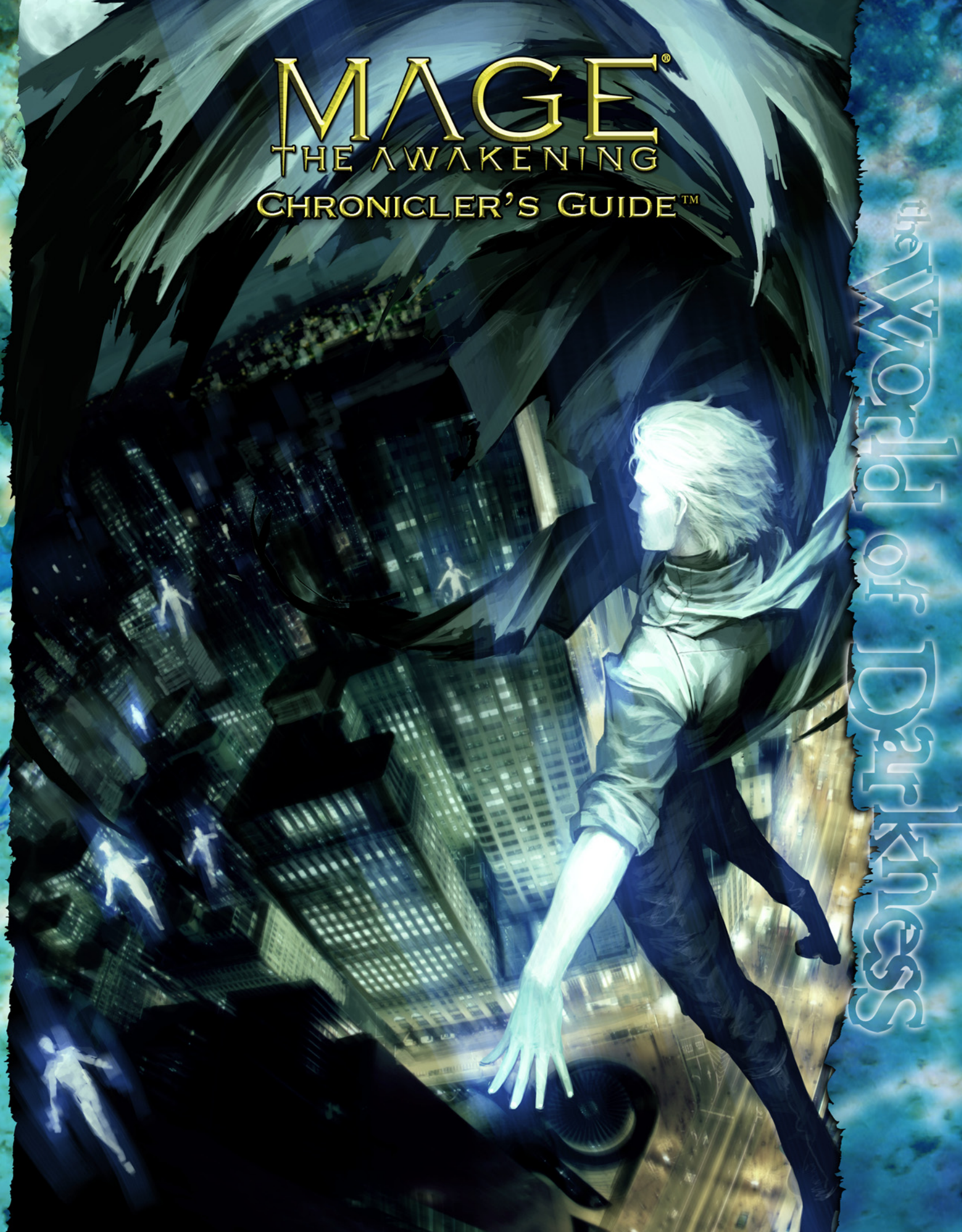# MAGE
THE AWAKENING
CHRONICLER'S GUIDE™

Reality is glass, is gingerbread and sugar, is chalk. We break pieces away.
We take pieces apart. We reassemble them to suit ourselves.
The seams are there for those with the eyes to see.
The flaws are there for those with the hands to split them.
The configurations are born from those with the minds and wills to create them.
This is how it has always been. This is how it will always be.

— Virbius, King Under the Branches, Thyrsus seer

This book includes:

- A variety of different approaches to the **Mage** chronicle, from genres such as noir and action to the concept of tiers of power

- Variant interpretations of the magic system, such as Weird Science or psychic powers

- Enhancing the player-focused facets of the game, sample chronicles, and more

For use with The World of Darkness and Mage: The Awakening rulebooks.

MAGE®
THE AWAKENING
CHRONICLER'S GUIDE™

By Dave Brookshaw, Bethany Culp,
Howard Ingham, Danielle Lauzon, Matthew McFarland, Mark Simmons,
Chuck Wendig, Filamena Young, Eric Zawadzki

INITIATION

Estelle blearily opened her eyes. She was lying on the floor. Unable to see in the dim light, she called upon her magic, blinking as her new eyes adjusted. Everything was brighter now. Her older brother, Jack, was sprawled out on a faded, moth-eaten rug next to her, sandy-blonde hair a typical mess, and snoring lightly. Suddenly alert, Estelle pulled herself upright and shook him.

"Jack! Wake up!"

"'s Saturday, Squirt, leemie 'lone..." he muttered, rolling over.

"Jack, I'm serious. I don't know where we are!"

"Okay, okay, jeez." He said. Estelle was inches from his face, her wide, golden cat's eyes shining eerily in the darkness. "It really freaks me out when you do that, you know." Sitting up, Jack surveyed the room. "Whoa, you weren't kidding. What is this place?"

"I'll try the door." Skidding across the dusty floorboards to the ornately carved double doors of the foyer, Estelle jiggled the tarnished bronze doorknob. "It won't open!"

"Let me try," Jack said, getting to his feet and approaching the doors. "Yeah, they're good and stuck there, aren't they? Weird."

"I *told* you that already. The windows won't open, either. And why do you always have to double-check everything I do, you dork?"

"Do you even know what a dork is? It's a whale penis. You just called me a whale penis."

Glaring at Jack, Estelle pivoted on her heels, ponytail whipping around behind her, and stormed into the adjacent living room.

"Hey, don't spaz on me, 'Stelle. It's not going to help anything," said Jack, rummaging through his backpack. "Worst case scenario, we call somebody on my cell to come and get us out of this dump."

Jack flipped open the cellular phone and punched the keypad, "Huh, that's strange, there's no signal. Hey! What are you —?"

Estelle returned to the window with a wrought iron fire poker. She lifted it over her shoulder and swung, hard, at the grimy glass. When the poker hit the pane, it glanced off with a loud, metallic clank and a shower of orange sparks. There was no damage at all — not even the smallest of cracks. Estelle lifted the poker and swung again. Again, sparks fell from the impact, leaving the glass intact. A sharp pang of panic jolted through Estelle. Trapped. She swung at the obstinate pane again and again, until her petite form was lost in a blazing cascade of brilliant sparks and the hallways of the old house reverberated with the cacophony. Out of breath and arms shaking with fatigue, she let the iron rod drop to the floor. The poker struck the dusty, hardwood floor without a sound.

"What the — ?" Estelle mouthed in confusion, but no sound issued from her lips. All was deathly still. She felt magic behind her. Spinning around noiselessly, Estelle saw two other kids standing in the dingy hallway behind her.

One was a boy, pale, dark-haired, and handsome in an awkward sort of way. He was older than Estelle and her brother, maybe 16 or 17, with a hard expression. He surveyed them both with an unsettling intensity in the utter silence.

Estelle recognized the pudgy, cherub-kneed girl shifting nervously behind the pale boy. Her name was Blaire Baker. She was in the same grade as Estelle at Austintown Middle School. She never said very much in class, and most of the kids made fun of her, calling her "Big

Blaire." But Blaire never defended herself or spoke back. She always sat rigidly at her desk, eyes cast downward, pudgy face sweaty and red with shame, biting her lip in a defiant attempt not to cry. Estelle had never joined in teasing Blaire, but some of her clique did, so she didn't want to get involved. Maybe she felt a little guilty about it, but what was she supposed to do? Standing up for Blaire would have been social suicide.

Casting a nervous, sideways glance at her brother, Estelle saw that Jack had fixed his eyes upon the intruders. The pale boy looked taken aback for a second, and then turned to face Jack.

Estelle heard her brother's familiar voice echo through her mind, "He says it's dangerous to make loud noises in this house, but he'll drop the silencing spell if we both promise to keep it down."

Estelle nodded at the pale boy, indicating that she understood, and after a long moment, he dropped the spell and spoke in an urgent whisper.

"Keep your voices low. If Jonathan hears you, it'll just piss him off. Besides, banging at those windows won't do any good anyway. I was brought here three days ago, and still haven't found any way out of this house." Jack was still studying the boy intently as he spoke.

"Where are we?" asked Estelle. "How did we get here? Who's Jonathan?" Estelle thought about asking about the magic, about whether Blaire could do it, too, but then she shook the thought off. It didn't seem to matter, not here.

"I'm not sure how we got here. The last thing I remember was walking by the park on the way home from school. I had to stay late because Principal Brice is a douchebag with no sense of humor. Anyway, I think I might have seen some people moving around through the trees, but then something happened and I blacked out. When I woke up, I was here, just like you. And Jonathan, that's what the ghost calls himself —"

"A ghost?" exclaimed Estelle. "Like, rattling chains and—"

"Are you Riley Sharp's older brother?" Jack interrupted, staring hard at the older boy. "He's in my grade, and you look a lot like him."

"I am Riley Sharp," the boy said. Behind him, Blaire tugged at his sleeve.

"Explain it later, Riley," she said in an anxious whisper, "I can feel him coming. We need to move!" Eyes wide with fear, Blaire bolted from the room.

An abrupt wave of intense heat gusted through the living room, throwing dust, cobwebs, and tattered scraps of peeling wallpaper into a wild whirlwind. "Run! Hide!" Riley shouted through the deafening roar of the wind, "*Now!*"

Estelle ran down the hallway after Jack and Riley. Her skin blistered in the heat, and the sweat from her brow stung her eyes and blurred their forms ahead. Half blind, she followed as best she could through endless, twisting corridors. How big *was* this house? Her lungs felt as though they might burst from the heat and strain, and she could tell that Jack was further away now. Up ahead they turned yet another corner, but when she reached it, they were gone, and so was the wind.

All was silent. At the end of the dark, deserted hallway was a single, white door with a large eye design painted upon it in broad, curling brushstrokes. The others must have gone through it. Nursing the cramp in her side, Estelle walked cautiously down the corridor. Twisting the glass knob, the door swung open, revealing a twisting staircase descending into shadow. The dank, but not altogether unpleasant scent of damp, molding earth and mildew wafted from the passageway.

"Jack?" she called softly, "Are you guys down there?"

Estelle took a first tenuous step down the flight of stairs, and the white door abruptly slammed shut behind her, leaving her in utter, pitch blackness. In such complete darkness, not even her cat's eyes could see. Panic constricted her chest; breathing hard, she felt like she was being smothered in black velvet. Estelle turned back and groped for the door behind her. Where the door had been, she now felt nothing but a wall of damp earth. How could the door have simply vanished? Would Jack and the others ever find her? If she shouted out to them, would whatever caused that wave of blistering heat come and find her? Would she ever see her parents again? Would she *die* alone down here? As she sat on the stairs with her knees pressed to her chest, wide-eyed in the darkness, Estelle felt hot, wet tears roll down her cheeks.

• • •

Blaire slammed the door behind her, and heard the roar of the blazing wind rush past the other side. Jonathan must not be after her. She was safe for the moment. Blaire bent down to catch her breath, and when she stood up, she saw that she was in the kitchen. It was strange here, and Blaire felt strange, too, but not in a bad way. Burnished copper pots and pans hung from a rack beside her, brightly reflecting the merry fire alight within an old-fashioned stone hearth, and Blaire could smell something sweet baking. An earthenware pot filled with red geraniums sat atop an antique oak dining table. Dreamily, Blaire felt warm memories of her grandmother sift to the surface of her memory — red geraniums were Gram's favorite flower. And there she was!

"Gram!" Blaire exclaimed, running forward and burying her face in her grandmother's soft, patched apron. "I haven't seen you in so long!"

"I know, Baby Bee, I know," said the plump old woman. The laugh lines around her bright blue eyes crinkled as she smiled down at her granddaughter. Lifting Blaire's chin in her soft, warm hands, she said, "Now let me have a good look at you!" Blaire looked up, and the old woman appraised her carefully for a moment. "Well, are you growing up to be quite the looker! Just like your mother!"

Blaire's smile fell, "Actually, I get made fun of a lot in school. I'm fat, Gram. Nobody likes 'Big Blaire.'"

"Oh, horsefeathers! It's just puppy fat! Your mother had it, too. But I can see the beauty about to blossom in you. In a few more years, all those boys who used to make fun of you will be asking you out. I guarantee it, Baby Bee!"

Blaire let herself smile a little, "You really think so, Gram?"

"I know so, Honey. Now sit down at the table, and have a few of those cookies I baked! I made your favorite, chocolate chip. I'll get you a nice cool glass of milk."

Gram puttered over to the refrigerator as Blaire sat at the table, feeling cozy and happier than she had in a very long time. Fresh chocolate chip cookies sat cooling on trivets. They looked and smelled delicious. Vaguely, Blaire wondered how she hadn't noticed them when she looked at the table before, but the thought left her mind almost as quickly as it had entered it. Choosing a cookie, Blaire took a bite. Something crunched, then popped, releasing a foul, bitter taste in her mouth.

Something was very wrong. Blaire spit out the mouthful immediately and examined the cookie. Baked into the golden batter were tiny, hairless human heads. Blaire dropped the cookie and retched. The tiny heads screamed and jeered at her as she vomited. "Big Blaire! Big Blaire! Look at the fat pig crawling around on the floor in her own filth!"

A wave of infernal heat blasted from the hearth. When Blaire looked up, wiping the sick from her lips, Gram was gone, and Jonathan stood in her place. His body was wreathed in black flame, and he grinned down at her with a mouth full of cruelly pointed teeth. "Looks like there's something Big Blaire won't eat, after all."

• • •

"Pull yourself together." Estelle thought, "Sitting here crying isn't going to help anything. Just calm down." Wiping her stinging eyes, Estelle stood shakily in the blackness and consciously slowed her breathing, thinking hard. Her magic let her change living things, but how would that help her now? There probably were

no other living things down here but some insects and the mildew growing on the walls, and a fat lot of good those were going to do her. As she leaned against the soft, dirt wall, Estelle recalled something she had just learned about last week in science class. Certain types of fungi, invertebrates, and microorganisms are able to convert chemical energy into light energy. Biolumines-cence, Mr. Evans said it was called.

Concentrating, Estelle placed her hands on the damp earthen walls to either side of her. She closed her eyes, and felt the movement of life beneath her palms — the restless vibration of tiny creatures squirming and skittering in their subterranean homes, and the softer, steady hum of the growing things rooted in darkness and death.

"Help me." She whispered in the darkness.

When Estelle opened her eyes, the staircase before her was bathed in soft, blue-green light. Foxfire mush-rooms and ghost fungus clung to the dirt walls in thick, glowing clumps, and a multitude of fireflies circled lazily around her, blinking and flickering to light her descent into the unknown.

• • •

Jack and Riley ran until Riley stopped, abruptly. Jack realized the wave of heat had died down. Out of breath, the pair collapsed against a nearby wall. Jack gasped, "What's going on here? What do you mean you're Riley Sharp — there's no way you're him! He's my age, and you're way older than me!" Then, looking around, Jack leapt to his feet "Where's Estelle? She was right behind us! And that other girl…"

"Blaire," said Riley. "Shit. I have to go back." Riley leapt up and raced back down the hall.

"Wait a second! We should stay together!" Jack called, as he raced to catch up.

"I don't know why we're here," Riley panted as he ran through the labyrinthine corridors, retracing their steps. "But I think it has something to do with the fact that we're different. Blaire can see and sense things that nobody else can, your sister has those freaky eyes, and I'm assuming ordinary kids can't read minds. I can do some pretty weird stuff, too. "

"What are you doing?" gasped Jack, as he skidded to a stop beside Riley, who had knelt down and was listening at a door.

"Back up." Riley said, standing and putting up his palms to face the door. Jack barely made it out of the way before a bolt of fire erupted from Riley's fingertips and blasted the door off its hinges.

Riley stepped around the smoldering doorframe and into the room. "Blaire? Estelle? You in here?"

The crumpled form of a pretty teenage girl lay beside the stone remains of what might have been a hearth, years ago. Riley knelt down beside her, and lifted her face carefully. "Blaire?" He whispered in astonishment. The girl coughed, and opened her eyes.

"*That's* Blaire?" exclaimed Jack in disbelief.

"Riley," the girl said weakly, "Jonathan did it to me, too, didn't he."

Laughing with relief, Riley helped the voluptuous girl sit upright. "Yeah, it looks like he stole some years off you. I'm just happy you're still alive. On the bright side, if anybody calls you Big Blaire now, they'll be talking about something else—"

"Don't say it," said Blaire.

"You mean, this thing, Jonathan… he makes you older, somehow?" Jack asked, still staring in amazement at Blaire.

"As far as we can tell, yeah," said Riley, "Can you walk?"

"I think so," said Blaire, getting shakily to her feet. "Where's Estelle?"

"I don't know," said Riley, "but we'd better hurry. She's alone, so Jonathan will be after her next."

"Wait!" said Blaire, grabbing hold of Jack and Riley by the wrists. "He hides. You need to be able to see the dead, and I can show you how."

• • •

The cellar was small and claustrophobic, with a low ceiling. The room was bare, apart from an old furnace, which had a familiar-looking eye design drawn upon its dark surface in white chalk. In many areas, rust had eaten away at the metal leaving gaping holes in its dented sides. A fire burned at the heart of the ancient furnace, radiating uncomfortable heat and a dim, orange light.

Listening hard, Estelle heard slow footsteps heading down the stairs to the basement. "Jack?"

"Not Jack," said a low, cold voice behind her, and the fire in the furnace roared and rose, blasting Estelle with a wave of blistering heat. She spun around, but there was nobody there. She searched the dim room with cat's eyes in vain for the source of the voice.

"You know," the invisible thing said cruelly, "You were right to be afraid of the dark, weren't you, little girl? You never know what might be hiding in the shadows. Why don't we make it a bit brighter in here?"

All around her, it seemed as though the air itself was bursting into flame, bright and searing. Coughing and choking on the smoke, Estelle threw herself to the ground, searching for breathable air, and failing. *I'm going to die here,* she thought.

"Go ahead and squirm on the ground like a worm, if you must," said Jonathan mockingly, "Nothing can help you."

Estelle's vision blurred. She could feel herself slowly slipping away.

Blaire and Riley followed Jack slowly down the hallway as he invoked his magic to trace his sister's path through the old house. All three could now see the strange, ethereal creature, floating behind them on six, shining wings of smoke, following their every move. The thing appeared to have a human form, but it was wrapped from head to toe in strips of aged cloth, through which hundreds of eyes observed the small band.

"You really don't think that monster following us around is dangerous?" Riley hissed at the others.

"Believe me, I've seen stranger things," said Blaire. "It's been following us around since we got here, and doesn't seem to have any connection to Jonathan. Whatever it is, it doesn't seem to want to hurt us *or* help us. And besides, we don't have time to pick a fight with it right now. We need to find Estelle before it's too late."

"Here!" said Jack, stopping at a blank wall at the end of a corridor. "I don't know how, but her path goes right through this wall!"

"Let me see," said Blaire, pressing her palms to the crumbling wallpaper.

The blank wall shimmered and vanished. A white door marked with the symbol of an eye appeared in its place. Blair opened it, and an intense blast of hot air and blazing light exploded from the passageway beyond.

"Let's go! She's through here, and I think she's in trouble!" Jack cried urgently, as he pushed past Blaire and tore down the staircase and into the inferno.

Jonathan stood over Estelle's crumpled form. A cylindrical wall of fire surrounded the apparition, circling Jonathan in mid-air as he ran his oily, black tongue over his pointed teeth. "Out of the frying pan?" he chuckled.

"Estelle!" shouted Jack, sprinting toward her.

"I've got you covered!" cried Riley. Straining, eyes stinging with sweat, Riley fought to control the blaze, quieting its fervor and creating a gap in the roaring wall of flame so that Jack could reach Estelle.

Jonathan rose up, growing larger, cackling insanely. "You're so *weak*. This is too easy!" The wall of flame exploded before Jonathan with such force that all four children flew backwards against the dirt walls of the cellar. As Jack lifted himself and pulled Estelle toward the protection of the staircase, Blaire pulled herself upright.

"Riley! Over there! By the furnace!"

Hovering beside the furnace on wings of smoke, the strange, ethereal blinked at the children with hundreds of shifting eyes, ever vigilant. Then, in a voice that sounded like the wind rustling through dry leaves, the creature spoke, softly but distinctly, to the children. "Destroy the anchor."

"That's it!" shouted Blaire. "We need to destroy the furnace! Riley! Come on!"

Pulling himself weakly to his elbows, Riley focused the last of his strength upon the coals, burning hot and white in the heart of the furnace. "Get out of here with Jack and Estelle, Blaire," said Jack. "Run. *Now*!" Blaire dove behind the walled-off staircase, as the furnace exploded in a ball of violent flame, hurling sharp, molten scraps of rusted metal shrapnel in all directions. Jonathan howled in agony as his ethereal form dissolved in dying fire, and as the last flame died, pitch darkness fell upon the four children in the cellar.

Jack, Estelle, Riley, and Blaire lay together amid the charred wreckage of a house that had burned to the ground many years ago, holding each other in silent relief, the clear night sky above. Five figures emerged silently from the shadows, surrounding the group of exhausted children in a solemn circle. One of them stepped forward, an old man with white hair that nearly shone in the moonlight. "Welcome," he whispered. He indicated each of the children in turn. "We have been surveying you for months, Jack, Estelle, Riley, and Blaire, and you have shown tonight that you are prepared to take your place among us. We, the watchers, have come to welcome you into the Ministry of Panopticon."

Credits

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MAGE
THE AWAKENING
CHRONICLER'S GUIDE™

Table of Contents
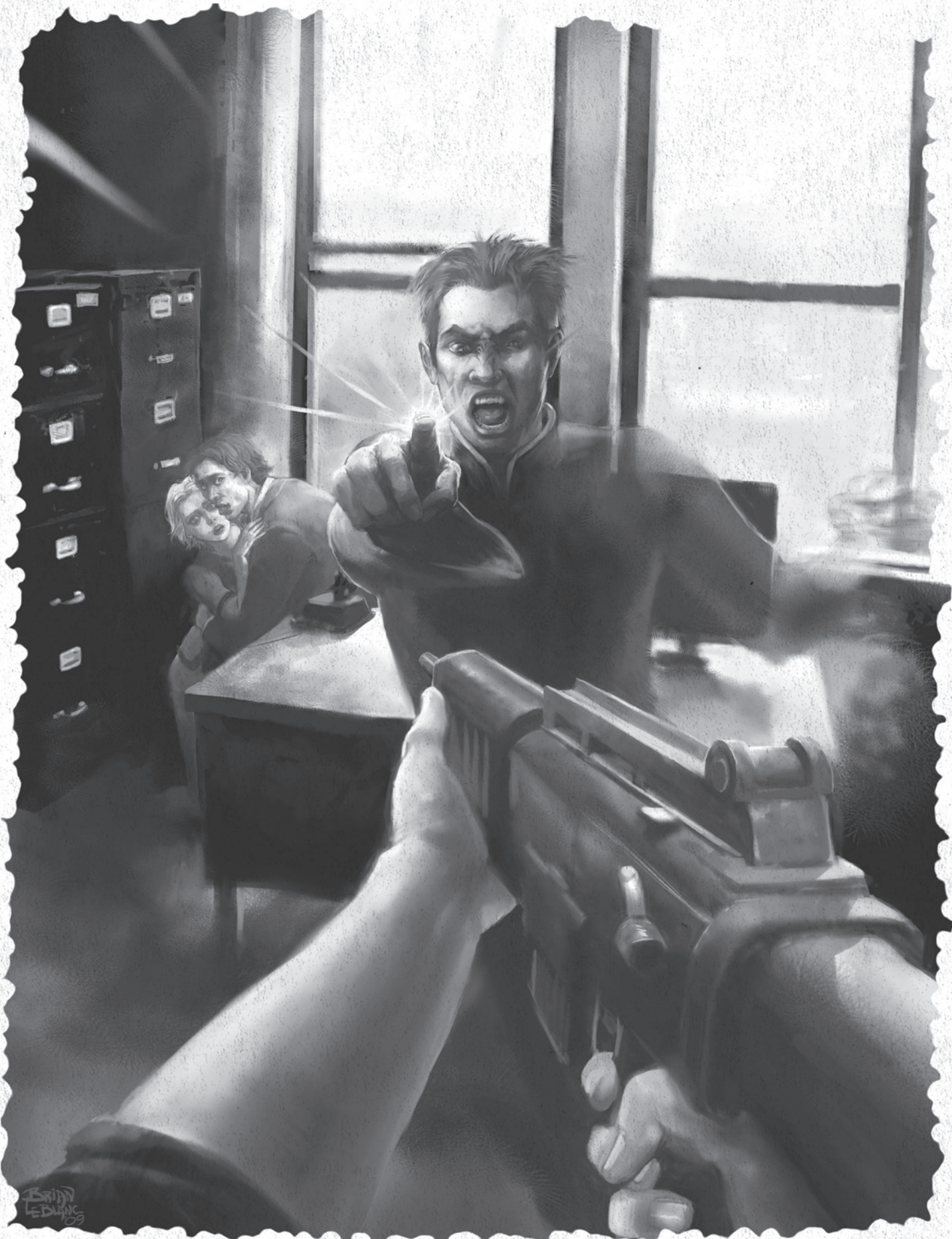
The gunman didn't see them. Bella's magic had seen to that. He just kept walking, room to room, firing. Blood, cordite, death. Andos saw the spirits of murder swarming around him. He opened his mouth to ask Bella if the spirits were responsible, but he didn't bother. He knew they weren't.

They followed the gunman, two Masters, invisible, not even physically present. They didn't stop him. They didn't because they couldn't — the Hierarch made it quite clear that Sleepers killing Sleepers was not the purview of the Awakened. That didn't mean they couldn't watch.

"I don't remember this happening so often when I was a kid," murmured Andos. "These shootings, I mean. Seems like there's a new one every week."

The gunman kicked open a door. Three women and a man were huddled behind a desk. Andos could feel their fear, their minds racing, synapses firing uselessly. Animal instinct said run fight flee but their bodies didn't have the muscle memory.

The gunman raised his weapon. He could see them in the office window's reflection. Bella looked pityingly into the women's faces.

"This is the way it's always been," she said.

Andos stared at the man. He wore a wedding ring. The woman he was clutching wasn't dressed for this office. She was dressed casually. Laundry day. Here visiting her husband on his lunch hour. Till death do us part.

"No," said Andos.

The gunman pointed the rifle. Bella looked at her cabal-mate. "No? What do you mean?"

Andos pointed at the gunman, and his mind rebelled. His brain cooked itself from the inside. He had 17 strokes at once, and fell, dead before he hit the ground.

"I mean, 'no'," he said. "Maybe it's always been like this." He looked up at Bella. "It's not like this anymore."

And he appeared before the terrified people, and extended his hand.

> *A desire presupposes the possibility of action to achieve it; action presupposes a goal which is worth achieving.*
>
> — Ayn Rand

Mage: The Awakening is a big game. Any of the World of Darkness games are, really, but **Mage** in particular covers a lot of ground. The game is about *magic*, after all, and that's a big topic — even just restricting the focus to modern sorcery in which Gnostic-style sorcerers struggle to uncover and protect the mysteries of the past, the sheer breadth of themes, settings, scales, and antagonists makes **Mage** intimidating. That's to say nothing of the freeform magic system and the material published in all of the different sourcebooks, not to mention the possibility of including characters from other World of Darkness lines.

But despite all of that, running **Mage** is nothing to be afraid of. It's just a matter of choosing what kind of **Mage** chronicle works for your troupe, and then focusing on the aspects of that chronicle. **Mage** makes for awesome stories, with compelling and dynamic characters. All a troupe needs is a bit of direction.

This book expands the **Mage** universe even further than before. Herein, we'll talk about running **Mage: The Awakening** as a *noir*-themed game, as a superhero game, and as a war game. We'll present systems for magic that drives characters crazy the more they use it, and systems for using magic as a metaphor for kung fu. It would be presumptuous to say that the **Mage Chronicler's Guide** has something for everyone, but it's safe to say that it has something for everyone who wants to play **Mage**.

What's In this Book

The **Prologue** showcases a version of **Mage** in which characters Awaken early, and are put to the test, in order to become the best examples of their faction possible.

This **Introduction** gives a quick summary of the book, its themes and its *raison d'être*.

Chapter One: Genres of the Awakened World discuss running **Mage** in seven different styles. New systems are presented where necessary, but much of the chapter is simply a discussion of tone, mood, and emphasis. What kinds of characters should show up in **Mage**-noir? What kinds of stories work well in **Mage**-action? The seven genres we discuss herein are by no means the only ones that you could use as filters for **Mage**, and hopefully these discussions will spur your troupe to see what happens to its preferred milieu when the Awakened arrive.

In **Chapter Two: Mirror Magic**, we alter the magic system a bit. Actually, from a mechanical perspective, the system stays much the same. What the system *means* changes. For instance, what if "magic" were Weird Science, instead? What if mages cast their spells by popping pills or shooting heroin? What if what the game calls "magic" was psychic powers?

Chapter Three: Building Character discusses the other important facets of the game and how to enhance and change them. That includes the individual mage, the cabal, Path, and order. The chapter ends with an in-depth discussion of magical style, how it works, what it means for your characters, and some systems to back it up.

Finally, **Chapter Four: Mage Chronicles** presents three articles on running **Mage: The Awakening**. The first discusses the scale of the game in three tiers (fans of **Hunter: The Vigil** might recognize this set-up, but if you haven't read **Hunter**, don't worry; it's all laid out for you). The second acknowledges the capacity of the Awakened to gather more information than a Storyteller might immediately wish, and how to make that work *for* the story. The final article discusses running **Mage** once the characters have become Masters and what the Storyteller needs to be aware of in such a chronicle.

The book ends with 15 **Mage** chronicles. The chronicles include brief notes from the authors about how they were conceived and the authors' experiences running such games, just to give the reader a bit of insight into what other folks have done with the game.

A brief summary of each of the 15 chronicles follows, just so you know what's in store:

The **Andrews Family Coven** examines the notion that magic might just be hereditary, and explores themes of predestination and familial obligation.

Bones of the World shows a cabal in pursuit of the wonders of the World of Darkness, and enables Storytellers to use any of the interesting plot hooks they find in any sourcebook — or from any source — they find irresistible.

Mages walk **The Chosen Path**, learning rotes while still Asleep and choosing which of the Watchtowers they will sign… provided they can find their way to the Supernal Realms.

In **Diamond: The Awakened Are One Nation**, the characters attempt to build a national (or even global) Consilium, uniting the orders and forging cooperation between all mages.

The **Epistolary Chronicle** is simply a different approach to running **Mage**, in which players have a greater degree of control over the story as their characters describe their odd experiences in a series of letters.

Furyland means war — the Consilium is engulfed in a battle against outside forces, an invading Consilium, or whoever the Storyteller would like to use as enemy soldiers.

Journey **Into the Shadow** as the Gauntlet falls, and mages must adapt not only to the sudden proliferation of spirits and spirit-Claimed Sleepers, but to the fact that the un-Awakened know about them.

The **Jianghu Modern** chronicle spins **Mage** together with the *wuxia* genre, and uses magic as an expression of kung fu.

In the **Legacy Chronicle**, the characters progress through the ranks of Awakened society as Legacy replaces order as the dominant social group.

What if magic drove mages insane? The **Mad with Power** chronicle explores this option, in a tragic and bitter expression of **Mage**'s themes of hubris.

In **Over the Falls**, the mages of Buffalo, New York meet the players' characters — mages who belong to no recognizable Paths. What does this portend for the future of the Awakened?

One of the common goals of the Awakened is **Protecting Sleepers**, and this chronicle explores this theme. It also strengthens the role that Virtue and Vice play in **Mage**.

Learn the **Secret of Shangri-La**, in which an order falls, magic runs wild, and the characters learn the terrible truth about Atlantis and the source of their power.

In **Taking Over**, the characters seek to overthrow the current regime and institute their own. What tools do they use? Manipulation? Lies? Betrayal? Assassination? Or do they go the hard route, and try truth and integrity?

Finally, **White Wolf Comics Presents: The Cabal!** Take **Mage** into the realm of four-color superheroics, complete with a system meant to represent mages in the comic universe.

CHAPTER ONE:
GENRES OF THE AWAKENED WORLD

The streetlights cast a weak, pale rectangle of light down the brick alleyway onto rusting dumpsters and old crates. A few meters beyond the reach of the feeble light, the ally extended into an ominous blackness. A thin drizzle fell from the rust-colored night sky, stirring up the ripe urban stench of exhaust, rotting refuse, and sewage.

"You're sure this is the right place, Sam? Probably ain't nothin' back there but the usual street tramps. Man, it reeks."

"Yeah, this is the place, all right."

"Whatever you say, boss." Roscoe flicked his wrist as the pair worked their way past the jumble of crates and into the thick shadows beyond. A small, bright flame ignited over his shoulder, illuminating the hazardous, garbage-strewn path ahead, and causing vermin to flee the brightness. The wet, rotting stench grew overpowering, and Sam paused, casting a quick spell to ward off the foul odor. Roscoe just gagged and covered his nose and mouth with a handkerchief. "There it is," said Sam.

"Where? I don't see nothing."

Sam approached a large heap of garbage, spilling from a dumpster turned on its side. Roscoe strained to see if something was moving in the darkness of the refuse bin.

"I was told you have something for me," Sam said, staring fixedly at the heap.

The mass of refuse moved, lurching forward suddenly. Roscoe leap backwards. Rotting food, shreds of greasy newspaper, and discarded rags assembled from the garbage in something that vaguely resembled a human torso. Nesting rats, disturbed by the movement, darted from the bowels of the grotesque thing, carrying their blind young, pink and wiggling, out of harm's way. A pair of yellow, lid-less human eyes surfaced from within a malformed lump of spoiled meat meant to be the thing's head. Broken shards of green glass formed jagged rows of teeth within its crudely improvised mouth.

"And you are...?" rasped the thing. Its yellow eyes rolled over in the rotting meat to moisten themselves in its foul juices.

"Samuel Moore. Max sent me."

The thing's eyes rolled back forward, surveying Sam carefully. Then it produced a small package wrapped in oily, wax deli paper and tied with brown twine.

"I wouldn't eat that if I were you," the creature chuckled before crumbling back into a formless heap.

Sam carefully unwrapped the package, revealing a moldering hamburger bun.

"A sandwich?" said Roscoe indignantly, peering over Sam's shoulder, "What the hell is this?"

Apprehensively, Sam lifted the upper bun, and Roscoe recoiled in revulsion at what lay beneath. A severed human ear, blue-white and drained of blood, rested on the rotting bread. A single ruby earring hung from the pierced, pale lobe, glinting in the fiery light of Roscoe's spell.

"I know these earrings, Roscoe," said Sam coldly, trembling with anger, "They belong to Annie. I gave them to her for our anniversary last year."

Mage: The Awakening is a "game of modern sorcery." But what if we look at the game through a different lens? What would happen in a chronicle if **Mage** took on the feel of a brutal, bone-crushing action adventure? What if the game was set up as a hard-boiled detective story, placing the characters in a dark, surrealistic urban environment where magic is the sole source of hope in a crumbling metropolis? And what chaos would reign if everyone, even those unable to perform magic, knew of its existence? In this chapter, we explore genres, looking at **Mage: The Awakening** in new ways, and stretching the boundaries of the game to provide a novel, diversified look at storytelling.

We examine seven genres in this chapter. Some of them aren't so very far removed from the World of Darkness as presented, and therefore don't require systems to change (Noir, for example, only needs **Mage** to become slightly more bleak and to highlight certain themes). Others are distinct enough from the **Mage: The Awakening** that we all know and love that new systems are necessary, and these are provided where appropriate.

Action Horror

Secrets burn. It just takes the right words. Fire's name is on the tip of my tongue but I hesitate, even as one of them sprouts a sharp bone and drags it down my chest. Leather rips; Kevlar holds. I waste my focus on a big exhale, twist and jump to the next I-beam. I can smell his breath (not his, its — think its) and the rotted, man-meat stink as I go.

My master once said that even above the Imago, the most important secret to casting martial rotes is forgetting that the enemy is (or was) human. So I focus on the way bones rip out of their bodies to stab and cut, on the unnatural quickness and length of their limbs as they climb chains and rebar, quick as chimps. I think of Strix. This is her magic, her sins. Not mine.

There's a rope and pulley on this side. I'll grab it and jump, casting as I fall. That way I can burn all six floors. Maybe I won't even smash my head to wet splinters on the bottom. I hitch a rope, push off the beam, and scream a bright, terrible word.

This is about bullets, gore, and fire: **Mage** as an action horror game. Action horror mixes the conventions of the cinematic action genre — creative, violent set pieces — with visceral horror motifs. The protagonists are good at fighting, but they still might be taken aback at what they have to face: zombies, magical mutants, and possessed animals, for example. There's an evil force behind them. Whether it's a person, artifact, or strange energy, there's always some greater manifestation of the malefic influence behind the violence — or to get lowbrow, it's not over until you beat the end boss.

Bullet Points

Let's drill down into mass media influences to show you where the ideas come from.

• **Classic Action Films:** This is the genre as it evolved in the 1980s: *The Terminator, Die Hard, Lethal Weapon* and the rest. The characters never slide through the action without a scratch. It's not enough to act tough; they need to show it by taking their licks. Fortitude and camaraderie are key themes.

• **Contemporary Action Films:** The 1990s introduced Hong Kong action cinema to Western mass culture. Motifs from the heroic bloodshed and *wuxia* genres brought martial arts inspired choreography and stories about conflicting social and moral obligations. For instance, in John Woo's *The Killer*, the cop Li Ying deals with the clash between his duties and his sense of justice, because hitman Ah-Jong (played by Chow Yun-Fat) is just too virtuous to bring down.

• **Survival Horror:** This film and video game genre is almost synonymous with zombies. The characters are stuck in a closed environment where they have to fight off hordes of creatures that can't be bargained with — or in the case of movies like *Alien* or *The Terminator*, single, formidable opponents. (These films may not fit everyone's definition of the genre, but for our purposes, they fit here because of the type of conflict.)

• **First and Third Person Shooters:** Shoot 'em up computer and console games have a lot to teach about the dynamics of interactive action sequences. They divide enemies up into minions, opponents with a few special tricks and "boss" characters. The environment matters and if you want to win, you need to use time economically. *HALO*'s Grunts are no big deal individually, but wasting time with them leaves you open to a shot from a nastier enemy.

• **Comics:** Some comics probably come closest to what we're going to run with as action horror. *Preacher* and *The Invisibles* mix fearsome supernatural enemies, violence, and blood in the almost perfect mix for this take on **Mage**. One thing to note here is that in comics, protagonists have coarsely distinctive motifs, like cowboy hats and favorite swear words. These are great hooks to center roleplaying.

Bringing It Back to Mage

Baseline **Mage** is a contemporary occult game: a fusion between horror and fantasy. In an action horror take on the game, magic creates monsters to fight and makes characters tough enough to tackle them. Beneath what Sleepers know, supernatural powers constantly threaten the world. Mages are the only ones with the tools and knowledge to end an

ever-spawning array of dangers. Some come from the Banishers, Seers. and Abyss; others are magical experiments gone wrong, unearthed artifacts, or monsters from the fringe of mundane reality. If the cabal fails the universe itself could die, or turn into something too strange to tolerate humanity.

Nevertheless, mages don't expect gratitude from Sleepers, who can't even see the threats surrounding them. Sleepers are dupes of evil, bystanders and occasionally, witch hunters. They turn into enemies thanks to magical mutagens, demonic possession and mind control magic, but sometimes you need to blow away some innocent soldiers to get into that Seer-controlled compound, too. Is it the right thing to do?

Summing It Up

What do we want out of an action horror **Mage** game? Pick and choose the influences you want, but we're going to go with these basic objectives:

• **Bonding:** Action horror is about bringing characters together in the face of danger. Others may fall apart, but the players' cabal builds its common morale with each challenge.

We're Dead!

The theme of ever-present, world-shattering danger begs the questions: *Don't mages ever screw up? If so, why is everyone still alive?* To get your answers you have to dump the assumption that players' characters are common representatives of their kind. These threats aren't the responsibility of all mages, all the time. The characters are special.

If the cabal blows it, feel free to destroy the world, but keep an alternative waiting in the wings. It might be time for a post-apocalyptic game, or some sinister shift in the laws of magic. Whatever you do, respect the players' failure. Choose an outcome that differs from what would have occurred if their characters had succeeded. Leave odds and ends to explore. Roleplaying games are constantly shifting, open ended narratives; tying up loose threads helps bring closure to a film but it can kill your chronicle's momentum. Respect the fact that the game is a different medium.

• **Competence:** The characters are either good fighters or clever enough to make their way through combat.

• **Fear and Gore:** Enemies are frightening because they're a danger to the world and they serve sinister powers. Even if the characters and players aren't scared, they should be able to see why the opposition's nothing to be trifled with. The supernatural is a visceral threat, featuring showers of blood, zombies, demons, and extra limbs sprouting from ripped flesh.

• **Interesting Fights:** Characters take advantage of their surroundings. Combat is tactically challenging.

• **Mortality:** Characters can die. Storytellers love to save them, but this time they have to hold back and let a protagonist fall.

• **Pacing:** By itself, wall to wall violence gets pretty dull. The next time you see an action film, take note of the things that *aren't* fights. These events establish the world, provide clues to the next action set piece, and tell the protagonists how to beat their enemies. This breaks up action scenes to keep them from getting boring, and accompanies every scene with a dramatic justification.

• **Violence is a Tragic Answer:** Violence is the best way to pragmatically resolve the chronicle's central conflicts but unlike a straight action game, action-horror doesn't extend a "free pass" that totally justifies bloodshed.

A World of Danger

An action horror setting is just a bit different from standard **Mage: The Awakening** assumptions. It's more of a spin on things than a total rewrite.

The Bloody Pentacle

The orders are like mob families. Order doctrine says they're freedom fighters, protecting humanity and magic from numerous enemies. The reality is that order mages use their power to jockey for influence in the mundane world. Consilii only exist to keep cabals from escalating small disputes into serious order wars — but those wars have been known to happen. Still, when something threatens their collective self-interest the Pentacle's members cooperate efficiently.

The higher up in the hierarchy you get, the more corruption you'll see, with the exception of a few idealists that separate themselves from the political process but are just too talented or connected to be taken down. There's plenty of room for righteousness at the bottom, however, and the players' cabal might just change things for the better.

We'll also stick to obvious tropes when they support the genre. When we look at a sneaky Guardian of the Veil we're not afraid to call a ninja a ninja.

The Adamantine Arrow is part Murder Inc, part Special Forces. If you want to run a scene where someone opens a closet with a huge rack of neatly arrayed weapons it will probably happen at an Arrow sanctum. In an action game this order has specialized body armor, silenced machine guns, and enchanted counterparts to all of the high-tech toys you see in the movies.

The Free Council has deep contacts with mundane subcultures. If you want to hook up with thugs, smugglers, and thieves, these are the people to find. This contrasts with an interest in bleeding edge technology and culture, so they're also the people to blame when one of them goes rogue and decides to use a social media site as the carrier wave of a mind control meme, or send Techgnostic cyborgs on a bloody rampage.

Guardians of the Veil are spies and assassins. They shape Awakened society by murdering or banishing anybody they don't think deserves the Art. Guardians learn arcane secrets from the rogues and solitaries they eliminate. They secretly experiment with them, opening gates that should never be opened, or creating monsters in the name of raising a mage-messiah Stories deal with these threats, along with Guardian operatives trying to cover up their mistakes.

The Mysterium is the power brokerage of Awakened currency. Mystagogues argue for consistent standards in trading magical secrets. They also act as a kind of "Q Division" in emergences. They've got a lot of dangerous things locked up in crates, waiting for the right occasion.

The Silver Ladder is dug in with high society and the occult Old Boys' Clubs of Hermetics, Freemasons, wannabe Templars. and other Sleeper groups with more ambition than real knowledge. They rule the realm of faceless bureaucrats with city-altering authority and old people you've never heard of, with more money than you can imagine. In a crisis, this largesse trickles down to operatives who need it. Use the Ladder to justify an expensive, jet-setting chronicle.

The Enemy

You can easily play a single order chronicle set during an order war, but even when the Pentacle is united there's plenty of opposition to spare.

Seers of the Throne are more numerous, with more aggressive plans to enslave humanity. If the orders are the mob, the Seers are corruption-riddled cops. In fact, orders and Seer pylons may even make deals and trade double agents.

Banishers are lone operators or have single cells, devoted to one mad ideology or another. Many Banishers have strange abilities thanks to their twisted Awakenings.

The Abyss and its followers are more numerous, but often more short-lived. The Abyss seeps in through errant magic or strange occult conjunctions. Many general supernatural antagonists are born of Abyssal resonance. It's in the Abyss' nature to ultimately manifest a guiding intelligence for the horde, however — a boss.

Action Horror Systems

Use the following optional rules to taste. Each one is designed to stand independently of the rest. Note that in addition to what you see here, **World of Darkness: Armory Reloaded** provides another set of combat hacks you can easily port into the game.

The Action Pool

The Action Pool provides a way for players to dynamically shift character priorities in combat. In an action horror game all characters have an Action Pool equal to the *two highest* out of Wits, Dexterity, and Composure. The pool refreshes at the start of every turn.

Only major Storyteller characters (what you might call *bosses* in a video game) and players' characters have Action Pools. Typical supporting characters are stuck with static Defenses and standard rules. This is done to ease play and give major characters a spotlight in action scenes.

When the Action Pool is in play, the All-Out Attack and Dodge maneuvers are redundant and cannot be used. Furthermore, characters *don't* have an automatic Defense. Supporting characters do use the regular rules, however.

Spend Action Pool points reflexively to activate and modify actions, as follows:

Where Are My Stunts?

Fans of **Exalted** and other games that reward cool descriptions may ask why there aren't these kinds of rules here. One reason is that action horror is a bit grittier than a straight shoot 'em up, but remember all **Mage** characters have an innate "stunting" ability: magic. If you allow narration-based enhancements without magic you move sorcery away from the game's heart.

As a compromise, consider using a stunt system for spells. Add dice (typically 1 to 3 depending on how well the player describes the action) or mitigate Mana costs. An awesome description means that for an instant, the player's mage brought the Fallen and Supernal into exceptional harmony.

• **Base Defense:** Spend points up to the lower of the character's Wits or Dexterity. The result is the character's standard Defense (lower of Wits or Dexterity) against all attacks. It degrades against multiple attackers as usual, *unless* those characters are Extras (see p. 20). This can be performed once per turn.

• **Buff Defense:** Spend one point to increase the character's Defense against a single attack by two. This adds to the character's current Base Defense against that one attack. You can activate this multiple times in a turn.

• **Defensive Expertise:** If the character has the Brawl or Weaponry Dodge Merits, the player can spend one point to increase the character's Defense against a single attack by the character's applicable Skill dots. This replaces the standard effects of these Merits and maneuvers.

• **Enhance Attack or Turn-Based Skill:** Spend points up to the lower of the character's Wits or Dexterity. These add an equal number of dice to a single attack roll or an active Skill check (not a check to passively notice something, for example), including the use of a rote. This ability is not available outside of turn-based action scenes.

• **Evade Gunfire:** Spend one point to reduce a single ranged attack's dice pool by two, or three points to reduce it by the *higher* of the character's Dexterity or Athletics. The character must be running, rolling, or otherwise moving to evade gunfire, and suffers standard penalties for returning fire while moving.

• **Extra Action:** Spend four points to take an extra instant action, such as casting an instant spell, attacking, or using a Skill. This action takes place immediately. Note that if the character has a Merit or other ability that grants multiple actions, this does *not* begin an additional series of those actions.

Note: If you target an Extra this maneuver only costs two Action Pool points.

• **Increase Initiative:** Spend points up to the lower of the character's Dexterity or Composure. Each point spent increases the character's Initiative by two for the upcoming turn.

• **Success Wager:** Spend points up to the lower of the character's Wits or Composure, attached to a single dice roll. If that roll scores even one success, add these points as additional successes. If the roll fails, the expended points have no effect.

What's In the Action Pool?

The Action Pool is designed with a number of things in mind. First of all, the pool is calculated to give characters with a Mental or Social Attribute enough focus to avoid being overshadowed in an action-filled chronicle. It also gives every character a few more dice to play with in combat, increasing competency across the board. This privilege is available to players' mages and major foes, enforcing a competence hierarchy of Extra, supporting character and major protagonists or antagonists (players' characters and "bosses"). Finally, the staple ability to dodge bullets is built right in.

Most characters using the pool can get an extra action in. For mages, this means they can cast a spell as well as make an attack. The Action Pool also provides ways to boost rote spells, encouraging players to stick to their favored tricks. Success Wagers provide an alternative to simply buffing attacks, since the points are worth more after the fact.

Extras

Extras are minor characters that get mowed down by protagonists, monsters, and other threats. They're a time-honored tradition in the action genre — and more to the point, they make Storytelling a violent game easier. Here's how they work.

Extras have Hits, not Health: Extras harass the characters on the way to a more important opponent and fall down to demonstrate how potent their attacker is. That's why they have Hits: the number of shots it takes to knock them out of the fight. It doesn't matter what kind of damage they take or how much (or even that it be a conventional attack — fear spells and the like work fine, too). Instead, each successful shot removes a Hit.

Most Extras have one Hit. Elite Extras have two and supernaturally potent Extras *might* have three, but use multiple-Hit Extras sparingly, lest you lose the whole point of employing them. Once downed, an Extra might not be dead, but he won't figure in the fight again.

If you use critical hits (see below) you may decide that all damage inflicted on the final Hit is critical damage, adding a graphic tone to action scenes. Every bullet sends brain matter and bone chunks flying; swords hack through arms. Extras don't get a Stamina roll to mitigate critical hits. If you use this option, six or more successes (or damage) on an attack inflict *two* Hits of damage, along with a critical hit if that makes sense for the attack type.

Extras Have Hits, Initiative, Speed, Defense and Dice Pools — That's It: Like noncombatants, Extras don't need every detail fleshed out, just the stuff that matters in a fight. Most Extras only need a single dice pool to determine attack strength. This can be as high as you like, since Extras can be legitimately dangerous. You might add a secondary dice pool to represent a relevant noncombat talent.

Extras Always Attack the Character's Base Defense: Multiple Extras don't reduce a character's Defense the way standard multiple attackers do. They always lose dice based on the character's standard Defense (or the Base Defense she's opted for if you use the Action Pool).

Some Extras Are Conditional Extras: In the case of supernatural assailants, some of them *might* be Extras if an attacker knows a special way to defeat them. Think of the vampires in *Blade*. They're scary until you use a silver weapon — then they're Extras. Similarly, some zombies are tough until you shoot them in the head. Other examples include mind-controlled minions who fall into a state of disarray when their master dies, or demons cut off from the Verge that gives them strength on Earth. Until the cabal finds out the secret, these opponents are tough, full-fledged foes.

Critical Hits

The following systems exist to drive home the horrific element of violence. In an action-horror game people don't take generalized scratches and bruises. They lose eyes and hands. Organs spill out. It's not pretty.

In these rules, a critical hit is a special effect that occurs alongside aggravated damage — but serious damage like aggravated wounds are easier to mete out. Whenever a strike in combat scores more damage than the opponent's Size, any damage in excess of Size is upgraded to the next most severe damage type. Bashing becomes lethal; lethal turns aggravated.

Example: *Zeno shoots a security guard, inflicting a base seven points of lethal damage. Five points stay lethal, but on the Size 5 guard, two points are aggravated.*

When a character suffers aggravated damage, roll for its location on the following table. Alternately, a character can specify a target before attacking, but this imposes a penalty to the player's roll based on the location. Penalties are included in parentheses.

Die Roll	Hit Location*
1–3	One leg (victim chooses; –1)
4–6	Torso (–1)
7–8	Dominant arm (–2)
9	Non-Dominant arm (–2)
10	Head (–3)

* Generalized injuries such as explosive effects are always considered to be torso hits.

Once you've determined location it's time to figure out the Severity of a critical hit. Base Severity is equal to the aggravated damage the attacker inflicted with that single shot. The target may reduce it by making a Stamina roll. Mundane conditions (wounds, etc.) never penalize this roll, but each critical hit already sustained imposes a –1 penalty to the roll. On a dramatic failure, increase Severity by one.

You *never* add the Severity of two critical hits, but their effects are cumulative. For example, two Severity 1 hits to the arm subtract two from applicable actions.

Option: If you don't think the players' characters should get maimed as easily make their Severity reduction roll Stamina + Composure. (Yes, it's cinematic, so it's about attitude.)

Severity	Effect
0–1	The character suffers a –1 penalty to all actions involving the affected body part. This is cumulative and lasts for the scene.
2	Body part is useless for the next turn. If the location is the head, the character cannot act at all — she's stunned by a shower of blood or near-knockout blow. If it's a leg or torso hit, the character falls prone.
3	Body part is useless for the scene. Other effects are as for the Severity 2 injury.
4	Indefinite crippling injury in the body part as it is severed, crushed, or burned. If the head is the target, this causes permanent (to normal medicine at least) deafness, blindness, or the loss of one Mental or Social Attribute dot. If target is the torso, this causes the loss of one Physical Attribute dot. These losses can be recovered with experience points, but the character's ceiling on increasing the Attribute drops by the amount lost (one per applicable critical hit). Once this cripples an arm or leg, the character is immune to further damage in that hit location.
5+	Death. This is instant if the attacker is willing to risk a Morality/Wisdom check (see below). Otherwise, the victim is completely incapacitated, and dies at the end of the scene unless someone renders immediate, skilled aid (usually five successes on an extended Wits + Medicine roll, one roll per turn). If the character survives, she suffers a Severity 4 effect.

Without supernatural aid, the Severity of any non-lethal critical hits drops by one per week, but Severity 4 effects never go away. They leave scars, limps, and stumps. Fortunately, mages can heal critical hits magically, removing their effects. Each affected body part must be healed separately in this fashion as if it were an aggravated wound equal to its Severity. Other supernatural creatures heal critical hits in the same way, using their own methods for healing aggravated wounds. Supernatural healing methods remove even persistent Severity 4 effects.

Moral and Psychological Effects: Inflicting a critical hit is traumatic for the attacker as well. Maiming a living (or lifelike, like a vampire) being only pleases desperate people and psychopaths. Any critical hit is a Morality (or Wisdom) 8 sin. Maiming someone in a fight *the character* started is at least an Impassioned Crime (Morality 4), even if the ultimate aim is some greater good. (That's what *everyone* thinks they're doing.) As mentioned in the Severity table, the player can choose to instantly dispatch the recipient of a Severity 5+ hit by voluntarily making Morality check, typically against murder (Morality 3). In cases of multiple critical hits, wait until the scene's end and tally the worst hits per victim.

Using magic to inflict critical hits on living, feeling beings is worse than mundane methods. The mage is directing his innermost being toward mutilating or killing a victim. Rate this as a Wisdom sin one rank worse than its mundane counterpart.

Tactical Features

The enemy has a secret weakness. You could make it to the other side by grabbing the chain and swinging. You've found the perfect ambush spot. These are all Tactical Features: elements of the fight that can turn things in the character's favor if she plays her cards right. Tactical Features are often a way for characters without a combat focus to contribute to an action scene. They figure out an occult, scientific, or psychological tactic to even the odds.

Storytellers should provide at least one Tactical Feature in every action horror combat (or let the players propose one, if it makes sense). Create them using the following system:

Description: A Tactical Feature can be a great snipers' nest, the opponent's supernatural weakness supernatural opponent, a psychological flaw that drives the enemy to distraction—anything that lends an advantage. All other game systems are subordinate to the feature's in-game rationale. Story logic trumps dice rolls.

Activation Requirement or Drawback: You need to give to get. To use a Tactical Feature usually requires a dice roll to get to it or figure it out, or imposes some kind of penalty. Give this a 1 to 5 rating. This rating is the penalty it imposes to one or more actions or to Defense; this is called the *activation difficulty*. (If you levy a penalty, make sure it's relevant to the scene in progress. An Academics penalty in the middle of a firefight usually doesn't count. Then again, you *are* dealing with mages.)

Some Tactical Features require an extended action instead. These provide benefits for an extended period of time (see below). In these cases, impose a required number of successes and a 1 to 5 rating. The rating is the maximum strength of the linked benefit (see below) per turn.

Benefit: A Tactical Feature usually provides a bonus dice equal to the activation difficulty to one particular dice pool. A sniper's nest with an activation difficulty of three (probably applied to Stealth rolls to capture it) adds three dice to Dexterity + Firearms attacks.

The benefit usually lasts for one turn unless activating the Tactical Feature required an extended action. If it did, the benefactor gains a bonus up to the Feature's rating or a portion thereof, across multiple turns until the user runs out of successes. The benefit also stops when the opponent nullifies it in a way that makes sense in the story. A sniper's nest stops working when you blow it up.

Optionally, Tactical Features can provide other benefits: bonus damage to successful attacks or penalties to attackers' pools, for example. The benefit should be proportional to the activation difficulty. The character who activated the feature need not be the one to benefit from it; if it makes sense in the story she can pass it to somebody else.

Stories to Kill For

The ingredients for an action horror chronicle are interesting combat scenarios, frightening opponents, and plot-driven pacing that lets action escalate quickly enough to excite players without wearing itself out. Here are three story seeds that can help you generate this type of chronicle. In fact, you can string them together into a full chronicle if you like.

• **Five Filthy Fingers:** The Arrows think he's a lazy bastard. She slept with the théarch's daughter. He sold your Libertine brother out to a Guardian. The Guardian swapped that Libertine's secrets for Tass-laced heroin. His dealer's a Mystagogue who learned to make magical opiates from a stolen grimoire. They're all scum — perfect for the kind of action the Consilium's planning. As crooks and outcasts from their orders, they're expendable, worth wasting on a risky plan to take down a Seer pylon. If the "Dirty Five" get into the enemy's compound during a high-level meeting they'll be reinstated in their orders, with privileges.

• **Dark Operations:** The name has two connotations. First, it's what mages call the escalating series of phenomena that have appeared, source unknown, across the past 25 years. Inmates at a local penitentiary scrawled diagrams of impossible machines in their own blood, while babbling in Atlantean. Ghosts reconfigured medical waste into dripping bodies of pus and fat. They steal tools and body parts in 33-day cycles. A cargo of steel went missing when the train came through town; the cop working the station shot three people, then himself. Whatever's behind it all is powerful, ruthless, and *building something*.

Next, the name stands for the response. The Adamantine Arrow will supply guns, gear, and commandos to mop things up, but the players' cabal must take the long lead, tracking the Dark Operations to their source, and fighting half-dead monsters and Atlantean automata on the way.

• **Order War:** They've been sharpening their knives, ensorceling their weapons, and giving birth to hideous servitors, all behind each other's backs. Then it happened: a simple theft and corpse was enough to set the orders at each other's throats. This time it's the Mysterium and Adamantine Arrow against the Guardians of the Veil and Silver Ladder, while Libertines make bank selling rotes and favors to both sides.

The players' cabal has to decide its loyalties and get the warring sides focused on one question: who was the murderer and thief who started it all in the first place? The characters have to get past the defenses of paranoid Masters, and make risky deals to investigate. The mission is sure to lead to a dangerous figure who's been preparing for war all along. He'll have the soldiers and resources to show for it, setting the stage for an intense final battle.

Alakazam! Awakening Pulp!

Betty "Brassy" Braun hit the ground with both knees and spit blood out onto the solid steel floor of the bridge's massive pedestrian walkway. She never took her eyes off the Marquise and he swayed on his feet. The gash on his side from where she'd caused the metal of the bridge to twist up and bite him would kill him, but maybe not soon enough. The reflective wound caused by the Paradox she'd created was just as likely to kill her.

She staggered to her feet. The high winds of their elevated position whipped her hair back over her shoulders. The Marquise kept wavering and wiped blood from cheek with a cruel grin. "You've killed me before, Brassy. What makes you think it'll stick this time?"

Her eyes flicked from him to the iron support wire he stood in front of. A foot of air between him and the wire, maybe two. She had a choice to make as he reached his hands up into the air, drawing storm clouds to his aid. Death, or a hero's death.

It wasn't much of a choice.

"This time is different, Marquise."

He threw up his hands in exultation of the lightning storm above. "How is this time different?" he cried into the clouds.

"This time, I'm seeing you to Hell personally." Before he could respond, she jerked forward, bear-crushing him to the wire that she commanded to wrap up around both of them, encasing them in steel, just as the lightning lanced down toward the bridge.

Action! Adventure! Romance! Mind Bending Horror! In the early days of mass media, the pulpwoods, or Pulp magazines, thrilled the imaginations of their readers with the fulfilled promise of passion and danger mixed with heavy doses of the incredible. While much of the writing in Pulp magazines was dismissed as talentless crap by the literary elite (and much of it was, honestly) Pulp was very good at one thing: entertainment.

Pulp as a genre is represented by vivid, seat-of-your-pants entertainment with larger-than-life characters, settings, and plots. It is this bigger-than-big principle that makes it so perfect for a **Mage: The Awakening** chronicle. When a Storyteller employs the Pulp style in her stories, she has no need to hold back her imagination or the imaginations of her players.

Pulp often includes the following elements:

• **Mystery**, whether a challenge for the brooding gritty detective or the curious and plucky reporter, is at the center of many a good Pulp story. It need not be a straightforward whodunit to add the feel of mystery to a chronicle. Strange artifacts from lost civilizations or enemies whose abilities defy reason can all paint a dark coat of mystery over the tales a Storyteller crafts.

• **Science Fiction** may not have been born in the pulpwoods, but it cut its teeth there. When adventures just need to be amazing, Weird Science and out-of-this-world encounters are the order of the day in a Pulp story.

• **Unspeakable Horror** creeps at the darkest edges of the minds of mages, and the Abyss begs a careless mage into madness. While this sort of story may be a stand-alone genre, H.P. Lovecraft wrote many stories for the Pulp magazines of his era, and so a healthy taste of twisted monstrosity always fits a Pulp mood.

• **Romance,** passion runs high and love can be a tool as sanctified or sanctimonious as a Storyteller wishes. Whatever the ideal expressed, love and hate are big concepts and love is as likely to consume a thoughtless mage as a vendetta might.

Whatever tropes a Storyteller draws from Pulp, the point of the genre more than anything else is the creation of a story that is as fun as it is clever, as engaging as it brilliant. Action is the rule of the day, and a Pulp story should pull no punches.

But What Is Pulp?

Because so much came out of the magazines, popular science fiction, mysteries, fantasy, the argument could be made that in order to know what ties all those subgenres together, you need to see it, read it, and hear it. With that in mind, here are some examples.

• **Read It:** It's easy to start with the comics, but make sure you start well before "antihero" was the common trope. You have to look back to the age of Captain Marvel and the Shadow. But don't stop there! Over the years, writers from Lord Dunsany and Lovecraft through Raymond Chandler, C. L. Moore, and Ray Bradbury made their way writing Pulp for the magazines of the area, and much of that work is available to read on the Internet or in fantastic anthologies reprinted for your convenience. While reading, take note of the sheer size of the characters, from Doc Savage through Sam Spade, these men and women made the pages they stood on worth reading.

• **See It:** Film is full of Pulp brought to life, and while the easy picks exist (*The Mummy* (1999) and *Sky Captain and World of Tomorrow* (2004) to name just two), movies like *Big Trouble in Little China* (1986) have some of the Pulp feel in a slightly more down to earth setting.

• **Hear it:** The importance of radio drama in its golden age cannot be stressed enough. Hearing and listening to the serial adventures of classic Pulp characters not only gives the listener a good insight into the genre, but also the age from which the genre was born. While collections of classic radio are available, much of it has entered the public domain, and so you can find Inner Sanctum right next to Candy Mason. And don't neglect Varity shows or news broadcasts, as they may help set the mood during game, or even as plot points themselves.

• **Play it:** Several Pulp-themed roleplaying games have graced game store shelves. **Hollow Earth Expedition** (Z-Man Games), **Spirit of the Century** (Evil Hat Productions) and **Adventure!** (White Wolf) are all excellent games, and exemplify the Pulp milieu.

The Awakening as an Adventure

A great deal of **Mage: The Awakening** fits the Pulp genre with little or no variation. Don't reinvent the wheel. That time and creativity should instead be spent using the wheel to rocket down a hill side at 110 miles an hour after a horde of escaped genetic experiments with guns blazing! The Pulp genre doesn't introduce any changes to **Mage**'s game systems (though we do recommend reading the Weird Science section in Chapter Two).

The Setting

With the possible exceptions of far-flung future stories or space operas, most Pulp fits well in the real world, bending only so much as is necessary to make life more exciting and colorful for the heroes and antiheros of the story. Don't ignore the grim side of the World of Darkness just because the genre is thrilling. Grit, grime, and death all play their parts in the genre. After all, greed, rage, and hate are powerful motivators. A story about a cabal of mages chasing a nemesis across the globe because he has a powerful and dangerous artifact is dynamic and adventurous. A story with the same situation in which political corruption and maybe even war lets the villain escape time and time again is very much in-theme for both Pulp and the World of Darkness.

The Magic

Magic is powerful, wild, and as dangerous as it is beneficial. Given the choice, most people would have to be either stupid or insane to willingly accept the Awakening if they knew the true dangers inherent. The intrepid heroes of a **Mage** chronicle don't have a choice, of course. They are doomed or destined to Awakening and the keys to reality are just beyond their fingertips. The Arcana themselves can be treated as High Atlantean Magic, shades of real world mysticism, or even unique and inexplicable powers.

The Secrets

Secrecy and the unknown are as important to the Pulp genre as action. Mages might take for granted that they know where they come from and how their magic works. In a Pulp setting, a Storyteller should strip away certainty. Why hand out the story of Atlantis, the truth of the Watchtowers, or even what it is a character's Path really stands for? Some of the greatest adventures come from seeking to answer unanswerable questions.

The Enemies

Much of the menace mages face is well suited to the genre. Shadowy cults serving hidden masters, lone maniacs with incredible power, and the ghosts of dead tyrants

who cling to their power from the grave all have their place in a good action story. It's less the antagonists and more in the presentation. A Storyteller trying to evoke the feel of genre should avoid a Consilium chess game and rather drop them in the middle of heated debate that borders just barely on the edge of war. If the story demands a quiet warning from a shadowy threat, remember that even a quiet, shadowy character can be larger than life. He might gibber or seethe with mad rage as he threatens the characters with a fate worse than death should they ever seek to approach his fell master.

The Seers of the Throne are excellent villains for a Pulp chronicle. Just strip away any hint of moral ambiguity. They're the *bad guys*, and you can tell because they have huge armies of brainwashed soldiers, their leaders rave about world domination (but cower in fear of their Exarch masters), and their magic is ritualistic and stilted. If you have to make it any more obvious, have the Seers speak with German accents.

Changing the Game

Not all Awakening conventions fit into the Pulp genre, and to give players a full experience, a Storyteller should make a few changes.

Science!

In the golden age of Pulp, from the comics to the radio, all forms of popular fiction had seeds of the idea that science can solve all problems. In the 1940s and 50s, the scientific community was making huge strides, and the media responded with grandiose exaltation of just what science was capable of. The spark of passion for the future ran the gambit from the bored housewife being assured that her "kitchen of the future" would fill her day with free time by making everything easier, to children who were assured that some day they would go to school on the moon.

The Pulp magazines responded by filling their pages with larger-than-life scientific possibilities. Detective shows used unbelievable pseudoscience to catch criminals that contemporary forensics would never have been able to touch. The fields of medicine and psychology were stretched to the breaking point to create heroes who could handle any problem laid out for them — so long as they used Science!

In truth, the trope of spectacular science isn't so very different from the use of magic in Awakening. To the mage, all things are possible through the right combination of understanding, Arcana, and the will to act. For the scientist in the Pulp genre, anything is possible through the right combination of know-how, equipment, and sheer genius.

For more on using Weird Science in a chronicle, see p. 56.

Creating the Hero

When considering the heroes of a Pulp adventure, brilliant personality and vibrant characteristic help to fit characters into the mood of the genre. Of course, every character should be the player's own creation, so they need not crib classic comic and magazine characters.

Character background is as important as concept and the dots on a sheet. After all, a character might have enough expertise in the Mind Arcanum to control the dreams of others, but that the mage learned this talent thanks to having studied with a potent Aboriginal shaman in Australia while doing time in a penal colony is far more important to the mood of the Pulp chronicle.

The standard World of Darkness character creation rules require the player to spread a character's capabilities out somewhat. The Pulp genre is somewhat more welcoming of a character who shines in scientific endeavors, for instance, but has few other noticeable skills. As an extension of that, a Storyteller may forgo the normal confines of picking primary, secondary, and tertiary Attributes or Skills, and instead give the players a large pool, (12 dots in Attributes and 22 dots in Skills,) so they can spend the points wherever they see fit.

Adding "Pow" to the Paths

If a Storyteller is using Paths in his Pulp chronicle, below are some possible variations to the standards she might consider. These variations are thematic, not mechanical — an Acanthus in a Pulp chronicle still takes Time and Fate as her Ruling Arcana. For a possible variant, though, consider changing the favored Attribute from Resistance to Power. Pulp characters are forceful, driven, and (again) larger-than-life. It makes more sense for a Pulp mage to gain a dot in Intelligence (the super-scientist Moros, the mesmerist Mastigos), Presence (the charismatic Obrimos, the impossibly charming Acanthus), or even Strength (the raised-in-the-wilds Thyrsus).

(For more on a chronicle without Paths, a viable option for a Pulp setting, see p. 103.)

It's worth noting that for the purposes of the examples below, the idea of the mystery play has been tossed out of the door. While the dive into Jungian psychology works perfectly well for **Mage**'s standard themes of "as above, so below," Pulp requires more dramatic beginnings for larger-than-life heroes.

Acanthus: The Touched, blessed or cursed by primordial outsiders they glide through danger with Fate and Time to protect them. Some are born to families long blessed by forces from outside the normal world. Some are just lucky bastards full of guile and cunning with no clear reason why or how. The Touched make excellent

allies and cabal mates so long as you don't invite them to a card game or your daughter's 18th birthday party. **Pulp Concept:** Lucky Mike wasn't just born with a silver spoon in his mouth, he was born on a pile of gold bullion. Blessed from childhood with "Loki's Favor," this devilish, handsome rake always gets the breaks, and always arrives in the nick of time.

Mastigos: The Mesmerists, manipulators and tainted by nightmares, control Mind and Space. Mesmerists understand secrets no man is meant to know, either by willful pact with creatures in darkness or by accidentally stumbling across lost books of forbidden magic. Some masters are guilty of nothing, tainted by fate or ancestral relation to the demonic. Not all Mastigos must be evil, but finding one with pure intentions is as precious as diamonds in the sea. **Pulp Concept:** She claims to have been raised by Gypsies, but it's a cover — Mila, known to her friends and enemies alike as "Madam Medea," cultivates her terrifying, demonic persona to frighten the Hell out of those who oppose her.

Moros: The Necromancers, slaves to the soil or lords of the dead, wield Death and Matter thanks to their connection to the dust we must all return to. Some come to the madness of these occult arts through years of study or perhaps after having died and crawled their way from the Underworld to settle business by returning to life. Among the Necromancers, the world possesses endless riches, and endless rot. **Pulp Concept:** "We are all matter," states Dr. Albedo, "even in death, we are nothing but matter, and matter can be manipulated." This super-scientist works tirelessly on finding the secret to re-invigorating dead tissue. He won't say why, but he keeps a cameo with a woman's face in his glove at all times.

Obrimos: The Chosen, brilliant warriors of Forces and Prime, get their start on the battlefields of war or crime. Cops, soldiers, and devoted clergy Awaken from Sleep when the night is at its darkest. When death and failure seem unavoidable, a distant voice, a beam of light, or a mysterious and luminous stranger lends aid, changing the Sleeper into one Chosen by light. **Pulp Concept:** Officer Rodney should have died in a shootout with the Mafia, but he firmly believes that God saved him that night. Now, in the darkest, most trying times, he can silence the chaos of battle, repel the speeding bullets, and rise above the violence, a champion of light.

Thyrsus: The Wild, ever changing masters of beasts and of their own flesh with Life and Spirit. Some are wild children, raised far outside of so-called civilized society. Some are born to the call of the wild through an ancestry full of were creatures and shape shifters. Whether the Wild are vine-swinging nature boys, or relentless physical brutes honed on mercenary missions

in wet jungles, they are destined to be outsiders among "normal" civilians. **Pulp Concept:** Harmony West followed her father into the deepest jungles on one of his insane expeditions. She won't speak of what they found there, but she insists he didn't die. He merely returned to the Earth, and before he vanished entirely, he showed her the secrets of the Living World.

The Orders in a Pulp Setting

Of course, a hero is far more than just who she was meant to be. The choices she makes and ultimately the order she chooses to join has as much influence on her adventure through a Pulp setting. Note how the character interacts with her chosen order, whether it is as a band of brothers or cogs in a huge clandestine machine where one hand can't see the other, let alone know what it's doing. Also, it's worth noting that apostates can be treated just as they are in a standard setting. A mage without an order is a mage who has something to hide and most are distrusted out of hand, and of course, the shadowy loner fits the genre perfectly (provided, of course, the shadowy loner is willing to make an exception to his usual "I work alone" ethos for the rest of the troupe's characters).

Adamantine Arrow: A world that is filled with excitement is also fraught with danger. No matter the setting, an order of mages with a focus on martial magic is a natural outgrowth of that potential danger. In a Pulp setting, the Arrow might be a paramilitary organization with lofty goals, or a network of loosely connected mercenaries who exchange notes but ultimately operate to protect reality independently. Officer Rodney is a member of the Adamantine Arrow.

Mysterium: Little needs to change to make the Mysterium fit this genre. After all, a secret society of bookworms and anthropologists with a bent to collect and protect the world's hidden magical mysteries is perfect for a Pulp setting. Harmony West joined the Mysterium shortly after returning to civilization.

Silver Ladder: Nouveau riche, old money, or political animals, the Silver Ladder can remain a magical Old Boys club. Anyone drawn to money and power finds himself right at home among the Ladder. For a twist, a Storyteller hoping to use the Weird Science approach to magic in her setting might create a branch of the Silver Ladder entirely out of experimental research scientists. With the Ladder's wealth and influence, strange science could be funded to save the world from devastation at a good profit. Madam Medea is a member of the Silver Ladder.

Guardians of the Veil: A secret society of assassins is nearly as deliciously Pulp as a group of librarian relic hunters. Still, a Storyteller should strip away a player's

assumptions about the order to fit it into genre. Sure, in theory, they should be protecting the Veil, but what if no operative on the field really knows what that means? What if most Guardians are pawns in some massive game, moved around the board by hands they can never identify? Guardians might belong to a cabal, but only because secret masters wish it so. They appear like cloaked assassins behind masks to help or harm. A cabal with a Guardian in it should spend a fair amount of time trying to determine if he is a guardian angel, or a double agent. Lucky Mike is a Guardian of the Veil, but very few people know it.

Free Council: Freedom and new ideas are an American ideal second to none. While a Storyteller might take the approach of jamming the Free Council into a gang of anarchists, should the story warrant it, a more interesting approach might be to cloak the heroes and villains of the order in red, white, and blue. The Council might be pushing a break from the old European systems of leadership among mages because it's the American way, painting them as patriots rather than malcontents and idealists. Also, if a Storyteller wanted Weird Science but just not in the hands of Silver Ladder, it might find a special place here among the free thinkers of the Council. Scientific innovation is progress toward a better reality for all people, after all. Dr. Albedo is a member for exactly that reason.

Join Our Heroes Next Week for the Further Adventures Of…

• **A Dagger in the Back:** The War is over, and people are trying to put their lives back together. Just because the active fighting is over and "peace" has been declared, doesn't mean the enemy is gone. It can be the Nazis, the Russians, or the Seers of the Throne — the important thing is that the characters are veterans of combat (and so giving the players some extra experience points to reflect this is appropriate). The characters discover that a beloved mentor was actually with the Enemy, and was grooming them as spies and soldiers. After stopping their mentor, the characters realize they now have unique knowledge of how the Enemy works, and it is up to them to seek them out in the darkest corners of society. Expect the path to include dangerous animals, buxom seductresses, assassins, and violent biker gangs.

• **The Mad Mayan Mummy:** A contact from the Mysterium reaches out to the cabal, asking them if they would be willing to do a "dangerous, possibly deadly" job for them in the tropical lowlands of Honduras. Apparently, virgin girls from all over the region have been going missing and it's up to the characters to find out why. That's just the hook, however, the mage in question knows the

disappearances have to do with a lost Mayan pyramid in that area recently uncovered after centuries lost in the jungle. Deep inside an immortal foe stirs, a monstrous Tremere Lich who hungers for virgin flesh and has many potent and powerful artifacts at his disposal. If the cabal survives and defeats its foes, the Mysterium and his men will clean the place out and give the mages a fat reward, if they don't… only the Mayan hells await!

• **The Philanthropist's Folly:** Winston Margrave, noted philanthropist, is turning 65 this year. He's retiring, leaving his charity organizations and businesses in the hands of his beloved children. Still, he feels like a life of public service only scratches the surface, and so he'll tell anyone who will listen. So, in retirement, Winston has struck on a plan, he will create a band of heroes to dog evil and obliterate mayhem with him as their benefactor so long as he still lives. He contacts the cabal, somehow, offering them a king's ransom if only they'll help him right wrongs no court can touch. The only problem is that Winston is only a Sleeper. He has no idea about the Awakened world, and so if the cabal takes him at his offer, they will have to perform his quests all the while assuring old Winston stays in the dark about what's really going on in the city he loves so dearly to protect the Veil and the old man from Guardians who might object to him knowing the truth.

Epic Fantasy

The forest had no trees, but the Polisi still called it a forest. Columns of yellowed bone rose out of a floor of solid basalt ahead. Each one supported a dome of pale skin supported by ribs of long, thin bone.

Like the wings of dragons, Miril noted.

"That's where Galis went?" Bur asked, perhaps wishing he hadn't been so quick to volunteer as her companion.

Miril closed her eyes and reached. "Can't you feel him? The Nakrida ambushed him on the road and brought him back to their nest."

"The Nakrida do not take prisoners. If they took Galis into Bone Forest, he will soon be dead, if he is not already."

"Nevertheless, we must go. Galis was carrying an Orb of Solace. Even if he resists the interrogation of the Nakrida warlocks and doesn't reveal its word of activation, the Society will have lost its only Orb of Solace without unraveling the secret of its making."

"You didn't tell me it was a retrieval mission when you asked for my protection," Bur growled.

"If you wish to stay here…"

"No," Bur said. "I know Bone Forest as well as any sorcerer within a month's travel. If I let you go in there alone, you'll die."

"Even without you I'm not completely defenseless, you know."

"No, but neither is the dragon who hunts here."

"Dragon?" It was the first time Bur had heard the arcanist betray fear.

Bur nodded grimly and drew the great sword from the sheath on his back. "I hope your Society rewards you well for your courage."

Here be dragons. And trolls and unicorns and any other wondrous creature, place, or artifact the human mind can imagine. This takes **Mage** into parallel worlds of great magic and precious few technological advances. Mages are teachers, defenders, explorers, diplomats, enforcers, and rulers.

It is certainly possible to use these rules for a story or chronicle set in ancient Atlantis, but that's only one of many possibilities. Before beginning an epic fantasy chronicle, the troupe should discuss the way the world in which the game will take place works. This can be as simple or detailed as the group wishes, but while fantasy allows for exceptions to just about any rule, the setting should be internally consistent.

Creation Myths

What makes an epic fantasy chronicle? Here are some likely tropes.

Ancient Wonders

The world is old beyond imagining. Countless civilizations have risen and fallen, leaving secrets and magical treasures buried in the ruins. Sometimes the guardians over places of power survive the cataclysms that destroyed their masters. Ancient wards and traps continue to function even after their creators have turned to dust. Some mages seek out these lost temples and buried cities in search of forgotten wonders. Not all relics of ancient civilizations are beneficial, though, and sometimes what was lost ought to remain lost.

Supernal Influence

Supernatural energy is readily available in the world, and the characters have no shortage of strange and magical places to explore. Supernal energy suffuses many places, creating regions that resemble the Supernal Realms in some way. No two Supernal regions are identical. One Arcadian forest might be positively thick with fairies, while another might seem like a normal forested wilderness that happens to enjoy an eternity of winter. Though most people avoid Supernal regions, mages often find themselves traveling them. Sometimes they must identify and neutralize some threat that originated in a Supernal region. Other times they have diplomatic or other business that carries them into a Supernal region. And some mages enter Supernal regions to study them or to exploit their unique properties.

Many Nations

Humans occupy many nations scattered throughout the world. These range in size from hamlets to city-states to empires and in character from republics to monarchies to theocracies. The exact role of the Awakened varies from place to place. In some, mages rule openly. In others, they act as the powers behind thrones. In still others, they may be distrusted or openly attacked by non-mages.

Further, humans are only one of many sapient species in the world. Some creatures are confined to a particular Supernal region, but others have vast empires. While some of these nonhuman civilizations are the constant allies or sworn enemies of humanity, most have more complex relationships with humankind, and many have had little or no contact with humans. Some human nations have nonhuman rulers. Some nonhuman nations have human rulers. And some nations have citizens of many different species living together. Most major sapient species have mages or possess magical powers that allow them to protect their interests.

Higher Powers

Powers beyond the power of mortals to defy inhabit the world or wander it, and even mages have only limited influence over them. Godlike beings rule in some places, whether their domain is a largely deserted Supernal region or an ambitious and expanding empire. The lords and princes of the Supernal Realms are not spirits in some faraway place but fully manifested deities with alien minds and goals inscrutable to human understanding. It is possible that the most powerful of these exert godlike influence over the whole world, pitting whole civilizations against each other as though they were playing a game. Even these meddlesome deities have their limits, spelled out in ancient prophecies that tell how a god may be thwarted, manipulated, or destroyed.

Awakening

High fantasy mages do not Awaken during a mystery play or astral journey the way modern mages do. Instead, someone wishing to tap her magical potential must set out on a perilous journey — whether to seek an object of power, a person of great wisdom, a place of mystic significance, or simply to recover a lost heirloom. Once she reaches the destination, she is rewarded with the power to wield magic. Not everyone survives the ordeal of Awakening. In fact, most either give up before completing the quest or die during the pilgrimage. Even those

who become mages often bear scars from their journey for the rest of their lives.

The destinations of these journeys are as numerous as the seekers, but every journey ultimately exposes the traveler to a Supernal influence. When a mage feels his apprentice is ready for the journey, he often sends the seeker on a quest into a Supernal region in hopes she will return Awakened. While many seekers take the journey in search of Awakening, others have no idea what the journey will do to them until they encounter the Supernal world for the first time. Some do not even choose the journey. A boy carried off by Stygian creatures may Awaken when he finally reaches home after a daring escape and a long journey.

At the moment of Awakening, a mage does not arrive at a Watchtower. Instead, he receives some gift or sign from the Supernal world. This might be the blessing given by a Supernal being, a bargain struck with a terrible stranger, a holy light that shines down on the place, or a surge of energy flowing out of the object of the quest. Many newly Awakened mages incorrectly assume that their magic comes from the object or creature they encountered at the moment of Awakening — the magic sword, the twisted demon, and so forth.

Paths

Paths are not mandatory for the genre. Troupes should feel free to keep them or to use the optional rules for Paths in Chapter Three (see p. 99). For those chronicles that include Paths, a seeker's destination usually determines his Path. One who delivers a package to the prince of a primal wood, for example, is likely to Awaken as a Thyrsus. This is far from foolproof, however, and many seekers who tried to travel one Path found themselves diverted onto another. Sometimes the angel at the top of the mountain turns out to be a demon, and the would-be Obrimos finds himself a Mastigos, instead.

Orders

Magical knights, wandering magicians, sorcerous viziers, occult scholars, and miracle-working priests all fit into the epic fantasy genre, but the world's mages are not united into universal orders. Travel is slow and dangerous, and there is no reliable means of communicating across the great distances between mage communities, so this isn't surprising. Nevertheless, the Awakened form alliances with other mages in their communities for mutual protection, access to shared resources, and assistance in projects too big for a single mage. Sometimes this is no more than a Master who trains apprentices to carry out her will. Some groups of mages found academies to train

apprentices, while others establish distant chapterhouses to spread their influence into other cities or nations. The optional rules for orders in Chapter Three (see p. 107) provide numerous alternatives to the Pentacle Order structure.

Keeping It Simple

Building a fantasy world complete with magical creatures and complex sorcerous societies is no small task, and it can seem a little intimidating. For troupes who want to keep things simple — or who just aren't interested in designing new orders — it's possible to keep the Pentacle Orders with only a few small changes. These five orders are coincidentally the dominant sorcerous organizations in the region where the chronicle takes place.

• **Order of Arcanists:** This order seeks, preserves, and passes on arcane knowledge and artifacts. While some are content to act as librarians and teachers, arcanists are often well-traveled wanderers, aware as they are that the sum of all human knowledge is as nothing next to all that has been lost and waits to be found again. In most other ways, arcanists resemble members of the Mysterium.

• **Order of Artisans:** The members of this order engage in Sleeper enterprises such as crafts, trade, and usury, blending magic into their everyday lives. Artisans look out for each other, train apprentices, and share information freely with one another, but they do not present a consistent face the way the other orders do. They work with other orders whenever they share interests. Artisans consecrate tools of their mundane trade as order tools. They are similar to the Free Council.

• **Order of Whispers:** This order's members greatly prefer subtlety to brute force, and stability to uncertainty. Immersed as they often are in political intrigues within and between nations, dedicated whispers can stop wars before they begin — whether it only takes a timely word in the right ear or a dagger in the right back. Whispers avoid drawing attention to themselves to conceal the extent of their influence over a ruler's decisions. Many go so far as to masquerade as Sleepers except among fellow mages. Whispers most resemble the Guardians of the Veil.

• **Order of Magocrats:** This order seeks nothing less than the creation of a magocracy — an empire ruled by magocrats where mages of all orders work together. While some magocrats are highborn mages with delusions of grandeur, many simply dream of a civilization where magic makes life easier for all its citizens. They point to successful magocracies throughout history as proof that their ambitions are not groundless. Magocrats resemble the Silver Ladder.

• **Order of Warriors:** The members of this order defend the borders of the nation and uphold its laws.

In times of war, they serve as generals, elite soldiers, and the bodyguards of lords. In times of peace, they act as rangers, constables, or sheriffs. Local rulers value warriors for their power and loyalty, so the order has strong financial backing even in difficult times. In many ways, warriors resemble members of the Adamantine Arrow.

Advanced Variations

There's no end to the number of interesting orders creative troupes can invent for an epic fantasy chronicle, but it helps to have a starting point. Here are some seeds Storytellers can use to build new orders.

• **Religion:** Epic fantasy worlds often have pantheons of gods and goddesses who rule every aspect of nature and human experience between them. Mages devoted to a particular god often form religious orders whose tenets, interests, and ideals reflect the nature of their patron deity. These religions can be as simple or as complex as the Storyteller desires.

• **Legacies:** Each of the dozens of Legacies scattered throughout various **Mage** books positively drips with ideas for Storytellers to plunder for epic fantasy orders. It often takes far less work to excise the attainments and alter some of the details of a Legacy than it does to build an order from scratch.

• **Lineage:** Some people quite literally have magic in their blood. Maybe their ancestors interbred with nonhumans whose magic manifests in generation after generation of offspring. Or maybe a powerful supernatural being bestowed a blessing on a long-dead mage's family line centuries ago. Perhaps there's just something in the water supply at the ancestral castle. One way or another, the loyalty these mages feel for each other is a matter of filial duty instead of a shared philosophy or goal. Inherited magic and the obligations it creates are common tropes in epic fantasy.

• **Profession:** A mage doesn't necessarily identify himself only by his magic, and some form fraternal orders or guilds based on mundane arts, crafts, or professions. Wandering performers swap stories on the road and warn each other of trouble. Craftsmen create standardized ways of measuring a skilled laborer's mastery of carpentry or stonemasonry. Merchants and investors organize expeditions and establish relationships with banks in distant lands to facilitate trade. Most members of these professional organizations are Sleepers, which provides a mage among them with an abundance of allies willing to shelter or aid him. This approach takes central idea behind the Order of Artisans a step further, but instead of all artisans belonging to a single order, mages of an order practice the same craft.

Magic Changes

Magic is much more common in epic fantasy, and mages seldom need to be shy about hurling fire or calling forth demons. This creates several important changes in the rules of magic:

• **Sleepers witnesses don't affect magic:** Covert spells are never improbable, and witnesses do not reduce a mage's control over his magic.

• **Backlashes are rare:** Even vulgar magic almost never calls for a Paradox roll. If a mage suffers a dramatic failure on a vulgar spell roll, the Storyteller makes a Paradox roll. Magical tools and Sleeper witnesses have no effect on Paradox dice pools, but other modifiers still apply. Successes on a Paradox roll still cause effects ranging from Havoc to Manifestation, but since the casting already failed, they obviously do not subtract from the mage's dice on the original casting roll.

• **Mages need magical tools for vulgar magic:** Mages can cast spells without magical tools, but vulgar magic is much more difficult without them. Casting an improvised vulgar spell without a tool bestows a dice pool equal to the character's Arcanum rating instead of Gnosis + Arcanum. If the mage is casting a rote, the player instead subtracts the character's Gnosis rating from his dice pool. So the dice pool for a rote is Attribute + Skill + Arcanum - Gnosis. As a mage grows more powerful, she becomes increasingly reliant on her tools for her flashiest spells.

Skill Changes

Certain Skills are not appropriate in an epic fantasy setting or require some modification:

• **Computer:** Eliminate this Skill.

• **Occult versus Science:** In an epic fantasy setting, most scientific fields don't even exist, while scholars regard a wide variety of magical phenomenon as ordinary. As a result, quite often some overlap occurs between Occult and Science. In general, theories, legends, and abstract ideas are governed more by Occult, while concrete and observable phenomena are the purview of Science. For example, when a character with a high Science skill encounters a fire dragon he quickly recalls its dangerous breath, its favored prey, and its likely vulnerabilities — all physical qualities and behavior patterns. On the other hand, a character with a high Occult skill recognizes a fire dragon based on tales with which she is familiar, but she recalls that fire dragons are sacred to certain gods of the Aether, that they seldom roam beyond their territory except to retrieve items stolen from their lairs, and that a frontal attack is usually ineffective against them.

• **Athletics:** This skill also covers riding horses and other mounts.

• **Drive:** Eliminate this skill. Depending on the exact setting of the chronicle, a Storyteller may instead replace it with a similar Skill relevant to the region, such as a skill in sailing ships or driving chariots.

• **Firearms:** Simply change this skill to Archery. Since it already covers bows and other older missile weapons, this is only a change in scope.

Story Hooks

• **A Diplomatic Theft:** A powerful local arcanist called Kea contacts the characters and entrusts them with an important task. Kea's colleague uncovered the entrance to a previously unknown ruin while traveling in the mountains of a nearby nonhuman nation. Because the relations between the two countries have been tense lately, the scholar did not reveal his discovery to the local authorities, concerned as he was that they would eject him from their lands and seize his discovery for themselves. A week into his investigations, the scholar's colleague lost all contact with him, and she wishes to find out what happened to him. Unfortunately, Kea has gained a poor reputation among the nation's inhabitants to the point where the local mages there have orders to capture or kill her on sight — a misunderstanding, she insists, but one that makes it impossible for her to investigate matters herself.

