

UNKNOWN ARMIES

TO GO



A CAMPAIGN OF MYTHIC ASCENSION
BY GREG STOLZE



I MAY NOT HAVE GONE WHERE I INTENDED TO GO



BUT I THINK I HAVE ENDED UP WHERE I INTENDED TO BE

photo by John Tyas
background painting by Matthew Harold

TO



A CAMPAIGN OF MYTHIC ASCENSION BY GREG STOLZE



GO



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SECOND EDITION NOTE: ALL PAGE REFERENCES TO THE UNKNOWN ARMIES RULEBOOK USE THE SECOND EDITION. IF YOU DON'T HAVE THE SECOND EDITION, WE REALLY, REALLY URGE YOU TO GET IT. COMPARED TO THE FIRST EDITION, THAT BOOK WALKS ON WATER.

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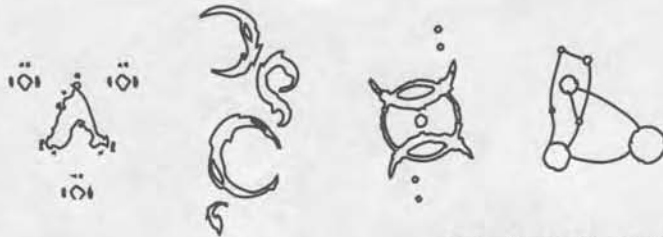
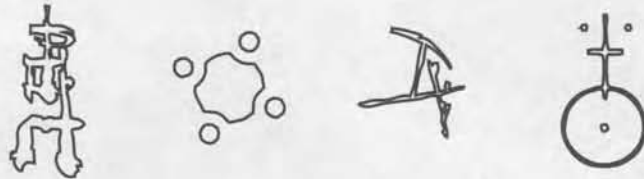


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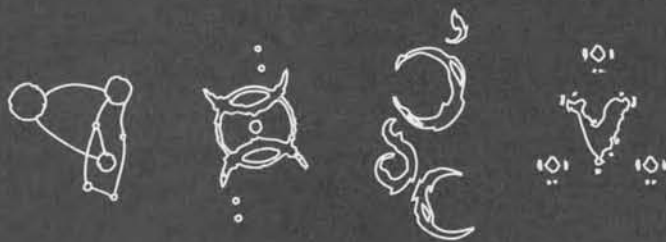
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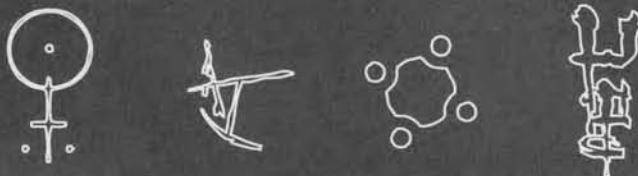
IMPORTANT NOTE

We didn't have room in this book to include the Gambler avatar description, which is used by an NPC named Fortuna on p. 57 of the Las Vegas chapter. Instead, you can download the complete Gambler text as an Adobe Acrobat document from either www.Atlas-Games.com or www.Unknown-Armies.com.





CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION



Mak Attax has been around for about ten years. It's got over 400 members now, but it started out with just three. So on average, we'll say it's had 200 members every year it's existed. No, we'll be conservative and say 150.

A hundred and fifty people a year, for ten years. Some of those people are full time employees putting in 40 hour weeks, but most are (or were) doing part-time work. So . . . to pull a number out of thin air . . . ten hours a week average? Sound about right, for a median Mak Attaxer? Too high? How about eight hours a week? Two four-hour shifts. That's pretty reasonable, once you factor in all the poseurs who quit the restaurant after a month but stayed on the mailing list.

Let's do the math. Ten years, 52 weeks a year, eight hours a week, multiplied by 150 people . . . all in all, it comes out to 624,000 hours.

But that's just grunt work, and magickally-aware occult sophisticate types are notoriously disdainful toward ordinary hard work. What's Mak Attax been up to magickally?

Hm . . . well, the situation there is even more specialized and specific and resistant to general analysis. But what the heck. Let's assume that 10% of the members of Mak Attax are adepts dumping charges. There are all kinds of adepts doing all kinds of magick, and some charge easy (dipsomancy, anyone?) while some charge hard. But it's probably safe to assume that the adept members are passing out an average of two minor charges a week. If those charges have to go through various non-adept members, there's probably some leakage as people goof up the ritual, or some waste as people get two charges and use one to pass the other on . . . so let's just factor that in as 50% waste, it makes the math easy. We'll assume that the adepts of Mak Attax are averaging a Special Order every week.

Ten years times 52 weeks times fifteen adepts is . . . 7,800 minor charges. It's not the equivalent of 780 significant charges, or 78 major charges. I mean, you could turn 78 major charges into 7,800 minor charges, but it only

goes one way. So it's not *really* the equivalent.

(By the time he died, Dugan Forsythe — arguably the most powerful archmage of the twentieth century — had barely fired off two dozen major charges. But it's not the same thing. Not really.)

Still, they're impressive numbers. 624,000 hours of work. 7,800 magick charges.

Doing what?

"Bringing about a magickal renaissance" is the stock answer, but it doesn't explain much. The Safe and Happy New Year was nice, it was slick and impressive, but monkey-wrenching the work of 50 terrorists doesn't sound like much of a payoff for that much labor and effort and belief and sheer *energy*.

For ten years, Mak Attax has sowed its seeds, never knowing what it was really planting.

Now a few people have realized it's harvest time. The question is: Who will reap?

WHAT'S GOING ON?

Magick energy forms patterns. That is its nature. If spilled, it runs downhill until it forms a metaphor.

Mak Attax has been dumping magick for ten years, and it has finally pooled in a pattern — a pattern formed, in part, by a man who never even heard of Mak Attax.

In 1999, a man named Simon Diulio tried to ascend into the Statosphere, embodying the archetype of "The Terrorist." (His attempt is chronicled in "Fly To Heaven," an adventure in the collection *One Shots*.) Maybe he failed, maybe he succeeded. It doesn't really matter now.

What matters is, as part of his attempt he hijacked a plane, made it into a microcosm of the United States and a symbolic human body. His plan was to crash the plane into the heart of America (which, for his money, was Chicago, Illinois) while killing a bunch of people in the "heart" of the plane. He put a lot of energy and thought into this and — more importantly, perhaps — he broadcast it live over the World Wide Web while he was doing it.

People saw it. The plane dripped blood and the passengers became mysteriously synchronized and unnatural phenomena occurred, all captured by his handy webcam. (Or not. It's possible that the PCs in the scenario smashed his camera or stopped him before he could perform his ritual. If you need an explanation for why no one's heard of this, there you go.)

What matters is, he made Chicago into America's heart, symbolically and magickally.

That definition gave focus to a lot of loose energy that had been coursing through the U.S., courtesy of Mak Attax' ten years and thousands of charges. Like a seed crystal, like the sugar on the string when you're making hard candy, that single element shaped and brought forth a much larger pattern. Once there was a heart, there could be a throat, and a navel and all of the other seven chakras.

A "chakra" is a center of mystic energy within the human body. Some forms of mystic yoga believe enlightenment is attained when they are activated in order. See, there's this serpent of mystical energy, called shakti or Kundalini, that normally is coiled around the root (or Muladhara) chakra near the groin. If awakened, the Kundalini serpent climbs through seven chakras until it hits the crown (or Sahasrara) chakra, fusing the individual human consciousness with the larger cosmic consciousness.

The USA has developed chakras, and the shakti — fueled by those thousands of Mak Attax charges and thousands of Mak Attax hours of effort — is going to race across the nation, manifesting at seven cities and aligning individuals with the Invisible Clergy.

Most people on Mak Attax have no clue what they have wrought. The Moks on the Feng Vespucci discussion forum have theorized that something like this might happen, but Erica Fisher (see p. 15) has had the dream that *showed* her it *is* happening. The Kundalini serpent is going to pass through seven Mak Attax operations, starting in Los Angeles, passing through Chicago and ending up somewhere



on the east coast. But she doesn't know *exactly* which cities it's going through. She believes, however, that if she can follow along with the pulse and contact it at every station, it will harmonize her more fully with the True King archetype. She believes that by the time it reaches its destination, it may have made her the perfect embodiment of the True King on earth.

She's both right and wrong. She's right about the pulse having the power to harmonize her with the statosphere. She's just wrong about winding up as Godwalker.

If she can harness the power of the pulse, she'll ascend and *replace* the True King.

Dermott Arkane (currently going by the alias "Dean Matterkros"), the Godwalker and would-be usurper of the Messenger, has also realized the power of the pulse. Its promise is enough to lure him out into the open, where he's vulnerable to attack — but also where he could potentially steal the power he needs to ascend.

OVERVIEW

The struggle to ride America's Kundalini has two obvious sides, and one hidden one. The obvious sides are Dean Matterkros and Erica Fisher.

Dermott/Dean is a Godwalker, first introduced in the story "Legacy" in *Unknown Armies*. The Messenger in the Invisible Clergy, who (naturally enough) does not want to be replaced, opposes him. That means that every Messenger avatar in the world is trying to stop Matterkros — whether they realize it or not. The most rabid of Matterkros' opponents is Eugene LaRue, who covets the position of Godwalker but has no ambitions to ascend. (Though who's to say that wouldn't change once he was at the top of the heap?)

In addition to the supernatural enmity of the Messenger, Matterkros has also made a powerful temporal enemy in Alex Abel: It's quite possible that Matterkros' meddling kept Abel from ascending himself. Abel knows it,

and he'd be perfectly happy to have Matterkros killed by The New Inquisition, his private army of crooks and head cases.

Between the physical resources of Alex Abel and the metaphysical resources of an Invisible Clergy member, it would seem that Matterkros doesn't have a chance in hell. But he has some allies as well. The mortal cult around him is shrinking, but it's still there. He has several proxy children who shield him from physical harm, magickal detection and (to some extent) the metaphysical perils of breaking his taboos. He has allies in the Invisible Clergy as well as an enemy: The Rebel has a minor interest in seeing any staid old clergy member usurped. More concretely, the True King is aware that Matterkros' ascension precludes Fisher's, and is therefore supporting Matterkros' bid in self defense. (The True King and the Rebel make strange allies, to be sure.)

Fisher herself is unaware of her potential ascension, but that very ignorance protects her: She has been faithful, and it is not in the True King's nature to destroy or corrupt her without treason as a pretext. His plan, instead, is to strengthen her enough that she can serve him well, but not so much that she can replace him as the True Executive.

The Fool archetype, however, has no such compunctions. There is a long and powerful association between the King and the Fool, and the Fool is loath to give that up. The current ascended Fool has a good sense that Fisher's replacement archetype for the True King will be far less tolerant of foolishness, so it has sent one of its agents, Lataetia Ludophis, to screw up Fisher's ascension bid by allying with her. (After all, you don't want a fool for an ally, do you?)

The Rebel would like to see Fisher succeed — in fact, he'd rather see the True King replaced than the Messenger, but he's hedging his bets by helping both usurpers. The Necessary Servant is backing Erica's bid as well, in its own subtle way, having foreseen a stronger future for its avatars in the reigns of the True

Executive. The Messenger wants her to succeed for the same reason the True King wants Matterkros to succeed: Self-protection. Added to this compliment of allies is Mak Attax: While it's not as powerful as TNI, nor as focused as Matterkros' followers, it does have the advantage of being the superstructure through which the great charge flows.

Then there's the third man.

Mitch Geddakis is not an executive, not an avatar, not a conspirator. He is no hidden mover behind the scenes. He's a trucker. He's never heard of the Invisible Clergy and he does not practice magick. But he's seen a few things. By sheer dumb luck, he's crossed paths with the unnatural a couple times, and there's an out-

side chance that he could wind up ascending as an entirely new archetype. The Rebel wouldn't like it, but the Messenger and True King sure would. But he's an outside bet at best. Maybe.

THE SEVEN CITIES

The seven chakra cities are as follows, along with an overview of what form the shakti charge takes in each.

MULADHARA — LOS ANGELES

Muladhara is the earth chakra, the seat of survival and material existence. Its color is red, and it is the home of the sleeping Kundalini serpent.

HOLDING KUNDALINI

It's possible that a PC could end up holding one of the seven shakti charges. In fact, it's very likely indeed. As a good GM, you're probably wondering what your options are when this happens.

The strict option is that it can be passed on like a hot potato, but only one of the three candidates (Matterkros, Fisher or Geddakis) can actually *receive* it. If anyone else is given the charge, it simply hums within that person, focusing the attention of the Invisible Clergy on him or her until s/he passes it on. Passing it to one of the three attunes that person, and then the shakti is released to race down the road to the next station. Passing it on to someone other than one of the potential IC members means *that* person gets the attention of the IC until the charge gets passed again.

What passes on the charge? Giving someone your blessing. This can be a simple matter of laying one's hand on the blessed one's brow and thinking holy thoughts. Or it can be passed on with the words "I anoint you the True King" or "I acknowledge thy message" or whatever. "Bless you" would do it too. Remember that if someone sneezes nearby.

What happens to you before you pass it on? You become the focus for uncertainty. Wildly improbable things — good *and* bad — happen to you and around you. The IC is watching and fighting and trying to warp your will to their ends, but for all their power over circumstance, they cannot overcome free human will. They can't *make* you bless someone. They can't even kill you while you've got the shakti. (Well — one clergy member alone could, but for each clergy member that wants you dead at that moment there's another who doesn't and they cancel out.) You can get maimed and crippled and blinded and randomly attacked, but (probably) not killed unless you do something stupid. Hey, maybe not even then.

Every time the player rolls while holding the charge, he should roll only one die and use it for both the tens and the ones place. That means every success and failure is *matched*. It's double or nothing, because the fluctuations of probability are so violent that they preclude almost any average or median outcome.



America's Kundalini awakens in Los Angeles. Specifically, it awakens in an L.A. slaughterhouse, where a golden calf gets ground into hamburger patties. Whoever kills that calf becomes the bearer of the charge, and can give it to whichever candidate — Matterkros, Fisher or Geddakis — he sees fit.

SWADHISTHANA — LAS VEGAS

Swadhisthana, the navel chakra, is the seat of sexuality and desire. If unbalanced, it produces envy, self-regret and possessiveness. In microcosm America, swadhisthana is Las Vegas.

A journalism convention is in town. Since many there are under the aegis of the Messenger, Matterkros dares not come in person. He does send one of his proxies to search for the charge there, but Las Vegas — home of Caesar's Palace and long associated with gangland rulers and the King of Rock and Roll — is a stronghold of the True King as well. In a land of risk and distraction, however, it is perhaps the Fool whose power is greatest.

In Las Vegas, the charge falls into the hands of the Las Vegas occult underground — and then the only way to get it is to gamble for it.

MANIPURALADHARA — ATLANTA

The solar plexus chakra is the seat of confrontation, and it was in Atlanta that Eugene LaRue dealt a crushing blow to Arkane in late 1997. Revealing Arkane's use of proxies cost the Godwalker many of his most capable followers, but it was one of those proxies who paid the price. Renata Dakota (introduced in "Legacy" along with Arkane) has been in prison for over two years, convicted of shooting Duane Regis — the man she *thought* was her father.

Having one of his proxies in prison has been tough on Arkane/Matterkros, and he's pushed to get her an early parole trial. He's scheduled to testify, but so is Eugene LaRue. Since Dakota is fated to mediate the third passage of the shakti, her trial becomes one of cosmic importance.

ANAHATA — CHICAGO

Anahata, the heart chakra, is seated in Chicago, Illinois. So is a major safehouse for Alex Abel's New Inquisition. Led, perhaps, by Matterkros' Ascended enemies, the New Inquisition finds the Godwalker in the city and forces him to flee. This theoretically clears the field for Fisher, but thanks to a mis-read invoice, the "holy hamburger" meat is delivered to a downtown restaurant instead of the waiting Mak Attax franchise in DeKalb. When the mistake is realized, it becomes a chase down the Eisenhower Expressway to get the charge before it goes off at random. Plus, there's bikers.

VISHUDDA — NEW YORK CITY

The throat chakra, governing expression, found its home New York City, home to Broadway and "Good Morning America," headquarters of countless publishing houses and setting of a hundred sitcoms. When corrupted, vishudda also stands for emotional excess, consumerism and criticism.

Shakti seems to be accelerating as it rises, and by the time any of the players realize that NYC is its next stop, the great charge has already found its high priest — a city police detective on stakeout. All three factions need to track the charge, discover who got it, find him... and possibly save him from a deadly shootout in order to get his blessing.

ANJA — PHILADELPHIA

The chakra of the third eye is delivered in the City of Brotherly Love — delivered to a 'brother' on his way to initiate some pledges into the dark mysteries of his college fraternity. Unfortunately for the frat boys, there are other dark initiates moving through the forest around their campsite on Lake Nockamixon.

SAHASRARA — WASHINGTON, D.C.

The crown chakra — governing connection between the physical world and the spiritual one — begins in the nation's capital. But like Anja, it moves on. In this case, however, the

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final confrontation occurs in a space outside space. It takes place in the past, and it takes place in the Statosphere.

FOLLOWING THE CHARGE

Markott and Fisher have no idea what shape America's Kundalini path will take. It would be nice if it was a straight line, but no such luck: The interactions of civic symbolism, feng shui dragon lines, and the haphazard Mak Attax methods ensure that the cities aren't readily apparent. Fisher figures Chicago is the heart and that D.C. has to be in there somewhere, but other than that, she's as lost as everyone else.

No matter what kind of prophecy or divination people use — rituals, channels, adept techniques — it is *simply not possible* to know where Kundalini is going two steps in advance. Seeing where it's immediately headed next is easy — give any diviner who's trying to find that information a bonus, or even an automatic success if necessary to keep the plot ticking along.

In other words, seeing one stop down the line is simple. Seeing two or more is nearly impossible. (Fisher only guessed Chicago because she knows about Diulio's ritual.) If you've just distributed the charge from Las Vegas, you can tell the next stop is Atlanta fairly easily, but there's no way for magick to reveal that Chicago comes after that.

You can follow it, but it's very hard to get ahead and wait for it.

GETTING INVOLVED

To Go is a big and important event, involving multiple members of the Invisible Clergy. It has a profound impact, not only on the occult underground, but on the whole world, and on the next world as well. It is a *big deal*. The question is, how do your characters get involved? The answer, of course, depends on their allegiance or narrative structure.

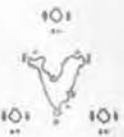
MAK ATTAX CREW — FIXED

If the PCs are Attaxers with a fixed franchise location, getting them to Los Angeles for the slaughter of the Sacred Cow may be quite a trick. There are a couple ways you can do it.

The easy way: Taking a page from Robin Laws, you could just *ask* the players "What's something that would get your characters to all go to Los Angeles together?" By giving the work back to them, they're more likely to think of a good motivation that doesn't rock the story boat too much, and you don't have to deal with the fear that they just won't bite at a plot hook. On the other hand, they may create a plot so involved that they ignore hints about the Golden Calf in favor of their own concerns. That's actually fine. If you want, you can finish off their plot line first — possibly introducing Matterkros and/or Fisher and/or other involved characters. Then, when they *think* they're going home, have them get the call that a Big Important Magickal Event is going down and Mak Attax *needs* them to watch over this one particular cow.

The hard way: The traditional way to get characters interested is to make them think it's their own idea. This can take a long time, but if they go by choice they're far more likely to hit the ground running and have a lot of investment in the outcome. To do this, you have to lay a lot of plot pipe to get them motivated. Try to get one of the characters on the Feng Vespucci list, where discussion of the theoretical "big pulse" gets a lot of play. Give any sensitive characters (avatars, precognitives, hallucinogen-snorting visionary types) dreams about golden calves and sunsets. Throw in synchronistic connections — that crappy old song "I Love L.A." is inexplicably popular in their hometown, angel symbolism stands out to them and is suddenly much less cloying, and their local teenage subculture starts giggling over the phrase "go west, young man" for some reason.

When one of them wins an all-expenses paid trip to see the hometown basketball team



play the Lakers (“along with five of your friends! Or three! However many PCs there are in the crew!”), they should all be ready to go.

The evil bastard way: Destroy their franchise. Burn it to the ground, or have it swallowed up in an earthquake, or have a nutjob with an AR-15 mow down people inside. Then connect that to the Big Pulse. Maybe someone from Feng Vespucci links a series of disasters to the awakening of the national shakti (which is, after all, on the San Andreas fault). Maybe they see the Hollywood sign in the flames, along with angels and a golden calf and the face of Dean Matterkros. Maybe the arsonist or shooter rants about angels, golden calves, touching heaven . . . and uses the phrase “special orders” over and over again.

MAK ATTAX CREW — MOBILE

This is bone simple. Erica Fisher asks ‘em to go. Ta da. If you feel the need to spice it up, maybe Erica isn’t telling Derek about the Big Pulse because (1) she’s afraid of looking stupid if it turns out badly and (2) she figures he’s got enough on his mind, what with the attempt on his life and all. So then you can have secrets and politics and questions of trust. Or you can just have Erica ask ‘em to go.

REALITY COPS

A Reality Cop narrative structure might already include some kind of sensitive character who could catch wind of this big, rapidly approaching brouhaha. If that’s the case, just have ominous images of Los Angeles creep into the clairvoyant (or whatever) character’s mind. Given that the first scene is in a slaughterhouse, that shouldn’t be hard.

If you want to take a more direct hand, introduce Matterkros (or Eugene LaRue, or some other interested avatar) early on as an ally of dubious origin — a Deep Throat figure who gives them useful information, but who is secretive and keeps his own counsel. Once he has their trust (or once they distrust him enough to investigate his advice on general

principles) he tells them that something big is coming to Los Angeles. In reality, of course, this joker figures the PCs for some easily-led righteous types who can help him secure the shakti — or at least run interference between him and the other seekers.

AVATARS

Many avatars can be led to the first chakra by dreams and visions relating to their archetypes. Their allegiance is likely to be influenced by what benefits their Archetype.

THE DEMAGOGUE

The Demagogue could go either way. Replacing the ‘truth’ focus of the Messenger with the ‘interpretation’ focus of Matterkros’ ‘Heisenberg Messenger’ could be good for the Demagogue by providing less foundation to the idea of truth itself. On the other hand, it could sap the strength of the Archetype by stealing the social position of those who determine opinion. Similarly, the democratic demagogue might want to see the ‘god-given’ authority of the True King wither away, or it might want to support the True King because it’s always good to have an enemy position against which one can define oneself — especially a position as weak as that of ‘kingship’ in the twenty-first century.

THE EXECUTIONER

The Executioner, like the Fool, has long been associated with the True King and could find much less prominence under Fisher’s ‘True Executive.’ In all likelihood, Executioners are going to get involved to oppose Fisher. The problem is finding an authority to sic them on her.

THE FLYING WOMAN

The Flying Woman might support Fisher’s bid out of an interest in seeing a woman in power, or it might oppose her as a representative of a new form of oppression. Similarly, it might support the ‘Heisenberg Messenger’ as a champion of the right to interpret the facts for

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oneself, or oppose it as an attempt to interpret them for others.

THE FOOL

The Fool, as explained above, supports the sitting True King.

THE MASTERLESS MAN

Individual Masterless Men would be most likely to follow whichever candidate had the strongest personal appeal. They might support the True King for the same reason as the Demagogue — the structure of the True King gives meaning to their wandering, serving as the yin to their yang. Or they might oppose him because his structure excludes them. Or, just possibly, they might support Geddakis because, as a wildcat trucker, he is beholden to no one (in theory).

THE MERCHANT

The Merchant might help anyone, for a price. Fisher's businesslike "True Executive" might appeal to Merchant sensibilities, or be seen as a rival.

THE PILGRIM

As a group, there's little to interest Pilgrims, but individual Pilgrims might support any claimant for their own reasons.

THE SAVAGE

The Savage might oppose the "True Executive" as an emblem of civilizing influence. But the True King is just as likely to have earned its ire.

THE CHRONICLER

The Chronicler is unlikely to get involved on any side, but this is certainly a momentous event to witness.

THE CONFESSOR

This is not a situation that hits the hot buttons of the Confessor archetype, though individuals might get involved for personal reasons.

THE DARK STALKER

The Dark Stalker has no particular interest in the outcome of this bid, which is probably a relief for everyone involved.

THE HEALER

One could make an argument that the chakras of the U.S. are imbalanced, producing negative energies instead of positive ones. Rather than healing an individual, the journey of the Kundalini could be used to purify the whole country — if the right person ascends at the end.

THE HUNTER

As useful as his tracking skills would be to anyone involved, there is little political angle to involve the Hunter. Which means, of course, he could be invited in by anyone.

THE JUDGE

Hm . . . the opportunity to influence who is going to have the power over all the cosmos? Yeah, that might interest a judge.

THE MARTYR

Plenty of causes are involved, but it's up to individual martyrs to decide which they want to die for.

THE MESSENGER

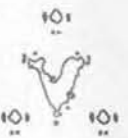
Obviously, Messengers are directly involved trying to stop Matterkros.

THE MOTHER

There's no obvious reason for Mothers to get involved. Individual avatars might find out about Matterkros' sleazy use of his kids as bullet shields, but that sort of thing is unlikely to rouse the Mother in the Clergy.

THE MYSTIC HERMAPHRODITE

When one is beholden to nothing but the idea of contradiction, it becomes difficult to get ideologically involved. However, their power of detecting magickal flow is going to go off the scale whenever the shakti charge gets near.



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THE NECESSARY SERVANT

The Necessary Servant has thrown its support behind Fisher's usurpation, hoping that the 'True Executive' will provide more opportunities for subtle influence.

THE OUTSIDER

Outsiders might get involved on the behalf of Mitch Geddakis, simply because he's an outsider — no real boss, no real occult position, always on the move — who might become very, very prominent.

THE PEACEMAKER

There's certainly plenty of conflict coming, and the ascended Peacemaker might want to get its agents involved early to keep a lid on things. As for supporting one candidate over another, the Peacemaker might see Geddakis as a good compromise, pleasing both the Messenger and True King and keeping things calm.

THE REBEL

Where the Peacemaker wants to calm things down, the Rebel wants to spice them up. Rebel avatars can be found aiding both Fisher and Matterkros, often simultaneously. It seems the Rebel is supporting change for change's sake.

THE SCHOLAR

There's nothing of particular interest to the Scholar in any of the candidates, but the process of the chakra ascension might well be worth watching.

THE TRICKSTER

The Trickster might support the 'Heisenberg Messenger' because of the wealth of trickery that can arise when the Messenger is divorced from the necessity of telling the truth. On the other hand, it might oppose Matterkros for fear of losing the definition of its mission. Whichever way it picks, it's unlikely to reveal its true motivations — possibly not even to its agents.

THE TRUE KING

The True King opposes Fisher, as explained above.

THE TWO-FACED MAN

As with the Trickster, the Two-Faced man could benefit or suffer from Matterkros' ascension. It all depends on how you look at it.

THE LOYAL LABORER

The Loyal Laborer supports its cause and its boss, come hell or high water. If a Laborer has been working for Matterkros or Fisher so far, they're not going to change now that those individuals are a challenge to their Archetypes.

THE GAMBLER

Rather than pick a side for political reasons, the Gambler is likely to pick the side he thinks will win and bet on it. Or pick the underdog and then try to help that side win, after making suitable wagers. In any event, Gamblers are likely to get an intuition about the situation so that they can make their bets . . . and remember that the second chakra is Las Vegas . . .

OCCULT CABAL

Sensitive characters can be manipulated to sense great power gathering in the west, power that can be turned to good or ill . . . (Honestly, clairvoyance is so useful for roping in PCs, I'm surprised I didn't make it a free skill.) If that isn't an option, you can always lead your PCs in by entangling them with Mak Attax (a good bet if you've got this book). Once they're snooping around the Attaxers, it's fairly easy to have some sloppy Mak from Feng Vespucci tip them off about the big doings transpiring in Los Angeles. For extra fun, set it up so that the PCs are the only ones taking this Mak seriously until after the Los Angeles set-to.

THE NEW INQUISITION

Easy. TNI has got Mak Attax fairly well compromised. Debbie Roth is in a good position to catch wind of Erica Fisher's suspicions and

manipulations, and the PCs might get sent to look into this “Kundalini” business. If they’re a low clearance/low power group, they get sent because Abel isn’t taking it seriously. If they’re big shots, he sends them because he doesn’t want to get caught with his pants down by another Safe and Happy New Year.

THE SECT OF THE NAKED GODDESS

Given their reliance on synchronistic guidance and their interest in desire, it shouldn’t be hard to get them to L.A. to find the magical Maguffin (or should I say McGuffin?) that everyone wants. The fact that loads of porn gets shot in L.A. doesn’t hurt either.

THE SLEEPERS

Initially, the Sleepers are probably concerned about Matterkros. They don’t know that he’s a Godwalker, but it’s clear to anyone with eyes to see that he’s at the center of some kind of incipient mystic shitstorm. Checking him out leads the Sleepers to the Big Pulse. Initially, they probably try to stop it, and it’s up to individual GMs to decide whether the Kundalini train can be derailed. Failing that, they’re probably going to try to keep the carnage deniable — a tall order in itself.

THE GLOBAL LIBERATION SOCIETY

The GLS is already watching Mak Attax. In their typical boneheaded but strangely useful fashion, they probably interpret the list’s discussion of the shakti charge as code-talk for some massive mind-control op.

THE ORDER OF SAINT CECIL

The golden calf is a false idol in the bible, and Hollywood has been identified as the new Babylon by some of the more hysterical fundamentalists. The OSC probably has at least one man on the scene in L.A., tracking down rumors of Rosicrucian heretics. He could easily call in OSC PCs to advise if he started having nightmares about Dean Matterkros, a golden calf, and a whole lot of blood.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The following description of Erica is reprinted from *Break Today* for ease of reference. Note that while her actions are charted in a fairly clear fashion, her motivations are not. You can take the high road that Erica really wants what’s best for Mak Attax, and probably clued in early that Derek really *isn’t* very happy as the leader. Or you can go the low road that Erica is mainly self-interested and is trying to displace Derek because he’s in her way. Her actions in *To Go* support either interpretation.

ERICA FISHER/“REGINA”

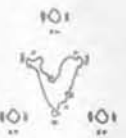
At age 45, Erica Fisher was a successful executive, freshly divorced from another successful executive. She kept the Lexus, he kept the BMW. She got the house in L.A., but he got the ski cabin in the mountains. Her son was starting college in Seattle. Her daughter had just begun working as a graphic designer in Milwaukee.

She liked her job a lot and was very good at it. She’d fought some glass ceilings, especially when the kids were younger, but by the mid-1990s, at age 45, there was nothing to keep her from focusing intently on her job.

Nothing except a business trip to Colorado that ended with some friendly skiing. Normally Erica was an excellent skier, but perhaps the divorce had taken more out of her than she realized, or maybe she was distracted or, well, any number of things. She wiped out. Bad. Into a tree. The pain was so severe she passed out, and when she came to there were five pins in her leg, holding the fractured bones in something resembling their original shape.

She went back home on crutches, and getting a ride to the Denver airport was a headache, and her luggage got lost, and her flight got delayed, and she wound up hobbling to the airport Golden Arches for a burger she was certain would be perfectly satisfactory.

Erica had tremendous confidence in that burger because she was, at that point, West



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Coast Vice President of Material Procurement for that particular burger firm. She was sure that there would be no surprises — no hair, no *e coli*, no rat feces. That was her job.

No, the surprise was the magick.

It crept up on her. It was in the way she caught herself thinking of her secretary as her “seneschal” and her receptionist as a “herald.” It was the taste she developed for Crown Royal whiskey sours instead of her usual Stoli vodka martinis. She found herself pricing tiaras on E-Bay and daydreaming about tournaments and ladies-in-waiting. But it was nothing serious until she had The Dream.

She still thinks of it that way, not just as a dream but The Dream. In it, she saw her employees and co-workers, but not as she'd always seen them. Edgar, who always had a joke at the water cooler, wore a jester's cap and bells. Martin, the grim security guard who'd gotten a pizza delivery man fired for consistently parking in the handicapped parking place, was now a knight in armor. She surveyed them, and many others besides, from a desk chair that was also a throne, in a corner office that was also a grand chamber, wearing a sensible business suit that was, at one and the same time, robes of ermine, silk and sable.

It is quite normal, in dreams, to see people as they are not. But Erica knew, absolutely *knew*, that while she was not seeing these people as she always had, she was seeing them as they truly were.

One of her colleagues in the dream was Steve Gorman. In life, he was an executive auditor. In the dream, he was a judge with a wise face and a kind smile — but on the back of his head was a second face, inverted, twisted with malice and cynicism.

When she woke, she went to the office. She spoke with Martin, and with Edgar, and within a month they had uncovered Steve's embezzlement.

It took her a full year to become comfortable in her role as True Queen. Her leg healed but she still had a limp, and she limps to this day.

It took her another year after that to discover Mak Attax and to realize they were the ones who had — albeit unintentionally — opened her eyes to the secrets of deeper reality.

From within the corporation, it has been relatively simple for Erica to work Mak Attax deeper into its structure. Instead of handing out charges at the end franchises, she can put an adept in place in the factory, insinuating magick into the containers and prizes and ingredients themselves. Since 1997, burgers have been coming off trucks charged, random fireworks of magick fired down the gullets of unsuspecting Americans.

Initially Erica was unimpressed with the structure of Mak Attax. With the practiced eye of a business whiz, she'd spotted a dozen ways to make it more responsive, more malleable, more controllable, more efficient. She pushed for them, hard, but despite all her expertise and eloquent rhetoric, no one on the list was willing to give up anonymity. She had joined too late to see the disasters of 1996 firsthand, but many on the list still remembered and resisted the proposals of this newbie interloper.

For almost a year she was the most consistent source of controversy on the list, which is saying quite a bit. It didn't die down until she was badgered into using the Ritual of Fealty in 1998. That gave her quite a different perspective on matters, and she was able to mend her fences in time for the Safe and Happy New Year program of late 1999. Though it was Borowski's idea, the management and organization of it owes a lot to Fisher. (For one thing, she bought Derek his plane ticket to Tonga.) Now the list is full of people who don't remember a time when “Regina” wasn't helpful, gracious, and cooperative.

She's met Derek Jackson personally, likes him, respects what he's done, but nonetheless wants to supplant him as leader. Erica believes that while there will always be a place for Superconductor, at some point Mak Attax must outgrow his leadership, or Derek will constantly hold it back. She wants to be the

next leader of the group, but senses that the list is not ready for her to take that step. Not yet. But every day brings her closer.

STATS

Personality: Aquarius. She combines a keen insight into human nature with the pragmatism to know where an individual nature will do her (or her company) the most good.

Obsession: Erica has no obsession.

Wound Points: 40

Rage Stimulus: Those who question her judgment because of her age or her gender.

Fear Stimulus: She's afraid of being hurt by magic. (Unnatural)

Noble Stimulus: She believes Mak Attax can enlighten people to a bigger world — as it did for her.

Body: 40 (Middle-aged)
General Athletics 15%, Skiing 35%, Struggle 15%

Speed: 40 (Limps)
Dodge 25%, Drive In Los Angeles 20%, Drive In Normal Cities 10%, Initiative 10%

Mind: 55 (Enunciates Each Word)
Executive Businesswoman 55%, MBA (General Education) 50%, Notice 20%

Soul: 99 (Commanding)
Avatar: True Queen 98%, Charm 40%, Eyes That Seem To Bore Into Your Very Soul 60%, Lie 55%

Eyes That Seem To Bore Into Your Very Soul. She's extremely good at the "cold read" — judging a person's personality, skills and limits simply through visual observation. Basically, it's the Sherlock Holmes shtick; she sees your bitten-down fingernails and cringing posture and pegs you as a weakling. That sort of thing.

Violence: 0 Hardened 0 Failed
Unnatural: 2 Hardened 1 Failed

Helplessness: 1 Hardened 1 Failed
Isolation: 0 Hardened 0 Failed
Self: 1 Hardened 1 Failed

POSSESSIONS

Erica has an awful lot of nice stuff: luxury car, tricked-out cell phone, top of the line laptop computer, a lovely leather-bound day planner, that sort of thing. Lately she's been purchasing a few antiques that are associated with noteworthy female rulers, but that stuff is usually beyond even her fairly substantial means.

NOTES

Erica channels the True Queen archetype (see UA2, p. 192). Her realm covers the Scotsman's factories, warehouses, and distribution centers on the west coast of the United States. (It does *not* include the restaurants themselves.) She has about ninety followers, most of whom are in Mak Attax but many of whom are not.

She knows version 1.1 of the Ritual of Lesser Correspondence (see *Break Today*, p. 84), along with the Ritual of Fealty (see *Break Today*, p. 85).

**DERMOTT ASA ARKANE/
DEAN A. MATTERKROS, GODWALKER**

Dermott — or Dean, as he now prefers to be called — has been involved with the occult for at least forty years. Eugene LaRue could tell you terrible stories about the hideous crimes Arkane has committed in his quest for power, but Arkane could (similarly) dish you a deep plate of dirt about LaRue. Naturally, they were at one time close friends and tight allies.

Physically, Dean is a tall, lanky white man in his mid-sixties. He's in fairly good shape for his age — his hair is silver, but he's not going bald. His skin is weathered and creased, but he's not unattractive in a war correspondent kind of way. He usually wears a trench coat over a business suit. His shoes, however, are always black Air Jordans. Currently he works for a web-based news service called NowNews.com. (You can easily change this



to any wire service or web-news entity of your choice. That obscurity has kept him safe: He's well aware that with Abel mad at him, network exposure = wetworks exposure.)

Psychologically, there are a couple ways to approach Dean, depending on your needs as a GM.

- **High Road:** Dean wants to become the Heisenberg Messenger because he believes the truth of uncertainty is a higher calling than the lie of believing only in facts. A superstitious belief in "one truth" keeps people from finding the useful truths they really need.
- **Middle Road:** Dean's no villain, but he's hardly heroic either. Sure, he avoids hurting people on principle and he thinks his archetype is a more accurate reflection of how people experience reality. He believes (like most people) that things would be better if he ran the zoo, but he won't shy away from using ugly means to get his ends.
- **Low Road:** "Truth? What is that?" said Pilate, and washed his hands. Dermott Arkane knows that "truth" (by which he means 'opinion') is just another weapon the strong use on the weak to keep them in line. The predator has no pity for the prey. If you're not strong enough to form your own truth, you deserve the spiritual stomachache you'll get from whatever half-plausible batch of bullshit some plausible pundit decides to fire down into your slack jaws.

STATS

Personality: Dean is like a shark. If sharks stop moving, they die.

Obsession: The interaction between "fact" and "truth" fascinates Dean.

Wound Points: 50

Rage Stimulus: Narrow-minded people who insist that their philosophy or religion is objectively true, but who are unwilling to listen to debate.

Fear Stimulus: The Messenger. He *knows* someone in the Invisible Clergy wants him dead, and it scares the shit out of him. (Unnatural)

Noble Stimulus: Dean insists that people keep an open mind about people and ideas — especially about "the truth." He prides himself on his willingness to listen to the other side.

Body: 50 (Lean)

Struggle 20%, General Athletics 15%, Run 40%

Speed: 60 (Quick)

Drive 40%, Dodge 60%, Handgun 45%, Juggle 15%, Initiative 45%

Mind: 70 (Brilliant)

General Education 35%, Notice 60%, Computer Use 25%

Soul: 99 (Mesmerizing)

Charm 50%, Lie By Omission 60%, Inspire Obedience Through Charismatic Speeches 50%, Avatar: Messenger 99%

Violence: 3 Hardened 2 Failed

Unnatural: 10 Hardened 2 Failed

Helplessness: 2 Hardened 0 Failed

Isolation: 1 Hardened 1 Failed

Self: 4 Hardened 2 Failed

POSSESSIONS

Thanks to the statosphere tinkering of the Messenger, Dean's assets are frozen, but his followers keep him in beer and pretzels. He used to own a gun, but given his current legal troubles, he's lost his concealed carry license. He always has a portable video camera with him, along with a loudspeaker and several tape recorders. He loves his little earpiece microphone, too. Perhaps most important, he has several cell phones, two of them hooked to different wireless web news services. With this constant access to up-to-the-moment reports on crises all over the world, his ability to get to newsworthy events (see below) makes him very, *very* hard to track or trap. He checks one of these phones about every ten minutes so that he has

an idea of a “hot spot” he can duck out and get to.

In addition to the Messenger’s normal powers, as Godwalker Dean is allowed to design a personal channel all his own. Arkane’s Godwalker channel is called The Painful Truth. With a successful roll, he can divine a truth that a given individual *least* wants to hear. If he shouts this out, the unfortunate victim has to make a rank-10 stress check. (It’s up to the GM to decide what gauge the check is on.) The victim also loses his or her next action while reeling from the effects of a truth that cannot be ignored or dismissed.

Dean has also, historically, been very busy with Proxy Rituals. He used to have five proxies, but he’s down to three: His son Matt, and his daughters Sara and Renata. They have been sufficient, however, to protect him from the wrath of Alex Abel — so far.

DEAN’S FOLLOWERS

Dean Matterkros has about fifteen or twenty followers spread across the U.S. — people with no particular magickal or martial skills, but who believe in his vision and his cause and are willing to help him out. By and large, this “helping out” takes the form of cash donations, which is awfully nice for Dean. Invisible Clergy tinkering has put his finances in a world of hurt, but his followers suffer far less from the malevolent attentions of the Ascended, so they’re able to pay his hotel and lawyer bills, keep gas in his car and pay his gargantuan cellular bills. It’s not a luxurious life — his followers are generally those with a hankering for easy answers, and that sort of yen isn’t often paired with the long green. (Even when it is, you can bet there’s some other mystic huckster with a much better Charm skill than Dean’s to swoop in and fleece the sucker.)

If push comes to shove comes to hit, Dean’s followers might even be willing to take someone down street-style for him. That’s not their usual style, but these are desperate times.

Assume that Dean’s followers all have the

following stats: Body 40, Mind 45, Speed 40, Struggle 15-20%, Initiative 20%, 40 hit points. Maybe five of them have Guns 25% as well, and are armed with small handguns (maximum damage 40 or even 30). Those who aren’t gun-totin’ are probably unarmed unless they’ve planned an ambush. If they’re ambushing, they probably have clubs (+3 damage).

However, none of Dean’s remaining followers have any hardened marks in Violence. That means that unless it’s a bushwhack, they won’t go in guns blazing. They try to talk first (and a good Intimidation roll might get some of them to back down). Once the shit hits the fan, they’re quite likely to freak and run. Any follower who takes more than 10 points of damage is going to either cheese it or lose it, and fast.

No more than 10 of Dean’s followers are ever found in one place at one time. They’re much more likely to be found in groups of 2-5.

MATT ROADKANE, ANGRY YOUNG MAN

At eighteen, Matt Roadkane is the youngest of Dermott/Dean’s proxy children. He was raised in Texas and has a fairly strong drawl. He was raised by a single mother — “Dorothy Roadkane” (born Dorothy Blakewell) who loves “Dean,” deeply and truly. As a member of Dermott’s cult, she was one of the few he trusted with the truth about the proxies, and she has no real problem with it. As she sees it, it’s just his way of being closer to his children, who will surely be rewarded when he comes into his heavenly kingdom. (Dorothy usually keeps this sort of “heavenly kingdom” rhetoric to herself, of course.) She raised Matt to idolize his father and obey him without question. Granted, Dean wasn’t around a lot, but when he did come by he showed genuine affection for both of them, and was very generous with his money (which they needed).

Of course, it didn’t escape Matt’s attention that other kids had dads who were actually part of their daily lives, and some tiny seeds of resentment towards Dean began to germinate



in his heart. But his mother wouldn't hear anything bad said about Dean, and Matt wasn't about to disappoint the only parent he really knew. So he denies all his discontent towards Dean, buries it deep inside, and it makes him rather surly and temperamental. Now that he's at his father's side, now that the ascension is nigh — well, he's more eager than ever to prove his loyalty to his father. And prove it to himself in the bargain.

STATS

Personality: Matt's middle name is "Ares" and, while misspelled, it's a good description for his personality. He's aggressive and tenacious and not terribly subtle at all.

Obsession: Since his childhood, Matt's been taught that he's a mystical prince who will come into his true power when Dean fulfills his destiny. He's heard a lot of fairy tales and he's determined to make them come true, no matter how many dragons he has to slay.

Wound Points: 70

Rage Stimulus: Anyone who tells him "no" or otherwise thwarts his will. This does not apply to objects, but an animal might trip his rage if it's in his way.

Fear Stimulus: He's afraid of failing in front of his father. (Self)

Noble Stimulus: He values courage highly, and truly fancies himself a "knight protector." He'd throw himself in front of a car to save an old lady, or run into a burning orphanage to save endangered children.

Body: 70 (Steroid-Enhanced)
Football (General Athletics) 25%, Beat You Up 60%, 'Roid Rage 40%, Weight Lifting 40%

Speed: 50 (Rough)
Dodge 25%, Drive 15%, Catch 20%, Sprint 20%, Initiative 45%

Mind: 50 (Short Attention Span)
General Education 15%, Notice 20%, Luchador and Football Trivia 15%

Soul: 60 (Likes "Gut Instincts")
Charm 20%, Lie 55%, Magickal Intuition 25%

Violence: 2 Hardened 1 Failed

Unnatural: 3 Hardened 1 Failed

Helplessness: 0 Hardened 1 Failed

Isolation: 0 Hardened 0 Failed

Self: 0 Hardened 2 Failed

POSSESSIONS

Nothing too special: The clothes on his back, a spare set of keys for Dean's car, a canister of pepper spray. He often carries some sort of makeshift club (+3 damage) if he can do so subtly — a hammer in his backpack, a tire iron from the back of a car, that sort of thing.

NOTES

With a successful roll on his 'Roid Rage skill, Matt can continue to act without penalty even if badly injured, sick, poisoned, etc. This cannot be used to help in situations where being senselessly angry isn't useful.

Magickal Intuition is a side-effect of his childhood with Dean and Dorothy. Matt has a subtle, inchoate sense about the underlying patterns of reality, though nothing he could put into words. In practical terms, he can roll this after observing someone to get a sense if they're magickally clued in or not.

If he rolls cherries while fistfighting, he usually uses Knock Down: Whenever he rolls a successful match, his opponent goes sprawling and goes last every round until he takes an action to get up.

Note that while Matt is a violent young man, he does not have many hardened or failed marks in his Violence gauge. He's done a lot of wrestling and some boxing, but he's never killed anyone or been in any kind of fight to the death.

SARA MARKOTT, LOIS LANE WANNABEE

Sara Deane Markott was born and raised in Boston. Like Matt, she knew Dean/Dermott as

a distant figure who came and went unpredictably, in and out of her life. Unlike Matt, her mother was not in love, and married a man named Kirby Meyer. Sara considers Kirby her father, and was initially suspicious of Arkane/Markott. However, as she became a successful reporter, he came to her and explained why that particular career choice seemed so simple for her. Not only was he pulling strings mundanely, her supernatural connection to him went both ways. She was partaking in his strengths as a Messenger as she set off on the path herself.

Initially she was dubious, but when the truth comes from the Messenger, it's very hard to ignore. She has had close to twenty years to get used to the idea that her biological father is also her magical father, and that through him she is magical as well. Or something.

Sara works for a monthly national news magazine (something like Time or Newsweek), and she's modestly well-respected in her field. She specializes in national political coverage, but she's been known to cover health issues as well.

STATS

Personality: Curious, canny and suspicious. She has a soft spot for those people she thinks she has figured out.

Obsession: She's fascinated by secrets and information, and delights in uncovering the unknown and the hidden.

Wound Points: 50

Rage Stimulus: People who are willfully ignorant or secretive.

Fear Stimulus: She's afraid of snakes. (Violence)

Noble Stimulus: She sees the truth as a weapon that the powerless can use against the powerful. She's not a blackmailer: She's a muckraker — but an *honest* muckraker. She'd never fake a story for personal gain.

Body: 50 (Aerobicized)

Shorinji Kempo (Struggle) 35%,

General Athletics 25%, *Long Distance Running* 40%

Speed: 60 (Quick)

Dodge 30%, *Drive* 20%, *Sprint* 15%, *Handgun* 15%, *Initiative* 35%

Mind: 65 (Dogged Persistence)

Investigative Reporter (Notice) 55%, *General Education* 25%, *Speak Spanish* 25%, *Computer Use* 15%

Soul: 65 (Incisive)

Charm 35%, *Lie* 15%, *Avatar: The Messenger* 55%

Violence: 3 Hardened 1 Failed

Unnatural: 0 Hardened 1 Failed

Helplessness: 1 Hardened 0 Failed

Isolation: 1 Hardened 0 Failed

Self: 2 Hardened 1 Failed

POSSESSIONS

Fancy cameras, sensible pantsuits, handheld tape recorders, press ID, laptop computer, small and sturdy flashlight, licensed Sig-Sauer P6 pistol (8 shots, max damage 50).

NOTES

Shorinji Kempo is a Japanese form of Shaolin Temple Boxing. It's a basic Struggle skill, except that she fights from slightly stylized stances. She can punch, kick, block, dodge and perform basic joint locks — but she's not very good and has never needed it outside the dojo.

She owns a pistol, but she does not have a concealed carry permit, she doesn't keep it loaded and she doesn't carry it unless she thinks she's going to be in danger.

Like Matterkros, she's an avatar of the Messenger. In her case, she can only use the first two channels listed: Getting around physical barriers, and making the truth hard to ignore.

MITCH GEDDAKIS, RAMBLIN' MAN

Mitch has dark hair, a slightly swarthy complexion, and gray eyes. He's in his mid-thirties, and has been driving trucks professionally since



he was twenty. A decade of jostling his gastric juices over the open road has given him a potbelly, but his arms and legs are still strong. He has a small condo in Rancho Cucamonga, a community outside of Los Angeles, but most of the time he's on the road. He likes the Rams and the Lakers, the Rolling Stones and Foghat, Tex-Mex cooking and slightly chubby blondes. His CB handle is "Sweet Tooth."

Mitch is in the process of paying off his own truck, a Peterbilt eighteen wheeler he has christened "Sweet Sweet Connie." (The name comes from a song by Grand Funk Railroad.) Being a wildcat trucker is not terribly easy. The powerful Teamsters' Union does much of the trucking in America, and freelancers like Mitch are often considered "scabs" and strikebreakers. (In fact, it's in just this capacity that Mitch gets involved in the events of *To Go*.) Mitch used to belong to the Teamsters, but he got on the bad side of Enrique Chavez back when Chavez was still minor union official. Now Enrique is a *very* powerful Teamster, and Mitch quit the union rather than kowtow to him. (Mitch insists that Enrique cheated him during a late-night poker game.)

The only thing that sets Mitch apart from every other blue-collar wage earner is his contact with the occult. In his life, Mitch has encountered big, obvious, genuine mystic phenomena three times (though he only remembers two) — and that's three more encounters than most people have.

The first time was when he was twelve. He was riding his bike through a convoluted parking lot near his house when he witnessed a T-bone car crash. A brown Mercury thought the two left lanes in a one-way street were turn-only lanes, when in fact the leftmost lane was the only turn lane. The Mercury turned straight into the path of a Lincoln Continental, and the Lincoln hit it square in the engine block.

Young Mitch stared. It was the first time he'd actually seen a car crash happen. So he got a good eyeful of the way the driver of the Lincoln just flopped bonelessly forward. He

saw how the Lincoln backed away from the Mercury — with its driver apparently passed out in the front seat — then reversed direction and drove quickly away right past him. He could hear the Mercury driver yelling behind him, but what really absorbed his attention were all the little metal sticks, writhing like spider legs from under the crumpled hood of the Lincoln. They seemed to be pulling at the metal, straightening the hood like a sheet on an unmade bed. Impulsively, he rode his bike closer as the Lincoln slowed for a turn. In the front seat, he could see that what he had thought was the driver was just a department store mannequin.

The second time wasn't so pleasant. He was just making a standard delivery — Popsicles to some convenience store in a dismal part of Phoenix — and when he stepped out of the store, he was somewhere even worse. The late afternoon sky was bloody. Not just red — bloody, bloody and dripping. The clouds that floated overhead were puffy infants, tears dripping from eyes the size of Volkswagens, wailing mouths trailing drool. Stunned, Mitch sat down on the curb and saw that the street was paved with badges — State Trooper badges, specifically. His truck was missing, and when he tried to go back in the store to call for help, the door *bit* him. Lucky for him an ambulance showed up, and the driver seemed to know where he was going. When Mitch was wheeled into a hospital, it was a *normal* hospital. Sure, the nurses were kind of short-tempered and he wound up having to get rabies shots for months because of the unidentified bite on his hand, but he found his truck again and considered himself lucky, all things considered.

The third time, he got a Special Order that made him an irresistible sex magnet for every adept within fifty miles. That was in San Francisco, and he wound up getting fought over by two rival rage mages, but he remembers nothing because Angela Forsythe (see *UA2*, p. 234) did him the dubious kindness of squeegeeing his memories after rescuing him from

UNKNOWN
ARMIES

them. (She wasn't quite thoughtful enough to brain-blank Daoud Masbut after Daoud saw her shagging Mitch's brains out in a truck-stop parking lot. But Daoud has conveniently forgotten it all on his own.)

In addition to these big experiences, Mitch has picked up a couple less dramatic (but still puzzling) SpOrds. All in all, it's made him a little jumpy — but also a lot curious.

STATS

Personality: Sagittarius. Mitch is an easygoing, friendly type who doesn't place a lot of value on deep, profound connections. He'd rather just go along to get along, y'know?

Obsession: Mitch has no obsession.

Wound Points: 60

Rage Stimulus: People who try to push him around or hurt him.

Fear Stimulus: He's afraid he's going to die lonely. (Self)

Noble Stimulus: Mitch enjoys spontaneous acts of kindness and helpfulness. He's not the type to plan a day around a charity event, but he picks up hitchhikers who don't look scary and he'll put some money in a truck stop donation jar.

Body: 60 (Beer Gut)
Struggle 30%, General Athletics 20%, Stay Awake 40%, Hold His Liquor 10%

Speed: 40 (Calm)
Drive 40%, Dodge 15%, Pinball and Pool 25%, Initiative 20%

Mind: 50 (Ordinary)
General Education 17%, Notice 25%, Mechanical Repair 40%

Soul: 50 (No Glamour Boy)
Charm 30%, Lie 15%

Violence:	1 Hardened	1 Failed
Unnatural:	3 Hardened	0 Failed
Helplessness:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Isolation:	2 Hardened	1 Failed
Self:	0 Hardened	1 Failed

POSSESSIONS

Mitch owns his own truck, a Peterbilt eighteen-wheeled refrigerator truck affectionately known as "Sweet Sweet Connie."

LATAETIA LUDOPHIS, WILD CARD

Lataetia ("Lala" to her many friends) got bad grades in school, but so what? She was popular and she had a lot of fun, she went to the right parties and managed to avoid chlamydia, gonorrhea and AIDS despite an unprotected adolescent sex life that was almost presidential in its scope. (She does have a minor case of oral herpes, but it's medicated.) She got pregnant, but gave the baby up for adoption and has been on the Pill ever since.

(Sometimes she wonders about the baby. Sometimes, when she's wondering about the baby, she almost realizes what a terrible, terrible mother she would be. But she doesn't think about the baby much.)

She dropped out of community college after two semesters to hang out with an exciting boyfriend who had just got out of jail and who was soon back in again after shooting his brother after catching said brother getting it on with Lataetia.

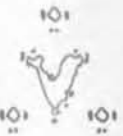
Lala decided to move to L.A. She thought about becoming a model or an actress, but she wound up becoming an aerobics instructor, and that's okay too. She doesn't have a lot of money, but she never seems to need a lot either. Every responsible person who meets her is either terrified of the fall that simply *has* to be coming for her some time (Right? Right?), or is profoundly jealous of the charmed life she's led.

Lataetia is one of nature's purebred fools, and fortune favors the fool.

STATS

Personality: She's carefree, fun-loving, and almost as dumb as she acts.

Obsession: Freedom. She doesn't want anyone to tell her what she can't do, or what she should.



UNKNOWN
ARMIES

Wound Points: 50

Rage Stimulus: People who boss her around.

Fear Stimulus: Physical injury.

