

The Spirit Ways™



A Guide to Shamans and Spirituality
in Mage: The Ascension®

The Spirit Ways



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Table of Contents

Prelude	4
Introduction	10
Chapter One: A Life Apart	12
Chapter Two: The Tongue of Spirits	32
Chapter Three: Walking the Spirit	54
Chapter Four: Spirit Helpers	76
Appendix	86



Prelude

Dizzied by the arcing deep blue curves painted on the walls, Adam wished for a moment that his mentor Apo were with him, but as quickly pushed the thought away. Trapped, beaten, tied to a bloodstained chair while awaiting his captor's pleasure, Adam knew that his mentor would not have been so easily caught. He'd thought his communion with spirits a necessary, even pleasant, avenue of insight; the fact that other magicians did magic so different from his own never bothered him. Unfortunately, that meant that he never bothered to understand how their magic worked, and that left him vulnerable. Which, ultimately, left him tied to a chair awaiting... something at the hands of a cultist who babbled with corrupted spirits.

Letting out a sigh, Adam tried to still his breath. He'd certainly never expected anything like this! He was just a normal guy. The shaman avenue was all new to him. Torture and sacrifice – that was ridiculous!

At least they hadn't blindfolded him. And he hadn't been hurt too badly; the magics of the other mage had incapacitated him but left him largely intact. He flexed his fingers; his wrists and ankles hurt from the bindings. Turning his head as much as his bound shoulders would allow, Adam tried to get a better view of the room itself. The same swirling blue patterns met his eyes everywhere he looked, even on the thick wooden door. The floor, rough wooden planks, was no better. His head started to throb.

Adam coughed once, trying to clear his dry throat, but the rising pain in his head prevented any further such endeavors. He tried to remember what Apo had taught him. How could he get out of this? He just listened to what the spirits had to say. He didn't do tricks the way Apo did.

"Hey, you," a guttural voice stabbed at Adam's ears. "Yeah, you. You look like you can hear me."

Adam turned his head slowly to avoid bringing further pain. To either side, he saw only the painted walls. "Who?" he croaked.

"Down here, bud," grunted the voice.

Shifting as best he could, Adam tilted his head a bit to one side and looked down. Below, at the foot of the chair, a single cockroach waggled its antennae. It measured perhaps a full two inches in length, and its shell was brown. Adam considered for a moment that he might be hallucinating, then decided that it didn't matter at this point.

"That's it," said the cockroach. "You wouldn't happen to have anything to eat, would you?"

Adam would've laughed or even quirked an eyebrow had he the energy. Feeling as tired and sore as he did, he barely managed a hoarse chuckle before answering, "I'm tied up in a chair awaiting my demise, and a hallucinatory cockroach wants to know if I have something to eat?"

The roach simply twitched its antennae in reply.

Adam let his head drop back against the chair. He thought hurriedly for a moment. He didn't have much in the way of useful tools to begin with, just his clothes and a few bits of random things for appeasing the spirits. A bit of string for a bird or a cat, a piece of bone for a dog or a spirit of death... and a bit of meat for a predator, like Lizard or Wolf.

"My pocket. In my pants. Jerky." Adam tried to motion with his head, failed.

The roach paused a moment, then that croaking voice issued from it once more. "Hey, yeah! Preservatives, spices and real meat, all at the same time. Can't beat that." With the faintest of scurrying noises, the creature went up the chair leg, then ran across Adam's legs and into his pocket. He felt it wiggling about in his slacks as it dragged at the piece of meat. Finally, it fell out of his pocket, landing on its back with the jerky nearby. Its legs waved in the air for a moment, then it righted itself and scuttled over to the jerky.

Incredulous, Adam watched the roach's progress from the corner of his eye. The tiny beast scrambled about the piece of meat for a moment. Adam couldn't quite tell if it was eating or not. Then, with an audible sound, hordes of roaches burst forth — crawling out from under the door, appearing from hitherto unknown cracks in the wooden floor and walls, dropping off the ceiling. In moments, an undulating mass of black and brown shells covered the small piece of jerky.

Crinkling his nose, Adam wondered for a moment if he would be forced to die with this memory as his last — a mass of frenzied roaches feasting upon the last bits of meat, or even upon his corpse. He shuddered slightly, and the bonds abraded his wrists. The roaches, seemingly sensitive to his movement, paused. Then, finally having sated themselves, they swarmed off into a small, loose formation. Instead of fleeing into the walls, they simply waited, a tiny cadre of scavengers waving their antennae at Adam.

Remembering that the spirits often respected offerings, Adam hoped feverishly that he wasn't totally crazed and decided to appeal to the horde. He managed to rasp out, "Help. Can you get me out of this chair?"

As if things weren't already strange enough, the roaches seemed to gather into a small consortium. Their antennae twitched at one another, and finally, the basso voice rumbled out again, answering, "Well, seeing as how you're sport for a human all tied up in a chair, we don't see why not." The roaches formed into something resembling a swirling circle, and then abruptly straightened into a double-file line, pointing straight at the chair. They trotted to Adam's nearest leg and started their way up.

Adam's skin crawled reflexively as the roaches climbed up the leg of his slacks. At least they weren't crawling up inside his pants. The roaches stopped on top of his leg.

"You... you're going to chew through the ropes, right?" asked Adam.



The lead roach rose up on its forelegs, almost as if staring up at him. Adam felt strangely foolish. "What, you think we'd eat that? Nah, it's totally synthetic. That's no good at all. Open your mouth and close your eyes."

A wave of nausea swept over Adam, but he heard the approach of a low, lilting chant from outside the room. Shutting his eyes tightly, he opened his mouth and tried to think of anything else as the roaches scuttled in procession up his shirt, along his neck, up his face, into his mouth and down inside of him. His throat gagged and his stomach turned as tiny feet and probing antennae swept down his gullet, then spread out. Roaches massed throughout his body, oblivious to muscles or bones or blood vessels or nerves. He was a skin-sack full of roaches.

As Adam thought that he might lose consciousness, he felt the roaches moving under his skin, gathering in his arms. He looked down, watching the crawling bulge as they crept down his arms toward his hands, roach after roach, forcing themselves to his wrists. The ropes tightened and bit into his skin until a fraying snap echoed once, and then the pressure was gone. Blood ran down his fingers as the roaches scuttled up to his shoulders, repeating the work there, then to his ankles, destroying those bindings.

With the roaches still swarming inside of him, Adam stood woozily. His balance seemed odd as the critters roamed about his innards. At the places of his bonds, his skin was torn open, bleeding, but he hardly felt the pain. He took a step, stumbling, and turned, grabbing the chair for balance.

The susurrating chanting approached nearer. Gripping the chair tightly, Adam hefted it up. It was made of heavy wood. He waited for the door to open, then twisted hard to his right, bringing the chair up. His arms and legs bulged unnaturally as the roaches moved about, and the chair caught the knife-wielding cultist in the jaw. The teeth in the man's sunken jaw cracked together, and a few shards of white sprayed out of his mouth as he slammed sideways into the doorjamb, then collapsed.

Breathing heavily, Adam stopped to wipe his lips. He dropped the heavy chair and bent down to pick up the knife, still awkward with the scuttling inside. Then, taking quick steps, he crossed over the unconscious man and stepped into a perpendicular passage. He glanced in both directions and settled on the right, spotting a rising staircase.

Moving quickly, Adam crossed the few feet to the stairway, glancing back to make sure that nobody followed from behind. The steps were of hewn concrete, rough against his bare feet, and he peeked up slowly into the room above.

The top of the stairs opened into a roughly rectangular room. Mason jars lined the shelves, storing peaches, pickles and less unidentifiable substances. To the left, mechanical engine parts lay scattered across a stone slab. To the right, a large white freezer took up much of the space of the basement. Straight ahead, another stairway, this one of wood, led straight up. From a tiny window on the left side, sunlight streamed in, and Adam began to hope that he might escape.

Creeping up the stone stairs, Adam dashed to the wooden staircase. As he looked up, his gorge rose in his throat — or one of the cockroaches; he wasn't sure which. Just coming down the stairs and looking more annoyed than surprised was the cultist that he'd run afoul of in the first place.

Adam felt panic as the cultist stared down hard at him. With his checkered shirt and casual slacks, the cultist hardly seemed the usual psychotic threat to human life. The brand on the right side of his neck gave that the lie, though, along with the heavy, brass-bound, bloodstained cudgel in his left hand.

Snarling, the cultist raised the cudgel, doubtless ready to add to the rust-colored splotches already on its bindings. Adam flinched, bringing up his left hand in front of his face while he stabbed out with his stolen knife. The blade thunked into the cultist's thigh, a meaty thump like stabbing into a pork chop. Almost simultaneously, the cultist brought the cudgel down. The heavy weapon smashed into Adam's arm. Adam stumbled back and fell heavily onto the floor, knife still stuck in his adversary's leg, as brilliant numbing pain flared up his arm. Head spinning, he barely managed to grab his wounded arm with his other hand, trying to keep his numbed limb from flopping uselessly about.

With a staggering gait, the cultist shuffled forward. His right hand stretched out and he grimaced, spitting syllables that seemed to bend the very air. Adam looked on in horror as his swimming vision registered tentacled balls of brown matter floating in the air. Spirits? More hallucinations? Monstrous servants? Whatever they were, they seemed to haze the

very air, waiting as the cultist continued his twisted chant. Blood oozed from the leg wound, but the cultist paid it no heed. For a moment, Adam felt sorry for the things, pressed into the service of a mad and misguided soul.

"My master will be even more pleased with this," gurgled the cultist, eyes calculating. "A sacrifice is one thing. A struggle, the tinge of fear, that is quite another." He waved his right hand forward, and the tentacles of the brownish lumps slithered out, reaching for Adam.

Swallowing once, Adam called out as Apo had taught him. "Ahiya, kah emah," his voice lilted, almost singsong, and the lumps quivered in the air, unmoving. He continued his greeting, addressing them not as slaves but as equals, and they stopped. Unable to defy their master yet incapable of breaking the ancient pacts of respect between spirit and man, they hovered, waiting.

Setting his jaw, the cultist advanced again, dragging his wounded leg. "You have no right to interfere with my servants!" It seemed almost as if the cultist were more concerned with the challenge to his authority than with his failure to kill Adam outright. The cultist gathered his reserve and continued. "You have a great deal of power within you. It'll be mine once I've killed you. Nothing personal."

Fighting to keep his eyes open, Adam spoke briefly according to his learning. "They were never yours to command," he said reproachfully. "The spirits are heralds for men, not servants." With that, he yawned. A great, welling yawn burbled up from inside of him and his mouth distended, his lungs filling with air, sucking in sweet life and breathing it out. Pneuma — breath — spirit. Adam breathed.

Gushing forth came the cockroaches. Scurrying in odd patterns under Adam's skin, the roaches rushed up into his mouth and out, running down, raining out like a black torrent. Skittering and chittering, the roaches ran all across him like armor, then formed into a moving morass between him and the cultist. The cultist had only a moment's terror to observe the hideous collection before the roaches boiled forward again, scrabbling up his legs, running under his pants, entering his shoes and crawling under his shirt. The cudgel fell from his hands as he shrieked, batting ineffectually at the bugs that swarmed over his skin. In waves they crawled up his face, entering his nose and ears. Crunching and writhing, the cockroaches slid about under his bulging skin. Tiny bites opened his flesh from the inside; a cockroach ate its way out through one of his eyes. Bulging, crippled hands tore at hair that came away in clumps of tattered scalp. In mere moments, the cultist seemed to melt, his flesh sagging, his clothes unable to maintain the shape of a body ravaged from the inside. He retched and a stream of noxious vomit spewed forth with a tide of cockroaches just before his jaw fell off. Without even a minute of time, his remains — a pile of bones with gobbets of partially-liquefied flesh attached — collapsed in a heap.

Adam sighed and squeezed his eyes shut. All about him, tiny feet echoed as they slid into the concealment of the walls. Feeling about with his good hand, Adam pulled himself around the pile of entrails, clambering up the stairs to daylight and friendlier spirits.



Introduction



Welcome to the other side of the world. No, not another continent — the spirit world. The Dream of the world that is.

In every culture, the shaman heard the wisdom of that other world, heeded the call of the spirits and became the mingling of flesh and spirit. Pulled by the totem — the spirit that is guide, mentor and master — the shaman serves the people with his power, yet he is servant to the spirits, giving them a taste of the material world that was once his home.

A shaman is more than a Dreamspeaker. The shaman is mendicant, medic, wanderer, wise man, healer, helper, servant and savior. The shaman is a normal man — or woman — who becomes sick with the calling of spirit, who lives the power that he must wield for the spirits. This isn't just magic. This is life.

What's In This Book

The *Spirit Ways* details the entire craft of shamanism, from the inside and outside. Turn one way, and it's a path of power and wisdom. Turn another, and it's a road of service to wandering spirits. This book tackles both angles: The world inside of the shaman, and the view from the outside.

Chapter One: A Life Apart relates the tales and trials of shamanism, as might be told by one of the initiated. A shaman isn't just a guy with sticks and feathers. Look at the whole world through a shaman's eyes, and see it anew.

Chapter Two: The Tongue of Spirits describes the shaman from the outside — the worlds that the shaman sees, the ways that they commune with spirits and the means for describing shamanic thought and practice.

Chapter Three: Walking the Spirit tells the tale of a shaman's trip through the spirit worlds, putting the various parts of the spirit world into the shaman's words. Discover how shamans interact with other travelers of the spirit road, and how they overcome the obstacles of spirit journeys with their unusual ways of thinking.

Chapter Four: Spirit Helpers continues to follow a shamanic journey while exploring the sorts of minor spirits that shamans might call upon or run afoul of. Here, too, you can find notes about integrating such spirits into your chronicle.

Appendix: By the Numbers offers several new toys for shamans. Fetishes and talismans of many sorts are described, as well as some new Merits and Flaws specifically for shamanic characters.

Remember to follow the drumbeat!



Chapter one: A Life Apart

*When the world hears the beat of my drum
Then the spirit of the gods will descend
I'm the drum
You're the drum
We're the drum*
— Babatunde Olatunji



If you want to see what is inside of yourself, go up to the darkness and the ice. Go there and sit. If you don't die, you will see what you went there to see, and you will come back a different person.

That's all there is to know about how shamans came to be. The rest is just embroidery.

Ah, you are not satisfied?

Good. Don't be. There's usually more, if you dig under the ice for a while. But don't dig too forcefully. You never know what's hiding there, resting, waiting in the blue-black, maybe not too happy to get a blow on the head from a shovel. Dig gently.

Pass me that bottle, already.

This is what I learned. Long, long ago, when our ancestors were still getting their bearings in this world, some went west, some went east, some went south to the warmer places, and the boldest and most adventurous went up to the ice. They went up when the sun was shining, and a person could

hardly walk straight ahead because of all the fat, lazy seal in the way, just sitting by the water waiting to become a meal. Naturally, our ancestors thought this was the finest thing they'd ever seen, and they prepared to settle down. But then the sun went down. And the seal got sparser. And our ancestors built a snow house and sat in it, darkness and cold surrounding them on all sides. And that's how they sat.

After a while, the spirits that move around in the darkness found them sitting there and tried to enter them. Those hungry spirits had been waiting a long time for some nice, gullible types to come along, and they weren't disappointed. Soon all our ancestors were possessed. They screamed and thrashed around. But our ancestor Ulgen was different. He didn't just fall down and let the spirits have his body. He fought against the spirits using every weapon at his command. He shouted at the spirits to get their attention and frighten them. He pierced his body with his knife to drive them out. But it wasn't enough.

So Ulgen used his knife to remove his own liver and offered it to the spirits. This attracted many, but not all of them. So Ulgen next removed his lungs. Finally, he removed his heart and set it out for the spirits. The hungry spirits swarmed over and devoured our ancestor's organs. With the last strength he had, he captured the distracted spirits in an elk-hide bag and tied it shut. Then he lay quietly, waiting to see the face of death.

As he lay there, a huge black seal appeared to him. It said, "Kill me, and live. Make the proper use of me. I deserve an excellent drum." Ulgen raised his blowgun to his lips and blew a perfect shot up the nostril of the seal, killing it immediately. He took its heart, lungs and liver and put them into his own body. When he felt his strength return, he immediately jumped up and shouted "Heyo, heyo!"

He made a drum from the black seal's hide as he had been told to do. The spirit of the seal came and said to him, "I will go back into my skin and be your guide." Ulgen said, "Many thanks, Seal Brother."

He saw that all his brothers and sisters were in a trance because of the spirits. He took his drum and began to play and sing. He drummed the spirits out of his brothers and

sisters and trapped them in the elk-hide bag. When his brothers and sisters awakened, each was more grateful than the next. They gave him gifts of walrus tusk and elk hide. But nobody wanted to sit with Ulgen anymore. They couldn't forget that he was full of spirit power like a bad smell. They felt afraid.

Ulgen saw this. So he took his son and blew his some of his own power into his son's nose. Then he said, "My family, I am going to visit our other relatives. I want to make sure that they don't need my help. If you have any trouble with the spirits around here, my son will help you out." Then he laced up his boots and set off in his kayak. And that's how Ulgen, the father of all shamans, came to leave the first snow house and travel south to Altai.

The path of Ulgen's journey is lost to us now. But I like to think he got a mighty long way, riding his drum just as we do today.

Is all this true? What a stupid question! I ought to come over there and smack you just for asking! And anyway, who gives a shit? If you're still so curious after the bear eats you, go back and see for yourself. You'll have your own drum then.

Roots of Shamanism



Swimming Between Mother's Thighs

We who still dwell up on the ice, Ammasalik and Habakuk and Iglulik, listen carefully to the rumbling voice of Takanakapsaluk, the Mother of Sea Beasts. We are the angakut, riding the drum under the blaze of the Northern lights. On the cold belly of the world, every being knows its place. With the taste of whale blubber on our lips, we keep an eye cocked for storms and for the great bear, our worthy brother and foe.

Look into our eyes and see that we have seen our own bones. Having seen this, we can see anything past and anything to come. That is the gift of Tongarsoak, after death. Ah, you are quick to look away. Does the dark frighten you, the dark that lasts for months, pressing outside the firelight with the weight of black water? Swim into the dark ocean with us, lift your nose to the airhole in the ice. Open your eyes and see the secret colors of the water.

My body is all eyes.

Look at it! Be not afraid!

I look in all directions.

We don't fear the white man's ways, but we will never abandon the purifying fire of the ice, the burning until all but the bones are gone.

The Bronze Gong

To refer to "Asia" is only to mark yourself as a stinking white ghost, as if it weren't already obvious to us who can see with opened eyes. Your stink of cheap cigarettes and rubber shoes precedes you, forcing itself past the pleasant scents of oolong, boiling fat, noodles and fish. We are Lolo, Xingpah, Moso and Na-khi. Or, for your simple Western ears, Chinese. We have climbed the ladder of knives and navigated the path of white-hot plowshares. Can you go up to the celestial places as we can? Do you know the three areas of the world and the roots of the World Tree? We remember how to fly, as we were taught long ago by Emperor Yao's two daughters. We remember how to use a bear skin to change our own shapes.

The coming of your people to our ancestral lands brought opium, which we sometimes find useful, but its strength is too much for the weak-souled. The Red Book persons think to destroy us with weapons, but we know the Celestial Roads, and it will take more than a few guns to finish us off.

The Green Heart

From the barrios around the feet of the Brazilian Christ to the slopes of the Andes, we have kept hold of our sacred ways in the face of so many invasions. We have snatched our livelihood from the mouths of rats. Simon Bolivar didn't kill us all, and neither will you. We fear the death of our rainforest, and we work against it with all our strength.

We are Manasi, Taino, Yanomami, Tapirape, Tupinamba and Yahgan; we are protecting our Mother's body with our own bodies. The jungle is full of dreams, of drumming, of spirits and wonderful danger. For us, the sky is no higher than a house, the gods no more distant than neighbors. If your soul runs off, who will find it, if not we? Of course, we have reason to doubt if whites even have souls.

Drumming at the Waterline

Each of us was eaten by the tiger, crushed in his white teeth. We Semang are little but fierce, like tiger's cubs ourselves, along with our brothers the Sakai and the Jakun, who came here before us. We came out from the tiger's belly with the knowledge of his shape, having become halak. Some of us were changed so far that they turned into women, but their magic was all the stronger for the change. Dancing in the tiger's eye, we hear the voices of the cenoi and speak in their secret language with them. How would anyone speak with the Wise Ones, if not for our dancing, if not for our crystals?

We fly in our boats to accompany the souls of our people into the Spirit World. We wouldn't let any Semang make that journey alone, prey to any hungry spirit that comes along. It's no wonder your people are beset by difficulties, having no one to speak for you in that other place. We watch over our people in life, as well, seeing their troubles in a bowl of water.

Eating Dust, Drinking Dreams

We are the Shuswap, the Paviotso, the Lillooet, the Sinkyone, Yurok, Wintu, Maidu, Yuki, Maricopa. You think you know us, you slick-talking whites with your fake clothes, but you don't know us any more than a child knows his parents. You see what you want to see, wearing silly goggles stuck on your eyes that Rousseau made for you. You see nothing and go away happy to have a real, genuine Indian dreamcatcher for your New Age decorations. As if a bit of string was all it took to catch a dream. You'll never catch ours!

When the totem tells us to, we suck out an illness along with the blood. Are we strong enough to suck the sickness out of your blood? Perhaps there is nothing to be done for you after all.

Look, shamanic power is like most things pertaining to human life: It's the solution to a problem of sorts. The problem is, the world is full of spirits, powers, strange forces and inevitable events. People can get attacked by demons, lose their souls while they sleep, who knows what. Even Sleepers see how strange this world is, but they don't know how to control it.

Ever looked into a dog's eyes after it got hit by a car? So sad, in such pain, and yet utterly uncomprehending. The dog cannot understand what has happened to it. What makes us human is that we can understand what's happened to us. We can try to fathom the mysteries surrounding us.

Humans have struggled with the spirit world and with their own souls ever since someone built a fire and finally they had a place to sit and be warm and think.

It's plain, you realize as you gaze into your own fire, that sometimes a person's soul gets injured; you can see it in the eyes, how the soul has been damaged. It's plain that sometimes the body is attacking its owner with terrible diseases and no one knows why. But why? What can be done to help the sufferer? Why are demons lodged in that person's body? What if the person dies — where does his personhood go? If a person dies angry, will he come back to finish what he started?

Our father Ulgen came to help answer those questions. If you put on a shirt and shoes, I think you have to call this metaphysics.

Our father Ulgen found his answers when he learned to ride the drum. The shaman protects the souls of Sleepers. Through the trance and the drum, sacred songs and drugs, the shaman enters the spirit world and brings back a soul that has wandered away, and stuffs it back into the left ear where it belongs. A shaman comes between the Sleepers and the crazy behavior of the spirit world.

Nowadays you may hear a lot about the Greeks and the French with their fancy philosophy. But philosophers are only guessing. A shaman knows the truth, because she's gone there and had a good, hard look. She's seen her own flesh rot, her own skeleton rattling white and bare. Plato, that pompous old fuck, was theorizing — him and his stupid cave. I actually died my own death. Who do you think knows more, huh? That's why the Sleepers will always need us, even though they are so foolish these days that they've forgotten everything useful that 10,000 years of work could produce. Stifling away in these ridiculous beehive buildings. Sleepers! Uma knows why they are so crazy. But they need us now more than ever. The spirits are strong and they feed on the craziness. We have to watch carefully for Sleepers who are in trouble.

That's why we aren't like those navel-contemplating characters in their Council. They're looking at the stars, at the roof of the world, at I don't know what. A shaman is of the people. The Sleepers need caring for; they have difficulties they aren't equipped to handle, and they don't need some snobby types coming around and looking down on them in that patronizing, I-know-the-secrets-of-the-universe kind of way that certain folks have. Cosmic manipulation is fun, but it's not the right tool for a shaman. That's not going to bring back Mrs. O'Shaughnessy's soul from where it's trapped inside her Spirit Lake, is it? A shaman pays attention to these sorts of little things.

In the old days, folks knew when it was time to hunt up a shaman for some help. You sat in the door of your hut enjoying a good smoke until somebody came up with a few

chickens or a wolverine pelt to ask for some assistance. A lonely life, but not a bad one. Nowadays, you may have to hunt up your own opportunities to exercise yourself, since

these silly big-city people no longer even understand that they have souls. Chicago's chock full of people who can use your help, so I reckon you'll do just fine.

Regarding the Matter of Names



Ahem. The word "shaman" originates from the Tungu, and some ethnolinguists relate this back to the Pali, "samana."

Make of that what you will. Myself, I have little use for such matters.

What is a shaman? Most Sleepers think of a wizened old geezer dressed in deerskin, popping peyote buttons and waving a smudge stick, chanting unintelligably. They're right,

and they're also wrong. As usual, the truth of a thing doesn't lie in its surface manifestation.

A shaman is a person who has learned to influence reality by manipulating sacred energy via the medium of an ecstatic trance. That's the core of it, though not the whole of it. It's not the ability to enter a trance — mystics in both hemispheres use their own methods to enter trances; this does not make a Zen master into a shaman. The core is that the trance frees the shaman's power to act; it collapses distances and time to the shaman's will and opens the gates of death.

At the shaman's right hand is his totem spirit. At his left hand is his key to the spirit world, anything from a peyote button to an heirloom niggun, carrying the singer toward the gate on a carpet of melody.

Yes, there's usually a drum, usually some smoke, usually recognizable traces of his culture and training, but that's just wrapping paper. What's inside the paper? A trance.

The trance is the gate to the spirit world. The trance is the essence of the shaman's art. His ability to sustain the rigors of the trance is the only limit to what he can accomplish, theoretically. One says "theoretically" because shamans are practical dealers in the difficulties of everyday life, and in everyday life, hardly anything ever goes as it theoretically should.

The Shamanic "Tradition"

They see the elephant shit, they want to shit like an elephant.

— Traditional Thai saying

Most mages would say that shamans are a small subculture under the influence of the Dreamspeakers, war-painted visionaries who certainly know their way around a sweat lodge (although members of the Cult of Ecstasy might claim sway over these ecstatic drummers). Many members of both Traditions are well-trained in shamanic techniques and

know how to enter the Otherworlds. Those grim-faced Verbena types are well-educated, too. But are they shamans? The exercise of other magical talents might be said to put them beyond the bailiwick of traditional shamanism.

The shamans themselves would say that the reason a Dreamspeaker isn't a shaman is that he wasn't initiated into shamanism by another master shaman. Shamanism isn't democratic; it's exclusive, even elitist. The choosing, testing and initiatory processes are rigorous and occasionally even fatal. There is no way to become a shaman without enduring the process to the last, agonizing detail.

"Lots of people can talk with spirits," say the elders on the slopes of Popocatepetl, "but that don't make 'em shamans. Just like lots of people fly these days, but that don't make 'em birds, now do it?"

On occasion, a shaman might seek membership among more Traditional mages, but she'll be pursuing her own agenda. Don't make the mistake of thinking that she'd be a good person to enlist in your own fight. Like most shamans, she has a highly individual sense of honor and proper behavior, and she might have no trouble letting you down. She's already faced death; she knows her priorities with grim certitude. Don't assume you're at the top of that list.

Become the Psychopomp

The shaman's most solemn function is that of the psychopomp: the soul's companion and guide. When a person dies, his spirit needs to go on with its journey, but it doesn't always do what it's supposed to. Spirits, like flesh, can be stubborn, contrary or just plain stupid. They may linger around like nasty smells in the garage, ruining everyone's life in subtle ways. They might just be stuck and not know what to do about it. The shamanic psychopomp can aid these footloose spirits to find the path, or if necessary she can force them onward.

The flip side of the psychopompic coin is conception, the process of inducing a spirit to take up the burden of flesh again. The psychopomp is trained to solve this problem as well. Make of that what you will.

Jack of All Trades

A shaman's basic function can be described in a single simple sentence: She handles situations no one else knows how to handle involving spiritual, mental or physical well-being.

Trouble conceiving? Sure, no problem. We'll find that blockage and blow it right out. Spirit possession? Right up our alley. Trouble with your mother-in-law, or worse yet, her ghost? Give a shaman a call. Dying? 1-800-SHAMANS for complete spiritual accompaniment services, courtesy of the psychopomp extraordinaire. Birth to Earth and beyond, as they say. That's what your basic, old-fashioned shaman is trained to handle. Your new-fangled shamanic type will have more experience with heavy narcotics, naturally — unavoidable in these modern times, but those ancient jungle-bound geezers can produce things from their hairy armpits that'd really make you fly! Sure, ecstasy is nice, and long-lasting, too, but iboga's really stood the test of time, in my opinion. Ask any shaman along the Horn.

The Rising Sun of Western Life



Well, I went to Belovodia. I saw the fire burning beneath the ice. But it was not as in the days of the Old Kams. To me it looked like strobes, or even like one of those flashing mirror balls from a discoteque. It made me want to dance, so I danced and I sang. My totem is partial to Pet Shop Boys.

Over the last 100 years or so, medicine has expanded to cover a lot of areas traditionally handled by shamans. Indeed, some might call modern medicine an offshoot of shamanism. Where once wise men combed the forests for useful plants, today wise scientists peer into microscopes searching for specific DNA. The search hasn't changed, though the searchers have. Anybody with a heart condition or a broken leg should see a doctor. A couple that's having trouble making a baby can find help in aisle 7 of the local pharmacy now. And Prozac will help many people more than a visit from the local midewiwin.

And yet, and yet, and yet... Every suburban housewife can tell a story about a friend who fell through the cracks, the chronic fatigue syndrome that just won't quit, the daughter who suddenly went bad, the unexpected melanoma, the migraines, the man who can't stay married to anybody, the uncle who lives on the Internet surrounded by antique newspapers and who refuses to come out of his house. Not to mention the possessed groundskeeper's cottage, the nixie in the swimming pool, the bad smell in the back room, the frog attacks. That's what a shaman is for — the situations that no one else knows how to handle.

That, in a nutshell, is the history of shamanism. Once, we were the only source for our people to turn to. But even the deep rainforest isn't impenetrable to determined imperialist bastards, and since the 13th century or so, those money-hungry white guys have been mighty busy. Even our brothers in the very coldest places have gotten a surprise visit or two from a longjohn-wearing oil prospector. Those crazy



Westerners will do just about anything to pile up money. They're like a man with two heads. Neither one claims to believe anything the other head says, but only in the secret place of its minds, it worries that the other head might be right. So the Catholic head, full of that dying god, says, "Be good to your fellow man. Reap your reward in the kingdom of Heaven. Suffer the children to come unto me. It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man through the gates of heaven." But secretly, the Catholic head is afraid that there's more to life. So what happens? The Medici popes had mistresses in the Vatican. And the Vatican itself — what a treasure house of wealth! I guess nobody there is really too worried about the gates of Heaven.

Meanwhile, the other head, full of imperialistic divine right, says, "God Himself wants me to have everything I see. In fact, it's my responsibility to enlighten my less fortunate, savage brothers and bring them plumbing and smallpox, while I have my way with their sisters, oh yeah." And he pretends that religion means nothing to him, but inside he's empty, so empty, so he keeps trying out new versions of religion, praying that something will fill that emptiness that no amount of money can make up for. Communism — that was a nice try. Seventy whole years. Let me tell you, if Saint Paul had been a communist, we'd all be wearing red now. Those idiots just had no organization. There you have it, the history of Western society.

Both heads, sacred and profane, have one thing in common — everything they do is a problem for shamans. On the one hand, nosy missionaries invaded every poor little village in South America, India, Africa, Australia. A person couldn't spit without hitting a missionary, I swear — not that I'd care if I did. It's hard for people to reconcile multiple beliefs, especially when one is represented by a kindly old lady who usually hides deep in the forest, while

the other has liquor and eventually death at the stake. So the Catholic head drove many shamans deep into hiding. A shaman doesn't fear death, even by fire, but it's inconvenient. Much better to avoid it.

The Modern Problem

Even a hundred years of smelly black cassocks was nothing compared to what the other head was cooking up: modernity. This idea, modernity, and all its trappings, has possessed the hearts and minds of the people thoroughly. They've put their head into the box and can't see out of it. I'll give you an example. Once upon a time, if a person was ill, she'd try to treat herself. If that failed, she'd try her friends and relatives. If that failed, she'd seek out a shaman. At each step, she tried something different.

What happens now? She feels sick. She tries to treat herself. If that fails, she sees a doctor. All right, so far, so good. But if that fails? She sees another doctor, then another! See what I mean? How desperate she'd have to be before she finally smashes out of that box of modernity!

And this is terrible for shamans. It's terrible for practicing shamans, because without someone who needs their art, shamans may literally die. It's terrible for future shamans, because if they can't pull their heads out of that damn box, they'll die without ever learning what they could have been.

A truly powerful shaman can do much more than shooing away a few pesky demons. She can travel through time to see the future or the past, or go deep into the Spirit Realm to speak with the dead. She works with the substance of reality itself. She manipulates and controls sacred energy through the medium of the shamanic trance. What she can accomplish is only bounded by her will and her skill, but the essence of shamanism is practical applications.

A Choosing, But No Choice



"I tell you most solemnly, unless a man is born through water and the Spirit, he can not enter the kingdom of God. What is born of flesh is flesh, what is born of spirit is spirit. Do not be surprised when I say, you must be born from above."

— John 3:5-7

The Siberian Kams say that all Kams are really just part of one great Kam, and that a future Kam is chosen by the Black Spirits, who are the spirits of the Kams who went before. So if you happened to be a Siberian from the Altai region, you'd be chosen by the Black Spirits.

Among societies where shamanism is hereditary, future shamans sometimes know their destiny before it arrives. If you were lucky enough to be Samoyed, Zulu, Dyak, Cobeno, Nez Perce or Ostyak, for example, you'd be ready to tackle your initiation after your father passed on. It's nice

when the novice shaman enters her training willingly, eyes wide and spirit eager. This saves a lot of wear and tear, especially on the shaman herself.

Unfortunately that's not always how it works. It's not always begun voluntarily and it's not always quick. What if you got stuck being, say, Tungu or Yakut? Or maybe even Portuguese or Swedish? How do you know you're supposed to become a shaman? How are you chosen? It could be described in a couple of different ways. Some say that something inside the future shaman calls to the spirits to come and Awaken her. Others say that the spirits find the future shaman on their own, drawn by the scent of power. To these unwitting recruits falls the more usual route of recruitment — spiritual attack.

The spirits aren't too subtle when they're trying to reach the waking world. They throw things, create horrible stench, all that poltergeist-y sort of activity. When they're



trying to convince a Sleeper to Awaken, they're just as impatient. They might try something nice like dream visitations or mirror apparitions. More typically, they just make the Sleeper get very, very sick.

Sickness Unto Death

I went out to hunt caribou, saying that I would make my mother some new buttons out of caribou antler. I went out and followed tracks for three days. On the fourth day, I wanted to make a fire and rest. But my hands couldn't do it. Then a yellow dog came out of the trees and said, "Let me help you."

"Please, Yellow Dog, help me," I said to him.

He made me a fire and said, "Don't forget to leave out some of that caribou for me." Then he went away.

The next day I killed a fat bull caribou. I left out a big piece of it for Yellow Dog. Then I went home.

I was sick then. I was sick for three days and nights. On the fourth day, a shaman came to see me. I saw Yellow Dog behind him. I said, "Hey, Yellow Dog, I need your help again."

The shaman looked into my face and said, "Don't talk about these things around people." He massaged my body for a while, then said, "When you feel better, come to see me."

So that's when I entered into my training as a shaman.

A person who is chosen to become a shaman may simply fall ill with a mysterious, incurable illness. He lies weakly in bed, day after day. He tries every cure he can think of. He goes to many different doctors, following the chain of referrals from clinic to clinic. Some treatments might even work for a short while. Ever known someone who just couldn't get well, no matter what they tried? That bad back, sour belly, hacking cough that just kept coming back? How about that chronic fatigue syndrome? Seems like city people will do darn near anything before they'll hear the voice of the spirit world.

This process can be especially drawn out if the sufferer doesn't have access to a shaman or simply resists the whole notion because he lives in a more industrialized society. Try locating a shaman in Liverpool or Aspen on short notice. They're not typically in the yellow pages. Now try convincing yourself that it's a good idea to consult a shaman about your chronic pinched nerve. Heck, try convincing anyone you know that it's a good idea:

"I've tried everything for my sciatica. I was thinking about seeing a shaman I heard about."

"You mean one of those weird guys with the peace pipe and the funny chanting? Do you think your insurance covers that?"

Yep, there's no denying that an un-Awakened one has a long road to travel before he'll see the doors of death.

The spirit world tries repeatedly to establish contact with the future shaman. Until he somehow understands what is happening to him and accepts his fate, the illness won't go into remission.

The sickness comes on strong sometimes, knocking the sufferer flat unexpectedly, or else it may creep up, slowly

sapping her strength until she never leaves her bed anymore. It might be an identifiable sickness such as malaria, or it might be a mystery illness that eludes all attempts to cure it. "Well," says the bright-eyed pupil, "how can she tell the difference between 'real' malaria and 'spirit' malaria?" The wise person will watch for other symptoms of spirit attack. The key thing is continual recurrence or incurability.

The victim might begin to act deranged. She might be uncontrollable and have to be watched very carefully by her family. If she's particularly unlucky, she might be locked up at this stage, and if she is weak, she'll never recover. Stupid spirits don't know when to quit.

It might be less drastic. Perhaps the victim will just be incredibly picky about food or bizarrely emotional, rather like a pregnant woman. The shamanic sickness is similar to pregnancy, in a way — it forces the sufferer into physical and psychic extremities and ultimately transforms her completely at the very deepest level of her personality. It lasts

quite a while; the time is not totally under the control of the swelling body's owner. The embedded thing, the coming sea-change grows and changes inside, out of sight but never out of mind. Eventually, at the end of the ordeal comes another, bloodier travail, also unavoidable, also uncontrollable, often terrifying, as the Sleeper gives birth to the shaman, squeezed wailing out of the dark into a dangerous new world. The experienced midwife may help her along, but ultimately, the sufferer endures and survives the ordeal alone, or she dies alone, her gift stillborn.

Are these changes real? Imaginary? Mystical? The initiated master knows the answer, but to her the question has no meaning. In either case, the novice has undergone an unfathomable change.

What if the novice rejects the gift? Perhaps a skilled shaman might be able to chase away the disease. More likely, the victim will just be sick forever, most likely he'll die, unless he gives into the compulsion at last.

The Agony and The Ecstasy



*Sky moving
as they sang
Spirits sang of salmon
I was drowning
in the basin
the place of power
for curing*

— Siwalxlelix, Bella Coola shaman

Finally, the future shaman gives into the pull of the spirit world. She starts to shamanize. She may sing, dance, drum, chant or any other activity as her soul moves her, until she enters her first trance. Once in the spirit world, she'll see her first spirits, with luck avoid any attacks, and learn that she is to become a shaman. When she comes out of her trance, the sickness abates.

At this point, she needs to find other, experienced shamans. She can't proceed with her training without help. Word travels quickly in the Otherworlds, though, and in all likelihood, a hairy stranger is already knocking on her door or lying in wait for her around the corner.

The Midewiwin

By nature, shamans are goats, not sheep: they like the solitary road, the high peaks. Two shamans together means that one of them is redundant. Still, it's good to be in the company of one's true family, those who understand the truth of one's life, and to be in a place that's almost totally safe. Thus it comes about that most shamans belong to a midewiwin society.

Every midewiwin has a fixed meeting place. It may be extremely remote. Shamans capable of traveling vast

distances in trance will not mind attending a sweat session in Nova Scotia, after all. Time and distance mean little to a master. Some societies meet as often as monthly or even weekly. Others meet yearly for a week-long bash that leaves the surrounding pines reeking of smoke and shaking with drums.

The societies help to keep shamans from stepping on each others' toes, and they also help steer available shamans toward open territory. Another function of the midewiwin is watching for ripples of power among the Sleepers. A shaman must learn her future craft through apprenticeship under an experienced shaman. It's not an easy life, so a shaman rarely seeks out an apprentice unless he senses extraordinary power in her, or if his guardian points her out. The midewiwin helps to match up the willing master with the needy pupil, conserving the magical resources of the shamanic community and preserving the life and power of the future shaman as well.

Initiation

Now the new shaman's initiation begins in earnest. As any Navaho can explain, a few visions and a trip to Spirits-R-Us do not a shaman make. The initiation process is what draws out and strengthens a shaman's power, preparing her to handle, on her own, anything the universe cares to throw at her.

This is the time when she sits at her teacher's side, learning whatever he can teach her. Herbs, drugs, animal-skin tanning techniques, proper use and care of weaponry, martial arts, dance, foreign languages or secret tongues, hunting and drumming, to name only a few, are some of the things a shaman might want to know. Every shaman, bar none, knows how to play at least one musical instrument —

the drum. Every shaman, bar none, knows at least one technique for entering the spirit world and exiting it successfully, still alive. Every shaman, bar none, is capable of healing at least a few types of sicknesses. Above and beyond that, it's a smorgasbord of individual choice.

Each master has a unique set of knowledge, much of it inescapably environment-specific. Shamans born and raised on the slopes of Popocatepetl are not typically experts on hunting seal or building igloos. Shamans from Manchuria will not have much to say about deep-sea fishing. Shamans

from the Outer Banks are cracker-jack on boats but not necessarily on firearms.

Because environment-specific learning is the least flexible sort, every sensible shaman constantly works to expand her base of knowledge. After all, you never know just when a deep understanding of the differences between macaques and lemurs will turn up useful, or when you might need to know how to build a hot air balloon from scratch. Life is funny that way, and the world's a lot smaller than it used to be.

The Death of the Flesh



[The two white bears] took her away over the ice and forced her to descend into the water through a hole in the ice. For some time she was dragged along through the water, only to be abandoned when the bears came to another opening through which they disappeared.

Left on her own, the girl sank to the floor of the ocean. When her feet touched bottom she was able to look about her. One side of the ocean appeared to be darker, the opposite side seemed brighter. She reasoned that the dark side must lie to the north so she began to walk toward the south where the light was brighter.

While she was walking tiny sea animals surrounded her. They bit into her body, tearing away strips of flesh. Little by little her body was devoured. Eventually only her bones remained. [...] She was nothing but a skeleton but resolutely she advanced toward the light. She found a crevasse in the ice and was able to climb onto the ice surface.

— The Magic Drum

The shaman's bailiwick includes all aspects of the soul's journey, including those portions that occur before the body is created and after it is discarded. The psychopomp must be ready to care for the soul at any point on the circle.

Every person has been born and carries the sacred knowledge of mother's womb already in his hidden memo-



ries. The road into the spirit world goes through the big, black door of death, though, and that's why every shaman has to pass through it. Shamans learn by doing the thing they are learning. They often learn to cure an illness by experiencing it. They learn to understand death by experiencing it.

To an outsider, this portion of the initiation is difficult to discuss, even more difficult to understand. This isn't some fraternity house hoe-down with its group humiliations and surreptitious buttock-fondling under cover of a chemically induced fog. It goes far beyond the deliberate sadism of military enclaves, blood-drenched torsos in push-up position, screams of pain mixed with howls of warlust, bonding men together through the intentional destruction of the ego. Shamanic initiation is all about death — dying, being dead, then coming back. It's never pretty. It's always thorough. It's as far beyond an ordinary initiation as the next continent is beyond your backyard. Shamanic initiation destroys and rebuilds the soul more thoroughly than can possibly be imagined by a non-initiate.