Kea sends the characters to the neighboring nation to learn the fate of her colleague, locate the ruin, and smuggle the treasures there back to her. She warns them that the inhabitants will mistreat the characters if they discover her connection to their mission, so she encourages them to create a cover story to explain their presence in the area. If the locals have not yet found the ruin, she insists the characters keep it a secret at any price.

Perhaps the local authorities caught the scholar in the act and convinced him or coerced him into revealing the location of the ruin. Or maybe he has resisted their efforts to force the secret from him, and the characters must rescue him from his captors. Perhaps he accidentally unleashed something or someone that should have remained buried in the ruin, and it is now terrorizing the local population. If they eliminate this threat without revealing their connection to the scholar and her colleague, the characters may earn two rewards instead of one. They might even secure an illustrious reputation that allows them free and exclusive access to the ruin.

• **An Inconvenient Oracle:** A well-regarded local mage prophesizes a terrible event that will strike the region in a matter of weeks. This might be something as mundane as an invasion or the death of the local ruler or as supernatural as the release of a powerful demon or rebirth of a terrible dead god.

The oracle offers a way to prevent this disaster in the form of an elaborate ritual that requires a large number of unusual components to complete. Other mages who probe the future described by the oracle cannot make out a clear vision of what will transpire, but because all of them sense that a terrible event is indeed about to unfold, they quickly band together to prepare for the ritual. The characters must travel into a dangerous wilderness or Supernal region in search of one or more of these components.

In addition to monsters, supernatural hazards, and magical wards, the characters must contend with a group of mages that seems intent upon preventing the ritual from taking place. Perhaps these mages want the oracle's prophecy to come true. Maybe the oracle's ritual is what will bring about the disaster, and these enemy mages are the only ones who realize it.

• **Against the Night:** A remote town has recently come under attack by a monstrous enemy that emerges from a nearby Supernal region every few nights and carries off two or three of its people at a time. A lone Sleeper travels across the wilderness and begs the characters to come to the town's aid and quickly. When the characters reach the town, they find chaos and despair. The terrified population huddles in their homes, too frightened to keep watches or even erect fortifications to discourage the attacker. Witness descriptions of the attacker vary widely, but it certainly is not human and might be an as yet unknown supernatural creature or cryptid.

The characters may elect to organize the townsfolk, building fortifications to deter or delay the monster long enough for them to identify its capabilities and weaknesses. Perhaps it can be reasoned with, but it might

also be a simple predator of superhuman prowess. They might instead choose to face the creature on its own turf, braving the Supernal region in order to spare the surviving townsfolk and possibly determine the fate of those who were already taken. Perhaps the characters simply wish to kill the creature or drive it off so it no longer threatens the area, but they might instead choose to capture it for further study. Is the creature sapient, or is it simply a dangerous predator?

Faustian Sorcery

Tourmaline frowned at the concrete wall that had once been the only exit from the tiny cellar where he was now trapped. The shovel had done no serious damage to it, and the crowbar would never break through before he ran out of air.

"My offer still stands, Touri," said a raspy voice like a whisper in his ear. "I can get you out of here."

Tourmaline wanted to ignore Srador, but the air had grown noticeably staler since the last time his patron had spoken. "What do you want from me this time?"

A black toad the size of a housecat hopped out of the shadows just outside the glow of Tourmaline's magical light. "There is a bag of charcoal in the corner. I'd like you to write something on the wall for me." The supernatural toad didn't look like it was talking, but Tourmaline knew the sound of Srador's voice in his mind.

He eyed it suspiciously. "Like what?"

Tourmaline had a sudden vision of characters in a language he didn't recognize. It vanished after a few seconds.

"Write those six words, and I will get you out of here," Srador's voice promised.

"What does it mean?"

"What does it matter? Are you prepared to die rather than write six words?"

Tourmaline digested this question for a long moment before going to the bag of charcoal. When it was done, Srador opened his awareness. Tourmaline saw the way the fleeing mage had shaped the cement to turn a cellar into a prison, and he knew he could transform it back into a cellar. Lightheaded from the thinning air, Tourmaline began the chant of opening, all but forgetting the message on the wall behind him.

Magic is not a mysterious gift. It is a fabulous prize begged out of mentors in exchange for obedience and oaths of secrecy. It is an endlessly useful tool that promises to fulfill all the mage's desires. By learning magic, he's earned the right to use it. And no one masters magic. Magic allows the mage to use it, but it uses the mage back — often in small, harmless ways. Sometimes, however, its demands are time-consuming, maddening, or abominable.

Below are some of the elements of this genre.

Price of Magic

All mages pay a price for their power — whether the cost is their health and sanity, a contract to serve a supernatural entity, or adherence to a strict code of conduct. Why is this important? Because it means every mage chose to accept that price in exchange for the power he wields. Each has a reason for the choice he made, and each mage reacts differently to the price he pays. Some become so enamored with the power that they will pay any price to increase it, moving further and further from the mundane world. Others set limits on how far they are willing to slide into the strange world of magic, some with greater success than others.

Shady Motivations

Mages really aren't highly moral people. Certainly some mages are *less bad* or owe you a serious favor, but the kind of people who acquire magical power aren't the kind of people who will put your interests ahead of their own. Even the mages who have resorted to feeding the souls of small children to their demonic patrons in exchange for more power weren't always degenerate scum. Every character's actions have a reason.

Awakening

Anyone can Awaken to the reality of magic, but Awakenings do not happen at random to unsuspecting Sleepers who suddenly glimpse a Supernal Realm. While a Sleeper sometimes stumbles upon an ancient ritual, powerful artifact, or spirit entity that grants her access to magic, Awakening is rarely accidental. Rather, someone who wishes to learn magic must almost always seek out a mage who is willing to teach her. This is no mean feat, and simply locating a potential instructor is an initiation ritual in itself. Mages have their pick of candidates, and most mentors belong to an order that governs the kinds of Sleepers who may be allowed to learn the order's secrets. Order mages only teach a student who agrees to remain loyal to the order and who passes a series of tests to prove her dedication to the knowledge. A student's initiation therefore takes place before she Awakens, and the Awakening is the culmination of an order's initiation rites. These are described in more detail below.

Mentors from outside the orders are rare and quite often dangerous and demanding teachers. If the postulant is lucky, her mentor is simply a charlatan who will abuse her trust and steal her money before abandoning her, or maybe he's barely more than an apprentice himself and can only teach his student so much before reaching the end of his knowledge. Of course, he could just as easily be a Guardian of the Veil who has descended so far into madness that his order has disowned him, and he has no way of knowing whether he is still able to guide a postulant through the rites of Awakening. Or he might
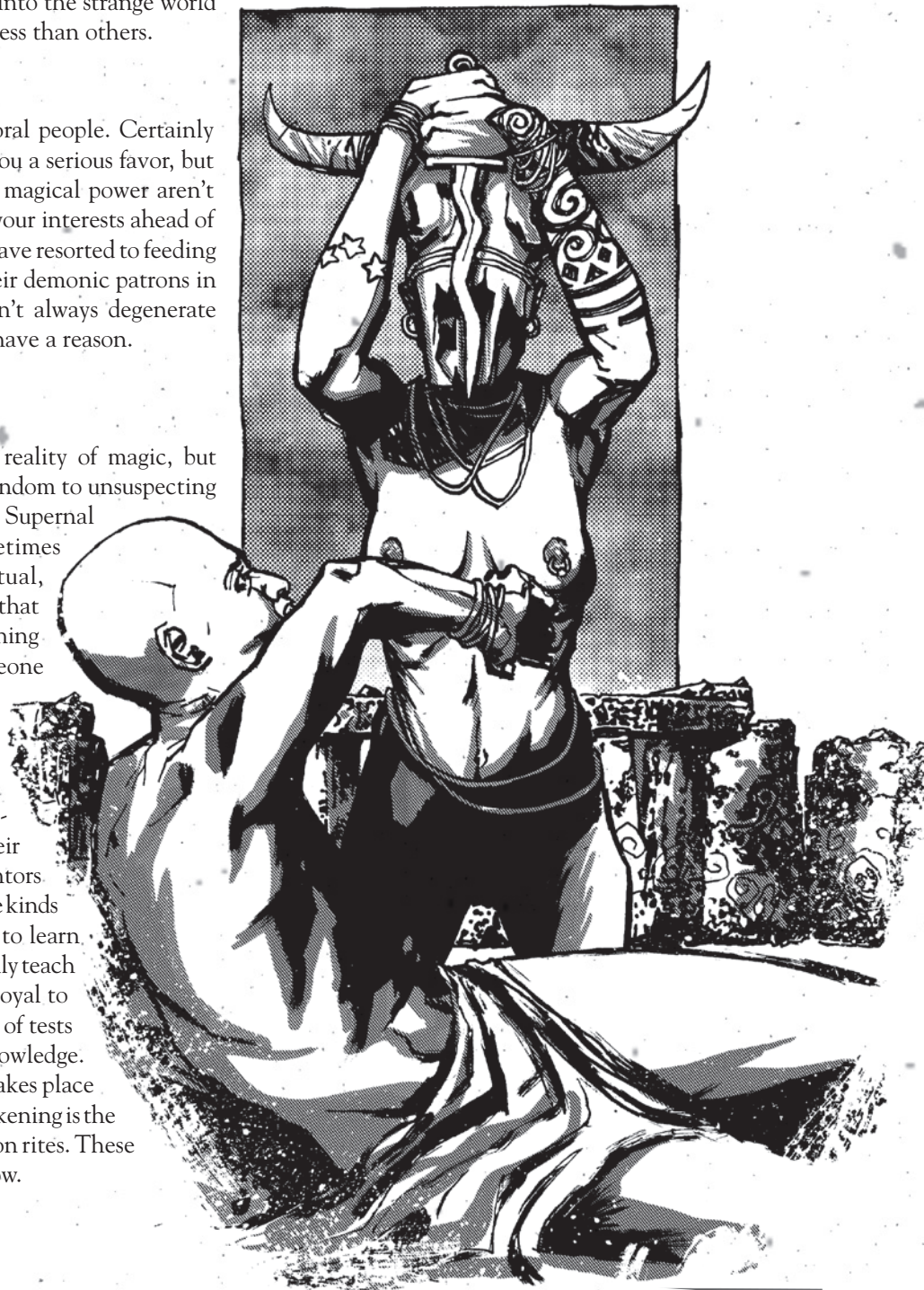
be a former Arrow who is looking for a willing human sacrifice to fulfill the terms of his infernal contract and increase his power.

Paths

If the Storyteller allows it, students may be able to choose their Path at the time of their Awakening. An Adamantine Arrow mentor whose student wants mastery of Death and Matter might help him draw up a contract with a Stygian patron, for example, or the Mysterium might have a different Ritual of Awakening for each Path, allowing students to choose their Watchtowers. Of course, this is not a requirement of the genre. Supernatural patrons may not be associated with any particular Supernal Realm, so a new Arrow would have no idea what Path he will walk until the moment of Awakening.

Orders

A mage's order is more than simply a political affiliation. It reflects the method by which he wields magic and the price he pays for his power. Once he chooses a patron and completes the terms of his Awakening, an Arrow cannot increase his Arcana knowledge simply by consulting a Mysterium tome, for example. The magic the orders use is completely different.

The orders seldom mention the legend of Atlantis, except the Silver Ladder. Likewise, the idea of the Atlantean Diamond and the concept of Pentacle mages are foreign to most mages. Consilii are, at best, loose confederacies intended to deal with threats that affect all mages, and are nonexistent in many cities. While mages sometimes work with mages outside their orders to accomplish mutual goals and even form lasting partnerships as cabal-mates, if they want to advance their magical knowledge, they must progress within their order.

Adamantine Arrow

Certain supernatural beings sometimes offer mortals Awakened magic in exchange for a service. The Adamantine Arrow has access to the names of thousands of such entities, and each of its members has contacted and contracted with one who acts as his patron. To increase his power, an Arrow must perform a favor for his supernatural patron. No one knows the exact nature of these beings, and their goals in the Fallen World are impossible to determine. The patron that asks an Arrow to rescue a child from vampires today may require him to commit cold-blooded murder next month. A wise mage knows that every negotiation with his patron is a battle of wills. The mage can refuse to agree to his patron's terms, and a patron may offer an alternative, but once the mage commits to an action, he cannot gain the desired knowledge until he completes it. The order greatly respects a sworn oath and looks down on anyone who breaks a promise. Likewise, the Adamantine Arrow recognizes the essential conflict between a desire and its price and urges mages to carefully consider whether fulfilling a desire is worth the asking price.

Learning Magic

An Arrow can increase her Gnosis or Arcana knowledge in exchange for performing a favor for her supernatural patron in addition to spending experience points as normal. She can also learn Arcana from another Arrow's supernatural patron in exchange for a similar favor (and experience point expenditure). She can learn rotes from other Arrows, from her patron, or another Arrow's patron for the usual experience cost. An Arrow cannot learn Arcana directly from another Arrow, however.

Limits on Magic

An Arrow's supernatural patron colors her magical senses. Whenever the Arrow uses the Practice of Knowing or the Practice of Unveiling, her patron may alter the information she receives to further its own goals. The mage has no way of knowing whether her patron is manipulating her mystical senses.

Vulgar Magic

Whenever an Arrow uses vulgar magic in a way that works against the interests of her patron, her magic loses some of its potency. The greater the mage's mystical connection, the more difficult it is for her to ignore the will of her patron. The player of an Arrow casting an improvised vulgar spell rolls Arcanum instead of Gnosis + Arcanum. If the Arrow is casting a rote, the player rolls Attribute + Skill + Arcanum - Gnosis instead of Attribute + Skill + Arcanum. The Storyteller determines whether any particular vulgar spell is against the patron's interests.

Free Council

Magic is a gift passed from mentor to apprentice in the form of consecrated magical tools and devices (simply called "tools" for short). A Sleeper cannot consecrate a tool, so he cannot Awaken until his mentor gives him one. Because the number of tools a Libertine owns determines his magical power and because consecrating a tool costs a Libertine a *dot* of Willpower, mentors carefully choose whom they Awaken. Tools only function for their owners, and no tool may have more than one owner at a time. Further, a tool belongs to its current owner either until he dies (at which point all his tools cease functioning) or until he freely gives it to another Libertine, whereupon the recipient becomes the new owner. A tool can be

won upon a wager or offered as a reward for a service, but stealing one doesn't change its owner.

Learning Magic

A Libertine gains his first point of Gnosis as a gift from another Libertine in the form of a consecrated magical tool. A Libertine's Gnosis cannot exceed the number of tools he currently owns. A Libertine cannot spend experience points to increase his Gnosis until the number of tools he owns is at least equal to his new Gnosis rating. For example, a Libertine with Gnosis 3 cannot raise his Gnosis to 4 unless he owns at least four tools — whether he consecrates a new one or receives one as a gift from its current owner. This means, of course, that the player must either buy the character's Willpower back up after raising Gnosis or contend with the loss of the Willpower dot. Libertine characters can use Arcane Experience to buy back Willpower lost to consecrating tools.

If a Libertine ever owns fewer tools than his Gnosis rating (due to giving them away), he immediately loses magical potency. His effective Gnosis rating is equal to the number of tools he currently owns until he owns tools at least equal to his Gnosis. This affects dice pools and Resistance rolls, and of course it prevents him from increasing his Gnosis until he owns the required number of tools. A Libertine who gives away or loses all his tools becomes a Sleepwalker and loses the ability to consecrate tools.

A Libertine who wishes to create a tool must first choose an appropriate item and perform a dedication ceremony upon it (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 80–81). To complete the consecration, the Libertine must spend a dot of Willpower. Thereafter, the device is one of the Libertine's tools. Unlike other mages, there is no limit to the number of tools a Libertine can own at a time.

Should a Libertine wish to break his bond with a tool he owns, he can perform a dedication ceremony on a new technological device. In this case, the Libertine doesn't need to spend a dot of Willpower. The old tool loses its properties, and the new tool replaces it. Libertines are notorious for constantly "upgrading" their tool into the latest tech toys, but they also do this in case they lose or break one of their tools.

A Libertine learns Arcana and rotes from other Libertines normally and at the usual cost.

Limits on Magic

A Libertine cannot use magic unless he is in physical contact with a technological device. This doesn't have to be a tool, but it must be a device he could consecrate as a tool. Any spell with a transitory, prolonged, or concentration duration ends immediately if the Libertine is not in physical contact with any technological device.

Vulgar Magic

A Libertine cannot cast a vulgar spell unless he is in physical contact with at least one of his tools. Any vulgar spell with a transitory, prolonged, or concentration duration ends immediately if the Libertine is not in physical contact with any of his tools. The Free Council, in this setting, is so dependent on its technology as a focus and a crutch for magic that they can't muster the will to cast vulgar magic without it.

Guardians of the Veil

The mere knowledge of certain secret truths about the world taints the soul and twists the mind and body, and the Guardians of the Veil have that knowledge. They know how dangerous magical lore can be for the simple reason that they have suffered its terrible consequences. Yet this knowledge also grants them mastery over supernatural forces, paradoxically allowing them to serve a higher purpose by sacrificing their sanity for the cause. Those who seek to understand too much risk becoming monsters with the power to undo any good they did before madness claimed them. Guardians of the Veil are understandably very careful to share their secrets only with those whom they believe will use them carefully and wisely.

Learning Magic

Guardians flirt with madness to learn magic. A Guardian cannot spend experience points to increase her Gnosis unless her Wisdom is equal to or less than (10 minus her target Gnosis). A player who wishes to increase her character's Gnosis to 4, for example, cannot do so unless the character has Wisdom of 6 or less. Guardians learn Arcana and rotes from other Guardians. Whenever a Guardian increases an Arcanum other than one of her Ruling Arcana, the player must roll Wisdom. On a failure, she manifests a derangement.

Limits on Magic

A Guardian who currently has no Willpower in reserve suffers a penalty on magic dice pools until she regains at least one point of Willpower. The player of a Guardian casting an improvised spell rolls Arcanum instead of Gnosis + Arcanum whenever this is the case, and if the Guardian is casting a rote, the player rolls Attribute + Skill + Arcanum - Gnosis instead of Attribute + Skill + Arcanum.

Vulgar Magic

Whenever a Guardian casts a vulgar spell she suffers one point of resistant damage. This is bashing damage for an instant spell, and lethal damage for an extended spell.

Mysterium

Magic is nothing more than a field of esoteric knowledge properly applied to achieve a particular effect. In

many ways, the practice of magic is no different from any other field of advanced engineering. The mage first determines what she wishes to accomplish. Next she designs a ritual that will create the desired result. Then she gathers together the necessary raw materials and tools for the job. Finally, she uses her tools to transform the raw materials into the object she desires. A mystagogue forced to improvise her way out of a problem on short notice often flounders, but few mages are more thorough than a mystagogue with the luxury of time and an ample supply of suitable components.

Learning Magic

A mystagogue can spend countless hours poring over ancient tomes of lore, but it is only through ritual that he masters these secrets. In addition to spending experience points, a mystagogue who wishes to increase his Gnosis must also spend Mana equal to five times the target Gnosis as part of a ritual lasting several hours. For example, a mage wishing to raise his Gnosis from 2 to 3 would need to spend 15 Mana as part of this ritual. This will often demand the mage scour his Pattern, draw on an Artifact, or find some other additional source of Mana for the ritual (killing a living being for Mana can, in fact, be part of the ritual). Improving an Arcanum requires instruction by a Mysterium mage (or access to an appropriate Mysterium library), an hour-long ritual, and twice the new Arcanum rating in Mana (two Mana for the first dot, four Mana for the second, etc.). Rotes still require an instructor or grimoire but demand only a short ritual and one Mana per dot to master.

Limits on Magic

A mystagogue must spend one Mana each time he wishes to cast an instant spell (or one additional Mana if the spell already has a Mana cost). A mystagogue can cast an improvised spell, but the player rolls Arcanum instead of Gnosis + Arcanum.

Vulgar Magic

Whenever a mystagogue casts an improvised vulgar spell, he must spend either an amount of Mana equal to the highest Arcanum involved in the spell or one point of Willpower. Mysterium mages don't have any particular difficulty casting vulgar spells using rotes, however (apart from the additional Mana cost for instant spells).

Silver Ladder

Magic is a gift granted to the Chosen by a higher power beyond all understanding. While they grudgingly acknowledge the supernatural abilities of the other orders, many mages of the Silver Ladder regard theirs as the only true magic. They alone believe in the legend of Atlantis, where they were once the rulers of a perfect nation. Only the hubris among those ancient mages could have caused the fall of Atlantis, but fall it did in a terrible war that tore a rift between the Supernal Realm and the Fallen World. Whenever a mage of the Silver Ladder draws down Supernal power, it passes through the Abyssal energy of that rift so that many times the magic curdles as it enters the Fallen World. Too often the Fallen World and its inhabitants pay the price of any Silver Ladder mage's recklessness.

Mages of this order follow all the rules of magic described in **Mage: The Awakening**. However, Paradoxes in this genre are more common and tend to cause collateral damage and Sleeper casualties. Add the rating of the highest Arcanum of a vulgar spell to the Paradox dice pool. The Storyteller should feel free to alter both the nature and the target of a spell that results in a Havoc backlash, choosing another spell of the Arcanum of equal or lesser power. Casting vulgar magic in front of Sleeper witnesses doesn't just increase the likelihood of backlash, it makes it more likely that the mage's spell will injure or kill the bystanders by accident.

Banishers

All magic is inherently dangerous, and mages must accept that danger to practice the art. Sometimes a mage has an especially terrible experience with the consequences of magic — whether someone else's or his own. Banishers are one of the most extreme reactions against the threat mages pose to ordinary people. They use the secrets they've learned against mages of one or more orders. Sometimes an order ignores a Banisher in its ranks so long as he doesn't turn on his own order, but most orders recognize the risk harboring these vigilantes creates.

Scelesti

Most Scelesti are Adamantine Arrows who have given themselves over to their patrons completely and without question, but mages of other orders can come into contact with dark forces who promise them investments in exchange for servitude. Regardless of the character's former order, a mage that takes on the Scelestus Legacy uses the magic systems given for the Adamantine Arrow.

Seers of the Throne

The Seers use the same systems as the Silver Ladder in this genre, and make many of the same claims — they were the chosen of Atlantis, they alone are the inheritors of true magic. They sometimes claim that the orders were banished from Atlantis, never to wield the power of the Supernal Realms again, but managed to find ways to cheat this divine edict.

Story Hooks

• **Rogue Order:** Mages quite often use magic to increase their wealth and influence, but the orders frown on actually selling the secrets of Awakening to such Sleeper organizations as governments, corporations, and terrorists. The characters are put in charge of finding out which mages are selling order secrets and to whom. They are then tasked with stopping these leaks and absorbing or destroying the unauthorized mages before they can pass order secrets to other Sleepers.

Any rogues who somehow escape this purge will no doubt be shaped by the attempt. Perhaps they become like Banishers, ruthlessly hunting down order mages with their stolen magic. Maybe they go to ground only to emerge later on as thralls of supernatural entities, mad mages, or something worse. Maybe they form a conspiracy that resembles the Seers of the Throne in methods and power, albeit with a very different history and goal.

• **The Purge:** The price its members pay for magic defines an order, and what one order considers a fair trade for power another regards as abhorrent. One order's leadership organizes a purge against another order whose practices they have decided are reprehensible. A series of violent attacks on the targeted order's members and sanctums soon grows into a battle between the two orders. The aggressors attempt to draw other orders into an alliance against the hated mages, while the targets of their purge likewise call for assistance from the other orders. Even if the players' characters are neither victims of the purge nor participants in it, they likely have allies who are affected by it. The characters may choose to side with one order or the other in the growing mage war. If they instead work to end the conflict, they must first investigate the root cause of the purge. As they plunge deep into the complex diplomatic puzzle, the characters find a complex tangle of real offenses compounded by misunderstandings and mages on the sidelines who will not mourn if the purge weakens the influence of both the involved orders.

• **Divided and Accused:** It begins with the death of an unpopular mage, someone whose passing is little mourned by the community. The mage's order investigates and quickly comes up with a list of suspects from other orders. A couple of those suspects die a few days later, and their orders assume the first order is behind the killings. More deaths follow, with each order accusing members of the other orders of orchestrating the murders. An order accuses one of the characters of murdering one of its members, drawing the cabal into what seems like a feud between orders. When an assassin comes for him, though, the cabal has a chance to trace the murders to the real culprits. Is it an order's power play, a mage's bid for magical power, or the work of an outside supernatural group that stands to benefit from the war between mages?

Lucid Sleepers

At 4:15 in the afternoon, Winnie was just getting around to a late tea when a pounding on the door off the kitchen startled her. She sighed, put a cozy over the kettle, and got to her feet, shuffling to see who would call during tea.

She reached the side door and pulled the blinds back from the window, letting a sunbeam pour in and fill her cheerful yellow kitchen with streams of light. The silhouette of a man very nearly clawing at the glass to be let in blocked her view of her garden.

Winnie rubbed the bridge of her nose. There was only one good reason to come to her side door in the middle of the afternoon with wild-looking eyes. This man was here for a love spell.

She opened the door and stepped out of the way so that Carl Franklin could step through, hat to his chest. "I just… I need her to love me. I can't take seeing her with that fat husband of hers."

Winnie nodded. As a professional witch, she saw a lot of this. She recited the compulsory "be careful what you wish for" warning and went to get a dove from the wicker cage in the next room. "Four thousand up front, cash, two after you've seen the spell's effects." She handed him the standard contract and pointed to a knife on the counter. "Sign, please, in blood."

Inspiration

From Harry Potter to the Dresden Files, the notion of mages living and working in the real world without a thick Veil to hide them is all over the media and most of them focus on wizards as heroes.

• **Literature:** The Harry Dresden Files are in perfect keeping with the genre. Many of Neil Gaiman's novels have the correct air of magic just past the surface of reality, but *Neverwhere* is an especially good start. Book stores have hundreds of books in the Urban Fantasy genre that fit the feel of this style of mage game, so it's really a matter of picking an author you like.

• **Movies:** Films about witchcraft, with the witches as main characters, set a good tone. *The Witches of Eastwick* (1987) to *Practical Magic* (1998) show how a small town reacts and overreacts to open magic in their midst.

Pulling Back the Curtain

Popular media has developed a great love for wizards and witches in a real-world setting. They love schools of magic, magical investigators, and magical families who live side by side with mundane next-door neighbors who "just don't get it." Sometimes the witches and wizards in these stories scramble to keep people around them from knowing what's really going on.

Sometimes they don't. The Public Awareness genre for a **Mage: The Awakening** game pulls the curtain of mystical secrecy away from their lives and leaves them exposed and dealing with the consequences.

Choosing the reasons why Sleepers are aware as well as to what extent they know is as important to the chronicle design as the central plot. It may even *be* the central plot. For instance, a Storyteller could easily decide that people have always known about mages and magic, but that they are simply so rare and subtle that most of the population ignores them. Taking this route, the Storyteller puts mages in the realm of urban legend. Sure, some people know for certain that the old man down the street really can summon and control the dead, but most look the other way because modern life just doesn't have the time for that kind of oddity.

Or maybe the chronicle starts just after some kind of catastrophic event, something that changes the world and exposes mages in such dramatic fashion that no one can deny their existence. Taking the genre this way, a Storyteller must decide how the public reacts. Do people grudgingly accept the truth and deal with the awkward adjustment period of accepting their magical neighbors for what they are, or do they respond with hate and violence? Does a modern witch hunt spring up? If so, do the world's governments open sponsor it, or frown upon it officially while secretly funding it?

The Sleepers' Response

The focus of a Lucid Sleepers genre chronicle should have a great deal to do with the human response to magic. A great deal of **Mage: The Awakening** fits perfectly in a chronicle where the Sleepers are at least somewhat aware.

Secrecy

Sleepers might be aware, but that doesn't mean that mages want all their activities on the nightly news. While some Consilii might have some kind of public relations with Sleeper organizations like the media and the police, others try to keep their secrets with magic and manipulation. Of course, the average mage can't hope to get the Consilium to protect her every mistake or keep her identity as a mage from prying eyes, and so the Awakened low on the social ladder find themselves constantly alert for slip ups….

Paranoia

…Which leads to a strong sense of paranoia. Sure, a mage might think the spell he just cast on the subway may have been covert, but can he be sure? Can he know that the bag lady on the platform who was watching him funny didn't know something was going on? Did he mutter his High Speech too loudly? If so, what kind of response would it garner from the public at large? Who's to say that Sleepers are the only ones a mage has to watch out for? Awakened are not, mercenaries will always be a threat. They may work for the FBI, the police department, or even fringe hate groups. A mage might try to hide his magic with subtlety and caution, but if even your resonance can betray you, where can you really hide?

Adventure

So why hide? Any cabal of mages that finds itself outed could just as easily step out of the magical "closet" and use the situation to its advantage. In this case, Sleepers' need for mages to handle the situations they can't becomes a recurring storyline. Perhaps a few Sleepers in the know hire the mages for heists or exploration. Perhaps the requests are on a grander scale. The community expects the exposed mages to run schools for gifted children and prevent magic from getting out of hand, or to hunt down the other creatures in the night in exchange for a life relatively unmolested by the population at large. However a Storyteller runs it, the characters feel that though they have almost limitless power just past their reach, they are still somehow indebted to humanity as a whole.

Crime and Mystery

Or perhaps the characters take the moderate path, hiring themselves out to discreet clientele if the money is right. The media is full of private investigators, spies, and even grunts and thugs who have a magical edge. In this case, the cabal might subtly advertise their services, work through a trusted intermediary, but ultimately try to keep their identities secret while they solve (or commit) crimes.

Power to the People

Some aspects of **Mage** need to change in a Lucid setting. It is, after all, a dramatic shift from the standard for most World of Darkness games, **Mage** in particular.

Since so much of the setting and indeed, some of the mechanics are based on the idea that people just don't know (and don't want to), a Storyteller should consider changing some things to make the genre fit better.

Paradox and the Lucid Sleeper

Don't remove the Abyss, vulgar magic, and Paradox just because people know that magic is real. They Abyss is a reality for mages, a true indicator of just how dangerous pride and unwise actions can be. The fact the Sleepers are aware that magic exists does not do anything (or not enough, at least) to bridge the gap between the Fallen World and the Supernal Realms.

So, if Paradox is here to stay, how is it affected by the shattered Veil? Vulgar magic still threatens reality and the people who witness it, so that remains the same. Covert magic still goes unnoticed and so stays as it is. Magic that would normally be improbable may be more likely to get a mage into trouble since its nature may well draw the attention of more lucid Sleepers than a vulgar spell. If someone knows magic is possible, isn't it likely that he will look for magic in things he used to see as pure coincidence?

Sleepwalkers present an interesting situation since in a more traditional **Awakening** game, they were the only Sleepers able to accept magic. One possibility is simply to remove the notion of Sleepwalkers from the game (if the widespread knowledge of magic is a recent thing, you might consider how the Sleepwalkers who had been loyally serving the Awakened feel about this development). If you want to have the term "Sleepwalker" still mean something special, perhaps Sleepwalkers are more sensitive to magic than most people? Taking this approach, a Storyteller could treat Sleepwalkers as if they had the Unseen Sense Merit (p. 109 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

Exposed: Mages without the Veil

Paths don't necessarily change in a Lucid Sleepers chronicle, but the orders almost certainly do. It's possible that in the wake of a grand conceptual awakening that leaves magic exposed to the world, the five orders (and maybe even the Seers) crumble, leaving new magical societies to arise. Chapter Three discusses the orders and how to alter them in more detail. Below, we discuss the five existing orders through the lens of the Lucid genre.

Adamantine Arrow: The Abyss and the dangers it creates do not change in this genre, so the Arrows still have plenty to occupy them. If the Sleepers know about magic, they may also know about a group of high-minded heroes who protect them from the dark side of magic with spells and guns. Furthermore, because Arrows are so uniquely trained for battle and strategy, it's possible they would frequently gather small bands of mortal soldiers around themselves using magic and training to build private armies. Perhaps the military, long thrown up against supernatural enemies with no recourse, openly seeks out the order for special assignments. A whole chronicle could be built on a platoon of Awakened Marines.

Mysterium: What would change about the Mysterium if, in some ways, their mysteries are taken away from them? Possibly the most dramatic issue these seekers of lost magic might run into is that they face occasional but open competition. Mundane treasure hunters seeking lost Atlantean loot to sell to the highest Awakened bidder might throw a monkey wrench in the plans of many a mystagogue. That said, the order will find itself with some unique opportunities. Many Sleepers seek out the Mysterium for assistance in translating texts long thought to be indecipherable. The lost knowledge and secrets lost could grant the Mysterium the honor of rediscovering magic the rest of the Awakened world didn't even know was missing, all thanks to a scroll kept in private Sleepers hands for centuries.

Silver Ladder: What do secret masters do when they are finally revealed? The Silver Ladder may find its only choice is to rule out in the open. It isn't a simple matter of throwing around the Arcana and controlling every aspect of mortal life, of course. Since the Abyss still endangers mages, overt attempts to seize control would spell disaster for any careless (or power-mad) mage. The théarchs, therefore, must operate quietly, since in all probability Sleepers are concerned about mages taking over. Cults of personality are an obvious choice, but celebrity in a broader sense might be the way for the Ladder to rule subtly in the spotlight. After all, luminaries in entertainment and society have such a profound effect on popular culture. How could the théarchs resist when they no longer have to hide who they are? All of this assumes, of course, that magic has been revealed only recently. If people have always known about the Awakened, what says they aren't used to the Silver Ladder being in charge?

Guardians of the Veil: The secret's out, the Veil needs no more Guardians. Now what? If magic has always been a known but inaccessible thing that select lucid Sleepers know about, then the Guardians may operate in nearly the same way, taking out mages who become a danger to the population at large. The Guardians' practices when it came to Sleepers would need to change, of course, either by being largely hands-off, or by being faster and more brutal. If the secret is out to the population at large, change the order's goals. They might, for instance, be

more interested in trying to return the Sleepers to deeper dreams. Since these Sleepers aren't ready to fully Awaken, it might follow that the Guardians have to conduct a terrible campaign to return order to the Lie.

Free Council: As the order with the most potential to survive changes, if the change is sudden and largely public, the Council sits on the edge of being a dominant political force in the mundane world but more importantly in the Consilium. After all, being in touch with the pulse of the modern world gives the Council an edge in dealing with it. Of course, being that close to Sleepers may leave them particularly vulnerable to any group that doesn't like mages out of principle. If they act openly they are the most likely to be threatened or harmed because they're just easier to find. To survive and thrive, the Council has to avoid being the scapegoat for any hate group or even the other orders attempting to distract the lucid Sleepers while furthering their own end.

Seers of the Throne: Like the Guardians, the Seers probably find themselves somewhat out of place if the big secret is suddenly revealed. They might wind up absorbing the Guardians as both organizations try to put the populace back to Sleep, or they might simply go public — Exarch worship becomes the next big-money "religion," and in this one, the higher-ups really *do* have magic powers! If magic has never been secret, the Seers can remain in their usual role. They are still secret masters, but they hide their real doings behind corporate, religious, or governmental authority. They are the Church, the Men in Black and Big Business, and everything they do is perfectly in line with society's laws. No need to steal the world for the Exarchs — they'll just buy it.

Public Awareness

For the sake of variety, the story hooks below each address a different level of public knowledge and even a different public reaction to that knowledge.

• **School for the Gifted:** Answering to public pressure or personal greed, a powerful cabal of Mysterium mages has started offering magic "lessons" to anyone who can afford its incredible price. The mages promise to increase the chances of a person Awakening nearly a thousand fold, but at first it appears to be nothing but a complicated con job. That is, until the success stories start flooding the streets. Children of privilege and even the eldest and wealthiest members of society claim that the school is a complete success. Beyond the troubles brought about by con artists offering to do what the Mysterium cabal says it can do at "more affordable prices" and possible Sleeper groups rallying against the lessons as "unnatural," the characters now have to grapple with a new wave of inexperienced mages disproportionate to what Consilii can handle. If the stories are true, they present an interesting scenario, but what if they aren't? Could the Mysterium cabal have found a way to create a sort of false Awakening? If so, what could the possible consequences be on the false mage? What if the Awakening fails?

• **Magic, Inc. Detective Agency:** This hook assumes that mages live half in and half out of the public eye — everyone knows, but few people really look into the Awakened world. Someone contacts the cabal of mages with a modest proposal. The contact is an ordinary Sleeper, someone who had a few too many brushes with the supernatural. He knows, and he knows other Sleepers who would be willing to pay for the unique services only a cabal of mages can provide. The set up is simple: he'll be the go-between, finding clients, setting up jobs, and letting the mages stay anonymous. It's a good deal, and everyone is happy — clients, the go-between, and even the cabal. That is, until the go-between goes missing. Then, one by one, other mages are exposed and many are dying in the process. The connection? All the outed mages had worked with the go-between in the past. Now it's up to the cabal to find their lost contact and discover who is using him.

• **All Out War:** The Veil is gone now, and humanity is chaffing in the uneasy stalemate while trying to decide what and how to deal with the new world order. The dust has settled, and all over the world the reactions are as varied as imaginable. While in some more enlightened countries mages are being welcomed cautiously, not everyplace is so benevolent. For whatever reason, the cabal finds itself stuck in a place where the news wasn't taken as well. The political and military machine has closed the country down. No mages can get in and any mage found within are to be eliminated. Worse still, the characters discover the government has hired mercenary mages to unweave, counter, and prevent seemingly simple solutions like teleporting out of the area. Now, the cabal must embark on a deadly adventure of espionage through unfriendly lands, never knowing who will help them and who will sell them out, all the while trying to escape to friendly climate. And if they don't escape, they may choose instead to stay as magical freedom fighters.

Punk

As the guitars growled a chord lower the amp made Easy's teeth rattle, but the club was the safest place for biz. Sleepers couldn't hear anything and order mages wouldn't come. Easy's trip was peaking now; the world was all spiderweb shadows

and twitching, bad TV reception. A woman with a nose bone and a sigil tatt on her chin erupted from the static and purple light. She moved her lips. It was too loud for sound, but Easy's spell threw her words into the air in brushstroke letters, imported from the club's smoke to his mind's eye.

He read: GOT THE MOD?

"Yeah," said Easy, knowing magic would send his words through the noise too. "Streetfighting shit. Shaolin black medicine. Secret chapter of the Yellow Emperor's Classic will teach you how to do it right. Otherwise, imbalanced furies will fuck you up, man."

IT'S NOT FOR ME. MARTYR OP IN ABU DHABI.

"Don't want to know. It's just biz."

ME TOO. But her gun was an old dirty Russian piece, Red Occult Faction style.

Easy skipped back and ripped a freshly autoclaved tungsten spike from its wrapper. As he drove it through his arm to boost the next spell he said, "Honey, if I was a bourgeois parasite do you think I'd be working in a place like this?"

Easy bled; the dance floor exploded.

We're going to run **Mage** Punk style. What does that mean? Punk's a flexible, much adulterated term, so we've got to narrow it down a little. We're going to look at Punk (forgive the capitalization — we'll use it for the gaming genre, to set it apart from punk bands, books, and people) from three angles: the subculture that lurks beneath mass media branding, the genre fiction label, and the connection between alternative cultures and the occult. We'll mash it all up to create a game about rebellious sorcery.

A Word for the Scenesters — and Everyone Else

If you're seriously invested in any branch of the punk culture you probably think there are things this section underemphasizes, overemphasizes or gets wrong. In fact, there just isn't enough room to lecture about Two Tone, Oi, or SHARPs, or remind everyone that Nazi skinheads are assholes in detail (they are, though). The writing here uses broad strokes and poaches elements that would suit a **Mage** chronicle.

If you're unfamiliar with any idea in this section, research it to get a far more detailed treatment than any book can provide. The stuff in these pages provides just enough to hit the ground running.

Punk Culture

Punk's immediate antecedents include the Situationist International, Motown as interpreted by the English, 1970s American Rock… and too many other things to count. Starting in the mid-70s, a pan-Atlantic cultural cauldron produced the punks you see today. This is what we want to steal from them:

• **DIY Ethos:** Punks make their own clothes, their own music and in **Mage**, their own magic. DIY ("Do It Yourself") is an ideal that refuses to buy in to the lifestyle envisioned by the mass market.

• **Individuality:** Unfettered self-expression is a core punk value. No punk is an island, so this generates specialized scenes with their own rules.

• **Politics:** Many punks have radical political leanings. A few are nihilistically apolitical or even conservative in reaction to what they see as cultural decadence in mainstream culture or in punk culture itself. Even when a punk doesn't take a side, he's likely to do it loudly.

Punk in Genre Fiction

Let's downplay the fact that "punk" is used to label cyberpunk-like fiction with a different window dressing and any hot new subgenre. We'll assign common characteristics that are somewhat arbitrary but move us in the right direction. Here's what we want to take from fiction:

• **Aesthetics:** Style matters. Everything has a look dictated by the world or by the theme the author wants to talk about. Authors use compressed descriptive prose and cultural references like branding to get images across. In speculative literature one technique is called the "eyeball kick." Look it up.

• **New Contexts:** Or as William Gibson put it, "The street finds its own uses for things." This fiction cuts up and staples together classic ideas to give them new life.

• **Social Consciousness:** The fiction recognizes that a society consists of more than its mass culture. It's got a mix of social classes and identities: rich and poor, male and female, corporate and street.

Punk Influences in the Occult

Punk contributions to the real-world occult subculture come from art-house film, early industrial music, and avant-garde literature. Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth and the Autonomous Individuals Network are among the better-known practitioner groups today. Here's how they remixed esoteric traditions:

• **Breaking Taboos:** Punk occult techniques confront social mores. They snap the magician out of psychic self-oppression or as an art form, challenge the status quo.

• **Experimentation:** Some say their objective is "magic without mysticism." Instead of following a set tradition, a practitioner constructs his own rituals and tests to see whether they satisfy his needs. (The question of whether you can really have an effective occult "experiment" is, of course, a matter of personal belief.)

• **Paradigm Shifting:** Borrowing from Peter J. Carroll's ideas about chaos magic, practitioners use "paradigm shifting." Instead of dogmatically obeying a particular belief system, the magician creates a provisional, ritual worldview to focus a particular intention. Belief is a conscious act, not a set of default assumptions.

A World of Armed Desire

The World of Darkness is an angrier place in a Punk chronicle, but in some ways it's more idealistic. Traditional institutions and mass media are the pawns of the elite, fortified by parasitic supernatural conspiracies. The middle class is almost dead and working class stability is a thing of the past. There are few reliable jobs or trustworthy institutions. The majority work long hours to pay a mounting collection of financial obligations they barely understand. Resentment simmers below the surface. Many take it out on friends and family. Sometimes it even comes out in a burst of murderous rage. Others numb themselves with regular doses of pop culture and binge consumption.

A few people drop out of the system. They find a name for their anger and a target. When they take to the streets buildings burn and windows shatter until the cops ride in. They become eccentrics, addicts, artists — even mages.

These rebels aren't the only mages around. Seers of the Throne are the ultimate manifestations of authority. The Pentacle is a collection of archaic occult aristocrats and appeasers who've learned to live with the Fallen system. They talk big about reform but it never amounts to anything. They've managed to lock down the magical resources that the Seers haven't already grabbed. They hoard wealth and temporal power for themselves, too.

Hope lies with sorcerers outside the orders: ragged mages who obey nothing beyond their desires. Influential sects hire them for jobs that reputable mages won't dirty their hands with, or knock them down when they rise up to challenge the system.

Slumming

On the other hand, your character doesn't have to get down and dirty to enjoy playing in the Punk genre. As we mentioned earlier, a lot of inspirational fiction draws together characters from different social classes. If a player wants a standard **Mage** character, you can allow it. A character from an order can be a strict "company man" whose worldview falls apart after associating with the punks, or an idealist who wants to bridge the class divide in Awakened society. He could just be in it for deviant kicks, too. Even though there's a lot of hostility between independents and order mages in the genre, nobody shoots anyone on sight and alliances do happen. Besides, there are plenty of common enemies to tackle.

Everybody knows the current system is unsustainable. The center won't hold. The choice is revolution now or Armageddon later. The longer the world waits, the harsher the adjustment will be, and the players' characters — mages from the fringe — will make it happen.

Punk Mages

Who are the protagonists? In Awakened society they're the lowest of the low: mages without orders or high occult connections. Atlantis is irrelevant and the Mysteries are tools, not truths. The world hasn't Fallen because of a cosmic accident, but because its self-appointed guardians were spineless, venal bastards. Here's what separates the Punk genre's core protagonists from standard **Mage: The Awakening** characters.

- **Outsider Status:** The characters aren't necessarily Mohawk-coiffed punks but they've all been alienated from society, denied institutional power, and driven to self-expression through the Mysteries. They don't belong to orders. In some cases, nobody's heard of their Watchtower either.

- **Radical Magic:** The characters lack formal tutoring but make up for it with creativity. The great Awakened factions keep the upper echelons of magical power tied up, but they can't match the desperate innovation of gutter-Awakened sorcerers, who do things to their souls that hidebound "high magicians" can't match.

- **Real Politics:** In this genre, order politics are bullshit. Atlantis is a trivia game for old men. Even the Free Council goes for abstract garbage about "techné." Punk mages who aren't just nihilists or radical individualists go for real world political affiliations. They're not Libertines and Ordeal Keepers. They're anarchists, Hindu nationalists and members of other camps to which real people belong. In a Punk game, the attitude at the bottom of the Awakened hierarchy is that Atlantean esoterica is either a waste of time or a strategy designed to keep magical power out of common hands.

Chronicles

Will you compromise your ideals to get ahead? It's easy to maintain ideological purity against the Seers of the Throne, but the Pentacle is different. Compared to the Throne, the Pentacle is a liberal organization. It still denies independents access to the Mysteries' greater powers. Order mages believe that all the Awakened should follow their laws. Although unwilling to issue convert-or-die ultimatums, they still won't share their resources. Sometimes, though, they're willing to trade for them. There are some jobs too dirty for the oh-so-civilized Silver Ladder, too politically pragmatic to fit Free Council democratic dogma — even too chancy to merit a Guardian scheme or Arrow strike force. The orders teach rotes, lend grimoires, even point the way to weak Hallows in exchange for services rendered. And if the so-called "mage-errants" and "solitaries" cooperate they build trust with their employers, embarking down a road that may lead to full order membership.

You'd be hard-pressed to find an indie cabal that hasn't made these deals from time to time, and plenty of former rebels now call themselves Provost, Councilor — even Hierarch. The orders see it as nothing more than growing up. Awakening starts a new life, complete with adolescent rebellion. But hard core independents call it selling out. They won't beg for scraps from the Pentacle's table. They'll steal what they want or invent alternatives. They'll ignore the Consilium or overthrow it (and don't get started on bullshit about the Assembly as an alternative, because collective oppression is no better than the variety handed down by elites).

Going it alone isn't easy. Scelesti and Tremere hunt the fringes. It's fertile ground for recruiting, too. After dwelling on the bottom of the ladder for a while most indie mages wonder if the Left-Handed is just propaganda. They join dark Legacies in greater numbers than order mages — one reason the orders hold independents in low esteem. Indie mages are impulsive, poorly educated. Some of them start out with a strong streak of nihilism, others develop it when the Awakened caste system bars them from greater magical secrets. These rogues strengthen the orders' resolve to recruit or suppress independent mages.

Mages who won't compromise or despair take refuge in militant action. They want a revolution that either gives them equal access to what the great factions hoard for themselves, or destroys the Pentacle and Throne. Militant cabals typically wed their objectives to a political ideology. Awakened culture should be revised according to Marxist principles, eco-anarchism, fascism — every group has its pet politics. In most cases, ideologues see this as part of a bigger fight for all humanity, but they're motivated to clean up their particular corner of it first. Most militant actions consist of theft, sabotage and social maneuvering designed to cut the enemy off from Sleeper ties, but a few indie cabals go in for full-fledged terrorism. The most radical actions rope Sleepers in. Robbing an armored car may not further the revolution directly, but it pays for the necessities.

Infighting abounds. Christian street preachers hate atheists, Party-focused communists hate anarchists and (thankfully) almost everybody hates the fascists. Indie cabals steal each other's territory, cash, and slapdash grimoires. Nobody cares about the niceties of the Duel Arcane. The closest equivalent is a five-on-one back alley "boot party."

Character Creation

To create one of the independent mages that define this genre, adjust the mage template found in the **Awakening** core book as follows:

• **Freeform Paths:** Idiosyncratic Awakenings help lead mages to a place outside the system. Pick one Subtle Ruling Arcanum, one Gross Ruling Arcanum, and one Inferior Arcanum. If the result duplicates an existing Path, the character is a member of it. Conventional factions only recognize the five standard Watchtowers. When somebody claims she wrote her name somewhere else, most of these mages think she's wrong, damaged, or maybe a little dangerous. See p. 103 for more guidelines on running a Pathless game.

• **No Orders:** Obviously, these characters don't belong to the orders.

• **Bonus Merit Dots:** Independent mages in a Punk game gain 10 bonus Merit dots, for a total of 17 at character creation. This makes up for multiple missing advantages.

• **Merit Restrictions:** Characters don't possess the High Speech Merit for free, but might be able to purchase it. Without the Merit they can hear High Speech but can't understand it, and can't read or use Atlantean runes.

The orders and Seer Ministries block Punk-genre mages from accumulating wealth, influence, and occult resources. Except for Striking Looks, Social Merits outside of Al-lies and Contacts can't be purchased past three dots at character creation. The Artifact, Enhanced Item, Imbued Item, Hallow, and Library Merits are usually unavailable at character creation, though you can make exceptions for extremely compelling concepts. For the most part, Punk mages have to claim these things during the chronicle.

• **No Rotes or Rote Specialties:** Punk genre mages don't begin with any rotes or rote Skill Specialties.

DIY Magic

In the Punk genre, magic is the supernaturally refined will to power. It can be practiced without believing any particular legend or aiming for enlightenment. An indie mage's quest isn't a numinous search for Ascension but a simple mission to do the right thing.

The Throne and Pentacle see things a little differently. They dress magic up in grandiose mythology and artistic pretensions. It's all about reestablishing some dead Utopia or appeasing tellingly silent Supernal man-gods. The purpose of it all is to suppress mages' moral senses so they'll fall in line with the status quo and do terrible things when their masters demand it.

The Ceiling

Propaganda is so subtly woven into the factions' formal magical practice that some independents won't truck with Atlantean lore at all — they're afraid of spiritual pollution. Runes, words, and signs are all compatible with the elites' just-so stories. Membership in these millennia-old cults has its advantages, however, as the orders and Seers know fearsome secrets and soul-shaping techniques that can scarcely be described.

For this reason, independent mages in a Punk genre game don't begin with much in the way of Supernatural Merits and have virtually no formal magical training. In

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Another Name for Banisher

If you want to boost the level of conflict in the chronicle ask yourself this: would order mages mistake a hostile, unconventionally trained sorcerer for a Banisher? What is it that *all* Banishers really are?

In one variant there might be no such thing as a "Banisher Awakenings." It's just magic in radical hands. Most order mages believe propaganda about the Banishers and hunt them down. Indies retaliate, furthering the myth.

fact, we suggest that you not only limit starting Arcana to three dots as usual, but limit Arcana gained in play *from other independents* to three dots. The factions hoard greater Mysteries and aren't above eliminating indies who understand them.

In a Punk game, Mastery is not an assured part of the character's life cycle (it isn't for most mages in the default setting either, but players' characters get some slack). It's a quest that involves putting one over on the great factions, compromising with them, or finding some ancient lore or potent inspiration that sidesteps the conflict. The Storyteller should make opportunities for Mastery available at great cost and with no assurance of success.

Thus, indie mages can't match their centuries of accumulated power, so instead, they revel in novelty. That's DIY magic: playing with the lower Arts to give them surprising effectiveness and staggering breadth. Here's how they do it.

Magical Components
(Supernatural Merit: ● to ●●●●●)

In a Punk genre game, indie mages create *components*: symbols and occult techniques they can use to enhance their spells. This compensates for their lack of formal magical training, but learning to use them requires some tutelage — usually, rough and tumble tips from other indie mages. This is represented by the Magical Components Merit.

Prerequisites: Awakened, not a member of any order, Seer Ministry or equivalent faction (Storyteller's discretion as to what qualifies). In a Punk genre chronicle, membership in such a formal tradition sets a mage in his ways, keeping him from learning this Merit. This Merit may or may not disappear after formal tutelage in a traditional magical society — the final decision is left to the group and Storyteller.

Effect: The mage can perform special actions to add power to an improvised spell. The mage's total Merit dots govern the maximum strength she can gather from a single component or the combined effect of multiple components, measured in component points. Once gathered, component points can be expended in a number of ways.

Base Components

Base components are the building blocks of a powerful improvised spell. Mages gather these at or near the moment of casting. The Storyteller should consider allowing additional components besides the ones described here.

Art (1 to 2 points): The mage creates a work of art that acts as a physical extension of the spell's imago. This can be a drawing, painting, sculpture, song, poem — any original

work (though it can be a remix or cutup of somebody else's art). It doesn't need to be particularly good for a one-point bonus, but a two-point bonus requires exceptional success (5 or more) on the applicable Attribute + Skill roll.

Arcane Experience (3 points): The mage draws on his experience with the supernatural for inspiration instead of investing it through study and contemplation. Accordingly, the player spends one point of Arcane Experience to empower the spell with a three-point component.

Ecstasy (1 to 3 points): The mage undergoes an intense mind-altering experience. She might experience significant (and perhaps impairing) effects from a drug, complete the spell at the moment of orgasm, or cast while suspended from hooks piercing her skin. At one point, the ecstatic experience is mild enough that it won't seriously inconvenience the mage. At two points, it's enough to inflict a mild disadvantage, such as a momentary −2 penalty to mundane dice pools. At three points, the ecstatic experience makes it difficult to perform any action other than spellcasting. It imposes a −4 penalty to mundane dice pools or an equivalent drawback.

Performance (1 to 3 points): At one point, the mage dresses in a way that ritually invokes the spell's power, or slaps together prefab artistic elements for display. At two points, the mage actually weaves the spell's Imago into a performance. At three points, this performance must involve multiple participants or an audience of uninvolved bystanders.

Component Modifiers

Once the mage has gathered magical components, modify the total in his pool according to the following guidelines.

Commitment: If the spell supports the mage's stated ideology or other creed, add one to the total component points. If the spell violates the creed, subtract one point.

Passion: If the spell would satisfy the character's Virtue or Vice, add one to the total component points.

Repetition: If any of the spell's components are reused in roughly the same form as before during the same chapter, reduce the total components gathered by one point for each reused component.

Component Effects

Players spend gathered components on the benefits below during the applicable stage in the spellcasting process. Again, the Storyteller is encouraged to add additional benefits where appropriate.

Arcane Inspiration: The mage can spend four component points to cast as if he possessed one dot in an Arcanum he doesn't possess — one dot higher than usual,

or one dot in an Arcanum he doesn't know at all. This cannot be used on the mage's inferior Arcana.

Factor Bonuses: If the spell succeeds, the mage can spend components to add additional spell factors after the fact, even if these were not originally entrenched in the spell's Imago, on a one-for-one basis.

Mitigate Combinations: Two component points nullifies the –2 penalty for combining an additional spell (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 129).

Soul Mods

Fuck Legacies. They're magical pyramid schemes that enslave a mage's soul to some self-appointed master. Indie mages don't like them, but Attainments are powerfully appealing. The soul should be malleable, tamed by the will, instead of dusty doctrines.

Instead of Legacies, indie mages learn Soul Mods: a haphazard collection of techniques designed to manipulate the inner self. Somewhere along the line, mavericks, geniuses, and madmen (or mages with all of these traits) learned to reject their original Legacies. Instead of cer-

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Optional Rule: Paradigm Shifting and Soul Bending

For those of you who have **Magical Traditions** and/or **Banishers** on hand, you may allow characters with the Magical Components Merit to purchase the following Merits with components points. Each dot costs one point. These Merits are temporary. They last solely for the duration of the attached spell and only apply to that spell. They are: Magical Tradition (**Magical Traditions**, p. 23, Body Ravaging Magic (**Banishers**, p. 41) and Extemporaneous Affinity (also **Banishers**, p. 41). The character must fulfill any attached prerequisites conditions and associated drawbacks. In the case of Magical Tradition, the character may use a relevant source from his library (as the Library Merit) or study with an informant to replace the required Academics or Occult Skill Specialty.

Access to Magical Tradition represents the real-world occult technique of "paradigm shifting:" temporarily changing the psyche to accept another belief system for magical purposes. The Merits from **Banishers** reinforce an indie mage's spontaneous and self-destructive tendencies.

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emonially inducting fellow travelers, they taught them soul secrets in brief, intense bursts. Severed from their origins, these Attainments can be learned by any mage with sufficient magical knowledge.

Mages learn Soul Mods from other mages who know them, Legacy members (who in a Punk chronicle know how to teach Attainments this way, but are usually loath to do it), or from special grimoires that detail the original Legacy (known as daimonomicons). There's a brisk trade in Soul Modding, and even in communities that try to make the process as "open source" as possible by maintaining databases of known Attainments and related lore. The result is a community of powerful, custom-built souls — and frayed psyches. Soul Modding is hard on the mind.

Here are the rules:

Arcana: The mage doesn't need to be a member of the Legacy's Path or Order, but must have the listed prerequisite Arcana dots for each Attainment. She doesn't need to have them as Ruling Arcana, but can't have them as Inferior Arcana either. Under no circumstances may she earn a new Ruling Arcanum through Soul Modding

Experience Cost: Soul Mods don't impose an experience tithe in the way Legacies do. Instead, they have a set experience point cost: 6 points for First Attainments and 12 points for Second Attainments. It is impossible to learn Third Attainments through Soul Modding.

Legacy Ban: Learning a Soul Mod bans the character from *ever* joining a Legacy. It virtually ensures the enmity of Legacies bearing the Attainments she's learned.

Order of Attainments: To learn a Second Attainment with a Soul Mod the character needs access to the same Legacy's First Attainment.

Soul Twisting: A soul can only bend so much before it cracks. Every two First Attainment Soul Mods and every Second Attainment Soul Mod either imposes a –1 penalty on Wisdom rolls to avoid degeneration, or adds one die to Paradox rolls — player's choice. This is a cumulative, permanent drawback.

Punk Stories

• **Cleaning House:** Two indie cabals at the opposite ends of the political spectrum decide they've had enough of each other. There's no genteel Lex Magica to turn to; it's all about gathering support for an occult street war. Complicating matters is the fact that each side is well-integrated with Sleeper allies: cultists, radicals, and gangs. The players' cabal has a chance to defuse the situation or at least negotiate a way to throw down outside of uninitiated eyes. Then again, if one of the cabals is a pack of assholes the key may be to execute them with

as few complications as possible. Pentacle mages are watching too, looking for the slightest slip up.

• **Common Enemies:** The Pentacle is corrupt but there are worse things out there. One of them is hunting mages, leaving mad, soulless husks behind. It preys on both order mages and independents. The thing (or person — nobody's seen it) baffles even erudite Mysterium researchers. The only thing left is an alliance to hunt it down. The cabal's Pentacle counterparts seem to be reasonable people, but is that a façade for a hidden agenda?

• **Up Against the Wall, Motherfuckers:** It begins with an abuse of power that demands revenge. The Pentacle moves from suppression to outright murder. The Throne reconditions an entire cabal into its puppets. It's enough to rally local independents to a direct attack on Consilium and Pylon alike. Some establishment mages even join the revolutionaries. Can the players' cabal keep the revolt from descending into indiscriminate bloodshed? Can they resist the temptation to become a dictatorial vanguard capable of worse abuses than whatever triggered the revolution?

Noir

Beverly is a real high-class dame, no doubt about that. Why she asked to meet up in a dump like Charlie's Joint, I couldn't guess.

Charlie's is a real hellhole, from the piss-poor watered-down liquor to the burnt-out neon sign in the single, grimy window. Not the kind of place Bev would mention in polite conversation, let alone set foot in under normal circumstances. But there she is, sitting at the bar in that red dress of hers, with all those curves. Her eyes are wet with tears. I feel a smirk creep across my face.

"Must be the smoke in here, right? 'Cause I know you ain't bawling yours eyes out over that rich fellow you've been working one over on."

I'm expecting her to take a jab at me like old times, but instead she looks up, a broken expression on her face, and her lip quivers.

"It's my sister, Lou." She says with a choked little sob, "Lil's missing."

My smirk dissolves instantly. "Shit, Bev. Tell me you haven't been having those nightmares again."

"You've got to help me, Lou." Bev says, taking hold of my hand, "Please. For old time's sake. You owe me." I feel the weight of the magic in her words. I knew she'd call me on that promise we made. I just didn't know it would be so soon.

Noir calls to mind the gritty underbelly of the metropolis, dark alleyways, smoke-filled nightclubs and bars, and abandoned train yards and factories. When running **Mage** in this setting, the city becomes a visceral, urban maze cloaked in perpetual night. The characters are morally ambiguous and often harbor unpleasant and possibly dangerous secrets. Time itself may be fluid and dream-like. Events may take place out-of-order, or the storyline may include occasional flashbacks or flash-forwards.

Magic in the Metropolis

Noir is notorious for its nihilistic presentation of the world. The tone of the genre tends to be cynical and pessimistic, with doom-laden storylines involving subjects of death, suffering, tragedy, unhappiness, and existential despair. In the **Mage** noir universe, however, this does not necessarily mean that the protagonist (or the characters) must meet death or tragedy at the chronicle's conclusion. In a gloomy underworld of crime and corruption, the tiny, wavering light of magic still burns, and the very existence of magic brings a small, cautious hopefulness to an otherwise bleak existence. In a city of endless night, the characters work together as best they can to keep even darker forces at bay.

The Conspiracy

At the start of a chronicle, the characters may be presented with a mystery, perhaps a murder, theft, or a kidnapping, but in **Mage** noir something larger and more ominous is always lying in wait behind the scenes. Somehow, all who Awaken within the crumbling city can feel it instinctively. Even if they are unable to understand how or why, inhabitants of the dark metropolis simply know it to be true. An unknown force is seething just beyond understanding, and in this dog-eat-dog world, that knowledge is the only truth there is. Even the Sleepers feel the tension. But those who most strongly sense that reality may not be as it seems, a feeling that mages of the city call the Conspiracy, are the ones among the teeming multitudes who Awaken to magic.

Even after Awakening, the Conspiracy remains. It is, perhaps, this pervasive sense that something is amiss in the world that so much crime and mistrust occurs within the **Mage** noir universe.

Nobody knows the cause of the Conspiracy. It could be an effect of the Abyss leaking into the reality of the Fallen World, it could be magic itself, or it could merely be an instinctive human reaction to a difficult way of life. Whatever the cause, everyone feels the Conspiracy's effects, and a general feeling of unease and mistrust pervades all who dwell within the city of darkness.

Character Archetypes

No clear-cut "good guys" exist in the **Mage** noir universe. Every character has a secret, a tragic past, or some inner darkness to hide, including the protagonists. Trust isn't freely given, if it's given at all.

The Private Eye: Although the Private Eye often intended to be the hero of the story, he may come across as being nearly as amoral, ruthless, and self-serving as the criminals he defeats. The Private Eye trusts no one and suspects everyone. He's tough, smooth, knows all the right things to say, and while he may not have an innate sense of goodness or compassion, he often has a personal code of loyalty, professional responsibility, and integrity that he seeks to uphold.

The Femme Fatale: The direct translation of the French term Femme Fatale is "fatal woman;" an irresistibly attractive woman who leads others (often men, but why stop at one gender?) to destruction. She is a seductive, stunning beauty with the calculated ability to use her sexuality and enchanting charm as weapons. Initially, every character who displayed these attributes was automatically a villainess, but as the genre has progressed, it's not uncommon to find seeming Femmes Fatales who are anti-heroines, foils, or even protagonists. The Femme Fatale typically has a manipulative and secretive nature, and as such she can never be truly trusted. All the same, she is just as likely to be the villain as she is the anti-heroine — it may just take an entire chronicle to determine where her true loyalties lie (quite possibly, to herself).

The Crooked Cop: In the public eye, the Crooked Cop may maintain the mask of morally upright protector of the peace. His agenda, however, is typically self-serving and may be connected to a much larger, more ominous plot. While he may boisterously declare loyalty to the just cause of his work and to any number of people, his true loyalties remain to himself, making the Crooked Cop the first to jump ship when the going gets tough, or his ruse is discovered. When cornered, he does not hesitate to shoot whoever stands his way, and is not beyond such cowardly actions as taking hostages or using Sleepers as human shields when on the run.

The Jealous Lover: The jealous lover could be anybody: an influential businessman, a mob boss, a bartender at the local joint. He is constantly suspicious that his lover has betrayed him in some way (with or without good reason). The Jealous Lover is openly expressive (often violently so) about his jealousy or suspicions. While he may or may not be a killer, if the body of his lover is found (or someone who is connected to his lover in some way), he typically has a clear motive for murder in the eyes of the law.

A Glossary of Hardboiled Slang

To add some authenticity to a chronicle set in the **Mage** noir universe, consider having your characters use popular slang of the 1940s:

All Wet — Describes an erroneous idea or individual, as in, "he's all wet."

Broad — Woman, dame

Bump Off — To murder, to kill.

Cat's Meow — Something splendid or stylish; the best or greatest, wonderful

Darb — An excellent person or thing (as in "the Darb" — a person with money who can be relied on to pay the check)

Fall Guy — Victim of a frame

Frame — To give false evidence, to set up someone

Gin Mill — An establishment where hard liquor is sold; a bar

Hard Boiled — A tough, strong guy

Heebie-Jeebies — The jitters

Hooch — Bootleg liquor

Jalopy — An old car

Joint — A club, usually selling alcohol

Keen — Attractive or appealing

Moll — A gangster's girl

Pinch — To arrest.

Sheba — A woman with sex appeal

Sheik — A man with sex appeal

Speakeasy — An illicit bar selling bootleg liquor.

Time Flow and Flashbacks

Noir is well known for its dream-like disregard for typical chronological order. In **Mage**, it is possible to apply careful displacement of key events throughout your chronicle. A storyline may be relatively consecutive, with plot detours into the past or future. At any point during a chronicle, a scene may take place at a future point in the storyline (a flash-forward), or a past point in the storyline (a flashback).

Flashbacks and flash-forwards happen *within* the story itself. The narrative progresses to a point, and at that point a flashback/forward is used. But to what purpose? You might choose to use a flashback in game for one or several of the following reasons:

• For thematic-, motif- or mood-based resonance. In a game about treacheries and betrayals, you might choose to flashback to a time the characters either betrayed someone or were themselves betrayed. Alternately, you might go an opposite direction and choose an event where someone stayed loyal — using an opposite "foil" in such a manner can provide contrast and highlight the point you're hoping to drive home.

• To provide some further detail. The cabal is battling an old nemesis, and in the midst of the combat, you choose to move to flashback. Why? So they can recall an earlier meeting or battle with the nemesis. When the narrative returns to the present, the characters can call-back moments from that flashback, or even help to conceive of the nemesis' strengths and weaknesses. In this manner, you're providing context from past to present.

• To answer questions. The characters confront something in-game that, up until now, they haven't seen before.

Cinematic Influences

Although film noir's classic period is generally regarded as stretching from the early 1940s to the late 1950s, its influence stretches across decades, as well as other genres, and can still be seen in films today. Look to the following movies as influences for your own film noir **Mage** chronicle.

• **Classic Film Noir:** The hardboiled school of American detective and crime fiction heavily influenced film noir during the 1940s and 50s. Most took place in an urban setting, featuring archetypal characters of the genre: private eyes, femme fatales, corrupt lawmen, or jealous husbands. Some classic noir films include: *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *Double Indemnity* (1944), *Murder, My Sweet* (1944), *The Killers* (1946), *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946), *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947), *Strangers on a Train* (1951), and *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955).

• **Neo-Noir:** The genre continued past its classic era, and a number of films today maintain the noir tradition. While *similar* plots, themes, and character archetypes persist, these attributes of the noir became more flexible or exaggerated as the genre evolved throughout the decades. Some neo-noir films include: *Blue Velvet* (1986), *Naked Lunch* (1991), *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), *Se7en* (1995), *Fargo* (1996), *Crash* (1996), *L.A. Confidential* (1997), *Fight Club* (1999), *Memento* (2000), *Mulholland Drive* (2001), *Insomnia* (2002), *The Machinist* (2004), and *Brick* (2005).

• **Cross-genre Noir:** Noir may also be blended with other genres. A primarily noir chronicle may also include elements of science fiction, comedy, pulp, or dark comic adventure. Some cross-genre films include: *Soylent Green* (1973), *Blade Runner* (1982), *Alien³* (1992), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), *Twelve Monkeys* (1995), *The Big Lebowski* (1998), *Pi* (1998), *Gattaca* (1997), *Dark City* (1998), *The Thirteenth Floor* (1999), *Minority Report* (2002), *Sin City* (2005), and *The Dark Knight* (2008).

Types of Flashbacks/Flash-forwards

We separate flashbacks and flash-forwards into two categories. These are certainly not the only ways to handle them, but it should give you an idea as to how to use them and, more importantly, *what they mean* in the context of the narrative. Note that it's important for Storytellers and players to be on the same page as to what style of flashback is being used in your game.

Informative Flashbacks and Flash-forwards

The "Informative" flashback or flash-forwards are meant to provide the characters with new information, which can then be used to provide context to events in the present.

For example, in an informative flash-forward, the characters encounter a young man holding a smoking gun standing overtop the dead body of a beautiful prostitute in the Hotel Regal. Clearly, it appears to the players as though the young man is responsible for the woman's death, and when the characters return to the present in the storyline, the players have this knowledge despite the fact that their characters do not. Certainly, the flashback or flash-forward can have *some* repercussions in the present, but the difference comes in how the players can use the information.

In the case of a flash-forward, the characters have no knowledge of the future event, but the players do. Flash-forwards should be treated as though the players are spectators watching a murder mystery. As such, in the case of flash-forwards, a certain amount of metagame thinking may be encouraged. Players may wonder why the girl is going to be killed and who the young man holding the weapon is. The players may allow this information to influence their character's choices (within reason). For example, "back" in the present, the players could not seek out the man seen holding the smoking gun in the flash-forward and kill him before he commits murder. The players may, however, indirectly guide their characters to the Hotel Regal (perhaps just for a drink at the bar), where the Storyteller provides new insight — "the prostitute is seen cozying up to the hot-headed owner of the Hotel Regal." The players then realize that situation may not be as it first appeared. By the time the present catches up to the future, the characters may discover that the smoking gun the young man holds was fired in hot blood at the prostitute's real killer, the Hotel owner. In noir, the truth is flexible and the plot full of complex relationships and full of red herrings that obscure the facts. The characters must use magical ability and investigative skill to work their way through the twisting labyrinth of the mystery.

Alternately, when the game switches back to the present after a flashback, the characters may recall past experiences to gain insight to a scenario that takes place in the present. Characters may make callbacks to a flashback, "Hey, Lou, remember that night at the old Gin Mill? You were completely tanked and stuck on that blonde broad with the great gams. Quite the sheik, weren't ya? Right up until you upchucked all over her shoes. What was that dame's name again? I thought I saw her down at Jerry's place last week."

Players can change things that haven't been pre-established, but not dramatically so. One way to ensure this is to eschew dice rolling during the flashback encounter. It's still important, of course, for the characters to be able to succeed or fail in the scene. What are the stakes? What *can* the players change? Social and mental challenges should abound. They might be able to humiliate the enemy (giving them a success, but also giving the nemesis further reason to become a thorn in their sides).

Adaptive Flashbacks

An adaptive flashback assumes that players help to set the course of the present through their actions in the flashback. They're free to act as they wish during the flashback (though players should always take care to separate out what facts the characters know between past and present), and can have dramatic impact on the present tale.

It's important that the Storyteller know how to frame events so as not to get caught up in a situation where he has to drastically rewrite the tale. The flashback isn't time travel, the characters aren't going back in time to save John F. Kennedy and change the course of the world, but the players should feel free to act accordingly *within* context.

In adaptive flashback, the events of the past are meant to be as important as the events of the present. They're not just informative. They don't provide small detail. They set major events into play, and the players are helping to orchestrate a tale at both ends of the narrative.

This mode has its pitfalls, and everybody needs to be comfortable with them. If the players do something that contradicts present precedent, the Storyteller has to be prepared to rewrite history a bit. It's important not to "railroad" them (something that happens more in a reflective flashback by necessity). *But,* the players also have to be prepared to accept the consequences of that. If killing the nemesis creates negative conditions, so be it. They also have to be willing to commit to a little suspension of disbelief when it comes to rewriting the narrative a bit.

Experience Points

It may seem strange to award experience points for something that's already happened, or hasn't happened yet, but it's only happened in the story, not at the gaming table. A game session is a game session. Lessons learned are lessons learned. We recommend that you give out experience points the same way as usual, with little to no variance.

Story Hooks

• **The Rotting Underworld:** The city's streets always have a certain, distinctive foul odor, but it's gotten worse lately, a lot worse. Something big is rotting beneath the metropolis, and the overpowering reek of death is rising from the runoff grates and sewers. The strangest thing of all is that the horrible stench is only affecting the Awakened. Sleepers do not seem to notice the change at all. There have always been rumors of a second, underground city beneath the metropolis. Are the rumors true? What is causing the foul smell? Why is it happening now? And why are only mages noticing?

• **Mr. Gray's Oath:** A powerful Artifact has allegedly been stolen from the private collection of one of the dark city's wealthy, Awakened elite, Mr. Gray. He calls upon the players' cabal, bringing into play an old, magically sworn oath. He provides little information on the Artifact itself, apart from the fact that it is extremely powerful, and must be kept out of the hands of the "wrong people." The cable has no choice but to help Gray, but what is this Artifact? Who has stolen it, and for what purpose? Did the Artifact really belong to Mr. Gray in the first place, or is he using the cabal as tools to obtain it for his own reasons?

• **Safekeeping:** Joey, a close childhood friend of one of the characters in your cabal, hasn't seen his sister in years. One night, he shows up tanked and distraught, claiming that his sister is back in town and wrapped up in something dangerous. After a brief visit, she left him with an enchanted box, warning him that it should never be opened, and asking him to use his resources to keep it "safe" for her. What does the mysterious box contain? What kind of trouble is his sister in, and who is she running from? Where has she been and what has she been doing all these years? (In true noir fashion, Joey should turn up dead before the end of the first chapter.)

CHAPTER TWO:

MIRROR MAGIC

"We have a success rate of one percent, which is far better than my competitors," Corliss said. His pride was certain. Chin up. Eyes and nose down. A smile tugging at his mouth and cheeks.

He took a clipboard from faithful attaché Kessler, and tossed it to Doctor Spears. Spears, nervous, nibbling at the torn cuticle of his thumb, perused the chart.

"That is good," Spears mumbled, running a yellowed finger along the axes of data. "I have a team. A staff of assistants. My studies… we don't study this element of enlightenment. We, ah, we look at—"

"The principles of uncertainty," Corliss interrupted. "The observer effect."

"The nature of Paradox, yes. My team needs help. They aren't enlightened. They aren't Gifted, you see? I need… *they* need help."

Corliss looked to Kessler for a confirming nod, which he received.

"Look around you, Doctor." Corliss swept a hand—before them, in this warehouse, were rows of chairs. On a cursory glance through smeared glasses, one might think it was a row of salon chairs: women getting perms, their heads embubbled for the sake of vanity. But a deeper look through clear eyes revealed the truth: tangles of red and black wires, eyes peeled back with delicate filaments, wrists and ankles secured with leather straps.

It was a factory. Row after row of potentials. Waiting to see if they could be enlightened. The power of science, gone so far beyond what the world already suspected.

"One percent success rate, you say?" Spears muttered.

Corliss nodded.

"And the other 99 percent?"

"Half survive with their wits intact. The others… well. They have their place, still. Their families still love them. They can get jobs… bagging groceries. Herding shopping carts."

Spears blinked. He continued to gnaw his cuticle till it drew blood.

"Yes," he blurted. "Yes. That's a perfectly acceptable success rate. I'll call my team at once."

> *Unaware of the absurdity of it, we introduce our own petty household rules into the economy of the universe for which the life of generations, peoples, of entire planets, has no importance in relation to the general development.*
>
> —Alexander Herzen

Magic operates via a few core assumptions, and we're not going to jigger with those assumptions. We *like* those assumptions, because they form a steady foundation on which to build. Everything else, though, is now suspect. It's open for reexamination. In this chapter, we're going to tear down everything but the core assumptions regarding magic, and rebuild them.

Want to see how magic can be framed through the warped lens of "weird science?" Want to know how psychic abilities or animistic shamanism can be applied across the board to redefine the entire Supernal experience? This chapter will provide you with a world of options regarding the way magic works. You want to break it down? Fuck it up? Turn it over and see what shakes out and what doesn't? This is the section for you.

Magic is still magic, but this chapter should show that *how* you get to the Supernal needn't be a straight or well-understood path. Every destination has many roads leading there, and magic is no different.

Really, what this chapter is about is access. How a mage accesses the Supernal, that's the change. This access, and what results from the change of access, can create whole new moods or themes for you to work with. In a way, the beginning and the end are the same — the mage reaches for the Supernal, and the mage ideally grasps and uses the Supernal to change the way the Tapestry is woven. But it's that stuff in the middle that defines the experience; a different road to the same destination.

First: let's talk about the core assumptions, those things that we're *not* going to change.

Magic, Defined

Magic is no random thing. It has rules. While the theories are many and fluid, the rules are numbered and fixed. The individual mage may not *understand* all the rules, or the many nuances found within, but from a systems perspective, the rules are defined.

Magic is also not a thing of belief. A mage cannot work magic, cannot use his extraordinary and luminary will to rework the threads, just because he believes it to be so. Similarly, his magic is not limited by a lack of belief. What he believes about magic is, in the grand scheme of things, largely an exercise of theory. Certainly some mages cling tightly to the idea that belief and faith

is what fuels their impossible capabilities, but it's not really so. The ability to draw down the Supernal can be framed in whatever belief system a mage chooses — Catholic mysticism, Gnostic hallucinations, *vodoun* rituals, whatever — but the core principles remain the same. He reaches for the Supernal, and what he finds there helps him to change reality in ways great and small. Doesn't matter what a mage calls it. It doesn't matter if he thinks of it as God or dragons or the firing of all his synapses and chakras in simultaneity; magic is what magic is.

A bullet punches a hole in your lung, you can call the bullet whatever you want. Divine will? A perfect expression of muzzle velocity? Random chance? An avatar of the gods-of-war? Who cares? It is what it is. It's your lung, perforated. It's a hunk of lead traveling at 1100 feet-per-second. What you name it doesn't change it.

To draw down the Supernal, one must reach through the Abyss, like reaching for the brass ring through a jar of scorpions or a puddle of acid. Paradox can be the result; Paradox is the burn of acid, the sting of the scorpion. Sleepers — those who are *not* special, those who are not mages now and may never be — reinforce the power of the Abyss because each contains a seed of it, each has sympathy with that wide and empty expanse.

To reiterate: magic has rules, magic is not built off of belief, and magic is perilous. Magic is defined by these parameters.

The First Two Roads

So we know now what's going to happen with this chapter: the fundamentals of magic are firm, but how one crafts and conjures magic is variable. Does a "mage" create magic through snapping Tesla coils and quantum computers? Does the "mage" harness psychic energy to affect the world around him? Is access to the Supernal hidden behind gates held firmly shut by a whole hoary host of spirits?

The first question, before we get into any of that, is how do you manifest this change in your **Mage: The Awakening** game? The way we see it, you can choose one of two roads…

Road One: Together Forever

In this approach, you assume that the Awakened know *one* way to the Supernal, but that other ways exist. They exist together in a World of Darkness replete with wild-eyed guys who can build a teleportation chamber or blind telekinetics that can hurl a television across the room by pulling Supernal energies into their "mindspace."

What's the benefit? The benefit of this approach is that it allows for a multifarious approach to magic. From that vantage point, the many roads to magic can cause a character to question his own beliefs and approaches, creating a measure of paradigmatic doubt because, hey, magic works for *those* guys, too.

The downside is that you run the risk of muddying the waters, mucking up theme and mood. That's not to say theme cannot remain consistent; hubris is very much a factor in scientists just as it is with the Awakened, and a psychic with a "big head" might actually *be* a psychic with a big head (or, at least, swollen brain). But mood can certainly become muddled. "Weird science," for instance, is sure to come with its own gamut of images and ideas, many of which are very specific, very strange, and often pulp-like in genre (and we recommend reading the section on Pulp in Chapter One, p. 22).

Road Two: One and Only

Here, magic works differently than presented in **Mage: The Awakening**. The approach you choose to use in regards to magic — be it drugs, psychic powers, weird science, or whatever — means that those willworkers *are* the Awakened. A character has his eyes opened to a particular way of reweaving the Tapestry, born out of some mad scientific revelation, a visit from a spirit, or a "psychic episode." The approach you choose is the one and only way. No other roads to magic exist but the one you deign appropriate.

The advantage to this is that you've given the entire game a new coating of paint specific to your vision. Nothing deviates from that, which means you've fortified both theme and mood. Everybody's on the same page.

The disadvantage is, of course, that you lose all the other stuff. While we'd love to give you as much setting and historical information as you'd find in **Mage: The Awakening**, the realities of publishing don't allow us to give you that kind of depth. That means the approach you choose doesn't have the clarity or profundity of information found regarding the Awakening. Of course, even here you have two options: the first is, well, so what? Players will help you fill in the details. Plus, some level of confusion and ignorance regarding the setting can be a feature, not a bug (ignorance creates conflict, and conflict creates good story). The second option is that you look through the setting information found in **Mage: The Awakening** and you mold it to fit the new approach to magic you've chosen for your game. That means taking some or all of Atlantis, the Orders, the Paths, and so forth, and shaping them to suit the nature of weird science or animistic shamanism or what-not. (And don't worry, throughout we'll provide hooks that help you do some of that reshaping.)

Gifted Science

Pop! One moment, a flickering flutter of bright color, the next moment, that color tumbled to earth. The butterfly landed on the green lawn; one last twitch of a motley wing, then no more.

Professor John Ridley sauntered over to the dead bug, his flip-flops clucking as he walked. A .22 pistol hung at his hip, the barrel still blowing wisps of smoke. His protégé and assistant, Philips, hurried after.

Ridley held up the butterfly and shook it slightly before Philips' nose. "Notice — the butterfly's head is gone. I shot it off, as I promised."

"That's incredible," Philips said, his mouth agape, ready to collect flies.

"Is it? No. The butterfly travels at a certain velocity. Its wing movements infer chaotic movement, but chaos can be predicted. A bullet, too, has its own velocity — so does the wind, and gravity always has its say."

"But such calculations, so fast—"

"They're unconscious, Philips. The same way that I can catch a baseball in my hand; the brain is doing phenomenal calculus to accomplish such a minimal task. My sharpshooter's eye isn't magic, you see. It's just math. It's all math."

Bear with us for a moment as we repeat an old idea, but it's an old idea worth repeating: science, if viewed by the ignorant or unaware, can easily be thought of as "magic." A monkey fears the light, heat, and crackle of fire. Early civilizations saw the rushing deluge as a punishment from one of their many gods, not something born as a result of environmental action. A crusader of the Middle Ages would certainly gawk in sublime fear if a Humvee barreled toward him or a bunker-buster bomb destroyed a distant castle. A housewife in the 1950s would wave off any discussions of the Internet as some silly science-fiction notion.

This, then, is the premise of this magical variant: magic is not magic at all, but in fact just a form of enlightened — dare we say "Awakened" — science. The acts of apparent miracle and magic performed by sorcerers are instead the acts of advanced experimentation and technology performed by *scientists*.

That's not to say the Supernal doesn't exist, or that the Awakened aren't capable of reaching toward a great well of knowledge and wisdom and drawing it into their sphere of existence with the goal of changing the fundamentals of the world around them. Instead, it's all a matter of definition.

For example, the Awakened themselves can just as easily be called "the Gifted." Yes, they're still special. They're unlike "normal" humans in that they have minds capable of parsing far more potent and incredible notions than the average Joe (and the "mind" is far more significant to the Gifted willworker than the "soul" is to our understanding of an Awakened sorcerer). Look back throughout history and you'll find scientists whose understanding of the world was, frankly, far more enlightened and deeper than the standard people of their times. In the 17th century, Anton van Leeuwenhoek made lens after lens, each more outstanding in its magnification, creating microscopes that could not be properly reproduced until the 1950s. Einstein had ideas that were so radical and outside the realm of expected thought that modern scientists still revisit his ideas with the need to test them (and all without him graduating high school). Nikola Tesla conjured theories and invented devices that have been squirreled away by the United States government because they are "dangerous" (like his supposed earthquake oscillator). Tesla created free energy, demonstrated by holding a light bulb and walking into a room… whereupon the light bulb actually lit up in one's hand. Tesla himself claimed that many of his inspirations were randomly inspired — during his many illnesses, he would have flashes of light, or have information revealed to him while staring at clouds. He'd build entire inventions in his mind's eye before ever committing them perfectly to paper — a combination of a photographic memory and so-called picture thinking. Even *now*, with Tesla being a noted scientist and having been retroactively credited with inventing the radio, what he came up with and the means by which he invented things all sounds like it skirts the definition of science, bumping shoulders with that ancient notion of "magic."

It is, of course, weird science, or science that exists on the fringe. Here we take a look at how the Awakened — or the Gifted, now — reach for a realm of inspiration to perform acts of bizarre science that could be *thought of* as magic. Again, our fundamentals are the same: the Gifted scientist reaches for the Supernal and applies it to the world in a way that *changes* the world. But beyond this, some definitions within this mode of will-working must certainly change.

Redefinitions

Abyss, the: A lot of Gifted scientists aren't particularly interested in the metaphysics of what they do — they accept that they're more enlightened than the masses, that science is far more advanced than mortal man would like to admit (in fact, science is represented by an endless ladder that the Gifted perpetually climb), and that's that. The Abyss exists for some as metaphor, for some as a parallel realm, and

for others still as a mental disorder that blocks one's enlightenment. For the purposes of understanding, it's accepted that all non-Gifted individuals all share a certain sympathy with the Abyss that prevents them from themselves being Gifted or truly comprehending the full potential of science. Some Gifted call the Abyss something different: *the Rationale*.

Arcana: Arcana and Arcanum are words loaded with mysticism. While the individual Arcana themselves have fairly straightforward names without much lofty mystical convention (give or take a couple), the overarching term would have to change — Gifted scientists are not beholden to magical Tarot-based magical systems. Since these categories of willworking are effectively based on many scientific modes of study or schools of thought, it is therefore apropos to call these *Colleges*. As in, "What College do you study?" or "I'll draw upon the College of Temporal Dynamics to examine what might have happened at the scene of the crime." A discussion of the Arcana/Colleges themselves follows:

• **Death:** Death is an unambiguous, non-magical term, but scientists (like magicians in some ways) are notorious for their use of big words and convoluted terms. The Death Arcanum now becomes the *College of Morbid Studies*.

• **Fate:** Fate is not a word to which the Gifted are hip. Fate implies a measure of destiny, a twist of the divine. While some measure of destiny is present in science (it is assumed, for instance, that individual cells are preprogrammed with a "time of death"), it's not something that scientists would cling to as a romantic notion. The Fate Arcanum is now known as the *College of Process Predictability*. It is less about luck, fortune, or predestination, and more about the *chances* of things both good and bad occurring:

• **Forces:** While the Forces Arcanum is arguably one that demonstrates some fairly bombastic and classic sorcerous ways (shooting fire, throwing some fool into a wall with but the wave of one's hand), it's one that remains grounded in scientific notion. Most of the Forces Arcanum is actually about energy: potential energy, kinetic energy, thermal energy, and so forth. Many of the spells actually sound like rational scientific ideas: Influence Heat, Control Light, Transform Energy, etc. Still, the term "Forces" isn't entirely clear — instead, this will now be known as the *College of Energy Evolution*, given that the progression of abilities within this College pushes one's finesse with energy to new levels (i.e. that progression evolves).

• **Life:** Again, Life as a term is straightforward, though a bit broad and ambiguous. The Life Arcanum is now called the *College of Biological Manipulation.*

• **Matter:** At its core, matter is essentially anything that has mass and volume and comprises the building blocks for all atoms and molecules. Scientifically, this muddles into the Life Arcanum because really, a living creature is made up of… well, matter. Everything with an atomic structure is made of matter. So, the Gifted will certainly differentiate in their terms. Henceforth, the Matter Arcanum shall now be known as the *College of Elemental Chemistry*, because that's what chemistry really is: the study of matter and its many states.

• **Mind:** To the Gifted scientist, the mind is far more significant than the soul — while certainly some Gifted still believe in the soul as an expression of one's existence (after all, "advanced science" might certainly offer evidence of the soul through things like Kirlian photography), it's the mind that seems to carry the persona and psyche of the individual. In broad strokes, the study of the Mind Arcanum is about psychology, but it goes deeper, invoking preternatural results — as such, the Mind Arcanum will be called the *College of Essential and Advanced Psychology.*

• **Prime:** The idea of a prime material (*prima material*) is an old one, and one largely brushed off by scientists — after all, atoms and molecules explain it all, right? Well, no. Actually, scientists have come upon smaller building blocks: quarks, leptons, bosons are all particles without a substructure, and scientists are routinely uncovering smaller and smaller elements (antiquarks, gluons, preons). Assuming that these tiny subparticles are actually the building blocks of everything, it is easy to see why the Prime Arcanum becomes the *College of Elemental Particles.*

• **Space:** Space is a pretty easy to define concept in science: it's a three-dimensional construct in so far as all things exist in relation to one another along those three dimensions. Magically, the Arcanum approaches this in a scientific way, assuming that all things along those axes are relative and that such relativity can be adjusted. Certainly it's easier to take the "we are all one" vibe from magic than it is from the more firmly-defined science, but the concepts are still in place, it's just a matter of definition. An idea like teleportation is handled in both magic and science — scientists have already managed to teleport light particles across a room, so imagine what the Gifted can do with the idea? Here, the Space Arcanum is known as the *College of Spatial Awareness.*

• **Spirit:** Spirit is a tricky one, because science doesn't have much room for sentient, ephemeral beings, does it? Well, maybe it does. First, remember that what we're talking about here is a Gifted science that goes beyond man's current understanding of the world. Certainly the technology we have now, and the discoveries made in the last 10 years alone would have been inconceivable at the time of Jesus, or even during Copernicus' lifetime. Second, modern science actually *could* explain spirits if you approach it from the notion of alternate realities as understood through a rough reading of quantum theory. Accepting the existence of a multiverse, the Gifted mind can suddenly grasp how different realms like the Shadow can exist in tandem with our own. Spirits, then, are the populace of that particular alternate reality, and they are entities with the dangerous ability to leave their reality and enter our own. Hence, the Spirit Arcanum is now seen as the *College of Parallel Reality.*

• **Time:** Scientists don't really understand time. Time as we grasp it — measured in seconds, minutes, hours, years, or whatever increment we so decide — is purely arbitrary. So how much of time is an artificial construct? How rigorous is the progression of events, how irreversible is time's apparent flow? This is something scientists struggle with, and the Gifted are doubly attentive to time's eddies and flows. The Time Arcanum becomes the *College of Temporal Dynamics.*

Atlantis: Certainly some Gifted see Atlantis as a shining beacon of scientific progress — after all, Atlantis was thought to be a very real place, one potentially far more advanced than its neighbors. Most, though, see it as a metaphor — a story about a fanciful place where the Atlanteans reached too far, too fast for science that would inevitably destroy them. The Gifted's struggle is in some ways one emblemized by Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, where hubristic grabs for radical science can easily backfire. Atlantis is just another facet of that story.

Awakening, the: As it stands, the Awakening of a mage's soul is a stirring hallucination or mystery play in

which the character is initiated at a Watchtower. The Gifted scientist goes through a similar, but markedly different, initiation. It is known as *the Enlightenment*, and it happens much as it did to Nikola Tesla — the character experiences flashes of brilliance which may actually come in a series of coded visions, flashes of light, or even as messages beamed to the Gifted's brain via what might very well be extraterrestrials or "entities" from a parallel universe. Usually, it's over relatively quickly, and isn't a protracted affair. The scientist does not visit a Watchtower, but *does* glimpse himself inscribing a design or theorem (his first "experiment") in much the same way that a mage scrawls his name into a Watchtower book.