Noble Stimulus: Fighting the forces of repression. As she sees it, there are a lot of people trying to control everyone, and too few people are trying to *not* be controlled.

Body: 50 (California Girl)

General Athletics 25%, Volleyball 30%, Struggle 25%, Sexy Blonde 20%

Speed: 60 (Seems Clumsy, But Never Gets Hurt)

Dodge 50%, Drive 15%, Run 20%, Initiative 30%

Mind: 40 (Ditzy)

General Education 15%, Notice 15%, Occult Underground Savvy 15%, Teach Aerobics 30%

Soul: 85 (Instinctive)

Avatar: The Fool 80%, Charm 50%, Lie 35%

Violence: 1 Hardened 1 Failed

Unnatural: 2 Hardened 2 Failed

Helplessness: 0 Hardened 1 Failed

Isolation: 0 Hardened 0 Failed

Self: 0 Hardened 2 Failed

POSSESSIONS

Many tank tops and lots of shoes.

NOTES

The Fool archetype is described in *UA2* on p. 175, but there is one modification to her “damage redirection” channel. Because she is operating (albeit unknowingly) in support of the current True King, damage that bounces off her tends to get reflected onto those who are supporting Erica Fisher.

RENATA DAKOTA, SIDE EFFECT

When she was a teenager, Renata came home from school and found that her parents had packed up and abandoned her. They weren't

great parents — her mom was on permanent disability and her dad was an asshole who was awful quick to give the back of his hand — but she went looking for them. She found them, and she found Eugene LaRue, and she found Dermott Arkane making a bid for ascension. There was a muddled confrontation, and there was gunfire, and she shot Duane Regis — aka Fred Dakota, aka “Dad” (to her) in the stomach before fleeing the scene.

The cops got her later that evening. She said nothing. Eugene LaRue skipped town. Dermott Arkane sent her a lawyer, his remaining followers testified that Duane (who had been identified by police as a fugitive at large) had fired first, but she was still convicted of reckless endangerment and sentenced to five years in a juvenile facility.

Jail hasn't been fun. She's been stabbed twice, and she fractured another prisoner's skull during one altercation.

Now she's up for parole.

STATS

Personality: Renata is sullen, surly and defensive. Like many teenagers, she feels like the whole world is against her. Unlike many, she can make a fair case that it is.

Obsession: Renata wants to find the truth about her family. If she does, her obsession may change to finding something that resembles a normal family situation.

Wound Points: 55

Rage Stimulus: People who try to take advantage of her because she's young.

Fear Stimulus: Being all alone. (Self)

Noble Stimulus: Renata is kind to strays of all sorts — animals and human.

Body: 55 (Chunky)

Struggle 35%, General Athletics 15%, Run Away 30%

Speed: 55 (Wary)

Dodge 30%, Drive 10%, Throw 25%, Initiative 49%

Mind: 55 (Resourceful)
*General Education 10%, Notice 35%,
 Breaking and Entering 35%*

Soul: 55 (Suspicious)
*Charm 15%, Lie 15%, Verbal Assault
 50%*

Violence:	4 Hardened	1 Failed
Unnatural:	0 Hardened	1 Failed
Helplessness:	0 Hardened	1 Failed
Isolation:	2 Hardened	1 Failed
Self:	1 Hardened	1 Failed

POSSESSIONS

Currently, she has none.

NOTES

Her “Verbal Assault” skill is the ability to bully and badger (or whine and complain) until she gets her way. Depending on the situation, she can use it make people back down or use it to make them feel sorry for her (though often with some resentment mixed in).

EUGENE LARUE, BITTER CRANK

Eugene is the bitter, burnt-out remainder of what was once a sweet, bright young idealist. He and his buddy Dermott were going to enlighten the masses. They were going to uncover the truth and use it to set folks free.

That was 1957. He was nineteen years old.

In 1960, he saw someone die by magick for the first time.

In 1965, he and his buddies faced down a powerful Messenger named Alton Montgomery. It was the first time he ever hurt a helpless person. The bile rose in his throat, but he knew it was for the greater good.

In 1970, he found out that instead of killing Montgomery, he and his friends had only caused the deaths of two of Montgomery’s proxies — two little boys, each younger than ten years old.

In 1971, they found Montgomery again, and it was the first time Eugene really enjoyed hurting someone.

In 1977, their group was strong enough that the Sleepers decided to break the minds of about half of them. Eugene was lucky to escape.

In 1981, Eugene discovered that Dermott, like Montgomery, had created a proxy. The two had a bitter quarrel, even though Arkane insisted that his motives were pure and that he would never harm his daughter. Eugene left the group. A few others left with him, but most backed Arkane.

In 1987, he found out his old ally Dirk Allen had consumed the soul of a mutual friend. He confronted Allen and barely managed to escape with a broken arm and a broken leg. Allen harassed him off and on over the next several years.

In 1992, he was arrested for assault after a brawl with a husband and wife team of entropomancers named Fred and Kate Mundy. He spent the next two and a half years in jail before being paroled.

In 1996, he felt it when the Naked Goddess ascended, and he immediately set out to find out what had happened.

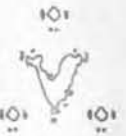
In 1997, his quest for Goddess led him back to Arkane, and through him, to Renata Dakota.

In the new millennium, Eugene is desperate. He’s pissed off or pissed away all his good occult contacts, and Arkane is closer to ascension than ever. He feels a lot of guilt over what happened to Renata, but doesn’t think he could have done much to protect her — all sticking around would have done would be to land him behind bars again.

Every night, he has nightmares about the world Arkane will shape if he ascends. He used to think he was a good man, but he knows himself too well. Now he just hopes he’s being a bastard for a righteous cause.

STATS

Personality: Underneath his smug and condescending exterior, Eugene is dead serious about his mystic quest.



Obsession: Comprehending the truth underlying reality.

Wound Points: 50

Rage Stimulus: People who treat truth or mysticism as tools to be used and discarded.

Fear Stimulus: Being beaten to the punch line of the paranormal joke. (Self)

Noble Stimulus: He doesn't believe in using people as means to an end. At least he tells himself that.

Body: 50 (Scrawny)

Struggle 30%, General Athletics 15%, Run Away 15%, Climb 15%

Speed: 60 (Slick)

Dodge 25%, Drive 25%, Firearms 50%, Initiative 40%

Mind: 60 (Know-It-All)

Autodidact (General Education) 25%, Notice 50%, Speak German 15%, Speak Spanish 20%, Occult Theory 50%

Soul: 99 (Profoundly Attuned)

Avatar: The Messenger 97%, Charm 15%, Lie 15%

Violence: 4 Hardened 1 Failed

Unnatural: 5 Hardened 2 Failed

Helplessness: 1 Hardened 1 Failed

Isolation: 2 Hardened 0 Failed

Self: 2 Hardened 0 Failed

POSSESSIONS

Eugene is currently roaming the country in a 1993 Datsun with four guns in the trunk — a revolver with a silencer (Max Damage 50), a small semiautomatic (Max Damage 40), a large semiautomatic (Max Damage 80) and a pistol-grip shotgun (Max Damage 120).

NOTES

Like Sara and Dean, Eugene is an Avatar of the Messenger. He can use all the channels listed under Dean's entry, except for Dean's unique "Painful Truth" Godwalker channel.

Eugene has picked up a couple rituals in the course of his occult career. He knows how to cast Poison Ward and Angel of the Animals (see *UA2*, p. 96 and p. 98).

DION ISAACS, TRUE KING GODWALKER

Dermott Arkane has gotten into his share of trouble by crossing the Messenger archetype, but at least his nemesis Eugene doesn't have a small army of weirdos obedient to his every whim. The same cannot be said of Erica Fisher's opposite number — the True King Godwalker, a man named Dion Isaacs.

Dion is not what people typically think of when they consider a "king." He's not particularly majestic. He's more likely to be seen in overalls and a worn Lynyrd Skynyrd t-shirt than in ermine and silk. His scepter is a keg-tap or a beer bong, and his crown is a wreath of laurel — or a pair of women's panties. Dion Isaacs is the True King of Debauchery, the heir of every great party animal from Bacchus to John Bonham, and his realm is anywhere the drunken fun threatens to spiral into something ugly, hysterical and out of control.

Fat, hairy and slovenly, this hillbilly emperor roams the United States in an ivy-green Airstream trailer. Somewhere within it is a whiskey still of nigh-mythical power, according to the folklore of America's trailer parks and dirt-track speedways. Dion's moonshine is the best, and if you're lucky, he might come to your county fair, set up camp outside your favorite roadhouse, and invite you to taste the booze you drink in your dreams.

Dion is far from alone on his unending journey. He always has at least a dozen lovely young female companions who minister to his every need — including (apparently) his need to refer to all of them by the interchangeable name "Becky." These women wash his grubby socks, gas up and drive his trailer, barbecue or deep-fry his meals, and generally provide party ambiance for his unending string of cross-country keggers.

(There are rumors of darker services as

well — services involving blood and frenzy and evil madness — but those who see the dark side of the Beckies rarely like to talk about what they witnessed.)

If the Beckies are his court, then a cycle gang called the Satyns is his army. (Though the name is pronounced “SAY-tins,” the embroidered or embossed ‘n’ on their leather jackets looks an awful lot like an ‘r’.) These guys are jobless, footloose lifestyle bikers who’d just as soon beat your teeth in as hear about your tax-deferred stock portfolio. However, given their association with Dion, they’d probably rather get drunk with you than either of the other two options. They are not a gang that has violence as its *purpose*. Their purpose is getting loaded and having a good time. But, that said, they’re hardly *averse* to violence. Even in the roughest biker bars, a jacket with the horned and goat-legged Satyn logo earns some respect. A dozen or more Satyns always accompany Dion as he wanders the land.

For all of his seeming laziness and lack of direction, Dion is nonetheless a loyal servant to his Archetype. (In actual fact, a lifestyle without stated goals or direction makes him an ideal tool for the ascended True King. Since whim can take him anywhere, it’s easy for the True King to maneuver him wherever he is needed.) Initially, the True King in the stator-sphere is reluctant to act against Erica Fisher, but as she progresses in her Shakti quest, Dion is dispatched in a last-ditch attempt to prevent the True King’s ouster.

Pledging fealty to Dion Isaacs is not a terribly complicated affair. You have to party with him and overtly offer your loyalty. If you’re a woman, you’ve got to sleep with him. If you’re a man, you either have to shed some of your own blood, or shed someone else’s blood on his behalf. (Those who opt to shed the blood of someone else get a target named by Dion.) Then all that remains is to drink with him until you pass out. Upon awakening, you’re one of his followers.

(Dion is described and pictured in *Lawyers*,

Guns and Money, p. 76.)

STATS

Personality: His hillbilly diction and drunken demeanor mask deep wells of common sense — and deeper pools of mystic drive.

Obsession: The fulfillment of his role as the protector of hard drinkin’, American style.

Wound Points: 60

Rage Stimulus: Killjoys and party poopers.

Fear Stimulus: The encroaching uptightness of American society. (The groundswell of quiet support for internet porn relieved him greatly.) (Helplessness)

Noble Stimulus: He’s tremendously protective of those within his realm — all the liquored-up frat boys, overserved groupies and New Years’ drunkards of the world.

Body: 60 (Chunky)

Struggle 40%, *General Athletics* 15%,
Drink Like a Fish 60%

Speed: 40 (Deliberate)

Dodge 15%, *Drive* 40%, *Firearms*
30%, *Initiative* 20%

Mind: 50 (Down-home)

General Education 15%, *Notice* 15%,
Knowledge of the Avatar Subculture
50%, *Brew The Best Damn Whiskey In*
The World 50%, *Knowledge of Amer-*
ica’s Highways and Juke Joints 50%,
Deep-Fat Cookin’ 35%

Soul: 99 (Strangely Compelling)

Avatar: The True King 99%, *Charm*
60%, *Lie* 60%, *Get the Party Going*
70%, *Play Covers of Alabama, Lynnyrd*
Skynyrd, Allman Brothers and .38
Special Songs on Guitar 30%

Violence: 5 Hardened 2 Failed

Unnatural: 5 Hardened 2 Failed

Helplessness: 1 Hardened 2 Failed

Isolation: 0 Hardened 3 Failed

Self: 1 Hardened 3 Failed



POSSESSIONS

Airstream trailer, whiskey still, .38 special revolver (max damage 50), double-barreled 12 gauge shotgun (max damage 120). Lots of beer, pork rinds and condoms. A real sweet acoustic guitar given to him by Greg Allman himself. Several thousand dollars in cash.

NOTES

Dion has all the True King channels from UA2, p. 192. In addition, he has a Godwalker channel called The King's Law. This means that the laws of his "kingdom" take precedence over any mortal laws when he is present. If one of his subjects kills a man in Memphis just to watch him die, Dion metes out justice — while the Memphis police department chalks it up as an unsolved case and gradually forgets all about it.

Dion has about 40 Beckies as followers, along with 30 members of the Satyns. However, not all of them are around him at any one time. Usually he's got 1-2 dozen Beckies and 10-20 Satyns. In addition to those seventy followers, he has claimed a number of roadside bars, speedways, dance halls and disreputable strip clubs as part of his Land. He's got about forty of these strongholds spread evenly across the U.S., and he makes a point of visiting each one at least once a year — usually more often.

TYPICAL "BECKY"

The average "Becky" is poorly educated, friendly, not naturally great looking, but making an effort to be cute and sexy. They're not equipped with passions and obsessions because they're generally minor characters. If the events of a plot make one particular Becky stand out, you can engineer a moment in which she reveals her true name — possibly as a precursor to leaving Dion's orbit, if the PCs give her a good reason.

STATS

Wound Points: 50

Body: 50 (Cute)

Struggle 15/30%, General Athletics 30%, Drink Heavily 20%, Dance All Night 50%

Speed: 50 (Good Dancer)

Dodge 15%, Drive 40%, Run Away 20%, Initiative 25%/30%

Mind: 40 (Poor Diction)

General Education 15%, Notice 15%, Maenad Freakout 40%

Soul: 40 (Little Is Expected)

Charm 40%, Lie 15%

Violence: 3 Hardened 2 Failed

Unnatural: 2 Hardened 1 Failed

Helplessness: 1 Hardened 2 Failed

Isolation: 0 Hardened 0 Failed

Self: 0 Hardened 0 Failed

NOTES

"Maenad Freakout" is a peculiar skill that basically lets the Beckies go voluntarily insane at Dion's command. When they're in Maenad mode, they tear off all their clothes and attack any clothed woman, or any man other than Dion, who approaches. This is considered to be a Frenzy response, as described in UA2, p. 69, except that if they voluntarily enter it, they get no hardened or failed notch on their Madness Meter. While Frenzied, they cannot be forced to take any Stress checks, they can't make any fancy attacks, they can't be reasoned with or calmed down (except by magick or avatar channels, and even then it's not easy) and they *fight until killed*. Furthermore, while in Maenad mode, their Struggle and Initiative skills both rise to 30%. (In Dion's direct presence, this may go up higher, if he uses the fourth True King channel, as described at left in the Notes section.)

TYPICAL SATYN

Most of the Satyns are high school dropouts and petty crooks who realize they've hooked up with a good thing. They do what it takes to protect Dion and his nonstop party.

STATS

Wound Points: 60

Body: 60 (Scarred)

*Struggle 40%, General Athletics 35%,
Hard Drinkin' 60%*

Speed: 40 (Easy Riders)

*Dodge 35%, Drive 40%, Firearms
30%, Initiative 30%*

Mind: 40 (Shallow)

*General Education 15%, Notice 15%,
Automotive Tinkering 35%*

Soul: 40 (Menacing)

*Charm 15%, Lie 40%, Threaten Cred-
ibly 40%*

Violence: 5 Hardened 2 Failed

Unnatural: 3 Hardened 2 Failed

Helplessness: 1 Hardened 2 Failed

Isolation: 0 Hardened 2 Failed

Self: 1 Hardened 2 Failed

POSSESSIONS

Bigass road bike, switchblade knife (+3 damage), chain (+3 damage). About 1 Satyn in 3 has a revolver (6 shots, max damage 50).

"SAN" QUENTIN HARDACRE, THE KING'S EXECUTIONER

The leader of the Satyns is a whip-thin, cruel-eyed man who never gets loud, no matter how drunk he is. Bitter, tough, and mean as the rattler that bit its own daddy, "San Quentin" worked as an enforcer for a redneck meth ring in Oklahoma before he got sent to jail on a trumped-up possession charge. When he got out, his old ring was busted and he hooked up with Dion, who revealed to him his true potential — not just as a thug, but as the vengeful right hand of a ruler. Quentin has been on the Executioner path for six years now. He likes it a lot.

STATS

Personality: Wants to be left alone. Failing that, he wants an excuse to kick your ass.

Obsession: Sadism.

Wound Points: 60

Rage Stimulus: Law enforcement personnel.**Fear Stimulus:** That something might happen to Dion, his liege. (Helplessness)**Noble Stimulus:** He is fanatically loyal to the man who showed him his true nature. This is lucky, since Dion keeps him on a pretty tight leash.

Body: 60 (Coiled)

*Punish (Struggle) 60%, General Ath-
letics 40%, Hold his Liquor 30%*

Speed: 70 (Explosive)

*Dodge 40%, Drive 30%, Firearms
50%, Initiative 45%*

Mind: 50 (Focused)

*General Education 15%, Notice 15%,
Jailhouse Savvy 50%.*

Soul: 55 (Radiantly Vicious)

*Avatar: The Executioner 55%, Charm
15%, Lie 30%, Intimidate 50%*

Violence: 7 Hardened 2 Failed

Unnatural: 3 Hardened 2 Failed

Helplessness: 1 Hardened 2 Failed

Isolation: 0 Hardened 2 Failed

Self: 1 Hardened 2 Failed

POSSESSIONS

Lots of black clothes, mirrored motorcycle helmet, an Ace of Spades tattoo on the back of each hand, a big axe (+9 damage) and a big damn gun (7 shot semiautomatic, max damage 95).

NOTES

His channels as an Executioner can be found in *UA2*, p. 172. When he gets a hand-to-hand combat cherry, he tends to pick *Second Helping* (see *UA2*, p. 56)

OL' JOE, THE KING'S ADVISOR

Ol' Joe has been with Dion as long as anyone can remember — longer than Quentin and the



Satyns, longer than any of the Beckies, longer than any of the bar owners at his various hang-outs. There's speculation that Ol' Joe is, in fact, Dion's father, though there's not much resemblance between the hairy fatso and the skinny old bald guy. Ol' Joe is the only male who gets to ride along in the Airstream, and while he's never the center of attention, he's always around — collecting a cover charge for the parties or passing the hat for the next beer run, chatting up the local cops, greasing the skids with property owners and generally making sure that Dion doesn't have to sweat the small stuff. Ol' Joe also seems to be the paternal figure that a Becky goes to if she's having a tiff with her Satyn boyfriend — or vice versa.

STATS

Personality: One part Dali Lama, two parts Uncle Jesse from "The Dukes of Hazzard."

Obsession: Ol' Joe has no obsession

Wound Points: 30

Rage Stimulus: Unreasonable stubbornness.

Fear Stimulus: Gettin' his ass kicked. (Violence)

Noble Stimulus: He loves humanity and thinks most people just need some gentle good advice to get over all their fussin' and feudin'.

Body: 30 (Wheezy)

*Struggle 15%, General Athletics 15%,
Drink Without Passing Out 30%*

Speed: 30 (Dodders)

*Dodge 15%, Drive 15%, Rifle 30%,
Initiative 15%*

Mind: 60 (Crafty)

*General Education 15%, Notice 60%,
Cutting Red Tape 30%, Automotive
Fixin' 40%*

Soul: 60 (Just Makes You Feel Good)

*Avatar: The Necessary Servant 60%,
Sensible Advice (Charm) 60%, Lie
60%, Figure People Out 60%*

Violence: 5 Hardened 2 Failed

Unnatural: 5 Hardened 2 Failed

Helplessness: 1 Hardened 2 Failed

Isolation: 0 Hardened 3 Failed

Self: 1 Hardened 3 Failed

POSSESSIONS

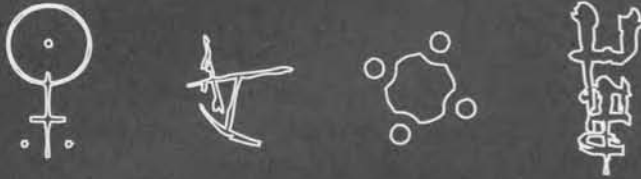
.22 Long caliber semi-automatic rifle, overalls, false teeth.

NOTES

The Necessary Servant avatar is described in *Statosphere*, p. 67. Short version: Ol' Joe can recognize other Necessary Servants and they're inclined to get along with one another. He also has an uncanny grasp of social hierarchies — he can readily pick out who's the boss, who's the weak link and who's really getting things done.



CHAPTER TWO
MULADHARA : LOS ANGELES



Priest Brothers' Meat Packing is not having an easy year.

First off, there was a contamination scare in February. No one got sick, no tainted beef even made it off the premises, but they had to destroy four thousand pounds of meat and then shut down the entire plant to clean it thoroughly. So two months in, the management was already way behind its expected profit margin.

The specter of bad beef raised a few eyebrows over at the Priest Brothers' biggest client — the same "Scottish Restaurant" that employs so many Mak Attaxers. The Priest Brothers' administration managed to assuage them temporarily, but it's not comforting to have to beg. This left Priest Brothers behind in profits and scared of looking bad.

They decided to increase production to try and shrink the profit gap, but at the same time they couldn't afford to let quality control slip. So they're poor, scared, and in the unenviable position of having to be more careful while working *faster*.

Of course, it's not the suits who actually have to do this harder, faster work: It's the men and women down on the kill floor. Unfortunately for everyone concerned, the shareholders picked the wrong plant manager to implement their "increased productivity and quality initiative." They picked the guy who's been there forever and who worked his way up from the floor, inch by inch. While said manager does know the Priest Brothers kill floor inside and out, he's not a charmer and can't sugar coat bad news worth a damn. Basically, what the workers heard was "You're gonna have to do more in less time. Oh, and don't screw up again like February or you'll all lose your jobs!"

In addition to low profits, the danger of losing a big client and the need to do more with less, the Priest Brothers soon had a wild-cat strike on their hands.

If they weren't already in a financial hole, they could have maybe shut up shop for a while to negotiate. But they didn't have that

UNKNOWN
ARMIES

luxury. They had meat to pack, so they hired replacement workers. The meat packer's union got their noses out of joint over that and gave their blessing to the wildcat strike, making it an *official* strike. Once that happened, the Teamsters jumped aboard.

Low profits, danger of losing a big client, need to do more with less, all their experienced workers are on strike, and now trucks can't bring cows in or take hamburger away without crossing a picket line.

The cherry on top was media attention, gathered by the strike, which resurrected the worries about the original February taint problem.

On top of all *that*, they're going to have the PCs on their kill floor.

STRUCTURE

This part of "To Go" is fairly free-form. The PCs have a goal: Get the blessing of the killer of the Golden Calf and deliver it to their chosen patron. (Or, if they're not on the ball enough, the goal is even simpler: Figure out what the hell is going on.)

There are a lot of ways to get to that goal, and a lot of things that can happen if they fail or succeed. At this point in the "To Go" campaign, it doesn't matter *too* much. So rather than give you floor plans and schedules and flowcharts, we're presenting Priest Brothers more as a setting. We're describing the areas and what might happen in them during the day, during the night, and depending on what tactics the PCs use. But nothing is carved in stone here: This is mostly a framework for your improvisations.

The threat level is low: Unless the PCs decide to throw down with the LAPD, there's little chance of getting killed. They can get bashed around and they may have to leather up for a few low-level stress checks, but by and large it's unlikely that anything really bad is going to happen to them. This is intentional. The timer is ticking in "To Go" and if a PC gets her spleen lacerated in the first section,

there's not going to be a chance to spend a month in the hospital before part two.

In short: Take it easy, build the mood and improvise.

GETTING IN

The PCs are interested in Priest Brothers Meat Packing. Maybe they're guided by visions, maybe they're ordered by superiors — whatever pretext you use, they're interested in getting on the kill floor when the Golden Calf arrives.

Priest Brothers is way out in the middle of nowhere. You take the highway east from L.A. until you're about halfway to San Bernadino. Turn right on Industrial Road and follow the stink of frightened cattle until you come to a large cyclone fence topped with razor wire, enclosing maybe five acres. There are two big gates — one for incoming traffic, one for outbound. There are guard stations at each gate. There are also lights and video cameras along the perimeter, but security is very light. To put it delicately, the plant smells real bad, and there aren't a lot of people itching to break in. With the labor troubles they've got a couple rubber gun guards walking the fence every hour or so, but they've only got pepper spray and truncheons. They're not paid enough to deal with real trouble. There are two police officers at the gates when the picketers are there, but they're watching the strikers and don't want any trouble. (If they get mixed up with things, use the standard police officer in UA2, p. 264.)

At the center of the parking lot sits the plant. Assuming you come in through the front gate, you can head off in one of three directions. If you go off to the left, you can go into the Executive Wing. If you go straight ahead, you can enter the Main Building. The right end of the parking lot connects directly to the kill floor. Closest to the fence are the cattle pens: Cows are loaded from delivery trucks into the pens, then led to the beginning of the kill floor. Other trucks (the refrigerated ones) go past the



pens and back up to the loading docks where the processed meat is loaded.

As usual, there are several ways the PCs can try to get in.

STEALTH

Sneaking in is not too tough. I mean, shit, it's not like this is a top-secret military installation, right? Any half-bright joker with some guts can sneak into Priest Brothers. The sneaky ways in include (but are hardly limited to) . . .

- **Stowing away.** Hop in one of the cattle cars, if you can handle the smell, or cling to the bottom if you watched "Cape Fear" too many times. It's no problem to mingle in with the strikers and media crowd, and the incoming scab truckers have to slow down to walking speed to get through the picket line. A significant Sneak roll is all that's required to duck under the truck and grab on while no one's looking. Then a Body roll is needed to hang on until the truck stops in line to unload. Getting inside with the cows is a bit harder, requiring the PCs to open the lock on the back of the truck and then manage to get inside without anyone noticing. Bad fumbles can result in cows getting out the back of the truck. (But if they try to sneak in during the confusion caused by letting a cow loose in a group of strikers, don't even make 'em roll.) Additional Body rolls may be required for non-rural adventurers to resist the urge to throw up when locked in a hot enclosed space with a lot of cows and their various effluvia. I hate to keep harping on the stink, but you know how you can sometimes smell cattle when you drive past them on the highway? Well that's when it's gone through your car's air conditioner at sixty miles per hour. Think what it's like in still air. Of course, all that sneaking in with the cows does is get you access to the waiting lots, and the handlers are going to be a bit curious about what people are doing

disturbing the cows. The handlers have cattle prods.

- **Going Under the Fence.** The guards are as regular as a well-fibered colon, and it's the work of two minutes with some bolt cutters to go under the fence. Going over the top is harder: That razor wire is nasty stuff. (If the PCs insist on going the hard way, give 'em about 5 points of damage to their arms and body unless they can get some serious padding on the wire. Also have them all make significant Sneak rolls or get spotted by the guards.) Once they're past the fence, there's a long open walk until they hit the cars, but then they're scott free right up to the front doors. (Once they get that far, refer to the area descriptions.)
- **Taking Out the Gate Guard Under Cover of Darkness.** They really want to go commando on some loser who's getting minimum wage to watch a fence? Okay. Use a single stock thug from *UA2*, p. 264. The only real problem is if he can get to the phone and yelp out a warning, but considering it takes his first action to get the phone and his second to dial and yawp, this shouldn't be a threat. Of course, once they're in they have to remain undetected until the Calf arrives — and it gets delivered in the morning.

SUBTERFUGE

Why get all dusty crawling in when you can just bluff? Most of the people working there are replacement workers. The guards don't even know all of the *permanent* staff (though they're getting used to the angry faces of the usual line workers as they glare at them for hours on the picket line). The scab workers and staff have bar-coded photo ID badges in plastic holders. The gate guards let in *anyone* who has one of these badges.

- **Stealing such a badge ain't hard.** After work, lots of replacement meat packers can be found at the nearest bar and grill having

breakfast, dinner or a nightcap (depending on their shift). Getting a badge by force or stealth there shouldn't require too many rolls. Or, if the PCs have money to spend, some replacement workers will sell their badges for as little as \$50.

- **Forging a badge** is similarly simple. Anyone with any kind of forging skill who's even seen one, let alone examined one, should be able to whip up reasonable forgeries in an afternoon with no rolls and one finger up her nose. Even inexperienced forgers with a good color printer or copier can fool the gate guards with a successful Mind roll. The bar code won't scan right, but after two or three tries the guard just gives up, shaking the scanner and cursing.
- **Bluffing.** The PCs may simply try walking up and saying "Dude, I'm s'posta work today, but I forgot my badge thingie. Can I, like, sign something or...?" With a successful significant Lie roll, the guard rolls his eyes, hands over a clipboard and says "Check in with Margie in Personnel for a temp badge. Jesus."

SETUP

Of course, the easiest way of all is to get invited in. There are all kinds of ways to swing this. Some of the most obvious include...

- **Get a job.** The company is *hiring*. Anyone with warehouse or meat packing experience can get a job, even with a criminal record.
- **Guests.** If the PCs are Attaxers operating on the orders of Erica Fisher, she can set them up as unofficial inspectors — just looking things over to make sure the recent troubles haven't become overwhelming for the Priest Brothers. (If they go this route, however, the PCs can expect overly-helpful management types getting in their way until disposed of or ditched.)
- **Magick.** Cliomancers and others with Jedi-mind-trick shticks can get in pretty easily.

MEETING DEAN

The day the Calf arrives, Dean Matterkros is out in front of Priest Brothers, along with his son Matt Roadkane. Dean is interviewing strikers, guards, truckers, replacement workers — pretty much everyone who passes by. He's holding a microphone and Matt is operating a video camera.

Every week or so, Dean performs divinations on himself (his third channel, see UA2 p. 181) to see if there's anything he ought to know and doesn't. He knows there's something big going on at Priest Brothers, but he doesn't know exactly what or when. He's shown up to find out by talking to the people working there.

More than that, however, he's ingested some ritually prepared hallucinogens in hopes of receiving some paranormal info. Thanks to his altered perspective, he immediately perceives the importance of the PCs. If they're not members of TNI, he walks over and introduces himself. (If they're a TNI squad, he watches them carefully but does not approach. Seeing them enter the plant, he follows, and may make trouble for them there at the GM's discretion.)

Dean seems a little spacey, and anyone he speaks with can make a Notice roll to spot his shrunken pupils and distracted manner. He shakes hands, says he's from NowNews.com and generally tries to feel out the characters for their motivations for being at Priest Brothers. If they try to bullshit him, he smiles knowingly, nods, chuckles, but doesn't call them on it. The heroes are probably going to try to wring him for information as well, and he can give them a factual overview of the events at the plant — the contamination scare, the pressure, the strike. Depending on what the PCs tell him and what he can gather about their opinions, he skews the story towards what they want to hear. (For example, if the PCs have a "Rush is Right" sticker on their bumper, he tells a tale of responsible businessmen who bent over backwards to clean up their plant, and got bitten in



the back by lazy workers. If, on the other hand, the PCs seem more proletariat-oriented, he spins it that management goofed and expected the workers to work twice as hard cleaning the mess — without a pay increase. The facts, of course, support either interpretation.)

If the PCs aren't completely rude and dismissive, Dean changes the topic of the conversation about halfway through. He turns off his mic, gestures for Matt to shut down camera and says "Would you like me to do a reading on you?" He's referring to a tea leaf reading. In the back of his huge Chevy Blazer he's got a portable tea set and some tiny porcelain cups. He's decided that if the PCs matter, telling them something about themselves is a good way to (1) get them on his side and (2) find things out himself.

PCs who agree get subjected to his "Find Out Important Things About People" channel. This is your chance to give the PCs some GM-approved hint or guidance. (Of course, Dean being who and what he is, it's quite likely that he changes his presentation of the true reading in a manner calculated to yield him an advantage. He won't *lie*. Remember that. But he can mislead through omission, by selective revelation and by manipulative emphasis. And every truth he tells is nearly impossible to ignore.)

If the PCs have been guided by vague visions and don't know exactly what they're after, he can tell them "Hm... you're looking for something. Not clear what. In fact, its shape is not so much vague as vagueness manifest. See what I mean? *It* doesn't know what it is yet, so you can't know either. But you'll find it under a maple tree."

Particularly friendly or helpful PCs get offered doses of the Universal Perceptual Solvent. (UPS is described on p. 144 of *Unknown Armies* — short version, it's LSD that lets you see the influence of magick and the Statosphere.) Dean tells them "This may help you on your quest. But it can be risky if you're not used to seeing two realities at once." He's only got enough to dose two PCs.

It's possible that the PCs may invite Matterkros along with them. If they do, that's fine. He's happy to go. If they go to the kill floor and he sees Marcia become the High Priestess (see p. 43) he takes off after her and it's up to the PCs to follow him before he gets blessed. On the other hand, if they get caught, or just don't go to the kill floor, Matterkros misses out on the charge and pegs the PCs as losers. He still might ally himself with them (or try to use them, depending on whether he's high road or low road or what) but he won't rely on them or trust them with sensitive data.

THE PICKET LINE

Getting through the picket line can be easy or hard, depending on the PCs. (If they sneak in, it's not going to be an issue, of course.) Any PC who makes a significant Notice roll can spot something a little unusual about the signs the strikers are holding. They're the usual home-made cardboard placards, but they're not simply stapled to strips of plywood or pressboard. No, those signs are stuck to solid wooden 2x4s. Anyone who makes trouble for these "peaceful strikers" is going to discover that a good portion of them have makeshift but perfectly effective clubs.

If the PCs go in as workers (either real or fake) they get stares, a bit of shoving and some insults — maybe even some spitting at their feet but no picketer takes the first swing. There are two cops right there, after all.

STATOSPHERE INVOLVEMENT ON THE PICKET LINE

The picketers don't know it, but they're being watched and manipulated from the Statosphere. The Rebel — visible to UPS trippers as a chain-wrapped, torch-bearing figure thirty feet high, with no facial features except a huge, shouting mouth — has made the weather pleasantly cool, to keep tempers from fraying. It's also provided minor cold and flu symptoms to the most aggressive picketers to inhibit their tendency to pick a fight with the PCs.

The True King has influenced the leader of

the unions in an attempt to keep out anyone who might help Fisher. (It also made sure the picketers got lots of very strong black coffee to make them tense and jittery.) However, since the original picket line was a rebellion more than a gesture of solidarity (remember, it started as a wildcat strike), the influence of the Rebel is stronger.

If the True King is trying to stop the PCs, hallucinating PCs can see it as well. The same size as the Rebel, but dressed in regal garb, it reaches down and pinches the head of one of the picketers, who steps forward and points at them. If it's visible, it looks eerily like someone reaching down to move a chesspiece on a board.

One picketer is a union official named Glenda Kirkwood and she's got a tiny touch of the True King about her. She steps forward and points at the PCs, saying "There's the scabs who are taking your jobs!" (Or, if the PCs are dressed like executives, she says "There's the suits who made this mess!") She encourages the crowd, rather ambiguously, to "Give 'em what they deserve!" If the PCs can see the Statosphere, she's the one maneuvered by the True King.

(If Matterkros is with the PCs at this time, he and Matt discretely fall back and start filming.)

PCs who slink off and don't engage (either through the gate or into the plant) get jeered, mocked, and the crowd gives them sarcastic applause while spitting at their backs. But if the PCs get in the union leader's face, a couple picketers back her up. Glenda won't escalate to physical violence, but she's game for a face-to-face screaming match. If this starts, the two cops come up and try to separate the groups, while the gate guard looks on anxiously. The guys behind Glenda are willing to push and nudge and get in the PCs' faces, but won't throw an actual punch until the PCs do.

PCs who mix it up are going to get in the middle of a good dozen picketers with clubs, plus two cops who are just trying to separate the combatants. The brawling meat-cutters and shop stewards are not fazed by violence. (Are

you kidding? They kill hundreds of times every day at work.) They have Brawl and Initiative 25% and clubs that do +3 damage, but each brawler disengages when he's taken 10 or more points of damage. If a gun gets fired, they scatter, but then the cops draw and arrest (or fire on) the shooter. Without gunplay, the fight goes on for two or three rounds before the cops and the security guard restore order. The police arrest most of the brawlers and all of the PCs. (If the GM is feeling particularly cruel, the brawlers and PCs wind up in the same holding cell.)

If this bad shit goes down when both archetypes are visible and involved, the tripping character sees them look at one another, then silently reach out and touch one another, fingertip to fingertip. They remain in contact, high above the fray, until the combat is resolved.

THE PLANT

Once the PCs get past the gates and the picket line, it's up to them to decide where they're going. There are three main areas they can go: The Executive Wing, the Main Building and the Loading Dock.

(Note: Rather than give you an exhaustive list of every room in every section, we're going with looser descriptions. If you feel like you need a map, by all means draw one, but the encounters contained within are primarily social and metaphysical, rather than spatial.)

THE EXECUTIVE WING

The Executive Wing is quiet, tastefully bland, and mostly filled with office cubicles. Like the Main Building, the Executive Wing is completely climate controlled: It's kept at a steady 72 degrees, and only the faintest hint of the kill floor's distinctive aroma makes it this far.

People who break in under cover of darkness can find a whole bunch of cubicles, fax machines, half-used Bic round stic pens, photocopiers and printers and mid-range personal computers from two years ago. Several desks



have a sign over them that says “Doing your job around here is like wetting your pants in a dark suit. You get a warm feeling, but no one really notices.” These signs are obviously nth generation copies, getting mungy-looking from multiple reproductions.

There are maintenance people in the offices all night, emptying the trash, vacuuming and swabbing out the toilets. A good half of them are illegal immigrants from Mexico, and the other half are either legal immigrants or the first generation Latino. They all speak Spanish. About three-quarters of them speak English as well.

Avoiding the janitors requires a successful major Sneak roll each hour if the PCs are moving around, or a significant one per hour if they’re just hiding in some innocuous spot.

The cleaning people have zero interest in calling the cops if they spot a prowler, but they also have zero interest in getting in a fight. If the PCs get spotted, the cleaners start bel-lowing at one another. (Spanish speakers can understand “Hey, come here! Thieves!”) There are about a dozen of them, and their plan is to shoo the intruders off while avoiding entanglements with The Man. (They won’t tell the PCs this, of course. One of the brighter janitors even yells out “Eh, the cops are on their way!” in English, followed immediately by the Spanish equivalent of “It’s cool man, it’s okay.”) They make a show of force, and all but two of them are soon armed with makeshift (+3 damage) hand weapons — heavy staplers, mop handles, toilet plungers. The other two have knives (also +3 damage). Each janitor runs off after taking 10 points of damage, they fight with Speed 50, Initiative 25% and Struggle 20%. Getting away from them at any point takes no rolls, since that’s what they *want*. Anyone who fires a gun can scatter them, but a security guard hears it and calls the police.

Characters intent on looting can make major Search or Notice rolls for every hour they spend quietly ransacking the place. A successful roll turns up one of the following.

- \$200 cash in the accounting department petty cash fund. It’s in a folder that says “Reamortization report.”
- A top of the line laptop computer in one of the VPs’ offices. It’s even got *Doom 3* on the hard drive.
- Several copies of *Spank* magazine in a manager’s desk.
- About half of an old, dried out nickel bag of pot in one of the secretary desks.

Other than that, there’s not much to do in the Executive Wing except wait for daylight and get caught.

Visiting during the day is another matter. Upon entry, visitors see a receptionist in a kiosk with a door behind him. To his right, there’s an elevator and two other doors. He’s gracious, very polite, and not expecting any trouble. He’s not a security guard, and he figures that anyone who got past the gates is okay to be here. His name is Savoy and he can direct them to any office they’d care to visit.

The wing is three stories high. On the first floor, behind Savoy’s desk, there’s a hallway with doors on either side. On the right is the Personnel office. On the left, Accounting. The second floor (reached by the elevator or by the stairs that go up next to the elevator) is divided into thirds. There’s Marketing, the Comptroller’s Office, and Quality Control. The top floor is a bit more nicely appointed, and that’s where the Vice Presidents of each department can be found, as well as the office of the President himself.

With the exception of the third floor, the Executive Wing is simply a lot of office cubicles, interrupted here and there by photocopiers, water coolers, bathrooms and the occasional enclosed office for a manager or director.

There’s not much to find in the Executive Wing. There isn’t even a Necessary Servant avatar around. No corruption. No huge dirty secrets. Just people who type and file and cash their paychecks.

Characters who poke around the executive wing eventually come to the attention of a manager. (Exactly what the manager manages depends on which department they're poking around.) All the managers are pretty much the same: They're polite, mildly friendly, and rather curious about what the PCs are doing there. If the PCs have no good explanation for their presence, the managers warn them off and make vague noises about summoning security. If the PCs make a fuss or refuse to budge, 4-5 security guards are called.

If the PCs get really nasty (using blast magick or pulling guns), it's a couple more security guards, and the two cops from the front gate. The office workers stampede out in a panic and a SWAT team is at the doors in ten minutes. (A couple things to remember: One, this is L.A., so the cops shoot first and ask questions later — even if the “bad guys” are apparently unarmed. Two, the police are *ready* to get cops to the plant fast — they're worried the demonstration might turn into a riot. Three, the plant really is out in the middle of friggin' nowhere. PC who bolt for it are going to be out in the open with a couple cop choppers above them, and nowhere to hide unless they're real good at looking like desert.) But really, it's unlikely to come to that, right?

PCs with a pretext — fake OSHA or USDA credentials, or a recommendation from Erica Fisher — get the kid glove treatment. Steve Ramirez, the manager of Quality Control, greets them with a big grin and handshake, offers 'em coffee and brioche, and is happy to show them whatever they want to see. (He does make some excuse about having a few things to finish up first, then goes into his office and warns all the floor managers to get things in prime condition 'cause the health inspectors are coming.) Then it's off to the Main Building to get set up for a guided tour. Steve drags his feet as much as he can: He wants to give the floor managers as much time as he can to get ready.

On the other hand, the PCs may go see Margie in Personnel (meaning, they may have convinced the gate guard they were supposed to be working there). In that case there's about an hour in which this kind, matronly old fat woman tries to find out who interviewed them and why they think they're supposed to work there. If the PCs make some major Charm or Lie rolls (or, alternately, can magickally tweak memories or use some other kind of trickery) they get temporary badges and are told to go see Chuck in the main building. Otherwise, it's the same deal as above, with the manager threatening to summon security, etc. etc.

STATOSPHERE INFLUENCE IN THE EXEC WING

None. Nil, nothing, nada. Zip, zero, zilch. Move along folks, nothin' to see here.

THE MAIN BUILDING

The one place where the line workers from the kill floor mingle with the office workers of the Executive Wing is in the Main Building. Like the Exec Wing, it's extensively climate controlled, filtering out a good 90% of the animal smells. This building, however, is only one story high.

Entering from the Executive Wing, a guest or laborer comes first into a large cafeteria containing about fifty tables, each big enough to seat a dozen workers. There's an industrial kitchen attached, soft drink machines, orange plastic trays on rails — you know what a cafeteria's like, right? The menu choices of the day are hamburgers, chipped beef on toast, or a rather soggy lasagna. Plus, succotash.

Unless it's noon or 6:00 PM there's only a few workers taking breaks, getting a coke, reading magazines and trying to psych themselves up for the next couple hours of labor. At lunch time and dinner time, it's more crowded, but there are still empty spaces at four or five tables. At all times however, busy or empty, the office workers tend to cluster closer to the Exec Wing and line workers sit closer to the kill floor. It's just that way.



Halfway between the door to the offices and the other side, there's a door opening to the parking lot. People who enter the main building directly come in through that door.

The door to the right leads towards the kill floor, but it doesn't open onto it directly. There's a corridor, with the entry to the floor at the end. There are two doors on the right and two on the left. If the PCs haven't been to the floor yet, when they enter from the cafeteria they can see fresh, bloody footprints and spatters leading from the kill floor to the first door on their left. That door is labeled "Infirmary."

The infirmary gets some action nearly every day — after all, you've got a lot of people working with knives, heavy machinery and tons of upset beef on the hoof. Now that the plant is staffed mostly with replacement workers, it's positively hopping. There are two nurses on duty at all times, and three during the busier day shift. These folks have the Medicine skill at 30%, but they get a +15% bonus on the common injuries of the slaughterhouse — cuts and slices, contusions, pinch and crush injuries that sort of thing.

Curious PCs who poke their heads in are "lucky" enough to see (but first hear) a 19-year-old scab worker who has just accidentally cut two fingers off his left hand. Two of his co-workers dragged him off the floor to the nurses. He's panicky. The three floor workers are all dressed in white gowns, rather like lab coats, with blood and tissue on the front. They also have hairnets, facemasks, rubber boots and gloves.

The injured worker is screaming and moaning, trying to curl into the fetal position around his maimed hand. The nurses, with gentle voices, are telling him that unless they see his hand they can't help him. Belying their pleasant tones, however, they're getting rather physical trying to pry his arm out. The other line workers are looking on uncertainly.

"Uh . . . we got the fingers right here," one says hesitantly, and holds out the two gruesome morsels.

Seeing this scene is a Rank-2 Violence check. If the PCs help, they can easily pry the guy's arm out, get the flow stanced and make themselves useful to the nurses. If they just gawk, the nurses briefly look up and say "Something wrong? No? Then you can't watch without buying a ticket, ass-eyes." (If the PCs should show up back in the infirmary later, the nurses recognize them. They get competent treatment, along with competent sarcastic backchat.)

Across from the infirmary is an unmarked, locked door. It leads down into a cavernous basement filled with ductwork, boilers, janitorial supplies, a gigantic laundry room and much of the guts of the building's massive air filtering and conditioning system.

The two final doors between the lunch room and the cold floor lead to the men's and women's changing and shower rooms. Men to the left, women to the right. Both rooms are pretty much the same — there's a sort of a foyer where gore-spattered aprons, boots and gloves get dropped down a chute to the laundry area. Past that are ranks of gray steel lockers where the workers store their street clothes on the job, and their work coveralls when they aren't there. The showers are big, open gym-style group showers. There are also toilet stalls adjacent to the locker room.

STATOSPHERE INFLUENCE IN THE MAIN BUILDING

One of the nurses has a very small touch of the Healer archetype, and one of the janitors in the basement has a similar slight hint of the Loyal Laborer, but other than that there's nothing.

THE STORAGE PENS

These are huge, roofed-over cattle pens that poke out into the parking lot from the killing floor. There are metal-frame gates on the fronts of them, but they're otherwise open to a fenced-in area. Trucks back up to a ramp and unload their cattle. The cows are then moved into the pens until the slaughterhouse is ready for them. There's no equipment there to feed

or water them: They're not going to be around long enough for that to be an issue.

The two paths from the pens to the first station in the kill floor curve very gently to the right, then swing around back left, gradually narrowing so that the cows enter single file. (All this is carefully planned to encourage the cows to move forward slowly without panicking. A sharp curve looks like a dead end, and the cows won't go in.) There are handlers — okay, technically “cowboys” — on gantries along the fence, moving the cows forward. Generally this is done with flags and nudging and gentle encouragement. But, of course, with replacement workers, the cattle prods are getting much more work. This in turn has made the cows skittish.

Honored-guest style PCs are not allowed into the pens, at all. “What kind of operation would we be if we let people jeopardize themselves like that?” Steve asks. But really, nothing much is stopping PCs (guests or not) from hopping the fence.

Characters who make it up to the fence and who (for whatever reason) want to get in can climb in fairly easily. Anyone with a Climb skill can just do it, no roll. However, people without such a skill have to make a significant General Athletics roll to get over before a cowboy runs over and grabs the PC by the legs, shouting. (If several characters are climbing at the same time, only one gets grabbed.) A major Struggle roll can break the grip, but then the character has to make another significant Athletics roll to get over before the cowboy can latch on again. (The cowboy also has to make a Struggle roll to do this.)

PCs on the inside of the fence get the attention of the cows. If the characters are acting calm and soothing, the cows do nothing. But if they're running, shouting, or just moving purposefully, the cattle get spooked. *All* of them. They're not stampeding, but they're snorting and neighing and trying to bump the characters back with their heads or sides.

Have each PC in the pen with agitated cattle make a major Dodge roll every so often. Success means the cows don't noticeably hurt the PC. Failure indicates 1-5 points of damage from bruising and general crushing.

A hotheaded replacement cowpoke named Evan decides he doesn't want the PCs in there. A few rounds after the PCs enter the pens, Evan jumps in and starts yelling at them to get out. (This, of course, gets the cows nervous.) Any PC who doesn't comply gets a taste of the cattle prod.

Evan has Initiative 25%, Body 60, Struggle 35% and is armed with a cattle prod. Anyone hit by the prod takes normal damage and loses the next two actions twitching. Victims also make a Body roll; failure means unconsciousness, which is not a good result around antsy cattle.

The Golden Calf gets delivered to the pens by a truck from Mapletree Haulage. (Remember Matterkros's prediction?) The truck has a fairly clear maple tree logo on the side, along with the name. Characters who have any reason to be watching for the maple tree can notice it with a significant Notice roll.

The Golden Calf itself doesn't stand out too much to ordinary vision. It's a warm buff color, while 90% of the other cows are dark brown, black or black and dirty white. To aura sight or to someone under the influence of UPS, it's a different story: It's suffused with a pure crimson light burns like a vivid sunset.

THE KILL FLOOR

Priest Brothers' ideal capacity is 300 kills per hour. It runs two parallel slaughter lines, each of which processes 150 head per hour — or five cows, per station, every two minutes. The pace is relentless and not very forgiving of errors. However, with temp workers, errors are exactly what happens.

Ideally, the process goes like this. A cow enters from the pens and is gently lifted up by a strap across its midsection. This sling carries it forward to one of two bolt gun stations.



The bolt gun is a heavy hydraulic device hanging from the ceiling on several chains. It looks something like a miniature jackhammer. When the trigger is depressed, a bolt about an inch thick shoots out about eight inches, with enough force to go right through a cow's skull. The cow should be dead before it knows what hit it.

The carcass proceeds to the bleed rail, where it gets hung by its back legs and the neck is slit. While it's bleeding out, it goes into an enclosed steel chamber where it's blasted with searing-hot steam. (This loosens up the skin.) At the other end of the steam chamber wait the skinners, who strip off the skin, and then it's a series of chop stations that separate it into cuts. Prime cuts get sectioned off early and sent to the freezer section for wrapping. Loose meat is gathered and ground up for hamburger. Bony cuts (like the meat close to the spine) go into specialized scraping and grinding machines designed to get off every last ounce.

If the PCs know that the killer of the Golden Calf is important, they're probably going to try to find some way to hang around the bolt guns. If they're on the trail of the calf's meat, that's also probably a good place to start: By the time it comes out of the steamer, it's not going to be recognizable as the sacred cow, and soon after that it's going to be in a lot of different pieces.

It's possible that a PC takes a turn bolt gunning. Use a simple Speed roll to operate the bolt gun. Any outcome other than a matched failure or fumble indicates that the animal is dead. However, each time the PC bolts a cow, it's a rank 2 Violence stress check. (Naturally, one either flees or gets hardened rather quickly). A failure to immediately kill a cow results in a rank 3 Violence check and a rank 1 Helplessness check.

After the first hour of bolt gunning, give the PC a Body check. Failure means that his Speed drops by 10% for the purposes of bolt gunning until he takes a break. (Unless you're feeling kindly and deliver the calf to him before an hour is up.)

KILLING THE GOLDEN CALF

If a PC can get a shot at the cow before it faces the bolt guns, s/he might try to kill it personally and become the sacrificial priest(ess). The cow has Body 70 — good luck with your bare hands. However, if the cows are calm and the PC has a gun or a knife, s/he can pointblank the cow (see UA2, p. 56). Any roll other than a fumble or a matched failure kills the animal, triggering a rank-2 Violence check for the killer. In any event, the attempt immediately agitates the cows in the pen quite a bit, not to mention the cops from the gate and about 4-5 other security guards. If the PC was visible when jumping the fence, the security forces arrive right after s/he kills the cow. If the PC was sneaky, s/he has 4-5 rounds head start before the guards and cops show up.

Play it by ear if this happens. Given the wild improbabilities implicit with carrying the shakti, it's not unlikely that the PC escapes in the confusion. But even if arrested, the most the PC is going to be charged with is malicious mischief, disturbing the peace and destruction of property. L.A. needs its jail space for drug offenders, so the PC probably only gets sentenced to probation, community service and a \$1000 fine — if s/he sticks around to be tried, two days after arrest. But by that time the next charge is long gone...

Unfortunately for the PCs, if one of them doesn't step up, the destined bolt-gunner is (you guessed it) a scab. And he's friggin' *tired*. He yawns just as the calf comes to his station, and instead of shooting it through the temple, he fires shallowly, laterally, across both its eyes.

Understandably, the cow goes wild. It starts screaming and thrashing and kicking. Blood flies everywhere. Anyone seeing it makes a rank 2 Violence check. (The bolt gunner fails his and opts to freeze.) Furthermore, everyone nearby

gets to make a Dodge roll (except the stunned bolt gunner). The highest failure catches a hoof to the chest for 1d10 of damage from cracked ribs, and is also knocked down (as per the Knock Down cherry in *UA2*, p. 56). If all the PCs dodge successfully, it's the slack-jawed bolt gunner who catches it. (PCs who regard themselves as good folks may invite Self checks if they chase the cow instead of helping him.) Everyone present can take one action before the cow proceeds to the bleed rail. Note that grabbing the bolt gun, or drawing a weapon that wasn't already prepared, is one action.

At the bleed rail, the cow continues to scream and thrash. Armed PCs who run after it can (with a successful Run or General Athletics roll) attempt to kill the animal themselves before the bleed rail operator (a lady named Marcia) slits its throat. Doing so makes her the charge carrier. Her aura becomes infused with the cow's brilliant crimson glow. To people on UPS, she appears garbed in the ceremonial garb of an Aztec sacrificial priestess — feathers, obsidian jewelry, the whole schtick.

As she kills the cow, Marcia also blows a stress check. She throws down her knife and starts swearing monotonously as she flees the bleed rail, heading for the loading docks.

(Marcia's experienced, but non-union, so all her co-workers spat on her this morning. The last thing she needs is some inept bolter making her life hell. She can't quit the job 'cause she needs the money, but she is *fed fucking up*. The check she blew was not Violence, but somewhere in the Isolation/Helpless area.)

Marcia knows her way around, and the PCs don't. She can make her way to the loading docks in three actions without any rolls. PCs have to make major General Athletics rolls to catch up to her without accidentally slipping on blood, getting clobbered by a strung-up and partially dissembled carcass, slamming into a meat-packer or catching a spray of white-hot steam. (If the roll fails, give the PC a chance to dodge. Failed dodges result in a d10 of damage, or less — GM's call.)

PCs who grab her before she reaches the loading dock... well, what are they going to do? She has no idea what they're talking about if they start babbling about magick, destiny or golden calves. If they try anything rough, she tries to break free and succeeds. (She doesn't have to roll: Assume it's a matched success as a result of the Statosphere's attention.) She runs off to the loading docks hollering for security.

Characters who catch up to her and act concerned or kindly can calm her down. She tells them she's had enough and she's heading to the loading dock for a smoke. If a PC offers her a cigarette she says "Oh, God bless you" — transferring the charge to that character.

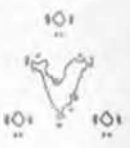
Dean Matterkros is only present if the PCs convinced him to come inside. If he's there, though, he can get to her without rolling — he's got that gimmick that lets him get to someone if he has something to say, remember? He tells her "You need to calm down, take a step back, and think things through." This is indubitably true, and she nods, acknowledging it. (At this point, the PCs can catch up and interfere or support him, as they wish.) If the PCs don't actively interfere, she nods and thanks him, and he says "Just tell me you hear what I'm saying to you." As soon as she says "Yeah, I hear you" — acknowledging his message — the crimson glow flows into him and transforms into pure white light in his aura.

If the PCs didn't bring Matterkros along, and they don't catch her or can't convince her to bless them, she goes to the docks where Mitch Geddakis is waiting for his truck to get loaded. He spots her and asks if she's okay. They converse briefly. He offers her a smoke and she blesses him in gratitude.

