional energy. His kin all understand this and they can even accept that his favorite flavors are hopelessness, heartbreak, and regret. But must he really spend so much time lingering at battlefields, hospices, orphanages, and abortion clinics? It's all so dreadfully morbid, and most are content to let him go it alone.

He visits the physical world frequently, but with great caution, preferring that humans never know he is nearby. If someone does notice him, he's seen enough ghosts over the years to create a pretty convincing impression that he is one himself. Phrases like

"*Why have you disturbed my slumber?*" and "*No one can help me...*" delivered in a suitably spooky tone serve him well in this regard. Likewise, while Charms like Soul Reading, Terror, Short Out, Shatter Glass, Inhabit or Possession might not fool a Taftani, a real ghost, or a savvy Hermetic or Chakravat, other mages are easier. If a spirit talks like a wraith and uses powers that seem ghostly, they will usually conclude it's a wraith. Being able to absorb a little of their fear can be a nice bonus, but his main goal is to escape without anyone learning what he really is. After any escape from a mage — or any other human able to see him before he Manifests — Yazid becomes rather skittish, and he returns to the Umbra for days or weeks until he's feeling safe again.

His ghost impression is usually unnecessary with dying people, since he prefers those who are comatose or delirious. When his source of emotional energy is a living person, such as a child living in an orphanage, he relies upon their loneliness and lack of self-confidence to keep them from telling anyone about him. "*Tell me your story,*" he whispers to the person. Then he listens, asking follow-up questions if they need prompting, and feasts upon whatever feelings the story stirs up for the teller. Insight and Influence can help with steering the tale toward his favorite emotions. Dream Journey and Mind Speech allow him to ask his questions even if the person is unconscious or hesitant to talk to him.

It might sound as if Yazid has compassion for human beings, but this is rarely the case. Humans are responsible for breaking his people, corrupting them, and taking most of his family by force. He has little love for them as a species, so when listening to the life stories of those whom other humans have destroyed or discarded, he most often feels a sense of satisfaction and poetic justice. *Good, he thinks. You and all your accursed race should suffer at least this much for your crimes. If I had been responsible for your misfortune, I would have made it hurt more, and drawn it out far longer, before finally allowing you the peace you scarcely deserve.* He has no qualms about taking a dying person's wedding ring, or someone's only picture of their dead parent or spouse, if it's infused with great emotion or even if it just catches his eye.

But he isn't always so heartless. As often as once or twice a month, one of the stories touches him enough to use Lullaby, Ease Pain, or Dream Journey to give the person a short reprieve. A few times a year, he meets a dying soul whose nobility, faith, or self-sacrifice is strong enough to bring a tear to his eye, causing him to use Healing to ensure their story need not end just yet. He has also been known to rescue a few of the kindest and most humble orphans, teleporting them near a friendly household holding a persuasive note from a fake relative. Once every few decades, he finds an unfortunate person he considers truly worthy, using Spirit Away to provide them a short trip to the magnificent City of Brass before their time on Earth ends.

He avoids Manifesting unless compelled to do so, either through magic or by a circumstance that requires it. If directly threatened, he prefers to Teleport, Re-form, or duck behind something to Shapeshift, after using Flee to boost his chances.

If unable to escape, he might use Disorient, Terror, Smoke Screen, Sand Swallow, Mislead, Mirage, or Heat Metal. When truly in fear of destruction or enslavement, he can Possess an attacker and turn them against their allies, or use Spirit Away to drop them all into an Umbra Storm of his own creation.

**Willpower 6, Rage 1, Gnosis 8, Power 30**

**Charms:** Disorient, Dream Journey, Ease Pain, Flee, Heat Metal, Inhabit, Lullaby, Manifest, Mind Speech, Mirage, Mislead, Possession, Re-form, Sand Swallow, Shapeshift, Shatter Glass, Short Out, Smoke Screen, Soul Reading, Teleport, Terror

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 1, Perception 2, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

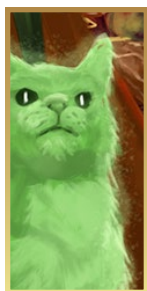
**Abilities:** Academics 3, Alertness 4, Athletics 2, Awareness 5, Cosmology 4, Empathy 3, Etiquette 1, Intimidation 5, Investigation 4, Leadership 3, Medicine 5, Occult 5, Streetwise 2, Stealth 5, Subterfuge 5

**Materialized Health Levels: 6**

**Image:** Yazid has no constant appearance.

**Roleplaying Notes:** For his part, Yazid just likes what he likes. In his youth, humans frequently died as casualties of war or from outbreaks of the Black Death. The despair and bitter-sweet nostalgia of those who felt they shouldn't die so young became his comfort food. He's not the type of djinn to sit up late at night by candlelight, sipping absinthe and smoking a clove while reading Edgar Allen Poe. He just wants to enjoy good, hearty meals that remind him of times he misses.

## Lesser Entities



From the lofty reaches of godhood and the muddy depths of mortal life, countless entities fill the spaces gaping between our grubby everyday lives and the sublime Courts where divine entities hold sway. Because mages often travel in that in-between space, the so-called “lesser” spirit entities – the ones most often known as *Umbrood* – are the spirits a wandering mage is mostly likely to deal with in her journeys, rites, and occasional nightmares.

### Dataphyte

Among the more easily overlooked Umbral natives, dataphytes are little more than mobile mouths with an instinct to keep the Umbra relatively tidy. Well, as tidy as a dimension *literally* formed of the stuff of nightmares can be, anyway. Although creepy, they pose little danger and don't really mean anyone harm. Incapable of fighting, talking, or even autonomous thought, these entities aren't even hard to destroy. Even in the Umbrae where they dwell, subtle Charms cloak their existence from all but the most accomplished eyes.

Dataphytes create what's sometimes known as *the thought-void*: a swirling sense of forgetfulness that often misleads mortal creatures, especially when they venture into the Penumbrae and seek distant Realms. Essentially metaphysical bottom-feeders, dataphytes eat any “unattended” thoughts they can find. If you're not concentrating on something, or giving it only a passing bit of attention, there's a chance that thought might disappear into the smooth, seamless surface that somehow functions as the mouth of a dataphyte. To a dataphyte's senses, most living creatures constantly leak thoughts, leaving disgusting trails for the spirits to clean up. And so, that's exactly what they do: clean up your thoughts. Are you finding it hard to focus on the task at hand? You might have a dataphyte munching on your ideas. If you've

ever entered a room and immediately forgotten what you were doing, you've probably crossed paths with a dataphyte. That thing you swore you'd remember and then can't recall for the life of you? *Om-nom-nom*, as the saying goes. To be fair to the little critters, dataphytes can't eat anything you're concentrating on, and things that aren't thoughts (e.g. autonomic functions, like breathing) aren't snacks, either. Dataphytes, therefore, aren't *harmful*, really... just *extremely* unhelpful.

For the most part, people (Awakened and otherwise) remain relatively safe from these annoying little buggers. Every so often, though, someone or something sets thought-munching dataphytes loose into the material world; at such times, neighborhood or whole towns may grind to standstills as the inhabitants of those locales wallow in indecisiveness, perhaps (in rare, extreme cases) starving to death because folks can't even decide what to eat or remember how to eat it. The Void Engineer Border Corps Division shows up when such incursions show up on their radar, and they capture or purge every dataphyte they can find. Theoretically speaking, even if the Void Engineers took any of these thought-eating aliens back to the labs for further study, those paragons of guardianship would *never* accidentally release any of their subjects back into the wild (or, so to speak, into the Wyld). They *certainly* wouldn't *theoretically* create a larger, lethal version of the dataphyte and unleash it on the Deep Umbra. Of course they wouldn't. Perish the thought...

**Willpower 1, Rage 1, Gnosis 1, Essence 10**

**Charms:** Disorient, Materialize, Memory Eater (consumes one random thought or memory, 1 Essence), Mind Speech (though they don't have much to say), Mislead

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Use Gnosis for Social and Mental Traits

**Abilities:** Awareness 4, Brawl 2, Stealth 1

**Materialized Health Levels: 2**

**Image:** Dataphytes resemble polished obsidian salad plates with two pairs of crab-like legs.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Clean. Must clean.

## Grinders (Technology Minions)

Comprising some of the many inventions of the Lord Viscount Talos Perdix, “grinder” is a catch-all name for a collection of weirdly technological spirit-beings from Theastavroses, a High-Umbral technology realm where unearthly science meets inventive spirit. That moniker comes from the grinding sound they make when moving — a sound that becomes a din when groups of grinders work together. For obvious reasons, then, Theastavroses is, to mortal ears, a loud, dissonant place.

Possessed of a rudimentary but subservient intellect, every grinder follows the purposes for which it was created. Most of these entities are errand runners, lab assistants, brute-force laborers, maintenance workers, and cleanup staff, with little “personality” to speak of. A few of the more elaborate grinders, however, work as courtiers in the halls of the Lord Viscount — greeting visitors, tending to their needs, and enforcing order and discipline throughout the Realm. In this capacity, a grinder may be “lent” to mages allied with the Lord Viscount, ferry them from place to place in the Lord Viscount’s domain, or deal with trespassers and other offenders in the most direct way possible.

Although the Lord Viscount’s creations may wander the Otherworlds (except for Realms where pure, elemental Nature defines reality), they’re far too vulgar to manifest on the Earthly plane. A grinder brought into human reality through a portal or other trans-dimensional technology simply freezes up and collapses into a heap of interesting junk. A technomancer with Hypertech 4 or 5 might try a combination of Forces 2, Matter 2, and Prime 2 to jump start such a creature (difficulty 7; see the Materialized Attributes and Health Levels, below); at that point, the grinder runs for one scene per success, after which its works grind to a permanent halt. (It’s worth noting that the Lord Viscount is not pleased when his gifts are treated with such carelessness.)

**Willpower** 5-7, **Rage** 4-8, **Gnosis** 2-5, **Essence** 20-40

**Charms:** Armor, Control Electrical Systems, Create Fires, Lightning Bolts, Materialize, Mind Speech, Short Out, Solidify Reality, Tracking

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 7-13, Dexterity 2-4, Stamina 5-10; use Gnosis for Social and Mental Traits

**Abilities:** Alertness 2, Brawl 3-5, Crafts 3-6, Hypertech 4, Intimidation 5, Technology 4; courtier models also have Etiquette 2-4, Lore: Umbrood Courts 2-5, and Subterfuge 2-4

**Materialized Health Levels:** 8-10

**Image:** Each grinder is an essentially unique creation of gears, shafts, engines, pistons, wires, domes, limbs, claws, tools, and

other mechanical implements welded together into creatures that range from shambling drones to delicate servitors.

**Roleplaying Notes:** They have a task. Wind them up, and let them get to it.

## Miengu

Freshwater spirits best known in Cameroon, miengu (singular *jengu*) bring good fortune and can cure many diseases. Since water is the cleansing potion of life, granting relief to people suffering from illness, the miengu grant magical healing for those who worship them. These entities can also act as messengers between humans and the spirit world. If you need a message sent to an ancestor or a god, you can ask a jengu to send it from you.

The blessings of these benevolent spirits are said to be fourfold: abundant harvests of crayfish, victory in local boat races, protection from disease, and the end of the rainy season. For those reasons, among others, local humans revere the miengu, often forming fellowships to worship them in thanks for their generosity.

Though feminine in most aspects, miengu are essentially genderless spirits who embody kindness and innocence. Typically invisible unless they choose otherwise, these entities favor children most of all, and appear to kids — especially little girls — far more often than to adults. When a young girl’s in danger, the miengu can help her hide in the water, turning her invisible as well. If an innocent person needs magical intervention, a jengu may grant her a healing potion if the spirit considers her worthy of such a gift. If a jengu allows itself to be seen by an adult, that’s considered to be extremely good luck, and a sign of valuable protection. People chosen for such favor by these spirits enjoy helpful coincidences and — if the person needs concealment or escape — a gift of stealth on the land or invisibility in the waters where these spirits make their home.

**Willpower** 5-6, **Rage** 1-3, **Gnosis** 2-5, **Essence** 30-40

**Charms:** Cling, Dream Journey, Good Luck, Healing, Materialize, Spirit Away, Spirit Gossip

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 2-4, Dexterity 2-4, Stamina 3-5, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 4, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 1, Cosmology 1, Empathy 3, Enigmas 3, Esoterica 2, Stealth 5, Survival 2

**Materialized Health Levels:** 4-7

**Image:** Essentially African pixie mermaids, miengu combine the sleek tails of fish with the upper bodies of gorgeous women. Their bodies are slim and iridescent, shining like the sun of the water’s edge, which also makes them hard to see. Although one may change size if they desire to do so, the natural form of a jengu is far smaller than an adult human being. They’re fast, too, and often swim by before you even have a chance

to realize they were ever there. Combined with their talent for invisibility, these spirits are seen only when they wish to be seen, and only by those who the meingu trust.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Helpful, if called upon by someone in genuine need.

## Omniphage

These massive silver orbs are more than just scaled-up versions of dataphytes; omniphages bear clear marks of having been engineered by an external intellect. Fortunately, omniphages possess the same level of intelligence as their smaller cousins... that is, almost none. And now the bad news: Omniphages are exponentially hungrier. They can eat literally anything. They *will* eat literally anything, too. Matter, antimatter, thoughts, hopes, dreams, magick, they're not picky. Casting a spell on one of them has a fair chance of feeding it instead of doing any harm.

Since omniphages have the ability to eat anything, they have absolutely no incentive to leave the Deep Umbra where they were marooned. Sure, the beasts could be lured out. Sure, the inhabitants could finally figure out how to push the omniphages out of their reality. But you shouldn't hold your breath waiting on those scenarios to happen. On the other hand, if the omniphages ever get loose, you probably ought to hold your breath; they eat air, too. At last count, there were three of these things in existence, but no one has risked going out there to see if they've reproduced or eaten each other.

**Willpower 5, Rage 6, Gnosis 4, Power 50**

**Charms:** Absorb Spell (acts as six dice of countermagick, and every success negated by the Charm's "countermagick" gets turned into 5 points of Essence instead; costs 5 Essence), Armor, Disable, Disorient, Materialize, Memory Eater, Mind Speech, Mislead, Quake, Unbirth (as per the Paradox Spirit Wrinkle; costs 15 Essence)

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 6, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5; Use Gnosis for Social and Mental Traits

**Abilities:** Athletics 2, Awareness 4, Brawl (Devour) 5, Stealth 1

**Materialized Health Levels:** 10

**Image:** Cold iron spikes riveted to plates of armor dot their rough and chipped obsidian hides. Stranger still, those hides feature additional spikes and plates that look as though they were naturally extruded by the omniphages themselves. The dull glint of iron gradually takes on more of a black stony appearance until it merges into the obsidian disk. Instead of four spindly legs, these entities are propelled by eight sharply pointed obelisks, jutting downward. Finally, whereas dataphytes can fit in your hand, these monstrosities are the size of a car... at least the size of a car.

**Roleplaying Notes:** *Hungry.*

## Owl Shards

The world is a dark, dangerous place. When you've been face to face with agents of cruelty and destruction, you learn how to fight the good fight. You know that it's your brothers

against the darkness. You know that no one else will stand in your place. You know it's a thankless job, and sometimes a price has to be paid. In the end, however, the heroes are the ones who stand tall. Folks possessed by Owl Shards are such heroes; they were *born* to be heroes, and all those naysayers who want to cry about missing and murdered indigenous women, who want to cry *Black Lives Matter* while thugs run wild and murder police without retribution... well, they're just the tools of pure, unadulterated evil. They're the cogs in the machine of anarchy, and Owl Shards are protectors of what is good and just. The Owl Shards sing of such goodness and justice, and they sear those songs into the souls of their Awakened partners.

Owl Shards almost always accompany souls that have been damaged, or that will *become* damaged before their Awakening: children of absentee or abusive parents, kids from impoverished families, or even simply folks who come from households rife with psychological abuses in the form of toxic masculinity, racism, pro-militarism, pro-secessionism, and so forth. The key here is *fear*: fear of difference, of The Other, of poverty, powerlessness, loneliness, persecution. Owl Shards nestle in the souls of people who, for whatever reason, are afraid, and who deal with that fear by turning against their neighbors and embracing hate that seems like power.

Why? Because Owl Shards originate in the shattered form of Big Owl, the embodiment of fearful hatred.

Even before a mage Awakens to their influence, Owl Shards are quite powerful, able to shape the people around them through the principles of fear. Once drawn to a potential host, the Owl Shards encourage hellish childhoods; that abuse, in turn, shapes someone who will abuse others. Occasionally, a Shard's influence leads to, or is tied into, a magickal Awakening; in such cases, the Shard becomes that mage's Avatar spirit, and guides his life accordingly. More often, these entities roost in hosts who never fully Awaken; these unfortunate souls become corrupted or even possessed by the spirit (as in the Corruption and Possession Charms — see **Page 20, pp. 491, 493-494**), suffering painful influence and, in extreme cases, grotesque physical transformations.

People chosen by an Owl Shard tend to favor violent careers, strict discipline, and a communal sense of belonging — like the Shards themselves — to something greater than one's self. Rigorous physicality and emotional distance nurture the influence of the Shard... and, in turn, the Avatar nurtures a depthless aggression. Although a toxic stereotype of "masculinity" provides a firm base for an Owl Shard's possession, women embrace it, too, either in the cold "ice queen" persona, the "tough bitch," or the archetypal heartbreaker whose apparent beauty underscores her ruthless, yet fearful, cruelty.

Beyond the hidden apprehensions of the Owl Shard's host, such entities thrive off the abuse their hosts commit against other people. That abuse doesn't have to be physical; in truth, despite the momentary satisfaction an act of brutal violence can bring, it's often easier (especially in a legal



sense) to get away with emotional cruelty. Punching someone with a fist tends to bring the wrong sorts of attention, while ripping someone apart with words tends to earn social status instead. And so, in whatever form, the Owl Shards encourage ever-widening spirals of abuse. More abuse means more fear; more fear means more places for the Owl Shards to grow.

Generally, Owl Shards tend to gather within the people of a dominant culture, where their abuses can be excused away as “just the way things are.” If and when a host establishes a certain amount of respect and influence (as in, say, military or police forces, gang culture, upper-echelon corporate management, mass media, government or — most appallingly — childcare, medicine, education, and religious organizations), that status excuses untold measures of fearmongering abuse. One person so influenced can influence hundreds, perhaps thousands, occasionally *millions* of other people. And so, the Owl Shards come home to roost.

Occasionally, a host goes too far. A cop may be fired, an executive banished, a celebrity disgraced, a soldier dishonorably discharged. That’s when the Owl Shard truly digs its claws in deep. Whatever happened to the host is always someone else’s fault: those lazy, crazy, twisted, hateful [fill in the blanks]. Skin color, gender, religious creed, political affiliation — it’s all ammunition for boundless fear. That fear ripens into hate;

hate sows discord; discord feeds violence, which in turn creates more hate. And through it all, the Owl Shards feed.

That’s when the Owl Shards begin to manifest. First, they coo quietly—gentle whispers of frustration and directed rage. They point out lost scholarships and veteran-hating liberals. They cry out about the unfairness of the media that favors those who would destroy society, and they mutter about the strangeness of movements to undermine “traditional values.” Soon, the whispers become violent screeches. The hosts go forth to target “those people,” bold with a sense of righteous fury. Immigrants, natives, homeless people, women who would falsify rape charges against innocent men...the Owl-hosts take them out to the desert, or dump them in garbage bins, or just leave their corpses near homeless encampments where those corpses will be forgotten. The hosts begin staying up all night because it makes their work easier... and they start to listen to the screeches with gleeful anticipation, for now the Owl Shards give them orders. These people crave direction, and now they have it: a sense of purpose that seems to drive the fear away.

Except, of course, that it does no such thing, because that fear has lived inside them all along.

Most Owl Shards remain unseen by mortal eyes... even, in most cases, from the perceptions of their hosts. Such owls are seen clearly only in dreams, mystic Seekings, or both. The sounds they make, however, might be heard by people who

cannot see them directly. Hence, Owl Shards are sometimes referred to as “night screechers” by those who have heard of them, perhaps even heard the sounds of their wings and cries, but who have not seen such entities in solid form, or at least have not seen such entities in solid form quite yet.

**Willpower** 5-7, **Rage** 8-10, **Gnosis** 5-7, **Essence** 20-40

**Charms:** Appear, Blighted Touch, Corruption, Disorient, Influence, Inhabit, Materialize, Possession, Soul Reading

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2-4, Stamina 2-3; Use Gnosis for Social and Mental Traits

**Abilities:** Empathy 4, Intimidation 3, Subterfuge 4

**Materialized Health Levels:** 4-6

**Image:** Owl Shards appear — generally in dreams and visions, occasionally in three-dimensional form — as large, shadowy, bird-like shapes. Sometimes they emit hollow, echoing sounds, like the flapping of ghostly wings. The size of such apparitions varies significantly, and often correlates to the relationship between a mage and his Avatar. (In game terms, a higher Avatar Background Trait means a larger and more fearsome Owl Shard.) Stronger Shards often ride on the shoulders of their companions, digging their sharp talons in deep while spreading their wings to cast shadows over

everything the mage perceives. These entities whisper fear and screech hatred. On rare occasions, they manifest during an especially powerful projection of magick; at such times, the sounds of hundreds of birds can be heard while the light above darkens with their flight.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Though not “intelligent” by human standards, such entities possess enough foresight and cognizance to recognize individuals whose terrors and scars will nurture their implacable hunger.

## Qilin

Qilin radiate intense tranquility on a level that most monks would literally die (multiple times) to attain. Despite their nightmarish appearance, qilin won’t even step on the ground for fear of crushing insects or unnecessarily harming the grass. Because of this, if you ever see one attacking someone, that person had it coming. No question. Fuck that guy. Anyone not flammable will usually get beaten to death with their hooves. Hell, things that *are* flammable will still get beaten to death with their hooves; they’ll just be on fire the whole time.

Although their presence signifies good fortune, they make crappy conversation partners. Good luck convincing them to do anything more active than meditation; most of them would

## Owl Walkers

People who’ve been possessed by Owl Shards manifest a primordial sense of fear. Although they’re not consciously “spirit-talkers” in the usual sense of that term, the essence of Big Owl and his brood have infested their damaged souls with uncanny powers. Those powers — similar to the horrifying talents of Wyrms-ravaged *fomori* from **Werewolf: The Apocalypse**, but without their roots in spiritual corruption — channel terror down subtle yet inhuman paths. Guided by their fears, these people live out walking nightmares. And when confronted with something that reminds them of those fears, they often like to share.

In game terms, “owl walkers” are normal human beings with one to three of the Special Advantage Traits found in this book’s Chapter Five. The Advantages in question won’t be obviously inhuman (sharp claws and teeth, for instance, not wings or fiery breath), and they’re inevitably tied to the fears that drive that person most. A person who’s scared of pain will manifest a few points of Armor; one who diverts attacks by appearing cute and helpless could gain the Advantage: Aww! A guy terrified of darkness could gain Nightsight, and the girl who dreads being seen might learn to Blend. Most owl walkers also gain a dot or two in their Physical Traits, making them stronger, faster, or tougher than they might appear. Mages possessed by Owl Shards retain their usual abilities, with a Special Advantage or two thrown in for good measure in addition to the one or two dots in Physical Traits.

Folks who can see auras and spiritual presence discern a rolling blackness in a vaguely owl shape. That blackness seems to flap its wings when the walker manifests her powers. The Resonance around such people is much richer than the usual energy associated with human beings, and it radiates an implacable sense of fright. Possession by an Owl Shard adds five points of Quintessence to their usual human energies, giving them 15 Quintessence instead of the usual 10. (See **Mage 20, p. 507**.) That energy, however, remains Fearsome and Temperamental (as detailed **The Book of Secrets, p. 133-138**), so a mage who wants to employ those energies is asking for a harrowing ride that most likely won’t go well. Such possession can be purged by a mage who knows how (see Exorcism in **How Do You DO That? pp. 125-126**), assuming the would-be exorcist can beat the Owl Shard and drive it from its human host.

As far as normal perceptions are concerned, owl walkers seem like everyday people with an especially haggard air about them. A few behave militantly in the face of the things they fear, but most shy away from contact unless forced toward interactions. In situations that bring their terrors to the fore, however, even the most mild-mannered owl walkers explode into violence. Whether or not they use their uncanny powers (most will), they’ll hit fight-or-flight mode until they escape or defeat that threat. In most cases, they’ll have no idea why they’re so afraid, and the terrifying powers they draw upon just make things even worse. Eventually, most owl walkers disappear into addictions, get themselves killed, or wind up on the streets, in jail or on the run thanks to bursts of violence they can’t understand, curb, or cure.

rather contemplate creation than talk to anyone. Because of their serenity, they come off as genius stoners to westerners. They have a great deal of wisdom but go off on tangents so frequently that you can almost mark time based off how many times they change topics. That said, anyone interested in day-long conversations about the nature of existence would do well to look them up.

**Willpower** 10, **Rage** 1, **Gnosis** 5-8, **Essence** 30-40

**Charms:** Blast, Create Fires, Deflect Harm, Flee, Good Luck Charm, Insight, Materialize, Mind Speech, Soul Reading

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 7, Dexterity 2-4, Stamina 2-5, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 5, Wits 3

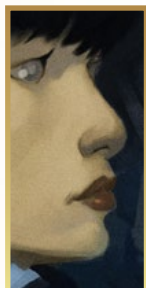
**Abilities:** Academics 3, Alertness 2, Athletics 4, Brawl 3-5, Cosmology 4, Enigmas 5, Esoterica 5, Meditation 6

**Materialized Health Levels:** 8-10

**Image:** Dragon giraffe unicorns. On fire.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Imagine a pacifist philosophy major with focus issues and a *lot* of free time.

## Personages



Individual spirits with distinct personalities and agendas, spiritual “personages” exist for their own purposes. Most occupy Realms within the High-Umbra Courts, but others wander the Earth or Penumbra on quests that only they truly understand.

### Aelida, Lady of Feathers

A powerful spirit more enigmatic than most, the Lady Aelida most often appears as whomever you trust most. Expect to see your grandmother? She’s there. Your best friend? That’s Aelida. The sweetheart you haven’t seen since college? She’s hanging out in the most expected places, going by the name Aelida. In every guise, however, the Lady of Feathers wears at least one feather somewhere on her person — a small feather in a hat, a pattern of feathers on a blouse, or even a necklace in the form of a feather. If she’s in the mood to do so, Aelidia can also appear the same way to all observers.

These feathers contain Tass (typically five points per feather), and she sometimes gives them to mages who aid her; providing that aid, however, can be difficult. Aelida prefers to speak in riddles, and rarely says anything directly. She’s a staunch opponent of the Technocracy, though... and, more generally, of any group that seeks to bind the world to a single unified reality. In her many-changing splendor, the Lady of Feathers is a spirit of Dynamism who values change and unfettered freedom above all else.

According to Hermetic lore, Aelida was once one of their own — Yoassmy of Britain, murdered by Craftmasons in the late Middle Ages. Ascending into heaven as a huge bird, she took her place among the Umbral Lords and Ladies. Although other mages dispute this claim, the Lady of Feathers holds an implacable hatred for the Technocrats and their creations. And although she displays a melancholy humour, her recent manifestations reveal a prankish side as well. She gives out clues in the form of complex riddles and seemingly

meaningless phrases, and while she doesn’t seem to flat-out lie, her misdirection, facades, and enigmatic utterances leave many would-be allies confused. Some authorities have even speculated that Aelida is a particularly adept Marauder, though her obvious spirit-nature makes this seem unlikely. Ultimately, the Lady of Feathers remains an enigma — one of the countless living question marks that inspire the old name for spirits: *Mysticae*.

**Willpower** 5, **Rage** 5, **Gnosis** 8, **Essence** 30

**Charms:** Appear, Break Reality, Create Wind (usually a gale-force wind), Influence, Materialize, Possession (birds only), Reform, Shapeshift

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3; use Gnosis for Social and Mental Traits

**Abilities:** Academics 4, Alertness 3, Animal Kinship (Birds) 5, Cosmology 4, Enigmas 4, Esoterica 5, Etiquette 4, Occult 4, Stealth 4, Subterfuge 5

**Equivalent Arete:** 6

**Equivalent Spheres:** Correspondence 1, Entropy 1, Forces 5, Life 4, Matter 1, Mind 2, Prime 3, Spirit 4, Time 1

**Materialized Health Levels:** 10

**Image:** In her normal form, the Lady usually appears as a beautiful olive-skinned woman wearing a cloak and crown of feathers. Otherwise, she looks like the woman you need most in your life.

**Roleplaying Notes:** The Lady enjoys shape-changing into a variety of forms (typically avian) and offering cryptic advice and warnings to mystics she apparently favors.

### La Huesera, the Bone Woman

The Bone Woman, La Huesera, collects the bones of discarded and forgotten beings, and then sings them back to life. Despite surface appearances, though, she is not a legend of death, but rather a keeper of memory. She does

not collect the remains of just *any* dead person or animal; instead, she seeks out animals who are disappearing (such as wolves, cougars, and polar bears), and people whom no one has time to remember (like street people, or women from minority communities who were murdered and discarded). La Huesera sees no distinction between animals and human beings; they're all just different kinds of "peoples" in her eyes.

Although tales of her powers have inspired more than a few grieving souls to seek her out, Bone Woman has never been known to assist anyone in returning their loved ones to life. La Huesera does not concern herself with the loss of those who will be remembered, so if someone cares enough to seek her out then the memory of the dead person already lives on inside of them. Some people who've come seeking Bone Woman's help in returning life to their lost ones wind up dismayed when she ignores them entirely and chooses instead to fret over the yellowed bones of a dog for weeks on end.

When La Huesera collects enough of the remains of the deceased, she attempts to put them back together in some fashion. Sometimes she wraps them with beads and binds them together; sometimes she carves a wooden frame, bound with the remains, that resembles the living form of the dead. She's been known to piece bones together with bits of foil, wire, and other scraps of refuse. La Huesera spends weeks, sometimes even months, stitching a corpse back together. And each time, she sings.

La Huesera almost always sings in indigenous languages of the region she appears in, and while some witnesses claim that her songs are simple and repetitious — "*Flesh to bone! Flesh to bone!*" — the truth behind the song is more complicated. The words the Bone Woman sings are sacred (some would say magickal) songs and stories; she sings of the past of the corpse, and its life before, and she sings of its life to come, after it breathes again and changes shape. When the sacred song is complete, the corpse comes back to life, but is changed.

All evidence of death's traumas is erased by the song. The new life is nearly always a much stronger, healthier version of what the dead person was before their death. A wolf that died of starvation might return larger, with a lush coat, and might even be a more skilled hunter than he was before death. A woman who lived on the street and carried its many scars is returned to life with gleaming hair and radiant skin. The beings resurrected by the Bone Woman are so dramatically transformed that anyone who knew them before could never hope to recognize them now. The resurrected people often return to their old communities as newcomers and live entirely different lives. Always, they remember what La Huesera did for them, but never do they betray her secrets.

**Willpower 8, Rage 4, Gnosis 8, Essence 50**

**Charms:** Materialize, Re-form, Spirit Away

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3; use Gnosis for Social and Mental Traits

**Abilities:** Alertness 2, Awareness 3, Craft 5 (Bodies), Empathy 3, Enigmas 3, Expression 5 (Song), Intimidation 3, Leadership 2, Medicine 5

**Equivalent Arete:** 6

**Equivalent Spheres:** Correspondence 1, Entropy 3, Forces 2, Life 5, Matter 3, Mind 5, Prime 4, Spirit 4, Time 3

**Materialized Health Levels:** 10

**Image:** La Huesera appears as a rotund and elderly Mexican or Apache woman who might be seen digging through trash heaps, dumpsters, or even directly in the ground of hidden places. Those forsaken places include ravines or gullies (where bodies are often dumped in the hopes that they won't be found), abandoned ruins, hasty makeshift graves, or streams and shores where memories are carried away like bodies often are.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Many people who encounter the Bone Woman remember her standoffishness; those who've tried to interfere with her works report that she ignored them completely. In reality, La Huesera simply has little time or care for the concerns of the living. Living people do not need your magic. They're a waste of your time, and time is a precious thing when so many of the dead have been forgotten.

## Lord Viscount Talos Perdix (Umbrood Lord)

Technology has its spirit-patrons too. Legends state that Lord Viscount Talos Perdix was once the nephew of the mythic inventor Daedalus, killed by Daedalus in a fit of jealousy because Perdix's inventions surpassed his own. The truth behind this story remains unknown (see the entry for the giant bronze construct Talos, p. XX), but this powerful Umbrood Lord has a close connection to technology and invention.

Apparently consumed with Umbrood hierarchies, Lord Viscount Talos Perdix (he prefers to be called by his full title, and can get angry if he's not) maneuvers for status among the other High Umbrood Courts. And while he doesn't seem interested in the conflicts of mortal beings, he is very much aware of the power mages hold. As a result, the Lord Viscount regularly offers his services to favored willworkers — most often Technocrats, Etherites, and other strange tinkers — in exchange for their help with status-boosting endeavors. Mages who agree to such alliances find themselves in the midst of Otherworldly errands to disgrace or undermine other Umbrood courtiers... a dangerous proposition that usually ends with a grudge from some powerful spirit-creature. For his side of the bargain, the Lord Viscount offers advice and warnings; teaches unconventional tech-skills (in game terms, the Hypertech Ability); weird Devices; and occasional help from his pattern spiders and other mechanical servitors, like the grinder Minions, above.

In addition to his powerful helpers and strange mechanical toys, Lord Viscount Talos Perdix is one of those powerful Umbrood who can use magick-like Effects. (See the *optional rule* "Umbrood Magick," in **Page 20**, p. 490) In his case,



those “spells” take the form of strange machines, elemental phenomena, and mind-twisting acts of unearthly technology.

**Willpower** 10, **Rage** 8, **Gnosis** 8, **Essence** 60

**Charms:** Armor, Blast Flame (eight dice), Control Electrical Systems, Create Fires, Influence, Lightning Bolts, Materialize, Mind Speech, Possession, Short Out, Solidify Reality, Tracking

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4; use Gnosis for Social and Mental Traits

**Abilities:** Academics 8, Alertness 5, Awareness 5, Brawl 3, Cosmology 5, Crafts (many) 6, Dodge 3, Enigmas 4, Etiquette 5, Hypertech 7, Intimidation 3, Intuition 3, Investigation 3, Melee 3, Occult 5, Science 4, Subterfuge 4, Technology 6

**Equivalent Arete:** 7

**Equivalent Spheres:** Correspondence 3, Entropy 4, Forces 4, Life 4, Matter 4, Prime 3, Spirit 5

**Materialized Health Levels:** 19

**Image:** Ruling Theastavrosēs (roughly, “the Crossroads”), the redundantly titled Lord Viscount is a bizarre techno-organic hybrid, with a wizened human face affixed to a complex mechanical metal head; a snake-like body made of metal, plastic, and rubber; and a pair of huge peacock-hued bird wings across his back. Perdix has four clawed draconic legs; in place of hands, he uses a mass

of writhing tentacular wires near his head. He speaks in a growling Greek-accented voice that sounds like stones grating against each other, and cares little for mortal “Ascension” and its wars.

**Roleplaying Notes:** He is a proud, arrogant spirit that acts like he’s better than everyone else. No wonder he gets along well with mad scientists.

## Tzitzimimeh

Since the Time Before, humanity has sought answers about the mysteries of life on Earth in the stars, and the stars have whispered their secrets back. Those stars taught the people how to navigate treacherous seas and twisting mountains. The stars imparted their wisdom of the seasons, and showed the people when to sow and when to reap. In thanks, the people named the stars, and called them guides and gods. Stars, in those days, were revered, and their aid made life possible. But when the sun sank into shadow, the secret stars that were obscured by its light shone forth to sing their own spells to humanity. However, these hidden stars knew nothing of the secrets of life, and spoke only death. Without the goodness of the sun to protect them, those stars — the Tzitzimimeh — descended to the Earth and snapped up mortal men in their skeletal jaws, devouring them and sending them off to Mictlan, the kingdom of death, to serve the King and Queen of the dead.

The hunger of the Tzitzimimeh for the living, however, is directed only at men. They will not harm children, and actively protect women. Pregnant women, or women with children, receive the most attentive care and fiercest defense of all. Sometimes, according to ancient tales, when women need their help, the Tzitzimimeh will tear the sun from the sky so that they can descend to earth like falling stars and protect their charges.

The stars above instruct and teach... and in this way, they also act as guides. The Tzitzimimeh guide the lost and forlorn dead to their final resting places. Most of those dead souls — like the souls gobbled up by the Tzitzimimeh themselves — are collected and brought safely to Mictlan, so that nothing truly horrific can get to them. Many creatures of the Underworld will feed upon or enslave a lonesome dead soul, and so the Tzitzimimeh intervene, offering protection to those who might otherwise be consumed.

The nature of a Tzitzimimeh can be, for mortal men, a puzzle. For while she protects women and encourages the birth of new life, acting as a defender of the living, she also descends upon Earth to deal out cruel death and agony, and then guides the souls of the departed to a world of unending loss and ruin. But for those who understand these star goddesses (and yes, they *are* astral deities), the dual nature of a Tzitzimimeh fits perfectly into the nature of life and death. After all, there are times when the stars in heaven are ordered and bright, with light that imparts wisdom and order unto the world. But then there are times when the stars wink out and the sun is dragged down from the sky. There are nights when the moon drips with blood, and the anger of the stars booms across the world. Chaos and instability are as natural as death, and are just as rightly feared.

Large or small, horribly desiccated or uncannily compelling, Tzitzimimeh personify the awful beauty of a star. Being ageless, they can appear as any age they desire to be, changing through the span of human years in the blink of an eye. Most often, though, these entities appear as titanic corpses

whose garb suggests (but is not limited to) the classical dress of Mesoamerican women. Always, these entities are female. Men, to them, are lesser beings, unworthy of the glory of a star.

Praise the stars. And likewise, fear them.

**Willpower 9, Rage 8, Gnosis 7, Essence 70**

**Charms:** Armor, Blast, Break Reality, Call for Aid, Cleanse the Blight, Death Fertility, Ease Pain, Healing, Iron Will, Materialize, Open Moon Bridge, Re-form, Soul Reading, Spirit Away, Umbral Storm

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 7, Dexterity 6, Stamina 7; use Gnosis for Social and Mental Traits

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 4, Awareness 5, Brawl 5, Cosmology 8, Empathy 4, Etiquette 4, Expression 3, Intimidation 5, Leadership 3, Medicine 4, Melee 4, Occult 5, Stealth 3

**Equivalent Arete:** 6

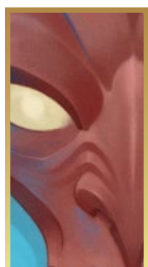
**Equivalent Spheres:** Correspondence 5, Entropy 4, Forces 5, Life 5, Matter 4, Mind 5, Prime 4, Spirit 4, Time 3

**Materialized Health Levels:** 20

**Image:** Appearing as corpse-like giantesses cloaked in beautiful regalia of colorfully dyed fabrics and feathers, a Tzitzimimeh might manifest as a recently deceased woman, discolored and bloated, or she might carry only shreds of rotting flesh on her bones. Most often, she'll be entirely skeletal, stripped clean and bleached of any and all signs of having once have lived.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Once revered, now forgotten, the Tzitzimimeh have little use for people of the modern world except when such people might lead humanity back to the respectful state the people once knew. Many Tzitzimimeh have individual names of their own, and some bless certain individuals with their protection for life; others name a target who has transgressed against women and children for consumption, and they hunt him across the earth until he is found and eaten. The stars provide, and the stars destroy.

## Paradox Manifestations



When Paradox essence attains a form of sentience, the bizarre entities known as *Paradox Spirits* manifest themselves with lasting identities and uncanny connections to the metaphysical principles that brought them into existence. Detailed in **Mage 20** (pp. 552 and 639-641), these Umbral punishers exact a fearsome toll from mages who dare too much and push too far.

### Erinyes (Entropy and Hubris)

The Erinyes are spirits attracted by acts of entropic imbalance that result in death or murder. It's a rare thing for someone to look upon the Erinyes and live to tell the tale. It is even rarer

for one to do so and remain sane enough to describe them. Wards and Talismans are rendered useless against these spirits, their Quintessence sizzling and burning away at the righteous flame of their torches. Known as *Furies* in the western world, they came by another name in ages past: *Eumenides*.

Few tragedies would be complete without an appearance of the sisters, yet the truth can often be more tragic than any tragedy. Hidden in allegory and folklore lies the history of two of Greece's most powerful Traditions, as well as the horror of Tisiphone's revenge. The legend speaks of an unlikely romance between Tisiphone and Cithaeron the king, who murdered his brother, Helicon, for the throne. Said romance met a premature ending when a viper hidden in the Fury's hair instinctively bit the young monarch. But what events could have possibly inspired this myth?

In a city named Thebes, not far away from Athens, two great mountains stand: Cithaeron and Helicon. Countless years ago, beneath the shadow of trees and within the sanctuary of caves, two cults held rites on each of the respective peaks. Cithaeron was home to the priesthood of Demeter, whereas Helicon was a site of worship for the followers of Persephone. In Greek mythology, Demeter, goddess of agriculture and fertility, was mother to Persephone. Nevertheless, the shrines of Helicon were there before Persephone, and their stones were thirsty for blood. The sisters of Cithaeron frowned upon the primitive practices of their Helicon counterparts and took it upon themselves to purposely *civilize* them. With careful manipulation, the cult of Demeter persuaded the king of Plataies — a city at the foot of Cithaeron — to ally himself with Athens and Sparta against Thebes, in hopes of gaining his fiefdom's independence. The war came and went, leaving behind charred earth and driving the followers of Persephone away from their ancestral home. The remaining survivors asked the Necymantes of Acropolis for sanctuary, uttering the binding words, "*konx om pax*," which obliged the temple's priesthood to open the walls of their sanctum and embrace the refugees as their own. The meaning of these words is lost in time; still, they are used to this day as a formal petition for assistance amongst Greek Traditionalists. Ash staining their eyelids, the diviners of the dead cast the bones and prayed to the gods for answers. The gods were displeased, for the balance was off and only death could restore it. But not just *any* death would do. Ismene, the high priestess of Demeter, had to be removed, and they had just the man for the job. The elders summoned Splenion, who had served the temple for many years and was blessed with both lethality and beauty. His blackened hands were a testament to his efficiency as a killer; thus, he came to be known as Melanheiras. Upon the night of his departure for Cithaeron, the elders spoke words into the waters underground and filled a goblet for Splenion to drink. The salty water would ward him against Ismene's power, they said.

