ROOT MAGIC

She awoke in a tunnel, or in what seemed like a tunnel. All she knew at first was that it was very dark.

"No, not just dark," she muttered. "It's friggin' cold, too."

Her eyes stung as they tried to adjust to the lack of light, but her long, straight hair was plastered to her face, stray wisps irritating her eyes. She tried to lift a hand to brush her hair back from her face and then remembered they were bound behind her.

"Oh, yeah," she told the darkness. "Well, at least they didn't gag me." She tested her legs by trying to stand, but felt tape wrapped tightly around her ankles.

"You're not making this easy, if you're watching," she said. The absolute silence that surrounded her made her think that maybe they weren't watching. Maybe they had done exactly what they said they would do.

• • •

"Why do you want to study with me, anyway, girl?" Old Man Pardee glared at her, his bushy eyebrows forming a glowering line above his dark brown eyes. "Aren't your fancy teachers in the city good enough for you? Have you learned everything they can teach you? Or do you think you can come back here with your big city airs and show us pore ol' mountain folk how to work real magic?"

Whatever Aralathienne was expecting when she left Raleigh — where she'd gone off to college, where she'd Awakened and where she'd been recruited by the Mysterium — to return home to the Blue Ridge Mountains in search of the magic of the hills and hollers, she never thought she'd have to plead her case to such a hard man.

"I want to learn the magic of my home," she had told him honestly, "and I want to learn it from the best." She waited to see if the old conjure man would cut her off. When he didn't, she took a deep breath and added, "And you're the best, is what I hear."

• • •

She shivered suddenly and her surroundings rushed to the fore. It was more than dark and cold, it was damp, and she felt that it was growing damper — but not as if it were raining.

"The water level's rising," she thought and felt a wave of panic rush through her body, settling in just above her gut which had somehow risen up to surround her heart.

"First things first," she told herself as she started working her wrists back and forth within the ropes that bound them. At first, she had trouble, for her fingertips were numb and stiff. After what seemed like eons, she felt the ropes loosen and give. She shook them from her wrists and swiftly turned to use her newly freed hands to remove the tape from her legs, which had also gone to sleep from lack of movement.

She stood up, intending to stretch her legs and restore some flexibility to them, but a sharp crack to the top of her head stopped her before she could fully straighten her body.

"Ahhh—shit!"

It was a tunnel after all. Her first instincts were right. And not a very tall tunnel either. After experimenting, she found that her best course of action was to travel on hands and knees, although the rough stones and dirt of the tunnel floor — no, the rough wet stones and ever moistening mud of the tunnel floor — would wreak havoc on her knees as well as on the palms of her hands.

Again, she strained to see through the darkness, but her eyes wouldn't adjust.

Damn it!

She suddenly remembered the salve Old Man Pardee had put on and around her eyes when she complained of a burning sensation she passed off as eyestrain. Almost immediately, she had grown very sleepy and had sunk into the worn but comfortable sofa in the front room of the old man's cabin, pulling a quilted coverlet over herself. She must have drifted off to sleep listening to the crackling of the fire in the hearth.

She'd woken up in the tunnel, and now the damn salve was keeping her from focusing properly, keeping her in the dark.

"Great, I can't use my eyes. I've got four senses left." A picture rose in her mind of a bloodhound sniffing its way out of the tunnel. She shook her head, trying to clear the image from her mind. "I'm not going to smell my way out of this."

A sound that she had been hearing all along suddenly clarified itself, revealing its nature to her as a steady trickle of water running into the tunnel from somewhere above.

"I'm under water," she whispered aloud, more to hear herself voice the words and crystallize her fear. "Underground and under water, and the water is breaking through." Again she fought a war with the panic inside her, pushing it aside with her

will. At least her magic had taught her that much, that she could focus her will and create results — among them, banishing negative emotions like fear.

"Let's move, legs!" she said, striking out in the direction she was already facing. "Standing still is a bad thing!"

A few minutes later, Aralathienne realized that she was literally going nowhere. Whatever the old man had done to her had confounded her sense of direction as well as temporarily (she hoped) blinded her.

"Now what?"

She sat back on her heels and forced herself to think, noticing, as she did so that the trickle of water now sounded more like a steady rush.

"Take stock," she told herself. Most of the magic she knew as a mage of the Path of Thyrsus and a member of the Mysterium depended either on seeing a target or having a direction. Here, she had neither.

"I came here to study the hoodoo tradition, old man!" she said, her voice defiant despite her misery in the growing damp. "You're not going to get rid of me this easily."

• • •

She tried to remember what she had learned from the old man so far. Despite his reluctance to take on a "city girl," as he called her, as a student, he'd showed her some of his books, including what he called his "book of remedies," a small, hand-bound book filled with crimped handwriting. The book contained recipes for poultices, instructions for curing diseases in animals and people by transferring the sickness into an object or an animal. Odd rhymes and fragments of ballads made up a good portion of the book, charms to use in all kinds of situations. Somehow, she'd expected more, and she said so. "These are too easy," she complained to Old Man Pardee after reading through one of the books in an afternoon.

He barely glanced at her as he continued carving down a length of cherry wood into what looked like a walking staff. "You'd be wise to larn what's in there, girlie," he snapped. "Someday your life could depend on that easy stuff."

• • •

"Great," she muttered, getting used to talking aloud to no one but herself. "What did I read that could possibly help me here?" She put her mind to work swiftly sorting through everything she could remember of the old man's books.

"I'm in a tunnel, under ground — no, make that under water — and I might as well be under the ocean for all the good knowing that will do me." She made herself relax and clear her mind. Fragments of verses from ballads that had been copied into the old man's book flowed through her mind like water. She cast them all aside — most of the ballads ended badly. One song remained, distinctive because of its cheerfulness. Now, she felt it might hold the key to her release, for it spoke of being underground.

Gone the iron touch of cold, winter time and frost time
Seedlings working through the mould, now wake up for lost time

The words were from a song called "The Flower Carol" and she remembered her first night with the old man. His son, visiting from the next holler, had brought his guitar and sang after supper. The old man accompanied him on banjo. It was the first inkling she had that she had chosen right by coming back to the mountains to study the magic of the hills. She remembered that song because of its tune, the same tune as the Christmas carol about King Wenceslas.

"It's now or never," she murmured, and recited the words. The rhyming sounds hung in the air, devoid of power. But thinking back on the evening when Lyle Pardee had sung the song, she remembered feeling something stir in the back of her head, something from the world that used to be — the Supernal World, her Atlantean masters had called it.

"It's a song," she said to the darkness. "It needs the music."

• • •

The old man had grunted his appreciation when she perked up at the song, recognizing the tune. "So, you've heard this afore," he said. She'd nodded. "The tune, we used to sing it at Christmas." He'd shrugged. "It figures," he muttered while Lyle checked the tuning of his guitar before starting another song. "It's the tune that carries the meaning," he said.

• • •

She's heard that pagan rituals had survived the ages of persecution by disguising themselves as Christmas carols or ballads, but she'd always assumed that the words were hiding. Maybe the tunes hid as well, and maybe they conveyed the power as much or more than the words.

Her throat felt scratchy but she turned her focus inward, steadying her voice, then sang the lyrics about the seedlings. She felt power build up around her, but not enough.

The power of three, she remembered, and repeated the couplet twice more. As her voice died into the silence that surrounded her, she realized she could hear slight movements around her.

Seedlings working through the mould.

They would grow in the direction of the surface, pushing their way to the light. She let her hearing guide her, following the soft shuffling of earth, sounds she knew were amplified by the power in the air around her. She felt the earthy ceiling inches above her head and touched tiny tendrils — roots — that moved under her hand.

Now she had a purpose. She began crawling again, but this time casting about with her hands, feeling the tunnel above her head for the telltale root tips. All she had to do was use her hands and her ears to follow the pattern of their growth, for they were leading her to safety.

She crawled quickly, ever mindful of the sound of water growing steadily louder, but definitely behind her — and below her. She was rising as she followed the root path overhead. The tunnel was set on an upward incline and she was keeping ahead of the water, and would do so as long as she could remember the right things to say or sing or do at the right time.

Without warning, she found that her hand could no longer touch the ceiling. The tunnel had grown bigger from ground to ceiling and she could no longer find the path the magicked roots had taken.

"Damn," she cursed softly. "Now what?"

She thought back to the songs she'd heard that night. After the flower song, Lyle had given them another carol, this one called "The May Day Carol." She didn't remember this song as well as the other, but part of a verse stuck in her head.

A branch of May I will bring you, my love,
Here at your door I stand
It's nothing but a sprout, but it's well budded out…

"I'm looking for a branch," she said, and sang the verse as she remembered it. This time, she felt that she need sing the words only once. When she finished, she tried listening beyond the sound of the water for any sign that "something" had happened. For a minute or two, she couldn't make out any other sounds, just the water following her and coming closer as the rush became a roar of sound. "I've got to step up the pace," she said.

Then she heard it, a soft sighing breeze blowing toward her from one side of the tunnel, but not the other, a breeze that carried with it the faintest memory of the tune she'd just sang. "The tunnel branches," she observed. "And I'm taking the branch that leads to the air."

Although she could stand up in this part of the tunnel, she felt little relief even though her knees no longer had to take the brunt of her journey. Shakily, she traversed the tunnel from side to side until she found where it split in the middle, one branch a little cooler and dryer than the other one, which appeared to arc downward from the sound of the water that now seemed to come from that direction as well.

She noticed that her hands could touch both walls without stretching her arms out. The tunnel was narrowing. Soon she felt the ceiling press on the top of her head and had to stoop lower and lower until she was crawling again, with the tunnel closing in on all sides. If this continued, the passage would soon be too narrow for her to navigate. She kept going, even when crawling gave way to dragging herself along on her belly, pushing her body with toes that she could barely feel while she dug her fingers into the tunnel floor, trying to find enough purchase to pull herself forward. She felt the tears fill her eyes and trickle down her face as she came to a halt, unable to move further forward or, as she discovered, backward.

"No," she whispered, horrified as she heard the sound turn into a sob. "Not like this!"

Panicked, she tried to find a song that would fit her situation. Nothing Lyle had sung that night seemed to apply. Or if any of his song choices did, she couldn't bring them to mind.

• • •

"There's more than cures for sick horses and babes in this book," Old Man Pardee told her. "You keep readin'. There's charms to protect you from the thoughts of evil men, there's words to conjure something from practically nothin', if you know how to read it right.

• • •

"I need a way through," she said. "I need something I can use as an anchor to pull me forward."

A charm from the book scratched the surface of her consciousness and she threw as much magical energy as she could into its three-fold recitation.

Earth above me, earth below me, wood before me, bring me home.

The charm was intended to help someone who was lost find his way to a familiar place. She hoped it would work for her now. She repeated the phrase twice more and wept with relief as she felt her power take form.

She stretched her hands out in front of her as far as possible, groping on the ground and on the sides of the tunnel until finally, just at the edge of her fingertips, she brushed against what felt like a heavy root that had looped upon itself, forming nothing so much as a hand hold. With the ferocity of a drowning person — which, she reminded herself, she might be in the next few minutes — she grabbed hold of the root and pulled herself a few more feet through the tunnel. She could feel the walls scrape the exposed parts of her arms and legs and pull at her hair, but somehow, with the help of the twig bundles, she made it through what had been a bottleneck.

"Something from practically nothing," she repeated, echoing the old man's words. A rush of confidence flowed through her. She just might survive this after all.

She felt the cave open out around her at least somewhat, but she had little strength to do anything other than just lie on the tunnel floor, relishing the feeling of space around her.

Despite her sense of urgency, she must have fallen asleep, or gone unconscious from exhaustion, for the next thing she knew, she was gasping for breath as water filled her nostrils and mouth. Hurriedly she stood up to get away from the water that reached her ankles even as she stretched to her full height. Resolutely, she moved forward in the direction she last remembered going. She took only a few steps before she found a wall.

Quickly, she felt for her surroundings and encountered walls in all directions. Her tunnel had led her to what was apparently a circular chamber with no exits — not even the way she had come, for that low, narrow opening was now the conduit for a flood of water.

A sudden calmness came over her as she felt the water rise up past her ankles. The words came unbidden to her mind:

I wish I was some little sparrow,
That I had wings and I could fly…

And then she knew that the next part of the verse must be her own for the magic of the hills to take effect.

I'd rise above all pain and sorrow,
And count the stars up in the sky.

She sang the verse three times, each time feeling the Mana coalesce in the air around her, gathering at her back like feathery soft wings of crackling energy.

There's no place to go but up, she knew, and lifted both hands in the air in a gesture reminiscent of both reaching and surrender. She felt a rush of air gather under her energy wings and lift her upward, even as the lapping water tried one last time to claim hold of her for itself.

Taking a deep breath, she willed herself higher, rising through the hold in the earth until she felt herself break through a barrier of some sort, or perhaps she just pushed through the opening of the tunnel into the world outside, rising through some sort of hole in the earth. She stood up, still in darkness, surrounded by sounds of the night, and moved away from the hole. Then her legs gave out and she slumped to the ground, lying on what felt like thick clumps of soft grass and staring up at a sky filled with stars of a magnitude impossible to see against the glaring lights of the city she used to call her home.

She blinked her eyes a few times, to make sure that she was really seeing the stars, a thin crescent moon and, here and there, the looming blackness of the surrounding trees.

She decided she would allow herself to sleep for a few minutes on the surface of the earth, in her grassy bed. As she shut her eyes, other sounds crept into her awareness: the rustle of small creatures darting about through the grass, the nearly deafening chorus of cicadas answered by the tiny croakers in a nearby pond. Then she heard footsteps approaching hastily. Two of them.

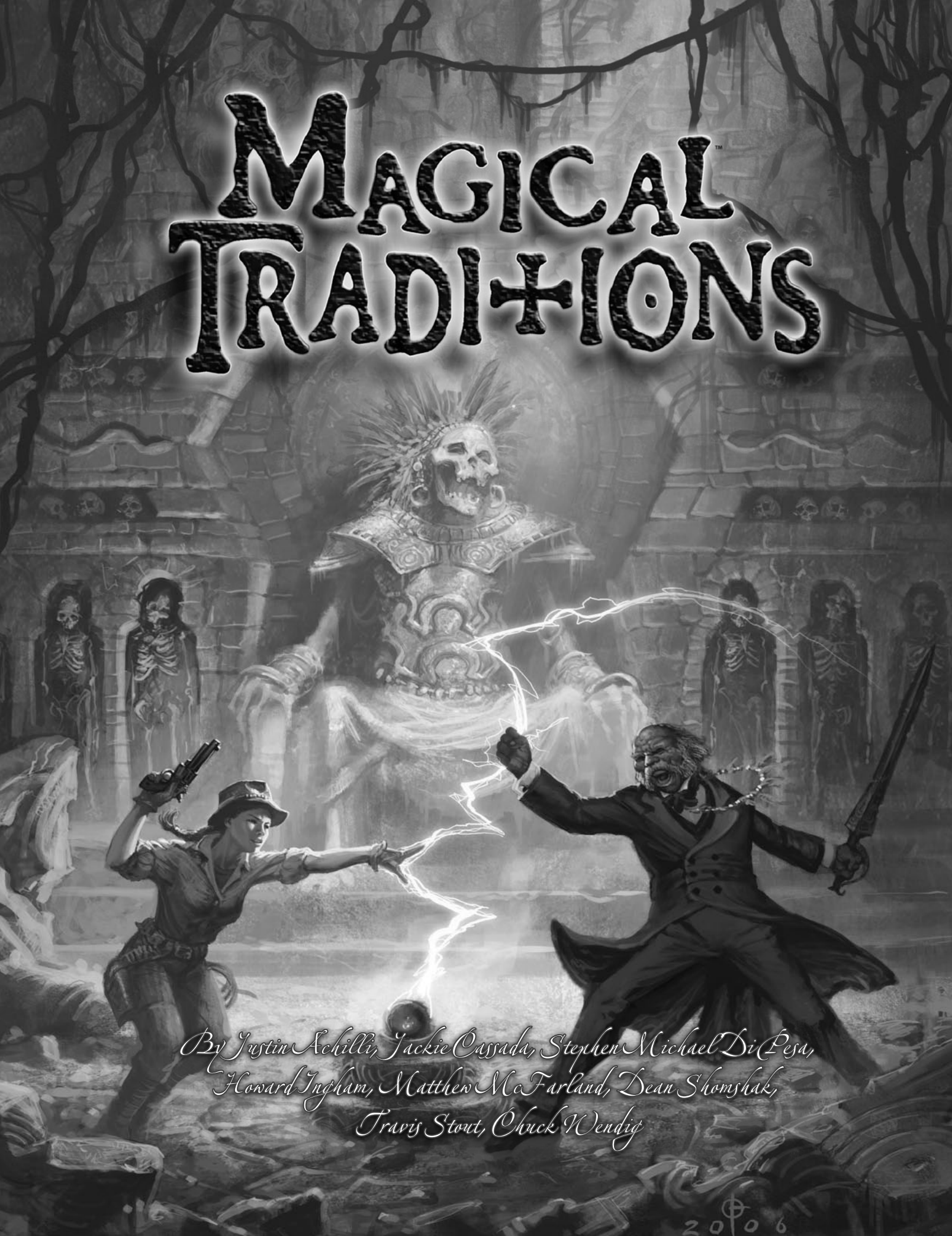
She was sitting up in the clearing when Old Man Pardee and Lyle came into sight, a lantern leading them straight to her. "So, you made it," the old man said. "I reckoned you might, if you could get over yourself long enough to work some real magic."

"Daddy and I were thinkin'," Lyle said in his slow, thoughtful voice. "You might want to learn the guitar or maybe the banjo. You got a right pretty voice and we can always use a third harmony in some of our songs."

She nodded, "I'm thinking I'd like to be called Sparrow from now on," she said knowing at last that she had come home to stay.

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Magical Traditions™



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COMING NEXT FOR MAGE

Astral Realms

"We all contain worlds within us. True worlds, full of all the greatness and magnificence and terror that could not be contained in any lesser shell."

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Magical Traditions™

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INTRODUCTION

This book reveals how real-world occult traditions have actual relevance to Awakened magic. In the World of Darkness, magic's not all just about Atlantis, although that culture's magical mythos secretly informs many mortal belief systems. Although Sleepers can't cast magic, that doesn't stop some of them from thinking that they can. Throughout human history, the occult has captured the minds of many, from superstitious peasants to erudite philosophers. Something keeps them coming back for more, even though the promised benefits of magic don't pan out. Their souls are stirred by something that resides within the occult, something either absent or more elusive in other areas of mortal knowledge. That something is the Supernal.

While Sleepers are drawn to create and build upon occult traditions, their reward isn't the power to smite their enemies with the fire of heaven; it's the feeling in their souls that the world is not utterly meaningless. For mages, however, the Supernal connection these traditions hold offers real power. If they can set aside their snickering condescension of these practices and see past the guises these often-irrational traditions wear, they might catch a glimpse of something Supernal that they wouldn't otherwise witness from their lofty Watchtowers.

The Atlanteans knew more of the truth of magic than any other culture that has risen or fallen since their time. Their system is ontologically privileged, but it isn't complete, despite what their most fervent modern followers believe. While the eternal truths of the Supernal World do not change, not all Supernal truths are eternal — there is change even in the higher, perfected world. The modern day orders do believe, for the most part, that if the pieces of truth scattered throughout the world could be unearthed, they could be combined with Atlantean wisdom to create an authentic picture of the heavens. Some say that this is what the Celestial Ladder was — not a physical stairway but a mosaic built from secrets.

As Above, So Below

All mages know there is a nigh-impermeable barrier between the Fallen and Supernal Worlds and that, short of a rare Awakening (and spells, of course), things just don't cross that barrier. This metaphysical condition illustrates the tragic circumstances of modern man and the predicament of mages — but it's not *exactly* true. There are always exceptions. While no one can *bodily* cross the Abyss into the Supernal World (and vice versa — Exarchs and Oracles cannot bodily come down to the Fallen World), and no one can project one's mind or soul there — the Fallen World is conceived by mages as a cage, after all — it is possible for Supernal *phenomena* to drift down into the Fallen World. "Possible" here means that it occurs more often than even mages usually suspect. In other words, even though the shattering of the Celestial Ladder occurred long ago, not all fragments of the Supernal come from ancient times.

The Atlantean orders teach that any fragment of Supernal truth that a Sleeper occult tradition might hold is a legacy from pre-diluvial times. It is a kernel of Atlantean wisdom carried down through time. And this is often true — but not the whole truth. Not all Supernal truths are from days of yore — new truths can enter the world at any time, and become the basis of a new occult tradition.

One way to phrase the distinction: Atlantean wisdom holds the most complete *understanding* of the Supernal, but the actual *phenomena* (and *experience*) of the Supernal can be contemporary or from any historical era. Mages who recognize this distinction seek Atlantean wisdom as a means of *making sense* of Supernal fragments, but it's not the only key to *discovering* them. Further, Atlantean praxis might not hold all the answers. It can shine a light on many truths, but some might best be illuminated by the light of a magical tradition — indeed, a Sleeper magical tradition might actually hold more wisdom about a particular Supernal phenomenon that all the libraries of Atlantis. This is why certain iconoclastic mages value magical traditions — and why the more orthodox abhor them.

Supernal phenomena — entities, objects, thoughts, words, deeds, etc. — that occurs in the Supernal World can, for mysterious reasons, create an "echo" that travels to the Fallen World. But here's the key: they almost never appear in the Fallen World as what they really are. They're masked. They become metaphors for themselves. Their forms, contents and even meanings appear different,

distorted — but they remain charged with some sense of their original Supernal essence.

For example: An angelic choir in the Aether sings. The sound echoes down through the Abyss and into the Fallen World. (Why? No one, except perhaps a rare archmaster, knows why this one sound makes it through and countless other don't.) But it no longer appears as a sound. It might instead appear as the seemingly random and momentary manner in which a ray of light breaks through a cloud, illuminating the morning dew in such a way that a mortal viewer "hears" music in his soul. Then it's gone. Anyone who didn't see it *at that moment* will never be graced with it. However, an artist who witnessed it might try to convey it by painting a picture or composing a poem. How well this secondary chronicle of the Supernal-inspired moment works to convey the mystical experience depends on the skill of the artist and some readiness within his audience; but it's a pale imitation at best. Such Supernal moments aren't always uplifting — they can be sublime, in the sense of overwhelming awe, or in the Lovecraftian sense, especially if a bit of the Abyss comes with them.

Some Supernal phenomena, however, can come in the form of *symbols* or *ideas*. Symbols are inexhaustible and can't be reduced to a single particular meaning within a given cultural matrix — they always mean something greater. But what? It's this slipperiness, this evasiveness and inexhaustibility, that is a hallmark of the Supernal: the *signifier* points to a *signified* that exists in a higher world, a larger frame of reference than an un-Awakened mortal mind can conceive.

This is why occult magical traditions are important — they provide useful clues for mages that allow them to grasp these stray Supernal ideas. It's not that the occult necessarily has more Supernal fragments than other area of human life, but it does have more transparency, allowing those with a trained eye to look past the masks and veils that cloak the true Supernal phenomena. Further, mortal occultists do seem more attuned to recognizing these things, and so they tend to enshrine them in such a way that they aren't lost over time.

The magical traditions in this book don't describe what their Supernal signifiers actually signify — that's the Mystery. They might hint at some possible answers, but they cannot know the true reality. Still, using the signifiers within a magical tradition provides magical benefit, even if the mage can't state exactly what they point to; his understanding of the elusive Supernal World is still expanded.

The Traditions

This book provides a sampling of certain occult traditions from around the world, from well-known traditions like Kabbalah to the more obscure, like Appalachian hoodoo. Each section describes the tradition's history and practices, with sample rotes that mage characters can learn, and storytelling hints, including optional rules for alternative forms of magic. This book isn't meant to be exhaustive; it's a sampler that you can use to adapt other traditions for use in your chronicle. Chapter Five gives some hints on how to go about doing that with whatever tradition you want to incorporate.





CHAPTER ONE: SUPERNAL CORRESPONDENCES

"…and that is why Crow's feathers are black."

The young Mystagogue scratched at the days of stubble now sprouting from his narrow chin. "That's well and good, John, but you still haven't explained to me what, if anything, this has to do with the Supernal secrets that the Awakened of your tribe allegedly possessed. I'm looking for fact, not myth."

"You hear me, Quicksilver, but you don't listen, and that's why you won't understand." The Sleepwalker sighed softly. "Myth and fact are reflections of one another; where gods walk, lies are truth and truths become fiction. Can't you see that?"

"Seriously, John, this is some 'wise old Indian' bullshit you're trying to sell me." Quicksilver shook his head and pointed to the ancient pictograms adorning the rough stone. "These markings are unknown to anyone outside of you, the other Sleepwalkers who live in town and, now, me. I need to know what secrets they conceal."

John smiled a bit. "And I'm trying to tell you, just like I tried to tell your teacher when she came here, 35 years ago."

"I didn't come here for stories; I came for the power of this place…"

From his seat, the Sleepwalker gestured reverently to the paintings, staring hard into the mage's eyes. "These stories are its power."

His disciples said to him: "When will the Kingdom come?" Jesus said: "It will not be a matter of saying, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is.' Rather the Kingdom of the Father is spread out upon the earth, and men do not see it."

— *Gospel of Thomas* (113)

The world as we know it is a lie; mages have understood this for millennia. The world as it is meant to be exists beyond the vast and shadowy nightmare of the Abyss, forever severed from the damaged, lesser cosmos in which the majority of humanity is condemned to dwell. There are those among the Awakened who believe that there is no way home, that there never was and never could be after the calamity of the Fall; that, save for a journey of spirit by which some small shard of the Supernal's magnificence accompanies a soul back to this plane, there are no ties left that connect this world to the higher realms. Nothing could be further from the truth, however.

The fact of the matter is that aspects of the Supernal Realms are still present in the Fallen World, though their influence is felt in much subtler and more rarified ways than most people, Sleeper or Awakened, can readily identify. Perhaps the medium most abundantly blessed with Supernal wisdom — the occult beliefs of a thousand cultures throughout history, even unto modern times — allow *all* human souls to glimpse the higher worlds in some small way and to connect to those worlds in a meaningful fashion. These traditions, concealing within them as they do a measure of fundamental truth, often become the core tenets of cultures, religions and the like, as the practice of them makes people feel that they are, in some small way, doing something *right*, something important. Cut off from the Supernal in almost every way that matters, humans reach for the barest fragments of otherworldly lore and hold onto them tightly, their spirits aware on some instinctual level that these ideals bring them closer to the world as it is meant to be.

These shreds of genuine, higher reality are small and often difficult to find, even for practiced seekers, but they are not rare. The Realms Supernal still hold a deep sympathy with the Fallen World, a tie that has not yet been severed by the machinations of the Exarchs or the terrible properties of the Abyss. Those determined to uncover the secrets of the higher worlds hidden within the recesses of mundane lore need only look so far as those beliefs that still encompass the possibility of magic and miracles; that which does not deny what others consider to be impossible but, rather, embraces such knowledge. It is in these places that the wisdom of the Supernal collects, shaping and being shaped by the beliefs and practices of countless cultures, moving down through the ages, and awaiting those souls perceptive enough to glimpse such truths and know them for what they are.

Just to be Clear

This chapter, and indeed *every* chapter in this book, is not intended to encompass literal truths about Atlantis or the Realms Supernal. Rather, it illustrates the *symbolic* and *metaphorical* realities of these times and places, echoing down through time, place and the barriers between worlds. Even when something here is stated in what seems to be a plain, forthright, indisputable manner, understand that it's not a mandate, but instead a suggestion.

Further, nothing in this book is meant to undermine or invalidate the beliefs that it explores. Its purpose is neither to show that the Atlantean myth is absolutely true or that the beliefs held by Sleeper cultures are absolutely false. Rather, the reality is to be found in some nebulous middle ground that can be freely adjusted, one way or the other to suit the needs of your game.

The history of the Awakened and the legends surrounding the realms are full of "maybes" and are very rarely adequately served by "yes" or "no." The wisdom of the Supernal isn't easily confined within something so narrow as fact, which, by definition, denies possibility. Each idea given in this book is an opportunity, rather than a framework designed to tie you down and limit your options. Use what you like and discard the rest. If you happen to decide that a given occult tradition encapsulates an objective Supernal truth, then that's entirely appropriate. Conversely, if you opt to use this book as a source of false paths and bunk intended to lead the Awakened astray, that's just fine, too.

The Descent of Wisdom

The perfect wisdom of the Supernal descends through space, time and, indeed, planes of existence, each individual fragment of lore becoming ever more diluted and flawed as ages turn and knowledge passes from master to student, generation after generation. Teachers of the ancient lore of Atlantis have used many different analogies for the way in which the years have bastardized its secrets, though the most common by far are those that equate such esoteric learning to light, shining down from the perfected world, both in ages past and in modern times.

As time marches ever onward, the light that radiates from the Realms Supernal, which can be thought of like sunlight, dims and fades as it passes through various media. The long dark of the Abyss obscures the sublime light, as though behind clouds, while the layers of mystery and secrecy necessary to protecting such lore from the Sleeping world act like a prism, refracting illumination into many distinct (and scattered) components. As the knowledge is handed down from teacher to apprentice, one moves further away from even this faded, broken light, until at last it is visible only as a faint glimmer, beheld from the depths of shadow. For Sleepers, this is as much of the Supernal as most of them will ever touch and, indeed, most of them choose instead to turn away from even this dim glow, preferring the unbroken monotony of darkness to the intimation that there exists something more than the benighted world into which they were born.

The Awakened, however, have the power to choose to move toward that light, to step out of shadow and to behold the shattered rays cast by the prism itself. For most, this is enough, and there are those mages that spend the entirety of their lives piecing those disparate shards of illumination back together. Others, however, seek to look upon the source, to pass back further still, beyond the prism itself, and to stand outside, beneath the thin light of a stormy sky, there to look upward and wonder what, truly, lies beyond the roiling tempest overhead. Of these brave – and perhaps foolhardy – souls, most achieve little, while no few are consumed by their quests, and still others vanish, becoming as much mysteries of the ages as the knowledge that they so desperately seek.

So, what of those that desire to gaze upon Supernal truth and to grow wise by it? A better question might be to ask what those that have dwelt all of their lives under a bleak and stormy sky would do if a single ray of sunlight were to break through the clouds. Even were they to gaze upon it, in its naked and unadulterated splendor, all they'd be apt to accomplish is to lose their sight to something that their experiences have in no way prepared them to behold. Wiser by far are those that toil in the half-dark before the prism, arduously reassembling a thousand disparate luminous rays and seeking thereby to know the substance of what the light *might have been* before it was diminished, refracted and scattered in shadow.

But how do the Awakened pick apart the weave of innumerable lies, to find each grain of genuine substance? There is no simple answer, as the Supernal is both so well-hidden and so deeply ingrained in the flawed realities that we take for granted that it can at times seem impossible to know the light from the shadow-play that it casts upon the walls. Do the Norse runes, for example, conceal Supernal wisdom, or are they merely the product of a logical progression of cultural and religious influences, coupled with the circumstances of a given people's lifestyle and habitat? What about the dualistic beliefs of the Gnostics? Or, for that matter, what about the modern ideas of UFOs, psychic phenomena, and globe-spanning conspiracies bent on world domination? Are secrets of the higher worlds scattered in these places and, if so, what means do the Awakened have at their disposal to sort truth from deception?

First, it may be best to figure out how and why these miniscule fragments of higher realities actually manage to survive within the Fallen World. Naturally, Sleepers must somehow be responsible for preserving and propounding most of the lore in which Supernal truth is concealed, as the Awakened are nowhere near numerous enough to sustain these mythologies and legends on their own. How is it, then, that mundane human beings with no sense for the elusive secrets of the perfected realms somehow instinctively gravitate toward these ideals and pass them down, generation upon generation? The likeliest explanation is that the metaphysical "substance" of these kernels of Supernal wisdom is so powerful and compelling unto itself that legend aggregates around them. As these mythologies change with the times, the knowledge at the center remains untouched, passing down in a form fundamentally unaltered from the first moment that it descended to the Fallen World. In a way, then, these misdirections serve to protect the Supernal lore from total degradation, perhaps into something dangerously unlike its original form, allowing it to be gleaned by those with the understanding and determination needed to see through the accumulated detritus of millennia.

These echoes of the Supernal survive amongst Sleepers precisely because they *are* echoes of the Supernal: the most meaningful realities with which those burdened by the Sleeping Curse can connect, even if only in a very small way. Somehow, on a level so deep that it is an ill-understood

instinct to the Sleeping soul itself, individuals, groups and whole societies grasp the knowledge that this lore is important; more so than any of the profane realities wholly native to the Fallen World. Those touched by such wisdom can feel, in some way too subtle to properly articulate and usually only for the briefest of instants, that existence is not meaningless, and that striving for harmony with the perfected world truly can have a positive impact upon humanity as a whole.

For mages, Supernal truth is something more substantial and powerful than any "mere" sense of the unseen balance of the realms. The Awakened have the ability to glean actual, functional insights that can improve their capacity for calling upon the magics of a higher world and manipulating this one thereby. While these glimpses aren't going to, for example, improve their ability to throw fire from their fingertips or to hold audience with strange and forgotten gods, they might just reveal subtle variations in the tapestry of creation that allow for phenomena just a little bit astray of what is expected. By deciphering the cultural traditions (and the Supernal fragments that they conceal), the Awakened can behold something that ties them, in a real and often quantifiable way, to the higher realms. These connections reveal the hidden nuances of the Realms Supernal, motes of wisdom that allow for unexpected exceptions to the laws that govern the Fallen World, suborning them to a superior reality.

And the descent of wisdom is perpetual. Even now, spirits call to one another in the Primal Wild, their cries echoing down, refracted by the Abyss to be perceived by mortals through different senses: as the momentary glimpse of a majestic eagle wheeling over untamed woods.

Fumbling in the Dark

While this book is intended primarily for the Awakened, it can also be used to illustrate the ways in which Supernal knowledge is disseminated throughout the Fallen World, even into the hands of those living under the yoke of the Sleeping Curse. While Sleepers may never be able to realize the cosmic secrets that can lead back to the eternal realms that lie on the far side of the awesome gulf of the Abyss, they *can*, potentially, assimilate and even make use of these hidden, "higher" laws of the universe.

Perhaps it is that the low magic and psychic phenomena practiced by ordinary mortals (such as those found in **World of Darkness: Second Sight**) are the result of these "Supernal loopholes" in an otherwise mundane world. Then again, perhaps not: there are few that have studied such phenomena extensively enough to be considered authorities on the subject. Of course, such diluted echoes need not even be anything so easily quantified and overt (relatively speaking); while an unscrupulous man in Haiti enslaves the living in a half-death using only a powder concocted precisely according to a recipe handed down from father to son, children in an inner city neighborhood ward off an unknown horror using a nonsensical nursery rhyme. Those that dig deeply enough may very well discover lore filtered down from the Supernal into the Fallen World.

Perhaps the most important thing to keep in mind in chronicles involving Sleepers delving into Supernal mysteries is the fact that, no matter how much they learn, so long as they remain Asleep, they'll never really be able to do much of genuine substance with the knowledge that they gain. This, however, can be a great benefit to the stories that your group tells, as otherwise ordinary men and women scratch the surface of timeless otherworldly secrets, uncovering lore lost since the Fall. What do they do with such information? Who can they trust with it? Can they even trust *themselves* with such potent secrets, the long-hidden enigmas of creation itself? Such chronicles can explore themes of ancient conspiracy, as well as life-altering knowledge and the cost of uncovering it.

To put it another way: imagine the impact upon the life of a committed atheist, were he to unwittingly uncover definitive proof of the existence of the divine. How might such information change his life? Now, what happens when he suddenly develops enemies that he never asked for on account of a truth that he never wanted? How did they discover what he learned? Why are they hunting him? What do they have to gain by taking the knowledge from him (or, perhaps, by silencing it forever?) This is the level of disruption that a revelation of Supernal wisdom should often engender in the life of a Sleeper.

Demons of Pandemonium whisper dark secrets, which are felt in the sting of a lover's bite and in the aroma the wafts from an old and exquisite bottle of wine in the instant it is first opened. These phenomena exist for but a moment in most cases and are then gone forever, but some fragments linger. And, even in the case of those echoes that vanish after but a moment, the Awakened can, if they have the good fortune to perceive them and the wisdom to know them for what they are, glean powerful insights that might serve them in the Fallen World. While one might not be able to hold onto these brief fragments in any meaningful way, they can serve – for mages and Sleepers alike – to show that there exists a superior reality, one worth aspiring to.

The Myths and Realities of Atlantis

That Atlantis truly existed is an idea open to some debate among the mages of the modern day. Naturally, it stands to reason that there was once a tremendously magically proficient culture, from which the current awareness of the metaphysical laws of Awakened willwork descend, though whether it was a paradise of mystic discovery, laid low by the hubris of a few is not necessarily a matter of historical record. While it would be pointless to attempt to reconcile the legends with the reality, certain facts regarding the ancient empire of the Awakened stand out and reveal truths of their own about the value of a unifying culture for mages, even if it might indeed be one that exists only in myth.

For the most part, the members of the so-called Diamond Orders, those supposedly directly descending from the cultural traditions of Atlantis itself, maintain that the ancient nation-state was, in fact, a real, historical place in the world as it was meant to be. While not all agree upon even this basic notion, it is at least widespread enough among them – and even among many willworkers of the Free Council, as well as Apostates and even Seers of the Throne – that it becomes a basic frame of reference for the majority of mages from around the world. In the end, this is really all that is necessary to make Atlantis as real as it needs to be. The moment that the majority of the members of a given culture, even a disparate and scattered culture such as the modern Awakened possess, cleave to a single broad interpretation of events, the interpretation becomes real enough to them as a frame of reference for the distinction between truth and fiction to become irrelevant.

It is exactly this sort of ambiguity upon which Supernal wisdom builds. If such knowledge were easily discerned as fact, there would be no impetus for humanity to search for it and to question its truth and reality. If the answers come easily then they are probably not worth having. Instead, Supernal secrets descend through the Abyss and so become cloaked in lies, misdirection and disbelief. It is *easy* to deny the lore to be found within the Supernal, and it is hard to accept that the world one knows to be true is, in fact, the deception. Peeling away the layers of the lie is supposed to be a difficult process. Were it not, there would be no inherent value in the pursuit of the otherworldly wisdom to be discovered thereby.

The Case for Atlantis

From a Storytelling perspective, Atlantis can be a genuinely good thing. It creates a unifying "meta-mythology" for the game, granting cohesion to the innumerable other mystical practices, throughout time and the world over, offering glimpses of the Supernal truths concealed, deliberately or otherwise, within those systems of belief. Of course, this is not to say that the Atlanteans were possessed of a comprehensive understanding of the fundamental magical axioms of existence. If they were, it's doubtful, for instance, that the willworkers who ascended the Ladder to Heaven to become the Exarchs would have even attempted their gambit, given the distinct possibility of the total destruction of *everything*, their selves included. Likewise, if the Atlanteans possessed a complete blueprint for universal magical truth, then the Oracles probably wouldn't have to sit back and allow knowledge of the Realms Supernal to filter its way down to the Fallen World in hidden and, often, bastardized forms.

"While this is all well and good, however, what does Atlantis *do for my game*?"

It's certainly a reasonable question to ask, and not one that can be adequately addressed by a single answer. Perhaps it is best to begin by thinking of Atlantis, whether as an actual historical nation-state, a vague ideal, or something in-between, as a foundation upon which your **Mage: The Awakening** chronicle can be built. Viewed in such a light, Atlantis becomes the basic concept that informs the experience of all Awakened magic everywhere. This is definitely a useful tool for a Storyteller, since the process of fitting round pegs into square holes, so to speak, need be no more time-consuming, complex or painful than the needs of your chronicle dictate. Eventually, you can just have characters discover the common ground that unites disparate practices with ancient Supernal lore.

While you don't want to make things *too* convenient, lest all of the conflicts and contradictions that make for a compelling setting – and for compelling disputes between characters – vanish, you *can* show the characters that there are pieces which do, in fact, fit together. They may not have all, or even most, of the pieces of the

Mad Insight

It is often said that the mad have wisdom, that they possess a certain awareness of subtler truths of the world and that these insights are more a curse than a blessing. What would become of an individual "gifted" with too much understanding of the Supernal realities interspersed throughout the Fallen World, especially if that person was a Sleeper, or a mage with no formal training in the ancient lore of the higher realms?

Many Awakened thus afflicted become Banishers. Unable to cope with the truths that they cannot deny and yet so desperately wish to, they simply retreat into a personal reality in which magic is evil and must be erased, so that they need no longer be reminded of the terrible *wrongness* of the world that they've always taken for granted. These pitiable souls must often be put down, thus threatening the continuation of the Supernal lore that they possess. Some wiser and more farseeing (and, more often than not, extremely powerful) mages manage to find more humane ways of neutralizing the threat represented by these broken Awakened, and eventually learn to glean Supernal insights from them, but this is rare. The Realms Supernal are the nature of the world as it is *meant* to be, which is far from the same thing as saying that those realms are always kind to those that behold their secrets.

As to the Sleepers that look upon even the smallest measure of the undiluted splendor of the Supernal, no few became visionaries, prophets and leaders, though their insights are typically valued only by a handful during their lifetimes. These individuals, dubiously "blessed" with understanding that others simply do not understand, become driven by the revelations that have been bestowed upon them. In time, though, some of these people become the unwitting vehicles for great change in the Fallen World, as the fragments that they perceive and propound acquire momentum in the hearts and minds of others, and become the foundations on which religions, ideologies and other social movements are built. Most of these sad souls, however, come to fates perhaps worse still than even the Banishers. Incapable of processing what they now know to be true, they either desperately cling to the Supernal knowledge that they possess or shove it away. In either case, though, such madmen might be the only earthly beings with any understanding at all of a given Supernal echo, lore that may die with them if not carefully studied by those with the training needed to assimilate such learning.



puzzle, but the scant handful of fragments that they've managed to assemble do seem to point at an unimaginably huge and elaborate design, the likes of which no human mind, or collection of human minds, could ever truly comprehend.

Ultimately, it's up to you and the needs of the story that you're trying to tell as to whether or not Atlantis was real and, if so, the degree to which it was real (keeping in mind the fact that the unified world likely included within its fundamental makeup the possibility of differing degrees of reality). "Atlantis" might be a code for a Supernal nexus, a place where all the realms meet. This might have been understood by mages through the most apt metaphor available to them in ancient times: the polis. Then again, it might have been a place that one could have pointed at on a map, and whose high towers one might have beheld from miles away, while sailing upon the waves. But, true or false, Atlantis, even if only as an ideal, may well have something to offer your group, even if it doesn't always seem so on the surface.

Where Is Supernal Lore Hidden?

The secrets of the higher world and of lost Atlantis are concealed anywhere that your game needs them to be. Obviously, the ubiquitous flood myths of countless cultures are one extreme example, but others certainly exist, and can be readily adapted to the history and legends of the culture that came closest to truly mastering the power of Awakened magic. Perhaps the mythic figure of Coyote – or another trickster deity – holds hidden Atlantean correspondences in your game, or the lost rites of the cult of Mithras conceals Supernal revelations in their symbols. Not all such lore need be ancient (from a Sleeper perspective, anyway): newer myths can also conceal timeless truths, as Atlantean legend, woven into the subtle threads of the tapestry of ages gradually resurfaces. Perhaps the Bermuda Triangle is the result of the last remaining terrestrial echoes of the site at which Atlantis plunged below the waves, or the deepest mysteries of the Theosophists actually conceal otherworldly lore.

Most important to remember is that Supernal knowledge isn't merely secreted away in places and hidden in things; far more often, in fact, it is interspersed throughout ideas and concepts, in modes of thought and in the most esoteric tenets of ideologies. Too rarified by far to easily exist in any physical medium in the Fallen World, these enigmas fall from the higher worlds like a mist, curling gently upon the winds and settling in the most unexpected places. Such lore is much likelier to be found in contemplation of the nuances of a medieval Christian heresy than it is to be inscribed upon the walls of a temple lost under the sands of the Sahara. To give a material reflection to this wisdom is to further degrade it and to attempt to fix in form that must, of necessity, be simultaneously as protean as it is unchanging and eternal.

Of course, all of this begs the question of why the Oracles, if indeed they exist and desire for humanity to aspire toward the perfection of the Supernal, have made it so difficult for those stranded in the Fallen World to discover this lofty knowledge. While any speculation on the will and intentions of the Oracles will likely forever remain just that, unsupported by any concrete facts, it is probable that the deliberate interference of the Exarchs factors heavily into the degree to which the lore of the higher worlds is muddied and occluded. Further, the nature of the Fallen World itself, utterly alien to the Oracles (who have never truly experienced its realities firsthand), surely interferes inherently with the transmission of Supernal wisdom. Also, there almost certainly exists a higher order to the nature of magic itself, beyond the control or even influence of the Oracles; in the end, it might be that *no* human will, regardless of how enlightened, has anything at all to do with the transmission of Supernal echoes. All of these factors and more conspire to make the quest for the lore descending from the Watchtowers difficult and even perilous, which is, all told, probably how it should be.

Naturally, those Awakened entrenched in different occult traditions and who speculate upon the true nature of the cosmos tend to maintain that their respective beliefs hold more "Supernal truth" than many (or most, or even *all*) others, even if they've not yet discovered the entirety of such wisdom. This, however, is really nothing more than wishful thinking. Indeed, a number of occult traditions throughout the world and time have been utterly bereft of Supernal lore, and not necessarily on account of any inherent moral or spiritual failing of such practices, but rather because the higher realms disperse their blessings according to a design unfathomable to minds rooted in the realities of the Fallen World. As you develop such traditions for use in your game, you will, of course, have to determine which of them encapsulate true wisdom, and which are "merely" cultural phenomena (which makes them no less important than those that encompass Supernal knowledge, but instead simply less connected to the truths of those other realms). There exists also the possibility that some traditions embody both possibilities at the same time — they exist in a state of quantum uncertainty until an Awakened observer witnesses them.

Through all of this, however, keep in mind that prediluvial secrets are not the only possibilities encompassed by the Supernal – far from it, in fact. While mages resort to Atlantean learning to *make sense* of the lore of the higher realms, the Supernal is simultaneously a thing of the past, present and future as one. It is an eternally contemporary and protean ideal. Supernal phenomena are continually filtering down into the Fallen World, transcending the barriers of space, worlds and time, at a rate that most Awakened would consider stunning, were they to truly grasp the scope of such echoes.

Mythologies

For the purposes of this book, the term "mythologies" is used to reference any religious or mystical practices inherent to any culture which are intended to represent a cosmology and a moral and/or ethical bias; as far as the Atlanteans would have been concerned, Buddhism and Christianity are as much mythologies as primordial goddess cults and the classic Hellenic pantheon. All spiritual practices inherent to the Fallen World share a single distinction that, if the legends of Atlantis are true, the Atlantean beliefs simply could not encompass: faith. With the Celestial Ladder, the Awakened of that time were capable of enjoying converse – albeit infrequently, but certainly in a quantifiably real way – with whatever powers existed in the divine realm, thus allowing for a more objective, and inherently faithless, view of spiritual reality. The Atlanteans would likely thus consider all mythologies in the Fallen World to be equally flawed and inaccurate, but such is often the perspective of an overly-proud culture whose members believe themselves to possess a monopoly on universal truth.

Instead, it is probably more accurate to say that all mythologies offer equal opportunity for aspiration toward the realization of universal truth. With their intimate understanding of the way in which the cosmos actually works, the Atlanteans were, for the most part, bereft of many chances to enjoy personal spiritual growth in the pursuit of greater understanding. When a truth is known, it ends some portion of the worthwhile reflection and speculation in the world, and it was on account of such expansive lore that the Atlantean culture became arrogant and jaded. Furthermore, it takes great courage to admit that one knows little and is willing to delve into the mysteries of faith to learn more. Thus, those that pursue Supernal wisdom within the framework of Fallen mythologies are simultaneously far more humble and, in many ways, far more courageous than the people of latter-day Atlantis could have even aspired to be.

Supernal lore takes easily to mythological belief structures. Because so many of the tales of such structures are parables or fables, deliberately intended to convey deeper meanings on the truths of the universe and the proper path for a human soul to walk, both in this world and in the next, Supernal wisdom transmits easily through the medium of mythology. These stories also tend to explain the realities of the world in ways that go beyond simple fact; no scientific treatise will even be able to adequately explain the metaphysical reasons for why suffering exists, for instance, while mythological tales can handily answer such a conundrum, and often do so in ways that echo the understanding encompassed by the higher realms.

Paranormal Studies

Not all beliefs in the paranormal encapsulate a spiritual vision of the Fallen World. There are supernatural perspectives that say little about the divine and possess no inherent moral or ethical mandate. Instead, these systems of belief maintain that they simply *are*, and are reflective of a more accurate and encompassing view of reality than those espoused by the majority of modern humanity. Amoral metaphysical philosophies can also fall into this category. Note that these are distinct from left-handed spiritual practices, which are for the most part really just mythologies with inverted priorities. Many varieties of Satanism, for example, are not amoral belief systems, but instead deliberately *immoral* systems – according to a certain vision of the spiritual reality of the Fallen World, at any rate.

In older days, occult studies and mythologies were almost always inextricably interconnected, but changing times have resulted in many occult practices diverging from faiths and legends, and moving toward what each such practice considers to be a higher order of occluded fact. While the UFO phenomenon is one that is adhered to with a religious zeal by many of its advocates, for instance, it is, to many, a search for fact, not faith. Further, the mysteries that the quest for truth conceals in this instance lead to moral and spiritual growth only as ancillary factors to the inherent desire for greater knowledge. Or, to put it another way: even the most devout UFO enthusiasts, those that believe extraterrestrial life forms to have some deeper knowledge of the spiritual nature of the universe, still need to discover who and what such beings are before they can believe as such beings believe.

Alien Practices

Combining certain aspects of both mythologies and paranormal studies, alien practices are systems of belief held by certain cultures to be inherent to inhuman entities. Many cultures throughout time have subscribed to the notion of civilizations of non-human creatures, to

Initiation into the Mysteries

Particularly popular in recent film and literature is the idea of individuals who gradually open their eyes to a world of secrets literally inconceivable to the average person. It is certainly possible to play with such a concept, leading a troupe of Sleepers through a journey into the hidden history and occult truths of a world more vast and bizarre than they could have ever imagined. The chronicle might even focus upon guiding the characters toward the Awakening. Are they brought there by their own determination and incisive minds, however, or are they led there by fate? Or by the ancient designs of "hidden masters" in another plane of existence (in the form of the Oracles or even the Exarchs, or perhaps beings stranger still).

The chronicle might focus on a drawn-out process of initiation into the Mysteries, leading the characters from one revelation to the next, as they discover that the world isn't what they thought it was. Such characters may well run afoul of forces that they can't begin to understand. Just imagine what the Guardians of the Veil might seem like to people in a situation like that, as hoary lore more or less falls into their laps and the Eye of the Dragon seeks to recover the knowledge and silence the threat, by whatever means necessary. The "friendly stranger" that offers clues and aid to the characters might turn out to be a Seer of the Throne, using them to fulfill some prophecy only she truly comprehends — or at least *believes* she comprehends — or perhaps even a Scelestus or malevolent spirit, cloaked in human form.

On the other hand, maybe several strange revelations and inexplicable phenomena help to guide the characters to a sudden, even traumatic, Awakening. Without any knowledge of the hidden struggles of the Awakened, however, they are forced to find their own way in a world that no longer truly makes sense. They are courted by unknown parties on all sides and inherit foes that covet the precious knowledge that the characters have, perhaps inadvertently, uncovered: secrets of the Realms Supernal lost to the modern age. Whom, if anyone, do they trust? Surely, the characters can't make it on their own, and they have to turn to someone, but how to know the right choice from the wrong one? What if there is *no* right choice?

which they have also often ascribed a higher order of understanding of the essential nature of reality or, at least, a different – and often more powerful and compelling – view of the cosmos. Ancient Celtic peoples, for example, believed in the Fair Folk, creatures both willing and able to inflict terrible torments upon mortal men, using powers beyond human ken, often due to ideals and an understanding of reality which was simply alien to the human experience. Those that pursued the lore of the fae in a manner that such beings considered to be appropriately respectful, however, could occasionally benefit by their teachings, and grow wise in ways that allowed for greater control over the world.

When cast through the Atlantean prism, such entities can often be seen as reflections of one Supernal Realm or another, but this need not always be the case. There are certainly many entities native to the Fallen World, which might be possessed of magics of their own; taken in large enough numbers, they constitute cultures. Such beings might unwittingly be the vessels of Supernal wisdom, in whom it is stored and through whom it is transmitted. While the Awakened often make the tacit assumption that the lore of the higher realms is specifically intended to benefit humanity, this is not truly the case. The Supernal World is what *should be*, irrespective of the benefits or drawbacks of such for humanity; it is the embodiment of a comprehensive view of the universe, which is, at times, actively harmful to the life of the Fallen World, human or otherwise.

Superstitions

In some cases, the root causes for certain mystical perspectives on the world become lost to time, cultural assimilation and other factors. When this happens, such beliefs are usually wholly subsumed into other cultures and are assigned new causes or else vanish entirely. In some cases, however, these beliefs persist, often devoid of any understanding *why* they continue to exist. These beliefs, cut off from their respective points of origin, carry on as superstitions. In the World of Darkness, however, even superstitions can carry grains of Supernal truth; indeed, some such beliefs may persist solely because of

the Supernal realities that they echo. Granted greater metaphysical substance due to the echoes that they contain, the idea survives long after its mythical justification has ceased to be.

In many ways, superstitions can be the most fascinating vectors for Supernal lore, as they aren't inherently attached to any particular logical progression of beliefs, anymore, and instead simply free-float within a culture's frame of reference, wholly unjustified by even mythological evidence. They simply *are*, and people tend to take them at face value, long after anyone knows the reasons why. Even in supposedly "progressive" cultures, among people who hold to no religious beliefs and have no spirituality to speak of, there are those that will not cross under a ladder, go far out of their way not to break a mirror, and always "knock on wood" to ward off ill fortune.

The trick, for mages, is often found in discerning the origins of these obscure beliefs, as Supernal wisdom has a way of leading to more of the same. Once a grain of knowledge from the higher realms is discovered within a given belief, the Awakened feel compelled to seek out more, to find where a single fragment leads. Depending upon the superstition in question, however, such quests may be quite difficult, if not outright futile, as such practices readily outlive the cultures that beget them by centuries or even millennia, which means that there is, as often as not, no trail of evidence leading back to the beliefs in which the superstition originated. So it is that sources of Supernal wisdom occasionally dry up and disappear, leaving no tributary that might be followed back toward the greater whole.

Occult Traditions

For whatever reason, the knowledge that filters down to the Fallen World from the Realms Supernal seems to be most easily transmitted through occult lore: mythologies, arcane religions and systems of magical belief, for instance. Why is this? Those few Awakened scholars who speculate on such matters believe that it is the simple fact that occult traditions frankly admit the possibility (and, in many cases, the indisputable existence) of the supernatural. Science posits the idea of a universe that can, eventually, be quantified and objectively known for what it is. The Mysteries, however, resist such sterile categorization, and so the higher worlds insinuate their realities into this plane through a medium friendlier to the lessons that they have to impart.

This is not to say, however, that the light that descends from the Supernal is changeless; rather, it grows and evolves with time, the same as any other knowledge. Just as the occult traditions within which it is concealed change with the tides of cultural development and new ideas, so does Supernal wisdom move like a living thing, developing and migrating, consuming and multiplying; even dying, when its time is done. All of these notions are encompassed by most of the Fallen World's most persistent paranormal systems of belief. Those occult beliefs that are unchanging tend to stagnate and die out, as the societies that conceived of them grow beyond the need for fixed and inflexible schools of thought. While shreds of Supernal lore may be interspersed throughout such "dead" practices, they are likely few and may, in fact, become invalidated by the march of centuries, the same as with any outdated knowledge.

But what does all of this mean to characters in the game? First and foremost, it means that they *absolutely* need not abandon all of their cultural beliefs upon Awakening. Some mages *choose* to do so, but other might come to perceive the Supernal echoes within the practices to which they subscribed as Sleepers and come away with the understanding that these beliefs are, in fact, quantifiably correct – at least partly so – in a cosmic sense. This is more common amongst mages that come from more "traditional" (read: less entrenched in the ideals expressed by the modern Western world) backgrounds, as their belief systems often include a tacit acceptance of the supernatural, on some level. The further one gets from the cutting edge of the 21st century, the more likely it is that willworkers will embrace their Sleeper religions and cultural myths (which come to seem much less myth and far more reality, or at least *a* reality.) Thus, a Haitian Silver Ladder Thyrsus may also be a practicing *mambo* to the members of her community, both Sleeper and Awakened, or a Mastigos of the Mysterium in rural China may make his living as a master of the arts of *feng shui*. Such mages can see, through the lens of the Supernal, the manner in which the practices with which they grew up are real and impact the Fallen World in ways that are, if not necessarily obvious to those burdened by the Sleeping Curse, then at least capable of effecting such people and their surroundings.

Of course, there are mages from outside such cultures that attempt to embrace and assimilate their beliefs and practices. Mystagogues are especially persistent in their attempts to reconcile many different beliefs into a superior working model of the unseen currents of the Supernal in the Fallen World, with mages of the Silver Ladder following closely behind them. Also, Libertines are occasionally known to apply a critical eye to the ways in which occult traditions interact, seeking new paths that combine disparate beliefs into a whole that functions more effectively than the distinct practices that comprise



it. Tradition-bound in many ways, mages of the Adamantine Arrow and the Guardians of the Veil are somewhat less likely, overall, to attempt such studies, though those that do sometimes enjoy great success, as the particular interests of their respective orders allow them to focus on a relatively narrow range of topics. Conversely, Arrow mages and Guardians who are actually *from* such cultures tend to fiercely embrace their native beliefs, looking to them for strength and inspiration.

Certain Arcana are generally favored by certain "real world" mystic practices. Generally speaking, for instance, many offensive applications of the Forces Arcanum are the purview of modern takes on ancient legends. Very few of even the traditional tales of wizards, for example, involve throwing lightning bolts, raining down fire on foes, and the like. Invisibility and flight, however, are much more common in such tales, as is the shaping of weather. The shapeshifting powers granted by the Life Arcanum and the gifts of converse with restless shades conferred by Death are abilities attributed to "people of power" in many traditional systems of belief. Likewise, Matter spells can replicate many of the feats attributed to different schools of physical alchemy – as opposed to spiritual, or "true" alchemy, which is generally considered to be a transmutation of the human soul, and is thus the purview of the "subtle" Arcana – or of Legacies.

Supernal fragments concealed within cultural beliefs can certainly express themselves in the form of Legacies (see the Bokor in **Tome of the Watchtowers** for an example of this.) Indeed, particularly powerful Awakened who are strongly entrenched in the paradigms of their respective cultures can sometimes inadvertently undertake the steps needed to reshape their souls into something unlike other Awakened. The revelations of Supernal wisdom hidden within their beliefs can help to guide such a mage through the process of synthesis, incorporating such secrets into the very core of her being in a way that draws her closer to the higher worlds (drawing a small fragment of the Supernal into her, in the form of Legacy attainments.)

Sleeper Magic

There are a great number of real world practices considered by their practitioners to be magic. In the World of Darkness, these practices also exist and are held by their adherents to be magic; a subtler variety of magic than that used by the Awakened, to be sure, but magic, nonetheless. In the World of Darkness, however, most souls that hold to such beliefs are misguided, seeing providence in coincidence and evidence of their own mystic talents in perfectly mundane turns of good fortune. Metaphysically speaking, the average Sleeper is inert — a pale shadow, devoid of power or genuine substance. Even those rare few that manage to make use of an occult tradition to affect a paranormal change in the world are really just calling upon the power of the tradition itself — or on *something else* — rather than any strength inherent to the human spirit or to human belief.

While it may seem cruel to say so, the World of Darkness is an unkind place, and Sleepers are, almost without exception, a powerless lot in terms of supernatural capabilities. It is the insinuation of Supernal wisdom into the cultures, religions and other such traditions of those fettered by the Sleeping Curse that gives the barest fragment of Supernal insight to them, and not the other way around. Of course, it is *possible* that some Sleepers manage to align themselves particularly well with extant Supernal influences, learning to call upon considerably more potent resources. (See **World of Darkness: Second Sight** and **World of Darkness: Skinchangers** for examples of the kinds of abilities that otherwise normal people can call upon when they discern certain fundamental but hidden truths about the unseen nature of the Fallen World. Such abilities may or may not have their roots in Supernal echoes, as required by the needs of your chronicle.)

Foci

Because the Sleeper traditions that conceal and protect Supernal wisdom from the hostile environment of the Fallen World are in many ways themselves flawed reflections of a higher order of reality, the lore that they reveal requires such mechanisms to connect to more metaphysically dense and "Fallen" forms. Such foci serve to create ties of Supernal sympathy, constituting something of a bridge between this world and the higher realms. Mages can work around the need for these crutches, containing within themselves enough of the Supernal to forge the necessary threads without resorting to such external tools. Sleeper occultists, however, find that the only way that they can *ever* (and even then, only infrequently) successfully connect to those worlds is by making use of these correspondences.

So it is that Sleepers who delve deeply into such wisdom make use of the ritual instruments of their cultures: from fetish dolls, to ceremonial robes, glyphs, hex signs, chants, sacred stones and the like. Important to note, however, is the fact that *Sleepers cannot perform Supernal magics – even with foci.* Instead, called to an awareness of powers that they do not, and cannot, truly grasp, such would-be sorcerers and wise men clutch at the tools that whisper of a connection to a higher reality, a murmur heard in the deepest recesses of a decrepit and malnourished soul. Still, the magical traditions that spring up around these symbols and ritual tools sometimes inform the Awakened as to the more rarified layers of reality toward which they point, like a compass needle. While Sleepers may enact such magical rites, they gain no genuine benefit for doing so (beyond the exercise of personal belief, which can, of itself, be very much an empowering experience) – unless the Storyteller rules, under a certain, probably unique, circumstance, that a more meaningful connection to the Supernal is momentarily forged. Even then, however, the connection comes from hidden significance of the focus, married to the inscrutable will of the Realms Supernal, and not on account of the Sleeper herself.

Still, these correspondences are not without value, even to the Awakened. While mages contain within themselves the necessary connection to the Supernal to obviate the need for these ritual tools, their specific tie is to the higher realms as a whole, rather than to an individual Supernal truth. Sleeper occult traditions, on the other hand, simply cannot bridge the gap to the entirety of the Supernal, or whatever level, so they instead constitute ties to a handful of distinct otherworldly phenomena. To put it another way: any mage skilled in the correct Arcana can call up a demon to serve her, but one that employs the exact formulae set down in the Keys of

Solomon (or in a book of Satanic magic) can exchange flexibility in her practices for magical benefits that simply aren't encompassed by her inherent connection to the Realms Supernal. These practices become rotes in the truest sense: acts that must be repeated in an exacting fashion in order to produce predictable and perpetually replicable results. At times, this is because the focus used is, itself, the Supernal signifier involved in the magic. At other times, it is simply because the mage, who enjoys a personal connection to a Watchtower, nevertheless does not enjoy *privileged access* to that Tower's secrets. The focus in question serves as a sort of key to a "locked chamber" within a given Watchtower, bestowing temporary access to the secrets of a given "room."

Putting Theory into Practice

For a mage, the benefits of Sleeper occult traditions come in the form of spells, specifically rotes. These rotes can be learned at the normal cost, but the prerequisite for learning a magical tradition's rote is the Magical Tradition Merit.

There is a further prerequisite: Although a mage can learn as many magical traditions as he likes (that is, he can purchase the Magical Tradition Merit multiple times), he can gain the magical benefits only for a maximum number of traditions equal to or less than his Gnosis rating. A mage with a Gnosis of 3 might deeply study three, or five, or ten different mystic traditions, but only three of them can provide him special magical benefits. His Supernal understanding isn't broad enough for him to see the hidden Supernal connections in all the traditions he has studied.

Merit: Magical Tradition (●●)

Prerequisite: Awakened, Occult 2, Academics or Occult Skill Specialty representing the tradition

Effects: Your character has studied a particular Sleeper occult tradition, its body of beliefs and spellcraft, and can glean special magical benefit from working within that tradition. Knowledge of a tradition itself is represented by the Academics or Occult Skill Specialty, while this Merit represents a special kind of knowledge available only to the Awakened that allows a mage to learn the rote spells of that tradition. Whereas Sleepers cannot evoke magical results from these rotes (although they might erroneously believe the spells do work in some unseen fashion), mages with this Merit can divine the Supernal echoes reverberating in the tradition's myths and symbols, and so gain special magical benefit from them.

When casting a magical tradition rote, the mage gains the following benefits:

- *Sleeper Acceptance:* When the Storyteller is checking for a Paradox for a vulgar spellcasting, he does not add the +2 dice bonus for Sleeper witnesses.
- *Conditional Duration:* Tradition rotes benefit from the Fate 2 "Conditional Duration" modifier (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 150). Even if the casting mage does not know Fate 2, he can incorporate a conditional duration into the tradition rote casting.
- *Spell Tolerance Mitigation:* Tradition rotes seem more tightly woven into the fabric of the Fallen World; they don't cause as much mystical interference as other spells or rotes. The first tradition rote cast upon someone does not count toward that person's Spell Tolerance. Any successive tradition rotes cast upon him will count normally — until the first spell expires, and then the next active tradition rote in line inherits its Spell Tolerance mitigation effect, and so. So, the first one's free, the rest levy a cost as normal.

Naturally, however, these benefits do not come without a price. The drawbacks of culture-bound magic are as follows:

- *Foci:* The mage must use a culturally appropriate focus to cast the tradition rote. Suggestions are provided in the descriptions of the magical traditions in chapters one through four.
- *Environment:* Some rotes require that the spell be cast at a particular time (midnight) and/or in a particular type of place (cemetery).
- Tradition rotes cannot be cast as a combined casting with non-tradition rotes.
- All those participating in a group casting ritual must know the relevant Magical Tradition Merit (in addition to the usual Arcana requirements), although only the group leader must know the rote.

Each time this Merit is purchased, it applies to a different magical tradition. This Merit may be purchased only once per dot of Gnosis.

Traditional Resonance

Mage Sight plays an important role in the study and practice of magical traditions. Even mages who have not studied a magical tradition (i.e. who have not purchased a Magical Tradition Merit) can still scrutinize the magic cast within that tradition and gain some insight.

Sleeper Traditional "Magic"

Belief is important, even the belief of Sleepers. When they perform rituals or consecrate idols and the like, this affects the resonance of the time/place or items involved.