Fallen World: Most Gifted accept that the 20th century was a gilded age for science, but that the 21st century represents the "Fallen World." While it's easy to think of this current century as one of "the future," most Gifted disagree. They feel that science has been suborned by corporate greed and personal gratification. The discoveries are purely for comfort or cash; everything is a new iPod or a new antidepressant. Where are the radical theories? The gestalt-shaking notions and discoveries? The world-changing inventions? This then, is the Fallen World. The Gifted see it as their purpose to bring the Supernal science down to the masses, enlightening them with possibility and potential.

Gnosis: Gnosis as an idea is replaced with *Insight*; it is critical to have the mind's eye as open as it can be, allowing for maximum comprehension and conception.

Mana: The Gifted don't think in terms of a magical energy. Rather, they conceive of their innate power as one of Vision. Mechanically, the Gifted may collect and spend points of Vision, which makes it a renewable resource.

Paradox: A Paradox in Gifted terms is something of an extreme example of the uncertainty principle in action. The uncertainty principle assumes that the study of a particle's wave function can actually cause that wave function to collapse, ruining any definite values able to be ascribed to that particle — the particle's momentum is destroyed, with accuracy lost and uncertainty gained. (This is conflated with the observer effect, in which observers attempting to study a phenomenon often change the phenomenon merely by dint of observation.) It works with the weird science performed by the Gifted; in short, witnesses beholding science that is ultimately "too weird" for their Abyss-addled minds contribute an unknown factor of scrutiny to the experiment, causing the experiment to fail (the "wave function collapses").

Accuracy is lost. Uncertainty is gained. The science fails due to the scrutiny of observers. Hence, a Paradox, or an *Uncertainty*.

Paths: The Gifted do not follow Paths.

Sanctum: Fancy word for *laboratory*.

Shadow Realm: The Shadow is considered to be a parallel dimension/reality.

Spirits: Spirits, as denizens of the Shadow, are thought to be entities of a parallel reality.

Supernal Realms: The Gifted do not conceive of the Supernal World as having Realms, and as such do not have Paths deriving from such.

Supernal World: The Supernal World is a place of enlightenment; some Gifted conceive of it as an actual place, likely a parallel realm from which they draw their profound intelligence and capability. Most accept that it's largely theoretical and possibly metaphorical, representing the pinnacle of the ladder of all scientific discovery; all enlightenment thus climbs down the ladder, while the Gifted is the one climbing up.

Wisdom: The same idea is present among the Gifted. A scientist given over to hubris is just as much of an ego-driven self-made god as is an Awakened mage, and one must have the balance to see the warning lights flashing, lest one fall to madness.

How Weird Science Works

The question here is, since the Gifted apply weird science to work their will and achieve an improbable or even impossible result, how does that actually work? Awakened magic can launch lightning from the palm of one's hand or raise a dead beloved hound from quietus with a calming breath. That's not science. It's not even remotely close. This section will help clear up the process.

The Rules Are Rules

For the most part, the rules of a Supernal experiment are the same as when a mage casts a spell. Those rules begin on p. 110 of **Mage: The Awakening**. The systems are basically unchanged, though when changes are necessary we'll note them here. It's not the rules that change dramatically, it's the characters' understanding of the rules that changes. The actions they take may lead to similar dice pools and expenditures, but the actions themselves can be wildly different than what an Awakened mage might attempt.

Performing Experiments

Gifted scientists do not cast spells. They perform experiments. As with spells, anything is theoretically possible — fire from one's fingertips, changing a marble countertop to water, teleporting oneself from a Sao Paolo cantina to a pub in London. The thought process to get to that result is far different, however. One isn't drawing on some nebulous force. Rather, one is using extant natural forces to "prove" a theory true and finish an experiment.

Different Gifted have different explanations that help to prove a theory. Take the marble countertop as an example. A drastic change of state certainly falls under the College of Elemental Chemistry, and might involve the Gifted scientist humming a tone (perhaps an oscillating frequency) that matches an inaudible micro-tone put forth by the molecules present in the marble as they barely vibrate — by then changing his tone swiftly to one more sympathetic to water, he can potentially cause a dramatic phase shift in the countertop. Or, perhaps a Gifted scientist of the College of Spatial Awareness or the College of Parallel Reality is able to cause the phase shift by signaling a quantum tunnel that moves the countertop to the ocean (or to a parallel dimension) and replaces it with water from the Pacific Ocean (or from the aforementioned parallel dimension).

Yes, the result is the same as what an Awakened would achieve — the marble becomes water. But that's the point. The beginning and end assumptions are the same (character uses enlightened will to tweak reality), but it's the path connecting them that is different (one character uses occult magic, the other uses weird science).

And it *is* weird science. Don't think you need to actually read a handful of science textbooks to play with this

variant. That's part of the fun: making stuff up that *sounds* like pulp science, or science-fiction. If reading a collegiate Physics textbook makes you and your troupe happy, go for it, but it's by no means necessary to play with this wholly fictional concept. Feel free to invent things, or to pull stuff from the Internet that *sounds* pseudo-scientific.

The following is a paraphrase from the Internet that a Gifted character could use to explain how he forms ball lightning from the tips of his fingers: "A fractal tangle of tiny fibers exists because of weakly-ionized atomic vapor evaporating from a static field; this creates high surface energy and can result in an explosion of these fibers that leads to powerful thermodynamic waves channeled along each individual fiber. The result of this energy is ball lightning." Does it make sense? Well, not really. But again, it doesn't have to: weird science has the veneer of real science, but don't ignore that word "weird." That's where the fun lurks.

The Blueprint

Mages form an Imago, but a Gifted scientist creates a Blueprint. The idea is much the same. The effect of the experiment and the processes needed to make that experiment come true must be visualized within the mind of the scientist.

Rote Spells: Proven Theories

Most Gifted scientists rely on what the Awakened conceive of as "rote spells," but the Gifted see as "proven theories." The effect is the same. A Gifted has performed an experiment that worked, thus proving his theory. Hence, it's now reproducible. Experience costs don't change, nor do benefits (found on p. 111 of **Mage: The Awakening**).

Improvised Spells: Radical Experiment

The Gifted do not rely overmuch on what the Awakened consider "improvised spells," but the Gifted see as "radical experiments."

A radical experiment is one that the scientist conjures out of his own mind, but has yet to be proven in reality. The Gifted rely on these less than the Awakened do improvised spells, usually because of the higher rigidity of thought given to the weird scientists.

The Role of Scientific Apparatus

One difference between the Awakened and the Gifted is that the Gifted rely heavily on so-called "magical tools" (though for them, a magical tool is a *scientific apparatus*).

Each Gifted scientist has one scientific apparatus bound to each College to which he belongs. Many of the devices can be used across multiple Colleges (a microscope is useful to chemists, biologists, particle physicists, and coroners). Depending on the approach you take to the weird science variant, the apparatuses might become truly bizarre. Those grounded in mundane sciences use things like microscopes, gas chromatography devices, Liebig condensers, handheld computing devices, scalpels and other dissection tools, wave readers, thermometers, and so forth.

Those whose science tends less toward the "real world" and more toward theoretical or really *out-there* pulp science use Kirlian cameras, ether goggles, microscope monocles, hallucinogens, Tesla coils and oscillators, handheld hadron colliders, an unstable particle hanging around the neck in a small lead box, and so forth. Actually, such mad scientists are likely to use their own invented apparatuses, and players are encouraged to have fun with this notion (a jury-rigged "gluon reverser," a "mental energy prismatrix," an "ultrasound oculus").

Use of a scientific apparatus has the same effect on the experiment as a magical tool does on a spell: it mitigates potential Paradox. Each tool used reduces the Paradox dice pool by one. Here, though, the Gifted scientist *must* use a scientific apparatus during an experiment. Failure to use such an apparatus *adds* a die to the Paradox dice pool because performing an experiment without any tools at all is truly inconceivable (see Plausible versus Inconceivable, below). It's not that it's impossible, but it does force witnesses to observe and scrutinize the experiment (which, according to the uncertainty principle and the observer effect, can lead to Paradox and the failure of the intended effect).

More information on magical tools can be found on pp. 89-90 and p. 124 of **Mage: The Awakening**. Gifted scientists generally refer to "calibrating" their apparatuses, rather than "consecrating."

Plausible Versus Inconceivable

The Awakened have covert versus vulgar; the Gifted have *plausible* versus *inconceivable*. The idea is roughly equivalent. Here, though, bystanders may see a science experiment whose existence their minds can justify. In that split-second, unconscious justification, they've deemed the experiment plausible and won't examine it any more than it needs to be examined.

If something is truly out of the mind's experiential spectrum, then the unconscious mind deems it inconceivable. The science is too much. Too weird. While clearly the experiment exists and was performed, it doesn't stop the bystander's brain from going over it, from observing it and scrutinizing it in a way that can be dangerous to the experiment or to the Gifted (see Paradox, p. 59). Observation can change the experiment, and so it is here.

Note that, technically, vulgar magic is thought to break the laws of science. The Gifted don't feel that inconceivable experiments actually contravene natural law, but instead are performed in such a way that they *appear* to disregard rational science.

Nimbus and Resonance

Awakened magic has resonant effects — a mage casting a spell finds himself surrounded with his signature aura of leathery wings, or a luminescent vapor, or the sound of whispering book pages forever turning. Spells have their own resonant signatures, often appearing as glowing auras that contain subtle traces of information about the effect.

Gifted science has similar trace effects, though it's important to note that they're rarely flashy — and, when they are, they're usually describable in some real-world way. Crackling lightning, for instance, is flashy but found in nature; an aura of red mist that contains a halo of screaming mouths couldn't be considered a natural phenomenon.

The roll to scrutinize is now Intelligence + Science, instead of Intelligence + Occult.

Scrutinizing resonance requires the Gifted scientist to have some manner of apparatus on hand. Instead of crystal balls and bird bones, the willworker uses an EMF reader, a diamond-lensed microscope, a DNA swab. No apparatus allows the scientist to still make the attempt, but doing so incurs an automatic -5 penalty.

Three Approaches

Below, we offer three different facets of weird science. These facets aren't changes to the mechanic so much as they represent changes to the *flavor* of this approach.

As Storyteller, you can declare that one of these facets is the only one you want in your game, but you can alternately allow multiple characters to practice Gifted science from different approaches. It'll create some nice in-game conflict between characters when one cobbles together an apparently-successful steam-driven automaton and another character doesn't see how such a thing would even be possible.

Super Science

Electromagnetic rail guns. Sonic weapons. Teleporting beams of light. The Casimir Effect. Animals whose feet bond to the surfaces they walk upon at the *molecular* level.

Sounds far-fetched? It isn't. Scientists — *real* scientists, not the Gifted of the World of Darkness — have teleported light, they've invented sonic weapons and rail-guns, they've measured the "force-from-nothing" Casimir Effect, and they've discovered that geckos cling to walls with a force bonding, yes, at the molecular level.

Science has always produced effects and ideas that go beyond what the average man expects. Think of the computer, or the space shuttle, or the hadron collider. Or even look back at the codices of Leonardo Da Vinci, which contained sketches of items that at the time seemed like crazy super-science, but today are commonly used inventions like contact lenses.

Taking this approach with Gifted science doesn't mean that the effects and experiments need to be bound to already extant notions, but it does describe the degree to which the in-setting science gets "weird." You're describing what's permissible. A computer that operates on the molecular or quantum level doesn't exist, yet. Neither does artificial intelligence, or a cure for cancer. But those things are *permissible* in terms of Gifted science if that's the flavor you want. You're keeping the effects from being totally bizarre, and accepting that most experiments will provide results that humanity might find 10 or 20 years down the line — not 100, not 1,000. Moreover, you're not hand-waving certain realities as you might do with Mad (or "pulp") Science, below.

Where's the dividing line? It's likely the troupe will know it when it sees it, as most Mad Science doesn't hold up to much scrutiny. A character with a Super Science background maybe creates artificial intelligence as a kind of hive-mind, a "colony" or computerized super-organism that thinks in much the same way a bee-hive thinks, or the way a series of human cells coalesce into an organ (like, say, the brain). A character with a Mad Science approach creates a server rack of monkey heads, skulls popped and brains exposed, each connected with a string of red-and-green wires ("It's like Christmas!"), and *that* is what powers the artificial intelligence. The first idea, one can actually find some evidence for how it might work. The second idea demands little more than picking one's jaw up off the floor and offering a semi-horrified shrug.

Mad Science

Mad — or "pulp" — Science, as noted above, is sanity-bending science that largely hand-waves pre-existing scientific laws or notions. Part of the fun of pulp science is that it effectively makes itself up as it goes along. Players, through their characters, get to marry wild-eyed creativity with pseudo-scientific effects.

For one, they get to make up new terminology. "I'm binding together neoparticles" doesn't actually *mean* anything to actual scientists, but it may very well mean something to that player's Gifted scientist character. Creating a "psychoscopic brain-wave emitter" is ulti-

mately a meaningless term to anybody outside the Mad Science sphere of thought: but, a character creating such a thing knows full well what it does, and has the hastily sketched schematics to prove it.

Second, they get to exploit scientific jargon without having to actually know what it means — that may sound ignorant, but it's fun to let loose and let ignorance truly be bliss. When the character decides to make an automobile engine that "runs on dark matter," that doesn't really mean anything at all, and it's damn sure not possible. Dark matter isn't even proven, it's a purely hypothetical "missing matter," but, in a Mad Science game, a character might harness some nebulous "black" energy that she knows to be "dark matter."

Finally, they get to create effects that surely won't work in any real world context, not even when viewed through the Super Science lens noted above. And yet, they can be assured that as long as it *sounds* good, it'll work. Creating a robot with a quantum heart? Using a "nanotech flock" to eat someone's brain and create a derangement? Downloading someone's identity to a hard drive powered by steam and bioluminescent fireflies? Why not?

Mind you, this isn't far from Awakened magic. And that's okay. But it removes the mystical and occult components from magic, which ultimately turns "magic" into "pulp science." Doctor Frankenstein empowers a corpse with the stumbling facsimile of life, but doing so is never magic… and then again, it's not really science, either. It's somewhere in-between, which is the domain of Mad Science.

(Oh, one more thing about Mad Science, and this relates somewhat to the Doctor Frankenstein comment: Mad Science has always been around, at least in this flavor of Gifted science. Setting-wise, pulp science goes back a long ways — Atlanteans with clockwork elevators, extraterrestrial Egyptians, giant steam-powered sextants during the Renaissance, human slaves with transplanted monkey heads used by the Nazis to build highways, and so forth. Whereas both Super Science and Science Fiction approaches assume a "looking forward" approach, Mad Science looks forward *and* backward in time.)

Science Fiction

Technically, all of this is science fiction. But here, we're trying to invoke a specific feel, and that's the feel of literature, films, and comic books that utilize hard science to create profound effects. This is science that represents a strong leap forward on our current axis of thinking, something that pushes further down the timeline than Super Science — whereas Super Science

thinks 20 years ahead, Science Fiction has no problem exaggerating that timeline to 100-200 years.

The approach is still based largely in "hard" science (though it should never necessitate players having to go for their PhDs to play the game) — take a current idea and leap it forward. The hadron collider now is essentially meant to conjure up the Higgs boson, an as-yet-unobserved sub-particle. Fast-forward that idea by a century, and you might get the ability to create localized black holes, or the ability to take all mass away from objects that currently *have* mass by firing a beam of highly-charged Higgs boson particles. The only difference here is, Gifted scientists have that ability *now* as opposed to what humanity will uncover in 100 years.

Look at what we have now, and you see that we have a space shuttle that can take us to a small space station or to the moon. Push that thinking a century or two, and you get travel to Mars, or to interstellar spaces, or even to alternate dimension (it's always fun to couple quantum theory, right?). In the last 10 years or so, we've seen the Internet connect a great portion of all the humans on Earth — is it unreasonable to suggest that in a century, we'll all have contact lenses that enable us to browse the Internet? Right now, a monkey with electrodes attached to his head can control a mouse cursor or a mechanized wheelchair with his mind. Imagine the prostheses or robotic suits that could exist in two centuries' worth of time for the average human. The leaps forward in genetic engineering, in teleportation, in prediction sciences — they'll be *profound*.

And, under this style of play, it's something that Gifted scientists have *now*.

What does this do to your game? Well, ultimately it means you have to be comfortable with sci-fi notions — if you're okay with the characters utilizing interstellar travel (and that might be how they get to so-called "astral space" or even the Shadow), then this is the mode for you. Instead of an occult underground, too, the characters are part of a "futurist" underground in which the not-yet-possible is made all-too-real by the Gifted.

The Psychic Sphere

The mind is a maze, she said. It's a maze with many destinations. Most people, they take the easiest destination. They follow the path with the fewest turns and dead ends. The proverbial straight and narrow, she called it. Mixing her metaphors, she went on to talk about a path with the trail of breadcrumbs already in place, or a road well-traveled and well-charted by GPS. Safe paths. Sane paths. Easy paths.

We, she explained, do not take such easy paths. The mind is a maze, and we find its darkest corners. We push onto the dead ends and realize they're not that at all — you can climb over them, or under them, or through unseen gaps. We test the limits of the mind and don't mind the tortuous spirals and switchbacks.

And we find our own destination.

She says all this while a cherry blossom off the branch floats a few inches above her hand. She closes her eyes and it becomes a mouse skull. Then a flickering flame. Then a bullet. The bullet drifts back to her hand — while she continues to talk, as "multi-tasking is key" — and she pops it onto her tongue. At which point it's just a hard candy. Butterscotch, by the look of it. I wonder, does it taste wholly of sweetness? Or does it have the acrid taste of lead still?

The mind is a maze, she said, smiling, sucking on the candy.

It doesn't take much to recast Awakened magic as psychic powers, instead. Magic is performed as an act of will, with the mage working his needs and desires into the fabric of reality — sometimes subtly, sometimes not. Here, "willworking" is a rough analog for "psychic powers," because both demand that the character conjure the end result (the Imago) in his mind before enforcing that end result on the world.

Of course, it's true that psychic powers are seemingly more limited — psychic powers *appear* lesser. They carry with them a connotation of weakness, as if magic is simply a bigger and more potent "thing" than what can be conjured by one's psychic abilities. Generally, psychic abilities are limited to little tricks: reading cards to tell the future, maybe bending a spoon, or at the most being able to ignite a candle wick from across the room. Certainly, psychic powers in pop culture also get the *holy shit* treatment. Think of Stephen King's *Firestarter*, which has a little girl whose psychically-caused conflagrations are far more significant than a guttering candle flame. Or even look to anime, to something like *Akira*, which has a main character whose psychic powers are enough to obliterate whole buildings.

What this section is going to do is allow you to play with psychic powers using the rules put forth in **Mage: The Awakening**. Some of this may necessitate some rules tweaks to achieve the result you desire, and herein you'll also find a number of tweaks that are purely optional. Many of these mechanical changes will allow you "dial up" or "dial down" the potency of magic recast as psychic abilities, with the goal of allowing both Storyteller and player to conspire toward achieving a common result.

Setting Changes

Before getting deep into potential mechanical shifts, it's important to consider the changes to the setting. Whether or not your psychics exist in the same World of Darkness as Awakened mages, what *is* clear is that psychics and mages do not share common culture — even if you imagine that both magic and psychic ability have similar systemic genesis, the reality is that different cultures will surely arise. The Awakening culture will exist on one hand, but what culture will you put in place on the side of the psychics? What do they believe? Does their society have any organization at all, or are they a rag-tag bunch of mind-head misfits? Do they share common ideology, or is it splintered into so many fragments?

Origin

The psychics must consider: where does their power come from? Mages have a fairly clear common origin to their culture and to their magic in Atlantis — while they don't universally agree on it, for the most part it's considered the primary approach.

Do the psychic characters in your game possess a similar shared origin? Perhaps every cabal has its own understanding of the origin of psychic powers, or it's even possible that they just don't care about the genesis of their abilities. After all, if psychic powers work, then that's enough, right? Why investigate meaningless depths? (Answer: because in those meaningless depths can lie great ideological conflict if you play it right.)

Below, then, you'll find three potential approaches to the origins of psychic abilities. Use, modify, or discard as you see fit:

Human Potential, Realized

It's a myth that people only use "10% of their brains." It doesn't really make any sense, given that on PET or MRI scans, the brain lights up like a Christmas tree — while maybe a human doesn't use 100% at every given moment, the brain gets put through its paces. It's not like certain cubbyholes of the physical brain remain dark and inaccessible (well, neuroscientists still have a few questions about the parietal lobe…).

This oft-touted myth is one of the reasons given as to why psychic powers "could" exist — if we only have unlocked a meager 10%, what happens when we get to 20%, or ratchet our use up to a full-blown 100%? In those unused margins, psychic powers lie (so the myth suggests).

So, while we've clearly recognized this as a myth, that doesn't mean we can't use it. (After all, vampires and werewolves and Atlantis are all myths; the World of Darkness isn't about scientific fact.) We will, however,

twist the phrasing a bit, and instead suggest that most human beings use only 10% of their *mind*, not brain. The mind, being something far less concrete a concept, is easier to imagine as having nebulous potential. We're not talking about the firing of physical neurons. This is about the potential for the power of thought.

This, then, is the origin of psychic powers. Fairly simple, right? Most humans don't reach the mind's full potential, and psychics do. Of course, you then must consider exactly what opens up one's mind to that unused potential. Maybe the characters are all victims of trauma. Trauma (whether a blow to the head or the "psychic" trauma of being on the battlefield in war) can rewire the brain to some degree — think of how Phineas Gage caught a hunk of iron through his brain and it dramatically changed his personality. If it had gone through a different way, might it have awakened within him the ability for psychic powers?

Alternately, maybe it's genetic. Assuming that one out of 100 or 1,000 people are "psychic" in this setting and system tweak allows us to imagine that somewhere way back when, psychics might have a common ancestor. Perhaps it's a recessive gene. Maybe, like some dramatic diseases, it requires that two parents featuring the recessive gene get together and have children, and those children will or could possess the potential for psychic powers.

It's up to you how mundane or strange you want to get with it. Maybe some people just "have it," the same way that some people are smarter than others. Or, maybe you want to throw in a government conspiracy, or ultradimensional "alien" intervention, or some kind of mind-opening but invisible spore.

The Process

Another book (**World of Darkness: Slasher**) puts forth the idea that psychic abilities are the result of a forced process, in this case known as the Wintergreen Process. In fact, Barbara Wintergreen worked with the CIA on Project MK-ULTRA research (MK-ULTRA was that CIA program that supposedly attempted to put in place mind control parameters, sometimes with hallucinogenic drugs) and as a result created agents with psychic abilities. Wintergreen used a potent cocktail or DMT (dimethyltryptamine) and a modified Harmala alkaloid that Wintergreen termed the "telepathine extract." In her process, the administered chemical bonds with the brain's receptor sites, kicking down the so-called doors of perception — as a result, the agent has what could easily be seen as "psychic powers."

You don't need to explicitly use the Wintergreen Process (though it works well enough). Any "process" will do. The idea here is that some forced procedure, some convoluted method, is the origin of psychic pow-

ers. Twist it any way you see it: a long-forgotten KGB experiment with humans featuring wires hooked right into their brain? A complex fractal "screensaver" program that downloads information right to the cerebral cortex and unlocks psychic powers? The assumption is that, whatever process you choose, *all* of the psychic characters will have undergone its horrors.

Not Human After All

In this origin, psychics are not human. It is up to you to decide to what degree this is, but the core notion is the same across the board: some part of the psychic character has origins outside humanity. They may still be mortal beings (meaning, possessed of a finite lifespan), but they're plainly not human.

Potential non-human origins include:

• **Alternate Genetic Evolution:** Once upon a time, humans emerged as a species (*Homo sapiens*). Humans evolved from some common ancestor, but that common ancestor was not the only human being on the block. In this case, psychics branch off from one of those other common ancestors, and while they *appear* largely human, they are actually of a separate species.

• **Alien:** As a term, "alien" is a bit vague, and that's deliberate. Alien could mean something from outer space, sure. Ultimately, though, it means something "inscrutable," something so far outside the human experience that it can only be termed "alien." Ultraterrestrial beings from outside our reality? Entities from within a secretly hollow earth? Shifting hyper-intelligent mandalas? Up to you. Also up to you is just *how* alien the characters are. It's easiest to assume they're not fully from another world or plane of existence — ultimately, it's going to be easier for the players if their characters only have a small fraction of alien DNA or whatever in their blood. Then again, if they want to go whole hog, let them.

• **Monster:** The World of Darkness is notable in that it allows players to explore the experiences of monsters out of myth and legend. Even **Mage: The Awakening** allows players to grab the reins of characters who might worship the Abyss or might simply be so morally deficient that they're happy to use magic to commit murder or other atrocities. (Some humans, such as hunters, might even perceive *all* mages as "witches" that are deserving of little more than a bullet to the head.) In this mode, psychics are all monstrous. This could mean that they're psychic vampires (more information can be found on p. 71). It could mean that the psychic ability so deforms the humanity within that they become something fundamentally worse (note that many of the origins of the World of Darkness' denizens stipulate that they were *once* human, but are no longer). Maybe they're vessels for demons, ghosts, or spirits.

It's a small question, but one you should ask when adapting this mode into play: how long have psychics been around? Is this a relatively new phenomenon, as with MK-ULTRA in the 1950s and 60s? Or is this something that's been around since the "alien astronauts" helped ancient Egyptians build their seemingly-impossible pyramids? If psychics have been around for thousands of years, then organizations like the orders make more sense. If they've only been around for a few decades, obviously they haven't had time to form those kinds of societies (and they don't have the numbers to do it anyway).

Culture and Society

Do psychics possess a common culture? Looking at the characters in **Mage: The Awakening** you'll find that mages share a relatively stable society. The majority of mages come together and join the mystical orders. These orders play fairly well together; they all believe similar things about magic, and all have a common point of origin in Atlantis. They don't agree on *approaches* to magic, and many work against one another in that they have competing agendas, but it would still be termed a "common culture." Do the psychics share similar notions? Do they all accept a shared history and an organized society?

We'll suggest here that you conceive of this as a three-tiered system. Any one of these tiers can exist on their own as far as what you want to use as a "play experience," but you can also mix-and-match or even assume that this is a World of Darkness in which all three tiers exist. The goal of these tiers is to dial up, or dial down, exactly how much of a common culture exists, how localized it is, and what this means to the experiences of those psychic characters within each tier.

Tier One: Cabal

Welcome to the tier of the ignorant. Psychic abilities exist. Psychic abilities work. That's the end of that. The characters at this tier know next to nothing about why they are what they are. Maybe they remember some gauzy and sinister origin (*strapped to a chair, eyes peeled back, two syringes, one for each cornea*), or maybe they only know that they've always had psychic powers.

At this tier, these psychics find one another, but only in small groups (i.e. the cabal). Three characters, maybe five, find one another perhaps by reading minds or by witnessing psychic abilities in action (one robs a bank with no gun and only his mind, the others see it or hear of it). They don't really know much about what they can do, only that they do it. They don't know much about other psychics either, except maybe in glimpses and hazy rumor.

What do characters at this level *do*? They're relatively local, so whatever they do is likely kept to their jobs, their families, their neighborhoods. Maybe they're criminals, and use their psychic abilities to knock over banks or other criminal organizations. Maybe they use their psychic powers to help others (or help others get revenge). They take their abilities to Vegas. They use their powers to gain their wildest and weirdest pleasures. They try to resist using their powers but find them too alluring. The key is that the approach here is less… bombastic, less grandiose. They're five characters with very little clue, which can be both very fun and very dangerous. Antagonists likely end up being human: police, feds, mobbed-up criminals, and the like. If they find other cabals of psychics, it ends up being something more like street gangs — lawless bands going at one another for a slice of territory or handful of cash… or even for fun.

Example: The Bowery Boys. Imagine, if you will, a gang of four brothers. Whoring, selfish criminals, they are. Together they form a quartet of thugs who, in the grand scheme of things are small fish in a big pond, but that's okay. They don't much care about big paydays or marriages or long-term plans. They live night to night. They have fun where they can. They punish anybody who gets in their way. Oh, and they're also psychics. They don't know why they have these abilities — maybe their dead boozehound mother had something to do with it, or maybe one of their many fathers (the dead boozehound mother was also a whore who spread her legs for any mook on the street looking for a little trim). Who cares? They can do little tricks with their minds. They can run cons on con-men. They can convince a lady to lose her inhibitions. What more do they need?

Tier Two: Cult

At this tier, psychics are a bit more organized. They gather in tens and dozens, each "cult" having something of a shared purpose within that group but not outside of it. One group follows a Svengali-like psychic master who promises to teach them to unlock their full potentials (while also claiming that their alien masters will come pick them up with their ultra-dimensional UFOs mere moments before a purported apocalypse). Another cult forms an entire criminal underworld whose members comprise all manner of illicit "talents" both psychic and human. A third group bands together to hunt and destroy other psychics so that they may pilfer their power and remove them as competition.

The difference here is really one of organization. Relatively, they're still local — the cults still operate together in a single city, with influence that doesn't go far beyond the metropolitan limits. Even in their organization, though, the cults exist without shared culture. They're not like the Awakened orders; they don't cooperate, and may not even know about one another. They all cling to differing origins. They have wildly disparate approaches. One sees psychic ability as a purely religious phenomenon, another believes it's simply an expression of super-science (so maybe you want to tie in the Gifted Science variant, p. 56).

Their primary antagonists are likely one another. They compete for ideas, for territory, for members. It's not impossible that psychics at this tier work against the other monsters of the World of Darkness, too. Vampires, to some degree, gather in cult-like groups known as covenants; these covenants do not agree on vampiric origins or even on the moral vagaries of being one of the walking dead.

Example: The Blackstripe Society. The crème de la crème of the city's high society just happens to be roughly composed of a bunch of psychics. Therein you'll find fashion mavens, CFOs, city councilmen. They work in tandem to "adjust" city politics, to shepherd new art movements, to leech psychic energy from the poor and destitute. This isn't a conspiracy — they don't look beyond the boundaries of their own city. But they are a cult. They share a common origin within their own group, believing that they are creatures of privilege and such creatures are privy to the glorious bounty provided by their minds' potential. They also know that others exist in the city who would take that away from them, other shadowy cults that might have ties to the United States government — it's like a chess game played in darkness. It's good that they're quite gifted at the game then, isn't it?

Tier Three: Conspiracy

Here, psychic potential is something profound, something that goes far beyond the local and is now something global, or even cosmic.

The term "conspiracy" is appropriate. Consider what would truly be possible if one were a very powerful psychic with the ability to bend one's will or conjure gold from thin air with nothing but the psychic will to demand molecular change (and again, you'll see there just how *Awakened magic* and *psychic powers* can be the same). First, money would never be a problem. You could read a billionaire's mind and learn his bank account numbers, or twist his personality so that he becomes suddenly "charitable," or you could simply force him to start vomiting up bile-slick hundred dollar bills like he was some kind of fleshy ATM machine.

And even *that* is small potatoes. Think of the conspiratorial elements one could put into place. Want to telepathically control an entire coalition of bankers? Want to leech the psychic energy of a senator or president? Want to mentally "cloudburst" weather patterns so that you can cause world-changing hurricanes or tornadoes or other disasters? Psychics at this stage come together and form Illuminati-like conspiracies, working together to enforce their will on an unwitting humanity. Their antagonists are primarily other conspiracies, because it's certain that these elements will work against one another. Of course, if you're assuming a world where both "psychic conspiracies" and "Awakened orders" exist in tandem, you have a powerful clash of ideologies. Mage orders roughly exist at this third tier (they share culture and are roughly global-slash-cosmic in their scope), and as such will surely work against the influence of psychic conspiracies.

Example: The Free Mind Commission. They have members the world around, all powerful psychics. They believe in a kind of utilitarianism — what's best for the greatest good is what must be done. And what's best for everybody is when everybody blows open the doors of perception and becomes psychic. It will even the playing field. It will eradicate poverty and war. Of course, forcing a psychic paradigm on everybody isn't going to be easy. Or pretty. Or painless, for that matter. People will die. But the ideals of democracy are fought for vigorously, are they not? Sometimes, blood must be spilled… again, the greater good is everything. The members of the Free Mind Commission are wealthy beyond measure and with a combination of psychic manipulations and cash infusions can make great sweeping changes across the world — they recognize that psychic abilities are given when one endures great trauma, so that is what all the world must endure. Right know, the approach is a global economic crash. If that doesn't work, they'll have to find something more severe. More… traumatic.

As Framed By Nature of Magic

We've already decided that the nature of magic is a set thing: the mage draws the ability to work his will down from the Supernal and through the Abyss. So, how to frame that in a game where psychics are the primary characters?

It's pretty easy. The psychics consider their capabilities the provenance of so-called "Supernal Thought," which is to say an idealized potential of the human (or not-so-human) mind.

To reach the hidden potential of the mind, however, they must use the crude human brain they've been given — effectively drawing their higher abilities down through the lower primate's brain. That, then, is the Abyss concept.

From there, the psychic's will is worked on the world if successful — and, if not, the lower primate (or even reptilian) brain prevents the psychic and Supernal Thought from being made manifest.

System Hacks

When converting over the magic (Arcana) system to something based purely in psychic powers, you have a few options as to how deep those changes should be. Below are some options. These options are not mutually exclusive and you're free to cherry pick the elements that will help you put together the game the troupe so desires.

Option: Do Nothing

Mechanically, you can approach psychic powers with the exact same systems that you'd work Awakened magic. You should consider changing some of the terms, perhaps (see "Recommended Redefinitions," below) to make things sound more psychic than occult, but ultimately, the idea is the same and the mechanics that follow can be exact.

What about the Paths? Well, you *could* keep them. They don't quite elicit the same theme and mood you'd expect with psychic powers, but psychic abilities are certainly an internal process and power. The journey to the Watchtowers at the moment one "awakens" to psychic powers could still serve as an interesting mental journey.

Other options include:

• Keep the very core of the Paths, but lose all the mystical stuff. What you're really keeping here are the Ruling Arcana and Inferior Arcanum listed with each Path (p. 66, **Mage: The Awakening**), but that's it.

• Ditch the Paths and allow players to select two Ruling Arcana and one Inferior Arcanum.

• Lose the Paths *and* the Ruling/Inferior Arcana system. Assume that all Arcana are Common for experience point expenditure purposes.

Option: Limit Powers

You've already seen a sidebar on converting psychic disciplines using pre-existing **Mage: The Awakening** Arcana and spells. With this option, you're assuming that these (and maybe a few others if the players have some good ideas) are the only psychic powers that characters can possess. Maybe they each possess only one "discipline" regardless of dot-level — so, a character who can remotely view locations uses the "Scrying" spell. He uses the rote dice pool listed with that spell on p. 235 of **Mage: The Awakening**, which is Intelligence + Investigation + Space. The Space dice pool is probably limited to two dice, given the fact it's a two-dot spell, but the Storyteller may adjust this up or down before the story begins.

What's the purpose of this approach, exactly? The goal is to keep elements out of the system that don't "feel" very psychic. Mystically altering a wolf's DNA so that it grows wings or becomes a mechanized golem is great. It also doesn't *feel* very psychic, does it? It feels more magical, more occult-based, and so you cut those elements out. Certainly this needn't be restricted to the list found in the aforementioned sidebar — a lot of spells sound like psychic abilities, really. The sidebar doesn't mention the "Psychic Assault" spell under the Mind Arcanum (p. 212, **Mage: The Awakening**), for instance, but it sounds perfectly viable under a psychic system.

One way to handle this is that, at the game table, the players all "vote" on what *sounds* psychic, with the Storyteller providing only a tie-breaking vote. For the most part, the troupe probably won't find a lot of gray areas, but when they do, the vote will be essential. Alternately, it can be left solely up to the Storyteller if he's clear on his vision for a psychic-themed game (though, remember Storyteller, *be consistent*).

Alternately, maybe you just want to make a few "targeted excisions" and remove just a few elements. That's okay, too, as long as everybody understands this before play begins. You might suggest that the Prime Arcanum doesn't have a lot of psychically-themed spells and concepts (though we'd argue that the ability to mess with auras is pretty cool and certainly in-theme), so you keep all the other Arcana, but lose Prime as a possibility.

Maybe you think that "alternate realms" like the Shadow are really something that you can't see as being appropriate for psychics, so you cut that out of the setting, also removing any mechanics that tie mages to that (perhaps even excising the entire Spirit Arcanum if you're so inclined).

Option: No Paradox

If you want to explain why Paradox *does* exist in this play style, it's easy to do so. Other humans have "lower" minds, minds based in both primate and reptilian urges. It's not that they disbelieve in the existence of psychic phenomena, exactly. Instead, each non-psychic gives off a small trace signature of their own psychic energy, effectively amounting to a kind of "nega-psychic" frequency. The more mundane humans around a psychic attempting to invoke his will on the world, the more of this "nega-psychic" energy they contribute, and it works as an opposing force to the psychic.

That may not make sense to you, however. And so, one radical option is to completely obliterate the idea of Paradox entirely. Other humans have no psychic ability and thus can do nothing to limit psychic abilities. Yes, this means that a character's psychic powers are largely unhindered, and it also means that powers are going to be amped up *and* that more dramatic effects are likely to be possible. If you're comfortable with that (and the players are, too), then feel free to perform a little psychic surgery all your own, excising Paradox and tossing the system into a bedpan like a discarded tumor.

Option: Replace Paradox

Okay, maybe you're *not* that comfortable with the idea of unfettered access to big, bad psychic powers. You still want the limitation on power, but feel that Paradox as a concept is better suited to magic, not psychic phenomena. Consider, then, replacing it.

Psychics, to reach for Supernal Thought, have to effectively push past the mundane limitations of their own brains to reach for psychic ability. As such, sometimes a negative result can manifest. In this case, you're still going to use the *system* of Paradox (see "Invoking a Paradox" on pp. 123-124, **Mage: The Awakening**), but some (though not all) of the *results* will be different. The results could include:

Physical Backlash: As per **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 124. Psychic takes damage to his own body. Likely manifests as bloody noses, terrible bruises, and the like. Up to the Storyteller whether this is subject to the player's choice (mages can choose a backlash, for instance).

Converting Psychic Disciplines Into Arcana/Spells

Below you'll find a list of expected psychic powers and the Arcana
(and in some cases, the spells) that match them.

Any-kinesis: This covers telekinesis (move objects with mind), Pyrokinesis (fire with mind), Hydrokinesis (move water with mind), etc. Any psychic control of elements or matter counts. The Forces Arcanum covers it all (see "Telekinesis," p. 170 of **Mage: The Awakening**), but Matter can help in some cases (as with water, see "Shape Liquid," p. 196, **Mage: The Awakening**).

Aura Reading: Certain auras work with Resonance (pp. 277-280, **Mage: The Awakening**). Reading a person's aura, however, can be performed with "Aura Perception," a Mind spell found on p. 205 of **Mage: The Awakening.**

Astral Projection: Astral travel is covered outside the Arcana (p. 283, **Mage: The Awakening**), but if you choose, either the Space or Spirit Arcana could cover it.

Bi-location: Being in two places at once — known as "Co-Location," a Space spell on p. 239, **Mage: The Awakening**.

Clairsentience: Clairsentience includes clairvoyance, clairaudience, and so forth — it assumes that the psychic can look backward in time to see or hear events as they play out. The Time Arcanum does the trick, specifically the "Postcognition" spell, p. 260, **Mage: The Awakening.**

Channeling (Mediumship): Channeling allows the psychic to take ghosts into his body (or at least to "channel" and communicate with them). Also works on spirits in some psychic practices. Both the Death and Spirit Arcana work on ghosts and spirits, respectively.

Dowsing: The psychic ability of finding water. Like falls to the Matter Arcanum (see "Detect Substance," p. 195, **Mage: The Awakening**.)

ESP: ESP (extra-sensory perception) is somewhat vague — a lot of psychic disciplines theoretically fall under this umbrella. Assuming that this has a lot to do with a character's enhanced perceptions of the perceived and unseen world, this falls to various spells within the Mind Arcanum.

Psychic Detective: Like with ESP, noticing unusual details falls to the Mind Arcanum for the most part, but any detection-based spell (such as the aforementioned "Detect Substance" spell under Matter) can contribute.

Psychic Reading (Precognition): Precognition attempts to perceive future events, whether in the near or far flung future. This is the province of the Time Arcanum, specifically spells like "Augury" (p. 258, **Mage: The Awakening**), "Glimpsing the Future" (p. 259, **Mage: The Awakening**) and "Divination" (p. 263, **Mage: The Awakening**).

Psychic Surgery (Faith Healing): Psychic surgery generally involves the psychic pushing his hands through the flesh and excising (with naught but fingers) tumors and other harmful biological masses. Faith healing is less bloody, requiring nothing more than "laying on hands." Either way, the Life Arcanum handles this well — specifically the "Healing Heart" spell on p. 186 of **Mage: The Awakening** covers it.

Psychometry: Psychometry is the reading of objects to determine their past and their nature — this could be Matter (to detect facts about the item's composition) and Time (to detect what happened around the object in the past) working in tandem.

Scrying (Remote Viewing): The Space Arcanum is the dominant element to this psychic discipline, which involves watching a person, place, or object at impossible distances. See "Scrying" spell, p. 235, **Mage: The Awakening**.

Telepathy: Telepathy is the reading of minds. It's covered by... you guessed it, the "Telepathy" spell on pp. 212-213, **Mage: The Awakening**.

Transvection: Levitation, or "psychic flight." Look to "Levitation" (p. 173, **Mage: The Awakening**), "Bestow Levitation" (p. 175, **Mage: The Awakening**) and "Flight" (pp. 177-178, **Mage: The Awakening**) in the Forces Arcanum for all your transvection needs.

Psychic Backlash: The backlash is not physical, but mental — the psychic develops a penalty to all Mental rolls equal to Paradox successes. Penalty fades at a rate of one die per day. Alternately, this might work like "Bedlam," except here the psychic gains a derangement that lasts for a number of days equal to Paradox successes.

Spectral Manifestation: As per "Manifestation" on p. 273 of **Mage: The Awakening**, except here it's a ghostly manifestation, not an Abyssal spirit. The psychic energy summons a troubled ghost. Rank doesn't apply to ghosts, but the Attribute dots can. The more powerful the psychic power, the more powerful the specter summoned. The psychic is a temporary anchor for the ghost for the duration of the Paradox.

Option: Psychic Tools

Some psychics rely on "tools" to access or amplify their powers. Awakened mages have their magical tools, and so here you might want to determine what "psychic tools" are appropriate to augment or replace those.

Some of this might cross over into the mystical, so you'll have to figure out with your troupe where that dividing line exists.

For example: a Ouija board or a pen-and-paper for automatic writing are not expressly mystical, but what about Tarot cards? Some say that Tarot cards are really just an expression of archetypes that speak to common journeys, but others ascribe religious or mythic significance to particular sets.

Is divining with playing cards considered mystical, or not? What about divining with bird bones, or a crystal ball?

Tarot cards are already on the line, but what about Zener cards (for reference, they're those cards to help determine psychic ability, like the ones you see in *Ghostbusters*).

In this option, it's recommended that Storyteller works with player to determine the best individual "psychic tools" for each psychic character.

Another possibility within this option is *requiring* the use of psychic tools. As it stands, the rule on psychic tools (i.e. "magical tools") can be found in the sidebar on p. 124 of **Mage: The Awakening**. But, you could also put in place a rule that says that psychic abilities can *only* work when the character makes use of the appropriate psychic tools.

Option: Psychic Vampires

All the characters are psychic vampires. They have to be. That's how they fill up their Psychic Energy (i.e. "Mana") pools.

Recommended Redefinitions

The magic system, appropriately enough, is sodden with ideas and terminology that are plainly more mystical- and occult-driven than you would normally find in explorations of psychic phenomena. They *can* play well together, but if you want to excise some of that, it helps to re-label some of the pre-existing terms in **Mage: The Awakening**. We recommend the following, though you're encouraged to come up with your own redefinitions:

Arcana: These are the magical elements key to Awakened magic. Change the term to something more baseline: *Principles* should work as a term, but if you're okay with a little cross-game confusion, *Spheres* or *Disciplines* are apropos to psychic powers (as in "psychic spheres" or "psychic disciplines").

Gnosis: Now called *Psyche*. Less about understanding Supernal reality and more about grasping one's own internal psychic potential. Note that this is the same "power stat" found in **Geist: The Sin-Eaters**, though it shares only the name, not the function.

Mana: Mana, which has roots in South Pacific myth, is a little too religious and mystical. Some psychics rely on what they term "Qi," or "chi," which is the internalized energy bandied about in Chinese esotericism, but again, that's a hair too mystical. Instead, go for the straightforward *Psychic Energy*.

Resonance: *Aura*. Same idea, different term.

Wisdom: The core idea remains the same — the psychic has access to powers that he can abuse, and that can damage his internal ethical yardstick *and* saddle him with derangements. But "wisdom" sounds a little too lofty. Here, we go with a simpler, more direct term: *Self-Control*.

This is quite likely a violation against whatever Morality score you choose to use, be it Morality or Wisdom. On the Morality score (p. 91, **World of Darkness Rulebook**), it counts as injuring someone, at Morality 8. With Wisdom, it's up to you whether it serves as a violation at the same level (Wisdom 8: injury to another or a magical coercion) or at Wisdom 4 (using magic — or, in this case, psychic ability — to harm someone, or draining Mana/Psychic Energy against their will).

The system is as follows:

Action: Instant and contested

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Empathy versus target's Wits + Resolve

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Dramatic failure on the part of the psychic means the psychic suffers a powerful backlash: she takes a number of points of bashing damage equal to her own Gnosis (or "Psyche") score.

Failure: The psychic character fails to gain anything from the victim.

Success: The psychic gains more successes than the victim. The psychic gains a number of Psychic Energy points equal to the player's successes. For each point taken, though, the victim suffers both one point of bashing damage and one die of penalty against Mental rolls. That penalty lasts for a number of days equal to the psychic's Gnosis (or "Psyche") score.

Exceptional Success: Extra successes are their own benefit.

Option: Sanity Score (Modified Advantage)

Psychic ability isn't normal. The human mind is initially durable, but it wears down and over time, it becomes fragile. Trauma causes fractures, and over time, fractures can widen and deepen and shatter one's psyche. The idea here is that psychic ability only adds stressors, which hastens the breakdown of the mind.

To highlight these, we're adding a quick optional modified-Morality hack, which is meant to simulate the breakdown of one's sanity (hence, the score is called Sanity).

This is a system highlighting *passive witnessing* in addition to *active behaviors*. The idea here is that use of psychic powers can wear down the mind, opening cracks — when a character witnesses things outside the norm, these traumas more easily push apart the cracks, resulting in derangements.

This system is stacked somewhat prohibitively against the character, but note that it isn't meant to represent *normal* humans. Normal humans don't have a Sanity score in the World of Darkness (unless you really want them to), because they don't have psychic abilities and psychic energy widening pre-existing cracks. So, if the system below seems a bit strict, it's because these are psychic characters prone to easier breakdowns.

The thresholds are as follows, and are based on the Morality score found on p. 91 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**:

Morality	Sin
10	Selfish thoughts. Using one-dot psychic powers. Witnessing use of other psychic powers.
9	Minor selfish act. Witness injury to another.
8	Injury to another (accidental or otherwise). Using two-dot psychic powers.
7	Petty theft. Witnessing death. Breakup of a significant relationship (such as a marriage).
6	Grand theft (burglary). Using three-dot psychic powers. Witness overt supernatural powers (non-psychic). Suffering a life-threatening disease.
5	Intentional, mass property damage (arson). Witness a friend, family member, or loved one die. Suffer the trauma of war or similar high-stress situation (such as a terrible car accident).
4	Impassioned crime (manslaughter). Using four-dot psychic powers. Suffer sexual or physical abuse.
3	Planned crime (murder).
2	Casual/callous crime (serial murder). Using five-dot psychic powers.
1	Utter perversion, heinous act (mass murder).

Minor Variants

What follows are magical variants that don't necessitate major write-ups. Some of the tweaks to the assumptions regarding magic are small, some are large, but none demand large changes to thinking or planning.

All for One, One for All

Dex reached for Gemma's hand in the darkness — gently, their fingers touched, and it was enough. A warm light grew, the shadows pushed away.

Kabren opened the door of the van, and like a game show hostess did a fancy gesture to reveal what — or, really, *who* — waited within. His cabal leered, smiled, winked as the door exposed them. Five of them. Kabren felt the power surge within. They all did.

Marlene ran. Down a tortuous network of blackened streets, down twisted alleys, up over rooftops and fire escapes. They were on her tail, and they'd have her soon. On any other day, she could turn and toast them like fucking marshmallows… but she was alone. Her magic lay beyond her reach.

The Variant

The Awakened don't tend to fly solo, because they have strength and wisdom in numbers. Mage cabals form out of self-interest, self-protection, friendship, even love. But as it stands right now, mages *can* be lone wolves. Nothing prevents them from traveling alone as a rogue sorcerer drawing down the Supernal all by his lonesome.

This variant changes that. It assumes that the human mind is frail. Or, even better, think of one human as the leg of a chair. The chair can't stand on one leg, and can only stand on several. One mortal mind, regardless of being Awakened to the truth and the power, cannot successfully reach for the Supernal. Here, the "strength and wisdom in numbers" isn't metaphorical, and isn't debatable. The more minds one has in his cabal near to him, the easier it is for him to access greater handfuls of the Supernal. The Abyss resists those who are alone, but yields to those who are together.

Thematically, this doesn't make any monster-sized changes to the game, but it does instill a deeper importance regarding the cabal. The cabal now is more than just a social configuration. It's an outright necessity, for the Awakened can't really invoke what *makes them* Awakened without more of their kind. Given that mages can be hubristic, strong-willed and dogmatic, this can create more intense conflict (and conflict is good provided it doesn't damage the play experience). The emphasis here is on group dynamics; lone wolves aren't possible, even as antagonists. (This group dynamic then also makes antagonists more dangerous, because enemy mages will not show up alone if they plan on having any effect at all.)

The System

First and foremost, mages must bond with one another to form a cabal. This is more than just an agreement to work together; a handshake will not suffice. First, the cabal must agree on a symbolic theme, like with those found in the sidebar on p. 35 of **Mage: The Awakening**. While this is largely non-mechanical, it is necessary still that they share this theme because it is in part what allows their souls to resonate together and draw down the Supernal into the Fallen World. It doesn't matter that they're from the same Paths or Orders, or that they share Arcana. It only matters that they bind with the same theme in mind.

From that point, the mage joining must spend a point of Willpower and a point of Mana to seal the deal. The cabal is formed.

It is necessary to be with one's cabal (or at least some of them) to cast magic. The greater the magic, the more members of a cabal are necessary. The number of dots necessary in the higher Arcanum present in the spell is equal to the number of cabal members that *must* be present for the spell to even be attempted. So, if a mage wants to gain Mage Sight regarding Matter (Dark Matter, pp. 194-195, **Mage: The Awakening**), she can do so alone because it requires one dot, and thus, only one cabal member. Using the three-dot Matter spell Repair Object (p. 199, **Mage: The Awakening**), though, necessitates two other cabal mates (i.e. three total mages present). Finally, using a five-dot spell like the Mind Arcanum's Psychic Reprogramming (p. 218, **Mage: The Awakening**), necessitates four other cabal mates to cast.

If a combined spell necessitates more than one Arcanum to cast, then the number of cabal members necessary is equal to the Arcanum with the highest dots (take a look at Oubliette on p. 243, **Mage: The Awakening** — there, Space is the highest with five dots necessary next to Forces, Mind, and Time, so the spell requires five cabal mates).

The cabal members must be nearby for this "chain of magic" to work. The greater a mage's Gnosis, though, the further away a cabal mate can be — each point of Gnosis is equal to 100 yards, so a mage with Gnosis 10 could conceivably cast magic while his cabal members are over a half-mile away.

However, if one has more cabal mates present than is necessary, then the overage can result in a bonus. If the mage is casting a two-dot spell but has five total cabal members present, he gains +3 to the spell-casting roll (five minus two). The channel that the cabal forms is wide if their numbers are high enough, and the overage can result in an easier draw-down of the Supernal.

Some other elements come into play with a bonded cabal: Paradox that affects one (such as with Bedlam or Branding) affects all. All cabal mates are considered to have a sympathetic connection with one another regardless of distance. Finally, mages can spend Mana on behalf of their cabal members.

Below, you'll find further sub-variants to tweak this particular "play experience:"

• Want to ratchet up the difficulty a little bit? Then assume that a mage must have members of his cabal who possess the same Arcana as he does, at least as far as casting goes. An Awakened who aims to heal a damaged ghost with the three-dot Death spell, Restore Corpus (p. 141, **Mage: The Awakening**) better have two other mages nearby who possess the Death Arcanum, or that spell's not happening. Is this overly restrictive? Sure it is. But, it also embellishes the theme and helps reduce flagrant magic use in your game (good if you're intending a game where magic is truly rare and hard to reach).

• Instead of necessitating that a mage be in some proximity to his cabal mates, maybe it's not necessary that they're of his cabal at all. Just being near other Awakened is enough to widen the channel and allow the Supernal down through the Abyss. This still means that the cabal can provide a major boost to power and access, but it no longer means that the bonding process is necessary (and that solitary mages are likelier prospects). Of course, it also implies that the more Awakened that are present, the greater the potential damage done from magic. Maybe Paradox is heightened by such a broadened channel to the Supernal. If you choose to go that way, assume that each mage present above five adds a +1 modifier to the base Paradox dice pool.

• Consider the opposite: mages working together find that their concentration is hampered. It's like white noise, or static; the more magic present in one area, the more overwhelming that static becomes. Solitaries are therefore very successful, but cabals are still necessary from a social standpoint. It just means that mages can't be *near* to one another when casting magic. Each mage present beyond the caster invokes a -1 penalty (and potentially adds +1 to the Paradox dice pool, to boot). Certainly this can add a level of complexity to the game that won't be easy to navigate, as characters will strive to be alone when it comes time to cast magic — *but*, it does properly stress the overwhelming danger and capriciousness of magic. Magic here is like a keg of black powder: add other mages, and you start adding kegs to the tally. Blow one, you potentially blow them all, or at least destroy your chances of accomplishing anything meaningful.

Pop More Pills, Pillheads

The tea was bitter; well, really, it tasted like shit. Some put sugar in theirs or mixed it with chaliponga or chacruna to sweeten it, but not Ginger. Magic wasn't about pleasure. Kicking open the doors with ayahuasca was meant to be violent, rattling, strange. The spirits understood.

His skin was sallow, ruptured in places. His teeth looked like dice — white, yes, but pocked with black holes. The meth did that to Jumping Johnny, but that was the price of channeling fire and lightning, wasn't it?

Oxycontin — "hillbilly heroin" — helped Ophelia think. How appropriate was it that the capsules she stole from the pharmacy were "time-release" when, in fact, they helped her see backward and forward in time? Still. She was nursing a mean addiction, a chattering, slurring monkey on her back. She had to quit. Which meant she had to quit magic.

The Variant

You want magic, you do drugs. End of story. They don't call them "magic mushrooms" for nothing, apparently, because being a mage just isn't enough. The human mind, even one that's been blown open by the Awakening, still has the taint of the Abyss — and that taint forms a metaphysical barrier. Anybody who wants to push past that barrier has to have a little help, the same way that a rocket booster will help a shuttle punch through the upper tiers of our atmosphere and blast into the far-out reaches of space. That help comes in the form of drugs.

Some drugs are addictive. Some aren't. And, not everybody is guaranteed to become addicted, either — strange as it may seem, some people exist who can actually maintain a very normal life while booting heroin or smoking crystal meth. A housewife needs an extra boost, or a stockbroker needs to cool off. Or, even better, a mage needs to see spirits, mend his broken flesh, or get from San Francisco to Singapore in 11 minutes. Can he manage? Can he maintain his mind and body while using drugs to connect to the Supernal?

What this means for mages is that they're a far different lot than what you'll find in **Mage: The Awakening**. Mages are already strange as it is. Some are Paradox-addled. Others are bloated on their own hubris. Now, throw in a necromancer hooked on coke, or some urban "shaman of the rust" who needs fistfuls of MDMA (ecstasy) to connect with the "pantheon of spirits" that rules his city. Mages can be tweakers, crackheads, pill-popping fiends, Quaalude slugs, drunks, whatever. Some will be worse when they're *not* on drugs — irritable, angry, confused, going through withdrawal.

Here, magic — or, access to it — is an Icarus situation. You need to fly pretty close to the sun to catch a taste of the Supernal, but too close and the wax melts. Too close, and you plummet to the ground.

The System

A mage possesses Arcana just like they do now. Magic has the same spells, the same rotes, processes, everything.

One change, though: the mage needs to take drugs to access magic. Specifically, each Arcanum has bound to it one or several drugs that help to "open" the way to reaching the Supernal. Certainly this list can be changed, but what follows is the default:

- **Death**: Barbiturates, embalming fluid, heroin, oxycodone or other opiate derivatives
- **Fate**: Tryptamines (psilocybin, DMT)
- **Forces**: Amphetamines or other "uppers" (coke)
- **Life**: Anabolic steroids, MDMA (ecstasy)
- **Matter**: Alcohol, inhalants of consumer products (paint, glue, nail polish remover)
- **Mind**: Dissociative drugs like ketamine or PCP
- **Prime**: Hash, marijuana, opium, salvia
- **Spirit**: Ayahuasca, DMT, mushrooms or other naturally-found entheogenic plants
- **Space**: LSD, or other manufactured entheogens

Of course, doing drugs has ups and downs, and mages are susceptible to all of these. Information on specific drugs can be found on pp. 176-177, **World of Darkness Rulebook**, and the Addiction Flaw can be found on p. 218 of that same book. However, any penalties associated with drugs should be in place for *non*-magical roles only. Because drugs are what help propel a mage's reach and consciousness through the Abyssal barrier and toward the Supernal, drugs should never limit spell-casting rolls (though drugs will certainly inhibit one's own sense of judgment and wisdom).

What about magical effects that reduce the potency or effects of drugs on a mage's body (like, say, Body Control, the Life 2 effect)? It's recommended that the mage can only commit to such effects when they help *others*, but not themselves. Perhaps it's a mental barrier, perhaps a metaphysical one, but the mage cannot purge the narcotic effects from his own system, as by doing so that cuts off his magic (until he next gets high, anyway) — consciously or unconsciously, his mind stops him from doing so.

Variants Within Variants

Below, you'll find elements that help to focus and change this particular variant of magic:

- Only inexperienced mages need to do drugs to access the Supernal. You get so far (say, Disciple or Adept), and you no longer need to rely on drugs as a "focus." This narrows the field, somewhat — it means that neophyte mages must survive their initial years using

magic. They need drugs to access magic, and drugs are addicting, which by proxy means that magic is addicting. So, because your character reaches a certain "stage" of enlightenment, he can now technically access magic without the use of drugs… but the question is, does he *want* to? Can he? Is he capable of withdrawing from the addictions (and perhaps the insane, exhilarating lifestyle that goes with them) to find magic in clean living? Many might not even make it that far, which is where the field narrows; the need for drugs is a gauntlet that younger mages must run.

- You can soften the blow a little bit by changing the drugs needed. In this case, the mage doesn't need hardcore illegal drugs, but instead needs prescription meds. Mind might require her to take "smart drugs" (i.e. drugs that increase cognition) or even antidepressants like Prozac. Steroids could still apply for Life, but so might antibiotics. Death might work with anti-cancer meds (chemotherapy, even radiation). Maybe Forces works by injecting a shot of adrenalin (or, hell, using the crash-cart pads — *clear!*). This isn't to say that prescription drugs are necessarily less harmful than illegal drugs, only that they're generally less ravaging on the body and aren't usually as addictive. Of course, the side effects can be brutal.

- Drugs? Who needs drugs? Some mages do, some don't. What all mages need to boost their grasp toward the Supernal is *Vice*, not drugs specifically. So, a mage bound to Gluttony would need to consume food, drugs, and liquid in an egregious enough manner so as to get his endorphins fat and happy. A Lust-driven mage would need to reach new heights of perversity and pleasure to access his magic. Wrath means the mage needs to bring the pipe down on an enemy (or even someone who cut her off in traffic), and so forth. A measure for whether or not it would allow access to magic is, does it help the character gain Willpower? Then it's suitable to access the Supernal. As an added twist, if the Vice-driven act invokes a degeneration roll, the mage gains +3 to the spell-casting roll (whether or not her Wisdom actually degenerates).

Supernal Objects

Ozone knows a trapdoor exists somewhere in his enemy's office, and so he slips on a gold-rimmed monocle imbued with the Find the Hidden Hoard spell (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 195) and scans the carpet for the glittering lines indicating the door.

Walpurga places a 1950s transistor radio down on a card table in front of a man bound and gagged. He pops two batteries in the back, turns the radio on, and

tunes it to a terrible frequency — a frequency delivering a Psychic Assault (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 212) to the victim.

Cady Stanhope keeps a lot of these special objects in her own bedroom, a place without any kind of traditional security at all. That's okay, because she has another object to help her: a long silver filament — like a jewelry chain, but far longer — that she can drape around the corners of the room, allowing her to Hide Space (p. 242, **Mage: The Awakening**) and conceal this room from others, and from all spatial awareness.

The Variant

This variant assumes *all* magic spells are contained only within objects. Perhaps the same type of object. The only way to cast a spell is to possess the object in question. Access to the Supernal is provided only by particular objects, objects seemingly destined to, or at least keyed into, a specific spell.

So, your character wants to cast the Disciple of Matter spell, "Jury-Rig?" No problem, provided she has the Black Wrench that is imbued to perform that spell.

Does this variant assume that mages are somehow less special because they themselves are not channeling the magic, that their own souls aren't calling on the Supernal? No, because only mages are the ones capable of using this magic to begin with. Their souls are still keyed to the Supernal, and thus they're still unique individuals.

What does this variant bring to the table? For one, competition. Spells are now beholden to these Supernal Objects — a mage could steal one, destroy one, hide one. An Awakened without a spell-paired Supernal

Object cannot cast that spell no matter how much he wants to; the object is the conduit, and without the conduit, his access to the Supernal is limited. Another element is that it makes spell-casting more vulnerable for just such a reason: when one's magical abilities are bound up through these amped-up magical tools, spell-casting is in greater danger of being threatened. Lose the object, lose the spell.

The System

No real changes, actually, beyond the physical limitation of having to possess the particular Supernal Object bound up with the spell. Otherwise, the rules are the same — same rolls, same threats from Paradox in applicable situations, same risks and rewards.

How, then, does a mage buy Arcana? The mage still has a certain metaphysical understanding (mechanically represented by dots in different Arcana) and can increase her understanding (purchasing more dots). If an object essentially *is* the spell it accesses, that means the Supernal Object's rating is much the same as the spell, so the Time 3 spell Temporal Shift still necessitates that the mage possess the Time Arcanum at that level of proficiency and understanding.

Variants Within Variants

Below are a handful of ways you might seek to adjust this variant for your game:

• A spell only has *one* unique object tied to it. The variant above assumes that a spell has multiple copies or versions of the Supernal Object representing it, but here, that changes. The Endless Injector, a forever-filled epi-pen auto-injector, provides a mage with the Life 2 spell, "Self-Healing." And it's the only one. A mage wants to cast that spell, well, he's going to have to find that Supernal Object — which means discovering its hidden location or uncovering who has it and taking it from him (or even negotiating a deal to gain its use for a time). This severely limits the powers of the mage, of course, because you don't have a bunch of mages running around with Endless Injectors — but it certainly amps up the tension surrounding the very nature of one's own spell-casting access.

• Screw Arcana. A mage doesn't need to buy any points in Arcana at all — just *being* a mage allows her to cast the spell associated with a given Supernal Object provided she can get hold of the item in question. The spell-casting roll no longer gains the added dice from an Arcanum rating, though, limiting the pool.

• Screw the Awakened! *Anybody* can use the Supernal Objects. How's that for a scary world? (Of course, if

you go this route, we recommend that each spell has only one unique example of an object associated with it, as with the Endless Injector example above, but that's your call to make as Storyteller.) Joe Blow grabs hold of the Dread Decree, a banged-up notebook that allows him to dictate terrible destinies as per the Forge Doom spell (p. 159, **Mage: The Awakening**), so be it. The terrible power is in his hands if he ever figures out what to do with it.

Ritual Magic

The coven of witches gathers together beneath the bent oaks. They drizzle the crow's blood in an 'X' across the ground. They wave sticks of burning sage over it. For a moment, the blood bubbles and spatters. They can feel waves of magical energy released from the ley lines, below.

Three men, faces hidden behind deprivation masks of hard black plastic, stand with hands linked. The curtains are drawn so that little light may enter. They stand in silence for what seems like hours. When the time is right, each takes a step forward — their feet fall on the snow globe filled with the tears and skin flakes from the daughter of their greatest enemy. The globe pops. The tears spill, a flood of skin and *lacrima*. Their enemy is now weakened.

Zero Boy kicks off from the file cabinet and launches himself across the room, the wheels of his office chair rattling on concrete. He catches himself on the desk where seven monitors cascade data: financial, packet loss, heart rates, extinction ratios. All seemingly disparate information, but that's okay. He jacks into his Web cam. He sees the others: Jacqui-June and Parallel Tom. They smile and give a nod. Together, it was time to look backward in time and see who was trying to have them killed.

The Variant

Magic in **Mage: The Awakening** is a bit different from what mankind has accepted as magic for the breadth and scope of human history. In the game, magic is relatively quick to perform — a hurried look into a puddle for purposes of scrying, snapped fingers launching a hard sharp static burst, a whispered code word meant to signal a conditioned behavior in a mind-fucked victim. That's all good. It's entirely in theme with the game that magic has great power and can be accessed swiftly — it only increases the risk of one's rising hubris.

That being said, perhaps you want to limit the potency or reflect the real-world perception of magic. In history, magic has long been a thing

that takes time — its slower, methodical, requiring strange reagents and hissed entreaties to old gods. Moreover, it's rarely the will of the single practitioner, and often is performed by a gathered throng of adherents.

This variant attempts to simulate that more completely by forcing all characters to perform the spells and rotes of **Mage: The Awakening** as protracted ritual magic — magic that takes time, and magic that necessitates the help of other practitioners.

The System

Magic still works effectively as normal, but here it follows a protracted set of steps that demands more time and effort on the part of the practitioners. The following changes are in place:

• All magic is now performed via extended rolls (see chart, below). Each roll is considered to equal one hour's worth of casting (though the Storyteller is free to dial this up or dial this down as she sees fit, provided consistency is maintained).

• All magic is now a teamwork action (p. 134, **World of Darkness Rulebook**). One mage should be considered as the "primary actor." The others are considered "secondary actors." Secondary actors only get to roll Gnosis + Arcanum, while the primary actor rolls either Gnosis + Arcanum (if improvised) or Attribute + Skill + Arcanum (if rote). Successes gained by secondary actors are added to the primary actor's roll. This happens during each phase of the extended roll (i.e. once per hour).

• All magic now necessitates reagents (i.e. mystical ingredients) to work properly. See below for more information on reagents.

The more potent the spell is (i.e. the higher its dot rating), the more that is necessary to cast it. The following chart should be followed when considering how a spell can be performed via ritual magic:

Arcanum Rating	# of Mages	Successes Needed	# of Reagents
1	2	10	3
2	3	15	4
3	4	20	5
4	5	25	6
5	6	30	7

The potency of the spell is in proportion to the potency of the reagents necessary to cast the spell. Below are some examples:

One- to Two-Dot Spells: Standard mystical reagents usually work. Herbs, ritual tools (athame, wand, chalice, altar), sympathetic representations of targets (dolls, hair, blood, semen, spit, photos, love letters), animal's blood, toadstools, candles, etc.

Three- to Four-Dot Spells: Reagents at this level are harder to procure, but are not in any way otherworldly. They might include placenta, umbilical cords, the body parts of rare animals, tears from a virgin, menstrual blood, burning of rare woods, recitations from rare tomes or prayer scrolls, animal sacrifice, etc.

Five-dot Spells: Spells of this profound potency require rare and often magical ingredients: demon's blood, bodily fluids of a saint, human sacrifice, the tears of a mythical creature, one drop of ocean water from all the world's seven oceans, a splinter from the world tree (Yggdrasil), etc.

Reagents are handled differently for each spell. One ritual spell might demand that they're burned in a brazier, another might expect them to be pulverized and snorted, while a third still might ask that they're fed into a poultice and stitched into the skin of the primary actor.

It would be ideal if we could go through each of the spells in **Mage: The Awakening** and give a list of proper reagents used for each, but space restrictions prevent that. Our recommendation is that, at least for rote usage, the troupe determines what reagents are necessary for each (and it's likely that different orders rely on different ingredients).

Some other considerations:

• Paradox still applies. Use like you normally would given a spell requiring extended casting. Any Paradox effects affect only the primary actor.

• Only the primary actor of the spell requires the full dots of the spell to use. The secondary actors don't actually need to have any dots in the Arcana necessary (though they must themselves possess a Gnosis score, meaning, they are Awakened characters).

• The Mana cost can be paid by any of the mages contributing toward the ritual, in any combination.

• Rituals needn't be cast in one sitting. They can be spread out over the course of many days or weeks. An hour here, an hour there, etc.

Variants Within Variants

Below are a handful of ways you might adjust this variant for your game:

• You don't need other mages to cast — but it helps. A lone practitioner can still cast ritual magic using the rules above. However, choosing to have others allows them to contribute to a teamwork roll as secondary actors. Without them, though, the process can continue with only one mage working the ritual.

• Reagents are king! Discard everything about this *but* the reagents. Frankly, reagents are cool

— having to concoct weird heady brews and tear pages out of forbidden tomes are certainly in-theme with **Mage: The Awakening**. So, assume that "fast magic" is still in place, but that all magic requires the aforementioned reagents to perform. Or, if you don't want them as "necessary," they can work similarly to magical tools, contributing a +1 bonus to the roll per reagent used.

• We said it before and we'll say it again: screw the Awakened! You can use this mode of play for any mortals in the World of Darkness. In fact, maybe the Awakened are the ones with the unfettered access to "fast magic," but all mortals in-the-know are capable of casting spells as rituals. It's recommended that the human character possess a number of dots in the Occult Skill equal to the rating of the spell he and his ritual pals wish to cast. The dice pool for such magic is Intelligence + Occult – 3 (this penalty is a kind of "unskilled" penalty, since the characters don't have Arcanum dots).
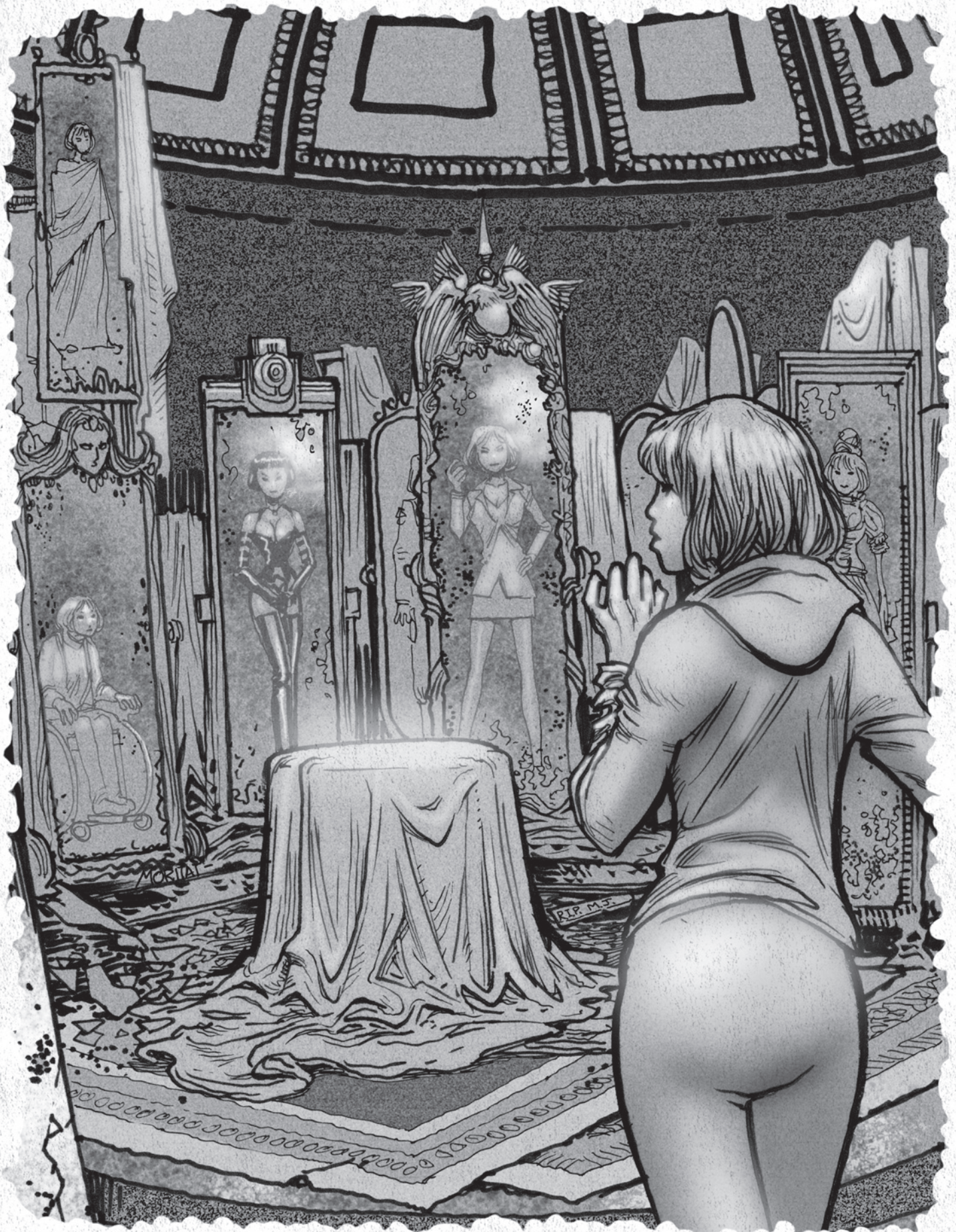
CHAPTER THREE:
BUILDING CHARACTER

"Hello? Master Ararat?" Clarion was doing her best to be polite. She was frightened, but didn't want it to show. "Hierarch Wight said I could find you here."

Clarion closed the door behind her. When her eyes adjusted to the dim light that filtered in through the small, filthy windows at the top of the wall she could see fifty or so full-length mirrors scattered about the dusty room, some covered by cloth, others so warped and faded they displayed nothing. An old man in a gray pinstripe suit was standing in the middle of the room next to a round cloth-covered table. Clarion's Supernal senses showed her the thick coils of Fate weaving in and out of his fingers and caressing his face.

"Are you Ararat? Hierarch Wight said—"

The man pointed at one of the mirrors.

Despite the dim lighting, the reflection was clear and bright. Clarion was looking at herself, but different. In the mirror, she was wearing brighter clothes that showed a little less skin and a golden cross necklace that had gathered dust in Clarion's desk for years. The image stared out at Clarion with such defiance that she had to look away.

"Why am I an Acanthus, Clarion?" Ararat asked. "Why are you?"

"Arcadia called us across the Abyss," Clarion replied. She grimaced, feeling like a kid at Sunday school again.

Ararat gestured again. More mirrors lit up with more Clarions. Clarion saw herself in Goth getup with five piercings in each ear and holding a human jawbone. She saw herself in a business suit clutching a Venetian mask in one hand, the ribbon ties dangling to the ground. She saw a Clarion in a wheelchair with a laptop on her lap and a scar on her cheek. There must have been 10 or 15 mirrors, each of them with a different Clarion.

"Why not an Obrimos or a Moros?"

"Because the Watchtower of the Lunargent Thorn had sympathy with my soul."

"Could you have been something else?"

"No! The Watchtowers choose us. We don't choose them."

Suddenly, every image in every mirror exploded into motion. Clarion saw each false Clarion gesture and recognized the rote mudras of every order. Phantasmal feathered wings and staring violet eyes appeared above the cross-wearing Clarion and spinning golden gears manifested around the wheelchair-bound Clarion. Goth Clarion's hair was whipped by an invisible wind and business suit Clarion was surrounded by a crimson bonfire. The real Clarion felt her nimbus — floating fairy lights and illusory music — burst into life all around her. The mirrors blazed, and then they were dark again, leaving Clarion blinking.

"You may have been destined to Awaken, Clarion, but everything else is up to chance and Fate. Who you are, you are because of the choices you made and the choices that were made for you."

"I don't get it." Clarion put her hands on her hips. "Look, I came here because I—"

Ararat cut her off. "You need help defeating the Scelestus called Echidna. To do that, you need to know what choices led her to who and what she is today, and what else she might have been." Ararat pulled the dusty cloth away from the table, revealing it was also a mirror. He blew on the mirror's surface and it rippled, like a pool of mercury. He gestured for Clarion to come closer

"Watch and learn, Clarion."

"Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power."

— Abraham Lincoln

You are the player, and it's all about you.

Mage: The Awakening is a shared storytelling experience of modern magic and occult horror. It is a story where you are the heroes, the readers, and the writer, all in one. If you are reading this, you probably know that already.

You probably also have some questions. There might be things that aren't clear to you or places where you could use some new techniques. This chapter answers some of the questions that you, as a player, might have.

The first three sections are all about character. The first explores the ins and outs of character creation, offering narrative and mechanical advice for creating compelling characters in the world of **Mage: The Awakening**. The second explores how your character grows with experience, and how to best take advantage of experience points. The third explores the world of a mage in larger terms: the cabal, how to build one during character creation and how to keep it dynamic as the game goes on.

The next two sections experiment with the assumptions of **Mage: The Awakening**. These sections explore how the Paths and orders described in **Mage: The Awakening** can be changed to provide a different game experience.

The last bit of this chapter takes magical style, an important and fun, but all-too-often ignored, facet of **Mage** and fleshes it out. Here we present what style really means in the context of the game, and a sampling of such styles to use as written or as inspiration.

Character Creation

Character creation is where it all begins. Your character is your access to the world of **Mage: The Awakening**. The quality of your character has an effect on how much you and everyone around the table with you enjoys the game.

When a player makes a character, she has two primary goals. The first is to make someone who is interesting: interesting to the player, to all the other players at the table, and to the Storyteller. The second goal is to make a character who is effective. That is, the character should be a useful addition to the chronicle, rather than a bumbling comic relief or an inept distraction.

This section is divided into two parts. The first handles the story-focused aspects of character creation — how to create an interesting and compelling mage in the World of Darkness — and the second explores how

to take that person and reflect him in the Storyteller system in a way that is true to the character and helps you have fun.

This section is not, however, a replacement for the character creation section of **Mage: The Awakening**, neither does it repeat the information contained in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. This chapter endeavors to clarify a few things, but it does not serve as a reference or a procedural guide. For those purposes, you'll still need the aforementioned books.

Concept

A blank character sheet is one of the most intimidating things in roleplaying. On the one hand, you can do anything. All you have to do is create; you don't have to worry about points, minimums, or maximums. On the other hand, you can do anything. With all the possibilities to choose from how can you know which one will be the most fun to play?

Every player has a preferred method of character creation. Here are a few tactics that might inspire you.

Communication

In character creation, communication is key. Like a well-written novel, a good chronicle stars characters who complement and frustrate each other in various ways. Why leave these relationships to chance when you can write them — or their potential — into the game from the very beginning?

Sometimes the game begins with a blank slate. Everyone knows they want to play **Mage**, but no one has a strong vision for the chronicle. In this situation, a brainstorming session is in order. What about **Mage** does each player find most interesting? The characters, and perhaps even the general shape of the entire chronicle, can emerge naturally from this conversation.

When building a chronicle, make sure you ask some key questions. The Storyteller and all the players should be clear on which of **Mage: The Awakening**'s themes, orders, and traditional antagonists everyone at the table finds most and least interesting. What other World of Darkness games do the players find interesting and might want to see involved in the chronicle, if any? What kinds of relationships — romantic, familial, platonic — is everyone interested in portraying with each other's characters and with Storyteller characters? Do any of the genres in Chapter One seem more interesting than the "default" World of Darkness? Finally, it is important to talk about everyone's limits. How does everyone feel about character death? What sorts of things could happen in play that would make someone too sad, angry, or uncomfortable to continue playing?

Even if the Storyteller or the troupe as a whole has a clear vision for the chronicle, this kind of conversation can be an excellent place to begin character creation. Sometimes all it takes is one person with a vague character idea to transform a table full of blank faces into a creative firestorm. All the players have to do is keep their minds open and offer to fulfill narrative roles for each other.

When one of your fellow players presents a character, ask questions and listen carefully to the answers you get. Then, incorporate those answers into your character. For example, does one of your fellow players have an idea for a character who strongly — but not violently — dislikes the Guardians of the Veil, but has a great deal of respect for people who manage to balance the demands of magic with the needs of a family and children? If you create a Guardian devoted to keeping his wife and nine-year-old son safe from Paradox, you can force her character to question her assumptions.

Finally, even if everyone comes to the table with a great character idea, if you are willing to stay flexible you can build a much more compelling group of characters. Listen to each other's backstories for hooks, places where the characters might have encountered each other in the past or unwittingly changed the shape of each other's lives.

During cooperative character creation, everyone at the table needs to ask open-ended questions and listen carefully to the answers. Make sure you have a clear idea of the details of every character's backstory and personality. What does your character look for in friends and romantic partners? What newspaper headline would catch your character's immediate attention? What does your character believe about himself that probably isn't true? What is your character's experience of the supernatural and the Supernal? What kind of person would make a good foil for your character? What does your character miss most about being a Sleeper and what does he like most about being Awakened?

The most important principle of group character creation is this: no one's character is done until everyone's character is done. Every character is subject to change until the moment the game starts, the better to make every character a finely-tuned response to the needs of the chronicle.

Image

Some players find it useful to start with an imaginary picture of their characters. Remember, this is about conceptualizing your character, not scripting future scenes for actual play. The things you imagine don't have to be even remotely plausible.

Do you imagine your character standing among the ruins of the Empire State Building, keeping a pack of diseased werewolves at bay with arcane fire? That image might imply that your character is a survivor, with high Resistance traits and an interest in combative magic, possibly a member of the Adamantine Arrow.

Is your character the kind of person you can imagine coolly defying the will of the Hierarch and then striking out on her own? Maybe she's a Libertine, or at least anti-hierarchical and forward-thinking (or maybe she's just a troublemaker).

Do you see your character using good humor and a level head to broker deals between local supernatural populations for the good of the city's Sleepers? That tells you a lot about his personality and implies an interest in the non-Supernal supernatural and the well-being of Sleepers, traits that not all mages share.

While you are at it, imagine how your character might fail in ways that are appropriate to your vision. Do you see your character trying to be suave at a high-class ball, but spilling wine on the front of his date's shirt? That implies that he has a low Manipulation rating and has reasons to be anxious when among crowds.

Is she the kind of person who can't form close relationships and insults the people she cares about most? This vision implies a poor Manipulation or Composure score. What happened to her to make her this way?

Does he have a glass jaw, effective in lots of other ways, but one punch and he's down? That image should inform your choices when it comes to his Physical Attributes and combat tactics.

Some players go so far as to draw a picture of their characters, as they imagine them, or find pictures in magazines or on the Internet. Once you have a firm image of your character, you can fill in the gaps. A strong and dynamic image serves as the seed, and the rest of the concept crystallizes around it.

Inspiration

Every player has heard or experienced horror stories about "that guy" who insisted on playing a clear rip-off of a successful fantasy property, often a certain grim and clawed hero named after a large mammalian predator or a bold, dark-skinned outcast with twin sabers. The details of the fiasco vary, but "that guy" is always the same. He invariably latches on to the worst, most asocial and chronicle-wrecking aspects of the character he emulates, and, worst of all, he's so unoriginal about it.

As a result of "that guy's" excesses, derivative characters have a bad name in many troupes, which is a shame. You can find a lot of inspiration in our history, the books we read, and the television shows we watch.

Although nothing is wrong with building off inspiration, it is important to find ways to be original. Instead of trying to play a given character, only as a mage, use the fictional character as the basis of your character. Take the original character in a new direction. For example, ask yourself what a similar character would be like if she had been born in a different country or economic class or to parents of a different ethnicity? What would your inspirational character be like if he had been born a she (or vice versa)?

You can also slice an inspirational character up and use only pieces at a time. Take your favorite set of super powers, for example, determine which Arcana will let you emulate them most faithfully, and give them to someone who would find having these powers particularly challenging or gratifying. You can take just part of an existing character's story as inspiration.

Alternately, don't play your inspiration as a mage. Instead, play her child, or her husband, or her sibling. The original character may or may not be Awakened as well — she may not even be a part of the story — but if she provided you with inspiration, she did her part.

Finally, real life has produced a huge variety of heroes and villains, creative geniuses, and passionate but troubled people willing to give everything to change the world. Give someone inspired by one of these passionate, intense people — already struggling with hubris and ethics — magical powers and you have the basis of a truly fascinating story. Because you are creating fiction, you don't need to worry about accuracy and even a little research can go a long way. The Internet is a brilliant resource for this sort of character creation. Just so we don't leave you hanging, here are 10 real and fictional people that might be the basis of interesting **Mage** characters:

• **Aleister Crowley** is well known as a real-life occultist who laid the groundwork of modern Hermeticism, much of which inspired **Mage: The Awakening** in the first place. Rather than assuming that a Crowley-inspired character was such an outsider because of an Awakening, what might happen if a Sleeper who resembled Aleister Crowley were introduced to the Supernal? What transformations might the experience work on his mind and outlook?

• **Andrew Jackson:** One of America's most dynamic and controversial figures, Andrew Jackson was a military commander and passionate statesman whose efforts helped build the modern United States. Jackson was devoted to his wife and fought several duels in her honor. At the same time, he was sickly and often ill. He suffered from tuberculosis and constant pain from old injuries, many of which were inflicted on him in his many duels. A modern, **Mage: The Awakening** version

of Andrew Jackson could easily be a member of the Silver Ladder or the Adamantine Arrow with strong and often controversial opinions.

• **Edmund:** The bastard son of Gloucester in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Edmund isn't an entirely sympathetic character. He's manipulative and scheming in the extreme. He plays his hot-tempered father and his good-natured brother against one another, and sets in motion events that wind up (as befitting a Shakespearean tragedy) creating a pile of corpses by the end of the play. But at the same time, what Edmund really wanted was acknowledgement from his father, from the universe, as being a real person, not just a bastard. In a highly dogmatic Consilium, it wouldn't be too hard to see an Edmund-like Mastigos among the Free Council, or as an apostate.

• **Eddi McCandry:** The star of Emma Bull's *War for the Oaks* is an Acanthus waiting to happen. In her original context, Eddi is a rock 'n roll musician who becomes a key player in a war between two factions of fey. The entire novel could easily be an Acanthus Awakening.

• **Eleanore of Aquitaine:** Eleanore went through two husbands, fought in the Crusades, supported her son in a rebellion against his father, and eventually ruled as regent while her son fought in a later Crusade. Although women as powerful and ambitious as Eleanore are not as rare or remarkable in this relatively enlightened day and age, Eleanore of Aquitaine's life is full of symbols and events that could easily inspire a compelling character.

• **Harvey Milk** was a gay man who, at 43 years old, became the first openly homosexual elected official in California. His passion for his cause was an inspiration for a generation of gay and straight activists. Although he rejected the sexual mores of his time, his dedication and sense of mission would make for an interesting Obrimos or member of the Silver Ladder.

• **Jack Churchill** was a soldier in the British Army during World War II. He went into every battle armed with a claymore and a bow and quiver of arrows. He was captured by the Nazis twice, only to escape each time. In the face of a Nazi advance, after his entire squad had been killed by mortar fire, he simply began to play a sad song on his bagpipes. Nothing more has to be said to establish that real people can be as strikingly brave as any fictional character.

• **Lyudmila Pavlichenko** was one of two thousand female snipers who fought for Communist Russia in World War II, of which only five hundred survived. Her photogenic appearance and high kill count — 309 by the end of the war — resulted in her being pulled from combat to become a minor celebrity. Pavlichenko was the first Soviet citizen to be personally received by a United States president. She was given gifts of various high-quality guns by heads of state in America and Canada, and she spoke at meetings of the Congress of Industrial Organizations and a federation of unions that later merged with the American Federation of Labor. Despite her success on the battlefield, Pavlichenko was not by nature a warrior. She interrupted her studies in history to volunteer for the military, and when the war was over,

she returned to university and spent the rest of her life as a historian. Pavlichenko is a good example of a fighter who cares passionately about what she defends but does not necessarily relish combat.

• **Robert E. Howard:** A pulp fantasy writer in the 1920s and 30s and the creator of Conan the Barbarian. Howard was plagued by lifelong depression and killed himself at age 30. A modern, Awakened version of Robert E. Howard might have survived his suicide attempt and Awakened as a Moros. Alternately, his fertile imagination might have opened the way to a Sword and Sorcery version of Arcadia where his stories were reality. How might that have affected him?

• **Sam Spade** from Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*, the movie versions of the book, and three little-known short stories, is the quintessential *noir* detective. He is keen, but detached, familiar with humanity's dark side, but still an idealist. This concept has already been explored in noir magicians like *Hellblazer*'s John Constantine and *The Dresden Files*' Harry Dresden, but there's no reason you couldn't take the concept in your own, unique direction.

Path

Path only means as much as you want it to mean. One character's Path might dominate her entire Awakened experience, but for another mage, Path is nothing more than a footnote in his story. However, Path does have one effect that cannot be ignored.

Because it boosts a Mental or Social Resistance Attribute, Path has an effect on a mage's personality. You should consider how this transformation affects her and her relationships with other people. Was there someone in his life for whom he was a doormat, but he can't take that anymore? Did her lack of emotional control drive someone away who might now be interested in pursuing a friendship again? Was he plagued by an addiction that he can now more easily kick? When you choose a Path, consider these character elements.

Also, remember that Path is an external, not one the character makes. A devout Christian who is struck by a vision of God and Awakens as an Obrimos is a great start to a character concept. However, a Path that puts your character at odds with herself might be even more interesting. What if the Christian above has a near-death experience and Awakens as a Moros? What if she is nearly kidnapped by faeries and becomes an Acanthus? What if her Awakening called out to some hidden, primal, sensual part of her and she ended up a Thyrsus? As long as the Watchtower reflects something that is genuinely a part of the character, it doesn't matter if it's a part that she is particularly fond of, or even aware of.

Order

If Path reflects where your character is coming from — the magical identity inflicted upon him by the Supernal Realms — order is where your character is going. Order is the place your character chooses to take in the Awakened world, the destiny he sees for himself.

When you choose an order you should also consider the needs of the game. If everyone but you is on board for a story about delving into ancient tombs seeking the mysteries of Atlantis and you make a Silver Ladder politico, you are asking for trouble. If your Storyteller is smart, she will find a way to make it work. She might ask you what you find appealing about a Silver Ladder character and find a way to apply that to a character more appropriate to the chronicle, or find a way to relate your character to her plans. A good Storyteller knows that "no" is an important tool in her repertoire, but so is "yes, and" or "yes, but."

Fortunately, the orders are, overall, cooperative. If the core concept of a chronicle doesn't interest you, try making a character who is at least tangential. Even if playing a tomb-delving Mystagogue like your fellow players doesn't excite you, perhaps you might like playing an Adamantine Arrow bodyguard, who has taken it upon herself to protect these brilliant but impractical explorers so their discoveries can benefit the whole Awakened world.

You also might find it rewarding to choose an order that creates some tension in the character. Very few people agree with everything about their chosen religion, nationality, or social group, and order can be a choice of convenience rather than one of real faith.

For example, other mages trust the Adamantine Arrow because they take their oaths of loyalty and service very seriously. There is no reason that a socially adept character who wanted to be a diplomat and unite the Awakened world couldn't find a home with the Arrow. Even if hardened Adamantine Arrows might eat him for breakfast, well, that's what training and experience points are for. Similarly, someone who prized honesty and transparency might join the Guardians of the Veil if a bad experience with magic convinced her that preventing Paradoxes is more important than her personal ideals. Both of these characters can remain loyal members of their orders for their entire careers, experiencing inner conflicts that could drive many stories.