As the sun rose above the ancient mountain, the assassin stealthily made his way toward his target. Eventually, he came upon a creek; there, the priestess was bathing, her back conveniently turned. He had taken but a step when she locked eyes with him and smiled. They boldly approached one another. Ismene welcomed him and, at that moment, Splenion realized that his intentions were known to her. She was willing to face judgment, but she wouldn't let him touch her with tainted hands. She guided him to kneel beside her by the stream and washed the taint away with her touch. As soon as Splenion was Melanheiras no more, a vision bloomed in both their minds: They stood as one, embraced in love, joined in perfect balance. They shrank back in confusion, each one thinking the other was trying to trick them. Splenion wouldn't have any of it and cast the bones for guidance. The gods remained silent. Ismene had no bones to cast, but she was given a prophecy as a girl; the Oracle of Delphi foretold the coming of her soul

mate. *You will know him by his kiss, by taste of sea and stone*, the Oracle had said. Eager to prove the vision wrong, the priestess pressed her lips to his, only to leave her dying breath in his salty mouth. The waters beneath Acropolis were poison to the living; the Necymantes were safe from them, for they had already died once and returned. Splenion was then stunned into another vision, one of Ismene and himself surrounded by their laughing children. At that moment, he knew he had to get her back and called upon the gods below, desperate to strike a bargain. Tisiphone watched from the shadows and smirked. She had marked him long ago — a mark that deepened with each life he took. The young man didn't stand a chance. His plea went unanswered, never reaching Hades' halls. What *did* answer was Tisiphone, her voice a dry whisper in his ear. *For every death, a root you'll grow, for every scream, a branch, unmoving on Demeter's soil, her heart within your arms.*

The Verbenae of Cithaeron know the great tree as the Heart of the Mother, and they revere it to this day. Tradition dictates that all coven mothers must be buried in its shadow, the reason behind it known only to the High Priestess and her successor. Unfortunately, such secrecy has dulled the lesson inherent in the tale. Many Euthanatoi have unleashed the Erinyes on their targets, hoping that the avenging spirits will impart justice on their behalf, only to see the Furies return to claim them as well.

The Verbenae and Euthanatoi of Greece know them as three sisters: Alecto the Mad, Megaera the Spiteful, and Tisiphone the Relentless.

### Alecto the Mad

Alecto personifies wrath and mania. Rage is what stirs her, and crimes of passion call to her. Alecto's high-pitched screams shatter the mind as her claws tear the offender's sanity apart. Many mages have taken their own lives after realizing that attempts at self-mutilation could not silence Alecto's persistent wail.

**Willpower 7, Rage 5, Gnosis 8, Essence 40**

**Charms:** Armor, Bad Luck Curse, Blast (Screams), Break Reality, Lightning Bolt, Shatter Glass, Terror, Umbraquake

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 7, Dexterity 8, Stamina 7; use Gnosis for Social and Mental Traits

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 5, Awareness 4, Brawl 4, Melee 5, Stealth 4

**Materialized Health Levels: 10**

### Megaera the Spiteful

Megaera embodies hate and envy. She's the reason behind cautionary tales of hexes backlashing when cast with intent to kill. Deaths caused by hexing spells cause the caster's name to carve itself onto the spirit's flesh. Millennia of scar tissue prove that seldom are these warnings taken seriously. More often than not, you only *do* take them seriously when it is already too late.



Megaera's punishment comes in the form of a temporal loop that cannot be escaped by any means. Death would seem like a great option, then... but death is merciful, and Megaera is not.

**Willpower 7, Rage 9, Gnosis 8, Essence 50**

**Charms:** Bad Luck Curse, Blast (Screams), Break Reality, Disorient, Lightning Bolt, Terror, Temporal Loop (as a Time 4 effect, but it runs as long as Megaera desires)

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 7, Dexterity 8, Stamina 7; use Gnosis for Social and Mental Traits

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 5, Awareness 4, Brawl 4, Melee 5, Stealth 4

**Materialized Health Levels:** 10

### Tisiphone the Relentless

Tisiphone is the manifestation of vengeance. Patient and predatory, her blood colder than that of her prey, she stalks murderers and assassins alike. Contrary to her sisters, Tisiphone is insidious and possesses a sense of poetic irony: She *will* wait, and she *will* follow, until the time comes for killer to turn savior. After being marked by Tisiphone, the very first attempt her target makes at healing, restoring, or protecting someone's life will horribly and irrevocably fail.

**Willpower 7, Rage 8, Gnosis 6, Essence 40**

**Charms:** Bad Luck Curse, Blast (Screams), Break Reality, Disorient, Lightning Bolt, Re-form, Terror

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 7, Dexterity 8, Stamina 7; use Gnosis for Social and Mental Traits

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 5, Awareness 4, Brawl 4, Melee 5, Stealth 4

**Materialized Health Levels:** 10

**Image:** The half-crazed mumblings of few survivors speak of tar-skinned women draped in tattered shadows. Winged and crowned in hissing snakes and tangled hair, they descend raptor-like upon the insolent mage whose hubris provokes their fury.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Alecto the Mad, Megaera the Spiteful, and Tisiphone the Relentless all have their own distinct personalities, but all crave revenge.

## Farandwee (Correspondence and/or Time)

The eccentric Farandwee (thought to be named from Arabic *firanji*: "foreigner") bedevils mages who disrupt the orderly rules of space and distance. Endlessly shifting size, mass, and appearances, this clown's indistinct gender seems as impermanent as the reflections it creates.

Hermetic lore suggests that Farandwee is a patchwork of mages whose carelessness bound them together into a swirling trickster of spatial-temporal madness. Early tales depict this entity as a court jester of indeterminate gender. Late-Renaissance incarnations portrayed the spirit as a harlequin figure, while more modern ones embrace the eerie clowns of circus shows and childhood terrors. In every guise, Farandwee manifests in response to people who place their own vanity above the apparent constraints of human dimensions.

As soon as Farandwee appears, the spirit tries to grab the mage responsible for the backlash that summoned it; most often, that backlash comes from Correspondence-based spells, though the clown appears to punish Time-based backlashes as well. If Farandwee succeeds, observers see a large, gray, coffin-shaped capsule appear around the punished mage; sometimes, that container looks more like a giant wrapped present, a puzzle box, or a medieval hellmouth attached to a horrifying circus funhouse. Regardless of the container's appearance, a grabbed mage get pulled inside with appalling and yet somehow comical speed.

Inside that enclosure, the mage experiences a maze of unbreakable funhouse mirrors. These extremely disorienting mirrors increase the difficulty of all Correspondence magick by +2 (up to a maximum of 10). Farandwee then appears within this maze, manifesting in up to a dozen duplicate forms so he can grab the mage and teleport him off to a dangerous location. This location isn't immediately fatal (like, say, the inside of a volcano), but it does present the mage with a potentially calamitous puzzle: *How do you get out of here before things get even worse?*

The transported mage finds himself in a ticking-clock situation: a remote mountain top, a cell in the brutal prison of a corrupt autocratic nation, high in a burning apartment building, that sort of thing. The location isn't simply perilous in and of itself (though it invariably is), but it contains an impending threat to the mage's safety. Farandwee, meanwhile, heals the tears in reality caused by the backlash and its punishment, and then disappears... along with the mirror-coffin and all hope of escaping the same way.

While in the mirror, the offending mage can try to destroy all of Farandwee's manifestations before he arrives at the place of punishment. (In game terms, he has one turn per manifestation to do so.) Failing that, he might attempt a mystical departure via the Correspondence Sphere (no telling where he'll end up), or else escape the situation once he's been dropped into it. Given the recursive natures of Farandwee, Correspondence, and Time, that attempt might trigger a second backlash, which could lead Farandwee back to the offender, which could result in an even bigger mess the second time around.

**Willpower 4, Rage 4, Gnosis 8, Essence 20**

**Charms:** Duplication (one Essence point per self), Materialize, Mirror Maze (conjures the maze; three Essence), Shift Other (teleport vs. target's Willpower; three Essence), Spirit Away

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3; use Gnosis for Social and Mental Traits

**Abilities:** Alertness 5, Brawl 4

**Materialized Health Levels:** 5 per self

**Image:** A catastrophic clown wearing a bizarre hodgepodge of clothes and ornaments from at least a half dozen periods and cultures.

**Roleplaying Notes:** A silent, creepy figure. Honks and giggles are the only sounds it makes.

## Hex (Entropy)

Immediately after an Entropy Paradox backlash strikes, the affected mage sees a traditional symbol of bad luck: a broken mirror, an inverted horseshoe, a hissing black cat, or a number that's unlucky in the mage's culture. The offender always notices this symbol, but he might not know what it means.

Hex then waits until the mage is in danger; the next time that mage winds up in a tough situation, he automatically botches one roll that doesn't involve performing magick. In most cases, Hex then departs, and the mage's luck returns to normal. However, if the mage caused an especially severe Paradox backlash (more than seven Paradox points' worth), then Hex may cause a *second* botch to fully balance the scales of reality.

Regardless of the backlash, Hex cannot cause more than one botch per scene, and always departs after the second botch.

**Willpower 8, Rage 5, Gnosis 8, Essence 30**

**Charms:** Bad Luck Curse, Cause Botch (see above), Materialize (as a symbol of bad luck), Tracking

**Image:** Hex looks like a symbol of bad luck that resonated with the mage observing him.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Show up, ruin a mage's day, leave.

## Swipe (Mind and Correspondence or Data)

You know how you sometimes wish you could just make annoying people disappear? The universe knows that feeling, too. So when certain mages go bit too far, demanding that the universe fits their immediate demands, Swipe sometimes appears to remind such people that the universe is not their bitch.

According to Umbrood lore, the entity now known as Swipe has been around for centuries. In the old days, this spirit manifested as a strong wind that would blow offending mages far away from where they'd been standing moments before. Just before the mage in question found himself in some distant, unexpected location, a heavy sigh of wind — occasionally heard to be muttering to itself in a decidedly feminine voice about the annoying inconvenience of Awakened humanity — would gust around the mage, ruffle his hair and clothing, and then whisk him off to a rather inconvenient

place: a mountaintop, a deep woodland, a faraway crossroad, a distant city, that sort of thing. Most often, the trip would simply inconvenience the mage in question; an especially annoying or dangerous mage, however, might find himself facing a sudden threat — an onrushing train, a hungry lion, a fall from several hundred feet in the air — from which his magick might not save him in time.

In the age of smartphones and social media, Swipe refined its approach. Now manifesting as an attractive member of the mage's preferred gender, Swipe appears, holds up a cell phone, scowls or grins at the mage, and "swipes left," erasing that mage from view. Seconds later, the offender pops back into existence elsewhere... usually inconvenienced, occasionally imperiled. Swipe, meanwhile, disappears back to wherever it came from, leaving the mage's companions (assuming the mage *had* companions) wondering where their friend went.

In rare instances, the spirit not only removes the mage from his physical location, but also swipes the memory of that mage's presence from the people who were nearby when he disappeared. ("What? Bob was here? I don't remember him being here...") Those memories return in time, generally within about an hour; until that point, though, no one in the mage's immediate location will recall his presence after he departs. They'll remember he *exists*, if they knew him before the spirit appeared... they just won't remember that he was with them until he abruptly vanished from view.

A mage who finds himself whisked away by Swipe generally winds up somewhere within 10 miles or so of his original location. *Where* he winds up, and under what circumstances, is a judgment call on the Storyteller's part. Wherever he appears, the mage finds himself too disoriented to use magic effectively. The strain of being erased from one location and dropped into another adds +5 to the difficulty of any task he attempts. (Maximum difficulty of 10.) This penalty drops by 1 difficulty per turn, giving that mage a +4 difficulty on the second turn after his arrival, +3 on the third turn, and so on. Until his scrambled senses realign themselves (in game terms, after the penalty has faded, six turns after his transference), all of that mage's magickal attempts are considered to be *vulgar with witnesses*, even if he's alone in his new location. Combined with the increased difficulty modifier, this situation makes it difficult, though not impossible, to employ magick... and inflicts additional Paradox on the mage if he tries to do it anyway. Thus, the stranded mage is well-advised to rely upon his wits and physical abilities to get him out of trouble in his new location. If that mage is unfortunate enough to invoke another Paradox backlash while trying to escape, Swipe will appear and send him somewhere else where the cycle starts all over again.

How did an entity who's essentially a wind spirit get hip to cell phones and social media? Some researchers theorize that Swipe is a manifestation of cosmic code, as described in the paradigm "Everything is Data" (**Mage 20**, pg. 570). What people

used to consider "hearing voices on the wind" actually involved the passing of information in the pre-virtual age. Now, with so many people attuned to the virtual world at their fingertips, Swipe asserts its true form as an agent of data-transference, shifting a mage "out of sight, out of mind" by rearranging the data associated with his existence. That's the theory, anyhow. As is so often the case, this Paradox spirit isn't talking — just making folks who disrupt its dominion disappear.

### **Willpower 6, Rage 4, Gnosis 8, Essence 20**

**Charms:** Materialize, Shift Other (teleport vs. target's Willpower; three Essence), Spirit Away

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4; use Gnosis for Social and Mental Traits

**Abilities:** Alertness 5, Brawl 2, Technology 5

**Materialized Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -2, -5, dispersed

**Image:** An attractive human with a smartphone and an exaggerated grin or scowl.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Like its original form as a wind spirit, Swipe is often flighty and distracted. Once a mage is "swiped," it often finds a new target, forgetting the target entirely unless its attention gets drawn back to the mage.

## **Whisper (Mind or Life)**

A manifestation of paranoia, Whisper cannot materialize; in the Umbra, the spirit resembles a swirling, shifting mass of colors and shapes. This entity doesn't approach mages in the Umbra, though. Instead, it manifests within an offender's own mind — reading the mage's thoughts and fears, and then suggesting that those fears are coming true.

When conjured by a Paradox backlash, Whisper employs four tactics: First, it locates the offender, wherever he might be; then it possesses people (typically Sleepers) in that mage's vicinity, getting them to behave erratically so that the mage begins to question their motives with regards to him. From "inside" those mortal minds, Whisper reads the mage's thoughts and fears; finally, the spirit moves into the mage's own head, inspiring small paranoid delusions until either the mage cracks or the spirit is satisfied.

When possessing mortal hosts, Whisper sends them against the mage in eerie yet nonviolent ways. People begin to follow the mage; scary toughs might trail him, New-Age weirdoes might follow him, cops might cast wary eyes in his direction. Cars creep along behind the mage, driving off before he can confront them. Whisper never possesses any one person for more than an hour or two, and these people never recall what happened while they were possessed. Sometimes Whisper jumps from one person to another in a crowd, delivering a cryptic and ominous message; each possessed person delivers a word or two of the message while looking directly at the mage, and then the next person continues that message without pause. Attempts to scan the possessed people with Mind magick produce blurs of

indistinct and vaguely ominous thoughts — nothing as obvious as a threat but filled with intimations of obsessions or harm.

Once the mage gets jumpy, Whisper flows into its target's consciousness, reading the fears that rise in response to people following him. From there, Whisper begins to seed hallucinations, breed surges of unexpected emotions, and generally drive the mage toward irrational and paranoid acts. These delusions generally last until the mage does something stupidly self-destructive; at that point, Whisper generally departs... at least for the time being, anyway.

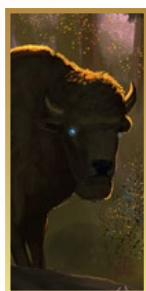
**Willpower 8, Rage 4, Gnosis 8, Essence 40**

**Charms:** Influence, Mind Speech, Paranoid Delusions (as per the *Corruption* Charm, but with fearsome delusions rather than evil suggestions), Possession (one person per Power point spent), Reform, Tracking

**Image:** A chaotic manifestation of color, shapes, and sound in the mage's mind.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Whatever it takes to get the mage to doubt her own sanity.

## Totem Spirits



To many people, gods are distant, abstract entities — assuming they exist at all. For rare mortals, though, certain gods are family. Favored by these entities, those rare people enjoy special gifts, mystic kinship, and frequent annoyances from their patron beings. That bond can be fleeting, lost by carelessness or disrespect. The folks who manage to sustain such ties, however, retain a sublime relationship with someone greater than themselves.

Like kami, the Loa, and other god-forms, totem entities are too vast for simple statistics. Though they'll assume material form, or manifest as members of their "broods," these spirits are essentially immortal and, if not omnipotent, then at least deeply perceptive with regards to their chosen kin.

For details about totems and their relationship with Mage characters see **Mage 20**, pp. 326-328 and 633-636.

### Cat

Sly and graceful, Cat is especially popular in urban areas or farmlands. Like her larger cousins Lynx, Cougar, Tiger, and so forth, she's a devastating hunter when need be. The smaller embodiment of Cat favors the domesticated feline, though, so she tends to be cute and affectionate as well as fierce. Occasionally regarded as male (especially under names like *Tybalt* or *Old Tom*), Cat likes people who enjoy the finer things in life.

**Manifestations:** A large (sometimes very large) feline of the more-or-less domesticated sort. Sometimes appears as a person with distinctly cat-like characteristics or as a cat with unusually human characteristics, such as *Puss-in-Boots* or the archetypal talking cat.

**Associations:** Grace, insight, sensuality, curiosity, cruelty.

**Brood:** Spirit cats, catlike people, and the infamous *NyanCat* and *Grumpy Cat*.

**Abilities:** Awareness, Seduction, Stealth

**Bans:** Though Cat can be silly, she does not suffer her allies to be boorish, rude, clumsy, or stupid. People who abuse cats

are anathema to her. Although folks often think of Cat and Dog as natural enemies, those spirits and their people can be comfortable allies, even great friends, so long as the Dog-folk remember who's really in charge.

### Cockroach

Though ancient, Cockroach has come into its own in the modern age. In every city, around every corner and seam, Cockroach waits for the dark. Persistent and incredibly hard to kill, this totem's chosen folk share Spider's uncanny patience; where she is delicate, though, Cockroach is tough... and its people know things... things they're really not *supposed* to know.

**Manifestations:** Large roaches, roach swarms, titanic roaches, and people with the nightmarish ability to grow antennae or dissolve into vast carpets of... *ugh*...

**Associations:** Toughness, persistence, secrets, filth, infestation, survival.

**Brood:** Roach spirits, gremlin-imps, electrical impulse spirits that glide through machinery, street people, and especially strange hoarders.

**Abilities:** Streetwise, Survival, or the Stamina Attribute

**Bans:** Cockroach doesn't like people who kill its kind or who keep their living spaces too clean. This totem's favored people leave offerings to Cockroach's insect children and regard them as good luck.

### Joe Dread

He's the face of fear, though he has no face. He can look like anyone yet resembles no one. Joe Dread is the embodiment of terror that wears a human guise. He lurks in alleys, shouts from cars, and walks loudly down the street behind you when no one else is around. Some people, though, make a friend of Dread. For them, he's family, and his gifts to them are legion.

You'll never see Dread clearly. That's the point. His dominion is the unknown factor at the edge of what seems certain otherwise. At times, he'll crouch on your shoulders when you're trying to get things done, or loom over your bed

## Controversy is My Spirit Animal

Taken from the Ojibwe word *doodem*, meaning “clan” or “lineage,” the word *totem* has become a contentious subject in the 21st century. Because the original word refers to a family structure that was destroyed by Euro-American invaders before that word was adopted as a commodity to be bought and sold by those same people, it’s the subject of intense debate in certain communities. Like *shaman*, *voodoo*, *gypsy*, and similar terms, it’s a word whose pop-culture usage ignores deeply offensive baggage and a history of turning something vital to one culture into a bad joke (as in the convenience-store chain U Tote ‘Em) for another.

A related concept, the “spirit animal,” is even more contentious, with some folks demanding that non-indigenous people stop using it altogether. The term itself isn’t Native American, of course, though it was coined by anthropologists to describe the “primitive superstitions” of indigenous peoples. Those waters get muddled further by the fact that certain European and Asian cultures have their own animistic traditions in which people bond with or are related to animals, as with the Norse “bear-shirt” *berserkers*, Siberian *ayami*, heraldic beasts, and the tradition of familiar spirits. New-Age commercial culture, naturally, has trivialized and commodified such ideas to a ridiculous degree, and so people who couldn’t care less if someone feels a spiritual kinship to Wolf get understandably hacked off at “spirit-animal workshops” where rich attendees pay \$1,000 a pop to receive wildly inaccurate (and offensive) “primal wisdom” based on the same Native American creeds that, for generations, got actual Native Americans beaten, locked up, and killed. Certain activists now insist that if non-Natives respect the concept, they’ll use terms from their own culture (*patronus*, *daemon*, *familiar*, etc.) instead of copying sacred concepts from another one. (See “Taking Other People’s Stuff?” in **The Book of Secrets**, pp. 290-291.)

The totem concept appeared in **Mage** and **Werewolf** years before these debates became common conversations. In hindsight, we might have chosen another term if we’d been aware at the time that it could offend folks we hadn’t wanted to offend. At this point, the word’s so ingrained in World of Darkness material that extracting it would cause an even bigger controversy than keeping it intact, especially since many potential substitute words (like *familiar*) already refer to something else entirely. That said, you can represent the same concept by substituting *Numen* (“a nod of the head” from a god), *Daemon* (“guiding spirit”), or whatever else suits your needs if the term *totem* doesn’t fit your group or your take on the game.

Regardless of the word employed, the World of Darkness totem concept refers to a greater spirit that shares intimate kinship with its chosen people. It’s not restricted to “power animals,” and carries a lot more significance than the cool perks your character gets from this Trait. A totem, by any name, is *family*. Contentious as it might be, a totem’s presence reflects a sacred bond, and should be treated with respect.

on a restless night. Dread is an imp. Dread is a stranger. Dread looks just enough like one of *those people* to get you fired up about them, yet he can look like you as well. He’s the fiend whose face is everyone’s. Dread knows no ethnicity or class because terror haunts us all.

Some folks view Joe Dread as part of Big Owl’s brood — a servant, perhaps, or a human manifestation of the fear-god himself. That might be true, but there’s no way to be sure. These days, Dread is everywhere: screaming at you on the internet, lurking behind your best friend’s grin, knocking on your door and then disappearing before you answer, smashing your car window just for fun so you can wonder what he took or fear that someone might be inside the car, waiting.

As a totem entity, Joe Dread gifts his chosen with Intimidation, Stealth, and Torture. He knows how to hurt folks and likes to share his secrets. For Joe, the threat of pain is sweeter than pain itself; thus, the favors he confers focus more upon what *might* happen than on violent acts of certainty. He’s not about beating someone to a pulp, but about getting them to fear what being beaten to a pulp feels like. Dread’s chosen people are similarly frightening, not because they use brutal force but because the potential for force always seems to hover around them. Inflicting such fear really is a kind of science, so Joe’s an

exception to the rule that Technocrats cannot bond with totem spirits. His kinsmen among the Black Suit and PsychOp ranks don’t view him as an ephemeral entity, though; to them, he’s just a guy like them, who happens to be extremely good at his job.

Despite his colloquial name, Dread isn’t bound by gender. A man who fears women would meet Jo Dread instead. She sneers at him, tears him down, leaves a blank space of rejection in the center of his world or else tells that world that he’s really no one at all. Names are just conveniences we attach to things we wish to classify, and Dread reminds us we have no control. Even those who Dread befriends realize that life is full of terrors and their lives are no exception.

**Manifestations:** Loud noises, sudden shouts, feelings of anxiety, shadowy figures, whispered threats, posts and comments on the internet, sudden acts of random violence.

**Associations:** Terror, anxiety, suspense, phobias.

**Brood:** Elementals of cold wind, “bad luck” or fearsome animal spirits (spiders, black cats, crows, owls, snakes, and so forth), people who use fear to their advantage.

**Abilities:** Intimidation, Stealth, Torture



**Bans:** Those who embrace Dread cannot comfort other people or ease their fears unless they do so as a tactic to scare that person even worse afterward.

## Mama Plenty

*Mother will take care of you.* That's the idea, anyway. The archetypal Mother cares for her children, and although human mamas often fall short of that ideal, Mama Plenty comes around when folks lose hope and have nowhere else to go.

An embodiment of merciful generosity, Mama Plenty has existed in one form or another for as long as people have needed her. She is Mary, Kuan Yin, White Buffalo Calf Woman, Tonantzin... or an aspect of those venerated women, anyway. More than anything else, Mama Plenty is the feeder of the hungry and the soother of the sick. Healers of all kinds revere her, and the roiling hordes of refugees and homeless folk sometimes feel Mama Plenty's hand on their brows or see her smile through a wall of soup-kitchen steam. She can't feed *everyone*, of course — human need is too great for even a goddess to resolve. People who dedicate themselves to be her instruments, however, help share her bounty across our world.

Mama Plenty generally appears as a hearty woman from the culture of those who behold her. Her touch is cool; her grin is warm. She's got lots of pockets, and all of them are full of goodies: candy,

bread, cold water, hot milk. Mama makes the best soup you've ever tasted, and even the most miserable folk find something to smile about when she hands out food and says, "Eat, child — eat!"

People bonded with Mama Plenty learn to cook and scrounge, how to get the most out of whatever you can get and then find a little more besides. In return, they must remain dedicated to helping folks in need; Mama has no time for selfish kids, and she withdraws her gifts if she ever finds them being used for profit. Her chosen kin excel at healing, too, and must do so without charge while acting in her name. Mama's gifts must be reserved for people in need. Rich folks have money of their own; for the rest of us, Mama's there.

**Manifestations:** The Virgin Mary (by any name), nurses, soup-kitchen chefs, reliefworkers, grandmas, old-country aunts.

**Associations:** Healing, food, nurture, mercy.

**Brood:** Doves, spirits who take the form of helpful old women, the ghost of someone's departed Mom or Grandma, swans, large sows, mama spirit-bears.

**Abilities:** Cooking, Empathy, Medicine, Scrounging

**Bans:** People devoted to Mama must help people who need it, free of charge, whenever possible. Using Mama's gifts for personal gain is a sure way to lose her favor forever.

# Mr. Black

Mr. Black has the best of everything. The best clothes. The best cars. The best parties. The best women. With a snap of his fingers, he can get you the best drugs. With a phone call (on the smartest phone money can buy, of course), he can make or break your career. He's everywhere at once, and no one place is his home. Mr. Black is the hustle *and* the flow, with the inside track on everything. It's been said that what goes up must come down, but Mr. Black has never been down in his life.

The fact that he's not actually a man might have something to do with that.

Mr. Black embodies the dream of success, bigger than life and twice as prosperous. A reigning spirit of the 21st century, he's tasteful excess riding in style. You can find him in the shadows of the best nightclubs, talking up a storm in the finest parties, eyeing the models as they trot through their paces at Balenciaga, snorting a mirrorful of the very best flake in a Shanghai penthouse where even the *thought* of what he's doing would get you locked up under the jail. He is money. He is power. He's all the things the richest people dream of and the poorest folk know they'll never have. Suave, classy, and way too busy for mere mortals like you, Mr. Black is the essence of the fast track where the race is never won, only topped by going even faster.

Like Joe Dread, *The Man and The Machine* (Mage 20, pp. 635-636), Mr. Black is a totem spirit even Technocrats can embrace. They don't view him as a spirit, of course — that would be absurd. Rather, he's the Platonic ideal of human wealth — not a rattle-shaking grunt of primal ignorance but a man who always takes it to the next level. You don't make weird blood-pacts with him; you make deals with him, and he opens doors for you. Mr. Black is just a man to them, the epitome of success but nothing more. He is the top of the ladder of success and getting his attention in a good way can boost you up a few rungs too. In game terms, of course, Mr. Black is a totem spirit of formidable means. Technocrats (and many other people, too) simply believe he's mortal even though he's really not.

So potent is Mr. Black's allure that only the most perceptive folk can see him for what he truly is. All perception rolls made to determine his true nature, or to crack the web of misdirection around his financial network, are made against difficulty 10 simply because he draws his power from the concept of prosperity itself. Everyone knows *who* he is, but very few know *what* he is. Mr. Black's greatest power, though, may be the ability to claim other people's riches as his own. That mansion where Mr. Black lives this week actually belongs to Mohammed bin Nayef; Mo won't be using it for a while, though, so why not use it while he's gone? That Aston Martin was "borrowed" from the collection of a famous action star who's got several hundred cars and so won't miss it for a day or so. Most of Mr. Black's riches, of course, simply come from his innate magic powers. He's wealth personified, so manifesting a Eurasian Diamond Card, a Lexus, or a roll of vintage 1932 \$1,000 bills is child's play to Mr. Black. These

items are as solid as any human-manufactured thing; if they disappear within a day or two... well, hey, wealth comes and goes, and so do Mr. Black's assets.

Unbound by laws of time and space, Mr. Black is everywhere he needs to be, at once: chewing out a stockbroker in Seattle, hefting Cristal in the 40/40 VIP room, and discussing the next big thing with Sony's CEO. His hair's always perfect. His suit's always clean. He never ages, and his body would awe a physical trainer for the stars. He's light-skinned enough to satisfy Euro-American preconceptions about "where the money is," but elements of his Asian and African heritage keep him ambiguous enough to be welcomed from Beijing to Dubai. No matter what location he inhabits, Mr. Black seems right at home. He speaks every language fluently because his real language is success.

As a totem spirit, Mr. Black gives inside tips for personal enrichment (adding dice to a character's Finance Knowledge instead of to the usual Cosmology Trait), introduces his ambitious followers to new Contacts (as in that Background), and provides an extra dot in Resources so long as the character stays on his good side. Mr. Black's blessings never seem overtly paranormal, just the benefits of knowing the right people and taking the right risks. He *does* demand risk-taking, of course — cautious people rarely achieve greatness, after all — and his favor is as fickle as a stock-market surge. He'll share a few goodies with the people who have his ear, but those gifts are always small, fleeting things: a great party, a night on the town, some fine drugs, or the best orgasm you ever had. In return, he wants to be shown a good time; He scratches your back, and you'd best believe you'll have to scratch his, too. That's just the way things work, so if you want the best things life has to offer you must offer something else in exchange.

**Manifestations:** Jetsetters, playboys, celebrities, top-tier businessmen.

**Associations:** Class, wealth, greed, prosperity, risk.

**Brood:** Spirits who manifest as apparently human executives, personal trainers, escorts, personal assistants, and hangers-on.

**Abilities:** Finance, Politics, and the Contacts and Resources Backgrounds

**Bans:** Don't invest conservatively, be timid in pursuit of wealth, or embrace a philosophy or cause based on taking wealth from those who enjoy it.

## Trip

Embodiment of warped perceptions, Trip opens mental blocks, rearranges expectations, and grants insights that range from profound peace to screaming terror. Known by many monikers (including the names of particular entheogenic plants like *Peyote*, traditional brews like *Ayahuasca*, and modern psychotropic compounds like *Sid*, AKA, LSD), Trip takes his chosen on dazzling journeys of altered reality. To Ecstasies, Children

of Knowledge, shamans, witches, and even the occasional Technocrat (especially among the Progenitor Convention), Trip bends the edges of normalcy and helps you crawl, leap, or fly to a different dimension... a useful, if precarious, mystic tool.

**Manifestations:** Trip manifests as... well, a trip. The specifics vary from compound to compound, but usually involve bright colors and altered sounds, shifting textures and surfaces, “bent” perceptions of time, incredible and sometimes horrific visions, and the deconstruction of “reality” as the shaman typically perceives it. Trip also manifests as people offering hallucinogenic visions (with or without chemicals), psychedelic sages and seers, or the material embodiments of what the shaman sees... which can be pretty damned unnerving!

**Associations:** Insight, perception, prophecy, deception, illusion, impermanence.

**Brood:** Serpents, jaguars, floating balls of light, time-spirits, and other psychotropic entities.

**Abilities:** Enigmas, Esoterica, Pharmacopeia

**Bans:** Trip loathes fearful people, and tends to take them for very bad rides.

## Wolf

For all his ferocity, Wolf’s also a noble teacher and protective guardian. Like his little cousin Dog, Wolf (known too as *Fenris*, *Brother Wolf*, *Mama Wolf*, and *the Big Bad Wolf*, among other names) shares close ties to humanity even in his most primal state. Few archetypes, in human symbolism, hold as ambiguous and ambivalent an identity as Wolf. Loyal yet predatory, bestial but majestic, he’s among the most powerful totem spirits known to man.

**Manifestations:** Huge, regal wolves, wolf packs, howls, lupine people of feral aspect.

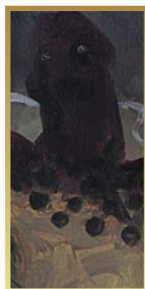
**Associations:** Hunger, protection, ferocity, terror, loyalty, seduction.

**Brood:** Spirit wolves, storm spirits, hunger spirits, human predators, and — of course — werewolves and other lupine shapeshifters.

**Abilities:** Awareness, Brawl, Survival

**Bans:** Although real-life wolves can be cowardly, Wolf the totem does not bond with cowardly people. Weakness is anathema among this spirit’s chosen folk; they might protect someone who needs help, but they cannot bear craven behavior.

## God-Forms



God is a funny word. People will kill each other over different interpretations of it, but few — even when they share a creed — agree completely about just what the word means. For **Mage** purposes, though, a god-form reflects a spiritual entity who embodies a recognizable identity that has been shaped by human belief in its divinity. Although it might assume temporary manifestations in the human world, a god-form transcends game Traits. Its powers might not be truly limitless, but they’re far greater than those of playable characters or confrontable foes. Whether a given god-form predates humanity, has been shaped by human consciousness (see “Thought Forms” in **Mage 20**, pp. 598-599), or is an ineffable essence that has, in turn, been shaped into an identity by mortals who revere it... that’s stuff for philosophers to debate. In practical **Mage** terms, a god-form is a spirit too vast to be confined yet personal enough to be encountered on a human level if it chooses to reveal itself that way.

“It does me no injury,” wrote Thomas Jefferson, “for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods, or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.” Mages tend to keep a similar view of things. Even if they worship a particular god to the exclusion of all others (perhaps while believing other gods to be, in fact, demons), Awakened folks who deal in such matters recognize that many god-forms exist even if they don’t accept such “gods” as the one true divinity. Atheistic mages generally accept the

existence of such beings, too, if only because those god-forms tend to show up with annoying regularity. (*Are they aliens? I guess they’re aliens...*)

Because human beings stick labels all over everything, philosophical belief in gods tends to break down into five general categories:

- **Atheism:** There are no such thing as gods.
- **Polytheism:** Many gods exist, with distinct identities and divine provinces.
- **Monotheism:** There’s only one God; other “gods” are lesser beings... and probably evil, too.
- **Pantheism:** All things *are* God, all gods are aspects of a singular Divine Force, or both.
- **Agnosticism:** Hell if I know!

And because human belief is seriously bizarre, these categories are not always mutually exclusive. A Buddhist atheist might revere the gods as abstract symbols standing in for a greater sublime Reality in which there are no “gods” per se; his monotheistic Christian friend asserts a single God while acknowledging other godlike entities like Mary, Satan, and the saints. Their animist buddy knows that everything has a living spiritual essence, yet feels like calling those entities “gods” would be insulting to the spirits. The cabal’s resident

materialist thinks the other folks are full of shit... but she's seen enough weird stuff to admit that *something* exists out there, and it's not human, exactly... but she won't refer to such things as "gods" because that's, you know, *silly*. All of them concede there's more to Creation than meets the eye but disagree about specifics regarding what it is and what that means to them.

Depending on which way you tilt the World of Darkness, its cosmology could be considered polytheist, monotheist, pantheist, or *maltheist* (divinity exists, and it hates your guts). Tons of godlike entities exist, but are they "real" gods or just really potent alien-spirit-beings operating in a cosmos ruled by some far greater Divine Principle? **Mage** does not presume to answer that question one way or the other. Ultimately, the nature of divinity within your chronicle is whatever you want it to be.

A small handful of **Mage**-centric god-forms includes:

## Anansi the Spider, Keeper of Tales

A weaver of webs and words, Anansi is the god of communication. Once, long ago, the Sky God alone held access to all the stories in the world. Anansi asked the Sky God for stories, and so he was given the task of capturing three elusive animals. When Anansi used his cunning to capture them all, the Sky God made Anansi the god of all stories. But there was a catch, as there usually is in any deal: If the Sky God needs something to be told to someone, Anansi must act as the messenger. Anansi agreed.

Now Anansi has access to all the stories and fables humanity has ever invented, and he uses it to be cunning and teach lessons to humans. Like a spider winding a web, he spins tales and legends to keep his heritage alive. When African peoples were captured and sold as slaves across the ocean, he came with them. When people lost their language, their names, and their stories, Anansi whispered their heritage to them and told them to keep it in their hearts. He helped the slaves stay tied to their roots, and he inspired the cunning they needed in order to survive the atrocities of manor and plantation. It was Anansi who gave the slaves the intellectual resistance to stay alive during one of the worst times in history, and so his name has been revered for 500 years. The fact that so many slave masters feared the massive tropical spiders of South America, and often suffered and perished from the venom within them, became signs of Anansi's favor.

Anansi has a wife, who is known only as *Mistress Anansi* or *Mistress Spider*. They have countless children, the most notable of whom is Ntikuma, who outsmarted his father's attempt to gather up all the world's knowledge and hold it for himself. The chilling were-spiders who are also known by Anansi's name sometimes claim distant heritage from their namesake god. More often, though, they serve the imprisoned Queen-Mother Ananasa, Lady of Webs, who may or may not

be a child of Anansi himself, or perhaps some aspect of his enigmatic mate.

Anansi appears sometimes as a normal spider. Other times he looks like a spider with a man's face; a spider wearing clothing; or a man with spider-like attributes, such as a disconcerting number of long limbs. His ability to assume multiple forms is part of his desire to know more stories; Anansi can turn into a man and sit at a poetry reading, or become a spider spinning a hidden web during a museum lecture, in order to hear the tales of all people.

## Big Owl, the Screaming Night

In the Before, this world teemed with many monsters. They were unafraid, and lived out in the open, where they could be seen and easily found. Human beings were no threat to them; in truth, many of them fed on men like men feed on cattle. Humans were too filled with fear to challenge them, and the monsters ruled uncontested. That situation came to an end when Killer-of-Enemies was born into the world. Killer-of-Enemies was not afraid of the monsters, and one by one, he hunted them down, destroying and dispersing them to the last. Except for Big Owl.

As the stories go, Killer-of-Enemies defeated Big Owl and cast him down, dispersing him into hundreds of thousands of little owls, who flew far and wide and hid in the night, afraid that Killer-of-Enemies might hunt them down as well. But Big Owl lived on within those dispersed owls, and within the hearts of the men who, even after his defeat, feared him.

Big Owl lived closer to men than many other monsters did. He had children to feed — two of them, most stories say. His children were even larger than he was, and they were ever-hungry, ever-growing. Big Owl had to stay close to the world of men in order to satiate their infinite appetites. Back in those times, in the Before, Big Owl was unafraid of the light, and walked openly during the day. His horns were long and curved like blunt yellow knives stained with the dried blood of the innocent. His eyes were large and reflected the light of the moon as if they were celestial spheres unto themselves. They were lined with yellowing finger- and toenails, the only parts of the dead he and his children did not care to eat. He wore them like trophies. His feathers stank like rotting carcasses, and the basket he carried on his back, big enough to fit a pair of black bears, reeked of offal and excrement. Big Owl was one of the most horrific of monsters, but unlike the others he carried himself with dignity and pride, a chief amongst the common, a moon amongst the stars.

He lived so powerfully in the hearts and dreams of men that when Killer-of-Enemies dispersed him into the night, he slept bloodlessly in their memories, patient and knowing. His children still lived, somewhere out in the darkness, and they hungered, and without him to feed them, they would dwindle into nothingness. He remembered this as Killer-of-Enemies



walked across the land, slaying the last of the monsters. He remembered this when Killer-of-Enemies settled down to have his own children. He remembered this when Killer-of-Enemies passed into story and legend and myth. And on the lips of mothers trying to scare their misbehaving children, and in the nests of owls high in the trees at night, Big Owl was reborn. He donned his basket and his chopping knife. He watched through the eyes of the owls in the trees and through the moon itself. He called out to strangers walking at night, and reminded them, deep in their hearts, of the terror of being dragged across Big Owl's chopping block, limbs stretched. The ancestor-memories from the Before would not leave them, and they remembered the knife coming down, chopping them into pieces, and the endless, desolate voids that were the maws of Big Owl's children, hungrily choking them down.

Big Owl is stronger now than he ever was in the Before, when Killer-of-Enemies faced and defeated him. He lives in the night but does not fear the day. He lives in the memories and hearts of boys and girls, and on their lips when they grow into parents. He no longer slips into the homes of the sleeping to steal victims away into the forest. Now he slips into their dreams, stuffing them into his basket before they can wake. When the sun rises, their families find bloodless empty beds and assume their children ran away. Often, Big Owl targets the most vulnerable in a community; the destitute, women,

orphans and foster children, people who will not be missed. Sometimes the police or even the FBI might open a case and pretend to search for Big Owl's victims, but nothing ever comes of it, and no one knows where they go.

Except, of course, those who still tell his stories — but every time Big Owl's story is told, his strength grows, and as Big Owl's strength grows, his children grow. The real question is this: *What will they grow into?*

A vast shadow in vaguely owlish form, Big Owl looms through the Penumbra more like a cloud than like any mortal beast. When pressed, this spirit can burst into several thousand (or several *million*) owls of normal size, or perhaps compress itself into a single owl of unusually intimidating aspect. What *kind* of owl? Whatever sort seems most frightening to the beholder. Big Owl is not so much a titanic relation to the Strigiformean birds of prey so much as it's a primordial manifestation of terror embodied in the idea of an owl screaming in the dark.

## Bondye, the Most High

God. The All. Most High. Unreachable.

Bondye has existed since the beginning of everything, and They will be here long after everything else ends. They are an entity of immense space, and yet They contain no form.

They have no gender, sex, race, or nationality, existing outside human parameters. Bondye recognizes none of the markers that separate people, seeing only each person's true spirit.

Bondye is unreachable. Even the most powerful gods are not capable of speaking to Them directly. Long ago, this isolation made Bondye very lonely, unable to speak to anyone. Bondye wished to fill the vastness of time and space with other things, and so Bondye separated themselves into three manifestations: Eledumare, Olorun, and Olofi. Eledumare is responsible for Creation, having made the universe and all the things inside of it, including the mortal concept of "time." Olorun, associated with the life-giving energy of the sun, is the ruler of the heavens and the holder of *Ashe*, the life force (that is, Quintessence) that runs through all things. Olofi is the ruler of the Earth, and he forms the conduit between the Earth and the heavens. Bondye is both the three manifestations of themselves, and also a single entity unto itself. Bondye knows no limitations, and They may be whatever They choose to be.

Bondye does not grant miracles or change fate, but rather is the vessel through which all things are possible. So long as Bondye exists, there's a chance for the existence of life, of luck, of fate, for trees to grow and waters to flow. To give praise to Bondye, then, is to give praise to all deities, and to show gratitude for the existence of life itself. It is up to the gods — and by extension, the Loa — to make sure that Bondye is being worshipped. Without Bondye everything would cease to be: humans, life, consciousness, *everything*.