Normally, affecting resonance through mundane means is a long, slow affair. Unless supernatural intervention is involved (a spirit, a werewolf's Gifts or rites), resonance only slowly receives the impressions of the most prevalent emotions and concepts that affect it. For instance, a street corner doesn't usually have its resonance altered by a murder that occurs there, but it will be altered if multiple murders occur. The "magic" of a magical tradition, however, even when performed by a Sleeper, might have more immediate effect — thanks to the Supernal signifiers seeded within its corpus of beliefs. The event or item is more meaningful, and so affects resonance more strongly.

This is a Storyteller option; there are no strict rules here. The key is deep, authentic (not fake or feigned) spiritual belief that engages the soul (not just the mind — this is a spiritual phenomenon). Even though the soul is not awake, the Sleeping soul is still interacting with potent symbols, and the combination of the two is enough to leave an impression in the mold of an area's or item's Resonance.

In game terms, such Sleeper "magic" alters Resonance's *quality*, and is easier to scrutinize. It normally takes five successes on an unveiling Resonance roll to discern an aspect of the Resonance (see **Mage: the Awakening**, p. 279). A Sleeper's tradition "magic" only requires three successes. In addition, the quality isn't just a word or feeling like "cruelty" or "rage"; it's a sensory phenomenon, with images appropriate to the tradition. For instance, Resonance affected by the entheogen tradition (p. 131) might appear to Mage Sight as a drug trip, with LSD "trails" or ayahuasca's recurring motif of UFOs hovering in the sky.

Note that this is a Supernal "layer" to the Resonance; it doesn't necessarily appear to the supernatural sight of other beings, such as werewolves using Gifts.

Awakened Traditional Magic

If Sleepers can have such an effect on Resonance when working with a tradition, think what mages can do. The Resonance of their magical tradition rotes is stamped with the unique character of its beliefs. A santero mage's rotes might reveal the very orisha allegedly behind the spell. The tradition's beliefs seem quite real when viewed through Mage Sight (although the standard rules apply for scrutinizing such spells — their special stamp still might not be obvious at first).

Each tradition introduced in this book describes some samples of what its Awakened traditional magic looks like to Mage Sight.

Awakening to Occult Traditions

The Awakening is an occurrence that requires special attention as far as Sleeper occult beliefs go. Those that grow up immersed in such traditions tend to have Awakenings that are significantly impacted by such lore. While a cynical child of the modern West is often inclined toward a journey more or less inspired directly by the images and ideals of the Supernal Realms, colored by more mundane life experiences, those that are raised to believe in a deeply spiritual vision of the world commonly experience the Awakening through the lens of their peoples' legends.

For instance, a Thyrsus Awakening in rural Russia, raised quietly in the old pagan traditions of her forefathers, might experience an astral journey that involves beholding each of Baba Yaga's three horsemen in turn, at dawn, noontime and dusk, and visiting the ancient crone in her chicken-legged hut, protected behind a fence of human bone. Conversely, a Maori Mastigos could Awaken while out sailing on the water, shown the infinite reaches of the world by Tangaroa, the god of the sea, and the secrets ways by which he might reach any shore in safety. These sorts of religious-mystical experiences demonstrate the connection of the Supernal to these human beliefs, and the ways in which such beliefs reveal the simple truth that humanity does not and cannot know everything; there will forever be mysteries, the secrets of an occult world, just beyond the edge of the mundane.

Even mystery-play Awakenings can be touched by elements of these cultural beliefs, demonstrating to the newly-Awakening soul that she is not wrong in her beliefs, and that the unseen world in which she had always had faith watches her and knows her deeds. Symbolism is very important to many of the belief systems that would be considered occult traditions, and their symbols can readily manifest during an Awakening, pointing a believer at the truths that such systems uphold and propound. Even a non-believer could be touched by such a tradition in his Awakening, whether in an astral journey or a mystery play, educating him in the reality that there truly are things in this world worth believing in.

On the Origins of Occult Traditions

Among the Awakened, the most significant part of any occult tradition's value is the way in which it points to Supernal wisdom, and the degree to which it does so. While there is something to be said about the things that myths and legends reveal about the cultures that spawn them (*exoteric* knowledge), most mages are interested primarily in the ways in which such beliefs can act as a compass pointing toward the Supernal (*esoteric* knowledge). For some, a return to the ancient homeland of



the Awakened drives them, while others simply crave the power inherent in an expanded understanding of the interactions of the Supernal and Fallen Worlds. In the end, though, and despite the often pedantic studies of no few Mystagogues, the impetus for mages to unravel the Supernal secrets within Sleeping lore is purely utilitarian in nature.

For the Awakened, the archetypes that arise repeatedly among cultures throughout time, and the morals and beliefs reflected by those archetypes, are evidence of the power of the higher realms acting upon the Fallen World. Modern social studies declare that the notion that one should not take what belongs to another arose out of the needs of a functioning society; willworkers have a somewhat different perspective. The tenets of Wisdom say that one should not steal and those that do wear the stain of doing so upon their souls, as is evidenced by the way in which Paradox interacts with them, thus demonstrating a fundamental aspect of Supernal wisdom. To the Awakened, we do not steal because to do so is to degrade the self in a metaphysically quantifiable way. Echoing this essential reality, innumerable religions, philosophies and cultures conceived of rules and guidelines that asserted that one should not take another's possessions without permission or a ritual implying the transfer of ownership. Further, cultures that did not or do not subscribe to such an ideal are often seen as backward, barbaric or particularly lawless, as the spiritual fabric of such an institution is sullied by its refusal of Supernal truth in a way that other human beings sense, even if they cannot readily articulate why. (Also important to note in terms of Supernal correspondences, however, is the appearance of a metaphysical "loophole" demonstrated by trickster gods and heroes, who are often admired for their larcenous skills.)

In such a way, it is possible to understand the rules mechanics for Wisdom through the lens of Supernal axioms. The soul is weighed down by sins, for Sleepers as well as Awakened alike. But the Awakened soul can rise, although sins might weigh it down and interfere with its fate upon death. Those with "heavy" souls might have to struggle harder to make it up the mountain, lest their souls fail to escape the Fallen World when their bodies die. Likewise, other supernatural beings, severed by their spiritual nature from the higher realms as the Awakened know them (or, perhaps, simply enjoying a relationship with those realms alien to willworkers), often subscribe to different beliefs. Because mages know much more, both consciously and unconsciously, about the nature of the world as it is meant to be, they are more morally accountable by far than almost any other thinking creature in the Fallen World. Hence, why the hierarchy of sins for those upon the Path of Wisdom is considerably broader than for any other earthly being.

Not all – or even most – Supernal secrets descend from the higher realms to the end of categorizing moral or ethical truths, however. Some instead reveal mysteries of the hidden framework of reality, whether from the Realms Supernal or from the time of Atlantis itself. The preponderance of serpent imagery across most of the world's cultures, for instance, in even lands virtually devoid of snakes, hints at a deeper symbolism behind the *idea* of the serpent. As an example, some Awakened speculate that the twin serpents of the caduceus are a reflection of the Celestial Ladder. An instrument of Hermes, messenger of the gods – and often considered a patron of sorcerers – the entwined snakes stood originally for commerce, but have come to be associated with health and wellness; the power to harm or to heal. Some maintain that the staff itself is the heir to an earlier symbol still, dating back to ancient Mesopotamia. In this, the Awakened see echoes of their ancient culture, bastardized legends that ignorantly whisper fragments of Atlantean legend.

An Atlantean Legend Revealed

Basaida was a young woman of low caste in Atlantis. She was the daughter of immigrants, who gave her an Atlantean name meaning, "blessed promise," when she was born. Her family lived on the outskirts of the prestigious northern banks of the island, making their way as servants to the household of the powerful sorcerer, Kherem. Despite their status, Basaida's family enjoyed the prestige of service to so great and esteemed a willworker, and many suitors, handsome and wealthy, came to her parents with offers of marriage. Still, Basaida had eyes only for Kherem's son, Ashir, who would, she believed, surely one day be as great a man as his noble father.

Ashir, who was anything but great and noble, however, played with Basaida's emotions freely, sometimes going to far as to stoke her love for him with his spells, so that he could amuse himself by her poorly articulated attempts at subtle gestures of affection. Still, she *was* quite lovely, and the young rake eventually took her into his bedchamber, after years of toying with her. Each time she departed, under the cover of shadow and with strict instructions from Ashir to tell no one of their liaisons, he promised that he would soon find a way to break the news to his father and take her as his wife. Naturally, Ashir intended no such thing, though he was more than happy to keep Basaida as a concubine – his shameful little secret – until she eventually grew wise to his manipulations, or else he tired of her.

Midway through her nineteenth year, one full turning of the moon came and went without what Basaida's mother called "woman's blood," and she knew that Ashir's baby was inside her, for she had taken no other man as a lover. Instead of going directly to the man she believed would one day be her husband, however, Basaida went to Yrindi, a witch come to Atlantis from her parents' homeland. Of the old sorceress, the young woman requested that a blessing be put upon the unborn child, so that she might go to her beloved with *truly* joyous news. Unfortunately, Yrindi had no joyous news to offer:

"I foresee your tears mixing with the great water," the witch murmured, staring into her divining fire. "I cannot bless this unborn babe, for the sea claims him, and I shall not contend with Her will."

Furious, Basaida left Yrindi's house and went to Ashir, telling him of her pregnancy and expecting him to be happy at the news. He put on a paper-thin smile and told Basaida that he must conceal her, for his father would not understand; that she was with child would only complicate his marriage plans. Naïvely trusting in him, she did as Ashir asked and dwelt in a small home on the edge of the sea, along the eastern banks of the island, in a neighborhood peopled largely by foreign merchants. Periodically, Yrindi would visit and offer her skills as wise woman and midwife, but always she would set a potion on the table and tell Basaida that it would be wisest to drink, to slay the child in the womb and spare herself the terrible things to come. Resentful of the witch's advice but without enough money to retain any other midwife, Basaida tolerated Yrindi's oft-repeated suggestion only inasmuch as it was the price of her care.

The birthing was difficult, to be certain, but Yrindi's spells and poultices aided greatly in the process. When the boy was laid in her arms, Basaida named him Eku, which was Atlantean for "daylight." As the new mother drifted off to sleep with her child, Yrindi also noted, muttering under her breath, that *eikkhau* was a word in the tongue of Basaida's ancestors that meant, "drowned one."

After she had recovered sufficiently from her ordeal to go to Ashir, Basaida did just that, carrying her infant son in a brilliantly colored blanket that her parents had given to her when she was a child. As she approached the gates of Kherem's estate, however, the young mother beheld a sight that broke her heart. Ashir stood upon the tall dais in the manor's courtyard, beside a lovely woman, obviously of high Atlantean birth, and spoke the words of the joining ceremony that Basaida had been promised on so many occasions, as she crept from Ashir's quarters. Hundreds of spectators smiled and cheered to see the happy couple wedded, and Basaida's love drowned in an endless tide of rage, betrayal and hatred.

Insensate with fury, Basaida stalked down to the water's edge, along a stretch of rocky beach that few swimmers or fishermen ever frequented, wading in up to her waist and holding Eku under the gently rolling tides. When her newborn son stopped his struggles, Basaida simply released his corpse, and allowed it to sink, still bound up in his blanket, and returned to shore. Basaida crept into Kherem's estate, through hidden gates known to the servants, intent upon going to Ashir's quarters, to confront him when the ceremony concluded. As she moved through the halls of the house, however, Basaida heard an infant's cry. She stopped short in the corridor and what remained of her sanity fled her. The young woman looked into the nursery, where a newborn child lay. An elderly nurse slumbered in a chair beside the crib. Somehow, to look upon the infant, Basaida knew him to be the son of Ashir and the woman that he had taken to wife. She reached into the cradle and wrapped her fingers around the newborn's throat, squeezing the life from his tiny body.

No sooner had the child stopped his frail struggles than the cry of, "Murder! Murder!" came from the old nurse, whose fitful sleep was broken by the sudden silence in the room. Basaida only slowly glanced up from the infant's body, and beheld the aged woman stumbling from the nursery. Having strayed far beyond reason, Basaida picked up the body, cradled it in her arms, and began to walk toward the courtyard, humming softly to it a tune that she remembered from her own childhood.

"It will be well, Eku," she whispered, rocking the dead child as she walked. "We're going to see your father now."

Basaida walked through the manor by instinct, emerging into the courtyard, where the assembled guests gasped in horror to see the truth of the frantic nurse's cries. For her part, the young woman simply sang quietly to the murdered infant, her mind lost in worlds only she could see. It was Ashir's voice, crying her name in unbridled fury and despair, which brought even the smallest measure of Basaida's attention back to reality.

"Look, husband," she murmured quietly, "I've brought our son to you, so that you could see him and bless him. Is little Eku not splendid?"

Ashir snarled in rage at his lover. "Do not call me that! I am no husband to you, and the child in your arms is not yours. I know not what you did with that bastard, but you have slain my progeny, and I hate you for it!"

Basaida seemed genuinely hurt and confused, as though she no longer understood what was happening. This seemed to enrage Ashir all the more, and he stepped forth, fell powers gathering his fingertips. He was halted in his advance, however, by the firm hand of his father, which came to rest on the young man's shoulder. The old sorcerer shook his head, and his son fell back a pace.

Kherem stepped forth. "I name you anathema, Basaida. You are *Lalitha Medda*: Slaughterer of Youth. May you be cursed to wander this world forever, condemned to an eternity awash in your tears, eternally to haunt the steps of misfortune, that you should behold no joy, from now until the end of all things." At that, the old wizard smote the cobbles at his feet with his staff, and the sun hid its face and the wind grew still for fear of carrying so awful a curse, even for a moment.

Basaida shrieked and tore at her hair, and her beauty seemed to slip, like a mask the laces of which have frayed. Some beheld her as a creature of fragile loveliness, behind which a terrible evil lurked, while others saw her comely features slough away like the shed skin of a snake, revealing a hideous crone beneath. She ran from the courtyard, screaming in a voice that made children wail and animals cringe in terror, and dove into the sea, never to be seen again as a being of earthly flesh.

Between that day and the shattering of the world, the Atlanteans said that Basaida reclaimed her dead son and somehow raised the lifeless thing, and that it became a spirit of great evil, bound to its mother's fate. Others called him *morqad*, "kin-slayer," and say that he grew to manhood in the invisible world, returning in time to murder his father with a spear the tip of which was carved from a sea serpent's envenomed fang.



But Is It Really True?

This Atlantean fable is meant to serve as inspiration for your own chronicle, as fodder for the stories that you and your players want to tell. That said, though, it's exactly as true as you decide that you want it to be. If Basaida's sad fate can help to make your game a better one, then maybe Ashir's terrible deception, the young mother's heinous crimes and Kherem's dread curse all have some deeper Supernal meaning in your chronicle. If not, then this story not only is untrue, but it need not even exist in your game as a legend.

This book, ultimately, isn't intended to be a primer for "genuine" Atlantean history, allowing Storytellers and players alike to glean information about some "canonical" vision of the ancient empire of the Awakened. Objective truth is in the hands of the Storyteller, allowing you to make your Atlantean legends as real in the chronicle as you desire them to be, if indeed Atlantis *itself* is a matter of historical fact in your game, rather than merely *metaphorical* fact.

Exegesis

In the days after the fall of Atlantis, of course, the Supernal lore encompassed by Basaida's betrayal and her great crime would survive, after a fashion, in myth and legend. As Lilith, she would be known as a demoness who slew infants in their cribs out of hatred for the man who was to be her husband, while, as Medea, she killed her own children after the sea took her love from her. As Lorelei, she was known as a siren that lured sailors to their doom with murmuring and singing upon the water. As the banshee, she is a female spirit whose wailing heralds death. And, as *La Llorona*, she is a grieving woman, slaying her children in a fit of rage and then being forever cursed to wander, weeping; a figure in white whose coming presages doom.

As for Eku, his ill-omened name survives as the Japanese *akuma* – a demon or other force of darkness – while the title that the Atlanteans bestowed upon him hints at Mordred, in the versions of the Arthurean legends in which he is the traitorous son who slays his father. The Sumerians knew a small fragment of his sad tale in the form of Enki, often called, "the Lord of the Earth," but whose alternate name, Ea, can be construed to mean, "He whose house is upon (or under) the water."

But what are the Supernal truths revealed by Basaida's tragedy? Perhaps there exists a universal axiom by which creation itself condemns the mother that slays her offspring. Or, maybe, the world needed a monster that preyed upon the young to teach humanity the importance and value of its children, and so destiny conspired to create such a beast. Of course, the lesson to be learned (and, thus, the Supernal secret concealed within all of the stories that descend from Basaida's tale) might instead be of Ashir's wickedness and Kherem's passionate and ill-considered malediction, and of the price to be paid for such thoughtless acts of hubris.

The Role of Atlantis

The truth of the matter is that, whether as a historical location or a culturally accepted metaphor, Atlantis is a convenient point of origin for the axioms expressed by Supernal wisdom. Why? First of all, Atlantis, irrespective of whether or not it truly existed, was the most direct intersection of mystic forces in the history of creation. If it was real, then it was geographically at the crossroads of almost all of the world's powerful metaphysical energies. If it is merely a tale to be told, then that tale is, of itself, the conceptual confluence of those unseen currents of power; in the Supernal, the ideal and the real are as one. Thus, the reality of Atlantis, on that level, cannot be disputed. The story creates its own foundation, which then supports all of the myth and legend that succeeds it.

Further, Atlantis is really the only pre-Fall civilization that the Awakened know anything of substance about, even if only scant details that are heavy on speculation and short on fact. Thus, the truths of the unified world which inform the mythologies and systems of belief that came after are most easily understood when viewed through the lens of Atlantis. While there were almost certainly other societies of power and influence in that vastly different world, modern mages know almost nothing of them, save perhaps for rare relics and other hotly disputed shreds of evidence (which are most commonly attributed to the Atlantean culture).

Also, and perhaps most importantly, Supernal wisdom has only been able to touch the world in indirect, metaphorical ways since the Fall. These axioms simply cannot manifest in any manner that obviously conveys their own meaning, but must instead become cloaked behind layers – sometimes, *many* layers – of mystery, allusion and misdirection. To put it simply: the core ideals expressed by the Supernal hearken back to Atlantis because the age in which that nation existed was the last

time that such ideals were completely extant within the same plane of existence as the majority of humanity. As the core tenets behind these fables become blurred by time, and the transmission and transformation of ideas, they evolve (or, perhaps more accurately, degenerate, as any distancing from Supernal truth must be seen to be) into something different, though the essential truths behind them often remain unchanged and, in some cases, immutable.

What If Atlantis Isn't Real?

Supposing that you don't make use of Atlantis in your game as an actual historical location, what then? On a related note, maybe your character just doesn't believe in "those fairy tales about some island that sank about a million years ago in the world's largest morality play." It can be difficult to make the Supernal revelations of history meaningful in a world in which the Supernal cannot be quantifiably determined to have ever intersected with what is now (and perhaps always was, according to your game, or even just your character's point of view) the Fallen World.

First of all, keep in mind that Atlantis and the Supernal *are not* synonymous. In fact, the Realms Supernal and Atlantis, even according to most scholars of the ancient nation-state, never truly coexisted. After all, it was the destruction of Atlantis that divided the worlds from one another. Thus, while many of the fundamental lessons of Supernal wisdom are assumed to have their origins in the empire of the Awakened, at a time when the world was whole, such need not necessarily be the case. Instead, these revelations, ideas like the law of threefold return, the corruptive effects of power, or the spiritually healing properties of true love, may simply be rules that govern the cosmos on a level too subtle to be precisely and objectively quantified by human powers of observation.

For Storytellers, working from the perspective of a fully mythical Atlantis, or even just a chronicle in which the historical reality of Atlantis is meant to forever be a matter of debate, means that the lessons to be learned from the dispersed wisdom of the Supernal is just that much more obviously important than the vehicle through which it is delivered. In the same way in which we don't actually believe in Aesop's Fables and yet can understand and appreciate what they have to teach us, mages can embrace the examples that the tales of Atlantis and the higher realms have to teach without necessarily accepting the stories themselves as literal truth. Even deliberate untruths can impart important knowledge upon those that open their minds and are willing to look past – or even just sit through – the more fantastic elements of such legends.

Other Truths

Just to be clear, not all truths that descend from the Supernal are benevolent. Just as Pandemonium's realities are often harsh and brutal, so, too, might the Aether's relentless purity scourge the unworthy. Add to this the fact that Supernal wisdom, no matter its nature, must pass through the gulf of the Abyss in order to reach the Fallen World. This means that, on occasion, otherworldly lore becomes tainted by the nonbeing of the Abyss, and turns foul and corrupt. Indeed, some of the less savory occult traditions of the Fallen World may stem from these polluted truths, which are, unfortunately, no less powerful and real for the degradation that they endure.

Likewise, some rare few empowered occult traditions seem to connect to truths neither Supernal nor Abyssal in nature. Does such lore have its roots in the Fallen World? Most willworkers would say not – though this assumption may well be a flawed one. And even if the skeptics *are* correct, it begs the question of whence these phenomena stem. While many Awakened are quick to dismiss the possibilities encompassed by such traditions, citing an incomplete understanding of the higher realms and human misinterpretation of sublime and unfathomable realities, perhaps it is that the worlds catalogued by the Atlanteans in the age of their ascendancy were but few among many. Just as the Mysteries elude the comprehension of Sleepers, might it not also be that there are deeper secrets still, unknown even to the Awakened, some waiting to be discovered, and some that may never be known?

Likewise, there may well have been nations other than Atlantis in those days. While the stage upon which the great drama of the Oracles and the Exarchs was played out is certainly the most famous – or infamous – land in Awakened legend, by both believers and skeptics, there is nothing at all to say that there weren't other empires of sorcerous might in those days. Perhaps an occult tradition more readily links back to the legends of Lemuria or Ultima Thule, in ways that don't necessarily resonate with those myths as synonyms for Atlantis. Perhaps it is that one (or more) of these nation-states was a rival power to Atlantis. While cities of brass and flame, peopled by demons, seem to have their origins in tales of Pandemonium and its denizens, for example, there are those that believe such a place to have actually existed somewhere. Maybe it was that so cruel and monstrous an empire once stood, ruled over by inhuman kings and princes, an enemy to the Island of the Dragon. Surely, a left-handed occult tradition could easily descend from such a place, as readily as it could from Atlanteans and members of Diaspora cultures.


BRIAN LEBLANC
07

Chapter Two: "Traditional" Traditions

The room was dim, lit only by two guttering, black candles at either end of the large, stone altar, draped with a cloth the rich brown of new-turned earth. The air smelled faintly of incense and of the red Georgia clay. Rabbi Moshe tried to push the stifling heat out of his mind and concentrate on the pronunciation of the Psalms, but the trickle of sweat running down his back was a constant, irritating distraction.

As he recited the holy Scripture—from memory, of course—he walked in slow, proscribed circles around the hulking, inert figure lying on the altar. Exactly how big it was he couldn't say, but it was large enough that the light from the candle at its head and the light from the candle at its feet didn't quite meet in the middle, leaving a narrow band of shadow across its midsection. In the Rabbi's right hand, a ceremonial knife gleamed in the yellow light, the reflection leaping around the room as he carefully, ever so carefully, carved a single word into the figure's forehead of red earth: Emet. "Life."

With a low rumble like the breathing of something impossibly large, the Golem opened its eyes and, for the first time, beheld the world. Rabbi Moshe smiled.

"You will hold the Rabbi up," he instructed his creation. "He is so old, you know. And then you will show the Seers of the Throne what it means to offend the Name of God."

Magical traditions can be old, hoary wisdom handed down from ages past, or new crazy cults with little grasp of reality. This chapter looks at two traditions that have been handed down for thousands of years, and which have influenced other traditions that have come and gone since. As venerable as they are, they are still esoteric "inner" traditions, often spurned by the orthodoxy of their cultures. This is almost always the case with any magical tradition — its penchant for magic and superstition, even if these are seen to be metaphors for deep truths, threatens the more authoritarian and "stable-minded" priests and pandits who run the mass religions of which these traditions are but small parts.

True believers in magical traditions often hold the pedigree of their tradition higher than others. The more "traditional" traditions in this chapter can claim older pedigrees than most, which often lend their practitioners an air of wisdom — and sometimes, arrogance — they might or might not have earned.

KABBALAH

Ten sephiroth of nothingness: Their measure is ten which have no end. A depth of beginning, a depth of end.

— The *Sefer Yetzirah*

It has been called the "Yoga of the West," and has informed nearly every European occult tradition since the Renaissance. From its humble beginnings as a branch of esoteric Judaism, it has gone from being a hidden and rigorously restricted mystical practice to an integral part of the Jewish faith to a historical curiosity and, recently, back to a vital, thriving practice.

History

The precise history of the practice of Kabbalah, at least as it is understood today, is difficult to trace back to its beginnings, owing to the longstanding oral tradition of Judaism. The word "Kabbalah" itself means "to receive" or "to accept," in the sense of a received tradition, and in its earliest use was to refer to the vast body of oral tradition in Jewish teachings. Over time, as the oral traditions were written down, the term came to apply specifically to the mystical and esoteric knowledge which remained an oral tradition until comparatively recently.

Early Recorded History

The oldest extant texts related to Kabbalistic mysticism date from the later Roman Empire, from approximately 100 A.D. and onward. These documents describe the practices of the Hekhalot mystics, a group which used shamanic practices to ascend through the seven Heavens and achieve the throne-chariot of God. In each Heaven, the mystic would have to pass terrible seals and wrathful guardian angels who would only let the most worthy pass into the presence of the Most High.

After the Hekhalot, the book *Sefer Yetzirah* ("Book of Formation") was written sometime before the sixth century, and formed the next major building block in the history of Kabbalah. *Sefer Yetzirah* describes how God made the universe through the power of Hebrew numbers and letters, and implies that a wise and pious man can use the same knowledge to achieve magical ends. Awakened scholars have often referred to this work in treatises on the High Speech, and to a lesser extent Atlantean runes, and some have even credited its author with Awakened influence.

The Medieval Era

Around 1200 A.D., the famous Jewish mystic Isaac the Blind wrote the *Bahir* ("Illumination"), which introduced Kabbalah in the essence of its modern form. The text is largely comprised of a series of parables illustrating Kabbalistic concepts and philosophy heavily couched in metaphor. It was in this text that the first conception of the *sephiroth* as emanations of the Divine was recorded, in a form that seems to bear a good deal in common with the Supernal Realms familiar to mages.

At the end of the 13th century, Moses de Leon, a Spanish Jew and Kabbalist, wrote the *Zohar* ("Splendor"), considered to be the core text of Kabbalah today. Indeed, Kabbalistic thought was so prevalent in Medieval Judaism that, for a time, the *Zohar* was even incorporated into the Oral Torah and considered part of mainstream Jewish law.

In 1569, Isaac Luria, a now-legendary Jewish mystic, settled in Palestine, where he began to teach a new school of Kabbalah with an emphasis on ritual and on bringing the consciousness of God through oneself and into the world. Whether Luria was Awakened, a Sleepwalker, or merely a mortal who pieced together many smaller clues into a startlingly accurate parallel to Atlantean

cosmology remains a mystery, but even today Lurianic Kabbalah remains one of the most popular subschools for Awakened practitioners.

Decline and Rediscovery

By the close of the 16th century, Kabbalah was an integral part of mainstream Judaism, but over the next century or so it began to experience a decline. In the mid-17th century, a charismatic Kabbalist named Sabbatai Zevi appeared in the Ottoman Empire and declared that he was, in fact, the Jewish Messiah. His followers included many Kabbalists, and the practice thereby gained a reputation as a font of blasphemy and idolatry. When Sabbatai converted to Islam to avoid execution at the hands of the Ottoman Sultan, his movement collapsed, but Kabbalah remained tainted by association.

Ironically, and perhaps proving that the Supernal truths will *always* find their way to light, given time, at the same time Kabbalah was declining in Judaism, its influence was dramatically rising among Christian mystics and occultists. This new branch of the teachings rapidly evolved into its own philosophy, drawing as it did on the syncretism of Hermetic thought. Most of the Christian mystics who adopted Kabbalah likewise lacked access to the extensive commentary and original source texts that gave rise to Jewish Kabbalah, which further pushed Hermetic Kabbalah apart from its antecedent.

Modern History

Kabbalah reached its peak as an occult praxis in the late 1800s with the founding of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in London. Within the Golden Dawn's teachings, Kabbalah was largely folded into a larger, syncretic view of Eastern and Western religious and magical thought, with the ten sephiroth gaining associations with Greek and Egyptian deities and the Enochian philosophy of John Dee, among others. Some Hermetics, notably Aleister Crowley, wrote deliberately idiosyncratic or blasphemous interpretations of Kabbalah as a way to shock initiates into forming new thought processes.

In more recent years, there has been an upswing of interest in Kabbalah among the Jewish faith as well. Prayers and services from Kabbalistic texts have been incorporated into most branches of liberal Judaism. Most, if not all, Rabbinical seminaries now teach at least a few courses on Kabbalah, and a few even have full-time instructors in the field. Awakened proponents of Kabbalah, especially within the Silver Ladder, claim that this upswing of interest points to the truth of Kabbalah's Supernal knowledge; the soul *wants* to fight against the Lie, and even when the truth is suppressed or marginalized, it will always find a way to push itself back to the forefront of the human mind.

Theory and Practice

At its core, Kabbalah is a way of defining the universe; specifically in terms of understanding how creation emanates from the infinite, all-encompassing Godhead



down into the earthly, material world. Kabbalists call this structure the Tree of Life, and mages often compare it to the Atlantean Pentagram in both form and function.

In the Beginning...

The foremost principle of Kabbalah is one familiar to anyone who has read Genesis: In the beginning, there was God, whom Kabbalists term *En Soph* ("no end"). As the name suggests, *En Soph* was infinite and omnipresent—all that was was God, and God was all that was. God desired to have a Creation that was separate and apart from the infinite, and so within the endlessness of God, a single point of *something* formed out of *nothing*. The exact means by which this happened may be the most discussed topic in all of Kabbalah, but one of the most popular theories, as coined by Isaac Luria, is that of *tzimtzum*.

Tzimtzum roughly translates as "contracting" or "making room," and that translation encapsulates the core of the idea: In order to make a "space" for the new Creation, God pulled away, creating an empty space that was surrounded and encapsulated by *En Soph* but not truly a part of it. The raw, creative power of God could then flow forth into the universe, creating the world as it is understood by mortals, Sleeping and Awakened alike.

In order to create a universe truly separate from *En Soph*, however, the power of God had to be channeled through a series of progressively more-refined filters, which constrained and focused that pure, creative potential into a less divine and more earthly form. In much the same way as a factory's assembly line takes in raw materials on one end and produces a finished product at the other end, the divine energy of Creation had to be refined into the forms of the material world. These "filters" are called *sephiroth* (singular *sephira*), which means "emanations," and they can be defined both as processes and as actual realms, like the more familiar Supernal Realms known to Atlantean mages. As the divine power of *En Soph* flows through the *sephiroth*, it is changed and channeled before emanating along down the Tree of Life to the next *sephira*, and so on until it reaches the bottom of the tree, which is the physical world.

Kabbalists divide the Tree of Life into three distinct paths, or pillars, which correspond to the three basic precepts of creation: Force, form, and balance, or consciousness. Force is, of course, the raw energy of creation, the fuel for the fire, so to speak. Form, by contrast, is that which constrains the power of creation and shapes it into something. Finally, balance or consciousness is the state in which form and force come together and create, where the harmony of creation allows awareness of that creation to grow. To return to the factory metaphor, without a mold (form) into which to pour molten steel (force), the liquid metal will simply run loose and overwhelm everything; without the metal to pour into the mold, the mold itself is nothing, a mere husk of the thing it should be (this is a topic Kabbalah revisits in the form of the Qlippoth, which will be discussed later). Only when the molten steel is poured into the mold can the final product be created and used.

Apples and Serpents

According to the traditional Kabbalistic viewpoint, mankind's Fall came in the form of self-awareness. This caused the world, Malkhuth, to fall from its exalted state directly connected to both the Will of God and the form of Creation. In its place was left a hole, Daat, which allowed the cold, alien half-life of the Abyss into the world.

Naturally, the ancient texts pin this occurrence on the eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, but many Awakened scholars point to the Celestial Ladder. It was not simple awareness of self that led to the Fall, they claim, but awareness that the individual could be *like* God that caused the radical change in the world. Some Kabbalistic scholars attempt to reconcile the Fall and Tree of Life with the Atlantean cosmology, but many argue that the old model of the five Supernal Realms no longer applies; the Fall wreaked much more drastic changes upon the shape of the universe than the severance of the Fallen World from the Supernal.

The Tree of Life and the Lightning Flash

Since the Fall, the Tree of Life has taken on a radically different shape. The ten *sephoroth* are arrayed in three columns, associated with the three forces of creation. On the left hand is the Pillar of Severity, comprising the *sephiroth* of Binah, Gevurah, and Hod. These *sephiroth* are considered to have a feminine aspect. On the right is the Pillar of Mercy, encompassing the masculine *sephiroth* Chokhmah, Chesed, and Netzach. Finally, running straight down the center, the Pillar of Balance represents the synergy of the two extremes, and contains the *sephiroth* Keter, Tipheret, Yesod, and Malkhut. Also considered to be on the Pillar of Balance is Daat, which is not a *sephira* at all, but a sort of "false enlightenment" within the depths of the Abyss. Kabbalistic tradition holds that Daat is the "hole" left by Malkhut (the physical world) when it Fell from its exalted place. Daat, the Abyss, and all of the *sephiroth* individually will be discussed in greater detail later.

Between each of these *sephiroth*, twenty-two paths link the Tree of Life into a symmetrical structure loosely resembling an elongated snowflake. It is by these paths that the energy of creation pours into the world, following a zig-zag pattern referred to as the Lightning Flash. The term is something of a misnomer, as Kabbalah holds creation to be a constant, ongoing event, rather than an instantaneous event like a lightning strike. Likewise, the twenty-two paths, which are each associated with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, are the means by which the Kabbalist, mage or Sleeper, attempts to ascend the Tree to attain enlightenment and Ascension.

The Lightning Flash begins at the top of the Tree, where the limitless power of *En Sof* flows into the *sephira* Keter ("Crown"). Keter is the point within this universe which is closest to *En Sof*, and it is through Keter that the power of the infinite enters the world. Keter is on the Pillar of Balance because, as the "access point" for the energy of the infinite to enter the world, it necessarily contains the perfect, balanced power that is God. Mages associate Keter with the Prime Arcanum, the stuff of pure, unadulterated magical power, but also the potential to shape that power into any form. According to Kabbalistic tradition, Keter is hidden from the minds of mortals and can never truly be reached—some branches of Kabbalistic thought actually propose that this *entire universe* is but the lowest of four; four *complete* Trees of Life layered on top of each other, so that even if a seeker were to reach Keter, he would only find himself in Malkhut once more, having moved "up" one rung on the proverbial ladder of reality.

From Keter, the energy of creation flows to Chokhmah, sometimes called the Will of God. If Keter is the generative power to create, Chokhmah can be thought of as the *desire* to create, the will to apply force to the energy of the divine and urge it on into the creation of the universe. Without the impetus provided by Chokhmah, the power emanating from Keter would do nothing, merely collect and pool until it eventually filled the entirety of the universe, negating the concept of *tzimtzum* and returning all to a union with *En Sof*. Mages associate Chokhmah with the Arcanum of Forces, which governs the primordial energies of the universe; according to Genesis, after all, God's first command was "Let there be light."

As mentioned in the factory analogy, the will to create is useless without a form in which to contain it. Thus, from Chokhmah, the energy flows to Binah, the Mother of Form. Binah is often thought of as the feminine aspect of God, much as Chokhmah is the masculine form (at least inasmuch as God is knowable within this world), and the analogy is an apt one. Many religions depict the initial act of creation as one of divine sexual intercourse, with the masculine generative power combining with the feminine ability to give form to life to create the world. Of course, at this level of the Tree of Life, the form exists as *potential*, not an actual physical or spiritual thing, much in the same way that a recipe holds the potential to become a cake, but is not a cake itself. Thus, mages associate Binah with the Arcanum of Fate, which governs the ultimate destiny of all things.

From Binah, the energy of creation leaps across the Abyss through means unknown to the Awakened and reaches the *sephira* Chesed. Chesed is the point at which the potential forms from Binah can be recognized as discrete entities. It is the inspirational moment, where the *idea* of a form acquires the *potential* to be actualized. Some Kabbalists liken it to the sudden moment of inspiration when the answer to a puzzle suddenly becomes clear. Since even the most potent of inspiration cannot spring fully-formed into existence, mages associate Chesed with the Arcanum of Time, representing the transitional period from idea to reality.

From Chesed, the energy of creation now laden with the fuel to be born (from Chokhmah), the potential to be shaped into anything (from Binah) and the inspiration to determine what it will be, it reaches Gevurah, where the impulses of creation are balanced by those of preservation and destruction. Creation, by definition, requires something to change, and change, by definition, requires the old to be destroyed to make way for the new. If you want to build a house, you must cut down trees to make lumber, and if you want to abolish an unjust law within the Consilium you must destroy the social structure that allows that law to exist. Gevurah represents the judgment of what should be kept and what should be discarded; it is the counterpart to Chesed, which represents innovation for innovation's sake. Thus, Gevurah is associated with the Arcanum of Mind, governing the ability to discern ideas independently and make an active choice of which to keep and which to discard.

After Gevurah, creation returns to the Pillar of Balance for the first time since it originated in Keter. Tipheret is the embodiment of wholeness and balance, wherein creation and preservation are held harmoniously in check. Here, outdated concepts are destroyed to make way for new concepts, but at the same time those concepts that remain balanced and useful are protected from meaningless change. Mages associate Tipheret with the Arcanum of Space, in the sense of its purview over the sympathetic connections that hold the world in balance. Some Awakened liken Tipheret to a vast warehouse of the cosmos, where all concepts and ideas are filed and

sorted in an infinite space (thus connecting it to the more literal purview of Space).

After Tipheret, the energy moves once more to the Pillar of Mercy, to the *sephira* Netzach. Netzach is where the forms and ideas of creation acquire the primal drives of self-preservation and the urge to *be*. It is here that the potentials of form and inspiration are given the urge to be made manifest. To coin an analogy, a writer might have the idea of a book in his mind and the ability to create it, but it is the urges from Netzach that actually compel him to write, to apply the force to the form and actually create. The Awakened link Netzach with the Arcanum of Spirit, which governs those most primal of urges that drive the Shadow.

Passing again to the Pillar of Severity, creation reaches Hod, the *sephira* where form is given definition by language and abstraction. Without Hod, people would still be able to distinguish between a dog and a cat in front of them, or between one dog and three dogs they could see, but were the dogs and cats not actually there we would have no concept of them. It is Hod that allows the human mind to understand and abstract the *ideas* of dogs, cats, and numbers. Although many mages would logically see a connection between Hod and the Arcanum of Mind, Awakened Kabbalists have traditionally associated it with Life, after the story of how Adam defined all living things in the Garden of Eden by naming them.

As the long journey of creation nears its end, the divine energy reaches Yesod, the foundation of the world. It is through Yesod that the higher spheres interface with and filter down into the Fallen World. In the balance of force and form, Yesod is the final layer of abstract creation before the physical manifestation of the world. Some mages liken it to the Shadow, and in many ways they are similar concepts—debate between Kabbalists as to whether Yesod literally *is* the Shadow, or whether the Shadow is a part of Malkhut and Yesod is an abstraction of both the Shadow *and* the physical realm at once, remains heated. The Awakened associate Yesod with the Arcanum of Death, which may seem an unlikely correspondence until one realizes that it is at this point on the Tree that the ineffable, Supernal element of creation "dies" and becomes entirely the mundane dross of the Fallen World. Accordingly with this principle, some mages also associate Yesod with the Abyss (as it is understood by Atlantean philosophy, not to be confused with the Kabbalistic Abyss that surrounds the world).

Finally, we reach the base of the Tree: Malkhut, the "Kingdom," which is the Fallen World that mortal and mage alike dwell in. Fallen from its exalted place just below Keter and Binah, only the faintest spark of the Supernal remains in Malkhut. Denied their former glory, mages must scrounge out the faintest sympathies that link them to the Supernal once more, using the guidance of the Watchtowers to work their wills. Malkhut, for obvious reasons, is associated with the Arcanum of Matter, the crude, base material of the world devoid of the spark of life.

Awakening and Kabbalah

Atlantean doctrine holds that there are five Supernal Realms, and that each governs two of the Arcana; the ruling Arcana of the Path associated with its Watchtower. Meanwhile, the Kabbalistic worldview posits *ten* realms, each associated with one Arcanum, and with considerably less emphasis placed on the divide between Supernal and Fallen. According to the Awakened Kabbalist, the Watchtowers are not located in any one Realm, but on the paths that lie between the sephira associated with the ruling Arcana. Thus, the Watchtower of the Golden Key lies along the path between Keter and Chokhmah, while the Watchtower of the Lead Coin lies between Yesod and Malkhut.

Watchtower	Kabbalah Path
Golden Key	Keter to Chokhmah
Iron Gauntlet	Gevurah to Tipheret
Lead Coin	Yesod to Malkuth
Lunargent Thorn	Binah to Chesed
Stone Book	Netzach to Hod

The Abyss and the Qlippoth

One of the first things that strikes Awakened mages when they begin to study Kabbalah is the dark slash across the Tree of Life labeled "the Abyss." Surely, these novices say, this is evidence that Kabbalah holds an understanding of the Awakened world. Where else would it have acquired the idea of an empty hell that severs the higher realms from the lower, and which denies mankind its birthright of union with the divine wisdom? While there are certainly similarities between the Kabbalistic Abyss and the Atlantean Abyss, and many mages are able to satisfactorily reconcile them within their personal philosophies, there are likewise significant differences that a wise mage does not discount.

According to Kabbalistic theory, the Abyss has *always* existed—it is, in fact, the empty space created when *En*

The Kabbalistic Abyss and Paradox

Many mages, on encountering the Kabbalistic model of reality, spot what appears to be an obvious flaw, either in the Arcana correspondences or the placement of the Abyss. After all, Paradox comes from the Abyss snatching at the power of a mage's magic as it crosses the Abyss, and yet the *sephiroth* associated with seven of the Arcana are actually *below* the Abyss! If the Kabbalists' model is accurate, why do mages still suffer Paradox when they cast vulgar spells from Arcana like Life, Matter, or Death? Shouldn't those bypass the Abyss altogether?



Kabbalists counter with an alternative theory of Paradox: Paradox is not the result of the Lie of the Fallen World conflicting with the Supernal Truths, but rather the product of the *qlippothic* entities of the Abyss. All the energy of creation must cross the Abyss in order to reach its ultimate destination, and this gives the Abyssal entities a taste for that power. When a mage casts a vulgar spell, the energy flares and shifts out of the pattern of the Lightning Flash, drawing the attention of *qlippothic* monstrosities that surge through the hole in creation, desperate in their hunger to be made manifest and truly real by the power of creation. Their attempts to seize the energy is what causes Paradox. Kabbalists are less clear on the mechanism whereby the Abyssal entities can detect improbable spells, but postulate that it may have to do with the "knowledge" garnered from the hole called Daat.

Sof pulled away to create space for the universe. Initially, it was only the emptiness in which the creation would play out, like a stage without dressings or sets. According to Isaac Luria, building on a story within the *Zohar,* the initial act of creation was flawed: When the power of the divine emanated into the Abyss, its sheer might was too great for the Tree of Life. Keter, Chokhmah, and Binah held the force, but the lower *sephiroth* could not contain the power and shattered.

The remnants of the *sephiroth*, like the empty remains of an eggshell after the egg has been cracked, fell into the Abyss, devoid of the life and vitality granted by the divine. New *sephiroth* were created, capable of holding the divine power, and the empty shells, called *qlippoth*, lay forgotten in the abyss. But like a thin scum of oil that remains in an emptied vessel, a tiny spark of the divine clung to the *qlippoth*, just enough to imbue them with a faint life and intelligence, and a hunger to regain the touch of God's power.

The Abyss, and its *qlippoth* inhabitants, might have remained safely sealed outside of creation for all time but for man's (and, if the Awakened are to be believed, specifically mage's) hubris. There are literally countless legends of the fall of man, of which the story of the apple and the serpent and that of the Celestial Ladder are but two. Whatever version the individual chooses to believe, mankind tried to attain true knowledge of God, and failed spectacularly. Malkhut, the Kingdom of God, fell from its exalted place in the Tree of Life and left in its place a hole, called Daat ("Knowledge"). Through this hole in creation, the Abyss was able to seep in, hungry for the divine power of creation: the power the Awakened call magic.

The exact nature of the *qlippoth* has been debated by scholars, Awakened and Sleeper alike, since the very idea was introduced. The most popular theory among Awakened Kabbalists is that the *qlippoth* are both the ihabitants of the Abyss and a sort of inverse image of the Tree of Life, sometimes called the Tree of Death or, more rarely, the Tree of Knowledge (both in reference to the tree from which Adam and Eve ate and to the "false *sephira*" of Daat). This Tree of Death is what the Tree of Life would be if it were devoid of the power of creation: to return to the factory analogy, it is a condemned and closed down factory, full of hollow molds and useless machines that serve no purpose, a home to filth and vermin and disease.

Hermetic Kabbalah has a long tradition of assigning specific classes of demons to each of the *qlippoth*, including, confusingly, the shells of the *sephiroth* that did *not* shatter in the first creation. Many mages postulate that these divisions are arbitrary and meaningless; the essence of the *qlippoth* is formless emptiness; they can have only the forms the enlightened will gives them. Nevertheless, many Kabbalistic mages recognize these forms as a useful fiction. Oftentimes, when a Kabbalist mage's Paradox invokes a Manifestation, the Abyssal creature brought forth corresponds to the *qlippa* of the *sephira* associated with the spell's primary Arcanum.

Kabbalistic Symbolism

Kabbalah has no shortage of occult symbology that resonates with the Supernal World. Hermetic Kabbalah in particular has compiled a dizzying array of correspondences tied to the *sephiroth*. Mages studying Kabbalah likewise often sort their Supernal sympathies by the *sephira* that governs their Arcanum of choice: for example, a mage casting a Death spell might burn a purple candle or chant the name of the archangel Gabriel while meditating on an intricate clockwork, all symbols associated with the *sephira* Yesod.

Malkhut (Matter)

Since Malkhut ("Kingdom") is identified as literally the Fallen World, it may seem odd that it possesses any Supernal sympathy associated with it. What the student of Kabbalah must remember, though, is that the energy of creation is itself Supernal, and even though only a tiny portion of that energy reaches the Fallen World, it is still there and ready to be called forth. In keeping with its place at the base of the Tree of Life, Malkhut's correspondences are earthy and straightforward: the color brown, the element of Earth, and the concept of discipline. The Virtue associated with Malkhut is Prudence, and its Vice is Greed. Malkhut has less-pleasant associations with the concepts of materialism and stagnancy, both rooted in the image of earth and its riches. The angel associated with Malkhut is Sandalphon, and it has a planetary association with the Sphere of the Elements. In numerology, Malkhut is connected to the number 10.

Yesod (Death)

Yesod ("Foundation"), despite its Arcanum correspondence with Death, also has strong parallels with the Shadow, and thus has many sympathies similar to that realm. Its color is purple, and its element is Ephemera (the stuff of both spirits and ghosts alike). Yesod resonates with the concepts of perception and the reception of knowledge or ideas, often by channeling the restless dead. Those meditating on Yesod often perceive the image of a vast, infinitely-complex clockwork, a sort of God Machine endlessly regulating the life and death of

the world. The Virtue of Yesod is Fortitude, and its Vice is Sloth. The "cold comfort of the grave" gives Yesod a correspondence with the idea of security (especially a false sense of security), and mindless automata, especially zombies and non-sentient ghosts, likewise have strong links to Yesod. The planet that governs Yesod is the moon, and its archangel is Gabriel, the messenger and also the angel of death. Yesod's number is nine.

Hod (Life)

Hod ("Glory") is the *sephira* that embodies the glory of life in all its forms. Hod is linked with the color orange and the element of Air, which represents both the breath of life and the breath of the words that define life. In keeping with its association with the naming and defining of life, Hod has strong correspondences with the High Speech and Atlantean runes. The Virtue associated with Hod is Hope, and its Vice is Envy. For all that life can be a chaotic riot of being, Hod is connected strongly to the ordering of life, and thus any kind of order or hierarchical structure contains sympathy with Hod. Hod is associated with the planet Mercury and the archangel Raphael, who was both a healer and a bringer of knowledge. Hod is linked to the number eight.

Netzach (Spirit)

Netzach ("Victory") is the *sephira* of the pure, primal urges in all living things. Perhaps no entities in the Fallen World embody that concept more than spirits, who exist for no other reason than to fulfill the urges of their nature. Netzach's color is green, the color of life and of covetousness, and its element is Water. Desire, passion, and all of the pure, strong emotions a human being can feel are associated with Netzach. The Virtue and Vice of Netzach are simple, straightforward, and diametrically opposed: Charity and Greed, respectively. Unsurprisingly, Netzach's planetary governance is Venus, named for the goddess of love and passion, and its archangel is Haniel, whose name means "joy of God." Netzach is given the number seven in numerology.

Tipheret (Space)

Tipheret ("Beauty") represents the perfect balance of potential, of all things being in their proper place and the interconnections between all things. Its harmony is a bright, glorious thing, a far cry from the stereotypical image of the Mastigos who claim affinity with its Arcanum. Tipheret is associated with the color yellow and the concepts of unbrokenness or wholeness; gold rings are a popular representation. The element of Tipheret is Fire, its Virtue is Faith, and its Vice is Pride. The planet that rules Tipheret is the Sun, and its archangel is Michael, the righteous warrior. Christian Kabbalists connect Tipheret to the image of the Son of God (in the disincarnate sense, not specifically the image of Jesus Christ). Tipheret is identified with the number six.

Gevurah (Mind)

In Gevurah ("Strength"), that which is good and deserving of existence is preserved, while that which is flawed and unworthy is destroyed. Gevurah is associated with the color red and the concepts of power and might. Gods of war, power, and divine justice (Ares, Thor, the Morrigan, and their ilk) are often depicted as manifestations of Gevurah. Gevurah is tied to the Virtue of Fortitude and the Vice of Wrath, and is governed by the planet Mars and the archangel Kamael. Martial arts, justice, and revenge are also powerful associations, as are acts or symbols of cruelty, dominance, and oppression. Gevurah bears the number five in numerological studies.

Chesed (Time)

Chesed ("Mercy") is the creative font of the idea, of the potential genesis of the actual from the conceptual and the process of creation. Its color is blue, and it is associated with the images of authority and majesty; sky-fathers and ruling deities, from Ra and Zeus to the Abrahamic God and Odin, are often associated with Chesed. The Virtue linked with Chesed is Fortitude, and its Vice is Gluttony. In astrology, Chesed is ruled by the planet Jupiter, and its governing archangel is Zadkiel, the angel of mercy. Any symbol of power and authority, especially righteous authority, is associated with Chesed, as are moments of inspiration or sudden enlightenment. Some mages, for this reason, call Chesed the "*sephira* of Awakening" and claim that it is the divine energy emanating from this *sephira* that lifts mortal men and women out of the Lie and brings them to the Supernal Truth. Chesed is associated with the number four by numerologists.

Daat (The Abyss)

Daat ("Knowledge") is not a *sephira* at all; it is a false emanation of the Abyss, left when Malkhut fell from its original place in the Tree of Life. To the unwary seeker of enlightenment, the power of Daat can seem to bring knowledge, but all it truly offers is shadows and lies. It is knowledge, but the empty, useless knowledge of one who *knows* but does not *understand*. Daat is associated with no color or planet, for it does not manifest as a positive force in any way. Any symbol that expresses

emptiness or nothingness—a pit or chasm, tunnel, or black hole—has sympathy with the concept of Daat, as do gods of falsehood and deception, such as the Norse Loki or Roman Janus.

Binah (Fate)

The first of the so-called "Supernal" *sephira*, Binah ("Understanding") is the mother of all form and shape. Understandably, then, the imagery of the sacred feminine is strongly associated with Binah. Mother-goddesses and the fecundity of nature are powerful symbols of this *sephira*. Binah's color is black, and its ruling planet is Saturn. The angel of Saturn (and thus Binah) is Cassiel, the watcher, who observes all that unfolds in the cosmos. Binah's Virtue is Prudence, and its Vice is Sloth. Divine figures like Isis, Hera, and Nut are all associated with Binah, as are darker "mother" figures like Echidna, the mother of monsters. Binah's numerological correspondence is to the number three.

Chokhmah (Forces)

Chokhmah ("Wisdom") is the divine masculine principle of creative power. Its color is silver, and it is often associated with patriarchal symbols like Cronus, Geb, and Ymir, symbols of the progenitors of the universe. Chokhmah is associated with no planet, but with the stars of the Zodiac, and the angel Raziel. Chokhmah's Virtue is Faith, and its Vice is Wrath. According to most Kabbalists, Chokhmah is the highest *sephira* a mortal mage can attain comprehension of, and thus is the pinnacle of Kabbalistic magic before Ascension. Chokhmah is given the number two by numerologists.

Keter (Prime)

The pinnacle of the Tree of Life, Keter ("Crown") is difficult to assign occult sympathy to, as most Kabbalists believe that mortals can only truly understand it upon Ascension. Only the Obrimos even glimpse it during their Awakenings (a fact that often contributes to the arrogance of Kabbalistic Obrimos). Keter's color is white, and its symbols are those of the Prime Mover; this might be Jehovah or another being the Kabbalist believes to be the supreme force of creation. Keter is associated with the highest virtue of all, according to mages: that of Wisdom. As it is the point of union with the pure and infinite existence of *En Sof*, Keter is not given association with a Vice (although cynics often suggest, if those mages with affinity to Keter are any indication, Pride would not be a poor choice). Keter is ruled by the archangel Metatron, the voice of God himself. Like Chokhmah, Keter is associated with no planet, but rather with the moment of creation, what science terms the Big Bang and religion calls "Let There Be Light." Keter's number, of course, is one; the number of unity and singularity at once.

Tools of the Trade

Kabbalistic magic draws from the same tradition as much of Western European ceremonial magic, and thus uses many of the same tools. Altars, candles and incense, as well as ritual circles and tools such as wands, knives, and cups are common in extended castings, as are *gematria* (a Jewish practice that involves finding sympathy between concepts or individuals by adding up the values of the letters in their names) and intense meditations on specific letter forms. Instant castings often invoke the names of the archangels of the *sephiroth* associated with the Arcana of the spell.

Tools and sacraments are often of the color or element associated with the *sephira* of a spell's primary Arcanum, and mages will often add symbols associated with other *sephiroth* which have relevance to the spell. For example, a mage wishing to conjure a spirit of retribution might perform a ritual at an altar surrounded by a circle of seven green candles, but drape his altar with a red cloth decorated with the Atlantean astrological symbol of the planet Saturn and invoke the name of Kamael. The actual spell is a Spirit spell, and even though there is no conjunctional Mind effect in the spell, Gevurah governs the concept of retribution and the destruction of the unworthy, and so it is honored in the spell. Obviously, this sort of symbolic honorific is easier to incorporate into extended castings; instant castings are usually limited to meditating briefly on the archangel or other appropriate symbol of the relevent *sephira*.

Kabbalistic mages, by dint of long tradition, use a form of accented High Speech which strongly resembles classical Hebrew. Likewise, a variant form of Atlantean runes more closely resembling written Hebrew has been devised by Awakened Kabbalists over the centuries, and is often used preferentially by practitioners of this tradition. There is no mechanical difference between these Kabbalistic variants and the standard versions taught by the Atlantean system, and any character capable of understanding one is capable of understanding the other.

Kabbalistic Mage Characters

Kabbalah, unlike many magical traditions, is a comprehensive cosmological philosophy often presented as an alternative to, or elaboration on, the Atlantean model. Kabbalah is not unusually attuned to any one type of magic; as such members of every Path and order can be found practicing Kabbalah. Some Kabbalist mages erroneously reckon the Paths' importance based on how

far up the Tree of Life they Awakened, but true masters generally eschew this theory. After all, pride goeth before the fall, and those who place themselves highest often fall the farthest.

Contemplating the Tree of Life is predominantly mental exercise, and so Mental Traits tend to dominate among Kabbalists. In particular, Occult and Academics (preferably with a Religion Specialty) are vital to a Kabbalist's work. Those who wish to trace the practice back to its roots are strongly encouraged to take the Language (Hebrew) Merit, as many source texts remain untranslated. Despite the emphasis on Mental rigor, Social and Physical Traits can be equally useful. Many of the *sephiroth* are associated with action, whether physical or mental, and rotes drawing down those realms often make use of those Traits. Many Kabbalists identify themselves strongly with a particular *sephira*, and such individuals often prioritize the Traits associated with that *sephira*. A Mastigos who considers it his duty to embody Gevurah and protect the innocent and pure from all that is wicked and wrong is likely to have Physical or Social Traits as his primary categories, depending on the specific method he chooses to protect them.

Character Concepts: Messianic rabbi, jaded initiate of the Golden Dawn, community defender, devout seeker of enlightenment, blind alchemist, Solomonic demon-binder, emissary to the angels, Abyss-deceived "enlightened master," instrument of God's balance, wandering pilgrim.

Kabbalah Rotes

The magic of so-called "practical Kabbalah" (as opposed to the esoteric Kabbalah which focuses on union with God) is as wide and varied as the entirety of western occult tradition. The powers associated with Kabbalah are so varied that, at some points in Jewish history, *any* miraculous power exhibited by a rabbi was attributed to Kabbalistic knowledge. The following are a few specific examples of some of the most impressive and famous of the powers attributed to Kabbalah.

Note that mages who have studied Kabbalah as a magical tradition (via the Magical Tradition Merit, p. 23) do not need to know Fate 2 to utilize the conditional duration effects described in "The Golem" and "Lashes of Fire" spells below.

The Golem (Matter ●●●● + Fate ●●)

According to legend, the creation of the Golem, an animated being of lifeless clay given vitality by the power of the Tree of Life, is a feat accomplished by many great masters of the tradition. The most famous version of the tale dates from 16th century Prague, where the Maharal, Rabbi Judah Loew, created a Golem to protect the Jews of his city from anti-Semitic violence.

Practice: Weaving
Action: Extended
Duration: Prolonged (one scene)
Aspect: Vulgar
Cost: None

This spell bestows a kind of life on an inanimate figure, traditionally a humanoid figure sculpted out of clay. A single success is sufficient to awaken a single Golem of up to Size 5, but almost all Kabbalists spend a great deal of time and energy investing their creation with additional Potency and Duration factors. Some create Golems significantly larger than human size; for each additional 5 points of the Golem's Size, add one Target factor. The Golem has a Strength score equal to the spell's Potency, but has no other Attributes or Skills. Like an object, the Golem uses its Size, Durability, and Structure to determine the effects of attacks against it. When the Golem suffers damage in excess of its Durability rating, it suffers a –1 penalty on all actions. If its Structure points are completely depleted, it is destroyed.

The Golem created by this spell has no true intelligence or initiative. It can understand simple commands, up to roughly the complexity one could expect a dog to follow, and can be "programmed" to respond to a specific stimulus with a single, predefined action (e.g. "Attack anyone who tries to harm me"). By adding Mind 5 to the spell, the mage may grant his creation a mind of its own. It may be worth noting that nearly all tales of free-willed golems end with the creature rebelling and killing many, sometimes including its creator.

At Matter 5, the mage may use Advanced Prolongation factors.

Tradition Rote: Maharal's Wisdom
Dice Pool: Intelligence + Crafts + Matter

The traditional Kabbalistic rote for the creation of a golem is a long and arduous ceremony, lasting as long as several days. First, the mage prepares and ritually cleanses an altar, which is draped with a brown cloth (representing Malkhut) and on which the Golem's form is laid out. The mage need not sculpt the Golem himself, if he so chooses. Once the Golem is in place, two black candles (for Binah) are lit at the head and foot of the Golem, and the mage begins to carve sacred runes into the body of the inert statue (both to represent Hod and to provide the additional duration from Atlantean runes). The mage then chants in the accented High Speech favored by Kabbalists for thirty minutes before beginning the invocation proper, which involves readings from scrip-

ture and invocations to the archangels of the *sephiroth*. The traditional target number aimed for by Kabbalists is nine: five applied to the spell's Potency and four to its Duration (allowing the Golem to exist for two days, or indefinitely if the caster is a Master, counting the Atlantean rune bonus), but the caster is free to set his own desired target number. Often, the rote concludes with the mage writing the Hebrew word *Emet* ("Life") on the Golem's forehead and setting the conditional duration to specify that the Golem will be destroyed if the first letter is erased, rendering the word *Meit* ("Death").

Lashes of Fire
(Mind ●●●● + Forces ●●●● + Fate ●●)

This devastating spell has long been attributed to Kabbalistic practices, though most practitioners ardently insist that it goes against everything that Kabbalah teaches. By means of this terrible curse, the subject is "denied the forgiveness of God," and moreover is cursed to suffer savage lashes as from a whip of fire each time he transgresses.

Practice: Patterning
Action: Extended
Duration: Prolonged (one scene)
Aspect: Vulgar
Cost: 1 Mana

By means of this spell, the target is rendered unable to "achieve forgiveness," as Kabbalists put it. In game terms, this takes the form of a compulsion forbidding the subject from increasing his Wisdom or relevant Morality Trait for the duration of the spell. The subject, of course, does not think in terms of ratings and experience points; the compulsion merely prevents the subject from coming to terms with his own sins. Moreover, should the target lose a point of Wisdom for any reason during the spell's duration, he takes damage equal to the spell's Potency (reduced by armor if the subject's armor can protect against fire) as invisible whips of flame scour his flesh. Note that suffering this damage does not end the spell — flagrant sinners can be (and have been) killed by this spell. At Mind 5, the caster may use Advanced Prolongation factors.

Tradition Rote: Pulsa di Nura

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation + Mind



Because of the elaborate casting ritual traditionally involved, many Kabbalists incorporate Space 2 to cast this rote sympathetically. The Pulsa di Nura, as this spell is traditionally named, begins in the Kabbalist's preferred ritual space. An altar draped with red cloth (for Gevurah) and set with purple candles (for Yesod and Death) is the centerpiece of the ritual. As with most Kabbalist spells, it begins with chanting in the High Speech for a half an hour. Once the ritual proper is begun, the mage takes up a silver dagger (representing both Chokhmah and his desire to do harm), with which he traces the names of Michael and Kamael in the air above the altar. Finally, at the completion

of the casting, he pierces an image of the desired target (or another object which has sympathy to the target) with the dagger, then transfers the object to a burning brazier to be consumed. If the ritual is performed during the astrological hour of Mars (for example, at dawn on a Tuesday), the Mana cost is waived.

There is no common consensus as to the appropriate number of successes the willworker should target with this spell. Most agree that it should last no less than two days, so five successes are often allocated to Duration; alternately, the spell's conditional duration is often set so that the spell expires if the target deviates from a course of action the caster finds displeasing — for example, a Pulsa di Nura cast on a businessman might be set to end if the target gives up his efforts to buy the apartment building that houses the mage's sanctum. Successes devoted to Potency range from one (if the caster only wishes to gently goad the target) to ten or more for truly Biblical-scale vengeance.

Climbing the Tree (Mind ●●●● + Any Arcanum ●●●)

A great part of the teaching of Kabbalah involves the mage's efforts to understand and achieve union with the Tree of Life. Kabbalists see this as a form of metaphysical "climbing" of the Tree to reach the higher *sephiroth* and greater understanding. Traditionally this is accomplished by intense meditation and prayer; this spell allows the Kabbalist to make the journey more literal.

Practice: Weaving
Action: Extended
Duration: Prolonged (one scene)
Aspect: Covert
Cost: None

This spell must be cast in conjunction with an astral journey (see **Mage: the Awakening** p. 283). Upon casting this spell, the mage shapes the Astral Plane around him into a representation of one of the *sephiroth* he has gained an understanding of (that associated with the conjunctional Arcanum of the spell). He can interact with the angels and spirits of that *sephira* and gain wisdom and understanding of its principles. The exact effects of this wisdom varies; in general, if the mage overcomes the challenges and seals that guard the *sephira's* mysteries, he should earn 1-3 Arcane experience points depending on the difficulty of the challenge. According to Kabbalist doctrine, the key to Ascension is to use this spell to journey completely up the Tree of Life, from Malkhut all the way to Keter, navigating each *sephira* in turn. This obviously requires considerable mystical power, and there are few if any reliable cases of a mage achieving this goal.

Tradition Rote: The Serpent's Path
Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult + Mind

Just as energy travels down the Tree of Life in the Lightning Flash, so too does it ascend once more in the Serpent's Path. The mage who climbs that treacherous road and passes all the wrathful guardian angels set over it will achieve unity with God, or so they say. This rote is one of the more subdued Kabbalistic rituals: the mage dons a purple robe (even if Yesod is not his ultimate destination, it is the traditional "beginning" of the road). Surrounded by foci that represent his goal, the mage meditates until he slips into the Astral Plane, then continues meditating on the names of God and the archangels of the *sephiroth*. When the spell is complete, the mage enters the "realm" of the *sephira*, and can interact with its inhabitants. If he overcomes their challenges and riddles, he may gain enlightenment. If he fails, the result could be messy to say the least.

Magic Items

For the most part, Kabbalah is an internal tradition, focusing on the practitioner's enlightenment over external symbols. As such, there are comparatively few magic items associated with the tradition. A few, however, have gained prominence among occultists, and even popular culture.

The Golem

The Kabbalist spell described above is certainly one interpretation of the myth, but some mages consider it to be only a recreation of the legend, which dates back to antiquity and often attributes strange behaviors to the Golem. Some argue that the original golem was a curse, a trap laid for the hubris-filled mages of an earlier time.

Golem as Imbued Item (• • • • •)

This version of the Golem is a simple, animated statue imbued with the Maharal's Wisdom rote described above. The Golem is a roughly man-sized figure, with crudely human features hewn from white clay etched with countless mystic runes. It has a Size of 5, Strength 6, a Durability of 3 and 10 points of Structure. The Golem can understand moderately-complex commands, and will defend its owner without any instruction. The word "Emet" is written on its forehead; if the first letter of the word is erased (and remember, Hebrew is written right-to-left), the Golem ceases to function.

Golem as Curse (Imbued Item • • • • •)

Outwardly, this Golem resembles the one described above; it even has similar Traits. This Golem, though, has a different Fate-based trigger. Any time its owner orders the golem to commit an act of hubris, mark a "Resistance"

point in the Golem's statistics. When five of these points have accumulated, the Golem goes berserk and begins killing and destroying randomly. It no longer responds to its "owner" and must be destroyed or shut down.