STATOSPHERE INFLUENCE ON THE KILLING FLOOR

No archetypes to be found, but there's activity when the heifer arrives (as described above).

PCs who perceive the statosphere can, with a successful Notice roll, pick out something weird about Mitch Geddakis. Unlike other UPS hallucinations, this one is subtle:



There are no shadows on him. He seems perfectly illuminated from every angle, as if he was at the focal point of a thousand spotlights. Yet he doesn't seem *brightly* lit, he doesn't glow or emit light. He just has no shadows on his person, anywhere.

Once Mitch Geddakis' truck is loaded, stato-vision makes it look like a giant, glowing serpent.

THE LOADING DOCK

It's possible that the PCs go to the loading dock first, before they head to the killing floor. If they do this, they see Mitch standing next to his truck. The truck is memorable because the custom paint job on the cab is well done — a flirty-looking blonde bombshell in cutoffs and a tank top, with the words "Sweet Sweet Connie" underneath in fancy script. He's talking to the loading dock manager, gesturing a little bit and looking exasperated. The manager shrugs, turns and walks away. Mitch watches him a moment, then shrugs and heads for the edge of the dock, pulling out a pack of smokes.

Though neither man knows it, statesphere interference has ensured that every package of burger with meat from the Golden Calf is on Mitch's truck. Divination can determine that the meat is on the truck, but not which patties (out of thousands) are the magick ones.

Those burgers are fated to be the triggers for the national shakti.

Mitch has no clue, of course. To him, it

looks like a paperwork snafu that's going to keep him waiting. While he waits, he looks for someone to make small talk with — someone like the PCs.

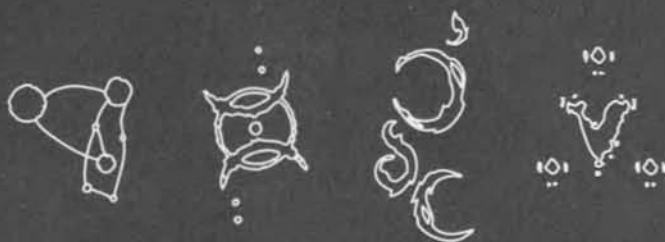
This is your chance to convey Mitch's personality — down to earth, friendly, and above all *ordinary*. PCs who talk about weird mystic stuff find him surprisingly unfazed. "Yeah, I seen some weird shit in my time, I tell you what." He's not naïvely buying any crazy line of jive they lay down, but he doesn't reject it out of hand like a "normal" person would.

It is also a really, really good idea at this point for Mitch to mention that he's headed out to Las Vegas next. PCs who want to hitch a ride are gently turned down — if they were thumbing on the road he'd say yeah, but the security guys are being real nosy at Priest Brothers these days and he can't look weird bringing passengers out.

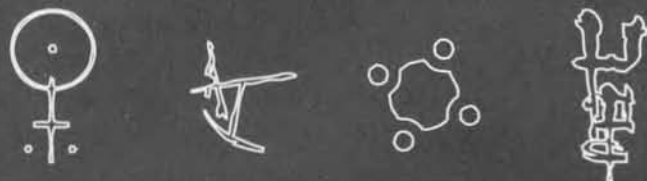
If the PCs stick around the loading docks long enough, Marcia shows up and (unless interrupted) blesses Mitch. But it probably makes for a better story if the PCs go onto the killing floor and see all the gory stuff. It makes her blessing of Mitch (or whoever) more vivid.

IF THE PLAYERS DON'T DO MUCH

The default fate of the Muladhara charge is to get grounded in Mitch Geddakis. Score at the end of the first inning: Geddakis 1, Matterkros 0, Fisher 0.



CHAPTER THREE
SWADHISTHANA : LAS VEGAS



Let's see here: You've got a city out in the middle of nowhere that was more or less built by gangsters. A city from which nuclear tests were visible in the 1950s. A city to which thousands of decent, law-abiding folks travel every day to partake in delights that, if sampled in their home town, might get them arrested.

Las Vegas is kind of weird.

Granted, it's not as rough and tumble as it used to be. MGM and Disney are squeezing out the mob like a glutton passing a foot-long turd: It ain't happening fast or easy, but it's happening. This makes things considerably easier for the Vegas occult underground, since the Mafia's policy towards magick has calcified to "shoot first and don't bother asking questions later." But it must be said that while the connection between the made guys and the occultists was never *cozy*, neither was it as openly and violently hostile as it was (and still is) in New York or Philadelphia.

Maybe it's something in the water. Maybe the mind-boggling amounts of money and

luxury available to the mobsters put 'em in a good (or lazy) mood. Or maybe it's something about the city itself. The tone of the town is conducive to magickal thinking: When you can walk into any casino and smack up against evidence that dropping one coin in the right slot could change your life, the whole idea of bending reality's rules becomes more palatable. Superstition goes with gambling the way hard liquor goes with questionable sexual decisions, the way a cell phone and a Lexus goes with being a shitty driver. So much magick is so subtle . . . if the gangsters got hardcase on everyone who was performing weird little rituals or following bizarre and seemingly nonsensical habits . . . well, pretty soon they'd be busy roughing up a good half of the city's guests. They'd have no time to launder money, fix games and shake down the dentists' convention. Better to let the little stuff slide.

Besides, Las Vegas is possibly the city in the U.S. where the interests of the Occult Underground and the more ordinary Stealing Stuff

UNKNOWN
ARMIES

And Killing Underground coincide the most. Vegas is the gambling center of America, which draws Gambler avatars and entropomancers like fat guys to an all you can eat shrimp buffet. Entropomancers are (as a general rule) crazy dangerous, and notoriously immune to common sense. If a New York mobster roughs up a New York dipsomancer, the boozehound is likely to figure “Hey, I can get just as drunk in Boston.” He moves along — no big loss. But Vegas is something very special to chaos mages. Some practically regard it as the Promised Land. It’s not so easy to make them budge.

As for the Gamblers, most of their effects are (by and large) so subtle that the goodfellahs never picked up that they’re anything other than absurdly lucky. (Which, arguably, is all they are.) Sure, there were the few powerful Avatars who were running games where you could gamble away your vision and your sanity, but they weren’t that thick on the ground and they weren’t making trouble. At least, not trouble the way bodybags make it.

The Vegas occultists can talk your ear off about nasty scrapes between mobsters and magick-users, but when Fortuna showed up in the late 1970s, she did an admirable job of calming things down. By and large, the gangsters stayed downtown, at the older and more traditional casinos, while the chaos mages moved out to the new, big, glizty hotels.

The situation now is pretty calm. The entropomancers aren’t making trouble because, win or lose, they’re charging up. The Gamblers are gambling, like they’ve always done. And the mobsters are slowly becoming anachronistic.

Enter the PCs, pursuing one national Kundalini spirit.

WHO CARES? (EVERYBODY CARES)

The shakti charge almost certainly works its way to a woman named Felicia Williams, whose luck immediately goes very, very wiggy. (That Statosphere attention, remember?) She goes off to gamble.

Sara Markott, one of Dean’s proxy children, is in town for a journalism conference. Her father soon alerts her to the impending presence of the Kundalini pulse — and (if he’s aware of them) the PCs.

Lataetia Ludophis, the Fool avatar described on p. 23 (ha!), also shows up. She’s got no idea what she’s doing there — she just decided going to Vegas sounded fun. This ignorance makes her an especially powerful tool for the Fool, who uses her to block agents of Erica Fisher.

As if that’s not enough interference, the True King may (if Fisher wound up with the last charge) begin some subtle moves against her agents. (The True King can’t attack her personally until she knows she’s on the usurpation route. Her friends and agents, however, are fair game.) The King’s manipulation takes the odd form of Elvis impersonators. While not the most traditional rulers, they do refer to themselves as “The King” an awful lot. And arguably they are decked in magnificent robes.

The Rebel archetype is acting out a bit too, but not too obviously (yet). Its influence over runaways and petty crooks can act in favor of the PCs (if they look to be working towards unseating the True King or the Messenger) or against (if they seem to be helping Mitch Geddakis.)

Finally, with a journalism convention in town, the Messenger’s influence is widespread and powerful. Its most direct agent, however, is Eugene LaRue (see p. 25) who has come to try to foil his old nemesis, Dean Matterkros/Dermott Arkane.

OVERVIEW

There are basically three parts to this adventure. First off, there’s the social element, wherein the PCs meet Eugene, Sara and Lataetia — people who continue to seek the charge throughout “To Go.” This is the first meeting with them, so it’s important to make a strong impression.

The second part requires the PCs to run around looking for the charge bearer, Felicia

Williams. This is when they might bump heads with the lesser servants of the archetypes — the Elvii, the journalists and the crooks. Ideally, this ends with the PCs tracking Felicia to Fortuna's Great Game.

The third part is the Great Game. The PCs (along with everyone else) duel for the kundalini charge in a game of Gambler-enhanced magick poker. This is their chance to score big and pick up skills that could serve them *really* well later — or, alternately, to get stuck talking like a Chinese fortune cookie forever.

PART ONE: MEET THE PLAYERS

The Big Pulse arrives in Las Vegas aboard Mitch Geddakis' truck, which delivers frozen patties to a good half-dozen franchises throughout the city. He then goes off to finish his deliveries. PCs who try to find him are in for a hard time, unless they've got (1) prophecy, (2) Regina Fisher's help or (3) some powerful research skills. (He's not hiding: It's just not particularly easy to find one wildcat trucker when he's on the road if you don't know where you're looking.)

As soon as the L.A. charge was bestowed, the next chakra city was set. Before that, nobody knew what was next on the shakti's itinerary. But after Matterkros either got the blessing himself or perceived its use (courtesy of a channel, or maybe just UPS observation) he started trying to find out where it was headed next, and he quickly succeeded. "Lucky" for him (or maybe not luck at all, maybe fate taking a hand) the charge was headed to Las Vegas, where one of his proxies was already in place . . . along with a lot of people inimical to his quest. Maybe not so lucky after all.

In any event, if the PCs are allied with Matterkros, he can easily point them at Las Vegas.

On the other hand, it's possible that the PCs are friends of Erica Fisher. If they told her Mitch Geddakis received the pulse, she can easily find out the six or seven restaurants on his schedule.

If they got the blessing for her, it's a good idea to make it trickier. She can give them a list of the fifteen franchises in the area scheduled to get a Priest Brothers delivery, but *only if they ask*. In her mind, there's no necessary reason that the first chakra would have such a literal, physical connection to the second. If the PCs don't think to ask, she can consult Feng Vespucci (or the PCs can consult the MakAttax list — Sophia McCallum's vision potion could easily reveal the next stop). Either way can yield results, but either costs them several valuable hours.

PCs without intimate connections to Dean or Erica still might get sucked in. Avatars of interested Archetypes can be led by constant play of "Viva Las Vegas" on the radio, reruns of the old detective show "Vega\$" in cable syndication, posters for Las Vegas getaway fares, overheard jokes and similar portents. Characters with divination skills and no other way to get involved can succeed automatically. (It's not like the shakti is leaving small, imperceptible prints.) Organizations like TNI and the Sleepers have prophets on call — *if* the PCs didn't clue in to Mitch's importance early or remember where he's headed.

Freelance PCs with *no* patron and *no* divination skills may be up a creek, which is exactly the kind of person Eugene LaRue would look for to enlist. A final way to get these characters to Las Vegas is to have Eugene find them in Los Angeles. (After all, he's been chasing Matterkros and he *does* have divinatory powers.) He could tip them wise if they seem to buy his passionate line about Matterkros being a poor man's Antichrist.

MEETING EUGENE

Eugene finds the PCs through his Messenger prognostications, and he immediately attempts to wow them with his superior knowledge and background. He's not a particularly charming man — the fiction in *Unknown Armies* should give you a good feel for his caustic speaking style — but he's ardently convinced that he's right and that his mission is important.



He's used to bartering information, and happily trades what he knows for what the PCs know. (Make sure you work in the phrase "What's the scoop?" one time. *Only* one time. You'll see why in a little bit.)

What Eugene Wants to Know:

- What the hell happened at the Priest Brothers plant?
- Do the PCs have any idea *why* it happened?
- Was Dermott Arkane there? (Eugene has a photo — you can use the one in *UA2*, p. 17, if you want.) If the PCs tell him, "That's Dean Matterkros," he laughs and shows how the names are anagrams. "Dermott's still doing his same old Scrabble shit. Middle initial must be 'A' now." He's also interested to hear about Matt Roadkane.
- Do the PCs have plans for this "big charge"?

What Eugene Has to Share:

- Dermott's dirty history (available on p. 17 and in the opening story of *UA2*). "And that's just the stuff I know about." He's particularly incensed by Matterkros' callous use of proxies — such as the way he fled Renata's trial rather than have to tell the truth about his involvement with her. If the PCs seem to be taking his stories with a grain of salt, he can back up his factual statements with the first Messenger channel.
- An explanation of what proxies are and how Arkane is using them to get around behavioral restrictions.
- If the PCs explain what the shakti is, Eugene can divine where it's going next. He can even give 'em a ride in his 1994 Subaru Imprezza wagon. He won't want to pick up Lataetia though — he's dealt with Fools (not to mention more ordinary fools) before.

Eugene isn't friendly: He's too honest for that. He wants to use the PCs to stop Arkane.

He freely admits that, and if making himself useful to them gets their cooperation, fine. But he makes no pretense of being "on their side." Good roleplaying (or a few well-placed Charm rolls) can soften him up, but he won't drop his guard. The myriad betrayals of the occult underground have left him permanently suspicious.

MEETING LATAETIA

Regardless of what directs the PCs to Vegas, they have a chance to meet Lataetia on the way, if they drive. About halfway there, in the middle of the friggin' *desert*, they see a blonde woman, alone, sitting on her suitcase and trying to flag a ride. (Nice legs, incidentally.) She doesn't seem to be having much luck, but there are butterflies clinging to her and to the road sign she's using for shade. She looks overheated, pretty and definitely in distress.

PCs who pick her up hear that she's heading to Las Vegas. She was going with a friend of hers named Betty, but Betty got sick at the last moment. So then she caught a ride with Betty's friend Rick, but Rick developed a case of "octopus hands" after hearing the song "Gas, Grass or Ass" on the radio, Lataetia said no, and he dumped her on the side of the road. Just like that!

(If the PCs don't give her a ride, she still manages to get to town. She just shows up later.)

Lataetia is consciously following her archetype. She's heard it called "the Fool" but she thinks of it as "Simplicity." She might lie about it to the PCs, or she might not, depending on what you think would serve the story best. She is genuinely clueless about the Big Pulse: She's following her impulses, and they led her to Las Vegas. She's not surprised she's doing Simplicity's work, but she didn't know she was when she set out. Finding out that Archetypes are on the move doesn't faze her in the least. She just keeps doing whatever feels right at the moment, confidently (and correctly) trusting the guidance of her higher power.

Her personal agenda for Las Vegas is to do some gambling, check out a show and try her

luck at the really big, really cheap buffets. She's got a reservation at the New York, New York casino.

If the PCs are working for Erica Fisher, Lataetia definitely wants to stick around. She isn't going to consciously make trouble. She doesn't have to.

True King threatens in Lataetia's company can expect the following sorts of hassles:

- An aggressive human-resources assistant from Michigan. He's drunk, he just won \$700.00, he thinks she's cute and is disinclined to hear "no." He's got a Struggle score of 15% and gives up after getting hit once, but not before landing a "lucky" shot to a PC's face for about 5 points of damage and a persistent nosebleed. The cops show up, of course, and there is a great deal of hassle before it gets managed. (Witnesses on the scene say the guy from Michigan was the aggressor. PCs who wish to sue this guy or send him to jail can go testify when he gets arraigned in two days — but by then, Kundalini has moved on.)
- Any PC who's with Lataetia for a meal is mistakenly served a rohypnol-laced drink intended for her. Have the affected PC make a Body roll. If he succeeds, he takes a 10% penalty to all Speed and Mind based skills for the next couple hours, then falls into a heavy sleep and remembers nothing of the penalized time afterwards. A failure means a 15% penalty to *all* skills except Soul, and the PC passes out after just one hour. A matched or critical failure indicates instant unconsciousness. More police hassles are, of course, perfectly possible.
- Male characters with any skill relating to attraction or good looks can get seduced. Lataetia is surprisingly adept at vamping men by letting them think they're seducing her.
- She offers to drive. If allowed, she blows a stop sign and gets into a low-speed fender-bender with a red Maserati. No one's hurt

(though make 'em roll anyhow) and the car's still driveable, but the front right panel is messed up and the right headlight is ruined. Plus, the Maserati driver is an asshole from Italy with no English.

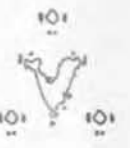
- Lataetia gets mistaken for a hooker, by an actual hooker. (Note: While prostitution is legal in Nevada, it's still against the law in Las Vegas proper. That doesn't stop lots of pros from practicing their trade, of course.) The hooker goes to get her pimp: The PCs can either flee, kick his ass (Body 50, Speed 40, Initiative 30%, Knife Fighting 20% and a +3 damage switchblade, but he bails if threatened with a gun, or after taking 10 points of damage), or abandon Lataetia to her fate. (With her avatar channels, she escapes unscathed, but is awfully pissed at the PCs.)
- While the PCs are walking along the strip with her, a liquor store robber blasts by at high speed and chucks his gun out the car window. She catches it. The police show up in hot pursuit, and they're disinclined to believe her unlikely story. Incidentally, the description of the holdup man matches one of the PCs.

MEETING SARA

PCs who met Matterkros in L.A. were probably filmed (or at least photographed). This means Sara Markott has seen the pictures and, if you think it adds to the story, she can spot them in Las Vegas. Her reaction depends on their behavior in Los Angeles.

Characters who helped her dad out get her aid looking for the Big Game. She's not real familiar with Las Vegas, but she's got a decent set of reporter skills. She can't divine the truth like Eugene or her dad, but she can get to it and she can deliver it.

If the PCs gave the charge to someone else, or acted against her father, she just stays out of their way. She's not keen on confrontation at this point, and she's been told that her father has powerful and dangerous enemies.



Note that she knows Eugene LaRue: If she sees the PCs with him, she assumes they're on the Other Team and stays away.

Neutral characters are targeted for recruitment. This takes the form of earnest "do the right thing" rhetoric at first, but if they seem like self-interested bastards, she can switch to "get a powerful ally when Matterkros becomes a god" mode.

Unlike Eugene, Sara doesn't have much to trade in the way of information. She believes her father is a good man, and that anything that helps him is probably good for humankind in the long term.

INTERSECTIONS

You can pretty much let the PCs do what they want when they reach Las Vegas — at least for a little while. If they come in with Eugene, he's eager to start tracking the charge. Lataetia, on the other hand, wants to waste as much of their time as possible. If Sara approaches them, play it by ear.

While they're picking a hotel and trying to get their shit together, it's time to introduce any characters they haven't met.

PCS ON EUGENE'S SIDE

If the PCs are with Eugene, they can run into Lataetia at their hotel. (Yeah, she just happened to pick the same one — the first of many such coincidences, surely.) Initially Eugene considers her a mundane distraction, to be dealt with by a fairly rude brush-off. Depending on the PCs' reactions, she may scam, or she might be oblivious to his hints. Given any encouragement at all from the PCs, she sticks around, talking and flirting and bickering mildly with Eugene. Eventually he gets fed up, pulls out a deck of cards and, squeezing the ends with his fingers, fires them at her, "52 Pick-Up" style. A joker card gets stuck in her cleavage, prompting him to say "Hah! I knew it. The Fool sent you, right?" This leads to a noisy verbal confrontation. Security staff arrive promptly and take the side of the pretty blonde, rather than

the skanky stranger. (Funny how that works.) The PCs can now pick which one they want to go with. If they pick Lataetia, Eugene shrugs, says "You people are fucking worthless" and stalks off. If they pick Eugene, he theorizes about why the Fool would be involved, but he has nothing concrete to offer.

Alternately, PCs in Eugene's company may spot Sara. This requires some sort of Notice skill, however, because as soon as she sees Eugene she becomes very frightened. With a successful Notice roll, a PC can see a woman take a picture of them, then duck back into hiding. If they approach, she bolts. Any successful Chase or Run roll catches her, but if it fails she gets away — and decides to load and start carrying her gun.

If she's caught, play it by ear. She won't volunteer any information, and if they try to haul her off somewhere private to search her purse for ID, she screams for help at the top of her lungs. Aggressive PCs are met with force, but she doesn't have any sort of weapon on her. Particularly persistent PCs may succeed in dragging her off somewhere for interrogation.

Eugene won't help with this: He'd love to taboo Arkane though a proxy, but not at the cost of committing a felony like kidnapping or assault. Remember, this is a guy who *can't deny the truth*. He does not want to get arrested, no sir. If the PCs present him with a *fait accompli*, he tells them (in front of Sara) that he intends to rat them to the cops if they don't release her immediately. Then he looks at her and says "I'm not as bad as your dad probably said." She looks shaken and promises not to go to the police if they just let her be.

PCS WHO PICKED UP LATAETIA

PCs who hooked up with Lataetia can also run into Eugene at their hotel, or out on the strip, whatever. If they haven't met him before, assume he's divined their (murky) involvement and recognizes Lataetia as a Fool avatar. He tries to warn them that Lataetia is "a siren, sent to lure you from your true quest" and he



can back this up with the Messenger channel that makes the truth hard to ignore. Lataetia tells him to buzz off, and if they're anywhere that has burly bouncer types (not at all uncommon in Vegas) she flounces over and says "That man is bothering me!" Its up to the PCs who they want to stay with.

Another way to run it is to have the PCs with Lataetia meet Sara first. Lataetia reacts pretty well to Sara: After all, her mission is to protect the True King, and if the kundalini is spent on Matterkros, it can't go to Regina. Sara, for her part, is less certain. Her reaction depends on what her father told her about the PCs. Depending on her categorization (enemy, friend or neutral) she reacts as described on p. 49.

PCs AND SARA MARKOTT

PCs who were referred to Sara by Dean, or who just happened to meet her first, may spot Eugene sniffing around their hotel. Sara immediately tries to steer them away from him, warning him that he's dangerous, unpredictable, and a killer (all true statements — or, at least factual).

With those warnings in place, Eugene approaches and tries to enlist their aid. Sara pleads her case too and bickering ensues — bullying on his part, frightened on her part.

Sara and the PCs can also meet Lataetia before meeting Eugene. As above, this isn't a big deal. Lataetia tries to tag along, and Sara (while not enthusiastic) can't really object too much. Lataetia acts as a bad-luck charm for the PCs, but not for Sara who may (if Lataetia becomes too much of a burden in part two) tell the PCs they have to choose between the two women.

PART TWO: ANTE UP

Once the PCs have received contradictory warnings from Eugene and Sara, have been discombobulated by Lataetia and are generally wondering what's going on, it's time to start seriously tracking the shakti.

Your players will, no doubt, come up with several strategies for finding the thing. That's fine. But just between you and me, it doesn't really matter much. True, a smart strategy should be rewarded and incredible stupidity should have consequences, but the focus of this chakra is not detection. Unless they do something completely moronic (like get arrested, or give up) your PCs should get admission to the main event in Part Three.

The point of Part Two is to let the PCs blow off a little steam with some inconclusive struggles, and to get them to the Big Game. Some strategies they may try include the following . . .

SHAKE DOWN MY SOURCES

Some PCs have connections in the occult underground, established through play or simply because they bought a skill like "Underground Contacts." Whichever, this seems like a fine time to use it.

Don't make 'em roll for this, but try to work in some roleplaying. If they're Attaxers, a consultation of the list indicates which Vegas franchise is infiltrated. Asking at that restaurant yields the story about the woman who won the money right when she needed it. "Last time I seen her, she was headed for the Horseshoe." Diligent detective work at the Horseshoe Casino finds a waitress or gambler who witnessed a plain woman with spectacular luck. "I think her name was Theresa or Alicia or something like that. She left for the New Orleans for lunch, I think." From the New Orleans it's not hard to track her to the hospital. Alternately, a curious Fortuna hears about their questions and connects with them. If they make a good impression, she invites them to her game with the promise that Felicia will be there.

Non-attaxers are more likely to know (or be referred to) John Stoli. He hasn't heard about Felicia, but he can help the PCs find her — for a price. He explains Fortuna's Game and tells them about the Henri Paul glass (he and it are

described on pp. 60 and 61 respectively). “I’ll help you find this woman, if you agree to get in the game and try to get me that glass. Even if you win it, you owe it to me, got it? Agreed?” With his connections to the superstitious and drunken of Vegas, a little legwork can uncover that Felicia is going to the game too.

DOWN A SHAKE AT THE SOURCE

Offline attaxers, or non-attaxers who are familiar with the cabal, may simply start going from restaurant to restaurant asking about unusual events. If this is their best route, you can retroactively put a couple unnatural phenomena in with the story of Felicia’s anointing as the charge carrier. The counter wipers have not only heard about her weird luck, but after she bought her burger the phone rang nonstop for half an hour. No one was on the line. Not only that, but someone’s been coming in and making messes — making this weird pattern out of sugar or ketchup in various booths. The employees have been watching, but they haven’t caught the fucker. “In fact, there’s one now!” (Anyone who reads Hindi script can recognize it as the word ‘Kundalini’.)

From there, it’s the same trail described above — casino, different casino, then Fortuna or the hospital. Only in this version, the “Kundalini” script can periodically be seen, formed in the spatters of spilled drinks or the streams of cigarette exhalations.

HOCUS POCUS

Magick is, as always, the easy route. A successful divination yields enough information to find Felicia just as she’s getting in a limo to go to the Big Game. Numerical divination reveals the address of the hospital (3186) and the time at which she leaves (6:30), along with the hospital’s front desk phone number. More visual styles reveal an image of a sunrise, a red limo and the state Maryland. (She’s at Sunrise hospital at 3186 Maryland parkway and the red limo is what she leaves in for Fortuna’s Game.)

Magick is also, of course, the route most fraught with uncertainties. Consequently, divination of the shakti charge causes some ripples. A few minor unnatural phenomena, along with maybe a significant one. It’s also far more likely that some (or all) of the Statosphere flunkies (described in the sidebar titled ‘Heaven’s Mooks’) zero in on the PCs.

ASK A FRIENDLY POLICE OFFICER

Calling police stations, fire departments and hospitals asking about unusual accidents and mysterious phenomena is unlikely to pay off . . . unless the PCs are charming and/or sneaky. Talking to an off duty officer or dispatcher is far smarter, and a good Charm roll can pull out the story about the woman who got creamed by a car right after winning something like twenty grand.

Similarly, asking around the casinos about unusual events can (with diligence) lead to Felicia’s trail. (If the PCs are reduced to this kind of thing, you might want to spice it up with unnatural phenomena, as described above.)

COMPLICATIONS

Of course, it’s not so simple as all that. As they investigate, the PCs are likely to get harassed by individuals under the influence of various Clergy members. The exact type of harassment they receive depends on what they’re doing. Those who support Regina Fisher can expect to be pushed around by Elvis impersonators. Reporters pick on allies of Dean Matterkros. Those who helped out Mitch Geddakis receive the attentions of petty criminals.

You can play this by ear. The PCs are generally going to be running around to casinos, fast-food joints and hospitals. All are open to the public, and it’s hardly a strain on credulity that any of these agents could be present at any of the above locations.

HEAVEN’S MOOKS

The minor servants of the Invisible Clergy who operate throughout “To Go” are not brain-



washed zombies. They all have free will. It's just that their chosen profession has made it easier for the relevant Clergy members to pay attention to them. When a Clergy member can perceive you, it's not too hard to move you through circumstances that influence your behavior. If they want you to be violent and sullen, for example, they engineer it so that you hear gangsta rap and see a lot of graffiti and broken windows — stuff that subliminally inclines you to doubt the effective rule of law. Add a string of annoying but non-harmful personal setbacks — broken shoelaces, phone solicitations during dinner, toothaches, insomnia — and pretty soon one's violent inclinations get much closer to the surface. If they want you to be friendly and kind, on the other hand, you can expect all green lights, polite drivers all around (because bad drivers who would annoy you get vaporlock) and songs you like on the radio.

More than that, the Clergy can give you . . . impulses. Not orders, not commands. The individual disposes of her will and does as she chooses. But the Clergy can propose. They can make you consider “What *if* I pushed him in front of the train?” Or, more likely, “What if I *don't* back down when he tells me to shove off?” Are the words implanted in your brain, the result of random neurochemical misfires, or is it that the wind whistling across your ear and swirling around your eardrum sounds, subliminally, like “kill them”? It doesn't really matter.

Those who have been entranced by a Clergy member tend to fall back on a particular catch-phrase. It's not exactly clear why this happens — possibly that slogan is attached to the archetype in the cultural consciousness. In any event, if the circumstances warrant, the slogan is likely to pop out of the influenced person's mouth. This is subtle — most of the phrases are current and innocuous, so they don't seem out of place. Haven't you ever said (in your best Elvis voice) “Thankew. Thankew verra' much”?

(As a GM, take it easy with the catch

phrases. Ideally, it should be something that the PCs can readily dismiss as coincidence. But it's also very cool when you can creep your Players out just by having a GMC say “You do what you gotta do.”)

None of these guys are going to fight to the death. In fact, most of them start running or dodging once they take damage, and all can easily be scared off with a brandished gun. (Of course, the Elvii and journalists are almost certain to call the cops in that instance.)

ELVII

The True King's agents in Las Vegas are Elvis impersonators. Most of these guys are between 20 and 40 (though a few “Fat Elvii” are older). By and large they tend to dress in the King of Rock 'n' Roll's glittery pantsuit/big ol' gold belt/Las Vegas mode, but a few of the younger ones show up in the leather outfit from his early career. They tend towards clunky sunglasses, and sideburns are universal.

Catch Phrase: “Nuthin' beats the King, baby.”

Stats: Body 50, Speed 45, 50 Wound Points, Struggle 20%, Initiative 22%

Equipment: About 60% of the Elvii have guitars which can (in a pinch) be used as +3 damage clubs.

Madness Meters: Violence 1, but let them automatically succeed at their first stress check against Violence or the Unnatural.

JOURNALISTS

The fourth estate are a pretty diverse bunch, ranging from ponytailed indie rock reviewers to plausible gray-haired pundits, with a few hard-drinkin' newspaper stereotypes thrown in for good measure.

Catch Phrase: “What's the scoop?”

Stats: Body 45%, Speed 45, 45 Wound Points, Struggle 25%, Initiative 30%

Equipment: All the journalists have cell phones, which they unflinchingly use to call the cops if things get out of hand.

Madness Meters: Most of these guys have a couple hard notches in everything but the Unnatural. Like the Elvii, their Clergy patron protects them from their first stress checks.

HOODS

Petty criminals — graffiti taggers, shoplifters, part-time hookers and the like, not hard core career crimeys — can be molded by the Rebel, because they're transgressing the restrictions of society. (Mobsters' loyalty values shield them from the Rebel's influence.) These reservoir puppies share no common uniform — some are dressed in a cheap attempt at flash, others wear the plain and simple clothes they can afford on uncertain income — but most of them seem somewhat shifty or nervous in their mannerisms.

Catch Phrase: "You do what you gotta do."

Stats: Body 45%, Speed 45, 45 Wound Points, Struggle 30%, Initiative 30%

Equipment: About a third of the hoods have knives (+3 damage).

Madness Meters: The crooks usually have 2-3 hard notches in Violence. The Rebel is unable (or perhaps, merely unwilling) to protect them against stress checks, however.

PART THREE: PLAY THE GAME

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

HAT FUN, PHELGMATIC HEADKNOCKER

It's not easy to get respect when your name is Hat Fun. Fortunately for Mr. Fun, it *is* easy to get respect when you weigh 260 pounds and have a reputation for inscrutable, competent violence.

Hat Fun is forty-two years old, huge, bald, and has a little goatee and moustache. He rarely speaks. There's all kinds of crazy stories: He used to work for the Chinese secret police, he's a disgraced Triad hit man, he murdered a Kung Fu master after learning the highest secrets of the Benevolent Horse style, yadda

yadda yadda.

Hat Fun doesn't know Kung Fu. He was born in Argentina, not China — his native language is actually Spanish. He worked for the plain ol' American Mafia for a while, but they got wary when he started hanging around with weirdo occult types. Now he serves Fortuna as a bodyguard.

Mr. Fun is really a pretty simple sort: He likes a good reuben, a cold beer and a nice sweat in the Luxor steam bath. There are no great, deep thoughts going on in that shiny dome. He's just your basic goombah, wants the good life without working too hard, isn't squeamish about breaking a few thumbs to get it.

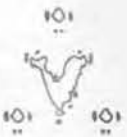
Unfortunately, in the 1980s Mr. Fun ran afoul of one of Las Vegas' more colorful dukes, a fellow called Irving the Shit.

Irving the Shit really earned his nickname. Nobody who knew him can recall him being nice to anyone, ever. The most common theory is that he was some kind of variant Irascimancer. Certainly he pissed off everyone he met. But unlike the stock-standard rage mage, he showed no compunctions about expressing his own anger. His spells seemed to work differently too. No one really figured him out. Given his temperament, no one wanted to. It was a known fact that he could put curses on people, so most folks just kept out of his way.

One day, Irving the Shit made one "slitty-eyed fatass chrome dome bucktooth chink" remark too many in the presence of Hat Fun. Mr. Fun dragged him to the parking garage and opened his skull on the concrete. Eight people were in the bar when Hat Fun lost his temper, and not one of them said a word about it to the police. The death of Irving "the Shit" Mueller is still unsolved.

Three of the witnesses bought Hat Fun drinks.

Unfortunately for Mr. Fun, Irving the Shit cursed him before he died. Since that night, Hat Fun has been unable to speak, except in fortune cookie phrases. The regular guy who lost his temper at the bigot is being forced to



live life as a degrading stereotype. Is it any wonder he keeps his mouth shut?

20 LINES FOR HAT FUN

- *While gambling:* A fool with money is a popular fool.
- *Conceding defeat:* You are the master of every situation.
- *Threatening:* A grievous error in judgment is about to become clear to you.
- *Mysterious:* The world contains uncounted wonders.
- *After drawing a gun on someone who's threatening him with a knife:* Measure twice before you cut.
- *Noncommittal:* One cannot prepare for the unexpected — by definition.
- *Explaining his curse:* Help! I am being held prisoner in a Chinese cookie factory!
- *Flattering:* Your friends admire your many fine qualities.
- *Threatening with a handgun:* Your lucky number is nine. (It's a nine millimeter, of course.)
- *Pleased:* It is an excellent day for any enterprise.
- *Menacing, or helpful, depending on the circumstances:* Your luck is about to change.
- *Dismissive:* If your aim in life is nothing, you can't miss.
- *Impatient:* Indecision is the assassin of time.
- *His stock response to comments about his silence:* Judge a man by his actions, not his words.
- *His other stock response to comments about his silence:* It is better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to open one's mouth and remove all doubt.
- *Warning people to be discreet about Fortuna's game:* A man hungry for power should watch his mouth.
- *Admitting to people that Fortuna's game exists:* If opportunity does not knock at your door, it is time for you to knock on its.
- *Hearing someone snivel or wish things were different:* If wishes were chopsticks,

the world would need no forks.

- *To someone concerned that he can't afford to buy in to Fortuna's game:* Every man has value — to others, if not to himself.
- *Amorous:* Tonight is an opportunity to have a lot of fun.

STATS

Personality: Pretty much pure Taurus, only without the creativity. He just wants to go along and get along. Of course, his lifestyle circumstances mean that "go along" often implies the mangling of those in the way.

Obsession: Hat Fun has no obsession.

Wound Points: 70

Rage Stimulus: Racist comments. You guessed this, right?

Fear Stimulus: Magickal curses. Also something of a no-brainer.

Noble Stimulus: Hat Fun is remarkably patient with people who call him a coward or a sissy or what have you. He knows it's not true, so it simply doesn't bother him.

Body: 70 (A Whole Lotta Man)

I Can't Believe It's Not Kung Fu! 65%,
General Athletics 15%, *Large and Hard to Move* 70%

Speed: 55 (Gentle When He Wants to Be)

Handgun 55%, *Drive* 25%, *Block Punch or Kick* 30%, *Fast Draw* 20%,
Initiative 35%

Mind: 45 (Phlegmatic)

Notice 35%, *General Education* 15%,
Speak English 45%, *Gamble* 45%,
Tend Bar 20%

Soul: 45 (Quiet)

Charm 15%, *Lie* 15%, *Intimidate* 45%

Violence: 5 Hardened 2 Failed

Unnatural: 4 Hardened 2 Failed

Helplessness: 0 Hardened 1 Failed

Isolation: 0 Hardened 0 Failed

Self: 2 Hardened 0 Failed

NOTES

Just in case you were wondering, "I Can't Believe It's Not Kung Fu!" is his Struggle skill.

POSSESSIONS

Hat Fun carries a licensed 9mm handgun, loaded with silver bullets. No, really: You can go out and buy silver bullets nowadays. It's a soft metal, so it mushrooms up on impact. His piece holds 16 shots and has a damage maximum of 55. He also routinely wears a bulletproof vest under a thick leather jacket. He usually wears a diamond pinkie ring, too.

FORTUNA, THE GODWALKER OF GAMBLERS

Fortuna is a lovely woman, charming, friendly, with a flamboyant sense of fashion tending heavily towards the motifs of games of chance. It's not uncommon to see her in a strapless, full-length gown with a pattern of dice picked out in white and black sequins. Or a cocktail dress completely embroidered with aces, jokers and face cards. In a more casual setting, one might find her in jeans, a T-shirt, sandals, and a jacket made from a horse that lost a "sure thing" race.

Fortuna is 5'11" but between her hair and her heels she's usually well over six feet. She's a light skinned black woman who looks thirty and, if pressed, coyly refuses to reveal her true age. (People in the Vegas occult scene put guesses all over the map, from "She's forty and had a good facelift" to "She's Cleopatra.") She has many friends but few true intimates. She expects, and receives, luxury comps from every casino in Las Vegas (and Atlantic City, and Monaco, and Aruba, and pretty much any other area where gambling is a Big Deal). She's known world-wide as a high roller, an inscrutable poker player who can drop a million bucks in an evening without batting a single long, thick eyelash. She's rich, she's pretty, and if that isn't enough, she's the Godwalker of Gamblers.

STATS

Personality: She's got the sort of serene, sympa-

thetic friendliness that only comes from knowing you're better than everyone around you.

Obsession: In a word, "winning."

Wound Points: 60

Rage Stimulus: People who try to use mind-control (magickal or otherwise) on her.

Fear Stimulus: Vehicular accidents. Her drivers and pilots are ridiculously overqualified because she's afraid of dying in a car crash or plane wreck.

Noble Stimulus: She's charitable to those who have gambled away all their money. After all, if it wasn't for folks like that, she couldn't afford all her nice opal jewelry, right?

Body: 60 (Statuesque)

Martial Arts Medley 50%, General Athletics 20%, Golf (Driving) 60%, Gorgeous 30%

Speed: 80 (Remarkably Deft)

Handgun 55%, Golf (Putting) 80%, Horseback Riding 60%, Drive 5%, Dodge 40%, Cheats of the Hand 80%, Initiative 50%

Mind: 65 (Observant)

Notice 65%, General Education 30%, Speak All Human Languages 25%, Cheats of the Mind 65%, Medicine 45%

Soul: 99 (Awe-Inspiring)

Avatar: Gambler 99%, Charm 60%, Lie 60%, Aura Sight 25%, Interpret Dreams and Visions 33%

Violence: 4 Hardened 1 Failed

Unnatural: 6 Hardened 2 Failed

Helplessness: 1 Hardened 1 Failed

Isolation: 0 Hardened 0 Failed

Self: 3 Hardened 0 Failed

NOTES

Cheats of the Hand is Fortuna's skill at palming cards, performing false shuffles, covertly switching the table dice with loaded ones, tilting slots and generally performing acts of legerdemain that could get you shot in old-time



Dodge City. Cheats of the Mind is, similarly, her skill at counting cards, using slugs (or more sophisticated devices) to defraud slot machines and engaging in more complex and technological forms of cheating.

As Godwalker, Fortuna has a unique channel. In her case, she can enforce the rules of a game (stated or implicit). If she decides no one is going to cheat during her poker game, nobody *can* — not with prestidigitation, not with magick, not with *nothin'*. She uses this selectively, to enforce her reputation for running a fair game. Truthfully, she rarely cheats at more than one hand of cards a week, if that. (If she dislikes a known cheater, she won't stymie him: She'll just state that one of the rules of the game is, "Anyone caught cheating makes a proportionate forfeit to the hostess.")

Her "Speak All Human Languages" was won off a very old adept who had endured a simply horrifying ritual in order to gain a permanent gift of gab. By the time he was seventy, he was willing to risk it all for a working kidney. Too bad for him . . . anyhow, with a successful roll, Fortuna can speak and comprehend (but not read) all human languages for about an hour. Her Aura Sight skill was similarly acquired, and is similarly unreliable. She's not an expert aura reader, but has picked up enough to judge emotions, spot adepts and notice illnesses.

Interpret Dreams and Visions is more than your standard Freudian "royal road" routine. It allows her to make educated guesses at the meaning of genuine prophetic visions, dreams or omens. Note that this skill doesn't *give* her such visions (though as a Godwalker and general sensitive she has them now and again), but it allows her a shot at understanding those she has or hears described.

POSSESSIONS

Well, if she liquidated all her stocks, bonds, securities and shares in winning racehorses, she'd have about \$7 million. Selling off all her jewelry, real estate, memorabilia and antiques

would net her another \$10 million, easy. But as for what she carries on her, it's usually a couple thousand in cash, several times that much in jewelry and assorted bling-bling, and a two-shot derringer (maximum damage 50). To protect her person she relies on Mr. Fun and a gentleman known as Constancio, or more simply "the Greek." Constancio is an Ein-Sof golem (as described on page 150 of *Unknown Armies*) who has a Struggle skill of 45% in addition to his regular stats. He's built up a fairly sophisticated set of humanlike responses: He seems almost as normal as Hat Fun (though that's not saying much). He made his reputation when a bodybag was giving Fortuna some trouble and she said "Constancio, bite off his fingers." The golem obeyed without changing expression, and since that day no one has had much desire to fuck with him.

In addition to the formidable protection of her Gambler powers, Fortuna also has what she calls "markers" on three individuals who are (by now) scattered across the globe. These schmoes each agreed that if they lost a card game with her, at some future point an inimical paranormal effect would be redirected from her to them. Thus, the next time someone tries a spell designed to make Fortuna uncomfortable, or confused, or dead, it hits one of the trio instead. The debt is then discharged and Fortuna has only two defenders between her and mystic attack.

THE LESSER GAMBLERS

If you want these minor GMCs to make stress checks, assume they've got Mind 50. Or you can just have them fail and succeed however you feel would be most interesting and appropriate.

IAN BOLERMO, LOW-RENT JAMES BOND

Ian feels deeply, profoundly cheated that he came of age after the end of the Cold War. He started working for the CIA during the Bush Sr. years — just in time to see it all fall apart. A bit of a racist, Ian just couldn't get as excited

about the Chinese. As for “rogue states”? Please. Just a bunch of ninnyes whose biggest dream would be to maybe take out one major metro area with a dirty suitcase nuke.

No, Ian wanted to be fighting the *Russians*, dammit, and by the time the CIA realized that this guy was not psychologically qualified to do much more than make copies, he was just about fed up with the whole schmear anyhow. He left the CIA, pretty much by mutual agreement, and has been kicking himself ever since Bush Jr. started the “War on Terrorism.” He’s tried to get back in the game, but they’re not having him.

Not that Ian’s insane, or stupid, or anything like that. He’d just make a dismal spy, probably because he wants to be one so damn bad. He does have an insatiable curiosity and a decent stable of dirty tricks. The first enabled him to bumble across the Occult Underground, and the second has kept him alive long enough to get some vague notion of what is and is not tolerated.

Both the Sleepers and TNI have used Ian (though through secure cutouts and fronts, of course) to gather intelligence on their enemies. He’s also done a spot of industrial espionage and sabotage, just to keep his wallet fat. He’s been to a couple of Fortuna’s games before — what Bond fan could resist high-stakes gambling? — but what’s drawn him to this game are rumors about a powerful piece of espionage software. He’s determined to acquire it.

Ian brings \$50,000, the Cancer Shot (see p. 63) and a device called The Jammer (see p. 61) to the table. He’ll quit as soon as he gets Cryptonite (see p. 62) He has a Walther PPK (6 shots, maximum damage 50) but he had to give it to Hat Fun before he entered the gaming area.

QUICK STATS

Body 60, Speed 40, Hit Points 60, Dodge 35%, Struggle 35%, Pistol 40%, Initiative 30%
Hardened Marks: Violence 3, Unnatural 2

FELICIA WILLIAMS, MS. RIGHT PLACE, RIGHT TIME

Felicia is an ordinary woman, a Las Vegas native who works in a grocery store. She’d stopped by a local fast food place for some lunch during a day off, and just as she finished her burger she realized she’d won \$500 from a game piece on her soda cup. This came in handy when she discovered that her wallet had, at some point, been lifted from her purse. On a whim, she dropped a quarter into a slot machine and won another \$330. Abandoning her daily chores for what was clearly a winning streak, she took the cash she’d won and started playing — blackjack, roulette, poker, more slots . . . she had some big and improbable setbacks, but overall she won and kept winning. She’d just cashed out and was going to head home and phone her mom when she got hit by a driverless car (the parking brake just up and failed) and wound up going to the hospital to get her leg put in a cast. However, while she was there she overheard this other woman telling her son about a “magical poker game” where she could win back his health.

Getting out of bed that morning, Felicia never would have believed it. But after the day she’s had, she’s ready to believe just about anything.

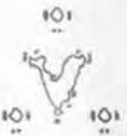
Courtesy of an exhilarating ten hours, Felicia comes to the table with the Shakti charge as well as \$41,333.08.

QUICK STATS

Body 50, Speed 40, Hit Points 30, Struggle 15%, Dodge 5%, Initiative 20%

Hardened Marks: Violence 1, Unnatural 1

Courtesy of her wheelchair, Felicia’s chances of dodging are reduced to 5% — and make no mistake, dodging is all she does. The shakti charge gives the GM a plausible excuse for giving her plot immunity — or, if she does get hit (remember, she’s already been clobbered by a car today) she could die. Would the charge just disappear without a trace? Maybe. Or the charge could go haywire, resulting in a major unnatural effect or two right there at Rancho



Fortuna, dozens of significant unnatural effects all over Vegas, and hundreds of minor effects.

JOHNNIE WALKER STOLICHNAYA, BOOZEHOUND

Born “Johnathan Markham,” Johnnie Walker Stolichnaya (“John Stoli” to his friends) is small potatoes, really. A minor adept who’s been bumming around Vegas, L.A. and Tijuana for decades, Johnnie’s a part-time bartender and would-be “professional gambler.” Using dipsomantic hunches, he has an edge — but it’s an edge considerably blunted by his drunken distraction and a bad tendency to blow through his charges, losing his ability to predict his luck. This is (of course) easily fixed by more booze, but that starts him on a slippery slope to the point where he’s too hammered to even see the cards clearly.

Ironically, he plays pretty good cards sober, and (consequently) often does better at Fortuna’s games (where magick is often stifled anyhow). As something of a regular, he’s won a couple magickal oddities — the Hungry Pants and the Magick 8-Ball — but what he really wants is a significant vessel for his dipsomancy.

Ollie Fayette *has* such a vessel, of course — but he’s not going to trade it when he can gamble for it.

Johnnie quits as soon as he gets the Henri Paul glass (described on p. 61). In addition to his two artifacts, he has \$8,000.00 cash. He’s got a 5% drunk penalty and six minor charges (which he can’t use to influence or predict the game). Both are likely to increase as the night wears on.

QUICK STATS

Body 45, Speed 45, Hit Points 45, Struggle 15%, Pistol 15%, Dodge 30%, Dipsomancy 60%, Initiative 20%.

Hardened Marks: Violence 4, Unnatural 5

CLARA RAMOS, SAD SACK

What can you say? You have a woman who’s thirty-six, and the only thing she’s got to remember her tragically dead husband by is

her tragically sick son Juan. The doctors can’t do anything, and on her low-level insurance they’re not inclined to try.

(Is Juan the most wonderful kid ever? It doesn’t really matter, but no. He’s okay. Average. Ordinary. And his mom’s willing to die for him.)

Clara found out about the game from a friend who overheard Johnnie Walker Stoli talking about it with Hat Fun. She begged Mr. Fun for admittance, and once she explained that she would put up her health, years off her life or even *all* of it for her son, he decided to let her in.

Clara quits the game as soon as she gets her son’s health, but until she gets that goal, she’s willing to stay in until she’s reduced to nothing.

QUICK STATS

Body 50, Speed 40, Hit Points 50, Struggle 20%, Dodge 20%, Initiative 20%

Hardened Marks: Violence 2, Helplessness 4

If shit goes down, assume Clara ducks and covers until it gets quiet.

OLLIE FAYETTE, TROUBLED YOUTH

This snotty young skate punk was something of an entropomantic prodigy — possibly because he’s shit stupid, if you believe Johnnie Walker Stolichnaya. At 19, his command of his powers is still imperfect, but he’s usually well charged (and slightly injured) due to his reckless disregard for the safety of himself and others. He loves Fortuna’s game because it allows him to take big risks in inventive ways that don’t involve firearms.

Ollie has Cryptonite (see p. 62) and the Henri Paul glass, but not a lot of cash. That’s okay though. He’s perfectly happy to gamble away years of life.

QUICK STATS

Body 50, Speed 70, Hit Points 35, Struggle 20%, Dodge 15%, Entropomancy 20%, Initiative 60%

Hardened Marks: Violence 4, Unnatural 3

Ollie's already got some contusions and fresh stitches from his chaos magick adventures. He's also got five significant charges.

THE SPOILS

In addition to the magnificent power of the shakti charge, there are several other doodads that get put up as stakes in addition to "standard" stuff like years of age, money and skills. What follows is a list, along with a rough monetary value.

THE JAMMER

This item is about the size of a large suitcase. It weighs about 160 pounds, including the car battery that powers it. It combines a versatile radio transmitter with a portable, self-contained phone cell.

Two things happen when you turn it on. First off, every radio within a one mile radius statics out. Second, every cell phone in the same area switches signals from whatever tower it was using to the Jammer. (Cell phones automatically switch to the strongest carrier signal they can detect.) However, since *this* cell isn't tied in to any network, the phone immediately disconnects.

There are two ways to use the Jammer: You can flick it, or just leave it on. If you flick it, all nearby cell phones hang up and there's a moment of fuzz on the radio, but it's not enough to really get a lot of attention. Sure, cell phone users bitch to their carriers about lousy service, but nothing gets done unless it's flicked often enough for a pattern to emerge.

Leaving it on precludes radio and cell phone use while it's functioning, but this is the sort of thing that gets police attention. Initially there's not much the fuzz can do, unless there just happens to be a FCC investigator in town. But continued use will bring in the FCC with tracking vans, and they can triangulate on this gadget very, very easily.

PCs should use the Jammer with caution; it is quite illegal. If used for flicking, it's probably considered a nuisance, punishable with a stiff

fine and maybe probation or community service. Leaving it on for extended periods of time can earn the user a charge of obstruction of justice (if it messed up cops) or reckless endangerment (if it interfered with an ambulance or fire truck).

The Jammer is worth about \$6,000.

HENRI PAUL'S WINEGLASS

Henri Paul was the drunk driver whose Paris crash killed Lady Diana Spencer. There was quite the duel among the Paris dipsomancers to get the cup from which he quaffed his final drink. Now it's wound up in Las Vegas.

This item is a significant vessel for Dipso-mancy, and many minor boozehounds would happily kill to possess it. In a private auction of morbid Princess Di fans, it could fetch millions — if its provenance was proven. Lucky for the boozehounds, there's no way to confirm its historical importance.

THE MAGICK 8-BALL

In the year 2000, an eight-year old boy was in K-Mart with his mom and she agreed to buy him a Magic 8-Ball.

(If you're unfamiliar with this toy, it's a round black plastic ball that looks like the 8-ball from a pool table. There's a plastic window at the bottom. The ball is filled with a dark blue fluid, in which floats a 20 sided bubble. On the flat sides of this icosahedron are written twenty phrases. You ask it a yes/no question, shake it up and look in the window for a randomly generated answer.)

This boy asked every 8-Ball in the store if it was the one he should buy. Only one said "Yes." Then he checked with several other balls. They all said that the other one was the ball he should get, and that he shouldn't pass up the chance. Convinced he'd found the "king ball" he asked his mom to buy him *that one*, and she did. She made him sell it when she realized that it was never wrong. Sometimes it would refuse to answer, but it never said anything that later failed to come true. It was creepy.



If she'd tried it herself, she might have been relieved, because the Magick 8-Ball doesn't work for grownups. That is, it works as well as any normal Magic 8-Ball: It gives you a random answer completely unrelated to the question. But in the hands of anyone eight years old or younger, it is infallibly correct.

(Yes, this is basically a GM clue dispenser, but the vague answers like "Cannot predict now" give lots of wiggle room — and the necessity of having a kid use it is also a big limitation. The fellow who bets this item may or may not explain that it only works for young'uns.)

Incidentally, the item does not register as "magickal" if any sort of detection is used on it. Apparently it's not paranormal in the sense that adepts understand: It's just right all the time. (Adepts who come to realize this may have to take Unnatural stress checks, as they're confronted with something that's unnatural even by the standards of their understanding of paranature.)

TWENTY PHRASES IN THE MAGICK 8-BALL

Signs point to yes

Yes

Reply hazy, try again

Without a doubt

My sources say no

As I see it, yes

You may rely on it

Concentrate and ask again

Outlook not so good

It is decidedly so

Better not tell you now

Very doubtful

Yes - definitely

It is certain

Cannot predict now

Most likely

Ask again later

My reply is no

Outlook good

Don't count on it

CRYPTONITE

This item appears to be an old-style Iomega 100mb Zip disk. It contains one very very large program, which is named "Cryptonite." It's a code breaking program developed by the Indian government to circumvent the encryption routines used by the U.S. Department of Defense, NATO and the U.S. Department of Energy. India (which has an awful lot of Ph.Ds per capita and has produced more than its fair share of talented computer coders) developed Cryptonite at staggering cost as part of a highly classified program to steal U.S. nuclear secrets. In the hands of a cryptographer or computer security specialist, this thing is incredibly powerful and dangerous, capable of penetrating almost any computer security with which it can interface. To 99% of the people outside that rather rarified realm, it has no direct use. However, the Indians are still looking for it and would kill to recover it. The CIA and FBI are utterly clueless about it, but would be very interested indeed to learn of its existence. The NSA, or any other international high-tech spookshow would pay at least \$2 million U.S. for this thing if they knew what it can do — and if they believed it wouldn't be simpler to just kill its owner and take the damn thing.

It is a splendid way for computer-savvy Infomancers to get significant charges.

THE HUNGRY PANTS

The Hungry Pants are an odd magickal item. Physically, they're a pair of olive-drab nylon warm up pants, 34 inch waist, 36 inseam. There are two standard-sized back pockets and two simply huge front pockets. They're cargo pockets that go from the hips to the knees, and they're about four inches wide.

The Hungry Pants are something of a magickal shoplifting tool. Here's how they work: While wearing them, you look at a group of identical or largely similar objects. You put a hand in your pocket when no one else is looking at the item, and one of the things teleports from the group into the pocket.

For instance, if you were looking at a bin of gumballs, you could teleport in one gumball. If you were looking at a sheaf of hundred-dollar bills, you could take one bill. One poker chip from a stack could be pilfered, if no one was looking, and so on. But it won't work on an object if anyone is paying attention to it, or if it's a unique object. So you can't snag jewelry out of a jeweler's display case, even if no one's looking, because all the pieces are different and individual.

Furthermore, each pocket can only hold one item of a particular type. So you could steal one gumball in each pocket, and one hundred dollar bill in each, but no more until you'd emptied the pockets out. Still, in Vegas, with poker chips operating as a second currency, a guy with these pants and someone to create a distraction will never starve.