## Christ, the Good Shepherd

For many people on this earth, there's only one God: the omniscient eternal Father of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, maker of heaven and earth, ruler of all that is seen and unseen. Call Him by his many names, it's still the same God, at least in the eyes of the faithful. All other "gods" are mere shadows of His Divine Presence. Such immanence, though, is too hard for mortal minds to grasp. And so, God took on flesh and became a man. In the form of the Christ, the *Christos* ("Anointed One"), the man *Yeshua* — commonly known as *Jesus* — walked among humanity to show by teachings and example what God desired and the prophets decreed. This Jesus was exalted, rejected, cast down, and tortured to death as an offering to redeem the sins of the world. According to scripture, he rose again three days later, returned to his disciples, and ascended into heaven to await the Final Judgement. When God destroys the world as we know it, Christ will usher in the world to come. This, to much of the world, is literally the Gospel truth. Jesus Christ is the human personification of God. And although mages experience a world far more complex than that known by most human beings, a fair number of Awakened Ones still believe that Jesus is Lord.

Which Jesus, though, is the *real* "Only Begotten Son of God?" The compassionate rebel? The doomsday judge? The conservative Jesus of southern evangelists, or the socialist Jesus of their progressive rivals? The rabbi? The prophet? The magician? All

of them, or none of them? Was Jesus a man, a myth, a divinity, or perhaps a lot of each? People live and die by those questions, and to posit any answer than the one accepted by a believer is to court blasphemy at the very least. As a god-form, then, there may be *many* Christs personified, each inspiring or inspired by the disparate visions of a flawed humanity.

As a god, the Christ is transcendent. And yet, believers throughout the last 2,000 years have claimed to walk with Christ, talk to Christ, hear His voice in their hour of need. "With man," Christ said, "this is impossible. But with God, all things are possible." The Good Shepherd, then, is a true presence in the hearts of His believers. Whether or not He is what people say He is, Christ's reality as a godhead is undeniable. This is as true for Pagan mages who don't accept His divinity as it is for Choristers who do.

The Christ one meets (if indeed, one meets Jesus face-to-face) depends, as usual, on the spirit one expects to see. A devout Saudi Muslim might see the Middle Eastern Jew speaking Aramaic in an ancient accent. A megachurch parishioner from Alabama sees a pale-skinned king with a soft southern drawl. The Jesus whispering to a death row inmate isn't the same guy who reportedly "hates fags." Even if both figures come from the same book and Holy Spirit, the form they take in the eyes of the beholder reveal more about the person than they do about the god.

In any form, the Christ embodies justice. To some believers, He tempers God's implacable perfection, while for others He's the stern judge of righteousness. Because his Gospels pose so many questions, this godhead might be a Prince of Peace or the King of the Apocalypse. Maybe he was just a man who became a myth. Regardless, he speaks across the centuries as a voice for righteousness, bringing compassion to a world desperately in need of it.

And so, the Good Shepherd remains a contested figure, adored by many, despised by some. The enigma at the heart of Christian creeds is a Rorschach test for the human soul. Thus, a mage could encounter a blinding presence that inspires radical conversion, or else hang out with a gentle hippie who really digs good wine. Despite the omniscient nature of the One True God, His godhood, it is said, has a face in the man called Christ, and any mage — believer or not — could have a personal relationship with Him.

## Grandmother Elephant, the Wise and Kindly

Wisdom, nobility, and strength. These are the attributes of Grandmother Elephant. Appointed by the gods to be the chief of all animals, she was chosen not only because of her great wisdom, but also because she's so powerful that she can be killed only by magic or man. When other animals find themselves in irreconcilable disputes, they turn to Grandmother Elephant. Humans do so too, often calling her in as a neutral party outside their arguments. An old adage claims that elephants never forget, and Grandmother

Elephant never does. Like all her children, she retains great stores of knowledge gathered over the course of her long life. When ancient chiefs, human or otherwise, pass on, their knowledge goes to Grandmother Elephant.

As a deity in her own right, Grandmother Elephant can shed her skin and transform into a human body as a means of defending herself. In one legend, a hunter found a discarded elephant skin in the woods. He took it and hid it away in a cave. Nearby, he found a large and beautiful woman, crying. When he asked her why she was crying, she said she couldn't go home. The hunter consoled her; eventually, she went home with him. Soon afterward, they were married and had several large children. One day, the man went back to the cave to check on the elephant skin, but didn't realize his wife was behind him. When she saw her old skin, she bellowed with joy, put it on, and returned to her herd as an elephant once again.

It's been said that the human children of Grandmother Elephant are large people with extreme physical stamina, sharp mental faculties, grand loyalty, quiet moderation, and a cooperative spirit. Such people get along well with humans and animals alike, and are generally trusted to resolve disputes fairly, and to retain information that lesser people might forget.

Grandmother Elephant normally looks like a particularly large African elephant. If she chooses to shed her skin, however, she can look like a beautiful (and unusually large) woman of whatever age she desires to be. Grandmother Elephant has been alive a very long time, and thus can be quite patient. Kind and empathetic toward all creatures, even those wicked ones who seek to deceive her, she forgives easily but forget nothing. It's hard to rouse her anger, but such things *are* possible. If someone manages to get under her skin, Grandmother Elephant reminds them how much larger, older, wiser, and stronger than people elephants truly are.

## Itzpapalotl, Queen of Tamoanchan

Obsidian Butterfly, Knife Wings, Mother of the Hunt, Bearer of Stars, Murderer of Men, Serpent Killer... Itzpapalotl has hundreds of names. She is one of the first stars, and she'll continue to burn long after the people have fallen to ash and the land has been scoured away. She will shine brightly when the fires consume the world, and the floods drown it out. Itzpapalotl cares little for the fear of death that lingers in the hearts of men. Men are small and fragile things. Her patience for them matches their stature. Itzpapalotl is a Tzitzimil, and the greatest in power amongst them. She is the queen of their home, Tamoanchan, a sacred place of genesis. Tamoanchan is a paradise where life no longer exists. It is where children sleep before they are born, and sometimes it is where women sleep after they have died. Tamoanchan is neighbor to Mictlan, but not a place necessarily allied with the Land of the Dead.

In the beginning, the dust of the bones of the last people was brought from Mictlan to Tamoanchan. Picturing in her mind the beauty, grace, and divinity of women, Itzpapalotl took

the dust and transformed it into the first of the people. Men came as well, but Itzpapalotl chooses not to speak of their evil origins. Tamoanchan is open to good women and children after their deaths, but only if the Tzitzimimeh choose to lead them there instead of to Mictlan. As people grow more numerous on earth, and the death tolls rise, Tamoanchan grows... and when Itzpapalotl learns the manner in which women and children are dying, she grows more and more interested in raining down fire and spears of obsidian upon the evils of the world. The more death is fed to her, the sooner she will bring death to the world.

The Mother of the Hunt appears similar to other Tzitzimimeh, but her skeletal frame is carved from shining, razor-edged obsidian. Her spindly, knife-like fingertips split the flesh of the living without effort, and she pierces the hearts of the unworthy to draw them out and judge their evil. The Serpent Killer also bears a fan of massive butterfly wings: black, shimmering, and sheer as the volcanic glass she is named for. Giant silkworm moths with rust-colored wings flutter about her, emitting a keening, breathy whisper as their wings brush her obsidian bones. The Bearer of Stars wears a long cloak sewn of the scales of the foul serpents she slew. The monsters from which she peeled the scales were so terrifying that light itself shies away from even their remains. Her cloak, when wrapped about her gigantic frame, renders her completely invisible, even to spirits and the dead. The only possible sign of her presence is the eclipse of moths that follows in her wake.

Itzpapalotl's concerns primarily reside within the cosmos. She considers the rise and fall of the sun, and when her sisters will rip it from the sky to fall down to earth and punish the evils of men. And so, she considers her thousands of children — twinkling and winking and sometimes dying in the night. She doesn't wish to waste her time with a race that only sheds its flaws in death... but when she must, her revenge is swift and decisive. The Mother of the Hunt intends to be present when the last of humankind is brought to Mictlan, and she'll assist in the grinding down of their bones.

## Kane, the Maker

Most men who call themselves "self-made" are full of shit, but Kane actually *did* make himself, crafting himself from the Umbral void. Naturally, that makes him the god of birth, as well as the god of pretty much everything that involves making something, except for agriculture. Where there was sea, Kane made land. Where there was salt water, he made fresh water. Where there were no people, he made people.

Some lore paints Kane as the leader of a trinity of gods — the other two being the peaceful Lono and war god Ku. This same lore also paints Kane's sea-god counterpart Kanaloa, who's often associated with death and the underworld, as a sort of Satan figure. Some tales even conflate the two entities into a single being. All of this is complete bullshit, naturally — the result of the Technocratic annexation of Hawai'i and the subsequent attempts to make Christianity the only legal



religion. Instead, Kane heads a quartet of gods, working *with* Kanaloa most of the time. Really, the two make a potent team, often able to accomplish incredible amounts. While Kane generally provides the muscle of their team, it would be a mistake to underestimate his intelligence.

A tall and powerfully built Polynesian man with thick white curly hair and a short white beard, Kane embodies a vital maturity and virile masculinity. His broad shoulders were said to have pushed apart his mother Papahānaumoku (or simply *Papa*, the earth) and father Wakea (the sky) while they were creating the world between them. This divine act of *coitus interruptus* kept a rather annoyed Ku from killing their parents and taking over world, a fortunate occurrence that also allowed light to enter Creation and nurture new life across the world. His primary skill lies mainly in his ability to create, but mages who cross him may find themselves learning just how good at destruction he can be. Just ask any of the Polynesian Technocrats... if you can find them. They tried to put Kane to the test during the United States' expansionist period, introducing writing and Christianity to the island in an attempt to unseat the Polynesian gods. Instead, Kane encouraged his children to embrace writing, and to write down as much lore as they could, co-opting literacy — the world's most powerful technology. Two hundred years later, people take vacations in Polynesia, hula dancing and escaping from the technology in their lives.

While the Kopa Loei hold the most favor in Kane's heart, anyone who's willing to put the hurt on the Technocracy and Nephandi is okay in his book. His pragmatism leads him to see the good in bad situations, and to find ways to turn a disadvantage into an advantage. Any accident that nets him more allies, or hurts the Technocracy, sounds like an accident worth causing. Once you get the conversation going, he's astoundingly affable. As the father figure for much of Polynesia, Kane's ready to spoil you with kindness.

Of course, befriending him only works if you can find him. Unsurprisingly, a god who's been in open war with *ha'ole* Technocrats since 1778 has no desire to meet with unknown mages. While it's possible to contact him through the Kopa Loei, they're not the biggest fans of outsiders, either. Regardless of how you make contact, be prepared to be put at a disadvantage just for the right to an audience.

## Kudu, the Old Tortoise

Kudu is a trickster. He may look elderly and frail, with his wrinkles and slow movements, but that's part of the tricks he uses in order to make people lower their guard around him. In truth, he is not nearly as old as he appears to be, but he's a very wise creature because everyone underestimates him. They consider Kudu feeble while, in fact, he's taking

notes and observing everything around him to use later in one of his antics.

The tortoise doesn't trick people out of cruelty, though. He does it to survive. Because he is so slow and low to the ground, and because he has no defenses like the elephant's tusks or the cheetah's claws, he has developed many ways of deceiving his opponents through nonviolent but ingenious ways. Kudu is adept at camouflaging himself to hide amongst anything around him. An aggressor might think she's attacking Kudu, only to discover that she's attacking a rock, a deadlier animal, or even herself. Kudu uses his knowledge of plants in the surrounding area to make potions and then trick the person into drinking them. Such potions cause the victim to fall into a deep sleep, spill her most tightly kept secrets, and even make the person slip into a false reality (as in a psychotropic drug's hallucinations) or drift over into the Penumbra without a way to get back home.

In fact, Kudu is so smart that he brought the knowledge of the Tree of Life to the animals in the forest. Once, there was a drought, and all the food dried up except a bojabi tree, which was guarded by a ferocious python. The animals were starving, and they went to the python for food. Without any knowledge, however, they couldn't remember what the python told them. After many days and nights of watching the animals forget what the python had said to them, Kudu hatched a plan. When the python told him the fruit was edible, he sang a song out in front of the python to all the animals about the food. The animals ran to the tree and ate merrily, and so Kudu was lauded as a hero among them.

Because he has an insatiable hunger for knowledge, Kudu is a valuable ally. If a mage can't solve a particular puzzle, needs to know how to make a potion, or is having trouble locating something, it's a smart idea to come to Kudu and beg for his limitless knowledge. Kudu can't turn down the opportunity to humiliate someone and assert his knowledge over someone else, and so appeals to his vanity tend to work well; if the person appealing to him knows Kudu will try and trick her eventually, she can even try to trick him first (but good luck with that).

Kudu is a very busy tortoise, with many children to take care of, and a wife who requires much from him during the day. Thus, he vets people who come to him for help by asking them to solve a very difficult riddle. Kudu is patient, and he can wait for hours, days, or even weeks for the seeker to answer his puzzle. If that person solves it in a way that Kudu likes (which doesn't always involve an honest or straight solution, as Kudu appreciates cunning as well), he'll then grant that clever mortal the information she seeks.

Even in his humanoid form, Kudu looks like an ancient tortoise, with wrinkles hanging low from his face, his dusty shell, and his slow speech and dull mannerisms. He can be found living in a modest hut with his wife and children, surrounded by a garden of fresh spinach, collards, carrots,

and yams. Being a god, of course, he can appear as an actual tortoise, ranging in size from an unremarkable river tortoise to a titanic creature of appalling size and power.

## Mawu-Lisa, Twin Parents and Breath of Life

They are *parent*.

There are few universal truths from around the globe, but parenthood is one of them. A child needs her parents even into adulthood, and the gods recognize as much. Mawu-Lisa, then, personifies the bond between parents—both mother and father, both seed and womb, both nurturer and disciplinarian.

Among vodou devotees, Mawu-Lisa is sometimes associated with (or regarded as an aspect of) the orishas Aganju and Yemaja. In Dahomy lore, Mawu-Lisa are celestial twins who combined in matrimony and thus became one. The potency of Their love made living apart unbearable, and so They fused together into a spirit of two-as-one. Mawu is the female entity, and Lisa (much to the confusion of certain English-speakers) is the male, but they exist as the presence of both genders and the absence of either. Thus, They can be thought of as the essence of life itself, because each of us holds elements of the masculine and the feminine.

The joining of Their forces put the creation of the world and all its inhabitants into motion. Mawu-Lisa are the holders of *Sekpoli*: the breath of life they use to imbue their children with life. When one of Their children is born, They watch over that person with great love and patience, remembering the special needs, tastes, and attributes of each one of their offspring. *Everyone* is special to Mawu-Lisa. Some people mistakenly believe they can win the favor of their creator by being the smartest or strongest person around, but Mawu-Lisa views all of Their children as special, and potentially capable of great love.

In all aspects of Their existence, Mawu-Lisa remains highly concerned with human procreation. If a woman is unable to conceive, Mawu-Lisa is the deity to ask for help. A successful petition to the god soothes their child's fear and heals the malady that's blocking fertility. Ideally, Mawu-Lisa protects the mother through her pregnancy, though the horrific toll taken by childbirth despite their blessings shows that Mawu-Lisa cannot save everyone. The creation of a child, however, through any means necessary, reflects the presence of Mawu-Lisa and acts a sign of Their love.

Healer-mages of African ancestry may also invoke Mawu-Lisa in order to harness the power of *Sekpoli* when the healer or her patients are low on energy or life force. (In game terms, then when using Quintessence, Prime-Sphere Effects, and Life-Sphere healing spells.) By praying to Mawu-Lisa, a mage can be restored to health after injury or illness, and she may be protected from sickness while she's under Their protection. Much as They love Their children, however, Mawu-Lisa has little

patience with hubris. When Awe the monkey-god, one of Their earliest children, scaled mountains to the heavens, and bragged that he, also, could create life, Mawu-Lisa made him a porridge with the seed of death in it, and reminded Awe that just as Mawu-Lisa could bless us with life, They could revoke it, too.

Often envisioned as a unified body in which the upper bodies of a man and a woman join into a single body at the waist, Mawu-Lisa may, of course, appear as a man and a woman, as a fusion of a single person with characteristics of any gender, or as person whose gender identity does not match either polarity. Especially because They transcend rigid notions of identity, and love all their children, Mawu-Lisa has been occasionally associated (especially in recent years) with people who live outside those rigid polarities too.

Mawu-Lisa sees every living thing as Their offspring. They are protective of their children, and yet very strict with the punishments those children deserve if they guilty of wrongdoing. They have an incredible patience and see all of Their children as equals: humans, animals, and plants, no matter how great or small.

## The Nine Muses

Taking the appearance of beautiful, young women dressed in flowing gowns and stylish clothing, the Muses guide and inspire all forms of artistic, scientific and magickal creation and discovery. Daughters of Zeus, king of the gods, and Mnemosyne (Greek for “memory”), the Muses are nine: *Calliope*, *Clio*, *Euterpe*, *Terpsichore*, *Erato*, *Melpomene*, *Thalia*, *Polymnia*, and *Urania*. They dwell on mount Helicon, and when they sing, the cosmos stand still.

Legend has it that when the Muses were born and initially erupted into song, a few men were so entranced by it that they joined in the divine melody and sang for days, without food or rest, until they perished. The Muses took pity on them and transformed them into cicadas, small insects that spend the entirety of their lives singing. Cicadas were also thought to be the Muses’ agents in the world, informing the goddesses of all they saw and telling them about those humans who honored them.

It was customary for poets in Ancient Greece to summon and thank the Muses before reciting their poems, for it was thought that all artistic creation originated from the Muses and the poet was but their faithful vessel. Hesiod, in his *Theogony* (“the birth of the gods”), was the first to deviate from this pattern; he addressed the Muses as teachers and mentors. *Theogony* holds an important place in early European poetry because, for the very first time, the artist recognized and claimed his place in the process of artistic creation... and, through it, in the whole cosmos. The Muses initiate Hesiod into the Art; the goddesses know all, and only assist the poet in remembering them.

Some among the Awakened think they have found a link between the magick and the Muses, matching each

of the nine deities to a corresponding Sphere, as follows: *Urania*, holding a pair of compasses, with Correspondence; *Melpomene*, carrying a knife, with Entropy; *Erato*, playing the lyre, with Forces; *Thalia*, leaning on a branch, with Life; studious *Calliope* with Matter; *Euterpe*, breathing through an *aulos* (a musical instrument similar to a pipe or a flute), with Mind; *Terpsichore*, her musical triangle chiming, with Prime; veiled *Polymnia* with Spirit; and *Clio*, bearing an hourglass, with Time.

But this is not a time for the Muses of old, and the goddesses have been forced to either wither away or adapt... and adapt they did. *Calliope*, the Muse of heroic poetry, the eldest and wisest of the nine sisters, is now the patron of comic books, video games, superheroes, action flicks, fantasy TV series and roleplaying games. *Clio*, the Muse of history, suffers from fits of madness: in an era of fake news, when the phrase “history is written by the winners” is universally accepted, in an age of rapid information and even more rapid responses, it is hard to keep up. During her moments of lucidity, *Clio* inspires a fervent desire for Truth within the hearts of few – but these moments are rare, and they’re becoming rarer still. *Euterpe*, the Muse of aulic art (that is, the art of playing the *aulos*) helps inspire the increasing popularity in the West of yoga, tai ch’i, and other meditative practices and martial arts focused on respiration. Hers is not a huge or terribly important influence on the world, but it is an influence, and it has kept *Euterpe* alive. *Terpsichore*, the Muse of lyrical poetry, has seen her influence grow with the rise of hip-hop wordcraft, and has since taken up a respectable place among her sisters after centuries of neglect. *Erato*, the Muse of erotic poetry, has been steadily gaining in power since the 18th century and the birth of Romanticism. She has taken romance and erotica writers under her wing, thriving in the success of popular fiction, love songs and rom-coms. *Melpomene*, the Muse of tragedy, will never be out of business. Human suffering knows no end, and *Melpomene* is always nearby. She inspires the majority of the goth scene and subculture, as well as much of modern fiction, TV dramas, and tearjerker films. *Melpomene*’s expertise often creates conflict with her sister, *Calliope*: One is moved by the heroics of war, the other by the grief it causes. *Thalia*, the Muse of comedy, is still relevant and sought-after today. She’s there for them all: stand-up comedians, internet satirists, actors, comedy writers, directors, even creators of memes. As important as it is to consider human tragedy, it is equally important to banish it with joy, laughter, and – when appropriate – mockery. *Polymnia*, initially the Muse of hymns (songs honoring the gods) and, later on, the Muse of mimic art, has regressed to her original state. She inspires every prayer, every Pagan or Christian rock song, and every hymn to every god. The 20th and 21st centuries have been good for *Polymnia*. *Urania*, the Muse of astronomy, is the only one who remains who she was. Not only because she is associated with science rather than art, but also (and perhaps more importantly) because humanity will always look to the stars for hope and guidance. *Urania*



inspires scientific discovery, yes, but she does something even greater than that: She fills our hearts with the desire to fly, to touch and understand the stars, to demand the impossible.

The Muses have certainly changed a lot since their birth. Still, however, they remain spirits of purity and light, bringing beauty and solace to all. They still know everything, and they still remind it to this age's poets. And they still sing in harmony the *Musica Universalis*, the Music of the Spheres.

The Muses tend to be imagined in the flowing garments of Classical Greece. Centuries of preconception bleach those garments white, but people who understand the history of the Greek people see the clothing in vivid colors instead. (The image of white clothing comes from statues whose bright hues were bleached white by time and sunlight.) Their hair coils in marvelous styles of exotic antiquity, and their voices reverberate with stately accents.

In reality, the Muses manifest like gorgeous women of modern Europe. Art moves with the times, and so too have the Muses. Stylish and confident, they radiate that same transcendent sense of charm; their voices, though, catch the fluid tone of modern media discourse, moving within a syllable from Hollywood American or vernacular English to the emphatic tones of Japanese cinema and the Arabian lilt of modern spoken Greek. These days, their clothes tend

toward darker, monochromatic hues, but fit them as if those clothes were made for the sisters... which, of course, they were.

The personalities and dominions of each Muse come through in her bearing and clothes. The colors of their hair range from the somber blackness of Melpomene's long locks to the passionate fire of Erato's disheveled bed-head, Calliope's bright purple styles, Terpsichore's dark dreadlocks, and the incandescent blonde of Thalia's manic tresses. Poor Clio can't decide *what* color her hair should be, while Urania favors the bookish dark hair of the archetypal "hot librarian." Euterpe's hair changes with her mood, though it often favors the silver hue of her favored instrument, and Polymnia's hair mirrors the bright flare of sunlight on the Aegean Sea. Though many people imagine them with Northern European skin tones, the Muses favor the darker color of their Mediterranean heritage. Inspiration, of course, knows no single culture, and so the Muses appear in whatever forms they please at that particular time; one moment Southeast Asian, tall and Nordic the next. Like art itself, the Muses are universal.

## Namaka, the Soothing Seas

The quintessential team player, Namaka shares the waves with Kanaloa. Like Kanaloa, the majority of Namaka's teamwork goes unnoticed, which is a shame because millions owe

their lives to her. As Pele's oldest sister, Namaka routinely nudges her younger sibling away from volcanic apocalypse, and it was her soothing touch that cooled the lava and created the islands her people now call home.

Unlike the rest of the Polynesian gods, Namaka makes herself easy to find, partly because she believes that cultivating a middle ground between the various cultures vying for control of the Pacific is not only possible, but also the right and pragmatic thing to do. The fact that everyone knows how essential Namaka is to survival on the islands doesn't hurt her optimism; so long as Pele lives, no one's going to hurt Namaka. And so, while she may seek peaceful resolutions above all others, Namaka's not above playing hardball in negotiations.

A vibrant Polynesian woman with a cool touch but divine strength, Namaka appears in a young, mature, or elder aspect, depending upon what age she feels would be most effective at the time. Equally at home in either traditional or modern Hawai'ian dress, she trusts the people of the islands, whom she views more broadly and generously than most Oceanic deities do. Anyone who lives on the islands enjoys her protection: Native Hawai'ian, Asian, white Americans, whatever — the islands and those who dwell upon them have always changed. She doesn't see any point in preserving homogeneity, which is good news for a lot of mages interested in exploring Polynesia.

This doesn't mean, however, that she doesn't value tradition. She considers the continuation of Polynesian culture to be her *kuleana*. Where Pele sees commercialization of the hula as sacrilege, Namaka welcomes the idea of new people taking the dance into their souls. If you're willing to help the islands, or think of yourself as an islander, then Namaka's willing to listen to you. The odds of you having to prove yourself to her before she'll stick her neck out for you are high, but anyone willing to cut a deal with a goddess already knew there'll be a price. The skin colors of her islanders may change, but they damn well better keep up the hula.

## Our Lady, the Merciful Mother

As we're all grown and nurtured inside women, so too does the Divine Mother figure exist in almost every creed. Prehistoric statues attest to Her presence among the most primal human folk. Call her *Hathor*, *Durga*, *Great Goddess*, *Queen of Heaven*, or simply *Mom*. Although She is most often known these days under the name of Mary, Mother of God, Our Lady is far older than Christianity, the Bible, or organized religion itself.

Like mortal mothers, Our Lady has many faces and aspects. She can be ruthless like Kali Ma, jealous as Hera, sublime as Sophia, or mortal as Fatimah. The *Shakti* essence of radiant femininity assumes a multitude of forms, each distinct yet intertwined. The Triple Goddess manifests its own Holy Trinity of Maiden, Mother, and Crone. Biblical Eve was the third among First Women (after Lilith and the

unnamed Lady of Blood), and biblical Mary's name connects her to the Magdalene, the favored consort and wife of Christ. It's significant that both Marys stood at the foot of the cross between mortal ruin and heavenly transcendence, and even more so that scripture names the Magdalene as the first of Christ's disciples to see the risen Jesus, and to tell his hidden men, "*He is risen*." Our Lady is mother and mate — the lover, the nurturer, and often the destroyer, too.

Sadly, jealous men debase Our Lady. She's called *whore* as well as *mother*, slapped aside to the shadows of male dominion. Mary the consort is equated (wrongly, by the way) with the Woman Taken in Adultery, viewed as a prostitute even when the Bible itself describes them as two different women. Just as Marduk slew Tiamat and made the world from her corpse, so too do many men discard Our Lady's presence in favor of their own reflection. And so, like Kali Ma, she rages. Like Begtse, she bears a sword. She is awful as the Morrigan, Phantom Queen of war and fate, yet forgiving as Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe. Embodied as Fatimah, she nurtures the faith; in the forms of Hel, Persephone, and Ereshkigal (among others), she rules the realms of death. Our Lady is greater than name or face or culture, and she's among the most personable of gods.

God the Father stands aloof in judgement, flinging thunderbolts and plagues. It's Our Lady who takes our hands in the darkest nights and clicks softly in the warming beads of rosary atonement. Suffering people cry out to Her; doubtful folk see Her portrait on their bread. Our Lady shimmers in garden shrines, takes wing as doves, and casts her colorful lights upon the praying faithful in a church. While other goddess-figures embody lust or joy or war, Our Lady stands most for healing, justice, and mercy. She intercedes with raging lords, and births them when they become men. She is Isis, the reconstructor, and Freyja, chooser of the slain. Her cauldron is immortality, and her feet crush the serpent of death. Our Lady walks among mortals in the guise of women. She sends Marian apparitions to remind us to keep faith. She weeps for the Dying God, and nurtures crops with the blood he spills. Avalokitesvara blossoms in both male and female forms, bridging the illusion of gender through the unity of compassion. She is our past, our present, our future in one, as close as humanity yet as distant as the stars.

## Pan, the Goat-Foot God

The great god Pan is certainly not dead, and certainly not happy. Unfortunately, he's not that great anymore, either. Half man, half goat, horned and pointy-eared, Pan was a god of nature, fertility, and passion. The "lightning-eyed and cloven-hooved" deity has been around for millennia, and though his name is still on the minds and lips of people, its meaning — as well as Pan's true essence — have sadly faded into obscurity.

There are various myths about the god's origins, but the Ecstatics of the Fellowship of Pan, regard only two of them as canonical. The first states that Hermes and the Nymph Dryope brought the horned god into existence, whereas the second (and

earlier) one attributes his birth to the coupling of the primordial god Ether and a humble Dryad. Both myths illustrate the merging of ethereal and chthonic (that is, air and earth) or, as the famous Hermetic quote goes, “as above so below,” and hint at Pan’s all-encompassing nature. Pan’s birthplace is as ancient and mystical as any befitting a god: Ten thousand years before the birth of Christ, in the heart of Arcadia, under the shadow of mount Lycaeon, there stood a city called *Lycosoura* (meaning “the first to be touched by light”). Its inhabitants called themselves *Proselenoi*, which means “those before the moon.” According to legend, this was the first city to ever see the sunlight, and the people of the region took pride in the fact that their ancestors were there to watch the moon rise for the first time. There, above and before even *that* ancient city, Pan was born, and the seeds of his influence bloomed all across the region. Arcadians, temperate and respectful of the natural ways, quickly thrived under Pan’s guidance. At about that time, the *Arcadian Measure* emerged: a philosophy dictating that no human act may impose itself on nature’s way. Those were days of simplicity and harmony, when the walls between matter and spirit were casually pierced and so the gods roamed our earth. Pan would descend from his mountain, surrounded by satyrs and naiads (nymphs of sweet waters), who danced to the music of his pipes. Strange songs and fevered dreams trailed in their wake, tantalizing mortals with glimpses of eternity and *eudaemonia*: the indwelling spirit of happy madness.

Due to the god’s very nature, it took centuries for Pan’s worship to leave the forests and take root in urban centers. One incident of great import to that effect was the Battle of Marathon. Among the ranks of the Athenian army, there was an Arcadian soldier named Pheidippides. On his way back to Marathon after an unsuccessful attempt to rally the Spartans under the Athenian banner, the young man heard *something* call his name. Exhausted, he turned around, and there stood Pan in all his glory. The god said the Athenians had neglected him, but he was still willing to come to their aid if properly summoned. Pheidippides delivered the message and, seeing his comrades’ disbelief, started screaming Pan’s name himself. It didn’t take long for his fellow soldiers to take up the chant. True to his promise, the god manifested, filling the Persians’ hearts with primal fear and causing them to flee. On that day, a new word came into being: *panic*. To honor the god, shrines were built, and festivals were held; thus, Pan came to be worshipped in cities as well as in the wilderness.

Any resemblance between this story and a much later godhead visitation along the road to Damascus is probably intentional on *somebody’s* part, especially considering what followed in its wake...

Pan’s popularity exceeded even the god’s own expectations, and the Goat-Foot God remained prominent for centuries to come. The flock could not have two shepherds, though, and soon a new one arrived. The coming of Jesus signaled Pan’s downfall and the gradual demonization of this generally benign Pagan deity. On the morning of Christ’s

birth, so legend tells us, a heavenly voice proclaimed, “*The Great God Pan is dead.*” Not much later, the creed forged in that Redeemer’s name would do everything in its power to make that pronouncement stick.

But let’s not venture into the dark just yet; let’s stick with the glory days for a little longer.

Pan’s unabashed libido was one of the horned deity’s most significant characteristics. Combined with his terrible appearance, it often set him up for grief and heartache... and could be hard on the targets of his affections, too — just ask poor Syrinx. Two incidents stand out among his many erotic adventures, revealing the often lovely yet sometimes brutal nature of Pan’s carnality: Selene, Goddess of the Moon, who caught Pan’s interest during his early years; and Syrinx the nymph, not much later. In Selene’s case, the stories speak of a beautiful coupling between the two, as Pan courted the moon goddess with heavenly music and ecstatic dance. He cajoled her into coming down to the mountain of his birth, and there they copulated happily between earth and sky.

Unfortunately for Pan, the pursuit of Syrinx had a bitter ending for them both. Scared of his animalistic visage as well as his reputation, the chaste nymph broke into a run when the god tried to entice her. Reaching the river bank and knowing that he would eventually catch her, she implored her father, Ladonas — the deity of that river — to save her from Pan’s lusts. Ladonas obliged, and transformed her into a patch of reeds, leaving Pan with only a handful of the hollow plants. While he stood there, mourning, a breeze picked up and the reeds resounded with the nymph’s voice. It didn’t take long for Pan to understand what had transpired. He shaped the broken reeds into a wind instrument made up of seven pieces of varied lengths, which, in time, came to be known as the Pan flute.

Sadly, in the wake of Christianity, the wisdom of these tales was lost, and they were turned into anecdotes to be laughed at, or worse. And such wisdom it was! Between the 16th and 19th centuries, Hermetic scholars and Ecstatic philosophers found common ground and examined those old myths with new eyes. Unsurprisingly enough, the two paths diverged before meeting once more. Let us consider the story of Pan and Syrinx, for example: The Order focused on the numerical significance of the panpipes, the tune of which echoed the seven-voiced Music of the Spheres, the divine harmony. The Seers, on the other hand, envisioned Pan’s music as a means of transcendence, a sacrament of the *Palmos* (the divine pulse); they saw Ascension in Syrinx’s transformation, and so envisioned a road toward it through an interplay of lust, surrender, the acceptance of mortality, and the ways in which art and spirit survive beyond mere flesh. In Pan’s twofold shape, one Tradition recognized the Promethean man’s coming out of the wild (the animal part) to claim enlightenment (the human part), whereas the other perceived passions (the goat) and awareness (the man) in perfect balance, which they embraced as a holistic way of living. Both groups, however, realized the fundamental truth hidden in the parable of Syrinx: *Fear of Pan is fear of self.* The

god, then, symbolizes the Awakened mystic, equipped with powerful hooves to help him scale the mount of Ascension, while the nymph is the still-sleeping soul, terrified with the prospect of facing or embracing the passions and fears keeping it chained to the material. Tearing away the veils of Sleep would frighten anyone. Yet music can put the soul at ease and guide it to safety through the treacherous paths of the mountain.

No wonder the Church felt threatened by Pan. In his core, the god was an equivalent of the Nazarene shepherd, but one who didn't turn a blind eye to the darkness within. Of course, associating such a promiscuous deity with Jesus (whose nature was also twofold) would have been improper, but something had to be done with him — after all, he *was* immensely popular. Turning the holy mountain on its head, they portrayed Pan's path as a downward one; Pan, then, became the Adversary, Satan, the demonic Goat of Blasphemies. This slander provoked Pan's ire, which has not abated to this day despite the Ecstatics' best efforts to appease him. The highlight of this endeavor is a secret ceremony held annually in Greece. The Fellowship of Pan, with stomping feet and playful tunes, lifts the veil between worlds, and invites the god on a night of pleasure and excess. For roughly two centuries, Andronikos, head of the Fellowship, has had the singular task of chaperoning the horned deity that roams the city of Athens in the guise of a man. But how could this one ritual ever be enough? Once, festive pyres burned all over Greece, both above and below the ground, and the god's name was whispered in reverence or screamed in ecstasy, in celebration of all that is Pan, and Pan who is all.

Lean and goatish, Pan is Man and Nature interwoven in a single form. His rugged features, thick musk, wild eyes, and unabashed erection appeal to some folks while repulsing others. There's nothing refined or civilized about Pan's appearance, but his voice is said to be as sweet and gentle as the tunes he plays on his venerable flute. As the primal lands have been hacked and paved beyond recognition, Pan's dominion falters and his influence fades. Yet man's vanity has limits, and in the rising storms and collapsing equilibrium of a transforming "modern" world, Pan asserts his power and reminds the world that the Great God Pan is indeed alive.

## Pele, She Who Shapes the Sacred Land

Pele was born in fire, and (if she has her way) she'll go out in fire, too, taking everyone else with her. A goddess of volcanoes and destruction, Pele does nothing by half measures. Which is a damn good thing, really, because if she ever took up doing things only halfway, there'd be a shit-ton of lava everywhere. Only the influence of her sister Namaka keeps her from going nuclear, and even that goddess' legendary patience is starting to fray.

What makes her so pissed? It was Pele herself who created the islands of Hawai'i — lands sacred to her, forged from her body and blood, and then cooled by her sister's touch.

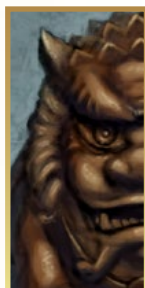


To Pele, traditions like the *hula* are sacred, and cruise ships disgorging millions of tourists who muddle their way through holy ceremonies represent perversion. Not only does she hold the tourists to blame, she wants to eradicate the islanders she sees as complicit in the downfall of the islands. Think of her like your angry, racist aunt, only holding the trigger to thousands of volcanos in her hands.

Pele looks young despite her primordial age. She's passionate in all the best and worst ways, with glowing reddish hair and a look on her face that promises annihilation for the slightest misstep. Pele is, of course, beautiful in the way the most dangerous things are beautiful, and actually *does* have a generous side. It's her fire, after all, that lights the night, cooks the food, and provided the catalyst for the islands of Hawai'i. She joined her uncles Kanaloa and Ku centuries ago

in open warfare against the Technocracy and their spawn... and so, theoretically, she'll accept help in the battles, but that would mean first finding her in someplace other than an active volcano's heart, and then getting her to trust you enough to fight by her side. The former requires connections, persistence, and a potent resistance to fire and heat; she counts the Kopa Loei among the few organizations that she trusts, but the goddess of destruction does not check in with her foot soldiers. Leave a message and maybe she'll get back to you. The latter? Well, remember the "racist aunt" part? If you want her trust, don't be white. Pele's got sort of a thing about that subject. Hawai'i is *hers*, and this goddess loathes seeing the islands despoiled by white magic and nuclear fire. To destroy them, though, would be to destroy a part of herself. She still might do that someday, but for now she holds something resembling her peace.

## The Greater Kami



Kami occupy an unusual place in the world. For the most part, they're big-name heavy hitters. Not necessarily violent—just very capable. Over the past 1,000 years or so, several groups of kami have arrived in the material world, made their mark, and left. This section focuses on several of the ones who are still around—greater kami who are, for all intents and purposes, gods. Each of them maintains a royal court in the Otherworlds, where they deal with guests.

For the most part, these resemble the courts of feudal Japan, with lavish dress, ceremonies, and lackeys.

While this section addresses kami from a Japanese viewpoint, most are known in other lands and revered as gods. Each of the great kami maintains their own Otherworldly court, a place of power for them. These courts directly reflect the personalities and attitudes of their owners: The regal Amaterasu has a palace, Tsukuyomi has a moon base, and the sea dragon Ryujin has an underwater city.

### Amaterasu Omikami, Empress of the Sun

The kami with the most power, Amaterasu controls the sun in the East and all that goes with it: weather, healthy crops, even prosperous industry. Like most sun deities, she has a strong connection to the concept of rebirth. In fact, during a festival in her honor, her followers raze a shrine to the ground and then rebuild it. She's so revered, the imperial family of Japan claims to be directly descended from her. They're probably full of shit, but most emperors have demonstrated supernatural abilities, so who knows?

From the few who have talked to her, Amaterasu embodies royalty, with all the virtues and vices of nobility. It pays

to study court etiquette if you plan on asking for her help, because she's not going to talk much outside of her court, at least if she doesn't know you. Protocol rules every dealing with her. Some have found conversations with her cut short by her feigning illness and giving vague clues on how to correct some social failing. Failing to bow to her court in the correct order will result in nothing happening until you *do* bow in the correct order. And don't you dare pour tea for yourself.

The fastest way to piss her off is to screw up her order. For example, she exiled Tsukuyomi, her husband and brother, after he killed one of her handmaidens. In addition, when her other brother, Susanoo, trashed her carefully constructed divisions between crops, she exiled *herself*, leaving the world in darkness for a time that would later be blamed on the eruption of Mount Paektu in 940. To be fair, legends don't agree on which brother did what, but no one disputes that both can be dicks, nor her unforgiving nature.

The point of all of this is that patience and knowledge are essential to dealing with her. She can grant significant boons, but only after navigating a maze of social etiquette. And, as frustrating as delays and seemingly pointless rituals may be, crossing her boundaries will cause some serious problems, up to and including regional famine and mass starvation.

### Hachiman, Lord of Martial Order

Once a mere mortal, Hachiman proves how far you can ascend through hard work, determination, and being born emperor. Though few Westerners know his name, his influence reaches around the globe. His rigid code of honor, *bushido*, rules the lives of millions who don't look much like samurai. Countless business professionals live and die by Hachiman's ideals. Have nearly two millennia slowed him



down? Not even close. Almost as much of a rules-stickler as Amaterasu, Hachiman still responds to dishonorable actions with lethal passive aggression.

While you might think that his sponsorship of industry would make him a natural ally of the Technocracy, their emissaries keep dishonoring themselves. If the Technocracy ever figures out bushido, the balance of power in Asia might shift dramatically. Mages who don't represent a larger entity find it easier to talk to him, as they only have to worry about disgracing themselves, not their superiors.

Straight to the point, Hachiman respects information and action. While he respects some courtly etiquette, he'd rather learn something, plan, and execute than waste time with niceties. Hachiman fears nothing and tends to look down on anything that might be remotely viewed as cowardly. Note that this doesn't mean that he charges in blindly; he bases his confidence on centuries of wisdom. If he believes in you, you should, too. That doesn't mean stop training.

Hachiman's court takes the form of a field encampment, a tactical arrangement of tents and guards. While open to guests, the kami of battle never sits idle, so getting his attention presents a challenge as great as navigating through his army without pissing one of them off. Fortunately, the rewards of his favor make the struggle to attain it worth it.

Those chosen by Hachiman become *muteki* ("invincible"), but not in the Western sense of that word; rather than gaining skin impervious to harm, they find their minds accelerated, able to react to threats before those perils become dangerous.

## Ryujin, Dragon of the Deep

One of the few dragon kami to gain much attention among humans, Ryujin claims the ocean as its domain, making it popular among coastal people, especially the Ryukyans. It rules the Dragon Palace, located far beneath the ocean's surface. In addition to keeping sailors safe, Ryujin also routinely grants rain to farmers, providing a helpful balance to Amaterasu's sunny weather... not that either of them would admit to the usefulness of the other, of course.

Like many serpents, Ryujin takes offense to metal, leaving the Dragon of the Deep in a particularly strange quandary when dealing with larger, steel ships: It would love to destroy them, but sinking them would probably be worse than letting them pass unharmed. Wooden fishing ships using nets represent a much cleaner form of fishing in this kami's eyes, and so those fishermen are more likely to receive a bountiful catch in its waters.

