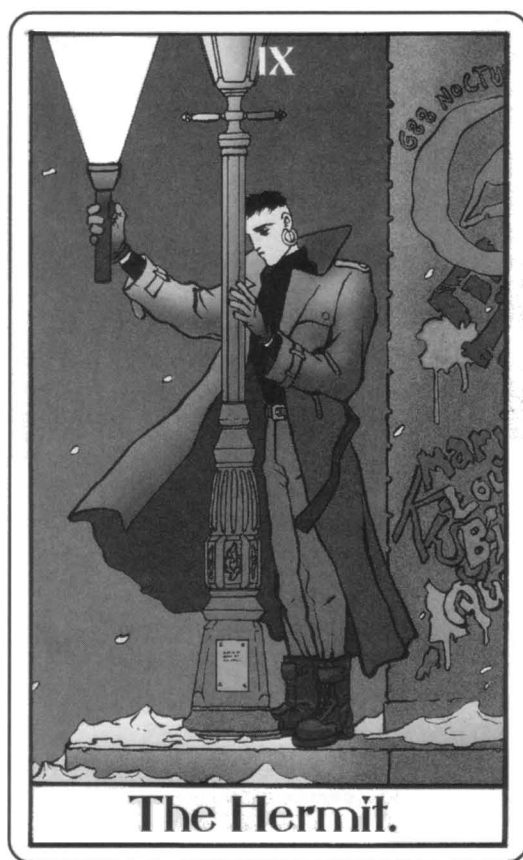


TRADITION BOOK:

GOTHIC DRESSES™



TRADITION BOOK:
HOLLOW ONES™



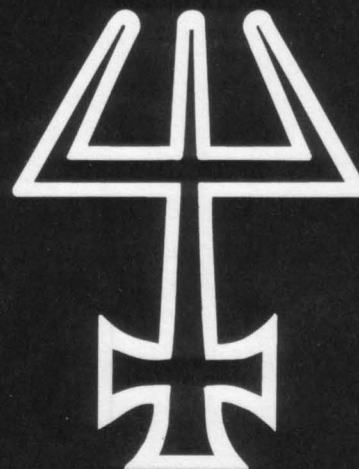
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MAGE**



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TRADITION BOOK: HOLLOW ONES™



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PROLOGUE: BIRTHDAY



Mark's birthday arrived. He didn't bother to call his mother, and he had no home phone for her to reach him. Truth be told, he had no real home. He told himself he didn't give a shit whether she even remembered or not. He knew she was probably drunk or stoned.

To celebrate his birthday, Mark took himself out for a small order of fries at his favorite fast-food joint. He ate alone, savoring each bite and watching the workers eye him suspiciously. He knew he looked scroungy. He hadn't washed his hair in a couple of days. He had been wearing the same jeans for months, washing them at the laundromat when he had an extra buck. He'd watch to see who left the 'mat while drying their clothes, then he'd toss his jeans in with their dryer load to save money. It was risky, he knew, but he couldn't help it. He had what he had, and it wasn't much. After dinner, he decided to work. He took his ragged bag of art supplies and trekked up to Broadway. Seattle had a community of discarded kids that

hung out on the hill. They begged change and cigarettes on Broadway. The cops didn't hassle them there, on their territory. Mark set up outside the sushi place and began to sketch. His rates were cheap; his hand-drawn sign announced, "Portrait for donation." Usually, he did a relatively good business, when it wasn't raining. However, this was Seattle, the city where it rains five out of seven days.

Mark waited two hours. No one stopped for a portrait. He gave one away to some girl, hoping her friends would buy one. None did. The girl took her drawing, and they all split. Mark penciled a gray fantasy, rain and traffic, pedestrians and muted neon. Eventually, he gave up. The mist had begun to soak down into his collar and through his pants. He felt chilled to the bone.

The walk home took only a few minutes. Home. Mark still marveled that he called the place that. It wasn't a home. He squatted in a tiny apartment with eight other people. Mark paid \$20 a week for the privilege of sleeping on the floor in a corner of the living

room. He didn't know what the others were paying, but he suspected they were paying less. He didn't care. He really just needed a dry, relatively safe place to sleep.

Mark entered the apartment — it was never locked — and stepped across a nest of bodies crashed out on the floor. The only light filtered in from the kitchen, casting a rectangle across the floor. Mark stepped in a wet spot on the carpet. It went "squich." Mark looked down. Whatever they'd spilled was dark. Mark grimaced and stepped across Jim's new, half-naked, crack-head girlfriend. He took a closer look at the tangle of squatters. He figured they'd gathered enough money to buy some dysfunctional drug or other. Not a one of them was conscious. Not a one of them was breathing.

Realization slammed into Mark's mind. Not a one of them was breathing. There was nothing peaceful about the way they all sprawled in an orgy of death. Death. Heart pounding, Mark began to back toward the door.

Something interrupted the light coming from the kitchen. A tall man stood there, a silhouette, stiff postured and unyielding.

Mark backed into the door. He felt the knob poke him. He reached behind to turn it.

The man on the kitchen's threshold raised an arm and pointed something at Mark.

Mark panicked. He ducked, spun and pulled the door open. A portion of the doorjamb near his right shoulder exploded into splinters. There was no loud nose, no audible gunshot. Somehow, that disturbed Mark even more. He fled into the hallway and ran with all his might toward the stairs. They caught him there.

* * *

Mark woke up on the floor. His head pounded. His face stung. His whole body ached. Then, it got worse. Someone slapped him. "Where is it?" The question crashed through Mark's pain. It came on a gravelly voice, male and pissed.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Mark replied, mouth sore.

The man backhanded him. "Don't fuck with me. I have neither the time nor the inclination to play games. This is about life or death. Yours. Tell me where the book is, or die. Do you want to die?"

In a moment of surreality, Mark seriously considered the question. It was his birthday. He was 21 and had never felt so completely miserable, so totally pitiful in all his life. He wanted to cry like a baby. He hurt. He was cold. He was hungry. He was alone. He was still getting beaten. Did he want to die? He did. Or rather,

at that moment, he didn't care one way or the other. It seemed a reasonable solution to his pain.

The man hit him again, harder. Mark tasted blood. "Where is it?"

"What?" Mark screamed abruptly. "What?! I don't know." He tried to crawl away from his attacker. A kick to his gut sent him into a fetal position and halted his progress. The abuse turned him right back into the little boy he had once been, suffering the anger and insanity of his father's fists. He had done nothing to deserve those attacks. He had done nothing to earn this one either. His mind and soul rebelled against a return to those old feelings. He had fled them once, successfully for awhile, but they'd caught up with him. The fear and the guilt that had haunted him throughout childhood had returned, and so had his weakness. In that moment, he hated himself more than he ever had. In that moment, he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that he deserved to die. He had outlived his usefulness on the planet. He should have died at the hands of his father. He should have taken his own life years ago. He wanted to die. He was ready.

His Avatar had other plans.

Mark gave in to the idea of dying. He relaxed into it and released every hold on the world he knew. He voided his emotions and fears. He hollowed himself in preparation for death. As he did, his senses expanded. He found peace the likes of which he'd never known. He could see every pore on the face of the man leaning over him. He could hear another person, behind him. He could smell her perfume. He sensed the rise and fall of her chest as she breathed. Time slowed. It stalled for a moment and may have even slipped into reverse for the briefest few seconds. When it re-engaged, it advanced with a decelerated steadiness that made Mark feel secure. His confusion left him.

A third person stepped up inside the bubble of slowed time, an old man, a grandfather. "Wait," the man said, voice outside reality, accented from a guttural French dialect. "Help is coming."

The attacker's fist landed just below Mark's left rib. It hit Mark's stomach and caused it to convulse. Mark curled tighter and nearly vomited. Bile burned his throat and spawned a painful coughing fit.

"It's got to be here somewhere," a woman said. "Help me look. He's not going anywhere."

Mark felt every bruise from the inside out. He could tell where his flesh had been tenderized. He felt the broken blood vessels, the excited nerve endings. He became aware of the expansion of his lungs and ribs with each breath. He sensed the pulpy beating of his

heart and the rush of blood through his veins. His mind processed all that as well as the noises made by his attackers. He listened to them rummage through the apartment, through his bag, through the cushions on the stained, old couch. He heard them tap walls and tear up carpet.

"Do not move," the old man told him in that throaty French accent. "Just lie still. They have sensed you. They are coming."

Mark intuitively trusted the old man. Mark focused his attention there, taking in the details of the man's antique suit. Mark wondered about ghosts, figured the man had lived during the late 1800s. Mark's mind wrapped easily around the concept, open and available to such notions. He didn't balk or question. He didn't disbelieve. He knew that he and the old man were linked in some inextricable way. Mark knew the man had come for him. He kept his eyes on the old man like a child trying hard to be brave. Mark still wanted to cry.

Others came, as the man had promised. Mark heard the fight begin and immediately, painfully, crawled to the wall, out of the way. The air crackled, and ozone burned Mark's nostrils. He felt the hair at the back of his neck stand on end.

At one point, a young woman came flying across the room. She landed hard on the floor by Mark. Holding her shoulder, she pushed up and gave Mark a smile. "Hi," she said, standing. "I'm Mysry. Don't worry. Everything's gonna be okay."

Mark wasn't so sure. From his position on the floor, he watched electricity flash through the air. He watched skin melt and people fly. He saw two people, his attackers, suddenly blip out of existence as if they'd never been there at all, right before his very eyes. Mark wasn't so sure at all that everything was gonna be okay.

The rush began the moment the attackers disappeared. Mark felt strong hands helping him up off the floor. He stood on shaky legs.

"We have to get out of here," Mysry said, business-like. She was looking into each of the rooms that

opened off the living room. When ready, she opened the front door and stepped out into the hall. Some guy that smelled of patchouli helped Mark out to the street. If he hadn't been injured and in shock, he never would have gone with Mysry. But, he was, and he did.

Mysry and the three men with her parted ways on the street, heading off in four different directions. Mark went with Mysry, limping along with her help. She took him to a black, old-style VW Bug. Mark buckled his seatbelt and noted the black rose in the dash's flower vase.

"You're not gonna freak on me or anything, are you?" Mysry asked as she turned over the ignition.

Mark slid his gaze from the rosary hanging on the rearview mirror to his hostess. He didn't know what to say. He felt on the verge of freaking. "I might," he finally murmured.

Mysry nodded. "What's your name?"

Mark told her.

"Nice name." Mysry smiled and guided the car out into traffic. "Mark, I'm gonna take you to my place. My name's Mysry, in case you didn't get that before. This isn't my car, so if you feel like puking or anything, warn me, okay? I just borrowed it to come get you. Y'see, you've just had what we call an Epiphany. Nothing to worry about. You're not only gonna be fine, you're gonna be better than you've ever been. You're safe now. And you'll never have to eat out of dumpsters or live in shitholes like that again... unless you want to." She looked over at Mark and smiled again. "You hungry?"

Mark shook his head. He wasn't hungry anymore. He wasn't anything but a deep, low rumble of friction, of static and of dissonance. He knew he would never be the same. He knew that a part of him had died back in that apartment, a part that he no longer wanted or needed. Clarity pulled his spine taut and made his every movement seem measured and timed. He knew an awareness that lived in each second, each half-second, each quarter-second. He was alive.



INTRODUCŦION: PROŦIETHEANS UNBOUND

MERCURY. *If thou might'st dwell among the Gods the while,
Lapped in voluptuous joy?*

PROMETHEUS. *I would not quit
This bleak ravine, these unrepentant plains.*

MERCURY. *Alas! I wonder at, yet pity thee.*

PROMETHEUS. *Pity the self-despising slaves of Heaven,
Not me, within whose mind sits peace serene,
As light in the sun, throned. How vain is talk!
Call up the fiends*

— Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*



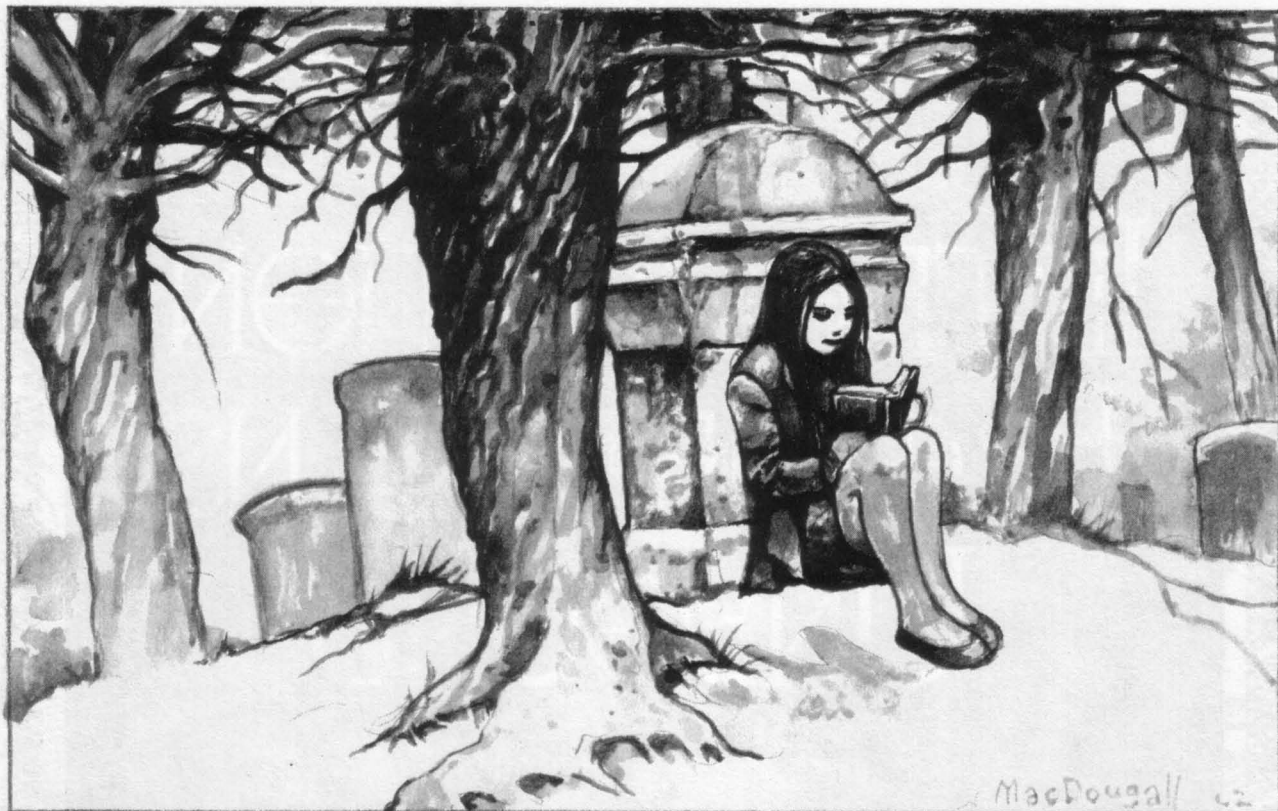
Each Hollow One is like Prometheus in that he defies the gods — the powers-that-be, the status quo, whether it be the Technocracy or the Council of Nine. As punishment, these avant-garde forethinkers suffer the torment of ostracism and infamy. But like Prometheus in Shelley's poem, they escape their chains, for heroism and romance always conquers

in the end, no matter the cost.

Each Hollower follows an individual path. While the traditional image of a Hollow One mage is a goth

girl or boy, hopelessly morbid and outcast, that's not the whole truth behind this loose Tradition of sorts. Certainly, many of them do go for the goth look, but just as many of them go for Eurotrash rave styles or just about anything else on the fringe that's very old or *now*, never last week. Hollow Ones are not about 70s or 80s retro; they're either the avant-garde of the counterculture or utterly retro Victorians, Edwardians or Roaring '20s poets and flappers.

Hollow Ones, at their core, are all about self-expression. This shows itself in their fashion but also in their magical styles — rather than cling to one of



the Tradition's outdated paradigms, Hollow Ones prefer to make their own. Their style of postmodern magic seems like a combination of Crowley and pop-culture iconography — whatever best suits the mage, whether it be Lovecraftian deity yoga or channeling Lord Byron for inspiration.

THEME: ETERNAL ROMANCE

Harkening to the themes of the famous Romantic poets — Byron, Shelley, Keats and others — Hollow Ones try to live their lives as embodiments of Romanticism: creative, artistic, passionate and ever ready to sacrifice themselves on the altar of individuality and romance. Tragically so.

Theirs is a Tradition of Orphans, mages who each do their own thing. The only thing that sets them apart

from individuals with no Tradition whatsoever is the core Hollow One calling to keep romance alive. The heart of goth is tragic romance, lost and doomed loves, melancholy poetry, doomed heroes in great cloaks standing on jagged rocks above roiling shores during storms — all the stuff of 19th-century Romanticism. The Hollow Ones are the last Romantics, keeping the flame alive in an era of Technocratic control and dogmatic religion.

MOOD: THE TRAGEDY OF FATE

As defenders of a dying faith, Hollow Ones feel lonely and beset by fate. They like it that way. There's no romance in fielding giant armies of mages to remake the world into a more Romantic place. No, that's a job for lone individuals, struggling against the misconceptions of their peers, standing against the tide of mediocrity while love dies, strangled in a bed of dying roses. And if they lose most of their battles? Well, that only makes the few victories more poignant and the defeats more heroic. What's romance without martyrs?

Hollow Ones go for everything Romantic or gloomy Victorian. Imagine gardens with dead roses at night under a full moon, as statues of weeping angels look on. Lonely maidens riding mares across misty moors or windswept shores. Tortured poets tossing failed manu-

LEXICON?

Since the Hollow Ones have no central Tradition from which they draw their culture, society or paradigm, they've got no central language for their concepts, except perhaps those used by modern mages: "Spheres," "Quintessence," etc. In other words, no strange Hindu, Latin or Enochian terms here — just whatever each individual Hollow One brings with her.

scripts about candlelit rooms, standing on canes to bolster leg injuries that just won't heal.

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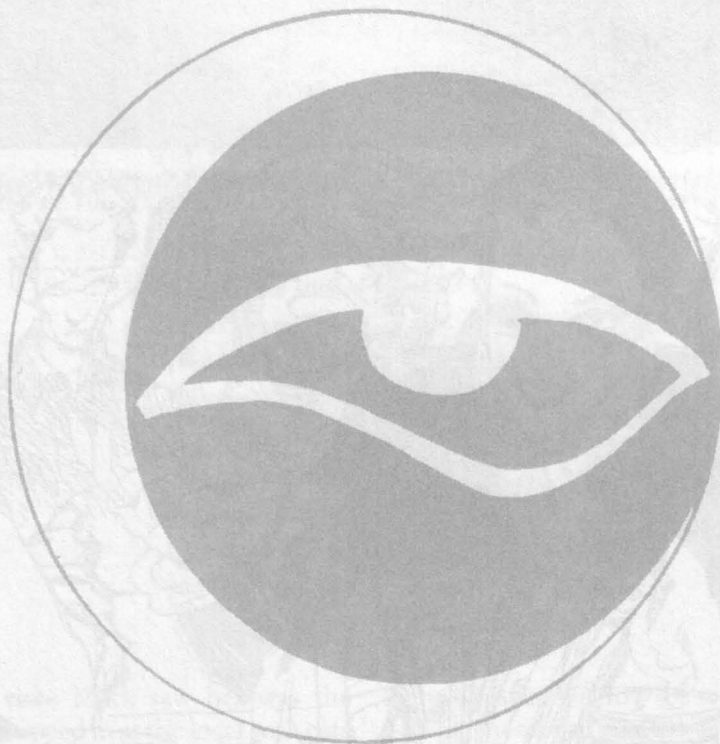
No Tradition as diverse as the Hollow Ones could possibly be summarized in a single book — or even a library of books. Nonetheless, the following chapters reveal much about this eclectic group of Orphans, banded together under the banner of romance.

Chapter One: The Saga introduces prominent Hollowers and allows them to recount their history, from their vague beginnings in the medieval era, when

chivalry and romance flourished, to their formation as a loose Tradition in the 1920s. Hollow chantries all over the world are visited in search of mysteries.

Chapter Two: A Hollow Paradigm reveals the inner dynamics of the Hollow tradition, from its conflicting philosophies to its numerous cliques. A collection of Hollow rites and Wonders are provided.

Chapter Three: Hollow Personalities witnesses the people who define "hollow." From Neville Nevermore, so-called founder of the Tradition, to Horatio's House of Horrors traveling carnival, you get a glimpse of what Hollow Ones do.





CHAPTER ①: THE SAGA

*We are the hollow men.
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless
As wind in dry grass
Or rats' feet over broken glass
In our dry cellar.*

— T.S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men"



The third time Mark saw her was the charm. He stopped in at the local goth café for an infusion of caffeine. He waited at the counter for the tattooed barrista to squeeze his double espresso. The smell of coffee permeated the place and granted a high all its own. Mark breathed deeply of it. Later, he told himself that was how he knew Mysry was there. He smelled her perfume or her shampoo or her sex. His subconscious picked up on it, and that's why he felt the tickle in the middle of his forehead and at the back of his neck. That's why her

name whispered across his mind, "Mysry." That's why — when he turned to find her looking at him with those intense, gray eyes — he wasn't surprised. That's what he would tell himself — later.

Mysry was hot. She wore her desert-colored hair short and scrappy, like a boy or a computer tech who just doesn't give a shit about her looks. She didn't wear any make-up either. Everything else was all woman. Her black turtleneck was of a thin material. Her smallish breasts lay loose and low enough to make it distractingly obvious that she wasn't wearing a bra. She stepped up next to Mark and said, "Hi."



Mark raised his attention to her face and watched her smile. "Hi," he finally replied.

"It's good to see you again," Mysry offered. "How's your face?"

Mark shrugged, "Better." Movement, seen out of the corner of his eye, caught his attention. He glanced that way. Since his Awakening, things had seemed strange. The world shifted the night they beat the shit out of him, the night he met Mysry, the night she saved his life. Since then, he'd been noticing things, seeing everything more clearly. Once the shock had passed, his newfound mental clarity had birthed a certain anxiety in him, a jumpiness in his muscles and brain that he didn't like. He didn't feel safe, not anywhere, not anytime. The movement in his peripheral vision turned out to be a woman coming in the door, just another goth, just another chick in black lace and kohl.

Mysry had puckered up a soft pout by the time Mark looked back at her. "Relax, Mark," she intoned. "You're so uptight. Does it still hurt?"

"Nah. Not much." Mark attempted a crooked smile for Mysry's sake. He owed her more than just his physical well-being. He owed her his sanity as well. If she hadn't been there, he'd have been overwhelmed by his Awakening. He knew this to be true beyond a shadow of a doubt. He remembered the physical pain,

but even it had paled in comparison to the distraction of his senses going into overdrive. He had needed her to talk him down first, and then later, he'd needed her to explain what was happening to him. She had done an admirable job of both.

The barrista set Mark's steaming, tar-colored espresso on the counter and took the money he'd placed there, money he'd earned cleaning a garage for a friend of Mysry's. She tendered change with efficient ambivalence and an eye to the next customer in line.

"I got us a table over here," Mysry announced. She jerked her thumb toward a small table saved with a coat slung over the chair and a miniature, vinyl bowling bag set on the tabletop.

"Okay," Mark agreed, nodding.

Mysry smiled and made an about-face. She headed toward the table.

Mark paused to pick up his espresso and the change.

A soft voice sounded near his ear, a whisper, intimate and personal. "Double espresso." The murmur seemed important. It carried a message that slipped through Mark's mental fingers. His mind skidded on the surface of it and couldn't find enough traction to understand what was intended. Mark fully expected to turn and find himself face-to-face with the owner of the dulcet tones. When he did turn, however, the nearest

person was the gothette who had originally drawn his attention when she entered the café. Mark calculated her distance from him to be several long paces, nowhere near close enough to whisper to him.

She was watching the woman behind the counter, eyes dark doorways to occult secrets. The goth held herself with stoicism, prim and proper, a pair of black gloves in one hand and an old-fashioned, leather doctor's bag in the other. Black lace, ruffles and silver buttons all combined to paint her into the perfect vision of a Victorian widow, mourning the loss of her one true love, a young Miss Havisham in negative. Her body was ripe, full-figured and sexy. The luminescent pallor of her face, rounded cheeks and high forehead, persisted even under the glare of the fluorescent lighting. Black-framed librarian glasses slipped down her austere nose. Her lips, like her body, were ripe, full and fleshy, painted burgundy wine. She didn't even seem to notice Mark, but rather kept her attention on the activities beyond the counter.

Mark liked the way she looked, but the whisper haunted him. It took him only seconds to size her up. He took a few extra seconds to consider the trick of sound that had made him mistakenly think she was so close, speaking her order directly to him, intimately, rather than to the barrista. He didn't like the way his mind had been playing tricks on him, ever since the fight. With espresso in hand, he finally turned away.

Mysry was arranging her things at the table.

Mark crossed to join her. His mind stalked around the idea that maybe his injuries had been worse than he thought. He felt no particular pain, nothing out of the ordinary. Bruises. No more headache. He didn't feel dizzy. He hadn't passed out after the attack. He hadn't noticed any odd dilation in either or both eyes. Mark set his cup down on the table and sat across from Mysry. He settled and scooted his chair forward.

The whisper still bothered him. He glanced back toward the counter. His gaze met the darkest brown eyes shot through with amused glimmers, lined heavily with black and highlighted with blue.

The gothette quirked one thinly drawn eyebrow and the very corner of her mouth. That was the only indication that she'd noticed he caught her staring at him. She lowered her gaze to his shoes, both eyebrows went up, and then, she turned back to give the barrista her money.

Mark looked down at his tennis shoes. They were white, dirty and scruffy.

"Has anybody strange approached you since the last time I saw you?" Mysry was talking.

"No," Mark replied. He faced her. "It's been pretty quiet."

"Good."

"So what's my lesson for today?"

"History."

Mark took a sip of his espresso. "Sounds dull."

A third party, female, interrupted, "Not the way I tell it."

Mark peered up at the speaker. It was the gothette from the counter. "Huh?"

"I said, 'Not the way I tell it.'" The woman cast an imposing shadow over the table, even though she couldn't have been much taller than five and a half feet. Her hair added a good inch or two, teased up and enhanced with streaks of white and royal purple amidst the black — extensions undoubtedly. The figure eight of her torso was exaggerated by a midnight corset, blue-black brocade. It and the fullness of her mesh skirt made her hips look all the more feminine and rounded. Up close, she smelled of flowers that Mark couldn't identify. It reminded him of spring evenings, cool and crisp.

Mysry chuckled, "Mark, meet Penny Dreadful."

"How do you do?" Penny affected a Mary Poppins accent for the greeting. She set her double espresso on the table and pulled out a chair for herself. She sat down. "I'm glad to finally get a chance to meet you, Mark. Mysry's been telling me all about you. You're crude and graceless, but you have a quick mind and a romantic soul. That's why I've decided to involve myself in your education. You don't mind, do you?" She glanced sideways at Mark from behind her black-framed glasses.

"I guess not," the young mage replied and looked to Mysry for guidance. He took her grin as encouragement. "I mean, I don't even know who you are," he added. "I suppose if Mysry thinks you're okay, then you must be."

"Caution is good," Penny praised. "By the time we're done here, you'll know who I am. Of course, by then, you may wish you'd never met me."

Mysry lowered her voice to just above a whisper and leaned forward to say, "Penny is visiting from San Francisco. She learned from Neville Nevermore himself."

"Neville Nevermore?" Mark asked. The name felt powerful upon his tongue.

"That's one of his names, yes. He also goes by Neville Sinclair. My mentor, as much as any of us have mentors." Penny lavishly poured at least three whole teaspoons of sugar into her espresso. "Some call him the Father of the

Hollow Ones, and in many ways, they're right to do so. He's a fascinating man, though I don't think he will like you. Of course, he doesn't like anyone much." She swirled the plastic stirrer through her coffee.

"I see." Mark shrugged and slouched back in his chair. He crossed his arms on his chest and one ankle over the opposite knee. "So, let's get this show on the road, yeah?"

"You have places to go?" Penny quipped. "People to see?" The old doctor's bag she had set on the floor beside her shook. Penny gave it a sideways kick through her skirts.

"Something like that," Mark replied, eyeing the bag.

"You can't just blow off our history." Penny adjusted her bodice and straightened the lacy fluff at her collar. "Our history is everything that has made us what we are today. It's the reason we exist at all. We are not only the product of our history, but we depend upon it for our purpose. Significantly, it reminds us that we've lost something precious." Her lips curved upward, as sensual as a cat stretching. After a moment, she added, "Most importantly, it also shows us how to get that something back."

Mysry turned her attention to the café and the street outside. She kept watch for the duration of the meeting.

Mark listened.

"I don't expect you to understand immediately," Penny commented. "But you will, in time. You'll seek

your own emptiness, your own hollowness. You've much to study and much to learn. We fill ourselves so that we may empty ourselves."

"Pfffft!" commented something haughtily — from somewhere.

Penny looked down at her doctor's bag. "You promised to behave, Mr. Mist. We don't need any comments from the peanut gallery."

The bag, or whatever was in it, moved and sighed loudly.

AS THE PERPETUAL STAR: HOLLOW HISTORY

Penny brought her attention back to Mark without bothering to explain the bag. "History is a strange thing, Mark. Normal people look at history as if it were a ruler, a straight line with a tick for each major event. The trouble with this is that history is a continuum shaped more like a spiral — three-dimensional. It's not the two-dimensional concept that the un-Awakened take with a spoonful of sugar so they can easily swallow it.

"Nothing ever has a definable beginning or ending. Rather, like the transits of the planets, events in history begin to build at some point prior to the apex, then gradually fade afterward. As the planets approach one another, the tension increases. At some point, they



reach a perfect angle, a powerful aspect to one another. Afterward, they separate, and the tension decreases again. Of course, on a spiral, as opposed to a line, proximity takes on whole different dimensions." Penny studied Mark's face.

Mark forgot to blink.

"Let me give you another, simpler example," Penny continued. "For instance, you cannot pinpoint the exact moment when the Civil War began. You can name the date on which the first shot was fired or when the first political clash was experienced. But was that really when the tension began?" Penny tipped her head as if she expected an answer. She waited.

Mark blinked. He waited as well, thinking the question rhetorical. When she didn't say anything more, he shook his head, "Umm, no, of course not. They discussed the ideas that eventually caused the war for a long time prior to the actual first shot."

Penny nodded. She sipped her coffee before continuing. When she did, her voice remained soft and even, smooth as velvet and rich as a sultry, summer night. "There are lots of people who believe that our history, that of the Hollow tradition, began when we were named. That didn't actually happen until the 20th century when Neville made an off-handed comment in reply to a silly question. The true beginning of our history is much more complex. At some indefinable point in the past, the ideas, feelings and concepts that evolved into the Hollow Ones crawled from their own proverbial primordial goo. From the swamps of humanity's consciousness came thoughts and emotions." Penny waved her hands in elegant swoops to illustrate. "These split and spliced... and broke apart... and reconverged as time went on." She leaned forward. "You following me?"

Mark gave a short nod. "I think so."

LOST KINGDOMS: ROMANCE

"Good. See, the thing is, the thing that you have to understand, is that the Hollow Ones isn't a club. It's not really even a Tradition. It's a name and a faux structure that we impose upon something much greater and much more lasting. And we are all, individually and collectively, just a vehicle for this one thing. You want to guess what that one thing might be?" Penny tapped the long black nail of her index finger on the tabletop and studied Mark with an expectant expression.

Mark didn't hesitate, "Angst?"

Both Mysry and Penny spontaneously laughed. Penny replied, "You're the first to actually have the balls to say that to me." She shook her head, smiling

amused, "No. Not angst." She paused for dramatic effect. "It's romance. Romance, Mark. And I'm not talking about some insipid novel banged out to amuse bored housewives. I'm talking about romance in the sense of epic heroes, tragedy, forever friends who die for one another, quests, wars and star-crossed lovers. Romance found in dark fairy tales and the histories of martyred saints. Romance expressed through murder, cannibalism, resurrections and hauntings, through ancient tales of chivalry, sacrifice and betrayal. This is what we are, and romance has lived in the human heart since the earliest days. We find it recorded in history, in ancient writings, in mythologies, in architectural carvings and in graveyards."

"Romance is older than the Council of Nine. It has held sway over the world since long before the Ascension Wars. Its magic has birthed and destroyed nations. It has broken hearts and committed murder most foul. It has also mended the deepest wounds and spread boundless joy. We, the Hollow Ones, are the keepers of romance. We have taken a name, but our growth is spontaneous. We have done nothing to attract others to our cause aside from being ourselves. That, it seems, is enough. It's just the right thing to do to combat the devastating influence of the machine heads. We preach the gospel of romance to the uninitiated, the goth babies and the rebel youth of today, sure, but we don't preach dogma. We preach self-expression and personal romance.

"Some call it rebellion. Others call it individualism. Nonconformity via a particularly macabre form of conformity. Whatever. None of the titles matter. All that matters is that each of us strive to be our own person, as we wish it, as we envision ourselves to be, and that we express that self image as purely as we possibly can.

"You're getting the briefest introduction to something rooted in centuries of iconoclastic heroes. Even among the Hollow Ones, there are many who never fully grasp the gravity of what I'm telling you now. Every art has its poseurs."

Penny leaned toward Mark, a crooked Cheshire smile on her face. "Repeat after me, Mark. The Hollow tradition is not a club; it's the living embodiment of romance."

Mark chuckled and mimicked, "The Hollow tradition is not a club; it's the living embodiment of romance."

"All right," Penny nodded. She straightened her spine and lifted her chin to peer down her nose at Mark. When she spoke, her voice had deepened into the realm of magic. A spooky and mysterious timbre reverberated at the core of her words. She commanded, quietly, intensely, "Now say it again. And mean it this

time. Feel it. Know it. The Hollow tradition is not a club; it is the Living Embodiment of Romance."

The air passing through Mark's nose suddenly took on a chill. He smelled Penny's perfume again, more acutely than before. The tingle across his scalp expressed the seriousness and profundity of the words. He felt his posture straighten of its own accord. He let the shivers run through him as he repeated, "The Hollow tradition is not a club; it is the Living Embodiment of Romance."

"I," Penny emphasized the first word, "I am the Living Embodiment of Romance." She laid her hand over Mark's and nodded to indicate that he should repeat after her.

"I..." Mark did so, "...am the Living Embodiment of Romance." His mind flashed with scenes of ancient towers and waves crashing on distant shores. He saw bloody battles and harsh faces lifted to the full moon wailing cries of anguish and pain.

As the vision played for Mark, Penny continued quietly, "We trace our roots back as far as the early Middle Ages with confidence. The days of knights and maidens, of kings and queens, were the most primitive of our ancestry. Were there Merlins back then who shared our philosophies? Perhaps. We're unsure. The records are not clear, but they don't need to be. What we do know is that our predecessors lived in an era of heroic deeds and experienced epic adventures. They loved and fought wars and birthed and died. They knew magic that has been lost in the progression of time.

"Gothic art and architecture exploded in the mid-12th century, in Normandy and Burgundy. These two regions have long histories tied to magic and mystery. Even today, they are among the most lush areas of France. Gothic art and architecture set the tone that many of us Hollow Ones have adopted. The Gothic style not only didn't turn away from the more bizarre, morbid and grotesque aspects of the Middle Ages, but it celebrated them. It threw away what classic art and architecture of previous centuries considered sacred and instead used tall pillars, spires, pointed arches, vaulted ceilings and flying buttresses to express the heights to which humanity could rise. The people warding these high places with the faces of demons, gargoyles and saints.

"We can trace negative connotations of the term 'Gothic' all the way back to the 16th century when our first critic, a man named Giorgio Vasari, who some claim was Awakened, attributed the medieval artistic styles to the East Germanic peoples also known as

Visigoths and further accused Goths of destroying the original 'classicism.' Goths took a lot of heat for that, as we always have, throughout history, for daring to show what others don't want to see, for daring to feel, for daring to express all our feelings, not just the pretty ones. And, well, to be honest, I think Vasari was right, and thank Heaven. Original 'classicism' needed to die to make way for the heart of humankind to beat freely again. The criticism we face for living the way we do is our cross to bear. We try to carry it proudly and bravely."

Pieces of stories continued to magically fly through Mark's mind: an Eastern warrior committing ritual suicide in order to preserve his honor, a child hidden away in a basket, a woman sacrificing herself in order to save the man she loves, a man sacrificing the woman he loves to the arms of the friend he also loves, a small village standing up to an army in the name of freedom, a knight in armor astride a black steed, a duel, a suicide, a murder, a murder-suicide, a castration, a crucifixion, a stoning, a sacrifice. He saw courage, strength, love and honor, and he believed.

The three mages sat in silence for a moment after that, Mark the most silent of all. He barely breathed. He understood the gravity of what Penny was telling him. The weight of it felt as if it would crush his heart. He could sense his own connection with history, the silver cord that anchored him to all those heroes and cowards, villains and saints that had long since died. He knew that he was just an extension of what had come before, just one more link in the chain. He carried on what they had started.

Penny finished her espresso and murmured, "That is our ancient history, the many and various beginnings of who we are and what we are and why we are. I think that's enough of a lesson for today. We'll meet again." She stood with a rustle of taffeta and lace, grace in her every movement. "Mysry, take care of him. Guide him. Make sure he stays safe. This one has understood. He's precious." She pulled her gloves onto her hands and picked up her black doctor's bag.

"I will, Penny," Mysry replied with a smile. Penny looked back at the young woman; affection shone in her eyes.

Mark felt Penny run her gloved hand over his shoulder and pass behind him. He muttered an approximation of goodbye and watched the gothette go. Momentarily, he turned his gaze back to Mysry. "Everyone thinks goths are just angsty snobs who do nothing but pose, posture and pout. They make fun of goths."

Mysry's smile turned enigmatic. "Yes, they do, don't they."

MULTIFOLIATE ROSE: NAITING

One night, Mark and Mysry went to dinner at the little French café around the corner from Mark's new apartment. As they enjoyed a leisurely meal, they discussed recent events, keeping their conversation as neutral as possible in case anyone was eavesdropping.

At one point, Mark asked, "So, how *did* we get our name?" He had already begun to think of himself as a follower of the Tradition.

Mysry finished chewing her mouthful of *boeuf bourguignon*, swallowed and then replied, "It's kinda anticlimactic, really — not very interesting. Back in the 1920s, Neville was talking to some woman he knew, Lady Astria Moonshade. Is that a dumb name or what? She was an Artist, capital A." They had determined between themselves that the code word for "mage" was "Artist with a capital A." Mysry scooped more food onto her fork and said, "She asked him and those in his group,

"Who are you?" Neville replied, 'We are the hollow men.' And it stuck. It's a line in a poem by T.S. Eliot. Some people say Eliot wrote the poem from that reply. Or maybe Neville just got to see it before Eliot published it. Neville hung out with lots of writers and poets back then, I think. Some people even think that Eliot was one of us and that the poem has secrets in it. It certainly does have a lot of coincidental symbolism. Over the years, the poem has become more and more central to the Hollow Ones. New kids pick it up and groove on it."

"Isn't that," Mark asked, "kind of like having dogma?"

Mysry shook her head, "Not exactly. The poem is beautifully written and leaves a lot open to interpretation. I'll show it to you later. You'll see." She smiled.

When Mark read the poem, he saw.

MORE DISTANT AND MORE SOLETTIN: HEROES

Mark dropped an armful of rolled, black socks in the milk crate he used as an underwear drawer. He patted them down into a semblance of neatness. Mysry had found him a job washing dishes at a local restaurant.

He had money. He had an apartment. Life certainly had taken a turn for the better.

As he straightened his meager belongings, he thought about Mysry and Penny. He hadn't seen either one in several days, though Mysry phoned every evening to check on him. He'd given the things he had learned from Penny a great deal of thought and had found



himself behaving differently since then. He had always felt a profound connection with the heroes of old, the legends and myths and the fairy tales in which everyone lived larger than life. He gradually came to understand that he wasn't overly dramatic, as so many had accused him of being over the years; no, he was heroic and romantic. "The living incarnation of romance," he muttered to himself as he pulled a blanket over the mattress on the floor.

A knock on the front door drew him from his thoughts. Mark crossed the one-room efficiency and put his eye to the peephole. He saw a devil. Black on red vinyl, the little devil struck a sassy pose. Mark chuckled and unlocked the door. He pulled it open to find Mysry and Penny.

Mysry's face split into a huge grin. She had dressed more goth than normal, though only slightly. Looking like a modern-day highwayman or pirate, she wore thigh-high boots, black satin stretch pants and a frilly poet's shirt, untucked. Her scrappy, wheat-colored hair was unkempt. She tended to look like she had taken less than five minutes to dress in the morning — pants, shirt, boots, eyeliner, mascara, maroon lipstick. That was her style. In another reality, she might have been a Cultist of Ecstasy. In this reality, however, she chose to be a "living incarnation of romance." Mysry waggled the red vinyl purse with its little devil on the side. "We've come for your soul," she chuckled.

Mark laughed and stepped aside so they could come in.

"You think she's joking?" Penny Dreadful asked, deadpan. She entered behind Mysry.

Mark lifted both eyebrows and cast an uncertain look to Mysry. The young woman was still grinning. Mark shut the door and locked it.

Penny went almost directly to a pile of books on the floor in the corner and proceeded to browse their titles, in silence, her doctor's bag held with both hands by the handle.

Mysry sat down on the floor for lack of furniture and opened her devil purse. She pulled out her lipstick and applied some with the help of a small mirror.

When no one seemed ready to speak, Mark asked, "Can I get anyone anything to drink?"

"Coffee," stated Penny without turning away from the books. "Please."

Mysry looked up at Mark and nodded, "Me, too, please."

"Cream," added... Penny?

Mark looked oddly at Penny. Her voice had changed. It sounded muffled and odd, as if she had her hand over her mouth. She didn't.

"Sure, I can make some coffee," Mark replied and went off to do so at the small corner kitchenette. By the time he returned with the beverages, Mysry had removed her boots and was standing by the window, looking out at the street three stories below.

Penny had picked up a book and seated herself on an overturned milk crate. She had a black cat sitting on her shoulder. "You have a wonderful collection of books, Mark," she commented. "You like war stories, do you?"

Mark stared at the cat for a moment, meeting its slow-blinking gaze. He chuckled and set Penny's coffee mug on a cardboard-box table beside her milk-crate chair. "Yeah, I suppose so. Some of them. It depends. I'm not one of those guys who likes all things militaristic." He carried Mysry's coffee to her.