To reach the spirit world, the novice breaks through her own resistance using whatever technique her teacher may recommend. These methods vary from pole to pole, but they have one thing in common — they cut the senses off from the everyday world and force them, whether suddenly or gradually, to open up to the spirit world. A week floating in an isolation tank, or a heavy dose of hallucinogens that

bring Uma Herself out of the fire — either way the shaman's perceptions are altered. Her eyes finally see the spirit world.

She may see her entire body dismembered limb by limb, then reassembled. Perhaps the elder shamans will operate on her body, replacing her internal organs with mystical facsimiles or huge rock crystals. Among some Eskimos, Tongtsoak comes in the form of a great bear from the lake and eats all her flesh. She contemplates her naked skeleton until it reclothes itself in flesh.

Dayak shamans recount undergoing a literal brain-washing: the head is severed, the brain cleansed and returned to its cavity, the head restored. After a quick application of gold dust to the eyes, the new shaman is ready to see the Otherworld clearly. This is similar to the initiation of an Ungarinyin shaman — suddenly abducted by spirits, he simply gets a new brain, which lets him see the Spirit Realm. Or how about having worms drain your blood out until you die? Kalweit reports that this is "said to produce highly gifted shamans." Maybe you'd prefer the fate of an Arunta novice: pierced by ancestral Dreamtime spirits with a spear through the back of the neck until the blade emerges through the mouth, perforating the tongue. The tongue piercing is permanent, too, as if one needed any reminders of such an experience.

A Siberian shaman recalls that a huge blacksmith chopped up his body and boiled it in a huge cauldron for



three years, at the end of which time, he forged him a new body on his three immense anvils. Did we forget to mention that the initiation may not be fast?

Among the Arauca, the shaman and her master hold the initiation ceremony publicly. Teacher and student each tear off their nose, tongue and eyeballs, then swap. The Buryat say that the novice's soul is taken by her shamanic ancestors before a dread assembly of spirits. They torture her cruelly, slashing and poking at her belly, cutting off big gobbets of flesh, tossing around the bloody prizes. They cook the flesh. While this goes on, the novice listens to her heart beating as her breath slowly ceases and her skin turns dark blue. Who can top that?

The thinker who is having difficulty extracting his head from the box of modernity should consider this: One of the most well-known men in all of Western

culture died a painful death of exposure, wounded with a spear, tormented by his captors. He returned to life three days later and changed all of history with the power of his experience.

This is the truth — one person, one death, no limit to the possible.

The act of dying strips away the trash, leaving only the essence and the unleashed power of a full-fledged shaman. Many people who have undergone a near-death experience report a vivid clarity of sight and perception following the unexpected return to life. Because of the deliberate and magical nature of the event in a shaman's case, that intense ferocity of vision never fades. The memories of the knives, the anvil, the spear, the bear and the vast indifference of death are always there, burning in the mind, searing away the nonessential things.

Drowned in the Lake of Pain



Jimi surpassed my every expectation. He entered the spirit world effortlessly on a tide of ecstasy the likes of which I've never seen before or since. The power of his music sent shudders to the soles of my feet. I half-expected to see a welcoming line of spirit groupies, I swear, for all I should know better.

Well, things went about as you'd expect. He was climbing the Tree of Knives, reciting the sacred phrases and chanting for the sheer joy of it. An immense dragon popped up and began to rip him apart. Limb from limb, then bone from bone, then shred from shred. It's almost as hard to watch as it is to feel it. I was queasy, but satisfied.

Suddenly, a much larger dragon came up and devoured the first dragon. Where had it come from? It spied Jimi's

spirit, naked and unsuspecting. One bite. That's all it took. Jimi never knew what happened.

The dragon looked at me maliciously and knowingly. A horrible stench of Pittsburgh, steel foundries and despair, poured off it. I gagged as I readied myself to attack. The dragon only laughed and went back where it came from.

I left Jimi's body as he'd left it, in the bathtub. To see that beautiful, sad face distended and choked with waste in death saddened me, but what made my heart pound was the loss of Jimi's power, that easy way he made the gates open for his guitar. What shaman could have equaled him, had he survived? He'd have been worthy to drink with Old Red Papa.

So I have come to the source of the evil smell, and I will not leave here until I find the dragon's master, and eat his heart, and grind his body to paste, and feed it to my garden, and know some peace.

Falling from the Initiation

It happens on occasion that a novice fails the rites of passage in some way. The results of this depend on when she stumbles. If she does not gain entry to the spirit world, then she simply never finishes her training. End of story. But if she missteps in the spirit world itself, only she can save herself. The master will leave the student to her own devices, come what may.

A clueless human soul wandering about the Otherworlds smells absolutely irresistible to the hungry spirits there, sort of the way a cheeseburger does to a human. It'll typically get the same treatment — chomp, chomp, chomp, bu-uurp.

Now, any master shaman is capable of rescuing a soul from hungry spirits, but to do so would be to compromise the ritual. No matter what happens, the master may not intervene. He must leave the novice to her fate, no matter how grisly. After all, she may well rally her forces and survive the experience, scarred and wiser for it. And, as they say, sometimes the bull wins.

Experienced shamans regard these occurrences dispassionately. A person who's gone this far through her initiation can hardly go back to her previous life; the spirits will not release their grip on her. The only way to move is forward. What is the alternative? A life of chronic illness, perhaps regarded by all as insane? Only a crazy big-city Westerner would think such a life preferable to simply continuing along the Wheel. The novice must continue, come what may. If she failed at this stage, well, clearly she didn't have what it takes to become a master, so true death was actually the only way for her life's progress to move onward anyway.

Still, once in while, a horrible accident transpires which leaves a reeking stain on the fabric of the spirit world. Any shamans who come near it quickly depart, wary of the site of such an awful occurrence, since the lingering stench often draws all sorts of undesirable types to its pall of misery.

The Totem Covenant



A shaman without a totem is a legless marathon runner. She can still stay the course using the proper equipment, but it'll take a hell of lot more effort, and it won't ever come naturally or easily. Thus, the key aim of a novice's first journey, other than simple survival, is to meet her totem. Luckily, it's usually not an overpowering effort to accomplish this. Often, the totem will seek the novice out before she even gets her bearings in the spirit world, or the totem will bump into the novice on her path. It may seem strange that it could be that straightforward, but in many cases it is.

Another way of finding a totem is via a ritual hunt. The novice, under the aegis of her master, hunts and kills an animal native to her area, in essence creating a brand-new spirit. If she lives out in the country, she gets to choose among noble animals such as elk, wolves and mountain lions. A city dweller has less glamorous choices among rats, mice, birds of various types, dogs and cats. A widely-available and yet highly prestigious totem is the raven, revered in cultures from Arizona to Manchuria. You can find ravens snarling garbage or robbing backpackers at just about any park in America from Thompkins Square to Yellowstone National. Leave out a few half-sealed packets of food and see what turns up. Do it three days or more, it's a good bet you'll fetch a raven or two.

Don't be fooled by an animal's lowly status. A weasel totem can hold its own with an eagle totem. A spirit's power is utterly unrelated to the body it once occupied.

I didn't meet my totem in the spirit world, and when I came back and said so, Don Auracio just grinned at me. "Guess you'll actually have to work for it, Ray. Maybe you should go find one your own lazy self."

I stewed over that for a while. Where could I find some animals around Astoria? Did I really want to have a squirrel or a pigeon totem? Maybe somebody's ill-tempered Rottweiler to share my Spirit Lake forever? I went down to the subway and let my feet guide me, listening to the drum of my heart. I sat on the trains a long time and changed trains a few times. When I came up to air, it was night. I sucked in some cool, crisp air, pungent with exhaust fumes. I looked up at a big sign.

The Bronx Zoo.

Boy, I thought, *Don Auracio's gonna fall down laughing when he hears about this. Time was, a man went out into the deep forest to hunt a totem, and here I am at the goddamn zoo. Is this what we've come to?*

But the drum beat strongly, sure and clear, and by now I knew better than to disagree. I slipped over that gate as smoothly as if I'd been busting into highly patrolled public facilities since birth.

Most of the zoo was dark. Some animals were sleeping, others awake and throwing down lots of animal chit-chat. The drum didn't signal me to go anywhere in particular, so I just kept strolling.

My feet led me to an area of the zoo that was dark and quiet. A big house of some kind, all locked up. I popped the lock like James Friggin' Bond — I have no earthly idea how,

The Totem Compact

The totem spirit and the shaman collectively come to an agreement about what their relationship will be. Usually, it's a simple arrangement: the totem will watch out for the shaman, help her and increase her power with its own, and the shaman will become a healer, take on all other shamanic sorts of responsibilities and more or less do as the totem recommends. She accepts a lifetime of working in the Worldwide Weirdness Rodeo as a professional craziness wrangler and all-around psychopomp. Some totems have a weakness for alcohol, sweets or fresh meat; it will be the shaman's job to jump out of bed at two in the morning to satisfy these cravings on demand.

Occasionally a totem spirit is much more demanding. Some totems, particularly in Asia, will want to enter a spirit marriage with their partner. This marriage would be celebrated like a normal marriage of the flesh and have everything a normal marriage has — a house, sex, fights, jealousy. A female totem paired with a male shaman might even get pregnant and bear spirit children to her husband; the children would live only in the Otherworlds, though they might manifest in our world as eggs or pebbles. A spirit marriage doesn't necessarily preclude a real-world love life and marriage, but woe to the shaman who gets stuck in the middle of a problem between her flesh husband and her spirit husband. The spirit husband is absolutely capable of forcing the shaman to get rid of her flesh spouse, or of simply killing him on its initiative.

Some totems demand a different kind of sexual sacrifice — a change to the opposite sex. As part of her bargain with her totem, the shaman assumes all the characteristics of the opposite sex that she can. She wears only male clothing, tries to find traditionally male sorts of work and conceals to the highest degree possible that she is actually a woman. She might even take a woman as her wife. A male shaman who enters into such a bargain would spend his entire life in drag. That's a mighty long time to wear pantyhose, but the naked truth is that a shaman will do just about anything his totem requires, because the alternative is at best loss of power, and sometimes death.

The Ineffable Name

A mage would unquestionably call the Spirit Guardian an Avatar. He'd probably call the spirit world the Middle Umbra, too. A shaman would unquestionably reply, "Mind your own business, big-nose. Ten thousand years ago, we called it the spirit world and we ain't changing our ways just 'cause you went and started a club and named yourselves king of the hill."

Any linguistics egghead will tell you the name you call a thing forever codifies it in your mind, and subtly influences the manner in which you regard that thing. It literally imprints itself into your neural pathways, a flaming brand pressed to your cortex. So, no thank you to all that talk of Avatars and what-have-you. We prefer to keep to our own ways of naming, our own ways of thinking. We don't need your words messing up our brains.

except that I was wanted inside, so inside I had to go. The air inside felt suffocatingly warm and humid. A nasty shudder ran up my spine as I took in the still, silent glass walls inside. The Large Reptile House.

The drum started beating harder and faster as it forced me deeper into the room. I passed the crocodile pool, some mystery-meat things that were hiding under their fake tree stumps, even a big, fat Komodo dragon. The drum stopped.

I was face-to-face with the largest anaconda I'd ever dreamed of.

Pale eyes of clouded jade surveyed me dispassionately. I looked back, trapped like prey in the gaze of a being who'd be only too happy to have me for dinner. Alone in the dark, overheated room with this merciless predator, I could not suppress a shudder of fear even though I was safe outside the glass. I fought back the sweat and reached out to the monster.

"I've come a long way to find you, Snake Brother."

Its voice in reply felt dry and raspy. "I've waited a long time for you to come, Little Brother. A long time, even by the reckoning of the cold-blooded, watching my rightful prey walking by while I dine only on stinking scraps. What is your name?"

"My name is Raymond Ignacio Fuentes, Snake Brother, but my friends all call me Ray."

"Ray. Are you here to free me?"

"The only way I can free you, Snake Brother, is to set your spirit free from your body. It would be quick, almost painless, I promise."

"And in return?"

"You would join me, after leaving your body. You would watch over me in the spirit world and lend me your power. You would become my totem."

"You offer something good, but I will ask for more. I require blood, Ray. Fresh blood, drawn greedily out from

Practice, Practice, Practice

The demands of a shaman's life are varied and unpredictable. The one constant is a frequent need to practice. When the itching fire begins to seep through her veins and the drum begins to speak in her ribcage, she'd better be able to answer the call. This usually means choosing a venue with at least a moderate choice of willing subjects.

Many shamans find a "day job" among environmentalists and activists. The connection to the earth is strong, and spending time nurturing it is pure pleasure. What's more, among the hippie tree-huggers, your medicine bag and smelly old pipe won't seem so out of place.

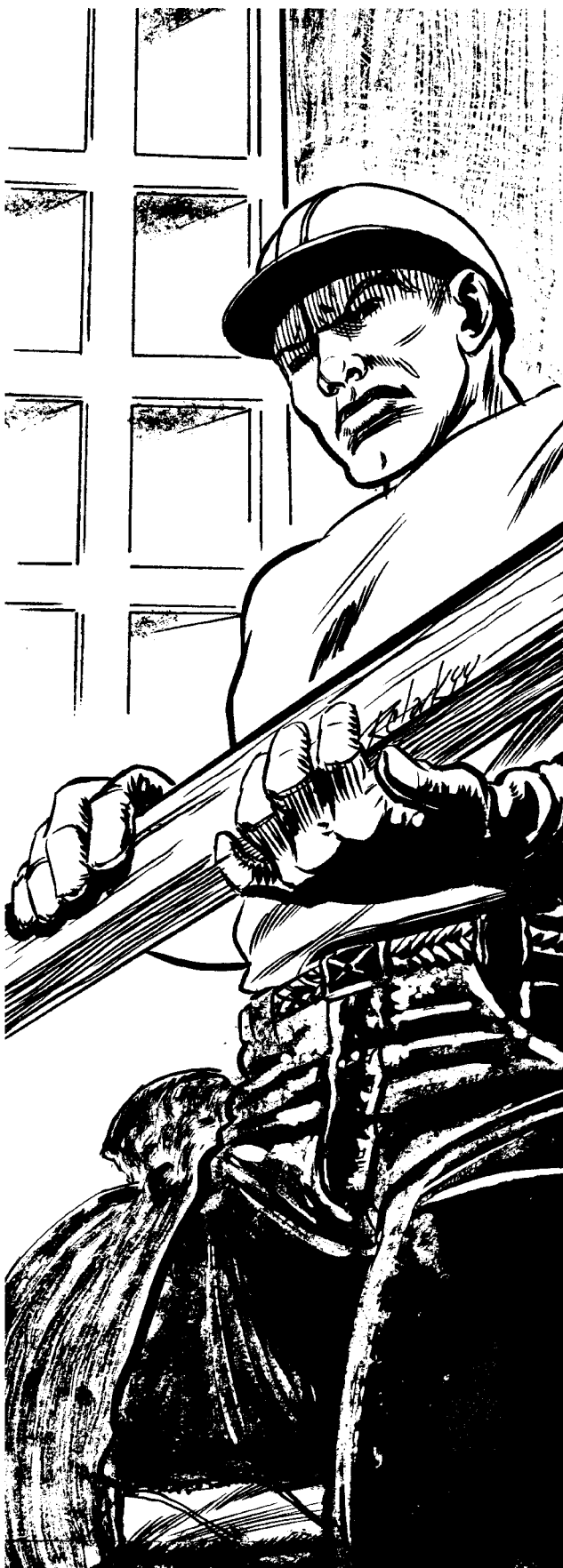
These solitary oddballs usually get along reasonably with any other natural creatures they may encounter in such settings. A powerful shaman might not be above tweaking the wolf's tail for his own amusement on occasion, but most know better than to poke their noses into someone else's caern. It's been heard that a totem covenant was once reached between a shamanic novice and a dying Garou; such a partnership would be formidable indeed, a trumpet blast to shake the doorsills of Doissetep.

For big-city types, construction is a fine way to get in touch with earth and open air. Digging, hammering, lifting and carrying — such activities are almost trance-inducing, and nobody on the site expects erudite conversation. This is a favorite with shamans from the high-altitude slopes of the Andes. Plumbing's good for watery sorts of shamans, of course, not to mention that favorite cushy job — pool boy.

Aim for unstructured sorts of jobs that don't require many years of training. You just spent years learning how to be a shaman. Are you really that keen on going back to school?

Another great route is that of the professional musician. What a great excuse to just start drumming and singing. Occasional drug use? Sure, we're used to it! Mumbling incoherently? Seen it. It's a tough job to get, but the rewards are great. The downside is that the wings are thronged with annoying persons who are begging to be choked to death, and any self-respecting shaman will have a tough time restraining herself from unleashing mischievous spirits. Her spirit guardian will keep her from falling into the ego-traps that catch so many talented artists, though. There's nothing like an angry dead animal crapping in your shoes for cutting you down to size. A good alternative in that same field is nightclub work — a bartender, or better yet, a janitor.

As always, shamans prefer loose guidelines to rules. Every shaman finds her own niche and reaches her own accommodation with the big city's nasty ways.



the living being. You will provide me with this when I ask. If you will swear to give the blood, I will become your totem. This I swear on the Egg that bore us all."

"I swear on my own heart's blood and on my drum to give you the blood you require and to hear your voice whenever you may call me. May I come in to you now, Snake Brother?"

"Yes, you may enter." The slender tongue flicked in and out. "But do not forget that I am still an anaconda."

I shook myself and went through the zookeepers' door to get to the entrance of his cage. He lay coiled in the middle of the floor, waiting patiently for me to come to him. In the warm air of the reptile house, his movements were swift; it didn't take him a second to trap me in his coils, each muscular loop as fat as my thigh.

"Ah, Ray, you did not heed my warning." Blood thundered behind my eyes as he squeezed. "I can smell the warm animals outside the house now, waiting for me to devour them. You will be hardly an appetizer for my long, long hunger. You will be delicious, Ray."

I sucked hard for a tiny breath and grappled with my pocket. I found what I needed and then had to force my hands out between the coils that were crushing my ribs. I uncapped the syringe and stuck the snake blindly. I prayed with my last breaths that the dose would be enough. How much digitalis will kill a snake of that size? Distantly I thought of the long hours fooling around with Don Auracio's treasured foxgloves.

The room began to blacken, then the snake stiffened. I heard his fading valediction. "Very good, little one. Not only a cobra may have a poison tooth." I struggled free of the loosening loops and fell to my knees, coughing blood. I could feel the tip of one broken rib pressing up against my arm through skin. No time to think of that now.

When the black spots eased up before my eyes, I emptied out a water bowl and sat down in the center of the cage. I let my own blood flow into the bowl, then pressed my hand over the cut and started to chant myself through the black door. I knew he'd be there before me, and it's rude to make a friend wait too long for you.

Going to the Spirit Lake

The Spirit Lake is where the still, small voice of power dwells inside every person. It's the sacred water that nourishes the burning bush, the drink the heart craves. Every man and every woman has a Spirit Lake inside themselves. It's here they store their dreams and all their magic power, however little of it they may have. The shaman's totem finds it a pleasant resting place, on occasion. The Spirit Lake holds the moisture that refreshes the soul.

The Lake takes whatever form the person imagines. Its banks may be clogged with memory-constructs of past events, or pristinely tree-clad. Any person can visit her own Spirit Lake; it isn't necessary to be initiated to do so.

A shaman might bring a person suffering from mental illness to spend time at the Lake. Alternately, the Lake itself might be blocked or shrunken, causing illness, need-

ing the shaman's attention. So many Sleepers go their whole lives with hardly a taste of the precious fluid of the Lake. How do they survive?

Mysterious Ways



I walked inland from the harbor a little ways, smelling that dirty city air, full of the scent of drug-spirits and dead-women-sex-spirits with their feet on backward. I passed so many Sleepers that had lost access to the Spirit Lake; I could see it in their faces. My totem didn't speak up so I kept walking. After a while I saw a huge statue of a man; that seemed very promising so I kept on walking. I smelled a big smell of power, and I followed that odor into a huge building. There, I came into a room full of men and women. They were all shouting and chanting as loud as they could, and doing a

strange dance that had a lot of jumping. Some were chanting "Buy, buy, buy," and others, "Sell, sell, sell." I watched; it went on for hours, as long as any corroborree. They used telephones. I didn't see any drums, but my fingers sure started to itch. The power was thick in the air, and I could feel my totem sit up and take notice. I knew I'd found myself a good place to shamanize. Where else could I spend half the day in the spirit world and attract no notice at all?

So I went out and got myself a three-piece suit and became a trader. I won't pretend it was that easy; I had to twist some gabardine-suited arms to get that seat. But all that money pays very nicely for many trips back to Altai.

A Story of Water



She was dreaming of drowning. I could hear the little choking sounds, see her chest jerking as her hands swished helplessly at black, endless water. The Texas sun beat down on my head. I just kept right on with the net, scooping out leaves while the little whirring pool machine made its rounds. Snails would be both cheaper and more efficient than I am, but the chlorine kills them. As I do for all my customers, I tossed in a little "float" powder, the better to keep the youngsters from an early grave. And why not? An accidental death tends to put people off using the pool, and then I have to hump around looking for a new job. Tch. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Behind me on her chaise, the matron of the house twitched and gasped a curse as she surged out of the dream's grasp. I squinted at her over my shoulder. "You okay, Miz Shelley?"

She only stared at me, pale under her tan.

"Miz Shelley? You have bad dream?" I already knew that answer, but the patient must participate in the diagnosis.

"Yes. A bad dream." Her eyes swam, glassy and unfocused below the brim of her straw sun-visor.

"You have dream before, Miz Shelley?" I asked, easing a little more old-country chumbleness into my accent. I don't really understand why, but the whole wrinkly-geezer-with-two-teeth-and-heavy-accent thing helps Sleepers get in touch with their woes. Maybe because they don't feel like they have to be so civilized around me. I gave Ms. Shelley my best wise-old-man stare, beady and unblinking. Just like that, she opened up.

"I feel like I'm drowning. All the water is all black. I can't even tell which way to swim. I'm struggling to

move, but my shoes are too heavy. I can't get them off. I swim and swim until I wake up. God, each time I get closer to drowning."

"Miz Shelley, you say okay, I help you. I know good thing for bad dream." I gave her the beady-eyed geezer stare some more, willing her to cooperate.

She sank back on the chaise with a sigh. "Okay, fine. Whatever." Her eyelids sagged with sad exhaustion.

I sat on the tile by her chaise and pulled up an empty plastic canister which once contained pool poisons of some sort. "Okay, Miz Shelley, I make you some old-time music now, music I learn many year. You close eyes, listen music." I began to drum, not the goofy hey-hey of a social ritual but the rich syncopation that soon carries me deep within, through the black doors. Miz Shelley, too worn down by her bad dream to resist, lolled on the chaise like a big, sepia rag doll.

Now I could see the whole scene from a spirit perspective, and boy, did things look different. The surface of the pool looked slimy. Something sinuous moved idly below the diving board. I reached into my pouch and tossed a doggy treat into the water. Huge jaws razored up and snatched the treat before it splashed. A narrow yellow eye regarded me. "Who might you be, little man?"

"I'm the pool boy, selkie. What are you doing in there, besides getting fat and sassy?"

"I live here. She used to put out milk for me, but now nobody does anymore." It sounded very hurt. I tried to think what it was talking about, then remembered that Mrs. Cora Lyn O'Herlihy, formerly of Dublin, had retired from her long-time position as housekeeper on this

spread about two months ago. "I want my mommy," sighed the selkie pitifully. I suppressed a gurgling of cynical amusement.

What would be the best course of action? Kill the poor, dumb thing? Maybe send it to Florida to visit Mommy at her retirement condo village? Hmmm. Much as I love a good fight, I couldn't really see the need. I dug a couple more doggy treats out of my pouch and swore the selkie to the service of the family, to fight off any and all other encroaching spirits and attackers of the Otherworld, in exchange for a slight increase in living standard. Selkies aren't that bright; you don't have to promise the sun, the moon and the stars to close the deal.

I came down out of the clouds and went up to the house, where I found Corazon Milagros, the new housekeeper, deeply engrossed in reruns of "Sabado Gigante." Now, my Spanish is not terrific, and I'm not sure exactly what she understood, but I got the point across. Milk, in a bowl by the pool, every Monday night. Once a month, raw meat. Her eyes rolled white at me, but she didn't argue.

I went back to the pool in time to see Ms. Shelley sit up, disoriented. "Ah, Miz Shelley. Your problem all gone. You see? All gone." I deliberately bowed and scraped a little, to ease her discomfort at having revealed her weakness to me. Her blue eyes blinked uncomprehendingly. Times like this, I miss the educated consumers I left behind in Bulgaria.

Return from the Heart of Darkness



It felt mighty good to be out of Korea, that's for sure. I love kimchee as much as the next girl, but I sure needed a change. I walked around Venice Beach, watching the self-obsessed perfecting their melanomas, and tried to figure out what to do now that I'd arrived at the Golden Mountain at long last. The dream of generations, finally achieved by me, Stinky Bho-Cho. Great. No doubt my ancestors are all torn between laughter and scorn.

I drifted down the beach and sat on a rock to watch some bodybuilders puffing themselves up. That whole

scene is pretty strange, but it's not any weirder than, say, lip plates or penis sheaths, I guess. Humans just can't leave their bodies alone, any more than monkeys can stop picking fleas.

After an hour, another woman came along, dressed in a hilarious outfit that featured lots of fringe, sequins, feathers, scarves, you name it. She spread out a scarf and a little sign saying "Madame Zalenskaya Sees All. \$2.00." What the hell, I said to myself, it's a good way to waste some time until Old Father Crow finally wakes up, wants some plum brandy and helps me get a clue about what to do next. You might think that I should just exercise my brain and figure it out on my own, right? No way. If I were to figure it out, and go ahead and make some arrangements without consulting him — let's just say, Old Father would let me know of his disapproval in obvious ways.

I scrounged the money out of my pockets and settled myself across from Madame Zalenskaya. She gave me this intensely campy stare, caressing the cards in a manner no doubt meant to be feline. I turned my eyes away from her too-visible cleavage while she shuffled the cards. She drew.

I felt the unmistakable tingle of magic. Once you've felt it, you'd never miss it. Somewhere between a sudden static shock and the taste of hot chocolate, for me at least. I deliberately suffocated my own response, hoping she wouldn't notice my nipples standing out like pebbles. Madame Z went on reading the cards — the Devil, the High Priestess (no big surprises for me so far), the Page of Coins, blah blah blah. All totally accurate, worthy of a true magic-wielder, but nothing I didn't already know. The power flowed around the Celtic cross layout, tickling my nodes sensually. I started to get the itch to drum. Typical. Old Father always wakes up when I am in the middle of something else. If I have the shits, he wants to go out for a beer. Guess who wins that argument.

Anyway, Madame Z finally nattered on to the oh-so-pretentious conclusion of her spiel. I thanked her. As I got

Bring Me a Shrubbery!

Even the most ordinary shaman's life is rich with Storytelling material. Shamans soon learn that every person is living inside her own epic, her own song. Like Alice down the rabbit hole, the scale of a shaman's situation can shift rapidly.

A simple-seeming chronic tennis elbow on some anorexic debutante might reveal an incredibly powerful dragon-spirit curled up in her spleen, with its own ugly agenda to discuss. How did it get there? What does it want? Can the shaman negotiate with it, or will force be necessary? Will killing the dragon harm the girl? After the shaman handles that nasty obstacle, there's still the immense spirit construction the girl erected to hide her soul from the dragon. Now she could use her soul back, and she doesn't know how to dismantle the construct. What spirit guardians are protecting the soul? Will it harm the girl to disable the guardians? Will it be sufficient to extract the soul, or must the shaman destroy the construct?

At first glance, no one would suspect the real situation. But a shaman learns to anticipate the extraordinary; it's all part of the life of one of the world's professional weirdness wranglers.

up, I leaned on her shoulder and let her feel my own power. The power going out feels like waves rushing around my ankles, like a feather boa, like getting good oral sex. Madame Z's head snapped up, and for a second her eyes shone yellow as Baltic amber. I stared back calmly so she could see I wasn't attacking her. Then I walked off down the street to answer the call for beer that you-know-who was bound to be wanting, the drunken old fart.

About a week later I woke up and realized that Madame Z really had shown me my future. This was fucking California. I didn't need a day job as a Sunday school teacher at Byul Duk Soong Baptist Church. I could just hang out my shingle and shamanize, right out there in the open. This blinding insight freaked me out so much I practically wet the bed. At the back of my head, I could hear Old Father laughing that creaky old laugh of his.

Depending Upon the Kindness of Strangers



There's one way to stay cheap in the city and find Sleepers who need help bad. Some do it every winter as the wind starts to sharpen.

Just go downtown to a shopping center and take off your clothes. Shout loudly about your mother or big snakes. Soon, some nice people will come and attack you. Don't fight too hard; they get awfully rough if you give any excuse, but you have to fight some, or they'll suspect you. These people will put you into a warm, comfortable place where you'll get three free meals a day and all the company you can stand and free drugs besides. Who could refuse such a great deal? Many Sleepers you'll meet there are desperately in need of your help.

The downside is having to sit through all that therapy, but that's good practice for you, too, if you know what I mean. It's a naughty kind of fun driving the shrinks crazy, even if it's not nice. I've faced the sight of my own organs being devoured by rats before my eyes. I can handle a little Jungian analysis. All kidding aside, though, there is one serious downside. While you're inside, they take away all your possessions. No handmade elk-hide drum, no bones, definitely no powdered bufo sweat. You'll have to operate on your own steam. But when the power's singing in your legs, pounding on the bottom of a garbage can is all the music you really need. Besides, no one can take away your totem. Sometimes, you even wish they could. Get that idea out of your head. The nice people who try to "heal" you cannot break the covenant. Forget it. You're stuck.

Hiding in Plain Sight

The experience of initiation and psychic change can leave a shaman out of touch with normal Western behavior. He'd better dig out Emily Post and stimulate his memory if he ever wants to go back to town, though. A shaman on the subway doesn't have to share his seat (except during rush hour, of course). It might be the ozone scent of spirit power, or more likely the stale reek of deer glands, but whatever the reason, it takes a little effort to move unnoticed among Sleepers. It's a simple effort, using a skill a shaman ought to know: hiding the true shape. Shamans know how to change their shapes to hunt spirits; wiser shamans have applied the same skills to pass among Sleepers. Unmasked, a shaman often makes Sleepers very uneasy.

If a shaman has settled into his role way off in a quiet backwater, surrounded by happy Siberian, Tungu or Dayak tribesmen, he's got it made. He occupies a respected position in the tribe. He might even be supported by the tribe in recompense for his services. He could marry, since a nice tribal girl won't be put off by the occasional night attacks of drumming or public displays of shamanizing. As a wise man once said, "Nice job, if you can get it."

Now let's talk about the rest of the world.

Experienced shamans say that the rule of thumb is, the closer you get to an airport, the worse you'll be treated. If you're actually in an airport, don't call that raggedy sack your "medicine bundle." Call it your "valuable collection of quaint native artifacts," unless you want to spend a happy hour with airport security without your pants. No rent-a-cop worth his salt will let some chanting, leaping, bear-grease-smeared freak onto the plane. Wear a long-sleeved shirt to cover up those tattoos, and don't forget shoes. Camouflage is key — if it's good enough for nature's creatures, it's good enough for you.

Once made, the effort pays off nicely. Any big city is a rich pool of Sleepers who need a shaman's services.

Intuitive and wise, the shaman can make friends easily when he cares to, though the shallow, hypocritical personalities of most Sleepers don't attract him. He can draw Sleepers to trust him as he can wild creatures.



The upside is that many of your fellow inmates will happily try anything to get out. They will unflinchingly agree to your ceremonies and not bat an eye at your behavior. Not all of them are inside willingly, after all. They remember their freedom and will fight for it, and if that means letting you sing and dance in their rooms, no problem. It's also true that since Reagan cut funding to so many institutions, most of what you'll find inside will be people who really, really need help. Any help they can get.

You have to be careful in your shamanizing in an institution. If anybody catches you blowing sage smoke around, you'll be in deep shit. Inside, no one is allowed to do any healing but people with badges and "authority." They're very touchy about their "authority," too, so don't go stepping on those toes unless you want to get the Nurse Ratchett treatment. Practice safe shamanizing, folks!

Man Child In the Promised Land

I try to keep in contact with this *soi-disant* "shaman" I ran across, one of those Dreamspeaker characters. He's full of crazy ideas, but I like to listen to him to hear how the wind is blowing up high. You know what they say: "When elephants dance, the grass gets trampled." Mostly I don't give a shit what those fancy-pants are up to, but all that power sloshing around gives me a big headache, so I like to know when to rusticate myself. I'm telling you, when I hear about activity at "Doisutep," I roll up my bivvy bag and head for the Boundary Waters. I don't want to be around when the elephants dance.

The Burning Heart

Just as many shamans gain their vocation through a painful illness or spiritual compulsion, so too they must continually practice their art. Most shamans complain of sickness or mental fuzziness if they don't shamanize regularly. The totem always has its own agenda. It is not necessarily a benign entity, although it always looks out for the shaman's well-being; woe to the shaman who somehow manages to overlook this brutal reality. Sometimes, the totem unabashedly coerces the shaman into going along with its plans. The bottom line is that shamanizing is not optional. The need to practice the arts is like a dog that has to be walked every day or else it gets frisky, then aggressive, then finally you come home and find it's torn your bathroom to shreds.

If they resist the compulsion, some shamans experience a recurrence of the illness that forced them into shamanism. Spirits, dreams, visions or acute pain torments them if they don't get busy and start drumming.

The Red Shoes



It fucks up my attempts to be cool, if you know what I mean. I mean, there I am trying to relax and watch *Bring Da' Funk*, when I hear my guardian urging me to dance. So I don't want to, of course, knowing full well what will happen. I hold back as long as I can. Finally, as my windpipe starts squeezing and icy sweat is pouring off me, I pop out of my seat like a stuck pig.

Next thing, I start dancing, start chanting, sucking up some of the stray spirits that are prowling around looking for junkies to ride. I'm going "Heeeey ow Uma, heeeey ow ow," I'm leaping into the air, you know, standard shamanic trance-dance coming on. The people on the stage all come to

a halt and watch me, but I can't stop now. Even as sweat starts to leak into my eyes, I can't help noticing that Savion Glover has what looks suspiciously like a look of understanding on his face. I make a mental note to look him up later.

I'm just getting into a groove — heeeey ow Uma ow — when three bulky ushers body-slam me into the alley. Brand-new suede jacket, meet week-old cat urine. And I wind up spending all night on the A train, drumming out alcoholic demons until my arms shake with exhaustion and my jeans are soaked with sweat. Don't even ask about what my date had to say the next day. Is this my idea of how to live? Not really, but the elder shamans took my choice away from me when they took me into the circle.



Chapter Two: The Tongue of Spirits



Sleep fell upon him, washing his soul in a brilliant, almost visible ecstasy. The serene image of the grotto in which he sat, blurred around him, trees like capricious brown strokes on green canvas. Deep within, he felt his soul detach from his physical being, a feeling almost familiar but odd, like that of a word stuck on one's tongue. A moment passed, his breathing becoming quicker.

Suddenly, reality melted around him, rushing quickly by, the feel of water swallowing a diver. Thrust into the lukewarm, airy environment of the spirit world, he opened his eyes. Seeing what appeared to be his body laying comatose, the Dreamer began his walk into the unknown. The land sprang to life before him, each step a leap into a virtual plethora of existence and

unspeakable being. Vibrant greens, dazzling reds, a shimmering landscape lay before him, greeting him with a fragrance and warmth that words failed to describe. The beauty, it seemed, had devoured him, and he was shaken to the soul. Trying to cry, he could only walk on, his virgin mind unable to comprehend this foreign emotion.

Deeper and deeper he walked; the scenery began to change. The luminescent glimmering light that once enveloped him gave way to a bitter, tangible darkness. His heart and soul pierced with a cold unknown, he shuddered, though still compelled to walk on. Further and further he walked, frightened by the demented images of tortured souls that passed him by. Humanity, he thought, was being exposed as it truly was. Darker and darker it got, the inky black nature of Man's collective soul closing around him, smothering him within its demonic folds.

Fear gripped the traveler, his physical body twitching as it lay hollow on the Earth. The darkness had consumed him, light but a memory and joy only myth. Lo, before him glimmered a small light on the horizon. Where before he had moved slowly, the Dreamer now felt a sense of urgency. He rushed toward the light within the darkness, feeling a passionate desire to be touched by this energy that he'd never dreamed of in waking life. Running now, every fiber of his being longing for this light's gentle caress, his very essence racing to it as if his soul had a mind of its own. Closer and closer the light drew him near....

Finally, the Dreamer arrived at his goal. Sitting within the wispy folds of the golden light was a woman, a woman whose beauty rivaled, if not surpassed, the very cosmos. She looked up at him, their souls meeting with their eyes. Suddenly, he

learned the secrets behind all that he'd seen. No, he didn't learn — he remembered. The knowledge poured over his mind, a sweet enlightening shower of pure ecstasy. Then her gaze became curious.

"I have shown you what I know," sang the woman's melodic voice. "Why are you still here?"

The Dreamer was caught off-guard by the question, almost wondering why she needed to ask it. "I cannot bring myself to leave your radiant presence, o Mother of the Ten Thousand Things."

With infinite patience, she replied, "The longer you stay, my child, the less of my radiance that remains. The time to stare is done, the era of idle dreams over. Only the strong and persevering are my servants. The time has come, my child — let us Dream the world anew. Wake up!"

Not Dead, but Dreaming



Some would say that they are outcasts; others would call them charlatans, and still others would say that they are merely primitive fools, fools who know not the ignorance of their ways. Well, look closer — closer at yourself, at the world around you. Can you deny the life of the world? Can you honestly deafen yourself to the cries of our Mother? Can you blind yourself to the vibrant and luminescent colors of Gaia's Dream? Have you already?

For many, the answer "yes" to the latter question is understandable. The Others have gone far to keep the world at large unaware of its own insignificance, keep it unaware of the fact that it is but an infinitesimally small drop in the incomprehensible sea of realms. The unfortunate majority has not even had the idea that there is something "beyond," nor has it ever had the ability and desire to experience this infinite wealth of bliss. We, however, have. We are shamans; this is our world.

Hearing the Voices

The world of the shaman is rich and complex, both religiously and magically. An oral tradition, shamanism is passed from generation to generation, embellished by new ideas and influences, and perhaps this accounts for the diversity. Or, perhaps, the diversity exists because of the shamanic worldview, one in which all things are alive and all things, biological or otherwise, have a spiritual nature. The former is the most likely explanation, although the latter certainly plays its part, as we shall see.

It is commonly held that the shaman lives in two worlds, that of the physical and that of the spirit. This is a misunderstanding. The shaman lives in one world, a world

that draws no distinction between the so-called physical and spiritual realms. For them, waking life is the world's Dream and, despite (or possibly in spite of) the world's sterilization through technology, the shaman is still more intimately connected to that Dream than most in modern times. One wonders how good of a thing that really is, however, as even the world's spiritual nature is being tainted with the stain of "progress."

The shaman feels the pain of the planet, hears the cries of the Mother calling to him in the darkness of the wild, those lands untouched as of yet by the Technocracy's digital hand. Now, on the brink of being overrun by the Western world, these lands roar in retaliation. One can see this on the nightly news. The very planet itself thrashes in revolt, calling up cataclysmic earthquakes and terrible storms side-by-side with drought and famine, most likely in an attempt to curtail the Mother's progressive rape, or perhaps to kill the problem completely. While ecologists and the Traditions debate the answer, the shaman already knows; we have angered the spirits and the mighty Mother. We must pay for our sins.

Filled with love for the Mother and Her children and the rage of the planet, it is the path of a healer that the shaman walks. Locally, the shaman acts as wise man and doctor to his dying peoples. Universally, the shaman works to burn away the cancer of "progress," to bring the Dream back to its glorious state of beauty and splendor. While their wrath seems violent and retrogressive to the modern world, the shaman knows better than to let pity for the offenders enter his heart, lest he be led astray. The shaman has heard the will of the Mother through the cries of Her children, and takes up his quest as healer in earnest, one thought guiding his actions: *We have angered the Mother; we must pay for our sins.*



A Healer and Her Magic



Poised on the brink of two worlds, the shaman has only herself and the spirits to utilize in her path as a healer. Her relationship to the spirit world is important, both in her duty to the Mother and in her responsibility to her tribe and planet. Playing both ends, she hears the desires of the Earth, performing her tasks in accord with this, and she offers supplication to the Mother on behalf of her people, asking for

no more than the ability to survive. In fact, the whole of the shaman's world centers on her relationship with the spirits, and as such, she treats them with a respect that is commonly described as reverence. Never will you find a shaman that is "using the spirits"; more often than not, the spirits are using her. Her role is that of a servant. She must learn to serve well if she and her peoples are to survive.

The Nature of the Universe, Shaman Style

Understanding the cosmology of the shaman is essential in understanding the role she sees herself playing. Common to all shamanic lore is the idea of three primary realms, that of the Earth, the Sky and the Underworld.

These three regions of reality are connected by way of the Axis Mundi, the spiritual center of the universe, seen in various cultures as the World Tree, the Tree of Life or, in other instances, the Cosmic Mountain. Symbolically speaking, it is climbing this tree that allows the shaman access to the spirit worlds.

In reality, the Axis Mundi is a symbolic representation of the link that exists in all things, the link between spiritual and physical realities, those facets of reality of which all things partake. In the modern world, most fail to recognize this aspect of self, and thus are blind to its potential, or even to its existence. The shaman, however, understands all too well the power of the Axis Mundi and its use has become almost second nature for her.

The Sacred Center in Various Cultures

Every culture has its own view of the Axis Mundi, but the World Tree is found in just about every myth across the globe. Most commonly it is symbolized as a cosmic tree, an image that can be found in places as varied as Africa, Siberia and even among ancient Germans. Naturally, the exact aspects of this symbol are unique to each culture. For

Shamanic Verbena?

One interesting parallel between shamans and the Verbena is the practice of keeping and guarding a sacred tree that symbolizes the Cosmic Tree, the Axis Mundi. It is not known which of the Traditions started this practice, though after much speculation, many have come to the conclusion that shamanic peoples began the custom. In fact, some believe that the Verbena sprang from ancient forms of European shamanism, though none can verify this. Still, the naturalistic ties of Verbena and shamans keep them close in many ways — some Verbena are still shamans.

instance, the Yakut of Siberia see the World Tree as having eight branches and standing at the golden center of the planet, whereas the Osmanli Turks imagined the tree as having a million leaves, on which the fate of every person was written.

Another common image is that of the Cosmic Mountain, found also among many cultures of the world. Often times it is described as a mountain at the center of the world, the navel of the sky and usually has the gods of the culture sitting atop. The Tatars of the Siberian Altai region see this Cosmic Mountain as the golden center of the Universe, and their supreme deity watches the world from this point of points.

Other symbols for the sacred center include ropes, pillars, the "Sky Nail" of the North Asian Samoyed and variously termed "holes in the sky." All symbols, regardless of origin, tend to share common characteristics, however. The main idea is that the object touches the earth, the sky and the Underworld in some way all at once. Thus, the shaman, in his various rituals of initiation and healing, generally climbs it. Remember, though, that the sacred center is merely a symbol....

The Earth Realm

Describing the Earth Realm in terms of the Traditions' view of the Tellurian is a difficult task. Each of the three realms seem to have aspects in common with the various parts of the Umbra. For instance, the Earth Realm can be seen as a combination of the physical planet, the Penumbra and the Middle Umbra. As one can see, converging these two systems of thought can be troublesome.