As you might expect, getting an audience with Ryujin is a *huge* pain in the ass. Although falling into the ocean has gotten some humans face time with the dragon, most people

just drown. Once you get there, assume that every little suggestion is keeping you from certain death, because it is. If Ryujin gives you a box and tells you to never open it, then *don't fucking open it*. Don't let your *spouse* open it. Seal that box inside every container you can find, and then sit on it. The rules of the kingdom under trillions of pounds of water do not give a fuck about good intentions or innocent curiosity.

That said, if you've been a friend to the ocean — especially to its marine life — you can expect to be treated very well in the Dragon Palace. You *can* expect it, but you probably shouldn't. Stay humble. Stay alive. React to everything as though it is a great honor, because it probably is. Unlike the human-shaped kami, Ryujin isn't going to wait on ceremony because you don't know the right way to hold a teacup. It probably won't even hold your ignorance against you, but arrogance is a pretty sure way to piss it off. And trust me on this, do *not* piss off a sea-dragon god.

## Susanoo, Lord of Summer Storms

Susanoo controls storms and summer. Anyone familiar with the Pacific's typhoon season would rightly call him a hothead. As a storm kami, he has a bit of a rivalry with Ryujin, the dragon kami of the seas and storms. On top of that, he's been vying with his siblings for bragging rights and worshippers since they were born.

This isn't to say that Susanoo is a terrible kami, at least not to humans. His worshippers routinely return home from perilous sea voyages with nothing worse than cool scars and exciting tales. He's paternally protective of his people and seems more than willing to go the extra mile to make sure they come home safely. Well... *most* of the time, anyways. Sailors who hedge their bets by also praying to Ryujin do so at their own peril.

While his siblings hold relatively conventional courts in palaces, Susanoo prefers an open and accessible setting. Those willing to make the sea voyage sideways have no problems finding his floating court in the Penumbra. In fact, calling it a court is being generous; it's more of a nightly banquet. Rules and protocol still apply, but anyone making social *faux pas* will probably face being called an asshole rather than exile.

Of course, given the openness of the court and Susanoo's general vanity, getting him to notice you is a bit of a challenge. To say nothing of getting anything useful out of him. And so, if you find yourself in Susanoo's court, be bold. Be loud.

Play into his ego. Just be careful not to get into *too big* of a pissing contest with him. As long as he's having fun, things are probably going to be okay. If not... well, he is a lord of storms, so draw your own conclusions.

## Tsukuyomi-no-Mikoto, Lord of the Moon

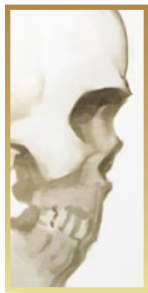
Triplet brother of Amaterasu and Susanoo, Tsukuyomi rules as the kami of the moon. Even harder to contact than his sister-wife, he spends most of his days in the moon's Penumbra, only holding court during the full moon. For those without teleportation or space craft (e.g. most people), the full moon opens up a bridge that can be walked across, although running across it is even better. It *does* disappear during the day, you know, and dying in the vacuum of space *hurts*.

While not technically a mad god, Tsukuyomi-no-Mikoto has lost a staggering amount of his marbles during his lunar exile, making him the most eccentric kami anyone will encounter, by far. To put this in context, he was originally credited with killing Uke Mochi, a kami of food, for the crime of grossing him out. He didn't just *kill* Uke Mochi, either; he flayed a horse and threw it at Amaterasu's loom, *then* killed Uke Mochi. He may also be responsible for placing rabbits on the moon, with orders to pound rice into mochi cakes. The fact that Uke Mochi and mochi cakes sound similar is a coincidence. Probably.

Fortunately, Tsukuyomi's isolation makes him unusually receptive of guests, happy for any interruption to his solitude. Unlike his sister, he enjoys conversation much more than he enjoys rules and regulations. And so, while his court generally resembles an ancient palace, it feels informal and lived in. As long as his visitors play along with his meandering conversations and don't mind abrupt shifts in topic, everyone should get along just fine. *Do* note, though, that he has subsisted on basically just mochi since his exile, so maybe don't talk about food unless he does.

If you can get him to talk much, you'll likely learn much more than you bargained for. Looking toward the Earth from the moon (from both sides of the Gauntlet) has given Tsukuyomi a rather unique perspective of events. Tsukuyomi sees strange coincidences and connections everywhere, most of which are surprisingly real. Talking with him can be a massive headache, but such conversations reveal conspiracies within conspiracies. Just keep track of time. Learning the truth does no one any good if you're stranded on the moon for a month.

# The Loa



For those who understand the sacred ways of *vodou* — a much-maligned family of creeds also known collectively as *voodoo*, *Vaudou*, *Vaudoux*, and other variations — Creation is a vibrant world of spirits, not a simple dance of matter or the discarded toy of distant gods. Named for a Haitian Creole word based upon the Ayizo language, *vodou* refers to the enigmatic forces that animate and guide our world, and to the various spiritual and often artistic practices that allow a human being to commune with them.

The word “voodoo,” of course, has centuries of racist, sinister, and generally inaccurate baggage attached to it, so the creed is often (as in **Mage 20th Anniversary Edition**) referred to as “Voudoun” even though that word actually refers to a specific strain of the larger group of faiths. (For details, see the “Voudoun” entry in **Mage 20**, p. 583.) Some folks capitalize “vodou” out of respect, while others consider such European conventions to be pretentious, simply going a lowercase spelling. Minus the trappings of pop-culture fiction, *vodou* represents a celebration of life and a transcendence of its mortal limitations; unlike many transcendentalist religions, though, *vodou* remains honest about the carnal and often cruel nature of life, and it remains rooted in the practical realities of the people — often oppressed and poor — who comprehend its ways.

At the center of *vodou* beliefs, we find the *Loa*: god-form spirits who intercede on behalf of the living world. Intermediaries between Bondye, the Most High, and the principles, elements, and people of our mortal realm, the *Loa* are *imminent* divinities: entities that dwell within the material here-and-now, not in some distant plane removed from our world. According to some tales, many (if not all) of the *Loa* were once human beings who assumed godhood through their connections with Bondye and the prodigious deeds and charisma of their mortal lives. Other stories, though, insist that the *Loa* always were, have always been, and always will be who they are. The personalities we recognize in them are slivers of their true divine nature, and many *Loa* have different aspects and different names for the same essential entity.

Though the name *Loa* is common in American understandings of *vodou*, it derives from the Haitian adaptations of the Yoruban *orishas*: gods from Western Africa whose worship (and, some say, whose spiritual essence) was brought over to the Americas during the slave trade. Many American practitioners, therefore, refer to the *Loa* as *orishas*, and commonly recognized American *Loa* like Chango are more properly known by their *orisha* names, such as *Shango*.

In *vodou* cosmology, Bondye is the name of the creator, the supreme god, the Most High above all. Bondye has existed since before there was an existence to have. A person can call them *God* if that makes them more comfortable, but labels are

inadequate in defining the ethereal context. Bondye created the concept of “life” itself... and with life, the *Loa*.

The *Loa*, then, are arbiters, liaisons, or facilitators for the will of Bondye, since the Most High is otherwise unreachable. Bondye gave each of the *Loa* power and responsibility over an aspect of life. The *Loa Yemaja*, for example, was given responsibility over motherhood; without nurturing, nursing, and the pain that spills out from childbirth, life itself could not flourish. Thus, motherhood is part of Bondye’s will, and *Yemaja* is in charge of facilitating it. Human beings, however, have a responsibility to recognize the *Loa* — to aid and nurture and respect them — especially if they want to receive what the *Loa* have to offer. Without that recognition and the deeds that go with it, the divine essence of the *Loa* falters. If, for instance, *Yemaja* is not properly taken care of by her human followers, her abilities will diminish, and mothers can become barren or lose their children during birth. Therefore, it’s up to the human worshippers of the *Loa* to supply *Yemaja* with what she needs to continue her work.

The American version of *voodoo* is a mix of West African traditions, remembered through the cruel Middle Passage between Africa and the Americas and then reassembled by Christian European slave owners (which is why Bondye is called *Bon Dieu*, or “Good God,” in Louisiana *voodoo* circles), and often combined with Native American practices as well. This fusion of belief systems, however, can lead to misunderstandings of the true nature of the *Loa*.

For example, the common comparison of the *Loa* to European Christian “saints” is inaccurate. In Christianity, saints are people who were empowered by God to help humankind. Saints don’t require food or sleep or sex; they just carry out God’s will. The *Loa* are more mortal. They need sustenance (like rest and food), and have preferences (like long naps, or favorite foods like coconuts, chicken, yams, and especially liquor). Mortal worshippers, therefore, must ensure that the shrines and altars dedicated to each of the *Loa* are stocked with plenty of what the *Loa* enjoy, so that each *Loa* wants for nothing and can focus on their work. The *Loa* also need affection; unlike Christian saints — who exist in a celibate communion with their god — the *Loa* are often married or share sexual relationships with each other. As with mortal relationships, though, things can get messy between the *Loa*; when a domestic issue comes between them, the emotional turmoil can spill out into the human realm.

## Tying Souls Together

Another disparity between the *Loa* and saints: *Loa* are not individual deities. Rather, they are spiritual beings — essential presences carrying out Bondye’s will and possessing intense power. An uninitiated human can’t just call upon the *Loa* and ask for help; the *Loa* need to possess human vessels in order to offer instructions, heal the sick, or pass messages along. This

spiritual power, however, can be overwhelming to a mortal, and it sometimes takes on violent forms: contortions, exertions, inhuman athletic feats, elemental manifestations, and other activities that would injure or destroy a human body without protection from the spirits.

Vodou is far more than simply a religious creed. In practice, it's a personal experience that ties together the physical body and the immortal essence of the human soul and the divine spirit. This concept of tying things together comes through in vodou magic, which involves knots, *vevès* (patterns), and the binding and unbinding of soul-essence and physical forms (poppets, jars, bottles, bodies, and so forth). Communion with the Loa, then, involves tying the body of a devotee to the essence of a Loa... in Christian terms, the possession of the body of a human "horse" by the "rider" Loa spirit. A trained vodou priest or priestess can handle the Loa's power, which is an extension of the infinite, astral power of Bondye. Uninitiated "horses" may easily be consumed by such communions. When the Loa take over a spiritual practitioner's body, her mortal shell isn't destroyed by it; the invested power, though, can react in frightening ways when such massive spiritual power is contained.

The training to become a spiritual practitioner of vodou often occurs along hereditary lines, with that training passed down from parent to child. Such an education starts after a Loa touches the student, choosing that person to be their worshipper. With proper training, education, and sensitivity, a student can directly engage directly with her Loa, eventually leading other followers in rituals based on the demands of the Loa in question.

Such rituals can be bloody, but the Loa understand that blood is necessary for life and is therefore to be celebrated, revered, and worshipped. Blood is not a scary thing — it is the water that allows life's essence to flow. If a creature is to be sacrificed in a ritual, therefore, that sacrifice shows respect for the importance of life, death, and blood in the connective unit of existence in the mortal world. By honoring the Loa in such ways, vodou devotees also deal with past and present traumas, both cultural and personal. The blood ties everything together in a bright collaboration of life, death, and all things within and beyond both.

## Gamespeak

In World of Darkness cosmology, the Loa home Realms exist within the Middle Umbra, not in the rarified space of the High Realm of Abstract Ideas. Most often, though, these entities walk among us in the mortal world, imbuing their sublime essence in the bodies of their followers. A devotee venturing through the Middle Worlds might discover a Great Crossroads favored by Papa Legba, feel the heat of Ogun's forge, or spy the impossible heights of Obatala's white palace. For the most part, though, the Loa remain remote from everyone save their mortal followers. An unbelieving troublemaker isn't likely to find them at all... and will probably regret it if he ever does.

## Possession

That soul-tying experience comes through, in game systems, as spirit-channeling and willing possession. The entries for "Soul-Possession" and "Invoking Spirit Possession" in the **Mage 20** sourcebook **How Do You DO That?** (see pp. 87 and 123-125) present the system details. For the most part, a mortal host cannot employ the Charms of a possessing spirit; certain Charms, however, can be used by the spirit while it possesses the host, and channeled through the living body of an essentially willing devotee. See the entries in Chapter Five (especially Deflect Harm, Plant Command, Seductive Aura, and Rouse the Dead) for Charms that reflect the power of a Loa in a human host. Although such Charms aren't listed under the Loa entries themselves, a Storyteller can determine which Charms seem most appropriate for a devotee under a Loa's influence.

## A Bond of Favor

The bond between an initiated vodou practitioner and the Loa who originally chose her can be represented, in system terms, by the Totem Background, as presented in **Mage 20**, pps. 326-238 and 633-634. In this case, the Loa who chooses the practitioner is that character's primary spirit. Other Loa can bond with that character too, becoming Allies or Mentors (as in those Background Traits), or perhaps a Spirit Mentor or Guardian Angel (as in the Merits of those names). Allied Loa often confer a Mark of Favor (as per that Merit), too. It's worth noting, however, that *significant cultural, linguistic, and metaphysical distinctions exist between a vodou practitioner's bond with the Loa and a medicine-worker's bond with a totem*. The use of this Trait to represent the bond is there for game purposes only. (See the sidebar "Controversy is My Spirit Animal," p. XX.)

Depending on the tradition in question, Loa are reckoned to range between a few dozen to several hundred entities, most of whom have various aspects within a single named entity. The most famous and popular of them, however, include the following god-forms:

## Aido-Hwedo, the Great Python and Rainbow Serpent

When Mawu-Lisa was giving birth to the creatures of the world, the Rainbow Serpent Aido-Hwedo held them in its mouth and traveled across the earth. When he was done, he coiled up under the world and used his body to support the heavenly bodies in the sky.

A primal spirit of storms and serpents, the Great Python is revered for his healing powers and control over rain. This Rainbow Serpent is largely responsible for the rains and the lightning. When the serpent gets thirsty from holding up the world, he strikes at the clouds with such fierceness and speed that it looks like flashes of light; when he drinks the water from the sky, it often spills over the sides of his mouth and falls to the ground below as rain. When Aido-Hwedo feels full from drinking, he stretches across the sky, his banded scales shining with the luminous colors of the rainbow.

When Mawu-Lisa saw how many people there were in the world, the Parents of All Things knew They had to let some of the creatures of the Earth die so that our world wouldn't be overrun. If too many people lived on earth, Mawu-Lisa knew, everyone would suffer. And so, They created Death, but wanted to give all living things an informed decision before that Death was revealed. When Mawu-Lisa came to the Earth and asked who would like to live forever, Aido-Hwedo said "Me, Mawu-Lisa, I would like to live forever." Thus, the Rainbow Serpent gets to live, always shedding its skin and being born again in a new life.

Given his endless life, Aido-Hwedo several aspects. In Haitian Vodoun, he may be known as the female Loa *Ayida-Weddo*, her consort *Damballa-Weddo*, or occasionally both. (Gods are like that.) To the Fon people of Benin, the red part of the Rainbow Serpent is male, and the blue part is female; green and white, however, are commonly associated with both deities. Some tales regard the Rainbow Serpent as an aide to this world's creators, while others insist the Rainbow Serpent is the Creator of this world. Like the Great Python itself, these tales curl around one another and swallow their own tail, as solid as the stone beneath our feet and ephemeral as the colors of the sky.

In the Loa aspect of *Ayida-Weddo*, the Rainbow Serpent nurtures fertility, protects snakes, and presides over water, wind, and storms; her colors are blue and white, and she favors offerings of milk, eggs, bleached cotton, and white rice. As *Damballa*, he rules intellect, consciousness, and the balance of natural forces; he loves white rum and white eggs, and he's considered to be perhaps the most vital of all Loa. Despite the sinister nature attributed to him by ignorant outsiders, *Damballa-Weddo* is a paragon of innocence and purity, sometimes associated with (or regarded as) *Bon Dieu*, a knowable aspect of the Most High himself.

By any name or aspect, the Great Python has many children: the serpents of our world, who are deeply respected by those who understand the ways of vodou. When a snake enters the home of a vodou devotee, that practitioner must treat the serpent with respect, for that snake may be a messenger from the ancestors, coming to pay that person a visit. After paying their respects, that person should let the snake leave on its own accord. Whether they carry a message or not, snakes are regarded as the bearers of secrets because they go everywhere, listening silently to everything, even in the night where secrets like to hide. This reverence for serpents extends even to the most venomous of snakes, like the black mamba and the Indian cobra. If someone abuses or kills a deadly snake, Aido-Hwedo's vengeance can follow them into their nightmares and torture that person until the end of her life.

Great Python is a titanic sky-serpent with rainbow-colored scales. The god's domain stretches across the skies of the Middle Umbra, where this deity can be seen and occasionally met by travelers who ascend to the Aetherian Reaches which present "the face of the soul of forever." At times, the Serpent manifests as a male or female person, often merged with the body of a gigantic snake. In all regards, the Rainbow Serpent is beautiful and terrible to behold.

Patient in wisdom and in anger, the Rainbow Serpent personifies the cool distance of an immortal snake. If badly crossed, however, the Great Python won't be satisfied until the offenders are either repentant or dead... and may not be satisfied even then.

**Manifestations:** Rainbows, serpents, storms and especially lightning.

**Associations:** Snakes, blessings, beginnings, rain, sunlight, rebirth, immortality.

**Brood:** Snakes of all kinds, but especially those with bright coloration.

**Abilities:** Enigmas, Medicine, Survival

**Bans:** Devotees of the Rainbow Serpent should not, of course, harm snakes if they can help it.

## Baron Samedi, the Cemetery Lord

Everybody dies. Even gods, it is has been said, must die eventually. And when we die, it is the Baron — *Baron La Croix*, *Ghede*, *the Cemetery Lord* — who will greet us on the other side. Tipping his top hat, puffing his cigar, laughing at mortality's little joke on us, Samedi embodies life as well as death, and can bestow either one with a snap of his fingertips.

Wrongly viewed by outsiders as a demonic figure, the Baron represents balance, not cruelty. Amidst the horrors of slavery and poverty, his presence seems oddly comforting. *All things end*, the Baron reminds us. *Even suffering. Especially suffering*. This doesn't mean he's not above poking fun at humanity, of course. Among Loa and devotees alike, he's infamous for crude jests and sexual humor. *You might as well laugh at it all*, Le Baron says. *The alternative is misery... and who wants to go through life like that?*

A large man dressed in a mockery of the white man's fashions, Baron Samedi heads the *Guédé* Loa family: a clan of entities whose provinces are death and fertility. His wife, Grandma Brigitte, appears as a blazing skeleton-woman who guards the crossroads and cemeteries of the nighttime American South. Le Baron has a thing for crossroads, too — a territory he shares with Papa Legba... usually over a bottle of good rum and a lot of filthy jokes at humanity's expense. Manifesting most often with his signature top hat, tailed coat, and a face either painted with skull-like makeup or replaced by an actual skull, Samedi speaks in a high, often loud, nasal voice, swears continually, and smokes up a storm. He often wears dark glasses, with plugs up his nose like any well-dressed corpse should have. His devotees, when ridden by La Baron and his kin, smear themselves with crushed hot peppers and raw rum, taxing the limits of the flesh because what's most important is the state beyond this mortal shell.

Straddling life and death like an enthusiastic lover, Gedhe always speaks the truth. Because he transcends mortal limitations, he ignores the bounds of propriety, too. The head of his cane is carved into the shape of a cock, and he loves to wave it around. Samedi is, after all, a deeply sexual Loa, too. Some folks call upon



him when they want to get laid in non-fatal fashion, and his devotees have a reputation for being frighteningly seductive yet downright crude. Samedi loves to party, but he's always watching the clock... not his, but yours. A trickster godhead, he's got the blunt honesty of the grave. Sex and death are his dominion, and he enjoys indulging both.

Thanks to his province over death, Samedi tends to attract necromancers to his path. These folks often wind up wishing they'd knocked on someone else's door. Though he often plays the fool, La Baron does not suffer fools at all, most especially not if they're white folks who think they understand voodoo. In addition to the frenzied dance called the *banda*, Papa Gedhe loves to mess with people's minds. He can *read* minds, too, so it's a bad idea to try and fool La Baron. Coffins, poisons, graveyards, and near or actual death are signatures of his rites, and would-be devotees need the courage to face both the grave and what lies beyond it if they wish to beg Samedi's favors. Offerings of rum, cigars, black coffee, roasted peanuts, and bread (baked black if you can manage that) attract La Baron's attention, but you'd best be ready to meet death face to face if you wish to work with Samedi. Though often associated in popular media with zombies, Samedi actually prefers to keep dead people dead. Behind his rough humor and fearsome façade, Baron Samedi hides a secret compassion for the poor souls walking this hard earth. Demise, he knows, is not a torment but the blessed relief from life itself.

**Manifestations:** Skulls and skull-faced men, gravediggers, skeletons... very *profane* skeletons.

**Associations:** Crossroads, death, sexuality, graves, top hats, phalluses, black or purple clothing, cemetery dirt.

**Brood:** Ravens, black dogs or roosters, gravedigger spirits, southern American goths, and the *Guédé* Loa as a whole.

**Abilities:** Intimidation, Medicine, Occult

**Bans:** Don't lie. Seriously, *don't*.

## Erinle/Abatan, Land-Elephant of Waters and Earth

The god of plants, nature, animal husbandry, and prosperity, and the orisha of medicine and natural forces, Erinle is a hunter, farmer, and fisher who teaches the people how to grow their resources into prosperity for themselves and their families. His presence can be felt in a garden or farm, where the soil is rich and moist, where things are growing and flourishing, where animals are safe and fed in their flocks, and where a person has all the things in life that they would need. Much like a healthy crop, finances, health, and friends must be cultivated, and Erinle watches over them.

*Erinle* means "land elephant," one who lives on the land but also in the water — he bridges the gaps of those lands. As such, Erinle enjoys being next to life-giving sources of water. Since water

is a necessary element of what it takes to stay healthy, Erinle can often be found in parts of the world where water has been contaminated, offering relief to those inflicted by the illnesses that result from drinking bad water. Erinle also works as an herbalist, making different forms of medicine from herbs and plants to help heal those who are inflicted with different diseases. Although he encourages good health, exercise, and self-care through traditional means, he favors modern medicine as well. Anything a person can use in order to remain well and take care of their family — within the bounds of fairness and reason — is fine with Erinle.

If a mage needs to find Erinle, that person should go where the water meets land (like swamps and marshlands) and offer him gifts of gold, cowries, fine bird feathers, coral, jet, rams, quail, and fine foods. Erinle doesn't have a need for hard-to-find or expensive offerings, since he already has so much. Erinle can be invoked for his powers of abundance, the ability to take items and multiply them infinitely. Erinle is also the keeper of health, called upon when a devotee needs to stop the spread of poison or is severely harmed in an attack.

His ability to go between two different walks of life also embodies itself in his feminine side, Abatan. In this form, Erinle takes on the role of healer, nurse, caregiver, and a provider of other forms of emotional labor. Erinle believes there is not a single way of giving and taking care of someone. Providing for people's needs requires both of his aspects in order to take care of everyone.

Erinle is a hearty, smartly dressed god with long, thick braids draped down his body. Necklaces of cowrie shells, red coral, and plumage from his many birds represent his wealth. Despite that wealth, though, he's not boastful or proud. Abatan appears in much the same way, though with feminine form and dress. Whatever aspect they assume, Erinle is content when everyone else nearby is also fortunate. When people are deprived, when they need things only this god can provide, and they know how to ask for it properly, then Erinle is there for them.

**Manifestations:** Mist, swamps, blossoming plants.

**Associations:** Borderlands, water, dirt, growth, "feeling grounded."

**Brood:** Creatures who can cross from water and land while being comfortable in either one.

**Abilities:** Crafts, Esoterica (herbalism), Medicine

**Bans:** As stewards of the land and water, followers of Erinle should not poison, pollute, or otherwise contaminate either one, or allow them to be contaminated if it's within a follower's ability to stop the pollution.

## Legba, Keeper of the Crossroads

Legba, also referred to as *Eleggua* and commonly referred to with the appellation *Papa*, is the first and oldest of all the gods. Legba is the most prominent god above all others. No ritual, religious festival, or practice can proceed without his approval.

Without him, prayers cannot make it to heaven. Without him, people cannot age, pass over in death, or mature. He is the god of crossroads, doors, and paths, and he allows all the movement in the universe to happen. Without him, nothing happens at all.

Legba is everywhere, and he has 256 forms, each of which is a different part of his personality. Whatever his form, Legba comes to a people when he's least expected, in order to test their integrity. This propensity to show up at the most inconvenient time contributes to the perception that Papa is a trickster. Legba, though, is not trying to trick anyone; when someone's completely unguarded and unprepared, he feels, that is when they're at their most authentic.

At birth, everyone receives Legba as their first guardian spirit because he represents the beginning of spiritual development and learning. Legba opens the doors to growth and possibility. A mage might evoke Legba when they wish for doors to open or paths to appear; when such people get stuck, though, and have a hard time making decisions. Legba opens the doors so they can start their journey toward spiritual awakenings. Thus, no true journey can start without an offering to Legba so Papa can open the path toward your destination.

The offerings a person can make can range from candies and toys for his younger side, to popcorn and toasted corn for the older side of his personality. Crossroads traditionally represent a sacred place for his worship, but since Legba lives everywhere, every place is sacred.

Legba often spends time with his friends Oggun, Oshosi, and Oshun. Together, they're known as the Warriors: those gods who help guide a person's spiritual path. They are responsible for opening up a passage for a person's spiritual journey, and to watch over that person as she travels along the roads and eventually makes it to the other side. These friends are often found together, enjoying large meals of wild-caught animals and harvested food provided by Oshosi.

Legba has many forms, depending on the situation and his mood. Sometimes he appears as a small child, an elderly person, or the man of your dreams. Traditionally, he has a withered, twisted, or otherwise distorted leg (a common Mark of Favor for his devotees), bears a cane or walking stick, and is frequently attended by at least one dog. Because he is a god, however, he can take whatever form Legba desires... and some forms, like the virile lover Legba Atibon, are *quite* desirable!

Papa Legba savors the element of surprise. When talking to someone, he suddenly changes topics, trying to catch that person off guard. Papa values candor over politeness, and can come across as blunt, obnoxious, mocking, or rude in order to get the answers he seeks.

**Manifestations:** Dogs (often but not always black), crutches, old men with a hobbled leg.

**Associations:** Passage, safety, secrets, travel between places and realms.

**Brood:** Dogs of all kinds are held sacred by Papa's devotees.

**Abilities:** Area Knowledge, Enigmas, Survival

**Bans:** Don't be a dick.

## Obatala, the Sky-Father

Often said to be the eldest of all gods (though Legba, too, is known as "First and Oldest"), and the king of religion, Obatala is the father of many other gods, respectfully known as the "Sky Father." Because of his standing, he is often the one to whom the gods go when they quarrel with each other. He can separate them, hear and comprehend each side, and then come to a fair judgment. For the followers, Awakened and unAwakened alike, who welcome his presence within them, Obatala can offer a certain amount of protection and guidance in dangerous situations, gliding them around obstacles whenever possible, navigating the world like he navigates through thorny arguments: unharmed and often untouched.

(Obatala's presence within a host allows the spirit to employ his Deflect Harm Charm on the character's behalf, and also gives the host a temporary Arcane Background of 5; if the host already has Arcane, Obatala's presence raises that Trait to 5 while the spirit resides within the host.)

As the eldest of the gods, Obatala is the one who molded the bodies of humans and decided on the human anatomy before Olodumare breathed life into them. He is also called the "ruler of heads," meaning that human thoughts and ideas are his domain. He knows what thoughts reside within the minds of men, and tries to help people think more clearly. To those who know him, Obatala is like a grandfather. Many gods — Loa and otherwise — view him fondly.

In vodou, white is a sacred color that offers protection to anyone performing magical tasks while wearing it; under **Mage** rules, white garments could be considered focus instruments (see the entry for "Fashion," **Mage 20**, p. 591), possibly personalized or unique ones if they've been properly consecrated. To get the attention of the "Sky Father," then, Obatala's offerings should be white objects, including the metal silver, rice, eggs, coconut, cocoa butter, white yams, white hens, doves, and white goats. He prefers a soft and bland diet, so do not offer this spirit spicy or salty foods and alcohol. Obatala is also fond of snails, whose calm and steady behavior he enjoys so much that he considers snails to be his living symbols; thus, he will not tolerate anyone abusing them, and takes a dim view of those who, for example, pour salt on snails or eat them for dinner.

Obatala lives in a white palace on a high mountain, surrounded by tall walls that extend up into the sky. Mortals on the ground are unable to grasp the true height of his fortress, as it extends so high into the sky. His hair forms long white dreadlocks, and while he is an elderly man, Obatala remains strong in body and mind. He always dresses in white, to symbolize his calmness and even temper, and prefers to surround himself, and his worshippers, with the color white.

Beloved for his fair and even temperament, Obatala has few enemies among even the most sinister entities. Occasionally, he must reprimand some errant creatures for their behavior; even then, however, those he disciplines rarely hold it against him. Instead, he's generally respected for his fairness and his ability to cut right to the heart of every matter.

**Manifestations:** Clouds, snails, birds of many kinds.

**Associations:** Death and resurrection, fatherhood, redemption, fair judgement, earth and sky.

**Brood:** Snails, spiritual judges and healers.

**Abilities:** Law, Medicine, and the Arcane Background

**Bans:** The Sky Father's followers must remain impartial, honorable, compassionate, and fair if they wish to retain his favor.

## Oggun, Master of Tools

In the beginning, when the Earth was being created, it was a wild place overrun with flora. Not until the man-god Oggun brought tools to the people could that wilderness be tamed enough for humans to live and prosper. As a hunter named *Tobe Ode*, he cut paths through wilderness and created a place for his people to live. With Oggun's tools, those people could craft homes, towns, roads, and clothing, domesticate their animals, and survive the lash of elements. Weapons, however, are tools as well, so Oggun is sometimes associated with the atrocities of war. During his human life, it is said, he slew his disrespectful subjects, and ultimately himself, with his own sword. To offset the awful legacy of weapons, Oggun also developed surgery and surgical tools with which to heal the bite of his creations. Now he can remove things from the body like tumors, cysts, and blood clots, and has become a very skillful, caring doctor. Thus, Oggun is like a knife: In one person's hands, he can kill, but in the hands of another, his power can be used to heal.

Anyone who's good with their hands — such as barbers, carpenters, hairdressers, tailors, and jewelry makers — is said to be blessed with the powers of Oggun. A devotee with Oggun's powers may create any tool necessary for whatever challenge she has in front of her, from potent weapons to the specific key needed to unlock a door. Oggun's true gift is utility, and his worshippers are inventive folk indeed. Thanks to his affinity for paths through impediment, he's regarded as a patron of drivers, some of whom wear iron amulets in his name in order to ward off traffic accidents. Like his tools, Oggun is honest even to a fault. In some courts, his worshippers can swear upon his name and kiss a piece of iron as a sign of truthfulness.

A mortal who wishes to invoke Oggun must use a cast-iron cauldron with tools inside of it. Since Oggun is such a hardworking man, he has a large appetite and will eat almost anything offered to him; that said, he's very partial to watermelon, smoked fish, plantains, pomegranates, grapes, rum, roosters, and goats. An invocation to Oggun needs to have an animal sacrifice, and no ceremony can go forward without first asking him to bless the knife. Once appeased, Oggun clears a mage's path by using his

collection of tools to create a road — symbolic or literal — upon which the mortal can travel to her desired destination.

A large man with strong arms, Oggun wears the colors green and black. He carries tools like the hammer, anvil, machete, hoe, shovel, pike, rake, and pickax. Like the hunter-king he once was, Oggun dwells in the forests, and can often be found hunting or fishing with his friends Erinle, Elegua, and Oshosi.

Much like his tools, Oggun often seems hard, strict, and cold. He is not, however, a violent or frightening god by nature — just someone who's firm in his stance. A tireless worker, Oggun crafts tools endlessly at his forge, and enjoys finding new materials he can use and problems he can solve with his inventions.

**Manifestations:** A glowing forge, iron, fire, well-made tools and the people who make them.

**Associations:** Industriousness, smithing, endurance, cleverness.

**Brood:** Mystic smiths.

**Abilities:** Art, Crafts, Technology

**Bans:** Oggun has no patience for laziness or cutting corners. Any job worth doing is worth doing well.

## Oko of the Fertile Staff

The god of the fertile land, tied to the earth and the tilling of the soil, Oko is a mysterious figure whose work is mostly concealed under the earth. To those who recognize his wisdom, though, he teaches the mysteries of life and death. The earth he farms feeds people and animals during their lives and, in turn, the living feed his earth when they die.

Represented by the staff that symbolizes both his farming implements and his virility, Oko also takes care of issues dealing with male potency and fertility. His altars are often painted red and white, symbolizing blood and semen, the liquids of life's essence. Although the god Erinle also grows many different things, and takes care of animals in their pens, he's more of a hunter-gatherer than Oko, who maintains expansive, rural fields.

Oko enjoys being near water. Not just because he needs water to tend to his crops, but because the waters soothes him. The cooling effect of water on his skin after a long day of work puts Oko's mind at ease. It reminds him, too, of a love affair he once had with Olokun, a goddess of the bottom of the seas. Since she cannot leave the seas, though, and Oko cannot leave his fields, they remain permanently separated. Every once in a while, Oko takes a boat out and dives down deep to see his beloved; soon, though, he must return to his fields, or famine will cover the land.

Although other orishas are said to be far older, Oko was the first to discover his life-force, and thus was the first to descend out of heaven. For a long time, he was alone, and annoyed because no one else shared his burden. Once the other gods began to discover their life-forces, however, they began to contribute to every aspect of life on Earth. And so, Oko learned how important patience is when you're putting work into the earth. One cannot immediately sow what one plants. They must be given time to grow.

According to mortal lore, Oko disappeared long ago, perhaps to become one with the soil he works. All he left behind, they say, was his staff, sticking erect out of the ground. Mages, however, and other folks who can cross into the Otherworlds, understand that Oko still tends his fields in a land untouched by modern human corruption. There, he continues to bring forth bountiful harvests to offset the poisons and famines that humankind creates. Since Oko provides food from his harvests year round, people who ask for his help must make an offering of food in return. Oko's favorite foods are made deep in the earth, like yams, taro, sweet potatoes, and other root vegetables. He also enjoys corn, smoked fish, and offerings of animals like roosters, pigeons, and guinea hens. If Oko decides to favor a devotee, he'll grant that person the power of harvest; invested with Oko's magic, that devotee can call upon the forces of plants great and small (Life-Sphere plant-magick, in game terms, and the use of the Plant Command Charm). Anything that can be grown in the soil can be controlled through the powers of Oko.

Hardworking, constantly covered in the dirt of his rich fields, Oko has rough hands from handling tools. He frequently wears red and white, carries a staff or farming implements, and often shades his face with a wide-brimmed hat.

A god of few words, Oko prefers action to talk. Because he works in the fields, he's very close friends with Oggun, who also understands the value of hard work and dedication, and he feels more sympathetic to mortals who till the soil than to folk who live in cities and die never having known how to work the earth.

**Manifestations:** Aside from his staff, or his human guise, Oko doesn't tend to appear much at all. He's often regarded as an absent god, though he can be found in the Otherworlds if one looks hard enough to for him, or doesn't expect to find him there at all.

**Associations:** Fertility, water, farming and its many tools.

**Brood:** Plant-spirits, worms, water-elemental spirits.

**Abilities:** Crafts, Esoterica (Herbalism), Survival

**Bans:** "You call that rubbish *food*? And you actually plan to eat that...?"

## Oshosi, the Hunter

With arrows drawn and arm held straight, Oshosi never misses his mark. He's the great hunter, steady and strong, who can always catch his prey. This archer enjoys being out in nature, where he can rely on his quick reflexes and primordial instincts in order to hunt and trap game. A patron of quiet meditation, craftiness, and art, Oshosi can remain completely silent and track each target undetected. He always, *always*, he gets what he's tracking. Even a moving target many miles away is his when Oshosi's on the hunt.

Oshosi the Hunter doesn't restrict his craft to animals. People, too, who break oaths and corrupt the world with lies, can fall beneath his arrows. When fired in pursuit of justice and honor, Oshosi's arrows never miss; their blades can pierce

through corruption and reveal the truth. Pure-hearted devotees call upon the hunter to avenge wrongs done against them, and occasionally he answers. An arrow from nowhere pierces the wrongdoer's heart or hide. Anyone who calls upon Oshosi's vengeance, though, had better be as honest as the sun. A liar who invokes the hunter's arrows will soon feel their edge as well.

(Ironically, Oshosi gets associated, in Santeria, with St. Sebastian — a martyr pierced to death by arrows. Because St. Sebastian in the modern world is often venerated by gay male Catholics, Oshosi is occasionally associated with queer male identity, too, especially since his interest in beauty and the arts is considered “unmanly” by certain men.)

The hunter helps needy people attain their goals, as he's sharp-sighted and understands the long game. As orisha of the hunt, he's the god of anyone who participates in the justice system, courts, police officers, or jail. Oshosi's arrows, flying in a straight line, symbolize his ethical and virtuous nature. If a mortal needs the power of a steadfast and targeted arrow to pierce its objective, no matter what the distance might be, Oshosi can be called upon to grant accuracy to that devotee. And since Oshosi doesn't rush into anything, he can also grant you the patience you need when waiting for the right moment to strike.

If someone wants to invoke Oshosi's presence, this orisha enjoys the color blue, and likes amber-hued items as well. You can win his favor with wild game like roosters, pheasant, quails, deer, and pigeons, but foods like pears, grapes, plantains, pomegranates, anisette, and bananas please the hunter, too.

As a hunter should, Oshosi dresses lightly and carries only what he needs. Always armed with his *ofá* (bow and arrows), or occasionally a crossbow, Oshosi prefers life in the wilderness over the dull confinements of the city. When he isn't spending his time barefoot in the grass, he works for Obatala, the Sky Father, and sometimes hunts in the sky god's vast white palace. He's honest and clear-sighted, loyal, tireless, and fair. Some folks might consider Oshosi to be simple, but they don't understand the artistry of nature or the refinements of a good hunt.

**Manifestations:** Magical arrows, lightning, silent shadows in the forest.

**Associations:** Hunting, woodlands, fertility, honesty and honor.

**Brood:** Birds of prey, spiritual archers and other hunter-entities.

**Abilities:** Archery, Hunting, Stealth

**Bans:** Once again, *don't lie*. Seriously.

## Oshun, Bright Lady of Fertility and Moon

Every pantheon has a deity of love, one who brings the joy of sensuality, romance, marriage, and beauty to their devotees. The Greeks have Aphrodite, the Aztecs had Xochiquetzal, and the Classical Egyptians had Hathor. None of them, however, stand above Oshun.

The embodiment of love, happiness, pregnancy, emotion, gentleness, and refinement, Oshun has many manifestations and aspects and is known also as *Oxúm*, *Ochún*, *Iabá-Omi*, and *Nkisi Ndandalunda*, the Lady of Fertility and Moon. Always, she is beautiful and charming beyond compare. When Oshun appears at a party, the mood lifts and people laugh. Everyone gets up out of their seats to dance while love flits freely in the air. Dazzled by the aphrodisiac of her presence, people and gods alike lose themselves and enjoy the moment.

In addition to her *abèbè* — a mirrored, circular fan made of bronze or gold — Oshun carries a honey pot around her waist, imbued with enchanting magic. Oshun uses that honey pot as part of her dance of seduction.

The polar opposite of her husband Shango, Oshun personifies the ultimate feminine principle. Much like Ares and Aphrodite, they represent the binary divides between love and hate, peace and war, hurting and healing. A loyal wife, she remains passionate, supportive, and entirely devoted to him despite his many misadventures. When Oshun doesn't get all of his attention, however, she can turn moody, petty, and awesomely vindictive.

According to Ifa legend, Oshun was the first (and, for a while, only) female primordial spirit at the beginning of the world. The other primordial spirits, all male, ignored her; alongside mortal men, they denigrated womanhood and dismissed Oshun and her mortal sisters as unimportant in the great work of creation. In response, she formed the *Iyami Aje*, a sisterhood imbued with immense mystic power that only women could truly comprehend or wield. Named for the generative potential of women and the essence of creation they command, the *Iyami Aje* revealed the unbalanced and ultimately ineffective power of masculinity. Shamed by their failures, the men and male spirits agreed that women, too, were essential for the work of men and gods. They know anything they attempt without the help of women will fail.

Though she loves to be the center of attention, Oshun aids those (especially women) who find themselves alone. Thus, when someone finds themselves repulsive, unattractive, rejected by a lover, they call upon Oshun. Nothing makes the Lady happier than seeing people in love, for when people are in love that's when they're most beautiful. Oshun values the power of seduction, too, and knows that one way to get ahead in life involves getting people to like you, putting them under your influence, and charming your way into a better situation.

Seduction may be Oshun's most famous calling card. A vodou devotee who invites Oshun's presence into herself can employ this Loa's Seductive Aura Charm... or perhaps, it's the Loa who employs the Charm through her. That said, Oshun's not careless, and she expects her devotees to be careful, too. If a person calls upon Oshun in order to harness the power of seduction, that person is held entirely responsible for what happens as a result. Sexuality can be a powerful drug, both for the person using it and for the person it's used against; thus, it should be used only by those strong enough to wield it. Oshun tries to



guide her devotees when they employ such powerful magic, but what they do with it is eventually on their heads, not her own.

Sometimes called “the Lady of Gold,” Oshun prizes luxury and enjoys receiving gifts. Like a noblewoman who never lets her hands touch anything rotten or dirty, she loves beautiful, expensive things. The color gold, and things associated with it (honey, sunflowers, lemons, yams, squash, pumpkins, cinnamon, and precious liquor), are her hallmarks, though she also favors jewels like amber, topaz, and citrine. To truly win her attention, though, a person should pursue love, passion, and the sheer joy of being alive.

Inevitably draped in precious jewelry and gold clothing, Oshun is the essence of seductive beauty. Her warm brown skin glows as her hips sway in a dance — her arms outstretched, her eyes lifted to the heavens, and her mouth speaking a spell as soft as a secret. Love is the greatest treasure imaginable, and she is the beating heart of love.

**Manifestations:** Reflections in a mirror, the taste of honey, disembodied music or laughter, a woman of stunning gorgeousness, inevitably dressed in yellow or gold.

**Associations:** Beauty, glamor, lust, love, femininity, the moon.

**Brood:** Lune-spirits, lovers, dancers, fire elementals.

**Abilities:** Art, Etiquette, Seduction

**Bans:** To violate someone sexually is to insult Oshun herself... which is a *terrible* idea.

## Oya, Our Lady of Rage

Many legends surround the concept of a woman scorned. Oya’s anger, though, exists on another level altogether. A formidable fighter who rules over the winds and storms, Oya’s name translates as “She Who Tore,” and she ferociously protects women who have been wronged by men. Also known as *Oiá*, *Yansá*, *Iansá*, and *Oya-Iyansan* (“the Mother of Nine”), she rides into battle with two machetes in her hands, striking lightning down onto the Earth. Her power can manifest as the strongest of gales or the gentlest of breezes. If need be, she can also summon tornados to destroy the subjects of her wrath. No wonder, then, that she’s often associated with life, death, and the secrets hidden by the dead.