"What do you like?" Penny queried.

"I like to read about the people."

"The heroes."

"Yeah, I suppose so. But also just the weird war stories, like the ghost stories where a soldier finds his way through the forest following the ghost of his great-grandfather. That sort of thing." Mark slipped back to the kitchenette and returned momentarily with a spoon, milk and sugar.

Penny waited until he came back, then said, "So much of our history is tied to wars. I bet that surprises you, doesn't it?"

"You mean our history, as in the Hollow One's history?" Mark set his load within Penny's reach and sat down on the floor. A glance to Mysry told him she hadn't moved from her place by the window. She stood there, sentinel, sipping her coffee. It occurred to Mark to wonder why they needed a lookout.

Penny poured sugar, sugar and more sugar into her coffee, "Mmmmyes, of course. The Hollow One's history. Have you ever noticed how it is in times of trial that humankind rises above the mediocre? Challenge provides the push people need to go that extra mile. War provides challenge."

"Is this our next lesson?" Mark held his coffee cupped in both hands at his chest. He watched Penny.

"What a clever boy you are," Penny smirked. She took a moment to arrange her black widow's gown, then took up her hyper-sweetened and creamy coffee. She sipped.

"Ahem," coughed the cat.

Penny eyed it sideways.

"Well?" said the cat.

Said the cat! Mark's heart leapt up to meet a swallow of coffee on its way down. It took a firm assertion of his will to avoid spewing coffee all over himself.

The cat continued, "Are you going to introduce me or not, and am I supposed to drink my milk straight from the carton? How uncivilized."

"My bad," smirked Penny. "Mark, please allow me to introduce Mr. Mistoffelees."

"Go ahead and say it," chimed the cat, bitterly. "My familiar."

"My familiar," Penny smiled.

"She loves," remarked Mr. Mistoffelees, black lips curling around each syllable, "to remind me that I'm just the ol' ball and chain. The witch. Prrrratrrrr."

Mark stared.

"We'll just give him a moment to recover," Penny said. She sipped her coffee.

"Yes, yes," added the cat. "If you need to go change your shorts, Mark, please feel free to do so. Though," he sniffed the air, "I think you actually managed to salvage your dignity."

Mysry laughed. "Oh, poor Mark. You two are so mean!"

THE CLASSICISTS AND THE ROMANTICISTS

Eventually, Mark pulled himself together and swallowed the concept of a talking cat. He didn't have much choice.

Once she had a green light again, Penny took a deep breath through her rouged lips, as if breathing for the first time in long seconds, and said, "Those ancient times I showed you the last time we spoke have survived only as conjecture and myth. Though some claim to know the truth about how things went down, they really only believe. That, in and of itself, holds a great deal of power. What they choose to *believe* was beautiful and clean and golden may have actually smelled bad, looked worse and died horribly. But, the myths are our legacy, and they hold truths inside them when you look closely enough. These truths, hidden in the secret code of history's tales — a largely unbroken code, I might add — convey the magic of the ancient ages to us. Myths are the messengers, or the ghosts of our ancestors if you prefer, speaking to us from the grave, and guiding us out of the forest. Every one of those tales in your books could potentially hold a key to your own enlightenment and Ascension. You seek in the places that speak to you, even subconsciously. But we all seek in the past."

Penny's voice had a mellifluous generosity, alto, that matched her voluptuous figure. Both pleased Mark. He smiled and nodded. He understood.

The gothette continued, "In more recent history, relatively speaking, we find fewer ghosts speaking to us

through the language of stories, but they're still there. I can see from these books that you're familiar with the Romantic period of literature and art. Let me explain the connection between the Hollow Ones and the romanticists of 19th-century Europe." Penny paused to take a drink from her mug. "During the 19th century, the romanticists were having one big orgy." She smiled mischievously and quirked an eyebrow just a touch.

From the direction of the windows, Mysry chuckled. Mark did too, a half-second later, though he didn't really get the joke. Mr. Mistoffelees chewed loudly on one of his claws.

Penny clarified, "Okay, no, they were not all engaged in one great, literal orgy, though they did do some of that. But no, that's not what I mean. The romanticists, as a whole, were the parents of the Hollow Ones. They provided the sperm and the egg. More importantly, they produced the right chemistry for us to come into existence. They spread their seed, and we were the children that popped out as a result. That love-making session lasted a long time, and it was also a long gestation period. The Hollow tradition didn't actually emerge from the proverbial womb until the early 20th century. But, without the romanticists, we never even would have been conceived.

"So, you're wondering," Penny pointed a black-polished finger at Mark, "who were the romanticists and why was their contribution so crucial to the later formation of the Hollow tradition? Well," Penny paused for dramatic effect. "In order to understand what role the romanticists played in history, you have to understand what came before them. Prior to the Romantic period, there was 18th-century classicism, not to be confused with the original, pre-medieval Classic period that was destroyed by Gothic art and architecture in the 12th century. You see, we're already beginning to see history repeating itself here. Do you see it? The first Classic period was ended by the Gothic style in the Middle Ages. Then, in the 18th century, classicism reared its ugly head again. It gained a great deal of popularity, again. And again, it was destroyed by people who were unafraid to express their romantic souls, in this case, the romanticists.

"I have often argued with Neville about this period. I believe, you see, that the Technocracy actually began to truly take hold of humanity during the Classic period of the 18th century. He disagrees. Oh, well. What can you do? That's the beauty of friendship. We can disagree and still remain friends. You'll have to ask him about it some time, so that you can hear his viewpoint and make up your own mind about it.

"In any case, the classicists worshiped all the worst qualities of Greek and Roman art and literature. Again, this is only my opinion, and there are those who disagree. Are you familiar with classicism?" Penny tipped her head to eye Mark.

Mark shook his head and admitted, "Not really, no."

"Well, the classicists liked things neat and organized. They had rules out the ying. They valued reason, balance, objectivity, strict adherence to things such as form and content. They — get this — preached a philosophy of restraint. Now tell me if that doesn't sound like our nearest and dearest enemies? Eh?"

Mysry interjected, "We discussed the Technocracy the second time we met, Mark."

"The Technocracy," Mark nodded. He glanced across the room to Mysry. "Gotcha."

The young woman nodded encouragement to Mark, smiled and turned back to the window.

"Good," said Penny. She set her coffee mug aside and leaned forward toward Mark, hands clasped in her lap, back primly straight. "So, at the same time that the classicists were restricting artistic expression to copying what the Greeks and Romans had done, down to exact measurements, the Enlightenment was restricting how people thought. Enlightenment thinkers ruled the intellectual scene in the 18th century. They embraced the idea that rational and scientific thought could liberate humankind. Not much good came of that. They opposed the belief in the supernatural, in magic and in anything that didn't conform to their strict guidelines. They only cared about what they could measure. The only good things that came out of the Enlightenment were the French and American revolutions, both of which borrowed Enlightenment philosophies to justify the uprisings. Of course, what they said and what they meant were two different things, but that's for another lesson. Both revolutions had emotional foundations, no matter what anyone says.

"So, then the romanticists crashed the party. They barged in and basically thumbed their noses at both the classicists and the Enlightenment." Penny mimicked the gesture. "Where the classicists produced cold, dead, lifeless art and music, the romanticists poured their hearts and souls into their work. They venerated nature and their own emotions." As she spoke, Penny became more animated; her hands flowed through the air and her body rocked back and forth. "They sought to lift art and music to a transcendent level of beauty and communication that the classicists had forsaken. The romanticists didn't merely want to copy what had come before. They revered no one but their own inner truths.

They refused to believe that someone else had already reached the pinnacle of what art could ever be. They rejected the idea that they could do no better than to mimic the work of the ancient masters.

"Among the romanticists were such greats as Delacroix, Gustave Doré, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, William Blake, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Keats and, of course, Byron, who lived the life of a Romantic as much as he expressed it through his art. All these and so many more started a movement that not only birthed the Hollow Ones, but continues to inspire us to this day."

Penny folded her hands again, fingers entwined, and quoted, "O hear a pensive prisoner's prayer, for liberty that sighs; and never let thine heart be shut against the wretch's cries!" She smiled and explained with affection in her voice for the subject matter, "Anna Laetitia Barbauld. In this particular poem she petitions Joseph Priestley, the chemist who discovered oxygen, to release one of the mice on which he was experimenting. The entire situation and poem is loaded with symbolism relevant to our cause. It also has meaning for all revolutions, including those of the day. But I like to quote that poem when I need a touch of extra courage. It's my own personal battle cry. You see, as a result of Anna's plea, Priestley released the mouse, just as, some day, our own cries will free us from the oppression of the Technocracy, though perhaps not quite as peacefully. There is much to be learned from that poem."

"I love that poem," Mysry commented from the windows. She didn't bother to turn from them, but spoke to the window.

Penny nodded. "Of course, there's more to the Romantic period than just the inspiration we draw from it. Whether aware of it or not, whether Awakened or not, the romanticists opened themselves up to become conduits for the ghosts of our ancestors. Through them, the myths and fairy tales and, yes, truths were translated to the modern canvas, page and musical composition. In recent years, especially, several Hollow Ones have discovered through intense study of these 19th-century works of art, literature and music, that many of the secrets we thought had been lost actually found their way into the arts of the Romantic period. No one knows what muse inspired them, but it's becoming more and more clear that the romanticists play an important role in our Ascension. This, of course, explains the intuitive attraction we all have to them.

"It was also at this time that Lewis Carroll was writing his *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and I can think of no better example of Romance than the works

of Edgar Allan Poe. Although he's not strictly considered a romanticist, I do include him because he followed many of the same philosophies, he was writing at the same time, and he made an amazing contribution to the body of self-labeled *Gothic* literature.

"Mark, you have an inordinate percentage of works by romanticists among your books. I'm glad to see that. It means I don't have to explain to you the varying attitudes generally associated with romanticism. You've undoubtedly already noticed that I am goth. I wear black. I like lace and silver buckles. I wear fancy shoes and would fit perfectly in a Tim Burton flick.

"However, not all Hollow Ones are pristinely goth, as I am. Just as there are differences between Mysry and me, there are also differences between all Hollow Ones. These differences are sometimes subtle, sometimes not so subtle. Among us, we vary in flavor from an expression of profound despair to dashing bravado. Some of us, many of us, are goth in its purest definition, I suppose. But, more importantly, we are romantic. We are heroic. We are larger than life. We mourn, we celebrate, and we espouse intelligent revolution of the mind and heart. We challenge the world's sensibilities. We're not afraid to appreciate the beauty in the horrific. We boldly uncover terrible things and challenge the world to look at them. We show that it's important, cathartic, to feel and to express even the most negative of emotions. We feel, and we express those feelings; and in doing so, we dare the rest of the world to feel and to express with us. That is the role we play.

"But we are, all of us, individuals. We embrace individuality and diversity as the holy ideals that they are. As Neville loves to say, 'No two gargoyles are exactly alike.' Still, there are those factions of the Hollow tradition who require that you wear black only or that you listen to goth-industrial music or that you recite Keats' *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* before you will be welcomed." She launched into a quotation without pause, "O, what can ail thee, knight at arms, alone and palely loitering? The sedge has withered from the lake and no birds sing. O, what can ail thee, knight at arms, so haggard, and so woebegone? The squirrel's granary is full and the harvest's done. I see a lily on thy brow with anguish moist and fever dew, and on thy cheeks a fading rose fast withereth too. I met a lady in the meads, full beautiful, a fairy's child, her hair was long, her foot was light and her eyes were wild."

Penny took a deep breath and smiled. "Sorry. You don't need me to recite Keats just to prove I can. In any case, what I was getting around to saying is that you will find that the Hollow tradition is quite diverse. We share certain elements of philosophy, but not all. And cer-

tainly, not all of them dress as staunchly Victorian as I do. Which brings me, conveniently, to the Victorian era. Are you bored?"

Mark quickly shook his head. "No, no. Not at all. But would you like more coffee?"

"Yes, please." Penny stood and fussed with her funeral frills. "But hurry. They got raunchy in the Victorian era. I think you'll like what I have to tell you."

Mysry laughed quietly.

Mark grinned, "Okay." He gathered the empty mugs and hurried off to refill them.

"Do you have anything to eat?" Mr. Mistoffelees called after him.

BEHAVING; REASON

Once Penny left, Mysry and Mark continued to talk for some time. At one point, Mysry remarked, "Don't underestimate the power of reason, Mark. Though Penny tends to downplay it, you can't ignore that there's structure beneath all romance. Structure and discipline. Every poem, aside from the most anarchic free verse, has form. The intellect guides our hearts so that we don't become lost in our feelings. We strive for a balance of the two: heart and mind. That's our strength. Penny is emphasizing the romantic with you because you're very intellectual."

Mark nodded, "Yeah, I noticed that even the Tradition seems to have a structure to it, but it doesn't allow that structure to control it. Know what I mean?"

"Yeah," Mysry grinned. "That's exactly right. It's there. We acknowledge it only when we have to, but we strive to maintain it because it gives us a solid foundation so we don't all go mad. As Eliot said, 'Shape without form, shade without colour, paralysed force, gesture without motion.' The best poetry hides its structure so well that you barely even notice the rhyme except for the feeling of comfort you get when you read the lines. That's the goal of the Hollow tradition as well."

THE VICTORIAN ERA

The three mages and one cat settled back into their positions — Penny on her milk-crate throne, Mark slouching on the floor, Mysry standing guard at the window and Mr. Mistoffelees happily eating tuna from a plate set down near Penny's feet.

"So, tell me, Mark," Penny was saying while doctoring her coffee. "What do you think of when you think of the Victorian era?"

Mark humphed quietly and considered the question. "I suppose," he replied, "that I think about old fashioned values, women covered from neck to toe, chaperones and other strict social codes, that sort of thing. I think they were very stifled back then, weren't they?"

Penny seemed pleased with the answer. "Yes, in many respects they were," she responded. "However, the Victorian era was also a time of enormous social revolution. We rarely hear about these things though. Many conclude that the Victorian era was a backlash to the Romantic period, though the two actually overlapped a great deal, and one could easily make the case that the Victorian era was just a part of the larger Romantic period. The Victorian era technically began in 1837 when Queen Victoria succeeded her uncle William IV to the throne of England. She was an interesting woman, quite a bit more passionate than one would think to look at her. She bore nine children to her husband, Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. There are many who believe her love for him was a *grand amour*. Others, of course, suggest that not all the children were his. Being of a romantic heart, I choose to believe the former.

"She loved him for good reason. He came from the area of Eastern Germany where the ancient Goths originated. His hometown was even named Gotha. Prince Albert had the gentle and passionate soul that the queen could not afford herself. It is my belief that, when alone together, the queen and her prince let down their guards and reveled in romance. In public, she was extremely masculine and hard. In private, I bet she was all woman. This would explain why his death affected her so profoundly. She went into seclusion immediately afterward, deprived of the one thing that gave her the strength to carry out the trying duties of royalty." Penny sighed, melancholy. She gazed into space for a moment, lost in her own thoughts.

Mark waited in silence, patient.

"So, anyway, I mentioned that the Victorian era was a time of social revolution. This is true. It saw the birth of ideas that eventually grew into movements in the early 20th century. For example, it was the Victorian poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning who wrote *Aurora Leigh*, an extremely long poem about a young poet's struggles to find her artistic voice and pursue her art despite the obstacles confronting a woman writer. At this same time, a man named John Stuart Mill dared to write an essay called *The Subjection of Women*, which not only defends women, but states that the subordination of women is one of the main obstacles standing in the way of human improvement. He further espoused perfect equality. And these are just two examples of the

discussion going on at the time. The seeds for women's rights were being planted.

"For that matter, many of the female writers revered by the Hollow Ones were writing during this time — Mary Shelley, who wrote *Frankenstein*, for example. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who I mentioned just a moment ago, also wrote one of the most beloved love poems in history. I know you know it. Everyone does. It starts out, 'How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.'"

Mysry perked up and interjected, with dramatic exuberance, into the pause, "I love thee to the depth and breadth and height my soul can reach, when feeling out of sight for the ends of Being and ideal Grace."

Mark cast a grin toward the performer.

"Thank you, Mysry," Penny chuckled. She took a drink from her cooling coffee.

Mysry bowed. Penny continued, "Not only did the Victorian era see passion and love and an increase in discourse surrounding the equality of the sexes, but it also saw writers such as Friedrich Engels taking a closer look at labor conditions in the industrial landscape, and it saw the beginnings of the homosexual revolution. I don't know whether this last came as a reaction to other influences that were attempting to stifle and persecute homosexuals, but I do know that queers were coming, at least some of them, out of the closet. Not all, mind you, and certainly not as boldly as we saw in the 20th century, but they began to peek out and wonder what the world would be like if they could walk openly and without fear in society. The movement toward liberation for homosexuals has been a long and complex road, but I, and others I know, believe that the Victorian era was a crucial turning point on it.

"During that time, Oscar Wilde wrote his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which rocked Victorian society with its thinly veiled suggestions of homosexuality. That novel was largely influenced by another, written in 1884 by Joris-Karl Huysmans. Huysmans' book, entitled *A Rebours*, came to be known as the bible of decadence.

"Wilde was an aesthete. He believed in 'art for art's sake' and life for life's sake. He, as you probably know, made no secret of his own homosexuality. This eventually landed him in jail, hard labor. He was ruined. One of the most witty and clever minds of the Victorian era was cast into the toilet because of who he entertained in the privacy of his own bedroom." Penny shook her head sadly.

"I hate that shit," Mark muttered.

"Me, too," Mysry stated.

"Yeah," agreed Penny. "Well, the good thing is that things began to change. The bold romanticists of that

period refused to let their hearts and minds be stifled. When Wilde couldn't keep the fascists from throwing him in jail, for example, he still made a statement. He martyred himself, whether intentionally or not.

"Change and revolution are first conceived in the population's minds. A martyr gives the population a rallying point, an injustice that is so extreme few will argue that it was justified. People begin to question their beliefs. This, eventually, hopefully, leads to a change in those beliefs. The revolution occurs then on a social, political and personal level. One can only hope that it never has to go to the extreme of taking up arms. Sometimes, it does go that far. Part of our goal, as the Hollow tradition, is to bring the revolution of the mind to the world and hopefully avoid a revolution of physical violence. Words and images are our weapons. Like Wilde, we are catalysts for evolution. It's a grassroots endeavor, in many ways. Live as you know it's your natural right to live. Lead by example."

ACROSS THE WATERS

"But, I digress." Penny chuckled. "I get fired up about this stuff. Sorry about that." She rearranged her bottom on the milk crate and continued, "Just one more thing I wanted to mention about the 19th century. Over here in America, society was undergoing a lot of changes at that time. Americans had revolted against the British and won their independence. They had established a government all their own based on principals that merged ideas from the classicists and the romanticists. While most scholars divorce American literature and art from the Romantic Movement, similar changes were occurring here. America was a romantic place back then, full of heroes and myths and great evil. The Wild West was in full swing. The Civil War erupted.

"Americans began to establish their own literary presence in the world. Writers such as Henry David Thoreau and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow both spoke the language of romance and revolution, though each in his own ways. Others, such as Mark Twain, for example, also produced tales of romance and heroism. They weren't grounded in the mythology of Europe, no. These stories, such as *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, may not seem Gothic on the surface, but they are Romantic. You could easily make the case that everything that came or comes out of the American South has a Gothic undertone to it. So much superstition, heroism, tragedy and beauty permeates the Southern culture. Look to New Orleans or Savannah for examples of how Gothic romanticism is alive and well in the South. The South certainly has its ghosts. The Civil War hit in the 1860s and created a good many of those

ghosts. That war caused most everyone to reevaluate their feelings on slavery and loyalty. There are few situations more romantic than brother fighting brother, as Margaret Mitchell capitalized upon in *Gone with the Wind*. That novel is about as romantic and as Southern Gothic as you can get.

"Shortly after the Civil War, American women started standing up for their rights. They held a convention in New York where they put together a document that demanded they be given the right to vote, an equal education, better jobs and more legal rights. Most people view that convention as the start of the women's movement in the United States. Later, in 1869 I think it was, Susan B. Anthony founded the National Woman Suffrage Association."

Penny waved her hand, "Anyway, my point is that, even in America, changes were occurring. The people were questioning old ways of doing things. They were expressing their unhappiness — their angst — via the written word. The United States was experiencing its own special version of a Romantic period. Admittedly, it was a somewhat warped and hypocritical version, considering what they were doing to the Native Americans; but even though we celebrated America's 100th birthday during that time, it was still a relatively new and clumsy country."

"Man," Mark interjected. "Time flies when you're having fun."

Both Penny and Mysry laughed. Penny replied, "Isn't that the truth? We're discussing whole centuries here. It's very hard to really break history down into anything much smaller than that. Whole generations were born and died in that time. As you pursue your own studies, you can delve deeper into all this, in the areas that interest you the most. Unfortunately, I'm only giving you an overview."

"That's okay," Mark reassured. "You're whetting my appetite. I think it's all very interesting."

"Well, good." Penny stood. "I'll save the 20th century for next time. You'll get to hear about some of the movers and shakers in the Hollow tradition." She reached into her sleeve and pulled out a white business card. She looked it over herself for a moment, then handed it to Mark. "Tomorrow, you have an appointment. Don't be late, and don't be followed."

Mark stood as well and took the card. He examined it. It had a time and an address printed upon it. He recognized the street name, but couldn't place the actual location. "All right," he nodded.

"Do I need to send Mysry for you?"

"No," Mark replied. "I can find it."

"Excellent." Penny gathered up her gloves and began to put them on. "Into the bag, Mr. Mist," she ordered.

The cat gave her a look, and hesitated briefly, but did what it was told.

Penny closed the doctor's bag and lifted it. She moved toward the door. Mysry stayed where she was, near the window.

Mark opened the door for Penny. "Thank you, Penny. For everything."

"You're welcome," Penny smiled. She stepped out into the hallway but paused there. With her back still to Mark, she added, "And Mark?"

Mark had been ready to shut the door. He paused. "Yeah?"

"I recommend you get yourself a nice pair of black boots and burn those tennis shoes." She headed up the hall without looking back.

Mark looked down at his shoes.

Mysry muffled a laugh behind her hand.

The doctor's bag snickered.

LEANING TOGETHER: LIVING HISTORY

Mark walked quickly down the street toward the address that Penny had given him. He felt wonderful. The new brightness and alertness that his Awakening had instilled in him combined with an even newer sense that he was finally becoming his true self. Mysry had taken him shopping the evening prior. She had allowed him to choose his own clothes, without censure, but had encouraged him to let his soul speak through the attire he chose.

She had said, "You don't need to wear what you think would please anyone but you. You don't have to worry about offending anyone or being harassed. You're a Hollow One now. These things flow through you and away. They can't hurt you. Be yourself."

So, Mark did. He had kept primarily to black T-shirts and jeans, but had purchased a pair of boots with silver buckles that had attracted his eye weeks earlier. At the time, he'd laughed at himself for even considering them. With Mysry, he'd tried them on and bought them. He also purchased a black leather duster. It had surprised him, hanging so nonchalantly upon the rack. When he tried it on, it fit perfectly and made him look like a character from *The Matrix*. It pleased him. He wore this new skin as he made his way to see Penny. He was going to be right on time....

He was going to be, and then, a man stepped into his path and wouldn't let him pass. Mark and the man

did a short dance before Mark gave up and just stood there. "Excuse me," he told the man.

The man shook his head.

Mark hadn't expected that. He looked around at the other people on the street. They minded their own business. The man let them pass. Mark said again, "Excuse me," and tried to walk by the man.

The man stepped into Mark's path.

Mark studied the man more closely. He was the same height as Mark, but slightly broader in the shoulders and chest. He had a big head, the kind one expects to find on a boxer or Mafia grunt, topped with a stubbly haircut. His eyes didn't seem to hold any malice, ice blue though they were, and yet, something about the man put a tingle at the back of Mark's neck. His clothing was inconspicuous, so that wasn't it. A retro-50s, gray suit, white shirt and plain black shoes gave nothing away about the man's identity. He was too well dressed to be a beggar or thief.

"Excuse me," Mark said again. He took a step backward.

The man took a step forward but said nothing.

Mark tried again, to the right, to the left. The dance was slightly more aggressive that time, and still, the man would not let Mark pass. Others went by without trouble. The man made no move to stop anyone aside from Mark.

"Look, man," Mark said, growing nervous. He contemplated his options. Magic? He knew a few tricks that Mysry had taught him. "I don't have anything to give you." He took another step backward just as a young woman came walking by. Mark quickly scooted around to the other side of her and walked with her past the man. He had banked on the idea that the man wouldn't get physically aggressive with a young woman. He'd been right. He left the man in his dust. The young woman never even knew she'd helped.

After that, Mark took a circuitous route to get to the address Penny had given him. He took a cab, then walked around a block or two, just to make sure he wasn't followed. He saw no indication that he was. Unfortunately, this made him late.

The address was an old Masonic temple. Its architecture elaborately combined Egyptian and art deco accents with Gothic structure. Certain bricks had symbols upon them. Mark suspected the symbols were sacred to the Masons who had built the temple, but he had no idea what they might mean. Besides, he had more important things to do than stand outside on the sidewalk and admire the building. He climbed the front steps and raised his fist. Mysry interrupted his knock by opening the door before he could even put knuckles to wood.

"Wow, you look great," Mark blurted. Mysry wore a fitted velvet dress of dark purple. It made her look like she had just stepped out of *Romeo and Juliet*.

"Come on," Mysry whispered. She grabbed Mark by the coat collar and pulled him into the vestibule. "You're late."

"I know," Mark replied, keeping his voice low to match Mysry's. "I'm sorry about that. Some crazy guy stopped me on my way here."

Mysry shushed him. "Tell me about it later. They're waiting for you."

"They?" Mark blinked.

"Yes," Mysry nodded. "The cabal elders. Through there. Go on. Just be respectful, and they won't turn you into a toad." She smiled and winked, which helped.

FACE-TO-FACE WITH THE PAST

Mark suddenly felt very self-conscious. He smoothed down his hair and headed for the curtained archway. He heard voices coming from behind it but couldn't make out what they were saying. He pushed the heavy drapes aside and entered the main room of the temple. It was huge. The vaulted ceilings reminded Mark of several Gothic cathedrals he'd seen in Europe. These had an obvious modernity to them, in the cut and material of the arched vaults, but they were impressive nevertheless. Two stained-glass windows cast jewel-toned patches about the room, draped them over couches and chairs and end-tables and painted them upon the ornate altar and podium at the far end. Mark realized with some surprise that the temple was actually someone's home — or the home of a group. Little signs that people actually lived there began to catch his attention. He saw a soda can on the coffee table, a pair of shoes tucked under the end of one couch, a plastic bag of stuff from the local drug store lying next to another door and a paperback book open and upside down next to a yoga mat in the far corner. There were other things of interest in the room, but five things in particular demanded Mark's attention: the five mages who were waiting for him. Much to Mark's relief, Penny was among them. Mr. Mistoffelees perched on the back of a couch near her.

Penny glided forward, her feet hidden beneath the many-netted layers of her black, wedding-cake dress. She slid her arm through Mark's. "Ladies and gentleman, here he is, our newest protégé, Mark Moon."

Mark cast her a sideways glance and mouthed, "Mark Moon?"

Penny smiled up at him and uttered quietly, "Just roll with it." She guided him forward, toward the others.

Mark smiled in greeting and made a cursory study of each. There were two men and two women besides

Penny. Of the other two women, one was tall and thin, with the shortest cap of woodland hair. She looked to be of East Indian ancestry, with skin the color of café latté. She wore all black — a long, lace coat over a bra and slim-fitting bell-bottoms. Her lacy sleeves extended down over her knuckles. She wore dark eye shadow and had black-cherry lips. She was exquisitely striking in a graceful, elegant way.

"Mark, meet Purity...", Penny introduced the exotic woman.

Penny then gestured to the other woman. She was much more petite than the first, with an hourglass figure that rivaled Penny's. She wore a red-vinyl dress that came down to the tops of her thighs. It gave her a sassy look that enhanced her obvious, natural energy. Her eyes outshone the rhinestones she had glued around them. Stripes of red marked her cheeks, as if she were preparing to play quarterback for the Red Queen. The strawberry coloring on her lips drew the eye and enhanced their sensuous swell. She had the essence of fire written all over her, from the intelligent spark in her eyes to the passion that flickered upon her mouth and in the curves of her body.

"Anaïs...",

The first of the two men stood an inch or two shorter than Mark and had a well-toned, lean body. He had dark circles under his eyes and hollowed cheeks that had nothing to do with make-up. His legs were snug in a pair of black pants so form-hugging they could have been tights. He wore a white shirt with lace at the sleeves and collar. Its buttons gleamed softly. Over that, he wore a burgundy velvet coat with tails. He presented, between the clothes and his dramatic bow, the image of a 19th-century gentleman — an insane gentleman, if the Jekyll-and-Hyde messiness of his hair and skittishness of his eyes were any indication.

"Pietro...",

The second man looked much more trustworthy. He had long, sandalwood hair that seemed almost to glow from the inside out, like moonlight reflecting on a stream. He carried himself with confidence and an innate stability. He had a solid, Celtic body to match a pleasant, Celtic face. Black pants, simple and unpretentious, set the foundation for a loose-sleeved, satin shirt the color of the forest under a full moon. Over that, he wore a leather vest. Each of his fingers held a ring. Their silver reflected the light as he gestured.

"Aarik...",

Mark nodded and smiled to each, and he received the same in response.

"and this is Neville Sinclair...",

Mark hadn't noticed anyone else in the room, but there was one other man there. He stood from where he'd been sitting in one of the chairs in plain view. Mark wondered only for a second why he hadn't noticed the man, but he let it go.

Neville stood slowly, as if he had all the time in the world and intended to make the most of every second. He was tall and thin. Mark had never seen any man look so completely goth. Neville even wore make-up. He outlined his eyes with black and drew them outward with sweeps of coal gray. He had painted his lips black. His cheeks had deathly shading, a shadowy blush applied with care. A black velvet suit and midnight satin vest over a white pirate's shirt would have looked ridiculous on anyone else. On anyone else, it would have resembled an Austin Powers hand-me-down. On Neville, it looked elegant. He carried himself with a timelessness that made him seem almost like a spirit, a ghost. His pale skin did nothing to counter that impression. He posed his cane in front of himself and rested both hands upon it. He barely nodded.

"and that is Aurelius."

The other man had entered from the vestibule just as Penny began the introduction. Mark followed Penny's gesture to see whom she meant. To Mark's surprise, it

was the man from the street earlier, the one who had refused to let Mark pass.

"Hey!" Mark said, pointing. "That guy—"

Penny put her hand on Mark's arm, encouraging it back down to his side. "It's rude to point, Mark." She smiled coyly. Someone else chuckled. Penny explained, "That was a setup, a test of sorts. You passed. Neville wanted to know what you would do. He's rather sadistic that way." She cast the tall, gaunt man an affectionate smile.

"It's just as important," commented Neville, with a Spock-like tone of logic laced over a British accent, "to know when *not* to use magic as it is to know *when* to use magic. I wanted to see if he would resort to his new tricks to avoid a minor annoyance."

Penny drew Mark with her toward a couch. "Mysry has been working with Mark," she explained to Neville. "She's been teaching him how to behave and how not to behave. He's a fast learner. Not to mention, he has a good deal of natural common sense, and he's very intelligent."

"Yes, well," Neville grunted, "so we've heard. That's why he's here. Let's get started, shall we?" He pulled a silver pocket watch from his vest and popped it open to check the time. "I don't have all day. I have things to which I must attend this afternoon."

THE STUFFED MEN

Neville Sinclair Nevermore and the Longest Night

Seated on the floor, Mysry threaded another bead onto the string. "Now that you've met Neville, would you like to hear a story about him?"

Mark looked up from where he was stretched out on the floor, drawing. "Sure," he replied.

"Okay." Mysry wiggled herself a little taller and leaned on the cardboard-box table. "So, they say that one night Neville was leaving a theatre in Paris. This was back in the 1920s, I think, shortly after he made that fateful quote that ended up defining us. Anyway, so he's leaving, right, and walking home. I've heard Paris was beautiful back then, with gas lanterns in the streets and horses and carriages mixed in with those old-time cars. I always imagine it not much different from when Jack the Ripper walked the London streets killing whores — except for the cars. Anyway, so, he's leaving the theatre, and this beautiful woman comes up to him. She's dressed all in white, with glass beads on her dress and in her hair. When she walked, you could hear the soft tinkling of the beads hanging from the fringe at the hem of her dress.

"Neville was immediately enchanted with her. He loved Josepha, even then, but this woman had a quality about her that could instantly break men's hearts. Neville is an honorable man though. He would not betray Josepha. The woman flirted with him. She tried to seduce him, but Neville graciously refused her advances. It took every ounce of his willpower to do so however. That's how beautiful she was.

"Eventually, the woman left him alone, but it was only a ploy. As he continued on his way, he was followed and then chased by a terrible coach with two wild-eyed black horses. He had just stepped onto a bridge when they charged him.

"Neville ran. The fog made the cobblestones slippery, but he managed to keep his footing. Suddenly, the entire city seemed deserted. Neville saw no one. The bridge seemed longer than it had been. The sound of the horses' hoof beats pounded in his head and seemed ready to crush him at any moment. Just as he was sure that the horses would trample him, Neville threw himself over the side of the bridge and into the water. He used his magic then, in the camou-

flage of the fog. He softened his fall. He landed in the water and had to swim to shore. When he got there, he could still hear the huffing and snorting of the horses on the bridge. They pawed at the cobblestones. The sounds rang with eerie echoes through the fog.

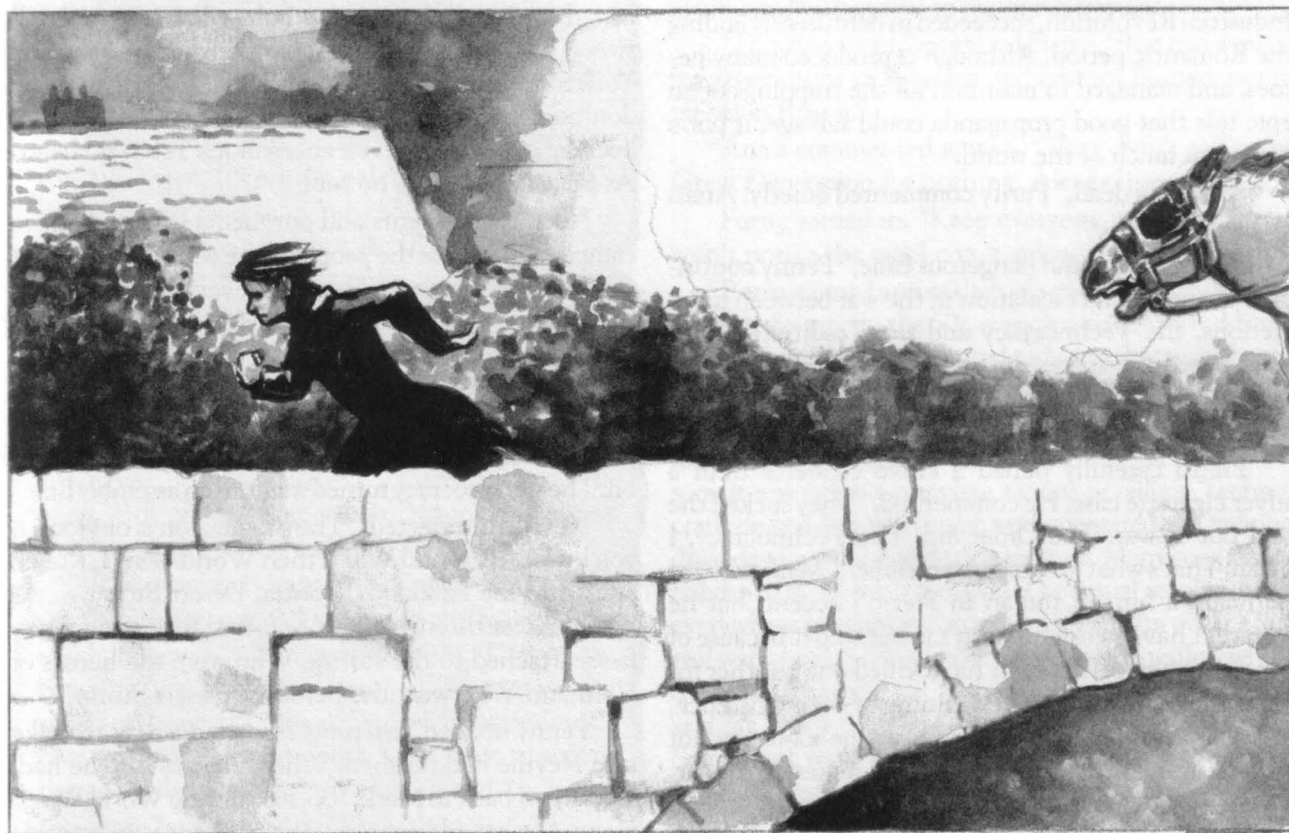
"Neville crawled up into a niche under the bridge. He knew they were looking for him. He could sense them nearby. He could hear their chittering, unnatural thoughts. So, he stayed there, in the cold, stone niche, wet and miserable... all night long. The night stretched on and on. Spiders crawled from the cracks in the bridge. They crept all over him. He wanted to scream and brush them away, but he held his tongue. He didn't dare make a noise. He didn't dare move. So, he suffered and let the fear and horror flow through him. He composed a poem about it in his mind in order to pass the time." She quoted with an elegant wave of her hand, "The man in the moon and she watched me from the surface of the water, wight and knight, reflected side by side, her cheek pressed to his. An otherworldly team, they had paired to torment

me throughout the longest night." She paused, then explained, "I don't remember the rest, but there's a copy of it hanging in the chantry."

"That's okay," commented Mark. "I'll go read it sometime. So, what happened?"

"So, there he was stuck under the bridge, hiding in the fog. The sniffing... sniffing... sniffing... was close sometimes, too close sometimes. Neville hoped they'd think he'd drowned, but they didn't give up easily. Finally, Neville passed out, from the cold and the long, long wait. And morning eventually came. And when it did, Neville awoke to find two things. A glass bead still attached to a bit of fringe lay upon the stones beside him and a spider that had built a web in a wrinkle of fabric between his coat pocket and lapel. The spider had taken up residence in the pocket.

"They say that, to this day, Neville keeps the bead and a spider in his pocket to remind himself of that longest night and what he endured because he dissed the wrong chick." Mysry grinned.



VIOLENT SOULS, BUT ONLY: WARS

Via a gentle push and a gesture, Penny indicated that Mark should sit on the couch. She arranged her skirts and settled beside him. "Yes, we're here for his final history lesson. I thought it would be a good opportunity for him to see the chantry and meet you all."

"And for us to see him," commented Anaïs. She had a lilting accent that seemed almost French to Mark, though he wasn't entirely sure.

"Exactly." Penny nodded and smiled. "So, I'll begin. Feel free to jump in whenever." Penny turned so she was sitting primly, half-facing Mark on the couch. "I believe we had arrived in the 20th century. This is easily the most complex and busiest period of our history. For one thing, we actually became an organization. But I'm getting ahead of myself. You and I had talked about your fascination with war stories, Mark. Do you remember?"

Mark nodded. "Uh-huh."

"Well, it's time to talk of war," Penny announced. "We've already discussed the Civil War. Various other wars also influenced the spread of romance in the world, some negatively, some positively — the Napoleonic Wars, the Boer War, the Crimean War and et cetera. But, the biggest wave to crash upon the shores of the romanticists was World War I. It, along with the Industrial Revolution, succeeded in definitively ending the Romantic period. Although it produced many heroes, and managed to maintain all the trappings of an epic tale that good propaganda could salvage, it put a pall upon much of the world."

"So many dead," Purity commented quietly. Anaïs hugged her.

"It was a dark and dangerous time," Penny continued. "It marked an escalation in the war between mage factions, the Technocracy and the Traditions. Both sides raised the stakes. Imaginations and talents were conscripted into military service where they suffered from regimental restrictions."

Pietro carefully pulled a clove cigarette from a silver cigarette case. He commented, "They sucked the soul out of war. The Order did. The Technocracy, I mean. That's what we need to remember." Mark thought he heard a hint of Italian in Pietro's accent, but he wouldn't have sworn he wasn't imagining it because of the man's name. "Humans have killed one another for various reasons since the beginning of their existence, and that's not likely to change any time soon. I'm not sure I'd want it to change. There is romance in war. When you go to war, it says that you care enough to send the very best." He chuckled at his own cleverness. A couple of the others did as well.

Aarik said, "At least, that's the way it used to be."

Purity added, "There used to be a time when people were fighting for causes. Revolutions had meaning. Conquerors had purpose. Crusaders had righteousness. Whether you agreed with them or not or whether you agreed with their methods, it was rare that war didn't have some romantic quality. What do we have today?" She shrugged.

Penny nodded. "That's right. And there are plenty among us who claim that the first World War was the beginning of the downfall. It and World War II both certainly had good causes, but it was in the attitudes of the warring nations that we began to see a change. Technology slipped into the mix. Respect for the enemy, formalities and traditions slipped out the back door. In the end, it was every man for himself."

"That's right!" proclaimed Anaïs. "There's nothing romantic about fire-bombing whole villages of women and children like they did in Korea." She humphed.

Penny smiled at the other mage. "No, there's not, though atrocity does not necessarily equate to a lack of romance. And we could debate this for hours, no doubt — later — but what I believe reveals the lack of romance is the elimination of the individual from the equation. Armies have become machines, not men and women fighting for a cause. It's the facelessness of it, the fact that we can wipe out whole villages in one fell swoop without ever having to get our hands dirty. You're no longer face-to-face with your enemy. You don't see the pain and anguish as you kill him. War has become impersonal, even anonymous. It has no heart. As Pietro said, it has no soul.

"Our governments and our media initiated active campaigns to make the people of the world numb to the wars and the violence. They had several strategies that they still use today to keep us from feeling. Dehumanize those involved, and people don't care. If people don't care or if they feel helpless, they won't rock the boat. We saw the beginnings of this with World War I. It got progressively worse with the second World War, and so on. The Technocracy turned war into an assembly line."

Neville interjected, "The progression is obvious, if you look at it. World War I, then World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Falklands, Bosnia, Desert Storm.... As you progress through them, you find fewer and fewer faces attached to the stories. Who were the heroes of Vietnam? Who were the heroes of Desert Storm?"