Attributes

The Attribute system favors strength and is forgiving of weakness. There are more levels of excellence — an Attribute rated at three, four, or five — than there are of mediocrity. It's easy to be average (just spend one of your points on an Attribute and there you are) and

harder to be above average, exceptional, or truly brilliant. In order to get those points, however, you have to skimp elsewhere.

Fortunately, a score of one in an Attribute does not mean disability or total incompetence. If your character has one dot in Stamina, she is sickly, not dying. If she has one dot of Wits, she is a little slow, not disabled. If he has one dot of Manipulation, he is a little naïve,

The Rule of Three

The first three dice in your dice pool matter the most. With one die, you have a 30% chance of rolling a success. With two dice, you have a 50% chance. With three dice, that chance rises to 65% — this is the point where success becomes more likely than failure — and with four dice you have a 75% chance of success. At this point, however, you hit the point of diminishing returns. Your fifth die increases your chance of success by 8%. Your sixth die increases your chance of success by a mere 5%. Exceptional successes are not really worth considering, as they are improbable until you hit 14 dice or so.

Achieving multiple successes is important in three broad situations. The first is rolls that are likely to suffer from numerous penalties. If you want your character to defuse bombs, for example, you probably want as many dice as possible in your Intelligence (and Wits, and Composure) + Crafts pool, because you are going to be dealing with penalties for tension, rushed work, complicated bombs, and so on. The second is rolls where you need more than one success. There are few examples of this in the World of Darkness, but some applications of magic work better the more successes you roll. Finally, combat combines these factors into a single situation. Your combat dice pools will suffer large penalties from your targets' Defense and Armor, range penalties, and your character's own wound penalties, and every success equals a health point of damage.

When you allocate your points during character creation, consider what you are going to actually be doing with your dice pools. Unless you are going to use a dice pool in combat or other situations where penalties are common, or in extended rolls, a dice pool of four is all you really need.

not utterly unable to speak. The system carries these assumptions out in play — you will rarely, if ever, be totally crippled by a low Attribute.

When it comes to experience points, starting with some high Attributes and some low Attributes — which you plan to improve later on with experience points — is less expensive than starting with average Attributes and improving them. Increasing an Attribute from one dot to two dots costs 10 experience points, but increasing an Attribute from two dots to three dots, on the other hand, costs 15 experience points, even though both expenditures are worth one die. If you chose to reflect a character's weakness with a single dot in an Attribute, you can count on being able to buy that weakness off in three or four sessions.

Since **Mage: The Awakening** is a game about magic, it is also important to remember that your character's Attributes can change in less permanent ways. The Perfecting Practice of Mind lets you improve your character's Intelligence, Wits, Resolve, Presence, Manipulation, and Composure, and the Perfecting Practice of Life lets you improve your Strength, Dexterity, and Stamina. Although relying on magic too much raises its own issues, magic can also render your character much more powerful than usual when she has the opportunity to prepare herself.

In **Mage**, one Attribute in particular deserves extra attention: Intelligence. Intelligence is part of the Intelligence + Occult dice pool for using an Unveiling spell to scrutinize resonance (see pp. 277 to 280 of **Mage: The Awakening**). Because scrutinizing for resonance is one of the primary ways that mages learn about their magical world, Intelligence is a very important Attribute.

If you choose to make a low Intelligence mage, you can look forward to being left out when your fellow players scrutinize resonance with their various unveiling spells and discuss their findings. However, perhaps consistently getting that sort of thing wrong is part of your concept. It is important to remember that as the life of a mage presents your character with many mental challenges, perhaps this is a way your character can grow with experience (and experience points).

Skills

When you spend your precious Skill points, remember that the Storytelling System only requires a roll when the outcome is in question. For most mundane tasks, it isn't. A character with average Attributes and no dots in Drive only gets a single die (not a chance die) when faced with a stressful driving situation, but that does not mean he can't drive across town without getting into an accident. Most drives across town would never call

for a roll. If something came up that demanded a roll, the character's player could opt to spend a Willpower point, which practically ensures success. The character experiences a particularly stressful drive, and probably vents about it later (possibly regaining that Willpower point by indulging in his Vice).

When you choose your character's Skills, remember the magic number — four — except for Skills you use in high-stress situations. Don't dump points into low-rated Skills that your character will rarely use. Focus them on important Skills that represent your character's natural proclivities and areas of training. Your character doesn't need a dot of Drive or Computers or any other Skill that is ubiquitous to the modern world to succeed at the occasional low-stress task, only to be genuinely good at those Skills and succeed under pressure.

Skill Specialties are a way to add a touch of detail to your character. He isn't just skilled at Crafts, he's a Gourmet Chef. She doesn't just have dots of Firearms; her Israeli father taught her everything there is to know about Uzis. If you can think of three colorful details that aren't reflected elsewhere, Skill Specialties might be a good place for them.

On the other hand, Skill Specialties add one die to any roll involving the Skill that falls within its narrower purview. This means you can use a Skill Specialty to fill a gap in your Skill selection. If, after spending your Skill points, you have any Skills you wish were just a little higher and your character is only or most frequently going to use the Skill within a narrow domain, that might be a good place to put a Specialty.

Path and Order Redux

Unlike order, Path has a significant mechanical effect on your character. Each Path provides two Ruling Arcana and one Inferior Arcanum; two Arcana your character excels at and the one he finds challenging.

First, you pay fewer experience points to improve Ruling Arcana and more to improve the Inferior Arcanum. A character who eschews his Ruling Arcana in favor of his Common — or worse, his Inferior — Arcana is swimming upstream. If you make this choice, you effectively have fewer experience points than your fellow players. Second, your character pays one more Mana to cast spells from his Common and Inferior Arcana. This makes using improvised magic in those Arcana much easier.

Effectively, Path tells you what magic your character is going to do. You can buck the trend, but you will pay for it. Your concept for an Obrimos necromancer or a Thyrsus mentalist might be worth it, but you should know what you are getting into.

Fortunately, Legacies can mitigate this limitation. A Legacy can grant one additional Ruling Arcana, but only if the Legacy favors an Arcanum that a new member does not already favor. Most Legacies require only two dots of this Arcanum, putting them within the grasp of a character whose magical preferences run counter to Path without too much difficulty. However, for this to work out, you need to find the right Legacy. If there isn't a Legacy you like in any of the books, you need to work with your Storyteller to create it, either in character, with your character as the originator of the Legacy, or out of character, with the two of you talking about your ideas and the Storyteller introducing it in game.

While Path determines a lot about what magic your character will excel at, order only has one mechanical benefit: Rote Specialties, three Skills whose associated rotes will gain a one-die bonus. While a one-die bonus is nothing to sneeze at — in the right situation it can be a matter of success or failure — it isn't such a huge asset that Rote Specialty should be make the difference in order selection.

Rotes

The hard truth is that not all spells are worth buying as rotes. Likewise, the value of a rote is not directly related to its value as a spell. Some very valuable spells that your character will use over and over again make poor purchases as rotes.

When you purchase a rote for your character, what you are really buying is a bigger dice pool. A bigger dice pool only helps you with spells where the number of successes you roll is directly related to the power or duration of the spell. For spells where the effectiveness of the spell is based on some other factor and the number of successes only applies to how difficult it will be for another mage to dismiss your spell, you should not bother buying the rote.

Consider the following one-dot Matter spells: Alter Conductivity and Craftsman's Eye. Both of these are nifty magical tricks: the former allows your character to alter the conductivity of simple objects and the latter allows your character to discern the purpose of any object with moving parts at a glance. Which of these spells would you be better off buying as a rote?

Alter Conductivity allows you to affect more than one object per casting, depending on the number of successes you roll. Craftsman's Eye, on the other hand, requires simply a single success to take effect. Dispelling isn't even an issue, since the spell has a duration of "Concentration" and takes effect immediately. The former spell is a much better purchase than the latter.

Similarly, between offensive and defensive spells — for example, Celestial Fire and Unseen Shield — the offensive spell is usually a much better purchase. Celestial Fire is an aimed spell, meaning that in some situations you might suffer a −2 penalty or more from your target's Defense score or cover benefits. Successes translate directly to damage, so the more the better. On the other hand, Unseen Shield only requires a single success to come into effect, but the armor score it grants is based on the caster's dots in the Forces Arcanum and the spell's duration is automatically one scene (or 24 hours with the expenditure of a point of Mana). The only thing multiple successes are useful for is preventing your Unseen Shield from being dispelled.

Character Development

No matter what vicious foes a **Mage** character faces over the course of a story, no matter what terrifying secrets she discovers, she can be assured of *some* reward for her efforts: experience points. To the player, they represent the character's ongoing story arc in concrete terms.

Before delving into the ins and outs of experience points, however, we need to clear up what experience points are and what they are not. Experience points do not exist to turn your character's experience directly into growth and change. Certainly, you can spend experience points to improve Attributes and Abilities that your

Flags

Flags are a concept from roleplaying game theory that some players and Storytellers find useful. A flag is a signal that a player sends up in the way she makes her character that informs the Storyteller what sorts of thing she finds interesting.

A character with a high Strength score is made to lift things and throw punches. Similarly, a character with many dots of Firearms needs to have the opportunity to shoot guns once in a while, or dramatically fix a gun with poor tools and under a time limit, or use some obscure bit of gun trivia to gain a tactical advantage. The player who made that choice made it for a reason, after all, and that reason is probably that she finds those tasks interesting.

Other traits can be flags as well. If a player pours many of his limited Merit points into a powerful familiar, that player wants an opportunity for his familiar to achieve cool things in game. Another player who takes high ratings in Contacts and Allies wants to play someone who is well connected and whose connections are an asset (and, potentially, a liability). Similarly, when a player of **Mage: The Awakening** buys a rote, she is simply begging for the opportunity to use it.

Negative traits are just as valid as potential flags. A low Attribute implies that the player wants her character to fail, dramatically, at tasks related to that Attribute. Flaws are flags, too. Each flaw represents a problematic situation that the player is literally asking to have the opportunity to deal with in character.

Finally, not all flags are mechanical. It is entirely possible for backstory elements, beliefs, and personality quirks to be excellent flags. However, because they have no mechanical reflection, these flags can be harder to see.

As game progresses, experience points become another form of flag. What you choose to spend your precious experience points on — Merits, Skills, Attributes, magic — is another signal to your Storyteller of what sorts of things you want the game to include.

As a player, it is your job to send up clear flags. Make strong choices! Pour points into things that interest you and refrain from spending points on things that don't interest you. Stress elements of your character's backstory that you would really like to see come back to haunt her.

As a Storyteller, it is your job to watch out for the flags your players are sending up and adapt your game to their interests. Your notes for each character should include flags alongside Arcana, favored rotes, and key backstory elements. If one of your players is pouring his character creation points into a trait that won't figure into the story, either re-imagine your story to give your player's character a chance to shine or let your player know so he has a chance to re-imagine his concept or play a different character altogether.

character uses on a regular basis, or to purchase Merits related to your character's capabilities. Pay attention to what dice pools you have been using frequently, and not just the ones you've succeeded on. Have you failed a lot of Stealth rolls lately? All that practice fumbling around in the dark might justify buying another dot of Stealth, Dexterity, or Wits. Similarly, has your character been getting into a lot of fights? That might justify a dot of Strength, Dexterity, Stamina, Wits, any of your character's combat Skills, or dots in a Fighting Style. Although they don't have to, experience points can be used to reflect your character's experiences.

Similarly, you and your Storyteller should keep track of what your character spends her time doing. Mages are more likely than most people to spend their time learning since they have two sets of traits — rotes and dots of Inferior and Common Arcana — which can be improved by poring over dusty tomes, memorizing magical principles, and studying with more experienced magicians. However, it is just as valid for a character in the World of Darkness to start spending time at the

shooting range, take a book on lock-picking out of the local library, or sign up for Introduction to Criminal Law at the local community college. All of these activities could easily justify increasing an Attributes and Skills or buying one of several Merits.

If you roll a given dice pool over and over again, but you don't feel that's where the character's interests lie, you aren't obligated to spend experience points on its composite traits. Similarly, a character can grow in ways that have nothing to do with experience. You can spend experience points to improve your character's rating in Merits that reflect who your character knows and what he owns, like Barfly and Resources.

You can be a little creative with your justifications. Windfalls do happen in real life, after all, and your experience points are yours to spend. Sure, it's unlikely for your character to win the lottery, allowing you to purchase another point of the Resources Merit, but it could happen, even without the use of the Fate Arcanum. Similarly, does your character work in a used book store? The Library Merit and the first couple of dots in pretty much any Mental Skill can be justified by having your character find an interesting book and take it home.

Real people grow from bad experiences as well as good ones. Storytellers should let you turn negative experiences into experience point expenditures. In some cases, this adds color to scenes that might not have gotten any attention at the table.

Did your character spend the night in jail? Maybe his cell mate was a street tough, a former boxer, who gave your character a few pointers — enough to buy the first dot of the Fighting Style: Boxing Merit, Brawling Dodge, or a dot of Brawl or Streetwise. His cell mate might even become a Contact or a dot of Allies (which might not actually require experience points; see sidebar).

Finally, many characters begin play with weaknesses and failings that you want them to eventually overcome. When a shy character learns to stand up for himself, his player could buy another dot of Presence, when an overweight character finally goes to the gym to lose all that excess weight, her player might buy another dot of Stamina and/or Dexterity. The same applies to Skills and Merits as well. When a character who eschewed book learning finally decides to go to college, it might be time to buy some Academics. When a meek boyfriend leaves his abusive partner and starts taking self-defense courses, his player should consider purchasing a dot of Brawl (maybe Resolve, too). The above overweight character's player could even consider purchasing the Striking Looks Merit and really blow her friends, family, and cabal mates out of the water.

Acquiring New Merits

If a character makes a friend on the local police force, should the player have to pay for a dot of Contacts or Allies? Likewise, if the character gets a job and has some extra pocket money, should the player reflect this by buying another dot of Resources?

Under a strict read of the rules, yes, probably. But this lends itself to discussion about at what point an acquaintance becomes a Contact, and whether a player pays experience points for Imbued Items that the character creates herself. As an option to paying the experience point costs, consider this:

Merits that the character gains *in play* (not downtime) do not cost experience points. Most of the time, this applies to Allies, Contacts, Resources, Imbued Item, and possibly Library or Sanctum. At the Storyteller's discretion, it might also apply to Status, Fame, and Merits such as Barfly. It shouldn't apply to Physical or Mental Merits that have more direct, measurable effects on the game.

If the character gains the Merit during downtime (the acquisition happens "off-screen," as it were) the player spends experience as usual.

The most important thing to remember about experience point expenditures is that every point you spend should add something to the story. Your experience points are as much a tool as who your character speaks to and what she says. You can simply pour your experience points into what makes the most sense or adds the most to your character's power, or you can balance that by using experience points to expand on the story.

What experience points really are is what roleplaying game theorists call a pacing mechanic. Experience points exist to control the forward march of the game. By allowing the Storyteller to control the rate at which characters acquire experience points, the Storyteller can control at what speed the game marches forward.

For example, a Storyteller who is most interested in gritty, low-powered games might hand out experience more slowly in the opening sessions of a chronicle so she can savor the stage of the game she likes the best. Then, as the game progresses, she might hand experience out more liberally to bring the chronicle to a satisfyingly epic close. A Storyteller who is interested in high-powered chronicles of mystical exploration and battles for the fate of the Fallen World and Supernal Realms might be very liberal with experience points in the early and middle portions of the chronicle and slow down only when each character has mastered several Arcana and has a position in the Consilium and a high rank in her order.

The ways that experience points will be used to pace the game is something troupes should talk about at the beginning of the chronicle so that players and Storytellers know what to expect.

A better term for experience points might be "character improvement points." Rather than simulating the way people grow and change in the real world, they are an abstraction that allows the Storyteller to control the rate at which characters grow stronger over time. Your experience point expenditures do need to make sense in the context of the game, however. As a player, it's your job to keep an eye out for opportunities to justify spending experience points.

Arcana

The experience point chart on p. 340 of **Mage** attempts to account for the relative usefulness of different traits with some success. The more powerful and useful a trait is the more experience points it costs per dot. This chart does a good job of keeping the game balanced, but ultimately it cannot account for everything, leaving **Mage** with one significant factor: the overwhelming usefulness of Arcana.

Your character can achieve almost anything with the right mix of Arcana. With the right Arcana, you can temporarily improve Attributes and Skills, gain information about past, future, and distant events, read minds, and strike down your enemies from a distance. Arcana do everything Attributes, Skills, Merits, and equipment do, often with greater ease and flexibility. Once your character Masters his one or two Arcana — his Path's Ruling Arcana or whatever other Arcana he chooses to specialize in — he loses much need for anything else.

This isn't necessarily a bad thing. After all, **Mage: The Awakening** is a game of modern sorcery. However, this means that whenever you spend experience points on anything other than Arcana and Gnosis, you need to consider how that trait is going to help your character in a way that magic won't.

While magic can do nearly anything, magic can also cause more problems than it solves. If your character's favorite spells are vulgar, for example, Paradox can be a problem, especially as your character's Gnosis grows and the Fallen World increasingly rejects her magic. To combat this, your character should stay skilled at those basic tasks that tend to be vulgar when performed with magic. Combat, athletics, and creating and destroying physical objects all tend to be vulgar when done with magic, meaning it might be safer for even a powerful mage to know how to do these things with his own two hands.

Similarly, some tasks are hubristic and morally gray when performed with magic, but easier on Wisdom when performed with the mage's mundane faculties. This may seem strange, but it is an intentional choice. In **Mage**, magic is sacred and misused Supernal power is bad for the soul.

In some ways, this varies from Arcanum to Arcanum. A master of Spirit, for example, should consider keeping his Social traits high because causing a spirit to possess another person — using Spirit magic to control another's will — is a sin against Wisdom 3; but coercing someone socially isn't listed on the chart at all, and might fall under Wisdom 9 (minor selfish acts). Coercing a spirit with magic is a sin against Wisdom 6, but driving a hard bargain with a spirit (taking advantage of a high rating Presence, Manipulation, and Persuasion) isn't a sin at all. Similarly, all mages should study combat skills (and combat avoidance skills) since using magic to harm someone risks degeneration at Wisdom 4 or above. Even with a bonus for harming someone else in self defense, losing Wisdom is a real possibility for a mage who gets into a lot of fights and relies on magic too heavily.

Finally, mundane Skills can be a huge asset against other, more hubristic mages who do rely on magic too much. A master's Sanctum might be warded against Space scrying, but is it adequately protected from bugs, a wiretap, or plain old eavesdropping? The Silver Ladder

diplomat might have layer upon layer of Mind shields and Resolve-boosting magic, but she is probably still susceptible to a well-orchestrated and well-researched seduction. As an added benefit, because mundane skills are much less expensive than Arcana and Gnosis, a well-rounded character can easily develop unusually high ratings in the necessary traits.

Mage: The Awakening is about magic, and nothing can sidestep the fact that more Gnosis or another dot of your favorite Arcanum is probably the best and most fun thing you can do with your experience points. While you might never suffer from pouring experience points into your character's magic, however, you should remain aware that other choices can add a lot to the game and open innovative possibilities for solving your character's problems.

Cabal Development

The cabal is the unit of Awakened society. In many iterations of the setting, what cabal your character belongs to matters more than his Path, order, and Legacy combined. A mage without a cabal is alone against the world and mistrusted by his peers. Most mages would prefer to deal with an apostate who has a cabal than an ostensibly respectable Pentacle mage who lacks one for no good reason. Only Banishers and the hated Scelesti regularly operate alone, and even they often gather together into small, temporary groups. This section focuses on how the cabal influences a player's experience of the chronicle, and how to use it as a tool to improve the story. After all, cabals are key to a mage's experience of her world.

The cabal is like an extra character that the players make and control together. Like a character, the creation of an exceptional cabal requires communication between the players and the Storyteller and the players and each other. Like a character, cabals are born, they grow and change as experience points are spent to improve their traits, and sometimes they die. Cabals experience challenges and conflicts, develop communal allies and enemies, and increase in power and influence within the shadow world of Mage society. Also like a character, a good cabal can make a game, and a bad cabal can ruin it.

Cabal Creation

When building a cabal, communication is the key to success. The players and Storyteller need to communicate about their ideas and expectations. The players should have a clear idea of what the Storyteller wants to get out of the game, and the Storyteller should have a clear idea of what the players are interested in.

The character creation section above gives many ideas for how to guide a conversation to achieve these goals. The lists of questions are especially useful to cabal development. In general, nearly everything that applies to individual characters can apply to cabals as well. A cabal can be inspired by a famous group from fiction or history. A cabal can be held together by a strong image of a group of characters engaged in some dramatic action together.

The most important thing to remember about a cabal is that just like a character, it needs a purpose — a concept — to hold it together. The cabal's shared attributes should flow from that concept. For example, a cabal dedicated to hiding dangerous magical secrets from the world should probably have many points in shared Sanctum, so they have some place to put all those magical secrets. Most of those points would be placed into Sanctum Security. On the other hand, a cabal dedicated to magical research might have fewer points in Sanctum and more points in a shared Library. Either cabal could have shared dots in the Hallow Merit, but a cabal dedicated to the creation of magical items or magical combat would have more.

All cabals have a purpose. The scope, specificity, and permanence of this purpose vary from cabal to cabal. One cabal might be a tightly knit group of friends with a wide variety of interests who have united for mutual protection and aid. Another cabal comes together to defeat a specific threat. A third cabal might be made of highly political mages with an ambition to become the ruling cabal of their city's Consilium, or the leaders of their orders within the city.

Although it is a useful shorthand, order is rarely enough to define a cabal by itself. Without straying too far from the core principles of the *Ungula Draconis*, a cabal of Arrows could be warriors, bodyguards, assassins, or even diplomats who trade on the trust the rest of the orders have for the Adamantine Arrow to broker deals and end conflicts. A cabal of Guardians could dedicate themselves to manipulating the local media, running Sleepers through a Labyrinth, or destroying dangerous lore. The best cabal concepts generally have room for two or three orders, unless a good reason exists in the context of the greater chronicle for a cabal to all belong to a single order.

The cabal exists within the context of the Consilium and the city. In a city where the Storyteller has decided that tensions run high between the orders, playing members of a mixed-order is a much more striking choice than it would be in a standard city. In a Consilium that is home to several powerful, highly specialized, and welcoming cabals full of friendly older mages willing to accept and mentor young mages, creating a small cabal of friends with little to offer each other is a similarly powerful choice.

The cabal is defined by the characters in it. The concept that unites the cabal should flow naturally from the characters. On the other hand, the cabal should be influenced by the needs of the story. If the Storyteller comes to the table with an idea for a chronicle, the cabal has to fit into that idea, or the story will suffer. Similarly, the characters the players make need to fit into that cabal.

At the same time, the cabal creation process should include some give and take. One or two characters who take a half-step outside the cabal's core concept can significantly enliven the chronicle, if the Storyteller is prepared to include plots to entertain those players. If the Storyteller wants to run a political game of plot and counterplot, most of the cabal will be théarchs and Guardians, with perhaps a Libertine or two thrown in. It might be interesting, however, for one of the characters to play the cabal's Adamantine Arrow bodyguard.

When building a cabal, the group needs to take their characters' Paths into consideration. Mages are defined by what magic they choose to excel in, and Path strongly influences that choice. If more than one character walks the same Path, they risk stepping on each other's toes.

If your cabal-to-be contains more than one mage of each Path, those players need to have a talk with each other about their goals. If a cabal contains two Moros and one's player wants to specialize in alchemy (and the Matter Arcanum) and the other wants to specialize in necromancy (and the Death Arcanum), then the problem is somewhat lessened. The overlap of Knowing and Unveiling spells may sometimes be frustrating and the cabal will be slightly less versatile, but neither of these problems is critical.

On the other hand, a group of players with two characters whose interpretations of their Path are very similar — such as two Acanthus who both want to sling curses — has a real problem.

It would probably be easiest for one of the players to play a totally different character or reinterpret the character she has, but this is not the troupe's only option. The players can resign themselves to the conflict and try to find ways to make it fun. Maybe the characters start in the same place — perhaps even sharing a mentor — and develop in different directions. Perhaps they are or become foils for each other, with each taking the lessons of their mutual Path in ways that challenge each other's beliefs. Perhaps the characters can grapple with how they render each other redundant in game and find a way to work together. The situation is not totally
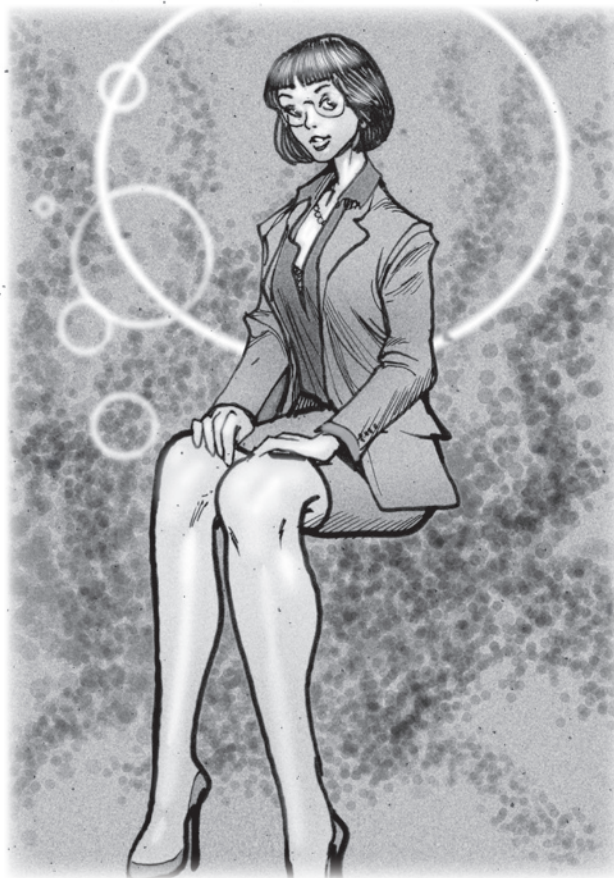
hopeless, but it is problematic and the troupe will need to use cooperation and communication to transform it into something fun.

The players and the Storyteller also need to decide where the cabal came from. How did the characters meet and why did they decide to become a cabal? Were they introduced by their mentors? Does their Consilium do something to introduce newly Awakened mages in the hopes of forming new cabals?

Alternately, was their meeting more dramatic? Did the characters come together while overcoming some deadly foe? Did they save each other's lives? Did some or all of them leave other cabals behind? Just as a character's backstory should come back to haunt him, so should the events formed by a cabal continue to affect its future.

Finally, the cabal needs a name. This name can be simply descriptive — the Grant Street Cabal — or it can reflect the cabal's purpose, like Internal Affairs. Many cabals choose names that are strongly evocative, like the Red Sentinels or the Broken Throne, or are inspired by the theme of member's shadow names, like an all-woman cabal called the Four Queens whose monikers are Diamond, Spade, Club, and Heart. Finally, some cabals might choose names that only make sense to them, such as a cabal of spies and archivists who name themselves Equus Informatica, broken Latin for "Information Horse," which reflects their role as the Consilium's information gatherers and the fact that horses are one member's nine-year-old stepson's favorite animal.

Cabal Growth

Over time, cabals develop new resources and improve the resources they began with, increase their esteem in the eyes of their peers, and change directions. The Storyteller should make sure the transformation of the cabal is as much a part of the game as the growth of its member characters.

Cabals gain status within the Consilium and the Awakened world at large in two ways.

First, a cabal can achieve fame by doing impressive and difficult things. Mages respect intelligence, cunning, wisdom, and magical prowess, and a cabal that expresses these traits and gets results rises in the esteem of other mages.

Second, a cabal improves its standing by taking actions that benefit all mages. In some cities, the Hierarch of the Consilium or influential members of the orders might be eager to hand tasks off to ambitious cabals, and in other cities the cabal might be on its own.

Finally, a cabal can develop a reputation for certain political leanings and alliances. A cabal that reliably aids a certain agenda develops a reputation for favoring that agenda. A cabal that dabbles in magic rejected by some factions — goetia, necromancy, or Abyssal magic — discovers that some mages accept them and others reject them. Whatever choices the cabal's members make, the whole cabal has to live with.

Cabal Death

Cabal death is a very serious issue, since it usually means the end of the chronicle as well. Short of actually being killed off, a cabal's membership can dissolve in several ways.

The most common way for a cabal to die is for the members to agree to go their separate ways. This usually happens when the cabal achieves the goal for which it was founded. A cabal formed to investigate corruption in a given Consilium might disband because it discovers the Tremere Lich at the center of her web of lies and dispatches her.

Alternately, a cabal might choose to split up if their interests diverge. This often happens to cabals whose members choose disparate Legacies or incompatible political causes. Some cabals also dissolve when their members achieve archmastery.

Cabals also fall apart when they become dysfunctional. A cabal that is afflicted by internecine strife and betrayal could decide that disbanding peacefully is the last thing they agree on. A cabal that has been through too much, leaving all its members reminded of their supernatural traumas whenever they look at each other's faces, might disband more agreeably. Any number of things in the World of Darkness can traumatize a cabal of mages in this way. Either way, the scene where a group of former friends say goodbye to each other is a bittersweet conclusion for any chronicle. Alternately, the cabal can explode more dramatically. The members can betray each other, kick each other out, or even come to blows. Of course, hard feelings among the characters should not equal hard feelings among the players.

In most cases, cabal death is equivalent to the end of the chronicle. Players and Storytellers should think carefully about what they are doing when they allow the characters' cabal to disband for good.

Paths and Orders

The Paths and orders of **Mage: The Awakening** together provide definition to characters, a kind of shorthand that can be used as a basis for player or storyteller character creation to get everyone in the troupe on the same page. "A libertine Obrimos" is by no means the complete character (by itself, it's no character at all) but it's a framework, a skeleton that the rest of the creative

process can use. In the World of Darkness, those descriptions are used by mages to pigeonhole one another and get a grip on strangers' possible capabilities — it's no substitute for interaction but a useful frame of reference from which to start.

This section is about exposing the parts of that skeleton, examining each in turn, and rebuilding it to suit a chronicle. **Mage** includes 25 combinations of Path and order — is that too few or too many? Do the orders make sense for your chronicle, or would you prefer something a little less global in scope? Do you dislike the way that Path dictates Arcana and want to change it? We'll show you how, starting by examining the way the Paths and orders are structured as **Mage** stands both mechanically and within the setting before moving on to ways in which a troupe might want to change those assumptions and what effects it might have.

But why have these structures at all? The simple answer is that in our experience players like to have defined choices when creating characters. The 5x5 model that **Mage** uses is by no means the only way to provide those choices. Most **World of Darkness** games break these frameworks down into "inborn" groups that are gained when a character applies a template and "social" groups that are technically optional, though usually highly encouraged. Inborn groups never change during play, but social groups can.

Mage defines the two sets of groups as being a broad description of the part of the Supernal World to which a character Awakened, which provides the basis for their acquisition of Arcana (inborn) and the way in which they approach the Mysteries as they experience the World of Darkness (social). In this way, the divisions between groups have been placed to emphasize the game's themes. Other Storytelling games use their groups to emphasize their own themes and setting points, from **Changeling: The Lost**'s social groups of what predominant emotion characters feel about their imprisonment and escape to **Vampire: The Requiem**'s inborn groups based on broad types of vampire from legend. If your troupe is considering a radical departure from "core **Mage**" in a new chronicle, altering the Paths and orders to fit is an effective way to stamp the new theme over the game.

Paths

As the "inborn" character group, Path has more mechanical implications than order while still influencing many aspects of the setting. The following paragraphs outline the assumptions Mage sums up in the concept of "Path".

Not every mage is a member of an order, but all willworkers are members of one of the five Paths. Mages journey to Arcadia, Stygia, Pandemonium, the Aether or the Primal Wild in Awakening experiences that take the form of astral journey or waking mystery play, and their lives are shaped by what they experience. After returning to the Fallen World (never to return to the Supernal) otherworldly experience and their new earthly powers combined form inclinations toward personality and action that are the basis of the stereotypes the Paths have about one another. Although some theorize that the Watchtowers attract those who are suited for membership in their Paths, the true trigger for Awakening is unknown. The Paths provide all knowledge of the Supernal Realms within the setting, with the five known Realms containing Watchtowers being almost interchangeable with "the Supernal as a whole." The Paths provide symbolic and sympathetic links as a basis for a magical style and serve as a metaphor for the ongoing journey of discovery and mystery a mage is on for the duration of their magical career.

The Arcana are pinned mechanically to the Paths, with each Realm providing two Ruling Arcana, seven Common Arcana and one Inferior Arcanum. The Ruling Arcana are further divided into one subtle Arcanum and one gross Arcanum. Overall there are five Arcana "sets," one for each Path. A mage learns Arcana with varying degrees of difficulty, and there are limits to how far she can progress in Arcana depending on whether they are Ruling, Common, or Inferior. To learn beyond her Path's limits, she must study with a mage of a Path that does provide the level desired. Last of all, Path provides a boost to a resistance Attribute.

The above description can be broken down into over a dozen small statements. In the default **Mage** setting, they're all true, but they don't have to be. A troupe can change just one to tweak their game setting or throw the entire description away and start fresh. We'll go through them all one by one, showing how they can be altered, and then give some partially fleshed-out examples of the results you can get.

All willworkers are members of one of the five Paths.

Start with the most basic assumption; not that there are only five Paths (there are potentially up to 360 combinations of Arcana, but we'll get to that later) but that all mages are members of one. Or, put another way, that there aren't any mages that *aren't*. If you keep the rest of **Mage**'s systems intact, a mage without a Path would have no natural ability to learn Arcana and would require a teacher for all levels of all Arcana, only starting with a Gnosis of 1 and the Unseen Senses ability. If all mages were Pathless in this way, the setting would be very different. See "Pathless" on p. 103 for one version of such a world.

Mages journey to Arcadia, Stygia, Pandemonium, the Aether, or the Primal Wild.

The Supernal Realms fit five broad versions of "the other world" (Fairy-land, Hell, Heaven, the Forest Primeval, and the land of the Dead) as part of **Mage's** Gnostic vision of the World of Darkness with the Paths as they exist being combinations of those Realms and five broad stereotypes of wizard. Even within the narrow confines of a Path stereotype ("Warlock," "Enchanter") and a set of Arcana ("Mind and Space," "Fate and Time") the Realms themselves are rather specific — the Aether as described in **Mage** might not satisfy your troupe, even if the players like the idea of the Obrimos.

Whether a new Supernal Realm is being created to replace an existing one or to be an addition to the five described in **Mage**, Supernal Realms follow a few basic patterns and are relatively easy to invent. First decide on the Arcana making up the Realm and on a Path stereotype for mages who Awaken to the new Realm. Supernal Realms can be as culturally specific as the troupe likes, but are always indicative of a higher truth or lesson that a soul must learn. Arcadia is made of agreement and narrative, Stygia teaches that souls must let go of the concerns weighing them down after death and the Aether is the concept of "power" given form. Each Realm also has creatures drawn from human myth as inhabitants. While inhabitants of a new Realm might well be original to a troupe such as a Realm of Spirit and Forces inhabited by *Djinn*, they don't have to be creatures new to the World of Darkness — note how Stygia contains beings that look very much like ghosts, whether they actually are the souls of human beings or not. The Realm versions may be platonic forms of beings separate from their Fallen World counterparts, or they may have the ability to cross or ignore the Abyss. It would be perfectly in keeping for a Realm of Death and Life to contain vampires or vampire-like creatures, for example.

Awakening experiences take the form of astral journey or waking mystery play.

The game provides two means of Awakening, which can be narrowed if your troupe requires particular focus. If all mages Awaken to mystery plays, the lore surrounding the Supernal Realms is all but eliminated — enough common themes will be present for willworkers to realize that there are different varieties of Awakening, and perhaps even realize some supernal symbols such as the trappings of death for Moros, but concepts like "Arcadia" would be lost. The Supernal would be seen as a higher truth behind the Fallen World, not a separate reality. Most importantly, there would be no knowledge of the Watchtowers and therefore no question of who built them — unless knowledge of the Exarchs and Oracles has some other means of being passed down, they are unlikely to have been heard of and the Diamond orders and Seers of the Throne will be substantially different in their beliefs.

Limiting Awakenings to astral journeys reinforces the existing setting, leaving willworkers in no doubt that the Realms exist. The notion — present to some extent in the **Mage** setting as it is — that the Supernal Realms are a blocked-off part of the astral beyond the Anima Mundi would gain credence, and your troupe's cabal might decide this is objectively true rather than merely being hinted at. That in turn puts a hard division between the Realms and any supernatural spaces that might share names and broad descriptions with them — Supernal Arcadia becomes a platonic "pure form" of the Arcadia described in **Changeling: The Lost**, the Underworld finds a Supernal reflection in Stygia, the Primal Wild mirrors the Shadow and the other two… are for your troupe to decide.

After returning to the Fallen World a mage never returns to the Supernal.

That the Supernal is cut off from casual voyaging is an element of the setting that could be changed, though it's beyond the scope of this section to suggest what that might do to the World of Darkness. However, raising Gnosis is an act of putting oneself in sympathy with the Supernal — perhaps mages could gain visions of their Path Realm and Watchtower when the Gnosis trait increases, facing an ordeal to do so? More experienced mages then become so because they have had the most contact with their Path. Or maybe the only one trip to the Supernal occurs at the end of a mage's career rather than the start, with mages Awakening to mystery plays and Ascending to astral voyages. Path then becomes something to aspire to, a road stretching in front of a mage leading back to the Supernal World. The Arcana change from being gifts from a Realm to being a sign of a mage's intent to reach their source; Obrimos do not use Forces spells because they experienced the Aether, but because they *wish* to, and every spell is a step along that road. The mystery play might still impose Ruling, Common, and Inferior Arcana, but for a setting like that it might be best to leave it up to the mage to decide which Arcana will be their focus.

Otherworldly experience and new earthly powers combined form inclinations toward personality and action.

Just as the Realms are manifestations of common visions of the otherworld, the Paths are five broad versions of "wizard," coupled with a Realm and an Arcana set. Enchanter, warlock, necromancer, theurgist, and shaman are common enough, but some stereotypes were merged in the fit, or didn't get the powers they perhaps should have.

The "magical" subcultures of the real world that inspired the Obrimos, for example, might be better served with the Spirit Arcanum, while the Moros are an unhappy combination of roles for some players.

Creating a new Path stereotype is a matter of choosing a cultural niche that fits with a Supernal Realm and set of Arcana. You might make "alchemists" recipients of Mind and Matter to represent internal and external alchemy, give the Mastigos Spirit or couple Fate and Life to create a more traditional "witch." Beyond the five, there are a host of magical styles that didn't make it to "full path" status. See the section on Magical Styles later in this chapter (p. 110) for more.

Finally, you may want to throw out the notion that the Path stereotypes — the mythic niches filled by the Paths — are linked to the Realms at all. "Warlocks of Arcadia," one of the example Path systems discussed later in this section, was created using this option.

Some theorize that the Watchtowers attract those who are suited for membership in their Paths.

Mage presents no definitive answer as to whether a Path (and a Watchtower) chooses a particular mage or the mage subconsciously chooses the Path, with willworkers arguing either based on their own experiences. While deciding that one or the other is true might bias Path membership for or against acting in line with the common stereotypes of their members (if, for example, only people inclined to act "like Acanthus" Awaken as Acanthus) the larger issue is whatever means by which mages arrive at their Path during Awakening. To be clear, this isn't about "what causes Awakenings" — that's next on the list of assumptions — but how Awakenings are then divided into the Paths. Perhaps the Watchtowers *do* have selection criteria, or types of souls they can attract over the Abyss; the Watchtower of the Lead Coin in Stygia might only be able to guide souls in a near-death experience, while the Watchtower of Arcadia might be limited to those that have made bargains with supernatural creatures.

If the Watchtowers can only guide souls with sympathy to their Realm's meaning across the Abyss, perhaps Sleepwalkers are the result of an Awakening that failed to meet any Watchtowers' requirements. They could then be trapped in their aware but powerless state forever or, for chronicles of a more hopeful theme, be able to build enough sympathy to a Path realm by changing their lives appropriately (or by having full mages alter their souls) that they trigger the second stage of their long-deferred Awakening and cross to a Realm. The Chosen Path chronicle, p. 150, works with this theme a bit more.

If the conditions for Awakening to a specific Realm are known to the orders, and enough knowledge of what causes Awakenings at all is held, then Path becomes a matter of conscious choice. The identified mage-to-be shapes his magical life to put himself on the "frequency" of a particular Watchtower.

The true trigger for Awakening is unknown.

Mages don't know what causes a person to Awaken, beyond a list of factors — a questioning mind, a world-shattering stimulus — that make it more or less likely and vary according to which order is compiling the list. Changing this has vast implications for the setting, and opens up a number of possibilities. If Awakenings can be imposed (perhaps including a mechanical levy to keep the number of mages in the setting manageable) or detected ahead of time, then the orders can headhunt people they consider to be "suitable," leaving accidental mages that don't quite fit as apostates. That entrenches the orders into their solitary cultures, and unless the orders change to push it back, the Pentacle has less reason to cooperate. The loss of a Willpower dot to trigger an Awakening would be in keeping with other World of Darkness games, but ruling that Awakening a Sleeper costs a *potential* Gnosis dot (in the same way as creating a soul stone) along with the Willpower expenditure forces mages to make the hard choice between replenishing their numbers and their own potential, making any chronicle themes of the ethics of sharing or hoarding secrets explicit.

Awakening may have to be deliberately sought out by those that wish to become mages (as willworkers say it was in Atlantis), with the mage-to-be embarking on an astral journey to the edge of the Abyss in the hope of surviving a trial and attracting the pull of a Watchtower. That would deny some potential character backgrounds and focus the game onto the theme of striving for dangerous knowledge — especially if the Awakening ordeal is not without its risks and gatekeepers to be defeated.

The Paths provide all knowledge of the Supernal Realms within the setting, with the five known Realms containing Watchtowers being almost interchangeable with "the Supernal as a whole."

The Realms containing Watchtowers might not be the only ones that exist, but they're the only ones mages have any knowledge of and, if the Atlantean story is true, they are the ones to which the Oracles managed to flee the Ascension battle in order to build the Watchtowers, which in turn raises the question as to where they fled the Exarchs *from*. The Exarchs could inhabit the same five Realms (which are theoretically infinite), but whole Realms that the Oracles never achieved a foothold in might exist in the Supernal World. New Realms could be introduced as recent victories for the Oracles, or the source of new and strange Seer or Banisher Paths.

The Paths provide symbolic and sympathetic links as a basis for a magical style and a set of Path tools.

Magical style is amply expanded upon in its own section of this chapter, on p. 110, though any new Path should have a set of Path tools created for it following the format of **Mage** p. 89 — each Path has a material used for making magical implements and a type of weapon.

Paths are a metaphor for the ongoing journey of discovery and Mystery.

"Path" implies a journey — an increasing of Gnosis over time as a mage encounters the Supernal and gains enlightenment — but it's frequently used in only the past tense as the Path that a mage took to Awaken rather than the path she is on to Ascension. A troupe that wants to tell a story of continuing enlightenment could reinforce the concept by changing any awards of Arcane Experience to be not for encountering the supernatural but for acting in accordance with the character's Path. Alternately, requiring conditions to be met before Gnosis can be raised is a change that dovetails nicely with the idea above of allowing mages mini-Awakenings when such ordeals are passed, reinforcing the idea of magic as an ongoing process of discovery. If the character stands a real chance of failure, though, you should adjust when the player pays the experience cost — before the trial but with some of the experience being regained on failure for medium levels of risk (success on a dice pool of two) or only paying the experience on success for especially difficult forms of challenge.

Each realm provides two Ruling, seven Common and one Inferior Arcanum.

Altering the number of Arcana provided at each level fine-tunes the progression of characters. Turning Common into Ruling allows characters to advance in the Arcana faster, while increasing the number of Inferior Arcana makes it more difficult for a player to develop his character away from the Arcana stereotype of the Path. Remember that Legacies grant the use of a third Ruling Arcanum when making decisions about the 2/7/1 split, though, as it's already possible for a character to have three Ruling, seven Common and no Inferior, and adding additional "Ruling" slots may lead to characters with far fewer weaknesses. Eliminating Common Arcana entirely and declaring all but the two Ruling to be Inferior hyper-focuses Mages on their Paths and pushes characters towards Legacies that can provide a third, coveted Ruling slot.

It's not just the numbers of each type that can be modified though — the setting point that the Path Realms provide the Arcana split can be examined. Perhaps Path only dictates some of the spread, or even none. The Realms are mostly described in terms of the Ruling Arcana, and allowing players to pick their own Inferior Arcanum is a common house rule (though, again, canny players will place it as an Arcanum they had no intention of ever buying).

The Ruling Arcana are further divided into one subtle Arcanum and one gross Arcanum.

The Arcana aren't organized into one pool of ten Arcana in the default **Mage** setting, but rather five sets of linked pairs, one gross and one subtle in each pair. The gross Arcana are those with power over the material — Forces, Life, Matter, Space, and Time — while the subtle Arcana of Prime, Spirit, Death, Mind, and Fate allow spells affecting the ephemeral. Because the gross/subtle pairs are also the Ruling pairs in a standard game, there's no mechanical distinction between the two types of pairs.

Both gross and subtle are decided by Path in the default **Mage** setting; changing that can fit with other adjustments. If Path only provides one of the pair, the troupe gets to decide how the other is picked. Perhaps only subtle Arcana are Path-determined, with the gross ruling Arcanum being a free choice.

Removing the gross/subtle distinction is trivial — it's a barely-mentioned part of **Mage** anyway. The material/ephemeral split suggests a link to the Paradox systems as a means of emphasizing gross and subtle for troupes that want to make more of an issue of it. Perhaps the gross Arcana, acting on the elements of the Fallen World, are not as touched by the Abyss and spells from them roll fewer Paradox dice. Or perhaps the subtle Arcana live up to their name and slip past the sympathy Sleepers have with the Abyss, being more robust against Disbelief than gross spells? If your troupe is willing to cope with the extra modifiers, there's no reason both can't be put in place.

There are five combinations of Ruling, Common, and Inferior Arcana

Without inventing new Arcana, the maximum number of Path combinations depends on how those Arcana are combined. **Mage** gives five Paths, but the Supernal Realms contain room for many more.

If the 2/7/1 Ruling/Common/Inferior split is retained and the ruling Arcana must be made up of a gross/subtle pair, 25 possible combinations exist. If each gross/subtle pair has to choose an inferior from either the 4 remaining gross or the 4 remaining subtle, up to 100 Paths potentially exist. If the Inferior Arcanum can be chosen from any remaining Arcana, the number of combinations rises to 200 and if the gross/subtle distinction is removed and any two Arcana are suitable for use as a Ruling pair, with any of the remainder as Inferior, a total of 360 combinations exist. Altering the Ruling/Common/Inferior ratio causes the number to fluctuate wildly.

Having the full set of possible combinations will be unwieldy if Realms are being designed for every possible Path. It's a burden to invent the 20 Realms needed to increase the number of Paths to 25, let alone the 355 needed to achieve full potential. If your troupe is interested in increasing the number of combinations beyond one or two extra Paths, you should look seriously at also changing how Path maps directly relate to Arcana sets, as discussed above. "Warlocks of Arcadia," below, describes a version of **Mage** in which 25 Paths have been created without adding extra Realms, while "The Circle of Degrees" shows what might happen if caution is thrown to the wind and Arcana choice is made entirely free.

A mage learns Arcana with varying degrees of difficulty, and has limits to how far she can progress.

Having decided how many Arcana of each type a Path provides, the next element to be considered is what those types mean mechanically. Raising and lowering the number of experience points needed to buy Arcana has obvious effects on the speed of character progression, but the Ruling/Common/Inferior divisions also control the natural learning limits for the mage as described on p. 132 of **Mage: The Awakening**. Lowering the limits of natural understanding for Common or Inferior Arcana makes characters focus on their ruling Arcana in the same way as making them easier to buy, enforcing the niches of each Path. Without the ability to progress as far before being trained, mages seek one another out for tutelage in the Arcana, strengthening any potential master/apprentice theme. Raising the limits (or allowing archmastery in ruling Arcana without a teacher) results in fewer searches for suitable teachers and more diverse Arcana sets among characters.

A final mechanic linked to the division of Arcana is the Mana surcharge for Common and Inferior improvised spells. Making Inferior Arcana improvised spells cost two Mana instead of one gives the concept of an in-built Path weakness more teeth.

To learn beyond her Path's limits, she must study with the mage of a Path that provides the level desired.

As stated in **Mage**, a tutor teaching a mage to exceed the limitations of her Path does not need to have the Arcanum at the level desired, only the potential to one day learn it. By studying with four other mages — not inconceivable in a large cabal — a mage can forget all about Path limitations on Arcana given sufficient experience.

While it's easy enough to reinforce the idea of tutelage by saying that the actual Arcanum level known by the tutor affects whether someone can learn from them, more fundamental changes can be made. In **Mage**, magic comes naturally to willworkers, who don't have to study the Arcana in order to raise them. Dot-traits in Arcana are an expression of talent and practice at manipulating that Arcanum, not wholly a representation of learnt secrets and study. A chronicle focusing on secrets and knowledge would do well to change that, making progression in the Arcana a matter of book-study and teaching. If that's too extreme, the troupe could experiment with only limiting the Common Arcana, leaving a Ruling pair as those a mage has natural talent in.

Last of all, Path provides a boost to a resistance Attribute.

In fact, only Social and Mental resistance Attributes are included in the table that makes up part of the mage Template, an omission that might seem a little odd. Why does a Life-focused Thyrsus who survived an astral journey to the Primal Wild, where she struggled through the jungle, not receive an extra dot of Stamina? Your troupe could make the Attribute free-choice, change which ones Realms provide or link it to the highest of the two ruling Arcana with which a character is created, with gross Arcana providing Resolve and subtle Arcana Composure.

Alternate Paths

The following alternate ways of using the concept of "Path" are intended to show the potential for customization. They all require some work to use, but are a starting point and possible inspiration to troupes looking to come up with their own.

The Watchtower of Brass and Flame

Awakened to a Sixth Watchtower in a Supernal Realm unfamiliar to the Atlantean cosmology, mages of a new Path are appearing. Willworkers have only recently begun to Awaken to the new, as yet unnamed, Path. These Awakenings follow a global "event" in which Hallows erupt with Mana across the world in an expanding ring centered on the deserts of Afghanistan. Since then, new mages have not been limited to the five known Supernal Realms. It's too early to say for certain, but the number of Awakenings of other Paths isn't diminishing, leading to theories that the new Path is Awakening people that wouldn't have been called by the other Watchtowers.

The orders are searching for the cause of this phenomenon, so far without success. Mages interview both sides in the fighting in the region with means both mundane and magical. Did whatever happen cause the Abyss to breach, allowing the Sixth Watchtower's light to cross into the Fallen World? Or was the event an aftershock, a rallying cry to the Awakened from the Oracles?

Neither the Realm nor the Path that springs from it have agreed-upon names used by all of the wise, as the phenomenon is too recent. The Realm is one of raging elemental forces, but not in the sense of the raw power of the Aether — the Sixth Realm is made of flame, lightning, freezing cold, and crashing sound, but they move with purpose, filled with alien intelligence that can be contacted and — for those that learn the Path well — coerced into doing the new mage's bidding. The inhabitants are beings made out of the same purposeful energy, creatures of smokeless flame that the Pentacle orders, at least, are calling *Djinn*.

The Sixth Path grants the Ruling Arcana of Spirit and Forces, and the Inferior Arcanum of Prime. The resistance trait is Composure. Through experimentation, members have discovered that magical tools of brass, bronze, or copper have Supernal weight, and some have had success with knives as weapon tools. Though Middle Eastern symbolism is obviously the orders' starting point for experimentation, mages seek other elements of Sleeper culture and occult practice that might have power. The Free Council, Guardians of the Veil, and Seers of the Throne lead the charge — the Libertines because they seek proof that humanity was influenced by this Realm spontaneously, without inheriting their symbols from Atlantis, and the Guardians and Seers because many of their "useless" cults and societies used to keep the unworthy from magic are now charged with the Supernal.

The Conquered Supernal

The Pentacle orders whisper rumors to one another about "Seer Awakenings" even in the default **Mage** setting, telling tales of mages dragged across the Abyss to be forcibly awakened by the Exarchs. In this setting, the rumors are true.

The five Paths of the Watchtowers exist, and Pentacle mages along with some Banishers and apostates awaken to them, but the remainder of the Awakened journey to one of the 20 Paths of the Thrones instead. Rather than use the Watchtowers built in Oracle-controlled Realms to Awaken their servants, the Exarchs bestow names on their chosen representatives from their Supernal palaces. Rather than being unknowable, the state of the war in Heaven is known to all mages. The Exarchs are *winning*, four Realms to one.

The consequence of Seers having their own Paths is suspicion and violence directed towards apostates of "the wrong sort." Pentacle and Seer alike use Knowing spells that detect the Path of a mage to screen prospective acolytes, and both the Guardians and the Seers are harsh in putting down willworkers of enemy Paths. As novices realize that failure to join means death and stay away, the formal orders shrink and apostates and unaffiliated mages grow in number. Smaller-scale organizations spring up (see the Tiers section on p. 126 for some ideas) taking recruits from both sides. And the Banishers don't discriminate, either — if anything, a Throne Awakening seems more likely to create a Banisher than a Watchtower one.

The Throne Paths grant the remaining 20 combinations of two Ruling Arcana (presuming one subtle and one gross), although characters experiencing one as part of a modified "Seer" mage template then have a free choice of Inferior Arcana and Resistance Attribute, reflecting the ever-changing alliances and feuds among their celestial masters.

Banishing and Summoning

The Pentacle diagram of the Atlantean orders is a truth of the universe, a map of the Supernal Realms handed down from the Dragon Isle. Rather than five Paths reaching Realms formed from a pair of Arcana, the Awakened describe 10 Supernal Realms of one Arcanum each. When a mage Awakens, he travels through a Realm filled with the symbols of one Arcanum and ascends a Watchtower. From the tower, two similar structures are

always visible — one shrouded in darkness "behind" the Realm and one shining brightly "ahead" of it. Willworkers take these to be the Watchtowers of the preceding and following Arcanum Realms.

Characters within this model have one Ruling Arcanum — that of their Realm — and seven Common Arcana. Inferior Arcana as **Mage** describes them do not exist. Instead, the remaining two form a matched pair of Banishing and Summoning Arcana. Consult the Pentacle diagram and associated Arcana sequence on p. 130 of **Mage**. A character's Banishing Arcanum is the one "behind" the position of his Ruling Arcanum, while the Summoning Arcanum is the one "ahead" of it, such that a mage Awakened to the Watchtower of Time has Fate as a Banishing Arcanum and Mind as a Summoning Arcanum. Banishing and Summoning cost the same experience amounts as Common Arcana and do not remove the need for Mana to cast improvised spells, but they and the Ruling Arcanum receive bonuses to certain spellcasting rolls. Mages receive a free, extra success on successful spells (added after each roll for extended spells as long as there were successes that roll) for different Practices. Not all spells benefit from multiple successes, of course, but at the very least this bonus makes the spell harder to unravel or dispel.

The Banishing Arcanum boosts the Practices of Unveiling, Shielding, Fraying, Unraveling, and Unmaking. The Summoning Arcanum boosts the Practices of Knowing, Veiling, Perfecting, Patterning, and Making. The Ruling Arcanum boosts all spells. The bonuses apply to a spell entirely cast with the appropriate Arcana, as well as conjunctional and combined spells with the Arcana as primary. Only one such bonus applies per roll.

Warlocks of Arcadia

Path is distinct and separate from Realm in this change to the **Mage** setting — or, rather, each Realm contains a fivefold Path. "Path," to mages in this setting, describes the subtle Arcanum a mage has sympathy to, while the word "Realm" is used to describe the gross Arcanum. The Supernal Realms themselves are slightly different — each has the gross Arcanum manifest throughout, but is divided into five "corners" influenced by the five subtle Arcana. A mage undergoing her Awakening trance enters the Realm in one of these regions and follows her Path to the Watchtower, which is at the "center" of the Realm where the Paths literally meet.

A Warlock of Arcadia, therefore, is a mage who Awakened to the Mind region of Arcadia, which in this setting is the Supernal Realm of Time rather than Fate and Time. That combination does exist — an Enchanter of Arcadia would possess them as Ruling Arcana — but is only one of the five Arcadian Paths. The Inferior Arcanum for a character is selected as a free choice at character creation from among the remaining four subtle Arcana. Mages disagree on what the different Inferior Arcana exhibited by members of even the same Path and Realm might mean, the Silver Ladder and Mysterium going as far as to codify each Path as having four "Shames," each of which has a different Inferior Arcanum. For example, a Warlock of Arcadia who counts Prime as his Inferior Arcanum is a "Warlock of Arcadia, with the Shame of Prime." Telling another mage one's Shame is a mark of trust.

This change to the Path model allows the troupe to write around any problems you might have with the default Paths. It is also low on setting impact with the exception of Legacies — the troupe will have to decide whether the Path requirements for a Legacy are based on the Path, the Realm, or both, which should be apparent for most Legacies based on their descriptions.

The Circle of Degrees

This schema of the Supernal reduces the meaning of Paths to absurdity, portraying the Supernal Realms as so numerous that willworkers are unable to properly codify them. Paths exist as per the mechanics of **Mage** and the Watchtowers exist within the setting, but every combination of two Ruling Arcana and one Inferior Arcanum has a Realm and Watchtower.

Because this schema counts 360 Realms, the Supernal Realms are referred to by mages in this setting as "the Circle," and circles replace pentacles as magical tools.

Because so many Realms exist, most of which are unnamed apart from High Speech phrases derived from the runes for the Arcana governing them, no more than a handful (if any) of mages of the same Path will ever share a Consilium. Some mages, particularly mystagogues, see exceptions as signs of significant movement in the Supernal World. "Path" is useless for stereotyping fellow mages in a world where no Path can gather in numbers, and the orders therefore become more important as part of a mage's identity while Path becomes something very personal. Every mage in this setting has to fight for Supernal correspondence, from Path tools to Oblations, in a long process of trial and error informed by what they experienced during their Awakening. A troupe can represent this by disallowing the use of Path tools at first until a character is experienced enough to determine what metals and weapons she has sympathy with, a discovery which should merit Arcane Experience.

Awakening to Ascension

A mage experiences the Supernal Realms in vision form several times over his career, building this form of "Path" into a literal journey. The destination is Ascension — not a rumored but never seen end as it is in

Mage by default, but a process that the Pentacle and Seers understand to a point and have documented cases of success on both sides.

Although this alternate uses the five Paths of **Mage**, all Awakenings take the form of mystery plays with the signing of the name surrounded by only the barest hints of the Supernal Realm. Mages must then work to put themselves into greater sympathy with their Realm, searching for what they call "milestones" along the Path. After building enough sympathy to his Path, the mage can meditate in a Hallow to trigger a fleeting vision of the Supernal Realm, which cements his progress (and in game terms raises the Gnosis Advantage) and offers symbolic clues to the next milestones.

These visions, called *Seekings*, lead the willworker through his progress so far as he travels through the Supernal Realm, listing all the milestones already reached in highly metaphorical ways that may require weeks or months to decipher. As the mage increases in Gnosis, he may begin to catch sight of the Watchtower in the distance — entering the tower and reaffirming the name is the final goal of the Path. Although some few mages enter Seekings so many times that they reach the entrance of the Watchtower in small steps, it is possible to attempt to walk all the way to the entrance in any Seeking. The chances of being successful are negligible early in a mage's Awakened life, increasing as she grows in power until the most powerful willworkers have an even chance of success.

Creating milestones requires some work and bookkeeping on the part of the Storyteller as well as a degree of planning. They should be representative of the Path the character is on, but although casting spells is a valid means of achieving them, only very low Gnosis mages should achieve milestones simply for using magic. The milestone should be a simple idea, able to be summed up quickly and achieved in many different ways, the last as a preventative measure against forcing the player to make particular choices in the chronicle. Some examples follow:

- **Acanthus:** Rely on (nonmagical) luck, begin a new journey (metaphorical or otherwise), abandoning and rebuilding the Shadow identity in a new Consilium, keeping promises at great personal risk.

- **Mastigos:** Learning secrets, mastering one's own inner demons (whether through goetia or more symbolic means), understanding the motives of antagonists.

- **Moros:** Bringing closure to ghosts of people linked to the mage, shunning materialism, entering the Underworld, going through the grieving process.

- **Obrimos:** Religious experiences, purging some representation of corruption, being trusted with authority.

- **Thyrsus:** Prolonged exposure to the Shadow, fasting, surviving exposure with no resources (in a wilderness or in a city — doesn't matter; living only by your wits is the key), consuming a living being.

- **All:** Joining a Legacy, earning an attainment, discovery of an Artifact, contact with a being of the Supernal Realms, surviving contact with a being of the Abyss.

Instead of earning Arcane Experience for encountering new things, mages in this alternate earn it by achieving milestones. A mage might earn between 3 and 15 Arcane Experience for a milestone, depending on the importance of the task. After the mage accumulates enough experience to raise Gnosis (which must include some earned from at least one new Milestone), he can perform a Seeking.

The Seeking is a meditation (Wits + Composure with modifiers as per p. 51 of **World of Darkness**) roll that requires a Hallow (of any size) and the expenditure of Mana equal to double the Gnosis level sought, spent over consecutive turns. After achieving 10 successes, the mage's Gnosis increases at the usual experience cost and the Seeking vision gives a hint as to the next milestone.

When a mage believes she is ready, she can attempt Ascension while in a Seeking.

Dice Pool: Gnosis + Wisdom – 15

Action: Extended (20 successes required; one roll equals one hour of meditation)

Each Watchtower has a "Guardian," a symbolic challenge at the doorway of the Watchtower, unique to each mage, which bars entry unless it can be defeated. Successful mages often begin and then abandon multiple Ascension attempts, gathering information about the final challenge before they are then ready to defeat it. Guardians are spirits of Rank 5 and control of the Arcana of the realm as Influences — some appear to be versions of the Seeker's own Daimon brought forth from the Oneiros, others seem to be inhabitants of the Supernal Realm (Fae, Demons, Angels, and so on) tasked to bar passage. Seers of the Throne attempting Ascension are tested by representations of the Exarchs, demanding the Seer prove himself worthy to join their ranks.

Target Number	Connection
1 success	The Seeking feels especially profound as the mage forces herself forward on the path; the Seeking only uses Mana equal to the Gnosis level bought.
4 successes	As above, except the Hallow the Mage is meditating in "flares", becoming a Demesne of the mage's Path for 24 hours.
15 successes	As above, except the mage manages to move as far down the Path as to catch sight of the Watchtower and observe the Guardian.
20 successes	The mage reaches and may interact with the Guardian.

Defeating the Guardian allows access to the Watchtower, where she re-signs her name and Ascends: the successful mage's soul and mind vanish, brought across the Abyss to the Realm in full, while her now-dead body becomes Tass worth as many points as she had Mana remaining in her pattern. Beyond the beliefs of the Seers, who dutifully add the names of any Ascended fellows to the pantheon of Exarchs, the Ascended are never seen again without the use of archmastery, although the former students of successful mages sometimes note that their own Guardians resemble the departed mentor.

Suggested Modifiers: Having created a soul stone (–5), having destroyed a soul (–3), being a member of a Legacy that does not grant a third Ruling Arcanum (+3), being a member of a Legacy that does provide a third Ruling Arcanum (+1), attempting the Ascension in a Demesne of the appropriate Path (+1).

Pathless

In the last alternate, Path does not exist. No mage visits the Supernal Realms, signs his name on a Watchtower or experiences otherworldly guardians. He has no Ruling, Common, or Inferior Arcana. Without the guidance of the Supernal, mages must grope for what little power has been found by experimentation and luck over the centuries. Tutors can demand great sacrifices of prospective students, and the Pentacle orders and Seers of the core **Mage** setting are barely in existence.

Without a Path, mages Awaken exclusively in mystery plays — they are aware that the world is a Lie but lack any experience of the truth so must try to find it for themselves. Choose a resistance Attribute at character creation as with the default **Mage** template. Apart from that, a single dot of Gnosis, and the Unseen Senses ability, mages have no special powers beyond mortal men and women. They require a teacher for any level of any Arcana, who must know the desired rating herself. No Path tools exist. Joining an order allows access to rote specialties, High Speech and rotes as normal.

Atlantis, in this setting, is a long-vanished dream, the decline of magic through history is easily explainable as every Master that dies takes Arcana lore and rotes with him, potentially denying mages for hundreds of miles the tutelage needed to achieve the highest command of the Arcana themselves.

Without Paths, though, a mage is not tied down to a specific Realm. He may require a teacher, but learns all Arcana at the Common rate. Legacies are more numerous and freer, shaping an Awakened but unbiased soul rather than trying to shape one that is already in tune with a Realm means that Attainments come at one Gnosis dot less. The lack of Path symbolism means that mages can dedicate almost anything as magical tools. Most valuable

of all, magic does not flow across the Abyss, but instead stirs the energies already in the Fallen World. Unraveling has a greater effect (+2 to the Sleeper's Resolve + Composure roll; see p. 274 of **Mage: The Awakening**) and casting a vulgar spell in front of a Sleeper levies a +4 increase to the Paradox pool, but the Paradox pool itself is modified as follows:

Gnosis 1–4   1 die

Gnosis 5–8   2 dice

Gnosis 9–10 3 dice.

Additionally, all Paradoxes use the Bedlam duration chart.

Orders

While Path — the definition of what kind of mage a character is — ties closely into the game mechanics of **Mage**, order defines what that character *does*. Only a few mechanics are associated with the social group so that players can portray apostates if they wish, leaving the five orders as a much easier element of the game to modify without changing what it means to be a mage.

"Order" as a game mechanic for providing Rote Specialties and High Speech isn't the only way to fulfill a need for a social structure for mages in the World of Darkness. As with Path, we'll examine the existing social assumptions of the game and then challenge them one by one, concluding with a selection of partially fleshed-out examples of alternate "orders."

After Awakening, unless they become Banishers or remain unidentified, mages are recruited to one of the six orders of the Pentacle and Seers of the Throne. The orders offer training in the High Speech and a few introductory rotes as "tasters" to encourage new mages into their doors, but to join properly requires initiation. The Diamond and Seers of the Throne are organized as mystery cults, believing that the Mysteries cannot be properly taught but only experienced, with details of deeper levels of initiation deliberately kept (or in the Seers' case outright falsified) until a member is ready for them. The Free Council, allied to the Diamond orders, is more egalitarian but even they only dispense information to those that meet their requirements. It's just that their requirements are much looser than the Diamond or especially the Seers.

The orders are distinguished by how their members approach the Mysteries and the purpose of magic, with how they regard the story of Atlantis as a distinct but still important third. Even if they reject the notion of being Atlantis' heirs, they seek to learn the lessons of the past. The Pentacle orders have supernal weight lent to them by the legacy of Atlantis, causing them to spontaneously form in isolated communities and reform when crushed. As such, the Pentacle orders are global phenomena. The Seers have no such protection for their own societies, which

Other Useful Resources

A large amount of material has already been published in the **Mage** game line examining social groups for mages and what mechanics might lie behind them, material which may be useful to your troupe when looking to redefine the social model of the game.

The order books (**Guardians of the Veil**, **Free Council**, **Mysterium**, **Adamantine Arrow**, **Silver Ladder**, and **Seers of the Throne**) all contain optional mechanics for emphasizing the existing orders that can serve as inspiration for inventing benefits for your own orders; the Masque system, order relation flaws, Mystery Initiation Merit, Adamant Hand Fighting Style, Cryptopoly, and Prelacies.

Magical Traditions presents a Merit-based approach to organizing mages by magical style, describing several in depth. **Tome of the Mysteries** has guidelines for flavoring the existing orders with cultural trappings.

Last, the section on the Tier system in Chapter Four shows how play can be focused on a local or cabal level rather than globally-oriented orders. The sample chronicles and genres elsewhere in this book are all good starting points for ideas. And if seeking inspiration, the social groups of other **World of Darkness** games — the covenants, tribes, Courts, and conspiracies — may contain gems of ideas that can be mined.

rise and fall with the rigors of history. The orders all teach rote mudras designed by archmasters that allow rotes to be pinned into mundane skills, reinforcing the identity of the order by specializing members in certain fields of study and providing them with mudras that only other members of the same order can understand.

After Awakening, unless they become Banishers or remain unidentified, mages are recruited to one of the six orders.

Unless your chronicle is introducing a reliable means of detecting Awakenings, social groups need to watch for new mages and have means of getting to them before any enemies. A relatively small and exclusive group that finds itself in a position to detect new mages may keep itself in alliances with other factions by providing them with those newly Awakened that do not meet their own criteria. The Guardians of the Veil perform this service for the other Pentacle orders in the default **Mage** setting as although the other four allied orders all have their own means of finding prospects as well, the Guardians' Labyrinth and stringent beliefs lead to them to having many students that they cannot use themselves.

The orders offer training in the High Speech and a few introductory rotes as "tasters" to encourage new mages through their doors, but to join properly requires initiation.

The way the Diamond orders hand out the basics before requiring a character to have dots in the relevant Status Merit is simply a way to explain starting characters having the High Speech Merit and their starting rotes, but is by no means set. More secretive or isolationist groups might not teach the traits for free, while a social group that exceeds **Mage**'s Free Council in being the champion of the common mage might go beyond the basics and provide further rotes or Merits.

Alternately, different groups in the game could provide different sets of game traits; a secretive group that teaches the Occultation Merit instead of High Speech for example, or one that has no Rote Specialties but teaches more rotes to members. The consequences of membership do not need to be all positive, either — **Free Council** introduces the idea of highlighting the tense relationship between the Libertines and Diamond orders by using Flaws that grant experience when argument causes setbacks. A fractious social group setup for the game or a particularly hated group might use the same thing.

The Diamond and Seers of the Throne are organized as mystery cults.

A mystery religion is one in which the significant initiations rely on the person taking part experiencing them for the first time, without pre-warning of what they'll face. Interpreting what happens for oneself is the point, and the initiates' reaction is more important than the letter of the ritual. The orders in **Mage** are mystery religions in this sense, believing that a willworker's personal experience of the supernatural is paramount. It's especially important to the Mysterium, but the Guardians and Seers withhold knowledge until a member has surpassed the point at which they are ready to understand. Even the Adamantine Arrow and Silver Ladder believe a mage must develop on his own experience.

Within that definition, the Seers differ from the Diamond in that the Seers are a "revealed" religion — they see their knowledge and power as being handed down from the Exarchs, while the Diamond sees itself as reaching up to take the power of the Supernal themselves.

Creating orders that aren't mystery cults or that don't follow a religious model at all is one of the great

opportunities to alter the **Mage** setting. A social model for mages based on academic departments could be one in which new mages are trained en masse by adepts, who each have a staff of disciples to assist them in their own studies and answer up to a council of masters, with learning being freely shared within the organization. One based on more scientific methods might see mages submitting discovery for peer review and testing. Strip the layers of false titles and pyramid-schemes from the Seers of the Throne or Guardians and you have a revealed religion of mages that dutifully collects wisdom gifted to them from the Supernal Realms (not necessarily by the Exarchs, either) or a group dedicated to maintaining the status quo of the world, waiting for the promised individual who can repair the damage that has already slipped past them.

One last thing about Mysteries — the Arcane Experience system is tied into the assumption of the orders that an individual must encounter magic and the supernatural on their own terms, which is why a character receives it for learning about the supernatural aspects of the World of Darkness. Alternate setting assumptions should lead to Arcane Experience being awarded for different things. The "academic" order structure suggested above should grant Arcane Experience for mentoring younger mages, while the "revealed wisdom" order might gain it for retrieving the gifts of their Supernal masters.

The Free Council, allied to the Diamond orders, is more egalitarian.

The Free Council is, to a degree, an example of a social group based on the free exchange of knowledge. The order still levies conditions for members to be considered of good standing and demands payment for their assistance, but sells rotes, artifacts, and knowledge to those capable of meeting its price where the Diamond orders and Seers wouldn't. An even more open group that allowed access to all mages would be either a valued neutral party, shaping the setting around them, or a target for more exclusionary groups.

The Free Council is allied to the Diamond orders in **Mage** to produce the Pentacle, and to avoid the potential confusion of there being a third "sect" between the Diamond and the Seers, but their philosophy saw them stand alone for most of the history of the setting. If playing in a historical chronicle set before the Nameless Cabals issued the Great Refusal, or an alternate history set in which they did so but were not allied to the Diamond, their role as the non-Mystery order could be expanded. If they instead accepted the Seer's offer, then a sect seeking control of the human population through technology and cultural shifts is created by the marriage of the Seer's agenda of control and the Free Council's innovation.

The orders are distinguished by how their members regard the Mysteries and the purpose of magic.

If the Awakened agreed on everything, there would be no basis for having more than one order. Whether it's to give a basis for antagonism or to maintain niches in an alliance, difference defines societies. It may be useful to give a core statement about a group's belief; "power is the preserve of the wise," "Awakening comes with the responsibility to use one's powers for the benefit of those still asleep" and so on.

The core statements for the five Pentacle orders, Seers, and Banishers could be:

- **Adamantine Arrow:** "Service is magical."
- **Free Council:** "Humanity is magical."
- **Guardians of the Veil:** "Magic is fragile."
- **Mysterium:** "Magic is alive."
- **Silver Ladder:** "Magic is humanity's right."
- **Seers of the Throne:** "Magic is payment."
- **Banishers:** "Magic is immoral."

Note that the specifics of the social groups are in no way dictated by the above statements — the orders could have developed in significantly different ways and kept the same central differences of opinion.

How they regard the story of Atlantis is important.

No other aspect of **Mage**'s design is as controversial as Atlantis. The real world mystery cults and "magical" societies that informed the creation of the orders for **Mage** shared a belief in a golden age, a perfect society that they and they alone claimed descent from. The detail changes every time, but ideas of an ur-culture from which all magic sprang are a common theme in the source material. Use different source material, however, and it becomes less suitable. A punk-genre world in which the Free Council and Seers are the only orders, fighting along the lines of Liberty versus Control and freely using magic versus jealously hoarding, has no need for ancient sunken islands to drive the setting conflict. For that matter, the orders as presented in **Mage** can survive the deletion of Atlantis with a little work — the Seers need an origin for the Exarchs and the Guardians need an ancient catastrophe that created Paradox, but either could still regard the existing story as a myth.

Other than simply removing the concept from the game, an option is to retain the idea that all magic stems from a golden age of the past. Rather than mages (mostly) agreeing on that golden age, though, the game could take another element from the beliefs of those real-world societies; that each of them was the sole heir of past glories, and all others were pretenders. One order might claim descent from Hyperborea, another from Lemuria, and a third from Thule. If having

a reduced number of different stereotypes won't impact the troupe's chronicle, multiple lost civilizations could even be combined with the Watchtower concept so that "order" and "Path" become the same thing, each cultural group Awakening to a different Watchtower-remnant of their own myth.

Even if they reject Atlantis, the orders seek to learn the lessons of the past.

Your options for dealing with the Atlantean mythos go beyond the poles of leaving it alone or removing it entirely from the game. Even if your troupe decides that there really was an ancient magical society that caused the Fall, the amount that modern mages know about it can be adjusted. **Mage** places the truth or otherwise of Atlantis in a position where it appears certain until a mage starts to look at evidence too closely. The modern orders are built on fragments, to the point that the very name "Atlantis" was adopted after Plato popularized it — the orders don't actually *know* what their ancestors called the island.

Only the Mysterium actively wants to seek Atlantean lore for its own sake. The Seers of the Throne and Silver Ladder both regard it as a failure in comparison to the society they'll one day build; the Adamantine Arrow take what artifacts and lessons they find useful; the Free Council — those that believe in the Dragon Isle to begin with — see it as a source of ideas; and the Guardians of the Veil see it as something to be preserved and very carefully hidden. Collectively, the orders are reasonably certain Atlantis had a caste system based on magical roles, though if the Sleepers living in Atlantis had similarly defined roles they were divided into, mages have yet to discover any details. The orders know enough High Speech to describe spells but not hold complex conversation, and they know enough of Atlantis' writing system to draw the shape of spell resonance trails as runes but not enough to reliably read inscriptions. They know of the existence of the five Supernal Realms with Watchtowers and theorize about others. Finally, they pass down the story of the War in Heaven between the Oracles and Exarchs, though only the Seers of the Throne are certain beyond doubt that the Exarchs exist, and no order has completely accepted evidence of the Oracles.

Your troupe might decide that one or more customized orders know more High Speech or Runes than the default understanding. **Secrets of the Ruined Temple** suggests allowing the Language Merit to be bought as "Atlantean" to supplement High Speech and represent conversational use of the language. Your troupe could grant the use of this second Merit as doubling the effect of High Speech or Runes in spellcasting through superior grasp of the tongue. Alternatively, you could decide that the orders do not retain as much knowledge of the language as **Mage** portrays, reducing the bonus for using it to +1 or not giving the Merit to order members for free.

Modifying the orders to reflect the notion that they retain more of Atlantis' past is a matter of incidental detail — the names of ranks within the order may be in High Speech, the names and descriptions of archmaster-level practices may be known even if not useable by normal mages, and customs may be skewed towards your troupe's version of Atlantean culture. The Artifact, Library, or Imbued Item Merits could be made cheaper to purchase, reflecting a larger stockpile of finds within the orders. If the Oracles are in contact with the Pentacle as the Exarchs (or beings matching their descriptions) are portrayed as being with the Seers, the orders gain "from the top" leadership and a unity that isn't seen in the game as presented.

The reverse also applies. If the orders know less about their ancestors than in the default **Mage** setting, then they might not map quite as exactly to the Dragon Isle's castes — two orders might have merged over the intervening time or been lost altogether. The Seers, without contact with the Exarchs, become less organized and the Pentacle less harassed in turn. The Merits representing passed-down magical lore could be made more expensive. Keeping the orders as they are while reducing the amount known about the past isolates the Guardians of the Veil — the fragments that do remain are even more precious and in need of saving, but the other orders need them and can't afford to let the Guardians censor them. The Mysterium rises in prominence, hunting for secrets that in the default of **Mage** the orders already have while conflicting theories abound about how to interpret what little evidence there is.

Last of Atlantis' gifts are the Practices — the classification of spells taught by the orders. If you wish to portray the orders as knowing more, perhaps improvised magic does not cost Mana to cast as spell theory is properly understood and students are taught to optimize their spells. Removing the knowledge of Practices shouldn't restrict mages to only using rotes unless your troupe is determined to play a very low-magic version of **Mage**, but might require extra Mana or levy a –2 dice penalty for improvised spells.

The Pentacle orders have Supernal weight lent to them by the legacy of Atlantis.

It's a little-stated setting assumption of **Mage**, but a highly important one: the Pentacle Orders, based on the caste system of Atlantis, were imprinted on the Fallen World by the Oracles' (or Exarchs') Ascension just as their language became High Speech. Willworkers who

have never heard of the Dragon Isle find themselves falling, after a few generations, into the five roles of the orders and no matter how hard the Seers of the Throne try to exterminate them they always come back as long as the Watchtowers Awaken new mages. The Seers, on the other hand, don't have such protection and Ministries have to fight for survival.

The Free Council's inclusion on the list of Supernal orders might strike you as being a bit odd — p. 313 of **Mage** mentions a "lost" order named the Timori, who may be linked to modern Banishers in some way. Surely the fifth Atlantean order were these mages, which would neatly explain why the Banisher phenomenon seems to reoccur spontaneously no matter what mages do. Removing the Supernal correspondence for one or more of the Pentacle orders means they can, eventually, shrink and die through lack of membership, and new orders can rise in their place — a good first start for declaring that contrary to **Mage,** the Pentacle have historical origins. What if the Seers of the Throne *are* proper heirs to the Dragon Isle? A possible version of such a setup is outlined in "the Diamond Way," below.

The Pentacle orders are global phenomena.

Global conspiracies that spontaneously form out of any magical society given time are all very well for **Mage** as written, but your troupe may find the idea dissatisfying, especially if Atlantis has been removed from the setting. Although it might seem a lot of work to define enough local groups to cover the world, there's only a strict necessity to handle those in the region in which the chronicle is set. The movement of groups across the world in phases of colonization, expansion, exploration, conquest, and in the modern day globalization leads to groups coming into conflict with one another. In **Mage**, those conflicts are mostly cultural, as both sides follow broadly the same practices, but in an alternate setting they can be based on real magical differences as well, the conflict providing fuel for several stories or even whole chronicles as foreign mages distinguished by different Practices, mudras, or High Speech immigrate alongside their Sleeping cousins, keeping their own ways and clashing with native Consilii.

The orders all teach rote mudras.

The rote mudras and associated Rote Specialties are assumed in **Mage** to be the product of archmaster-level spells, but that closes them off from modification. Allowing them to be defined at the creation of a rote allows characters to effectively start their own order-like groups, or more likely puts the onus of providing rotes on a character's Legacy rather order. Characters might also develop Supernal sympathy with up to three Skills of the player's choice rather than have them imposed through the social model of the game.

Alternate Orders

As with Paths, the following alternates are intended to get your troupe started on the process of thinking about how to change the orders for your game.

The Diamond Way

The Seers of the Adamantine Pyramid rule the world from the shadows, agents and heirs of the Atlantean Kings who Ascended long ago and conquered the heavens. During their Ascension, the Exarchs imprinted the shape of the occult society they ruled onto the cosmos. By following their edicts, joining their cults and learning the proper, Atlantean, way of magic, a Seer can be granted leave to be an exception to the Exarchs' great commandment: Humanity must be kept Sleeping.

The Seers of the Pyramid are rigidly organized into 10 Ministries, each of which has power over a particular Arcanum and is headed by a council of Exarchs commanding a Minister, and further divided into groups specializing in the 10 Divine Practices. Every mage in their schema has her place and is granted a True Name by the Exarchs, a Supernal code-word describing their function that overwrites their real name for the purposes of sympathetic casting. Mages who reject their place in the shadow hierarchy are accordingly called "Nameless," and gather (when they gather at all) into loose cabals who attempt to survive in the face of hostility from the Pyramid.

Some mages go further than mere survival, and intend to fight the Exarchs' grip over the world. The Nameless periodically form more realized organizations; cabals of like mind managing to make contact with one another. These nascent orders have so far been crushed whenever they appear — the present-day iteration is the result of a post-war utopian movement allying itself with the remnants of earlier failed attempts. This "order" follows a manifesto called the Precepts of the Silver Ladder of Ascension and the Flawless Diamond of Humanity to Come or, more commonly, "The Diamond Way." They are a rebel army of willworkers, going further than the Nameless and declaring their own Shadow Names to protect them from the spells of Seers, stealing the Atlantean secrets of the Pyramid so they can be countered or turned against the Seers, and always trying to further their goal of Awakening the rest of the human race.

The Seers of the Pyramid pay one less Mana for spells of their Ministry Arcanum, as though they were always in a Hallow. They receive the High Speech Merit at character creation. Any successful spellcasting roll of their Practice is treated as having one more success than the dice indicate. Their human names have been burned away. A mage attempting to target a Seer by sympathetic magic must know the secret True Name of that Seer.

The Nameless have no Practices, and spend two Mana to cast improvised spells instead of one. They do not receive High Speech or order tools. They have no supernatural names and must rely on secrecy and the use of Shadow Names to protect against sympathetic magic.

The Diamond Way have stolen the Practices, though they reject the hierarchy of the Pyramid so they cast improvised spells as per Mage. They may buy High Speech but do not receive it for free. The names they choose for themselves after joining the order become muddied with their real name and both must be known for full effectiveness — knowing only one of a Diamond mage's two names moves a caster only one step on the sympathetic chart.

Life as a mage in this setting is one of paranoia, beyond that of default **Mage**. Paradox does not represent the encroachment of the Abyss but rather the attention of the Exarchs — Paradox effects take place in the Exarchs' interests (that is, against Diamond mages) and the use of High Speech boosts the spells' effectiveness as normal but increases any Paradox dice pool by one die. The Diamond only teaches the Merit to cabals that prove they can be trusted to be responsible with the language of the enemy, and take a similar view of Supernal Artifacts, which popular rumor states the Exarchs can track. Oblations are hurried, Diamond mages not lingering near Hallows for too long lest the Seers find them, and all mages face the stark choice of abandoning their Sleeping families or have them be targets of the Pyramid.

Shadow Academies

Willworkers are organized into schools, not orders, formal academies of initiation where mages learn from those more advanced at the price of owing favors, which can be discharged partially by teaching those less advanced in turn. Once a cabal's members all achieve Mastery of their chosen Arcana, they create a splinter school in their own locality to attract students of their own. In this way, lines of descent and inheritance can be drawn between schools as spin-offs gain power, combine with other schools when cabals of different initiation meet, and develop rivalries with other schools.

The academies are part order, part Legacy — they teach High Speech, rotes, and Rote Specialties but also Attainments according to the prejudices and preferences of the founding cabal, who often inherit them from their own student days. Although the fighting over Artifacts and Hallows can be bloody, this setting lacks the outright conflict of the Pentacle versus the Seers. If Atlantis ever existed, it is forgotten. The competition for new students — some of whom travel long distances to attend lessons — is such that knowledge isn't hoarded between members of a school, and while some subscribe

to the mystery initiation method of enlightening their students, recognizing that it creates stronger mages in the long run, many more settle for churning out Disciples rather than taking their time over Adepts.

This way of passing on magical knowledge can be dangerous. Schools need to be built on Hallows, reducing the number of available sites of power for mages to construct their own Sanctums. Traveling to the school on a regular basis raises awkward questions for a mage attempting to maintain a normal life, and many schools end up pooling their resources to offset the fact that their members tend to withdraw from mortal society. The rivalries between institutions can turn nasty as well, requiring the sites to be fortified. Contributing to the academy's defense is sometimes an accepted means of discharging the student debt for less personable mages, as is donating a soul stone for the building of a new Demesne.

Chapterhouse

In this world, the Caucus (the total members of a given order in an area; see **Mage** p. 37) rather than the cabal is the primary unit of magical society. Dozens of orders exist, all global concerns, each teaching a different set of Rote Specialties, rotes, and Legacies, and jealously guarding their own Artifacts, imbued items, and grimoires. A Consilium typically has four to five orders represented among the local mages, who gather in Caucus Sanctums called Chapterhouses. The local chapters of each order relate to those of the same order in different Consilii in the manner of college fraternities or sororities, even organizing large-scale regional gatherings at times appropriate to their own occult systems of symbolism.

Not every mage is a member of an order, those without membership banding together in cabals for safety, but not because of any lack of resources. Rather, the orders are aware that the system of privilege that their Caucuses rely on to operate would be denied by true global membership. As long as a minority of mages remains shut outside the Chapterhouses, hungry for the Artifacts and learning within, willworkers are ready to give handsomely for the chance to join the clique.

Mages that do boast membership find that they are able to travel between far-flung Consilii as long as their destination contains a Chapterhouse of the same order. A stranger that knows the correct passcodes and hand signals can find shelter and support all over the world, which unscrupulous or Left-Handed mages can use to their advantage. Life within a Chapter is not so different from membership of an order in the default **Mage** setting, with varying degrees of initiation, origin stories, and private rites.

At the Feet of the Master

The orders described in **Mage** do not exist, but the willworkers of this world have greater command over rotes than those in the default **Mage** setting. Mages swear loyalty to individual Masters in cults of personality revolving around those mages that have the capacity to create rotes. First, Rote Specialties can be defined by Masters when the rote is created rather than being the province of archmasters creating orders. Second, rotes for instant action spells can be taught to Sleepwalkers, who cast them as extended spells. In the absence of any other social organization for the Wise, those that can hand out power to their students are venerated.

Masters vary in how they regard the entourages of lesser willworkers that rely on them for knowledge and training — they were all members of a similar cult themselves at one point, so while some are relatively benevolent and teach their students out of good will, others are dictatorial and enslaving. In any case, mages and Sleepwalkers wishing to become cult members must prove themselves via ordeal, religious conversion, service, or donation of resources.

While some cults allow their members to maintain Sleeping associations or friendships with mages of other societies, most require members to live at the communal Sanctum and maintain mundane lives only as long as they provide useful resources or services for the group. Association with other mages is discouraged, and the groups rely on the same social conditioning methods as any mortal cult to reinforce the insular behavior on which they rely.

Knowledge from Afar

In this alternate, the threat of an especially organized local-level Seers of the Throne has led to the orders not existing as individual regional Consilii but rather as further-flung organizations cabals can join. The orders maintain stronghold-like Sanctums (such as the Mysterium Athenaea), which members travel to for initiation, training, and assistance. For the majority of a mage's time, the order is on the other side of a post-office box, enjoying safety in isolation while the Seers stamp out any attempt for cabals in a region to unite.

Grimoires are of utmost importance in this setting, as they allow rote training at a distance when lent out to cabals. The Free Council in particular is experimenting with alternate forms of grimoire — electronic versions held on secure networks, meeting places reached by mentally inhabiting computer systems via magic, and instant-messaging spell circles that can cast cooperatively even when not physically present. The more traditional orders settle for sending lesser grimoires out to members but requiring members to travel to the central Sanctum to study Legacies and the rarer rotes, although some have taken to building outposts of the stronghold in the Temenos, allowing members who can make it to a Demesne to study.

The security of the orders is fragile — all it would take is one traitor to reveal the location of the order stronghold or one Seer spy to get lucky and the Seers would be able to cut hundreds of mages off from the support of their order in a single attack. For this reason, travel to the strongholds is tightly regulated with double-backs, dimensional shifts achieved with Space magic, and other methods of ensuring that no one can follow. Mages routinely have their sympathetic connections to the stronghold severed when they leave.

No Order

In this final alternate, "order" does not exist. Mages do not gather together beyond the cabal level. There is no concept of Atlantis — those cabals that have stumbled across ancient ruins bearing indecipherable inscriptions and spells they have never seen before interpret them as they will, but without orders collecting evidence no bigger picture can emerge. The High Speech Merit is disallowed for any character. Improvised spells are at –2 dice penalty due to the Practices being unknown. The Imbued Item, Mentor, and Thrall Merits (which all rely

on another mage providing help or creating an item) are discouraged at character creation without a good reason, as is Familiar unless one of the characters is a Disciple of Spirit. Artifacts gained during Awakenings and brought back with the mage into the Fallen World are still allowed. Troupes going this route are encouraged to read the Tiers section in Chapter Four, which goes into detail regarding cabal-level play.

Magical Styles

What happens when a mage casts a spell? What happens when you roll the dice? It's a question that needs to be asked. Mages can do all sorts of crazy, nifty magic tricks, but what do they actually *do*?

Mages hail from all over the world, and every single one of them is informed by the culture that produced him. The kind of person who Awakens often sort of knew that something was up in her life long before she took the magical dream-trip to the Watchtower and signed her name on the walls of eternity. The kind of person prone to Awakening is often — not always — the kind of person who started investigating the occult long before the Supernal came and grabbed her by the soul. She has ideas about how the magic works and because she had these ideas, she finds it easier to do that magic. She gains access to it through an occult tradition of sorts, and a style of magic, a conceit through which she uses certain rules and practices to work her spells.

Magical styles exist — in game terms — as a means to encourage mechanically a greater degree of storytelling in the casting of magic. A player gains a number of modest but attractive benefits for the character if he describes the way his character casts his magic. In story terms, styles exist to offer a character a means of accessing the Supernal through symbols and signs. And they're a hook on which to hang a character's cultural understanding of magic.

Mage is a game about magic as much as character. We're presenting magical styles here as an option for your chronicle to add character to magic, and magic with flavor and detail to a character.

The Philosophy of Magical Styles

Awakened magic only works the one way. That's important to note. The magic that mages wield comes from the Supernal Realm. Even if a mage doesn't necessarily know exactly where his powers come from, he knows that it comes from outside. He had a vision of the Supernal Realm, and the point of access to that realm, symbolized as a Watchtower.