When it comes to protecting people whom society makes most vulnerable, especially women who have been badly abused, Oya steps in to avenge their misery. Her rage does not subside until those who need punishment have been suitably dealt with. Also called the “Mother of Nine” because she had nine stillborn babies, she watched with jealousy and rage as her sister Yemaja had many children with Oya’s first love, Shango, while Oya herself had none who survived. This disparity created a brokenhearted goddess who remains torn between her hatred for men and her desire to protect

women and children. Fortunately for her, and *unfortunately* for the targets of her rage, it's easy to indulge one while satisfying the other.

In her capacity as the keeper of death and its secrets, Oya prevents the living from crossing over before their time and collects the dead in order to lead them to their next iteration. As the guardian of the cemetery gates, she guides the dead to their resting place, but can also raise an army of the once-dead to do her bidding. Because of this, she's a terrifying figure, especially for men. In truth, though, she's also a figure of rebirth who's capable of pulling someone through a rough and dangerous transition in their life. A woman who craves fairness, and who needs protection against being ripped off or cheated, should call upon Oya to protect her livelihood. If that person has been scorned by a lover, and needs to call for justice, Oya is her guide.

Oya cycles between a hurt, sad figure who mourns constantly over the passing of her nine children, and a raging fury who will cut a man's heart out on general principle. To get her attention, a person should offer sweet, dark things like red wine, chocolate, and plums. Oya also enjoys offerings of eggplant, black hens, and black she-goats. Once possessed by the essence of Oya, a devotee can employ a terrible but wondrous power over the boundaries of life and death (In game terms, the Rouse the Dead Charm). That mortal, however, must be careful she doesn't become possessed by Oya's never-ending sorrow and loss. If a devotee can't properly control herself, she might fall into a deep depression and never again be able to enjoy the world of the living; for mages, this peril manifests as Morbidity Quiet, as described in **Mage 20**, pp. 558-559, while non-mages suffer from the Flaws Derangement, Chronic Depression, or both.

A ferociously beautiful woman, often masked with pearls, wearing feathers, or dressed in white or bloody red silks, Oya carries two machetes or a scythe. She wears brown and burgundy beads, as well as nine scarves around her waist to remember each of her children's lives. Envy, rage and sorrow are her legacy. She's got a soft spot for women and children who have been abused, and eternal hatred for the people who would violate the gift of life. For them, then, death is a fitting punishment... although, perhaps, not one given *too* quickly.

**Manifestations:** Powerful winds, lightning, furious shadows or reflections, the sound of sobbing or wailing.

**Associations:** Fury, envy, revenge, blood, sorrow, secrets, rebirth.

**Brood:** Vengeful women, elementals of lightning, air, and storms.

**Abilities:** Enigmas, Melee, Subterfuge.

**Bans:** While not exactly *forbidden*, forgiveness is not exactly Oya's strong suit.

## Shango, the Thunderer

Shango is the god of justice — the kind of justice that's neither kind nor impartial, but which rains down heavily on those who commit crimes. His flaming chain crashes down across the earth, shaking the mountains and the skies. When the sunlight flees and thick clouds roll across the sky, that's a sign that Shango is near. Also known as *Badé*, *Chango*, *Xangô*, or *Jakuta*, Shango

assumes several manifestations, like *Airá*, *Agodo*, *Afonja*, *Lubé*, and *Obomin*. All of his identities, however, are noted for their rage.

Even before his assumption into godhood, "the Lord of the Ax" was a fearsome man of great intellect and terrifying anger. He is the celestial embodiment of masculine passion, intensity, and patriarchal power. Like the mortal warrior king he once was, Shango is a master tactician and formidable combatant. When he's not working on battle strategies or punishing errant souls, however, Shango enjoys courts of law and universities, as he's also the orisha of mathematics and intellect. Through many ups and downs, Shango learned (often the hard way) to temper his energy, and so matured into a graceful and diplomatic god. His ruling of justice helped him to realize that many people need a second chance, as well as a firm hand to get them there. Despite his wisdom, or perhaps because of it, Shango is also a proud pyromancer who casts down thunderstones from the skies in order to punish wrongdoers, and who uses a mortar and pestle to craft enchantments that help him control fire and cast devastating spells. Shango's devotees call upon his fire, his passion, his potent sense of rightness, and his prowess in battle. Among West African slaves and their many descendants, this god personifies resistance, fury, and fiery justice.

Shango loves to dance. Whenever he hears drums, he can't help but seek out the beat. When the ceremonial *bata* drums roll like thunder, players beating them so furiously the musicians glow with sweat, the sounds of the rhythm drawing everyone into a hypnotic trance, Shango is there having the time of his life. Shango's a huge fan of beautiful ladies, too... which often gets him into trouble, as he's married to Oshun, the Goddess of Love.

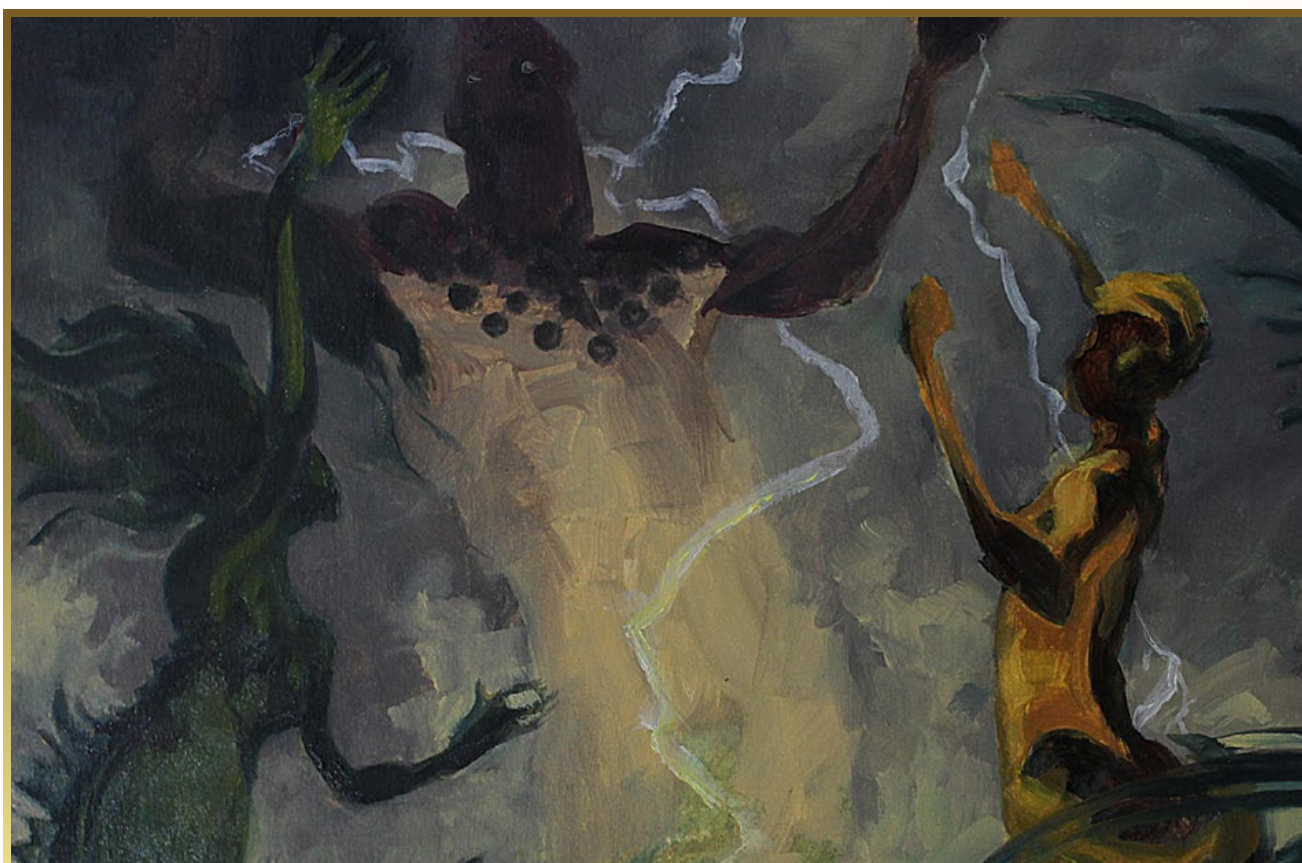
A devotee can summon Shango when that person needs strength, a just decision, or simply a good time. To call upon his presence, make an altar and lay out bright red apples, deep red wine, spiced rum, bananas, *amala* (a cornmeal dish made with okra), tools made of cedar, beads, and turtle shells, and then play drums in order to summon and appease him. Once the devotee allows the rhythm of those drums to put her into a deep trance, Shango tests that devotee with a steady supply of hard alcohol. If the mage can stay dancing and alive through Shango's ordeal, he will grant that person his power.

Shango is a proud god who never refuses a challenge or a fight. Some folks call him a tyrant, but that's the necessity of being a strong king. He cannot tolerate weakness except in those unfortunates who've been laid low by injustice. Shango is not a violent person on principle, but violence is often a very effective way to solve certain problems. Despite his fearsome might, however, this Loa prefers fighting with strategy over pummeling someone with his fists.

Surrounded by fire, Shango is a strong and muscular man, powerfully built, with long beads of red and white draped around his neck. He carries a double-headed ax in one hand, and a flaming length of chain in the other. His voice speaks deep as thunder, and lightning sparkles in the darkness of his eyes.

**Manifestations:** Fire, storms, axes, thunderclaps.

**Associations:** Anger, war, justice, courage, strength, flame, masculine power.



**Brood:** Elementals of fire and lightning.

**Abilities:** Brawl, Law, Melee

**Bans:** Deceit and cowardice are forbidden to Shango's followers.

## Yemaja, La Sirène

With the upper half of a beautiful woman and the lower half of a fish, Yemaja would be commonly called a “mermaid” in the West; she has two tails instead of one, though, and is no mere mermaid, but is instead one of the most awesome and revered of gods. The Goddess of Seas, she can be found wherever water flows. Many gods and goddesses, of course, hold dominion over water. For Yemaja, however, *all* forms of water are her dominion.

Like the tide attracted to the full moon, Mami Wata (“Mommy Water”) is a mysterious figure seen only by a select few people. Because night is often used to cover the deepest of secrets, Yemaja is also the keeper of secrets. She watches over fishers and sailors at night, making sure that their vessels journey safely even on the darkest and roughest of seas. When La Sirène cannot prevent the people aboard a vessel from coming to harm, she also protects of victims of shipwrecks, and does all she can do to get them back to shore. Finally, she is also a protector of women, especially with regards to love, sex, and childbirth. As life begins in water, so too does the influence of Yemaja.

Like all gods, she can be terrible, too. La Sirène may summon her rage as a hurricane, sweeping the lands and drawing all things

back into her seas. In order to appease such fury, her devotees give her offerings of fish and jewelry, as well as fruits like watermelon, cantaloupe, berries, and coconut. White wine, coffee, and silver are acceptable gifts as well; she prefers high-quality things, though, so only the best wines and jewels will suffice. When she's calm and the seas have eased their tempests, a brave mortal can ask Yemaja to grant them a blessing of her powers. Respectfully approached and properly appeased, she might grant a devotee the power to raise typhoons, the strength of some vast ocean creature, or the stunning appeal of the eternal, depthless sea.

Yemaja is beauty personified. Moonglow shimmers from her cool brown skin, which is typically draped in blue clothing if she wears clothing at all. Upon her head rests a crown of shells. Strands of pearls hang loosely around her neck, contrasting with the rich darkness of her long, wet hair. Like the sea, Yemaja is calm and comforting. When angered, though, she rages like a storm.

**Manifestations:** Waves, rain, moonlight, mermaids or other water-women.

**Associations:** Water, the moon, mermaids, women, fertility, comfort, childbirth.

**Brood:** Mermaids, sirens, water elementals, fish of all kinds.

**Abilities:** Medicine, Survival, Swimming

**Bans:** Devotees of Yemaja must not pollute the waters that are her domain.



**NO ADMITTANCE**

**DANGER**

# Chapter Five: Crafting Characters

*Whether we are based on carbon or on silicon makes no fundamental difference;  
we should each be treated with appropriate respect.*

— Arthur C. Clarke, 2010: *Odyssey Two*

*When Mom told me I should learn to make friends, I don't think this is quite what she had in mind.*

*Rose began as a sketch of sorts, a proof-of-concept experiment with my V24-C12 biovallic formula and a batch of BIOL-27 florocognitive elixir I concocted by combining a restorative formula I reconstructed from an Egyptian papyrus from roughly 1434 BCE with some of my personal research into floronic demisentience and the groundbreaking work of Barnes, Obode, Woodrue, and Smitherman, et al. I expected her to last perhaps a day; she's been with me for almost two years, and though she has a literally prickly temperament at times, I continue to be amazed by the progress she displays.*

*I found Eckhart dying on the side of the road, wrapped him up, took him home, and applied regular treatments of my fourth-iteration biorestorative/ accelerated-regrowth J420-series self-replicating anti-mortality treatments. He recovered quickly, and with only a slight limp to show for the shattered condition his body was in at the time of my intervention. He realizes, of course, that he owes his life to me, and is as loyal a bear as any girl could want.*

*Janine was a homeless junkie I found dying one night along the path of my post-midnight constitutional. What could I do? Let her perish? Of course not! I took her home and did what any conscientious scientist would do: used my G8-Z26 purgative treatments while stabilizing her physical condition with Dr.*

*Johnstone's now-famous bioregeneration matrix. I admit she's not the sharpest scalpel in the drawer, but given the condition I found her in last year, I doubt she ever was. There's no excuse for sloppy work on my part, of course, but Janine's still alive, and I consider that a victory.*

*Consensus-based restrictions of physical and mental deterioration limit their ability to leave my lab, of course. Of the three of them (as well as my other, less-successful, subjects), only Janine can sustain much scrutiny among the unenlightened hordes. Doctor Preston reminds me that letting her accompany me in public risks a potentially disastrous encounter if she's seen by someone who knew her before our fortuitous meeting that night. Janine still hasn't quite mastered her enhanced reflexes and prodigious strength either. Still, the hoodie obstructs her face well enough to obscure her identity from casual observation, and the dye in her hair grew out long ago, to be replaced by the pale locks that inspired my colleague Professor Dogwood to nickname her "Snow White." Between Rose, Snow White, and Eckhart the bear, it could be said... **has** been said, to be honest... that I've got a regular faerie tale at my beck and call. Still, a scientist makes do with what she has to work with, and I confess a certain pride that I could create with perfectly normal (if admittedly advanced) science what I once read about in storybooks during my lonely childhood.*

*I'm not certain mom would approve, but she's not here to criticize my decisions now. Perhaps I did "make" my friends, but really — doesn't **everyone**?*

# Building the Perfect Beast



Although Awakened humans occupy the center of the **Mage** world, unAwakened companions, and even non-human ones, may be viable player characters if the Storyteller allows them. Especially if your group employs the troupe play option described in this book's introduction, you could have a mix of Awakened mages and non-mage consors, companions, lovers, agents, familiars, and so forth. Even if your players don't run such characters, the rules presented in this chapter allow you to craft those non-mage folks and run them in whatever capacity you wish.

Depending on the tone of your chronicle, the plans of your Storyteller, and the desires of your group as a whole, the rules presented in this chapter may be included or discarded. Especially when it comes to non-human characters, the ability to construct and play such beasties is an *optional rule*. Certain **Mage** chronicles could be thrown completely off-balance by the introduction of talking cats or fire-breathing jerboas, and many of the Advantages and other Traits listed below reflect abilities outside of normal human capacity. As always, *the Storyteller has final say over what is and is not allowed in your chronicle*, and the more obviously inhuman Traits should remain rare, costly, and liable to get you into all kinds of trouble if thrown around carelessly.

## Types of Characters

Beyond the obvious human beings and their slightly altered kin, non-**Mage** characters may (again, only with Storyteller approval) hail from the following *optional* types. Each type features certain Traits that reflect the innate capacities of the being in question, and those Traits can be found in the appropriate sections of this Chapter.

### Alien

Creatures from another world? Perhaps. According to the Technocracy, all “unnatural” beings are actually aliens, while more classically minded wizards speculate that modern people

perceive our fae cousins as “aliens” simply because it's easier for tech-obsessed folk to accept extraterrestrial visitors than ageless mystic entities. Although most World of Darkness books prefer to leave ET questions up to the whims of individual Storytellers, your chronicle might feature an alien companion or two, especially if you're dealing with Etherites, Void Engineers, or the “Aliens” paradigm from **The Book of Secrets** (pp. 188-189).

From a character-creation standpoint, alien beings possess whatever Advantages and Flaws seem most appropriate to their kind. Science fiction tropes usually portray aliens as being incredibly tough with regards to physical damage, though, so the Soak Lethal and perhaps Soak Aggravated Damage Advantages are probably part of an alien character's Trait collection.

Because aliens hail from distant environments, certain Vulnerabilities are also traditional: Earth germs, fire, high or low sound frequencies, and other phenomena Earthlings take for granted often prove dangerous or fatal for beings from distant planets. Thus, an alien character should have at least one Vulnerability, and possibly several of them, depending on how... um, alien our world is to such entities.

Aliens, by their nature, tend to bring advanced technology along with them on their visits. Certain aliens, like the mysterious Zigg'raugghur, seem to be their own technology, though that perception might simply be a product of our fragile human minds. In any case, extraterrestrial aliens seem to be immune to the Unbelief Flaw (and the Paradox manifestation of that name), if only because such beings are part of the modern world's Consensus. (The aforementioned Vulnerabilities might be the way aliens manifest Unbelief, but for simplicity's sake let's just assume your character has a Vulnerability or two, not Vulnerabilities *and* Unbelief.)

### Animal

Creatures of our natural world — that is, dogs, deer, ravens and such, as opposed to the uncanny *Bygones* mentioned below — can be companions, of course. Animals who've been “advanced” through magick or hypertechnology still count under this category, though their Mental and Social Traits run beyond the usual limits such animals typically display.

Animal characters may have the Human Speech or Telepathy Advantages, although they'll be smart enough not to use the former Advantage around the wrong people. For obvious reasons, they'll have the Animal Disadvantage, and most have No Dexterous Limbs, either. An animal with clearly paranormal abilities (like fiery breath), or who has obvious traits that aren't natural to other animals of its species (such as wings on a wolf) would be a *Bygone* or construct instead.

Many unusual animals have “legendary” abilities, too: mystical powers that folkloric traditions attribute to the animal in question. An aura of bad luck surrounding a black cat, for instance, would be a legendary ability. Those sorts of abilities can generally be

## Familiar or Companion?

For clarity's sake, this chapter uses the word *familiar* to refer to a character associated with the Background Trait of that name, and *companion* to refer to non-mage characters who hang around with mages. For now, assume that even non-mystic companions are “familiars” if they were purchased with the Familiar/Companion Background Trait, and that all non-mage characters described in this chapter are “companions” even if they're not Technocratic familiars.



assumed to be “natural” talents of such animals so long as they don’t range too far outside of what people expect from such beasts in today’s world. If that bad-luck kitty starts chatting in front of mundane folks, things don’t bode well for the cat in question.

Animal characters should use the Physical Traits provided by the appropriate template entries under the bestiaries in **Mage 20** (pp. 618-620) or this book (p. xx), with Mental and Social Traits appropriate to the character. Although a special animal can have Physical Traits that run higher or lower than the templates provided, those Traits should be in line with other animals of its type; a housecat, for example, with Strength 6 would clearly not be “natural.”

## Bygone

The proverbial “fantastic beasts” more suited to a science-fiction menagerie than to the average pet shop, Bygone characters don’t fit into the modern world’s idea of “reality.” Griffins, imps, unicorns, and so forth tend to stand out in all but the most remote corners of our mortal realm.

On the rare occasions when they venture out of the Umbrae, these characters suffer from Unbelief Paradox (see **Mage 20**, p. 553), and therefore depend upon a steady diet of Quintessence from their human hosts. Dropped into the public view (often by Marauders wishing to cause as much chaos as possible in a short

amount of time, as described under “Zooterrorism” in **Mage 20**, p. 240), such creatures often expire within minutes, their corpses decaying or fading away soon afterward. As characters, then, Bygone aren’t suitable for the everyday world unless your mages hang out on top of mountains or deep in rainforests far from mundane view.

That said, small Bygones make decent Chantry guards, or perhaps fit into the local Consensus so long as they’re not too showy about what they really are. (For examples, see the entries for Shisa, Yao Guai, and similar beasts in Chapter Three.) A full-fledged dragon won’t last long among modern humans unless he transforms himself into a human shape; a kijimuna, however, remains hidden well enough, and in a remote enough place, to avoid the pressing weight of technological reality... at least for now, anyway.

Thanks to this state of affairs, Bygone characters must take the Thaumavore and Unbelief Flaws unless they remain sequestered in an appropriate Chantry, Sanctum, Otherworldly Realm, or Primal Reality Zone (**Mage 20**, p. 615). If and when they leave that area, those Flaws kick in anyway. While it’s possible that a dramatic shift in Consensus Reality could change this situation (as described in **Mage 20**, p. 615), the question lingers: *Would it really be a good idea to have basilisks strutting down Main Street?* Then again, given the chaos of today’s mortal world, a few hundred



petrified people might actually be an improvement, especially if said basilisks were dropped into the right strategic place.

## Construct

As detailed in Chapter Two, constructs are living creatures that have been modified or spawned by magickal Arts and Enlightened hypertech. The Reanimates and Robots described below are constructs with specific traits and origins; as a general category, though, construct characters have the following Traits in common:

- **Bioconstructs** almost inevitably have some forms of natural or cybernetic armor and weapons. In game terms, these would be Advantages like Armor and Claws, Fangs or Horns, plus suitable Advantages like Extra Limbs, Wings, and so forth. Bioconstructs also tend to have at least a few of the goodies detailed under “Biotech” (**Mage 20**, pp. 657-661), and almost inevitably have appropriate Genetic Flaws to go with those powers. (See **Mage 20**, pp. 648-651.) Obviously bizarre bioconstructs have the Unbelief Flaw as well. The specifics depend on the sort of construct involved, but protection and weaponry are essentially universal for such characters.
- **Material constructs**, shaped from elemental substances, possess the Soak Fatal Damage Advantage in addition to

whatever other Advantages seem suitable for the construct in question. Such characters always have the Unbelief Flaw, and most also have Thaumivore, Vulnerability, or both.

- **Mental constructs**, which have been created through intense psychic concentration, are always subject to high levels of Unbelief thanks to their essentially ephemeral nature. That said, they can also Soak Lethal and Soak Aggravated Damage because their physical forms lack the physiological vulnerabilities of organic and mechanical life-forms.

For other types of constructs, see Reanimates and Robots, below.

## Familiar

Spirits who’ve been incarnated into physical bodies in order to aid allied mages, familiars are — as Chapter Two explains — essentially family to the mage in question. The Background entry in **Mage 20** (pp. 314-316) covers the important ground as far as a mage and his bond with a familiar is concerned, but that entry tells just part of the story.

When dealing with familiars, the bond between mage and companion is crucial. A familiar, by definition, is associated with a mage, and so a familiar character *must* have an intimate

connection with a mage character. The familiar might have jumped ship from one mage to another — or might do so over the course of the chronicle — but cannot hang around in the material world without being bonded to a human mage. That mage might be a Storyteller character; more likely, though, he'll be run by another player. In the latter case, everyone involved needs to keep an eye on the way that relationship gets played out in the game, and avoid (or, if necessary, crack down on) situations that take advantage of the bond, nonconsensually abuse the players involved, or — especially — both. (Abusive relationships between characters that involve full consent for the players running them is another matter; see the Broken Flaw and the My Master is My Slave Merit, later in this chapter.)

In terms of character creation for the familiar herself, you can consider that character to be a physical being but with the Essence Trait and the ability to use Spirit Charms in addition to Special Advantages. This way, your character can access Umbrood abilities as well as those enjoyed by material creatures. These Charms, of course, must be purchased with freebie points (detailed under “Purchasing Charms,” p. xx), and they employ the Essence Trait when Charms are being used. A player character of this type begins with one point of Essence and must spend additional freebie points in order to raise that Trait.

All familiar characters possess the Bond-Sharing and Paradox Nullification Special Advantages, plus the Thaumivore Flaw. Most familiars have Human Speech and Spirit-Travel, too; other abilities depend on the familiar's form and function, but those first three are essential and the other two are common to all but the lowliest familiars.

Most **Mage** sourcebooks base the relative power of a familiar off the dots in the associated mage's Familiar/Companion Background. While that rule makes sense for non-player familiars, it's too unbalanced for player-based familiars, and holds too much potential for abuse on both ends of the bond. (An old rule, for instance, gave a familiar 10 freebie points for each dot in the mage's Familiar Trait... which translates into 50 freebie points for a five-dot Background before Flaws get figured in, making the familiar considerably more powerful than the mage himself.) For simplicity and fairness, then, assume that a player-character familiar begins with 25 freebie points, as mentioned above, and that her associated mage must purchase three dots in the Familiar Background.

A familiar-type companion might also be a robot, a reanimate, an animal, or some other sort of critter from this list. If necessary, check the appropriate entries for additional rules and details. The intimate nature of familiars, however, and the bond they share with their chosen magi, sets them apart from other sorts of characters even when they use the rule systems of those other companion types.

## Object

Not all objects are inanimate. Modern technology, even among the Masses, imbues certain objects with personality... and to an animistic perspective, nothing is truly “inanimate” to

begin with. Thus, apparently lifeless objects can and do attain a state of sentience and personality, especially if a mage has been using the Arts to awaken the slumbering Essence of a given item, place, or substance.

People — especially folks with a magical perspective — often personify apparently inanimate items by default; admit it, you probably yell at your computer or beg your car to hold on until you get enough money to repair her again. It's not surprising, therefore, that those items sometimes talk back, especially if the mage in question has imbued that car or computer with metaphysical power. Other items or places had an identity long before the mage showed up. You've probably heard of the obnoxious dagger who wants to stab your next-door neighbor, or the stuffed cougar who complains about her inability to eat you... and if you hadn't heard about them before, you have now. Such items, in **Mage**, become characters in their own right. The walls of a haunted house might talk, a book might start reading itself to you, that guitar might start playing solos of its own. Although limited in their ability to manipulate the environment the way a human or animal can, such objects and areas display a distinct sense of self... and often an attitude to match.

As characters, objects remain limited by things like a lack of limbs, mobility, or social recognition. An enchanted skull might talk a lot and perhaps fly around the room occasionally, but “he” won't be driving cars or playing the piano any time soon. Thus, sentient objects make fine familiars, especially for mages who refuse to wrap their heads around chatty ravens but have no problem with the idea of Alexa displaying more personality than usual. By the 21st century, objects with voices, names, and identities are common enough to pass without comment among the Masses. *Cool tech, bro! Where can I get one of those?*

Like any other character type, objects have their own agendas. They might not respond well to pushy mages and could (as with a certain Black Blade) have agendas that are not in their “host's” best interests. A mage who considers herself the master of this relationship may discover just how wrong she is. An annoyed microwave, for instance, doesn't need hands or a credit card in order to ruin your day.

Due to factors like game imbalance, portability, and the potential nightmare of whole other sets of rules for a game already swimming in them, objects are not suitable player characters. A player could provide the voice and attitude for a mouthy sword or temperamental car, but the soul-drinking bound demon who was always a thousand times eviler than the guy who perceived it as a sword is a role for Storytellers, not a full-fledged character viable for players.

For details, suggestions and inspiration regarding objects with identities of their own, see the following: “Awakening Substances” (**Mage 20**, p. 443); “Inhuman Entities” and “Settings as Characters” (**Mage 20**, pp. 356 and 359); **Mage 20's** Instruments entries for “Computers and IT Gear” (p. 590), and “Thought Forms,” “Vehicles,” and “Weapons” (pp. 598-600); **Forge Psyche** and **Rouse and Lull Spirit** (**Mage 20**, pp. 520-522); “Consecrating

and Energizing Items,” “Living Charms,” and “Creating Soulgems, Soulflowers, and Assets” (**How Do You DO That?**, pp. 46-48); and the entries “Living and Virtual Foundations” and “Sentient Wonders” in the Wonders section of **The Book of Secrets** (pp. 154 and 157).

## Reanimate

Despite taboos, mages often mess around with mortal remains. Mad scientists blast corpses full of lightning or reagent, bokors pull zombis from their graves, and bizarre atrocities of flesh and bone stumble from the labs and grottos of magekind; while such companions are not exactly common company (or *pleasant* company either, for that matter), their presence among Awakened folk is traditional if not exactly kosher.

System-wise, all reanimates can Soak Lethal Damage; after all, they’re already dead. Aggravated damage can still tear their bodies apart, although tougher constructs can soak that, too. Reanimates also suffer from Unbelief except for zombies and apparent vampires of various sorts, as they’ve become so firmly established in modern media culture that these days they seem almost mundane. (Actual Kindred vampires are, of course, not “constructs” in this sense, though a mage can make a corpse look and act like a stereotypical vampire — with all the attendant weaknesses.) Vulnerabilities like fire, salt, sunlight, and gunshots to the head are traditional for such constructs, with Advantages like Claws, Fangs, or Horns, Aura, Soul-Sense/ Death-Sense, and Unaging being standard issue for reanimated characters. Most reanimates tend to have the Flaw: Repulsive, thanks to their rotting skin and exposed bones, combined with the human mortal fear of death.

## Robot

Taken from the Czech Slavonic words *rabota* (“servitude”) and *rabu* (“slave”), robot companions are mechanical beings who’ve been constructed with various purposes in mind. The technology involved in their construction varies from creator to creator; certain robots may even be built by other robots. In **Mage**’s world, such characters range from automated drones with little or no personal discretion or sense of identity, to self-controlled mecho-organisms who really *are* more than just “the sum of their parts.”

As **Mage** companion characters, we’ll assume that robots have at least a certain degree of sentience and personality — that is, Mental and Social Traits. True automatons are props and story elements, not characters in their own right. Generally, these characters are built from metals and plastics, with glass and silicon components when necessary. As a result, they Soak Aggravated Damage, but require a Power Supply (as in the Flaw of that name). Unbelief doesn’t bother them in regions where the Consensus favors advanced technologies; in primal regions, though, or ones that favor old-school magickal traditions, robot characters are pretty much screwed, with Unbelief Paradox rendering them inoperative in very short order.

How advanced *can* robots get in the World of Darkness? That’s really a question for the Storyteller to decide. Generally,

the World of Darkness favors a sinister occult tone, not the rollicking theatrics of science-fiction action thrillers. **Mage**, however, occupies a middle ground between occult mystique and hypertechnology adventure. That hotly contested middle ground is the foundation of **Mage** and its Ascension War, so it makes sense that robots in **Mage** are pretty damn advanced, especially where the Technocracy and Etherites are concerned. As we slide into the third decade of the 21st century, even our real-life robots have begun to develop an uncanny state of development. The leap between a self-willed android in **Mage** and actual robots like Sophia or Junko Chihira isn’t nearly as large now as it was when **Mage** first appeared in 1993. In place of the clunky *Terminator* homages of 1993, today’s robotic characters might be largely indistinguishable — at least to the casual eye — from organic human beings.

Which begs an interesting question: *Can a robot character Awaken?* After all, certain artificial personages, like the implacable Matriarch of the Technocratic Construct MECHA, have been known to employ reality-altering powers and the abstract vision of true Enlightenment.

With regards to the subject of robo-mage characters, we’ll just say “no” for now, if only because so much about Awakening’s conflicted blessings depend upon the uncertain state of human consciousness. That answer might change, though, especially if your Storyteller decides otherwise. After all, can a robot “awaken” if its consciousness was never “asleep” to begin with? And if it *wasn’t* ever asleep, what might a sufficiently sentient machine achieve?

## Spirit

Ephemeral entities from across the Gauntlet, spirits embody principles and forces more primordial than human beings. While many spirits have recent origins, their metaphysical essence (in game terms, the Essence Trait — see **Mage 20**, p. 489) is the force of existence itself. Spirit characters, then, remain enigmatic even to their companions. On one hand, spirits *are* what they *are*, with few pretenses or deceptions about their true nature; on the other, they’re immortal forces wearing guises that seem far more limited than the forces they personify. Even when they look like crows, cats, or human beings, spirits are — literally by nature — Otherworldly.

Chapter Four deals with spirits in detail, and the **Mage** rules regarding them can be found in **Mage 20**, pp. 485-495. From a roleplaying and character-creation perspective, such entities should be restricted to the Storyteller alone, if only because spirits lose their mystery when they become just another character for folks to play.

Under an *optional rule*, a player might be able to create and run an incarnated spirit character — that is, a familiar whose ephemeral body has manifested in a physical form. For details, see the “Familiar” entry, above.

For further reference, see the *Companion Character Creation chart*. For details about buying Charms, see “Purchasing Charms,” p. xx, and for roleplaying suggestions, check out the **Mage 20** entries for “Inhuman Entities” (pp. 356-357) and “Atmospheric Powers” (p. 495).

# Companion Character Creation



The following rules can be used to create allies, familiars, Wards (as per the Flaw of that name in *The Book of Secrets*, p. 66), retainers, spies, and whatever other sorts of characters you might want to include.

Players who wish to create unAwakened characters to assist or bedevil their Awakened heroes should use the following steps while following the overall Traits and processes shown in *Mage 20*, pp. 250-336. Obviously, those characters won't have Traits like Arete, Spheres, or the Avatar Background: those Traits are for mages only. Overall, though, the process is similar. Unless you employ higher levels of freebie points, the resulting characters tend to be less powerful than their Awakened companions. That's to be expected, though. After all, mages, in a *Mage* game, are the stars of the show.

## Step One: Character Concept: Who Are you?

- **Concept:** Who were you before you encountered mages and their world?
- **Motivation:** Why'd you get involved with them?
- **Affiliation:** Traditions, Technocracy, Disparates, Marauders, Nephandi, or none?
- **Type:** Are you an acolyte, consor, hedge wizard, familiar, or what?
- **Archetype (Nature and Demeanor):** What's your personality? (See *Mage 20*, p. 250, and *The Book of Secrets*, pp. 14-18.)

## Step Two: Attributes & Abilities

As per *Mage 20*, Chapter Six.

- **Attributes:** Primary 6, Secondary 4, Tertiary 3
- Physical, Social, and Mental
- **Abilities:** Primary 11, Secondary 7, Tertiary 4
- Talents, Skills, and Knowledges

## Step Three: Advantages

- **Background Traits:** 5 (consors must put at least one dot into Mentor.)
- **Special Advantages:** Base 0 (limited to certain types of characters; see p. xx.)

- **Willpower:** Base 3
- **Essence:** Willpower x 5 (familiars only.)
- **Merits and Flaws:** Base 0 (as per *Mage 20*, *The Book of Secrets*, and below.)
- **Charms:** Base 0. (familiars only; as per this book's section on Spirit Charms.)
- **Freebie Points:** Acolytes and backup agents get 15 points. Consors and other skilled allies get 21 points. Familiars get 25 points.

*Starting levels in Abilities and Backgrounds may not be higher than four dots.*

## Merits

| Name                  | Cost / Value | Type   |
|-----------------------|--------------|--------|
| Alpha                 | 2            | Social |
| My Master is My Slave | 2            | Social |

## Flaws

| Name               | Cost / Value | Type         |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Alien Impression   | 1/2/3/4/5    | Physical     |
| Animal             | 2            | Social       |
| Aura               | 3            | Supernatural |
| Beta               | 1            | Social       |
| Broken             | 5            | Mental       |
| Limbless           | 5            | Physical     |
| Power Source       | 1/2/3/4/5    | Physical     |
| No Dexterous Limbs | 4            | Physical     |
| Omega              | 4            | Social       |
| Ungainly Fingers   | 2            | Physical     |
| Weak Spot          | 3            | Physical     |
| Thaumivore         | 5            | Supernatural |
| Unbelief           | 3/5/8        | Supernatural |

## Special Advantages

| Advantage        | Point Cost |
|------------------|------------|
| Alacrity         | 2/4/6      |
| Armor            | Variable   |
| Aura             | 3          |
| Aww!             | 1/2/3/4    |
| Bare Necessities | 1/3        |

| <b>Advantage</b>       | <b>Point Cost</b> |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| Bioluminescence        | 1/2/3             |
| Blending               | 1                 |
| Bond-Sharing           | 4/5/6             |
| Claws, Fangs or Horns  | 3/5/7             |
| Cause Insanity         | 2 per die         |
| Deadly Demise          | 2/4/6             |
| Elemental Touch        | 3/5/7/10/15       |
| Empathic Bond          | 2                 |
| Extra Heads            | 2 pts per head    |
| Extra Limbs            | 2 pts per limb    |
| Ferocity               | 2 pts per dot     |
| Flexibility            | 2                 |
| Dominance              | 1                 |
| Earthbond              | 2                 |
| Hazardous Breath       | Variable          |
| Healing Lick           | 3/6               |
| Homing Instinct        | 2/4               |
| Human Guise            | 2/4               |
| Human Speech           | 1                 |
| Information Fount      | 5                 |
| Intangibility          | 8/10              |
| Mesmerism              | 3/6               |
| Musical Influence      | 6                 |
| Musk                   | 3                 |
| Mystic Shield          | 2 pts per dot     |
| Needleteeth            | 3                 |
| Nightstight            | 3                 |
| Omega Status           | 4                 |
| Paradox Nullification  | 2/3/4/5/6         |
| Quills                 | 2/4               |
| Rapid Healing          | Variable          |
| Razorskin              | 3                 |
| Read and Write         | 1                 |
| Regrowth               | 2/4/6             |
| Shapechanger           | 3/5/8             |
| Size                   | 3/5/8             |
| Soak Lethal Damage     | 3                 |
| Soak Aggravated Damage | 5                 |
| Soul-Sense/Death-Sense | 2/3               |
| Speed                  | Variable          |
| Spirit Vision          | 3                 |

| <b>Advantage</b>     | <b>Point Cost</b> |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| Spirit Travel        | 8/10/15           |
| Telepathy            | 2/4/6             |
| Telekinesis          | 3/5/8/12          |
| Tides of Fortune     | 5                 |
| Tunneling            | 3                 |
| Unaging              | 5                 |
| Universal Translator | 5                 |
| Venom                | Variable          |
| Wall-Crawling        | 3                 |
| Water-Breathing      | 2/5               |
| Webbing              | 5                 |
| Wings                | 3/5               |

## Charms

| <b>Charm</b>                | <b>Point Cost</b> |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| Bad Luck Curse              | 5                 |
| Bargain                     | 2                 |
| Create Water                | 5                 |
| Deflect Harm                | 5                 |
| Disorient                   | 1                 |
| False Wealth                | 5                 |
| Good Luck Charm             | 5                 |
| Jack In                     | 5                 |
| Mirage                      | 5                 |
| Mislead                     | 5                 |
| Plant Command               | 5                 |
| Rouse the Dead              | N/A               |
| Sand Storm                  | 8                 |
| Sand Swallow / Sinkhole     | 5                 |
| Smoke Screen / Blinding Fog | 2                 |
| Spirit Gossip               | 5                 |
| Teleport                    | 10/20             |
| Wish Fulfillment            | N/A               |

## Freebie Points

| <b>Traits</b> | <b>Cost</b>                       |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|
| Attribute     | 5 per dot                         |
| Ability       | 2 per dot                         |
| Background    | 1 per dot                         |
| Willpower     | 2 per dot                         |
| Essence       | 1 per dot                         |
| Charms        | 1 pt. per Essence needed / 5 pts. |

|                   |                   |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| Merit             | Cost as per Merit |
| Flaw              | Bonus as per Flaw |
| Special Advantage | As per that Trait |

## Experience Costs

| Traits      | Cost                              |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|
| New Ability | 3                                 |
| Ability     | current rating x2                 |
| Attribute   | current rating x4                 |
| Background* | current rating x3 / x6            |
| Willpower   | current rating x1                 |
| Essence     | current rating x2                 |
| Charms      | 1 pt. per Essence needed / 5 pts. |

*\*If allowed; see “Raising and Buying Backgrounds with Experience Points,” Mage 20, p. 366.*

## Character Questions

Many of the Character Questions presented in **Mage 20**, pp. 262-265, still apply to unAwakened characters. Certain queries like “*How do your beliefs determine your focus?*” would, however, be replaced with questions like the following:

### What Drew You to This Crazy Life?

That’s kind of where it starts off, isn’t it? How’d you fall down this particular rabbit hole? Were you raised in a coven? Bred in a vat? Assembled from spare corpses? Conjured by some sorcerous douche? Did you get saved from a deadly situation, or were you born into this sort of life? For companions, cultists, contacts, and retainers, this question explains a lot about the character’s perspective on mages, their world, and the character’s place in that world. On a related note, it also guides the sorts of Merits and Flaws your character might have, and the stories behind the Traits you possess.

### Where do You Live?

What space do you call home? A wizard’s mansion? A military base? Do you hang out at a Node, or are you free to wander wherever you will go? If you belong to a cult or coven, do you have your own house from which you come and go? Or are you a house-bound servant with duties that make your living space your workspace too? Are you part of the mage’s family? A nine-to-five employee? A pet? A robot? Did you ever live what most people would consider a normal life? Or were you born and raised in a Horizon Realm, spacecraft, remote Chantry, underground bunker, or other sort of alternate world?

On that note, are you free to come and go as you please? Do you have a day job that takes you away from the mage for extended periods of time? Maybe you’re a kid, with school and friends and a neighborhood to run around in; or an animal confined to stables, house, or yard. If you’re accustomed to

the strange environs of a Realm or Chantry, the so-called everyday world might seem, to you, bizarre. Your answers to this question, then, will reflect what you call “normal” and how you define freedom or the lack of it.

### Why Are You Still Here?

Keeping company with Awakened folks is not for the faint of heart. Once you realized how unusual life among the Awakened can be, what kept you sticking around? Love? Duty? Money? Faith? The response will reveal a lot about your character’s attitude and loyalty toward her Awakened associates. Is she a reluctant participant? A lovestruck paramour? A resentful ward? A daredevil adventurer? Does she view her life these days with humor? Sadness? Fury? Loss? Is this a matter of religious devotion, as the term *acolyte* suggests? Or are you sticking around for the next paycheck? A dedicated companion might stick by her mage even under duress, while one who’s spent the last six months looking at the door will bolt at the soonest opportunity... possibly while leaving a big knife sticking out of the mage’s back on her way out that door.