Someone who believed what the Hungry Pants can do might spend as much as \$10,000 to acquire them.

THE CANCER SHOT

A CIA agent who went rogue lifted this on his way out his last day at Langley. His corpse is now surprisingly well preserved under six feet of dry Saudi sand, but that's neither here nor there: He sold the gadget, before MOSSAD slit his throat in exchange for CIA favors to be specified later.

This item is about the size of a wallet, it's black and it's remarkably heavy. There's a key on one corner — not like a key for a lock, but the kind of key you use to open a canned ham or a tin of sardines. This can be used to peel apart the top and bottom layers of the Shot, which are lead about a half-inch thick. Inside the lead layers is a thin plate of depleted uranium alloy. It is about the size of a stick of gum and extremely radioactive.

The Cancer Shot is intended as a deniable assassination tool. You put the depleted uranium under the cushion of someone's chair, or you hide it in the mattress of his bed. After about a month of sitting on it, there's a good

75% chance of developing cancer of the colon, testicles and/or lymph nodes. Once the target is infected, the agency replaces the chair with a non-radioactive duplicate.

This item is worth about \$10,000.

ANTE UP

The climax of the Las Vegas portion of this adventure is, of course, a high-stakes poker game. Yeah, it's a stereotypical trope, but it became one for a good reason.

The game is held at Rancho Fortuna, a stylishly landscaped, well-irrigated home out near the dam. It sits on a good dozen acres, and it's attractive in an angular, Lloyd-Wright kind of way. There's a fence, there are security cameras, there's barbed wire, there are buried Panamanian ghost-dogs that gnaw on the souls of uninvited guests... but since the PCs get invited (one way or the other), that's no big problem, right?

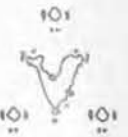
The driveway up to the house curves around picturesque garden of cactus and stone with a granite apple on a pedestal in the center. Fortuna meets guests at the door, along with Constancio. (Mr. Fun is keeping an eye on those who have already arrived.)

If the PCs show up with Eugene, they get a curve ball right off the bat. The door opens, he blinks and says "Fatima?" in a surprised voice, right before she knocks him back a good yard with a wicked right cross.

"Eugene. You remember me. That is so sweet. Now get the hell off my property."

If the characters are set to interfere, Eugene waves 'em off. "It's clear I'm not wanted... if you win the doodad, you can find me at Binion's Horseshoe." He shrugs. "If she doesn't want me to win it, I wouldn't anyhow." He departs.

Fortuna (or "Fatima"?) invites the characters politely within and assures them that she won't hold it against them that they arrived with a "crass and uncouth disgrace to the human condition." Inquiries about her anger



HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

I'm assuming anyone reading this knows how to play basic poker, which is the game in question at Rancho Fortuna. This sidebar deals with how you *model* this game, UA-style.

Frankly, there's not much to it. You, the GM, are going to sit down and play a game of cards with your players... kind of. You'll be playing the role(s) of everyone else in the game. And — this is the big, major departure — *you'll already have the highest GMC's hand prepared.*

Two simultaneous games occur all night. For each of these eight games, a "default winner" is listed, along with that person's final hand. It doesn't matter what the other GMCs have in their hands — it's lower than what the default winner has. If a PC has a hand that can beat that, the PC wins. A default pot is also listed, intended mainly as a guideline for how the game goes if no PCs are playing around with it. Naturally, their actions may bid up the pot, or end the game early.

I recommend that you get two decks of cards — two at least. Pull out the winning hands for each player at each table and seal them in an envelope. Then you can simply describe what Ian or Sara or Fortuna are doing as they play. When everyone's done raising and calling and so forth, any PCs still in the game reveal what's in their hand, and you open the envelope. Simple.

towards Eugene are politely brushed aside, as Fortuna leads them to the Playing Room.

The Playing Room has a well-stocked bar (with Mr. Fun mixing drinks) and a sideboard lavishly loaded with exotic snackables like caviar on toast points, shrimp cocktail, raw oysters flown in from the Gulf, fine goose-liver paté — and Mr. Fun's favorite, several cans of Pringles. There's a beautifully restored antique pool

WHAT'S IT WORTH?

Playing in a poker game where you can gamble away power, or years off your life, naturally raises the question of what's considered a "fair match" for a particular bet. Sample prices are given for things like the Hungry Pants and the Jammer, but really, these values are highly subjective. The value of a given wonder or skill depends largely on how badly an individual wants it.

Thus, if someone puts the Jammer up as a bid and someone else says "I'll put up my skill at interior decorating," the players may consider that a fair bid and so it goes. Or any player might say "Hey, who cares about your pansy-ass flower arranging schtick?"

If a player contests the value of a bid, Fortuna intervenes to "make the pot right." Generally speaking, a common skill is worth \$1,000 for every percentage point risked. If you put up 10% of your Notice skill, it's worth ten grand. More esoteric or dangerous skills — stuff like gunfighting, computer programming, or any kind of mystic ability — go for \$2,000 per point. Your 40% Avatar: the Mother is worth \$80,000 as a stake in Fortuna's game.

This may sound rather low for something like knowledge of an occult school or attunement to an archetype. It is. Fortuna does not want people gambling away that stuff, because it causes problems, as demonstrated in the scene on p. 67.

table, a rather commonplace dartboard, and three card tables topped with a "speed-layout" — cloth embroidered with fine vertical lines, so that cards slide across it easily and quickly.

The game starts at 8:00 in the evening. If the PCs get there early, they run into John Stoli and a nervous Clara Ramos. Ian Bolermo and Ollie Fayette show up about 7:45. The last people to arrive are Lataetia, Sara Markott and

Felicia — the woman bearing the Shakti.

Give the PCs some time to chat with the other players, if they seem interested. Otherwise, you can gloss over it and go directly to Fortuna's games.

Once all the players have arrived and seem ready to begin, Fortuna taps her martini glass with an oyster fork and gives a little speech.

"Greetings, and welcome to my home. My name is Fortuna, and I'm delighted to have you here to play some cards. Just so everyone's aware, I'd like to go over the ground rules.

"First, no cheating. All poker is to be played, the games won and lost, by the skills and luck normally associated with the game. Second, no welshing: You *will* bet only what you have to lose. Third, the dealer calls the game, but only recognized variations are permitted. No more than four cards may be wild in any game, in addition to the jokers. No Indian poker, no Night Baseball, no strip poker, no Sick Puppy.

"Two tables should be enough... ante is a thousand dollars, or equivalent in trade. My rake is 10% of the cash element of all games. Betting for other things... well, you're on your own. I take no rake off of Jailhouse Eightball. You may not join a game in progress. New games begin simultaneously at each table — so if yours gets done early, you must wait for the other table to finish. All players are free to switch tables between games.

"Any questions? Then let's begin!"

GAME ONE

TABLE ONE

GMCs: Fortuna, Johnnie, Felicia, Sara.

Default Winner: Felicia, with AA22K

Events: Everyone buys in with money, and continues to play with money, except for Johnnie, who clearly thinks he has a good hand and bets the Magick 8-Ball. Fortuna folds at that point, Felicia stays in with money, Sara folds later.

The Default Pot: \$15,000 (of which Fortuna takes \$1,500) and the Magick 8-Ball.

THE SHAKTI-HUNTERS

The lesser gamblers (see p. 58) have their goals and their strategies and they know when they're going to quit. But what about Lataetia and Sara?

Lataetia is following her instincts. Unless the PCs explained it to her, she's never heard of the Big Charge and has no idea what's really going on. Again, given her attunement to the Fool, this is the most dangerous attitude she could have.

Sara has inside information. Before the game, Sara got a call from her dad, who learned (from someone or something) that she will be very lucky in the fourth game. So all she's going to try to do is stay in to the fourth game, and to make sure that whoever has the shakti is playing against her.

TABLE TWO

GMCs: Lataetia, Ollie, Ian, Clara

Default Winner: Lataetia, with 23478 in diamonds.

Events: Everyone buys in with money except Clara, who pays a year of her life. Everyone stays in for a hand: Ian and Clara don't raise, just take new cards. Ollie, with a smirk, bets the Cryptonite. Lataetia asks how much it's worth, and discussion ensues. Ollie ends up valuing it at \$8,000, which Lataetia, after a second look at her hand, trepiditously matches. Ian puts in the Jammer and \$2,000, while Clara folds.

The Default Pot: \$13,000, (less \$1,300 for the hostess) the Jammer, a year of life, and Cryptonite.

Note: By risking his valuable property, Ollie gets a minor charge, even though the risk doesn't pan out.

GAME TWO

TABLE ONE

GMCs: Mr. Fun, Lataetia, Ollie, Ian, Clara



Default “Winner”: Ollie, with 44J92

Events: Mr. Fun enters the game as dealer, shuffles — and then reaches over to pluck the eight-ball off the pool table. Fortuna, preparing to deal at the other table, excuses herself to explain.

“Mr. Fun is calling the game as Jailhouse Eightball. This game is played lowball — the lowest hand takes the pot. All players are permitted, and encouraged, to bet things you want to get *rid* of. I suspect that Mr. Fun will bet the curse upon his speech. The ante remains the same, so the unfortunate who takes the cursed pot does get the consolation of some cash. It’s called ‘Jailhouse’ because no one is allowed to fold until final show. But I haven’t seen many games go beyond one round of betting. It’s a rich game.” Her eyes glitter as she looks at the hope in Clara’s eyes. “Loser takes all. Any questions? Have . . . fun.”

All the players buy in with cash, except Clara, who puts up another year of life. (She’s visibly aging.) Then the bets come.

Clara bets “Juan’s cancer.” If pressed, she explains that the person she loves best in the world is dying, beyond the hope of medical science.

Ian asks “I can bet *anything* I want to get rid of?” Hat Fun nods. “All right, er . . . the grudge Jose El Diablo holds against me.”

Lataetia is confused, but bets her herpes. Ollie, wild eyed and grinning, bets his nightmares. Mr. Fun grins and puts a fortune cookie on the table.

The Default Pot: Ollie’s mom gets cancer, he’s stuck talking like a fortune cookie, he gets herpes, a Mexican car-and-person smuggler wants to kill him and he still keeps his four failed notches. He does win \$4,000 though.

As soon as the game is over, Mr. Fun leaps up and punches the air and says “Aw, fuck yeah! I’m free! Fuck you in hell, Irving Mueller!” He proceeds in this vein and is in a good mood for the rest of the night. His jubilation is nothing next to Clara, who weeps with joy, blesses Fortuna, jumps into Mr. Fun’s arms,

even hugs *Constancio* for pete’s sake. Ian looks on with bemused relief. Lataetia starts out confused, but Clara’s joy is infectious.

Once she calms down a little, Clara approaches Ollie, who is (understandably) sulking. She hesitantly touches him on the shoulder and says “I will pray for you, señor.”

He looks up at her, shrugs, and hands her the \$4,000. She’s incredulous, and he tries to speak, looks confused, then says “A problem that cannot be fixed with money is a problem indeed!” This prompts some laughter from Mr. Fun, but it is quite possibly the last classy gesture in Ollie Fayette’s life. Clara kisses his hands, thanks him, and takes a cab home.

(For those of you keeping track, Ollie gains a significant charge for his role in this game. If he’d been smart enough to bet his life, he might have gotten a major, since he also risked the life of a loved one. Or, quite possibly, he wouldn’t have gotten the major charge because it was a hedged bet — if he “wins” he survives but his loved one is in peril, while if he “loses” he dies but there’s no risk to anyone else. However, since Ollie has no idea how to get a major charge, it doesn’t really come up.)

TABLE TWO

GMCs: Fortuna, Johnnie, Felicia, Sara
Default Winner: Felicia with four Jacks and a wild Joker. (The Joker is considered an ace because you can’t have 5 of a kind.)

Events: Fortuna folds early, Sara stays in a while nervously trying to persuade Felicia to bet the Shakti (which is the first Felicia hears of it). Johnnie has a good hand, so he bets the Hungry Pants, which Sara matches with part of her Shorinji Kempo training. Felicia keeps up with cash, happy over her big win, and gets another pot. Sara is quite frustrated by this turn of events, since the more crazy stuff Felicia has to bet, the less likely she is to put up the shakti.

The Default Pot: The Hungry Pants, 10% Struggle skill, and \$14,000 (of which Fortuna takes \$1,400 — even though \$10,000 of the

money was bet by the woman who probably wins it.)

GAME THREE

TABLE ONE

GMCs: Ian, Felicia, Lataetia and Sara

Default Winner: Ian, with 77AK2

Events: Ian makes it clear that he wants the Cryptonite from Lataetia, and impresses on her that it's dangerous stuff. (She's swept up in his underworldly glamour, and falls completely for his promises to protect her.) Everyone buys in with cash, but Ian raises with the Kill Shot immediately. Felicia, overconfident, matches it with the Hungry Pants. Lataetia ponies up the Cryptonite, while Sara grimaces and folds. **Note:** This game goes fast. It's much tidier, plotwise, to have it end before the game at the other table.

The Default Pot: \$4,000 (Fortuna gets a measley \$400), the Hungry Pants, the Kill Shot and the Cryptonite.

TABLE TWO

GMCs: Fortuna, Johnnie and Ollie

Default Winner: Ollie, with 555AJ

Events: Ollie is clearly smarting from his "victory" at Jailhouse Eightball, and he comes to the table with a reckless gleam in his eyes. Johnnie's dealing, and he calls a simple game of draw, Jokers wild. After buying in with cash, Ollie puts up the Henri Paul glass... and then says "The master of fortune is the master of all things."

There's a sharp intake of breath and Fortuna shoots him a dirty look before folding. If anyone wants to know what's going on, she can explain that he's just put his skill as an adept into the pot. Meaning, if Johnnie wins, he goes absolutely bugshit.

(Mr. Fun discretely opens the Velcro stay on his shoulder holster and gestures for Constanccio to move closer.)

Johnnie, curling his lip furiously, says "I'll give you five grand for the glass — all the

money I got left. An' I'll match my magick against yours."

Ollie starts to laugh maniacally, as he realizes that win or lose, someone's gonna go crazy.

(At this point, smart PCs fold like venerable origami masters. If not, make sure they know what they're in for if they win.)

The Default Pot: The Henri Paul glass, \$8,000 (of which \$800 goes to Fortuna), 20% Entropomancy skill and 20% Dipsomancy skill.

If Ollie wins (the very very likely outcome) he immediately goes bugshit, stands up and starts screaming. Play this out as a standard combat. Ollie (with initiative 60) probably goes first and casts some whack-ass random magick spell that makes all the loose stuff in the room — poker chips, cards, glasses, pool balls — whirl up into the air and dart madly about in a fluttering explosion of painful trouble. Anyone who hits the deck can make a Dodge roll to avoid injury, even if s/he is dodging after the spell was cast. Anyone who doesn't make a successful Dodge roll takes 1d10 damage.

Hat Fun opens fire, Constanccio wades in and Johnnie tries to uncork a minor blast, but what with the chaos of the situation, none of them hit in the first round. If the PCs don't kill Ollie, those three get him next round. (Ollie might attack the PCs specifically in round two, or not, depending — GM's call.)

After everything settles, Fortuna clears her throat and says "Well, that was dramatic and unpleasant. I believe I'll have a drink. Constanccio? Please attend to Mr. Fayette's remains." The golem trundles off expressionlessly, returning soon with a tarpaulin. Johnnie has a brief conversation with Fortuna, who looks at him with amusement. "Does anyone here object if Mr. Stolichnaya takes the wineglass from the pot as a... souvenir? If not, he has my permission. I believe I'll take the cash, if no one objects; it should just about cover the inconvenience of Mr. Fayette's disposal."

There's a moment of confusion and fear while John Stoli sorts through the various



broken snifters, tumblers and broken wine, shot and martini glasses. By the process of elimination, he finds the Henri Paul glass — now cracked and with a chipped stem. But, judging from the gleeful fire that burns in John Stoli's eyes after he tastes liquor from it, the glass is still potent.

(If there's a minor dipso PC who wants the glass, Fortuna decides that whichever one of them finds it first among the mess can keep it. The race is on!)

GAME FOUR

Game Four occurs about a half hour later. Fortuna leads her guests to a cozy living room and chats with them, trying to calm and reassure them after the unpleasantness. ("There's no one around for miles to hear a gunshot, and what if they did? This is Nevada. People go out in the desert and fire weapons for no particular reason at all.") If first aid is required, she delicately provides it. In the meantime, Constancio and Mr. Fun wrap up Ollie's corpse and haul it away. They sweep and vacuum and gather up the cards and the spatters of blood and caviar and shrimp cocktail. They put a plastic bathmat on the bloodstain, cover it with an oriental rug from the hallway, and soon the room is ready for more gaming — if people are willing.

People are. Sara still wants that goddamn Shakti. If Felicia still has it, Sara spends the intermission in the living room persuading Felicia that as long as Felicia possesses it she'll be trapped in a half-life of weird happenings — some good (like winning all that cashola) and some bad (like watching a teenage sorcerer get mauled before her very eyes.)

The PCs can get in on this action if they want. If they give her a terribly persuasive argument, she might just give (or sell) them the shakti and have done with it. Note well, however, that Fortuna won't stand for one guest to bully or shake down another in her home. If they can do it nicely, all to the good. But if they're not more persuasive than a bag full of

grinning politicians, Felicia is just as likely to decide to gamble it away. Sara (with her hot tip about her luck) is fine with that.

TABLE ONE

GMCs: Lataetia, Sara, Felicia

Default Winner: Sara, with 33346

Events: It's almost anticlimactic, if the PCs aren't involved. The three ladies buy in with cash. Felicia bets the shakti. Sara bets half her Messenger attunement. Lataetia bets the Jammer and the year of life she won off Clara — a piddly contribution, but neither of the other women complain.

The Default Pot: \$3,000 (with \$300 as Fortuna's rake), the shakti, the Jammer, 27% in the Messenger skill and one year of life.

TABLE TWO

GMCs: Fortuna, Ian

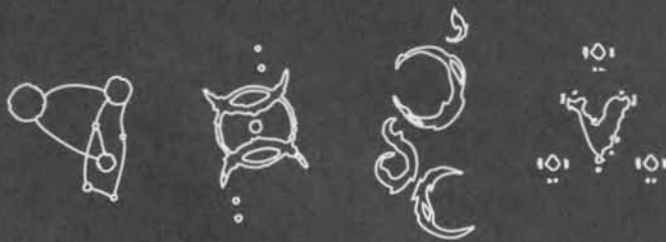
Default Winner: Fortuna, with AAK3

Events: Ian's in a great mood, having acquired the Cryptonite he came for. Seeing the punk get popped was just icing on the cake. He bets the Hungry Pants, which Fortuna matches with \$10,000 and raises with another \$5,000. He sees her raise and raises again with the Kill Shot. She puts in \$5,000 again to call, and wins. He doesn't care though. He had vague plans to use the Kill Shot on Jose El Diablo, but the Jailhouse Eightball game has removed that need. He doesn't fully understand the value of the Hungry Pants, and he's got the Cryptonite. He's a happy man.

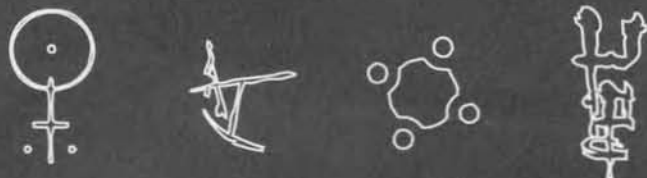
The Default Pot: \$22,000 (of which Fortuna takes \$2,200 if she doesn't win it herself), the Hungry Pants and the Kill Shot.

IF THE PLAYERS DON'T DO MUCH

Barring PC intervention, the Swadhisthana charge goes to Sara Markott, who receives it on behalf of her proxy, Dean Matterkros. Score at the end of the second inning: Geddakis 1, Matterkros 1, Fisher 0.



CHAPTER FOUR
MANIPURALADHARA : ATLANTA



STRUCTURE

Like the previous adventures in *To Go*, Manipuraladhara can swing between straight-on action and insidious social engineering — or a balance of the two. In this case, however, the danger comes up right at the beginning and the politics show up at the end.

The general overview is this: Renata Dakota becomes the charge bearer in a contortion of magickal energy that draws both a mundane lunatic and a storm of unnatural phenomena. This happens two days before a hearing that determines whether she is paroled from her imprisonment in Atlanta's juvie hall, or whether she "graduates" into an adult penitentiary.

The PCs are present at the traumatic charge changeover, and this is their chance to get Renata on their side. Don't tell them this (of course), but if they behave heroically and protect her, they can gain her trust. If they act selfishly or show cowardice, they gain much less pull over her decision.

Both Dean and Eugene intend to testify at her hearing, but their testimony depends (of course) on her compliance with their plans. Dean wants Renata out of jail, but more than that he wants her to freely join him. If she voluntarily strengthens the proxy connection, he gains another powerful tool in his bid for ascension. Eugene wants Renata to renounce Dean — or, failing that, he wants her in jail where she can't help the godwalker.

Complicating matters are two groups centered on Dean Matterkros. A few members of his old cult, including Renata's mother Judy, are around to aid him however they can. Opposing them is a group of FedEx employees led by Terry Young, aka "Joanna Baptist," who believe that the Christian apocalypse is coming and that Matterkros is the herald of the Prince of Lies.

The final element — if the situation wasn't already complicated enough — is Mak Attax. (Remember them?) The bad craziness with the charge goes down in one of their infiltrated

franchises, and Erica Fisher is on the scene pretty quick to take matters in hand.

The PCs are going to have to deal with the lunatic, with the cults, with the ascension candidates and — perhaps most importantly — with Renata Dakota.

GETTING THERE

The first question for this section is “How do the PCs get to Atlanta?” The answer depends on their allegiance. If they’ve been helping Matterkros, he simply tells them he’s headed to Atlanta to take care of some business. Same thing with Eugene, though he seems a lot less eager to get there than Dean.

If they’re on Erica Fisher’s side, she’s got a list of restaurants that Mitch Geddakis delivered to after Las Vegas. It’s a rather strange list, in her opinion — instead of delivering to the hundreds of franchises in California or Nevada, he got strung all the way across the country to Atlanta. It makes no sense from a business perspective or a logistical standpoint, but it’s the shortest and most direct route to get him to a franchise in a bad part of Atlanta — one that Mak Attax has had infiltrated for years.

Nonaligned characters can find clues if they have any kind of paranormal detection skills or gear. Lacking that, they can follow Eugene or Dean, both of whom seem to know where they’re going. If all else fails, they may just head east, figuring that “Hey, this shakti thing has been heading east so far.”

It’s possible that the PCs won the shakti in Las Vegas and didn’t give it to Eugene or Erica or Dean. If that’s the case, they’re in the eye of the “weird probability” storm, and all kinds of omens, coincidences and even hallucinations can point them towards Atlanta — everything from the sun looking like an open eye in the morning (when it’s in the east) to a sudden winning/losing streak for all Atlanta teams involving multiples of three. (Their baseball team loses with three runs, their soccer or hockey team wins with three goals, their bas-

ketball team gets crushed with only 33 points, etc.) Similarly, they’ve got unusual temperatures — 33, 66 or 99 degrees for three days in a row, depending on the time of year.

If they drive east, they get a much more concrete hint, whether they’re carrying the Kundalini or not. They run into Mitch Geddakis.

When the PCs pull in to a truck stop for food, gas or a bathroom break, they spot his distinctive rig (“Sweet Sweet Connie”) — even though it wasn’t visible from the road. He’s inside, having a burger and some coffee at a Golden Arches restaurant, and sporting a sharp new pair of snakeskin cowboy boots. (If the PCs ask about them, he just shrugs and says they caught his fancy. “Looked good in the store window, and when I put ‘em on they just felt right.”) He’s relaxing now, but he’s got to get a move on soon: He’s got this crazy-ass schedule, doesn’t make any sense at all, but it’s getting him plenty of overtime dollars.

It’s not hard to get his itinerary out of him. He tells them he just came from Atlanta (“You been following this weird season they’re having there?”) and any halfway plausible question can even get the specific restaurant to which he delivered. He also says that his next stop is Illinois. After that clue, he looks at his watch, curses, and says he’s got to get moving like *now* to stay on schedule.

It’s possible that the PCs try to follow him north. If you’re willing to skip the Atlanta section, let it happen, but nothing goes down in Chi-town for a few days — the Big Charge being either trapped with the PCs or working its way through Atlanta. Alternately, the PCs could return to their vehicle and discover it’s got a flat — a threepenny nail nicked the right rear tire at the three o’clock position, giving it a slow leak. Replacing it’s a breeze at the truck stop, but by the time they get it done, Mitch is long gone.

A DISTURBING INTERLUDE

This is something of an unconnected scene

that occurs when the PCs are trying to either find something out or figure something out. Ideally, they're walking through a public place — subway station, city park, mall, busy downtown street — anywhere that the approach of a stranger wouldn't cause immediate comment. It can happen before or after they meet Renata.

In the background, the PCs can hear an old, cracked, very black voice doing a blues rendition of that Rolling Stones tune that goes “Baby baby baby you're out of tiiiiime . . .” If they're moving, they pass by a black man in a black suit playing guitar (rather well) and singing. The painful scratchiness of his voice is used superbly for stylish musical effect. Any PC who drops money in his guitar case has a Notice roll chance of spotting the hand grenade in it — pin out. (This is a significant check.)

If the PCs miss the grenade in the guitar case, have them all make major Notice checks. Those who succeed realize that (1) the guitar has stopped — the old man is now singing *a capella* and (2) he's not getting any farther away. In fact, he's getting closer. If they turn to look, they can see the old black man, grenade in hand, only a couple feet away. If no one makes the roll, he taps one character on the shoulder right before the grenade explodes.

The PCs can try things if they want — try to grab the grenade or dive on it or take cover — but they really have no measurable chance (not even with a critical success) of stopping the detonation. Let them roll anyway, of course: If they get the 01, the black man looks surprised and says “Damn. You quick!” before the blast. Otherwise, his line is “I'd like a word with you.”

As soon as the bluesman speaks and the grenade explodes, the scene changes; the energy from the explosion is all the raw power needed to trigger this situation.

The blues musician is the Comte de Saint-Germain. He's become aware of the shakti spirit and he wants details. Since the PCs seem entangled, he's decided to ask them a few questions.

When the grenade goes off, there's a deafening boom and a blinding flash, but when their senses recover, the PCs are in the same place only . . . frozen. Any people around are stuck in place. The air is perfectly still. Even the blades of grass (or, in a street setting, the discarded gum wrappers and cigarette cellophanes) do not wave. Anything the characters touch does not move. They can push with all their strength and not even deform a frozen soda straw.

They are, quite literally, Out Of Time.

The only thing moving (indeed, mobile) besides themselves is the singer.

“So, y'all gon' tell me what happened in Los Angeles and Las Vegas?”

It's almost certain that the PCs ask him questions in turn. He doesn't give a damn. He's not going to explain who he is or how he did what he did, or why. It's not really worth his time.

Once this is clear, it's almost certain (again) that the PCs protest this unfair high hat treatment. He's unmoved.

“Look, I can't die. I'll tell you that straight out. So if y'all don't want to tell me what happened in Vegas an' L.A., I'll keep you frozen here until you die of thirst. That's gon' take three days. I can pick my goddamn nose for three days.” With that, he sits and starts playing guitar — this time, a soulful version of “So Many Roads, So Many Trains.” He briefly toys with using the grenade pin as a guitar pick, grimaces at the sound, and tosses it away over his shoulder.

Assuming the PCs eventually crack, he asks intelligent questions and shows keen interest (and, if the story is amusingly told, appreciation). This — the PCs' version of their adventures — is an important element of this interlude. It lets you, the GM, gauge their take on events and see what it means to them. It also can let you evaluate their reactions and adjust planned events accordingly.

Once they've filled him in on the shakti (or whatever they're calling it) he scratches his chin, shrugs and says “Don't that beat all. Well, thanks kindly for the information. Y'kin



be goin' now." With that he claps his hands and time unfreezes.

As soon as the world begins to move again, he stands up, faces east, and shouts out something in a dead language, his voice as loud as thunder. Passers-by (if any) look on in puzzlement and confusion. He turns to the west and says (in English) "Your Highness! I hereby announce that I am neutral in this matter! I will neither help nor hinder these people, nor anyone directly involved, until the conclusion of this event!"

If the PCs are staring, he turns to them, shrugs and says "They could hear me if I whispered, but sometimes I indulge my sense of the dramatic." Then he sits and plays "Boom Boom — Out Go the Lights." If the PCs wait long enough, they can see him get arrested for vagrancy. If they look around, they can find the fragments of the grenade — cool and still, showing no sign of their violent origin.

PREVIOUS COMTE SIGHTINGS

Two previously published adventures have involved the Comte. In "Bill in Three Persons" (from *Unknown Armies*) he recruits the PCs as his agents in solving the Bill Toge problem. If the PCs have been through that episode, they feel a strange sense of *deja vu* when the grenade goes off. He looks completely different — but PCs who ask about the Bill Toge episode get a knowing grin from him.

In "Drink to That" (from the anthology book *Weep*) the Comte tests the PCs for suitability for a dangerous and mysterious task. If they went through "Drink to That" successfully, they can recognize him instantly as "Sheriff Orczy," even through his disguise. He, however, does not recognize them. If they went through "Drink to That" and failed, they don't see him as Sheriff Orczy and the interlude plays through normally.

MEANWHILE . . .

While the PCs are in Atlanta, the other players

in the Shakti game aren't sitting still. At least, not all of them.

DEAN MATTERKROS

Dean's in Atlanta. He arrives at the same time as the PCs, or possibly before them. However, he doesn't get to the charge quickly because he has (1) a meeting with his lawyer and (2) a meeting with his cult on his schedule. He also has to put up with an unscheduled encounter with God's Heralds. They don't attack him. C'mon, they're Christians who work for FedEx, not ninja warriors. Instead, they harass him — letting the air out of his tires, calling all his cell phones nonstop, phoning in fake crime reports with his description — all kinds of petty, irritating, "nibbled to death by ducks" shit that, nonetheless, manages to waste an awful lot of his precious time.

If the PCs are on Dean's side, he asks them to check out the area fast food restaurants while he hooks up with his former cronies and checks out the scene. If they ask, he explains that he wants to keep the PCs separate from his other followers. "If they get compromised, I don't want anyone finding out about you. And vice versa, of course."

EUGENE LARUE

Eugene's also in Atlanta, talking to Brian Stark (Renata's social worker), and trying to avoid getting his ass kicked by Dean's cultist cronies. Like Dean, he asks the PCs to split up from him and check the restaurants — only his rationale is that the cultists are primarily looking for him, so he can lead them away on a wild goose chase while the PCs do the dirty work.

SARA MARKOTT

Sara flies home to New York after the conference ends, and spends several days recovering from either the disappointment of losing the shakti or the brain-shaking awe of carrying it. There's also some residual weirdness in there from watching Ollie die.

LATAETIA LUDOPHIS

With nothing immediately better to do, Lataetia goes home to L.A., where she learns she's won a free vacation to go to Chicago and see a Bangles reunion tour. She'll be back.

MITCH GEDDAKIS

Mitch is also truckin' north to Chicago, bringing the beef and making good time.

ERICA FISHER

The True Vice President is hastily canceling appointments in her nice leather day planner so that she can get on the scene where the Big Charge is. She'll be in Atlanta a day or two after the PCs.

MEETING AT MAC'S

Renata works at the Mak Attax-infested franchise, courtesy of a work-release program at the Metro Regional Youth Detention Center. As any cynic might suspect, the restaurant that's getting its labor from incarcerated minors is in a rather scuzzy part of town. She only works day-shift, she has to be ferried to and from work by her social worker, and she's not allowed to leave the building except in case of an emergency.

She's had little contact with the Attaxers who work there — she got in a yelling match with one and made him cry, and since then they've all given her a wide berth. She doesn't care — she has no idea that Mak Attax exists or what it's about, and if she did know she'd think it was stupid. She's mainly there because it's a break from jail, and because she can sneak away during the slow times. She's thought of just plain running off, but Brian Stark's kindness — and her lack of any better destination — has kept her on the straight and narrow.

The PCs get there after the noon rush. There are some late eaters — three guys who look like they're doing road work or house repair, a woman with five kids, trying desperately to keep them under control, a fat man in

BRIAN STARK: NOT MAGICK, JUST CHRISTIAN

Renata's social worker is an energetic young man with a sandy crew cut, an earnest demeanor and a lot of sweaters that smell vaguely like pot. (Or maybe it's just patchouli oil.) Brian is genuinely nice: The material blandishments of the world don't do much for him, he finds them boring compared to people. Even people most other people find dull or unpleasant or scary are interesting to Brian. He's particularly interested in people's problems — empathetic, but also just plain *interested*. Becoming a social worker seemed natural enough. The job fascinates him and he puts in a good eleven hours a day at it.

Brian's not perfect, by any means. He's scatterbrained, and he's very annoying if you're at all reticent about sharing your private emotional experiences. He can come off as condescending, or as a know-it-all. Plus, he's very pushy about Jesus. But, unlike a lot of the other people in the world, he wouldn't hurt someone for his own gain.

As a social worker for the state, Brian is the caseworker for about a hundred abused, molested, neglected, abandoned or fostered children. Renata is a little special, though: Since she was imprisoned with no social security number and no relatives on record, Brian was appointed as her advocate and guardian. He spends a little more time with her than with his other kids, particularly since he's her ride to and from work the three days a week she's furloughed to go flip burgers.

Brian has a soft spot for *all* his kids, but his soft spot for Renata is particularly large because he's spent more time with her.

his fifties — but the drive thru is clear. The restaurant workers are slowing down a bit, catching their breath after serving a lot of lunches.

The PCs enter the restaurant right behind Brian Stark. He's right in front of them in line,



and if they have aura sight, they can see him get his burger and fries and world-shattering dose of magickal power. He turns to go sit at a booth just as the sullen, stocky young woman behind the counter says “Brian! You forgot your change.”

“Well bless your heart,” he replies absent-mindedly, returning the charge to the counter worker (who is, of course, Renata Dakota).

(This exchange occurs whether the PCs can perceive it or not, but if they can see the charge somehow, it provides a clue to how it’s transferred.)

The PCs can try to trick or persuade Renata to hand over the charge, but (1) “bless you” is not in her vocabulary and (2) any talk of mysticism or the supernatural kicks her into Red Alert paranoia mode. (Remember, the last time someone started giving her a bunch of hand jive about the paranormal, she ended the day in jail after shooting her adoptive dad.)

Let the PCs wrangle this to an impasse, or let them go meet Brian and talk to him. (In fact, Brian gets involved pretty quick if he sees people hassling Renata.) Then Betsy Barry shows up.

OPEN FIRE

It doesn’t take any magickal second sight to see that something’s amiss with Betsy Barry. She’s wearing a dirty overcoat that’s several sizes too big, but that’s the least of her fashion problems. Her head is freshly shaved — completely bald except for two long patches over her temples which she has moussed up into horns with Elmer’s glue. More glue has been used to attach hair to her upper lip and chin in a pointed moustache and beard. She would look like a ridiculous parody of the red devil cartoon stereotype seen on canned hams and red-hot candies . . . only her blank, staring expression and the unstaunched nicks on her shaved, pale pate do a fine job of draining any humor out of her appearance.

She looks, in a word, crazy.

In this instance, you *can* judge a book by its cover.

Betsy’s local to Atlanta, but not to the neighborhood where the PCs meet her. She worked for a local real-estate lawyer doing title research, which was a real waste of time for a genuine psychic sensitive.

Betsy had no idea she was psychic until she took up jogging in college. When her brain gets really oxygen-deprived, it somehow relaxes the filters that keep her from acknowledging her perceptions of the future, the present, the hidden elements of the world — she really has a wonderfully versatile gift, except that she can’t use it unless she’s so exhausted that she can’t think straight.

It took her a few years (and a few Unnatural checks) to admit to herself that she was having precognitive and clairvoyant episodes towards the end of her marathon runs. She made a few halfhearted attempts to make money off it — predicting the stock market, say — but invariably the twenty-mile run required to (maybe) trigger her powers left her too exhausted to remember which stocks she meant to examine. Usually she wound up having visions about her friends or herself, and most of *those* were variations on “things are going to continue pretty much the way they are now” — accurate predictions, but nothing that’s going to convince a skeptic.

Where a more typical occultist would have started fooling around with plastic dry-cleaning bags, Betsy decided that this psychic business was worthless and stopped running marathons. But recently she’s started getting visions when she’s *not* tired, and these are *not* typical “status quo” concepts. They’ve been revelations about the underlying shape of the world, and they’ve broken her mind into a thousand pieces. She’s come to the restaurant looking for the devil. She’s wearing a coat she got from a “magic man” hobo (specifically Jeeter, described in UA2, p. 262 — the coat has no paranormal powers, though both Betsy and Jeeter believe it’s a shield against evil). She’s disguised herself as the devil so he won’t suspect until it’s too late. She’s got a pair of .45 revolvers loaded

BETSY BARRY, COSMIC CASUALTY

Personality: Desperate, aggressive and barely coherent.

Obsession: Betsy has no obsession.

Wound Points: 60

Rage Stimulus: Anyone who tries to escape while she's ranting.

Fear Stimulus: The Devil

Noble Stimulus: She won't hurt the old guy, because everyone knows the Devil's not an old man.

Body: 60 (Physically Fit)

Psychotic Episode (Struggle) 40%, General Athletics 30%, Marathon Running 60%

Speed: 60 (She's a Runner)

Dodge 15%, Drive 15%, Firearm Brandishing 50%, Initiative 50%*

Mind: 50 (Out to Lunch)

General Education 20%, Notice 40%

Soul: 80 (Man Was Not Meant To Know)

Charm 0%, Lie 80%, Broad-Spectrum Psychichosis 60%

Violence: 1 Hardened 2 Failed

Unnatural: 4 Hardened 5 Failed

Helplessness: 0 Hardened 1 Failed

Isolation: 0 Hardened 0 Failed

Self: 1 Hardened 3 Failed

POSSESSIONS

Most relevantly, two .45 revolvers. Each holds 6 bullets and has a maximum damage of 60. She cannot reload.

NOTES

Normally, Betsy has no handgun skill, but someone in the Invisible Clergy has seen fit to make her wild shots implausibly accurate. When rolling for her gunshots, you must flip-flop every roll until it's as low as it can get, even if this would turn a failure into a success.

Her unusually low Charm skill should require little explanation. Similarly, it's very difficult to tell if she's lying because her grasp on the truth is, at best, subjective and slippery.

Finally, her Broad-Spectrum Psychichosis skill can, at the GM's discretion, provide her with protection from mood, mind and behavior-influencing magick or channels. She is, after all, in the middle of a full-bore psychotic episode: Tinkering with a deranged mind is much trickier than zapping someone sane. Particularly when said deranged mind can subconsciously anticipate everything you're going to do to it.



and glued into her hands, and secured with duct tape on top of that. Unfortunately, these strange precautions against dropping her guns or being disarmed do not interfere with the weapons' operation in the least.

When Betsy first enters, the sleeves of the raincoat conceal the pistols. Give the players a Notice check. If they get below their Mind, they spot that it is, in fact, a crazy looking *woman* with the devil's haircut. If they get below their skill as well, they spot the guns. Renata is working one register, and a brown-eyed fellow named Roy is working the other one.

If the PCs move close to Betsy, she jerks up her arms, revealing her weapons, and starts babbling at them. Otherwise, she keeps them hidden, walks up to Roy and asks him "Are you the Devil?"

Roy grins a weak grin and says "Uh, miss? It's not Halloween."

Betsy shoots him in the chest.

As GM, you need to take a pause here. Odds are good that the players are going to start in with all kinds of actions they want to take, but hold up your hands and give everyone a rank 2 Violence check. When that's resolved, ask for Notice rolls. This gives you an excuse to describe the scene in a little more detail. Stress the five kids, the old guy, the manual laborers. Good Notice rolls can spot some, or all, of several other things, to wit:

- 1) One of the madwoman's pistols is aimed in the vague direction of the kids.
- 2) The female clerk (Renata, though they might not know her name yet) has quietly squatted down behind the counter, where the crazy woman can't see her.
- 3) Up at the very top of the walls, the seams where they join the ceiling are starting to drip blood.

Basically, there are two ways the PCs can jump with this: They can immediately go to DefCon 1 and jump the crazy woman, or they can try to talk her down. Either one works; in

a perfect world, they probably talk first to give you a chance to ratchet up the suspense.

While this is going on, minor and significant unnatural phenomena are occurring. The frequency and intensity of these events depend on your judgment — do what you think would fit in your campaign. If you think it will distract from the tension, forget it. If you think it will heighten tension, go nuts.

PCs who simply try to soothe and talk her down attract her attention: She points one gun at them (while the other wanders aimlessly) and demands to know "Are *you* the Devil?" If they outright deny it, she may ask for proof, or she may say they could be the devil and not know it. Trying the usual soothing psychobabble may distract her for a while — long enough for her to make a few more cryptic comments (see the "What Betsy Might Say" sidebar). Eventually, though, one of the laborers makes a run for it (possibly after failing an Unnatural stress check, if you're piling on the phenomena) and Betsy fires at him.

SUGGESTED UNNATURAL PHENOMENA

- The temperature inexplicably drops until everyone's breath is visible for a round or two. Then it returns to normal.
- A powerful scent of bananas fills the air, cloying and strong enough to cut even the reek of cordite and fear.
- A sudden downpour begins outside. Mixed in with the rain are tiny blobs of lard and big, hopping maggots.
- A garish red and yellow statue of the burger chain's spokesclown begins to rock gently back and forth, then move forward, almost as if it's walking.

Other than the moving clown, none of these have any effect on Betsy. She doesn't really notice. The statue is hard to ignore though: She shoots it. Surprisingly, it stops.

The PCs may just hide. This is fine. While they're hiding, she interrogates other people in the restaurant, pausing now and again to utter some mysterious observations. The other patrons start blowing their stress checks and freezing. Unless the PCs do something — either talking to her or attacking or doing something to catch her attention — she eventually points her guns at the mother and her kids, who run for it, and she opens fire. If this happens, she tags the mom and the oldest kid, killing neither, but creating quite a commotion.

Alternately, the PCs might engage her at her own level. If they recognize what she's talking about (depending, of course, on how much they understand themselves) they may give her answers. If they pick up the references in her prognostications (such as, for instance, quoting the rest of the Grand Funk Railroad lyrics when she obliquely refers to "Sweet Sweet Connie") and try to explain the shakti business, she listens attentively. She still seems confused and distressed, and (eventually) one of the children escapes his mother's arms and runs for it. She fires at him.

A particularly brave and noble PC may say "Hey! *I'm* the devil!" or something similar. If he makes a successful persuasion roll of some sort — Charm if no other skill fits — she believes him and begins to moan softly in terror. She spends an action backing away, giving the PC plenty of time to dive for cover, before she opens fire on him. She shoots and shoots until she's out of ammo.

If the Charm (or whatever) roll fails, she says "Liar! Who are you protecting? *Who are you protecting?*" Then she starts shooting at the PCs.

Alternately, a PC might say something along the lines of "Maybe *you're* the devil." In this case, don't even roll. She looks at herself in a polished chrome napkin holder and says "Of course. It makes so much sense." Then she puts both guns to her head. She only fires one, though.

If they attack right away (which is not an unreasonable action since she just holed poor

THINGS BETSY MIGHT SAY

"I've seen it! The great serpent from the garden of Eden, stretching across America!"

"The Whore of Babylon comes from Los Angeles, seeking her crown and carrying her scepter. It looks like a cane, but it's a scepter!"

"She had the whole show, that's a natural fact!"

"Where is the Devil? I've seen him, on the TV, on the Internet, and now he's here, he's here in Atlanta! Those FedEx people think they know him, but they don't!"

"The signs are all around! I have seen the Wandering Jew in the park, playing guitar, singing, with weapons in his guitar case like that guy in 'El Mariachi'!"

"What's the scoop? You do what you gotta do. Nothing beats the king, baby!"

"I see a spike and a mirror, that's where, that's where it will all get decided, that's where the angels and devils will bow down before men . . . and you'll be there! You and you!"

These cryptic statements refer (in order) to the shakti itself, to Erica Fisher, to Mitch's truck "Sweet Sweet Connie," to Dean Matterkros, to the Comte, to the servants of the Clergy, and to the forthcoming confrontation in Washington DC.

Roy), you may just let the chips fall where they may. Or you may want to cheat a bit and stretch things out. If you fudge Betsy's damage to keep her alive, it's only fair in turn to fudge the PCs damage to keep them in the game too. (Need a rationale? Okay, different members of the Invisible Clergy are protecting each side.) Once she's had a chance to babble, fire randomly, and freak people out, run the combat normally.

In any event, if the combat lasts more than 12 rounds after the initial gunshot, the cops show up and blow her away. At your discretion, they may show up sooner, especially if the



PCs can talk to Betsy for a comparatively long time. (Talking takes much longer than shooting, after all.)

Once Betsy is dealt with — killed, knocked out, disintegrated, whatever — the unnatural phenomena cease. The blood vanishes from the walls, the banana scent dissipates. Sadly, the maggots and lard remain. If the PCs took her down fast and the police haven't arrived yet, Brian Stark jumps up and yells "Renata? Are you okay?" Getting no answer, he runs for the back of the restaurant.

Eventually, a SWAT team shows up and surrounds the building (that is, if it wasn't the cops who settled Betsy's hash in the first place). The phone rings, one of the guys in the back answers it and explains that the crisis seems to be over. The police come in and secure the area. By this point, the press has shown up. The cops give blankets to all the witnesses and escort them to the station. Unless the PCs hide or escape somehow, there's no good way to get out of going to the station, and the cops are very suspicious about anyone who tries to get out of giving a statement. People who go along quietly are not searched. There's a metal detector at the police station though, which could cause some trouble for any PCs who fail to ditch their unlicensed or illegal firearms before entering.

DOWN AT THE STATION

The PCs' experiences at the precinct depend largely on what they say happened at the restaurant. First the witnesses are separated, brought into interview rooms, offered coffee, pastries and cigarettes, given phones and general sympathy. But unless they're related by blood or marriage, witnesses aren't allowed to talk to one another before their interview.

Eventually they're going to wind up talking to one of three people — Homicide Detective Reese Markham, Lieutenant Laura Schmidt, or Doctor Evan Saunders.

Detective Markham is a frank, no-nonsense kind of guy. Short hair, glasses, overweight — looks kind of like a dour, humorless Drew

Carey. His poker face is advanced beyond a science — he's so good at concealing his emotions it's practically an art form. He almost seems bored with the whole situation, except that he keeps asking the same questions over and over. Reese Markham has no preconceived notions: He just wants to get the facts, ma'am. He does about half the interviews.

Lt. Schmidt is in her fifties. The yellow in her eye-whites offsets the sharp blue of her pupils. She's a yellow-toothed chain smoker (Virginia Slims) and she's got that smoker's lean-ness that seems to make her skin look dried and leathery. By nature, she is suspicious of *everyone*. (Hey, being a policewoman since the 1960s will do that to you.) She tends to take a more aggressive, interrogatory tack. At least once per interview, she finds a way to mention that it's against the law to give a false police statement. She interviews about half the witnesses, and if Reese thinks anyone is acting funny or seems criminal, he refers that person to Lt. Schmidt.

Doctor Saunders seems to have a lot in common with Brian Stark, though perhaps an older, less opinionated and more reserved version. (Also, he's Jewish, though he's unlikely to volunteer the fact.) He only interviews those witnesses who seem particularly distraught, or who seem outright delusional.

There are myriad stories the PCs might tell, but all of them are likely to be variations on about five basic themes.

- 1) "Oh officer, it was terrible! She started shooting and I got so frightened and I just put my head down and waited for it to be over!" If this is the truth — or, more to the point, if the PCs did nothing visible — either Schmidt or Markham refer the PC to Saunders, who is very calming and compassionate.

If, on the other hand, the PCs did something visible, they get a bit more grilling. If they fought Betsy in any fashion, Schmidt knows about it from the other witness' state-

DIDJA SEE MY MEDICALERT BRACELET?

It's far from implausible that Betsy manages to hurt one or more of the PCs. Injured characters — even if they're only lightly wounded — get hauled off to the hospital. If they're helping Erica Fisher, she pays for their treatment. Otherwise they're on their own.

Saunders and Markham talk to hospitalized PCs, but unless the PCs shot Betsy with illegal weapons, it's a pretty desultory interview. Any talk of mystic abilities is quickly dismissed as aftereffects of trauma and painkillers.

ments and gives the PC the third degree — threatening obstruction of justice charges, yelling, not letting him go to the bathroom for extended periods, etc. If the PC sticks to the story, eventually Schmidt lets him go: After all, in the final analysis, the PC *did* take care of an awfully ugly situation.

PCs caught with unlicensed firearms or concealed weapons who used them to kill Betsy are arrested on weapons charges, and damn the consequences.

- 2) “I don't know nothin', copper.” PCs who don't want to make a statement are encouraged to do so, but — in the end — there's nothing Schmidt can do other than yell, hold them for a couple hours, and make empty threats about obstruction of justice. Unless, of course, others at the restaurant saw the PCs shooting.

In that case, Schmidt can chuck the PCs in jail on weapons charges. Talking and/or “doing magick” aren't against the law, and Schmidt knows she'd be a fool to arrest someone who punched out a gun-toting lunatic. But illegal ownership or concealed carry is beyond her capacity to ignore.

- 3) “. . . and then I heroically took her down street-style!” If the evidence supports the assertion that Betsy was felled by brawling-style damage, this plays pretty well. Even if

she got messed up with magick, the police are more likely to accept a “rational explanation.” “Wow, looks like the psycho was cutting figures into her skin” is a lot more plausible than an entropomancer blast, for example.

- 4) “Yeah, okay, I blew her away, but I can explain!” This is probably the smartest move the PCs can make if they did gun Betsy down with unlicensed firearms. (Well, actually, the smartest move is “I ain't saying nothing until my lawyer gets here.” PCs who take that tack are advised by their lawyers to admit to a lesser charge like unlawful concealed carry or unlicensed possession.)

Given the circumstances, the police offer the PCs the option of a bench trial on the lesser charge(s) in exchange for an admission that they shot Betsy in self-defense. PCs who don't want the deal are threatened with those charges plus unlawful discharge of a firearm and reckless endangerment.

PCs who take the plea bargain have their weapons permanently confiscated, but they're released on their own recognizance. The trial is scheduled in four days, and (barring any new evidence or unexpected outbursts in court) they're found guilty, given a light fine and a suspended sentence of 400 hours of community service.

- 5) “I wasted her with my kewl majik powerz!” Anyone who tells this to Markham or Schmidt gets sent straight to Saunders. Saunders is gently skeptical, suggesting that the situation was very stressful and taking the line that “You may not be quite yourself.” Depending on their reactions, PCs may get a referral to a private psychologist, or a recommendation that they just take it easy for a while — or the Atlanta PD may call their next of kin and start inquiries about institutionalization. Particularly pushy or showy PCs attract a Sleeper team within a week.



After their interview (or interviews), PCs are asked to wait a little longer in a conference room. Inside are other people from the restaurant — a guy who was working the fry station, the old guy, one of the laborers, and Brian Stark.

If the PCs took Betsy down, this is their chance to get some well-earned kudos from the people whose lives they saved. Brian is grateful and impressed too, but he's also worried about Renata. The last he saw of her, she'd dropped behind the counter, and he wants to know if anyone saw her get hurt. Once that's a negative, he fills the PCs in on her situation and worries (out loud) that she could somehow get in trouble for fleeing the scene of a murderous gun battle.

If asked about the Shakti or anything of the sort, Brian acts puzzled. If the PCs discuss the unnatural phenomena, the other survivors have mixed reactions. Some are relieved — “You saw it too? I thought I was goin’ nuts!” and others are trying very hard to deny what they saw. Brian is just purely puzzled. He's not entirely closed to mystic explanations, but he immediately rephrases them in Christian terms. Mostly he's concerned about Renata.

At least one of the PCs gets called back in to talk with Markham or Schmidt again. This time, in addition to going over the PCs story again, the cop asks specifically about the girl behind the counter — whether she seemed to know the assailant, whether they said anything to one another or “communicated nonverbally” — nodding or winking, for example. On the way back from the interview, the PC runs into the other cop coming the other way down the corridor with Renata in tow. She's clearly angry, saying something like “If I was gonna break out of juvie, why would I do it right before my parole thingie, huh? You got an answer for that?”

The officer escorts the PC back into the waiting room and gestures for Brian. Brian gets interviewed (again), which means the PCs cool their heels for about 20 minutes in the wait-

ing room. Then the cops bring Brian back and tell everyone that they're “no longer needed.” Doctor Saunders clarifies this by thanking them for their time and cooperation, then shows them to the exit. He makes sure to give each witness his card, saying “If you remember anything else, or just need someone to talk to about this ordeal, give me a call.”

As they're leaving, Brian gives them his card as well and asks for phone numbers where he can reach them. “I'm worried. Those cops insisted on taking Renata back themselves, and I'm concerned that this might damage her chances of getting paroled. Would you be willing to say a little something at her hearing, if it's okay with the parole board?”

24 HOURS

The next day is pretty much open, plot wise. What this means depends on how the PCs handled Betsy and who they've decided to back with the Shakti. Some possibilities are as follows.

DEAN MATTERKROS

Despite the interference by God's Heralds and the demands of his own followers, Dean is eager to talk to the PCs. If they describe the unnatural phenomena, he nods grimly and theorizes that the Big Pulse is getting stronger and purer as it travels.

Unless the PCs tell him, he has no idea that Renata was involved with the restaurant bloodbath. He's shocked and disturbed — even moreso if they tell him she's the charge bearer. If they don't tell them this, he asks to read their tea leaves, and after that he tells *them* that Renata is the carrier.

“This is strange. Strange and bad. She's my daughter, and when she received the charge it should have come to me. But I haven't gotten it.”

Unless the PCs have more reasonable suggestions, he says he's going to try some ceremonies to reinforce his bond with his daughter — maybe then he'll be able to assume control



of the Shakti from her. While he's doing that, he suggests that the PCs either (1) try to track down these piss-ant whackos calling themselves "God's Heralds" and 'take care of them' or (2) talk to Renata and convince her to cooperate with him.

EUGENE LARUE

Despite his loathing for Matterkros, LaRue's reactions and interests parallel those of his nemesis very closely. He hadn't heard about Renata being at the restaurant: If told that she's got the charge, he shakes his head in weary disbelief. "If that don't beat all. Well, no one ever said the Invisible Clergy don't have a sense of humor."

Knowing that Renata is Matterkros' proxy, his immediate concern is that Matterkros seized the Kundalini as soon as she got it — unless he doesn't know she's got it. He can't do any divination about her unless he's in her presence, and he's not sure she'd be willing to talk to him. (He looks a little regretful as he says that.)

He thinks it's very important to convince her to defy and resist Matterkros. Then he looks pensive and says "You know, if he hasn't been able to just jack the charge from her, it may be because she's in jail. The Messenger is archetypically free and mobile. Since she's incarcerated, he may have scaled back on his connection to avoid getting tabooed. I don't know much about it, but Dermott — I mean 'Dean' — seems able to tune his proxies in and out when it suits his purposes."

He asks the PCs for their help and advice. They were there with Renata: Can they talk her into seeing him, if only for a moment? He wants to make it right with her. Failing that, he wants to make sure she doesn't get on Matterkros' side. Failing even *that*, he hopes he can at least find out whether she's still got the charge.

What it comes down to is this: If she's got the charge and she won't agree to help him with it . . . should he try to fix things so she stays in prison? Let the PCs discuss this among

themselves and then make their case to him. Unless they're particularly stupid, Eugene probably follows their advice.

(Note to GMs: If things seem a little slow at this juncture, you might decide to have five of Dean's followers catch up with Eugene. Initially they just threaten and insinuate, but if your players are itching for some paper tiger action, Dean's cultists might ambush Eugene and the PCs later. Dean's followers are described on p. 19.)

GOD'S HERALDS

Finding God's Heralds is no easy task. Going to the local FedEx office and asking yields blank stares — unless the PCs' open by guessing the God's Herald password. It is (of course) "What's the scoop?"