But at the same time, one mage has this book that talks about how the way to do magic is with the rituals and the hazel wand, and the specially prepared rooms with the single window and the checkerboard-tile floor. Another mage, who dabbled a long time ago in chaos magic, creates visionary god-forms of figures like Kurt Cobain and Princess Diana. She doesn't actually believe these dead celebrities are gods in anything but the most figurative way, but it doesn't matter because Di and Kurt and Elvis and Marilyn and Lennon still become a conduit in her mind's eye for making magic. In a tight spot, she enters her mind's eye, and the celebrity god-form she has invented — a different one for each Arcanum — possesses her and works magic.

An art school goth girl with a love for artisan fashion works magic through the manipulation of her clothing and jewelry. Each new dress, each new hat or designer T-shirt or home-designed coat is a magical tool. Each ring, each piercing, each band in her hair offers her a different insight, each allows a different mode of access to her magic. She undoes a button, changes the position of a pin, clicks her tongue piercing against her teeth and miracles happen.

A student of various martial arts constructs his own style. He works his magic through movements and meditations. Combinations of breathing exercises, meditations, strikes, kicks, steps, and cries create a near-infinite variety of magics.

A computer nerd treats his magic spells as simple programs that he writes in Visual C on his palmtop using custom commands. The computer isn't the tool — the higher-dimensional math that the programs contain is the vehicle for transforming the world.

A performance poet uses his art as a magical style: he improvises magic with improv-free verse, uses poems written in more formal forms and kept in a leather-bound notebook as his rotes. In a similar sort of way, a savant musician uses her facility with any kind of musical instrument to create magic from music.

None of these mages are deluded. They all know that their unique and in some cases wholly new magical styles are just styles, ways they do magic. It's all the same magic. What their very different magical styles do is allow each of them a point of reference through which each can access the same source of power.

It's like in high school physics, where they show you atoms and the composite parts of atoms, the electrons and neutrons and protons, as little balls all flying around each other in circles. Molecules are atoms connected together by little lines or beams. And, of course, matter isn't really made of teeny tiny little multi-colored balls — but it's a whole lot easier to think of atoms and molecules and their component parts that way because the actual states

of matter and energy are so abstract that it's difficult to understand them any other way unless you're doing physics at college level or above. And even then, you'll use the diagrams of molecules and atoms that show the little balls when trying to explain this stuff to people who haven't quite grasped that because they're a helpful conceptual tool for the understanding of molecular physics.

And that's what magic is like: a difficult thing to grasp that could be made a whole lot easier with some conceptual tools to make the process of understanding easier.

More than anything, a magical style allows for a spell with a better, brighter, clearer Imago. The mage pictures the spell better, because he can picture it in terms he can understand, little balls instead of invisible matrices of matter, the trappings of a magical tradition instead of inchoate magical energies.

It's not about making things *real*. It's about doing magic in a way that works better. It doesn't actually change that magic, or make it more likely in and of itself. It changes the mage doing the magic, helps her fundamentally to *get it*.

Different Strokes for Different Folks

Teachers of magic often tell their pupils that the styles they use are true, and objectively better than other styles. People being who they are and mages being people, practitioners of differing magical styles, spend a lot of time engaging in one-upmanship over other mages, passing patronizing remarks and showing off. Gambler's Magic is better than Cell Magic, is better than Autohypnosis, is better than Gambler's Magic, and so on.

In a manner of speaking, a mage is actually objectively right when he says something like "the style I use is better than yours," or at least he would be objectively right if he added the words "*for me*" at the end.

One mage finds the easiest way to access the Supernal comes through putting herself into a series of trances. She applies keywords to herself and empties her mind completely, and in that silent vacuum, the magic comes. Another hasn't been able to still himself for five minutes in his whole life, but that's fine, because he approaches magic more easily through slicing his arm with razors and drawing on the ground in the blood.

A third mage can't bear the sight of anyone's blood, let alone her own, but manages just fine by working magic with a notebook, a pen, and some brain-squashingly complex supra-mathematical equations. The abstract symbols, sacred primes, and impossible arithmetic she creates transfers into the real world around her, conceptual space transferring into real space.

Yet another magic-worker, a guy who can't even do his 12 times table without a calculator, finds the magic flow through his fists: he punches things — a punchbag, a wall, a door; he skips on his feet; he makes things happen. It doesn't always involve breaking things and hitting people. But usually it does.

And another mage who can't cope with up-close violence bends over and whispers to the world-soul, speaks the language of flowers and stones, channels green energy by brushing her fingertips against trees.

This one set of phenomena — Supernal magic expressed through Gnosis and the Arcana — has hundreds of different ways of accessing it. It's *not* the hoary old metaphor about all roads leading to the truth. Magical styles aren't systems of belief (some of them might be connected to systems of belief or even assume ideologies, but it's not the belief that makes the style — it's the practice). They're ways of teaching, ways of learning, and ways of doing.

Magical styles aren't the truth in and of themselves. They're an *access* to truth, fingerpost signs that say "Supernal Enlightenment — THIS WAY."

Growing Into a Magical Style

An Awakened magical style is emphatically not the same as a Sleeper ("real world") magical practice. It might look a bit like Sleeper magic; it might even be learned from Sleepers. But the magic is faster, brighter, more powerful. It doesn't depend so much on ritual or preparation (although preparation and ritual are both useful tools).

Sleeper magic is often a lengthy, involved affair that requires literal years of study and expensive, time-consuming organization. For example, take a spell in the Western Tradition that allows a magical apprentice to conjure up his *augoeides* (which is like a "higher soul," only slightly more nuanced and complex than that). It requires a windowless room with a white roof and a black-and-white checkerboard carpet, with a blue-and-gold border, lit by a single red lamp burning olive oil. In the middle of the room you need an altar made of polished white wood of precise proportions, on which is painted with gold a spell that the magician has composed. On the altar the magician has to put a flask of oil and a silver censer on a triangular mat that has to be a specific shade of red. The censer has to burn one specific home-made blend of incense. The magic-worker has to wear a specific kind of robe (blue, no sleeves, golden sequins, lined with red) and a specific head-dress, which he has to have made himself, *and* a fillet made of one of a few types of plant. He has to use a wand made of the right kind of wood that he cut from the tree *himself* in the few minutes before dawn on the Solstice or the Equinox. After he's meditated using his invocation for a solid hour between three and seven times in every 24-hour period for *12 weeks* (including once every sunset,

sunrise and midnight, mandatory); he *might* get to see his *augoeides*. People who claim actually to have done it say that it's pretty amazing (but then, after all that, it'd really have to be).

This magic business is pretty damn hard. But then, that's an extreme example. A lot of esoteric and occult stuff isn't quite that much effort, but the point is, it doesn't come naturally to most people. It's the result of hard graft (that is, if you believe that people who aren't Awakened, or who exist in a world where people don't Awaken can do it *at all*). On the other hand, the Awakened mage has one universe-smashing visionary experience and suddenly he can see auras, avert bullets, light fires with his fingers, talk to ghosts and/or heal broken arms in a few minutes. And that "in a few minutes" is important. It might take him hours and hours, but just as often he does this stuff in a finger-click.

Assuming he doesn't go wrong and end up a Banisher, he knows from the very start it's magic, our mage. But knowing he can do magic doesn't mean he has a clue where to go with it. He finds himself a teacher. And the teacher teaches him magic the way he knows it, in the context he finds it.

Contextual

Traditions change. And the way we approach traditions changes. As much as some would like to think so, no one who goes to a Christian church in the developed world today is really following the same religion that sprung up in the early years of Imperial Rome. And no one who does magic is doing magic in exactly the same way that the arch-masters of Atlantis, or Lemuria, or Mu (or whatever you want to call it) were doing magic. The mages of the four ancient orders may be the inheritors of those original gifted sailors who apparently sailed from the cataclysm in ships with painted sails, but they're just kidding themselves if they think that the original Awakened would recognize them or the way they do their magic as being identical. They'd probably get that it was magic, and they might eventually see that the horribly mangled words of power these modern mages were using were in a debased, mispronounced version of their own High Speech. But the practice of doing it, the *style*, that they wouldn't understand.

The fact is that *every mage has a style*. It's all magic with a style applied — it's just that what mages of the old orders think of as "pure," unadorned magic is so theoretical, so archaic, so philosophically abstruse that for all its transcendent power it's really just another style. It just happens to be a *really bad one*.

And every mage has a style because no mage can fully grasp magic, and philosophical attempts to grasp it actually present an obstacle to understanding (because

magic, being magic, is counterintuitive, practically by definition). The human mind — even an Awakened one — can't wrap itself around this stuff. Much better to look at it by means of metaphor. Again: it's all magic, it all comes from the same source, and mages get to grips with the facts of that pretty early on. But the sensible ones *don't care*. It works better when they use it in the style to which they are accustomed. It doesn't actually matter whether or not they know *why* it works better. What's important is only this: *it does*.

Styles in Each Others' Context

The magical styles that the Awakened create are culturally bound and born from cultural contexts. Because of that, they bring with them cultural assumptions. A magical style that only allows itself to be taught to women by women has a very different set of assumptions from a style that depends upon its practitioners being male. A women-only style that comes from a tribal culture in Central Africa and has a heritage that goes back hundreds of years is completely different from a women-only style created by a cell of radical feminist-lesbian Dworkinite ideologues in San Francisco in the early 1980s. The Dworkinites probably wouldn't give the African mages the time of day, because the ideological basis under which they exist is — to the feminists — oppressive. They probably wouldn't have any time either for the mage who works according to the Edwardian quasi-Thelemic academic tradition, with all its imperialist assumptions. But then *he* probably isn't going to see wholly eye-to-eye with the earnest, bespectacled mage who works magic by expressing it in terms of Marxist dialectic ("I control the means of production").

All of those styles, whether with a solid cultural heritage or relatively modern, have their basis in some heritage of

Sleeper culture or philosophy. The cultural basis serves as a point of commonality with mages of different Paths and orders. One mage who uses Chance Magic might be an Obrimos of the Adamantine Arrow and another might be an Acanthus of the Free Council, but even so, they'll at least have something to talk about.

Some other styles don't even have that. They're ad hoc, created by a mage when she Awakens and made into something personal and the more powerful for that. Consider the gambler who finds in his playing cards and dice the key to fate itself, or the young gang member, who even after his Awakening is so in love with the way of the gun and its glamour that he makes magic *with* his gun, making it a fearsome — self-destructive — magical tool.

A man who makes magic from murder (or at the very least the dark glamour of murder, the intention of murder channeled) probably is going to fall and when he falls, he'll fall hard. But then, nothing in the rules — not that "rules" as such exist — says that magical styles have to be morally attractive or healthy. Just as a mage can doom his soul by crafting it into a Left-Handed Legacy, a mage can take a style that leads him down a dark path. The mage who adopts the unsavory practices of proper Dennis Wheatley-style Satanists (it's not out of the question at all) with the black masses and everything is going to be having a go at human sacrifice before long, and by that time the slope is so slippery that it's pointless trying to scramble back up. A mage whose magic depends upon the use of goods found in wallets he's taken from the pockets of passersby isn't on quite as extreme a track, but theft is theft, and greater magical power might need to come from more audacious criminal acts.

Getting into a morally unpleasant style is not as final or as inalterable as getting into a dark Legacy is, but a style emphatically doesn't have to be good for a mage's Wisdom. It can make him a monster, even while his magic is working just fine.

Legacies

Legacies are the ultimate expression of magical styles, in some respects, in that a Legacy offers an access point to Supernal truth (or Truth, even) that even so often depends upon a mage having some sort of a style. Some Legacies are more tied to styles than others. For example, a Legacy called the Sodality of the Tor (detailed in **Legacies: The Sublime**) expresses its magic in terms of English paganism. A mage whose style depended upon use of the rosary and catechism of the Catholic Church would have a lot of trouble understanding their appeal. The hermaphrodite Daksha (from the same book) use a strict system of theosophical inquiry, bastardized Hinduism, and yogic exercises to do their weird miracles, all of which constitutes a style in its own right. The

Uncrowned Kings are alchemists; the Walkers in Mists are neo-druids.

Pretty much every Legacy is a magical style in its own right, but it's a different *sort* of magical style. Like a more general magical style, a Legacy is an access point to the Supernal World, but unlike a magical style that helps a mage meet the Supernal, the Legacy puts the Supernal into the mage.

Leaving a Style Behind

Sometimes a mage might decide it's time to change the way he does magic. People change over time; sometimes we have to leave things behind. A mage whose magic is founded on the trappings of religion, for example, could experience a crisis of faith and cease to believe in God, however he understands it, A mage might find he is drawn against his better judgment to a Legacy, and that the magical style of the Legacy is not compatible with the magical style he's been practicing. Something's got to give, and that means he has to pass up the style.

Picking up another style is harder than giving a style up, but it's possible.

Systems

Every mage has a magical style, because it's where she came from. What we're presenting here is a formal basis for creating magical styles that are different from each other. Every one of these magical styles offers small mechanical bonuses when the mage uses particular Arcana or Practices, or tries to cast spells that use certain Traits.

A mage with a magical style — and if you're using this option in your stories, all mages have a magical style by a sort of default — casts all her magic using it. It's how a mage does magic. But a mage who has a bit of room to do so *can* use the magical style actively, introducing definite, planned elements of the style into spell-casting.

Every mage, Seer or Pentacle or apostate or Banisher or whatever, should have one of these styles, even if he never gets the chance to reap its benefits, mechanically speaking. It's about description, mostly. The style allows for a more detailed, rich description of what a mage is doing when she casts a spell.

A number of sample styles appear at the end of this section as a sort of kick-off point for creating your own styles, in a format that looks like this:

• A brief overview and description of the style.

• **Casting:** A description of how a spell looks when a mage casts it using the style, and two examples of spells, showing the style in action.

- **Tools:** A brief list of the tools a mage might use when doing magic, if any.
- **Favored Attribute:** An Attribute or choice of Attribute that particularly favors spell-casting in this style. If the style has more than one, the player must choose which Attribute gets the bonus when he creates the character, and can only get mechanical advantages from that Attribute.
- **Favored Arcana:** Three Arcana that especially suit the style.
- **Favored Practice:** Three Practices, one for each of the first three dots of an Arcanum, which practitioners of the style find easier to use.
- **Unique Advantage:** One other mechanical perk the style offers.

A character can apply her magical style to any spell, improvised or rote, but has a particular advantage when using the style to a spell that includes any of her style's favored Attribute, Arcana, or Practices.

Style Bonuses

All magic a character casts is colored by her magical style, no matter how small or improvised. But at any time, given a few seconds extra, a mage can use her magical style *actively* to improve her magic.

The basic magical style bonus:

- In the turn before casting an instant spell, the mage takes an **instant action,** which she spends performing actions and using tools appropriate to her magic style — katas, chanting, punching sacred numbers into a mobile phone, channeling John Lennon, whatever.
- While using her style tools, the mage **loses her Defense** and **can't run** (she can only move at her Speed) unless the style says otherwise.
- If the spell the mage wants to cast is **extended,** the mage must be able to apply her magical style for **10 minutes** before beginning the extended action.
- If the mage manages to fulfill the above conditions, the player gets a **+1** bonus to her dice pool for the spell.

Secondary advantages:

If the spell:

- is a rote using the favored Attribute;
- is cast using one of the style's favored Arcana;
- falls under the purview of one of the style's favored Practices;
- or has a unique advantage that allows for another useful condition,

the player may choose **one** *of the following mechanical improvements to the spell:*

- a reduction in Mana cost by 1 point;
- two fewer successes needed to achieve an extended casting;
- two fewer dice in the Paradox pool;
- a further +1 bonus, for a total of +2 to the casting dice pool;
- or another bonus allowed by a magical style's unique advantage.

Leaving a Style, Changing Style

In story terms, a mage who chooses to stop using a magic style makes a big decision, because he's abandoning some part of his identity. In game terms, it's simple: the character just stops getting bonuses.

Getting a new magic style is only a little bit more involved: the player expends a dot of Willpower (representing the character's investment in taking on a new philosophy). It's not simply a matter of swapping Skills: a character can't have more than one magical style at a time, simply because in order for a style to be the point of access for magic that it needs to be, the mage needs to have an undiluted view of it. Trying to approach magic from two directions at once leads to cognitive dissonance, and not the useful kind.

Magical Styles

Any mage character, regardless of Path or order, can take any of the styles that follow (although some might be more suited to some Paths more than others). They aren't particularly based on real-world occultism so much as they use real-world cultures and philosophies as a jumping off point — real-world magic doesn't bear a whole lot of resemblance to Awakened magic, it being the magic of fantasy and horror. Each style should serve as inspiration for making up your own magical styles, for your own characters.

Autohypnosis

The conscious mind finds the Supernal Realms almost impossible to grasp. But the *sub*conscious mind understands. Accessing the Supernal practically requires entry into a hypnagogic state. But the mind is easy to mess with, and entering a hypnagogic state is easy enough with the right tools. What if it was possible to tap that into the subconscious conduit all mages have to the Supernal, to mold the mind into the best shape to deal with Awakened magic?

Autohypnosis is the key, self-hypnosis the better to work magic — an empty mind, the theory goes, is a mind

with no obstacles to the passage of Supernal power.

The mind is a powerful tool, but it's so vulnerable, open to all sorts of outside factors. Vast conspiracies are out to get the Sleeper, let alone the Awakened. They know how to make us want the things they sell, the ideologies they espouse. They know how to make us think the way they want to.

A person could get paranoid. Especially one who knows for a fact that a world-controlling conspiracy routinely works people like puppets and brainwashes with magic.

But if they can do it, you can do it, too. And this is also where autohypnosis comes in: you can protect your memories, your knowledge, even your identity, by locking it away, even from yourself, until such time as the right post-hypnotic trigger goes off and it all comes back. If it ever comes back.

Casting: A mage who bends her own mind spends a great deal of time in preparation, staring at hypnotic patterns on her laptop screen, subjecting herself to suggestions hidden in white-noise laden audio tracks, performing meditation exercises, and subjecting herself to custom-designed, pre-recorded hypnotic inductions. By the time she's ready to go out into the field, she's able to enter a trance state just by playing a series of tones on her cellphone. She's got a whole array of post-hypnotic triggers ready to put her under, so that it takes a minute to forget who she is and channel the magic (and maybe come out of the trance when the magic goes off). The trance state doesn't stop her from functioning or make her into a zombie — she just functions differently, with more purity of focus, more direction, and she normally remembers everything after the fact, even she's only half-aware of what she's doing when she's doing it.

The mage casts **Postcognition** (Time • •). She pops the ear-buds from her mp3 player in and cues up the right white-noise track. Her eyes lose their focus and she begins to experience the past of her current location as in a dream.

When she casts **Greater Spirit Summons** (Spirit • • •), she presses a few buttons on her cellphone. A series of tones sounds. She stiffens, and her eyes become all-white. She has no idea what the words she is chanting are — she programmed them into her subconscious and conditioned herself to forget them, even as she chants the words. The incantation — is rhythmic and soothing, and the tone she played to put herself under plays in the air around her.

Tools: Pendulums and other pendants, watches, flashcards, Web-based computer applications, mobile phones, mp3 players

Favored Attribute: Manipulation

Favored Arcana: Mind, Time, Spirit

Favored Practice: Knowing, Veiling, Weaving

Unique advantage: The mage gains a +1 to dice pools to resist attempts to dominate, control, influence, or possess her mind (or a +1 to Resolve or Composure when used as a resistance trait subtracted from a hostile dice pool): what better way to stop them brainwashing *you* than to brainwash *yourself* first?

Example character: n (Mastigos/Guardians of the Veil)

n is almost aggressively non-descript, a skinny woman aged somewhere between 25 and 35, habitually dressed in a grey office suit and blouse, her brown hair cut in a pageboy crop. She talks in a voice that never, ever loses its level, soothing tone; her face never seems to crack its passive expression. And her eyes are wide and lusterless and blank, so empty that nobody can remember what color they are (and when she does magic, they have no color at all, they become opaque white spheres, like billiard balls). She can't even remember the color of her eyes, or her real name, or where she came from, or anything beyond the now, the magic for which she is the vessel and conduit. She did it to herself, wiped her mind with means magical and non-magical so many times, so thoroughly that she probably couldn't access her own history, even if she was capable of wanting to. *n* lives in the now, in a state of permanent post-hypnotic trance. She loves it — she programmed herself to love it — and she works her magic with abandon, following the agendas of her Consilium with absolute dedication and no regard for moral consequences: she has not allowed herself to know anything else. Somewhere along the line, *n* lost her moral compass. It's all a dream for her, and in dreams we are not accountable for our actions.

Merit: Hypnosis (• • •)

Prerequisite: Medicine • or Occult •

Effect: A character with this Merit can hypnotize others (or herself) using the Occult or Medicine Skills. The character must choose which of the two Skills the Merit is tied to, and write the Merit down on the character sheet as either **Hypnosis (Medicine)** or **Hypnosis (Occult).** The character can only use the chosen Skill to perform hypnosis. If the player wants the character to be able to use either Skills, he has to buy the Merit twice, once for each Skill.

Many hypnotists use equipment such as pendulums, pocket watches, simple machines that project revolv-

ing spiral patterns and the like. A subject placed in a trance becomes easily manipulated and likely to respond positively to questioning or suggestion.

This Merit is not limited to mages; it can be bought by any character.

Hypnotizing a Subject

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Occult or Medicine + equipment (hypnotist) - subject's Resolve (if target resists)

Action: Extended

The hypnotist requires a number of successes equal to twice the target's Willpower. Each roll represents one minute of work. If the hypnotist succeeds, the target falls into a trance and becomes malleable to suggestion.

A hypnotist can hypnotize himself.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hypnotist fails even to calm the subject down, or makes a basic error in the process. The subject cannot be hypnotized again for a number of days equal to his Resolve.

Failure: The hypnotist fails to induce trance in the time allowed, or gains no successes towards hypnotizing the subject.

Success: The hypnotist makes progress, or gathers enough successes to place the subject in a trance.

As long as the trance persists, any rolls the hypnotist's player makes to influence the subject (e.g. to induce the subject to impart information or to implant a post-hypnotic suggestion that will make the subject behave in a certain way after the trance has ended) gain a bonus equal to the hypnotist's dots in Manipulation.

Exceptional Success: The hypnotist makes speedy headway towards hypnotizing the subject.

Equipment: Pendulum or pocket watch on chain (+1); audio-visual stimulation (+1 to +3); white and featureless room (+1).

Possible Penalties: Unfamiliar with subject (–2); language barrier (–3); distractions nearby (–2).

Chance Magic

Life itself is a game of chance. It's chance we're born where we are, chance we're not hit by a truck the next time we cross the road, chance that we win the lottery, or don't. The true gambler — not the addict, the professional — understands that, and knows that you can't argue with fate. You just have to shrug it off and smile, and understand that next time Lady Luck might smile on you. Or might not.

The Awakened gambler understands this at a different level. Because the love affair between him and Lady Luck isn't unrequited. He knows he has to treat her well, not abuse her, but he also knows he's got the chance to tip things in his favor sometimes.

The cards, the dice, the flip of a coin are the tools of the gambler, but they're also his judge and jury, the arbiters of his fate. The mage might be able to control how that coin lands and what card comes up, but he must still recognize that the consequences are still in the hands of that most capricious of anthropomorphic personifications.

Casting: A magician using chance magic uses the tools of the gambler to cast his magic. A shell game, a deck of cards, a flip of a coin. He pulls out his cards and riffles and flicks, and something comes up, and somewhere else a coincidence happens: a mind changes, a car crashes into a fire hydrant, a bullet ricochets off a lucky dollar pendant.

The mage pulls out his trusty deck of cards and shuffles them, inviting a bystander to pick a card. Was this her card? It was. Everyone's impressed, but the act of making the magic has changed something about the mage. He's just cast **Transform Aura** (Prime ••).

Casting **Destroy Bindings** (Fate ••••), the mage shakes his dice and blows on them. He declares that he's got one chance to fix this problem and rescue this soul from its jar, and he gives several things he could do that might work. He rolls the dice on the ground and bases his decision on what he rolls. He rolls a double six, and the soul jar shatters of its own accord, as if by accident.

Tools: Casino dice, playing cards, uncashed casino chips, lucky silver dollar

Favored Attribute: Wits

Favored Arcana: Fate, Mind, Prime

Favored Practice: Compelling, Veiling, Weaving

Unique Advantage: The mage also treats Unraveling as a favored Practice.

Example character: Bad Bobby (Acanthus/Mysterium)

Bad Bobby looks like he might be an easy touch, all soft lines and unfashionable clothes. But at the poker table (or any other game of chance), no one can touch him. His round, innocent face suddenly hardens; those sleepy eyes narrow. He knows odds and has a knack for understanding the measure of a man. He's not afraid to lose, either — he deals with vast amounts of money, but has never been rich, for the simple reason that he's always lost as much as he's won. It's the ability to take wins and losses in the same spirit that make him so valuable to his Consilium. While others might deal with problems with their fists, or with guns, Bobby gets to the heart of the problem with his powers of perception. A simple

game of poker, or a wager on some inconsequential event reveals more to him about the character of a man than any amount of scrying or interrogation.

Dialectical Occultism

Everything is politics. The food we eat, the jobs we're stuck doing, the man who keeps us down. We're all trapped in a system that oppresses us, that locks us into a class system we never asked to be in. The Marxist — an endangered species in the English-speaking world these days, but still out there — applies the principles of Marxist dialectic to pretty much every part of his life. He discusses doctrine in robust terms with colleagues and opponents alike, using nigh-impenetrable language. He expresses no satisfaction in anything that's done within the current capitalist class system (no middle ground exists; he takes no hope from small victories). And he will not compromise until the Revolution happens.

On occasion, opponents of the more radical Marxists have pointed out the way that the writings of Marx, Lenin, and the other seminal Marxist thinkers seem to have become religious, quasi-mystical texts, and the Marxist scheme a sort of esoteric philosophical system in its own right.

An Awakened Marxist ideologue pretty much serves as the proof of that theory. Dialectical occultism is the application of Marxist thought to the theory of Awakened magic. The dialectical occultist takes as read that the Fallen World is fallen because of the exploitation of the masses by the few, namely the human race by the Exarchs and their bourgeois servants. The hard-line dialectical occultist considers most of the Awakened to be part of the problem, not the solution, because they are opposing the Exarchs, or attempting to, using ideologically unsound methods (some particularly extreme dialectical occultists even consider the oppressors to be the Awakened as a whole, and the Sleepers as the true masses). Human souls are the means of production, and the human race needs to be made aware of that. The final goal of the dialectical occultist is to destroy the occult, to make it unhidden, accessible to the masses (the Sleepers), allowing them to storm the Supernal Realm: a cosmic revolution. The universe isn't ready for that yet, but the Awakened Marxist thinks it might one day be.

Most mages think that's wishful thinking, even dangerous thinking (even the ones who don't think socialism is crazy or even evil), but even so, the dialectical occultist has one thing missing from so many other mages: passion.

Casting: Ideologically sound spell casting is easier than it looks. The Marxist magician is utilitarian and philosophical in his casting, preferring to use the plainest possible tools. He reads from a work of one of the seminal (or even the more recent) Marxist thinkers, applying the tools of dialectic to the material realm. He makes a proposition; and then backs it up with his will (philosophically speaking, that's a big departure from true Marxist dialectical materialism, by the way). He says something is so, uses the arguments of Marx, Lenin, or one of the other ideologues, and proves it with magic.

He casts **Influence Sound** (Forces •). Reading from Lenin, he states that the voices of the ideologically correct need not obey physical rules imposed by exploitative cosmic forces. It is so.

Later, casting **Transform Median Life** (Life • • •), he adjusts his spectacles and explains how the guard dogs that menace his cabal are no more than unwitting prisoners of the same oppressive cosmic system that imprisons all Sleepers. As unwitting prisoners, he continues, they are subject to the alteration of said, rules, ergo the Marxist with a solid grasp of the philosophical underpinnings of the world-system should be able to declare these animals to be mice. Even as he talks, the dogs become mice.

Tools: A copy of a book, usually by Marx, Engels or Lenin.

Favored Attribute: Strength or Resolve

Favored Arcana: Life, Forces, Matter

Favored Practice: Compelling, Ruling, Fraying

Unique advantage: Occult dialecticists are all about the importance of the collective, and that extends to magic. A practitioner of occult dialectic gains a +2 dice pool bonus when part of or leading a group ritual (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 129).

Example character: Metcalf (Acanthus/Free Council)

Tall, stocky, entering his 30s, never seen without a cigarette, Metcalf is an indie DJ, although his attitude to music is pretty much the same as his politics: some things need to be purged and some people need to be shot. He's only really the member of an Order at all because he needs the help, and because — so he says — he wants to be able to destroy the system from within. He still goes to meetings of his favored splinter-group, and writes a column for a national socialist journal, but he's working for revolution among the Awakened first. At least, he says he is. He never seems to get very far with it, instead preferring to canvas among his colleagues for new converts to dialectical materialism and its occult sibling.

Fight Magic

You don't know you've lived until you've got into a fight, a real fight with fists and bruises and broken teeth and blood. The adrenaline thrill of flesh on flesh, on doing unto others exactly how they're trying to do unto you. It's an addiction for some, a pastime or hobby for others. Some people — mostly men, granted, but not wholly — just get into fights, whether they want to or not.

A mage with an urge to get into fights, with that instinct for blood and scars and bruises, finds it the most natural thing in the world to channel that into his magic. It's not the same as a more traditional, more meditative martial arts-based style (of which several exist). The fight mage doesn't have time for all that Bruce Lee shit. It's about the body, and it's about the blood and the pain and the prospect of self-destruction. He hits things. He hits other people.

He takes off his shirt. He licks his lip and feels the blood from the inside of his cheek and the fight he was in last night well up and run up into the gaps between his teeth, touches the still-tender bridge of his nose and feels the rasping shift of the broken cartilage there. He runs the pad of his thumb along the deep graze on his jawline, feels the tiny specks of gravel still embedded there from when someone pushed his face into the concrete and beat down on his head, again and again until he managed to gather enough breath to cast a healing spell and stop himself choking on his own blood.

Casting: The fight mage's magic depends upon three things: beating on someone, being beaten on, and experiencing the physical consequences of having been beaten on.

A mage punches, bites, and kicks with all he's got, and in the process does magic, maybe even *healing* the person he's apparently beating to a pulp. Or he loses himself in the sensation of injury, the examination of a tender bruise; the taste of fresh blood, the jagged feeling of a broken tooth on the tip of your tongue. Or he gets into a fight with a stranger with the sole intention of losing — which is a whole lot harder than it might seem.

A bunch of fight mages performing a group casting looks like a circle of men (and maybe women) taking turns to beat the shit out of each other — no shirts, no shoes — while the others watch.

Whatever happens, it's about the body. It's about fists and skin and muscle and bone. A fight mage who gets powerful enough even gets into fights with abstract concepts and elemental forces.

The fight mage casts **Organic Resilience** (Life ●●) by getting into a fight with a guy in a bar. The mage gets his ass handed back to him, but with every blow that lands on him, his skin gets harder. The pain doesn't go away, though. The pain is part of the point. It just gets easier to bear.

With **Telekinetic Strike** (Forces ●●●), the fight mage's blows don't even have to land to hit his target. He can even hit things that he shouldn't normally be able to hit, so with **Control Fire** (also Forces ●●●), he can put a fire out by punching it.

Tools: A handkerchief speckled with dots of the mage's own blood, scars, the mage's own bare hands, injuries inflicted on the mage in recent fights

Favored Attribute: Stamina

Favored Arcana: Life, Forces, Fate

Favored Practice: Compelling, Shielding, Fraying

Unique advantage: The mage gains a further +1 bonus to magic dice pools if he is currently injured (that is, if at least one of the character's Health boxes are filled with bashing, lethal, or aggravated damage). This bonus only happens if the injury was inflicted by someone else, deliberately. No accidents, no self-inflicted wounds.

Example character: Britannia (Thyrsus/Silver Ladder)

Britannia is one of the most intimidating people anyone could ever hope to meet, an exceptionally tall, hard-faced, broken-nosed white woman with a livid scar

running from the left side of her chin up to her lower lip, a brutal black buzzcut and the sort of muscular build that comes from hard work and exertion rather than time spent at the gym. She dresses in simple clothes that don't restrict her movements (but don't give anyone anything to hang on to, either) and talks with a cockney accent. No one seems to know what she does when she's not doing magic; no one has the nerve to ask. Britannia is the local Sentinel, and happily beats the errant Awakened into shape — often literally. Everyone seems surprised that she's not in the Adamantine Arrow, but that's because they don't get it, and they don't get her. She's never killed anyone (although she's hospitalized a fair few people). And what she does, she does out of a wish to improve the bruised subjects of her work… and herself.

In her spare time, Britannia knits. No one tells her they find it funny.

Inspired Music

Musicians have long been thought to have some access to the mystical, the sublime. Singing brings people closer to what they perceive as the divine; Beethoven, Strauss, Wagner, and Stockhausen all considered their music to have a mystical element. Iamblichus, Kepler, Kircher, Steiner, and Schopenhauer all wrote about music's occult force.

It's no surprise then that when a musician Awakens, he finds it easy to compare the theory of music with the theory of magic. Different sounds bring on different emotional states, and sometimes even transcendent experiences. Music can hypnotize. Music can heal. Discordant musical sounds can cause chills to run down the listener's spine or even to push someone to flight, or make a person violently ill.

Casting: A practitioner of inspired music does pretty much the same thing every time: he pulls out a musical instrument, whistles a fragment of song, hums or sings, and things happen. Different tunes work for different things — a song intended to harm might be piercing and discordant; a piece of music that heals might be the sweetest thing anyone ever heard. But it's not always the case. A talented artist can hide meanings within an otherwise innocent piece of music — consider Dmitri Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony, subtitled "A Soviet Artist's Reply to Just Criticism," which Shostakovich wrote after a stern critique from Stalin's regime, and which, under its martial rhythm hides a discordant strain, making it an authentically *sarcastic* piece of music.

A guitarist strums a few notes; the vibrations of the strings resonate with living things nearby and hears the vibrations echo back to him, which is a casting of **Pulse of the Living World** (Life •).

Another mage whistles a tune that makes his companions literally smarter — it clears the mind, makes perceptions clearer, a casting of **Augment Other Minds** (Mind • • • •).

Tools: Musical instruments, sheet music, song
Favored Attribute: Presence
Favored Arcana: Life, Mind, Time
Favored Practice: Unveiling, Ruling, Fraying
Unique Advantage: The character gains an extra rote specialty in either Empathy or Expression.
Example character: Fiona Three (Moros/Silver Ladder)

Fiona's hair is shaved into a long dark-blue mohican; she has seven facial piercings and thirteen ear piercings. She habitually wears heavy eyeliner and black lipstick; her clothes are black and usually partly made of plastic.

She plays the cello. One of the best chamber musicians in the country, Fiona chooses her own assignments. But her own compositions are bleak, atonal things. She sees the dead everywhere. At times she serenades them. At times she makes them suffer.

Junk Magic

Objects have significance. The people who leave things behind don't always discard them willingly, and even if they do, they have a history. A child's broken toy was once loved. A wedding ring in a pawn shop has its own tragic story. A schoolroom desk covered with the names of generations of bored school kids left in a junkyard when the school got demolished tells more stories than you'd credit.

For many, raiding junk shops and charity shops is an absorbing pastime, and not just because of the possibility of owning something old and beautiful. It's because of the stories, the history.

A mage *feels* the history in an old object, understands what history means. Seeking out old things — sometimes beautiful, sometimes just interesting — becomes more than just a pastime. Objects have power, and objects with history have the potential for truly impressive power.

Casting: A junk mage always has something on her person, squirreled away in her pockets or carried in a backpack or handbag or holdall. A broken Bakelite telephone. A locket containing an old photograph of a sad woman. A copy of *The Apocryphal New Testament* in which someone left a photograph of a serious-looking young man standing on a beach. An out-of-focus sea-

man's telescope with a brass panel on its side, engraved with someone's initials. Read from the book. Tear up the photograph. Look through the telescope at nothing; pretend to talk on the telephone. Magic reveals itself in all these things. Anything at all can be a magical tool, but a thing that is second-hand and cast-away has the most use. *How* you can use it depends on the object, and on the situation.

A mage pulls an abandoned, engraved gold wedding ring out of her coat pocket and places it under the driver's seat of her Volvo. Its metaphysical weight disguises the ownership of the car. The mage has just cast **Conceal Sympathy** (Space ● ●).

The mage kneels down in front of the door and pulls out a family portrait with cracked glass in its frame, a weather-stained teddy bear, and a monogrammed lighter. She sets fire to the picture and the toy as a sacrifice; then he reaches through the door and molds a hole in it — casting **Plasticity** (Matter ● ● ●) — through which she reaches her hand and turns the handle.

It probably isn't worth keeping track of the junk that the character carries around. Assume that a junk mage has in her bag enough tools to cast her magic for the day (it's up to the player to describe the items and what they do — the player has to explain what she's using to get the bonuses).

Tools: Plastic carrier bags, holdalls, shoulder bags, backpacks, discarded valuables

Favored Attributes: Stamina or Presence

Favored Arcana: Space, Matter, Mind

Favored Practices: Compelling, Veiling, Perfecting

Unique Advantage: Junk mages always seem to find the best stuff. A character using this style can buy the Artifact Merit for four fewer experience points (meaning that a three-dot Artifact costs 8 experience points, a four-dot Artifact costs 16 experience points, and a five-dot Artifact costs 26 experience points).

Example Character: Clean Steve (Obrimos/Guardians of the Veil)

Clean Steve always has a five o'clock shadow, no matter how often he shaves. A skinny man in an ugly print shirt and tight jeans, whose dark eyes stare out under heavy black brows and messy, greasy black hair, Steve isn't exactly a charmer. But Clean Steve's junk shop is the meeting place of choice for several cabals in the region. Steve — and no one knows how he manages this — always has exactly what the mages who visit him need. He never asks for anything in return and no one seems to know what his agenda is. No one knows what he wants. The mages who use his services again and again are trying not to think about the fact that he's soon going to call in some heavy favors.

Neo-Enochianism

A lot of people believe in angels, more than the more rational among us would think, and the hierarchies of the higher realms have held a fascination with occultists for centuries, ever since Edward Kelley imparted to John Dee the knowledge of Enochian, the supposed language of angels. Vastly simplified, a magic-worker uses the Enochian alphabet as the basis of his communication with angelic beings that may or may not exist — in fact, it doesn't matter whether they exist or not, because they're just a metaphor for the magic. The letters, arranged in complex patterns and tables (particularly the tables called the "Watchtowers"), each have correspondences with phenomena and objects in the real world, allowing the magician power of them, to a degree.

The neo-Enochian practitioner still memorizes the tables of correspondences, but makes the magic a faster, more fluid affair, requiring nothing more than a pocket-sized reference book, a notepad, and a writing implement.

Casting: A practitioner of neo-Enochian magic pulls his book of tables from his pocket, consults one, quickly draws a sigil on a piece of paper or a sticky note, or in magic marker on the target of his magic itself. He sticks the note somewhere, or sets light to it with a lighter, or holds it up as a shield, or crumples the paper up and eats it, or folds it up and gives it to one of his friends. Each sigil possesses angelic power, and while drawing his sigil, the mage might mutter a prayer or an invocation to the angel whose name and realm corresponds with the sigil. Maybe he hears the voice of the angel (or enters a sort of psychological fugue where he tells himself he hears the voice of the angel). In the more vulgar versions of the spell, the people viewing the spell maybe even see the same visions as the mage does.

The best-known archangels are Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Uriel. It doesn't have to be a real angel: the angel is just a symbol, after all, and some neo-Enochians use famous people who have "passed to the Higher Realms" as the symbolic angels of their magic — ranging from philosophical figures (Freud, Marx, Barthes), literary figures (Dylan Thomas, Charles Dickens, Edgar Allen Poe), great dead musicians (Kurt Cobain, Nick Drake, Jim Morrison) or celebrities whose deaths seem to have entered the public consciousness (Princess Diana, Jade Goody). All these people occupy the same conceptual space as angels, and they're all fair game, because it's not actually them a mage is channeling — it's the *idea* of them.

A mage casts **Supernal Vision** (Prime •). Flipping through his handy book of tables for a second, he locates the sigil he's looking for, invokes the ascended William Blake, and uses a small-tip marker to inscribe the sigil on the arm of his spectacles. Or he writes it on a notelet and then looks through the piece of paper, which is to him and only him now transparent, seeing the truth through the opaque.

Casting **Ghost Gate** (Death •••), the mage closes a door, consults the book, and writes his sigil in magic marker on the door frame; his hand appears to be guided by a gray-robed angel. He opens the door again, to reveal a different destination than before.

Tools: Book of tables, notepad, writing implements

Favored Attribute: Presence

Favored Arcana: Spirit, Prime, Death

Favored Practice: Knowing, Ruling, Perfecting

Unique Advantage: The mage gains an extra +1 bonus to the casting dice pool (on top of any others) when casting spells affecting, summoning or dismissing spirits, demons or angels (particularly the Dominions, or *qashmallim*).

Example character: Peter Bell the Fourth (Moros/ Silver Ladder)

Peter lectures in Art at a fair-to-middling college, and keeps an eye on the art students under his care. Bookish and deceptively conservative in appearance, his own art never amounted to much. He's particularly interested in the history of design and type, and takes an active part in encouraging students to beautify the college with art. Meaning that the college has on its grounds several sigils of protection and knowing, encoded in collages and artworks made by Peter and his students. Peter's favored angelic forms are Uriel, Raphael, Percy Shelley, and Christina Rosetti.

Psychogeography

Places have power, but not always in the way that we think. It's not always a function of ley lines or magical nexuses. Sometimes it's a function of the meaning of a place. Maybe it's to do with the history of a place: the housing project where a serial killer once lurked; the city square where the army massacred a horde of democracy protesters, the site of a church bombed out in World War II. Maybe it's some other meaning the place has, a function of its name or the relation between it and other places: the street between two great cathedrals, the central intersection of the five streets that comprise the city's red-light district, the street named after an angel or a poet, or an historical figure, or some philosophical concept, or a name with peculiar numerology. Perhaps it's something unique about the place — the only public statue made by an artist who committed suicide immediately afterwards, the tallest monolith in the country, a building built in an apparently occult shape.

Every city has its psychogeography. Urban explorers exist, who try to get into places no one has seen. "Zedders" spend days looking for places they've chosen at random from an A-to-Z street map.

Places matter to the Awakened, and a mage who uses psychogeography as the focus of his magical style makes use of a sense of place in his magic. He knows where his feet stand, he knows where he is going, he knows where he has been.

Casting: A psychogeographer makes use of maps and compasses. He uses the significance of the place where he stands as the focus of his magic. The ground is his tool. He studies his map, pinpoints his position, calculates the numerological significance of his location, perhaps even invokes the names of historical figures associated with the place — every place has ghosts, of sorts, metaphorical ones, if not literal ones.

The mage places himself and directs himself with a compass (or, in an extended ritual, with a more elaborate piece of equipment such as a theololite, seeking to find the exact perfect spot in relation to himself and his target. This really works if he's trying to affect a target out of sight: the relations between locations aren't necessarily as obvious as all that, but they exist, and the proficient psychogeographer can find them with only a little effort.

A mage casting **Scrying** (Space ••) does precisely that: she pinpoints her own position on a map, and then, using a notebook and taking down grid references, does some quick numerological calculations, taking a specific route down three streets until, at the correct street corner, she can see her target in her mind's eye.

She finds her quarry. Adjusting her position in relation to her target, the mage pulls out a notebook and rapidly jots down a quick map of her immediate surroundings, making a particular note of the subject's precise location. The target tries to get away; suddenly, he can't — the mage has cast **Chronos' Curse** (Time ••••).

Tools: A compass, a well-thumbed A to Z, topographical underground train maps or bus route maps, pocket street maps, a theodolite, a notebook and pen, pocket GPS

Favored Attribute: Wits

Favored Arcana: Space, Fate, Time

Favored Practice: Unveiling, Ruling, Perfecting

Unique Advantage: A mage using psychogeography as his magical style gets the Direction Sense Merit for free.

Example character: Berlitz (Acanthus/Mysterium)

Even if you didn't know Berlitz was a policeman, it'd be obvious. He just has that look, the slightly square dress sense, the loose saggy area in one side of his coat, the graying hair, the eyes that always look around for something to seize on. Berlitz always, long before he Awakened, had a keen sense of place. Now he's Awakened, the fact he knows the back streets of his city like the map-lines on his hand — in fact, the lines on his hands are, to him and only to him, a topographical map of the center of his town. He's the man to go to if you need to find someone. But he's surprisingly fey and unreliable. And although he always finds who he's looking for, he does not always look for the right person.

Recovery

Magic is one of the things that rescued the Recovery magician — or maybe Recovery made him possible to do magic. The practitioner of Recovery was at some time in the past an alcoholic or drug addict who got help and joined a twelve-step group. The Twelve Steps become for some recovered addicts a kind of mantra, and some consider AA to be a cult, that works, as many cults do, on clichés and trite buzzwords.

But it *does* work (for some people), and the Twelve Steps, with their insistence on the recovering addict turning himself over to a "Power greater than ourselves", have a sort of force over and above the simple expression of discipline. They transform a person, save him from the control of his chosen substance, and allow him to reconstruct a new life, albeit a life that has, sitting in its center, the Twelve Steps.

Recovery, then, is like Awakening — in both of them you leave behind a lesser life and construct a new one around your new understanding of who you are and what you can do. The Higher Power and Awakened Magic are analogues. Recovery magicians understand that and use it.

Casting: The spells of the Recovery mage depend upon the practice of the Twelve Steps, themselves a spiritual discipline.

The mage needs to surrender his self wholly to master Recovery magic. By admitting that you have no power over a situation, you paradoxically give yourself power over it. The Recovery mage regains control by abandoning any pretense of power. He prays.

What he prays *to* is not the issue — in fact, the Recovery mage knows that's a massive red herring. It's the act of prayer, the literal act of falling on one's knees, hands clasped, prayers of surrender to the Higher Power, "God as You Understand Him." The Higher Power of a mage is magic, the simple abstract connection the mage has with the Supernal. He needs to make a "searching and fearless moral inventory" of himself in his prayers. He needs to be specific.

He needs to admit what he has done wrong to others, and do something to put that right, no matter how difficult it is. And through prayer and meditation, he needs to try to seek the truth and the future. And then he needs to pass on the fruits of his spiritual awakening to others.

What this means in practice is that the Recovery mage has an honest, informal sort of magic, a lot of which happens internally.

The mage gets on his knees, and he prays quietly or out loud, or he pulls out a little copy of the AA Big Book and reads a passage or part of one of the stories. Maybe he examines himself in relation to another person's experiences — that person being the target of his magic, and Identifies — capital-I Identification is a central part of the AA experience. Inside, he has surrendered himself to the Higher Power — magic, although he doesn't ever have to admit that it's other than the Higher Power he uses as his focus — and he uses that surrender as a means of making the magic do the work that he cannot.

Casting **Interconnections** (Fate •), the mage engages in friendly conversation with his unwitting target, listening rather than waiting for his turn to talk. He Identifies with the target and hence makes intuitive leaps and more-than-inspired guesses as to who is pulling the target's strings.

Another mage casts **Phantasm** (Prime • • •). A vulgar spell, the mage creates his illusory object through on-his knees half-spoken, half-mumbled informal prayer. He admits that he cannot create the illusion — a chair, say. One moment it is not there, and then, as if you looked away and looked back again, there it is, inexplicably.

Tools: The Big Book (the basic text of Alcoholics Anonymous), prayer to God As You Understand Him

Favored Attribute: Resolve

Favored Arcana: Fate, Mind, Prime

Favored Practice: Knowing, Shielding, Perfecting

Unique Advantage: Recovery mages learn how to endure. A recovery mage never suffers a wound penalty of more than –1. He endures the pain by taking each second at a time.

Example Character: Miss Diagnosis (Acanthus/ Free Council)

"Miss Diagnosis" was a film student with a great deal of promise, who squandered it all when she started using freebase at an art-school party somewhere. On the wagon and in her early 30s, she Awakened and works as a counselor in a half-way house. Although still a restaurant-silencing beauty, Miss Diagnosis wears a veil when doing her magic workings, often coupling it with utterly inappropriate outfits (e.g. jeans and a T-shirt), her tortuous rationale being that she has an urge to hide her magic, and by wearing the veil she is able not to hide the fact she wants to hide. The Twelve-Step logic informs the way she treats her magic, using prayer, often counterintuitive Identification and AA slogans ("put down the spoon and pick up the fork" being one her favorites).

MAGE CHRONICLES

"This is the end, is it?" The severed head was still speaking. Zephyr checked his watch. Assuming it was still working right, he'd been in this boat for 13 days.

"Probably," whispered Zephyr. The lifeboat wasn't leaking — thank God for plastic — but it didn't matter. It was empty except for a dead mage and a living one. "I'd have eaten you by now if you weren't rotting."

"I wouldn't have minded much," said the head. Its tone of voice indicated that it would be shrugging, if it had shoulders. "Lots to eat, though."

Zephyr looked around. "Yeah? Where? I'm out of water and at this point I'm down to hoping a bird flies by. Maybe I could burn it in mid-air, but I don't know if I can even *find* the Aether anymore."

"What?" The head didn't understand. Zephyr wondered how much sense he was really making.

"I mean, this is nothing like Aether. There's no energy. Nothing I can latch onto. It's all water."

The head rolled its eyes. "Zephyr, it's *all* energy. I tried to tell you that before, when I still had my body and all. It's all the same stuff. What I did with Matter, you do with Forces, and we meet in the middle at—"

"—Prime," Zephyr muttered. "But how is that going to help me?"

He reached over the edge of the boat and felt the endless deeps below him. It was infinite, he realized. Infinite, churning, moving — all energy. Just like Aether. He swirled his fingers in a *mudra* he'd only ever seen powerful Adepts use, and the water under his hand vanished, flowing into him as Mana. He drank it in, and converted it once more, this time to flesh and blood, sustaining him.

"It's not bread," he said to his bodiless companion. "But it'll do."

> *Beauty is a manifestation of secret natural laws, which otherwise would have been hidden from us forever.*
>
> — Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Our final chapter presents a few considerations for running **Mage**. The first three articles discuss three of the biggest hurdles that the game presents. Namely, scale, magical power, and breadth of information. A **Mage** game might center around one cabal, one city, or the entire world — which works best for you? How do you make that decision? The Tiers section should help.

Next, we examine the Awakened ability to gather information and fact on almost any situation by casting a few spells, and why that ability can be a huge headache for the Storyteller. In fact, though, a mage's data-gathering ability can be a Storyteller's greatest tool, if you present the information the right way.

Finally, we examine what happens when **Mage** characters get powerful enough that challenging them becomes a serious problem. It's actually not as big a challenge as you might think, we promise.

After these sections, we present 14 chronicles. Some of these chronicles assume the standard **Mage: The Awakening** system and setting, and include events or presentations just a bit off the standard. Some of the chronicles tweak some default assumptions of the game, and we've provided alternate systems, where necessary. Hopefully, this chapter shows how versatile and how rewarding **Mage: The Awakening** can be, and inspires you and your troupe to try it out, or try it again.

The Tier System

One of the great things about **Mage** is its flexibility. Want to play the sort of game where a group of on-the-ground street mystics fight mystical battles on the lamp-lit city streets? Fine. Desire games of labyrinthine magical politics where the stakes are souls and abstract concepts, and where the results could be the very future of humankind?

No problem. Want to indulge in crazy edge-of-the-seat arcane tomb-raiding, outwitting nefarious rivals, dodging immortal temple guardians, ducking massive rolling boulders, and unearthing the secrets that underpin the very universe, all before teatime? Can do.

That said, that very openness can be in its own way intimidating. So many options, so many different styles of play and nothing to tell them apart. What to keep in? What to leave out?

One useful way to approach the game is with a system of *Tiers*. Tiers are like a set of dials that change the volume and contrast of various parts of the setting, enabling the Storyteller to set a consistent tone for the game.

At the bottom level, the first tier deals with a group of mages in a **Cabal**. They might have some contacts with an order, but only really in terms of teaching. Essentially, they're on their own. Their stories deal with personal issues, small-scale conflicts, and the problem of day-to-day survival. The mages might have day jobs, lovers (maybe even kids), addictions, and very human antagonists. People and magic, and the interaction of the two: there's the drama.

Above that is the second tier: the **Consilium**. Stories have a more political bent, as decisions made by the characters can affect the lives of hundreds of people the characters have never even met. The characters find allies and enemies among the mages in the city, and clash on a more organized level with rival groups (such as the agents of the Exarchs). The games here are about politics and morality. What are you prepared to do?

At the third tier, games are played on the level of the **Order.** This is where it gets world-shattering: mages engage in the highest level of derring-do among vampires, werewolves, spirits, ghosts, and fairies. The characters investigate the secret history of the world, uncovering truths that could shatter everything they know.

Tier One: Cabal

The world looks just the same as it always did. The sun till comes up, the sky is still blue, grass is still green. But not long ago you had a terrifying dream, and the next thing you knew, you could do magic.

You stumbled across a few other people who could do the same: a student teacher, a trash man with a Ph.D. in physics, the guy who works in the hardware store. This old guy in the antiques shop clued you in on some books to read and told you about whole networks out there who could teach you more about this stuff and help you out. But they're far away. You and your friends, you're on your own. It's up to you and this mismatched bunch of miracle-workers to figure out what this power of yours means, and what you should do with it.

So. Now what?

Soap Opera

This is the basic level, the level where human drama happens, and human drama is really the key to Tier One. The cabal is the central unit, and a game focused so tightly on a small group of folks needs to be focused on character, on the relationships, the ins and outs of a character's life. Those Allies and Contacts aren't really dots on a sheet in any game, but in this version of the game, they're vitally important. They need to be fleshed out, made into full characters with motivations of their own. Players need to work for their characters' relationships. That also goes for the people they love and hate — parents, kids, siblings, and significant others.

Characters have day jobs, but they also have magic. Balancing the two makes for a lot of the conflict — vampiric spirits might be seeping through a crack in reality under the mall, but how are you going to explain that to your boss when he tears you a new one for being late for work four days in a row? What happens when your wife starts suspecting you're having an affair with that student you keep running off with in the middle of the night and follows you (or hires someone to follow you)?

Magic becomes a complication to this: your boss hates you because your work is failing miserably, but what's stopping you from making him forget that you're not there? Or making it look like you're there? Or making him believe your excuse? And when you start messing with your boss, what then? This is where abuses come from. And this is the sort of thing that attracts the attention of monsters and rivals — for example, in the comic book *Courtney Crumrin*, the teenage heroine has a scam in which she enchants one of her classmates to do her homework for her, which works until her new teacher turns out to know magic as well.

As a game based around characters and their relationships gets going, magic intrudes into their world, and that's where the conflict really comes in.

Things to Do

To begin with, Tier One characters may or may not have a baseline of knowledge about what sort of magic they can do. The other members of the cabal are most likely the only mages the characters know, at least to begin with, apart perhaps from a mentor or teacher (and more on that in a moment). Stories need to begin at home — the group of friends who all know magic have to deal with everyday problems, maybe using magic, and then with supernatural problems on a local scale.

Your teenaged son is dating this girl who only comes out at night — what do you do when you find an old newspaper with a photo and a story about her disappearance, *30 years ago?* The woods near your home are haunted, and the ghost is becoming steadily more malevolent. The spirits and monsters that the characters run into aren't necessarily vast and mythic, but they can still be awful. The Abyssal demons, werewolves, patchwork monsters and fairies that the characters run into are all the more terrifying for being unknown. The Seers of the Throne are out there, but they're an unseen, unknowable force. They might wield the same kind of magic as the characters, but how would they really know?

And that's really the key to a game on this scale: the unknown. All this stuff is new to the characters. The trappings of the setting are minimal: they know magic and trouble is finding them and their families. That's all. But that's plenty.

Character Creation

Most of the special mage-only Merits (**Mage: The Awakening**, pp. 81–89) don't work at this level, since they deal with a society in which the characters don't play so much of a part. Tier One characters shouldn't have access to the Enhanced Item, Imbued Item, Library, Sanctum, Order Status, or Thrall Merits (and probably most, if not all, of the specialist Merits found in any of the other supplements for **Mage**). Artifacts and Hallows *might* be available, but the characters found them on their own and are probably unclear about how they really work. The characters only get the chance to know High Speech if they are members of orders.

Characters should really have lives and day jobs, families, and friends. Social Merits dealing with people outside Awakened society — those Contacts and Allies we talked about before — become really important, since most people the characters meet on a social or friendly level probably aren't mages. Consider using the Rela-

tionship Merit as a kicker for this sort of game. It isn't for everyone, but a dice-pool bonus when you bring in people with whom you have some sort of connection, good or bad, can drive some stories and create drama.

Orders and Legacies

At this level, the orders aren't there. Or, at the very least, the orders aren't a factor in the stories. The thing is, in the game, the orders are where mages learn their rotes from, and that's an important consideration. How to manage this?

Actually, it's not all that hard. Here are a few ideas. They're not the only ideas going, but they're good for a start.

• **No Orders, no Rotes:** The characters don't get to join orders. Either orders don't exist at all, or they don't know about the orders and the orders don't impinge on their lives. And because they don't get to join orders, they don't get to learn Rotes at all. *All* of the magic they cast is improvised. Paradoxes become a bit more likely, and mages probably have to be careful with their magic. At the beginning, it means spellcraft is probably quite hard. If you use this option, consider allowing the Relationship Merit and the dice pool bonuses it grants, which has the great opportunity for drama, as the characters find that they're exploiting or endangering their friends and family in order to get magical power. If you decide that the orders do exist in your game, and the characters just don't know about them yet, it means the cabal has somewhere to go, and it means that each character gets to grow into the sort of mage who might join an order (that is, rather than saying at character creation, "my character's in the Adamantine Arrow" and then playing him like you think a member of that order should be played, you play the character and then see where he naturally fits when the time comes to join an order).

• **No Orders, Rotes from another source:** On the other hand, the characters might not be members of orders as such, but they might have a mentor (or maybe an inherited library of esoteric books, or maybe a magic shop). Maybe the mentor — or mentors — is grooming the cabal for membership in one of the orders (and they're actually *de facto* members already, only they don't know it yet). This is a good tactic to take if you intend sometime in the near future to move up to the Consilium level. Or maybe you rule that the orders don't actually exist, and this is all there is, and all the rotes and spells out there exist in books of magical lore, which the cabal have to find.

• **Orders as magical philosophies and schools:** Or perhaps the cabal know about the orders, and are joined-up members and everything, but don't really have much to do with the orders in their everyday lives. They're a source of magical training (read: rotes) and a philosophy on which the characters can base their approach to magic, and that's it. Maybe at some time in the future the characters might get involved in the local or worldwide politics of their orders... but not yet.

Can the characters join Legacies? Well, that really depends on the Legacy more than on the tier (because if a player wants to join a Legacy, his character should be able to stumble upon a teacher, even if that search for a teacher is in fact the central plot point of a story). Some Legacies are more suited to playing at this level than others.

On the one hand, a subtle Legacy like the Sodality of the Tor (found in **Legacies: The Sublime**), whose magic is based on certain Sleeper pagan practices, fits right in with this tier. A no-nonsense Uncrowned King or a martial-arts-practicing Perfected Adept could keep her old life going while crafting her soul. But on the other hand, a character that joins the ranks of the hermaphrodite, bizarrely ascetic Daksha (also from **Legacies: The Sublime**) or the zombie-commanding Bokor (from **Tome of the Watchtowers**) is really a character who's moving the game up to the next tier of play. So many Legacies exist now in print that it's impossible to list them all. Ask yourself: if a character joins this Legacy, what does he care about? What kind of stories should he be part of now?

New Merit: Relationship (• to • • • • •)

Effect: The character has a reciprocal relationship with a Storyteller character, in which he has at least some emotional investment — the more dots, the more significant the relationship. This relationship is a source of strength and aid. It could be a parent, a sibling, a child. It could be a lover or an ex-lover. The relationship doesn't have to be a positive one: that ex-wife who you've got to see every week because she's got custody of the kids is still important to you, even if love turned horribly sour long ago. Your feelings for your going-right-off-the-rails teenage son may be appallingly conflicted, but he's still central in your world.

Each relationship requires a separate purchase of this Merit. Once per scene, you may add your dots in the Relationship Merit to one dice pool, provided that you can give a plausible rationale as to why the relationship should aid you.

Sometimes, this is simple: when you're trying to convince your ex-wife that you need to see the kids a day early because you're going to be out of town (and no, you can't tell her you're off risking your life), add your relationship dice to your Manipulation + Persuasion roll.

The relationship might be at stake in some way: you'd get the bonus while trying to convince the headteacher of your deadbeat teenage son's school not to expel him for truancy and the stuff they found in his locker. Players are encouraged to be creative with their rationales for getting the dice.

You can get the bonus relationship dice while using magic, but again only in a circumstance when the player can justify the bonus.

Drawback: Relationships are reciprocal, and complicated. The Storyteller character with which you have the relationship gets the same bonus on dice pools when it's relevant to you. Also, relationships need to be kept alive. You actually need to have some contact with the character with whom you've got the relationship — phone, face-to-

Relationships = Power

Free dice on tap, if only you can make a plausible case for it? Isn't that a bit powerful?

Yes, yes it is, and intentionally so. But remember: the dice pool bonuses only come into play when the Relationship does, meaning that players who want those dice pool bonuses *must* bring their relationships constantly into play. The idea is that after a while, play directed towards relationships creates drama and stories about those relationships while offering simple but satisfying mechanical rewards for introducing them into play.

These Storyteller characters soon become vital supporting cast. When they're in danger, it matters. More than that, if they become targets or subjects of a mage's powers, issues of Wisdom come into play. You might mess with your husband's memory to help him forget the weird things he's just seen... but it's easy to go further. And then what?

face contact, whatever — or risk losing dots in the Merit. The Storyteller can decide what constitutes a reasonable interval for lack of contact. Finally, if the subject of a character's Relationship Merit dies, the Merit is lost.

Tier Two: Consilium

Mages eventually find each other, and when people with similar interests and conditions find each other, they create a society. Compare churches, political activists, and Al-Anon groups. Each of these groups is part of something larger — a church is part of a denominational grouping, which is in turn part of a larger, diverse worldwide faith grouping. Everyone in Alcoholics Anonymous works from the Big Book and an AA meeting goes in roughly the same direction wherever it happens. Political activists may be part of a national party. But all of these groups operate first on a local level, and inside their local groups, they all have their own internal politics that are unique to their regional group. This, of course, is the logic behind the Consilium in **Mage: The Awakening.** Mages are people, more than any of the other supernatural character types in the World of Darkness, and while they're part of these vast worldwide mystical orders, they do what people do and get embroiled in local politics. On the one hand, they're still working at a local level, just like they are in Tier One, but on the other hand, they're part of something bigger. While their actions affect a small sub-sector of the population — namely the people who can do or see magic — their actions do have repercussions on a larger scale than before, and may have repercussions on the lives of people they have never met, people who might not even have been born yet.

This is pretty much the default level on which **Mage: The Awakening** bases itself, and most of the supplemental material in print assumes that characters are part of a local Consilium, in which the orders of the Pentacle have representation, and in which a healthy number of rivalries and conflicts exist, no matter who the outside opposition might be.

We've Got your Back

The advantage of playing a game set in a Consilium is that a cabal of mages has back-up. The orders might have varying degrees of influence in these incestuous little societies, but they do *have* influence. It means that a group of mages can expect to find friends in unexpected places. The characters have mentors within the established hierarchy of the Consilium. They have support.

And with support comes the ability to take on more organized opposition. The characters have access to rotes, and they have access to a certain amount of knowledge.

The cabal know that spirits, vampires, werewolves, fairies, and other, rarer beings exist out there, and might even have to deal with them. Likewise, the characters probably know a little of the eschatology of the setting: the Seers of the Throne are opposed to us, and worship the Exarchs, who are the Lords of the Aeon; the Pentacle orders are terribly ancient; grudges between the two factions run deep. But the theoretical nature of things isn't really an issue here. The characters' knowledge of history should be limited to a practical level. The history that matters is the history that has a direct impact on the present. The recent history of the Consilium informs its current status.

The Enemy Within

As political heavyweight Henry Kissinger once put it when asked if academia had prepared him for politics, "academic fights are so brutal because the stakes are so low." This is a classic example of the way the little subsocieties we create have of getting really heavily invested in these small conflicts that to outsiders seem pointless or ridiculously esoteric. The passion members of these groups put into this stuff is more or less inversely proportional to its significance. Now imagine if the ridiculously pedantic internecine squabbles within one of these little interest groups really *were* significant? What if it really *did* make a difference in the community that houses it?

That's the fantasy that informs **Mage.** These politics matter. The stakes are not low, but the passions are still high.

And the arguments are over magic. They're about monsters and spirits. They're about rival magical cabals and the conspiracy of mages who even now work the civic leaders of our fair city like glove puppets. The question of who becomes the Hierarch's right-hand man could mean the difference between peace in the Consilium and a city overrun by the vengeful blade-handed ghosts of a thousand dead mages. Who gets to speak first at the next council meeting could mean a dozen innocent people having their souls and eyeballs eaten. Politics matter.

Who we Face

Like we said, the characters might know about vampires, spirits and such, and know about the Seers of the Throne. The Seers are mysterious and paranoid, they're still an unknown quantity in a lot of ways, and they probably have the upper hand. But the situation isn't going to change any time soon. The Consilium has enough strength and savvy to stay where it is.

Banishers are unpredictable, but at this level, they're organized too — they get together into cabals, cults, and groups like the Timori (see **Mage: The Awakening,** p. 313). It takes more than the defeat of one lone hunter to get rid of them. Both the Banishers and the Seers exist

in an uneasy equilibrium with the Consilium. They're a danger, but it's really going to take a catalyst to make things change. The catalyst, of course, is your troupe's cabal.

Character Creation

It's the default tier, so characters at Tier Two use the creation rules presented in the **Mage** rulebook. The Merits work in the same way, and a character can join any Legacy she pleases (subject to Storyteller approval, as usual).

Tier Three: Order

But a Consilium is still part of a worldwide, ancient order. Mages who take part in their politics are still members of conspiracies that have lasted 10 or 15 millennia.

At Tier Three, mages find that their actions, for whatever reason, have repercussions on a worldwide scale. They're people of destiny, people whose advent heralds a new, unstable world. They are the leaders of the new order. Everything they do alters the world.

The Top is Way Below You

Tier Three is where adventures that change the world happen. The characters are special. All eyes are on them. This is the tier where heroes leap from massive waterfalls, swing on ropes from magical zeppelins, run hell-for-leather from exploding buildings and engage in desperate gunfights atop speeding freight trains, in the rain.

But it's also the tier of revelation. A mage holds the skull of Saint John the Divine in her hands and hears it sing the Last Revelation. Another converses with the King of All Snails and understands, just for a moment, the secret of all biological evolution from the beginning to the end of time. Their cabal-mate reaches the Vantage Point, from where all views, literal and figurative converge.

Magic at this level is secret, and yet epic and grandiose. A pyramid appears over Paris, visible only to the Awakened, and the gods of Egypt, returned from the spirit-stars after three thousand years, hold court to mages who can reach them and brave the Elemental Question. In the lowest depths of Aghartha, the mages learn the secret of the Vril-Ya and what it means for the future.

And then there's Atlantis.

Hung up on History

Obviously, Atlantis is just a name for something else — the ur-civilization of the Awakened existed long before Plato invented the name, but since its actual name is not pronounceable in any Sleeper language, Atlantis will do.

It's where the orders came from. Their forms and grimoires pay lip service to it. But does it matter?

It does, but only as much as the history of the place impinges directly on the present. The characters — particularly those who have the Dream Merit — might have visions of Atlantean wizard-kings or grim Rmoahal warriors, which impart vital if metaphorical information.

Ambitious Storytellers might consider playing out whole stories set in shared dream-visions of the ancient past, as immeasurably ancient analogues of the characters live out a parallel story, or maybe even run two stories in alternating sessions, one in the present, one in the past, where both groups come to the same place and the same solution to a seemingly insoluble problem.

That history can also come into the present through artifacts and remains left behind by the ancients. History can be a great McGuffin — witness the desperate race to beat a madman to the final resting place of the last of the *Vimanas*, the engines of unmatchable destruction once ridden by the god-heroes of the *Mahabharat*. Will our heroes destroy it before the Bleak Minister of Judgment revives it and incinerates New Delhi?

It can also be an end in itself. Our cabal stands and faces the Annihilating Hand of Shiva and his Five Brothers at the gates to a ruined temple that has waited for them and them alone for 19,000 years. If they can get past, they can find the truth about their Paleolithic ancestors, and the key to becoming gods. A whole chronicle could be centered on what amounts to tomb-raiding, except that the real treasure is knowledge of the past, knowledge that illuminates the present and creates the future. Books of magic and artifacts of power are all very well, but the real prize comes in illumination, the spiritual prize that comes from unlocking the key to the past. It might express itself as a Legacy or Arcane Experience, but it could also be a vital piece to a manifesto that could Awaken the whole of the human race, or cast a bridge across the Abyss, or lead to the secret names and dwelling places of the Exarchs themselves. It could lead to the end of all things, the *real* Second Coming, the end of this world and the dawn of the next, for good or ill.

This Isn't Politics, This is War

The local squabbles of the Consilium don't really make a whole lot of difference once you get to Tier Three. The orders now seem from this level a little more consistent in their doctrine. Sure, disagreements exist within the orders, but the disagreements are less to do with individual beefs and more to do with the philosophies espoused by different factions. And the difference between the orders themselves is more important still. Opponents represent their orders much more clearly at this level, and while their agendas are still personal, they are leading their factions. The characters

may be above slavish adherence to the ideology of their orders (and in fact the cabal's membership may come from several different orders), but their rivals present the face of the Pentacle — so that rival cabal that keeps racing the characters to each of the Seven Sites of Final Illumination might all have names, but they're also all Guardians of the Veil — or the Seers of the Throne.

The servants of the Exarchs come at the characters in vast numbers, subtle and unsubtle, but they're just as occulted. It's true for the other tiers, but should be especially true here: if the Seers are the bad guys, they should come back, the same few mages plaguing the protagonists of the chronicle for story after story until a reckoning comes.

Character Creation

Characters on Tier Three live faster, brighter, more *awesome* lives than other characters. You might want to allow for that in character creation by granting players more experience points to spend on their characters (as per the sidebar "Trial By Fire," **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 67).

Alternatively, if you want characters who are not significantly more experienced than anyone else but marked by magic, you might allow a character to begin with two or three dots in Gnosis and more dots in her Arcana (for example, you could allow nine or ten dots, spread across no more than four Arcana, with no more than three dots in any one Arcanum).

You might even allow characters to begin with three dots in Gnosis and choose a Legacy at character creation. It means that characters get that first Attainment for free, and with it a magical effect free from Paradox, and free Mana from oblations. Characters with Legacies have different priorities. Many Legacies have built-in concerns and story hooks. They drive stories towards mystic knowledge and magical conflict, which is what you want, really.

Whatever happens, characters should choose Merits suited for mystical illumination — Familiar, Library, Dream, Status and so on — and should, as opposed to Tier One, prefer these to more mundane Merits such as Allies and Contacts.

Destined for Great Things

Whether or not you choose to allow characters any extra experience points or magic dots, one thing that all characters on Tier Three should be allowed is a free extra dot in the Destiny Merit. Players can choose to spend some of their characters' seven regular Merit dots to make the Merit more potent, but everyone gets that one little bit of Destiny for free, and gets to flesh it out, if the troupe think it's appropriate, as we said.

Those Destiny dice should come in useful, and players are encouraged to make their characters' destinies colorful and dark at the same time.

Endgames

Characters with Destinies should have some sort of climactic send-off. Don't be afraid to be apocalyptic in this sort of chronicle, and don't be afraid to offer pre-planned fates. All Tier Three characters should have some sort of higher destiny (expressed using the Merit — see below). If the Storyteller and the players agree that it's a good idea, allow each player to write down a Final Triumph and a Heroic Death, expressed in the vaguest terms attached to his character's Destiny and Bane.

Once, in the last session of the chronicle, the player can declare either a Final Triumph or a Heroic Death. If the player can describe how the appearance of the Bane might allow for his Final Triumph or his Heroic Death, he can roll the character's whole pool of Destiny Dice (equal to the Destiny Merit times two). If the dice come up a success, the player can choose how his character will die or triumph. The player gets to narrate the outcome, which can include the death of one Storyteller character. That stands, regardless of other dice rolls.

The Storyteller should make the characters' Banes come up in the chronicle as often as possible, and should tailor the chronicle to suit the characters' Destinies and Banes. It doesn't make sense for Destiny to show up at all unless it's going to play a critical role in the story.

For example, here's Simon May's Destiny:

Destiny • • •
- **Bane:** Seven black roses.
- **Final Triumph:** The planting of a new branch.
- **Heroic Death:** Impaled on the eternal briar.

The Seers who have hounded him and his friends are seven in number, and each has tattooed upon his or her left hand a black rose. This has caused Simon some difficulty, but now Simon's cabal stands at the root of the World-Tree in the Last Temple of Poseidonis, and the vengeful ghosts of the Seven Black Roses' countless victims come to their aid. Simon's player rolls six dice for Simon's Destiny and, rolling a success, describes that the Seers' attempts to sever the roots of the World Tree fail — the ghosts hold the Seers off, allowing him time to take a cutting from the World-Tree and make his escape. He will plant the branch later in a place where the Seven Black Roses will never find it. Simon could have chosen to defeat one of the Black Roses once and for all, but he doesn't find a reason to do so.

Meanwhile, in the same session, Simon's cabal-mate Lucy Sulphate's Destiny looks like this:

Destiny • •
- **Bane:** The Heart.
- **Final Triumph:** Presiding over the Flying Party.
- **Heroic Death:** Dancing at Armageddon.

One of the Black Roses, Rebecca, is Lucy's own nemesis, because Lucy and Rebecca were lovers for a time,

without realizing they were sworn enemies. Lucy, face to face with her nemesis-beloved, rolls her four dice and also gets a success. Lucy's player decides that Lucy's story is over. Rebecca and Lucy embrace, and kiss, and as they share the kiss, Lucy feels the knife enter her heart, stabbed by the tearful Seer, who whispers how sorry she is. Inspired into one last act by the terrible howling song music of the ghosts, Lucy holds Rebecca tight and begins to dance. Rebecca screams, trapped in Lucy's dying embrace, as the two of them pirouette off the edge of the mountain into the Abyss itself.

A Question of Scope

The difference between the three tiers isn't really about levels of power. It's more about scope and scale. The same plot devices, creatures, and enemies can appear in all three tiers, and really the consequences aren't so different. Death, humiliation, failure, and abuse of power remain a threat no matter what the tier.

Let's demonstrate this. For your consideration: one blatantly swiped plot device (the best plots are often stolen). A movie, an art movie, that is so inexplicably entertaining that Sleepers who see it can do nothing else but watch it over and over until they die in a state of bliss (this is one of the main plot points in David Foster Wallace's novel *Infinite Jest*). The film-maker killed himself in an unusual and extremely gory fashion shortly after completing the movie, and although he never managed to get the film into distribution, a master copy exists and a few DVD copies, meaning that a few people have seen it and paid the price. Let's say for the sake of the game that the film doesn't have a lethal effect on the Awakened (but it does contain within its running time a secret, some kind of enlightenment). And let's say the Seers of the Throne know about the movie and are looking for it. Or some Banishers are trying to destroy it and kill everyone who had anything to do with the film. Maybe a mage whom the cabal trusts has plans for the film that aren't all that savory.

At Tier One, the characters sort of fall into the plot. Perhaps one of the characters is the child of the deceased movie maker, so she knows that dad was working on something just before he died, but doesn't know what it was. Or maybe another character actually starred in it and Awakened while making the film, so it turns out that somehow, in some oblique way no one really understands, the Awakening experience was captured in the movie, and so the lethally entertaining part of the film is really *his* fault. And maybe the reason the film-maker made the film, that his family and friends haven't actually seen, was to reach out and communicate with a character whom he really loved, but couldn't ever connect with. Either way, the film-maker died, and so the characters who knew him have to deal with the fall-out of his death. The grief of the rest of the family. The carrying out of his truly bizarre last wishes. But at the same time, the Seers of the Throne are looking for the master copy because they want to use it, and so they're drawing closer to the characters that are, whether they like it or not, involved. And why does the cabal's teacher seem so interested in their private lives all of a sudden? The Seers are journalists, and cops, and teachers. They have a copy, and they want the original master, so they can make high-quality copies of their own (and stop more copies from being made). Will Sleeper loved ones see the film and get entertained to death? Will the characters discover the truth? And who's handling the *hors d'oeurves* at the funeral party?

At Tier Two, it's not

nearly so personal. A Sleeper personage — the mayor, maybe, or the chancellor of the local university — sees the film. And then his wife sees it. And then the housekeeper sees it. And then two cops who go into the house to find out what's wrong see it… until about nine people are lost to the movie's lethal charms, before some bright spark cuts the power to the house. The mages at the Consilium — maybe even the characters themselves — catch the thing happening, and now have to figure out what to do. There's something Supernal about the movie, that's obvious. The Hierarch sends the cabal to check it out. The characters, investigating the origins of the movie, have a run-in with the Seers, but at the same time they're dealing with other rivals, factions in the Consilium who want the movie for themselves. Someone is trying to kill everyone associated with the movie. Maybe it turns out that the local Mysterium high-up already has a copy of his own and wants to use it. Or the Silver Ladder guy is looking for a way to tweak the film to see if it can make people Awaken. Maybe the local changeling Court wants it. Whom can the cabal trust? Where can they take the master of the film, even if they can find it? And what about the innocent family of the film-maker?

At Tier Three, it's not personal at all. A whole cinema full of people — they came in expecting to see *Star Trek* — goes out smiling, and it's already happening across the country, maybe across the world. Who's swapping the movie in theaters? Who's slipping copies of it into cases that should contain copies of *Watchmen*? Where's the source? Can the characters stop this happening? A chase begins through the shadow society of the Awakened. Several terrible schemes are laid bare. A whole faction within one of the Pentacle orders wants to use the movie as a tool for exposing untold millions of people to the Supernal and forcing mass Awakenings. A faction of Seers want to use it as a tool of absolute control over the minds of every Sleeper in the country, and possibly the world. And maybe, hidden in the frames of the dead film-maker's final and greatest work, lies the secret to transforming the future of human consciousness.

Moving on Up (and Down)

There's no rule that says once you've picked a tier, you have to stick with it. A cabal of mages at Tier One wins through a whole bundle of bizarre adventures. Relationships change and shift. One night they're suddenly standing in the middle of the Consilium, and the Hierarch is asking them to join, and they're part of mage society whether they want to be or not.

They shake things up and get things moving — they're players' characters and it's their story, after all — and after a while, they're not only settled into to this new world, but changing it.

And in changing it, the conflicts get bigger. Travels to the spirit Realms become necessary. They become embroiled in battles over who gets to control ancient ruins and their terrible magical contents. Other supernatural beings see them as terrible enemies, or the subject of grudging respect. The orders' ancient secrets become the very source of conflict as the all-too-human scruples of their fellows give way again and again to the twin lures of power and knowledge.

It's easier to move up through the tiers than down, but downward movement isn't impossible, and it's perfectly acceptable to create a story on one tier and the next story on another. A cabal might be the protagonists of a story where they find the Eternal Mind-Loom of Helio Arcanaphus and reap its secrets, beginning the process that leads to the next stage of human spiritual evolution. And then, in the next story, they're in the middle of a sordid tale of adultery and theft that threatens to tear apart the magical society of their fair city. Or they're called home when one of the cabal's Sleeper relatives suddenly turns out to be terminally ill, and they have to deal with their friend's family fall-out (and the shadows that lurk in the alleys around their old home). Even Harry Potter, world-mover that he is, has to spend summer getting picked on by his appalling cousin Dudley. Just because our cabal are transforming the future and past of the human race and driving back the unholy swarms of the Abyss, it doesn't mean they can't go back to their roots.

Too Much Information

Mages can learn anything, so plan accordingly. Have a look over the Practices available in the first dot of the Arcana. The most basic types of magic are Unveiling and Knowing (also Compelling, but that's not immediately relevant here). All 10 of the Arcana allow Mage Sight, meaning that all them allow for scrutiny of magic resonance based on a particular phenomenon. Beyond that, a player can make a case for perceiving (that is, Unveiling) or just realizing (Knowing) anything within that Arcanum's purview.

Put into more concrete terms, let's take the example character presented on pp. 71–75 of **Mage: The Awakening**. Maculda starts the chronicle with Life 2, Space 2, and Spirit 2. That means, as a starting character, Maculda can analyze life, identifying species of animals and plants at a glance. She can also determine the health of nearby living creatures, and, as a bonus, she can tell if a creature is *not* alive, meaning she can detect vampires and other undead creatures. She can instantly measure the distance between two points, with pinpoint accuracy (which means she can analyze changes between such distances,

if she checks at the right times). She can analyze the sympathetic connections between people, objects, and places, meaning that she can tell by looking around a bar how well any given patrons know each other. She can speak with spirits, but she can also analyze spiritual residue. If a spirit has crossed the Gauntlet recently — indeed, if the Gauntlet has changed in strength for any reason — she is able to determine it.

All of that, of course, is just based on the spells listed in the **Mage** book. In the hands of an imaginative player, Knowing and Unveiling spells can reveal a surreal amount of information. As characters grow in power, their abilities to tap into other fonts of information likewise increase. Consider, for instance, what happens when a Mastigos character becomes an Adept of both Mind and Space. If he knows a name or has a description, he can open a scrying window to, say, an IT professional of a given corporation and then use Telepathic Control to create himself a window into the corporation's accounts or files. This isn't *easy* to do, of course, but it's by no means beyond a mage's ability. And that doesn't even take into consideration what a mage with Time 2 can accomplish with Postcognition.

Traditionally, roleplaying games involve a slow reveal of information — characters find a "hook" to get them into an adventure, they delve into the backstory, and they slowly learn what's going on. Often, though, this information comes as other characters can provide it, or at least, provide someplace to look (hoary tomes, other characters, sites to investigate, and so on). This set-up requires that the characters be kept in the dark, up to a point. Keeping mages in the dark, though, is an exercise in futility and, worse, player frustration.

Our suggestion, then, is this: don't try to keep them in the dark. Let them learn everything.

Facts, Not Truths

Using magic and creative application thereof, characters can learn a great deal of data. But no "learn the whole plot" spell exists (it would probably involve Fate, if it did). Characters can learn the facts, but putting them together is up to the players. This requires a few things of you as the Storyteller, though.

Know What's to Know

It seems basic advice — know what already happened in your story. Decide on what characters took what actions, what steps they took to cover their tracks (if any), and what kinds of spells or Arcana might be best suited to uncover it. Take notes to whatever degree you feel necessary; some Storytellers can make details like this up on the fly and keep things consistent, whereas some

of us need to color-code our story ideas so that we can find characters names and other such important details at a moment's notice.

Take two deeper considerations into account, though: what supporting characters know; and *why* events are happening the way they are.

Supporting characters range from passersby to other mages to enemies to the spouses of the troupe's characters. Any character that you've decided is going to play a major role in the story, or knows something of import, should get at least a few moments' consideration, if not her own character sheet. But players often seem to go searching for people that you thought would be mentioned only as an afterthought. The characters are investigating a murder that bears a similarity to one that happened five years ago? Well, is the investigating officer of that older killing still on the force? How about any of the CSIs, or the medical examiner who did the autopsy? How about the victim's family or friends? If the characters were Sleepers, hunting down these characters would be difficult, time-consuming, and probably not all that fruitful, but with two dots of Space and a photograph, a mage can find almost anyone. With two dots of Mind, he can make the subject feel chatty and at ease. With a dot of Life, he can monitor a subject's heart rate (which a player might argue would make for a decent lie detector, coupled with a Subterfuge roll). Fate might allow the character to know whether a given statement is true or not (but note that such a spell wouldn't necessarily allow a character to detect a deliberate lie, just whether a statement is objectively true — that's an important distinction!).

Along with deciding what supporting characters know, you should decide what they're willing to tell the cabal. This requires understanding their motivations (which we'll discuss in more depth presently), but also paying attention to what the characters ask. If the characters walk into a situation with a set of assumptions and base their questions on those assumptions, they stand to miss information. There's a fine line, of course, between giving the players information based on their characters' questions and being deliberately obtuse, but you want the players to pay attention to *how* supporting characters answer questions. A turn of phrase can tip the characters off that something isn't right, or that they need to change their line of inquiry.

For instance, if the cabal is investigating the disappearance of the Consilium's Herald, and they go to question the mage's Sleeper brother, they are probably careful to avoid using his Shadow Name. If one of the characters slips up, though, and refers to the Herald by his pseudonym, the cabal might learn something important if the Sleeper doesn't react (specifically, that he understands that this

name refers to his brother and doesn't think it odd, and therefore he might be aware of the Herald's Awakened life to some degree). You might consider allowing the players to roll Wits + Subterfuge to notice this, or you could rely on the players' own powers of observation. If one of the characters has used Mind magic to increase his Wits rating, though, it's probably fair to allow the roll — players don't have the same capabilities as their characters, after all. But the whole exchange requires you to put some thought into what the Sleeper knows, what he knows about the characters, and what he feels comfortable telling them. This kind of bias should inform everything that your Storyteller characters do, and making these kinds of decisions stops such characters from appearing one-dimensional and similar.

More important even than this, though, is *why* events happened the way they did. Any Storytelling section in any World of Darkness book will tell you to consider the motivations of Storyteller characters, both for the purposes of story cohesion and portrayal of said characters. In **Mage**, however, we add another layer: motivation can change the qualities of resonance (see p. 278 of **Mage: The Awakening**) on an object, person, or place. If the cabal starts scrutinizing the site of their investigation, learning the resonance qualities won't tell them the whole story, but it might give them a sense of why things are happening the way they are. And if they understand their targets' (or enemies') motives, then by opposing them they are making a deliberate choice. In a **Mage** story, anything that leads the characters to making their own moral and ethical decisions, especially where magic is concerned, is very much in-theme.

Don't Tell Them What They Don't Know

The flipside of the above, of course, is to avoid telling the players what the characters have no way to know (or don't think to find out). Going back to the example of the missing Herald and his Sleeper brother, the characters might assume that the Herald was involving his brother in his Awakened activities (correct), but never think to check what the ramifications of that might be if the local Guardians of the Veil discovered it. Of course, if the cabal includes a Guardian, or if the characters are well-versed in Consilium legalities, it's safe to assume that the characters would know that mages who reveal the existence of the Awakened to Sleepers are subject to punitive action. But if the cabal is composed of young mages, or mages who have recently arrived from other Consilii, or mages who believe that Sleepers *should* know about magic, it might never occur to them that this sort of revelation (especially to a family member) might have earned the Herald a visit from the Visus Draconis.

It can be tempting, especially when the players seem poised to hare off down the wrong path, to have a Storyteller character swoop in and set them right again. Sometimes that's appropriate, but often it's annoying to the players because it makes them feel like they're being directed. Before doing that, ask yourself two questions:

First, *does it really matter?* If the characters follow their current line of thought, are they going to miss out on the story entirely? Or are they just going to approach it from an angle you hadn't considered? Do you *need* them to know the information that they're presently missing, or will they get to the next plot point without it? You can usually arrange things so that they learn what they need to know without resorting to information dumps or heavy-handed Storyteller characters activity, which brings us to the next question.

How else might they learn what they need to know? A character with a few dots in Consilium Status probably knows the Consilium's membership fairly well. A mage with dots in Politics keeps abreast of the city's government. A character skilled in Streetwise might not know all of the local drug hotspots, but she can probably make an educated guess. If the characters need to know something and you feel they *should* know it before the story progresses, have someone make a roll. If it's crucial, don't bother with the roll, just pick the character who would most likely know it and inform the player about what her character "just realized."

Of course, the best method of getting more information to the players is to let them look for it. As such, before you go asking the players to roll dice or having an old Mentor call them up, it's probably best to ask what they are going to do next. Continuing the example of the loose-lipped Herald, the characters might not know that talking to Sleepers about magic is *verboten*, but if the players say that they're going to visit a Mysterium record-keeper contact, that presents the Storyteller with a golden opportunity to reveal that piece of information. Of course, that does mean that when the characters realize that the Herald might have run afoul of the Guardians of the Veil, they aren't the only ones who do so — does the Mysterium character have any motivation to pursue the matter, or will he leave it to the players' characters? The answer to this question might change the story, and as such, it's one the Storyteller should consider.

Keep Track of What They've Learned

You don't have to write down every little piece of information that the characters pick up, but if you've written out notes about your story ahead of time, it might be of benefit to highlight or check off the information and plot points that the characters have seen. Likewise, encourage players to take notes — perhaps it's worth extra experience points, in fact. The more the players take ownership of the story,

making the quest for the truth their own, the easier your job becomes. They should be making assumptions (even false ones), making judgments about characters (even shortsightedly), and planning ahead based on incomplete information — that means the players are seeing the story through the eyes of their characters. The characters can't be omniscient, even if they *are* mages.

The other reason to keep a close watch on what the characters have already learned is that you can cheat. Anything that hasn't been established in play is still fluid, and you can and should change motives and events as much as you'd like *if doing so would make a better story*. Note that "better story" refers to interesting conflict, dramatic resolutions, and highlighting the themes of **Mage** in general and your chronicle in particular. Don't go changing things around just because you think the players are blowing through the story too easily. If they get to a story's conclusion because they interpreted all the clues correctly and came out on top, great! Wrap up the story a session early, take what you've learned about how this troupe (and cabal) operates, and apply that wisdom to the next story in the chronicle. Don't try to stretch things out just for the sake of it; you run the risk of boring the players.

Magic Can Be Wrong

As versatile and powerful an information-gathering tool as magic is, it's by no means infallible. One of the running points of discussion about the Awakened is that they don't know everything, they just think they do. There's some truth to that, and it makes sense if you consider how magic works. Awakened magic deals with 10 very broad purviews, and within those purviews (the Arcana), mages can learn and manipulate much of the Fallen World. But some phenomena fall outside of the 10 Arcana (just as an example, a gateway leading into the Hedge, as described in **Changeling: The Lost**), and when Awakened magic encounters such a phenomenon, one of two things happens. Either it misidentifies the phenomenon, or it doesn't identify it at all.

One way to express this is for Knowing spells to fail, while Unveiling spells still provide some information. Knowing spells work by providing knowledge or realization without sensation. The Sense Consciousness spell, for instance, tells a mage when a thinking mind enters the proximity of the spell. Based on the Practice, that realization takes the form of simple awareness, not a sound, sight, or scent (magical style and personal interpretation might play into this, but *as written*, this is how Knowing spells function). Therefore, when the Supernal Realms just don't recognize a given event, person, or place, the spell might just fail, since magic is unable to classify what the mage is seeing.

Unveiling spells, though, work more by altering a mage's perception. Since the *mage* is the target of the spell, she still views the subject through whatever lens magic places over her senses. This doesn't mean that she identifies the phenomenon correctly, of course — it's actually more likely that she'll make an erroneous assumption. But this reinforces the point: magic can be wrong, and information gained through magic is only as accurate as its interpreter.

Consider the example above, a gateway into the Hedge (if you don't have **Changeling: The Lost**, the Hedge is a barrier between the Fallen World and Faerie, where the mysterious Others dwell, and it is a place outside of the purview of the Supernal Realms). A mage sees someone sketch a crude door on a wall and then dash through it. It remains open for a few moments, and the mage is intelligent enough not to go jumping through strange portals. She does take the time to cast a few spells to try and identify this oddity. For the purposes of this example, let's assume she has dots in Space, Time, and Fate.

Mage Sight identifies the gateway as supernatural, of course, and Spatial Awareness marks it as some kind of portal (though not one created via Space magic). Casting Finder on the person who drew the door works until he enters it, but once he's in the Hedge, the spell fails. Temporal Eddies probably reveals some distortion in time (since time is different in the Hedge), but nothing constant. The Sybil's Sight probably reveals heavy destiny surrounding the portal, but this has more to do with the nature of the Hedge than with the mage's destiny to enter it. A Knowing spell like Interconnections (to determine whether any threads exist between the mage and the gateway) probably fails outright.