### How do You View the Magickal World?

Through what lens do you view this life? Were you raised with a mystical viewpoint? Are you fascinated by hypertechnical potential? Did your vision of the world get blasted into a million shards the first time you witnessed magick in action, or were you just like, “*Oh, cool – I knew that sort of thing was possible*”? What sorts of magick do you accept as “normal,” and what sorts might have you scrambling to revise your ideas about how the world works? Maybe you were brought up in an Evangelical household where miracles were possible but “magic” was for devil worshippers. You might be a devoted Technocrat who views magick as treacherous superstition, or a suburban demonologist with a secret terror of religious rituals.

The answers to this question won’t simply decide your view of the mages in your midst. They’ll also provide a guideline for what you might or might not consider vulgar magick – an important consideration if your character is devoted to the Technocratic paradigm, participating in a cult, or helping out around the wizard’s workshop. (See “Do the Night-Folk Count as Witnesses?” and “Allies, Assistants, and Cults” in **Mage 20**, pp. 531-532.)

### Do You Pursue Magick Yourself?

Are you a helping hand with regards to metaphysical pursuits? Do you study hedge magic, or employ paranormal powers? Do you wish you were a mage, perhaps envy the mages you know? If you don’t have magick of your own, what might you do to get some? An ambitious or perhaps resentful “Sleeper” might well make infernal bargains, invite spiritual possession, or otherwise sell out his magickal friends if it means getting some of the sort of power they take for granted but do not share with him. Or maybe he’s a hapless sorcerer’s apprentice type whose penchant for getting into

trouble outweighs his potential for metaphysical craft. What happens if this person *does* Awaken? Might his association with mages guide him toward a simpler Path, or could a calamitous Awakening (like, for example, an eruption of wild talent in the middle of a Technocratic Construct) make his life even more difficult than it had been before?

### **How do Your Awakened Associates Treat You?**

Are you their bitch? Their beast? Their lover? Their chew toy? Are you forever considered “less than equal” in the eyes of a mage? Or do your Awakened associates regard you as one of their own, with or without those magickal powers? Do they want you to learn their Arts, or strive to keep you “innocent” of such things even if you display a talent for the craft? Are you just some Sleeper from the Masses, denigrated simply for existing without that glorious Enlightenment? This question reveals a lot about both the unAwakened character and the Awakened ones around her; those answers, incidentally, might not be terribly flattering to the mages in question, and their treatment of this “ally,” this “cultist,” this “retainer,” “familiar,” or “construct” may expose troubling aspects of high-and-mighty mages that they might not recognize themselves until, or unless, circumstances force them to do so.

### **What Benefits Do You Get From Your Association With Reality-Twisting Demigods?**

Are you a paid employee? A treasured friend? The proverbial “faithful companion” who might secretly get sick of being in the shadow of his mage? Why are you putting up with this wondrous yet challenging role? Is it love? Cash? Potential power? A sworn oath of service? The more you receive, the happier you’ll probably be. Ah, but some people’s idea of “happy” can be pretty strange, especially in the World of Darkness, and what looks like abuse to an outside party might be the thing your character demands.

Alternately, you could start planning your escape if you’re not getting what you need. Starving familiar? Long-suffering butler? Low-paid bodyguard? Yeah, *fuck this* — you’re out the moment a better opportunity comes along! For haughty mages who regard their associates as mere Background Traits, the defection or betrayal of an unrewarded consor could be the wake-up call they need.

### **Are You Alone, or Are There More Companions Like You Here?**

Yo, Igor — are you the only one of your kind hanging around the mad doctor’s lab? Or are you part of a team, a cult, or an army of people like yourself? If you’ve got similar associates, how well do you get along with them, and how well (or poorly) do they treat *you*? If you’re in a wizard’s harem, what sorts of politicking do you indulge in or avoid as part of your pampered captivity? What if you’re a hired killer in a house filled with gentlemen? Or a commoner among nobles, or vice versa? The

ways in which you get along (or don’t) speak volumes about your living situation as a whole.

Fellowship can provide stability in a chaotic world or infest your life with the worst elements of family dysfunctions and office politics. Do you associate with your fellow companions? If so, do you collaborate with one another? Do you plot to rebel? Are you devoted to a cause? What might happen, in the latter case, if your mage was exposed as a hypocrite or fake? What if she proves herself to be the paragon you all wanted her to be? Are you trapped in a similar situation, or might some folks be the overseers while other folks play the slaves? Do you work on projects together... and if so, who gets the credit, and do they deserve it at all? How do you view your mage(s) and their relationship with the rest of you? Happy? Bored? Vengeful? Rebellious? Your answer to this question reflects the stability of your mage’s situation as well as the state of your own. After all, a mage sitting on Mao’s “throne of bayonets” won’t be comfortable for long.

### **If It All Falls Down Tomorrow, Where Will You be Then?**

What happens if your world goes sideways — the Chantry is betrayed, the stronghold is attacked, the rivals offer some or all of you a better deal than the one you currently enjoy or despise? Do you have an escape plan... and if so, does your mage know what it is? Have you squirreled away a nest egg and possibly a new life, or are you utterly screwed if everything goes to hell? Does your mage provide you with a life away from his company, or are you shackled (perhaps literally) to this life until something comes along to change it?

### **How do You Survive Your Association with These Mages?**

That’s a pretty valid question. After all, the average mage gets into situations that would turn most Sleepers into Play-Doh. Obviously, a mage’s companion is mentally and physically superior to the run-of-the-mill Masses. One visit from the local Construct’s HIT Marks, though, would send most people scurrying for cover. Why are you still here, and how do you survive — again, mentally and spiritually as well as physically — regular encounters with the supposedly impossible? The answer will reveal a lot about your companion’s values and perspective as well as his ability to walk away from Ground Zero with a grim smile on his face.

All too often, a mage’s companions become a mass of Background Traits, to be used, exploited, or forgotten at will. By asking and answering questions about a companion’s situation and his thoughts regarding it, you and your Storyteller get a blueprint for dramatic conflicts while the mage and his player learn — one way or another — not to take his companions for granted, no matter how “enlightened” he might think he is.

## **Character Advancement**

Like mages, unAwakened characters progress, too. They get experience points for participating in adventures, and they

can buy new Traits or raise old ones if events warrant the new or higher Traits. Especially if your group employs troupe play, these companions can become quite powerful in their own right, possibly even Awakening if the character's nature and circumstances allow for such enlightenment. Dramatic events can have drastic effects, pro or con, with Merits, Flaws, new Background Traits, or possibly new Advantages transforming the original character in heroic or potentially tragic ways.

If the companion is part of another player's Background, Flaw, or Merits traits, the question arises: *Can the player with that Trait raise or lower the companion's abilities by adjusting the level of that Trait?* The answer is no. If a player is running a familiar whose mage is being run by another player (or even by the same player), then the Background is set at Familiar 3, the familiar gets 25 freebie points, and that's that. After the characters begin play, their relationship might change; the points involved, however, do not change. Once a companion character begins to earn experience, that experience benefits that character, not the mage. Subsequent changes in the Background, Flaw, or Merit will change the roleplaying relationship between those characters, but not the Traits involved.

(A companion who's not being played by another player can receive experience from the mage in question or earn her own experience points. Characters who are run by players, however, progress through their own deeds, not through points expended by a player-run mage.)

As always, make sure all newly purchased Traits fit the character and chronicle. An intelligent cat who gains the ability to shift between dimensions fits the elusive mystery of cats (*you mean they can't already do that?*), while a fire elemental gaining power over water seems rather silly unless he transforms it into boiling steam.

The guidelines for character progression can be found in **Page 20**, pp. 335-339. UnAwakened characters, of course, will be restricted in certain ways unless they become mages in their own right. Those restrictions might be tied to species or society, too; a biografted tiger could grow wings, but a malformed Etherite servant might not be free to leave her master's lab unless she flees his world entirely.

## Mistreatment

The relationship between companions and a mage will, as mentioned earlier, depend upon the treatment that mage gives to his associates. A mage who mistreats his companions might earn their terror and hate, but rarely will he have love or loyalty from them beyond a Stockholm syndrome sort of bond.

This doesn't mean mages don't mistreat their companions; all too often, they do. Abusing your supposed inferiors is literally a tradition among many occult groups, even in our supposedly democratic age. A mistreated companion tends to be restricted in fairly severe ways — perhaps literally enslaved, imprisoned, threatened with imminent doom, or otherwise confined by physical, emotional, or metaphysical chains. And

while such abuse appears at first glance to be the purview of Nephandi and the like, the “good guys” do it all the time. Etherites didn't earn their crazy reputation by making nice with the hired (or constructed) help, and wizards and witches might act with perfect courtesy toward one another while terrorizing their social inferiors.

If you're playing a companion character, the treatment you receive will have a huge impact (perhaps literally) on your self-esteem as well as your relationship with the mage in question. Confident people aren't prone to taking anybody's shit; broken-willed people, though, become the proverbial whipped dogs crawling to their master's table. That warped obedience *does* become a sort of loyalty, especially if the abuser tempers her violence with kindness while convincing the abused party that he deserved whatever she just did to him. Vast wealth and social-class distinctions are especially important in this regard, with servants taking untold amounts of garbage from their masters simply because that's the way their society works. Although a mage *can* command obedience, loyalty, and even love with the appropriate forms of magick, the strongest bars and smallest cages are the ones people carry around their own heads.

(Compelling people to love, worship, and obey via magick, by the way, is a really shitty thing to do — see “Questions of Consent” in **How Do You DO That?** pp. 119-120. It's a common practice throughout occult history, though, especially in class-based cultures and secluded Horizon Realms, so it's entirely possible that your unAwakened companion has been manipulated this way whether he realizes it or not.)

For a mistreated companion, escape and defiance *are* manifestations of progress. That broken-willed servant, for example, might shrug off his abuser once he begins to recognize his own self-worth. Especially if your chronicle provides opportunities for significant growth among its unAwakened cast, the power dynamics between mages and their acolytes and cults might shift in sudden, potentially fatal ways.

## The Non-Human Mindset

It's relatively easy, for the most part, to wrap your head around a human character. Sure, that person might have a very different set of experiences, but she's still fundamentally human. The same can't be said for crows, horses, dragons, androids, sentient insects, nature-spirits, and other entities that are not in any measurable way human. Playing such a character, then, demands an imaginative approach and willingness to place your perspective behind the eyes (assuming it even *has* eyes) of an entirely different species. You could, of course, just play that character as a human being with neat powers... but really, where's the fun in *that*?

## Physical Shape

First off, reorient your perspective to the physical body of the critter you wish to play. Our crow will see the world from both below and above, with a perspective that changes with



a few flaps of his wings. The horse orients to his world with four legs, breathtaking speed, and a body that makes sitting or lying down difficult under most circumstances. Both animals have radically different senses, too — impressive long-range eyesight for the crow, a greater sense of smell and hearing for the horse, and nothing like what we humans would consider a functioning sense of taste. Both animals also see colors very differently than we do; while not entirely colorblind, crows and horses don't share our vivid perceptions of color, if for no other reason than that other senses are more important to their survival. Their tactile body awareness is nothing like our bipedal solidity, either; crows can move around on two legs, but their primary locomotion is flight; horses occupy a lot more space than humans do, and equines lack our fluid freedom of movement even though they're generally far faster and stronger than we are. Even if the crow and horse in question possess human-grade intellect (which crows might, anyway), the way they process sensations and information depends on their physical perspective, not our own, and their priorities differ from ours even when they live in a largely human world.

Even characters with humanoid shape might experience their world very differently if they're not actually human beings. An android, for example, possesses a human size and shape; does that robot possess human sensory organs, though?

Human memories? A human sense of self? Probably not. The most sophisticated robot would have elaborate sensory arrays and a vital intellect; those senses, though, would differ from the organic imperfections we humans consider "real," and its perceived identity would be almost certainly include a sense of being manufactured for a purpose, not born to seek one. Things we take for granted would seem bizarre to an android: what is "gender," for example, to a being that doesn't need to reproduce or have any innate connection to sex beyond what, perhaps, it was manufactured to possess? Ditto that for a being made of corpses, conjured from raw energy, or grown from biomass in a vat. Such beings, even if they look like us, would not think or feel the way we do, if only because their sense of identity and perception differ so strongly from our own. As a roleplayer, then, it's a real challenge to play a being that might look or even act human but who is intrinsically *not* human.

## Abstract Intellect

Physical form guides, but does not define, one's capacity for thought. An entity composed of flexible jelly could still outthink a human mind. The *ways* in which it would think, however — priorities, associations, points of reference, pattern recognition, and so forth — would be radically different. Thanks to those differences, human beings often make the

mistake of believing that an entity that is not like us is not on our intellectual level. And that's just not true at all.

For ages, humans considered animals to be dumb brutes, “engines of instinct” whose capacity for abstract thought was limited at best and most often nonexistent. The last few decades of animal research, though, prove that old view wrong. Most animals *do* have at least a discernable sense of self, the ability to puzzle out circumstances, a perception of potential results (and the ability to choose between them), and an emotional life as rich and varied as our own. Even the simplest animals can communicate with one another in sophisticated ways, and many can communicate across species lines as well. Animals who share living space with human beings and other species can communicate *very* effectively with various animals; if we stupid humans choose not to understand what the cat is trying to tell us, the fault is on our end, not on the cat's.

As David Abrams points out in his book *Becoming Animal*, our animal kin display intelligence all the time. A crow swooping in between speeding cars to chow down on the corpse of some unfortunate raccoon isn't operating on mysteriously automatic “instincts,” but gauging the relative speed of the cars, judging air currents, adjusting his wings and tail feathers to precise degrees in order to get in, gobble up, and get out of the way before the next car hits him. Considering that the cars move considerably faster than the crow does, that the air currents change in reaction to winds, cars, and the bird himself, and that the crow knows damned well that he'll be the next meal if he misses a single calculation, the scope of that “bird brain's” intellectual capacities becomes obvious. The crow might not be able to write Shakespearean sonnets, but Shakespeare didn't live or die by how well he could fly down between speeding cars.

As Abrams writes: “Sentience was never our private possession. We live immersed in intelligence, enveloped and informed by a creativity we cannot fathom.” Crows, cats, horses, raccoons... they think, reason, perceive, and feel — maybe not the way *we* do, but the way *they* do. As a roleplayer, then, consider the ways in which your character would think: the form she inhabits, the needs she must meet, the obstacles in her path, and the ways in which her form and experiences allow her to overcome them. Away from the gaming table, watch other living things, see how they process and reflect upon their circumstances, and try to get into their heads by considering *how* they think, pondering *why* they think that way, and observing that they generally *do* get what they want and need even though they're not getting those things our way.

## Communication

Among the first things you notice when you watch animals of different species sharing common ground is that different species quickly work out methods of communicating with one another. Animals, sometimes more acutely than humans, excel at figuring out ways to communicate across species lines. And because they can't usually speak human

words, they let actions speak for them. Body postures, vocal sounds, hiding, looming, grooming, playing, sniffing, spitting, sharing, snuggling, avoiding... animals have as many ways of sorting their stuff out as humans do, and they're generally really good at puzzling out what humans want as well, and then communicating with us in ways they figure we'll understand. Your cat might nuzzle your finger, claw your sweater, or pee on your bed if he's trying to get your attention, and the affection or vehemence he displays reflects both his current mood toward you and the tactic he thinks will work best to get his message through your head.

Yes, your cat isn't just expressing his mind, he's also attempting to read yours. And usually, he's right.

Animals ain't stupid. Remember that.

From a roleplaying perspective, consider the ways in which your non-human character communicates. Does she employ pheromone scent cues, subvocal rumblings, body postures, submission gestures? Most animals with any level of intellect have a wide array of communication techniques, many of which fly right past our human preconceptions. Other animals, though, can read those cues just fine — just watch a dog and a cat, or a snake and a cricket, or a dog and a cat and a person, and you'll realize that the one who understands *least* what's going on in those communications is you. As a roleplayer, then, work out the languages of sense and action that define how your character communicates, both with others of her kind and with beings of different species. If you're running a non-human companion in a largely human world, those methods of communication will be, in many ways, your path between life and death, prosperity and rejection.

## Social Interactions

No one, to paraphrase the old saying, is an island. Even the most reclusive being needs to interact with others. The more you need in this world, the more you must hash out social interactions with your fellow beings. Again, those beings don't necessarily need to be *human* — a loner in the woods still deals with the local wildlife if she wants to live through the next few days out there. Mages, in contrast, deal with all kinds of entities. And when those entities could swallow your soul, then the need to establish rules of contact become *really* obvious.

Humans, as a rule, impose our social methods on other beings whether those other beings agree with them or not. We do the same thing to one another, too, which is why our species seems to exist in endless states of war. Half the time, we don't even understand each other; our modes of communication seem so slippery that two people can share a screaming match over different interpretations of the same damn word. It's no wonder, then, that animals and other non-human entities consider *us* the stupid ones. Despite our many protocols, human methods of social interaction make less rational sense than two cats hissing in any alley. The cats, at least, know exactly where they stand with regards to one another.

Social status is not built on force and chaos. Dogs do not actually eat other dogs unless humans are forcing them to fight, or those dogs are sick or starving. Rats run in mazes because people put them there, and if “survival of the fittest” meant that strong animals kill everything within reach just because they *can*, all earthly life would have ended long ago. That said, force is a factor, if only to maintain civility; some motherfuckers understand nothing less than force, and if no other options exist, then they call the tune for everyone. Animals don’t usually fight each other to the death unless one’s planning to eat the other one. Both parties have a lot to lose if that fight goes badly, so status tends to be based more on dominance postures and mutual aid. Humans often work that way, too, but we’re often quicker to resort to force if we think it’ll get us what we want.

Regardless of the methods involved, social interactions are, at their most basic level, about getting what you want or need as easily as you can get it. Everybody’s trying to get their needs and desires met, and the methods they use depend upon what works best. If one party wants to meet his needs through force, then the other parties must either depose him through force, find someone else to depose him through force, or else live with the fact that he rules them through force. If the parties involved manage to work things out through wits, seduction, laws everyone agrees to follow, outside intervention, or magickal oaths, then the social group functions according to the tactics that serve the group in the most effective way possible, as far as that group is concerned. Non-human characters, then, will use whatever methods appear to work best for them. Social interactions, human and otherwise, depend upon working out needs and communicating them to one another... through conversation if possible, and force if need be.

When playing a non-human being, especially one who spends most of her time around humans, figure out the ways in which your character establishes respect, submission, dominance, and affection. Does she speak plainly, and if so, how are her words received when she does? Must she grab people by the scruff of the neck in order to get them to understand they’re not to fuck with her... and if she *does*, then does she have sufficient force to back up her threat? If she doesn’t have that kind of power, what other kinds of power does she have, how does she use them,

and how successful is she when she does? What happens if her social tactics backfire on her, escalating verbal arguments to physical violence? Can she dominate through force, or must she find some other way before that relationship turns into bloody smears on the nearest wall? Like the crow dodging between cars, that character’s survival depends upon how well she gauges her abilities relative to her circumstances. A blown Social roll, under perilous circumstances, could make getting hit by a speeding car look like the easy way out.

Generally, though, intelligent creatures avoid violence, if only because there’s so much more to lose when bodies start hitting the floor. **Mage**, though filled with conflicts, is more about duels of cleverness and conviction than about beating someone’s ass with the nearest piece of furniture. Hence, social status and interactions in **Mage** are more likely to follow unearthly diplomacy than crazed carnage.

Social status between mages and companions can be as brutal as a whip across Igor’s back, as subtle as two chess masters regarding each other’s next move, as arcane as Solomonic pacts in a wizard’s tower, or as carnal as a two pagan priests making love in a grove under the light of a full moon. It takes a multitude of forms, and all those forms depend heavily on how much the parties involved respect, love, and probably even fear each other. When violence sets the tone, then violence sets the rules; the night Igor grabs that whip from the mad scientist’s hand, their relationship changes forever. **Mage** players and Storytellers, then, should keep the social methods, needs, tactics, and stakes of their characters in mind. Few things are simple in a mage’s world, and that’s especially true when human mages and non-human companions meet.

If all this stuff seems a bit abstract for a game-system chapter, that’s because it is abstract. There’s no rule or chart that can accommodate the many needs and abilities that a bunch of mages and their companions can face. When playing your characters, then, and working out the many stories they might share, shape those stories according to the wants, needs, intellectual capacities, and communication styles of the characters involved. Those choices will shape the Traits you choose for your characters... and the Traits, in turn, will shape the way your characters interact with one another, guiding the stories that emerge when they do.

## Merits, Flaws, and Special Advantages



Human beings and not-so-human companions share a broad range of possible abilities. The majority of human and somewhat paranormal gifts are covered by the Merit Traits provided in **Mage 20** (pp. 642-646) and **The Book of Secrets** (pp. 34-99), while an array of extra-human capabilities can be found in this chapter under the heading “Special Advantages.”

### Merits

For the most part, the collection of Merits provided in **The Book of Secrets** can be considered comprehensive. We’ve added two new, companion-appropriate Merits below, but other than that the Merit Traits provided in previous World of Darkness companion-type books have either been incorporated into **The Book of Secrets**, or else worked into the Special Advantage Traits featured in this book, below.

## Alpha (2 pt. Social Merit)

You were born to lead. The dominant beast in any situation, you provide for your pack regardless of their species, take command when need be, and embody the will of the group. This does not, contrary to popular misconception, mean you're a bully who does whatever you want to do. Among animals, the dominant beast has a responsibility to the pack, and if the pack suffers, its alpha gets deposed.

Game-wise, this Merit reduces the difficulties of your Social Trait rolls by -2, and also earns you near-automatic deference from the rest of your group unless you're slacking off on your job. So long as you employ your dominance to the benefit of your group, the others feel a near-instinctive submission to your leadership.

It's worth noting here that the whole alpha-beta-omega concept is based on flawed research involving captive populations of unrelated wolves in artificial circumstances. Its primary proponent, L. David Mech, spent most of his later career debunking the idea. Still, the Alpha Merit and the Beta and Omega Flaws deal with hierarchy in human-dominated settings, possibly among creatures who are at least partially human and whose social dynamics depend heavily on human situations, so these Traits can still apply to companion characters even if they're not true of real wild animals.

## My Master is My Slave (5 pt. Social Merit)

Everyone thinks your mage commands you. And everyone is wrong. Though he might indeed believe he's the one calling the shots in this relationship, he's wrong. Better still, he gets the blame for whatever it is you choose to do, and though he'd like to *think* he can take you down if need be, you possess enough leverage (of one form or another) to ruin him if you so choose.

Obviously, this Merit applies only to situations where an Awakened mage has a familiar, a servant, a retainer, a child, a ward, or else some other sort of apparently dependent character for which he is responsible. That mage has you as Background character, and you dutifully fulfill that role when it suits your purposes to do so. You've got your own agendas, though, and the power dynamic lets you get away with them unless you're really careless about your true intentions. To keep the upper hand, you'll have to be clever; that said, you can be a real prick behind closed doors. Your mage considers you a useful burden, but *he's* the useful one here and once you've gotten what you wanted from this relationship, you'll ditch the burden too.

(Please don't use this Merit to be a jerk to your fellow players. Consent is awesome. Thank you.)

## Flaws

Nothing good comes without a cost. Though companion characters have some truly badass abilities to choose from, their lives (especially if they're Bygones, cyborgs, and other odd entities) have drawbacks as well as benefits.

The following Flaw Traits work along the same rules as those presented in **Mage 20** (pp. 646-651) and **The Book of Secrets** (pp. 39-99). The usual seven-point limit on the number of Flaws, however, may be lifted for characters of unusual strangeness and power. It makes sense, for instance, for a dragon to have more Flaws than a mortal mage. That said, try not to go overboard with such Traits; after all, your Storyteller will be bringing these Flaws into play, and you and other players ought to work them in as often as possible, too. Flaws aren't simply exercises in creative point generation — they're innate and intimate elements of the character you play.

Although mage-specific Flaws (especially those dealing with Avatars and Spheres) are obviously inappropriate for non-mage characters, many of the Flaws presented in **Mage 20** and **The Book of Secrets** can apply to companion characters. The Genetic Flaws detailed in **Mage 20**, pp. 648-651, are especially applicable to — almost required for, really — construct-type characters.

On the flipside, the following Flaws are appropriate only for non-human characters. A game based on superheroes (as described in **The Book of Secrets**, p. 282) or faerie-tale witch lore might incorporate Flaws like Alien Appearance or Vulnerability, but otherwise such Traits should not apply to human mages.

## Alien Impression (1-5 pt. Physical Flaw)

Your appearance freaks people out. Perhaps it's your lidless serpentine stare, your cobalt-blue skin, or the wings jutting from between your shoulder blades. It might not even be a feature of your visual appearance, *per se*; maybe you've got a synthetic techno-voice, a crackling aura of prickly invisible energy, or an uncanny way of moving when you walk. Whatever the specifics might be, your presence evokes whispers, unease or — at the highest levels — outright fear. The more disturbing your impression, the more this Flaw (originally known as *Alien Appearance*) is worth:

- (1 point) Minor feature, generally concealable, that inspires minor discomfort from people who notice it.
- (2 points) Noticeable feature, hard to conceal, that inspires discomfort in people who notice it.
- (3 points) Major feature, difficult if not impossible to conceal, that weirds out most people who notice it.
- (4 points) Unmistakably alien feature that rather frightens most people.
- (5 points) You stand out almost anywhere a human mage might go.

*Minor* features include oddly colored eyes, artificial tone of voice, eerie lightness or density of form, and so forth. *Noticeable* ones get stranger and more troubling for the average mundane (horns, sharp claws, animalistic hair), with

## Companion-Suitable Merits and Flaws

Aside from Traits that apply specifically to Awakened mages and their abilities (Avatar Companion, Cyclic Magick, Manifest Avatar, and so forth), a companion-type character can have any Merit or Flaw that suits the character in question. The Storyteller gets the final say as to what is and is not allowed in your game. Certain Merits and Flaws, though, are especially appropriate for companion-type characters:

### Merits

|                      |                                           |                       |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Acute Senses         | Huge Size                                 | Physically Impressive |
| Animal Magnetism     | Hyperflexible                             | Property              |
| Berserker            | "Immortal"                                | Sanctity              |
| Cast-Iron Stomach    | Insensate to Pain                         | Secret Code Language  |
| Catlike Balance      | Iron Will                                 | Shapechanger Kin      |
| Cloak of the Seasons | Jack-of-All-Trades                        | Socially Networked    |
| Code of Honor        | Language                                  | Spirit Magnet         |
| Danger Sense         | Legendary Attributes                      | Too Tough to Die      |
| Enchanting Feature   | Loyalty                                   | True Faith            |
| Expert Driver        | Mark of Favor                             | True Love             |
| Ghoul                | Natural Channel/Linguist/<br>Shapeshifter | Twin Souls            |
| Green Thumb          | Nephilim / Laham                          | Unaging               |
| Hands of Daedalus    | Nightsight                                | Unbondable            |
| Hideaway / Safehouse | Nine Lives                                | Unobtrusive           |

### Flaws

|                              |                          |                         |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Absent-Minded                | Echoes                   | PTSD                    |
| Addiction                    | Expendable               | Repulsive Feature       |
| Anachronism                  | Extreme Kink             | Rivalry                 |
| Bizarre Hunger               | Family Issues            | Short fuse              |
| Blood-Hungry Soul            | Faulty Enhancements      | Short                   |
| Bound                        | Feral Mind               | Sleeping with the Enemy |
| Cast No Shadow or Reflection | Haunted                  | Strangeness             |
| Child                        | Horrific                 | Stress Atavism          |
| Conflicting Loyalties        | Icy                      | Sympathizer             |
| Cultural Other               | Immortal Enemy           | Taint of Corruption     |
| Curiosity                    | Impediment               | Throwback               |
| Dark Fate                    | Insane / Infamous Mentor | Troublemaker            |
| Dark Secret                  | Mayfly Curse             | Twisted Apprenticeship  |
| Degeneration                 | Monstrous                | Uncanny                 |
| Deranged                     | Old Flame                | Ward                    |
| Diabolical Mentor            | Primal Marks             | Witch-Hunted            |
| Double Agent                 | Psychic Vampire          |                         |

major and *unmistakable* features becoming more overt and less “natural” by earth-reality standards (winged people, six-legged horses, cybernetic wolves... you get the picture). Creatures at the highest level of this Flaw might not be frightening, but cannot blend into anything resembling “normal” human society (dragons, “gray”-style aliens, unicorns that clearly are not horses with a horn attached, that sort of thing).

Obviously, this Flaw means nothing if your chronicle is set in some place where your character’s “alien” impression is normal. A unicorn in New York City is alien, but the same unicorn at a faerie festival seems perfectly mundane.

### **Animal (2 pt. Social Flaw)**

In a human-centric world, you aren’t human. I mean, it’s cool and everything that you’re a fox or a bear or a cat or a raven, but the majority of your surroundings aren’t made for you, folks call Animal Control when you walk around without a leash, bystanders keep trying to pet you, bus drivers refuse to let you on the bus, fleas burrow into your fur, adults speak to you in baby talk, etc.

Obviously, this Flaw doesn’t count if you can change into a human form. For Flaws dealing with an inability to manipulate human tools and so forth, see No Hands and Ungainly Fingers. If being an animal isn’t a hinderance in your chronicle, then this Flaw does not apply at all.

### **Beta (1 pt. Social Flaw)**

You are born to follow, not to lead. Although capable in your own right, you’re the reliable support staff to your group’s real leaders. Alpha dominance is not your style; instead, you keep the rest of your “pack” in line while following the alpha’s lead in all ways. Challenging authority seems alien to you, and where other companions of yours might seek status and ambition, your interests lay in doing what’s (at least apparently) best for your group as a whole. That’s your role and your duty, and you’re damned proud of both. The common perception of a “beta” as inferior and subservient misses the point: An alpha might get the glory, but the betas keep the pack alive.

### **Broken (5 pt. Mental Flaw)**

Your will to resist has been trashed. Your master broke you to her service, and her wish is your command. Maybe she’s the mad scientist who created you, the psi-ops Technocrat who destroyed your will, the necromancer who crafted you from the bodies of the dead, or the wizard who bound you with ancient pacts and potent spells. The abuse she used to break you may have been subtle: emotional manipulation, pervasive gaslighting, social isolation, and the like. Then again, she might tyrannize you with raw brutality, terrorize you with fears of damnation and destruction, compel obedience through blackmail, torment you with magick and crime... Hell, she might use every trick in the book to keep you in line. It works, too. What master says, you do. It’s far too late to resist.

A seriously nasty Flaw, this Trait reflects the ugly side of paranormal lore. Your character was, and remains, abused into servitude, and whatever your Willpower Trait might be with regards to other tasks, it’s only 1 when it comes to standing up to your dominator. Circumstances can change this situation, of course, but the recovery from such staggering abuse should involve powerful roleplaying and long-term consequences for every character involved.

For many obvious reasons, this Flaw is trigger city for people who’ve been abused in real life and should be employed *only* with the full consent of *all* members of your gaming group. That consent can be withdrawn at any time, by any member of the group, and the abusive side of this relationship — if it gets played out in the game at all — remains subject to the *safewords* and *blackout rule* detailed in the “Triggers, Limits, and Boundaries” sidebar in **Mage 20** (p. 345). *The choice to assume or retain this Flaw belongs only to the player who chooses it.* If that player decides to abandon the Flaw (and the relationship), the Storyteller should make allowances for that. The player will have to pay the points off, of course, but although your character may be broken, you always have the choice to change the game.

### **Limbless (5 pt. Physical Flaw)**

You possess no arms, legs, or other usable limbs other than perhaps a prehensile tail. You’re a serpent, you’re a blob, you’re a worm or snail or something else like that. In order to manipulate your surroundings in a human world, you must use Telekinesis or a related power that can maneuver those things for you. This Flaw doesn’t mean you’re slow or clumsy; it *does* mean, though, that you can’t employ most human tools, climb ladders, or grab things with anything other than your mouth or tail.

A character with this Flaw cannot also take No Dexterous Limbs.

### **No Dexterous Limbs (4 pt. Physical Flaw)**

Though you’ve got paws, jaws, or other ways of grasping and manipulating many objects, you lack the complex prehensile fingers that allow you full access to the human world. Sure, you could pick up a laptop in your mouth or push a door open with your paws; you won’t be using that laptop’s keyboard very well, though, and you’re helpless before a locked doorknob. Horses, dogs, eagles, and the like are extremely smart and clever beasts, but even when their intellect and perspective approach human levels of cognition, such critters won’t get much use out of, say, a smartphone.

Animals with precise prehensile digits (like monkey fingers) or limbs (like tentacles) should take the Ungainly Fingers Flaw instead of this one.

### **Omega (4 pt. Social Flaw)**

Like a beta, you occupy a low place in your social hierarchy. But while the beta still retains a position of honor, you



don't. Instead, you occupy the bottom layer of your group's social structure. You get whatever they choose to give you and take whatever they dish out. Verbal and perhaps physical abuse are your daily lot, and although the group will generally protect you from outside forces, no one will protect you from your group.

Although this Flaw generally raises the difficulty of your Social rolls by +2 when you deal with parties outside your group, and by +4 within that group, certain Social rolls (for Intimidation and perhaps Seduction) might remain unaffected if you're a dangerous sort of beast. After all, an omega wolf is still a wolf, and the beast who cowers from his packmates could still rip out a human's throat.

### **Power Source (1-5 pt. Physical Flaw)**

You require energy in order to function. Your makers thoughtfully provided a power source for you, but it tends to run out and must be periodically replaced if you're to stay in good working order.

A common Flaw for robots and cyborgs, this Flaw's value depends upon the frequency with which your power source must be renewed.

- (1 point) You need a new power source or recharge every 30 days.

- (2 points) Every 15 days.

- (3 points) Every seven days.

- (4 points) Every three days.

- (5 points) Every day.

For each day you go without a renewed power source, you lose one die from all of your dice pools until a new power source gets installed. The penalty applies to all dice pools equally – not different rates for different pools. When your highest dice pool runs out, you go inactive until you've received a new power source. Although that new power source starts you right back up again, an especially long period of inactivity might (Storyteller's option) damage your systems to the point where you function at half of your normal dice pools until an appropriately skilled technician can repair you.

Characters with Technocratic power sources can be recharged easily so long as there's a supply of the correctly standardized power sources available. Characters with unusual, ancient, experimental, or unique power sources would be much harder to resupply, especially if only a limited number of such power sources exist.

Although it's generally intended for mechanical characters, the power source in question might also be mystical

(specially cut jade crystals bathed in sunlight), metaphysical (an hour of meditation with a properly trained monk), or else otherwise paranormal or immaterial (the light of the full moon, a gallon of bats' blood, rocks collected at the Burning Man festival, etc.).

### Thaumivore (5 pt. Supernatural Flaw)

To survive in the material world, you must consume that lifeblood energy of Creation that mages call *Quintessence*. Without it, you suffer debilitating hunger, weaken steadily, and eventually perish and fade into nothingness.

Ideally, you consume solidified Quintessence in the form of Tass. Your patron mage can feed you raw-energy Quintessence, but it's not terribly satisfying. Although a steady diet of it won't harm you, it will leave you grouchy enough to reconsider the terms of your relationship. Ideally, you'll be given a regular diet of metaphysically energized substances — magic toadstools, enchanted amulets, batteries charged with raw lightning pulled from the heavens, that sort of thing. The nature of your food, of course, must suit your innate nature; trying to feed a unicorn with Technocratic fuel cells will go about as poorly as trying to recharge a HIT Mark with goblin fruit. (In game terms, no — that won't work.)

System-wise, your character must devour at least one point of Tass or Quintessence per day. Each day he goes without that nourishment, he loses one health level, and suffers a one-die penalty to all his dice pools. This damage cannot be soaked, of course, and if your character passes Incapacitated, he dies, and his body rapidly decays until nothing's left at all. (See "Unbelief," below.) Once he begins to feed again, all previous damage heals. His mood, however, might take quite a while to abate...

This Flaw can (and probably should) be taken in connection with the Flaw: Unbelief.

### Unbelief (3, 5, or 8 pt. Supernatural Flaw)

Once upon a time, your kind may have freely wandered the mortal realm. The centuries, however, have not been kind to your sort, and now the weight of human disbelief has turned you into a walking paradox... or literally speaking, a *Paradox*. On the other hand, you might be a hypertechnology entity whose existence offends the natural world. Regardless of the details, you fit in only within certain surroundings, and violate reality in most others. Unless you remain hidden in a region where culture, solitude, or both protect you, the weight of disbelief soon crushes you out of existence.

Thanks to this Flaw, you must remain within a Reality Zone (see **Page 20**, pp. 611-617) that's appropriate to your essential nature. A pair of shisa hanging out in the Ryukyu Islands are literally part of the landscape so long as they don't bite the tourists; a devilish imp in a wizard's workshop is pretty much *de rigueur* for such a place; a white hart dashing through

the English mists belongs to that land as surely as any human resident. Transplant such creatures to other settings, though, and the weight of the modern Consensus soon proves fatal... not for the hart, perhaps, but surely for any less-natural thing.

In game terms, this Flaw reflects the character's affront to Consensus Reality outside of a specific sort of Reality Zone. That character remains healthy inside an appropriate Zone but suffers damage once she leaves the Zone and wanders around a world that's not ready to deal with her existence.

That damage assumes two levels of severity: *painful*, in which the creature's essential nature clashes with the area she's in; and *fatal*, in which the creature's nature is so deeply opposed to that area that her body begins to break down under the force of Unbelief.

- **Painful:** One health level of bashing damage per turn, which becomes lethal damage once the character's health levels run out (As per **Page 20**, p. 406).
- **Fatal:** One health level of aggravated damage per turn.

This damage cannot be soaked, as its cause is metaphysical, not physical.

The value of this Flaw depends upon how remote the safe Zone is from the rest of the world, and how "allergic" the character is to places outside her home territory.

As shown in the "Reality Zones" section of **Page 20**, the three categories of Zones are: *Technocratic Reality*, *Localized Reality*, and *Primal Reality*. Any character with this Flaw is at least uncomfortable (that is, vulgar) in relation to the Earthly Foundations of material reality.

- (3 points) The character is comfortable in most types of Zones, suffers painful damage in an opposed category of Zones (say, Technocratic Reality vs. Primal Reality), and gets fatally damaged by specific Zones that are diametrically opposed to the character's nature (a robot in a Mystic Region, for example, or a forest-spirit in a Technological Installation).
- (5 points) The character is comfortable only within a specific category of Zone, suffers pain in most others, and gets fatally damaged by an opposed category of Zones.
- (8 points) The character is comfortable only in a specific type of Zone (like a Node, a Rural Area, or a Technological Installation), suffers pain in most places in that category of Zones, and gets fatally damaged in any other category of Zones.

When creating the character, decide which type of Reality Zone is most suitable for this creature, which types make her uncomfortable, and which types conflict with her innate nature. A Cyber-Tooth Tiger with 8 points in this Flaw, for example, will be perfectly at home in a Technocratic Construct

(a specific type of Zone), feels uncomfortable in the middle of a mundane city (even though it's still part of Technocratic Reality), and quickly perishes in a Primal Zone where such hypertechnology is anathema.

(If you want to reflect vast differences in culture, you could say that different sorts of regions have their own specific forms of belief beyond the Reality Zone categories. A Japanese oni could be perfectly at home in a Tokyo apartment building, for instance, but suffer fatal damage if he ventures into the Amazon rainforest. This complication, however, is an *optional rule*, and could become too difficult to apply to your chronicle.)

If taken by a character with the Thaumivore Flaw, the fatal damage becomes bashing damage, and the painful damage disappears entirely, so long as the character eats at least one point of suitable Tass or Quintessence per day. If he is not fed regularly, though, or if that food supply abruptly ends (as it might if the mage and her familiar get cut off from each other), then the damage kicks in immediately if the creature's stuck in a "fatal" category Zone. For what ought to be obvious reasons, that Tass or Quintessence must suit the creature in question; an android grazing on magic mushrooms is courting immediate shutdown mode.

A character who dies of Unbelief begins to decay almost instantly. Like a cinematic vampire in the sun, the corpse crumbles to dust, bursts into flame, fades away, dissolves into a puddle of goo, collapses into a heap of bones, or performs some other suitable act of rapid disintegration. Within a minute or two, nothing but unidentifiable debris remains where that creature died. Certain spells (usually ones dealing with the Life, Matter, Prime, or Time Spheres) or hedge-magic mystic rites might preserve bits of the dead critter; the Technocracy, of course, has hypertechnology Procedures that preserve the remains for later research. As far as the average human bystander goes, though, a creature who perishes from Unbelief becomes just another mystery to be argued about in seminars, labs, and — of course — the internet.

This Flaw does not apply to all to the fluid reality of the Umbrae. It may, however, apply to Umbral Realms, the Old Roads, and so forth if the vision of reality in such a place is diametrically opposed to the character's nature — an android in Midrealm, for example, or a tree-spirit in a Technocratic space station.

For guidelines regarding the suitability or conflict between a creature and a Zone, see the **Mage 20** sections for "Magick in the Otherworlds" (pp. 483-485), and the "Technocratic Reality," "Localized Reality," and "Primal Reality" entries under "Reality Zones" (pp. 613-615).

### Ungainly Fingers (2 pt. Physical Flaw)

Although you can manipulate most human devices with your fingers, claws, or tentacles, you lack the physical shape, leverage, or reflexes to manipulate such things *well*. Add +2

to your difficulty when you're trying to employ a sophisticated object, fragile item, precision device, and so forth. This penalty does not reflect your overall lack of dexterity; you could, in fact, be far more agile than those clumsy human beings. The human world, though, is built and shaped for *people*, however, and because you're *not* a person, you have a harder time working with stuff designed specifically for their hands and limbs.

### Weak Spot (3 pt. Physical Flaw)

Thanks to an injury, a curse, or some other handicap, you've got a vulnerable spot. Attacks that strike that area inflict extra damage and might also incapacitate you. This infirmity could be a gap in your armor, a badly healed limb, weakened bones, a shut-off switch, or a joint that tends to dislocate. Whatever it may be, this weak spot allows an attacker to penetrate your usual defenses and take you down hard.

A successful strike on your weak spot inflicts two unsoakable health levels of aggravated damage; if that damage would have been aggravated to begin with, it inflicts two more health levels' worth of damage than it would have if the attack had hit you elsewhere.

Weak spots like this tend to be hard to spot and harder to exploit. To realize it exists, your opponent must first successfully roll her Perception or Intelligence (whichever is higher) + an Ability that might help her recognize your weak spot for what it is. A physical weak spot might involve Medicine; a mechanical one, Technology or Hypertechnology; a metaphysical one, Lore, Occult, or a suitable Esoterica discipline. The roll's difficulty is 8, but it might go higher under especially difficult conditions (darkness, heavy rain, obscuring smoke, and so forth).

*Spotting* the weak spot is easier than *hitting* the weak spot. A targeted shot at your vital area adds +4 to the attacker's difficulty when she's trying to strike it.