In their own terms, describing the worlds of shamanic cosmology becomes much easier. Remembering that shamans make no real distinction between the physical and spiritual, we can safely say that the Earth Realm is the planet and its constituent parts, ranging from the most subtle of energies — the spirit — to the most rigid of patterns, or matter.

The Heavens Above

Moving onward and upward, we come to the realm of the Sky, also known as the heavens. Seen as the

habitation of the gods in much of shamanic lore, the Sky Realm is the proverbial "higher self," in a sense. It is through ascending to this sacred place that the shaman may attain the highest of truths, as well as the gifts of divinity. Much like the High Umbra in the Telluric explanation of reality, the Sky Realm is also a world where ideas take on lives of their own, and it also houses the Dreamscape, known to many as Maya. Each different culture has its own view and peculiarities of the Sky Realm; however, the aforementioned description serves us well for the moment.

Land of the Dead

Finally is the Underworld, land of darkness and death. Although it could be compared to the Christian idea of Hell, the Underworld is markedly different in shamanic lore. The Underworld is the final resting place of many human souls, but rarely is it seen as a place of torture — except, perhaps, to the newly departed, those who can't accept their new "life." Most common is the pervading theme of challenge and temptation, the Underworld being the flame by which the shaman is tempered. Also, it is here that the shaman many times quests, particularly for the lost soul of an ill person. It is believed that one of the many sources of illness is the loss of one's soul. Stolen away by theft, a soul might only be recovered if the shaman does battle with an evil spirit. The careless wanderings of a capricious spirit sometimes take the soul to other places as well, in which case the shaman must coax it to return.

Roaming the Planes

Traversing the planes, and the methods thereof, are what make the shaman truly different from the world around him. Walking the spirit world comprises a large part of his magical style, and it is what earns him the respect of his fellow tribesmen. In common shamanic parlance, traveling to and from the various worlds is a very different process than that taken by Tradition mages. It is seen as a journey through a primal wilderness, a journey fraught with danger and peril, where around every corner awaits some hidden nemesis who would stop the shaman in his quest. This is especially true for travel to the Underworld, where many a malicious spirit waits in anticipation to devour the flesh of the living.

There is rarely an event, magically speaking, in which the shaman does not spirit quest. This is why it is of grave importance that his relationship with the spirit world be a good one, lest he should find many of its inhabitants opposed to his journey. Thus, from initiation onward, the shaman finds himself learning about and befriending many beings in the realm of spirit.

The Nature of Spirits

The true nature of spirits has fueled raging debates for centuries. Mages and Sleepers alike have sought to explain

the mysterious realm of spirit, and explanations vary about as much as their explainers do. Views on the nature of spiritual reality range from the total denial of its existence (as is the case with mainstream scientific theory), to the belief that the spirit realm is not only real, but more real than physical reality (an idea commonly held throughout the religions of the world, as well as the Traditions).

Despite their different views of spiritual reality, one idea is shared by all of the Traditions. It is the fact that, regardless of whether or not the spirit world is objectively real, it functions as if it is. In fact, the only group of mages that doesn't accept this are the Virtual Adepts, who often scoff at the idea of spiritual reality, but this sentiment is usually held only by younger initiates. It is only when they actually encounter a spirit that they begin to believe.

In brief, there are four major ideas concerning the world of spirits:

This is how it is....

Those who adopt this view believe that spirits and the spirit world do not exist. They believe that spirits were all that primitive people had to explain the world around them, and that now, in our enlightened age of science and reason, such nonsense is no longer needed to understand the world. It is the physical laws and processes of science that run the world, not the whims of spirits. This is the most common belief among the vast majority of the "civilized" world (which is no doubt the Technocracy's doing). The only Tradition that staunchly supports this attitude is the Virtual Adepts.

Molded of the Mind

Pioneered by the Order of Hermes and later made "scientific" by psychologist Carl Jung by way of his collective unconscious idea, is the theory that spiritual reality is created directly by the myths and beliefs of humanity. This would account for the common occurrence of deities and other such beings in the Umbra, which are all obvious human creation, as the Order says. The Cult of Ecstasy has recently begun to adopt this philosophy, but most, like their Wiccan cousins, still believe the old ways. Numerous neopagans and their peers have adopted this view as well, but the Verbena still hotly debate the validity of this approach to spiritualism.

Forged in the Fire

The most common approach to shamanic spiritualism is the basic tenet that the spirits, human and otherwise, were created in the primordial fire of the Pure Ones' explosive shattering. These beings, under the Celestines' plan, were named and given purpose in their existence, just as every human being. Shamans, as well as many Euthanatos, most Cultists and nearly all Dreamspeakers, believe that it is merely human pride to believe that we alone are the sole inheritors of divine purpose.

To account for the fact that many "human myths" are found in the Dreamland, the believers of this theory state

that humans were inspired by these beings to create myths and lore. They point to the fact that relatively few archetypes account for the vast majority of deities in the many human pantheons, and that any variations among peoples are merely cultural interpretations.

It is worth noting that the Celestial Chorus cleaves to this interpretation of most spirits. For years, members of its order have scorned the peoples of the Dreamspeaker Tradition, and other "primitive" groups as well, all the while believing in the same basic structure. Perhaps now they are finally seeing the error of their ways, but even the small steps taken so far haven't been sufficient recourse for the Chorus' victims. Many among the Dreamspeakers and Verbena, as well as many shamanic peoples, still seek revenge for past ills wrought upon their kind.

The Hollow Ones also believe that the spirit world is real — as much as they can reach a consensus about anything. As they typically discover their Avatars and Awaken via a spiritual experience, they have little room for doubt in the existence of the spirit cosmology.

What They Don't Want You to Know

On the flip side, the Technocracy has its own views of spirit. This is the fourth major theory, that of the Others.

In recent decades the Technocracy has made remarkable strides in a "new" field they label dimensional science. In effect, this new field of science allows "spiritual realms" to fit into the Technocratic paradigm. Technocrats believe that the energies involved in producing these other dimensions are of more subtle frequencies than those previously measured and, as such, have proven difficult to detect given past methods. Now the Union is beginning to see that these other dimensions are the foundations for our physical reality, an energy landslide of sorts that spills into the physical realm.

As the Technocrats explore and pattern the various "subdimensions," they realize more and more the danger of what they're doing. If the average person were to find out that there are indeed realms of existence beyond our own, safe, physical world, there could be hell to pay in spades for the Technocracy. This would throw all they have been working for right out their sterile window. Not good.

Thus, the Technocracy is carefully guarding their secret knowledge and never intends to let this information become public. This may be harder than they thought, however, as the Sons of Ether and, to a lesser degree, the Virtual Adepts are catching on. As it stands, the Technocracy can only hope that the Sons' reputation for "spoo science" will precede them in regards to the common populace of the world. If not, the time-table for the Pogrom may have to be advanced a little....

In the End

Perhaps the debate on this subject will never end as many mages don't even really care to know the truth. For

them, the actuality of the situation does not matter; the simple truth is that, regardless of the spirit world's nature, it works. Those few mages who do bother pondering the question are, to their dismay, met with adversity. Usually when a spirit is asked as to the truth of its nature, the reply is, "Does it really matter?"

Playing Up Paradigm

So, what does all this information mean for players? It is a basic starting point for how characters view, and thus, interact with the Other Side. Some time during the development of any character, players should take the time to consider how his character views the spirit world. For instance, is she a Hermetic mage that holds true to the Order's paradigm? If so, she will most likely treat spirits more like objects or tools than actual beings. This could be of major importance should the spirit be touchy or easily offended.

It is recommended that the player come up with his or her own particular twist on spirit world paradigm. In the above example, perhaps our Hermetic mage believes that most spirits are a psychological construct, but that some of the more powerful and ancient of spirits actually exist independent of humanity. Maybe she just doesn't deal with

spirits at all, seeing them as crutches for the weak. The choice is yours.

For the Storyteller, paradigm presents an opportunity to develop stories and plots based directly on character motivation. What if the character experiences a situation that requires her to reconsider her paradigm? A situation like this, if done right, should affect the character traumatically. In the real world, when one is forced to take their beliefs into consideration, it is often a painful experience. This should be no different for mages; after all, they are human too.

When using a player's view of the spirit world as the fulcrum for this type of plot, consider the idea of forcing a player to consider his view of spirits. One possibility is that of a Virtual Adept encountering a spirit for the first time. What will he do, how will he react? Will he treat it as real, or will he wonder what he ate earlier? To make things more interesting, what if this shade is the wandering spirit of a dead loved one?

Keep in mind that many mages don't have an iron-clad definition of what a spirit actually is. For many, the knowledge that it exists and that it can be used is good enough. A good guideline is that the answers to the many riddles of the spirit world are just as elusive as spirit itself. It has been called the World of Mists, has it not?

Dream Dances



In working their magic, shamans have found the best route to the spirit world is ecstasy. Throughout the various cultures of the world, the methods and practices of attaining the proper ecstatic state are many indeed, but most fall into two general categories. First is the use of mind-altering drugs, such as peyote, which allow the shaman direct contact with the spirit world via

hallucinations, visions and dreams. The other most common method is that of ritual music and dancing. In these rituals, the singing, dancing and drumming build to ecstatic climaxes, which in turn call the spirits, or else allow the shaman to transcend the physical world, entering into that of the spirits. Often, the shaman's ritual is a combination of these two styles.

Ecstasy Brew

Psychoactive drugs have been used since time immemorial for making contact with the spirit world. All around the world, in many different cultures, plants have been used to make ecstatic brews for centuries, and this tradition is still practiced today, especially by more primitive Cultists. From the famous peyote cactus of the southwestern United States to the various forms of the little-known henbane

plant throughout the world, hallucinogens are used by many to reach the Other Side.

The ideology surrounding the use of psychotropic plants in shamanic ritual stems from the concept that all things have spiritual counterparts, including plants. When the shaman consumes these hallucinogens, it is believed that he actually ingests the plant's spirit, and thus the visions received are "teachings" from the plant. In the shaman's worldview, these plant-induced visions aren't hallucinations; the visions are sight into the spirit world, the true nature of things.

In typical shamanic ritual, where song and dance are used ecstatically, the shaman is frequently "told" by spirits the nature of the given situation; psychoactive plants "show" the shaman his problem, often in vivid details, visions that rival the natural splendor of the physical world. In a sense, the shaman becomes possessed by the plant-spirit and can then travel as the spirit travels, see what the spirit sees, and know what the spirit knows. In this way, use of the shaman's brew seems more suited for ritual. It offers first-hand experience as opposed to a second-hand account. However, this is not to say that a shaman using this particular method will be more successful. Indeed, what a shaman does with the information gained from the spirit world is of crucial importance. It is often believed, though, that this method yields far more believable results.

Ayahuasca (And Other Fine Drinks Served by Shamans)

The methods of preparing psychoactive plants for use in ritual are varied and often include cultural overtones, but generally the hallucinogen is boiled and then brewed, making a tealike concoction of ecstasy. Other than straight ingestion, this is the most often seen route to "psychedelic spirituality."

The brewing process is always done by the shaman, as many of the plants involved in such ecstatic events are extremely poisonous and any mistake in made may result in a one-way ticket to the Other Side. Knowledge of ecstatic brews is passed from generation to generation, shaman to shaman, in order to ensure the safety of the participants, or this, at least, is intended. In recent times the shaman's brew is becoming rarer as the many institutions who would see drug use banned have made attempts to stop these practices. Most, so far, have failed.

There are many plants used in these ecstatic escapades. In North America we find two of the most famous psychotropic plants in the world: the peyote cactus and the psilocybin mushroom, two plants used for centuries to attain visions of the Other Side. In fact, the former has an entire religion attached to it in the southwestern US, which developed as a mix of Celestial Chorus beliefs and the lore of the native Navaho peoples concerning the peyote cactus and its powers. Moving north and east within the United States, we find the powwow tradition, a mix of native shamanic practice and Verbena magical knowledge. These peoples have, in the past, used the plant *atropa belladonna*, also known as deadly nightshade. This practice is almost never seen now, as the plant has acquired a rather grim reputation. It is thought that the use of deadly nightshade was imported from Europe by Verbena escaping Inquisition persecution, along with use of the henbane plant, another deadly brew.

The rainforests of the Amazon also provide many plants with psychotic effects on the consciousness, chief among them the plant *banisteria caapi*, the "vision vine," known variously as ayahuasca in Peru, caapi in Brazil and natema in Ecuador. This is perhaps the most often-used plant in the Amazon region, and the teachings of this plant form the basis for much of the shamanic experience here. Many other plants, some known to science, some not, are used in this region, though the nature of many of these experiences are not known. As for use of the ayahuasca, the Peruvian shaman exercises a degree of control when using this plant. It is said that he can dictate the nature of his visions via the use of icaros, magical songs of power. With these songs the shaman can influence his visions to achieve a specific end, such as curing disease, calling lost spirits and even performing marriages.

In other regions of the world, use of hallucinogens among shamanic peoples is rare indeed. This is primarily

because of the lack of psychotropic plants in most temperate areas. One plant used throughout the world, however, is *cannabis sativa*, a mild hallucinogen commonly known as marijuana. This plant has had reported use in places as varied as the north-central United States, Europe, Asia and even in the Arabic deserts of the Middle East. This plant, unlike most psychoactives, was used to enhance other forms of ecstasy, however, and not to produce ecstasy in its own right. Used in conjunction with more standard ritual, like that described below, cannabis is a world-class hallucinogen for ecstasy.

Can I Take Your Order?

With the advent of many new types of "highs" in the world, modern city shamans are turning to less traditional forms of psychoactives to achieve ecstasy. In fact, one of the most common used of these new drugs is called XTC, or ecstasy. Other drugs, like imitation cannabis, various pharmaceuticals and LSD, are also taking their turns in the hands of neo-shamans, and many are meeting with surprising success. Of course, there are many established institutions who look down on this practice, including the many "Just say no" organizations, as well as those who prefer purer forms of the "old ways."

Plants For Those Who Like to Stay at Home

Not all plants used in shamanic practice are psychoactive. Indeed, a lot of the flora used in ritual can be seen as living symbols as these plants have been assigned associations with various aspects of the spirit world. These correspondences have been developed through trial and error conducted throughout the centuries. For instance, apples, as well as basil, are used in rites of love.

Ordinarily the mystic attributes of plants are in some way related to the appearance, properties, or uses of the plant. Cayenne, the extremely potent pepper, is used as a curative among many native tribes of the southern United States, for example, as it is seen as burning away the offending malice. It should be noted, though, that while psychotropic plants are unquestionably seen as teachers throughout the world, other plant associations are hardly, if ever, universal. Tobacco, used for centuries among those in the US, has been labeled a gift of the gods by native tribes, whereas most modern practitioners deem it a horrid scourge, symbolizing addiction and death.

Augmentation: The True Art of Shamanism

The shaman rarely uses his own skills beyond his ability to make contact with the spirit world. More often he augments his own powers in a variety of ways. Commonly, the shaman aids himself with plants, which are believed to

confer specific qualities to the shaman's rite. In effect, these plants (as well as other items, including, but not limited to, rocks, crystals, bones of various dead animals/humans and metallic objects) increase the shaman's rating in a specific Sphere, or otherwise decrease the difficulty of performing a particular ritual or spell.

When using objects for augmentation, the item must be handled in a specific way. For instance, when using plants, the shaman may have to brew a tea, eat a specific part of the plant, or make a satchel (called a *gris-gris* bag) containing the powdered remains of the plant. Objects used this way can only be used once, and it's generally required that the object be found in some sort of quest or under some mystically significant condition, such as on the night of a full moon. In more modern shamanic practice, these last two conditions are often dropped; going to the store and buying whatever is needed suffices to their more practical minds.

The other source of augmentation are the inhabitants of the spirit world themselves. In this type of augmentation, the shaman is possessed by a particular otherworldly entity who then acts through the shaman, enhancing his abilities and, in some cases, providing access to Spheres the shaman does not know. In these instances of augmentation, the shaman is very expected to provide some service or other payment to the spirit involved, usually in the form of sacrifice. If no payment is forthcoming, the spirit enacts his own form of retribution against the indebted shaman, a fate feared almost more than death.

All this talk of augmentation is primarily directed at shaman characters, but there is really nothing stopping any character from augmenting himself. Many of the Traditions use various forms of augmentation in their work. The Verbena and the Cult of Ecstasy are two prime examples of this, as well as the Dreamspeakers and Euthanatos. Again, as with paradigm, the choice to augment is up to the player, but it should keep in line with the role he is playing. After all, the Virtual Adept carrying around a four-leaf clover is likely to get laughed at by his elitist friends....

What this all means to the Storyteller should be clear: augmentation is a wonderful way to bend the rules a bit, but this bending should always have some price. It should almost never be an easy thing for the shaman to augment himself, otherwise who'd want to go the slow path of learning the Spheres for themselves? Keeping a sense of balance in the area of augmentation is the best route for the Storyteller. Generally speaking, the quest to obtain the "augmenter" should be roughly equal to the power of the augmented effect. In the end, as with all aspects of the game, the ultimate decision (even to include augmentation in the game) is the Storyteller's. Some Storytellers may not like the idea that a shaman with Life 1 can heal that horrible wound inflicted on his friend just by making

a good deal with the spirits, and that is fine. The Storyteller may find that the middle ground is better, such as that no shaman may be augmented more than two points above his total Spheres. In the end, do what works for you and your game.

Waking the Dead

A shaman deals with many spirits along the way in her career. Eventually, certain of these spirits become her true companions, and it is these spirits she comes to rely upon. In her rituals, the shaman attempts to call her spirit helper, otherwise known as a totem, by way of her song and dance. These songs of hers, often called *icaros*, as well as the rhythm she plays on her drum, are generally unique to each spirit, and they act to summon a particular entity, separating it from the massive host of Otherworldly denizens.

When the spirit is finally summoned to the ritual area, the shaman usually falls into an ecstatic trance, generally brought on by the chants and dancing. She then begins communicating with the spirits in the form of a monotone dialogue, which can often be a grueling experience as she attempts to persuade the spirit into providing the requested information or services. Often the spirit is asked to diagnose the cause of a problem and then offer a cure, or otherwise is asked to augment the shaman with its powers.

This part comprises the main bulk of the ritual, and can last hours or, in certain cases, days. It is very physically and mentally taxing to the shaman, and during this portion of her magic dance she may appear to be in pain or totally oblivious to the world around her. This is perhaps why most shamans practice their ritual in front of an audience, as safeguard should something go wrong.

The last stage of the ritual, which may be combined with the previous, is that of payment. This is almost invariably a sacrifice of some sort, and this sacrifice can take many forms. One common example, and the one considered most abhorrent, is that of a living sacrifice, in which an animal, or, more rarely, a human, is slain as a present to the spirits. This practice apparently has influences from both the Euthanatos and the Verbena, as the main focus is on the type of creature being slain and the blood involved in the affair.

The death and blood of a creature are not always the sacrifice demanded. Other forms of "sacrifice" include ritual infliction of pain to oneself, such as walking on hot coals or piercing the body with metallic objects, as is common practice among the Bon Po shamans of Tibet and among the various tribes of Africa and South America. More on the safe side, and much easier to perform, is the sacrifice of ritual fasting and the cleansing or purifying of one's body and soul. While this practice is becoming rarer now, it has been seen in the shamanic rites of ancient Europe and China, as well as among many peoples in the Middle East and the Amazon.



Elements of the Dance

Among the diverse shamanistic cultures of the world, many common elements are found in the ecstatic dance. Naturally, the specifics of the dance vary from culture to culture, but certain tools and methods are used the world over. Regardless of what the shaman is actually wearing, speaking or doing, one goal is achieved — entering into the proper state of being in which to deal with the spirits and their world.

What Should I Wear?

When choosing what clothes to wear during the dance, the shaman is hardly guided by the fashion sense of pop culture. The costume he wears is sacred dress, constructed specifically for the purpose of being used in ritual. This costume is often embellished with symbolic elements peculiar to the culture, and is many times infused with the power of various spirits which enchant the clothes in much the same way that various plants are used to augment the shaman's powers, making them fit for use in ritual.

A Little on the Top

Certain aspects of the costume are found anywhere in the world. One chief example is the shaman's cap or headdress, an item that many believe is crucial to the practice of shamanism. Most Siberian shamans feel that magic is almost impossible to the shaman should he not don his cap. In most northern climes, the symbolism of this cap involves the horns of an animal, commonly a stag, though feathers are more universal. Sometimes, as among the Buryat shamans of Mongolia, the cap can also signify a rudimentary ranking system. The Buryat shaman, after initiation, receives a cap shaped like the head of a lynx. After his fifth ablution, or ritual cleansing, he then receives an iron casque adorned with horns.

A note about headgear: the most common theme of the shaman's costume is the idea that it "transforms" the wearer into an animal, or, at very least, it grants the shaman that animal's powers. Thus, the exact nature of the cap is determined by the animal that the whole costume tries to portray. It is safe to assume that caps with horns correspond with costumes representing stag or reindeer, such as those of the Mongolian Buryat, and that those caps dressed with feathers are worn by cultures who seek to emulate birds, like the many native tribes of the Americas, as well as in Siberia.

Those With Something to Hide

In some cultures, especially those of the North American southwest, masks are worn in place of the cap. Rather than seeking to become an animal in their rites, these shamans opt to become ancestors, heroes of legend or even gods. Masks are also used to conceal the shaman's identity as he deals with unfavorable spirits and those that "dwell in places unspeakable and dead." In the modern era, however, masks are almost unheard of. It is thought that this is due to

the fact that the costume is indeed an advanced mask of sorts, as it has the ability to change the identity of the shaman in his rituals, the ultimate point of costume in the first place.

Spirit Style

Following suit, the next object, and perhaps the most culturally varied, is the caftan, or ritual garment. Primarily made from the skins of sacred animals, including the stag and goat, the caftan provides the main bulk of the costume. This isn't always the case, however; many Eskimo tribes practice in ritual nudity, although they are even found wearing the ritual cap and belt. Essentially rather plain by itself, the caftan is often enhanced with objects such as metal disks, feathers or long strands of cloth that represent snakes or hair, among other things.

The caftan is used in ritual to represent many distinct ideas. First and foremost, the material and design of its construction often corresponds to a member within the animal kingdom, typically a bird, stag or bear, with the bird being most common. There are instances within specific cultures in which this animal changes from ritual to ritual, as in the Tungus peoples of North Asia, where reindeer and duck are interchangeable, fitting the situation. In any case, the animal choice has some intrinsic meaning, from what the shaman is doing to what particular totems she has acquired.

Apart from the main animal the costume represents, the long strands of cloth adorning the dress also possess a certain significance. Whether interpreted as snakes or hair, these strands generally signify the concentrated magical power of the shaman. The choice of snake or hair is usually a cultural one decided by the frequency in which the tribe encounters snakes. In general, tribes found in regions of the far north use hair to symbolize magical strength, though the symbol of the snake is not unheard of. In cases where a shaman of the north bears images of snakes, it is usually the result of the inevitable cultural sharing of ideas, but more on the subject of cultural interaction later.

Other articles of clothing donned by the shaman in her rituals include boots and belts. Typically these items serve to flesh out the animal form implied by the cap and caftan. Returning to the Tungus, you find boots that resemble bird's feet. The important thing to remember is that the costume functions as a prop to "magically" transform the shaman into a spirit being, thus making her capable of the journeys to the Dreamland she is so famous for.

What Do I Bring?

While the elements of the shaman's costume vary significantly from culture to culture, there are many tools common to the trade of spirit dealing that can be

found the world over. These items serve as trademark objects in shamanism, and the methods of using these tools, along with their purpose, seem to have almost no variation among cultures.

Shake, Rattle and Bang

The melodies a shaman sings while making contact with the world beyond are important in selecting what spirit she wishes to assist her. However, it is the rhythm that is the most essential part to the affair, and thus the drum (or rattle or tambourine, depending on culture) has risen to paramount importance in shamanic culture. The drum functions in a manifold way, one case being its use in the initiation process, where the future shaman is carried to the "center of the universe" to produce her drum with a branch fallen from the Cosmic Tree. Other primary uses within ritual include providing a focus for the shaman to concentrate and steady her mind on, aid in "flying" to the spirit world and the aforementioned use of making contact with and binding spirits to the shaman's will.

In her use of the drum as a focus, the shaman tends to start the beat slow, and the song begins at a low, almost harsh whisper. Gradually, she increases the intensity, and now the dancing begins. As the melody takes a definitive shape, the beat begins rising in intensity to compliment her now loud singing. She starts to scream, almost howl, her voice taking a forced, shrill quality, and now the banging of her drum rises to an almost ecstatic climax, her soul set free to fly. She is now ready to deal with the spirits.

A certain degree of reverence is associated with the shaman's drum, and thus much symbolic significance is attached to the drum. As was said earlier, in the initiation process the drum is symbolically carved from the Tree of Life. The actual wood used in its construction comes from a tree designated by the spirits, insuring the qualities of purity and sacredness, ideas common to myths concerning the World Tree. Such justifies the belief that the drum is sacred as the shaman was guided by the spirits in the drum's construction. It is through this association with the Axis Mundi and the spirits that the drum has given the shaman his power to "ascend to heaven."

Costume Jewelry

Dealing with spirits is not always a simple business. Many times the shaman encounters hostile, unknown beings in his spirit quests and, as such, he takes measures to ensure these encounters are "safer," wearing many metallic disks, chains and what not. These metallic items, typically disks, carry with them symbols of protection and guidance. Even the fact that they are metal implies this protective quality.

Upon each disk there is usually an animal figure or various planetary symbols, such as that of Father Sun or Sister Moon. In general, the symbols are appropri-



ate to both culture and also to those spirits the shaman wishes to make contact with. Regardless of what symbols these disks actually bear, it is only when the shaman dances that they are "activated." The clanging flurry of noise serves to frighten unwanted spirits away and to heighten the shaman's ecstasy, much like the drum or rattle. It is also common tradition that the disks serve as a spiritual armor in a sense, deflecting the attacks of hostile entities.

Other types of embellishments worn to substantiate the costume include various metal rods and designs. For instance, the Yakut costume of Siberia includes adornments of iron that imitate ribs, arm bones and miscellaneous organs, such as the liver and the genitalia. Feathers are also among the many embellishments that trim the shaman's costume, as well as bones, rocks, staves (that often bear the heads of animals at the tip) and different types of plant matter.

Who's There?

In rites of healing, the shaman is almost always with his patient, and they are surrounded by the tribe, which serves both as an audience and as a safeguard should something go wrong. In more esoteric journeys, the shaman is usually seated by himself, away from the activities of the tribe. In any case, the shaman is always accompanied by spirit companions and their ilk.

Totems, a Shaman's Best Friends

In her journeys to the Other Side, the shaman deals with many spirits that she must coax or otherwise convince to aid her in her work. Most of these transactions are one-time deals in which the spirit, in one way or another, augments the shaman in return for some service or sacrifice. However, there is one spirit that the shaman deals with often enough that they form a bond and friendship. Often, this spirit was in some way responsible for her Awakening. This is her totem spirit.

For the spirit to qualify as a totem, the shaman must know the being's True Name, and the two must *trust* one another. That's what the relationship between the two is all about: Trust. The shaman and her spirit must be friends in the truest sense of the word, especially when names are involved, since to know a spirit's name is to have that spirit's power. This power is never to be abused, as this may result in dire consequences for the shaman. When dealing with totems, remember that it is a two-way street. A totem that is abused may take its power back from the shaman, or inflict illness upon him once again. Shamans who are recalcitrant with their totem spirits find that they lose the confidence and power of the Otherworlds.

In most cultures, the totem takes the form of an animal, usually one that bears some significance to the culture in question. Animal forms typically adopted by

totems are those of stags, birds or bears, much like the costume of the shaman. In fact, the style of costume a shaman wears is commonly dictated by the nature of her totem, though this doesn't always hold true. Many instances are seen in which the costume is determined by tradition and is an animal that has been revered within the culture since the Dreamtime. Other common forms a totem may take are those of the shaman's ancestors, often found among animistic peoples and others who revere the dead.

Other Guests Who Lack Bodies

While Totems are present in almost all shamanic seances, many other spirits are also commonly found at such functions. These include the spirits of dead ancestors, especially in the Far East, where animism is widely practiced, and also the spirits of various animals and geographical features of the region where the shaman does his work. These spirits are a diverse lot indeed, and the only certain thing when dealing with them is that there is no certain way of dealing with them. While some of these beings are beneficial and benign in nature, many are also hostile, belligerent or just plain troublesome for the shaman.

Making Sense of it All

All of the information on the shaman's drug use, costume and seance is important not only to understanding shamanic culture and fleshing out character, but also to fueling stories involving shamans. The many elements involved in the proper performance of the shaman's ritual are often difficult to attain, and many trials may be necessary for the character to earn the right to walk the path of healer.

The costume is rarely just given to the would-be shaman. It is usually buried with the former shaman,

and is thus not passed along in most cultures; the shaman himself must craft it under the supervision of the spirit world. As such, gathering the right materials, contacting the right spirits and putting it all together can be a trying task, one that may be played up by the Storyteller, either in the prologue or in the actual game. Even when the shaman has his general attire complete, he may need to deal with a particular spirit that requires different symbols to be donned; any good Hermetic mage knows that symbols are rarely universal in the spirit world.

Dealing with the spirits can be an obvious source to draw upon for compelling plot fodder. As it was said, not all spirits are akin to fairy godmothers. A great many of them, in fact, have learned to not trust humans due to the centuries of constant abuse the spirit world has endured from Mankind. What if an apparently benign being gives the shaman wrong information and his patient dies? What if the information is right, but it involves a perilous quest to the Other Side? Pull out all the stops — what if one tribe is about to bring a spiritual assault down upon the character's tribe that would put Normandy to shame?

The Storyteller may want to make a list of correspondences for dealing with spirits, especially individual beings. Common to most spirit magic — predominately among the Order of Hermes, the Verbena and most shamanic types — is the belief that certain materials attract certain spirits and avert others. Figuring out these correspondences can prove to be quite a task for characters who wish to deal with the Spirit Realms. Top off correspondences with taboos that the spirit might hold, and you begin to see just how fickle the Unborn are. Use this information sparingly, though. There is a thin line between a challenging puzzle and a frustrating boggle, one that players will definitely pick up on.

Dreams Within a Dream



The spirit world is everywhere. Of all the places on Earth, not one is isolated or left untouched by the spirit's capricious caress. Because of this, those who hold council with the world beyond are to be found in all places of our planet, serving as audience to the Mother's messengers and heeding the cries of the dying Earth. In essence, shamanism is not a cultural thing; it is a human thing. While method and practice defines the shaman in general, and also illustrates the universality of his Art, it is culture that defines the individual shaman and normally dictates how he views the Dream.

Scarred by Progress: A People Scorned

Shamanism's roots run deep into the origins of time, far back into that period known to them as the Dreamtime. From these depths, when men first heard the voices of beyond, the shaman has kept to his road, defending his people and keeping his legacy alive from generation to generation. This has been no small feat, however, as his road has been fraught with perilous adversity, winding further into chaos, and even the shaman's own brothers oppose him. Tried by fire and cleansed in the sea, the

shaman and his peoples have withstood the tests of time, but as for how much longer these scorned people can endure, only time will tell.

In days past, the shaman's world has been only moderately affected by the onslaught of progress, surfacing mainly in the form of religious proselytizing. Though many tribes were infected by the Chorus' quest for divinity, especially in the Americas, the life of many shamanic cultures remained largely unaffected. Even after the British Empire had taken Africa and the Far East, only moderate change befell the world of the shaman. Reasons for this abound, but the most frequent assumption was that traveling to the remote regions of the world in which primitives lived was a dangerous proposal, even to the tenacious Celestial Chorus, and thus the shaman and his people were able to escape Western ideology for many centuries. The shaman's paradise and isolation, however, would not last forever.

With the advent of more efficient transportation coupled with the infant industrial world's need for raw resources, hunting season was flung wide open on the land of the shaman and his tribes. In the Americas, for example, the white man's relentless search for power lead to the natives' eventual decline, a one-way ticket to disgrace and lives in trailer parks or reservations. Those who dared question the abuse were assimilated, converted and shown the light, or, in more drastic situations, systematically destroyed in an ethnic pogrom. This was only the beginning.

The Truth and the Story

Everyone's tragedy is the worst.

The survivors of the living ways from the Americas lost their lives and cultures to the invading Europeans. Roman legions burned the sacred groves of the Celts on their arrival to Britain and Gaul. The Asian immigrants settling Japan displaced the native Ainu.

Who is at fault? Whose loss was the greatest?

Who can say?

Perhaps it is true that other mages or Technocrats drove the extermination of shamanism. Mankind can be more cruel than any individual mage, though; cultures war with one another, and the losers are left to dust and history.

The bitter are the first to lay blame. If the Chorus or the Technocracy or the Euthanatos destroyed the ways of people, did not these magicians spring from their own cultures? We cast blame, but we must remember: If a group of mages has done a thing, then a group of people has done so ten-thousand fold.

The American Dream

In the Americas, it began in 1492, when Columbus sailed the ocean blue, bringing the first European expedition to the Americas and starting one of the greatest massacres the world had ever seen. From the very start

Christopher Columbus began killing the native peoples which began the legacy of death and destruction that would befall these innocent peoples. From this shocking start, explorer after explorer came to the Americas taking advantage of the ignorance of the natives who, in some instances, believed the visitors were glorious manifestations of their gods. Ever since, the first Americans have been exploited, raped, killed, diseased and converted by the white man's ways — even in modern times, this is still the case. Granted, the civil rights movements have made some headway in the equal treatment of people, but this once grand nation of Earth Dancers has been reduced to rubble, shadows of their former glory.

Today, most tribal peoples of North America are willing to forgive, but never forget. They have become pragmatic in their degradation and only wish to move forward, hoping to preserve as much of their culture as possible and making only a few ripples in the collective sea of humanity. There are those who wholeheartedly want to strike back against those who've done them harm, but the real enemy is the hate and ignorance that was largely responsible for their people's downfall, and much more pressing issues are at hand. The ecological death to which North America subjects itself is a far more pressing issue on the minds of most native shamans, and many feel that the rape of the Mother must be avenged before the insignificant crimes committed against their own people can be considered.

In North America, the tribes that still exist have changed dramatically, both in form and practice. In much the same way that they were forced to adapt in lifestyle, so too did they have to adapt religiously, many tribes adopting Christianized versions of their previous Earth-worship beliefs. As was mentioned above, the peyote religion of the Southwest is a mix of older ways and Christian symbolism that almost seems paradoxical, yet still thrives, with shamans of ancient lineage who still govern the travels to the spirit world. Other tribal practices have survived, albeit in a watered-down version done more in lip-service to culture than anything, though this is a broad generalization. Alongside these "wannabes" still exists purer forms of the old ways, done with the same reverence that has been attached to these rituals for centuries. Helping to preserve these traditions are many social institutions provided by the government, perhaps to alleviate themselves of the guilt of their previous exploitations.

In South America the story starts the same: Spanish explorers and exploiters come in, converting and killing the native peoples, breaking their pride and destroying their lifestyles. Fortunately for the natives here, however, was the loving embrace of the Amazon rainforest, ultimately their home and their source of well-being. The blessed Amazon of the natives was the cursed Amazon to those who would kill them, being vast, hot and very



dangerous, and thus offered ample protection for many years. Because of their ability (and white man's inability) to navigate and survive in such trying terrain, shamanic culture in this region ultimately survived to the present day, largely unchanged in the centuries in which the natives lived here. Their fuse is burning shorter in modern times, however.

Western civilization's growing need for resources and land have pushed the boundaries of the rainforest ever further into itself, and now the fate of the tribes in this area of the world is becoming uncertain at best. Where once there were trees, now lay overworked fields; where once there were animals, now stand towns; where once was an ancient holy site, there now sits a Christian church. Tribal children wearing T-shirts brought by missionaries stand next to their fathers donning traditional garb, and the elders fear the worst. In fact, no other single region in the world has been harder hit by the intruding Chorus than in the rainforests of South America. Some would even go as far as to say that the Celestial Chorus is working with the Technocracy here to subdue the natives, but this is only angered speculation.

As the rainforest dies, so too does the spirit of the shamans in this area, but the Amazon is not the only place in South America where the shaman still works his Art. The barrios of Brazil, much like the urban areas in

Mexico and the southwest U.S., are seeing a new phenomena grip the young minds of the poor: city shamanism. City shamans are about as varied a lot as any other, and some say more so. This is because in the cities, where tradition is lost to progress, there are many ways in which to Awaken to the spirits around you, and credible mentors are rare indeed. Some groups have grown, despite the odds, and are almost mainstream in Brazil. One major example of this is the tradition known as Saint Daime, a mixture of beliefs which can be described as Incan Christianity. The practices of this pseudo-religion include the use of the psychotropic ayahuasca teas to commune with the holy spirit, as well as the spirit of the Mother, symbolized by the Virgin Mary.

In the Caribbean and southern United States, perhaps the oddest blend of shamanic lore is practiced today. almost "pop culture" tradition widely known as *voudoun*, and it has the most unlikely mix of traditions the world may have ever seen. *Voudoun* (called "voodoo" by Hollywood and ignorant Sleepers) is a strain of pseudo-shamanic culture with many influences: the ancient shamanic practices of the Caribbean, spirit-talking, ecstatic trance, animistic thought and, surprisingly enough, the Christian practices of early settlers and missionaries, all mixed in a wild blend that may have a priestess calling upon the Virgin Mary and the saints as she enters trance, then being ridden by a very un-Christian male spirit. The tradition survives today in Haiti

and New Orleans under somewhat squalid conditions. While voodoo's trappings of dolls stuck with pins, zombies and John-the-Conqueror powder are largely Sleeper invention, it is rumored that some mages draw upon darker *voudoun* influence in their magics. Any true Dreamer knows, though, that a religion so vibrant with life can only grow, and the spines of such poisoned plants turn inward on their twisted growers.

Thus is the Dream danced in the Americas.

Imaginary Lines, Real Hell in Africa

In Africa, where perhaps the Dream was first danced, the French and British opened the slave trade around the late 1500s, turning the indigenous tribes there into less than inferior people. These people became objects, bought and sold at the price of their souls. Treated with even less compassion than cattle receive, these Dreamers' spirits were broken, their ways erased, and their future left uncertain, often coming at the crack of a whip. Brought to the Americas, many were even forced to abandon their beliefs, being educated to the ways of the white man's cruel god.

Arguably, those who were left in their native land faced a far more insidious fate. The British, with their maps and pens, began drawing imaginary lines all over the land of Africa, grouping tribe with tribe, often enemy with enemy. These peoples, unaware of the concept of "owning" land, found this change almost unbearable. Where once they could roam the land freely, now these peoples needed passes to cross the invisible lines of the British, or else face swift and unmerciful reprisal. Even when the attacks came not from the British, the natives were dying. Forced to live within absurd new boundaries, tribes began warring with each other over the limited resources far more frequently than ever in the past. Countless lives lost, the spirit of the Dream was becoming tainted with a black darker than night, former Dancers becoming killers in the name of survival.

The shamanic culture of Africa is dying fast. In the northern edge of the continent, few nomadic tribes dot the deserts, having been replaced by city dwellers digging for oil. At the opposite extreme, in southern Africa, the once-populous tribes here are finding their lives dictated by the development of cities and the growing economic plight which is effecting the region. In between, the poverty-stricken tribal nations suffer shortages, the crushing pressure of a world economy disinterested in "primitives," the famine of a dying ecology and constant war as outside nations attempt to enforce artificial borders on the native peoples in the search for lines of control over scant valuable resources or their own leaders grow fat on corruption. In these overcrowded and suffering regions, where much is left undeveloped, the Technocracy has left its digital mark on the very souls of the people themselves. Here the Prognitioners unleash

obscene diseases upon the populace, and rumors of things far worse are drawing attention to the goings on in this area. Rumors of genetic tamperings and clones are the concern of much of the talk, and some say that the Technocracy is attempting to develop the "Urbemensch" (or, "super man") from these experiments. Any attempts to validate these claims, however, have proved thus far futile. Those who enter this region with the intent of unveiling such supposed Technocratic abuses either leave empty-handed or not at all.

As if humanity itself wasn't enough adversity for the shamanic tribes of Africa, the very land cries in anguish and rage. Droughts, plagues of ungodly proportions and epidemics of unknown diseases cover the land, seeking revenge for the ecological rape of the Mother. The land withers away, cities to mark its scars, and once-fertile regions become barren. Add this to the already harsh conditions of the African wilderness, and one begins to get a picture of the hell life is for tribes in this region. Because of this, those natives that manage to eke a living out of such squalid conditions are an unsavory, often hostile lot, treating foreigners with contempt and an icy shoulder at best, and attacking those who would dare pose a threat, saving death only for those they like. Perhaps these peoples know best the meaning of the phrase, "drastic times call for drastic measures."

The Middle East region, partly belonging to Africa, has never really had any cultures that can be called "shamanic," though those peoples that would fit into this category are long gone, consumed largely by the turbulent religions of their region. This region is largely dominated by the Chorus and its warring factions, such as Islam, Judaism and Christianity, who are collectively playing out the age old struggle to win the Holy Land. Those who didn't want to play this game have been ignored or destroyed, swallowed by the sea of time.

Thus is the Dream danced in Africa.

Oriental Express to Exile

In the Far East, the tune of genocide was played to a different beat, and, surprisingly, the Akashic Brothers held the drum. As Buddhism spread its way across the land, the blood of the indigenous peoples began to flow, opening the chapter of this "peaceful" religion with a bang. Fortunately for these tribes in Tibet and in other places of China, the massacres were short-lived, and, in fact, Buddhism began to absorb ideas related to the Bon Po shamanism, the indigenous beliefs of this area. The cultural sharing was mutual, too, as the Bon Po began adopting Buddhist teachings, forming a branch of Buddhism almost unique to the Tibetan peoples. Still, many Buddhists disdain the Bon Po, seeing their doctrine as almost heretical, despite the fact that one Dalai Lama said, "Any teaching that brings greater peace and happiness is part of the teachings of the Buddha."

In current times, the tables have turned against both the Buddhists and the Bon Po shamans, as the Chinese communist government has moved into the Tibet, assimilating the peoples there into a new state regime. Guided by communist policy, the government condemns religions and traditional practices, instead infusing its own brand of state loyalty and Legalism as a mandatory faith for its citizens. Those who do not conform, Buddhist or otherwise, are forced into exile, fleeing to the Himalayas in India, where they can find peace and practice their religions safely. Monasteries in China are closed down, schools are forced to teach politics and the ways of China's new government, and those who don't are left broken, empty and abandoned. The Akashic Brotherhood is taking this purge in stride, however, seeing it as the karmic retribution for their crimes against their brothers. Karmic or not, the Brothers still believe that they see the root of the problem: the Technocracy, who wishes to bring the modern world full force into this almost-primitive land. This region is a hotbed of social upheaval, and none know how much longer the oppression will be tolerated, let alone actually carried out.

In the Siberian region of the Far East, many of the tribes here have found a bittersweet isolation that few other peoples in the world have experienced. Left to their own devices, the shamans here, known as Kam, have been fortunate enough to practice as they have for centuries. This isolation has left them safe, but perhaps it has left them far too unaware of the world around them, thus making them ignorant to the ways of the outside world. Ignorant, but not stupid. Once a group of missionaries came to the region, but there were no conversions, and the missionaries were killed at the first mention of their god. Despite these apparent successes, mass civilization is ever encroaching upon their world, as it has for years, and it is unknown how long their paradise will last. As for the entire world of the shaman, only time will tell.