Magic Can be Manipulated

Powerful mages can alter their auras, disguise an area's resonance, and even change their spells so they appear to come from different Practices or Arcana. A mage with Time 2 can mask an area from Postcognition, while a mage with Space 2 can create a Ward to keep other scryers from peeking in. Any Arcanum could be used this way — Death can alter the circumstances of a person's demise, Life can change the flora or fauna of an area, and Matter might destroy forensic evidence. Note, though, that if a mage detects that any manipulation has taken place, she is likely to set her mystical powers to work at circumventing that manipulation.

Put another way, if a mage casts Shield of Chronos to mask himself from other Awakened using Postcognition to see what he did, all another mage has to do is exceed his Potency. With an extended action, a mage can probably manage it, and even if she can't, the Duration of Shield of Chronos isn't Lasting, but Prolonged. That means that the inquisitive mage can wait it out (unless the mage doing the hiding took the time and had the expertise to increase

the Duration to Indefinite — as a side note, while you don't need to sit around rolling dice for your Storyteller characters' "off-screen" actions, it's sometimes necessary to assign Potencies and Durations to existing spells, so that the players' characters can break through them).

If, however, the mage wove a Hallucination into the Shield of Chronos, it's entirely possible that a mage trying to break through the Shield sees a vision that the first mage planted specifically for an investigator to find. Why? To buy some time? To set investigators on a wild goose chase — or after his own agenda? Whatever the reason, it should move the story along, not be a simple roadblock for the characters.

Make the Players Interpret (But Help Them If They Need It)

By presenting facts to the players, rather than truths, you force them to draw their own conclusions about what's going on in the story. That means, among other things, they can be wrong. That might not sound like a great idea, since if they go off after red herrings, it might bog down the story. But the other extreme is just as bad — the players do nothing but roll some dice and wait for the Storyteller to tell them what's happening. In that scenario, the players really don't have much to do except decide what spells their characters need to cast to get the right information.

Like everything else related to Storytelling, this is a question of balance. You need to figure out how your players approach problems, what type of information they latch onto as important, and how well they interpret the data that their characters' spells reveal. If they have trouble parsing too many details, trim out anything extraneous. If they take notes and try to look for the salient points, don't be afraid to throw in some information that might be interesting, but isn't immediately relevant.

Three final suggestions for presenting information to **Mage** players:

• **Know the Characters:** Know what the characters are capable of doing, and not just magically. Merits like Eidetic Memory mean that both you and the player should take extra care to remember what information that character learns, since she can call it up at a moment's notice. Skills like Academics imply that the character is used to dealing with large amounts of information, and thus might be worth a bonus on certain rolls.

• **Avoid Parroting:** If one character learns something away from the others, pull the player out of the room and give him the information in private. That way, the player can't just look at the other players and say, "What he said." The player is forced to remember what you said, and will inadvertently provide his own interpretation of the information. That allows you to see what the *player* thought was important, which, in turn, allows you to tailor future investigation scenes accordingly. It also fosters in-character discussion, which makes for good roleplaying.

• **Don't Say No:** Players will come up with odd uses for magic, and some of them might seem to stretch the limits of the Arcana. If it seems to be within the purview of a given Practice, though, it's always better to say "yes" than "no." If you make a ruling, stick with it — you might decide a spell to read the last thoughts of a dead person requires Mind 4 and Death 2. If the player later buys his character's Mind rating up to 4 so he can use the spell, be prepared to let it work.

Mages have access to a great deal of information, and it can be daunting for the Storyteller trying to run a game about the mysteries of the World of Darkness. But the fun of a good mystery is discovering all of the secrets, including the motives behind the truth, and the players can't discover that with a few good dice rolls. They need to figure those motives and truths out for themselves, and for that, they need all the information their magic can provide.

Powerful Characters

Awakening to magic is only the beginning. Occult conspiracies court newly Awakened mages, who either join one or strike out on their own. A mage's mind and soul expand so that she can call down the energies of the Supernal Realms with greater power and finesse. The challenges and rewards that satisfy a newly Awakened mage are nothing to a mage with years of survival in the World of Darkness under her belt.

As the characters grow in power and influence within the setting, the story needs to grow and change as well. Like any transition, the change from low-powered chronicle to high-powered chronicle is fraught with difficulties. Some chronicles fail to make the transition and simply peter off as the Storyteller runs out of ideas or the players lose interest. In order to keep a chronicle engaging for the players of powerful characters, the Storyteller needs to learn how to tell a new kind of story. She also needs to be familiar with the way high powered magic changes the shape of the game, mechanically, and influences the options at her players' disposal.

The Theory of High Powered Storytelling

Consider that every plot is, essentially, a question. In low and medium-powered chronicles, where the characters have a real chance of failure, the question is usually "can we?" As in, "can we uncover corruption within the Consilium" or "can we survive the Banisher attack" or "can we beat the oppressive Hierarch at her own game?"

As the power level rises, the stakes become higher, but the character of the question remains the same: "can we create the most powerful weapon the Pentacle has ever seen" or "can we reach the Temple of the Blue-White Star before the Scelestus intent on using its secrets to destroy the world" or "can we discover the demon's true name before it eats the dreams of Toronto?" For a while, this change is satisfying.

Eventually "can we?" stops being a compelling question, because the answer is obviously "yes." The story might push the characters to their limits, but they will find a way to succeed in the end. While it is fun to put powerful characters through their paces, casting world-shaking spells and fighting suitably epic foes, it eventually gets old. To survive, the chronicle needs to transform; the question it asks needs to change.

The question a high-powered chronicle asks is not "can we?" but "should we?" "Should we unite the Pentacle and attempt to build a new Atlantis" or "should we seek out archmastery and ascension" or "should we use our power to solve the Fallen World's social, economic, and political problems?" Are our goals wise or hubristic? Are we virtuous or selfish? Now that we *can* do anything, what *will* we do?

"Should we" questions will revolutionize your chronicle. Some questions have no right answers, and lead to worlds of moral quandaries, drama, and internal and external conflicts. How will your characters deal with opposition whom they respect — perhaps even like — but disagree with? What will they do when the price of choosing incorrectly is too high?

"Should we" questions also mesh well with the shift in the balance of power that happens as characters become more powerful. Such mages develop responsibilities in the Awakened world. Instead of following the orders of higher-ranking mages, the protagonists give the orders. Instead of reacting to the setting, they help create it. The stakes are much higher when the characters are responsible for the lives of others as well as their own.

Of course, even in a chronicle that becomes focused on questions of right and wrong, it's still fun for the characters to cut loose and get their hands dirty once in a while. Moral quandaries may be more rewarding, but it's still enjoyable for the characters to fight epic battles and throw high level spells around. This brings us to the next section: the practice of keeping powerful characters challenged.

The Practice of Challenging Masters

A chronicle quickly becomes boring if the players don't feel that their characters are being challenged. Overwhelmingly defeating powerful foes with earth-shaking magic is only fun so many times before it becomes routine.

On the other hand, it isn't really that difficult to present even powerful mages with opponents they cannot defeat. No matter how many rotes the characters know, how many dots they have in their various Arcana and relevant Merits, and how powerful their servants and allies are, nothing stops the Storyteller from creating opponents who know more rotes, have more dots in their Arcana, and have more powerful servants and allies. No matter how many successes a player can roll to overcome a Storyteller character's wards and defenses, nothing stops the Storyteller from creating an opponent who can roll more. Unfortunately, this approach is unfulfilling and likely to annoy the players, who have worked hard to earn the resources at their characters' disposals and want to enjoy them.

The trick to challenging powerful mages is to give the players a chance to revel in their characters' power without making victory too easy. To do this, however, the Storyteller needs to understand how powerful magic interacts with the rest of the game.

Mental Challenges

As noted in Too Much Information (above), mages excel at information gathering. This is even truer of experienced mages, who have very large dice pools with which to cast investigative spells, defeat concealing magic, and scrutinize resonance. As written in Too Much Information, this isn't much of a problem, as long as the Storyteller is sure to provide even powerful mages with data to interpret, not answers to their questions. As long as her powers lead to more plot, rather than ending the story right there, a mage's investigative powers are good for the chronicle.

However, in addition to the basic abilities to see the world through the lens of various Knowing and Unveiling spells, scry, and look into the future and the past, a powerful mage has a variety of other, more problematic techniques at his disposal. A powerful mage might create a super-intelligent mind tasked with thinking about the problem for him or summon a spirit or ghost with relevant expertise. The trouble with these spells is that it is harder for the Storyteller to provide data, not information, when the mage can command the universe to tell him what is and isn't so.

In particular, Storytellers should watch out for characters who Master Death, Fate, Mind, Spirit, and Time. High levels of these Arcana have the potential to answer the character's questions for him. With Death and Spirit a mage easily summon and compel servants and spies to uncover information for him. With Mind, a mage can, with some effort, create a super-intelligent mind, feed it all the information she has about a problem, and task it with discerning a solution. With Mastery of Fate, a mage can give himself a powerful blessing and then think hard about a topic (that is, roll Intelligence + an appropriate Skill). A Master of Time can even edit his own history — redistributing his character's dots — so that he has the expertise he seeks. The player is then quite justified in requesting a dice roll to see if her character's new knowledge includes the information she needs. A character who can do more than one of these things — alter his traits and then bless himself, for example — is even more of a headache.

When a mage can consult his magic mirror or crystal ball or talking skull and have it explain the plot to him instead of investigating the matter himself it is sure to suck a lot of the drama and tension out of **Mage: The Awakening**. Investigation plots are no fun when the definitive answer is just a spell away.

The best solution to this problem is for the Storyteller to be at her cryptic best. Although the Storyteller cannot help but allow these tactics to answer the mage's questions, she can make sure they do so in ways that are useful but not too useful, and answer some questions while raising others. A created mind might be supremely intelligent, but it might also inherit the mage's own prejudices. A ghost or spirit's alien perspective might muddle its understanding of what it sees or prevent it from making an effective report. Even supreme information gathering magic is magic, and therefore mysterious, evocative, and never simple.

Physical Challenges

Most starting **Mage** characters must respect physical threats and obstacles. Mages are mortal. Without the use of Arcana, they can't boost their Attributes by transforming into a stronger shape or flooding their limbs with stolen blood. Although mages do have the ability to heal themselves with Mana, this ability isn't meant to represent the fact that mages are all but immune to mundane injury. Indeed, this "healing" ability is a stopgap, a way for mages to stave off death long enough to get help.

Of the 10 Arcana available to the Wise, half of them are subtle, related to matters of the mind and soul. The other half, the gross, physical Arcana, are narrower in application. The Matter Arcanum, for example, is best used to analyze and transform material objects, but its ability to deal with living things is limited. Similarly, Time has a wide variety of uses, but an Initiate or Apprentice of the Arcanum will be hard pressed to use it to bypass a physical barrier. Depending on a cabal's mix of Arcana and Skills, a locked door, a well-armed opponent, or a long trek through the wilderness can be a serious challenge.

When a mage masters one or more Arcana, however, this limitation fades with regards to physical challenges and disappears with regards to combat. The Practices of Patterning and Unraveling, Making and Unmaking — available at four and five dots of Arcana — render violence practically moot. With Death, Forces, Life, Mind, and Prime at these levels, a mage can easily do truly atrocious things to her targets. She can rot, blast, and rend their bodies, tear their souls out, destroy or subvert their minds, and scorch them with the fundamental energies of the universe. High levels of Matter means that a mage is never unarmed — or his enemies are always unarmed — and high levels of Spirit means that a mage is rarely without allies. Space and Time make escaping from combat extremely easy and Fate's ability to grant superlative luck is especially useful in combat.

The trick for presenting challenging combats to powerful mages is numbers, surprise, and magic. Although mages

are capable of doing terrible things to individuals, it is much more difficult for them to use magic on multiple targets simultaneously. Mages are also much more powerful when they have time to prepare: hanging spells cast using the Time Arcana, attacks at a distance cast with the Space Arcana, Mind and Life spells that boost the mage's own abilities, and all manner of Shielding spells that make a mage harder to harm are either useless or at least less useful, if the mage doesn't know an attack is coming. Because magical healing is either inefficient (with Mana) or available only to some mages (with the Life Arcanum), once even a powerful mage is wounded the battle becomes much more serious. Finally, an opponent who is a mage or magical creature with his or its own set of powers and the ability to counteract the mage's powers can give a cabal of Masters a run for their money.

Another significant cap on a character's ability to use magic in combat is the Wisdom degeneration rules. Harming or controlling another with magic is always a sin against Wisdom. Justifications like self defense or a higher purpose only add dice to the roll to resist degeneration (and then only at the Storyteller's discretion). Magic is a sacred thing and using it for combat debases it; a character who relies too much on magic to defend herself in combat is going to suffer for it, no matter how powerful she is.

The Arcana are not broadly useful against other physical challenges. A wilderness journey can still trouble a Master of Matter, for example, but a Master of Life can easily turn himself into something better suited to the trip. A locked door, on the other hand, is insignificant to a Master of Matter or Death, somewhat more difficult for a Master of Life, and a serious hurdle for a Master of Mind.

When it comes to physical obstacles of other sorts, the fun comes from creatively using the Arcana to solve problems, and the trouble with high-powered characters is when their Arcana allow them to sidestep the problem without creativity. To avoid this, the Storyteller should present obstacles that don't fall directly into his characters' Arcana, or do so with limitations. For example, a locked door might be immaterial to a cabal who includes a Master of Death, who can simply cause the door to dissolve. However, if there is some reason why she can't simply dissolve the door — the runes inscribed on it are necessary evidence in some investigation, the door's spirit has been awakened with magic and would be understandably upset, and so on — she will have to think of something else.

Social Challenges

The realm of social interaction remains challenging, even to powerful mages. Fortunately, as written above, most powerful mages occupy a social world of interaction, leadership, and negotiation.

First, many Arcana have nothing to do with overcoming social obstacles. Forces, Matter, Prime, Space, and Time aren't directly relevant in most social situations without creativity on the part of the player. Of the remaining Arcana, only Life and Mind are directly related to interaction. Life can be used to subtly alter a target's mood or improve the mage's appearance and Mind can be used, subtly or blatantly, to change a target's way of thinking or boost a mage's Social Attributes. Death, Fate, and Spirit are useful, but indirectly. Fate can grant the mage good luck — which can improve any roll, social rolls included. Spirit and Death can call up a summoned spirit or ghost to do anything that falls within its power, including influencing the emotions and thoughts of other beings.

Second, blatantly manipulating the minds of others — binding a sentient being to a place or task — is a sin against Wisdom 6. Harming someone with magic, which includes causing her to harm herself, is a sin against Wisdom 4. Unless a mage has degenerated a great deal, forcing other people to act or think her way with magic should give her pause.

Wisdom is kinder to mages who subtly influence others with magic, which is only a sin against Wisdom 8 or 9. Fortunately for the Storyteller, subtle magic leaves room for challenge. Just because a mage has improved his Social Attributes, granted himself good fortune, or gently inclined a Sleeper or a spirit to listen to him doesn't mean he will be absolutely successful. The mage still has room to succeed or fail, which means that social interaction is still potentially a challenge.

The Andrews Family Coven

The Athanasius family has a family tree with deep roots and branches that stretch so far as to block out the sun. Records kept in Rome trace the family back to merchants out of Alexandria; private family records stretch back much further. While much of the traditional family remains in Greece, a branch of them can be found on just about every continent. They're well connected after a fashion, though prefer to keep a low profile so they don't show up in the media the way the Hiltons or the Kennedys might.

When a large branch of the Athanasius family moved to the United States before the turn of the century they had their name changed by the people at Ellis Island like so many immigrants. On paper, they became the Andrews family (the man at the desk had no interest in the Greek spelling). They didn't stay long in New York thanks to their unique talents and connections, choosing instead to move south to a quiet fishing town along the Georgia seaside.

Moderate wealth and privilege aside, what really sets the Athanasius apart is that they're mages. Not to a one, of course, but every generation following along two or three branches, a cabal's worth of mages Awaken just after puberty with the rest of the close relatives all Sleepwalkers.

Upon Awakening, the players' characters find no end of pressure to live up to familial standards. In the mortal world, the Andrews family is a wealthy and powerful outsider in its community and remains aloof and suspect despite the length of time it has been established in Georgia. As a result, the characters find themselves under special scrutiny by the locals for strange or eccentric behavior. The older families in the area whisper about witchcraft and black magic from way back when.

In this chronicle, the players take the roles of this generation's fortunate sons and daughters. They are the children born to be cabal-mates and bred to Awaken. As inheritors of a magical dynasty, the characters have to struggle with forces both inside and out who want to wrest control from them.

Authors Notes — The Andrews Family Cover by Filamena Young

My grandmother is a first generation Italian-American. She is a prime example of the beautiful blending of old world tradition and American sensibility. She still assumes the streets are paved with gold, but figures you have to work hard for the right to mine it.

She also believes in witchcraft. From a very young age, she'd tell me in hushed tones, "you need to be good, because there are a lot of witches in our family." She's told me about crazy Aunt Pinkie, whom I have never met, and taught me how to ward off the *malocchio*, the evil eye. She never disparaged the supposed witches in our family tree. They were just what they were, and we were what we were.

This chronicle was born out of the strange "what if" dreams I had as a little girl. It was less a matter of "what if Nana is right about Pinkie" and more "what if I turned out to be one of the families' *Streghe*." No matter how those daydreams went, however, I never once worried that my family might not accept me. That wasn't a part of my grandmother's mythos. Instead, it was assumed that I would be different but not separate, and I hope that's the spirit the chronicle follows.

Themes and Mood

Filial piety forces the characters to linger in the shadows of their ancestry. They're bred for the Awakening, but the question remains, are they destined for it? Struggling against trying to live up to the standards set before them or rebelling against roles they never agreed to, the characters live a life that only half belongs to them.

Claustrophobia has its place in the Andrews Family Coven chronicle, since these heirs know that family, outsiders, and even the local Consilium watch their every step. Perhaps they take their parents' instructions very seriously and labor over every choice they make. Maybe they simply tread softly or maybe they go out of their way to misstep since it might be the only things in their lives they can control.

No matter how successful the characters become as people and as mages, they never totally escape the ghosts of the past. Their long-reaching ancestors so strongly affected the local community that they have changed it forever. Do the Sleepers watch them from the corners of their eyes because the cabal has some familial debt to pay? If so, the cabal's relatives aren't talking.

Unity and betrayal play their parts. After all, while most mages find their cabal by luck and chance, the Andrews family cabal members know from their Awakening that they do not need to rely on luck. It is, after all, predestined that they have each other. While normal cabals struggle to discover the glue that holds them together and what ties they share, the Andrews Family Coven has the strongest ties of all. They share ties of blood. That said, acts of betrayal within the family were not unknown in centuries past. Brother might turn on brother if one is a particularly bad seed or if life is tumultuous enough.

The Homestead by the Sea

Savannah, Georgia, is a port side city with a rich history, plenty of wealth, and a Consilium as starkly traditional in its practices as imaginable. People still nod to each other when they pass on the street and Saint Patrick's Day on the waterfront is like Mardi Gras for the whole family.

Savannah's well-known schools, including a branch of Georgia Tech, draw in great young minds and feed the club and bar scene just as much as the tourist trade drawn in for Savannah's history and beauty. However, that isn't to say she's a particularly progressive city, and the farther out from the schools and nightlife, the more traditional and reclusive people get.

So on tiny Tybee Island, at the tip of its three miles of oceanside beach lives the Andrews family in their pair of homes on either side of 19th Street, facing the ocean some discreet distance from their closest neighbors.

Scenic, still, and secretive — just the way the Andrews family has always liked it.

Their closest peers, owners of multimillion-dollar homes that have been in their old-money local families for a century, still treat the Andrews as nouveau riche. They are outsiders whose people weren't there for the founding of Savannah, through the yellow fever, and the Civil War. However, money creates its own admiration, and so the Andrews are still on the list for every debutante ball and cotillion that take place on Tybee or in nearby Savannah. Because of this, stories in this chronicle are as likely to take place in the dusty libraries of Andrews family home as the glittering social events of Southern luminaries. The Andrews are still looked at as "people to know" whether the family wants to be looked at or not.

To this generation's cabal of chosen, the houses on 19th Street, one a typical family home housing the direct lineage members of the center Andrews line. The other house is a potent Sanctum that is at the cabal's disposal so long as they tow the family line.

The House on 19th Street (Sanctum Size ●●●, Sanctum Security ●●●●, Hallow ●●●, Library ●●–)

The house's Hallow is located on a wrap-around porch that faces the ocean and seems to feed off the beauty and danger of the waves. These days the family Library is in a bit of disrepair, though with some effort that might be improved. The Sanctum's Security consists partially of locks and help with surveillance from the Andrews house next door, but partially from the fact that the Sanctum is on an island.

In addition, once the characters accept their inheritance, they find that they have friends in high places, money, and other advantages. The Storyteller should give the characters six additional Merit dots to spend on Resources, Contacts, or Status. These Merits benefit the group as a whole, and any of the characters can use (or abuse) them.

What is the Andrews Family Coven?

Ultimately, the Athanasius have been producing Sleepwalkers and mages as far back as civilization can remember. Maybe even back to Atlantis, or so claim some of the more egotistical members of the clan. Still, some lines produce more mages than others, and as of today, only seven lines exist that produce a full cabal every generation. The Andrews is one such line, and has been referring to the Awakened members of the line as the Andrews Family Coven since they first settled in the United States.

While it might seem somewhat limiting to have all the characters in a chronicle from one family and one background, the only real requirements on character creation is that the characters are mages, and are related by blood to the center family. The cabal is not usually comprised entirely of siblings (though it has happened in generations past, and tends to make for a powerful and dangerous cabal). Cousins of illegitimate relations can and occasionally do make up the majority of members. Once, in the 1960s, when the family lost a number of sons to the Vietnam War, there was even an adopted addition to the cabal who later married into the family, though that ultimately resulted in catastrophe. While it might help to have a few characters raised in the houses of Tybee Island, a distant cousin raised anywhere in the world with almost any kind of background could have Awakened and ultimately been called to Tybee.

Because of their wealth and distant connections to the rest of the Athanasius and in order to compete in the local Consilium, many of the Andrews Family Coven gravitate to the Silver Ladder. Still, children are often their own people and any order is possible, especially if cousins from distant backgrounds come to 19th Street. The Paths the members of the cabal walk have no pattern and older family members suggest that the only Watchtowers that call to the children of the family are the ones that generation needs. Path, therefore, like most else, is considered destiny.

The Andrews Vicennial Family Reunion

The ride down Interstate 80 was long and dull and only got quieter and lonelier the closer to the address you came. Behind scrubby seaside pines full of gray tangled Spanish moss, a pair of houses hide from the rest of the world. A few hundred people mill between the houses on either side of 19th Street dressed in the best spring fashion from ladies in hats and sundresses to older gentlemen in white suits. Walking among them, you cannot avoid feeling out of place. Stranger still, while most of the party guests don't give you a second look, some nod with a confident understanding. Despite that, many of these people know you. They've followed your story through letters with your kin since your birth. They've counted on you one day returning, and now, looking up at the large banner that hangs from the second floor balcony of both houses that reads "Welcome Home Distant Kin," it almost feels like a trap.

Whether the Storyteller plans to take the characters through their Awakening and inheritance, or simply leave the details of becoming mages and joining the cabal to the prelude in order to set the scene, she should establish the whens and hows the characters all met for the first time.

The Andrews Vicennial Family Reunion doesn't actually happen every 20 years as the name would imply. Instead, it's on a preordained day calculated many generations back by a cabal member with a particular mastery of the Fate and Time Arcana. Each generation, one such party takes place. It always coincides with the springtime immediately following the Awakening of the last member of the cabal-to-be. The family head, a grandfather or grandmother of the current direct line, is then charged with contacting whatever Awakened descendants can be found in the hopes of coaxing them to join the family with promises of money, power, or just familial duty.

Once the party is started and all the "guests of honor" have arrived, they are given some time to drink and get used to the grounds. Exploration of their new home is welcome, but at eight o'clock sharp they are expected across the street. At that point, they have to sign a lot of paperwork, things to do with inheritance, land ownership and access to the estates money. There's a family lawyer there (related by blood, of course) who rarely explains things in plain English, dismissing questions as a waste of time when there's so much party left to be had.

After that, the characters are the Andrews Family Coven, for better or worse.

Family Secrets and Family Legends

What follows are some story ideas for this chronicle. It's important to note that one of the things that sets the Andrews family apart is that magic is not usually hereditary, and to have a cabals worth or mages consistently is utterly unheard of outside of the Andrews and their founding line.

Adrienne Andrews, Matron

Today, Adrienne is a 75-year-old great-grandmother and the executor of the Andrews' family wealth. While some women her age might be described as heavy or fat, Adrienne is charmingly plump, mostly white haired, and wears a little too much makeup, but not garishly so. She treats those around her with a firm and steady hand, and is as judgmental and critical as she is kind and loving. Her compliments are usually backhanded but appear to come from a good place in her heart even when at their harshest.

In her youth, Adrienne was a stunning beauty with the sharpest, most cunning mind in the family and the tendency to "know things" just before they happened. She was expected to Awaken at an early age and join her generation's coven.

Only, she never did Awaken. Through her youth, Adrienne was bitter since being cast aside because she didn't inherit a position in the coven. However, later on, she realized there was a reason she didn't Awaken, and learned to accept her role.

Adrienne is, among other things, a very potent psychic, though her abilities limit themselves to family matters, she has spent nearly 40 years chronicling the signs and portents that would herald the next generation's coven members. She's written predictions out a hundred years from now, and so far all the predictions have been frighteningly accurate. Of course, even the best oracles may be wrong, and a false prediction could easily lead to a break down in the family stability…

Ghosts in the Attic: The Sanctum of 19th Street houses almost as many secrets as the ancestral family, and many of them are located in the attic. Covered in a thin patina of sand blown in through a hole in a fourth-story window, cabals past have left collections of books, journals, photos, and objects that they had no room for in the library below. Some of it is just junk from the passage of lives through the house. Some of it is research material that belongs in the library but has never been categorized and sorted. Some are pieces of stories, parts of the puzzle of who the Andrews Family Coven has been in its murky past, maybe even further back than the arrival in the United States. What was Uncle Arthur doing with a collection of jars with unidentifiable fetuses inside? Great Aunt Margaret was a seamstress and a costumer a hundred years back, so why do the clothes in her hope chest look as though they were sewn yesterday? Discovering the history of these objects and what if anything are their magical uses could take a cabal a lifetime, and along the way plenty of unhappy and unfinished business endangers the cabal if they get involved. Used as a chronicle, this story hook needs an antagonist trying to stop the characters from cleaning out the family closet, perhaps a long dead (and now Tremere) enemy of the family, or a Pylon of Seers studying the family line.

Sins of the Father: Not all the old families in Savannah are willing to accept the Andrews family as eccentric newcomers and little else. The Doughertys, a family of Southern aristocrats that can trace their line back to certain generals in the War of Northern Aggression, have had their eye on the Andrews' odd behavior for a while now. It is only with this newest cabal do they finally have something concrete to deal with. It seems that a loyal grandson of the nosey and suspicious family patron snuck into the basement of one of houses on 19th Street during this latest reunion party and found evidence that the previous coven was responsible for a death in the Dougherty family. While the patron has long suspected his brother's death was no accident, now he has proof enough for him, though not proof enough for court. He's a sly old buzzard though, and rather than blackmailing the family or slandering them, he's content to wait and watch for a chance to put an end to the line once and for all. He isn't stupid, and knows if he's not very careful a potent cabal of mages could destroy him with the blink of an eye, so he's studied and ever perfected certain methods to keep scrying out of his home and destroy sympathetic ties without having magic. Now the new cabal has to establish themselves in the city, and fulfill their destiny while under the watchful eye of an obsessive witch hunter. If they slip up, their entire dynasty might just fall.

The Prodigal: Sometime after the reunion and the cabal's formal formation, a forgotten member of the line shows up at the Sanctum on 19th Street. He's been Awakened for some time and claims he's been busy and so couldn't answer the call to join the cabal in the tra-

ditional fashion. Still, he's blood and can prove it, and so the family is left with little choice but to welcome him and share the inheritance with him. But who is he really? Why does he feel so out of place among the rest of the cabal and what is he really after?

Other stories include struggling to secure or create a place for the cabal in a Consilium that would rather have the power structure left as it is. Discovering what happened to the last cabal, searching for Artifacts that once belonged to the family. The characters will have to deal with the possible dark roots of the family, and even why they breed mages so frequently.

The Bones of the World

The World of Darkness is a place of mysteries. It has a secret history of magic and wonder, one that the Sleepers ignore. Wonders beyond wonder are everywhere, just beneath the surface of the world we know. Any mage with enough exposure to this world to join an order has heard a host of weird rumors:

A madman in Chicago made a machine out of glass and quicksilver that can restore life to a dead body, once.

Brooklyn, New York, is home to a ghost cop who will solve any murder if you buy him a beer.

There is a diner bathroom in Nevada whose door opens into any other diner bathroom in the world, even for Sleepers, if you know the right words.

The thing Neil Armstrong brought back from the moon is more than a chunk of rock.

The statues in a certain cemetery in the Czech Republic come to life at night and dance. They have done this every Sunday night since the end of World War II.

In this chronicle, the players portray mages who are dedicated to digging up and studying the hidden magic of the world. They don't care if what they seek is "good"

Author's Note — The Bones of the World by Mark Simmons

I am an obsessive collector of gaming books and writer of game ideas. I have shelves upon shelves of gaming books and file after file of characters, places, situations, and magical items that I may never use. For the most part, I'm content with this situation, and if the opportunity ever comes up to run a session about a group of skinchangers investigating a house with magically locked doors and cursed keys looking for an Artifact of Arcadia that lets its wearer turn into an animal by gazing into any reflective surface — just for example — I'm prepared.

The Bones of the World is for people like me. If you have a head full of ideas for the strange and wonderful hiding in the shadows and shelves full of World of Darkness reference material that you're itching to use, this is the chronicle for you.

Enjoy.

or "evil," and they don't necessarily want to use what they find, they simply have a desire to know the secret history of the world and see its secret wonders, and to preserve that knowledge for future generations.

Unfortunately, their quest is not without complications. Other mages are less idealistic and pure of intent, and the characters eventually find themselves fighting to preserve the world's wonder from those who would exploit it.

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I am in a cave beneath Manhattan Island. The nearest subway tunnel
is about half a mile above me.

The structure is cylindrical, at least 17 feet tall and slightly
less around, and made entirely of glass and silver. It seems to be
full of adult humans, all strangely pale, curled into the fetal
position. They're packed in there like sardines.

I'm going to try to wake one of them up
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Pulp Wonder

Although Bones of the World is a low-action, low-combat chronicle, it has a certain modern pulp sensibility. The ubiquitous nature of the strange and wonderful, the presence of conspiracies, and the role of characters as investigators of the world's secret histories all evoke the pulps. The Storyteller might find it useful to read the Pulp section, pp. 22-27 in Chapter One.

Tone and Theme

The Bones of the World is a story about magic and awe. The feel of the chronicle should be one of high wonder and strange beauty. Even though they are frightening and sometimes deadly, the secret wonders of the world deserve the characters' protection.

In The Bones of the World, the Pentacle needs to be strong. Much of the tension in this chronicle comes from the characters facing a foe — a rival cabal within the Pentacle — that they cannot simply track down and murder. The characters need to feel that their rivals are more like troubling relatives than total strangers and know that there would be consequences within their order and Consilium if they started an open conflict.

The Storyteller might also find it useful to reinforce conventional morality. This is not a high-action chronicle where the cabal can mow down hordes of opponents without a moment's regret. Their rivals are real people with understandable reasons for doing what they do, and the characters should feel extremely ambivalent about murdering them. This is the kind of chronicle where the players should think twice about having their characters kill someone.

Character Creation

Bones of the World focuses on investigation. Whatever his Path or order, every member of the cabal needs to be interested in delving into the hidden wonder and secret histories of the world.

The Storyteller should forbid any player to create Guardian of the Veil characters. In this chronicle, the Guardians take the role of antagonists. They are mages who want to destroy knowledge they feel is too dangerous for the Awakened, while the cabal is composed of mages who believe in preserving the magical and the wondrous for its own sake. (If you don't feel like dividing the chronicle so starkly down order lines, feel free to allow Guardian characters who aren't so hardline about magical knowledge.)

The focus on investigation and adventure means that Mental traits are essential and Physical traits are somewhat useful. Social interaction is not the focus of this chronicle, but the cabal might find it useful to have someone who can act as a "face" when necessary.

The players should make sure their characters' cabal has connections to the world of occult investigators, both Sleeper and Awakened. Contacts and Allies in academia and archeology, law enforcement, and the media are also useful. Rather than depending upon high-ranking mystagogues and curious Hierarchs to send the cabal on missions, this chronicle is much more rewarding if the cabal has its own network to point it in the right direction.

The Rivals

While the players are building their characters, the Storyteller is building the cabal's rivals, a cabal of Guardians of the Veil who are dedicated to destroying uncontrolled magic they feel is too dangerous for the Awakened world.

The rivals need to be foils for the players' characters — antagonists who point out the protagonists' flaws and foibles. They should be personalized to the characters your players create, which is why this chapter does not include details. However, the following principles of foil creation can help the Storyteller create an effective group of rivals:

Two Paths Diverge: This tactic focuses on a moment in the character's past. Give the Storyteller character a similar backstory to one of the players' characters, except that at a climactic moment, the Storyteller character made a different choice. Her life since that moment has been strongly influenced by that choice. Whenever the player's character deals with this Storyteller character, she sees the consequences of that choice and wonders if she chose correctly.

Similarly, **There But For the Grace of God** uses a Storyteller character who has suffered through something negative also experienced by a player's character, but for some reason it was even worse. Perhaps the player's character had a dangerous encounter with the Supernal before her Awakening and was saved, and then developed a fascination with even the most dangerous magic, while the Storyteller character's entire family died in a similar (or even the same) incident, leaving him with an obsession with destroying dangerous magic before anyone else can be hurt.

Through a Mirror Darkly means making a Storyteller character who reflects a trait the character is ambiguous

about back at her. Does the character have a violent temper? Present her with a foil who has channeled his anger to becoming a dangerous killing machine. Is the character reflexive deceptive? Present him with a rival who is a skilled liar. The familiarity is sure to create both sympathy and tension. Alternately, this tactic can be used backwards. Instead, present the character with a rival who embodies a trait the character possesses and finds admirable.

Enemy Mine: The Storyteller can get a lot of drama out of presenting the characters with rivals designed to be their best friends in every way but the one way that counts. What will a character do when presented with a rival who shares her interests, agrees with most of her philosophies, and is a generally stand-up guy? How will the characters face down people they would love to hang out with, play chess with, have a beer with, or even date?

Old Friends: This tactic — almost as dirty a trick as the one below — involves hijacking a Storyteller character from one of your players' characters' backstories and making him a member of the rival cabal. Because the character already has a relationship with this person, you have ready-made ambiguity and tension. Nobody wants to kill his own long lost cousin, even if he turns up on the other side of an important issue. The Storyteller has to be careful with this tactic, however; some players do not appreciate having their backstory elements changed without their permission.

Finally, there is one last **Dirty Trick** a Storyteller has access to. Base one (or even all) of your Storyteller characters on one or more of your *players*. Everyone at the table will feel a haunting sense of sympathy and familiarity, probably without ever knowing why.

Story Arc

The Storyteller should start The Bones of the World with a few opportunities to investigate the world's strangeness and deal with some complications in recovering or studying their finds. By the time the rivals come into the story in a meaningful way, the characters should have a firm idea of how they relate to each other and how they go about their investigations.

Also in the opening chapters, the Storyteller should introduce a Sleeper ally for reasons that will soon become apparent. This should be someone normal and steady, but also endearing. It is probably best if this person is useful to the cabal in some way, which will keep him or her involved in the chronicle. The players and their characters should be encouraged to become as fond of this person as possible.

A clever Storyteller should also find some way to introduce the rival cabal in some innocuous fashion. Perhaps the players' characters meet them at a Consilium function and are introduced to them separately, not realizing that the charming Guardians of the Veil all belong to the same cabal. Alternately, they are assigned by the Hierarch to work together on some unrelated project, like handling a breach of the Mysteries that requires the cabal's mystical expertise.

Eventually, however, it comes time to introduce the rivals in earnest. After the characters discover a mind-bogglingly fascinating and heart-breakingly beautiful — but arguably dangerous — wonder, the rival cabal sweeps in. They have orders from the Hierarch to destroy it, but it becomes quite clear that the rivals arranged these orders because *they* feel that the wonder is too dangerous to exist. This time, they succeed. The wonder is carted off to be destroyed, leaving the cabal frustrated at their impotence.

This is where the battle begins.

Relics and Wonders

In Bones of the Earth, the cabal should encounter a huge variety of strange and wonderful relics and mysterious events. Entire books could be written on the kinds of things the players should encounter, and they have: **World of Darkness: Antagonists**, **Reliquary**, **Mysterious Places**, **Keys to the Supernal Tarot**, **Skinchangers**, and **Second Sight** all contain the building blocks for the various things the cabal might come across in their search for the strange and wonderful. Some of The World of Darkness's other core lines, like **Vampire: The Requiem**, and **Werewolf: The Forsaken** also contain some interesting ideas. However, some of the best options come from the other side lines, like **Promethean: The Created** and **Changeling: The Lost**, which are full of strangeness that mages are hard-pressed to explain.

Alternately, you can look to the real world's huge wealth of people who believe strange things. Bookstores, libraries, and the Internet are full of descriptions of wonders suitable for inspiration for this chronicle.

Finally, online communities dedicated to roleplaying games are a great resource for plot seeds that could easily provide this chronicle with a session or two of material apiece.

As the chronicle progresses, the cabal should have numerous similar encounters with their rival cabal. It should never be as simple or as straightforward as it was that first time. Sometimes the cabal should win and take a dangerous relic off to their Athenaeum or lorehouse for further study. Sometimes the rival cabal should win and a priceless wonder is lost forever. Sometimes the two cabals should find reasons to work together, like when they cooperate to keep a powerful but "safe" relic out of the hands of the Scelesti or Seers of the Throne.

Remember that in Bones of the World, the rivals are unwilling to use force directly against the protagonists, and the protagonists should be encouraged to feel the same way. They are all members of the Pentacle, and therefore nominal allies. You can get a lot of drama out of a moment where the rival cabal endangers themselves to save the protagonists cabal, and out of putting the protagonists in the position to make the same choice.

The exact pacing of this chronicle is highly variable. The climax is a matter of timing, and not dependent upon any particular power level. A Storyteller with a lot of time to burn could easily insert numerous other incidental plots. The cabal could develop other enemies and become embroiled in other plots. The protagonists should grow in power, join Legacies, and deal with their various personal issues. In the end, however, it all comes back to their rivals and their shared, conflicting obsessions with the world's hidden magic.

Matters come to a head when the cabal discovers the Flywheel Heart, a powerful Artifact of the Aether. The Heart has a strange and troubling quality: any Sleeper who touches it is transformed forever into a Supernally powered amalgam of human and machine. At this point, the Storyteller should reintroduce the sympathetic Sleeper who has been the cabal's ally since the beginning of the chronicle and make sure he is transformed.

Until the cabal's ally becomes a Sleepwalker — which might take some time — he constantly creates minor Paradoxes, a situation the Guardians of the Veil takes extremely seriously. No one likes Paradoxes, but the Guardians believe that every Paradox, no matter how small, brings the Abyss one step closer to destroying the Fallen World. The Guardian cabal's Path is clear: they have to kill their rivals' Sleeper friend and the sooner the better. The severity of this matter is such that members of the rival cabal are finally willing to become killers. This Paradox-spewing abomination, this weird amalgam of Supernal and Fallen, is something they cannot tolerate.

The cabal's course of action is less clear. Do they give up their friend to be killed? Do they sink to the same level as their old rivals, whom they have probably become fond of? What will they do when their rivals try to turn the entire Consilium against them? Do they work towards a

Artifact: The Flywheel Heart

The Flywheel Heart is a circular case, about three inches in diameter and an inch thick, made of something that is as clear as glass but practically unbreakable. The rim is made of steel with Atlantean runes inlaid in lapis lazuli. Inside the glass case is a wheel made of solid gold. The wheel spins at exactly 3.14 meters per second and occasionally crackles with blue-white lightning.

For a mage, the Flywheel Heart is nothing more than a Mana battery, a sort of a mobile Hallow (as Hallow ••• except that it produces no Tass). This would make it an extremely useful item, were it not for a special drawback. The Flywheel Heart blurs the distinction between living and unliving. The heart is the mainspring of a man, and a mainspring is the heart of a clockwork; both are the knot of power at the center of a moving thing. The Flywheel Heart embodies that ambiguity and has a strange effect on Sleepers.

If a Sleeper touches the Flywheel Heart, it disappears into his body, replaces his heart, and works a strange transformation upon him. Flesh becomes as smooth and as white as alabaster and sprouts brass and gold fittings. Hair becomes as bright as steel wire but as soft as silk. Eyes turn into pools of quicksilver. A being that houses the Flywheel Heart becomes enormously strong and tough (add +3 to Strength and Stamina) and capable of speaking to machines, perceiving Mana (as the one-dot Prime spell, "Supernal Vision"), and throwing bolts of lightning at will (Dexterity + Firearms + 5 — Defense; damage is lethal).

The transformation wrought by the Flywheel Heart is permanent. The only way to recover the Flywheel Heart is by killing its host and taking the heart from the wreckage left behind. A Sleeper who merges with the Flywheel Heart is doomed to spawn Paradoxes on a regular basis as the shard of the Abyss wars with the piece of the Supernal inside him — roll three dice for Paradox whenever the Sleeper uses his new powers and approximately once every 24 hours. Increase the severity of Paradoxes by one step (one success indicates Bedlam, two an Anomaly, and so on). If the affected Sleeper throws off the Quiescence and becomes a Sleepwalker (he is too altered by the Flywheel Heart to ever Awaken), this effect vanishes.

way to reverse the transformation or speed the process of making their friend a Sleepwalker so the Paradoxes will stop? What will they do to buy themselves time?

And when their old rivals — their dearest enemies — come kicking down their door, guns and magic blazing, what will the cabal do? Will these simple scholars and seekers after wonder become murderers as well, or will they find another way?

Permutations

This chapter presents the chronicle from one point of view. However, it could easily be presented the other way around, with the players portraying a cabal of Guardians trying to stop a foolish and careless — but ultimately sympathetic — group of libertines and mystagogues from unearthing things they can't put down, until finally they find something so dangerous that all bets are off and it comes to blows. All the same tactics for creating a sympathetic rival cabal apply.

The Chosen Path

The understood method of Awakening into the world of magic is either a mystery play or an astral journey. Mages are not born into magic, and often they do not choose it. Instead, their souls are drawn into an Awakening. What happens when a Sleeper finds magic, and seeks out the clarity and knowledge granted by such power? This chronicle is about choosing magic before it chooses you. The characters discover that they have a knack for magic. They research, practice, and eventually find the Path to their Awakening.

Author Notes — The Chosen Path
by Danielle Lauzon

I decided to write a chronicle in which the characters seek out and research magic before they Awaken for two reasons. The first is that I really like the aspect of arcane wizardry, and the second is because there just aren't enough options in **Mage: the Awakening** to begin with (*Developer's note* — Text doesn't really convey sarcasm well, Danielle).

The research aspect of the chronicle takes a view of **Mage** that is often unexplored. Magic is learned — look at mentors, grimoires, and libraries and the roles they play in **Mage**. I have always liked the thought of wizards in their towers preparing arcane rituals and collecting lore of old. Now the characters will be doing that and more.

Also, this chronicle gives ample opportunity to explore the Path choices detailed in Chapter Three.

Starting the Path

The characters should start without the mage template. The characters need a reason to be together. This could be as simple as friends, family, or co-workers. The most probable relationship is one of occult research. A group of friends with a common interest in occult, witchcraft, or general magic makes for a good start. Each character should have a defined interest in magic, otherwise this chronicle will not make much sense for them. It might be necessary to run individual preludes to bring the characters to a point in which they are working together. The thing to keep in mind here is that the chronicle is about the characters becoming mages and the following life changes that come from that event.

Following the Path

As a group, the characters should be allowed to research and practice magic. Creativity is the best way to achieve this goal. They could hear of ancient Hermetic books on display somewhere and figure out a way to get their hands on them. The characters could discover a grimoire that they each try to use. Other mages might mentor the characters and teach them their magic.

Research (**World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 55) is usually an Academics roll, but Occult is a valid option when magic is involved. Reading dusty old books in dirty libraries is not the only way to learn, but it should probably be part of the process. Once the characters know about a particular ritual or spell, they have to practice it. The first time the character casts a rote, it must be done as an extended action with a target number of successes equal to the level of the rote being cast +1. Successful casting requires tools, implements, arcane ingredients, and a dose of luck. The characters must ascertain the correct elements, acquire them, and activate them in the correct manner. Determining what goes into the ritual requires research. Finding those things requires a little travel and investigation. The characters might be able to get all their material components from their mentors (if the character has the Mentor Merit, this should be true), or they might have to find an occult shop that sells the things they need.

The payoff for all that hard work is buying rote dots. The players can purchase rotes at a maximum of two dots. The dice pool for these Rotes is Attribute + Skill. This shows a base understanding of the magic the characters are researching, and gives a reason to continue the research.

The characters are still considered Sleepers at this point, and that means that if a character uses a vulgar rote, a Paradox might occur. The base dice pool for this Paradox is one die, plus for a Sleeper witness (the character herself), minus one for knowing the rote, for a total of two dice. The character does *not* suffer from Disbelief, nor does her attention Unravel her or other mages' spells.

Research Can be Fun

Rolling dice to represent hours of hard work is a useful tool for speeding a Research topic along. Unfortunately, a large part of the game is rolling to research and rolling to practice. This can get boring pretty fast. Give the players descriptions of the types of books they are reading during research, or have them describe their character's actions while practicing rotes.

To encourage story over rolling dice, you can forego Research rolls in favor of interactive research in which you describe the scene and allow them to tell you the things they are looking for. You can also give a +1 die bonus towards ritual casting for a well described scene.

Journey to the Watchtowers

The Supernal Realms are actually situated within the Fallen World. Just like the Shadow and the Astral Realms are part of the Fallen World, so are Stygia, the Aether, Arcadia, Pandemonium, and the Primal Wild. The Atlantis myth and the Abyss still have their places. Atlantis is missing, and the Abyss still taints magic. Even though the Realms are in the Fallen World, the Abyss reaches into and through them, causing Paradox for willworkers casting vulgar magic. The Realms are only accessible to Sleepers making the journey to the Watchtowers to Awaken. Once they do, they are returned to the entrance, and it never opens for them again.

The most important question about discovering magic and choosing to become a mage is — how does the character make it to his respective Watchtower and inscribe her name on it? How does she become fully Awakened? This will be the meat of the chronicle. Discovering a way for not-so mundane Sleepers to travel to the Watchtowers, and then subsequently following the Path to those Watchtowers should take up at least the first part of the chronicle.

Examples for discovery of the Watchtowers:

• **Actual Mages:** The characters could discover Awakened in the city and become friends with them. The willworker mentors might even try to direct the characters to the correct Path to the Watchtowers. In this instance, the mages might try to persuade the characters to pick one Path or another. Experiences with their mentors and discussions about magic could lead the characters to searching out their own Path to the Watchtowers.

• **Ancient Texts:** Ancient relics of power are scattered throughout the Fallen World. The characters could come across an ancient text that describes hidden pathways to other Realms. Following clues and deciphering ancient languages could lead them to the hidden paths hinted at in the book. The characters might discover the abandoned journal of a Sleeper who found his way to the Realms. The journal ends right before he entered the Realms.

• **Accidental Discovery:** Though it sounds illogical, a simple and often fun way to lead the characters to discover the Watchtowers is by pure accident. While

	Acanthus	Mastigos	Moros	Obrimos	Thyrsus
Tarot card	The Fool	The Devil	Death	Strength	The Moon
Watchtower	Waterfall	Forge	Mausoleum	Spire	Cave
Element	Air	Void	Earth	Fire	Water
Weapon	Bow	Knife	Hammer	Spear	Staff
Color	Green/Blue	Black	Gray	White/Yellow	Red/Brown
Jewel	Emerald	Topaz	Diamond	Ruby	Sapphire
Plant	Bramble	Nightshade	Yew	Oak	Vine
Earthly animal	Bird	Snake	Moth	Dog	Cat
Mythic animal	Unicorn	Manticore	Basilisk	Hippogriff	Minotaur
Fragrance	Cedar	Sulfur			
Fabric	Wool	Silk	Linen	Fleece	Fur
Vehicle	Ship	Palanquin			
Planet	Venus	Mars	Jupiter	Saturn	Moon
Food	Fruit	Meat			

practicing a rote, the characters accidentally open a pathway to another Realm of existence. Or the characters begin searching out new materials and happen across a door to the Watchtowers that opens under certain circumstances. It might take some research to figure out what they have just stumbled upon, and how to go through it.

• **Astral Callings:** The characters gain visions of the Watchtowers in their dreams. They may follow a dream Path that is a representation of the real world. For this kind of discovery, it might be useful to give all the characters access to the Dream merit, or even give them a dot for free.

The characters do not all need to find out about the Watchtowers in the same way. In fact, multiple choices for research and discovery give the characters options for differing motivations.

Correspondence

The Fallen World is filled with hidden clues and secrets all pointing towards the Watchtowers. Symbols, talismans, and tools are keys to magic, and they unlock the doors to the Realms. Seemingly simple tokens have the power to guide the characters on their Path if they know where to look. During their research, the characters learn of specific things within the Fallen World that have special connections to each of the Watchtowers. The more of these items that the characters collect, study, and incorporate into their magical workings, the easier it will be for them to find and pass through the entrance into the Realm where the Watchtowers lie. Each Path has a distinct set of items that hold more meaning than others. This list is not comprehensive, and the concepts can be broken down further into each Arcanum.

The correspondence that is tied to the items and the Paths is a simple one. Each item represents what it is to be part of that Path. As the characters learn about the Paths, they gain insight into their truths by studying items with correspondence. Once the characters have found items with correspondence to a Path, they must attune that item creating a connection between themselves and the Watchtower. Attunement takes a week of meditation for the first item, and each subsequent item with the same type of correspondence needs one less day of meditation. Therefore, the fifth item a character attunes only takes two days to attune. If the character decides to attune a different Watchtower, then he spends a full week of meditation on a new item, and all previous correspondences are lost.

A character that is learning about the Mastigos might need to wear black clothing and have crushed nightshade and sulfur available while performing a Space ritual to enhance his efforts. A prospective Thyrsus carries a staff that is carved with a breaking wave pattern along the length of it. He must use the staff when he casts Life rotes to concentrate his efforts. The character that wants to be a necromancer carries a hammer as a weapon and carries a tarot card of Death in his pocket.

As the characters become more attuned with the correspondences of the Watchtower they wish to follow, they gain insight on how to find them. Each item or representation of an item that the character is attuned to gives him a tighter connection to the Realm of the Watchtowers. This connection might be represented as a +1 bonus to Investigation rolls when attempting to find the way in, or as a +1 to Research rolls to determine more correspondences. The connection from attuning one token with correspondence to a Path eliminates the need to spend a Mana when casting rotes from that Path's Ruling Arcana.

Through the Realms

The characters seek out the way to the Watchtowers. There could be a door that only opens to those in the right frame of mind, or a place that becomes the entrance at the right time of day. However you wish to let them in, you should make sure it is accessible once they know how to do it, before they fully Awaken, and never accessible afterwards.

Once the characters know about the Watchtowers and how to get to the entrance, they quickly learn that travel to them is rife with danger. Rumors tell of people that entered the Realms, never to return. Their mentors tell stories of their own journeys through the Realms. They might find texts describing the Realms and their dangers, as well as a few pointers on how to survive. They travel through each of the Realms associated with the respective Watchtowers and finally come to where the Watchtowers stand. What order they travel through the Realms, or even how often they can leave and come back are up to the Storyteller to determine. It is not necessary for the characters to travel through each of the Realms, especially if they have decided which Path they will walk before entering.

You should decide if Paradox has its usual effects while traveling through the Realm. It might work normally, it might have its full effect, or perhaps only the Inferior Arcanum of a given Realm triggers it.

The Realms

The Realms are places of mystery and danger. Generally, the characters enter and travel through the Realms together to help each other through the unfamiliar terrain. For each of the Realms, we pres-

ent a few sights and events that the characters might encounter in their travels. We recommend that each of the Realms has a story that the characters experience while traveling through it, culminating in the Awakening of whatever characters have chosen to walk that Realm's Path. For instance, when the characters enter Pandemonium, the Storyteller describes a band of demons that press the characters into service. The story involves the characters inducing the other slaves to revolt and storm the master's home — which, of course, is the Watchtower that any would-be Mastigos in the group must sign.

Stygia

• A black river glides over a deep bed of white marble. As the characters watch, a creature gets too close to the edge and is sucked in.

• The dead walk amongst dilapidated tombstones. Beneath layers of decayed skin, the characters can see metal gears and workings keeping the zombies moving.

• Large clockwork soldiers patrol the area. The characters can pass only after confirming that they are not undead.

• A horrible gelatinous colossus comprised of the rotting flesh of a thousand corpses oozes from the ground and flows towards a nearby mechanized village, bent on its destruction.

• Deep shadows engulf a city filled with peaceful undead. They use complex alchemy to assist the characters in their journey.

Pandemonium

• A woman screams in the distance, but the characters see her five feet away.

• As the characters walk along, they notice that the direction they move in does not correspond with the movement of the landscape.

• The characters see a group of vile creatures rip a hole in nothing and enter it, leaving the gaping wound open for those who would dare follow them.

• Inside a cavernous maze there are evenly placed stalactites and stalagmites. The floor seems to move underneath them, pushing the characters at the deadly spikes.

• Each of the characters sees a dark reflection of himself walking around. It wants to take over the life of the character, and only one persona can exit the Realm.

Arcadia

• Time moves backwards as the characters move forwards. Things around them grow young and disappear. Buildings slowly spring from the earth from ruins to shining new structures.

• The characters come across a tribe of Fae demanding payment before they can pass.

• Upon careful examination, the trees are infested with tiny people. They offer help in exchange for the characters' modern, if unusually large, goods.

• Traveling between one landmark and another seems to take a random amount of time, dictated by chance.

• A member of the group seems to be constantly struck with bad luck — he trips and falls on obvious roots, branches catch him in the face, and he's itchy. Is something causing it? If so, can it be convinced to stop?

Aether

• Pristine buildings sprawl across the landscape. Celestial beings wander between the buildings going about daily life.

• A lightning storm rages between silver clouds. New life springs from the ground where electricity touches it.

• Wild forces constantly rend the earth and make the skies impassable. Travel will not be easy over this dynamic and dangerous terrain.

• Creatures born of light and sound approach the characters. They are angry about the intrusion into the Realm and want to punish the characters for trespassing unless they can come up with a good reason for being there.

• Magic cast by the characters is amplified in the Realm to the point that it might attract the attention of beings seen off in the distance.

Primal Wild

• Carnivorous plants the size of vans bloom throughout the countryside. As the characters pass through, the plants shift and attack them. They seem hungry and angry at the intrusion.

• The characters find that they are back in their home city — as it would look after all of the human beings die off or leave. The city is overgrown with plant life, and the mutated descendants of city animals (dogs, rats, pigeons) stalk the streets.

• A friendly-looking animal tries to get the characters to go down a dangerous path. It might not be malicious, though — maybe it just doesn't understand what the characters want. Maybe they don't, either.

• The characters walk into a clearing amidst a circle of trees with a large pit in the center. As they move, they realize the pit is the gullet of a large creature and the trees are its teeth.

• The characters trespass in the territory of a hive of large, flying insects. They might have to avoid these immense bugs, or take audience with their queen before they can pass out of the Realm.

Arcanum Realms

As an alternative, each individual Arcanum might have its own Realm. The Arcana are living entities, with each its own Watchtower. Whenever a character first enters the Realm of the Watchtowers he meets each of the Arcana's Patrons. The character pledges to one Patron, which grants him his first Ruling Arcanum. If the character wishes to have a second Ruling Arcanum, he must take on a second Patron. The Arcana are jealous beings, and do not enjoy sharing their followers. To take on a second Patron, the character must sacrifice his knowledge of one other Arcanum to his Patron to prove his willingness to continue in her name (resulting in an Inferior Arcanum). Correspondences to these living Arcana are developed similar to Paths, except the items in the Fallen World with correspondence directly represent the ideals of each Arcanum.

Diamond: The Awakened Are One Nation

Mages act as though they are a nation apart from the Sleepers around them. Many mages treat Sleeper laws as mere inconveniences — and have the power to back up that conceit — and others see Sleeper society as an extension of the Lie and an effort by the Exarchs to control them. The Awakened have their own laws, and according to the dictates of these laws they lie, cheat, steal, and murder, and consider themselves wholly justified.

However, the Awakened are not one nation. The Awakened are a thousand scattered nations, living in a world that rejects them.

What if someone wanted to change that?

A suitably brilliant and charismatic mage or cabal of mages can transform the Pentacle. All they have to do is buck years of tradition and protect themselves from deadly opposition from within their own orders. However, **Mage** chronicles are about nothing if they are not about heroics, ambition, and confidence, and achieving this would take all three.

Mood and Theme

The mood of Diamond varies from moment to moment. At times, the protagonists should feel that victory is within their reach. They are the prophets of tomorrow, bringing new hope to a tired people. Magic is full of wonder and majesty, a tool that will let the characters reshape the world. At other times, they must deal with ages-old corruption, the legacy of generations of violence and paranoia. Their foes should strike at them indirectly, politically, and at their friends and

loved ones. More importantly, the protagonists should be faced with evidence that the Pentacle is hopelessly cynical, sick unto death with hopelessness and fear, and be tempted to abandon their cause.

Magical exploration and mystery have little to do with this chronicle. However, the occasional foray into the arcane secrets of the World of Darkness can make for a welcomed change of pace. In general, this motif should be to support one of the more important themes. The characters should deal with arcane initiations into the secret societies that run the Pentacle and, of course, the magically powered intrigue of their enemies. Oddly enough, magic is not the focus of Diamond. Rather, it is a backdrop that provides tension and heightens the drama.

Character Creation

The players must know why and to what extent their characters are involved in this scheme and what they imagine an Awakened nation would look like. A character who doesn't have the ambition to unite the Awakened into one nation is probably a poor choice

for this chronicle, but dedication to the cause can vary. The interaction between characters who are passionate about this goal to different degrees can provide compelling tension within the cabal.

Order is critical in this chronicle. Typical members of the Adamantine Arrow, the Free Council, and the Silver Ladder will have different ideas of how to unite the Awakened and different visions of an Awakened nation. In a cabal that contains more than one of those orders, the players need to decide how their characters have compromised or temporarily set aside their differences. Some internal conflict goes a long way towards making this chronicle memorable, but if the cabal suffered from any serious differences, they probably would have worked them out already.

The Mysterium and apostates are less involved in this chronicle. A mystagogue in this chronicle needs to have a more personal connection to the cause than other characters, and the Storyteller needs to be prepared to reinforce this connection.

The Guardians of the Veil are extremely problematic in Diamond. Guardians are dedicated to the myth of the Hieromagus, a mage chosen by destiny to unite the Pentacle and lead it to victory over the Throne and the Exarchs. The Guardians of the Veil believe that false Hieromagi must be stopped, lest their well-meaning efforts destroy the Pentacle. The Guardians are not entirely clear on how they will recognize the Hieromagus when she arrives, but some Guardians spend their entire lives seeking out the Hieromagus and hunting false messiahs. A Guardian of the Veil needs to have a very good reason for being involved with this cabal, like the belief that one of her cabal mates *is* the Hieromagus.

Early Game

In the first sessions of Diamond the characters lack the raw power, status, and connections to make any real progress in their project. Like other young mages, the cabal's job at this point is to grow. The Storyteller should give the characters the opportunity to gain mundane and arcane experience, learn rotes and occult secrets, and generally become more powerful as quickly as possible.

In the early game, the Storyteller should present the characters with opportunities to shoot themselves in the foot: seemingly innocuous deals that are a little darker than they seem, paths to power that are a little too easy, and friends who are a little two convenient. The later parts of the game will be much more interesting if the protagonists create their own enemies and blackmail material to be used against them later.

Midgame

By the time the midgame begins, the characters should be in the 35 to 50 experience point range. They should have a couple of dots of Order Status apiece, a significant library of rotes, and a few extra dots of

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The Double Agent

A player who wants to portray a Guardian of the Veil might find it compelling to play a double agent, a mage who was placed with this cabal by higher ranking members of the Guardians of the Veil because of the cabal's problematic ambition, to keep an eye on it and report on its activities. This agent needs to lie to the mages who will be his closest allies and maintain a façade of dedication to the cause at all times. He will have to be ready to make the ultimate sacrifice — commit the ultimate treachery — on behalf of the Awakened community at large.

It is a foregone conclusion that such a mage would eventually find himself growing close to the people he is posing with. As they face challenges side by side, friendships are bound to blossom. What will happen when the double agent finds himself genuinely attracted to the cause? Can he convince himself that one of his friends is Hieromagus? Can he convince the rest of the Guardians?

This option is not for every group. It has a subtle thread of player-versus-player, which not everyone enjoys. The group should decide if they are comfortable with the one character being set up to act, even temporarily, at cross-purposes with the rest.

Beginning in the Middle

Some troupes will want to start Diamond: The Awakened Are One Nation in the midgame. This is a good idea if the troupe has limited time and is concerned that they will not be able to finish. The troupe will miss out on some of the fun parts — the cabal making friends and enemies and making choices that will haunt them later — but still get to play the most important part of the chronicle, the quest to unite the Awakened world.

their favorite Arcana. They should be considering Legacies, but probably have not yet begun the process of joining one.

What happens in the midgame is up to the players. This chronicle is about the characters and their ambition to revolutionize the Awakened world. The cabal's schemes are entirely its own. The cabal has two basic options: centralized and grassroots, each with its own challenges and benefits.

The grassroots approach is faster, but much more perilous. The cabal uproots itself and tours the world's Consilii, building connections and inspiring others to join the cause. In cities that are supportive of their idea or support a certain degree of free speech, the characters might give public addresses or hold town-hall style meetings. In other cities, they arrange their meetings in secret and find clever, possibly magical, ways of getting their message to the people who need it. The goal is to create a vast network of mages all over the world who are passionate about the cabal's vision of a united Awakened nation and ready to support them.

By hitting the road, the cabal cuts themselves off from the support structures that keep most mages safe. The cabal depends on others for Mana, protection, and sometimes a place to spend the night. The cabal is sure to run afoul of Scelesti and Seers of the Throne with more regularity than a cabal that stays somewhere safe.

This approach makes the cabal's goals obvious. Even if the characters avoid direct confrontations, it is only a matter of time before the wrong people find out who is spreading sedition. The Guardians of the Veil, the Seers of the Throne, and mages with a vested interest in the status quo are likely to respond with smear campaigns at the least and physical attacks at worst.

Alternately, the cabal can chose a more settled approach. They stay in their home city and rise through the ranks. When they are powerful enough — perhaps the local leaders of their orders or highly placed in the Consilium — they turn their city into the center of their movement. They start with diplomatic overtures to nearby Consilii, building bridges, and creating networks of alliances. When they have acquired enough power, the cabal begins taking Consilii that refuse to join their growing network by force.

Gathering power and using it to create the seed of a new kind of Consilium is much slower than the grassroots approach. Rising through the ranks is fraught with distractions and further opportunities for the cabal to entangle itself in the kind of politics that will eventually get in its way The settled approach is also more likely to result in violence that the cabal will need to take a hand in. With a grassroots movement, the cabal already has allies in new Consilii when they arrive to incorporate them.

Finally, a cabal could try both approaches at the same time: claim one Consilium as a home base while simultaneously building an ever-widening network of supporters in the surrounding Consilii, as well as the occasional trip to distant communities. This approach could work, and its drawbacks are a combination of those facing the previous two possibilities.

At this point in the chronicle, the Storyteller should make the consequences of the cabal's mission more immediate. Now that they are dedicating themselves to the cause full-time, they have to make tough choices and hurt people they would like to help. Of course, it should never be simple. The characters should rarely find it absolutely necessary to do the wrong thing. Instead, they should find honor difficult and treachery easy, and ultimately make their own choices.

The two groups whose opposition to the characters defines the second half of the midgame are the Silver Ladder and the Guardians of the Veil, both of whom employ allies in other orders. Depending on the character of the cabal's ideal Awakened nation, the Free Council may attack them or back them to a greater or lesser degree.

These groups almost certainly do not coordinate their efforts, thanks to mutual distrust and a history of secrets, but they will attack simultaneously. Both groups begin by attempting to hurt the cabal's credibility or dissuade them from their quest without resorting to violence or open political action. The Silver Ladder is somewhat more likely to attack the cabal politically, attempting to undermine their efforts to win friends in the Awakened world. The Guardians are more likely to attack the cabal directly.

Ultimately, the only way the cabal is going to end these fights is by turning their enemies into allies. The characters certainly don't have the power and resources to slaughter or cripple all those who oppose them. Even if they did, that kind of violence would erode their Wisdom and drive them mad. Worse, an extended, large-scale conflict within the Pentacle opens the door for the Seers of the Throne to wipe them out once and for all. The cabal is going to have to make compromises to quell dissent, but first they are going to have to survive. The Storyteller should not make that too easy. If it comes to that, however, see the Furyland chronicle on p. 164 for notes on how to run a large-scale magical conflict.

Towards the end of the midgame, the characters should also begin to suffer for their ideals. They may find the doors to high status within their orders closed to them. Certain Legacies that are strongly associated with an order that opposes them may refuse to teach their secrets. Nonetheless, the characters soldier on and enter the last phase of Diamond.

Endgame

The endgame of Diamond is composed of two parts. In the first, the characters finally overcome their resistance and unite the Awakened into a single nation. In the second, that nation faces its first test. When the endgame begins the characters should each have more than 100 experience points. They should be established members of Legacies, with a least one Arcana at five dots. They will need all the power they can get — and all the contacts, allies, and influence — to survive what comes next.

Also at this point, the characters should have made significant progress towards their goal. They should have a clear idea of what their united Awakened world will look like. Perhaps they have even started to build structures and hierarchies to support the new order. By now, the cabal should have made a huge number of allies, and enemies, who continue to influence the chronicle until the very end.

The cabal's first challenge is going to be turning their enemies — the orders that opposed them and holdout Consilii — into allies. Transforming the orders into allies is an exercise in compromise. Each of the orders wants something, and if the cabal can convince them that their new order will deliver it, the orders will fall in line.

The Silver Ladder is concerned about losing its privileges. They have been the leaders and priests of the Awakened world for a long time. Convincing them that there will still be a place for them in the new, united Pentacle goes a long way to gaining their alliance. At heart, the Silver Ladder is a brotherhood of statesmen and idealists. They want to see the Awakened united; the idea that the Awakened are one nation is one of their principles. Ultimately, winning the Ladder over will be a matter of convincing them that realizing this principal is both possible and to their advantage.

The Guardians of the Veil will be much harder to convince. Many of them are very set in the belief that either the Hieromagus will come, but that any attempt to unite the Awakened world before he arrives is doomed to failure, or that trying to change the status quo is dangerously ambitious. Of course, some Guardians might be more pragmatic. Either they never believed in the myth of the Hieromagus or they are simply able to accept that the Hieromagus is whoever does the Hieromagus's job, and if the cabal can succeed, they deserve the Guardians' backing. With some work, the cabal might be able to win them over.

Once the cabal manages to sway the Guardians, they can count on having the order as a staunch ally. However, it is important to note that while many Guardians of the Veil believe it is their duty to *support* the Hieromagus, very few of them think they should *obey* the Hieromagus. The tasks of the Guardians demand they do the things that no leader they would follow would tolerate, so they must always act in secret.

If the cabal's vision of a united Awakened world is suitably liberal and democratic, the Free Council may have thrown its weight behind the characters a long time ago. If not, then convincing the Free Council is remarkably similar to convincing the Silver Ladder. The Free Council has been willing to tolerate the hierarchies of the Pentacle for a long time. If they can be convinced that a new, united Pentacle will be no worse, they might be willing to fall in line, if only to avoid more bloodshed. Showing the Free Council that a united Pentacle will be able to more effectively combat the Seers of the Throne might make them enthusiastic supporters of a new order.

The Adamantine Arrow is in a delicate position regarding the cabal's plans. The primary concern of the Arrow is fulfilling their ancient oaths of loyalty, service, and protection, sworn to the other three Diamond orders in the days of Atlantis. Like the Silver Ladder, the primary hurdle in earning the allegiance of the Adamantine Arrow is practicality. If the cabal can convince the Arrow that uniting the Awakened will make them stronger and easier to protect, the Arrow backs them. If they can't, the Arrow considers them dangerous ideologues and stands against them.

Finally, the Mysterium's stance towards the new order is harder to predict, since the order's priorities are academic rather than political. The mystagogues might be difficult to convince, or they might have already sworn support for the cabal's efforts, depending on the cabal's actions up until now. Anyone willing to devote time and energy to preserving knowledge finds it easier to earn the Mysterium's loyalty. Although they are sometimes characterized as passive librarians, the Mysterium's aid could be invaluable, and their resistance could set the cabal back a great deal.

Swaying the Consilii is much harder. While the orders remain in existence as parts of the new hierarchy, local Consilium leaders are going to have to accept a higher authority, something they are not used to. Some Consilii sign up willingly if the leadership is convinced of the rightness of the cause. Others might take more coercion, and some have to be invaded violently. No historical effort of unification has been without bloodshed.

Of course, no effort to sway the orders and Consilii is going to be complete. The holdouts of today will train the rebels and insurgents of tomorrow. Some individual mages might go so far as to defect to the Throne. This plot thread is best left unresolved. No matter how hard the cabal works, their victory will never be complete.

Once the cabal has swayed all their enemies and begun building the new order, the Storyteller should give them an external conflict to conclude the chronicle. At this point, the Seers of the Throne, and possibly the Exarchs themselves, notice the change that has been wrought in their old enemy. They will react, hoping to shatter the united Pentacle before it can act against them.

This is a climactic battle, a full-fledged magical war with the cabal at the head. Everything written in the section on powerful characters applies to running this final confrontation. When it is over, however, the new Pentacle has had its baptism by fire, and the cabal has changed the world.

Permutations

For a bleaker chronicle, you can run a game where the intrepid mages trying to unite the Awakened world are either foolishly overambitious or hypocritically self-interested and the players portray a cabal that is trying to stop them. The feel of ambition wedded to hope is lost, but the darkness and paranoia will remain. Additionally, the chronicle will not involve reshaping the entire setting, which is something not everyone likes.

In the real world, these kinds of grand unifications take time. The fact that the Awakened world is a relatively tiny — if scattered — community could certainly speed things up, but it could still be a matter for generations, and you could run it that way. The players could portray a series of cabals, each building on the efforts of the last, until their trials culminate in the unification of the Wise.

The Epistolary Chronicle

An epistolary chronicle is one in which the players resolve most of the action by writing letters in-character. This kind of chronicle calls to mind novels like *Dracula* and *Carrie*, or many of the works of H. P. Lovecraft, in that the action is explained by a witness or participant looking back upon the events. Done well, an epistolary chronicle can produce a work of fiction that remains interesting and compelling to read even after the chronicle ends, and allows the players to flex their muscles as writers as well as roleplayers.

We need to state right up front, of course, that this kind of chronicle isn't for everyone. In order for an epistolary chronicle to work, the players need the following traits:

• **Commitment:** Everyone involved has to be willing to put the effort into the chronicle that it will require. In a standard, table-top **Mage** game, having a player who doesn't say or do much can be annoying or boring, but it's rarely crippling. In an epistolary chronicle, everyone

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Author Notes — The Epistolary Chronicle by Matthew McFarland

I decided to write up the "chronicle as series of letters" idea for this book because **Mage** seemed like a good place for it. Actually, the World of Darkness in general seems like a likely setting for such a chronicle, and it's not hard to imagine a vampire, a mage, and maybe a Promethean corresponding about some hoary matter, never revealing their real natures, and all living out their own stories. But this is a **Mage** book, and it's a good idea to have a little focus, anyway.

I fully admit that this would be a tricky chronicle to run, and would require people who *can* write a good letter and are willing to do so. But I also think that in light of the Awakened's superb information-gathering abilities, a chronicle in which the players dictate so much of that information and only the grand truth is really the Storyteller's province is a good expression of **Mage: The Awakening**.

Besides, as online gaming continues to grow in popularity, I'm always interested in presenting ways for people across the globe to roleplay together without some of the hassles that accompany chat-room or MMORPG gaming. The epistolary chronicle, if you'll indulge me in a little pretension (hey, that's what we do here, right?), allows a little of the *art* of roleplaying to come through.

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needs to carry some of the weight, and that means putting pen to paper (or fingers to keys, more likely).

• **Writing Ability:** Not everyone needs to be a professional writer, obviously, just as you don't need to be a professional actor to play **Mage** as a table-top or live action game. But every player in an epistolary chronicle needs to have the writing ability to convey information well through the written word, and the reading comprehension skill to understand what others are writing.

• **The Right Attitude:** The epistolary chronicle spreads the role of "Storyteller" out between the players a bit more than a "standard" **Mage** game. As such, each player needs to understand that the letters he writes are meant to advance the plot, not showcase his character to the exclusion of everyone else. More on how to write a good story/letter below.

Dear friends,

Hopefully this letter finds you well. Walter, I first want to express my sincere condolences for what happened to Mikhail. I know there was nothing that you could have done, I know he went willingly into our investigations, aware of the dangers. Still, I am sorry that I could not be there for his service, and I know he was your friend and companion. Please do pass along my condolences to Mary.

Since receiving your letter, I have been busy. I delved into every book on the subject I could find, looking for some reference, no matter how oblique, to the Eight Circles. I found something that I think might be of interest. In 1906, Percival Lowell began searching for a ninth planet in our system, one that he called "Planet X." He theorized its existence based on the orbits of Neptune and Uranus. As you know, the planet wasn't discovered until 1930, 14 years after Lowell died, and as it turned out the mass of Pluto isn't enough to disrupt the larger planets' orbits anyway. So Lowell was right, but not for the reasons he thought he was. What happened?

The Eight Circles cult predates the knowledge of Pluto, and they based their practices on the eight known planets. That much we've discovered. But my evidence suggests that Lowell might have been a member of the cult at one point, and presented his findings to them first — resulting in his expulsion. I'm still trying to reconcile this with the fact that Lowell was a known pacifist, since we know the cult is prone to violence. I feel that I might be missing something, and am planning on doing more research into both Lowell and the man who eventually discovered Pluto, Clyde Tombaugh. The naming of the planet is also interesting — the name was chosen by an 11-year-old schoolgirl. Guess where she was from? Oxford, England. Given the cult's leadership at the time, I think that's just too much of a coincidence.

I don't mean to presume, but it does seem that this information gives all of us something to research. Walter, if I could impose upon you to call upon your contacts at Harvard for any records they might have regarding the discovery of Pluto? Thomas, perhaps you could do some digging into that girl's history there in Oxford; perhaps she has living family there still. Ella, if you would look into the Lowell Observatory and its history, since it isn't far from you? I will try and call up the spirit of Percival Lowell. I have never tried to conjure the spirit of someone who has been dead so long, but I suspect that, if I can, he can answer some important questions for us.

I have only one other thing to relate, and I do not know what it means. Indeed, it might mean nothing at all, but as we have learned, what seems least significant often winds up being crucial. When I was walking to my apartment last night, I chanced to look up at the night sky. Normally the lights of the city blot out the stars, but this night they seemed inordinately bright. I stopped on the sidewalk and gazed upwards, and I found myself thinking about what the members of the cult must think when they look up — is it an act of worship for them, or do they avert their eyes from their gods? In any event, as I looked up I found myself thinking of Stephen Crane's poem. I said to the sky, to the gods of the Eight Circles cult, "Sirs, I exist," in a loud, clear voice. I don't know why. I was tired, perhaps, or frustrated with our recent setbacks. I did not expect what happened next.

As I stood there, I had an unshakeable and palpable feeling that something had heard me. I felt magic, too far away to be analyzed and yet too strong to be ignored. And far from the universe's response to the man in Crane's poem, the universe acknowledged my existence — our existence — with a sense of obligation.

I felt, though, that this obligation was of a most terrible and foreboding nature. I hope and pray that it was all just the product of too many long nights in research.

Thank you, and I hope to see all of you again soon.

—Wes

The Storyteller's Role

The Storyteller in an epistolary chronicle has a different role than in a standard **Mage** game. Instead of guiding the action at every step of the way, the Storyteller needs to be on hand to clarify characters' experiences, rule on what a character saw, provide information that players can then shape into parts of their letters, and, probably most importantly, decide what scenes need to be played out in full.

Starting Out

The epistolary chronicle begins with the players defining their characters and the relationships between them (more on this below). The Storyteller presents the first occurrence in the story to one or more players. This occurrence has to be something that gets the attention of the character(s) and induces them to ask for advice from the others, or at least interests them enough to tell their contemporaries about it (of course, if the characters *don't* do this, the chronicle doesn't progress).

The Storyteller might run a solo session with the player whose character witnesses the "starting point" for the chronicle, or, if the chronicle is going to include multiple characters per player (see below), this first session might involve the full troupe, but only one of the primary characters. Alternately, if the starting point involves all of the characters in their respective locations, the Storyteller might run a normal session but cut between the players, allowing all of them to see the beginning of the story firsthand. If the Storyteller wishes character interaction to begin with the first letter, he might explain to one or more of the characters what happens and what their characters experience, and then hand the reins over to the players and await the first letters.

Chronicle Concepts

The Storyteller has a great variety of options in designing an epistolary chronicle. Most of the conflicts appropriate for other **Mage** chronicles work for this kind of storytelling, but consider that the characters probably represent several different regions, and might well be from different countries. This means that you need to construct a plot with the potential to affect them all. It is possible that characters get involved due to intellectual curiosity or an altruistic need to help their fellow mages, but in general, any given Consilium has enough going on that mages don't need to bother themselves with crises halfway around the globe. Don't shy away from world-shattering plots, especially since anyone that the characters might think to contact could write them a letter and share some information (that does mean you might wind up writing letters as many different supporting characters, of course).

Remember, too, that the players will be directing much of the action, so planning the chronicle out in detail isn't to your advantage. Instead, decide upon *what* is happening and *why*. You can steer the characters by choosing scenes to play out and telling them what information they discover, but don't try to exert too much control over how that information comes out or who the characters interact with.

Example: The Eight Circles

A cult called the Eight Circles has been operating since the late 19th century. The cult worships eight beings — possibly demons, spirits, or guises for the Exarchs — that draw mystical correspondence to the eight planets that were known to exist at the time that the cult was formed. The cult was, until recently, not much of a blip on the Awakened radar. Members met and performed rituals to their various Masters, but didn't usually hurt people (and when they did, local chapters of the Guardians of the Veil or the Adamantine Arrow usually stepped in). Recently, though, a schism has formed in the cult over Pluto. Some of the newer members feel that this planet also has occult significance and that a ninth being awaits worship. Traditionalists believe Pluto to be a lie, a figment of a deranged mathematician's imagination.

This would all be a quaint story traded among cult experts if it weren't for the ritual that one branch of the Eight Circles performed in New Mexico. In attempting to get the attention of Ybnis, the Incarnation of the Ninth Circle (Pluto, that is), they caused a snowstorm in the desert. Sleepers saw it as a freak occurrence and fell over themselves making up weather patterns that might explain it, but mages in the area felt something come loose in that storm. The cult isn't satisfied yet. Some of them want to bring Ybnis to Earth, while others wonder if this ritual will work on the other, "true" Incarnations.

Scenes

Most of an epistolary chronicle takes place through letters the players write to one another. The sequence of events should go something like this:

• A player contacts the Storyteller, explaining the avenue of approach his character is going to take.

• The Storyteller tells the player, based on what he knows about the ongoing plot and what information there is to find, what the character discovers.

• The player writes an in-character letter to the other players, explaining what happened and what he learned.

• The other players respond with their own letters (if they wish), or inform the Storyteller as to their characters' next moves.

The Storyteller can decide, however, that a particular scene should be played through in the usual fashion. In an epistolary chronicle, this is called a *focused scene*. This is a good idea for scenes in which more than one of the characters are together, scenes that might resolve major plot points, and combat scenes. Players can certainly request that a given scene be represented in play rather than by a letter, of course.

Example: The Cabal

The Eight Circles chronicle consists of four characters and the Storyteller. The characters are: Walter Brale, a Moros of the Mysterium living in Cambridge, Massachusetts, acting as a record-keeper for his order after a Scelestus' curse confined him to a wheelchair; Ella Cushing, an Obrimos of the Adamantine Arrow living in Gallup, New Mexico, terrified by the freak storm and trying to convince her order to take it seriously as a threat; Thomas Alessi, Acanthus of the Silver Ladder, born of Italian parents but living in England and shut out of his Consilium's insular political scene; and Abraham "Wes" Westin, Moros of the Silver Ladder and self-styled expert in ghost summoning, living in New York City.

The chronicle begins with Ella experiencing the storm and trying to convince her fellow Arrows that it wasn't just a bad Paradox or an isolated incident. In desperation, she reaches out to a contact in the Mysterium, who tells her to contact his order in Boston (they have a superb historical record of such events). The Mysterium shunts her letter to Walter, to give him something to do, and he performs some research that leads him to discover records of the cult. He sends his acolyte, Mikhail, to New York to do some further digging, and Mikhail meets Walter, who is already acquainted with Thomas. Soon, the four mages are exchanging letters, and they agree that this storm has greater implications than the Arrow of the Southwest is willing to admit.

As the chronicle progresses, the characters learn that a cult was involved with the storm in New Mexico, and it has branches in many major cities. Walter's player informs the Storyteller that he is going to follow a particular lead to an isolated mansion in upstate New York. The Storyteller tells the players he would like to play that as a focused scene, and so the other players take on the roles of supporting characters (including Mikhail). The players discover the cult performing a summoning ritual, and though they disrupt it, in the ensuing battle Mikhail is killed. The chronicle resumes with Walter's tearful letter to his compatriots (which, in turn, sparks the letter from Wes that began this section).

The Players' Role

The players in an epistolary chronicle have an expanded responsibility in creating the story. First and foremost, they must help the Storyteller to create multiple locations in the World of Darkness. **Mage** is designed with a local feel in mind — one's home city and the interpretation of an order in that locale matters more than the entire world and the order's place within it. But as the Tiers section on pp. 126–134 demonstrates, it's entirely feasible to run **Mage** with a global focus, and the epistolary chronicle explores that possibility by having players create characters from several different locations. The players must create not only the characters they will portray, but provide data (at least to the Storyteller) about their characters' Consilii, what the politics are like, who the movers and shakers are and, most importantly, why the rest of the mages in the characters' lives aren't dealing with the problem at hand.

One basic requirement of all characters, of course, is that they be interested and able to write letters. A Mastigos character who simply teleports to people when he wants to talk to them isn't a good fit, nor is a telephone or IM junkie. One of the conceits of this type of chronicle is the written word (or typed; nothing says these missives can't be e-mails or even journal posts), and so characters have to be willing to work in that medium.

Another consideration is that the characters have to be motivated to participate. If the player can't think of a reason that his character would care about the problem at hand, then he needs to make a character who would. Most of the time, this is just a matter of deciding that the character *does* have a personal stake in the issue (the player controls the character, after all), and this can be as simple as curiosity or desire for occult discovery.

Example: Wes

Wes' player decides his character is a dilettante, a dabbler in magic and many other things. His aptitude is for Matter and he has used this to expand his already impressive personal fortune, but other mages in New York find him insufferable company. He writes well, though, and corresponds with other Awakened the world over.

Writing a Story Letter

Writing a good letter is art, and doing it in such a way as to advance the story but not upstage the other players is a task that requires some deliberation. We're not going to go into general tips on writing and compositions (some excellent resources for which can be found online or at your local library), but it does behoove us to consider how to construct such a letter.

A good letter in an epistolary chronicle should *reveal the author*. In the letter that begins this section, for example, Wes shows us that he recognizes that Walter has suffered a loss in the death of Mikhail, but doesn't show a great deal of empathy for it. Is that because Wes is a Moros, and therefore has a different take on death than other characters, or because he didn't know Mikhail well and has difficulty expressing anything beyond cursory condolences? This is a decision for the player (and the truth might be a little of both), but the other characters only see what is in the letter and must draw their own conclusions about Wes. The letter goes on to direct the other members of the chronicle in their investigations. Is that kind of direction welcome, or is Wes, as he himself says, presuming too much? Is Wes really the leader he is trying to be? Time (and further letters) will tell.

Another requirement for a good letter is that it *further the story*. Wes' player could have spent the letter agonizing over the battle with the cult and how he missed it (and thus blaming himself for Mikhail's death), and this might be totally in character, but it wouldn't make the story go anywhere. Instead, he includes details of his investigations in the letter, giving other players a place to start their own letters, even if they don't agree or intend to follow up on exactly what Wes suggests.

Finally, the letter should *help define the world*. This has been mentioned already, but beyond just deciding what the various orders are doing in different cities, the letter needs to include some of the strange details of the World of Darkness. These details might be directly related to the story at hand (Wes mentions, in his letter, that the leadership of the Eight Circles cult was based in England during the time that Pluto was discovered and named), or they might be seemingly unconnected (Wes' story about looking into the night sky). It's important for the players to realize, though, that whatever details they choose to include in this vein, the Storyteller makes the final decision about what (if anything) they mean.

Logistics and Systems

For the most part, the epistolary chronicle runs on the usual **Mage** system, when a system is required. Story letters include all of the usual actions, spells, and investigations that characters perform, but the success or failure of these actions is largely up to the players. If the Storyteller has any ground rules or assumptions that he wishes to keep sacrosanct, he should inform the players before they write letters. Once a letter is written, the Storyteller should endeavor to treat it as part of the chronicle — it's already happened, and going back and saying, "No, this didn't happen this way," disrupts the

flow of the chronicle and asks players to remember too many changes. It's also rather disrespectful to the players and the work they put into their letters.

If the Storyteller wishes to have a bit more control over the events of the chronicle, he might ask players to submit letters to him before sending them out to the other players, allowing him to do some "editing." Again, though, we recommend that this editing be minimal and quick. The chronicle should probably include at least one letter per week (not necessarily from each player), and if the Storyteller is asking for too many changes to letters before the other players get to read them, the players will quickly lose interest. The Storyteller needs to relinquish a great deal of the control he would normally wield over a chronicle, but the result is a truly shared storytelling experience.

Focused Scenes

As mentioned previously, the Storyteller can ask that any given scene be played through using normal **Mage** rules — dice, Willpower, and Mana, and so on. This scene can take place with the players around a table like a normal game session, or in a chat room if the players aren't local to each other. Focused scenes should probably only happen once a month or so, and should be reserved for scenes that are highly variable or critical to the story. A combat scene is a good choice for a focused scene, as is a scene in which most of the characters are together. The resolution of the chronicle, of course, should always be a focused scene.

Experience Points

The usual systems for experience points, as listed on pp. 216–217 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, apply in an epistolary chronicle, but players only receive experience points when they write a letter or participate in a focused scene. The experience points apply to the player's primary character, even if the player takes the role of a supporting character in a focused scene. For example, in the battle scene in which Mikhail dies, Ella's player takes on the role of the unfortunate acolyte. She still receives experience points, which she can then apply to Ella.

In addition to the usual experience point allocation, the Storyteller should make the following awards for a player's letter:

1 point — Revelation: The letter revealed the character in a new and interesting way.

1 point — Story: The letter moved the story along in an appropriate direction.

1 point — Other Characters: The letter provided the other characters with good bases for their own letters and actions.

1 point — World of Darkness: The letter showcased something strange and appropriate to the World of Darkness in general.

Players can spend experience points in the usual way, but since they aren't typically rolling dice, their expenditures need to be realized through the letters. If a player spends experience points to increase his character's rating in an Arcanum, the next letter should probably include a description of that revelation: a new spell, the understanding of a higher-level Practice, a session with a mentor, etc. If the player raises a Skill, the character's next letter should include a description of using it.

Furyland

Furyland is the war chronicle. It's about callous generals and disposable soldiers — an epic told not in the stories of a few individuals, but a stream of warrior-sorcerers, tossed into the abattoir of battle.

Here's what you need to know:

It's About Stories First — Characters Second: Don't get too invested in the characters. They'll probably die. So will their replacements. Furyland is mercilessly bloody, so players shouldn't assume they're playing one character for the duration. Storytellers, don't give characters script immunity by fudging dice rolls. This doesn't mean every mission is 100% lethal. Survivors exist and move from one mission to the next, but everyone should understand this isn't a guaranteed thing. The real focus of Furyland is the overarching secret war.

It's Got Two Phases, and Two Types of Characters — Command and Operations: A Furyland chronicle looks at the war story from two basic perspectives. The first point of view is Command. Players portray the Legates that direct an Awakened war. Once they formulate a plan, the grunts in Operations put their boots on the ground to carry it out.

Casus Belli

The first thing you need to do is set up a conflict that embroils enough mages and territory to break the careful structure of laws, duels, and ritual vengeance that keeps Awakened society at peace. Here are five quick ways to get a war started:

• Mages come to blows over a powerful resource. It could be an artifact like Chicago's Celestial Flange, a well-stocked occult library, or even a person — perhaps the Guardians' legendary sorcerer-saint, the Hieromagus, or a true heir to the throne of Atlantis. Then again, it could just be a fight over an area's ordinary wealth. Who wouldn't want to be the only supernatural power in Washington D.C.?

• One faction possesses total control over a region. Their enemies invade, either out of a historical grudge or ideological motive. Mages who've been driven away are eager to return, weapon in hand. The Silver Ladder will *never* tolerate any council that bans the order from power, and Libertines love hitting a powerfully entrenched Seer contingent.

• The enemy is a target for simple outrage. A Scelesti-infested Consilium worships the Abyss. Seers turn entire cabals into mind-controlled quislings. Enough is enough. Sometimes the enemy isn't even responsible for the offense, but the crime puts old rivalries in a new light. When Banishers murder the Hierarch, the Consilium won't tolerate the Seers that backed them — or who they *assume* backed them.

The Sword of Awakening

Whatever the cause, it's enough to commit the normally fractious orders to a war footing. The Adamantine Arrow distributes officers among the cabals and the Silver Ladder dusts off old wartime laws. In the West, tradition calls a wartime collective a Consilium Bellorum. This triggers the following actions:

Leadership Passes to the Adamant Sage: In most Consilii, the Hierarch cedes power to the senior Adamantine Arrow for the duration of the conflict. The Sage's powers are wide ranging, including the ability to appoint Legates to the Ruling Council. A Legate is given more authority

than a Councilor in military matters (and might be a Councilor wearing a different "hat"). Some Legates are even recruited from entirely different Consilii.

Some Adamantine Arrow Cabals Disperse into Other Cabals: The Arrows are considered to be the natural leaders and trainers of any Awakened fighting force. The Adamant Sage tries to ensure that every cabal has a guiding Arrow, but still maintains at least one Arrow-dominant cabal for special operations. Each cabal's Arrow is theoretically the leader but in reality, most cabals treat him as an advisor, not an officer

Allies Quicken Apprentices: One of the first things a Consilium Bellorum does is scour allied areas for young mages to throw into the meat grinder. These mages are trained quickly and transferred into a cabal for service — a process called "quickening." Despite constant haranguing from the Arrow, most Consilii have few agreements

with others to snatch apprentices in this fashion, so the Ruling Council pays for the privilege with all the favors and resources it can muster.

The Law Grows Severe: The legality of a Consilium Bellorum is debatable. The writings detailing them are widely thought to be forgeries and the idea of a rigid chain of command is anathema to the spirit of Awakened society. The Adamant Sage usually demands an explicit oath of service from every cabal. If she can't get enough promises, the war effort dies in the cradle. If she can, she makes it clear that she and her Legates are calling the shots, and gives the local Interfector free reign to punish disobedience.

The Free Council Makes Its Own Plans: Libertines hold emergency Assemblies to name a wartime strategos that organizes a Column to fight for the Free Council's agenda. When relations between the Libertines and Consilium are good, the Column serves as an allied force.