The Rabbi's Cane

According to legend, the Maharal of Prague, the legendary Rabbi Judah Loew, possessed a marvelous walking stick which he could use to summon the shades of the dead. These restless ghosts would often testify at criminal proceedings, providing evidence to exonerate persecuted Jews. Some say the story is a myth, others say that the cane was an artifact or the Rabbi's personal dedicated tool. In either form, the cane is a simple walking stick of black-lacquered wood, with an unadorned handgrip well-worn from use. When the light catches the lacquer just right, the observant eye can make out Atlantean runes carved into the wood below.

The Cane as Artifact (• • • • • • • • •)

The artifact form of the Rabbi's cane came into Loew's possession from a mysterious source during his stay in Moravia. The cane has the power to invoke the Death 5 "Summon the Dead" spell, drawing the shades of the dead up from the Underworld. It further incorporates the Death 3 "Control Ghost" spell so that the owner can compel summoned ghosts to speak truly. Both effects last for one scene.

The Cane as Magical Tool

According to the tales, Rabbi Loew was a Kabbalistic mage of considerable power. This cane was his dedicated Path tool, which he used to aid him in calling down the Supernal; it has no intrinsic mystical properties, but in the hands of a skilled diviner its sympathetic connection to the old mage could make it a tremendously useful tool. Who knows what secret treasures the threads of sympathy might lead to, or what secrets the Maharal's shade might share with a necromancer who called him forth with the cane's sympathy?

Storytelling

Kabbalah presents a complete, comprehensive cosmology that can either compliment, compete with, or even supplant the Atlantean system. You can run a very novel game in which any of the three are true. The last option obviously differs from the view presented in the **Mage** rulebook, but it can make for an intriguing new twist on the setting. Consider the Storytelling possibilities inherent in a chronicle built entirely around the rich symbolism and esoteric mystery of the Kabbalah; hidden meanings and symbols abound, and every new level of an Arcanum learned is another step toward enlightenment.

Story Hooks: Roots and Branches

• **Choking the Tree:** It is the driving goal of Abyssal entities in the Kabbalistic worldview to reunite with the energy of creation. Recently, a group of powerful Scelesti has discovered a ritual they believe will accomplish this goal; a mighty spell that aims to actually choke off the *sephira* Binah, leaving no receptacle for the energy flowing forth from Chokhmah. Left unchecked, the pure stuff of creation will overrun the universe, dissolving all creation back into unity with *En Sof*.

• **The Tree of Death:** Over the past few weeks, three murders have caught the eyes of the Guardians of the Veil. Each victim was brutally killed in a ritual manner, and carved into their flesh were the Kabbalistic terms for the *qlippothic* demons of the *sephiroth* Keter, Chokhmah, and Binah. Each victim in some way embodied or indulged in the sins associated with those entities. With seven more *sephiroth* to go, the killer must be found and stopped, but when his choice of victims comes to focus on truly heinous individuals, the choice might become more difficult than some would like.

• **The Lost *Sephiroth*:** One of the most prominent masters of Kabbalah in the local Consilium believes that Kabbalists have been entirely too swift to dismiss Daat as a mere trap to deceive those not discerning enough to pass it by. He believes there is vital knowledge about the world before the Fall to be had within its ruined shell. The master's plan to mount an astral exploration of the "lost *sephira*" has met with enthusiastic approval by younger, more radical thinkers, but the Hierarch and his council think the whole thing smacks of Scelestus-talk. The players might come down on either side of the debate, fending off Abyssal entities while the scholars make their examinations, or they might staunchly try to stop the expedition from taking place — or deal with the fallout when the party returns... *changed* somehow.

In such a chronicle, Ascension might be a very real and ultimate goal of many or all characters —and there are certainly those who see enlightenment as a "me or you" prospect and do everything in their power to advance their own enlightenment over their rivals. The film *Pi* could be seen as an example of this type of story.

Of course, Kabbalah can also be used to simply provide an interesting alternative to the Atlantean orthodoxy. Mysterium mages, in particular, delight in discussing philosophical differences as to the nature of reality. As anyone who has ever worked in academia can tell you, this process isn't necessarily as civilized as it sounds. Backbiting, political pressure, and even outright sabotage can mar the "gentleman's" disagreement. For inspiration, turn to historical accounts of any Crusade or Inquisition toward an alternative religion. Movies like *The Name of the Rose* might not deal specifically with Kabbalah, but they do provide an interesting example of the savagery with which the establishment can defend its view.

Kabbalah can also make excellent fodder for a chronicle centered around astral journeys. Kabbalists devote much of their time to acquiring as much knowledge of the Tree of Life as they can, both by studying earthly accounts of Kabbalah and by entering the Astral Planes to climb their own, personal Tree, a sort of microcosm of creation's macrocosmic Tree. Like any astral journey, a trip along the Tree of Life is no less dangerous for being "all in your head," nor is the wisdom to be gained from the inhabitants of the *sephiroth* to be devalued because it comes from within. For inspiration for such a chronicle, look no further than the graphic novel series *Promethea,* which devotes quite a few issues to its heroine undertaking just such a journey.

Alternative Magic (Storyteller's Options)

With a few small modifications to the magic system of Awakening, Kabbalistic theory and wisdom can easily be brought to the forefront of your chronicle if you so desire. Consider employing one or more of the following optional rules to give Kabbalah a larger share of the spotlight.

• **Harmonious Magic:** A Kabbalist mage understands that, while the Arcana are the tools by which he shapes reality, the power of the *sephiroth* is what creates that reality in the first place. Accordingly, he learns to lessen the impact of his spells on the Fallen World when he acts in accordance with the *sephiroth*.

In game terms, the mage may reduce his Paradox dice pool by –1 die when he casts a spell whose intended effect is in harmony with the nature of the *sephira* associated with it. For example, casting a Forces spell to give power (that is, "life") to a machine would qualify, because Chokhmah deals with the concept of the primal life-giving, generative force. Likewise, a Spirit spell to conjure a spirit that will urge the target to fulfill her primal urges qualifies, but summoning a death-spirit to attack an enemy would not.

• **Awakening to the *Sephiroth:*** When a mage Awakens, he journeys to one of the five Watchtowers, each of which exists in two *sephiroth* at once. The mage journeys to *one* manifestation of the Watchtower, which grants him an additional affinity to one of the ruling Arcana of his Path. At character creation, choose one of the ruling Arcana of your character's Path. That Arcanum costs only new dots x 5 to increase. However, this affinity makes it harder to learn the Arcanum opposed to your primary affinity. The cost to increase your inferior Arcanum increases to new dots x 9.

• **Kabbalistic Conjunction**: The Arcana are associated with the *sephiroth*, but the *sephiroth* are more than the Arcana. A Kabbalist understands that, and knows how to draw down the power of creation in novel ways. Whenever he casts a conjunctional spell, a Kabbalist may replace the normal conjunctional Arcanum with the Arcanum associated with the *sephira* which most closely matches the effect of the spell. For example, a spell which would ordinarily have a conjunctional Mind effect to allow the caster to speak any language could use Life instead, because Life is associated with Hod, the *sephira* of the power of words and languages. The caster must have one more dot in the *sephira*-associated Arcanum than the spell would require. In chronicles using this rule, the common names of the Arcana might be downplayed in favor of calling them by their *sephiroth's* name. A Moros wouldn't call himself a Master of Death, but a Master of Yesod.

• **The Virtue of Man:** Kabbalah places a great store in virtuous thought and deed, and posits that virtue is the only way to truly achieve enlightenment and Ascension. The universe rewards the virtuous; and as such, whenever the casting of a spell would count as the mage fulfilling her Virtue, in addition to regaining all spent Willpower, she gains a point of Mana. For all that Virtue is exalted, Vice is also powerful —Kabbalah sees the Vices as traps, illusions set out by the *qlippoth* to lead the unwary astray from Wisdom. The Abyss wants to lure mages into hubris and folly, and so it holds back its sting when a mage gives in to his weaker impulses. Whenever the casting of a spell would count as the fulfillment of the mage's Vice, he gains a Willpower point, but also subtracts one die from his Paradox pool if the spell is vulgar.

Sample Character

Shabbatai

"Your lament and sorrow must be changed into joy, and your fasting into merriment; for ye shall weep no more. Rejoice with song and melody, and change the day formerly spent in sadness and sorrow into a day of jubilee, because the Awakened Kingdom is coming."

Background: Mordecai Halberstam was born into one of Brooklyn, New York's most prominent Hasidic Jewish families. From an early age, he showed himself to be an apt pupil of the Talmud and was groomed by his family and his community for rabbinical studies almost from the time he could read. God, or Fate, or some other higher power (depending on whom you ask) intervened in his sixteenth year, though, and while praying at Temple, Mordecai experienced a vision. He saw the holy archangels Metatron and Raziel, standing before the gates of a great golden tower, wherein surely must have dwelt the Throne of God. The angels vexed him with temptations and scriptural riddles, but Mordecai answered all of their questions and defeated their seals, and was allowed to enter the golden tower, into whose walls he signed his name in Hebrew letters wrought with mystical significance.

When he returned to awareness of this world, Mordecai began to tell others in his community that he, like Elijah, had been called up to Heaven to witness the Throne of God, and that he had brought back with him secrets and wisdom to share with the Jewish people. Word eventually made it back to the Guardians of the Veil, who recognized the signs of Awakening in the young man's tales and quickly sent agents to quiet him. Once Mordecai had been inducted into Awakened society and told its myths, he recognized the truths in them — certainly, Atlantis was merely a metaphor for Eden, and the Supernal World a *goyim*'s imperfect understanding of the Tree of Life, but the truth of an ancient, Awakened paradise lost by man's hubris resonated with his soul. In that resonance, Mordecai felt that he had found God's plan for him — that he was allowed to enter the highest of the Watchtowers, that he was escorted by the archangels themselves, surely this meant that he was to lead the Awakened nation back to its paradise, its Promised Land. If God demanded that he be a Messiah, even to a community with so many idolatrous and blasphemous members, then that was the duty he would perform. He took the name Shabbatai, after the 17th century Jew who claimed to be the Annointed One, to remind himself to be humble in his task. He has a long road ahead of him, but already the young mage's fiery intensity and raw charisma have gathered a number of followers to his banner.



Description: Shabbatai is a young Jewish man of just under eighteen years of age. His features are of strongly Eastern European character, and his dark eyes smolder with the intensity of his cause. His hair is worn in the traditional Hasidic fashion, and he is slowly but surely developing the full beard characteristic of his sect of Judaism. Likewise, he dresses in the conservative, somewhat archaic suit and hat favored by the Hasidim, albeit subtly augmented by Atlantean runes woven into the lining to aid in the casting of protective spells.

Shabbatai's nimbus is that of the Kingdom of Heaven — he seems to be backed by an invisible but clearly-felt host of holy angels, not the New Age harps-and-chubby-babies variety but the mighty and terrible messengers of God that leveled cities in the Old Testament. During especially potent castings, his very surroundings seem to transfigure into a shining city of gold, while the voices of the Seraphim unceasingly chant the Trisagion.

Storytelling Hints: Shabbatai is either a deluded zealot or the greatest hope the Awakened have for re-

gaining the glory of Atlantis. If he is wrong about his destiny, no force in the Fallen World will convince him of it, and in time he may well be led to acts of increasing desperation to fulfill it. If he is right, that same dogged tenacity will allow nothing short of death to stop him — and maybe not even that. Shabbatai speaks softly, for he does not need to shout: the power of his belief is sufficient to sway others to his cause. Regardless of that cause's rightness, though, Shabbatai is bound to make waves in any Consilium he happens to visit, waves that could lead to no shortage of enemies among the Awakened.

Dedicated Magical Tool: Copy of the Torah
Real Name: Mordecai Halberstam
Path: Obrimos
Order: Silver Ladder
Legacy: None
Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 2, Resolve 5
Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2
Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 1, Composure 3
Mental Skills: Academics (Judaism) 4, Investigation 4, Occult (Kabbalah) 3, Politics 1, Science 1
Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Drive 1, Firearms 1
Social Skills: Empathy 3, Expression (Oratory) 4, Persuasion 3, Socialize 1
Merits: Allies (Messianic Awakened) 3, Contacts (Hasidic Communities), Destiny 4, Eidetic Memory, High Speech, Language (Hebrew, Aramaic), Magical Tradition (Kabbalah), Order Status 2
Willpower: 8
Wisdom: 7
Virtue: Faith
Vice: Pride
Initiative: 5
Defense: 2
Speed: 9
Health: 7
Gnosis: 4
Arcana: Fate 1, Forces 3, Mind 2, Prime 4, Time 1
Rotes: *Forces*—Influence Light (•), Control Sound (••), Unseen Shield (••), Call Lightning (•••); *Mind* — Aura Perception (•), Emotional Urging (••); *Prime* — Discern Phantasm (•), Dispel Magic (•), Supernal Vision (•), Counterspell (••), Primal Flow (••), Celestial Fire (•••), Phantasm (•••), Awaken Hallow (••••)
Mana/per turn: 13/4
Armor: 3 ("Unseen Shield," Forces ••)

TAOIST SORCERY

The utmost man is daemonic. When the wide woodlands blaze, they cannot sear him. When the Yellow River and the Han freeze, they cannot chill him. When swift thunderbolts smash the mountains and whirlwinds shake the seas, they cannot startle him. A man like that yokes the clouds to his chariot, rides the sun and moon and roams beyond the four seas. Death and life alter nothing in himself.

— Chuang-Tzu

In the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese Communist Party tried to suppress the ancient, mystical tradition of Taoism, along with every other doctrine that might compete with its own. It failed. Taoism remains deeply woven into Chinese culture. Its influence reaches from medicine to organized crime.

Until recently, other people knew little about Taoism. Western scholars had read a few cryptic, mystical-philosophical treatises. They knew about community religious festivals, popular fortune-telling methods, miscellaneous folk charms and wonder-tales. It was like trying to understand Christianity based on one gospel, a community Easter parade and a group of Holy Rollers. In recent decades, however, scholars have finally studied ancient, little-circulated scriptures and persuaded actual Taoist masters to reveal mysteries and practices long kept secret.

Taoism remains difficult to define, though. Perhaps that is appropriate. Its foundation scripture, the Tao Te Ching of the legendary sage Lao-Tzu, warns, "The Tao that can be named is not the true Tao." A Taoist does not believe in a tidy, well-defined set of dogmas labeled "Taoism"; he seeks experiences beyond description. Supernal experiences, you might say. Taoism isn't something you believe; it's something you do. Any brief discussion can

only touch upon a few core concepts and try to suggest the goals and methods of Taoism's practitioners.

The Taoist Cosmology

As Lao-Tzu said, the concept at the core of Taoism is fundamentally indefinable. "Tao" means "the way." The Tao is the Way of the Universe: the natural order of things and the totality of existence, beyond time, space and division into separate entities.

The Tao Te Ching describes the genesis of the Universe in this way: "The Tao gave birth to the One; the One gave birth to the Two; the Two gave birth to the Three; the Three gave birth to the Ten Thousand Things." However, this is not a historical progression analogous to the Judeo-Christian seven days of Creation. Instead, Lao-Tzu describes the progressive development of concepts, from the indescribable Tao to the real, concrete objects of everyday experience.

The One

Because the Tao is totally beyond all description or division, one cannot even say that it exists: That would ascribe a definite quality to the Tao and a division between existence and nonexistence.

All of reality — the manifest Tao — is the One. The manifest Tao is called T'ai Chi, "the Great Principle," or Hun Tun, "Primordial Chaos." Reality is not yet divided into entities, qualities or levels of being such as matter or spirit. At this level of comprehension, everything consists of one essence: Ch'i or Qi, "Breath," a force both natural and supernatural. Like the Western scientific concept of energy, qi appears in many forms, from literal breath to the power of souls. Solid matter is just a particularly dense configuration of qi. Taoist religion represents this ultimate force as the god Yüan-shih T'ien-tsun, or "Primordial Heavenly Worthy."

The Two

The quality of existence necessarily implies the quality of non-existence. Unity begets duality. The primordial qi operates in two fundamental modes: Yang, the principle of active force, expansion, light, motion, life and Heaven; and Yin, the principle of passive receptivity, restriction, darkness, stillness, death and Earth. Just about everyone has seen the monad symbol of the circle divided by a recurving line into two comma-shapes, black and white, that represents the division between yin and yang.

As the monad symbol suggest, yin and yang are not static qualities locked in eternal opposition and negation. Their interplay is dynamic: Something can be yin in one context, yang in another. Each half of the monad also contains a spot of the opposite hue. Taoist philosophy says that nothing is pure. Everything contains a bit of its opposite. Indeed, any extreme tends to give rise to its own opposite. For instance, long periods of peace and social stability generate the seeds of revolt; periods of social chaos lay the groundwork for a new order. One Taoist initiatory rite increases a student's mystical force by poisoning him and leaving him in a lightless cave for a week. The concentrated force of yin must attract a complementary upsurge of yang, increasing the student's spiritual force overall.

Taoist religion represents this conceptual stage of duality as the god Ling-pao T'ien-tsun, the "Spirit Jewel Heavenly Worthy," emblematic of the connection between matter and spirit, Heaven and Earth.

The Three

Some Taoists interpret "the Two" as Yang and "the Three" as Yin, but other interpretations are possible. The I Ching, an ancient fortune-telling guide, ascribes special importance to eight "trigrams" that represent the permutations of yin and yang in groups of three. Each trigram consists of three line segments, whole for yang and broken for yin. They range from three yang lines to three yin lines. The eight trigrams are often drawn around the yin-yang monad; this octagonal arrangement also provides a map of space for Taoist rituals.

"The Three" can also refer to a third Taoist deity, Tao-te T'ien-tzun, the Heavenly Worthy of the Tao. Taoists regard this deity as the divine archetype of the sage Lao-Tzu and a symbol of qi as life force.

Taoism also places great emphasis on the triad of Heaven, Earth and Man. These three realms of being reflect each other. Entities in one realm correlate to entities in the others. For instance, the Purple Court is simultaneously the highest palace in Heaven, a palace on the mythical mountain K'un-lun, and part of the human brain. A Taoist draws power from these affinities.

The Ten Thousand Things

The interplay of qi creates an infinitude of different entities. Some are material; some are spiritual. As the appearance of the three Heavenly Worthies suggests, Taoism combines an abstract, philosophical conception of qi with belief in gods and spirits. The Heavenly Worthies exist in Prior Heaven, the realm of transcendent archetypes. Most gods, however, exist in Posterior Heaven, which is merely a place in the sky for spirits. Taoists often personify the forces and concepts of their creed as gods whom they can call upon for power.

The Five Elements

Yin and yang operate at a high level of abstraction. Taoism also postulates five forces, qualities or agencies with more immediate relevance to the continual changes that take place throughout the Universe: the elements of Fire, Water, Wood, Earth and Metal. They are not so much substances as modes of existence. In particular, they change into each other and affect each other through cycles of generation and restriction. Wood generates Fire, which gives rise to Earth, which forms Metal, which creates Water, which nurtures Wood again. But Wood controls Earth, which obstructs Water, which quenches Fire, which burns Metal, which cuts Wood. Everything in reality can be tied to these five elements, and their interplay described and controlled through the cycles of creation and destruction. They play an important role in Taoist magic.

Return to the Tao

In the world of the Ten Thousand Things, the Tao is hard to perceive. A Taoist tries to comprehend the Tao through meditation, mystic rituals and a variety of other ascetic and occult practices. He gains more than a mystical experience of being "one with the Universe." Along the way, a Taoist gains power. As he reaches beyond the fragmented, everyday reality of the Ten Thousand Things, he touches the fundamental currents of qi that drive the Universe, and takes them into himself. His initiations give him the right and the power to command the spirits. Ultimately, his communion with the Tao makes him a living nexus between the levels of reality. He is at once mortal and divine, in the world and beyond it. Through his rituals and meditations, the Taoist brings the realms into harmony and reinforces the cosmic order. As such, the Taoist master does not merely perform feats of magic. He helps to sustain the world itself.

History

The origins of Taoism fade into legend. No Taoist claims to invent anything; they merely explicate or develop the doctrine of previous masters. Indeed, the scriptures of Taoism are said to exist as part of the Tao itself, eternal and transcendent, until gods reveal them or mortal sages perceive them and write them down.

In mythology, the first Taoists were the legendary Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors. These primal culture heroes revealed the Tao to humanity along with writing, agriculture, government and other civilized arts. The most important of these mythical sage-kings, Yü the Great, saved the world from flooding after an evil power broke the foundations of reality. Mages might find some familiarity in sage-kings of the ancient past, flooding and a broken world.

The First Philosophers

Taoism took a step into history with the sage dubbed Lao-Tzu, the "Old Master," who flourished in the 6th century BCE — early in a remarkable 700-year period of religious ferment that saw the birth of Temple Judaism, Buddhism, Confucianism and, finally, Christianity, as well as Greek philosophy. Tradition says that Lao-Tzu was the archivist for the royal court of Chou. After his retirement, he wrote the Tao Te Ching, traveled west out of China, and disappeared. Lao-Tzu's dense, aphoristic little treatise lends itself to diverse interpretations ranging from mystical cosmology to political theory. The Tao Te Ching, however, is the first book to enunciate the concept of the Tao.

Taoism's next scripture, the Chuang-Tzu, takes its name from its alleged author, a figure even more shadowy than Lao-Tzu. The Chuang-Tzu stands out for its utter skepticism about all dogma and belief, even belief about one's own identity. In the book's most famous passage, the author recounts how he dreamed he was a butterfly, and in that dream, he fell asleep and dreamed that he was Chuang-Tzu. Which person is real, the butterfly or the sage? Again, mages might find the notion of the world as a dream somewhat familiar.

Sages, Sects and Schools

The Tao Te Ching and Chuang-Tzu inspired philosophical speculations. It also seems so have influenced notions of magic, for magicians — called fang shih — also began to be called Tao shih. Taoism did not emerge as a religion, however, until the 2nd century CE, during the Han Dynasty. According to legend, the gods gave the prophet Yü Chi the T'ai-ping Ch'ing-ling Shu, or Great Peace Book of Pure Commands. This scripture laid out the doctrines of yin and yang, the cycles of the five elements and methods to obtain blessings and disease cures from spirits. Yü Chi's book also claimed that improper balances between yin and yang caused all troubles, both natural and social. The Han emperors and ministers of state no longer ruled according to the Tao. By flouting the ways of nature and neglecting the balance of yin and yang, they were in danger of losing their right to rule.

Yü Chi greatly influenced the Taoism master Chang Dao-Ling. He established the Heavenly Master sect in western China, which ruled a province as a virtually autonomous state for centuries. Chang Dao-Ling divided his theocratic state into 24 districts, each overseen by a grand libationer to whom was assigned a register of servant spirits. Under the rule of Master Chang and his descendants, this Taoist state repaired roads, drained marshes, and set aside grain collected as taxes for feeding travelers

and the poor. Convicted criminals had to confess their sins in public and do road repair as penance.

Legend ascribes many miracles to Master Chang, including trapping demons in pottery jars, raising himself from the dead and ascending to Heaven. His strangest feat, however, was perhaps lengthening his arms to pull a disciple up a cliff. Chang Dao-Ling's talismans to bring good fortune remain popular throughout China, particularly a talisman that shows the legendary sage riding through the sky on a tiger.

Other sages revealed more scriptures and founded more sects in the next two centuries. The Shang-ch'ing or "Highest Pure" school, based on the sacred mountain of Mao Shan, became particularly influential. Its founder, Lady Wei Hua-ts'un, wrote (or revealed) the Huang-tin Ching, or Scripture of the Yellow Court, which describes the connections between the five elements, the human body and Heaven. Its meditative regimen shaped much of subsequent Taoist practice. Chinese folklore ascribes many wondrous powers to Mao Shan adepts The tradition continues in Chinese fantasy-action movies, in which Taoist adepts can perform feats ranging from leaping great distances to making vampires explode.

Other schools include Ling-pao ("Spiritual Jewel") and the P'ei-chi ("Pole Star") sect that became famous for its exorcistic prowess. Along with spirit-summoning and talismans, the scriptures from this period describe ascetic regimens and meditations to increase one's mystical power, prolong life, engage in visionary journeys to distant realms, commune with the Tao and ultimately ascend to Heaven as a divine immortal.



The Yellow Turbans

One 2nd century Taoist sect met a violent end. Another Taoist inspired by Yü Chi, named Chang Chiao (no relation to Chang Dao-Ling), founded the Great Peace sect in an eastern province. Like the Heavenly Master sect, the Great Peace school tried to build a new society amid the decay of the late Han Dynasty. Chang Chiao claimed the "blue heaven" of the Han dynasty was ending and the "yellow heaven" of his new order was about to spread across China. As token of this, his followers wore a yellow headband and so the sect was called the Yellow Turbans.

Unlike the Heavenly Masters, the Yellow Turbans attracted the ire of Han government. The Han military crushed the fledgling Taoist state. Somewhat later, the Heavenly Master theocracy accepted imperial vassalage in return for a free hand running local affairs. That would seem to be the end of Taoism as a political force.

Except it wasn't. Time and again in Chinese history, mystical movements turn into rebel movements, or rebel movements adopt mystical trappings. Typical ingredients include diet restrictions and avoidance of intoxicants (part of the Taoist regimen to keep the body pure), talismans, peachwood swords, symbolism based on the five elements and their associated directions and colors, and leaders who claim supernatural inspiration. (Admittedly, their supernatural guidance more often comes from trance mediums than Taoist masters.) Such rebellious cults and mystical rebels also frequently taught mystical exercises and martial arts drawn straight from Taoism. Some of the more influential secret societies include the White Lotus Society (which lasted from the 12th to the 19th centuries), the Eight Diagrams, the Golden Elixir Society and — most of all — the Righteous Harmony Fists, or Boxers. These mystical martial artists' rebellion shook China from 1897 to 1900.

These secret societies and rebel movements, in turn, helped create the Triads. These criminal gangs played an important role in the revolution that ended the Manchu dynasty and led to the Chinese Republic. Nowadays, they control much of the heroin trade.

So maybe it's no surprise that the China's Communist government harasses the Taoist-inspired Falun Gong movement. Its practitioners claim that Falun Gong is nothing more than a system of meditation and light exercises for physical and spiritual health, with no political aspect whatsoever. And so it is... for now. But other rebel movements and secret societies started the same way.

Success and Schism

During the 5th and 6th centuries, religious Taoism spread throughout China with the help of patron emperors, and its rites became highly popular with common folk. In this period, scholars also began compiling the proliferating scriptures into a Taoist Canon. The various schools assumed a distinct hierarchy of mystical power, enlightenment and respectability, with some schools considered more orthodox than others. Tales of Taoist masters from this period often feature miraculous journeys between sacred mountains, to distant regions of the earth, and to the stars and realms of the gods.

The Sung and Yüan dynasties (10th to 14th centuries) saw a great multiplication of popular Taoist sects and cults. These groups offered magic rather than philosophy or mystic enlightenment, much to the disgust of the leaders of older, orthodox schools. The heterodox cults even perverted Taoist ritual to black magic. The new sects did not actually disagree with the doctrines of the older schools; they differed only in their applications, or in details such as what color an adept visualized when he meditated upon a particular element. Heterodox Taoists did not scruple to use the names of prestigious schools, however, so Taoism still has a large body of "Mao Shan" black magic that has little or nothing to do with the actual meditative Taoism of the famous monastery. A new practice called "Thunder Magic" appeared and quickly spread through all the schools and sects, since it provided the best (or only) defense against black magic.

In time, some measure of order was restored by a partnership of Taoist sages and the imperial government. The imperial government recognized the Heavenly Master sect as supreme arbiter of Taoist orthodoxy and gave it the authority to ordain and rank Taoist adepts. Sects were graded into degrees of initiation and prestige, from popular cults up to the Heavenly Masters themselves and the elite adepts of inner alchemy.

Modern Taoism

When the Communists took over China, they tried to suppress Taoism. Many Taoists fled China for Taiwan, Hong Kong and the wider Chinese diaspora. The Heavenly Master sect, still led by the descendents of Chang Dao-Ling, moved to Taiwan along with Master Chang's demon-quelling sword and hundreds of pottery jars containing trapped demons. Since many Taoists operated without allegiance to any temple or monastery, however, masters continued to teach students right under the noses of the Communist authorities. As the Communist Party relaxed its grip, Taoist temples, priests and monasteries returned to public view. The great monasteries on Mao Shan and other sacred mountains now train as many initiates as ever, and receive a measure of state support as part of China's cultural heritage.

Taoism also receives interest from foreign scholars who, at last, are neither colonialists nor Christian missionaries — not the most sympathetic of investigators. A foreigner who wants to learn about Taoism — such as a curious mage — actually has a decent chance of learning from an authentic Taoist master.

Becoming a Taoist

This broad and diverse tradition demands an extraordinary range of Skills from practitioners: Academics to interpret ancient scriptures, Crafts (Calligraphy) to compose talismans, Medicine to perform acupuncture and other healing arts, Occult to know the tradition's vast body of esoteric lore, Survival to tramp through the wilderness from temple to temple, and even Weaponry to duel with spirits — among other possible Skills.

As a necessary minimum, however, any character who wants to become an actual Taoist (and not just a person who studies Taoism) requires at least Academics 2 (with a Skill Specialty in Taoism), Crafts 1 (for calligraphy) and Occult 2. This is an exceedingly literate tradition.

Taoists are religious figures in their community. As such, they may have Status. They also have their own hierarchy of recognized masters, monasteries and grades of initiation. Taoist Status does not extend past four dots, for figures such as Chang Dao-Ling's heir or the abbot of a Mao Shan monastery. This hierarchy can also justify Allies, Contacts or a Mentor — indeed, a Taoist must learn from a Mentor, whether a personal tutor or a monastery.

Magic and Mysticism

Taoism includes a prodigious range of magical practices and mystical devotions. Some of them might carry genuine magical power, or hint at new techniques for the Awakened.

Talismans

Chinese tradition describes several ways of working magic, but Taoism emphasizes talismans drawn on colored paper or, less often, wooden plaques. These are called fu, from the old Chinese word for a contract. A proper talisman should be hand-drawn by a Taoist or some other mystical initiate (Chinese Buddhist tradition now incorporates fu as well), but the Chinese people buy enormous quantities of cheaply printed talismans. Such mass-produced talismans of course have no power whatsoever.

A basic Taoist talisman consist of a prayer, command or other statement addressed to a suitable god or spirit — most probably a god in the Taoist's lu, or register of spirit servitors granted by his initiation into the mysteries of a Taoist sect or school. Talismans often include phrases such as, "By imperial order," or "In accordance with the protocols," to remind the spirits of their duty to obey.

Many talismans are written in ordinary Chinese characters. Some fu, however, use special scripts. The Taoist Canon provides a yang-aspected script whose characters are even more square and angular than regular Chinese script, and a yin-aspected "cloud script" of flowing or wriggling lines. Other talismans carry irregular blobs that bear no apparent relation to writing. These talismans take their inspiration from ancient Chinese shamans and mediums who swiped their bleeding tongues across paper to transcribe "messages" from the spirits that possessed them. Fu may also include portraits of gods or animals, diagrams that represent constellations, and other figures. A talisman might combine these methods so, for instance, the characters representing the name of a god might be drawn and arranged in such a way as to make a picture of that god (with a few additional brush-strokes if necessary).

Most talismans are written on bright yellow paper — the imperial color, as if it were an official edict. Bright red is also popular. Some fu, however, use blue, green or other colors of paper, chosen for their association with particular elements and directions. For instance, one set of talismans consists of five slips of paper, one for each of the cardinal directions, colored violet for the East, red to the South, green for the West, blue to the North, and yellow at the Center. (These colors are not consistently applied, though.) Such a set of charms protects a person from every direction and invokes the power of all five elements.

A true talisman consists of more than ink and paper, though. The Taoist must also infuse it with qi. The Taoist might visualize the god to whom he addresses the talisman. He may also visualize the sun and moon hovering in front of his left eye, or similar invocations of cosmic power. Most importantly, though, he imagines elemental qi flowing from an appropriate internal organ, through his mouth, to the brush and paper to imbue the talisman with magic.

Once a Taoist finishes scribing a talisman, he stamps it with a cubical stamp whose symbols certify his authority over the spirit world. Wax seals may further embellish the talisman and increase its resemblance of an imperial directive.

A completed fu may be used in various ways. The Taoist (or his client) may burn the talisman as a way to send its message into the spirit world. An offering of incense and gold-paper may serve as a bribe to the spirits, in case quasi-imperial and mystical authority fails to provide sufficient motivation. The talisman's recipient can paste or nail the fu to a wall, door or post, to deliver an enduring blessing to the house and all who dwell therein. Some fu

Timing

Taoist tradition says that some times are more auspicious than others for particular magical operations (a notion also found in Western ceremonial magic). To see whether a time is auspicious or unlucky, a Taoist examines the eight characters that describe it — four pairs that represent its hour, day, month and year in a 60-year cycle. Any appearances of 4 or 8 tend to be lucky, but the numbers also correlate with the five elements. An hour whose numbers conflicted with the elemental character of a working would not be lucky. Some talismans should only be written at particular hours of the day.

The angle of the Big Dipper also matters in Taoist magic. In some magical operations, the sacred space must be aligned to the direction that the Big Dipper's handle points. Any serious Taoist magician — Awakened or Sleeper — keeps an ephemeris showing the direction of the Big Dipper's handle for every hour of the year, or the Taoist works it out from memory.

are buried, perhaps to invoke chthonic spirits instead of celestial gods. In some cases, the Taoist tears the finished talisman in half, burns one part and buries the other, forging a connection between Heaven and Earth. This imitates an ancient Chinese form of contract that was torn and one half given to each party. The two halves could be put together again, showing the match between them, as a way to verify the contract.

Awakened Use of Fu

Writing a talisman takes time — enough time that it might make an excellent method for extended spellcasting. As a Taoist mage draws the words, special characters and pictures of the talisman, she builds the Imago of the spell and slowly charges it with Mana. The visible, tangible fu provides an aid to concentration and memory. At the end, the mage burns the talisman to release the completed spell, or gives the fu to the spell's target.

Fu are especially appropriate for casting rotes. These standardized spells echo the standardized nature of talismans from the Taoist Canon. A Taoist seldom invents new talismans: He copies the fu found in scriptures written by Taoist masters of long ago. These could, indeed, be grimoires of Taoist rotes: A true master uses handwritten copies handed down from initiate to initiate, sometimes for hundreds of years. Any copy, however, might assist a Taoist mage in reconstructing a rote for his own use.

Rotes involving fu often use Academics as the Skill component of the dice pool, rather than Craft or Occult. Technical skill at calligraphy matters, and so does esoteric knowledge of the spirits and Taoist occult theory. More than those, however, a fu is an official document submitted to the Celestial Bureaucracy. The Taoist must know the proper rules and formulae; and to understand them, he must master a millenium's worth of scriptures, from the Tao Te Ching onward. He must also understand how the obscure symbols of the fu derive from Chinese characters and star maps.

Sleeper scholars, however, must take it on faith that cloud script and other symbols are altered versions of ordinary Chinese characters. There's no working backward from a talisman that looks like a random scribble to the original characters. These scripts could just as easily be altered versions of glyphs assembled from Atlantean runes. A mage might use fu written in these scripts to extend a spell's duration, just as with standard Atlantean runes (see Mage: The Awakening, p. 119).

Talismanic scripts have some advantages compared to Atlantean runes. In Chinese communities, at least, fu do not stand out. Talismans tacked to the doorpost of a building or hung on a room's wall do not attract much notice. (Of course, people may notice if someone affixes fu to a building that belongs to someone else.) Western mages also are not likely to recognize cloud script or blob-symbols as runes. This can be useful if a Taoist wants to plant Atlantean runes on a mage he intends to attack, or annoying if the foreigner and the Taoist want to work together.

Typical Talismans

The Chinese people want pretty much the same things from their charms and talismans as anyone else in the world. Charm-sellers offer *fu* to avert bad luck and attract good luck. Talismans can speed recovery from disease or prevent sickness in the first place. Some *fu* banish hostile spirits; others rescue ancestral ghosts from torment (the Chinese have a lot of hells) and deliver them to Heaven or reincarnation. Some talismans are very specific: One set of talismans must be placed around a house that has burned, to purge it of bad luck before anyone rebuilds.

Taoist Rote: Summoning Talisman (Spirit ●●●)

Spell: "Greater Spirit Summons" (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 249)

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Academics + Spirit vs. Resistance

Unlike the Silver Ladder's rote, the Summoning Talisman does not depend on sheer force of personality or persuasion; the rote depends on the Taoist's knowledge of talismans and ability to draw them correctly, freehand. However, the rote only summons spirits who already have personal sigils, and respond to the proper form of the appeal rather than the magician's personal charisma. Without knowledge of a particular spirit's talisman, the rote is useless. Of course, a Taoist mage could summon spirits in other ways and strike a pact or compel the spirits to accept their own sigils.

Taoist Rote: Luck Blessing (Fate ●)

Spell: "Reading the Outmost Eddies" (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 149)

Dice Pool: Presence + Occult + Fate

The mage scribes a talisman that includes the name of the person she intends to bless, stamps it, seals it and burns it. Count the number of successes rolled; that determines the duration factors of the blessing. Whenever the recipient is in a challenging situation (one that calls for a dice roll), the character receives one free success. This happens as many times as the successes rolled, or the duration expires, whichever comes first.

Lu

A *lu*, or "register," is a roster of spirits assigned to serve a Taoist initiate. Each Taoist school offers different lists



of spirits; Taoists who attain higher grades of mastery receive a greater selection of spirit minions. Orthodox Taoists generally rely on the spirits of their *lu* rather than seeking to forge new spirit pacts of their own — and indeed, an un-Awakened Taoist has no choice. Even an Awakened Taoist might prefer to work through a *lu* for the sake of reliable results. Each spirit in a *lu* is bound to perform one specific feat when invoked through the proper talisman. As such, a mage with a *lu* has a source of power that may extend beyond his own Arcana.

The great Chang Dao-Ling drew up the first *lu*. Other Taoist masters issued their own *lu*. A mage could institute his own *lu* and place it at the disposal of disciples: This would involve forming his own spirit court and possibly creating or reshaping spirits to order (all of which a master of the Spirit Arcanum can do; see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 255). Such a program necessarily involves a mage in the politics of the Asian spirit courts that form the Celestial Bureaucracy. The complex etiquette and intrigue of this great court of courts surpasses anything ever found in the mortal imperial court of China. Fortunately, Taoist masters have a reputation for inappropriate behavior that *might* lead celestial functionaries to overlook minor breaches of decorum... but a prudent mage doesn't press his luck. The Eight Immortals might get away with giving the Celestial Emperor a bedpan as a birthday present, but anyone less powerful than these mythic arch-masters should show more discretion.

Merit: Lu (• to ●●●●●)

Prerequisites: Taoist Skill package (see "Becoming a Taoist," p. 51), Taoist Status •, Mentor • • •

Effects: A character with this Merit can call upon a roster of minor spirits. Unlike Familiars, each spirit in a *lu* performs only one feat, and only when specifically invoked through the proper ritual. A *lu* might be seen as a sort of collective Familiar — both in the sense of powers spread among a collection of spirits, and in the sense that all the Taoists of a particular school might call upon the same *lu*. The size of a school's register of spirits may vary. A very large *lu*, however, is a sign that a school lost Awakened leadership long ago, never had it in the first place, or just pads out the register with multiple names for the same spirits to sound more impressive. The number of spirits in a *lu* (or the number of applications, if one spirit can be invoked for multiple functions) is actually quite modest — no *lu* exceeds the 24 magical feats offered by the register of Chang Dao-Ling.

•	One spirit, for one magical service
• •	Three services
• • •	Six services
• • • •	Twelve services
• • • • •	Twenty-four services

The Storyteller decides what services a Taoist can obtain from a *lu*. At one or two dots of *lu*, a Taoist can obtain only minor services, from spirits of rank 1. For three to four dots of *lu*, a Taoist can invoke spirits of rank 2 and obtain somewhat greater services. Only at five dots of *lu* can a Taoist direct rank 3 spirits to perform feats of considerable power. Typical feats for the spirits of a *lu* include luck, protection from various hazards or curing disease.

To invoke the spirits in a *lu*, a Taoist writes the proper talisman for that spirit at an hour whose eight defining numbers (a pair for the hour, day, month and year) harmonize with the spirit's nature and function. The Taoist also burns an offering of incense and makes particular mudras while he imagines elementally-charged qi flowing from the proper part of his body into the talisman. The whole process takes an hour. Once he completes the talisman, the Taoist may burn it, bury it or otherwise treat it like any other talisman.

When a character invokes his register of spirits, his player rolls Dexterity + Academics + Spirit – the target spirit's Rank, to see whether the Taoist correctly draws the talisman and performs the associated ritual.

Sleepers and Sleepwalkers

A Sleepwalker can have the *Lu* Merit. This indicates she received genuine Taoist training and initiation from a true master (and so she had the Mentor Merit at the time). Although she did not Awaken, she understood enough to forge a true connection to the spirit world. Since a Sleepwalker lacks access to the Spirit Arcanum, however, her player merely rolls Dexterity + Occult – the spirit's Rank. For the weak spirits of a lesser initiate's *lu*, the chance of success is still quite good.

Like all talismanic magic, a mere Sleeper has very little chance to invoke the spirits of a *lu*, no matter how well he performs the ritual or how elegant his calligraphy. The petty spirits of a *lu*, however, are not very bright. If they should happen to pass by a correctly drawn talisman, the chances are good that they will perform their set task. Thus, even a charlatan Taoist may get lucky now and then. Fortunately, the registers of orthodox Taoist schools only contain spirits for beneficial works. Less fortunately, old books may provide the talismans of heterodox sects who included curses and other black magic in their *lu*.

Internal Alchemy: the Body Cosmic

All things unite in the Tao, but some of the Ten Thousand Things are more united than others. Taoism posits deep affinities between the realms of Heaven, Earth and Man. Everything in one realm has counterparts in the others. As such, a Taoist's most important laboratory, temple and instrument of magic is his own body.

Taoist tradition assigns special importance to five internal organs: the heart, lungs, spleen, liver and kidneys. These five viscera correlate to the five elements, as well as the five directions, five planets, seasons, colors, flavors and so on. They are called Ts'ang, or Zang, "Reservoirs," because each organ can become a vessel filled with elemental qi.

The five viscera show their importance through their influence on health. Taoist medical theory says that if one organ has too much or too little qi, this can cause disease. A person can restore balance by eating foods whose elemental character strengthens the organ whose element restrains the element of the offending organ. For instance, the liver connects to Wood while the heart's nature is Fire. Fire destroys wood; so, if a person became sick because of an overactive liver, a Taoist would prescribe foods that strengthen the heart.

Taoism also posits a number of purely metaphysical entities in the human body. The most important of these are the three "cinnabar fields" located in the head, the heart and the space between the kidneys. The lower cinnabar field may be the same as another metaphysical "organ," the Yellow Court—the nomenclature of Taoist scriptures is extremely cryptic here, and not at all consistent.

According to the *Yellow Court Scripture* and other esoteric texts, a Taoist can perform an "inner alchemy" to produce nothing less than the Elixir of Life itself—the drug of immortality. This involves charging the five viscera with qi, then fusing that qi into new forms and cycling it through the energy channels of the body. The ancient scriptures promise that the internal alchemist's body will "shine like vermilion, illuminating 1,000 *li*," that his bones become like jade, or that he can dissolve his body and ascend to Heaven in a blaze of radiance. Later scriptures offer subtler achievements: By calling elemental qi from various organs into his mouth, mixing them with solar or lunar energy and imbuing them into the saliva that he then swallows, the Taoist evokes the Three Heavenly Worthies and places them within the three cinnabar fields. Lesser gods dwell in the five viscera, the palaces of his brain and other organs. The Taoist's body thus becomes identical with Heaven.

Visionary Journeys

The scriptures and legends of Taoism tell of sages and masters miraculously traveling vast distances, even to the ends of the Earth, ascending into Heaven and descending in paradises and hells hidden underground. The legends take these stories literally. The scriptures, however, describe these as visionary journeys undertaken in meditation. As the *Tao Te Ching* says, "The sage can travel the world without leaving his room."

The Body Cosmic Table

Organ	Element	Direction	Season	Planet	Color	Flavor
Liver	Wood	East	Spring	Jupiter	Blue, Green	Sour
Heart	Fire	South	Summer	Mars	Red	Bitter
Spleen	Earth	Center	Late Summer	Saturn	Yellow	Sweet
Lungs	Metal	West	Autumn	Venus	White	Sharp
Kidneys	Water	North	Winter	Mercury	Black, Violet	Salty

Taoist Immortality

From ancient times, Taoist doctrine promised immortality to its adepts. Internal alchemy was only one method. Taoists also practiced external alchemy: Recipe-books survive that describe diverse pills and drugs meant to grant immortality. Since these drugs were compounds of mercury and arsenic, they would certainly send you to Heaven in short order. The theory behind such lethal elixirs was that if properly administered, they would kill the metaphysical entities responsible for aging and death.

Early Taoists also sought immortality through fasting and other ascetic practices. They believed that with practice, they could sustain themselves entirely on qi from the air, and by swallowing their own saliva. Consuming talismans and various drugs could help dull the appetite until the body purged the impurities taken from grosser food (and, possibly, gave hallucinations of heavenly ascent). Modern Taoism rejects such extreme methods; contemporary doctrine simply enjoins a well-balanced diet. The ancient doctrine enjoyed a modern revival, however through the "Breatharian" cult.

Even stranger methods included eating chunks of rock crystal. Somehow, the crystal was cooked so it became soft and edible. The recipe has not survived. Over the centuries, however, Taoism has rejected all such attempts to gain immortality by external means. Through meditation, the body and soul create their own immortality elixir. And indeed, Taoist masters seem to enjoy remarkably long and healthy lives. Maybe a balanced diet, martial arts exercises, avoiding alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, and stress-reducing meditations account for it... or maybe there's something more.

Taoist meditation involves a great deal of visualization. The Taoist visualizes colored mists of elemental qi, which he sucks into his mouth, mixes with saliva and swallows to empower the five viscera. He imagines gods living in his body or descending from Heaven.

All this is merely practice, however, for visionary quests the scriptures describe in remarkable detail. Some destinations are coterminous with real geography. In the material world, for instance, Mao Shan is a hill less than a thousand feet high. In vision, however, its interior holds paradisiacal lands within vast caverns.

More often, however, the Taoist undertakes a visionary journey to mystical, mythical realms. The ancient Chinese believed the world was flat and square: At the north, south, east and west poles of the world rose enormous mountains inhabited by gods, genii, immortals and strange races such as people with the heads of birds or only one arm and one leg. At the world's center rose the cosmic mountain of K'un-lun, abode of Hsi Wang Mu, Queen Mother of the West, and the peach-tree of immortality. Jeweled trees and terraces of jade and gold further ornament the holy mountains.

In these visions, the Taoist met the gods of the five directions and received from them "efflorescences" or elixirs of the five elements. For instance, one scripture tells how the sage Lord P'ei visited the Green Hillock of the uttermost East, where he met the Green Emperor who fed him "green efflorescence" (the power of Wood) and "solar water." Lord P'ei followed this with a journey to the furthest west, where he swam in the White Water and climbed the Mountain of the Void, where the True Man of Great Simplicity taught him to absorb the power of the sun and moon.

Certain scriptures even provide maps for the cosmic mountains. These "maps" take the form of talismans composed of squarish black blobs cut by narrow, wriggling white blobs that represent the caverns within the mountains. Red lines represent rivers that flow from the caverns.

Visionary flights to the cosmic mountains are only the start of a Taoist master's travels, however. He may also fly to the sun and moon, the five planets and the stars of the Big Dipper. At each location, he encounters more gods, presents tablets of passage and receives new enlightenments and immortalizing divine nourishments of qi. These locations are all, of course, magnificent with gold, jewels, flowers and wonders beyond counting. The sun, for instance, contains a walled city, a Valley of Seven Jewels, a pond of multi-hued water lilies, another pond of Golden Essence in Fusion, the Palace of Universal Yang and the Court of Liquid Fire. The people of the sun grow 24 feet tall and wear red clothes.

To a skeptical Sleeper, all this may seem like a rather pointless exercise in daydreaming. Mages familiar with astral travel, however, may wonder if the Taoists have found something real—or at least, as real as anything in the subtle planes of mind. After all, meditation doesn't require an

Merit: Astral Adept (• • •)

Prerequisite: Magical Tradition (Taoist); or Sleepwalker plus Taoist Skill package (see "Becoming a Taoist," p. 51)

Effects: An expert at astral projection can meditate her way past the Astral Threshold without the need for a Demesne, Hallow or Mana. For each stage of Astral Space entered, however, the mystic's player must roll an exceptional success. Reaching the Anima Mundi, therefore, would require three exceptional successes in the course of the extended Meditation roll.

Awakened consciousness. Maybe the Taoists *have* found — or created — locations in the Astral Planes where they encounter godlike entities. Perhaps those entities even give them gifts of Mana or some other sort of power.

Crossing the Astral Threshold, however, requires expending Mana. How does a Taoist Sleeper acquire Mana? Is it possible that when they imagine imbibing power from the air or the sun, they really do?

Mages also need to embark on their astral journeys within a Demesne or a powerful Hallow. Surely, very few Taoists would have access to such locations. If Taoist disciplines enable anyone to visit Astral Space, without the need for a mystically-charged location, that would be... very interesting.

Even if these visionary journeys were just elaborate daydreams for *most* Taoists, other mages would like to know if Awakened Taoists visit astral locations such as the caverns beneath Mao Shan, K'un-lun, or the heavenly palaces of the Big Dipper. Any stable location in the astral planes, which mages have repeatedly visited for more than a millennium, deserves investigation.

High Ritual Magic

Even the simplest talisman carries a good deal of ritual in its preparation. The meditations that fill the body with qi and send the mind on astral voyages involve ritual as well. These ceremonies are private. Some Taoist operations, however, involve public performances of magic. The "audience" can range from a single client to an entire town, and the ceremony may take days to complete.

The Rite of Cosmic Renewal

The most important of all Taoist ceremonies has a simple name: *Chiao*, or "Offering." It takes place in a temple, with images of gods by the score or even by the hundred — but the *Chiao* is a great deal more than a rite of public worship. In this ceremony, an entire community joins a Taoist master in restoring their harmony in the Tao.

Originally, the Rite of Cosmic Renewal took place every 60 years, at the transition between one cycle of the calendar and the next. Now communities perform it more often, whenever they feel the cosmic order needs reinforcement, such as times of plague or social upheaval. A *Chiao* is important enough to attract visitors from nearby communities — divine visitors. Other temples send images of their gods to the temple that performs the rite. Mortal visitors come too.



In its classic form, the *Chiao* takes five days. An abbreviated ceremony may take just three. The entire community joins in the ritual through banners, lion and dragon dances and other festivities. The temple priests conduct many of the subsidiary rituals, decked out in spectacular robes. A proper *Chiao,* however, requires the participation of a real Taoist master.

The *Chiao* begins with an announcement of the ceremony to the gods and spirits. The priests purify the temple and the area around it using holy water, firecrackers, ritual swords and talismanic symbols traced in the air. Actors perform a play about Chung Kuei, the legendary banisher of demons. A new fire is kindled and consecrated, and talismans invoking the five directions, their elements and divine guardians are placed about the temple. Priests read from various scriptures each day. Restless spirits of the dead — the hungry ghosts — are invited in and given offerings, that they may find release, either to reincarnate or ascend to Heaven. The ceremony ends with a final banquet.

The Taoist master, however, performs the ceremonies that give the *Chiao* its meaning and power. In the course of the ceremonies, he invokes the Three Heavenly Worthies through his internal alchemy. In this way, he works backward from the Ten Thousand Things to make his body itself a vessel for the archetypal realm of Prior Heaven. In the climactic ritual, however, he *expels* all the gods from his body: first the lesser gods of the various visceral courts and cinnabar fields, and finally the Three Heavenly Worthies themselves. Emptied of all the forms that evolve from the Tao, he at last may contemplate the Tao itself. He *becomes* the Tao. Heaven, Earth and Man fuse. The laity, the priesthood and the master join in one rite, along with all the spirits from the Heavenly Worthies to the most wretched ghost. The cosmos returns to its source, and is renewed, placed in balance once more.

The Rite of Cosmic Renewal is not specifically an act of magic. The Taoist does not seek to achieve a particular, concrete goal; he asserts and reinforces the cosmic order that makes all goals possible. Nevertheless, the *Chiao* might have some magical applications.

Storytellers must decide for themselves whether the *Chiao* has power of its own when performed by Taoist Sleepers. It might. The intense visualization of the Taoist master and the emotional support given by the attendant priests might have a powerful effect on the Astral Plane or in the Shadow Realm, and certainly on Resonance (see p. 23). Spirits may well respond to the ceremonies and offerings; angry godlings may be mollified, and lost souls be persuaded to move on.

The Awakened might turn the Rite of Cosmic Renewal into a massive act of countermagic, banishing and dispelling every supernatural force in the area. The preliminary rites give a Taoist mage *days* in which to accumulate successes for both Potency and area of effect. Of course, the Taoist would use Five-Cycle countermagic (see p. 60); and instead of pitting a single Arcanum against the Arcana of the next element in the cycle, he would invoke *every* Arcanum in which he had sufficiently high rating, for the broadest possible exorcism of mystic forces.

The *Chiao* could be a powerful exorcism against forces of the Abyss. The Rite of Cosmic Renewal asserts the wholeness of the Tapestry and the connection between the Supernal and Fallen Worlds. It is everything the Abyss is not. In this case, the Storyteller might simply apply the Taoist mage's highest-rated Arcanum in an extended ritual of countermagic against an Abyssal demon, curse or Paradox effect. Even Sleeper Taoists might perform an effective *Chiao*; the Storyteller might roll the Taoist's Willpower and apply it as countermagic, without any accumulation of successes.

Invocation of the Six Chia Spirits

Some time during Taoism's period of sectarian strife, fallen Taoist adepts began summoning six powerful spirits and using them for black magic. Some legends say Ch'ih Yu, the first black magician, first summoned these malevolent Chia Spirits but no documentation has been found before the 12th century CE. These six demons are so powerful that their mere presence can desecrate the Rite of Cosmic Renewal and prevent its proper performance. An orthodox Taoist can summon the Chia Spirits, but only to help a deposed emperor regain the throne or to combat other black magic.

The Chia Spirits, indeed, constitute a small but exceedingly powerful *Lu,* and each of the six commands legions of lesser spirits. The ritual to gain control of this register of spirits is correspondingly long and complex—fully comparable to the most elaborate demon-summonings found in European grimoires such as the *Key of Solomon.*

The entire process is far too long to describe in detail. In brief, it involves concentric circles of stones representing the 64 *I Ching* hexagrams, banners representing the 28 constellations of the Lunar Houses, a central flagpole representing the god of the North Star, a tent of blue-green cloth, and two altars for ritual implements and sacrificial offerings. The complete ceremony takes 60 days, in five-day cycles. Each of the Chia Spirits has its own talisman, of course, which the adept must draw from memory without flaw or hesitation. (They shall not be depicted here, for reasons that should be obvious.) The finished talisman

is stamped with a special seal and burned to invoke a particular Chia spirit. Each ceremony to conjure and bind the spirits must take place on a particular hour and day, with directions set by the handle of the Big Dipper at that time. The Taoist must also perform certain mudras and visualize particular images to "internalize" the spirits — binding them to his own body and life force, to call upon later through their talismans.

Tradition says, however, that holding the Six Chia Spirits as servitors is a terrible drain on a Taoist's life force. While most Taoists enjoy long and healthy lives, masters of the Chia Spirits invariably die young. Awakened Taoists fear these spirits might come from the Abyss, for surely they defy the laws of Heaven. If so, the Chia Spirits might claim a price more terrible than a Taoist's life.

A mage *might* be able to abbreviate some of the 60-day ceremony for binding the Chia spirits... or she might not. If a character can gain the Six Chia Spirits as a *Lu*, they constitute a five-dot Merit. Alternatively, calling on the Chia Spirits is a rote based on "Greater Spirit Summons" (Spirit 3; see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 249). The Taoist still must perform a long series of ceremonies as an act of extended spellcasting to summon the Chia Spirits and pact with them, but from then on, she can summon them using the "Summoning Talisman" rote (see p. 53).

Thunder Magic and the Hoet'u Dance

The most powerful Taoist exorcisms call on the power of thunder to banish spirits and break curses. To gain this power, a Taoist must meditate during a spring thunderstorm and draw the charged air into his body. He circulates the thunder-qi through his viscera, energizing each organ in turn, and then collects the thunder-qi in his gall bladder. He can later call on this reservoir of power to "light the furnace" for his alchemical meditations, expel spirits, and turn black magic against its source.

A basic thunder magic exorcism involves calling qi from particular internal organs, fusing it with thunder-power, and exhaling the resulting mystically-charged breath while making certain mudras. A Taoist master of thunder magic can force gods and demons to vacate mortals they possess. When faced with the Six Chia Spirits, however, a Taoist resorts to a more elaborate procedure that combines thunder magic with a special dance.

According to mythology, the divine emperor Yü the Great ended a cosmic flood and repaired the world with the help of talismans of the five cosmic elements and a magical dance. Both the talismans and the dance derive from the magic square, the *Ho-t'u* that he saw on the back of a swimming dragon-horse. The numbers in the *Ho-t'u* add up to 15 along every row, column or diagonal. The *Ho-t'u* also corresponds to the circular arrangement of the eight *I Ching* trigrams, with the Yin-Yang monad occupying the central box. In the zigzagging dance of Yü, a Taoist steps from box to box of the magic square, counting each number from one to nine.

To ward an area, a Taoist thunder magician dances the steps of the *Ho-t'u* 12 times, turning 30 degrees and pacing a ways before repeating the steps. In this way, he traces out a circle infused with thunder-power, shaped by a symbol of cosmic order. Even the Six Chia Spirits cannot cross this barrier. At the Taoist's command, the thwarted demon must then return to vent its rage on the black magician who summoned it.

To a mage, the meditation to collect the power of thunder looks a lot like the oblations used to harvest Mana from a Hallow. The power of thunder magic may be that of Mana itself, given the resonance of each element and stored in the five viscera and the gall bladder. The *Ho-t'u* dance is clearly some form of ward — one of great power against which Chinese demons, at least, are powerless.

Taoist Rote: Thunder Meditation (Prime ●● or ●●●)

Spell: "Transform Aura" (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 223) or "Channel Mana" (p. 224)

Dice Pool: Resolve + Medicine + Prime

The mage uses a meditative oblation to collect Mana during a thunderstorm. The rote enables her to imbue the Mana with elemental resonances and store it in her viscera, so that motes (points) with different resonances do not mix. This gives the Taoist reservoirs of Mana with whatever resonance she needs for a particular working. Each success changes the resonance of one mote and binds it to a particular organ.

Taoist Rote: Hoet'u Dance (Space ●●● + Spirit ●)

Spell: "Ban" (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 237)

Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult + Space

Unlike the basic rote, however, the Taoist mage imbues the ward with Mana given the resonance of thunder. If the mage allocates all her successes to Potency rather than area or duration, she can evoke a ward powerful enough that even the terrible Chia spirits hesitate to test themselves against it, and consider themselves no longer obliged to attack a victim thus protected.

Storytelling Hints

Since China encompasses one-fifth of the world's population and a large fraction of its geography, one could

run an entire chronicle set in China, with mages accepting Taoist doctrines and methods as a matter of course. Unlike the West, a Taoist mage in China can perform some feats of magic openly; exorcism and similar feats remain socially accepted activities for Taoists. A Taoist chronicle could also span a breathtaking range of settings and challenges, from teeming, polluted megacities and the ever-suspicious (but frequently corrupt) officials of the Communist Party, to gorgeous astral domains and grotesque demons like the Six Chia Spirits.

The widespread Chinese Diaspora, however, means that Taoist characters can appear just about anywhere. An ethnic Chinese mage might well find a Taoist as his first mentor. Even if the Taoist isn't Awakened, the doctrines and practices resemble magery enough that a novice mage could find their study enlightening. If the Awakened Taoist decides to interact with the wider Awakened community, she brings a distinctively different style of magic to her cabal and Consilium.

Like other occult traditions, Taoism offers important roles for Sleepers. Taoist doctrine says that power comes from enlightenment, but ordinary people can gain that enlightenment through their own efforts. You don't need some lightning bolt from Heaven to meditate, scribe talismans and attempt inner alchemy. Storytellers must decide for themselves whether such practices offer any real benefits — but Taoists sure *sound* like they reach for the Supernal World. Mages accustomed to thinking of themselves as the only people who really know what's going on may find their Wisdom put to the test when they need to bow before a Taoist Sleeper and humbly ask for his help.

Although Taoism includes a lot of practical magic, this mystical practice sets contemplative enlightenment as its highest goal. Taoism lends itself to themes of search, teachers and students, and exploration. But although Taoists seek to touch the Supernal, their tradition also values community involvement. After all, Taoism's highest ritual, the Rite of Cosmic Renewal, involves whole towns. Perhaps the greatest enlightenment is not the ascension into Heaven — or the Supernal World — but the return to Earth.

Story Seeds

• **Southward, Ho!** In the course of an investigation, the cabal learns that the information they seek is held by the Old Man of the South Pole — one of the gods described in Taoist visionary journeys and wonder-tales. Is there such a personage? Is he a god of the Shadow Realm, or an entity on the Astral Plane? Either way, the characters need a Taoist master to give them directions.

• **Dancing with Demons:** A charlatan who sells phony talismans acquires a real talisman of great power, or perhaps even a complete *lu*. Without knowing it, he releases several potent spirits who start raising havoc (maybe even the Six Chia Spirits). Even if the cabal doesn't care where these Chinese demons came from, they may need an adept to teach them the *Ho-t'u* dance to have any hope of banishing the spirits.

• **The Cosmic Offering:** A massive Paradox ripped a breach in reality that just won't close. Things are coming through from the Astral Planes, the Shadow Realm or even the Abyss. Everything around the rip is falling apart, from buildings to respect for laws. Perhaps the Rite of Cosmic Renewal can restore order and harmony to the

Alternate Magic: Yin-Yang Five-Cycle Countermagic (Storyteller's Options)

The cycles of elemental production and restriction suggest alternative approaches to countermagic. From a Taoist perspective, using an Arcanum against itself is counterproductive. The elements of reality do not cancel themselves out. For instance, setting Water against Water increases the flood. Instead, a Taoist looks for the element that naturally restrains the dominant force in the phenomenon at hand — matching Yin to Yang, restoring balance. Earth dams up Water, controlling the flood.

For the Arcana, this means associating each Path and Watchtower with an element in five-cycle theory. To counterspell one Arcanum, use an Arcanum associated with the controlling or restraining element. For example, Earth — the element of stability, in China as in the West — corresponds to the Moros Path, while ever-flowing Water, the sustainer of life, corresponds to the Thyrsus Path. Thus, a Taoist mage would use Death or Matter to counterspell magic of Life or Spirit.

The way that each element tends to produce the next in the cycle suggests another option. Instead of directly countering a spell, a mage might pull the force of its magic to the next element in the cycle. The power

doesn't disappear, but it doesn't follow the Imago set by the caster, either. In this case, the countering mage might even detour the spell's power into a spell of his own — though this suggests a more advanced degree of arcane mastery. For example, Water produces Wood, so an expert at Forces or Prime might pull away the power of a spell based on Life or Spirit.

Adding five-cycle countermagic to orthodox counterspells and Prime-based dispelling may seem excessively generous. Taoist mages, however, don't use traditional counterspells. The choice between two Arcana to work a counterspell still gives Taoist mages broader options than non-Taoist mages enjoy; to compensate, Storytellers can rule that five-cycle counterspelling requires two dots in a suitable Arcanum, instead of only one.

The mage also needs to purchase the Magical Tradition Merit (Taoism). As foci, the Taoist could employ traditional implements such as a paper fan or a sword engraved with the Big Dipper — but Taoist tradition supplies more unusual options. For instance, the Taoist might need Mana with the proper elemental Resonance stored in his viscera.

Yin-Yang Five-Cycle Countermagic Table

Path	Ruling Arcana	Element	Controlled By	Produces
Acanthus	Fate, Time	Metal	Fire	Water
Mastigos	Mind, Space	Fire	Water	Earth
Moros	Death, Matter	Earth	Wood	Fire
Obrimos	Forces, Prime	Wood	Metal	Water
Thyrsus	Life, Spirit	Water	Earth	Wood

Five-Cycle Counterspell (Suitable Arcanum at ●●)

A five-cycle counterspell uses the same rules as regular counterspells, as described on p. 123 of **Mage: The Awakening**, with two exceptions. Instead of using the same Arcanum as one found in the target spell, the mage uses one of the Arcana associated with the contrary or controlling element. The mage also must be at least an apprentice of the Arcanum she chooses. Each success rolled reduces the target spell's Potency by one.

Five-Cycle Spell Theft (Suitable Arcanum ●●●●)

A Taoist adept of an Arcanum can use it to steal the power from another mage's spell and add it to his own — coaxing his opponent's power into a new pattern. The mage matches the target spell's Arcanum with its element, and then invokes an Arcanum associated with the Element that comes next in the productive cycle. Each success rolled reduces the target spell's Potency by one... and *adds* that as a spell factor (either Potency, Target, or Duration, chosen by the Taoist spellcaster) to another spell of the same Arcanum, cast as a combined spell with the spell theft. As usual with combined spells, the required Arcanum rating for the concurrent spell rises by one dot, and both the spell theft and combined spell lose two dice from the spellcasting dice pool.

Resonance

The correlation between Paths and the five elements also suggest distinctive forms of resonance for Taoist magic. Any spell or enchantment carries the resonance of the elements that correspond to the relevant Arcana. Every spirit also has an elemental association, so a spirit's powers also leave an elemental trace.

The table of elemental correspondences (see p. 55) supplies novel ways a mage could perceive Taoist resonance. While Arcana might be perceived as colored auras, a mage could also perceive a mystical trace as a taste, a direction or a feeling in parts of her body associated with particular elements. For instance, Life magic corresponds to Water: a mage might perceive its trace as wetness, a salty taste, a tugging toward the north, or a twinge in her kidneys.

Sample Character

Master Elvis Quan

Quote: *Very good car! Good match for you, very lucky! But... You didn't come here for a car, did you. Come into my office, sir, and tell me your problem.*

Background: Elvis Quan's parents fled to Hong Kong after the Communist takeover of China. They thought it auspicious to name their son after a famous person. Young Elvis became interested in Taoism and apprenticed himself to a priest of Shen-Hsiao, or popular Taoism. Elvis soon surpassed his master — not difficult, the man was a complete fraud — and found a true mentor who initiated him into Mao Shan Taoism. After more than a decade of training, including a walking tour of China that took Elvis to Mao Shan itself and several other sacred mountains, Elvis received his ordination from the Heavenly Master in Taiwan. He returned to Hong Kong to become a professional Taoist.