Indonesia, Oceania and the other islands and groups of islands in the Pacific have all faced similar fates to their brothers in the rain forests of the Amazon. These people, often times living in the shadow of Christianity, have had to struggle to keep their ways from being devoured by the monster of Western industrial ideology. It can be confidently said that they are meeting with more success than their Amazon counterparts, but, then again, the modern world has only recently turned its eye to these remote, floating paradises that drift peaceably in the Pacific. Prospects are looking rather bright for them as of now, as little interest is had for this region, other than perhaps in the way of tourism, and this has produced a strange phenomena: pop culture shamanism, but this will be described later.

Thus dance the Oriental shamans, their Dreams remaining strong....

The Land Down Under, Under Attack

The Southland, or Australia, has been the last great, livable continent to see the white man's face. Starting in the late 1700s, this land, barren as it was, became a prison for British debtors, though it later became settled, and is continuing to be settled today. While at first skirmishes between natives and settlers were common, things changed, and something remarkable happened here that is practically unheard of else where in the world: the indigenous peoples, known as aborigines, gained the respect and the protection of the foreigners! Some feel that this is because of the late development of this land, as people were learning to become more tolerant of those different, and xenophobia was becoming less common. As the first settlers were criminals, perhaps being outcasts themselves allowed them to possess more sympathy for their new neighbors, but what gained them respect was how the aborigines had mastery over such a harsh land. In many ways like the "Indians" to the pilgrims, the aborigines have suffered persistent persecution and displacement in the face of onrushing settlers.

Eventually, as the Land Down Under became more and more populated, this interaction between the aborigines and their pale-skinned friends became rarer and rarer. Civilization here was taking the same course as the world over, becoming industrial as opposed to agricultural, urban rather than rural. Cities began to dot the landscape, burying nature under concrete. Finally, the natives abandoned the white man to his own devices, opting to return to their untamed world. While still possessing the respect of the white man, the aborigines went back to the way they were, roaming the vast expanses of wilderness that remain in Australia.

In modern times the ever increasing population and urban development of Australia is pushing ever deeper into the heart of this vast continent, ever closing in on the aborigines and their lands. The two factions, at this point in time, still have a healthy respect for one another, but some predict that this all too soon will go sour. As cities grow bigger, aborigine elders are becoming more wary of white man, eyeing him with understandable suspicion, and they are quickly growing paranoid as the wild fills with the electric hum of motor vehicles traversing their sacred plains. White man, too, is looking more at the natives with what is termed pity, and one wonders how long he can subdue his urge to "enlighten" the "primitives." For now, the Dreamspeakers and their ilk watch, keeping their fingers crossed, hoping perhaps that Australia can prove once and for all that such a situation is possible, white man living in harmony with his Dancing brothers.

However, where the clash of cultures has absorbed people whole before, so it does in Australia. Though some

pockets of wilderness remain untouched by the spread of "civilization," the slow and viral spread of cities and their influence is pervasive. In a single generation, an entire culture is swept away by the education of modern schools. As the conveniences of technological life spread, even far-away villages are left with the unmistakable stain of blue jeans and cell phones. There is no clash of armies or displacement from homelands, just an inexorable change as the old ways are discarded and forgotten by youth who cling to the promises of a faster, better, more entertaining life. The Dream does not die — it simply becomes the vision of a private few, passed on where it may and humming a quiet tune, waiting to be found again.

Thus goes the dance, unhindered in Australia's Dream....

Dancing to a Different Tune: The European Dream

Many shamanic cultures have seen their rise and fall on the ancient plains of the European continent. The Celts and the little-known Cult of the Dead paraded across Europe, staring wide-eyed at the heavens since Neolithic times. Unfortunately, none of these cultures actually exist in their true form today, the last actual shamanic group to see the sun being the Lapps of Scandinavia, which died out in the 18th century. However, the shamanic tradition has survived, albeit under a very different name: the Verbena.

The Verbena can trace their roots far back into time, with various places claiming to be this Tradition's point of origin, but one fact cannot be denied: the Verbena did indeed find their start in Europe. Their origins can be found among ancient Italian peoples, the Celts, Gothic Germans, as well as many other groups dotting the old landscapes of Europe. How all these people came together to form the Verbena is a fuzzy issue, but it is most likely primarily due to the force of the Roman Catholic church, which tried to eliminate the "heathens," who in turn caused these groups to pull together if they were to survive. Whatever the case may be, the Verbena absorbed all the various tribes and peoples to make the Tradition we see today, which can be said to be the modern shadow of Europe's shamanic culture.

There are groups in the world today that claim to be Druids and whatnot, and there has indeed been a revival of ancient Celtic ways, but these sects are generally a far cry from their namesakes. These groups are found in Verbena and Sleepers alike, though the Verbena come closer to the original concept. With this revival of ancient traditions in the world, we have seen the rise of the oddest form of shamanism to date.

Pop Culture Shamanism

It seems as if all things spiritual find their way into the mainstream eventually, albeit in a rather broken-up and watered-down version. Shamanism is no different. Today's pop culture is slowly taking a look back at the old ways, perhaps with the help of the Dreamspeakers and Verbena,

but the shamanism of pop culture is as different as times are now compared to the dawn of time. Pop-shamanism is an extremely weak and commercialized version of its namesake and, as such, is very misleading. The general trend of spirituality in pop culture is very "New Age", and shamanism is no different, having been usurped by the Sleepers as another "feel-good religion for the '90s." Most true shamans don't really mind as long as some of their message gets out, but many feel that it is a petty attempt by humanity to regain its self-made image.

Shamanism and Mage Society

Most shamans do not call themselves mages. They are healers, speakers of the land, the tongues of spirits, the audience of the Mother, the keepers of tradition and the Earth's warriors, not petty politicking mages. This sentiment runs strong in the shaman's mind, as many see the Traditions as no better than the Others, all fighting to twist reality to their limited views. The shaman disdains such, knowing full well that reality is the Earth's dream, and that She makes the calls. Humans, insignificant parasites in the big picture, have an important part in the scheme of things, but hardly one as special as they try to make for themselves. The shaman knows this, and takes it to heart.

While shamans hold a harsh attitude toward the Traditions, this is not to say that they hate them or hold them beyond a general contempt. In fact, they have family within the ranks of the Council of Nine, four Traditions that have walked the same path with them for centuries. These are the Dreamspeakers, their brothers and voice in the Council; the Cult of Ecstasy and Verbena, their virtual children, who were birthed following the old ways; and the Euthanatos, distant cousins in belief and practice. Of these four, only the Dreamspeakers maintain active ties with shamanic culture, though it is not too rare to see the other three walking with shamans.

Bloody Past, Bitter Hate

Of all the Traditions, only one draws the deepest rage from the shaman's heart, and this is the Celestial Chorus. Through their own misunderstanding of shamanic spirituality and the prostelyzation of their native religions, the Choristers spread intolerant religion with them. Even those who Sing out with tolerance are drowned by the masses of humanity, mage and Sleeper alike, who declare that their one way is the only truth and that all dissonance must be extinguished. Shamans hold Choristers in hateful contempt for all the crimes committed by this Tradition against their peoples. Sharing this sentiment are the Dreamspeakers, who often wonder why they sit in council with these vicious killers.

The heads of the Chorus proclaim their desire for peace and conciliation, yet still the religious fanatics cry death and hatred for the "heathens" — and all the while, the Chorus accepts such erstwhile allies, instead of casting out the intolerance that taints the spiritual heart.

Shamans' hate for the Celestial Chorus lies less in the physical deaths that this Tradition has caused, and more in the great spiritual murder that has taken place. Entire tribes, as well as countless individuals, have all fallen prey to the Chorus' spiritual monopoly in the recent centuries, and there is little hope of this changing. Perhaps it'd be easier were it only the Tradition's efforts, but Sleepers, too, spend a great deal of time and effort trying to convert the heathens. This, and the ever-banging drum of progress, are the primary threats to the shaman's world. From the standpoint of Dreamspeakers and shamans in general, the Chorus and the Technocracy are no different in this light.

The Others Dance Softly

Aside from the Celestial Chorus, shamans hold the Traditions in mixed regard. Openly, shamans consider the other Traditions as power-hungry self-servers too caught up in the affairs of the Sleeping world. Deep down is a different story. On the inside, shamans possess an unspoken respect for the other Traditions, a respect based almost solely on those sects' willingness to stand up in the face of adversity. Most shamans realize that they themselves lack the organization and drive to fight the good fight against the Others, and thus they appreciate the fact that there are those who can and do.

Walking the Path, Hearing the Voices

Walking the path of the healer in the modern world poses quite a challenge to today's shaman. Faced on all sides with those who'd see his ways gone, the shaman's life is a bitter struggle from start to end, a struggle made seemingly in vain. On one hand there are the Traditions, often trying to "enlighten" the primitive tribes to which the shaman belongs; on the other, there is the Technocracy pushing ever deeper into the heart of the wild lands in which a shaman lives. Even the depths of the mind hold no safety, the shaman having to deal with the Earth's tainted spirit as it blackens his psyche. It is no easy task to be a shaman, and none said it would be.

As the Reckoning creeps nearer, shamans in modern times have found ways to adapt, and several new phenomena are being made manifest in the World of Darkness. These new groups, akin to pseudo-Traditions, are now banding together in dying wilds and barren cities alike, struggling day by day to survive and make their presence felt by the world around them. Many of these groups are signs of the Traditions' ever-growing influence on spirituality in the world; others are stark reflections of the spiritual black-

ness found in the very essence of the Dream itself. Regardless, one thing is for certain: The tongue that once whispered is now bracing itself to roar.

Shamans Brewed by Tradition (and in darker pots)

It goes without saying that most shamans with Traditional training have been reared by the Dreamspeakers. In fact, it can almost be said that all Dreamspeakers are shamanistic, at least in essence. One cannot say, however, that all shamans are Dreamspeakers. Looking at how things stand now, a shaman brought up in the Dreamspeaker's paradigm is becoming a rare thing indeed. Many modern shamans are finding their way through other Traditions, a trend that some call unnerving and others retrogressive. The fact of the matter remains the same: Humanity as a whole, Traditions included, is moving toward older ways and older methods to find the answers.

Shamans with Traditional backgrounds typically reflect the regressive trend the late 20th century has seen of "digging into one's roots" and the whole New Age movement, while other groups of shamans reflect more the current state of affairs in the Dream. These shamans representing the darker side of life are variously called Dark Dancers, Wyrms Tongues, Mad Seers and other unappealing terms, but most often the Order of Descent. While some breed decay and oblivion, most see the goal of "harnessing the Beast" as the end of the road. Usually the end of one road leads to another....

Those of Tradition

Twentieth-century spirituality has seen a regressive tendency as of late. More and more people are turning their eyes toward the past, looking for a sign that leads to even the smallest kernel of truth. Sleepers in general are coming to a point where they realize that something's missing; it's as if there is no true inspiration left in the world. The mages of the Traditions are no different. These, founded by ancient legacies with lineages that span back hundreds or thousands of years, feel that they've lost something great, some divine radiance that the elders once possessed. The New Age movement and the aforementioned "pop shamanism" are signs of this spiritual revival taking place on all levels of humanity.

In the Traditions, this manifests as a look toward shamanism, and how most of the Council has historical ties to shamanic culture. This trend is especially common among newer initiates, who are typically introduced to the occult through mainstream spirituality, and who've come to the Traditions looking for "older ways." From these

unlikely sources stir now in the Dream a new, louder, and more organized voice in shaman culture.

Shamans of the Brotherhood

As mentioned previously, the Akashic Brothers and the shamans of Tibet have shared ideas for some time now, mixing symbology and ideology. As a result, this area has given rise to a new shamanism, one that still bears the name Bon Po, but stands markedly different from its traditional past. These new Bon Po, many forcibly educated by the Chinese, are not so foreign to the ways of the modern world, and are now organizing to stop communist oppression in their lands. These neo-shamans are often found on the front lines, protesting Chinese occupation, fighting Technocratic assimilation and resisting conversion, all the while performing their duties to their tribes. Tibet is not the only place to see such active Dreamers; Indonesia and Thailand have their share as well.

Celestial Follies

In the Americas, where zealous conversion rivaled the fanaticism of the Inquisition, the Celestial Chorus inadvertently provided the inspiration for several new shamanic sects to form. These new sects, most notably the Saint Daime of Brazil and the peyote religion of the United States, combined Catholic teachings and ideas with the methods and mythologies of earlier indigenous peoples. The end result proved to the world once and for all that the Chorus and so-called "barbarians" could coexist and even see eye-to-eye. While such is considered a heresy in Sleeping Celestial society, the Chorus has been left speechless, though appeased. This is perhaps the most pragmatic innovation since anyone can remember, and attracts many new members daily. One may wonder, though, how all this potential will be utilized....

Ecstasy Way

Most likely birthed in the '60s, these self-fashioned "Aquarian Elite" mark the Cultist contribution to the world of shamanism. Almost entirely found in industrialized nations, these activists and civil pioneers are truly committed to change, constantly striving to guide humanity to Utopia, though certainly not one as sterile as the Technocracy's. Despite eyes set on Utopia, this practical lot lives in the here and now, focusing on contemporary change for the better and winning the small fights. Ranging from ecological tree-hugger types to pro-cannabis activists, this diverse group attracts a lot of attention, some good, some bad, always controversial and timely, and definitely appealing to the new generation of would-be mages. This is perhaps the strongest of the neo-shaman sects, holding sway in Sleeper and Tradition society alike.

Entropic Dreams

This sect is probably the most horrifying and dangerous scourge overlooked by the Council in recent ages. Attracted to the entropy of the Euthanatos, it is in this Tradition that these Dark Dancers are typically trained.

Not satisfied with the idea that Entropy is only a part of reality, these twisted shamans, who've dubbed themselves the Harbingers, see Entropy and Oblivion as the goal of creation, pointing at Nature's upheaval as evidence. This cult of darkness is sometimes considered more in rank with the Order of Descent, though some say these vile souls are worse. Walking with the legions of the Damned and the wretched souls of Oblivion, these Harbingers of destruction wish to carry the Mother to her deepest sleep, the dance of death.

Keepers of the Name

Though any good Hermetic would deny it, a pseudo-shamanic rediscovery has been made among their ranks in recent years. Labeled the "ancient Sumerian revival" in the 1970s, this research has made the Order push its origins further back into time, and has forced them to reconsider just how High their Art really is. As one presses into the depths of time, the distinction between shamanism and religio-magical beliefs becomes a very thin line, often crossed. Likewise, when looking back upon the earliest roots of the Order, one sees how similar their practices are to those of ancient high priests, who were known to name the names, enact ritualized movements akin to dancing, and somehow, like the shamans, intoxicate themselves through various means.

Mages studying under this branch of the Hermetic Houses are an odd lot indeed. These pseudo-shamans hold the spirits in higher regard than most in the Order, and often attach themselves to ancient pantheons and old forgotten spirits found within the pages of grimoires. Dealing frequently with spirits, especially the types these Sumerian revivalists prefer, seemingly brands the mage's Avatar, inducing tremendous Quies and possible insanity. The most common source of these afflictions is the constant light-versus-darkness drama playing out in their paradigm, and the endless temptation to open the proverbial Gate to the Other Side. Truly, these mages walk a dangerous path.

You Wear Goggles?

The Sons of Ether share no real ties with shamans or their culture, but there is one sub-culture within this Tradition that holds the vision of their primitive cousins. Dubbed "Pantheists," these Sons claim that, if anything, Nature itself is divine and the Universe is "Her" temple. These serene Sons of Ether see no difference between Man and the world around him, and feel that Man's creations are, in a sense, holy. As such, the biggest enemy is the Technocracy; their constructs are poisonous and defiling to the planet, and are thus a detriment to all society.

Present since the Sons were known as Electrodyne Engineers, Pantheists are known to challenge conventional science with eco-friendly alternatives. One example is their having developed the use of solar energy slightly after the light bulb became popular in attempts to ease the

ecological strain of producing electricity. This and other innovations, despite being more practical than most techno-science, have been largely ignored. Sadly, even to this day, this group remains unrewarded, most likely due to being severed from the Technocracy and thrown into a group that can't understand their odd approach. The Pantheists, however, shed some light in hope's direction, paving a pragmatic road of ecological friendliness that many can relate to. Oddly enough in this respect, this sect of the Sons of Ether and the Aquarians of the Ecstasies often team up in battling the Others, along with other peoples of the Earth. They've even gone so far as to formulate the Gaia Hypothesis, an idea that stands in good stead with many shamans across Traditional boundaries. Through the Gaia Hypothesis, the faction postulates the living Earth as a whole entity, its microcosms of life and ecology forming a great, interlinked existence that binds all creatures together. Humanity is no more important than any tree or bird — humanity is simply the consciousness through which Gaia turns an eye upon Itself. As every creature depends upon others for sustenance and life, the chain is complete and wraps in upon itself, a hypothesis that is clear and at once demonstrable to any shaman.

Life as a Healer

The Verbena are well-known for their shamanic ways. First and foremost in this Tradition are the keepers of the old ways, healers and the closest thing to shamans outside of the Dreamspeakers. These mages can hear the call of their ancient Avatars, seeking to bring the primordial splendor of Gaia's Dream back to the modern world. Like most Verbena, these almost-but-not-quite shamans are vengeful and vindictive, craving the blood of Man as retribution for Mother's rape. In accord with this sentiment, some tend to be eco-terrorists, more often doing less good than harm. Hardly pragmatic, this group is surprisingly the largest growing shamanic sect, and is quickly becoming the loudest. For these shamans, spirits hold shotguns, and they're trigger-happy, looking to ease the Mother's burden by relieving Her of the parasite known as Man.

Techno-Shamans and Friends

While Virtual Adepts themselves tend to scoff at the shaman and his culture, this former Convention has influenced many would-be shamans immensely. The desolate city streets are giving way to a new Dreamer, born in a new Nature that has telephone poles for trees, sky-scraping mountains and asphalt paths on which two-ton carriages tote the dominant species around. This neo-shaman, perhaps the latest addition to the legacy of Dreamers, sends his smoke signals via e-mail, and deals with the spirits of the land, namely steel, electricity and concrete. Whereas most shamans despise the modern world, techno-shamans utilize it, realizing it is no more or less natural than the rest of the



planet. All this is enough to make the elders cry, "Oy!", but at least discredits the claim that shamans must be primitive or retrogressive.

No other Traditional shaman has made as big a splash as this recent addition. Taking to the streets with force, these techno-Dreamers are less concerned with bringing back the old ways and more involved with fighting battles that can be won. There are many agendas this budding group wishes to pursue, first and foremost being the idea of putting Humanity in the seat of power when it comes to technology, rather than the other way around. To put it another way, this group won't tell you to kill your TV; rather, they'll tell you to put it in its place, that of mere entertainment, not a way of life. Related to this is their desire to bring truly useful information to light, through whatever means possible. The techno-shamans' idea of "truly useful information" is anything that grants one more personal power and freedom without being a drain to the rest of society. The only problem in enacting their plans, as of yet, is lack of organization.

The Order of Descent

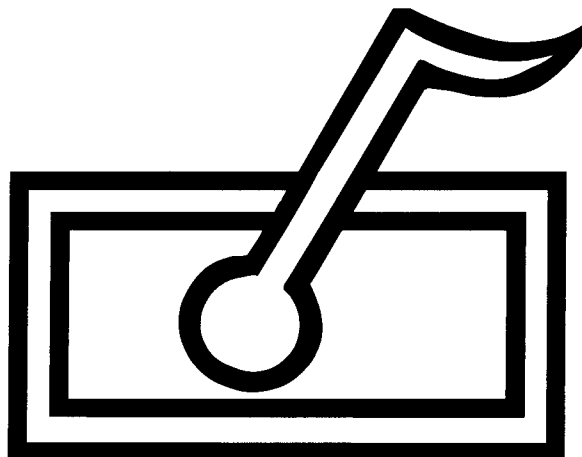
Dreams are not always pretty, bright, hopeful flights of fancy. Some hold our darkest fears, our most dreaded ills and our most perverse desires. Others leave you feeling empty, oblivious or worse. In these supposed end times, there are those who would willingly plunge themselves into this nightmare of horror, those who take joy in hearing the wailing soul of Mankind as it's dragged into the Hell it has devised for itself. With Avatars stained by despair and hearts darkened by powerlust, the sect known formally as the Order of Descent delights in these tortures.

As the Technocracy spans its digital fingers across the globe and humanity revels in decadence, the very spiritual nature of the Earth Realm has become stained, and it is believed that these dark shamans are a sign of the impurity.

Rather than looking toward the Heavens and wanting to heal the planet, the Order of Descent sees only the bloody face of humanity and craves to drag it screaming to Hell with them. Much like the Nephandi, the Order sees Oblivion as the ultimate perfection, entropy as the savior. What makes them dangerous, however, is that they aren't lurking deep within the Umbra; they prowl the streets, looking to serve up souls on a tarnished platter and making prey of those who unwittingly cross their path.

Rumors about this mysterious sect abound. The most common idea about this group is that it wants to reduce the world to a hellish pit of utter destruction, an entire planet of the original primordial sludge. More and more evidence is mounting to the contrary, however. It's coming to be understood that this group wishes to harness the powers of the darkside under the impression that only through mastery of the Beast is one allowed to ride it into battle. This may be too optimistic, though. The terror that this group has brought to Mankind can barely be equaled, let alone comprehended. Some think that this group was responsible for the black magic lodges of Germany (in conjunction with the Order of Hermes), and thus at least partly to blame for the occult conspiracies and ties attributed to the lieutenants of the Third Reich. As with all other aspects of this mysterious cult, however, this idea lies in the land of mere speculation. Anything heard from outside sources should be taken with a healthy dose of salt.

This group has taken an intriguing leave of absence in recent years, as if biding its time. With all the hysteria brought about by the approaching millennium, one is left to wonder what they are planning. Again, this absence has rumors thriving. Perhaps the Order of Descent is plotting to make Armageddon a reality; maybe something worse? None know for sure, but one thing is a certainty: whatever it is, whenever it hits, the world may never be the same again....





Chapter Three: Walking the Spirit



Running Deer cleared the path of the tree branches that hung low overhead, less out of necessity than to prevent the obnoxious Hermetic behind him from complaining.

"I don't believe this," the magus gasped. "Lost in a goddamned spirit forest! Hey! Where are we going?"

Running Deer sighed. He had found the erudite "mage" — a scholar calling himself Alexander LeSalle, something something blah blah of the Shining Stone blah blah blah — unconscious on a moon path. The werewolf pack that ran into them minutes later was ready to kill the white-skinned magus, but Running Deer managed to squeak both of them out of that situation. LeSalle was apparently journeying to the Elemental Court of something or other, but one of Thunderbird's storms had knocked him all the way into the Middle Realm. Running Deer, being a compassionate man, had agreed to lead LeSalle back to Earth.

It had seemed a good idea at the time.

"If I'm not back at my Covenant soon, who knows what will happen! They'll send search parties out, they'll start an incident, they'll—"

Would it have been so bad to leave him to the werewolves? he thought. A sharp pain in the back of his head answered that question — his totem didn't share his sense of humor.

They came to a three-way fork in the path, of which all three forks led into seemingly identical forest. The Hermetic pulled out a pendulum, muttered some nonsense and concentrated.

Running Deer sighed. Looking up in the trees, he spotted an owl. Maybe...

The Hermetic's pendulum failed to move.

"Um... er...."

Reaching into his medicine bag, Running Deer whispered a soft summons to Owl, asking for his assistance. He pulled a white mouse out of the bag, which Running Deer set on the ground.

The owl flew down and snatched the mouse up, leaving a single feather lying on the middle fork.

"This way," Running Deer said, starting up the middle fork.

"How do you know?" the confused Hermetic asked.

Running Deer smiled as he walked. "A little bird told me."

Journey's Beginning



Adam pulled the Buick over to the side of Beacon Street, narrowly missing compact cars. He hated driving in Boston, and he hated parking most of all. Fortunately, he managed to find a space right in front of Apo's apartment building. It might have been luck, or it might have been the *iwa* intervening. Adam was betting on the *iwa* — no mortal force could find a good parking space in Boston.

Strange that it's all come down to today, he thought. It had been a little over a year since the *babawalo* had read his destiny and declared that he, Adam Goldstein, the slightly skinny, slightly nerdy Jewish kid from Newton, would have to be initiated into the Yoruba tradition as a child of Obatala because of the toss of some shells. At first, Adam had laughed. Then Adam got angry. — *Does this guy really expect me to join his religion just because his magic shells told him so?* And yet, deep inside, Adam had known that this was right. Something in him stirred, something that he had never recognized before... and yet, it was almost as if he had known it his entire life. When they had dressed him in white robes, he had known. When they had shaved his head and made the incision on his scalp and cut the rooster's throat, he'd felt the presence entering him, crowning him. He knew what he had been missing his whole life.

Now, it was a year later. His hair was long again. He was no longer required to wear all white. Apo had taught him about the *iwa*, and now it was time to take a firsthand look. He got goose pimples just thinking about it, despite his doubts. His parents had finally spoken to him for the first time since his initiation — his conversion to the Yoruba tradition didn't go over well with his upper-middle-class, conservative Jewish family. Talking to them had created that old fear in his heart — the fear that he was doing a stupid thing, that he had joined some sort of cult, that the

whole thing didn't make sense — *Enough, stop it. I understand*. He was able to explain his whole experience, but *something* still nagged him.

Adam entered the old building, climbed the stairs up to Apo's apartment. After a knock, he let himself in. The apartment was decorated with trinkets and tools from nearly every culture imaginable, and Apo knelt before his shrine to Eshu the Trickster, in the living room. Apo was in his early 50s, an emigré from Nigeria who'd come to the New World to remind it of the old one. Initiated into the Yoruba tradition and then educated at Harvard, he was a living bridge between two cultures. Which, of course, was the role the *iwa* had selected for him.

"So. You are ready then, eh?" Apo grinned without looking up. His high-pitched voice was calm. "You've been called, and you have died and left your old life behind. You have been instructed in the ways of the *iwa*, their names and their customs. You have learned the languages and the rituals. You have learned the divinations with the shells and how to build your shrine. You have learned the Ghost Dance, and you have made your rattle. And now you want to walk among worlds, is that it?"

"Yes, Apo."

"Sorry, you're not ready for that."

Adam recoiled in shock. Apo winked.

"Relax. I'm joking."

Adam slumped into a chair. "I hate it when you do that."

Apo burst out laughing. "It's all part of the adventure, Adam. Eshu has his own peculiar sense of humor. But yes, the time has come for you to see what lies beyond this... this mortal, material world you've lived in for too long."

Apo grabbed a bag and headed for the door. "Well, c'mon! What are you waiting for? We sure as hell aren't going to do this in my apartment!"

Adam stumbled up, following his teacher.

The Shaman's Responsibility



Everything is laid out for you. Your path is straight ahead of you. Sometimes it's invisible but it's there. You may not know where it's going, but you have to follow that path. It's the path to the Creator. It's the only path there is.

— Chief Leon Shenandoah

Apo directed his student north, toward a place in Maine.

"We've got some time before we get outside the city, so listen. You can listen while you drive, can't you?"

"Yes, Apo. At least as long as traffic stays this light."

Apo smiled. "You've probably heard this a thousand times before. Well, you're gonna hear it again, and you'll hear it again and again until the day you die. It's the most important thing I'm ever gonna tell you, and it's the only thing you have to know when dealing with the Umbrae.

"Remember your responsibility.

"Sounds easy, right? It isn't. You're not a sorcerer, you're not a Hermetic, and you certainly aren't a Technocrat. When any of them touch the spirit world, why do they do it? They don't do it because they need something, they do it because they want something. Verbena and Cultists might respect us,

but when they awaken something, it's out of selfish desires. Maybe they want some information, maybe they're lazy and they want a servant. Maybe they just want a good lay."

Adam turned. "What? Is that possible?"

"Of course that's possible. Wipe that smirk off your face."

"Yes, Apo," Adam said, failing utterly.

"You know how I feel about Hermetics, so I won't beat that horse. And Technocrats — they just want the whole thing gone, wiped from the dreams of all men."

Apo lit a cigarillo, imported at no small cost from Havana. "When you go into the Otherworlds, you're not joyriding. You're not going out there for a thrill. It is thrilling to see the Umbrae, to see the true essence of the world, but that's a bonus. You're going out there to help your people, to speak with the spirits of the land and to bring the wishes of the *iwa* to the world since they can't do it themselves. And let me tell you, it's dangerous."

Apo's face, normally beatific, turned into a mask. Adam knew this tone. It was rare when his master took it, but when Apo got serious, it was important.

"The Technocracy wants to cut the whole thing loose and send it adrift. The Nephandi and their poisoned *iwa* want to reduce the Dream to ashes. Shifters live out there, and they're completely unpredictable. Plus, you got spirits who all want different things, Olodumare's storms which'll knock you on your ass into who knows where, and what's more, the landscape's always changing so you can never get your bearings. It's your responsibility to deal with all these things, figure out what the symbols and omens mean and bring that knowledge to the people who count on you to keep them safe."

Apo puffed on his cigarillo, managing to keep the smoke and smell down remarkably well despite the confines of Adam's compact. Especially with the windows up and the air-conditioning on. "That's a heavy burden, and a lot of shamans chafe under it. I know I did. But we're not Joe Average anymore. We're medicine men, and we have a sacred duty to guard the spirit ways and pass them on to your descendants."

"Otherwise, we're dead, and the world dies with us."

The Tree of the World: A Shamanic Cosmology



As they approached the site of their journey, Apo began lecturing. *I hate when he does this*, Adam thought. But he had to take the bad with the good.

"All right. You've never met a sorcerer — I mean, from another Tradition — so, let me tell you something, a little warning in advance. When they talk about the layout of the Umbrae, they're totally wrong."

"About all of it?"

"Okay, maybe not *totally*... I mean, the Verbena, the Cultists and the Euthanatos have similar views on the Spirit as we do. But the rest of them... forget it. Hermetics will try and classify every last thing until they've Named the whole damn world. They're almost as bad as Technocrats."

Adam nudged him. "You're doing it again."

"Yes, I know, I know," Apo said impatiently. "I'll stop. Akashics will never give you a straight answer about anything. Choristers are too busy seeing angels. The Euthanatos deal almost exclusively with ghosts, so their knowledge of the other aspects of the Spirit is lacking. And forget the Ether Scientists or the Virtual Adepts — they'll babble for hours about 'alternate dimensions' and horse shit like that."

"See, none of them get it, because they've all cut themselves off. They've all forgotten the primal spark, that time when all things were one. They're working from rules

that came much too late in the game, after everything fractured. Being a shaman is about realizing that all worlds are one. Even though they seem totally disparate, they're all different ways of looking at the same thing. We know this, so it's easier for us to make the mental shift."

"So here's the deal. The world is a tree. This world here, this is just the most obvious aspect of the tree. It's the bark, it's the leaves, it's what you can touch. The spirit world is the inside of the tree, the essence of it. You go higher up, you reach the sky, the ineffable. For simplicity's sake, we'll call it the High Umbra. This is the realm of ideas, abstract concepts and other nonsense. Pure theory, I say. We'll go there, but it's not a place suited for shamans. Why would you want to sit on your ass and contemplate the idea of something when you can step off your cloud and actually experience the real thing?"

Adam nodded. "Makes sense, I suppose...."

"Now, you go in the middle, you're in the heart of the tree. We'll call this the Middle Umbra. This is where we spend most of our time. This is our domain. This realm belongs to us — well, us and the shifters, anyway. It's the primal urge, it's life and death and ecstasy rolled into one. It's where the *iwa* are. *Iwa*, as opposed to Umbrood, who exist out in the High Umbra. You'll get sorcerers who call any spirit an Umbrood. Make sure to ignore them."

Adam grinned. "Yes, Apo."



"You go down, you're at the roots, with all the fallen leaves and fruits decaying around you. This is the Underworld, the Shadowlands, the whole kit and kaboodle. You saw a glimpse of that when the spirits took you. Aside from speaking with the spirits of our ancestors, you don't want anything to do with that place. Miserable doesn't begin to describe it, but there's no life without death, right? Still, it's an atrocity, one I don't expect you to visit too often. You aren't a Euthanatos, after all.

"And all through the tree are knots and irregularities and weird branches that are just there. Those are Zones and Realms and the like. And then, when you get to the top of the tree, you can see the stars. That's the Dreamshell. You can break the Dreamshell and walk to the stars, but not until you're a lot tougher. Like me." Apo grinned, a fresh cigarillo between his lips.

Adam gave him a look and drove on.

Looking Through the Veil



It was near dusk when they arrived at a forgotten clearing in the Maine forest. Adam built a fire as Apo unpacked blankets, drums, masks, rum and other "tools of the trade" (as Adam called them) from the car.

Apo grinned. "I love this place. You can feel it, can't you? The closeness of the spirit world? You can't get that in the city, not even in my sanctum. Plus, there are fewer eyes out here. And I have friends watching."

Adam could feel the thinness of the Gauntlet here, the power of Mother Earth beneath his feet. "What is this place?"

"It's a gate. I helped build it, along with some friends of mine. It's a place where it's easier to make the leap across. Now, start setting the place up like I taught you. We have

to prepare ourselves for what we're about to do. Just keep in mind that you won't always have this luxury."

"What do you mean?"

Apo sighed. "All right, let me put it in perspective. Even if you just look across to see the world beyond, that's a spirit quest in and of itself. When you're looking, you are gone from this world. That's what you've been training to do — leave your body, leave the shell and experience the vision. Like the Ecstatics, we break free from the constraints of our physical selves and experience the spiritual. We just have better reasons for doing so.

"And there are so many ways of getting there. I mean, it's not always about jumping through the Gauntlet. I've gone on many spirit quests when my body has stayed right here. Whether it's through dancing, taking tobacco, going

into a trance or even going to sleep — whatever is necessary to get your spirit out of your body and into the Otherworlds.

"And sometimes, you'll have visions when you're not even trying. I've had more than my share of waking dreams. The *iwa* can be demanding, and sometimes it gets annoying, but waking dreams are always important. If the *iwa* are taking the risk to come to you and bless you with wisdom, you better pay close attention."

Apo stood up.

"Now, you ready?"

Adam nodded.

"You sure?"

"Yes."

"Good. Drink this."

Adam opened his eyes. Apo was holding a wooden cup in front of Adam's face. "Trust me."

"What is this, *Alice in Wonderland*?"

"No, this is better. Besides, Lewis Carroll was an Ecstatic."

Adam took the cup. It smelled like rancid grapefruit juice.

"Wait!" Apo said. "You didn't eat anything today, did you?"

"Don't you trust me?" Adam grinned. He swallowed the contents of the cup.

Almost immediately, a swirling cacophony of visions assaulted Adam's brain. He heard Apo pick up his drum and start playing... heard his mentor talk about concentrating, floating... everything got brighter, more vivid as things slowed around him....

Adam looked up. A rope ladder hung from the clouds. He could see Apo already ascending it. Adam looked down. Apo and Adam were sitting around the fire. Adam looked up again. Apo waved for him to come up.

Swallowing, Adam gripped the rope ladder and began to ascend.

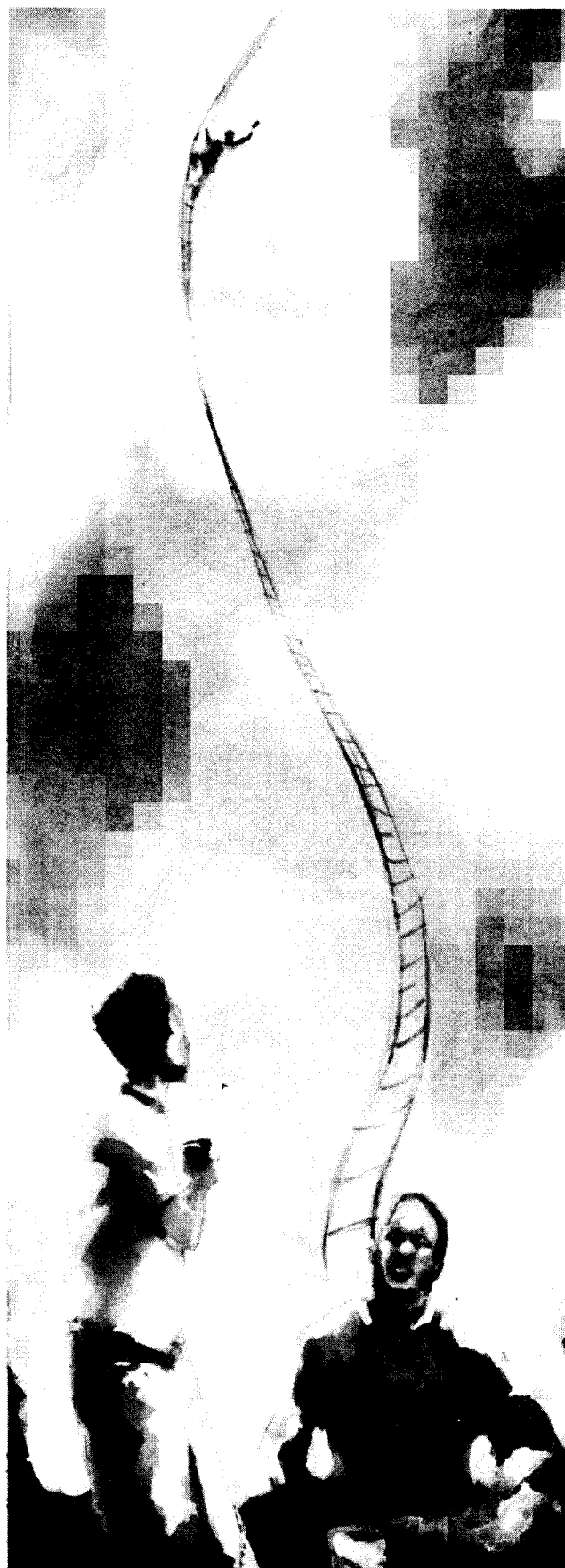
Walking the Spirit: The Shaman in the Umbra



For as we have seen, a number of myths refer to a primordial time when all human beings could ascend to heaven, by climbing a mountain, a tree, or a ladder, or flying by their own power, or being carried by birds.

— Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism*

Through sticky-sweet dry-ice chills, through tingles like his whole body had fallen asleep, through a breakthrough, a membrane... Adam opened his eyes and found himself outside, but not quite. The trees were taller, and they glowed with an energy he had never seen before... even the rocks seemed alive... the air full of mist... the



moon a fat circle, glistening like a diamond... and there was Apo, smiling, glowing like a beacon.

Adam took a step and promptly collapsed. Apo rushed over and cradled him. "Careful! Easy, easy, easy... you're not used to it yet, and it can be rather disorienting. The first time's always the hardest."

Adam lay there, like a man shell-shocked. "I hallucinated... I was above myself... I saw everything... this... is this... is this real?"

Apo smiled. "Well, here's a question for you: When you saw yourself floating above your body — why is that a hallucination? And does that mean this is a hallucination? And where is the hallucination coming from? And in the end, does it really matter? After all, if this is in your mind,

then it doesn't matter, does it? But if this really is happening, and you're actually in the Umbra, does that prove anything?"

Adam turned the words over in his mind. "I guess not..."

"It's like I told you before: All distinctions between worlds are pointless. They're mental walls, keeping you from seeing Creation. You can believe that this is just an *ayahuasca*-induced vision—"

"I drank *ayahuasca*? No wonder I feel so wobbly."

"Yes, bless my Amazonian friends for their wisdom. Now, as I was saying, you can believe this is fantasy, or you can believe you're dreaming this whole thing, or you can believe you're physically here. Either way, you're here. So why bring theory into it? You're blessed with this experience — why fill your heart with doubt?"

Apo helped his young pupil up. Adam wasn't so shaky anymore. Apo gave him a hug. "You are my student, and

Getting There is Half the Fun

So how does a shaman enter the Otherworlds? Well, there are any number of means. The foci and techniques of shamanic ecstasy are detailed in Chapter Two. In gamespeak terms, here are the ways a shaman may travel in the Umbra:

Spirit 1 — Spirit Sight. What players tend to forget is that while a character is peeking into the Umbra, he is oblivious to the "real" world. A shaman understands that to look upon the dream is sacred in and of itself, and he will never just "turn on his Spirit sense." The basic variation looks at the Penumbra around the shaman. Correspondence 2 allows the shaman to look anywhere in the Umbra that is accessible to him.

Spirit 2 — The Sacred Touch. At Spirit 2, the shaman can speak to, call and touch *iwa* on the other side. Keep in mind that doing so does not compel spirits against their will. **The Sacred Touch** is a method of asking, and if a shaman isn't polite, the *iwa* will ignore him — or worse. Correspondence 2, again, allows the shaman to interact completely with spirits anywhere he can go. The shaman will appear as a faint outline of himself when using this technique.

(The preceding methods are risky in that the shaman is completely vulnerable to anything that happens in the material world, as with astral projection. A Dreamspeaker employing this technique better have a secure sanctum or friends watching him. Keep in mind, though, that these rituals are considered a sacred spirit quest in their own right.)

Time 2 — Swimming the River. Most people don't believe Time magic has anything to do with spirits. Shamans would heartily disagree. The gift of prophecy or second sight is indeed a blessing of the *iwa*. Although not as adept with *zeitgeists* as the Cult of Ecstasy, shamans still consider Time 2 as a vision granted for knowledge and wisdom.

Spirit 3 — Stepping Sideways. The shaman can now enter the Umbra physically. When he does so, his body is transformed into ephemera. Rules for spirit travel and combat appear in the **Mage** rulebook. He can go anywhere in the Umbrae that will allow him, including

Maya, the Dream Realms. (Remember that shamans are the *only* mages who can step sideways into Maya — see **Dreamspeakers**, page 66.)

Mind 4 — Walk in Dreams. The shaman can astrally project himself into the Umbra while asleep — in essence, having a guided dream into the Otherworlds.

Spirit 4 — Breach the Gauntlet. The shaman can bring other people into the Umbra as well.

Mind 5 — Untether. The shaman can astrally project anywhere, anytime.

Spirit 5 — Break the Dreamshell. A shaman with Spirit 5 can pass through the Horizon and walk among the stars. It helps if he starts at an Anchorhead, but it's possible anywhere along the Horizon. Of course, just because he *can*, doesn't mean he *should* — that is, unless he has lots of Quintessence, a good sense of navigation and plenty of patience.

Shamans usually use Spirit magic as opposed to astral projection when visiting the Otherworlds, as they're more concerned with preserving the heart of Mother Earth than with visiting the fortress of government in the Epiphames. Still, it's always good to have alternatives....

The key here, however, is that shamans need time and preparation to embark on any spiritual undertaking, even if it's just a quick peek through the Gauntlet. As a shaman's Arete increases, of course, his ability to see the Otherworlds comes more naturally. A newly initiated shaman, however, must focus all of his concentration to break the Gauntlet and see the other side. In an emergency (such as combat), a shaman can call upon the *iwa* to bless his eyes or open a passage to the Otherworlds, but the results are not as potent or clear. And, lest the medicine-worker forget, the spirits have excellent memories when it comes to who begged for their help in a pinch, and they will not let a shaman forget that they saved him from the HIT Mark....

For the complete rules to Umbral travel, please refer to **The Book of Worlds**, pages 184-6.

you are a blessed being. I knew you would make the journey safely."

And with that, they started walking off into a dream made real.

The Real Side of Reality



"So where are we now?" Adam asked as they made their way through the forest.

"The world closest to our own, the mirror of ours, unclouded by sweet lies and shrugs. Here, everything appears as it truly is. Some call this place the Penumbra. They claim that it is merely the reflection of Earth, but I tell you, this is the essence of what we call reality."