Penny nodded, listening. She waited a bit to make sure Neville had finished. When she was sure he had, she turned back to Mark. "So, also during World War I, many Awakened began to see the changes in attitude and reporting about the war. The Traditions initiated a

campaign to counter the damage the Technocracy was doing, and they were quite successful — in limited ways. The escalation occurred because the Technocracy stepped up their agenda, then the Traditions did the same, then the Technocracy, and so on and so forth.”

“That’s why,” noted Neville, “the Hollow tradition first started forming, coalescing really, like white blood cells gathering at a wound. I suppose you could say that everyone wanted to do their part. Orphans never had much organization, so they all felt helpless.”

Purity commented, “We’d been goofing off, spending too much time in our own minds, our own drawing rooms and our own dramas to see what was happening to the world. When we looked up, it was to discover that the world had gone to shit while we were daydreaming. We needed a way to get involved. It’s been a roller-coaster ride ever since.”

Pietro added, “We had been reveling in the afterglow of the romanticists.”

“So,” concluded Anaïs, “when the shit started hitting the fan, we all started looking for others of like mind. We found each other, and thus, the Hollow Ones were born.”

THE STUFFED MEN

Pietro diGenoa

“Did you know,” Mysry asked Mark, “that Pietro’s full name is Pietro diGenoa?”

“How would I know that?” Mark replied.

“Well, it is. It’s not his real name, but Hollowers never use real names. Some people say he chose it because diGenoa sounds a lot like degenerate. If you know Pietro even a smidge, you know that’s silly. He’s too serious to do that. It’s because he Awakened in Genoa. He may even have been born there. He has ties to very old families, maybe even royalty, in Italy. I don’t know much about him. Actually, I try to keep my distance from him whenever possible. Pietro’s a necromancer. He plays with ghosts. Sometimes, I think he prefers their company to the company of the living.”

“You mean real ghosts?” Mark asked, incredulous.

“Well, I’m not talking about the fake Casper you hang on your door at Halloween. That would be kinda sick. No.” Mysry grinned. “You know, the spirits of the dead. Come on, you’re a mage now. It’s okay to believe in crazy shit. Or at least to accept the possibility.”

Mark laughed, “Well, okay then.”

OUR DRIED VOICES: HOLLOW BIRTH

Penny fussed with the lace on her sleeve. She said, “Exactly. In the first two decades of the 20th century, one particular group of Awakened iconoclasts, or Orphans as they’re sometimes called, began to meet to discuss what could be done. It started as social gatherings, over brandy and cigars, in velvet parlors, just as the romanticists had done 20 to 100 years earlier. As soon as they realized that they were losing the world to the Technocracy and its allies, they began to mobilize. It took them several years to get their act together, but they eventually developed a plan that wasn’t really a plan. It was more a philosophy designed to make us slippery so that no one could ever put restraints upon us.”

Neville spoke without looking at anyone, “The turn of the century was the perfect opportunity for our enemies to turn the collective consciousness toward a more rational, less feeling, less imaginative approach to life. The Industrial Revolution kicked into gear and everyone became a cog in the machine. Even in the Roaring 20s in the States, they took away people’s source of enjoyment. Of course, that backfired on them. The Traditions countered by sparking the public’s imagination with new myths and heroes in the stories of gangsters and those who fought them. Our enemies never expected that. But they weren’t stupid. They rescinded Prohibition and began to use alcohol as another tool to numb the populace.”

“That was a tool,” muttered Pietro, “that had worked for generations in Western and Eastern Europe, not to mention Russia.”

Anaïs commented as well, “They didn’t call it the Great Depression for nothing. Alcoholism exploded.”

Purity joined in. “Keep everyone tossed, and they won’t notice the wool coming down over their eyes.”

Pietro grinned a tense slash of a grin. “Then they added drugs to the mix. In the 50s, every housewife was addicted to valium or some other attitude adjuster that made her fit more easily into the stereotype of ideal wife and mother that was so prevalent during those days, in America in particular, but elsewhere as well. That led to the 60s and 70s. Sure, sure, it was never a complete success or failure. Technocratic drugs designed to numb were countered by Tradition drugs designed to expand consciousness. Many good things happened in the 60s, especially. The sexual revolution hit everywhere here and in Europe. And Vietnam was the first real war where the American people didn’t swallow whole the bullshit coming out of their government. Like Purity said, it’s been a roller coaster ride. A tug of war, if you will. Sometimes, we’re winning. Sometimes, they are. Sadly, if I had to venture a guess, I’d say we’re currently losing. They’ve got more rope on their side.”

Neville grunted. Several of the others made hemming and hawing noises as well.

"It's true," snuffed Pietro. "Sorry. Truth hurts." He wrinkled up his nose and walked away toward the other side of the room. A moment of awkward silence ensued.

"So," Penny broke the silence. "This group of six intellectuals, all Awakened, all filled with the essence of romance, came together toward the end of World War I and began to pool their thoughts and ideas. They discussed all the things that the romanticists had discussed — human rights, art, literature, love, misery, Ascension, the meaning of the universe. They discussed all these things and more and came to the conclusion that because we've had our eyes opened, we have a duty. It is our responsibility to ensure that dreams, myth and romance never go out of style. Four of the original six of those vanguards are here in this room."

"Vanguards," Anaïs snorted. She wagged her index finger at Penny.

"Yes," Penny smiled back at her. "Vanguards."

Mark sat up and looked around, surprised. "Wait. You mean...? How's that possible?"

Penny knew what he meant. "Yes, I mean four of these people are at least 75 years old, though they look no older than you or me. Magic can do wondrous things that you have yet to discover, Mark Moon."

"Which ones?" Mark asked, awed.

"Neville, of course," Penny replied, indicating the man with a wave of her hand. Neville cast Mark a bitter smile. "Anaïs and Purity." Anaïs blew Mark a kiss. Purity bowed her head and touched her fingers to her forehead. "And Pietro." Pietro huffed a dramatic burst of clove smoke up into the air but otherwise made no particular gesture of recognition.

"Wow," uttered Mark.

Anaïs affected the demeanor of an old woman and hobbled with an imaginary cane toward Mark, "Child, the things we have seen. Why, back in my day, we had to walk to the Horizon Realm through three feet of snow, barefoot."

Everyone responded with their own versions of a laugh or chuckle or smile. Mark smiled too, but he didn't get it. "Horizon Realm?"

Penny patted his hand, "Don't fret it, dear. It's a special place where the Awakened go... or used to go. You'll learn all about it in time."

Mark nodded, then asked, "So where are the other two?"

The room fell silent. All eyes turned to Penny, at least for a moment before skittering off to the corners of the room. Those present knew the time had come to tell the saddest part of the story. They all dreaded it. They all soaked in the dreading.

Pietro commented softly, "To dread is to honor the seriousness of the deed... or the dead, as the case may be."

THE STUFFED MEN

Purity, Just Purity

"Purity was once one of Queen Victoria's servants," Mysry announced as if it were a precious secret. She nodded. "It's true. That's how Neville met her. You know that, at the turn of the century, India was ruled by the British, right? I don't think they treated the Indians very well either. I don't know. Purity had Awakened and was using Vedic astrology to make predictions for the queen. Sadly, Purity predicted the queen's death and was tossed in jail. That's how Neville heard about her. He rescued her. It was all very heroic."

"Wow, that's cool," Mark replied.

"Yah, and you should see some of Purity's photos," commented Mysry. "She's fabulously talented."

"What kind of pictures does she take?" Mark asked.

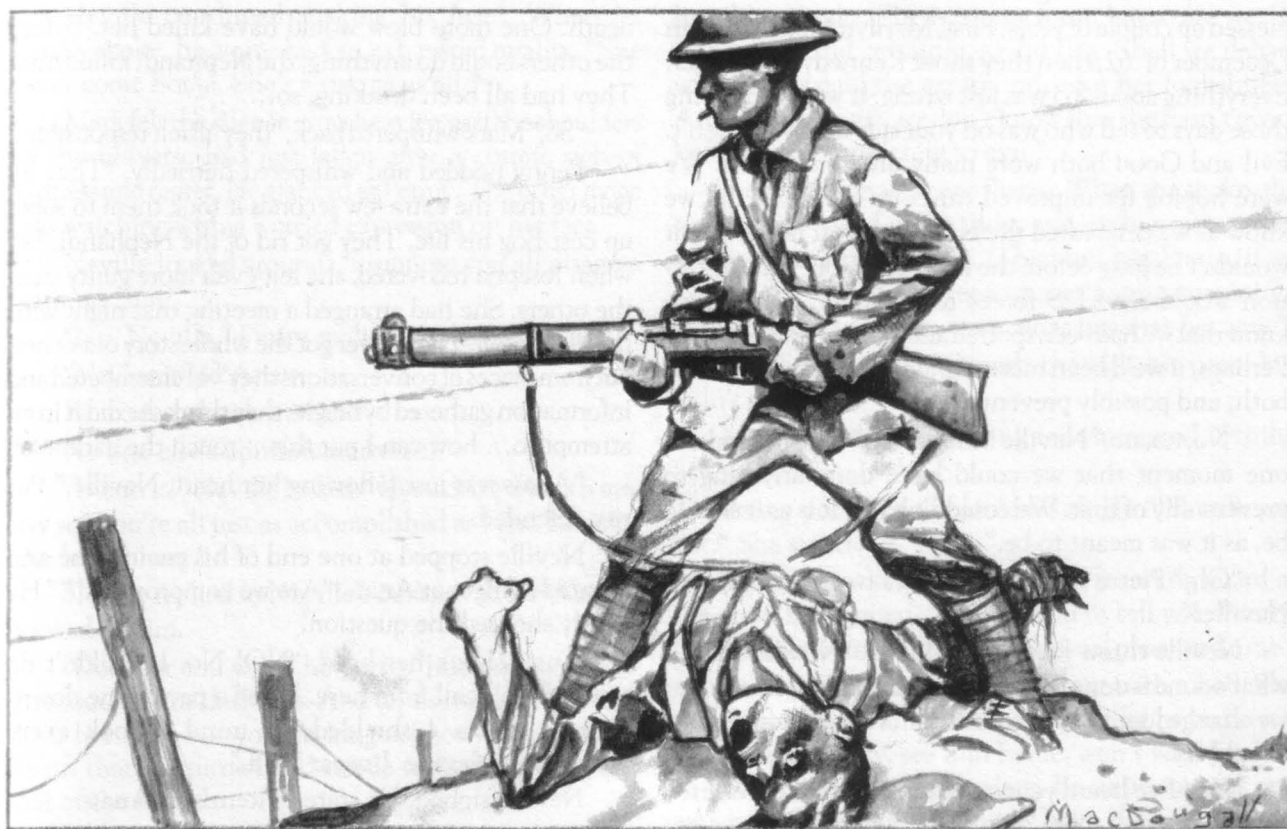
"Fetish and goth stuff mostly. She's into the scene, you know? She's got a whole flock of pretty goths lining up to put on their vinyl and leather to pose for her." Mysry shrugged. "Mostly 'cause she makes them look beautiful and mysterious and sexy no matter what they really do look like. Everyone wants to be immortalized by Purity."

"So," Mark mused, "what's the difference between the fetish scene and the goth scene?"

"Mostly just the clothes," explained Mysry. "At least in practice. A lot of the same people travel in both groups. You know? The fetish crowd wears vinyl and leather and buckles and... well, fetish gear. They have uniforms, just like the goths. Where goths wear lace and velvet and look like distant relatives of Morticia Addams, the fetish folks wear vinyl nurse's outfits or rubber shirts or just leather everything. Not so long ago, the two groups were pretty much separate, but these days, they mingle a lot more. All the best clubs have both a fetish and a goth night. You see a lot of the same faces and hear a lot of the same music on both nights. I guess you could say they're interbreeding." She chuckled. "There are a lot of Hollow Ones in the fetish scene these days."

"Gotcha," nodded Mark. "And Purity hangs out in both, huh?"

"Yeah. I guess so. She always has, really. She has some photos that she took back in the 20s and 30s that show people playing with fetish gear. It's damn cool. I didn't realize they did it back then." Mysry chased one of her skull-shaped beads across the coffee table. "Purity used to be a dominatrix, I think, but she says that fetishism has evolved beyond BDSM. Now, according to her, BDSM is just one aspect of fetishism. She says a lot of people do it just to be a little larger than life for awhile." The pretty mage looked up at Mark. "And that's what it's all about, right?"



RETIEN TIBER US: DEAD AND GONE

Something unsettled hung in the air. Mark looked around and noted that no one seemed comfortable, not even Penny. The others in the room shifted and paced, restless. Only Anaïs and Purity met one another's eyes. Everyone else kept their gazes upon their hands or cigarette or the wall or the floor.

Penny watched her own pale fingers play with the black lace of her sleeve. Quietly, she spoke, "As I've said, there were six Awakened who founded the organization known as the Hollow tradition. They originally met in Europe, over a period of approximately five years. During World War II, they moved together to the United States and chose San Francisco as their primary base of operations. They still have a chantry there, called the Waydown, though they travel more now that they've been cut off from their realm. Five of them have survived through the years. We lost one during a battle with Nephandi decades ago. His name was Bog Asphodel."

Penny paused. Mark remained silent while everyone in the room simultaneously whispered a few words in tribute. Each had his or her own version of the quiet prayer or incantation or whatever it was. Mark couldn't make out what they said. He could tell, however, that it was different for each. Their whispers combined to form a dissonant kind of music, short and sweet, shadowy and morbid. He heard Asphodel's name in the mix

several times. The whole sent shivers up his spine. It lasted only a few seconds, 10 perhaps, then the room fell to silence again.

Penny continued, "Asphodel died a hero's death. He sacrificed himself to save Josepha de Espronceda, the last of the group."

"The lost of the group," Pietro grumbled.

Mark knew enough to keep his mouth shut. So did everyone else. No one spoke for several long seconds. Even Penny seemed unwilling to continue. Finally, Purity broke the silence.

"Josepha," Purity volunteered, "was — is — a poet. She took her name in honor of José de Espronceda, the Spanish version of Lord Byron. She believed wholeheartedly in living life to the fullest, just as both Espronceda and Byron did. Some called her a bohemian, or even a Dionysian, but neither of those labels did her justice. She believed in honor and courage. She believed in revolution and is the mother of many of our own philosophies related to the revolution. Furthermore, she believed that the only thing that mattered in life was to embrace it in all its aspects, including the most horrible, degrading and macabre. She cried just as easily as she laughed and indulged regularly in both." Purity took a deep breath and wrapped her arms around herself. "The night the Nephandi jumped us, we had just celebrated the New Year of 1964. It had been a

messed up couple of years. First, Marilyn Monroe dies in December of '62, then they shoot Kennedy a year later. Everything about '63 was just wrong. It was hard during those days to tell who was on your side and who wasn't. Evil and Good both wore many different masks. We were hoping for improved times in '64. Little did we know as we celebrated the New Year that night that it wouldn't be long before the new American administration would send US forces to Vietnam. Nor did we know that we had been spotted and tracked by Nephandi. Perhaps, if we'd been more vigilant, we'd have foreseen both, and possibly prevented—"

"No, no, no," Neville interrupted. "Do not think for one moment that we could have done anything to prevent any of that. We couldn't have. It is as it should be, as it was meant to be."

"Oh," Pietro interjected, "so now you're a fatalist, Neville?"

Neville threw Pietro a cool look. "No, Pietro. But what's done is done. We cannot bring Bog back, nor can we change Josepha's heart. Nor am I convinced that we should try."

"Yes, I've heard your arguments, Neville," retorted Pietro, growing more animate. "But the night we got ambushed, I sensed nothing, absolutely nothing in Jo's manner to indicate that she was anything but her usual self. It was a long time ago, Nev."

"And," Neville countered, "we've been over this a thousand and one times since then. We must not let our own guilt force us into a position where we endanger ourselves... or others."

Anaïs sniffled. When everyone turned to look at her, she burst into tears.

Mark began to wonder whether he should leave.

Slowly, Neville moved to stand over Anaïs. His voice when he spoke was deep and reverberant with power. "What've you done?"

Purity rushed to Anaïs' side and put her arms around the other woman. "She meant no harm, Neville," Purity explained.

Neville quirked an eyebrow. "Go on."

"She had a dream one night," Purity said. "It was about Jo. It scared her, so she...."

"She *what*?"

"She called."

"She called?!" Neville threw his arms into the air and began to pace, quickly, back and forth, back and forth.

Penny leaned toward Mark and whispered to him, "The night the Nephandi attacked," she explained, "Bog Asphodel died protecting Josepha. She was near

death. One more blow would have killed her. Before the others could do anything, the Nephandi killed him. They had all been drinking, so...."

"So," Mark whispered back, "they all felt responsible."

Penny nodded and whispered hurriedly, "They all believe that the extra few seconds it took them to sober up cost Bog his life. They got rid of the Nephandi, but when Josepha recovered, she felt even more guilty than the others. She had arranged a meeting that night with the Nephandi. They never got the whole story out of her, but from pieces of conversations they've remembered and information gathered by magic, they think she did it in an attempt to... how can I put this... touch the darkness?"

"Anaïs was just following her heart, Neville," Purity defended.

Neville stopped at one end of his pacing line and pointed a finger at Anaïs. "Are we compromised?!" He nearly shouted the question.

Anaïs shook her head, "NO! No, I wouldn't do that. I didn't call from here. I used a pay phone downtown. I swear. I shielded my mind. I took every precaution, Neville. I swear I did."

Neville sighed. He stared intently at Anaïs.

Everyone else watched, different expressions on their faces. Everyone seemed, to Mark's eye, to be holding their breaths. They looked ready to leap out of the way of lightning bolts.

Finally, Neville stalked away. He returned to his seat and sat down in it.

Pietro rushed to Anaïs. "I can't believe you didn't tell me you talked to Josepha," he scolded. "How was she? What did she say?"

"She said she wants to come home," Anaïs replied quietly.

Penny leaned to whisper to Mark, "After Bog's death, Josepha was never the same. They never did figure out whether it was because of the Nephandi or simply because of her guilt over what happened. I think it must have cracked her mind a bit. And I suspect that she had... challenges melding with the rest of the cabal after that. They, understandably, had a hard time trusting her afterward. A few weeks later, I think, she left their chantry and never came back."

Neville began to shake his head.

Pietro returned to his smoking corner to light up another clove cigarette.

Anaïs wiped her eyes and leaned against Purity.

No one else moved. The younger members of the cabal knew well enough to stay out of this discussion. Aarik had even backed into the shadows near the doorway.

Neville continued shaking his head. When he finally spoke, his voice had an exhausted quality. "She can't come home. She's a risk to us all."

Mark felt the silence grow heavier, as if the shoulders of the universe had just fallen after a cosmic sigh of sadness and regret. He glanced at Penny. The other mage was watching with a worried expression on her face.

Neville looked around. "I suppose you all disagree with me, hm?"

"No, Neville," Purity replied, shaking her head.

"No," sniffled Anaïs.

Pietro just shook his head.

No one else's opinion mattered.

"Damn it!" Neville hissed. "If you disagree with me, say so! You're all just as accomplished as I am. I am not the leader here."

No one replied to Neville's outburst. Everyone just looked at him.

"Do what you will!" he burst. "Just take care. She has touched the darkness. And it has touched her. You love her face, but you no longer know... her heart." With that, he turned and strode toward the door and out of the room.

Penny whispered to Mark, "Neville and Josepha were in love."

Purity shook her head. "He'll leave," she remarked with certainty.

"Maybe not," Anaïs suggested hopefully. "Maybe not if we can get them together, to see one another again."

Pietro squawked from his corner, "Anaïs, have you lost your mind? If he wanted to see her, he'd have done so in the years between now and then. Forty years isn't something to sneeze at."

"Time heals all wounds," replied Anaïs softly.

"Perhaps," Purity interjected. "But I am certain he will leave rather than see her again. His wounds haven't fully healed, and they may never. She betrayed him most of all, even more than Bog, because of the love they shared."

Anaïs pouted, "I'm just tired of having to choose between them."

"I know, darling," Purity soothed. "But, it was her choice. She could have stayed and worked it all out, but her heart was too tender. She couldn't bear his rejection. And she wasn't strong enough to see it through to his forgiveness. Who knows? Maybe the darkness did infect her. Maybe she is lost to us."

"We cannot," noted Pietro, "allow our own romantic imaginings to make us careless, Anaïs. Josepha was loved by all of us, but the truth is that she made a

horrible mistake. She is paying for it, but so are we. So is Neville. And certainly, so did Bog. Shall we debate which of us paid the greater price for her foolishness? And, as Purity said, we don't know that she hasn't given herself over completely to evil."

Anaïs lifted her gaze to Pietro. When she spoke, she suddenly sounded much older and authoritative than she had previously shown. "Then tell me, Pietro, if we cannot give ourselves over to our romantic imaginings with courage and faith, then what have we become?"

Pietro took a deep breath through his nose, but didn't reply.

Mark leaned toward Penny and murmured, "I think I should go."

Penny nodded and patted his thigh. "I'll walk you out." She stood.

Mysry was still in the vestibule, standing guard at the door. She smiled, "Neville said to tell you, Penny, that he'd see you tomorrow at the usual place and time."

Penny acknowledged the message with a nod. She paused there in the vestibule. "I'm going to leave you here, Mark. Mysry, see him home, won't you? Explain to him about Horizon Realms. Be extra careful and watch for followers. There may have been a breach of security in the chantry. We're not sure. I'd just rather you were more cautious than normal." She put her hand on Mark's arm and looked him in the eyes, "Mark, remember that the people you met and those we discussed are the founders of the Hollow tradition. They formed the first cabal and have guided many others to follow in their footsteps.

"They have established halfway houses and chantries all over the world for Hollow Ones to find sanctuary, education and companionship. In nearly every major city in the world, you can find one of these places. The contribution that those four people have made to the Hollow tradition cannot be appreciated enough.

"This was your final, official history lesson. Think deeply about the things that were said and how they were said. There's a lot you can learn from it. Most importantly, think about all the details that were left out, that you have yet to uncover. And think about what your role will be in our future history." Penny smiled a melancholy smile. "All things considered, I think it went quite well. I'll see you again soon, Mark Moon."

"See you soon, Penny Dreadful." Mark broke out a sincere smile. For the first time in a long time, he liked the idea of building a future history.

THE STUFFED MEN

Anaïs Chevalier

Mark turned the page on his sketchbook and began a new drawing, this one of Mysry. "What about Anaïs?" he asked. "What's her story?"

Mysry nodded, "Anaïs supposedly met Neville at the same time Pietro did, at a birthday party for the Prince of Wales, in London. That was in 1901. It was either his birthday party, or they were celebrating the death of Queen Victoria. I can't remember which. But, anyway, the three met that night, and the rest is fate.

"I remember one night, Aarik had been drinking absinthe, and he told me that Anaïs was actually much older than Neville. He insinuated that she had actually known Neville a lot longer than most people think and even that she was there for his Awakening. He also said that he thinks Anaïs harbors some bitterness because Neville has gotten all the limelight. I don't know. I've never seen any evidence of that, but you never know."

"Has Anaïs done anything for the Hollow Ones?"

"Before Neville showed up? Not that I know, but then there wasn't really a Hollow tradition until he made one. Afterward, oh yeah. She's subtle though. She works through pop culture. In the 50s, for example, Anaïs was in the coffee houses encouraging the beat poets. They say she was instrumental in getting Kerouac on the road. Don't laugh, but she also claims that Roswell was her idea. She felt that people needed something magical to believe in, to fear. What better monster is there than the government and aliens? Whether she's telling the truth or just spinning fantastic tales is hard to tell. She says she believes in the grays and says she knows lotsa people who've been abducted. Is she telling the truth? How dare we, of all people, deny that there may be things out there we know nothing about. Besides, it doesn't really matter whether it's fantasy or fact. It's an intriguing thought, and she's spreading her own legend, forming her own romantic history. For all I know, she may be the mastermind behind the alien autopsy video too, and maybe it's for real." Mysry laughed. "She's kinda freaky that way."

"Dang," chuckled Mark.

IN A FIELD: HORIZON REALMS

"Horizon Realms," Mysry mused. "Hm. Okay, so Penny wants me to explain Horizon Realms to you. Let me see if I can. They're basically places that mages create on a different plane. I don't exactly understand how they work. I've only been to one once. They're crazy, sometimes fantastic and fabulous places. I think they're basically sculpted from the imaginations and thoughts of the mages that live there."

"Do the Hollow Ones have one?" Mark wondered.

Mysry nodded. "Well, we used to have a few, but only a few, and they were small. It takes a lot of energy and dedication to maintain one. They're dangerous now, since the Avatar Storm."

"The what?"

"The Traditions call it the Avatar Storm. It's this weird effect that came out of nowhere, making it dangerous to go to other planes, including our Horizon Realms. It pretty much cut us off from them, which is kinda okay by us. I mean, the Hollowers didn't ever really have much need for Horizon Realms anyway. We like it better here.

"The Hollow Horizon Realms I've heard of, though, were little more than hiding places in half-way houses and chantries or special altar rooms where Hollow mystics practiced their rituals. I've never heard of one much larger than a house, though. The Avatar Storm cut us off from a lot of them. Of course, that doesn't mean there aren't any in use out there. It just means no one has clued me in to them."

Mark chuckled. "You mean they don't tell you everything?"

Mysry threw a pillow at him.

SHAPE WITHOUT FORM: GEOPOLITICS

Penny drove a black hearse. Riding in it, Mark felt an odd combination of emotions. He noticed the skittish looks the vehicle drew from folks on the streets. He found he didn't mind that too much; rather, it gave him something of a thrill. The hearse was pristine, an older model undoubtedly bought used. Mark wondered how many dead people had taken their last ride in it. That unnerved him somewhat, but by the same token, he didn't really mind it all that much. It added to the thrill, though he was glad he was sitting in the front seat.

"No one expected things to escalate so quickly," Penny relayed. "I have to apologize in advance, Mark. You're going to get tossed into the deep end to learn how to swim. I would have liked to have taken more time with you, but I can't change the situation. We're going to need all hands, including yours and Mysry's." She turned her head toward her companion just long enough to smile at him. "We'll try to keep you out of harm's way as best we can." Eyes back on the road, she added, "Of course, there are no guarantees in life... or in death."

Mark would have sworn she was enjoying tormenting him. Actually, he didn't mind *that* too much either. "So, what's the emergency?" he asked.

"Around the globe, our safe havens and chantries are reporting robberies. It's always the same M.O." The corner of Penny's mouth quirked up, and Mark guessed that she'd been wanting to use that phrase for some time. "They leave no sign of break-in," she continued. "And somehow, they manage to do it undetected. So far, no one has been attacked during one of these break-ins." She paused to pay attention at an intersection.

Mark waited until the intersection was nearly behind them, then asked, "Do they take anything?"

"That," she replied, "was our first question when the rumors started spreading. They do. But they only take a trinket, a knickknack or some little thing from an altar that has no value. We know it's the same person or group, however, because in place of the thing they take, they leave an eyeball."

"An eyeball?!" Mark gasped.

"Yes." Penny peered sideways at Mark. "Does that unnerve you?"

"Hell, no," Mark grinned. "That's cool!"

Penny grinned back. "Excellent." She pulled into the alley behind the chantry and took her parking space.

AS WIND IN DRY GRASS: MOBILIZING

Mark followed Penny toward the main gathering hall of the art deco-Egyptian-Christian-Gothic chantry.

Penny's skirts swished as she preceded Mark down a long, narrow hallway. Her skirt hem rearranged dust bunnies as it brushed the wood floor. Finally, she stopped at the side door to the main temple. She paused there.

Mark had been raised enough of a gentleman to know that was his cue to open the door for her. He did so.

Inside the hall, no one said a word. Mark could tell even before he entered that everyone he had met was there, as well as several people he hadn't met.

Penny headed inside with a soft, "Thank you," for the opening of the door. Just as she crossed the threshold, an odd sense of wrongness assailed Mark. If asked what bothered him, in those few seconds before he followed Penny into the room, he wouldn't have been able to answer. Then, he crossed the threshold as well. Immediately, he understood. The moment he was inside, sound resumed. He could again hear Penny's skirts whisper as she moved. People were talking and coughing and clinking their spoons in their coffee or tisane or tea. It was as if he had crossed an invisible sound barrier. Indeed, later, he would learn that's exactly what it was.

Neville announced, "Here are the last of our gothlings. Our gaggle is complete." He moved to the front of the room and pulled down a white screen. "I'll keep this short and sweet."

Mark and Penny sat on one of the couches.

"Through the Hollow Underground," Neville explained, "we've been hearing about break-ins at various Hollow havens around the world. It didn't take a genius to notice the trend. This is completely and utterly unacceptable. Our safe havens are supposed to be just that... safe. So, we're mobilizing."

Anaïs clapped her hands and squealed with excitement. "How fun!"

Neville glanced askance at Anaïs and then continued, "We're splitting up into teams of two and going to go calling upon each of the main nests."

A wave of excited whispers passed through the room.

Neville waved his hand toward the screen. A slide projection showed a charming sidewalk café in the old part of Paris. A sign over the door read *Le Corbeau Cruel*. The Notre Dame cathedral in all its Gothic glory was the backdrop. "We will be sending Anaïs and Gabriel to *Le Corbeau Cruel* in Paris." He proceeded to assign locations to others in the room.

Mark's name didn't come up, so he began to assume that he wasn't included. He watched as everyone discussed their trips. Mysry and Penny had been chosen to go to England. Pietro and another would visit Italy. Another pair were headed for Brazil. Mark just assumed he was too new. He couldn't help feeling disappointed. He congratulated Mysry and then moved off to one side to stay out of everyone's way. The party began to break up.

Neville Sinclair and another man approached Mark. Neville introduced him, business-like, "Mark, I'd like you to meet Baron, one of the regulars at our San Francisco chantry. Do what he says." Sinclair made gestures with his hands to indicate that the two should talk, and then, he walked away.

OR RATS' FEET OVER BROKEN GLASS: A TOUR

Baron nodded to Mark, "Hi, Mark. Nice to meetcha." The man stood well over six feet. In his mid-to late-30s, he seemed somewhat out of place with the other Orphans. Even Neville appeared no older than 30. Baron had short brown hair that curled at his nape and over his ears, unkempt. However, he kept his mustache and goatee neatly trimmed. He wore a simple suit of brown wool, leather at the elbows, no tie and riding boots. The ensemble made him seem scholarly or ready for a tramp through the forest with Hemingway. He kept his hands in his pockets, a stance that gave him an air of friendliness and self-confidence. Though his accent had a definite taste of New York in it, the rest of him seemed European.

"Same here," replied Mark.

"Looks like you and I are a team," Baron remarked casually. He moved to lean against the wall beside Mark. "We're gonna hit every chantry. Hope you don't mind traveling."

"Wow!" Mark felt the excitement begin to build within him. "All of them?"

"Yeah." Baron pulled a book of postcards out of his pocket. "You ever been to Paris?"

"No." Mark shook his head.

"Here, take a look at this." Baron opened the book of postcards to one that showed the exact same scene that Neville had displayed on the screen.

Mark looked at the postcard. He felt Baron's hand come to rest at the back of his neck, and the shout of an abrasive woman exploded in his head, "No, George. To the left! Move to the left! I want to get the church in the picture too!" The feel of cool, open air touched Mark's cheeks. He lifted his gaze from the postcard to find himself in the middle of the real thing. His heart hammered.

"Breathe," ordered Baron, quietly in Mark's ear. "It's real. It's magic. Believe. Dare to believe. Breathe."

Mark abruptly took a deep breath through his mouth. Tears stung his eyes. The talking cat had been one thing, but he hadn't experienced magic quite so personally and quite so dramatically. The magic he'd

seen up to that point suddenly paled in comparison to traveling in an instant to the other side of the Atlantic.

Baron took hold of Mark's sleeve and tugged him out of the alley. "Come on." He pulled Mark toward *Le Corbeau Cruel*. "Don't think about it too hard, or you'll pull Paradox down on top of us. It just is. Accept it."

Mark accepted it but then spent the next hour and a half in a state of excited agitation. He tried to sit still but couldn't. He wanted more magic.

THE HOLLOW WORLD

Baron talked to Philippe DuVauge and several of the other local Hollow Ones who orbited around the café. He and Mark went back into the private areas, the parts that were once the main body of the mortuary but that the DuVauges had renovated into their own living quarters and gathering place. They surveyed the security and the spot where the eyeball appeared; they surveyed the eyeball.

Finally, Baron and Mark said their *au revoirs* and, Baron, whistling "It's a Small World After All," popped them off to Italy. The first night, Mark and Baron stayed in Milano, Italy. The time difference caught up with them there. As they sat at the kitchen table in the chantry, the hour approached midnight. Mark hadn't even begun to tire.

"This Tradition still blows my mind," Baron was saying, "even after all these years. I can't believe that no one has stepped up to try to turn it into a cult of personality or some shit like that. But no one has. Despite the number of primadonnas we have, the political games stay on the local level. I suppose that's good. It's probably because everyone knows better than to fuck with Neville Sinclair, Esquire. Or maybe it's just that they don't think that big." He shrugged. "It's not about world domination. It's about making an impression at the club."

Mark chuckled. "You really think that?"

"Well, no," Baron admitted. "Not entirely, I mean. There're some who are like that. Shallow as puddles in the Sahara. They're happy that way. Less responsibility, I guess. And then there're others who take the studying and the philosophy pretty damn seriously. They're the ones who go off and make their own chantries. You can't judge the Hollow tradition by the American Orphans though, ya know? We're a special breed."

"How do you mean?" Mark asked.

"Well, technically, I suppose you could say that modern goth originated in the US, but it has spread to Europe. On the other hand, punk and its various step-

children as we know it today originated in Europe. What Americans have done with that is turn it into its own special brand of consumerism. Not that there's anything wrong with that, but the punks of Britain in the 80s would have eaten them for breakfast." Baron stretched out his legs and crossed them at the ankles. "Nowadays, kids seem to think there's not much left to rebel against." He shrugged. "Or maybe they're just not as conscious as we were back then."

Mark took advantage of his pause. "You're American, aren't you?"

"Oh, yeah," Baron answered. "You can't tell by the way I talk?" He chuckled. "Yeah, I'm from New York. Being tough and rebelling comes as natural as taking a shit in New York. It's not like the rest of America. We're not pampered in New York. We take it on the chin and come up ready to kick some ass. But, see, that's the great thing about this world of ours and the Hollow tradition. We're all different. We're all special in our own ways, and I don't mean special like we ride the short bus — though, hm, that does apply in some cases." He laughed and Mark joined him. "No," he continued, "we're all different. And that's okay. Wait 'til you meet the Germans. They're a hoot. They take themselves even more seriously than the French. At least the Italians know how to kick back and have some fun. I'll warn you, the Germans will want to talk your ear off and discuss philosophy with you until the cows come home. I usually just nod a lot. They get riled if you disagree with them. I spent six months with them doing a sort of study abroad. They were the most hospitable people I've ever met, but they sure can talk your ear off."

STUDY ABROAD

"You did a study abroad?" Mark wondered. "Was that before or after your Awakening?"

"After," answered Baron. "You've probably noticed by now that everyone keeps telling you you're gonna have to figure some things out on your own. Well, they're not pulling your leg. They give you the basics, and then, you're expected to run with it from there. If you do, great. You'll earn respect and learn a shitload while you're at it. If you don't, then, hell, you can have a good time. No matter what, you'll usually be welcome in any Hollow halfway house or chantry. Open invitation, unless and until you drag trouble along with you. You'll have to earn some celebrity status, like Neville or Penny, before they'll let you in with hellhounds on your heels. They're not American embassies keeping the Commies at bay with machine guns, ya know?"

"But, they're great hiding and resting places, and they're repositories of knowledge, with extensive li-

braries. You can read to your heart's content. Hell, the regulars in the chantry usually grab any chance they can get to show off what they know. Especially among the European cabals; they take that kind of thing pretty damn seriously.

"The folks in the Wells cabal, in England..." He chuckled and interrupted himself, "We call them Wookeys because the little burg where they live is actually named Wookey." That amused him, obviously. After another chuckle, he continued, "Anyway, they think of themselves as guardians of what they call 'The One True History.' Penny told you about the ancient secrets we believe were hidden in old texts and stories and fairy tales, right? Well, here in Europe, they're really uptight about that shit. Back home, it's parties first and then scholarship. Here, it's scholarship and then parties. That's why they kinda talk down to Americans sometimes, though they love us once they get to know us." He grinned. "Cause we're fun."

"Damn straight," commented Mark.

"That's right." Baron drank from his glass of beer.

THE HOLLOW RAILROAD

After a brief pause, Baron continued, "So, you should do a study abroad. You'd be amazed at how much it'll broaden your horizons. And you'll make contacts that will get you into the Hollow Railroad."

"The Hollow Railroad?" Mark asked.

"You bet. The rumor mill. It's how we keep in touch with each another. It's pretty fucking amazing. Hollowers, chicks and guys both, love to gossip and talk, so there's this magical thing that happens. Everyone's networked, and I don't mean in the electronic sense. Information finds its way to whoever needs it the most. That's how Neville found out about the break-ins. There's not much that doesn't make its way through the Railroad — and pretty damn quickly too."

"Why do they call it the Hollow Railroad?"

Baron shrugged, "It's better than the Hollow Network. That sounds too techno, ya know? Hollow Railroad has romantic connotations. There's always romance going on when railroads are involved. Ghosts on the tracks, hangings at the trestles, or beauties tied down in front of a train and the heroes who save them." He grinned. "Plus, it's not the first time the word 'railroad' has been used to signify an underground method of communication and transportation of treasures."

"True, true," Mark agreed.

HERE WE GO: HOLLOW PLACES

Paris, France

Within blocks of the Seine, within sight of Notre Dame cathedral, sits a small, unassuming café. Just another bit of charm to attract tourists, the establishment offers coffee, cigarettes, chewing gum, croissants baked fresh each night by a local bakery, chocolates and souvenirs that reflect the more macabre side of Notre Dame. Among these charming souvenirs, one finds replicas of gargoyles and relics, tiny bottles of "lucky" sand and dirt said to have come from the sandblasting of the ancient stones during its last cleaning, jewelry boxes shaped like tombs, holographic key chains of the hunchback and rosaries said to have been blessed by the priests of Notre Dame.

On any evening, one finds both the Orphans and the orphans of Paris wandering into the place. They smoke their cigarettes, drink their coffee and wax intellectual. All kinds come to *Le Corbeau Cruel*. Outside, they sit in plastic chairs and set their drinks on wrought-iron tables. They slouch and lean close to one another, adding throaty voices to the hiss that is Paris at night. To the passerby or the tourist, they look like they own the place. Only the most daring irregular stops in at the café, and that's just how the owners

like it. If the straggly kids laughing and shoving and jibing one another doesn't deter the middle-aged Americans, then the disturbing artwork inside on the blood red walls most assuredly will. The artwork changes, but it always consists of pieces of a certain genre, a dark genre. Be they sculptures of humanoid robots with animal-skull heads or paintings of Hell, the café's artistic fare not only doesn't appeal to the typical tourist, but it usually appalls them.

The interior is split in half. On one side, visitors can spend their money in the bizarre souvenir shop and the tabac. On the other side, interior seating keeps customers dry and warm in nasty weather. A combination of booths and couches edge the room. A short bar stands against the back wall. The music in the place varies between classical, Edith Piaf and Enya. Occasionally, they'll play a touch of Depeche Mode, but even that's rare.

Ownership of the café has stayed in the DuVauge family for more than three quarters of a century, though before it was a café, it was a mortuary. Whichever of the owners happens to be on duty will gladly talk about the café's history. For two and a half centuries, the DuVauge family ancestors received the



bodies of royalty and prepared them for burial or entombment. They proudly display locks of hair supposedly taken from various noble celebrities, including the Marquise de Pompadour and romanticist Victor Hugo.

Its proximity to Notre Dame has always made it a draw for Orphans — and Hollow Ones in particular. Only the most recent generation of DuVauges, however, has been Awakened. Three brothers, triplets, were born to Michelle and Henri DuVauge in 1967. The brothers took over the café from their father in 1992. One by one, they began to Awaken. Philippe, Henri Junior and Marius take turns running the place. For four months of the year, one brother takes care of business at the café, while the other two do whatever it is mages do in their “spare” time. All three of them live in the apartments above the café, though Philippe tends to travel a great deal when he’s not on duty. All three are gregarious and charming. Even before their Awakenings, they had a psychic link that alerted them when one of the others was in danger. It wasn’t always reliable before, but since their Awakenings, the link has grown stronger. Only Henri openly claims to follow the Hollow philosophy, though his brothers don’t stray far from it.

Milano, Italy

In the 1920s and 30s, the Milano chantry was a fancy hotel located within walking distance of the Duomo cathedral, the biggest and greatest example of late Gothic architecture in Italy. The hotel flourished through World War II, but shortly after the war, its bankrupted owners were forced to sell it. The hotel changed hands numerous times. Several of its owners tried to renovate it and reopen it for business. Unfortunately, none of them had enough business savvy to make it work. Finally, in 1971, Bernardo Veneducci bought it at a state auction. Bernardo had been searching for just the right building to house his cabal. He lives in the Renaissance Suite himself and has renovated the 20 bedrooms in the hotel into comfortable living quarters. Those who live there gather in the gorgeous 1920s ballroom for meals, meetings and socializing.

Somerset, England

The Wells cathedral stands over England’s smallest city, Wells. It sits at the foot of the Mendip Hills. A place of draping willows and sparkling brooks, immaculate lawns and charming English homes, it seems almost too cheerful to host a cabal of Hollow Ones.

The Gothic cathedral, Bishop’s Palace and Vicar’s Close emit an aura of ancient mystery despite the local government’s attempt to pretty the place up with creative landscaping. Vicar’s Close holds the prize for oldest, intact medieval street in Europe. The residences on that street house the members of the Chapter, the cathedral’s ruling body. These administrators have no connection to the Hollow tradition, and actually, the Hollow Ones avoid them completely, fearful of their alliances. There are reasons why many would show an interest in the area and reasons why the Hollow Ones carefully watch the goings-on there. One house in particular, along Vicar’s Close, was once the home of Mr. William Hughes, chancellor of Wells cathedral in the early 18th century. He was the last one known to possess Arthur’s Burial Cross. Many sources throughout history claim that the cross was dug up at Glastonbury Abbey in 1190 along with a hollowed log that contained two bodies. These bodies, many believe, were King Arthur and his queen, Guinevere.