When Hong Kong returned to Chinese rule, however, Elvis packed up his family and left. His late parents had

made him swear never to live under Communist rule, and he felt obligated to keep that promise. There wasn't much call for real Taoist adepts in his new country, so Elvis had a choice: Sell a cheapened, simplified Taoism to the New Age market, or do something else for a living. He opened a car dealership.

The local Chinese community knows that Elvis Quan is an ordained Taoist. He conducts religious rites in a rented hall or private homes. The few people who still believe in such things also hire him to prepare talismans and exorcise their homes. Every car that Elvis sells, however, has a talisman hanging from the rear-view mirror—"Good luck!" he says with a grin. "Old Chinese custom!" Very few people outside the Asian community believe him, but the talismans are quite real.

Description: Elvis Quan is a short, plump Chinese man in his early 60s, with silver-gray hair worn short and slicked back. At work, he wears leisure suits with loud ties. When he conducts Taoist rituals, he wears embroidered robes, a black velvet skullcap and a golden coronet. His 30-something son assists him in rituals (as well as the dealership), but possesses no special abilities.

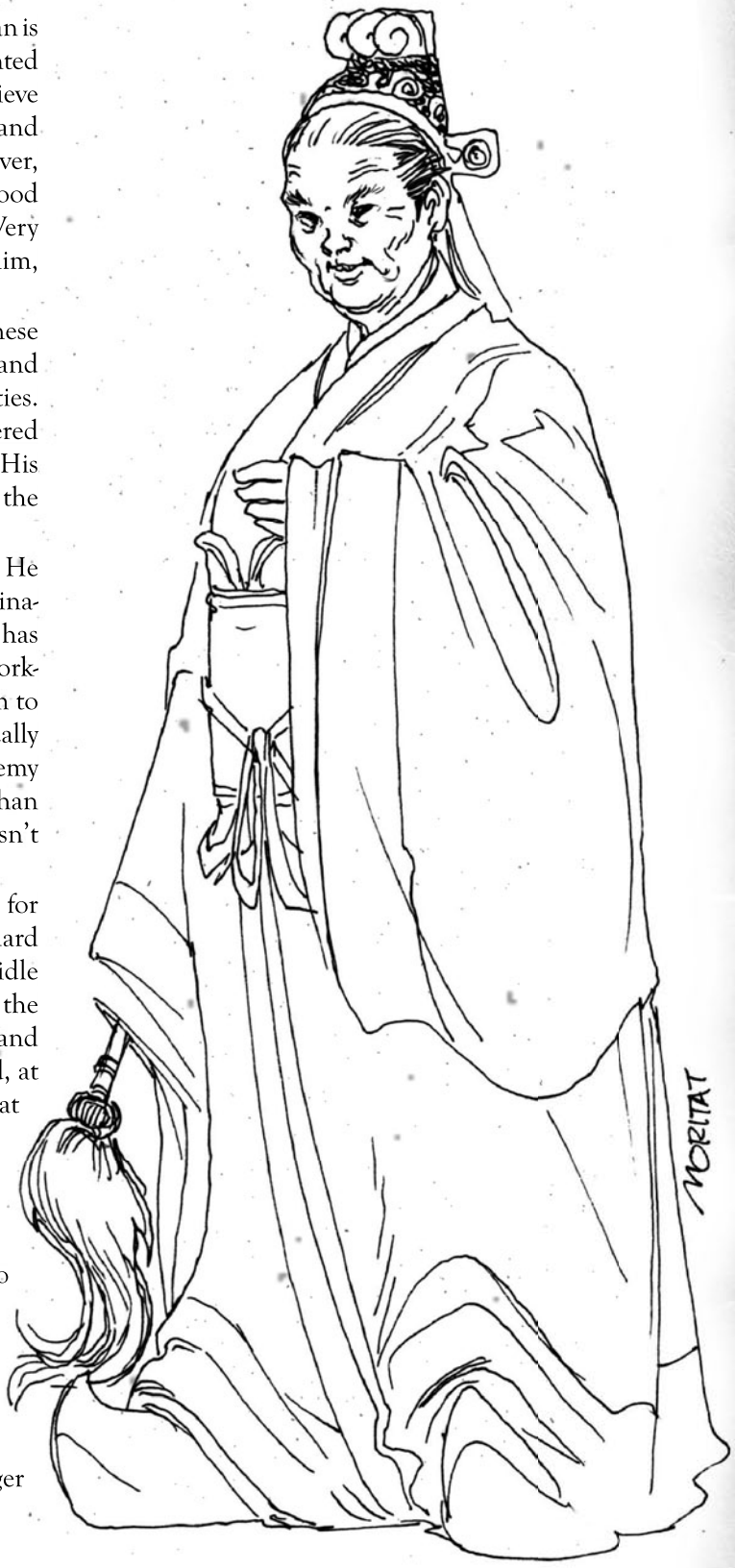
Storytelling Hints: Elvis Quan is a Sleepwalker. He possesses a register of minor spirits through his ordination, has a sense for the presence of spirits and has occasionally succeeded at astral travel. He is still working on his internal alchemy, which will promote him to the highest grade of Taoism. Elvis does not specifically know of mages, but he believes that internal alchemy will bring him much greater awareness and power than he has now. Nevertheless, Elvis knows a lot and he isn't afraid to confront demons and other spirits.

If anyone outside the community comes looking for a Taoist, Elvis denies that he is one. This is standard operating procedure for Taoists, to discourage idle curiosity-seekers. If a character can prove she's "in the know," however, Elvis provides whatever assistance and education he feels the seeker is ready to understand, at only a modest fee. If he senses supernatural forces at work, he gets straight to the point.

If Elvis Quan has a failing, it's a deeply concealed spiritual pride: Faced with the Awakened, Elvis would try to remove himself, protesting that such enlightened persons do not need his poor skills—thus enabling him to avoid confronting his own limitations. He would have great difficulty resisting any promise that he could gain such power and enlightenment himself, though.

Dedicated Magical Tool: As a Taoist, Elvis owns a selection of brushes, pens, paper and seals for talismans, a bowl for holy water, censers, a cash dagger and other ritual implements.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 4
Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3
Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 3, Composure 3



Mental Skills: Academics (Taoism) 3, Crafts (Calligraphy) 2, Investigation 2, Medicine 2, Occult 4

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Larceny 2, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Empathy 3, Expression 3, Intimidation (Threatening Spirits) 2, Persuasion 2, Socialize 1, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Astral Adept (see p. 57), Contacts (Chinese Community, Chamber of Commerce), Holistic Awareness, Imbued Item (Cash Dagger; see below) 4, Language (English, Mandarin; Cantonese is native), Library (Chinese Spirit World, Taoist Lore), Lu 2 (see p. 54), Meditative Mind, Resources 3, Retainer 1, Sanctum 2, Sleepwalker, Status 1, Unseen Sense

Willpower: 7

Wisdom: 7

Virtue: Charity

Vice: Envy

Initiative: 6

Defense: 3

Speed: 10

Health: 8

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Size	Special	Dice Pool
Cash Dagger	1(L)	1	Only affects spirits	5

Notes: Elvis Quan's *Lu* permits him to grant a variety of protective blessings, such as warding a home against the weakest of hostile spirits, preventing car accidents or general good luck (one extra success on one challenging task within the next week, selected at random by the Storyteller). The most powerful spirit-minion in his *Lu* is a Rank 2 spirit that can bar ghosts of rank 1 or 2 from a building.

Cash Dagger (Imbued Item • • • •)

Taoist tradition ascribes exorcistic power to swords or daggers made by stringing coins on a loop of wire emerging from a hilt to form a stylized blade. A "cash sword" is most powerful if all the coins come from the reign of the same emperor, but a "cash dagger" should be made of five coins, each from the reign of a different emperor to symbolize the gods of the five directions. Such weapons can be enchanted with various spells to harm or compel spirits. Elvis Quan's dagger is enchanted with "Harm Spirit" (Spirit 3; see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 249). It deals the normal damage of a dagger, but only to spirits that have materialized, exist in Twilight, or possess mortal bodies. The dagger does not harm a possessed mortal's flesh.



CHAPTER THREE: OFFSPRING

"The only reason you're here is that you're Awakened. They know that. They think you're already santo. Otherwise outsiders aren't welcome." Miguel's tone was low, gentle but cautionary. Fuego didn't seem to get the hint.

"Like I couldn't read all about this stuff at my local Borders, man."

Miguel shook his head. They were approaching the ilé, and he could feel the ashé in the air even as he smelled the herbs and the stink of the goat, the sacrificial animal for tonight's ebbó. "You can't. Not this." They paused at the top of the stairs. A heavy drum beat pulsed below them, from behind a rickety-looking wooden door marked with white and red graffiti. "You can read about what we do, but you can't read about what it's like to see the spirits here. You can read about what we believe, but you can't read about what we see." He put a hand on his friend's chest. "If you can keep respectful, man, follow me. If not, there's a good bar a block up."

Fuego stared at Miguel, and focused on the green and yellow beads around his cabal mate's neck. "How do you stay with this, even after what you've seen?" He had stopped wearing his crucifix the day after he'd Awakened.

Miguel smiled. "Because this is who I am, man. This is my camino." He started down the stairs.

Fuego watched as he opened the door and felt a wave of power wash over him. There was something behind that door, something in the music, the fire and the gathered faithful, and it was strong…and aware. He followed Miguel into the ilé, and felt the spirits watching. He clutched at his chest, where his crucifix had once hung, and hoped he met with their approval.

The traditions in this chapter originated in other, often larger, traditions. Santería is a New World religion that comes from the meeting of African Yoruba and Christian Catholicism. The esoteric magical tradition of the Knights Templar is part of the greater Christian religion. Theosophy originated in the 19th century as a mixture of Eastern and Western esoteric traditions. Just because these traditions don't have the same age-old pedigree or "purity" of older traditions, doesn't mean they aren't equally important or potent in their connection to the Supernal trace. Indeed, some of these might even hold more relevant truth for mages in the modern age than occult ideas that have become timeworn with age. But that's for individual mages to discover for themselves.

SANTERÍA
LA REGLA DE OCHA

Pleasing the gods requires knowledge of their individual tastes and histories. All the orichas have a particular four-legged animal that they must eat in the asiento, and with these animals they eat their favorite birds.

— Michael Atwood Mason,
Living Santería: Rituals and Experiences in an Afro-Cuban Religion

Put people together, and they mix. It's an unavoidable fact of human nature. Slaves take on the practices of their masters, hostages come to sympathize with their captors. Two cultures with no common language will form a new one (called, in linguistic terms, a *pidgin*) and their children will embellish it, adding new words and grammatical rules and solidifying it into a *creole*. When this happens with religious traditions, even those traditions that, on the surface, seem irreconcilable, the phenomenon is called *syncretism*. A sociologist might call this a survival mechanism, a way for a people to keep its beliefs at least partially intact in the face of oppression (or, indeed, for an oppressing culture to make *its* beliefs more appealing to a conquered people). A mage, however, sees a different message in the fact that cultures always seem to find common ground — the truth is there, beyond the Fallen World, and even Sleepers can see parts of it. The bits of a religion (or even a language) that a syncretic system keeps, then, might be fragments of Supernal knowledge.

Santería is one such syncretic religion. From its roots in West Africa to its evolution in Cuba, it remains a powerful and growing religion in the United States today. The American media often misrepresents this tradition, often portraying it as bloody, barbaric and replete with black magic. The truth, though, is that Santería is no more inherently evil than any religion. Acts for both good and ill can be performed in service to the *orishas*, should the practitioner so desire.

History

Santería, as stated previously, traces its roots to the Yoruba culture of West Africa, predominantly what is now Nigeria. The religion as it exists today truly began when slave-traders from Spain captured Africans (often sold into slavery as punishment for a crime or as debtors) and transported them to various Caribbean islands to work in mines and on sugar plantations. These captives brought their spiritual beliefs with them, but under Spanish law were required to undergo baptism into Catholicism (indeed, the Spanish Slave Code required slave owners to "educate" their slaves, which generally translated solely into instruction in Catholic worship). Unable to legally worship the gods they knew, the slaves syncretized the orishas into Catholic saints. Did they do this in the interest of safety, praying to a saint outwardly but truly directing their energies toward the appropriate orisha? Or did the slaves truly see the similarities between asking an orisha for intercession and praying to the patron saint of a given cause?

In truth, it might have been a bit of both. Of course the slaves were oppressed, ripped from their homelands and forced into labor in an environment with such a high mortality rate that it was actually more profitable for the Spanish to import new African workers than to allow them to breed. Of course they clung to whatever remnants of their culture that they could, even if that meant changing some names here and there. It's worth

Languages and a Brief Glossary

Santería is largely practiced among Cuban-Americans, and so much of its vocabulary comes from Spanish. Since the religion's roots are African, however, many of its terms also come from the language of the Yoruba peoples of West Africa. Some of the terms given here have alternate spellings ("Lucumí," for instance, is sometimes rendered "Lukumí" or "Lukumi") that aren't necessarily any more or less "correct" than the ones given here.

This glossary is by no means exhaustive, but is meant to present the reader with a few terms that Santería characters can use in reference to their faith. Any good book on the subject should turn up several pages more.

adura: prayer (Yoruba)

aleyo: person not initiated into Santería; "foreigner" (Yoruba)

ashé: power, blood, reality — the essence of the world itself. Mages within the Santería community often use the term to refer to Mana or Tass (Yoruba)

asiento: initiation ceremony (Spanish)

babalawo: male high priest of Santería (Yoruba)

camino: path or destiny; can also refer to an avatar of the *orishas* (Spanish)

ebbó: any ritual involving a sacrifice to an orisha, or the sacrifice itself (Yoruba)

egun: the dead (Yoruba)

elekes: beaded necklaces presented to a practitioner upon initiation; the beads are colored in accordance with the orisha appropriate to the person. (Yoruba; called *collares* in Spanish)

guerreros: the warriors; refers to the orishas Elegguá, Oggún, Ochosi and Ósun (Spanish)

ilé: sacred or ritual space, church (Yoruba)

iyawó: recently initiated person (Yoruba)

Lucumí: synonym for Santería; also refers to the Yoruba culture or language, or simply the Cuban term for the Yoruba language

madrina: godmother

ori: literally the head, but the term is more precisely used to mean the soul (Yoruba)

orisha: deities that maintain the world, oversee and protect human beings and can be enticed or bribed into performing services for those who know how to supplicate them (Yoruba)

padrino: godfather

pataki: a story based on the life of an orisha; a fable or myth (Yoruba)

registro de entrada: a ritual to determine an individual's guardian spirit; simply "registro" can refer to any consultation with a divination expert (Spanish)

Regla de Ocha: "rule of the saints," another term for Santería (Spanish)

santero/a: a priest or priestess of Santería, consecrated ("made santo") to a particular orisha

noting, too, that unlike in Haiti, where Catholic traditions combined with African ones to a much greater degree (leading eventually to the advent of the religion known as *Vodoun* or Voodoo), in Cuba the slave-owners didn't make the same effort to Christianize the slaves. This might have been due to previous slave rebellions in Haiti, or to the aforementioned high mortality rate (no point in converting the slaves, after all, if they were just going to die in a few months anyway). But the end result was the same: Without anything but a token attempt to educate the slaves on Catholicism, combined with a high rate of arrival from Africa (and thus a continually fresh supply of practitioners of the native religion), the belief system known as Santería or Lucumí arose.

Creation: Olodumare and Atlantis

In the beginning, say the patakis, was ashé. The universe was pure, formed from this sublime energy, the lifeblood of the cosmos. And the name for this energy was Olodumare, the Prime Mover, the Supreme Being.

It was Olodumare who created all that is and shall be, but he (insofar as the male pronoun is applicable at all) wears many different masks and names. In his guise as Alaaye, he gave life to all of creation. As Olofi, he acts as the personal God of humanity (and it is in this guise that a Christian might see him as God or a Muslim as Allah), and has two other equivalent personas: Nzame and Baba Nkwa.

Nzame created the first man (called Omo Oba) after Olofi and Baba Nkwa noted that creation had no intelligent inhabitants. Omo Oba was formed from mud, much like the creations of the Greek Titan Prometheus (formed from clay) or Adam, the first man of Judeo-Christian myth (formed from dust and the breath of God), but unlike other "first persons," Omo Oba was immortal. This first man eventually grew conceited and proud, fashioned as he was in Nzame's image, and finally Nzame destroyed all life on Earth with lightning bolts and fire in retribution for this hubris. Omo Oba, however, being immortal, was unharmed, and was cast into a fiery pit. He escapes periodically, however, to bedevil and tempt humanity.

Mages look at this pataki and see many parallels to their own history. The destruction of the world might be a reference to the destruction of the Celestial Ladder, while the creation of Omo Oba might refer to the Awakening or ascension via the Ladder of the Oracles and/or the Exarchs. Given that Omo Oba is supposed to current dwell in a place apart from the physical world but very much apart from the orishas, some mages equate him to the Abyss and the creatures that dwell there. The implications of this inference are interesting, given that Omo Oba is, according to the legend, a prototype of humanity itself. If Omo Oba, now dwelling or even embodying the Abyss itself, in a forerunner to the human race, might that shed a bit of light on why Sleepers carry a shard of the Abyss in the form of Quiescence? Might that be why moments of supreme arrogance or miscalculation (that is, powerful Paradoxes) run the risk of summoning a being from the Abyss? Mages who practice Santería sometimes refer to a Paradox as "calling Omo Oba," whether or not the Paradox actually results in a Manifestation.

Another creation myth, though, paints a slightly more flattering picture of humanity. This pataki has Olofi creating the first human (named Obatalá), and making him mortal. When he desired companionship, though, Olofi created the orishas out of smooth stones and infused them with ashé. The orishas almost immediately went to war (Sea against Sky, with the result that no dry land could form), preventing any life from taking hold, until Obatalá intervened and created lands enough for living creatures and plants to flourish. The orishas, curious, set out to explore this new world.

Again, the parallels here to the mages of Atlantis are obvious (at least to the mages themselves). Obatalá was created as the ruler of the world, originally human, but takes on the role of one of the orishas (and, in a very real sense, architect of the physical world). Is he, therefore, the first of the Oracles, from which all other Awakened beings (i.e., orishas) spring? Or, if the orishas are inhabitants of the Supernal Realms, as some mages suggest (see below), perhaps Obatalá is some kind of cosmic organizer, the being that pointed the Atlantean kings toward the Supernal Realms and inspired them to build the Watchtowers. The diaspora of mages after the destruction of the Ladder and the fall of Atlantis might also be likened to the orishas' exploration of the world that Obatalá made for them.

Cultural Sensitivity

It bears noting that attempts to identify Olofi with Jesus Christ, Olodumare with God and the orishas with the saints do Santería something of an injustice. Santería owes much more to Yoruba traditions than it does to Western religion, and comparisons are usually made in service to making the religion more palatable and understandable to Christian outsiders. Santería does not actively search for outside converts and the religion does not advocate proselytizing, partially because it has a long history as the religion of an oppressed people (and thus one that needed to be kept hidden). This can make Santería seem exotic, but to many of its practitioners, raised within the faith, it is simply what they know.

The same is true, then, for santeros who Awaken. A practitioner of Santería who becomes a mage and joins one of the orders of the Pentacle might look at the story of the destruction of the Celestial Ladder and be reminded of Nzame's destruction of the world in response to Omo Oba's hubris, but not the other way around. This doesn't imply that the stories of Atlantis are less valid than the cultural heritage of Yoruba (or vice versa, for that matter) simply that people tend to see things through the lens of their upbringing.

Santería Today

Santería is very much alive today, though demographics on the religion are hard to come by. This is due in part because practitioners of the religion aren't usually as overt about it as religions that require proselytizing and conversion, and in part because, being a syncretism, Santería is often lumped under Catholicism in surveys (likewise, many santeros also self-identify as Catholic to

outsiders to avoid uncomfortable questions, though this depends heavily on the surrounding culture).

The religion has a thriving population in Cuba, Brazil (where it is called *Candomblé*), West Africa (where, of course, many of the Cuban aspects of the religion do not appear) and the United States. The first initiation in the USA was performed in 1961, and since then the religion has grown considerably, especially in areas with high populations of Cuban immigrants, such as Miami. Researching the religion is as simple as a trip to the library or a few hours on the Internet...but this kind of research only provides history and fact. Actually contacting the orishas requires initiation, and sacrifice.

The Orishas

The number of orishas varies depending on who one asks. The orishas listed below are the most widely recognized, but local orishas and familial guardians are not uncommon. Names for such orishas might be Spanish or Yoruba, or even English, depend on where they first appeared. Orishas have different aspects and even different names, especially for the broader and more powerful deities such as Obatalá. A santero might speak of a "path to Obatalá," referring to, for instance, Yemmu (the feminine aspect of the god) or Airanike (a warrior on horseback).

Aganyú: A powerful but lesser-known orisha, Aganyú is the ruler of volcanoes and molten lava and the protector of travelers. Some legends claim he is Changó's father — he traded passage on his boat for the sexual favors of Yemmu (a female aspect of Obatalá) and the result was the young god.

Babalú-Ayé: This orisha is the lord of disease. Often pictured as a lame old man leaning on a staff, Babalú-Ayé is capable of inflicting and curing any illness (and so in modern times is sometimes seen as the patron spirit of AIDS victims). It is said that he started a smallpox epidemic long ago in the nation of Benin, and that the survivors of the plague thanked him for his mercy in letting them live. Thus, he is "the king who kills and is thanked for it."

Changó: Changó is the lord of thunder and lightning, and is in many ways the most human of the major orishas. He is the only orisha, for instance, to have died. One legend says that, as the fourth king of Yoruba, he ordered his two brothers to fight a duel (these "brothers" must have been mortal, not orisha). One died, and overcome with grief, Changó hanged himself but ascended to the heavens rather than simply dying. Changó is the patron of vengeance, justice and sexual prowess (he is said to have had forty-four wives and kept them all satisfied).

Elegguá: The messenger of the gods and the greatest of the four *guerreros*, Elegguá is the youngest of the major orishas, but also considered the cleverest. He is the trickster of the orishas, gifted by Olodumare in one legend with the privilege to do whatever he wants, paying no heed to restrictions. He is also the lord of the crossroads and the guardian of pathways, and so some modern santeros consider him the patron of the Internet. He is always invoked first when a sacrifice is made to the orishas, and part of the initiation into Santería involves fashioning an image of Elegguá (see p. 71).



Ibeyi: Ibeyi is the name for the twins, the children of Changó and Oyá (according to some legends, though the parentage of these and in fact most of the orishas varies depending on which legends one hears). The twins are eternal children, youthful, innocent and exuberant. Their names and genders vary depending on which "path" one takes to the orisha (see above).

Inle: Intelligent, calculating and cautious, Inle is the patron of physicians and scientists. He is also the lover of Yemayá and the patron of fishermen. Inle has a strange position in the hierarchy of the orishas; although he is much-worshipped, he is also seen as a something of a weakling. The story goes that during his time as Yemayá's lover, he learned the secrets of her underwater domain and was not allowed to leave until she had cut out his tongue to prevent him talking. He is usually pictured as beautiful but androgynous.

Obatalá: The most powerful of the orishas, Obatalá was, in some legends, the first being that Olodumare created after the fiasco with Omo Oba. He is the creator (and thus ruler) of all human heads, and so the lord of dreams and thoughts. Santeros pray to Obatalá for clarity of mind and for peace, as he is also renowned as a mediator and peacemaker. He has many different aspects, forms and names. Obatalá usually dresses in white, as do his devotees.

Obba: The wife of Changó and the goddess of marriage, fidelity and neglected wives, Obba is usually pictured wearing a scarf or bandage on her head. This is because, according to legend, she approached her husband's mistress Oshún and asked how to arouse Changó's passion once again. Oshún tricked Obba, telling her to prepare a stew and add her own ear to it. Obba did so, cutting off her own ear for the stew, but when Changó saw this he was repulsed and vowed never to engage in sex with Obba again. In addition to forsaken wives, Obba is also associated with cemeteries and the bones of the dead.

Ochosi: Ochosi the patron of lawyers, judges, jailors and those who must appear before such people. He is also the patron of hunters, but, according to some legends, does not hunt himself anymore. The story goes that he was asked by Obatalá to hunt a bird as an offering for Olodumare. Flattered, Ochosi hunted down and shot a beautiful bird and stored it in his hut. His mother visited while he was out and took the bird, reasoning that her skillful son could shoot another. Ochosi returned and found the bird missing. Furious, he fired an arrow into the air and ordered it to slay the thief. He realized his mistake when he heard his mother scream, and vowed never to hunt again. Ochosi is one of *los guerreros*, and usually pictured as a strong man with a bow and arrow.

Oggún: Oggún, one of the four warriors, is the god of metal and everything that relies upon it. He is therefore the patron of the military, policemen and even surgeons (since they work with scalpels and other metal objects). He is a cruel god — traffic accidents and train derailments are often laid at his feet, as are casualties of war and virtually any death in which metal is involved. Oggún lives underground, and is variously considered to be the son of Yemmu or the adopted son of Elegguá. He is the husband of Oyá and the enemy of his brother, Changó.

Oko: Oko is the prudent and fair, but naïve, god of the harvest. Celibate (or impotent, depending on the legend), he serves as the arbiter of disputes between orishas and between women. One legend says that Yemayá seduced him for the secrets of a bountiful harvest. The sea-goddess took his knowledge following their tryst and left, never to return — Oko never suspected a thing.

Orúnla: The lord of divination and of reading the future, Orúnla is unique in that he does not physically possess his followers, but instead comes to them through oracular methods such as casting cowrie shells. Only males are accepted into his service as diviners (traditionally, at least). He is physically frail, but renowned as an herbalist and healer as well as a diviner.

Osain: Osain is the lord of the forest and is a master hunter and herbalist. He is also pictured as deformed — he has only one eye and one leg, and one of his ears is huge and deaf (the other, however, is so sensitive it can hear a leaf falling anywhere in the forest). There are many patakis about how Osain became so deformed. Some say that he was simply born (or grew, like a plant) that way. But others point to a rivalry between Osain and Changó over Oyá, in which the powerful thunder god burned Osain's forest and left him maimed. Osain also had a rivalry with Orúnla over their respective skills — Osain considered his skilled as an herbalist to be much more important than Orúnla's as a diviner. These two gods did eventually make peace, however, and even prefer each other's company. Osain likes to smoke, and often asks others for a light while possessing a worshipper.

Oshún: Oshún is the goddess of love and relationships, and though married to Orúnla, she had trysts with Changó, Ochosi and Oggún, among others. She is the orisha to whom santeros pray when they wish to untangle complicated relationships and love triangles, and also when they wish to find love. She journeyed from Africa to Cuba with her children during the slave trade, and again to America during the Castro Revolution of 1959.

Ósun: Ósun was once the messenger and watchman of the gods, but fell asleep on the job. Obatalá stripped

him of his duties and gave them to Elegguá (who had informed Obatalá of Ósun's failure), but let him keep his duties as guardian of human heads. Ósun is one of the four warriors, along with Elegguá, Oggún and Ochosi.

Oyá: The guardian of the cemetery (along with Obba), Oyá is Changó's favorite mistress. She is a warrior and the ruler of the wind, and according to one legend she saved Changó's life when his enemies threatened to overwhelm him. She shaved his hair and dressed him as a woman, allowing him to escape his enemies and rest until he was ready for battle once again. She is Yemayá's sister, but the two are enemies — one legend says that Oyá once ruled the seas and was tricked into taking her sister's territory (the cemetery).

Yemayá: Yemayá is the goddess of the sea and the mother of the universe. She has been identified as the wife or lover of most of the major orishas, and some legends even state that she birthed the sun and the planets after union with Olodumare himself.

Initiation

Initiation into Santería is actually a four-step process, and not every santero undertakes all four. It is possible to be an active believer in the religion and not progress beyond the first ritual. The exact order of the first three rituals varies from place to place, but the fourth, "making saint," is always considered the most holy. During the initiation, the iyawó often lives with and receives instruction from a *padrino* or *madrina*.

Receiving the Elekes

The first step in becoming a santero is often to receive the elekes. These ritual necklaces are fashioned from beads, colored to represent the orisha ruling the supplicant's head (that is, the orisha to which the supplicant is uniquely suited; this orisha could be viewed as his "guardian angel"). To determine which orisha this is, the supplicant undergoes a divination ritual overseen by a babalawo. This ritual involves casting cowrie shells (the cowrie is a marine snail, and its beautiful shell has been used as currency as well as a divination tool by some cultures), after which the babalawo interprets the results in conjunction with five of his peers. Although the babalawo determines which orishas will be represented, the madrina actually makes the elekes. Afterwards, the iyawó receives several elekes, including one colored for his "personal" orisha. Again, the order of events can vary.

Santeros wear their elekes for protection from evil spirits and from bad luck. Whether or not they have such effects depends on who makes them; Awakened santeros are, of course, often capable of constructing necklaces that actually do have protective powers. In any case, santeros remove their elekes during sex, bathing and (for women) menstruation. If the thread of the elekes breaks, it is considered a dire omen, perhaps even a warning of impending death.

Making Elegguá

During this ritual, the iyawó fashions a representation of the orisha Elegguá to act as a protector of his home. This requires another divination ritual to determine what material Elegguá should be made from (note that when the ritual is finished, the santero considers the figure to *be* Elegguá, not just an image of him). Possible magical properties of this representation are discussed on p. 77.

Receiving the Warriors

The iyawó receives los guerreros — "the warriors," a term referring to the orishas Elegguá, Oggún, Ochosi and Ósun — by crafting or receiving iron tools (representing Oggún), a small iron cauldron surmounted by a rooster (Ochosi), and an iron bow and arrow figurine (Ósun). Unlike the elekes, which serve to protect the santero from outside influence, these objects and the orishas they represent are supposed to actually attack enemies of the santero. A santero in possession of such artifacts that actually have magic bound into them is a very dangerous individual indeed.

Making Saint

Undertaking the first three rituals makes one half the saint, but the final ritual — *hacer santo* ("to make saint") is a ritual death and rebirth. When the santero has completed this ritual, he is no longer iyawó, but is a priest of Santería.

The iyawó spends the week prior to the ritual with his madrina or padrino, undergoing special spiritual instruction and engaging in intense prayer and meditation. Before the ritual, the madrina or padrino shaves the head of the iyawó and paints circles of blue, yellow, red and white on it as an invitation for the orishas. The iyawó undergoes another round of divination, this time to determine his past and future. At this point, the diviner might discover that the iyawó is destined to be a diviner himself (this sometimes indicates that the iyawó is destined to Awaken, often as an Acanthus, but with some affinity for Fate magic in any case). If this is the case, the iyawó will be taken under the wing of a powerful and respected babalawo after the *asiento* is concluded.

The iyawó is given a name in the faith, not unlike a Catholic Confirmation name. Some santero mages use this name as their Shadow Name among the Awakened, but most do not. The name in the faith is meant to be exactly that — a name used with other santeros. Unless the mage primarily interacts with other Awakened within

the context of Santería, he will probably choose another sobriquet for use in magical circles.

On the final day of initiation, called *lerí ocha* ("crowning the orisha"), the iyawó is treated much like a child. He is bathed, fed and dressed as a newborn might be, for he has symbolically died and been reborn into the faith. It is during this final ceremony that he is mounted by an orisha — the spirit possesses him, makes demands and exhibits behaviors appropriate to that particular deity, and forms a spiritual contract with him that he will obey for the rest of his life. This contract isn't always stated in terms that the santero can easily explain, but if the character possesses the Destiny Merit, it is at this point that he typically becomes aware of it (and his Bane). Following the ceremony, the santero gathers up all of the paraphernalia associated with his orisha and places it upon his personal altar. His madrina or padrino keep a record of spiritual information and practices for the santero, and present this record to him after a year and seven days have passed from the time he has made saint.

Reality

As noted, the particulars of initiation can vary. Sometimes the rituals all take place at once, with the santero receiving the elekes and the warriors in the days leading up to making saint. Sometimes making Elegguá is skipped altogether. Like any religion, Santería evolves and changes depending on region and the teachings of the elders in that region.

It bears noting, too, that anyone can purchase the tools to perform these rituals and learn enough about the rituals to perform them through research. Whether the ritual has the same spiritual power if performed by someone who doesn't have the proper status in the faith is a matter of opinion, at least when magic isn't involved. Would the orishas actually respond to a ritual performed by someone other than a confirmed priest of Santería? If they did, how would they treat the iyawó? Likewise, the ritual of making saint isn't free, and can cost several thousand dollars if the officiating priest wishes to charge thusly. How might the orishas respond to this? Some of them might be offended, while others would simply demand a fair "cut" of the profits.

Santería and Awakened Magic

Magic in Santería is a matter of sacrifice and supplication. All magic is actually performed by the orishas, who reveal the secrets of the future through divination, bestow favors in exchange for their favorite foods and drinks, and punish those who offend them. Santeros worship the orishas, but recognize that these gods are not always kind or loving. One story, for instance, says that a man possessed by Oshún began to flirt with the other men present at the ritual (not at all uncommon for the goddess of love). Another man swatted the possessed individual on the buttocks and made a comment about his sexuality. Oshún became angry and said that both men — the man who had made the comment *and* the man she was currently possessing — would be dead in five days. And, indeed, five days later they both died of intestinal problems. Decorum with the orishas is of utmost importance.

A certain amount of fatalism pervades Santería. This is because the orishas rule the world, and the orishas have their own desires, idiosyncrasies and agendas. Sometimes these agendas are understandable, and sometimes the actions of the orishas seem completely random or cruel, but santeros are taught not to judge the gods. Oggún might kill a family in a car accident, but this is his prerogative as the god of metal. Oshún might lead two soul mates together. Orúnla might send a prescient dream to a man, saving his life. All of these events are accepted within the faith as the wisdom of the orishas. Not for nothing is the religion commonly called the *Regla de Ocha* — the rule of the orishas.

Magic, therefore, isn't an act of will on the part of the spellcaster, but an invitation to the orishas. How, then, do Awakened mages within the faith reconcile this attitude with their powers? It isn't as big a leap as an outsider might think. A santero mage simply regards the act of spellcasting — the hand mudras, the chanting in High Speech, the Imago itself — as the act that gets a particular orisha's attention. The orisha empowers the mage to call down the laws of the Supernal Realms, granting the mage a small portion of his authority for a short time. Hubris, therefore, is especially dangerous within Santería. Excessive spellcasting is seen as an attempt to usurp the position of the orishas, and mages who rely too heavily on magic tend to be shunned by others within the faith.

Awakened santeros recognize the 10 Arcana, though they don't use the standard terms for them (unless they have been schooled by a Pentacle mage, of course). Instead, they are likely to refer to using a given Arcanum as calling upon a given orisha. The Arcana do not exactly

correspond to orishas, though, because any orisha might empower a mage to use any Arcanum. The function of the spell determines which orisha might aid the mage. Healing spells, for instance, might come from Inle, Osain, Orúnla or Obatalá. Spells over metal naturally come from Oggún. Love spells belong to Oshún (or sometimes Changó, if the spell is more about pure sex than love). Spells designed to harm another might come from any orisha, because all of them can be vengeful (some more than others, of course). Since every santero who has undergone the ritual of *asiento* is consecrated to given orisha, a mage's preferred spells naturally correspond to his orisha. That doesn't mean that a mage who follows Oko is incapable of casting violent spells, just that it doesn't come naturally to him and he runs the risk of offending the orisha if he makes a habit of it (this is discussed further anon).

Who are the orishas, then, to an Awakened santero? Most such santeros don't change their beliefs in the nature of the orishas post-Awakening; they are the deities given control of the world and of human lives. Mages who don't mind subjecting their religion to a bit of scrutiny (particularly those within the Pentacle) sometimes see the orishas as the Oracles. Several legends speak of the orishas beginning as "kings," after all. Other mages consider the orishas to be powerful Supernal denizens, though most believe that every orisha is present in every Supernal Realm. Some, though, are more powerful than others — Oyá, naturally, is the ruler of Stygia, but Oggún is also powerful there.

Mage Sight

To Mage Sight, a Santería ritual performed by Sleepers is frenetic and immersing. The mage smells blood, cooking food, spices and sweat. He hears drums (even if they aren't actually present; if they are, they grow louder and more frantic) and the sounds of stamping feet as the santeros dance. He feels the orishas watching him, which can be comforting (Obatalá), frightening (Oggún) or even arousing (Changó or Oshún).

If a mage scrutinizes the Resonance of a Awakened santero, he is likely to see some representation of the orisha(s) being invoke. Lightning and thunder shatter the sky for Changó. The smell of sea salt and a feeling of being lost at sea for Yemayá. If the ritual is extremely potent, the scrutinizing mage might see the orisha's features superimposed over the santero's. This is most commonly the case during rituals in which an orisha possesses a santero. In such instances, the santero's Resonance (and aura) disappear completely, leaving only the orisha).

Supernal Symbology

The orishas are deities, but not creators. They control the world within their own spheres of influence, but they are not omnipotent. They are simply greater than humanity, and capable of putting events into motion on Earth. They are, however, susceptible to bribes, taunts, and flattery. In many ways, the orishas behave like people.

Is it any wonder, then, that some mages, even within Santería, look at the orishas as an expression of the power of Awakening? Here are beings with very human-like foibles wielding incredible power. If Wisdom is the yardstick, the orishas, who murder, poison and infect apparently at whim, fall short indeed. While a mage might worship an orisha reverently, the fact remains (whether he wishes to admit it or not) that he *cannot* emulate the orisha, because doing so would cost him his sanity, and probably his freedom or his life.

The orishas, then, are beings to rise above. They have phenomenal power, which they can and do grant to mortals, but that power isn't any reflection on them morally. To a person raised to believe that an all-powerful being is also all-good, and above human notions of morality, this can be quite a strange notion. But again, Santería evinces a certain amount of fatalism. A man can't change his *camino*, and he can't change the nature of the orishas. All he can do is try to work within the system, to supplicate the gods and receive their favor, and ultimately be ready for their judgment.

Foci

Santería makes use of many different foci, but most of them serve the same purpose: Sympathetic resonance with the orishas, or getting the orishas attention. For instance, every orisha has a particular color that they prefer. Obatalá's color is white, while Changó (and his brother, Oggún) prefer red. A santero wishing to contact, ask a favor of or especially be possessed by a given orisha should wear the appropriate color. Also, the orishas have foods, drinks and objects that they must have close to hand. Osain requires a walking stick, even if the man or woman he possesses is perfectly capable of walking. He also likes to smoke, and so a cigar or pack of cigarettes must be kept close at hand when the lord of the forest comes calling, lest he be offended. The orishas also have favorite plants and foods that can aid in rituals involving them — Oggún famously prefers rum, Inle likes oranges and yams, and Oshún is notorious for smearing honey across the lips of those she wishes to seduce.

Animal sacrifice is an important aspect of Santería, so much so that in the United States, the right of santeros to ritually sacrifice animals has been taken to court (normally by



people who, on the surface, express concern for the well-being of the animals, though fear of the religion itself probably plays a greater role). The right of santeros to perform their sacrifices has always been upheld. It bears noting that the animals are not tortured or killed any less humanely than animals used for food — and indeed, sacrificial animals are cooked and consumed during the ritual (normally; in certain propitiatory rites to appease angry orishas, the animal's flesh isn't consumed). But the meal is an offering, given up to the appropriate orishas, and every orisha has a particular type of animal it likes to eat. Oshún prefers castrated goat. Elegguá likes goat and rooster. Oggún also likes roosters (and the warriors do prefer to eat together), but also enjoys young bulls and black dogs.

Santería also makes heavy use of dance, and ritual drums are commonly used as foci. Again, the style of the dance used at drumming ceremonies (called *bembes*) depends on the orisha in question. Babalú-Ayé has lumbering dances befitting the god of disease. Elegguá, the trickster god, enjoys capering, silly-looking dances. It is during a bembe that an orisha is often enticed to possess a santero, and so getting the dance right (the overall tone, if not the specific steps) is crucial. But then, some santeros find that insulting the orisha they wish to entice can work to lure the spirits down. Calling mighty Changó a weakling might get his attention — and then the santero can only hope that he is in a forgiving mood once he sees the feast laid out for him.

Ritual Sacrifice and Wisdom

Santeros make frequent use of animal sacrifice in their rites, and it's not unreasonable to assume that a mage of the faith would use the blood sacrifice to obtain Mana in the form of ashé. Does that mage run the risk of losing Wisdom, even given what his culture teaches about ritual sacrifice?

Yes.

What the mage's culture teaches isn't relevant. The fact is that he is still bleeding a living creature to death for magical energy, and that is an act of hubris. Now, if the mage did not accept the ashé himself, but released it into the world to feed the orishas, therefore making the offering a *true* sacrifice, does the character still check for degeneration? It's not an act of hubris, but it might still be construed as an act of cruelty, particularly if the animal is conscious when its throat is slit. It certainly shouldn't be as severe a sin as blood sacrifice usually is; perhaps Wisdom 6.

Finally, as mentioned, Santería makes use of cowrie shells for divination. These are normally kept in a set of 18, though only 16 are thrown during a reading (two are set aside to "stand guard") over the others. The patterns in which they fall, and the number that land "mouth up," with the dentated openings facing the reader, determine the message that the diviner receives. The spirits of the dead, as well as the orishas, send these messages to the diviner

Santeros

Once a santero's patron orisha has been identified, it isn't uncommon for others in the faith to refer to him by the orisha's name. One might be called "an Elegguá," for instance, in the same way that someone might be referred to by his Western astrological sign. The orisha that claims a santero also imparts certain personality traits (again, as a zodiac sign supposedly does). For the most part, these resonate with the orisha in question. An Elegguá is clever and vigilant, while a Changó is volatile and lusty.

For mages, the patron orisha doesn't determine Path, but it often means more to them than Path does. The orisha who guards a mage's ori is seen as the way in which he works magic, and thus is the way in which Path is expressed. A Moros who follows Oggún is likely to work more with Matter than with Death, while a Necromancer watched over by Oyá is probably the sort who raises zombies and commands ghosts.

Below is a list of the orishas and the Paths with which they most easily resonate. These aren't hard and fast rules; it's possible for an Obrimos to follow Inle or an Acanthus to enjoy Osain's protection. Remember that the function of the magic a spellcaster uses is what determines which orisha is entreated, so the orisha that watches over a mage probably guides what Arcana and spells he learns.

Aganyú: Obrimos
Babalú-Ayé: Thyrsus, Moros, Obrimos
Changó: Obrimos, Acanthus
Elegguá: Acanthus, Mastigos
Ibeyi: Acanthus
Inle: Mastigos
Obatalá: Any
Obba: Acanthus, Moros
Ochosi: Obrimos, Mastigos
Oggún: Moros, Mastigos
Oko: Acanthus, Thyrsus
Orúnla: Acanthus, Mastigos
Osain: Thyrsus
Oshún: Acanthus, Mastigos
Ósun: Mastigos
Oyá: Mastigos, Moros
Yemayá: Any

As for order, if a santero joins one of the Atlantean orders it is because he agrees with the tactics that the local representatives of the order use and because he feels his orisha encourages it. The Adamantine Arrow probably serves as the best home for santeros, especially those who claim one of *los guerreros* as their patron orisha, but a practitioner of Santería might join any of the orders in the right circumstances.

Rotes

Rotes in Santería spring from a variety of times, places and cultures. Some stem from West Africa and draw on practices that are centuries old, while others were created in Cuba either by slaves or in the years since slavery ended. Still others originated in America since 1961, when the first initiation into Santería occurred. In any event, these rotes are *only* taught to mages who have been made *santo*, and usually only to mages whose guardian angel approves of the rote in question. For instance, while an Oggún might learn Tribute of Iron, a follower of gentle Oko never would.

Elegguá's Notice (Fate ●●●)

A santero who is menaced or even annoyed by a rival can try and attract the notice of Elegguá, the trickster god, onto the enemy. Elegguá, once his notice is drawn, watches over the mage, making sure if his rival menaces him directly, the rival suffers for it.

Practice: Fraying
Action: Extended and contested; target rolls Resolve + Composure reflexively
Duration: Prolonged
Aspect: Covert
Cost: None
Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion + Fate

If the spell is successful, the rival suffers the following effects:

- If the rival has the Destiny Merit, he cannot make use of its benefits during the scene in which he menaces the mage. The Storyteller can, however, apply the effects of his Bane (and probably should).
- A number of the rival's rolls equal to the mage's Fate rating are reduced to chance dice during the scene. Dramatic failures involve some spectacularly bad run of luck.

While normally this spell has a duration of Prolonged (one scene), most santeros use the Conditional Trigger effect (see p. 151 of Mage: The Awakening), provided they know Time 2.

To cast this spell, the mage must have fashioned a representation of Elegguá under the guidance of another santero (usually, this is done during the initiation rites anyway). The mage writes the rival's name on a piece of paper and places it underneath Elegguá's head, and then spends hours in meditation, dance and vocal entreaty to the orisha.

Invitation to the Orishas (Spirit ●●)

In one of the most basic spells of Santería, an Awakened santero can call down one of the orishas and allow the deity to possess him. The orisha can then use its powers through the mage's body, dispense godly wisdom...or, unfortunately, wreak punishment on anyone who happens to offend it. Although this rite is considered a sacred act as well as a useful practice, santeros do understand that they risk their lives by trucking with the orishas. But, characteristically, they realize that if they should die while being ridden by an orisha, they have become a great ebbó. Some traditions even hold that if someone dies while being ridden by an orisha, that person can *become* an orisha.

Practice: Ruling

Action: Extended (target number = mage's own Stamina + Resolve; see below)

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

Dice Pool: Presence + Athletics + Spirit

The mage dances a bembe, and he must be accompanied by ritual drums. Often, other santeros dance with him, and this ritual usually follows an ebbó. The mage continues to dance until his mind and body are overwhelmed by the exertion of the bembe and the drums, and the orisha enters him. In game terms, the player must accumulate a number of successes equal to the mage's Stamina + Resolve, and if the character possesses the Iron Stamina Merit, those dots are also added to the target number of successes. Each roll equates one minute of dancing, and the player can only make a number of rolls equal to the mage's Stamina + Athletics (after which the mage is too exhausted to dance properly).

Once the player has accumulated the proper number of successes, the orisha possesses the mage. At this point, the mage begins to behave like the orisha in question. Osain limps and leans on a walking stick. Changó is lusty and belligerent, while Oshún is flirtatious. The orishas demand their tribute — many of them try to take bites of the raw flesh of the ritual sacrifice, and all must have their special foods and items (see Foci), or else they depart and the spell ends.

While the mage is being possessed, the orisha speaks and acts through him. The other santeros present can ask the orisha for advice or intercession. If any are Awakened, they can ask the orisha for magical understanding (this can be used to justify an increase in Gnosis or Arcana ratings), even learning rotes from the orisha. Occasionally, a mage channels one of the warlike orishas (Changó, Oggún, Elegguá, Ochosi, or Oyá) to help him fight in an upcoming battle.

The game effects of this possession vary depending on the Storyteller's decision of what the orishas are and what role they fulfill in the chronicle. In general, this spell allows an effect similar to Coaxing the Spirits (Spirit 1), but with farther-reaching effects. The mage receives a number of bonus dice to a given task based on how satisfied the orisha is with the sacrifice, the items offered to it, and the bembe the mage performed (the Storyteller should take all of this into consideration and then make a roll for the player, probably Manipulation + Socialize, and use the successes for the bonus dice). These dice can be used on any roll that the task involves, but the player does not know how many he has to work with (just as the mage doesn't know how far the orisha's influence will carry him). At some point, the capricious orisha's attention fades, and the mage is on his own again.

Tribute of Iron (Prime ●●●+ Death ●)

Anyone who dies by metal, whether shot, crushed by a car or stabbed with a knife, belongs to Oggún. Horrible accidents and casualties of war are often considered the god of metal taking his tribute in blood from the world of men. One story, though, has it that a santero enslaved in Cuba rose up with a spade and slew several of his keepers in a burst of rage. He saw his masters' relatives coming to kill him, and begged Oggún for help. The story says that Oggún answered him, telling him to taste the blood of his victims. The slave did so, and he found his strength replenished. He killed many of the slavers before they finally brought him low, and as the bullets pierced his heart, he uttered his thanks to Oggún and promised his blood and soul to the orisha.

Practice: Weaving

Action: Instant

Duration: Lasting

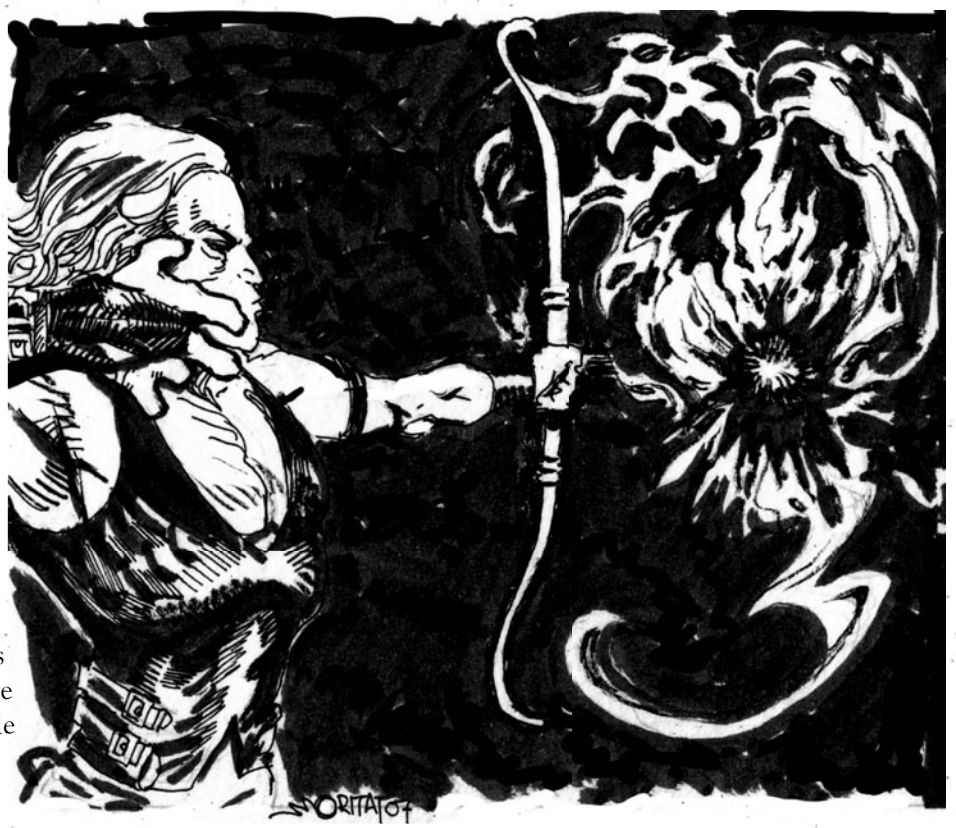
Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

Dice Pool: Strength + Occult + Prime

Modern santeros are loath to use this spell often, because it requires another human being to die by metal (though it does not require the caster to kill the victim himself). The santero must taste the blood of the dead or dying. If the spell is successful, the mage can gain ashé (Mana) as if he had performed a blood sacrifice (see p. 78 of **Mage: The Awakening**). Casting this spell by itself doesn't cause degeneration, though killing someone to facilitate it certainly does.

The casting mage must carry or wear a piece of metal, but no Oggún would ever be without such a focus anyway. Many mages using this spell dip a blade in the victim's blood and lick it off while casting, but this isn't necessary.



Magic Items

Santería is a religion that grew across continents and centuries. It doesn't have a Holy Grail or an Excalibur, but it does have many charms and items that might be useful and powerful on a day-to-day basis. Mages within the faith, however, look at the legends of the orishas and wonder how much is pure fiction and how much has a historical basis, especially with antecedent events before the fall of Atlantis. Sometimes, research turns up references to something like Ochosi's Arrow, below, which is assuredly a powerful and unique item...if it exists.

Image of Elegguá

Most santeros create a representation of the trickster god Elegguá as part of their initiation. The materials out of which this statue is created, revealed during a divination for the iyawó, say much about him. In the case of a mage (or a mage-to-be), it's not unknown for the materials traditionally associated with a Path to appear as the components for that mage's Elegguá. A Mastigos might fashion his Elegguá out of brass, while a Thyrsus carves hers from stone. In any case, once it is constructed, that statue *is* Elegguá, at least as far as the santero is concerned.

The point of the statue is protection, both from intruders in the home and enemies outside. Some mages use this statue as part of casting the Elegguá's Notice spell (see p. 75). Others use the Prime Arcanum to imbue the statue with certain protective spells. It's not unknown, for instance, for a mage to use Prime 3 and another Arcanum of his choice to infuse the statue with an armor spell. If someone attacks him in his home, he has only to call out to Elegguá for assistance and the armor spell suddenly takes hold (he must be in the same room as the statue, of course, or else weave Space 2 into the spell).

Ochosi's Arrow

The tragic legend of the hunter god Ochosi is related earlier in this chapter (p. 70). Some mages look at this story with keen interest, for they believe that the story has a literal antecedent in Atlantis. The story, taken from fragments found in a temple discovered in modern-day Benin, tell of a man renowned as a great hunter who accidentally killed his mother (translation uncertain; some Mysterium linguists argue that the word might actually translate as "wife," but given the incestuous natures of the Yoruba pantheon it might not matter) while attempting to slay a thief. The "arrow" that he used to do this (which might not have been a literal arrow, but possibly an African throwing blade) was never retrieved, because the hunter decreed that it would bring tragedy to whoever wielded it with anything less than perfect faith in his abilities.

Since discovering the fragment, the Mysterium has searched for the "arrow" itself, not necessarily with the intent of letting anyone use it as a weapon (because whose

confidence doesn't waver occasionally?), but with the intent to study it and gain some insight in how events before the Celestial Ladder filtered into Sleeper legend.

Below are three possibilities for how Ochosi's Arrow might function as magical item:

• **Enhanced Item:** The "arrow," in whatever form it actually takes, is simply a superlative example of a weapon of its type. Increase its Durability by 5 and add five dice any attempt to use it. *Any* failure, however, is treated as a dramatic failure when using Ochosi's Arrow.

• **Imbued Item:** Ochosi's Arrow was Imbued with several spells somewhere along the way. In particular, using it allows the wielder to ignore up to five dice of penalties due to environmental conditions (darkness, smoke, cover, etc.) from the Space "Spatial Map" spell; it inflicts lethal damage to spirits and ghosts per the Death "Gossamer Touch"/"Touch of the Grave" spells, and the wielder adds 5 to his initiative if he has the weapon drawn and ready (a Ruling Time spell). A failed roll when using the weapon, however, invokes a Havoc Paradox — the weapon veers off and strikes a different target, possibly the wielder.

• **Artifact:** The Arrow is a Supernal artifact, probably crafted in either the luminous aeries of the Aether or the mindbending hell of Pandemonium. In either case, it seeks whatever target it is instructed to seek, rounding corners and chasing the target until it strikes. It inflicts aggravated damage and inflicts 5 damage dice instead of whatever damage a weapon of its type would normally cause. It ignores non-magical armor entirely. Every time the weapon is used, the wielder's player must spend a point of Willpower and roll Resolve + Composure. If this roll fails or if the wielder uses the weapon and does *not* spend the Willpower (either because he chooses not to or because he has run out), Ochosi looks unfavorably upon this cretin making the same mistake he did. The Arrow itself falls to the ground and will not budge for its former wielder (though a new master may now claim it). The former wielder now suffers from a Bane as presented in the Destiny Merit (**Mage**, p. 81), save that he doesn't gain the benefit of Destiny. The Bane is "agents of justice" and is the equivalent of a 5-dot Destiny Merit. That is, whenever the character encounters an agent of justice, the Storyteller has 10 dice in penalties to apply. This curse lasts until the character can somehow appease Ochosi.

Storytelling Hints

Santería is a living tradition, and therein lies one of the biggest advantages for the Storyteller. A trip to the library can provide detailed information on this religion, how it views magic and destiny, its heritage, its history and even recordings of its music. Since Santería is "real" (insofar, as with any religion, as people practice and believe in it) including it in a **Mage** chronicle can be an interesting way to show that Awakened magic does filter into the non-hermetic traditions of the world, and it functions just as well in them as in the magic of the Pentacle.

Santería Story Hooks

• **War of the Gods:** The spirit world in the characters' home city goes haywire. The various spirit courts seem to be reinventing themselves, changing to accommodate a new order. The spirits are now aligned based on which orisha they serve. The characters will need to learn about Santería *fast* if they stand any chance of altering or even comprehending this occurrence. But is there anyone in town who is willing to teach them?

• **Sanctuary:** A young mage of the Mysterium — also a santero — discovers an artifact in his order's collection that he believes belongs to his faith. He steals it and flees back to his home town of Miami, where Santería runs deep and strong in the Cuban community. The Mysterium asks the characters' cabal to retrieve it, but it's guarded by an entire neighborhood now, some of whom are Awakened and powerful. And what's so important about the artifact, anyway?

• **Sacrifice:** This story requires that one of the characters or one of their allies has a Familiar. A powerful babalawo decides that the Familiar would make the perfect sacrifice for his patron orisha. He isn't swayed by talk of the Familiar being a sentient being, because a cowrie reading revealed to him that the Familiar is destined to give its life for the ebbó. What's so important that the santero is willing to invest his life and energy into making this sacrifice? Does he wish to bring torture and harm to an enemy? Save the life of a friend or relative in another country? Bring his love back from the dead? It all depends on which orisha he's trying to bribe.

Santería can seem exotic, but as mentioned before, it's only exotic to people who haven't grown up with it. It would be an interesting story that required the characters to become initiated in order to fulfill some goal, even if they only received a cowrie reading and perhaps the elekes. As the characters become immersed in this tradition, they find people who live their lives by their own *caminos*, subservient to the will of the orishas yet quite willing to bribe, trick and cajole their gods into service. This relationship with otherworldly beings might be something quite different from what a typical Western mage is used to, and might be quite eye-opening.

Alternative Magic (Storyteller's Options)

• **Orisha Chooses the Path:** When a person Awakens, he usually travels to a Supernal Realm and forges a sympathetic connection to the Watchtower there, allowing him to draw down the laws of that Realm into the Fallen World, and thus perform magic. But to the santero, there's an extra step: The orishas must *allow* the spell to occur. In that sense, all the connection to a Watchtower does is give a mage a direct line to an orisha, and it is the orisha who actually casts the spell. To simulate this in **Mage**, consider replacing the notion of "Path" with "Orisha." An Oggún, for instance, might find it easier to use the Arcana of Matter and Forces, while an Obba might use Life and Mind. The non-Ruling Arcana require a "bribe" of ashé (Mana) for the orisha, or, instead of the Mana expenditure, might require an additional turn to cast as the mage dances or otherwise pleads with the orisha. Alternately, a mage might garner a bonus of two extra dice if he uses foci that are appropriate to the orisha being called upon — possibly more if he performs a ritual sacrifice. It might be more in keeping with the beliefs of Santería, though, to apply a penalty if the mage *doesn't* use the appropriate foci.

• **Divination Works:** This option presumes the existence and near-omniscience of the orishas and the egun. When a babalawo performs a divination, regardless of whether he is Awakened or has the requisite Arcana to perform such spells if he is, have the player roll Intelligence + Occult. This roll functions as the Dream Merit, except that the hints are usually brief flashes rather than involved visions. An alternative would be to make this action extended, allowing the babalawo to clarify the question by asking the person for whom he is performing the divination for more information. The target number of successes should be set by the Storyteller and reflect the complexity of the matter and how helpful the orishas or egun are willing to be.

Sample Character

Papa Congri

Quote: *"Tell Papa where it hurts."*

Background: Born in Cuba in 1946, Fernando Ortiz grew up with the orishas. His father died when he was very young, and his mother refused to remarry, dedicating herself to her work as a madrina. Over the years, Fernando saw many santeros and santeras receive the orishas. His mother, though not Awakened, was a skilled herbalist, healer and cook, and the feasts that she prepared for the holidays were legendary.

In 1958, Fernando's mother received a dream from Orúnla. It told of coming war, strife and persecution. She didn't tell her son of her dream, but arranged for the young man to travel to America to live with her late husband's brother. The next year, the Castro Revolution began, and Fernando watched from another country as the land of his birth changed. He begged the orishas for help, asking Oggún to spare his mother, asking Orúnla for advice and asking Obatalá to intervene and bring his mother to him. But when Fernando's uncle, a powerful babalawo in his own right, cast the shells to determine Fernando's personal orisha, it was Osain the herbalist who the shells identified.

Fernando was unable to understand this turn of events at first. Then he learned that his mother had been killed in Cuba. He fell into a deep depression and took a huge dose of an herbal sedative, seeking to die and end his pain. He slipped into a coma and found himself in a deep, dark forest, walking behind an old man with one leg. The orisha Osain talked to him, and told him that everyone had their pain to bear. Osain's pain was his missing limbs, while Fernando's was his grief as his mother's death. In that moment, Fernando was humbled, because he knew that his pain would subside in time, but Osain's never would. He pledged himself to the orisha of the forest, and returned to his body, Awakened.

Over the next several decades, Fernando became a respected healer and priest of Santería. He encountered mages of the Pentacle and developed a loose understanding of the orders, but consistently refused offers to join them — until the local Adamantine Arrows asked him to join not as a student or a soldier, but as a teacher and consultant. Within the space of a year, the Arrow had several santero members, and these mages made sure that no harm or harassment comes to "Papa Congri" (the Shadow Name comes from a Cuban dish called "congri," made of black beans and rice) or the Sleeper adherents of the faith.

Description: Papa Congri is a handsome man in his late 50s. He has dark skin and speckled gray hair, and is missing most of his teeth. He has a hearty laugh and a warm demeanor, even with people he dislikes. He carries a walking stick, though he does not need it to walk — it is a symbol of his devotion to Osain. He usually wears green and brown, and is never without his elekes.

Storytelling Hints: Papa Congri regrets never having children of his own, and regards every iyawó for whom he acts as padrino as an adopted child. He has no particular regard for the Atlantean orders other than the Arrow. It bears noting, though, that this is mostly because of the adherents to Santería who belong to the order in his area, rather than the order itself — Arrows from another community might well spoil his perceptions, even induce him to leave the order. Likewise, members of another order who showed interest or knowledge of Santería would certainly bolster his opinion of the Pentacle. Papa Congri is distrustful of Americans, but his door is open to santeros of any nationality.

Dedicated Magical Tool: Walking stick
Real Name: Fernando Ortiz
Path: Thyrsus
Order: Adamantine Arrow
Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3
Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2
Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 2, Composure 4
Mental Skills: Academics 2, Crafts (Clay) 3, Investigation 2, Occult (Santería) 4
Physical Skills: Stealth 1, Survival 1, Weaponry (Knife) 2
Social Skills: Animal Ken (Birds) 1, Empathy 3, Expression 3, Persuasion 2, Socialize 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 2
Merits: Allies (Adamantine Arrow) 3, Destiny (Bane: Ochosi's Arrow) 3, Magical Tradition (Santería), Resources 1, Status (Santería Priest) 2
Willpower: 7
Wisdom: 8
Virtue: Prudence
Vice: Gluttony
Initiative: 6
Defense: 2
Speed: 9
Health: 7
Gnosis: 4
Arcana: Fate 3, Life 4, Mind 1, Spirit 5
Rotes: *Fate*—Winds of Chance (•), The Evil Eye (••), Elegguá's Notice (•••); *Life*—Healer's Trance (•), Heal Flora and Fauna (••), Healing Heart (•••), Enfeeblement (••••); *Spirit*—Exorcist's Eye (•), Lesser Spirit Summons (••), Exorcism (•••), Spirit Possession (••••)
Mana/per turn: 13/4
Armor: 5 ("Organic Resilience," Life ••)



THE TEMPLAR TREASURE

My soul is protected by the armor of faith, just as my body is protected by the armor of steel. I am thus doubly armed, and I fear neither demons nor men.

— Adapted Templar catechism of St. Bernard of Clairvaux

Introduction

The Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon, as the Templars are formally known, are one of the most storied knightly monastic orders to arise from the Middle Ages. At one time in European history, the workings of the Templars affected the everyday life of every European citizen, so integral was the order to finance and religious function. Shrouded in mystery, conspiracy, and allegations of foul witchery, the Templars are the stuff of modern popular fascination, a medieval bogeyman illustrating the fear of fanaticism or the ultimate failing of organized religion as a tool for oppression. Movies feature skulking Templars, whacked-out pseudo-occultists use Templar trappings for their own crackpot theories, and conspiracy authors pin all manner of diabolical machinations to the dogma of the order.

The truth of the Templars is bitter and far subtler, however. The order never truly recovered from its disbandment at the hands of political enemies. The centuries intervening between the order's dissolution and its modern incarnation as a scattered relic clinging to solvency have made its story a sad one of nadir.

Making the story even more sorrowful is the fact that the Templars aren't the cackling villains of popular fiction or French Royalist propaganda, rubbing their hands and plotting heresy or debasement. The Templars were a righteous chapter of warrior-monks who truly discovered the light of God, but in striving for the divine, fell prey to the treacheries of desirous temporal envy.

History

The history of the Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon begins in 1128 with the Cistercian Bernard of Clairvaux, who authored the rule of the order. In truth, the order came into being some 10 years prior, formed by Hugh de Payens with the intention of protecting Christian pilgrims in the Holy Land. King Baldwin II of Jerusalem approved this initial charter, and the support of Bernard of Clairvaux (a nephew of one of the original nine Knights Templar) recognized and confirmed the order at the 1128 Council of Troyes.

With their approval by the Church, the Templars enjoyed immediate success, most often in the form of noble donations. The knights made their requests for donations in the name of their mission of protection: they asked for money, land, even noble sons who would become knights in the interests of St. Bernard's Rule. As a monastic order, the knights took a vow of poverty, and thus any of their own noble possessions (such as land, chattel, and cash) became assets of the order itself.

Although they originally served as warriors in the Holy Land, contributing to many battles during the Crusades and the *Reconquista*, the Templars made a far more significant contribution to medieval culture in the form of banking. Since their members swore oaths of poverty and donated their assets to the order, the Templars had a great deal of money readily on hand at their chapter houses, which they began loaning to pilgrims in 1135. Pilgrims were also able to leave their own valuables in the possession of the Templars, for safekeeping during the period of pilgrimage.

As record of these valuable deposits, the Templars issued letters of credit. These letters assured other Templars of the pilgrim's wealth and could be used to withdraw funds from any chapter house along the way to the Holy Land and, eventually, across Europe. The temple knights both certified and encrypted these letters of credit, so they couldn't be easily forged.