Chain of Command

The basic Consilium Bellorum chain of command is simple enough. At the top is the **Adamant Sage**: the general in charge of the entire war effort. She has a council of **Legates** who are either Councilors or have been drafted into the position for the duration of the conflict. Arrow **First Talons** relay commands to individual cabals, either directly or through a network of Adamantine Arrows. Ancient tradition calls Arrows in a militant mode **Talons**, though a few go by the peacetime title **Banner Warden** as they already performed protective duties. The basic foot soldier from another order is called a **Latronus** — Latin for "mercenary," which is an apt comment on how much the Adamantine Arrow trusts outsiders with the business of fighting. The Adamantine Arrow's chain of command theoretically takes precedence over other orders' hierarchies, but a strong custom gives credence to Arcanum competence, since it's widely known that no second degree Adept is going to bow to a snot-nosed Arrow apprentice without a very good reason.

Things also get a little sticky when peacetime officials use their influence during the war. Theoretically, they retain all of their power, but the Adamant Sage can override their decisions whenever she thinks they interfere with military efforts. Furthermore, recent tradition cedes Free Council members the right to obey their order's strategos and Column as long as it stays allied to the Consilium. Official speech calls Libertine allies **Partisans**.

Character Strategies

To get the chronicle started, the players need to design two groups of characters: the Consilium Bellorum's Legates and one cabal at the tip of the spear, fighting on the ground.

Legates

The position of Legate has been designed to let you create completely fresh characters, even in an established chronicle setting, so if you don't want to deal with the old bastards in charge in Boston (see the Appendix of **Mage: The Awakening**) you can pick new people without substantially revising things. Give each player control of one Legate. If the Free Council is an ally, add the military strategos, who will be an unofficial associate of the council.

Design Legates as standard mages but increase one Arcanum to five dots, increase Gnosis to four dots, and spend 75 additional experience points on anything else you like in conformity with **Mage: The Awakening**'s character development rules. Be aware that in every case, the Adamant Sage selected the character because she thinks he has something useful to contribute, even if it's just wealth or connections.

Grunts: Talons and Latroni

Next, it's time to design the mages who will actually carry out the Legates' plans. These characters have an excellent chance of leading nasty, brutish, and short lives, so they use a simplified character creation scheme. In fact, you may want to start with at least two per player: a starting grunt and a replacement.

Step One: Character Concept

New Furyland characters are assumed to be recent recruits. They start play at the very dawn of the war, or they've been quickened into service later. Define the character's peacetime role and current place in the war.

The Adamant Sage

By default, the Adamant Sage is a Storyteller-controlled character. This provides some guidance for stumped players and a possible source of tension if the Storyteller decides to put the Sage at odds with her staff (since the Sage makes appointments this isn't very common, and this twist should only get pulled out when the Command phase gets boring).

Design the Adamant Sage after everyone else creates Legates. She's someone who would have chosen those specific individuals. Naturally, that means if the players create incompetent Legates the Adamant Sage is probably either incompetent herself or plans on exploiting the feckless council for her own selfish ends. Bad Legates plan a lot of SNAFUs (see p. 169).

The character concept is a bit more important for game system purposes than it is in a standard **Mage** chronicle. Do the following:

• Highlight *two things* the character is better at doing than his other game traits would suggest. One thing is a personal or peaceful vocation. The other is the result of training for the war. Each bit of background provides a +1 bonus to dice rolls that invoke it.

• Describe *one thing* the character is bad at. He's a lousy shot, stammers when he's nervous, or can't memorize texts to save his life. This disadvantage imposes a –1 penalty to applicable dice rolls.

Step Two: Power, Finesse, and Resistance Attributes

Next up: Attributes. Grunts have three of them. Each Attribute defines the character's ability to perform a certain type of task in play. Characters with a high Power are good at applying raw force to solve problems. Characters use Finesse to act with precision. They trust to Resistance to endure harm and guard against threats.

Start with one dot in each and divide five more dots between them. The fifth dot in an Attribute costs two dots. (This would normally provide totals of 5/1/1, which isn't a great idea but might be fun for an expendable grunt.)

Step Three: Mental, Physical, and Social Skills

Grunts only have three broad skills: Mental, Physical, and Social. Split seven dots between them. The fifth dot costs two dots. A character with a high Physical score is athletic and coordinated, while a character with a high Social is generally good at making friends and influencing people. If a field requires special training, look to the character's concept; this determines whether she has specialized knowledge in a particular field.

Grunts *don't* have Skill Specialties. Again, look to the character concept for narrow abilities.

Step Four: Add Mage Template

A Furyland grunt uses a simplified Mage template.

Path: Pick a Path. It controls the character's Primary Arcanum as usual but it doesn't provide a bonus to Resolve or Composure, or their equivalents.

Order: Pick an order. Instead of rote specialties, order members pick one of the following permanent bonuses. Each order has two choices.

Adamantine Arrow: +1 Physical or Power
Free Council: +1 Mental or Resistance
Guardians of the Veil: +1 Mental or Finesse
Mysterium: +1 Mental or Power
Silver Ladder: +1 Social or Power

Gnosis: All characters start with one dot of Gnosis.

Arcana: Pick Arcana as usual (two dots in two Arcana, one dot in another, with at least two being Path Ruling Arcana, and then a final dot placed anywhere). Characters do *not* have rotes.

Styles: Characters do not have rotes. Instead they have magical *styles*. A style consists of a function (destructive magic, espionage, crafting) and a form (fire, technology, spirits). Pick one; invoking it allows the player to roll Attribute + Skill + Arcanum instead of Gnosis + Arcanum, and doesn't invoke the Mana cost of improvised magic.

Step Five: Determine Advantages

Calculate Advantages as follows:

Health: Resistance + Size
Willpower: Resistance + Mental
Defense: Lower of Finesse or Resistance
Initiative: Finesse + Resistance
Speed: Power + Finesse
Morality (Wisdom): Start with 7
Virtue and Vice: Select normally

Step Six: Finishing Touches

Furyland grunts know the High Speech, but they don't have other Merits. At this point, it's time to establish a relationship between the characters. This is pretty simple, because in many cases the Legates and Adamant Sage would have drafted the characters into one cabal. It is possible to use an established or voluntary cabal instead. Many cabals have an Adamantine Arrow who serves as an advisor (and in meetings with Legates and First Talons, is usually treated like the leader, even if it's just for appearance's sake).

Advancement

Grunts are simplified characters because there's a high likelihood that they'll die (or suffer a fate worse than death). If they survive, they advance, but to prevent the pain that occurs when a player's character dies before completing a meticulously planned advancement path, and to actually increase the rate of improvement (survival should have a palpable reward), grunt advancement doesn't use experience points. Instead, do the following:

• After a story, the survivor's player documents its events, identifying *two things* the character has learned. These are extensions of the character concept in Step One. Harnessing one of these learning experiences adds +1 to applicable rolls. These stack with other background bonuses.

• Alternately, the player can trade in both background bonuses for either an extra dot in one Arcanum or an extra dot of Gnosis.

The point of this system is to ease the technical aspects of character development and move focus to his history in the story. It adds more commitment to the grunt over time, so his death has an impact proportional to his story, instead of wasting system optimization efforts and a detailed, front-loaded character background.

Grunt Systems

Whenever you need to convert a standard Storytelling System mechanic for these characters, do one of the following things:

• If the dice pool is Attribute + Skill or Attribute + Attribute, check the Attribute category (Power, Finesse, or Resistance) and Skill type (Mental, Physical, or Social) and use equivalents.

• To make Resistance a more active Attribute, employ it as a substitution when the character must use another Attribute in a defensive or protective role. For example, don't use Finesse + Mental to detect an ambush, but Resistance + Mental.

• If you don't want a situation where a dice pool is the same Attribute added twice, use Power + Finesse instead of Power + Power, Finesse + Resistance instead of Finesse + Finesse and Resistance + Power instead of Resistance + Resistance.

Promotion

Aside from death, magical competence is one of the best ways to get excused from the front lines. Even though a Master of Forces could certainly tear things up, his knowledge makes him too valuable to risk in combat. Sacrificing any mage is a tragedy, but losing anyone truly enlightened is just intolerable.

This is why Adepts are usually reserved for a few important missions, and Masters are encouraged to take on advisory or ritual roles. In fact, a lucky grunt might even work his way up to the rank of Legate by getting far too talented to send on missions.

Command

Every Furyland chapter starts with the **Command** phase. This is where the players' Legates construct a mission for their grunts. The Legates are actually busy with a great many things but we'll assume these take place "off stage." Play out Legate actions that specifically matter to the grunt cabal.

In the role of the Adamant Sage, the Storyteller reviews the war so far, providing story seeds that the players' Legates can build into missions. The Legates need to create an *objective* and an *action plan*. This sets up the framework for everything that follows.

Command Systems

After settling on a plan, the Command phase moves into a Teamwork roll (**World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 134) that represents how effective the Legates' orders are. Each participant chooses an Attribute + Skill dice pool that represents the ability to formulate and communicate part of the plan.

Each dice pool requires a *rationale*: a bit of the plan, backed by the Legate's expertise. Intelligence + Firearms might represent advice that helps grunts survive a firefight; Charisma + Occult could give them the motivation to risk life and limb in pursuit of some obscure grimoire. Every rationale needs to justify why the pool is appropriate, and link it to an assumption about the upcoming mission. The assumption needs to be more specific than, "They'll get in a fight," but doesn't have to be so specific it boils down to, "A sniper will shoot a Fate-enhanced bullet from a vintage Lee-Enfield rifle."

The Storyteller decides what fits in the right range of specificity, helping the player get it right, if necessary. Record each rationale — it'll be important later. If the Storyteller deems a contribution's rationale especially clever or insightful, she should grant a bonus of one to three dice to the player's pool.

Each player rolls his Legate's chosen pool once. This is not an Extended Action, regardless of the amount of time it takes to formulate the plan. Pick one Legate to act as the leader, as is standard for all Teamwork rolls. As usual, he rolls last after adding all the other contributors' successes as bonus dice.

The final, total successes constitute the grunt cabal's Mission Pool: a mechanic that rewards the Legates' planning. See below to see how the Mission Pool works.

Magical Planning

Legates can use magic to gather intelligence or otherwise enhance a plan. Adamant Sages discourage overdoing this because it can unwittingly expose Leg-

Mission Seeds

Give players a choice between multiple mission seeds. These are a bit less detailed than what you'd develop for other chronicles because you're relying on players to flesh them out into detailed plans. Here are five seeds to get you started.

- **Attrition:** It's a straightforward opportunity. The other side is gathering to meet, plan, and set forth against you. Get there first, kill as many people as possible, and get out with as few casualties as you can manage.

- **PsyOps:** Nobody fights without a motive. Destroy the motive, and kill the enemy's will to fight. If the Guardians of the Veil are hiding a young boy they think is the Hieromagus, killing or capturing him will probably cripple their morale. Reveal traitors, sow disinformation — if the other side is despondent and confused they'll lose.

- **The Siege:** If the grunts can hold a Hallow, Atlantean ruin, or other key chunk of territory it would be a tremendous help to the war effort. Unfortunately, the enemy knows this and plans to take it. Alternately, the grunt cabal has been charged with seizing well-guarded enemy territory.

- **Snatch and Grab:** Boston's Secret Concord and Chicago's Celestial Flange are both items that can transform their owners' fortunes, even if only by boosting their prestige. Some of these assets are spirits, people with strange destinies and even the secret names of certain Abyssal entities. Grab them before the other side does, or steal them right out of their strongholds.

- **With Extreme Prejudice:** Assassination is a time-honored military tool, especially among mages. Masters aren't just role models, but men and women of power, with secrets preserved from before the Fall. This makes them challenging but rewarding targets for a hit. On the flip side, the Legates discover a possible plot and order the grunts to neutralize it.

ates to spying and assassination attempts. If the Legate uses a spell instead, its Potency (if successful) counts as automatic successes on the leader's roll, but *only* if that roll scores at least one success. If the plan just sucks, magic won't make it better.

Spells that contribute to the Mission Pool are always treated as instant spells, even if they are normally extended spells. This is purely for the sake of the Mission Pool. If a Legate wants to cast a spell for some other reason, it works normally.

The Best Laid Plans...

Of course, this begs the question: what if the Legates fuck it up? If they merely put together a bad or incoherent plan (represented by 0 successes) this doesn't hurt the grunts, but if Command proceeds based on faulty intelligence, bad assumptions, or plain stupidity the Storyteller has two choices:

Roll With It: If the plan sounds really clever but doesn't fit what the Storyteller knows about the situation, she can simply rewrite the plot to make the Legates right. Go for this option if the players would enjoy it in the *long term* — if success would just bring cheap, immediate gratification it doesn't really fit the chronicle's style.

SNAFU: Situation Normal, All Fucked Up. The Storyteller should secretly note every incorrect rationale that went into the Mission Pool. These are SNAFU rationales. If these are used to activate bonus dice, they're *liabilities*. Read further for how it works.

Operations

Next up: Operations. It's time for the players to portray their grunts in the field. Furyland encourages the Storyteller to be violent and merciless. Characters shouldn't just die when it's dramatically appropriate. They should perish for seemingly random and even *stupid* reasons. This isn't a chronicle where characters are guaranteed a spot in the next mission, or to even die heroically. Them's the breaks.

Nevertheless, this chronicle uses the Mission Pool (below) to link the Legates commands to grunt outcomes. When the Legates plan well, grunts have a better chance of succeeding. If the Legates get it wrong… well, magic makes it possible to visit some very bad things on hapless grunts.

The Offstage Briefing

Between the Command and Operations phases, Legates either relay the mission plan themselves or through subordinates. Handle this offstage (don't run the scene with character interaction) for two reasons. First of

all, it's awkward for the players to talk to themselves if their Legates are giving the orders. Second, the specific content of the briefing should be vague so that during Operations, players can activate Mission Pool dice by freely narrating a briefing flashback.

Using the Mission Pool

Once Legates transfer orders to the grunts, the grunt cabal acquires a Mission Pool equal to the number of successes earned during Command planning.

The Mission Pool is a bunch of bonus dice that players add to their grunts' rolls during the mission. A grunt's player calls on one of the listed rationales defined during the Command phase. If it fits the upcoming roll and is intended to bring the cabal closer to its mission objective, the player can add as many dice as the higher of his Resistance Attribute and Mental Skill to his pool. (If you use standard **Mage** characters, make this Intelligence or Composure Attributes instead.) In the story, the pool represents mental preparedness, training, and confidence, but it ultimately operates at the level of a meta-narrative element used to support the chronicle's structure. Spells don't affect it after it's been created, and it has no true reality in the world of the story.

If the rationale is a SNAFU, using it to get extra dice is bad. The Storyteller applies a *penalty* equal to the number of bonus dice the player would get if it wasn't a SNAFU. (Yes, this means the better you are at following a bad plan, the more you'll be punished.)

The Mission Pool refreshes every scene; you can't save dice from one scene to the next. If the players use any Mission Pool dice in a scene, reduce the maximum by one die per cabal grunt during the following scene. This is a cumulative loss, but it *only* applies after the grunts use the pool during a scene.

Soldiering On

The chapter ends if the grunts all die, when they succeed and return to safer circumstances, or if they retreat for good after failing to accomplish the mission's objective. Apply grunt advancements to the survivors and add fresh mages to replace the dead. Don't give the new mages extra advancements to catch them up with survivors; they're probably the result of quickened apprenticeships and in any case, the chronicle isn't designed to help them survive. The real story is the overall progress of the war, punctuated by the stories of those few that are lucky enough to survive.

Deciding how the war unfolds is a sticky situation. In real conflicts, the usual goal to win as quickly and efficiently as possible, but this doesn't suit the dramatic needs of a chronicle, where you want to explore its theme and mood through challenging conflicts, spread out over as much time as you need to play to a satisfying conclusion. Nevertheless, if the players don't have any control over the war they won't feel like they're really affecting things, especially since as Legates, they play major movers and shakers.

As a compromise then, success in the Operations phase makes future planning more potent. If the grunts fail or die, the Legates' plans aren't as effective. Use the following systems:

• If the grunts accomplish the mission's objective add three dice to the lead Legate's next planning roll. Drop the bonus by one die if there are casualties or two dice if the mission succeeds, but all the grunts die. This modifier doesn't accumulate across multiple missions.

• If the grunts fail to accomplish the mission objective, subtract a die from the lead Legate's next planning roll. Make that a two-die penalty if there are any casualties or a three-die penalty if every grunt in the cabal dies. This modifier doesn't stack across multiple missions either.

• Next, pick an odd number of missions based on the length of chronicle you want to run. Three, five, or seven missions are a good start. Count whether the majority of missions succeeded or failed. Failure adds a penalty to the lead Legate's future mission planning rolls equal to the number of Legates involved in the planning process; success adds a number of bonus dice equal to the number of Legates. This applies to all future missions.

• After the next lowest, odd number of missions pass (five missions after seven or three after five, for example), apply the modifier again, based on whether the majority of missions in the shorter segment succeeded or failed. These bonuses and penalties *do* stack; apply them again and again with successively smaller numbers of odd numbered missions until you're left with a single mission cycle. The chronicle's climactic mission is the very *next* mission after that.

For example, let's say you want to run a 10-mission chronicle. The grunts fail three missions out of the first five. There are four Legates, so the next three missions suffer a –4 penalty to planning during the Command phase. Fortunately, all three missions succeed, adding a +4 bonus — a 0 modifier after removing the –4 penalty. The next cycle lasts just one mission, which succeeds, but one of the Legates is assassinated in the process. The last three Legates contribute a total of +3 to Command planning for the tenth and final mission.

None of this governs other events like politicking and surprise attacks, and doesn't directly decide success or victory. Victory and defeat are for the Storyteller to devise, based on events throughout the chronicle. In general, the grunt cabal's fortunes reflect the overall course of the war, but there is still room for secret weapons, jaw-dropping revelations, and ancient curses to kick things out of a predictable course.

Into the Shadow

Dealing with the supernatural is part and parcel of being Awakened. The Mysterium catalogues items of power while the Guardians of the Veil seal them away. The Adamantine Arrow defends the mages against threats, usually including supernatural antagonists. Spirits are part of the Awakened world's everyday life, but to Sleepers, they are little more than a passing nightmare. Rarely do spirits interact with Sleepers, unless it is to take them over for some period of time, or to gather Essence from their actions. Usually, the Gauntlet separates man from spirit, but not in this chronicle. The barrier that separates the world of mortals from the world of spirits is gone. It has been destroyed, allowing spirits to commingle with the Fallen World. The mages of this chronicle must delve into the Shadow to reinstate some kind of order.

What Happened?

From a time before the characters Awakened, the Gauntlet has been absent. Deciding what happened to it is important in deciding what direction the chronicle will take, and how the characters will fix the problem. Decide if the problem is localized to one city or small geographical region, or has occurred globally. The assumption this chronicle makes is that the Gauntlet's fall is a comparatively recent occurrence (that is, it hasn't always been this way). This brings in some of the questions of the Lucid Sleepers genre (p. 37), should you choose to use them.

The characters have been living in this environment for a long time. It doesn't matter how it happened, the Gauntlet has not been right for many years. During character creation, each mage gains the Spirit Arcanum as a third Ruling Arcanum. All Legacies that use Spirit as a Ruling Arcanum are open to characters of all Paths.

The following are a few example scenarios for the chronicle.

Author Notes — Into the Shadow by Danielle Lauzon

I like spirits. I like them enough to fantasize about what it would be like to play a game where they were the main focus of play. They don't have the same center-stage focus in **Mage** as in **Werewolf**, so I wanted to come up with a reason for them to be the focus of play.

Spiritual Destruction

A spirit or group of spirits decided to tear down the Gauntlet in the city to allow their brethren into the Fallen World to wreak havoc. The spirits came together and began weakening the Gauntlet, but met with resistance. During the fight, spirits and mages pushed magic and Numen across the Gauntlet, which eventually tore it down. In trying to prevent it, the mages caused the Gauntlet's fall.

Foul Play

A Silver Ladder cabal decided to weaken the Gauntlet strength to allow a few spirits across. While performing their ritual, spirits amassed on the other side waiting to come in. The pressure from the spirits pushing against it and the magic of the ritual tore the Gauntlet as they passed. Afterwards, the mages could not restore the strength of the Gauntlet, and the tear began to widen.

Magical Degradation

As magic flows from the Supernal Realm into the Fallen World, it passes through the Abyss. Many mages believe that when the Abyss touches the magic, a Paradox occurs, and this act makes the Abyss bigger and stronger. What they don't realize is that it also weakens the Fallen World and its barriers to the other Realms. After a fight between Seers of the Throne and Pentacle mages, the Gauntlet in the city has degraded to nothing. Spirits leak across and with their newfound freedom take residence with willworkers and Sleepers alike.

Shadow Play

The Shadow is a dark reflection of the Fallen World. Many Awakened never step across the Gauntlet into that world, and those that do exercise extreme caution. The characters in this chronicle will be faced with it every day. A nominal distinction exists between being in the Fallen World and being in Shadow. Moving from one to the other is as simple as wanting it to happen. For Sleepers, this is not an easy task, but if compelled to do so, they are capable of going. When a Sleeper enters the Shadow, his psyche cannot handle the sensory overload. Most Sleepers go catatonic, or even die if left for too long in the Shadow. Possessed or Claimed Sleepers do not have this problem. Yet, if a spirit leaves his host in the Shadow, the host is sure to die.

Spirits

Spirits have no problem moving between Shadow and the Fallen World, and do so with abandon. Lack of a Gauntlet makes the Gauntlet Breach and Reaching Numen useless for spirits as they do not risk the chance of being sucked back into Shadow. Spirits that use the Materialize, Discorporate, and Fetter Numina spend one less Essence to do so. Since it costs nothing to be in the Fallen World, few spirits choose to fetter themselves to objects. Some spirits use Living Fetter to keep track of the person to which they are fettered. Many conceptual spirits choose to Possess or Claim Sleepers for multiple reasons, such as to perform tasks they would normally be ill-equipped to do or to have physical interactions with Sleepers. The primary reason is to create and gather Essence. Gathering Essence is the top priority for spirits, and it is easy to do so outside of Shadow.

Before the Gauntlet fell, a fire-spirit would move from camp fire to house fire and so on to gain Essence. Leaving the Shadow was not common due to the prohibitive cost of making the journey. Making someone create a fire, or using Influence on a fire was difficult and not generally an efficient use of resources either. Now the Gauntlet is gone. The spirit roams the physical world greedy for fire and Essence. It Manifests to convince Sleepers to start fires. It influences fires at the behest of supernatural creatures that can pay it with Essence. It possesses Sleepers to use them to commit arson on a grand scale.

The Awakened

Though the Shadow and the Fallen World share the same space, the Shadow does not completely overlap the world. Instead, it appears in patches. Places that have always had a strong connection to the Shadow are deeply immersed in it, where areas that were strongly separated still have a distinct separation. Locations such as loci are completely overlaid with Shadow where large downtown office buildings have very little Shadow around them. In the places that are overlapped with Shadow, determining what is physical and what is ephemeral can be difficult. Mages can see and interact with both Realms at once in these places.

Travel within the Shadow is both easier and riskier than in standard **Mage**. The spirits that mages encounter in the Shadow are the same as those encountered outside. They have the same strength and powers but are less likely to start a fight as they have nowhere to safely discorporate. Moving deeper within the Shadow is dangerously easy, and powerful spirits lurk in the deep recesses of the Realm. These spirits are powerful and deadly, as they feel that any outside presence is an intrusion into their territory.

Dealing with Spirits

The characters are going to need help as they travel between the Realms, and the fastest way to get help is either from other mages or from spirits. Both mages and spirits are eager to help if something is in it for them. Spirits and mages trade Essence as currency for favors. Usually, spirits are satisfied with a simple Essence gift, where mages often want more.

Interactions between spirits and the characters should follow certain guidelines. If the characters are willing to assist the spirit either by giving it Essence — directly or indirectly — or performing tasks, then the spirit is more inclined to give them aide. Spirits with opposing agendas to the characters are less likely to accept favors as payment for services. The characters can engage in chiminage to pay the spirits, or they can have Essence on hand to give to the spirits.

Effect on Sleepers

Sleepers might not be able to see spirits all the time, but they know they exist, and they are afraid of them. Sleepers refuse to travel to certain places because of the spirits there. Of course, spirits are just about everywhere. Spirits only want to use Sleepers for the purpose of gaining Essence, or doing tasks for them. Conceptual spirits compel them to act out to produce Essence. Nature spirits have them perform tasks that the spirits are unable to accomplish. Artificial spirits use them to fight wars with the other spirit courts. Any type of spirit might possess a Sleeper to interact with mages, or even other Sleepers. Sleepers seek out deals with spirits to increase personal power.

SpiritNumina and Influences are not subject to Disbelief. If

Spell Name	Page in Ma	
Essence Gift	p. 252	Requires Spirit 2, Prime 1
Medicine Bag	p. 25	
Sacramental Chain	p. 253	Requires Spirit 2
Spirit Court	p. 25	

the Gauntlet's absence is widespread, then magic might not cause Disbelief either. The state of mundane in the world might have shifted to the point that the Sleeping mind has become attuned to elements of the occult. The Sleeper's soul is still tied to the Abyss, and Paradox effects occur as per normal.

The fact that magic is so prevalent leads to an inflated number of Sleepwalkers. Not everyone Awakens from their exposure to spirits, but many eyes are opened to the presence of magic. Reduce Unseen Sense (**World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 109) Sleepwalker (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 334) two-dot Merits.

The effect of spirits on Sleepers makes a profound difference in how they interact with the Awakened community. Mages employ powers just like spirits, and every Sleeper reacts to that knowledge differently. Some see mages as those chosen to fight the spirits and keep them at bay, while others see them as dangerous consorts of spirits. Sleeper groups dedicated to hunting down and killing both spirits and mages dog the mages' steps. These groups have learned to operate imbued items, and collect them for use against their makers. Other Sleeper groups work like cults with mages as their leaders. Still others take spirits as masters. These few Sleepers have learned the value of the activities that will produce Essence for their patron spirits. They perform daily rituals to appease the spirits, and include friends and family to be considered for protection.

What Happens Next?

The characters can be many things in this chronicle. They are heroes, villains, mercenaries, wanderers, or possibly gods. They could rebuild the Gauntlet and cast the spirits back into the Shadow. They could enslave spirits to their will, creating armies to pit against other mages. They could save entire cities of Sleepers from spirits that wish to enslave them all.

No matter which scenario is used for the chronicle, several things should remain the same. The world has been devoid of the Gauntlet long enough that no one alive remembers the time before, but the Gauntlet still isn't more than about a century gone (meaning that vampires and other undying beings might remember, and be able to help characters to rebuild the Gauntlet). Spirits both help and hinder the characters. Sleepers are deeply affected by this phenomenon. No matter what started it, the problem can be fixed by multiple means. Some are obviously easier than others, and that should be taken into account when working out a solution. The following

are some examples for the scenarios in which fixing the problem makes sense.

Spiritual Destruction

• The characters make deals with spirits to reinvent the Gauntlet. Because it was destroyed with Numina and Magic, it must be restored with a combination of both. The characters must decide to either appease the aggressive spirits, or destroy them all and make pacts with friendly spirits.

• After the spirits broke through the Gauntlet, all was not well with the spirit courts. The stronger spirits prey on both mages and spirits, stealing their Essence and Mana. Some weaker spirits beg the mages to make safe havens for them, which eventually constructs a barrier around the entire city.

Foul Play

• The characters find the Sanctum of the original cabal that caused the rift. After researching their notes, they discover what actually caused the problem and are able to restore it.

• Older spirits that remember the breaking are willing to help the characters for a price. If the characters can pay, the spirits will lend their help in restoring the Gauntlet.

• The characters find some spots where it is hard to pass into the Shadow. As they investigate this phenomenon, they realize they can strengthen its properties constructing a wall between the two worlds.

Magical Degradation

• After many years, the mage council for the city realizes that abstaining from casting magic helps restore the Gauntlet. The characters are charged with policing the Awakened society until the Gauntlet heals itself.

• A wasteland exists at the edges of the city where the Gauntlet is still slowly degrading. By watching its growth, the characters realize that magic is not the problem, instead a disease is eating away at it. If they can discover a cure for the disease, they will be able to repair the Gauntlet.

• Spirits tell stories of how their Influences and Numina worked differently before the combining of the worlds. Other mages pass it off as the previous need to manifest, but the characters realize that their magic works differently when they move into Shadow. If they cast magic from within the Shadow to restore the Gauntlet, they might be able to accomplish their goal, but be stuck in Shadow forever afterwards.

Aftermath

The Gauntlet has been restored and all is right with the world? Not exactly. Sleepers and other mages with strong ties to spirits will be angry at the loss. Some Sleepwalkers lose their connection to the Supernal. Some spirits are not happy with this result, and during the raising of the Gauntlet enter into items and Sleepers to evade the return to Shadow. Cleaning up the mess left by the spirits will take years. The characters might focus on finding hidden spirits and returning them to the Shadow.

Jianghu Modern

Magic is *gongfu* — kung fu — in the literal sense: a near-synonym for virtuoso ability. That's the inspiration for Jianghu Modern. It's a chronicle that uses **Mage** to frame the *wuxia* genre (Chinese period martial arts

Author Notes — Jianghu Modern, by Malcolm Sheppard

This is a pure indulgence. I've been a fan of *wuxia* films since the first time I saw *Swordsman II*: an epic with a lurid color palette and action that managed to be visceral without losing the genre's signature grace — and the gender-bending kung fu sorcery rocks. You should rent this along with *The Bride With White Hair*.

Aside from the supernatural elements, these movies are relevant in the way they turn traditional definitions of virtue upside down, presaging the approach of films like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *Hero*. These movies are a bit more "international," toning down on strident plotting in favor of a more introspective, character-driven tone.

In a **Mage** game, tone is a collaborative effect that can veer wildly from soap opera theatrics to functional plot progress. Jianghu Modern's inspirations give you a lot of room to move around, but some strong roots: the pursuit of superlative skill as an end in of itself, the idea that there is a proper order of things above our petty concerns, and in the tradition of later films, conflict between duty to that mandate, duty to one's companions, and the ambition to master an ultimate Art.

Where's My Kung Fu?

Jianghu Modern's conceit is that magic has the same story role as martial arts in a *wuxia* epic — not that the game is all about kicking ass. It's all about learning secret techniques, developing allegiance to Masters, and building rivalries with other cabals.

If you want to make this a full-blown chronicle of magic and martial arts, consider adding systems from the Action-Horror genre (p. 16). If you want something simpler, you might also allow mages to use one magical and one mundane action per turn.

cinema) in contemporary clothing. At the same time, Jianghu Modern isn't completely faithful to *wuxia*. It's about sorcery as much as fighting and takes place in the modern day.

It's called Jianghu Modern for a reason. *Jianghu* is a *Putonghua* (Mandarin Chinese) term (it's *gong wuh* in Cantonese) that literally means "rivers and lakes," but is actually a colloquialism for the demimonde of *wuxia* fiction, where practitioners of *gongfu* band together to protect their communities from pervasive corruption. It's "Modern" in that we've taken the idea to **Mage**'s contemporary occult setting, but also because the chronicle has more moral confusion and introspection than traditional *wuxia*. If you've seen modern exports of the genre such as *House of Flying Daggers* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* you'll see the signs, because the protagonists have doubts and personal drives that aren't really part of the classic form. In short: the chronicle is an unabashed mash up designed to turn mages into heroic sorcerers, standing against corruption while they learn the secret techniques that will give them full command of the Mysteries.

The Supernal Mandate

Atlantis was the ur-empire, wisely guiding All Under Heaven. This age of virtue ended when corrupt sorcerer-aristocrats tempted the Dragon Blooded Emperor with the promise of immortality, a gift that could only be stolen from the Supernal Realms. This was an unforgiveable offense against the gods, because the law was clear: Atlantis was meant to be a reflection of Heaven's perfection, not its usurper. The corrupt wizards used stolen power to remake Atlantis in their image, leaving

Poisoned Dragons

What about other magical factions? In a Jianghu Modern chronicle, the Abyss represents corrupt magical teachings. Desperate mages encounter Abyssal sects when they get frustrated with learning magic the proper way, or let revenge take precedence over morality. Dark Masters on the fringes of Awakened society mold these guileless mages into thieves, killers, and lesser corrupters.

Banishers are a bit of a different case. This chronicle assumes that no self-taught mages exist. They all need rote magical training. Banishers either reject their original sect or learn from isolated madmen, but in all cases they are educated sorcerers who have no illusions about what they are even if they have grown to hate it.

Of course, you can let Banishers break the rules instead. Maybe to leap right into the spontaneous Art you *have* to go mad.

the emperor an ageless puppet. Virtuous rebels fought the new order. A cataclysm followed.

Now, the corrupted ones call themselves the Seers of the Celestial Throne, Ministers of the endless Black Dynasty. Their emperor sits on that Throne, entombed in enchanted jade, forever alive. The War of the Fall reduced their empire to a movement in the shadows, pulling the strings of influence behind the ignorant, Sleeping masses.

Virtuous exiles survived with the help of five enlightened beings. Call them Oracles, Immortals, bodhisattvas — it doesn't matter. They maintained the pure Paths to enlightenment, even for lackeys of the Ministries. Cultivation, not conscience, was their concern.

To find a purpose on the road to Ascension, the other exiles founded the four Diamond orders. Diamond Masters teach sorcery techniques to their disciplines from hidden, holy places, but lesser mages make do with learning on the road from grimoires, mutual training, or even rotes that they steal from rivals. In a world where even Heaven's laws are corrupt, the Diamond protects ordinary people from the Ministries of the Throne. Some would free the Dragon Blooded Emperor from imprisonment, others believe he lost the Supernal Mandate when he fell to temptation. They look for a replacement candidate. And then there are modern punks who don't believe in having an emperor at all, and seek a Way of No Way, beyond the traditions of the Diamond sects.

Setting Differences

To fully implement Jianghu Modern you'll have to tweak **Mage: The Awakening**'s setting a touch beyond what you've just read:

• The orders aren't organized political factions as much as schools of magic, the Shaolin and Wudang of the Jianghu Modern chronicle. A mage studies with her Master at a temple-sanctum and then goes out to right wrongs.

• The orders have monasteries and academies run by Masters, but there aren't any Consilii out in the world — just cabals. Some are tolerant, but most are common students of a single Master. They tend to be doctrinaire followers of their orders, and regularly brawl over ideology and magical secrets.

• The Seers of the Throne are well organized and behind much of the World of Darkness' corruption. They're a secret, evil empire. Nobody knows where the Dragon Blooded Emperor is being held, but he is a sympathetic anchor to the Supernal Realms, bringing them under the Ministers' sway. For this reason, there are *no Exarchs* — no antagonists who can't be confronted and beaten.

• The Seers destroyed the proper structure of the universe, so they can only find allies among corrupted spirit-beings. Virtuous spirits (including Astral entities) who remember the proper Supernal Mandate are sympathetic to members of the orders. This motivates the Ministries to create spiritual corruption: malformed ley lines, monstrous hybrids, dark thoughts, and angry ghosts.

The Five Secret Sects

The orders are philosophies with little organization outside the secret sanctums of their Masters. They provide two things: an ethos to guide young mages and a magical method. An order's mystic art fills the same thematic role as a martial arts style in *wuxia* fiction. It has a unique mix of techniques (rotes) that rivals try to steal or counter.

Adamantine Arrow: Their Masters teach that Existence is War. Fighting for a virtuous cause is the only way to balance the furies in one's soul. The *Adamantine Hand* style's focus on combative magic reflects this. They wish to restore the Dragon Blooded Emperor, because their ancestors never rejected their oaths to the Dynasty. Their academies in old castles and armed compounds teach military arts and sorcery together.

Free Council: This order claims it doesn't have a style — just an *Empty Way* — but observers see that their innovation falls into patterns nonetheless. They have

no temple; Masters are vagabonds, teaching wherever they wander. They want a world without emperors and cosmic orders: a democratic reality.

Guardians of the Veil: The subtle *Executioner's Mask* style gives the Guardians a reputation for deception and treachery, but they have never betrayed the other orders to the Black Dynasty. From their underground labyrinths, Masters teach students that no sacrifice is too great in defense of righteousness, even if less enlightened people see evil in the sacrifice itself. The Guardians want to depose the imprisoned emperor in favor of a predicted enlightened ruler.

Mysterium: The Mysterium seek to preserve all magic, though other orders say this is just a way to steal rotes for their *Esoteric Syllable* art. In their spare library-monasteries, Masters are ascetics who don't want to interfere in worldly affairs, but something always drags younger members into the fray. Where the Arrow supports the Dragon Blooded Emperor out of old loyalty, the Mysterium does it out of the belief that he can be reformed, as long as he has the proper spiritual advice.

Silver Ladder: It is right for the Supernal Mandate to slip from one Dynasty to another. Who should succeed? As far as the Silver Ladder is concerned, the true heir is whoever heeds the order's advice. Its *Elemental Preceptor* style is the art of viziers and generals. Masters teach from boardrooms and wealthy temples, surrounded by Sleeper servants.

Mystery Techniques

In a Jianghu Modern chronicle, the idea of magic as a spontaneous art form is a lofty goal, not an assumption. Instead, mages study specific techniques with their Masters in the hope that they'll understand the secret principles behind their rigid forms (or in the Free Council's case, the universal concepts behind technological and cultural tools). This has several effects:

• Mages do not begin with a sixth Arcanum dot they can place anywhere. Magical training is too structured to allow it.

• Instead of six dots of rotes, mages begin with two one-dot rotes and two two-dot rotes in each two-dot Arcanum, and a single one-dot rote in their one-dot Arcanum. It's more rotes than usual but she needs them, because:

• Mages *must* learn rotes to properly comprehend their Arcana. Improvised magic costs one Willpower point unless the mage knows at least one rote from that Arcanum equal in strength to the spell she wishes to cast. She must possess *two* rotes at her highest Arcanum dots to purchase the next Arcanum dot. For example, without two Forces 3 rotes, it's impossible to learn Forces 4.

• Advanced spells that allow the mage to cast a personal effect on someone else (such as granting someone

else Mage Sight or a magic shield) must be cast at *two* dots higher than the personal version, instead of the one dot increase in the standard rules. It's hard to get around lack of knowledge by relying on your companions.

• The small scale and specialization of the orders means their magical knowledge lacks breadth. Mages may only freely learn three-dot or higher rotes that are *specifically* listed for their respective orders. There is no well-known Mysterium version of "Turn Projectile," for example. It might be out there somewhere, but it's the mage's job to seek it out, not a simple task to accomplish between scenes.

• Fortunately, every character has a Mentor capable of passing along the Art. Jianghu Modern mages begin with one dot in this Merit for free. The Mentor will typically teach order rotes up to his Merit dot rating, and possesses a Sanctum worth four times as many dots as the Mentor rating, too: a temple or training hall that the character can visit to study the Mysteries…or avoid heat from the Seer Ministries. Characters from the same order may pool Mentor dots.

Secret Methods

Mages are limited by their orders' styles, but their highly organized regimens include ways to enhance their own spells and defend against incoming magic. This is reflected in the following Merits. Note that each of them must be taught by another mage.

Countermagic Stance (• to •••)

Prerequisites: Awakened, one dot in the applicable Arcanum

Effect: A countermagic stance weakens spells that use a particular Arcanum. Purchase this Merit separately for each Arcanum. Each dot reduces one spell factor rank of the mage's choice from any spell of that Arcanum that targets him. This is a reflexive action. This Merit is effectively one dot higher when it's either connected to the mage's Ruling Arcanum or the incoming spell is a rote the mage knows. These benefits stack.

For example, if an Obrimos knows Forces Countermagic Stance ••• and an enemy casts a "Telekinetic Strike" at her that inflicts four points of bashing damage, she can strip all four points (factors) from the spell. If she actually knew "Telekinetic Strike" she could even nullify a spell that inflicted five points of damage.

Rote Mastery (••)

Prerequisites: Awakened, member of an order

Effect: This Merit represents exceptional training in a single rote. Purchase this Merit separately for each rote. By spending an additional point of Mana on the spell, the mage gains the rote benefit (re-roll failed dice) while casting it. (Yes, the character gets the rote benefit on a rote. If this is confusing, read the listing for Rote Action under "Systems Permutations" on pp. 134–135 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.)

Chronicle Outline

The chronicle begins when a new cabal of mages, freshly trained in their orders' Mysteries, encounters conflict in their chosen home. The Seers of the Throne lord it over humanity from behind mundane institutions. The goal of the chronicle is to throw off their local influence, cripple their control over the rest of the world and ultimately, reform or overthrow their Black Dynasty. This begins a three stage overarching plot. Here are three suggested story seeds for each stage.

Stage One: The Local Struggle

• **Crack the Pylon:** The most basic story involves fighting the local Seer pylon. In the Jianghu Modern chronicle it's a large, organized group of Seers, akin to a full Consilium — a structure the orders don't use in this chronicle. The Seers' agenda is a balance of institutional and personal goals. Individuals use magic to procure slaves and wealth, but they also work together to kill or convert independent mages, blunt social and technological progress (a weak humanity is easier to control), and keep "mere mortals" from understanding the supernatural world around them. Conflict is inevitable; they believe the world is theirs to exploit as they see fit, and never compromise with the rebel orders.

• **Fighting Dragons:** Rival cabals have no Consilium to act as a court and arbiter, so pure magical

might determines who gets a Hallow, sway over a local business, or "digging rights" over local occult secrets. Furthermore, almost every mage feels some pride for his temple, so dueling to demonstrate the superiority of an order's style is common. Some orders are better suited to violent conflict than others, so at times one cabal will play bodyguard to another, or the wolves circle around mages who look weak, but are known to own valuable artifacts and grimoires.

• **Spirit Guardians:** Pure Astral and Shadow beings remember the true Supernal Mandate, so they're an order mage's natural allies. The Seers need to corrupt the spirit world to win their own invisible servants. They use magic to do this, but it's even more efficient to sow strife and pollution in the material world, so that Resonance will do the job for them. The Ministries have been very successful, so it's up to order mages to guard the few remaining untainted beings. Some Libertines believe the other orders' definition of "corruption" is far too broad. Guardians, mystagogues, and their ilk ignore the new spirits of this age, who tell a disturbing truth: reality can never be an empire again.

Stage Two: War Against the Ministries

• **The Assassin's Game:** Killing a Minister is no easy task, but success would destabilize the Seers of the Throne. The rest of the Dynasty would turn on the headless Ministry to divide its possessions, distracting it from maneuvers to overthrow it for good. Would-be assassins need to know where the target Minister's head-quarters is and who his bodyguards are. After that, the cabal needs to decide on an approach. Do they break in to the Minister's chambers or disguise themselves as servants? Can they find a traitor willing to help them? What will *that* cost?

• **One Society:** It's time for the orders to unite. The cabal builds a movement to form a common secret society that's dedicated to overthrowing the Seers of the Throne. Characters not only have to overcome old rivalries, but deal with the kind of corruption that only organized conspiracies can muster. Some of its members use the movement to become true revolutionaries, but others prey upon Sleepers as thoroughly as the Seers. You might want to mix in concepts with the Diamond: The Awakened Are One Nation chronicle on p. 155.

• **Siege:** If the characters drive off the local Seer pylon, the Ministries are sure to send a force to retake the area. They have no scruples about using Sleepers as proxy soldiers or hostages, and might even arrange a "natural disaster" that kills targets and bystanders alike. The cabal not only has to drive off the invasion, but protect Sleepers from the battle.

Stage Three: Restore the Emperor of the Universe

• **An Evil Opportunity:** By this stage in the chronicle the characters have greatly disrupted the Seers of the Throne — but for all their corruption, the Seers kept some terrible threats in check. Abyssal sects get organized to rip open the universe. Where the Seers' grip falters, vampires get their hooks in, seizing control of entire nations. Is it time to finish the fight, or hold back until these secondary threats can be defeated?

• **Storm the Jade Prison:** The imprisoned Dragon Blooded Emperor is the Seers' link to the Supernal Realms. Free the emperor — or kill him — and you might destroy their unity, even their magical power. But where is the Emperor? He might be hidden on Earth, or found beyond some gateway to the Supernal Realms. Perhaps he's even floating in the Abyss, and is the reason why the anti-reality bars mages from the Realms above.

• **War of Emperors:** The orders each have different opinions on who should rule after the Seers fall. In the final days of the war, the Guardians' enlightened teacher appears. The Silver Ladder finds a different candidate, and the Dragon Blooded Emperor looks like he could be rehabilitated. Supporters battle over who will inherit the Supernal Mandate. How is a winner even determined? Is there a special coronation ceremony? If so, what happens when more than one candidate undergoes the rite, or if there's no emperor at all?

The Legacy Chronicle

A chronicle in which Legacies are as important as orders or Paths to the setting (perhaps even *more* important) focuses the game on the concepts Legacies bring to **Mage**. It's a chronicle that deals with matters of the soul, contains conflicts of magical style and opinions of the purpose of magic, showcases the mentor/student relationship, highlights a mage's progress towards enlightenment as she grows in Gnosis and, of course, gains Attainment powers.

The Legacy Chronicle requires a bit of extra work on the part of the Storyteller to set up before it begins, and for the players to think hard about what kind of Legacies their characters would be suitable for, but it's rewarding in play to those that like a feeling that a setting is evolving and changing alongside their characters. The progression of characters as they rise in Gnosis and through the ranks of their chosen Legacy gives the chronicle a shape with turning points to reach and hang stories from.

Author Notes — Legacy Chronicle by Dave Brookshaw

There wasn't really much to consider when asked which chronicle idea I would write up for this book; the combination of focusing on the "Z-Axis Splat" with carefully setting up Storyteller characters before the chronicle begins and then running through the lifecycle of a mage from apprentice to master is how I run **Mage** in my personal game. In fact, it's how I run any World of Darkness game; by changing "Legacies" to "Embrace family trees" you have my method for running **Vampire: The Requiem**. But this is a **Mage** book, so Legacies it is.

I love Legacies. The mixture of the mentor/student relationship, which I'm fond of as a Storyteller for the opportunities for chronicle-defining Storyteller characters it provides, and the addition of a little magical style and motive to the Legacy's members just pushes my buttons. If you're interested in the same things, or if you want a grand epic chronicle charting your troupe's characters from Awakening to grave, I think this will be up your alley, too. Believe me, it's been *extensively* playtested.

Theme

Legacies are about two things — *sublimation* and *tradition*.

Sublimation

The Legacy chronicle deals with matters of the soul, the esoteric and ephemeral. Mages gain attainments by focusing so hard on their style or role that their souls change to suit, internalizing powers that require the casting of spells for other mages. It's not to be undertaken lightly (by the wise, at least; the Awakened tell cautionary tales of those that rush into sublimation) and is irreversible. By using stories to highlight transformation, souls and consequences, this chronicle theme is maintained.

Tradition

Tradition isn't just for ancient hoary groups of long-bearded Diamond order mages — relatively new Legacies are about tradition too, in the meaning of "passed-down custom." Legacies are learned and taught, informing the worldview of their members through the lens of their attainments and inner culture. A brand-new Legacy has to create an identity for their new fellowship by exploring the purpose of their abilities; the members are the ones who are laying the foundation for generations of mages to come. An ancient one is subject to reinterpretation as new mages put their spin on it. Both are concerned with what has gone before and will be left for those ahead.

Double Ruling

The Legacy chronicle doesn't need any system hacks in order to function, but the following tweak might be useful. At the moment, if a character joins a Legacy with a primary Arcanum that is already Ruling, her ability to take a third Ruling is lost. It's somewhat balanced by the fact that she only has to buy two Arcana up instead of three, but you may wish to declare that such a situation creates an Imperial Arcanum, which can be raised at (new dots x 5) in experience points.

Mood

The mood for the Legacy chronicle is one of growth. The rules in **Mage** pin attainments to set points on the Gnosis scale. Sublimation never stops; mages branch off into unique attainments or are delayed in achieving them by a lack of tutors, but attainments are achieved as long as Gnosis rises. A character that joins a Legacy as a novice at Gnosis 2 and gains her attainment at Gnosis 3 only needs to raise the Advantage twice before she can teach students of her own. The chronicle will have to grow with the characters, being ready to have them take over leadership of their Legacies as they rise with experience and to provide newly Awakened Storyteller characters for them to become mentors to.

Chronicle Preparation

Most of the Storyteller's extra work in devising a Legacy chronicle is in the setup. You must choose appropriate Legacies to be your main actors based partly on setting concerns and partly on player preference, provide enough grounds for the Legacies being used in the setting to conflict with one another, determine how many members of each Legacy there are, and build cabals appropriately.

Choosing Legacies

Many Legacies beyond those presented in the **Mage** core have been presented, and your troupe may have some of their own design that they wish to see included in the chronicle. When selecting which Legacies to include, pay first attention to the wishes of your players — what are their characters like? Are there any Legacies for which they are especially suitable? Do the players want their characters to join particular ones? If so, include them in the setting — but be sure to leave options open. After the players' preferences, those that best fit with your vision of the setting should be used. Most **Mage** settings have a central mystery or plot device, such as **Boston Unveiled**'s Secret Concord or **World of Darkness: Chicago**'s Celestial Flange. Note any such plot devices in your plans and select those Legacies that will have different approaches to and opinions of them. For best results, wait to create such a device until this point in the chronicle's development and ensure that the Legacies the players picked are those likely to have strong opinions on the subject.

Example: Sarah is preparing to run the Legacy chronicle with a troupe of three players: Liza, Rob, and Chris. The players have come up with a theme for the cabal already; it is to be based on a tripartite model of the world, the "exterior" of a mage and the "interior" of a mage, each member specializing in magic that follows their niche. To give the cabal focus, the players have decided, unusually, that they all want their characters to have talent in the Life Arcanum.

Sarah notes the Walkers in Mists, Orphans of Proteus, and Perfected Adepts as likely Legacies for the three characters, and decides to use all three in the setting. She thinks that, as the cabal are so focused on the body, the Uncrowned Kings might be good as Storyteller characters to provide contrast. A setting point is needed to hang all of this off — rumors of an Artifact or method allowing spells to be cast at indefinite duration on a living being fit with the four Legacies chosen so far.

How Many?

Five or six main Legacies (including any Left-Handed ones that are antagonists) are about right for a chronicle of this kind. Too few and you restrict the choices of players as to which to join, too many and you lose focus and require so many Storyteller characters in your setting that you drown in keeping them all straight.

Setting Conflict

The relationship map described on page 207 makes an ideal way to map the relationships of the selected Legacies, both to one another and to the plot device of the chronicle. Pay particular attention to the lines between Legacies earmarked for players' characters. They should have clear-cut differences of opinion but not be overly antagonistic to one another.

Antagonists

While spirits, Abyssal entities, vampires, and Banishers are perfectly good antagonists, the Legacy chronicle needs something a little more in keeping with its theme for major villains. A variety of Left-Handed Legacies have been detailed in the Legacy and order sourcebooks, but those in **Mage: The Awakening** have their uses. Tremere, who steal souls to extend their own lives, are an especially good fit for the Legacy chronicle's themes. The best Left-Handed Legacies to use are those that reflect the Legacies chosen by players for their characters in terms of powers, philosophy, or even just subject matter. Some Legacies are considered borderline Left-Handed by Consilii or have Left-Handed variants. For a change from an external enemy, consider an antagonist from an otherwise respectable Legacy that is opposed thematically to those of the players.

On the level of the individual, many mages prey on Legacy members — Seers of the Throne infiltrating a Legacy in order to learn it and return to their own order with the secrets of the Legacy's Attainments. Rejected candidates who steal soul stones to try to force their way in or settle for bitterly opposing everything the Legacy does, loyal members turned bad who now jeopardize the reputation of the Legacy, and members who joined and now regret it, seeking a way to remove their Attainments or to bring the Legacy down from within all make excellent thorns in the side of player characters.

Demographics

Note the entrance requirements for the Legacies marked for inclusion in the chronicle. Now comes the decision of how many members each should have, but don't just divide the Storyteller characters up equally among them. Legacies vary in how social they are, from one student/one Master to miniature orders, and the chronicle should reflect the diversity. Go back to the player characters — is one a social maven? Noting his Legacy as having dozens of members might work better than that of the character whose player is more interested in depth rather than breadth of Storyteller

character interaction. For that player, a Legacy that has a unique outlook on the plot device but only very limited numbers would suit her more.

Once you have the number of Storyteller characters in each main Legacy, add a few more to represent those who have not joined one — about as many, in a Legacy chronicle, as the second-largest Legacy has members. Then determine the Path of each character based on the entrance requirements of the Legacies chosen, aiming to keep the total number of each Path broadly equal unless there is a reason why they should be out of balance. If the chronicle is using orders, note them now — remembering that it is possible to learn a Legacy outside of one's order if there is a compelling enough reason to do so.

Gnosis requirements make up the next part of the demographic skeleton. The mechanics of gaining Attainments dictate minimum Gnosis levels for characters.

Work through each Legacy in turn, applying the following rules to each Legacy one after the other:

• All members of a Legacy have a minimum Gnosis of 3

• Any Legacy with more than one member requires one member to have a Gnosis of 5.

• Any Legacy with more than one member with Gnosis 5 requires a member with Gnosis 7

• The most advanced member of each Legacy in the Consilium shows where the Legacy came from. Maybe the originator of one Legacy developed the attainments herself, while the leader of their rivals learned it at a different Consilium and the matriarch of a third received her training from a now-deceased Master.

Go through the remaining characters, assigning Gnosis to suit. The following guidelines are generalities, describing a population of "average" mages. Don't feel

the need to have every Storyteller character follow this progression — there are prodigies and those less able among any group.

A mage typically gains Gnosis 3 within a year of completing his initial training and Gnosis 4 the following year, then either concentrate on raising his raw potential (achieving Gnosis 5 within the third year) or focusing on other things such as rotes, Arcana, or mundane Skills (which means Gnosis 5 may take much longer to reach). It takes that long to separate because of Arcane Experience — Gnosis 4 is the last point at which a character can comfortably buy the Advantage up without spending "regular" experience. Only very new mages should have Gnosis 1 or 2.

Having arrived at Gnosis, note the primary Arcanum of each Legacy. For each character, the primary Arcanum will usually be both their highest Arcanum and bought up leapfrogging with Gnosis — a Gnosis 3 character will usually buy his primary Arcanum at 4 next

followed by Gnosis 4. It's very rare for a character to reach Gnosis 7 without at least one Arcanum at 5.

The Storyteller characters should now be a list of Legacy/Path/order combinations, Gnosis levels and primary Arcanum (which, remember, determines rank in mage society). That's the skeleton of the chronicle's supporting cast, ready to be given genders, shadow names, personalities, Virtues, and Vices. Preparation complete.

Example: *Sarah's chronicle notes are now taking shape. The Walkers in Mists are the smallest Legacy in her setting, with a few itinerant members wandering in and out of the Consilium's territory that she can use as a way of introducing news and starting stories. The Perfected Adepts and Orphans of Proteus are large and organized into two rival lodges, with cabals in the Consilium allied to one or another (which will make the troupe's cabal, with members of both, ideal candidates for arbitration of disputes). The Uncrowned Kings are smaller and less politically active, partly because Rob, who has earmarked his character for membership, has a preference for investigation over politics in the game.*

Motives for Joining a Legacy

Not everyone is in it for the enlightenment, after all. Some mages may seek out a Legacy because they crave wisdom, but just as many join because they like the look of how a Legacy treats its members or want to join the club. Others think that fellow mages may look down on them if they don't join one; remember that joining a Legacy is often seen by mages as a sign of magical "adulthood." Refusal to join one might be seen by especially haughty mages as indicating a lack of commitment to the Mysteries. Still more select their Legacies based on the utility of the Attainments they hope to achieve — those that will be useful to them in meeting their own goals, those that believe the Attainments will change them in a way they believe to be complimentary, or those that just want to throw Paradox-free fireballs.

Player and Storyteller characters can be any of the above. Some Legacies only accept those with motives they approve of. Others don't care why a mage joins, hoping that the sublimation will make the candidate fit in even if she didn't before. Telling a story of that going wrong is prime material for this chronicle.

Phases of the Chronicle

The Legacy chronicle is about sublimation and tradition with the mood of growth. It can be divided into several phases, which run parallel to the characters' progression in their Legacies. No phase has a set length in stories, allowing the Storyteller to control the pace of her chronicle, but just as a mage cannot undo the development of an Attainment the phases can't be repeated once passed — youth flees, students become Masters, and souls can only be shaped into Legacies, not out of them.

Example: *The troupe decides that, as they played an Apprentice-level game once before and they feel that Life magic begins to get really interesting around the fourth dot, they want to skip the early lives of their characters. They would rather move on to the point at which they are already members of their Legacies and about to graduate to leadership; the transition between Phases Four and Five. That should let them get right into the action as the Legacies argue over the possibility of permanently enchanting the living, with some such as the Uncrowned Kings and Orphans of Proteus declaring the idea to be abhorrent and others (such as the Walkers and Perfected Adepts) taking the opposite position. Things come to a head when the cabal's mentors discover the Artifact, the fallout of the Legacies removing those mentors from the setting, and allowing the cabal to step up and handle the situation their own way.*

A Note for the Storyteller

While reading the phases of the chronicle, remember that these are individual for every character — and by "character" we mean Storyteller and player alike. In order to reinforce the themes and mood, at any given time there should be Storyteller characters both ahead and behind the player characters on the list. When the players' characters are apprentices in the first stories of the chronicle, a Storyteller character should graduate to her first Attainment. When a player's character has reached Gnosis 5, younger mages, Awakened and introduced in the chronicle so far, should be ready to become apprentices. Once her character has Gnosis 6, the Gnosis 7 master of the Legacy should be looking to retire (or have otherwise left the chronicle) to leave room at the top for the protagonist.

It isn't necessary to start at Phase One and run the chronicle all the way to the end of Phase Six; doing that would result in a chronicle potentially running for years longer than your troupe is comfortable with. Pick the part of the progression that interests you — a short chronicle could be about the transition from Journeymen to Adept — or use periods of downtime to skip over any that aren't wanted.

Phase One: The Recruitment Fair

In this stage of the chronicle, Gnosis is low (1 or 2) and the characters are being introduced to the other members of their Consilium. A mage at this phase is taking part in her first stories, gaining Arcane Experience and settling into a cabal.

The mage at this level is also being watched by the Legacies of the setting for possible membership. The mentor that taught her initial Arcana and order initiation may be a member of a Legacy himself — if it's one that suits her, the character may feel pressure to join. Other mages might go in search of Legacies themselves, or be introduced by friendly Storyteller characters to members of Legacies they may fit. The recruitment fair may be literal — a Consilium meeting in which Legacies recruit new prospects and extol the virtues of their particular soul-shaping to apprentices.

This phase ends once the character identifies a Legacy in which she seeks membership, or a Legacy decides to actively recruit the character. It can last as many stories as it takes to build up the experience for Gnosis 3.

Phase Two: Testing

Once the character (knowingly or not) is a prospect for a Legacy, the process of testing her for suitability begins. Many of the Legacies already described in **Mage** have specific entry requirements, tests, and ordeals that candidates must pass before gaining entry. New Legacies designed for the chronicle should have them too. Remember that the orders listed for a Legacy are technically only a limitation of this stage — a non-Mastigos non-Guardian attempting to join the Subtle Ones, for example, is "supposed" to fail at this point, but could be taught the Legacy anyway by a member that doesn't mind losing status for the shame of teaching an outsider.

The testing phase is best done in a single story once all characters have the necessary experience built up, or even in downtime between stories.

Example: The troupe plays Phase Two as the chronicle's prelude rather than the main action. The prelude introduces the characters, their mentors, and the Legacies involved by means of showing the challenges they went through to become members. A Storyteller character is introduced as a fourth member of the cabal who fails the entry tests for the Uncrowned Kings and leaves the Consilium.

Those Cast Aside

So what happens if a character doesn't get to join the Legacy of his choice? If the existing members dislike him, or he wants the Attainments while conflicting too heavily with their philosophy, leading them to conclude that he's unsuitable? The failed petitioner doesn't have anyone to appeal to and only a few options. He could try to join a different Legacy he's more suited to, wait until Gnosis 4 and develop one that duplicates the Attainment he wanted, or covertly join the one that turned him down — either by persuading an existing member to go against their fellows or by underhanded means such as studying the soul stone of a member.

Phase Three: Sublimation

The joining of the Legacy and the gaining of the first attainment marks the point at which a character begins paying the experience levy (if joining by normal means) to her mentor. In the Legacy Chronicle, the event should be highlighted both as a major achievement on a par with gaining adulthood in the eyes of the magical community and as the point of no return. The specifics of how the joining works depends on the Legacy, but usually involves the new member being walked through the use of their Attainment in controlled conditions. This can be a highly private affair, just the new member and their mentor, or can be an occasion for every member of more sociable Legacies.

If a mage is creating her own Legacy, of course, she has no one to walk her through the process of changing her soul. She does so alone, casting the spell that will become the attainment over and over until it comes naturally and the moment of sublimation occurs.

For mages that can't or won't find a mentor, other means of joining Legacies exist. A type of grimoire known as a daimonomicon contains an imprint of the author's attainments at the time of writing, allowing readers to use it to learn the Legacy up to that point. Similarly, soul stones can be examined (5 successes on the scrutiny roll after using a suitable Mage Sight spell) to find the same imprint of their creator. Using either of these methods requires a flat cost of 10 experience per attainment rather than setting up a tithe to a mentor. If you're using the Punk Genre in Chapter One (p. 40), Legacy members can teach attainments by means of Soul-Modding without setting up the mystical link to the student that full Legacy membership requires.

Phase Four: Journeymen

The character is now a member of the Legacy. She has the first Attainment (and, other Arcana permitting, any optional powers as well) and is expected to do the Legacy's work. She has more friends than enemies and few responsibilities beyond pitching in to help when the Legacy needs all of its members to work together on something.

It can't last.

The character finds old allies in different Legacies no longer treat her in the same way — where they saw an individual, now they only see a member of her Legacy. She is asked what her mentor's opinion is rather than her own a few too many times for comfort. She gets involved in how the Legacy reacts to the plot device of the chronicle or feels like the Legacy is demanding time that she once spent on her order or cabal. Unluckiest of all are those that find they now have inherited the enemies of their Legacies — enemies they weren't told about before they joined…

Example: The first half of the chronicle takes place over three stories of two to three sessions each, as the cabal interact with Storyteller characters and solve local Mysteries — negotiating the sharing of a Hallow between the Orphans and Adepts, helping an Uncrowned King (the ex-mentor of the departed cabal mate) put down a Goetic Demon of guilt, and investigating several incidents that turn out to be the result of an unusual number of Proximi families clustered on one town in the Consilium's territory. As the chronicle continues, they discover that the Proximi are descended from experiments with an Artifact that can permanently alter a living pattern to accept a spell cast upon it. The cabal go in search of the Artifact and recover it from the ancient Demesne it was sealed in — noting the glyphs warning the discoverer that it should not be used.

Phase Five: Adept Life

After a number of stories, the character has survived and built up enough experience that, when added to the Arcane Experience she's been accumulating, makes her able to buy Gnosis 5 and achieve the second Attainment. By now she's an Adept or a triple Disciple, no longer wet behind the ears and together with her cabal capable of handling most things without running to a mentor.

All of which serves to make her prime mentor material herself.

The second Attainment must be learned from a character with the third, which may mean trading mentors (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 344 for details of how to change mentor mid-Legacy) with all the attendant hurt feelings that might engender. Once achieved, though, the true pain begins — for a Legacy to grow powerful within a Consilium it needs members, and the character is now at the stage where she can create them. The Willpower dot cost for doing so is offset by the flow of experience, which is unfortunately then offset by that experience being taken by the character's own tutor. She is expected to help her student with all the things she herself once required help with, from accidental exposure to the Seers of the Throne to becoming lost in the Temenos. And in matters of the Legacy itself, having the second Attainment means you can do more towards any communal goals.

Example: The chronicle now kicks into high gear, as the Legacies argue about what to do with the Artifact. The Arcane Experience for discovering it put the characters over the point where they could buy Gnosis five, so stories in this section have subplots regarding them taking over their share of mentoring students. A group of Storyteller

characters reach Phase Two and the cabal must assess them for membership — reinforcing what happened in the prelude, Sarah decides to make one of them unsuitable for membership in their chosen Legacy and so Liza's character must let them down gently and find them an alternative group to join, in contrast to what happened to their own cabal-mate. Once everyone's memory of that earlier story has been jogged, the story concludes with that former cabal-mate reappearing, claiming to have found a Legacy that would accept him. The cabal take him back, though the players clearly relish the idea that there's something not quite… right… about him.

Phase Six: At the Top

The character's old mentor has retired, died, become an archmaster, Ascended, been murdered, transformed into stone, fallen into the Abyss, gone mad, entered a hermitage, or stepped down for his health. Fortunately, the character has achieved Gnosis 7 and is now in a position to raise other members up to the second or third Attainment herself. She's in charge.

Unless the Storyteller has been truly ruthless in purging Storyteller characters, some of the members of the Legacy will have been members for longer than her. How do they feel about being eclipsed? Can the character maintain discipline when she needs to? And just what is she going to do about that plot device? She has vast responsibilities, but also vast resources — probably a Master by now, leader of a group of characters that are all funneling experience her way (the leader of a large Legacy receives as much experience at the end of a story as she typically does for a session within that story, thanks to having multiple students) and one of the movers and shakers of the Consilium (which, just when she thinks she can't take any more work, will probably get around to electing her Councilor).

Example: At the end of Phase Five, the cabal decides to give the Artifact to the Uncrowned King mage they interacted with before — he's been the wise mentor figure before, giving them advice from his position of neutrality when they feel pulled in different directions by their Legacies. This makes it all the more poignant when the returned cabal-mate murders him and takes the Artifact. The cabal gives chase and discovers that he's Left-Handed, fallen in with a very bad crowd after leaving the Consilium. They battle their former colleague and recover the Artifact again, then declare that they're going to return it to its resting place. That marks the shift to Phase Six, and the end of the chronicle.

The former cabal-mate was a Tremere Lich, picked as a dark reflection of the Life-focused mages of the cabal (because Tremere consume lives to extend their own — they're parasites).

Mad With Power

The power that comes from wielding magic is addictive, corrupting, and maddening. Mages must balance between infinite power and madness. The desire for power drives some people to do terrible things, and sometimes terrible things happen no matter the intentions. This chronicle explores the maddening consequences of having unlimited power.

What about the Abyss?

If magic must come through the soul of the caster, and wreaks terrible changes upon a world not designed to deal with it, where does the Abyss fit in? To be honest, it doesn't. The Atlantis myth doesn't have much of a place in this chronicle. That's not to say that some characters won't believe in the myth of Atlantis, it is just obvious that the part about the Ladder bridging the Fallen World with the Supernal Realm and the subsequent breaking did not lead to the creation of an Abyss separating the two entities.

Mage has room for alternate settings in which Atlantis does not exist, exists only metaphorically, or is an actual physical place. The following are examples of Atlantis stories that can be used for this chronicle, but the chronicle as written assumes Magic from Beyond.

Author Notes — Mad With Power by Danielle Lauzon

When I first started writing this chronicle, I thought, "How do I make Paradox worse?" I did not end with an answer to that question, though. Instead I ended with eldritch horror. I have always felt that if any of the World of Darkness games favors the Elder Unknowable Horror, it is **Mage**. Mages have the awesome ability to find out about what they are up against and have the power to make the tough decisions on what to do about it. The consequences of those tough decisions, though, should have some teeth.

I thought for a long time about why this is fun to play. I believe that the answer is self-explanatory, but that isn't always the case. How do you get your friends to play in a game in which you are going to drive their characters mad and maybe kill them off in the end? You remind them that crazy is fun.

Magic from Beyond

Atlantis is a myth. Mages Awaken by projecting their souls into the Realms of creatures so old that the world has forgotten them. Even those who enter the Realms do not realize what they are doing. From before human beings existed, these creatures worked their will upon the world, shaping and molding it to their liking. But now — with the advent of man — their powers have waned, and they cannot work so directly. They project their minds into the world, and call out to those strong enough to hear them. They guide the Sleepers through their home worlds and call them into service. The Awakening is one of horror, pain, and mind rending fright. When the mage finally returns he has been changed fundamentally and irreversibly. The act of casting magic brings the will of the sleeping creatures to the world, which drags the willworker further into the unknown cause of his benefactor.

Supernal is a Myth

Older mages talk about the Supernal Realms with reverence. They speak of going to Heaven, and "getting there soon." The only problem is that they are so insane, no one is really sure what they mean. The first step to depravity, according to rumor, is Awakening. The more a mage uses his magic, the more he understands the realm of things that should not be. Of course, insanity propagates itself, and the stories could just be the ramblings of mages gone mad with power.

Cast Out

The Celestial Ladder never actually existed. Instead, after the first magical war, the magi kings of Atlantis decided that magic should not reach outside the borders of the city. They constructed a great wall to keep magic in and prevent others from seeing through it, this prevented travel to Atlantis for many years. After a while, some mages wanted to rule the Sleepers of the world as gods. The Atlantean kings felt the magi had more important things to do, such as serving their every need. After a heated argument, all the magi that wanted to rule on Earth were exiled from the lands of Atlantis, never to return. The kings of Atlantis placed a curse on the outcast willworkers that would leave them insane for using their magic. This caused the first Awakenings in the world, as the minds of the Sleepers made astral journeys to Atlantis. Unfortunately, the curse on the mages persevered into the newly Awakened minds, which became tainted by madness from the beginning.

Some mages do not believe that these were actual events, but instead think that Atlantis is a metaphor for perfect, untainted magic. Others believe Atlantis *is* real and it is possible to return to a state of magic only known to the ancient magi.

Dealing with Paradox

This chronicle excises the notion of Paradox as an external occurrence. The backlash from vulgar magic does not come from Abyssal resonance infecting the spell. Instead, it is the horrible blight that the spell makes upon the soul of the caster as he bends the will of the world to his own. The mage wields an alien power that consumes him over time. Hubris is the act of forcing magic upon the world, and allowing magic to transform the mage's soul. All magic is anathema to reality itself, and detrimental to the world. The concept of aspect, therefore, does not apply — in a sense, *all* magic is vulgar.

This chronicle presents several ways to represent the changes to the psyche that magic wreaks. To use the following suggestions, first determine which style of play your troupe is comfortable with and then decide what kind of penalty is appropriate from casting magic.

High Insanity

Casting spells risk degeneration. As the characters progress in their knowledge of magic, it is easier to lose Wisdom. The following should be added to the normal Wisdom chart:

Using the powers granted by the ancients corrupts the mind of the mage. As he grows in power, the being that grants such begins to seep in and take over. As the character's Gnosis rating increases, he is more likely to fall into madness. For every point of Gnosis that the character has above his Wisdom score, he gains a permanent derangement. This derangement is trig-

Wisdom	Sin
6	Casting any one-dot level Arcanum (roll four dice)
5	Casting any two
4	Casting any three-dot level Arcanum (roll three dice)
3	Casting any four
2	Casting any five-dot level Arcanum (roll two dice)

gered by normal circumstances, but also has a chance of being triggered when the character casts magic.

For example, a mage gains the suspicion derangement (p. 98 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). This derangement can be triggered whenever the character suffers intentional misfortune at the hands of others. In addition, the mage runs the risk of this derangement becoming active whenever he casts a spell.

Temporary Insanity

Casting magic opens the mage's eyes to the Realm of his benefactor. This horrific sight is enough to cause temporary insanity. The player rolls the character's Wisdom every time the character uses magic, modified by the situation.

If the roll fails, the character suffers from a mild derangement for the duration of the spell cast, or a scene, whichever is longer. If the character casts magic again in the same scene, and fails the roll again, the derangement can be upgraded from mild to severe or the character acquires another mild derangement. The consequences for the actions should make sense. Derangements gained in this way should be directly correlated to the actions of the character or the event that caused him to cast the magic.

Example: Ebon is investigating the murder of a fellow mage. He thinks the perpetrator might still be lurking around so he uses the Sense Consciousness spell (Mind 1) on himself to search for other minds in the area. His casting is successful, but he has the chance of inflicting a derangement. His Wisdom is 6, giving the player a dice pool of 4 after the −2 modifier for targeting himself. The roll fails, and Ebon immediately begins suffering from the inferiority complex derangement (**World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 98). No one lurks at the scene, and Ebon is fearful he is too incompetent to find his friend's murderer. All subsequent actions in this scene are at a −1 penalty.

Faustian Magic

This chronicle, you'll note, shares some themes with the Faustian Sorcery genre detailed on p. 32. You can use any or all of the magical styles found therein for a Mad with Power chronicle. The magic rules presented in that section for the Adamantine Arrow and Guardians of the Veil are especially appropriate.

Going Mad

As this chronicle is about the insanity caused by casting magic, Wisdom and derangements deserve some discussion. Wisdom, in this chronicle, is the direct representation of the willworker's soul. Changing the world corrupts the soul of the character, and Wisdom determines how this happens. No matter which version you decide to use for your chronicle, Wisdom has a high impact on how insane the characters become. The following effects of Wisdom should be included with the normal ones. Any references to Paradox in the original Wisdom chart should be ignored for this chronicle.

Effects of Wisdom

• As Wisdom decreases, so does the character's ability to perceive and understand the world. The magic he uses taints his perceptions of the world and touches everything around him. The character suffers a −1 penalty to Perception rolls at Wisdom 4–5, a −2 to Perception rolls at Wisdom 2–3, and a −3 to Perceptions rolls at Wisdom 0–1.

• Sleepers seem to recognize the noxious blot that magic leaves on the soul and try to avoid it at all costs. A mage with a Wisdom score of 8 or higher gains a +1 bonus to Social rolls to deal with Sleepers, and those with Wisdom 4 or less have a −1 penalty to Social rolls to deal with them.

New Derangements

Magical Addiction (mild): The power that comes with magic is like a drug. Though it has severe consequences, it begs to be used. Whenever the character is faced with a decision to use magic instead of solving a problem with mundane means, she has a hard time resisting the use of magic.

Effect: Roll the character's Resolve + Composure to avoid using magic instead of solving the problem with mundane means. A failure indicates the character must attempt to deal with the problem using magic.

Magical Delusion (severe; extreme): The affected character believes he is touched by something from another Realm, most commonly a god of some sort. Those suffering from this derangement believe they are the harbingers of their god, and must use magic to ease its entry into the world. This derangement occurs after constant or excessive exposure to magic. Sleepers are more prone to this

Event	
The magic targets someone other than the caster	+2
Magic cast in alignment to	
Each previous spell cast in the same scene	−1
The magic targets the cast	

derangement than mages, though they have no means by which to assist their gods.

Effect: Whenever a Sleeper is confronted with magic, he balks against the unfamiliar god. Spend a Willpower point and roll Resolve + Composure for the character to resist attacking the source of the magic. If a mage with this derangement is confronted with magic he has never seen before, he tries to supplant it with his own. Spend one Willpower and roll Resolve + Composure to resist trying to counter or overcome the source of the magic.

Artifacts, Imbued Items, Rotes, and Legacies

When casting magic causes mind-rending effects, questions about items and specializations crop up. Magical items are both a boon and a curse.

Artifacts

Artifacts are items created within the outer Realms where ancient creatures sleep. Using Artifacts is just as bad as casting the magic granted by these beings. Anyone using an Artifact is affected as though he was personally casting the spell.

Imbued Items

Imbued items are mystical trinkets created using the power of elder beings. The transfer of power into the item reduces the effect it has on the world and the user. Activation of an imbued item follows the same rules as casting magic, except the item grants a +2 bonus to Wisdom or degeneration rolls, no matter which option is being used. If a Sleeper activates an imbued item, he must make a degeneration check as though he was a mage casting the spell. Just like mages, physical items are not made to hold eldritch power. Every time the item is used to cast magic, it takes an irreparable point of Structure damage.

Rotes and Grimoires

The process of learning rotes is dangerous, but the final outcome is worthwhile. A mage must open himself to his otherworldly benefactor to learn the intricacies of the spell he wishes to ritualize. This act draws the minute attentions of the great creature, who tries to use the opportunity to seep into the world. The mage must pit his will against that of the being while he is learning the rote. Roll the character's Resolve + Composure, modified by the character's Wisdom score. He gains a +1 bonus for every point of Wisdom above 5 and suffers a –1 penalty

for every point below six. Success indicates that he has learned the rote. If the roll fails, the character gains a permanent derangement.

The ritual developed during the rote learning process distracts the ancient being. It binds the power given to the mage into a worldly form that cannot be easily tapped by the creature. Whenever the mage casts a spell as a rote, he rolls his Wisdom or degeneration dice pool twice, and takes the better of the two rolls, no matter which option is being used.

Grimoires follow the same rules as outlined in **Mage: The Awakening** (p. 220). Whenever a spell is cast using a grimoire, it follows the same rules for rote casting above. Learning rotes from a grimoire is not the same as developing rotes for the first time. The mage does not open himself to madness, instead he simply copies an already established ritual. The mage runs no risk of gaining a derangement when learning a rote from a grimoire.

Legacies

Legacies remain mostly the same in this chronicle. How a mage learns a Legacy is unchanged. Whenever a mage gains an attainment, he also acquires a severe derangement. However, the mage can use his attainments without risking madness — attainments are not spells, and thus avoid the notice of the creatures that power the character's magic.

Getting Started

Characters in Mad with Power should be created with the knowledge that use of magic is a slippery slope to madness. Characters should not be allowed to use the optional creation rule that awards experience points for starting with a lower Wisdom score (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 66). This chronicle is about the choice between staying sane and relatively mundane or going mad in the pursuit of power.

When creating characters, the players should think about what role they want to play in the chronicle. The orders have different roles in this chronicle based on the fact that magic is the portal to the wills of ancient beings with hidden agendas.

Adamantine Arrow: The Adamantine Arrow's role is not different in this world. Mages are still beset by threats at every turn, and the Arrow's purpose remains to keep them safe. The twist is that they are trying their best to not use magic at all. Members of the order take ascetic vows to only use magic in the most extreme of cases. Often they work side by side with the Mysterium

in hopes of discovering the source of magic, and fixing the problem that causes insanity.

The Free Council: Free Council members believe that magic can be circumvented by technology. They are fond of making and using imbued items. They spend a lot of time researching them in attempts to discover why they reduce the effects of casting magic. The Free Council believe the properties contained in real-world items are the key to breaking free of their strange magical ties. They often work closely with the Mysterium to catalogue and study items of power.

Guardians of the Veil: Guardians of the Veil are concerned about the influence of magic and madness on Sleepers. They spend a lot of time trying to save mages from themselves. The Guardians attempt to police mages that cast magic without moderation. The order recognizes the usefulness of imbued items, but they feel having them around is dangerous because they could fall into Sleeper hands.

Mysterium: The Mysterium mages are arcane investigators attempting to discover the source of magic, and turn it towards a useful advantage. They are concerned with chronicling mystery plays to uncover the strengths and weaknesses of the ancient creatures that fuel their magic. The Mysterium are lore keepers that collect grimoires and rituals to ease the dangers of casting magic.

Silver Ladder: The Silver Ladder believe they can supersede the will of the ancient being by taking the power unto themselves. Their members attempt to make the magic more attuned to the world and vice versa. Most members of the order do this by developing new rotes. They feel that rotes are the foundation to creating a magical world free of madness.

Running the Chronicle

To run this chronicle, you need to decide what kinds of things will drive the insanity level of the game. It is one thing to describe that the use of magic and the power behind it is maddening. It is another thing to tell a story in which using magic is the key to survival, but doing so is so horrible it drives you insane. You also need to think about the kinds of encounters mages will have in a world where magic doesn't belong.

Storytelling Tips

The first thing to do when starting this chronicle is to set the right tone and mood for the rest of the events. The mood should be dark and fearful. One thing to keep in mind when designing this chronicle is that the world is bigger and more incomprehensible than the

characters can handle. Instead of a traditional setting where the characters can accomplish anything, the characters should feel that their efforts are staving off some greater whole at best.

For instance, no matter what the characters do to prevent it, they will go insane. Their minds will never truly be their own unless they forsake their magic forever, but using their power might be the only way to stop something horrible from occurring. In essence, the characters have to sacrifice themselves to save everything else. Of course, it's also very much in keeping with the themes of Mad with Power for the "horrible event" that the characters sacrifice their own sanity to prevent something that only happened because they started using magic in the first place.

This chronicle is not about winning the day, or feeling good about what you have accomplished. Instead, it is about not losing completely. This chronicle is about avoiding a fate worse than death. The characters left standing might feel the characters that have died are better off. Mad with Power is meant to be a bitter and tragic chronicle, and that's not for everyone. That said, the players might be able to relish the moment of terrible revelation when the characters discover their minds cannot be trusted and that all they have done, they have done for exactly the wrong reasons.

Example Scenarios

• The water in a local lake has gone pitch black. The characters discover more odd occurrences leading to a cabal practicing for a ritual. It turns out they are attempting to cure the madness of one of their fellows. The ritual must not be completed, lest the area be permanently damaged. As the characters combat the cabal, they realize the use of magic itself is causing the disturbances. They must decide if they are going to help the cabal with their problem and puzzle out a way to do so, or neutralize the cabal, and risk increasing the local environmental problems.

• One of the characters has a dream about something vague and menacing. He awakens every morning screaming and drenched in sweat. The other characters decide to investigate, only to find that some entity is trying to take him over during his sleep. As the characters try to combat the being, it turns out their enemy is fueling their magic, and that it is slowly taking *all* of them over.

• The characters find a set of grimoires that belonged to a long dead mage. As they read the books and research the magic, they begin to realize it was the magic that drove him insane, leading to his eventual death. As they follow his path, they also start to go mad. The derangements they may gain from Wisdom loss or otherwise should be similar to those of the owner of the grimoires.

• The characters are Banishers. In this scenario, they are the "good guys." Magic is invading the world using mages as its vector, and all those that cast magic freely are spreading this eldritch "disease." The characters have realized this horrible truth and must attempt to stop the incursion before all is lost. They only way to stop them is to use the magic that will drive them insane in the process.

Over the Falls

Sleepers are leaves floating on a lake. The world around them is vast but familiar and largely predictable. When those same Sleepers feel the tug of the Supernal Realms, they can no more imagine the Awakening than a leaf on a lake can comprehend being pulled over a cataract. It is a momentous experience, arguably the most important event in a mage's life. But it provokes more questions than it answers.

What causes the Awakening? Why does one person Awaken but not another? What determines when someone Awakens? Mages might not ignore these questions, but many accept they can never know the answers. The leaf does not ask why the waterfall is there. It cannot know why the same currents that washed its fellow leaves onto shore instead drew it over the falls.

Magical discoveries are often like that, and mages are not immune to the terror and wonder inspired by sudden cataracts that upset centuries of magical theory and plunge widely accepted truths into doubt. Some may recognize that their assumptions are flawed, while others search for ways to explain how the contrary evidence fits into the existing model.

The Awakening is enough to alter the way any Sleeper looks at the world. Most new mages can at least take comfort in the discovery that others have seen the same Watchtowers. The players' characters, however, have no such luxury. Their accounts of the Awakening inspire wonder, curiosity, and even fear in other mages. Just as the players' characters come to grips with the existence of one waterfall, they feel the swift current of another just around the bend, and this one is powerful enough to draw entire Consilii over the falls.

Setup

This chronicle explores what it means to be the exception to universally accepted truths. The Storyteller should meet with the players before they make characters, because this chronicle makes two important changes to the usual character creation process. First, the chronicle begins before any of the characters Awaken, so the players will

Author Notes — Over the Falls by Eric Zawadzki

My players will tell you I'm incapable of running any roleplaying game exactly as written. There's always some little rule or setting detail that doesn't sit well with me, so it isn't so much a matter of *whether* I'll make changes to the game but *how much* I'll change. For **Mage: The Awakening** my only real gripe was the limited number of Paths. I'm glad this book explores so many awesome ways of altering the Path rules to give troupes more options, but the option just wasn't there when I was planning my first chronicle.

As much as I enjoy tinkering with systems, I try to think through how my changes affect the setting of the game. I wanted to give my players a chance to pick their own Ruling and Inferior Arcana, but I didn't want to write up 355 new Paths for one chronicle. Ultimately, the solution I came up with was simple: everyone but the players' characters belonged to one of the five Paths. The characters' Awakenings were anomalies.

What happens when a society discovers an exception to widely accepted truths? How would the Awakened community react to a group of mages who described Supernal Realms and Watchtowers that didn't match any of the five Paths? You'd get curiosity, sure, but also fear. How would those remarkable mages respond to an Awakened society that treated them like patients with a disease no doctor had ever heard of before?

The idea intrigued me and required surprisingly little system tinkering. I just needed to dream up an explanation for these strange Awakenings. Fate led me to the bizarre coincidences surrounding President McKinley's assassination. Over the Falls took shape from there.

not apply the mage template during the character creation process. Second, instead of choosing one of the five Paths described in **Mage: The Awakening**, each player creates a new Path using the rules from the Circle of Degrees in Chapter Three (see p. 101), though the Arcana combination must not match that of any existing Path. Each player also chooses whether the Path will provide a +1

bonus to Stamina, Resolve, or Composure. The characters won't have access to magic right away, but the Storyteller needs to invent a new Supernal Realm and Watchtower for each character in the group before the prelude, so the players need to know their characters' Ruling and Inferior Arcana before the chronicle begins.

Prelude

The chronicle begins in Buffalo, New York, on September 6 — just another day in the characters' lives. If someone takes the time to read a newspaper or watch a local morning news show, he hears in passing that today marks the anniversary of President McKinley's assassination at the Pan American Exposition in 1901.

Why Buffalo?

Everything here assumes events of the chronicle take place in Buffalo, New York. President McKinley's assassination and a Fate spell that draws on the Arcadian correspondence of Niagara Falls both serve specific purposes within the chronicle. With a bit of adjustment, of course, a Storyteller could set the chronicle in another city.

The formula is relatively simple. Research a city enough to find the correspondence you're looking for. These can be natural features, architecture, or just interesting public buildings. Find some event in the city's history that can be explained with a story about a major ritual gone wrong. Pick and choose bad things that have happened since that event to show that the city is now cursed. Dream up some correspondence that local mages might use to break that curse.

Las Vegas is a much larger city, but its long history of gambling and other entertainment make it another likely spot with a strongly Arcadian correspondence that has Free Council leanings. Boulder, Colorado has a colorful history with a bit more of a Silver Ladder feel to it. With its history and breathtaking natural beauty, it's easy to imagine a Thyrsus trying to call some spirit down from the mountains that is far too powerful for her to control. San Antonio, Texas, has the Alamo, hurricanes, and some fascinating scenery.

In the late afternoon, all the characters enter the mystery plays that lead them to their Watchtowers. Upon Awakening, they find themselves standing in a circle facing each other on Goat Island in Niagara Falls after dark with no memory of how they got there. The time is about 2:15AM on September 14.

At this stage, the players apply part of the mage template. Each character gains the Gnosis trait and one dot in both of their Ruling Arcana. They also change Morality to Wisdom and increase the Resistance Attribute appropriate to their Path — Stamina, Resolve, or Composure, along with the attendant increase to Willpower or Health. The players will apply the rest of the mage template — Arcana, rotes, and any mage Merits — a little later in the chronicle.

Missing Time

Due to their close proximity and the freshness of their contact with their Supernal Realms, the characters immediately recognize they have all had an unusual experience. This doesn't mean they become fast friends, but each will recognize the resonance of the others if they see it again.

Soon after the characters return to their homes in Buffalo, they learn they have been missing for more than a week. This is bound to raise questions even after they make excuses to employers, apologize to families, and ask law enforcement to call off the search for their bodies. The characters are dressed the way they were at the beginning of the mystery play, but a bit of scrutiny (whether through Time magic or examining beard growth) shows that only about two days have passed for them — certainly not a week.

Let the characters take the initiative to experiment with their strange new powers and search for the cause of this lost time. Whether they immediately band together or work separately, and whether they actively seek answers or try to return to something like their normal lives, they eventually make contact with mages of the Buffalo Consilium.

Stump the Mentors

The characters eventually make contact with one or more Consilium mages. The Free Council has a long history in Buffalo stretching back to the Pan American Exposition of 1901, which showcased many technological wonders we take for granted now. The characters might attract the attention of another order instead, however, depending on how they use their new magic. Once these mages learn the characters have recently

Awakened, they seem eager for an opportunity to explain all about magic. It is no conversation for the local coffee shop or social club, however, so the Consilium mages suggest the characters attend a meeting at a secure site in a few days. If the characters make contact with Consilium mages separately, the time and place of this meeting is the same for all of them.

When the characters arrive at the safe house, they meet half a dozen mages representing all five Paths and orders between them. The mages welcome the characters warmly, offer them refreshments, and introduce themselves with two names — their shadow names and Sleeper names. They explain that they are the Buffalo Consilium's Welcoming Committee. They try to make the characters as comfortable as possible, asking questions about their families, jobs, homes, and hobbies while sharing a little bit about their own mundane lives.

Eventually, they get down to the business of explaining the rudiments of magic and Consilium history, answering most questions the new mages have without hesitation. If the characters ask a question that touches on an order or Consilium secret, their hosts politely feign mutual ignorance and assure the characters that they'll have to get back to them with an answer to that question. The hosts take turns explaining the roles of each of the five orders in Buffalo. They take note of which ones interest the characters most. After this, they explain about the five Paths, and each of the hosts describes the Watchtower and Supernal Realm they experienced during their Awakenings.

As the meeting winds down, the hosts ask the characters to describe their Awakenings, complete with Watchtowers and Supernal Realms. At this point, the characters should be a bit confused, since their Watchtowers have little or nothing in common with the ones their hosts described. If they lie about their Watchtowers to conform to their hosts' expectations, the Welcoming Committee promises to arrange for them to meet with mentors of whichever Paths they claim. If they tell the truth, their hosts look slightly puzzled and assure them they'll have some specialists do some research to find out which Paths the characters are on before finding an appropriate mentor.

The Consilium soon uses the information collected by the Welcoming Committee to find appropriate mentors for each of the characters. If the characters somehow pass as members of the known Paths, the Consilium assigns them mentors of those Paths. If they convince the Consilium that they're something completely different, each mentor will share one Ruling Arcanum with her apprentice. After the characters have had enough time to learn the basics of magic, they apply the rest of the mage template.

Welcoming Committee

Buffalo's Consilium is strongly influenced by the Free Council and is welcoming of new mages. In all, its Councilors would much prefer to recruit new mages now rather than have to fight them later. They are not so naïve as to assume no one would ever try to spy on them, however, so the Guardians of the Veil have worked out a procedure for dealing with unfamiliar mages.

Enter the Welcoming Committee — a task force of six mages who give the Consilium authority over newly arrived and recently Awakened mages without ever making the subjects uncomfortable or suspicious. They serve as polite interrogators, collecting useful personal information that could provide mystical leverage or blackmail to control their subjects (or just help the Consilium learn about new arrivals). They deliver Consilium propaganda as useful information while explaining magic and mage society. They size up new mages to determine the orders to which they are best suited and the kinds of mentors they are most likely to respond to favorably.

In addition to their shadow names, members of the Welcoming Committee have elaborate false identities. They talk freely about families that don't exist, imaginary jobs, and other mundane details of their false lives in order to encourage new mages to talk about themselves. If mages are evasive or lie, the Welcoming Committee doesn't push the issue, but they include their suspicions in the report they deliver to the Councilors for review.

None of the information the Welcoming Committee collects about a mage will ever be used against him unless it is absolutely necessary, since only the Hierarch or a majority vote of the Councilors and Provosts can grant anyone access to this information. Members of the Welcoming Committee certainly have no such authority, and if they overstepped their bounds, they would certainly suffer harsh punishment for it.

The members of the Welcoming Committee are not merely Consilium spies looking to manipulate new mages. They genuinely enjoy teaching newly Awakened mages their first lessons about magic, and they sincerely try to pair potential recruits with the orders and mentors that will be the best possible match for their interests and talents. The lies, interrogation, and propaganda are an unfortunate necessity to prevent Seers of the Throne spies from infiltrating the Consilium.

Sample Members:

Buddy (Moros Free Council) — Clearly doesn't take himself or magic very seriously, and generally comes across as a playful, down-to-earth guy who'd love to show you a neat trick for, say, turning water into beer.