The actual chantry isn’t in the city. To the west, a few miles outside Wells, the cabal purchased land containing a network of caves. In a hamlet named Wookey, where the locals give tours of a cavern called Wookey Hole, the cabal maintains its own private, underground sanctuary. Members keep an extensive and impressive library of historical documents and works of art in a magically controlled environment, and they guard it with their lives. They call themselves the Guardians of the One True History. They believe that fact is stranger and more magical than fiction, and thus, they strive to piece together the reality hidden within myths and tales. In their collection, they have — among many other things — tapestries, illuminations, personal journals, novelizations, musical compositions, paintings and selected church and government records from different places, including churches that were destroyed, their records supposedly lost.

Even among those who follow the Hollow tradition, rumors have erupted from time to time that the Hollow Ones of Wookey, Somerset, actually know something about the location of Arthur’s Burial Cross. Of course, such rumors have been popping up for centuries in both mage and mundane societies. The Hollow Ones of Wookey deny that there’s any truth to them, but of course, they would deny it if it were true.

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

In Rio, there are the rich and there are the poor — and a vast expanse of nothingness in between. In Rio, superstition, occultism and Catholicism all go hand in hand. The Orphans of Rio come in two types: the rich and the poor. For Hollow Ones in Rio, these tags represent philosophies more than an actual acquisition of wealth. A war of sorts rages in Rio, among various factions of the Hollow tradition. Those who strive for an improvement of living conditions for the poor butt heads with those who look down upon the poor with aristocratic arrogance. They rarely find a middle ground.

The nobility of the Rio Hollowers maintain a club in the swank part of the city. The club has a public section for anyone and a private section for magi. To pass from one to the other, you must know a specific password that you only earn once the chantry elders have had a chance to check you out and possibly even test you. The club is called *Decadence*, and the mages couldn't have chosen a more appropriate name. Its twinkling décor includes expanses of glass and gold, chandeliers, luxurious benches and carved tables. The whole place sparkles like a diamond.

The other chantry stands in the touristy part of the city, near the beaches. In the front, the little shop sells good-luck trinkets, souvenirs, postcards, magazines and soft drinks. Down an alley, in the back, a communal home serves as a youth hostel for mundane travelers and the newly Awakened. An attached set of rooms provides housing for the cabal's elder magi. It's always exciting at the rundown youth hostel/souvenir shop. More than one young traveler has Awakened spontaneously in the magic-infused bunk rooms.

Cologne, Germany

Cologne, in Germany, has been around since AD 50 when Agrippina, Roman empress and wife of Emperor Claudius, made the area where she was born into an official city. Evidence of its Roman beginnings exist throughout the city. The 2,000-year-old Hohe Strasse, a street lined with shops of all sorts, was once an old Roman road. At one end of it stands the cathedral. At the other end is Neumarkt Square. The cathedral towers over the Hohe Strasse. Its Gothic spires stretch upward, 157 meters, to pierce the sky.

Three-quarters of the way down the Hohe Strasse, an access gate beside a women's shoe store opens onto an interior courtyard. Built in the late 18th century, the courtyard and surrounding building still has its original cobblestone. The building that surrounds it on three sides houses people who work in Hohe Strasse. In the

far corner, a particularly large apartment serves as the local Hollow halfway house. Visitors must often sleep in bunk beds or on the floor if space gets too tight, but the Hohe Strasse Halfway House never turns away an Orphan in need of a place to eat, rest and study.

An austere woman by the name of Fraulein Kirchin oversees the chantry. Fraulein Kirchin dresses in strict clothing reminiscent of Puritans, old-fashioned and in dark colors. She keeps a lace scarf on her head and wears her long hair braided and wrapped into a bun. This mode of dress draws attention in Cologne, though many tourists believe she must be an actress in the reenactments of the witch hunts. When she walks down the street, people often stop her to ask for directions or to ask questions about the history of the city. Fraulein Kirchin doesn't mind. She speaks seven languages, is a consummate storyteller and always entertains those who stop her with inspiring or horrifying tales of romantic Cologne.

The fraulein rarely leaves Cologne, and if she does, it's only for crucial reasons. Her name has become synonymous with the Cologne halfway house. Others come and go, but Fraulein Kirchin remains. As a result, it doesn't have a stable cabal. Rather, the chantry houses from three to ten mages at any one time, depending on the season and the magi-political activities occurring in Europe.

Moscow, Russia

The Internet has opened many doors. Even in countries where Internet access is restricted, such as China, the youth and rebels — and certainly the Orphans — have discovered a way to "get out." In Moscow, the discovery of gothic websites has inspired a movement there. A small chantry has developed in the blue-collar district of the city. The Hollow Ones there take the stereotypes to the extreme and tend to resemble vampire wannabes as much as anything else, but their hearts are in the right place. In recent years, they have become more bold and confident in incorporating their own culture into the development of a Russian goth style. Their chantry consists of a network of apartments across the city. Mika's apartment — Mika being the leader of the cabal and the one with the largest living space — serves as headquarters.

Coming from a history of persecution and subjugation, Orphans in Russia are not likely to be flamboyant in their ways. They keep to an underground system of gatherings and communications that cloaks them in secrecy. They have signals, knocks and code words that



they use to recognize one another, and they're much less likely to have mentors than even the Hollow Ones of other countries. Information spreads via word of mouth in the quiet corners of forgotten parks.

San Francisco, United States

The Hollow hangout in San Francisco does offer sanctuary to Hollowers but not the way it once did. Called the Waydown, it can only be described as unique. Once upon a time, it was a club, a crossroads where Orphans special enough to be on the guest list could meet, greet and stomp their feet. Twice a month, the club was open to those invited. Invitations appeared in the mail — or coincidentally on the invitee's windshield or front door. The invitations told the time and location of the next event. Some months, the club didn't open at all, however, as the parties occurred completely at the whim of those running them.

Since the Avatar Storm, the party has ended. The golden age has passed, and the chantry can't maintain the security it once did. It has taken up residence in an old warehouse, a static location. There can be few parties — and certainly not with guests that include Sleepers and other supernatural creatures. The San Francisco cabal cannot protect itself as well as it once could.

The Waydown had earned infamy among the Hollow Ones. Those on the guest list shared, to a certain extent, in that infamy and miss the place terribly now that it's gone. Patrons of the club prized their status and the exclusivity it fostered.

The Waydowners, or Waydown Viktae, ran the place and still live in the new Waydown chantry. The Viktae includes Neville Sinclair Nevermore, Penny Dreadful, Baron and several others who come and go over time. They have decorated the new chantry similarly to what it was as a Horizon Realm, a sentimental gesture as much as anything. The floor-to-ceiling draperies, back-lit stained-glass windows and candelabras cast a shifting, dreamlike illumination about the place. Darkened alcoves, now empty, host lounging couches and low tables that once seated intellectuals and modern romanticists discussing the news of the day and the philosophies of the past. Memories of laughter and sighs ripple through the torn, black netting like spectral emanations. The music descends from on high and rises up from below. Much more quiet than it once was, it still fills the empty spaces. A dance floor occupies the very center of the main room. At one time, no matter where you were seated, you could watch the drifting ballet and stomping self-expression. Those were the good ol' days.

DELIBERATE DISGUISES: HOLLOW PHILOSOPHY

The whirlwind tour of halfway houses and chantries took three days. Mark had plenty of opportunity to get to know Baron. During their downtime between jaunts, they discussed many things. Near the end of their trip, seated in the antique parlor of a Victorian house an hour outside of Chicago, they drank beers — Baron's favorite beverage — and discussed philosophy.

"You don't really seem like the others," Mark commented at one point.

Baron eyed him suspiciously. "What do you mean?"

"I don't mean any offense," Mark replied. "I actually think I'm more like you than like... I don't know... Penny, for example. Nothing against Penny, but I'm not all that goth."

The chuckle that rumbled out of Baron came with wisdom attached. He nodded. "I see what you mean. Well, not all Hollowers dress like they've just come from Byron's funeral. Being a Hollow One isn't about dressing weird. It's about..." He paused and took a deep breath. "I always have a hard time," he confessed, "expressing this. Being a Hollow One is about finding your own true self and having the balls to show it off."

Mark frowned slightly, thinking.

FALLS THE SHADOW: AVATARS

"I know, I know," intoned Baron. "Sounds corny, huh? Well, it's more complex than that. See, each of us Hollow Ones acquired or discovered or created or whatever an Avatar at that instant of Epiphany when we Awakened. Our Avatars aren't like other mages' are. Our Avatars instill cravings in us. Some say our Avatars are all the reincarnated souls of the great poets, writers and artists of the Romantic period, but I think that's bullshit and wishful thinking. Some of these guys would kill to be the reincarnation of Byron." He snorted out his nose and shook his head. "That just isn't the case. But something in our Avatars definitely desires the romance, horror and heroism of bygone days. I suppose, in a way, you could say that we're the bridge between the past and the present, between pain and pleasure, between... romance and reason." He smiled, pleased with himself.

"And that's what attracts us all to each other too, huh?" Mark asked.

Baron nodded. "That's right. It's the same thing that draws any group together. Similar likes and dislikes. Similar goals. It's really hard to pin down a

particular philosophy for the Hollow tradition. Penny, I know, likes to spin it all around the word 'romance,' but while that's a very powerful word, it doesn't always express everything. 'Horror' is another powerful word that is a second cousin to romance. A whole crapload of Hollowers steep themselves in horror until they reek of it. They turn themselves into walking horrors, basically. Whatever turns them on. I mean, I like a good Lovecraft tale as well as anyone else — or the more modern writers such as Clive Barker or Poppy Z. Brite, both of whom have the amazing ability to expand the mind of the reader. I'm sure the Technocracy would just love to turn either one of them into corporate machines pumping out crap to cover up their talent. But, as long as we watch over people such as them, it will never happen."

"You mean," mused Mark, "that good writers and artists, even if they're Sleepers, are in danger from the Technocracy?"

"Hell, yeah! Sleepers are at even more risk because they're so naïve — and easily led, like sheep, to the slaughter. Awakened artists have a little better chance of slipping under the radar, just because they know what they're doing."

Mark gazed into the fire, thinking.

BETWEEN THE IMITATION AND THE CREATION: SELF-EXPRESSION

"That's the other thing that seems consistent among the Hollowers. They all express themselves with some artistic hobby or other. Like you. Is there anything you do like that? Write? Don't worry, I won't make fun of you if you write poetry." Baron chuckled.

Mark laughed. "No, I don't write poetry, though I do like to read it when it's good. No, I draw. I'm an artist. Mostly comic-book style, I guess. I never did learn how to paint. What about you?"

"I play with words," Baron replied with a smile. "I write a little now and then. Sometimes, I even write poetry. So, you see? That's what I was talking about. Nearly all of us have some sort of artistic bent. It's all about self-expression, man. I've met some Hollowers who can get snotty about it. They see everybody else's stuff as a threat to their own greatness or some shit. I don't know. Don't let those jerks ever get to you, though. It's not about one-upmanship, not when you get down to the nitty-gritty. It's about the stories you tell with your art. Our stories will live on long after we're dust."

BETWEEN THE POTENCY AND THE EXISTENCE: BEING

Baron shifted the subject back, "If I had to choose two words to sum up the Hollow tradition's philosophy, I think I'd choose 'individuality' and 'courage.'"

"Courage?" Mark perked up.

"Sure," Baron replied. "It takes a Hell of a lot of courage to be yourself in the face of criticism and, in our line of work, even danger. If your soul is telling you that the real you loves skulls of all shapes and sizes and bones and that you are a night creature, then it takes balls to give yourself over to that and be it. If your soul is telling you that you love Star Wars more than anything and want to live by the code of the Jedi knights, dress like them and fight like them, then you're gonna need all your courage to go with that. After all, we are Beings, not Doings. Don't do it. Be it. Listen to your inner voice, your soul, your Avatar, whatever. It will tell you who you are, who you truly are, and once you know, then you can begin to learn what you need to know to be the best you that you can be. And if the truth you takes you away from the Hollow tradition, then so be it. We miss those who move on to one of the Traditions or who go off on their own where we can't help them. Some people might piss and moan and make a drama out of it, but nobody really blames them, especially not if they're going after their own truths." Baron took another long drink of his beer.

Mark chewed his inner cheek for a moment, then asked the question burning his mind, "What about Josepha de Espronceda though? Everyone seems sad and pissed that she left."

Baron nodded for several long seconds and took a deep breath. "Yeah. Well, that's a good example of how nobody's perfect. That situation is complicated by many factors. According to Neville, Josepha stabbed him and the cabal in the back. And she put them all in danger and even got Asphodel killed. See, Neville's got something of a martyr complex. He feels responsible for his cabal, probably 'cause he's the one who brought them all together and started all this Hollow tradition business. To tell you the truth, I think that's why he's still alive. Neville's tired. If he didn't feel like he had to take care of his cabal, he'd have released his Avatar by now. I suppose you could say he sticks around as a matter of honor."

"Wow," commented Mark.

"It all makes for a kickass story though, doesn't it?" Baron grinned.

Mark laughed. "Yeah, I suppose so. Maybe someday it will be a myth, about the early gods of the Hollowers." He amused himself.

Baron just kept on grinning, "That's the goal, son. That's the goal. We live it so, someday, our descendents can tell it and ooh and ahh over it."

FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM: ASCENSION

Baron indulged in a bodacious yawn. He slouched somewhat in his chair, relaxing even more, and remarked, "The truer you can be to your Avatar, the closer you come to divinity, Mark. I believe that. You have to be true to your self. That just makes the most sense."

"Makes sense to me," agreed Mark.

"That's right. That's why it's so damn important to set a good example. Most Hollowers agree with me on this, to some extent or other, though a lot of them would argue with me just for argument's sake. When you find the courage to be yourself, your true self, without caring what others think of you, then you help other people find the courage to do the same thing. Inch by inch, people begin to come out of their shells. They quit being fearful of criticism. Do you have any idea how much that would piss off the Technos? A lot. Cripes. It's like a disease — but a good disease. And we're the carriers." He paused, then added, "I don't know if I believe in Ascension or not. I don't know that I have to believe. I think it's better to just be than to believe. When you start believing, then you start expecting, and when you start expecting, then you start making laws for yourself and for others. Everybody's different though. So laws don't work. You can't tell somebody else how to be true to himself. You just can't. That's contradictory." He took a deep breath and closed his eyes.

Mark knew this pattern. He'd seen it twice before. He knew that, seconds after Baron closed his eyes, the man would be asleep. He waited, quietly. Once Baron's breathing had become regular, Mark rose and began to clear off the table.

He set the dirty dishes in the sink and ran some water. He didn't pay much attention to what he was doing, automatically washing up. His attention had turned inward. He had never questioned himself to find out who he was. The age-old question — *Who am I?* — hadn't entered his mind until recently when his Hollow friends had made him face it. *Who am I?* he asked himself. *Who am I?* He felt his Avatar shiver with pleasure, nearby, inside. *Who am I really?*

A voice inside, perhaps his Avatar, perhaps himself, replied, "Whomever you want to be."



CHAPTER TWO: A HOLLOW PARADIGM



The Hollow One paradigm is less a concrete belief system than an observable set of tendencies. These tendencies include subversive philosophy, intellectualism and an epic romantic vision. From an outsider's viewpoint, Hollow Ones often seem shallow, unmotivated and petty. These qualities confound and frustrate many a mage of an orthodox or Traditionalist paradigm. It seems a paradox to some how these "kids" who lack drive and will nonetheless manage to Awaken. This common perception is fine with the average Hollow One, who sees himself as a walking, talking paradox anyway and finds amusement when the "old coots" are as bewildered at his life as he is.

The Hollow Ones themselves cannot seem to agree on the overall reason for these tendencies, aside from the fact that these ways are practical, useful and, yes, even cool. The motivations of these modern-age mages repeatedly confound the staunch mystic Traditionalist's and the average crypto-fascist Technocrat's sense of worldly duty. What the Traditionalist and the Conventionalist fail to understand is that blanket statements simply don't apply to all Hollow Ones. Each Hollow One has his own perception of his place in the grand scheme of things.

The Hollow Ones lack any organization in the conventional sense. Some Hollow Ones do feel the need to save the mortals from the things that go bump in the night. The local Technocrats may even tolerate these heroes of the street — if they keep the magic coincidental and remain secretive, refraining from preaching subversive propaganda to the mundanes. On the other hand, some Hollow Ones have thrown their lots and loyalties in with the mystical, magical and fantastic. These shadow warriors gladly fight the good fight alongside any subversive-minded individuals, be they mage, vampire, shapeshifter, punk gang or whatever. Hollow Ones act when they feel like it, on whatever side they feel sympathetic to. There exists no united Hollow One cause — unless you consider loyalty to ideals of individuality and romanticism a cause. You can certainly call the Hollow Ones major players in the modern magical society, but you cannot actually call them a faction. The odds against the Hollow Ones rising at once and working in concert on a single goal they all agree upon are rather slim — although it has been known to happen, especially when Neville Nevermore or his cabal is involved.

One common practice of Hollow Ones — more of a survival tactic than a cherished principle — is to keep hollow magic

subtle and coincidental. More than any other groups of mages, the Hollow Ones live in the streets of the mundane, real world. Even before the Avatar Storm, there existed few fancy Hollow One Horizon Realms in which to practice highly vulgar techniques. If it were not for creative cunning and much-practiced subtlety, Paradox would have ended the Hollow tradition as soon as it began. This practice has put the so-called "Tradition" in a powerful position in the modern era. With the Traditions cut off from their elders, they have to learn to adapt in ways the Hollow Ones have practiced for years. Predictably, many Hollow Ones hold this need over the heads of those few Tradition mages who have managed to swallow their pride and approach them for ritual advice. Conversely, some Hollow Ones have embraced the "lost" Traditionalists with open arms, appreciating the newfound credit and acknowledgement. Earthbound cabals of Tradition mages are quickly learning that the Hollow Ones are a fickle bunch; you can't use experiences with one Hollow group to gauge the reactions of another.

SYNCHRONICITY IS YOUR FRIEND

The subtle approach to hollow magic can be daunting to a player used to thinking of direct, simple uses for his character's abilities. To properly play to concept, your Hollow One character cannot grandstand with flashy vulgar magic in the same way other concepts often do. Hollow Ones don't shoot lightning out of their fingertips, shapeshift into dragons, turn vampires into pillars of salt or any of that vulgar nonsense. A Hollow One will always find a more subtle way to deal with the task at hand. It's not that Potters and Merlins are not tolerated by other Hollow Ones — it's that they're not tolerated by reality. Many newbie Hollow Ones are lost to Quiet or death by weird circumstance when they fail to learn subtlety. Why use Entropy to disintegrate a car when a hairline fracture in the brake line can do the job? Why levitate an enemy's firearm from his hands when you can use a similar Forces effect to cause it to misfire?

The more subtle effects are superior in several ways. The first is the obvious avoidance of Paradox. The second is the fact that bad-luck coincidences cannot be pinned on your character in any legal sense. Whatever result you desired with a well-placed coincidence, no mortal institution can trace a single lead to you. A street kid who, according to witnesses, shot fireballs out of his fingertips, is going to be dragged downtown by cops to answer questions.

Passive and unnoticeable effects are your friends. Telepathy and mind reading may be vulgar, but they're rarely witnessed if the acting Mind mage refrains from bragging to Sleepers about her actions. The sensory-oriented Sphere abilities are incredibly useful when trying to determine what kinds of subtle reality manipulations are possible.

BEING HOLLOW

As one can imagine, Hollow Ones do not form the normal kinds of Master and Apprentice roles for learning magic the way other mages do. This would defeat the independent, self-reliant spirit of Hollow One philosophy. With handed-down teachings come creeds and dogma, something Hollow Ones prefer to avoid. More experienced members of the art are much more prone to encourage fellow Hollow Ones to find their own answers. At its core, a young mage finding her own way and constructing a unique paradigm is what "being hollow" is all about. Most veteran street magi realize that the answers that work for them will not necessarily work for others. If a Hollow One were to spread her particular perspective and start a trend in belief, then that Hollow One would no longer be unique. Creed and concrete traditions result when an Awakened one tries to convert others. The fact that most Hollowers do not even want others to see things their way often confuses mages whose goals involve finding the Truth and sharing it with the world. Perhaps Hollow Ones simply realize how truly subjective reality is without needing to twist their part in it (unlike the Marauders).

Wisdom and enlightenment, fought for with sacrifices of blood, sweat and tears, shouldn't be shared with some mundane moron who will not value it. It would be like giving away money to monkeys. To a Hollow One, when you share secrets of the universe with someone who does not understand them, you have effectively given up all personal meaning these insights have for you. This is the reason that Hollow Ones do not generally believe in Ascension. Like one wise elder said, "If someone truly has faith and belief in a particular paradigm, he should not feel a need for others to accept or agree with it for that belief to be valid." One of the first ways you can separate the Hollow Ones from the wannabes is that real Hollow Ones do not constantly argue their perspectives.

The real-world subculture is full of Hollow One wannabes. They dress in black, listen to the right music and live the whole lifestyle — yet they are not truly hollow. The wannabe who tries to get a pat on the back for his "brilliant" idea becomes an object of ridicule. Most often, the average wannabe is too interested in impressing everyone around him or her to even form a real sense of self. The enlightened eye picks out a wannabe's flaws immediately. "Dark Raven" or "Puck" or "Wednesday" or "Lenore" (simply insert highly creative goth nickname here) all have the same story: They started dressing in black because they "hated it all," and of course, they were "the first in their school to dress in black." They all say that. Then the part about where they come from, "nobody understands me," followed by the waterworks. These types are usually just terrified of being average but still lack the courage to think, act or speak in a manner that is not positively reinforced by their environment.



During the 90s, the Hollow Ones had what some might call an image skirmish with the commercial juggernaut of the Syndicate. Some of the elders think that the "dark and cool" overkill that assaulted the decade from the beginning of grunge to the bonfire of Woodstock was an engineered, Technocratic smear campaign. Since then, the underground has become overcrowded as the wannabe population exploded and Generation X showed up demanding answers. The lost generation and older Hollow Ones are still sifting through the dispossessed masses, looking for those that have the cunning and the chutzpa to be brought into the fold.

The idea of worldwide Ascension makes the average Hollower sick. If all the beer-swilling, propaganda-accepting, mindless sheep in the world were given wisdom and power they neither quested after — nor earned — it would make all life meaningless. The concept of personal Ascension is absurd to many Hollow Ones as well. The prospect of one day muttering the words "that's it!" and promptly disappearing in a poof of white light is an utterly escapist — not to mention nauseatingly stupid — goal. There is only one thing that a Hollower owes the universe: to make it more romantic and passionate. It doesn't matter if it's tragic romance, heroic romance or ironic romance. The world is in danger of losing its passion. Acting as the protectors of the last scraps of passion that exist and working them like dying embers to a flame is the unifying goal of the Hollow tradition.

The term "hollow" is interpreted in many ways by Hollow Ones. For most, to be hollow is to realize that life has no meaning, with all the emotional distance that imparts. That's generally the party line, sounding tragically goth- and Poe-like. This sense of longing is only the top layer of romantic craving. Other factions within the Tradition interpret "hollow" to mean different things. To a Hollow One Spirit mage who specializes in channeling, "hollow" could mean that she doesn't believe she has a soul. Hollow on the inside, if you will. To her, being hollow explains how she has room for all the things that she channels. To a rave-hopping socialite Hollow One who specializes in the Sphere of Mind, hollow is his state of consciousness. Using the idea of hollow as a mantra, he makes his own mind a complete void — the Zen no-mind.

The Hollow Ones as a group will never completely agree on how to interpret "hollow." For that matter, they'll never completely come to a unanimous decision about anything other than the sacrament of romance. The Tradition, intentionally disorganized, is itself a statement that no belief or paradigm is ever fully supported or fully denied. There are probably Hollow Ones who do not even believe in magic. In the end, the true meaning of "hollow" will probably follow Neville Nevermore — the term's founder — to his grave.

FACTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS



Each Hollower finds her own "thing," her own philosophy to embrace. For some, this comes easy; they have always known what they wanted, and they stick to it. For others, discovering their identities means trying out many fads until a handful of them seem right. This self-chosen paradigm may seem fickle and ever-changing to others, but it binds the mage's form of magic as tightly as any Tradition's more time-tested ways. For the period in which a Hollower follows a fad, she's passionately devoted to it and can't work her magic without it (unless she transcends the need for foci).

Nonetheless, these highly individualistic mages often fall into one of two primary categories: Councilors or Revolutionaries. Anyone who doesn't fit into these groups is often the "who cares and shut up already" type.

COUNCILORS

Councilors are the Hollow Ones who still care despite the angry, stubborn lack of direction harbored by many of their Hollow brethren. All Hollow Ones pretty much agree that the Technocracy really sucks. With only a few exceptions, most Hollowers would agree that the versions of reality presented by the Marauders and the Nephandi are utterly unacceptable. Councilors consider the Council of Nine Traditions the lesser of the magical world's evils. These more optimistic Hollow Ones believe that, if allowed the opportunity to teach the high-and-mighty Traditions techniques that will keep them from fading into antiquity, a new era of magic will result. Councilors honestly believe that magic is not drying up — quite the contrary. Magic is changing itself, and systems from forgotten cultures (ancient Tradition ways) are losing their validity. These often "perky goth" Tradition members see themselves as heroes on the brave new frontier of the redefinition of magic. They wish to share this questing spirit with the Tradition mages who, the Councilors believe, are losing their way. Perhaps these Hollow Ones are right. If so, and they can motivate their jaded brethren, then someday soon, the Council may again number ten... and the Technocracy won't know what hit it.

REVOLUTIONARIES

The viewpoint of a Revolutionary is simple. She looks at the world around her, seeing the pollution, rust, greed, depleted ozone, corporate raiding, lawyer and insurance scams, brain-dead TV, the joke of propaganda that was her high school education, the waste of human life. It makes her say, "Technocracy.... You suck!" Then, she looks at the millions sacrificed in holy wars. She looks at the fanaticism and blindness of religion. She looks at the past and the present and realizes that, throughout humankind's history, religions have enjoyed trying to exterminate each other, and she says, "Tradi-

tions.... You suck, too!" Moreover, it does not take a lot of vision to see how much worse the Nephandic and Marauder options are. With a passionate cry of anguish, she says, "You all suck, and you're screwing up reality!" So, she opts out, seeking what moments of magical glory she can find for herself.

That's pretty much how the average Revolutionary feels about mage society. Revolutionaries are angry and defensive when dealing with other mages. They may greet ghosts, fae and vampires with open arms, but they hate the company of other non-Hollow One mages. Get Tradition mages and Revolutionaries together, and the Hollow Ones get fierce in their not wanting to listen to anything the Tradition mages have to say. They find Tradition sentiment as patronizing as any authority figure's and fiercely resent any attempt at "guidance" by a Council mage. In other words, Revolutionaries do not play nice with other mages.

CLIQUEES

There are a number of different cliques of varying stripes, each one a collection of individuals with their own ideas about how things work.

ELEMENTAL CLIQUES

Usually made up of five members, elemental cliques focus on group ritual. Each member takes on the attributes and responsibilities of one of the elements. Sometimes, it is the Western elements: earth, fire, water, air and spirit. Sometimes, it's Eastern: fire, water, air, wood and metal. Dynamic Avatars are common in members of elemental cliques. Every so often, members of the clique swap elemental roles. This practice keeps the members of the cell from being trapped in a single role for too long.

Interpretation of the responsibilities of each element varies from group to group. The idea of such a clique is that the different Spheres develop as the individual Hollow Ones experience each elemental role. Obviously, holding the fire seat of the cell is auspicious to learning Forces, while the earth seat is favorable for learning Matter. Again, each clique interprets the metaphysics differently, but such a system works well for the purposes of group ritual and adds a pack mentality to the clique that is helpful in day-to-day life on the streets.

PANTHEISTIC CLIQUES

If Dynamic Avatars are common in elemental cliques, than Primordial Avatars occasionally gravitate to one another and imbue a social circle of Hollow Ones. The result is a pantheistic clique. Members of pantheistic cliques use a distorted version of the Voudoun "horse and rider" technique. They generally believe that, in certain ritual circumstances, their Avatars take control of their minds, wills and bodies. "Hollow becoming filled" is the term the pantheistic cliques call the possession-by-Avatar experience. When the whole group does this in unison, the result is several

ancient, primordial magical entities that have known each other for millennia working through fragments of themselves (the mages). Whether this technique is legitimate channeling or whether it is just some shared melodramatic Quiet that the cliques get into is unknown. One way or another, it adds a particular form of unity to the clique when its members are in the middle of a magical ritual wherein they can literally read one another like a book. Pantheistic cliques that strike as one are effective and efficient.

Each member knows what his or her role is and what to expect from the others. One drawback of the pantheistic method is that it tends to create great specialists instead of well-rounded Awakened. Members of these cliques tend to see themselves as the incarnation of just one thing. Granted, their power in their specialties can be impressive, but without the other specialists to guard their weaknesses, they can be picked off one by one if separated. Due to the common paradigm the group uses during ritual, Paradox is often shared between the clique.

INCÖGNITÖS

The true spirit of revolution lives on inside these society fringers. They wage a pure tactical war against the Technocracy. The Incognitos believe that the only way to put a crack in the Technocratic Union is to destroy its unity. Just as each Tradition has its squabbles, so to does the Technocracy have its internal schisms. Although the mechanical façade the Technocracy uses to project its uniformity is formidable, the Incognitos believe it is merely that — a façade.

The Hollow Railroad and Hollow moles placed near Technocrats feed information back to the Incognitos. The Incognitos themselves are put together like small think tanks. They don't actually see the field; their job is to sit in the back corners of Hollow One-controlled coffee shops all over the world, hyped on caffeine, brainstorming on how one Convention's goals can be placed at odds with another's. Their theories are then distributed along the Hollow Railroad, delivered to other cliques and cells as sensitive, tactical information.

The Incognitos have several currently running strategic theories, mainly based around exposing some of the Conventions' nasty inner secrets to their fellow New World Order Convention, thus turning the Union against itself. The NWO control freaks won't appreciate some of what the others are up to.

Working their special brand of conspiracy, the Incognitos hope to sow the seeds of chaos and anarchy on the enemy itself. True metamagic chaos masters in their own right, Hollow Ones of this breed become increasingly paranoid. They are watched by others in the Tradition for fear that they'll fall into Quiet as their sanity explodes under the weight of mentally juggling the Ascension War's fallout.

VOUDÖUN GANGSTAS

A breed of Hollow One that gained momentum in America's South, especially during the Prohibition era. Although not all of the Voudoun Gangstas are of



African-American heritage, most of them are. The style first gained its footing around New Orleans among those helping to run bootleg alcohol — not so much out of addiction or for profit, but because somebody dared to tell them they couldn't have it. The Gangstas to this day embody the heroic romanticism of the "on the edge" dangerous life of a gangster of modern myth. Although this sub-faction was primarily made up of Voudoun practitioners, the modern movement — now spread throughout the American South — has adopted many of tribal Africa's myths, ceremonies and rites. Modern Voudoun Gangstas appeal to all manner of tribal spirits, from Papa Ghede to Anansi the Spider.

The Gangstas combine magic with modern weapons. Most modern Gangstas feel a deep, noble calling to protect the underprivileged from being exploited by the forces of oppression — usually those originating from the Technocracy. Crack and other suspected Progenitor-designed drugs are the primary targets. Firefights frequently erupt in the night in underdeveloped Southern sprawls as Voudoun Gangstas take down rival gangs who unknowingly serve Technocratic schemes.

SOUNDWAVE MASTERS

The techno and trance music masters of sound are an integral part of the Hollow Railroad and many group rituals in nightclubs. Soundwave Masters usually excel in the Spheres of Mind and Forces, converting mental thoughts and emotions into sounds and vice versa. They run the raves that crawl around the underground. They sit in the sound booths of most Hollow nightclub gatherings. It's widely known that most SW Masters tend to have sympathies for the Council of Nine. They openly trade digital sound techniques with Virtual Adepts and use suggestion-enhancing vices supplied by the Cult of X. Considering how their art works and the lifestyles they live, it's easy to see why the Soundwave Masters share interests with other mages who can help them better understand their chosen art form.

SW Masters possess a vast array of rites that convey information for the Hollow Railroad. An SW Master uses the gaining momentum of her raves or nightclub parties to use Mind techniques, reading the surface thoughts of the crowd. All types of rumors, information, newly discovered techniques and/or memories of events or stories are gathered from the minds of those in the crowd. A SW Master can enter a trancelike state when certain focus music is playing, allowing her to mentally sift through the information to find relevant details for the cause. All of this information, in the form of thoughts and emotions, is converted into music. This music is so soaked with the SW Master's psychic essence, it transmits the associated thoughts and feelings to all who hear it, in the form of a brand new mix that the Master creates on the broadcast. The live broadcast to the dance floor is also recorded on digital CDs or MP3s or is dubbed onto Tass tapes. Whenever a Hollow One hears the recording, the psychic

imprint can be experienced. This process of encoded communication is one of the pillars of the Hollow Railroad's secrecy.

RAILROAD RIDERS

The riders of the Hollow Railroad have a thankless job. The first of them was a British goth by the name of Telegram Sam who appeared on the club scene in the late 70s. These Correspondence junkies martyr themselves, facing lots of Paradox for gratuitous space folding, just so the Hollowers can keep up with one another. Railroad Riders feel a romantic passion not unlike the famed call of duty ascribed to the Old West's Pony Express. Aside from regional parties, where Hollow Ones can gather en masse, individual cliques don't see each other very often. Clique members across the oceans from one another hardly see each other at all, if ever. It is up to the Railroad Riders to keep fellow Hollowers up to speed and in relatively good contact with one another. Railroad Riders carry Tass tapes and CDs of Soundwave Master performances. Sometimes, Riders have dream letters deep in their heads that other clique narcoleptics can access, read and respond to. Teleporting from chantry to chantry, Railroad Riders are the ultimate drifters, always the guest, never the host.

These guys practically invented most of the street survival rites employed by the craft. They tend to have high ratings in the Contacts and Allies Backgrounds, and as a survival mechanism, will flee before they fight, seeing their messenger duty as much more important than gestures of bravado.

SOCIAL TERRORIST PUNK CELLS

No other type of clique makes as much noise and draws as much trouble as the punk cells. You can't tell them that the war against the Technocracy is over. To them, anarchy is a religion, and nonconformity is a sacrament. Unlike the rest of the Hollow Ones, who tend to focus on the goth lifestyle and act mellow and brainy, the hard-core punks prefer brawn and action. The Spheres of Life, Forces and Entropy are schools of specialty for these rough-and-tumble revolutionaries, who are appreciated for the brute destruction they can unleash. Time is also looked on favorably for its ability to quickly deliver damage.

If there were a Hollow One warrior caste, then the punks would be it. Unfortunately, few punks survive to become elders since "die with your boots on" is one of their mantras. Punks also implode themselves on Paradox more than any other type of Hollow One. When violence goes down, punks hang in there with the Hit Marks, the Do Masters and the rest, unlike the more elusive goth types of the Hollow Way, who tend to avoid the punks due to the heat they inevitably draw.

MOLES

Perhaps the most introverted Hollow Ones of all are the moles. Moles do not work with any one clique; instead, they maintain contact with many cliques. Unlike her radically decorated brethren, the mole looks conservative in her attire. The function of a mole is to get as close to Technocratic

operations as possible, to watch and to listen. Moles are the few Hollow Ones with desk and laboratory jobs. Masquerading as Sleepers and playing dumb while at work, moles are the mail clerks in the Syndicate's mailroom. They are the janitors of the New World Order's meeting rooms. They work in the factories of Iteration X and as nurses under Progenitor doctors. Moles have no piercings and no tattoos, and they voice no belief save a conformist façade — at least, while spying on the enemy. Moles must have wills of steel to remain immersed in the Technocracy's paradigm and yet remain hollow.

⊕OUTSIDERS

Outsiders are Hollow Ones (mostly Revolutionaries) who prefer the company of the other creatures of the night to the society of their fellow mages. Some Outsiders are hip deep in vampire alliances — and the struggles that come with such allegiances. Hollow Ones that run with the shapeshifting wolves also face dangerous consequences for their lifestyles. There are even Hollow One loners who travel with cadres of dead spirits or hosts of fickle, personified dreams.

Those who heavily traffic with the Restless Dead are called **Gaunts**. Gothic culture, with its romantic fixation on death, influences Hollow Ones magic. Necromancy is a common skill for a magically Awakened, primarily black wearing, death-fixated group of Hollow Ones. However, unlike other forms of true magic necromancy, the Gaunt-style revolves around making allies of wraiths instead of slaves or servitors and rarely involves forcing these allies to do one's bidding. Thus, the domicile of a Gaunt is most often haunted — intentionally so. Gaunt Outsiders are one of the primary information-gathering departments of the Hollow Ones. Apparently, the dead spend a lot of time watching the living... and talking to any Hollower who helps them in their endeavors.

Mangers are Hollow Ones who hang with werewolves or other shapeshifters. It is difficult to gain a shapeshifter's trust if you are not of his bloodline. Apparently, shapeshifters have human kin, which they take an interest in protecting and nurturing. When one of those kin Awakens, the shapeshifters may not understand what is going on, but being supernatural creatures themselves, they at least have a frame of reference. Unlike most Hollow Ones, kinfolk Mangers often have mentors who are mystically oriented shapeshifters. Although shapeshifter Gifts and true magic differ radically, these mentors at least have a working understanding of cosmology and the occult. All Mangers have a bit of competency in the Sphere of Spirit and foci that are often actual werewolf rites.

Hollow Ones who traffic with vampires are nicknamed **Blood Bags** by their peers. Surprisingly, Blood Bags are rarely actual ghouls but often serve as part of a vampire's herd. The life of a typical Blood Bag is rarely long. To hang with vampires, you really have to be a combination of crazy, suicidal and a complete adrenaline junky and have to possess nerves of steel. Despite all of these obvious flaws, some goth definitions of cool are just that stubborn. A surprisingly high number of none-too-



experienced Hollow Ones learn a few tricks they think might be useful to a vampire, such as minor control over fire or warding from sunlight. They then trek off into the night, heading for Los Angeles, New York or Mexico City — just like in the movies — to find a vampire friend. Most Blood Bag wannabes are never seen again. A small number of them actually survive... for a while. Some even become competent at being the “precious, hard-to-find mage” who is in the pocket of some centuries-old undead elder. Living dangerously and dying young is an ideal some Hollow Ones try to embody.

Relations between the Hollow Ones and the fae are almost impossible to define. The two groups are quite aware of each other. However, relations are mixed. On one hand, dream-oriented magic is part of the Hollow One arsenal, and the fae love these mage dreamers. The problem is that, deep down, most Hollow Ones are escapist. That is why they erect this strange world for themselves because they do not like what either side of the Ascension War has done to the world. When a Changeling brings a Hollow One into the world of the fae, the mage usually doesn't want to come back. Hollow Ones can become addicted to fae enchantment. It cuts through their macabre façade and hits them where they feel it, in their hopes. The enchanting world of the Dreaming is almost everything the Hollow Ones want the real world to be. The darkness is dark, the light blinding, and nothing is dull or mundane. Where a Tradition mage might experience enchantment and hearken to the mythic age, the Hollowers never saw a mythic age; to their jaded, stoic hearts, the Dreaming is breathtaking to the point of evoking tears.

When the enchantment wears off on a Sleeper, the mortal usually remembers nothing. Hollow Ones have built entire paradigms around dreams and visions, and when an enchantment eventually wanes, the Hollower remembers everything. This makes returning to real life very painful. The enchantment of the fae can exploit this Hollow One failing in a very addictive way. Hollow Ones who run with the fae too much, derogatorily called **Glamour Whores**, are of no use to their clique when frolicking in dreams. Their clique-mates often try to get them to snap out of it.

MASTERS

The Hollow Ones Masters are walking, talking paradoxes. While they are the most powerful of the Hollowers, they are also the lowest profile. Where younger Hollowers live on their reputations, little is known about the Hollow Ones' older mages except wild and contradictory rumors. While the Hollow Ones are relatively new to the Awakened scene, they have been at it for several decades now. For every young Hollow One who claims she was the first to wear black in high school in the early 90s, there is probably an elusive elder who was into the mid-70s punk scene at the same age — or a beatnik before him, or a flapper in the 20s, and so on, into the past.

Contrary to stereotype, not all Hollow Ones are in their early 20s (although *many* look it). Being a Hollow One is not

a phase you outgrow. Individual mages may start hanging with Hollow Ones, call themselves Hollow Ones and then, later, join a Tradition. That happens all the time — but they were not *really* Hollow Ones. They were temporarily confused Verbena or Ecstatic Cultists or whatever. Indeed, there are Hollow Ones of all ages, from 80-year-old flappers who can tell you about what poseurs those Golden Dawners really were to eight-year-old Damien-like, spooky child prodigies.

Hollow One elders are like phantom strangers in the night. They come into a scene, pass some music around, say a few snide but nonetheless true statements and disappear back into the night. It is common for Hollow Masters to have high Arcane ratings. They really seem to get off on the mysterious ideal, and they like to flaunt it.

CLIQUE POLITICS AND HOLLOW ONE SOCIETY

If there is any one aspect of the Hollow Way that is most misunderstood by other mages — Traditionalist and Technocrat alike — it is the politics of Hollow Ones society. Hollow Ones do not have mentor-apprentice relationships the way other paradigms do. How could every magic style be unique if the older, more seasoned Hollow Ones were teaching the younger ones all their experiences and lessons? This driving principal of individuality is what, in many ways, gives the Hollow Ones their identity. The total lack of doctrine is what gives the street mages their versatility and advantage over other mages in the world. It is up to every Hollow One to figure things out for herself, in a way that may only makes sense to her.

In many ways, this emphasis on subjective reality and personal belief is akin to a Marauder's philosophy. However, unlike any Marauder, a Hollow One remembers that there is still a group consensus that she has to play nice with. With a degree of humility and realism, the mage's beliefs serve her well, and Quiet does not set in the way it would for a Marauder. A Hollow mage understands that her paradigm is unique; to keep it unique, she should keep its truth to herself. In this way, Hollow Ones handle their truths similarly to any Hermetic. To preach, spread and spout such dogmas invites Paradox, confrontations and, yes, even the unwanted scrutiny of the Technocracy. The secrets of magic are something hard earned. Therefore, Hollow Ones clutch tightly to theirs.