As a result of noble contributions and interest made on loans to pilgrims, the Templars soon found themselves in control of vast sums of money. The letter of credit represented a new form of banking, and the suspicious ease with which the Templars avoided condemnation for usury made the order an extremely profitable venture.

The fall of the Knights Templar came as a result of filthy lucre. Most historians believe that, jealous of the Templars' moneys and in need of financing for his own wars, the French King Philip IV convinced his childhood friend and then-Pope Clement V to declare the Templars heretics. King Philip then arrested hundred of French Templars, seized the order's assets, and disbanded them.

Of significant note is the fact that Philip was already greatly indebted to the Templars, and grew incensed when the order refused to loan him additional money. Additionally, Clement's actions against the order occurred during the Babylonian Captivity, when a succession of French Popes resided in France, not Rome. In 1312, Pope Clement issued the edict formally terminating the order's rule. The Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon, officially at least, were no more.

The story becomes even darker than a simple tale of aristocratic greed, however. Under the investigation begun by Pope Clement — which almost certainly consisted of physical torture — many Templars admitted to heresy. These heresies included acts of homosexuality, idol-worship, denials of the sacraments, defilement of the cross, consorting with the Adversary, and veneration of a sublime entity known as Baphomet.

At the point of their dissolution, the Knights Templar scattered into anonymity in hopes of safety. Their treatment at the hands of the French king was by far the most severe of all European countries, especially in comparison to investigations and trials in England, where many knights of the order were arrested and tried but ultimately found innocent. Elsewhere, the Knights Templar either found their order absorbed into other orders or just vanished. Estimated numbers of Templars across Europe before Philip and Clement's collusion were in the tens of thousands, with perhaps 3,000 in France alone. The number arrested in France was but a fraction of this greater figure. Where they went remains a mystery.

What is certain, however, is that Philip IV and Clement V made a brutal example of the Templars who were indeed arrested and "brought to justice" in the king's fashion. After Grand Master Jacques de Molay realized the futility of the situation, he and Geoffrey de Charney recanted their torture-induced confessions. For this, Philip IV had them both burned at the stake.

Philosophy: Baphomet

Banking and warcraft aside, the true interest of the Templars to both mages and mortal occultists is in the order's secret rituals and inexplicable devotion to Baphomet. Historians generally agree that Clement's antagonism of



the order occurred largely at the behest of the extremely powerful Philip IV, and that most of the heresy charged were inflated, if at all extant. The Church itself considers the treatment of the order inappropriate, and Clement managed to prosecute the order's termination as a result of exerting his own authority over the findings of investigatory councils and a potent Inquisition.

Where the reputation of the Templars *doesn't* emerge as a politically motivated fabrication is in the order's devotion to the being or ideal referred to as Baphomet. Supposedly, one of the idols, or "Heads" as they are sometimes called in context worshiped by the heretical Templars was named Baphomet. The problem arises in exactly what Baphomet is supposed to be.

Some historians believe "Baphomet" to be a poor-integrity translation of the name of the prophet Mohammed to Old French. These historians suggest that the Templars converted to Islam after contact with it in the Outremer chapter houses, that the root of their heresy was the abandonment of the Christian faith. Theology doesn't bear this out, however, as Islamic faith also forbids the worship of idols; if the Templars were so keen to adopt Islam, why would they make up their own ersatz version of it?

Close to the same Arabic sources, some suggest that "Baphomet" is a coarse Westernization of the term "Abufihamat." If the Templars came into contact with Sufism or Sufi mysticism during the Crusades, which they almost certainly did, they may have been introduced to the concept of Abufihamat, which means "father of wisdom," in reference to an accomplished Sufi mystic.

If the Head the Templars worshiped was truly a head, and not simply an idol, the rumored Templar possession of John the Baptist's head takes on a grotesque cast. In this scenario, "Baph" and "Metis" provide a rough Greek translation of "baptism of grace." Were this the case, a true accusation of heresy might be able to be made, if the Templars genuinely revered John the Baptist on the level of an idol.

Indeed, most of the accusations of idol-worship probably involved the veneration of relics. The Templars may well have possessed the head of John the Baptist, and they may have even called it Baphomet, but they didn't necessarily elevate it to the status of a god or idol, any more than any observation of relics does so. This misunderstood reliquary may have combined with a potential conscious choice of substituting the Orthodox Eucharist for the Catholic Eucharist (which might have also been the source of accusations of debased sacraments).

In the World of Darkness, the truth of the matter is less sinister, as odd as that seems. The Grand Masters of the Templars, in moments of supreme but fleeting clarity, caught a glimpse of the Supernal. They called this peering into vast, unknowable truth *Sophia*, after the Greek word for wisdom and the Gnostic concept of Man's perception of the light of God. In order to keep the devoutly Catholic knights of the Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon from fearing that this Supernal spark was heresy, the Grand Masters of the order hid the concept beneath a veneer of worldly observance. That is, to keep their knights from looking askance at the light of God through the flawed and dim minds of mere Men, the Grand Masters simply told them it was something else. They had their chaplains translate "*sophia*" using a primitive Hebrew cipher, resulting in the neologism Baphomet.

It's a lapse in reasoning, to be sure, but these were soldiers in hostile lands, first and foremost. Their faith was greater than their theology. The Templars privy to this secret of universal order failed to understand that a holy truth venerated under false pretenses results in false faith. In their hubris — for that's what it was, even if none of them were willworkers in true — they turned the light of God into a graven idol. In the ultimate irony, they were undone by mostly untrue claims of more pedestrian idolatry.

As well, not every member of the Templars' order was an initiate of the so-called magical tradition of the order. The original Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon were disbanded far too soon for the order as it initially existed to conduct much magical experimentation and research. Most of what today's "Templarism" makes possible has come as a result of mages' quiet study and practice in the intervening centuries, away from the disapproving eyes of the order's Sleeper critics.

The Philosophy Today

Despite the order having been formally disbanded seven centuries ago, in the World of Darkness the Knights Templar still claim a few members worldwide. A scholar would hardly confuse the mages' modern incarnation with their medieval precedent, however. Today's Templars are esoteric collectors of the arcane, not warrior-monks or avid bankers, whether they're mages or Sleepers.

As well, today's Knights Templar remain avidly Christian, devoted to the purpose of witnessing the light of God. They have little use for Hermetic "magic," and indeed disdain the concept of magic as most modern (Sleeper) occultists define it. If forced to put a term to what they seek, they might describe it as thaumaturgy or Sephiroth (see Chapter Two for more information on

Sephiroth and Kabbalah). An especially liberal-minded modern Templar might describe the Baphomet as theurgy. A notably traditional Templar would likely describe the Eucharist and Novena as evidence of the Baphomet.

Fundamentally, the "magic" of the Templar legacy is a regimen of protection and fortification. This is an outgrowth of the order's original purpose of protecting pilgrims — under such blessings, the Templar himself is the pilgrim and the light of God serves as his armor, shield, and sword. Unfortunately, the very rubric of protection probably served to ignite some of the accusations of heresy and witchcraft against the order. In the act of a Templar's binding of a "demon," an ignorant onlooker would only have seen the "demon" and the Templar and thus assume that the knight was trafficking with an evil spirit. The medieval mind was superstitious and fearful, and the other rituals to which the Templars were privy likely seemed just as alien and heretical as Islam or diabolism to the uninitiated, earning the Templars the ire of the Church (not withstanding the financial ire of King Philip IV).

Sleeper Templars' current heuristic model is that of the archetypal lone magician. Templars don't often congregate anymore; a chapter house today is likely the nigh-abandoned manor of an obscure European minor noble or the forgotten study chamber beneath a church or library, where an aged acolyte pursues his craft in quiet anonymity. Gone are the days when a force of hundreds of knights would take to the battlefield, clad in the armor of God. Today, the Templars are solitary knights-errant, waging their own pilgrimages to the shrines of holy enlightenment.

Sleeper Templar "Magic"

The theme, both Resonant and metaphorical, of Templar magic is the light of God. Thus, "magical" acts performed by Sleeper Templars occasionally shimmer with numinous halos of such light. In cases like this, however, the light appears muted and indirect, as if viewed as an emanation from behind a sacristy door. It sometimes softens the visible "focus" of the Sleeper working what he believes to be a ritual. It is in these moments that the omnipotent, unknowable God seemingly lets His gaze fall upon the knight, and the radiance of His attention washes over the Templar like a beam of virgin sunlight.

Arcana

The Templar tradition, as understood from the point of view of a genuine mage, is as medieval as its origins suggest. It naturally has no comprehension of the full nature of the Tapestry, and concerns itself with only two Arcana, Prime and Spirit. Given that these are both subtle Arcana, the Templars' understanding of them is incomplete at best, and certainly imprecise. Where Sleeper practitioners of the tradition hone their craft, they see miracles, manifestations of God's light. Their unreliable ability to view this light fits utterly with the Christian ideal of God working "in mysterious ways." When a Templar mage performs a spell, he's not creating the effect himself, he's submitting a humble request that God shine a bit of His light on the Templar. If the spell fails or succeeds, it's because God — if He even heard the Templar beseeching Him — actively chose to grant or deny the request. (Tangentially, it's for this reason that so few of the Templar tradition truly Awaken. Where most mages of the Atlantean craft understand that magic is the imposition of the will on the universe, Templars see magic as a force applied by their divine superior.)

The whole matter is a point of minor contention for religious mages who are aware of the existence of the Templar tradition. The presence of what the Templars claim to be the light of God argues in favor of the existence of God, or at least some higher power, but the fact that mages perceive this light of God to be a duality of two Arcana causes some degree of a lapse of faith. In this sense, either the mages or the Templars are right, and with their greater understanding of what's happening, it's likely to be the mages. That doesn't lessen the power or value of what the Templars have discovered, it simply means they're wrong, in a Supernal sense, about where that power comes from. While this doesn't by any means deny the existence of God, it does mean that the Templars have an outlook that doesn't mesh neatly with the Supernal dialectic. For that reason, many mages choose to avoid the Templar tradition, as belief in its efficacy almost demands a deliberate delusion of the self.

Assuming, of course, that the Supernal aren't lesser manifestations of a greater God. That's a point of theology and cosmology for mages to debate, though, and hardly the bailiwick of the comparatively humble Sleeper Templars.

For its part, the Templar tradition doesn't pretend to concern itself with the full breadth of "available" Arcana. Even when mages scrutinize the Arcana of Prime and Spirit, their revelations miss... *something* when placed in the context of all the Arcana's more comprehensively defined magical relationships. Put simply, Templar mages sometimes deliberately overlap in their distinctions between Prime and Spirit (on the occasions when they use those words as such). To a Templar, certain magical miracles occur as a result of seeing the light of God. Templar mages often acknowledge these miracles in the context of one "Arcanum," (and, again, they don't use that word), and it's the light of God.

In general, Obrimos mages tend to sympathize more strongly with the Templars than the Thyrsus mages, despite equal importance falling on both the Prime and Spirit Arcana in the Templar idiom. That's not to say that Thyrsus mages don't relate at all, just that the Templar doctrine cleaves a little more closely to the Obrimos' celestial inclination than to the Thyrsus' animistic outlook. Indeed, Templar Sleepers might even decry the Thrysus reverence for spiritualism as heresy, because in Templar dogma, there is no god but God.

Divergent Philosophies and Other Mysteries

Many organizations claim descent from the Knights Templar, but the Supernal spark that remains precipitously — if capriciously — among those few real mages who practice the tradition of the Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon so far seems to have eluded these derivatives. Separating these related traditions from popular misconception is perhaps the greatest difficulty a student of the Templar tradition faces. Indeed, in some cases, popular perception forms a truth of its own, subsequent to the suspected connection. Myth becomes truth. With a history as deep, as culturally resonant, and as thrilling as that of the Templars, it's bound to happen.

That doesn't mean they work, however. Of the numerous factions claiming descent from the Knights Templar, none of them has succeeded in capturing the ability to reflect or selective shine the light of God as have the Templar mages. While they may echo the ritual and adopt the processes, they lack that resonant, divine spark that sets the Templars apart. Indeed, the lack of Resonance endemic to these tangential philosophies allows mages to separate the wheat from the chaff. Since divergent practices to date have lacked any trace of the Supernal, mages have felt safe waving a hand at their collection. The Temple scholar must beware, though, for not only is such blanket dismissal crass, it can be dangerous if one of these parallel traditions turns out to resonate with a mote or more of greater power.

Organization

The Templars today have the merest fraction of their former numbers, and they're scattered even further across Creation than they were during their heyday of the Middle Ages. While any number of false practitioners claim some sort of heritage involving the Templar legacy, historians among the Templars estimate the number of worldwide members at something around 200.

Modern Templars do retain some of the anachronistic ways of their medieval heritage, notably in their relationships with other Templars. For example, most Templars are loath to share their mystical knowledge, even among fellow members of the order, like the alchemists of old, unless they know the colleague in question quite well. They reason that, with no central governing body, anyone can claim to be a Templar, so only the ones personally known to the practitioner have any reliable degree of authenticity.

Indeed, this decentralization contributes to the waning health of the tradition. While the Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon no longer exists, only the magical tradition in its wake means anything any longer. Thus, anyone who can convince an existing member of the order to make him a "knight," whether a Sleeper or a mage, has the opportunity to call himself a Templar. After all, this is no longer truly a knightly order; it's a collective of marginalized nobles and talented scholars united by their common interest in arcane practice. Thus, anyone who fortuitously comes across the magical notes of a Templar (living or dead) — some can even make those notes reveal the light of God — can legitimately make a claim to the Templar legacy.

In game terms, a character need not be a mage to become a member of the tradition, though he must naturally be a mage to practice actual magic. Because the characters in the World of Darkness don't have access to each other's character sheets, many of these Templar titles are thus honorific. A Templar who can make magic is as much a Templar who is just a Sleeper who can witness the Supernal via Unseen Senses, and they're both potentially on an equal level with the Templar whose family has been attached to the order for seven centuries.

Where the Templars may exercise some degree of control over the tradition's destiny is apprenticeship, but again this shows a great deal of medieval mindset. Few Templar mentors would apprentice a female, though a few progressive knights, seeing the nadir of the order have brought women into the tradition — often to the disgust of more conservative members of the order. Likewise, some mentors will take only suitably aristocratic apprentice-squires, who are able to prove both their magical acumen and their distinguished breeding. Still others make poor teachers, encumbering the already oblique esoterica of the tradition beneath layers of quasi-feudal obligation and mystical mumbo-jumbo, none of which is relevant to the modern practice of the tradition. In the end, finding a mentor who's not mired in his own delusions of what the order is can be an exercise in futility, and a would-be Templar might occasionally be better off by translating one of the order's documents and learning its tenets by process of trial and error. Indeed, it's often (and ironically) easier for a mage to find



Templar tutelage than a Sleeper. Once an Awakened individual can make the magic work, he won't have to answer to anyone about the validity of his interest or potential. Meanwhile, so many Sleeper Templars vigorously protect their knowledge from curious outsiders, heedless of the fact that their jealousy of others winnows the tradition's vitality.

One of the greater results of the lack of a central, governing body in charge of the order's consistency of practice is the utter absence of any sense of rank or qualification. Everything occurs at the pace and approval of one's local master or mentor. Thus, while modern members of the order may claim a knightly rank, that rank may or may not accord to actual magical ability. It may have been bestowed by a noble member of the order, or it may have been granted by a self-styled master whose understanding of the order is based on interpretation of medieval journals instead of true knightly ennoblement. For example, an Awakened mage might find himself possessed of a title below a Supernally impotent Master, simply because of heredity or the standing of the mage's mentor. The Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon no longer have a Grand Master, or at least they don't have one recognized by every active member of the tradition. Their titles and ranks have no common meaning. That's because even the members of the order itself don't have any metric by which to judge membership or accomplishment, even among themselves, other than the ability to make the magic work. It's a dying tradition, suspended from obscurity only by the handful of devotees who practice it in ever-dwindling understanding of the greater legacy. A high-ranking Templar might be magically impotent or even a quack, while a mage who can truly shed the Light of God with his willworking labors anonymously beneath a theoretical Master.

Symbology

The Templars observe a comparatively small collection of arcane symbols, though this actually reflects their narrow focus and devotion to singular purpose. The wise mage knows better than to take this as a sign of simplicity on the tradition's behalf, however, for these symbols are exceptionally powerful in their use. Awakened mages point to the inherent power of the symbols as an example of trace Supernal influence translating into the Sleeper craft.

The Baphomet

Perhaps the best-known image of the Templars' key symbol is the illustration rendered by Eliphas Levi,

depicting a goat-headed creature of decidedly demonic cast. This is somewhat misleading, however, as few of the Templar tradition think Levi had actually achieved any of the mysteries of the Templars. Levi's illustration actually exceeds the concept of the Baphomet as *Sophia*, depicting what appear to be the dualistic aspects of the *Sophia* and the *Logos*, the Light and the Word. Levi's Baphomet has both female and male features, and makes a gesture implying "as above, so below," which is a far more hermetic ideal than the Templars subscribe to.

It is odd, then, that the most recognized image of the pivotal Templar symbol is so distant (though subtly so, to the untrained observer) from genuine Templar doctrine. In the estimation of some scholars of Templar mages, though, this is a masterstroke of misdirection. It leads those who would discern their mysteries for their own purposes away from the actual philosophy of the Templars. Levi's Baphomet is more in line with Crowley's Thelema, hermeticism, and astrology.

The functional Baphomet of the Templars' actual veneration is rarely depicted as a symbol. In practice, the word itself serves as much as a symbol as anything else. Given that the word is an encrypted translation, all of the power inherent in a symbol already exists in the word itself. In fact, one of the most common uses of the symbol in Templar ritual is the inscription of the word upon the air before the practitioner, which many mages see as having parallels to their own use of mudras.

Occasionally, the Baphomet is given a graphical depiction, but only rarely, such as in situations where the Templar wants to leave a symbol of her passing for other members of the order, or where openly writing BAPHOMET might attract the wrong sort of attention. In cases such as these, the Baphomet is sometimes represented as a star (for the light of God), a head (lending credence to the connection between the Templars and the relic of John the Baptist), or a fountain (presumably a fountain of wisdom, and perhaps another misinterpreted symbol leading the Templars to condemnation for heresy).

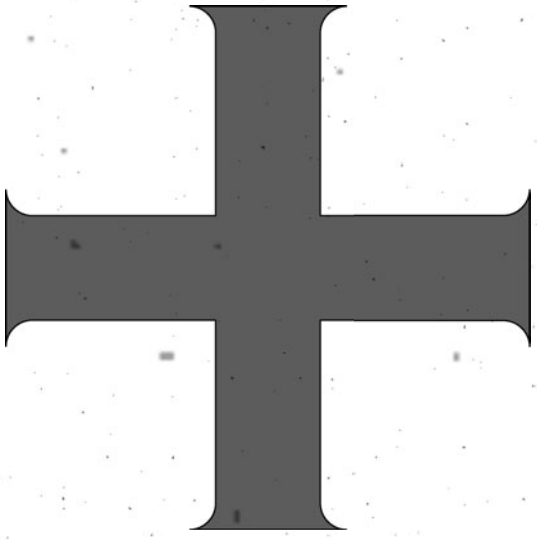
The Holy Cross

Templars are very particular about the use of the Holy Cross in magical practice (whether in true Awakened magic, or in the empty ritual of Sleepers). Specifically, the Cross is often used to depict the *presence* of a magical effect, but never the *result* of a magical effect. Metaphorically, the Holy Cross represents the light of God shining, not what it shines upon.

Some degree of this can be seen in the practical applications of Templar "magic." A Templar might hold a crucifix when establishing a protective ward against some otherworldly entity, but he wouldn't wave it around as a symbol of faith to strike fear into such creatures.

Templars also distinguish between the Holy Cross that represents Christianity and the specific Holy Cross that represents the light of God in magical practice. The former is the cross lay folk are used to seeing, the universally recognized T-shaped cross. The Holy Cross associated with Templar magic is the Gnostic cross, a cross within a circle (known as the sun cross or Odin's cross in some cultures).

Templars often carry these crosses or at least have local access to them, much as a faithful Catholics carry a string of rosary beads. Indeed, most Templars, being Catholic, carry both their rosaries and their Holy Crosses.



Codes and Ciphers

Encryption has long been a part of the Templar tradition, from the codes it used to protect pilgrims' assets to the translated and encrypted name of the *Sophia* as Baphomet to the imperfect recording of the whispered fragments of the Word transcribed into the low tongues of a post-Babel world. Although by no means as reliant on codes and numerology as Kabbalah (q.v. on p. 32), the Templar tradition does occasionally involve writing hidden prayers as entreaties to God. Likewise, Templars sometimes create amulets in case they think they might not be able to speak a prayer to God in certain dire circumstances.

These encoded prayers typically find their form at either end of the spectrum of magical practice, both functional and Sleeper. Sometimes they're quick-and-dirty "insurance policies" that make sure the magician will at least be able to make the prayer when situations align against him (such as when dying on a torturer's rack or being caught beneath a rockslide while searching

for the Temple of Solomon). Of course, the Templars themselves would never deign to call such amulets something so crass as an insurance policy, but the analogy works somewhat. On the other end of the spectrum, Templars occasionally undertake vast rituals, where inscriptions and codes play a critical part in the ritual's invocation. Indeed, the "grimoires" of many Templars are these very types of talismans, transcriptions of long and involved prayers.

Rotes

In most cases, rites and magical ceremonies practiced in the Templar tradition can be learned by mages as rotes. They involve shining the light of God on a certain being (as with protection rotes or rotes of binding) or awakening the latent light in an object (such as a holy relic). For this reason, the Templars have codified a handful of the spell effects outlined in **Mage: The Awakening**, though they obviously don't cast them as improvised spells, like a true willworker does.

Templar rites can be used as a basis for the following pre-existing rotes: Divining the Relic (Analyze Enchanted Item, **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 219); Exalting the Relic (Activate Enchanted Item, **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 221); Recording the Light (Inscribe Grimoire, **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 220); the Sword of Archangel Michael (Celestial Fire, **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 224); Identify the Interloper (Exorcist's Eye, **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 245); Hallower's Prayer (Place of Power, **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 247); and Banish the Interloper (Exorcism, **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 248).

Templars also have access to the following unique rotes.

Girding the Champion's Faith (Prime ●●●)

The Templar invokes a brilliant armor forged from the light of God to turn back the blows of his most ardent enemies.

Practice: Shielding

Action: Instant

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Method: Vulgar

Cost: None

The Templar gains two points of armor for the duration of the rote. Additionally, the Templar, illuminated by the light of God, can withstand even the most heinous perils that his foes would inflict on him: While under the aegis of this spell, the Templar downgrades any aggravated damage he suffers to lethal damage. (This does not affect the upgrade of lethal damage to aggravated if the Templar has already suffered his full Health points in lethal damage, however. See p. 175 of the **World of Darkness** rulebook for more information on this.)

The foci for this spell are the Baphomet and a cipher. First, the Templar encodes his own name in a cipher of his choosing, thus protecting his identity with the cipher just as he seeks to protect his body with the spell. The Templar also traces the sign of the Baphomet in the air before him as he casts the spell.

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult + Prime

The journals of the Templars indicate that this spell was most commonly used in preparation for a physical conflict with otherworldly enemies, when the knights would face hostile "angels" or entities from beyond most realms of perception. Tales of knights in shining armor, whether among actual military accounts, or even folkloric legends such as *Beowulf* or the *Volsung Saga* might have involved kennings related to this spell's function, even though those sources clearly predate the Templar order.

While it works fine as a standard armor spell, most mages would likely eschew it as such, since it's not as effective as the armor rotes of many other Arcana (offering less in the way of protection for skilled mages of those Arcana) and it's plainly vulgar. On the other hand, the protection it offers from aggravated supernatural damage is certainly a boon.

Communion with the Messenger (Prime ●●, Spirit ●●)

The Templar calls out to seek the audience of an "angel" in its literal definition from New Testament Greek as a messenger.

Practice: Ruling

Action: Instant and contested; target rolls Resistance reflexively

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

The foci for this spell are all three of the hallmark Templar symbols: the Baphomet, the Holy Cross, and a cipher. First, the Templar creates the sign of the Holy Cross on the ground where he wishes to commune with the angel — the cross in the circle serves as a sort of beacon to the angel in question. Next, the Templar speaks the name of the angel after it has been encoded as a cipher. The more important the "messenger," the more elaborate the cipher must be. Finally, the Templar makes the hand-sign of the Baphomet when the angel arrives, proving to the angel that he is worthy of witnessing the light of God.

The Templar casting this spell makes a single call to a single, specific "messenger" angel (whose name he may have procured from any number of sources, liturgical or lay, but it must be the angel's true name). The angel



who heeds the call (if the spell is successful) is from the loftier regions of the Shadow Realm but has a singular connection to the Aether, or "Heaven" as the Templar understands it. Obviously, the "angel" is not from the Aether proper, but is savvy to what has occurred there in an up-to-date sense. In the communion with the angel, the Templar may ask the angel any questions that he wishes, and the angel responds with whatever information is salient.

Of course, mere men surely cannot grasp the full import of what occurs in the Realms Supernal, and the angel's answers may seem obtuse, incomprehensible, or chaotic. As well, the angel might simply deem the answer to a given question as one the Templar's mind cannot possibly understand, and may deliberately occlude or withhold information (though it will never lie outright). "What does God look like?" is not a viable question for this spell to answer, nor is "What is the meaning of life?" In response to this first question, the angel might loose a torrent of incomprehensible Enochian syllables, answering the question honestly, but in the language only the angels can understand. The second question might yield an almost rhetorical response, such as, "To live in righteous imitation of Christ." The angels will not be fooled by vain men's attempts to divine the secrets of heaven.

Information that may be legitimately gleaned is information that the angel believes men have the context to understand. For example, "Is God angry that we seek the Ten Commandments" is a question that would receive a concise answer, while "How does God feel about our quest for the Ten Commandments" would elicit either an answer incomprehensible to the Templar or a simple rebuff that "It is beyond your capacity to know."

The answers asked of the angels need not always concern the loftier realms. "Is the Temple Mount the true site of the Temple of Solomon?" is a fine question to ask (the answer to which depends upon the individual chronicle). So is "Where have the Templars stored their treasures?" Indeed, so is, "Where are my car keys?" but such a flippant question may well serve to stoke the ire of the angel, and the anger of angels isn't something any mortal is likely to emerge from unchanged. To this end, it's worth noting that summoning the angel in no way offers any protection from it, should its divine graces be mocked, challenged, or denigrated.

Dice Pool: Presence + Persuasion + Spirit vs. Resistance

The Templars believe that the evolution of this spell occurred during New Testament times. They note that Abraham, Isaac, Moses, and other key Biblical figures had to use nothing of the sort to commune with God,

while later figures such as Simon Magus had to use the same sorts of formulae that the order itself must. Of course, Simon Magus met his end after challenging God's supremacy, but the Templars are certainly capable of learning from the mistakes of others.

Some Templars have taken it upon themselves to learn the celestial speech of the angels, potentially in hopes of tricking the angels to answer their questions with a language they assume the mortals not to comprehend. Again, the angels aren't so simple as this. If an angel suspects a man might have learned the divine tongue, it might simply respond that the answer to a particularly dire question isn't for men to know. And again, attempts at fooling the angels rarely work out well for the would-be trickster.

(Of course, that begs the question as to whether a man might even learn the Enochian language, where he'd learn it, and to what end. The occultists John Dee and Edward Kelley claimed to know the speech of Angels, but neither of them is associated with the Templar tradition.)

Dangerous Knowledge

The ability to learn the secrets known only to Heaven represents a facet of the **Mage** game that eclipses any easily defined rules. The Templar tradition is included in this book as a way to explore the relationship of faith in the modern world, especially through the lens of the waning ways of the temple knights. We're seeking to create a sense of Christian mysticism; since these games are written for a predominantly Western audience, we want to reach into that common well of cultural origin and faith so many of us have. We don't mean any slight to any other religion in this. We just want to present the Templars as a tradition that has encountered the True Word of God. From their origins as a critical presence in the Age of Faith to their dwindling relevance in these modern, cynical times, the Templars "got it," even if their understanding of how it works or was achieved is less then perfect.

So, while it's easy to use the Templar tradition to answer nagging questions that come up over the course of a chronicle, our intent is thematically larger than that. If mages think they have the answers, but these primitive medieval thaumaturges have methods that exceed the mages' ability to understand or codify them, what do the mages really know?

Magical Items

It is curious but fitting that the Templars have no magical items laid claim by the organization itself. The foremost reason is that modern Templars are simply too few and far between to maintain any vast treasure troves. Although they certainly held significant stores of relics and mundane riches in the past, the fracturing and dissolution of the order contrived it so that any wealth or artifacts held by any Templar today is a result of his own luck or initiative, not a factor of Templar affluence.

Still, those artifacts of history may have secretly been passed down through family lines or discovered among hidden caches of private Templar treasures. What follow, then, are a few examples of magical items that the Templars were once rumored to possess. If they still reside among the private collections of modern Templars, only he who possesses them knows for sure.

Since all the relics once possessed by the Templar order were literal, religious relics, they're all considered to be Artifacts, owing to their miraculous origins. The Templars were never great practitioners of enchanting items, though religious and magical relics certainly captured their attention.

The Shroud of Turin

When the Shroud of Turin first appeared in history, it did so in the hands of Jeanne de Vergy at some point in the middle 14th century. De Vergy was the widow of Geoffroi de Charny. De Charny's primary claim to fame was his treatise on the finer points of chivalry, a work of great cultural import alongside those of Chretien de Troyes.

Geoffroi de Charny also had an uncle, Geoffrey de Charney, who was a prominent figure among the Templars, serving as Preceptor of Normandy. Geoffrey de Charney also burned alongside Jacques de Molay after King Philip's condemnation of the order.

Speculation among conspiracy theorists and some mages seems to be that de Charney gave the Shroud of Turin to his nephew for safe-keeping, anticipating the turning of fate against the Templars. When de Charney met his cruel end and after de Charny's own passing, Jeanne de Vergy found her husband's secret treasure among his estate. The Shroud of Turin then changed hands frequently throughout history, finally ending up where it resides today, in the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Turin, Italy.

The shroud is believed to be the death-shroud of Jesus Christ, the cloth that wrapped His entombed body after

He was taken down from the cross. Skeptics believe the shroud to be a medieval forgery, like the finger-bones of so many supposed saints, though true believers insist that the shroud is indeed the funereal garb of Christ and bears His image upon its weave.

Whether the Shroud of Turin is real or not depends on how the Storyteller wishes to use it. If it's false, so be it; it's simply a hoax relic pursued by those ignorant of its falsehood or who have interest in it as a historical item as opposed to a holy artifact.

If it's a true artifact, however (and if the one in Turin is the real one and not a fake planted by some enterprising occultist or religious zealot who wanted it for himself), its powers are surely estimable.

The Shroud of Turin may be able to restore life to a deceased individual, bathing the departed in the light of God and allowing that fallen individual to experience the Resurrection as did Christ. This probably isn't the case, however, as it discounts the divinity of Christ and the miracle of His death and return to life. Alternatively, it may indeed represent such power of life eternal, an earthly symbol of God's immortal reward, such as in Christ's miraculous revivification of Lazarus.

More likely, the Shroud, as a symbol of Christ's time on Earth, possesses some ability to reproduce the miracles He performed. In this case, it almost certainly exceeds the humble magics of the Templars and brings a full spectrum of godly wonder to the world. It may heal the sick and repair the injured, as Christ tended to the lepers, or it may produce a bounty from a meager meal, as with the miracle of the loaves and fishes.

In the end, the power of such an artifact is truly in the hands of the Storyteller, as an item of such power and significance is doubtless beyond the codification of rules as they exist in **Mage**. We mention the Shroud of Turin only because of its connection to the Templars, who were likely only the bearers of the artifact; it's certainly not an artifact created by their own imperfect magical practices.

The Cursed Crowns

As Jacques de Molay burned to death on his heretic's pyre, he whispered a quiet curse upon his malefactors, King Philip IV of France and Pope Clement V. Although the Avignon Papacy would have troubles of its own, it seems that King Philip suffered the true brunt of de Molay's rumored curse.

Philip IV died within a year of de Molay's execution. Thereafter, his three sons succeeded him with astonishing rapidity. His son Louis assumed the throne after he died. Louis X's reign was short and undistinguished, notable only for the posthumous birth of his son, Jean, who lived only five days, but for those five days was king. Thereafter, Philip IV's other son, Philip V, assumed the throne and ruled for six years. Philip V produced no heir, and was thus succeeded by another of Philip IV's sons, Charles. Charles IV ruled for six years and also died without heir. Upon his death, the Capetian dynasty ended.

While rapid succession occurs throughout history, the details surrounding "the Accursed Kings" are certainly strange. How curious it was for Philip IV to die within a year of de Molay's curse, and then to have his dynasty utterly eradicated within a scant 15 years afterward.

While the mortal world looks askance at such notions as curses, that is indeed what happened here. Although de Molay probably didn't know he had the power in him, he did render a profound judgment on the House of Capet, and the crowns worn by those Accursed Kings still bear the touch of that quasi-divine vengeance to this day, should anyone find them.

Each of the crowns worn by the last doomed scions of the Capetian Dynasty is considered a cursed item, unsurprisingly. (See pp. 336-337 of **Mage: The Awakening** for more information on cursed items.) Should anyone be so foolish as to don one of the cursed crowns, an ill fate will befall him: Not only will he die within the year, but his direct descendents will die within seven years. If those descendents have progeny, those children will die within seven years of their parent, and so on down through the line of family. It should be noted that only those with a direct bloodline traceable to the crown wearer

Templar Magic and Christian Theology

The exact function of the Abrahamic God isn't necessarily reducible to Supernal-only phenomena. A mage deals with the Supernal World because his Awakening ties his soul to that higher reality. But there might well be other higher (or lateral, or lower) worlds, and a Sleeper might actually be more free to experience these other realities, since his Name isn't written on a Watchtower, as he hasn't signed a contract.

With that in mind, we're not trying to define Christian reality in the terms of the Supernal Realms. For more information on the intentional blurring of these lines, see the Storytelling section below.

are affected; relations by marriage are left untarnished by the crown's deadly legacy.

Exactly how many of these crowns exist is a mystery. Some followers of Templar mysteries suggest that only one cursed crown exists, that it was the curse laid on Philip IV that provided the withering of the line of descent. Other suggest that each crown worn by each of the kings, from Philip down through Charles — even the tiny coronation ringlet worn by the infant Jean I — possesses the taint of de Molay's dying exhortation. The fractured nature of the modern Templar tradition further conspires to keep this mystery unanswered, and even those who claim to own one of the cursed crowns may or may not possess one of the actual artifacts.

Of additional curiosity is the fact that the magics suspected to lie within the cursed crowns aren't those with which the Templars are readily identified. While the Templars are most commonly associated with the Arcana of Prime and Spirit, those mages keen to the legend of the cursed crowns suspect that the magic empowering them combines aspects of Fate and Time. Explanations for this abound, with almost as much weight of conspiracy as popular Templar myth attributes to the order. Some mages believe that the crowns are powered by divine wonders that exceed Supernal magic, and thus have no definition within the Atlantean idiom. Others suggest that the original crown was crafted by a mage who resented the treatment of the Templars at the hand of the king, and the curse is a product of that mage's ire. Exactly who this oracle of Fate and Time might be, who was also masquerading as an ironmonger or jeweler at the time, eludes this theory.

Storytelling

The Templars as a concept present a broad base of cultural myth upon which to draw, and then debunk or confirm as the Storyteller chooses to employ. They're perfect for tales with a gothic tint, as their history is rife with madness, heresy, barbarism, and medieval overture. They're also well suited to tales that contrast the modern with the arcane, as **Mage** is designed to do by nature. An interaction with Templars can be a high-action rampage of armored knights fighting against corrupt philosophies, or it can be a sublime revelation of God's will for His Creation.

The centuries-long degradation of the Templar charter and purpose provides a ready-made backdrop for stories with themes about corruption, decay, and decline. The grand principles to which the Templars originally aspired, both worldly and divine, have crumbled as a result of greedy men and the Templars' own defeatist isolation. Today the Knights Templar are but echoes of their former glory and grandeur. This has occurred not through any overt evil of their own, but of external forces. The Templars are the remains of a tower, once besieged in an era of legend, now left to crumble and decay under exposure to modernity. Is there a place for the Templars' archaic practice and dauntless faith in a venal, modern world?

The Templars can also serve as the basis for a story or chronicle with plenty of rollicking derring-do, digging up the relics connected to the order and rescuing the Ark of the Covenant from shifty-eyed heretics or more chthonic threats crawling in from the Abyss. This can be pulp action (in a cinematic archaeological context you're no doubt familiar with), tense mystical espionage, or an academic race against time and the minions of the hoary Aether.

Most importantly, though, the Templars serve as the vehicle by which to examine the interplay between the living religion of Christianity and the conjectural metaphysics of Atlantean magic. The magic theory of the mages works almost without a hitch — every idea has its proper place, every Arcanum has its key relationships. But the power of divinity eludes the Atlantean model. It places "gods" among the Aether, claiming them to be the stuff of power itself, attributing to them the meta-Arcanum of Prime. The God of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam trumps this Atlantean rubric. At least, we assume so here, for the sake of the game, and the emotional response you and your troupe have to that notion is the foundation for a chronicle with the Templars at the center. The Templars themselves represent this parallel power theory — mages understand Templar magic only in the context of their own Atlantean perspective. **Mage** assumes that the Atlantean perspective is correct, but this treatment of the Templars assumes that the Abrahamic perspective is *also* correct. Thus, we present the one in terms of the other without suborning the importance of either.

Alternative Magic (Storyteller's Options)

The key to Templar magic is in combining aspects of Atlantean magic into a functioning whole. From the Atlantean perspective, the Templar understanding of what they call magic combines aspects of the Arcana of Prime and Spirit. From the Templar perspective, of course, "Arcana" are a foreign concept — there is only the "light of God."

As such, few Templars would be well disposed to see what they wish to do and what mages actually achieve as one in the same. Surely, they wouldn't argue against the wonder of the mages' craft, but they would argue that the

Story Seeds: The Templars

Among the many conceptual hooks presented in Templar magic, history and philosophy, a number of other ideas come out of the tradition and are worth a few thoughts on the Storyteller's part if she chooses to involve them.

• **The Templar Treasure:** Of all the money and private belongings held in the Templars' many chapter houses, much of it became the property of other religious orders, the state, and in a rare few instances, its original owners. That doesn't account for every valuable belonging or parcel of land held in Templar treasury or knight's name, however. When the Templars were disbanded, vast amounts of money, valuables, land deeds, and religious artifacts simply vanished by dint of going unaccounted for. Who knows what the contents of each chapter house were? In addition, one item that the dissolution of the Templars never saw admitted into posthumous evidence was the archive kept by the order, detailing those very holdings and assets. This can spawn a number of stories, from the material ("As it turns out, much of France actually belongs to the Vatican as of 1299, according to this parcel of fief-deeds we found beneath the Comte's wine cellar.") to the spiritual ("Does anyone else find it strange that everyone who goes to that church in Midtown since that priest from Europe arrived has been calling for an exorcism of the old chapel?") to the overtly magical ("That guy with the cross on his shirt and the case full of 13th-century scrolls just bound a demon, but he's not using any Atlantean ritual I'm familiar with"). Indeed, an entire chronicle can spring from seeking an answer to the question, "Just what *is* the Templar Treasure?"

• **The Templar Fleet:** Another vanished enigma, a vast fleet of ships once belonged to the Templar order. Historical records claim that a score of ships registered to the Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon had been docked at La Rochelle on the western coast of France the day before King Philip's agents arrested hundreds of members of the order. The next day, the day of the knights' arrest, all of the ships had vanished, leaving no records of their destination. Where did this fleet go, and whom and what did it bring with it?

• **The Temple of Solomon:** After receiving their initial charter from King Baldwin II of Jerusalem, the Templars were allowed to make their base at the Temple Mount, which is believed to be the location of the original Temple of Solomon, itself built in the age of antiquity to house the Ten Commandments. It is also believed to be the site where Abraham formed his covenant with God, where he slew a ram instead of his son Isaac. Obviously, the Temple Mount is of great significance to all of the Abrahamic faiths, and remains a site of many modern pilgrimages (today it is the site of the al-Aqsa Mosque). While the Temple Mount has been explored thoroughly (revealing a network of tunnels beneath the structures there, some of which lead to the mosque that was once the Templar chapter house), actual, physical evidence of the Temple of Solomon has never been satisfactorily discovered. If the Temple of Solomon still exists in the world, in a ruined state or somewhere pristine and untouched by man, and if it truly houses the Ark of the Covenant and the Ten Commandments, imagine what other divine wonders it contains, and what mysteries of the human condition it reveals.

sources are similar. What the Templars do focuses upon the glory of God and the grandeur of heaven. Templar "magic" (and many hesitate to call it that, for fear of the very argument we posit here) is the art of conversation with angels, exalting the Kingdom of God, and bearing witness to miracles on Earth. It has no place for time dilations, tricks of probability, or mind-control. While it doesn't *deny* those things, it considers them on a level other than that of working miracles.

To represent the single-Arcanum adaptation of Supernal magic to the Templar tradition, an option the Storyteller may wish to exercise in the use of Templar magic is to negate the increase in the relevant Arcana and heightened Gnosis that normally applies to combined spells, as described on pp. 128-129 of **Mage: The Awakening**. Because Awakened Templar magic is designed to intermingle the effects of the Prime and Spirit Arcana, Templar understanding of them is conjunctive. Thus, the

requisite Gnosis to cast a Templar-tradition rote combining the aspects of Spirit and Prime would be the number of Arcana it combines, and the knowledge of the Arcana in question would have to be only at the level required to create the single-Arcanum effect. For example, the Communion with the Messenger Rote would require only Spirit 2, Prime 2, and Gnosis 2, instead of Spirit 2, Prime 3, and Gnosis 3. Speaking with the Angels, hearing the Word of God and seeing His Light is the core ability of the Tradition, and keeping the basic functions of the tradition out of the hands of most of its (true) practitioners makes the tradition too esoteric.

Sure, you could argue here, that it's not supposed to be easy, but we're not trying to make it easy. The Templars in question still have to be possessed of the Gnosis, Prime, and Spirit prerequisites to cast the rotes — they still have to be mages. This isn't something everyone in the world can do by throwing a hand sign and wearing a cross. It's something that initiates into the tradition *do*, and the doing of that makes them valued members of the tradition.

Storytellers seeking to adapt this principle beyond the Templar idiom should have no difficulty in creating other philosophies that merge the functions of multiple Arcana into a single meme. Consider a "natural force" principle that combined the principles of Forces and Life, for example. Indeed, Storytellers may wish to expand the Templar portfolio to include other Christian miracles, such as by adding Life to Prime and Spirit in the interests of synthesizing Christ's purification of the lepers, or the healing powers of the blessed Merovingian Kings.

The main idea is to allow cumulative effects that exceed the focus of a single Arcanum. The admixture of Arcana provides a bit of breadth to the tradition whose power hinges upon these combinations, but it comes at the cost of precluding understanding all other Arcana. While that's not a problem for the true mage, true mages are as rare as hen's teeth, and the more-common "normal" scholars of these traditions are thereby bearing witness to the greater light of "all magic" through the prism of their own understanding, whereby the light separates into the colors they perceive.

Sample Character

Rossello Viotti, Barone di Petra Longa, Preceptor of Petra Longa

Quote: *I never chose to seek the light of God; it sought me.*

Background: An inheritor of minor fortune and fame from birth, Rossello Viotti inherited the life of a baron. More accurately, he inherited the titles and moneys of an extinct Italian barony. It was a largely outdated title in a fief that had been sold more than 500 years ago, but it was by rights his.

Rossello's father had other anachronistic ties to lapsed historical offices as well, and upon his death, his father bequeathed not only the title of barony but also the protectorate of Petra Longa under the Knights Templar.

The inherited knighthood struck Rossello as just as frivolous and outdated as the barony, but when he went over the books and journals held in his father's secret cache — some dating to more than 300 years ago — Rossello understood. It made sense to him all of the secrecy in which his father had kept him and his brother, and why his too-modern mother succeeded in gaining her annulment. Rossello's father was a sorcerer.

With the comfortable lifestyle established by the estate, Rossello turned his attention inward to the family history. As it turned out, his family was one of the last few remaining families ennobled in the original Templar tradition. A devout Catholic, Rossello delved readily into the mysteries of the warrior-monks, and considers himself one of the vanguards of the order today. He is well-read, knowledgeable of many of the order's legends and interests, and willing to personally lead (and fund!) an expedition into the order's lost assets, provided he can find trustworthy companions.

Description: A distinguished man of 50 or so years, Rossello is just starting to take the paunch of middle age. He's tall and stocky, with classical features softened by a life of luxury amid local scandal. All of his clothes are made for him by local tailors or Savile Row ateliers, so he always looks ready to accept even the most esteemed of company. The only time Rossello is without his Holy Cross pendant is when he showers or shaves.

Storytelling Hints: Most of the time, Rossello is good natured and affable, ready with a joke and a smile for all of the residents of his rural barony. He especially enjoys foreign visitors, with whom he kids that "the problem with Italy is that it's governed by Italians." When it comes to matters of Catholic faith or Templar magic, however, Rossello is serious, but open. He enjoys meeting real practitioners of magic, in hopes of comparing notes—but only if those fellow-knights (of other orders, as he sees them) are Christians. He has no interest in "paganism" or "witchcraft" or "diabolism." The great shames of his life are his mother, whom he cannot forgive for her ill treatment of the sacrament of marriage, and his brother Lamberto, who joined the rival knightly order the Pious Brothers of the Abbey of Theleme, out of spite for the family custom.



Real Name: Rossendo Viotti
Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 2
Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2
Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 2, Composure 2
Mental Skills: Academics (History) 4, Computer 1, Investigation 2, Occult 3, Politics 2, Science 2
Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 1, Firearms 1, Stealth 2, Survival 1
Social Skills: Empathy 2, Expression 2, Intimidation (Rank and Privilege) 2, Persuasion 3, Socialize (High Society) 3, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 3
Merits: Allies (Government) 3, Allies (Local Police) 2, Contacts (Occultists, Military) 2, Fame 2, Languages (Arabic, English, Greek, Hebrew, Latin) 5, Meditative Mind, Resources 4, Retainer 1, Status (Aristocracy) 3, Unseen Sense 3
Willpower: 4
Morality: 7
Virtue: Faith
Vice: Pride
Initiative: 4
Defense: 2
Speed: 9
Health: 7

THEOSOPHY AND ITS INHERITORS

A little judicious theosophy seems on the whole a most excellent thing.

— Aldous Huxley, *Letters*

A culture used to meaning, used to the certainty of human significance, faces the realization that the universe is vast and uncaring. Suddenly, the great scientists of the age turn everything upside-down. The hand of the creator is withdrawn; suddenly, man is no more than another animal, part of a system with no meaning beyond its own adherence to the laws of nature. *This cannot be,* thinks the savant. The savant has faith in science, but he *knows* there is something more. It's only waiting for science to explain it.

This attempt to provide empirical proof of metaphysical and religious meaning reached its height in the Victorian era, and the result was theosophy, the practice of "spiritual science".

Surviving cranky beginnings, bitter schisms and bizarre scandals, the theosophical movement went on to become the touchstone of the New Age. The practice of channeling, the occult history of Atlantis and Lemuria, the investigation of auras, the belief in a brotherhood of adepts and masters, the attempt to syncretize Eastern and Western religions, all these things really began with the brainchild of Mme. Helena Blavatsky. Hundreds of esoteric movements exist today, all because of a strange lady from Russia who brought with her news from nowhere.

News From Nowhere

Darwin's discoveries changed the way we see the world, and the way we see ourselves. With *The Origin of the Species*, the hand of the creator had suddenly been withdrawn from the world. Suddenly, mankind inhabited a vast impersonal system in which there was no meaning, and in which the human race is no more central than any other animal. To the affluent Victorians of the West, who had long believed that Civilized Man was the center of the universe, such a revelation was a great psychological blow. A new era of spiritual inquiry began. A particularly overt and theatrical kind of spiritualism was all the rage. Visionary groups split from the established Christian churches, and Westerners began to investigate the religions of the East: Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Taoism, mining them for whatever wisdom they could find.

Enter Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, known to friends and enemies alike as HPB. In 1848, aged 17, she'd married the Russian Governor of the Caucasus. Within a few weeks she had run away. 25 years later, she turned up in New York with barely a penny to her name. No one knows for sure what happened to her in the time between. Her own accounts are wild and strange. She'd been the lover of a series of famous men, she said. She fought alongside Garibaldi in Italy. She rode bareback in a circus. She had evaded Indians in Canada and narrowly escaped voodoo magicians in New Orleans, she said. She'd owned an ink factory in Odessa and imported ostrich feathers in Paris. She'd traveled across the world as a spirit medium. And then there was her time in Tibet.

She had, she claimed, been visited as a young woman by one of the Great White Brotherhood, the hidden masters of the world. This led her to Tibet, where she spent seven years studying under the Masters Morya and Koot Hoomi, immeasurably ancient beings who had the key to all hidden knowledge. They had chosen her to reach the highest level of occult initiation available to a living human being. By the time she arrived in New York, she was ready, she said, to begin her greatest work. This was her news – plucked from the ether. She was the herald of a new age.

Blavatsky claimed to be in constant touch with the Masters. Neatly addressed letters from them would appear from nowhere when she was around, literally dropping into the lap of their intended recipients. She could precipitate objects out of nowhere. Small spirits would surround her, sometimes playing tricks on her, such as tying her to her bed while she slept.

Or, at least that's one side of the story. Others said she was a charlatan. Sometimes, when caught out, she'd freely admit using trickery to get people's attention. But she always maintained that the visions were true. By the beginning of the 1870s, Blavatsky had the attention of a lot of people.

HPB soon produced *Isis Unveiled*, her first manifesto of "spiritual science." She claimed that pages of the manuscript appeared overnight, created by unseen hands. Depending on the reviewer, it was either a revelatory tome of spiritual science or a piece of hackwork cribbed from a dozen different religious and philosophical sources.

At HPB's instigation, her friend Colonel Henry Olcott founded the Theosophical Society, In a New York drawing room in September 1875. The people present at the occasion found the name "theosophy" by flipping through a dictionary.

No one had called themselves a theosophist for hundreds of years. The Philalethians, third century Neo-Platonists from Alexandria, had invented the word, and Jacob Boehme had used it to describe his own blend of esoteric cosmology. Nobody was really sure what it actually meant.

Blavatsky had her own ideas.

Schisms and Inheritors

The newly minted Theosophical Society became immensely popular. HPB set up her Theosophical world Headquarters in Adyar, near Madras (now Chennai), and branches of the Society started up in Australia, England and across Mainland Europe. Blavatsky's second volume, the vast and convoluted *Secret Doctrine*, made her more converts and more enemies.

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky died – or ascended as a True Adept to join the Masters – in 1891. Theosophists around the world had already begun to develop and interpret her vast and often contradictory body of work. The Theosophical Society developed schisms. Theosophy spawned movements with similar philosophies but very different practical outworkings.

Annie Besant and Charles W. Leadbeater, the two Britons who took control of the Society after Olcott and Blavatsky were dead, took HPB's free-wheeling, messy cosmology and transformed it into something much more formal, much more hierarchical. Blavatsky had drawn a great deal of her ideas from Hinduism; Besant and Leadbeater consolidated that. Funded by bequests and benefactors, they set up dozens of clubs, orders and esoteric societies within the Theosophical Society, each more spectacular than the one before. And then, at the dawn of the twentieth century, they discovered Krishnamurti, a teenager from Adyar who they claimed was the incarnation of the Maitreya, the new World Teacher.

Not everyone liked the direction the Theosophical Society had taken. In California, Katherine Tingley, one of the American leaders of the Society, formed a "back to Blavatsky" splinter group, and founded what amounted to a personality cult in Point Loma, California.

Rudolf Steiner, head of the German branch of the Society, had long been disaffected with the Theosophical Society's growing move into ceremony and hierarchy. The unveiling of Krishnamurti was the last straw, and he formed his own group, the Anthroposophical Society. Anthroposophy is now far more influential than theosophy ever was, thanks to Steiner putting his views on agriculture, medicine and education into practice. Steiner (or Waldorf) schools exist all over the Western world now.

Other groups had no formal links with theosophy, but much in common. In their own way, they were theosophy's errant stepchildren. George Ivanovich Gurdjieff talked his way across Europe in the first half of the twentieth century, teaching his followers to have absolute faith in him and his intimate contact with the Source. JG Bennett and PD Ouspensky followed his lead, and other teachers, such as Rodney Collin and Idries Shah, have followed in turn. As an adult, Krishnamurti may have denied that he was the Maitreya, but even after he severed his links with the Theosophical Society, he still taught what amounted to a development on theosophy.

A darker side of theosophy existed. This had its inheritors too: Savitri Devi's attempts to create a synthesis of esoteric Hinduism and neo-Nazism, although not strictly theosophical, could never have come into being without the existence of theosophy's own religious syntheses.

In the present day, theosophy's family tree is vast and diverse, ranging from respectable quasi-academic societies all the way through to extremist cults. The work of individuals as diverse as Tony Neate, Doreen Virtue, Betty Shine and David Icke all could never have developed the way it has if it hadn't been for HPB. The New Age that Madame Blavatsky predicted may not have happened exactly as she expected, but it's here, in a thousand different ways.

Doctrines, Secret and Otherwise

Theosophy, anthroposophy and their offshoots are vast fields of study. Madame Blavatsky's writings alone fill several thousand pages. Rudolf Steiner's lectures and books fill more than 300 volumes. And none of that is dogma. Belief has never been a prerequisite for the theosophist.

The only thing that a theosophist needs is an open, inquiring mind and the earnest desire to investigate these things. A potential theosophist doesn't have to believe; she has to *want* to believe. Skeptics might think that this amounts to pretty much the same thing, but there really is a difference.

Still, there are several main themes which run across theosophy. Many of these have much in them to fascinate the Awakened.

Where to Start?

Reading more about theosophy can be difficult: there's just so much of it! HPB's own writings are all but impenetrable (although the curious should note that all of her work is freely available in several places online, including http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/ts/tup.htm). C. Jinarajadasa's *First Principles of Theosophy* was first published in 1921 and is extremely dated, but it does put across in relatively straightforward language some of the general ideas of theosophy, and, more importantly, its quasi-scientific attitude (find it online at http://www.austheos.org.au/clibrary/bindex-0.html). *An Introduction to Anthroposophy: Rudolf Steiner's World View* by Francis Edmunds is a good general guide to the main Theosophical offshoot.

If you have the time, Rudolf Steiner's *Cosmic Memory* is well worth a read (online at http://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA011/CM/GA011_index.html). It isn't central by any means, but it's a fascinating source for **Mage** Storytellers and players, since it gives a detailed and very odd overview of Steiner's (and Blavatsky's) idiosyncratic view of human evolution.

Meaning and Faith

More than anything else, the one underlying assumption that nearly all theosophists hold is that human beings *matter*. The whole point of theosophy as "spiritual science" is to find a validation for what we believe or want to believe: that there is a benevolent force guiding humankind. That humanity is unique. That human life has meaning and significance beyond the simple material facts of existence.

Theosophy and anthroposophy alike posit that all religions hold a glimmer of truth in them. There is a great Intelligence at the center of everything, and this being, this Lord of Everything, governs all fate, all destiny.

Because every religion has some part of the truth, theosophy attempts to bring them together into that grand synthesis. The existence of God is a given, although the actual conception of God is very vague, and depends a lot on what religion any given theosophist favors.

The issue is that while all religions may theoretically be equal, in practice theosophical thinkers tend to take one religion and its esoterica and look at others through the lens of that religion. Blavatsky and Besant after her concentrated on Hinduism. Leadbeater preferred Buddhism. Steiner found his truth in esoteric Christianity. Gurdjieff colored his mysticism with Sufi Islam.

This mysticism often marries itself to a somewhat Victorian attitude towards science. Theosophists and anthroposophists alike still often attempt to catalog these observations through empirical observation and dedicated study. A theosophically minded individual believes that natural and supernatural phenomena are both simply things which can be studied and measured, if only we knew how. It's part of the reason why so many theosophists worked so hard investigating reports of fairies, ghosts and psychic powers in the first half of the 20th century.

Awakened mages can find this all very attractive, particularly if they were already of a religious persuasion before they Awakened. Reluctant to abandon his religious beliefs, a mage (particularly a Christian or Hindu) could well find theosophy or anthroposophy a perfectly reasonable way to make sense of his experiences with the Supernal Realms and the ancient lore peddled by the Orders. Likewise, a mage whose approach to his magic is academic and methodical may well find that a theosophical approach helps to crystallize his attitude to magic. Whether scientific or religious, the revelation that comes with the Awakening, that there's a Supernal World beyond anything we know, causes many to develop the belief that there's a meaning behind it all.

The Three Aims of the Theosophical Society

The Theosophical Society states its three aims as:

1. To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or color.

2. To encourage the study of Comparative Religion, Philosophy and Science.

3. To investigate unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in humanity.

The Invisible Government of the World

Madame Blavatsky claimed that there was a hierarchy of Ascended Masters or Mahatmas, who formed what she referred to as the Great White Brotherhood. According to Blavatsky and her successors, an order of Ascended Adepts inhabits Tibet. From there, they use their powers and agents to guide humanity into the next stage of spiritual (and in some views literal) evolution.

In Blavatsky's scheme, the Lord of the World, highest of the Masters, descended spiritually from Venus to inhabit the ageless body of a teenage boy, who made his home at Shambhala. His assistants were Buddha, Manu, Malachohan, and Maitreya, and each of those was assisted by another Mahatma. Jesus Christ, the Count Saint Germain, Solomon, Cagliostro, Moses and Plato were all members. Koot Hoomi (who, in a previous incarnation was Pythagoras), and El Morya were assigned with the founding of the Theosophical society. They, Blavatsky said, were the source of her knowledge. She frequently received letters from Koot Hoomi and El Morya. Most of her books were allegedly dictated by these Masters. CW Leadbeater, meanwhile, heard from the Master Djwal Khul; other theosophical leaders had their own favored givers of occult knowledge. Helio Arcanaphus, an Atlantean king, apparently sends messages to channelers in the United Kingdom even today.

As time has gone on, the list of Cosmic Masters has exploded. Depending on the list, it includes potentially hundreds of others, including Mother Theresa, Pope John Paul II, Padre Pio, Princess Diana and Adolf Hitler.

Hitler gets referenced more frequently as a servant of the less well-described but just as ubiquitous Lords of the Dark Face, the Great White Brotherhood's eternal opposition. They're the force that seeks to keep mankind off the spiritual path. They would keep us from final Ascension to the company of the Mahatmas. Their way is chaos. Rudolf Steiner gave them names: he called them Lucifer and Ahriman. Lucifer, he said, was a spirit of pride. Ahriman was the spirit of materialism. Between the two of them, they kept humankind sleeping. The writings of David Icke concerning a conspiracy of giant reptilian beings with psychic powers draw on a similar well of ideas.

How real are the Masters and their opponents? To some of the inheritors of theosophy, the Masters are absolutely, literally real, New Age superheroes who contact the chosen, fight the forces of darkness on a cosmic level and guide humanity through good and bad to a final, shining future. But even in Blavatsky's day, people found other ways of looking at them.

The poet William Butler Yeats, who dabbled with theosophy for a while, thought that there were four explanations for HPB's Masters. Maybe they *were* living

occultists with amazing powers, he thought. Maybe they were psychological artifacts, dramatized forms of her visionary trances. Maybe they were spirits. Maybe they were symbolic faces attached by visionaries and psychics to forces of nature. He never settled on a single answer.

The whole cycle of teachings surrounding the Masters appeals to many of the Awakened on a gut level. The Oracles are said by the old Orders to have been responsible for the erection of the Watchtowers and the preservation of magic in the Fallen World. But since then, they've been more or less silent. The idea that maybe they *do* exist, that maybe they're out there, disguised as these Masters, taking a hand in history? That's incredibly tempting. Likewise, to identify the Lords of the Dark Face with the Exarchs doesn't take an enormous amount of effort.

Rumors of theosophical Seers of the Throne who consider the Exarchs to be the Masters and the Oracles to be the Lords of the Dark Face are, as is always the way with the Seers, just rumors.

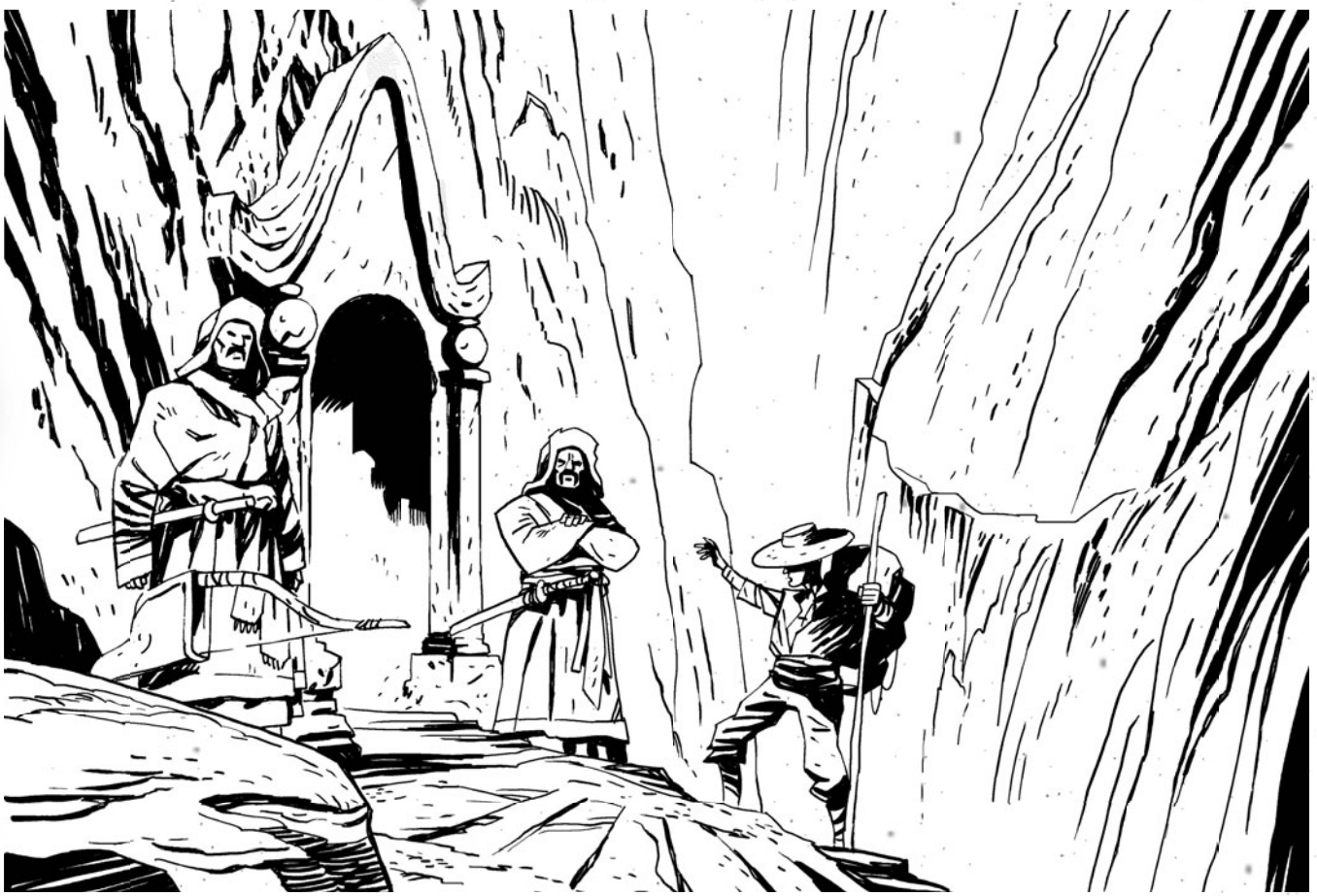
Even if they're not literal beings, the Awakened mage can use the Masters as a focus. The theosophical mage with a metaphorical bent pictures his chosen Mahatma as a kind of avatar or representative of his Awakened soul, a vehicle in his mind's eye for his magic, and the supernatural insights he holds.

A picture or a symbol of a Mahatma can be a powerful focus for either kind of theosophical mage. The mage meditates on the Master in his working, creating an *Imago* in the shape of the Ascended One. Any number of magical effects can be performed by a mage "channeling" a Mahatma, real or imaginary.

Shambhala and Agharti

The legend of the Mahatmas often gets tied up with the legends of the hidden city of Shambhala, and the underground realm of Aghartha. In Buddhist legend, Shambhala was shaped liked a lotus. Its people were beautiful. They had the secret of longevity. Villages were happy and prosperous. A million sages lived in golden palaces and contemplated the wisdom of the Buddha. With the birth of modern theosophy, the myth took on a life of its own.

Madame Blavatsky claimed Shambhala was in the Gobi desert. Other mystics write that it's in the Himalayas. The painter Nicholas Roerich led an expedition looking for Shambhala in 1926, only for the British to turn him back at the Tibetan border. The SS sent Ernst Schaefer's expedition to seek the Original Source of the Aryan Race in 1938. Schaefer made it to Lhasa, but he never found Shambhala.



The myth was complicated by Victorian tales of Agharti, a vast underground world, a spin off from the various hollow earth theories made popular in Europe and the US towards the turn of the 20th century. The connection between Shambhala and Agharti is unclear. Is ancient Shambhala the capitol of hidden Aghartha? Are they even the same place?

And is Shambhala even a place where a mage would want to find? Some versions of the legend of Shambhala and Agharti describe it as something less than a paradise, a vast, hellish world that stretches beneath all the nations of the world, and inhabited by anything from people possessed by ultra-terrestrial entities through to Richard Shaver's "Deros", degenerate beings enslaved by evil and addicted to negative psychic emanations.

Opinions on Shambhala among the Awakened are as varied as anyone else's. Maybe it's a real place, inhabited by archmasters who have a direct conduit to the Oracles. A friend-of-a-friend story that cropped up in the Mysterium in recent years tells of a doorway in the heart of Shambhala leading directly to the dwelling of the Oracles. Or maybe the Exarchs. The story isn't clear, probably because of the uncertainty of who the Mahatmas actually are. Mages across the world have certainly battled creatures on occasion that resemble the Deros, but that's no proof that Agharti exists.

Revelations from the Source

The Great White Brotherhood isn't, in theosophical terms, the only way to get information. Some esoteric teachers claimed to get it directly from the Source, from the vaguely-defined natural phenomenon they identified as God. Gurdjieff, for example, said that he *was* an Ascended Master, directly inspired by the Source.