Adam marveled at his surroundings. "The trees are huge here."

Apo laughed. "That's because nature is more powerful than men want to believe. This is how the forest was from the beginnings of time, before the Europeans came and cut everything down. I bet you didn't know that the settlers clear-cut the entire eastern seaboard."

"No, I didn't."

Apo shook his head. "Well, while in the white man's nightmare reality, all the trees are relatively small and young, the original remain here in the Penumbra — a reminder that there are some things stronger than man. This area is a Glen, a purified area untouched by the evil in men's hearts. Here, there is power, the natural power of the Earth Mother. You can feel the love the Earth has for Her children, even as spoiled and rude as they are."

"So is there a Penumbra in the city?" Adam asked.

"Oh yes," Apo answered. "Much different from here. There, the concrete and asphalt chokes the spirit world, and *iwa* breed like maggots, feeding on the pollution spilling into the air. There are areas called Blights there, perverse inversions of Glens. There, the poisoned spirits rise up from a spawning pool of filth, attempting to degrade people who hold themselves too proudly. Humility," Apo said, "is a must in this line of work."

"So there's nothing good in the city?"

Apo sighed. "Well, it depends. There are spirits everywhere, of course, and some shamans deal with the modern ones — steel, glass, plastic, those sorts of things. But those shamans have a much harder time dealing with the Otherworlds. For one thing, it's harder to cross. For another, the Penumbra of a city is more hazardous to a shaman who's connected with nature."

Adam frowned. "But you live in the city. Isn't that kind of hypocritical?"

"I suppose it is. But I am an instructor, and my clients are in the city — convenience weighs down even on a shaman." Apo laughed, frightening off a squirrel spirit. "Besides, my apartment is a sacred space, so I am protected from the dangers of the city — spiritually, anyway."

"Yeah. Just keep those doors locked, okay?" Adam said, grinning.

Marking the Trail



They had been walking through the forest for about half an hour when Apo suddenly declared that it was time to visit the Middle Umbra.

"Sure," said Adam. "How do we get there?"

"How do you get anywhere?" Apo asked. "You follow the path."

"Okay, so where's the path?"

"Damned if I know," Apo shrugged.

Adam gaped. "What?"

"Like I said before, the spiritual geography changes. There's been a path here in the past, so there might be one here again. Then again, maybe not. It's almost a full moon, though, so it shouldn't be hard to find."

Adam sighed. He knew when Apo wanted him to do something for himself. *All part of the teaching, I guess....* He started looking through the forest, looking at the moon, which shone with an unearthly intensity... looked at the trees...

And then he found it. Runes carved into a tree. He recognized the language.

"It's the language of the *iwa*..."

"Yes, it is. Another Dreamspeaker carved it into this tree for his brothers to read. What does it say?"

Adam bit his lip, concentrated. "Um... 'Journey here... this way to reach the middle of the world.' There's gotta be a path around here."

Apo smiled while Adam looked around the tree. Soon, however, Adam's pride turned into frustration. There didn't seem to be a trail anywhere near him.

"The side of the tree," called Apo.

"I'm looking there," Adam said.

"No, no, no — the side of the *tree*," Apo repeated.

Adam sat up. He looked around. Finally, he saw the three-foot-wide hole in the tree. "Oh. It didn't occur to me."

Apo laughed. "That's because you're thinking like a human, not an animal. Come on."

And Apo walked into the hole and disappeared.

The Blessings and Curses of Being a Shaman

Shamans have an instinctive closeness to the spirit world. They are the undisputed masters of all things spiritual. This closeness to the Dream, however, has both benefits and curses.

Blessings

Animal Mind — When dealing with the Umbra, the Middle Realm in particular, shamans have a distinct advantage over anyone else because they have an innate understanding of how the logic in these worlds works. A shaman removes himself from a structured (i.e., logical, orderly and otherwise Technocratic) mindset and acts on instinct and “animal sense.” (Buy those Intuition scores up!) The shaman acts in the realm of myth and archetype — the example of Adam climbing the tree to reach the Aetherian Reaches is an example of how this illogical logic works. Abstract thought only hinders the intuitive nature of the Middle Realm, and only shamans have been trained properly in how to break free and achieve the animal brain. Reaching this state occurs mostly through roleplaying, although the Storyteller might allow a roll of Perception + Intuition, Cosmology or Enigmas to reduce navigation difficulties.

(Yes, it is confusing to other members of a cabal when a shaman starts acting like a dog. Yes, this will raise many eyebrows among witnesses. And yes, it's a hell of a lot of fun to roleplay.)

Binding the Will — Shamans are experts at making fetishes. The difficulty for them to create a fetish decreases by one, as long as they are respectful and polite — and they ask the spirit beforehand.

Dreamwalking — As described in the **Dreamspeaker** Tradition book, shamans — and *only* shamans — can step sideways into Maya using Spirit medicine. Other mages must use Mind 3 to visit the Dream Realms. Note that shamanism isn't exclusive to the Dreamspeakers — there are certainly various Disparate shamans and even a few shamanistic types in the Verbena and Order of Hermes — but almost all Dreamspeakers count as shamans.

Iwapo' — The sacred language of the spirits, Iwapo', was taught to the sacred representatives of the *iwa* — the shamans — at the beginning of time. Since then, every shaman has passed the language down to his pupils. Spirits, even High Umbral ones, respond instinctively when a shaman addresses them in Iwapo'. The language also exists in a written version, which shamans use to leave spirit markings for their brethren, indicating warnings and directions. (Iwapo' bears a slight resemblance to Garou glyphs — difficulty 10 to translate between the two. Also, Iwapo' and Enochian (see **Order of Hermes**) share the same ancient linguistic base, so there is a chance — with five successes on an Intelligence + appropriate Knowledge roll (difficulty 9) — that someone who knows one might be able to grasp the basics of the other. The extent of either of those translations is limited, however. Think of bad English subtitles of a Japanese B-movie gone to hell, and you have an idea of what *might* be communicated.)

Knowing the Dream's Desires — Shamans are trained for years on the nature of spirits and what they want. Most shamans are familiar with the various sorts of spirits, their powers and their limitations. For those of you who use the ubiquitous “Lore” Abilities, a shaman typically begins play with some Spirit Lore, and he can learn more easily, without the painstaking study and trial-and-error more common to other types of magicians.

The Primal Root — Shamans make little to no distinction between the Umbrae. The High, Middle, and Low Realms flow seamlessly into each other — they're all part of the same tree, just different sections. Shamans find it easier to cross from one Umbral aspect to another (i.e., from Middle to High Umbra). The difficulty of the appropriate dice rolls reduces by one.

Respect of the Iwa — Most importantly, a shaman will automatically hold more weight with spirits than anyone else. If a cabal with an Akashic, a Hermetic, a Virtual Adept and a Dreamspeaker approaches a spirit, the spirit will almost certainly address the Dreamspeaker first. Moreover, if a shaman and another mage are competing for the services of a spirit, all things being equal, the spirit will side with the shaman. The spirit knows that the shaman is the least likely to go back on his word when a bargain is struck.

Unfettered Vision — Because of this primal affinity with the spirit world, shamans can see almost every aspect of the Umbra. The only exceptions are the Epiphamies (unless the shaman has Mind 4) and a few Realms of the Middle Umbra (specifically, Erebus, Pangaea, Summer Country and Wolfhome, which are the exclusive domain of the Garou) — shamans can only travel in strange overlaps between these Realms.

Walking with Spirits — When a shaman enters the Umbra, those spirits that walk with him become visible. Totems emerge, providing power (and intimidation in some cases) to the shaman. If the shaman has five dots in his Avatar background, that aspect of his own spirit becomes visible as well. (A Native American shaman walking through the Umbral plains with Thunderbird stretched above him and a potent Ancestor Spirit beside him makes a *tremendous* impression.) Familiars generally grow to at least twice their size, unless their spirits emphasize stealth or cunning. Also, a shaman will receive respect (and possibly assistance) from other spirits of their totem's Brood (see *Axis Mundi*.)

Of course, blessings wouldn't be complete without...

Curses

Bleedover — Too much exposure to the spirit world has another price. Bleedover occurs when the shaman's affinity with the spirit world intrudes on his mundane perceptions. What is real and what is dream intersect for a few moments, confusing the hell out of the shaman who sees the Addiction Bane hovering around a chain smoker. Meditation (on the material side of the Gauntlet) will usually sort these problems out. However, bleedover is also the first step toward Quiet.

Disconnection — A shaman who spends too much time in the Otherworlds (anywhere from four months to a year without contact with Earth) will eventually lose his mortal body and become a spirit. While a few shamans might want to cultivate this step (Dreamspeaker lore is full of legends of mortal men who became *iwa*), players should ask themselves if they really want to lose their characters in this fashion. Storytellers should also consider the possible pitfalls of this sort of metamorphosis, and they may bar it from their games outright (especially with the potential headache of crossovers).

Quiet — As mages who interact with two worlds at once, shamans are notoriously prone to this state of mind. Paradox backlashes almost always take this form. When a Paradox backlash isn't an angry spirit or a bizarre Flaw, it should be an episode of dreamlike Quiet.

Western anthropologists used to classify shamans as insane. While doing so was arrogant presumption on the part of those who cannot see the Dream, a shaman will occasionally sink into his own pocket of reality. The shaman sees spirits everywhere. The Gauntlet becomes meaningless to him. He may believe he is in a Mythic World when he's sitting in a coffeehouse. Worse yet, the hobgoblins of insane shamans aren't just extensions of his own insanity, but also material spirits that feed from the shaman's Quintessence. A shaman in Quiet is a beacon to every *iwa* in a mile radius — good and bad.

The big problem with trying to cure shamans in Quiet is that they don't want to be cured. After all, the reunification of spirit and matter is one of the goals of the Dreamspeakers. Their sympathy for Wyld mages sometimes borders on jealousy. Insane shamans tend to go Marauder at an astounding rate. Hopefully, the shaman has friends willing to bring him back to this world....

Too Much Respect — Since all *iwa* (save the poisoned spirits of the Wyrms/ Nephandi/ Darkness) are sacred, shamans feel an obligation to appease and treat all spirits with respect. While doing so does not present a problem with friendly spirits, it makes dealing with the more dangerous spirits (Griffin, Stag, Falcon, etc.) a hazardous proposition. In some cases, Void Engineers have an edge on shamans. They're much more willing to blast a charging spirit than to attempt to outwit it. And a tomahawk does a lot less damage than a Ghostduster...

What's more, shamans can fall into the trap of trying to appease *every* spirit they come across. Most novices become walking feed stores, bringing way too many herbs, seeds and other foci into the Umbra *just in case*. Again, a discriminating sense of the word "no" comes in handy here.

Voice of the iwa (Constantly) — A shaman's responsibility is to make the wishes of the *Iwa* known. Spirits have little patience and less tact. Once a shaman begins speaking for a few spirits, he'll find that they besiege him continually with all sorts of tasks. Unless a shaman learns how to say "no" in a polite manner, spirits will swarm around him constantly. (The *Spirit Magnet* Flaw is quite appropriate for shamans. Coupled with the *Medium Merit*, a character might go insane.)

Waking Dreams — Sometimes, an Avatar, a totem or a rather powerful spirit has its own ideas of when a shaman should be in the Otherworlds. Waking dreams, powerful visions that overtake a shaman, are common occurrences. Unfortunately, they tend to happen at exactly the wrong times, like when the shaman is doing 80 down I-95, making love or sneaking through a Progenitor Lab. (Couple this curse with the *Strangeness* Flaw for super-wacky fun...)

The Middle Realm



*I have been to the end of the earth.
I have been to the end of the waters.
I have been to the end of the sky.
I have been to the end of the mountains.
I have found none that were not my friends.*

— Traditional Navaho song

After Adam entered the hole in the tree, he found himself on a path that glowed like silver beneath his feet. Apo stood there as well, his essence glowing even stronger. Adam could almost make out the Trickster surrounding him, grinning.

Then it was gone. The glow disappeared from Apo. "Ready?" he asked.

"What happened?"

Apo tilted his head in confusion, then: "Oh! I dimmed my aura. No need attracting attention from the spirits."

Adam frowned. "I thought that was what we came here for."

Apo took Adam by the arm and started walking down the path. "Well, yes and no... we don't need every spirit in the whole Umbra swarming me with requests. It's always best to keep as low a profile as possible. Humility, remember?"

As the path continued, the mist crept up around their feet. The big bright moon — was there a face in there? Adam couldn't tell — illuminated a vast landscape. Mountains off in the horizon, a frothing river visible from their location... the mist couldn't conceal the ten thousand eyes blinking at them from the darkness, watching them, sizing them up, possibly respectful... somewhere, off in the distance, a wolf howled. It might be one of those werewolves Apo mentioned, the Stride Ritters. (Yeah, Adam, you big moron, he thought, a werewolf tribe named after a shoe store, what's wrong with you?). Just the scope of the land before him, the faint glimmer through the mist of the paths winding their way through the world... around him the evergreens reached impossible heights, nearly touching the myriad stars that shone with an unreal intensity above him.

And as Adam stood there, in the Middle Realm, he realized there was no way anyone could view this and feel hubris. Here, the Earth Mother — Gaia, the Goddess, whatever you wanted to call it — ruled. Here, a human was just another component of Nature, no better than anything else.

Humility, indeed.

Dealing with Dream Figures



Offerings and Pyres

The path continued through the mists. Apo led on, pointing things out as they went along. The tree they went through to get there was called an airt. They were apparently walking on a moon path, made from silver and moonlight. Occasionally a silver blur would race past them — Apo said they were servants of the Moon, but they had nothing to fear, for Apo made a propitiation to Luna when they crossed over and received her blessing. Still, it was disconcerting to see a blur of quicksilver blow past you.

"This is amazing, Apo. This whole realm... it's astounding."

Apo chuckled. "Of course it is. Didn't I tell you so?"

Adam smiled. "How far does it go?"

"It's endless. Just like the world. It can go on forever, to the horizon, to wherever you wish to go."

A noisy flight of birds caught Adam's attention. They flew overhead and perched on a cloud. Adam blinked. "How did they do that?"

Apo followed Adam's gaze. "Ah. That is the Aetherian Reaches. It's a Realm within this world."

"Really? Can we go there?"

"I don't know. Can we?"

Adam looked at his mentor. "Oh, fine."

He sat down among the roots and took out his rattle. Closing his eyes, he began chanting in Yoruba, asking the *orishas* and *iwa* for assistance. A robin swooped down from a tree and landed in front of him.

"The human has a question," the robin said.

Adam nodded. "Yes, the human does."

The robin cocked its head. "The human knows the ancient words. Does the human have some food for me?"

Adam searched his bag, looking for something a robin might want. Apo nudged him. In his hand he held a big, slimy worm. Adam made a face, but took it. It writhed in his fingers as he set it before the robin. The robin quickly lunged at it, capturing it perfectly in its beak.

"Ask your question, human."

"How does one get to the Aetherian Reaches?"

The bird cocked its head.

"Up there." Adam pointed to the clouds.

The robin nodded. "To reach clouds, you must leap off trees." And with a hop, the robin flew away.

Adam stared, confused. "Um, Apo... was that supposed to help?"

Apo laughed. "Adam, the bird told you exactly what you wanted. Think about it — you're talking to an animal spirit, not a human. The animal will not befuddle you. Unless you talk to a Trickster spirit like Fox or Raven (or Eshu)—" Apo winked "—a spirit will tell you directly and bluntly how to achieve your goal. In order to get around in the Middle Realm, you have to think like a natural being and not an urban yuppie. It is a more primal way of thinking, but that's how the Middle Realm works. Now, the clouds are up. You want to get up. What's the quickest way to get up?"

Adam sputtered. "Um... grow wings... ask for a wind spirit... um..."

"You're thinking too complex. Think simple. How do you go up?"

"You fly... you lift up... you... you *climb a tree*. Of course. To reach clouds, you must leap off trees!"

"Exactly. Keep abstractions and surrealism for the High Umbra. Here, you have to think like the animal you are."

"All right. Well, I'm gonna see the Aetherian Reaches. Wanna come?" Adam asked as he began climbing a tree.

"Of course," Apo said. He levitated gently up through the air and into the clouds.

Adam stared, cursed under his breath, and continued climbing.

Propitiation

No one gets something for nothing. If a shaman wants a spirit to perform a service for him, the spirit has a long list of demands to choose from. And the shaman had better be willing to keep his side of the bargain.

Each spirit has its own ways of being appeased (see **Axis Mundi: The Book of Spirits** for an exhaustive list of spirits a shaman will encounter in the Middle Umbra). The medicine bags shamans carry contain more than foci. They hold offerings to any spirit a shaman might come across.

When a shaman wishes to appease a spirit, the player makes a Spirit Lore roll (difficulty based on the rarity of the spirit) to figure out what the best appeasement is. Take the example at the beginning of the chapter. Running Deer needs to figure out which path to take. He sees an owl spirit sitting in a tree. Knowing that Owl probably knows the lay of the land, Running Deer conjures up a mouse — a tasty treat the owl spirit will be sure to like. In exchange for the mouse, Owl points the correct way. That's how propitiation works.

Of course, propitiation and chiminage can get out of hand quickly, especially when dealing with some of the more violent spirits. At this point, being a shaman (rather than a Hermetic or Void Engineer) gets tricky. It's easier for a Technomancer to blast an attacking spirit than to bargain with it. Sometimes, the patience and humility that shamans practice can backfire on them.



Willworkers in the Mist



It took Adam 15 minutes to get to the top of the pine tree. Once up there, he found Apo, lounging on a cloud, puffing contentedly on a cigarillo.

Adam's eyes bored into Apo. "You could fly up here that whole time? What about all that talk of acting like an animal?"

Apo blew a perfect smoke ring. "You acted like an animal just fine." He grinned like the Cheshire cat as he extended a hand to Adam.

Once safely on the cloud, Adam looked around. The Umbrascap extended to the horizon below him, a mist-en-shrouded world with a barely visible layout of silver pathways going everywhere. It was astonishing — but not as astonishing as when he looked up.

Adam was looking into the deepest eye of infinity.

The moon and the sun just hanging there, close enough to touch, to hold in his palm... he could see planets — he swore he could hear the stars talking to him. It was unreal — a faint jeweled rainbow enveloped the sky... and the faint outline of a zeppelin floated above.

Adam shook his head. The zeppelin was still there.

"Apo? Why is there a blimp above us?"

Apo looked up. "Ohhhhh... looks like an Ethership. Don't worry, it's just the Sons out for a joyride."

"They're here in the Reaches?"

"No no no... technology doesn't work in this Realm. We're looking up directly at the High Umbra. Top of the trees, remember? The Sons of Ether seem to love it there. You'll also find some Virtual Adepts, when they deign to step out of the Digital Web."

Apo got up and walked out on a beam of nothing. After cautiously testing to make sure he wouldn't plummet to his death, Adam followed.

They passed another cloud where... *something*... was going on. After looking over to see what the commotion was, Adam quickly looked away.

"Ah. Ecstasies."

Apo chuckled. They kept strolling.

"So Apo, are we the only ones here? I mean, besides them..."

"No, not at all. The Verbena also enjoy this place, although they seem more interested in their bloody-handed rites than in serving the *iwa*. Not all Verbena are bad, though. Most of them remember to appease the old gods. Some Ecstasies like it, as you have seen. Even the Euthanatos will grace the Realm with their presence on occasion. But

I Went to the Middle Universe, and All I Got Was This Gaping Head Wound

Dreamspeakers and other mages who travel the Middle Umbra often wonder where their erstwhile foes, the Void Engineers, are. After all, the rest of the spirit world seems to crawl with orange-jumpsuited geeks with spaceships and laser pistols. Yet they are conspicuously absent in the Middle Realms.

The Void Engineers loathe the Middle Umbra. In their eyes, it's the bottom of the barrel when it comes to exploration. The Penumbra offers Node sanitation and Qui La Machinae, the High Umbra is a conceptual playground — hell, at least Darkside Moonbase, for all its suicidal Resonance, has an interesting view! To the VEs, the Middle Umbra (otherwise known as the Middle Universe, the Savage Land, the Lost Continent of Mu and That Shithole) is the worst place to be assigned. The environment is hostile, the shamanic RDs are on their home turf, and homicidal werebeasts roam the terrain.

There's also not much here that the Void Engineers need. The Middle Umbra is considered a relic, a ghostly museum clinging tenuously to an Earth that has surpassed it. The VEs may do a rare favor for the Progenitors, who may need an unavailable (i.e., extinct on Earth) species for one of their experiments. However, the only real reason the VEs pay attention to this part of the Umbra is that the Garou pass freely between the Middle Umbra and Earth — a violation of the Gauntlet that cannot be tolerated.

Therefore, Void Engineers assigned to Middle Universe duty are either misfits who screwed up one too many times or psychotic slabs of beef with heavy weaponry. It takes a certain mindset to *want* to march into an extradimensional forest filled with wild animals and hunt packs of Garou. The battles here are sporadic, yet legendary in their sheer carnage. Moon paths have been annihilated because of Garou-VE battles.

The Convention keeps a small battalion assigned to the outskirts of the Cyberrealm/ Dystopia, ostensibly to keep unauthorized personnel from entering the Realm. The attrition rate for this unit is appalling — when you're trying to prevent Glass Walkers from entering their native Realm, things get very ugly very quickly. The unspoken purpose of the patrol unit is to provide an efficient and guilt-free way for DESATC to rid the Convention of its problem cases. The rank-and-file Engineers are quite aware of this purpose, and an assignment to the Cyberrealm unit prompts smart VEs to get in touch with their contacts in the other three factions of the war. The not-so-smart ones come back in Ziploc bags — if at all.

this place is our home, our soul, our nurturing mother. Along with the shifters, this is our domain to defend against any who try to intrude. It's also the place where we come looking for answers. If you are ever filled with doubt, with uncertainty — as you will be, as everyone gets sometimes — come here. You will find the answers you seek here, away from the bang and clatter of the modern world."

Adam nodded. "But doesn't the Technocracy come here? Don't I have to worry about them?"

"It's odd," said Apo. "I have traveled all the different aspects of the Umbra. And I've found the Void Engineers everywhere — the Penumbra, High Umbra, even out in the Dreamshell — but I've never come across one here. I don't understand why — perhaps the place isn't to their liking. But that is a tremendous advantage, my boy. If they're not invading here, this might just be the last refuge for the planet from the coming storm."

Adam raised an eyebrow. "Storm?"

Apo sighed. "I'll tell you about this later. Let's just say that if the end does come — which a great many people believe is happening — we will be prepared."

"That's rather cryptic."

Adam shrugged. "Life isn't straightforward."

Adam nodded. "So that's it? Just us and some naked Ecstasies, maybe the occasional Verbena?"

"Oh, no," said Apo. "That's just the beginning. You also have other mages coming here. The priests of the Bata'a and the Kopa Loei know this place quite well. I'd avoid both of them, though. While we respect their dedication and dreams, they're very insular groups — more so than we are — and they don't respond well to outsiders. Of course, they're changing these days. They have no choice but to make friends, since the Technocracy is turning into everybody's enemy."

"And then, the Nephandi and Marauders are here, too. If you see a Nephandus — and you will, because the poisoned *iwa* will swarm around him like hornets — kill him. No talking, no reasoning, just stick a knife in his black heart and watch him die." Adam was amazed — Apo had never talked this way before. Not even about the Technocracy.

"The Marauders, though, have a gift that the rest of us could never understand. They carry their Dream with them at all times. They've thrown off the shackles of the mundane. Insane, yes, but also fiercely in touch with the primal nature. They traverse this world often, looking for allies and subjects. Be cautious when dealing with them — they might unintentionally lash out, or even pull you into their dreams."

Other Dreamers



Suddenly, a large, ebon bird landed on a cloud in front of them. Before either could react, the glossy creature became a wiry young girl in leather pants and a halter-top.

"Hey!" she said in a brassy, Brooklyn, New York accent. "You guys are wizards, right?"

Adam bristled. "Who's asking?"

"Name's Razor Wire," said the girl. "I'm a raven... more or less. And if I were you, I'd get the fuck out of here pronto."

Adam got angry despite himself. "What the hell's that supposed to mean?"

The girl met him straight on. "It means that a pack of werewolves are about to tear through here. I'm faster than them, so I can warn all you sorcery-types, but you've got about three minutes to vamoose before they turn you into jerky."

Apo stepped forward. "Is there anything we can do to help?"

"Not unless you wanna die," said Razor Wire. "These guys are lunatics. I gotta warn everybody here, including the 'gazers up top there. Go, get out of here." And then she was a bird again, flying away. Apo took Adam by the arm, pulled a feather out of his medicine bag, and called upon Oya, the *orisha* of the wind.

A gust of wind pushed them off the cloud. Adam nearly lost his composure until he realized that Apo was controlling the wind, and they were flying instead of falling. He stole a look back at the Aetherian Reaches. He could make

out four or five black-furred wolves running through the clouds behind them.

"I thought the werewolves were our friends!" Adam shouted over the din of the wind. "What the hell are we running away for?"

"We're not running, we're flying!"

"Always with the jokes!"

Apo forced a chuckle. "It's not as easy as that. Things are quite complicated in that world. So unless you know exactly what's going on, stay the hell out. They got their own agenda, and they don't like people butting in on them."

"So they're not our friends?"

"It depends. Don't assume that a pack of werewolves will cut you slack just because you're a Dreamspeaker. You'll wind up dead that way."

"And what about that bird-woman?"

"Hell, the shifters come in all stripes. Who knows how many species there are? Birds, wolves, cats, spiders, snakes, squirrels... They're not exactly open with that kind of thing. Tell you what, if you meet one, treat him as a person and not a potential bodyguard, and he'll treat you like a person and not a meat popsicle."

They flew on, and one thing kept racing through Adam's head:

Meat popsicle?

Shamans and Shifters

The relationship between shamans and Gaia's Children has been exaggerated and distorted in the lore of the Traditions. Some mages seem to think that a shaman can summon a werewolf with the snap of his fingers. Obviously, the truth is much more complex than that.

It is true that shamans are perhaps the only mages that shifters respect. They honor Gaia (or Mother Earth, Goddess, or the myriad of other names She is referred to by). They share many of the same goals and visions as Gaia's Children do. And there have been many instances where Dreamspeakers and shifters have teamed up to achieve a common end. But the relationship is hardly egalitarian or even friendly. By and large, a major crisis has to occur to get these two groups working together. Shamans and shifters do not get along all the time. Most shamans don't even know of the existence of shifters. At this point in time, the werereatures are so rare that (for the most part) they exist only in the realm of legend for most indigenous people, shamans included. Those who interact with the Changing Breeds, however, do so carefully and quietly.

Native American shamans might know one Wendigo — *maybe* a Corax or a Nuwisha. South American shamans might correspond with an Uktena or a Bastet. A Slavic shaman might know of the nearby Shadow Lord sept, but he certainly wouldn't trust any Garou that lived there. A Kopa Loei may know of the Rokea, but that won't stop him from becoming the weresharks' next meal if he's not careful. The point is that shamans and shifters don't sit around the campfire in the middle of the Caern cracking jokes and drinking Gnosis/ Quintessence with bendy straws, plotting how they're gonna go on the warpath and destroy both Pentex and the Syndicate's SPD.

In the eyes of the shifters, shamans are merely lucky humans, gifted by Gaia with limited insight. They are *not* Gaia's Chosen. Some of them haven't even *heard* of Gaia. Besides, a shaman has to struggle for years to learn how to cross the Gauntlet — something even a metis can do from adolescence. Shifters see shamans as slow-witted nephews who are still learning what the *proper* names for things are. What's more, the close company shamans keep (or are presumed to keep) with "sorcerers" makes them suspect, especially among those shifters who have suffered directly at the hands of conquerors.

It's also important to realize that some shifters will never acknowledge a shaman's right to traverse the Otherworlds. A Get of Fenris will have little to no respect for a Cuban *santero*. A Silver Fang will not condescend to share her domain with a *voudon* priestess. And the Red Talons will kill any human they find on one of their moon paths — shaman or otherwise. There are some lines that will never be crossed, no matter whose goals will be achieved. However, not all the prejudice comes from the Garou end of the spectrum. A Realm controlled by Hopi won't be the most hospitable place for a Glass Walker to end up.

That being said, some of the Changing Breeds are very interested in shamans and their travels. Children of Gaia tend to get along best with shamans — simply because they're not as arrogant as the other tribes — but Uktena are always looking for new spells and rituals. Bastet and Corax have been known to suck up to, stalk or slavishly follow a shaman in the Middle Umbra just to get a secret. The few remaining Gurahl have ancient ties with the shamans of their lands. And it's rumored that the most powerful shamans of the Amazonian rainforest forged pacts with the Mokole long ago.

On the other side of the Gauntlet, it's a matter of avoidance and mutual respect. Unless the parties in question are obnoxious, stupid or suicidal, shamans and shifters tend to stay out of each other's way. When dealing with shifters (especially werewolves), a smart shaman knows that the pleasant-looking man in front of him could transform into a nine-foot-tall engine of death and tear him limb from limb in the blink of an eye — and he acts accordingly. Experienced shamans know that the spirits aren't the only things that have to be appeased. Then again, an experienced shaman can take care of himself if a confrontation occurs — if not through combat, then through medicine.

Aspects of Dream



The first peace, which is the most important, is that which comes within the souls of men when they realize their relationship, their oneness, with the universe and all its powers, and when they realize that at the center of the universe dwells Wakan-Tanka, and that this center is really everywhere, it is within each of us.

— Black Elk

They glided through the cool, misty sky. All around them was the lush terrain of the Middle Realm, except...

Adam spied it — a slight fissure in the ground, growing larger as it ran off toward the horizon. "What is that?" he asked.

Apo looked ahead. "That... is an unfortunate circumstance. It's a fissure in the Realm, leading to the Chasm."

"The what?"

Apo sighed. "Maybe we should start at the beginning..."



The Aetherian Reaches

"Apart from the Middle Realm," began Apo, "there are seven distinct subrealms here. They're not so much isolated worlds as much as they are different geographies. You were already in one of them — the Aetherian Reaches, the realm of Thunderbird and Oludumare, the last pinnacle of sky before you hit Heaven. From there, you can look straight into Paradise."

"Or outer space," Adam remarked.

"Outer space. What a joyless concept. When you looked out there, tell me you didn't see the eternity of Creation before you."

"I... yes. Yes, I did."

Apo smiled, a warm understanding smile. "There resides Father Sun and Sister Moon, mighty spirits who smile on the work we do. That rainbow you saw — that was the Dreamshell. You can follow a lightbeam — be it sun or moon — all the way up through the Reaches and the High Umbra to the Dreamshell and walk among the stars. You could talk to the Sun or the Moon, you could reach the Shenti of creation, you could jog to Cerberus and back — it's all there. Besides walking among the clouds, that is.

"There's also the Lodge of the Sky," Apo continued, lighting a cigarillo as he glided, "which I didn't get a chance to show you because of the werewolves. But there lies a grand council of *iwa* — bird-spirits, thunder totems, wind elementals from the First World. There are similar places for other spirits, but they're harder to get to.

"And the best part is," Apo continued, "no one who believes in science can get there. Not even a Son of Ether."

"Why not?"

Apo grinned. "Because if the men of science say that people cannot fly, the *iwa* will make sure they never get the chance."

The Chasm

"Amazing," Adam said. "But what about that crack in the Realm? What was that?"

A gust of wind blew them toward the gash in the ground. Now that they were closer, Adam could make out other crevasses in the land, all converging on something obscured by the mist.

"It leads to the Chasm," said Apo. "Pray to the *iwa* that you never end up there."

"What, like the Grand Canyon?"

Apo's laugh this time was harsh. "More like the abyss that that Nietzsche fellow wrote about. It's a gash in the universe, a living wound in Mother Earth's body. It's the cancer of the darkness, and it's spreading. Slowly, to be sure, but it's spreading."

"Holy... What's in there?"

"I've been there twice. Both times, the same thing — just a huge canyon, leading into darkness. The thing is," Apo continued, his voice taking an edge of confusion, "it's the depression and hopelessness one feels there. Like it's all for nothing." Apo looked like he might say something else, but he was silent.

Dystopia

After a few more minutes, Adam swore he could see a huge building off in the distance.

"What's that out there, that skyscraper-looking thing?"

"That's a skyscraper," Apo answered, unsmiling.

"What? Here? I thought this Realm was just nature!"

"The nightmares of men blight even the dreams of the world," Apo said. "That is the Realm known as Dystopia. Don't go there. It's a dank, depressing pit. It's bad enough people live that kind of life, but to think that there's a whole world dedicated to that shit, a living monument to greed, stupidity and hate, here in this Realm... Okay, don't get me started."

As the mist parted, Adam could make out several other skyscrapers — ultra-modern, sleek and soulless, the bland fluorescent glow shining off them — and lower, the red glow of flame. The pristine mist that blanketed the rest of the Middle Realm thinned, and, for the first time since he arrived here, Adam could smell the acrid sting of pollution.

"It looks like *Blade Runner* mixed with Dante's *Inferno*," he said.

"A good observation," Apo replied. "Here, the dreams of the Technocracy and the Nephandi overlap each other. I have only been there once, and that was because Olodumare's storms blew me there. I barely survived."

"Is it growing as well?"

"Possibly, although you won't get me close enough to measure."

Hy-Brasil

"So are there any Realms that aren't Blights?" Adam asked.

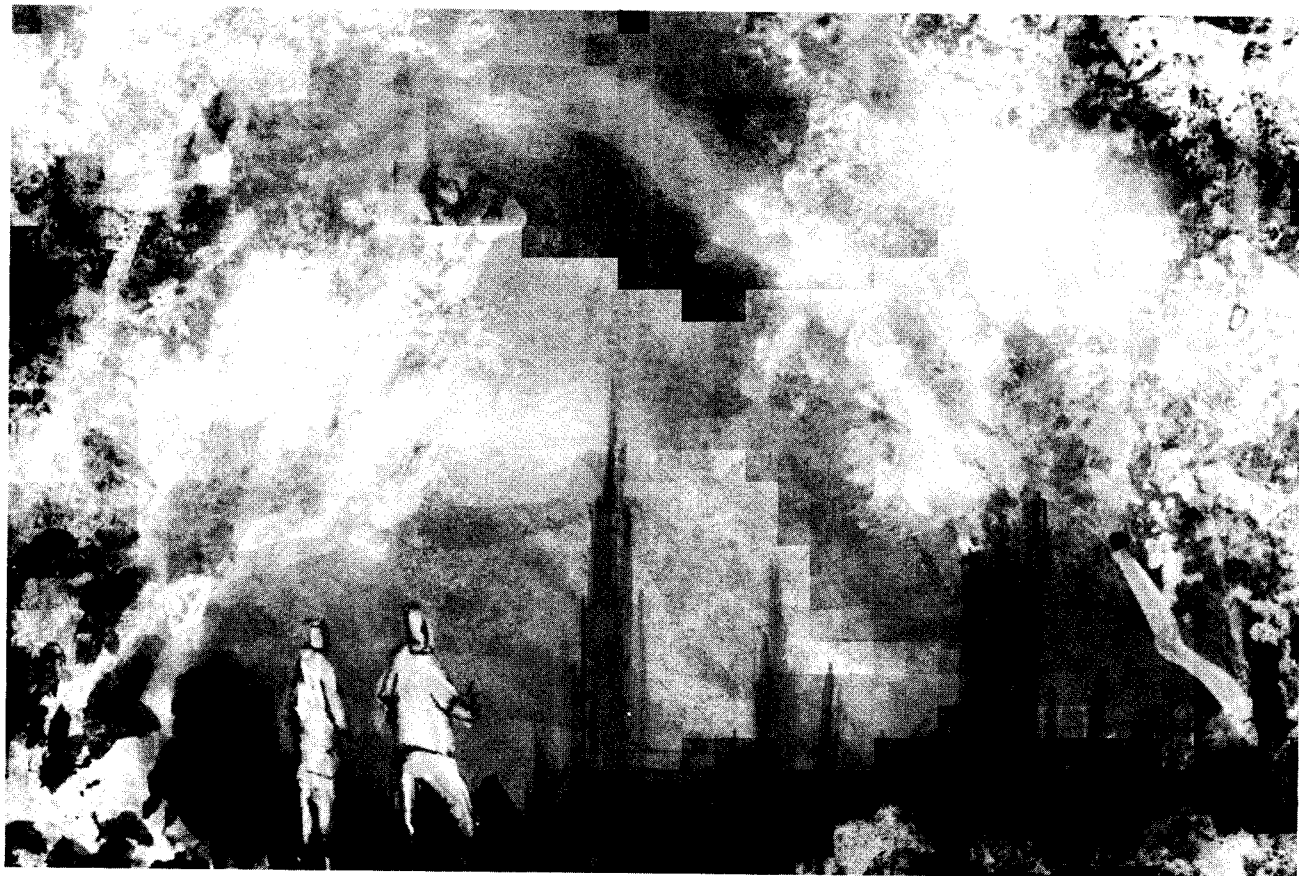
"Two Realms. You saw two ugly Realms. Don't let that cloud your mind. The Aetherian Reaches were beautiful, weren't they? And what of the rest of the Middle Realm?"

"Okay, okay... stereotype gone."

"For example," Apo continued, overlapping his student, "there's the Realm called Hy-Brasil. It was made by the faeries, many centuries ago."

"Faeries? Like sprites and elves and whatnot?"

"Something like that," Apo answered. "To be honest, I don't know as much about the fae as I'd like. They claim that they're living dreams, which would certainly make them blessed beings in the eyes of the *iwa*, but I haven't been able to find one to talk to."



"Dreams are fragile. Maybe they're too fragile for reality," Adam said.

Apo looked at his protégé in a new light. "Hey, you're finally thinking! Thank the *orishas*."

"Very funny. But if there's anything that this trip has taught me, it's that if these worlds are the living dream, and they're cut off from the 'waking' world, then any dream being that walked in the waking world is suicidal."

Apo frowned. "I hope you're wrong. Maybe that's why they built a world here."

They hovered above a strange-looking land that gave Adam the distinct impression of a snow globe. On one side, a gallant castle, framed by the sun on the horizon, filled with life and cheer and brightness. On the other, a dark and gloomy structure, silhouetted against a yellow moon, surrounded by lands shaded in purple and red, dotted with gnarled dead trees.

"It almost looks like a movie set," said Adam. "As if someone build what Faerieland is supposed to look like."

"It does look a little static," admitted Apo. "But perhaps Faerieland is too wild even for the Middle Realm. Anyway, who knows? I'm simply telling you that all is not squalor and rot in this world."

"I never said it was, Apo."

"Calling the spirit world squalor and rot..."

"Apo, I never said—"

"Squalor and rot, huh?" Apo winked.

The Mythic Worlds

"Hey, you wanna see something funny?" Apo asked as they continued flying. "I'll show you Joseph Campbell's idea of paradise." They flew towards a vast plain, strewn with a hundred different areas: a Greek temple, a medieval castle, a run-down bar — every imaginable scenario possible.

"What is this place?" Adam asked.

"The Mythic Worlds. Home of the Hero." Apo laughed. "Here, you can be Hercules or Luke Skywalker or anyone else you want to be. Like I said, Joseph Campbell would love it here."

Adam grinned. "Not a big Campbell fan, huh?"

"The fact that he conveniently ignored everything south and east of Mesopotamia makes me wonder about him. Plus, there's his focusing so much on the hero archetype. In Africa and Asia, the good guy doesn't always win."

"Does the good guy always win down there?"

"Depends on which one you go into. There used to be a few of these Realms — they contained the mythology of every culture on Earth. The stories were passed down from generation to generation, and the Realms grew in strength.

Now, however, you have professors and critics and who knows who else deconstructing stories, rewriting history to suit their own whims. So now you have a hundred different versions of the legend of King Arthur. Lots of different beliefs show up here. It annoys me to see a thousand bad versions of the Star Wars universe — they all look like those comic books, if you ask me — but none of these kids willing to venture into the Diaspora mythologies. Ah well — I'm just a cranky African," Apo said with a laugh.

"The danger, though," Apo continued, "is that once you enter a world, you can't leave until the adventure's done. For instance, I once wandered into a *Star Trek* world. I hate *Star Trek*, but I was having the time of my life. I was flying my spaceship and fighting Romulans and Borgs and who knows what else, and I couldn't leave — I didn't want to leave — until I had united all these people in the Galactic Federation or whatever. Plus, this isn't like a virtual-reality Digital Web thing in there. If you get hurt in there, you really get hurt.

"So watch where you step, okay?"

The Wasteland

"There is one place that I can't show you, though I know it exists: a Realm known as the Wasteland. You can't find it intentionally, not that you would want to. It's a place of death and rebirth."

"No thanks — been through that once already." Adam was smiling. Apo wasn't. "Listen to me, Adam — the *iwa* have initiated you once. Sometimes we forget who we serve. Sometimes we forget we serve anyone at all. That's when the *iwa* will take you to the Wasteland.

"We all carry pain within us, Adam. The shaman, he tries to rid himself of pain as best he can. We are not afraid to sing, to cry, to mourn — after all, we have already died once, so what is there to fear? There are times, however, when we gather pain, we harvest it like the farmer harvests grain, and the *orishas* and *iwa*, they don't want to see us in pain. They love us too much to see our hearts turned to stone. So if you're not letting go of the pain, the *iwa* will drop you off in the Wasteland, where you'll understand your pain.

"I'm not gonna tell you what happened to me. All I can tell you is at the end, I died. I died again, and was reborn outside. And it hurt, Adam, even after I was reborn. But the sadness, the anger I held in my heart, was gone. It took me a long time to realize what happened, but everyone else I talked to who had been in the Wasteland had the same story — they died and were reborn, cleansed. It's not an easy ordeal, as you know, but if you carry around a death wish in your heart, the *iwa* will be happy to oblige you and remind you of what death is like."

Adam had nothing to say.

New Dreams: The Digital Web

The pair flew on, looking for a good place to land. As they descended, Adam caught a glimpse of the sky of what looked like a huge chrome wheel, spinning slowly.

"...the hell!?!!"

Apo looked up. Even he was startled, although he soon regained his cool. "That — that right there is the Digital Web."

Adam's eyes boggled. "That's the Digital Web? I thought it... well, I thought it didn't exist *as such*... I thought it was just a virtual place..."

"Every place has a spiritual reflection, even a place that doesn't exist."

"So why is it floating here?"

"It's not. It's everywhere and nowhere, if I understand it correctly. It's a strange Correspondence Realm, made from pure Prime. It floats throughout the Three Realms, going everywhere and nowhere at once. I understand that it used to be connected to a place called Mount Qaf, but who can say for sure?"

"Strange," Adam said. "Can we go in there?"

"We could," answered Apo, "but it's too dangerous to just walk in. The place is quite unstable, especially if you just walk in, as opposed to jacking on."

Adam tried not to laugh. "That's jacking in."

"Is it? Whatever."

Anima Mundi: Maya, Radiance, Midrealm, the Null Zone and the Ancestral Homelands

*Dark young pine,
At the center of the earth originating,
I have made your sacrifice.*

— from a traditional Navaho prayer

"So now, we shall try to find Maya, the realm of dreams, the only spirit world that everyone goes to," said Apo as they glided toward the ground.

"But isn't this all the Dream?" asked Adam.

"It's one of those questions we must ask ourselves; a brain teaser, I believe you call it. Is this part of Maya, or is Maya distinct? Is there a difference between a sleeping dream and being conscious, walking around, thinking our elected officials' sex lives are important? Aren't they both expressions of belief, desire and love?"