Instead of formal mentoring, Hollow Ones are sometimes picked on, ridiculed and condescended to by their elders. This is the first step of indoctrination. This thickening of the proverbial skin is like a short hazing ritual. Most of the older, more experienced Hollow adepts do not necessarily enjoy this, but they do understand that the fallout of the Ascension War is far worse. Seductive *barrabi*, Men in Black agents, psychotic Marauders and the occasional Tradition fanatic lay in wait, ready to destroy, exploit or control these newly Awakened mages. The sooner they learn to be self-reliant and draw strength from themselves, the better off they'll be.

Minor curses are often thrown on new Hollow Ones, designed to humiliate rather than hurt. This practice forces initiates to develop cunning and counter magical measures early on. From the outside, the practice seems immature and outrageous. Many Tradition mages lose their tempers when they become aware of the way Hollow One adepts treat their initiates. However, from within, the Hollow Ones see these practices as ways to teach while allowing a student her own opinion. These so-called adepts actually enjoy the day when the student becomes the teacher and the once-ridiculed newbie outmaneuvers his elder adversary. Once this is done, the relationship between the two changes drastically. The more experienced mage finally acknowledges the younger as a peer. This is where the kinship of the Hollow Ones actually begins. Respect is something that one earns on a member-to-member basis. Two Hollow Ones who meet each other for the first time may seem like dire enemies with huge chips on their shoulders. This bravado camouflages the beginning steps to Hollow One trust. The more they magically battle with coincidental inconveniences, the more they know what the other is capable of doing. If the two so-called rivals find themselves in a real magical skirmish against Technocrats, aggressive Traditionalists or whomever, they would actually prove to be a well-oiled team. Each would know the other's tricks, and they would understand each other's symbology. The weaknesses they once exploited for sport must be protected in such life-and-death struggles.

In a way, all Hollow Ones wear masks. Each Hollow One's demeanor is custom fitted to be both dark and spooky or full of piss and vinegar — or some other sort of harsh extreme. When you get a bunch of these masks together, they do indeed appear petty in their hatreds for one another. This is how the Technocracy sees them and, generally, how the Traditions also see them. However, Hollow Ones learn to see the truths behind the dance of masks. The petty rebellion of a punk and the clash of goth egos are simply well placed disguises. Industrial anger, crooning angst — all just the color of the shell. A decoration, a style, a playing to a stereotype.

On the inside, a Hollow One's nature and Avatar possesses a wisdom and understanding that does not wish to be named. It cannot be defined by convention or restricted to a Tradition. It chooses to be free of the chains of names, titles or even a concrete self-identity. Using philosophies and beliefs that defy categorization, this unnamable nothing that exists underneath the mask is the core of the Hollow paradigm. Most mages think the very term "Hollow One" connotes pessimism. This is the irony of the façade.

Hollow One titles are, likewise, complete façades. Once per year, the Hollowers throw a big party. It was once held at the Waydown in San Francisco, but the bash is no longer just a West Coast gathering. The yearly Halloween gala has now started to move about like a rave. At this party, two Hollow Ones, one male and one female, are titled the king and queen of the year. These are mock titles. The only things the king and queen get out of it is a boost to their reputations. If they were to try to issue commands in a leadership capacity, they would

quickly find their followers giving them the finger and telling them where "your highnesses" can stick it. For many Hollow Ones, the desire not to take orders is what brought them to the group in the first place. The king and queen are elected based on popularity or whatever kind of magical mischief they subtly pulled off — or even just plain good looks. The duties of the king and queen are minimal, but they can be annoying to a royal Hollow One who wants to just be left alone.

The reigning king and queen are obligated to appear at all formal invitations to Tradition councils. When the Council of Nine wants a representative of the Hollow Ones (as if there were such a thing), it's the king and/or queen that have to make a token appearance. To keep things balanced — or maybe it just works out this way, most Hollow Ones are not sure — one of the two is always a Revolutionary and the other a Councilor. Obviously, when the king and queen make appearances before the Council of Nine, they inevitably quarrel about everything, giving the Traditions a good hard, look into the Hollow Way.

Hollow One society exists deep in the bosom of the counterculture. Wherever there are freaks, urban tribes, underground ideas and thriving club scenes, there are Hollow Ones. Several common-sense reasons cause the craft to inhabit such environments. First, counterculture by definition strives to be the inverse of the dominant paradigm. In other words, freaks, goths and punks — even as Sleepers — are more open minded than truly conservative New World Order and Syndicate propaganda-affected Sleepers. Counterculture breeds things such as suspension of disbelief, revolutionary thinking and, yes, a little questioning of reality. Simply put, surrounded by a flaky counterculture where the bizarre is the norm, Hollow Ones risk less Paradox. Instead of escaping reality for the far reaches of the Umbra to avoid Paradox as the Traditions and Conventions have always done (and are paying for now), Hollow Ones stay in society and remain anchored in the real world — although the part of it ever open to the strange. This is why there were so few Hollow One Horizon Realms. Sure, back in the day, a few Spirit-intensive Hollow Ones had a few neat places to hang out. Nowadays though, no real Hollow One wants to leave the comfort of the independent coffee shop/bookstore or the energy of a nightclub dance floor for long.

Instead of having an ordered, formal organization, Hollow Ones work in cliques or small circles. It takes a certain chemistry for a clique to become a strong circle. This process cannot be forced. Freshly Awakened Hollowers tend to form cliques with each other at first, primarily for support and from necessity, given how so many elders are "out to get them." These new recruits eventually fall into a circle of their own. Once an up-and-coming initiate outmaneuvers a few of the old school and has built a reputation for herself, an appropriate circle evolves around her. The only Hollow Ones who never really find a niche are those still trying to ingratiate win people over and haven't yet learned the dance of masks. But really, those types are just Orphans who wear black. They are not Hollow Ones at all.

THE HOLLOW RAILROAD

The Hollow Railroad is a vast network of Hollow Ones who use rites, rumor, spray paint, symbology and mail (normal and electronic) to keep communication lines open. Information is distributed from cell to cell in any number of ways. The Mind specialist of a cell receives information via mental channels, often through dreams. Spirit sensitive Hollowers are visited by ghosts or other types of spirits. Complex techniques wherein vast quantities of information are carried via music serve the Railroad well. Each Hollow One has his or her role in the Railroad. Some Hollow Ones with Time and Correspondence abilities cast complex divinations, delivering details of circumstances from remote observation. Hollow One Mind adepts bring back tidbits of knowledge gleaned from passive telepathic scans. The Hollow One narcoleptics keep scenarios and knowledges passed around through elaborate dream dramas. Hollow One Gaunts collect the observations of ghosts, who witness things unseen. Given the extreme versatility of

the Hollow Ones when they collectively attempt detective work, accurate information has a way of just popping up and making its way to the Hollow One who originally put forth the inquiry. Thus, the so-called Hollow Railroad.

The only way Hollowers do not normally share their work and insights is through normal conversation. Not only is it considered very bad form to brag about one's magical accomplishments, it's considered incredibly impolite to directly ask another Hollow One about his own Sphere competencies. Much of the Hollow One philosophy revolves around an emphasis on subtlety, mystery and secrecy. Telling stories of the achievements of other Hollow Ones, on the other hand, keeps the Romantic tradition alive. For instance, Neville Nevermore never tells his own stories unless directly asked, and even then, he often turns down the request. This is the subtle difference between the creation of modern myth and downright bragging. A reputation must speak for itself. Myth must be given time to be told, and legends need time to unfold.

HOLLOW ONE FOCI



MAKEUP

A careful and controlled demeanor is the key to leaving impressions with others. All radical forms of makeup and dress are common for subtle Mind Effects such as Empathetic Projection and Psychic Impression. These uses of Mind are largely coincidental. The ritual of "putting on your face" (subtly activating the No-Mind) is common and acceptable as a form of mentally readying oneself for a situation.

CLOTHING

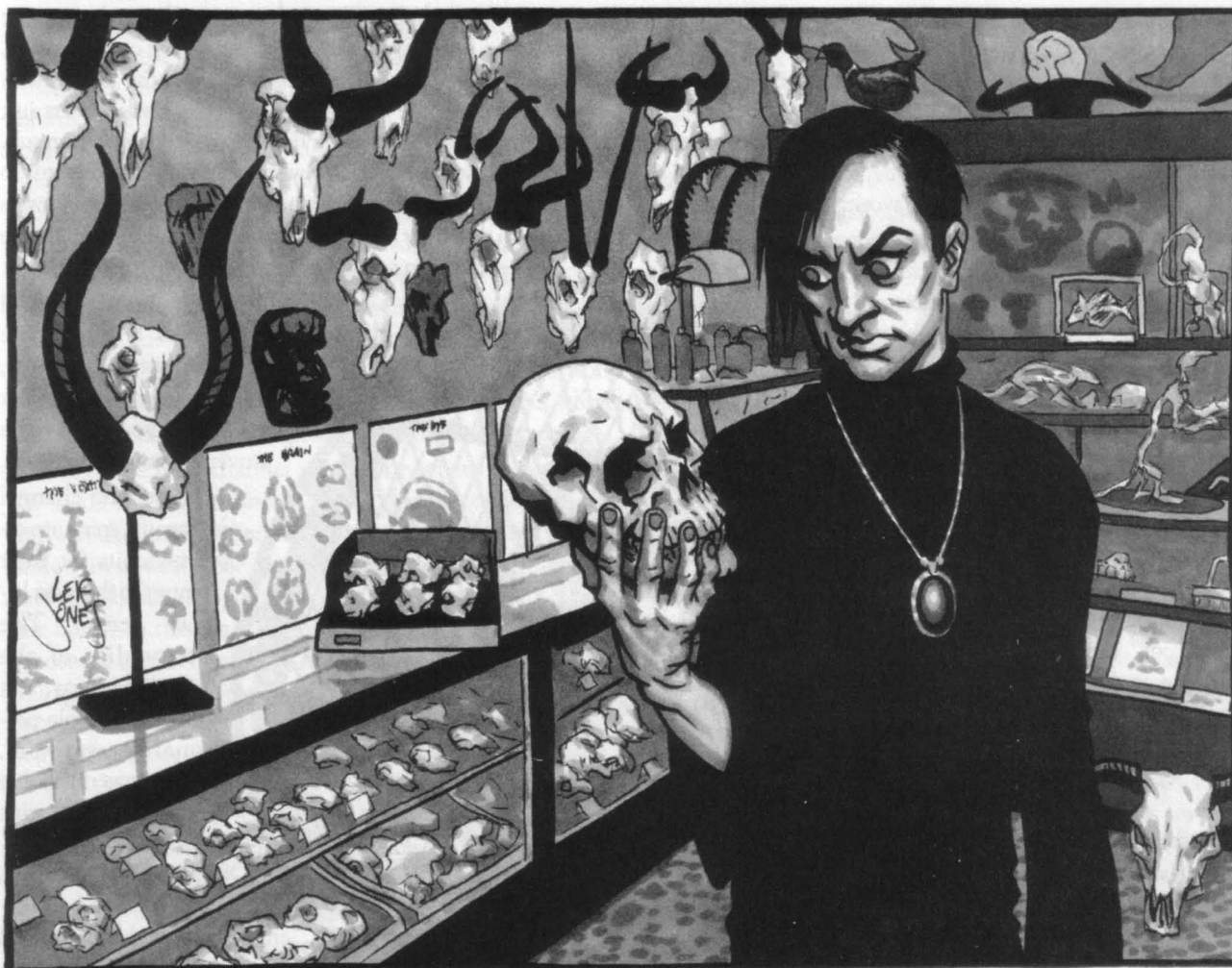
During many Hollowers' early days of facing the supernatural on a daily basis, a subconscious reality-check anchor is invested into a trusted garment of self-expression. Leather jackets painted in all manners of sayings or symbols or even full leather trench coats are common for males. Cloaks, special "soul-self symbol" necklaces and even dresses or pairs of magic boots are common among females. These symbolic expressions are actually Prime focuses for the Hollower, and more than just a mystical focus — many Hollowers treat these essential garments with as much significance as any Hermetic's True Name.

TATTOOS

Even more deeply symbolic than symbols on the clothes are symbols on the self. The Hollow One perspective on tattoos is not unlike Euthanatos and Dreamspeaker primitive ritual. All manner of mystical symbols hide on the skins of Hollow mages under pop culture inks. The "marking" of a Hollowers' mystical pedigree is written on her skin. Hollow One elders can often look at another Hollower's skin and know as much about him as a Hermetic could size up one of his own kind with full name and title.

Depictions of a Hollowers' perception of her Avatar are prominent. As the Hollower grows in power and technique, his skin bears the icons and symbols of his style. Mind practitioners usually have at least a few eyes somewhere on their body. Practitioners of Entropy tend to have grim reaper, playing card, dice or skull illustrations, although females often tend toward ankhs or the spiders of Fates' web. Drops of blood or perhaps illustrations of muscle and bone can identify Life adepts. Time specialists can often be elusive in their markings: Hourglasses, watches and the like are not subtle enough; symbols that correlate to old time gods or candles are the types of markings to look for. Forces adepts are blatantly obvious because of the red, yellow, blue and purple flames that line their chests and arms. Matter mages usually have some type of circle on them — a pentagram or pentacle, coin or medicine wheel, or perhaps a serpent that bites its own tail will be visible somewhere. For practitioners of Correspondence, the key is not the symbol itself but its location — the feet, fingertips or knuckles are preferred. Spirit mages, who dauntingly poke at the Avatar Storm in the name of pure curiosity, have some of the strangest tattoos of all. Symbolic representations of the spirits they traffic with are emblazoned on them like logos. Odd, diamond-shaped skull-and-bone motifs frequently crop up on Hollow Ones who often deal with the dead. Finally, there is the Sphere of Prime — the Hollow One Prime mage is usually the person with the ink and the gun.

There are many advantages to having a tattoo as a focus. A tattoo cannot be easily taken from the Hollow One who wields it. A brutal carving, surgery or some vulgar Life effect is required to separate a Hollow One from her tattoo. This all assumes that the Hollowers' enemy will even understand that the tattoo is linked to power. Tattoos are as common a sight on these days' streets as sand in the desert. They are a lot less conspicuous, bulky or restricting than most common foci the



Traditions or the Technocracy use. This is partly why Hollow Ones seem to pull power from nowhere in the eyes of the average mage uneducated in Hollow One styles and forms.

JEWELRY

Perhaps one of the most common foci for Hollow Ones is jewelry. Icons dangling on the ends of black cords are symbols of self-perception. Charm bracelets, earrings, nose rings — all of which have certain symbolic representations for the Hollow mage — make subtle but potent foci. In many ways, these techniques have been borrowed and eclectically added to by the Hollow Ones. Prayer beads, hermetic pendants, pentacles around the neck and other forms of Tradition practices inspire the Hollow Ones' magical accessorizing.

SYMBOLIC TRINKETS

"Whatever works" makes a good Hollow Ones motto regarding the finding of suitable spell components in a pinch. Instead of choosing a static spell formula that must be rigidly conformed to, Hollowers just grab the metaphors they see in their environment, creating weird, on-the-fly ritual gestures. If you need to do a Samhain-like ritual in March, decorate the house with Halloween stuff. Unleash Entropic destructive mayhem using a rubber Kali finger puppet. Evoke the healing power

SYMBOLISM

Every Hollow mage has symbols and objects that she values. One may identify with a particular animal totem, such as a crow, a cat or a wolf. Others may express themselves through the symbolism of mythological creatures, such as dragons, sirens or sphinxes. And then there are those who prefer as their theme a religious culture, such as Catholicism, the mysticism of the Far East, Voodoo or Wicca. The mage decks herself out with expressions of these parts of her identity. They often become talismans, devices or fetishes. The mage sometimes chooses a new name based on the symbols that speak to her.

of the Babylonian goddess Ishtar with some plastic grass and a pink marshmallow egg. These are just some of the examples of the oddball, mundane stuff a Hollower can use as magical foci.

Example: A Hollow One is calling the quarters, but he has substituted a few things in place of details a member of the Order would have insisted upon. Instead of the specifically colored and dedicated-on-the-proper-day pentacle an Order of Hermes mage would use, the Hollow One uses a silver dollar with sigils inscribed with black eyeliner. Instead of the blessed, purified

blade of the Hermetic, the Hollow One uses his pocketknife. Where a Hermetic would raise his wand to the South and whisper the secret names, the Hollow One grabs his fire wand — a cigarette — and strikes the end ablaze, causing the destructive fire to burn in his lungs as he blows rings. While the Hermetic would raise his silver chalice to the dedication of the West, the Hollow One turns there and sips his favorite coffee beverage.

The same magical Effect is accomplished through a specific ceremony in both cases. For the Hermetic, this ritual requires meditation, a cleansed ritual space — usually a home or chantry secured against observation by the un-Awakened. The Hollow One, on the other hand, performs a similar ritual in the mall around witnesses, managing not to look out of place; no one at the mall notices anything out of the ordinary.

As one can imagine, this ritual “bastardization” does not sit well with many conservative mystics. Many Order of Hermes, Verbena and Celestial Chorus members from the “old school” see these rituals as a downright mockery of everything they stand for.

However, the Hollow One is not completely free to mix and match anytime he feels like it. Once he’s established a way of doing things, he needs to stick to it. He can’t just change his mind and substitute Coca-Cola for coffee in the “silver chalice.” Inconsistent methods can lead to inconsistent results.

POP OCCULTISM F&CI

Tarot: Borrowing from Tradition methods, a Hollow One’s tarot deck is an invaluable tool and focus. One

can see the future with it (Time), determine what archetypes are active around one (Spirit) and even find a sense of self (Prime). Different Hollow One paradigms and styles use the tarot in different ways; some do readings with the cards, others just randomly draw one card and understand how to apply the result. A Hollow One might grab a few specific major arcana cards to help him visualize Incarnae for a Spirit ritual. Some Hollow Ones even claim that their Avatars are cards in the tarot, and a simple spread can assess the “who’s who” of any situation.

Channeling is a technique with myriad different forms and types. There are those who channel one spirit in particular, those who channel a few familiar spirits and those who are the proverbial spiritual taxicabs.

Those who channel one specific spirit are often conduits for their Avatars in the most literal sense. The personality of the mage “goes away,” not unlike a multiple-personality symptom, and a powerful being who has bonded with the mage takes over. Often, in the early years of a Hollow One’s Awakened life, only the channeled spirit can work magic. The mage must then totally surrender herself to the spirit. This particular focus can be socially problematic. In a psychological sense, the Hollow One has learned what “polite society” is; she knows when not to express certain aspects of herself. The powerful magical spirit, or Avatar, however, knows no behavioral boundaries. Because of this fact, the channeler has learned to wait until she is alone or around fellow clique members who understand what is transpiring before she lets the forces of supernature to the surface.

A channeler who keeps a cadre of several spirits has benefits and problems of her own. The first useful aspect of this



form of channeling focus is the vast amount of information and resources at the mage's disposal. When one spirit is being channeled, the others can be active gathering all kinds of information. The abilities, supernatural and otherwise, of each spirit can be called upon in times of need. Obviously, these types of Hollow Ones seem well informed on a vast array of subjects due to their unique resources. The major downfall of this type of channeling is when the cadre of spirits starts to argue among themselves. When this happens, the Hollow One quite literally becomes torn in different directions. Each of the spirits can ride the mage's mortal body. When they start arguing over "time-share," the Hollow One has to fight for self-control on multiple fronts. Such problems are rare, but when they occur, it cripples the magical abilities of the afflicted mage.

For those who channel whatever happens to come by, the world is a strange and unpredictable place. They claim that the channeling phenomenon is a result of being totally hollow, in a literal sense. With no soul inside to put up a fight, every random spirit is going to take a shot at corporeality. The one upside to this magic technique is that it gets the mage exposed to a lot of metaphysical variation. If he can handle it, this spiritual-revolving-door mage tends to quickly grow in Spirit Lore. The drawbacks for this style of channeling are many. Every day is a battle of control for mind and body. Hollow Ones who channel this way find it hard to remain inconspicuous in public places. In addition, these chaos-riding Hollow Ones are prime candidates for Quiet, for their sense of self is often tenuous at best.

Of course, some Hollow Ones have fully explored all of these types of channeling. An open-to-anything channeler can, in time, narrow down the numbers to a few trusted spirits that can fend off other body snatchers. A channeler who has a few familiar spirits can, over time, choose one to invest all of his will and magical support into. Because of this scattershot approach to trafficking with spirits, the Hollow Ones as a whole is in contact with and aware of many types of spirits and different spirit worlds. A channeled spirit could be a skin-riding ghost, or it could be a natural elemental from the Middle Umbra. The being that inhabits a mage's body might be an embodied abstraction from the High Umbra, or it might just be the mage's Avatar itself. Hollow One channelers trade enough information with each other to know that there are many different classifications and levels of power to spirits. Over time, channelers realize that different spirits inhabit different realms and exist by different rules.

Séances are a way for more Spirit-oriented mages to share their experiences with other clique-mates. Usually, a channeler uses a group séance ritual to share the experience of consulting things from the other side of the Gauntlet. The séance is usually formal and highly ritualistic, incorporating other foci from Ouija boards to crystal balls.

Arcanology, AKA metaphysics, is a hot topic of conversation in most Hollow One social circles. Although they have no unified theory of reality, these intellectuals — while keep-

ing an open mind to all possibilities — prudently remember not to see any one possibility as absolute. This constant research keeps arcanologists busy exploring all of the different possible ways of seeing the universe. Some Hollow Ones adopt pet concepts and work them into their mystical styles. These ideas, often borrowed from one of the nine Traditions, are invariably given different spins. Endless hours spent carefully weighing subjective reality against objective reality over coffee is the average Hollow One's idea of fun. Most published philosophical greats, from Carl Jung to Nietzsche, have influenced Hollow One arcanology. Perhaps more than any other magical foci, the metaphysical beliefs of the Hollow Ones show their eclectivity. Obviously, many Hollow Ones agree to disagree on the subject of arcanology. By choosing to play devil's advocate to one another, instead of directly challenging the validity of a concept in heated debate, they push their base of knowledge.

Playing to mage stereotype, many Hollow Ones create and design their own **spell books**. The insides of these "books of shadows" tend to be combinations of notes, poetry, ideas and an all-around journal of the mage's thoughts on magic itself. Sometimes, they are very subtle looking diaries written in ballpoint pen. Other times, Hollow Ones "dress up" these spell books, creating a personalized grimoire, complete with customized covers, thick paper and secret codes. These spell books have occasional passages added in with the Hollowers' secret ink recipe and a feather quill. These bound investments are very important to the Hollow Ones who create them. They almost never let anyone else even look into their pages. Obsessively secretive Hollow Ones place magical wards and locks on their books to keep highly personal and sensitive information safe.

Runes and sigils from dead cultures are esoteric enough symbols to allow a large number of Hollow uses. Hermetics are not the only ones who can get ancient symbols, letters and languages to produce magic. Sometimes, a handful of runes are cast for an overall divination (Time and Correspondence), or runes that hold symbolic meaning can be incorporated into elaborate rituals to produce other effects: A rune symbolizing growth and health could aid a Life ritual, while one symbolizing strength and war could be crucial to a Forces effect. There are so many pictorial, symbolic letters from almost every ancient culture that the possibilities for rune working are almost without limit.

Astrology for some Hollow Ones is more than a focus; it is a paradigm unto itself. Arcanology specialists often learn the language of astrology — both East and West — to provide a common vocabulary for describing abstract observations. Natal charts are calculations of the relative "when and where" of stellar bodies corresponding to the time and place of a mage's birth. Some arcanologists see this unique, defining moment as a destiny signature upon the universe. When it became known to these arcanologists that many of these solar bodies were themselves realms in the spirit worlds, with other mages living in custom-built realities inside them, Hollow Ones started taking their astrology seriously. Although Hollow Ones overall

have no Sphere specialty, a Hollower's astrology chart will often show what Spheres the mage is most sympathetic toward. Heavy fire signs tend to excel at Forces mastery, while perhaps an air-influenced individual might have a natural talent at Mind mastery. Astrology in some form or another will always be a factor to elemental cliques, who often use the planets' rhythms to dictate the timing of their rituals or the changing of elemental functions.

At its core, Hollow magic encourages each of its practitioners to invent and display a unique understanding of magic. As stated before, each Hollow One's paradigm is one of a kind, and therefore, each style of magic is going to differ. When working out a character's concept, much thought should be devoted to developing a unique magical style, paradigm and Avatar.

FAMILIARS

Hollow Ones tend to acquire familiars that reflect the Romantic depictions of magic but also remain passable pets in the modern world.

Cats: A black cat familiar is about the most common familiar a Hollow One is likely to have. Black cats have that "unlucky" dark mystique about them, and they're incredibly common in the urban world. A faithful cat who naps on the stoop of the local coffee shop is not going to attract as much attention as a homunculus who rides on your hat as you board the bus. For reasons unknown, it seems that black cats tend to gravitate to Hollow Ones. Perhaps like attracts like. Not all Hollow One cat familiars are black — just most of them.

Rats: For a Hollow One who lives on the streets, there's no better street survival teacher than a rat familiar. Rats see it all in an urban setting. Rats who can reason and talk learn all kinds of things about the city they inhabit. It's not uncommon for Hollow One rat familiars to have the ability to communicate with normal, street vermin. More than one detail passed along the Hollow Railroad came via a rat.

Snakes and Lizards: Reptile familiars tend to be grumpy in personality and to complain constantly, particularly about the weather and the temperature. Even though they require tedious upkeep, there are several rewards for having a content reptilian familiar. Reptiles know a lot. Each reptile familiar possesses some aspect of ancient wisdom. It is not uncommon for a lizard familiar to have the ability to recall details of things that predate its birth, even regarding dragon legends. Snake familiars can often recall with clarity certain aspects of Aztec, Aborigine, Egyptian and Native American mysticism that should otherwise be lost to the sands of time. It is unknown whether this insight is because reptiles symbolize wisdom in so many cultures or is due to some racial memory.

Crows and Ravens: Thanks to the poets of previous eras, no animal symbolizes Gothic romanticism more than a large black bird. American Hollow



Ones usually have crows, while European Hollow Ones have ravens, due mainly to availability and habitat. Hollow Ones with large black birds as familiars tend to view them as their best friends. The loyalty runs deep; the avian familiar is the primary confidante of the mage's most inner thoughts. Large bird familiars often have the ability to spot from a bird's eye view other magic wielders.

Owls: Owl familiars often have the same magic-sensing abilities that crows and ravens do, but they have radically different personalities. Owls attach themselves to hardcore, intellectual Hollow Ones. They tend to be fluent in several languages and

adopt staunch, teacher-like relationships with their mages. A Hollow One back-talking her owl is not out of the ordinary. Owls are patronizing and hard to please, but they are wise and knowledgeable creatures from whom a Hollow One can learn much.

Dogs: Large, dark-colored dogs are those most likely to adopt Hollow Ones. While a dog is not the most intelligent familiar, it is perhaps the most vigilant. Dog familiars are very protective of their Hollow Ones. They tend to have a sharp eye for security, and with their keen sense of smell, they — and their mages — are rarely ambushed.

ROTES



ALLEY VANISH

(...CORRESPONDENCE, ...MIND)

The downtown urban sprawls of the World of Darkness are dark, twisted mazes of graffiti and the dim glow of neon. A Hollow One on her own turf who knows this little trick can fake out, misdirect and shake anyone that may be pursuing her. A combination of twisting space and confusing the pursuer's sense of direction, this rote makes back alleyways seem to swallow the Hollow One, throwing off any pursuit.

This rote is coincidental if it is accomplished out of the direct sight of a pursuer and if the pursuer can perceive some manner in which the mage may have escaped ("Damn, he must have jumped onto that dumpster, grabbed the fire escape and vaulted over that fence. I'll never catch him now.") If a character vanishes in dead-end alley with no conceivable means of physical escape, the Effect is vulgar.

MET: Disciple *Correspondence*, Initiate *Mind*. A successful *Alley Vanish* is considered to be Fair Escape. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

ANTIQUING

(...ENTROPY, ...MATTER, ...PRIME)

One may ponder, after exposure to Hollow Ones, how these usually unemployed vagabonds always manage to have the coolest goth stuff. The insides of their downtown crash pads/studio apartments seem covered with trinkets and decorations that came straight out of a Hollywood monster-movie set. Just how these street kids afford all the antique candelabras and hearses with black-tinted windows while sleeping all day and not playing the Syndicate's paycheck game is a Hollow One secret. Antiquing allows Hollow Ones to find things in thrift shops, yard sales and junk yards that may be completely nonfunctional, broken down and/or forgotten. The junk, acquired through trade or minimal cash, is then transformed via magic, thus turning someone else's trash into a Hollow One's magical treasures.

System: The magic itself is a complex combination of restoring Matter patterns, turning back the clock on decay and channeling Quintessence to create something from noth-

ing. The result is Gothic-style extravagance on a budget. Not all items require all Spheres, but the more used, the more extravagant the items created or restored.

The Effect is coincidental if performed over time and out of sight of others. If objects are restored instantly or within someone's view, it is vulgar.

MET: Disciple *Entropy*, Adept *Matter*, Initiate *Prime*. With a little magical assistance, antique shop and junkyard finds can be refurbished to their original state, bringing new meaning to the term "shabby chic." This rote can be coincidental if done over time, between games. If this rote is done instantaneously, it is considered vulgar. Item descriptions and Traits are best represented by item cards; the Storyteller has the final word on an item's Traits and refurbishing. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows for one extra level of restoration.

BEING INVISIBLE (...FORCES, ...MIND)

The ability to remain unseen is crucial for any Hollow One on a stakeout or who finds herself in situations she would rather not be caught in. This rote manipulates the light of the surroundings to cloak the mage's presence. Additionally, the Hollow One enacting the rote projects a mental impulse for anyone nearby to look in other directions. Part trick of the light, part misdirection, Being Invisible is subtle. However, if the mage moves — takes a full step or more — the Effects is nullified, and others may glance in her direction and see her.

MET: Disciple *Forces*, Disciple *Mind*. Hollowers have learned the value of not being seen. If the magic test is successful, then the mage is cloaked. Arms are folded across the chest to represent this. To remain unseen, the mage must remain still and quiet — speaking, taking a step, swinging a weapon or the like will end this Effect. *Grades of Success:* None.

BUT A DOLLAR FROM THE UNIVERSE

(...ENTROPY, ...MATTER)

On general principle, Hollow Ones hate to play the Technocracy's money game. Yet, they cannot deny that such a trade medium is often their only means for survival. Hence, the creation of this rote. Hollow Ones using it can find money — rarely large amounts of moola, just enough to get by on. It is an effective and mostly coincidental survival technique. People

drop money all the time; the Hollow One mage just happens to be the guy who finds these lost bills and coins. Whether the found greenback is just a fiver to eat on or a twenty to catch a ride with, street survival is something Hollowers can summon at will.

MET: Initiate Entropy, Initiate Matter. With this Effect, a lucky Hollower can find the loose change or bills that get dropped. A simple "Hey, look — money!" gesture can make the Effect coincidental. The Storyteller has the final word on how much money can be picked up on a casting (generally, no more than \$20). *Grades of Success:* For one grade of success, you may cast this Effect on another person.

CØOL GLAMØR (•••MIND)

This Hollow One rote accompanies getting dressed and made-up. It is ritual where a Hollow One puts a lot more effort than normal into the way she looks. Cool Glamor sets up a particular mental impulse broadcasting to onlookers, creating a sense of respect and awe.

System: While the rote is active, the Hollow One's player can roll Intimidation + Appearance, (the difficulty is the target's Willpower) for her character to come across as one cool, self-confident and powerful person. The affected parties will feel the impulse to treat the Hollow One with respect while acknowledging her aura of impressive mystery.

MET: Initiate Mind. With this rote, the Hollower can extend an impressive aura of power and confidence. The magic challenge is made when the mage first comes into contact with someone. With success, the target is naturally inclined to treat her as her aura suggests for the duration of the rote. This rote is usually coincidental. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the duration for one grade.

CROWD SURFING (••••MIND)

At concerts, parties or any circumstance where there is a large group of people in one place interacting with one another, the vibes are perfect for crowd surfing. Erecting a cool façade of finely chiseled coolness, cigarette hanging out of the lip, the surfer closes his eyes and sees the plane of thoughts. With the cresting waves of emotion and inner voices, intention and inhibition rise and fall in the ocean of minds. The Hollow Mind adept merely walks around the scene, mentally divining and analyzing the local who's who, discovering who is with whom and who really feels what for whom. His mind steers an astral surfboard, cutting through the tides of thought, allowing the crowd surfer to conquer any social scene.

MET: Adept Mind. With this rote, a mage can skim lightly over minds, picking up the thoughts that are closest to the surface. Casting allows one to choose three targets within direct line of sight (no scanning someone across a crowded club with someone blocking one's vision every two seconds). With success, the mage can ask his targets what their goals for the next scene are. *Grades of Success:* Every two grades allows for one extra target.

CUP ØF JOE (•••PRIME)

One of the most common forms of Quintessence transference, distribution and consumption for Hollow Ones comes in the guise of this coffee ritual. Coffee is a very common focus for Prime, and more than a few Hollow One nodes exist in the form of coffeehouses.

System: A number of points of Quintessence equal to the character's Arete can be invested into a caffeinated beverage (even cola, for those who've just gotta be different). When consumed, the "liquid-bean-of-life" is treated like Tass being transferred straight into the mage.

MET: Disciple Prime. With this rote, a mage can invest Quintessence into a cup of coffee or another caffeinated beverage. With success, the drinker receives the Quintessence as Tass but may not hold more than her Arete rating. If this rote is done in a coffeehouse node, then the mage barrista's Quintessence is regained within the hour. *Grades of Success:* None.

DARK STREETS (••ENTROPY, ••FORCES)

This rote can create a cover of darkness around the streets a mage currently occupies, helping her to avoid others or to keep her features ambiguous. This rote tends to be coincidental if the mage merely causes a flicker or a dimming of street lamps when he walks past — lights flicker on and off in the urban landscape all the time.

System: The successes rolled equal the extra dice the Hollow One can add to his Subterfuge rolls for the scene in which the lights are dimmed.

MET: Initiate Entropy, Initiate Forces. If the test is successful, the street lights flicker or dim when the mage passes them. This distraction can be used for a Fair Escape, with Narrator approval. *Grades of Success:* With one grade of success, a mage may extend the duration for one grade.

RIDING THE RAILROAD (•••ØR ••••CORRESPONDENCE)

This ability was developed by Hollow One teleporters to "hop" from Tradition chantries and safehouses the world over. Unfortunately, this type of transportation is always vulgar, but the less witnesses, the less Paradox incurred. The Paradox usually takes the form of physical exhaustion, severe jet lag and the need to sleep for long stints after multiple transports.

Railroad Riders can carry luggage with them. Knapsacks, backpacks and fanny packs filled with mail are not uncommon. Often, the Railroader spends a few days at a location, bringing his clique hosts up to speed via normal means and magic. Hollow Railroad Riders are on a perpetual surf, and many learn Mind or Spirit secondary Spheres to further enable themselves to carry, receive and deliver the bulk of Hollow Railroad "mail."

System: With three levels of Correspondence, the mage can transport himself. With four, he can take more people or large things, although this also requires the Life or Matter Spheres (whichever is appropriate).

MET: Disciple or Adept Correspondence. This rote is always considered to be vulgar. Challenges for this Effect should be made with a Narrator, as they may mean a character leaving the game scene. Paradox usually prevents multiple jaunts; once a character departs, the player had best be prepared not to reenter for the rest of the session, unless by more mundane means. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows the mage to double the Effect's distance.

ROOFTOP LEAP (•••FORCES, •••LIFE)

A common pastime of young, street-punk Hollowers is to leap from rooftop to rooftop. Punk-combat Hollowers consider this rote a test of bravery and a rite of passage. Over time, through such workouts, the cliques of punks who regularly patrol the streets build up extra muscles in their legs to give them spring. This muscle mass, along with the very subtle manipulation of momentum, can give these street troops leaping routines that rival those of any martial arts movie.

MET: Disciple Forces, Disciple Life. First of all, don't go leaping from rooftops (see the Mind's Eye Theatre rules regarding stunts if you need a reminder). This Effect is always considered vulgar. The test can be done with anyone nearby. If the test is successful, then the mage can leap an additional 10 feet per Trait of Arete. Additionally, during the scene where this rote is activated, the caster gains a bonus Nimble Physical Trait for each Trait in Arete. These extra Physical Traits vanish after the scene. *Grades of Success:* Every grade of success allows the Hollow One to extend the duration by one grade.

SCENT OF CONTROL (•••LIFE, •••MIND)

Some Hollow Ones (particularly club-goers) can produce certain behaviorally stimulating scents from their sweat glands. All kinds of subtle messages, from "desire me" to "leave me alone" to "protect me," are released through scent-induced hormones to convey and create unconscious obedience in others. It takes working up a rather large sweat to be totally effective, but intense dancing, long running and even sex can be pheromone-inducing activities.

Circumstances help determine whether the Effect is coincidental or vulgar — although the target is usually unaware that scent is affecting his emotions, strange and unbidden emotions will not go unnoticed. Projecting "protect me" to a cop who is chasing you down is somewhat vulgar. On the other hand, projecting "desire me" during sexual intercourse is quite coincidental.

MET: Disciple Life, Initiate Mind. With this Effect, a mage can send a short pheromonal message to a target. These pheromones are carried in sweat, usually requiring physical activity (or a very bad case of nerves) before the Effect can be invoked. With success, the target is unconsciously compelled to

obey a simple command. Targets cannot be commanded to harm themselves, and once out of range of the mage's scent, they may wonder why they acted as they did. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows the mage to affect one additional target.

SOUND/THOUGHT TRANSFER (••FORCES, •••MIND)

Certain sounds evoke certain thoughts and emotions. The Hollow Ones perfect this concept and apply it in several ways. A package of information — be it a story, an encoded message or a secret piece of gossip — can be invested and concealed within a certain pattern of sound waves, usually music or a spoken voice. The sound waves are recorded in any number of ways. Later, when the sounds are played back, the sound evokes mental images of the invested information. Sound/Thought Transfer is the Hollow One method of choice for communicating to each other what they do not want others to hear. Raves, nightclubs, pirate radio and even the exchanging of mix tapes and CDs serve as the complex system by which Hollow One knowledge is passed around. Things hidden in music serve as the Hollow One grapevine. This Effect is considered coincidental ("We understand what this music is saying").

MET: Initiate Forces, Disciple Mind. With success in the magic challenge, a mage can pass along information via a mixed tape, pirate radio or other soundwaves. This is best done by passing the target a card with the intended information. At Storyteller discretion, this information may be passed through telephones. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

SPOT THE ITIAN (•CORRESPONDENCE, •LIFE, •MATTER, •PRIME)

This rote is used by Hollow Ones on the street to recognize the enemy. It is usually used on anyone who looks out of place. Those wearing full black suits are often checked, as are most black sedans.

System: With a successful roll, this rote will reveal the existence of any Technomagic implants in a target, as well as identify the presence of the substance known as primum. This rote is considered coincidental.

MET: Apprentice Correspondence, Apprentice Life, Apprentice Matter, Apprentice Prime. With a successful magic check, the target must reveal any cybernetic implants she has and if there are any traces of primum on her person. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

SUITION FOG (•••MATTER)

This rote conjures ever-creepy and mysterious fog to embellish the Hollow One's rituals or conceal his presence. The fog can provide safety, cover and privacy from others.

System: The full effects of the fog are up to the Storyteller. It might raise difficulties on Perception rolls and/or lower the difficulties on Stealth rolls, depending on the success of the Effect.

The Effect can be vulgar or coincidental, depending on circumstance and location. In early morning San Francisco, the Smokey Mountains or predawn London, fog is most certainly a normal occurrence. In the deserts of the American Southwest or an afternoon in the city, however, fog is an improbable occurrence. The slower the fog takes to set, the more coincidental it can seem.

MET: Adept Matter. Whether or not the rote is coincidental depends on the factors listed above and Storyteller discretion. If the test is successful, the fog rolls in whenever the mage desires. In all outdoors settings, perception-related challenges are reduced by two Traits as the fog shrouds sight and muffles hearing. *Grades of Success:* Extend the Effect's duration by one grade.

TRAFFIC PULSE(••ENTROPY, ••FORCES)

For those who choose to listen to the music of the city, there is an underlying pattern, a rhythm, if you will, to all the rumbling and revving of the engines. With mastery of the Traffic Pulse, a mage can affect the time it takes traffic lights to turn, cause traffic to be heavy or sparse, even direct and prevent minor accidents. For a mage who literally lives on the streets, Traffic Pulse can be a useful magical tool.

MET: Initiate Entropy, Initiate Forces. First of all, *do not play in traffic!* That said, for some "off location" scenes where travel via automobile is involved, this rote can be called upon to detain, expedite or hinder an automotive journey. The test should be done with the Narrator overseeing the travel scene. Choose one element of traffic to affect (traffic lights, volume). *Grades of Success:* Extend the Effect's duration by one grade or affect one additional element.

VEXT(••ENTROPY, •••TIME)

Perhaps the most useful of all Hollow One curses is the mighty Vext. The Vext is only evoked on enemies of the Hollow Ones, never on a rival Hollower. The target suffers a series of minor setbacks and annoyances—nothing goes right or according to plan for someone who has been Vext. When Hollow Ones are compelled to warfare (magical or otherwise), it is common to evoke a Vext on the enemy a few days before a calculated strike.

System: This rote makes its recipient the target of Murphy's Law for a number of days equal to the successes gained on the Arete roll. Since streaks of bad luck are not out of the norm, this rote is coincidental.

MET: Initiate Entropy, Initiate Time. Perform the magic test with the target of the Vext. If the test is successful, then the target must bid two Traits instead of one in all challenges where he is defending. This lasts for as many challenges as the mage who cast the Vext has Arete Traits. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

WE'LL GET THERE (•CORRESPONDENCE, ••ENTROPY)

This trick is a way to keep from getting lost in the surreal urban landscape that is a Hollow One's habitat. Combining a keen sense of direction with a good set of odds, the mage can usually stumble to where she wants to be or needs to be.

System: As long as the mage has a good idea of where she's going ("I need to get to Tadd's apartment..."), a single success is enough to point her in the right direction and keep her on track. More successes clue the mage into short cuts that get her there faster. This rote is coincidental magic; the name of the rote itself is a good enough way to subtly pass off this Effect.