Even those who get their information from the Masters have the chance to access the Akashic Record, the astral library of all conscious thought. Literally "written on the air", anyone with properly developed perception can read it.

Again, it's an attractive idea for the Awakened. There are many ways a mage can gain knowledge. A theosophical mage creates an *Imago* of reading the information he finds in the air. Even those mages who don't have any theosophical background can find the idea of an aetheric record of everything a useful thing to visualize when working magics of knowing.

Evolution

HPB owned a stuffed baboon. It stood in her office, wearing a wing-collar, shirt, jacket and tie. Under its arm was a copy of Darwin's *Origin of the Species*. That about summed up Blavatsky's attitude to Darwin. Not that she didn't believe in evolution. Her problem with Darwin was that Darwin drew a connection between man and animal, the logical conclusion being that man was simply a very clever animal.

To the theosophist, man is unique. It's impossible to fully explain the theosophical theory of evolution in brief, but generally, the theosophist saw evolution as a function of the connection of everything to everything else.

To explain: everything came, way back in the beginning, from inchoate elemental forces. All matter, energy and life came from the same source. Guided by the central intelligence of creation, those elemental energies solidified into matter; the matter gained life and became vegetable matter; the vegetable matter evolved into animals; the animals evolved into higher beings.

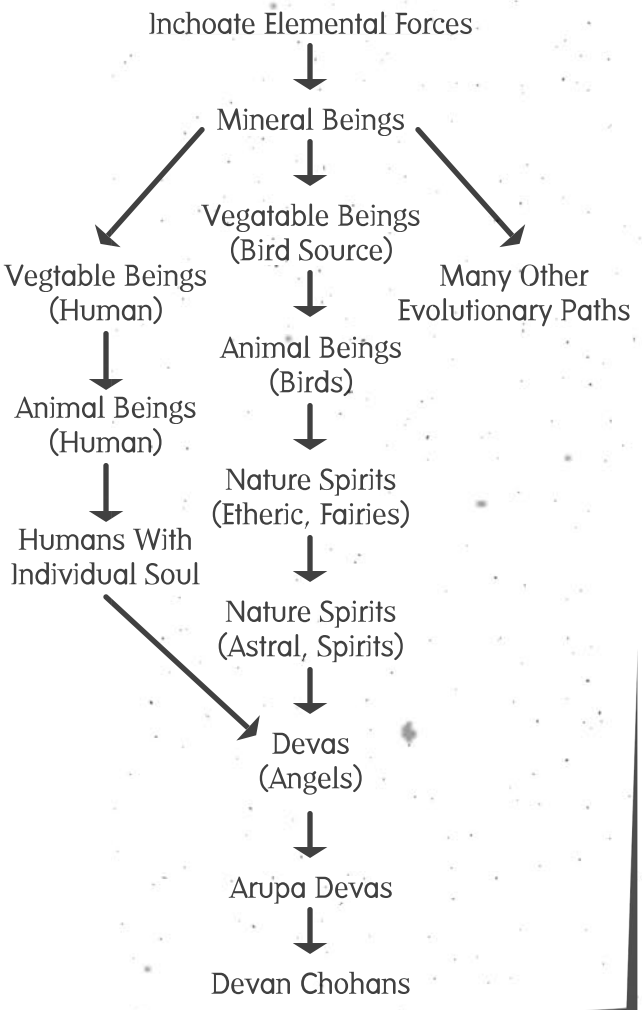
Base matter evolves into different kinds of vegetable matter. Here's where the spiritual part comes in: everything beyond mineral being has a group soul, a kind of general evolutionary consciousness. So there's a group soul for oak trees, a group soul for roses, a group soul for elephants, a group soul for house cats, and so on. When a creature dies, its experiences return to the group soul, allowing the rest of its kind to benefit and evolve. Different kinds of being evolve in different ways. At some point, a vegetable progenitor became a dinosaur, which became a bird. The bird eventually evolved into a fairy, which is actually a nature spirit. In theosophical jargon, that's called a "minor devic force." Different kinds of nature spirit evolve from different animals, and each of these kinds of nature spirits might one day evolve further

The Daksha and the Dhyanis

One Legacy of mages, called the Daksha, draws much of its philosophy from the stranger, crankier teachings of theosophy's inheritors. Obsessed with being the means by which the Awakened evolve into the next Root Race, the Daksha allegedly get a lot of their teachings from *Dhyanis,* reclusive archmasters whose true headquarters are, the Daksha say, unknown. More information on the Daksha can be found in **Legacies: the Sublime**.

Perceptive mages within the Mysterium, the Daksha's favored order, take note that the more influential Daksha do everything they can to discourage expeditions to Tibet. Maybe they're trying to hide something.

The Theosophical Theory of Evolution



into the form of a greater deva (which is more or less the same as what most people would think of as an angel).

Humans are different. They're separate from the rest of creation, because they've been guided by the Lord of Creation, and by the *Manus*, who are archetypal beings entrusted with overseeing human evolution. Humans don't have a group soul. They have an individual soul, which can ascend. Before he ascends, a human has to reincarnate until he finds his way onto the Path of the Adept.

The implications of this for the Awakened are vast. If spirits , fairies, angels and demons are really evolved from animals, surely it could be possible to find a single magic capable of evolving or devolving any creature? Surely, truly understanding the interconnectedness of all things could lead to unlocking the key to the one magic that governs all life, all spirit, all matter and all forces?

Anthropogenesis

The detail of Blavatsky's theory of human evolution is vast. Humanity, she said, is destined to exist in seven Root Races, each of which is divided into seven sub-races, each evolved from the one previous to it and often co-existing with its predecessors and successors. William Scott-Elliot and Rudolf Steiner added more and more detail, creating a vast and bizarre literature.

The first Root Race were the Polarians, beings of energy living in the primeval world, as shapeless as the planet Earth itself was. They evolved into the Hyperboreans, shapeless beings who eventually solidified and and became the third Root Race, the beings of Lemuria. Originally, the Lemurians were huge, brutish hermaphrodite beings, possessed of a third eye and innate psychic abilities. Some undefined sin, combined with a new stage in the "solidification of the planet" led to the sexes being divided by the time they became the fully human inhabitants of Atlantis. The first Atlanteans, the Rmoahals, were giants with blue-black skin. As time went on, they became smaller and changed color. The Atlanteans had amazing powers of memory, but little reasoning capacity. Their psychic powers were incredible. They had harnessed the power of *vril*, the life force and used it to power amazing wonders of science, many of which are impossible now, because the planet's gravity and atmosphere are not what they were. When Atlantis fell, the fifth Root Race, the Aryans – modern Indo-Europeans – arose. The psychic powers so common on the sunken island were lost to all of humanity, Atlantean, Lemurian and Aryan alike.

Living in a world where school textbooks and mainstream encyclopedias divided the human race into three sub-species, it's not surprising that Steiner, Blavatsky and Scott-Elliot identified black people with the remnants of the third Root Race, East Asian and Native American people with the fourth Root Race and Indo-Europeans with the fifth. These days, this part of the story gets ignored.

For many of the Awakened, the tale of a long-forgotten past where magic was real is foundational to what they are. Theosophy adds a further explanation of the loss of the greatest Atlantean magics: it was partly because of a sin, but also because the world has changed in form. This can be something of a comfort and a frustration. The Akashic Record can reveal amazing things. If they're impossible, that's too bad. But it isn't a modern mage's fault. It's just the way things are.

Reincarnation and the Augoeides

Theosophists maintain that there is no human group soul. Human souls are unique. Over and over again,



the soul turns the Karmic wheel and, every six hundred years, incarnates in a new life. Each new incarnation can be either male or female. Some souls are destined to incarnate together, re-living close relationships over and over again. A man and a woman in love in one life might be father and son in another. Friends, enemies and lovers appear over and over again with varying relationships to each other.

The soul's true form is as an *Augoeides*, an idealized, shining, sexless human figure encased in an ovoid of light. Between incarnations, the Augoeides retreats into the Presence of God, however God is conceived. The Augoeides is a constant in Western occult thought, going back to the Platonists. Many traditions apart from theosophy have their own take on it. Although theosophy itself isn't strictly magical, there are Western traditions which have created complicated ritual spells for the summoning of an Augoeides, both one's own and the one of someone who has died. Given the cross-pollination of theosophy with practically every kind of esoteric wisdom out there over the course of the twentieth century, an Awakened theosophist shouldn't have a great deal of trouble learning one of these spells.

The Problem of Race

It's pretty inescapable: the theosophical ideas of culture and race were founded in the work of people who, by modern standards, really were racist. Having said that, the culturally-bound prejudice that produced the more extreme racial views of Madame Blavatsky and her various successors wasn't deliberate, as such, and theosophists and anthroposophists these days mostly concentrate on the idea of the Brotherhood of Man, interpreting the Root Races less in terms of actual physical evolution and more as "cultural epochs", stages of spiritual history.

This is not to say that there haven't been open racists — Savitri Devi, for example — whose theories have owed a huge debt to theosophy. But in general, theosophists have moved on, thankfully in line with the culture in which they live.

CW Leadbeater's *Lives of Alcyone*

In 1910, Charles Leadbeater began a series of articles in *The Theosophist*, which were later published as a book with the title *The Lives of Alcyone*. The *Lives* purported to be the biographies of the thirty previous incarnations of Krishnamurti, then still a boy, beginning in 22,622BCE and running up to 624CE.

As the biographies were published, it became apparent that the figures who were reincarnated around "Alcyone" happened to be Leadbeater's contemporaries in the upper echelons of the theosophical hierarchy. Having a place in the *Lives* was for a time a source of great personal pride (and a fair deal of oneupmanship) among certain members of the Theosophical Society's more influential membership.

Character Creation

Theosophy is an easy tradition for the Awakened to use. A lot of its ideas – the sanctity of the soul, Atlantis, the existence of cosmic Awakened figures with superhuman powers – only slightly differ from those passed down among the old Orders for millennia. That's something of a cause for wonder in itself: how did Madame Blavatsky know so much? How did she get so close to so many Awakened secrets? After all, in the end she was just a Sleeper. Wasn't she?

Members of some Atlantean orders find theosophy easier to countenance than others. The very fact that Blavatsky, Steiner and the others were so close in so many ways gives members of the Guardians of the Veil jitters. As a "spiritual science," theosophical investigation is often open for anyone who would listen. The idea that mage would practice as a theosophist and possibly even share secrets, even minor secrets in a diluted, cryptic form, doesn't cut much ice with many Guardians. Having said that, some post-theosophical groups are more secretive than others, and it's possible that a Guardian might throw his lot in with one of the more reserved esoteric societies. Other Guardians of the Veil find theosophical groups as excellent places to disseminate disinformation along with rare, precious jewels of truth.

Theosophy in its purest form has a tradition of pacifism. Not all of theosophy's inheritors were pacifists (GI Gurdjieff and Savitri Devi certainly weren't), but traditionally, theosophists and anthroposophists themselves eschew the use of violence as a solution. The Adamantine Arrow, on the other hand, exists to fight. That Arrow mages have little to do with theosophical mages shouldn't come as much of a surprise.

On the other hand, theosophical ideas about the hierarchical nature of the world, evolution and spirituality fit right in with a lot of Silver Ladder mages, both where they are and where they would like the Sleepers to be. A theosophical teacher has to be willing to help his pupils pull themselves up to a higher plane by their metaphorical bootstraps, and a Silver Ladder mage is so very likely to think she's the adept for the job. Some mages believe that the Mahatmas who contacted HPB were actually mages in disguise, their intention the revelation of barely veiled truths to the Sleepers.

Mages belonging to the Free Council, although not always quite so enthused by Atlantis stuff, still have a lot of time for theosophy. The idea of spiritual science, of a discipline through which religious belief, supernatural phenomena, scientific and quasi-scientific observation and personal experience appeals to mages modernist and religiously inclined alike.

Of all the orders, the mages most sympathetic to theosophy come from the Mysterium. Theosophy, anthroposophy and the esoteric systems that grew up after them are about knowledge. A Mysterium theosophist takes pleasure in re-reading and re-interpreting the great theosophical writings, investigating fortean phenomena and scouring the Akashic Records for clues.

Of the Paths, Acanthus, Mastigos and Thyrsus mages are those who find theosophy's esoteric disciplines easiest to practice, as the theosophist finds magics of Mind, Time and Spirit surpassingly useful. Moros mages who specialize in talking to ghosts and Obrimos mages who know how to manipulate *vril* (the Atlantean power source, which some mages identify with mana) find uses for their skills, but their favored magics tend to be less focused towards theosophy's peculiar spiritual disciplines.

Leading an Esoteric Society

Theosophists work best in groups, and an Awakened theosophist's insights into reality give him an ideal opportunity to set up a group of his own. Members of a group like this respect their teacher and can be expected to provide aid, supplying him with small one-time gifts of money, a place to stay if necessary, practical help, or any of a hundred different kinds of material aid.

The player of a theosophicallly-inclined mage can duplicate all of these things with applications of different Merits and Skills.

Retainers represent the most faithful members of the group. Others might just as well be Allies or Contacts.

Finding the Masters

All it takes is for a venturesome cabal of mages to find a journal or some other shred of evidence which shows that the Masters really existed, that they knew about the true history of magic, and that they disseminated it among the theosophists. Even if it doesn't take the cabal to Shambhala, it leads them to discover the identity of the Masters.

But who were they? Archmasters? Mages who actually ascended (and is "ascension" the same as joining the Mahatmas)? Spirits? Ghost mages from lost nations? Or something else entirely? And are they still alive?

With a group that counts as one dot of Allies (Esoteric Society), the character leads a handful of people.

With a total of two or three dots of Allies, Retainers, or Contacts, the society is either based in a single commune or teaching center, or it is spread out across the state or region in small groups, each numbering no more than a handful. The group has no more than a hundred members. At this level, the mage might also think about tying in extra dots in Sanctum and Library, representing buildings that are at the mage's disposal.

With dots in Allies, Retainers, Contacts, and other Merits totaling no less ten, then the organization is better known, with a nationwide spread and membership in the hundreds. The player can tie dots in Sanctum and Library to the society. One dot in the Fame Merit might also be justified.

With more than about sixteen total dots in various Merits (including five dots in Allies), the organization could have an international following. Its membership is in the thousands. It might have other resources, too, such as a small printing press or an international center owned by the group rather than the teacher, like the Theosophical HQ in Adyar, for example, or the Anthroposophical Goetheanum at Dornach.

None of this presupposes that the teacher is making any money out of the group, although subscription fees and benefits for the group can be the source of the Merit: Resources. Gurdjieff, despite his undeniable charisma, lived in penury for years at a time (no more than one dot of resources). On the other hand, the late Rev. Mark Prophet (a more recent channel for the Masters) lived very comfortably indeed (four or five dots).

An Esoteric Society needs to have come from somewhere. A teacher who leads another, older society can be a Mentor, as Gurdjieff was, for example, to Ouspensky. Running a society is potentially very useful. It gives the players' characters a space to be based, and a reason to exist beyond just "doing magic and stuff." It gives the Storyteller the chance to create subplots and storylines based around the people in the society.

This kind of support doesn't come for free. A character needs to maintain his group, with regular meetings or bulletins from wherever it is the character draws his authority. No one gets a reputation as a teacher without teaching people stuff.

Abuses of the group's goodwill can backfire, causing people to leave or for outsiders, such as investigative journalists or church action groups, to denounce the Esoteric Society as a cult. Of course, an esoteric teacher must also live up to his teachings, at least publicly. Getting caught in deception can be potentially disastrous. A failure to

The Lonely Death of Peter Damien Ouspensky

In 1947, the esoteric teacher PD Ouspensky chaired a series of question-and-answer sessions before the full membership of his own Historico-Psychological Society. In the last meeting, tired and irritable, he told his assembled followers that his teachings were worthless, that he and his followers had wasted the last thirty years. His followers should forget what they learned and strive for self-knowledge, he said. That was all. Shortly after that, he died, surrounded by still-adoring followers, but very alone.

A large proportion of Ouspensky's followers decided that he knew that he was about to "ascend" and that his apparent denial of his "System" was an act of trial. He was testing himself and them, only rejecting the System as they had inadequately understood it. He hadn't failed, and his System hadn't, they said. They had, and it was their duty to carry on studying it.

The lesson here is simple: anyone charismatic enough to start an esoteric group — especially a mage, who has the mystical prowess to back up claims of supernatural knowledge — should beware. Groups like this can often be more single-minded than the people who start them up.

observe any of these things can cause the character to lose dots in the various Merits that represent the society as word gets around the group and people leave.

Theosophical controversies are fierce, and esoteric groups are notoriously fissive. A teacher needs a strong personality to keep a group from falling apart. Other mages might want to manipulate the group. Other rival groups might cause problems. The Guardians of the Veil run groups like this... and introduce moles into groups that interest them.

Finally, esoteric groups sometimes develop a mind of their own. Even the most charismatic leader can find zealous followers getting out of hand, particularly if the followers do things in the teacher's name that are wildly at variance with what he actually wants.

Magic

Theosophy isn't a magical tradition. Its Sleeper followers don't do magic. It isn't a religion either. It's a given in theosophy that belief comes from insight and experience. Theosophy isn't about performing miracles. It's about understanding them. The uncanny miracles that HPB performed are, for the most part, in the past now. This is not to say that an Awakened theosophist can't do magic. Magics of knowing, perceiving and understanding all have their place, often proving to be the difference between success and failure for the esoteric adept.

Unlike the paraphernalia of other Western traditions, the tools used in theosophical spells are rarely elaborate. The Awakened theosophist uses mundane objects, such as watches, pens, pieces of jewelery, plants, pieces of paper or books as concentration points. Often, he performs his magics through meditation, and lengthy concentration on one particular point. The theosophical movement was the first to popularize channeling in the West, and still practices channeling today. It can be a useful and powerful tool for discovering truths, no matter how real the entities channeled might be. Theosophical disciplines take time and concentration, and most tradition rotes count as ritual castings for an Awakened theosophist.

In game terms, most theosophical rotes are extended castings, even if the original spell could be cast instantly. A theosophical mage *can* use the instant version of the spell, but only either as improvised magic or by learning the rote again from her order (meaning that the player has to pay the experience points for it over again).

Theosophical magics have a clear, bright kind of resonance. They feel clean, but they also feel somehow "foreign," as if they came from far away, or long ago.

Past Life Regression (Mind ●●● + Time ●●●)

To find one's way through past lives is often to find out the key to the present. A mage with this spell can bring himself and others through other past lives, reliving one or more of their previous sojourns on earth.

Practice: Patterning
Action: Extended
Duration: Prolonged
Aspect: Covert
Cost: 1 Mana

The mage can cast this spell on himself with Mind ••• and on others instead of or as well as himself with Mind ••••.

Success allows the subjects of the spell (who must be living) to experience events in one or more previous lives, experiencing the events if they were there. Their past life adventure might appear to take a long time (perhaps taking a whole game session for the players), but it only really takes a few minutes for the present-day character or characters.

The spell is subject to the usual modifiers for extended castings (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 120). It takes a psychological toll on its subjects, and can only be cast on any given individual once in a 24-hour period.

Mysterium Rote: Pre-Incarnation
Dice Pool: Manipulation + Occult + Mind

The Mysterium investigate every shade of being they can. The few Mysterium mages who travel through apparent past lives have come back with powerful insights.

Theosophical Rote: Path of the Augoeides
Dice Pool: Presence + Occult + Mind

It's a long, drawn-out process. The spell needs a quiet, dark room and a relaxed atmosphere. The caster induces trance in himself and/or his colleagues. Perhaps he hypnotizes each of them with a watch or a pendulum in turn. Perhaps he chants. The mage calls on one of the Mahatmas to appear and show the subjects their past lives. They perceive the Master as a presence, leading each of them in turn out of the room and into a former memory. The process of inducing the trance and taking the subjects back into their previous lives takes a whole lot longer than the actual experience, although the subject doesn't perceive it that way.

The Life of the Senses (Life ●)

Spell: "Pulse of the Living World" (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 181)

Dice Pool: Wits + Science + Life (extended)

The very first anthroposophical exercise involves meditating on the force of energy within a living plant. The

So Reincarnation Happens, Then?

Just because there's a spell that allows characters to experience past lives, it doesn't mean that reincarnation actually exists. A trip through past lives thanks to the spell could as easily be a symbolic means of allowing the spell subject to access useful information from the Supernal Realm. In the end, it's up to the Storyteller exactly how real reincarnation is.

Running a past life story can be a fun way to change the pace of a story. Characters living past lives have the same Traits. Traits that wouldn't exist in the past disappear or turn into similar Traits. Drive, for example, could turn into Ride; Firearms could become a skill in shooting other, more ancient weapons. Otherwise, the characters can change sex, relationship with each other and social station. Nothing that happens in the vision can directly affect a character undergoing regression: injuries that happen to the past-life character don't affect the present-day character, for example.

This spell can be abused, and a savvy Storyteller whose players learn this spell might wish to have a few ideas for past lives (and how they apply to the story at hand) ready and written up. Alternatively, the Storyteller is well within her rights to disallow the spell.

mage needs to find a place of silence and contemplates a living plant, observing its every contour and purpose with the utmost care, gradually becoming aware of the green force within it. Having reached a point of enlightenment through observation, the mage understands life that much better for a while.

Etheric Lens (Mind ●)

Spell: "Aura Perception" (see **Mage: The Awakening,** p. 205)

Dice Pool: Wits + Empathy + Mind (instant)

The mage sees without seeing, closing his eyes for a moment and concentrating on the individual in front of him. In his mind's eye he sees the aura of the subject, like the colors that appear on the back of the eyelid after staring too long at the sun.

Ajna (Mind ●)

Spell: "Third Eye" (see **Mage: The Awakening,** p. 206)

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult + Mind (extended)

The mage meditates for a time, closing his eyes and focuses his being on the center of his forehead. Suddenly, his third eye opens, like a flower unfolding its petals.

The Presence of the Teacher (Mind ●●)

Spell: "Emotional Urging" (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 207)

Dice Pool: Presence + Persuasion +Mind vs. Composure + Gnosis (extended)

During the Russian Civil War, Gurdjieff and his commune fell foul of the Bolsheviks while trying to escape Russia. In danger of being shot where he stood, the Master managed to not only convince the Reds that he and his friends were a legitimate archaeological expedition, but talked them into giving him money for shovels and picks. His possibly supernatural powers of persuasion got him safe passage letters from both White and Red armies, written on the two sides of a single sheet of paper. Such was his hypnotic power.

Getting Away With It

In 1884, Madae Blavatsky left Adyar for a trip to Europe. While she was away, Emma Coulomb, a member of staff who had recently had a serious argument with HPB, threatened to blow the Theosophical Society wide open with accusations of trickery and the production of incriminating letters. She even told the Theosophical Society's Board of Trustees where HPB's props were hidden. They all went to the shrine room to investigate. One of the trustees banged his fist against the shrine, saying, "You see, it is quite solid," at which point the middle panel flew open, banging the poor man in the face and revealing a secret compartment containing all of HPB's guilty secrets.

Despite the charges, Blavatsky got away with it. Some charges she freely admitted. Some she laughed off. Some she flatly denied in the face of overwhelming evidence. And somehow she managed to get through the scandal with the bulk of the Theosophical Society still convinced of her powers. Maybe she really did have mystical powers — just not the kind everyone originally thought.

The mage who uses this power, like Gurdjieff, fixes the subject with his eyes and talks to him at length, using the full force of his will, the cadences of his speech and the subtle cues of his posture to talk anyone into nearly anything.

Transmission of Brilliance and Energy (Mind ●●)

Spell: "Opening the Lidless Eye" (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 209)

Dice Pool: Presence + Persuasion +Mind (extended)

When Annie Besant first met Madame Blavatsky, HPB didn't say a word to her about anything occult at all. They spoke for half an hour, and when it was time for Mrs Besant to leave, the older woman fixed Mrs Besant's gaze and said only this: "Oh my dear Mrs Besant, if only you would come among us." At that moment, Mrs Besant's perceptions were altered. This was the moment of her conversion.

By talking to the subject about anything at all, the mage can implant a tiny suggestion. A single trigger phrase, right at the end of the conversation, instantly expands the subject's perceptions. Suddenly, everything looks new and strange.

Thought Forms (Mind ●●●)

Spell: "Universal Language" (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 213)

Dice Pool: Wits + Expression + Mind (instant)

Annie Besant and CW Leadbeater pioneered the use of thought-forms: pictorial representations of shapes and emotions, encoded in any music, language or work of art. The mage holds his pen tightly and meditates on the thing he wishes to translate for a moment. Then sketches the shape of the thoughts he sees in his mind's eye on a piece of paper. The resulting series of abstract shapes can be understood by anyone who sees them, at least for a little while.

Call Augoeides (Mind ●●●●)

Spell: "Supreme Augmentation" (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 216)

Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult + Mind (extended)

The mage can bring his own Augoiedes to the surface, becoming able to access skills and potential locked within it, at least for a while. It takes a long time to do (it's always a ritual casting). The mage needs to meditate in his sanctum and needs to avoid all other contact. He adopts a comfortable position and trains his third eye on the center of his being, before thrusting his perception outwards towards the God-principle at the center of everything, linking himself with the whole. If successful, he becomes aware of his own Augoeides as a shining figure at the corner of his perception, which separates from him, and then merges again. The wisdom of dozens of past lives floods to the mage's surface consciousness, allowing him to access greater psychic reserves than he normally could use.

Precipitation (Space ●● + Matter ●●)

Spell: "Apportation" (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 234)

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Occult + Space (extended)

Madame Blavatsky used to receive letters from the Mahatmas. Sometimes the Masters would have letters for her friends, too, which used to appear in thin air and drop into the laps of HPB's bewildered pupils. She was good at making other things appear, too: small china saucers, little trinket and the like. It's not incredibly hard to cause little things to drop out of thin air. All it needs is a bit of time spent visualizing the object in the third eye. A clever mage can even hold a conversation while visualizing the object's form, although he can't do much else, allowing the effect to appear much more sudden than it really is.

Spirit Guide (Spirit ●●●)

Spell: "Greater Spirit Summons" (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 249)

Dice Pool: Presence + Expression + Spirit vs. Resistance (extended)

When Madame Blavatsky was completely alone, she was able to call upon the Mahatmas Koot Hoomi and El Morya. Her relationship with them was cordial. She could, apparently, call up other things, devic forces of various kinds that did her bidding. A theosophical mage can do much the same. Meditating in absolute solitude, chanting, perhaps using a crystal or a book as a focus, the mage can call a spirit to her. It might be a Mahatma, or one of the Masters' servant beings. It might be a being that resembles a "fairy" or an "angel". It could be a spirit from Atlantis (some of the Awakened say that a few Rmoahals retreated into the Shadow, for example). It might even be one of the Manus, the archetypes of each of the Root Races, still extant in the company of the Lord of All Creation and ready to answer questions.

Overshadowing (Spirit ●●●●)

Spell: "Spirit Possession" (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 253)

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion + Spirit vs. Resistance (extended)

To be overshadowed is to be controlled, worn like a glove. In séance conditions, the theosophical mage can make a spirit enter her (or someone else) and for a time,



overshadow her. The séance doesn't need all of the paraphernalia of the séance, but it does take time. The mage might meditate silently, or maybe she chants or repeats a spoken formula. Maybe things happen to the room. The lights flicker. The table shakes. There's a knocking on the walls or at the window. The subject of the spell stiffens, and begins to speak with a strange, impossibly altered voice. The victim has been overshadowed. Mages with sense order themselves or their subjects (who must be willing) to be strapped or tied down until such time as the spirit leaves. The kind of spirits that the theosophists call upon themselves are usually benevolent, but it's best not to take chances.

Guide To What Is (Time ●●)

Spell: "Augury" (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 258)

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Time (extended)

There's a kind of Clear Light that infuses everything, containing the potentiality of all things. Meditation allows one to enter that light and merge with it. A mage whose can both lose himself and retain control of his spiritual direction, allowing him to ascertain threads of cosmic direction for people, places and objects.

Akashic Reading (Time ●●)

Spell: "Postcognition" (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 260)

Dice Pool: Wits + Academics + Time (extended)

The Akashic record is like a vast library, an ephemeral computer, and the mind of God. Anyone can read it if he only knows how. The mage stills his body, regulates his breathing and empties his mind, entering a hypnagogic state where his perceptions are able to read the spiritual data that overlays a place or object as if it were words written on the air.

Storytelling

Theosophy is quite easy to slip into a **Mage** chronicle: the assumption of significance and the myths of Atlantis are already part of an Awakened orthodoxy. Now mix in a small faction of mages who operate within an esoteric tradition, and suddenly the society of the magicians goes beyond the Awakened. Sure, the inheritors of theosophy can be misfits and outsiders, but they can also be frighteningly knowledgeable. The fact of unearned knowledge can pull the rug out from right beneath a character's feet.

Consider a mage who, searching for the tomb of some Atlantean adept-king, finds himself approached by a Sleeping stranger who knows his name and claims to have a message for him from the ancient long-dead mage. And then, imagine the mage's surprise when the information put across in that short, cryptic message turns out to be completely accurate.

Maybe there are Sleepers in theosophical (or like-theosophy-but-not-actually-theosophical) groups who really are being contacted by someone or something. Are the Masters real beings? Are they Oracles, reaching across the Abyss to contact the Sleeping? Have the Sleepers come across a sure-fire means to access some cosmic source of wisdom, using the Masters as convenient thought pictures to dramatize the process?

Alternative Magic (Storyteller's Options)

What if it were all true?

The stakes would be different: Real Masters and real Lords of the Dark Face battle for the evolutionary destiny of humanity. More than that: they're in touch. A lot. Communications from the Mahatmas and the Enemy are everywhere. They arrive in mysterious letters from nowhere. Bearded, smiling Brahmins appear in locked rooms and give clues to the future. And Sleepers get the message, too. The problem – and this is a problem that Leadbeater, Besant, Tingley and the others had – is that the messages are contradictory. Whose side are the Masters on? Are the Lords of the Dark Face guiding the Seers of the Throne and the Mahatmas guiding the Pentacle? Or is it the other way round? Or are the Masters and the Dark Ones both guiding individuals on both sides at the same time?

Real Masters living in a real planetary HQ means a real Shambhala, and possibly a real Agharti, and if that's the case, the questions surrounding them might one day be settled. The Watchtowers might be real earthly places, albeit real earthly places that a mage can visit astrally, the HQ of the Masters. What if a different cabal of Mahatmas made its home in each Watchtower? And what if the Watchtowers themselves held the key to the Supernal Realm? Finding Shambhala could mean ultimate power. It could mean the end of everything, as the balance is upset and the evolutionary plan is jeopardized.

Story Hooks: Isis Unveiled

• **The Lives of Alcyone:** A cabal of mages facing a terrible enemy discover evidence that they've faced their opponent together in previous lives, perhaps seeing portraits of versions of themselves in a book of ancient lore, or hearing a supposedly mythical tale that parallels their own struggle in too many ways to be simply coincidental. Perhaps they start having dreams. A theosophical mage who knows the rote "Path of the Augoeides" helps them to discover past lives, going all the way back to Atlantis. The mages experience a series of brief vignettes (or even complete stories) where they have different relationships with each other, different stations in life, different faces and names and possibly even different genders, each time finding a different weakness or a different facet of their trans-incarnational enemy, who could be a Sleeper enemy, an ancient conspiracy, a spirit, another re-incarnated mage who has taken the road of the *Scelesti* in each of her previous lives, or even one of the Bound.

• **Oh, Look. Another Schism:** A theosophical mage, perhaps a member of the cabal, meets with his Sleeper allies only to find that his thunder is being stolen by another esoteric teacher with a subtly different but seductive system (such as one which leads the way to occult racism or to acts of violence, for example). The mage hasn't met the newcomer, and the Sleepers, who are leaving the mage in droves for the newcomer, are reluctant to let the mage near their new favorite teacher. Who is leading the Sleepers astray? Is the other person a charismatic Sleeper, a rival mage, or a vampire with an interest in things theosophical? Is the new teacher necessarily all that bad? And what will the character have to do to regain the trust of his pupils? There may well be a temptation to abuse his powers with these Sleepers. That way leads to the Abyss.

• **Cataloging Fairies:** The cabal are asked to face a malicious spiritual force — spirits, perhaps, or actual fairies. Unfortunately, their efforts are opposed by a well-meaning theosophical mage who wishes to study the phenomena, and considers the creatures' destruction a violation of "evolved devic forces." Is this mage misguided, or is he on to something? Are the creatures less malevolent than they appear, or will it all end in tears?

Magic would change subtly. The "Spirit Guide" and "Overshadowing" rotes might become useful for contacting the Masters themselves. Meanwhile, the interconnectedness of all spirits, animals and vegetation could mean that magic could affect evolution itself. Consider what an archmaster's Practice of Evolving could achieve. Forces could be made into actual living mineral beings, minerals into hive-sentient vegetation... and animals into spirits, spirits into angels, people into higher spirits... and people could be made to Awaken. With the right mix of Arcana, anything could become anything else: with Life 6+ and Spirit 6+ a bird could be made to become a fairy; with Matter 6 + and Life 6 + a rock could become a living, walking being made of vegetation.

If all knowledge were available on the Akashic Record, a talented enough mage would be able to learn rotes directly from the Akasha. He'd have to have the means of reading it (namely Time 2), but essentially, like all learning, rotes are there for the taking, which means all sorts of other implications. An order's library of rotes wouldn't be useless, but it would be less vital. Meanwhile, Acanthus mages, with their power over Time magic, could become powerful repositories of knowledge.

Sample Character

Abayakoon

Quote: *The emanations? Oh yes. They're particularly strong... here. No, not there, idiot! Here.*

Background: Jyotishi Anand's father was a doctor, one of the wave of medical professionals who moved to the United Kingdom from India in the 1950s and '60s. Jyotishi was a teenager when London began to swing, and threw himself into the scene, much to his dad's disapproval.

As the 60s wore on and London swung in a psychedelic direction, Jyotishi became, like many of his fellow hipsters, mixed up with a number of gurus and esoteric teachers, more because it was where the beautiful people were than because he had any interest in watered-down Hinduism. In the end, transcendental meditation only took him so far. His Awakening came at a Strawberry Alarm Clock gig. Having consumed a prodigious quantity of acid, he went on a trip straight to the Watchtower of the Stone Book. He signed his name on a guest list for a party he could never leave.

Jyotishi took a step back from the London scene. He tried to make sense of what had happened to him through the lens of the half-remembered Hinduism he'd abandoned years before. By the time the Mysterium found him, he'd become conversant with the works of



Madame Blavatsky and her followers, and when his new friends explained their take on history to him, he found his interest in theosophy validated.

Nearly four decades later, Abayakoon (the name of Jyotishi's maternal grandfather, who himself was a minor spiritual teacher) is a prominent figure in theosophical circles across the British mainland. He's not particularly senior in the Mysterium, but he is certainly well-known. He's got a small esoteric school of his own, running correspondence courses for Sleepers in such things as "Psychic Self-Defense" and "Self-Actualization Through Meditation", and travels around the country giving talks to esoteric students, New Agers and theosophical groups. Often, his travels are an excuse to do his own research.

Description: Tall, straight-backed and noble of feature, Abayakoon looks upon friend and enemy alike with an enigmatic smile. Now in his early 60s, he is clean-shaven and always immaculately groomed, preferring to wear tailored suits and ties, sometimes in an Indian style. Abayakoon's good looks and sense of authority allow him to get away with lapses of personal etiquette that would get other men beaten up.

Abayakoon's nimbus is a gentle corona of multicolored light that temporarily obscures the details of his face and makes the colors and shapes around him seem to waver and blur into one another for a second, before snapping back into sharp focus.

Storytelling Hints: Although genial, Abayakoon is sometimes breathtakingly rude. His personal magnetism (and a dash of magic) helps him to get away with it. He often says exactly what he thinks of people to their faces,

although he knows when to be gentle. He's very perceptive. His criticism is often right on the mark.

Abayakoon's youthful curiosity and zest for experimentation grew, as he matured, into a desire to investigate. Usually, his travels bring him to places where unusual phenomena have been reported. He is particularly interested in sightings of fairies, or creatures that look like fairies, such as Chhaya-Ji, the spirit that became his familiar. He would much rather understand these "devic forces" than assault them. He has sometimes obstructed the actions of other mages who would destroy what they perceive as a supernatural threat, but what he sees as an opportunity for study.

Dedicated Magical Tool: A calling card featuring the Theosophical emblem.

Real Name: Jyotishi Anand

Path: Thyrsus

Order: Mysterium

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 2, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 3, Computer 1, Investigation (Fortean Phenomena) 3, Occult (Theosophy, Esoteric Hinduism) 3, Medicine 1, Politics 1, Science 1

Physical Skills: Drive 2, Larceny 1, Stealth 1

Social Skills: Animal Ken 1, Empathy 2, Expression (Writing) 2, Persuasion 1, Socialize 2, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 1

Merits: Allies (Theosophists) 2, Contacts (Theosophical Study Groups, Fortean Investigators, *Vedanta* Movement), Familiar (Twilight), High Speech, Languages (English, Hindi, Sanskrit — his native language is Tamil), Library (Fairies), Magical Tradition (Theosophy), Resources 2, Status (Mysterium) 2

Willpower: 6

Wisdom: 7

Virtue: Charity

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Health: 7

Gnosis: 3

Arcana: Life 3, Mind 4, Spirit 4, Time 3

Rotes: *Mind* — Alter Aura (••), Read the Depths (••••); *Spirit* — Coaxing the Spirit (•)

Tradition Rotes: *Life* — Life of the Senses (•); *Mind* — Etheric Lens (•), Third Eye (•), Thought Forms (•••), Path of the Augoeides (Mind •••• + Time •••); *Spirit* — Spirit Guide (•••), Overshadowing (••••); *Time* — Guide To What Is (••), Akashic Reading (••)

Mana/per turn: 12/3

Armor: 3 ("Organic Resilience", Life ••)

Chhaya-Ji

Abayakoon's familiar, Chhaya-ji, appears in Twilight as a strange cross of bottom-of-the-garden fairy and Hindu avatar: a perfect, tiny representation of a slim, beautiful, naked woman, no more than a foot tall, with sky-blue skin and smiling features, wreathed in gentle light. She has brightly-colored butterfly wings and shining black hair, clipped back with minute stars. She speaks from Twilight with a voice that is low and musical, like gentle chimes.

Attributes: Power 2, Finesse 3, Resistance 2

Willpower: 5

Essence: 10 (10 max)

Initiative: 5

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Size: 1

Corpus: 3

Influence: Light 1

Numina: Wilds Sense (Dice Pool 5)

Ban: Chhaya-Ji must spend the whole night, every night in the open air. She cannot remain under a roof between the hours of sunset and sunrise.



CHAPTER FOUR: THE FRINGE

"Ma told us to bring you these eggs, Miss Sairey," the taller of the two little boys said, his voice a little trembly as he looked up at the conjure woman who stood in the doorway of her small cabin.

"That's kind of your Ma, Robby," the old woman said. She smiled at the smaller of the boys, who stood in his mud-stained overalls a little behind his older brother. "Take your thumb out of your mouth, Lewis, you'll grow warts!" she said. Lewis immediately jerked his thumb from between his lips and wiped it dry on his overalls' leg.

"Here," she said, handing the older boy a wire-wrapped crystal hung from a ribbon soaked in broccoli water for three nights. "Have her wear this next week when she goes to the hospital for her chemo," Sairey said, hoping she had imbued the crystal with enough Life magic to buy the boys' mother a few more good years.

A big, fluffy orange-tabby tomcat came to the door from inside the house and twined himself around Sairey's legs. "Here's Ginger," she said. "Go ahead and pet him like you do the other times you've come by." First Robby, then his little brother gently stroked the big cat on the top of his head and repeated the verse Sairey had taught them, "Kitty be nice, Kitty be good. Kitty keep me from fire and flood." Another week's protection for two active, precious boys, Sairey thought as she watched them turn and run back down the path until they disappeared from sight as they entered the forest toward their home.

Her magic was harder here; wrapped in rituals as it was, it took more time. Still, there was something satisfying in the rhymes and repetitions, the poultices and hoodoo bags. More importantly, the Seers wouldn't look for her among the superstitious mountain folk of West Virginia. Not for a good long time.

Although many magical traditions are considered by their more orthodox sibling or parent religions to be illegitimate or bastardized versions, some magical traditions are even more denigrated than others. These exist on the fringe, barely considered traditions at all, or are thought by some to be outdated and ridiculous relics of older times. And yet, these traditions have as much potential to convey Supernal truth as any, if one can get past preconceptions about their legitimacy or seeming lack of gravitas. Two such "fringe" traditions are the hoodoo magic from the hills and hollows of the American Appalachians, and the entheogen cults that have risen in the wake of the '60s drug-based explorations of consciousness.

APPALACHIAN HOODOO

All ye things and spirits of evil, I forbid you this house and home; I forbid you, in the three holy names, our blood and flesh, our bodies and souls; I forbid you all the nail holes in this house and home, until you have traveled over every hillock, waded through every water, till you have counted all the leaflets of the trees and counted all the starlets in the sky, until that beloved day arrives when heaven comes upon this earth.

—Manly Wade Wellman, *The Old Gods Waken*

From the Hills

Hexery, conjure women and root doctors call up images from a time before the modern world and its science displaced folk remedies and "superstitions." Flourishing in the 19th and early 20th centuries in the Appalachian mountains and as far north as Pennsylvania Dutch country, hoodoo practitioners and powwowers served as healers, charmers and hexers for much of the rural population. Often revered, more often reviled or feared, the men and women who practiced—and in some of the mountains' hidden places still practice—spiritualist magic most often found power in the connections between the natural world of herbs, roots and simple objects and the objects of their spells.

But are these backwoods practitioners really gone? Have they been consigned to history or do they still work their mountain hoodoo behind the backs of the scientists and debunkers? What is their history, their folklore, their system of beliefs? And what is their attraction for mages of the Atlantean traditions?

To seek out these folk mages of the Appalachian mountains is to travel backward in time to an era marked by small communities locked away in their mountain fastnesses, far from the conveniences of city dwellers. Amid the lonely calls of the whippoorwills and the long silences of a darkness far from sounds of traffic and gunfire, a magic born of nature casts a dim but vibrant reflection of the Supernal World.

History of Hoodoo

The word "hoodoo" comes from an African word associated with root magic, but the practice itself derives from a combination of African beliefs, Native American herbal and plant knowledge and European folklore. Though hoodoo men and women hail from the 19th and 20th centuries, the traditions they draw from are much, much older. Once practiced throughout much of colonial America, particularly in areas where African, Native American and European knowledge came together, it became associated with the magical practitioners of the Southeast and Appalachian regions. During its heyday in the 1800s, root doctors, conjure women and witches or hoodoo workers could be found almost anywhere by someone looking in the right places hard enough and long enough. As civilization moved into the mountains and rural places where hoodoo prospered, the conjure woman's clients turned to science to cure their ills, psychobabble to help them find love and "get rich quick" scams to bring them riches. Though the tradition has diminished in numbers of adherents, a few still exist, mostly in the Appalachian mountains and other out-of-the way places where the modern world has not yet completely erased the old connections.

Hoodoo magic is traditionally passed down from mother to daughter or father to son, and outsiders who want to learn this tradition have to prove themselves worthy and willing. The study of hoodoo can take years,

and those not born to the tradition often learn it in bits and pieces. Hoodoo mages generally learn the ways and words as children from the practicing parent. By the time they are old enough to use the spells and workings, they have had a lifetime of exposure — a familiarity that cannot be duplicated by outsiders. It is almost impossible to learn hoodoo from books and research, even for Awakened mages.

Mix and Match Magics

Because hoodoo comes from such varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds, trace connections exist between it and other magical traditions. The African elements cross paths with the voudon or "voodoo" tradition, sharing similar concepts of mojo (or gris gris) bags, fetish objects and potion working. Native American shamanic and herbal magical practices are echoed in hoodoo through the use of plant or root cures, ritual baths and burning of herbs. Hoodoo resembles the European magical or pagan tradition in its attention to nature and weather magic. Lastly, hoodoo has incorporated Christian symbols and textual references into its practices, thus preserving it from the persecution suffered by the practitioners of other traditions.

In short, the amalgam of folk traditions and beliefs that make up the practice of hoodoo has become a uniquely American — predominantly southern American — form of magic, complete with its own trappings, vocabulary and belief system.

From Atlantis to Hoodoo

Though hoodoo does not have one common mythology or one single origin, the idea of a world that has fallen from grace or perfection figures strongly in its background. The memories of Atlantis become longings for the Garden where Adam and Eve dwelled. In fact, Biblical figures sometimes populate many underlying hoodoo myths. The Fall of Atlantis survives in the story of the Exile from the Garden of Eden. The Abyss or outer void that separates this world from Eden or Heaven takes the form of Hell.

For those who approach hoodoo from the African traditions, many of the spirits revered by voudon believers also stand guard over the magical practices of hoodoo. In particular, the spirit known sometimes as Legba, sometimes as Eshu and sometimes as the "dark man" has an affinity for crossroads and represents the one who opens the way. This spirit is often confused with the Devil (or Satan) of Christian beliefs, but is actually more of a trickster or tempter.

Some Atlantean mages see the Crossroads as a symbol of the intersection between the Supernal and Fallen worlds, and, therefore, the source of hoodoo magic. Since crossroads consist of two roads intersecting at right angles, ideas of Euclidean geometry and the magic of measurements and relationships come into play, extending the invisible lines of history back into the distant past. Crossroads as centers of power are also seen as the intersection of two ley lines, forming natural Hallows where Mana collects and contributing to the eerie feeling many people get when they encounter a true Crossroads. And it may be the Crossroads itself that stands for the memory of Atlantis, for it is both a place of power and a potential site of doom or destruction. The mage at the Crossroads may choose the path that leads to knowledge and guardianship of the magic at the root of the world or she may follow the road to delusion and destruction, re-enacting the primal fall of Atlantis in her own life.

Hoodoo and the Magical World

Though it draws from three distinct cultures — the European magical tradition, Native American shamanism and plant lore, and African root and spirit magic —Appalachian hoodoo has a surprisingly unified outlook on the world. To put it simply, the world is a place filled with magical potential and responds to the workings of the practitioner.

Having expressed the unified vision, the belief system backing up the hoodoo tradition consists of several disparate principles. These principles are not unique to the hoodoo tradition; some of them are not even what most mages consider "true" magic. Taken together and unified through the worldview of a magical, responsive universe, all these ideas come together into a magical tradition that has flourished since the early days of colonial America.

Sympathy: Like Affects Like

The notion that all things are connected by a common force or energy lies at the heart of sympathetic magic. To a hoodoo practitioner, bonds of sympathy aren't just used with Space magic to affect distant targets; they are also exploited for healing purposes as well as for hexing and attraction spells. Knives, axes and other sharp implements become tools to "cut" the pain in the hands of a conjure woman. The sharp object is placed under the bed of a woman in labor or a child suffering from the pain of a broken limb. The color green, represented by green candles or a dollar bill figures in magic to attract wealth. A stone may be used to harden someone's heart, either physically or emotionally.

"Measuring," "passing," and "transference" are other forms of sympathetic magic that make use of relation-

ships between an object and the target of the magic. Taking the measure of a person involves outlining the person with a cord which is then sealed or fused shut. The person possessing the "measure" literally controls the life of the person measured. Cutting the cord could have very serious, possibly lethal, effects while burning or singing the cord could cause great pain in the person it represented. Another form of measuring involves cutting a stick to the height of a person, usually a child. As the child outgrew the stick, he would outgrow the condition that the stick was used to treat, such as childhood asthma or other physical weakness.

"Passing" is a method of sympathetic magic that makes use of the physical action to denote a metaphysical passage. Passing a child back and forth between her parents three times was used to cure childhood sicknesses, making visible the "passing" of the child from one state of health (sickness) to another (wellness). Other forms of passing require that the target be passed underneath an animal, such as a cow or horse, handed through the twin trunks of a split tree, passed from a dark room into a lighted one and similar activities, each geared to the desired effect through a sympathetic connection.

"Transference" refers to the idea that an illness or a condition can be transferred from one object to another. The idea of transference is a very old one, fraught with religious meaning for many followers of the Judeo-Christian religions. The sins of the world were transferred to Christ and were thus forgiven; an animal to be sacrificed often bore sins or gifts or petitions from the physical world to the supernatural one; a scapegoat received the blame for a mistake, misfortune or some evil deed. Appalachian hoodoo makes the most use of transference in healing illnesses, passing them along to an animal or an inanimate object.

The Rule of Three

The old adage "the third time's the charm" is nowhere more true than in Appalachian hoodoo—and in European magics as well, thus confirming one part of hoodoo's origins. Whether stemming from the Christian trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, or the pagan trinity of Maid, Mother and Hag or, as some more modern symbologists decree, the nuclear family of mother, father and child, the practice of repeating an action or reciting a verse three times or in multiples of three has deep roots in hoodoo magic. The book by John George Hohman, called *Pow-wows or Long-Lost Friend*, thought my many to be one of the most definitive compilations of Appalachian hoodoo, is subtitled "*a Collection of Mysterious and Invaluable Arts and Remedies for Man as Well as Animals...*" and throughout its pages, the following injunctions (or variations) proliferate: "this must be repeated three times..."; "Break off three twigs from a cherry tree..."; "say three times in the same breath...."

Other cures and spells involve repeating an action for three days, three times each day, for a total of nine times, which is one of the strongest uses of the power of three and invokes the Pythagorean theories of mathematics involving the squares of numbers. Atlantean mages, when they work within the tradition of Appalachian hoodoo, often find that judicious use of the trinomial power can act as a focus for their rotes even when no other materials are at hand.

Charms, Talismans and Hexes

The use of charms, either material objects or recited words, and talismans, always material, to "fix" or focus magic is common to many traditions, including Appalachian hoodoo and its African cousin, voudon. Worn talismans or amulets also appear in many religions, and include the Catholic practice of wearing a saint's medal and the occult use of the talisman against the evil eye. In hoodoo magic, the charms are often made from simple, ready-to-hand materials. Diseases such as epilepsy or fevers of various kinds are treated by writing a phrase such as "sickness leave me" on a scrap of paper, folding it, wrapping it in a piece of red cloth or unbleached linen, tying it with a leather thong and wearing it around the neck. Similar pouches, called "hoodoo bags," can contain a lock from someone's hair for a love charm or various herbs for protection from a number of physical or spiritual ailments. Talismans are often made from stones or crystals and wrapped with wire and hung from a strip of leather, a silver or gold chain or a ribbon of a particular color. These objects are either imbued with power (or Mana) or else they draw their energy from the wearer's own body. These often serve as protections, such as the wearing of a cross is thought to protect against vampires.

The widespread familiarity of talisman use is found in sources such as the English ballad "All Around My Hat," in which the singer wears green willow around his or her hat for "a twelve month and a day" to keep a wandering lover true, and in the American song "She Wore a Yellow Ribbon," which echoes the sentiment of its British cousin.

Hoodoo and the Arcana: an Awakened Interpretation

When an Atlantean mage embraces the trappings of Appalachian hoodoo magic, she uses her Arcana by filtering them through hoodoo's accepted forms in order to get the benefits of the tradition. She can always

cast spells in the normal fashion but doing so gains no special benefits. Many Awakened mages who opt for Appalachian hoodoo do so because they live in an area where such magic is less likely to draw the attention of Seers, Banishers or other witchhunters.

Though Appalachian hoodoo reached its peak in the early years of the 20th century, diminishing as the Appalachian region "caught up" with the science and technology that so often displaces magic, a renewal of the old ways is taking place as more and more educated individuals reject the proliferation of technology and try to recapture the values imbued in the knowledge of their elders. Some believe that Atlantean mages are at the heart of this renewal; others feel that the Awakened are merely taking advantage of hoodoo's rebirth to hide in plain sight from rivals or enemies who might be focusing so strictly on Atlantean magic that they miss or belittle hoodoo's homespun variety.

When looked at through the principles of Appalachian hoodoo, the Arcana sometimes undergo a distinctive transformation in feel and emphasis, if not in effect.

Death

Ghosts are taken seriously in Appalachian folklore, and Awakened mages who use the Death Arcanum are both feared and respected because of their perceived control over the realm of the dead. While some Atlantean mages might use Death magic to get rid of rivals or to intimidate those around them, those who seek credibility within the hoodoo community use Death magic to lay ghosts ("haints") to rest or to help, in some circumstances, in solving mysteries surrounding the death of an individual.

Spells like Death 1 "Forensic Gaze" (see **Mage: the Awakening**, p. 134), used by an Awakened conjure woman to determine the cause of death, might require some ritual action involving either measuring the victim or some other type of sympathetic magic to effect. Death 1 "Speak with the Dead" (p. 135) might have to take place within a limited time after death or only during certain times of the night or month in order to fit within the confines of hoodoo. In a like fashion, Death 2 "Ghost Summons" (p. 137), allowing the mage to call a specific



ghost, would have similar conditions placed upon its use. Death 3 "Quicken Corpse" (p. 140), the spell used to create zombie servants from corpses, might borrow some trappings from African elements of hoodoo magic.

Fate

The Fate Arcanum enables an Awakened mage to perceive the threads that link objects, places and creatures together and, with that knowledge, to catch glimpses of a likely future occurrence. To the hoodoo man, this insight is known as the "second sight." Even in Sleeper circles, where magic is outright disbelieved or else shunned, people with an uncanny sense of what the lucky lottery numbers are or what days are best for taking certain actions are often accepted at face value. The Awakened mage keeps this in mind when he casts spells involving Fate, for his is the power of prophesy and in the Appalachian region, there is no shortage of prophets.

Spells such as Fate 1 "Quantum Flux" (p. 148) and "Reading the Outmost Eddies" (p. 149) may require only that the Awakened mage acquire a reputation as someone with the "second sight." Other spells such as Fate 2 "Exceptional Luck" (p. 151) and "The Evil Eye" (p. 151) may require visible components such as the wearing of a talisman or the passing of an object between two people or through another object. The passing of talismans or charms also figure in spells such as Fate 3 "Bestow Exceptional Luck" (p. 155) and "Grant Fortune's Protection" (p. 155), in keeping with the image of the wise man or root woman handing out amulets or hoodoo bags to her clients for their protection or to bring them luck.

Forces

Hoodoo magic has always enjoyed a reputation for being connected with weather magic, finding water (dowsing) and otherwise dealing with the world of elemental forces. Whether acting as a rain bringer or predicting a storm, calling lightning or seeking the best place to sink a well, the conjure man has been able to help his clients make their lives better. The hoodoo mage can also use the power of wind and water, lightning and fire to call down wrath upon her enemies. In order for an Awakened mage to channel the Forces Arcanum through the ways of Appalachian hoodoo, certain visual actions or verbal charms must solidify the spell's effects in the mundane world.

By chewing on the root of a nightblooming flower, an Awakened mage can channel the Forces Arcanum for casting Forces 1 "Nightsight" (p. 163). Forces 2 "Influence Fire" (p. 166) may require the recitation of verses enjoining the fire to stop, purify, or take some other action. For other purposes, such as erecting a protective ward against fire damage through Forces 2 "Unseen Shield" (p. 167), the mage may require the client to wear a particular hoodoo bag containing a series of words arranged into a diagram. To direct the elements to do the bidding of the mage as in Forces 3 "Control Fire" (p. 168), the hoodoo mage may need to recite a verse while passing three times around the fire to be controlled.

Life

In many ways, Life magic is among the easiest of the Arcana to cast within the purview of Appalachian hoodoo. Perhaps 75% of the charm books that contain the directions or spells used by conjure women and root doctors throughout the mountains are involved with healing everything from colic in babies to tapeworm in animals and epilepsy in anyone. The ingredients involved in doing Life magic include potions and teas to drink, verses to be chanted, poultices for application or some form of sympathetic magic as described above. The persona of the healer commands great respect not only in the mountains, where hospitals have been few and far between until recent years, but in the lowlands as well, where alternative medicines of all kinds are enjoying a revival.

Spells like Life 1 "Healer's Trance" (p. 181) require little in the way of material amplification other than putting a hand to a sick person's forehead or conducting a cursory examination (for show) of a wound. A hoodoo mage's clients accept his diagnostic powers thus lowering any incidence of Paradox. Life 2 "Heal Flora and Fauna" (p. 182) and "Purify Bodies" (p. 183) form one of the staples of Appalachian hoodoo, for the root doctor or conjure woman spends a great deal of time making plants and herbs flourish, serving as a veterinarian for the small-time farmers in the mountains and providing cures for hangovers, and other bodily toxins, including snakebite and drug overdoses. Many of the folk remedies found in books such as *Long Lost Friend* (see above) provide detailed instructions for how to conduct purges of toxins or how to ease the ills of horses, goats, dogs and other animals. Whether preparing a special mash for a colicky horse or a wrap for a foundered mare, fixing a foul-tasting herbal tea for a man poisoned by bad moonshine or giving a farmer a charmed verse to take home to recite over his chickens to make them lay more eggs, the likelihood that Life magic in the guise of hoodoo performed by an Awakened mage will succeed is often greater than its probability of failure. Life 3 "Banish Plague" (p. 185) and "Healing Heart" (p. 186) provide even greater examples of healing, allowing the mage to deal with cases of multiple outbreaks of sickness before they become epidemic in nature or to staunch the wounds

of humans and cause them to heal quickly and cleanly. Many of these cures include prayers and supplications to God and the saints, a deep-seated testimony to the power of religion in this tradition.

Matter

The Matter Arcanum concerns itself with non-living objects, including the elements, alchemical materials, made and naturally-occurring objects, and the transformation of one thing into another. Where Fate magic may help you win the lottery, Matter magic can turn rocks into coin or paper into 100 dollar bills — at least in theory. Although primarily called upon to heal or harm others or to help in matters of love and money, hoodoo mages are sometimes asked to make or find things, such as money, metal or water. This type of magic requires more props for the Atlantean descendant to use as a means of focusing Mana. Those who seek out a conjure man to help them fine an ore lode beneath their property expect to see him out there with a metal finding stick (wand) or some other item of magical sensing.

Matter 1 "Detect Substance" (p. 195) can serve the Atlantean mage as a basis for both finding metals or dowsing for well-quality water. The difference is in the composition of the "wand" or dowsing stick used in the process or the verse used when performing the search. *Long Lost Friend* contains directions for crafting a wand for finding metal or water, including when and where to find an appropriate forked stick, how to hold it (by the two forked ends) and what prayers or verses to recite. An interesting and popular use of the Matter 2 "Transmute Water" (p. 197) spell involves the clandestine business of distilling moonshine. With the power of the Matter Arcanum, a hoodoo mage can mix up her own form of moonshine without a fancy still (or even a clunky cobbled together one). All she needs is something to appear as the effective transformative tool. A cheap coffee maker will do in a pinch. Matter specialists can make a local name for themselves as "makers" and "fixers." The spell Matter 3 "Repair Object" (p. 199) enables the mage to repair broken objects, some of them utterly beyond help without magical assistance. While pure Atlantean magic requires only that the mage touch the object to be repaired, hoodoo magic requires some actual work (or the appearance thereof) on the object.

Mind

The bulk of Appalachian hoodoo concerns itself with physical substances — healing the body, finding water or rare metals, or nudging the laws of probability. When using the hoodoo tradition, Atlantean mages use another side of the tradition to draw on the Mind Arcanum. Although "second sight" also falls under the aegis of Fate magic, hoodoo mages call on Mind to read a person's emotional state of being or general mental health, to sense the presence of others, to determine if a mind is still present in an otherwise dead body or to affect and control the minds of others, including animals. Mind magic is behind mental attacks on another person and defending oneself against such attacks. It is one of the forms of magic most feared by the locals and gives the conjure woman or root doctor such a palpable aura of power and, often, menace.

Mind 1 "Aura Perception" (p. 205) enables the Atlantean hoodoo mage to diagnose an individual's current state of mind, thus assisting in further treatments (either mundane or magical) of the person's condition. In order to effect this spell through the hoodoo tradition, the mage needs to use some physical trigger, such as a feather to brush over the person's face or an ointment to place in her own eyes to "open their sight." In a similar fashion, the spell Mind 1 "Third Eye" (p. 206) enables the mage, using appropriate physical or verbal triggers (verses or rhymes), to sense whether others in the vicinity are using supernatural powers such as telepathy, clairvoyance or other mental forms of perception. This allows the hoodoo mage to discover others like her or potentially like her. She can also tell from this whether or not anyone else is interfering with or otherwise affecting her own workings. An Atlantean hoodoo mage casts her own Mind 2 "Mental Shield" (p. 208) by reciting a verse calling upon the Trinity to protect her mind from attack, with the caveat that only a person who is stronger than "the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" may attack her. Hoodoo mages from pagan traditions substitute their own trinity. This incantation usually requires a battery of prayers afterward to ensure its efficacy. Using Mind 3 "Mental Wall" (p. 211), the mage can extend this protection to another person who might be under attack. Provided she has some item to use as a focus for sympathetic magic, an Atlantean hoodoo mage can conduct her own mental and psychic attacks using Mind 3 "Psychic Assault" (p. 212).

Prime

According to the hoodoo tradition, just as in Atlantean magic, the world contains a wealth of power. Whether detecting power residing in an item or person or finding the lines of power that criss-cross the earth, hoodoo mages know they depend on the ambient power of the world (though they may not call it that) and Atlantean practitioners realize that Prime magic enables them to keep in touch with the Supernal World. When people feel they are under attack by a witch or by malign spirits, they sometimes seek out the local conjure man or woman for

assistance, and by using the magic of Prime, the Atlantean hoodoo mage can give that protection to another.

Through using Prime 1 "Analyze Enchanted Item" (p. 219), an Atlantean hoodoo mage can detect the presence of charms or hexes on another person and can thus advise a petitioner to rid herself of "that bauble given to you by the man you think is courting you" or to use some of her own magic to counter a hexed item. Prime 1 "Supernal Vision" (p. 221) gives the mage the ability to see the magical resonances that lace the world, including ley lines, sources of Mana and other magical essences. The strictures of the hoodoo tradition require the use of enchanted talismans or ointments to enable this sight. Similar to Mind 2 "Mental Shield," above, the hoodoo mage can use the spell Prime 2 "Magic Shield" (p. 222) to protect herself from outside magic of any variety, whether from a magical bolt of lightning or a psychic attack. Again, the mage must use the proper formulaic verse, often combined with a physical sign, such as the brandishing of crossed fingers or pointing a finger. If the attacker is known, inserting his name into the verse ("Adamarius, your works cannot stand against me by the protection of the Lord..."). By using Prime 3 "Armor of the Soul" (p. 223), a mage can shield another person from attacks against their soul by malignant spirits or Death mages. The mage needs to write a sacred verse from the appropriate page of her spellbook onto a piece of paper and give it to the victim to carry on his person at all times or until the danger is over.

The potency of wielding Prime as an attack through the use of Prime 3 "Celestial Fire" (p. 224) is not lessened in the hoodoo tradition. Casting a ball of pure Prime requires a physical trigger such as a specially made wand as well as an empowering verse, often in the name of the Trinity, and it is no less vulgar than doing so using Atlantean magic alone. Nevertheless, when two opposed mages are duking it out or when a hoodoo mage faces a Twilight enemy that cannot otherwise be hurt, considerations of vulgar magic's repercussions often go by the boards.

Space

Space magic is one of the most practically useful magics in terms of its application in daily life. Some conjure mages or root doctors have a sideline as a "finder," or person who finds lost objects or people. Space magic, with its premise that distance is an illusion of perception and that all spaces are linked together and are essentially the same space, makes the use of sympathetic and other forms of magic more powerful when used in conjunction with this Arcanum. Thus, the hoodoo mage who is versed in the Space Arcanum can find what is lost, track items or people and even ease a journey for the journeyer.

Using the spell Space 1 "Finder" (p. 233), the Atlantean hoodoo mage can track down a lost item within her immediate range. This is also known as the "lost keys" spell, and is useful for hunting down objects that may be hard to spot otherwise. A simple verse such as, "Come hither, come hither in foul or fair weather," repeated three times while concentrating on the desired object might be all that is necessary for this working. With the acquisition of another dot in the Space Arcanum, the hoodoo mage can combine this spell with some sympathetic magic to find an object regardless of how far away it is. The further addition of the Life Arcanum enables the mage to locate a missing person, whether a runaway child or a fugitive from the law. Space 1 "Correspondence" (p. 232) enables the mage to determine the existence of and the strength of sympathetic connections that exist between people, places and things, thus finding out if a client who comes to her for help is sympathetically (in the magical sense) bound to a person who might wish her harm. This spell can also suss out people sent to spy on the mage who are magically connected to the person they are working for. A verse for recognizing enemies or seeing the "ties that bind" may be necessary for this spell in the hoodoo tradition. The Atlantean hoodoo mage can use Space 2 "Scrying" (p. 235) to view another place by employing any of the hoodoo tradition's typical scrying devices, such as a bowl of water that has been passed three times through a flame, or a crystal ball blessed in the name of the Trinity. Space magic can also serve to destroy the threads of a sympathetic connection through Space 3 "Destroy the Threads" (p. 237). The magic is activated through the use of a verbal charm such as "Whether ye go on horse or heel, your magic is severed, your wickedness revealed. Begone, begone, begone!"

Spirit

Appalachian folk tradition is riddled with tales of ghosts, while both Native American and African folk tales deal with the spirits of animals and plants, as well as spirits of the dead and malevolent or benevolent spirits from the over- or underworlds. Legends of spoiled milk caused by mischievous "fair folk" or "little people" abound as well as tales of demons possessing otherwise good people and causing them to perform all manner of wicked deeds. The Spirit Arcanum is one of the most useful types of magic an Atlantean mage can know when working in the hoodoo tradition, which deals as often with healing the spirit as with healing the body or mind. This is the magic that deals in protections against the evil of the Abyss (in Atlantean terms) or the demons of Hell (in the Judeo-Christian terminology more familiar to the Appalachian region). On the darker side, this is the

magic used by hoodoo witches to call upon malevolent spirits to empower them or do harm to their enemies. Appalachian hoodoo sees Spirit magic as something to be dealt with almost every day.