"So... is there a difference?"

"How should I know? I'm just a backwards shaman." Apo grinned. "But there is a distinct Realm called Maya, and that's where the sleeping dreams of humanity reside. The catch is, of course, trying to find it."

As they descended, Adam felt the wind suddenly pick up "Is that you?"

"No," said Apo. "Oh, no, it must be—"

And his words were cut off as an Umbral Storm reached over the mountain. The winds blasted them apart. Adam tried to reach for his mentor, struggling against the insane wind, but he was being blown back at an astonishing rate.

"APO!"

It was hopeless. Adam could see Apo, flying away from him as the whole Umbra blurred around his head, the wind tearing at his skin, propelled to who knows where.

Something struck Adam on the head, and black silence swallowed him.

The Ancestral Homelands

Adam came to consciousness in a field of grass. The moon still shined on the land, but the sun was soon to rise. A light breeze caressed his face, bringing the whispers of wind spirits to his ears. His head pounded, his throat was dry — where the hell was he? He stood up and looked around. Off to the north, he could see evergreens and pines gathered around a mountain's feet. To the south, the jungle encroached. West lay red desert. Nothing here made sense, and yet it did.

Adam felt a tug on his soul, coming from the east. As he started walking, he heard thunder. *Great, another storm, he thought. But thunder doesn't get louder, and it doesn't go on for this long.* He turned a slow circle, looking for the source of the sound. When he found it, his heart began to pound in time with the sound.

A herd of buffalo was charging right at him.

It was a few seconds before Adam was able to run. He panted as he tried to elude the oncoming rush. Over the din of hoofbeats he heard the shouts of humans, though the words were unintelligible. Adam kept running...

...and then the din died down. Adam kept running, but looked behind him.

The buffalo herd had stopped. A white buffalo was staring at Adam with watery eyes. At the sides of the herd, a Sioux brave painted for the hunt... a Peruvian shaman, then a huge Slavic man on a warhorse. Looking beyond the herd, he could see a village... a *huge* village... and in the middle of the village, a wall, pure energy. Adam stumbled, slowed and finally stopped.

"Where... where am I?"

From the hunters emerged an African woman, unnaturally beautiful, skin of pure ebony. Beside her walked

a Native American man with an eagle perched on his right shoulder.

They approached Adam, giving a short bow of respect which Adam duly returned.

"Who are... um... please, tell me... where am I?"

The African woman smiled. "Adam Goldsmith, bride of Obatala... you are home."

• • •

"These are the Ancestral Homelands. We are the Heart, the Paradise, the Lost Dream that humanity has forgotten. We are the First World, the primal link with the Earth Mother. We are the archetype and the subconscious. And you have returned to us.

"Your name was not Adam Goldstein, obviously, when you first came here. But you have been here, hundreds — thousands — of times before. You have walked in a number of guises. You have been all people, you have walked through all worlds.

"Long ago, when we first walked the Earth, we were blessed. We mingled freely with the *iwa* and the animals. But that does not mean life was safe — after all, nature is chaos, and the cycles of life hold their own share of blood. That is when the fear first entered our hearts. We saw a cycle we could not control, and yet we tried to stop it out of fear.

"When I say us, I mean all people. All humans. We are as one. Can you tell me my skin color makes me different than you? Of course not. It means I won't get a sunburn as easily — a thoughtful gift of the Mother when one lives by Her waist, don't you think? And yet fear is a subtle thing. After all, we are still animals, despite our vanities, and animals always fear a disruption in what they know. It could spell doom, after all. So when we saw those who appeared different from us, we felt the fear grip our hearts.

"The *iwa* wept when they saw us divide. They told us that the highest duty was love, not fear, for our brothers and sisters. And yet we divided. We split into tribes and villages, nations and cultures, each one forgetting the link they had with all the others. Worse yet, we forgot the *iwa*. The fear had grown in our hearts so that the spirit split from the material, and we decided we would not respect the cycle of the Earth any longer. So we buried ourselves and cut the heart of the world from our breasts.

"Yes, I include the medicine workers in my indictment. Even though we were gifted by the *iwa*, even though we kept our people together and tried to teach love rather than instill fear, we cannot think of ourselves as superior to those that we minister to. We are still in the grips of fear we try to shake off every day. I can see the fear and doubt in your heart, my brother. You are afraid of the path that has been chosen for you. It is understandable — but you have already died, and you are reborn as a *babawalo*, a priest of the *ashe*, and the mouth of the *orishas*. This is an awesome responsibility, but it is the greatest privilege a person may have.

Indeed, in these hate-filled days, it is hard to act with love. But this you must do, for to do otherwise is to condemn humanity worse than it has condemned itself.

"When humans began to forsake the Dream, when their prayers went to their tools and to a god that would deliver them from their Mother, the World Tree hid from the earth. The source of the earth's soul pulled its own Gauntlet around it and made sure the nightmares of men would never touch it. The Earth-Mother, the Moon-Sister and Father-Sky all worked together to make sure no harm would come to it. And they made a Realm where the ancestors and the wisest medicine men could remember the dream of the First World and bring this wisdom to those who could change the world for the better. This was no accident, my brother. The vision you are beholding was chosen for you by the *iwa* out of the love they feel for you.

"This is where you are now, Adam Goldstein. Obatala, the King of the White Cloth, has brought you here. The Ancestral Homelands welcome you."

• • •

"The World Tree — it's beyond that barrier, isn't it?" Adam asked. It was a shimmering rainbow wall in the middle of the village. The people — infinite faces, infinite colors — stood around him, watching as he approached the barrier.

The African woman nodded.

Adam could feel Obatala urging him on. He approached the wall, touched it. It gave way. He stepped through.

• • •

"The Alder Bole, or the World Tree, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, et cetera," he heard a voice say, "is a useful analogy for the cosmological structure of the Umbrae, but we certainly don't mean to accept it as a literal model for how the world is structured—"

An aborigine sung, "Tree... he watching you. You look at tree, he listen to you. He got no finger, he can't speak. But that leaf... he pumping, growing, growing in the night. While you sleeping you dream something. Tree and grass same thing. They grow with your body, with your feeling—"

A shriek, a howl from somewhere below, then the calm, patient hum of absolute nothingness.

Then something flew to the top, and his eyes opened.

• • •

The tree reached beyond his vision. It seemed to touch stars. Its branches were so dense he couldn't see the trunk. They were dripping with golden honey, which hit the leaves from (*oh, iwa, give my eyes the reach*) a cave, a vast cave made from stars and cosmic dust. Honey dripped down the branches of the tree to the trunk. The trunk was an insane circle where everything was possible, and he could see people in the circle. Golden fruit dangled from the branches of the tree, almost close enough to touch, to carry and eat and receive the divine wisdom of the Creator. The

The World Tree and the Ancestral Homelands

Of all the visions that a shaman may receive during his life, none is more sacred than the World Tree, the living heart of all Creation. It extends everywhere — nothing escapes its touch. It is, has and always will be — it's possible it was the first manifestation of Earth before anything else was created.

It has a few specific manifestations within the Umbra: the Well of Souls in the High Umbra, the Radiance in the Middle Umbra, the Labyrinth and Oblivion in the Low Umbra (or Shadowlands). The enigmatic place described as Midrealm in **The Book of Worlds** is its most blatant manifestation, and the Null Zone exists within its trunk and branches (literally inside the tree). Maya, the Dream Realms, are a mirror of the World Tree — in dream, everything is possible and played out. Here, the eternal cycle — Dynamism, Stasis and Entropy — continues as it has for millennia.

When the humans rejected the spirit ways in favor of the material world, the World Tree pulled itself into the spirit world, hiding itself out of fear that humanity would want to chop it down or steal its fruits for selfish purposes. Its servants keep the eternal cycle going, each performing their eternal duties of birth, life, death and rebirth.

A journey to the World Tree should *NEVER* be taken lightly. The number of living shamans who have seen the Heart can be counted on one hand. To behold it is to be changed forever. Storytellers are advised not to turn the World Tree into "just another adventure" — it is a life-shattering phenomenon that will profoundly alter any chronicle.

The Ancestral Homelands are exactly that — the living Earth that existed before the rending of spirit and matter. Surrounding the World Tree, they are the true essence of reality. Here, spirit and matter coexist as they did so long ago. Ancestor-spirits, primal *iwa*, Transcended wraiths from First World cultures, Oracles of Spirit, Bygones — the inhabitants of these lands defy imagination. (By the way, these Realms may coincide with the Tribal Homelands and the Summer Country that the Garou are familiar with — at the Storyteller's discretion, as always.) Here, the lessons of the *iwa* have been learned, and all are at peace with each other — and themselves.

Needless to say, this Realm is spoken of in legend, if at all. Trying to find it is not an option — if the *iwa* think you deserve such a powerful vision, you'll receive one. Those who have returned from the Realm have shared their knowledge, of course, and many shamans have made pilgrimages into the Otherworlds to find the Tree. If the shaman is not ready, he won't find it. No rolls, no medicine, nothing will bring him here unless the *iwa* believe the shaman is worthy.

And what about other magi? While Hermetics also have a World Tree that they use, they believe it to be a metaphor (and so it shall be). The Verbena also worship the World Tree, but their insistence on the Sacred Self usually blinds them to the possibility of the Realm. Other Traditions either don't believe in it, or they have their own substitutes (like the Digital Web). Marauders and Nephandi are barred from this Realm, for they would surely destroy the Tree (the Marauders chopping at the dark roots, the Nephandi poisoning the golden branches). And, needless to say, no Technocrat will ever set foot here.

For more information, please consult **The Book of Worlds**.

tree stood tall all the way down to its gnarled and tangled roots which tore through the earth down to unseen depths. Four rivers — north, south, east, west — ran at the base of the tree. Adam could see people move through the tree, up and down the roots, and he knew that this tree reached all places, that it connected everything and everyone together, that this tree was the dream of the entire world, that this was the living heart of the Earth.

• • •

Blurred vision. Sound moving in slow-motion. Skin tingles like pins on needles as the world depressurizes and the merry-go-round ends...

Adam stood on a moon path. The sun illuminated the golden landscape. Butterfly spirits fluttered amongst flow-

ers, doing nothing and everything at once. Somewhere, the distant howl of a wolf resonated within him.

I know that howl well, he thought.

Suddenly, a bright blue-silver figure materialized in front of him.

"You are he, known as Adam?"

Adam nearly had a heart attack. The Lune didn't blink. "You are he, known as Adam?"

"Yes, yes, yes... I'm Adam..."

"Apo seeks you. I have found you. You must come with me to see Apo."

"Is he all right?"

"Apo is a shaman."

Always expect a straight answer from a spirit.

• • •

"Adam!" Apo exclaimed, embracing his pupil. "Thank the heavens, I thought I had lost you forever! It is good to see you all in one piece."

Adam smiled. "It's good to be seen."

Apo released him. "When Olodumare's storm blew you away, I tried to follow you. But it was like you disappeared into thin air. I had assumed the worst. Oh, bless the *orishas* for keeping you safe!"

"Perhaps it's time to return to reality. I think I've had enough adventure for one day."

"Certainly, certainly. But where were you?"

"That," said Adam, "is a long story."

• • •

On the drive home, Adam recounted his vision — of the Homelands, the Tree, the people. Apo listened in stunned silence. When Adam was done, Apo's eyes were brimming with tears.

"Apo, why are you crying?"

"I... I am overwhelmed... with joy. To receive such a vision... it is... incomparable. To see it... and the Native American had an eagle on his shoulder? You're sure?"

"Quite. It was them."

"I... words fail me. Such a thing cannot be comprehended through words."

"I was feeling that way myself. Unsure of how to describe it. But I just had to speak from the heart. It was incredible. Beyond anything I could imagine, and yet there it was."

"So what will you do now?" Apo asked.

Adam sighed. "I don't know... I'm not going to process it too much... I suppose I'll have to become some sort of wacko cult leader now."

Apo whirled in confusion, ready to scream at Adam, when he saw the shit-eating grin plastered on his student's face. "Ahhh, you almost had me! You should learn not to grin when you lie, it's a dead giveaway."

The city of Boston broke through the skyline. The sun bouncing off the John Hancock Tower almost made it presentable.

"The people are there," Adam said, indicating the city. "They live in fear — constant, unrelenting fear of the unknown. They'll fear anything that's different or unusual or even remotely threatening to the life they've built for themselves — and had built for them."

"What can I do? I saw that the world is all connected. Everything gets equal billing with everything else. Every one of those people, regardless of color, belief, age, wealth — they're all blessed beings."

"It's easy to be territorial — too easy. We must think like animals at times, but we should always act like humans. It's not about *just* saving the Native Americans or *just* preserving the Amazon or *just* reclaiming Africa. It's about saving the entire world."

"Sounds like a mighty big job," said Apo, lighting his last cigarillo.

"Well, what am I gonna do? I'm a priest of *ifa* who's just had a big dream. But I'll do what I can. You know that stupid phrase that was popular a while back, 'global village'? As corny as it is, it's true. It's not just about saving a tribe or a country or a forest — it's about the world. If that vision showed me anything, it's that the world will go on regardless of what we do to ourselves. We can nuke the whole damn thing, kill everything on the surface, and the world will go on. The Tree will still be there. It'll start over."

"Do you know what I'm feeling right now? Love. Hope. Faith. Cynicism's easy. Nihilism's even easier. That's going with the flow. That's allowing yourself to be a pawn of the Technocracy and the Nephandi. That's doing nothing because nothing's worth doing. I can see why people would feel that way — hell, I felt that way before my calling — but with that attitude, we might as well hand the world over to the Vision Mockers and get it over with."

"We walk in the dream. That has so many meanings. Humanity forgot the dream millennia ago, and now it needs to remember. What can I do? I'm just one lousy shaman. But if I can show people the miracle beyond the Gauntlet — if people could experience just *one* of the things that I saw today — then there might be some hope, you know? People might realize it's not just about them — it's about the whole damn world, and the dreams we hold dear. That's what I can do."

Apo smiled. "Your words are wise, *babawalo*. Myself, I might be too old and cynical for my own good — that's for the *orishas* to decide. But you — you're a bridge between worlds. Just like I was."

Adam grinned. "That's the first time you've called me *babawalo*."

Apo laughed. "I'm not about to disagree with the *iwa*, am I?"

And the car drove on, into the city, where dreams carried their own hope with them.



Chapter Four: Spirit Helpers



Even though it wasn't the first time Adam had dealt with a real, honest-to-goodness talking animal spirit, he still nearly fell out of the tree he'd been climbing when the animal opened its mouth and words came out.

"You," the squirrel addressed him, "climb out of my way!"

Adam had to grab a branch to steady himself, and he nearly slipped anyway. Once he got his bearings, he fixed the squirrel with a rather unbelieving gaze.

"You," the squirrel said again, "get away from my winter stores!"

Shortly after the initial shock wore off, Adam found the presence of mind to climb down out of the spirit tree. He'd turned to Apo, looking for some sort of guidance in the midst of the surreal experience.

"Do they all talk like that? What was it?" he'd asked.

"Of course they all talk," said Apo. "And that's your totem. Your personal spirit."

Adam's eyes widened. "A squirrel? My totem is a squirrel?"

Apo chuckled with his characteristic grin. "No, of course not. I just wanted to see your face when I said that."

Seating himself on the ground, Adam prepared for a longer explanation.

Ignoring him for a moment, Apo turned and wiggled his fingers at the squirrel. It made its way back up the mighty tree trunk, into the bright foliage, where it disappeared.

"Your totem could be a squirrel — but that wasn't it."

"How will I know?"

"You'll know," Apo answered. "You'll know because it will be more annoying than me."



Totems

Totems are powerful archetypal spirits that embody some quality or drive. Being associated with a totem irrevocably associates the shaman with this quality or drive. A number of shamans find that their relationship with their totem is the closest and most intimate relationship they have. Certainly, when a totem chooses to ally with a shaman, it's not a simple or light decision — it's done for life, and sometimes beyond.

There are almost as many different methods of becoming allied with a totem as there are shamans. In some traditions the shaman's mentor chooses her totem, based upon the mentor's evaluation of the shaman. Other shamans choose their own totems, or are actively chosen by the totem. Often, the totem is "chosen" by the shaman's Avatar, though that's rather one-sided. A totem won't have anything to do with a mage if it doesn't want to!

With rare exceptions, shamans ally themselves with totems either during their Awakening, or while they are being trained by their mentor (though the shaman-to-be may not be aware that he's getting training in advance). The shaman's totem then helps shape the shaman's magic. Shamans with violent or aggressive totems find themselves increasingly drawn to learn the more violent and active Spheres. However, since few violent totems ally with peaceful ages, the totem's influence is often quite subtle.

Technically, totems are Incarna, the most powerful servants of the Celestines. Most Verbena, as well as many Akashics, Ecstatics and Euthanatos regard the Celestines as gods. The Incarna are seen as their angels and devas. Shamans see the situation somewhat differently. Shamans look at the vast hierarchy of the Umbra and see allegiances, lineages and clans, but the concept of gods who are approached with worshipful devotion is completely foreign to their paradigm.

To shamans, Celestines like Luna, Helios, Ogma, Sophia and the Monkey King are spirits who have attained great wisdom and more power. However, few shamans attempt to work with Celestines directly. Shamans know that all visitors must learn to respect and understand the structure and hierarchy of this realm in order to prosper in the Umbra.

Incarna, like totems, elementals and ascended mortals (such as the shaman, Vainamoinen) ally themselves with the Celestines. Mages, Garou and Jagglings ally themselves with the Incarna, and minor spirits (like Gafflings) ally themselves to Jagglings, mages and werecreatures.

The Celestines are creatures of pure, brilliant power. Luna, for example, contains the spiritual essence of everything connected with the moon. Similarly, the Roman god Mars understands everything about bloody

combat, strife and chaos, but he is almost incapable of communicating about or understanding any other topics. While a being that is a pure archetype possesses an incredibly powerful understanding of its own nature, it cannot conceive of anything outside its nature except as either tools to assist in its own goals, or obstacles which block it from its goals.

While extremely powerful and daring shamans seek aid from Celestines, all shamans understand that the vast difference between humanity and these incredible beings restricts significant interactions to either distant worship or temporary alliances when the needs of mortals temporarily coincide with the desires of these inhuman creatures. Conversations with Celestines are exceedingly limited. While Celestines are more brilliant and more insightful than any mortals, everything said to a Celestine must be put in terms comprehensible to the being's nature. Attempting to talk to the god Mars about limiting pollution and rainforest destruction will result in brilliant strategies for attacking the polluters, but the entire discussion will be framed in terms of warfare and frenzied battle.

Instead, most shamans realize that they need an Umbral patron in order to truly become a part of the Umbra. The powerful (but still comprehensible) Incarna are perfect for this task. Just as numerous Garou, Jagglings and similar beings swear allegiance to the Incarna, shamans pledge their loyalty to these beings.

Though the Incarna are wiser and more powerful than any mortal, they are substantially less limited and more comprehensible than the distant Celestines. The Celestines created the Incarna to act as their agents in the Umbra, and to a lesser extent in the mortal world. While all spirits have a distinct archetypal nature, Incarna have natures which are broader and more diverse than those of the Celestines, and they are also capable of understanding beings with different natures. An Incarna Earth elemental is inexorably linked to earth, but it has a definite (if somewhat limited) concept of the other three elements and how they relate to earth. While Incarna are both less deep and less perceptive than Celestines, they are also much more capable of understanding diversity and complexity, largely because they are more diverse and complex beings.

While it is difficult (and it requires some thought on the part of the shaman), it is actually possible to hold something resembling a normal conversation with a totem or other Incarna. Of course, with both Celestines and Incarna, a single mortal, even a mage, never talks with or even perceives the entire spirit. These powerful entities have a single unified nature, but this nature is so vast that they can interact with dozens, or even hundreds of mortals simultaneously. Each mortal will seem to be

dealing with the entire spirit, and each one will almost certainly perceive the spirit in her own idiosyncratic way. For one shaman, Falcon might be a noble peregrine as large as a golden eagle, while another would see a vast bird the size of a small plane, with feathers the color of brightest moonlight.

When dealing with their allies, a combination of experience in dealing with a specific human and the exact nature of the bargain effect between the totem and each individual shaman means that each shaman who takes a particular totem effectively has a slightly different version of the same totem. The totem itself does not change, but it appears to, and it interacts with each of its allies in a slightly different fashion. The nature of the relationship between totem and shaman determines a great deal about what the totem is willing to do for the shaman, what services it asks in return, and how the shaman perceives it.

Out of all the many possible variations, there are three primary motivations for shamans to select a particular totem. Some shamans are drawn to a totem that either represents some quality that is also a deep and important part of their own nature. Others are drawn to a totem that represents some quality they aspire to, and occasionally shamans are drawn to totems that they hope will help them solve some serious problem or right some dire wrong.

In the first case, the shaman sees the totem as the perfect embodiment of the shaman's most treasured traits. This type of relationship is especially common to shamans with Primordial Avatars. Shamans of this type often perform services for the totem by doing what they feel is right. Sometimes the shaman sees herself as a mortal extension of the totem. Others see themselves as the totem's champions in the mundane world. Totems are usually quite willing to aid such shamans, especially since the aid asked is usually an action the totem would have considered performing anyway. The relationship between totems and this type of shaman is one of intense loyalty, especially on the part of the shaman. However, while the rewards of this type of relationship are great, so are the responsibilities. If the shaman ever acts in a way that is antithetical to the totem's nature — such as a martial shaman with a totem of war becoming afraid and fleeing a battle — the totem will demand great restitution before it will be willing to forgive the shaman's indiscretion.

However, most shamans are not so devoted and pure in their purpose that they align themselves so clearly with the goals of a totem. Of these, some wish to aspire to the traits symbolized by the totem. A young warrior-shaman may try to take a totem of war in an effort to gain prowess in battle, while a sheltered and somewhat naïve shaman

may take a totem of wisdom to help her on her quest for deeper insights. Such shamans tend to see their totems as ideals to be aspired to. As beings of archetypal power, totems are often somewhat flattered by individuals who wish to follow their path. Many of the services the totem will ask of such a shaman will both aid the totem and help the shaman better learn to emulate the totem. Shamans with Dynamic or Questing Avatars often have this sort of relationship to their totem.

One exceedingly common relationship between shaman and totem is one in which the shaman needs or wishes the totem to help with some long-term goal. A shaman from a conquered tribe who wishes to either free her people or exact vengeance on her people's oppressors might seek a totem of war to aid in her struggle. Similarly, a shaman who wishes to understand some particularly difficult mystery, such as discovering another habitable world deep in the Deep Umbra, might ally herself with a totem of wisdom to gain aid in this endeavor. Shamans with Pattern or Questing Avatars maintain this type of alliance with their totems. In this sort of relationship all of the normal give-and-take and minor services which occur between shamans and their totems occur, but the shaman also asks the totem for periodic aid or advice on her project, and the totem expects substantial favors in return.

Regardless of the motivations behind this relationship, shamans often end up closer to their totems than to their mentors. Totems are often their shamans' spiritual parents, their wise and elderly friends or their oath-sworn leaders. Also, in all cases, this relationship is reciprocal. Just as shamans ask for aid from their totems, totems ask their shamans for services in return. The more a shaman asks, the more his totem will ask of him. Some shamans maintain a strict and formal relationship with their totems such that tasks will usually be performed on a service-for-service basis. However, many shamans have a closer relationship with their totem, in which each party exchanges services on an informal basis. Both shaman and totem ask what they need, and both assume the total will balance out.

Storytellers must take care to help the player work out the exact nature of the alliance between a shaman and her totem. This relationship will depend on a multitude of factors including the personality and wishes of the shaman, the nature of the shaman's Avatar and the number of points put in the Totem Background (see page 109 for details). The more points put into the Totem Background, the closer the relationship. However, one of the most important of these factors is the nature of the totem. While Lion will demand obedience, honor and formal respect from its allies, Fox will usually have a more casual and joking relationship, whereas totems like Dolphin tend to be more nurturing and parental.

Aides and Confederates

While most shamans have totems, and some also occasionally deal with other Incarna and Celestines, all agree that these beings are vastly more powerful than any mortal mage. However, a multitude of more modest entities lives in the Umbra. Jagglings are widely regarded as beings whose nature, consciousness and basic power level are quite similar to most shamans. Just as Incarna can sometimes be parents or leaders, Jagglings are occasionally friends, allies and even spiritual siblings.

While shamans regularly deal with numerous Jagglings, sometimes this relationship becomes more formalized and permanent. In a manner similar to mundane blood brothers or sisters, shamans and Jagglings can join together in the bond of shaman and familiar.

Unlike Incarna and Celestines, Jagglings and other lesser spirits are singular beings. They cannot communicate with hundreds of different shamans spread over the entire Umbra. Instead, Jagglings have limits similar to those experienced by most mages. Also, Jagglings are very diverse and complex entities. Just as they lack the raw power and profound insights of the more powerful spirits, they also lack these spirits' conceptual limits. In general, a Jaggling is capable of understanding anything a mortal can. While some Jagglings are mere extensions of an Incarna or a Celestine, most such beings (especially those that have existed for many decades or centuries) are fully independent, free-willed entities tied to the Incarna or Celestines by alliances very similar to those found between shamans and their totems. Just as shamans who share the same totem frequently form alliances and even close friendships, Jagglings and shamans who serve the same Incarna often have similar associations.

Having a familiar is like having a close friend, a sibling or even a lover. While the two parties may differ somewhat in power and experience, both realize they are on an essentially equal level, and they agree to work together because each can aid the other, and because they are bound by ties of mutual respect, caring and even love. A number of shamans have multiple familiars, and some are closer to their spirit companions than they are to any mortal. There is no fundamental problem with having multiple familiars. However, shamans must make sure that their familiars get along, and they must work to alleviate jealousy and rivalries among them. Solving such problems can even become the basis of short scenarios set entirely in the Umbra.

One problem some shamans face is that while most Jagglings have only a limited interest in the mundane world, Jagglings who become familiars learn more about our world from their shaman, and those who possess the capability to materialize in our world without aid some-



times decide to go exploring. These erstwhile explorers can cause large amount of havoc in a remarkably short time, especially if they come to the shaman for help or advice once they become aware they are causing problems. Having a material Jagglings show up with angry mages or Technocrats on its heels is the nightmare of many shamans with familiars.

Below the Jagglings, the least of the spirits are the Gafflings. Regarded by many greater spirits and some shamans as little more than spiritual animals or tools, most Gafflings lack the same degree of choice and free will Jagglings or shamans possess. Just as Jagglings are the spirits that become shaman's familiars, shamans often make Gafflings into fetishes and talens. While some mages in other Traditions see creating fetishes as a violent and coercive act during which the shaman imprisons a spirit in a material cage and forces it to do her bidding, the reality is far different. Dangerous spirits are imprisoned in this fashion occasionally, but such a punishment is very rare, and it is normally done only to isolate a spirit which has caused great harm. The vast majority of fetishes are inhabited by Gafflings who are more than happy to live there.

In general, Gafflings are quite weak compared to other spirits, and the only way to ensure a long and pleasant existence is for them to have a patron. Shamans work quite well as patrons for Gafflings, and living in a fetish protects the spirit from rivals and predators. Of course, talens and fetishes must be finely made enough to please the prospective tenant, and they must be properly attuned to the spirit being housed inside. A fetish designed to house a spirit that can heal living beings is entirely unsuitable for housing a spirit which helps a shaman slay her enemies. These necessary correspondences are the reason that talens and fetishes are almost always made in a form which relates directly to their function. A fetish designed to open barriers will look like a key (or perhaps like an ID card for a techno-shaman), but it will not look like a weapon or a container.

Making alliances with Gafflings is very similar to forging a bond with a totem, except in this case, the shaman is patron and not the client. This patronage offers minor spirits a number of important benefits. Most importantly, many Gafflings, especially those whose Celestine or Incarna has been destroyed, are effectively adrift without alliances or protection. Being able to state that it is allied to some more powerful entity protects a Gaffling from many minor problems and torments. To gain this protection, Gafflings often agree to protracted alliances with shamans. Some Gafflings agree to act as long-term talens for shamans. Once the talen is used and their spiritual energy freed, they will agree to place their energy into another talen.

During the time before the new talen is created, this spirit may come to the shaman for minor aid and assistance. In general most services asked by a Gaffling are little trouble to a well-trained shaman.

Other Gafflings seek the even more permanent bond of becoming a fetish. Mages from other traditions often ask why a spirit would be content to be imprisoned for the shaman's pleasure. However, shamans know that this relationship is never that simple.

All sentient beings wish to feel useful, and becoming a treasured fetish makes the Gaffling both useful and exceedingly valuable. Also, dwelling in a material object protects the spirit from all ordinary Umbral attacks, giving weary and embattled spirits a chance to recuperate from the stresses of Umbral life. In many ways, for a spirit becoming a fetish is analogous to a mortal deciding to become a monk. A life of quiet dedicated contemplation is not for everyone, but it is an excellent decision for some.

Of equal importance is the fact that, while in a fetish, a spirit will be able to perceive and learn about the mundane world in a much more direct and long-term fashion than it could otherwise. Shamans also realize that fetishes are not just magical tools. Fetishes talk to and advise their owners. Some give useful counsel, others ask questions about the mundane world, and some enjoy talking. While shamans' relationships with their fetishes are not as deep or complex as with a totem or a Familiar, it is still quite important and worth devoting some roleplaying to define.

The process of actually creating a fetish is an important roleplaying opportunity. The shaman must first convince the Gaffling that its services are greatly needed and that it will be treasured and valued. Then, some spirits will wish to bargain for elaborate and expensively decorated dwellings, while others will discuss how their powers are to be used and will ask to help perform certain tasks such as defeating a mutual foe. In some cases, the spirit will ask the shaman to perform some service before agreeing to inhabit a fetish.

In addition to long-term Umbral allies and assistants, shamans also interact with a wide variety of spiritual denizens regularly. While most Dreamspeakers use magic almost as often as any other mage, they also have a different option. Dreamspeakers, lesser shamans, and similar practitioners can ask a spirit to use one of its charms on their behalf. Only two dots in Spirit are necessary to communicate with nearby spirits, and two dots in Correspondence (at most) may be necessary to help locate distant spirits. However, these abilities are enough to request aid from everything from a minute Gaffling to a vast Celestine. If the shaman can find a spirit with the desired Charm, she can request help accomplishing a wide variety of goals. However, such requests are almost never granted without question.

To gain the cooperation of a spirit, the shaman has three possible options. Lesser spirits can be threatened into obedience or awed with the promise of minor rewards. Other spirits can either be convinced of the rightness of the shaman's actions and will volunteer to help, or they can be paid with the promise of useful good or services. The exact nature of the service determines much about the form of these negotiations.

Saving a prominent Caern from being overrun by evil Banes or distilled by soulless Technocrats is a goal which interests many spirits. Concerned Jagglings, or even Incarna, may assist after nothing more than the promise of minimal rewards, such as a small offering of Quintessence. In contrast, controlling the electrical system of an office building so that a techno-shaman can break in and steal a land-developer's secret financial records is a task most spirits have no interest in. Convincing a Jaggling to perform such a minor (but uninteresting) service would require offerings of a service in return or moderate amounts of tass. Complex and lengthy endeavors (such as convincing a spirit to possess a politician and destroy his campaign) would require a single large reward or an offer of a similarly impressive service. However, since most such services do not put the spirit at risk, the shaman is essentially paying for the being's time and effort. A few well-spoken and clever shamans manage to convince spirits to perform lengthy and menial tasks by convincing them of the value or importance of such a service. However, most spirits are not stupid, and only the most silver-tongued shamans can craft such convincing arguments.

Services which require spirits to oppose mages or other powerful Awakened beings who could imprison or destroy them are even more costly. Praise and flattery about how only the bravest or most powerful spirits could perform such a mission may convince a spirit to help (and it might even reduce the cost), but very few spirits will risk their freedom or their existence purely for acclaim and glory. Any task that requires the spirit to materialize on its own or to be brought through the Umbra physically is counted as highly dangerous by most spirits, since they will then be at the mercy of aggressive Sleepers and other alien threats.

The advantages to shamans who use spirits to perform magic are numerous. Since merely communicating with a spirit is never obvious and rarely even vulgar, asking help from a spirit is usually a Paradox-free way to perform powerful effects. Also, spirits can perform these effects far from the shaman. They may even perform their magic while the shaman is performing a completely separate ritual. Using spirits in this way allows shamans to both multiply their efforts and to accomplish powerful effects without risk of having the effect traced back to them (unless someone captures and interrogates the spirit).

Storytellers should assume that it takes no more than an hour or two to locate a spirit with any of the more common Charms, less if the shaman knows such a spirit already. Since many shamans have extensive contacts in the Umbra, an Allies or even an Influence Background roll should turn up a Jaggling or Gaffling with the desired ability easily. Except for requesting aid from a totem, acquiring the assistance of Incarna or Celestines almost always involves the shaman entering the Umbra and journeying to the being's Realm. Such journeys should usually be roleplayed out. Searching for a spirit with a specific rare and exotic ability can also be a difficult task that can take many days to accomplish.

Once the appropriate spirit has been contacted, some sort of agreement must be reached.

As stated previously, Gafflings can usually be tempted with minor rewards like a small amount of quintessence or tass, or minor services. Jagglings usually request services of some sort, and Incarna and Celestines ask almost anything in return for their services. Such requests range from elaborate taboos against some act (such as eating meat or lying ever again) to pledges that the shaman will undertake some lengthy action or quest to elaborate offerings. On one occasion, a shaman summoned an Incarna that was once worshipped as a god, and the Incarna asked the shaman to slay seven perfectly white bulls then offer up their dripping hearts. In general, the magnitude of the service required of the shaman is directly related to difficulty of the service asked of the spirit, as well as the relative power and influence of the spirit.

A number of shamans attempt to avoid this lengthy and difficult process of bargaining by making their bargains in advance. Most spirits, like most humans, are loath to accept payment and then agree to perform an unspecified service at an unspecified time. In general, the exact nature of the service (such as attacking a single target or defeating a single alarm system) must be specified when the bargain is made. The time and target need not be set, but spirits will not agree to requests like, "Attack the next person sneaking up on me," unless the duration of this guardianship is set at a day or less. Normally, to call on this bargain, the shaman must call out a command, break or set fire to a small item or sometimes even play a special song to call the spirit to fulfill its bargain. The spirit will then arrive within a turn or two. Regardless of the exact nature of such preemptive bargains, spirits will always ask larger payments than they would for services performed when the bargain is made.

Another drawback of using spirits to perform your magic is the fact that few spirits truly understand the mortal world. Unless the shaman accompanies the spirit to the location where the magic is to be performed and advises it on how exactly to work its charms, a spirit being asked to

perform a complex task in the mortal world may easily do either too much or too little. Sometimes spirits misunderstand the situation enough to cause unusual and even dangerous problems while performing the desired task. As always, asking others to do your dirty work can result in unforeseen consequences.

In spite of the various problems involved, some Dreamspeakers seek to use their own magic and attempt to avoid the twin dangers of Paradox and drawing Technocratic attention by relying largely on spirits to perform desired effects. While such an approach to magic can work, if the shaman desires spirits to perform powerful effects she may find herself asked to cast powerful magic in return, as well as having to go on frequent dangerous quests into the far reaches of the Umbra. As every Dreamspeaker knows, there is no easy or safe path for a true shaman. Shamans are the intermediaries between humanity and the Umbra. They must always worry about dangers coming from both.

Nuisances and Enemies

While shamans work with many spirits and are ignored by most of the rest, every shaman makes enemies in the Umbra. These enemies can range from disgruntled Gafflings who spread false rumors about the shaman, to Incarna and Celestines whose plans the shaman has been unfortunate enough to oppose or thwart. The Umbra is as complex and political an environment as any large mortal nation. Careless shamans can offend powerful spirits unknowingly in a multitude of ways. When a shaman asks a powerful spirit for a favor, some unscrupulous spirits request seemingly simple services without telling the shaman that such a quest will almost certainly anger another Incarna (or even a Celestine) greatly.

While totems will never ask such services of their allies, Incarna contacted by previously unknown shamans may ask such a service both as a way to hamper a rival without drawing the blame, or to teach an improperly humble shaman a lesson. Clever shamans who take the time to ask the correct questions (or whose contacts in the spirit world inform them of problems with accomplishing the desired task) usually earn the respect of the spirit and are given less dangerous tasks to perform.

A shaman who is unfortunate enough to earn the ire of a powerful spirit has a few options. A shaman with powerful allies like totems and familiars can attempt to have these allies work out some resolution to the problem. If the enemy is powerful enough to warrant such action, it is likely that the shaman will end up owing a number of spirits large favors in return. If the shaman wishes to deal with the problem herself, contacting this spirit directly is the only answer. The rules of propriety observed by most powerful spirits dictate that a properly humble and dedicated visitor can visit a spirit's home safely. However,

once she is in enemy territory, the shaman must be extremely careful to avoid giving offense, or she may provide the spirit with an opportunity to politely devour her on the spot. Some spirits can be placated with large and lavish offerings of tass, exotic substances, several talens and perhaps even a fetish. Other spirits will forgive offenses only if the shaman agrees to perform a significant service, or even to swear loyalty to the spirit.

Some spirits oppose certain actions of shamans by their very nature. Pattern spiders resist disruption of the perfect order of the Weaver, disease spirits exist to bring sickness to the weak so the mortal world will not become crowded beyond all reason, and hungry spirits feed on tass at Nodes, including Nodes owned by the shaman. Responsible shamans distinguish between spirits that oppose their wishes through conscious choice and spirits whose very nature makes them problematic. The first can be negotiated with. The second type must either be destroyed or worked around. Since most shamans recognize that disease spirits, patterns spiders and similar creatures are necessary for the health of both the Umbra and the Tellurian, the accepted policy is to placate, misdirect or imprison such spirits temporarily rather than to destroy them.

The lore of the Dreamspeakers contains numerous cautionary tales about powerful but foolish shamans who brought famine, drought and other disasters on their own people by destroying malevolent spirits and thereby disrupting the natural order. Driving out a spirit that is haunting a house or possessing a person is perfectly acceptable. If other methods fail, it is even acceptable to destroy such a spirit. However, most shamans and their spirit allies frown on casually slaying spirits that have a place in the natural order.

Going on a campaign to destroy disease spirits and similar entities will eventually attract the attention of powerful Incarna and Celestines who are associated with death, entropy and decay. These powerful entities do not look kindly upon a shaman endeavoring to exterminate their minions. Since most Incarna also grow concerned when the ecology and society of the Umbra is seriously disrupted, such a foolish shaman's totem will likely agree to help her only against such threats in return for a promise to cease such endeavors.

However, some spirits are considered wholly unnatural. Dreamspeakers agree that such entities should be destroyed on sight. The clearest examples of such spirits are the alien creatures from the far reaches of the Deep Umbra which work with the Nephandi. Whenever such a creature penetrates the Horizon, Incarna and powerful shamans become aware of the disturbances in the Umbra and seek to track down and destroy this intruder. If the problem is serious enough,

neophyte shamans may be recruited by either their Mentors or their totems to aid in tracking down and slaying the invading spirit.

Hunting down such creatures is one of the few times Dreamspeakers work with the Void Engineers. While both groups seek to explore the Umbra and to protect humanity from dangerous Umbrood, normally each group sees the other as almost as serious a problem as malevolent spirits and Nephandi. However, if there is a serious threat to the mortal world, Dreamspeakers and Void Engineers will temporarily put aside their differences and work together to slay these dangerous beasts.

The only other time that shamans will actively seek to destroy large numbers of spirits occurs when large outbreaks of the Wyrms threaten the natural order of both the Umbra and the Tellurian. Unlike the Garou who are often caught up in a blind hatred of the Wyrms, shamans realize that Banes and other spirits of the Wyrms are necessary for the health of both worlds. Unfortunately, the Wyrms went mad countless eons ago, and outbreaks of Wyrms threaten to overwhelm portions of the mortal world occasionally. Often such attacks are led by powerful Banes like Nexus Crawlers or Scraggs (see *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* for further details). When such infestations break out, shamans will attempt to identify and slay the spirits leading such attacks. Once these spirits have been destroyed, shamans are then usually content to drive off the minor spirits.

Notoriety

Just like the changing breeds, shamans can garner Notoriety among spirits. In game terms, notoriety is a measure of the character's negative reputation with spirit entities. A high rating in Notoriety means that the character has a harder time dealing with spirits, since they don't trust her!

Most of the usual deals involving spirits — securing a totem, creating a talen, asking for advice — are fairly routine, as long as the shaman performs the appropriate appeasements. However, certain actions may garner Notoriety, and some actions are almost guaranteed to do so. The following list shows some of the things that can gather a point of Notoriety (severe infractions, almost certain to cause Notoriety, are marked with an asterisk):

- Insulting a powerful spirit
- Offering a spirit an obviously bad deal
- *Compelling a spirit's servitude with magic
- *Trapping a spirit in a spirit prison or bottle
- *Destroying a spirit permanently
- Disobeying one's totem
- *Failing to uphold one's end of a spirit bargain
- Breaking a spirit's taboo or ban in that spirit's presence

*Breaking the taboo or ban of one's totem

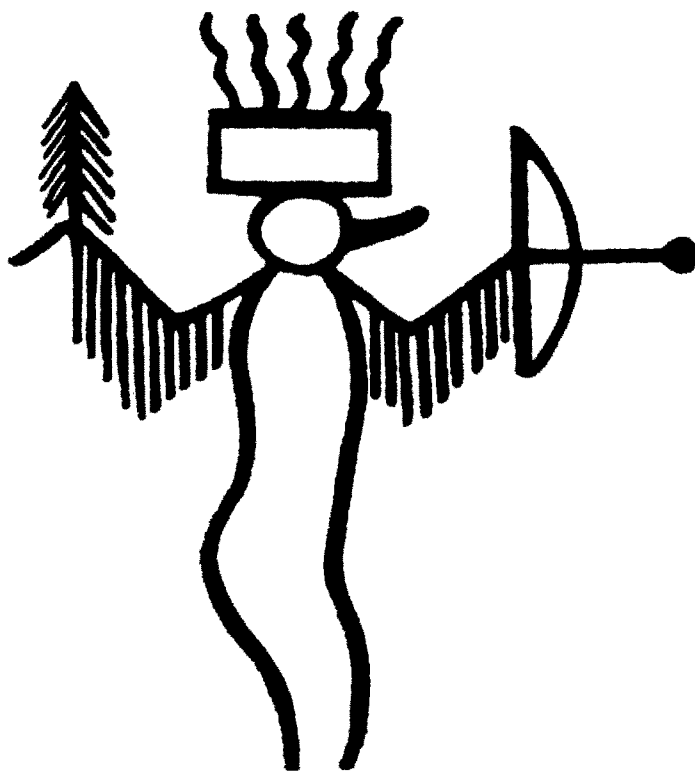
Deliberately lying to a spirit (not including contrariness, trickery or games of wit)

Allying with two opposing spirits

As a shaman gains Notoriety, her reputation as an untrustworthy trickster spreads. Few spirits respect this sort of thing. Add the shaman's Notoriety total to the difficulty

of all Social rolls when he interacts with spirits. If this penalty raises the difficulty past nine, remove one success from the roll for each additional point.

Shamans can remove notoriety only by atonement and chiminage. The shaman must make appropriate reparations to the spirits, certainly in the form of an interesting story and quest.





Appendix



Regardless of creed or Tradition, many spiritual and shamanistic mages share particular magical practices. Since congress with the spirits is so central to many cultures, many mages share means to appease, communicate with and banish those spirits that favor — or haunt — their kind. Though these rites often differ in outward appearance, they usually share a common purpose.