Franklin (Mastigos Mysterium) — A garrulous scholar who enjoys answering questions with the preface "here's the simple answer." If asked for more complex answers, he smiles mysteriously as if to warn that he could speak on the subject all night if given half a chance, but he wouldn't want to wander that far off subject just now.

Michelle (Acanthus Guardian of the Veil) — A serious woman who remains a quiet listener at the beginning of the interview but later provides an abundance of warnings about Seers of the Throne, Banishers, and other dangers the newly Awakened may face.

The Board is Set...

The mere presence of these strange mages sparks a lively debate throughout the Buffalo Consilium, and by the time the characters complete their initiation into the first secrets of magic, the various factions have come to some conclusions about them. As the characters integrate into mage society, they'll soon realize how varied these responses are.

Charlatans: Some mages are convinced the characters lied about their Awakenings, possibly in hopes of securing positions of importance within the Consilium by virtue of their novelty. Members of the Silver Ladder are especially likely to disbelieve the characters.

Dark Reflections: Mages that have studied the Abyss have at least heard rumors of a rare but disturbing phenomenon in which a mage's encounter with his Watchtower is tainted by Abyssal energy. Those mages

who Awaken to the dark reflection of a Watchtower are more susceptible to madness and depravity than other mages are. Certain members of the Guardians of the Veil and Mysterium assume the reason the characters' descriptions of their Watchtowers are unusual is that they have, in fact, Awakened to dark reflections of the Watchtowers. These mages watch the characters carefully.

Curiosities: Some of the mages who are prepared to accept the characters' Awakening stories at face value want to study these new Paths for their own sakes. Mysterium mages in this group generally wish to find a way to fit the characters into established cosmology, while Free Council mages are more likely to see this as proof that all the Pentacle cosmology is flawed. In either case, these mages will demand as much of the characters' time as they're willing to give them.

Good Omens: Some mages believe the characters' Awakenings herald something momentous in the Supernal Realms. After all, the Oracles made it possible for mages in the Fallen World to draw down power from five Watchtowers, so if there are now more Watchtowers, it probably means the Oracles have won a great victory in their war for the Supernal Realms. A number of Silver Ladder mages are only too glad to believe this, and as it becomes obvious to more and more Consilium mages that the new Watchtowers are real, this becomes the dominant sentiment. Mages who subscribe to this idea are more likely to befriend the characters, when possible.

Suspects: The day after the characters began their mystery plays, a few Consilium mages vanished. Their bodies were found the day after the characters regained awareness of the Fallen World. The number of missing mages is exactly equal to the characters' numbers. A small but vocal group suspects the characters somehow killed these mages. They make no secret that they think the characters are spies (or puppets) for Seers of the Throne, Banishers, or similarly hostile supernatural groups.

Causeless Effects: Few mages believe Awakenings can be affected by events in the Fallen World, so few ever look for coincidences surrounding the Awakenings of mages. A small number of mages accept the characters' accounts but speculate that some event in the Fallen World might have caused mages to Awaken on these new Paths. Most members of this faction belong to the Mysterium or Guardians of the Veil, and they spend a lot of time learning everything they can about the characters in hopes of finding some answers in unlikely places. While they have little or no direct contact with the characters early in the chronicle, their speculation bears important fruit later.

Coincidences and Oddities

In addition to their unusual Watchtowers, the characters gradually learn a number of other interesting and strange circumstances surrounding their Awakenings:

• Buffalo rarely has more than one mage Awaken in any year. Multiple Awakenings in a single month would have been remarkable enough. Multiple Awakenings on the same night is unheard of.

• While it is not unknown for an Acanthus to skip forward in time when performing an extraordinarily powerful Fate and Time ritual, it is unusual even for Acanthus to experience lost time during their Awakenings the way the characters did.

• The characters entered their mystery play on the anniversary of President McKinley's assassination in 1901 at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo — down to the minute. They regained awareness of the Fallen World on the anniversary of McKinley's death.

• Consilium legend claims McKinley's assassin, Leon Czolgosz, was either a mage or the unwitting pawn of a mage. Some versions claim the Seers of the Throne were responsible, while others argue an extremist Free Council cabal wanted McKinley dead. The story goes the Free Council had intended to bestow a powerful and lasting blessing on Buffalo by means of a ritual that used McKinley's visit and the scientific wonders of the Exposition as catalysts. It isn't clear exactly what the blessing was meant to accomplish, but the attack on McKinley turned the blessing into a terrible curse that has been gradually devouring the prosperity of the city — McKinley's Curse.

• President McKinley was the first victim of McKinley's Curse. Despite being in stable condition and well along the road to recovery, the President took a sudden, fatal turn. His last words were from a hymn that would later be the last song played by the band on the sinking *Titanic*.

• The Consilium has made numerous attempts to break or diminish McKinley's Curse. The first was an attempt to prevent Leon Czolgosz from ever being born, but the mages achieved nothing but the quick execution and strange interment of a man who may have been nothing more than the unfortunate target of a Profane Urim. Every other attempt has been similarly futile, and many have actually intensified the Curse. Several Consilium mages speculate that these mad attempts to break McKinley's Curse are, in fact, just one more aspect of the Curse.

• Niagara Falls is an extraordinarily powerful mystical site, especially for Acanthus. Local legends claim that the Consilium Hierarch gained his great insight into the weavings of Fate by surviving a fall from the top of one of the waterfalls without using magic.

• Mages feel drawn to the Buffalo region like moths to flame. Is it the magic of Niagara Falls? Is it McKinley's Curse? Either way, dozens of mages visit the area each year, and not all of them can bring themselves to leave. The mystical energy is like a maelstrom that draws mages in and never lets go of them. As a result, there are far more mages in the Buffalo area than is normal for a city of its size, and the Acanthus population outnumbers every other Path.

• Goat Island, which lies between the two waterfalls, has been the site of two of the most disastrous attempts to break McKinley's Curse using ritual magic, the most recent of which called forth an Abyssal entity into the Cave of Winds behind the falls. It lured victims to their deaths for nearly a year before the Adamantine Arrow found a way to banish it.

The Pieces are in Motion

Once the characters reach understandings with the Consilium mages' responses to them and join an order (if they so choose), their troubles become more complicated. The entire pace of the chronicle depends largely on when the Storyteller introduces the hooks in this section. If a year has passed, the characters and Consilium have a lot more time to explore the problems this section introduces. If only a month has passed, however, the events of the chronicle will come to a head rapidly.

• More Consilium mages disappear — twice as many as the characters' number — and no one can locate them. Some factions immediately suspect the characters are somehow responsible. At least one Consilium mage makes sure every Banisher in Buffalo finds his way to the characters' Sanctum (he might well suffer sanctions if this betrayal comes to light).

• The Seers of the Throne learn of the characters' strange Awakenings and immediately reach conclusions of their own. The characters face assassination attempts, persistent spying, and brazen attempts to recruit them for the Seers.

• The characters begin to unravel the many connections between their Awakenings and McKinley's Curse. If the characters haven't investigated the significance of their Awakenings by now, a group of mages approaches them with evidence that suggests the appearance of mages of new Paths might correspond with events in the Fallen World and not with some battle in the Supernal Realms. The deaths of Consilium mages also appear to be connected, though it isn't clear how.

• The Welcoming Committee makes contact with another group of newly Awakened mages whose Watchtower descriptions almost exactly match the characters'.

In fact, the circumstances of their Awakenings are almost identical to the characters' except for the date and there are twice as many of them. The mages who disappeared a week before these new mages Awakened turn up dead, and suspicion once again falls on the new arrivals (and the players' characters).

Crushing Burdens, Unwanted Responsibility

The characters find themselves burdened with greater responsibilities within the Consilium. They get closer to the truth about their Awakenings, their Watchtowers, and the latest manifestation of McKinley's Curse.

• The newly Awakened mages need mentors from their Paths, so the characters are the only ones who can take this role. In addition to all their other responsibilities, they must guide these new apprentices and ensure their continued loyalty to the Consilium. Depending on the personalities of the apprentices and the behavior of the characters, this might be an easy task or the toughest job they'll ever have.

• More mages begin to suspect the connection between the Awakenings of new mages and the mysterious deaths of mages of the old Paths. Responses to this vary but tend toward extreme paranoia. Some accuse the new mages of murdering other mages during their Awakenings. Others claim the characters are somehow killing mages to fuel the Awakenings of other mages of their Paths. Still others believe the effect has a mystical origin but that it can be stopped by killing all the mages of the new Paths.

• The characters learn from Time mages or through their own prophetic powers that more mages will Awaken in Buffalo at regular intervals, and each Awakening will mark the death of another Acanthus, Mastigos, Moros, Obrimos, or Thyrsus. Worse still, once all of Buffalo's mages have been replaced by mages of the new Paths, McKinley's Curse will spread into other cities, gradually replacing all the old Paths with the new at the same pace in every city.

• Once rumor of this gets out to the rest of the mage population, responses intensify. Many mages flee Buffalo, but others attempt violence against the characters and their apprentices. The Seers of the Throne, afraid they'll become obsolete as a result of these events, grow almost desperate to recruit mages of the new Paths.

• The characters eventually discover that the Hierarch and his cabal are connected to their Awakenings and the resulting manifestation of the Curse. In their attempt to break McKinley's Curse, they channeled the mystical power of Niagara Falls as part of a tremendous ritual. While the ritual failed to break the Curse, it badly damaged the threads of Fate and Time, opening a rift between the Fallen World and a parallel time stream in which the Oracles established a different set of Watchtowers in the Supernal Realms. This hypothetical time stream is gradually devouring the existing one, which is why mages of the old Paths are slowly dying off.

• The characters learn that the rift can be closed, but only by mages of the new Paths. The ritual involved is dangerous and difficult, and there is a fair chance that McKinley's Curse will find a way to disrupt it. Perhaps of greater personal interest to the characters, if they seal the rift, they and all their apprentices will lose access to their Watchtowers forever. If they are lucky, they'll emerge as Sleepwalkers, but they could just as easily forget their Awakenings or even cease to exist.

• The characters face the choice between attempting the ritual at dear cost to themselves and establishing themselves as the new masters of mage society. If they attempt the ritual, one or more of their apprentices attempts to disrupt the ritual. If they refuse, they find themselves at the center of a magical war that will decide the fate of Awakened magic.

Protecting Sleepers

The World of Darkness is full of monsters that prey on innocent people. Some drink blood. Others feed on their victims' sanity or pain. Even the bravest and most defiant person cannot hope to resist the terrible supernatural powers these creatures possess. The monsters destroy most of those who struggle, devouring them when they can and casting aside whatever is left as carelessly as a child discarding a candy wrapper. Some monsters choose to break the wills of those who oppose them, turning a defiant victim into a fawning slave willing to betray everything she once believed and loved. Many simply take no note of humans that are neither their night's prey nor an immediate threat, knowing that the witnesses must either rationalize what they saw or be called madmen.

Mages are the only real defense ordinary humans have against the monsters that hunt them. Magic lets the Awakened track, resist, and destroy anyone and anything that uses supernatural abilities to control or harm Sleepers. Mages defend Sleepers from secret threats. They punish crimes the victims themselves cannot remember. They give mankind's predators something to fear.

Author Notes — Protecting Sleepers by Eric Zawadzki

Maybe it's because I grew up watching *Star Wars* and reading *The Lord of the Rings*, but I've always found something compelling about well-meaning heroes who must resist the temptation to use their powers for evil or selfish ends. In more recent years, the paradox of virtue bent to the cause of evil has wormed its way into my imagination, as well. Given a chance to write about mages as (to be perfectly honest) superheroes, I felt less inspired by Superman or Captain America than by Luke Skywalker and the X-Men. Good thing, too, because when it comes to larger-than-life, over-the-top superheroes, Malcolm Sheppard's The Cabal chronicle would have stolen the show.

On the surface, Protecting Sleepers is about sorcerers fighting a war of attrition against Things That Should Not Be, but it is also an opportunity to explore the nature of good, evil, and temptation. The dangerous spirits, vampires, Scelesti, cursed artifacts, and creatures of the Abyss pose a threat to the characters, but they are no more dangerous than the heroes' own desires. A Vice too often indulged and a Virtue taken too far can both lead to evil. Does that mean players should avoid letting their characters make mistakes? Absolutely not. Quite often it is not *whether* the heroes make mistakes but *when* and *why* they do that makes their stories interesting.

Themes

The Human Element

Despite their supernatural abilities, mages consider themselves human first and supernatural second. Nearly all crave human contact, and many pursue normal lives in the Sleeper world in addition to their secret lives as humanity's protectors.

Characters in this chronicle should begin with a number of human attachments. These can be individuals, but even a character whose family is dead and who has few close friends should feel loyalty to a human institution or ideal, whether it's a code of honor or a government agency.

A mage recognizes that he endangers his loved ones by merely associating himself with them. A monster unable to defeat a mage might well attack his friends to hurt him. One that grows tired of a mage's interference thinks nothing of holding his family hostage to force his compliance with its demands. Mages usually operate under a shadow name when chasing monsters or patrolling the dark streets and maintain separate Sleeper identities in their daily lives.

Called to Be More, Tempted to Be Less

The characters in this chronicle are heroes. They use their powers to protect the innocent, uphold justice, and oppose those who would exploit the weak. A character's defining characteristic in the chronicle is not what she does but why she does it — her Virtues, Vices, and Wisdom.

A character's Virtue describes the noble passion that drives her to put her life and sanity on the line for the world day after day. A character's Vice, on the other hand, defines her darker desires. Far from being a morally neutral tool, magic responds to the desires of the mage — a mystical truth she ignores at her peril. Magic used in the service of justice or hope or in the spirit of charity draws additional power from the strength of the mage's convictions. Mages who selfishly waste their power indulging personal vices or pursuing petty grudges soon become fodder for the predations of monsters, if they do not become monsters themselves.

A low Wisdom represents more than a mage's descent into hubris and madness. It leaves her more vulnerable to supernatural powers and makes her more susceptible to temptations that prey on her Vice. A wrathful mage is easy to provoke to violence, while a proud one can be manipulated with flattery. A high Wisdom provides greater protection from appeals to the mage's Vice and from supernatural influence, but it makes it more difficult for the mage to deny her Virtue. A mage with great fortitude can be foolishly stubborn in pursuit of his goals, while a temperate one may prove indecisive when his personal interests are at stake out of concern that emotion is clouding his judgment.

Cities of Light and Shadow

This chronicle works best in a large city — whether New York City, San Francisco, or London. A fictional city is just as good as a real one, though it usually means more work for the Storyteller, since she can't just consult the Internet for street maps and local flavor. The city has all the problems of large cities — crime, poverty, natural disasters, and corruption — plus hidden supernatural creatures that pose a threat to the human population.

Origin Stories

The characters in this chronicle are superhuman heroes who contend with supernatural enemies on a regular basis, and their mistakes and missteps often have terrible consequences. What are the character's greatest regrets? What is the one thing about his past that he would change if he could? What were the consequences of his greatest mistake since his Awakening? Looking to the future, what does the character hope to achieve in the short, medium, and long term? What inspires him to risk body and soul facing down the supernatural each night? Think not just in terms of Virtue or Vice, but pick a specific event or person that made turning away from the Awakened world unthinkable to him.

Virtue and Vice

A hero who always does the right thing is boring. The tension between a character's Virtue and Vice is an important story motivator in this chronicle. When considering Virtue/Vice combinations, think of situations where they would come into direct conflict or where one would trump the other. Mages often do the wrong thing for the right reasons or the right thing for the wrong reasons, too, so imagine situations in which both Virtue and Vice would call to the character to take the same action. If the combination's potential isn't obvious, share your musings with the Storyteller.

For example, Sarai's Virtue is Temperance, and her Vice is Wrath. When dealing with enemies, she often finds herself torn between responding with diplomacy or violence. Taking Sarai's Virtue and twisting it, she has significantly less patience when dealing with those who overindulge — such as those who make a lavish show of their wealth. In acknowledgment of her Vice, however, Sarai can be remarkably patient and understanding of someone who lost his temper after being pushed too far. When she faces someone who encourages others to overindulge, such as a drug dealer or similar pusher, Sarai's Virtue and Vice align, and diplomacy is seldom on the table.

Paths

A mage's Path directs not only his magical style but the way he fights supernatural monsters.

Acanthus

Enchanters are quite often the first ones to learn of the arrival of any new monster. They have a knack for being in the right place at the right time, stumbling onto monsters just as they are about to cause trouble. They also make frightening vigilante avengers, since it is almost impossible to hide a crime from an Enchanter's investigations.

Mastigos

Many Warlocks walk the world in secret, making themselves irresistible bait to draw monsters out of hiding. Some hunt alone, relishing the thrill of conquering their enemies. Others act as decoys, flushing out monsters and preventing them from escaping long enough for the rest of the cabal to destroy the creatures. Sometimes a Mastigos lets a monster go free with no more than a few drops of blood lost. Though this might be mistaken for an act of mercy, more often the Mastigos uses one monster to spy on others, especially if the creature has contact with others of its kind.

Moros

Necromancers are best known for dealing with hostile ghosts and other undead. They tend to be well-equipped, whether that means a shotgun that turns concrete into Swiss cheese or a T-shirt that can turn aside monstrous claws. A skilled Moros can give a ragtag group of vigilantes the tools of an elite fighting squad without the exorbitant price.

Obrimos

Loud monsters often call for loud mages, and Theurgists excel at supernatural shouting matches. While Obrimos can be subtle when the situation demands it, they are at their best in open, toe-to-toe confrontations with supernatural enemies. Many also take on a support role in cabals, creating imbued items that improve their allies' odds of surviving an encounter with the monstrous.

Thyrsus

Shamans are the most likely of the Path to take a diplomatic approach to dealing with the supernatural world. This doesn't mean they tolerate monsters that are bent on harming humans, but they are more likely to look for nonviolent solutions, first — or at least solutions that leave their hands clean. Thyrsus quite often call on spirit allies to destroy or drive out dangerous or hostile beings. Most Shamans eventually find themselves serving as cabal healers, for it is a role that comes naturally to them.

Orders

While a mage's Path influences his method of fighting monsters on a tactical level, his order governs the overall strategy he adopts for protecting Sleepers from supernatural entities.

Adamantine Arrow

This order is tolerant of monsters that don't pose any serious threat to local Sleepers, and they are willing to negotiate compromises that allow a monster to live among humans. A supernatural being that rejects (or cannot

comprehend) diplomacy or violates an Arrow treaty can expect no mercy. The order will not rest until they have utterly eliminated the threat. Other orders rely on Arrows to confirm the intentions of a monster and respond with the appropriate diplomatic or violent solution.

Free Council

This order focuses on arming Sleepers against the supernatural. Some set up "neighborhood watch" programs to alert local mages to potential supernatural activity. Others literally put magical talismans in the hands of select Sleepers, such as government officials, to prevent monsters from using them as tools. Libertines have no tolerance for authorities who willingly aid hostile monsters, and they will not hesitate to blackmail, exile, or kill anyone who betrays his fellow man. Other orders call on libertines when they need something from local Sleepers, whether it's extra muscle, information, or just conveniently located warm bodies.

Guardians of the Veil

This order hunts the most dangerous and elusive of all prey — mages who have become monstrous. When possible, they capture corrupted mages in hopes of bringing them to justice or even redeeming them, but every Guardian is prepared to kill without hesitation. Other orders call on the Guardians of the Veil whenever they suspect a mage is colluding with monsters.

Mysterium

This order focuses on collecting new lore about monsters and the means by which they may be controlled or defeated. Some mystagogues want to satisfy intellectual curiosity about monsters or determine which can be reasoned with and which must be destroyed. Most, however, seek weaknesses mages can exploit or weapons that will make it easier to defeat monsters. When members of other orders find themselves facing a new monster or one that seems invulnerable, they call on the Mysterium for knowledge, analysis, and solutions.

Silver Ladder

This order focuses on drawing monsters out of hiding, deliberately placing themselves in harm's way by patrolling dangerous neighborhoods, investigating haunted houses, and hanging around graveyards after midnight. Some make themselves look vulnerable by hiding their magical abilities until a supernatural creature tries to make them its prey. Others create flashy auras visible only to supernatural senses and parade through the streets in hopes of provoking territorial monsters to attack them. Théarchs often find themselves practicing vigilante

justice on Sleeper thugs, burglars, and robbers who cross their paths. Other orders prize the Silver Ladder's ability to find monsters and call upon them whenever they need a clever and effective decoy.

System Changes

Calling on Virtue and Vice

Whenever a mage tries to cast a spell that reflects her Virtue, the player may opt to channel the Virtue to add 3 dice to the spell check or reduce the Mana cost of a spell by 1 (minimum 0). Likewise, if a mage tries to cast a spell that indulges her Vice, the player may channel the Vice for the same benefit. A mage can channel a Virtue and Vice on the same spell.

Channeling a Virtue or Vice deeply colors the spell's Resonance. Until the end of the scene or until the spell

ends, whichever happens last, any supernatural being can discern the mage's Virtue (or Vice) on a successful Wits + Composure + Gnosis (or other supernatural trait) roll. Some monsters despise specific Virtues, and many monsters feed on Vices.

Wisdom and Resistance

A mage who falls into depravity is low hanging fruit for supernatural powers. Whenever the mage's Gnosis trait is added to one of his resistances (Stamina, Resolve, or Composure), the player instead adds the lower of his Gnosis or his Wisdom. A mage with Gnosis 4 and Wisdom 6 would add 4 to a resistance trait, as would one with Gnosis 6 and Wisdom 4.

Ruled by Passions

Contact with Supernal Realms makes mages creatures of great passion, less able to resist pangs of conscience or temptation than Sleepers. While this doesn't mean a mage must take an obviously suicidal action when faced with an opportunity to uphold her Virtue or indulge her Vice, it makes it much harder to resist these opportunities, and a clever enemy who knows a mage can even manipulate her by her passions. A Lustful mage may allow a known enemy to seduce him, for example, while a Temperate one may capture a monster even if it would be easier to kill it.

Whenever a mage is given an opportunity to indulge her Vice in a way that doesn't cause her immediate harm, the player must succeed on a Wisdom roll to resist the urge. If the mage channeled her Vice into any spell she currently has active, the player suffers a −3 die penalty to this roll.

On the other hand, in order to act contrary to the mage's Virtue, the player must succeed on a Resolve + Composure roll. If she channeled her Virtue into any spell she currently has active, the player suffers a −3 penalty to this roll.

The Storyteller must inform the player when a roll to resist following Virtue or Vice is appropriate (though the player can certainly suggest it). This shouldn't happen more than once a chapter.

Narrative

This chronicle revolves around a group of well-meaning but flawed heroes with remarkable powers. Their lives are full of violence and dangers that leave them little time for prolonged contemplation of the moral rights and wrongs of their behavior. And yet, the chronicle is about the heroes' struggle between good and evil, Virtue and Vice. Until the Storyteller knows the characters, it is impossible to illustrate that conflict, so this chronicle is different for each troupe.

Inciting Incident

Also known as the hook, the chronicle begins with something big that draws the characters together. This can be a fight, a disaster, a major supernatural manifestation, or any other crisis. Maybe this is the first time the characters have ever met. Maybe they've worked together for a long time but this represents the beginning of a series of challenges that will redefine them. Or maybe it's something in between.

In addition to drawing together the characters on-screen for the first time, this scene sets up the final conflict of the chronicle. Ideally, when the players look back at the first session months or years later, they should be able to see the hand of their nemesis in it. This might mean meeting the nemesis in a context that shows just how far beyond the characters' power it currently is, but it can be much more subtle than that.

The Character of Plots

The chronicle layers three kinds of stories — nemesis, recurring villain, and monster of the week.

Nemesis

The nemesis is the overarching plot of the whole chronicle. It is introduced with the inciting incident and ends with the final confrontation at the end of the chronicle. A nemesis might be a supernatural enemy of Godlike power (like Sauron in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy or the Dark One in Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time*), a seemingly impossible task (like restoring Al's body in *Full Metal Alchemist* or returning to Earth in *Farscape*), or averting some foretold disaster (like the explosion in *Heroes*). It should be clear the first time the nemesis is introduced that the characters are not yet equipped to defeat it. Any attempt to overcome the nemesis before the final confrontation usually ends in failure, at best, and more often in disaster (Luke's duel with Darth Vader in *The Empire Strikes Back*, for example).

Recurring Villain

A recurring villain is the arc of a moderately long story. Each is like the plot of a single season of a television show or serial movie. The main enemies of each season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are good examples of recurring villains. Over the course of the chronicle there will be several recurring villains. Some of them are connected to the nemesis or somehow survive the

climax of their story, but most are independent threats the characters defeat resoundingly at the end of the story. Not all recurring villains are monsters or corrupted mages. An artifact or remarkable event can also play this role in a chronicle.

Monster of the Week

Despite the name, this story doesn't necessarily involve a monster at all. Rather, it is a story with a clear goal that can be achieved within a couple chapters, or even in a single chapter. It usually has little or no connection to the nemesis or any recurring villain, though there will be a few exceptions. A monster of the week plot makes a good break from the events of a long-term story — as comic relief or a way of filling time when a player will be absent for a chapter. These stories also give players opportunities to explore their characters and interact with storyteller characters that are important to the larger story.

The Plot of Characters

Interesting plots and memorable villains are just a means to an end. The chronicle's external battles are extensions of the characters' internal conflicts between Virtue and Vice. Mages express Wisdom through actions, not intentions. A mage's choices define who he is, was, and will be. A Storyteller can rearrange the order in which he explores these character plots, but it is important to save the biggest stories for later in the chronicle.

I Am

During the first recurring villain story of the chronicle the storyteller should give players ample opportunities to explore their characters and settle on the dynamics of the cabal. Present them with opportunities to show off their best and worst skills, act on their Virtues, and indulge their Vices in interesting ways. The consequences of their actions should be relatively small at this stage, but each player should have a good sense of her character's personality, motivations, and role in the cabal by the end of the story.

I Was

The next few recurring villain stories explore each character's past. Some will have few secrets, and some may tell their histories in the previous story. Focus on bringing out the histories of any characters with hidden pasts and dark secrets. Recurring villains are often old enemies, former allies, or the consequences of the character's terrible mistake. The stakes are higher, now. At some point each character is forced to choose between her Virtue and Vice, and a serious lapse in a character's judgment will have significant story consequences.

I Am Becoming

As the chronicle nears its conclusion, the characters face not only more powerful recurring villains but more difficult moral decisions. Characters encounter situations in which obeying a Virtue has negative consequences, or satisfying a Vice actually serves a greater good. Situations that put the Virtues and Vices of two or more characters in direct conflict arise, and how the mages resolve these situations may well change the dynamics of the cabal.

Final Confrontation

In the final story of the chronicle, the characters confront their nemesis in a climactic showdown. This can be an epic magical battle, an elaborate trick to imprison the nemesis, an intense debate to convert it, or any other suitable challenge. Ideally, the way the characters resolve the conflict should reflect who they are now and how it is different from who they were at the beginning of the chronicle.

Whether they win resoundingly or fail tragically, the chronicle ends after this story. There may be a chapter or two as a denouement or epilogue to show the consequences of the characters' actions.

The Secret of Shangri-La

It is a Storyteller's fiat to take the conventions of a game and bend them for the joy of the players as much as for their own enjoyment. Certainly, in a game where some or all of the players have read all the books, know all the concepts, and played them all through at least once, a Storyteller has to change some things around to make it all fresh. This book charges a Storyteller to do that.

More specifically, this chronicle takes a few core ideas, even the basics on which **Mage: The Awakening** is built and challenges the players to deal with some very awful truths.

Atlantis is often treated as a glittering city of enlightened wisdom as well as powerful magic. Like it or hate it, Atlantis and the stories written about it are a big part of many books written for **Mage: The Awakening**. But what if the material only told half the story? Sure, a Storyteller can treat the Atlantean myth as a story, a metaphor for the problems mages face as well as cause. It's clearly analogous since it isn't the literal Greek myth but rather a representation of mythical cities of splendor ultimately corrupted by human greed or arrogance. But for every classical or modern reference to a city brought down by man's greed, a parallel story exists of a city brought down because it had to be for the good

of mankind. For every Atlantis, Thule, or Shangri-La is a Hyborea, a R'yleh, a Sarnath, or a Carthage. Is it possible that mages were the lone reason for the loss of Atlantis? And if not, what was?

The Awful Truth

Since we first gathered in groups, human beings have struggled to understand why we do horrible things to one another. A thousand faiths, philosophies, and sciences have formulated over the years to explain why the human animal can be so very monstrous.

For every reasonable and rational explanation, someone says, "it wasn't my fault, the Devil made me do it." Accountability has been passed on to supernatural surrogates for as long as we've been sophisticated enough to create mythologies. When we created the ideas of good and evil as a people, we probably created an avatar of evil on which we could blame the wicked things we do.

So what makes mages so different? Sure, awful forces lurk in the night that sometimes seek to control and influence the gullible or careless mage, but when you get down to it, when you ask your average Awakened "why did Atlantis fall?" the answer is usually "because someone fucked up."

What makes mages so unique in the human condition that they take the responsibility? Are they really that much more sensitive and wise than their Sleeper counterparts? Apparently not, despite their understanding of how dangerous arrogance is, they still keep doing it.

What if there really was something to the "Devil made me do it" mentality? This chronicle asks that question with an answer no mage wants to hear.

Simply put, the reason Atlantis fell had far more to do with ridding the world of evil once and for all than the silly politics of the Exarchs and the Oracles. During the course of the chronicle, the characters discover the truth of Atlantis, its location, and face the same terrible decision their ancestors faced before written history.

This chronicle assumes three things: first, Atlantis was real. Second, the source of all magic and the source of all evil was housed in the guts of Atlantis. Third, everything the characters, indeed the world of the Awakened understand about magic and the Supernal are merely the twisted dreams of the sleeping chaos trapped deep in lost Atlantis.

From there, the setup should be a set of events that, when looked at in relationship to one another, suggest a terrible event of Apocalyptic scale. Something is shifting in the black core of the world and its fitful tossing will destroy all life as we know it.

Suggestions for Characters

When considering character creation and character type ideal for this chronicle, the Storyteller and players' tastes should be the only inherent requirements or limitations. Because so much will involve seeking things that are lost, not only are Mysterium characters ideal as the core of the group, but if a Storyteller presents it as a Mysterium-style adventure, it gives the players a good idea of what kinds of characters will work best. Characters should be somewhat flexible and able to leave their home city, since the story inherently involves travel.

Time and Fate magic might at first glance seem to be a chance to spoil the surprises coming, but in the end, it's up to the Storyteller what information can be gleaned while using the Arcana. In fact, having an Acanthus in the cabal might prove helpful since it will be a means to lead the characters to the next part of the story if they don't head there on their own.

Note, too, that this chronicle shares some themes with Mad with Power (p. 185). The Storyteller might consider some of the systems presented there for this chronicle, especially as the truth is revealed.

A Complete Chronicle in Five Books

Creating the feeling that the world is falling apart takes some time. To do it effectively, it needs to be a slow build, starting with small-scale oddities. There's no reason to start the players off with the feeling that this chronicle will take them to the end of the world and beyond.

Each book is meant to last a middle-sized story arch with threads tying each together. Within each book, a Storyteller should try to present at least three smaller stories to keep the pacing, though ultimately that depends on the group and its needs. Each write-up includes a story hook to flesh out the arch.

Book One

Start simple. Mess with the mystery plays of the characters. In this case, a Storyteller should take a hands-on approach to the character's Awakening. Describe it as almost typical, almost straight out of the book save for some distinct oddities. Something is wrong with the Watchtower when the character reaches it. For instance, the character might experience an unusual amount of malice from the inhabitants of the Realm or the substance of the Realm is unusually insubstantial, as if a waking dream instead of a deep fantasy as normally experienced.

But don't panic, since these are a few isolated instances. Surely, if something major were going on, some of the established mages would have seen it coming and been prepared. It takes a while for the rumors to circulate widely enough to garner any real attention.

In the meantime, encouraging the characters into situations based on exploration and discovery will gear them up for their final descent. Whet their appetite for the grand adventure that comes by filling them with the thrills of discovering something long thought lost.

Book One, Chapter Two

The characters find a sunken ruin in a local body of water too small to contain it. The Storyteller should fill it with wonders and handsome rewards that might plant seeds of greed or curiosity and spurn the characters on down the road.

Book Two

The rumors regarding the characters' Awakenings are finally reaching the right mages and curiosity starts to give way to paranoia. When the characters have returned from their exploration they find the Consilium watching them more closely, and older established cabals avoiding younger ones.

Furthermore, magic itself is starting to behave strangely. While it remains mostly a matter of hearsay, more and more mages are saying magic just isn't behaving the way it ought to.

Mix it up with other typical **Mage** stories or possibly another Artifact hunting expedition to pace out reveals more slowly.

Book Two, Chapter One

A potent cabal of mages in the city is growing concerned enough with the stories they're hearing that they've decided to actively spy on the characters. Breaking Consilium rules, this other cabal is using

Chaotic Magic

Any spell might be plagued by an odd Paradox-like effect. Whenever a player makes a spellcasting roll, the Storyteller should roll a single die. If the die comes up as a 10, a covert spell is then considered vulgar. If the spell was already vulgar, add one to the successes of the Paradox roll.

If that die turns up a one, the spell is warped for the worse. The Storyteller should randomly choose another spell that the character's Arcanum could support, and have it take the intended spell's place. This spell must be covert if the initial spell was.

magic to violate a Sanctum. When the characters discover this, it's up to them to prove to the Hierarch what this other group is up to, for their sake and for the sake of other young cabals in the city.

Book Three

Next, start visions and portents, dreams that say what their mystery plays seemed to suggest. Something is wrong with the Supernal Realm. As the characters get involved either through active augury or chance, they find themselves drawn more and more to real-world lost cities like Dunwhich, England, or Rugholt, Germany. The draw to these places is almost impossible to resist, and each new location has its own story to tell. What do the cites all have in common? Mythical or real, they were all pulled down into the sea.

After that revelation, start hitting the characters with bigger indications of how bad things are getting. Stories and events, confused nightmares shared by all the mortals of the city, messages apparently written in the stars, start to point to the possibilities that neither the Exarchs nor the Oracles are what they were once thought to be. In fact, they might not be real at all. Prejudice and fear rule the day and continually back the characters into a corner.

Book Three, Chapter One

In a quiet countryside of Suffolk, England, the locals have gone back to the old traditions of killing witches. Driven by cultlike tendencies, the people of the region are somehow identifying mages and dragging them to the seaside to drown them by force. On these murderous missions they chant "it is called Tehom, who is called Tamtu, who is the Chaos Dragon!"

Book Four

Things fall apart. Sleepers are canceling magic just by their presence or seeing full-blown vulgar magic without tempting a Paradox. All over the world, the rules seem to no longer apply in any understandable way.

What the Awakened world understands to be the Abyss becomes a swirling threat, no longer held back by wise mages careful with their Arcana. Instead, entities creep into the world with no provocation at random.

Things have become bad enough at this point that all-out chaos is just a few more catastrophes away. At Storyteller's option, one of the orders disintegrates, falling hopelessly into anarchy and Awakened society hemorrhages.

Book Four, Chapter Three

A maddened Seer of the Throne reveals himself to the cabal in public, screaming that his Masters are a lie. He pulls his hair out cursing the Abyss saying that there is no Heaven, only Hell. After that, he kills himself in spectacular fashion with magic. How the characters clean up the Veil breach will become just as important as figuring out what the poor fool meant.

Book Four, Chapter Four

Any characters that belong to the Mysterium start receiving strange, sprawling messages from mentors and Masters. The messages grow more insane, indicating some renowned members of the order have discovered a series of papyrus scrolls filled with undeniable blasphemies. The messages turn to demands that all members of the order kill themselves "before it's too late." Members who don't comply and kill themselves become hunted by what's left of the order on top of their other problems.

Book Five

The Final Revelation is at hand. The clues planted in the previous books finally all make sense, and whether it is due to nearly divine inspiration or raw deduction, the characters manage to triangulate the coordinates of what may be the final resting place of the mythical Atlantis.

The Veil is gone, and mages actively war in the streets with each other, old enemies like the Seers, and even Sleepers in an attempt to stay alive in a world gone mad. Paradoxes no longer separate our world from the Abyss. Nightmares of unmaking roam the world freely.

With no choice left but to go to Atlantis and try to stop whatever is happening from going on, the characters find their path to the location surprisingly easy, as if something powerful wants them to make it to the lost city.

When the mages reach Atlantis, the Storyteller hands out new characters — potent wizard-kings — instead of the players' normal characters. These characters, original inhabitants of Atlantis, were there for the fall and had some part to play in it, though the modern characters won't figure that out until the end. Throughout Book Five, the Storyteller should run these flashback scenes on occasion giving the characters the idea that they are having flashes of a past life. (For some suggestions on running flashbacks and flash-forwards in a chronicle, take a look at the Noir genre in Chapter One, p. 47.)

The rest of the chronicle takes place in Atlantis, deep under the Atlantic ocean. Having no idea what is going on in the outside world, it's only a matter of time before the characters realize they may be the only people left alive.

Perhaps to the characters' surprise, people are still alive in the shattered city. The millennia of living under the sea have changed them, as has their proximity to the source of all evil. While it was somehow easier for the characters to get to Atlantis, once there, it seems like they're on their own to get through it.

A Storyteller can experiment with creative Storytelling methods down here as well. Despite the poor reaction most of the current inhabitants may have towards the characters, there was a time when the city was full of people. Those people left evidence of who they once were, and how they survived. More importantly, evidence indicates the frightening pale cannibals hunting them through Atlantis are relatives after a fashion.

After the characters have been dragged through the pits of Atlantis to such an extent that they can no longer see any difference between it and Hell, it's time to wrap up the chronicle.

In an ancient cavern that opens into a black pit, darker than even the ocean should be at this depth, the characters finally encounter Tehor-Tiamet, the mother of evil, the Abyss itself. If the cards have all fallen correctly, it will not be until this moment that the characters realize the whole truth. All of their magic comes from this primordial evil.

Hopefully, that's an awesome revelation for the characters. Tehor-Tiamet communicates with them, answering their questions mostly because it is amused anyone got so far. It can't remember the last time anyone found where it dwelled, and that's a good thing because otherwise it would remember the characters' past lives being responsible for making it slumber for millennia.

The only difference between the last confrontation with Tehor-Tiamet and this is that the characters have no way to make her sleep again. They are left with two choices: walk away and try to find a way to live in Atlantis in the hopes to someday save the human race; or destroy Tehor-Tiamet once and for all, robbing the world of magic forever and possibly losing their lives in the process.

If they choose to walk away, their reward will be death and the end of the world in their future. If they choose to destroy the Abyss, it takes a ritual that they discovered along the way and the sacrifice of at least one of their own. The choice is theirs.

The End

Whatever choice the characters decide to make, it should be a heavy one so that the full gravity of their choice can be appreciated. If they perform the ritual, the world is safe but magic as the mages know it is gone forever. If they don't, they'll be able to keep their power — in fact, they'll possess unlimited power — but only in the horrible underworld which will be all that's left of reality.

Kind of a bummer.

If the group likes that kind of ending, the Storyteller can choose to leave it at that. Some people like a stark ending if it makes sense with the story. This sort of ending works particularly well in the chronicle if the characters decide to walk away.

But not everyone is happy with that kind of wrap up. Many players, even when a chronicle ends, like to think that their characters went off to further adventures or at the very least to quiet and well-deserved retirement. What's the point if the character gets nothing out of the story and whatever growth and development they went through doesn't mean anything? In this case, nothing is wrong with adding a slightly hopeful epilogue to the chronicle. Maybe after their sacrifice, the characters return from Atlantis and find that though magic is gone and the population is decimated, those left are willing to lay down arms and usher in a new age of peace and rebuilding.

Or maybe the destruction of the Abyss frees the world to see the true Supernal, a Realm of high magic the likes of which the world has never actual seen thanks to Tehom-Tiamet's intervention. A completely new chronicle could follow, set in a world with no distinction between the flesh and the Supernal. (If a Storyteller wants to run a follow up chronicle, she might look into the Epic Fantasy genre on p. 27.)

Taking Over

In this chronicle, the characters not only run across the members of the city, they interact with them, socialize with them, and eventually engineer their downfall and take over. A social political game is more than just killing others to get ahead in the world, though that is a valid option at times. It is about intrigue and cunning plans laid to lure rivals into a false sense of security while you prepare to rip their world out from under them. It is about gathering support from others via favors and blackmail. This chronicle is about setting a stage for the characters to enact social cunning and wit against each other and their surroundings to get ahead. The characters may decide just to kill their opponents to get what

Author Notes — Taking Over by Danielle Lauzon

So, you are probably thinking, "If I want to play a political game, why aren't I playing **Vampire: The Requiem**?" The answer is because there is so much potential for intrigue and social maneuvering in **Mage** that it begs to be played out.

The politics of **Mage** are different than the politics of **Vampire** anyway, because vampires are predators and parasites by their nature. Mages are human beings, and as such carry the same potential to be petty, grasping, and shortsighted that all of us do — only with the power to alter reality itself backing them up. In a setting like a Consilium, where *everyone* has the same capability for information gathering (though the specifics may vary), the politics become subtle, twisted, and vicious.

All of this, of course, can make for a superb story.

they want. Of course, they risk losing Wisdom if they do, and besides, murder will out eventually (especially where mages are concerned). The true art of getting what you want is making it look like you never wanted it in the first place, and making sure that no one knows how you got it.

Getting Ready

A lot of preparatory work needs to go into creating the setting for this chronicle. As a Storyteller, you must define the structure of the city, the rules of the city, the roles of the members, the goals and motivations of the members, and how the characters will interact with the whole.

This chronicle explains the roles that can be taken up within the political city. All the examples use the traditional Consilium and Lex Magica (**Mage: The Awakening** p, 55–56). Different political systems work for the chronicle, just so long as the details are determined before the start of the game.

Laws of the City

A Lex Magica can be as complex or simple as you want. You can use the base ideas from previously-written materials, or you can create your own magical laws. The best way to decide how you want to go about

making the laws is to decide what you want them to accomplish within the chronicle. The laws can be fair and just, allowing the characters to utilize them to their advantage when dealing with the other members of the city. They can be one-sided and unfair, giving the characters a point of contention with the rest of the city, and a way to make allies with other mages being oppressed by the laws. The laws could be fair in theory, but be easily misinterpreted and misused by the ranking mages in the Consilium.

You should think about how the city follows the law. Mages excel at information gathering (see Too Much Information, p. 134). But what if that information was gathered by the use of illegal magic, such as by vulgar means, or spying? Is that evidence admissible in an accusation, or will it be ignored? Determine if the Council will follow the letter of the law, or the spirit, and for whom — it's entirely possible that the Council might interpret the law differently for different defendants. Indeed, if the characters can build up some political credit with the mages in charge, they can afford to break the Lex Magica a bit more freely later, because they can cash in on that reputation.

City Structure and Membership Roles

The city structure and members of the controlling body is a setting element with a lot of options available to the Storyteller. It is also one of the most important defining factors of this chronicle. It is important to populate your city with someone to fill each of the following roles, either with traditional Consilium roles or something more innovative.

The Leader: This person is in charge in some fashion or another. This could be a definitive ruler, or a seat that casts the tie-breaking vote. This is the Hierarch, or some other ruling position given to a mage with a lot of respect within the city. This position is one that either directly or indirectly gives orders to the other members of the city. The leader can also be a face man for a governing body that simply sees him as a puppet.

The Council: This is a group of people that advises, manipulates, or outright controls the leader. The Councilors, made up of representatives of the local cabals, are the most skilled members of the Paths, or the leaders of the orders. They meet and discuss rules, regulations and infractions thereof. They bring decisions either from the council or the leader to their representative group. The Councilors can have aides that either assist them, or replace them if they cannot be present for some reason or another.

The Law: This is the mage, or group of mages, that enforces the laws of the city. They bring violators to heel and enact the will of the leader or council for the city. Traditionally, this position is called the Sentinel. The law could be many things; corrupt, strictly loyal, sympathetic, or cold and merciless. The law might deputize others to assist in its duties.

The Others: There can be as many other positions as you want. Possibilities include a right-hand man, a representative branch for the population unrepresented by the council, a judge that gives checks and balances to the council and their law, or a speaker — the Herald — that dictates public standing and intrigue.

The Neutral: Though this is not actually a position in the city, it is a personality archetype that deserves discussion. The neutral is a person in a role that has no real opinion on the matters at hand. He can go to either side at any time based on the facts and greasing of palms.

The Storyteller can either create characters to fill these roles, and the players' characters attempt to usurp them, or the characters fill the roles and defend their positions from outside forces. Both options will be explored later in this article.
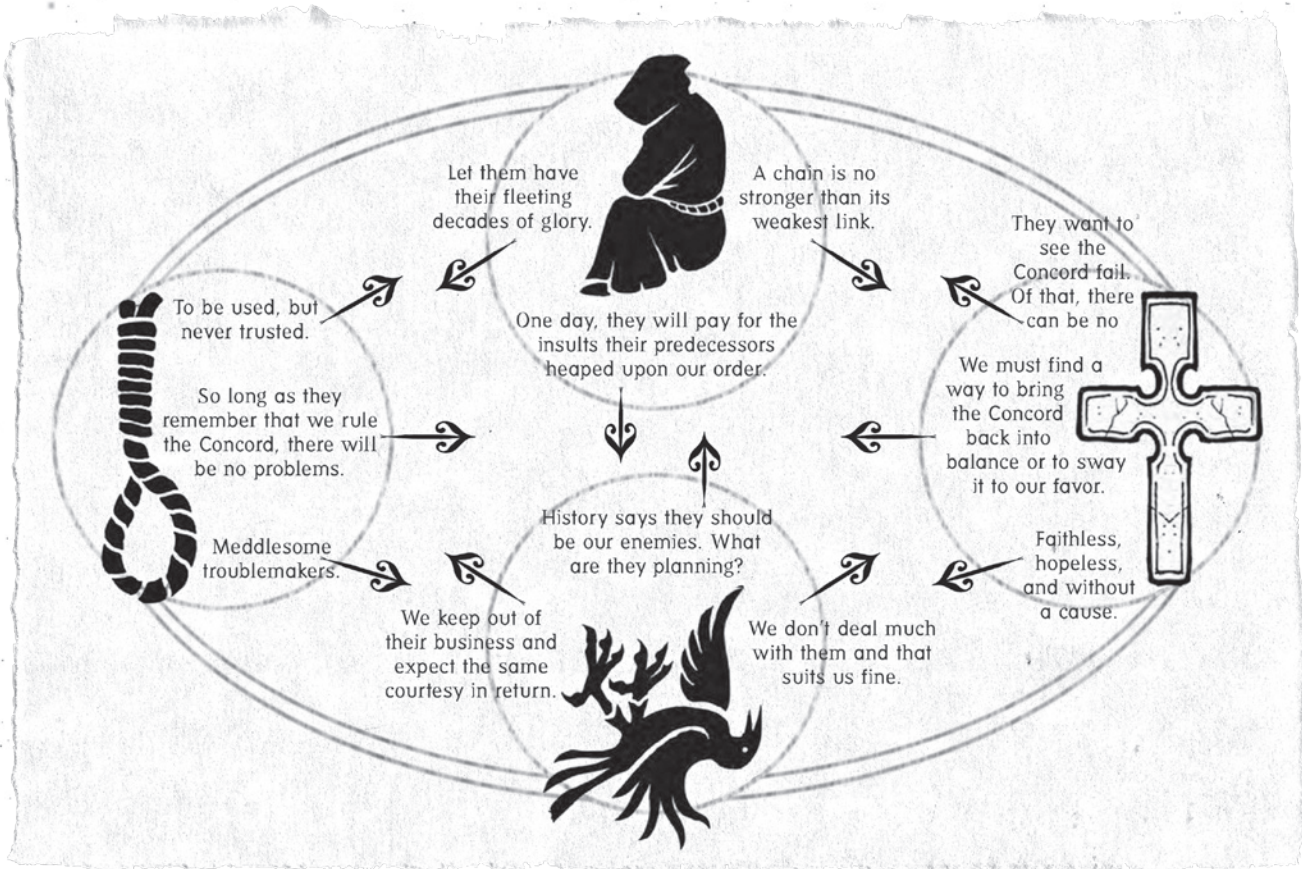
Relationships

Once you have filled the city roles, and decided on the laws of the city, you need to decide how they all function together as a whole. It isn't necessary to write out a long and detailed history of your city's Consilium (though it doesn't hurt). Instead, think about how characters behave toward each other. One way to do that quickly is to create a relationship map.

A relationship map is a web diagram in which each character is represented by a bubble and the relationships between them are represented by the arrows that link them. This is a useful tool for tracking relationships, especially in political chronicles where the Storyteller is more likely to be juggling multiple supporting characters.

Relationship maps are also useful for tracking the agendas of cabals, orders, and other factions. In a chronicle like Taking Over, playing one faction off against another is a good strategy, so it behooves you to know what rivalries exist.

For example, consider four of the cabals described in Appendix Two of **Mage: The Awakening** — the Ebon Noose, the White Putnams, the Dead Wrens, and the Shadow Chorus. A relationship map based on these cabals might look like this:

Let them have their fleeting decades of glory.

A chain is no stronger than its weakest link.

They want to see the Concord fail. Of that, there can be no

To be used, but never trusted.

One day, they will pay for the insults their predecessors heaped upon our order.

We must find a way to bring the Concord back into balance or to sway it to our favor.

So long as they remember that we rule the Concord, there will be no problems.

History says they should be our enemies. What are they planning?

Faithless, hopeless, and without a cause.

Meddlesome troublemakers.

We keep out of their business and expect the same courtesy in return.

We don't deal much with them and that suits us fine.

In a Taking Over chronicle based on the Boston Consilium, the Storyteller might find himself running a scene in which the characters take a meeting with Davy Jones of the Dead Wrens (see p. 384 of **Mage: The Awakening**). The characters try to feel him out about who he would support in a battle between the Ebon Noose and the White Putnams. Rather than trying to interpret text from **Mage** (or from **Boston Unveiled**, which, of course, goes into much more detail on these cabals' relationships) or, indeed, from the Storyteller's own notes, the Storyteller can refer to the relationship map. The Dead Wrens, based on the relationship map, want both of those other cabals to leave them alone, but the White Putnams seem more inclined to do that than the Ebon Noose (since the Noose considers them "troublemakers"). As such, it seems likely that Davy Jones would indicate grudging support for the Putnams over the Noose, but not be terribly enthused one way or the other. This might, of course, be exactly what the characters want to hear.

Rules of Engagement

If the characters are going to get wrapped up in the politics of the city, they are going to need to know how to interact with the roles and how to achieve their own goals and motivations. It is not necessary to let the char-

acters know the whole of the story driving the supporting characters, but they should know some back story to get them involved. Based on the example motivations for the different roles, the characters could know that there was a big fight with the Seers of the Throne during which a Pentacle mage was killed by the Guardians of the Veil for consorting with the Seers. Tensions on the council since the event have caused the city to fall into disarray. There is only one Sentinel, and he can't be everywhere at once.

Political Maneuvering

After you have created the setting and put everything into place, you need to introduce the characters to the city they live in and the Consilium to which they will belong. The following are examples of how to do this.

New to the city: The characters are members of a cabal that is new to the city. They have moved in and are seeking an audience with the Consilium. A Herald or Sentinel might greet them.

Newly Awakened: This book presents a few other chronicles that detail Awakenings, which could be used as a prelude to this chronicle (The Chosen Path on p. 150; Over the Falls p. 190; The Andrews Family Coven, p. 141). The characters are newly Awakened,

and they have mages in the Consilium as their mentors. The characters do not have to be part of a cabal, nor do they need to even know each other before the start of the chronicle, though they are going to want to work together in most instances.

New to the Consilium: The characters are members of a cabal that has been living in the city, but have not been formally accepted into the Consilium. This might make political workings a little harder for the group because the city might not trust their new-found desire to be part of the Consilium.

City Officials: The characters are the Council members, the law, and the leader. The characters must defend their positions from scheming cabals. When starting the characters in esteemed positions in the city, they should probably be allowed to start the characters with extra experience points to represent the skill needed to gain such a position.

Gaining the Upper Hand

Once the characters have been introduced to the Consilium, it is time to start them on their paths to political glory. The characters are going to need to test the waters to figure out who can be bought, and at what price. Intelligence can be gathered at social gatherings, private visits, or even formal Consilium meetings — if they find themselves invited. Depending on the group, the characters might do reconnaissance missions on their own, then return to the rest of the group to share information. This is particularly useful if the characters are each of different Paths or orders. Some of the characters might gather information about the council members as a small group, probably because they are all of the same Path or order.

How the characters gather their information is up to them, but getting the city members what they want will be tricky. The Sentinel of the city might want information about tight-lipped members of the Council, but the only way to gain that information is to befriend them. The Hierarch might want the Moros Councilor removed, but doesn't want a coup. Instead, he wants the characters to publicly humiliate the Councilor, forcing his Path to choose a new representative. The Herald of the city wants a new Silver Ladder Councilor, and is willing to support the characters, but only if they are the ones that remove him. The leaders of several unrepresented cabals are willing to align with the characters' cabal, but only if one of those leaders becomes the new Sentinel.

The characters have to decide who to help, who to betray, and where in the city they would like to land when the dust settles. If the characters are starting from the bottom, then they are obviously working their way up. If they are already on the top, then it will be in their best interest to not only keep their positions, but to make sure their allies are in positions to support them.

Social Combat

Social interaction and debate isn't everyone's strong point, but in a roleplaying game, a character's skill is often conflated with the player's skill. This isn't really fair — after all, you don't make players arm-wrestle to determine the results of their characters' Strength rolls. This system gives the characters the ability to enact social justice and maneuver in the political setting.

If the characters are engaging in social and political engineering, then they will eventually run into the need to debate with their rivals in front of the Council or other cabals. The character can choose between three types of debates styles to convince the audience they are correct over their opponent. At the start of the debate, the Storyteller assigns a target number of successes (base 10) that needs to be gained over an extended and contested action. This number can be altered at Storyteller discretion based on the audience and the character and rival's standing within the city. A small audience makes it easier to debate, where a large audience can distract the debaters and make it harder for them to get their points across. The first person to reach the target number of successes is the victor.

Situation	Modifier to target number
Most of the audience is the character's cabal	−3
A very small audience	−2
A very large audience	+2
Most of the audience is the rival's cabal	+3
Character changes style partway through the debate	+5

To use a particular style, declare at the beginning of the debate which style is being used. All rolls are based on that style for the entirety of the debate. If the character changes styles partway through the debate, it is harder for him to convince the audience he is sincere.

• Roll Manipulation + Empathy to sway an audience using emotional appeal.

• Roll Presence + Persuasion to sway an audience using the character's standing and force of presence to make their argument.

• Roll Intelligence + Persuasion to sway an audience using facts and evidence to prove the character's point.

Aftermath — Holding Power

It's one thing to seize power in a Consilium, whether it's done by violence, manipulation, or (for a real surprise) simply working up through the ranks. Holding onto that power afterwards is another matter altogether.

If the chronicle culminates in the characters becoming the new Council, or with one character becoming Hierarch and naming his cabal to important positions in the city, it might not be necessary to worry about how the characters will hold on to their status. The chronicle is over, after all.

It's possible, though, that the characters take power at the midpoint of the chronicle. The second half, therefore, might be a constant, paranoid struggle to prevent rivals from gaining a toehold in the city, or it might be a denouement as, no matter what the characters do, they realize that the ebb and flow of politics is going to sweep them out of office eventually. Likewise, you might simply choose to change the focus of the chronicle to something less political and more mystical. The characters have to cope with magical threats (see Powerful Characters, p. 139), events happening halfway across the world (see the Epistolary Chronicle, p. 159) or full-scale war (see Furyland, p. 164). The chronicle might end with the characters realizing that leadership doesn't suit them after all.

White Wolf Comics Presents: The Cabal

You've heard the critique. Some say **Mage** is nothing more than a pretentious superhero game.

Okay, let's run with that. But first, forget what you know about the World of Darkness. Pretend it all happened a little differently.

A History of White Wolf Comics

In 1939, pulp publishers Lion Rampant and White Wolf merged to take advantage of the growing market for original comics. Lion Rampant was a stable for creative talent; White Wolf was known for its monthly pulp title, *White Wolf: Wilderness Adventure!* Together, they launched *Tales of the World of Darkness.* The anthology would give birth to several popular characters and teams, including *The Silver Pack*, *Caine* and the company's flagship supernatural hero team, *The Cabal.*

Author Notes — White Wolf Comics Presents: The Cabal, by Malcolm Sheppard

This is really a bit of game design judo. "Mages are arrogant superheroes" is a charge I've heard often enough. Even though **Mage**'s developmental direction isn't about that my gut reaction has always been, *so what?* One of the pleasures of Storytelling is the ability to draw ideas from outside the box of an established genre or setting. It also helps that modern comics have evolved from Silver Age naïveté to 90s cynicism, and come out the other side to explore their own weirdness with enthusiasm *and* maturity. **Mage** is a "big tent" kind of game that can embrace the same kind of strange diversity you see in popular comics, so to me, it's a great fit.

The toughest thing to work with here is the Scale system. It dumps any pretense at modeling extraordinary abilities in a realistic world so that unbelievable feats don't lead to unplayable consequences. Realistically, someone who can juggle 100 tons would simply turn even player-controlled opponents of lesser caliber into an unpleasant red paste. The rules mitigate this a bit by divorcing the narrative image from the game effect.

One more thing: this chronicle is big on homage, but don't get stuck in it. Steal comic book tropes to improve your game, but if you're just simulating superheroes, dip back into **Mage** to turn assumptions on their heads. They're all still sorcerers: learned, curious, passionate and yes, probably a bit arrogant.
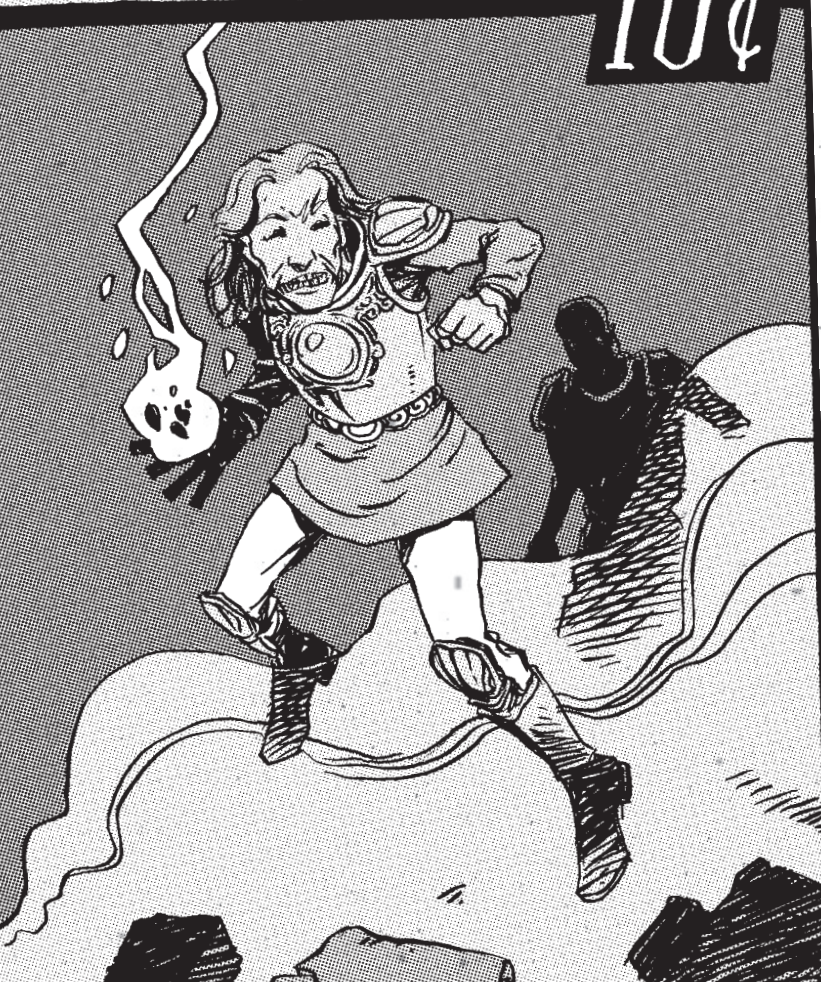
White Wolf set itself apart from counterparts Marvel and DC by concentrating on supernatural themes, but unlike horror publisher EC Comics, White Wolf eschewed self-contained morality plays for a pulpy, heroic take on subjects like vampires, werewolves, and sorcerers. Unfortunately, despite a slate of patriotic titles like *Hunter: Nazi Reckoning!* , White Wolf was still caught up in the backlash against horror comics. The Comics Code of 1954 kept White Wolf out of newsstands. The company limped along on semi-clandestine mail orders.

The company only made inroads back into corner stores in the 70s, after the Code was revised to allow "literary" horror. Silver Age White Wolf presented a more cohesive World of Darkness. By the 1980s and 90s, events in *Caine* left aftershocks in *The Silver Pack*. Storylines were aggressively combined in major, cross-title events; it took a hardcore fan to keep up with every major development in the universe. Many fans see the Fall of Sam Hate storyline as the point where the World of Darkness became too thematically diffuse and hard to follow.

To overcome the creative inertia of decades of continuity, White Wolf revamped the World of Darkness, leaving behind the background but keeping the names and some of the concepts behind popular characters. *The Cabal* underwent drastic changes but its new incarnation acquired a loyal fan base, along with the demand for spinoffs like apparel and roleplaying games.

Playing the Cabal

The Cabal is White Wolf's premiere supernatural hero team. We can't reach into the alternate timeline where the *World of Darkness Comics* roleplaying game and its Cabal sourcebook exist, so we're going to have to adapt **Mage: The Awakening** to run it.

The modern Cabal is a five-person team of heroic sorcerers — that is, heroic in accomplishments, not necessarily character. Each of them learned magic from unique sources but they all tie together into a common background: Atlantis, capital of the Astral Realms. The Cabal has a huge rogues' gallery but its greatest enemy is Exarch, tyrant-ruler of Atlantis and thus, master of the Astral Currents that descend to Earth. Meeting in various adventures (detailed in each hero's own comic series) the Cabal's members came to realize their common destiny. They are the last Awakened: the only ones who can translate pure thought forms to the earthly plane. They fight Exarch's conspiracy to discover the Ascension Formula, a spell that will open the Five Watchtowers to his will and give him total mastery of the world.

Other World of Darkness Comics

Crossovers are a frequent occurrence in White Wolf's new World of Darkness comics. Here are other popular titles you can use to develop stories in your *Cabal*-based game.

Captain Frankenstein: Captured in the frozen north by a Nazi expedition, Frankenstein's monster escaped to fight the Axis for Uncle Sam! Since the 1940s, the Promethean Patriot has been a popular character and more recently, a mouthpiece for writers to talk about the way they think America *should* be.

Gentry: This comic about the Immortals of Arcadia is the flagship of White Wolf's 90s-era Arthaus imprint of alternative-style comics. Surreal storylines chronicled the Dark Feud: a game to determine the fate of the world through the actions of a few people: "change-lings" who know little of their true importance. The main Dark Feud storyline is over, but fans continue to follow numerous spinoffs.

Krewe: *Krewe* is a new series: a crime drama featuring necromancers. *Krewe* stories usually run parallel threads in the material world and Underworld. Readers see rivalries develop on the streets, but also get to know the ghosts who carry out their krewes' orders.

Silver Crusade: This reboot of *The Silver Pack* centers on the world's last five uncorrupted werewolves as they try to convert members of the enemy Pure and preserve the divide between the spirit world and material reality.

Solomon Birch, Blood Hunter: Solomon Birch is an ex-priest who was given the blood of Longinus — the only pure Vitae in the world. Able to survive fire and the sun, Birch uses these abilities to hunt vampires born of tainted blood. The series has a dark tone, where many of the "impure" may be better people than Birch himself.

Vigil: *Vigil* is the adventures of Task Force: VALKYRIE, the U.S. government's last line of defense against so-called *esohumans*, but the book also devotes many storylines to self-contained, supernatural-tinged espionage.

Character Adoption

In a Cabal chronicle, players portray the team's heroes. That means that unlike a typical **Mage** game, players don't make unique characters, but develop a particular take on a hero from the Cabal. The descriptions below have deliberately vague elements. Fill in the blanks and tweak what's here to get your take on the hero. When you're playing Supernal or anyone else, *your* take on the character is "canon." Make the hero your own. Note that space considerations in this section mean that we've left out many, many potential variations and additions. Does Supernal have a secret weakness? What's the nature of Veiled Guardian's "demon?" That's up to you.

This approach changes character creation. Some game traits are set; others are customized by the player. Use the following steps to create a character. Note that even though each character gets some traits for free from Heroic Traits (see below) other traits have not been reduced to compensate. This gives all characters an extra bit of competence beyond their specialties. Keep that in mind if you adapt this chronicle to make original heroes.

Rolling Your Own

One of the novel ideas about this chronicle is that you're running with the fiction that there's a World of Darkness comics universe out there and you're adopting famous characters. If this doesn't float your boat, however, here are some rough guidelines for creating your own heroic mages.

The Heroic Traits listed with each character were derived from a formula that granted Gnosis 5 and Mastery in two Arcana, along with roughly 9 dots of Attributes, 10 dots of Skills, and 10 dots of rotes. Scaling (see p. 218) is given a point value of Elite 1, Supernatural 3, Incredible 6, Godlike 12, and Supernal 24, and attached to various traits in the following proportions: about 20 to Attributes, 20 to Skills, and 24 to rotes. After that, the author cheated to make the characters fit their concepts while remaining balanced in theme, if not strictly in terms of raw power.

One last thing: *never* add Scaling to a base Arcana. It's limited to rotes to give every protagonist a specific niche. Well, you can if you *really* want to, but this is a better idea for big antagonists like Exarch, who is probably at least Godlike in everything.

Step One: Heroic Traits

Each member of the Cabal has special game traits listed on pp. 214–216. Record these first. They're essential to the character and won't change as you go through the other steps.

Step Two: Standard Traits

Unlike standard **World of Darkness** characters you'll get a straight pool of dots to spend on Attributes and Skills: 12 dots for Attributes and 21 dots for Skills. You have a ceiling of five dots on any given trait and 15 total on any particular Skill category (Mental, Physical, or Social), including Heroic Traits (in some cases, this means you may not add dots to a certain category, as the character has already met or exceeded this limit). You may not use dots to increase Heroic Traits. All other steps for pre-supernatural character creation remain the same.

Step Three: Mage Template

Apply the Mage template as usual, but note that you can't use it to increase any defined Heroic Traits. That means that Supernal's Forces 5 is set, for example — don't use template dots to increase it. Furthermore, don't pick an order. These don't exist in a Cabal game. Cabal members do know the High Speech, however.

The Cabal's Roster

The Cabal: guardians of sorcery, defenders of the Five Watchtowers. Each hero has a unique past, but fate locks them into a common purpose. The Oracles of the Watchtowers brought them together, but these ethereal, blue-skinned beings have apparently taken a vow of non-interference in mortal affairs.

In the original continuity, the Cabal formed in the 1930s but for the sake of verisimilitude the new version is assumed to be about 20 years old. Still, writers do forget continuity sometimes, and editors cut some slack about flashbacks that go further back, provided they're cleverly done.

The Cabal is known to the public. It loves them for saving the world on several occasions, but fears the dark powers they wield. People have never been comfortable with esohumans (the quasi-scientific designation for people with supernatural abilities) in the first place, and through his Ministries, Exarch manipulates society to magnify that unease.

Between adventures, the Cabal maintains sanctums in two places: their Boston headquarters (called the *Mysterium*) and Supernal's Ruined Temple. The Mysterium is a restoration of a lost age of high sorcery, filled

with conveniences that would be futuristic, if they were scientific. The Ruined Temple is an ancient Atlantean outpost whose depths have never been fully explored. The Cabal sometimes uses it to travel to other times and planes of existence, and sometimes it *talks* to them.

Members swing between close friendships and bitter rivalries. Some leave the team for a while, but they always come back during the most pivotal events in the World of Darkness. For decades, writers have explored an implicit love triangle between Anima, Veiled Guardian, and Supernal, but ironclad editorial guidelines prevent this from ever resolving itself. The writers are getting tired of that, however, and in any game based on *The Cabal*, there's certainly room to move things forward.

The following section describes each member of the Cabal with their Heroic Traits. Note that some of these Traits are subject to a special system called Scaling, explained on p. 218.

Anima

Empress of the Wild

Artemis Moor is the daughter of a witch and a spirit. Her mother Latona was infertile, but longed for a daughter born of her own flesh. She called the Animus: an entity from deep within the Shadow that claimed to be the elemental of Life itself. Artemis was born seeing the spirit world, able to pass from matter to Shadow so easily, she had to be taught that it wasn't something everyone could do. Latona raised her in a place she simply called "The Wild," accompanied by numerous spirits who taught her the arts they represented. Their training and her hybrid nature made her superhuman, but she didn't know her true purpose until the night Latona died.

The Animus visited her and said he too was dying, as humankind poisoned the Earth — and he feared that after death, he would transform into something monstrous, doomed to destroy this world. He charged her with changing humanity's ways and named her Anima to remind her of her heritage. Supernal found her in Russia, protecting the wilderness. After a brief battle they realized they were of a kind. Ever since then they've been the strong roots of the Cabal.

Heroic Traits

Path: Thyrsus
Attributes: Wits 3 (Incredible), Stamina 5 (Godlike), Composure 4 (Elite)
Skills: Brawl 3 (Elite), Survival 5 (Godlike), Occult 2 (Godlike Specialty: Spirits)
Gnosis: 5
Arcana: Life 5, Spirit 5

Rotes: Life — Honing the Form (•••; Incredible), Self-Healing (••; Incredible), Organic Resilience (••; Incredible); Spirit — Greater Spirit Summons (••••; Incredible)

Libertine

The Prodigal Son

Libertine is the son of Exarch himself. The Usurper (see below for more about Exarch) created him after the death of Warp, the Cabal member who last protected the Acanthus Watchtower, as part of a scheme to infiltrate the team. Libertine was conceived on Earth through sorcery and kidnapped to begin a brutal training regimen on Atlantis (something that was only possible because he is Exarch's son). Every lesson sparked new thoughts of rebellion, however, because the Watchtower's metaphysics contain the essence of freedom. Mastering it, he escaped Exarch's care and voluntarily presented himself to the Cabal. They accepted him but still suspect this might be what Exarch wanted all along.

Libertine is a rake and a born showman. The Cabal may be a team of sorcerers but only the Libertine styles himself a magician. He even performs for the public, complete with top hat, sleight of hand, and a range of restraints that he frequently implies are used for more intimate functions than his escapology act. His flippant attitude hides an utter hatred of all those who would bend others to their will.

Heroic Traits

Path: Acanthus
Attributes: Wits 5 (Incredible), Dexterity 5 (Incredible), Manipulation 2 (Elite)
Skills: Larceny 5 (Godlike), Stealth (Supernatural) 2, Subterfuge 3 (Supernatural)
Gnosis: 5
Arcana: Fate 5, Time 5
Rotes: Fate — Lucky Coin (Incredible; •••), Destroy Bindings (Godlike; ••••); Time — Acceleration (•••; Incredible)

Supernal

Last Son of Atlantis

Qashmal of Atlantis: the last perfect man. Supernal was born in Atlantis near the conclusion of Exarch's coup. His birth parents loved him too much to let him stay in the higher Realm and feared that Exarch would destroy the flame of enlightenment forever, so they constructed the Silver Ladder to send him to Earth. Exarch shattered the Ladder, however, so untold eons passed until the protective crystal lotus bulb Qashmal was placed on the mortal plane, in the wilds of Alaska.

An aged trapper found the dissolving bulb. He took the baby inside as his own son and helped him adapt when his body and mind — pure Forms from Atlantis — transcended Fallen human potential. When he came of age, a remnant of the lotus bulb guided him to the Ruined Temple, where Annake completed his instruction on the mystic arts. They told him his purpose, but that didn't matter. His foster father already taught him that people should do good in proportion to their abilities — and his powers were mighty enough to help everyone.

Supernal soon revealed himself to the world. Most consider him the first and greatest esohuman, but despite his powers he still maintains another identity as Quentin Malachi, roaming reporter and blogger for the *New York Daily Star*.

Heroic Traits

Path: Obrimos
Attributes: Intelligence 3 (Supernatural), Strength 5 (Supernal), Stamina 5 (Godlike)
Skills: Occult 5 (Godlike)
Gnosis: 5
Arcana: Forces 5, Prime 5
Rotes: Forces — Flight (Godlike; •••••); Prime — Counterspell Prime (Supernatural;••), Celestial Fire (Supernatural; •••)

Silver Scythe
The Scarred Sentinel

The current Silver Scythe is the second to hold the title. The current White Wolf continuity maintains the Golden Age Scythe, an archaeologist who found the titular hero's weapon in a secret temple. The modern Silver Scythe is Ross Moro, a mercenary engineer and artillerist who lived without fear or morality until he was ordered to lay down a barrage upon child soldiers in Central Africa. When he refused, his own people shot him in the back and left him for dead.

Nevertheless, iron will forced him to his feet again. He staggered for days until he reached a forgotten graveyard: the resting place of the Stygian Oracle. The Oracle deemed him worthy to carry a Silver Scythe, last of the weapons that were once wielded by Atlantis' special watch. Before the rise of Exarch, those sorcerers guarded Atlantis Apocalypse Armory: the Awakened City vault of world-shattering weapons. The Oracle taught him the Awakened City's occult science and gave him the Mark of the Scythe: a blackened, curved scar on his face. It advised him to hide the true weapon, since with the Mark upon him he only need visit it occasionally to maintain a sympathetic bond. Ever

since then he's enforced the Old Code of Atlantis though at times, he makes exceptions for modern situations.

Heroic Traits

Path: Moros
Attributes: Resolve 5 (Godlike), Composure 5 (Incredible)
Skills: Crafts 4 (Incredible), Occult 4 (Incredible), Science 4 (Incredible)
Gnosis: 5
Arcana: Death 5, Matter 5
Rotes: Death — Summon Shadows (Incredible; •••); Matter — Unseen Aegis (Incredible; ••), Raw Creation (Godlike; •••••)

Veiled Guardian
Mistress of the Labyrinth

Is the Veiled Guardian a demon? That's what her enemies believe, and Constance Lord isn't about to correct them. She set upon the path to vengeance in Cairo. That's where her parents died, victims of a terrorist attack — or so she was told. Young Constance quickly abandoned her keepers and disappeared into the Middle East, beginning a journey that would see her master martial arts, sorcery, and criminology, all at the urging of the wrathful demon within her. In the process, she learned her parents were actually killed by an organization called the Praetorians. It was part of a plot to steal certain antiquities: Atlantean artifacts that were buried with the Pharaohs.

Even though she found and dispatched the real killers, the demon wouldn't stay quiet. To this day, she controls it by diverting its vengeful energy into vigilante justice. When she isn't with the Cabal she either patrols the streets of Detroit or plays the public role of the Lord hotel chain's ditzy heiress.

Veiled Guardian is the only member of the Cabal to take an apprentice: her so-called "sidekick," Templar. She always stands a bit apart from the rest of the Cabal, distrusting their power, and has often been the one to take a member down when he becomes a menace to others thanks to madness, mind control, or some other exceptional situation.

Heroic Traits

Path: Mastigos
Attributes: Wits 5 (Supernatural), Dexterity 5 (Supernatural),
Skills: Investigation 5 (Supernatural), Athletics 4 (Supernatural), Brawl 5 (Supernatural), Stealth 5 (Supernatural), Weaponry 4 (Supernatural)

Gnosis: 5

Arcana: Mind 5, Space 5

Rotes: Mind — Incognito (Incredible; ••), Misperception (Incredible; ••); Space — Spatial Map (Incredible; •), Co-Location (Incredible; ••••)

The Cabal Story Arc

The Cabal's central opponent is Exarch the Usurper, Tyrant of Atlantis. Atlantis is the ur-Realm from which all possibility flows, including humanity's vision of itself. His very presence poisons the Astral Realms, giving rise to hateful ideologies and widespread corruption. Exarch has sealed off Atlantis and pretends to rule it absolutely, but the Five Watchtowers remain inviolate. Without the Ascension Formula, he can't enter them, learn the final Mysteries, steal the highest Throne, and make himself the one, true God. The essence of the Watchtowers is the key to the Formula. It's on Earth, in the souls of the Cabal. Exarch can't leave Atlantis without reopening the Celestial Ladder and giving the rest of humanity access to magic, so he acts through his minions, the Ministries. In the series, Exarch has managed to get around this restriction a few times, but it's always been an epic occasion.

Each Minister is a match for the Cabal, but their conspiracies are far more dangerous. They encourage Sleepers to hate the supernatural and distrust the Cabal. At the same time, they secretly sponsor hideous magical experiments. As a result, govern-

ments barely tolerate the Cabal and religious figures deem them witches, heretics — even servants of the Devil. The Cabal has fought government agencies like Task Force: VALKYRIE many times. When the persecution rises to its peak, the Cabal's sorcerers wonder if they should take a more active hand in global affairs. Why not take over the world?

Traditionally, Libertine and Veiled Guardian oppose the idea in favor of teaching others about magic — liberating the Fallen World one soul at a time. The others are less sure of this approach because they don't want to put Sleepers in danger. They also know from experience that magic inspired by darker passions draws the Abyss: the anti-reality that forms the barrier between Atlantis and Earth.

The most important things to remember are the ways in which *The Cabal* differs from similar comics. This is the only team where every character is a sorcerer, trained in the arts of magic. The series has always played up the strange, amoral nature of magical forces with storylines that blossom out of rash or morally questionable magic use. You may not be unfamiliar with the comic because it doesn't really exist, but that should present no barrier to mining **Mage: The Awakening** for ideas. Characters have the familiar problems of humbler cabals writ large, and just because there are villains out there doesn't mean that heroes are always good guys.

Like any comic series, the Cabal chronicle has no set ending, but evolves along particular story arcs. The basic ingredients for a story are a villain and his plan, set against a shared history that allows the characters to bond, but also provide room for internal conflicts. Exarch is the ultimate menace but he's only used sparingly. After all, if you beat him, that ends the series. Since *The Cabal*

Stories

Over the 70-odd years of its (non)existence, White Wolf Comics has approached the Cabal from almost every conceivable angle. Here are three linked stories to get you started.

• **Pop Culture:** Unlike the World of Darkness we know, everybody in *The Cabal* series knows magic exists. So do psychics, vampires, demons, and gifted esohumans of every stripe. Some series writers have explored this, creating a culture of occult fandom that idolizes esohumanity and tries to join its ranks — usually with tragic results. When a fan steals a grimoire from the Mysterium, his magical experiments call up an Abyssal horror. The hapless summoner gets turned into twitching, bloody dog food — and it's a public relations disaster for the Cabal, too. The characters have to find the entity before it hurts anyone else, fend off Sleeper-supremacists who want to burn them at the stake and ask: who brought an Abyssal grimoire to the Mysterium in the first place?

• **An Evil Mirror:** After a debacle like the one in "Pop Culture," the Ministries push world governments to replace the Cabal. They've painstakingly researched a way to make sympathetic doubles of each Cabal member with a formula based on a study of Captain Frankenstein conducted by the United States. The doubles will parasitically use the mages' souls to cast spells, so the originals need to be captured and put on ice. Can the Cabal escape half a dozen wealthy governments and destroy their doubles?

• **Hits the Fan:** Somehow (possibly during "An Evil Mirror") the Ministries collect enough occult information about the Cabal's souls to construct a blasphemous Sixth Watchtower. This gives Exarch the ability to possess a mortal on Earth. Through this puppet, he acquires unprecedented political power and uses it to attack the Cabal. Once Exarch captures their souls he'll be able to discover the Ascension Formula, conquer the Five Watchtowers and become God. The Cabal has to deal with their greatest enemy and the millions of people he commands.

series doesn't exist and every group has its own idea of who would be a really impressive cosmic arch-antagonist, it's up to you to develop Exarch.

Heroic Magic

In a game based on *The Cabal* series, magic is big, loud, and powerful. In fact, *everything* is big, loud, and powerful unless it demonstrates something like Veiled Guardian's incomparable stealth, or furthers a conspiracy for the Cabal to uncover. This entails a few rule modifications.

• Cabal members and major villains such as Exarch and his Ministers have separate spellcasting, and mundane actions that they perform once each per turn. That way, Supernal can activate "Burst of Speed" and hurl a lamp post at an opponent in the same turn. Go all the way around the Initiative order twice to resolve both actions. Players can choose which phase will contain their spell or standard action. Characters can't take two normal or two spellcasting actions instead. If they don't want to perform one of these types of actions, they don't get an alternate action in return. Optionally, Storytellers may grant a +3 dice bonus (or +1 to Defense) when a character elects to only act once in a turn.

• Cabal members and other major characters can reduce the casting interval for an extended spell to a single turn by spending one Willpower point and suffering one point of lethal damage per interval. With sufficient motivation, these characters can unleash some truly miraculous (or heinous) spells on the fly.

• Almost every Sleeper has seen the Cabal's heroes cast spells. The Quiescence obviously doesn't modify their perceptions of spells, though it still masks the High Speech.

Dramatic Paradox

In the *Cabal* chronicle, no Paradoxes exist as defined by **Mage: The Awakening**'s rules. Instead, characters earn a Paradoxical complication check mark whenever they use magic and are forced to make a Wisdom roll in the same scene.

The complication stems from the character's magical nature more than it does any specific incident. In metaphysical terms, powerful Resonance bleeds from her Nimbus, warping the world to reflect her inner nature.

Storytellers track and redeem these checks for complications of increasing severity, rated on a one to five scale, according to this table:

Intensity (Check Marks)	Example
1	Minor (harassment from the public; a Sleeper associate gets into a trivial jam — a scene in an unrelated chapter)
2	Lesser (extended harassment from Sleepers or an imp-like Abyssal creature; a Sleeper associate suffers a serious indirect loss — a side chapter, tangential to the main chronicle arc)
3	Medium (releases a tough demon from the Abyss; kills or kidnaps a Sleeper ally — enough to occupy a one or two chapter story)
4	Major (draws the attention of a powerful threat; opens a Verge — and sparks a three to five chapter story)
5	Epic (The character triggers a chain of events that threatens the world — the chronicle shifts to center on this complication)

The Storyteller redeems up to five checks at a time (from one character or several) for a complication of equal intensity. We advise that you never let any one character accumulate more than five checks to make complications appear frequently.

Scaling

Scaling is a system designed to allow truly stupendous supernatural feats. It hinges on a simple idea: the way things look and feel in the story can be separated from their dramatic impact — in other words, blowing up a building doesn't mean you need to throw a double handful of dice at players for damage.

Scaling can be added to any system. The game notation is a Scaling Rank, attached to an existing game trait such as a rote, Attribute, or Skill.

• **SFX** is short for "Special Effects." This Scaling element describes the multiplier you should apply to successes, or to the trait itself for resisted rolls in situations involving minor characters and story elements, such as scenery, bystanders, and minor combatants ("mooks," or Extras as defined in Action Horror on p. 20). You can play fast and loose with these "virtual successes" so that (for example) a character who scores 200 SFX successes knocks down a dozen helicopters instead of having to get them one at a time.

• **Impact** is how much the Scaled trait actually affects characters and other elements that are central to the story. Add it to each trait in an applicable dice pool, to the resistance penalty it confers (this includes Defense subtracting from dice pools), and to equipment, each based on their respective Scale ratings. The bonus stacks with each trait, so that Elite Strength (+1) and Incredible Brawl (+4) adds a total of five dice to the combined pool.

Scale also affects derived traits such as Health. For example, Anima's Godlike Stamina 5 adds 13 points to the 5 she gets from Size, for a total of 18.

In the case of rotes, the Impact bonus adds to effective Arcana dots when a rote's effects are governed by them, (so that, for example, Libertine's Incredible Acceleration is calculated as if he had — believe it or not — Time 9) but this doesn't grant whatever other powers lie at that end of the scale. If a rote provides a trait bonus, the character can take a bonus of equivalent scale instead of the effective Arcanum rank bonus, so that (for example), Anima can use Honing the Form to acquire Incredible Strength.

Scaling Rank	SFX	Impact	Example
1: Standard	n/a	+0(0)	Normal **World of Darkness** scale — not noted in trait listings
2: Elite	2x	+1	A martial arts Master out of **wuxia** films, augmented with wirework and CGI tweaks
3: Supernatural	5x	+2	A monster that hurls cars with ease
4: Incredible	10x	+4	Dispatching 10 enemies in a second or two
5: Godlike	100x	+8	A blow that smashes a tank in half
6: Supernal	Lots and Lots	+16	Spells that affect entire continents

Remember: In this system, these traits come into play for *dramatically important* challenges only — SFX applies to anything less important.

Scaling also applies to non-supernatural elements. In a standard **Mage** game, an Abrams Main Battle Tank has loads of dice to throw at anything it wants to destroy, but in *The Cabal*, it's an Incredible-Scale vehicle whose main gun has a base dice pool of 10, +8 for Scale. SFX means it can kill a dozen hapless targets in a single shot, but the Silver Scythe's Nimbus and heroic destiny will blunt the shot — he's not like other people.

It's the job of the players and Storyteller to bridge the divide between the *narrative* effects of SFX and the *dramatic* effects of Impact. Impact is deliberately weaker to level the playing field, so that if Supernal casts Supernatural "Celestial Fire" on Veiled Guardian it doesn't simply disintegrate her. So she leaps aside at the last moment, or some of the bolt arcs to a nearby ley line. This is integral to the system — without it, you can't break out the intense sorcery of a *Cabal* game.

Scaling Example

Angered by Alberta's environmental crimes, (sucking oil from the tar sands has turned huge tracts of it into a toxic wasteland) Anima has conquered the Canadian province. Veiled Guardian has come to show her the error of her ways but before they can talk (or more likely, get into a supernatural slugfest) a battalion of U.S. soldiers supported by an A-10 Thunderbolt antitank aircraft storms the rocky, natural fortress where Anima holds court. Civilians who've come to negotiate with (and worship) Anima cower and run. The Minister called Praetorian — the so-called ultimate soldier — is with the force, but he let his mundane dupes attack first.

The A-10 spits 390 depleted uranium rounds at both Cabal members. This is an Incredible Scale Long Burst attack. The gun's base bonus is 3; Scale increases that to 11 against the heroes. The burst adds another 3, –2 since the plane is attacking two targets. The pilot has a base dice pool of 8, so equipment, Scale, and circumstantial modifiers increases it to 20 dice.

Shooting at Veiled Guardian, the A-10 must be content with an Incredible "Misperception" spell that operates with an effective Arcana of 9. Anima has an equivalent degree of Organic Resilience. The Storyteller rolls 11 dice twice. The rocky hill virtually disintegrates under the heroes. Veiled Guardian is cut up by rock shards;

bullets rebound off Anima's steel-hard arms. Anima suffers five points of lethal damage; Veiled Guardian suffers three. The dozen or so negotiators who were near Anima suffer SFX damage (x10 — they aren't major participants in the scene). The attack successes against Anima equate to 50 points of lethal damage — enough to shower her in their remains.

The battalion's 200 members also open fire, but the Storyteller decides they aren't relevant, since they're just using M-4 carbines. In game terms, their attacks deal with the SFX value of the heroes' magical shields, which drops their dice pools by 50 each instead of the 9 they're good for against worthy opponents.

Veiled Guardian uses Space to materialize in the midst of the army and attacks hand to hand. She scores five Strength + Brawl successes; Supernatural Scaling against these opponents increases it to 25 SFX successes. The Storyteller treats the troops as one hit Extras (see Action Horror, p. 20) and lets the player divide successes, so Veiled Guardian knocks out 25 opponents in six seconds.

Anima casts Incredible "Honing the Form" to increase her Strength to 7 (Incredible Scale) and hurls a boulder at the A-10's cockpit. The A-10 is a tough Incredible Scale vehicle with 14 Structure and 8 Durability after counting Impact bonuses (though its realistic SFX value is higher). She gets a +4 dice bonus for Incredible Strength but only has a Standard Scale Athletics of 4. The Storyteller decides the rock is just a prop, conferring no bonus. This gives her 15 dice, reduced to seven by the plane's Durability. Aiming for the cockpit reduces this by another three dice, to a total of four. She scores two successes, which the Storyteller judges is enough to crack the cockpit, shake the plane, and force the pilot to retreat.

Praetorian decides to act in the next turn. He casts an enchanted spear at Anima, using his own Godlike Strength + Athletics. The spear is also a Godlike tool. Before Scaling, his dice pool is 12; after Scale bonuses it's 36. Anima's Incredible "Organic Resilience" drops it to 27. The spear inflicts 9 points of lethal damage. Anima has suffered a total of 14 points of lethal damage, but as she started with 18 health points she's badly hurt, but not out of the fight yet. Remember: It may not look like much between titans like these, but a spear like this could rend a mountain.

AFTERWORD

And so, once more, we come to the end. A sort of well-deserved sleep after being Awake for a time, perchance to dream anew. As a certain fictional archmaster of Time said, "Nothing ever ends." *This* **Mage** is ending, but your **Mage** can go on. That's the wonder of roleplaying games – unfettered imagination to a degree unknown in traditional forms of storytelling. Okay, it sounds silly and pretentious, but roleplaying is a form of will-working. Every participant can change the story, mold what happens, and so shape time. Sure, it's not too different from what an author does when he sits down to write, but in an rpg, *anyone* can do it *in collaboration* with others and *on the fly*. There's no time for revisions and second drafts – in the heat of the game, what happens happens. An rpg session is a spontaneous group spell.

While I haven't personally guided **Mage**'s line of game books for a while now, I'm damn pleased with the quality and imagination of every book in the line. Every book has made me want to play a new character – even a Seer of the Throne or a Banisher. **Mage: the Awakening** was launched as a step away from its Ascended predecessor, as a more purposefully occult setting, one that fit better into the murkier and more mysterious World of Darkness of its new siblings. It also aimed to provide a magic system that was less daunting to new players but still retained a wide-open malleability, one that both represented that hoary old trope of the "laws" of magic and the sheer, unbridled creativity of a will-worker. I like to think it succeeded in these goals, these purposes, these *teloi*. But don't take my word for it – judging from sales figures, it was quite well received, despite some grumblings about Atlantis.

Ah, Atlantis. I'm pleased that the exegesis on that fabled isle's legendry throughout history, as presented in *Secrets of the Ruined Temple*, better established its place in the setting not so much as the literal, historical realm of some New Age crystal gazers, but as a primordial archetype of the Magical City on the Hill, a Supernal idea casting many distorted reflections into the Fallen World. A memory of what was lost. A legend of the Fall.

Excuse me as I get this out of my system: Certain Forces have worked to bring us to this moment, but **Mage** is Primed to continue in the Minds of its players. While I can't reveal what Time holds for **Mage**, I suspect Fate will conspire to revisit the Spaces it chartered. Think of this not as a Death but a new form of Life, in the hands of those who love it most. Its Spirit lives on with its players, and that's what Matters.

All right, enough with the analogies. I'm supposed to be writing a farewell here, and this is becoming an elegy for something that's not really going away. The books will still be here, even if in the years to come they'll be primarily accessible to new players as PDF downloads — digital traces rather than ink on paper. In a sense, **Mage** is becoming more Supernal. Its truths will continue to emanate from its world of ideas into the games of its players.

I hope you continue to peel back the Veil of the Mysteries.

Stay Awake,
Bill Bridges
August 2009

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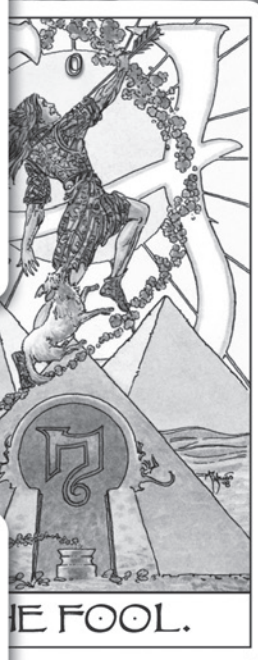ISBN 978-1-58846-439-2
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