As an *optional rule*, the Storyteller might declare that a random, untargeted attack that scores six successes or more when trying to hit you automatically inflicts the damage associated with your weak spot.

If you define your weak spot as a flimsy joint, automatic shut-down system, or other liability, the Storyteller may replace the aggravated damage with an appropriate condition: Your leg dislocates, your systems deactivate, your cybernetic limb stops working, etc. However it is defined, this condition lasts until you manage to get it fixed, turned back on by a third party, and so forth.

Regardless of its definition, location, and effects, Weak Spot can be a devastating Flaw. It's also traditional, though — almost every epic monster has one. Mad inventors tend to install such failsafes in case their creations get out of hand, too, and most Technocratic constructs have a suitable weakness that a properly trained operative can activate. These intentional design flaws, however, are changed out regularly,

with their schematics provided only on a need-to-know basis to managers and agents with the proper security clearances. After all, the Union doesn't want random Deviants taking advantage of backup safety systems designed for the use of Union personnel! Agents tasked with taking down a rogue construct, however, will probably get briefed about the nature and location of that construct's shut-down feature.

## Special Advantages

Wings. Claws. Regeneration. Such powers belong to certain non-human creatures, and although mages can duplicate them with various magicks, those birthrights — called *Special Advantages* (or simply *Advantages*) — are not normally found among human beings. Even so, the consors, Bygones, familiars, and other allies and rivals of Awakened humans often possess such Advantages. Demon-bound characters may acquire Advantages through their infernal pacts, and paranormal critters can inherit such powers as part of their innate selves, acquire them through mystic or scientific methods, have them “built-in” as part of their creators' design, or otherwise obtain abilities that range beyond the abilities we accept as part of essentially human character creation.

Like Merits, Advantages get purchased with freebie points. In the case of infernal pacts, those points come at the expense of literally hellish deals made with Otherworldly powers (as detailed in **The Book of the Fallen**). For most characters, however, the Advantages are part of a being's natural abilities. Birds have Wings, wolves have Claws and Fangs, familiars have the Feast of Nettles, and so forth.

Special Advantages do not invoke Paradox. That said, creatures with obviously “unnatural” Advantages usually have the Thaumivore or Unbelief Flaws, or both. As usual, the local Consensus determines what is “unnatural.” A hypertechno robot in Los Angeles fits into the landscape a whole lot better than a flying snake-god does.

## Special Advantages or Charms?

Mage fans familiar with the sourcebook **Forged by Dragon's Fire** may recognize a few of the following Special Advantages as the Charms described in the chapter “Companions on the Path: Familiars.” Certain Charms from that chapter have been retained in the Spirit Charms section starting on p. XX, while others are now considered Special Advantages.

Why? Because several of those Charms had already been given as Special Advantages in previous books, and because the ability to purchase Charms as character Traits was not presented in any previous **Mage** or **Werewolf** rulebook, **Forged by Dragon's Fire** muddled some waters regarding the Traits and Charms in question. In order to simplify the situation, we have differentiated between Special Advantages and Charms in this book. Although certain characters can still purchase Charms and Special Advantages, duplicated Traits have been consolidated into one or the other.

## Alacrity (2–6 pts.)

*Damn, you're fast!* Capable of bursts of inhuman speed, you can strike before most people can think. Each two points spent in this Advantage, up to the maximum six points, allows you to spend a Willpower point and take one extra action within a single turn. That six-point Advantage, for instance, would let you act four times in a single turn for the cost of one Willpower point. Subsequent Willpower points spent that turn do not add up, however; six points let you act four times in one turn no matter how many Willpower points you spent that turn. This bonus lasts only one turn per point of Willpower spent that turn; if you need to burn Willpower in order to move like the wind, however, you can do so for as long as your Willpower lasts.

## Armor (variable)

Thanks to thick hide, armored plates, warty skin or some other form of innate protection, your character gains extra soak dice, and can soak lethal damage as well. For double the usual cost—that is, two freebie points per point of protection—she can soak aggravated damage, too. This armor isn't invisible, though; in most cases, it's pretty obvious, and for every three points in protection, the character loses one point of Appearance. (This penalty does not apply to animals or beasts with natural armor — turtles, alligators, dragons, and so forth.) As an optional rule, the Storyteller might decide that an aimed blow (typically +3 difficulty, although the specific penalty depends upon the nature of the armor) can bypass that protection.

The normal cost for Armor can be found on the chart; armor that soaks aggravated damage costs double these amounts.

## Armor

### Points

1 pt.

2 pts.

3 pts.

4 pts.

5 pts.

### Armor

One soak die (thick fur or hide)

Two soak dice (scales, ridges)

Three soak dice (chitin, shell)

Four soak dice (bone plating, dragon hide)

Five soak dice (metal plates, thick hide plus layers of fat and muscle)

## **Aura (3 pt. Advantage, or 3 pt. Supernatural Flaw)**

Uncanny radiance surrounds you. Perhaps you shimmer with holiness, reek of death, smolder with the essence of the Pit, or otherwise reveal an affinity for a given element through your very presence. The specifics depend upon the sort of creature you are and the essential nature of your true self: An infernal entity projects an unholy aura (scent of brimstone, unnerving chorus of damned-soul voices, and so forth), an elemental conjures phenomena related to its home element (breeze, flickering flames, dampness, blooming plants, that sort of thing), an embodiment of technological principles radiates cold perfection... you get the idea.

As an Advantage, this Aura ripples the localized environment surrounding the entity in question. It doesn't inflict damage upon the area or on characters within that area, but it can be rather unnerving to folks who have reason to fear such entities. People and entities opposed to the nature of this creature (like demons in the presence of an angel, or vice versa) feel compelled to flee unless they spend a Willpower point to remain in the aura-bearer's vicinity; if they stay, such creatures suffer a +3 addition to the difficulty of all rolls they make against the character who radiates the Aura. More neutral characters, meanwhile, can't help but notice the pervasive effects of this entity: withering or flourishing plant-life, shining light or glowering darkness, faint music, metallic clanging, or a buzz of flies, and other similarly environmental effects. While those effects won't influence system modifiers, they speak volumes — for good and ill — about the nature of the entity in question. The character can spend a point of Willpower to suppress the Advantage for one scene, at which point, a witness needs to make a successful Awareness roll, difficulty 7, to discern the character's true nature. Otherwise, the Aura manifests as a matter of course, without any form of "activation" required or any duration set on the length of its effects.

As a Flaw, this Trait cannot be suppressed. The Aura betrays the character's nature whether he wants it to be obvious or not.

## **Aww! (1-4 pts.)**

Cuteness excuses a multitude of sins. In your case, you're so adorable that people tend to give you more slack than your activities deserve. Every point in this Advantage adds one die to the Social rolls you make based upon endearing yourself to someone through your sheer cuteness.

This power works in any form, but it grants only half of the usual bonus (rounded up) when you're in a human guise.

## **Bare Necessities (1 or 3 pts.)**

Physical shape-changing typically deals only with the body itself. A radical shapeshift — say, from woman to wolf — usually forces the character in question to spend a turn or

more either stripping down before changing, or else wiggling out of the discarded clothing and possessions afterward. (See "Shapeshifting and Consecrating Possessions" in *How Do You DO That?*, pp. 20-21.) With this Advantage, however, you can shape-change with your clothing and small possessions intact, and then carry them over with you when you return to your natural form.

For one point, you can retain your clothing and small items that are worn close to your skin (wallets, watches, knives strapped to your leg, etc.). For three points, you can meld small carried items as well: backpacks, swords, a walking stick, and so forth. The carried items must be small and light enough to be held in one hand; a pistol could be transformed and carried this way, but an AR-15 could not. The transformed items essentially disappear when your character shapeshifts, and they cannot be used or taken away if they were being worn or held at the time of transformation. When you change back to your natural form, however, the items are wherever they were when you shifted shape.

Unless it involves some technological method (like small compartments that open within a robot and stow the items inside that robot's body), this Advantage is essentially magic. The Storyteller might rule that sophisticated technologies (computers, firearms, cell phones, etc.) transformed by magic might malfunction when the character changes back to her natural form. Although this malfunction check would involve a successful roll of Stamina + Technology, difficulty 7, for non-mages (and a Willpower + Avatar roll with that same difficulty if the Storyteller allows Awakened mage characters to take this Advantage), a character whose paradigm is based on hyperscience instead of natural magic can simply define the Advantage with anime-like technologies.

## **Bioluminescence (1 to 3 pts.)**

Fireflies. Anglerfish. Certain forms of mold. And you. Like those luminescent beings, your body — or parts of it — can glow, and you can turn this self-contained light on and off at will.

For a single point, that glow is roughly as bright as an average cell phone, and it cannot be focused or directed. For two points, it's either brighter (like a halogen flashlight) or directable, and for three points it can be both. The light in question could come from natural luminescent organs, cybernetic implants, biotech body modifications, magical powers, mutant abilities, or what have you.

Generally, this light allows you to illuminate a small area, as if you're holding a hand-held light source. Directable luminescence, however, could be used to blind a character for a turn or so with a successful Dexterity + Perception roll. The difficulty for the latter application depends on the target's sensitivity to light, the contrast between light and darkness, potentially protective gear, cover, distance, and so forth, and ranges from 4 (a point-blank flash in some surprised person's eyes) to 10 (trying to blind a protected and hostile opponent).

Beyond 15 feet or so, however, this Advantage illuminates an area but isn't strong enough to blind someone at range.

### Blending (1 pt.)

This creature has the ability to alter their appearance to match the dominant attributes of their surroundings, much like a chameleon. Creatures with this power can either slowly acclimate to their surroundings, requiring at least a scene, or they may quickly acclimate through a successful Wits + Survival roll, difficulty 8. Creatures with either Quintessence or Gnosis may spend a point to immediately blend into their environment. Successfully Blending causes a +2 difficulty to perceive the creature with any natural sense.

### Bond-Sharing (4 to 6 pts.)

Certain legendary creatures — most notably witch-familiars and heart-bonded companions — can share perceptions, thoughts, and even certain abilities with their close friends. This Advantage allows you to exchange such communions; a horse may “move as one” with his rider, a dolphin might share water-breathing with his land-born lover, a bear could confer healing powers upon his totem-sister, and so forth. Such mystic bonds may be shared only between close companions. If one “partner” gets harmed or killed, the other partner suffers awful pain.

Game-wise, this Advantage creates a “bridge” between partners, allowing them to share a certain ability or range of abilities. For four points, your companion can use one of your senses; or withstand one environment (intense cold, underwater, fire, etc.) that's native to your character. For five points, she can go anywhere you can go (including, in an Avatar Storm chronicle, through the Gauntlet without harm); or — by sharing your senses — feel anything you can feel. And for six points, she can do both at the same time. This “bridge” stretches roughly half a mile but works best when both characters remain in close proximity. At the Storyteller's discretion, a Stamina roll might be necessary to form a “link” across distances of 300 feet (or 100 meters) or more.

Such bonds require intense connection and trust. Each partner imparts a bit of their essence with the other one. If one partner suffers, the other partner feels pain even if they're not bond-sharing at the time. The death of one partner inflicts agony upon the other — a few levels of bashing damage, if nothing else, possibly an incapacitating psychic shock if the partners were especially intimate. Sharing also involves an act of will; both partners must make a conscious decision to “connect” each time they share abilities or perceptions. Such bonding sends a powerful surge of energy between both partners — a communion that the partners may share simply for enjoyment's sake. Incidentally, neither partner needs to be human; though it's odd to see such levels of connection between, say, a dog and a gryphon, stranger things have happened.

## Method to Madness

Mental illness is no joke. Although magic is often associated with madness, it's worth remembering that someone in your gaming group might have personal experience with mental illness and the people who suffer from it. The ability to violate a person's sanity is a terrifying power, and so the Storyteller may wish to check in with players before unleashing this Advantage carelessly within the chronicle.

### Cause Insanity (2 pts. per die)

Consciousness is fragile. With this Advantage, a creature can rattle the cage of sanity and provoke temporary fits of madness. Generally possessed by entities of cosmic horror or stunning beauty, this power provokes hallucinations, derails trains of thought, and forces the target to doubt her grasp on reality. Especially among mages, this ability can have fearsome consequences.

A target of this Advantage must be within visual sight of the creature who inflicts the madness. The player with this Trait spends one point of Willpower, and rolls one die for every two points spent on this Advantage. The target's Willpower Trait provides the difficulty for that roll. A single success forces the targeted character to assume a Derangement (**Mage 20**, pp. 649-650) for one day per success rolled. If that target is a mage, three successes or more also force that mage to make a Willpower roll (difficulty is that mage's current Paradox + 2), or else suffer one level of Quiet, too. (See **Mage 20**, pp. 555-556, for details.)

### Claws, Fangs, or Horns (3, 5, or 7 pts.)

Unlike frail, soft humans, you possess natural weaponry: slashing talons, gnashing fangs, goring horns, or perhaps a combination of all three. These hardy attacks inflict lethal, sometimes even aggravated, damage in addition to your natural strength and mass. They can't be removed without ripping or cutting off body parts, and so you're never really without the ability to hurt someone.

The number and nature of these natural weapons depends upon the points spent upon this Advantage: Three points get you one form of attack, five points buys you two of them, and seven points obtain all three forms. Each type of attack allows you to use certain combat maneuvers, as shown below. (See the **Mage 20** entries for “Bite” and “Claw,” p. 420.) For the normal cost, these attacks deal out lethal damage; for double the usual cost, that damage becomes aggravated. With certain types of characters (cats, demons, etc.), the claws or fangs might be retractable — a minor benefit that does not cost additional points. Other kinds of beasts might have “horns” on the back or tail, claws on wings, rending “teeth” embedded into tentacles, and so forth. In all cases, the cost of these

attacks comes from the type of attack (claws, fangs, or horns), not from the number of attacks a given character can use.

| Maneuver | Difficulty | Damage                                                       |
|----------|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Bite     | 5          | Strength +1                                                  |
| Claw     | 6          | Strength +2                                                  |
| Gore     | 7          | Strength +2 (Strength +4 after a charge of 10 yards or more) |

Human characters *can* possess these sorts of attacks, of course; cybernetics, mutations, prosthetics, surgically implanted weaponry, Life-Sphere Enhancements, and other forms of physical alteration may bestow the gifts that Mother Nature has so carelessly forgotten to give her human children.

### Deadly Demise (2, 4, or 6 pts.)

Certain enemies take you with them when they go. Often associated with zombies, robots, poisonous fungus-folk, and other beings with innate capacities for self-destruction, this Advantage inflicts damage on everyone nearby when the character goes to meet its maker. If that character drops below the Incapacitated health level, thanks to attacks which inflict lethal or aggravated damage, then the character screams, explodes, or performs some other final strike against its enemies on the following turn, dealing out damage as per the chart below.

The blast radius for this final strike is roughly 30 feet (nine meters). If the character is some sort of vehicle, or is otherwise carrying other characters in its body, arms, or what have you, then those other characters meet a messy demise unless they manage to escape before the blast. Run!

| Value    | Damage                                                   |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| 2 points | 4 dice of lethal damage                                  |
| 4 points | 6 dice of lethal damage                                  |
| 6 points | 8 dice of lethal damage (or 6 dice of aggravated damage) |

### Dominance (1 pt.)

You have a naturally commanding demeanor, or an elevated place in the social hierarchy of your people or species. Therefore, you gain three additional dice to any Social interaction within the appropriate groups, and also reduce the difficulties for your Intimidation or Leadership rolls by -2.

### Earthbond (2 pts.)

A bond with your surroundings helps you perceive trouble and respond to possible threats. Rules-wise, this Advantage reduces the difficulty of your perception rolls by -2 if you're trying to spot potential trouble. Maybe your keen senses help you hear, smell, feel, or otherwise perceive trespassers; perhaps you've got passive sonar or high-tech scanning devices. Maybe the wind speaks to you. Whatever the reason, you're seldom surprised by anything that's not teleported to your location,

stepping in from the Umbra, or otherwise using unusual methods to surprise you.

### Elemental Touch (3, 5, 7, 10, or 15 pts.)

Wherever you go, an element responds to your presence. Perhaps breeze rises when you flick your hair; maybe you call down lightning with your rage. Whatever the source of this bond might be, you are one with an element, and it responds to your commands. Game-wise, this Advantage grants a limited amount of control over a single element that's associated with your character. Because this bond works through mystical associations, that element must be natural and "pure": fire, earth, wood, air, a given metal, and so forth. That said, modern "para-elementals" can supposedly manipulate plastics, glass, alloys, and other products of elemental technology. The element and bond, therefore, depends upon the concept of your character and its connection to his world. The degree of control you can exert upon the element in question depends on the amount of points invested into the Advantage, as shown on the chart below. Once that element responds, however, you don't maintain much control over what it does afterward. Calling up an inferno to cook your hot dogs, then, might be a very bad idea!

| Cost | Feat                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3    | Sense the presence of a large quantity of your chosen element within a half-mile or so. Requires a successful Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 6-9, depending on the amount of the element and the obstacles between it and you).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 5    | Sense your associated element; or affect a nearby quantity of it in small yet possibly significant ways (calling up a breeze, making flames flicker or settle, rippling the surface of water, etc.). Roll as above.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 7    | Alter a small local quantity of your element in minor ways (warping a tree branch, causing a fire to flare or gutter, raising waves on water, and the like). This control demands one point of Willpower and a successful Manipulation + Awareness roll; this roll's base difficulty starts at 6 but rises higher if you're trying to alter a large or stubborn amount of that element (cracking frozen earth, soothing a fierce fire, etc.).                                                            |
| 10   | You may conjure a small amount (roughly one foot square, five pounds or gallons, a strong gust, etc.) of your element into existence; or affect the behavior of that element to a greater degree than before (calming a bonfire, shaking the earth around you, and so on). Both applications must be within a few feet of where you stand, and you must touch the affected area in order to conjure the element from nothing. Both applications demand a roll as above, and cost one point of Willpower. |

For a cost of two Willpower points, with a successful roll as above, you can rouse or alter large amounts of your element (stirring or calming a wildfire, inciting a minor earthquake, twisting a tree into a new shape, etc.). This degree of power can inflict significant damage on your surroundings (broken walls, flaming forests, and the like), and once set in motion, that damage cannot be stopped on your end, though you can try and fix the results afterward with further applications of your elemental powers.

### Empathic Bond (2 pts.)

What others feel, you can feel, too. A lesser version of Bond-Sharing, this Advantage helps you reach into the emotional state of another person (not necessarily a *human* person) and sense or influence those emotions as if you possess the Mind 1 Effect **Sense Thoughts & Emotions**. (Mage 20, p. 519.) Because this bond can be a two-way street, you've also acquired enough discipline to shield your feelings and surface thoughts, as described in the same Mind 1 entry. Even with such shielding, though, you feel things rather intensely, and probably keep to yourself a lot, if only to protect yourself from the barrage of other people's passions. A character with this Advantage almost certainly has the Empathy Talent, too, and the combination of both "gifts" can feel extremely vulnerable to the character that possesses both.

Unlike Bond-Sharing's intimate connection, this empathic talent can touch anyone with whom you want to share it. A surge of fellow-feeling can influence the mood of that other party, too, if you spend a point of Willpower to do so. Empathy can be a tricky gift to have, though, and it shades into some ethically dubious territory if you use it without your target's prior agreement. As detailed in the **How Do You DO That?** entry "Questions of Consent" (pp. 119-120), messing with someone else's feelings may be "traditional" in terms of fiction and folklore, but that doesn't necessarily make it okay.

### Extra Heads (2 pts. per head)

For better and worse, this Advantage grants you a friend that never leaves your side... or your shoulder, for that matter.

Game-wise, this Trait provides one additional head for every two points spent on the Advantage. This benefit also provides two extra dice (per head) for Perception-based rolls; increases the difficulty for mind-control attacks against you by +2 per head (difficulty 10, maximum); and allows each head to make a bite attack (at the usual dice pools) if your target is within reach. The downside, of course, is that each head also has its own personality, and those personalities might not always get along.

### Extra Limbs (2 pts. per limb)

Like an octopus or a Hindu deity, you possess more prehensile limbs than an average human or another beast

of your kind... like, say, a 10-legged octopus or two-trunked elephant. In game terms, each extra limb adds one die to your dice pools if you're using several limbs to perform multiple actions (as detailed in **Mage 20**, pp. 388-389 and 391). Also, you use your *highest* dice pool, not your *lowest*, when performing those multiple actions.

If you could use your extra limbs to perform several related activities, or to attack several targets at once, then you may perform one action for every two limbs involved. An animated six-armed Krishna statue, for instance, could perform three attacks per turn. This benefit, however, applies only to activities where extra limbs would allow your character to do something that a character with a "standard" number of limbs could not do; that six-armed statue could attack three people and / or attack one person three times, but six legs would not make him run any faster than a person with two of them could run.

These prehensile limbs might also – depending upon what sorts of limbs they are – let your character do things which might otherwise be impossible without them. A monkey-tail, for example, might grab tree limbs and help you swing better than a four-limbed person could swing, while a prehensile tongue could grab objects within reach even if your hands and legs are bound. Such specific tasks depend upon the limb and character in question, and the Storyteller should handle those situations (so to speak) on a case-by-case basis.

### Ferocity (2 pts. per point of Rage)

You seethe with uncanny fury and may turn that fury to your benefit. In game terms, you gain a Trait called *Rage*, and may use it to perform extra actions, shrug off injuries, or tear through your enemies with primal ferocity.

For every two points in this Advantage, your character receives one point of Rage. By spending a point of that Rage, you may: add one automatic health level to a successful hand-to-hand non-magical attack (that is, a bite, a slash, and so on); perform one additional action without using your lowest dice pool (again, see **Mage 20**, pp. 388-388); ignore wound penalties for one turn; or penetrate two points of an opponent's armor with a single hand-to-hand attack.

Under normal circumstances, it takes at least one day of rest to recover spent points of Rage. Certain situations, however, can rouse that fury again and restore one point of Rage. These situations depend upon the nature of your character and her channel to such primordial wrath. A nature-guardian, for instance, might be infuriated by destructive trespassers in her domain, while an embodiment of vengeance regains a point of Rage if she sees a person commit some act that demands violent retribution.

The downside of this Advantage is obvious: On some level, you're always angry. Beyond an irritable temper and an unnerving edge to your personality, you also have the Trait: Berserker / Stress Atavism (**Mage 20**, p. 644) for free. Thus,

you're often one bad moment from a meltdown that could injure companions, enemies, and innocents alike.

### Flexibility (2 pts.)

You may be a snake, or other creature that is capable of bending, squishing, or twisting yourself around. This flexibility allows you to perform maneuvers that might otherwise be impossible, like twisting yourself into a pretzel, reaching through a window to unhook a lock, or squeezing through a space too small for someone to squeeze through otherwise.

This Advantage adds two dice to any Athletics roll where such Flexibility would benefit you (escaping ropes, grappling an opponent, and so forth). You may also tuck yourself into spaces that a creature of your size would not usually be able to squeeze into, and might (depending on the situation) be able to slither between bars, coil around branches, and so forth.

### Hazardous Breath (Variable)

With a gust of breath, a ripple of quills, or some other minor exertion, you can hurt and perhaps kill your prey at a distance. Epitomized by the deadly halitosis of dragonkind, this Advantage allows a character to fire off some nasty surprises. The attack itself isn't based upon the Trait — it can take whatever form you desire. Demon-bound servitors can spit flames, while woodland elementals could spray clouds of thorns or poison gas.

For every five points spent on this Advantage, you inflict one health level of lethal damage with your attack on a successful roll of Dexterity + Brawl (difficulty 7). For seven points per level, that damage can be caustic (acid, Greek fire, toxic gas), dealing out an additional level of damage per turn until it's washed off, scraped away, or otherwise neutralized. For double the cost (either 10 points for most attacks or 14 points for caustic ones), it can be aggravated. Any target that can soak the appropriate type of attack can try to soak your "breath weapon." You can employ this attack once per scene for every point of Stamina your character possesses. An attack that affects several targets at once (like a cone of flames or a toxic storm) hits one additional target for every success above the first — two targets at two successes, four targets at four successes, and so forth. The range of those attacks depends upon the nature of that assault; a "pinpointed" lightning strike generally reaches further than a localized cloud of gas. For details about toxins, electricity, fire, and other assaults, see "Environmental Hazards" in *Mage 20*, pp. 435-444.

### Healing Lick (3 or 6 pts.)

In legend and in fact, animals can lick wounds in order to soothe the pain. Certain beasts, however, can do more than that: Their licking actually heals cuts, burns, and so forth. With this Advantage, you can repair a certain amount of external damage — gashes, slashes, and the like, as opposed to venom or broken bones. For three points, you can heal one health level of bashing or lethal damage per turn of licking;

for six points, you can heal a level of aggravated damage the same way. In both cases, that healing also eases the pain of injuries, spreading a sense of calm along with the obvious relief from torn tissues and flowing blood.

### Homing Instinct (2 or 4 pts.)

You know where you're going even if you don't consciously think about it. An inner GPS (which, if you're a cyborg or robot, may be an *actual* GPS) guides you toward your destination. This Advantage won't cover the distance for you — you still need to do that part yourself. Despite confusing circumstances and tangled paths, however, you'll eventually make it home.

This Special Advantage directs you to the destination of your choice. As with the fast-travel ability in video games, this must be a destination you've bonded with before that trip — a place or person you can sense across the intervening time and space. For two points, you can home in on that location from anywhere in the mortal side of Earth; for four points, you can home in on it from anywhere.

When faced with obstacles and obstructions, you may need to make a Perception + Awareness roll in order to get your bearings toward your destination. The difficulty of that roll depends on the circumstances involved:

| Difficulty | Circumstances                                                            |
|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 6          | Normal circumstances.                                                    |
| 7          | Harsh weather or terrain.                                                |
| 8          | Major obstacles or an erased trail.                                      |
| 9          | Vast distances (500 miles or more) or paranormal obstructions or delays. |
| +1         | Each month of separation from that target.                               |

Your instinct allows you to keep track of a moving goal even if you're moving, too. If you lose the path, you'll need to concentrate on finding it again (possibly while using Meditation, Esoterica, Area Knowledge or some other Ability suited to your character). At some time soon, however, you'll be on your way again. Distance can slow you down, but your heart (or technology) knows its way home.

### Human Guise (2 or 4 pts.)

You have a human form you can wear when required. For the two-point version of this Advantage you present a few tells. These could be semi-visible gills, cat eyes, or hints of your reptile scales poking out from under that neat human skin you've thrown on. The two-point version of this Advantage comes with one dot in Appearance. Your tells can be covered up with makeup and or the right type of clothing, but it's fairly clear that you are not quite what you appear to be.

The four-point version of this Advantage gives you a completely normal human guise with no obvious tells. Powers and abilities that can uncover a being's true form are

the only way to discern that you are something other than a mild-mannered reporter (or whatever).

### **Human Speech (1 pt.)**

Simply put, you can speak in human languages even if “your kind” can’t normally do so. Whether through magic or physical mutation, you have the ability to form human words that most folks can understand. Granted, you still need to know the language in question – this Advantage gives you the talent to *speak*, not the knowledge to speak fluent Lakota, French, and Classical Greek.

### **Information Fount (5 pts.)**

You know the *weirdest* shit! Thanks to a strange connection to the Collective Unconscious (or maybe just a great mind for trivia), you manage to make deductions, observations and connections that puzzle other, lesser minds. The traditional talent of oracles and familiar spirits, this ability grants you insight into things you probably shouldn’t know but manage to wrap your head around anyway. Now, if only *other people* could just understand what the hell you’re talking about...

In game terms, this Advantage allows you to make astute (if not necessarily accurate) observations about things if you successfully roll Awareness + a related Ability. The Ability in question should be related to the situation you’re trying to understand: Martial Arts to note a detail about an opponent’s fighting style, Etiquette to recognize your host’s taste in silverware, Streetwise to spot a Hell’s Angel in disguise, and so forth. This information, however, comes across in poetic and often fractured observations; like the classic rock fanatic who declares out of nowhere that Chris Squire is famous for playing “a Rick with a pick,” your proclamations might not be understood or appreciated by anybody else.

From a roleplaying standpoint, this Advantage gives the player / Storyteller plenty of opportunities for fun, especially if other characters (and players) have no idea what the bloody hell your character is going on about. Game-wise, another player might need to roll Perception or Intelligence + Enigmas in order to make sense out of the tidbits offered up by the Information Fount. It’s more fun, of course, to just roleplay everything out. Oracles and familiars, after all, have rich traditions of saying things that wind up mangled in translation.

### **Intangibility (8 or 10 pts.)**

Like a certain madly grinning cat, you can fade from sight (8 pts.) and perhaps become totally incorporeal (10 pts.) as well. Certain ghostly creatures might use this Advantage to become corporeal instead, attaining physical substance from a normally intangible form. Unlike Stepping Sideways, this shift doesn’t bring the character into the Penumbra – it just changes his relationship with the physical world. The Cheshire Cat, for example, didn’t run off to join the werewolves; he just... disappeared.

An invisible character still exists in a physical form, and can be heard, smelled, tackled, and so forth if someone manages to spot him. Rank 1 magickal perceptions can sense the invisible character if the player makes a successful Perception + Alertness roll at difficulty 9. Other forms of paranormal senses (vampiric Auspex, for instance) can do the same thing with the same sort of roll.

While intangible, that character remains immune to most normal sorts of physical harm. Bullets, winds, fire and so forth pass right through him. Magickal spells, True Faith, and other sorts of paranormal attacks, however, affect him in the usual ways. A normal bullet or fire can’t touch that disappearing asshole, but an enchanted bullet or blast of hellflame is a different matter entirely. While in this invisible or intangible state, the character cannot attack anyone else, either, except through magick or other paranormal powers; even then, an attacking character immediately becomes visible again.

To shift from one state to another, the character’s player spends one point of Willpower. No roll is necessary, and the shift takes place on the following turn. During that transition, the character assumes a phantasmal half-visibility which is hard to see (Perception + Awareness, difficulty 8) if he hasn’t been spotted already, but which remains vulnerable to physical attacks until he becomes fully incorporeal. For two points of Willpower, the character can change states immediately. Either way, it takes another point of Willpower to return to the character’s normal state; if he runs out of Willpower before he can do so... well, tough luck, kittyhead. The character gets stuck that way until he recovers enough Willpower to shift to a different state. For reasons that should be obvious, this Advantage may be restricted to non-player characters. Your Storyteller has the final say regarding this uncanny talent and the creatures that might possess it.

### **Mesmerism (3 or 6 pts.)**

With a frightening glare or bewitching enticement, you can freeze prey (3 pts.) or draw it to you in a mild trance (6 pts.). Perhaps you’re a siren with fascinating secrets that you sing about to draw trespassers to their doom; or a ghost-dog whose predatory gaze locks her target in place while the hunter ends the chase. Specifics depend upon the creature in question, but only one method works for you. You could be a singer of charming songs, but if so then your gaze is merely pretty, not especially hypnotic.

System-wise, this Advantage requires the right sort of contact with your prey (a gaze, a song, a touch, and so forth) followed by a roll of Charisma + Intimidation. If your mesmerism depends on enticement, then Seduction could work in place of Intimidation. Either way, the difficulty is 6, and you need to collect at least one success for each point of your prey’s current (not permanent) Willpower. So long as your prey doesn’t object to your influence, this could employ an

extended roll; if he does resist you, though, then the roll would be extended and resisted instead – for details, see **Mage 20**, p. 389-390. A botch on your part negates the mesmerism... and because he's wise to you now, you cannot attempt to mesmerize this character again.

A successfully mesmerized character feels frozen or enchanted – even if he suffers violence – for at least three turns; after that, he can try to break free using a Willpower roll. The difficulty for that roll begins at 8, and then drops one level lower until the character escapes that predatory influence. By that time, of course, the hypnotic critter may already have begun to feast.

Because it is, by nature, a predatory power, this Advantage might stray over the boundaries of certain players. Either way, this influence is decidedly non-consensual, and a frightening thing for the prey on its receiving end.

### **Musical Influence (6 pts.)**

You are a veritable Pied Piper of Hamelin, capable of leading those around you into temptation... or wherever else you're looking to take them. This Advantage confers the power to motivate, suppress, heighten or demoralize the emotions of those who hear your music. You could be a wolf howling to terrify his prey, or a faun channeling the ecstatic powers of Pan. You call the tune, and your audience is inspired to dance to it as you will.

To use this power, the player rolls an appropriate Social Attribute + an appropriate Ability. The Traits involved depend on what form the music takes, and what the character hopes to inspire with it. A carnal tune might employ Charisma + Seduction, while beating the war-drums combines Manipulation + Leadership or Intimidation. You could use some unusual combinations, too; a song that blends Appearance with Torture could provide an unsettling soundtrack for delicious atrocities.

The difficulty of this roll is the target's Willpower. Additional successes let you influence larger groups of people. Although that influence lasts only so long as you keep playing (or singing, or whatever), its emotional effects can linger for quite a while afterwards. If your audience realizes you're playing them (so to speak), they can shrug off the effects of your charm. Music's funny, though; even when people have decided they don't care for a given song or singer, they often find themselves haunted by those feelings long after the music ends.

Unlike Mesmerism, this power confers influence but not command. Like Mesmerism, however, this power messes with people's minds and emotions. Keep that sort of impact in mind when using this Advantage in your game, and perhaps check out the entry about "Questions of Consent" in **How Do You DO That?** (pp. 119-120) before you utilize this Advantage with your fellow players.

### **Musk (3 pts.)**

Ugh. Dude, you *smell*! So *badly* do you smell, in fact, that other creatures feel nauseated when you blast your musk in their direction. This revolting aroma could be a natural stink, tear gas, the reek of fetid trash you call your home, "the funk of 40,000 years," or whatever other avenue for sensory repugnance strikes your fancy. Thankfully, you can turn this rank odor off when you want to. The stench when you chose to deploy it, though, is impressive.

System-wise, this Advantage deploys a rancid stench upon command. Characters affected by the smell add +2 to the difficulties of all of their rolls (Arete rolls included) until they manage to escape the area. Characters with senses keener than the average human's sense of smell (that is, most animals, werebeasts in general, vampires with enhanced senses, people with the Merit: *Acute Senses*, and so forth) add +4 to their difficulties instead. A Stamina roll may overcome this penalty (difficulty 7 for most people, difficulty 9 for those with a sharper sense of smell); even then, however, those people feel seriously ill.

Like a skunk, you can spray other characters with said stench. This requires a Dexterity + Athletics roll, difficulty 7 for targets within roughly 10 feet (or three meters), +1 difficulty for every 10 feet after that. Each success showers one target with musk; until they can wash it off, your stench follows them around, inflicting the usual penalties and making them extremely unpopular to be around. Characters without a sense of smell, of course, are not affected by this miasma, though it might produce a gross film of residue as well. Your smell lasts for a day or so before wearing off, and although its worst effects inflict penalties only within 10 feet or so of their point of origin, the pungent vapors make life unpleasant in a much larger area than that.

### **Mystic Shield (Variable)**

Certain critters are especially resistant to magic of all kinds. With this Advantage, you may be one of them. This resistance might come from innate anatomical properties, paranormal stability, an aura of protection cast by some force greater than human willworkers, Technocratic Primium, or simply a bone-deep power older and more potent than mortal whims. Perhaps you're just really damned lucky. For whatever reason, spells slide past you, bounce off of you, fade in effect, or simply disappear.

In game terms, you get one die of countermagic for every two points spent on this Advantage; when utilized against other forms of magic (vampiric Disciplines, Garou Gifts, changeling cantrips, and so forth), this Advantage adds +1, for each two points spent, to the difficulty when other characters use such powers against you. This Advantage, however, maxes out at five dice. (10 pts.)

This protection, though, is not effortless or constant. To use it, you must declare that your character is shielding

herself from the spell. Essentially, you're using a dodge maneuver (**Mage 20**, p. 411), in order to avoid the spell's effects. If caught unaware, asleep, or otherwise unable to avoid the enchantment, you're as vulnerable to magic as anybody else.

### Needleteeth (3 pts.)

Thanks to strong, sharp teeth and powerful jaws, you can bite through up to three levels of armor when chowing down on prey. This Advantage enhances biting attacks only, and leaves gaping, bloody wounds behind.

### Nightsight (3 pts.)

You can see where other folks remain blind. So long as a little bit of light remains, you can see normally. Even in total darkness, a roll of Perception + Alertness (difficulty 8) reveals vague outlines of your surroundings. Certain atmospheric conditions (smoke, mist, dust storms, and so forth) may screw with your perceptions, though, at the Storyteller's discretion.

Despite the name of this Advantage, your "sight" might involve echolocation, sensitive whiskers, tactile perceptions, and other keen senses. Such senses, however, might not function at a distance, and could be obstructed under certain circumstances: tangled undergrowth, conflicting vibrations, having your whiskers plucked, and other hindering situations.

### Omega Status (4 pts.)

There's power in being the one nobody pays attention to. Disregarded by all but the most astute observers, you slink through the shadows of your pack or warren, apparently inconsequential but, in truth, more watchful and conniving than anyone gives you credit for being. Oh, you're the lowest of the low as far as your fellow creatures are concerned. As certain humans learned long ago, however, slaves, outcasts and servants make the finest spies.

Unlike the Omega Flaw (p. xx), this Advantage does not penalize your Social rolls. Instead, it lowers the difficulty of certain rolls – Scrounging, Stealth, Streetwise, and Subterfuge – by -2 when you perform those tasks within the group that despises you. Obviously, this group must be a significant part of your life. There's no point in purchasing this Advantage if you're not hanging with the pack. In large social hierarchies, though (such as a Technocratic Construct, a large Tradition Chantry, a network of cultists, a Nephandic Labyrinth, and so forth), the ability to skulk around under everyone else's noses can be a useful talent for a character with quiet ambitions and vengeful plans.

### Paradox Nullification (2–6 pts.)

A metaphysical gift allows you to consume the energies of Paradox. Although this "feast of nettles" is far from pleasant, you may be willing to endure it on behalf a valued friend or ally... for a price, of course! Story-wise, these prickly clouds of energy resemble briars or fog lit by fireflies and strobed with strange lightning. The smell and taste of such energies

depends upon their Resonance but consuming them tends to be rather... *bracing* would be a nice way to put it. Oh, the things you do for these so-called "Awakened ones!"

Game-wise, a character with this Advantage can open his mouth and swallow certain amounts of Paradox. These amounts correspond to the ratings of the Familiar/Companion Background (**Mage 20**, p. 316), and reflect familiars with lesser or greater abilities. In order to devour Paradox energies, the familiar must be within arm's reach of his mage – a necessity that explains a lot about the closeness between mages and their familiars.

| Points | Amount of Paradox Devoured                               |
|--------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| 2      | One point of Paradox per month (one-dot Familiar).       |
| 3      | One point of Paradox every two weeks (two-dot Familiar). |
| 4      | One point of Paradox per week (three-dot Familiar).      |
| 5      | Two points of Paradox per week (four-dot Familiar).      |
| 6      | One point of Paradox per day (five-dot Familiar).        |

### Quills (2 or 4 pts.)

Like a porcupine or hedgehog, you possess sharp, spiny quills. Anyone unfortunate enough to rub you the wrong way, as the saying goes, winds up getting hurt. With a muscular flex or two, you might also be able to fire these quills into some poor opponent's face. And should you happen to grapple that opponent instead, your foe will be having a very bad day.

The two-point version of this Advantage bestows a collection of quills on the character's skin. A high-tech character might possess cybernetic needles or hidden spines instead. Once activated, those quills puncture skin, often lodging in the target until they can be (while inflicting additional damage) removed. A character who strikes or lands against that set of activated quills suffers an "attack" from the spines, rolling one die for each dot in his Strength and then taking the result as lethal damage. If he takes three health levels or more after trying to soak that damage, the quills lodge in his skin and must be removed; until they are, he cannot recover that damage because the quills keep ripping the wounds open, scraping muscles and organs, seeping infection into the wounds, and so on. Removing the quills demands at least one turn for each health level of damage taken. The process inflicts an additional, unsoakable health level of damage, although the character can recover once the quills have been removed.

If the spiny character assaults another person with her quills, the attack inflicts her Strength + 1 in lethal damage. The usual rules about lodged quills still apply. That attack demands a Dexterity + Brawl roll, difficulty 6, and counts as a hand-to-hand maneuver. If that maneuver is combined with a successful grapple attempt, martial arts, dirty fighting, or some

other refinement, then the quills add one automatic health level of damage on top of the usual damage for that attack.

For four points, the spiny character can shoot her quills at distant enemies, too. This attack employs a Dexterity + Athletics roll, difficulty 7, and fires the quills up to roughly 30 feet (10 meters) or so. Shields and other barriers automatically deflect the quills, however, though that layer of protection soon winds up featuring an impressive display of spines.

Your character can launch one quill-enhanced attack for each point of Stamina she has; after that, the quills are depleted, and must be regrown, restocked, or what-have-you. As an *optional rule*, the Storyteller might allow these spines to inflict aggravated damage instead, for double the usual cost.

### Rapid Healing (Variable)

Wounds don't sideline you for long. Although you lack the startling regenerative powers of werereatures, your body heals at an amazing rate. This Advantage accelerates the usual recovery rate for injuries. Every two points spent on this Trait moves you one category higher on the Healing Damage charts (see "Health and Injury," **Mage 20**, p. 406). If, for instance, you were taken to Mauled by bashing damage, two points would allow you to heal in one hour rather than the usual six hours, and four points would allow let you heal those injuries almost immediately. Lethal and aggravated damage, of course, takes longer to heal. Even then, though, this Advantage helps you recover more quickly than usual. Story-wise, such characters remain hardy and healthy despite the battering they endure. With six or eight points spent on Rapid Healing, such creatures can shrug off most forms of harm.

### Razorskin (3 pts.)

Like a shark, a thorny devil, or some other creature with sharp defenses, you have skin that shreds anything that touches you. When something tries to grab you, your assailant regrets that decision immediately. If you gets hit by another creature using Brawl or unarmed Martial Arts (that is, someone who brings his bare skin into contact with your own), then that character suffers an attack of his own Strength + 1 in lethal damage. Unless you can shapeshift or otherwise cover or transform your skin, this Advantage is always active. Those wishing to be intimate with you will have to be either incredibly careful or particularly resilient.

### Regrowth (2, 4 or 6 pts.)

The blood of the hydra flows in your veins... or at least, it seems that way sometimes. To an extent, you can regrow severed body parts. It'll hurt, and it takes time. Given enough opportunity, however, your body can restore itself.

The extent to which you can pull a Deadpool depends upon the points invested in this Advantage. For two points, you can regrow fingers, horns, claws, a tail, or some other secondary appendage. For four points, you can regrow gouged eyes, severed limbs, a ripped-out tongue, and a secondary

organ or two if their absence won't cause immediate death. And for six points, you must be burnt to ashes, dissolved in acid, poisoned to death by sickness or toxins, or otherwise consumed entirely before the restoration process ends for good.