PCs who guess (or overhear this) can eventually gain access to Terry Young — or, as she's rechristened herself, "Joanna Baptist." She's in Atlanta, having been guided there by a dream, and she's set up a cell of God's Heralds in a local FedEx warehouse/sorting facility.

She's convinced that Dean Matterkros is the envoy of the Antichrist. She's equally sure that she's his opposite number — the harbinger of the Second Coming.

She's surprisingly reasonable and personable. She believes that Matterkros' powerful lies can only be countered by the truth. She is, consequently, very happy to hear any dirt about him that the PCs care to spill. She has no inkling about the Big Charge, but can rapidly confabulate something relating it to the Seven Seals from the Book of Revelations. The first seal released Dean himself — the conqueror trying to seize the world with his lies. If they described their experiences in Las Vegas, Ollie is shoehorned into the role of the rider freed by the second seal — the man in red destined to remove peace and order from the world. (Unless the PCs somehow managed to find out that Cryptonite was designed to steal nuclear secrets. Then Ian becomes much more plausible as "War.") The third seal produces a

figure holding scales, which stand for justice — and here they are in Atlanta, involved with a woman who's going before a panel to decide her freedom.

What could be more obvious?

If the PCs hook her up with Eugene, they get along great: LaRue tells them exactly what they want to hear and has plenty of bad truth about their enemy to share. The stuff with the proxies is particularly titillating to God's Heralds.

Characters aligned with Matterkros may get involved with the Heralds another way: They might catch some errant FedEx employee monkeying with Dean's car or some such. He prays at first, but cracks under any kind of rough treatment, giving them the location of the Herald clubhouse and the password. This leads the PCs to their conversation with Terry/Joanna, but simply going in guns blazing is a bad idea. Sure, they'll waste a lot of Heralds, but this particular FedEx warehouse is right next door to a switching station for Angel Security — an armed-response private guard firm.

Don't even make the PCs roll to spot the "Angel Security" signs posted all around the warehouse. They're supposed to be obvious. If you're feeling really stingy, you might ask for Mind rolls to put that together with all the cars next door that have lights on top. But it's not particularly subtle either.

Normally one car from Angel shows up about 5-10 minutes after an alarm sounds. In this instance, however, they show up instantly — they're already *there*. Not only that, there are about five cars at the ready at any given time — meaning ten guards with sidearms. (Use the stock thug from *UA2*, p. 264.)

Joanna is not going to be persuaded that Dean is anything other than Satan's personal spin doctor, but reasoned arguments (or, alternately, some serious threats) can convince some of her followers to quietly cheese it. They don't run away right away, of course. They just gradually stop coming to the meetings.

UNNAMED GOD'S HERALDS

These guys don't really need passions and they have no obsessions.

Body: 60 (Sinewy)

Struggle 20%, General Athletics 20%, Lift Heavy Packages 40%

Speed: 50 (Average)

Dodge 20%, Drive 25%, Initiative 25%

Mind: 50 (Curious)

General Education 20%, Notice 15%

Soul: 50 (Concerned)

Charm 20%, Lie 15%

POSSESSIONS

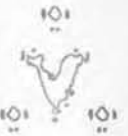
A clipboard and a FedEx uniform, which can get you access to an awful lot of places. A canister of pepper spray. (It takes a successful *Struggle* roll to hit someone with pepper spray. This attack can't be Dodged. If the spray hits, the target must make a matched, successful *Soul* roll or lose his next two actions to pain and blindness. This is also a rank-3 *Helplessness* check.)

RENATA DAKOTA

Renata spends this day back at Juvie. If the PCs stop in, they can get the scheduled visitor's hours and leave their names for her. Visitors aren't allowed until the afternoon (when school's out), but Renata agrees to see them.

Her behavior towards the PCs depends, of course, on how she's seen them act. If they were heroic in the restaurant and stood up for her to the cops, she's happy to see them and willing to listen to them. (She doesn't immediately *show* this: She's a tough cookie who's spent three years in a milieu where suspicion is your friend.) Restaurant cowards are regarded with a more jaundiced eye.

Once the PCs start talking about Eugene and about "her real father" (assuming they



know anything of the sort), she becomes more agitated and suspicious. She's confused about both men and hasn't quite made up her mind about what she feels. On one hand, Eugene did tell her the truth and gave her answers about the people she *thought* were her parents. But when the shit hit the fan, Eugene ran.

On the other hand, Dermott (that is, Dean) never really seemed to give a damn about her one way or the other. Sure, he's her 'father' — whatever that means — but he didn't seem to do much of a job of it. She's never even *seen* him.

If the PCs tell her about the Shakti, it upsets her further. She does not get this mystic mumbo-jumbo, she does not *want* to get it, but it keeps butting into her life unasked. Telling her that she's the carrier for it and that she's going to have to decide who receives it really frosts her shorts.

"Now I get it. The only reason Eugene and my 'dad' give a fuck about me is 'cause I've got this mystic whing-whang and both of them want it. Well fuck 'em. Fuck 'em both."

If she respects the PCs, they can influence her decision about what to do with the Shakti. If she doesn't, they're going to have to do some awful good persuading.

Once she has something to bargain with, Renata tries to get what she can. PCs with cash on hand can extract a promise of a future Shakti transfer — but not an immediate exchange for the Big Charge itself. The deal she wants is this: When she gets out of jail, the PCs give her ten million dollars cash, and she gives them the Shakti. (Yeah, ten mil is a lot of money, but Renata points out that this is a unique thing and there's no way to get it except through her.)

PCs who want the transfer before she's released just get a sad headshake. "If I'm stuck counting the days in jail, why should anyone else get what they want. You want your thing? Fix my trial. Get me out of juvie and then I can *sell* it to you." Offers to fix the trial are met with skepticism, but inside she's hopeful. If

a PC can ensure her release, she's willing to let the charge go for "just" \$40,000.

All this assumes, of course, that she thinks the PCs have money. If they look shabby and poor, she won't try to shake them down: She figures it won't do any good.

GENUINE AMURRICAN HEROES!

Another way to go — entirely separate from any mytho-mystical intrigues — is that the PCs become the center of a media maelstrom. After all, it's quite possible that they overpowered a dangerous madwoman, saving the lives of those cute lil' kiddies. There are plenty of newspaper and TV folks who'd love interviews.

PCs who give the media the brush off are pestered, but nothing much else happens to them. But they may decide they like their looks in limelight. If that's the case, they can spend the entire day before Renata's hearing giving interviews about how great they are.

Play this by ear. If they blew her away with some variety of illegal firearm, the PCs become the center of a media tug-o-war. One area newspaper prints an editorial depicting them as heroes. Sure, they broke a few laws, but they showed undeniable courage. Would it be better if they'd been Betsy's unarmed victims? Another newspaper lambastes them as vigilantes and insinuates that without their escalation, a confused and sick woman (one with, they stress, no previous history of violence) might have been peacefully persuaded to give herself up.

Radio is unanimously on the side of vigilante ass-whuppin', technically legal or no. With TV, it all depends on how good the PCs look on camera. If they're good looking or articulate, they're heroes. If not, "many questions remain unanswered about what *really* happened."

In any event, the PCs get a lot of attention, they get dinner invitations at fancy restaurants from local businessmen, and a legal defense fund is established in their name. This fund is much larger if they were injured, and it also serves to pay their hospital bills.

The one thing no form of media tolerates is sincere talk of supernatural powers. Claiming that “someone was looking out for me” is perfectly acceptable, but saying “I’ve got magical protection because I have sold my will into the yoke of entropy” is just going to scare people away. Anyone who starts gabbing about “magick” gets dismissed as a nut. Offers of proof are condescendingly rebuffed. PCs who really *do* convince a reporter wind up buried in the back of the Metro section, next to the obituaries, corrections and state auction announcements. The reporter insists that s/he believes and asks the PCs to convince his/her editor, but if they wait around long enough to get an appointment with the editor, the Shakti has (one way or the other) gone to ground.

If they strut their stuff for the editor, it goes on page one. Angela Forsythe and her bodyguard Daoud (see *UA2*, p. 234) are in town within six hours, accompanied by two other well-charged Cliomancers. Within seven hours, the editor and reporter remember something completely different. Within ten hours, Lt. Schmidt, Detective Markham and the other witnesses have entirely different memories of what *really* went down between Betsy and the PCs, resulting in a warrant for their arrest.

THE HEARING

The hearing happens the next day — that is, two days after the confrontation in the restaurant. It’s scheduled for 3:00 in the afternoon at the district court house.

At 6:00 in the morning, Erica Fisher arrives at the airport, where two Attaxers meet her. No one from Mak Attax was present when the shakti jumped from the counter to Brian to Renata, but they know the guy who was cooking fries and they know Roy the counter boy. Even if the PCs aren’t aligned with Mak Attax, the local Maks know the outline of mundane events (even if the police and papers received an “edited” version). They also know about the unnatural effects (if any).

If the PCs aren’t on Erica’s side, she contacts them anyway: She’s talking to everyone who was at the ‘incident.’

Erica pushes the conversation towards the events of the previous night. If she finds out the PCs know about the shakti, she’s intrigued and offers to exchange information with them.

WHAT SHE WANTS TO KNOW

- How did the PCs find out about the Kundalini charge?
- Where has it been?
- Who got it then?
- Who wants it?
- How is it transferred?

WHAT SHE HAS TO OFFER

- Her theory: That the Big Charge is the result of a decade of Mak Attax chargewiring, and that it’s effectively focusing the mystic attentions of an entire nation onto the people who handle and absorb it.
- Her knowledge: So far, it’s popped out at two hamburger restaurants and a slaughterhouse that supplies them. No one is in a better position than her to predict where it’s headed next.
- Her assistance: She’s got the support of the world’s largest mystic conspiracy.
- Her cash: She’s willing to pay the PCs \$10,000 apiece to become her vassals and help her get the Shakti. That’s just a retainer, of course: If, as she suspects, this thing makes her a Godwalker, the perks could get bigger and better yet.

Becoming a vassal of Erica Fisher isn’t as easy as signing on a dotted line, though. (They do need to do that, but there’s more to it.) They have to sign *in blood* — to a contract that’s an intimidating syncretism of modern legal boilerplate and mystic promises to deliver up “all of one’s fleshy health, even unto death” should one knowingly betray the liege. They must also kneel before her, verbally acknowledge her authority, and get tapped on the shoulder with her cane.



(What does signing up as Erica's vassal actually *do*? Well, that "fleshy health" thing is no joke. The contract acts as a form of permanent permission to drain wound points — but only if the vassal knowingly betrays the True Queen. Whether Erica would have the stones to actually kill someone is something even she isn't sure about. And, of course, she still needs to touch a character to drain him.)

If the PCs are on Erica's side — either because they started that way or because they just joined up — she expects them to help her secure Renata's blessing. (How they go about that is up to them.) If they haven't managed to figure out that Renata is the charge-bearer, she expects them to figure out who is and help her get the goodies. (If all else fails, following Eugene or Dean can lead the PCs right to Renata's hearing.)

If the PCs are helping Dean or (for whatever reason) are trying to amass charges for Mitch, they presumably turn Erica down. If that happens — or even if they agree to help her but you think they're going to backstab her — she goes off to talk to more witnesses from the restaurant. While the PCs are doing their thing, she's talking to Brian Stark, making some big promises, and getting him entirely on her side.

Keep close track of time during this day, especially if the PCs have a lot they want to do. That 3:00 court appointment comes up fast. (If the PCs are doing too much running around, you can have either Dean's cult or God's Messengers vandalize their cars or something.)

At 2:15, Dean arrives at the courthouse with his followers, and Eugene arrives either with or at the same time ("what a coincidence!") as God's Messengers. There's some ugly words exchanged between the two cults, but Eugene and Dean just stare.

Every street light in front of the courthouse explodes. It's harmless, but loud (and mysterious, since they were all turned off.) Everyone present jumps, startled — except the two Messengers. Without taking their eyes off one another, with-

out saying a word, they slowly mount the stairs together and enter the courthouse.

Brian arrives at 2:30, with Renata in tow. If the PCs are *not* allied with Erica Fisher, she's with them too. Otherwise, she arrives promptly at 2:45, accompanied by the two local Maks.

The parole committee is three people, who aren't expecting this to take long. However, before the hearing, both Eugene and Dean ask permission to address them about Renata — Dean citing his authority as her father. Eugene simply tells them "What I say is relevant to her past and to the rest of her life." With his Messenger channel, that's good enough.

PCs who want to address the bench need one of four things: A legitimate reason that they're involved (such as Dean's paternity claim); a legal pretext (available with a major Law roll, but not much else); a supernatural means to persuade them; or a successful Charm roll that's a critical success, a match, or higher than 20%.

The first person to address the parole board is Renata herself. She doesn't make a terribly good impression. It's clear that Eugene's presence is upsetting her and Dean's presence is confusing her. They ask her the standard questions — "Do you regret what you did? Do you know what you did was wrong? Do you know *why* it's wrong?" and her responses are just short of sarcastic. (You don't need to do a two-character dialogue here: Just giving the PCs an overview is sufficient, since they probably have no influence on this part. Don't gloss over it completely though: This is a chance to develop Renata's character a little more.) They ask a few tougher questions — what happened with Shaia Morris? (That's the girl who got her head beat in by Renata in juvie. Renata claims self-defense. When pressed for details she says Shaia and her friends beat her up, wouldn't leave her alone, tried to take her food and generally punk her out. She says it was Shaia who stabbed her "that first time" and that months later, Shaia made the mistake of trying

to mess with her “when all her . . . friends . . . weren’t around.” Two days after that she got shanked *again*, this time by Shaia’s sister. As far as Renata is concerned, this proves Shaia was bad news and that she was right to do what she did.)

The final question is about “the incident two days ago.” She gives a sparse account — “Crazy woman came in, I ducked down under the counter and got out of there.” (If the PCs have become media darlings, a board member might recognize them and ask for confirmation.) The board asks why she was found waiting at a bus stop. “I just wanted to get away from there. Wouldn’t you?”

Brian speaks next. He tells them that Renata has had a hard life full of neglect and tragedy — but that she’s still shown qualities of responsibility, resourcefulness, and respect. He believes she’s learned her lesson. Furthermore, he has found a superb opportunity for her: If paroled, she’ll have a job waiting at a factory in Boca Raton. “Not a glamorous job, but a good, honest one. A job that will get her out of Atlanta — a place with so many bad, violent memories. This woman here,” — gesturing at Erica — “wants to give Renata a second chance. All her life Renata has been an orphan, and this kind woman wants to give her a place in the world. Are you going to deny that? Do you really think prison is a better alternative to a new start?”

(As Brian says this, Dean turns to glare at Erica. When they lock eyes, every cell phone and pager in the courtroom goes off simultaneously. Then they burn out.)

PCs who are aligned against Erica may choose, at this point, to jump up and say something. That’s fine. The chair of the parole board bangs her gavel and a bailiff arrests the PC. (For simplicity’s sake, the charges are dropped later.) If other PCs speak up, she does the same thing.

This means that the PCs basically have one chance apiece to interrupt someone and either demand acknowledgement or make a point.

If they do this with Brian, they’re probably throwing their chance away. Maybe if they were real charming on TV . . . maybe not.

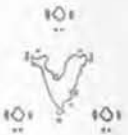
However, remember that the next two speakers are Messengers, and the one thing they cannot do is deny a truth if confronted with it. If a PC jumps up and says “Dean Matterkros wanted to have this child because he believed it would help his occult ambitions to become immortal!” . . . then Dean has to admit that, yes, that’s pretty much true. Similarly, Eugene can’t deny it if a PC points to him and shouts “He was there when she shot that guy! He was the man with the shotgun!”

After Brian, Dean speaks. He’s got a speech prepared. (You can read this verbatim or, if you prefer, just give them the gist.)

“I am this young lady’s estranged father. Since I learned of her incarceration, not a day has passed that I have not regretted it. The thought of my own child behind bars was terribly painful to me. By just about any standard, I’ve been a bad father . . . but I want to acknowledge her as my responsibility now. I want her by my side. If you release her, I promise I’ll do everything in my power to bring her closer to me . . . to try to bridge the gulf I’ve made, and to undo any harm I’ve done to her.”

This is all, of course, literally true — and backed by the power of his Messenger channel, very hard to ignore. If you’re going with a high road Dean, the *implications* of what he said (that he’s sorry he was neglectful, that he wants to help her and make it up to her) can also be true. On the other hand, you can also read it that he regretted her imprisonment because it made her less useful and that he wants to bring her closer so that he can drain the Shakti from her. He does want to be the Heisenberg Messenger, and letting people read emotion into a purely pragmatic decision is certainly in character.

Eugene LaRue speaks next. As he stands — looking strangely diminished in a shabby navy blue suit and green tie — he points his hand at Dean and says “This man, Dean Matterkros



— also known as ‘Dermott Arkane’ — has killed at least two men. I know about two for sure, there are probably more. He’s fathered children by five different mothers. Two of those children are dead because of their paternity. If Renata Dakota goes with him, I believe she’ll be in far greater danger than she would be in prison, even adult prison. Dean, do you deny any of this?”

Dean grits his teeth, clenches his fists and says “I won’t deny what you *believe*. Your *beliefs* about her safety are irrelevant. I won’t deny the rest of it either — though I doubt very much that you can prove anything you say today.”

What Eugene says after that depends on what the PCs have done. If he thinks it’s in his best interests to keep Renata behind bars, he says “The gunfight that landed Ms. Dakota in prison was with members of a cult, and the head of that cult was Dean Matterkros. That cult is intact, and some of its members are in this courtroom today.” He bites his lip, looks at Renata, frowns, and says the rest in a rush. “I want what’s best for Renata, which is why I feel I have to tell you that releasing her is only a recipe for further violence.” He sits down quickly as Renata shoots to her feet, ready to say something. But Brian Stark urgently says “Renata, *don’t*.” If, at that point, you feel the PCs have done a sufficient job of persuading Renata to support Dean Matterkros, Renata stares balefully at Eugene and says “Bless you, Mr. Matterkros. I mean, ‘dad’.” Otherwise she sits down without a word.

If, on the other hand, Eugene is going to try to get her out, he says “I’m telling you the dirt on her father so you won’t hand her over to him. But I also want you to understand where this poor girl came from. All she was — all she ever was, growing up — was just a useful thing to her parents. In 1997 she did a terrible thing. But having to grow up in prison, she’s paid a terrible price. If you let her, I think she can sever her ties to the past and extract herself from her history. I hope you’ll give her that chance.”

THE DECISION

Ultimately, it’s up to the GM to decide if the PCs have interfered successfully (one way or the other) with the parole board. If they did nothing effective, the board releases Renata on probation, and sets the wheels in motion to permit her move to Boca Raton. Otherwise, she “graduates” into adult incarceration for the next three years.

It’s also up to the GM to decide if the PCs have convinced Renata to give the Big Charge to a particular candidate (or, alternately, if they’ve persuaded her *against* doing so). If their persuasion was insufficient, she gives it to Erica Fisher — partly for cash, partly to punish Eugene and Dean.

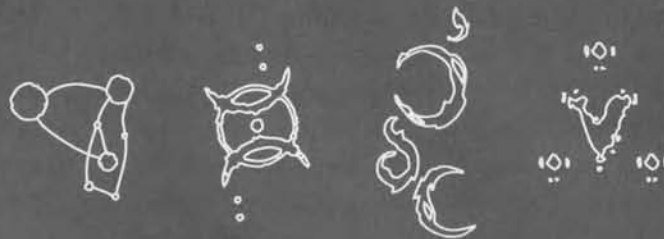
If she gives the charge to Eugene, he immediately grounds it. If he knows the Shakti got grounded through Mitch Geddakis before, he sends it to the trucker. If he doesn’t know that, or if the PCs have interfaced him with Erica Fisher, he might give it to her. If he knows about Geddakis *and* Fisher, he gives it to Geddakis unless Fisher bribes him somehow. (As the GM, you can decide. You can even decide that he goes off and grounds it without telling where it went. That gives you some play later to keep the three-way competition interesting.)

If Renata gives the charge to Dean, he has some of his cultists give her a job. She stays in Atlanta and the cultists watch her very, very carefully.

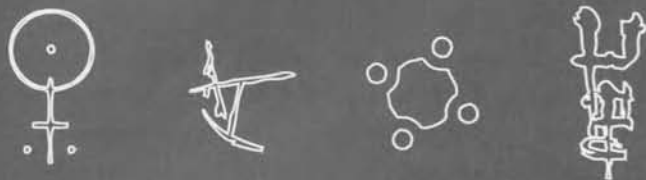
If she gives the charge to Erica, the True Queen is true to her word and arranges for her to get a job under the protection of Paul Borowski (see *Break Today*, p. 60).

IF THE PLAYERS DON’T DO MUCH

Barring PC intervention, the Manipuraladhara charge goes to the True Queen. Score at the end of the third inning: Geddakis 1, Matterkros 1, Fisher 1.



CHAPTER FIVE ANAHATA : CHICAGO



Chicago. The windy city of big shoulders. Known worldwide for jazz, pizza, Al Capone and Michael Jordan.

What's less known is that it's a stronghold for The New Inquisition, the birthplace of the Naked Goddess Sect and a frequent stalking-ground for the Freak. Stir in a random set of Entropomancers (who seem thicker on the ground in the American Midwest, for some reason) and you've got one spicy meatball.

What's surprising is that none of the Chicago-local power groups have heard about the Shakti. The synchronicity of the Naked Goddess does not seem to be leading the Sect towards the national Kundalini. (Unless your PCs happen to be NG Cultists, of course.) If anything, it's keeping them away.

The New Inquisition is another matter. While they've heard nothing about the Big Charge (other than rumors and speculation on the Mak Attax list, which they're ignoring in favor of following news of "mass hysteria" in the Grenadine islands), they do know

about Dermott Arkane. Alex Abel feels he got cheated out of Ascension, and he partially blames Arkane.

Being partially blamed by Alex Abel is much like being obsessively loathed by a man of lesser means.

The Godwalker of Messengers gave TNI the slip with his proxies and his name-scrambling, but coming to Chicago is risky for him, and he knows it. He just doesn't have much choice.

STRUCTURE

Chicago is where the PCs should (ideally) declare an allegiance, if they haven't done so already. That's not to say they can't become treacherous backstabbers in later chapters, but here — in the heart chakra — they should get identified with Erica Fisher, Dean Matterkros or (the perennial dark horse) Mitch Geddakis. If they later betray their chosen patron, it should affect their reputation (such as it is) in

the Occult Underground. (Granted, this is not a terrible threat, since communication in the OU is so impaired that one of its biggest players doesn't even hear about one of the biggest events until it's half over. But still.)

The Chicago chakra is intended to take two days, and the violence quotient is ramped up from earlier episodes. It starts with Dean getting shot, continues with TNI thrashing around in a mess it doesn't really understand, and ends with the Big Charge getting delivered to the wrong address.

ARRIVING AT THE CITY BY THE LAKE

By this point, it's assumed that the PCs have some semi-reliable way of tracking the Shakti. If they don't, you can mine the previous chapters for ideas. If they have the resources to get fairly specific details, they can learn that it has not yet emerged, but that it will somewhere in Chicago — probably somewhere on the I88 East-West corridor.

When your PCs arrive in town, make sure you get a sense of where they're staying. One of the nice hotels downtown, where they can rely on slow traffic pretty much all the time? Or are they out in the suburbs, paying much less but away from the action?

Things unfold pretty much the same wherever they are, but the tone of the city downtown is different from the feeling in its satellite communities. Downtown is crowded, hurried and populous. There's a lot of pedestrian traffic and visibility is low in every direction, blocked by tall buildings and signage. Out in the burbs, things are much less compressed. People drive far more than they walk, and once you're off the busy streets (which are just as fast paced as the downtown roads, and just as plagued by assholes talking on their cell phones) the visibility is often good and the traffic fairly sedate.

It's a long drive from Atlanta. For simplicity's sake, I'm assuming your characters get in at night or in the evening. They get one night of superb, peaceful, uninterrupted sleep.

DAY ONE

DEAN'S AMBUSH

Wherever they settle, Dean finds them. They're awakened early in the morning by a phone call from him. Basically, he wants to talk. His reasons for this depend on his previous encounters with the characters.

If they've helped him, he wants to fill them in on Chicago and warn them about potential troubles. He's left his "less capable" followers back in Atlanta precisely because they'd be likely to draw attention in Chicago. He's hoping the PCs can serve as his agents without him having to put himself in direct danger by sticking around.

If they've gone against him, he's making another effort to bring them into the fold. (If they opposed him successfully, they've obviously got the right stuff and ought to be inside his tent pissing out, rather than the other way 'round. If they opposed him but failed, he figures he's in a strong negotiating position — "Get on the right side or you'll keep losing.") He asks them to meet him downtown for breakfast at a restaurant called Miller's Café.

"I really think we can do great things together. I promise you that I'm not setting you up." Courtesy of his Messenger channel, the PCs can be sure he's telling them the truth.

Dean's waiting for them at Miller's, along with Matt Roadkane. Dean greets them warmly, while Matt is more reserved and suspicious.

Characters who make a Notice roll can spot a flesh-colored earplug in Dean's left ear, with a cord leading down towards his waist. He also seems vaguely distracted during the conversation. If asked about it, he pulls it out and lets them listen. It's a computerized voice reading Reuters news headlines off an internet feed. "I need to remain in constant contact with the news," he explains.

After inviting them to sit and order, he either (1) gives them a rah-rah recruitment speech about how much better the world will

be when he's reconfiguring reality or (2) warns them about the New Inquisition and tells them that he'll be in terrible danger if these enemies of his find him.

He doesn't get far, though. Even before their food arrives, a man walks into the restaurant, points at Dean, and says — in a very loud, clear voice — “You're willing to kill because you believe you should become a god. Do you deny this?”

This person is (of course) one of God's Heralds. Dean curses, stands up and says “You're pretty gutsy to annoy me if you believe that.” Matt also stands and shoves the man. The management shows up, and a three-way yelling match ensues between Matt, the interloper, and the restaurant employee. Dean grimaces and asks the PCs if they'd like to continue their discussion elsewhere. Assuming they agree, he pays for coffee and turns to leave. Before he goes, though, he leans in and says something to the fellow from God's Heralds. The man tries to lean away, but he still hears whatever it is that Dean tells him. It causes him to burst into tears and flee at top speed.

(If a character tries to hear what Dean says, give a significant Notice roll. A success lets him hear Dean mutter “Your mother-in-law would have said yes, you know.”)

With a pleasant smile, he asks them out into the street. “I can give you a ride to another place, a bakery up in Wrigleyville,” he says as morning traffic glides past — taxis, bike messengers, office managers in Toyotas and CFOs in limousines.

As the group turns a corner, they see a large man — no, make that a *huge* man — running at them with a gun in each hand.

Roll initiative.

Their linebacker-sized opponent is none other than Alex Abel's personal bodyguard, Eponymous (see UA2, p. 237). He and Abel were cruising along in Abel's limo when they “coincidentally” (that is, “guided by the ascended Messenger”) passed by Matterkros on the street. The driver pulled into a park-

OH MY GOD! WE KILLED EPONYMOUS!

Before starting the fight scene, carefully evaluate your PCs' fighting abilities. Keep in mind that (1) it takes an action to draw a weapon, unless you've got some kind of quick draw skill and (2) Eponymous is wearing a bulletproof vest. But he does not have any protection against magick. If you think your PCs can dish out 80 points of damage to him in two turns, give him some backup. Specifically, give him an entropomancer sidekick with several significant charges and a handgun. This gal — we'll call her Janice — got pressured to join TNI when they were shaking down the area chaos mages. Play her by ear — she can use Luck of the Damned, Edit the World and Taste of Chaos to protect herself and Eponymous until they bug out.

ing structure a few blocks down, Eponymous jumped out and doubletimed it back while Abel drove off, moderately confident that no one would connect the big guy who got out of a limo with the big guy who started shooting three blocks away.

Eponymous is a tough opponent for a number of reasons. First off, he's buff with the high skills and the scary stats. But more than that, he's smart. His mission is to kill Arkane (or, as the PCs know him, Matterkros). He doesn't give a shit about anyone else there.

In the first round of combat, he runs up and, with his absurdly high initiative and firearm scores, takes three shots at Dean. Since this is GMC on GMC violence, there's not much point in rolling. Eponymous goes on 70. (If that seems ridiculously fast, remember that he's got the Messenger on his side, not to mention the element of surprise.) Assume that the first shot hits Dean in the leg. Matt Roadkane tackles his father out of the way and takes Eponymous' second bullet to his chest. The third shot misses, but shatters a storefront window.



On his first round action, Dean stumbles through a doorway into a store — and vanishes. There's no flash of light or thunderclap: Even someone watching him might momentarily think that he just lost track of Dean in the confusion of the glass door's reflections. But no, Dean's used a Messenger channel to go to where a big story is happening. (Now you know why he keeps the news feed plugged into his ear 24/7.)

On the second round, Eponymous realizes that Dean has vanished and he legs it. Depending on what your PCs are doing, he might: Fire blindly behind him to discourage pursuit; do a combined action, running and dodging; or just run as fast as he can, trying to get to the closest subway station. Play this out as you wish, but remember that once Dean is gone, Eponymous' motivation is to get the fuck out of there before the cops show up. If the PCs give chase and all but one of them get lost, Eponymous might turn on a lone pursuer, but he's got better things to do than get into a two-on-one fight.

PCs can fire on him as he's running away, but make sure they know the streets aren't empty. If they don't hit him, have them roll a single die. If it comes up 1, they've hit a bystander. ("Quick, put a gun in her hand!")

Matt is down, crying piteously and clutching the bleeding hole in his chest. All he can do is ask "Did they kill Dad?" over and over again. PCs with First Aid skills can help him out, but he's going to need a hospital. Luckily, about a dozen people with cell phones called *911 when they heard the second and third gunshots.

The police are (of course) terribly interested in what the PCs have to say about the attack, but lots of witnesses can testify that this huge loony ran up, opened fire, and ran away. If the PCs flee the scene of the crime, some fairly bad police sketches of them show up on the TV that night. You can make the PCs sweat with these, but they're not good enough to get the characters hauled in for questioning — unless, for some reason, you decide that ought to happen.

Once the PCs have been thoroughly questioned by the cops (or, alternately, have cheesed it) they're probably going to try to find the Anahata charge, by means fair or foul. That, or find one of the other questing characters.

EUGENE'S AGENDA

Eugene has hooked up with God's Heralds and is concentrating on making Dean's life hell. If the PCs go to him after Dean gets shot, he's suspicious. Remember, a Herald was nearby and saw the PCs being chummy with Dean. Nevertheless, Eugene is willing to trade info for info. He's particularly interested in details of who attacked Dean and theories about why. If he finds out that one of Dean's proxies is injured, he wants to know what hospital the proxy (Matt) went to.

MATT ROADKANE

Depending on how you want to play Eugene, he might just go to the hospital and kill Matt. Or TNI might send someone to the hospital to finish the job. Either possibility is something to keep in mind if the PCs decide to go visit Matt as he's recovering.

If they do go looking for Matt, it's a chance to play him as something other than an arrogant, pushy young punk. Sure, he's all those things, but he also took a bullet for a man he believed in. PCs who try to persuade him to turn against Dean have a very, very tough row to hoe. They can point out that Dean bailed out when the bullets started to fly, but Matt can counter by saying that was the right thing for Dean to do. "If he'd stuck around and gotten killed, then it woulda been pretty stupid of me to try and save him, right?"

If your PCs are dramatic, talky types, you can have Eugene show up to debate the ethics of snuffing Matt to impair Dean. This can even be a three way discussion, as Eugene tries to convince (or threaten) Matt into breaking his tie with his father.

On the other hand, if your PCs lean more towards the "furious action" side of the equa-

tion, a couple TNI goons can show up with orders to put a pillow on Matt's face and shut him up for good.

ERICA AND MAK ATTAX

Erica Fisher arrives in town the same day the PCs do, but she doesn't waste any time talking to Matterkros. Instead, she marshals her Mak Attax troops. There are three infiltrated franchises in the Chicagoland area, and she figures the charge is intended to go to one of them — probably the DeKalb Oasis. (DeKalb is a small farming town about an hour and a half outside of downtown Chicago. It's right on I88 and — according to Feng Vespucci — it's a propitious place for the Shakti to choose.) She's stationed herself there with Harvey Duopoulous (see UA2, p. 248) the restaurant's Mak Attax crew chief and charge dispenser. Unfortunately for her, he's got a freshly broken leg, but he's well-charged because of it. Erica also has 2-5 non-adept Attaxers with her. The rest of the Chicago Attaxers are split between the other two infiltrated restaurants, and probably won't be able to get involved with the events described here.

If the PCs are allied with Erica at the beginning of this section, Dean still contacts them, and Erica actually encourages them to go talk to him. She's interested in possibly meeting him, so she can judge her competition. Once he gets shot at, she decides that maybe a meeting *isn't* such a good idea.

LATAETIA LUDOPHIS

She's in town — in fact, having skipped Atlanta, she got to town before the PCs did, and she met this kind of *cute* guy. Well, not cute really, but interesting. Maybe "weird" is the best word. But he was nice to her, so they kind of hung out. His ideas about how everyone everywhere should be free sounded right-on to her, and they fooled around for a while in the back of his pickup truck. Then he said he'd show her this really cool trick on his skateboard — a "goofy-foot flimflam topnotch" or

something like that — and he wound up breaking his leg and Lataetia feels *so* bad about it. She's decided to make it up to her new friend Harvey by hanging around him until she has to go back to L.A.

She has (of course) no idea that her presence allowed the Fool to smite Harvey, just like she has no idea that her presence around him endangers him and all his friends.

MITCH GEDDAKIS

Mitch is not yet in Chicago. He's getting his truck refilled at a processing plant downstate. (As it really should have been much sooner — he's still unclear on why he had to haul meat all the way from California to Georgia when there's plenty of restaurants in between.) The meat from the original Golden Calf is gone, but now the Shakti has become associated with Mitch's truck itself. He'll be pulling into the DeKalb Oasis at 10:00 tomorrow.

Finding out his route is not necessarily difficult. Erica Fisher knows it. Eugene doesn't know for sure, but he could find out. So could anyone with sufficient Charm or Investigation rolls, provided they provide a plausible course of investigation. They can call the manager at the Atlanta or Las Vegas restaurants to find out how Mitch was hired to deliver to them. Through the delivery agency, they can get Mitch's location — even a phone number if the pretext is urgent and persuasive enough.

Phoning Mitch won't necessarily do a lot of good, though. He hasn't seen anything weirder than his erratic schedule. In both Atlanta and Las Vegas, the fireworks didn't happen until after he'd dropped his load and moved on. He may not even remember the PCs. Even if he does, he's going to have a large grain of salt ready if they go into a lengthy mystic shit spiel.

DAY TWO

MEET ALMA GINTY

No matter where the PCs spend the night, TNI



finds them and sends Alma Ginty out to have a talk with them. This is bad: Alma Ginty is one of the Legion of Doom — a cell of powerful adepts who answer to Abel, and only Abel, personally. (You can find a full writeup of Alma — also known as “Liebestod” — on p. 104.)

Abel knows that the PCs were with Matterkros/Arkane, and he wants to find out what they know. Hence, Alma has been sent to shake them down. If they killed Eponymous (or Janice), she’s told to interrogate them and then kill them.

Liebestod is not one for the knock down, drag out style of confrontation. She’s got five hired bruisers (use the Stock Thug from UA2, p. 264) nearby. They aren’t TNI, and they aren’t really tuned-in to the occult. They’re just teenaged gang bangers, members of the Spanish Warriors who understand that the old dame has cash and weird hoodoo. They’re superstitious, and they’ve picked up a few Hardened notches in the Unnatural area from watching Liebestod do her thing, but they don’t have anything useful to say and they can’t be traced back to TNI. (Just as well, really: Given Alma’s inhibitory effect on everyone she works with, there’s not much point in pairing her with a skilled fighter.)

She shows up early — maybe six o’clock — and places homing beacons on their car or cars. (PCs who’ve taken precautions — driving a car that’s registered in someone else’s name, or a stolen car — reap the benefits as she’s unable to suss out which one belongs to them. If the PCs booby-trap their car, she comes at them with one fewer thug — and, depending on the trap, she may lose her element of surprise. Plus, of course, she can’t easily track them later.)

Once that little chore is complete, she tries to get the PCs out of their room (or house, or drainage ditch — whatever). Ideally, she wants them to be able to hear her voice (and thus, feel her deadly power) without seeing her. For example, if they’re in a standard motel with two floors of rooms opening onto a parking lot or balcony, she’ll be in a car in the parking lot,

hollering questions up at them. If they’re in a fancy hotel with an interior courtyard atrium, she’s on one of the interior floors yelling back and forth, but constantly moving around so that they can’t get a definite bead on her. Since she knows what room they’re in, she starts out right beneath them, but she moves off to an elevator to change floors pretty quick.

Alma’s strategy is to keep two Warriors with her and scatter the other three throughout the area — hotel, motel, neighborhood of private homes — wherever the PCs sacked out. When they’re in position, she makes her move and alerts the PCs to her presence — possibly by calling them on the phone and letting them know she’s looking at them, possibly just by shouting at them from outside their door. (For a chain smoker, she’s got a surprisingly loud and penetrating voice.) She wants answers about Dermott Arkane and she wants ‘em now. (She doesn’t know the name “Dean Matterkros,” but if the PCs don’t recognize the name “Dermott,” she says “The man who was shot at breakfast yesterday. The man who has not yet passed into the realm of death. Remember him now?”)

She wants to know:

- What Dermott Arkane/Dean Matterkros is doing in Chicago.
- Who his allies are and, where.
- Where he ran off to.
- How the PCs are involved in all this.

Depending on what they tell her, she may have lots more questions — she (and therefore TNI) know nothing about the American Kundalini, or about Erica Fisher, or about any of the weirdness in Vegas, Atlanta or Los Angeles. She also makes sure to warn them that anyone who helps Dermott Arkane is as good as dead. If they’re helping him, they better quit.

On the other hand, the PCs may play it pretty quiet. After all, she’s not offering anything in trade. She’s threatening them, though with her powers, it’s probably a fairly credible

threat. PCs who respond poorly to threats may charge after her and attack. If this happens, she flees, covering her retreat with her various powers. By the time the PCs reach her, their Body and Speed scores are probably pretty marginal.

Her first instinct is to give the Kiss Off of Death to anyone who charges her and her Warriors *without* a weapon in hand. (She figures that only adepts go into gunfights without guns.) Effective shooters get Secondhand Smoke. Anyone who hurts her gets the Deadleg Curse before she retreats.

The Warriors tend to fire at people with guns in their hands. She's only got two with her to start: The others can arrive as you see fit, but remember that they know where she is, and as soon as shit starts to go down, they're going to run to her. If she's not decisively winning the fight after two rounds, or if she gets hurt, she has one of the Warriors wheel her away at top speed while the other covers her retreat. She continues to fling her nastiness at pursuers as she goes.

On the other hand, she and her goons may get the drop on the PCs. PCs who surrender to her are hauled off for more questions in the basement of a condemned apartment building on the city's south side. If they killed Eponymous or the entropomancer the previous day, they're restrained and pointblanked after questioning.

(As GM, you may want to give them a few chances to get the hell out before they're handcuffed to the water pipes downstairs. They get hauled downtown in two different vehicles — one a van with a lift for Alma's wheelchair. The most physically powerful-looking characters are put in with her. Scrawny adept types are put in the trunk of a big old Chrysler sedan. It holds two at most, forcing the Warriors to put any overflow in the van with Liebestod. While the characters are debilitated by exposure to her, remember that her errand boys are too — they could easily botch the job of tying up the PCs, or whatever.)

If they seem eager to betray Matterkros, they're released to do that, but warned that

TNI is keeping an eye on them. If they didn't kill anyone and they seem genuinely terrified (blown stress checks are very convincing), Liebestod tosses the key to their handcuffs at their feet and leaves while they're struggling to pick it up.

PCs who manage to drive off her and her buddies can try to follow. If that's the case, the van takes lead and tries to get away while the Chrysler runs interference. If they run the Chrysler off the road, the gangsters within know nothing (and the police show up within ten or fifteen minutes). If they can get past the Chrysler and knock the van off the road, I recommend having it hit a curb, roll over, and slide into a gas station pump. As the van bursts into flames, the driver runs out screaming and frying, while within the PCs can hear Alma shrieking "Husband! Come for me! *Please come get meeee!!*"

THE CHARGED CHOICE

PCs who drive off or escape from Liebestod may realize that if this woman and her thugs are assaulting Dean's allies, Matt Roadkane could be next on her list. (I recommend against giving them Mind rolls to figure this out. If they overlook Matt's predicament, just have them find out about his brutal murder in the hospital later on in the campaign.)

If the PCs do realize that the hospitalized Matt is in peril, they might decide to go protect him.

That's your cue to pay off some of their investigation by revealing where and when the Shakti's next stop is likely to take place — setting them up for the difficult choice between Matt and their mission.

"Where" is the DeKalb Oasis rest stop. "When" is pretty much "right now."

So. What do they do? Abandon a teenager to the mercies of Death's Bride? Or let one of reality's seven keys tumble from their fingers?

Some strategies the PCs might use to deal with this dilemma include:



ASK THE BOSS (1)

If they're helping Erica and ask her what they should do, there's a couple ways you can play it. The mean way is to not let 'em off the hook: She tells them that they should do as they see fit, though she does point out that if the New Inquisition is now after the Shakti, they're more likely to attack the restaurant than the hospital. The other way to handle it is for her to tell them to come and defend her in DeKalb while she sends some other people to protect Matt. (If those "other people" get killed failing to defend him, the PCs may or may not feel guilt and chew the scenery. That's fine. If they don't react, don't try to force it. Players who don't want to get distracted from the plot by such characterization opportunities should be free to ignore them.)

ASK THE BOSS (2)

If they're helping Dean and call him for directions, he either instructs them to protect Matt (if you're doing a High Road Dean) or tells them that Matt wouldn't want them to defend him at the cost of the mission (if Dean's on the Low Road).

SPLIT UP

If you're comfortable running a split-scene, let them divide the party. Just switch back and forth between the two PC groups. (I recommend pacing it so that you always switch at a point of great tension. The cliffhanger is a literary convention for a reason.) On the other hand, if you don't want them to split up, you can decide that TNI sent two teams and that one did Matt in while the PCs were struggling with Liebestod.

LEAVE MATT FOR DEAD

Hey, the kid might as well have "martyr for the cause" written on his forehead. If he doesn't die today, he'll just croak making some bonehead "heroic" maneuver tomorrow, right? Why fight fate? If the PCs abandon Matt, it's up to you whether he lives or dies. You might

even want to put off the decision until later. If it would provide an interesting complication, you can tell them later that he died. Alternately, he could show up with a chip on his shoulder about how they "passed out" on him.

GO RESCUE THE BOY

If the PCs stick their necks out to rescue someone, it behooves the GM to give them someone to fight for him. (This is even more keen a dilemma if their assessment of Matt is "a prick in normal circumstances, a hero in extraordinary ones.") The question then becomes. . . who's the enemy?

The opponent you pick depends on what kind of struggle your PCs want. If they're looking for more of a fight (possibly because Liebestod frustrated them one way or another), you can have Matt's assassins be five more stock thugs — TNI knows something big is going down and doesn't want to waste its heavy hitters on a sitting duck in a hospital.

(These thugs wouldn't be Spanish Warriors. Instead, they're real TNI operatives, though low-level ones. They've got the skills and intelligence to get into the hospital, do the kid, make it look like an accident, exfiltrate themselves safely — and defend themselves if necessary. Of course, all this is irrelevant since they're really just there to fight the PCs.)

(If you think the PCs are so tough that five stock thugs won't faze them, you can beef up the thugs by letting them flipflop their handgun attacks.)

On the other hand, the PCs might be injured themselves, or they may be the type who prefer to hurt people emotionally. In that case, the PCs could arrive right before Eugene LaRue.

Eugene doesn't want to kill the boy (though, if push comes to shove, he might). Instead, he'd rather get the kid to betray his dad. If you play it this way, you can turn this into a debate instead of a fight. Eugene argues that Dean used Matt to protect himself and then threw him to the wolves when the going got tough — just as he's always done and has

planned to do since day one. Matt's riposte is that Dean did the right thing by protecting himself, and that Matt would be *disappointed* if his father had tried to save him. "I took a bullet to let him escape. How do you think I'd feel if he hadn't gotten away?"

The presence of the PCs and their arguments can, potentially, sway either man. Don't just let them roll Charm for this, of course: If the player can't think of a good reason that Matt should jettison his old man (or a good reason that Eugene should leave Matt alone), don't let the character do so either. But with enough fast talk, Eugene will reluctantly respect Matt's loyalty. (If the PCs are on his side, Eugene may need to be talked out of killing the boy once it's clear that Matt won't bend.) Alternately, it's not impossible to convince Matt that his father isn't all Matt thinks — especially if the PCs have evidence of Dean's callousness that Matt hasn't heard or seen before.

The above scene can be played out with an agent of Erica Fisher and Mak Attax instead of Eugene. Same arguments, only more idealistic and less well-informed. (The attaxers, of course, would only be angling for betrayal. They're not about to kill a teenager in a hospital. Geez!)

Finally, it's hardly impossible that the PCs could convince Eugene or an Attaxer to leave Matt alone, and *then* have the TNI thugs show up. (They must have gotten stuck in traffic.)

THE DEKALB DISCOVERY

The PCs probably end up at DeKalb eventually, maybe after visiting Matt, maybe instead of visiting him. They're led there by their own devices or by the guidance of Dean or Erica. In any event, they don't arrive there before the Big Charge does. . . because the Big Charge doesn't go there at all.

Mitch pulls up (possibly before the PCs arrive — play it by ear) and unloads his beef into the hands of the waiting Maks. These include Harvey Duopoulous (see UA2, p. 248), Erica Fisher (see *Break Today*, p. 52) and sev-

eral non-adept Attaxers. Harvey is loaded up with four significant charges.

If the PCs are friends of Erica Fisher, she has three Chicago area Maks with her. She immediately deploys the PCs strategically through the truck stop, while keeping the Attaxers close to her. Some of the things she wants done include:

- Stationing someone by the gas pumps to keep any mischief away from them if things go south. If possible, she tries to put a mystic who can influence events as damage control or prevention. The Oasis is big and crowded: The last thing she wants is for the pumps to blow up.
- Putting someone on a bench by each of the building's two public doors to watch for trouble. She tries to assign these tasks to mundane bruiser types.
- Placing a PC in a parked car where it can watch the two offramps that feed into the Oasis' parking lot. (The DeKalb Oasis has two onramps, two offramps and two segregated parking lots to keep eastbound and westbound traffic from getting mixed together.) She tries to pick a PC with exceptional or supernatural senses.

One of the Chicago Maks is a ham radio enthusiast who has brought enough portable, hand-free radios for everyone helping Erica. However, PCs who are helping Dean (either secretly or openly) cannot make these work at all. Good communication for the True King challenger, bad for the Messenger Godwalker. That's how it works.

There are two highway patrol officers at the Oasis. They're getting fresh coffee and pissing away digested coffee. They arrive about the same time as the PCs, and their car is clearly visible. (Use the Average Police Officer from UA2, p. 264.)

If the PCs arrive before Mitch, they can also spot Lataetia, right in the middle of having a falling-out with Harvey. (He's busy,



he's cranky and he's on crutches. Not his most charming moment.) Right before Mitch pulls in, she goes off in a huff. Harvey shrugs and goes into the back of the restaurant.

(As he's delivering, Mitch runs into Lataetia, whom he remembers from a chance bar room meeting in his hometown of L.A. They immediately get to talking.)

PCs who oppose Fisher can attempt to negotiate, but there's really nothing they can offer her that she wants more than the Shakti. She is stationed in the restaurant loading dock with Harvey and her followers. (And if the PCs are against her, she has *six* Attaxers with her instead of just three. Also, Harvey has six significant charges.) She and her companions are all legitimate employees of the restaurant chain with a good (or, at least, vaguely plausible) excuse for being in the back room. In all likelihood, the PCs don't have a similar excuse. If they start to menace her, she threatens them with the cops. (They are, technically, trespassing.)

If the PCs just show up and start whaling on her (or start throwing down the ol' mind control, or whatever), she and her minions put up a fight until one of the Chicago Maks gets badly hurt. Then they all flee towards the front of the restaurant while Harvey stays back to engage the PCs solo. He's got two rounds to fight them by himself before the two State Troopers arrive to see what the trouble is.

If the situation (PCs, Troopers, Maks) isn't complicated enough, TNI gets there eventually. Specifically, it's Cage (see UA2, p. 239), Violet McIntyre (see UA2, p. 238) and two Spanish Warriors. This escalates the possibilities of violence once again. (Violet has a gun and five significant charges, but she won't attack unless someone attacks her.)

At some point in this chaotic clusterfuck, it becomes apparent that the Shakti has *not*, after all, arrived at the Oasis. Possibly Harvey detects this by trying to use his magick to pull the one "sacred" burger out of the many, many crates. Or, if the PCs have some kind of sixth sense, they might twig to it. If all three groups

(the Maks, the TNI agents and the PCs) are somehow in the kitchen without mayhem going down and the Troopers getting involved, Violet can detect its absence eventually (taking her down to four significant charges) — though she insists that "it was here, not long ago!"

As this becomes clear, the GMCs figure it out and connect it to Mitch's truck. (The fact that Lataetia just ran off with him may or may not figure into Harvey's calculations.) The Maks immediately take to their vehicles in pursuit. The TNI agents fall in behind the Maks. The reactions of the PCs depend, of course, on what's going on with them.

- If they're on Erica's side, they can simply grab their own transport and bail down the highway — or jump in the back of Harvey's truck.
- If they're against Erica and were whaling on the Troopers, they can emerge just in time to see Harvey's truck heading hell-bent for leather down the eastbound ramp, with a couple of the Maks clinging uncomfortably in back.
- If the Troopers busted them, the mass flight of the Maks and their pursuit by TNI distracts the arresting officers. (Especially since one of the Spanish Warriors is dumb enough to fire at the retreating truck.) The PCs can take advantage of this lapse to escape, as it occurs before they're imprisoned in the Troopers' car. If your PCs are particularly badass, they get their break after their hands have been cuffed, when they're being escorted out. If they're less fighty and more talky, the gunshot goes off while they're still trying to explain what's *really* happening. If they run immediately, they can get away from the Troopers without even a roll.

There are a lot of variables, but unless the PCs have really screwed the pooch, they should wind up jamming eastward on Highway 88, right behind the Maks, accompanied by TNI.



GET YOUR HATE ON ROUTE 88

Route 88 stretches west from the Loop — the very heart of downtown Chicago. It sees an awful lot of traffic, much of it consisting of very impatient people. This impatience has a tendency to drive the average speed rate up. But at the same time, 88 is a toll road which (as of this writing) shrinks down to a single lane at one point.* Those factors, along with the high volume, can drive the speed rate *down*.

In practical terms, Route 88 tends to either move at 60-80 mph, or slow to a dead stop. The speed is usually exhilaratingly high or aggravatingly low, without a lot of predictable middle.

(Characters unfamiliar with Chicago may be completely ignorant of this, of course.)

If you have *Lawyers, Guns and Money*, or the latest edition of *Unknown Armies* this is (of course) an ideal place to use the nifty car chase rules. But if you don't have either book, that's fine too. Just keep throwing events at the PCs, making the driver roll Drive to keep the car on the road.

HELL IS OTHER DRIVERS

The PCs aren't the only people on the road, not by a long shot. The others involved in the chase — whether they know it or not — include the following.

Mitch Geddakis and Lataetia Ludophis: Mitch has no idea that he's being chased. (Okay, if the PCs have told him about all this magick hooplah, he might have an inkling. But he's also got Lataetia next to him in the cab of Sweet Sweet Connie, showing a lot of leg. So he's distracted.)

If you're using the chase rules, Mitch starts out with a lead of seven lengths. Furthermore, with Lataetia inadvertently sharing his fate, the ascended Fool can protect him from the vicissitudes of Chicago traffic. In game terms, this means he automatically succeeds at all his Drive rolls and doesn't have to confront any particular hazards. This doesn't mean the PCs can't catch up with him. It just means they aren't going to catch up because he blows a series of rolls.

Mitch is trying to get downtown and make his delivery. If anyone waves a gun at him, he actually doesn't notice. (Leg. Distracted. Remember?) Similarly, attempts to raise him on his CB fail because Lataetia accidentally hooked one of its cables with her sandal and disconnected it. Yelling at him from outside the truck won't do a lot of good either. He's got the windows rolled up, and a Molly Hatchet tape cranked up loud enough to be heard over the roar of Sweet Sweet Connie's engine. (PCs who actually get into the cab arrive in the middle of the song "Flirting With Disaster.") A bullhorn can penetrate his audio fog, but no unaided voice has much of a chance. Flashing police lights get him to pull over, if anyone has such a thing. So might someone hanging out a window and vigorously flagging him down. But if anyone actually fires into his cabin, he doesn't pull over: He tries to either knock the offending car off the road (if it's in the right breakdown lane) or crush it against the six-foot high concrete median wall (if it's in the left breakdown lane).

Cage, Violet and the Spanish Warriors: Cage is behind the wheel with his puny 15% Drive skill — but with a Rage passion that can apply to any Drive failure that might let someone best him in the race. He's got Violet riding shotgun, and in extreme duress she can use random magick to correct Cage's blown Drive rolls — but doing so costs her two significant charges, since it's only indirectly germane to "acquisition."

Cage is driving a souped-up El Camino, and the two Spanish Warriors are in the back, hanging on for dear life and taking pot shots at anyone they've identified as an "enemy" — probably the PCs and the Meks. Of course, they've got zero chance of hitting any car that isn't directly adjacent to them — right in front, right behind, or directly to one side or the other — but don't tell the PCs that. Just roll for the Warriors' gunshots, then shake your head and say "They missed."

Cage and his TNI team start out six lengths behind Mitch.

*That one place is the notorious interchange known as "The Hillside Strangler" or "The Birth Canal." Governor Ryan has promised to expand it, and there seems to be some construction. We'll see. Even if he expands it to three lanes from one, it's at a point where two highways converge. With three lanes, you'll wait two minutes instead of ten. Which is still an improvement, of course.

Cage's strategy is to try and knock others out of the race — either by ramming them himself or by getting close enough that the Warriors can fire. He's not going to try to stop Mitch. He figures to just follow Mitch to his delivery and get the burger when the truck stops.

Erica and the Attaxers: Harvey and Erica are in the cab of Harvey's light truck, with Harvey at the wheel. The bed of the truck contains other Attaxers (if the PCs are aligned against Erica) or it can provide a platform for PCs who want to come along (if they're allied with her.) Excess Attaxers are following along in a Saturn four-door. The Maks in the Saturn aren't going to do anything particularly noteworthy — they're not stunt drivers. However, they do attempt to run interference for Harvey, to the best of their ability. This can (at the GM's discretion) give him a +5% boost to his Drive skill. The Attaxers start out five lengths behind Mitch.

Harvey wants to get close enough to the truck that Erica can flag it down. With a cane to wave, Erica actually has a decent chance of getting Mitch's attention.

THE SATYNS

About 15-20 miles down the road from DeKalb, a biker gang pulls onto the highway and involves itself. They're hairy, uncouth, driving big heavy road bikes and wearing jackets that advertise them as "The Satyns." (Dion Isaacs is present as well, in his big green Airstream, but it's so bulky that it gets caught in a traffic clog on the onramp. His minions, being on smaller vehicles, take advantage of the breakdown lane to illegally pull onto the highway.)

The PCs may never have heard of Dion Isaacs and the Satyns. They may have no idea who these biker mofos are. That's fine! All they need to know is that they're interfering, and that their infernal allegiance is apparently mis-spelled. (Characters with any kind of staspheric sight might briefly perceive them as knights in battered armor, whose crest seems to involve grapevines and a man with goat's legs.)

There are six Satyns, and they start out about five lengths back from Mitch. Their stats are available on p. 28.

The Satyns generally mess with anyone who's trying to get to the truck — or anyone in their way — but their primary strategy is to try and drive Mitch off the road so they can trash his truck. (Not a smart or likely strategy, given that Mitch has a lot more wheels and a lot of tonnage on his side.) They won't succeed without PC help. If they do manage to pull this off, the Anahata charge is *lost* — specifically, it expresses itself as a couple major unnatural phenomena on the highway, about a dozen significant phenomena for a couple miles around, and a couple *hundred* minor phenomena all through the Chicagoland area.