Shamanic Rotes

Awaken Flame

(•• or ••• Forces, ••• Spirit, sometimes •• Prime)

Fire is a talkative and hungry spirit, easily aroused and quick to take action. With a few words or a pinch of spirit dust, a shaman can awaken that spirit, giving the fire its own

direction and life. Once awakened, the fire retains its essential nature, which is to burn and grow. However, it now possesses a limited capacity to grow in certain directions and not in others. Once awake, this elemental being has its own desires and wishes, so the shaman must convince it to cooperate. Awakened Fire is chaotic and dangerous, but Fire has long been a friend of man, so it can sometimes be helpful.

[Once Fire is awake, the shaman must communicate and barter with it. Fire is often temperamental, quick and hungry, but it can be tricked or enticed by a clever shaman (with a sufficient Manipulation + Subterfuge roll). The addition of Forces 3 and Prime 2 allows the mage to actually create the fire she wishes to awaken. Most versions of this rote require the mage to throw some offering into the fire, or sometimes to sing for it. Once Fire is awake, the mage may talk to it as she talks to any other spirit.]

Possess Flame

(•• or •••• Forces, •••• Mind, sometimes •• Prime)

Instead of awakening the spirit of a fire, some shamans prefer to actually become the fire. While her body lies in a deep trance, the mage extends her mind and possesses a living fire. At this point, she can control the flame and sense its surroundings. While possessing a fire, the mage can cause it to move over any flammable surface, to reach out tongues of flame that ignite nearby objects, and to flare up or die down.

[As a thought-in-flame, the mage can control the direction and action of the fire, though the flame can be extinguished, snuffing out a part of the mage's strength. Unless the mage ends the possession before the fire is extinguished, (and the player successfully rolls Wits + Alertness [difficulty 7]), she loses a point of Willpower. The Forces 2 version allows the shaman to possess any fire up to the size of a large bonfire or small burning house. Larger fires, which engulf entire mansions, apartment complexes or office buildings, require Forces 4 to possess. Prime 2 is necessary if the mage wishes to also create the fire being possessed.]

Spirit Journey

(•• Spirit, •• Correspondence)

Entering an ecstatic trance through which spirits can be contacted and their worlds understood is one of the

most basic rites of shamanism. The shaman first enters a deep trance though drugs, dancing, drumming or meditation. Next, the magician untethers her perceptions and wanders the Umbra mentally. This rote allows the mage to explore any region of the Umbra, including the Deep Umbra. Separated from her body's limitations, the mage's spirit casts about various realms of perception. The shaman can visit even those strange and bizarre places of the High Umbra that escape the comprehension of most other mages, as long as she takes the proper steps to prepare her consciousness.

[The mage's perceptions are located directly above her body initially. However, she can shift her perceptions in any direction at great speed or choose to perceive any well-known location in the Umbra (or the Umbral equivalent of any well-known terrestrial location). The standard Correspondence difficulties apply, but the rote incurs a difficulty modifier of one if the mage attempts to view the Umbral equivalents of ordinary locations. While mages can theoretically use this rote to visit any portion of the Umbra, some regions are intensely confusing, while others are magically warded or guarded by fierce Umbrood who attempt to chase away all intruders. Also, travel is either purely linear or limited to appearing in well-known locations. Trying to find a place that is not well-known can be a long and fruitless task.



[Using this rote, the mage can also communicate with all spirits she encounters and even work magic (+1 to all difficulty modifiers). While this ritual itself is usually coincidental, since the mage's mind and body remain in the mortal world, vulgar magic worked while using this spell remains vulgar. Also, spirits that notice the mage's wandering perceptions can attack the mage directly through the link. However, all such attacks also suffer a difficulty penalty of one.]

Spirit Warding

(•• or •••• Spirit, •• Prime)

Hostile spirits and ghostly manifestations are no strangers to mages. Such apparitions plague many areas of power, or sometimes return to haunt their family or enemies. This aspect of a shaman's fearsome power is often welcomed in the community, for the shaman can protect against spirits that possess people, cause mischief or destroy property.

Most versions of this rote can be cast by drawing a circle around the area to be protected with a special tool or special ink. Other versions protect the region for as long as some activity continues, like keeping a blessed candle or fire burning, drumming or chanting for the duration of the ritual. Techno-fetishists and Void Engineers use a variety of bizarre trinkets — techno-shamans draw upon the warding and binding power in reflective surfaces, twisted chunks of metal and painted spiral patterns, while Void Engineers draw upon dimensional-stabilizing equipment. Like most rites that affect only spirits, this rote is almost always coincidental magic.

[Spirit Warding seals an area of the mundane world from spiritual attack and interference. The Spirit 2 version of this ritual raises the level of the Gauntlet by one per success (to a maximum of 10). In addition, while this version of the rote does not prevent spirits in the Umbra from entering the region, the addition of Prime causes damage to any spirit entering the area. If the spirit has materialized, this rote does normal damage. If the spirit has not materialized, this rote does five times that much damage to the spirit's Power. The Spirit 4 version actually creates an Umbral shield around the protected region, preventing all spirits from either materializing inside or otherwise entering the area. Once again, the Prime component of this rote damages any spirit that touches the barrier.]

Animal Riding

(••• Mind, or ••• Mind, •• Correspondence)

Shamans and certain animals have deep mythic bonds. This rote allows shamans use of these bonds to contact the mind of a specific animal. By tugging on the mystic threads of animal totems, ancient animal kings and pacts made with the animal kingdom in days long past, the shaman can communicate with and influence natural creatures. Once in contact with the animal's mind, the mage can use its senses as if these senses were her own. In addition, the mage

can influence the animal's emotions. This communication is relatively imprecise, but animals can be convinced to perform many relatively simple actions.

A mage using this rote must communicate with the "ridden" animal and attempt to convince it to do his bidding. This magic is not so much a form of control as a sort of barter. Typically, the shaman makes an offering to the animal — a bit of food, a promise of freedom or knowledge — and asks the animal's aid in return. This sort of cooperation is most common with the animals familiar to the shaman's family and culture. A mage from northern Africa would be more at home with snakes, jackals and cheetahs than an eastern-European shaman, who would commune with various sorts of birds and wolves.

[If the mage wishes the animal to do something obviously dangerous, he must either convince it to do so (probably requiring a Manipulation + Animal Ken roll), or the player must roll a contest of Willpower to force it to do so. If the mage wants to force the animal to do something highly dangerous or obviously suicidal, the player must also expend one Willpower point. In either case, forcing the animal to perform any action makes the animal unwilling to cooperate with any further suggestions. A shaman who relies on animal servants too much may acquire a poor reputation with totem and animal spirits.]

[If the mage uses the version of rote that includes Correspondence, she may "ride" any animal she knows, regardless of distance. Mages who know this rote often have many pampered pets and work animals that they use for these purposes. Note, though, that a shaman can commune with animals of this sort due to a profound and natural respect. No shaman would consider trying to make animals into slaves or tools with this magic.]

Coerce Spirit

(••• Mind, •• Spirit or •••• Spirit)

Though spirits are often friendly and cooperative to mages who address them properly, some mages are unaware of the proper forms of address, or they prefer to deal from a (perceived) position of strength. Other spirits are disagreeable by nature. When a mage wishes to deal with such a spirit, a lengthy dialogue or physical duel is sometimes too demanding. In such cases, a mage can resort to magical means of coercion, forcing the spirit to obey his will. Naturally, this sort of magic is risky, and continued behavior of this sort will certainly attract negative attention.

[There are two basic rites for coercing and controlling spirits. Their effects are essentially identical, but their exact methodology differs. The version that uses Mind 3 and Spirit 2 affects the spirit's "mind," while the Spirit 4 version affects its Umbral nature directly. While different in technique, the results of both techniques are nearly identical: The spirit is compelled to obey the mage.]

[Mages use this rote frequently to force spirits into a spirit bottle. This rote can also summon a spirit and cause it to perform a single action. To force a spirit to perform some action, the caster's player must achieve a number of successes equal to the spirit's Power score. The exact nature and difficulty of the task asked of the spirit determines the difficulty of this roll. Compelling a violent spirit to attack someone is relatively easy, while asking a fire elemental to help put out a fire could necessitate a difficulty of 8 or 9. Extended rituals are often necessary to compel powerful spirits. However, spirits know instantly if someone is attempting to perform such a ritual. Unless the shaman is in some way protected from the spirit, the spirit may attack before the ritual is complete.]

[Mages who use this Effect too often risk alienating spirits entirely. Such mages gain Notoriety.]

Create Talen

(••• Spirit, or ••• Spirit, •• Prime)

Talens are essentially single-use fetishes. Both shamans and the Changing Breeds make use of talens as simple, portable, easily created items of magical power. Creating a talen involves either awakening the spirit of the object that will become the talen, or persuading a lesser spirit to lend the object some of its Power. Once a shaman uses or destroys the object, its power is released, infusing the user with the appropriate power. Obviously, talens are most effective when their powers mirror some of the item's archetypal properties.

[Whether a talen incorporates an awakened spirit or merely a bit of a patron spirit's Power, the talen must incorporate some tass, or else the shaman must use Prime 2 to infuse the item with Quintessence to fix the magic within the object. In many cases, talens are destroyed when they are used. The ritual necessary to create a single talen takes a minimum of eight to 12 hours to perform.]

Death Curse

(••• Life, •• Spirit, sometimes •• Correspondence)

Whether caused by pointing a killing bone, making a "voodoo doll" or sending the target a deadly dream, shamans use this curse to slay their enemies. Regardless of how the curse is performed, the results are similar. The target will experience a serious illness (which can vary from a sudden heart attack that kills the target within minutes, to deadly fever that saps the target's strength until death) or possibly a fatal accident.

[In most cases, the **Death Curse** rote is performed as an extended ritual, with the shaman gradually accumulating the successes needed to slay the target. Typically, the caster must score enough successes on an extended damage ritual to overcome the target's total Stamina and health levels. This ritual usually takes at least a full hour to perform. If the caster uses Correspondence magic for targeting, she can slay

a distant target as long as she possesses some arcane connection to the target — preferably hair, blood or some other physical item. Without Correspondence magic, the caster must confront the target and actually point the death bone at him, curse him verbally or otherwise direct the curse personally once the ritual is complete.]

[Once successfully unleashed, the curse makes the target suffer from a debilitating disease, taking away one health level per day. Alternately, the target may be involved in a serious accident within the next 24 hours. Regardless of cause, the ritual is almost always coincidental. Life magic or even immediate medical attention can sometimes save the life of the victim.]

Luck Blessing/Curse

(••• Spirit, •• Entropy)

By awakening the spirits of an area, the shaman draws their attention to the place's inhabitants and calls down luck or curses. The shaman needs only leave a small symbol or trinket that attracts the spirit's attention, so that it stirs and seeks the object out. Most such blessings or hexes affect the area for a short time before the spirit returns to its business. Longer-duration blessings or curses of this type are possible, but they require that the shaman negotiate with the now-awakened spirit and provide it with some service worthy of continuing to enforce this blessing or curse for a longer time. Curses are often produced by arcane pictograms drawn on walls, or by strange bundles buried in a field or hidden under a building's floorboards. Most blessings are tied to attractive charms attached to a wall or door, or even to a scarecrow. Dreamspeakers tend to use small medicine bundles or pictograms, while Verbena often effect this rote with a blooded staff or sacrifice of a particular animal.

[A blessing or cursing rote must be cast on a specific place, no larger than a single building. The actual size of the region affected determines the number of successes needed. One success affects a small one- or two-bedroom house or a barn, while a mansion might take four successes, and a large building as many as six or seven. If performed successfully, this rote provides the inhabitants with a general feeling of good will or ill will, and it grants a -1 reduction (for a blessing) or a +1 increase in difficulty (for a curse) for all routine activities performed in this space. This bonus or penalty helps (or harms) productivity and morale. A related version of this rote blesses or curses up to several acres of fields, orchards or other agricultural land.]

[Both versions of this rote can also be performed so that they affect only a single activity. When used in this fashion, the rote provides a bonus (or penalty) of three to all task difficulties directly related to this specified activity. Fields could be blessed so that the difficulty of all rolls related directly to farming reduce by three, or a Progenitor labora-



tory could be given a curse that imposes a difficulty penalty of three to all Science rolls. In all cases, the effects of this rote last no longer than three months (one season). Casters often use extended rituals to provide the maximum duration to this blessing. This rote cannot boost the success of any type of magic.]

Physical Exorcism (••• Spirit, ••• Life, •• Prime)

According to the shamanic paradigm, curses, bad luck, illnesses and many similar problems come from the influence of malefic spirits. While driving off such spirits is usually sufficient, sometimes it is necessary to slay them so that they will never return. This powerful rote exorcises a possessing spirit and gives it a physical form that may then be killed. The spirit is bound in this physical form for the duration of the rote. When killed in this fashion, the spirit is destroyed permanently. In addition, shamans also can use this rote to physically personify bad habits, mental illnesses, physical diseases or even destructive emotions like hatred or jealousy. If the rote works, the trait or illness is removed from the person and must then be killed by the Dreamspeaker and her associates. Once slain, the spirit leaves the patient completely free of the illness or bad habit.

If the spirit, trait or illness survives this attack, it will possess its victim again as soon as the duration of the rote expires. Sometimes, the spirit will affect one (or even several) of the people who attacked it instead. Often, if this rote fails, the entity will affect its target with renewed vigor.

While Physical Exorcism provides a very direct method of solving problems, it also carries many risks. A bad flu may become a small predator like a bobcat, and a somewhat more severe illness (like pneumonia or TB) may become a large venomous snake. However, a deadly curse or an extremely serious illness (like the AIDS virus) may manifest as a large dangerous creature potentially as dangerous as a vampire or a bear. Since the spirit is called forth specifically to battle the shaman, the creature is often hostile and unnaturally aggressive. Some particularly subtle or canny manifestations may choose to flee the shaman, hoping to escape and infect others.

[Physical Exorcism is often vulgar. To make it coincidental, the creature must become a normal animal and the location must be such that a normal animal could reasonably show up. For these reasons, this rote is usually performed in wilderness areas.

[The Storyteller determines the severity of the problem to be overcome. If the rote succeeds, the problem manifests as a physical creature, as described previously, and the shaman must take steps to deal with the creature. Generally, the spirit must be defeated in physical combat without the use of additional magic. The duration of the Effect determines how much time the shaman has in which to fight the creature.]

Animal Possession

(•••• Mind, or ••••Mind, •• Correspondence)

Though communication with animals is a mainstay of shamanic lore, potent mages can even borrow the forms and perceptions of animals. When using this rote, the magician's body lapses into a deep trance while her mind occupies the body of an animal. For all intents and purposes, the mage becomes the animal for the duration of the ritual. She can operate its body, guided by its instincts, as well as using its senses to her advantage.

To use this rote, the mage must first find an appropriate animal and bring it into the ritual space. Many Dreamspeakers (and other animal-kin) believe that the animal should come willingly. To attract animals, many shamans use gifts of food and space, setting aside a place for the animals to come to them. Obviously, setting up this rote isn't something one does on the spur of the moment. Waiting for the animal may require several hours of silent observation.

Most versions of this rote require the mage to touch the animal's head or to gaze deeply into its eyes. Whatever the case, the mage must allow his *anima* to move, then let the dream-trance pull his consciousness into the body of the beast.

[If the animal is injured, the player must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 6) or lose a Willpower point due to the stress of controlling an injured beast. If the animal dies while possessed, the player must score two or more successes on a Willpower roll (difficulty 7), lest the shaman snap back into his own body and enter a coma. Even if he lives, the mage loses three Willpower points and suffers a level of damage. The mage can leave the body at any time, though a roll of Wits + Alertness (difficulty 7) may be necessary to escape under duress or attack.

[Most shamans consider any animal they are possessing to be under their care, and they see allowing it to be injured as unjust and wrong. Violating the values of the shamanic animal pacts can bring consequences. A shaman who uses animals blithely with no regard for their welfare — or who manages to get many killed — is likely to draw down the wrath of animal spirits. Like Animal Riding, the version of Animal Possession that uses Correspondence 2 allows the mage to possess a well-known animal regardless of distance.]

Dreamquest

(••• or •••• Spirit, •• Prime, •• Entropy, •• Mind or •••• Mind, •• Prime, •• Entropy)

When Dreamspeakers call on ritual, they often use soothing drums or trances to commune with the spirit world, so that they may extend their powers over an area. The frail mortal husk can only withstand so much exertion, though, and many shamans have died while attempting to create Effects of phenomenal strength. Dreamspeakers long ago acknowledged the power of the

spirit over the material, though, and through the Dreamquest, they learned to call out to the Umbra and cause the living world to respond in turn. Many shamans know of this ritual, but the power and danger inherent in its use makes it a rarely invoked rote.

Using the linkage of material and spiritual, it is possible to find the Umbral effects that will cause the desired result to occur in the mundane world. To cause an earthquake, the Dreamspeaker might have to do battle with a powerful Earth spirit. To cure a plague, the Dreamspeaker might have to go on a lengthy quest into the far reaches of the Umbra for a special healing herb. Similarly, causing a city to collapse under social unrest and economic upheaval might require that the Dreamspeaker gather an army of Umbrood to storm the city's spiritual counterpart.

A Dreamquest rote is designed specifically to produce large-scale effects. In its most extreme forms, it can start or stop wars, topple governments, unleash or banish widespread famine and pestilence. However, the difficulty of the Umbral quest is directly proportional to the magnitude of the desired change. A Dreamspeaker who casts this rote successfully will know the quest that she must undertake and approximately how difficult it will be. Mages who fail or who abandon the quest before it is complete accomplish nothing at all. They may even draw down the ire of spirits roused for the task and then left astray. Furthermore, while the quest is in motion, other great forces may mobilize to maintain the status quo. A Dreamspeaker could go on a Dreamquest to rid his city of Technocratic influence, but the Technocracy would certainly send its Pan-Dimensional Corps to intervene.

[The Dreamquest is one of the oldest of the shamanic rituals, as well as one of the most unusual. This rote essentially allows the Dreamspeaker to make powerful, coincidental changes in static reality by altering the Umbra. Powerful magic that has a profound effect on the mundane world is often exceedingly difficult. Loosing or curing a huge plague, destroying a city or causing a large earthquake can often involve rituals that require as many as a dozen successes and difficulties of 8 or higher. Such rituals also risk completely destroying the mage with paradox. However, Dreamspeakers know that every action taken in the Umbra affects the mundane world just as every action taken in the mundane world affects the Umbra.

[When a mage performs this ritual, the Storyteller is under no obligation to make this quest easy, or even possible. This rote could theoretically be used to start a global thermonuclear war, ruin the economy of the United States, cure the AIDS virus or produce a lasting world peace. However, such extreme quests might take many months or even years, and they would be far too difficult for anything but a large group of the most powerful mages in the world. As a general guideline, a normal group of mage characters should, after much work, be able to affect

the fate of a single moderately large city. A quest of this magnitude should be an epic event, not merely a matter of a few die rolls.

[The mage or mages involved enter the Umbra (either by using the **Stepping Sideways**, **Breach the Gauntlet** or **Untether Effect**), then begin their quest. As soon as the mage who actually performs the ritual enters the Umbra, she will have a vision of the quest which must be undertaken to accomplish the desired goal. At this point, the mages involved can either decide that the quest appears too difficult and dangerous, or they can set off. Such quests form an entire story's worth of events, and they involve a series of heroic endeavors like slaying foul Umbrood, capturing valuable treasures or helping important spirits in their hour of need. The nature of the quest should relate indirectly to the task being performed. Causing social chaos in a city or producing some other disaster usually requires a quest that involves slaying or destroying something; blessing a city or solving some social problem usually involves rescuing a spirit or repairing some damaged object of value.

In all cases, the mundane results of such a quest occur by purely coincidental means, over which the mages involved have no control. A doctor might discover the vaccine for a plague, a city's economy could be bolstered by new businesses moving in, or social chaos may increase when new gangs (or possibly even reckless vampires) move into a city. Only a few powerful spirits, mages with both Entropy and Spirit scores of 2 or higher and individuals with an Awareness talent of 4 or more will notice that these events have a magical cause. While some brave or foolhardy shamans attempt such quests on their own by merely **Stepping Sideways**, most use **Untether** or **Breach the Gauntlet** to allow them to bring their companions along to aid them.]

Tools Drugs

Various drugs have long been a part of shamanic practice. Amazonian Dreamspeakers learned to use their rich pharmacopoeia of jungle hallucinogens, while their Central Asian counterparts used exotic, potentially deadly mushrooms. Unlike the members of the Cult of Ecstasy, Dreamspeakers rarely use powerful mind-altering drugs for entertainment. Instead, shamans the world over have developed a rich lore of the various magical and medicinal uses for a wide variety of leaves, roots, mushrooms and herbal potions.

Today, the Progenitors, as well as a large number of mundane doctors and biologists, journey to isolated parts of the globe regularly to attempt to learn this lore and to find and make use of these various plants and drugs. The infamous "zombie powder" from Haiti is merely one of a

vast array of these drugs. Fortunately, the native shamans have developed ways of protecting their knowledge from outsiders.

While there are a number of plants, fungi and even animal parts that are useful on their own, the most potent shamanic drugs are all complex mixtures prepared in lengthy, highly ritualistic ceremonies. Without the ceremony, the effects of the drugs are much more subdued and usually much less useful for anything other than mere entertainment. Many of these drugs are also tass. This tass must come from natural sources that have aspects related to the drug's use. Thus, the natural sources absorb resonance that multiplies their own properties and augments it with magical power. Few Progenitors and other outsiders have easy access to these varieties of tass, and even fewer know the rituals that allow it to be incorporated into the drug.

All of the following drugs are the shamanistic equivalent to talens. They are materials that are infused with spiritual power, and which are only effective for a single use.

Talen drugs derive their spiritual power from the awakening of the spirit of the drug. To make a drug talen, the Shaman must spend several days performing elaborate rituals, and he must incorporate at least one point of Quintessence into the drug. Awakening the drug usually requires a Spirit 3 effect.

Curse Powder

Unlike the other drugs listed here, this one is designed for use against the shaman's enemies. Despite the name, this drug can take almost any form. One version is a colorless mild-tasting liquid, another is a powder that works on contact with the skin, and one of the most common types is incense that must be burned.

Anyone affected by curse powder becomes sleepy and falls into an exceedingly deep sleep within an hour. This sleep seems perfectly natural, and victims can stay awake during combat or other emergencies. However, victims immediately fall asleep and become difficult to awaken once the crisis is over. While asleep, victims have extremely vivid dreams and become highly susceptible to magical dream control. An unscrupulous mage can shape the subject's dreams, even causing an unsuspecting somnambulist to fall prey to her own dreaming actions. Conversely, the sleep induced by this powder is deep and refreshing, as long as the mage does not take advantage of it to send nightmares or injure the subject.

[The difficulty of all rolls to use Mind magic to control the subject's dreams or otherwise influence his mind decreases by two. In addition, the mage can cause the subject to lose the paralysis that holds most people immobile while they sleep. The mage can cause the subject to act out the actions he performs in dreams. Since the same mage can also use Mind magic to control the content of these dreams, the subject can be tricked into performing almost any action.

[However, if the subject is injured while under the influence of this drug, the player can make a Willpower roll (difficulty of 9 minus the number of health levels of damage taken) in order to wake up. Subjects who succeed in this roll throw off all effects of the drug immediately. Otherwise, a single dose of this drug lasts for 6 hours, after which time, the subject sleeps normally and wakes up when fully rested.]

Dream Powder

Almost every Dreamspeaker knows how to make at least one version of dream powder. This most basic shamanistic drug opens the gateways of perception and allows the user to perceive and interact with the spirit world more easily. It is also an extremely strong hallucinogen.

There are many forms of dream powder. Some are ingested, others smoked, and many of the versions made by Amazonian Dreamspeakers must be inhaled. Each version of this drug uses a strong local hallucinogen like peyote, *ayahuasca* or even LSD (for techno-shamans). Like soma, Dreamspeakers who manufacture dream powder often run into legal trouble. The Technocracy's end of the war on drugs is part of a concerted effort to prohibit the Masses from perceiving the spirit world.

[Dream Powder adds one temporary dot to the user's Spirit rating (up to the limit of her Arete) and reduces the difficulty of all Spirit Magic rolls by one. As a part of this bonus, the user receives the Merit *Spirit Sight*, and the Flaw *Spiritually Noticeable* temporarily. In addition, the hallucinations and sensory distortions increase the difficulty of all mundane Perception rolls by two. Sleepers who take this drug receive the aforementioned Merit and Flaw for the duration of the effect and suffer from the hallucinations. However, since few Sleepers believe in spirits, most will assume that the spirits are also hallucinations. Similarly, this drug aids the magic of only those mages who are willing to accept that dreams and hallucinations are real and valid. Mages other than Dreamspeakers, Cultists of Ecstasy and Verbena who use this drug receive no bonuses to their magic. Technocrats, Virtual Adepts and most Sons of Ether actually increase the difficulty of all magic rolls by two while under the influence of dream powder.

[Since dream powder is largely unrefined, new users often find it too harsh to breathe. The player must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 5) for the character to inhale the drug without sneezing or vomiting it up. Characters who have used the drug successfully on more than one occasion are acclimated to its use, and their players need not make such a roll.]

Flying Ointment

Unlike the "flying ointments" used by the Verbena, this concoction — one of the most powerful drugs known to the Dreamspeakers and kin — does not empower physical flight, but rather untethers the spirit. Mages can

use this drug to observe the spirit world in the vicinity of any familiar mundane locations. Someone who takes this drug while visiting Java can use it to observe the spirit world in the vicinity of her home in Maine, or even a familiar cafe in London. Of course, since this aspect of the spirit world is a reflection of the material world, some details may be hard to see. However, the mage can see spirits and (in some cases) the emotional resonance that clings to an area.

Taking this drug also drops the user into a deep, trance. Until the drug has run its course, users cannot be awakened from this trance without dangerously strong stimulants or powerful Life magic.

Sleepers who take this drug experience the same effects as mages. Unfortunately, they have no control over the spiritual locations they see. Instead, they might potentially view any location in the spirit world, from the most wondrous to the most horrific. The more upset and distressed the Sleeper is before taking the drug, the more unpleasant the experience is likely to be. Some Dreamspeakers and Verbena use this drug as a way to help Awaken promising Sleepers. Sometimes it works; sometimes flying ointment leaves the Sleeper with vivid memories of intense hallucinations, and sometimes it drives Sleepers who take it permanently insane.

Both the Verbena and the Dreamspeakers use this drug, but Dreamspeaker legends assert that the Verbena learned the secret of making this drug several thousand years ago from the native shamanistic traditions that evolved into the Dreamspeakers. Most likely, the drug was discovered in some long-ago date lost to history, when the proto-Verbena and Dreamspeakers were one and the same.

Like all other shamanic drugs, flying ointment comes in many forms. The most common form of this drug is an ointment that the user smears over her entire body. Recipes for flying ointments differ, and they include everything from jimsonweed to hashish. However, all versions contain several powerful euphorics and a few hallucinogens.

The Technocracy fears flying ointment since it can allow even the Masses to perceive (and perhaps catch the attention of) dread creatures lurking in the furthest reaches of the Deep Umbra. Similarly, inexperienced Nephandi often attempt to learn the secret of creating this drug since it allows them to visit and communicate with the realms of their masters.

[Flying ointment allows any Awakened character to view the spirit world by using a conjunctural Spirit 2, Correspondence 2 effect. Under the sway of the drug, the Effect is considered coincidental magic. Furthermore, the imbibor can slip into the spirit realms easily without any special knowledge. The player needs only make an Arete roll (difficulty 5) for the mage to see the spirit realms. Each dose of this drug usually lasts between one to two hours.]



Shomi

Until recently, shomi was only known to a few tribes living in the depths of the Amazonian jungle. However, increased contact between various groups of Dreamspeakers has spread knowledge of this drug throughout the world. Prepared from a mixture of tass and the South American ayahuasca plant, this drug allows an Awakened user to contact anyone she knows well, anywhere in the world. Creating this drug requires at least an ounce of fresh or dried ayahuasca, as well as knowledge of the rather proprietary formula. Once learned, though, its creation ritual is fairly simple.

Shomi produces intense and vivid hallucinations of a vast and somewhat threatening network of twining things that, depending on the user, may appear to be pipes, vines or even an enormous nest of large snakes. The secret of these vines or snakes is that they actually represent the myriad paths connecting humanity's collective unconscious. The way to use this drug successfully is to make close physical contact with this network. The imbiber must allow one of the vines to wrap around her and grow into her flesh, or allow one of the snakes to bite her. Once that happens, she can then use the power of the dream to communicate with another living or spiritual (but not undead) being anywhere on earth, as long as that entity is somehow connected to human consciousness.

Sleepers contacted using this drug will most often experience the message as a dream, a brief daydream or possibly a particularly vivid bout of talking to themselves. When used to contact another mage or other Awakened being, the drug allows normal conversation. However, numerous vivid impressions of vines or snakes and similar hallucinatory images creep into any communication that involves this drug. Sleepers who use this drug merely experience intense hallucinations of snakes, vines or other long, slender twining objects.

[Shomi effectively creates a coincidental conjunctive Effect of Mind, Correspondence and Spirit, allowing the user to communicate with other beings through dream-speech. The mage need not know any of these Spheres to perform this effect, but only mages with an Arete score of at least one can use this drug effectively. This drug does not allow the user to contact wercreatures or vampires, since such beings are not connected to the rest of humanity in the same fashion.]

Soma

Using secret recipes learned millennia ago from members of the (now) Cult of Ecstasy, Dreamspeakers the world over make and use soma as a potent physical drug. While most of the drugs known to shamans aid spiritual perceptions and mystical understanding, soma improves the user's body. Legends tell of how Dreamspeakers made soma for ancient heroes long ago, to allow them to fight

the most deadly magical beasts. Numerous pre-Columbian tribes in North America used a variant of soma to allow messengers to run for days without stopping or even slowing down. In Central Asia, Mongol shamans gave their version of soma to their bravest warriors. Today, few know the secret of its manufacture, but it is prized by all who know its power.

While there are many different recipes for soma (and the drug takes multiple forms), it is most often found as some sort of small cake or paste that is eaten. When the user takes the drug, she must have some definite physical goal in mind. This goal may be almost anything that is purely physical, like running to the next city, fighting a HIT Mark, lifting a huge weight or guarding a house against all attackers.

Once eaten, soma takes effect rapidly. The eater spends a few seconds focusing upon his feats to come, and the drug disseminates throughout the body, pushing him to incredible feats of endurance. As long as the drug lasts, the user is nearly indefatigable, with single-minded dedication and potent resistance to pain. Of course, once the heightened state ends, the user must recover, but the benefits often outweigh the costs.

There are almost as many different recipes for soma as there are different shamanic cultures. However, all of the recipes have many features in common. All soma recipes contain one or more strong natural stimulants, as well as a number of mild euphorics. Most known recipes for soma involve using materials that are illegal under most first world drug laws.

[Once eaten, soma takes effect within a number of turns equal to the user's Stamina. Soma raises the user's Strength, Dexterity and Appearance each by one, and it adds three points to the user's Stamina. The user literally seethes with life and health. The drug negates all penalties from damage while it is in effect, and it allows the user to do killing damage with her hands. Best of all, when performing the specified task — the one task on which the user concentrated immediately after ingesting the soma — the difficulty of all rolls relating directly to performing this task decreases by two. Using soma, someone can run for days at twice normal speed without resting or even slowing. A normal human using soma even stands a good chance of winning a fight against a vampire or other supernatural adversary. However, the affects of a single dose of soma last a maximum of three days.

[Using soma is a mixed blessing. The focus and single-mindedness produced by the drug reduce the user's Manipulation and Charisma each by one, and the user has a +2 difficulty modifier to all rolls that are not related to the focused task. In addition, once the user is finished with her task, she immediately loses all bonuses from the drug. Once the drug wears off, each of the user's physical attributes drops by one point for a full day. Also, the user

is physically and mentally exhausted, and he must rest for several hours before being able to perform any further strenuous activities. Humans can safely use soma no more than once a month. If soma is used without a clear objective, it merely gives the user a bonus of one to Strength, Dexterity and Stamina. In addition, using soma more than once in a month produces severe shakes and fatigue in the user, without granting any concomitant benefit.

[Creating soma requires that the Dreamspeaker learn the recipe and know Life 2 in addition to Spirit 3. Also, while the ingredients take only a single day to prepare, the drug must age for a full lunar month before it can be used. The finished drug then remains potent for only another full lunar month. Both mages and Sleepers can use this drug, but it does not affect werereatures or vampires.]

Spirit Smoke

Much like flying ointment, spirit smoke loosens the ties that keep mind, body and spirit in close communion. Inhaled as a form of incense, the smoke causes a mage's perceptions to expand until his mind is free from its physical confines, allowing the mind to roam about the various layers of existence. While the dreamer explores the higher planes of consciousness, his body remains comatose. Though Sleepers often misunderstand the visions imbued by spirit smoke, its use allows many mages to explore realms that would otherwise be barred to them.

Spirit smoke is made from a mixture of raw opium, hashish and several rare herbs, as well as a small quantity of tans. To create it, a mage must then infuse the mixture with Quintessence. After it has been infused with power, the drug must then age for a full lunar month. Only a single dose of this drug can be made at a time, as larger quantities do not "set" properly.

This drug must be burned in an open container, like incense in order to work. Spirit smoke produces large quantities of thick, sweet-smelling smoke. Any Sleeper who breathes this smoke will fall into a deep stupor filled with half-remembered visions and hallucinations. A properly trained mage, though, can guide his consciousness, sending it out to experience other places.

Of course, like many hallucinogens, spirit smoke has some side effects. Even in Sleepers, the drug causes fatigue. Excessive use can be physically debilitating as well.

[Any mage who knows at least Mind 3 and Spirit 2 experiences the Mind 5 Effect **Untether** while using spirit smoke. This effect lasts 7 - Stamina hours (with a minimum of two hours). None of the affected mages may return to their bodies until this duration is up. However, other mages can use Life 3 effects to cleanse the drug from a subject's systems and cancel the effects of this drug in a few minutes. While affected by this drug, the subjects are entirely unaware of their bodies, but they are able make full use of their untethered

condition to travel the far reaches of the Umbra. Since the drug is breathed in as smoke, it can be used to affect groups of mages who all inhale the fumes from the burning drug. Generally, up to half a dozen mages can partake of one dose of this drug.

[Unfortunately, using spirit smoke is quite exhausting. After this drug wears off, the user becomes groggy and somewhat nauseous. The user's player suffers a difficulty penalty of two to all Physical Attribute rolls until the character has slept for at least eight hours and eaten a full meal. Also, using spirit smoke more than twice a month risks serious health consequences. After the mage takes three or more doses in a month, the player must make a Stamina roll with a difficulty of 6 plus one for every dose beyond the second. Failure means the user becomes violently ill with no beneficial effects, remaining nauseous for several days. A botch indicates that the character loses one point of Stamina permanently.]

Magical Items

Spirit Bottle

Used to keep naughty spirits under control, the spirit bottle is thought to be a creation "borrowed" from the lost Taftâni mages. The Taftâni consorted with various sorts of djinn and efrits, spirits from Arabia, Persia and the Middle East. With a spirit bottle, a spirit could be stored, often trapping a hostile spirit so that it could not wreak havoc in the material world.

Some mages use spirit bottles as a method of capturing dangerous spirits. Others wish to have ready access to the knowledge and wisdom possessed by spirits, and many mages use spirit bottles as emergency defenses. Most spirits object to being placed in a spirit bottle, and they will readily bargain for their freedom. Some spirits offer advice and counsel, but the most standard bargain is for either one or three services to be performed by the spirit when it is freed. The magical structure of the spirit bottle itself helps enforce this contract, and it ensures that the spirit keeps any bargain it makes.

Spirit bottles must be physical objects, and opening them requires some physical alteration. A spirit stored in a bottle or jar is freed if the object is broken or the lid is removed. If a gemstone is made into a spirit bottle, the spirit is freed when the gem is broken. A spirit trapped in a tattoo is freed if the tattoo is damaged. While both stoppered gourds painted with intricate patterns and hollowed bones are traditional forms of spirit bottles used by Dreamspeakers, today glass pop bottles and mason jars (usually decorated with strands of beads) also function as spirit bottles.

Creating a spirit bottle involves lengthy preparation of the object being used. In general, creating a temporary spirit bottle requires at least a full day of work.

Shamans who craft or carry too many spirit bottles, or just use them often, risk Notoriety. Many spirits dislike being trapped, and a mage who makes a practice of doing so can earn the spirits' enmity.

[Any mage with Spirit 3 and Prime 2 can make a temporary spirit bottle. A temporary spirit bottle must be specifically designed to contain a single variety of spirit. Once a spirit of this type has been tricked or coerced into entering this bottle, the bottle is sealed and the spirit is trapped. Once inside the bottle, the spirit can communicate normally with other spirits, mediums or mages, but it cannot use any of its powers or abilities. A spirit can be stored in a spirit bottle indefinitely. However, some exceptionally powerful spirits like the Umbrood lords are simply too powerful to be trapped in temporary spirit bottles.]

Fetishes

While most Traditions concentrate on making talismans, shamans create a wide range of powerful fetishes. A fetish is a sacred object, since a spirit chooses (hopefully willingly) to inhabit it. As stated in **mage: The Ascension**, creating a fetish requires both a willing spirit and Spirit 4 magic. Mages can also force an unwilling spirit into a fetish, but doing so is considered a vile act unless the spirit is otherwise too dangerous to let loose. (In any case, forcing spirits into bonds against their will is, again, a good source of Notoriety.)

A mage must attune a fetish before using it. The maker of a fetish is automatically attuned to it. Other mages can attune a fetish if the player succeeds in rolling the character's Arete with a difficulty equal to the fetish's Gnosis rating. Every point of Quintessence or tass used in this roll lowers the difficulty by one point, up to three. Success of any type indicates attunement, failure indicates that the mage cannot attempt attunement with the fetish again until her Arete increases, and a botch indicates that either the fetish in some way attacks the mage or that the spirit has been freed from the fetish.

One attuned, a fetish can be used at will. To activate a fetish the player must make another Arete roll with the fetish's Gnosis as the difficulty. Success indicates that the fetish is active; failure indicates that the power does not function, but the mage may try again on the next turn. A botch means that the shaman must wait a full day before attempting to activate the fetish again. If desired, a shaman may also spend Quintessence to lower the difficulty of this roll (up to 3 points, as usual).

Many of the fetishes listed in **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** and its supplements may be both created and used by Dreamspeakers, at the discretion of the Storyteller. Obviously, some are too "werewolf-oriented" to be useful to a mage, while others depend on ancestral werewolf-spirits or specific shapeshifter rituals. Of course, mages create a



number of fetishes themselves. Though Dreamspeakers are the primary architects of fetishes, Verbena and Hermetic mages are known to barter with spirits to make objects of power in this fashion as well.

•• to ••••• (Depending on the Spirit) Spirit Possession Masks (Gnosis 5-8)

Masks allow shamans to become someone else, to let a different entity be responsible for the wearer's actions. They also channel the visage and power of the entity pictured. Spirit possession masks, then, are perhaps the most free expression of that principle. The shaman literally becomes a conduit for the mask's patron spirit. The particular spirit's essence is connected to the mask directly, and the spirit rides the shaman's body when the shaman wears the mask. Though the controlled shaman may perform inimical actions while under the sway of the spirit, the spirit can also exercise its miracles through its host.

[Putting on the mask and activating it successfully allows the mage to be possessed by the spirit associated with the mask. One advantage of using such a mask is that an unmasked-for spirit cannot possess the user, even if the activation roll botches. Instead, a botch usually means that the mask is destroyed or that the correct spirit arrives in a truly foul mood. While possessed, the user gains one dot in all Physical Attributes, as well as the ability to use any of the spirit's powers. Both wraiths and Umbrood can possess people using such masks. However,

shamans with no knowledge of Mind magic have no awareness of the physical events occurring while they are possessed. They may communicate with the spirit, but the spirit is under no obligation to be truthful in its statements.

[Mages possessed using these masks may also attempt to force the possessing spirit to leave (make contested Willpower rolls once per hour if the mage is trying to evict the spirit). Shamans who have at least one dot in Mind may maintain physical awareness of their surroundings, and the players may make a Willpower roll (with a difficulty equal to the spirit's Willpower) to take control of their own body for one scene. While possession by some spirits is quite risky, spirits who have a positive relationship with the shaman usually perform the actions desired by the shaman, and leave when requested. However, such spirits will expect certain payment or favors in return.

[As long as a nearby mage's player makes the necessary Arete roll, this mask can also be activated when a Sleeper puts it on, allowing the spirit to possess the Sleeper.]

•• Fire Shirt (Gnosis 6)

Speaking with fire is one of the basic skills that most shamans learn. The fire shirt is a fetish that helps novice shamans deal effectively with fire. Created with the aid of a powerful spirit of fire, the most common form of this item is as a highly decorated shirt. However, this fetish can also be found in the form of an

elaborately woven sash or a belt adorned with disks of metal and shell. The fire shirt calls upon its inhabiting spirit of flame to dull the effects of heat, to ward against burns and to defend against the ravaging effects of fire. Of course, the shaman will still feel the heat, but she won't suffer the usual injuries.

[When a fire shirt is worn and activated (regardless of its actual form) the wearer and everything else she is wearing or carrying receives three points of armor against all fires, as well as all attacks based on flame or heat. Once activated, this protection lasts for an hour.]

•• Spirit Snake (Gnosis 6)

Those who walk in dreams and among spirits may find their bodies left behind. Fortunately, Snake has long been a powerful friend of medicine men. Lairing in the earth, Snake knows much of the Underworld, and he can guard a shaman against harm while his spirit wanders there or elsewhere. This fetish is often used to guard a shaman's body. It normally has the form of a slightly wavy wooden staff or cane ornamented with bits of copper, shell, feathers or other similar objects. However, when it is activated, the staff transforms into a venomous serpent between two and four feet long. If instructed to do so, this snake will guard the shaman's body against all interference. Once activated, the snake remains on duty until the next sunrise or sunset. After this time, it returns to the form of a staff or cane.

[A spirit snake has the following Attributes and Abilities:

Physical: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Dodge Pool: 3; Attack Pool: 5

Willpower 5

Health Levels: OK, Injured (-1), Mauled (-2), Crippled (-5), Dead

Its bite does one health level of damage, and if the bite actually damages the target, the snake's poison does one health level of damage every 10 minutes, up to (eight minus the victim's Stamina) health levels of damage.]

•• Spirit Steed (Gnosis 5)

In the mundane world, a spirit steed resembles a hand-carved and decorated hobbyhorse. Spiritually, though, the spirit steed is a creature of speed and beauty — a powerful horse that travels the Umbral byways with surety. To use this device, the shaman must mount the steed and physically enter the Umbra. Once in the Umbra, the spirit steed becomes a horse-like creature that allows the rider to move at approximately twice normal speed, jumping easily over any obstacle. This steed outruns all but the fastest Umbrood, and it travels long distances without need for rest. Also, unless deliberately misled, it is impossible to become lost when riding a spirit steed to a location the shaman has visited previously. This device is another common item used by

powerful shamans, especially those trained in Central Asia and Siberia.

[Spirit steeds are nearly tireless, loyal horse companions. A spirit steed uses its own energy to empower its travels, and thus is valuable because it does not require any Quintessence. Since the spirit is usually a spirit of travel or horses in any case, the steed garners pleasure from fulfilling its role as a horse. Thus, such steeds can even be ridden by inexperienced characters without any affinity to animals.]