Again, this is a painful process. The Advantage does not in any way alleviate the agony of losing body parts, and the damage heals at a steady pace unless it's being enhanced by other magical means. A severed finger or missing eye takes roughly a day to grow back; damaged limbs or non-essential organs take three days or so before they're functional again, and essential organs, your head, your spine, and other complex, essential body parts demand a week or so. Missing limbs will start out small and then grow back gradually (again, as per Deadpool), and organs will function poorly until they've been restored to health. Penalties for things like missing legs or blinded eyes are yours to endure, and you must spend a point of Willpower in order to regrow vital organs, your heart, your head, and so forth. Still, given enough points in this Advantage and plenty of time to heal, you can survive almost anything...

Except fire or acid. If such caustic or cauterizing substances are applied to the injured area, you're not growing that part back again without some serious favors owed to high-powered magical healers.

### Read and Write (1 pt.)

Although you're an animal, or an alien, or whatever it is you are, you're fully capable of reading and writing in whatever human languages you know. If you *don't* know a given language, then you'll need to learn it (via the Language Merit) before you can read or write in it. Given your physical form, you might have certain difficulties with, say, holding a pen, opening a book, or typing on a laptop. Assuming you're able to access the method of reading or writing, though, you can comprehend its contents as well as any human could.

### Shapechanger (3, 5, or 8 pts.)

Certain creatures may change their forms in radically different ways. With this Advantage, your character shares that gift. Though you're not one of the legendary Changing Breeds, your physical body is less... *established* than those of other beings. A miraculous talent possessed by witches, spirit-animals, totem-blessed people, certain Bygones, and especially wise beasts, this inheritance violates "normal" physics and biology, yet conforms to older laws of poetic reality.

This Trait lets your character assume different forms. All of the natural abilities of a non-magical form (wings, speech, swimming, sharp teeth, etc.) become your character's own capabilities, although special ones (fiery breath, spirit-walking, and so forth) must be purchased as Advantages. The same rule applies to abilities that are not natural to the new body: A man who wishes to become a talking pig, for example, must still purchase the ability to form human speech with the pig's anatomy.

In most cases, your Attributes and Abilities remain unchanged unless those physical characteristics are incompatible with your new form (a mouse, for instance, with a Strength of 5). No other object shares your ability to change, and so you must discard clothing, armor, weapons and so forth every time you transform. Such transformations typically demand one turn, although extreme shifts in size and mass might take a turn or two longer than that.

An innate shapechanger retains her mind and personality when she changes forms. The things she knows in one body carry over into other physical shapes. Characters who can sense auras or perceive paranormal effects might notice the shapechanger's true nature with a Perception + Awareness roll, difficulty 7. That shapechanger's scent remains more-or-less consistent through her various incarnations; she might be a wolf who smells like a woman, or a woman who smells like a wolf, or a being whose smell doesn't seem quite "natural" to the body she "wears" at the time.

The number of forms you can attain depends upon the points spent upon this Advantage:

- (3 points) One alternate form (hawk, lynx, woman, shark).
- (5 points) Any form within a limited range (cats, humans, birds, equines, and the like).
- (8 points) You can assume any form, although you must purchase Advantages to cover things like venom, armor, radical changes in size and Attributes, and so forth.

### Soak Lethal Damage (3 pts.)

Thanks to a hardy frame, thick skin, great size, elemental materials, or some other physiological gift, you can soak lethal damage as if it were bashing damage instead.

### Soak Aggravated Damage (5 pts.)

As with Soak Lethal Damage, above, you can soak both lethal and aggravated damage.

### Soul-Sense / Death-Sense (2-3 pts.)

Animals are closer to the natural processes of the universe, and are often extremely sensitive to spirits and the closeness of death. This Advantage, therefore, provides you the ability to sense such spirits. You may be an animal yourself, or perhaps some other being with a sense for the life-forces of those around you. Dogs, cats, psychopomps, and other liminal entities frequently have this Advantage. Some people might be "blessed" with similar abilities, and they often work as palliative-care workers, doulas, midwives, and other folks with deep affinities for life and death.

With the two-point version of this Advantage and a successful Perception + Awareness roll, you can sense the vampire in a crowd, the spectre lurking in the graveyard, or perhaps the Pattern Spider about to manifest on the material side of

the Gauntlet. You may also be able to sense an impending birth, or the flowering of life within the womb.

With the three-point version of this Advantage, you have the ability to see the auras of those who will soon face and overcome death, or perhaps notice the entropic threads around a person who's headed to their doom. Such insight can give you enough time to intervene, or it might just be something you note and then move on with your existence. This Advantage, sadly, doesn't give you any sort of moral compass to go along with it.

### Speed (Variable)

You're a lot faster than you look. For every two points spent on this Advantage (up to a maximum of 10 points), you add + 2 yards (or meters) to your Base Move on the ground. That Base Move can be found on the *Movement Rates* chart in **Mag** 20, p. 401. Thus, six points spent on Speed gives you a Base Walk of 13 yards, a Base Jog of 18 yards, and a Base run of 26 yards.

If you can fly as well, this Advantage also adds + 5 yards to your Base Fly movement for every two points spent. Therefore, that same six points also allows a winged character a Base Fly of 25 to 35 yards per turn. *You do not have to purchase a separate Speed Advantage for flying*, though you *must* have some innate ability (wings, levitation, etc.) in order to use that additional speed in the air. This Advantage does not add to temporary flight powers, such as flying carpets, levitation spells, and so on; the ability to fly must be a natural part of your character first.

Due to the heavy resistance involved, this Advantage does not confer extra swimming speed, though an exception *might* be made (Storyteller's option) if the character is native to the water.

### Spirit Travel (8, 10, or 15 pts.)

Like a mage with Spirit-Sphere Arts, you can step across the Gauntlet and travel into certain Otherworlds. Unlike mages, you don't suffer the effects of the Avatar Storm, but may be bound to only one or two of the Umbral layers. In all cases, you must have some consistent method of passing through: stepping into mirrors, diving through reflective pools, jumping through fire, vanishing in a puff of brimstone, and so forth.

Because this gift comes from an affinity for certain energies and essences, your character's nature influences the sorts of Realms you travel into when you cross the borders. An angel will gravitate toward the heavenly reaches of the Astral World, while a sinister kitten could step into the Underworld. Very few creatures can walk freely into all of the Three Worlds, and so the Storyteller may decide that certain layers or Realms are off limits to your kind.

Game-wise, this Advantage gives you five dice to roll against the local Gauntlet rating. The speed of your crossing can be found below. Each crossing costs one point of Willpower, and it extends only to the character in question unless a mage

uses some sort of magick to “ride” your character beyond the Gauntlet. Basic Spirit Travel lets you enter one Umbral layer: The Middle Umbra, the Astral Umbra, or the Dead Umbra. For 10 points, you can travel into two of those layers, and 15 points allows you to reach all three.

| Successes     | Crossing Time                                    |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Botch         | Failure, lose Willpower point or else get stuck. |
| None          | Failure; try again.                              |
| One           | Three turns to pass through.                     |
| Two           | Takes two turns.                                 |
| Three or four | Takes one turn.                                  |
| Five or more  | Instant crossing.                                |

### Spirit Vision (3 pts.)

Although you cannot pass over the Gauntlet (unless you also have Spirit Travel, that is), this Advantage allows you to perceive the local spirit world, nearby spirits, and the overall “feel” of that realm beyond the mortal world. Despite its name, this power might involve other senses; perhaps you smell the rotting presence of a Bane spirit, or hear the crackle of hellish flames and the wails of damned souls when a demon lingers on the other side of the Gauntlet. This perception may be shaped, in turn, by the *Vidare* described in **Mage 20**, pp. 82 and 91; if you revel in the natural world, for example, you’ll be more attuned to the lively sensations of the *Vidare Spiritus* than you would be if, instead, you viewed the world through the dark prism of the *Vidare Mortem*.

In game terms, your Spirit Sight lets you sense the Penumbra in your immediate surroundings. Most times, this vision overlaps your perceptions of the material world, which can get confusing and occasionally alarming if you stray, perhaps, into an area with a hostile spiritual landscape. (A battlefield, a haunted house, a Nephandic Node, and so forth.) By taking a moment or two to focus on one realm or the other, you can concentrate on either the material world or the Penumbra without being distracted by the other side. Most often, however, you seem flighty and distracted, occasionally talking to people who, as far as most folks are concerned, aren’t really there. The entities on the other side of the Gauntlet, meanwhile, can usually tell if you perceive them... and they might not be happy about being so exposed.

### Telepathy (2, 4, or 6 pts.)

You might not be able to speak with your mouth, but you can speak with your mind. This Advantage allows, for example, a sword, a horse, or a quivering pool of sentient goo to hold conversations with anyone who understands what that character is trying to say. The recipient of the telepathy must be able to comprehend your conversation, of course, though certain phrases or empathic bursts may transcend a language barrier. (Roll Intelligence + Empathy, Etiquette, Intimidation or other appropriate Traits as needed.) That party may also,

with a successful resisted Willpower roll, block out what you’re trying to say. You can talk, but they aren’t compelled to listen.

Assuming both parties want to talk, and can understand what the other one is saying, you’re able to silently converse with one other character within an unobstructed range of sight (2 pts.); with one other character for each point of Willpower you possess (4 pts.); and perhaps transcend obstacles and talk to characters you already know and have bonded with, even when you cannot see each other, across distances of roughly a mile or so (6 pts.).

For organic and spirit-beings, this Advantage reflects a psychic or spiritual communion; tech-oriented characters may be using communication devices instead. However the telepathy is defined, outside parties cannot hear it unless they employ a suitable method (psychic power, the Mind Sphere, radio transmissions, etc.) to tap into it and spend a point of Willpower in order to do so. You might be using transmission technology, but if so, it’s not the sort of tech the average listener can access or employ.

### Telekinesis (3, 5, 8, or 12 pts.)

With the power of your mind, antigravity hypertech, mystic energy, or what-have-you, you can lift and — to a slight degree — manipulate objects from a distance, without physically touching them. Doing so requires a successful Willpower roll, and the difficulty of that roll depends upon the weight and accessibility of your target, combined with the effect you’re trying to have on it.

#### Difficulty Target

|    |                                                         |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------|
| 6  | Moving up to 10 lbs.                                    |
| 7  | Up to 20 lbs.                                           |
| 8  | Up to 50 lbs.                                           |
| 9  | Up to 100 lbs.*                                         |
| +1 | Basic manipulation (flipping lever, opening container)  |
| +2 | Fine manipulation (pushing buttons, starting car)       |
| +3 | Precise manipulation (typing accurately, driving car**) |

\*Attempting to lift objects over 100 lbs. requires one Willpower point spent for each additional 25 lbs.

\*\*Steering a vehicle is not the same as trying to lift it; assuming you can get in and start the machine, your base difficulty would be 9.

You must be able to see your target in order to influence it with this Advantage, and the cost of the Trait determines the maximum amount of weight you can lift:

- (3 points) Maximum 10 lbs.
- (5 points) Maximum 50 lbs.
- (8 points) Maximum 100 lbs.
- (12 points) No maximum.

In order to resist your activities, a character needs to break your grip, as described under the Grapple entry in **Mage 20** (p. 421). If you want to grab someone who doesn't want to be grabbed, you need to spend one point of Willpower and then grapple them as noted in that entry, using Perception + Brawl instead of Dexterity + Brawl. In such situations, your Perception becomes your effective Strength in terms of grabbing, holding, and resisting escape. If your target leaves your field of vision, however, your telekinetic hold on it immediately ends.

### Tides of Fortune (5 pts.)

Invoking the fickle currents of fortune, you can employ a combination of the spirit powers Bad Luck Charm and Good Luck Charm. Instead of spending a point of Essence, you must spend a point of Willpower to confer ill or happy fortune upon the target of your whims. For details about those Charms, see below.

### Tunneling (3 pts.)

You have the ability to create a tunnel in the ground. You might eat the dirt like a worm, or you might burrow it out of your way like a badger, marmot, or rabbit. Either way, you move through the earth at half your walking speed. You can either create a tunnel or just push the earth out of your way. If you create a tunnel, it is the same size as your body. If you're a magickal rabbit, you still only create tunnels the size of a regular rabbit. If you're a giant, 10-foot tall rabbit, well... in that case you make pretty large bunny warrens, don't you?

### Unaging (5 pts.)

You don't age. Perhaps you've found a way to restore your telomeres, or perhaps you are just mystically reinforced against the rigors of time. Regardless of how, you don't age. This Advantage is useful for telling stories across the ages and would make an interesting bridge between stories told during the era of the Sorcerer's Crusade and modern nights.

### Universal Translator (5 pts.)

Thanks to sophisticated tech or godlike knowledge, you can understand and communicate in any language you encounter. If you've never encountered a particular form of communication before, you'll need to make an Intelligence + Empathy roll in order to puzzle it out. The difficulty for this roll is generally 6 but could go as high as 9 if you're trying to sort out an especially arcane language, like the waving fronds of a plant-spirit or the shifting colors of an alien species' body hair.

To translate a language, you must first be able to *perceive* it as a language. Telepathic communications or subtle symbolic codes are beyond you unless you're able to recognize them for what they are. Your understanding, too, tends to be literal unless you've had enough contact with your subjects to recognize their slang, sarcasm, cultural references, and so forth.

### Venom/Poison (Variable)

A sting from an insect or a swipe from a platypus spur can really ruin someone's day. Like those creatures, you possess an innate venom or poisonous touch – a weapon whose effects may well be worse than the injury that injected that assault.

Your venomous power comes attached to a particular attack: claws, teeth, a stinger, barbs, needles, and so forth. In order to deliver your agonizing payload, you need to penetrate your target's defenses with that attack, and then inflict at least one health level of lethal damage after your target tries to soak it. Assuming you manage to break his skin and inject the toxin, the damage from this Advantage takes hold.

In game terms, your Venom / Poison inflicts two aggravated-damage attacks from the *Toxins* chart in **Mage 20**, p. 442. For every three points in this Advantage, your toxin inflicts one health level's worth of injury. Essentially, those three points purchase one level of Toxin Rating, as per that chart. The first level strikes during the turn that follows the attack; the second level strikes three turns later.

For five points per level (instead of three), your poison may be delivered through skin contact rather than injury. In this case, anyone who touches your bare skin with their bare skin suffers the effects. Sadly, you cannot turn this attack off; it poisons people whether you want it to or not. In such cases, hoodies, gloves and long pants are your friends.

As an optional rule, the Storyteller might allow you to deploy a psychotropic drug (**Mage 20**, pp. 443-444) instead of a damaging toxin. In this case, the drug inflicts the effects of a drug of your choice for one turn for every point spent on this Advantage; six points, therefore, would let you intoxicate someone for six turns.

Toxins may be treated, resisted or healed through the methods detailed in the section about "Drugs, Poisons, and Disease" (**Mage 20**, pp. 441-444).

So, what's the difference between a venom and a poison? *Venom* is an attack inflicted upon a victim by a poisonous species, while *poison* is a toxin that's absorbed, ingested, or inhaled by the victim. One could be considered active, the other could be considered passive. The difference isn't important in terms of this Advantage, but mages (especially Technocratic ones) can get pedantic about such things.

### Wall-Crawling (4 pts.)

Thanks to biology, mutation, or device, you can cling to and climb across sheer surfaces as quickly and easily as you can walk. This talent works without a roll or activation, although you might need to make a Dexterity + Athletics roll in order to hang on under extreme circumstances: icy walls, strong winds, driving rain, and similar situations.

## Water Breathing (2 or 5 pts.)

Born or adapted to an aquatic environment, you may breathe as easily under water – for two points – as you breathe air above it. For five points instead of two, you don't need to breathe at all. If you cannot normally breathe on dry land, then you might purchase this Advantage in order to live as the proverbial fish out of water. Either way, there's not much point in buying this Trait if don't plan to spend lots of time going from one environment to the other.

## Webbing (5 pts.)

Like a certain do-gooding wall-crawler (or certain less-benevolent predatory arachnids), you can spin webs that connect surfaces and entrap enemies. That web may be synthetic or natural; regardless of its composition, your webs are sticky, persistent, and strong.

Standard webbing has six soak dice, and it can take at least three health levels' worth of damage before it breaks. A victim trapped in your web must roll three successes or more on a Strength roll (difficulty 8) in order to pull free from that webbing. At the Storyteller's discretion, however, a stronger, thicker, or more-intricate web might demand five successes or more before the trapped character can escape.

To employ webbing, the player rolls her Dexterity + Athletics. A web-spinning character, though, can purchase an Athletics specialty called Webspinning in order to hone her web-based expertise. With or without that specialty, the chart below reflects the difficulty of various feats:

### Difficulty Feat

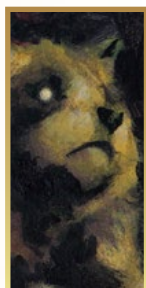
|   |                                                   |
|---|---------------------------------------------------|
| 5 | Travel up, down, or across distances on your web. |
| 6 | Craft large webs.                                 |
| 7 | Snare foes.                                       |
| 8 | Grab objects at a distance, or block entrances.   |

## Wings (3 or 5 pts.)

Put simply, you can fly. For three points, you may fly up to the normal human jogging speed (13 yards per turn); for five, you can cover 20 yards per turn. Despite the name of this Advantage, your character does not necessarily have physical wings – she could levitate, hover, or simply take to the skies under her own power.

For more details about flight, see **Mage 20's** Flying Talent (p. 293), and its *Movement Rates* chart (p. 401).

# Spirit Charms



The unearthly powers of ephemeral entities put most talents of mortal creatures to shame. Such powers, or *Charms*, draw upon the *Essence* of the spirit, concentrating its very existence into the force of the Charm.

The rules surrounding Spirit Charms can be found in the **Mage 20** section regarding Umbrood Spirit Entities (pp. 489-495). Such powers do not invoke Paradox, thanks to the intrinsic – if otherworldly – bond between spirits and the natural world. Although clearly paranormal, spirit Charms tap into a deeper, more elemental aspect of reality than human magick does. And while it is, in many ways, far more limited in flexibility than Sphere magick, this spiritual energy invokes forces more primordial than humanity and more sublime than the richest magickal Arts.

As manifestations of the spirit's intrinsic self, all Charms depend upon the essential nature of the spirit. A fire elemental, for example, won't have the Create Water Charm, and a forest-spirit won't be able to Jack In to electronic devices. Minor spirits possess five Charms or less, while greater spirits command commensurately greater powers. Certain refined spirits might use Sphere-like powers too (as detailed in **Mage 20**, p. 490), but that sort of might is reserved for god-forms and the mightiest of lesser entities.

## Purchasing Charms

Normally, such powers are beyond the reach of player characters. Under certain circumstances, however, a Storyteller might allow an embodied ephemeral character who's created and run by a player. This is choice, of course, an *optional rule*, and the Storyteller is perfectly within her rights to refuse. For details, see the "Familiar" entry under "Companion Types," pp. 184-185.

Familiar characters may purchase Charms with freebie points for a cost of one freebie point for each point of *Essence* that needs to be spent in order to activate that Charm. A Charm that requires three points to activate, for example, costs three freebie points to purchase.

If the character does not have to spend *Essence* to activate the Charm, if the Charm has a variable *Essence* cost, if it deals with luck or enduring illusions, or if that Charm is considered to be "always on," then the Charm costs five freebie points to purchase. The exception to this rule is the Airt Sense Charm (**Mage 20**, p. 490), which is free to any ephemeral spirit character.

In addition to the Charms given in **Mage 20**, ephemeral characters might employ the following Charms, if the Charms in question suit their nature. That suitability, in all cases, is essential. Although a demon might possess a Charm that lets him heal people, a reanimated corpse is not likely to possess such powers.



New, companion-oriented Charms include:

- **Bad Luck Curse:** The hallmark power of black cats and other beasts of ill-omen, this Charm directs the tides of fate and fortune to curse the ass of some beleaguered mortal.

The spirit's player spends one point of Essence and rolls that spirit's Gnosis against difficulty 6. Each success on that roll changes the result of the targeted character's next roll into a 1. Thus, an otherwise-successful roll can be turned into a failure... and, if there are no more successes left, but one or more 1s on that roll, into a botch.

The spirit may use this Charm as often as it likes. Pissing off a black-cat spirit, then, is a fast-track trip to a really bad day.

- **Bargain:** When mortal mages keep invoking ancient pacts and rituals in order to compel service from the spirits, those spirits need every edge they can get. This Charm, a specialty of the djinn, helps tilt negotiations in the spirit's favor by confusing the would-be master's mind. Employing a haze of esoterica (or perhaps just some well-phrased flattery or insults), the entity befuddles the mage and retains the upper hand.

The spirit spends two Essence points and makes a resisted Gnosis + Willpower roll. The summoning mage opposes that roll with her Willpower Trait; a wizard with Willpower 9 is a tough negotiator, but one with a paltry Willpower 5 is easy to mislead.

Using this Charm once on a target is easy. Subsequent attempts, however, grow harder because the mage gets wise to the spirit's tricks. Each roll after the first one adds one die to the summoner's Willpower roll as she resists the effects of the Charm. Taftani mages, moreover, are completely immune to this Charm if it's employed by a djinni — their training helps them see through such tricks — although other spirits may employ it normally against such magi.

For details about the bargaining process, see "Summoning, Binding, Bargaining, and Warding" in **How Do You DO That?** pp. 90-106.

- **Create Water:** In a dry space, the spirit may conjure a refreshing amount of water. As with the Create Fire and Create Wind Charms (**Mage 20**, p. 491), the amount of Essence spent determines the amount of water conjured: one point creates about 10 gallons of water, while 10 points could fill a backyard swimming pool or flood a small, enclosed area. This conjuration



requires a Gnosis roll: difficulty 4 in humid areas, difficulty 6 in moderate dryness, and difficulty 9 under hot and arid conditions. Unless the water is contained somehow, it quickly begins to drain away.

- **Deflect Harm:** With an invisible wave of power, the spirit deflects incoming attacks made against the spirit or — if the spirit “lends” this Charm to a mortal host — the host imbued with the spirit’s blessings. Each point of Essence spent by the entity blocks one health level of damage from an incoming attack that turn.

This Charm deflects bashing, lethal, and aggravated damage equally well, and protects against damage caused by magickal assaults as well as it protects against physical ones.

A spirit may employ this Charm for as long as that character’s Essence Trait holds out. A mortal host blessed with this Charm by a spirit helper, however, may deflect up to five health levels of damage per turn; additional damage slides past the deflection effect and affects the host normally.

A mortal host blessed with Charm by a totem, Loa, and so forth gets an Essence pool of three points per day for each dot in the Totem (or Loa) Background.

Five dots, then, would allow the host to deflect up to 15 health levels of damage per day, at a maximum of five health levels per turn.

- **Disorient:** By distorting a person’s perception of their surroundings, the spirit causes that person to become lost even in a familiar place. By spending a point of Essence and beating the target in a resisted Willpower roll, the spirit can temporarily cloud that person’s memories of landmarks, street names, etc. For one hour per success, every element of the target’s surroundings feels strange and frightening. Shadows appear to lengthen, words become hazy, and a pervasive sense of disorientation haunts that person. It’s all in that person’s head, of course — outside viewers see nothing wrong. Until the Charm wears off, though, all sense of familiarity disappears for the subject of the spirit’s tricks.

Although associated with the djinn, who use it with devastating effect in the close streets and vast expanses of their homelands, this Charm is also common among nature spirits, tricksters, and malicious entities who feed off mortal fear, confusion, and alarm.

- **False Wealth:** The infamous party trick of djinn and certain faerie entities, this Charm weaves illusions of

precious matter over materials that are actually worthless. A handful of leaves becomes a stack of \$20 bills. Lead seems like gold. Shards of safety glass appear to be diamonds. Although technology is not fooled (don't try to deposit those \$20 in an ATM), mortal minds and senses are tricked by the spirit's ingenuity until the Charm wears off and the truth is finally revealed.

A single Essence point conceals the nature of the materials at hand. That illusion lasts for an hour or so unless some viewer or technology uncovers the deception first, at which point the illusion disappears. Prime and Matter Sphere Effects cast upon the "wealth" instantly reveal the truth, and a successful roll of Perception + Awareness (difficulty 9) penetrates the Charm as well. Machines, as mentioned above, are not fooled at all. Generally, this Charm conceals the nature of a handful or two of "wealth." With a successful Gnosis roll, however, the entity can simulate stacks, piles, or even a whole room filled with wealth; the higher the difficulty, the larger the area concealed by this Charm.

Because this Charm taps into human greed, a suspicious mage with a rating of 4 or higher in the Mind Sphere can make a Willpower roll, difficulty 7, to see through this illusion. Assuming the Charm was cast by a djinni, Taftani mages of any degree of ability get to use this Willpower roll as well, as their traditions warn against the tricks of the djinn. Similar warnings allow Verbenae and other pagan mages a similar chance to recognize false wealth created by fae spirits. On a related note, Syndicate agents are seldom fooled by such trickery, and get that Willpower roll as well. "After all," one might say, "who's better equipped to recognize real money than *we* are?"

- **Good Luck Charm:** By adjusting the flow of fortune, the spirit offers good luck to the object of its affections. One Essence point allows the favored character to reroll a single task, though for better or worse that character must keep the results of the second roll. This Charm can be employed only once for any given task but can be used as often as the spirit desires.

- **Jack In:** Named for a rather outdated phrase, this Charm allows a technological spirit to access a smart phone or other computer anywhere there's some form of internet connection to that device. The Charm doesn't work, of course, if there's no way for it to connect to the computer in question.

Given the spirit's ephemeral nature, normal security programs and virus protections won't block this Charm; if, however, that computer is protected by some form of magick (including Enlightened hypertechnology or techno-spiritual wards), the spirit's player must roll the entity's Gnosis against a difficulty between 6 (basic

protections) and 9 (sophisticated hypertechnology or powerful wards) in order to get inside. If the spirit has already been cleared for access to that computer, though — as the familiar for a technomancer might be — it doesn't need the Gnosis roll.

- **Mirage:** Another legendary power of the djinn allows a spirit to conjure illusions that mislead mortal eyes. Such powers are not exclusive to the djinn, of course — trickster spirits of all kinds employ this Charm as well.

By expending three points of Essence, the spirit may conjure a vivid illusion of whatever it desires. Although such mirages can fool human senses of sight and sound, they have no physical substance, and so cannot be smelled, tasted, or felt. Animals are rarely deceived by such tricks, thanks to their keen senses, and paranormal perceptions and technologies (that is, sensor-tech, Sphere 1 perception Effects, vampiric perceptual Disciplines, and so forth) see through this Charm immediately. A character with the Acute Senses Merit, the Awareness Talent, or both can make a Perception + Alertness (or Awareness, if that Trait is higher) roll, difficulty 8, to perceive the flaws in the mirage and therefore recognize the illusion for what it is.

- **Mislead:** This fearsome ruse scrambles a person's decision-making processes, drawing them away from a reasonable conclusion and toward an error.

While the target of this Charm attempts to puzzle out a course of action, the spirit spends five points of Essence to cloud the target's judgment. The spirit's player rolls Gnosis, with the difficulty being the target's current (not permanent) Willpower Trait. One success makes an otherwise-obvious choice unclear, two successes leads the target to a false conclusion, and three successes or more draws the target toward the conclusion that's most likely to have unfortunate results for the targeted character. *How* unfortunate that course of action might be depends on the malice of the spirit, the sadism of the Storyteller, and the player's willingness to go along with a *really* bad idea.

- **Plant Command:** The spirit's connection to plant life allows the entity or its favored human character to help plants and fungi grow, blossom, flourish, wither, or achieve a limited form of animation. With expenditures of Essence, the following effects become possible:

#### Essence Points    Effects

|     |                                            |
|-----|--------------------------------------------|
| One | 1 turn duration of effect (1 pt. minimum). |
| One | 10' area (1 pt. minimum).                  |
| One | Restore damaged plants to health.          |
| One | Make dormant plants flower.                |

|       |                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Two   | Double yield of edible plants within area of effect.                                                                                                                                     |
| Two   | Double mass of plants within area of effect.                                                                                                                                             |
| Two   | Wither plants within area of effect.                                                                                                                                                     |
| Two   | +1 health level bashing damage (2 pts. minimum) inflicted by plants' thorns, spores, squeeze, etc. (For attack, see below.)                                                              |
| Two   | +1 to attack-dice pool.                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Two   | +10 Strength to grab and hold targets.                                                                                                                                                   |
| Three | Plants within area of effect can attack targets for one turn; base attack dice pool is two dice (Dexterity 1 + Brawl 1), base damage is one die bashing damage, and base Strength is 10. |
| Three | +1 health level lethal damage (as above), and all damage is lethal.                                                                                                                      |
| Four  | +1 health level aggravated damage (as above), and all damage is lethal.                                                                                                                  |
| Five  | Spirit may allow a human host or ally to use this Charm, with a total of five Essence to spend while using it.                                                                           |
| Five  | +5 more Essence that may be used by the human host or ally.                                                                                                                              |

All costs are cumulative, and only one form of damage may be used by a given group of controlled plants. A virulent patch of toxic fungus, for example, may inflict three health levels of aggravated damage for two turns, within a 20' area of effect, at a total cost of 14 Essence. If the spirit lends this ability to a human host or ally, the Charm costs that entity a total of 30 Essence points.

One the Charm's duration ends, attacking plants return to their normal state. Flourishing, withered, flowering, or expanded plants, however, remain in their new state until and unless some other factor changes that state; a hard freeze, for example, would destroy a flourishing patch of greenery.

This Charm works on any normal Earth-based plant life. Plants enhanced by Enlightened biotech or other forms of magickal alteration remain immune to this nature-spirit Charm.

- **Rouse the Dead:** Through the spirit's intense bond with the souls of the dead, this Charm allows an entity to temporarily revive the corpse of a human being or other sentient organic animal. The no-longer-dead being is clearly not entirely alive; its skin remains pale, its movements are stiff, and its vocalizations become slurred, hollow, or otherwise disrupted by the stillness of mortality. Inspections of vital signs reveal a body

that should, by all rational standards, be dead. Even so, the revived party retains the personality, memories, skills, and so forth it had in life.

Normal Trait rolls for the dead party lose three dice as a penalty from the dice pool the character used while alive, but otherwise function normally. An Awakened or otherwise magical creature, however, will lack all paranormal abilities it possessed in life. If the spirit revives a werewolf, for example, that creature will remain trapped in the form of its birth, without the ability to change into any other shape. Revived mages, of course, can no longer access their Avatar, Arete or Genius, Spheres, or any other related powers. Those abilities ended with the revived person's life.

A revival performed after sundown lasts until the next sunrise; a revival performed after sunrise endures until the next sunset. The spirit may cast this Charm again on the same subject after its duration ends, but each subsequent revival subtracts one more die from the roused character's dice pools.

Roused corpses return in the state they were upon death; if a revived person was crushed by a car, that person will return to "life" still crushed. The restored corpse may still feel pain (which could be pretty horrifying if the character died in some agonized fashion), and may be disabled or outright incapacitated if the body was mangled, dismembered, burnt, or otherwise demolished. If the corpse was utterly destroyed, this Charm will not work at all.

The spirit must expend five Essence to rouse a dead character for the usual duration. Each additional character roused costs another five Essence. Obviously, this Charm is rather godlike; few entities possess it at all, and this Charm *cannot* be shared with another character through a Totem or Loa Background bond.

- **Sand Storm:** Whipping up a cloud of dust or sand, the spirit hurtles a blinding, stinging tempest in the faces of mortals unfortunate enough to be caught in its path.

A single point of Essence allows the spirit to blind one physical opponent, as per the Blinding combat maneuver found in **Mage 20** p. 423. For eight Essence, that spirit can conjure a storm that covers an area roughly 500 feet across. The duration of the storm depends on the amount of loose soil in that area; an area with a little bit of dirt can supply a storm for a turn or two, while a vast area filled with sand or soil can keep the storm going for one turn for every point of that spirit's Rage Trait. This storm inflicts one health level of bashing damage for each point of Rage the spirit has, and blinds — for that storm's duration — anyone without some form of eye protection to screen out the flying grit.

- **Sand Swallow/Sinkhole:** With a wave of power, the spirit causes sand, mud, or loose soil to open up and swallow a target whole. Djinn may use this Charm only to control sand, but other entities, like swamp spirits or earth elementals, can command their appropriate type of soil.

To attack the target, the spirit's player rolls its Gnosis against a difficulty of the target's Dexterity + Alertness Trait. Each success sucks the target three feet into the ground. Unless that target can break free or get dug out by other characters, he may soon suffocate, as per the entry "Drowning and Suffocation," **Page 20**, pp. 440-441. This Charm costs 10 Essence to employ.

- **Smoke Screen/Blinding Fog:** Conjuring a thick curtain of dark smoke, the spirit confounds the vision of pathetic mortals in its midst. Such smoke is a hallmark power of certain djinn and elementals, though spirits of water, moors, swamps, or coasts may conjure blinding fog instead.

The spirit's player spends two points of Essence in order to conjure the cloud. That cloud obscures all forms of mortal vision, including magickal and hypertechnic sight, for as long as the spirit concentrates on the cloud's existence. This billowing curtain fills an area of roughly 10 feet square for each point of that spirit's Rage Trait. The cloud appears wherever the spirit wants it to manifest, and it disperses one turn after the spirit stops concentrating on its presence.

- **Spirit Gossip:** Heading off into the Umbra to speak to other spirits, the entity can gather information about Otherworldly matters. Obviously, the entity in question must be able to enter the appropriate Realms and talk to the appropriate spirits without getting smacked for its presumptuousness. A demonic imp, for instance, who wants to go quiz some angels is liable to have a difficult time finding anything other than a celestial beatdown.

This Charm requires no Essence to cast; instead, the spirit departs its immediate surroundings in search of information. Depending on what questions that spirit asks, and which methods it employs while looking for the answers, the spirit's player rolls the character's Gnosis plus any appropriate Abilities (if it has them), such as Cosmology, Etiquette, Intimidation, related forms of Esoterica, and so on. Thanks to variations of time-passage between the Umbrae and the material world, this excursion might take as little as a turn or two, or else as long (for a really involved search with complications) as a day or more.

- **Teleport:** In a flash, a powerful spirit can appear any place it has personally visited, or else vanish from one location and manifest in another (again, familiar) one. This power costs 10 Essence to employ, or 20 Essence if the spirit wants to take someone else with it. Each act of teleportation costs the appropriate amount of Essence, and the Charm can cross the Gauntlet with ease, assuming the spirit already has the ability to do so.

- **Wish Fulfillment:** Among the rarest legendary powers of the djinn (and certain other godlike entities or outright gods), this Charm allows the spirit to grant a single wish. The parameters of how that wish is granted are, of course, limited in scope and subject to the spirit's abilities. Save a person who's dying of cancer: "*As you wish it, so it is done.*" Cure all cancer forever: "*Much as it pains me, Master, to admit it, such things are beyond my humble powers to command.*"

Because humans tend to be greedy, selfish things, djinn and other wish-granting entities often bend the spirit of a wish to suit the wording of that wish. A desire for great wealth brings the wishing party a fortune in stolen money... and the investigators hot on its trail. Sure, you can play guitar like Hendrix's ghost, but Jimi conditioned his fingertips to that level of stress for years, and... well, you *haven't*. (If you wished for that wish in those very words, a ghostly Hendrix might come back and possess you — and he might not be happy about being brought back from the dead to act out some dude's fantasy.) Djinn measure status among themselves by the clever ways they'll pervert a "master's" wish, so while a djinni doesn't *have* to turn a wish against its maker, selfish wishes generally yield dire results.

From a Storyteller perspective, feel free to grant said wish the way you see fit, and say "no" if the requested desire would screw up your chronicle. Play fair, of course, but employ a draconian sense of poetic justice to excessive, greedy wishes.

Although this Charm may raise Background Traits or bestow new ones, it cannot affect a mage's Avatar, Arete, or Spheres. Such Traits reflect internal aspects of the mage, not the mystic power of external entities. A mage who wishes for insight, wisdom, mystic power, or similar may receive several dots in a Knowledge or two if the Storyteller allows it; higher Mental Abilities, perhaps a boost of Willpower; or maybe an appropriate Merit Trait. Again, we emphasize that *a djinni cannot raise a mage's Arete, Avatar, or Spheres*. The question was asked, and the answer is no.

Granting a wish expends 30 Essence, and requires a Gnosis roll on the spirit's behalf. Small wishes (a childhood toy, a cured disease, a corrected handicap, and so forth) would start at difficulty 6, and rise toward difficulty 10 when dealing with wishes of great scope and power (a government position, great wealth, a loved one's return from the dead, etc.). This Charm cannot be transferred to a mortal party (via the Totem or Loa Backgrounds) or purchased by player characters. The spirit may grant more than one wish to the same party, as in the traditional three wishes; as people in such stories often learn, however, there are reasons behind the old saying, "*Be careful what you wish for — you might get it.*"

# Suggested Resources



Gods, monsters, and strangers are everywhere. Anyone you meet, any story you hear, any interaction you have with another living thing can provide inspiration for the stories of mages and the people who surround them. The best source of stories, then, is as close as the person next to you, the cat in your window, the dog barking across the street, or the footsteps coming down your hall at a time when everyone else in your house is supposed to be asleep. (Wait — you don't hear them? Are you sure?)

The *Book of Secrets* contains a large selection of inspirational media in the final pages. Other sources that inspired and informed our collection of **Gods & Monsters** can be found below.

## Books

### Nonfiction

*The Book of Imaginary Beings*, by Jorge Luis Borges and Peter Sis.

*The Element Encyclopedia of Magical Creatures*, by Judika Illes.

*Haitian Vodou: An Introduction to Haiti's Indigenous Spiritual Tradition*, by Mambo Chita Tann.

*Islam, Arabs, and Intelligent World of the Jinn*, by Amira El-Zein.

*Ka and The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, by Roberto Calasso.

*Legends of the Fire Spirits: Jinn and Genies from Arabia to Zanzibar*, by Robert Lebling and Tahir Shah.

*Mythos: A Retelling of the Myths of Ancient Greece*, by Stephen Fry.

*Writing the Other*, by Cynthia Ward and Nisi Shawl.

*Yokai Attack! The Japanese Monster Survival Guide*, by Hiroko Yoda and Matt Alt.

### Fiction

*American Elsewhere*, by Robert Jackson Bennett.

*American Gods*, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, and the *Sandman* series by Neil Gaiman.

*Brown Girl in the Ring*, by Nalo Hopkinson.

*Christine*, *Cujo*, and "Battleground," by Stephen King.

*Coyote Blue*, *A Dirty Job*, *Fool*, *Lamb*, *The Lust Lizard of Melancholy Cove*, *Practical Demonkeeping*, and *The Stupidest Angel*, by Christopher Moore.

*The Elementals* and *I Was a Teenage Fairy*, by Francesca Lia Block.

*Feed* and the other *Newsflesh* books from Mira Grant.

*Hack/Slash* (graphic novel series), by Tim Seeley and various collaborators.

Seanán McGuire's *InCryptid* series. For extra fun and inspiration, check out the various associated web links, Wikis, and fan communities for this series.

*The Island of Doctor Moreau*, by H. G. Wells.

*My Life with Master*, a roleplaying game by Paul Czege.

J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series.

*Jitterbug Perfume* and *Skinny Legs and All*, by Tom Robbins.

*Where the Wild Things Are*, by Maurice Sendak.

## Movies

*28 Days Later* and *28 Weeks Later*

*A.I. Artificial Intelligence*

*Alien* and *Aliens*

*A Monster Calls*

*A Serious Man*

*Attack the Block*

*The Babadook*

*Beasts of the Southern Wild*

*La Belle et la Bête* and other versions of *Beauty and the Beast*

*The BFG*

*The Bride of Frankenstein* (Although any movie with the name *Frankenstein* in the title can be inspirational for this sort of thing, James Whale's seminal tragi-satire about the horrors of identity still has teeth nearly a century after its release.)

*Dark City*

*Dawn of the Dead* (both versions) and *Day of the Dead*

*Dog Soldiers*

*E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*

*Ex Machina*

*Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*

*Frankenstein's Army*

*Frankenstein: The True Story*

*Harry Potter* (series).

*He Never Died*

*Hellboy* and *Hellboy 2: The Golden Army*

*Her*

*The Hills Have Eyes* (originals, remakes, and sequels.)

*The Island of Lost Souls*

*The Island of Doctor Moreau* (the 1977 version has a very **Mage** feel; the 1996 version is weird as fuck)

*Ink* (Often referenced in **Mage 20**, but especially pertinent to this book.)

*It Follows*

*Lady in the Water*

*The Machine Girl*

*Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*

Any film by Hayao Miyazaki, but especially *Spirited Away*, *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Ponyo*, *Princess Mononoke*, and *Kiki's Delivery Service*.

*MirrorMask*

*The Neverending Story*

*Re-Animator* and *Bride of Re-Animator*

*Pan's Labyrinth*

*The Secret of Roan Inish*

*The Shape of Water*

*Small Soldiers*

*Splash*

*The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*

*Tokyo Gore Police*

*Trilogy of Terror*, "Amelia"

*Unbreakable*

*Under the Skin*

*Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets*

*Westworld* (film or TV show; both are good.)

*The Witch*

*Wolfen*

*A Wrinkle in Time*

*Young Frankenstein*

The greatest source of stories, though, cannot be found in media but instead in the lives we lead, the people we meet, and the things we learn when we observe with open eyes, ears, and hearts. In an age where fear builds walls and fortunes alike, the most heroic thing you can do is refuse to be afraid.

**What a world this will be when human possibilities are freed,  
when we discover each other, when the stranger is no longer  
the potential criminal and the certain inferior!**

**- W.E.B. Du Bois**

# GODS & MONSTERS

## Gods, Monsters & Familiar Strangers

We live in a world full of gods and monsters: spirits, creatures, Paradox entities, Avatar aspects, vampires, beast-folk, godheads, primordial legends, and other creatures too strange for the average mind to conceive.

Now, in an age ruled by fear, the ability to look beyond our preconceptions – especially in the world of Mage – becomes a vital tool for survival.

## Who Lives Behind a Stranger's Eyes?

This compendium of companions, divinities and beasts presents dozens of characters and creatures for your **World of Darkness** sagas. From Big Owl's brood to the literal heavens, this collection of **Gods & Monsters** includes:

Human characters and templates  
Vampires, werebeasts, ghosts, ghouls, hunters, and the Fae  
HIT Marks, artificial people, familiars, companions, Avatars, and gods  
Creation rules, Traits, and Special Advantages for non-mage companion characters  
...and far, far more

**We Are Strangers to Each Other  
Often Gods & Monsters, Too...**



20<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY EDITION

**MAGE**  
THE ASCENSION