MET: Apprentice Correspondence, Initiate Entropy. *Grades of Success:* For one grade of success, a mage may cast this Effect on another person.

WRITING ON THE WALL (•MATTER, •••MIND)

Graffiti is one of the Hollow Ones' hidden languages. All that multicolored scrawl and those odd, letterlike symbols decorating the dark corners are often really cryptic Writings on the Wall. This technique is similar to the old hobo language. Hollow Ones use this language to give others in the Tradition quick cues as to the lay of the land—whose territory is whose, what people to watch out for, where to meet. The writing may mark the lairs of supernatural creatures. All sorts of information about an area is plain to those who know the symbolic language of the spray-paint signs.

System: A single success conveys the simple gist of a message to any Hollow One who views it ("Beware: werewolf lair."). More successes add more nuance or complexity ("Beware: The sewer under the bridge is a Bone Gnawer hang-out."). This rote is coincidental, although often illegal.

MET: Apprentice Matter, Disciple Mind. This test should always be done with the Storyteller, since it affects the game environment. If the location of the game allows, the Storyteller may tape an index card to the wall that says: "Flip this card over if you are a Hollow One. If not, you see graffiti." The player of the Hollow One who succeeded in the rote can write the encoded message on the other side of the index card. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

HOLLOW NECROMANCY

Necromancy for Hollow Ones is a technique to interact with the spirits of the Restless Dead. Hollow Gaunts (necromancers) take care of their dearly departed friends in any way they can, tending to their so-called Fetters. In return, Gaunts get the protection and friendship of netherworldly beings. In return for having the dearly departed as advisors and protectors, Gaunts often have to meet certain demands. Sometimes, it's protecting

other people and objects the ghost has a connection to. Other times, it involves helping a wraith seek out and experience second-hand the things that meant something to her in life.

The most potent aspect of Hollow One necromancy is the powerful allies it garners. In many situations, wraiths can cover a mage with all manner of supernatural effects, freeing the mage from needing to use magic, therefore saving him from Paradox. Onlookers may think the Gaunt "incanted a spell" and made the walls bleed or the room stretch, making him seem like a magical badass. This psych-out can serve Gaunts well in terms of intimidation.

MET: Like other forms of necromancy in Mind's Eye Theatre, in order to be completely useful, there need to be wraiths around, be they players' characters or Narrator characters. If there are people playing wraiths in the game (using Mind's Eye Theatre's *Oblivion*), a necromancer should perform challenges with his target wraiths or the Shadowguide (a special wraith Narrator). The rules listed below are meant to mesh with the rules of *Oblivion*.

Note: Mages should avoid using Entropy Sphere Effects in the Shadowlands. Spectres and Shadows are drawn to it like sharks to chum.

BLOOD FROM A STONE (••••LIFE, ••••MIND, ••••SPIRIT)

Gaunts soon realize that their deceased allies are oftentimes at odds with themselves. Every now and then, a poor soul freaks out and becomes extremely self-destructive in one way or another. This means lashing out at everything he's usually passionate about — including the mage. Blood from a Stone helps ease the buildup of pain-laden angst that befalls a ghost. When the signs of a great catharsis fit are imminent — an observation that only comes from intimately knowing what makes the ghost tick — this rote is typically enacted.

The mage takes a needle to the wax Fetter Ball (see below). The wraith will usually make a big

stink and not be happy about it. It's like trying to give a little kid a shot; there's going to be a lot of moaning and screaming. Once the first few layers of wax are pierced, the rote transforms the ghost's pure negative emotion into a stigmata of blood streaming from the wax ball. The mage catches the blood in a cup. As the pure psychic pain, in the form of ectoplasmic blood, collects, the ghost begins to regain its composure. After the last of the blood has dripped out and the wraith seems as psychologically stable as anyone dead can be, the bloody angst is burned in the metal cup it was collected in, along with a good amount of sulfur. The burning smells awful in a clinging kind of way, but despite the stench, it helps keep ghostly companions grounded and stable. The wraiths themselves call this trick a "castigation" and are usually pretty thankful for the treatment after the ritual.

This rote is always vulgar, and it is therefore usually performed in private.

MET: Disciple Life, Adept Mind and Adept Spirit. With this rote, a mage can release the excess Angst of a wraith, especially one who is on the verge of Catharsis. The challenge should be performed with the Shadowguide. If the test is successful, then the target wraith's Shadow loses temporary Angst Traits equal to the mage's Arete Traits. Aside from the Paradox ramifications of this rote, the mage who enacted it gains the Negative Social Trait *Repugnant*, to represent that she now stinks of burned Angst. For *Oblivion* purposes, this rote is a cruder form of *Castigate*. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

FETTER BALL (••PRIITIE, ••••SPIRIT)

This process creates a permanent link between a ghost and a Hollow One Gaunt (a free 1-point fetter for the wraith). The ghost must be a willing participant and voluntarily "sign" a pact. This binding process cannot be taken lightly. Once this pact is sealed and the written agreement is crumpled into a ball, the

mage encases it in candle wax. The wraith's ghostly powers cannot affect the Fetter Ball, and the sphere of wax becomes a focus for further necromantic Effects.



If this rote is performed without onlookers, it is coincidental. If mundanes watch the wax and paper ritual, the rote is vulgar.

MET: Initiate Prime, Adept Spirit. Many necromantic Effects cannot be performed without a *Fetter Ball*. If successful, the wraith who is part of the agreement gains a one-Trait Fetter in the *Fetter Ball*. For all intents and purposes, or when using the *Arcanoi Lifeweb*, the *Fetter Ball* behaves no differently than any other Fetter, and wraiths are cautious about entering into such agreements. Destruction of the Fetter that is not part of a necromantic ritual results in a Harrowing for the wraith. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

SHADOW SIGHT

(•CORRESPONDENCE, •ENTROPY, •MIND, •SPIRIT)

The ability to see the Underworld is one of the first rites learned by those initiates who desire to commune with the dead. Not only does this rote allow a Gaunt to see dead people, he can also perceive the Shadowlands as ghosts see it. The surreal and morbid black-and-white environment that the dead see allows them — and mages using this rote — to perceive weak points in buildings and objects, as well as to perceive the “aura” of life essence in all living things. By concentrating on a particular ghost, a Hollow Gaunt can also see the inky-black, evil shadow that is ever present behind each restless soul.

MET: Apprentice Correspondence, Apprentice Entropy, Apprentice Mind, Apprentice Spirit. If the test is successful, then a mage can see the Shadowlands for one scene. Any wraith characters are plainly seen, as are any events happening in the Shadowlands. Generally, this appears as an overlay on the living world. This rote may be performed again on a particular wraith to view her Shadow; it will not give a numerical measure of Angst, but more likely, a more powerful Shadow or one on the verge of Catharsis will appear larger or more bestial. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows the mage to extend the Effect for one additional grade of success.

SHELTER FROM THE STORM

(•ENTROPY, ••••PRIME, ••••SPIRIT)

Just as there is a great Avatar Storm in the Umbra, there is a great maelstrom in the Underworld. The evocation of this rote allows a Gaunt to turn a room or a small building into a temporary shelter from this maelstrom.

System: One success creates a level-one Haunt. Each additional success adds to the levels. The Effect lasts for one scene. Since the mundane eye cannot even perceive a maelstrom, this rote is always coincidental.

MET: Apprentice Entropy, Adept Prime, Adept Spirit. If the test is a success, then the place the mage occupies becomes a Haunt with a Trait rating equal to the mages' Arete Traits. The shelter Effect lasts for one session. *Grades of Success:* Increase the Effect's duration by one grade per grade of success.

VOICE ACROSS THE VOID

(••CORRESPONDENCE, •••MIND, •••SPIRIT)

Using a Fetter Ball as a focus, the mage may communicate with the ball's partnered ghost no matter where it is in the spirit world. The communication is sent through the Fetter connection as a psychic impulse. This way, the Hollow necromancer does not have to formally summon and interrupt a ghost ally to consult him.

System: One success provides two-way communication between the mage and the Fetter Ball's wraith, no matter the distance between them. However, the wraith does not have to answer any of the mage's queries and may remain silent, although he cannot shut out the voice from afar. The Effect is coincidental when the conversation happens in private.

MET: Initiate Correspondence, Disciple Mind, Disciple Spirit. A player usually performs the test with a Narrator, who delivers the message. If the Hollow One player and a wraith player plan to use this rote often, they should show mercy on the Narrator and get two cell phones or walkie-talkies to facilitate their communication. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

ONEIROMANCY

The power over dreams is a very underestimated and flexible application of magic. Dubbed “narcoleptics,” dream specialists are at their magical prime when they sleep. Most Hollower narcoleptics possess the Dream Background. One of the most obvious benefits to working magic through dreams is that Paradox tends to be minimal and Effects are usually coincidental — anything can happen in a dream. Oneiromancy's limitation is obvious in that it carries little real-world punch. Still, messages, communications and entire spirit quests can occur in dreams.

Narcoleptics inevitably stumble upon the fair folk. The fae, like moths attracted to a flame, flock to Hollow One dream-crafters. When a Hollow One oneiromancer is placed under faerie enchantment, the experience is said to be like tripping in a virtual reality inside a sensory-deprivation tank. The experience of the Dreaming has made the dream god, Morpheus, an icon as important as the grim reaper in Hollow One mythology.

Enchanted narcoleptics (sometimes derogatorily referred to as Glamour Whores) claim that all of their Mind, Spirit and Prime “creative dreaming” rites that usually only have an effect while in REM sleep, function vividly like pattern magics in the world of the fae. Many Hollow dreamers seek more enchantment fixes once the experience wears off (as it inevitably does). When their habits get very bad, other Hollow Ones have to drag the narcoleptics away from slaying dragons and flying with Peter Pan — not unlike video-game addicts.

The dangerous side to flirting with the universal forces of creativity — which is what the fair folk and their Dreaming represent — is the breakdown of the psyche. Quiet, Bedlam, whatever you want to call it — mages that tap into and direct the flow of such forces undergo a process that mentally warps them. Dreaming specialists are rather godlike in dreams, and their mortal, real-world identities start to break down and become forsaken, as if the Hollow One's place in the world of the Awakened is the dream. The dreamstruck are often catatonic in the real world. Breaking free from their madness is not unlike quitting narcotics cold turkey.

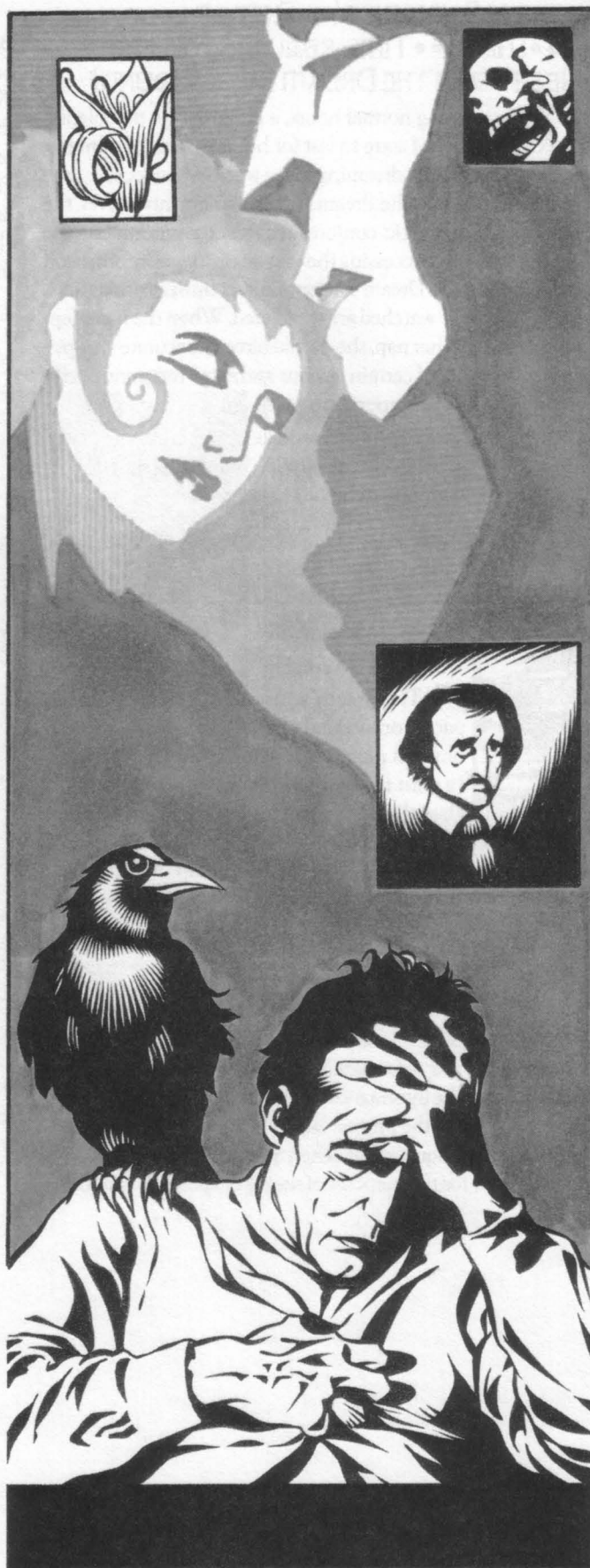
For more information about the fair folk and changelings in the World of Darkness, see **Changeling: The Dreaming** or **The Shining Host** for Mind's Eye Theatre.

DREAM PLAY

(••••MIND, ••PRIME, ••TIME)

Some see these strange forms of magical performance art as a bold new frontier for creativity. The dream artist takes time meditating and visualizing a scenario. Like the loose script of a "choose your own adventure" book or the outline of a video game, details are invested into the feel and mood of the piece. After long hours of meditating and mentally holding an intricate, mental construct in memory, the dream artist approaches a clique to be the audience of the piece. A sleepover is an easy way to conduct this rite, once all the attendees fall asleep. The creator is in the position of director and the audience members are the actors or players. Like a participatory, subjectively experienced movie, the dream drama plays out. When the gossamer curtain closes, the players and director wake up, with full memories of the experience, no worse for the wear, the drama having only been a dream.

MET: Disciple Mind, Initiate Prime, Initiate Time. This rite is coincidental and should be tested pre-game or between sessions, since it (like *Running Scenarios*, below) requires a full eight hours of sleep for everyone involved in the *Dream Play*. Pulling in unwilling victims requires the player to make a Willpower Challenge with the person before making the magic challenge; use of this rite on unwilling participants is considered vulgar. The rite doesn't really affect game play much more than by adding character development to a group or adding suspense if fear-induced nightmares are sent via the vulgar version. For those affected by the Flaw Nightmares, this rite can be very unpleasant indeed. *Grades of Success:* No effect.



RUNNING SCENARIOS (••ENTROPY, ••••MIND, ••TIME; REQUIRES AT LEAST ONE LEVEL IN THE DREAM BACKGROUND)

While sleeping normal hours, a Hollow One narcoleptic can extend his REM state to last for hours instead of minutes, effectively giving the dreaming mage weeks of subjective time to work with inside the dream. By exerting control over the dream, the narcoleptic conjures whatever environment she needs for research. Accessing the vast quantities of information available with the Dream Background, countless simulations of possibilities are watched and pondered. When the narcoleptic awakens from her nap, she should have an accurate synopsis of the probability of certain actions and some temporary skills (via the Dream Background) to represent this research.

System: The mage receives a relevant Ability associated with the dream, its levels equal to his number of successes or his Dream Background, whichever is lower.

MET: Initiate *Entropy*, Adept *Mind*, Initiate *Time*;
Background: *Dream*. This rote is always coincidental with a base difficulty of 4 minus the mage's *Dream* Background. Working this Effect takes a full eight hours of sleep, and it is therefore usually tested before the game. With a successful test, the mage receives several perks for the game session. First, the Storyteller may seed foreshadowing in the pre-game dream. Second, the Storyteller names an Ability that the character is going to need for what's in store for the evening's story. The mage receives, for the evening, that named Ability a number of times no greater than the mage's Arete Traits or Traits in the *Dream* Background (whichever is higher). The Meditation Ability can call for a retest when Running Scenarios. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

WONDERS



LOOKING GLASS

Level 2 Wonder

This small, antique brass make-up compact is ornate and unassuming. Aside from the obvious practical use of carrying face makeup (a must for every goth), the mirror is a looking glass that can scry and watch other locations like a specialized Correspondence Effect. The range of the looking glass is one mile, unless the

Hollow One wielding it can augment the range with her own Correspondence abilities.

RITTBAUD'S RECIPE FOR SACRED ABSINTHE

Level 3 Wonder

This Wonder is actually a one-of-a-kind scroll. Copies have been made of the information on the scroll, but when one attempts to use the information (written in old English) without the scroll at hand, the process fails. The proper formula creates a greenish-black liqueur that, when quaffed, lowers the effective Gauntlet by 4 for the purposes of seeing or speaking with other

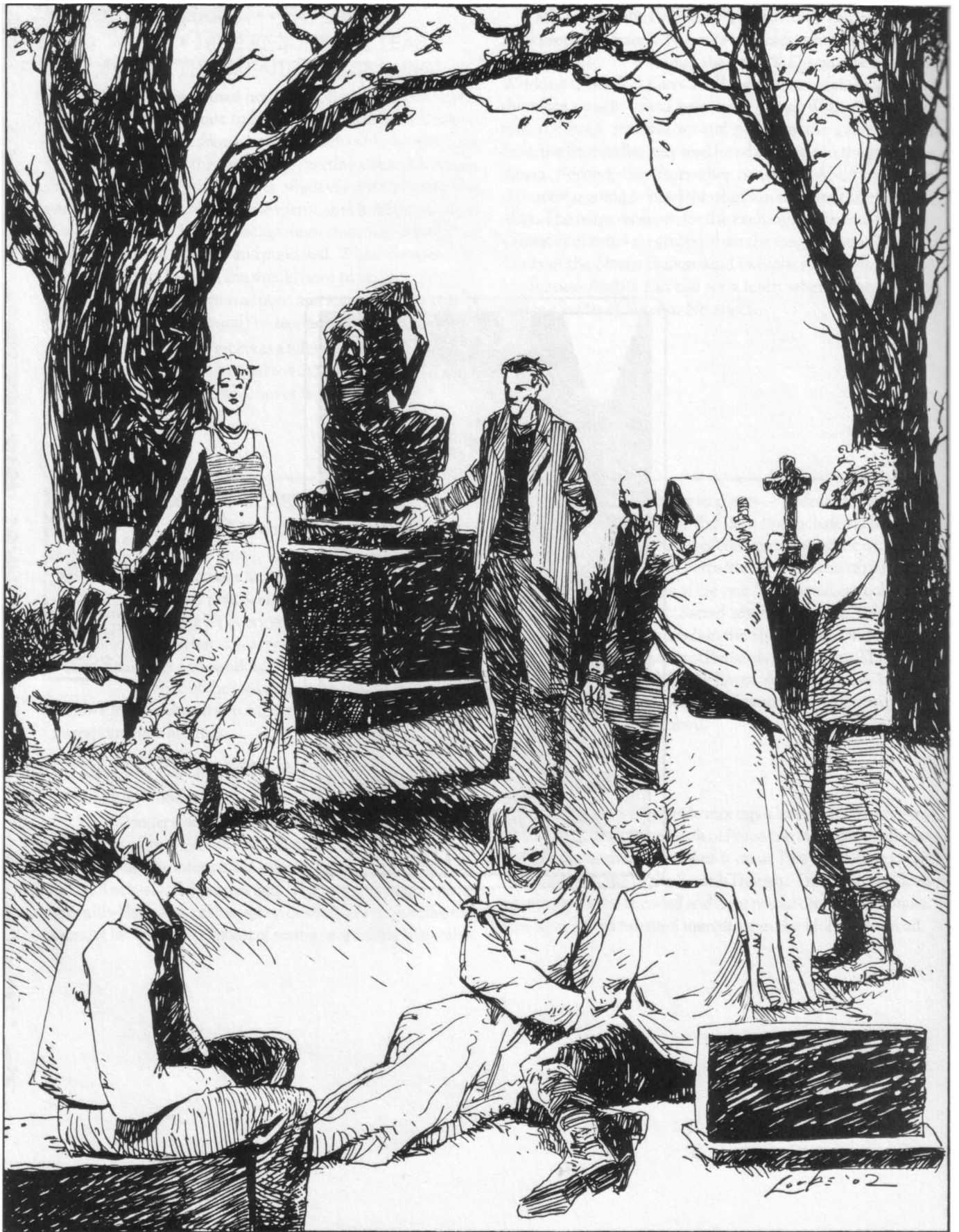
worlds while a mage is under its effects — a “derangement of the senses” of sorts. (Note that this does not include sidestepping into the Umbra). The process of creating the absinthe is long and arduous. It requires certain herbs from special areas of the world, harvested at certain times of the year. The ingredient collecting alone can take months. Sacred absinthe can be made with someone who has three levels in the Spirit Sphere and at least a rudimentary understanding of Renaissance alchemy. The effects of the liqueur last for about six hours. After the whole Umbral trip is over, the mage must make a Stamina roll (Difficulty 8) or be sick for two days afterward.

TASS TAPES

Level 1 Wonder

These small, homemade mix tapes have several uses. Any Hollow mage with three levels of Prime can imbue one with one point of Quintessence and pass it on as Tass to a fellow clique member. Also, use of the Sound/Thought Transfer rote allows information to be encoded and then passed on to other cliques. Tass tapes are an essential ingredient in the Hollow Railroad.





CHAPTER THREE: HOLLOW PERSONALITIES

*She dwells with Beauty — Beauty that must die;
And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,
Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips:
Ay, in the very temple of Delight
Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine;
His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,
And be among her cloudy trophies hung.*

— John Keats, "Ode on Melancholy"



Have you heard the tale of Snow White and the Seven Goths? Gloomy, Sappy, Snooty, Sexy, Hateful, Smarty and Perky? It takes place in an urban jungle, a forest full of predators and traps. There's an evil stepmother, of course, to torture the heroes. The prince starts out stupid, but he gradually figures it all out and allies himself with the Seven Goths to rescue Snow White. It's a touching, tantalizing fairy tale, but it is unlikely to have a happy ending.

Goth stereotypes fit some of the Hollowers some of the time but certainly not all of them all of the time. Goths have not only changed and evolved over the years, but they've expanded their circle to include anyone who takes the time and energy to assert self-expression. If a Hollower wants to show up wrapped in red cellophane or dressed as a tarty Japanese anime character, she'll be welcomed. Color has leaked into the black ambiance that encircled goths of the 1990s. Those who defined the subculture as it is now have grown up. They've entered their 30s and have developed a more mature perspective on the world, its

horrors and its romance. Some of them even smile sometimes. Sometimes. These elder goths continue to lead the subculture, but a younger generation is emerging, and the subculture is evolving as a result.

Hollowers don't claim credit for the goth subculture. Rather, they know that it developed naturally, organically. All the Hollow Ones did was provide the plant with fertilizer. The Hollow tradition has seen the evolution of the subculture through history. Modern goth is just the latest extension, the latest version of the romanticists. Though it has changed appearance over the years, the personalities remain basically the same, whether Sleepers or Awakened.

The Traditions underestimate the Hollow Ones. They don't get it, and that's why the Hollow Ones exist at all. Tradition mages view the Hollow Ones as miscreants and self-indulgent children who think that being young and stupid is cool. They don't see how deep the roots of the Hollow tradition have tapped. Few actually call it the Hollow tradition. They feel that to name the collection a Tradition gives the foolish, disorganized runts too much credit. Most Tradition mages prefer to call them Orphans. They feel that title more accurately describes the ragtag spattering of iconoclasts.

The Tradition mages undervalue the contribution of the Hollow Ones in the fight against the Technocracy because they don't understand the value of "passive assertion via existence," or in other words, "leading by example." They haven't grasped the difference between Doing and Being. Thus, the Tradition mages don't see the nuances of philosophy and the enduring strength that the Hollow Ones possess as a whole.

Because the goal of a Hollow One is to Be, no two Hollowers are exactly alike. They don't all dress alike, despite rumors to the contrary, and they don't all think alike. You don't have to pass a test or survive an initiation rite in order to become a Hollow One. All you have to do is to decide that's what you are and then be it. The Hollow tradition as a whole doesn't turn anyone away, though certain cliques might. That goes against the very definition of what it means to be a Hollow One. How can anyone turn you away from being yourself? Nearly anyone can find a niche for themselves within the "un-organization" of Orphans that is the Hollow tradition, and those who don't blend anywhere don't care if they're snubbed — it makes them no less Hollow than any other.

HOLLOW PEOPLE

Everyone wants to be somebody in the Hollow tradition. That's the name of the game. *Who am I? How do I refine my personality? And how do I share the perfect*

vision of myself with others? Hollow Ones create and climb social ladders as a natural extension of their constant attempts to better define themselves. They judge others harshly at times, for the same reasons. *What do I like? Well, I don't like that. And I don't like her. So there.*

Few have managed to reach the top of the social ladder. Those who have made it to the top invested decades of legend building to get there. How does one become a legend in her own time? The following Hollowers demonstrate how.

NEVILLE SINCLAIR NEVERMORE

Background: No one knows anything about Neville's Awakening. He keeps it to himself, and Anaïs guards his secret as well. Some claim to have proof that he was around as long ago as the 15th century. Others have even gone so far as to state that they met him that long ago, when he wore a different face and bore a different identity. Neville neither confirms nor denies such rumors, though again, there are those who say that Neville has let details slip in conversations (purposefully?) about past meetings that he couldn't have known unless he was there. Whenever Neville comes to visit, the local Orphans have discussion material for days. *Who is he? How old is he? What has he seen? Whom does he know? How does he do it? Why?*

Neville's semi-recorded history begins at the turn of the 20th century, when he formed the first Hollow cabal. Tying his fate to the fates of others anchored him in the history books. He has remained with and loyal to the members of that first cabal throughout the 20th and into the 21st century. The original members include Anaïs Chevalier, Pietro diGenoa, Josepha de Espronceda (see below), Purity and Bog Asphodel (deceased). Other members have joined in more recent times, including Baron and Penny Dreadful. They all live in San Francisco. Their chantry is the Waydown, a club hidden away somewhere where only those invited to attend an event can find it (see Chapter One, "Here We Go: Hollow Places").

Image: Common knowledge tells us that Neville can transfer his soul and Avatar from one body to another. He does this rarely. After all, it damages his reputation each time he has to rebuild his old image with a new face. Currently, Neville resides in a tall, gaunt, male body. He added the name Nevermore when he took this shell. He wears his hair shoulder length, in an old-fashioned style and dyed black. His preferred mode of dress usually includes suits that would have been more appropriate in the early 1900s.

Roleplaying Hints: Neville is a lawyer, and he talks like one. He carries himself with undeniable superiority, has no patience for trivialities and does not stand for



anyone other than his own cabal members to contradict him. He will end a conversation by walking away from it if he doesn't receive the proper respect. Neville has a web of contacts in the Hollow Railroad. Very little gets past him. He knows people he's never met by name, often just by looking at them, because he's heard about them through the Railroad. He has a mind like a steel trap and a memory that rarely fails him. Neville is the father of the Hollow Ones, but he's not a kind father. He trusts very few people. He will come to the aid of a Hollower or anyone else, for that matter, so long as the need is great and the cause worthy of his time. He leads by example. He may show his more human side to his cabal peers, but only under extraordinarily stressful circumstances will he let down his guard with those he knows less well. Neville remains constantly aware of his legend and strives to maintain it.

Faction: None

Essence: Dynamic

Nature: Fanatic

Demeanor: Curmudgeon

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

Abilities: Alertness 5, Awareness 3, Cosmology 5, Culture 4, Dodge 2, Enigmas 3, Etiquette 3, Expression 2, Instruction 4, Intuition 4, Intimidation 3, Law 5, Leadership 3, Linguistics (Dutch, French, German, Greek, Latin) 5, Lore (Changeling) 1, Lore (Garou) 2, Lore (Kindred) 2, Lore (Marauders) 2, Lore (Nephandi) 3, Lore (Technocrats) 3, Lore (Traditions) 5, Medicine 1, Meditation 5, Occult 4, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 4, Survival 1

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Arcane 5, Avatar 3, Chantry 3, Destiny 1, Dream 2, Node 2, Resources 3, Sanctum 2

Arete: 5

Spheres: Correspondence 5, Entropy 2, Forces 3, Life 5, Matter 2, Mind 3, Prime 3, Spirit 2, Time 3

Willpower: 9

Quintessence: 8

Paradox: 5

Resonance: (Dynamic) Commanding, (Entropic) Ruthless, (Static) Calm

PENNY DREADFUL

Background: Penny was a strange child. She never did fit in, as few Hollow Ones do. She clashed horribly with her parents growing up. Mommy was an alcoholic. Daddy played the field. On her 13th birthday, Penny held her first séance at her party. She and five other girls all sat around in their pajamas and called upon the spirit of Jim Morrison. He never answered, but something did. It scared the hell out of every girl in the room, except Penny. From that day forward, Penny walked on the edge of Awakening. She dipped across the line periodically, but her Avatar never quite Awakened. Penny took up tarot cards and began reading books about witchcraft and the occult. She dabbled for a few years.

Then, at the age of 16, Penny got serious. The kids at school had always picked on her. She was tired of it. Chubby and unhappy, suffering from a horrible case of acne, Penny began to cast spells. Young and naïve, she didn't fully understand the seriousness of what she was doing. People got hurt. Penny had her revenge. Fortunately, at that time, she only had her little pinky toe dipped in the pool of magic.

That little bit of magic in her, however, was enough to allow her familiar to sniff her out. One day, a black cat showed up at her window. Penny had just turned 18 and left home to live on her own in a basement studio apartment. It smelled of wet dog, but Penny couldn't have been more proud of it. The cat, on the other hand, was less than pleased to find this young mage, *his* young mage, living in such squalor. Penny fed the cat though, no matter how little she had in the cupboard for herself. She practiced her witchcraft, dressing the part and decorating her apartment as if it were a spidery bat cave.

One day, Penny found an old book in an old bookstore. It had spells in it. One of the spells promised a lover. Penny followed the directions and was preparing to cast it, when the cat walked onto the book — as cats will do. Like other cats, it sat there and looked up at her. Unlike other cats, it then spoke. It said, "You don't want to do that."



Penny slipped over the edge and plunged into the pool of magic that, up until then, she'd only barely touched. Her Avatar swelled up inside her. Since then, she and Mr. Mistoffelees have been inseparable, much to the chagrin of his previous mistress. She never bothered to cast the love spell.

A decade has passed since then. Shortly after her Awakening, Penny began to frequent an old halfway house for Orphans. She met Neville there, and he immediately saw something special in her. He took her under his wing, and eventually, when he began to build the Waydown chantry in San Francisco, she helped him. She lives there with the others in their cabal and assists in maintaining it. Born Penelope Anne Drizkowski, she chose the name Penny Dreadful for herself after her Awakening.

Image: Penny dresses most often in black Victorian gowns that button up to her neck and hang down to her toes. She adds her own style to them, however. She loves corsets and, rather than wearing hers on the inside, she wears it on the outside of her dress. Penny darkens her eyes using a kohl lining. Her naturally pale skin still bears faint acne scars, but she covers them with milk-colored make-up. Mr. Mistoffelees likes to sit upon Penny's shoulder, though when out in public, he rides around in her old-fashioned doctor's bag.

Roleplaying Hints: Penny speaks excellent English and rarely uses slang. She also employs graceful mannerisms that harken back to an older time, even though she herself was born in 1973. This gives her an old-world formality that makes her seem serious and mature. Until someone crosses her, she treats him with friendliness and

respect. When she bristles, Penny's tongue can become quite sharp, almost to the point where she puts Mr. Mistoffelees to shame. She doesn't cuss or call anyone names. Usually, her barbs go undetected, unless those listening are smarter than the average bear.

Faction: None

Essence: Pattern

Nature: Director

Demeanor: Bon Vivant

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

Abilities: Alertness 3, Awareness 4, Culture (Romanticists) 5, Drive 2, Enigmas 5, Etiquette 2, Expression 4, Instruction 4, Intuition 3, Leadership 2, Linguistics (French, German, Greek) 3, Lore (Garou) 1, Lore (Kindred) 1, Lore (Marauders) 1, Lore (Nephandi) 1, Lore (Technocrats) 1, Lore (Traditions) 2, Meditation 4, Occult 5, Research 5

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Arcane 3, Avatar 2, Chantry 3, Dream 2, Familiar 5, Library 5, Mentor 3, Node 2, Sanctum 2

Arete: 5

Spheres: Correspondence 4, Forces 2, Life 1, Matter 1, Mind 1, Prime 2, Spirit 3, Time 3

Willpower: 6

Quintessence: 6

Paradox: 4

Resonance: (Dynamic) Curious, (Static) Predictable

JOSEPHA DE ESPRONCEDA

Background: Josepha de Espronceda was born in 1891 to a long line of witches. Her mother and her grandmother, and their mothers and grandmothers before them, had all practiced the arts of divination, healing, blessing, cursing and exorcism. They kept primarily to themselves, in the foothills of the Pyrenees mountains, to avoid persecution. Locals in the area still used their services, though no one spoke of it to outsiders. By the time Josepha was 17, modern civilization had encroached enough upon the rural community that witchcraft was becoming obsolete. Doctors replaced healers. Catholicism replaced all the rest. Josepha's mother began to think about marrying her daughter off and putting an end to the family tradition.

Josepha, however, had other plans. She wanted to study medicine. From childhood, she had felt the calling to become a healer. If her ancestors' witchcraft and herbalism couldn't get her there, then she was determined to follow the more traditional route. At age 18, on the eve of her marriage to a local goat herder,

Josepha ran away. She begged a ride from a traveling merchant and made her way to Madrid.

Once in Madrid, Josepha made her bid at the local medical school. It was 1909. They didn't accept women except as nurses, who did little more than clean wounds and empty bed pans. Josepha had other ideas. She didn't understand the big city. She had come from a culture in which her talents were honored. Her sex hadn't mattered when she saved the life of the miller's baby daughter. She persisted.

One doctor at the college took notice of her. He approached her after her third rejection from the hospital school and offered to teach her — in private. His idea of teaching involved rape. He drugged her with laudanum, then proceeded to do his worst.

Josepha will tell her story up to this point, but she leaves out a patch here. A couple of industrious Hollowers once tracked down the legend. One of them discovered a reference in the diary of a local nun from that time period. The nun wrote about finding a young woman in a ditch, naked and near death. The nun described the woman as "spoiled and driven mad, as an animal that has just awakened in a strange location." Those curious Hollowers believe that young woman was Josepha. As evidence, they point to her reverence for Catholic nuns and the Holy Mary, despite the fact that she doesn't herself practice Catholicism. They further believe that she Awakened at some point during the attack or during the time she spent near death in the ditch.

If the nuns took Josepha in and cared for her, they didn't keep her long. One week after the nun's entry in her diary, the hospital school burned to the ground.

Only one victim didn't make it out in time — the doctor who raped Josepha.

Josepha picks up her telling of the story at the point where the hospital school burns down. She describes the leaping flames and the satisfaction of revenge. Witnesses on the scene described a dark-haired witch laughing as the hospital burned. At the time, they pointed fingers and wanted to burn her at the stake. Josepha explains that she wasn't completely sane. She thought she'd been infused with power to set right what had been made so wrong. Fortunately for her, Neville heard reports of the Madrid witch, her trial and imminent death sentence.

Neville gallantly rescued the young Orphan. He took her back to Paris with him and gradually helped her rediscover her sanity. He taught her, and he fell in love with her. The story couldn't possibly be any more romantic. It even ends in tragedy when, more than 50 years later, in 1964, she let her insatiable curiosity get the best of her. She felt that if she could understand the dark forces better, then she could combat them more effectively, just as a doctor needs to understand a disease before she can cure it. Though she learned a great deal, she made a mistake and misjudged the power of the Nephandi. Bog Asphodel died protecting her, and she left her cabal in shame.

Her misery has eaten away at her for the past 40 years, and she balances at the edge of Quiet. She desperately wants to regain what she once had, but she knows the likelihood is poor. If, in the days to come, the members of the San Francisco cabal turn their backs on her, then she will step through fully to her Quiet and, in despair, throw herself at the forces that initially caused her to lose everything she had. She sees it as her penance. It will undoubtedly mean her death unless somebody intervenes.

Image: Josepha has straight, black hair that reaches to her lower back. She wears it either down or braided in one long plait. Her face has a fullness that once reminded others of clean air and mountain breezes but now seems bloated and corpse-like. Josepha has become a shadow of her former self. Without make-up, dark circles ring her eyes. She rarely brushes her hair anymore, so it hangs about her in morning tangles. Her dark eyes have irises that hint at leafless tree branches silhouetted against a moonless sky.

She prefers to dress simply, always in either all black or all red. She chooses her attire with the intent of expressing her mood. Her gothic connection shows more in the cut and style of her clothes and leans toward simplicity. Ankle-length, straight skirts accompany



turtlenecks or ruffled blouses. Her wide cummerbunds are reminiscent of the fashions popular in the early 1900s throughout Europe. She accessorizes with symbols of the Madonna and has a particular fondness for the Pietà, the famous image of the Virgin Mary with the dead Christ cradled upon her lap.

Roleplaying Hints: Josepha will not discuss the details surrounding the time between her rape and the burning of the hospital school. She gladly embellishes the story of the inferno and Neville's rescuing her from the witch-hunt, though a distinct sadness washes over her whenever she mentions Neville. She rarely shows much more emotion than her usual melancholy. She seems drugged half the time, muttering to herself and wandering through the clubs without direction. She will talk to anyone who talks to her, but her attention usually drifts halfway through the conversation.

Faction: None

Essence: Dynamic

Nature: Rebel

Demeanor: Martyr

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

Abilities: Alertness 3, Awareness 4, Cosmology 4, Etiquette 3, Expression 2, Firearms 1, Intimidation 2, Intuition 1, Investigation 3, Leadership 3, Lore (Marauders) 3, Lore (Nephandi) 3, Lore (Wyrn) 2, Medicine 3 (First Aid), Meditation 4, Occult 5, Research 5, Subterfuge 5

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Arcane 4, Avatar 3, Library 4, Sanctum 3

Arete: 5

Spheres: Entropy 4, Forces 1, Life 5, Mind 5, Prime 3, Spirit 3

Willpower: 6

Quintessence: 7

Paradox: 6

Resonance: (Dynamic) Uncontrollable, (Entropic) Destructive

HOLLOW CHRONICLES

By their very definition, Hollow Ones tend to keep to themselves or to congregate primarily with others of their own ilk. This does not mean, however, that you shouldn't have a Hollower as a member of a multi-Tradition cabal. On the contrary, Hollow mages do not hold the same stereotypes that Tradition mages do. They will join forces with most Tradition mages when appropriate. The key to working a Hollow One into a multi-Tradition cabal involves developing a history for the cabal as a whole or a few

of the characters in it that gives the Hollow One a reason for wanting to hang with them.

For example, a Hollow One may join a multi-Tradition cabal simply because it's what her heart, her tarot cards, the stars or whatever inner voice she hears tells her to do. She may simply like the other mages and consider them friends, or she may have a sibling or other relative in the cabal. A big brother or sister may rescue the Orphan from life on the streets, perhaps even with the intention of eventually converting the Hollower over to the "family" Tradition.

Hollowers exude street wisdom and often maintain a code that they learned on the streets. This can make them both frustrating to and admired by Tradition mages who take the time to get to know them. For example, having come from the streets, having grown up with hard times and knowing what it means to be an Orphan, many Hollow Ones find it hard to refuse aid to a fellow Orphan. They're a band of mutts abandoned to the streets, and so, they understand the plights of other Orphans. Because of this, they may bring home strays, and they often rush to the rescue of the underdog. This may, at times, conflict with the goals of the cabal. Hollow Ones can add a great deal of intrigue and quirkiness to a chronicle. They give the Storyteller plenty of opportunity to insert clues, plots twists, challenges, drama and Storyteller characters into the story.

THE ALL-HOLLOW CHRONICLE

Tackling an all-Hollow chronicle can have great rewards. First, it encourages your players to deeply flesh out their characters, since they cannot rely on the goth stereotypes for clay. Second, it gives you, the Storyteller, a special playing field on which to create stories. When all your players have Hollow characters, you can customize their enemies, challenges and dramas to suit a more Hollow theme. For example, you would find it difficult to house your cabal in an abandoned building without electricity, surrounded by homeless people, if you had a Celestial Chorister in the group. You can aim for a grittier, more "dark-streets" ambiance if no one has access to money or fancy devices. Furthermore, it's unlikely that an Order of Hermes mage would enjoy hanging out in a goth club. She just wouldn't blend.

By focusing only on Hollow characters, you can give the entire chronicle a gothic feel. You can begin to play up the romance and spookiness of your locations and events. You can maintain this atmosphere without worrying about a Son of Ether shooting his Biff Spaceman Super Laser-Gun at the howling ghost and spoiling the mood.

If you want to create a chronicle that requires the characters to do less ass-kicking and more thinking,

then an all-Hollow chronicle certainly fits the bill. Because Hollowers consider themselves scholars and can rarely turn away from a mystery, they make the best choice for wandering through a damp, creepy castle in search of a murderer.

HORATIO'S HOUSE OF HORRORS: A HOLLOW CABAL

Carnivals have a certain mystique about them. Carnies, those who work the booths and rides, tend to make locals nervous. They're too road-worn. They look too hungry. They have an unsettled kind of wildness in their eyes, and well they should. Most of them have no real home. They often travel 365 days a year, moving with the seasons, following the better weather. Many have no other family. The other carnies become their family.

In a particular traveling carnival, one of the rides takes brave souls through a haunted house. The sign on the façade of the faux Victorian mansion proclaims that it's "Horatio's House of Horrors." It's the centerpiece of the carnival. All other rides, games and shows take a backseat to the haunted house.

HISTORY

In 1952, Hollow mage Benjamin Fortune had an idea. He had traveled the rails for two years, living the life of a hobo, and had grown tired of scrounging daily for food. He recognized that traveling was in his blood. He couldn't settle in one place, so he decided that he needed to take his work with him. One day, Ben and a traveling carnival both came to town on the same day. As Ben wandered through the stalls, his dream began to form. Ben convinced the owner of the carnival to hire him. It took him 10 years to save up a reasonable amount of money so that he could build Horatio's House of Horrors. Ben changed his name to Horatio in honor of American writer Horatio Alger. In the 19th century, Alger wrote children's books in which the heroes rose from rags to riches through hard work, luck and good deeds. Hollower Horatio had read every one of Alger's books as a boy. They were one of his few good memories from childhood.