The spell Spirit 1 "Coaxing the Spirits" (p. 245) allows the Atlantean hoodoo mage to nudge the spirit sleeping in a material object so that certain tasks can be performed easier. Some folk believe that a hoodoo man or woman's locks never rust, her clocks always run on time and her whittling knife never loses its edge or its accuracy. There are little tunes or ditties that the hoodoo mage hums or sings under her breath to boost the spirits (so to speak) of her household items to coax them to work more efficiently. Spirit 1 "Exorcist's Eye" (p. 245) allows the mage to determine whether or not an animal or human is possessed by a malignant spirit. This is usually done through the use of holy names and the sprinkling of pure or blessed water on the subject. This is usually done prior to an exorcism (see below). Spirit 2 "Ephemeral Shield" (p. 246) can protect the hoodoo mage from attack by spirits. Casting this spell is accomplished through speaking words of power (either names of God, saints' names or other revered deities) and the use of a ritual ablution or bath (not necessarily full immersion) that washes significant parts of the body, usually those involving openings such as eyes, ears, nose, mouth and anal/genital regions, but also including heart, hands and feet. Afterwards, precious oils or herbal tinctures are applied to the body and the protective verses are spoken. The actual spell Spirit 3 "Exorcism" (p. 248) enables the hoodoo mage to drive a spirit out of a living body or a material object. The ritual actions needed to evoke Spirit 2 "Ephemeral Shield" (p. 248) are also part of the exorcism ritual if they have not already been performed. The actual driving out of the spirit involves a stern admonition of the spirit by the exorciser and sometimes involves physical actions such as the striking of the body with a switch taken from a living willow tree and immersed three times in pure water. Causing harm to the possessed entity is not the object of the blows, but the transference of the exorcising power from the exorciser to the spirit takes place when the switch strikes its target.

Atlantean Paths and Hoodoo: Matches Made in Heaven

Appalachian hoodoo covers a lot of territory, and, as with any broad field of study, specialists exist who focus most of their attention on a particular aspect of hoodoo magic. For Atlantean mages who choose to work within the Appalachian hoodoo tradition, these specialties often (though not always) correspond to the mage's Path.

Mages who follow the Path of Acanthus, which treats primarily with Fate and Time, often focus their hoodoo magic on charms and hexes, dealing in both good and bad fortunes. They also use the Time Arcanum for predictive purposes, looking into the future for their clients. They are the most likely to set themselves up as the modern day version of the traveling snake oil salesman, with real snakes and bona fide oil!

Followers of the Path of Mastigos, with their emphases on the Mind and Space Arcana, may excel in certain forms of divination and scrying as well as in treating mental problems and magical bindings. They may also create charms and potions to change the minds of others, creating love potions and other mind-affecting items.

Mages belonging to the Path of Moros, who focus on the Death and Matter Arcana, may deal with ghosts and their summoning or banishing, or they may set themselves up as "fixers," who can take something broken and make it better than new.

Obrimos mages, with their propensity for Forces and Prime, often become weather witches, or dowsers, using their affinity for power sources and the elements to call rain (or stop it) or to find good water under the ground.

Lastly, mages of the Path of Thyrsus, who study Life and Spirit, usually find themselves attracted to the ways of folk healing and herbal lore as well as the summoning and banishing of spirits.

These divisions are not mandatory, of course. Instead they provide ways for players of mage characters who wish to investigate the Appalachian hoodoo tradition to tailor their characters and personalize their spells.

Time

The mountains of Appalachia may hold many timeless qualities, but the Atlantean mage working in the hoodoo tradition can certainly make good use of the Time Arcanum in his spell workings. While mages of any tradition, Atlantean or Sleeper folk tradition, are usually reluctant to tamper too blatantly with the past or the future — enough cautionary tales exist to warn about that — most mages with some abilities in the Time Arcanum don't mind tinkering about with small increments of time or participating in the "look, but don't touch" theory of time "travel."

The Time 1 "Perfect Timing" (p. 258) spell is useful as an augmentation to the performance of other time-dependent tasks. Herbs that must be gathered at precisely the full of the moon or within five minutes of the sun's passage from Cancer to Leo, verses that must be said at specific times of day to maintain a ward or enchantment or even knowing when to release a dart in a local game at the county fair are possible uses for the spell. The use of fast-growing herbs or the recitation of a particular verse three times in one breath can be used to trigger the spell. A hoodoo mage can look briefly into the future through the spell Time 2 "Augury" (p. 258) to find out if a certain action will take place, such as a marriage between two people or whether or not a murderer will kill again. As with Space 2 "Scrying," the mage generally uses something like a mirror or bowl of water to effect this spell, which can be augmented for greater accuracy by the addition of a sympathetic tie between the mage and the person whose future is in question. Time 3 "Divination" (p. 263) enables a much more extensive and accurate prediction of the future and requires a more elaborate method of casting, with more complex recitations, strong sympathetic ties and a specially prepared focusing device (mirror, bowl, etc.).

The Symbols of Appalachian Hoodoo

Born from a mixing of European folk, Native American shamanic and African root magic, Appalachian hoodoo borrows symbols from all its ancestral traditions. While these symbols are many and varied, there are a few commonalities that bring them together in some broad categories.

Religious Iconography

The use of prayers, religious writings, the cross, the Bible and other symbols of the Christian religion (though not exclusively) are common to Appalachian hoodoo. Many of its European practitioners were Christians, at least until the Church declared them witches and heretics, and the symbols of Christianity held both meaning and power for them. The Bible itself became a symbol of power, not so much for the words it contained, but because it was a sacred book, one that had accrued magical energy or Mana through many centuries of being associated with the "word of God." Another reason that the Bible is powerful, apart from its strictly Judeo-Christian association, is the fact that it is a book — and not just any book. The Bible, in Appalachian hoodoo, with its stories of patriarchs and prophets calling down the wrath of God and its message of good prevailing over evil, is a hatching book for spells.

Crosses and other religious symbols, particularly those that pertain to the Trinity, also carry a heavy weight

Merit: Seventh Son/Daughter of a Seventh Son/Daughter (• • • •)

Effect: Your character was born on the verge of Awakening and has a natural affinity for magic. He seems to live a charmed life, since his status as seventh son of a seventh son is known to everyone in the community, or at least to friends of the family. He may Awaken in the normal course of events, either due to some traumatic event or through a natural occurrence. He may even join the community of Pentacle mages, associating himself with an order and fulfilling a role appropriate to his Path.

The real benefits of his birth order, however, come when he embraces the Appalachian hoodoo tradition as his method of working magic. Here, his affinity for magic really shines and he pulls ahead of his Atlantean peers. This Merit, when used in conjunction with hoodoo magic (and the Magical Tradition Merit), provides the following benefits for the caster:

- +1 dot to any protection spell against attacks using Mind, Prime or Spirit. The mage treats his magical defense as being one dot stronger than it would be otherwise.
- +1 to the dice pool for any rolls involving scrying, divining or locating.
- Once per story, the character can roll Wits + Composure and gain an effect similar to the Time 1 "Perfect Timing" spell (see **Mage**, p. 258), representing natural good luck.



in Appalachian hoodoo. They are used as protection against evil spirits and evil creatures, as wards against disease and as reminders that they are on the side of good. Practitioners of a darker sort of hoodoo may use the obverse of these symbols to cast hexes and curses or avert their enemies' gaze.

Herbal Vocabulary

A good part of Appalachian hoodoo is involved with herbs and herbal concoctions. Many instructions for casting spells involve finding or preparing certain herbs and using wood from certain trees. Some spell books used in Appalachian hoodoo read more like recipe books than books of arcane directions. Herbs and plants mentioned in Hohman's *Long Lost Friend* include rose seeds, iron-weed, cherry wood, blackberry bushes, knot-grass, spicewort, cloves, flax-seed, mulberry, stinging nettles, millifolia, heliotrope (sunflower), swallow-wort and birch bark.

Not only do the herbs have meaning in their healing or harming properties but they also have a symbolic meaning harkening back to the language of flowers and herbs used in the Middle Ages.

Numbers of Power: the Seventh Son

The power of three has already been noted as important in Appalachian hoodoo. One of the most highly regarded numbers in Appalachian hoodoo, however, is seven, particularly when used in combination with birth order. Thus the seventh son or daughter or the seventh son of a seventh son (or daughter) is regarded as a person of destiny and power, one born to the ways of hoodoo magic, a natural healer, a prophet or any number of other things.

Foci

The herbs used in what might be called "recipe spells" are one type of focus necessary for the casting of hoodoo magic. Mostly used in healing spells or potions for humans and animals, herbs are also used as magical wards against creatures or spirits that are repelled by them or as attractors in love potions or charms. Appalachian hoodoo uses not only the herbs known by European witches but also the plants and herbs familiar to the Native American shamans and the root magics of Africa. Ginseng or "sang," John the conqueror root or *Ipomoea jalapa*, are two of the most common magical herbs.

Wands are also used in Appalachian hoodoo for a number of purposes. The most well-known "wand" is the dowsing stick, which, according to one source, must be made from a tree of one year's growth. Dowsing sticks or rods can find not only water, but precious metals as well. Wands are also used for divination.

Not only are books like the Bible and spell books used as sources for magical knowledge, the books themselves are often a focus for magic. An enjoinment at the end of *Long Lost Friend* states a list of protections that cover anyone who carries the book with him. In this case, the book itself becomes the focus, just as if it were a charm or amulet.

Prayers and rhymes are often used as foci and many spells depend on their precise repetition either a certain number of times or at certain times of the day, month or season or in a single breath. The ancient view of words as inherently powerful survives in Appalachian hoodoo. In some instances, Sleeper believers may serve as foci, particularly if a spell centers upon them.

Rotes

Locate Node (Prime ●●)

The African spirit Eshu often appears to travelers at places where two roads cross. Similarly, Hermes (for the Greeks) or Mercury (for the Romans) was associated with crossroads, as was the Christian St. Simon. Magic or Mana gathers here in larger clusters than at normal crossings, for crossroads are not just where two roads meet. They are where two ley lines or lines of power intersect one another, called a "node" by mages. Using a wand made specifically for this purpose, the mage can locate the nearest ley line node.

Practice: Unveiling

Action: Instant

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

Successes apply to the spell's duration factors. While the spell is active, the mage can make instant-action Wits + Occult perception rolls to scrutinize the immediate area's Resonance (within sensory range) for the tale-tell signs of a node, where two or more ley lines meet.

Hoodoo Rote: Find Crossroads

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult + Prime

This rote must employ a wand created specifically for this purpose, though it can be used over and over so long as it remains dedicated to finding crossroads. The wand must be made from a tree made by the natural joining of two saplings of different types. It must lie beneath a full moon for three consecutive nights in three consecutive months. When looking for the crossroads, the mage must speak the name of whichever crossroads deity or saint she holds dearest, followed by "show me the way of power" three times before starting out.

Bind the Wayward Body (Life ●●●● + Space ●)

The mountains have harbored many a fugitive in its hollers and caves thoughout the years. Some have never been brought to justice. Others have fallen prey to this powerful piece of hoodoo magic. This spell enables the mage to literally stop a fugitive in his tracks, rendering the person unable to move forward or backward for a period of time that is usually just long enough for his pursuers to catch him.

Practice: Unraveling

Action: Instant and contested; target rolls Resolve + Gnosis

Duration: Transitory against mages, Prolonged against Sleepers (until released by the caster)

Aspect: Vulgar

Cost: 1 Mana

Success means that the target cannot move more than three yards in any direction from the place he was standing/sitting when the spell takes effect. If he's a mage, the spell lasts for only one turn. If he's a Sleeper, the spell lasts for one scene or until he's released by the following phrase from the mage's own mouth: "As you have been bound, now you are free." Of course, by that time, the fugitive should be free only to accompany his captors to jail.

A Life 3 version of this spell targets animals.

Hoodoo Rote: Pillar of Salt

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion + Life vs. Resolve + Gnosis

The mage must follow the fugitive, who needs to be within line of sight (unless Space 2 is added to the casting). As she travels, she repeats a prayer similar to the following: *Peter, Paul and all the Apostles, be my witness to God's power which binds all rogues, thieves, murderers and fugitives who seek to hide from justice. In particular, let Thy power find* [name of fugitive or some other form of specific identification, such as "the man who robbed the Big Ivy branch bank last night"] *and bind him with fetters of guilt. Let him not step forward. Let him not step backward. Let him breathe but not speak until such time as he is released by me.*

The mage must say this prayer (or whichever one she uses) three times. When she comes in sight of the fugi-

tive, she must point her hand and clench it into a fist. As her hand tightens, the muscles of the fugitive will tighten until he cannot move.

Magic Items

Objects play a big part in Appalachian hoodoo, from hoodoo bags, amulets, dowsing wands and written charms to musical instruments, sacred books and other more powerful items. Below are a few sample magic items, some of which are presented in more than one format.

Harp of the Highlands

The series of Silver John novels by Manly Wade Wellman tell of a wandering storyteller and balladeer famous for his songs and his silver-strung guitar. Though the author does not directly mention any power associated with John's guitar, the implications are strong that it is something more than just a normal instrument. Music plays a large part in Appalachian culture and many people, regardless of their daytime careers, play an instrument. Much of Appalachian history is wrapped up in its ballads, so keeping the singing tradition alive in the region is one way of maintaining a dynamic history of the area. It is only natural to suppose that, over the years, some instruments have been crafted by mages to augment or focus their magic. Some of these items are initially destined to be magical; others are later imbued with a spell or spells. Still others fall prey to some evil working or tragic circumstance and act as a container for a malevolent spirit.

The Harp of the Highlands hails not from the Highlands of Scotland but from the town of Highlands in Western North Carolina. It is a lap harp of masterwork quality, made from seven different woods inlaid in intricate designs reminiscent of the outlines of leaves and mountains. The strings of this harp never seem to need tuning and it fits naturally and comfortably on the lap of its owner. The sounds that come from the harp are true and haunting and sometimes it seems to have its own voice, harmonizing with the singer. Few who listen to the harp come away from it untouched, as the instrument seems to radiate the emotions inherent in whatever song is being played upon it.

Harp of the Highlands as Artifact (●●●●)

Durability 3, Size 2, Structure 5

Mana Capacity: maximum 12

Said to be brought to the Appalachians from Arcadia by a lord of the fae, this elegantly made lap harp contains the voice of the lord's human lover, a woman with a wondrous voice who, when she knew she was dying of a wasting disease, asked that her voice live on after her.

Whoever plays this harp, if he is Awakened, gains the benefits of any one of the following spells per song played: Mind 1 "Third Eye" (see **Mage: the Awakening**, p. 206), Mind 2 "Emotional Urging" (p. 207), Mind 2 "First Impressions" (p. 208), or Mind 2 "Misperception" (p. 209). Simply holding the harp gives the possessor the benefit of a Mind 2 "Mental Shield" (p. 208). Finally, the harp provides the user with the answers to three lore-based questions per week, pulling up a ballad that contains the information, though sometimes in a cryptic fashion.

The harp cannot be broken by normal means and demonstrates an odd capability of healing itself, filling in scratches and nicks overnight. It also occasionally gives its possessor visions of a place that might be Arcadia as it still exists in the Supernal World.

Harp of the Highlands as Cursed Item

Let no one draw forth music from these strings without remembering his darkest day or his greatest loss. Let each song draw forth his life in misery so that he ends his days before his appointed time. Let my fate be his fate.

Jubal Curtis was a carver of instruments and a player of them as well. Deciding to seek his fortune as a traveling musician, he poured his heart into the creation of a lap harp meant to seal his success. As he made a name for himself, he forgot the people who helped him on his way to success. He even forgot that part of his talent lay in the virtuosity of his instrument.

One night, a second-rate musician even more unprincipled than Jubal entered his hotel room one night and stabbed him, grabbed the harp and turned to flee. As his life blood poured from him, Jubal uttered a dying curse that opened the doorway for a spirit of anger and vengeance to take up residence in the harp. Since then, the instrument has successfully ruined the lives and caused the early deaths of everyone who has ever come into ownership with it. It frequently turns up in pawn shops, where it rarely stays for more than three days before someone lovingly carries it away.

This lap harp is handsomely crafted from seven different kinds of inlaid wood: cherry, rosewood, ash, ebony, mahogany, teak and cedar. It has never been known to go out of tune, nor has one of its strings ever broken. No one remembers precisely when it was made.

Every one who has claimed this harp as their own has died from profound depression, suicide or violence within a year of taking the harp. Jubal's dying curse opened the way across the Gauntlet for a Twilight spirit who has made his home within the harp and is able to coax the life from its player and torment his memories as well.



Rank: 2
Attributes: Power 3, Finesse 3, Resistance 2
Willpower: 6
Essence: 15 (max 15)
Initiative: 5
Defense: 3
Speed: 7
Size: 3
Corpus: 5
Influence: Anger (murderous)
Numina: Fetter, Harrow
Ban: The spirit may only attack someone who has acquired the harp and wants to use it to further his career.

The Book of Safe Journeys

Brought to the mountains of eastern Tennessee by one of the region's earliest settler families of Celtic stock, *The Book of Safe Journeys, or Charms and Receipts [sic] for the Well-Being of Body and Soul in Its Passage Through Life* is a potent catalogue of hoodoo spells, herbal healing, protection rituals and instructions for making wands, hoodoo pouches, poultices and other useful and magical items. Handed down from seventh child to seventh child until the family line stopped suddenly in the mid-1920s, the book disappeared from sight and, with it, some of the precious knowledge contained within. Every now and then, someone reports hearing of a hoodoo witch or conjure man who possesses a copy, but all attempts to find it have resulted in failure. Though some fair copies of the book exist, made with the permission of the family that owned the book and likewise handed down, only the original book is said to hold power apart from its contents.

The Book of Safe Journeys as Artifact (●●●●●)

Durability 2, Size 1, Structure 3

Mana Capacity: maximum 15

An old legend tells how when God drove Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, one of the angels took pity on them and placed into their hands a scroll that contained the knowledge necessary for these first humans to survive in an unfriendly and unfamiliar world. As the years passed, the scroll changed form until it became the

leather-bound volume that arrived in Tennessee in the early 1700s.

The possessor of this book gains the benefit of all the shield spells, including Death 2 "Entropic Guard" (see **Mage: the Awakening**, p. 136), Fate 2 "Fortune's Protection" (p. 152), Forces 2 "Unseen Shield" (p. 167), Life 3 "Organic Resilience" (p. 183), Matter 2 "Unseen Aegis" (p. 197), Mind 2 "Mental Shield" (p. 208), Prime 2 "Magic Shield" (p. 222), Space 2 "Untouchable" (p. 235), Spirit 2 "Ephemeral Shield" (p. 246) and Time 2 "Temporal Dodge" (p. 261). In addition, any spell contained in the book, when cast exactly as written, has no chance of failing (always has one success). The book itself is impervious to the effects of physical decay and cannot be destroyed by non-magical forces. In the hands of a seventh son or daughter, the book reveals the true form of anyone who come within 30 feet of it.

The Book of Safe Journeys as Cursed Item

Everything in these pages is yours for an agreed upon payment. Don't complain about my asking prices. I've already paid a price you would never pay.

The Cottaher family of Windswept Gorge, Tennessee, were well known as healers and hoodoo makers and Papa Cottaher even kept ties with folk from all over Europe. Word had it that most of Papa Cottaher's hoodoo came from a book he brought with him from the Old Country, a hide-bound collection of loose papers called *The Book of Safe Journeys*.

When Jerub Cottaher took up the gift after the death of his father, in the mid 1800s, things changed. Jerub wasn't anywhere near the conjuror his daddy was. The fancy folk stopped visiting, and Jerub was heard to say that he was better off without them.

Only he wasn't. His charms failed, his healings didn't take. Even his love potions backfired. Then he started asking for money for his spells, which his father never did.

One night a neighbor saw Jerub leave his cabin with his book tucked under his arm and a white goat tied to a rope he held in his other hand. Jerub returned home without the goat but with a smile on his face.

After that, his magic worked every time. His prices went up and people paid them, but no one considered him a friend. Jerub never married or had children. One morning his body was found rotting in his cabin, a look of terror on his face. The book was missing.

Jerub's actual tale is a sad but cautionary one. Unlike the other mages in his family, Jerub never Awakened. Despondent and greedy, he went to the crossroads and sacrificed the white goat. A spirit from the Abyss appeared and took possession of the book and of Jerub's soul. As he aged. Jerub realized what he had done, but it was too late. He died in agony and terror, his soul a victim of his own deal with the "devil."

The Book of Safe Journeys is really a collection of loose parchments wrapped in a handsome, soft grey leather binding and tied with a cord of sturdy silk and silver and gold thread and wire. When touched, it seems to vibrate and a distinct feeling of unease travels into the person touching the book.

An Abyssal spirit of Corruption inhabits *The Book of Safe Journeys*, turning it into a book of foul workings. Anyone who claims the book immediately gains a false Awakening and is able to cast any of the spells in the book. Though every spell works, each spell has a drawback. A healing spell may rid the target of his fever, but lay the groundwork for an emergence of cancer the next year. The book also depletes the life of its holder, who ages prematurely and dies in terror. To break this curse, the spirit that inhabits the book must be named and driven out by an Awakened mage.

Rank: 3
Attributes: Power 4, Finesse 2, Resistance 2
Willpower: 6
Essence: 15 (max 15)
Initiative: 4
Defense: 4
Speed: 6
Size: 1
Corpus: 3
Influence: Corruption
Numina: Fetter, Ill Luck, as in Fate 3 "Monkey's Paw" (see **Mage**, p. 155), Terrify
Ban: The spirit may only work through the book and cannot act outside the limitations of the book's contents—except to drain the life from the possessor of the book.

Dr. Hardy's Comfort Packets

In an age of holistic, homeopathic and herbal medicines, aromatherapy and essential essences, many people turn to these cures to help them in everything from relieving stress to losing weight to curing cancer. Dr. Hardy, an Awakened medical doctor who also dispenses herbal cures taught to him by his conjure woman mother, has developed these small pouches or "packets" of herbs and other substances which he gives to needy patients for the cost of the ingredients. These comfort packets can perform any one of a number of magical effects when used according to the doctor's directions. Among their effects are: healing one Health point per packet (no more

than two per week can be taken without suffering from total exhaustion due to the strain on the body's healing system); raising one Attribute for 24 hours (no more than two packets can be used on the same Attribute in any given week); relieving mental stress; relieving headache or toothache; suppressing appetite; and bolstering the immune system.

Storytelling

One of the best sources for ideas for running a **Mage: The Awakening** Chronicle involving Appalachian hoodoo are the Silver John stories of Manly Wade Wellman. They include *The Old Gods Waken*, *After Dark*, *The Lost and the Lurking*, *The Hanging Stones* and *The Voice of the Mountain*. These tales depict southern Appalachia in the last half of the 20th century, a place of ever quickening pace, encroaching modernization and dark, shadowy secrets. While John does not fit the mold of either an Atlantean style mage or a true practitioner of Appalachian hoodoo — at least not to its fullest extent — he does carry around a copy of *Long Lost Friend* and uses it to fight the good fight against evil forces. Some of the characters he encounters, however, give good thumbnail sketches of various types of mages in the Appalachian hoodoo tradition, some healers and warriors for the light and others servants of the darkest powers or slaves of their own greed. Ideas for plots abound in these novels and can point the way for Storytellers to expand on their own ideas.

Libraries can also provide information on Appalachian hoodoo or folktales, while the proliferation of Southern writers such as Gail Godwin, Leigh Smith, Reynolds Price and others can help Storytellers translate the atmosphere of the modern Southeast to a game setting. Movies like *Nell* and *Songcatcher* provide good takes on the scenery of the Appalachians and the tenor of the people who live there.

The backwoods and mountains of the Appalachians stretch, incidentally, from north Georgia to Pennsylvania and continue on through to Maine and Newfoundland before leapfrogging over the Atlantic, stopping briefly at

Appalachian Hoodoo Story Hooks

• **Finding a Missing Mage:** The characters hear of a missing Life mage named Carianna who possesses lost information vital to their current mission. Rumors that she is hiding in the Appalachians after a cabal of Seers blew up her home in the characters' home city lead the characters to the mountains, where they hear of a reclusive healer woman who lives deep in the hills and who possesses powerful "hoodoo." This eventually leads the characters to Sairey, who can teach them hoodoo magic, give them an appreciation of the mountain culture and, ultimately, enable them to help defend her from a group of Seers who have tracked her down.

• **The Long Lost Artifact:** A high-ranking member of the characters order or of the local Consilium has heard that a valuable piece of Atlantean lore — a book of spells — lies somewhere in the heart of Appalachia, in the possession of a local root doctor. Asked to track down the artifact, the characters encounter several practitioners of Appalachian hoodoo, allowing the Storyteller to introduce her players to root doctors, conjure women, mojo workers, crossroads conjurers and other varieties of hoodoo mages. Each person has some precious item, from a translation of a German book of charms (i.e., Rohman's *Long Lost Friend*) to an amulet made of rare gems that look like no other gems on earth and appear to "sing" with resonance at certain times of the night, month or year. What the characters ultimately find is up to the Storyteller, who may use the item to launch the next phase of her chronicle or as an excuse to introduce the characters to tradition magic, Appalachian or otherwise.

• **The Root Shop:** The characters have some reason to be in the Appalachian region, either traveling through or thinking of taking up residence. In a little mountain town, they come across an unobtrusive store called "The Root Shop." Inside, they find not only herbs and roots for herbal and homeopathic medicines, but anyone using one of the Mage Sight spells can sense magical energy emanating from many of the herbs and from the shop in general. Further investigation leads the characters to a group of hoodoo mages who have come together to combat a hoodoo sorcerer whose powers are greater than theirs. The characters, if they stay, get caught up in a local hoodoo war and must learn the ways of hoodoo magic to stay alive.

Greenland, before settling down in the Scottish Highlands and the north of England. Evidence now places the origin of the Appalachian range as somewhere in Central America, but that's just a nicety of geographic accuracy. Within the hidden places of these mountains exists ample room for strange people, places, creatures and things that the rest of the world turns away from. In Appalachia, myths and legends still live, and good hoodoo mages are always in need.

Sample Character

Arabelle

Quote: *I suppose I could make me up something for you to take home with you and use, but if it don't work the way you need it to, you must bring it back to me and no one else.*

Background: Ever since she was little, growing up near the town of Clyde, in Haywood County, North Carolina, Jennylou Tweedy loved nothing better than watching her father fix things. She was a smart child, the only living child after three stillbirths and three late-term miscarriages, and her parents adored her. Even her witchy old Granny Tweedy, who everyone said was a conjure woman and who lived way up in the hills in a cabin with no electricity and no inside bathroom, called her a miracle child and predicted great things for her.

All Jennylou wanted to do was take things apart and put them back together again. Though her family wasn't rich, Jennylou's father did a thriving business in his repair shop. People paid in kind rather than in money, though, so although they had wood for the wood stove, gas for their truck, handmade clothing for Jennylou, smoked ham for Easter, turkey for Thanksgiving and a big goose for Christmas, all from the people who patronized Tweedy's Fix-It Shop, the family hardly had money to spend or save. When Jenny was thirteen, her mother died of ovarian cancer. Her father did not remarry.

Jennylou did well in public school and expressed an interest in going to college to be an engineer. Jennylou's father tried to explain to the teenager that there wasn't money for college. Jennylou tried her best to understand, but could only see her world suddenly grow very small. Then her father went to visit his mother, Granny Tweedy and a miracle happened shortly afterward.

The principal of Jennylou's high school called to say that he had managed to get Jennylou a full scholarship to NC State, for their engineering program. She would be gone east for six years — four for college and two for her Master's in Engineering.

Six years later, she was home to stay, complete with her engineering degree. Her expertise allowed her father to expand the business to take on some construction and engineering projects instead of just repairs and their finances improved. She made a point of visiting her Granny Tweedy once a week until the old woman passed away, leaving her cabin and all her belongings to her only grandchild, her son's seventh child. When her father passed away three years later, Jennylou sold her father's shop and moved away from Clyde. Though no one knew it, she went to her grandmother's cabin, now hers, spent some of the shop money on bringing indoor plumbing and electricity to the cabin, and took up practicing conjure magic like her Granny had taught her during their weekly visits. To it, she added her own abilities to fix things and has been busily adding her own spells to her Granny Tweedy's *Book of Useful Knowledge*.

In all the years since she's been back, Jennylou has said nothing of what she experienced in college or why she is so content to forget that part of her life.

Her junior year in college, Jenny went to a party where some seniors accosted her, drugged her and, she suspects, raped her. She doesn't remember what they did. What she does remember is that she awoke on a vast gray plane above which rose a massive tower that looked, at first as if it were made of lead. As she neared it, she saw that it was actually an intricate machine tower that was no longer functioning because it was missing an essential piece. She examined the tower, even as she entered it in search of its inner workings. She saw many names inscribed into the surfaces of the tower. When she finally came to the center, she saw that the machine wasn't working because it was completely depleted of oil — except Jennylou realized it wasn't oil that was needed, but blood. Hers. Without another thought, she sliced her wrist on a jagged piece of metal and let her arterial blood flow into the machine. The last thing she saw before she lost consciousness was her name appearing on the surface of the tower's innermost chamber.

When she awoke again, it was to the real world and to the knowledge that whatever had happened to her after the party, she had Awakened either because of or despite it. She found a teacher in the head of the engineering department who informed her that she had found the Path of Moros, that she had traveled to Stygia and that he would love for her to join his order, the Free Council, which had less problems with the modern world's high-tech gadgetry than many other orders. She took the name Arabelle, her mother's little used middle name, for her magic name.

Now, as Arabelle, she practices hoodoo magic, bringing help to the people who come to her. She also fixes things for her clients, charging only what they can afford in cash or kind.



Description: Arabelle is a sturdily built woman in her mid-thirties. Her sandy brown hair is cut short in the summer but is allowed to grow long enough to braid in winter. She would be pretty if her face didn't have so many harsh lines, as if something bitter had taken away most of her joy. She dresses according to the needs of the moment — long dresses for days spent in her cabin doing chores or mixing up some of her herbs, jeans and work boots for hiking through the woods with her *finding stick* and dark green coveralls for working on her truck or on her neighbors' cars.

Her nimbus manifests as the distant sounds of machinery, like the chugging of an old car.

Storytelling Hints: Arabelle has resolved never to marry, since she's afraid of being reminded of the horrors of her pre-Awakening traumatic ordeal. She has taken to collecting big dogs to warn off any potential suitors. She is mostly content to practice her magic in the old tradition of her Granny Tweedy, but she knows that if her order needs her for some critical mission, she will most likely answer them. She is currently looking around for someone to groom to be her successor since she knows that her family line has ended with her.

Dedicated Magical Tool: A length of lead pipe that stays with her whenever she works magic or makes her repairs.

Real Name: Jennylou Tweedy
Path: Moros
Order: Free Council
Tradition: Appalachian Hoodoo
Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 2, Resolve 2
Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2
Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 2
Mental Skills: Academics 2, Crafts (Repairs) 3, Investigation 1, Occult (Appalachian Hoodoo) 3, Science (Engineering) 3
Physical Skills: Drive 2, Survival 1, Weaponry (Lead Pipe) 2
Social Skills: Animal Ken (Big Dogs) 2, Intimidation 3, Subterfuge 1
Merits: Allies (Free Council) 2, Book of Spells and Simples, Magical Tradition (Appalachian Hoodoo), Resources 1
Willpower: 4
Wisdom: 7
Virtue: Fortitude
Vice: Wrath
Initiative: 5
Defense: 2
Speed: 10
Health: 7
Gnosis: 5
Arcana: Death 4, Life 3, Matter 5, Prime 3, Space 1
Rotes: *Death*—Forensic Gaze (•), Entropic Guard (••), Destroy Object (•••), Enervation (••••); *Life* — Healer's Trance (•), Heal Flora and Fauna (••), Healing Heart (•••); *Matter* — Craftman's Eye (•), Alter Accuracy (••), Repair Object (•••), Alter Efficiency (••••), Self-Repairing Machine (•••••); *Prime* — Locate Crossroads (•), Activate Enchanted Item (••), Imbue Item (•••); Space — Finder (•)
Mana/per turn: 14/5
Armor: 4 ("Forensic Gaze," Matter ••)

ENTHEOGEN CULTS

Under the influence of DMT, the world becomes an Arabian labyrinth, a palace, a more than possible Martian jewel, vast with motifs that flood the gaping mind with complex and wordless awe. Color and the sense of a reality-unlocking secret nearby pervade the experience. There is a sense of other times, and of one's own infancy, and of wonder, wonder and more wonder.

— Terrence McKenna, *Food of the Gods*

In a dank basement, a handful of men and women eat dried mushrooms so that they can speak to the strange beings that live in the building's ventilation system. Half a world away, in the middle of a rainforest paddock, a pair of sisters drink a potent tea brewed from the Vine of the Dead, hoping to commune with the world's spirit, a thing that some call Gaia, others call God, and a few believe to be the Devil herself. The drugs break apart the mind, forge new connections, allow one to realize things that could previously not be realized. Eyelids are ripped open, made to see hyperdimensional travelers creeping slowly across the night sky. Ears hear the chatter of plants, animals, and machines. The nose smells out the corruption born in a man's heart, and can suss out conspiracies and connections that seem alien and impossible. Is it all in the imagination? Some of it, yes. But some of it is real, too. Welcome to the cults of the entheogen.

Neoteric Shamanism

Shamans have been a part of the world since early civilization. A tribe's shaman acts as a mediator between the unseen world and the known world, appeasing or battling indefinable spirits. He works to tie the subtle threads of fate for the good of his people. He risks his soul and sanity to gain knowledge that aids the tribe.

To accomplish this, many shamans attempt to enter alternate states of consciousness through various means. Such means include drumming, fasting, sweating, or dancing. It also might include use of entheogenic substances – i.e. psychoactive substances taken from nature (various hallucinogenic mushrooms, vines, leaves, cacti).

The term "entheogen," referring not only to natural psychoactives but to artificial ones as well, indicates by its etymology a substance that "brings God within a person." It is religious, spiritual, a shift in consciousness that is divine and multi-dimensional. A drug taken for purposes of recreation is not, at its core, entheogenic. The same drug taken for purposes of enlightenment or spiritual awakening *is* an entheogen.

The ancient tradition of imbibing or ingesting psychoactive substances for spiritual purposes is not relegated to the distant past or primitive cultures. Use of entheogens is alive and well in modern society, given over to secret sects and hidden cults. These cults are disparate in most ways – in the drugs they prefer (ayahuasca, psilocybin, LSD), the goals they seek (mental evolution, world consciousness, forbidden knowledge), and in the entities with which they supposedly commune (hyperdimensional UFOs, so-called "machine elves," or the soul of the entire world). But for all that separates them, much unites and defines them, as well. Psychoactive substances kick open the doors to their pre-defined perceptions, knocking them permanently off their hinges. Entheogenic cultists speak with entities (or *believe* they speak with entities) about which normal man is plainly unaware. And they attempt to do their own kinds of magic – psychic manipulations, astral travel, prophesying – through this neoteric shamanic tradition.

Does the potential for real magic, or magic found accidentally, exist through entheogens? Does previously-inaccessible knowledge become accessible to those who are willing to sacrifice bits of established perception and sanity on this mad shaman trip? Mages may find that the diffused light of supernal truth waits in this tradition, but

> **FYI**
>
> We aren't advocating the consumption of illegal drugs. **Mage: the Awakening** is a fictional game, and this is a fictional exploration of one aspect — one tradition — of magic. So, stay in school, drink your milk, and don't do drugs.

becoming a part of it and seeing it laid bare is not so simple as eating magic mushrooms and going on a head trip. No, the journey to the heart of this tradition is a labyrinthine one, signposted with a number of powerful personalities, lunatic dogma and incomprehensible rituals. A mage can learn much from the entheogen cults. But she can lose much to them, as well – including herself.

History

Shamanism, as noted, has been around for thousands of years. This particular tradition, however, where anybody can arguably consume an entheogenic substance and perform certain rites and customs to gain a kind of magical awareness, is fairly modern. One could further argue that its origins lie in the invention of Lysergic acid dithylamide (LSD) in the late 1930s. The drug, along with psilocybin mushrooms, saw use as an aid to psychotherapeutic treatments. Doctors dosed the mentally ill – schizophrenics in particular – to help open up and explore the disease. At the same time, the drug found use in less altruistic avenues: both the British and American governments used LSD as a tool to ameliorate the effects of brainwashing and interrogation techniques, generally without the consent (or knowledge) of the dosed.

In the early 1960s, two Harvard psychology professors, Drs. Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert, studied the effects of LSD on students and professors in a consensual analysis. The results suggested that the drug opened a doorway to spiritual enlightenment; not entirely strange, given that psychoactive substances have been a part of religious ceremonies throughout cultures both extant and extinct. Leary, already having taken psilocybin-laced tequila in Mexico years before, became a champion of the drug's effects, even after it was banned in 1967. He was later fired from Harvard.

Until his death in 1996, Leary ended up the most public proponent for the entheogenic experience. Flitting around the world (often hounded by the authorities), Leary proselytized hallucinogens, tying them at times to Eastern philosophy, the occult magic of Aleister Crowley, and both virtual reality and the Internet. While Leary was the most public proselyte of the entheogenic experience, however, he was far from the only one.

Cults of Personality

The entheogenic movement is marked by a series of strong personalities. These personalities shepherd their individual entheogenic movements as a central figure who designs some of the movement's core dogma. Some are willing leaders, others end up as powerful personalities only by default.

Terrence McKenna is often considered as much a godfather to the entheogenic movement as Leary. Leary's partner, Richard Alpert, remains a potent spiritual leader (now calling himself Baba Ram Dass). A more modern proponent of the neoteric shamanic tradition is Daniel Pinchbeck. We don't have the room to describe these strong personalities and their visions here; doing so could take more pages than this book has in its binding. For a good primer, we recommend Terrence McKenna's *True Hallucinations* and Daniel Pinchbeck's *Breaking Open the Head*. Both are useful in that they combine a kind of travelogue "adventure" with shamanic, entheogenic theory. This combination should be what drives the **Mage: The Awakening** story, as well.

Bottom line is, assume that every cult is guided by the firm hand and strange mind of a powerful personality. This personality is the one who sets the tone for the cult's habits, beliefs, and ceremonies. The way that Supernal truth shines upon these cults is through such a strong cult leader. He is the prism that refracts it. The truth becomes his.

Researching the Cults

Certainly research can help a mage break into some rudimentary understanding of the entheogen cults. A base research attempt requires six successes, with each roll representing 30 minutes of research. That only provides a place to start, however — some names, maybe a news story or two, possibly a blog or three. The entheogen cults walk a fine line in that they want people to know about them, but they don't want to bring the authorities crashing upon them. And so they leave behind a kind of breadcrumb trail. A mage must follow this trail (and more of this is described below under the Storytelling section).

Assume that from that jumping off point, the mage's research must be conducted largely through interview and actual experience. All of this represents a path marked by trial: the mage will be tested by the cultists to determine her value and commitment to uncovering these new ideas. It will *certainly* involve the intake of psychoactives.

Culture and Philosophy

Below is an exploration of the cultural and philosophical cornerstones of the entheogenic cults.

Psychoactive Systems

The systemic effects for consuming a hallucinogenic substance are found on p. 177 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. However, not every entheogen provides the exact same effects. Below are a number of psychoactives, with rules dictating how they might vary from the base level hallucinogen system. This list is not exhaustive, providing only a sampling for your game.

DMT: Dimethyltryptamine is a naturally-occurring chemical that is also present in the human body in small amounts (used for metabolism). It can also be synthesized in the lab. Most commonly taken from the ayahuasca vine (South America). Dice penalties up to minus five dice, but trip only lasts for (60 minus Stamina + Composure dots) minutes.

Ibogaine: Alkaloid found in dogbane plants. Causes intense trip. Character suffers -5 dice pool for up to (48 minus Stamina) hours. Has profound effects: cures opiate or nicotine addictions, and with a successful Resolve + Composure roll, can cure one mild derangement (roll made at trip's end). Character can also choose to change his Virtue *or* Vice after his first ibogaine trip.

LSD: Mild chemically-synthesized hallucinogen. Mild to moderate dosage causes -2 dice penalty. Strong dosage assumes -3 dice penalty. Penalty doesn't apply to any Physical roll. Lasts for (8 minus Stamina) hours. Secondary effects lasts for (24 minus Stamina) hours, where character gains +1 to any Wits or Composure rolls, and -1 to any (non-Composure) Social rolls.

Mushrooms: So-called "magic mushrooms" or "shrooms" are generally of the psilocybin or fly agaric varieties. Can cause ataxia, conferring a -2 penalty to all Physical rolls, but it can increase mental acuity, granting +1 to Mental (and Perception) rolls. Lasts for (7 minus Stamina) hours.

Peyote: Taken from small ball cactus (Mexico and American Southwest). Can cause -2 to Physical rolls, -1 to Social, and +1 to Mental (and Perception) rolls. Lasts for (13 minus Stamina) hours.

At the end of any trip, a character should roll Resolve + Composure. Failure indicates suffering Hallucinogen Persisting Perception Disorder for one week. Dramatic failure means that HPPD is permanent (until cured). Information on this derangement can be found in the sidebar on p. 137.

Drugs and Magic

At a cult's core lies a simple truth: mystical power is within reach for those willing to consume psychoactive substances. Entheogenic drugs open the doors to perception, and once those are open, theoretically anything is possible. Some term it "magic," others think it as evolution, psychic ability, or powers granted by entities from beyond this reality. The thing to remember is that every psychoactive substance is different, providing effects at least slightly different from one another. As such, some cults adopt a tack that assumes certain rituals (or spells) can only be completed with certain reagents (meaning particular entheogens). A rote to commune with nature spirits may involve consuming natural mushrooms – psilocybin or fly agaric. One that demands speaking with ghosts or summoning internal power equivalent to that of a panther might necessitate the consumption of a tea brewed from ayahuasca (also known as the "Vine of the Dead"). Ibogaine alkaloids may figure into a rote that completely and utterly changes the self, meant to hone the mind, sharpen reflexes and purify the spirit. While some cults rely on the use of only one particular substance (something DMT-based, for instance), others open the field and accept that the varied effects of different entheogens grant access to unique magic abilities. (The following sidebar will help provide some varying mechanical effects for different psychoactive substances.)

Revelations of the Entheogen

Different cults advocate different mystical paths to enlightenment. When designing an entheogenic cult, pick as many of these as you feel are suitable for the group's habits and traditions.

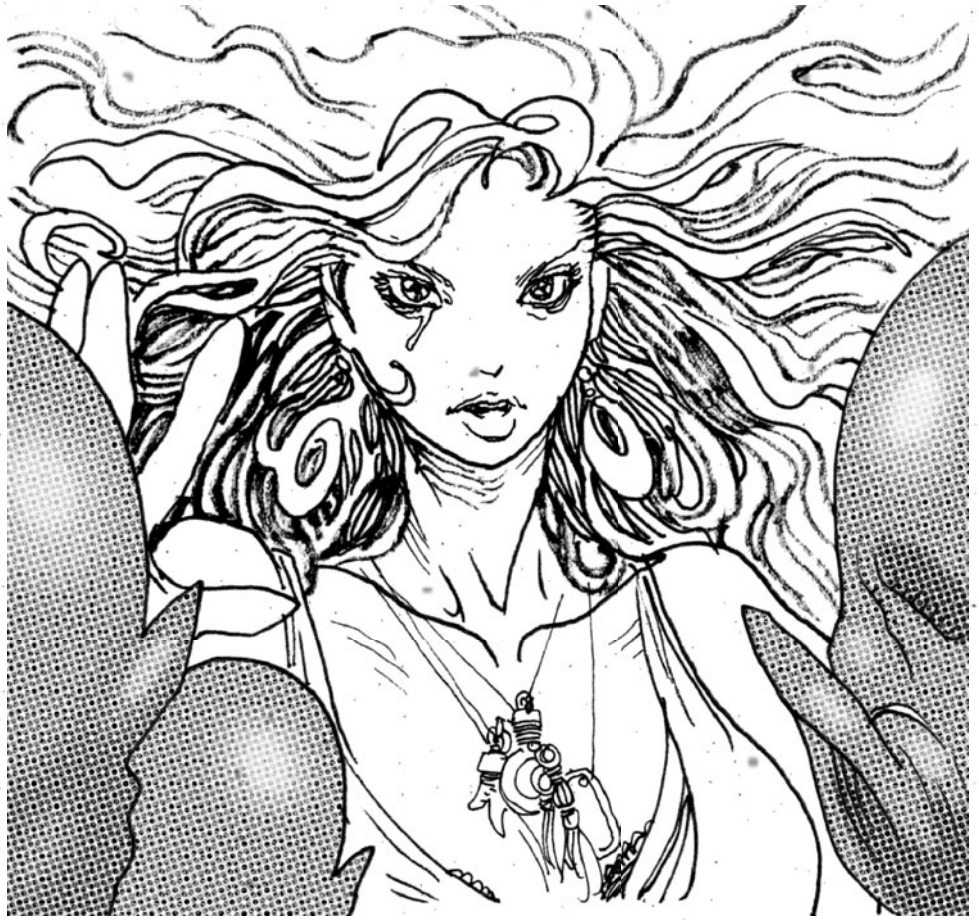
Evolution: A number of entheogenic proponents come to believe that the enlightenment brought on by the consumption of psychoactive substances pushes mankind to mental, spiritual, social, and even physical evolution. Terrence McKenna, for instance, purported the "Stoned Ape" theory, in which apes came down from the trees to pursue the ingestion of hallucinogenic mushrooms.

These mushrooms also gave the apes greater mental awareness and visual acuity. The primates who partook of the mushrooms were therefore subject to evolutionary advantages. Other evolutionary assumptions are that the mental and spiritual shifts brought on by entheogens will become so profound that those who partake will not be human, but "transhuman."

Prophecy: Some cults incorporate prophecy into their rituals. This prophecy can be a reinterpretation of old prophesying (Nostradamus, the Mayans, Edgar Cayce) or may involve using entheogens to contribute new insight using psychoactive divination. A few cults are apocalyptic, studying or channeling prophecy that foretells the end of the world. Most see the end of the world as a thing that is good, or at least can be made good (a transhumanist perspective). A rare few, however, see the end as a bad and permanent thing that either must be stopped, or *cannot* be stopped and therefore demands a moral-free ecstatic existence (or "ride") until it all comes crashing down. Daniel Pinchbeck, for instance, believes that 2012 is the year the world will end, requiring a transhumanist shift.

Entities: Some entheogenic practitioners believe that they commune with entities from outside this world. Such entities may be the ubiquitous "machine elves" seen as a part of most DMT-based experiences, while others may see angels, demons, gods, UFOs, aliens, ghosts, or totemic animals. Some see a language that only they can understand. This language, known as the Logos, is often seen written on the ground or on walls, and many believe it is the world (sometimes known as Gaia) communicating with them.

Conspiracy: The ingestion of illicit substances can lead to two effects, one good and one negative. The good is an increased awareness and level of perception. The bad is that it sometimes stirs paranoia or enflames mental illness. Combine these two effects, and sometimes users are able to see elements and connections that are either there but are difficult to see, or are able to "see" connections that don't actually exist. Because of this, some cults end up rather conspiracy-minded, seeing connections between events that may be true, or may suffer from the fallacy of the single cause. Some conspiracies are simple, focusing on the government's crackdown on entheogenic substances (the assumption being that entheogens might make a once-passive population restive), while others are elaborate conspiracies about 9/11, UFO cover-ups and abductions, assassinations, foreign policy, or mind control.



Occult: Some cultists explore variant magical traditions to add to their own understanding. One cult may fold the workings of Crowley into its ethos and rituals, while another may invoke the occult stylings of any of the other traditions found in this book.

Shamanism: Many cults continue the shamanic traditions of aborginal peoples, whether performing the Ibogaine rituals of the Bwiti or the peyote sweat lodges of the Sioux. They commune with nature and its spirits. They also generally believe that the planet has a single consciousness, sometimes called Gaia.

Fortean: Entheogenic adherents may grow focused on strange coincidences in nature as well as other Fortean or paranormal phenomena. Given that a user may witness things that normal man cannot see, it becomes easy to believe in UFOs or Bigfoot or other unusual phenomena.

Glimpses of Atlantis

Terrence McKenna's "Stoned Ape" theory of evolution is one way of imagining the Atlantis myth as viewed through the many lenses of entheogen cults. While not all cults ascribe to the exact nature of the Stoned Ape theory, many *do* believe that ancient civilizations were granted wisdom, even magic, through the consumption of entheogenic substances. Dionysus drank the entheogen wine in the mythical mountainous valley of Nysa. The psychoactive wine (based off of ergot, like LSD) called *kykeon* saw use in *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, and in the ceremonial practice of the Eleusinian Mysteries (which some theorize gave its participants mystical power due to the powerful properties of the entheogenic drink). Kykeon, having been given to the Greeks by the gods – or, in alternate modes of thought, having been concocted by man to honor Demeter – is a perfect example of how wisdom from on-high is given in the form of a hallucinogenic substance. Soma, in the *Rig Veda*, is both a drink and a god, helping men become immortal and destroying "mortal man's deception."

One cult might suggest that the entheogens were given to them by gods so that they may commune with gods, while another may claim that entheogens are a gift from aliens so that we may commune with the aliens. One theory even suggests that the ancients themselves, obviously far wiser than we are now, speak to only those cultists who have ingested the psychoactives. The drugs are a conduit to wisdom. This conduit was forged long ago, by the ancients.

Are the ancients the Atlanteans? Specifically, no, but generally speaking? Possibly. Many cults posit stories regarding ancient civilizations (Lemuria, Mu, Hyperborea) where the people were possessed of great wisdom borne of entheogens. Were the original sorcerers more powerful because of mind-opening psychoactive substances? Was the fall of Atlantis preceded by a sudden dearth of these substances, similar to how McKenna believes that a shortage of entheogenic mushrooms turned the evolving man back to brutality and primitiveness? Mages may find that some of these cults possess old bits of parchment or painted sheets of slate that reveal this theory of an evolved man devolving in this way – sometimes while a grand city sits in ruins.

Worth noting, too, is that some cults believe they're gathering messages from these fallen civilizations and ancient teachers by shifting their perceptions to different dimensions. The drugs "tune" them to different frequencies, and allow them perceptive access to these alternate realities. Are they seeing the Shadow? The wide gulf of Astral Space? Or are they simply hallucinating, their minds inventing this tale wholecloth?

Shifting Symbology

The symbology of the entheogen cults is not etched in stone and is not universally shared between all the sects and groups. The entheogenic tradition is somewhat unique in this, because as it stands, the potent personalities shepherding these cults are also the personalities that earmark which symbols (and, by proxy, which foci) are most significant to that particular cult.

For instance, a cult focused on interaction between its members and hyperdimensional UFO beings is going to have a wildly different symbology than a sect of urban "rust" shamans who communicate with a city's "spirit" through massive doses of LSD.

The UFO cult may hold important the symbols of bright, flashing lights (symbolizing not only what they see when they commune with aliens, but also representing that kind of "flash of enlightenment" as experienced by Saul on the road to Damascus in the Bible). They may keep fetish objects to use in rituals (foci) such as a keychain with a gray alien's face as the fob, a massive crop circle that counts as an "altar," or even small bits of twisted shrapnel found in the earth and believed to be from some hyperdimensional spaceship.

The urban shamans may believe that the map of the subway lines represents the synaptic map of the city's "brain," and may believe the subway itself is a crucial focus for all the magic it performs in and for the city proper. The leader may wield a rusty hunk of conduit as a scepter of power, and may weave for his children a quilt of "sacred" rags picked up off the streets.

Some cults focus on mythological symbology: the 2012 apocalyptic date is from the Mayans, and so Mayan ideas and symbols work their way into the entheogenic tradition with the same frequency as those from Greek mythology (like Eris, the goddess of chaos with her apple, or like Demeter the Earth mother and Dionysus the bacchanalian reveler).

One thing to note is that every cult counts as a focus some kind of psychoactive substance. Usually, each sect holds crucial one or two predominant drugs as its magical foci of choice. A cult in the deserts of the American Southwest is likely to consider peyote its sacred substance (though it may occasionally import *yage* tea from the Amazon jungle, too). A city sect may use LSD or lab-made DMT. A group of hipster "witches" might concoct heady brews of Fly Agaric mushrooms or even nightshade. The entheogen is key to the magical tradition. Assume that at least some of the symbology espoused by a cult (and more importantly the chief personality of that cult) is often born of the visions experienced from the consumption of such divine hallucinogens.

Magic and Mushrooms

Those within the entheogenic tradition don't generally know of "real" magic as the Awakened do, but one can assume that what they hope to achieve (or what they believe is "possible" through the consumption of psychedelics) is demonstrated by a number of Major Arcana. Life, Mind, Space and Spirit are probably key to the mindset of this tradition. Fate, Prime and Time are interesting abstractly, but one can argue that what the tradition knows (or thinks it knows) about magic is simply too rudimentary to be exemplified by these Arcana. Death and Matter might be considered Minor Arcana in that they simply don't concern themselves with the gross physicality of this world or of the entropic winnowing of life.

The Reality of Unreality

Most, mages included, assume that what occurs to a person while undergoing a psychoactive experience is false. It is hallucination; utterly unreal. This is true most of the time. Sometimes, though, the purported illusions of a head-trip are more real than one might expect. They certainly *feel* real while under the influence. Does this somehow make them real? Or do the drugs truly allow one to access new realities? Below are a few ways the "doors of perception" might be thrown open, revealing different glimpses of unreality made real. (These are certainly not exhaustive, and as player or Storyteller you're encouraged to think up your own glimpses of the supposedly imaginary.)

Into Astral Neighborhoods

The drugs might allow the user's consciousness to travel astrally for a time. Rules for astral projection apply, although no Demesne is required. Alternately, the headtripper's consciousness stays in the material realm but he is somehow able to *perceive* astral elements – the journeys of others, for instance, like silver ghosts flitting in the sky or stars above – but fails to actually achieve the journey himself.

(Some headtrippers refer to "astral neighborhoods," and claim that entire worlds – trees, bricks, clouds – can be born of thought and ideas. Is it true? Can ideas somehow be used to craft seemingly physical items? Isn't that what magic is, or at least what magic can sometimes do?)

Shaman Sees Twilight

The shaman knows he sees entities in this world existing in a state different from that of the physical. Of course, someone doing drugs may not be so aware as a primeval shaman, and may not *know* that what he's seeing isn't a hallucination but a ghost or elemental or fly-spirit. Entheogens can pierce this veil at times, making invisible beings visible to the user.

What about the Shadow? Do entheogens allow for a user to cross over to the Spirit Realm? Not usually, though it's not impossible. Some verges do exist that have "keys," or certain conditions that must be met before they will open. Sacred entheogens coursing through one's system is one such key for a rare few verges, and woe to the unaware user who crosses the Gauntlet by dint of being dosed.

Supernal Journey

Some mages claim that entheogens – particularly strong ones like ibogaine, or mild ones made strong through high doses – can open the door to a rare Supernal journey, in which great wisdom and information is parlayed to the user.

The veracity of such a claim is highly debatable. The mage who believes he has undergone such an experience is obviously changed in some way, but mortals who trip out on their first hit of acid often feel that they are radically different, too. Could it be the drugs simply doing their job? Can the psychoactive experience mimic a seemingly real journey to enlightenment?

Most mages refuse to believe it's possible. They expect that, if it's not born of the drugs, then it's spirits playing havoc with the user's perceptions, or worse, a trip to the Abyss.

Places That Do Not Exist

Some mages claim to have seen realms and vistas while tripping on an entheogen, planes of existence that few others (or no other) has witnessed. One Free Council mage believes to have seen a place where machine and flesh works together, blood pumping through rubber hosing, gears turning in a great God Machine made partly of skin and bone, with holy fire fueling the place in a vast furnace. Another mage claims that "magic mushrooms" allowed him to delve within a wide expanse of thorns, and a hazy realm beyond it that looks of something out of a dream (but the mage could not traverse the briar maze without the thorns snagging on his skin and soul).

Are these places real? It seems like no, they can't be, they're just manufactured from the interaction of drugs with an Awakened soul. But some mages certainly think they're real. And some have returned with real, *tangible* evidence of such trips – an odd leaf that smells of blood and cinnamon, a black coin with a dried human eye pressed and flattened into the metal. Some haven't returned at all, which is the most damning proof that sometimes psychoactives open the door to places nobody wants to see.



Merits

Below are Merits potentially possessed by members of the entheogenic tradition.

Entheogenic Synesthesia (●)

Effect: While under the effects of a psychoactive drug, the character experiences synesthesia, where her senses blur together (she can "taste" music, perhaps, or "hear" colors). This grants her an added level of awareness, as her perceptions are bolstered by more than one sense. While on the drug, she not only experiences no dice penalties to her Perception rolls, but also gains +1 to any Perception rolls.

Trip Sitter (●●●)

Prerequisite: Composure • • •

Effect: Your character has some skill when it comes to guiding others through intense psychoactive head trips. Perhaps it's a soothing voice or calming presence, or maybe you've just been through enough entheogenic experiences to know what effects are going to hit the user, and when. In your presence, a user can ignore up to two dice of penalties while undergoing her trip. If you're present at the end of the experience, as well, the user gains +3 dice to the Resolve + Composure roll made to resist Hallucinogen Persisting Perception Disorder (see sidebar below).

Entheogenic Resonance

As noted earlier in the book, a magical tradition contains enough glimmers and sparks of Supernal wisdom to shift Resonance both subtly and not-so-subtly. Below are brief descriptions as to how they might happen from both mortal and mage action.

Sleeper Resonance

Not everybody who takes a psychedelic drug believes in the entheogenic tradition. Few truly do. But those who are given over to the experience, embracing the spiritual and religious aspect of it, can alter Resonance. The Resonance takes on mild effects of a hallucination – a mage might see trails, vibrations, or experience synesthesia. Some things might become anthropomorphized for a moment, and seem to be alive when they are not. A mage might feel watched. Or she might see lights in the sky, ala UFOs or hyperdimensional travelers.

Mage Resonance

When a mage performs magic under the Supernal wisdom of the entheogenic tradition, the magical stamp is quite apparent (even if one does not know what it

Hallucinogen Persisting Perception Disorder (mild)

This derangement causes the character to suffer lingering visual effects — trails, halos, floating spots in the eye, mixed-up colors. (The severe version of this derangement is Schizophrenia, found on p. 99 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.)

Effect: If a character's roll fails, she is overwhelmed by subtle but persistent visual hallucinations. For the remainder of the scene, she suffers -1 to all Mental rolls except Perception, which suffer a -3 dice penalty.

indicates). A spell might reveal the perceptive divinities behind the rote (a ghostly image of Bacchus squeezing grapes into his mouth or Xoxopelli doing a hypnotic dance while orbited by shimmering flowers). Others see the plants behind the magic – rings of mushrooms, fat coils of ayahuasca vine, cacti dribbling golden fluids.

Entheogenic Rotes

The rotes below represent key ceremonies of the entheogen cults. Note that, for the most part, such rotes are performed by mortals and as such do not achieve much – if any – magical effect. When some glimpse of magic is achieved, the results can be dangerous and damning to a cultist's soul and sanity (but, for some, it can also be enlightening).

Playback Vision (Mind ●●)

The mage can "record" a hallucinogenic vision (though it needn't be purely visually-driven, and can feature input from all the senses) and "play it back" to himself or to another individual.

Practice: Ruling

Action: Instant (subtract target's Resolve)

Duration: Prolonged (length of vision; likely one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

The mage can playback one hour of the hallucinatory experience per success. (Most trips can therefore be re-played by a single success, but more intense and lengthy trips such as those experienced under Ibogaine might take several attempts with this spell to accurately revisit.)

Note that the target, be it the mage himself or a target victim, experiences the entire hallucination; with that come any of the systemic effects of the drug's presence in one's system *except* for the chemical signatures. In other words, the target would still gain any bonuses and suffer any penalties from the hallucination. However, a drug test would reveal no psychoactives in the target's system.

The only difference is that the target is fully aware that she is experiencing a hallucination. She can easily differentiate between reality and vision.

If the target is willing to receive the vision, her Resolve is not subtracted from the mage's casting roll.

Tradition Rote: Shamanic Communion

Dice Pool: Stamina + Expression + Mind

In times past, a shaman would communicate with and do battle with spirits to gain the knowledge his village needed. However, the village could not properly parse the knowledge as the shaman understood it. Moreover, such information could not be conveyed meaningfully through mere words or miming.

As such, the village would gather together to experience what the shaman experienced. To do so, they all drank from a cup of the shaman's urine. The urine delivered unto them the magic of the experience (and, as some scientists suggest, traces of the psychoactive chemical leaving the bloodstream via the waste).

This rote is much the same. The chief "shaman" (likely the cult leader) delivers unto the sect his urine. They drink it. They gain the visions he experienced.

The urine is, of course, the chief focus here. Some other "blessing" mechanism must come in play, similar to the Catholics aspergillum. Some shake a bone over the cup, others might wave a rusty pipe over it, or a branch from a purportedly "sacred" tree.

The final focus is, as always, the entheogen in the bloodstream.

The Divining Spirit (Spirit ●●●+ Time ●●●)

The mage summons a greater spirit from the Shadow Realm, likely unknown to her. This spirit is not drawn from the current Shadow Realm, however, but is drawn from the Shadow's past or future for divinatory purposes.

Practice: Weaving

Action: Extended (target number = Rank spirit sought) and contested; roll target's Resistance

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Vulgar

Cost: 1 Mana

The spirit called is generally unknown, and is drawn from the local area Shadow Realm's past and future (unless the mage uses Space 2 to extend his senses). The time period by which the spirit is called is also unknown – it may be summoned from the recent future or the distant past.

The mood of the spirit is often confused and maddened, though usually the dizzying effect upon the spirit keeps it from being outright hostile. That being said, the spell does not provide any kind of protection against the spirit; if it chooses to bring harm in some way to the participants, the spell offers no bulwarks against such an action.

The spirit summoned remains near the mage for the spell's Duration, unless the sorcerer allows it to leave.

Tradition Rote: Mystery of the Barley Wine

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion + Spirit vs. Resistance

This rote provides a modern refashioning of the ceremonies at Eleusis, particularly those that initiated a participant into the Eleusinian Mysteries.

In the Greek rites of old, the cultists drank from a heady entheogenic brew of what was believed to be barley, water,

and pennyroyal (a slightly toxic variety of strong mint). Honey was often added for flavor, and the modern version has it, as well. Some speculate that the entheogen of the brew came from empurpled barley, whose color was granted by the psychoactive ergot fungus that grew upon it. Others believe it the combination of the toxic mint and the fermentation of the brew contributed toward visions.

Here, modern participants of this ritual add their own hallucinogen – most prefer to add something natural (mushrooms, extract of ayahuasca, peyote), but some will add synthetics like LSD or lab-DMT to the brew.

The drink provides the first focus of the rote, and to a point, the hallucinogen *in* the drink is the second focus. Participants must gulp, not sip, the brew. The third focus is a copy of one of Homer's books: likely *The Iliad* or *The Odyssey*, though the anonymous (but oft-attributed to him) *Homeric Hymns* work just as well. The caster must read from random passages from the text. The nature of the passages matters little. The simple repetition of these ancient words is believed to form a conduit between past, present and future through which the gods can travel.

(Note that some mages set a conditional duration upon this spell for the sake of safety. That condition is met when the Homeric text is closed. With the clap of the book's closing, the "god" is banished.)

Note that this rote does not have a condition of environment (it can be performed anywhere, whether in the middle of a circle of stones or in a dark attic strewn with old toys), but it does have a temporal condition. It must be performed at dawn or dusk; at any other time, the rote fails. Improvised casting has no such restrictions.

Gleaning the Crowd (Mind ●●●●)

With this spell, the mage psychically projects his consciousness into Twilight amid a crowd of gatherers. Once there, he can plumb the depths of the crowd's aggregate minds, creating in some fashion one giant brain (crowd represents new synapses, and the caster forges between himself and the crowd new synaptic connections, making a massive – if temporary – neural network).

Practice: Patterning
Action: Instant
Duration: Prolonged (one scene)
Aspect: Vulgar
Cost: 1 Mana

The rules are the same for the Psychic Projection spell (pp. 215-216, **Mage: The Awakening**). However, while moving about Twilight, the mage's projection can move seamlessly through the gathered minds, learning new things. After the scene is over and the mage returns to his body, he learns a number of new Skill points equal to his Gnosis score, with the player essentially adding temporary dots to the character's current or non-existent Skill ratings. No more than two dots can be added to a single Skill in this way.



The Skill boost is temporary, lasting for 24 hours. After the 24 hours, the Skill dots "burn off" at the rate of one dot per hour (Storyteller's choice as to what order they fade). With Storyteller approval, however, this spell may make a good excuse for spending XP to purchase and keep the Skill points gained. If no XP is spent, no points are kept.

Tradition Rote: Surfing the Sacred Convergence

Dice Pool: Presence + Occult + Mind

Entheogenic cults are known for their ceremonial festivals – from the Harmonic Convergence in the late 1980s (a moment that supposedly began the world's temporal trek to the year 2012 when humanity would either end or evolve), to the current annual Burning Man Festival. The goal of the gathering matters little (Burning Man offers a generic focus on creativity, self-reliance, and ecstasy while something like the Harmonic Convergence was a conscious attempt to turn humanity's collective soul toward positive karma and dharma), but the gathering of people *is* a focus. Also important is that a number of the gatherers must be operating with some manner of psychoactive in their bloodstream (the number of dosed individuals isn't a hard or fast number, but one can assume that approximately 1/4 of the attendees should have recently imbibed some kind of entheogen).

Another focus of the festival is a key symbol that serves as the literal center of the activities. At Burning Man, it is obviously the giant effigy (which may actually burn or may be a figure comprising neon tubes and car parts), while at other ceremonial festivals it may be a central tree representing Axis Mundi or a sacred figure (such as *Om*, some kind of Buddhist mandala, or a figure from Native American or Japanese symbology) laid across or etched into the ground.

Music is the final focus. It may come from a drum circle, or may instead be trance music pulsing from a tower of speakers. It doesn't matter what kind of music it is, only that it's loud enough for the crowd to hear it.

The caster then literally surfs the crowd – they pick him up and carry him about. While atop the crowd, he projects psychically, his limp body carried by the crowd until the scene's end.

Magical Item: Soma

What is Soma? Mythically, it's an Indo-Iranian drink with the earmark of an entheogen. In both Hindu and Zoroastrian myth, the drink is believed to be both a god and the product of a god. It could grant a mortal man a number of divine qualities as well as providing him with visions.

Does Soma exist in the real world? Does it have botanical origins? Some speculate that Soma might be a brew of Fly Agaric mushrooms, while others ascribe it to a number of medicinal plants (such as Ephedra) that grant stimulating or hallucinogenic effects. Does it grow in dry mountain passes, or is it a golden reed that lurks at the river's edge? Few know, and for the purposes of the two magical items below, it matters little. These items exist, one created by god, one created by sorcerer. (One last connection worth noting in regards to the entheogen cults is that Soma is also the name of the narcotic tranquilizer used in *Brave New World*, a book often found in the collections of tradition cultists.)