•• Spirit Sword (Gnosis 5)

Many a mage runs afoul of hostile spirits at some point, and a potent weapon makes for a good defense. Properly enchanted, a fetish blade can deter spirits and drain them of their Power.

Of course, a spirit sword need not be an actual, physical blade — only the weapon's spiritual component is important. One common form of Asian spirit sword is made of Chinese copper cash strung together with a silk cord into the form of a sword.

[A spirit sword is simply a weapon that can do aggravated damage to all spirits, even completely immaterial ones. A spirit sword does sword damage (Strength +4) to any spirit it strikes. The blade does aggravated damage to Umbrood, ghosts, zombies (Risen) and even vampires. It can also be used to strike through the Gauntlet and attack any creature in the Umbra, including Garou. If a spirit has no health levels, this weapon does *quadruple* damage to the spirit's Power. Reducing a spirit to zero Power with this weapon destroys the spirit. However, since many Dreamspeakers see spirits as the opposite of the living, the vast majority of spirit blades cannot be used to effectively attack ordinary living beings. When used on living beings these weapons generally inflict Strength +1 lethal damage.

[A few extremely rare spirit swords are made in the form of ordinary weapons that do aggravated damage to all living and ephemeral targets, but such special items must be found — they cannot be made or bought as fetishes by ordinary mages. Some spirit swords have been designed so that even Sleepers can use them, but such weapons are also quite rare.]

••• Storm Whistle (Gnosis 6)

"Whistling up the weather" is not so far off from shamanic tradition. While song and dance may rouse the wind and earth spirits to action, a simple whistle channels and calls to the air much more effectively. This fetish is always made in the form of a whistle, recorder or other such musical instrument. Once activated, the shaman can play a variety of tunes that then produce almost any reasonable weather.

A storm whistle can produce only weather appropriate to the season and location. It cannot cause heat waves during an Alaskan winter or hurricanes in Nebraska, but different tunes can produce winds, storms, rain or drought.



[Using this Whistle requires that the player spend three points of Quintessence or tass. Weather produced by this item generally lasts until the next sunrise or sunset, at which point it fades naturally. This item does not allow the shaman to control or direct the weather precisely. It cannot be used to direct lightning strikes or tornadoes. However, general effects such as roughly controlling the direction of winds are possible.

[This item cannot be used more than once a day in a single location without a risk of producing extreme and unpredictable weather.]

•••• Drum of Madness (Gnosis 6)

Though shamans are often healers and arbiters, some follow a more malevolent path. Certainly, a drum of madness stems from such shamans, for its use cannot be construed as anything more than a device of terror. Almost always appearing as a hand-held drum, a drum of madness seems unassuming enough, at least until a shaman plays it with malicious intent. The reverberations of this drum flow through the minds of surrounding listeners, tugging at their inner demons and awakening manifestations of the most negative aspects of their personalities.

[When a skilled shaman beats a drum of madness and its activation roll succeeds, every person standing within clear earshot (usually around 30 feet) is subjected to its power. Each player must make a Willpower roll with a difficulty of 8, or the affected characters become temporarily insane. This insanity lasts for the next full day, unless the listener botches the Willpower roll, in which case the madness lasts for the next full lunar month. The shaman cannot determine the exact form of madness produced. Each listener will have the flaws and defects in his own personality magnified to such a degree that quirks and eccentricities can become full-blown psychoses. See the list of derangements in *Mage* for further ideas on the types of madness produced by this item. In general, the madness produced by this item is violent and disruptive, with emotional breakdowns, paranoia and severe delusions being common results.]

••••• Death Mask (Gnosis 7)

Worn to let the wearer see through different eyes and into the realms of the inhuman, a death mask's eerie and often gruesome visage is but a small fraction of its true nature. This item always has the appearance of a wooden or metal mask made in the form of the face of a corpse. As a release from the normal constraints of the body and a grim visage of the afterworld, the mask allows communication and contact with the Underworld of ghosts.

Furthermore, the death mask allows a shaman to perform the Orphic journey, to traverse the barriers of worlds and step into the lands of the dead. By diving into a pool of water until reaching a point where no light penetrates, or by walking into a cavern until reaching the depths of blackness, the shaman can liter-

ally walk or swim into the Shadowlands. By climbing back out toward the light, the shaman can even return from death — although the mask's power is insufficient to bring anyone or anything back with the shaman. Deliberately, anyway....

[The wearer of a death mask can see and communicate with all wraiths within his normal line of vision automatically, as long as they are in the Shadowlands. In addition, if the wearer either walks into a large body of water, or goes underground, she may travel into the Shadowlands immediately if the player spends one point of *tass* or Quintessence. Once in the Shadowlands, this mask makes the wearer appear to be a perfectly ordinary wraith. Unless otherwise told, most wraiths will not know that the wearer is actually a living shaman.

[However, working magic in the Shadowlands often gives away the shaman's true identity. See **Beyond the Barrier: The Book of Worlds** (p. 191) for information about working magic in the Shadowlands. To return to the land of the living, the wearer must climb above the ground, such as by climbing stairs or a tree, and the player must spend two points of Quintessence or *tass*.]

Talismans

Talismans are ordinary magical creations that are powered by Quintessence instead of spiritual energy. While fetishes are quite versatile, most items that involve controlling spirits, manipulating the Umbra or traveling into (or through) the Umbra are Talismans.

•• Permanent Spirit Bottle

Arete 3, Quintessence 20, Cost 2

Even the most fearsome of Umbral spirits are wary around the heavily enchanted spirit bottles. Since a cursory physical examination usually cannot tell a simple talen bottle from a more effective version, mages must often experiment to discover the true power of these sorts of spirit bottles. Spirits themselves can usually tell this potent sort of trap from the specialized versions, and they make themselves scarce when these bottles crop up.

A talisman spirit bottle is a more powerful and more durable version of a standard spirit bottle. Unlike ordinary spirit bottles, permanent spirit bottles can hold a vast variety of spirits, including (in some cases) the most powerful Umbrood lords. Using a permanent spirit bottle requires no special preparations, and any such bottle can hold any spirit.

Like "ordinary" spirit bottles, permanent spirit bottles must be altered physically to free the spirit. If a talisman of this type is broken or destroyed, the spirit escapes automatically. All such talismans are designed to be physically reusable, and most take the form of some sort of container with a stopper or lid.

Talisman spirit bottles are potent artifacts, and the secrets of their creation are thought lost with the death

of the Taftâni. Still, they do tend to show up in the oddest places....

[Each time a permanent spirit bottle is used to capture a spirit the cost of this talisman must be paid. However, questioning, bargaining with or freeing the spirit costs no Quintessence. Naturally, just *owning* a bottle of this sort is usually enough to attract some Notoriety.]

•••• Spirit Barrier

Arete 4, Quintessence 25, Cost 4

Designed specifically to ward an area against harmful spirit manifestations, this Talisman usually takes the form of a set of four small silver charms made in the shapes of small gates or doors. When not using them, shamans often wear them as jewelry. To use this item, one of these wards is placed at each corner of a room, house, yard or other region no larger than a single city block. Next, the appropriate ritual is used to activate the device. Once activated, all spirits inside the warded area are driven out, and no new spirits can enter the region for an entire lunar month. No Umbrood, regardless of its power level, can enter a region bounded by these wards. Even Umbrood in physical form are barred from entering. The wards are traditionally placed on or near roads, pathways or walkways to a dwelling. If any of the wards are moved once they are activated, then the protection is negated. Spirits cannot attempt to move these wards, but they can attempt to convince mortals to do so.

[Particularly powerful Umbrood may be able to batter down a spirit barrier, but most of the sorts of spirits that mages deal with will be unable to cross this boundary. Of course, operating this talisman can garner Notoriety, especially if a shaman bars a spirit from its natural home.]

•••• Spirit Door

Arete 4, Quintessence 25, Cost 4

Sleepers would laugh at the idea of an empty doorframe opening into other worlds. Shamans and science-fiction aficionados alike know better. This talisman usually takes the form of a false door in a wall. It appears to be a doorframe surrounding a blank wall instead of a door. A mage activates this talen by singing special chants, performing certain dances near it or by writing certain symbols along the doorframe. Just as the doorframe represents a gateway, it allows passage to the other side — but in this case, the other side of the Gauntlet.

[When activated, a spirit door opens a gateway into the Umbra. Anyone or anything that can fit through the doorway physically can enter or leave the Umbra through it. The portal remains open for a full lunar month, but it can be closed at any time with no additional Quintessence cost by anyone who knows the secret of opening it. Most Dreamspeakers do not leave such doors standing open since doing so can invite the attentions of dangerous Umbrood. Many Dreamspeakers place such doorways in their Sanctums where rending the Gauntlet is not vulgar magic.]

••••• Umbral Horse

Arete 5, Quintessence 32, Cost 8

This powerful talisman is a specially made version of the more common spirit steed fetish (see p. 99). Like the spirit steed, this device takes the form of an elaborately carved and decorated hobbyhorse. When the Dreamspeaker mounts the Umbral horse and utters the correct chant, the steed takes her anywhere in the Umbra or Deep Umbra, almost instantly. In addition, it can carry its rider though the Umbra at almost any speed desired, keeping pace with even the fastest Umbrood. While the person directing the horse must be a shaman, the rider can take along one additional passenger without risking any reduction in speed.

[The Umbral horse is, of course, a rather potent transport, but it is not flawless. Magical wards can stop it, and it cannot pull a shaman out of an area with special exiting requirements. Still, it makes for excellent transport, especially when the shaman and a passenger need to get somewhere in the Umbra in a hurry.]

Lesser Talismans

Lesser talismans are magical aids that help a mage perform a single rote. Unlike an ordinary focus, a lesser talisman is a specially crafted object that allows the user to perform only a single, well-defined rote. A mask that allows the user to change into a polar bear could not also be used to heal the user, or even to allow her to change into a black bear. In power, the lesser talisman is more heavily enchanted than a simple focus, but not quite the equal of a true talisman — a device keyed to make a single Effect easier, rather than a device that holds and invokes an Effect on its own.

Lesser talismans typically reduce the difficulty of their special rote by three. In addition, lesser talismans can be designed to boost one of the user's Spheres by one, but only for purposes of casting that particular rote. For example, a lesser talisman of shapeshifting could allow a mage with Life 3 to shapeshift (which normally requires Life 4). The only limit on this boosting is that the boosted Sphere can still not exceed the mage's Arete (in the previous example, the mage would still need an Arete of four or more). Any mage who is a part of the maker's Tradition can use lesser talismans to reduce the difficulty for a rote. Lesser talismans that actually boost a Sphere must be specially made for the wearer. This property may seem potent, but it's far from the power of a greater talisman, which could conceivably allow a mage to perform Effects far outside the reach of her understanding.

Lesser talisman creation is similar to other forms of talisman enchantment, but somewhat simpler. The mage need only build an object that resonates with the rote's principle characteristics, according to the mage's Tradi-

tional beliefs. A small forked rod may become a dowsing talisman, or a holy symbol could become a focus for Prime energy. The object's natural resonance as a focus increases, making it even better for its form of magic.

In general, lesser talismans take at least a week to create. Part of this week is spent in ritual purification or similar magical activities, depending on the exact nature of the mage's Tradition. Once the object is completed, the mage must then awaken it with a Spirit 3 effect. The awakened spirit of the item functions according to its nature, assisting in magic where the item is used appropriately.

A mage cannot create a lesser talisman for an Effect that she cannot produce herself. To obtain such an item, the mage must have it made for her — though the point is generally moot, since lesser talismans rarely allow a mage to actually perform an effect outside her reach. Lesser talismans can be bought during character creation just like fetishes or greater talismans, but they only cost one Background point per dot.

••• Healing Tube

Shamans often act as healers. Many shamans heal by touching short, narrow metal or bone tubes to their patient's bodies and sucking out the illness. This magical device enables shamans fairly inexperienced with the mysteries of Life to heal others.

[When used on a patient, this device allows shamans with Life 2 to heal any living thing the tube is touching. Each success heals two health levels of damage. Sucking out the illness or injury is part of a fairly elaborate ritual which takes a minimum of 15 minutes to perform, so this device cannot be used during combat or in other rushed and active situations.]

•••• Animal Masks

One common shamanic power is the ability to assume the form of an animal. Fetishes for transforming into animals are almost always masks or costumes made in the form of the desired animal. To use these items, the shaman must actually wear the mask. Other varieties of animal mask used by shamans allow the wearer to use the Ride Animal (Mind 3) or Possess Animal (Mind 4) rites. See the section on Rotes (pp. 87-93) for further details.

Masks

Masks are one of the more common shamanic talismans. While wearing a mask, a shaman can take on another identity, change his shape or even perceive things that are normally imperceptible. Shamans, especially Dreamspeakers, make masks that are talismans, lesser talismans or fetishes. The listings here are small samplings of the vast diversity of the multitudes of masks that they use.

•••• Traveling Drum

Shamans often use drums to induce the trances necessary to enter the spirit world.

This powerful lesser talisman was designed to aid entering the spirit world. One version gives a bonus to all attempts to either step sideways or rend the Gauntlet, as well as granting the mage an additional level in functional Spirit magic to attempt these feats. Another version of this item gives a bonus on all rolls to Untether using either Mind 4 or Mind 5, and a bonus of one dot in Mind to assist these journeys. To use either form of this item, the Dreamspeaker must play certain specific rhythms on the drum quite loudly, often for up to an hour or more. At the end of this time the desired effect occurs (assuming that the roll succeeds, of course). Among many shamanic cultures, the shaman's drum is the true symbol of her power.

Dreamspeakers usually receive their drums from their teachers. Creation of a traveling drum requires both Spirit 3 and Prime 3 — no mean feat, which explains their relative scarcity. Most drums of this type are wide, flat and small enough to fit in one hand. However, any sort of drum may be fashioned into a traveling drum. A few techno-shamans have made traveling drums out of ordinary rock music drums or even from small hand-held electronic drum units.

Merits and Flaws

By their very natures, shamans are frequently oddballs and outcasts. Thus, most shamans have one or more Merits or Flaws. Merits like *Medium*, *Past Life*, *Spirit Sight*, *Spirit Magnet*, and *Spirit Mentor* are quite common. Also, physical deformities and mental illness are extremely prevalent among shamans. In many cultures shamans seek their apprentices among the physically unusual and the insane. A large number of shamans possess Flaws like *Obsession*, *Absent Minded*, *Blind*, *Deaf*, *Transvestite*, *Bard's Tongue*, *Disfigured*, *Deformity*, *Lame* or *One Arm*. However, none of these Merits or Flaws are required. In some cultures, strong, attractive and even heroically proportioned shamans are the norm.

Like all mages, actual Dreamspeakers are relatively rare, and the vast majority of practicing shamans are not Awakened mages. Instead, many shamans are mediums, hedge wizards or ordinary Sleepers with Merits like *Lesser Shaman*, *Medium* or *Spirit Sight*.

Bonus From Props (1-3 point Merit)

You receive a +1 bonus to all of your magic rolls when using props. Many shamans who possess this Merit also have the *Dependence on Props* Flaw.

Communicate with Animals (2 pt Merit)

Through your deep and profound understanding of the spirits within all life, you can communicate with any

normal animal. This communication is not as detailed or exact as ordinary speech, nor does it necessarily involve you actually speaking. Instead, the animal you are communicating with understands you through a combination of posture, facial expressions, smell and speech, while you can understand it on an equally primal level.

Even if the animal noticed such things, you cannot use this ability to ask an animal the license plate number of a car, or the cut of someone's suit. However, most mammals and birds can tell you basic information like how many people passed by, as well as possibly odd details like what these people had eaten recently or if they smelled afraid. To determine the actual degree of communication, roll Charisma + Intuition. Finding out extremely simple information has a difficulty of 4 or 5. However, anything more complex than vague information about recent events, or questions about the animal's own activities, will have a higher difficulty.

Since so few people bother to really attempt to communicate with animals, even wild animals that are not normally interested in humans will usually wish to respond to a mage with this ability. This Merit is largely limited to Dreamspeakers and Verbena, although a few Akashics also know it. (See also the *Beast Speech* Ability in *The Sorcerers Crusade Companion*. By the modern age, of course, speaking with animals is so unusual as to require this Merit or some sort of magic.)

Dual Perception (2 point Merit)

Using your status as an intermediary between the spirit world and the mortal world, you can easily switch your awareness back and forth between these two realms. When using any spirit magic that involves perceiving the spirit world, you can cease using this ability and observe the mortal world at any time. Then, if the duration of the duration of the magic is not yet up, you can continue using it without additional rolls. Also, when you are in the Umbra, you can choose to observe the mortal world instead of the spirit world without needing to make additional rolls. Since this ability is innate, you suffer no disorientation or other penalty associated with switching your perceptions.

Transvestites and contraries often possess *Dual Perception* due to their own dual natures. If you take this Merit in addition to the *Medium* or *Spirit Sight* Merit, you can effectively turn the appropriate Merit on or off at will.

Mastery of Fire (2 point Merit)

Having control over fire and flame is one of the powers traditionally associated with shamans. Many cultures consider fire to be a natural force with a strong connection to the spirit world. As a shaman, you have a closer connection to the powers of fire than most. You are considerably more resistant to damage from fire than most people, and you receive three extra dice to all Stamina rolls to resist damage caused by fire. You can soak fire damage normally. In addition, you also receive

a one-point bonus on all magic rolls to create, destroy or manipulate fire.

Shamanic Authority (2-4 pt Merit)

You are recognized as a true shaman by a select group of people. This Merit carries both significant mundane influence and substantial responsibility. These people (who can be anything from a small, isolated band or tribe, to a local ethnic community in a large American city) aid you in any reasonable fashion that they can. Among other advantages, these people will support you with cash, goods or services. The larger and less isolated the community, the greater the cost of the Merit. Being the shaman for an isolated tribe of 60 people would be worth only two points, whereas being a recognized shaman for an ethnic community of several thousand people living in a major city is worth four points. Your people will aid and support you in a style appropriate to their own resources. If you are living among a small community, you may have a one-room home and regular (if bland) food, plus a marginal income of trinkets and gifts. Your flock will also attempt to protect you and aid you.

However, in return for protection and sustenance, you are expected to act as the spiritual guide and intermediary of your community. You will be expected to heal the sick, contact spirits of the departed, bless the community's members and allies and possibly to curse their enemies. Failure to meet these obligations will result in losing all benefits

from this Merit (at best), and it may even cause the people to turn against you and attempt to find another shaman to cast a curse on you.

Most Dreamspeakers with this Merit live full-time in their community. Those who do not usually have assistants or allies, such as lesser shamans, who help manage the spiritual affairs of the community while the Dreamspeaker is absent. In the vast majority of cases, shamans with this Merit were born and raised in the community to which they minister.

Gift of Tongues (3 point Merit)

All spirits that can communicate with mortals naturally possess the ability to communicate in any language. Like these spirits, you also have the natural ability to transcend language. When speaking with any sentient being (from Earth), you can understand its language as if it were your own.

Due to the limits of the human mind, you can only understand and speak one language at a time. If two people who speak different languages are talking to you at once you can only understand one of them. Using a coincidental Mind 1 Effect can allow you to understand multiple languages at once. Magically augmenting this gift to allow speech in multiple different tongues simultaneously is, of course, vulgar.

The *Gift of Tongues* Merit works only for conversation held in person, where you and the person you are speaking



to can actually hear each other's unaltered voices. You cannot use this ability to read another language or to communicate by telephone, microphone or any other electronic or mechanical medium.

Spirit Sight (4 point Merit)

You can see and hear all varieties of spirits, changelings, wraiths and similar entities. This Merit provides all of the advantages granted by the Merit *Medium* (*The Book of Shadows*, page 36). Like the *Medium* Merit, *Spirit Sight* reduces the difficulties of all Spirit magic by two. Nevertheless, this ability is a mixed blessing. Seeing these beings is not a choice; it is a normal part of your vision. You cannot help but see them. Being yelled at by an irate wraith who is shaking her fist in your face can be extremely distracting if you are attempting to hold a conversation with a Sleeper, and it's even worse if you are driving a car in bad weather!

Many shamans have this Merit, and shamans often look for people with *Spirit Sight* as potential students. Unfortunately, most Sleepers with this Merit conceal it poorly and instead end up in asylums.

Shamanic Traditionalist (4 or 6 point Merit)

Though you are a member of one of the Traditions, you had a shamanic Awakening, a calling through the spirits that took you to death's door and thence to realization of the single world. Perhaps a silicon spirit infected you before you joined the Virtual Adepts, or maybe you fell ill under the eye of a spirit of knowledge and then came through the fire to join the Order of Hermes. Whatever the case, you have some shamanic understanding combined with your Tradition ties.

With the four-point version of this Merit, you can take the Totem Background. You likely have a totem spirit — not necessarily an animal, if you're a modern shaman — and you can speak with it just like a Dreamspeaker. You may choose to make Spirit your specialty Sphere in lieu of your Tradition's normal specialty.

With the six-point version of *Shamanic Traditionalist*, you may have a totem, and you get Spirit as a specialty in *addition* to your normal Tradition Sphere! You don't start with an extra dot of Spirit (though you should certainly put one of your starting dots there), but it's easier for you to improve with experience points.

Obviously, the *Shamanic Traditionalist* Merit is pointless for Dreamspeakers, who get all of its advantages already. Similarly, it's too far afield mystically to be appropriate for Technocrats.

Lesser Shaman (6 point Merit)

Only Sleepers can take this Merit. Lesser shamans make up the majority of shamans found in the world today. While they have considerable power, they are considerably less able than even the weakest Dreamspeaker. Still, the power to speak with the spirits

is formidable, even if the will behind it is not Awakened. Imbued with a sort of calling by the spirits, a shaman of this sort still has many spiritual powers, though he ultimately must gain such from the spirits, not from an internal wellspring of enlightenment.

Lesser shamans all possess the Merit *Spirit Sight* at no additional cost. In addition, they can summon and banish spirits, raise or lower the Gauntlet (up to two points, but never below two or above 10) over a small area, and awaken the spirits inherent in objects or places.

Performing any magical actions requires long and elaborate rituals for a lesser shaman. Without the force of Awakened will, the shaman must rely on careful rituals and the good will of the spirits. Such rituals generally last between two and three hours. At the end of a ritual, the lesser shaman's player makes a roll using Charisma + Rituals (with a difficulty of no less than 6) and spends a point of Willpower. Once summoned or awakened, spirits may do as they will, but temporary actions like raising or lowering the Gauntlet only last until the next sunrise or sunset.

A number of Dreamspeakers who are connected to a tribe, band or other community have one or more lesser shamans who watch over the community while they are away. Any Sleeper who possesses the *Spirit Sight* Merit can be trained to be a lesser shaman. However, this training process often takes years. Still, the benefits of having shamanic acolytes often outweigh the investment costs in time and effort, especially because a few rare students may actually Awaken. Dreamspeakers generally know how to train apprentices (though how *well* the shaman teaches is a function of the Instruction Ability), and Verbena have been known to train Sleepers in this fashion as well.

Spirit-Trained (1-2 pt Flaw)

Spirit-trained mages have had no mortal teachers. Instead, one or more spirits select them as an appropriate candidate for Awakening. Sometimes spirits select mages to act as their agents in the mundane world, however, spirits Awaken a few mages for no readily discernable reason.

Awakening without mortal aid is much more difficult. The only aid and advice you received was from the voices in your head, voices which you may have at first believed were signs of growing insanity. Even more problematic is the fact that the primary information you possess about other mages (and the supernatural in general) comes from spirits. While some spirits are quite well-intentioned and helpful, all Umbrood are fundamentally inhuman and their perspective on people and events is not a human one. Anyone trained by a spirit is likely to have some rather unusual ideas about the supernatural. Because of your unusual training, you receive a free dot in either Cosmology or Enigmas, but you cannot begin play with more than two dots in any Lore. Also, you must take

the Totem or Familiar Background instead of the Mentor Background (if you have a Mentor, it's a spirit). Spirit-trained mages in the First World often also have the *Mental Patient* Flaw, and they are usually very poorly connected to other mages. A lack of traditional training makes it hard to relate, after all.

Being a *Spirit-Trained* mage with significant misinformation is a two-point Flaw. Shamans who are trained by spirits with a strong ulterior motive often have very unusually and significantly incorrect views about other mages and the supernatural. Dreamspeakers believe that spirits Awaken such mages to serve as tools for a specific purpose. In one instance, a mage was Awakened and told that a certain Node was becoming so unstable that it would unleash a vast magical catastrophe unless it was destroyed. The mage used her magic to attempt to destroy it, and he was badly injured by the Garou who protected the Node. It turned out that the Node was perfectly normal, but it happened to be the dwelling of a powerful spirit inimical to the mage's patron.

Spiritual Duty (1-4 point Flaw)

You owe allegiance to a powerful spirit. This Flaw is often possessed by Dreamspeakers who also have the *Spirit-Trained* Flaw, though any mage who has dealt with spirits extensively may take it. While you are not always at this spirit's beck and call, it asks you for favors or assistance frequently. This relationship may be one of mutual aid, in which case you can take the spirit as one of your allies. However, your connection to the spirit could be one-way or even unwilling. Perhaps you swore allegiance to it in return for it saving your life when you were lost in the Umbra. Alternatively, maybe you attempted to bargain with it for some service, and it tricked you into swearing eternal servitude.

Spirits who are willing to trick mortals into serving them often do not have the most pleasant motives for doing so. Such spirits also rarely care if the servants survive the tasks asked of them. Add one point to this Flaw (to a maximum of four points) if your service to the spirit is a result of trickery or coercion. The rest of the value of this Flaw depends on the exact frequency and nature of the services it requires of you.

Minor services of an infrequent and usually non-dangerous nature are worth only one point. More frequent, dangerous, expensive or elaborate services are worth additional points. Remember that unlike mortals, spirits have odd and sometime inexplicable desires. Sometimes a spirit will request relatively ordinary forms of aid, such as protecting a family or a location. However, these services could easily include regular offerings, which could involve anything from flowers to cash to animal sacrifice.

A mage who takes this Flaw will have a long-term relationship with this spirit, so the Storyteller should endeavor to give the spirit a deep personality, including

complex wants and needs. Of course, most spirits are, by their nature, fairly straightforward — but a spirit may have reasons to achieve its goals through intermediaries or in ways that a human wouldn't approach the same goal.

Transvestite (2 point Flaw)

Since roles and perceptions have power, shamans often break those stereotypes to gain special insight. Gender roles are only one of the more obvious stereotypes to break....

You are a transvestite. Your chosen mode of dress and behavior is that of your opposite gender. Transvestite men dress and act as their own culture's idea of women, and vice versa. In many traditional cultures, including a number of highly patriarchal Asian cultures, transvestites have a specific social role (often as performers or holy people). While most people in these cultures regard transvestites as odd, they are also respected. Unfortunately, in Western Europe and North America, transvestites are often regarded as deviants, oddities and freaks.

Transvestites, known among traditional cultures by many local names like *Berdache*, are seen by many as intermediaries between men and women, just as shamans act as intermediaries between humans and spirits. This intermediate position makes transvestites natural candidates for becoming shamans. Some Central Asian shamans will take only transvestites as students!

While many transvestites are happy with their intermediate role, some actually wish to physically assume the other gender. Today shamans can achieve this desire through either powerful Life Effects or medical solutions like hormones and surgery. However, so drastic a step not a necessary part of this role. A transvestite's functions as a shaman or magician are more important as a matter of changing perceptions than as a function of physical characteristics.

Shamanic transvestites, who are heavily indoctrinated into their roles (sometimes with powerful spiritual taboos), have great difficulty pretending to be "normal" members of their physical gender. Transvestites who attempt to dress and act like ordinary members of their physical gender increase the difficulty of all Social rolls by two. Transvestites who wish to avoid both the difficulty of acting "normal" and the problems most sexual minorities experience in Western Culture usually attempt to dress and act so that they pass as members of their chosen gender. Doing so typically involves a Charisma + Expression (Crossdressing) roll (difficulty 7) to pull off a reasonable guise, and it is resisted by onlookers with their Perception + Alertness or Empathy.

Mental Patient (2 or 5 point Flaw)

Sometime before or during your Awakening, you ran afoul of the mental health authorities. Seeing and talking to beings that no one else can perceive, and hearing voices that may tell you frightening and disturbing things, is far outside the paradigm of most First-World Sleepers. Anyone who does such things *must* be crazy!

Because you seemed delusional and incoherent, you were locked up as a possible danger to yourself or others. Since schizophrenia is the most common diagnosis for such problems, you may even have been on powerful antipsychotic drugs for a time. Worse still, because of Progenitor influence in the mental health community, some of these drugs can even hinder a mage's magical abilities.

If you managed to convince the officials that you are no longer a danger to yourself or others and you were released, this Flaw is worth only two points. However, if you actually escaped from a mental institution and are on the run from the authorities, then the Flaw is worth five points.

Even if you were legally released from care, the modern mental health system does not consider an illness like schizophrenia curable. Anyone who has ever been institutionalized against his will has this fact noted in his records. Prospective employers, landlords and similar personnel usually look askance at anyone who was "crazy." Also, some minor Technocracy functionaries keep track of mental patients who look like they might develop magical power. The Technocracy often considers such mages to be potential Marauders.

The discrimination and problems for "mental cases" are much worse if you were not released. Escaped mental patients are regarded in much the same light as escaped convicts. Most people see them as little better than dangerous animals. Everyone, from the police to the general public, will consider you to be a potential killer, even if you have no history of violence. In this age of nation-wide databases, any background-check using your name, social security number or fingerprints will reveal your status.

Dependence On Props (2-6 point Flaw)

While all mages must use foci to work their magic, shamanism often focuses on highly ritualistic traditions. Therefore, some shamans have additional requirements on top of their foci. Unlike foci that vary from Sphere to Sphere, props must be used for all Spheres.

Regardless of the specific type of prop, you can work magic only while using your chosen prop. Props like crossdressing and being able to work magic only while standing above (or below) ground level, are only two-point Flaws. More extensive props — like being able to work magic only while under the influence of a mild drug (which would subtract one die from all Dexterity and Perception rolls) or only when wearing a special costume — are three-point Flaws. Being able to work magic only while sitting on a specially made stool, or while riding an intricately carved hobbyhorse, are six-point Flaws. All costumes and other physical props must be made according to special ritual requirements. These items are elaborately decorated, often with shell, copper, iron, feathers and bells. None of these garments or items can pass as ordinary First-World garments, furniture or toys.

Distinctive Shamanic Appearance (3 point Flaw)

Either through magical prohibitions or personal choice, you appear very unusual. Some mages with this Flaw intentionally crossdress in a manner that makes it impossible to pass as a member of the other gender (such as a bearded man wearing a dress). Others continually wear traditional shamanic costumes covered with fringe, shells and metal ornaments. This Flaw also covers Techno-shamans with spiked mohawks and multiple piercings, or people covered with large obvious tattoos, especially on their face or hands.

While the exact nature of your *Distinctive Shamanic Appearance* is highly variable, the results are all similar. Most middle-class citizens of the First World will regard you as a freak and an outcast. Except for a few professions, you will have difficulty finding any but the most menial work. People will stare at you, and police and security guards are much more likely to harass you. In most cases, you will experience a difficulty penalty of two to all Social rolls relating to normal interactions with mainstream society.

In some cases, members of eccentric subcultures dress and act in a similar fashion. Such people are generally quite favorably inclined to you. However, all members of these subcultures experience the same social problems that you do.

There are also artistic and bohemian subcultures where you can be accepted, but even they are likely to regard you as somewhat odd. Essentially, if you take this Flaw, normal social interactions will become more difficult, and you will be extremely noticeable.

Spiritually Noticeable (3 pt Flaw)

Only mages who possess either the *Medium* or *Spirit Sight* Merit can take this Flaw. Spirits automatically notice that mages with this Flaw can always perceive them. Unlike the *Spirit Magnet* Merit or Flaw, *Spiritually Noticeable* mages are known to be able to interact easily with spirits. While most spirits will ignore you, wraiths who need aid in the mortal world, nature spirits who are upset with environmental destruction and odd spirits who merely want to talk to a human will flock to you. These spirits may be annoyed, or they may be honestly friendly, but they all want something from you.

While having spirits frequently hitting you up for favors can be annoying, having them do so when you are involved in some potentially hazardous activity can be extremely dangerous. Many mages with this Flaw either ward their dwellings against spiritual intrusions or make deals with one or more spirits to act as guardians.

Trance Requirement (3 pt Flaw)

In order to use one of your Spheres of magic, you must enter a deep and moderately long trance. The trance must last a minimum of 15 minutes. You cannot use the chosen



Sphere in any way, including conjunctural magic, without entering a trance. You can enter the trance though dancing, drumming, taking euphoric drugs or deep meditation. However, while in the trance, you are completely unaware of the outside world. If someone shakes you and attempts to get your attention, you must succeed in a Perception + Awareness roll with a difficulty of 8 to notice the interruption.

Even if you overcome the need for foci with your trance Sphere, the need to enter a trace remains. Fortunately, to most Sleepers, someone in a trance induced by mediation or self-hypnosis merely appears to be napping. Similarly, going into trance through dancing can be easily done at any party or nightclub. While dancing, you will usually avoid bumping into others, but you will still be completely oblivious to the outside world.

Contrary (5 pt Flaw)

You are one of the oddest and most enigmatic types of shaman, a contrary. Contraries attempt to live their lives in ways diametrically opposed to the ordinary fashion. Most say exactly the opposite of what they mean and attempt to live in reverse by sitting the wrong way in chairs, traveling only in the hottest part of the day, eating at unusual times, attempting to pass outrageous lies for the truth or speaking only in riddles. Many also dress as the other gender (though players gain no additional points for doing so).

Contraries are sacred clowns and fools whose existence helps to show that reality is not as solid and immutable as most Sleepers believe. Not all contraries are magicians — they are social outlets, showing the reverses of “normal” behavior. However, their dedication to change and opposition to static behavior certainly bolsters the Awakened insights of contrary mages. As a result, they gain an unusual level of magical power. When a contrary acts appropriately, reduce the difficulty of all magic rolls by one. Also, given how oddly they normally act, using their foci to perform magic often seems entirely in character. A contrary may even take contrary behavior as a focus for a particular Sphere — often Mind or Spirit.

Because contraries’ magic is highly tied to their unusual behavior, they must be careful to always uphold their diametric actions. If a contrary ever ceases to act in an appropriate manner, increase the difficulty of all magic rolls by two. This penalty continues until the contrary resumes diametric behavior for a full scene.

In modern Western culture, many people assume that a contrary is either insane or exceedingly annoying and confusing. Some contraries work as entertainers of various sorts, but holding ordinary jobs is usually impossible. The Technocracy is especially wary of contrary mages, assuming they are all potential Marauders. However, most contraries have no actual magical power, so contraries are usually just watched, not actively harassed.

Playing a contrary is not something to be undertaken lightly. Always saying the opposite of what you mean, only answering direct questions with another question or spouting long nonsense rhymes is difficult to play, and it may well annoy the Storyteller and the other players. It is best if you talk to your Storyteller about playing such a character, and that you are certain you can do it correctly.

New Background: Totem

One extremely common ability among shamans of all sorts is having a close tie to some totemic spirit. Many shamans, including both Dreamspeakers and lesser shamans, have totems. On the shaman's side, the totem offers advice, wisdom and assistance. On the spirit's side, the shaman acts as a living intermediary for the totem, and he gifts the totem with power through adherence to the totem's beliefs and patterns.

No shaman can have more than one totem spirit. While it is possible for a shaman to acquire a totem later in life, most shamans acquire their totem spirits either during their Awakening, or shortly afterwards, while their Mentors are training them. Since the totem relationship is intensely personal, the totem of a student may be entirely different from that of his master. Rarely, a Dreamspeaker is Awakened without the assistance of a mortal mentor and is entirely trained by a totem spirit that contacts her in a vision. Such an individual should take both the Totem Background and the *Spirit-Trained* Flaw.

Like the Talisman Background, every level bought in Totem costs two Background or freebie points.

Dreamspeakers can take any of the totem spirits normally taken by Garou or any of the other changing Breeds, as well as having some of their own. (See *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*, *The Werewolf Players Guide* and *Axis Mundi* for further information about Garou totems.) Verbena sometimes (though rarely) take a totem, and a few odd Virtual Adepts are known to consort with more modern spirits. Most other mages consider totems nothing more than abstractions, and, in any case, only Dreamspeakers usually have the spiritual fortitude to make favorable deals with a potential totem.

An alliance with a totem spirit is somewhat different for mages than for Garou and the other changing breeds. All Garou who are members of the same pack share the same totem. However, the essence of being a shaman is being a solitary traveler into the Umbra. Therefore, Dreamspeakers and other shamans have personal totems.

Acquiring a totem is a complex and difficult process, during which the mage enters or otherwise contacts the Umbra and searches for a powerful spirit to be her patron. The shaman must convince the spirit of his

favorable intentions and offer up something so that the spirit will listen to his petition. The spirit may choose to listen to the shaman, or it may dismiss him. The shaman then has the choice of renewing the petition later with a new gift or seeking out a different spirit. Once the spirit listens to the shaman's petition, it usually requires a special service to cement the shaman's allegiance. Finally, a binding oath is sworn, and the shaman promises to uphold the spirit's ways while the spirit, in return, gifts the shaman with some of its powers. This is no simple exchange. Rather, the process is a melding of the two, as the shaman literally takes on some of the spirit's aspect.

In addition to the bans and taboos placed on others who ally with a totem, totem spirits sometimes ask Dreamspeakers for aid and assistance with various endeavors. If this aid is infrequent, or asked only in return for specific services performed by the totem, then the player gains no points for it. However, a more frequent requirement for service does allow the Dreamspeaker to acquire the *Spiritual Duty* Flaw.

In addition to specific abilities granted by each individual totem, the points spent in the Totem Background "purchase" specific abilities for the mage's totem. It is important to remember that each individual totem spirit is only a partial aspect of the overall spiritual archetype. Any number of mages can share the same totem, but each spirit is a completely separate spiritual manifestation of the same archetype. In practice, this statement means that two Dreamspeakers could each have the same totem, and the totem could have completely different powers for each. The only constants lie in the spirit's basic personality and motives, as well as the type of aid and innate abilities they provide.

All Shamanic totems start out with 10 points to divide between Willpower, Rage and Gnosis, and 10 points of Power. Also, all Shamanic totems receive the Charms: Airt Sense and Reform, as well as the ability to speak with the shaman. Select the additional characteristics of the mage's totem from the Totem Background Chart. The cost listed refers to the freebie-point cost of the Power. Since one dot of Totem costs two freebie points, spending four points would give the Dreamspeaker a two-point totem.

Cost	Power
1	Per 6 additional points in Willpower, Rage, or Gnosis
1	Per 10 additional points of Power
1	Totem can almost always rapidly find the Shaman
1	Totem is respected by other Umbrood
1	Per Charm possessed (except Materialize)
1	Per Innate Abilities the totem grants to the Shaman
2	Totem can Materialize

Totems can possess any of the Charms listed in **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** or one of its supplements, or in **image: The Ascension** or **The Book of Mirrors**.

The totem's Innate Abilities are listed with the totem. When converting totems from **Werewolf: The Apocalypse**, disregard the listed Background Cost and total up the number of Innate Abilities or boosted Attributes granted by the totem and add them into the cost of the totem. There are also several totem spirits that are usually unique to shamans.

Horse (2 Innate Abilities)

Horse is the trusty and fierce steed that carries the shaman into the Umbra and throughout its vast expanses. Unlike mortal horses, the Shamanic Horse has eight legs. In addition to being a tireless traveler, Horse is a fierce warrior and attempts to defend its allies from harm. Horse grants some portion of its powers to its allies. Anyone with Horse as a totem receives an additional dot of Intimidation, and is able to run as fast as a galloping horse over any terrain in the Umbra.

Horse is especially common among Dreamspeakers trained in Siberia and Central Asia, but it is quite widely known.

Ban: Horse is fierce and independent and expects its allies to behave in a similar fashion. Shamans with Horse as their totem may never act in a cowardly fashion and may never abandon their comrades or allies in battle. Also, while shamans with this totem may sacrifice or otherwise kill horses if necessary, abusing a horse or treating one without respect earns the wrath of this totem.

Bird Mother (3 Innate Abilities)

The Bird Mother is an enormous bird with long, hooked claws, iron feathers and a razor-sharp curving iron beak. The Bird Mother takes the spirits of the departed to the land of the dead. As part of her Awakening, the Bird Mother also takes her Dreamspeaker allies to the land of the dead and hangs their souls on a tree, where they are devoured by spirits and then carefully reassembled by the Bird Mother. During the terrifying and lengthy ordeal the shaman's body lies in a coma, while the shaman's spirit learns the mysteries of life and death.

The Bird Mother is grim and unforgiving as befits a spirit strongly associated with death and the dead, but she is also compassionate and will reward selfless acts which result in lives being saved or deaths being made more dignified. Shamans with this totem are expected to act as intermediaries between the land of the living and the land of the dead. As such, many of them have spent a consid-

erable amount of time in the Shadowlands. Shamans with this totem gain a -1 difficulty modifier to all rolls to either heal the living or to summon, contact, or visit the spirits of the dead. All Shamans with this totem receive two dots in Wraith Lore. In addition, the mark of Bird Mother shows the shaman as a friend to ghosts and the dead. The shaman's player gains three extra dice in all Social dealings with wraiths.

Ban: Shamans with this totem must heal any sick or injured people who come to them for aid, comfort any dying people they encounter and aid wraiths visiting the Skinlands, if the ghost's purposes are moral and good.

Shaman (4 Innate Abilities)

This is one of the rarest and most powerful totems available to Dreamspeakers. Many shamans assume that this Incarna is the spirit of an ancient and powerful shaman. This shaman may be a revered tribal ancestor, or even a figure from legend like the Finnish shaman, Vainamoinen. Regardless of this being's identity, its Dreamspeaker ally gains the equivalent of a two-point Mentor (additional points spent on this totem can be used to raise this Mentor rating). Also, mages who have Shaman as their patron receive an extra dot in both Cosmology and Enigmas due to the vast wisdom it imparts.

Shaman is a very demanding totem, frequently asking services of the Shaman, but offering much wisdom and many secrets in return. Dreamspeakers who take the Shaman totem must also take the *Spiritual Duty* Flaw. The value in this Flaw must be at least one less than the spirit's granted Mentor level — possibly more. Depending on the exact personality of the shaman, this totem can be everything from a wise old master who asks much but provides commensurate rewards to an eccentric contrary who answers questions with riddles and requests that its ally perform seemingly meaningless tasks. However, in all cases, the more this totem gives, the more it asks of its Dreamspeaker ally. While no one knows for sure, some Dreamspeakers claim that many Dreamspeaker Oracles of Spirit ultimately become a part of this totem.

Ban: Allies of the Shaman totem must always aid other Dreamspeakers in need. Also, Shaman protects the world from evil and deranged mages of all types. Allies of Shaman must always oppose any Nephandi or Marauders that they encounter. Shamans whose spirits have persisted long enough to become a part of this totem do so because of their unwavering dedication to their Shamanic duties. They expect their mortal allies to show a similar level of dedication.

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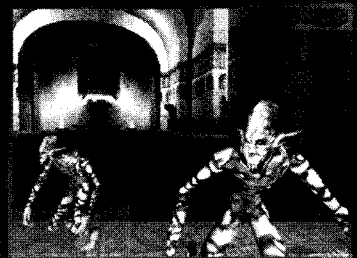
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