Horatio built the first version of his House of Horrors almost entirely himself, with the help of a few of the other carnies. He used his magic where possible to ease the process and, as a result, acquired a reputation as an astounding engineer and carpenter. The first House of Horrors opened for business on Halloween, 1962. Horatio gave his customers their money's worth. He scared the bejesus out of them with the help of special lighting, music, props, mannequins, live actors and a few minor magical effects. His business flourished.

Over the next 30 years, Horatio redesigned his House of Horrors three times, and each time, it got better, more intricate and scarier. As he was doing this, he was also picking up special employees. In that time, Horatio came across a number of Orphans looking for their place in the world. Some of them found it with Horatio's House of Horrors.

Quickly approaching his 70s, Horatio has decided to hand his business over to the first of his grandchildren who Awakens. To date, none of them have. This decision has caused some conflict among the members of the cabal, as there are those who think Horatio should give the business to one of them. Some fear that none of Horatio's grandchildren will Awaken. Horatio remains steadfast.

PRACTICES

The House of Horrors cabal travels full time. They follow one carnival for as long as they can, unless someone becomes suspicious of their "special effects." If that happens, they join a different carnival. On the average, they only have to change once every couple of years.

In the final design of the house, Horatio incorporated several scenarios that require magic to work properly. The members of the cabal operate the house. They keep all their magic completely coincidental and simple. They cause the sensation of a spider web brushing a cheek, for example, in order to make the target twitch and rub at her face. They whisper spooky warnings in the ears of jumpy patrons — from a distance. They put movement in the subject's peripheral vision, just out of sight, just enough to make them turn sharply and look. Subtlety works wonders without incurring Paradox. The patrons leave clutching at one another. They laugh nervously and talk about how they were so freaked out that they started imagining things. They tell their friends what a wonderful time they had, and secretly, they wonder whether they really did imagine it... or not.

The House of Horrors cabal doesn't just provide entertainment for the locals. It has a mission that Horatio began in his early days with the carnival. Wherever it goes, the cabal investigates reports of a supernatural nature. The cabal's members visit haunted houses and murder sites. They talk to witnesses and examine objects. In the past, they have investigated religious miracles such as spontaneous stigmata, bleeding statues of Christ and claims of possession and exorcism. They've looked into unusual missing persons cases and murders. They've tracked sightings of local monsters. They've visited crop circles as well as parlors where the blood won't wash out of the carpet. Why do they do this? To collect the stories, to lend them some credibility and to spread them.

Writing under a pseudonym, Horatio has written three collections of stories based on local myths and legends. Other members of the cabal have published similar works. In each one, they succeed in making the reader wonder if it all could be true. Because the stories all stem from real events, with real people claiming they witnessed something, they're given greater credibility. That's why Horatio collects stories rather than making them up himself.

"Fiction is fun," Horatio often comments, "but blend in a good dose of reality, quote some newspaper articles or show pictures of the actual location, and you have an even more powerful brew."

Sometimes, Horatio and his fellow Hollowers "find" new evidence that supports the legend. They have to be very careful when constructing evidence or influencing witnesses. Before they can do so, they must confirm that either the legend is actually true or that no one, absolutely no one, knows for a fact that the legend is false. If the legend is true, they simply spread it. If the legend is false and someone knows it, then they run the risk of being discredited. They cannot allow that. Therefore, they must solve each mystery before deciding whether it merits repeating in one of their books.

USING THE CABAL

You can place the House of Horrors cabal nearly anywhere you would like, in any country. Most countries do have carnivals of some sort. You may have to tweak it a bit to reflect the local culture, but traveling carnivals have been popular since the days when gypsies migrated from town to town performing dances and magic tricks for the locals residents.

One of the characters in your chronicle may come across a book written by a House of Horror mage. Perhaps your characters have taken it upon themselves to investigate one of these local ghost stories, murder mysteries, monster sightings or other conundrums. The book could provide clues. Although the books do not solve the mystery for the reader, they do offer advice on where to begin researching the events chronicled. The House of Horror mages don't want to prove the truth behind the myths; they want to make the reader believe without actually having concrete proof. With some work, though it will be difficult, your characters could perhaps track down the true identity of the book's author. Your characters may then go to the carnival in search of the author and even enlist the author's aid in solving the mystery. Add a new twist to the mystery, and the author won't know all the information. Perhaps she solved that one incorrectly the first time.

You may choose to portray the cabal members as more sinister than they seem here. Because they've

traveled so much, they don't trust others easily. Even other mages may find it difficult to form an alliance with them. Orphans have no definite code that makes them loyal or automatically helpful to one another. In the streets, it's sometimes every man for himself. A stranger is a stranger, no matter how you slice it. If your characters need something from the House of Horrors cabal, they may find it challenging to win the cabal's trust and earn the respect required to get them what they need.

Stretch your imagination when incorporating this cabal into your chronicle. Your players may want to play a similar type of Hollow cabal. If this is the case, you could establish an old feud between the two cabals. Perhaps the rivalry is friendly, perhaps not. What could be at stake to make two Hollow cliques feud with one another? Philosophy? A particularly important item's safety? Territory? Pride? Dispute over the facts Horatio printed in one of his books? Yes to all of the above, and many more options as well.

Members: Horatio (Benjamin Fortune), Mia Minuet, Little Jesus, Ophelia "Gypsy" Morton, Mohican "Mo" Guyot and Brahms Lieder.

HORATIO

Born Benjamin Fortune, Horatio has lived the life of a wanderer from the day he left home at the age of 17. He Awakened shortly after he struck out on his own and has been an independent mage ever since. He claims only partial allegiance to the Hollow Ones, though he definitely shares similar philosophies with the majority of mages in the Hollow tradition.

Horatio did marry and fathered three children who lived with their mother after the divorce. Horatio maintained a good relationship with all his children. They grew up and gave Horatio a total of five grandchildren currently ranging in age from 2 to 17. The eldest of the grandchildren, a boy named Thomas, has wanted to join the carnival ever since he was a kid. Though his parents both disapprove, they have justified concerns that as soon as the boy turns 18, they won't be able to keep him from running off to be with his grandfather. Horatio has not actively encouraged or discouraged his grandson's dreams. He leads by example instead. And though he believes that Thomas will soon Awaken, he doesn't know that his granddaughter, aged 14, has begun to see ghosts. He may be surprised to discover that the first grandchild to Awaken isn't Thomas after all.



MIA MINUET

The first of the cabal members to join Horatio, Mia has been a carnie for 40 years. She grew up in a blue-collar town. Both her parents worked in the factory. Her elder brother mowed lawns. All members of the family had to contribute in order to pay the bills. Mia began babysitting as soon as she was old enough. She did this for many years until, one evening, the child she was watching had an accident. He pulled a metal lockbox down from a closet shelf. It fell, and the corner of the box hit him in the head. The blow gave him a concussion. His brain swelled. He died. Mia did everything she knew to do, but the doctors at the hospital couldn't save him. Mia was blamed.

Though no one filed official charges, they weren't necessary. The police performed an investigation. Everyone had questions. *Why wasn't she watching him more closely? What was she doing?* Some people even whispered *murder* and dared to theorize that the lockbox hadn't fallen from the shelf at all. The kids in her high school treated her horribly. Her friends abandoned her. Her parents and brother all felt humiliated and experienced similar ostracism. Whether they meant to or not, they took their own frustrations out on Mia.

Three months later, at the age of 15, Mia ran away. She never returned home. The first year on the streets took its toll on Mia. She did drugs and fell into prostitution. Somewhere out there, a pornographic movie stars Missie Mango. Mia. To this day, Mia can't stand the sight or smell of mangos.

When a boyfriend of hers decided to join the carnival, Mia tagged along. The boyfriend eventually

took off with a *chica* from one of the towns they hit. Mia stayed. She did various jobs around the carnival, including sitting for hours, drenched, in the softball throw. If the pitcher hit the target, she fell into the water. At one time, Mia suffered from a cold that lasted two months. She was never completely well in those days.

As a result of her chronic colds and flus, one of the women who worked the ring toss booth took a special interest in Mia. They called the motherly woman Gypsy because she studied the occult and practiced herbalism and divination. She had strong roots in hedge magic. Gypsy liked Mia. The older woman took it onto herself to make Mia healthy again.

Mia watched Gypsy and learned. Over the course of six months, Mia began a lengthy Awakening. The more she delved into the occult, the more of a tie she felt to such things. It became her obsession. Gypsy, realizing that the girl had what she called special psychic insight, encouraged Mia.

Mia began giving tarot and palm readings at the carnival. She changed her style of dress to a combination of gypsy and goth: Stevie Nicks at a funeral. And she came to full Awakening gradually, slowly developing her skills and awareness rather than suddenly exploding as most do. She slid over that final edge in a sleepy, dream state one night after having collapsed in exhaustion after a hard day's work. When she awoke, she was Awake and has believed herself to be caught in a living dream ever since.

Serendipitously, Horatio and his haunted house joined the carnival the very next day. It didn't take him long to realize that Mia had Awakened. He convinced her to work for him instead of the carnival proper, but he had to hire Gypsy as well in order to acquire the young woman's trust. The two women joined Horatio's haunted house. As they traveled and picked up other Orphans along the way, the influence of magic eventually caused Gypsy's Awakening as well.

Image: Small and thin, Mia wears gypsy-goth rags to make herself appear more exotic.

Roleplaying Hints: You're still a bit shy of others, not sure whether or not to trust them, so you tend to put on an act around strangers—that of the mysterious and spooky fortune teller. Once you've gotten to know someone, you can let down the façade and be yourself.

Faction: None

Essence: Questing

Nature: Avant-Garde

Demeanor: Avant-Garde

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

Abilities: Alertness 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 1, Dodge 2, Enigmas 2, Firearms 1, Intuition 4, Leadership 1, Lore (Technocrats) 1, Lore (Traditions) 1, Meditation 2, Occult 3, Research 2, Stealth 3, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 1

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Avatar 1, Chantry 1, Dream 4, Mentor 1

Arete: 3

Spheres: Mind 1, Time 2

Willpower: 7

Quintessence: 1

Paradox: 1

Resonance: (Dynamic) Intuitive

MOHICAN "MO" GUYOT

Guyot originally hails from Nova Scotia, where he's wanted for murder. Like many Orphans, he chose his own name and discarded the old one recorded in the police records. He liked Mohican because it means, in the Indians' Algonquian language, "people of the tidal estuary." He felt a certain fraternity with both this tribe and with the multi-faceted symbolism of a tidal estuary. Guyot has no legal papers, no green card and no visa. He has no passport. Horatio pays him under the table.

For several years, Guyot lived the life of a vagabond, begging on the streets and hiding from the law. Contrary to most Hollowers' experiences, his misery kept his Avatar at bay. He networked into the ring of businesses that would pay under the table. They took advantage of him, paying him much less than they would pay a legal worker. Still, he needed the money. He needed to eat. He had only the pack on his back and the clothes on his body.

One night, with his weekly pay in his pocket and a case of the restless willies, Guyot decided to go to the carnival and have some fun. It had arrived in town a few nights earlier. A few of his buddies and he had a few beers in the beer tent. They rode a couple rides, including a trip through Horatio's Haunted House. They flirted with the woman at the softball toss booth. They had a good time. Near the end of the evening, on their way out, they passed the fortune teller's booth. Gypsy Ophelia, it said her name was. Guyot's friends kept walking, but Guyot paused. He told his companions he'd catch up and went to get his fortune told.

Gypsy gave him an earful. She tapped deep into his soul, and her eyes hinted that she knew even more than she was telling. Guyot left feeling both spooked and bolstered. For the most part, the reading had promised good things to come.

The following week, Guyot got a job at a farm where the owner didn't even ask for credentials. He had his own reasons for not wanting to file the employment with the government. The man paid a fair wage, gave Guyot a small living space in the attic over his garage and provided solid meals as well. Guyot worked hard for him. His health improved in leaps and bounds. He cut back on his drinking. He bought new clothes. All was going extremely well for Guyot.

In the quiet of a night illuminated by a full moon, Guyot simply and gently Awakened. He was lying on his back, in a field, gazing up at the stars. He had never felt so fully content with his lot in life. His senses expanded, and he abruptly knew the universe as intimately as he knew his own self. He lay there until dawn, communing with the twinkling stars and letting the warm, summer breeze wash over his body like the tide. As the sun was coming up, he arose and walked back to the farm to have breakfast.

Eventually, Guyot grew restless. He kept remembering something that Gypsy had told him. She had said, "Be ready, young warrior. Soon, the stars will reveal a secret to you. When that happens, you'll be called to your true fate. You will face a choice that you never expected to have to make, and you'll have an opportunity to truly come into your own. Be ready."

Guyot waited a full year until the carnival returned to town. He didn't go the first day, half afraid to rock the boat. The second day, he went and searched for Gypsy Ophelia. He had mixed feelings when he saw her booth there, but he went inside. He told Gypsy of his revelation under the stars and some of the things he'd taught himself to do since then.



Gypsy had not yet Awakened at that point. She thought Guyot had lost his mind. She thought it was a trick when Guyot demonstrated his magic by levitating Gypsy's tarot deck. The resulting Paradox hit Guyot in the gut. His stomach began to churn, and he ultimately vomited outside the door of Gypsy Ophelia's booth. Gypsy called for security.

Luckily, Little Jesus, a Hollower, was among those who responded. He sensed the Paradox immediately, and after listening to Gypsy's recounting, knew exactly what must have happened. A big man, tall and bald and intimidating despite his name, Little Jesus threw Guyot over his shoulder and took him to the haunted house.

Guyot, locked in severe stomach cramps, gave the giant no trouble. Once at the haunted house, he learned what had happened and why. He stayed with the carnival after that. To appease Gypsy, he apologized and blamed alcohol for the stupid things he'd said. Neither one mentioned the levitation of the tarot cards again until Gypsy Awakened and clued in.

Image: Guyot is of Native American ancestry, and he tends to wear knickknacks that show it: Indian beadwork on his denim jacket, leather braids tying back his long, black hair and, sometimes, a beaded or turquoise-studded bracelet. He is tall and heavyset, with the physique and complexion of someone who's spent his life working outdoors.

Roleplaying Hints: You prefer to remain quiet around strangers but can really open up around those you know. You like the camaraderie you and your fellow cabal members are developing, even though they don't communicate with you on the same level you're used to with co-workers (they don't always like to sit back to watch the game with a six pack).

Faction: Councilor

Essence: Primordial

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Loner

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

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Firearms 1, Enigmas 3, Intuition 1, Intimidation 2, Linguistics (Canadian French) 1, Lore (Garou) 1, Lore (Marauders) 1, Medicine 1, Meditation 1, Melee 2, Stealth 1, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 1, Survival 3, Technology 1

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Arcane 2, Avatar 2, Chantry 1, Mentor 1, Resources 1

Arete: 3

Spheres: Forces 3, Life 2, Spirit 1

Willpower: 8

Quintessence: 2

Paradox: 1

Resonance: (Dynamic) Explosive

HORATIO AND FEEDING THE HUNGRY

Horatio includes a less gruesome, more heroic version of this tale in one of his books but tells it in the third person to protect his identity among the general public. Hollowers worldwide know the true story and spread it among themselves as a warning.

One day in the mid-90s, the House of Horrors pulled into a small town. Horatio had plans to rendezvous with a new carnival there and had purposefully arrived a few days in advance of the carnival so that he could investigate the story of Jack Dresden, a famous ghost said to haunt the local retirement home. Horatio and his cabal announced themselves to the local authorities, found a legal place to park their trucks and settled in to wait for the carnival to arrive.

Mia usually helped Horatio with his investigations, but the thought of going to a — as she put it — “place where the mice go to die” bothered her. She decided to sit that one out. Horatio went on his own. He interviewed residents and employees of the home who claimed to have experienced strange phenom-

ena that they attributed to Jack Dresden. They all had typical tales of ghostly manifestations, cold spots, opened cabinets, moved objects, phantom footsteps and brief glimpses of a man dressed in outdated clothing. Horatio was disappointed. All he found, at first, was standard fare ghost tales. His Spirit senses gave him a general feeling of unease, but he attributed that to the nature of a retirement home. Though he began to doubt the veracity of the stories, Horatio wasn't truly disappointed until he began to suspect that the residents at the home were purposefully inventing the ghost and even playing tricks on the employees to convince them as well. *Boredom, perhaps*, Horatio thought.

Horatio decided to cash in his investigation. If anyone could refute the stories, then he had no use for them. He couldn't expand and spread them if someone could prove they were fabricated. That kind of discredit worked against him.

As he was leaving, one of the young nurses offered to walk him to the door. As she escorted him out, she whispered the clue he needed, "I can't remember the last time one of our residents passed away." Horatio grabbed onto that and shifted the focus of his research. He discovered that the home had reported only one death in its five years of business, and that was the accidental death of a kitchen worker by electrocution.

Horatio returned to the home two more times. On the first of those visits, he learned that the nurse who had spoken to him had quit. They could not give him a forwarding address for her. As he wandered the halls that day, he felt a prickle of paranoia washing over him. He imagined conversations stopping as he approached and eyes following him as he passed. It unnerved him. He cast about with Spirit and Life, searching for the cause. He shifted his gaze into the nether realms and abruptly understood. As his vision expanded, he saw the worms. They crawled over everything, through everything, like maggots on a corpse. They were in the walls. They covered the floor beneath his feet. They wriggled, half-in and half-out of holes in the residents' flesh. They fell from inside noses and crawled across lips. Their movement caused the residents' hair to shift.

Horatio heard the sound they made as their bodies writhed together — like hellish whispers. Some of the worms had crawled onto him and were trying to burrow. He panicked and fled. No one tried to stop him. At the front door, however, he came face to face with the home's director.

The director stood in front of the doors, blocking Horatio's escape. He said to Horatio, "It's the natural cycle. There are other things to feed on besides the flesh. Something has to break down their memories, their identities — their egos, if you will. From dust to dust, Mr. Fortune. From dust to dust." He stepped aside and opened the door. "We won't be here when you return. I'll see you in your twilight years."

Horatio rushed out. As he'd been told, when he and the other members of the cabal returned en force to perform a more in-depth study of the situation, everyone was gone. No worms. The place wasn't deserted. New residents and new employees now roamed the halls. They acted as if they had been there all along. New faces. New names. Yet, they all looked oddly at Horatio when he suggested they hadn't been there a few days earlier. "I've been here for five years next month, sir," commented one doctor. A Mind scan revealed that the doctor was telling the truth as she knew it.

HOLLOW HONG KONG

Baron and Mark had spent the day in Hong Kong, visiting the Hollower chantry there. The experience had opened Mark's eyes to the diversity in the Hollow tradition. The mages at the Hollower chantry in Hong Kong had freaked him out a little. They lived in a building on a tiny back alley just off the street market where vendors sold everything from chickens to pirated DVDs to used clothing to rip-offs of brand names such as Gucci and Rolex. The alley itself smelled of fish guts. Eight mages lived together in a two-bedroom apartment. Many of them slept on mats in the living room.

The mages of Hong Kong prized physical fitness. Many studied martial arts. An equal number of men and women lived there, all equally formidable and intimidating. They all reminded Mark of the characters in a couple of Japanese animes a friend had shown him, *Angel Sanctuary* and *X*. Darkly stylish with ragged clothes or black suits, they would have fit into the goth scene back home and undoubtedly spawned several new fashion trends.

NOT US

Late one evening, near the end of their tour, in San Francisco, Mark and Baron discussed the hospitality shown to them in Hong Kong. The conversation gradually worked its way around to all the many different types of mages and other supernatural creatures in the world. Baron gave Mark a short introduction to the complications of inter-Tradition and interspecies politics.

Baron told him, "Goths have a reputation for being judgmental. People think they're snooty. People accuse goths of having superiority complexes. Of course, nobody can deny they've got likes and dislikes. It's how we all define ourselves. But, Hollowers don't preach any real dogma aside from, 'There shall be no dogma.' Still, it's true that opinions spread like viruses among both Sleepers and mages — who are human, too, no matter what they try to tell you." He laughed.

Mark smiled and commented, "Nothing wrong with opinions."

Baron pointed to him and nodded. "Yeah, but the thing is that opinion creates fashion, and fashion creates opinion. So, which came first? The chicken or the egg? Fashion or opinion? Opinion or fashion?" Baron had had a few beers. He continued, "Let me give you some examples."

THE TRADITIONS

"Organized anything dulls the mind. All you have to do is look at organized religion to see what happens when a central ruling body starts dictating personality to its members. So, that tells you how most of us feel about the Celestial Chorus. They're welcome to their beliefs as much as anybody, and we'd be one of the last to ever begrudge them their faith, but we'd have a lot more respect for them if they had developed their ideas on their own rather than buying them wholesale at the Chorister warehouse. The Akashics seems to have a better handle on this. They actually let their members develop from the inside out, as it should be. They even sometimes talk about a philosophy of Void where you empty yourself so you can be filled. Sound familiar? Yeah, we've got a lot in common with the Brotherhood, except we drink coffee, smoke cigarettes and wear more than sheets or diapers.

"We're kind of a combination of Cultist of Ecstasy and Akashic Brother, with a pinch of Dreamspeaker and a shake of Verbena. Add in a teaspoon of Euthanatos and bake at 350 for a couple hours until crispy and blackened." That tickled Baron. He laughed at himself and took another drink of his beer.

"Really," he continued, "we find it hard to completely divorce ourselves from any of the Traditions. We have bits of each of them in our philosophy. We especially relate to the Euthanatos, I suppose, because they like dead things and we like dead things too. Bunches of us are computer geeks like the Virtual Adepts. Some of us would be lost without our Internet connections. Chat rooms and web pages are great outlets for self-expression. The Internet is one technology we don't shy away from because it opens doorways, it doesn't close them.

"All the Traditions have their own unique qualities that make them interesting and myth-worthy. Even the Order of Hermes has its place. They're the old guard, stiff and stuffy and almost too traditional. They walk the edge. We see that and deal with them cautiously, but so far, they've managed to stay on the side of Right and Romance. Hell, we'll work with just about anyone, so long as they don't try to tell us what to do, how to be or how to think. If they want our opinions and advice, we'll give them. Otherwise, we'll just keep on doing our own thing. You know?"

THE TECHNOCRACY

Baron took Mark's nod as encouragement to continue. He said, "And then there's the Technocracy. The Man. Gotta fight the Man."

Mark added his own touch of drama, "The Man is keeping me down!"

They both laughed together, then Baron said, "Seriously, never trust a Technocrat, Mark. They wear many faces,



and none of them are real. They would suck the soul out of everything if they could. Technocrats have no hearts and never will. This makes them jealous of those who can feel and especially jealous of those who can express what they feel. Have you ever known someone who has no imagination?"

Mark thought about it, but before he could answer, Baron rambled on, "These poor schmucks couldn't produce an original thought if their lives depended on it. They're afraid of the unpredictable and don't like risk. In other words, they're cowards. They have managed to chain the sheep only because most of humanity are cowards too. We can't let them drain the life out of the world and turn it into an assembly line, an automaton and a machine. So, we refuse their encroachment on beauty and art and personal expression. We rebel against them every second that we live our lives according to what's inside us, not what they want us to be, because we know something intuitively that Sleepers only understand on an intellectual level. We know that, without souls, we're dead. The Technocracy is slowly murdering us."

VAMPIRES

After 15 minutes or so of rambling, Baron picked up a topic that sparked Mark's interest, "Vampires. You ever met one?" Mark indicated he hadn't and half-laughed as if the question were a joke.

Baron barely paused, "Everybody thinks that all goths are vampire wannabes. This may have been true at one time for a portion of the Hollow tradition, but it becomes less and less true as time goes on. Sure, most of us have a sentimental attachment to vampire mythology, but that's all it is. We like the combination of romance and horror inherent in a good vampire tale. However, over the years, we've come to understand that the myths and the reality don't often jibe. In reality, vampires are much more dangerous than they are sexy."

"In reality?" Mark asked, blinking.

Baron nodded, matter-of-factly, "Yeah. Orphans who flirt with vampire society don't live very long. In recent years, vampires have become things that smart Hollowers watch and respect from a distance. It's one thing to have a love for lions and another entirely to walk up to them and try to pet them. This new and healthy respect for vampires has also occurred because of conflicting interests between us and them.

"Hollow Ones believe in living the romance. Vampires prefer to hide their light under a bushel basket. Sometimes, where we might happily allow rumors to spread, myths to form and questions to be asked, vampires prefer that it all just disappear out of sight, completely. This conflict of interest causes friction, hoo boy. When an Orphan clashes with a vampire in this way, you can bet

the Orphan's gonna disappear. Most of us have learned this lesson all too well and have pulled away from vampires entirely. Vampires may seem cool and interesting and romantic, but they're not your friends."

SHAPESHIFTERS

"And then, there're the shapeshifters. Flannel? Hiking boots? Whatever. I'm a city boy. I don't get why anybody would want to hang out in the woods all the time. But then, I don't turn into a wolf during the full moon."

"What are you talking about?" Mark asked. "Werewolves?"

"Hell, yeah. Let me tell you. It's pretty safe to say that shapeshifters... werewolves... and goths don't blend. Other types of Hollowers have more in common with them, but only a little. That doesn't mean we don't like them, though. Actually, we've been known to share the same cardboard boxes and abandoned buildings as the city werewolves." He nodded, "Yeah, I was surprised when I first learned about those too. Werewolves that live in the city. They have day jobs too, some of them. It's crazy. We've heard rumors that there are lots more of them in the woods, but since we never go there, we don't often cross paths with them. I reckon that's for the best. They don't seem to care for magic too much, despite their own liking for howling at the moon. They can be real dangerous too, even more than vampires if you find out too much about them.

"I suppose," Baron leaned back in his chair, "on one level, they've got a lot of romance going on. They're badasses of the ultimate kind. We've learned to approach them with respect and caution — and only when absolutely necessary. We'll gladly spread their legends for them, you know, and tales of shapeshifters are particularly popular around Hollower tables. Still, we don't want to get in their way. When you get in the way of a shapeshifter, you get flattened. Road kill." He made an appropriate sound with his mouth.

"You're so full of shit," laughed Mark.

Baron shook his head, smiling, "I wish I were. They're real. The mythology didn't spring up spontaneously. Werewolves, vampires... I know. Sounds nuts, but they're real. Of course, they'd prefer it if you thought they were imaginary for the same reason we don't go around blathering about magic and mages to Sleepers. What does a Sleeper do if he's afraid of something? He destroys it. Get a whole bunch of scared Sleepers together, and you've got a force to be reckoned with. It's a pain in the ass, a Catch-22. Here we are trying to get them to wake up and smell the roses, and they're ready to kill us for it. You just can't help some people, but we keep trying anyway. I guess that makes us masochists."

GHOSTS

"So let's see," Baron mused. "What else is there. Oh! Spooks! We love them! And they love us. Sometimes. Okay, we're not stupid. Ghosts are people too, and people can be everything from mean to cruel to downright homicidal. We realize the risks involved in playing with ghosts. But they're cool, so it's hard to avoid the temptation.

"Ghosts are like puzzles to a lot of Hollowers. Some of us like to solve them. Know what I mean? We want the story, the legend. We want to know how the ghost died, why it's still haunting the real world, that sorta thing. Then again, some of us just want interesting friends. Some of us dedicate our entire studies to necromancy, like Pietro diGenoa. Have you ever noticed how the word necromancy has 'romancy in it?' He grinned. "Thing is, ghosts are what you get after the tragedy. They're the souls longing for something or someone they lost. They are the heroes of the legends, but they're still suffering. Before I Awakened, I never would have guessed that the romance continues long after the hero's body has decayed. That kicks ass."

CHANGELINGS

As Baron talked, Mark began to feel like he should be taking notes. Baron told him, "You believe in faeries?" He raised his eyebrows. "Yup. They exist. We don't know much about them. They're like the toy surprise in the cereal box. When you come across one, you're undoubtedly in for a wild ride. Hollowers feel a special connection to changelings. That's what they're called. Changelings.

"Lots of Hollowers are envious because changelings do what the Hollowers try to do, but the changelings do it without even breaking a sweat. They *live* the romance. Hollowers have to work at living the romance.

"Hell, we'd love to get closer to changelings, but they don't trust us. I think that's pretty silly. I mean, as far as I'm concerned, we're just like them. We were born human, only to discover upon Awakening that we had special powers and a unique soul that carried the wisdom of the ages along with it. We are the defenders of romance, just like they are. We honor the heroes and the horrors, just like they do. We've got so much in common. I don't get why we're not more closely allied. But we're not. Lots of Hollowers are bitter about that, too. Faeries can be really condescending, too, and snooty. That really pisses off some Hollowers, especially the snooty ones." He laughed.

OTHERS

"I suppose," Baron commented, winding down, "you could say that all the supernatural creatures in the Tellurian serve the romantic ideal by virtue of their very existence. We acknowledge this, but we're not stupid. Like with vampires and just about anything else, we recognize that not all sexy things are friendly. We've lost too many friends over the years. With each death, we've withdrawn a bit more from the supernatural community. We're not cowards; we just don't have a death wish. Not all of us, that is. Some do. There are always those silly enough to think they can play with fire and not get burned. Some even manage to pull it off. Those are the exceptions to the rule. Besides," he lifted both eyebrows as if what he was about to say was obvious, "the other supers don't need us. Sleepers do. They're the territory in this battle with the Technocrats. We have to win them over, not the werewolves and not the faeries. That's like preaching to the choir." He pointed a finger at Mark, "And that, my friend, is why we hang so closely with Sleepers. They're our real audience, and if you don't appreciate your audience, you're nothing."

IDENTITIES

"If," suggested Penny with a lowering of eyelids that turned her into a sly, kittenish oracle, "you could lift yourself from your present circumstances and plant yourself down in any others, either modern, historic or fictional, where would you go? If you could take all your friends with you and play any role you wanted to play, what would you choose? How would you dress? What kinds of things would you say? How would you treat others? What would you do for fun? For penance? For love? For honor? Would any of these things matter to you at all?" She paused.

Mark's mind took flight with the suggestion. Penny's questions sparked his imagination. He had never thought about it before. Not really.

"Would you be a pirate?" she asked. "A Greek god? A satyr running through the forests and chasing nymphs? Half man, half tiger? A knight of the Round Table? A Jedi knight? Someone who might have lived in *The City of Lost Children*? A bodhisattva? Sherlock Holmes? John Constantine? A bladerunner? The Crow?"

Mark grinned. So many possibilities.

Penny leaned forward and put her hand on his arm. "Look at me, Mark."

Mark did. His eyes met Penny's and found a dark seriousness in them. He realized in that moment that she wasn't just being clever and coy. She had a purpose to her questions.

"If," Penny asked, gaze steady, "you're not already living that ideal of yourself, then why not?"

Mark had never thought about it. It was just understood that you didn't do that. Mark knew Penny wanted a response. The answers to her question flew into Mark's mind, but he was half afraid to say them aloud. He knew they wouldn't please Penny. He didn't want to anger her.

"Say it. It's okay," Penny encouraged.

"Because," Mark hesitated. After a second, he rushed forward with it, "Because nobody acts like that. Not now. It would be silly. People would think I was crazy or something. Stupid."

Penny gave Mark a gentle smile. "That's what Mostpeople think. Do you want to be one of the Mostpeople? No, of course not. You already know you're not like the Mostpeople. You're special. And you can be anything you want, in any way you want to be it. The worst crime a person can ever perpetrate is to kill his true personality in favor of something more socially acceptable. Mostpeople do it. You don't have to follow in their footsteps. If they all jumped off a bridge, would you do it too?" Penny smirked a cute, quirky kink of a smile. Irony.

Mark smiled too. He understood. He really was getting it. He sat in silence with Penny for a moment. He watched her pull back and dip into her purse for a small mirror. He watched her check her lipstick. He watched her wait for him to process the information she had just given him. And eventually, he said, "If I could be anyone I wanted and live in any time or place, I would be an artist in Europe in the early 20th century. I'd have a studio where my models would come to pose for me. I'd eat bread and cheese and meats, and I'd drink red wine at least once

a day with my meal. I'd wear fitted jackets over loose white shirts with billowing sleeves and leather pants. I'd practice fencing and ride horses to stay in shape. I'd drink coffee in cafés with my fellow artists and discuss the play of light when a beautiful woman tips her head just so or a man clenches his fists just so — things important to an artist and only visible to the eye of those who are looking for them. Movement and gesture can tell you so much about a person, yet it's so subtle that most hardly notice. Artists notice." As if suddenly realizing that he was rambling, Mark blushed. He looked down, away from Penny's eyes, which had held his the whole time.

Penny spoke softly, reverently, "The Technocracy tries to box us in and limit us. They surround us with rectangles and squares, buildings, televisions, desks, photocopy machines, computer screens, cars and the highways they drive on. They use these subliminal cues and so much more to try to stick us in a frame that conforms to their ideal world, but we don't have to go gently into that good night. We are not square people. We're alive and organic and creative and special — and every one of us has the ability to think outside the box, if we dare. Don't be embarrassed by your dreams, ever." She paused, then added, "Come on. Let's go get some dinner; the wine's on me." A pat to Mark's hand signaled she was ready to go. She gathered her things and stood.

Mark rose as well, and feeling somewhat silly despite her words, gave Penny his first bow of many to come. "*Merci, mademoiselle*," he said sincerely, though he didn't quite get the pronunciation of *mademoiselle* right. Both he and Penny knew the details didn't matter nearly so much as the attempt. Mark held the door for Penny, then followed her out, grinning. It was a good beginning.

HOLLOW HEROES: TEMPLATES

The streets carve human gargoyles. They sculpt sinister and sad statues from the discarded rubbish of people's lives. They weld together dirt and blood, broken glass and spit, naked steel and piss to make ragged dolls, hollow men — and the wind whistles coldly through them.

These hollow beings stand at the edge of the civilized world and watch the businessmen and the housewives drive by. The businessmen and the housewives see only silhouettes, faceless and inhuman, desecrating their landscape. Little do they understand that these hollow men, these dark figures lurking at the edge of "normal" society, have come to help them. From the security and comfort of their SUVs, they don't

care to see the nightmare behind the façade. Those who don't abuse, deny the abuse.

The Hollow Ones know the abuse intimately, and they are stronger for it. They fear little because they've seen the worst. They take their inspiration from the great works of literature, art and music. They find their own truth and express it, each unique, each eccentric. They dare. With courage, they irreverently go against the stream. They do not conform.

They have not sold their souls to the Man, to "respectability," to the Technocracy in exchange for a minivan, a prefab house in the 'burbs and a credit card. The businessmen and the housewives do not and likely never will understand that these silhouettes — so frightening, so disgusting and so far removed from their boxed-in worlds — are their last, best hope for salvation and Ascension.

THE GENTLE GIANT

Quote: *I do housekeeping for the dead. I make their beds for 'em. I even put chocolates on their pillows. Five-star treatment, they gets.*

Prelude: Some fairy tales portray giants as antagonists that eat children and kidnap princesses. You do none of those things. Rather, you are shunned and misunderstood, more like Mary Shelley's Frankenstein's monster. You sympathize with her creature.

Throughout school, you were always taller and broader than the other kids. They called you "Fatty," even though you weren't overweight, merely big-boned. As you grew, you withdrew and found peace in solitude. The few friends you've acquired let you hang around them in silence and don't press you to participate. You like that best.

In your late teens, you took a landscaping job with a local cemetery. Eventually, you became strong enough to dig graves. You've done this for years. During this time, you've seen many odd

things. You've learned about vampires and werewolves and know enough to be afraid of them. In your last encounter, one of the creatures attacked and tried to bite you. You remember little, but you know you saw ghosts crowding around you. You think they scared the vampire away. You're not sure because you had just Awakened and were reeling from the sudden rush of sensory input.

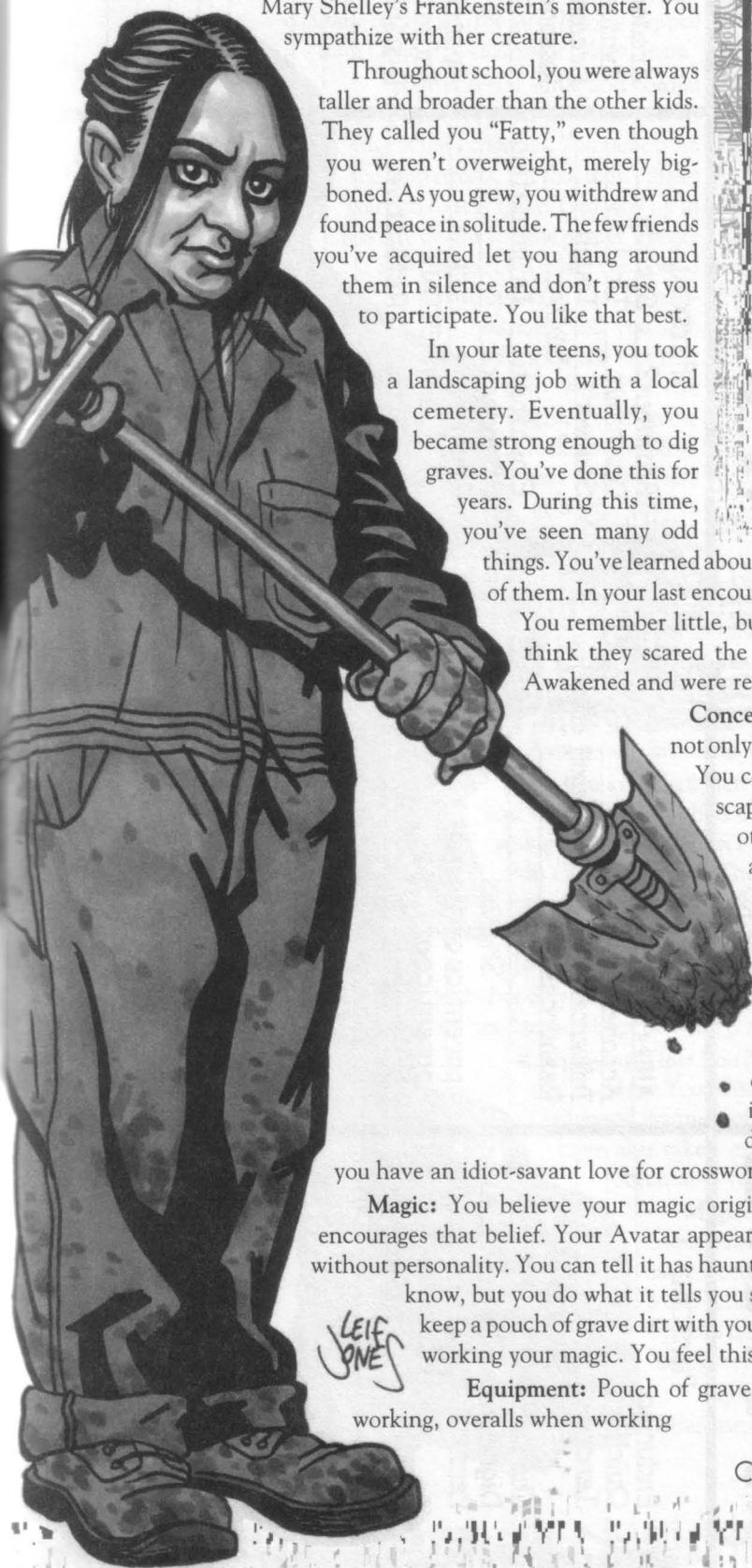
Concept: You feel an obligation to your ghosts. You believe they not only saved your life that night, but also caused your Epiphany. You continue to dig nice, neat graves and maintain the landscaping. You keep out intruders. You have since found several other Orphans who live in the area, so you follow them around from time to time. You're not used to feeling like you belong, but you're certainly learning to like it.

Roleplaying Tips: You rarely find anything worth saying. When you do speak, others should listen. You choose such moments carefully. You truly do have a gentle soul and wouldn't hurt a fly except in self-defense or in defense of a friend. Brute force is your calling card, but you don't turn it against others except in the most extreme of circumstances. You're clumsy and don't understand the meaning of "subtlety." Surprisingly,

you have an idiot-savant love for crossword puzzles.

Magic: You believe your magic originates from the spirits of the dead, and your Avatar encourages that belief. Your Avatar appears to you as a ghostly apparition, ancient, formless and without personality. You can tell it has haunted the world for ages. Why it has chosen you, you don't know, but you do what it tells you so long as it doesn't require that you harm anyone. You keep a pouch of grave dirt with you at all times and often rub some of it in your hands when working your magic. You feel this connects you with the ghosts.