PROBLEMS WITH TRAFFIC

So the PCs are on the road and have to deal with Attaxers cutting in front of them, Warriors firing on them, and Satyns trying to smash out their windshields with chains. What else could go wrong?

Plenty.

I'm not going to provide you with an elaborate map of the East-West Tollway. Instead, I'm going to provide a vague description, along with a series of events — "random encounters," if you prefer — that you can throw in at will to spice things up when you're degenerating into a chorus of "Make your Drive roll. Make your Drive roll. Make your Drive roll."

Generally speaking, you've got three lanes, sometimes with a fourth on the right as an on- or off-ramp. There are narrow breakdown lanes on the right and left. Out towards DeKalb, the left border of the inbound road borders a grassy median strip, but farther in there's a railroad station between the eastbound and westbound lanes. After the rail station there are tracks going into the city, and there's a concrete wall about six feet high and two feet thick between the tracks and the highway. There are two toll plazas along the way, and the notorious "Birth Canal." (The toll



booths and the Birth Canal should be treated as “Crunches” — as described below.)

Drunky McCellphone: Some jagoff in a Lexus or Infiniti is yakking on his cell phone while swerving in and out of traffic. (I have never, in my life, seen a Lexus or Infiniti driven well. Not once. But I suppose that shouldn't be surprising, given that their commercials all have that heavy “Rules and courtesy are for other people” subtext.) Alternately, the PCs could be confronted with some soused asshole in a big white rustbucket van. Either way, this driver is changing lanes whimsically, driving at an unsafe speed, and not paying attention. Having him cut in front of you forces a Drive roll. If you fail the roll, you rear-end him. It's not enough to knock you off the road into a barrel roll, but it's enough to slow you down, deploy your airbags, and cause a general ruckus. Hitting this dickhole costs you a length in the chase.

Crunch: Traffic is zipping quickly along, and then — rather suddenly — it isn't. Toll booths, the Birth Canal and simple traffic fluctuations can cause this sudden “molasses effect.” There's a flare of brake lights and everybody's suddenly crawling along. Normally it's not too hard to spot an oncoming crunch. Of course, normally one doesn't have to contend with gunfire and marauding bikers.

Give everyone a significant Notice roll to spot the clog ahead. Drivers can either slow down to the speed of the crunch (by making a significant Drive roll) or they can try to swerve out into one of the breakdown lanes (with a major Drive roll). Driving in the breakdown lane is illegal, but it's one way to get around a crunch.

Failing the “slow down” roll causes a rear-end that brings the car to a dead stop — and also results in the rear-ended driver jumping out to scream abuse at the driver. (A gun, spell or Intimidation roll can take care of these blowhards, though.) With the chase rules, failing this roll costs *two* lengths, while making it costs only a single length.

Failing the roll to go into the breakdown lane means the characters have either hit the grassy median strip (slowing them down) or have sideswiped the concrete barrier (costing them a sideview mirror and wedging the doors on the driver's side shut). The PCs also lose a length. If they make the roll, however, they lose no lengths and can get past the crunch successfully.

One fun option at a crunch is to have *everyone* get pretty much stopped. Sweet Sweet Connie may be visible up ahead, motor idling, creeping along. The Warriors may take this opportunity to jump out of the El Camino and weave between the cars, actually running up to the stopped cars of their adversaries. PCs who jump out and try to run up to Sweet Sweet Connie need to make two consecutive major Run or General Athletics rolls to reach it before it gets through the crunch and starts moving at cruising speed again.

Onramp: As hazards go, this isn't particularly hazardous. It just means more cars are impatiently coming onto the highway, while others are impatiently trying to leave. This creates a clog to the right, but you shouldn't tell the PCs that. Just say “There's an exit coming up.” If they're in the right or middle lane, they get stuck losing a length or wind up slowed almost to a stop while the left lane oozes past. If they react to the news of the approaching exit by getting in the leftmost lane, they don't get stuck or lose any time.

No rolls are needed.

Left Hand Ramps: Of course, on the East-West Tollway there are two interchanges that exit and enter on the left side. Non-Chicagoans should be given a significant Notice roll to spot these. Otherwise, handle it as an onramp — only on the other side of the road.

Repairs: This is a fun one to throw at PCs who've discovered the magic of the breakdown lane. If they've made the apparently smart decision to just stay in the lane and illegally blow by everyone else, you can let 'em get away with it a while — maybe even throw a couple of

"LIKE I SEEN IN THIS ONE MOVIE . . ."

Something about being in a car chase seems to prompt crazy schemes from PCs. A couple of the more common are discussed here to give you a general idea how to handle them.

Jumping Onto the Truck: Jumping from one moving vehicle to another is not easy or safe. If the vehicles aren't immediately adjacent to one another, it's simply not possible at all. It's also impossible to jump into a car or any other standard sized, enclosed vehicle. At highway speeds, you'll just roll off and go splat. But one can attempt to jump into an open-top jeep, into Harvey's truck, into the back of Cage's El Camino, or — in a nod to the cinephiles — onto the chain mesh dangling from the back of Mitch's truck.

The closer the two vehicles are — and, more importantly, the nearer they are to the same speed — the less difficult this feat is. When someone's going to make the jump, have that person's driver make a significant Drive roll to match speeds with the target vehicle. If the Drive roll succeeds, the vehicles have matched speeds. The jumper just needs to make a major General Athletics roll to get across. If the Drive roll fails, the Athletics roll is made at a -10% penalty.

If the Athletics roll fails — whoo, enjoy the car wreck damage in UA2, p. 57. (This actually makes the act of jumping out of a car on the highway surprisingly survivable. Just wait.) If the fall doesn't kill the character, have him make another major General Athletics roll (or a Dodge roll) *immediately*. If that fails, the car immediately behind the one he was trying to jump upon has hit him. Or, more likely, has run over him.

If the PCs — for whatever insane reason — have a grappling hook and can successfully throw that onto the truck (or whatever vehicle they're trying to board), then all it takes is a major Throw or General Athletics roll to get the hook in place. That done, a *Body* roll is all that's required to climb across onto the vehicle.

Getting Into Sweet Sweet Connie: A character who has successfully grabbed the mesh on the back of the semi can attempt to get inside. The door is locked, but can be picked without any particular penalty. (Yeah, the circumstances aren't ideal, but on the other hand, this ain't Fort Knox either.) Trying to force the door is another matter. It can be wrenched open with a successful *Body* roll — but the roll is made with a 50% *penalty*, due to lack of leverage, general door toughness, and the stress of becoming roadkill any moment. If the character has some kind of door forcing or feat of strength skill, it's rolled with a 10% penalty.

Once inside, the only way to find the "magick" burger patty is by using paranormal means. Or the character can start unloading the cargo on the road, which is going to take a long time and cause a lot of trouble, but which can eventually disperse the charge (as described on p. 101. under "The Satyns").

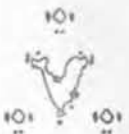
the other pursuers in behind them — and then close off the lane in front of them for repairs. They've got a major Drive roll to veer back into a traffic lane, or they're going headfirst into big, orange, plastic water barrels.

THE FINAL DELIVERY

If the PCs manage to get Sweet Sweet Connie pulled over, and if they can gain entrance to the back, *and* if they can divine the One True

Shakti burger among the thousands of patties back there — then they can seize it, abscond with it, cook it, eat it and deliver it to whom-ever they see fit.

If the PCs don't get him pulled over, no one else does either. Mitch stops at a franchise right across the street from the Chicago Public Library. While he's helping unload, one of the teenagers working there gives him a warning just as he's about to step off the loading dock.



“Thanks,” Mitch says. “You’re a real saint.”

The loader grabs a box of burgers and absorbs the Shakti charge moments before Lataetia giggles and says “Give him your blessing?” Grinning shyly, the worker makes the sign of the cross at Mitch, transferring the Shakti to him.

If the big car chase didn’t work as a climax for you, you can arrange for the PCs to arrive right as this is happening — along with the TNI folks and a couple Satyns. The blessing could go down during the ensuing brawl. Or you could just have the PCs show up in time to see Mitch get blessed and drive away.

IF THE PLAYERS DON’T DO MUCH

Barring PC intervention, the Anahata charge goes to that happy-go-lucky trucker. Despite his abject lack of mystic woo-hah, Geddakis leads at the end of the fourth inning with two Shakti charges consumed, while Matterkros and Fisher duel for second place with one apiece.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

NON-ADEPT ATTAXERS

These aren’t quite ordinary folks, but almost. They’re Chicagoland members of Mak Attax who don’t any magick skills of their own, but who have experienced magick themselves and are willing to take some risk in the name of the cause. They’re not individual enough to need obsessions and passions, and assume that they’ve got 3-4 hard notches in the Unnatural and a couple in Violence. Seeing someone get shot or mutilated still might be enough to force a check on them.

Wound Points: 45

Body: 45 (Roly-poly)

Struggle 20%, General Athletics 30%

Speed: 45 (Jerky)

Dodge 40%, Drive 30%, Initiative 20%

Mind: 50 (Wide-eyed)

General Education 20%, Notice 30%

Soul: 50 (Interested)

Charm 40%, Lie 30%, Mak Attax 30%

NOTES

If you’re anticipating a great deal of violence from your PCs towards Erica Fisher, you can also make these guys her followers, allowing her to boost their Struggle skill with her True King channel.

POSSESSIONS

Cell phones, pepper spray and maybe a big knife if things get crazy in the restaurant.

ALMA GINTY

Alma prefers to go by the name “Liebestod,” but unless you’re in a 1995 Goth club, it’s hard to make that stick, even if you are pale as a corpse and wearing a black wedding dress.

Alma is fascinated by death. Always has been. She started out poking dead squirrels with a stick as a little girl. When she was older, she was the only one of the kids to touch the dead flesh of her grandma during the open-casket funeral. (The skin was cold, and it left a residue of pancake makeup.)

In 1972, at the age of 18, Alma lost her virginity. She’d thought about it long and hard and had decided that if Bill Mullen wasn’t the perfect man, he was at least good enough and she was tired of waiting. She tried to make it special, and so did he, and they were fairly successful. It hurt, but it was also sweet, and wistful, and poignant, and when she got home from his house there was a police officer there to tell her that her mom had been killed in a car crash.

After her first failed suicide attempt (1977) she became convinced that death was keeping her around. She started smoking. She drank a lot, took drugs, drove recklessly. She lost her leg in a crash when she was 26, she was on dialysis until Abel’s underworld connections got her a black market kidney, and she’s been

possessed by spirits of the dead on three separate occasions.

At some point in the 1980s, Alma decided to marry death. By that point, she'd had plenty of exposure. She'd worked in animal "shelters", in emergency rooms, in churches and funeral homes. She found out what condemned prisoners had as their last meals, and she ate them on the anniversaries of their executions. On December 8, her home blares with the music of Yoko Ono, and on November 22, she wears a pink dress and a pillbox hat.

She's now approaching fifty, and she looks eighty. She's not an avatar, though she's definitely allied herself with some non-mortal force greater than herself. Probably she's an adept, though no one has figured out a charge structure or taboo.

Perhaps she's just what she claims to be: Death's bride on Earth, faithful to her husband and doing his work in the world.

Whatever the metaphysical truth of the matter, she's a member of TNI's Legion of Doom and answers to no man but Alex Abel.

ALMA'S FUNKY POWERS

Doomed Miasma: Probably her most potent power. Anyone who looks at Alma or hears her voice begins to weaken and sicken. (No, hearing her on the phone or seeing her on TV doesn't count.) Those affected lose a point off both Body and Speed every minute until their stats match hers. Once an individual is out of range, the stats recover at the same rate. Alma does not need to roll to use this power, nor can she turn it off. However, its power is limited if she's out of character. If Alma is dressed appropriately for the Bride of Death (usually that black wedding dress) the power works normally. If she's dressed more normally, the stat reduction stops after ten minutes. (That is, her victims only lose 10 points off Body and Speed.) Keep in mind that skills are limited by the governing stat: If Alma has knocked Eponymous' speed down to 30, his skill with firearms sinks too, as his eyes become bleary

and his hands shake with her palsy.

Being exposed to her Doomed Miasma is a rank 2 Violence check and a rank 3 Unnatural check.

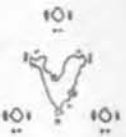
Deadleg Curse: Just as her left leg is gone below the knee, Alma can "kill" the left leg of someone else with just a look. To do this, she needs to roll at or below her Bride of Death skill and above the Soul stat of the target. If she succeeds, that leg goes immediately numb below the knee and collapses. If she fails, however, she cannot use the Deadleg Curse for another hour.

Once the Deadleg Curse is on, it stays on until (1) Alma removes it or (2) some form of magickal purification removes it. Once a leg is dead, it starts to decompose at the normal rate. After the first couple hours, the curse victim begins to take 1-2 points of damage an hour to the left leg until it's amputated below the knee. Once the calf has taken 25 points of damage in this fashion, it is useless and irreparably damaged. (If the spell is broken before that point, regular healing can return the leg to full function, eventually.)

Alma can only put the Deadleg Curse on one person at a time. If she wants to put it on someone new, she has to take it off the last victim.

The Kiss Off of Death: By blowing a kiss at someone, Alma can, for lack of a better turn, put a bad juju on him for 24 hours. If someone attacks the victim within that time, the attacker rolls three dice instead of two and assembles the best result from all three. Note that this only happens on the *first* attack. After that, the curse is spent.

If no one assaults the curse target within the one-day time frame, some other form of potentially deadly misfortune befalls him. For example: A brake cable snaps, a window pane falls off a skyscraper onto his head, a cabbie isn't paying attention when the victim is crossing the street — that sort of synchronistic strike. As a general guideline, the GM rolls two dice and flip-flops into the best result, while the



PC has an opportunity to Notice or Dodge the incoming disaster.

The Kiss Off of Death only creates or enhances *one* attack, and if the PC has managed to cower safely for 24 hours, the curse fades away. Alma can only inflict this curse on one person at a time. In a straight-up fight, however, there's nothing stopping Alma from putting the Kiss Off on somebody, shooting him with the bonus, and then putting the Kiss Off on again before a second attack. That's perfectly feasible. **Second Hand Smoke:** Alma has to be smoking to cast this spell, but since she's generally sucking a nasty unfiltered Seita in an ivory holder, that's not much of a limitation. (She used to smoke Gauloises until Seita became the first French company to be sued for the death of a consumer.) Alma blows a cloud of smoke at the target — a cloud which can travel up to ten feet in still air without coming apart — and the cloud surrounds and affects the victim. Specifically, the victim begins to cough, and does not stop until he leaves Alma's presence. It's possible to fight this coughing fit, but it ain't easy. To speak an intelligible sentence requires a successful Body roll. (Note that unless the roll succeeds, no speech-based channels or spells can be used.) Similarly, any Body-based skill can only be attempted after a successful Body roll. Speed-based skills can be attempted even if the Body roll fails, but in that case a 10% skill penalty is assessed because, hey, it's hard to be coordinated when your body is thrashing about, racked by emphysema-like coughs.

This spell cannot be cast in heavy wind, in rain or fog or underwater, but she *can* use it on more than one person at a time. She does have to make a successful Bride of Death roll to put it on an individual.

ALMA GINTY, CIGARETTE HAG

Personality: Profoundly morbid, negative and humorless.

Obsession: Death, death and more death.

Wound Points: 30

Rage Stimulus: Being mocked.

Fear Stimulus: Being insignificant.

Noble Stimulus: She is kindest to those for whom death is closest — the terminally ill and professional killers. It's an odd mix, to be sure.

Body: 30 (Twiglike)

Struggle 15%, General Athletics 0/10%

Speed: 30 (Palsied)

Dodge 10/15%, Drive 15%, Handgun 30%, Initiative 15%

Mind: 60 (Esoteric)

General Education 20%, Notice 50%, Veterinary Medicine 25%, Morbid Trivia 50%

Soul: 80 (Intense)

Charm 15%, Lie 50%, Bride of Death 80%

Violence: 5 Hardened 3 Failed

Unnatural: 6 Hardened 2 Failed

Helplessness: 2 Hardened 1 Failed

Isolation: 2 Hardened 0 Failed

Self: 2 Hardened 2 Failed

NOTES

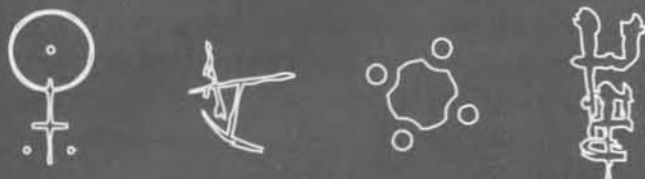
Alma spends most of her time in an electric wheelchair. When she's in it, her General Athletics is 0% and her Dodge is 10%. If she gets out, she still has to hop on her one remaining leg to get anywhere. (She refuses to wear a prosthesis. She'd secretly entertained notions of getting an elaborate and symbolic leg made, until she met Uriel Sterne. He spoiled it for her.)

POSSESSIONS

Black wedding gown with Kevlar corset. (Treat as a bulletproof vest, see UA2 p. 54.) Lots of Frenchie smokes, a long ivory cigarette holder, and a lovely silver lighter with a skull on it in mother-of-pearl. A sturdy electric wheelchair (top speed about 4 miles an hour). A pair of long-barrel .32 revolvers (6 shots each, maximum damage 50).



CHAPTER SIX
VISHUDDA : NEW YORK CITY



While New York City is an international center of commerce, art, fashion, crime, and plays about singing cats, it is a relative backwater when it comes to the occult underground. Its historic sites have attracted Cliomancers for years, but an awful lot of them got booby-trapped by the Sleepers back in the 1950s. Plutomancers used to feel the draw of Wall Street, but with internet day trading you can make as much in Wichita — without having to deal with taboo-breaking rents and a firmly entrenched criminal syndicate that would much rather kill an adept than listen to him blather.

Avatars survive, as they do in any city of note, but even they seem reduced in number in NYC — probably because of the very elements that make it so influential in the mundane world. New York is big, and busy, and bursting with life. A resident can walk away from an identity with ease and adopt a new persona simply by jumping on a subway train and hanging out at a new scene. With reinvention of self so temptingly easy, is it any wonder few people

can stay on one narrow Avatar track for long?

Fortunately for the PCs — or maybe not — the relatively small NYC occult scene is unlikely to get involved when the Big Charge visits the Big Apple.

Instead, they have to deal with cops and crooks.

OVERVIEW

The Vishudda Shakti finds its host in a grumpy, cynical, hard-bitten New York cop named Pete Brodski. Detective Brodski is on a stakeout, watching a dockside warehouse where, it is suspected, a fairly good supply of cocaine is being smuggled into the city outside of normal channels. Brodski has no illusions about who probably gave the cops their tipoff, but he doesn't much care. A coke bust is a coke bust is a coke bust, as Gertrude Stein might have said if she was an early-21st century New York cop.

The first person to get to Brodski has the best (though not only) chance of getting the

Big Charge from him. Unfortunately, events conspire (of course) to put him in tremendous peril. PCs who are serious about their Shakti finding are going to need to follow him into the middle of a gang of well-armed smugglers, some of whom are ripped to the tits on their own product.

Oops.

“WARP SPEED, MR. GEDDAKIS!”

Something odd happens to Mitch Geddakis, Lataetia Ludophis and “Sweet Sweet Connie” between Chicago and New York City. Specifically, three hundred and thirty-three miles disappear. One minute, he’s finally getting through the slow interstate traffic around Gary, Indiana. The next minute, he finds he’s really getting up to speed somewhere in the middle of Ohio on I-80 East.

Naturally, he pulls over a little bit to try and figure out why the sun jiggled in the sky and the weather changed suddenly. (Though not like a cut in a film — there was no jarring, instant jump, but rather a gradual transition between the highway of Indiana and the highway of Ohio. There was no one second where he could say “here I lost hundreds of miles of space.” But, really, could you tell, just by looking, whether a given stretch of interstate was in Indiana or Ohio?)

This quantum leap is a major unnatural effect caused by the Kundalini charge. It is also (possibly) encouraged or influenced by the Invisible Clergy. After all, the most direct result of this spatial jiggery-pokery is that it makes it harder for the rival Kundalini claimants to track Mitch — or to catch up with him.

Thanks to the 4-6 hours this jump cuts off his 760+ mile journey, Mitch is almost certain to make his delivery before any of the charge hunters can get to New York. Unless, of course, they’re traveling with him.

PC HITCHHIKERS

If the PCs are tagging along with Mitch, they

might teleport with him. This doesn’t work if they’re following him in their own vehicle. From their perspective, “Sweet Sweet Connie” goes around a gradual corner behind an overpass and, while out of their sight for maybe a second, *disappears completely*. (This is a Rank 4 Unnatural check, if any of the PCs aren’t that hardened.)

If any or all of the PCs are actually in the cab with him (probably along with Lataetia) they travel with him through hyperspace. While the transition is not immediately obvious, when it becomes clear that, no foolin’, they really are in Ohio, all the passengers have to make a Rank 4 Unnatural stress check. (For plot purposes, assume Mitch and Lataetia make it.)

Mitch, naturally enough, is curious about what the hell happened and invites the PCs to contribute their opinions. At this juncture the PCs are either going to (1) spin out some zany theory or (2) remain quiet and throw up their shoulders.

Either way, you’ve got an excuse for Mitch to give ‘em the slip.

While at a truck stop in upstate New York, Mitch excuses himself to go to the bathroom. He stays away for a while — even longer than a highway restaurant three meat burrito can explain. Looking in the parking lot, they can just see “Sweet Sweet Connie” pulling out into traffic.

Immediately after this, their waitress comes up to them with a note. It’s from Mitch. He’s paid for their dinner, he’s sorry, but he doesn’t want to give them a ride any longer. The reason? If the PCs remained quiet, he’s upset because he got the feeling that they know more than they’re telling about “all this weird stuff that’s been happening lately.” Or, if they told him their theories, he’s nervous about “getting too involved in all the weird stuff.”

All’s not lost: They know, at least, where in NYC he’s headed. Oddly enough, he only had one delivery in the whole damn city: The restaurant in the Grand Central Terminal, better known as Grand Central Station.

TIMING

There are many elements that contribute to the timing of the PCs' arrival in New York. It depends on what vehicle they use, on whether they rest or not, on what problems (if any) they encounter on the road with weather, traffic, phantom hitchhikers, etc. So it could, really, take the PCs anything from hours to days to reach NYC.

On the other hand, there are just as many factors influencing the timing of the charge delivery. Sure, Mitch gets there first, but the charge could lurk in the restaurant for a few days before going off like a metaphysical land mine.

In practical terms: While the PCs *should* feel like it's absolutely imperative that they get to NYC as fast as possible, events don't actually swing into motion until all the pieces are on the board.

PETE BRODSKI'S STAKEOUT

Thus, Mitch beats the shakti hunters to the punch and delivers the charge before they can arrive. (Even if they're flying, it's plausible that he beats them there. For one thing, if they're not with him they don't necessarily know exactly where in NYC he's headed. Even if they do, jumping on a commuter plane takes some time, especially once you figure in luggage check, flight delays, and traffic leaving the airport.)

The charge, housed in a breakfast hash-brown stick, is passed on to Detective Pete Brodski.

Pete's a familiar face in the restaurant, even though it sees literally thousands of customers every day. Pete is what is known in the biz as a SHU — a Super-Heavy User. In fact, Pete's beyond being a SHU: Going to the Golden Arches for coffee is just part of his daily routine. Unless something prevents him, he's at the restaurant every working day of his life.

Monica Barberry (see UA2, p. 248) the morning manager, is used to seeing Pete. Despite all that, she's made good and sure to

never give him a Special Order. Monica's no fool: The last person she wants poking around the occult is a NYPD detective.

Perhaps it's the Trickster, then, or some other Archetype-with-an-agenda, or possibly just the universal force of irony that delivers unto him the Greatest Special Order Of Them All.

Pete's 45 years old, unmarried, and has been a cop for all of his adult life. He was a beat cop for a while before getting promoted to plainclothes and getting a job in Vice. That nauseated him for about a year before he was able to transfer to Narcotics, which he likes better. At least now he can tell himself that he people doing the weird, freaky shit are off their nut while they're doing it.

His current assignment is surveillance of Bebedo Shipping and Storage — a warehouse suspected of being a receiving point for cocaine smuggled into the country by the Walpole crime family.

To digress, "crime family" usually means "a criminal confederacy who embrace familial behaviors to encourage loyalty." Sure, there really were people named "Gambino" in the Gambino crime family, but not everyone in the family was related by blood.

Not so the Walpoles. Everyone involved is a Walpole. Husbands of Walpole women can participate, but they're not fully trusted. (Neither are the Walpole women, actually. For all their innovations in the crime scene, the Walpoles are pretty reactionary in their gender politics. Racist, too.)

The Walpole clan really started out as a loose street gang in the 1950s. They all lived in the same part of the Bronx, there were dozens of brothers and cousins and uncles and nephews, and their code of retribution on anyone who crossed the family was brutal and strict. Over the course of many years they entered into a form of vassalage for one of the Mafia families in the area (though no Walpole would use the word "vassalage"). They jacked trucks, kacked stools and lacked morals.



PETE BRODSKI, ALMOST A STEREOTYPE

Personality: Is “Sipowitzian” a word? If not, substitute gruff, tough, but generally altruistic — albeit in an impatient fashion.

Obsession: Pete has no obsession.

Wound Points: 60

Rage Stimulus: Unrepentant crooks.

Fear Stimulus: He’s afraid the other cops in the precinct will find out he’s a closet homosexual.

Noble Stimulus: To serve an’ protect.

Body: 60 (Ruddy)

Struggle 40%, General Athletics 25%, Robust Digestive Tract 60%

Speed: 50 (Blocky)

Dodge 35%, Drive 35%, Firearm Training 45%, Initiative 35%

Mind: 50 (Skeptical)

General Education 20%, Police Detective (Notice) 50%

Soul: 60 (Straightforward)

Charm 20%, Lie 50%, Interrogate 60%

Violence: 4 Hardened 1 Failed

Unnatural: 0 Hardened 0 Failed

Helplessness: 2 Hardened 1 Failed

Isolation: 1 Hardened 0 Failed

Self: 2 Hardened 2 Failed

POSSESSIONS

Badge, bulletproof vest, Colt Commander semiautomatic handgun (9 shots, Max damage 50) and a .22 caliber Ruger Mark II “drop piece” in an ankle holster. (10 shots, Max damage 35)

NOTES

While he’s got the Shakti, Pete only rolls a single die and doubles it for every action. He either succeeds marvelously, or fails dismally.

Pete has a blotchy, wine-colored birthmark, right in front of his left ear.

However, the Walpoles wanted to get into the drug trade before the Italian mobs did, and this disobedience brought them into disfavor. Over the twenty years between 1960 and 1980, most of the Walpoles migrated down to Baltimore, where they muscled their way in to the local underworld. In their hearts, though, they knew New York was their home, and like exiled Palestinians, they swore that they would one day return — preferably after bombing the shit out of their enemies.

James Walpole, the current patriarch of the clan, has decided that the new millennium is the right time for them to re-enter the Big Apple. Playing off the disarray of the traditional Italian mobs, the rivalries of the black gangs and the general unease everyone feels around the new Russian “mafias,” the Walpoles have started a small scale import racket, distributing to anyone who wants some impure coke, cheap.

Though the police don’t know it, the Wal-

poles have their goods smuggled from Bolivia to Haiti, where Hugo Walpole has a small factory with a technique for turning cocaine into something that resembles porcelain. Hugo calls it “hard coke.” He bakes up sheets of it that are about four inches by sixteen, maybe an inch thick. Then he covers it with real porcelain and forms it into toilet tank lids. A dozen hard coke lids get shipped to NYC, along with a bunch of mundane lids, every two weeks. When they arrive, the Walpoles crack open the lids and rinse the hard coke plates with a corrosive mixture until it dissolves into a sort of slurry. As the slurry dries, some of the chemicals separate out. Once it’s completely dry, you get a mixture that’s about 75% cocaine, 22% mineral impurities and 3% caustic methyl tetrapropaline.

Adam Walpole handles receiving and purification, and that’s who the police have started trailing. Adam has become careless. Back in the ‘80s, Adam came to believe that he could only get an erection with the aid of cocaine. His family never found out, and he kicked his coke habit in prison (where he found himself inclined to just let his sexual problems slide). By the time he completed his sentence, Viagra was on the market and he saw no need to go back to the ol’ toothache powder. But once he was personally handing the goods all the time, temptation got the best of him. He started out dipping into the family stuff, but has recently started buying elsewhere. Sure, any coke is *probably* impure, but Walpole coke is for sure. Not only that, but once he got a bad burn on his forearm from the acid they use to process it, he became reluctant to put it in his brain. Oh, and also, his family would kill him if they knew.

This is a lot of backstory, but it goes a long way towards explaining why the Adam is so trigger-happy. And why there are big barrels of flammable acid in the warehouse. (Did I mention that methyl tetrapropaline is flammable?)

Pete Brodski’s routine has been: Get up, take the train in, get coffee and breakfast, go

to the apartment diagonal from Bebedo Shipping, and spend the next 8-10 hours watching who enters and leaves, making notes, taking pictures, and pissing in a coffee can.

The day he gets charged is, of course, anything but routine.

ENTER THE WEIRDOS

Dan gets the charge and heads off to his lookout post. While this is going on, the screw-tops of the occult underground are making their moves as well.

EUGENE LARUE

Eugene doesn’t make it to New York, unless the PCs are allied with him and lead him there. He’s done his own calculations, based on his observations, on a few overheard snippets from Mak Attax, and on his years of occult study. He thinks Vishudda is destined to manifest in Philadelphia instead of New York. He’s wrong, of course, but that’s where he goes.

If the PCs are allied with Eugene, he’s much less certain about his ciphering. Undecided between the two towns, he suggests that he go to Philly while the PCs check out New York. After that, they’re on their own.

MITCH GEDDAKIS

Mitch doesn’t stick around. He’s got more deliveries to make — all completely innocuous. He won’t become the Shakti Express again until the Brodski pulse is distributed, one way or the other.

This doesn’t mean he *can’t* get the pulse. If someone gets the Kundalini and says “Bless you Mitch Geddakis,” it finds him wherever he is. But he won’t be on hand personally to influence events.

LATAETIA LUDOPHIS

Lataetia and Mitch part company in New York — she wants to see the Statue of Liberty and ride the Staten Island Ferry. She spends an idle day doing touristy stuff — characters who



watch “Good Morning America” might even spot her waving at the camera from the crowd towards the end of the show.

In the course of her day she meets some guys in really wild clothes who invite her to this “totally cool curtain music show — it’s free!” down in Alphabet City. She’s never heard of “curtain music,” but whatever. On her way there, though, she gets lost. Specifically, she gets off the El near Bebedo Shipping by mistake and just happens to spot a familiar face. Maybe it’s Sara Markott. Maybe it’s the PCs. Maybe it’s a case of mistaken identity. Whoever it is, she goes over to say hi. Unless she’s forcibly repelled, she hangs around until the action starts. “Forcibly repelled” means being told, clearly and unmistakably, that she is *not wanted*. (Or a kick to the shins would do it as well.) Anything subtle or sarcastic is going to go right over her pretty little head.

MARKOTT & MATTERKROS

As soon as the charge is passed, Matterkros divines its general location. It takes only a call to his daughter Sara (a NYC native) to learn of an appropriate “big story” going down in the city. With that piece of information, he can teleport himself there using one of his channels.

While he arrives in town promptly, Dean is prevented from pouncing immediately by his injury. When he fled Chicago he wound up in Macon, Georgia for a train derailment. He was able to get to a hospital, though the authorities were baffled why he showed up with a gunshot instead of an impact injury. Nonetheless, they stitched him up — but he’s far from being 100% recovered. If he stayed in the hospital for a few days he’d be able to hobble around for hours on his own power without becoming exhausted. As it is, he can barely make it up a flight of steps by himself.

But with his proxy daughter around, he doesn’t have to.

If the PCs are allied with Dean, he calls them and asks them to get to New York as fast as they can — he can give them a vague idea of

where the charge is, but he’s in no shape to get it himself. If your PCs really dig investigation, he can be very vague about where in the city the charge has settled. If they’re hapless and need a clue, he can provide it when the players seem to be getting bored and frustrated.

It’s important to note that if the PCs are in NYC as Dean’s allies, they have Sara Markott around as a resource. She resists being bossed around, but she’s open to reasonable persuasion — and she has investigative skills the PCs may lack.

FISHER & MAK ATTAX

On the advice of Feng Vespucci, Erica gets to NYC as fast as she can. This involves renting a private plane, but despite many complications she gets to New York about the same time as the PCs — most probably, the morning that Pete gets the charge. (If the PCs arrive really early, they may have to spend some time fruitlessly shaking down the local OU, which is purely ignorant.)

Erica has Harvey Duopulous with her still, and she’s mobilized other Attaxers on the east coast to help her comb the city for the Kundalini. She’s got about six of them, all her personal followers, with the same stats as the Attaxers described on p. 104. Monica Barberry (see UA2, p. 248) is on the case with her. More frightening, Erica has called the Corsican Twins in from Rhode Island. Unlike her unnamed Attaxer allies, the Corsican Twins are not her vassals.

If the PCs are helping Erica, feel free to leave the Corsican Twins out (or recycle them into another cabal later). They’re included to make things interesting for the PCs, not to replace the PCs — and if they’re on the same side, that’s just what may happen. Use them if you need Mak Attax to be credibly antagonistic — otherwise they’re probably baggage.

PCs on Erica’s side can be enlisted to help search for the Shakti, with the advantage of starting with Monica. Monica may have an inkling that something weird happened to that cop who’s always coming in — when she gave

him his breakfast, it suddenly got really, *really* cold. She can describe him (and that birthmark is pretty distinctive). Using Cliomantic past viewing can get them on his trail. Again, if your PCs really dig investigation, soft-pedal Monica's contribution. If they just want to get to the furious action, have her help when they get bored.

THE CORSICAN TWINS

Everyone thinks that the so-called Corsican Twins — both of whom go by the name “Pisces” — are actual brothers. This is not surprising: They are physically identical, both being swarthy, muscle-bound and extremely handsome in the face. However, they were born ten years apart, to different parents in different countries. Gary Greenstreet and Edward Millstein didn't meet until they became apprentices to the same fleshworker. Unlike most apprentices, Gary and Ed “got it” — but they also got more than they bargained for. Specifically, they got this nutty idea in their heads that if they became the same person — same name, same appearance, same blood type and everything — they'd be able cheat their way past the Epideromantic taboo. That is, if Gary and Ed are (in some fashion) “the same person,” then when Gary casts a healing spell on Ed, it's not the same thing as if Ed let some doctor or hairdresser change his body. Their ultimate goal is for both of them to be able to get significant charges, then use minor-charge magics to heal one another. They want to find a zero-sum way to get power without paying the price.

They're misled, of course. No matter how close they get physically, they're two different souls and the universe ain't fooled. Their continued failure hasn't dissuaded them, though: They just think they need to become closer psychologically and spiritually. Since there's no real way to know what the other is *exactly* thinking or feeling at a moment, they can never tell if they're synchronized, so they can always think that the big prize — free charges! — is just a little bit beyond their grasp.

They've been tinkering with themselves and one another for a decade or so, and they've been in Mak Attax for three years. They figure it's good to have someone at their collective back, and Mak Attax was easy to find and not particularly demanding. They're not terribly passionate about Mak Attax: They come to New York because they think Erica is overestimating the danger. To them, this is just an opportunity to score some brownie points with the big boss.

Both Pisces regard themselves as a cut above normal mortals. (On the Mak Attax list, they're in the faction that thinks “Magickal Renaissance” means “Adepts running the show”.) Their condescension can be grating, but they also feel a sense of *noblesse oblige* and feel protective of “lesser people.”

When the shit goes down, one of them is fairly likely to cheese it and run. The other will fight bravely, but not stupidly. Guess they aren't as synched as they thought, huh?

Personality: One is naturally pushy, direct and arrogant. The other is naturally subtle, abstract and arrogant. Naturally, each tries to act more like the other than like himself.

Obsession: Controlling the flesh to gain personal power.

Wound Points: 75 (They show up with matching fresh cuts on their right arms and left legs.)

Rage Stimulus: Anyone who mocks their abilities or methods.

Fear Stimulus: Each is terrified that the other will die on him. (Self)

Noble Stimulus: They are into self-perfection, so they try to behave ethically at all times — keeping their promises, being kind and thoughtful, etc.

Body: 90 (Unbelievable)

Struggle 50%, *General Athletics* 50%,
Run 30%, *Beefcake Beautiful* 50%,
Pump Iron 80%

Speed: 70 (Lightning)



Drive 20%, Dodge 30%, Initiative 55%

Mind: 50 (Not As Brilliant As They Think)
General Education 20%, Notice 20%

Soul: 55 (Snooty)
Charm 20%, Lie 30%, Epideromancy 55%

Violence:	2 Hardened	2 Failed
Unnatural:	4 Hardened	1 Failed
Helplessness:	1 Hardened	0 Failed
Isolation:	0 Hardened	0 Failed
Self:	4 Hardened	5 Failed

POSSESSIONS

They're not particularly expecting trouble, so they're unarmed. If things go south, they'll grab whatever is at hand, typically some kind of +3 damage makeshift club.

NOTES

Both "twins" are insane. Specifically, they share the delusion that they feel one another's physical pain. If one sees that the other is injured in the leg (for example) he immediately feels psychosomatic pain in his own leg. If one knows the other is blinded, he loses the ability to see. They're not telepathic or anything: If the injury occurs out of sight, they remain unimpaired until they find out about it. Then they confabulate memories so that they recall feeling the pain as soon as the injury occurred.

If one sees the other die, the shock might kill him on the spot.

Both have been hoarding charges for a while, so they enter the combat with three significant charges and five minors apiece.

DION ISAACS & THE SATYNS

Dion had a vision of a serpent devouring a crown beneath the Statue of Liberty. Consequently, he and some Satyns hauled ass for the Big Apple. He's got connections to a NYC fortune teller named Rose Cranston Crowne, and her advice leads him (eventually) to the Bebedo warehouse.

If the PCs are on his side, he relies on them to find the charge for him. He can point them to Rose Crowne if he needs to, but she extracts some heavy form of payment from them. (Incidentally, Rose tells fortunes by going into a trance in which she "contacts her ancestors." This involves thrashing around for about ten minutes in a specially constructed, rubber lined room. The nature of her "ancestors" is entirely up to the GM.)

GOD'S HERALDS

PCs who are tied in with God's Heralds can hook up with a fair sized clutch of them (about six) in New York. The PCs are the Heralds' best bet for finding Brodski and the charge — and the Heralds have no clue about how to find it if the PCs don't guide them.

If the PCs aren't involved, God's Heralds can (if the GM so desires) stumble onto the situation by investigating Sara Markott. (Her connection to Dean was uncovered when. . . aw hell, does it really matter how?)

The New York Heralds have the same stats as the Heralds from Atlanta (see p. 83.) with one important distinction: Three of them are armed with .22 caliber Smith & Wesson 2213 pistols (8 shots, maximum damage 30). They have a Handguns skill at 15% to go with their concealed weapons. (Hey, they're making deliveries in New York. Wouldn't you want a gun?)

JEETER

Jeeter is described in UA2, p. 262. Anyone who knows him slightly is likely to dismiss him as another koo-koo casualty of the occult. Which is an accurate assessment, as far as it goes.

But once about a time, Etienne Cheitier was a big deal. A big *scary* deal.

(In his fifty years, Etienne has killed ten men, seven women, and one child. But that was the *old* Etienne. The new Etienne is profoundly nonviolent. Which one — old or new — was saner? Probably the old Etienne. But much less pleasant.)

Like Dean Matterkros, he was a high level avatar. Just like Dean, he had ambitions that were, arguably, beyond his station. Unlike Dean, he wasn't a Messenger. He was (and still is) a Pilgrim.

In a considered moment of staggering hubris, he decided his quest was going to be "learn the whole truth about magick and the occult." To his credit, he came as close as any mortal has in two hundred years. But the cost was his sanity. Same old story. "Those whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad."

Now Jeeter runs from city to city, chivvied on his way by visions, nightmares, and memories so vivid they're like actual experiences. Many of the menacing figures he sees and hears are wholly imaginary. Sometimes they're demons, or astral-projected magicians (most of whom are startled and frightened to be spotted). Rarest of all, sometimes members of the Invisible Clergy use the slow burn of Jeeter's unfortunate brain to send smoke signals into the material world.

In practical terms, this means Jeeter provides you a clue dispenser if your PCs have managed to get all the way to New York without a reliable way to track the Shakti. No matter who the PCs are backing, there's an Invisible Clergy member who wants them at Bebedo Shipping and Storage to snap up the Kundalini for a favored claimant. And, of course, another member who wants them there to catch a stray bullet and croak.

Therefore, if your PCs are really hard up for direction, Jeeter can stumble out of a doorway, seeming to materialize in a cloud of repugnant aroma. He staggers out and delivers the following soliloquy. (You can read this verbatim if you wish, or summarize, or use it as inspiration for a more personalized rant.)

"Aw god, goddess. . . wait, no, I thought you were someone else, something else, but you gotta lissen to me, you gotta hear the message! You gotta do what you gotta do! Oh, I've seen the snake, and you've seen it too, didn't you? You saw it live in Las Vegas and you saw it die

in the city of the Angels, where the angel fell to earth and hit a cow, don't have a cow man but it's here now! It's here, and they're all here, the angels and devils and the superhuman crew, I saw them, I saw the True King overstride the UN building and sneer, I saw the monster in the burning leather jacket, standing in the harbor and running his hand up the Statue of Liberty's thigh! Oh, you gotta help, you gotta get to Bebedo, you gotta save the knight of the blue shield! They wanna kill him! They want to smash the serpent's head and unleash its venom into this big Eden apple! He's going to die, the snowy Walpole is going to kill him and then it will unleash a thousand terrors, a thousand nightmares, a thousand thousand slimy things . . ."

As he says this, he tries to get one of the PCs by the hand (gently) and lead him or her towards a door. If he succeeds, he uses his Pilgrim channel (see UA2, p. 189) to move to a doorway across the street from Bebedo. Then he uses the same channel again to get the hell out of town. Presumably the one PC present can summon the others — especially if that solitary character sees someone like Sara Markott or Erica Fisher looking around.

FINDING THE FUNK

If you don't want to give away the store by using the Cheater (oops — I mean "Jeeter") option, it's still possible for characters without magickal divination to find Brodski. After all, he's got the Kundalini, which has swollen to the point that it's distorting reality left and right. Not only is Pete Brodski having bizarre luck — and I mean bizarre enough to stand out in New York City, which is pretty freakin' bizarre — he's also leaving behind a trail of unnatural phenomena. People who know what to look for can, with a bit footwork, follow his lead.

Pete took the train from home to Grand Central Station. That's where he got dosed. When that happened, the temperature in the restaurant dropped a good forty degrees and



stayed that way until he left. People noticed.

From there, Pete walked through a busy tunnel to his platform. As he walked, a statistically possible but thoroughly unlikely event occurred: Every pedestrian in the tunnel matched gaits perfectly for seven steps. Instead of the ordinary rumble and shuffle of a thousand people walking at a thousand different paces, for seven steps their feet struck with a precision unrivaled by any marching band in history. The shock of this sudden lockstep rhythm was strong enough to vibrate the entire tunnel and platform, causing paint to flake off the walls and a couple light bulbs to shatter in their housings. People noticed, including a few panhandlers and buskers who are still around later.

Pete boarded the “Snake Train” — an elaborately graffitied subway train with the engine painted to look like the head of a cobra, fangs bared. Now, even in the heyday of the painted New York train, the Snake Train would have stood out, but ever since Guiliani and “broken windows policing” came on the scene, the trains have been increasingly clean. But somehow the Snake Train got put on the tracks before it could be cleaned off. (The transit authorities got in the habit of letting the taggers do an entire three-day conversion on a train — paint it white, then put on the outlines, then fill it in — before they’d clean it off. More discouraging that way.)

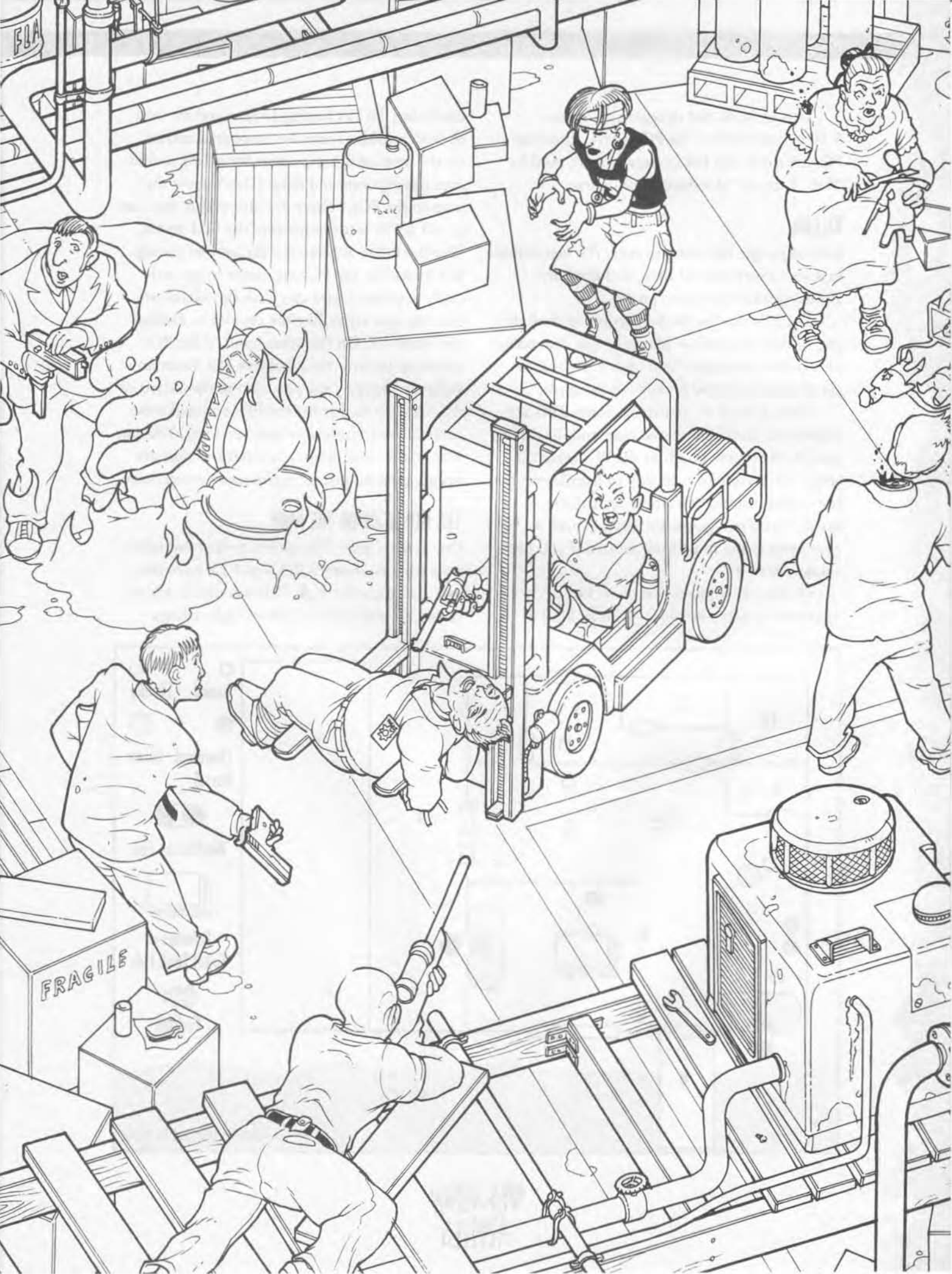
Commuters on the Snake Train might have ignored the graffiti if getting inside the train hadn’t been so creepy. First off, it was hot. And it was moist — very moist, dripping off the walls, wrinkling the advertising posters and making the ink on the public service announcements run. It smelled terrible — like the breath of some hungry, feral animal. The lights inside were dim, and there was this rumbling sound from all around — an unpleasantly *digestive* sound. Individually, these factors could be discounted. Lights and air conditioning go off in subway cars all the time, and the subway is noisy, and the subway is smelly. . . but all together, they gave a lot of riders a vivid sensa-

tion of being digested. The scary hiss the car gave every time it stopped at a station didn’t help either. At least one gent with a delicate constitution had a bit of a freakout and had to get off the train before his stop. But once he got up into the light he felt better.

All this weird mojo funk stopped when Pete got off at his station, of course. Or rather, it went with him as he left.

As he emerged from underground, the stoplights at the nearest corner malfunctioned, sending eight cars into the intersection simultaneously. Eight drivers hit brakes or gas or spun wheels. . . and they all made it through safely, against truly staggering odds. The guy running the news stand nearby never saw anything like it — “Almost like they was dancing, but you can see all the tire marks where they were skidding and screeching. Unbelievable! I guess they were just all lucky.” The security team at the building across the street got it all on tape, and can show it to the PCs. (It turns up later on the news — and on NowNews.com, too.)

As Pete walked down the street, pigeons lined up on phone lines along his path. Nothing unusual there — except that they lined up a pattern. First three groups of three birds apiece, then three single birds, then three more groups of three. (Like this: --- --- --- - - - - - - - - -) In Morse code, three long, three short and three long is SOS. No one noticed this at the time, but all the pigeons also happened to take simultaneous dumps, leaving a clear SOS line to the building across the street from Bebedo Storage. Nothing else much happened until Adam Walpole and Detective Pete happened to go down to the corner pharmacy at the same time. Adam recognized Pete from a day at the police station when he was taking care of a parking citation. In a more normal state of mind, Adam might have acted unconcerned and casually walked back to the warehouse to hide the goods. But being gilled up good on Bolivian Marching Powder, he decided to ambush the cop instead and drag him back for questioning.



This ambush and dragging take place 5-10 minutes before the PCs arrive. Once the PCs are there, the fun can really start. And by “fun” I mean “bloodbath,” of course.

KILLING

Lots of people are going to enter the warehouse in a very short span of time, and guns are almost certainly going to go off.

The PCs may be the first people in the building, or they may not — play it by ear, depending on whether you want them to *start* trouble or get thrown into trouble that’s ready-made.

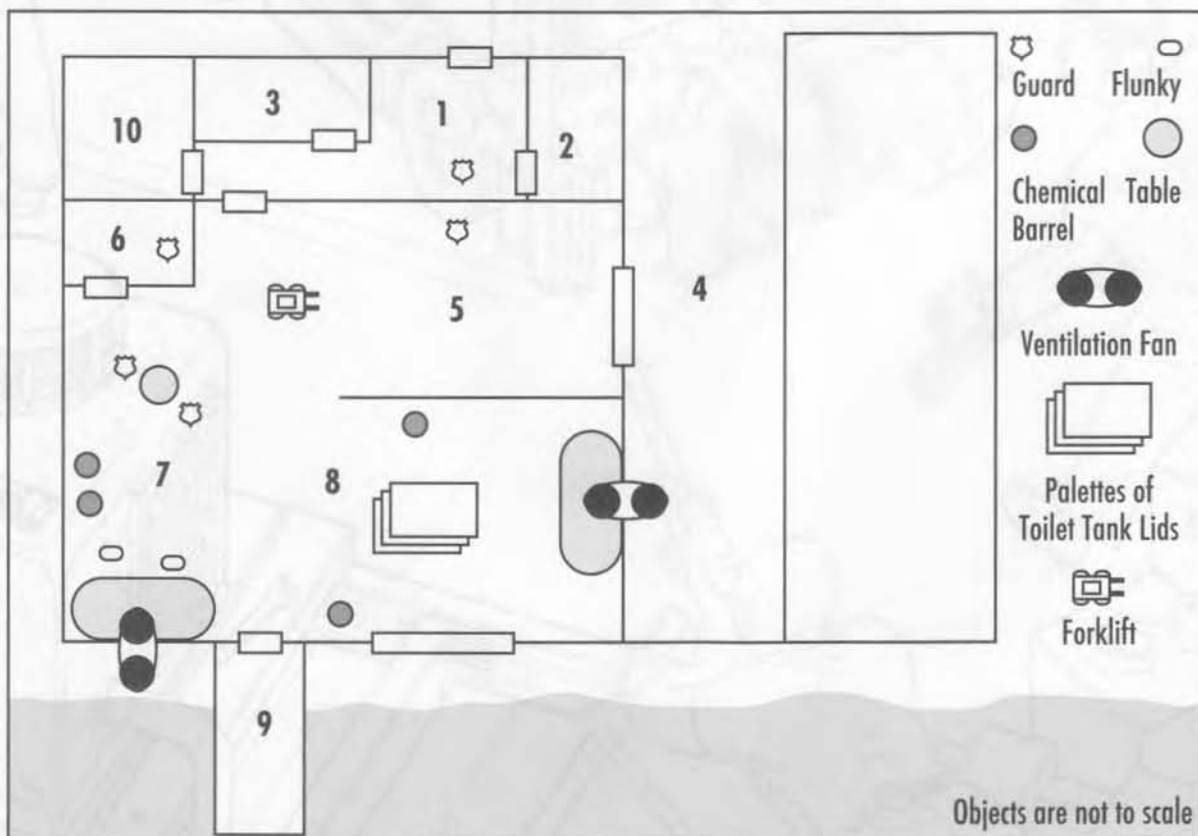
Now, a word on structure. Some RPG scenarios just give a numbered map and, like time bombs, the events go off as the PCs enter the space. This can be a nice way to handle events, but in this instance it’s a little unrealistic. I mean, if you’re a gun-totin’ thug in area 5, aren’t you going to go look around if you hear shots at area 8?

On the other hand, just providing a list of events — while flexible — can be kind of

confusing. So I’m hoping to give you the best of both worlds. There are numbered entries on the map, making it easier for a GM to find area descriptions and data. (Don’t show the map to the PCs.) There are also events that can go off pretty much whenever the GM wants. This flexibility is given for the sake of pacing. If it looks like the PCs are about to get seriously ventilated, you can have the Satyns or the Attaxers arrive like the cavalry to distract the Walpoles. On the other hand, if the PCs are romping over the gangsters like Sherman through Georgia, you can send in the Satyns or the Attaxers to distract the PCs and make the conflict more confusing (and exciting). You can also throw something in whenever things are bogging down, just to regain some momentum.

THE NUMBERS ON THE MAP

One general note: The rooms in the front office zone (that is, rooms 1,2,3,6 and 10) have ceilings about ten feet high. The warehouse regions (areas 5,7 and 8) have 20 foot high ceilings.



1. THE LOBBY

One of the Walpole guards usually sits here at a desk, bored, surfing the internet for foot fetish porn and giving the runaround to anyone who comes by. (Almost no one ever comes by.) This surly receptionist typically won't get up, won't help any delivery person with a package, and generally won't do much of anything except dully stonewall anyone who wants to see Mr. Bebedo ("He's gone for the day. You can leave a note") Mr. Walpole ("Never heard of him") or Mr. Brodski ("I think you got the wrong address, pal.")

Today, however, the guard is a little more alert. He's just seen Adam frogmarch Pete in through the front door at gunpoint, and the boss just told him "Make sure we ain't disturbed." The guard's used to Adam looking twitchy and weird, but he's locked the front door, bolted it and hung a "Sorry, We're Closed" sign on it.

He's still at his desk, but he ignores anyone who knocks. Smashing through the glass and unlocking the door isn't complicated, but it's not something he's going to ignore.

His shotgun is strapped to the underside of his desk, pointing at a thin wooden partition. If he wants to fire at anyone standing directly in front of his desk (which includes anyone smashing through the door), he does not need to take an action to draw his weapon. After that first shot though, he's going to need an action to fully free his firearm.

2 AND 3. OFFICES

No one's in these. They're boring. Desk, chair, aged computer, trash can, little golf decorations and faded, framed motivational posters left by the last tenants. Like I said, boring.