Whether a mage is using the two versions noted below or some other mythic and magical version, all types of Soma have a few common effects beyond the magical ones listed. First, Soma is a mild hallucinogen. In this case, however, the psychoactive properties bring no downsides. The trip is mild, providing aural and visual hallucinations that can be distinguished from reality without a roll, and as such they provide no dice penalties. These mild psychoactive effects also grant a +1 to the drinker's Perception rolls for the remainder of the scene.

The drink is also very fragrant (attempts to perceive it by scent gain a +3 bonus to that Perception roll), and has an overpowering taste of honey. The taste is so sweet that a character must succeed on a Stamina + Resolve roll to keep from throwing it up (however, throwing up after consumption does not obviate the drink's effects).

Soma as Artifact (●●●●●●●)

This Soma is that from Hindu myth. The Rig Veda describes it thusly: "We have drunk Soma and become immortal; we have attained the light, the Gods discovered." In legend, true Soma is no longer accessible by mortals for the gods have removed it from this world. However, it is believed that some mages possess the capability of apologizing to the gods (and using magic and perhaps entheogens to ensure that the apology reaches their distant or alien ears) and thus once again gaining access to the powerful divine drink of Soma. Assume that those seeking Soma must brave a number of dangers to find it. The Soma is always guarded by a door that only those under the spell of a psychoactive substance will recognize as a door. The mage must apologize to the door using passages from the Rig Veda to access.

The artifact itself is a small urn filled with the golden liquid. The artifact contains enough for only two drinks. Once imbibed, the artifact is rendered null (though some say that the urn itself is perhaps a whole other artifact).

The immortality posited by this drink is not so simply a measure of man's length of life, but instead refers to the

nature of divinity. Divinity is everlasting, even if the body is not. This drink allows the imbiber to reach one of the general goals of the entheogen cults, which is a kind of evolution.

Upon taking the drink, the Soma is permanently bound to the blood and soul. The mage may, once having consumed the Soma, choose a single legendary or mythical shape (see both Life ••••• spells Fantasia and Greater Shapechanging for ideas) for herself. This shape, once chosen, is coded into her blood, written upon her soul with the raw fire of godliness. Once per day, she can change into this shape for a single scene. This is persistent and does not end, providing a permanent benefit to the mage until the end of her life. She has, in some way, transcended her humanity and become something akin to the immortal gods who delivered Soma.

Soma as Imbued Item (●●●●●)

From the texts of the Zoroastrian Avesta, Soma (also called Haoma) grants "speed and strength to warriors, excellent and righteous sons to those giving birth, and spiritual power and knowledge to those who apply themselves to study." Haoma as a magical item is focused predominantly on that latter portion regarding spiritual power and knowledge.

It is a golden liquid that comes usually in an unadorned green bottle with a teardrop shape. Accessing its power only requires the consumption of a single drop upon the tongue, thus granting the item a relatively long life of use. (Though some, upon encountering it, might greedily suck it down – an act which grants no additional benefit beyond that gleaned from the one-tongue drop.)

The item, contingent upon drinking a single drop, provides two benefits in tandem, and one side-effect that isn't really a benefit or a detriment.

The first benefit counts toward the "spiritual power." It cloaks the drinker in an invisible yet palpable aura of power. Upon performing the drop-drinking trigger, the caster's player makes the spellcasting roll (equal to caster's Gnosis + two dice for this Mind effect). Successes on this roll can be added as extra dice to any Presence rolls made until the effects end.

The second benefit is that the caster gains the 9 Again rule on any Intelligence or Wits rolls made for the duration of the drink's effects. (Mind •••)

The side effect is that the character's Vice shifts to Pride for the following week. If her Vice already was listed as Pride, then nothing changes. At the end of the week, her Vice shifts back, as to her means of gaining Willpower accordingly.

The drink's primary effects last for a single scene. It can only be used once per day in this manner. It requires no Mana expenditure to use.

Storytelling

It's true that every entheogen cult is a little different from the next, but each sect still upholds some universal themes and traditions that you can grab hold of for use in a **Mage: The Awakening** story.

Wonderland, Of Sorts

It might be easiest to pattern a story involving entheogenic traditions a little bit after *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The Lewis Carroll story involves eating strange substances (tea parties, "Eat me," and "Drink me"), meeting bizarre characters (cultists, hyperdimensional spirits, abstract entities), suffering hallucinogenic visions (floating feline grins, hookah-smoking caterpillars, a baby that changes into a pig), and encountering madness in many forms (Mad Hatter, insane logic, riddles without answers). So too with dealing with one of these cults.

A mage trying to penetrate a cult for her own purposes is likely to encounter a similar journey. It may involve going down some kind of "rabbit's hole" into an underworld either physical (a basement or a subterranean club) or metaphorical (a criminal or countercultural underground). The mage is likely to encounter several odd, even dangerous personalities, and be put through various tests of trust (instead of a cake reading "Eat me," it'll likely be some kind of psychoactive substance).

It's not a journey with an easy or fast end. The mage won't simply be allowed to meet the cult's central figure on the first day – no, the character or characters must chase this central figure like the story's White Rabbit. Trials must be persevered. The ego must be damaged or destroyed. The mage must change a small part of herself – or at least fake it really well – to be allowed into see the White Rabbit (or, for a different allusion, The Wizard of Oz).

The thing to remember about these cults is that they're not generally isolated. They, as modern shamans, see themselves as having knowledge and wisdom that the world needs. This wisdom is technically meant to be free, but it's only free to those who want it. The cults generally believe that deceitful elements seek to undo their good work. In some cases, this breaks down to conspiracy-level thinking ("the government is trying to numb our brains so that they can keep us passive"), but often enough it's simply the practical thinking of drug users (avoiding jail time for possession of illicit substances). Hence, characters must prove to the sect that they truly wish to possess the wisdom obtained by the cult and that, perhaps more importantly, they aren't working for any kind of authority real or imagined. Does this mean

Story Hooks

• A cabal of mages, with little direct interest in learning about or joining the entheogenic tradition, discovers that a local entheogen cult holds what may be a book of ancient Atlantean lore. Other rumors suggest that this book was actually penned by one of the cultists themselves while tripping out on DMT. To investigate, the mages must infiltrate the group which will surely involve them partaking in the consumption of the sacred psychoactives. Can they maintain their sanity? Can they realize that some glimpses of true magic exist in what the cult purports as its own "truth?"

• The cabal finds itself between two warring entheogen cults. At first, the war was ideological — an urban shamanic group went vocally toe-to-toe with a group of radical environmentalists who speak to "Gaia" and believe that the world is going to end in 2012 during a terrible apocalypse. Does it matter who's right when both sides are attracting the interest of mortal authorities? When they start waging violence against one another, does the cabal step in? Can the mages convince these groups that, in *some* way, both are right? What happens when the groups find out about the mage meddling, and doses the character unknowingly with psychoactives?

• Upon exploring the truth of a local entheogen cult, the cabal undergoes the psychoactive experience. And thus begins the story. The entire story, which may take many sessions to play out, is told as one massive hallucination. The story provides an epic backdrop with great wisdom coming from on high. Battles with powerful spirits may be front and center, as is a potent war of metaphor against metaphor. Have fun with this story. Evoke crazy imagery. Subvert expectations (maybe the players don't know that it's all a hallucination until it begins to build by the third or fourth session). That's not to say that this story is meaningless — no, what happens in the vision really occurs, even if it doesn't "happen" on any physical plane. But what they do changes things in the world around them, even when they wake up from the trip and realize that, despite having been "gone" for weeks, only an hour has really passed. (A story like this should provide at least one Arcane Experience point. More if the journey was particularly profound.)

taking the substances the cult holds dear? Definitely, and probably in sometimes troublesome quantities. But it's more than that. It's about a willingness to show change, to have one's mind and spirit shift, to have those internal (and mystical) doorways open.

It'll be difficult for some mages. Mages are children of hubris, by and large, and may not easily admit that these humans possess wisdom that the mages themselves do not.

Sample Cults

The following example cults can be fleshed-out and dropped into any **Mage: The Awakening** game using the entheogenic tradition in its story.

Sacrament of the Earth Temple

On the surface, the Earth Temple seems to be a peace-loving community in the deserts of the American Southwest, committed to its universalist "church" where peyote provides the primary sacrament. Composed predominantly of white, once-middle class citizens who have come to desire a "liberation" of flesh and mind from "preconceived reality," the Earth Temple members have grown more and more isolated since its inception over a decade before. The reality is, however, that they condone peace only in the broader sense, and until it can be achieved, they believe that violence is a solution to enduring peace. The Earth Temple stockpiles weapons. Its members engage in fraud, violent protests, and have plotted (but not yet performed) a handful of assassinations. Oh, and then there's all that peyote going around. While some churches have managed to make peyote consumption legal for themselves, the Earth Temple hasn't provided a cogent enough defense of its drug use to earn itself the right. The Earth Temple is a profoundly conspiracy-minded organization that also believes that it communes regularly with Mother Earth and Great Spirit. Both of whom encourage them to take back this world – violently, if necessary. (What's more frightening to some is that occasionally the evidence mounts that suggests the people of the Earth Temple are at least partially right about their conspiratorial suspicions.)

Of particular interest to mages is what the Temple calls the "Natal Tipi," a conical dwelling found somewhere out in Arizona's Sonoran Desert. Missives from over 200

years before indicate that the Patayan tribe of the desert found this tipi here, and believe it has been here for thousands of years. Those who partake of peyote while inside the tipi find that their trip's length is doubled, and they suffer no dice penalties while within the tipi. A stranger benefit is given to those who give birth inside the dwelling. Both mother and child gain two unusual benefits permanently: the Unseen Sense and Eidetic Memory Merits. The Temple claims that this enhanced perception is a gift from Great Spirit.

The Advocates

The Advocates represent something of an intellectual entheogen cult. Unwilling to label their experiences with hard and fast certainties, they take a somewhat scientific approach ("somewhat" being the key; it only falls to such scrutiny when convenient) to the psychoactive experience. The group maintains an anonymous blog online, and publishes a fine-tuned print version of the blog articles once every couple of months. The Advocates themselves are generally young post-academics, though a few aging hipsters linger in their ranks.

The head of the Advocates is a young intellectual, a relative neophyte to the world of entheogens. Shell Delacroix was once an investment banker with a bright future in finance who dabbled in the haute drug culture here and there. A few acid and mushroom trips later, however, seemed to rewire Delacroix's white collar destiny. He became, as his group's name suggests, an advocate for psychoactive use, believing it to be a healthy experience that has a great potential for opening spiritual awareness and aiding psychological ills.

Rumor is, though, that Delacroix is into some strange business. Even his own Advocates don't know what he's entirely up to, if they even suspect at all. Truth behind these rumors is that Delacroix has been making a push to rediscover the mythic brews said to be truly divine. He seeks the recipes that open the door to powerful abilities or allow the gods to manifest in this reality. He hopes to uncover the true ingredients behind the Hindu's Soma, the Zoroastrian Haoma, the Kykeon of the Greeks, or the mushroom meads of South American *curanderos*. What Delacroix is missing, however, is real magic. If he could ally himself with a mage who could complete the faint but potent gaps in his recipes, he might be able to recreate the entheogenic brews.

Psychic Liberation Army

The Psychic Liberation Army (PLA) is listed as a terrorist organization by the FBI. Fronted by a mysterious character known as Betty Blue, this cult believes that an invisible war exists, except the predominant participants – normal citizens – don't know it even exists. This invisible war has been detailed partially in photocopied manifestos or odd fits of rambling propaganda that the group's hackers place over existing websites. This war, loosely detailed, seems to involve a massive conspiracy involving reptilian humanoid aliens (who have invaded the government) and ancient Mayan gods, both of whom seek to imprison man in his own ignorance and mediocrity. The PLA, however, believes it works on the side of a whole other race of hyperdimensional beings that appear as flashing lights preceded by the sound of gears rattling. These beings, which the PLA refers to collectively as "The Consciousness," has long been trying to help mankind ascend to the next stages of psychic awareness. However, the conspiracy by other beings has kept humanity from evolving any further, and instead hopes to invoke devolution.

The PLA is, of course, also a massive entheogen cult. They use and distribute massive quantities of various psychoactives, and its members have been arrested all around the world. Worse, however, is the PLA's tactic in "freeing minds." Its members kidnap unwitting victims and dose them liberally with powerful hallucinogens (often a combination of several substances). It then *abandons* the victims, leaving them just enough clues to find the PLA when the time is right for "enlightenment."

Betty Blue, the group's leader, has never been photographed, and very few can claim to have ever seen her up-close (it doesn't help that she wears a variety of Halloween masks wherever she goes). A number of mage cabals have long speculated that she herself is a mage, perhaps a member of the Free Council, perhaps with her own Legacy. No proof of this exists, however.

One rumor has persisted. Betty Blue, by some reports, is missing one of her eyes and has it replaced with a glass eye. However, some within the Guardians of the Veil believe that this eye is actually a scepter-stone taken from an old Atlantean artifact. Some say it allows half of one's vision to travel back in time and see old Atlantis. Is it true? Does Betty know what she has if it is true? Or, if she possesses such a thing, has she entirely misinterpreted these visions as being something that's happening today in this strange "invisible war" in which the PLA believes?

Sample Spirit

Users of psychedelics often experience sightings of unusual creatures. Below is one such creature, a spirit.

Machine Elves

Quote: *(high-pitched whine)*

Background: After consuming DMT, a potent psychoactive, the headtripper often is able to see spirits known



as "machine elves" (or in the parlance of other entheogen pioneers, "tykes," "self-transforming machine elves," or "fractal elves"). They seem to be carriers of ideas (as Terrence McKenna puts it, "meme traders"), infecting those they visit with new ideas. Some speculate that they are literally messengers from entities that cannot be visible or are unable to visit any of the "local" planes of reality, and the elves' goal is therefore to infect the mind of the witness with the meme, or viral idea, that the more powerful and distant spirit desires to be present in this world. Such distant entities want things that seem beneficial (reduce pollution), while other times they seem to provoke abstract or outright destructive ideas that make little logical sense (disfigure one's own body, steal 99 keys, transmit James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* over pirate radio). Sometimes, headtrippers have a singular name for this distant entity, and they call it The Logos.

Description: Preceded by strange sounds (mechanical whine, the sound of plastic tearing), the elves themselves are often little more than odd shapes moving erratically about. Occasionally one sees the shadow of a small body, or the turning gears of delicate clockwork, but mostly it's all blurs and smears of movement accompanied by the sound of electrical systems or motors working.

Storytelling Hints: Never travel alone. Swarm the user. Infect with idea at any cost.

Rank: 1
Attributes: Power 2, Finesse 4, Resistance 2
Willpower: 4
Essence: 7 (max 10)
Initiative: 6
Defense: 4
Speed: 16
Size: 2
Corpus: 4
Influences: Ideas •••
Numina: Gauntlet Breach, Innocuous, Living Fetter, Meme Infection (see below)
Bans: Cannot appear to a character unless that character is experiencing some kind of entheogenic experience.

New Numina: Meme Infection

This Numina compels a victim to hold a certain idea important, but the key is that the victim believes the idea came from within his own subconscious mind and not from any outside force. Curiously, it doesn't force the victim to *act* on the idea, exactly, only that they keep it and consider it somewhat important (a person can be for animal rights but still eat meat, just as a person can believe murder is just without actually killing anybody).

Spend two Essence and roll the spirit's Power + Finesse versus the opponent's Resolve + Composure score. If the spirit wins the contest, then the victim maintains this idea as important for one month. If the victim wins the contest, the meme fails to take hold. Note that if a meme is particularly bizarre or goes wildly against the victim's belief system, the spirit may suffer up to -3 dice against the Power + Finesse roll. The spirit regains a spent Willpower point whenever it successfully infects a *tripping* individual with a meme.

Option: Things That Are Not

It's not impossible that Machine Elves are from a place that isn't the Shadow, that isn't an Astral realm, but is something else entirely. A realm that mages haven't yet encountered (see earlier in the chapter, "Places That Do Not Exist").

If you choose to go this route, Spirit magic will not work on the Machine Elves, which is a terrible discovery and proof that mages only know part of what's actually going on "out there." For maximum weirdness, what if mortal practitioners of this tradition *do* know how to deal with and affect the Machine Elves? That can be a blow — a much-needed one, for some — to a mage's hubristic ego.

Alternative Magic (Storyteller's Options)

Below are a number of "variable" magic rules you may use in part or in total to slightly alter the metaphysics present in your story.

Entheogenic Benefits

Each entheogen is a little like an ingredient in a recipe; like how flour thickens a gravy or how citric acid can curdle milk, adding in these specific psychoactive ingredients into magic can subtly alter the process of that magic. A character may discover this on accident (simply by performing magic while on a specific substance), or may find this information bound up in old tomes, perhaps indicating that the sorcerers of Atlantis imbibed and ingested certain substances to achieve unique magical effects. Even without Atlantic figuring into the equation, various indigenous cultures use drugs for varying ceremonial and spiritual purposes, and a mage may be able to glean possibility from that fact.

Note that, unless the Storyteller deems otherwise, all these benefits are available only to those who possess the Magical Tradition: Entheogens Merit. The physical bonuses described earlier in the chapter do not require the Merit; the magical bonuses *do*.

Ayahuasca: Consuming the "Vine of the Dead," usually in a tea such as *yagé*, grants a +1 bonus to any magic rolls requiring the Death Arcanum.

Fly Agaric: The *Amanite muscaria* mushroom (Fly Agaric) puts the user deeply in touch with nature, conferring a +1 bonus to any magic rolls requiring the Life Arcanum.

Ibogaine: It is suggested that Ibogaine so removes a person from his own identity for a time that during the duration of the trip, any sympathetic spells cast against the user are penalized for an additional -2 dice, blurring the sympathetic conduit (see pp. 114-115, **Mage: The Awakening**).

LSD: The tweaks to one's awareness allows for the user to gain +1 to any rolls to scrutinize Resonance.

Peyote: Peyote buttons allow a user to reach beyond the veil between worlds, thus providing a +1 bonus to any magic rolls requiring the Spirit Arcanum.

Psilocybin: The inwardly-oriented intensity of these mushrooms provides the user with a +1 bonus to any magic rolls requiring the Mind Arcanum.

Touch of Madness

Entheogens are unpredictable. Nobody experiences the same exact effects twice, thus ensuring a personal journey as unique as a fingerprint or snowflake. Magic in many cases relies on recipe, on rote, but entheogens don't necessarily serve that purpose.

As such, assume that magic performed while on any psychoactive substance suffers a -2 dice penalty if the magic performed is from a rote effect. This doesn't apply to any of the tradition's own rotes, which are meant to be performed while under the influence of psychoactive drugs. *However*, also assume that improvised spells gain a +2 bonus. The randomness of the entheogenic trip opens the mind, unfetters the possibility – hence the bonus.

Off the Grid

Mortals belonging to the cults of the entheogen often drop "off the grid," leaving the world behind in their journey. They aren't connected to the Internet, phone system, and may not have social security numbers, credit cards, or anything else to connect them to the "system." Assume that mortals can therefore purchase and use (to an extent) one dot of the Occultation Merit (p. 86, **Mage: The Awakening**); they cannot purchase more than one dot, though

Accessing Dreams

Assume that any mage consuming a psychoactive substance temporarily gains one automatic dot of the Dream Merit (p. 82, **Mage: The Awakening)** in addition to any dots already possessed. Moreover, the secret Wits + Composure roll made by the Storyteller on behalf of the character gains +2 dice. Entheogens are a certain way to access this primordial sense of self and connect to the larger social, global, and metaphysical consciousness. Mortals can buy this Merit, as well, but it is only possible to activate when on a hallucinogenic substance.

Mage Sight

Entheogens open the senses, both physically and spiritually. Assume that any human who partakes of an entheogen is sometimes able to view Resonance, similar to the effects of one random Arcanum's Mage Sight spell (a list can be found on p. 110 of Mage: The Awakening). The mortal rolls a standard Intelligence + Occult roll (as per "Unveiling Resonance") to access this, but generally doesn't understand the results. He can describe them, to a point, but has little reference as to what it all means.

However, psychedelic drugs can also enhance a mage's own Mage Sight spells when seeking to scrutinize resonance. The mage gains a +2 bonus to the Intelligence + Occult roll used to unveil resonance (pp.277-280, **Mage: The Awakening**).

Sample Character

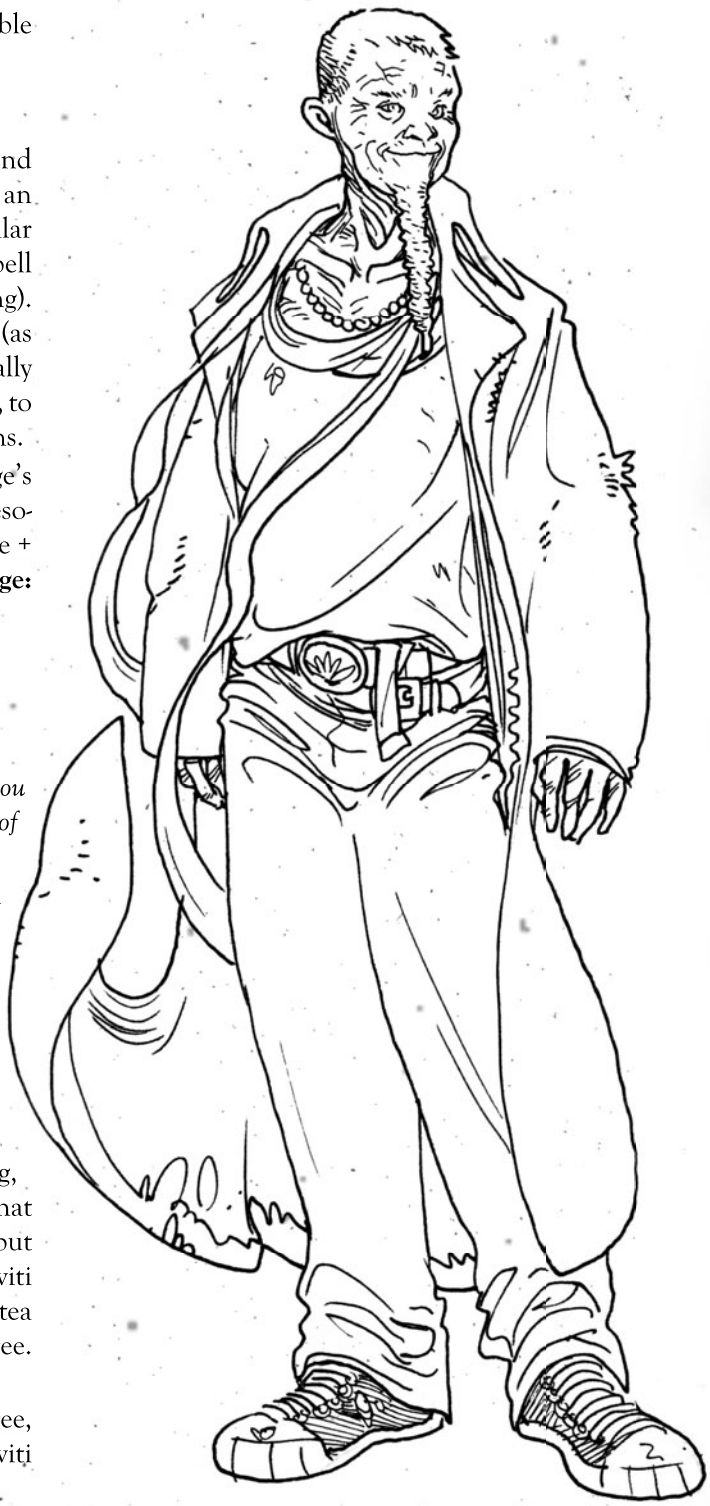
Tabernanthe

Quote: *This is going to be tough, mon capitán. But if you want to hang with me, we've got to first kill that little ego of yours. I'll give you ten minutes to say goodbye.*

Background: Tabernanthe – once Stuart Smith – was a heroin addict with a shattered life. His family was in ruins in the wake of his addiction. He ended up broke and homeless, living on the streets, doing whatever ugly act was necessary to earn him the next fix. Upon overdosing and nearly dying, Smith found himself in the hospital with no family willing to visit him. Only an old college professor of his from NYU, Carl Grunberg, dared to visit. Grunberg, an anthropology professor, set Smith on a journey that would change his life and end his addiction. He put Smith on a plane, and accompanied him to the Bwiti people of Africa. There, the Bwiti dosed him with a tea brewed from extracts from the root of the Iboga tree. The dose was massive.

Ibogaine, an alkaloid found in the root of the tree, is a powerful and long-acting psychoactive. The Bwiti use it as an initiation into the tribe, and make it a fundamental part of various tribal ceremonies. Ibogaine is *also* useful in interrupting opiate addictions, routing the dependency wholesale.

It worked, but the trip wasn't easy. The effects of the entheogen lasted well over 48 hours. Smith experienced awful physical side effects: vomiting, ataxia, and seizures. The mental experience was harrowing, as well – Smith



witnessed the steady crumble of his life through each of his five senses, but at the end of the hallucinations he was greeted with a powerful being made of white light and tree leaves. The entity looked upon him with a thousand eyes and told Smith that he was now Tabernanthe, and was made clean. The entity then entered Tabernanthe, taking "residence" within him. Afterward, a Bwiti tribesman explained only by saying a phrase common to his people: "In Church, they speak of God. With Iboga, you *live* God."

That was five years ago. Since that time, Tabernanthe has become something of a prophet, a central figure in a small urban sect that believes the trip of the ibogaine root is necessary to know God and His powers. He doesn't espouse a Christian God, not exactly, but believes that all entities (especially those he witnesses on his various psychoactive trips) are part of the same pantheistic being. He allows these beings into his body, possessing him for as long as they care to allow. He encourages his people to do the same, destroying their egos so that such divinity can take up temporary residence within their hollowed-out psyches.

Description: Tabernanthe is tall, thin, with playful eyes that overlook gaunt cheeks. He keeps his hair closely shorn to a faint stubble, but maintains a long goatee that he braids. He wears whatever retro-stylish clothing he can find at the local Salvation Army.

Storytelling Hints: Despite espousing the death of the ego, Tabernanthe is something of an egomaniac these days. He's very self-righteous, believing that he holds powerful truths that can help anybody overcome their demons, addictions, and frailties. To those who will listen to him, he is utterly kind and friendly. To those who give off even a hint of disbelief in him and his "powers," he utterly dismisses until they perform some act of attrition to get back into his good graces. (Note that, if encountering a mage, he won't hear anything about a mage's alternate ideas of reality, magic, or psychoactive substances. It is, essentially, his way or the highway. Opposing modes of thought are unwelcome.)

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 4, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics (sociology) 3, Computer 1, Crafts 1, Investigation 2, Medicine 3, Occult (shamanic) 3, Politics 1, Science 1 Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Larceny 2, Stealth 1, Survival 3

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Expression 2, Intimidation 1, Persuasion (double-talk) 4, Socialize 3, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Fast Reflexes 2, Holistic Awareness, Inspiring, Language (Bwiti), Meditative Mind, Unseen Sense

Willpower: 5

Morality: 5 (Hallucinogen Persisting Perception Disorder, mild)

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 7

Defense: 3

Speed: 10

Health: 8

Ego Death?

Death of the ego generally refers to the point during a head trip where the user loses the sense of boundary between himself and his environment. He is the world, and the world is him.



CHAPTER FIVE: GLOBAL MYSTIQUE

They swept through the village like ghosts from a time long past, curious crosses hanging like pendants around their necks. Something old accompanied them, an air of antiquity. Although they rode through the rough streets of town in a new Aston Martin, dust followed them as if their car were a horse charging through the Levant. Alternately they peered over each other's left shoulders and looked at the ground, then up to the night sky.

They prayed often, around their cold campfire that they favored instead of the run-down hostel where many of the pilgrims to this almost forgotten village took their rest. To be so obviously rich, and yet to sleep on the ground like a vagrant…. No one could guess what they sought, and if they understood the local language, they certainly never spoke in it. It was all Romance languages for them, in prayer and in conversation. They bought bread and cheese by pointing and waving euros around.

Someone great must have heard their prayers, for on a curiously cold night in August, a chorus of voices sang from the very air itself. They were the voices of angels, the unremembered language of the world before men built the tower in affront to God. It was music, a song of heavenly fire, a reverie recorded in tones, not words.

The next morning they had gone, and their "horse" had left no tracks in the dust. All that remained behind them was a broken tablet with an inscription no one could read, a clay tablet the size of a man's forearm. A hole in the ground marked their passage, similarly unreadable, but it bore the lingering sense of great wealth.

GHOSTS FROM A TIME LONG PAST

From that place we can understand Zen Master Un Mun when he says: "Buddha is dry shit on a stick" or when Zen Master Dong Sahn says: "Buddha is three pounds of flax." We don't need to do meditation for many, many years and wait and wait and wait until this place appears. There is no place that is not Buddha's place. There is no place that does not have Buddha nature. Even though everything we see, hear and smell has Buddha nature, we don't recognize it, because of all our thinking. If we put it down, all of our thinking, completely put it all down, then we become one with the whole universe. Then everything we see, hear, smell... is Buddha. Everything has Buddha nature.

— Zen Master Seung Sahn, "My Dharma Speech Is Already Finished"

The preceding chapters have given you seven mystical traditions—seven prisms for viewing the Supernal secrets of Awakened magic. Now, how can you use them in **Mage** chronicles? You have several options.

Most simply, they can be a bit of idiosyncrasy to make characters more distinctive. A particular mage believed in the tradition before his Awakening, and still filters his magic through its language and symbols. For instance, a mage who comes from the Caribbean might well believe in Santería or some other Afro-Caribbean religion, and so naturally tends to think of spirits as *orishas* or *loa*, use *vever* in spellcasting rituals, and so on, even if she later learns the Atlantis myth. A character who just Awakened might also turn to an occult tradition for explanations if some other mage doesn't get to her soon enough. Someone who Awakened during a drug trip, for instance — or thought someone must have slipped her some LSD — might turn to the entheogenic mythology. Quite possibly, most or all the mages in a region follow such a tradition. In China, for example, Taoism has so strongly influenced all occult beliefs it would be surprising if mages *didn't* adopt some Taoist ideas and symbols. Indeed, one could fairly argue that Atlantis, the Oracles and Exarchs are just another myth, assembled by mages (mainly Western) using their own mystical bric-a-brac — Plato's fable wedded to a quasi-Biblical war in heaven between powers of light and darkness.

In this case, occult traditions don't really affect how mages work magic or challenge their view of the secret world they inhabit. Taoists, drug-trippers, santeros and hoodoo men might know unusual rotes, but other mages can learn them without much trouble. The Magical Tradition Merit introduced in the Introduction to this book doesn't exist, and the player's characters can easily follow a tradition, because the magic still works the same. By the same token, this approach leaves little mystery or glamour to occult traditions. Nothing about the tradition is likely to surprise a character who spent a week researching it in a well-stocked academic library.

Another approach is to let arcane traditions have meaningful consequences for magic, but the Awakened already know about these quirks and accept them. Many of the Legacies from **Legacies: The Sublime** and **Legacies: The Ancient** exemplify this approach; see those books for examples. In a similar manner, the Awakened might know that Taoist mages, kabbalists, santeros and other traditionalists all have a few tricks of their own. In this case, the Storyteller's challenge lies in balancing a tradition's special advantages with limitations, to explain why every mage doesn't follow a particular tradition. Or maybe they do, but no tradition offers any systematic advantage over any other. This approach gives Awakened society a third dimension of distinctions that unite and divide mages: their Path, their order and their tradition, which can be as important or unimportant as the players and Storytellers desire. Like the previous approach, however, this merely grafts magical traditions onto **Mage: The Awakening** without making them generators of stories in themselves.

However, occult traditions also lend themselves to a particular style of chronicle, in which exploring the tradition becomes the whole point of the story. The tradition is a mystery — something hidden from other mages. The characters find themselves in the same position as Sleepers who have just discovered the existence of the secret, supernatural World of Darkness. They know, or suspect, that *something is out there*, but they don't understand it. As mages, of course, the characters probably feel they have less to fear from the unknown, and probably view a tradition as a potentially valuable source of arcane knowledge and power, rather than a threat to destroy or avoid. They may be correct... or maybe not.

Such a chronicle combines physical and intellectual exploration. The characters seek new knowledge. They enter new mental spaces, gaining a new view of Awakened existence. Physical travel reinforces this theme. The characters cannot gain their new perspective in the comfort of their sanctums. They must leave familiar territory as they search for clues. If they're lucky, their quest ends in greater understanding of the Supernal — and perhaps more tangible rewards ranging from new rotes to the lost treasure of the Templars.

Chronicle Design

Before anything else, decide on the length of your story of mystical exploration: single story, story arc or entire chronicle. Each choice offers advantages and restrictions.

Devoting a single story to a tradition has the advantage that the players and Storyteller do not commit to too much. If you want to add this sort of mystical exploration to an existing chronicle, you might consider running such a one-shot scenario to see how your players respond. If they are curious and intrigued, send the chronicle in this new direction. If the players don't enjoy searching for the Supernal truth behind occult traditions, drop the subject and no harm done.

On the other hand, a single story doesn't let you impart much context: Players do *not* enjoy stopping play for an hour while the Storyteller explains Taoist five-cycle theory or the history of the Knights Templar. If you run a one-shot, pick some aspect of the tradition that doesn't need much background information, such as a legendary magic item. For instance, the characters could seek the demon-quelling sword of the Taoist archmaster Chang Dao-Ling. If players enjoy the scenario, you can fill in the background later.

A story arc gives more room to develop the tradition. You can spread the exposition through several stories, revealing background as needed and the players express interest. You can also make your plots a little trickier. Single stories with narrow goals run the risk of seeming like a series of hoops through which the characters must jump — clue A leads to threat B, with clue C as a reward leading the characters to the next scene. A story arc lets you give characters a range of choices, giving the players a greater sense of real exploration and mystery. The flip side, of course, is that the Storyteller must prepare more material in advance.

For a story arc, you should still limit yourself to part of a tradition rather than shoveling the whole thing onto players. As you can see from the previous chapters in this book, some mystical traditions cover a *lot* of territory. Taoism, for example, includes spirit pacts, calligraphic talismans, fortune-telling, exorcism and astral projection — for a start. It might be prudent to limit the story arc to, say, Taoist spirit dealings. Perhaps the search for Chang Dao-Ling's magic sword leads to a broader inquiry into Taoist exorcism and spirit pacts; as their reward, a successful cabal might gain a register of spirit servants.

A full chronicle lets you explore a tradition as widely and deeply as you and your players want. This actually means *less* initial preparation than for a story arc. You don't have to decide everything at once: You can work out the magical secrets behind a tradition as you go. If the players don't pick up one clue right away, maybe they will think to look for it later, or you can slip the information into another scenario. You can also vary your stories to bring in hoaxes, red herrings and completely unrelated, change-of-pace stories. Or, exploring the tradition can itself be an ongoing subplot within a chronicle that also deals with magical battles, Consilium politics, personal affairs and all the other activities of a mage's life.

Chronicle Structure

Storyline based on investigation tend to follow three basic structures. Each structure, of course, is capable of endless variation in its detail. The structure also deals only with the investigative aspect of the story, not the character interactions and conflicts that make the chronicle a *story* rather than a puzzle to solve.

The Chain

The "chained" storyline, also called the "trail of breadcrumbs," is the simplest and most straightforward structure for a **Magical Traditions** chronicle. In this plan, one clue or encounter leads to another, until the characters reach the end when all is explained. For instance, the characters might start with an imbued item taken from an enemy; investigating the enemy's past leads them to the mage who enchanted the item; she's on the run from the cult whose secrets she stole; at the cult's shrine the characters find an ancient manuscript; and so on.

Indeed, the chained storyline works for just about any sort of chronicle, and that simplicity and universality is both its greatest strength and its greatest weakness. On the one hand, characters (and players) know they have a definite goal (even if they don't know what it is at the start). The players also don't have to do a lot of thinking: they just need to recognize each new lead as it comes before them. On the other hand, players and characters have very little choice in how to pursue the investigation. Some players don't mind that; others find it intensely irritating. What's more, the storyline can founder if the players simply do not recognize the next lead or solve a crucial puzzle.

The chained storyline works best for short, self-contained stories, just because the other two models take longer to run.

The Russian Doll

The "Russian doll" or "onion" plot is a bit less linear than the chained storyline. Here, the Storyteller creates a series of mysteries or layers of information. Behind each explanation is a deeper layer of explanation. For ex-

ample, the characters might investigate a rash of demonic possessions and find that the demons serve a renegade Taoist who works with a local tong (a Chinese immigrant organized crime group). The Taoist, however, is an emissary from a Triad based in Hong Kong (the second layer of the mystery). The Triad combines gangsterism with Taoist magic and mysticism — but the leaders believe they follow the orders of immortal, ascended masters (the third layer). When the cabal finally manages to confront one of these masters, the magus claims he is actually a reincarnated Lemurian adept (a fourth layer, and a jump to another tradition). But perhaps the characters can expose him as a Scelestus who takes his orders straight from the Abyss (the inmost layer).

The Russian doll storyline blends into the chained storyline. It tends to follow a longer, slower rhythm, though: characters can explore each layer of the mystery for some time before they discover that it is not the final secret, and some other group, entity or force is behind whatever they've seen so far.

This model works especially well for chronicles that emphasize conspiracy or mystery, or High Weirdness chronicles where traditions can intersect in surprising ways. A Russian doll plot gives players a real feeling that their characters have penetrated mysteries and discovered forbidden secrets. If continued too long, however, a Russian doll storyline stops being enticingly mysterious and just becomes frustrating or silly. The players need a sense that their search has an attainable goal — a final, inmost secret to discover.

See the **Guardians of the Veil** supplement for more discussion of this story model: secrets within secrets are that order's *raison d'etre*.

The Jigsaw Puzzle

The "jigsaw puzzle" or "mosaic" storyline is the least structured of the three. In this plan, characters gradually accumulate bits of information that eventually add up to a complete picture of the magical tradition. For instance, in a chronicle that features Taoism, one story might have the characters encounter calligraphic talismans, while another story might focus on five-element theory and a third deals with astral projection. As the characters learn more about Taoism and its magic, they gain a greater understanding of how the parts of the tradition fit together, and finally how they relate to Awakened magic, the Supernal World and the realms known to mages.

The strength of the jigsaw puzzle storyline is that you don't need to send the characters in a particular direction. If they miss one lead, why, they have others. You don't even need to plan much of the chronicle, since individual stories may be linked only through their connection to a particular occult tradition. Every story does not need to concern the tradition, either: the characters (and players, and Storyteller) can easily take a break and do something completely different without leaving an important plotline unresolved.

Each individual story had better hold the players' interest by itself, though. As Storyteller, you can't count on the momentum of an ongoing plot to carry the players' interest through a weak scenario. (Not that you should ever count on this and do less than your best, anyway.)

Combinations

Most likely, though, a chronicle uses more than one structure, on different scales. For example, a chronicle whose overall structure is a jigsaw puzzle may require characters to follow a trail of clues to find some crucial piece of information. Once the jigsaw puzzle seems complete, a new piece of information might reveal that the occult tradition conceals a deeper layer of mystical meaning or activity, giving the chronicle a Russian Doll structure.

Style (Storyteller's Options)

A Magical Traditions chronicle can use any of the styles described in **Mage: The Awakening**, but a few are particularly appropriate. The whole point of the chronicle is to learn something new about how Supernal mysteries manifest in the Fallen World, but you don't have to present this mystical theme openly.

Pulp Adventure

Looking for secrets in unfamiliar places lends itself to pulp sensibilities. This style features lots of action, travel to exotic locations, sinister foreigners, danger and romance. Mystic revelations take second place to figuring out who's part of the cult, how to penetrate the secret temple and what they're really up to. The plots tend to be simple: Find a clue or lead, follow it to the next scene, encounter a threat, find the next lead. The rewards tend to be tangible: a powerful Artifact, a jewel-encrusted idol or the like. Action-adventure is the easiest of all styles for games, and is often a lot of fun. Don't discount this option.

The Templar Treasure, Santería and Taoism lend themselves easily to this style. Theosophy is a little more of a stretch, but the connection to the mysterious Orient — well, it was mysterious to Madame Blavatsky and her followers — means that characters can journey to far-off-lands, encounter lost races and enigmatic gurus, and all sorts of pulpy goodness. (The lost continent angle of Theosophy also suggests adventures in magical

archeology: See **Secrets of the Ruined Temple** for ways to pursue this angle.)

High Weirdness

The whole premise of **Mage** is that the world is much, much stranger than most people imagine. A **Magical Traditions** story can easily play up this aspect, whether the tradition is old or new.

An occult tradition such as Kabbalah or Taoism lets you contrast the ancient and modern and mash them together — the weirder and more unexpected, the better. For instance, a Taoist priest or apothecary in Chinatown is right at home. A Taoist car dealer (like Elvis Quan, on p. **61**), plumber or banker in an ordinary suburb might surprise players and make them wonder what other weirdness is in store. A kabbalist rabbi is no stretch, either — but at least you could give him a high-end computer system to handle the gematria calculations. Where players expect the archaic, bring in something contemporary. Where they expect the familiar and contemporary, bring in the exotic and archaic.

A new "tradition" such as the entheogenic cults practically begs for a High Weirdness treatment. Such traditions have no past to lend them an air of respectability; they were born on the fringes and on the fringes they remain. Simply forcing characters to take such ideas seriously draws them beyond the fields they know. Fringe beliefs also tend to bleed into each other, so an inquiry into drug cults (for instance) can easily become a magical mystery tour through Ufologists, conspiracy theories, Hollow Earthers, crystal gazers, quantum mystics and the whole weird panoply of pseudo-science and New Age fads. Start anywhere, link it to anything.

The High Weirdness style also tends to juxtapose mythic tropes with pop culture. The effect can be funny, unsettling or both. For example, many mythic traditions include journeys to the Underworld that test a hero's courage, willpower or insight. In a High Weirdness chronicle, the harrowing of Hell might happen symbolically through a journey into the bad part of town or into the subway tunnels — or the actual Abyss or a death-realm might manifest as a high school, shopping mall or cubicle farm.

Horror

In the World of Darkness, any style of chronicle tends to have an edge of horror. You can push that aspect just by making the surprises nasty, emphasizing the uglier aspects of human nature and killing off supporting cast members now and then. Almost any tradition can receive a horrific twist. If it isn't a deceit of the Exarchs or an Abyssal trap, just ponder what the tradition members with real power must have done to hide that power from the Sleepers. What entities really speak in the visions of drug-trippers and floaters in isolation tanks? What was the true agenda of the Theosophical mahatmas, and what will they do to anyone who penetrates their secrets?

Hooks

Once you decide what sort of story you want and what tradition to use, give thought to why the characters embark on the story in the first place. Why go looking for magical truth behind the occult? Why this particular tradition, and not some other one? You need to give characters a motive.

Some players make it easy: They create characters who already want to go in the direction you have planned. If, for instance, someone makes an Awakened ethnologist who sees magic as a nifty way to study other cultures, all you have to do is suggest (through the persona of one of her colleagues, perhaps) that Santería might be interesting, or Taoism, or whatever. More likely, though, the most you can hope for are characters who are not opposed to exploring other traditions. If you start a chronicle from scratch and your players agree that a **Magical Traditions** storyline sounds fun, setting hooks will be pretty easy — but you still need to give the characters a reason to sally forth in search of occult secrets.

Story hooks divide into carrots and sticks. A carrot promises something good, that the character wants; a stick threatens something bad, that the character wants to avoid. Many classic carrots and sticks work as well for a **Magical Traditions** storyline as for any other plot.

Personal

Characters may embark on the storyline because of personal connections. Perhaps someone close to the character goes looking for the Templar treasure, joins a Santería congregation or buys a Taoist manuscript at an antiquities auction. A friend, lover, relative or professional colleague might find a lead to something the mage would find useful (a carrot) or get in trouble and need rescuing (a stick).

The patron is another sort of personal motivator. Some potential benefactor offers to help the characters if they do some job for her, and this involves exploring an occult tradition. Whether an eccentric tycoon hires the cabal to find the Holy Grail or a Consilium leader seeks the suppressed writings of Timothy Leary makes little difference. As a story hook, though, the patron has the disadvantage that characters do not start out intrinsically interested in the tradition itself; they just want to do the job and get the reward.

Rivals or outright enemies supply a variety of sticks. If characters learn that hated rivals now search for Lemurian artifacts



at Nan Madol, odds are the cabal soon goes to the South Pacific as well. After all, what if their enemies succeed? Maybe the hated rivals already have: The Consilium lauds them for discovering a long-lost rote, or they have attacked the cabal using a powerful artifact. Whether for self-defense or one-upsmanship, the characters want to find out whatever their enemies learned, and do them one better.

Treasure

Objects make good story hooks too. Give the characters a clue to something they find valuable, such as the long-lost grimoire of Rabbi Loew or a Taoist master's demon-quelling sword, and that may be all you need to start the story. (It does help, though, if you give the characters a special need for such a sword or grimoire.) One clue leads to another, and off they go! Naturally, to find the "treasure" the characters must investigate other aspects of the associated tradition as well.

Another approach is to put the "treasure" directly in the characters' hands — but other people want it, and these people already know more about it. If the "treasure" is a powerful imbued item or a grimoire of rotes, the cabal will probably want to keep it and find out how to use it themselves. Naturally, learning how to use the item requires understanding the tradition from which it comes. This approach combines a carrot with a stick: the prospect of power with a threat from people who want to seize that power for themselves.

Places of power form a special class of treasure. Several traditions ascribe special power or significance to particular locations, such as the caverns beneath Mao Shan, the secret redoubts of the Mahatmas, Mount Sinai or Roslyn Chapel. The place of power may be a Hallow or other magically potent site, or simply a place where characters gain important information.

Mystery

Sometimes you can motivate characters just by presenting them with a puzzle. Mages know that enigmas often lead to power — or hint at dangers to come. Either way, they need investigating. A mystery can take many forms, from an ancient tablet scribed in unknown glyphs (Taoist cloud script? Rmoahal? Extraterrestrial?) to a stranger on the sanctum doorstep who gasps out, "The stone from Heaven!" before his head explodes (A curse? Illuminati bomb in the skull? Sniper). The possibilities are almost endless; look through each tradition for strange phenomena, curious customs or bits of occult lore that could tempt and baffle mages who encounter them out of context.

Conflicts

William Faulkner said that great drama is about the soul in conflict with itself, but Storytelling games generally need a larger cast of characters. Occult traditions can generate conflicts that drive stories. Mages outside

a tradition may come into conflict with its followers. Advocates of two traditions may themselves come into conflict, and draw in outsiders. Conversely, members of a tradition may be drawn into conflicts between outside forces. Finally, traditions themselves suffer infighting because of variations in doctrine, ethnic differences or just the conflicts between rival leaders.

It's not hard to see how mages and traditions can come into conflict (especially for mages who follow traditions themselves). Mages believe they know The Truth, revealed through their Awakening and their training. They do not easily accept the idea that their transcendent, Supernal truth may itself be just another theory — a little closer to the truth than most of what Sleepers believe, but still not the whole truth. A mage who believes in an occult tradition has experienced Awakening but may interpret that experience in quite a different way than other mages. A tradition-believing mage most likely dismisses any other story as mythology or delusion — including the story of Atlantis and the war of Exarchs and Oracles.

History shows that disagreement about the fundamental nature of reality seldom stays limited to polite academic debates. When the partisans of incompatible dogmas meet, they soon go from trying to convince each other to trying to conquer or kill each other — witness the wars between Catholics and Protestants in Europe, Christians and Muslims in the Middle East, Muslims and Hindus in India, or capitalists and Communists in the Cold War. In the modern world, mages, and Sleepers who think they have magical powers, do not have much power to mobilize armies for real wars. Arcane societies, however, can still fight in ways that draw characters into stories.

Characters themselves might be tasked to attack a traditionalist group to destroy it or force its submission. (Loot, in the form of magical items, grimoires or other sources of magical power, can also motivate the attack.) Instead of an overt assault, the attack may take the form of espionage or subversion — or conversion to the true doctrine.

Of course, the players' characters may find their own cabal the target of such an attack by traditionalists who view them as deluded heathens. The traditionalists might regard the characters' enchanted items and grimoires as just so much loot — and if the characters acquired an item connected to the tradition, its partisans may view its recovery as well worth a small war. The characters can find themselves the targets of hostile spells and spirit minions in a battle of bewitchment. A cunning foe can also attack Sleepers the characters care about, perhaps including attempts to control them or convert them. On its home turf, a tradition's believers might be able to call upon large numbers of devoted Sleepers, who may well include civic leaders, law enforcement or even organized crime. For instance, Taoist priests and Afro-Caribbean santeros and houngans sometimes enjoy high status as community religious leaders. Piss off the wrong santero, and you may find a heavily armed Cuban gang shooting up your sanctum.

Just trying to learn about a tradition might spark a conflict. True believers may want to preserve their sacred mysteries from ignorant outsiders who would profane them (something any Guardian of the Veil should understand). At least, believers might not like seeing their doctrines and practices treated as raw material for a study in mystical anthropology. Mages who want to study a tradition had best take pains to show their respect and sincere desire to learn.

Arcane battles can draw in people who never intended to participate. If two groups of mages slug it out, their dupes and minions (mortal and otherwise) may cause a fair bit of havoc among the innocent bystanders. When arson-curses burn down buildings and innocent people go on involuntary, homicidal or suicidal drug trips, a cabal of mages might not care what beef the santeros have with the entheogen cultists — but they probably won't ignore it. Conversely, if two groups of mages start tearing up the city, they shouldn't expect an Awakened Taoist to stand by meekly if the fighting spills into Chinatown.

Even if a Consilium enjoys friendly relations with one group of traditionalists, that doesn't mean they've made friends with other followers of the tradition. That alliance may itself become a *casus belli* for a rival group that hates heathens and heretics. Friendly relations with one tradition can also spark enmity with another. For instance, allying with a group of latter-day Templars could bring a cabal or Consilium in conflict with latter-day Hashishim who never stopped fighting against Crusaders.

Finally, encountering a tradition may provoke conflict among the players' characters themselves. Some characters might find a tradition's doctrines or practices offensive. For instance, one character might want to study an entheogenic cult from the inside, while another character thinks it's foolhardy to conduct such experiments with your own mind and body. Such conflicts can test the strength of a cabal in unexpected ways.

Twists

To maintain interest during story arcs, reveal that something connected to the tradition is not what the character's thought. For instance, thanks to *The DaVinci Code* everyone now knows the idea that the Holy Grail is a

coded reference to a secret bloodline descended from Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Of course, the whole premise of **Magical Traditions** is that Sleeper occult traditions conceal Supernal, or at least magical, realities — but Storytellers can go beyond this basic twist. Basic twists include:

It's Real: Something the characters thought was just a symbol turns out to be literally true or concretely exists. For example, most mages probably would think that drug-trippers who report meeting aliens merely hallucinated, or at most, they perceived spirits in Twilight. Wouldn't they be surprised if the aliens turned out to be real, honest-to-God extraterrestrials... that are perceptible only by people who ingest certain chemicals? Or take the immense cavern-realms that Taoists say underlie the sacred mountain of Mao Shan. At most, mages might believe in astral or spiritual domains. Wouldn't that be interesting if mages explored a tunnel beneath one of Mao Shan's monasteries and found themselves in one of those paradise-caves?

It's Symbolic: Something the characters thought really existed turns out to be an allegory or a disguised clue pointing somewhere else. For instance, maybe the story of the Golem of Prague actually recounts how a group of kabbalists created a Jewish secret society that fought back against pogroms, and then tried to disband the society when it turned criminal.

It's Worse: The tradition gives a sanitized description of something very bad indeed. For instance, the Templars' admirers said they guarded the Holy Grail. Their enemies said they worshipped the demonic head of Baphomet. More recently, a few ethnologists see parallels between the Holy Grail and the Black Cauldron of Celtic myth, which returned dead warriors to life. Maybe they are all the same: the Grail was actually a skull-cup that could raise the dead... as demon-possessed zombies.

It's a Different Tradition: Something in the tradition also appears in another tradition, under another name and interpretation. For instance, many traditions describe some sort of spirit entities. Maybe some of them are the same spirits: the green man Mescalito of the entheogenic cults turns out to be the Green Man of British harvest festivals; the angelic Lhas who taught the Lemurians could still be around as the orishas of Santería or the angels of kabbalism. This sort of twist forms an integral part of Russian doll plots.

The climax of a story arc or chronicle is a good place for an especially big twist. However, this isn't mandatory. The players may consider themselves sufficiently rewarded by their characters finally understanding the tradition well enough to use its distinctive magic, or by finally defeating an important enemy.

The Most Important Advice

Finally: No matter how cleverly you intertwine an occult tradition with the cosmology and setting of **Mage: The Awakening**, your players still want an exciting story for their characters. Don't get so wrapped up presenting the tradition that you forget to include a vivid supporting cast of allies, adversaries and innocent bystanders, conflicts the characters can't ignore, and choices that shape the characters' destinies. A **Magical Traditions** chronicle should still be about *the characters* who investigate the tradition — the tradition itself is actually less important.

Sample Chronicle: Supernal Cargo

As an example of how to put all this together, here's a brief proposal for a chronicle based on Melanesian cargo cults. To people of the Western world, these outbreaks of religious enthusiasm seem like bizarre superstition from bewildered primitives. Yet this ramshackle religion, assembled less than a hundred years ago in a part of the world most people never think about, illustrates as much about humanity's relationship with the Supernal World as any ancient occult doctrine. Perhaps it teaches more than mages would really like to know.

Cargo Cults

The Melanesians live in the southeast Pacific, from New Guinea to Fiji. For thousands of years, they lived as hunter-gatherers or subsistence farmers, most of them at a Neolithic level of technology. Many tribes were also extremely isolated: the tribes of the New Guinea highlands, for instance, were unknown to the rest of the world until airplanes crossed their cloud-covered mountains in the 1930s. What's more, every tribe speaks its own language — a thousand or so tongues in New Guinea alone.

Late in the 19th century, entities from beyond the known world conquered the Melanesians. The natives were helpless before the powers of these pale-skinned humanoids. The French, Dutch and other Europeans demanded obedience to their alien laws, but offered the natives little access to their own society — except for the missionaries, who told the Melanesians to abandon their own faiths for Christianity. The missionaries promised the Melanesians that their rituals would let them rejoin their ancestors in the heaven beyond the sky, or risen from the dead here on Earth.

Destructive as the invaders were to Melanesian culture, they offered wonders to the people who served them,

from guns to canned food. The Melanesians had no idea where the miracle goods — "cargo" — came from, since it arrived in the same ships (and later, airplanes) as the invaders themselves. You couldn't get cargo through kinship ties or barter, though; you had to use the invaders' own magic tokens, called "money."

Melanesian tribes tried to copy the aliens' magic and take their power. These attempts became especially common after World War Two, which brought a surge of cargo to more Melanesian tribes than ever. Time and again, charismatic prophets said they had the secret: They knew how to call the ships from the sea or the great airplane-birds from Heaven. Some prophets said the Melanesians could join the white men. Others promised to cast them out, or usurp their rule and become their masters. Their followers stuck lines of poles in fields to form airstrips, with a red-painted wooden cross to call the humanitarian relief flights. They built control towers of bamboo, where traffic controllers wore balsa-wood headphones as they mouthed the magic words. Sometimes the cultists built jetties for the ships that must come. Sometimes they turned their villages into mock-ups of a police compound, imitating the uniforms and paperwork as best they could. Other cultists built mannikins of a savior, the white man Jon Frum, who would descend from Heaven in a huge scarlet plane loaded with cargo, and call the ancestors back to life. One way or another, the prophets would bring salvation and Spam, refrigerators and resurrection. Each cult failed and collapsed as quickly as it appeared. Jon Frum never came; the dead did not rise; the white men still ruled. But the Melanesians kept trying.

From one point of view, the cultists look ignorant, deluded or insane. They worship figures like Jon Frum who clearly do not exist; they engage in rituals that do not work. When the cultists fail, they conclude that they didn't get the words right, they didn't carve the balsa-wood headphones in quite the right shape, or they just didn't believe hard enough. From a wider point of view, they are simply people trying to control forces and entities they just don't understand: They don't have the knowledge, the social background or even the language to explain their experiences.

And besides, sometimes a ship or airplane *does* arrive, bearing white men who give away cargo. The cult's rituals didn't work for the intended reason, but they worked. Or maybe the more recent prophets figured out the real magic formula after all: Set up a cargo cult, and the anthropologists will come to study it.

Cargo cults may be an evanescent phenomenon. They arose from incomprehension and oppression. In the colonial age, Western masters had no interest in explaining their culture or technology to the natives they ruled. Decolonization gave the Melanesian political freedom, greater opportunities for education and contact with the wider world. Once they had the chance, some Melanesian societies jumped from the Stone Age to the Space Age with astonishing ease. They know where cargo comes from and how to get it, without the need for magic.

Behind the Myth

Compare the Melanesians to all of Sleeping humanity, confronted with the realms of spirits, the dead, the Abyssal and the Supernal. Entities who exist in wholly alien ways sometimes intrude on the mortal world, wielding uncanny powers and following codes they seldom bother



to explain. Sometimes they select particular humans as their agents — priests, mediums, devil-pacters and, yes, mages — and give them some of their own power. Other people think they have figured out the formulas to call power from beyond: kabbalists, Taoists, mescaline prophets, and all the rest. Sometimes their ceremonies and occult meditations seem to work; most of the time, they don't. The failures make their occult theories all too easy for skeptics to dismiss or debunk. But the believers and the doubters both operate without the context required for true understanding. Even when an occult tradition seems to "work," does that mean the doctrines and rituals are true? Or just that the believers have attracted some otherworldly entity that wants to watch the show?

For a **Mage** chronicle, however, cargo cults can do more than supply a metaphor for humanity's encounters with the incomprehensible.

Calling Jon Frum

To begin with, who or what inspires the cult prophets? Are they really just charismatic lunatics, or con men fleecing gullible tribesfolk? (Or gullible anthropologists?) Does *something* reach into their minds and their dreams? Something as alien as the white colonists, World War Two soldiers and Red Cross humanitarian workers seemed to their ancestors? They try to understand the message as best they can, and the cargo cult tradition gives them a framework. The prophet knows that an entity of great power wants to enter this world and promises to grant the heart's desire of the mortals who prepare its way. What hides behind the mask of Jon Frum, the white man who will drive out the other white men?

The Melanesians themselves see Jon Frum as a savior, with Coca-Cola as his sacrament. If the cargo cultists cannot imagine salvation without the promise of wealth, why, they have plenty of company around the world. Perhaps Jon Frum is a benevolent entity — a powerful spirit from the Shadow Realm, or even an Oracle. In their fumbling way, the cargo cultists try to connect the material world to something great and good that hates poverty and oppression.

On the other hand, perhaps the cults are just a cynical game played by the Exarchs. The cargo cultists expend great effort and may destroy what wealth they have — killing their pigs, throwing money into the sea — for nothing. They talk about overturning the world order, but they don't do anything that could really change their lives or challenge the established power structure. The Exarchs would like all of humanity to chase such mirages... and if some mages are right, the Exarchs have succeeded brilliantly. If it's true (as some people claim) that tribal people are closer to the mystical truth than civilized folk, the cargo cults keep the Melanesians distracted while generations pass and their ancient traditions are forgotten.

There are even darker possibilities. Promising material gratification in return for obedience and worship sounds a lot like a deal-with-the-Devil story. Cargo cult prophets often bring a message of revenge on the white folk who have the wealth and the power and *won't share the secret.* The prophets become rich and powerful themselves, while the cult lasts. Maybe some demon of the Abyss inspires the prophets. If a prophet ever gathers enough followers and persuades them to go beyond sacrificing pigs, Jon Frum shall break through the walls of reality to make this world his Hell.

Mages who explore astral space can suggest stranger options, though. If Jon Frum didn't exist before, he does now, in the dreams of the people who believe in him. When many people dream alike, they can form archetypes that slip from personal dreamworlds into the deeper realms of astral space. Or perhaps Jon Frum is a new mask for some primal archetype of generosity or prosperity, reaching out from the Anima Mundi.

Finally, who says there is only one Jon Frum? Perhaps several entities seize the mask to deliver their own messages, for their own purposes. The cultists cannot tell the difference — but a mage might be able to help them sift the latent astral culture hero or tutelary spirit from the tempting demon or deluding Exarch.

Cargo Artifacts

Cargo cultists see Western consumer goods as something more than everyday comforts and conveniences. They are miraculous intrusions from outside their world. The Melanesians don't know how a Jeep or a can of Vienna sausages get made; they see only the cargo unloaded from the ship or airplane, self-complete and inexplicable. Consider that can of Vienna sausages: little rolls of meatlike substance, looking a bit like seed pods or large grubs, inside a rind of metal. From what eldritch tree did this strange fruit grow?

Melanesians also divorce cargo from its context. A yellow pencil can be a writing implement — or it can be a bright yellow ornament for a nose piercing. A tin can with a bright enameled label can become part of a chief's headdress. Most of all, though, cargo cultists divorce consumer goods from their ordinariness and turn them into relics of divinity.

Mages believe that Artifacts are similarly intrusions from a sacred, higher reality. Are the Artifacts for which mages kill and die simply the commonplace items of the Supernal World? Or at least, the vessels for powers that world's inhabitants consider ordinary?

The most dramatic possibilities arise, however, if the cargo cultists are in some sense correct. The World of Darkness would have to be much stranger than it seems (even to mages) if the goods unloaded from container ships really do come from Heaven instead of China; but perhaps the cultists' faith in the sacred power of ordinary objects occasionally stirs a response from the Supernal World. Any mage might feel like reality is slipping underfoot if she finds a cargo cult venerating a Teletubby doll or a microwave oven — and it's an *Artifact*. No Atlantean origin or mythic past; just an ordinary object, that some people decided was miraculous... and it became so. A gift from Jon Frum, perhaps?

Building a Chronicle

A chronicle cannot possibly present cargo cults as something grand and mystical. They are intrinsically goofy and a bit pathetic. At the same time, they grow from a compost of desire, desperation and alienation that isn't funny at all. You can merge these aspects in a chronicle of High Weirdness. Mash together the magical and mythic with the absurd and contemporary to lead the characters, laughing, into horror.

Use bizarre juxtapositions of sacred symbols with consumerist banality as a leitmotiv throughout the chronicle — maybe start the chronicle in the holiday shopping season, when stores use a Savior's birth to hawk overpriced fripperies and TV intersperses religious specials with smirking ads for erectile dysfunction drugs. Maybe there's a bit of the cargo cultist in all of us.

Supernal Cargo starts out as a chained plot. One clue leads to another, with the cargo cult at the end. At the story arc's climax, however, the cargo cult stands revealed as dupes of dark powers (something the characters may already suspect), giving the plot a Russian doll structure.

Sample Story Hook: Cuddle Me Eggbert

This Artifact consists of a foot-long plush egg with a face. It talks in a toddler's voice, asking to be held, rocked, and so on. It rewards appropriate behavior with coos and giggles. They're the hot new toy for the holiday season, and parents are clubbing each other like baby seals to claim the limited supply. This particular Cuddle Me Eggbert gives prophecies (using Time 2, "Augury"; see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 258) — but as its predictions grow more critical to its owner, it starts asking for more than a cuddle. If it gets a garland of flowers, next it asks for a mouse, If it gets the mouse, it demands a puppy. But Cuddle Me Eggbert is almost infallible (a dice pool of 12). How far will you go to learn the future? No matter what your limits may be, someone else does not share them. Cuddle Me Eggbert could be in the hands of a rival cabal, or a businessman who is not yet ready to offer human sacrifices, but is fully willing to kill to retain possession of his hotline to the future.

This particular Cuddle Me Eggbert has already traveled around the world. Its serial number marks it as one of a lot that were sold to a store in Port Moresby, the capital and largest city of Papua New Guinea. Its current owner stole it from someone else and does not want to say who (for obvious reasons) but the previous owner might seek to get it back. Whichever end the characters follow, the trail leads them to new Guinea, more Artifacts and a new cargo cult.

Cuddle Me Eggbert isn't the only Artifact to emanate from the cult. Other mages have found similarly peculiar but potent Artifacts. Each Artifact extracts its own price from the people who use it.

Conflicts

The cargo cult's Artifacts supply the most immediate grounds for conflict. Just one or two Artifacts becoming known to the mage community — with the possibility of more — is enough to launch enough conflict for a chronicle. Cabals, Consilii and orders scheme to wrest the Artifacts from each other and race to find the source. The Seers of the Throne will be as eager as any — if not more so — to track down possible contacts from the Supernal World. Banishers who encounter seemingly ordinary items can only have their paranoia increase. Only the Mad, perhaps, can really make sense of it all... and when the bizarre cult Artifacts draw them out of the woodwork, characters might recognize their first warning of the madness to come.

Cuddle Me Eggbert may itself provoke conflicts between characters. The sentient magical toy adjusts its demands to test its owners' moral boundaries. If they won't sacrifice higher organisms to it, it requests that its owner deceive or humiliate another, steal, or perform other objectionable acts. Cuddle Me Eggbert tries to figure out their Vices, and then exploit them.

As various factions converge on the cult, they not only attack each other, they try to force the cult's prophet, who now calls himself Elijah Lincoln, to reveal how he turns ordinary objects into Artifacts. Elijah Lincoln believes God has blessed the Artifacts as rewards for the faithful and to herald the coming of Jon Frum. He is not a mage or even a Sleepwalker: He is a sincere, boundlessly devout man who cannot imagine anything bad coming from the dreams Jon Frum sends him. Nevertheless, he is not helpless. His cult has a few Artifacts that can knock mages for a loop, such as a cordless drill that projects

Psychic Assaults (Mind 3; see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 212). Neither he nor his followers will heed any warning that calling Jon Frum from Heaven might not be a good thing. What's worse, at least some other mages want the cult to perform its summoning because they think they can see how the Artifacts are empowered and, perhaps, acquire them.

Twists, Revelations and a Climax

The first twist in the plot comes when the characters realize that, somehow, a group of Melanesian cultists have become a conduit for vast power. Storytellers can insert lesser twists as supposed allies turn out to be villains, or at least enemies, while adversaries turn out to be reasonable or at least operating from motives the characters can appreciate.

When all the important characters converge in New Guinea, the plot reaches its climax with an attempt to summon Jon Frum. Perhaps Cuddle Me Eggbert hatches to release the entity that has grown powerful from the offerings of sin made to it. Perhaps Elijah Lincoln poisons the sacramental Coca-Cola as a way to sacrifice his followers and perhaps himself. One way or another, if the characters cannot stop the cult's final ceremony they must battle an awesomely powerful Jon Frum, now revealed as a horror from the Abyss, a minion of the Exarchs or something Supernally empowered but alien to any mythology known to mages.