Equipment: Pouch of grave dirt, a shovel, Johnny-Cash-style clothing when not working, overalls when working



HOLLOW ONES

NAME:		NATURE: Loner		FACTION: Gault	
PLAYER:		ESSENCE: Primordial		CONCEPT: Gentle Giant	
CHRONICLE:		DETECTOR: Survivor		CABAL:	

ATTRIBUTES		
PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength: ●●●●●	Charisma: ●●●●●	Perception: ●●●●●
Dexterity: ●●●●●	Manipulation: ●●●●●	Intelligence: ●●●●●
Stamina: ●●●●●	Appearance: ●●●●●	Wits: ●●●●●

ABILITIES		
TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Alertness: ●●●●●	Crafts: ●●●●●	Academics: ●●●●●
Athletics: ●●●●●	Drive: ●●●●●	Computer: ●●●●●
Awareness: ●●●●●	Etiquette: ●●●●●	Cosmology: ●●●●●
Brawl: ●●●●●	Firearms: ●●●●●	Enigmas: ●●●●●
Dodge: ●●●●●	Meditation: ●●●●●	Investigation: ●●●●●
Expression: ●●●●●	Melee: ●●●●●	Lore: Garou ●●●●●
Intimidation: ●●●●●	Performance: ●●●●●	Lore: Kindred ●●●●●
Intuition: ●●●●●	Stealth: ●●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●●
Streetwise: ●●●●●	Survival: ●●●●●	Occult: ●●●●●
Subterfuge: ●●●●●	Technology: ●●●●●	Science: ●●●●●

SPHERES		
Correspondence: ●●●●●	Life: ●●●●●	Prime: ●●●●●
Entropy: ●●●●●	Matter: ●●●●●	Spirit: ●●●●●
Forces: ●●●●●	Mind: ●●●●●	Time: ●●●●●

ADVANTAGES		
BACKGROUNDS	ARETE	HEALTH
Arcane: ●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	Brused: -0 □
Avatar: ●●●●●		Hurt: -1 □
Dream: ●●●●●		Injured: -1 □
Resources: ●●●●●		Wounded: -2 □
		Mauled: -2 □
		Crippled: -5 □
		Incapacitated: □

RESONANCE		QUINTESSENCE	
Dynamic: ●●●●●	Gentle: ●●●●●	PARADOX	
Entropy: ●●●●●			
Static: ●●●●●			

EXPERIENCE		COMBAT	
		Weapon	Difficulty/Damage



PHYSICAL	Enduring	_____
	Quick	_____
	Tenacious	_____
SOCIAL	Charming	_____
	Dignified x2	_____
	Persuasive x2	_____
MENTAL	Clever	_____
	Dedicated x2	_____
	Discerning	_____
	Knowledgeable x2	_____
	Observant	_____
ABILITIES	Computer	_____
	Etiquette	_____
	Law	_____
	Meditation	_____
	Occult	_____
	Streetwise	_____
	Subterfuge	_____

A black and white illustration of a man in a tuxedo, smoking a pipe. He has a serious expression and is looking slightly to the side. A briefcase is on the ground next to him. The illustration is done in a detailed, cross-hatched style. The man is wearing a tuxedo jacket, a white shirt with a bow tie, and a vest. He is also wearing trousers and shoes. The briefcase is a simple, rectangular bag with a handle. The background is plain white. The overall tone is serious and somewhat somber.

Prelude: Charles Dickens himself could not have created a character more Dickensian than you. Your dark suit, your pocket watch, the starched collar of your shirt, your ebon cufflinks and your long hair neatly captured at the nape of your neck all combine to give you the air of having stepped from *Great Expectations* or *Oliver Twist*.

Numbers had always fascinated you. You dabbled in numerology and began to notice trends in the stock market. You followed your instincts, bought lucky numbers and sold unlucky numbers. You spent long hours trying to grasp the elusive key that would make your system foolproof. And then, you found it — or it found you. Your Avatar came knocking. After that, it was a short step to wealth on the stock market.

You eventually left your work as an accountant to fall into anonymity. You had visions of yourself as a kind and eccentric recluse, the benefactor of promising young people trapped in poverty. You could have just set up a scholarship, but you didn't want to do that. There's no romance in that. You have to be directly involved, making the mystery unfold.

Concept: You masquerade as the accountant or executor for an anonymous benefactor. In this way, you can monitor the progress or decline of your Pips and see to it that they get the guidance they need. You have supported Orphans, though you're more inclined to aid Sleepers. Their poverty, after all, is a poverty of Awareness as well as funding.

Roleplaying Tips: You have a rosy disposition, but then you know something no one else does: You're in charge of the money. Your Avatar guides you toward old-fashioned manners of the sort found in a Dickens novel. Your speech patterns have also taken on a more formal cadence. You feel as if you're finally becoming your true self.

Magic: Your love of numbers plays a distinct role in your magic. You count down from 10 to zero when triggering an effect, or you associate each effect with a certain equation. This helps you to concentrate. Your Mind abilities keep others from poking around in your head. The other Spheres help you to deliver messages and monies to your charges. You take every precaution to keep your magic coincidental.

Equipment: Black suit of 19th-century styling, pocket watch, briefcase, accountant's ledger and ebon cufflinks

[illegible]

THE GEMINI TWINS

Quote: *We are Siamese, if you please. We are Siamese, if you don't please.*

Prelude: You took one look at each other, and that was that. You were a team, a relationship, a couple. You looked good together. You fed one another's creativity. More than once, someone commented that you were twins separated at birth, like the good and evil twins in *The Man in the Iron Mask* by Alexandre Dumas. Perhaps so, but that technically didn't make it incest, and it didn't mean that you had to hate one another. Quite the contrary.

A brilliant idea occurred to you one night: performance art. You had both dabbled in theater. You both had so many things you disdained and so many you downright abhorred. You were both clever; you could put on quite a show. You earned something of a local name for yourselves.

You had found your other half. You felt complete. And then, one day, you learned

the true meaning of the word "complete." Making love had never felt like this before. You both Awakened, together, at the same time — and with the same Avatar. Your shared Epiphany was a religious experience for you both. Then, things started getting weird.

You began to not only finish one another's sentences, but to say what the other was thinking. While you maintained your individual identities, you also seemed to have developed a direct line into each other's minds and hearts. Whenever separated, you could sense strong emotions from one another. As you developed your Mind Spheres, distance communication became even more accurate and easier.

Concept: You're bookends, each separate and unique, but each less than whole without the other. You have similar tastes, use common slang and think similarly. The most amazing thing is that you share a single Avatar — or at least you think you do. The only other option is that your Avatars are identical twins and have chosen to show themselves only one at a time just to mess with your minds. Nah. You prefer to think you share a single one.

Roleplaying Tips: Both very fashion conscious, you dress to impress. Your audience gets two for the price of one. You love being center stage and have outgoing personalities. One of you may talk a lot while the other chimes in only periodically, or you may both chatter constantly, finishing one another's thoughts. Over time, you have come to resemble one another across the board. You have the same Attributes, Abilities and Spheres (same character sheet for both).

Magic: The two of you often act in concert, working together to create a single Effect (see "Acting in Concert," *Mage*, p. 154). You don't have to discuss what you're going to do before you do it, so long as you are both paying attention (both act on the same initiative). You work best when together. Nothing seems to go as well when you're separated (-1 to all magic rolls).

Equipment: Cool clothes and each other



HOLLOW ONES			
NAME: _____		NATURE: Architect	
PLAYER: _____		ESSENCE: Primordial	
CHRONICLE: _____		DEFINITION: Critic	
FACTORY: None		CONCEPT: Gemini Twins	
CABAL: _____			
ATTRIBUTES			
PHYSICAL		SOCIAL	
Strength: ●●●●	Charisma: ●●●●	Perception: ●●●●	
Dexterity: ●●●●	Manipulation: ●●●●	Intelligence: ●●●●	
Stamina: ●●●●	Appearance: ●●●●	Wits: ●●●●	
ABILITIES			
TALENTS		SKILLS	
Alertness: ●●●●	Crafts: ●●●●	Academics: ●●●●	
Athletics: ●●●●	Drive: ●●●●	Computer: ●●●●	
Awareness: ●●●●	Etiquette: ●●●●	Culture: ●●●●	
Brawl: ●●●●	Firearms: ●●●●	Enigmas: ●●●●	
Dodge: ●●●●	Meditation: ●●●●	Investigation: ●●●●	
Expression: ●●●●	Melee: ●●●●	Law: ●●●●	
Intimidation: ●●●●	Performance: ●●●●	Linguistics: ●●●●	
Leadership: ●●●●	Stealth: ●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●	
Streetwise: ●●●●	Survival: ●●●●	Occult: ●●●●	
Subterfuge: ●●●●	Technology: ●●●●	Science: ●●●●	
SPHERES			
Correspondence: ●●●●	Life: ●●●●	Prime: ●●●●	
Entropy: ●●●●	Matter: ●●●●	Spirit: ●●●●	
Forces: ●●●●	Mind: ●●●●	Time: ●●●●	
ADVANTAGES			
BACKGROUNDS		ARETE	
Allies (Each Other): ●●●●	Avatar (Shared): ●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	
Resources: ●●●●	Sanctum (Shared): ●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	
		WILLPOWER	
		● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	
RESONANCE		QUINTESSENCE	
Dynamic: ●●●●	Expressive: ●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	
Entropic: ●●●●	Static: ●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	
EXPERIENCE		PARADOX	
● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●		● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	
HEALTH			
Bruised: -0		Incapacitated: 0	
Hurt: -1			
Injured: -1			
Wounded: -2			
Mauled: -2			
Crippled: -5			
CELIBAT			
Weapon		Difficulty	

THE CURIOUS CORONER

Quote: I've never seen anything so disgusting in my entire life. Let's cut it open and see what's inside.

Prelude: Tim Burton has your number. You grew up in the middle of nowhere. In communities such as yours, strange things happen. The most uncivilized creatures have retreated to the last untamed hills such as those surrounding your hometown. Old-fashioned superstition, or an understanding of the old ways, keeps the locals believing. You'd heard it all — strange lights in the sky, monsters in the backyard, ghosts in the middle of the road and so much more. You never claimed to believe the tales, but you believed enough to spook yourself when alone on a deserted

road or near the forest's edge in your own backyard.

Those were your beginnings. It's no wonder the city kids in college thought you were a freak. You earned your Doctorate of Medicine, and then, you returned home. The murders started a couple of years later. Someone was killing people, draining their blood. The locals whispered about a spectral widow-witch who used to live up on the mountain taking her revenge on those who refused her aid.

Though you had only basic forensics training, the local sheriff preferred to trust the examinations to you rather than bring in a stranger. You dove into your task with enthusiasm. Each new body was a puzzle to be solved.

Then, one day, you met the murderer. You had tracked her to an old shack. She bared her fangs and raked you with her claws. She would have killed you, but the sun peeked over the ridge. She ran. As that golden light streaked into your awareness, so did your Avatar. You Awakened in a bloody heap, hurting and terrified beyond imagining. She hadn't been human. You had no doubt. It changed you forever. Those were your second beginnings.

Concept: You admire Ichabod Crane. He faced his fears with the Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow. You strive to maintain similar courage though you're physically weak and uncoordinated. You can't walk and chew gum at the same time, but you could intellectually challenge even Sherlock Holmes. You believe that every corpse tells the story of its death. You're a medical doctor by profession, but you have studied forensic medicine on your own and can perform an impressive autopsy.

Roleplaying Tips: You can't turn away from a mystery. You're so curious, particularly about morbid things such as murder. You're still a cynic in practice, but deep in your heart, you've come to believe that maybe the tales are true.

Magic: You have a set of antique medical tools. Realistically, you risk a lawsuit every time you use them, but you do use them. You work your Life magic through them. You appreciate the romance of outdated medical practices and have sloughed the white-coated image of the modern doctor for the black-coated image of a previous age.

Equipment: Black suit of 19th-century styling, set of antique medical tools, set of saws and other autopsy tools, one large magnifying glass

HOLLOW ONES			
NAME: _____		NATURE: Visionary	
PLAYER: _____		ESSENCE: Questing	
CHRONICLE: _____		DETECTOR: Traditionalist	
FACTION: None		CONCEPT: Curious Coroner	
CABAL: _____			
ATTRIBUTES			
PHYSICAL		SOCIAL	
Strength: ●●○○○	Charisma: ●●○○○	Perception: ●●○○○	
Dexterity: ●●○○○	Manipulation: ●●○○○	Intelligence: ●●○○○	
Stamina: ●●○○○	Appearance: ●●○○○	Wits: ●●○○○	
ABILITIES			
TALENTS		SKILLS	
Alertness: ●●○○○	Crafts: ○○○○○	Academics: ○○○○○	
Athletics: ○○○○○	Drive: ○○○○○	Computer: ○○○○○	
Awareness: ○○○○○	Etiquette: ○○○○○	Culture: ○○○○○	
Brawl: ○○○○○	Firearms: ○○○○○	Enigmas: ●●○○○	
Dodge: ○○○○○	Meditation: ●●○○○	Investigation: ○○○○○	
Expression: ○○○○○	Melee: ○○○○○	Law: ○○○○○	
Instruction: ●●○○○	Research: ●●○○○	Linguistics: ○○○○○	
Intuition: ●●○○○	Stealth: ●●○○○	Medicine: ●●○○○	
Streetwise: ○○○○○	Survival: ●●○○○	Occult: ○○○○○	
Subterfuge: ○○○○○	Technology: ○○○○○	Science: ●●○○○	
SPHERES			
Correspondence: ○○○○○	Life: ●●○○○	Prime: ○○○○○	
Entropy: ○○○○○	Matter: ●●○○○	Spirit: ○○○○○	
Forces: ●○○○○	Mind: ○○○○○	Time: ○○○○○	
ADVANTAGES			
BACKGROUNDS		ARETE	
Allies: ●○○○○	Avatar: ○○○○○	●●○○○○○○○○	
Destiny: ●○○○○	Library: ○○○○○	WILLPOWER	
Sanctum: ●○○○○		○○○○○○○○○○	
RESONANCE		QUINTESSENCE	
Dynamic: ○○○○○	Entropic: Curious ●○○○○	○○○○○○○○○○	
Static: ○○○○○		PARADOX	
EXPERIENCE		○○○○○○○○○○	
HEALTH		COMBAT	
Bruised: -0 □	Hurt: -1 □	Weapon: _____	Difficulty: _____
Injured: -1 □	Wounded: -2 □		
Mauled: -2 □	Crippled: -5 □		
Incapacitated: □			

THE WISE FLAKE

Quote: *Some days, the world gets me down, but some days, I'm down with the world. I guess that's life.*

Prelude: Author Neil Gaiman likes to create characters that combine innocence with wisdom. Like they say, "From the mouths of babes." Well, you most definitely could have come from his mind. You grew up amidst violence and cruelty, yet you've managed to maintain a gentle attitude toward the world. After high school, you got a job at the local grocery store, running a register. You moved away from your alcoholic parents and became independent — of course, you always were independent considering how little your parents gave a damn. You made it official, though.

Shortly after you got your own place, you found your first stray. First, one cat, then two, then three came to live with you. Before you knew it, you had seven cats living in your small apartment with you. They kept you busy. People began to think of your apartment as the place to bring unwanted animals. If they couldn't keep it, they'd bring it to you. And you'd take it in. Before long, you had to rent a small house because you had a menagerie of two dogs, eight cats, an abused parrot, a ferret, a lizard and an unemployed boyfriend. All of them followed you around quite loyally, and all but the boyfriend came when called. You eventually had to let him go.

Mundane but tragic circumstances triggered your Epiphany. Your house caught fire one night while you were sleeping. You would have died in the blaze if your animals hadn't alerted you to the danger. You got them all out the window, but one. The baby, a kitten you'd recently found in a storm gutter, had hidden herself. You could hear her, but you couldn't find her. Racked with smoke, burned, you didn't give up. You kept calling, throat raw, and searching, crawling through the house. Just as you felt yourself begin to pass out, the sway of fainting became a whirlpool of increasing awareness. Your Avatar stepped in to encourage you onward. The pain tripled, but so did your determination and senses. Your Avatar led you to the kitten. You just barely escaped.

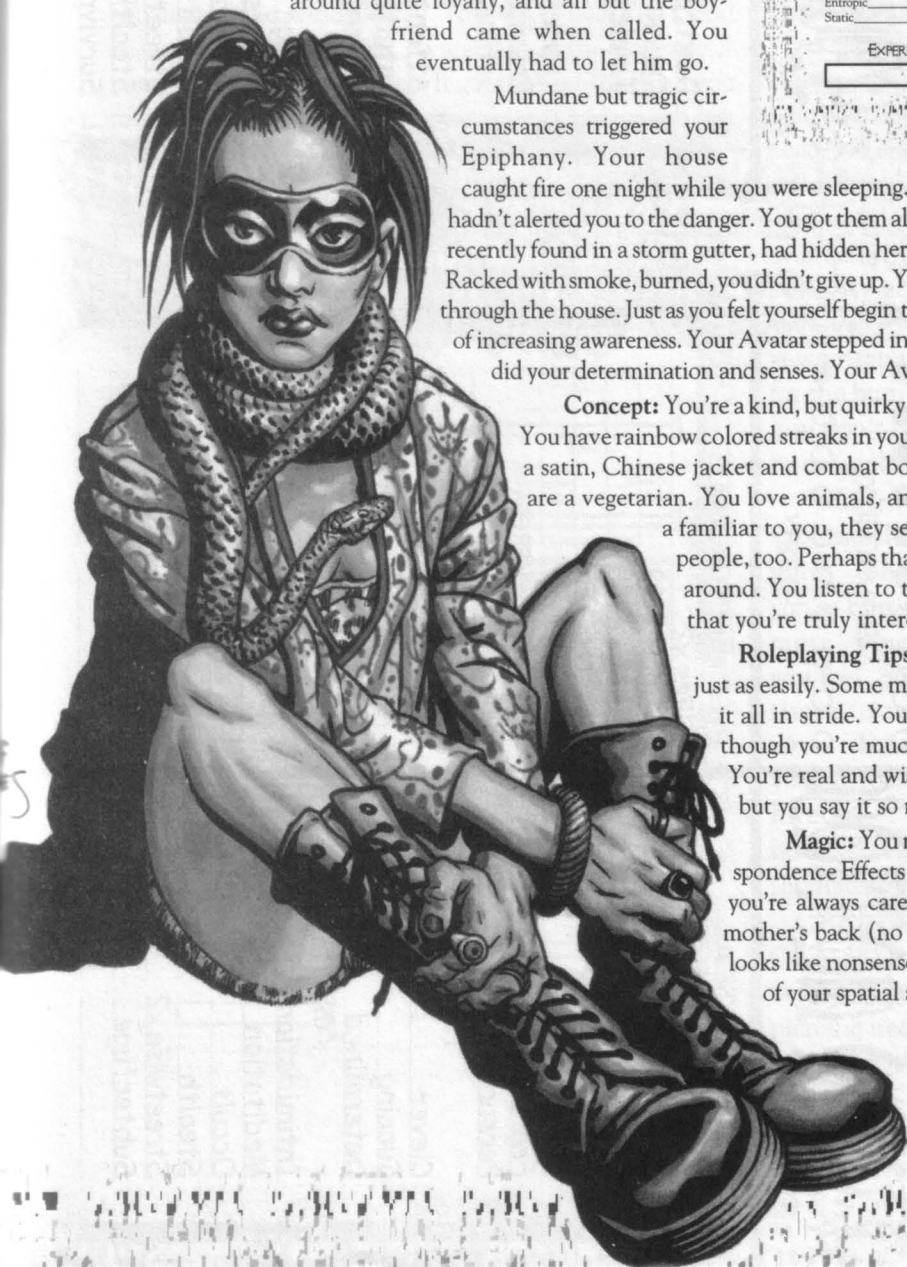
Concept: You're a kind, but quirky soul. You're not goth. You're not really anything. You have rainbow colored streaks in your hair. You wear odd clothes, like a pink tutu with a satin, Chinese jacket and combat boots. You're not afraid of color. You do yoga and are a vegetarian. You love animals, and they love you. Though none of them serve as a familiar to you, they seem to see through to your gentle soul. You love people, too. Perhaps that's why the snooty goths don't mind you hanging around. You listen to them and look them in the eyes, and it's obvious that you're truly interested in what they have to say.

Roleplaying Tips: Like a butterfly, you land softly and lift off again just as easily. Some might say you had a Zen approach to life. You take it all in stride. You would die to help either a person or an animal, though you're much more likely to go out on a limb for an animal. You're real and wise in a childlike way. You always speak the truth, but you say it so nicely that you rarely actually piss anyone off.

Magic: You make little games out of magic, casting your Correspondence Effects with short games of hopscotch or peekaboo — and you're always careful never to step on a crack lest you break your mother's back (no matter how much she might deserve it). This all looks like nonsense to others, but makes perfect sense in the context of your spatial awareness.

Equipment: Dog biscuits and cat treats, Bandit's eye drops, combat boots, bangle bracelets

FOLLOW ONES		
NAME: _____		NATURE: Bon Vivant
PLAYER: _____		ESSENCE: Dynamic
CHRONICLE: _____		DETEANOR: Bon Vivant
		FACTS: None
		CONCEPT: Wise Flake
		CABAL: _____
ATTRIBUTES		
PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength: ●●●●●	Charisma: ●●●●●	Perception: ●●●●●
Dexterity: ●●●●●	Manipulation: ●●●●●	Intelligence: ●●●●●
Stamina: ●●●●●	Appearance: ●●●●●	Wits: ●●●●●
ABILITIES		
TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Alertness: ●●●●●	Crafts: ●●●●●	Computer: ●●●●●
Athletics: ●●●●●	Drive: ●●●●●	Cosmology: ●●●●●
Awareness: ●●●●●	Esquette: ●●●●●	Culture: ●●●●●
Brawl: ●●●●●	Firearms: ●●●●●	Enigmas: ●●●●●
Dodge: ●●●●●	Meditation: ●●●●●	Investigation: ●●●●●
Expression: ●●●●●	Melee: ●●●●●	Law: ●●●●●
Intimidation: ●●●●●	Performance: ●●●●●	Lore: Changeling ●●●●●
Intuition: ●●●●●	Stealth: ●●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●●
Streetwise: ●●●●●	Survival: ●●●●●	Occult: ●●●●●
Subterfuge: ●●●●●	Technology: ●●●●●	Science: ●●●●●
SPHERES		
Correspondence: ●●●●●	Life: ●●●●●	Prime: ●●●●●
Entropy: ●●●●●	Matter: ●●●●●	Spirit: ●●●●●
Forces: ●●●●●	Mind: ●●●●●	Time: ●●●●●
ADVANTAGES		
BACKGROUNDS	ARETE	HEALTH
Allies: ●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Bruised: -0 □
Arcane: ●●●●●	WILLPOWER	Hurt: -1 □
Avatar: ●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Injured: -1 □
Destiny: ●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Wounded: -2 □
Dream: ●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Mauled: -2 □
		Crippled: -5 □
		Incapacitated: □
RESONANCE	QUINTESSENCE	CENTIBAT
Dynamic: Eccentric ●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Weapon: _____
Entropic: ●●●●●	PARADOX	Difficulty: _____
Static: ●●●●●		
EXPERIENCE		





BACKGROUNDS

Allies x2

Arcane x2

Avatar x1

Destiny x1

Dream x1

SPHERES

Disciple of Correspondence

Apprentice of Prime

Initiate of Time

ROTES



Dextrous		PHYSICAL	
Quick			
Tireless			
	SOCIAL		
Expressive	Persuasive		
Friendly x2	Witty		
Genial x2		MENTAL	
	Attentive	Reflective x2	
	Intuitive	Wise	
	Patient		
		ABILITIES	
	Dodge		
	Expression		
	Meditation		
	Occult		
	Streetwise		
	Stealth		
	Survival		



BACKGROUNDS

Allies x2

Influence x2

Resources x1

Sanctum x2

SPHERES

Apprentice of Forces

Disciple of Life

Initiate of Prime

ROOTS



PHYSICAL	Dextrous	Stalwart
	Energetic	Steady
	Resilient x2	Tough
	SOCIAL	
	Commanding	
	Fearsome	
	Persuasive	
	MENTAL	
	Clever	Disciplined
	Cunning	Shrewd
	Determined	Vigilant x2
	ABILITIES	
	Intimidation	
	Meditation	
	Occult	
	Stealth	
	Streetwise x2	
	Subterfuge	



THE FREAK

Quote: Birth hurts like a motherfucker. Death hurts like a motherfucker. Everything in between hurts like a motherfucker. Conquer the pain, you find true Ascension. How do you conquer the pain? You embrace it.

Prelude: Welcome to your nightmare. You wish you had stepped out of Clive Barker's *Hellraiser* series, but your origins were actually quite lame. It's the same old story you hear from every other Orphan: alcoholic and abusive father, absent mother, drugs, deviance, violence, homelessness, squatting, whoring, pain, pain, pain. You don't remember exactly when it happened, but one night, you and your pain had a talk. You bonded. Your pain became your best friend. After all, it had been there for you when everyone else had abandoned you. You could trust only your pain.

That night, you took a razor to yourself. You cut patterns into your skin. At first, the cutting came from anger, but as you progressed, it became meditative and ritualistic. Your mind cleared. Your soul eased. You found peace in your pain. Your Avatar found the doorway it needed to make its entrance. It guided you. It helped you to reach places you couldn't stretch to before, much less see. Blood ran down your body and smeared the floor.

After that, life simplified. You found a place in yourself where you went when the pain in your belly

became too sharp or when your limbs ached from the cold. In this place, you used your pain against itself to create heat from within and to ease the hunger pangs.

Your self-mutilation is personal to you. You don't do it to show off. You don't do it to offend or to shock. You do it because it brings you one step closer to Ascension. You view it as a sacred ritual. You don't shy away from anything that might hurt. You even took a bullet once, and it hurt a lot. You conquered the pain.

Concept: You have a saintly quality. Calm at all times, you have no fear. You don't freak. You don't get upset. You're the guy in the corner who watches everyone play out their dramas. You don't involve yourself. You don't need that anymore. You've ascended to a whole new level of self-inflicted pain.

Roleplaying Tips: Everything about you is tight. You keep your clothes and boots well-buckled. You wear your hair close to your head. No one would ever call you gregarious. What jokes you do make are dry as a desert. You have excellent posture when standing or sitting. Your body is your temple. You work out for the burn in your muscles. You don't preach. You lead by example.

Magic: Your magic expresses through your pain. The more you're hurting, the more powerful you feel. Sometimes, you'll even harm yourself for an Effect. If nothing else, it intimidates your enemies.

Equipment: Old-fashioned barber's razor, set of piercing needles

HOLLOW ONES			
NAME: _____		NATURE: Deviant	
PLAYER: _____		ESSENCE: Dynamic	
CHRONICLE: _____		DEITY/ANGR: Deviant	
FACTION: Revolutionary		CONCEPT: Freak	
CABAL: _____			
ATTRIBUTES			
PHYSICAL		SOCIAL	
Strength: ●●●●	Charisma: ●●●●	Perception: ●●●●	
Dexterity: ●●●●	Manipulation: ●●●●	Intelligence: ●●●●	
Stamina: ●●●●	Appearance: ●●●●	Wits: ●●●●	
ABILITIES			
TALENTS		SKILLS	
Alertness: ●●●●	Crafts: ●●●●	Academics: ●●●●	
Athletics: ●●●●	Drive: ●●●●	Computer: ●●●●	
Awareness: ●●●●	Etiquette: ●●●●	Cosmology: ●●●●	
Brawl: ●●●●	Firearms: ●●●●	Enigmas: ●●●●	
Dodge: ●●●●	Meditation: ●●●●	Lore: <i>Changeling</i> ●●●●	
Expression: ●●●●	Melee: ●●●●	Lore: <i>Kindred</i> ●●●●	
Intimidation: ●●●●	Performance: ●●●●	Lore: <i>Sabbat</i> ●●●●	
Leadership: ●●●●	Stealth: ●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●	
Streetwise: ●●●●	Survival: ●●●●	Occult: ●●●●	
Subterfuge: ●●●●	Technology: ●●●●	Science: ●●●●	
SPHERES			
Correspondence: ●●●●	Life: ●●●●	Prime: ●●●●	
Entropy: ●●●●	Matter: ●●●●	Spirit: ●●●●	
Forces: ●●●●	Mind: ●●●●	Time: ●●●●	
ADVANTAGES			
BACKGROUNDS		ARETE	
Allies: ●●●●	Influence: ●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	
Resources: ●●●●	Sanctum: ●●●●	WILLPOWER	
●●●●	●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	
RESONANCE		QUINTESSENCE	
Dynamic: ●●●●	Entropic: <i>Pessimistic</i> ●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	
Static: ●●●●		PARADOX	
EXPERIENCE		CENTIBAT	
_____		Weapon: _____ Difficulty: _____	



THE
STANDARD
OF
TRUTH

NAME: _____

CHARACTER: Reality Warrior

CHRONICLE:

FACTØN: Councilor

ESSENCE: Questing

CABAL:

NATURE: Visionary

DETTEANØR: Survivor

QUINTESSENCE/PARADOX

WILLPOWER

ARETE

BACKGROUNDS

Allies x2	
Arcane x3	
Avatar x1	

SPHERES
Disciple of *Forces*

Initiate of Spirit

Notes

RESONANCE

DYNAMIC Aggressive

ENTROPIC_

STATIC

PHYSICAL

Allies x2 _____
Avatar x2 _____
Destiny x2 _____

Mentor x1

Spheres

Initiate of Forces
Apprentice of Matter
Apprentice of Mind

NOTES

Quote: Reality is squishy. It can be whatever you want it to be. So, when you stick other people with your version of it, you're making them your slaves. That's bad.

What they hadn't predicted was that you wouldn't like it. You played their game for awhile, but you never felt at home with them. Eventually, you amicably parted ways. You took off on your own. Your *Ava Sleepers*. You had a more electronic byways run by your attention away from yourself in computers, out you wanted to break out

You went through several odd stages but have finally settled on a vision of yourself that feels just right. You are the everyman hero, the ordinary guy who just wants to do right. Despite your rejection of them as a tool, computer-related symbolism remains a strong part of who you are. You model yourself after Neo from the movie *The Matrix*. He is your hero. Now, like him, you find yourself fulfilling the role of hero to others. You've been chosen.

Concept: You don't actively seek out dangerous situations, unlike superheroes, but you do always try to do the right thing. You find it all confusing at times, and you have a lot to learn. Your time with the Virtual Adepts taught you what you don't want to be. Now, you're trying to find your true place in the universe.

Roleplaying Tips: You're the proverbial nice guy, but you fight your enemies just as viciously as anyone. For you, the world is never simple enough, filled as it is with too many shades of gray. This constantly frustrates you. You trust too easily. Your naïveté often draws you into dangerous situations.

Magic: You work your magic without many tools at all. Primarily, you use gestures and poses to focus. Many of your poses have martial arts origins, others simply involve a wave of the hand or a narrowing of your eyes.

Equipment: Cell phone, cool black clothes

FOLLOW ONES™

NAME: PLAYER: CHRONICLE:	NATURE: Visionary ESSENCE: Questing DETENANER: Survivor	FACTION: Councilor CONCEPT: Reality Warrior CABAL:
---	--	---

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength.....●●●●●	Charisma.....●●●●●	Perception.....●●●●●
Dexterity.....●●●●●	Manipulation.....●●●●●	Intelligence.....●●●●●
Stamina.....●●●●●	Appearance.....●●●●●	Wits.....●●●●●

ABILITIES

TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Alertness.....●●●●●	Crafts.....00000	Academics.....00000
Athletics.....●●●●●	Drive.....00000	Computer.....●●●●●
Awareness.....●●●●●	Etiquette.....00000	Cosmology.....00000
Brawl.....00000	Firearms.....●●●●●	Enigmas.....●●●●●
Dodge.....●●●●●	Meditation.....●●●●●	Investigation.....00000
Expression.....00000	Meloe.....●●●●●	Law.....00000
Intimidation.....00000	Performance.....00000	Linguistics.....00000
Intuition.....●●●●●	Stealth.....●●●●●	Medicine.....00000
Streetwise.....00000	Survival.....00000	Ocult.....00000
Subterfuge.....00000	Technology.....●●●●●	Science.....●●●●●

SPHERES

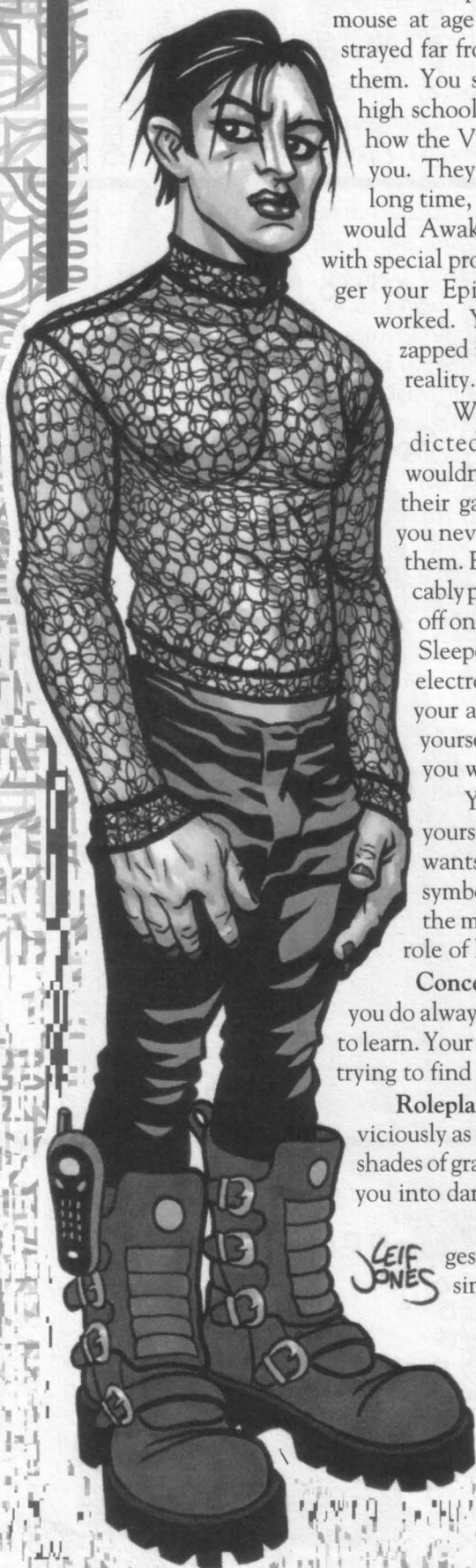
Correspondence.....●●000	Life.....00000	Prime.....00000
Entropy.....00000	Matter.....00000	Spirit.....00000
Forces.....●●000	Mind.....00000	Time.....00000

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS	ARTE	HEALTH
Allies.....●●000	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Bruised.....-0 □
Avatar.....●●000		Hurt.....-1 □
Destiny.....●●000		Injured.....-1 □
Mentor.....00000		Wounded.....-2 □
		Mauled.....-2 □
		Crippled.....-3 □
		Incapacitated.....□

RESONANCE Dynamic.....Aggressive●●0000 Entropic.....00000 Static.....00000	QUINTESSENCE PARADEX	COMBAT <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="padding: 2px;">Weapon</th> <th style="padding: 2px;">Difficulty</th> <th style="padding: 2px;">Damage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Weapon	Difficulty	Damage												
Weapon	Difficulty	Damage															

EXPERIENCE



EPILOGUE: BUILDING LEGENDS



Eventually, Baron and Mark returned to Seattle. They had spent an extra day in San Francisco. The weather lulled them into staying. Baron showed Mark around the Waydown chantry. They had become friends over the course of their four-day jaunt around the world.

The Seattle chantry was still nearly deserted when the two men *popped* back in. Quiet. Penny sat quietly in an armchair, alone with Mr. Mistoffelees curled in her lap. She was reading beneath a fringed lamp.

"Hi, Penny," Mark greeted, unable to keep the edge of excitement from his voice. "You would not believe the shit I've seen."

Penny smiled and put her book aside. "Oh, yes, I would," she replied.

Mark felt foolish. He nodded. "Oh, yeah, of course you would. Duh." He laughed at himself and took a seat nearby.

Baron greeted Penny with a warm smile and sat down as well. "Any news?" he asked. "Where is everybody?"

"Vacationing," replied Penny with a laugh and a shake of her head. "Still. They should all be coming back some time today. Word on the Railroad has it that they're all having too much fun chasing down phantoms bearing eyeballs as gifts."

Baron nodded. "Neville decide what we're gonna do about it?"

Penny nodded, a sly tilt coming to her eyes. "Yes," she replied.

Mark and Baron had already learned from the places they'd visited that the thefts and the eyeball gifts were harmless. The eyeballs came from animals, sheep and cattle. They were someone's idea of a bizarre joke. The mystery of the identity of that someone was keeping—and would continue to keep—Hollowers around the world busy conjecturing for some time.

Baron grinned and commented, "Someone out there knows how to keep the Hollow Kids busy and out of trouble, hm?" He chuckled.

Mark piped up, "So, what are we gonna do?"

Penny petted Mr. Mistoffelees with a practiced rhythm. The cat began to purr loudly. Penny answered Mark, "You know, this is a perfect illustration for you,

Mark, of the Hollow tradition's philosophy of legend building." She had to turn it into a lesson. "Neville and all you others traveled to all those places, hung out for awhile, partied a little, made some new friends, talked, danced and, I suppose, eventually the topic of the eyeballs came up. Well, during all this festivity, someone somewhere, I believe in Germany, suggested, tongue-in-cheek, that the Hollowers were the only ones who wouldn't bat an eye when an eyeball shows up unexpectedly. Everyone present laughed, and the joke spread back here through the Railroad. It gave me an idea." She paused for effect, then continued, "What if everyone who received an eyeball cleansed its Pattern of all signs that it was handled by the Hollowers, then took it and left it on a tombstone in the local cemetery?"

Baron laughed aloud; Mark grinned.

"So," Penny waved her hand, smiling, "that's what they've started doing. Already, the reports are showing

up in newspapers and on the Internet. I figure it'll take a week, maybe two for people to start putting it all together and realize that it's happening simultaneously all over the world. We'll start hearing reports of hauntings in cemeteries and worldwide conspiracies. I've already decided I'm going to put up a web page about the legend of the one-eyed ghost." She giggled. "I figure maybe we can also spread a story about a killer who lurks on deserted roads and eats everything but one of the eyes of his victims. Or a story about the spectral eye that the Devil places about so he can keep an eye on you."

By this time, Baron and Mark were rolling with laughter.

Penny just continued to smile, smug. Her eyes twinkled.

Mr. Mistoffelees licked one of his paws.

REFERENCES



To properly set the theme and mood for the Hollow Ones, the following sources might prove helpful.

MUSIC

All manner of gothic and industrial music, to numerous to list, but one standout worth mentioning is anything by *Dead Can Dance*.

GOthic BOOKS

Grant Morrison's *The Invisibles* series of graphic novels is not only a primer on modern chaos magic, it's the perfect inspiration for a cabal of Hollow Ones, each choosing his own paradigm and methods and learning to use them with others.

Alan Moore's *Promethea* is great for any Mage-related inspiration. It's really the most readable textbook on Western magic yet, although its modern and highly creative approach works for any style of magic.

BOOKS

Anything on modern chaos magic may help prime the pump for inspiration. Especially good is anything by Phil Hine or Peter Carroll, such as *Liber Null*. One thing chaos magicians are into is sigil magic (inspired by A. O. Spare, a contemporary of Crowley). This involves inventing your own magical symbols and using them as focuses of desire and will. So, following this "tradition," many young Hollow Ones may use such sigils as foci for their magic.

The fiction and essays of Robert Anton Wilson are a must for learning to crawl out of a limited "reality tunnel" and see the world through multiple perspectives. Postmodern neurolinguistic programming. *The Illuminatus Trilogy* is the best place to start.

The Romantic poets, of course. Also, T.S. Elliot, whose *The Waste Land* is perhaps the best statement on disaffection from the modern age.

MOVIES

The Craft shows sort of what it's like when a Hollow One is seduced by the Nephandi. The gothic style of four young girls who turn to magic to make their lives larger than life is very "hollow."

John Waters's *Cecil B. Demented*, although not about magic, is a classic example of the Hollow Ones' lifestyle and the heart of fanatic dedication they hold to their romantic ideals.

Ken Russell's *Gothic* is perhaps the best example of the heart of Gothic romanticism — and the wild and crazy ride it becomes when it is infused with supernaturalism. A telling of the famous summer of 1812 when Polidori's *The Vampyr* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* were inspired at Lord Byron's estate.

The Crow, of course.

Groove, about the Bay Area rave scene. A good primer on the Waydown for those who have never been to a rave.

HOLLOW ONES™

NAME:
PLAYER:
CHRONICLE:

NATURE:
ESSENCE:
DEITY/ANOR:

FACTION:
CONCEPT:
CABAL:

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

Strength ●○○○○
Dexterity ●○○○○
Stamina ●○○○○

SOCIAL

Charisma ●○○○○
Manipulation ●○○○○
Appearance ●○○○○

MENTAL

Perception ●○○○○
Intelligence ●○○○○
Wits ●○○○○

ABILITIES

TALENTS

Alertness ○○○○○
Athletics ○○○○○
Awareness ○○○○○
Brawl ○○○○○
Dodge ○○○○○
Expression ○○○○○
Intimidation ○○○○○
Leadership ○○○○○
Streetwise ○○○○○
Subterfuge ○○○○○

SKILLS

Crafts ○○○○○
Drive ○○○○○
Etiquette ○○○○○
Firearms ○○○○○
Meditation ○○○○○
Melee ○○○○○
Performance ○○○○○
Stealth ○○○○○
Survival ○○○○○
Technology ○○○○○

KNOWLEDGES

Academics ○○○○○
Computer ○○○○○
Cosmology ○○○○○
Enigmas ○○○○○
Investigation ○○○○○
Law ○○○○○
Linguistics ○○○○○
Medicine ○○○○○
Occult ○○○○○
Science ○○○○○

SPHERES

Correspondence ○○○○○
Entropy ○○○○○
Forces ○○○○○

Life ○○○○○
Matter ○○○○○
Mind ○○○○○

Prime ○○○○○
Spirit ○○○○○
Time ○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS

○○○○○
○○○○○
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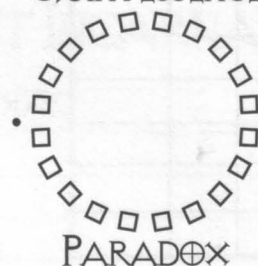
ARETE

● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

QUINTESSENCE



PARADOX

HEALTH

Bruised -0 □
Hurt -1 □
Injured -1 □
Wounded -2 □
Mauled -2 □
Crippled -5 □
Incapacitated □

RESONANCE

Dynamic ○○○○○
Entropic ○○○○○
Static ○○○○○

EXPERIENCE

OTHER TRAITS

○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

FOLLOW ONES™

MERITS & FLAWS

MERIT	TYPE	COST	FLAW	TYPE	BONUS

MAGIC

PREFERRED EFFECTS

ROTES

COMBAT

Maneuver	Roll	Difficulty	Damage/Effect

Weapon	Difficulty	Damage	Range	Rate	Clip	Conceal

ARTIST: _____

FOLLOW ONES™

EXPANDED BACKGROUND

ALLIES

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POSSESSIONS

GEAR (CARRIED)

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FAMILIAR

PAST INCARNATIONS

HOLLOW ONES™

HISTORY

AWAKENING

GOALS/DESTINY

SEEKINGS:

QUIETS:

DESCRIPTION

Age:

Apparent Age:

Date of Birth:

Age of Awakening:

Hair:

Eyes:

Race:

Nationality:

Height:

Weight:

Sex:

Appearance/Nature of Avatar:

VISUALS

CABAL CHART

CHARACTER SKETCH

T R A D I T I O N B O O K :

HOLLOW ONES™

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