4. PARKING LOT

Five cars are parked near the front, on the side closest to the Bebedo Storage door. Other cars (belonging to other businesses) are scattered along the other side. There are wide, clearly marked loading zones on both sides.

There's a big, sheet metal garage-style door between area 5 and this area outside. This entrance is about 2-3 feet off the ground — the right height to load directly to or from a truck. There's a closed-circuit camera above the door, hooked to a screen by the guard in area 5 — but he's not paying attention. He's asleep.

The door is locked, and it takes 50 points of damage to break the lock enough to get the door up. (Of course, the door itself is heavy. Raising it requires a successful Body roll above 15, or a successful major Weight Lifting roll.) That may not be necessary, of course, since a large tow truck is 'coincidentally' parked out back from the garage next door. There's no key and it's got one of those Club security devices on it, but that just means that it can't turn. Anyone who could hotwire it could back it right through the door.

There's the output from a vent here, with a powerful fan blowing some truly stank fumes out into the air. Anyone who breathes in while directly under the fan takes a point of damage to his lungs and has to make a Body roll to avoid some painful coughing. However, the vent was shoddily installed. If two people working together make successful Body rolls over 15, or successful major Weight Lifting rolls, they can simply rip the whole system out of the wall. Of course, the vent is ten feet up, requiring a ladder and some chains. Or telekinesis, I suppose. Anyhow, pulling it out leaves a yard square hole in the wall, through which truly determined characters can enter.

Luckily for just about everyone involved, the Walpoles went the extra distance and stole some very nice filters with their fans. Therefore, while the fumes are corrosive and mildly toxic, they are not flammable.

5. LOADING DOCK A

The guard with the fancy machinegun is here, his chair leaned against the wall, peacefully dreaming about a pony ride he took as a little kid. He's not a particularly sound sleeper: Any



unusual noise is sufficient to wake him. (The loading dock door is not oiled: Raising it is quite loud.)

There's a fifty-gallon drum of methyl tetrapropaline right across from him. There's also a forklift, not far away.

The forklift has the keys in the ignition. Anyone who's driving around in it is harder to hit, since the engine block and the cab structure provide some cover. If someone's shooting at the driver of a moving forklift, give 'em a -10% shift. If the shot would have been a hit without the shift, assume it's hit the forklift engine and disabled it.

Anyone in the forklift can ram people with the big metal prongs. Doing this successfully requires a major Drive roll. The prongs do damage like a firearm with no maximum damage.

CAUSTIC METHYL TETRAPROPALINE

The barrels containing this nasty stuff are bright orange and clearly marked with the international symbols for "corrosive" and "flammable."

Anyone who gets splattered with a little methyl tetrapropaline takes minor surface burns — it stings quite a bit but only does one point of damage.

If someone deliberately attacks with this acid, it takes a Struggle roll to chuck a can of it on someone, or to tip a barrel down on top of them. In these quantities, the corrosive does damage like a firearm attack with no maximum damage.

Walking through a pool of tetrapropaline melts the soles of your shoes, and the fumes do a point of damage to your lungs, but that's about it. If you fall in a pool of it, roll two dice and take the sum in damage.

All this assumes the stuff hasn't been lit on fire, of course.

When ignited, methyl tetrapropaline burns fitfully, producing low heat and a fair amount of yellow-white smoke. Walking (or, more likely, running) through a pool of burn-

ing tetrapropaline causes two points of lung damage and one point to the lower extremities. Falling in a pool of the burning stuff does damage equal to the sum of two dice from the corrosion — and sets the victim on fire. Until he stops, drops and rolls (or gets coated with something with a base ph factor) he takes two points of damage every combat round. Spraying water on someone who's coated with burning acid puts out the fire, but also spatters the acid far and wide, aggravating its damage. (Add another single die of damage.) Jumping into the river while on fire disperses the acid harmlessly and quenches the flames. (Just remember, "you OTTA add acid to WATTA.")

The fumes above a pool of tetrapropaline can catch fire, but not sustain it. A spark in the fumes will cause a flash of fire, but it's not bright enough to blind or hot enough to injure. It's scary, though. Plus, if there's a pool of the acid beneath the fumes, there's a 50% chance that the flash cloud ignites that.

6. CRAPPER

Other than being exceptionally filthy, this is a standard bathroom. As the action starts, one of the guards is in here, apparently leaving a long log while reading *Sports Illustrated*. In fact, said guard is sampling some product — just to keep himself awake, really.

7. PROCESSING AREA

There are four people in the processing area. Two are guards, sitting well away from the mixing table. They're playing a game of cribbage, bitching about the fumes and aching for a smoke. (Note: Both these guards smoke. That means they both have lighters. And they both know that tetrapropaline burns.)

The other two are guys who married into the Walpole family and who therefore get the shit job of processing the hard coke. This is a lengthy process involving chipping out the plates, grinding them fine, mixing in one chemical reagent, sieving out the lumps that form and then — the final and least pleasant

step — mixing in the tetrapropaline. That stuff gets stirred until it thickens to paste. They then take the paste across the room to the drying table in area 8, spread it thin on sheets of tin, and set it under the fans and heat lamps to dry.

The mixing table has a hooded fan over it, but it's not enclosed, so these poor saps are getting fumed pretty heavily. They have gas masks, but only one of them is wearing his. There is a corked pyrex flask of tetrapropaline within easy reach of either one of them. It holds a half-gallon of the stuff — enough to do serious damage if thrown or dumped on someone.

There's a bright red fire extinguisher, brand new, mounted on the wall by the mixing table. It's good for two blasts. Each blast takes a combat round and can extinguish one person or one pool of burning acid.

Two more fifty-gallon drums of acid are resting against the wall here, between the card playing guards and the mixing table. One of the containers has a lid with a metal tapping setup — not unlike a beer keg tap, only with a fixed faucet instead of a hose. Whenever a barrel gets emptied, they just move the tap-lid to a new one.

The fan above the mixing table expels its vapors into area 9. Like the fan between areas 8 and 4, it's poorly installed and can be ripped out if two people working together make successful Body rolls over 20, or successful Weight Lifting rolls. (It's a little harder to attack this one because it's over water.) Like the other fan, if removed it leaves a yard square gap.

8. STORAGE SPACE

There aren't any people here. One of the guards at the cribbage table is in charge of watching it, but he figures he can keep an eye on it from where he's sitting.

There are two doors which open from area 8. One is an ordinary steel door — knob, hinges, etc. It's heavy duty, built to resist a police battering ram, but no one bothered to inspect the frame in which it's set. The door frame is ordinary wood, and the hinges face

inward — so anyone who does 15 points of damage to area by the latch can knock the deadbolt through the flimsy wood frame. (Give PCs a significant Notice roll to spot the fact that the tough door is set in the chintzy frame.)

That door opens onto a dock sticking out into the river. Next to the dock is the second door which, like the one between areas 4 and 5, is a vertical steel door. It's set to make it easy to unload small boats into the warehouse. Like the door at area 4, there's a small closed-circuit camera mounted above it to show who's outside. Like area 4, no one's minding the store. And, like the door at area 4, it takes 50 points of damage to break the lock, and a Body roll above 15 to lift once the lock is bypassed.

In the center of the area there are pallets piled high with boxes. Inside the boxes are toilet tank lids — specifically, the ones that aren't doctored with hard coke. The pile of boxes is about ten feet high and ten feet on a side.

On the far side of the lids there's a fourth barrel of tetrapropaline. On the right side of area 8, there's the drying table. It's got four large, thin tin sheets on top of it, under the fan, where the hard coke gets dried out in its final transformation before hitting the street dealers (who probably step it down some more, but that's no concern of ours). If ignited, the stuff on these sheets burns fitfully — not hot enough to stick or really injure someone. Even if you fall in the burning stuff, it just snuffs out harmlessly. But lighting it up does ruin an awful lot of pricey product. And it pisses off the Walpoles, of course.

There's a second fire extinguisher next to the drying table, but this one is busted. If anyone tries to use it, nothing comes out.

9. LOADING DOCK B

This is the river outside the warehouse. There's a sturdy dock sticking thirty feet out, the two doors into area 8, and the vent fan from area 7. And a lot of rather fetid and nasty water, if one is inclined to jump in for some reason. (Such as immolation.)



Tied at the end of the dock is a small fishing boat with an improbably large and powerful engine.

10. ADAM'S OFFICE

This is out of order because I wanted to save the best for last — and so should you. If the PCs do a frontal assault through area 1 (which is actually probably the easiest route) you may want to have Adam drag his captive away, back through area five or even to area 8. If you time it right (and time the arrival of other factions right) you can let the PCs catch glimpses of their goal just as Adam drags him away and some new, loud group arrives on the scene.

(For total cinematism, as he drags Pete away, Adam forces him onto the fork of the forklift and starts driving that around with Pete hoisted into the air as a human shield. Just a suggestion.)

If the PCs work their way through from the back, Adam has plenty of time to emerge from his daze of cocaine and hatred and realize that something's going down.

Pete's arms are cuffed behind his back, he's got duct tape over his mouth and a nasty, swelling bruise over one eye where Adam pistol-whipped him. Adam has pulled out Pete's badge lanyard and hung it around Pete's neck: He figures the intruders are cops and that they'll be more impressed by a police hostage. He's got his gun pressed to Pete's head and vague ideas of forcing his way to the boat at area 9, or one of the cars in area 4, so he can escape.

The confrontation with Adam should be the climax of Vishudda. Reasonable characters can try to talk Adam down — a tense option that you can play with for a while before his incoherent threats, unblinking gaze, and the whitish trickle running down his nose make it clear that this is probably fruitless. Adam doesn't do anything crazy as long as people are getting out of his way and letting him head to one of his escape routes. But he's moving slowly, of course — being paranoid, he's trying to keep his back to the wall at all times.

If your PCs are precipitous action types, that's fine — but you need to slow things down a notch before they take him out. You can do this by asking them all to make major Notice rolls before they start combat with Adam. If they fail, just shake your head and make tsking noises in your throat. If they succeed, dole out details like the aforementioned whitish trickle (“Yeah, it *could* be some sort of cocaine discharge. Has your character seen a lot of serious coke snortin’?”) or the fact that the safety catch on the gun is off, or even the bulge around Pete's ankle. The actual detail doesn't matter: What matters is that making them take the Notice roll hammers home that *this* is an important scene. Make sure they know that they are going to have to completely kill Adam, and do it *before he can react* if they want to save his hostage's life. (Of course, you can fall back on his naturally poor initiative, if you're not rolling for him. But they needn't know that.)

It's perfectly possible that your PCs can inflict 65 points of damage before he can react, especially if they use Passions. If they don't, he puts a bullet in Pete's brain, the shakti charge goes to no one and instead explodes into unnatural phenomena. To wit:

- Adam dies. His body explodes from within as thousands of baby snakes burst out of him. (They're poisonous coral snakes, by the way. Unless promptly incinerated by the PCs, they scatter in all directions and grow up to be a recurring danger in NYC, until the winter frost kills them off.)
- The roof of the warehouse is blown off. Not by wind. Not by an explosion. It just shoots up into the air a good hundred feet, tumbles a couple times, and destroys a nearby crane before crashing into the river.
- Every rat in a two block radius suddenly turns bright white.
- A giant albino alligator bursts out of the sewers on Wall Street and bites the leg off a mutual fund manager.

- Every out-of-work actor in the city comes down with a nasty strain of the flu, simultaneously. Given their prominence in the area's food preparation and delivery sector, the flu becomes a major epidemic, eventually killing six elderly people and infecting thousands more.
- Pete becomes a demon who tries to possess crack addicts and force them into suicide missions against their pushers.
- And various & sundry minor unnatural phenomena as well.

On the other hand, if they *do* cap Adam, Pete passes out. When he comes to, he's certainly willing to bless his rescuers.

It's also possible that the PCs try some sort of mind control mojo on Adam. If it works, he doesn't shoot Pete — but in his agitated and paranoid state, he's not exactly amenable to Blackula-style mental manipulation. He starts to do what they want, but then realizes he's being tampered with and blows a stress check on his Unnatural gauge. He chooses to Frenzy (to, I'm sure, nobody's surprise) and tries to blow away the PC who put the whammy on him. Succeed or fail, Pete's able to lunge away as soon as the gun is taken from his forehead.

Finally, if you don't want to do a big hostage negotiation scene, you can have one of the other groups — the Satyns, the Attaxers or possibly even God's Heralds, if they're ridiculously lucky enough — take out Adam. The PCs must then either bully or fight their way through that group to claim Pete's supine form.

ADAM WALPOLE

He's 45, cruel, coked to the gills and he's torturing a kidnapped cop. Right now, you'd have better luck speaking Farsi than trying to talk sense to him.

Wound Points: 65, but he'll fight 'til he drops.

Body: 65 (Bulgy)

Struggle 40%, General Athletics 20%

Speed: 65 (Confident)

Dodge 20%, Drive 25%, Likes To Shoot His Gun 65%, Initiative 20%

Mind: 50 (Lowbrow)

General Education 15%, Notice 25%

Soul: 50 (Menacing)

Charm 20%, Lie 50%, Threaten 50%

Violence: 7 Hardened 0 Failed

Unnatural: 0 Hardened 0 Failed

Helplessness: 0 Hardened 1 Failed

Isolation: 0 Hardened 0 Failed

Self: 0 Hardened 2 Failed

POSSESSIONS

Smith & Wesson M645 semiautomatic handgun loaded with hollow points. (8 shot magazine, maximum damage 65.) He also has Pete Brodski's Colt, but he somehow missed the cop's backup Ruger.

FIVE WALPOLE GUARDS

Their motives are pretty basic: Kill, survive. If they hear a disturbance elsewhere in the warehouse, they tend to group up and see what's happening. As a rule of thumb, two (including the guy with the machinegun) go to see what's happening, while the other two check the loading docks and doors.

Wound Points: 50, but they run or quit when they're down to 10.

Body: 50 (Pork-Fed)

Struggle 40%, General Athletics 20%

Speed: 50 (Competent)

Dodge 20%, Drive 25%, Gun Totin' 45%, Initiative 25%

Mind: 45 (Obedient)

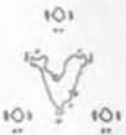
General Education 15%, Notice 15%

Soul: 30 (Shallow)

Charm 15%, Lie 30%, Threaten 30%

POSSESSIONS

Four of the five Walpoles are armed with sawed-off Browning BPS pump-action shotguns. They're loaded with deer slugs, since the Walpoles want to be somewhat careful around



all that caustic stuff. (5 shots, max damage 85).

The fifth Walpole (in area 5) has a Skor-pion vz68 submachine pistol (20 shots per magazine, max damage 50, capable of burst and full auto fire). He also has a spare clip.

TWO IN-LAW FLUNKIES

Use the Stock Thug from UA2, p. 264. They'll both beat it as soon as they're injured, and they both have Colt Vipers (6 shots, max damage 50).

EVENTS

Use any of these (or none, or all) as you see fit. My advice is just throw in something appropriate when things get dull — or just when you want to change the pace a little.

THE PRESS AND THE COPS

Sara Markott comes alone, since Dean's followers are unable to get to NYC fast enough. She cautiously approaches, intending to tell Pete that he gets to decide the fate of a fair scoop of cosmic power. Since she's got an important message to communicate, she's able to use her Messenger channel to pop the lock on the front door. However, the lobby guard makes it quite clear that she is not welcome and that he won't bother calling the cops if she doesn't back off pronto.

Nervous, Sara goes around to the side and uses her mojo on the lock there. Sadly for her, the door is just too friggin' heavy for her to lift on her own, and her channel conks out when she tries to use that on it. The best she's able to do is get it up an inch and prop it open with the handle of her flashlight. She peeks in, sees the sleeping guard with the machinegun, and quietly sneaks away.

Deciding it's too damn dangerous, Sara goes and calls a photographer from her magazine, and then the cops. The cops start trying to get hold of Pete, but there are complications. (Specifically, the Messenger would rather Pete die than get rescued by Markott. It's hoping

Fisher rescues him, so it throws communication roadblocks up in front of the cops.) The police show up — but they only do so *promptly* if the Satyns are *also* there (see below). Otherwise, they show up after the PCs are finished — which is really not terribly surprising, since the whole climax is unlikely to take more than fifteen minutes of character time.

THE SATYNS ARRIVE

A good dozen Satyns (stats on p. 28) show up, possibly accompanied by San Quentin (p. 29). Quentin doesn't have a named target yet, so he's unable to use his channels to the fullest. He's still a mean son of a bitch, but he hangs back a bit and lets the cannon fodder go first.

The Satyns have been drinking (of course) but don't bother giving them drunk penalties. It makes 'em brave enough to bull their way in, but it doesn't really impair their skills. Also, each Satyn has bought a deck of cards, pulled out the four kings, and made a rough necklace of them. They wear them in a muddled attempt to show their fealty to the True King. Of course, it won't protect them or anything.

Now, if Sara Markott was poking around first, the door's unlocked. The Satyns just fling it open, surprising the guard and startling him awake. Otherwise, they hotwire the tow truck and use it to tear the door clean off. Either way, they get in.

As they start climbing up the opening, the guard at area 5 points the machinegun at them. They back off and shouting ensues. Satyns draw guns, and the guard ducks back behind the drum of acid. Then, realizing how stupid that was, he knocks the drum over and pours the stuff out on them, just as several of the Satyns get fed up and start climbing inside.

A lot of this is probably going to play "offscreen." Even if your PCs are coming up behind the guard, you probably don't need to bother rolling dice for NPC on NPC violence. Tweak it to fit your needs. PCs need more challenge from the guards? The Satyns fire at him, miss and ignite the acid, giving him a screen of

flames to unload through at them. PCs need less challenge from the guards? The Satyns waste the one guard who's got the machinegun.

Whichever side the PCs are on, judicious application of the Satyns can distract the guards and/or the Attaxers and/or the cops and/or the Heralds. This lets you control the pressure and keep it in the sweet zone between "too hard" and "too easy."

Sadly for the Satyns, they're the first ones spotted by the cops when they pull up, and they get the brunt of police attention. Hey, if you showed up for warehouse trouble, would *you* look any farther than the screaming band of well-armed, drunk, burning bikers?

MAK ATTAX ARRIVES

If the PCs are associated with Mak Attax, the Attaxers follow their lead and you don't really need to read this section.

If the PCs are against Mak Attax (that is, supporting Matterkros or Geddakis), the Moks show up just as things are starting to get unpleasant — say, around the time of the first gunshot or loud scream.

Fisher decides against a frontal assault. Instead, she bribes a ride for her crew on a passing boat and has them deposit the group at the end of the pier at area 9. The Pisces twins bust the door down and rush in, followed more cautiously by the unnamed Attaxers, then by Harvey (who's having a hard time with his crutches), Monica and Erica.

There's one round of yelling before the gunshots start.

Generally speaking, the Attaxers immediately go for cover behind the pallet of tank lids. Erica starts giving orders, and under her leadership Harvey blasts one of the guards and Monica lays down suppressing fire while the Corsicans grab the barrel and throw it at the two shooters.

Again, this is NPC on NPC combat, so you can pretty much make it go any way you want. If you need the guards subdued, Harvey's first blast spell can trigger failed Unnatural checks

while the Corsicans melt them with the acid. If you want the Attaxers slowed down (but not stopped), Harvey misfires, the acid does its work, but one of the flunkies shoots one of the Pisces, thus messing up *both* of them. Or you can go for the big giant clusterfuck where the Corsicans throw the acid, it hits the guards, they fall and accidentally shoot the other *two* barrels and suddenly there's an awful lot of burning acid and agonizing smoke.

You can use the arrival of the Attaxers much like the arrival of the Satyns — to modify the pace of combat and keep things challenging (but not lethal) for the PCs.

UNNATURAL EVENTS

As if all that stuff didn't give you enough options, you can also stick in unnatural effects courtesy of the Big Charge. In the lobby or area 5, the lights could start flickering with a calypso beat while the guard's computer monitor or the closed circuit TV screen suddenly start flashing grainy pictures of a Spanish dance show broadcast in 1971. In area 8, the boxed toilet lids could start shuddering and rattling loudly, shivering their pallets and sending out clouds of porcelain dust. In area 7, as the guards shuffle, the cards could spurt out of their hands and spontaneously land in a perfect house of cards. Or the vibrations of the fan could suddenly sound like an eerie voice droning "iiiiim goiiiiing to kiiiiiii yooouuuu." All the roaches in the building could suddenly swarm into one room and crawl on the floor in lines that form a drawing of Richard Nixon, then Gerald Ford, continuing on until they reach the present president.

These freak occurrences let you fine-tune the opposition your characters face. You can throw the varying ranks of Unnatural checks at everyone, but (let's face it) the PCs are much more likely to have hard notches on that gauge than any of the Walpoles. You then have a reasonable explanation for the gangsters to quit shooting and start whimpering.



UNKNOWN
ARMIES

GOD'S HERALDS ARRIVE

God's Heralds show up at the front door. If your PCs are going to want (or even wonder about) a rational explanation for their appearance, it's probably best to have them show up after Sara Markott. Otherwise, toss 'em in whenever.

Initially they try subterfuge — coming in with a package with a barely legible street address, with the line for “person receiving” completely indecipherable. If the door is still locked and the guard at area 1 is in place, he gestures for them to buzz off and they start looking around the building. If the guard is there but the door is (for whatever reason) unlocked, they come in and he tells them to go to hell. Then they start poking around the side. If the guard isn't there (because he's been called away to shoot people, for example) they try the door and eventually force it. They poke around, starting in area 1. If they hear shots, shouts or loud crashing noises, they call the cops, say some prayers, and take a closer look. (Remember, they believe their personal attention may be required for an apocalyptic event. And, in fact, that's not far off, though they've got the details completely backwards.)

If some other group has busted in already, they may follow through the same route. (If the

Satyns came and busted in through area 4, for example, the Heralds might come in the same way.)

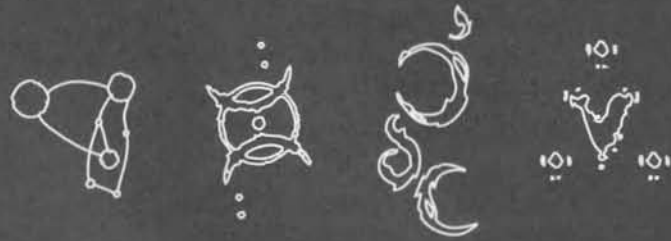
Generally, this event is good for sticking some helpless, hapless, harmless duds in the path of peril. If your PCs are decent, square-jawed hero types, the arrival of the Heralds can give 'em some heroism to perform.

HOW CAN I EVER REPAY YOU?

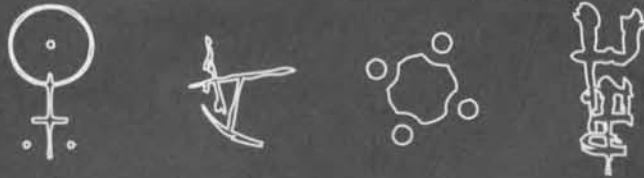
If the PCs manage to save Pete's bacon, he's naturally anxious to get to the station and file a report — though he's got no idea what to put in it. He's grateful to the PCs for saving him (unless they obviously endangered him) and it's not too hard to pry a blessing out of him. He's even grateful enough to promise not to mention them in his report.

IF THE PLAYERS DON'T DO MUCH

If events fall out without a lot of PC manipulation, Erica Fisher's subtle strategies trump the blatant acts of the Satyns. With the unwitting help of Sara Markott, Erica Fisher claims Vishudda. The score becomes Fisher 2, Geddakis 2, Matterkros 1.



CHAPTER SEVEN
ANJA : PHILADELPHIA



The sixth resting place for the Big Charge is Philadelphia, where America keeps the Liberty Bell, Ben Franklin's grave and a whole lot of history. But Shakti doesn't stay there long.

Really, is America an introspective country? Does America spend a lot of time sitting around, contemplating the past and musing over the twists and ironies of history? Traditionally, the answer is pretty much "hell no." Rather than sit on the porch with a metaphorical glass of lemonade and a book of crossword puzzles (the way old countries like, I don't know, Portugal, probably do), America has always been a country looking for a new adventure, a new frontier to explore and exploit and fill up with progeny and industry. Or failing that, we've been looking for a place where we can discretely light some fires and dump our empty gin bottles.

How fitting, then, that Kundalini — the very soul of America — rests in history-rich Philadelphia for all of maybe fifteen minutes before it gets hijacked off into the woods by

a bunch of frat guys looking forward to a weekend of camping, swimming, drinking and hazing.

America is not strictly urban, after all. There are still wild places. And late at night, when a group of college men have been drinking all day, even a state park with steel plumbing fixtures and concrete fire pits in the camp sites can become the Heart of Darkness.

OVERVIEW

The charge is big and obvious in Philly — a big rain of fish and snakes might as well be a neon arrow pointing to the franchise where it emerges. The involved people all gather and glower at one another as they figure out who got the Shakti.

Furthermore, the two True Kings meet under a flag of truce so that Dion Isaacs can explain to Erica Fisher that she's not just threatening him, but the Archetype itself. Erica decides to continue in her course, which means

UNKNOWN
ARMIES

the gloves are off. In full rebellion, she is now a direct target of the True King.

But this is somewhat secondary, because the charge is getting farther away as the charge-seekers quarrel. It has been passed, in a sugar packet, to a bunch of fraternity brothers called the Omegas. They're out in the woods, hard to find, and night is falling.

King Dion unleashes the Beckies, who rampage through the woods hoping to murder the charge carriers before they can pass it to anyone. Erica strikes against Dion while the Beckies are gone, hoping to usurp his power by humiliating him before his followers. And Dean is in the woods with his daughter and his cultists, trying to reach the Omegas before the Beckies do.

What no one has counted on, of course, is the power of the rapidly growing charge. It's not just gathering unnatural phenomena this time. It's drawing unnatural people and creatures as well.

THE OMEGAS

The Omegas are a predominantly black fraternity from the University of Pennsylvania. They are also a predominantly jock fraternity. Their culture is one of hard competition, solidarity, machismo, drunkenness, and the sort of fierce pride one often finds in those whose dignity has been assaulted through no fault of their own.

To truly understand the Omegas, you have to ask yourself what you'd do if you found yourself living a stereotype. Because most of these guys — consciously or not — are doing just that. They are exceptional athletes — each one of them good enough at wrestling, football, basketball, track, *something* — to get a college scholarship. They have those talents and certainly don't gain a goddamn thing by denying them. But when they excel, they pigeonhole themselves as "dumb black jocks."

It's quite a serious thing, really. The fact that bigoted dipshits think black people are all dumb jocks doesn't mean there aren't blacks

who are jocks. It doesn't mean there aren't blacks who are *dumb* jocks. Just like there are dumb blondes, clueless whites, effeminate homosexuals, incestuous Arkansans and Germans who are lousy in bed — even if those stereotypes are only true for a tiny fraction of the group in question, they're still there. Even a misguided throw hits the bullseye sometimes.

So the Omega choice boils down to (1) abandon sports at which they excel and which have always rewarded them or (2) reinforce one of a suite of stereotypes that shut off avenues of opportunity, not just for them but for others.

The Omegas have made their choices and they've taken their lumps for it. They pay for their decision every time they wonder why so many of their younger brothers are encouraged to play football instead of studying math. They pay for it with the knowing nods from the white students. They pay when their guidance counselors steer them to easier classes so they can focus on their physical training. And they pay by enduring the condescension of some of their non-jock colleagues at the black tables in their university cafeteria.

Keggars and the files of old test questions are not the reasons so many black athletes join the Omegas. They join because they know the Omegas understand their choices and agree and support them.

The Omegas are not political in the traditional sense of the word, but they can't ignore the *sub rosa* contradictions of their situation — even though no one ever, ever talks about it in public.

What do they do? They do what a lot of people who can't get out of their stereotype do. They get into it. You think they're brutish? Cross them and see how mean they *really* are. You think they're tough? You got no idea, motherfucker.

You think they're descended from slaves? No shit. And they've got the brands to prove it.

That's the climax of the Omega initiation, you see. At midnight during their annual

pledge camping trip, their members get their Greek letter burned into their skin. The horse-shoe brand is about the size of a teacup rim. Some get it on the shoulder, or the pectoral, or even right on the ass.

It is completely voluntary. They aren't held down or restrained. A surprising number stand up straight even as their flesh sears, as they catch the scent of their ancestral tragedy.

(Because this, too, is a part of America's soul.)

They've gotten in trouble for their initiations before (though no Omega has ever betrayed the secret). That's why they do it off-campus, at Nockamixon State Park.

This year, the hazing is going to be even worse.

TYPICAL OMEGA

On this particular outing, the typical Omega is drunk as an Irishman in a Victorian stereotype. All the skills listed below take that into account. There are around 30 of them present.

Hit Points: 65

Body: 65 (Ripped Abs)

Wrestle/Quarterback Sack (Struggle)
40%, *General Athletics* 50%

Speed: 60 (Maxed-Out Quads)

Dodge 40%, *Drive* 5%, *Initiative* 40%

Mind: 50 (C+ Student)

General Education 10-20%, *Notice* 10%

Soul: 50 (Soused)

Charm 20%, *Lie* 20%

NOTES

None of these guys have any Unnatural hardened or failed marks. Don't bother rolling for them: You can just use failed (or successful) stress checks as an excuse to use them as you want, at the pace you want. Need 'em to attack? Blown stress check, frenzy result. Need 'em out of the way? Blown stress check, freeze result. Need someone reasonable but edgy to deal with? Successful stress check — for now.

Rain of Fish in Philadelphia

Eileen Flaunders, Tribune staff

When today's forecast called for rain, no mention was made of catfish, eels and water snakes. But that's exactly what fell on the Liberty Corners mall this morning. A short downpour started around 3:30 this afternoon and dropped as much as a hundred pounds of aquatic life on a collection of restaurants, stores and small businesses.

"At first, I heard ordinary rain and didn't think much about it. Then these really loud thumps started," said Connie Delaney, 22, a Kinkos employee who was present during the unusual deluge. "I looked out the window and saw this big snake-thing slap right against the glass. I thought someone was throwing fish at the window until I saw that farther back, the fish were falling from real high up."

Rains of fish have been reputedly reported since 1838, and in the 1920s, researcher Charles Fort claimed to have collated 294 reports of falls of fish, snakes, frogs and other living creatures.

"It's rare, very rare, but it happens," said Channel 6 meteorologist Luther Shakti. "Strong winds can pick up a lot of material — dirt, trash, feathers, seed pods and such. Unusually strong winds can pick up unusually heavy loads, some of which are living. It's been a windy summer, thanks to some strong equatorial activity. In fact, there was a rain of fish in Atlanta, Georgia, not too long ago."

Regardless of the rational explanation, some witnesses insist there was more than mere wind power at work. "This is a sign. A sign from the True King, and I don't care who knows it," insists Angie Delphine, a worker at the Liberty Corners Mc-

see FISH, page 5

POSSESSIONS

Between them, there are about five hatchets (+6 damage) and two serious wood axes (+9 damage). If threatened, Omegas without wood-cutting gear can grab a knife, bottle, paddle or sturdy branch for +3 damage.

One Omega — his name's George — is rather sullen and unbalanced, and he's brought a gun along. It's a snub-nose chrome revolver, a Colt Detective Special (6 shots, maximum damage 50). However, his 0% skill in it, coupled with his drunk penalty, means he cannot even get the safety off. He has trouble keeping hold of it, and the first time he tries to use it he drops it in the mud. After that, it's jammed and no one can use it until a good fifteen minutes are spent cleaning it. But he can wave it around and scare the shit out of people just fine.

FINDING THE SHAKTI

As GM, your goal is to get the PCs to the woods around Nockamixon State Park at or after sunset. If your characters are the type to dither and ponder, (or if they're far away) you can have them hear the news on the radio pretty early after its occurrence. If they're close and you think it would help to have a time crunch for urgency, you can have them see the article in the evening paper around 6:00 PM.

If seeing that news item — or hearing about it in some puff news segment on TV — isn't enough to twig the PCs to the latest contact point, there are a couple other ways they could tune in.

- If Mitch Geddakis ditched them in the last segment, he might have some second thoughts and call them to make sure they're okay. (This assumes at least one of the PCs has a cell phone and that the number got to Mitch somehow.)
- News correspondent Matterkros is on this like porn on the internet. PCs in his corner can get a timely clue.
- Angie Delphine is an Attaxer who was on

the list as soon as she got home from work. Even if the PCs aren't in cahoots with Erica Fisher, they might be checking the Mak Attax list.

The exact circumstances of the PCs' arrival at the Liberty Corners restaurant depend on who they're backing.

THE THREE CONTESTANTS**ERICA FISHER AND MAK ATTAX**

Erica gets there pretty fast — in fact, a disgruntled looking city sanitation crew is still scooping, scraping and hosing in the parking lot. Angie isn't there, but a couple other Attaxers who work there have come in unscheduled to gawk, and she quickly convinces them to give up Angie's phone number — and to tell her what happened.

Harvey Duopulous is still hobbling along at her side, and Monica Berberry is with her. If the Pisces twins avoided mind- or body-shattering damage in New York, they're there too. And, of course, there are about a dozen Attaxers from the east coast gathered around to see what's going on. These 12 Maks have no paranormal powers themselves, but they've brought two small coolers, each containing six thick shakes. These are not just any shakes. They're even more special than the Shamrock Shakes that only get sold on St. Patrick's Day. No, these are Special Order shakes, and any adept who drinks one gets a minor charge.

"Superconductor" himself isn't present, but he's dispatched Brett Gustafson from the Bleach Crew to protect Erica. Brett is bulked out, yellow-eyed, surly and wearing a jacket, no matter what the weather. (No stats are provided for Brett. If the PCs are helping Erica, he's there as a plot device to keep her unkillable. If the PCs are against Erica, you may want to stat him up yourself so that he can challenge your PCs appropriately. By and large he's an overmuscled gun nut with some highly illegal

firearms, but if your PCs are heavily mojo-oriented, the Maks may have managed to cobble together some short term protection for him.)

Erica's priorities are: Find who got the charge, then find that person, then get the charge from him or her. If the PCs are investigative types, she asks them to help her, but keep in mind that all Monica Barberry needs to do is cast Past Sight (see UA2, p. 123) and ask "Show me what happened here when the Big Charge was passed on" to get some idea where the charge went. On the other hand, Monica's a long way from Grand Central Station, so she can only charge up with the Special Orders — and Erica is keeping those back so that she can give them to whatever adept needs them most.

Even mundane questioning (if done with any degree of subtlety or charm) can get a description of the Omegas from the manager. "A bunch of big black guys. . . man, it was like a caravan, must have been at least ten cars. All at the drive-thru, too. The first one was this big, like, purple Trans Am with a firebird on the hood, and then a couple jeeps and stuff. They ordered just a whole ton of food. Oh, and this one guy in the second car? He had on, like, a tank top? And there was this big scar on his arm, shaped like horseshoe. Then the fish and stuff started to fall, and they all started yelling and rolling up their windows and putting the tops up on their cars." He didn't see which way they went, but Liberty Corners mall adjoins a highway on-ramp.

The gas station attendant next door can tell them that the caravan of black guys went north. Questioning along the highway (at rest stops and gas stations) yields various clues — including that there was camping gear piled in the backs of two sport utility vehicles.

However, before the PCs leave Liberty Corners, there's a roar of motorcycles and the Satyns pull in, followed by the awkward magnificence of Dion Isaacs' Airstream.

Play this for tension. Erica immediately starts telling the Attaxers to fall back to

defensive positions inside the restaurant. Brett glances longingly towards the trunk of his car but contents himself with reaching inside his jacket instead.

The Satyns aren't attacking, though. Instead, Ol' Joe comes out, waving a grubby white handkerchief on a stick. He explains that Dion wants to have a peaceful negotiation with Erica and "her court." He describes a quick, peaceful discussion in the middle of the parking lot — Dion and four followers, talking to Erica and four of hers.

Erica picks the PCs as her court — if they've been helping her. If there aren't four PCs, she fills out her allotment with Brett, Monica and Harvey (in that order).

Dion comes forward with Ol' Joe, Quentin Hardacre, one of the Satyns, and the oldest of the Beckies.

I'll give you Dion's first line, for reasons that become clear in the Washington DC chapter. But in general, rather than plot out a conversation in intricate detail, I'll just give you a summary of what various people pitch in. You can improvise from there. Again, try not to fall into the trap of doing dialogue for two GM characters — it marginalizes the PCs and is usually pretty goofy. Instead, let the PCs talk quite a bit and interperse it with dialogue from the other camp. When a dialogue occurs between Dion and Erica (say), just narrate it and give an overview: "They're arguing about whether the True King is a real force for stability, or whether the stability just comes from True Kings keeping others from attaining power."

Dion: "You can challenge me. That's a pisser, but it ain't cosmic. Kings fight kings. That's the king thing. But that ain't all you doin', lady. You're fightin' kingship itself — the big king, the all-time king, the True King. That ain't royal, baby. That's treason."

Dion understands that Erica threatens the True King with replacement. His understanding of the archetype leads him to see this is a challenge to all order, all hierarchy. He wants her to pledge loyalty to the Ascended True King in



order to prevent herself from replacing him in the Invisible Clergy. If she does that, he has no beef with her. She can continue to try to seize the Godwalker status from him, but she'll no longer endanger kingship in general.

San Quentin: His main function is to make credible threats, should Erica continue her current course.

Ol' Joe: He wisely points out that if Erica ascends, she may not be able to protect and guide her followers any more. He initiates a discussion about whether she really thinks re-ordering the concept of loyalty can have a good result in a world where treachery and mistrust are already so widespread.

Erica: She's startled to learn that she's contending, not only for Godwalker status, but for a position in the Clergy itself. But she suggests that if the True King is weak enough for her to challenge, perhaps it's because the idea is obsolete. She questions the inherent value of total personal fealty and the subjugation of will — especially when compared with a free will/free market model where the True Executive needs to keep his employees happy and not just servile.

You can have this get as heated as you want, shy of actual violence. Erica and Dion both make sure to nip any of that in the bud — particularly since armed partisans in both camps are on opposite sides of the already bloodied parking lot in broad daylight. Not the best time for a confrontation.

Unless the PCs strongly encourage her to accept Dion's deal, become Godwalker and give up the ascension quest, Erica thinks hard, but refuses. She is — or at least seems — utterly confident, even to the point of arrogance. She might say something along the lines of "If not me, who? The bloody-handed egotist Matterkros? Or that ignorant truck driver? It's not just a matter of me letting go of the power. I have to consider who would seize it in my stead. No deal, Dion."

Dion nods sadly and says "I came here under the flag of truce, and I'll stand by that. But next time we meet, we enemies. I name you

usurper, and soon as you out of sight, I'ma put a sentence of death on you."

Then he turns to go, gesturing for his Satynic army to mount up and follow him.

Erica (of course) asks the PCs for advice. Assuming their goal is to get to the charge before Dion and the Satyns, there are a couple things they might try.

- **Squealin'.** If the PCs call the cops and nark out the Satyns, the cops pull them over and harass them for a while. ("Din' I hear somethin' about some warehouse in New Yawk?") Thanks to Dion's Godwalker mojo, the charges slide off — but it's still a good delaying tactic.
- **Research.** A caravan of black guys with omegas on their arms isn't something you see every day. An Internet search gets a couple different biased opinions about the Omegas. Attaxers can be scrambled to their University to scrounge for information about where they were going. This yields the name of Nockamixon Park, eventually.
- **Head 'em Off at the Pass.** If the PCs already know where the Omegas are going — thanks to divination, or a successful "College Fraternity Savvy" roll — they can try to beat Dion and his gang there by taking another route. Even though the PCs' route is less direct, they can make better time because they don't have to keep stopping to ask "Hey, didja see a purple Trans Am full of cicatrized black dudes right after the rain of fish?"
- **Road War.** If the PCs really got into battling the Satyns on the road in Chicago, this can be a chance for a rematch. Pretty much all the stuff from Chicago can be thrown at them here, along with anything else you care to add. If that seems like a sufficient climax for you, you can just have them find the Omegas and get the charge. Or you could have the cops show up and delay the PCs (and Erica) long enough to let Matterkros beat them to the punch.

In any event, if Erica and the Attaxer faction don't get killed or arrested, they arrive at Nockamixon just as the sun is going down. Erica — who's been thinking on the ride — has decided on some strategy. See "When True Kings Attack," on p. 136.

MITCH GEDDAKIS

Mitch? Mitch is dropping off his last load in Washington DC and wondering about all these funky dreams he's been having lately. If the PCs call him for any reason, he can tell them that, yes, he made a delivery to the restaurant that was on the news with the fish fall. Other than that, he's not particularly involved.

DEAN MATTERKROS

You would think that the guy who has automatic news delivered straight into his ear all the time might have a bit of an advantage when it comes to hearing about the fishy events in Philadelphia. In actual fact, that doesn't happen. Dean, after all, is constantly scanning for news stories of *national* importance — so that he can, if necessary, bug out when TNI (or Eugene, or some other Messenger) tries to cap him. His competition is, ironically, *more* likely to hear about the fish because they're more likely to be listening to music radio stations. For some reason, music stations love to have their on-air jabber jockeys natter on and on about weird (but not deadly) news stories, as opposed to playing "Freebird" already.

(One could, of course, point to the Ascended Messenger as a possible explanation for Dean's tardiness.)

In any event, Dean is cruising towards Liberty Corners with his five remaining followers when he hears the roar of Dion's party. In his weakened condition, he's understandably cautious, so he dispatches one of his followers to go see what's what. If the PCs are associated with Dean, he sends one of them, but only if he thinks that character won't be recognized. He doesn't want to tip his hand to Erica, or anyone else, for that matter.

If the PCs can find some way to spy on Dion to find out he's threatening Erica, Dean approaches Dion and asks to make a deal. But unless the PCs do the spying (using anything from magickal invisibility to a parabolic microphone), Dean does not identify Dion as a True King. (Guess he's out of UPS, huh?)

Unsure of Dion's position in the whole thing, Dean steers clear — having caught one bullet, he's unwilling to risk more trauma. (Unless the PCs want to go talk to the fellow with the bikers and see what's going on.)

Dean (or Sara or, most likely, one of the PCs) can readily hear about the Omegas and deduce that they're holding the Shakti. Then it's just a matter of heading south and tracking them.

When Dean and the characters arrive at Nockamixon, Dion has probably already established himself. The sun is going down and the PCs can faintly hear cries of "Euan! Eo! Iä!" echoing through the trees.

THE OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES

DION ISAACS

Dion makes his threats to Erica, then heads off towards the park. He's scared, and a lot of his Satyns are out of the picture after the brouhaha in New York. So he makes a fateful decision. Not only does he assign San Quentin to kill Erica Fisher, he decides to unleash the Beckies in the forest when they get there.

Dion's no fool — by the point he may have seen the Corsican Twins bending bones in New York, or Harvey throwing blasts in Chicago. He wants someone by his side to protect him, but the Beckies are much better on offense than defense. He plans to send them along the south shore of the lake, while he and the Satyns go along the north. If he finds the campers and talks 'em out of the charge, all well and good. If the Beckies kill them — well, that's a shame, but we all gotta go some time.



If the PCs are with him, they can talk him out of this — but only if they persuade him they've got a better chance of getting the charge, dispersing the charge, or killing Erica Fisher.

LATAETIA LUDOPHIS

If she can, she hooks back up with Harvey and the Attaxers, but by this point in the game that's pretty unlikely. If they turn her down, she tries to tag along with the PCs. If *that* doesn't work, she goes off with Dion Isaacs. She doesn't become a Becky, but she does accompany them when they go rampaging through the woods. Like them, she strips down for this (though unlike them she keeps her shoes on). Her nudity protects her from their assault and may give lady PCs a clue about how to avoid the sharp end of the Maenad assault.

By this point, Lataetia is finally starting to get some understanding of what's going on and what's at stake. When she sees how low Dion will go to protect his position, she reconsiders helping him. But by then it's far too late for her to make a difference. Besides, the biggest impact she's likely to have is through her Foolish damage redirection ability. That's not something she controls. That's something that the Ascended Fool controls, and to him a few frat-boy lives are just playthings.

GOD'S HERALDS

The FedEx folks don't *need* to get involved with this, unless (1) the PCs are helping them or (2) they've hooked up with Eugene LaRue. In the case of (1) they look to the PCs for guidance and can basically be used as cannon fodder. If it's (2), he isn't exactly *happy* about sending them into danger, but he does it if he thinks there's a chance it can stop Dean. Either way, their role is most likely to end up as some variation of "run around in the woods, and die." In any event, they can serve as a distraction — either to the PCs (they do make nice rescue objects for hero types) or to any of the other groups involved.

No more than six Heralds are going to tag along for this, but they're likely to be the best armed and toughest ones from previous *To Go* episodes. If you want, you can even increase their skills a touch from p. 83. Why should the PCs be the only ones to get the benefits of experience?

EUGENE LARUE

If he's gotten God's Heralds roped in, he goes into the woods with them, trying to find and kill Dean. He figures the woods at night are a good place for a violent ambush. Same basic thing if he's got the PCs on his side, except that with them he's more forthright and more willing to follow their lead.

Solo or with companions, he's armed, and if he sees Dean he opens fire and damn the consequences. He'd like to fuck up Dion Isaacs, on the principle that anything hurting Fisher helps Matterkros, but when he perceives just how many warm and homicidal bodies Dion has going around the lake, he backs off. He needs to keep his eyes on the prize, and if that means the Beckies or Satyns savage the PCs, or the Attaxers, or anyone else — too bad.

MIXED NUTS

In addition to Dion's kingdom, Erica's Attaxers and Dion's followers, the Shakti has become something of a beacon for unnatural persons and creatures. When the sun goes down any (or all) of the following could be flitting around the Nockamixon shores:

- A veritable carpet of tenebrae (see UA2, p. 306), scuttling through the undergrowth and attacking anyone foolish enough to wind up alone in the dark.
- The revenant of a hunter who managed to drown while looking for his beloved dog Snuff. (He fell, hit his head, and landed in the water unconscious.) He's gruesomely bloated and obviously dead, and he wanders the shore asking those he meets if they've seen a brown dog.

- A small group of ghouls (see UA2, p. 305) are wandering the woods, the males in conservative black suits and the women in black dresses with veils. They are completely out of place in the woods, and they're just waiting for people to die. Strangely, the Beckies ignore them.
- A lesser Unspeakable Servant (see UA2, p. 307) has been dispatched to find out what's going on, after its crazed master has dreams about Nockamixon park. The Servant flaps in at sunset, housed in the body of a dead vulture, but after taking any damage it oozes out — to attack or flee, as you see fit.

In addition, any mystically-aware character you've used in your own stories could show up. The PCs might get a glimpse of an old nemesis, looking distracted, right before the Beckies attack. Or Jeeter might cruise by, weeping and wailing and looking for a door to flee through. If Betsy Barry survived, she might somehow escape and show up (though probably unarmed). Heck, even a lost Elvis impersonator might be spotted, rhinestones glittering, lost in the moonlight and muttering about how nothin' beats the king.

BARE SHIT IN THE WOODS

Nockamixon park surrounds an oblong lake that stretches from northeast to southwest. There are three big, obvious, marked roads in. Several smaller service roads exist, but they're blocked with fences or (more often) a thick chain padlocked between two steel poles.

There are three large groups of campsites around the shores of the lake. These regions are dubbed (rather unimaginatively) A, B and C. A is at the northernmost corner, B is down at the south west edge, and C is more to the southeast, farther back from the water. The Omegas have reserved all the campsites at C. It's the most primitive and unattractive site. But that's perfect for them: They want privacy.

DION

Dion has the advantage of numbers. Don't worry about exactly how many Satyns and Beckies are running around: Thanks to darkness, division and confusion, the PCs are unlikely to run into all of them at once. Just make sure there are enough to provide an interesting challenge. (If the PCs are getting overmatched, you can throw some other group in to complicate things, just like you did back in New York.)

Dion and the Satyns show up at A and terrorize a lot of wholesome family campers into leaving. (Thanks to Dion's Godwalker channel, all of them think one of the other families will call the cops.) San Quentin tries to intimidate one of the park rangers into telling him where the Omegas are, but at that moment there's a power outage, rendering the computer files inaccessible. (How providential. The same power outage means that any lights in the park go out.)

(If anyone cares to investigate, what happened was a guy named Edgar Prince had a tire blowout on his truck. He slammed into a power pole and knocked down a transformer. He drove for King World Transit. But that doesn't necessarily mean anything.)

Dion whips the Beckies into a frenzy and sends them down the east and south shore of the lake. They're armed with sticks and stones (+3 damage). Note: The Beckies won't back down from any fight, but if someone flees into the water, the Beckies only follow until it's chest high. After all, they're too crazed to swim, but they're not quite crazed enough to drown themselves.

He leaves a small group of Satyns (maybe 6-8) at area A to hassle any "caravan of black dudes" coming out, or to kill Erica Fisher if she tries to come in that way. Then he takes the rest of the Satyns and heads off along the west bank of the lake.

(PCs helping Dion out may, of course, take over for the Beckies or the Satyns at any point.)



ERICA

Erica has the advantage of communications and something of a local edge. The guy with all the radios and cell phones from Chicago? He's out here again, providing communications gear for the Attaxers. Furthermore, one of the Attaxers lives nearby, and when Erica said there was something big brewing at Nockamixon, she went to get her boat.

The boat in question is named "Excalibur" and its owner is a non-adept, non-avatar Attaxer named Gwen. Excalibur is a ski boat that can hold four people comfortably, and six with a lot of crowding.

Gwen is quite familiar with Nockamixon park, and her ski boat ensures that the Attaxers rule the waves. Erica decides to place herself, Brett and Harvey on the boat, along with Gwen and the cooler full of charges.

Erica sets sail from area B. Six Attaxers, led by Monica Barberry, head along the north shore. Six others, led by the Pisces (if they're available) head along the south shore. Erica's plan is to stay in the middle of the lake. If either group encounters trouble, Excalibur can zip to its location and provide heavy backup. Gwen gives Monica her flaregun as a location signal if she needs it, while the Pisces group gets some roadside flares.

PCs who are with Erica can split up or (more likely) replace one of the two on-ground groups. Alternately, if they have other plans for allocating the Moks resources, Erica is likely to listen. (Unless it's going to totally ruin *your* plans, of course.)

DEAN

Dean's cult is pretty much useless to him at this point — the best thing they can do for him is get him a gun. Otherwise they're just going to slow him down. Sara is with him, but that's it.

Dean's advantages are threefold: He and Sara are highly mobile, they're a small target, and they know where they're going. He may have managed to get some healing magick on him in New York — or not. In any event, his

ERSATZ NOCKAMIXON?

The real Nockamixon park in Pennsylvania has cabins and a youth hostel, but no camp sites of the type described here. I claim artistic license.

first Messenger channel lets him blow through the undergrowth a lot faster than the Beckies, even if he's injured. Furthermore, once he reaches the park he's able to knock down a sign showing a map of the campsites and use a torn-free CB radio microphone as a planchette. With this makeshift ouija board, he divines the location of the Omegas and sets out that direction *tout suite*.

He's moving behind the Beckies' line of carnage, but going faster he runs into them pretty quick. If the PCs are with him, they can tilt the encounter in his favor and allow him to push through to Area C. Otherwise, he runs away, grabs a rowboat, and tries to flank around them on the water.

WHEN TRUE KINGS ATTACK

Here's a rough timeline of events without PC intervention, along with guidelines about how the PCs can alter the situation.

- 1) The southbound Satyns on the west coast of the lake run into the northbound Attaxers. A dozen well-armed bikers, led by San Quentin, vs. six fast-food employees and Monica Barberry. No contest. The Attaxers break and run immediately, calling Erica for help and firing their flares. As the Satyns pursue, they get spread out. Erica comes in where the Satyns *were*. Harvey and Brett disembark to pursue. Several Satyns turn around, but they're no match for Harvey's blasts and Brett's full-auto AK-47. Erica moves the boat down the beach and picks up several Attaxers, but three of the six unnamed Moks are too badly hurt to escape the Satyns. Monica

can move, but she's hurt as well.

If the PCs are with the Attaxers, the fight is a lot more equal. With great rolls, high magick, or brilliant strategy, they might even manage to repel the Satyns, who roll on to the south after deciding the PCs are too dangerous to fight when Erica and the Big Charge are still at large. They do leave 4 Satyns behind on the road to keep the PCs bottled up.

If the PCs are with the Satyns, it's possible that they take down the Attaxers so quickly that they don't even have a chance to alert Erica. Seizing the flare gun, they might be able to lure Erica into an ambush and put an end to the True Executive then and there. Or not. Remember that Erica tries to talk to any Attaxer who calls for help. If there's radio silence and a flare, she approaches cautiously. Only someone who can convincingly impersonate an Attaxer on the radio gets her close enough for a really vicious sneak attack.

- 2) **Four Beckies attack Dean and Sara.** Sara gets slightly hurt and Dean kills one before he and his daughter disengage and get away through the woods. They make their way to a dock, steal a rowboat and head out in the water.

If the PCs are with the Godwalker, they can hopefully make short work of the Beckies and the group can continue on foot. Having penetrated the line of the Beckies' advance, they can reach the Omegas before the Beckies do. (See #4, below)

If — for whatever reason — the PCs are with the Beckies, they can presumably butcher Dean and Sara, or at least force Dean to flee to some newsworthy event far away, keeping him out of the picture.

- 3) **Brett and Harvey decide to make an incredibly risky attack from the rear against Dion's Airstream** — symbolically, his very castle. They take a bike from one of the dead Satyns, Brett drives and Harvey

(with his broken leg) clings on in the back with the automatic rifle. They plan to roll in while protected by Bulletproof Chutzpah (see UA2, p. 131), and try to shoot up the Airstream enough to make it stop. Normally, Harvey wouldn't have any reasonable chance, but with the I Win spell (see UA2, p. 132) it could happen.

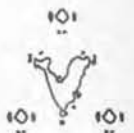
They get in and halt the trailer, but as they're fleeing both of them get hurt. They're not crippled enough to stop fleeing, but another attack would be pretty close to suicidal.

If the PCs were involved on either side previously, this Mak counterattack could have a very different shape. If Attaxer PCs maintained some sort of beach head and the Satyns went around, they have to break through the 4 Satyn ambush by a turn on the road. On the other hand, PCs helping Dion Isaacs might have smashed the Attaxers so thoroughly that they can do nothing but flee to the other side of the lake and consolidate their forces.

- 4) **A group of three Beckies reach the Omega camp, causing absolute chaos.** Hearing the screams, other Beckies rush towards the sound. The Omegas succeed at restraining and tying up the three women. They then stay put, recover from their blown stress checks, and wildly speculate about what the hell just happened, what they should do, and how the law would react if they found three naked white women tied up in the middle of a party of thirty drunk black men.

The Attaxers arrive shortly after that, and the Omegas (already jumpy and suspicious) bark at them with some ugly macho vibes. Then Dean shows up from the water and tells them they're in danger from a horde of crazy chicks. The Omegas listen to him because, after all, he's the Messenger and he makes sense, while the Attaxers are just a bunch of weirdos.

In the middle of this triple detente,



the main body of Beckies closes in on the camp. Some Attaxers fight bravely, some run away, one lights his flare and another runs down to the shore to light a second flare and summon Erica. But she's a good ways away.

A number of Omegas blow stress checks, either when the other Beckies close in or when the Pisces (or PCs) start flinging around Unnatural stuff. Dean and Sara are the sole voices of reason, getting the Attaxers and Omegas into a defensive perimeter and starting the process of an organized retreat.

If the PCs were with Dean, they can arrive at the scene before the Beckies attack and warn the Omegas of what's going on. There's not enough time to explain the Shakti and find out which Omega has it before the Beckies attack *en masse*. (Hearing the death shrieks of their fellow maenads as the PCs smacked them down earlier called the disparate Beckies into a single group.) It's PCs vs. Beckies (and vs. Omegas who failed stress checks and start frenzying) for several rounds while Dean gets the sane Omegas into their vehicles to flee.

If the PCs were with the other group of Attaxers, assume they made better time through the woods. They arrive just as the three Beckies storm out of the forest, waving clubs and hollering. Once the Beckies are restrained, they can offer any explanation they want to the Omegas, but they'd better make it good if they want to offset the advantage Dean has when it comes to persuasively saying things like "You're in danger and I can help you."

PCs with the Beckies are going to have to kill everyone to disperse the Kundalini, and that's a pretty tall order. Even without Dean's wise counsel, some of the Omegas are going to get the idea that, drunk or not, fleeing in cars is the smart course of action.

5) **As the Omegas flee** (with or without the

PCs), they reach Area B and its exit at roughly the same time as the remaining Satyns. The Satyns block the exit and the Omegas make to smash through, but Dean calms the situation by asking them to wait while he talks to "the boss." When he explains himself to Dion, the True King smiles and lets him through. Triumphant, Dean rides off with the Omegas, getting their blessing at a truck stop down the road when they stop to toast him for his courage and calm thinking.

Attaxer PCs who are fleeing with the Omegas may have to fight past the Satyns. Of course, the Satyns are on bikes and the Omegas have at least two heavy duty sport utes, so smashing over them isn't too bad — if the PCs are at the wheel or in the vehicles. (Without encouragement, no Omega is going to drive straight into gunfire.)

If the PCs are with Dean or Dion, you can gloss over this pretty easily. The two Godwalkers talk, and the whole thing is over. Ta da.

Attaxer PCs who've been fighting Dion this whole time can blockade the gate themselves (if they beat the True King) and try to get the blessing away from Dean, but by this point the Omegas are (1) pretty grateful to him and (2) pretty desperate to get away from the Beckies. Really intimidating PCs might be able to convince the Omegas to have one member bless them, but they have to talk fast and figure out which Omega has the charge. If they try to get all the Omegas to say "I bless you" or some such before they leave, the Omegas are going to get mad, and balky, and then it's time to fight. (Of course, once the PCs get a gun to a fellow Omega's head, the loyal frat brothers do whatever they say. If the PCs are willing to do what's expedient.) Attaxer PCs with Erica in the boat can head the Omegas off at the pass. (Remember, the Attaxers are in radio contact, and



one of the Maks from the camp site can tell them the Omegas' plan before area C is overrun.) Once they're there, it's pretty much the same issue — can they talk the Omegas into blessing them really, really fast?

If Erica Fisher gets the Shakti, she is promoted to Godwalker. She might get promoted even if Dean gets it — just so long as she manages to score some sort of symbolic victory over Dion. (Destroying the Airstream and his still might do it.) After all, he came forth with the tools of an old King — mindless obedience and brute force. She came to the field with an inferior force, but with flexibility, communications and delegated authority — the tools of the True Executive.

If she becomes Godwalker, Erica holds off on picking her penultimate channel. She's still aiming for Ascension, and until she names the

channel, she can pick anything that might help her (or keep her alive).

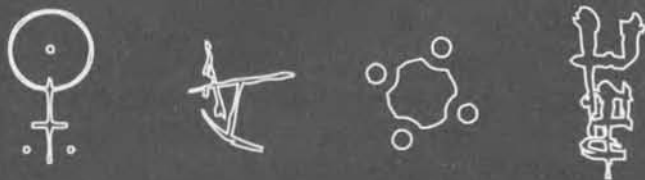
If Dion loses his Godwalker channel, he manages to get out of Philadelphia one step ahead of the cops, but he's forced to be far more circumspect in his actions when his law no longer takes precedence. Most of the Beckies sleep off their frenzy in the woods and get arrested for assault or indecent exposure.

IF THE PLAYERS DON'T DO MUCH

Running around in the woods confused and scared is not a great way to get much done, so it's possible that the PCs consider it a triumph if they just keep their various precious bits ungnawed. As Geddakis wanders off on his merry way and Erica makes her move against Isaacs (or vice versa), Dean swoops in and claims the Anja charge. It's a tight, ugly, three-pointed tie: Fisher 2, Geddakis 2, Matterkros 2.



CHAPTER EIGHT
SAHASRARA : WASHINGTON, DC



Washington, DC is the nation's capital, a city so important that no single state was allowed to claim it. As a penultimate destination for the nation's awakening spirit, only one place could serve better.

The Statosphere itself.

OVERVIEW

The rudiments of life on Earth weren't particularly promising. A few listless strings of carbon — that was it. If they'd been stuck forever on a dark lump of rock, floating in a lifeless void, no evolution could have occurred.

But these particular carbon strands existed on Earth, and Earth is at a pretty nice distance from a pretty nice sun. All that clean, healthy sunlight hit the carbon molecules and it agitated them. They moved. They clustered. There were reactions.

Every high school student learns the iron law of Entropy: That on its own, chaos increases. A system left to stagnate loses all cohesion.

What's stressed somewhat less is the converse. If a system is *not* left on its own, it tends to become more orderly. Gold miners knew this: To get the heavy gold out of the lighter dirt, you agitate it. Bakers take a chaotic mix of ingredients and whip them into a smooth batter with a mixer. The sun takes a group of simple and disorganized carbon atoms and (after billions of years) organizes them into something that can read a book, or write one.

This same principle — that adding energy produces higher degrees of order, even if it's done unintentionally — produced the American Shakti in the first place. As it shot across the country, the Kundalini has grown again and again, gaining more power as it went. Though no one observed it, the Big Charge was also becoming more and more complex.

In Washington DC — the last stop — the Kundalini crosses some mysterious tipping point. It's similar to the unmarked point in space and time at which carbon compounds stopped being simple strings and became some-

UNKNOWN
ARMIES

thing recognizable as “life.” It’s also somewhat like the point the human mind crossed, at some lost moment in history, that changed us from mere animals into conscious beings with free will and self direction.

DC, then, is not where the PCs find the Kundalini. It’s where they *meet* it.

The incarnate Shakti is aware of its function as a bridge between material humanity in the tangible world, and abstract humanity in the Statosphere. It knows it must die in order to exalt one human, to transform that mere mortal into a member of the Invisible Clergy.

To make its decision, the Shakti enlists some familiar faces who are (themselves) out of contention for its blessing. It picks the PCs.

MEET “MAC”

The PCs get to DC. Doesn’t really matter how. Mitch could tell them. Erica could tell them. Dean could tell them. Really — by this point, your PCs really should have some coherent ideas for following the Kundalini. If not, they get called in a dream. Or they just fall asleep in Philly or Baltimore or wherever and wake up lying on the floor in a closed down fast food joint at 3:09 in the morning.

That last option is probably the best one, really. If your players love nothing more than hints and clues and symbolic investigation, you can whip something up for them — something that leads them to a restaurant near the Washington Monument. But if they go during the day, nothing much happens. You can point to three AM with clues. Or you can simply have them wake up there, summoned through space by the whim of incarnate magick.

None of the three candidates can enter the restaurant. The moment Dean, Erica or Mitch cross the threshold, they cease to exist — albeit temporarily. Their missing time adds up to about three hours and thirty-three minutes, unless they’re called back sooner to Ascend.

Upon waking up on cold tile that smells of bleach, the PCs have a few moments to look

around and get their bearings. Then they hear a voice behind them.

“Hello. I need your help.”

Emerging from behind the fry station is a twenty-foot long winged serpent. Its scales are emerald green fading to chartreuse on its belly. The feathers of its wings are crimson and gold and a rich purple. The whole entity glows with a very faint phosphorescence, like a firefly.

“Don’t be afraid. I’m the Shakti. I’m what you’ve been chasing all this time.”

MAC FAQ

At this point, the PCs are almost certainly going to ask some questions. (Or flip out and attack it, but their blows, bullets and blasts pass through it harmlessly.) The serpent answers to the best of its ability.

WHAT ARE YOU?

“I’m the Kundalini spirit. I am the expression of America’s national, magickal, symbolic soul. If you’d like, you can call me ‘Mac.’ That seems to be the best name.”

WHERE DID YOU COME FROM?

“For ten years or so, an organization named Mak Attax has been passing charges of raw magickal energy into randomly chosen people. They hand them out in restaurants like this one, all over the country. All that energy looked for a meaning, and it created a pattern. You’ve been chasing that pattern across the country, from Los Angeles to here — I’ve felt you. Now I’m ready to complete my function.”

WHAT IS YOUR FUNCTION?

“I am to die in order to serve as a bridge between this world — the physical one — and the realm of pure ideas. One chosen individual will cross that bridge, ascending to take a place among the primal patterns that govern and shape all human actions.”

DID YOU BRING US HERE?

“Yes. I apologize for any inconvenience, but

this is really rather important.”

WILL YOU GIVE YOUR BLESSING TO ERICA FISHER/MITCH GEDDAKIS/DEAN MATTERKROS?

“Not on your say-so. There are three people who have attuned themselves to me — to the Shakti, or to what I was in a more primitive state. Only one of them can become immaterial and immortal — only the one who attunes to me best. But now that I am conscious, I can give the last part of myself to whom I choose. I would, however, like you to help me make my decision.”

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

“Come with me. Together, we will go halfway to that realm of pure Idea. There, you can help me review the three and choose who best deserves me.”

With that, Mac slithers gracefully out the door towards the Washington Monument.

Now, Washington is never completely still, but 3:20 in the morning is about as dead as it's going to get. A few cars drive by, swerve and nearly crash as their drivers see Mac, blow a stress check and decide to get away as fast as possible. A couple homeless folks wake up as the group passes their benches or doorways. One moans in fear and hides his head. Another holds forth her child, prompting Mac to lean down and flick at its forehead with his tongue.

“Thank you,” she whispers. Then she turns to the PCs and reflexively asks for change.

As the group comes close to the Washington Monument, the water in the reflecting pool seems lit from within, and the reflection of the great obelisk seems, for a second, to look like a sword held aloft in a woman's hand. But then the illusion is shattered as a group of young teens comes around a corner, laughing and hiccupping. They spot Mac and freeze in shock.

The great glowing serpent rears slowly up before them and says “Stay in school. Don't do drugs.” The wide-eyed teens drop their bottles and flee.

“In here,” Mac says, and slides into the

reflecting pool at exactly 3:33 AM. If the PCs follow, there is a brief moment of disorientation as gravity twists, pulling them face down towards water that parts like air. Then, they are somewhere else.

THE STATOSPHERE MUSEUM

Through the reflecting pool, the PCs enter what appears to be a museum. They stand within a corridor, perhaps twenty feet wide. Every twenty feet there's a cross corridor at right angles. Thus, walking along, the PCs see twenty feet of wall, twenty feet of corridor, then another twenty feet of wall. This extends before and behind them, to the right and to the left, apparently forever.

The floors are tiled in alternating panels of black and white veined marble. The black tiles have white veins, while the white marble has thin strands of black. The walls are cool white marble, pure and unflawed. Every twenty-foot span of wall has two Doric columns in front of it, two feet thick, made of the same perfect white stone. Each column is perhaps a foot and a half from the wall, near each corner.

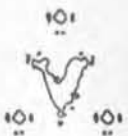
The walls and columns go straight up and do not, apparently, ever hit a ceiling. If the PCs squint, they might see clouds far above them, but it could just be a trick of looking at receding blank walls and columns at such great distances.

Everything is well-lit by a light that comes from nowhere.

In the center of each wall, between the columns, is a painting. The paintings vary in size, from ten feet on a side to miniatures the size of a baseball card. Each painting is set at eye height for the PCs. They are done in a variety of styles and colors. Each has a small brass plaque beneath it.

“These paintings are the important moments in people's lives. Turning points, I suppose. If you'll follow me, I'll show you the turning points for my three candidates. Please stay close.”

As they follow Mac, they pass by several paintings, including the following.



- A painting of a stylishly dressed black man standing in an austere fashionable bedroom. He's dressing — his hands are occupied with his cufflinks, but his attention is drawn to his keyring. Apparently he has knocked it off his dresser. He is watching it as it falls. Characters who are familiar with Alex Abel can recognize him, though in this picture he is at least ten years younger than he is now. The title on the plaque reads *The Fall of the Keys*.
- A massive canvas depicts a scene in a small private library or sitting room with a billiards table. A handsome man with an arrogant grin holds a hollowed out skull cup in one hand and a pool cue in the other. He is gesturing and, obedient to his will, the billiard balls are flying from the table to strike a delicate looking woman as she flinches away from him. A second man stands in a doorway, shouting and angry. A second woman kneels by the bookshelf nearby, hiding her eyes. The title is *The Birth of the Freak*.
- A small image a swarthy, obnoxious-looking young man pouring white powder from a pill bottle into a glass of dark red wine. His expression is a mixture of wounded pride, misery and anger. Behind him, an older woman is talking on the phone. Characters familiar with Simon Diulio (or "Apu al-Sayid") from "Fly to Heaven" in *One Shots* recognize the man as him. The title is *Pride Poisons Love*.
- A dark skinned man in antique Egyptian robes strangles a half clothed woman. Her skin, where visible, is completely covered with tattooed hieroglyphics. Loathing and disgust are clearly visible on the man's face. The title is *Death of a Sorrow*.

Other pictures can reveal single moments from the backstories of particular GMCs, at the GM's discretion.

At some point, you may find it entertaining to turn to one of your more creative players

and say, "The group walks in front of a painting, but you stop. You recognize the scene. This one is yours: This is *your* turning point. What's in the painting and what is the title?"

Eventually, the PCs arrive at Erica Fisher's portrait. (If the PCs ignored Mac and went off on their own, or even if they split up in different directions, they all wind up in front of the picture at the same time. Mac simply says "Oh. I see you found your own way here.")

In the picture, she's talking to Dion Isaacs and his "court," exactly as described on p. 131. As Mac rises before the painting and flaps his wings, it comes alive and the PCs can see and hear what happened. If they were present, give them a brief recap. If they weren't there for the first go around, you may want to take a bit more time and explain the nuances, or possibly just show them the relevant text in the Philadelphia chapter.

Eventually, the two groups part and the painting returns to its original appearance. Mac then turns to the PCs and asks "How could it have been different?" His glittering wings swing and sway, brushing them with a breeze that smells of cinnamon . . .

. . . and then the PCs are in the painting.

ERICA FISHER'S DECISION

As GM, simply look at the players and say "Which character do you want to control?" They can't take over for Erica Fisher, but anyone else — San Quentin, Ol' Joe, Dion Isaacs, any of Erica's supporters — are fair game. (Some players may take themselves. Fine. Some may take each other. That's also fine, if somewhat perverse.)

The PCs have a chance to replay the scene, however they want. This is not a retroactive change to the event (though, at this point, there's no way for them to know that). It's an alternate history — a "what if?" that gives Erica a chance to change her decision in response to different arguments or different events.

If the PCs are her supporters, they want to give her a chance to look noble. If the PCs sup-



port someone else, they want to trick her into looking stupid, or venal, or otherwise unworthy.

There are any number of ways this can pan out, though the PCs only get one chance to explore their options. If combat starts, don't bother rolling — since this is taking place in an “unreal reality,” the forces of chance, stator-sphere and free will don't interact the same way. Rather, just adjudicate combat with your (impartial) GM's common sense. PCs may see themselves die while they're occupying some other body, but don't bother with stress checks either. It's the stator-sphere, Jake.

In general:

- If Dion unexpectedly attacks, Erica retreats while her followers try to protect her. Several of them die, but she gets away.
- Someone who tries to threaten her or make her back down by emphasizing the personal danger (or the danger to Mak Attax) gets a steely-eyed glare perfected in a dozen boardroom duels. She refuses to back down. Depending on how the players want to finagle it, this can make her look courageous — or recklessly willing to let her followers burn as fuel for her ambition.
- If Dion and company suggest some kind of compromise — like, he'll give up God-walker status and let her have it if she pledges fealty to the True King — then her boardroom compromise mentality kicks in and she takes the deal. (Note: It's possible that PCs following Dion in Philadelphia already tried this and Erica turned them down. That's fine. If that's the case, they're unlikely to try the failed tactic again during the “replay.” So they never have to know that Erica's reactions and motivations changed to keep the plot ticking.)

However it works out, the PCs emerge from the painting when the meeting ends. They can (if they wish) discuss Erica's actions, be they good or bad, with Mac. If they ask Mac for clarification, he can explain to them

that they did not actually change the past, but rather directed an illusory variant on it, meant to give him a better overview of Erica's personality and whether she deserves his aid or not.

When they're all clear on that, it's on to the next candidate.

MITCH GEDDAKIS' DECISION

Mitch's picture is one down from Erica's, just as Arkane's is one past that. The title of Geddak's picture is a *A Woman Scorned, A Lonesome Man*. In a composition and style similar to Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks*, we see a truck-stop tavern late at night. Clustered together at one end of the bar is Mitch, two friends, and the bartender replacing their empty pitcher with a full one. At the other end of the bar is a woman with a short skirt, a low-necked top, and a fresh bruise on her left cheek.

As the picture becomes animate, the PCs hear one of Mitch's companions speak.

“... don't know the deal with her? That's, uh, Sally something. Sally Turner. Listen, every time her husband, y'know, flies off the handle and pops her one, she gets mad. And she puts on her party dress an' heads out to a bar to get even.”

Mitch expresses some disbelief, but the other man with him — a lanky fellow whose shirt has “Stan” on the name patch — confirms the story.

“Naw, Jim ain' lyin': I been with her myself, man. Her tits're getting' a lil' saggy, but free pussy ain't never half bad.” He scratches his chin thoughtfully. “Shit, I'd do 'er again, 'cept once you done it she can't stand the sight of you.”

His two friends both encourage Mitch to go over and talk to her. Mitch is somewhat hesitant and again suggests they're setting him up. The bartender confirms (rather neutrally) that Jim and Stan have it right. Once or twice a year, Sally shows up at some area bar “prowlin' for a man.” He shrugs, eyes weary. “Gotta wonder what's goin' on in that head of hers,” he suggests.

Mitch nods, but Stan replies “It could be your *dick* in that head of hers, man! Why you care if she a few bricks shy of a load? She’s here, she wants it, she’s a, a whatchoocallit. . . a c’nsenting adult. If it’s not you, it’s gonna be some other sucker gets lucky.”

Jim slaps a bill on the bar and tells the bartender to give Sally a drink, courtesy of Mitch. The bartender looks at him and Mitch shrugs.

After a short discussion between Sally and the bartender, complete with a gesture down the bar towards Mitch, he mixes a drink and puts it down in front of her.

She looks down the bar at Mitch, expectantly. When he doesn’t move, she puts a cigarette in her mouth and leaves it unlit, still looking at him. This prompts him to come down the bar and give her a light.

They exchange greetings. When he asks what brings her to the bar, she says, “I’m just bored. . . looking for a little excitement, a little something interesting. Are you interesting?”

They talk some more. Sally makes a few weak double entendres about him being a trucker. (“I’ve always been impressed with truckers. I hear y’all can. . . drive all night.”)

He offers to show her his rig and she agrees — her voice half sultry, and half resigned. As they leave the bar, Stan and Jim guffaw behind them and clink glasses.

Out in Mitch’s truck, they start to talk. Mitch hangs his head and confesses that Stan told him about “Y’know. . . you and. . . er, your husband.”

Sally slaps him. Hard, right across the face. She makes like to claw out his eyes, except that he’s quick enough grab both her wrists and hold her back. She thrashes for a little while, screaming insults, saying it’s none of his fucking business. Then she goes limp and starts to cry.

They talk some more. She tells him about how good her husband can be, when he’s not drinking. How he stood by her after their first baby died, when she was as low as she ever got in her life.

Mitch, awkwardly, asks if she’s ever thought about leaving him over the hitting. “Only for one night,” she says. “It’s the thing I can do that hurts him most, you know? And after, he’s always sorry. Real sorry. Says he’ll never lay a hand on me again, that he doesn’t blame me and. . . he’s so sweet then. After.”

Mitch asks why he seems to need to hurt her and why she always wants to hurt him back. Neither one of them can figure it out. He asks if she’s got a sister or a priest or someone she could go to instead of going out when it happens. She shrugs, says maybe.

For a while, they’re silent. He asks if she wants to go back in, get another drink or some coffee. She says “Nah. I think I’ll head home, maybe. I dunno, make an early night of it.”

“Maybe that’s for the best.”

“Maybe.” She leans over and kisses him. “Thanks. You’re a sweet guy. Sorry I hit you.”

Then she clammers down from the cab of his truck and drives off.

Mitch, frowning, sits for a while. He looks at his face in the rearview mirror, touches the handprint on the left side and the lipstick smear on the right.

Then he goes into the bar.

“Damn Stan, you were right about that bitch. That was some kind of crazy fuckin’! After, thought, she freaked out on me!” He points at the handprint.

Jim and Stan are beside themselves with amusement. “I tol’ you she was a hot one! And a nut!”

Mitch nods, says he’s going to go get some rubbing alcohol for the claw marks on his back. The other men laugh him out the door.

The picture stills, and Mac asks, “How could it be different?” As before, he spreads his wings and the PCs enter the scene at the beginning.

Depending on what the PCs do, Mitch may look better or worse.

- If one of his buddies is more sympathetic to Sally and expresses pity for her, Mitch doesn’t even go over and talk to her at all.



- If both his friends are very sympathetic, all three of them might go over and console her — although, in that case, Sally is profoundly offended that they know her personal business. She yells, spits, and breaks a beer bottle over Stan's head, putting him in a coma.
- If the bartender, instead of being neutral, plays up Sally's availability and desirability — especially if Jim and Stan are in on it, and especially if all three of them present it as a lark, a harmless adventure, a once-in-a-lifetime, "porn movies start this way" event — then Mitch goes over, picks her up, has awkward and anonymous sex with her in the cab of his truck, and pretends not to see her crying in her car after she leaves him.

As before, the PCs emerge from the painting and can (if they so desire) discuss matters with Mac before moving on.

DEAN MATTERKROS' DECISION

The painting is entitled *Dermott Goes Big Time*, and it illustrates a young Dermott Arkane (or, as the PCs probably know him, Dean Matterkros). Judging by his bell bottoms and beads, it's some time in the late 60s or early 70s. He's standing with a peculiar looking knife in his hand — it seems to be made out of glass or crystal — and the tip and edge are bloody. At his feet is a skinny black man in a cheap brown business suit, clutching his arm in a pool of blood. Standing off to one side is a young Eugene LaRue, sporting a black turtleneck and a scraggly beard. A thickset white man with long hair and a bushy beard looks down from behind Dean's shoulder. He has a sawed-off shotgun in his hands and a fat blonde woman in a dashiki shirt clutching his arm. As the picture comes alive, the first sound is the agonized panting of the wounded man.

"Just. . . get me a doctor. Come on, you, you fuckers can't just leave me to die."

From their responses, it's apparent that the heavysset man (whose name seems to be Duane, and who calls the black man Alton) thinks

they should do just that. Eugene wants to find a phone and make the call, but the fat woman (apparently "Judy") asks what the cops are going to think — after all, Alton is unarmed.

"Can we be sure we got every proxy?" Eugene asks. "Maybe he's got another child socked away somewhere, waiting to die in his place. Can we really take that chance?"

Dean nods and tells Eugene to go find a phone. Eugene looks at him gratefully and runs off. Then Dean looks at Duane and tells him to go into the office on the second floor, find the phone, take it off the hook and dial a single number so that Eugene can't dial out.

"So this is it, huh?" asks Alton.

"Looks that way."

"Dermott, it doesn't have to be. Just let me live and I'll give you everything. Everything!"

Dean/Dermott doesn't reply, just looks skeptical. The man then suggests that if he's not interested at all in what he has to offer, why doesn't Dean run away — or finish him off?

"You want the proxy spell, don't you? The good one, not that bullshit Yin Yang Marriage Discipline? Well I'm the one. I'm the only one. You let me die and it dies with me."

Dermott kneels and starts to bind the man's wound, but he suggests that, given Alton's history of using it to kill children in his stead, the loss of it might not be such a terrible thing. They go back and forth, but stop talking when Eugene returns. He tells them the phones aren't working. Dermott nods, looking grim but determined, and tells him to go to the gas station. He's to use the phone there to summon an ambulance, then bring the car around so that the four of them can flee.

Eugene rushes off again just as Duane reappears. He raises an eyebrow at Dermott who says, "I guess Alton gets to live." He then turns to Alton and says, "I've completed my part of the bargain. Now let's hear yours. Make it snappy — I got no guarantee you're going to survive on the operating table."

The dying man murmurs softly. Dermott makes him wait a moment while he pulls out a

bulky tape recorder and starts to capture what he's saying. The man draws a small sketch on the back of an envelope, and Dermott recreates it. The man nods. The woman looks out the window and tells them Eugene has arrived.

"You're sure this does it?" Dermott asks. The man promises he's got all he needs. Dermott nods, turns to Duane and says "Finish him."

As the bleeding man starts to holler, Duane produces a handgun and shoots him in the face. Then the three of them head off down the stairs.

Things can go differently if the PCs intervene:

- A PC in the place of Duane can refuse to sabotage Eugene's attempt to get help. If that happens, Dermott sends Judy, or goes by himself. Similarly, a PC Duane might tell Dermott to do his own dirty work on Alton. Dermott takes the gun, swallows hard... then rushes to the window to vomit. He can't do it.
- If a PC in the role of the bleeding man acts genuinely contrite and seems to be greeting death with equanimity (instead of pleading and weaseling), Dermott lets him die with dignity (if that's his desire). This might also persuade him to take the high road, listen to Eugene and call an ambulance.
- On the other hand, if the PCs encourage him to learn the dying man's hidden powers, he does so eagerly — even stooping to torture to get the secrets. (He won't torture the man *personally*, however: He leaves that to Duane while he listens with his head averted.)
- If a PC Eugene confronts Dermott with his double-dealing and treachery, Dermott at first tries to convince him that he — or, better yet, the four of them — can use the proxy power responsibly, that it could be the edge that makes a real difference. If Eugene remains unconvinced, Dermott breaks down and realizes that he was wrong and going too far — that no power is worth sacrificing his decency and his friendship.

After the PCs talk it over, it's time for Mac to make his choice.

THE DECISION

Generally speaking, the PCs' actions should really determine — one way or the other — which candidate Mac selects. If they think sharp, judge well and do a good job of making their chosen person look good and the rivals look bad, Mac picks the one they favor. On the other hand, if they botch it, judge poorly or seem unnecessarily cruel, Mac may decide against their candidate. (Remember, though — no dice rolling to persuade! This is the Statosphere, or as close as the PCs are likely to get. The normal rules do not apply.)

Persuasion hinges, of course, on what you (the GM) think Mac is like. This, in turn, probably depends on how you feel about the United States in general.

High Road: America is the land of opportunity, freedom, democracy and equality under the law. Mac opts for whatever candidate seems most inclined towards growth, fairness, exploration, innovation and (of course) common sense.

Middle Road: The USA has, traditionally, meant well but been perhaps a bit naïve, boorish and insensitive on the international scene. Individually its citizens value materialism and comfort — and, when practical, they want their standard of comfort for all. Mac picks the candidate who seems least likely to do a great deal of harm.

Low Road: America is apathetic, selfish, lazy except when vicious and cynically corrupt except when ignorant. The cult of individual aggrandizement is alive and well, and Mac gives himself to whoever seems most grasping of personal power.

Note that Mac's charge is not some kind of trump card: If the PCs were supporting Erica and did such a bang-up job that she picked up five of the other chakra jolts, Mac's final decision against her isn't going to prevent her from



Ascending. However, it's not impossible that there's a three-way (or two-way) tie going in, in which case everything hinges on Mac's choice. He also acts as a tiebreaker if his choice brings two candidates into a tie for Ascension. (That is, if the score was Erica 3, Dean 2 going in, and Mac chose Dean, then Dean would Ascend.)

THE REPERCUSSIONS

Once the PCs have all had their say about the portraits, Mac bobs his head in a surprisingly human nod. "I've made my choice," he says, and slithers over to the portrait of the winner. He spreads his wings and bursts into flames, plunging into the frame.

The PCs have a moment in which they can see which of the three pictures changes — it may not be the one Mac chose — as the previous turning point in that person's life is replaced by his or her ascension into the Invisible Clergy. The painting flares with intense light, light that blinds them even if they turn away or close their eyes . . .

. . . and they find themselves standing in the middle of the reflecting pool. It's fairly early in the morning, and they're soaking wet. A few people are pointing and staring, and several are taking pictures.

(Later on, they may see some amateur video tape of their emergence from the pool. The surface of the water shed a brilliant white light for a few seconds before they emerged. The tape gets shown on *Selena!* but is discounted as a fake by experts. The PCs are not recognizable, except perhaps to people who already know them . . .)

The PCs have about ten minutes to get away before the police show up to hassle them for jumping in the pool, but even if arrested they get let off with a warning and some grumbling about "keeping your nose clean."

Their emergence affects more than the characters' police records, however. Their journey — from night into day, from darkness into light, and from the otherworldly back into the

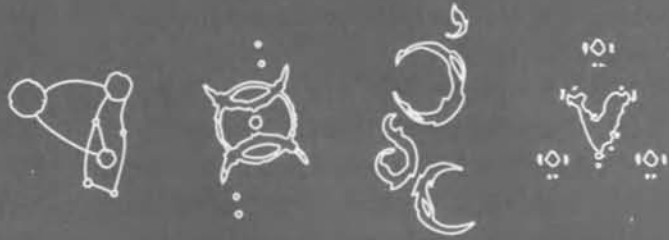
mundane — has changed them permanently.

The exact form of the change is up to the GM, but several options include:

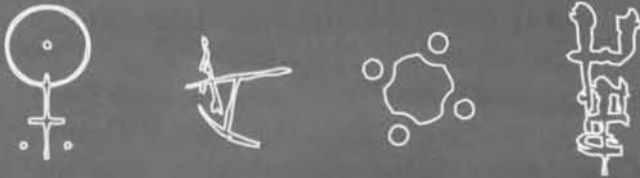
- A character gains the "aura sight" ability described in UA2, p. 43. It's a Soul skill and it starts at 20%.
- A character becomes preternaturally attuned to one of his Passions. Whenever a person within 333 yards has a strong sensation caused by that passion, the character has a chance of intuiting it. This is a Soul skill and it starts at 30%. The player picks which passion to detect and can't change it. If the character ever loses that passion by becoming a sociopath (see UA2, p. 69), this ability fails as well.
- The character develops a limited ability to tweak the Statosphere around him. Once per day, the character can choose to amp up the chaos on one action. When this is done, the player rolls only a single die for that action and uses it for the ones and the tens place: He's going to get a match, succeed or fail.
- If a character wasn't an avatar before, he might become one, following the path of the newly-ascended Archetype. (This only happens if the character has acted appropriately in the past, however.) This avatar skill starts at 15%.
- By staring at a still body of water for at least thirty minutes, the character can tell which Archetypes (if any) are taking an interest in events within a 3 mile radius. The water has to be outside, and it has to be at least the size of a kiddie pool — that is, big enough that the wind can act on the water to produce perceptible ripples. This doesn't require a roll — just time.

Whatever powers the PCs acquire, they also get an intuitive grasp of what sort of ability they have — maybe not perfect, but good enough to get them started fooling around.

(For the effects of the ascension on the whole *world*, check out the appendix.)



APPENDIX THE ASCENDED



In *To Go*, the PCs have a good chance of influencing, if not outright deciding, which one of three candidates Ascends: Dermott Arkane, trying to challenge the Messenger; Erica Fisher, challenging the True King; or Mitch Geddakis, replacing no one and ascending as the Holy Prole.

One of three possible Archetypes comes out of this. They are detailed below, along with other results of the three possible ascensions.

THE HEISENBERG MESSENGER

Attributes: What is truth? Facts are easy: The sky is blue, Marilyn Monroe is famous, cars have four tires. But truth... 'truth' is a word that seems reserved for abstract notions like beauty, justice, mercy and holiness. One man's truth is another man's blasphemy, and another woman's perceptual error.

Some people say truth lies in the realm of the statosphere — that what we experience as “reality” is the crude material shadows of

those perfect Platonic forms. But isn't it just as likely that Invisible Clergy are the phantoms of truth cast by the interpretation of facts?

The sky isn't blue, by the way. At least, it's not at night. There never was a Marilyn Monroe, no matter how hard Norma Jean Baker tried to persuade everyone. If you count the spare, lots of cars have *five* tires.

So even facts are pliable. How much more malleable, then, is 'truth'? In fact, there are many truths, as many truths as you need, as many truths as there are people fumbling around the blind man's zoo, groping the outlines of facts, then marshalling their personal biases to make sense of what they think they saw, or heard, or felt.

The Heisenberg Messenger is the one who realizes that presentation matters as much as content. Interpretation is inexorable. Persuasion is inescapable. Every time you speak, you have some vague idea of how your listener might react, and that very knowledge damns you to partisanship. You can't help but try

UNKNOWN
ARMIES

to get the best reaction (meaning the one you want). The only real falsehood is when you claim impartiality.

This has always been true. The only difference between the Heisenberg Messenger and the antique Messenger is that now, people finally realize it. The good side of this is that an honestly open Messenger can encourage people to reach their own conclusions, think for themselves and analyze the news with logic and critical thought. The dark side is the cynical muckraker who believes in *no* truth and is simply manipulating perception in pursuit of sensation.

Taboos: The Heisenberg Messenger must, if asked, express an opinion or a theory. She must stick by this theory for at least two hours. Uttering an unqualified “I don’t know” is an instant challenge to avatar status. (Even an honest Heisenberg Messenger must qualify any confession of ignorance with some sort of *guess*.)

Symbols: The microphone, mini tape recorders, small notepads, cameras of all types and press passes. A Heisenberg Messenger who isn’t working for some sort of news outlet (even a shady “news” web page) is unlikely to get far on the path.

Channels:

1-50%: The Heisenberg Messenger has a nose for news. With a successful roll, he can get a vague idea of where the next “newsworthy” event to occur within a ten mile radius actually happens. This provides no clue about what the event is, or whom it will interest.

51-70%: By badgering people with questions, the Heisenberg Messenger can confuse them and cloud their memories of events. This only works if the Heisenberg Messenger was also present at the same event. To make this work, the avatar must roll a success that’s higher than the target’s Notice score. This cannot remove all memories, but details get lost, the target becomes less certain and (consequently) less convincing when trying to tell others what “really” happened.

71-90%: The avatar can now mislead people in a very literal fashion. With a successful roll, a victim’s sense of direction becomes confused. If this is done in combat, any attempt to move more than two steps from where the target is currently standing sends her in a different direction. If she tries to close in on someone for a strike, she winds up turning right instead. If she tries to spin and confront an attacker behind her, she steps forward and to the left. This directional confusion lasts for a single action, and it does not affect ranged attacks, or hand to hand attacks on people who are within reach.

This channel can also have a much less dramatic but longer lasting effect, if the avatar so desires. If used more subtly, the victim can navigate just fine to any point within twenty or thirty feet, but trying to travel anywhere out of sight requires a successful Mind roll. If the roll fails, the target is hopelessly lost for at least an hour. Even if it succeeds, the trip *still* takes twice as long at least, because the victim misses their off-ramp, makes stupid mistakes, turns down the wrong street and otherwise acts clueless about his destination. This version of the effect lasts 1-5 hours.

91+%: Once per day, the avatar can influence the outcome of an uncertain event by making a prediction about it. If the event is absolutely random, the chance of it turning out according to the Heisenberg Messenger’s plan is equal to the avatar roll made to use the power. If the event depends on human choice and effort, one person chosen by the avatar gets to use the Heisenberg Messenger’s roll result in place of one of her own skills for as long as she’s participating in the event. However, while this is going on, the Heisenberg Messenger effectively has an avatar skill of 0%. He can still break taboo, however.

Once the event is settled one way or the other, the avatar skill returns. If the resolution of the prediction is put off, however, the avatar skill remains absent. This goes on as long as the situation is unresolved.

Example: Deke the Heisenberg Messenger knows that Eponymous is looking for his pal Terry. “Know what, Terry? I don’t think this Eponymous is such a badass. I think that if you two come into conflict, you’re gonna clean his clock.” Deke rolls to make this come true, and he gets a 54. This is a success. Now Terry can use that 54 as a Guns skill or a Martial Arts skill (but not both), during his confrontation with Eponymous, lasting until it is complete.

Example: Deke knows an entropomancer is gambling for a big shot of juice with some Russian Roulette. “Damn,” Deke tells anyone listening “That’s just foolishness. I bet the little punk blows his brains out.” He rolls to make it come true and gets a 75. Now, instead of a 1 in 6 chance of dining on a bullet, the unsuspecting entropomancer has a 3 in 4 chance. However, Deke can’t use his Avatar skill any more until the bodybag tries for the charge in that particular way. If someone kills the guy before he can charge up, Deke’s skill is effectively unusable. He’d better taboo himself down to zero and start again. Or try to bring the adept back somehow . . .

ARTIFACT: THE ARKANE CAMERA (MAJOR)

If Dermott Arkane succeeds in his quest to replace the Messenger, the digital video camera he used throughout the campaign becomes a major artifact with a devastating power: As its holder comments on the events it records, the events themselves change to conform to the “media spin.”

For example: The camera’s holder is on an airplane and starts filming the wing. Now, airplane wings have a bit of flex built into them, but a lot of people don’t notice this. If the cameraman started saying “Oh my god, look at that wing moving! I don’t think it’s supposed to do that!” there’s a chance that the wing would become damaged — even if it wasn’t before — in order to conform to the interpretation of the cameraman. Similarly, if smoke *was* coming out of the plane’s engine, the cameraman could shift it in and out of focus and say “I don’t

think that’s smoke, it looks more like fog to me,” and have a nonzero chance of making the engine be okay.

Inanimate objects are naturally quite resistant to psychological tampering: The chances of success with the inanimate range from 10% to 50%, depending on how plausible the alteration and how much the cameraman knows. If he *knows* that brown lump on the sidewalk is a dog turd, it’s going to be hard to change it into a chocolate bar. But if he’s not sure... well then, people drop chocolate bars all the time.

The camera works much better on people. Say, for example, a group of protesters throws rocks at police, tips over one of their cars and generally starts warming up for a riot. The camera owner doesn’t like the police, but doesn’t want a riot either, so when the police wade in with nightsticks, she starts recording then, claiming it was unprovoked police brutality. She films one running protester and says he’s running away. She films the flinching protesters, and turns the camera away from those who fight back.

Thanks to the camera, the police are now much likelier to be cruel, and the rioters are much likelier to run away. Rules-wise, she rolls one die: The result is the level of the Helplessness stress check forced upon anyone who goes against her script. If she rolls a 2, it’s a rank-2 stress on cops who don’t beat and picketers who don’t run. If she rolls a 9, it’s more clean-cut.

Note: The Arkane Camera is not indestructible. Anything that would destroy a normal camcorder can destroy the Arkane Camera.

REPERCUSSIONS

Honest reporting gets less common. Post-structuralist notions about the invalidity of truth and communication trickle further into mainstream thought. CBS puts on an hourly drama series about a reporter named Arcadia Dermott who lies and deceives “for the greater good” in order to protect people from paranormal threats. It’s a hit. It’s called “The Message.”



Gradually, there's an increasing schism in the media-consuming public. The smarter and better-educated distrust the news more and more as increasing bias and contradiction become noticeable. At the same time, those who are naturally stupid or who've had poor education tend to pick one news outlet that plays to their biases and stick with it, deriding all other information sources as tainted and untrustworthy.

All Avatars of the Messenger become Heisenberg Messengers instead, overnight. They all lose 30% off their Avatar: Messenger skill. (If this drops their skill below 0, they take a rank 6 Unnatural stress check.) Due to the extreme switch of allegiance — from a pure view of truth to a belief in mediated facts — all Messengers make a Rank 6 Self check.

The uncertainty of “fact” and the increased cosmic significance of interpretation has many occult repercussions.

- The Cliomancy spell “Trivia” (see UA2, p. 122) costs an additional minor charge.
- Appearing on TV news is now a symbol of the Demagogue (see UA2, p. 171) and the Two-Faced Man (see *Statosphere*, p. 80).
- Working in the TV media becomes taboo for Chroniclers and Scholars (see *Statosphere*, pp. 50 and 74).
- Bibliomancers who don't spend an extra charge on the “Book Learning” spell (see UA2, p. 119) have a 50% chance of only *believing* they've made the described skill switch.
- Eastern School Cryptomancers (see *Postmodern Magick*, p. 71) suffer an *additional* 5% penalty to their skill when casting spells, on top of the normal 10% static.
- However, the spells Truth's Hammer and Hermes' Tongue become 2 charges cheaper for German Crypts only, while Transformation only costs a single significant charge. (These spell descriptions are in *Postmodern Magick*, pp. 76–79.)
- Infomancy (see *Postmodern Magick*, p. 85)

kind of takes it on the chin, too: any time an Infomancer casts a spell, she does it as if her skill was 10% lower. (This doesn't affect the skill penumbra; it works just like the Cryptomancer penalty described in *Postmodern Magick*.)

- The charge cost of the Pentecost Ritual (see *Postmodern Magick*, p. 47) drops to 3 significant charges.

THE TRUE EXECUTIVE

Attributes: By and large, businesses have bosses. Someone has to make the tough choices, set the priorities, allocate the money, fire the slackers and motivate everyone else. Executives all over the world perform these tasks every day. But the True Executive goes a little bit above and beyond.

Every businessman is concerned with the bottom line, but the True Executive embodies the principle of management as a way of life. The individual traits of workers are analyzed, not in some strict hierarchy, but as varied tools with which to respond to varied contingencies. Personality, skill, ambition — all of these are qualities which are not good or bad of themselves. (Do you *really* want your very skilled secretary to be ambitious enough that he quits working for you and goes to greener pastures?) Everything can be applied situationally, for the greatest efficiency of the enterprise.

At best, a True Executive is a source of unorthodox solutions, a creator of synergies, a fair and admirable boss who not only rewards results, but encourages her workers and aligns their personal goals with the goals of the organization. But at worst a True Executive is a manipulator nonpareil, able to use your fears and neuroses as tools to squeeze out extra effort.

Taboos: As the True King had a Realm, the True Executive has an Enterprise. This is usually a business, but it doesn't have to be. A True Executive would be equally comfortable as the head of a cult, the mastermind of

a conspiracy or (more prosaically) the coordinator of a charity. Every Executive names an Enterprise, and working against that Enterprise is anathema. If the Enterprise fails, that too can damage a True Executive. (If an Enterprise is foiled completely, a new one can be selected, but it has to be trounced beyond any chance of recovery. For example, a project to be the first human beings on Mars could easily be headed by a True Executive. That Executive wouldn't be able to stop working on that Enterprise until his team had made it to the red planet — or someone else had.)

Symbols: Suits (particularly blue suits), briefcases, very small cell phones, PDAs, laptop computers, day planners, jokey little golf doodads (and, to a lesser extent, golf clubs and the game itself).

Channels:

1-50%: The True Executive always has unerring instincts about workers. With a successful roll, he can divine an individual's passions, obsession, and obsession skill. (A separate roll is needed for each.) Furthermore, if someone has explicitly agreed to aid the Executive with her Enterprise, the True Executive automatically knows all the above listed traits about that worker.

51-70%: With a properly inspiring and/or threatening speech, the True Executive can help workers under her command focus on the task at hand and put in that extra bit of effort. In game terms, she can (with an appropriately slanted pep talk) allow one of her aides or co-workers to re-use a Passion. This has to be a Passion that has already been used once in this session. The True Executive cannot use this channel on herself, and can only use it once per session on a given Passion. Furthermore, the pep talk should be roleplayed: If the GM can't figure out which passion you're targeting, it doesn't work.

Example: A True Executive is pushing his ad agency hard, hoping to land a fat anti-smoking PSA campaign. One of his graphic artists has already put in a couple twelve-hour days

because she believes Big Tobacco is evil (that is, she's already used an appropriate Noble stimulus). He tells her "Come on. You *know* those bastards over at Reynolds, Detwiller and Glancy don't have their hearts in it. They'll do something flashy but ineffective. They don't care about the *kids*, not the way you do!" If he rolls right, she can use her Noble stimulus again this session. However, no amount of pep and rolling will let her use it a *third* time. He'd do better trying to jumpstart her Rage or Fear stimuli.

71-90%: The True Executive develops the voice of command. If he makes a successful Avatar roll that is higher than the target's Soul stat, the target must either obey or immediately make a rank 10 Self check. Even if the target decides to ignore the command and take the check, the internal struggle causes the target to lose an action in combat.

The command cannot be longer than three words. It must also be something that can be obeyed immediately. (That is, "kill your spouse" could work if the spouse is right there, but not otherwise.)

91+%: The True Executive becomes authority incarnate. Even without the voice of command, people want to obey. He can now use his Avatar: True Executive skill in place of Charm and Lie rolls, because people perceive him as an important person who deserves to be trusted.

In addition, any Executioner, Loyal Laborer or Necessary Servant who takes an order from the True Executive has a temporary +20% increase to his or her Avatar skill. This lasts as long as s/he is doing the True Executive's bidding. (This bonus cannot, in any event, raise the servant's Avatar skill higher than that of the True Executive doing the boosting. Nor can it raise it above 98%.) By the same token, any Fool, Rebel or Flying Woman who works *against* the True Executive gains a +5% bonus. (Again, this bonus cannot raise the boosted skill higher than the True Executive's skill, or above 98%.)



ARTIFACT: THE DAY PLANNER OF THE GODS (MAJOR)

Erica Fisher always carried a rather nice day planner — you know, one of those small leather binders with a calendar, a personal phone book, a tip calculator, spaces for your personal goals and daily meditations, et cetera. If she Ascends as the True Executive, this humble item becomes a potent mystic focus with two different abilities.

First off, the address section begins to automatically update itself. Here's how it works: If the owner writes in someone's name, current address, phone number and so on, the book becomes "locked on" to that person. If she moves, changes her phone number, gets a different fax or pager or email address — the book changes to reflect that. It doesn't change if the target is just traveling — it doesn't show where someone is staying temporarily. It shows the person's *home*.

This is a powerful tracking ability, and because it's straight out of the statosphere, it cannot be baffled by rinky-dink shit like proxy rituals, tilts or Paul Borowski's rabbits. Any power sufficient to evade the Day Planner of the Gods has to be sufficient to recreate the person trying to hide. (So, basically, a major charge. Possibly a trip to the House of Renunciation.) However, this all assumes you get the person's proper name and residence in the first place. "The Fruit" is not going to cut it — the name C.K. Dexter Williams must be entered to create a fix. If you put in the wrong name or obsolete data, you get bupkis. Garbage in, garbage out.

While the address is a fairly useful tracking trick, the calendar is arguably more powerful. It lets you make an appointment. *With anyone*. If I carry the Day Planner of the Gods and I write in "December 2, Demi Moore, 4:00," then there's a real good chance that at 4:00 on December 2, I'll have a chance to finally tell Demi Moore what I think of her acting career. How? It just happens. If I need to take some action to make it happen (for instance,

if I want to talk to a prisoner like Manuel Noriega), I'll be guided to what I need to do — go to Florida, talk to the warden, et cetera. But for people who are free to move about, it happens by synchronicity. Demi's car might break down in front of me in downtown Chicago. Of course, synchronicity being what it is, I might meet Manuel because he's busted out of jail and I happened to become his hostage.

There are limits. Only living people can be met through the day planner. (If you make an appointment with a demon, it draws that spirit to the attention of the Cruel Ones. Just hope they find it before you're nearby.) Furthermore, the more lead time you give the calendar, the more likely it is that synchronicity can comply. Specifically, for each day in the future, there's a 1% chance that the appointment happens. If I make an appointment for tomorrow, there's only a 1 in a 100 chance it works. But if I make it two months in advance, that's closer to 60%. (No matter how much lead time you give it, the odds never go above 80%.) Additionally, *your* decisions can affect the probabilities too. If you go to L.A., your chances of appointing yourself with a movie star are much better. If you set out to Antarctica, the odds of bringing in *anyone* go down drastically.

This effect is usually so subtle that those in its web don't even realize it. It does not register as a "magickal effect." However, if they're perceived, the synchronic effects can be countered by anything that influences synchronicity.

REPERCUSSIONS

Erica's Ascension bodes ill for the Royal Family in England, along with all other kings, queens and emperors throughout the world. Prejudices and preferences based on birth, rather than merit (or perceived merit) become slightly less attractive worldwide. This is somewhat bad for race- and gender-based affirmative action programs, but at the same time the "old boys' network" of rich white men deteriorates as well. Since Erica Fisher was a female, the idea of a female executive becomes much more pal-

atable, even to old-fashioned and stodgy board members. Chalk one up for women's rights.

On the downside, the idea of *noblesse oblige* takes a hard shot to the gut, making people who have it good less likely to feel a duty to look out for the less fortunate. They may still do it out of the goodness of their hearts, but it no longer feels *expected*. As the business structure eclipses the feudal structure in the collective unconscious, rhetoric that "most poor people just don't want to work" sounds more reasonable to the employed and employing.

Personality cults based on "divine right" dwindle and suffer. It's a bad time to be a messiah figure. On the other hand, organized structures like TNI and IBM become marginally more efficient and streamlined, as people not only understand their bosses better, but become more willing to follow orders. Groups based on mass persuasion by one charismatic figure — *i.e.*, people who are more like the Demagogue than the True King — stay about the same.

All Avatars of the True King become True Executives instead, overnight. They all lose 30% off their Avatar: True King skill. (If this drops their skill below 0, they take a rank 6 Unnatural stress check and a rank 6 Self stress check.)

The cost of the Urbanomancer spell "Napoleon of Notting Hill" (see UA2, p. 158) rises by 1 charge, since people are now more skeptical and feel a greater need for qualification. (At the GM's discretion, other spells dealing with unearned or bogus authority, like the Plutomancer's "I'm the Man" may suffer similar problems.)

THE HOLY PROLE

Attributes: The Holy Prole is an ordinary guy in an extraordinary world. While he himself seeks no particular power or authority, he always seems to turn up in the middle when something mystically important goes down.

She's the innocent bystander who can't quite dismiss what she's seen. His ordinary life is interrupted when he stumbles into the right place at the wrong time. She has no extraordinary skills or abilities — her one exceptional quality is how ordinary she is.

It is the Holy Prole's nature to accept mysticism without letting that knowledge damage or unhinge him. Most people respond to magick with hysteria: Either hysterical denial or hysterical pursuit. Those who see it as "just another one of them things" are more likely to set their foot upon the path of the Holy Prole.

This ability to remain engaged in mundane life even when exposed to the occult can be a powerful solace in a world that seems crazy, but at the same time it can lead to a sort of sloth. At her best, the Holy Prole accepts what she cannot change. At his worst, he gives up before trying to change anything.

Taboos: It is contrary for the Holy Prole to stand out. Her place in the Statosphere is in the background. (A surprising amount of action occurs in the background.) Any avatar who possesses a flashy, unusual, or demonstrative skill above 20% has jeopardized his status as a Holy Prole. Common examples of such skills include (but are not limited to): good looks, performance skills, medicine, reputation, and business acumen. Exotic skills such as bonsai gardening, contortionism and hypnotism are also trouble if they go above 20%. The rule of thumb is, anything that makes the Holy Prole stand out in a crowd is suspect.

Learning any school of magick violates Holy Prole taboo. So does possessing any skill (other than the Avatar: Holy Prole skill) above 70%.

Symbols: Coveralls, farmer tans, menial jobs and beer are all symbols of the Holy Prole. Its animal is the groundhog (which is usually ordinary as dirt, but which has prophetic powers one day a year).

Channels:

1-50%: The Holy Prole radiates a sense



of calm and acceptance. All Unnatural stress checks made in the presence of a Holy Prole are considered to be one level lower. Furthermore, *no one* with an Unnatural fear stimulus can use it in the Holy Prole's presence unless his Soul stat is higher than the Prole's Avatar skill.

51-70%: At this level, the Holy Prole has attained a balance between his interactions with the physical world and the Statosphere. All failed *and* hardened marks on the Prole's Unnatural gauge are erased, and no further Unnatural stress checks need be made. Effectively, the Holy Prole has one fewer gauge on the Madness Meter.

71-90%: The Holy Prole's natural place is in the crowd or the background. At this level, she can use her Avatar: Holy Prole skill to hide, even in plain sight. This requires a successful roll, and works like the spell "Just a Harmless Drunk" described in UA2, p. 128.

91+%: Any spell cast on the Holy Prole without his permission fails unless the roll is higher than his Avatar: Holy Prole skill. The charges spent to cast it are still lost.

ARTIFACT: SWEET SWEET CONNIE (MAJOR)

Mitch Geddakis was a long haul trucker who spent countless hours on the road with no company but the CB, his truck, and his thoughts. What do *you* think becomes his focus on Earth when he ascends to the statosphere?

Geddakis called his rig "Sweet Sweet Connie" (after a reference to his favorite song, "We're An American Band"), and after his ascension, it becomes alive — after a fashion.

Sweet Sweet Connie can automatically make small corrections to her course, and she can work the turn signal and radio by herself. To make any moves more complicated than a shallow turn, a full stop or going straight forward, she has to make a Drive roll. (Her skill is 30%.) Her gas gauge always reads three-quarters full, and she no longer needs routine maintenance. (If she's damaged — injured — deliberately, or through something seriously

like a car accident, an ordinary mechanic can repair her.)

Despite her autonomy, she's more comfortable with someone behind the wheel. An avatar of the Holy Prole is best, of course: Any such individual can (with an appropriate roll) intuit what Connie is feeling at that moment.

Connie's motives are simple. She wants to travel, and she wants to proselytize magick to the masses. To accomplish this, she can cause as many minor unnatural phenomena as she wishes to occur. She can cause one significant unnatural phenomenon per hour, and one major unnatural phenomenon per year. All these strange events occur in her presence — that is, within her "sight range." (Assume she sees out of her headlights and rearview mirrors. You can thank the impact of "Herbie the Love Bug" on the collective unconscious for that one.)

Sometimes Connie appears to her driver (or riders) in visions. In these visions she's a gorgeous, flirty blonde woman in cutoffs and a tank top — the same woman as is painted on her cab. While she can speak coherently in visions, she's not as introspective as a human being. Her thoughts are not very abstract: She's got Mind 30 or so.

REPERCUSSIONS

People everywhere become more receptive to the idea of the paranormal. Angel sightings go way up. So do reports of demonic possession. (Incidents of actual possession don't increase, but people are more willing to call it what it is.) It's a good time to invest in a psychic hotline.

More importantly for the occult underground, the flow of magick gets a little easier. If any adept accumulates 10 minor charges, they can now be transformed into a significant charge. (Formerly, that exchange was only one-way.) Significant charges still *cannot* be combined into majors, but a lot of patient minor dukes suddenly find things going much, much better for them.

THE EXILE

If Fisher or Arkane ascend, they kick someone out. This fallen clergy member returns to the material world through the House of Renunciation, ready to wreak havoc on their former domain.

We're giving individual GMs discretion to decide the historical identities of these renunciates. (In *Statosphere* it states that the Ascended True King was Diamond Joe Esposito, but individual GMs can ignore that if they wish.) However, some suggested agendas are given as food for thought.

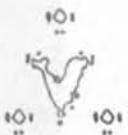
The renounced Messenger aims to impede, if not outright prevent, the dissemination of important information. Therefore, some interesting actions might include:

- Sabotaging important data in medical or scientific experiments.
- Spreading lies on the good ol' Internet.
- Uncovering evidence of media bias, to undermine faith in the fourth estate. (With Dermott in the statosphere, this won't be hard to find.

- Destroying important historical documents. Or, more simply and horribly, wiping out people's medical records.
- Coming into conflict with Tina Lovac (see UA2, p. 262).
- Finding and destroying Naked Goddess tapes — particularly the original.

The renounced True King has simpler course, albeit more dangerous. An exiled True Ruler is going to want to undermine any form of leadership and authority. For example:

- Procuring serious arms and training for the more radical "anarchists" who demonstrated against the WTO.
- Digging up embarrassing secrets about public figures.
- Assassinating royalty, or other singularly powerful individuals like presidents, the pope or Alex Abel.
- Dynamiting symbols of prominent leaders like the Lincoln Memorial or the Washington Monument. Alternately, stealing the crown jewels of England.
- Writing an incredibly stirring and successful book on individualism and the duty to bow head to no man.





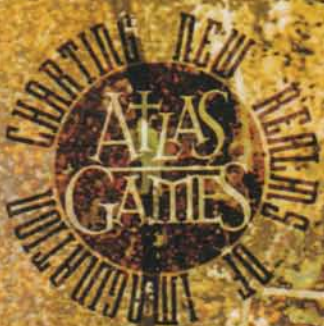
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